

Preamble

In one of the many pages written by Emilio Villa for Nuvolo, I refer to the one that accompanied his solo exhibition at Plinio De Martiis' La Tartaruga gallery in Rome in 1958, we read: «Personally, I consider it an adventure, a rare good fortune to have been able to witness such an unexpected birth of his vocation. One night in 1951, he invented his working system, his instrument, adapted to accommodate the vibrations of the pulse; and thus entered, from memory, speaking of painting and love like a blind man, into the most solemn degrees of restrained modern naturalness, into the most alarming probing of automatic sources, into the register of that industrious participation in the platonic spheres of elegance...».

By that time, according to Villa's own text, Nuvolo had already made his work widely known within the circle of the most important artists residing in Rome, starting with Burri who had even called him in and introduced him to the Roman milieu as early as 1950, and ending with Colla and Mannucci, Capogrossi and Cagli, who had 'presented' him in the catalogue of the Florentine exhibition at the Numero gallery, directed by Fiamma Vigo, in 1955.

But from the enlightening words of the great poet, a companion of Nuvolo, Burri, Lo Savio, Manzoni and Fontana, we learn another significant fact, confirmed by a recent exhibition event held in Boston in the United States: both the Brooklyn Museum and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection had already acquired Nuvolo's works; the latter, in particular, during several visits to Rome, had acquired some important works by the artist, including *Composizione*, 1957, oil on canvas (171.5 x 116 cm, inv. 64.2054) and *Collage*, 1959, oil and silk on canvas (69.2 x 49.5 cm, inv. 64.2054) donated to the Boston Museum and exhibited together with Pollock and other abstract impressionists in the 2003 exhibition. And it was the acute observation of Mario Diacono, still present in that city in the USA, who emphasised how authoritative the Italian artist's presence was in that context, in which he distinguished himself with «a large dramatic collage of geometric pieces of fabric painted in white or blue or left in the natural patina».

It therefore became clear again how the young Nuvolo's action had already strongly distinguished itself by the 1950s in highly qualified artistic circles.

Case and Spatiality: from Serotipie to Scacchi

Nuvolo's artistic experience began in that post-war period that lasted particularly long in Italy, for at least a decade, with the character of objective discomfort in life, above all for the poorer social classes and for the artists themselves. From his native Città di Castello, at Burri's invitation, he decided to go to Rome where Burri had already moved and had begun to exhibit since 1947, after his self-baptism into painting in the Hereford prison camp in Texas and the consequent abandonment of the medical profession. A guest first in Burri's studio and then in Edgardo Mannucci's, Nuvolo, in his early twenties, put into practice as a young man in the workshop those qualities and technical skills that everyone already recognised in his town and which, combined with a sensitivity for colour and drawing, made him a promise among those like Renato Cristiano or Roberto Fasola and very few others, especially in Umbria, «circled Burri Saturn like rings»¹.

Rome's artistic life in those years was as stimulating as it could be for a young person approaching art. Rome, together with Milan and Turin, was among the most advanced fronts of a cul-

tural revival and a ferment of initiatives by artists who, after the fall of Fascism, felt they had to reduce the cultural distance dividing the country from the rest of Europe. From 1946 to 1950, there was a succession of proposals aimed at reformulating a fabric of exchanges, experiences and debates: in Milan, the manifestos of Realism (1946), signed by Morlotti and Vedova among others, were echoed by those of M.A.C. Concretism, while in Rome, the young Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Turcato, Perilli, Sanfilippo and a few others signed the manifesto of the Forma 1 group (1947). Also in Milan, between 1947 and 1950, some of the most important manifestos of Spatialism were signed, which saw Fontana, Joppolo, Crippa, Dova and others such as Giani, Kaiserlian and Milani as authors and protagonists, while in Rome some important exhibitions - such as the one on Abstract Art in Italy (1948), organised by the Art Club, with works by Licini, Magnelli, Vedova, the artists of Forma 1, Fontana and numerous others, and the 5th Quadrennial Review of the Ente Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna - seemed to offer the broadest repertoires of what was happening in the country. No less important in those years in the capital was the climate created by the neo-realist cinema of De Sica and Zavattini, Rossellini and De Santis, which well reflected the extremely uneasy but incipiently changing condition of Italian reality. There would still be numerous symptoms and data to report on this great and slow transformation of Italian culture, if these were not already enough to indicate the background against which the young Nuvolo's path and initial experience was grafted. Thus, in 1950, when he went with Burri to visit the first exhibition of Capogrossi's abstract works at the Galleria del Secolo, he had the opportunity to meet other artists, including two demiurges of the capital's artistic life who, differently but surely, would influence his path: Colla and Cagli. But already at the time of his stay in Burri's studio, the first exercises with the silk-screen printing frame began (albeit of small dimensions), until then, at least in Italy, only used in the production of serial images in advertising graphics or industrial production and never in art. These were the years in which, within the vast 'informal' linguistic articulation, certain artists such as Burri, Fontana and Capogrossi himself left a strongly indelible mark on the image, due to the radical nature of their turns of expression and their forceful disruption of previous structures and conceptions of the practice of painting itself: «It must be said at once that the most obvious manifestation of this change in artistic experience lies in the abandonment of the techniques and materials that bear the traditional codes to which the realists and the majority of the abstractionists were equally and rigorously faithful, in favour of other techniques, other materials, other processes ...»².

Fontana's spatial ambience at the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan, directed by Carlo Cardazzo, dates back to 1949 and a year earlier had already seen the light of those *Neri* by Burri that lead to the inescapable and traumatic presentation of the *Catrami* (1949), true matter elaborated with drippings, removals, moulds, thin graphite grids and thickenings that reveal the novelty of the colour-matter. Of course, without having exerted any influence, but having already in some way considered the problematic, the presence of the strongly stimulating action of Enrico Prampolini, who came to formulate the sense and appropriateness of the use of materials considered extra-pictorial in the elaboration of a painting, in his book *Arte Polimaterica* (1944), published in Rome at the Galleria del Secolo, cannot be overlooked. In addition, the activity of the Art Club in which Prampolini, together with numerous other artists, critics and poets, among whom the brilliant personality of Emilio Villa began to stand out, carried no small amount of data and reports on the culture of artistic work in Europe, fostered a long-range circulation of ideas and experiences. But, for the purposes of this reconnaissance, the most explicit point of tangency between Burri's art, which after the *Neri* and the *Catrami* had already reached the extraordinary concepts and realisations of *Sacchi* and the *Gobbi*, and the first works of the young Nuvolo seem

to be those *Muffe* that in the two-year period between 1950 and 1952 appeared and encamped in Burri's repertoire. Based mostly on oil, vinavil and pumice stone, on different supports (canvas, faesite, cellotex), the *Muffe* are distinguished, as had already been the case for his abstract works exhibited in 1948 in his second solo show at the Margherita, by a certain filiform way of applying the material, by certain free and unravelling trends in the fluidity of drips and more extensive deposits of colour-matter³.

