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ENGLISH SYNOPSIS

de

Que serait-ce donc que la civilisation grecque ?
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Since January 2018, nobody in Canada, France, Belgium, Switzerland, etc., has read or found some interest to publish my study, *Que serait-ce donc que la civilisation grecque ? (What should it mean, the Greek Civilization ?)* I made a french synopsis, late march, with the same result. What will happen for it in English, the lingua franca ? Perhaps in California, Oxford, Cambridge, one does not despise a private website, even a french one, and one is aware of the many translations from French to English which have found a lot of readers... I am not serious evidently, but to demonstrate (without barbarism or solecism ?) that the Speech Act, the Nudity and the tragic Mask would be the three basic elements of the Ancient Greek Civilization, around the 8th and 6th centuries BC, may arouse some people's interest in some ways, somewhere...

SYNOPSIS OF MY STUDY

What could be these basic elements, especially the ones that obviously distinguish this civilization from others which have also lasted centuries and given rise to different conceptions of the universe ? One finds some of its fundamental characteristics in *Die Entstehung des Politischen bei den Griechen* (1980), where Christian Meier deals with the athenian democracy in a profound, substantiated, justified way, as in Pietro Citati's *La Mente Colorata* (2002), where emerges the luminous idea of LIMITATION or that of BORDER leading to the recognition that we cannot ever say everything, or in *CE QUI FAIT LA GRÈCE* (2004) where Cornelius Castoriadis develops, among other things, the idea of sharing, the μοῖρα, but also the idea of the indeterminate, the ἀπειρον, the origin of beings according to Anaximander, term which is subsequently translated by the infinite, the indeterminate, the unknowable, philosophical concepts of which Castoriadis develops the contribution in many areas of Greek civilization. In *la Civilisation grecque à l'époque archaïque et classique* (1963 and a second édition in 1983) of François Chamoux, one finds the history and the study of its most revealing themes.

For my part, I propose three elements I find the most fundamentals :

- 1 - The Parole: to speak the world;
- 2 - the Nudity: to have no shame of walking naked;
- 3 - The Mask: to walk under a mask when one speaks in place of the *Other*, a Hero, a Heroine or an "I" in some shadowy part.

I - PAROLE - SPEECH ACT - (nothing really new on this subject...)

- the different powers it grants in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to the Muses, to the kings (or the holders of the scepter) and to the bards (the *arrangers* of words, who weaved them - ὄφαινον - like strands of wool) : among those powers, their relationships with Truth, the past, the future;
- the characteristics the bards attribute to the Parole : to see it as an object, to be identical to the events, to the actions, at the point one must use the same words when reminding the same facts, the same actions;
- the Parole as such, for example in the catalog of ships, interlaces the past, the present and the future, in a way it permits, even without analyze, to incorporate individuals in the course of Time;
- all these elements contribute to the persuasive power which the Talk, the Parole (or the Word), will retain even after the return of writing, for example in tragedies where, above all, we wait for the story of the messenger to know or to be sure that the facts, words, etc. are the Truth;
- it comes a time, already in Homer, when the hero, let's say as a human person, takes over the role which before was reserved to the *arrangers* of words, first by vouching for the truth of the facts he hears in the bards stories (cf. Ulysses in front of Demodokos), by likening the power of the Parole to the excellence in body exercises, as a way of humanizing the words, dissociating them from the Muses; finally the individual man becomes the one who speaks *by himself*, naming and telling the facts of his own life;
- words are exercised, mastered by an Individual who must acquire, invent forms, create limits for himself, by choosing or *inventing* stories from the everyday reality, among historical facts; we will even see the Words having strange relationships with the real world when, for example, according to E. Benveniste, the word "oath" as such did not say or mean anything (if I explain it well), but referred to a gesture, as if one is seizing an object, and then it was *to take the oath*; thus, while being in a fabulous world, like the ships of the Phaeacians knowing the thoughts of humans, leading them where they want to go, but without talking, as if they had destroyed the Parole, one was also in a world of choice (cf. *la Pensée chatoyante* (2002), by Pietro Citati) where one refuses the

lures of the Fabulous, and prefers to choose to talk or to write, where one says what "I" think, want and do; I am not driven by words, I speak my own (if one can say so);

- about the Fabulous and the Word, one passage of my study (p.79-84) will be perhaps the most subject to discussion, when I attempt a comparison between the evolution of the Parole and the way the descriptions of ships are changing little by little in the marvellous homeric world, until at the end we find the cretan ship, in the *Hymn to Apollo*, in dry dock, by the sea, with an appearance of abandonment, to become, thus, a kind of symbolic counterpart of the Parole *tearing itself away* from the gods through the first ages of ancient Greece, to inscribe itself, abandoned or not, in History, in the time of the Individual confronted with reality, imaginary or not.

