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Guido Avezzù[1*]

Form, Event, Theatre

Carlo Diano, *Form and Event. Principles for an Interpretation of the Greek World*. Translated by Timothy C. Campbell and Lia Turtas, Introduction by Jacques Lezra. New York: Fordham University Press 2020, ISBN 978-0-8232-8792-5. pp. 128.

Abstract

In 1952, Carlo Diano, then newly appointed professor of Greek literature at the University of Padua, brought a short essay entitled *Form and Event* to the attention of the world of Greek scholars. Already translated into French, Spanish and Modern Greek, this essay has been translated into English by T.C. Campbell and L. Turtas, with an "Introduction" by J. Lezra. Also with reference to Diano's subsequent production as a scholar and translator of Greek theatrical texts, this note aims to make evident the close relations that link Diano's phenomenology of Greek culture and Greek tragedy.

Keywords: Carlo Diano; Greek tragedy; phenomenology; interpretations of Greek culture

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After the fourth Italian edition with a preface by Remo Bodei (Diano 1993), a French edition in 1994 and a Spanish one in 2000 (this one with the Bodei's preface mentioned above), Timothy C. Campbell and Lia Turtas have recently published an impressive English translation of Carlo Diano's essay *Forma ed evento. Principi per un'interpretazione del mondo greco* (1952b, 1960, 1967, and 1993) with an "Introduction" by Jacques Lezra (Diano 2020). Under the title *Form and Event. Principles for an Interpretation of the Greek World* (henceforth *F&E*), this edition is based on the Italian 1993 one. Starting from the 1960s, all editions of *F&E* include in the appendix the "Letter" to the jurist Pietro de Francisci about his own essay, that Diano published in the *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* (Diano 1953, but dated "July 1952", 104). The essay had appeared the previous year in the same *Giornale* (1952c) with the same title it was to have when first published as a separate book (1952b). This new edition, intended for the American public, adds several previously-absent notes (115-26) in order to document – and sometimes even to suggest further insights into – the sources of the ancient texts Diano quoted or alluded to. The *Commonalities* series, directed by T.

[1] I thank Carina Louise Fernandes for her revision of the text.

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C. Campbell, professor of Italian at Cornell University, shows a lively interest in continental thought and has published the writings of several Italian contemporary scholars, including Roberto Esposito, Maurizio Ferraris, Remo Bodei, Adriana Cavarero and Angelo Scola, Massimo Cacciari, and Emanuele Coccia.

It should be noted, by way of warning, that both Diano's essay and his "Letter" end on the same capitalised word – "Nothingness": in the former, one reads "Being coinciding with Nothingness" (88), in the latter, "Lao Tze's Nothingness" (104). This word is not much frequented by strictly classical scholars, and this choice may suffice to underline the uniqueness of an essay that in some ways caught by surprise the Italian academic milieu. Whoever faces a text like this – whether a translator, an editor, or a reader – has to deal with a binomial, *form* and *event*, only apparently analogous to the much more famous and now familiar pair from which we can no longer prescind: *apollinisch* and *dionysisch*. In his brilliant "Introduction", Jacques Lezra, professor and chair of Hispanic studies at the University of California, Riverside, rightly emphasises the insistence with which "other couples, couplets, and triplets, have served to . . . interpret the 'Greek world'", and how "these couplets and triplets and their destinies color Diano's" (4). In his "Letter" to P. de Francisci, Diano summarises the two terms of this polarity as follows: Event is 'what happens to each one' (the Latin *id quod cuique evenit*), and it "will always be found in the relation of two terms: the first is the *cuique* understood as the character of being grounded in existence [It. *esistenzialità*], which is pointed out in the *hic et nunc*. The other is the spatial-temporal horizon from which the *evenit* is thought to originate" and "includes within it all of space and time [*ubique et semper*]" (93). Form was understood by Diano as "mankind's reaction to the breaking apart of time and the opening of space created by the event in and around him" by "[providing] events with a structure and by enclosing them, normaliz[ing] them" (97-8). "One of the most simple forms for enclosing an event is a name . . . The name . . . spells out the power that is revealed in the event . . . allowing man to free himself from the *thambos* ['amazement'] that paralyzes, and to direct his actions" (99).

