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Virtual Theatre

Edited by Sidia Fiorato

Miscellany

Special Section

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Sidia Fiorato*

Introduction. Intermediality and Virtuality in Performance: A Reflection on Twenty-First Century Mediaturgy

Our contemporary period is witnessing an ever renewing intermedial turn: "many works of art, cultural artifacts, literary texts and other cultural configurations either combine and juxtapose different media, genres and styles or refer to other media in a plethora of ways" (Rippl 2015, 1). The theatre has always been a multimodal form of expression, it is "inclusive and collaborative by its nature and has always encompassed various sectors of art, design and technology" (O'Dwyer 2021, 3). Chapple and Kattenbelt have defined it as a "hypermedium that incorporates all arts and media and [as] the stage of intermediality" (2006, 20).

The increased mediatisation of the theatre reflects the increased mediatisation of our everyday life; the spread of digital technologies has added to the theatre's multimodal dimension, with particular reference to the interplay between words, visual elements, sound and movement. It has been accompanied by, and grounded in, a techno-cultural turn, which can be considered as an updating of the two cultures debate. Technology has affected the image of the world, human identity, and their relationship; this finds a privileged expression in the theatrical experience, which engages its own technological context and fosters a reflection on the relationship between the body and technology, as well as the potentialities of digital interaction.

Digital theatre needs the collaboration between the arts and sciences: "The complexity of digital technology demands that performers, artists and designers work closely with technical experts, like electronic engineers and computer scientists . . . thereby synergistically expanding knowledge in both domains" (O'Dwyer 2021, 23). In digital culture performances, technology is not only employed in an ancillary way for the *mise en scène*, but through its specificities, it affects the overall dramaturgical design. This

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calls for a dynamic reconsideration of theatrical performance that affects the conception of space, the human component of the performance, the relationship between stage forms and spectatorial attitudes. Causey speaks about a "theatre of monsters" to indicate "hybrid forms of performance [. . . which] bridge, extend and explore the gaps between the live and the mediated", as well as between an organic human entity and a "technologically integrated one" (Causey 2002, 182). The resort to the concept of monstrosity underlines the digital theatre's visual critical paradigm which exceeds and interrogates theatrical codifications within an ever-evolving context. As such, the theatre of monsters embodies the representational, ontological and epistemological anxieties of the twenty-first century.

Many critics remark upon a paradigm change from Peter Brook's empty stage to the digital stage, from the presence and the observation of a body in an empty space to the performer's interaction with digital interfaces and other users of the medium (see Elleström 2010, 30; see also Brook 1986). Brook asserted: "I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all I need for an act of theatre to be engaged . . . Another aspect of the empty stage is that the emptiness is shared: it's the same space for everyone that's present" (1995). Upon this empty stage an idea was "given flesh and blood and emotional reality".[1] The digital stage, instead, seems to have reduced the human body to one of the many signifiers of the performance, its primacy displaced by the co-presence of technological tools (screens, motion sensors) and their effects, such as the digital doubling of bodies, virtual bodies, robots and cyborgs (see Nelson 2010, 23). The stage is no longer empty but alredy *in potentia*, an open space for experimentation which determines a new spatial turn of the digital era, and the idea is given flesh, blood and technology in order to articulate a new emotional reality. As Masura asserts, "Theatre is an empty space left open to creative possibility" (2020, 17), to our imagination, and as also Causey observes, "The theatre is once again the test site, the replica, or laboratory, in which we can reconfigure our world and consciousness, witness its operations and play with its possibilities" (2002, 182).

The contemporary intermodal turn has led to the "possibility of transformation from the physical to the virtual in additional dimensions of space and time" (Nelson 2010, 14). In Virtual Theatre, "the work of art and the viewer are mediated" (Giannachi 2005, 4), and the medium disappears. As Susan Payne points out in her essay in the present special issue the word

[1] This was a reaction to the ubiquity of cinematic and televisual media (see Balme 2008, 200, who mentions also Grotowski's theatre as based on the actor-spectator relationship, which forms a perceptual living community).

virtual is characterised by a complex semantic relationship with its apparent antonym *real* in particular in the philosophical field, and this reaches a significant point in the contemporary concept of hyperreality, when images substitute reality. Over time, the concepts of *virtual* and *real* seem to meld into one another, as virtual reality synthesises a shared reality (a lifelike environment) through technology, which can be interacted with through responsive hardware. According to Giannachi, virtual reality is not a copy nor a re-presentation of the real, therefore it must be part of it, although it is not synonymous with it. It "*needs* the real as its major point of reference" (2005, 133, emphasis in the original). This paradoxical relationship with the real characterises virtuality and its unstable ontological status. Virtuality does not only represent "the main 'other' to the real, an other that is able to simulate the real while maintaining its difference from it, but can stand in for the real, thereby ultimately representing a perfect rehearsal space for it. Hence, virtual reality is both in the real and a simulation of the real" (Giannachi 2005, 152).

The connection between the real and the virtual for Giannachi is given by the digital screen, which allows different modalities of interaction: immersive, desktop VR, third-person VR (see Giannachi 2005, 10). The computer screen becomes a prosthetic element for the viewer, as it makes him experience a 'reality', through a willing suspension of disbelief.

In intermedial theatre, the word 'virtual' is often used in connection with the different possibilities for the use of screens in dramaturgy. The digital stage is characterised at the same time by materiality and immateriality; the live and the mediatised are foregrounded as integrated through actual spaces and virtual projections, through bodies and projections on screen. The duality that posits the experience of virtuality posits the screen as a material and technological border that divides the material body from the computer simulacra: actually, virtuality allows to permeate such border establishing and experimenting multifarious relationships that contribute to the experience and articulation of subjectivity and its expression in performance. The border is porous and protean: on the one hand, we have the more technological aspect that posits the body in a feedback loop with a computer-generated image (see Hayles 1999, 14), on the other hand we have the exploration of the dramaturgical use of technology in intermedial theatre. In the overall cultural context, "[t]he perception of virtuality facilitates the development of virtual technologies, and the technologies reinforce the perception" (ibid.).

This cultural turn involves all aspects of the theatrical experience. Virtual theatre has recently assumed the meaning of on-line theatre and included the possibility of interaction with the performance. On the other hand, the audience as well has become virtual, in the sense that it is no longer

seen and does not participate to the theatrical event, so in this sense, 'virtual' provocatively suggests absence, as Payne observes in her article in the present special issue. This calls for a reconsideration of theatre's defining characteristic as "the social meeting between performer and spectator in the live presence of the here and now" (Kattenbelt 2006, 33), because spectators and performers do, or may, not occupy the same time and space, or else they may do so in virtual and not in actual space. The performance thus transgresses/exceeds contexts and environments: "The space of intermediality, in this regard, is not already there but can only be understood as a temporal, dynamic and highly complex spatial configuration, which is created within the process of the performance" (Wiens 2010, 94). As a consequence, "Definitions of space must be supplemented by a subcategory, medial space, the digitally-generated spaces in which theatre is composed" (95). The stage posits itself as an interface opening up real space to the digital one; as Wiens asserts, "real, imagined and virtual spaces can performatively reconfigure one another and create enlightening tensions" (94). The stage becomes "a discursive instrument" (ibid.) which calls for a dislocation of the traditional roles of performer and spectator.

Avra Sidiropoulou's work shows how new artforms enter the domain of dramaticity (2018a, 117). In these porous dramaturgies the screens articulate a digital textuality: "Set and digital design thus inscribe their own narrative onto the performance from the outset of the creative process, together with the text" (Sidiropoulou 2020). In these hybrid scenographies, screens open dramaturgy to digital storytelling processes; the private corporeal self becomes a public space and parallel storylines can be created as a commentary, insight, alternative development, additional information in a technological garden of forking and innesting paths. Media aesthetics combines with theatrical design to present experiences of non-linear storytelling which involve the actor's body, visual and digital scenography "where meaning is produced dialogically" (ibid.). Sidiropoulou has extensively worked on the copresence of video images and live performers as a metaphor of split subjectivity and expresses the need to investigate the cultural reasons for this intermedial representation of contemporary identity (see Sidiropoulou 2018b), in line with the two cultures debate. In this kind of visual dramaturgy, the actors "create and receive narratives: they interpret through movement and presence, but also receive and respond to the projection or broadcast of impressions and structures" (Sidiropoulou 2018b).

Frozen by Bryony Lavery. Directed by Avra Sidiropoulou. Performers: Stelios Kallistratis and Monika Meleki. Skala Theatre, Cyprus, 2020. Photo Credit: Sofoklis Kaskaounias.

The live dimension of theatre includes the interaction between performer, audience and the digital in multiple combinations. Starting with the architectural space of the theatre, the co-presence of all members of the audience has traditionally created the premise for a collective act of imagination based on a shared sense of community which is contrary to the isolation of technological contexts. This is the condition for Schechner's "showing doing", that calls for a relational aspect of the performance based on a simultaneous visual and physical sharing on the part both of performer and audience. This is the space of illusion, for the willing suspension of disbelief that cements the audience, but it is also the condition for the circulation of social (and cultural) energy that renders the theatre the mirror of its contemporary society. In this temporary shared space, the body theatrical is constituted (see Fiorato 2016), which witnesses and probates the performance (see Watt 2016). In our digital age, the audience can interact through on-line feedback or through audio or visual content; in this way, the audience members become co-creators of the performance and this aspect becomes ever more relevant in the contemporary predominance of performativity, so much so that Masura warns against the overpresence of solo performances in line with the twenty-fist century cogito: I perform therefore I am. As she underlines, "We need an audience to witness, to be the recipient of the actor's energy and the playwright's message" (2020, 197). In the participa-

tory nature of the theatre, the audience is the representative of the society that generates the performance and, at the same time, also the (active) recipient of the ideas presented through the performance itself. Digital media can connect the audience situated in different spaces, who can join online for an event, thus creating a community based on shared interest. As Masura observes, such "cyber or virtual community is a logical extension of the "imagined community" (2020, 239). In this global performance place, a new place technologically engendered out of the scattered (and divided) ones, a new kind of "community is formed by using *gesellschaft*" based on the interest for the performance, "to form *gemeinschaft*, a shared place" (242). And this both keeps the imaginative engagement of the audience and fosters the circulation of imaginative energy through its synaesthetic multimodality. As Lavender observes, "theatre" comes from the Greek *theatron* which indicates a seeing place; this indicates how the theatre encompasses the audience as well as the stage (2017, 344).

In the same way, digital media can expand the playing space by connecting performers situated in different locations, thus allowing the sharing of creative places by a geographically dispersed ensemble. In the case of *Ajax* examined by Simona Brunetti in the present special issue, a whole village was cabled in order to organise a network of screens connected to the three settings of the *mise en scène*. In this way, the audience at one location could be aware of what was happening at the other locations and

Sophocles, *Ajax*, By Scenica Frammenti (Civelleri-Lo Sicco). Performer: Manuela Lo Sicco. Lari: Collinarea Festival, 2020

sometimes the screens created a mediaturgy as they affected the overall effect of the performance, in an updating of the polytopic space of medieval ancestry. In one scene for example, the female protagonists Athena uses a plastic cloth to cast a spell and in another location the group of actors is wrapped into a plastic cloth, with the screen on their background digitally duplicating Athena's action, thus creating the synaesthetic impression of the connection. The group of young actors projected on the screen represent Ajax's feelings and emotional reactions. In another moment of the performance, the video of Ajax's folly is posted online as a form of revenge against him by the other protagonists and it is actually showed on the background screens, as well as the followers' reactions. As Brunetti observes, the audience perceives the violence unleashed through the power of social media which nowadays affects human relationships; this determines the hero's isolation and estrangement which will lead to his suicide.

