

Paolo Piscitelli's *plastic anagrams*

In Paolo Piscitelli's work there are many instances of this creative procedure, already since a series of drawings of his dating back to 1999, *Smembrati (Dismembered)*, which I consider representative and typical of his analytical and combinatorial mindset, and of how it materializes through his work as a visual artist.

A recent work of his created in 2011, *Parallel Phenomena (to make a table)*, is a perfect example of this attitude: 15 small pieces of wood, discarded during the process of making a table, were subsequently collected and marked one by one with a letter of the alphabet - one of the fifteen letters which, in Italian, form the sentence 'per fare un tavolo' (to make a table). Finally, these pieces were nailed to the wall so as to form the image of a composite shape - it's uncertain whether aggregating or dispersing - as if stuck in the midst of a transformation process; it's up to the viewer to complete this process, by mentally re-arranging the fifteen letters according to their correct sequence, in order to compose the title, and the meaning, of the work.

In other recent work, such as in the various *natural settings*, the anagrammatic procedure takes place once again, in the form of a sculpture, since Piscitelli collected miscellaneous fragments (scraps of wood or of synthetic fabric, sometimes books) deriving from other forms - already created or just possible - in order to build a new structure. Often these sculptures aren't frozen into a final form, but maintain, though only partially, the chance of mutating, without adding any element to those already present, but just by forming new associations, after unravelling the existing ones. In my opinion, the interesting aspect of the *sculture temporanee / temporary sculptures* - drawings of a pile of books, the likeness of which is split into various sheets and rearranged so as to form the complete image, just as it appeared before Paolo's eyes when he drew it - is the precariousness of the composition and its objective impermanence. This is because the drawings (4, 6 or 8 according to the series) could be mounted together in a totally random fashion, without adhering to the original objective image (the pile of books), so as to create a regular rectangle, consisting of the various sheets of paper. And this is also the case with a series of works from the same period, the *site specific performances* realized during his recent residency in the Summer Residency Program at the SVA in New York. Where we can observe 12, 20 or 25 drawings each depicting a different detail of a mass of clay, or of a posing model, all hung up together on the wall, and faithful to the regular form of the final composition, though generating a completely incoherent sequence, as if following the rules of chaos instead of the coherence that would have placed them in a certain predetermined order.

In his work *Sign of the Times*, dating 2008-09, another instance of this procedure, a sentence, the very one that gives the work its title, emerges from a tangle of haphazardly placed letters of the alphabet. Each one is the shadow of a letter that once made out the sign positioned above the door of a business (a bank, a café, a shop), which has since been closed. The letters (collected by Paolo himself from second-hand dealers in the States), bear witness to the past existence of these businesses, as fragments of a now illegible sign. Nevertheless, once re-activated by the artist's action, they are still capable of creating abstract signs with new meanings, though scrambled inside a magma that mixes together the past, the present and the future, freely crossing the boundaries of time and space.

Creating anagrams is a very ancient practice, clearly related to the use of the written language, though not exclusively, since the very pattern of creative thinking can basically be defined as "anagrammatic", because fragments from the reality experienced (not only visually) by the creator undergo a continuous recombination, often in a casual manner (Filippo Juvarra once stated that one cannot be able to create or invent till one's seen many things). Even dreaming, if one pays close attention, is strictly connected to one's waking experiences, and a dream isn't simply the effect of a real experience, but rather draws from it - along with other occurrences - in order to take form, using pre-existing elements to create new narrative constructions.

And in the ancient practice of oneiromancy, a shaman, when analysing a dream, looked for traces which, once recombined in another form, suggested different meanings, concealed inside the observed form. William Camden defined the anagram as "a dissolution of a name truly written into his letters, as his elements, and a new connection of it by artificial transposition, without addition, subtraction or change of any letter, into different words, making some perfect sense applicable to the person named."

Piscitelli's work is also taken over by a certain degree of unpredictability, and the new word, the

new formation, casually assembled, doesn't disclose a new meaning, but eludes a possible (and neither necessary nor required) interpretation of its significance. This is the case in *Smembrati*, but also in a number of works whose anagrammatic nature isn't equally evident, maybe, as in other instances: the so-called *Noccioli (Cores)*, created since 2000, where various forms coagulated over time, through the physical action of the artist, carried out in an enclosed, well-defined space, creating new structures which were completely independent from the artist's will (just as the smaller ones which made them up) and devoid of any wilful meaning.

carlo fossati, 2011