

Curving the sky

Speaking of Nahum Tevet

Let us begin - from where however may we begin? - with a certain question, one which will lead us *directly* to Nahum Tevet's work: how can we suggest the sense of another logic where the boundaries, the frontiers, the tracings of this work cannot be assigned, determined and attributed? But this is actually what we must try to sketch while inquiring into Nahum Tevet. Trying to sketch thus a definition of space and of the spatiality proper to the work of art.

We actually and not randomly notice that, since the beginning of his path, Nahum Tevet gives to his work the aim of proposing a thought about the themes of space and spatiality, which involves a similarly important reflection on time. So it isn't by chance if from his "kick off" in the field of Art, Nahum Tevet traces the possible area of an unlimited experience for Art itself. Unlimited, that is, without preconditions allowing us to penetrate and enter the work. The open experience of an ever-evolving work, which bends the history of art and upsets, interferes within the possibility of thinking about a unifying sense in the name of the work. The space, so as it's regulated by Nahum Tevet, stands out or - if we prefer - calls into the question the identity itself of the space, the extreme planning and the perspectivism of the work. And this in order to question the inherent grammar of the spatial order, some may say in order to question from the essence of spatiality and not solely from spatiality in itself.

Hence the mania, we could say, the obsession of building, establishing and founding space. Nahum Tevet actually builds his work to question the essential grammar of spatiality. He builds without circumscribing, without stopping and always extending the work's space toward the undetermination and the emptying of its own place. As if space, built according to a dialectic idea of multiplicity and unity, had always been possessed

and worked by an irreducible disjunction, discordance without negativity, inadequacy with no possible unity, which goes on in modifying and upsetting it, making it able to present itself as such only through an enucleation and extraction of its own place.

Now, Nahum Tevet's work doesn't stop here. What would moreover mean a stop in this perpetual and endless emptying of the work's space? We otherwise say that this enucleation, this extraction could not be fixated in finality. They already are the sign towards an opening - *the undetermined opening of the work*.

So the regulated space of the work is not a precise opposition to the spatial order. Rather it seeks to reserve and preserve that from which the order, the disposition, the need, and thus the desire for a motionless and unchangeable centre - the mathematization of reality - can determine themselves.

It should not mean simply that the seriality, or the objective and objectifying serialization, or the planning of reality, are imaginary and fictitious. Let us assert it without subterfuges or excessive theorization: they depend and are conditional on their own *impossibility*. Or better, they are determined by a sort of "original disorder" – the word original however could not suit to this case – always and already implicit in them.

The "need" of leaning or laying down the objects in space, this omnipresent need of ordering things, objects, beings, of giving them a place or a function, never ceases to be investigated by Nahum Tevet. *Where does this question come from?* The question comes from a "source", which precedes the need, trespasses the desire, and anticipates the centre and the place of the unifying statement. To a better comprehension, we remember here the sentence of another great artist, Bruce Nauman, who recalls an irreducible "mystic reality" at the heart of Art work. For it is impossible to completely avoid this need of unity, centre and unification. But the reversing approach of Nahum Tevet is placed here: it is never possible to begin anything in Art without starting from this need. We can begin only with it, through it and from it. But the artist - if a law can be here transcribed - has

always to return this desire to another, set it according to a sort of non-order, which is not the simple contrary of order and which mainly acts as a force stirring order to go out of its torpor. And maybe it is for this reason that what arises from the ground-without-ground of Nahum Tevet installations, is something more than a simple disorder. It reveals the opening towards that which has neither *télos* nor *function*. As if the artist arose the question: is it around this opening that by chance Art works? And, consequently: is it from this opening that we are called to think thinking itself?

First of all we notice the space and the place: the seat of the *International Bank* (Habank Habei Leumi), placed in Rothschild Avenue in the heart of the Israeli metropolis, offers to Nahum Tevet its lobby, that is the principal welcoming place for visitors, clients, employers, managers, as well as the space, which, through a certain movement of veiling and unveiling, offers itself to the view of the busy pedestrians or flâneurs of Tel-Aviv.

It is necessary to stress and to praise this gift and this hospitality, uncommon in our time. Where a great financial institution could had simply decorate the space with one more fountain or with some reassuring paintings, as in a petit bourgeois residence, on the contrary it decided to invite the artist to exhibit his work elsewhere from the usual spaces, accepting, in this sense, to be displaced inside its own seat, to be put into question and to be moved out from its own foundations.

What an opening act to open the space of the institution! What a risk taken at the cutting edge of globalized capitalism! For once, the bank decided not to join the circle of exchanges, of gift and counter-gift, of debt and reward.

And the artist answered this call, bravely daring a work, which, inside the institution, at the heart of its triumphalist economy and its powerful globalizing logic of transactions and exchanges, proposes another constellation. Hence dreaming of inserting it into a

distant orientation, which, although connected to the world, leads our look, perception and thought travelling through the stars.