II - NUDITY

Unsurprising : a tortuous many-points plan...

Introduction : banality of nudity or an « a-historic » concept...

To write about nudity, in a text about the basic elements of ancient Greek civilization, confronts us to the simple denial of this social phenomenon which would be "a-historical" according to many, because total nudity would exist nowhere, or one is almost condemned to approach the question by multiple detours, as much among the moderns as among the authors of ancient Greece according to whom, by example, the word "naked" would have been used in moments of violence provoking this nudity, or in a notice on visual arts, or even as a parody of Pindar, making the nudity a quality of the stadium rather than a description of an athletic body. Could we believe, sometimes, that nudity would have been so widespread, that one no longer saw it, that it was a banality, with no interest at all. But to invoke the absence of the word to justify the existence of the fact, can also be seen as absurd. And we go back to square one : nudity is always in question, especially as a basic element of this civilization. However, the banality of nudity nearly considered as some invisible reality, plays an important role in my second chapter, a kind of monologue, if not a meditation, on the concept and practice of nudity especially during the centuries of the archaic Greece.

First and brief summary : - importance of the nudity in Greek ceramics (we will talk about the kouroi later); - rare negative points of view or reactions on this social reality in Homer, Herodotus, Pindar, Thucydides and Plato.

The dates of its *appearance* in games, palaestras, stadiums according to recent authors, historians, hellenists (approximately from 1991 to 2009) with the few reasons or justifications they give for it.

Links of this *curiosity*, above all in sports, to the SPEECH ACT :

- the nudity would be a social reality which, like the Parole, refers to the concept of choice, of limit (a concept that we see also in the decoration of vases, with the inscription of a name on objects, the claim for a status of creator): one could see an equivalence between "I name myself" and "I strip naked"; I am not subjected to the words of another and I fight the shame of being born naked, which predominates among other peoples.

From the shame of the naked body in *Genesis* and nearly all religions and philosophies:

- first, one must clarify, **nowadays**, the will or not, the interest or not of going naked, and especially the animal part in the human being which could nourish or modify the conception of nudity; even if it means blurring the tracks, we will take indications or ideas on this subject in a film by Jean-Luc Godard, *Adieu au langage*, as in Giorgio Agamben, Heidegger, Rilke, Jacques Lacan or Freud, to finally study the *kouroi-case*, these sculptures so numerous in the Greek *landscape*, which and even *who* in their nudity assume their link with the animal world, smiling, not losing face, confronted with the opinion of others, as it happens in Homer; we can even see them as *go-getters*, fixed on a goal, even a serene walk towards death...

About a passage on *nudity and truth*, in Foucault and his idealistic reading grid, in his study on boys and love in ancient Greece:

- I compare the relationships of greek temples to stone and gods, with those of kouroi to stone and nudity (an idealized body); if a meaning, a signification, is given to the gods through the temples, why nudity could not give or emphasize a meaning, about the men ?

My inquiry and my opinion on the naked man in Ancient Greece

- the meanings and uses of γυμνός in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: at least thirteen uses in the *Iliad*, meaning to be without weapon; seven uses in the *Odyssey*, where one is naked, either in a bed, or transformed into a pig, or in front of Nausicaa, but protected by some branch, or finally, in the triumphant nudity of Ulysses raising his arc against the suitors, which I consider to be the beginning of the notion where the naked man, in Greece, is the opposite to the man of Fault, the sinner, in *Genesis*. We can, therefore, study nudity, outside of texts or ceramic surfaces, and look at the naked body.
- Agamben quotes a theologian, Eric Peterson, according to whom Adam and Eve, when naked before the Fault, would have been surrounded by "supernatural grace" instead of clothings; and it is the Fault which *made* them naked, made nakedness visible;
- I will not go as far as to compare Odysseus showing himself naked in front of the suitors, with a nudity touched by grace in Paradise... I shall rather study the difficulties we had for centuries to make the difference between what we see, and what we do not see; we **see** weakness, slavery, shame, exceptions (the kouroi, the *naked images* on the vases, the sexes of the Hermes, along the roads) but we **don't notice** the primary fact (developed here, little by little, since the **first and brief summary**) which is at less for men the affirmation of the body, the acceptance of birth and destiny, embodied in the human flesh, and not in his clothes;
- Greek man is born naked, without the decision of the gods, without being punished for some original fault (the moral faults of the Greeks will come soon enough...);
- I add that nudity is related to the *misunderstood* or *strangeness* in the making or the creation of such a civilization, and whatever it was, it has been developed by the Greeks themselves, it was anchored in their nature, their minds, in such a way that they would have recognized the pressing need to keep their feet on the ground and to fight the excesses of reason, without forgetting their animal body as such, always showing and seeing the other side of the human diptych; if I deduce that nudity is one of the basic elements of their world, it is because a collective attitude, assumed like the air we breathe, can only be born and