It is unquestionable that Nuvolo had made profound and lengthy observations of Burri's painting, of whom he had become a friend since their first meeting in Città di Castello towards the end of the 1940s, on the occasion of exhibitions at the Galleria dell'Angelo, where Burri had exhibited in a solo show and in a group show, together with other painters from the city such as Aldo Riguccini, Alvaro and Nemo Sarteanesi. But what is equally certain, when Nuvolo met Burri, is that he possessed an early experience of proto-artistic work, which had matured in him from a very young age. While still a teenager, in fact, Nuvolo painted the proscenium of the theatre Impero, then numerous scenes for the Teatro Comunale, carried out some decorations and small restorations in the Churches of S. Maria delle Grazie and S. Domenico, painted banners for the theatre and the church of S. Maria delle Grazie. Domenico, paints banners for city processions, costumes, and furnishings for small theatres, and is involved in many other ornamental activities; Stimulated by the city's cultured characters such as Venanzio Gabriotti, a paternal friend, and the prelate Rolando Magnani, who initiated him at a very young age into artistic and scientific interests, albeit amateurish, astronomy and physics, Nuvolo expressed his versatility and manual skill in various ways until, in 1940, he was hired by the railways to replace personnel called up for military service and remained there until 1944, when the city station was destroyed by the Germans. It was at this juncture that at the age of eighteen, following the death of his father, he visited the exhibition of Flemish art at Palazzo Strozzi on a trip to Florence to procure a living, and was deeply moved. When, therefore, he followed Burri to Rome in the late 1940s, his move already had all the flavour of an artistic novitiate and for a few years, both Burri and Mannucci and then Colla, Fazzini and, from '53, Amerigo Tot, who had been commissioned to decorate the large frieze on the front of the entrance canopy at Rome's Termini Station, were to work with him. With the notions and experiments carried out at the School of Graphic Arts in Città di Castello, directed by Angelo Baldelli and coordinated by the photogravure artist Quietì, and following subsequent experiences in Rome in the field of advertising⁴, the first silk-screen paintings were born. They are nitrocellulose and oils on paper often plastered or glued on cello-tex, always of small dimensions; Nuvolo does not seem to favour a particular colour range, so much as he is interested in observing the result of the fluid colour imprints on the small papers. These *Serotipie* marked the outcome of a long process during which numerous attempts had been made, with some failures, to achieve satisfactory results. The dilemma was constituted by a twofold need; the first related to Nuvolo's reluctance to work in the traditional manner on the prepared blank canvas, tracing any drawing or composition, and on the contrary the desire to allow himself to be stimulated in his work by the very means he used, which he summarised as those of the silkscreen technique; on the other hand, the desire to photographically reproduce a pre-existing subject through silkscreen printing. The solution to the problem came when he learnt that certain gelatines, suitable for occluding frame silks through the photographic method, had the property of hardening under the exciting action of light when treated with potassium dichromate and, conversely, remaining soluble in water when unexcited. The discovery had the merit of allowing the photomechanical impression of the specially prepared loom and making it, by means of certain lighting tricks and then the removal of residual gelatine, ready for the passage of colour. But before satisfactory results could be achieved, much time passed

and above all one had to wait for the appearance of better quality colour products or silks. At a closer look, those first results between '52 and '53, beyond the apparent similarity of the trends, in part sinuous, threadlike and of relative clotting of the colour, are already distinguishable from Burri's *Muffe*, where a different quantity of material, sometimes real lumps with appreciable thickness, declare the intention of presenting the colour-matter, while Nuvolo seemed more intrigued by the emergence of a spatial exponents, the result of an interpenetration between chromatic imprints in the foreground and backgrounds. The indistinctness, the disturbed uniformity of the drafts, then the transparencies that allow glimpses of series of planes and smudges covering other chromatic traces give these early *Serotipie* an unprecedented fineness of conception of the image, which nevertheless seemed to continue to share an informal poetics. The small papers clinging to the cellotex that the artist had elaborated appear to be traversed by an internal wind, an invisible gestural expressiveness that spreads and dilates the colour, breaking it up with atmospheric and sidereal stormy resonances; the result is that of a spatiality activated by turbulence that is enunciated for the first time and that will later be found, with obvious differences, in the painting of Robert Rauschenberg and later Gerard Richter, especially in the multiple versions of his abstract paintings (1980).

What qualifies and distinguishes Nuvolo's painting from that of other great painters of his contemporaries is a different aesthetic motivation that was already evident to Villa from his first encounter with his painting. An interest in the effects of chance that the automatism of the draining of colour allowed to fall fluidly and thinly freely onto the papers and then shaved, dried and rendered static by the priming of the squeegee on the silk-screen printing frame, had highlighted. «The work of this painter is rightly conducted... where the first is indistinguishable from the indistinct... and where the weave, the sign, the neuma seems as carefree as air and instead is as calculated as breath, as necessity, where the atmospheric monstrous is electrified, as if inside a nervous or anatomical apparatus. And fancy provokes chance, and chance tickles fancy, and together they elaborate delicacies and colourful shifts among the most emotive that can be seen today»⁵ writes Villa, at the time, with enlightened synchronism. And that Nuvolo played with chance by introducing a rule of his own and then went on to disturb or break it with new causal interventions seems to be one of the salient aspects of his contribution to the climate that was meanwhile developing around Burri and Colla, first with the Gruppo Origine (1950) and then with the Foundation of the same name.

To tell the truth, during the Arti Visive years, there had been many different impulses that had contributed to the decantation of an environment, the Roman one, which at the end of 1949 and the beginning of 1950 would favour the very success of the Gruppo Origine which, as we know, did not last long. Nonetheless, it was Mario Ballocco's action that gave birth to the first breath of life to the ephemeral organism, when, in divulging the intentions of the Milanese M.A.C.'s research in the *AZ* magazine in November 1950, he pronounced the name 'Origine'. And it was in the following month that the same magazine announced a group exhibition by Ballocco himself with Burri, Capogrossi and Colla. The exhibition was held in the premises of Via Aurora 41, then owned by Colla, on 15 January 1951. The manifesto signed by the four artists in the catalogue reads «...The Gruppo Origine intends to take up and re-propose the morally most valid starting point of the 'Non-Figurative' needs of expression. In other words, in the very renunciation of an overtly three-dimensional form, in the reduction of colour to its simplest yet peremptory and incisive expressive function in the evocation of graphic nuclei, linearisms and pure, elementary images...»⁶. When the Group was dissolved in the same year, the name Origine remained with the Gallery and in the following year it passed from the Gallery to a Foundation, desired above all by Colla, which «proposes to create an international

documentation centre open for consultation and study by all those who care about the history of modern art»⁷. Alongside the exhibitions promoted by the Foundation, some of which were notable, such as the *Omaggio a Balla futurista* and the *Omaggio a Leonardo da Vinci* (with Accardi, Burri, Cagli, Capogrossi, Colla, Dorazio, Mannucci, Matta, Mirko, Perilli, Prampolini, Sanfilippo and others), as well as an exhibition for Forma 1, one of the institution's greatest merits was the publication of the *Arti Visive* magazine. It was in the daily militancy in that periodical, in fact, that Nuvolo had the opportunity to frequent and compare his work with that of other artists of his own generation or slightly older. The first issue of the *Arti Visive* magazine dates from July-August 1952. It was edited by a committee including Colla, Canevari, Dorazio, Prampolini, Pandolfi, M.A. Levi and Ripellino. The Editorial Secretary was Michelangelo Conte who had this task for the first three issues. In addition to the editorial printed on the cover, the internal features are dedicated to Gropius (on drawing), Kandinsky and Mondrian (Angelo Canevari) and also a long article by Dorazio on the 26th Biennale which, criticising the realist painting still present in it, emphasises however the importance of the presence of abstract art that international critics have realised. In the third issue, the editorial board is reduced to three names, Colla, Dorazio, Prampolini, and is distinguished by an editorial board that still includes Canevari, Pandolfi, Ripellino, Perilli, M.A. Levi, as well as a large number of regional and foreign correspondents. In the fourth issue, Emilio Villa appeared alongside Colla and Dorazio, who in the same issue dedicated a poem to Burri, to whom four pages were dedicated with numerous plates by Sacchi. From now on, Villa's action is central in the conception of the issues and in the very editing of them. The fourth issue, published with the numbering 5-6, bears a large service for Colla, again signed by Villa, and numerous images, including the one on the cover, exceptionally created in silkscreen by Giorgio Ascani, who is none other than Nuvolo. It should be recalled here that this nickname was given to him during his partisan militancy with the S. Faustino formation at the age of about seventeen, between May and July '44. Colla's cover, which some have tried to relate to Capogrossi's 'signs' of those same years, but which, if anything, seems more comparable to certain experiences by Sonia Delaunay, such as the gouache *Simultanéité* (1939), unknown to Colla, is the first of a series of interventions by the sculptor entrusted to Nuvolo (four covers and some plates included in the dossiers), who in the meantime had established an active collaboration and a true association with Colla⁸. When Dorazio left for the USA (1953), Colla and Villa were left alone to direct *Arti Visive* and entrusted its editorial responsibility to Nuvolo's brother Ascanio, known as Riri. And it is he, from now on, who reviews episodes of Nuvolo's own work in the art chronicles section: «The painter Giorgio Ascani,' we read in issue 10 of 1954, 'whom our readers may consider, in many senses, to be this year's sudden and important revelation in the field of non-figurative art, has prepared a truly unique book of illustrations, with a poem by Emilio Villa...». In addition to this mention for the small volume that he calls *Sei invenzioni*, but which contains five original *Seriotipie* in each of the 60 copies in the print run, Nuvolo's work will be featured numerous times in the pages of the magazine. Thus, in issue 1 of the new series, alongside Villa's introductory essay, the '54 *Seriotipie Idea culturale* and *Positivamente e non negativamente* stand out. This issue is also an opportunity for cohabitation and a comparison on the page with the work of Cristiano and Cervelli, who are closer to Nuvolo in terms of certain methods and material interests, and with that of Scialoja and Sanfilippo, who are quite distant in terms of language.