How can this happen? How can a whole constellation of socio-economical meanings can be entirely replayed, rethought, reiterated when these are already circumscribed by all the lines and the concatenations of theorized or real values? From what place can we attempt a new language while the artist, and us with him, are always determined by the language of economy and globalization? The language of an exposure, which can be measured only through the evaluation of profit or loss and which never arrives to think beyond the interest, only facing the evaluable and the measurable?

Surely not by refusing the institution or standing against what has always been the main course of things: the economical logic, which has always gone along its own way without being upset or interrupted. Certainly not by opposing it a counter-model inspired by an idealist claim to subvert or suspend the Western economical order. This means: it doesn't happen neither against nor beyond the principle of the economical circle.

Art takes its risk by inscribing in and within what has always necessarily constituted our community and our society – the State, the market, the media - a break without *télos*, a break from and through which a trace of light shines.

Because – and Nahum Tevet carries it out - art doesn't have neither proper means nor an infallible technique and doesn't benefit from a clear and legitimate status. It always goes with a sort of *impotence*, from which it has to move, to act and to express itself.

So what Art holds, what supervises to it and what is almost always perceived as a sort of weakness, is the movement, which allows the State, the market and the institutions to meet or to move away from, to separate from or to join with another ray of light arising from the vacuum. This is the frightful difficulty the art of Nahum Tevet faces: to show and to present the sovereignty of the economical world together with the fragility of this other irreducible, inapprehensible, hardly conceivable source of meaning.

Not hope for anything, not expect anything of what must remain immeasurable and incalculable - this is perhaps the Law, which Nahum Tevet, together with ourselves, are subjected to, while he opens the space and the institutional place to insufflate in it what has always been other: Art.

Here-hence the unusual representation of a constellation of stars: Nahum Tevet chooses to strongly throw ahead the constellation of the *Ursa Major* (the Great Bear) which, as we know, is the bigger and consequently the most visible in the sky of the North hemisphere while turning to *Polaris* (the Pole Star). As if the artist wanted to suggest a type of relationship or reciprocity and let us glimpse some similarity between the bank institution and astro-nomy. So he aims to include in a single entity the economical circle of exchanges- debts- discharges- rewards- and our pretence to determine the “states of the sky” through a human law.

In sum, Law (Nomos) Oikos (the dwelling) and Astro (the star) combine, reply and carry on each other.

What happens in and within this Law? What happens when the orientation of a movement leaning to the only light source, which all the other stars are always moving around, is stopped? What occurs when everything gathers around this cyclic movement merging to the Polar Star? Happening, occurring and turning up. For Nahum Tevet these words don't arise from the outside of the work of art. It's in the centre of its interiority that they prepare their opening: something that will not delay in provoking a sort of excavation of the Law itself. So Nahum Tevet doesn't stop to avoid the place where we would expect him to intervene. He constantly plays to shift the borderline between the inside and the outside, opposition and position. Actually Nahum Tevet moves between these two poles, without preferring the one to the other and constantly weaving between them. The result, if there is one, is an intervention which is never realized by starting

from a given place. It is perceived as a blow, an event, which we couldn't say if it is sweet or fulminating.

Neither internal nor external, the art of Nahum Tevet intervenes, it actually calls us to a sort of new answer which is neither prescriptive nor descriptive, neither ideological nor redeeming. It places us in a sort of vagueness, which exposes us to the night abysses - or better to the experience and existence afflictions.

As if the pure, empty, wrapping and terrifying vagueness of the nightly and infinite celestial vault enveloped the trained and controlled whirl of stars that Nahum Tevet reveals into the space and the place of the work of Art. In the middle of this space, the artist shows us the way to a certain direction - the North, or the polar source point, where everything meets and everything moves to - and in and within the most intimate intimacy, the undirectionality of an infinite space, the ground-without-ground mantling and englobing this astral movement. We could suggest that Nahum Tevet moves toward the invention of a new possibility of thinking *under* the economical order that cannot be reduced to it. Accompanying this arrangement till the burning threshold of the no-return point, which waves between the direction of a light and the darkness of a vacuum, where we can find certainty of foundations, orientation and direction. For example, the certainty of a source by which it's still possible to issue a judgment able to control or to minimize the risks and the effects on the basis of a certain assured and accountable logic. But notice that the Nahum Tevet chairs are overturned, decentralized and wobbling. They open the way to instability, to frailty and precariousness where it's possible to detect only the machinery ruins, only some isolated, broken and interrupted moments of the cyclical movement of the economy or of the continuous process of the sense, the significance and also of the hierarchization proper of this means. In truth all is here upset and reversed. And so Nahum Tevet could also recall those architecture conceived as an evolutive spatial diagrams (we quote here Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers and Gianfranco Franchini,

the architects of the Centre Pompidou) whose principle consists in letting arise - making them to be visible- the intimacy, the interiority, the hidden and the secret, in order to show how the demarcation line between the inside and the outside cannot exist anymore, being now completely overturned.