developed in the human tissue (mind and body) of those who claimed it, even if they did not say it;

- Nakedness has counterbalanced the primacy of the Word;
- Reason and the animal body would both have their share (to be discussed, of course, but why not accept the world, the earth as it is, instead of making oneself responsible for these facts or realities, by imagining some fault, worthy of a satirical drama...).

III - THE MASK

Here again, the approach is complex, if only in the opposing *conceptions* of the mask. How could one demonstrate, the irrefutable origin of the tragic mask, which I claim a basic if not a crucial element of ancient Greek civilization ?

Some facts, hypotheses, theses or even *articles of faith* it has generated, that don't convince at all or with difficulty, and more often leave indifferent :

- a) in 535 BC, in Athens, Thespis represents a tragedy where the participants wear a mask, but the primary reason is not found;
- b) one evokes representations with masks on ceramics, the practices in the σατυρικόν or some make-up one used during that time (with fabrics, plaster);
- c) the solutions proposed by H. C. Baldry, in *The Greek Tragic Theatre* (1971) : it would be a better medium than the human face and would better demonstrate its expressions; or the ones by the filmmaker, Otomar Krejča, who considers it more visible...; in both cases, one misses logic or precision ;
- d) at the end and in general, we rely more and more on Dionysus and his worship rites which, in addition to the mask, have the advantage to provoke the irruption of the strange, as often in tragedy.

From the strange or the extraordinary, one has proposed different conceptions of the mask:

- For Walter F. Otto (1933) and with nuances Nietzsche (1872) or Georges Buraud (1948), Dionysus is the only reality under the mask, and from this point of view the mask-object is not taken into consideration, as such;

- With Bonnard (1951), gods create the mask and thus irrational forces would lead us into an indefinite space where the mask appears as an empty figure, without eyes, but seen as a border.

New perspectives ? - One could deduce from this *empty* figure, the appearance of another character (in the tragedies), but the name given to the mask was also τὸ πρόσωπον, which means *face*, the one we present to people around us, and the mask, then, would be looking from inside at the eyes of the actor (under the mask); in this perspective, it would detach itself from the divine, from the irrational, and would become a border and above all, a passage (we will come back to it, later).

Practical functions given to the mask: according to some, it makes possible to identify the character on stage : for Claude Calame the mask may delimit even the sex and age of this character, without forming an identity between the actor and the character, but an imperfect assimilation, speaking thus of ambiguity : « Facing Otherness : The Tragic Mask in Ancient Greece » (*History of Religions*, vol. 26, no 2 (novembre 1986) and « la Tragédie attique : le masque pour mettre en scène le récit héroïque » (*le Récit en Grèce ancienne*, 2000); for A. David Napier (1990), with references to works of anthropologists, one insists on the ambivalence that the mask could create for the actor, who would again acquire a new status, ontological and/or mental.

Return to the divine (closing of ambivalence?): less and less, in the late twentieth century, one has seen in the mask a way to hide the figure of the actor, but discovered in it a way to create terror with its whitish colour, if it were in plaster (quoting Herodotus); Dionysus experienced a comeback too, with Euripides' *Bacchae*, in Jean-Pierre Vernant (1990) : the mask, smiling, reveals the god and is transformed into a living face.

Back to the Character-Mask : with *Du masque au visage* (1995), Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux tries to demonstrate that the *mask* is equivalent to the *face*, that it disappears as object, that it even abolishes the face of the actor, replacing it or becoming his face, to finally represent and form the "actor-character" identification; however she will speak of the "*persuasive force of the verb (parole) (...) more suitable for disguises (or concealments?) than faces*" (p.47), a phrase which diminishes, if not destroys, the nearly physical power of the mask...

The Neuro-sciences, with Peter Meineck (2011) : the mask would act first and foremost on the surroundings, on the spectators who look at it and that to the point, after numerous optical explanations, of rendering useless, in my opinion, the presence and the work of the actor...