A new circumstance for the observation of Nuvolo's pictorial-serigraphic work occurs in no. 10 of the second series which, as well as hosting two works from '56 next to works by Rotella, Scarpitta, Chillida, Chadwich, Burri, Colla and Mannucci, provides some biographical indications of Nuvolo for the first time. We are now in 1958 and, at the time of the publication of

this last article in *Arti Visive*, a sufficient number of years have evidently already passed for the artist to build a path and relative affirmation.

The technical mode and linguistic formulation of the *Serotipie* is a constant attitude in Nuvolo's work, such that it appears unbroken from the beginning of his work to the present day. And yet, within a time span of around fifty years, it is possible to distinguish the different moments of conception and execution of his pictorial and spatial conception. In the nitrocelluloses and oils on paper of '52-'53, colour drippings are juxtaposed with imprints that differently reveal gestures aimed at the removal or rapid spreading of liquid deposits. Overall, the colours, in a free and sometimes festive polychromy, seem to obey a tachiste impulse of which the author simultaneously observes the results with an analytical eye. The fluctuation of the smears, squiggles and serigraphic spots on the backgrounds, which are never totally monochrome and uniform, sometimes assume the abstract emblematicity of ideograms or neumes of musical writing. Already, however, a painting such as the nitro and tempera on canvas (1952, p. 26), largely determined by the brown marks with some light traces of red that are never totally covering, is the manifesto of a new spatiality, whose degree of indistinctness seems to be informed more by Heisenberg's indeterministic speculation than by the debate between formalists and informalists or by presumed but unfounded derivations of Pollock's own dripping action. This becomes even more evident in the spatial conjugations of the subsequent *Serotipie* of '56 and then '58; however, it must be warned that by those dates Nuvolo had undertaken other cycles of work, had already had a number of solo exhibitions behind him and participated in a number of group exhibitions in Italy and abroad that are worth reporting.

In particular, from 1953 until his first exhibition at the Galleria delle Carrozze in Rome (1955), urged on by Giuseppe Marchiori, Nuvolo alongside the *Serotipie* developed a painting based on collages of small silk-screen printed papers glued onto canvas or other support. The mostly square or rectangular shape - this time Euclidean! - of the small silkscreen-painted fragments in the new works provides a spatiality that is once again contradictory; the quantity of planes and spaces, each bearing a deferred temporality due to the very different execution of the individual parts, is echoed by the simultaneity of the statements on the same surface. Many micro-units of space-time on a single surface of spatio-temporal compendium induce in the new paintings, commonly referred to as *Scacchi*, a dimension of iconographic relativity that once again seems to have more Einsteinian phenomenal awareness behind it than the theories of Tapié or any other art theorist.

Scacco Matto (p.36), a work that began in '53 and that the artist dates in the act of removing the papers from the wall of his studio in Via Margutta, in '55, is one of the most significant works of this period. It is no coincidence that in this painting, for the reasons of a relativism that has become an active aesthetic conscience in the young Nuvolo, one can breathe in not only the phantasmal atmosphere of the Mallarminian hasard, where the coup des dés must be glimpsed in the overlapping and contiguity of the silk-screened paper tesserae, but also the dissolution of analytical Cubist composition and of the neo-Plasticist scheme itself which, as a residue of Euclidean culture, Nuvolo intuitively attacked and demolished on his own. Naturally, as one does with what one loves. For the exhibition at the Galleria Numero in Florence, Cagli writes in the presentation: «The weft, the one from before, changes meaning as the new warp takes over and the transition from transparent to opaque, from empty to full, from concave to convex, from mute solitude to human dialogue takes place».

The *Scacchi* cycle, like that of the *Serotipie*, knows several moments. At first the results are fairly homogeneous and under the banner of the collage of silkscreen-based squared paper, wholly or partly covered by nitrocellulose paint; a particular version is the of *Collage su legno* (1956), in

which a corrugated cardboard quilted with nails is superimposed on the painting with the effect of concealing-unveiling the underlying form. Both the vertical scanning of the cardboard vertebrae, which seem to accentuate the rhythmic congenitality of the work, are appreciable in this work.

The vertical scanning of the cardboard vertebrae, which seem to accentuate the rhythmicity congenital to *Scacchi*, is appreciable in this work, as is the final halt to the visual phrase, constituted by the nudity of a wooden slat that holds the only painted part left uncovered. No less noteworthy are the two oil and wax paintings on canvas (both from '56) where there is a substantial change of material elements. There is no longer even the collage that was always present in the other *Scacchi*, and the painterly sensibility, really high, evokes the palette of Kleeian colour scales. Pervading both paintings, equally, is still an irregularity of the geometric figures, an uncertainty of contours, which confirms, if there were any need, that the neo-Plasticist scheme reaches Nuvolo not without the fertilisation of some of Burri's *Neri* and *Sacchi* (hence the geometric irregularity). The colour, almost returning its own reverberation to its own radiographic penumbra, seems to dissolve and allow interpenetrations between colours.

The observation of the experiences of Balla or Orphic painting, which had already been hosted in *Arti Visive* since 1952, is probably not foreign to this sensibility either. A second cycle of *Scacchi*, much more recent (1991-92) and formulated with squared-off remnants of screen-printed paper during the lengthy rehearsals carried out for the printing of fractal works and then the *Aftermandelbrot* cycle (1989-92), has a more vivid appearance and, although the internal traces are certainly more sophisticated in technological terms, having emerged from screen-prints and computerised image bases, the result, on the other hand, is less bewildering and unglued than the chess works of '53-'57. Unlike those early works, where Nuvolo often painted certain areas with traces of white or other colours, thus intervening with elements tempering the image in order to balance its spatiality - a bringing of order to chaos or sometimes interrupting the regularity of the rhythms with some seismic spatula strokes! - In these more recent *Scacchi*, the luminous clean and clear of the silkscreens obtained from the electronic image, now cold, now vibrant, has a cybernetic radiance, overloaded with signals, such that a temporal distance is required to give them the same poignancy as their ancestors.

