

# The Greek View as Political Experience

Frank Kausch

For here there is no place that cannot see you. You must change your life.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Archaic Torso of Apollo*.

## The Greek view as tactile experience

Whether it is a question of apprehension, grasp, or simple contact, the vocabulary of perception clearly points towards the materiality of touch through what we usually think of as just a metaphorical variation. This is what ancient Greek thought recognized, or dimly felt, as a sometimes hidden constant in its history and its project: sensation, which describes the primary access to being,<sup>1</sup> is first of all and above all a way of touching. Far from indicating a simple perceptual realism,<sup>2</sup> this acknowledgement implies a specific idea about the presence of things in the world: touch assumes a surface, and every being, in order to appear and be seen, must therefore be entirely surface, be articulated within a boundary that describes it perfectly.

Starting from an assumption of concordance formulated by Empedocles, then Plato (like is known by like), perceiving a body assumes organs where the very essence of the thing perceived is discovered and unfolds. Sensation takes place when a meeting, a contact occurs between the external element and this same element as it appears to the organ. This meeting takes place in different ways peculiar to each sense but always maps the site of this contact as a surface along which each element extends and touches its internal counterpart.<sup>3</sup> Thus, even in the case of sight where the fire that fills the eye meets the fire of the sun, the sensation proceeds by adjustment (*harmonia*) and contact (*aphè*), as Theophrastus's words, though critical, confirm: "And even if like does not adjust through penetration but only *touches*, it follows quite logically that sensation will occur throughout."<sup>4</sup> The internal fire spreads out as far as the surface of the eye and, without going any further, *gathers* the light rays emanating from outside. If perception proceeds by reconstituting between organ and object a material continuity that obeys and verifies the similarity or concordance between them, each sense receives a touch effect within which no distance can dilute the co-natural character of feeling and felt, or the immanence of their coming together, since the basic element belongs to first, the second *and* what is intermediate.

Even though he insists on the primacy of sight,<sup>5</sup> Plato describes its mechanism as a veritable kind of remote touch whose seat is the eye's ray:

So when there is light all around the ray, it pours forth, like towards like, and unites with it; a single *body*, *similar to our own*, takes shape all along the straight line coming from the eyes,

whatever the direction in which the internal fire *comes up against* that emanating from external objects. Since it is open to the same impressions from one end to the other because of its homogeneity, regardless of the object that it makes *contact* with, or that makes contact with it, it transmits this object's movements to the whole body even as far as the soul, and gives it the sensation we call seeing.<sup>6</sup>

Being contact between the eyes' rays and the sun, whose shape they reproduce, sight shows meeting and similarity in action through touch. Thus seeing is touching, to look is to set up a contact, in whose connection and surface reality reveals its shape in a shared relief, over which the eye travels as it does over skin or wall.<sup>7</sup> And if like is perceived by like, it is because the boundary thus defined by these opposite movements brings together internal and external, and also establishes their respective dimensions. The intermediate space that the ray or movement crosses is therefore not a homogeneous inert medium that pre-exists the perceptual link without ever being affected by it, but a between-both, a spaced (but not spatial) distance between two boundaries that the act of perception works to link together within the bipolarity of a single boundary. Receiving is emitting, internalizing the external and vice versa, and linking these two dimensions in the single line where they complete each other.

Perhaps the most explicit version of this theory is to be found in the extension of it given by Euclid, who states in his *Optics* that things are never grasped completely and instantaneously, but redrawn by the emission of rays (whose speed makes them seem continuous) coming from the eye, whose straight lines focus on different points of the object.<sup>8</sup> Its shape is thus reconstituted by the swift multiplicity of these diverging rays, each quickly running point by point over what is recognized merely asymptotically. Here it is at the very boundary of things – grasped and then scanned by the movement of the eye's rays, assembled into a beam that dynamically reproduces the shape – that vision takes place. It proceeds by a kind of imitation within which the object's boundary (as the surface where shape is concentrated and manifested<sup>9</sup>) draws the eye in a movement whose features coincide with its own, a movement which is completed in the reconstituted surface of the seen object through a trajectory that achieves resemblance again even *within* distance. Distance and contact are thus, as it were, the two elements combined of a phenomenon that does not contain any suggestion of what is other or alien.

In this contact as movement we find Aristotle. When he states that "sight is *the sense par excellence*",<sup>10</sup> he does not say it is the most typical sense, but the most precise, the sharpest one (which he clarifies elsewhere<sup>11</sup> by citing its power of discovery and ability to distinguish a great many differences), and that does not stop its operation making use of mechanisms that are tactile in the extreme. Indeed, between organ and object there is an intermediary, a medium (*metaxu*), the diaphanous element (literally, transparent thing, the thing one can see through), one end of which receives the action of the object and transmits it to the other end, which is in contact with the organ, so establishing a link that both keeps apart and brings together, at its linked ends, external and internal, so much so that these two dimensions cancel each other out in favour of a single action, that is, contact in distance.<sup>12</sup> Thus the diaphanous element distinguishes the boundary of the organ from the boundary of the object and also links them, succeeding in this way in bringing them together via their adjoining surfaces: "The surface is the boundary of the diaphanous element, which is contained and limited within the body."<sup>13</sup>

