The Visuality in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*

> My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them.
>
> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

I "Visible" and "visibly" are brought up early and loudly in *Memorabilia* to delimit factual statements—"For he [Socrates] *visibly* sacrificed…" (I.1.2) and '…the penalty is death if someone is *visibly* stealing…" (I.2.62)—in addition to serving as a fact itself—"He [Socrates] was always *visible*." (I.1.10) Though the Greek word "*φανερὸς*" does not entail the optical, the habitual association between visuality and manifestation retains its significance which can be found in Socrates' examples in his reply to Aristippus' question of the good (*ἀγαθός*) and the beautiful/noble (*καλός*) (III.8): Three good objects indicated by Socrates as the remedy to fever, ophthalmia and hunger (the middle is an optical problem) are consumed by using. The first two of the four objects that are beautiful/noble—human beings who are good at wrestling and running—are likely consumed by spectating. If being visible, being manifest and being beautiful/noble are related, the too immediate thus seemingly silly response to the question "what is the beautiful"—"looking good (*ἀγαθός*?)"—will need a deliberation which will be started with the beginning part—the refutation of the indictment—of *Memorabilia*.[1]

II Following his opening wondering at the indictment against (or rather the speech leading to such indictment) Socrates, Xenophon defends Socrates by claiming that Socrates "visibly sacrificed often at home and often at the common altars of the city; and it was not difficult to see him using divination." (I.1.2) Though Socrates' sacrificing and using divination are both visible, but the generation of his to-be-used divination is not visible. It is hearable, however, since Socrates tells others about his daimonion: he at least tries to make something invisible manifest through speech. Then we might wonder why Socrates would like to make his divination manifest in this particular form. If Socrates never brags about his daimonion in the public, would that save him from being accused of not believing in the gods of the city? After emphasizing

1. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, trans. Amy L. Bonnette (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). For convenience, frequent reference to Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972) will be marked as XS in this essay.

again on the very visibility of Socrates (I.1.10), Xenophon admits the existence of the invisibility of Socrates' thought: "in the sphere of things in which it was not visible how he thought, it is no wonder that the jurors erred in judging him. But isn't it a wonder that they didn't take to heart (ἐνθυμέομαι)[2] what everyone knew?"(I.1.17) The wording in the (rhetorical?) question is curious. Knowing something and taking that knowledge into heart are separated. We wonder about what the relationship between knowledge and hearts. It is also not unrelated to consider the relationship between wonder and visibility[3]. We usually wonder about thing that is not manifest. Xenophon does not mention the jurors wonder about Socrates' invisible thought. Is their error (according to Xenophon) in judging caused by their wonder (paying too much attention to the invisible) or their judgement has nothing to do with wonder? In the former case, it seems that wonder, the motivation of philosophy[4], has the potential to cause vicious decisions. Then would that be wise to suggest a stoppage of wonder? We can even ask if wonder itself is visible for it is mostly a thought. It can be indeed expressed through its result (writing, discussion of the wonder) or solution (judgement, or rather, sentence—the settlement of the wonder). If wonder should be still encouraged, then the expression of wonder becomes the difficulty to be considered. The invisibility of thought, however, is not absolute, since according to Socrates, "the gods *know* all things—what is said, what is done, and what is silently deliberated…"[5] (I.1.19) Socrates' belief in the omniscience of the gods might be an irony of or, attack on, the impiety or, hubris, of people who think they *know* thus judge the wickedness of Socrates' invisible thought: they act as if themselves are the gods.[6]

2. My complete illiteracy of Greek and reliance on the English translation might cause a problem here.

3. I thank my classmate Rory O'Hollaren for her inspiring presentation on "wonder" of *Memorabilia* in our Xenophon's Socrates seminar

4. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b12.

5. Strauss says this belief "is meant to explain why he [Socrates] kept his oath." (XS 10) But does Socrates always swear? "…the Xenophontic Socrates only makes a dog swear 'by Zeus'. [Socrates did swear by Zeus three times in III.8]" (XS 10) Strauss also emphasizes on the abnormality of Socrates' extreme view here: "We may note that the belief of the many regarding the gods' knowledge is the mean between the extreme view held by Socrates according to which the gods know everything and the opposite extreme according to which they know nothing of the human things." (XS 10) We wonder if Socrates' "belief" can only be used as a rhetorical weapon.