In the case of Rinde Eckert's *Breathing at the Boundaries*, multi-site performances create a layered and shared space between all of the performance sites through visual proximity which is created through technology (see Masura 2020, 239). This creates a new sense of "being there" both for the performers and the audience, through telepresence, which "dissolve[s] the spatial (but not the temporal) unity between performers and spectators and distribute[s] the scenic space into diverse remote sites [. . . in a] telematically mediated status of the performers' corporeality" (Glesner 2002).

Rinde Eckert. *Breathing at the Boundaries*. Crystal-Dawn Bell.

Eckert manages to convey the dimension of theatre as a site for a sensorial experience, a "conspiracy" in the etymological sense of "breathing together" (see Watt 2016, 190) which is reinterpreted according to the digital paradigm and the liminal experience and transcendence of the physical boundaries to form a new and contemporary body theatrical. The bodies cross ge-

ographical boudaries; they are "simultaneously 'here/now' and 'elsewhere/some-other-time'" (Chatzichristodoulou 2017, 321). What Lavender asserts about the relationship between Internet and the theatrical experience can be applied to the intermedial context as well:

> Time, space, and event within theatre are coterminous (the space and events are accessed in time-experienced in the present), whilst in the internet thay are multi-synchronous (different spaces and events are accessed coterminously in time-experienced in the present, but may also be experienced in alternative relations – for example, by way of access after the event to material that was broadcast live). The Internet transmediates the theatre. (2017, 342)

It displaces space and "*effaces, emphasises*, and *extends* time" (346, emphasis in the original).[2] During the pandemic, artists like Eckert rendered theirproductions available on the internet through different platforms: the performance could be experienced in real time or accessed later in what became a composite virtual space. This layering of time and space becomes also part of Eckert's experience, as the performer on stage enters into dialogue with a pre-recorded performance either of him/herself or the other performers, and the audience watches the virtual space where the performers appear.

In Eckert's production we see how the body of the performer is split into and enters into dialogue with its screen image, or with the screen image of another performer, with his/her virtual presence. So he is subjected both to the gaze of the live audience, the cinematic perspective, and his/her own gaze upon his mediated and unmediated self. The corpo-reality of the self gives way to its multiplicity and networked status, playing with the sense of presence/absence and resolving it into a hybrid condition which, according to Chatzichristodoulou (2009), calls for a new understanding of presence in performance beyond the constraints of oppositional discourses. In this dramaturgy of layering, "layers of physicality and digitality overlap and interweave to generate hybrid spaces; layers of past and present come together to confuse linear timelines; layers of actuality and virtuality interweave to generate hybrid bodies and presences." This "disrupt[s] the unity of the performance *per se*, as well as unified concepts of the body, the self, and presence". The virtual here refers to the potentialities of the performance, that actualises the possibilities of expression of the body.

The body is the essence of the agency of the actor, who expresses him/herself through his/her corporeality on the space/time of the stage: "the

[2] Consider also: "If we access space *virtually*, we participate in time *vicariously*, both in the theatrical moment of construction and through ongoing and potentially reiterated consumption of the 'theatre' that has been constructed" (Lavender 2017, 347, emphasis of the original).

dramatic figure which appears on stage as unique cannot be conceived of or perceived without the actor's particular bodily being in-the-world" (Fischer-Lichte 2000, 73). However, as Ollivier Dyens notes, "Once digitized, the image of a human being . . . becomes a system unimpeded by any conceptual limits" (2001, 85), it can assume, and combine with, digital images and processes. As also Sidiropoulou observes in her article in the present issue, the projection of the characters on the digital screens lead to a "rebirth or reincarnation as hybrid, existing in a state of liminality between corporeality and imagination." And as in the case of Eckert's *Breathing at the Boundaries*, the performer can interact with his/her own projection on screen, a recorded projection of him/herself, the projection of other performers that are thus presentified and re-presented/re-mediated. The performer is a "border crosser" and the multimedia scenography interfaces with the performers" (Klich and Scheer 2012, 11).

Rinde Eckert. *Breathing at the Boundaries*. Dalton Alexander and Gosh Indranil from India.

This attunes with Lehmann's observation that "theatrical experience essentially involves bodies: living, breathing bodies that shape experience even when they are explicitly presented to the observer as absent – say through the use of media and avatars" (2016, 129). Moreover, networked/internet – based performances challenge the notion of the fixed subject opening the possibilities for disembodied (inter)subjectivity, "combining biophysical gesture and articulation with [. . . digital] means of expression" (O'Dwyer 2021, 18). This impacts conceptions of the real, as well as of the human. Technology has always accompanied human development. Stiegler considers technology as a prosthesis of the human body through his interpretation of the Epymetheus/Prometheus myth; he underlines how the latter gifted human beings with fire and skill to compensate for his brother's lack of provision towards them (differently from the other species). In this

way, *techne* was posited as a defining trait of human specificity, an empowering of the human body, a prosthesis that stretched the possibilities of potentialities of the body itself. Stiegler further observes that "A pros-thesis is what is placed in front, that is, what is outside, outside what it is placed in front of. However, if what is outside constitutes the very being of what it lies outside of, then this being is *outside itself*" (1998, 193; see also Worthen 2020), thus seemingly ponting to a confrontation of the human with itself and its potentialities. The digital age underlines how man is not subjected to technology but actively engages with it: therefore, "digital technologies are today part of the apparatus of theatre, not its other" (Worthen 2020, 10). As also Giannachi underlines, there is a strict connection between technology and art, based on the etymology of the word *techne* itself: "Just as art has repeatedly advanced through technology, technology has, via art, acquired aesthetic signification" (2005, 1).

Technology is not merely a tool for theatrical performance, but it plays a subjective role in the event (see Eckersall, Grehan, Scheer 2017, 3). On the digital stage, the performer's body undergoes a change in that it becomes an interface for the flow of digital data and/or becomes responsive to it (Balme 2008, 202). This calls for an engagement of the contemporary visual literacy to activate "new spatial organisations of processes of thinking and imagining" (Bleeker 2010, 40) which derive from the intersection between bodies and technologies and synaesthetic processes of perception. New Media Dramaturgy defines a kind of theatre in which technology does not simply represent part of the scenographic elements, but enters the dramaturgy of the production as a core component of it. Therefore, the "materiality of technical elements matters" (Eckersall, Grehan, Scheer 2017, 3) as it affects the creation, the performance and the reception of a production, as well as the conception of acting. New Media Dramaturgy observes how

> images and objects perfor[m] alongside humans in ways that seem to refuse old binaries and notions that position the human and the machinic in opposition. Instead, these agentic objects now appear to engage in complex processes of negotiation and reflection on the emergent possibilities of a new order of experience between the machinic object and the active subject. (2-3)

As O'Dwyer observes, "technology becomes a performance counterpart and affects the choreographic and dramaturgical outcome of the work" (2021, 51): we therefore speak of technological agency. In this way, "new non-anthropocentric possibilities for choreography and dramaturgy at the intersection of human and software" open (45).

Through the use of video projections, the space is no longer merely illustrative, but it becomes informatic: data-based images create immersive

virtual spaces as the auratic analogic image disappears (see Eckersall, Grehan, Scheer 2017, 15 and 25). This brings about a "resensibilisation of perception in terms of separating the inwardness of experience and the outwardness of action, spatialising time and temporalising space; confronting the reality of illusion (the live) with the illusion of reality (the mediatised)" (Kattenbelt 2010, 35). Moreover, the projection of scenic backgrounds signals the overcoming of a static conception of place, as they change and morph into one another accompanying the development of the plot. They can have a role of illustration or commentary of events, or they can relate interactively with the character's mood and personality, the workings of their minds, thus synaesthetically affecting the dramatic action of the play. The digital landscape/virtual scenery thus becomes a character itself.

Masura defines the digital as "a conjuring of other places through expanded theatre magic" (2020, 42). Therefore, it transforms the theatrical place through the layering of media and the overlap between real and imagined landscapes, as well as a connection between the two. As Masura asserts: "In Digital Theatre we can make the imaginary "other" places appear in real-time as one place cohabits with another" (58).

The intermedial theatrical stage appeals to the perception of the observer, who is called to negotiate the relationship between the live and the mediated in an augmented sensorial experience and to reconsider the relationship between actor/performer and audience in theatrical "acts of presence in which phenomena of self, other and place are defined (Giannachi, Kaye, Shanks 2012, 1)". On the digital stage, mediums can combine in different ways affecting the perception of the audience and challenging established modalities of experience. With regard to this, Petersen Jensen observes that the mind and body of the spectator can morph into a hybrid site itself, the locus for receptive interactions and multimodalities of experience, which leads to new cultural ways of seeing (see Petersen Jensen 2007, 122-3 and Nelson 2010, 17). In particular, "Designing human–computer experience . . . is about creating imaginary worlds that have a special relationship to reality – worlds in which we can extend, amplify, and enrich our own capabilities to think, feel, and act" (Laurel 1993, 32-3).

Another use of screen projections takes place in Digital Costuming, whereby images are projected on the bodies of the actors "as a canvas for the media" (Saltz's interactive costumes; see his 2001 article, 124). They can render the actor's body nonhuman, or express the duality of identity, as well as "our perception of the edges of human form and essence" (Masura 2020, 86). In Sidiropoulous performances, screens are used to give visual form to the psychological aspects of the character and/or his/her memories, giving the impression he/she is reliving specific events referred to by the performance. "This process of personality formation, reflected in the

staging of the character as a series of projected memory fragments on and around the actor, function as an inner dialogue adding to the complexity of the character and providing context for his/her behavior" (ibid.). The media are used to create an alternative or subjective perspective. Moreover, screens are used to project upon one actor the body of another actor, thus giving form to the layering of identity. Conversely these devices can lead to erase the actor's body: "when the cloth becomes a surface for projection, the edges of character blur and shift between multiple bodies and screens" (4).

Phaedra I—. Text-direction: Avra Sidiropoulou. Performer: Elena Pellone. Tristan Bates Theatre, UK, 2019. Photo credit: Michael Demetrius.

Intermedial theatre leads to a reflection on the relationship between technology and the human body: the actor's body can be both extended/enhanced and erased, "adding experiential meaning to the technical/scenic layer of theatre production—which alters the nature of being an actor itself", which has to take into account technological expertise. As Masura asserts, the actor becomes a human Everyman on the technological stage and fosters an engagement both on his/her part and on the audience's part in the "questioning of human value in the face of ever-present technology" (2020, 100).[3] As the author further underlines, a performer can manipulate media and extend his body into the performance space, thus expanding his/her agency in three ways. Motion capture converts a performer's movements into digital data, which then can become patterns in space or can be "remapped onto [… digital] puppets [avatars]" and produce 3-D animations

[3] See Masura 2020, 99-100 for the whole concept.

(Menache 1995, 1). Scheer refers to motion capture systems as "performative media" (2011, 36), which amplify (prosthetically) the body and foster experience in the hybrid space between the live and the mediated, which thus become "entangled" (see Salter 2010). The actor's body becomes a "transitional entity" (Masura 2020, 210), an interface between self and the world. The media become "part of [the performer's] gestural or performance vocabulary" (ibid.) who directly impacts the stage-world (101); through the movements of his/her arms or legs, the performer gives form/performs the audio and video world around him/her "becoming an architect of light, sound, and movement" (see Sharir 2000). The performance space reacts to the body's movement and engages in a dialogue with the performer's body, becoming a performing body itself (see Lovell 2000, 255). We witness here a process of digital synesthesia, whereby sensory, aesthetic and perceptual modes blend for new imaginative expression. For example, the volume and pitch of the voice of a performer can create a changing visual landscape of sound (Saltz's instrumental media). These are all examples of interactive media, which Saltz defines as adapting to the performer, rather than the other way round, i.e., requiring the performer to adapt to them, and in this way they merge the potentialities of both live and mediatised performance (see Saltz 2021, 109). Within this context, it is interesting to mention Stelarc's *Movatar*, which is based on a reversed motion capture system, whereby the body becomes a prosthesis for the expression of a virtual entity. In these examples the body comes to the forefront in its negotiations with technology and the surrounding environment.