To say that this dynamic medium, whose movement alone gives sensation, is indispensable to sight, is also to say that the contact at work here is not a direct touch,<sup>14</sup> a bringing together without remains, but a *link*, which first unfolds as a continuous path. The external nature of the object thus remains unaltered: there is contact in fact even when objects do not penetrate or become part of us, and we are present for them only because we are distinct from them. Contact in distance, distance in contact, in other words a diffracted presence carving out within itself a movement in whose action the world is projected for those who are it. Human beings are not within the world but present at it, like a place they are passing through, where external and internal speak to each other, displaying as they do so the finite nature of this world.

This being so, what exactly is this touch, taken in isolation, as a sense and not just as a model? What do we touch, and where? According to Aristotle, touch does indeed occur with the help of a medium, which is not external like the diaphanous element, but internal: flesh, which is a *metaxu* between the body's surface and the specific organ of touch, located near the heart. So there is no place on the outside of the body that is particularly associated with touch, contact extends over its whole surface, where it finds its unity. Touch therefore is remarkable in that the body carries with it distance, made manifest in this medium, flesh, so perception occurs there, not only via the medium but with it. So the body is at one and the same time sensing *and* medium, where it is *and* before itself, perceiving the object *and* what allows it to be perceived. As it perceives the object, it also perceives itself,<sup>15</sup> not as an organ (which is impossible) but as a medium, that is, in the totality of the body. For this reason perceiving and perceiving oneself are here essential to one another, in a simultaneity that is everything but reflexivity. The world is my boundary, I am the boundary of the world. Through the presence of things in me I am present to the world, via this mutual opening called touch. But it is never a matter of true identity between these two aspects of experience, only an identity of action: touch alone makes its terms possible and, far from pre-existing, they come into being only in the distanced contact that takes place there. Outside this touch there is no original identity. Sensation is a mutual act and a simultaneous one.

In the end, sight is a kind of touch because it occurs through physical contact with the object (via the intermediary), and touch is a kind of sight because the object is never encountered directly but always via an intermediary, in this case flesh. Since distance is essential for any perception (what is on the organ cannot be perceived), distance is needed for touch. To the extent that it cannot exist between body and object (which are linked when one touches), this distance must therefore be somehow inside the body. So here it is a non-spatial distance, that could rather be termed a non-coincidence, a gap, a difference,<sup>16</sup> where the action of a movement replaces the material continuity of a ray.

The consequences of this tactile nature of presence (even in sight) imply a unique presence in the world, far from the optical register that will later come into play to actualize it. Of course, according to Plato (*Republic*, 508a) as well as Aristotle (particularly in *Protreptica*), sight plays a decisive part in access to knowledge and contemplation. However, this has nothing to do with the idea, which is later than the Greeks, of the action of the mind as looking (*intuitus*), that was part of the theme of apparent or natural intelligence *lumen naturale* using the analogy of sight and stressing the immediacy of the relationship with the object. So if presence is like seeing, if it calls forth its own mediation in the form of the image, the world is also reduced to the objective (and object-like)

correlate of a conscious subject that brings the outside inside its specular and reflexive core and orders it in line with the outlook of its knowledge. Such a world takes on the dimensions of the ego, whose view sees only itself, arriving, via what is simply a detour, at the initial assumption of an internal intelligence that is its principle, archetype, and purpose. To put it in Aristotle's words, the sun has come into the soul.

*Imago mundi*: the world would be like a picture<sup>17</sup> and displaying it would only be an addition or adjunct to a consciousness self-constituted in the immediacy of its gift, for which seeing would be the founding action. Indeed there would only be simple, direct seeing, in a non-Greek version, what is already there, already manifest being that is apparent and remaining. For a world that is already present in this way (but then by means of what that came before it?), seeing is indeed the preferred access because it is immediate and direct. This primacy of visibility assumes an already constituted world, arranged into unique objects already separated from their essence,<sup>18</sup> so that this essence is in the end accessible only beyond sight, and a noetic apprehension replaces empirical sight to give access to essence. All things considered, what can be seen if sight has to be bypassed in order to really see, and if this higher seeing can only deal with the invisible?<sup>19</sup> Then is seeing as obvious as all that?

Anticipating this question, the tactile Greek view gives the apparently most paradoxical answer. Because beings in fact do not *give themselves*, but appear at the same time as something in them resists (their matter, but also their very presence, where they are), because they remain in the completed enclosure of their shape only by withdrawing their very existence, the sense that will not so much open access to them but reveal their presence will in fact be touch, the sense of surface and boundary, which encloses as much as it opens, and conceals as much as it displays.

This is what the Greek view experiences,<sup>20</sup> what the experience of vision is, and so it always has to start by abandoning seeing, in the modern sense of the word. This may explain the fact that Oedipus's experience of blindness is the founding act for the Greek presence and its political outlook, especially taken together with the experience of Herakles, who tested the limits of humanity on the precise site of his body, which was configured in a trial that became the whole and model of Greece.