6. How can human being judge on behalf of the god(s)? A Christian juridical case apropos of the sinfulness of intercourse for mere pleasure might be quite far-fetched but not totally unrelated: "There's the germ of an account of the motive called by theologians 'rendering the marriage debt' in his observation that married people owe to one another a kind of mutual service. Aquinas made two contributions the first of which concerns this point: he makes the remark that a man ought to notice if she does want it. This is an apt gloss on Augustine's 'mutual service,' and it destroys the basis for the picture which some have had of intercourse not for the sake of children as necessarily a little bit sinful on one side, since one must be 'demanding,' and not for any worthy motive but purely 'out of desire for pleasure.' *One could hardly say that being diagnosable as wanting intercourse was a sin!*" See G. E. M. Anscombe, *Contraception and Chastity*, https://www.open.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/bnccde/PH19B/conchastity.html

III We jump from the beginning to the middle, or rather, the approximate peak suggested by Strauss, of *Memorabilia*. Aristippus first asks if Socrates knows anything good—a question presupposes the answer to be an object. Socrates replies, however, with three situations—something good for fever, ophthalmia, or hunger (III.8.3). As we suggest in paragraph I, three good objects in these three situations would be consumed by using if not eating. And to be more precise, we should even say they are good not for fever, ophthalmia or hunger but for people who suffer from fever, ophthalmia or hunger. Then Aristippus asks if Socrates know anything noble/beautiful and if those noble/beautiful things are similar. Socrates gainsaid the similarity by two pairs of comparisons. It is curious why Socrates' comparison happens only within each pair: a more drastic difference could be drawn if he compares a human being with an object, which might, however, cause a difficulty in his later argument. But we will suspend the problem of difference for now. All four examples are related to activity (if not, to be more specific, competition) among human beings. The second pair is of objects and the expression resembles the good object: "a shield noble/beautiful for defense…a javelin noble/beautiful for being violently and swiftly borne." (III.8.4) Despite their resemblance, we should notice that the good objects are for personal feelings while both the noble/beautiful objects from the second pair are for intersubjective actions. Nevertheless, if Socrates only mentions the second pair, it will be still easy to identify the good with the noble/beautiful just like what he had done in III.8.5. But his first pair is of human beings: "A human being beautiful/noble *at* wrestling…another who is noble/beautiful *at* running." (III.8.4) If we use the structure "A is X for B" from the case of the good, we wonder what we should fill in the "A is noble/beautiful for B" regarding our first human pair. There are at least two viable possibilities:

a. A human being is noble/beautiful for wrestling/running
b. A wrestler/runner is noble/beautiful for the audience

The first possibility is not very different from the object pair. It is simply the way to say somebody is good at something in our ordinary language. But how do we tell who is good at something? This how can be different from how we tell the goodness of the objects regarding fever, ophthalmia and hunger. The second possibility is quite different from the object pair because a new relation—beholder and the beheld—is explicitly involved here. We might say that the introduction of spectatorship is one way to differentiate the beautiful/noble from the good. Socrates does not mention here one of the most obvious examples of the noble/beautiful (if not the beautiful *par excellence*): the beautiful-looking people who has an intense presence later in III.11 as well as Xenophon's *Symposium*.

IV Socrates ignores the second possibility and identifies the good with the noble/beautiful in III.8.5 though we should notice that the only assertion is of the identification of the good and the noble/beautiful regarding virtue which has no mention in any of those examples above. Regarding human beings, the

bodies of human beings, and the things that human beings use, the good and the noble/beautiful only appear, or are said, or are held to be the same. If we understand virtue as some character of human beings which is not immediately visible[7], it seems that in the realm of the unmanifest soul, the good and the noble/beautiful are indistinguishable[8]. Disregarding the nuance above, Socrates completes his relativistic view on the good and the noble/beautiful in III.8.7: the same things are both noble/beautiful and shameful/ugly and are both good and bad. Socrates talks about the same subject without any examples in his conversation with Euthydemus later in IV.6.8-9. The good is being beneficial for certain object and Socrates brings up the possible negative effect of the good: "what is beneficial to one is sometimes harmful to another." There is, however, no negative effect of the noble/beautiful mentioned in this part[9]: we can at most say the noble/beautiful may have no impact on something. I suggest this omission is not unimportant and it is caused by the specific definition of the noble/beautiful here: "using each thing *for* what it may be useful for." It seems that the noble/beautiful is actually the preposition "for" in "being beneficial *for* a certain object." As a result, the noble/beautiful serves as the teleological foundation for the good, which is the second way to differentiate the beautiful/noble from the good.