In his introduction, Lezra is also attentive to the presence of the concept of form in the best-known political manifesto written by Giovanni Gentile.[2] Diano had listened to Gentile as a teacher and then revered him as a father, yet his Form is opposed to the notion of Gentile's "'principle' – singular and indivisible, leading to a singular 'formula di verità'", "a form that is not correlative of time and space" (20-2). The difference is obvious, but it is worth pointing it out – and it is valuable that Lezra has done so – since the investigation of personal affinities and political affiliations often still outweighs the precise verification of the contribution of ideas. But perhaps the most important contribution of this "Introduction" is in the final underlining – an opening, rather than a conclusion – of "the critique of formality . . . and of formalism, that Diano mounts in his

[2] "Fundamental ideas [Idee fondamentali]" in the article "Fascismo", *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1932). See the extensive note by Lezra (118n11).

[*F&E*]" (23), arriving at a call against "the fantastic image of Hellenic cultural hegemony, catastrophically gathered and summarized . . . in the first half of the twentieth century, and threaten to gather together again today" (25).

This translation and Lezra's in-depth 25-page "Introduction" raise, in those who have had the opportunity to meet Carlo Diano, questions that do not concern the theoretical sphere but the functionality of the two categories, Form and Event, precisely in relation to Diano's wide-ranging interests in theatre. At the University of Padua it was Diano himself who inaugurated the practice whereby the specific subject of each class in Greek Literature, the so-called 'corso monografico' of the Italian academic syllabus, coincided with theatrical texts with a focus on tragedies, but sometimes comedies as well. Diano himself recalls that he dedicated his 'monographic course' in the academic year 1951-1952 to the *Iliad*, and in particular to Book 22 ("Letter to P. de Francisci", 94-5). In 1953-1954 it was the turn of Pindar, as the memory of one of his first students suggests (Degani 2004: 1309-10). But in 1955 it was the turn of the *Seven Against Thebes* – from then on, all the 'monographic courses' were dedicated to theatre, although, with regard to the one he dedicated to Homer, Diano already wrote that "through [Book 22] we can account for theater":

> while the representation in the poem occurs typically on one level and either ignores time or arranges it in linear fashion, on another level, just as soon as the action becomes tragic, an external space appears and the present forms a circle with the paste and future.
> ("Letter to P. de Francisci", 94-5)

It may be noticed that, although formulated in a non-scholarly piece, this fundamental remark by which Diano aimed to clarify the basic concepts of his essay, takes for granted the definition of what is "tragic": why the duel between Hector and Achilles in Book 22, and not others among the *Songs* that make up the *War Music* of the *Iliad*? Diano's answer is that the tragic lies precisely in that 'opening' of time and space, it is an 'event' and, at the same time, it coincides with history: "[w]e make history, not metaphysics" (89).

Thus, almost naturally, among the various aspects of classical Greek culture questioned by *F&E*, this review will privilege, selectively, the presence of the event in the construction of the dramatic character and, perhaps even more, the very notion of the dramatic play as an event.

We must, however, try to define the most characteristic feature of Diano's writing in order to explain the difficulties encountered by those who are about to translate him, and to fully recognise the merit of the translation made by Campbell and Turtas. Diano's writing, both in *F&E* and in his *Linee per una fenomenologia dell'arte* (1956, then 1968), reflects an approach far removed from the close reading of texts – which he had done for a long time, especially with regard to Epicurus – as well as from historical culturalism. In vain one would seek in *F&E* either the precise definiteness of philological writing or the detached *allure* of the historian. Diano, on the contrary, seems to write as if by

sudden illuminations linked not according to dialectical relations but on the basis of analogies and paradigms. This style seems to respond to an implied need for a silent dialogue with an ideal recipient, and, at the same time, is evidence of an effort of appropriation beyond any mediation.

This essay (a short book of just eighty pages in the English edition) has a complex history. Going over its history in the context of Diano's production will help describe the elaboration of his theoretical studies in view of what is most important here: theatre, and the theatre of the Greeks.