Therefore, if the Greek presence is to be found this side of any constitution or foundation, if it remains at a distance whose true model is in touch, is something involved that "is produced" in this interchange, this separation of experience?<sup>21</sup> Does this touch, from which the touched-touching experience comes, result in a revelation of something like a self? If there is no presence other than in and because of distance, is an identity possible? Is the "selves" of ourselves, and things themselves, capable of being grasped? In other words, is seeing nothing but being blind?

### **The ontological significance of touch**

If feeling receives the shape of a thing, does the thing therefore "take" shape? Should we interpret contact at work in perception as the means or mediation, at the risk of reintroducing the perspective of dialectical effectuation or process?<sup>22</sup> Maybe we should think instead of presence unfolding in this contact like an inscription on a horizon or boundaries, so that the topological dimension precludes any temptation to interiority or foundation.

So there is neither mechanism nor alienation, but the presence (diffracted, distanced) of what is there. No going out of the self, or returning to the self, because in that presence there is not yet any self.

This fits in with the founding experience of Greek art, for there the statue displays both a model of completion and, on the level of its very surface, how to achieve it. Based on the athletic test, where the mortal (that is, the human being in its entirety displayed to the measure of its furthest limit) achieves divinity by touching their boundary at the front of the struggle, statues recover the essential feature of that test in the fully realized surface of the sculpted figure, which is open as a project and closed as an ultimate measure, a completed presence that in its features sums up the boundary of all excellence. A Greek statue is experienced by touch through what it gives off: human limits, which are nothing other than the full extent of the world. Humans experience the statue in the same way as the fully developed mortal (having reached the extent of its wholeness, in which lies what is truly divine) experiences the world: as its ultimate contact.

This is indeed an ethical experience. I am what I am first of all in absence, distance, and I will need the test of a limit, my own and the world's, to be truly what I am. "Become what you are by testing it out", this phrase from Pindar (*Pythics*, II, 71) could help to interpret Greek art: the limit the statue displays is recognized by humans as their own, and it offers itself in the external world as the goal of an ethical project, not an absolute ideal. To put it another way, the true presence is indeed an imitation, not of the other whose determined otherness would refer me, through its distance, to the effective possession of a closed uniqueness, thus not a comparison or identification, but a confrontation, in whose polemical contact identity will never be an assumption or a result, but a movement. Human beings are distanced from themselves, but the movement by which they bridge that gap is in fact their completed form, that they make their own only by experiencing it externally in an ethical development. Thus the fully realized human being is not closed in and self-sufficient, but moving in a movement that is neither specifically spatial nor temporal, but towards (other) humans and from (other) humans, in contact with them. Being in the midst of others, for a statue or a person, therefore implies both a contact that makes imitation possible and a distance that makes it necessary.

The dynamic test we are dealing with here, that is not articulated around the identity-difference pair but around the instability of a similarity, makes human beings' limits not a static edge, but a movement in the development of the self, such that the "self" is nothing other than this movement.<sup>23</sup> So form is not a fixed perfection that one might possess, but a frontier extending outside one, as a model or a measure, that is, more accurately a horizon (*horizomai* means to demarcate). And thus the imitation is twofold: the imitated is echoed in what takes up the movement, the imitator discovers itself in the end of its movement, and this symmetry produces the possibility of a situation in the world<sup>24</sup> that is presence *to* the world, exposed to it. In contact and distance, in limitation and movement, each being exists at the horizon of the world.

Thus the gap that makes the world hollow locates in it, in order to fill the gap, the task of imitating,<sup>25</sup> which includes the issues associated with education, *paidéia*: to educate is to recognize an incompleteness, a lack, it is to define the child's boundaries and use them to create a path. Education does not bother with eliminating a fault or reconstructing a whole that has fallen apart, but helps the person who follows it to find in it, like a call, what they are meant to be and to relate to the world and themselves so that they are born

into the excellence displayed to them by their fully realized model. To educate is thus to bring children into complete contact with what they have to measure themselves up against, whose boundary dictates the path towards conforming to it. Here there is a kind of explicit echo of what could be called an erotics, and a desire which is indeed located in distance and lack, as Plato again states (*Phaedrus*, 253b): "Two friends, thus imitating the god [a reference to Apollo] themselves, advising and disciplining their beloved, encourage him to reproduce the behaviour and the divine form as far as he can." In other words, to the extent of his limits.

Becoming oneself by imitating the other? Is this just a dialectical link, whose process in the form of destiny dictates that no beings can reach self-fulfilment except by first revealing themselves to be the other they are, then the other they are not, a reflexive turn that establishes the depth of the complete concept? Are Greek perception, and the ethical project attached to it, only "egocentric", directed towards the construction of an *ego* that would only make itself strange in the other in order to take it back on the level of identity, and in the interiority that is its founding dimension (of which the Other, initial capital, would in the end be just the hyperbole)? After all, the completeness indicated by going to the limit, a principle of the Greek world, could be interpreted, once the logical mechanism is laid bare that unifies all its actions, as a still unresolved sign of a conscious, intimate totality.