Another aspect of virtual theatre that is analysed by Antonio Pizzo in his article in the present issue is the presence of AI on stage and how this affects the author's creation, the performance, as well as the audience's experience. It is based on a software system that aims to determine "how much computation and algorithm may shed a new light on the way we elaborate the notion of theatre and drama" (Pizzo, Damiano, Lombardo 2019, 20). After the first experiments in this sense in the 1960s, over the decades, programming has increasingly become a central part of some artists' creative process. In 2012 Annie Dorsen launched the idea of "Algorithmic Theatre", which focuses on the issue of presence and disembodiment in theatre, as well as on the tension between the written text and its performance on stage. The issue of control comes to the forefront as far as authorship directing is concerned, but also performing and assisting to the performance. The relationship between semiotics and performativity, meaning and experience collapses as the algorithm may be seen as text and performance at the same moment (as the instruction must precisely describe the execution), and the use of artificial agents collapses the difference between character and performer. Moreover, the live event does not

develop through a sequencing of dramatic units, but similarly to a hypertext where each node may be the start of different continuations. As Pizzo observes, a new competence is required of the audience for decoding the intricate web of meaning created by interconnections of live and mediatised performance.

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Susan Payne*

What Does *Virtual* Actually/Really Mean?

Abstract

This essay is intended as an overview, a summary of the usage of the English word *virtual*, its relationship with its apparent antonym *real* and, in conclusion, its meaning in the phrase *virtual theatre*. Such a vast topic lends itself with difficulty to treatment within the confines of an essay so an attempt has been made to exploit and/or create several *fils rouges* to aid the writing and reading of the article. The first one is the deliberate exploitation of the lexicographical scholarship of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which forms, with its etymological and linguistic expertise, the backbone of the topic and includes the corroboration of the various quotations provided which document the history of each headword. Another leitmotif is the fundamental (and hopefully not redundant) assumption that the exemplification of the frequently ambiguous grammatical and semantic usage of the pair *virtual/real* is significant in the history of this usage in the philosophical discipline of ontology. And last but not least is the role the word *virtual* plays in the history of physics as well as metaphysics and the apparently symbiotic connection of ontology to the often equally enigmatic world of the behaviour of scientific phenomena.

Keywords: virtual; real; semantics; ontology; theology; physics; theatre

> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I want it to mean – neither more nor less". The question is, said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things". "The question is", said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all".
>
> Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

1. Virtual/Real: Antonymity or Ambiguity?

This essay wants to address a series of issues generated by debate and reading in connection with the adjective (and, as a noun, concept) *virtual* and its usage. The main concern is with the complex semantic relationship with *real* in the fields of philosophy, theology and physics and finally what happens when *virtual* is used to qualify *theatre*. From the first moment that the word *virtual* is recorded in the written usage of the English language it becomes one of the key terms of argumentation in the theological dis-

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course of the early church, closely connected with *ideal* and opposed to *real*. It will collect further antonyms in its journey through philological history, but its antonymical relationship with *real* will reveal itself to be, from the very beginning, more of a cause for ambiguity than a clear-cut opposition. This will be the essay's main line of interest, as the usage of *virtual/real* plays a crucial role in the rhetorical categories of the description and exposition of the science of optics, and as scientific theory progresses exponentially, in the fields of physics and then in the more specialist area of quantum theory. With the advent of computer science, the compound *virtual reality* comes into being, and with this the technology of digitalization. At this point the usage of the term *virtual theatre* will be discussed. The fact this last is also in a way (though not in accepted usage), an example of tautology, is taken as a given, semiotics having theorized and demonstrated in the last century that theatre may be defined as a system of signs and therefore to qualify it as virtual could at first glance seem redundant. Nonetheless, the term has stuck and the various ways in which it is currently used continue to reflect the basic ambiguity of *virtual*.

One of the main points of reference will be the online ongoing 2013 re-edition[1] of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*),[2] the historical dictionary published by Oxford University Press,[3] and I shall be deliberately quoting from it in the body of my text. If we look up *virtual* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* the first detail of the entry, for both the adjective and the noun, is the fact that in the 2013 re-edition it is in Frequency Band 6[4] on the

[1] Beginning with the launch of the first *OED Online* site in 2000, the editors of the dictionary began a major project to create a totally revised third edition of the dictionary (*OED3*), whose possible completion date is 2037.

[2] Although the results of the *OED* are overwhelmingly important it should be borne in mind that other European countries had already produced exhaustive dictionaries of their languages. The first edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* was published in 1612, and constituted the first great dictionary of a modern European language. France followed in 1694 with the first edition of *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* and Spain in 1780 with the *Diccionario de la lengua Española*. The *Deutches Wörterbuch*, begun by the Brothers Grimm in 1838, the first volumes of which were published in 1854, and which was completed in 1961, served as the model upon which the *OED* was based.

[3] The original project of the *OED* began in 1857 and its publishing, in unbound fascicles, continued throughout the nineteenth century. The fascicles were finally republished in ten bound volumes in 1928. It was the brainchild of three members of the Philological Society, Richard Chevenix Trench (1807-1886), Herbert Coleridge (1830-1861, grandson of Samuel Taylor Coleridge) and Frederick Furnivall (1825-1910). The eventual principle editor of the 10-volume first edition, James Murray (1837-1915), died before he could see the publication of his life's work.

[4] At present, the *OED* only indicates the frequency that each word has in modern English (1970-). This is calculated by averaging the frequencies found for each decade

OED's eight-point scale (eight being the most frequently used). Band 6 contains words in current use which occur between ten and 100 times per million words in typical modern English usage, including a wide range of descriptive vocabulary. It takes very little imagination to suppose that by now, in 2020, especially while the various lockdowns of the Covid-19 epidemic are still a harsh reality, the frequency of the documented usage of *virtual* may very well have increased. A great deal of what is going on in daily life, from work, to shopping for food, to chatting with friends, exercising, enjoying art and music and indeed the other and more terrible side of the coin, communicating with the sick, and comforting the dying and the grief-stricken, is either done 'virtually' or with the minimum of human intervention. The documentation of the period is bound to reflect this increase and, as we shall see, the present situation is not unconnected with the theme of this essay in other ways too. The terrible reality of the pandemic has occasioned an exponential increase of social virtuality.

When trying to define terms it is useful to ask the question of what a word is not intended to mean. To return to the consultation of a dictionary (not for the last time) some of the antonyms of *virtual* provided by various online thesauruses include *actual, real, true, definite, genuine, authentic, concrete, tangible*. Without wanting to enter too far into the complex corridors of semantic theory it is clear that an adjective such as *virtual* is going to possess a considerable degree of semantic power.

Merriam-Webster also helps towards a pragmatic interpretation of the antonymity of the pair *virtual/real*. Entry 1.a for *virtual* has: "*being such in essence or effect* though not formally recognized or admitted" (emphasis mine). For sense 1.a of the correlated term *objective* it gives: "expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices or interpretations", and, perhaps more interestingly in the context of this essay, sense 2.a elaborates: "of, relating to, or being an object, phenomenon, or condition in the realm of sensible experience independent of individual thought and perceptible by all observers: having *reality independent of the mind*". As we see here, too, antithesis plays a considerable part in the definition of this slippery pair.

from 1970 to the present day. If a word is more recent than 1970, the frequencies found for each decade from the word's first recorded use are averaged. Frequency information is not given for obsolete words. In order to understand the dynamics of the language system, usage-based linguists study how languages evolve, both in history and language acquisition. One aspect that plays an important role in this approach is frequency of occurrence. As frequency strengthens the representation of linguistic elements in memory, it facilitates the activation and processing of words, categories and constructions, which in turn can have long-lasting effects on the development and organization of the linguistic system.

2. In the Beginning was the Real

The fact that the principal antonym of virtual in the context in which it is being examined here is indeed the adjective *real*, the discussion of which is the matter of ontology, does not render the problem any easier. Indeed, the matter of virtuality itself may be seen as always having been considered within this area of philosophy. In ancient Greece, the ideas of Pre-Socratic philosophy gradually through time divided into two main streams, that of 'materialist' thought which maintained that reality can be determined by human perception and that of what will later be termed Parmenidean thought which rejected the evidence conveyed by the senses and asserted that all sensible experience was mere appearance. But it is with the thought of Plato and Aristotle, with their distinction of the procedures of approximate and exact reasoning and the differentiation between abductive, deductive and inductive inference that the discourse of the philosophy of science is born. Platonic realism, following the theories of Parmenides, long before the English language had come into being, had already, with its theory of forms, or universals, made the distinction between (physical) reality which is perceptible, from the reality which is imperceptible but intelligible. In effect there are three realms of *reality* (or *existence*): the sensible, external world, the internal world of consciousness and a third realm, that of the concept of eternal unchangeable perfect types of which particular objects of moral and responsible sense are imperfect copies. The *idea* of the *ideal* is rendered more 'real' than human perception of the apparent *reality* (considered by Plato as "σκιαί" – shadows, and as "εἴδωλα ἐν ὕδασιν" – reflections in water, *Rep.* 7.516a-b) which this man is observing. In the analogy of the cave in Book 7 of the *Republic* he shows Socrates illustrating the contrast between the world of sense perception and the world of thought in what can also be seen as a parable of the aspiration of the soul (ψυχή) towards the ideal, by means of the practice of excellence (ἀρετή – virtue) this last translated later into Latin using the word *virtus*, meaning strength or power The physical world is revealed through the sense of sight, the metaphysical through the abstract concept of vision. Gradually, as the story develops the Greek words – ἀληθές – true, unconcealed; ὄντος – from εἰμι – I am; ὀρθός – straight, right, correct,[5] in this particular context translat-

[5] "As regards the translation, I impenitently reaffirm the principles that I stated in the preface to the first volume – whatever errors of judgement I may commit in their application. Much of the *Republic* can be made easy reading for any literate reader. But some of the subtler and more metaphysical passages can be translated in that way only at the cost of misrepresentation of the meaning. In order to bring out the real sig-

ed into English using variously, *real*, *reality*, *really*, *truly*, seem almost inevitably to slide over into the semantic field of the *ideal*. Indeed, many of the various more complex contemporary meanings of *real* are owed to Plato's thought and the translations, in this case into English, of his philosophical teaching which, it is important to emphasize here, was based on mathematical reasoning. As we shall mention later, eminent twentieth-century theoretical physicists concur that pre-Aristotelian thought constitutes the genesis of their theories, although the later theorizing on the part of Aristotle, which ultimately distinguishes clearly between the two levels of Being, actuality (*reality*) and potentiality (*virtuality*) allows a dynamism between the two concepts which will form the basis of the concept of motion. Elsewhere, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates' problematizing of the whole question of reasoning through antonyms is expounded on his deathbed:

> ὡς ἄτοπον, ἔφη, ὦ ἄνδρες, ἔοικέ τι εἶναι τοῦτο ὃ καλοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἡδύ, ὡς θαυμασίως πέφυκε πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν ἐναντίον εἶναι, τὸ λυπηρόν, τὸ ἅμα μὲν αὐτὼ μὴ ᾽θέλειν παραγίγνεσθαι τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ἐὰν δέ τις διώκῃ τὸ ἕτερον καὶ λαμβάνῃ, σχεδόν τι ἀναγκάζεσθαι ἀεὶ λαμβάνειν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον, ὥσπερ ἐκ μιᾶς κορυφῆς ἡμμένω δύ᾽ ὄντε. (Plato, *Phaedo*, 60b)
>
> [What a strange thing my friends, that seems to be which men call pleasure! How wonderfully it is related to that which *seems to be its opposite*, pain, in that they will not both come to a man at the same time, and yet if he pursues the one and captures it he is generally obliged to take the other also, as if the two were joined together in one head. (Fowler 1966)][6] (italics mine)

