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The Order of the World*

Lucio Saviani

The thinking of the world, the unfolded order of things, the places of the things in the world, their rising and declining; the course of the world, in which every thing finds its place and duration, rise and decline, growth and disappearance, light and shade. The splendor in which all the things flow, “take place”, find their order and the darkness of the place where all things have their origin and finally disappear. These are the light and the shade themselves, which in their alternating, draw the horizon that Western thought, fading thought, since its dawning, has looked upon to find the things of the world and the world of the shades which the things end in.

Two Words

All finite things take place and have duration, appear and reappear yet, being limited things, are mentionable and utterable. *Nomen omen*: every finite thing *destines* itself to language.

There are two words, in the language of Western thought whose destiny has been one of *giving rise* and name to an ordered play of light and shade, *in the name* of the mysterious appearance of the world and the speaking of the ordered disappearance of the things.

*Kòsmos* and *Tòpos* conceal long *vicissitudes* of mutual thought while displaying an essence that is closely shared.

In fact, it is extremely difficult, even fascinating, to *comprehend legein*, to tie and to loosen the knots, the links between the meanings of these two “nouns”**—but they’re not simply words—avoiding that the several horizons that every noun opens, finally include the sense and the values of the other.

*Kòsmos* has turned to “ordered universe” only when a superior universal “intelligence” has been imagined. In pre-philosophical language, the meaning of the word was simply “order”. In Homer’s poems, the arrays of soldiers are described as “en kosmo”, simply “in order” . . .

On the other hand, *Tòpos*, according to Aristotle, is extremely difficult to grasp, but it manifests a power that is extraordinary and “superior” to any other, that same power which, according to Plato, makes what is, “in a sense,” not to be and what is not, “in a sense,” to
be. Once more, splendor and darkness: the light of *u-topia* and the obscure world of unreality.

**The Acting of the World and Place of Things**

*Kôsmos*, according to Heraclitus, is the shining, ordered disposition of all things. It’s thunderbolt, fire, sun; it’s also the play of a child. In the burning play of the universe, the light of the fire is the force which settles and *individualizes* the things in the world; allowing them to see the light and, taking them back, fade. The course of the world, the play of a child. Universal play doesn’t take place in the world, it doesn’t reveal itself. It isn’t a “phenomenon,” it can’t be placed among the things of the *world*, for it turns into *giving*, into conferring place and time, instead of into what is *given*.

The world doesn’t last as long as a *thing* could last in the world; the world, at most, may last as long as time itself.

The course of the world is *not*. More than *defining itself*, it produces itself in the cosmic process of individuation, a process of which man is a part. Man’s ecstatic opening of himself to the world and his thinking of the totality of all things *define themselves* only in their belonging to the course of the world, to the power of individuation thanks to which *every finite thing* takes place and bears a destiny, appears and disappears. So, every thing remains in its limits but, at the same time, all things are linked in a comprehensive totality; fragments take part, participate in the power of the being that is one and universal, that keeps and puts them together, that abandons and takes care of them, that makes them see the light and die. The being of the world doesn’t find its place near or over the finite things.

**Panatopias**

The state of things shapes an order the moment that things are “oriented.” When a thing occupies, or expresses, an eccentric place, when it’s located as “something extra,” it gives *place* to a *situation* that is problematic owing to its “placing in the world.” It’s something like concentrical circles in the water, so fleeting and so ordered...

But “placing in the world” expresses, *first of all*, a very obscure and multifaceted situation. The things of the world are always “oriented,” insofar as they have a position, and therefore are *posted*, thus defining their own *situation* and, at the same time, their own horizon. This orientation is determined with reference to a zero-point, a full stop that is mobile like the things themselves. In this way, the placing of everything in the world is expressed by its relation with another determined thing, that is, defined as a thing in the world; and yet the world itself, in its “creating an order,” is beyond every placing. Every
defined thing, from its margins, is contained by and contains another thing, which is in the same situation, and “so forth.” But what is the end [termine] for this going forth? Are things contained in the world like the small things are contained in big ones? Must the world be considered a continent? The answer to the question of how single things take part in the universal whole (the eternal play of ἄπειρον and πέρας) may be found in the problematical nature posted by the concept of the world.

The Shining of the World

Sometimes, however, it happens that a finite thing may shine in its inherence in the world and refer to the universal whole so that a world fragment may shine in the world light.

If the world is not an object, a being in the world, and if it cannot withdraw from and escape the gazing of phenomena, then no image of the world may be drawn, especially on the basis of the thinking of a relation between two beings in the world.

However, it may happen that the finite thing shining in its inherence in the world, instead of referring to an image, becomes transparent in the world light.