A pause in the tragic mask history, a kind of stoppage time about other masks and other festivals in Athens, the Bouphónia, the Arrèphoria, the Anthestèria where men and women were masking themselves: the aspects more secular which we find there, if they send Dionysus back into the shadows, do not contain justifications for the tragic mask.

After this long, but necessary « introduction » to the tragic mask history : -

Proposition and demonstration of a new approach, with references to Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, Claude Calame and Albin Lesky:

- among the ideas mentioned above, I retain the *space* created by the black holes of the mask, which are not the eyes of the actor, but other ones; if we transpose this *space* into the structure formed by all the hollow spaces in the masks of the fifteen members of the chorus and that of 1, 2, or 3 actors, the **MASK**, as an object, materializes and increases an OTHER UNIVERSE (an *elsewhere*) where the *voyeur* is attracted to: it is a world without eyes, without human gaze;
- an essay about the relations of the mask with its first creator, who by tradition was also the creator of the tragedy : how this man, by virtue or because of his function, could propose, if not invent, the tragic mask and which fact has provoked the need to add this **hidden space** (the eye cavities) on stage?
- he would have been a leader, ὁ ἑξάρχος (exarchos), probably of the dithyramb, familiar with literary and scenic techniques, and would have wished to introduce a dramatic play, drawn from epic legends or historical facts, where the **Parole** would be the *driving force* on stage;
- to sing or dance on some stage was already considered like the exclusive domain of gods, heroes or even messengers and, as a result, the own domain of the first *tragic* author or leader could be the Parole in the spoken parts, but in using it, one could object that it would be to imitate the voices of gods, to speak in their place, as if denying their reality... I know it can be seen by academics as

pure invention or excess..., but the same problem would occur if the actor speaks at the place of historical figures : in front of these mental or even religious (?) considerations, the mask was for this writer, the *tragedy creator*, an attractive or at less a possible solution.

The MASK - Creation of an opportune space-object (and what's more, it would concretize the fusion between the dithyramb and the satyrs, cf. *Vereinigung*, according to A. Lesky; and also the tragic choruses in Sicyone, cf. Herodotus, *Histories*, V, 67) :

- through the mask, the exarchos believed he could appropriate the high deeds and abysses of gods or heroes and integrate them into the language of *speeches*, the language of dialogues;
- the mask, on the face, becomes a space added to it; it is or should always be the same, at the center of the **tragic** place;
- with the mask, a virtual reality is formed between the words of the actor, and his motionless mask;
- by hiding all the faces of the characters, it forms a spatial structure distributed (or spread out) all over the stage or the orchestra;
- it will be objected that the chorus is not always part of the divine or the mysterious, but I think one has realized, at these early stages of tragedy, that the mask was itself, by its presence on stage, as a prisoner in this invisible structure, the one beyond of the eye cavities.

Formation of two spaces

- a real and visible one is formed, made up of the spectators and of these men in the orchestra or on the stage, whose masks we see, and there is ANOTHER UNIVERSE, inside the masks, where are talking the characters, THE OTHERS; there is **no** substitution or identification between masked actors and characters.

Last considerations

- the mask does not look, and the actor has no face;
- the "I" who speaks, is from the world of absence, but this world is present among the actors, the chorus members;
- could we compare the *machinery* of the masked theatre, which highlights the absence of the characters, to the technique of writing, which *talks* of an absent reality beneath the words ?

- I give, towards the end of the study, eleven characteristics of the mask, six of which concern only the tragic mask.

In the daily life of the ancient Greeks and first of all among the Athenians, the tragedy manifests a radical alterity in their relationships to myths, heroes, as well as to scenic techniques used in dithyrambs. They get used to listen to the words of a foreign universe, if only in its openness to this Truth which could come from the shadows. To sing, to dance, and the chorus, were not enough to perform a tragedy in public; it was necessary to introduce characters in it, but to *make* them talking, using the Parole, seemed nearly (?) scandalous in these times (around the sixth century) where one was uncompromising about the traditional boundaries between the use of speech « for real » and any public performance where religion was of the utmost importance : then, in my point of view, it has been necessary to hide those *dramatis personae*. And the Athenians won their wager, the tragedy, a new way of celebrating, has lasted centuries, and still imposes everywhere, more than two thousand years later, endless essays and synopses...

In short, the MASK was making tragic thought acceptable in a strange world where one must already had to assume his NUDITY and the power of the Parole in the *demos*. By this very fact, to make the tragic thought *acceptable*, the mask was one of the fundamental elements of the ancient Greek civilization.

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