Meanwhile, a series of new works matured together with the *Scacchi* between '57 and '58 that Nuvolo was preparing to exhibit in Rome at Plinio De Martiis' Galleria La Tartaruga. These are paintings with broad spreads of white paint on which Nuvolo beat his serigraphic imprint with uncertain geometries and grainy backgrounds, thus articulating the surfaces between monochrome white areas and inserts of red, black, grey, ochre and green. At times, the white areas are taken up with additions of titanium white that give luminous and spatial shots to the mostly uniform backgrounds that seem prepared to welcome, in a diffuse stillness, yet another investigation. The solo exhibition at the Tartaruga in 1957 and a second group show in the same gallery in October, together with Dorazio, Perilli, Scarpitta and Sterpini, allowed Nuvolo to pursue a relationship with a number of American critics who had in the meantime begun to orbit Rome, for the Tartaruga's initiatives and for the exhibitions held at the Rome-New York Art Foundation, in which Colla had also participated. The interest shown in Nuvolo's painting by Lawrence Alloway and the collector Peggy Guggenheim prompted a fair amount of attention around Nuvolo. Guggenheim bought a number of works at the Tartaruga and, continuing to frequent the painter on each of her trips to Italy, she went on to purchase numerous canvases that she destined for various American museums, including Boston, as well as for her own collections in Venice and New York.

Bianchi, Cuciti a macchina, Diagrammi, Bianchi collages, Daini, Tensioni

The topography of the nitro silk-screen prints on the *Bianchi* reveals a naturalness in the domination of space that is from time to time qualified by an equivalence not so much metric as ponderal between chromatic interventions and backgrounds. The lesson of Mondrian and Burri has found in Nuvolo such a gifted interpreter of principles as to be able to carve out, between the Cartesian rigour of the Dutchman and the epic and solemn drama of the Umbrian, a further zone of poetic and desonoured but more profoundly lyrical sensitivity. Larval sites of images that, escaping from mists, show and deny themselves, those of *Bianchi* are mature dodecaphonies in the repertoire of a painter who is now able, at the age of thirty, to harmonise every spatial piece. Even when the supports of his painting are wardrobe doors that Nuvolo paints for his friend Villa, finally sheltered in a room and a studio, after having shared with him beds made of newspapers placed under the bridges of the Tiber! In spite of a thousand difficulties, which in various periods of his work and life would never allow the artist to have complete peace of mind, Nuvolo's work also experienced mercantile success in these years. The quality achieved by his works and the mutual support with friends such as Villa, Colla, Topazia Alliata and others contributed to these early results. In the meantime, in 1956, he married Liana Baracchi, who would always assist him in the silk-screen printing atelier; the following year, the first of their two children, Giorgio, was born.

Particularly intense also for Nuvolo's exhibition activity, the years between '57 and '60 saw him present in numerous exhibitions. In the meantime, all the suggestions of this decade that saw his debut are coming to an end, and so is the trajectory of his informal experiences. «From the Informal experience, however, traces will remain evident in both the abstract and figurative art of the following decade, as will also be practised by the generation born in the 1920s who, having reached maturity around '58, inherited the opposition between abstract and figurative ...»⁹. Indeed, the works that follow the *Bianchi*, and which coincide in time with the extinction of the *Bianchi* themselves, are as important as a timely pause for decantation from the chess paintings saturated with signals, and highlight a confidence and mobility in the registers of experimentation that opens up to new materials and techniques.

The *Cuciti a macchina* (1958-1963), of which Dorfles reports, spontaneously tuned into a linguistic and material wavelength that flanked «the barks (Schumacher, Crippa) to sacks and rags (Burri, Millares), to wire nets (Rivera, Lippold), to upholstery fabrics (Baj), to bandoni corroded by use (Chamberlain, César), to overlapping and sewn sheets (Scarpitta, Nuvolo), to shreds of fabric sewn to metal frames (Bontecou) ...»¹⁰. But of all those who made use of fabric to make paintings, it is curious that the example of Sonia Delaunay was always overlooked, even though it was early (1911) and is well represented, next to a *Sacco* by Burri from '52, in issue 6-7 of *Arti Visive*. On the other hand, the practice of patchwork has popular roots that are at least as old as that of mending for obvious reasons of domestic economy, and it is precisely by that route that it pertains to Nuvolo's work in early 1958. The *Cuciti a macchina*, born from the Vigorelli pedal-operated apparatus that came into the studio as a dowry after his marriage to Liana, and improved in performance through the application of a motor, are the result of a different way of 'drawing' and then chromatically sampling space. The smudges made from a piece of fabric as an efficient test after the technical improvement made to it, appear to him as traces of a drawing so charged with evocations that the artist would later consider a sign element suitable for expressing the very syntax and spatiality of *Diagrammi* (1958-72). In a measured control of that new medium, it was possible for Nuvolo to combine fabrics and textiles of different colours as ready-made colour fields, and then again sometimes to incorporate paint or in other

cases buckskin or moleskin or velvet, or to run them through with stitching alone. Many of these works are now in the Stendhal and Guggenheim collections in New York and Alain in Chicago. But among the works that can be admired in this exhibition, it is interesting to dwell on that *Cucito a macchina* (1960, p.49) where the artist synchronously achieves several pictorial and spatial results. In the construction derived from the stitching together of overlapping strips of fabric, the primitive neo-plasticist grid has largely given way to a design closer to the geometric solutions of a Nicholson or a Pasmore. The stitching on the right and reverse of the separate parts offers a monochromatism whose purity is in some areas abruptly diverted with an outcome of chromatic dialectics counterbalanced by the shadows of the three strips of fabric partially stitched and therefore by gravity reversed and falling. This state of freedom of the canape, in contrast to their own rigid juxtaposition due to the sewn parts, also allows for an effective antinomy. And then, certainly, the projecting vocation of those flaps that, like peelings, abandon and distance themselves from the body of the whole sewn underline its spatial incipience. Once again, it would be possible to say what Franchetti said about Scarpitta with regard to the crossed cloth bands: «Burri's influence legitimate and declared. But only in the use of materials»¹¹. After Burri's *Gobbi*, next to Scarpitta's 'bandages' and Castellani's extreme intro-flexions, this *Cucito* by Nuvolo is one of the most whispering but not uncertain documents of a civilised quality of forming, at the ford of a dimension between painting and plastic. Machine stitching must include those canvases where solitary little lines of stitching 'draw' the space, measuring its surface in pure digression. Indeed, these precious stitches are the most direct predecessor of the large nitro and oil on canvas work *Trionfo della morte* (1972), which inscribes on the 10-metre length of the painting the graphic pattern of an electrocardiogram during cardiac arrest. The episode, moreover autobiographical, underlines the peculiarity of these works that are scarcely drawn with wire, but have a singular premonitory value.

It is opportune to anticipate here, even before Nuvolo's path unravelled further, some critical reflections by Nello Ponente, made some ten years later, in '71: «It is clear – Ponente writes – that in Nuvolo's experience ... the choice of certain materials and procedures, different from and substituting for the traditional ones, was not a game of academic updating, but a necessity consequent to the development of a poetics that still today, in the progress and transformation of linguistic structures, does not renounce the principles established over time.»¹². In Ponente's writing, those principles are identified in Nuvolo's desire to adopt the serigraphic procedure and collage to produce modalities that would regulate the randomness of the acts dictated by informal poetics, while at the same time shunning any constructivist cage, claiming the freedom of automatism. Hence, silk-screen printing was the medium that brought "a more accurate control of the gesture" and while placing no limits on formal freedom induced automatism within serial constancy. It then becomes clear that Nuvolo's position is that of an anticipator of the very crisis of Informal Art and of later pronouncements (even of Pop Art, whose appropriations and homologation of the real often derived from the simple use of ready-made found images) he avoided. His being 'against the tide' nevertheless responds to the need for greater complexity in the central question active in his work: to measure a quantity of harmony in entropic disorder and to introduce into apparent balances a figure of chaos that reveals the unattainability of absolute harmony.