V Before we circle back to the peak—Socrates' mysterious speech on houses, paintings and the ideal location for temples and altars, it can be helpful to look at his conversation with some artists. If Socrates is our authority of aesthetics (suggested by Strauss), Parrasius might not be a successful painter for Socrates does not praise his works. For Parrasius, the soul's character is not immediately visible so that could not be imitated thus painted. Socrates succeeds in persuading him to admit the visibility of characters by an induction:

1. looking at one another in a friendly or a hostile manner
2. different looks when their friends fare well and when they fare ill
3. characters

Strauss points out there is only one step from 2 to 3 which Parrasius the artist easily takes in speech if not also in his future art practice (XS 84). But we wonder if we should take this one step easily in every circumstance (like legal cases). To the question whether is more pleasant to see human beings through whom the noble, good and lovable characters come to sight than the opposite ones, Parrasius only says that there is a great difference between the two. Is this difference a difference between types of pleasure regarding art appreciation? If the difference exists only within pleasure, can we say that art, regardless of its content, necessitates pleasure? Socrates praises the work of Cleiton the

7. The visibility of virtue, or rather characters, will be further discussed in paragraph V
8. Cf. XS 77. The pleasant can also be added.
9. In his eulogy to Socrates in IV.8.14, Xenophon emphasizes on Socrates universal harmlessness—"to harm no one" which is emphasized again by Strauss—"manliness is not mentioned among his virtues…he lacked the virtue of the man (aner) which includes surpassing one's enemies in harming them." (XS 126)

sculptor—he is a successful sculptor—but Cleiton could not answer in speech how he addresses the souls of human beings through the appearance. It seems that Socrates has helped him to a better understanding of his art but it is not so clear that if the inability of speaking of one's making of the beautiful means the lack of understanding of it: to what extent is making art itself a speech? Pistias, the maker of breastplates, is in a way an articulate artist: he makes good breastplates and is able to say why his products are good: they are well-proportioned thus fit to different needs.[10] It is curious why Socrates emphasized that fittingness prevents hurt. We want to ask: does beauty hurt?[11] Strauss makes it clear that "the difference between what is said about breastplates on the one hand and sculptors and paintings on the other illustrates the difference between the good (useful) and the beautiful: paintings and sculptures which are likeness or imitations are beautiful precisely because they are of no use but good only to be looked at and for leading our souls." (XS 85) We might also think about why the makers of the beautiful are portrayed as inarticulate while the maker of the useful are portrayed as articulate. Then Socrates heard of Theodote, whose beauty surpasses speech, and decided to see her. Cyrus also first heard of Panthea yet he decided not to see her (*Cyropaedia* V.1.2-4). Speech precedes beauty from time to time. Though the beautiful Theodote is the archetype of the work of artists, she is herself more or less an artist[12]:

10. Strauss wrote "The speech about what is and what is not well-proportioned is altogether Pistias'." (XS 85) But in Bonnette's translation, the hurt-fittingness part is articulated by Socrates. I don't know if this is an intended mistake or just a problem of translation. I will make my argument based on Bonnette's translation.

11. If the answer is in the positive, it seems to contradict the harmlessness of the beautiful/noble suggested in paragraph IV. When we are saying something is good for one but bad for another, "one" and "another" are different entities. It is in the same way we say that something is beautiful/noble for one but has no impact on another. Here the good/useful/fit is said to prevent hurt for the same entity for which it is good/useful/fit. So I am asking if the beautiful can hurt the same entity for which it is beautiful. In footnote 9 we mentioned Xenophon's emphasis on Socrates' harmlessness. We are tempted to say those who sentenced Socrates to death hated Socrates. What constitutes this hate? Envy might be one if not the component. Did Socrates in the end hurt his enemies by making them envious of him? We might say even if making somebody envious can be regarded as doing harm, it is not intended by the person who arouses envy. That's one way to keep Socrates' harmlessness intact. There is another way to deal with this difficulty which might only cause more difficulties. If we can use Socrates' very unique definition of envy in III.9.8—"only those who are distressed by their friends' doing well feel envy", we might say by making people envious of you, you must make them first friends of you, or put it in another way, they are automatically friends of you. Then we must ask: what is a friend? Leaving this question aside, in the case of envy, we can say a friend and an enemy are generated on the same entity almost at the same time, which might be an analogy of the hurting beauty. And by this interpretation, we can say that although, or rather, because he did harm, Socrates is more a beauty than a harmless fitting tool. [Strauss' reading of envy in this part is very different from mine (XS 80). According to him, those envious fathers' natural friends—their sons—are getting better due to Socrates. Thus they admire Socrates more than their fathers. That's the cause of those fathers' envy of Socrates. it is not a direct application of Socrates' definition. If we use this definition in an "authentic" way, those fathers should simply envy their sons instead of Socrates. It remains a difficulty and could not be addressed properly here.]

12. Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 150: "Eirene, who outshines all other gods, is nothing but a statue." Eirene is the complete

in addition to her natural beauty, she adorns herself, her mother, maids and house. If Theodote could speak of her cosmetic technique, how would she speak of her natural beauty? When Socrates and his fellows arrived, Theodote was posing for a painter and Socrates only started to talk after the painter left. The first topic of this conversation is of justice: should those beholders feel more grateful to Theodote for having exhibited her beauty, or should Theodote to those beholders for their beholding her? According to Strauss, "the decision depends on whether the exhibition is more *useful* to her than the beholding to Socrates and his company or vice versa." (XS 86) We notice that by structuring the problem of justice in this way, usefulness (the good) has the final word although beauty initiates the problem. Socrates' reason for "Theodote owes more to the beholder" draws from the fact that Theodote receives praise and more benefits (when she is reported to more people) while leaves the beholder only the lack—the desire to touch what they behold and the constant longing.[13] We wonder to what extent the desire to touch is related to the useful. We also wonder to what extent this lack has the right to overshadow its condition: the purpose-generating enjoyment brought by the beautiful. Based on the second wonder, we might structure the problem of justice in a different way in which the beautiful has the final word. The rest of the conversation is about contriving friendship. Strauss makes a connection between usefulness and speech: "even those whose beauty surpasses speech need speech, the art of speaking, in order to make their beauty useful to them." (XS 88) But soon he follows up with a statement of the supreme status of Socrates being "the true *erotikos* who can make others long passionately to be together with him in speech." (XS 89) Besides the useful speech, there should exist the beautiful speech (Socrates' love charms and incantations). We have to think about the difference between two types of people who hang out with Socrates.[14]

VI Due to the obvious obscurity of the architecture speech, it would be of no disadvantage if we have Strauss, the experienced reader of Xenophon, as our guide. Strauss suggests that this speech "sheds some light on the neglected side of the beautiful" and calls attention to Xenophon's replacement of words: "The same houses are beautiful and useful; Socrates no longer says that they are beautiful and good…Socrates here first replaces 'beautiful' by 'pleasant' and distinguishes the pleasant from the useful and in particular from what affords safety; he then replaces 'useful' (or 'safe') by 'beautiful'. He has no use for beautiful things which do not jibe with the specific pleasure or usefulness expected from the artifact in question." (XS 93) For clarity, here is a summary of this transformation:

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artificiality while Theodote is a combination of nature and human effort. Also see 154: "Only the beautifier deserves beautification."

13. The beautiful motivates three kinds of thing: 1. Longing—a mental state; 2. (the desire to) touch—a deed; 3. praise and report—speeches. It seems that only the third—speeches—will deal with, if not increase, visuality.

14. Cf. XS 5, 15-16 on two kinds of associates.

[beautiful – good]
beautiful – useful
pleasant [warm in winter; cool in summer] – safe [securing one's belongings]
pleasant – beautiful