The finite thing is not necessarily annihilated by this transparency, though it may be more clearly looked upon as a product and a work of the force that individualizes the universal whole, suddenly shining with its light. The “transparent” things which may be passed through by world light acquire a cosmical depth. The finite thing recalls the ruling whole, but not with reference to another thing in the world. The thing shining with the world power has become a symbol.

Therefore, every finite being may become a symbol, “representing” the universe, when the whole turns up and shines in it; indirectly, the world cannot become a symbol because, in finite things, it meets with an image that is its own and reflects itself in the symbol.

The totum is in parte; the whole is representable only through symbolical figure and the symbol isn’t a copy of the original, but a part which represents the whole. When the light of the ruling force of the universe falls upon the thing, the thing doesn’t assume a new aspect: it’s still what it was, yet it’s no more that thing.

Hence, the ambiguous dimension of mysteriously comprehensible “unreality” and, at the same time, the recurrence of the mysterious power of τόπος.

Everything said up to now has to do, has necessarily to do with artistic experience and with the work of art.
The Place Without Margins, or the Margins of a Non-Place

The new realization of a situation requires something like a paradoxical gesture, almost a false movement: it's the same peculiar difficulty manifested by a definition, insofar as saying what a situation is already expresses the impossibility of representing it, of placing oneself "in front" of it like every other thing which is placed and oriented. It's the situation, instead, which defines itself as a perspective, as a viewpoint, limiting one's outlook on occasion. It's an outlook placed and oriented for catching, inevitably, the thinking of the horizon: that circle which contains and de-limits (horizein) all that is visible from a particular point.

Then the particular and ordered relation between the point and the line: the horizon line separates and links sky and earth, and in accordance with it, it's possible to orientate, to draw a point, to define the position and the place wherein one finds oneself.

Again, the mysterious power of topos: the invitation to a new habit, to "inhabit," to think of the "place" like something more originary than the space.

Things are not outside of us, objecta, but the things themselves open the originary place that is the origin of the experience in the space. The things themselves have always been included in the topos outòpos of being in the world.

Again, all of this has inevitably to do with art.

The "World" of Art

The encounter with the work of art may be described, in Heidegger's opinion, as a meeting with a person who has a world "vision" different from ours and with whom we have to compare ourselves. The work of art so interpreted, not only enters into the world, but also sheds a different light—or shadow—upon the order of things. In this sense, according to Heidegger, the work of art founds a world, showing a system of meanings and producing the ground, that is the dark bottom where it takes root. Just on the basis of this movement of founding and de-grounding, the effect produced by the work of art on the spectator is a crash, a shake, a daze (Stoss, in Heidegger's words, but also shock, like in Benjamin's remarks on the technical reproducibility of a work of art) which makes familiarity with a certain presence of things oscillate—in the sense of routine as well—and makes the usual order of the everyday world vacillate. (The impact, sometimes, is so hard that it causes, beyond the oscillation, reversals, whirls and real alterations: the ""upside down" world of the Spanish Middle Ages insinuates itself into the "revolt of things" of surrealism, while Hoffmann's automatons peep from within Carra's orthopaedic
man or, seized with technological wonder, from within Marinetti’s mechanical man. The “revolving world”—as Eliot guessed—finds its sole full stop in artistic creation, because it is considered in its whirling). What becomes crucial in Heidegger’s and Benjamin’s remarks is the fact that the bewildering and shaking effect exerted over the spectator remains, in the work of art, constitutive and not temporary.

Suspending world obviousness, the work of art provokes anxious amazement for the “fact” that the world, merely is—a world which, giving all the things a sense, is itself empty and negligible. The “bewilderment” (Unheimlichkeit) caused by aesthetic experience is, just for this reason, the same feeling of anguish: the total gratuitousness of the existence of the world; the fact that the world itself has a reference to the emptiness, to the chasm: that the world means nothing.

The oscillation, the dismay which constitutes the work of art are then the signs, the presages of an obscure and sudden gaze at the chasm, at the emptiness: a distressful “warning” of the nothing of the world.

Again, duty and threat, loss and sense of emptiness. But this time emptying out of sense, a sense of the loss of the world and of the lost gaze at nothing.

Exactly like the gaze at the “lack” and at the subject’s emptiness, which is met and reflected in Velazquez’s Las Meninas or the void, which Foucault invites us to look at. Or like the disquieting nihil mirari of the mysterious woman sitting as if she were hanging, decentered, in Giorgione’s Tempest.

*Italian title L’ordine del giorno plays with a double entendre. A bureaucratic expression meaning agenda, it is used in the sense of “the ordered disposition of the things in world light” (kòsmos).

**The Italian word nome means both “name” and “noun”.