F&E was conceived as the inaugural lecture Diano delivered when he was awarded the position of Chair of Greek Literature at the University of Padua in 1950. As already recalled, it was published first in the *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* (Diano 1952c), then as a separate book (1952b), and in 1953 it was followed by the publication of the already mentioned "Lettera a Pietro de Francisci" (Diano 1953) – whose epistolary form responded to the author's dialogical vocation in the manner of Epicurus, rather than of Plato – as an eloquent proof of the intensity with which Diano continued to engage with this issue. This is not the place to discuss in details Diano's research themes before he became a professor in Padua and before *F&E*, but we should at least recall his early Platonic interests, dating from 1929 to 1935,[3] and his Epicurean studies, to which he dedicated, from 1935 to 1949, his most organic philological and exegetical contributions. However, it must be emphasised that in the academic self-presentation Diano drew in 1948 in view of a call for professorship, he defined himself as a scholar of Plato and Epicurus. It can be added that, before obtaining the tenure, Diano had not shown any specific interest in theatre – apart from an occasional contribution on Aristophanes (Diano 1950).

Although somewhat nostalgic for the Form – and it would be worth investigating to what extent this could be true for a classical scholar leaning towards phenomenology of religion – Diano firmly believed in the Event, be it "chance" or "destiny" (see 42). He spoke and wrote about it several times in order to describe the way in which circumstances had unexpectedly guided the steps of his research: "by chance" he began his research on the Aristotelian catharsis;[4] "by chance" his Epicurean studies originated (Diano 1986: 276). But there is another particular expression that Diano used in his already-quoted "Curriculum studiorum" of 1948 that is symptomatic of his way of remaining involved in research, always taking new steps, while only seemingly unmoving, in fact going deeper and deeper – or, more appropriately, plunging down – increasingly involved in his research. Describing his many years of work on Epicurus, Diano explains that his interest, which was born by chance from the reading of Cicero's *De finibus*, became "a whirlpool in which, drawn from thing to thing more deeply, I turned many years"

[3] On the *Ion*; the translation of several dialogues for Laterza's "tutto Platone": *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Alcibiades I* and *II*, *Hipparchus*, *Theages*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*.

[4] "It was a true gift of the Tyche, which, 'dissimilar to wisdom', is – according to Ion Chius – 'the author of works that are very similar to those of wisdom'" (1968b: 214).

(Diano 1986: 277).[5] I will return later to the birth and development of his 'theatrical vocation', which has always been implicit in his dialogical attitude, and became *the* main theme of his research during the twenty-four years he spent in Padua, inaugurated by his *F&E*. For now, suffice it to remark that a similar dizzying perspective underpins Diano's writing: research as a plunging into a whirlpool and at the same time as a dialogue. This clearly represents a challenge for translators and interpreters alike; and Campbell and Turtas (PhD in Romance studies at Cornell) have masterfully tackled their task.

As I anticipated, Diano's 'theatrical vocation' coincided with his years in Padua. It initially took shape in an article on *Oedipus the King* he wrote at about the same time as he also wrote *F&E*, even though the idea of that article must have germinated a few years earlier, in 1948, as suggested by the dates printed at the end of it ("1948-1952": Diano 1968a, 165). In the wake of his philosophical interests, his 'theatrical vocation' developed in the following years through his research on tragic catharsis, including his study on "Robortello interprete della catarsi" (1958). Diano returned to this topic in relation to Euripides (1961), and this remained a theme open to further development until 1968. His interest in Menander, testified by his critical edition of *Dyscolos* and two series of "Notes in the margin" (1959 and 1960), corresponded to his interest in the ethics of the early Hellenistic age. But the mid-1950s saw Diano especially engaged in the translation of theatrical texts and the publication, since 1962, of Euripides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Menander, and Lessing.[6] Alongside the translations, he also published critical essays on *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus* as well as on Athenian theatre, society, theodicy, and poetics. The term "event" recurs in the titles of his articles, as in the case of "Man and Event in Attic tragedy" (1965), which later became "Theodicy and Poetics in Tragedy" (1968a). His work was affected by continuous afterthoughts, which makes the task of drawing up a linear bio-bibliography of Diano very difficult. The last article cited above, which first appeared in 1966, brings us back to our starting point: the Event. On this same topic, in the same year of *F&E*, as I already recalled, Diano had also written another strictly related article, this time openly evoking the event as *tyche*. This article, "Oedipus Son of Tyche", was published in the *Festschrift* in honour of Max Pohlenz with the surprisingly reductive subtitle of "Commentary on *Oedipus rex* 1076-1085" (1952a). The Sophoclean lines there mentioned are uttered by Oedipus after learning that he is not the son of a king (or, rather, of the king he believed to be his father). Interestingly, Diano offers an innovative reading suggesting two different, albeit intersecting, concepts of *tyche*. For reasons that will be immediately obvious, my quotation below is from Hugh Lloyd-Jones' translation:

[5] "Fu un gorgo nel quale, tratto di cosa in cosa più in fondo, io girai molti anni".

[6] *Alcestis* (1962 and 1968), *Hippolytus* (1965), *Electra* (1968), *Helen* (1970), *Heracles* (1970), *Medea* (1971, 1972), *Phoenissae* (1970), *Orestes* (1970), *Bacchae* (1970); *Seven against Thebes* (1966); lyrical morceaux from *Antigone*, *Oedipus rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus* (1969); *Lysistrata* (1972); *Dyscolos* (1960, 1968); and *Emilia Galotti* (1968); see Longo 1976. The translations from Aeschylus and Euripides are included in Diano (ed.) 1970.

> Even if it is lowly, I desire to learn my origin: but she [i. e. Iocaste], for she is proud in woman's fashion, is perhaps ashamed of my low birth. But I regard myself as child of the event that brought good fortune, and shall not be dishonoured. *She* is my mother; and the months that are my kin have determined my smallness and my greatness. With such a parent, I could never turn in another kind of person, so as not to learn what is my birth.
> (Sophocles 1994)

In this translation, "child of the event" differs from the more common "son of fortune [with or without a capital letter]" (Jebb 1902, Finglass 2018, etc.), and one is tempted to say that it may be indebted to Diano's reading: "*She*" (emphasis by the translator) is apparently incongruous with "event" but congruous with the Greek *Tyche*, feminine (with a capital initial in the Greek text printed by Lloyd-Jones), and is understood to be related to "good fortune". In this short passage, the idea of a 'low birth' (*dysgeneia*) meaning 'poor birth' (*smikron . . . sperma*), is entangled with that of *tyche* as the event of one's birth, but also as a projection in time of Oedipus's growth: her function is not only to generate, but also to bestow good fortune (*eu didouse*) in the succession of "months" in which Oedipus has been defined as "small and great". This "event", Diano explains in his article, does not only coincide with being born 'as it happens' (*hôs étychen*), as can be said of one who is of 'low birth' (the Greek explicitly refers to being *dysgenés*, 'low-born'). It is not only the "conjuncture of an instant", because "the *tyche* of his birth guided his life" (1968a: 125), in "a linear and contingent time" – yet this time "around it has nothing, and has no meaning except that it is *his* time, just as space is the precarious space of his denuded self" (1968a, 131; author's emphasis). Oedipus's time, we must observe, is at the same time the object of his anamnesis, doubly public – in front of the Thebans on the stage and in front of the theatrical audience – and the well determined sequence of events that has seen him as a protagonist. Yet here and now, which is where and when his failure is represented, the polarities of the event change both in his anamnesis and in his desire to propose that he himself be once again "messenger of the event" (38):[7] they no longer coincide with Apollo's responses, on the hand, and the city of Thebes, on the other, but with Oedipus as the bearer of the event and the audience.

This short digression on Diano's analysis of the *tyche* of Oedipus brings us back to the theme of Diano's theatrical vocation, which developed almost simultaneously with, or perhaps as a consequence of, his conceptualisation of the Event. The individual experience of the event, beginning with the amazement of being born and the need to investigate the conditions of this happening, is welded to the serial temporality of action, which also is *tyche*:

> The individual remains therefore contingent and, similarly to Oedipus, the son of