To go down this road would be to forget that, if the Greeks are themselves and other than themselves, if they are at the same time one and the other, this is because, in accordance with the logic of the limit that defines its articulation and simultaneity, the pertinence of this structure rests entirely on the *and*, which is less the revealer of a doubling, or a splitting, than of a gap or fault, an idea of non-coincidence whose distance makes presence possible. In fact, there is only dialectical alternation (one through the other, the other through the one) once the factitiousness is eliminated that controls Greek experience: human beings are in the world, and it is against the backdrop of the world that their presence is defined, which is thus always presence to the world. Beings appear on the edge of what exceeds them, the world shows itself on the completed outline of what is separate from it.

Basically, the limit (*péras*) is more a transition (*poros*)<sup>26</sup> than an enclosure, which makes it capable of being crossed in both directions and thus differentiates it from the barrier or the secret, which are characteristic of the erection of a substantial self. And the Greek dimension is neither an outside nor an inside, but exceeding, going out of. The dialectic of the same and the other, on the other hand, is concentricity, integration. In order to pass from that boundary to this dialectic, the intensity of a contact and the opening it is proof of must be replaced by the extension and the appearance, even if shadowy, of an intimacy. What unfolded in the temporality of a movement needs to have become the enclosed frame around a space, and the *dimension* (where distancing predominates) needs to have become *dimension* (where measurement and identity prevail).

So that there should be opposition between oneself and the other there has to exist an interiority, a place that has an existence only because it is closed (introspection and will cut off), whose emergence H. Arendt says goes back to the end of Antiquity, either to Epictetus or Augustine.<sup>27</sup> Although it arises from an eminently political situation (the place of the Stoics and Christians in the Empire), this secret place means that one can "be a slave in the world and remain free",<sup>28</sup> that is, feel *oneself* to be free, in which we can

grasp the substantial circularity. A consequence, and cause, of a retreat from the world, with no link to it other than rejection, the internal space is first a protected place, homogeneous and enclosed, with no exposure or distance other than internal aperception. Thus it forces one to distinguish and separate the world that is *foreign*, other,<sup>29</sup> over which humans have no power, from “the I that they can do with as they will”. So this “I” enjoys a freedom that is reduced to an absence of obstacle, which, apart from the elimination of any theme of contact and action in general, completes the *identification* of the dimension of alterity (which also indicates the divine level) with foreignness, alienation, or transcendence, whose encroachment one must protect oneself against behind the walls of the individual.<sup>30</sup> Identity, rid of all political relevance, is thus both result and weapon of a flight away from others, away from one’s fellows, into a relation of I to me in the solitude and darkness of an internal refuge, which closes the distance where the experience of the community, literally, took place. Paradoxically, the question of the same and the other, a structure belonging to Western political thought, comes from a denial of any reference to action and human factitiousness in favour of an identity that is always verified. The other, in its unity that encloses it, thus replaces the others, in the uniqueness that exposes them. Henceforth, the only city is God’s city.

On the other hand, in Greece one is only said to exist politically. Existing is not being what one is according to the closed consistency of reflexivity, but being exposed,<sup>31</sup> both this side of any completed presence and beyond any fixed positivity. In the end the sole indicator of this existence is the constant decentring, the reciprocal involvement of the here and its horizon, which is continually sought horizon, continually pushed back and continually conquered. The Greek body is thus immediately in the middle of the rest, the gods as well as other people, it is religious as well as political.

This body is not the opaque mass, closed and mute, of matter or Christian flesh, which is so imbued with its own inertia that it is impenetrable, and which, precisely for that reason, must be overcome, not exceeded but eliminated. Neither is it the deep abyss of substance, betrayed in every peculiar phenomenon (the caricature of Greek beauty as ideal). It is simply the act of differentiating oneself, revealing oneself (in actions and words). Here we touch on one of the only thoughts of the body, which is neither body and soul nor body and chattels, that is to say a non-generic corporality but one that is given up to the factitiousness<sup>32</sup> of always being *a* body, *this* body that exists, in a uniqueness that in fact makes a *mimèsis* possible. The Greek body, whose tactile experience, even in the completed form of its surface, is an exposure at a distance and to something else, a difference from itself,<sup>33</sup> is connected to what J. L. Nancy writes about the body: it “comes into itself as to the outside”.<sup>34</sup> This *total* exteriority, outside of any intimacy, signals the intensity of a tactile exposure. Neither silent machine nor obtuse immanence, neither organism nor raw matter, this body, says Nancy, is like a soul: “the soul is the outer being of a body and it is in this outer being that it has its inside”.<sup>35</sup> To be oneself is to be outside, without position or appropriation, site of a finiteness where there is only the opening and exposure of oneself.

