

THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

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Sharpening the scalpel. Madrid, 2019

“Ma troisième maxime était de tâcher toujours plutôt à me vaincre que la fortune et à changer mes désirs que l’ordre du monde.”

Descartes, Discourse on the method. Third part. 1637

Descartes wisely advises that it is better to master ourselves rather than fortune and to change our desires rather than the order of the world. But now there are too many architects who put their own desires before the order of the world, creating disorder with their capricious architecture. And they prefer fame and fortune rather than mastering themselves. In short, Descartes defends reason as the tool for life. And how could I not be in agreement with Descartes when it is my firm belief that reason is the primary and principal tool of an architect?

The work of the architect is to bring order to the world. To physically organize the world, organize territory, organize cities, organize every building, organize rooms and organize services. Organizing means bringing order and to bring order to space, to establish the order of space is the work of the architect: bringing order to the world, order to territory, order to cities, order to every building, order to rooms, order to services.

What Palladio wished to do with his Villa Rotonda, was it not to organize, to bring order to the whole world? More than a house, it was a temple and more than a temple what the architect was trying to do was to make it the center of the world.

When Palladio designed the Villa Capra, Villa Rotonda, in 1566 on a hill on the outskirts of Vicenza, he wanted to build something there that was more, much more than just a villa. He builds a villa where the axes that traverse and articulate it are made visible. And with these axes that reach infinity he intends to bring order to the whole world. And he does. The two cardinal axes permit the Villa to become the centre of the world. Palladio brings order to the world.

Was it not to organize, to bring order to the emerging world that Michelangelo sought for with the Campidoglio square, the very epicenter of Imperial and Papal Rome, when he brought about the emergence of the world not just to be contemplated but also to hold in his hands?

When Michelangelo designs this sublime space, he creates something more than just a square. The two converging palaces and the position of the Dioscuris Castor and Pollux, apart from constituting an exemplary exercise in perspective, are no more than an excuse to make the world emerge there, at that very spot. And God knows he does it. Michelangelo brings order to the world.

What did the architects of Manhattan, Paris, Barcelona or Madrid do but bring order to these cities?

When G. Morris, J. Rutherford and S. de Witt brought order to Manhattan, they had no idea that the order imposed there in 1811 was to continue to be valid, and more than valid, two centuries later. The perfect grid plan of its avenues 150 feet wide and its streets 60 feet wide, is to this day extraordinarily efficient in its layout. When I go out walking in New York I am reminded how right these measurements are. One feels at home on these avenues. Their dimensions are just right, not too large, not too small.

When in 1865 Baron Haussmann decrees his modernization program for Paris, in spite of considerable opposition, he knows that he is imposing an order that will turn Paris into the capital of the world. As clear as daylight. And in the same vein, Cerdá in Barcelona and Castro in Madrid. And Bogotá and Lima and Buenos Aires. And so many other cities in the world. Something as logical as establishing the order of space, clearly the work of an architect. An architect who knows that reason is his primary and principal work tool.

Is it not to organize, to bring order to nature what man does when he plants thousands of olives and vine on a grid plan drawn up with string like a fishnet? Is it not to establish a very definite order? Is it not favoring nature? There are those who appeal for freedom, or who argue about the lack of freedom of the olives and the vines when it comes to choosing their position in nature. This brings us back to Rousseau and the age-old discussion of the noble savage.

And within this organization of the world and of nature, man uses, or rather he should use reason as his principal tool. And architects most of all. Because reason is the principal tool of the architect, of the creator. Cervantes in his short but marvelous prologue to *Don Quijote* writes: "I would this book, as a child of my intellect, were the fairest, gayest and cleverest that could be imagined..." He clearly states that reason is the principal tool of every creator. Because literary creation is also the result of reason, of the intellect.

What is it if not to bring order to the world what I strive to achieve with each and every one of my projects? I have a project on my desk for a white tower in Dubai, and all that I have done is to bring order, create order, put in order. I have done nothing more than create order, guided by reason. The tower brings order to the territory which becomes its principal point of reference.

To create order is to organize. I have had to organize the territory with my building: once the legal norms in relation to the other towers around it have been scrupulously adhered to, my tower brings order to the space there. The first operation with this new piece consisted in bringing order to the pieces in closest proximity. With my tower bringing order to all the other surrounding towers. Next I had to vertically order the functions, dimensions and character that I wished to include on every floor of my tower. Then in each apartment I had to put in order the programs stipulated for 1, 2 and 3-bedded apartments. Then within each apartment I had to put in order each and every one of the pieces, including bathrooms. Then within each bathroom I had to put in order every single element, including the door. In short, bringing order, creating order, putting in order.

And the facade of translucent white glass, is nothing more than another exercise that demands rigorous order, bringing a facade to order. Bringing order, creating order, putting in order.

It is my intention to bring order to the space with the establishment of cardinal points, rather like the threads of a spider's web. That is what I wish to achieve with my white tower in Dubai. Because there is not another tower in the world so square, so smooth, so white. Square, which by marking the cardinal points, seeks to be the center of the world. Smooth with the minimum envelope. White with the pure whiteness of an Arab minaret.

In poetic terms, I wanted to combine Beauty and vertigo in designing this tower in purest white, slender and tall, ever so tall, as if it were the minaret of a great mosque. Striving to achieve the most beautiful tower in the world. Knowing that Beauty belongs to the world of order, or better still, the dream of an order tempered by reason. Because creating order means bringing silence and calm to what is in order. Which is exactly what I propose to bring about with my architecture: silence, calm, order. That serenity, that silent music, that order that I believe architecture, in all its forms, should always provide us.

Because as Descartes goes on to say in his Discourse on the Method:

“There is nothing that is completely within our power except our thoughts, so that after we have done our best regarding things external to us, everything where we fail to succeed is, from our point of view, absolutely impossible. And this alone seemed to me sufficient to prevent me from desiring for the future anything but what I was to acquire, and thus render me contented.”

Or as Le Corbusier put it in more simple terms: “Space, light and order. Those are the things that men need just as much as they need bread or a place to sleep.”