Later Socrates addresses the question of the soul's immortality in the Argument from Opposites, maintaining that everything that comes to be, comes to be from its opposite although this reasoning has since been a constant source of debate. At *Phaedo* 104b he states:

> ὃ τοίνυν, ἔφη, βούλομαι δηλῶσαι, ἄθρει. ἔστιν δὲ τόδε, ὅτι φαίνεται οὐ μόνον ἐκεῖνα τὰ ἐναντία ἄλληλα οὐ δεχόμενα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσα οὐκ ὄντ᾽ ἀλλήλοις ἐναντία ἔχει ἀεὶ τἀναντία, οὐδὲ ταῦτα ἔοικε δεχομένοις ἐκείνην τὴν ἰδέαν ἢ ἂν τῇ ἐν αὐτοῖς οὔσῃ ἐναντίᾳ, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπιούσης αὐτῆς ἤτοι [104c] ἀπολλύμενα ἢ ὑπεκχωροῦντα.

nificance of Plato's thought it is sometimes necessary to translate the same phrase in two ways, sometimes to vary a phrase which Plato repeats or repeat a synonym which he prefers to vary. It is often desirable to use two words to suggest the twofold associations of one. To take the simplest example, it is even more misleading to translate *eidos* 'Form' than it is to translate it 'idea' – 'idea or form' (without a capital letter) is less likely to be misunderstood." (Shorey. 1942, lxxii-iii)

[6] All quotations from Plato's *Phaedo* refer to Fowler 1966.

> [Now see what I want to make plain. This is my point, that not only abstract opposites exclude each another, but all things which, although not opposites one to another, always contain opposites; these also, we find, exclude the idea which is opposed to the idea contained in them and when it approaches they either perish or withdraw.]

The 'unity of opposites' is a central category of dialectics defining as it does a situation in which the existence or identity of a thing (or situation) depends on the co-existence of at least two conditions which are opposite to each other, yet dependent on each other and presupposing each other, a contention that goes back to the origins of ancient philosophy and originates with the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus .[7]

As we shall shortly see, English medieval theological debates inherit much from Platonic realism, while including and expanding some later Aristotelian development, which was engrafted on to the doctrines of the early Christian church. But from the dialectic between ideal and real, first in Latin, then in English and the other modern European languages as they move away from Latin, the various vernaculars evolve and flourish and the Reformation grows in strength, another pair arises and progresses alongside the first. On the subject of transubstantiation, one of the basic differences between the dogma of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, the opposition between *virtual* and *real* establishes itself and then almost immediately begins to demonstrate how ambiguity lies at the very root of this pair of apparent antonyms. For the Catholic Church the mystical conversion of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood was a real conversion, and his words from the Gospels at the Last Supper "this is my body . . . this is my blood" were to be taken literally. The flesh and blood became actually real at the moment of Communion. For Reformation theologians, with Martin Luther at the forefront, the bread and wine were a virtual representation of the material and it was faith that was at the crux of the matter.

3. From Philosophy to Theology: The Appearance of *Virtual* in English

To return to the entry for the word under examination: in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which provides the origin and timeline for the foundation of this exercise, *virtual* as an adjective is divided into two main senses, both of which have numbered and then lettered subdivisions: senses relat-

[7] Across the millennia, and from a linguistic rather than a conceptual perspective, John Lyons one of the most eminent among British scholars of theoretical linguistics during the second half of the twentieth century, warns against the dangers of relying too heavily on the 'oppositeness' of antonyms. His semantic analysis of antonymy may be found in Lyons 1968, 460ff.

ing to particular qualities or virtue, referring to the obsolete usage *virtuous*, and senses relating *to essential*, as opposed to physical or actual, existence. It is obviously the latter case that is going to be relevant here and particularly the definition given by its first subdivision, 4.a: "That is such in *essence*, potentiality, or effect, although not in form or *actuality*. In later use also: supposed, *imagined*" (emphasis mine). This is especially pertinent as it shows that the date at which the word first appears is *circa* 1443 in a manuscript text[8] by Bishop Reginald Pecock (*c*1395-1461) *The Rule of Christian Religion* as part of Proto-Protestant Christian theological discussion, against the Lollards, a movement which followed and developed the teachings of John Wycliffe (c.1320s-1384)[9], the advocate and one of the translators of the first Bible in English, known as the Wycliffe Bible. Though Pecock, one of the first writers to use the vernacular, was an antagonist of the Lollards, he, like Wycliffe, was declared a heretic but he too managed to avoid a death-sentence. As testified by the quotations following Pecock's in the *OED* the term variously spelled *vertual* or *wertuall* finally became *virtual* during its use in English medieval and early modern theology, particularly throughout the course of the Roman Catholic and Protestant polemic during the Reformation.

At this point it seems relevant to return to *ideal*, the English word, still, obviously, closely connected to both *virtual* and *real* in the same semantic area of platonically indebted theology. *Ideal* is recorded by the *OED* as coming into usage during roughly the first half of the fourteenth century. Indeed *ideal*, *real*, and *virtu-al* could be seen as a sort of 'terminological trinity' in this intellectual sphere. Interestingly, if we turn to the *OED* entry for *ideal*, we find that its sense is that of an idea or archetype; relating to or consisting of ideas in the Platonic or theological sense. Thus, within the ongoing theological discussion contemporaneous with the example from Pecock, we have a quotation with the first case in English usage of *ideal*, not only being given as 'Platonic or theological' (not 'philosophical'), but also as coming from a translation of Boethius' *De Consolationae Philosophiae*.[10] This work, written in prison while Boethius awaited his own brutal

[8] Middle English lexicographical evidence is particularly difficult to date. It mostly survives in hand-written manuscripts.

[9] Wycliffe was a prominent English scholastic philosopher, theologian, and Roman Catholic dissident priest, predecessor of Protestantism. He narrowly missed being declared a heretic during his life and was finally declared so, and retroactively excommunicated in 1415.

[10] Boethius (c477-524), the Platonist and Christian Roman senator and philosopher of the early 6th century under the Ostrogothic King, Theodoric the Great, was eventually imprisoned and executed him in 524, on charges of conspiracy. As the author of numerous handbooks and translator of some of the works of Plato and Aristotle he, to-

execution, is a dialogue of alternating prose and verse between the ailing captive and his 'nurse', Philosophy. Her instruction on the nature of fortune and happiness, good and evil, fate and free will, restore his health and bring him to enlightenment. The ultimate 'consolation' is the conviction of the soul's immortality. It was to prove one of the most popular and influential works of the Middle Ages; indeed, one only needs to think of its influence on many of Dante's works, and his inclusion of the philosopher in Canto X of the *Paradiso* (ll.121-9). In the opinion of the Chaucerian scholar F.N. Robinson:

> From Boethius' treatises and translations the early Middle Ages derived much of their knowledge of Greek thought. But his wider fame as a man of letters rests on the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. The earlier writings were labours of scholarship: this was a work of imagination, produced less under the influence of Aristotle than of Plato and Seneca. The others were expositions of philosophical theses and method; this was applied philosophy – applied in the desperate circumstances of Boethius' fall. Written in prison in the last months of his life it was at once his *apologia* and the final statement of his philosophy. (1957, 319-20)

In England this work underwent numerous translations, notably one attributed to King Alfred (848/9-899) into Old English (*The Old English Boethius*, *c*880?), Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) into Middle English (the work *Boece*, *c*1380) and Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) into Early Modern English (*The Consolation of Philosophy*, 1593).

The next quotation from the *OED* is taken from a work by Thomas Twyne (1543-1613) the Elizabethan physician and translator of Virgil and Petrarch (the poet's Latin dialogues *De remediisutriusque fortunae*), is a passage from his translation of *Physica christiana* written in 1576 by Lambert Daneau, and is historically speaking, just as significant as the previous one:

> 1578 T. Twyne tr. L. Daneau *Wonderfull Woorkmanship of World* xi. f. 25 They make two sortes of worldes, whereof the one is intelligible, Ideall, or as a patterne, which indeede subsisteth, but it is resident aboue this world: the other is earthly and figuratiue, which God hath created according to the representation and image of that spirituall and ideall worlde.

Daneau, French jurist and Calvinist theologian, in an attempt to devise a 'Christian physics' based primarily on the Bible, develops an argument in

gether with Plotinus (205-270), and Augustine (364-430), became the main intermediary between Classical antiquity and the following centuries. His Neoplatonic idealism, with its emphasis on self-knowledge, action and internal, inalienable truths resonated strongly with medieval readers and thinkers.

his work for a Scriptural basis for physics. This discipline, as we shall see, is the next arena in the development of the term *virtual*.

Meanwhile, following the *OED*, *virtual* in the sense of essence, potentiality, or effect (later also as supposed, imagined) may be seen to continue its 'usage path' through the centuries in the area of philosophy, theology, metaphysics and ethics in the discussion of the reality or not of the eternal life of the soul and of the possible 'manifestations' of divine presence in earthly actuality. Just for interest's sake, as Shields reminds us, "in 1556 Thomas Cranmer was executed in large part because of his affirmation of the virtuality of the Eucharist. Similar charges were levelled against the reformation theologians Luther and Zwingli" (Shields 2003, 1).

4. Science and the Semantic Shift: Virtual Image and Real Image

The next entry for *virtual* in the *OED* takes us from the world of theology to that of physics, although science will take a long time to free itself from the shackles of theological thought. In fact, the conflation of philosophical and theological rhetoric gives the church of the early modern period part of the ammunition necessary to confront and condemn the implementation of the discourse of modern empirical science. At this juncture, with the genesis of this science, the sense of *virtual* splits and the new sense jumps from the abstract to the material world so that a semantic shift (in this case consisting of changes in the referents) occurs in its usage: the definition of *virtual* regarding physics in the *OED* concerns the discovery on the part of scientists studying optics that a virtual image is one where the light forming it appears to diverge from a point beyond the refracting or reflecting surface and the term *virtual focus* designates the point from which such light appears to diverge. By the seventeenth century European culture and thought is, needless to say, progressing by leaps and bounds. The beginnings of modern physics are already clearly to be seen, particularly in the work of the giant-like figures of Galileo Galiliei (1564-1642) and Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), although mention must be made at this point of Hasan Ibn al-Haythan, Latinized as Alhazen (c965-c1040), who was born in Basra, spent his life in Cairo, and who is generally referred to as 'the father of modern optics'. Alhazen conducted his research using controlled experimental testing and applied geometry, especially in his investigations into the images resulting from the reflection and refraction of light. Optics, the branch of physics that studies the behaviour and properties of light, is an ancient science, whose first recorded theory (followed by Euclid among others) was in fact, disproved by the same Ibn al-Haythan.