If the Christian model of the body, a radical alterity of the flesh and its weight, supplied the matrix for a politics based in alterity, the Greek body (a separated boundary joined to world) created the frontier of a community. Indeed, the Greek man is never alone, neither in the ascetic’s desert solitude nor the artist’s sublime isolation: what he is coincides with what one sees and touches of him, he is always present already to people.

Man stands against a backdrop of men, he is wholly political. He is a political animal, says Aristotle, because he alone "has the *sense* of good and evil, just and unjust, and other moral concepts, and it is the *shared nature* of these feelings that brings into being the family and the city".<sup>36</sup> The Greek man is equal to his position in the world (not simply *within* the world, in a strictly geometric way), and so the city is the individual's boundary in the full meaning of the word. There he is always exposed already, before he has a same, before he has an other.

But then, if "the city naturally comes before the individual",<sup>37</sup> if the city is always there already, if people are already there before the individual, is a community still possible that can be the site of a free connection and not the accomplishment of an assumption, not an almost mechanical necessity? Is the community still the site of the uncertainty, the contingency, that are the mark of human *praxis*, or does its exposure to legality or political organization reincorporate human finiteness within a logocentric constitution? Does practice in common not risk becoming common practice, far removed from the contingent nature of its origins. Does a community still allow that openness to the accidental, as a mark of our finite human situation in "a world that it opens to itself",<sup>38</sup> that practice must fully display? In other words, is it a *mimèsis* of the community? Where are the others if we cannot *see* them?

### Community of equals or undifferentiated community?

Thus the Greek has a view of himself that is not his very own, and he does so straightforwardly. Located in the midst of others, he has no existence except through his action, by which he is liberated. Action, which is co-extensive with the context that he is in and that makes action possible, describes on its edges both an originating community, pre-existing and shared, and a target community where a uniqueness that has finally been achieved and recognized is displayed.

Aristotle's analyses do suggest that this action in the world is a *sense* relation to it made explicit. Although, compared with the intellect, sensation inherits from its object, the sublunary contingent being, a lesser dignity that separates it from any understanding of principles and causes,<sup>39</sup> although its powers of discrimination tie it to an antepredicative approach to the specific, it establishes a kind of "knowledge" that means we can orientate ourselves in action, calculate means with a view to ends. Since what has to be done is always specific, practical knowledge that determines awareness of it must assess the situation, and to this end grasp the specific facts and plan relative to an action, just as, in order to hit his target, the archer must locate by eye the precise point he is aiming at.<sup>40</sup> What comes out in action has no normative regime, but assumes the exercise of a virtue, without rule or promise, for "it is in each individual being that the *télos* is realized, in accordance with the degree of fulfillment it carries".<sup>41</sup> If the Greek ethic is indeed the search for what is appropriate at every moment, it assumes that what it should be appropriate for is taken into account, which assumes a distance with respect to immediate realization or enjoyment. Thus the reasons for a choice are offered to those who project themselves, from the conditions of an action to the "going beyond" that gives it its value. This gap, in which Aristotle places the notion of *caution*, between the useful thing and its usefulness (which lies in a precise practical situation and not in an eternal essence) frees



the space for a practical preoccupation and knowledge, with the charge of revealing what is useful for all, that is, what is just. Usefulness, in the sense of appropriateness but also beauty, occurs in a shared way, in such a way, however, that its knowledge and experience are incumbent on every individual, and that each individual knows himself by deliberating with the other. "The case of others is a practical problem",<sup>42</sup> and politics always is a concrete way of acting in the present, the indissoluble reality of the Greek existence that only exists exposed to the community. The Greek *ethos* is political if by politics we mean not a defined field but the irreducible dimension of what creates the community as a participant in every action. Furthermore, as Aristotle specifies, action (*praxis*) is differentiated from production (*poiësis*): it is a doing that does not lead to the making of an external object, but its activity remains immanent. In acting, it is myself that I produce and give form to, that I must complete, and I do so in front of everyone, so that it is my action that reveals the world as a place where one may act, whereas a theoretical view could not.

However, this demand for perfection and fulfillment can transform a completed, determined, contingent act into an immortal gesture whose trace and imperishable glory will be a yardstick of excellence for the community that recognizes and repeats it as a frontier to imitate. The heroic destiny through which mortals enter into the immortality that is theirs is not experience of the eternal in the solitude of contemplation,<sup>43</sup> but a decisive complete test, which is often fatal, whose accomplishment involves not only establishing the victorious boundary of what is human, but shining forth in the brilliance of the statue or glorious words. Excellence is only what it is through the presence of others, who recognize themselves laid bare in it, and it is only here that it achieves immortality in the midst of a shared world: "With regard to human matters, human beings should not be considered as they are, nor should what is mortal be considered in mortal things, but they should be envisaged only to the extent that they have the potential to immortalize."<sup>44</sup> Human beings are the act they accomplish, but this act only has meaning when it is immediately projected towards others, towards the future. Neither introspection nor reflection, but a kind of extroversion where the community acts, not like mirror but like that against which one must measure oneself without either object or mediation resulting from it. To exist is to project oneself and to see oneself as project.<sup>45</sup> In this respect even isolation only has meaning in relation to others and the *rest* of the world, that is, that part of it that is irreducible. It is the same with shame or pride: to be ashamed is to wish to be elsewhere, to be proud is to enjoy being here, in front of everyone and with them looking on.