The *Bianchi Collages* (1958-64, pp.52-55) are proof of this invisible tension that always visualises new paradigms of the same problem: the neo-Plasticist spatiality is now opposed by its own open system in search of balance. They are collages of screen-printed paper and paint, and in most cases the works are denominated by a rhythm of vertical paper bands that rhythmically divide up the surface of the painting in a tight pattern, but spread over the entire painting. Some,

of great dimensions such as the *Sprempipi*, introduce a glimmer of double mirror symmetry, but more as a vocation than as a response. But there is a precedent that seems to close a circle of pursuits impossible to demonstrate and not even so much sought after if not by a concatenation of connections that even the work often triggers in the observer; it is that painting by Mondrian *Alberi sul Gein* (1903), where on closer inspection one sees that they are trees on the banks of a watercourse and therefore do not offer the phenomenon of the apparent symmetry of a mirrored nature. But so dissolved are the natural forms in that Mondrian painting that they seem to be comparable – in retrospect – with the chromatic bravura of Nuvolo's *Serotipie*; just as in reverse: some sequences of the *Bianchi collages* evoke a mirrored and partially symmetrical nature, the result of the dissolution of a neo-Plasticist grid! To these works by Nuvolo, however, it will be opportune to return for an appreciation of that cycle of works known as *Alfa 39* which, for certain structural and technical aspects (they are also collages), can be reconciled with the *Bianchi collages*. It is interesting to recall at this juncture a 'statement' by the artist that appeared in the catalogue of a group exhibition held at the Minneapolis Museum of Art in the autumn of '63: «Today I seek perfect balance, absolute equilibrium... however I live in a world made up of a continuous series of points and I have lines and colours as means of expression, not the infinite indefinite and atonal dimensions, not dimensionlessness. If I had presented an entirely white painting I would have a figure, not equilibrium. Then I must put something on the blank canvas that, if possible, is the best and most exact. Perhaps one day I will make such a painting. That day all painters may, along with me, stop painting. Until then however I look at each of my works as a relative equation with an unsolved unknown»¹³.

Although regarded as a tactile attraction – a 'private digression', as Nuvolo apostrophises them – in reality metaphors equivalent to falling in love with a material, the *Daini*, on the other hand, whose appearance is now being evoked, being inscribed in 1960-'62, are the result of a freedom achieved and conquered. They are, moreover, among the few works where the silkscreen process is largely absent. But «... even where it did not feel the need for screen-printing insertions – Ponente writes – the acquired regulations pacified the spaces (without slowing down the dynamic directions), organised, in the end, regular dimensions, intentionally adapted to a modular principle»¹⁴. The coloured and stitched buckskins do not only flaunt the quality of the material, but simultaneously induce the perception of the surface, the very idea of a chromatic field and of space stimulated and structured by the stitching or by the surplus of the joining edges, depending on whether the stitching has been done on the right or on the reverse side of the painting. The *Daini*, like plots of land that an aerial view offers in plan, in the irregularity of the individual modules in which they are organised, allow glimpses of shaving and tanning moods that, like silk-screen prints, never possess uniformity and monochrome. But it is never possible to reduce their tactile physicality to a naturalistic figurative requirement. In that ensemble (p.58) where a symmetrical arrangement of the parts stitched together is evident, the gap that is produced between the inertia of the material and the dynamic yet semi-balanced principle of the image is immediate. Equally admirably resolved in the stratigraphic aspect is the 'diptych' of 1961, which is very fine in its chromatic mixing and in the rhythms found in the juxtapositions as well as in the calmness of the hatching lines. When colour dominates the material, a variation of the hue of the same can endow the composition with a spatiality 'other' than physical. Nuvolo's conspicuous finding of leather samples at the 'flea market' of Porta Portese – an area where the artist has meanwhile found a new studio after those in Via Margutta and Clivo Rutario – will allow him to experiment with the use of this material for a long time.

Based on skins and strips of canvas held in tension on the painted supports, the *Tensioni* investigation also developed between '62 and '65. No longer structurally on the same level as the

painting supports, but spaced out and superimposed on them, the strips of buckskin and canvas are stretched from one slat to the other of the wooden frame almost like nerves or ropes in tension, incidental elements of the image with which to make space vibrate in a completely different way. The strips of canvas adhere more than the strips of fallow deer to the prepared backgrounds, while those in their middle parts, stretched to the limits of a possible break, twist on themselves, revealing the internal forces of the material brought into play. *Tensione* (1962, p.63) and the other works made with one or more juxtaposed elements thus constitute the next step, albeit contemporary to the *Bianchi collages*, with the evident intention of giving the induced spatial scansion of verticality very different and articulated values of presence. But these *Tensioni* are also a declaration of the reduction of matter to the minimum terms of signifying elementarity, an essay of its extreme organoleptic faculties in an iconographic function with their lowest qualitative use and in an outcome of active solicitation on the internal forces of matter and consequently of the image. Of this resulting quality in *Tensioni*, due to the primary use of matter already shared by Burri, Colla, Mannucci and by Rotella and Scarpitta themselves, we now also know the effective developments freed from the 'poverist' instance. Thus, for those strains present in doses as units of measurement of the spatiality of these *Tensioni* by Nuvolo, it is now possible to approach later works such as *Torsione* (1968) by Anselmo, whose energy and force, on a larger scale and with more pronounced plasticity, nevertheless exert macroscopically correlated spatial principles. The compositional interval between the taut skins and bands of canvas superimposed almost as a collage on the background of these *Tensioni* by Nuvolo is musically conceived in proportion and relation to the extent of the areas occupied.

In the meantime, between 1957 and 1962, Nuvolo was also presented with numerous requests for private commissions, which in these years allowed the painter to make several trips to northern Italy between Milan and Turin, where he came into contact with Fontana, Manzoni, Castellani and the architect Ettore Sottsass. While with the former a cordial relationship of friendship and an exchange of ideas on the aesthetic problems of the time was born, for Sottsass Nuvolo produced a decoration in fresco and collage in the Villa Astrua in Turin. Other decorations in those years saw him active in Rome, Città di Castello, Catanzaro and various other cities in Italy, where he was commissioned by the Ente Nazionale Cellulosa e Carta for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Oigroig, Videogrammi, Modulari: Iteration, difference, repetition

It is already evident that very often Nuvolo's experimentation with certain materials and the conception of new techniques alongside the basic technique of silk-screen printing take place at the same time, i.e. in a time during which the artist, while putting his hand to certain works, probes and ventures in other directions, so that the cycles of his activity can never be understood as locked dates like watertight bulkheads. The fluidity of research allows Nuvolo to stoke more fires and more cookers for the transmutation of his stones into gold. Evidence of this is provided by the *Serotipie* which, after the first cycle of '52-'53, are a linguistic sphere acted in conformity, while other inventions still found images. Each time, always different, the cycles of the *Serotipie* from '52 to '92 bring out new reactions and results of a 'causality' provoked and kept under observation under the screen-printing frames with always different expedients. From the nitrocelluloses of '56 to '58 and then from '64 to '66 with vinyl additions, then from '66 to '68 with works such as *La Battaglia di Anghiari* (1967, p.33), *A porta inferi* (1968, p.35 bottom), *Caronte* (1968, p.35 top) and *Chissà dove* (1967, p.32 bottom) bearing temperas and oils, the mutations are considerable. When Andy Warhol began to use silkscreen printing for the first

Seven Cadillacs (1962) reproduced on canvas and in *Printed Two Dollars* (1962), initiating the serial cycle of banknotes, Nuvolo had more than ten years of experience in the silkscreen technique applied to his painting. Beyond the respective implications of the works of the two artists and the undoubted effectiveness of Warhol's linguistic and mass-media use of silkscreen printing (which nevertheless remains at an elementary level), there is the fact that when Nuvolo produced the *Oigroig* (1967) or the *Modulari* (1969), his elaboration expressed an expertise and depth of sensitivity exercised on such a solid tradition that one can recognise him as the natural heir of all painting from Flemish or Sieneese Gothic to the 16th century in Europe!

And that this statement is not exaggerated can be deduced from the internal evolution of the solutions with increasingly sophisticated technical degrees, which can be observed in the *Oigroig* as well as in the *Modulari* and finally in the very landing to the computerised fractals of the *Aftermandelbrot* (1989). His is a dynamic magisterium because it is rooted.

