

THE EARTH, THE SKY, THE COPY

“The Earth is the copy of the sky” pronounced Hermes Trismegistus, and in the Middle Ages this teaching summed up all that was left of the ancient Egyptian wisdom. In this respect, at our time, even Michel Serres did not entirely hit the mark in his *Origin of Geometry*. Serres, after Herodotus, recalls that the measure of the Earth, like Egypt itself, is the Nile’s gift: spreading its fertile mud along its banks, it erased the boundaries between the fields and thus obliged to draw them anew. Hence, out of this compelling necessity, the origin of the geometric writing of the world, for the restoration of civil and political order, the transformation of the swampy *tabula rasa* into a single gigantic *pinax* (a votive tablet), in a set of signs able to guide the return of life. Up to now Serres reading Herodotus.

But the question that it does not duly answer is: just where do the geometric syntax, the form and structure of this set of signs, the dot, the line and the surface (as Kandinsky would say) come from? Right from the sky, as Hermes explains, from the “belief in stars”, to borrow the title of a famous book by Fritz Saxl. This belief has entirely disappeared in modern times, if in Walter Benjamin’s eyes stars meant only the “cryptography of merchandise”. And yet until the advent of aerial and satellite photography it was still the heavenly bodies, through geodetic triangulation, that dictated order on the face of the Earth, being a system of reference, in their ensemble, of the accuracy of every geometric outline, starting with the boundaries between one state and another, all regulated according to the angular distance with respect to the firmament. And besides, and in fact even first of all: can we conceive a straight line without first reducing things to dots and reality to a plane, like the sky and not the Earth makes us do from the beginning? And as Ptolemy, an Egyptian who wrote in Greek at the time of the Roman Empire’s greatest splendor, did, starting with terrestrial things, then projecting the heavenly order here below? From this point of view all of modernity is the highly concrete effect of such a projection-translation, the result of a gradual *adequatio mentis et rei*, where the *thing* is the surface of our planet and the *mind* is the cognitive function that depends on the relation between our brain and the sky’s vault. Just think of when roads became programmatically and systematically straight: not before the 17th century, that is, precisely after the advent of modern geodetic techniques. Or just think, in the 19th century, of the creation of the railroad, the straightest road of all, the first no longer placed directly on the bare Earth, but on top of boards placed over it, on the flat interspace responsible for entirely turning the earth’s surface into the receptacle of the *novus ordo saeculorum* of heavenly origin: an interspace on which the vehicles’ motion tended to acquire for the first time in the history of Man the same regularity and the same accuracy ascribed from time immemorial to the evolutions of the luminous bodies above our heads. The Earth that precisely becomes the copy of the sky, according to Trismegistus’ prophesy.

But now things have changed, and it is from here that we must start to be able to understand Diego Esposito’s work. With globalization, meaning the advent of the Net, all the world of yesterday is finished, because the space and time of classical physics (the space and time that Kant thought were

innate to the human race) can no longer explain much about how the world works. From this point of view, we should, as Eugenio Battisti did for the Renaissance, speak of anti-modernity instead of post-modernity. And anti-modernity, just as Diego Esposito’s works show us, is the period in which the relationship between sky and Earth is reversed.

By the word *globalization* we mean, cursorily, a set of processes that among other things refer back to the archaic, if not the archetypal, and for a very simple reason: if the Earth is the copy of the sky, that is, a gigantic map, as all of modernity pictured and built it, then leaving something behind means, for a moving subject, never again meeting up with it; but if instead the Earth is a sphere, that is, a globe, what on proceeding forward we inevitably leave behind us we shall fatally find before us. We should then be in serious trouble if we are unable to recognize it in time because we would end up beneath it, it would crush us. But to recognize it we must, among other things, overturn like in a glass ball the relation between our planet (that Carl Ritter in the early 19th century called the “house of mankind’s education”) and everything else, starting from the vault that has loomed over us from the beginning. And this is what Diego Esposito has begun to do, for the welfare, or rather the salvation of the whole world. With his works the sky begins to become the copy of the Earth, and a new era begins.

Franco Farinelli