And so Greek politics requires people to think the community without articulating it as identity–difference, same–other, but in the exercise of the place where these oppositions are merely possible. A total unity, essential or recapitulative, would have no meaning here: the equality of the ancient world creates a belonging only to receive the gesture of differentiating oneself from it, "constantly showing by one's actions that one is the best".<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, a radical alterity would not even be noticed, it would have no existence,<sup>47</sup> and what is strictly private, cut off, inaccessible, is merely a deprivation, and as such impossible to make manifest. In fact the other is neither a set of things nor an infinite single thing, but a dimension, or something to pass through that is not the property of anyone. The Greek community is a fluctuating, open community, continually outside itself and exposed to its limit, which is always new, both constant and unassignable, in a word, its horizon.

The community is a place, with no *parousia* or symbolic resolution, which possesses an entire presence, in that to participate in it in this way is to make room for all the *rest*. Thus the community does not *contain* individuals, for they are not an assignable space, but it reveals itself in them at the same time as it reveals them. So it is a shared place. The community is at every moment here and it is at every moment now.

And so it is animated by a twofold movement. First it is through the reduction of the world down to the line of a specific situation that it reveals itself in all its fullness. Whence the concept of combat as the supreme form of the being as a human ensemble, a contact and confrontation where everyone appears as he truly is.<sup>48</sup> And secondly the extension of every specific situation to the whole world, which means turning it into a model. Hence a public and political space that is a gathering of all and the consideration, in the experience of their difference in discussion and deliberation, of all things in all the aspects under which they may appear: in this way things are "brought under the spotlight of public space, where they are, so to speak, forced to reveal all their aspects".<sup>49</sup> Which assumes and brings about a freedom of discernment and movement, to put oneself in anyone else's shoes. It is only in the *polis* that freedom exists, in "the intermediate space that is created from where a number of people are together and that can last only as long as they remain together".<sup>50</sup> The world is here and now, a situation for which the community is the opening and the potential. To be fully human is to be part of the sharing, which is happening at every moment, replayed at every moment, in a founding being-ensemble.

It is thus not in the least surprising that this finished community, the site of an impossible unity and an unavoidable sharing, should be the opposite of any representation of politics as a body. There is no Greek body politic (as rational vertical organization with dependent parts and hierarchies, designed according to a transcendent principle), because in Greece the body itself is already political. This is also why questions of participation, commitment, tolerance, sacrifice,<sup>51</sup> only come into politics where the Greek model has already been put at a distance, which is the case with the Roman world. Belonging to the community is not the individual's choice, it is not his affair, but is always already decided, and decided by virtue indeed of the bond that it determines. So the community has no end (aim or finish) precisely because it is finished and exists only as the sharing of what can never be revealed as a unity. The finite nature of humans is thus neither a solitude nor an exile outside others, it is to do with the fact that there is no human except face to face with another human, against the backdrop of the home community.

All in all, this community has no place since it is only a boundary or the sharing of a place. There is no place that is common, only the community of a place that is simply diffraction and distancing within exchange. No common being (as essence or assumption) but being in common.<sup>52</sup> No organization but an articulation. No real whole similar to the one that would be described in terms of inclusion or exclusion, assimilation or rejection, but an ensemble that is merely "the opening of particularities, the tracing and beating of their boundaries",<sup>53</sup> that is therefore simply the distancing of the particular by the community and vice versa.

Recognized human excellence, whose boundary is to be striven for, does not establish any positive, definitive human essence at its extreme limit, but the simple revelation of a limit that only has meaning when it is repeated in and by human beings in the particularity of their finite nature, in the finiteness of their being-together. In this community there

is no exhibition or dialectization of a difference: the community does not differentiate (among individuals, groups, classes, etc.) but differentiates itself, is only the diffraction of its unity. What it is, what the individual is within it, is an event not an essence.<sup>54</sup>

And so in this rejection of immanence in fact lies the sense of community, its perceptible sense. It is therefore not in a unity of nature or end that humans exist, nor in an undifferentiated juxtaposition, nor in the pure within of sacred fusion or the pure without of commercial atomization, but at one and the same time within and without, at the limit, "in common without ever being common",<sup>55</sup> in a sharing that is both dividing *and* distribution?