The *Oigroig*, whose title anagrammatises Nuvolo's first name (Giorgio read backwards), are the first works to methodically emphasise symmetrical quality as a corrective rule introduced to verify the assumption that in chaos there is order and vice versa. The circumstance that promotes them is a bet with Mirko who, in a conversation with Nuvolo, expresses his perplexity in relation to the excess of randomness in the compilation of his friend's paintings. The ritual aspect of much of Mirko's sculpture and some of his totemic works had moved him to ask Nuvolo if he had ever been able to get anything close to his figures from his paintings. Nuvolo was quick to respond to the challenge and, setting up a few tests on the screen-printing frame with nitro paints, he proceeded with the symmetrical blob mode like those he had learnt in childhood. Using a permeable and transparent paper and taking into account the principles of fluid mechanics, which allows one to act on their degree of viscosity while avoiding their mixing, he works only on one half of the sheet, thus obtaining an equal but inverted shape on the other. The symmetry of the resulting figure now has a new coefficient of harmony that surprises Mirko. The shapes that emerge from the new experience evoke monsters, lepidoptera, faces, demons and can be extrapolated and enlarged into new representations. The videos that Nuvolo made in a later examination of that phantasmagorical and fabulistic world were to form the matrix of numerous graphic works entitled *Videogrammi* (1976), advanced psychological textures in the manner of Rorschach! In the *Oigroig* (pp. 74-79), the quantity of colours, their capillary free flowing, the kaleidoscopic complexity of the traces and colour zones, the organic fabric of the forms, the strong evocative power of natures from 'who knows where' are surprising. Their heraldic richness, the ductility of belonging to the imagery of Western or Eastern cultures, their sumptuous emergence or encampment suspended on monochrome backgrounds, where, in some versions, other spaces, other 'whereabouts' can be glimpsed from a gash within the colour, place them in a dimension of primordial and simultaneously futuristic time, between the archetype and the android, the latest dynasty of golems produced by art. The versions elaborated from some examples already realised in painting and modelled in gold and precious stones reveal a new congenital linearism of the structures of these serigraphic works, on which I have already had the opportunity to read in the catalogue for Nuvolo's exhibition in Rieti in '75¹⁵.

With these paintings and above all with the *Modulari* (pp.70-73), a discourse unfolds that does not seem to be able to have surrounding references as was the case with some cycles of his earlier pictorial production. In the *Modulari*, a new and almost boundless latitude of repetitions emerges on the subtle ridge that divides chaos from harmony, and the matching is possible in the very organism of the images. First and foremost, the *Modulari* offer a conception of new space, strongly stimulated by monochromatic iterations and dynamically investigated with sign repetitions and symmetrical specularities, bearing values of chromatic progression ranging from the lowest to the highest degree of intensity and vice versa. The modularities within the

image proceed either with a univocal or double vectority, or excentric or concentric, when symmetries are not double and reversed on both axes. The opposite of Cartesian vectoriality and Euclidean geometry, but no less harmonious for that, indeed proud examples of a generation of forms that considers the particle and the 'quanta' of information to be the new origins of their epochal belonging, the *Modulari* - if one were to conjugate them to any of the images of the last hundred years - invoke as antecedents the photograph of Jules Marey's *Salto in lungo con slancio* (1888) or the famous *Dinamismo di un cane al guinzaglio* (1912) or Giacomo Balla's *Studio si linee fondamentali* (1913). Otherwise, the modularity and symmetry of, for example, *Dogmatica* (1963), *Religiosa lunare* (1967) or *Colonna solare* (1967), all works by Colla, recall more the totemic idea or Brancusi's columns than the iterative rhythm, in vertical or horizontal extension or with multiple specularities, of Nuvolo. That latency of movement that in these *Modulari* comes from their sequential development is congenital to the very way Nuvolo executed them. They are based on the repeatability of the imprint due to the silk-screen printing process. The imprint of the pattern is repeated on a certain surface many times and what changes therefore is the quantity of acts; furthermore, the distance between one stroke and the next on the same sheet observes different intervals. This means that different impressions are created by the addition of chiaroscuro. A fundamental fact is that each serigraphic bar is made with colours that are gradually made more transparent. What therefore prevails in these images is a law of progression of colour intensity. Nuvolo is interested in the progression and quantity of colours that result, as well as the vibration effect that is produced in individual perception. In *Proposta per una tachicentesi* (Paoluzzi Collection), this modularity almost takes on a figurativeness, insofar as the resulting spatiality evokes a thoracic cavity. The repetition that these *Modulari* celebrate is that of a «diversity that escapes... indefinite fibrillation; time is what repeats itself...» (Foucault). The *Modulari*, as morphologies of the indeterminable infinite, claim an originality of foundation. «The fact is – writes Deleuze – that to found is to determine the indeterminate»¹⁶. But this is but one of the issues that can be traced back to the starting hypothesis of the entire poetics of chance - chaos and cosmic harmony within Nuvolo's work. And, in many ways, the text of aesthetics suitable for providing the speculative reasons for the research of a painting such as the *Modulari* already exists, and as chance would have it, it was conceived in the same decade and completed in the same years as these paintings!¹⁷

In the meantime, Enrico Crispolti (June 1971, see critical anthology) and then Emilio Villa (November 1972) were entrusted with an initial reading of the *Modulari*. This was the occasion for both of them to pay renewed attention to the artist's new works and to recall that Nuvolo had absented himself from public and militant artistic life for a number of years. Among the many reasons, one outweighs the others: the profound conviction of wanting to safeguard the freedom of his research from contingencies and material necessities that can sometimes push an artist to produce works in the absence of deeper and more aesthetically justified motivations. This is the motivation that drove him, during the 1960s, to a long period of time spent carrying out activities parallel to his painting, practising graphic design, for the purpose of his own livelihood or the use of the medium of silk-screen printing for other artists. It was in this circumstance that the resumption of relations with Corrado Cagli took place, giving rise to a true partnership for the production of numerous silk-screen prints and one-offs by the artist from Ancona, which lasted until his death. Due to the conspicuous amount of work, Nuvolo structured and developed his serigraphy atelier in Rome, on the Lungotevere degli Artigiani, and at the same time engaged in a teaching activity that, from '69, took him to the Art Institutes of Vasto, Foggia, Rome and finally, after the mid-1970s, to Perugia (1978), at the Academy of Fine Arts, first as a lecturer in the Painting Department, and then as Director of Courses.

The Alfa 39, the Nuovi Diagrammi and Aftermandelbrot fractals

Despite a meagre number of public appearances of his work (there were two major intervals: one between '63 and '71 and the other between '77 and '89), Nuvolo, as we have seen, never interrupted his research and the realisation of important works. And if the resumption of the first and second intervals took place in both cases at the Studio Piattelli in Rome with the exhibitions of the *Modulari*, curated by Crispolti, and with the first extensive anthology of cycles at Palazzo Altieri, curated by the writer, the last and most recent public meeting took place in Trieste, promoted by the Superintendency of the Friuli Region and the Municipality of that city. The deadline offered Nuvolo the opportunity to make public two new episodes of work that had matured in the quiet of his studio in Città di Castello, where he had returned to live permanently in the meantime. The natural Italian climate had changed many times in all those years. If the decade of the 1960s had been characterised by the extinction of informal poetics, with the consequent zeroing of languages brought about by the generation of Castellani, Manzoni, Kounellis, Paolini, Uncini, Schifano, Lo Savio, Pascali and the kinetic and programmed art groups, and had finally ended with the exploit of the poverist motion by Pistoletto, Merz, Fabro, Anselmo, Boetti, Prini, Pascali and a few others, that of the 1970s, with the exception of a few emerging personalities (Agnetti, De Dominicis, Pisani, Ranaldi, Spalletti, Bagnoli, Salvadori, who would only bring their work to fullness within the 1980s), turned out to be a period of consumption of what had already been conceived and realised, offering the side to an art of reflux and citationism that spread throughout the 1980s. The run-up of trans- neo- hyper- new avant-gardists and mannerists to the art market with evidently unfounded values dates back to these ten years. Perhaps the secrecy to which Nuvolo has forced himself – albeit of his own free will – does not seem so inappropriate, given the ‘moonlight’ of the ensuing art situation, with its consequent collapses in estimates.