It was the practical experimentation with lenses and the invention of eyeglasses or spectacles in medieval Italy, and later in the Netherlands and

Germany, which led both to the invention of the optical microscope (c1595) and the refracting telescope. The work of Galileo and Kepler in the field of optics, including, among many other things, the Galilean refracting or dioptric telescope (1608), and Kepler's improved version of this (1611), leads to further work in seventeenth-century Europe, including that of Johannes Hevelius (1611-1687) in Poland. It is the work of Kepler, however, which concerns us here as it was he who, in his book, *Ad Vitellionem paralipomena*, in the words of the scholar Alan E. Shapiro ". . . bequeathed two distinct concepts of image, *imago* and *pictura*, which to us are simply two aspects of a single concept of image, a virtual and a real image" (Shapiro 2008, 217). Real images are those where light converges, whereas virtual images are made by rays that do not actually come from where the image seems to be. But let us turn to the *OED* quotations for *virtual* in the above sense:

> 1692 W. Molyneux *Dioptrica Nova* ix. 56 Draw *g k* directly to cross the Axis in *e*. I call the Point *e* the Virtual Focus, or Point of Divergence.
>
> 1692 W. Molyneux *Dioptrica Nova* 96 What is here Demonstrated concerning the Real Image of a Convex Glass may be accommodated to the Virtual Image of a Concave.

The first two quotations, from Molyneux, are startling in the first place because he, a scientist, is writing in English. The language of modern science from its beginnings in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe was Latin (Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*, in 1637, being one of the few exceptions), and this practice will continue for many scientists in England and on the Continent right into the nineteenth century. Molyneux' main title, *Dioptrica Nova*, is indeed in this language, as if to give his work credibility and status, but the subtitle, *A treatise of dioptricks in two parts, wherein the various effects and appearances of spherick glasses, both convex and concave, single and combined, in telescopes and microscopes, together with their usefulness in many concerns of humane life, are explained*, is in English and the work itself continues in this language.

It seems more that just coincidental that, here too, *virtual* is a crucial term. In the field of optics, a discipline which constitutes one of the principal progenitors of modern physics, this lexical item, just as it was at the beginning of theological discussion in English, is involved in a central issue together with its antagonist/companion *real*. As there were no translations of Kepler's works into English until the twentieth century, Molyneux is using the pair *virtual/real* in English in this context for the first time.

Molyneux, like Kepler before him, is still perplexed by the fact that vision is upright if the image on the eye is inverted. Wade and Gregory observe: "Kepler (1604) would not be drawn on such speculation, considering that

the question was beyond the scope of optics: 'I leave it to the natural philosophers to discuss the way in which this image or picture is put together by the spiritual principles of vision' . . . Molyneux was similarly constrained as the question was taken to be one addressed to the soul rather than to the eye" (2006, 1579). Both Molyneux and Kepler, are still entangled in theological and metaphysical issues, as can be seen from the following passage from *Dioptrica Nova*:

> How then comes it to pass that the Eye sees the Object *Erect*? But this Query seems to encroach too nigh the enquiry into the manner of the Visive Faculties *Perception*; For 'tis not properly the Eye that *sees*, it is only the Organ or Instrument, 'tis the *Soul* that *sees* by means of the Eye. To enquire then, how it comes to pass, that the Soul perceived the Object *Erect* by means of an *Inverted* Image, is to enquire into the Souls Faculties; which is not the proper subject of this Discourse. (Molyneux 1692, 105-6, original italics, qtd in Wade and Gregory 2006, 1581)

As the science of optics progresses through the next three centuries optical science will reach heights of complexity unimagined by its first perpetrators, while the history of the usage of *virtual/real* maintains its place in the discussion of the development of the behaviour of light with lenses and reflections. The fact that only a real image may be projected on to a screen itself goes far in 'proving' its 'reality' to the layman. But the fact that in reflections real images are always inverted and virtual images are always erect/upright somehow, once again, confuses the issue. If we pick up a spoon and look at our reflection on both sides, the concave surface or bowl of the spoon will show us our real image upside-down whereas the convex surface will reflect a virtual image of how we actually are, upright.

5. Virtual Reality and Computer Science: The Usage of *Virtual* in Postmodern Philosophy and Physics

At this point in the semantic and ontological relationship between *virtual* and *real* the boundary between the two terms, which has always seemed fragile, is to all intents and purposes rendered null. In this 'decentred ontology' the term *hyperreality* comes into being, the boundary between reality and virtuality is blurred. In the words of the Hungarian scholar László Ropolyi:

> In this world, the images and signs, the simulations and simulacra have no referents, they can only be considered as real beings. In this situation (which is approaching the last stage of a cultural crisis), the image masks the absence of reality and substitutes it. It makes no sense to speak about external and internal worlds, because the construction itself is the definite,

> central part of the intellectual activity. The significance and the role of the place, the body, the distinguishable material and intellectual entities collapse, they become substituted by their interrelations and networks. (2016, 45)

Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), one of the most prominent of postmodern philosophers had much to say on the concept of the virtual and his work explicitly brought the concept of virtuality into twentieth-century philosophy. In the volume *Bergsonism* Deleuze derives, in turn, his idea of the virtual from *Matter and Memory* (1988) where Bergson's reasoning upon the 'virtual image' is suggested to him by the physical theory of the virtual image in optics (although his insistence on the inadequacy of mathematization is notorious):

> . . . the virtual image evolves toward the virtual sensation and the virtual sensation toward real movement: this movement, in realizing itself, realizes both the sensation of which it might have been the natural continuation and the image. (Bergson 1988, 131)

Deleuze's concept of 'the virtual' is also based upon what Proust maintains in *Time Regained*, "real without being actual, ideal without being abstract" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, 156). As Shields points out, Deleuze, elaborating upon Proust and Bergson and their thought upon memory and time, complicates and enriches the argumentation and definition of what virtual signifies. For Bergson, "the virtual is used only as a descriptive term, an adjective which helps summarize a much longer (and now outdated in terms of both the language of realization . . . and in terms of neurophysiology) discussion of stimulation, perception and memory" (Shields 2003, 26).

In Deleuze's thought, especially in the earlier works, the virtual is not only contrasted with the actual but also with the abstract, the probable and the possible. Plotnitsky maintains that here, in *Difference and Repetition*, for example, or *The Logic of Sense*, the virtual is "something that defines the space of what is possible and as such shapes the possible forms of the actual" (2006, 50) although in a context such as this – the usage of the English word *virtual* – the finer shadings of the words in question, particularly in the case of *actuel/actual* are slippery, given that they are translations from the French (*actual* in English does not express the same signification of the present as does the French *actuel* – and indeed the Italian *attuale*). In fact, Shields has to have recourse to qualifiers to his nouns and the use of italics to make his point clear in his summary of Deleuze's exegesis. He says:

> The best contrast to the virtual is the concretely present (which may also be called the real actual). *The virtual is distinct not only from the concrete, but also from the abstract.* (2003, 29)

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari confront some of the endless philosophical questions raised in the realm of science by quantum field theory and chaos theory by approaching them through Deleuze's concept of the virtual. When discussing their idea of the relationship between philosophy, science and art with chaos they comment:

> Chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes. It is a void that is not a nothingness but a *virtual*, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence. Chaos is an infinite speed of birth and disappearance. (1994, 118)

This text is also analysed in Elizabeth Grosz's useful essay "Deleuze, Theory and Space" which focusses, among other fundamental questions, on Deleuze's fascination with Bergson's idea of the virtual developed at the centre of his (Bergson's) understanding of duration as "a clash, a productive encounter between two kinds of forces, one rooted in chaos . . . as the force of events . . . and the other modality functioning around the production of a selective order and organization . . . (2003, 82-3). For Deleuze science must "search the infinite chaos of the virtual for new forms to actualize" (1994, 123) and art must "tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent" (203) and in doing so tame the virtual, defeat chaos. What, however, seems most germane to my argument in this essay is Grosz's emphasis upon the slippage of clear definition between the oppositional terms (or antonyms) adopted by Deleuze as he interprets and develops Bergson's thought:

> This series of oppositional terms (smooth/striated, chaos/order, fluid/solid, perception/intelligence, duration/space, *virtual/actual – my italics*) is not really a distinction between chaos . . . and order . . . for each of Deleuze's and Bergson's pairs is a *mixture* of both . . . (2003, 83).

Here again, then virtual and real although defined by their users as opposites seem inevitably to meet in the middle and coalesce.

To return to the *OED*, the senses concerning the usage of *virtual* in the fields of mechanics, and nuclear physics only need mentioning, in this essay, as the demonstration of disciplines in which the meaning of this term seems to possess a strong life of its own, often with little need to be associated with *real* (though of course it is still there in the background) and even less with *ideal*. The quotations from the literature regarding these fields in the *OED* begin in the nineteenth century but are naturally mainly from the twentieth and twenty-first. But when we get to particle physics what ap-

pears thought-provoking is that the links *virtual* has with philosophy, as we have seen in the case of Deleuze, have never been interrupted. Particles in the field of physics are defined as being unable to be directly detected, occurring over a very short interval of time and space and having (as a result of the uncertainty principle) a correspondingly indefinite energy and momentum which are not necessarily conserved over the time involved. Particularly in the case of quantum physics the ontological status of virtual particles and their behaviour meant that eminent founders of quantum mechanics and physics of the first half of the twentieth century such as Erwin Schrödinger (1887-1961), Wolfgang Pauli (1900-1958) and Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) maintained that as a starting point in their theoretical exegesis of this matter, it was necessary to include the metaphysical theories of Greek philosophers such as Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Plato (Mouján, 2020). The pre-Aristotelian ancient Greek philosophers accompany *virtual* into the modern world of *strange* physics, the world of the subatomic particles defined as leptons, bosons and quarks, which last particle numbers among its qualities (or 'flavours') *up, down, top, bottom, charm* and *strange.*

At this juncture we have arrived at the use of *virtual* in the world of computer science where the frequency of its usage is expanding exponentially. In computing it is used for the first time in 1957 to qualify *memory* when this becomes a resource which is not physically present as such but made by software to appear to be so from the point of view of a program or user. This is particularly significant as *virtual* is now made to seem real not by the argumentation of philosophy or theology or the actual properties of natural phenomena but through the physical intervention of science. As computer science develops, usages of *virtual* deriving from this first appearance gradually make their appearance in the quotations: *virtual hardware* (1972), *virtual disk* (1991), *virtual drive* (2009). It is however from the next definition onwards that we begin to see the acceptation of *virtual* that includes areas of activity essential to *virtual theatre*, the topic from which we started: the computerized or digitized simulation of something especially that simulated in *virtual reality* and also when established or conducted using computer technology rather than more traditional means. The examples of usage for this sense, including 'virtual office', 'virtual town halls', 'virtual gigs', 'virtual living room', have, coincidentally, become all too familiar in the past year, and are, ironically enough, extremely apt if one compares them to the comments and advice of the 'Lifestyle' section during most of 2020 of the online edition of the British newspaper *The Guardian*, although the final one from 2012, virtual wards, would unfortunately be useless in our Covid-ridden world. *Virtual*, indeed, in this sense has become a term familiar in everyday usage.

But here we leave the entry for *virtual* tout court, and are guided by a

link in the *OED* to the independent entry for *virtual reality*:

> A computer-generated simulation of a lifelike environment that can be interacted with in a seemingly real or physical way by a person, esp. by means of responsive hardware such as a visor with screen or gloves with sensors; such environments or the associated technology as a medium of activity or field of study; cyberspace. Abbreviated *VR*.