This understanding of the community indicates how full is the Greek notion of feeling, sight, of an extremely modern political meaning that extends indeed beyond the narrow face it has historically been given and redraws a forgotten usage. If sight is in fact the supreme touch, and if touch is contact at a distance, the relationship between the individual and the world around, the world of things or the world of people, will be the site of both a primal closeness and a distance that runs through it. Starting from this gap that defines the situation of the individual, the Greeks thought political existence both as a fact and as an act: what I am only has meaning in the midst of others, what they are only has meaning if everyone sees it and relates to it. Practical wisdom, how to act well in politics by putting oneself in the other person's shoes, *as if one were someone else*, is thus the opposite of any closed alterity and also the abstract fusion of a commandment that would say: thou shalt love thy neighbour *as thyself*. So the connection with others is not based on love (or hate), a connection of self with self, but on action, a connection of other with other, where the community is both the starting point and the final truth behind everything the individual undertakes. There are two opposing routes here: in thought about alterity one starts out from oneself towards the other before coming back to the self that in this movement has conquered its identity, its "myself". In the community whose laws the Greeks developed, one starts with others, from whom one is differentiated, before coming back to receive one's definitive face. But since this movement is precisely simultaneous, there is no source or beginning: in the Greek sense of the word, the world has always been there and always will be. And so have we really exhausted Greece?

Frank Kausch  
Paris

Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

## Notes

1. This should be understood chronologically and ontologically; see Heidegger (1986), *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer), p. 33.
2. The conceptual alternative between seeing and believing has hardly any meaning here, since touch must be everything but immediate, and belief, on the other hand, is the locus of a complex mediation of which tragedy will offer the jagged and painful spectacle. Thus the example of Oedipus, a central instance of the ambivalence of sight, whose excessive crazy temptation makes him lose sight of the primary tactility of a light that is experienced only through its stable contact and defined contours. "Oh light, invisible yet long mine, today my body feels your touch for the last time" (Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, vv. 1549–50). The more one sees, the less clearly one sees. Clarity, and the truth that takes its shape, are to do with presence, which

is measured by the defined arrangement of touch. This is also why the measurement referred to here has an eminently ethical significance, which tragic downfall in fact displays.

3. See Empedocles, fragment B109 Diels-Kranz, in Jean Bollack (1992), *Empédocle, II* (Paris: Gallimard), p. 191.
4. Translated into French by Bollack, *ibid.*, p. 144, quotation from *De sensibus*, §1 (my italics).
5. *Phaedrus*, 250d2.
6. *Timaeus*, 47b–c (trans. Robin). See also 64e on the subject of objects with which sight “through the rays it sends out, achieves contact”. In the area of sensation as contact, theories of sight as receiving (effluvia or simulacra) and sight as emitting (rays) are not so much opposite as complementary.
7. On this topic, see Hipparchus’s way of putting it: “rays extend outwards from both eyes and their ends, feeling external bodies like hands touching, bring back perception of them to the faculty of sight” (my italics). See G. Romeyer-Dherbey (1999), “Voir et toucher, le problème de la prééminence d’un sens chez Aristote”, in *La parole Archaique* (Paris: PUF), pp. 270–89.
8. On this, see G. Romeyer-Dherbey (1999), “‘Les yeux porteurs de lumière.’ Théorie platonicienne et théorie euclidienne de la vision”, *ibid.* pp. 150–66.
9. See Plato, *Menon*, 76a: “The boundary up to which a solid extends, this is what constitutes the shape.”
10. *De Anima*, III, 3, 429a2.
11. *Metaphysics*, A, I, 980a25.
12. *De Sensu*, 2, 438b1 et seq.
13. *Ibid.*, 439b30. So if Aristotle criticizes Democritus or Empedocles for having reduced all sensation to touch (*De Sensu*, 440a et seq.), it is in order to advance the necessary presence, proved everywhere, of the *metaxu*, the tactile link par excellence, by means of which external things are perceived. Thus it is because they have hands that human beings are the smartest. See Heidegger (1992), *Qu’appelle-t-on penser?* (Paris: PUF), p. 90: “Penser est un travail de la main” (Thinking is manual work).
14. See *De Anima*, II, 7, 419a12–13: “If the coloured object is placed directly on the organ of sight, it cannot be seen.” So the action of an intermediary is necessary for the contact of sight to be achieved.
15. R. Brague (1988), *Aristote et la question du monde*, (Paris: PUF) pp. 372–3, emphasizes the analogy between this dual action of touch and the activity of the intellect, that thinks and also thinks itself, which clarifies further the use of the term *tiggein*, touch, to describe this activity (*Metaphysics*, 10, 1051b24).
16. The movement from potential to action (and especially the theory of sensation as a mutual act on the part of the sense and the sensed) is rooted in this same distance that the being carries within itself, here the gap between what it is not yet and what it is to become. It has to become through action what it truly is.
17. And not as if it was in a picture, Kant’s phrase, whose meaning is quite different, and decisive in another way.
18. On this point see E. Martineau (1977), *Malévitch et la philosophie*, Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, p. 147 et seq., as well as his reference to Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 358.
19. See Martineau, *op. cit.*, p. 150: “Voir ne veut rien dire” (seeing means nothing) echoes Malévitch’s phrase: “l’absurde doctrine selon laquelle nos yeux pourraient voir” (the absurd theory that our eyes might be able to see).
20. In Greek to have an experience means to be within the boundary. This “within” does not refer to any spatial notion but is to be understood in the light of the Greek sense of the word “place”, which Aristotle says is simply the boundary of the body (*Physics*, IV, 211b12–14). To experience is to be at the body’s limit, hence the link with touch. Furthermore each body has its natural place, towards which it moves as if towards its form and self-realization (*De Caelo*, IV, 3, 311a4). But this place is first of all external (if fire moves upwards, this is because it does not start there) so that this form, what it truly is, is outside it. On this point see Brague, *op. cit.*, pp. 273 et seq.
21. Which is a relationship whose terms do not pre-exist it, at least not as such; Aristotle’s theory of the common act of sense and sensed makes this clearly explicit.
22. In accordance with which teleology would resurface, and therefore a position, even it were deferred.
23. This is what Aristotle, when characterizing completion in the form, *entelecheia*, calls movement *in* the form. The form is also a movement that is opened by the limit discovered in this way.
24. In fact, according to Aristotle, sensation defines the dimensions of things (in front, behind, up, down; see *Marche*, 4, 705b8–13), by situating them between a forward towards which it is directed (see *Youth*, 1,467b30) and a behind whose absence makes a discontinuous gap in perception. It is in this gap that the situation of human beings in the world is played out.