Distant from those events, in 1987 the artist came up with a new version of the *Cuciti*, as *Diagrammi* (pp. 67-69) and implemented a cycle of works based on silkscreen printing with nitrocellulose on ennobled chipboard, called *Nuovi Diagrammi*, almost all of which were large in size. Between the first *Diagrammi* stitched on canvas and these works, Nuvolo had executed a further group of small ones for a private client. The zig-zagging stroke describes threadlike, seamless landscapes. Just as in the first diagrammatic *Cuciti*, the declared lack of function of the thread's spacing on the canvas accentuated the dreamy arbitrariness of the paths and emphasised, far beyond the grace of the very thin ‘stripes’, the thought in freedom, so in these *Nuovi Diagrammi* the colour, substituting itself for the thread, actually mimics its path and its absolute lack of function, exercising equal freedom and visionary wandering. But what song do they transcribe the sonority of again? In many cases, the repertoire of notation is the swinging one that had immediately revealed itself with the first *Diagrammi*; in others, the seam thickens, integrates and the quotas of opposing spires of design reach the emblematic noise of interference. But in that same span of time, Nuvolo had ventured into the unprecedented exercise of using the *Alfa 39*¹⁸ sign code commonly used in commodity classification. He was assisted in this computer operation by his second son Paolo. The entry of electronic processing into the artist's work thus occurred with the first experience, which was a prelude to the more complex investigation for the realisation of fractal images and *Aftermandelbrot*.

That the appearance of the *Alfa 39* code used to form these works with the computer is not a foreign element to Nuvolo's lexicon, but something innate to his painting can be demonstrated without too much acrobatics. Thin bands, spatially located on the surface of the canvas like ‘septa’ that enclose the field of parallelograms in serigraphy, aggregated by chromatic conso-

nance and weight in the narration that the imprints on paper bore, the bands or bars had made their appearance early on in the first *Bianchi collages* of screen-printed paper and paint.

Those vertical elements that make up the *Bianchi collages* were placed on the surfaces of his canvases, defining a space of notation whose timbral scale had to be deduced on a sort of invisible pentagram, depending on their relative distance and the height of their traces. Rhythmics and the resulting spatial polyphony were a matter of free extension and connected to the listening of colour, experienced in the inextricable drafting made up of the lacks and fullnesses of the screen-printed bands and also of their form. Nuvolo's visual phrase in those canvases, whose horizontal development was arranged to the gothic narration of the silk-screen-printed imprints, seemed to live on the wavelength of bursting jazz tunes, such as those with which Miles Davis' trumpet is often charged, but also of the primary scansion of the sounds of Bach's organ music. Empty, high, low, high, dull, light, dark empty... on the edge. Within this rule of visualisation of an image that manifests itself to the painter, in an absolutely arbitrary norm whose compositional process and anarchic arrangement of forms and colour only accepts the invisible domain of the senses 'harmonised' in unfounded harmony, i.e. with an exchange of functions – sight hears, hearing sees, smell palpates, touch smells, taste suspends all immediate satisfaction – the feeling of time, as rhythmic, appears in his painting with true musical tunes. In a formal analogy, and with a different sensibility from the 'poverist' one, a work such as *Tommaso Albinoni* (1962) by Tano Festa, with its elementary sonority in the image and title and in many ways formally approachable even to these new *Alfa 39* works by Nuvolo, whose code, however, is much more ambiguously active in terms of its translatability, takes on the task of formalising the problem of banded spatiality pronounced by Nuvolo. But today, these works by Nuvolo, because of their yearning for an absolute and radical spatial quality, must be put in relation rhythmic relationship and compositional gravity also with works such as Barnett Newman's *Adam* (1951-52), or even with those of Mario Ballocco's *Indagine sul modo di appartenenza del colore* (1958), in which the verticality (or horizontality) of bands of different widths determines a different chromatic consistency. Nuvolo's work, however, has no gestalt ambition. Now, even these *Alfa 39*, which can be literally 'read', in order to arrive at their signifying foundation, in the same way as we could read, evoking their qualities, the Fibonacci numerical series realised in neon by Merz, manifest themselves on the elementary side of the sign and code to invest, however, with their organic image structure and aesthetic potential, a more complex reception that concerns the continuous vision of a black-white quantum rhythm, whose standard is the vertical bar. What is the origin of this interest in the *Alfa 39* code? Nuvolo renews with it, as with the use of the photographic-based process in silk-screen printing or the use of videotape, the act of faith in his own era, with whose technological spirit he identifies himself, albeit critically, i.e. by taking those signals that are effective for communication and subjecting them to the humanistic detournement of art's intentions. The appropriation, however, in this case is not that of the Dada or Pop matrix: he does not elect new 'ready-made', but rather, once he has taken on a visual code (the bar or the photogram) in his own grammar, he conjugates its lexical and visual faculty within an organism of new conception.

So, mind you, the image and message that these paintings structured with the *Alfa 39* code bear will not be found on any similar product of everyday consumption, since they are the fruit of a new authentic verbo-visual elaboration belonging to art. If you decode them, unlike Franco Vaccari's works that reproduce the alphanumeric code tout-court, you will find that they conceal esoteric playful moods. A further aspect of the *Alfa 39*, presented for the first time in Trieste, must be indicated for their correct reading. The first group of panels, in order of conception, consists of seven parts and in its invention evokes the painting *Positivamente e non negativamente*

(1954), named after Villa's alchemy of the word, to which this *Alfa 39* is explicitly dedicated. The second work is a triptych in which the image implies yet another exercise of esoteric freedom for a cryptic passage and the need for a decryptographic 'key' in order to reach the playful *divertissement* it conceals. And so much is enough.

Because for the truth or falsehood of visual language, silence counts more than words.

The Aftermandelbrots

Before concluding this review of Nuvolo's work, it is necessary to clarify how the most recent group of works called *Aftermandelbrot* is a highly original invention of his tension and research, as well as of his closest collaborator, his son Paolo. It must be premised that for some months, certainly more than a year, the greatest work has been directed towards understanding the mathematics of fractals or the 'Mandelbrot set', a name derived from the scientist who drafted every other set theory, from Georg Cantor's to Gaston Julia's, in a new and more advanced way. Mandelbrot, taking his cue from all the results that had challenged the foundations of Euclidean geometry, such as the famous curve of Giuseppe Peano, capable of filling a square, pursuing the 'intermediate' figures, between the point and the line, between the line and the plane and between these the volume, arrives at the notion of the 'fractal' or geometry actually existing in nature. One must also take into account that this order of interest introduces a not inconsiderable complexity. Thus it can be said that the fractal curve is «a complication curve of infinite order, i.e. infinitely irregular»¹⁹. Mandelbrot's ensemble resulting from a computer visualisation is a very complicated curve that has two fundamental aspects: «When you look closer and closer, you recognise in some details what you saw globally» and also that «some arms of increasingly complex filaments come out of it, while others go in, here as a kind of vortex, there as a tangle»²⁰. In the details, therefore, of the whole and of the figure one finds what one sees in the whole. This is what Nuvolo has always thought and wanted to demonstrate with his work: that an incessant exchange between chaos and order governs nature, that the conquest of precision occurs through approximation and, finally, that there is no solution of continuity between the finite and the infinite. Works such as *Oigroig* and *Modulari* also share these principles.