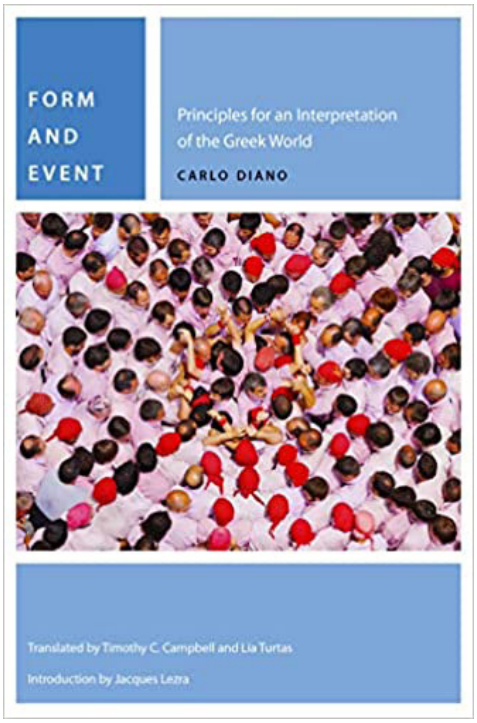
[7] The Italian has "portatore di evento", something like "bearer of the event", which perhaps better succeeds in penetrating the character of the function (the message implies a *tertium* with respect to its bearer and recipient).

> *tyche*. Just as individuals are history, history is the reign of *tyche*. Where there is no *tyche*, there is no history. (59)

Finally, a minor consideration. This edition includes most of the illustrations that accompanied the first Italian editions (I have the 1967 edition in front of me) and that do not appear in Diano 1993, nor in the French and Spanish translations of 1994 and 2000, respectively. This meritorious choice, however, presents a few omissions. Perhaps that of the 'Athena of Olympia' relief does not reveal a specific editorial criterion, but the omission of five pictorial examples, which are closer to the Event than the sculptures, seems to respond to a precise intention which, in its own way, appears consistent with this new and fascinating reading of *F&E*. I am especially referring to the first three: the *lekythos* with a dead warrior (National Archeological Museum, Athens); the so-called *Maenad of Spina* (Archeological Museum, Ferrara); and the fresco with Odysseus from the Domus of Via Graziosa (Apostolic Library, Vatican City). The fourth omission is the 'Harvester *rhyton*' from Hagia Triada (ca. 1500 BCE; Archeological Museum, Hiraklio). The decision not to publish pictorial examples could respond to an implicit critique of a

'Harvester *rhyton*' from Hagia Triada (ca. 1500 BCE; Archeological Museum, Hiraklio).

debated point in Diano's 'system of the arts', namely painting. However, I find it significant that the 'Harvester' vase, representing a ritual closely linked to a capital event in agrarian cultures, is somehow – I suspect, intentionally – replaced by the cover photo (the 'Castells Performance' during the Festa Mayor in Terrassa, Catalonia, 30 June 2013) reproduced here alongside the image of the Minoan *rhyton*. In contrast to the *aigle* – a frequently recurring term in *F&E*, which the translators interpret as "nimbus", designating the light that radiates and almost envelops isolated sculptural figures – the vase presents a plurality of figures, only seemingly chaotically. It is not unlikely that this vascular relief was meant anachronistically to represent, in an almost pictorial manner, the "[men] of the countryside [taken] by Dionysus" who follow Dionysus while he "brazenly enters the city and takes up residence here, dragging onto the stage . . . the Homeric heroes" and unleashing the people "in the ecstatic joy of the *komos* ['a ritualistic procession . . . typical of Dionysian rituals'] produce the



The 'Castells Performance' during the Festa Mayor in Terrassa, Catalonia, 30 June 2013)

Comedy . . . the revolution of the age of the people" (72). The orderly chaotic construction of the 'castle' of human figures offers a stimulating point of comparison with the Minoic vase.

The absence or, better, the replacement of the ancient, properly eventic images with a contemporary one, seems to me the symptom of a removal attempt that I largely share. As Remo Bodei wondered in his "Introduction", "can form really disappear in the whirlpool of the event, as much on a categorical level as on a historical-phenomenological one?" (1993, 29). As we have already seen, the choice of the word "whirlpool" expresses both fascination and *thambos*, and suggests the need to escape from it – however through other unavoidable *events*.

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[8] For a bibliography of Carlo Diano updated to 1980 see Avezzù 1986. Integrations and updates would be desiderable, also in consideration of the various re-editions that have followed one another up to now.

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