

## FILIPPOS TSITSOPOULOS - IN SEARCH OF THE MIRACLE

2023

LECTURE AND PERFORMANCE WITH VISUAL OBJECTS, MASKS, ONE PROJECTOR AND THEATRICAL PASSAGES



A long time ago in the year 1993 on the day my mother died, my father, a professional actor, played Polonius in Shakespeare's Hamlet in Athens. I must say that this performance was memorable and awe-inspiring. That man totally destroyed by the loss of his wife, my mother, buried this very day, is dedicating on stage his performance fully to her. It was obvious that all his gestures that night spoke about her.

The great emotion was when Polonio had to say, reading the letter of his daughter's love with Hamlet, the words »Doubt if there is fire in the stars, doubt if the sun doth moves doubt if false can be true, But never doubt my love, Never doubt my love!« My father kept repeating »never doubt about my love« so many times that the other actors on the stage we're shocked, and knowing the facts, they decided to remain inert looking.

The audience, not understanding what was going on, began to applaud, touched by the text and its constant repetition and the emotion was so much so that they finally had to stop the performance because people were applauding clapping

non-stop! And without understanding why they were touched like a huge wave attack in their nervous system.

Later, when we arrived home, it was the first night that my mother was not at home waiting for us, and while the cold food was in the oven as he was heating it up for the dinner he said to me, »- did you get that it was for her«. I thought to myself, yes it was for her. And he continued - »...And you like Leerte, (his son on stage), try, in your life, to be honest with yourself and this to follow, as night follows the day, that you cannot be untruthful to no-one.....«

It was obvious that he was still acting his role at home, believing or trying to convince himself that the reality we live in, is prolonged in art, and is saved because art exist as a miracle, and art again is prolonged at home and home is a rehearsal place where everything is mixed up and unique. And the theatre is linked to life and life is represented in the theatre.

Some years later when my father died, I have decided to watch all his videos all his performances to read and remember all the roles he has played, study all his monologues in older tapes where I was holding the line along with my mother in a kind of obsession, desire to understand, all my childhood and adolescence in my house, full of theatre and constant rehearsals from Harold Pinter to Gobrovich to Alby, and from Berry to Brecht and Beckett and I begin to articulate this enormous work of 52 videos of performances The number 52 has to do with the years that my father worked on the stage.

I have documented myself on customs that have to do with the soul, having as a main book »The history of the Soul« by Panagis Lekatsas among others. And I have started playing Polonius, for him. I have transformed my head with live elements by tying them on my face creating a flexible mask made of shrimps, imitating the red beard of Danish Polonius.

In the old traditions of the Pacific, the aborigines create masks similar to mine, believing in magic to the magic as main for them refuge, to the big questions and try to communicate with the lead to faith and faith to miracle and in that way can communicate with those who are no longer alive. This people believe that humans in other lives can be transformed into fishes, shrimps, prawns, octopuses, squids, whales, and come back to life under this form, to their paradise and their habitat is the sea, where they can emerge. As well as those who are with pending accounts for things, or their attitude or misfortunes will adopt forms of the earth, thus, beautiful flowers, animals, spikes, hearts...

So I have used these masks made of living elements and I transformed myself into a creature capable of communicating with my deceased father,

dedicating to him in form of exorcism through Shakespeare, the words that he dedicated to my mother during this performance of Polonius along with a text and a song with lyrics invented by me, which are superimposed on the old lieder of the 1929 old Feldeinsamkeit lieder recording that played in the backdrop sung by Julia Gulp.

The impromptu character at the beginning of the video, where I interpret this experience thanks to the repetition took shape until the dramatic end. The conclusion of a life, the impossible answers to the questions of how, why and for who the work has to be acted. a starting point or the beginning of the philosophy of my father as actor and as father, and his philosophy and my philosophy as well, about life, religion, death, faith and love.

But how can we approach the miracle since Homer's Nekya rhapsody, to the mystic of Elefsis and our days and what mechanics are activated when we use the mask as a ›transportation‹ medium.