To close a circle, and almost to prove how close his work had come to those invisible laws that constituted the very stimulus of his research, Nuvolo then decided to redesign or otherwise draw new symmetrical works using the Mandelbro-

tian graphic method. And although it is lengthy, as well as difficult and beyond the scope of this essay, to describe the numerous difficulties he and his son overcame in the computer development of software capable of enabling him to fully realise that goal. Suffice it to say that the main

obstacles that stood in the way of achieving such a programme and the possibility of translating the images obtained from it into screen-printed impressions of colour on the media were avoiding Mandelbrot's own models, obtaining full black from the printers in such a way as to avoid stripes appearing on the personal computer monitor, transferring the images from the printers to a photocompositive matrix, correcting colour register discrepancies that never coincided for thermal reasons and, lastly, being able to use the programme errors themselves by tracing error and randomness back to exact and representable values with mathematical calculation. «Contrary to what is ordinarily thought – Nuvolo comments at the time – mathematics is not only an opinion, but it comes from entropy and chaos».

The experiment succeeds a few months after the creation of some plates marked as 'fractal images' that remain to document the extremely articulate process of the entire speculation.

The first *Aftermandelbrot* family consists of some thirty works and it is enough to have a wire-counting lens or a good eye to realise that technically the level of these silkscreen works is very high. Yet, perhaps no more so than the *Oigroig* of a Seurat painting! The chromatic beauty of these results is far greater than that which had caused Mandelbrot to exclaim in his time: «And fractals are beautiful!»; it has ranges and graduated scales of colours, as well as structures analogous to the flash patterns of butterflies; one of the new elements perceived is the dimension of space created by light, so germinal and so foreign as to differ with all previous painting, even that of Nuvolo himself. It is an emanation of intensity that the colour seems to have inherited from the power supply, of the same fluidity as the vobbulations that appear on the computer monitor.

From 1992 to the present day, Nuvolo's work has developed with the new cycles of *Genesi*, *Circuiti*, *Dittici* and *Trittici*, *Enantiomorfi*, *Omogenei*, *Turbolenze*, and *Legni collages*, in some cases confronting the most advanced frontiers of the digital image. In particular, as far as *Genesi* is concerned, Nuvolo's video-plastic exercise, which has already been pointed out since the time of the exhibition in Rome at Studio Piattelli in Palazzo Altieri (1977), has since then stood out for its own internal requirements to the point of reaching a topicality that to define singular is synonymous with exceptional. Of course, this is not for the coarse palate: one has to enter this oscilloscopic universe, one has to penetrate the chromatic viscosities as he himself did with the video camera within his painting, and one would have to go through all the expedients and outcomes of the devices implemented – starting from the realisation of the matrices up to the numerous practices of reversal of the visualities and sonorities involved – in order to taste and appreciate these non-conformist inventions. And it would already be healthy to do so in a condition of multimedia euphoria that is often temporary and superficial in an aesthetic sense. Nuvolo's is therefore a chapter that encourages visual thought by taking it back to its space-time-order-caos origins, for a self-interrogation that is already subjective action.

Finally, when Nuvolo affirms that he has applied in the field of serigraphy (and painting) a logical chain of symmetries analogous to that applied by Bach (theme – regression from the theme – inversion and regression of the inversion, etc.) he induces us to a reflection that is as valid for him as for Bach. It concerns every kind of biological, sonorous, visual organism. All of these are potentially organisable and have the faculty of orderly and progressive growth (with exponential intervals of infinite faculty) in the face of a spatial acceptance. Space is a neutral limbo before the artistic act aimed at the conception of any form; it then takes on musical, pictorial and even mnemonic identity.

That to which Bach's sound chains are stretched is infinite space-time, just as Nuvolo's painting manifests-reveals a protogenetic space-time in which chaos and order consist, primitive among innumerable antinomies. His work, thus, must be read by subtracting it from univocal qualitative attribution: it is not beautiful, nor ugly, nor false, nor true: it is.

On the being of the work, on that present of the verb of which the work becomes the support and image, clarity must also be restored in relation to its constituent elements which, in the final analysis, are all the data of that 'real' that appears to our eyes and senses. We must therefore return to considering colour for colour's sake, form for form's sake, and every other aspect of the work for what it is. And nothing else.

Notes

- ¹ M. Di Capua, Emilio Villa, in *La Tartaruga - gli anni originali*, March 1989 n. 5-6, De Luca Editore, p. 41.
- ² Giorgio De Marchis, *L'Arte in Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, in *Storia dell'arte italiana. volume terzo, "Il Novecento"*, Einaudi, Torino, 1982, p. 576
- ³ Cfr. AA.VV. Burri, *Contributi al catalogo sistematico*, Fondazione Palazzo Albizzini, Petrucci Editore, Città di Castello, 1990. See catalogue numbers 75 and 143 (1950), 65, 69, 95, 101, 138 (1951), 85 (1952) and others.
- ⁴ The term would only be coined later, in 1957, by Emilio Villa, for the critical presentation of the artist's solo exhibition at the Galleria al Ferro di Cavallo in Rome.
- ⁵ Emilio Villa, *Indicazioni*, in *Arti Visive* n.1, 1 November 1954 (second series), pp. f.n., republished later in catalogue-invitation for Nuvolo's solo exhibition at the Galleria delle Carrozze in Rome, 6 May 1955.
- ⁶ Introduction to the Gruppo Origine exhibition catalogue, January 1951, republished in: Lucia Masina, *L'origine di Origine*, *La Tartaruga ...*, op. cit. . 21.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p.28.
- ⁸ Cfr. G. De Marchis e S. Pinto, *Colla*, Bulzoni Editore, Roma, 1972; at page 43 reads: 'Nuvolo's assistance throughout Colla's activity from 1950 onwards can only adequately be configured in terms of an authentic, mutual and balanced collaboration of artists.
- ⁹ Giorgio De Marchis, op.cit., p. 607.
- ¹⁰ Gillo Dorfles, *Ultime tendenze nell'arte di oggi*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1961, pp. 38 e 50.
- ¹¹ Giorgio Franchetti, "Il futurismo nel vissuto e nell'arte di Salvatore Scarpitta", in *Salvatore Scarpitta, opere 1955-1964*, Studio Durante, 1991.
- ¹² Nello Ponente, in *Nuvolo*, Delta Editori, Roma, pp. 41-44.
- ¹³ Cfr. Nuvolo, in *Eight Contemporary Artists from Rome*, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 11 settembre - 20 ottobre 1963.
- ¹⁴ Nello Ponente, op. cit., p.43
- ¹⁵ Bruno Corà, "Appunti per la prossima immagine", in the catalogue *Nuvolo*, Galleria d'Arte no. 1, Rieti, 1975; and in a two-page Addenda cyclostyled in Vasto in July 1976 on the occasion of the Oigroig exhibition at the Einaudi bookstore.
- ¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Differenza e ripetizione*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1971.
- ¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, op. cit.; it should be remembered that the first edition of this work published in France was in 1968.
- ¹⁸ The Alfa 39 bar code "is an alphanumeric code comprising ten digits (0 to 9), the 26 letters of the alphabet, 7 special characters (-, +, \$, ., -space-) and a start/stop code, 44 characters in all. Each character is encoded with a set of 9 elements: 5 bars and 4 spaces (between the bars), which can be of two types: wide and narrow (symbolising 1 and 0). The 9 elements that make up the character must consist of: 2 wide bars, 3 narrow bars, 1 wide space, 3 narrow spaces; however, there are 4 characters that are composed of 5 narrow bars, 3 wide spaces and 1 narrow space... The size ratio between wide and narrow elements is nominally 2.24, i.e. a wide element must be larger than a narrow element by 2.24 times" (S. Gervasini)
- ¹⁹ Benoît B. Mandelbrot, *La geometria della natura*, Edizioni Teoria, Roma, Napoli, 1989, p.25.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*