The strength of the term *virtual* begins to astonish. Although in constant conflict with *real* (and what word could be stronger?) it maintains its hold and manages to invade the semantic field of *real* at every opportunity. With this entry it almost seems as if *real* gives up the unequal struggle and the concepts of *virtual* and *real* meld into one another, in a noun phrase where, furthermore, it is *virtual* that possesses the power to modify the sense of *reality*. The first instance quoted by the *OED* is, not surprisingly from IBM's *Data Processing Division*, and dates from a Programming Announcement in 1979: "A base to develop an even more powerful operating system . . . designated '*Virtual Reality*' . . . to enable the user to migrate to totally unreal universes". By 1993 the usage of the term virtual reality, quoted from David Scheff's well-known volume of the history of the gaming industry, *Game Over: How Nintendo Zapped an American Industry, Captured Your Dollars and Enslaved Your Children*, also refers to the virtual world of computer games which will become more and more highly sophisticated as the twenty-first century progresses. And, in addition, this grammatical structure becomes an adjectival compound whose combined meaning can modify other nouns at its pleasure. The examples of compound usage in the *OED* quotations range from "virtual reality suits" (1990) to "a virtual reality model of the city" (1992), from "virtual-reality twentieth-century fashion, via the Internet and satellite phones" (1999) to "scanning of the mummy . . . combining CT technology and virtual-reality software" (2001), from "virtual-reality experiments" (2008) to "virtual reality glasses" (2012).

As the new millennium has proceeded philosophers have been expending much thought on the status of *virtual reality*. Brian Whitworth logically develops the extreme case of this thinking while positing (rather as Plato did, though not of course from the same idealist premises) a prima facie case that the physical world itself is a virtual reality:

> One of the mysteries of our world is how every photon of light, every electron and quark, and indeed every point of space itself, seems to just 'know' what to do at each moment. The mystery is that these tiniest parts of the universe have no mechanisms or structures by which to make such decisions. Yet if the world is a virtual reality, this problem disappears.[11] (2007, 9)

[11] The essay referred to explains in detail this contention, together with other rele-

David Chalmers also confronts this possibility from the opposite perspective in his 2017 essay on what he terms 'virtual digitalism'. Here, instead of starting with the contention that the real world is virtual, he wants to categorize the virtual world as a kind of digital reality:

> What is the underlying philosophical view that leads to this virtual realism? Some philosophers will be led there by idealism, saying roughly that reality is in the mind, so that if we have rich enough perceptions as of a world around us, that world is real. If so, then if a virtual object looks and sounds and feels real, then it is automatically real. I am not an idealist, however: I think there is a great deal of non-mental reality outside the mind . . . Instead, my philosophical view is a sort of structuralism. Physical reality can be characterized by its causal structure: the patterns of interaction between physical objects, and their effects on our experience. Exactly the same goes for virtual reality. Digital objects in general are characterized by their patterns of interaction, which is ultimately a matter of causal structure. Furthermore, the same patterns of causal structure that are present in physical reality can be present in virtual reality . . . Non-virtual reality and virtual reality are just two different implementations of closely related structures. There may be some differences, but not enough to make one real and valuable while the other is not . . . I think that at least the first two tenets of virtual realism can be accepted by people with little sympathy for structuralism or idealism. (2017, 34)

Naturally it is impossible within the confines of the article to do justice to either of the essays just quoted. But it is interesting to me that these two scholars approach the same basic question and arrive at (more or less) the same answer from opposite extremes. The first (Whitworth) wants show that it is possible in theory to explain, justify and define the real world as virtual. The second (Chalmers) wants to use the tenets of philosophy to identify the causal structure of the digital (virtual) world as being the same as that of the real world. Both seem to be saying, using different premises and terminology, that the two worlds are theoretically definable in the same way. The results of their arguments (only when summarized however) almost become a sort of Moebius strip.

The science of virtual reality from 'the operating system' of a computer which leading to 'totally unreal universes' as different from the 'real' 'parallel universes' of quantum physics,[12] becomes, by 1989, a 'technology' which 'synthesizes' 'shared reality' and then, by the beginning of the new millennium a pair of goggles (a form of eyeglasses or spectacles) which in-

vant information for which there is no space here.

[12] Another 'strange' theory generated by quantum physics is that which proposes that "each quantum choice divides the universe into parallel universes, so everything that can happen does in fact happen somewhere" (Whitworth 2007, 2).

stead of improving a person's sight or vision of the real world enables them to 'experience' a virtual one with its own space: cyberspace or 'Cyberia'. The name was coined more than thirty years ago for the notional environment within which electronic communication occurs (usually online), viewed as a sort of global village or sphere of human interaction. When one compares the journey of the words *real and virtual* (in effect, the history of ontology) through the millennia, the semantic shifting of the same terms to describe widely diverse physical and metaphysical experience is extraordinary, as is the constant impression they give of being opposite poles which instead of antonymically repelling one another, are continually attracted by their very diversity. The term *virtual reality* in effect seems to resolve the underlying millenary ambiguity in a conflation of antonymity and tautology.

6. Virtual Theatre in the Time of Covid-19: Real or Virtual, that is the Question

At this point in the overview we temporarily lose contact with the OED which has not yet supplied a compound sense or quotations for the expression virtual theatre, although it seems likely that this will be inevitable. As has been already stated all theatre, in the semiotic sense, is virtual. Ropolyi, in the article cited above, maintains:

> All beings produced by representational technologies are necessarily virtual. The reason can be found in the very nature of representation. There is no representation without using signs. In other words: there is no representation without two kinds of beings, or two contexts for the beings. The sign has a specific, double nature: the sign is an actual being, but at the same time, potentially something else. We can identify something as a sign if and only if these two faculties of its nature (actually something and potentially something else) are simultaneously present. (2016, 51)

Recently, however, other usages have joined this fundamental definition. The usage of term *virtual* to qualify *theatre* appears to have undergone a rapid coagulation in the very recent past when it is deployed in the sense of 'online'. Pre-Covid theatre had often been simply filmed and/or televised to be enjoyed without any intermediary factors between screen and fruition: recently one example of a different take on the exploitation of an association between stage and screen was the *faux naif* effect of Kenneth Branagh's project *Branagh's Theatre Live*, with the shooting of actual stage productions where apparently no attempt is made to 'interfere' technologically or to adapt the filming process. These productions were first intended for screening at cinemas, but are now streamed online. At the other ex-

treme, so to speak, online theatre can be produced, often as a didactic tool, or even as a game, so that the receiver may intervene digitally with the production. However, it is clear from simply googling the phrase that the fact that the Covid pandemic has practically eliminated public entertainment means that the prevalent usage of *virtual theatre* has adapted itself to circumstances, given that normal social gatherings have been suspended. To the majority of the public, it simply signifies the online transmission of performance, sometimes rendered more complex through the use of zoom to include actors who are socially distanced from one another. This usage evinces the huge loss of the whole theatrical experience: one of people coming together in a shared space to receive a message which their communal presence in some way modifies.

And, indeed, what to say of the expression 'virtual audience'? Vinson Cunningham, in the online edition of the *New Yorker*, in his article of 5 October 2020 "Adapting to the Age of Virtual Theatre?" had this to say on being a member of an online audience:

> A lot of work goes into seeing a show at home. For one thing, it's impossible to settle on a seat. I've watched plays while sitting at the desk where I write, or on the floor next to the desk, or on the couch across the room, or at the kitchen table, or, least proudly, lying in my bed, under the covers. I'm never even close to dressed up; I'm there to see but not be seen . . . It's easy to forget that, in the theatre, each ticket buyer plays a role. The quality of our attention – silent or ecstatic, galled or bored – is a kind of freestanding, always improvising character, and makes each in-person performance unrepeatable. Call it the congregational art, and remember how you once practiced it: it has something to do with location, and feeling, and your invisible relationship with individual performers and the whole panoply of action on the stage.

The audience in this case can of course can switch off video and audio and go about their daily business, leaving the laptop as an artificial presence to testify that they really meant to come, and at the same time possibly virtually feed the real audience statistics. But then, in this case we should perhaps discuss the term 'virtual absence'. Is this an oxymoron? Or a philosophical question? A neologism for a new situation? In a way simply as a situation it is not completely new, however, as the bored or those who simply came for the social occasion have always had the alternative of sleep.

Another acceptation of the term *virtual* as a compound expression with *theatre* is in the sense of *digitization*. The ramifications of the representation of the real, of mimesis, have always been explored in the world of theatre. At times these explorations have led to highly ambitious and complex realism, at others, the realization of a desire for simplicity and essentialism. These objectives have been pursued in the areas of costume design and es-

pecially of scenery, special effects and props. With the onset, and by now extreme sophistication, of digital technology it is still here that the principal concentration of effort lies. Not necessarily of course to produce the effect of reality, but often to aid the expression of symbolism within the text or to intensify characterization. In point of fact the increased complexity of digitization usually heightens and enhances the virtuality of the performance.

In conclusion, however, it may be with the ever more multifaceted creation of avactors or synthespians who/which will join human actors on stage that the most innovative consequences are going to be obtained. Research is going on, as witnessed on Youtube, into the production of a life-size, life-like avatar of Hamlet. To see this figure on stage declaiming "To be or not to be" or "Oh that this too too solid/sullied flesh would melt" or perhaps interacting with a human actor as the Player in the metatheatrical universe of Act 3 Scene 2, is, or could be made to be (or has already been made to be?) by director and/or dramaturge and technicians, part of the philosophical discourse concerning the status of the quasi tautology *virtual reality*. Perhaps with the stagecraft of the twenty-first century an important aspect of the usage and interpretation of the 'antonymical' pair *virtual/real* will be seen, in this way, to continue in its ambiguous development.
From the very beginning the flight of the human brain from the real (in reality, from chance and death) has been steady and unceasing and religion, philosophy, science and art – in this case the theatre – have attempted to aid and justify this flight. So much so that it seems that science has managed to do what religion and philosophy – and art – and, indeed, theatre from its very beginnings – have been attempting for millennia and in facilitating their task render the virtual, during the human lifespan at least, as strong or stronger than the real. This struggle, which theatre at its best often mirrors, explains and renders more endurable, is reflected in the usage of the little word *virtual* and its conflict with *real* through the centuries. As T.S. Eliot in "Burnt Norton" (1.42-3) wrote, "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality".

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Avra Sidiropoulou*

Permission/Seduction/Indulgence: A Theatre Director's Account of Working With Digital Media

Abstract

As digital design inscribes its own narrative from the outset of the rehearsal process, twenty-first century theatre artists and audiences are becoming more and more accustomed to porous dramaturgies, influenced by information technologies and digital articulations. This article explores the use of technology in contemporary performance from within the rehearsal room, interrogating the diverse functions of the multimedia element by touching on a number of theoretical and practice-related issues: how has technology affected performance both in terms of creative strategies and audience experience? What are some of the pleasures and dangers involved in the omni-presence of the media in today's theatre landscape? How has digital articulation enhanced, ironized or redefined structure and characterization? Under what conditions can the encounter of corporeal presence with an electronically interceded image provide meaningful experiences for the audience? Bringing in examples from different multimedia productions that I have directed, I will focus on the principles of compositional dramaturgy, where the philosophy that structures the *mise en scène* draws from the visual as well as ontological collision between the live and the mediated.

Keywords: digital performance; multimedia theatre; contemporary directing; theatre-making; digital dramaturgy

1. Context

The innate limitations of the live medium have established the theatre as the most humane of art forms. However, the representational possibilities available in traditional modes of theatre-making are finite and subject to relentless competition against the speed and potentiality of video and film. Marking a departure from the dramatic towards the postdramatic (according to Hans Thies Lehmann's analysis), the integration of digital media in the theatre has helped it transcend its irrefutable formal constrictions. Since the late twentieth century, performance has engaged with the aesthetic of the media, combining digital iconography, electronically intercepted voices, and filmic segmentation of story-telling. The media has created an "indetermi-

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nate status between the potential of the performance and its actualization", a "virtuality" (Remshardt 2010, 142) that takes several forms: from the use of video screens and microphones on stage to the application of gaming applications to telematics, robot theatre, and data bodies in performance. The present article examines prevalent uses of technology in performance from a theatre-maker's point-of-view. I use examples from my digitally-informed theatre work to provide an empirical account of some of the challenges that artists face in the process of developing multimedia projects.