Let's go back a little to find out what a mask can hide, what it reveals, what it manifests, and what kind of statement is found through the mask and in what sense is this explanatory and what kind of definition we find through the mask.

Looking for answers to this question I returned to those of Sophocles, of Aeschylus, of Euripides, and specifically in the passage of Euripides in the dialogue between Jokasta and Polynices. Jokasta says »what is the exile«. What does the exile person suffer from? And Polynices answers. »He suffers from the worst of evils« because, »the worst of evils is not having the right to parrhesia to speak in freedom«.

It is a slave condition.

Not to speak one's mind. And Polinices retorts, »...and above all to have to bow to the foolishness of those who command«. And Jokasta affirms. »Yes, that's right«. »One has to play the fool with fools«. »To bow down to what the political power says« and Polinices finishes, »and this one does it out of interest by force of his temperament«.

We could start from this idea of whether or not we have the right to parrhesia, the word in freedom, if we are in this stupid world with stupid people, or if we fold by interests and by the force of temperament thinking as a type of art that we are going to define as an exiled art, that makes use of parrhesia and of the right to the speak, forced to live like all of us in a world, a squared world of the spectacle of the contemporary culture or, of the contemporary biopolitical democracy.

This is a protected and protective narrative, directed to a concrete type of people that maintains what we can call ›the armed peace in force‹ or ›the state of exception‹.

What interests me here is to see what my work has to do with the proliferation of insignificance, that aspires to cover what exists, with something different from insignificance itself.

We know a little about masks but we know that man learns very early to play with masks because the mask has to do with the space from which the gaze is articulated and the animals that are part of the masks that I'm constructing.

The animals use systems of camouflage, systems of mimicry, systems of masking. They are capable of entering into what Roger Caillois calls petrification. The legendary psychasthenia. Petrifying animals immobilise themselves to escape from predators. They also mimic to seduce or attract their partner, but above all there is an experience between animals and humans that are interwoven in relation with the mimetic. With the preciseness of mimicry.

In the Platonist dialogues there is a moment, when Socrates is classified as a polytrophe, as someone who handles many tropes, who has a great rhetorical capacity, but he is also qualified as if he were ›the mask of xylene‹, of Plato's banquet and qualified as atope. He is also compared to a torpedo fish. Well, the atopy has to do with that legendary asthenia but also with something that in my performances is present, which is the anthropological problem of the evil eye.

They are performances that when one sees them, lead us to think not only about the ›atopos‹ or the legendary psychasthenia, but also, about psychosis and they are performances that have to do with the question of the gaze and power.

And when one looks at them, one asks oneself the question if one is prepared to look at them or if one has a certain ability to look at them.

And this question of gazing is a childish game where we have all been playing when we were children, staring at each other to see who is the one who looks away from the other more quickly or blinks, and it is the same experience of the gaze that is present in the performative acts.

The gaze has to do with the articulation of everyday desire with the relationship we have with empirical objects, but also has to do with strange

desires, and with those that are enigmatic with the search for the other in which we are confronted at the beginning of our life, with the desire to ask ourselves what we are for this other, or what the other wants from us.

Our visual reality is constituted by a process of looking, but there is another process of exclusion of looks.

In the animal kingdom that my masks are constituted there is a difference between the eye and the ocellus, the eyes of the animals can see. The ocelli.

The ocellus is something different from the eye. It's a kind of spot, an eye that does not see, an eye on the body surface of the animal, a multiplied larger eye, different from the eye itself, an eye sometimes surrounded by colored rings, the multiplied eye of argos.

When the animal is in danger, it activates these ocelli, because what the ocellus does is that the animal presents a terrifying aspect. In children's games we constantly find this dimension of presenting oneself differently to the gaze of the other, but above all, children's games have to do with the question of visibility and the question of invisibility, and with the question of exposure both very recently presented in the world of miracles.

Let's think about the child game we played when we were kids with our backs turned to the others. When our back is turned the others can move, and when we turn around they have to be paralyzed, and if they move they are captured and trapped by our gaze.