25. Imitation via the look is also used in Plato to describe the contemplation of intelligibles: "If a god invented the present of sight for us, it was so that, having watched the periodic movements of intelligence in the sky, we might use them to regulate the circular movements of our own thought, which are of the same kind" (*Timaeus*, 47b–c). In this ecstatic vision it is not a question of returning to the self but becoming what ideas are.
26. Indeed it is as a series of *poroi* (pores) that Empedocles describes the makeup of the organs of sense, the eyes especially.
27. H. Arendt (1986), "Qu'est-ce que la liberté?", in *La crise de la culture* (Paris: Gallimard), pp. 186–222.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 191. This is a kind of birth of consciousness, self to self being the only crucial relationship.
29. Matter and the finite become the site of an *infinite* alterity (a paradox that initiates our politics).
30. And if this freedom is first experienced as negative, in resistance to the will, it is less an imitation than the mark and the richness of a reduction that opens to consciousness the complexity of a depth that cannot be plumbed and the mirror to what it *contains*.
31. Here *expose* does not mean *pose* outside oneself, which would amount to giving the characteristics of interiority. It means a movement of going out that does not establish any self, exteriority being in itself unexposable.
32. This is the finite nature of this exposure: being exposed without any sense other than this exposure, leaving the self which it is impossible to leave, and impossible to enter.
33. Not in the infinity of a going beyond, which we find in the baroque body, and as early as Michelangelo.
34. J. L. Nancy (2000), *Corpus* (Paris: Métailié), p. 117.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 118. The body feels, and so it "feels like an outside" (p. 123).
36. *Politics*, I, 2, 1253a15–18 (my italics). Sense/feeling here is *aisthēsis*, that is, sensation.
37. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2, 1253a25, as action comes before power. See also a27: "the man who is incapable of being a member of a community, or who does not feel any need to because he is self-sufficient, in no way belongs to the city, and thus is either a brute or a god."
38. R. Brague, *op. cit.*, p. 362.
39. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A, 1, 981b10–13. It tells us fire is hot, not why.
40. *Ethics for Nicomachus*, I, 1, 1094a23. See F. Volpi (1993), "Le problème de l'*aisthēsis* chez Aristote", *Etudes phénoménologiques* (Brussels: OUSIA), no. 17.
41. H. G. Gadamer (1994), *L'idée du Bien comme enjeu platonico-aristotélicien* (Paris: Vrin), p. 147.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
43. Like that of Plato's philosopher in the allegory of the cave, which goes to meet the truth. On the difference between immortality and eternity, and its political significance, see H. Arendt (1994), *Condition de l'homme moderne* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy), pp. 53 et seq.
44. Aristotle, *Ethics for Nicomachus*, X, 7, 1177b31. On this topic, see H. Arendt, *op. cit.*, pp. 96 et seq.
45. On individual–community relations, see J.-P. Vernant (1989), "L'individu dans la cité", in *L'individu, l'amour, la mort. Soi-même et l'autre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Gallimard), pp. 211–32.
46. H. Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 80: "In other words, the public domain was reserved for individuality; it was the only area that allowed human beings to show what they really were, what was irreplaceable about them."
47. Which results, among other things, from perception through contact with the *parent*; see Plato, *Timaeus*, 63b–c.
48. See the fragment 53 DK from Heraclitus on combat as the "father of all things".
49. H. Arendt (2001), *Qu'est-ce que la politique?* (Paris: Seuil), p. 142.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
51. This is why the figure of Empedocles is so seminal in Hölderlin's work.
52. Here certain features will be recognized from the work of J. L. Nancy, as he lays out its development, particularly in *Etre singulier pluriel* or *La communauté désœuvrée*.
53. J. L. Nancy (1999), *La communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Galilée), p. 188.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 208: "Thus it is a becoming-another that does not include any mediation of the same and the other."
55. *Ibid.*, p. 225.