Evidently, our experience in the theatre has been profoundly mediated for several decades, whether through microphones or video screens. The acceptance that "there is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated" (Blau 1987, 164) goes hand-in-hand with the understanding that the expectations of a media-saturated audience keep changing dramatically, especially given that information technologies have established themselves as indispensable in nearly every sector of our private lives. Many contemporary theatregoers appear impatient with mainstream theatre narrative forms and, conversely, more comfortable perceiving things through the frenetic tempo of contemporaneity, which is constantly accelerated by technological progress and fresh forms of connectivity. To engage also younger spectators, who are addicted to the patterns of gaming, the expediency of apps, and the counterfeit intimacy of social media, the presence of technology in the performing arts sets out to create instantly recognizable spaces and rhythms, pitting the outside world against dated literary and performative conventions and the overall artifice of the theatre.

As a result, theatre practice has changed its priorities: revised interdisciplinary, hybrid modes of artistic research and expression are progressively emerging as important constitutional tools. These complex, 'porous' dramaturgies, "artforms that are uncomfortable, discontinuous, destabilizing, frenetic" allow for new information, theories, and discoveries in science and technology "to enter the domain of dramaticity" (Sidiropoulou 2018a, 117). While the integration of media into live performance updates theatre's "polyphonic system of information" (Barthes 2000, 263), it also attests to the genre's instinct for self-preservation, asking essential questions about theatre's ontology and the different manifestations of performativity in an era that valorises post-humanist expression. After all, "both human and non-human agents in contemporary performance can be said to possess a dramatic potency that is readable in terms of human experience" (Eckersall et al. 2017, 21). In this sense, "the [theatre] narratives have not disappeared but rather changed. Their operative force has just found more efficient spaces through which to flow. They increasingly operate through the invisible efficiencies of technological interfaces and their careful regulation of subjectivities" (Murphie 2003, 359).

2. Compositional Dramaturgy

To make the ambiguous, indeterminate space of virtuality work not as a foreign body but as an intrinsic principle of performative composition and perception, directors, actors and audiences alike were gradually trained out of long-held preconceptions about the nature of valid and meaningful works of art. In the framework of questioning existing evaluatory criteria for what could count as 'real theatre', a general reconceptualization of the role of the artist in excessively mediatized times is, I believe, necessary.

Some directors will describe their shift to technology as one that stems from a rather natural impulse pushing them to explore several alternatives in creating performance. Personally, I have discovered that applying video, pre-recorded text, and animation in my work has liberated me artistically: I have become less cautious about subverting common structures of dramaturgy and more favourable towards unusual story-telling strategies, often surprising myself and my team. Since 2009, I have been applying video and film in productions of contemporary plays (*And God Said*, Lula Anagnostaki's *The City Trilogy* and Bryony Lavery's *Frozen*); also in productions of theatre classics such as Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and in free adaptations of popular myths (*Phaedra I—*) or of fiction (*Maria Borisova*, based on Dostoyevsky's novella "A Meek Girl"). More recently, I have been adjusting narrative and dramatic writing to a film format, working on mixed media adaptations conceived entirely for online streaming.[1] In all these projects, technology – in addition to creating an autonomous and dynamic visual environment, defining ever-shifting locales and situating the action in a literal sense – gave shape to a variety of mental states, sculpting psychic landscapes where the 'real' seeps well into the mind. I discovered that the associative properties of media imagery and sound layered story-telling in ways that brought to light aspects of the text that originally felt obscure and impenetrable.

The ability to change the meaning of a scene by tampering with visual and aural rhythms and manipulating the semiotics of the stage beyond what is instantly visible makes digital articulation a potent textuality. Technology teaches one that there are hundreds of ways to represent reality and build an autonomous universe on stage. That knowledge can be very attractive to theatre makers, rendering the introduction of divergent narrative angles even more legitimate and possible. From the point of view of the spectator,

[1] During the Covid-19 pandemic, I engaged with a visual-animation project based on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Troy, Too*, a contemporary short play by American writer Karen Malpede, currently being workshopped for a mixed media video adaptation with drawings by Biba Kayewich.

the ensuing experience of disorientation is also fascinating, as audiences invariably love to be awakened to new possibilities. Productions are now built jointly with the video/film/animation designers and the dramaturg in rehearsal. In this way, digital elements become a "means of research and models not only for narrative purposes, but for reality itself: of each individual interpretation of reality" (Liakata 2018).

As a method, compositional dramaturgy entails that image, text, and sound will emerge simultaneously, with one aspect informing and developing the other. Rehearsals, for example, are structured and managed to allow these individual threads of creativity to develop concurrently. The director, dramaturg (when there is one), actors, and the design team are expected to work together closely to coordinate the separate facets of the show. Clearly, as is the case in all collaborative processes of theatre-making, engaged dialogue and brainstorming of ideas are essential. It is also necessary for everybody to generate meaningful material by means of associating what the actors come up with – often by improvising – with a specific image or visual sequence that the director and/or the video designer had originally in mind for a particular moment in the play. For shared insights to develop, such associational work can only be open and generous. Rehearsals relying on compositional dramaturgy are usually quite collaborative every step of the way, the distinct roles of the different artists ideally blurring into one joint effort to produce an aesthetic structure that accommodates both the live and the mediated element. Understanding the function of framing, "the exegetic manipulation of verbal, visual-somatic, digital and aural configurations and elements of staging", is therefore valuable, because it can provide an effective solution for arranging different elements of staging in non-serial fashion. Set and digital design thus inscribe their own narrative onto the performance from the outset of the creative process, together with the text (Sidiropoulou 2020).

This mode of rehearsing prevailed during *Phaedra I—*, a Persona Theatre Company production that premiered at Tristan Bates Theatre in London in 2019.[2] In performance, the elliptical, palimpsestic text, which revisits Euripides' classical story of unrequited love, uses projections and mapping to establish a striking visual landscape: the performer's costume is her whole world and also functions as a projection screen, allowing her to interact with the other characters of the play, who are digitally represented. The scenographer/costume/video designer Mikaela Liakata was present during the work-

[2] Text-direction by Avra Sidiropoulou; set-costume-video design by Mikaela Liakata; lighting design by Anna Sbokou; original music by Vanias Apergis. The production was supported by the J. F. Costopoulos Foundation. Elena Pellone performed the role of Phaedra.

shop phase of the project, as the text was being devised and the environment of the play determined. After a period of intense work between the actor Elena Pellone and myself, Liakata returned to the rehearsal room till opening night. Initially, staging the play was largely dependent on making the video serve the actor and the text. However, as Pellone became increasingly confident in connecting with her electronically simulated world, traditional notions of digital semiosis as a means of shedding light on the text became irrelevant. After a while, we were less preoccupied with matching image with movement and more interested in exploring existing ruptures and interruptions in the story.

In the specific production, because the actor on stage interacts with the filmed actors on her costume/screen, Liakata, who was also responsible for the video mapping, dedicated a fair amount of time in rehearsal to ensure that the coordination between performer and projection made sense. In hindsight, we realized that having a choreographer with us would have helped the actor with her unique kind of movement – one that should appear natural and also be technically precise. It is worth noting that while the designer and I prepared the video sequences and mapping in our laptops, sometimes the video images refused to co-operate with the performer, slipping and hiding away in different folds and corners of her oversized dress. Thankfully, the actor quickly adapted to the quirks of technology, frequently improvising her physical responses to the rebellious video selves. Some of her acting adjustments provided extra layers of interpretation to the piece and, as result, were kept in performance. Technology's resistance to the changing, fluid, live reality of the stage was manipulated to trace the way the dramaturgy of the play evolved collaboratively.

3. Digital Scenographies as Landscapes of the Mind

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the media aesthetic has become almost inseparable from theatrical design, creating visual and narrative collisions, whether through a simple projection of still photography on the back wall of a stage, a pre-recorded action played on a screen or more sophisticated 'mediaturgies'. Perhaps the most conspicuous and common use of the media has been its function as a visual/pictorial feature, which can add background and detail in places where the live medium alone proves inadequate. The digital component brings film closer to the live arts, producing hybrid scenographies which redefine and empower the narrational, sensory and emotional properties of stage images (Sidiropoulou 2018a, 158).

Technology is very often a simple and most eloquent way of providing scenography; not only because it saves the production the hassle of con-

structing sets, but also because there is nothing to interrupt its capacity to represent actual spaces and sites, no matter how distant or bizarre these may be. Besides the imaginative use of lighting, the introduction of photographs or video projections serves the 'willing suspension of disbelief' further. The artifice of the theatre act is enthusiastically accepted because the means that are employed to build its illusion are now updated further to match the audiences' multifarious arsenal of visual, audio and media references.

In *City Trilogy*, a triptych of three allegorical one-act plays by modern Greek writer Loula Anagnostaki (1965), which I directed as a staged reading at the Cyprus Theatre Organization in 2018,[3] video was used both in order to situate the physical action of the plays more clearly but also as a way of exploring subtext in theatre scripts that are notoriously elliptical, ambiguous, and highly parabolic. The projections functioned as pictorial background to the action narrated, providing a visual constant: because of the nature of the production (a staged reading), the actors in *Poli* (*The City*) were seated around a table in what seemed to be the interior of a house. The still image of a single naked bulb burning was projected in full screen at a large grey background surface, indicating a living room wall. In *I Dianykterefsi* (*The Overnight Stay*), the interior of a train which travels at seemingly zero speed documents the journey of the female protagonist to an unknown destination, but also references her internal voyage. In *I Parelasi* (*the Parade*), the most allegorical and dystopic of all of Anagnostaki's plays, an expanse of sky with immovable clouds provides the only visual escape for the two young siblings (locked in their attic room by their father), who will in the course of the performance become witnesses to a gruesome execution scene. Although these elements served a predominantly scenographic function, they also suggested a mood of mental and psychological stagnation for the characters – all of whom were held literally or symbolically captive.

Understandably, digital design has been a popular way of generating startling visualities, since it passes the practicalities and financial quandaries of having to build elaborate sets. This functionality notwithstanding, multimedia narratives also encourage ambiguity and abstraction to travel us into remote regions of human imagination. There are times when what is understated in the text is revealed through a simple yet 'transgressive' visual or auditory reference. This was the case with one of Persona's[4] earlier

[3] The trilogy was staged at the Nea Skini of the Cyprus Theatre Organization. It was directed by Avra Sidiropoulou and was performed by Vassiliki Kypraiou, Stelios Kallistratis, Victoria Fota, Yorgos Anagiotos and Andreas Koutsoftas. The original music score was by Anna Chronopoulou.

[4] Hereafter, all references to Persona Theatre Company will use the short form "Persona".

productions, in which a media aesthetic was employed. *And God Said*,[5] produced in Istanbul in 2010 and travelling to Tehran in 2011, was a bilingual (English and Turkish) piece about a dystopic world hit by an unnamed ecological catastrophe. The production design was driven by the need to evoke a post-apocalyptic universe where foggy memories and hallucinatory visions come together. Animation (by the now defunct Istanbul-based arts company Silo 1) was used amply to produce associative images that represented the turmoil in the afflicted characters' minds. In recalling the night when the enigmatic destruction hit, the male protagonist is haunted by nightmarish images that are expressly projected as a backdrop of the set design. As the other protagonist (the woman) emerges into the nuclear-like environment, she tries to piece together a plan for her uncertain future, while making a real effort to remember who she is and where she comes from. The animation conjures up a cosmos of shapes and colours that reinforce the sense of devastation the two characters experience, as they are stranded in a surrealist no-place, left with nothing but random recollections of a cherished past and dreams of a better life to come.

