

HYPERMAREMMA

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Felice Levini
Dal Giorno alla Notte

Da Cosa nasce Cosa (One thing led to another)

«If this discourse seems too long to be read all at once, it can be divided into six parts».

These are the first words we come across when we open the long essay published in Leiden in 1637 by an anonymous Frenchman and entitled *Discours de la méthode*¹. It is a sort of introduction to three jointly published essays on geometry, dioptric and meteors. It may seem strange, but meteors are of no interest to us here. Instead, it is interesting to discover the identity of this writer: René Descartes, known to most by his Latinized name Cartesio. Within the *Discours de la méthode*, in addition to the famous passage 'Ego cogito, ergo sum, sive existo', the possibility of man's ability to graphically represent dimensions comes to life: the Cartesian axes are theorized. Thus, the axes and their intersection are born, the horizontal plane of life and the vertical plane of art are born, space is born and so is time in our most canonical visualization.

To crown this new human possibility of reading the world, the author even shows us the direction in which to observe events, 'marking' the two small ticks that transform these axes into arrows. Here, then, takes shape the image of the arrow as vector, indication, sudden movement, crowning an imaginary already fertilized by a truculent history and mythology. A weapon already known in prehistoric times², the arrow - whose Roman lemma sagitta appears to be of Etruscan origin - not only travels vectorially through a space between two points but also establishes a strong connection between these two, the one who shoots it and the one who receives it, generating an immediate and intense, sometimes fatal relationship. The entire history of man thus hinges on two types of relationships that the arrow establishes: horizontal relationships, between man and man, and vertical relationships, between man and God. This last

¹ R. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences Plus la Dioptrique, les Meteores, et la Geometrie qui sont des essais de cete Methode*, Ian Maire, Leiden 1637;

² The first arrowheads date back to the Neolithic period (8000 BC - 3500 BC);

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relationship gives rise to an image of the arrow that is even different from the previous ones: lightning, a divine warning and signal, a sudden connection between heaven and earth.

Felice Levini, once up near the *Capitolium*³ that crowns the Archaeological Park of the Ancient City of Cosa, pays homage to this vertical relationship, capable of marking the history of a place that the Romans elected as sacred in respect of the defeated⁴ who prayed to their divinities in that same place. To do this, Levini takes off the shoes of the artist to put on those of Saturn, the God of Time⁵. Twelve metallic arrows, lit by a bright red tone verging on vermilion, pierce the ground, studding the Arce of the Ancient City of Cosa with incontestable divine signals. Like timeless archaeological findings, as many marble slabs bear the names of the divinities of the Roman Olympus in bronze letters: without any solution of continuity, these slabs emerge from the ground like warnings, signaling the continuity of the relationship between the human and the divine that goes back to the dawn of Mediterranean civilisations.

The artist retrieves the Roman *Capitolium*, the Etruscan ritual cleft that resided underneath⁶, and transports them so far into the contemporary that he creates a past for them. In this way, time dilates, almost coming to a complete halt. Looking up at the arrows, one realizes that they are nothing more than sundials bearing the four axes, the four cardinal points⁷. As in a metaphysical landscape, it is now impossible to understand a before and an after in relation to what is unfolding before our eyes. The polygonal walls of the temple, the tree bordering them, the foundations of the area dedicated to Mater Matutae become nothing more than a dechirican backdrop that instead of housing mannequin statues houses divine signals reduced to Euclidean geometries: arrows.

Once we are absorbed within this dense time, the artist brings us back to the frenzy of reality by ironically shifting the work's emphasis on chromatic impact. The light, which he captures through the red paint, dialogues with its surroundings in the only color tone that can be used to create a contrast, to send out an aesthetic signal. In this way, the typical luminosity of celestial intervention is represented, the same that radiates on the wooden pole supporting

³ Temple dedicated to the Capitoline Triad (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva) located in the center of the hill that houses the sacred area of the Archaeological Park;

⁴ The foundation of Cosa by the Romans dates back to 273 BC following their victory over the Etruscan cities of Volsinii and Vulci in 280 BC;

⁵ A Greek imported deity, Saturn was born from the encounter between Gaea, the Earth, and Uranus, God of the sky, taking the original name of Chronos (Χρόνος), Time, the one who generates and devours;

⁶ American scholars have pointed to a cultic use of the Arce as early as the 3rd century BC. The main evidence includes a square limestone platform of about 7.40 m per side and a natural fissure in the rock (h ca. 2.50 m), in which traces of ash and charred plants were discovered, to be interpreted as votive offerings;

⁷ Quattro punti cardinali (Four Cardinal Points) is the title of the work Felice Levini presented at the 1993 Biennial exhibition La coesistenza dell'arte (The Coexistence of Art);

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Constantine's tent in the Dream masterfully painted by Piero Della Francesca⁸. What emerges then is the dazzling rapidity of the encounter, the impossibility of continuous dialogue with the divine world reduced to brief signals to be interpreted, and thus the immeasurable smallness that marks human precariousness and gives the work its title.

Because, if from dusk till dawn, as a famous film by Robert Rodriguez with Quentin Tarantino⁹ teaches us, an eternity could pass, from day to night, on the other hand, it could only be a matter of a few moments.

Massimo Belli

⁸ Piero Della Francesca, *Dream of Constantine*, 1458-1477, fresco forming part of the Stories of the True Cross in the main chapel of the Basilica of San Francesco in Arezzo;

⁹ From Dusk till Dawn, directed by Robert Rodriguez, subject by Robert Kurtzman, screenplay by Quentin Tarantino, USA 1996, 108'