Strauss' guide for the first part—houses and paintings—of the architecture speech ends here. The replacement, or rather, overlapping of concepts is still obscure. I will provide two tentative and piecemeal interpretations based on his guide and my own interest. First, to remind ourselves, Socrates only spoke after the painter had left off when he was at Theodote's luxurious house (III.11.2). Is Xenophon implying some proximity or sequence of Socrates and Painter? Nevertheless, Socrates dismisses paintings and other decorations because they are unpleasant for him. If there are no beautiful things in the ideal, or rather, Socrates' house, then how can this house still be described as beautiful? In *Symposium*, we are told and pleased[15] by Socrates that he dances, for exercise, in his house by himself (*Symposium* II.17-19): Socrates makes performance art if not conceptual art[16]—he decorates his house by himself[17]. My second interpretation is of safety, at least implicitly, and will also lead to the second part—the ideal location for temples and altars—of this speech. Strauss' guide is more limited this time: "The most becoming location of temples and altars is one which is both most visible and 'untrodden'; for it is pleasant to offer one's prayers at the sight of them and it is pleasant to approach temples and altars when one is in an 'undefiled' disposition. Socrates does not speak here of the beautiful or of the good; but if anything can illustrate the excess of the beautiful over the good (useful), this example can." (XS 77) Such a location has an ambiguous state[18]: it is very visible, thus can be visually *used* by most people if not everyone pleasantly, at the same time very difficult to get to, thus can be "untrodden" and approached by only the undefiled pleasantly. The location provides its "content"—temples and altars, or presumably, "the good"—with a look. And a look has its intension (which is not invisible, to emphasize) a distance[19], or, a process, which cannot be used immediately, but will be walked[20]

15. See paragraph V: "art…necessitates pleasure." Socrates' useful dance is represented as a comedy—art—by himself.

16. Socrates makes his private dance visible by saying it aloud (conceptual art). And we should not ignore the fact Charmides sees Socrates' dance in person (performance art)

17. Socrates is more radical than Theodote regarding self-beautification.

18. Cf. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 57: "For the explanation of secrets is, as he asserts, not only forbidden by law, but also impossible by nature: the very nature of the secrets prevents their being divulged. We are then confronted with a third meaning of the word 'secret': secret may mean not only the Biblical word or parable which has an inner meaning, and the hidden meaning itself, but also, and perhaps primarily, the thing to which that hidden meaning refers."

19. Cf. Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3: "The other four sense require that we establish contact with their objects or even internalize them to a greater or lesser extent…Only sight objectifies what it perceives by setting it outside and before us: we cannot see something placed directly upon the surface of our eye any more than we can really taste or touch something held up at any distance in front of us."

20. Plato's *Laws* is a long walk to the temple. It also reminds me of my long-ago fascination with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the smooth space which cannot be "counted" but "explored

by us with joy and wonder.

VII I will indulge myself a bit more with the ending. Joseph Kosuth, the American artist who coined the term "conceptual art" in the 60s, like Socrates, has a distaste for paintings and sculptures. I heard of or, actually, saw (but this seeing is indeed more like hearing)[21] his *One and Three Chairs* when I first started my contemporary art education around five years ago. I remembered it easily, for its simplicity, but was hardly impressed by it, also for its simplicity: it is just a materialization of Plato's theory of form! And ironically, he called this materialization "conceptual art". Two years ago, my friend Tianhui, who was only around twenty at that time, told me she loved him in a motherly way (which is also a mysterious speech and forgive me if I remember it wrong). Since I really value my friends' opinions, Kosuth has gained a special status in my mind. I was (and am still) quite perplexed by the architecture speech and Kosuth somehow came to my mid for his weird similarity with Socrates—they are both very involved in speech. I thought now I might be old thus patient enough to truly see the look of his work and approach its intens/tion. I searched him online, watched a recent interview video of him, and was amazed by this 73 (now 77) years old man's candidness. He could be the opposite of Xenophon not to mention Strauss but even such a man has his wondrous walk. I conclude this writing with a simple but meaningful statement from that interview which echoes Socrates' architecture speech: "Architecture is particularly interesting because it's the most political of all art form because it's made for a purpose, and it reflects the culture."[22]

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only by legwork". But they explicitly emphasize that the smooth space is tactile rather than visual. I am quite sure the "visuality" I am developing here has a different connotation. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 371.

21. What I am trying to say is this: I heard thus knew the concept/information of it and thought its visuality was of no importance (which is actually suggested by the artist himself [even now] in speech but not in deed! I quote Kosuth from the same interview in footnote 22: "Artists really work with meaning not with forms and colors.") I have brought up the relationship between hearing, seeing and speech several times in this essay without elaboration. I shall address this problem properly somewhere else.

22. Joseph Kosuth, "TIME SPACE EXISTENCE interview series" https://vimeo.com/265792619?embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=51142642

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