This dimension of visibility and invisibility is also found at the idea that we have all of us had in our dreams where is night and someone breaks into our house, is a murderer, is a serial killer, is a ruthless killer, and is killing the whole family except from us who have been covered with the sheet, and as we are invisible we do not see the murderer, we are petrified which prevents us from being seen and trapped by the gaze of the power.

The camouflaged above all has the fascination that is produced by the sudden appearance, this kind of moment that one appears from nowhere, can cause a fascination and sometimes an enormous pleasure while some others are terrifying.

And this sudden appearance is to be introduced as a process of domestication in front of the terrifying character. In front of the malevolent character of the gaze, we can say that there is a process of domestication. An ›socialization‹ of the gaze.

Although in our surroundings there are always looks that disturb us, there are other looks that mark us, that locate us, that mark what is useful and what is useless, the presence of desire, and what we can or cannot negotiate.

And because child games are including art, they are processes that have to do with the visible and the invisible, with the pleasurable desire, with the horrifying desire, with the separation between the eye and the evil eye, between the visible division of the eye and the monstrous and threatening dimension of the evil eye.



To a certain extent my performances are an attempt to tame the evil character of the eye, they have an apotropaic character, they may be near with Lacan's idea that visual art functions as a screen that deflects the evil eye and disarms the threatening character of the gaze.

Humans have a characteristic that resembles certain animals, and when we are threatened we drop things.

Animals when they are threatened are dropping things, sometimes pieces of their body, they can drop feathers, they can dispense with part of their body, like lizards dispense with their tail when we are going to catch them. And that moment of dropping things that has to do with threat is also something proper to my work, where I drop things when I am extremely threatened.

The way I drop things in my performances, including the mask itself, is where the tremendous truth of the enunciated theatricality becomes unbearable. And there is the moment where the miracle appears...

## **FILIPPOS TSITSOPOULOS**

**Born in Athens in 1967, lives and works in London. He started his studies in Higher School of Fine Arts of Thessaloniki at Aristotle University and continued in Madrid at Complutense University where he completed his PhD (1996). He is an artist that moves in the fields of painting, digital art, video theatre as well as installation art. He has also worked in the field of interactive experiential theatre, video theatre, exploring the limits of them since 1990.**

**Filippos Tsitsopoulos video installations have been presented in many exhibitions and shows. He lives in London and Madrid where he worked at El Prado Museum from 2005 until 2012. His installations and artistic theatrical performances are known in exhibitions, such as The Serpentine Gallery, with the support of Hans Ulrich Obrist for film and perform Kage where K for Kott in the gallery premises, with Jan Hoet in several exhibitions, with Fernando Castro Florez in Madrid, at the FACT Liverpool, the Bluecoat, Frieze Art Fair (London), Alte Nationalgalerie (Berlin), twice in Tate Modern, Toynbee Studios and Artsadmin and Live art Development Agency LADA. Worked with Jan Fabre and Joanna De Vos at the project. Het Vlot. Kunst is (niet) eenzaam / The Raft. Art is (not) Lonely and in several theatres and stages, festivals of performance in the UK such as Fringe, Edinburgh festival Fringe, Leeds, Southbank Performance festival, and collaborate with the historic BONE Festival of performance in Bern and Norbert Klassen and The Black market International. In Greece has exhibited at Batagianni gallery at E. Tseliou gallery and in Madrid with Rafael Perez Hernando. Performances and installations at Megaro Mousikis with Anna Kafetsi and with Denys Zacharopoulos among others.**

Filippos is using extraordinary and elaborately constructed masks as a form of protection, disguise, identity, isolation, alienation, and human resilience. His work involves an exploration of authentic identity versus performed identity. He considers the often polarised fragmented identities that we perform and how to bring the interiorised authentic self and the exterior constructed self together. His goal is to examine socially constructed patterns of behaviour, create situations in which the participants break or transcend the internal feedback loops that control their own actions, and address the power structures we inhabit and perpetrate.