But Nahum Tevet goes beyond that. With this gesture- this prodigious effort- of course he doesn't want only to overturn, but he suggests how any structure, any building, any institution always interrupts and suspends the cadence and the rhythm of its own movement.

Here the movement, the cadence, the rhythm is not only locked up – as if the only thing to show was the simple upsetting- but it is already thrown toward an unceasing weaving run, which, without restrains, will never stop to move against itself. The bank institution – but certainly it could be also any other possible and imaginable conceptualized institution or, why not, history itself- cannot avoid, according to the order of its own deployment, interrupting and suspending itself in the actual moment of its realization and fulfilment. In truth -with no truth- this art's movement shows how any order doesn't stop of arranging *against* and *for* itself. It doesn't stop to frantically and passionately move toward its own collapse.

But we must remember that, in the effort of creating the art of a ground-without-ground, which, while occurring, routs all meaning, Nahum Tevet couldn't please to face only with abdication, with the abandon of this sense. Let us say it once more, Nahum Tevet doesn't want to rid us of meaning by simply engaging an experience of negation of economy and sense. But he wants to reveal, by displaying it, what in this experience is linked to the endless and always renewed question of meaning, the essence, and the truth, which has always worked inside every institution we think about... Because Nahum Tevet shows us

the single way to the light and, directly with it, the always alert darkness, which always risks to disorient man, here to deviate the sailor's navigation.

That sailor, whose ship maybe still follow its route or maybe has already capsized and so it's now going adrift, doesn't have anything but the same single Polar Star as his guarantee against deviation. The dark vastness of the celestial vault doesn't stop to swallow its light, to take its strength away and so to give the sailor the ambiguity of the unpredictable and no one could never ascertain if it will offer itself as fulminating peril or absolute promise.

How can we think this turnabout?

And in a little different way: how can we avoid the repetition? Maybe by endlessly repeating the same acts and the same gestures, by still supporting and upholding the act of repetition? How can we imagine the possibility of another destination if not as unapproachable, if not as the supreme impossible? What is an artist who doesn't compromise himself, who doesn't complicate the approachable? What is an artist who, just after the first effort, designates clearly the access and system to the thing itself (whether this is "orientation", "direction", "art", etc)? And, what is an artist who doesn't put the viewer before the challenge of that which is inaccessible, of that which is unapproachable? And what is an artist who doesn't exhibit or expose himself to the original muddle of things? Could it be the only possibility for a real difference....the only possibility for another direction, for the announcement of a turnabout?

As History itself, the history of a culture (economy, politics, art) presumes an identifiable route, a *télos* toward which it dreams that the movement, the memory and the promise - the identity as difference in itself- converge.

But History also presumes that the route, the orientation, the direction, the destination should not be given, ought not to be identifiable, predetermined and central. History, and maybe this is what Nahum Tevet could let us think about- should be disclosed as unpredictable, or as the radical and unexpected mess of elements, objects, things, buildings. That is, the same as saying that no direction, no aim could be assigned since the very beginning to the artistic exhibition. Unless we conceive the aim - if an aim is there- as the artist's retraction into the invisible. As if the subjectivity of the artist disappeared behind the "work", because to open a world, to recall the question or the query, it is not necessary to produce something monumental. It is necessary to draw the monumental back to its excess and make it disappear, almost vanish inside the excess itself. As if art became something material but also intensely insensible. A poem or a verse. Or, in the grammar invented by Nahum Tevet, a wooden installation in which the wood itself holds the frailty of a poem and where the doors of the universe can open. And you cannot not go to this universe, towards it. You cannot not look for your own direction or orientation, your own Ursa Major.

From the Greeks at least we know that Art is something that must be looked, observed, inspected. It necessarily recalls the field of vision and light. But what provokes, urges, summons our look doesn't answer to the simple manifestation, phenomenalization, and demonstration. What the artistic experience – the artist's and the viewer's one - recalls to do not belong to the perception of what is present or visible. It doesn't belong to what usually defines the experience. It's necessary that the viewed thing retracts away from the view and that a sort of interaction may occur between the seeing and the not seeing - a way of meaning, of signifying radically heterogeneous to manifestation, demonstration and vision consequently. As if what calls us, what keeps us busy and troubled, presumed an unimaginable retirement into the impossibility of giving a form or a content.

Whenever the value of the vision, of the exposition to the look, of the revelation, of the presentification becomes a difficulty, art can arrive, arise and compare. Because art – and we don't know this by the Greeks but from this other shore from which Nahum Tevet calls and invites us - alters the vision, throws our look toward an irrecoverable, immemorial blindness: a blindness abandoned to the darkest abyss and to the purest vision.