Similarly, in *Phaedra I—*, the visual element absorbed scenographic semiosis entirely. Throughout the play, the video stills and projections offer indications of location. In the opening sequence where Phaedra interacts with the chorus of women, the long white dress is imprinted with a video likeness of an ancient Greek pillar, which takes us straight to the mythic past of Greece. Phaedra's private, corporeal self grows into a public space. Images of urban life but also of natural catastrophes from the recent history of Greece ironize the clash between the country's past and present. Significantly, the fire spreading images at the opening carry the audience through to the final impression of scattered debris in a land field in the closing of the play.[6]

4. Factual Information and the Inner World

In a relatively unequivocal manner, the media can introduce into the live action missing or background information through explanatory imagery and

[5] The production was written and directed by Avra Sidiropoulou and set and costume designed by Tomris Kuzu. The original music was by Vanias Apergis, the lighting by Cem Yilmazer and the animation by Silo 1. It premiered at garajistanbul (Istanbul Turkey), featuring Derya Durmaz and Teoman Kumbaracibasi and was an invited production at the 28th International Fadjr Festival in Tehran (Sangelaj Theatre), performed by Derya Durmaz, Cihangir Duman and Mohsen Abolhassani.

[6] Those sequences had a special emotional significance for the Greeks among the London audience members, as the play was performed just a few months after the catastrophic wildfires in the Attica region of Mati in July 2018, which led to the death of 102 citizens, and left the entire country in a state of national mourning.

relevant newsfeed. Video footage is then used as a background for clarifying elaborate or ambiguous parts of the spoken text and for providing details of exposition.[7]

Beyond this basic and common use, digital storytelling also furnishes layered commentaries on the text by means of iconistic symbols and sophisticated metaphors that develop along the text and the actors' performance. It is a strategy that builds parallel story lines, which, far from being descriptive or merely substituting for missing text, can offer "additional emotional and cognitive content" (Liakata 2018). In Persona's production of *Maria Borisova*,[8] an adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novella "A Meek Girl" (Studio Mavromichali, Athens 2013), the title protagonist's suicide is depicted on a scrim which covers the entire upstage area, a physical as well as psychological border that divides the world of the young woman from that of her emotionally estranged husband. Video projections are used also to convey actual or imagined moments from the married couple's life. In one particular sequence, the actress is video-captured pointing a gun at her husband, but the moment is deliberately ambiguous – the audience remains unsure whether this dreadful event actually took place or was simply another paranoid scenario playing in the mind of the male character. Towards the end of the show, the title protagonist steps towards her mediatized death, appearing to jump into the void. Here, the pre-recorded sequence of the actor (Artemis Grympla) jumping out of a window frame plays out the character's suicide.

In my staging of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*[9] (Technochoros Ethal, Limassol and Theatro Apothikes, Nicosia, 2019), working on the scene which has Nora play fondly with her children, the video designer (Emy Tzavra-Bulloch) and I conceived of a video sequence that staged a merry-go-round game between the character and her kids. The practical difficulties of working with children and having them perform in the show forced us to think of alternatives, such as filming the children beforehand. Further to solving a practical problem, however, the sequence made Nora's conflicted realities even more poignant: the picture-perfect life of apparent comfort and familial pleasure – depicted in the video of Nora interacting happily with her children – was

[7] This may explain why digital technology is used broadly in performances of documentary theatre.

[8] Adaptation and direction by Avra Sidiropoulou; set and costume design by Alexia Theodoraki; original music score by Vanias Apergis; video and lighting design by Christos Alexandris; performed by Nikos Georgakis and Artemis Grympla.

[9] Produced by Ethal; translation-adaptation-direction by Avra Sidiropoulou; set and costume design by Yorgos Tenentes; video design by Artemis Tzavra-Bulloch; original music score by Vanias Apergis; lighting design by Aleksandar Jotovic; performed by Vassiliki Kypraiou, Neoclis Neocleous, Fotis Apostolidis, Thanassis Drakopoulos, Myrto Kouyali, Maria Povi, Leonidas Ellinas.

violently interrupted by the sudden, alarming entrance of the blackmailer Krogstad, whose presence harbingers Nora's downfall. Digital representation served to communicate the fleeting nature of joy as well as the shaky foundations of the Helmers' marriage and was strongly contrasted with the palpable carnality of the blackmailer's intrusion into Nora's household.

Similarly, the characteristic Tarantella dance that leads up to the climax of the play had Nora stand on top of the cyclical structure centre-stage against video projections of the actress frantically and freely moving to the music. The Tarantella holds a prominent position in Ibsen's text, as it demarcates the beginning of the end for Nora, a moment which is soon to culminate in the play's Aristotelian crisis that will eventually lead the protagonist to her enlightenment (recognition). In our production, the actor playing Nora stands on top of a revolving disc centre stage, quite still, but keeping a ballerina position, as if on display in a toy shop. While every other character in the play stands by admiring but also admonishing her to follow the dance's steps more accurately, the audience is watching a video of the filmed version of the dance, in which, clearly, Nora lets herself go, surrendering to her on-growing despair at the forgery allegations that threaten to overturn her life. At the end of the sequence, the actor collapses on the circular surface, exhausted. The contrast between the physical stillness of the performer and the nearly demonic dance captured on video, is highly ironic, as it illustrates the rift between her internal condition of paralysis and the effort to 'keep the show going' for her husband and her social circle.

In *Phaedra I—,* the apparently domestic scene between Phaedra and Theseus, where the former shares her sentiments of boredom and disenchantment to the latter, features a video of an elegantly positioned cluster of male and female naked bodies writhing languidly in white sheets. In this case, the image visualizes the subtext underneath Phaedra's *post-coitum* musings. The integration of dialogue with the visually absent Theseus' pre-recorded voice also serves to that effect. Later, in a nightclub scene, where Phaedra meets Hippolytus for the first time, a projection of the bottom half of a woman's body in short skirt and fishnet stockings, seated on a bar stool, captures both setting and mood. The way Phaedra crosses and uncrosses her legs, while the performer continues to sit still underneath her huge costume, resonates with a surrealistic, comedic feel. At the same time, what appears to be Hippolytus' male torso sneaks into the projection, creating a sensual ambience, which is well matched to the soundscape of mixed tipsy voices castigating Phaedra's lust for her young stepson. In fact, the video also follows Phaedra's fantasy: it portrays a voluptuous dance with the object of her desire, represented by two male hands that move slowly and intimately up and down parts of a glittery dress.

Here, technology also acts as an affective machine: some of the digital

images serve to unearth different stereotypes of femininity and the prejudices of the judgmental chorus about their queen: the visual of Phaedra's sexy dangling stilettos luring Hippolytus into small talk alternates with pink rose petals that in the video fall over Phaedra as she sings a country ballad and dances in a moment of teenage elation. Such images are meant to reflect the chorus' own projections on Phaedra's 'picture-perfect' life and her role in reinforcing the patriarchal narrative of marriage as an institution from which women can benefit socially and economically. Highlighting the protagonist's conflicting emotions, the sequence entitled "Contempt" follows Phaedra's transformation from a love-torn, dejected woman into an enlightened character, who philosophizes on the nature of rejection and on being human and vulnerable. Phaedra's costume is digitally transformed into a barren, cracked piece of earth that trembles throughout, suggestive of earthquake tremors, while her speech is nearly synchronized with the quavering landscape. The combination of image, intermittent sound and staccato sentences emphasizes the scene's disjointed sensation.

5. Relativizing Time

Digital technologies deepen and expand the perception of time (and space), altering our "perceptual mechanisms" and changing "the way we see and, more importantly, the way we think" (Aronson 2005, 46). Moreover, as Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink and Sigrid Merx argue, in intermedial performance, perceptual expectations are often played with or even explicitly deconstructed, thus producing "sensations ranging from subtle experiences of surprise or confusion, to more uncanny experiences of dislocation, displacement or alienation" (2010, 219). A "disturbance of the senses" and a "blurring of realities" is the manifestation of the "clash between digitally influenced perceptions and embodied presence" (ibid.).

By virtue of its mediating properties, technology introduces heterotopic zones of endless possibilities, inviting allegory to enter the realm of the private. Engagement with the media also reinforces the heterochronic element. Because mediation oscillates between realism and abstraction, it can travel the spectator to alternately existing or imagined places, where past and present blend into one a-historic, almost mythical dimension. Digital story-telling sets out to cover the entire expanse of history through to the present, deepening and distending our perception of time. Spaces buried in our memory can be reinhabited, and significant facts of personal or public history revived. Such certainly felt to be the philosophical premise of *Phaedra I—*, where the popular story of a classical heroine was developed into an a-temporal commentary on the perennial hunger for excitement and renewal.

As I have discovered by experimenting with the digital, beyond applying video projections as a mere background, beyond even using multimedia to produce jarring images and sonic environments, mediation can influence the entire make-up of the theatre narrative. In addition to sharpening the usage of visual and auditory signs, film is a compelling means of shaping temporality and structuring performance in non-realistic, non-linear ways: it allows for the action to move backward and forward, to be paused and repeated at will. Essentially, the digital narrative is more resistant to structural regularity, vanquishing standard representational conventions, pursuing unorthodox angles and, often, a cubist interweaving of different time frames. This involves more mental work but also more excitement for the audience, who must now produce the missing links in co-constructing the reality of the play.

Frozen,[10] Bryony Lavery's 1999 play – which I directed at Theatro Skala in Larnaca and Theatro Dentro in Nicosia in 2020 – brought together three interconnected stories of a paedophile serial killer, the mother of one of the girls he abducted and murdered and a psychiatrist who investigates the biological roots of evil. The three narrative points of view make for a structurally complex text, with a temporally and geographically expansive narrative. The design team and I opted for an elliptical style, resisting the temptation to have video simply illustrate the rapidly shifting locations, as the action in the play moves across different geographies and spaces during the span of twenty years. Instead, the imagery revealed subtle emotional temperatures associated with the suffering, confusion, rage and redemption, which are in the heart of the text. Some footage was more literally connected to the events of the plot: such was, for example, the video of a van crossing an expanse of empty space when the male protagonist recounts his method of capturing one of his victims. More than anything, video design became instrumental not only in allowing fact and fiction to co-exist, but in exposing in a non-hierarchical manner three divergent outlooks about a single incident.

To that end, different video motifs were created and linked to each character's engagement with the principal dramatic event, namely, the abduction and killing of the ten-year-old Rona. Nancy, Rona's mother, who joins a missing children's organization immediately after her daughter's disappearance, always speaks to the public under the watchful eye of her daughter in a video projection. Twenty years later, when the police inform her of the new findings in their investigation, she follows the officer to a run-down shack, where the body of the girl had been found. By using video we wished to amplify the emotional impact of special moments in the play and make

[10] Produced by Theatro Skala; translated and directed by Avra Sidiropoulou; set and costume design by Yorgos Tenentes; video design by Emy Tzavra-Bulloch; lighting design by Miroslav Stanchev; performed by Monika Meleki, Stelios Kallistratis, and Lea Maleni.

them resonate with psychological nuance. All through Nancy's suspenseful itinerary, the video projects fragments of the girl's image – of hands and face – and there is an impression of a body drowning. The same projection – this time in black and white – is played against the action of the shack being demolished, an operation which Nancy decides to attend as an opportunity for a final farewell to her daughter. The fading image of the girl emphasizes the inexorability of her death. When Ralf is present on stage, his scattered thoughts range from reminiscing the actual event in his home, and later in the prison, and reliving it moment-to-moment in what seems to be a constant nagging present. The video projections follow his state of mind, as they alternate between the van journeying towards his victims and a muddier, anarchic video collage of several young girls enjoying happy childhood moments. Gradually, their faces dissolve into visuals of neurons of the brain system, which, in turn, become tree trunks in an eerie forest. All three referents (girls, brain, trees) point to the sick act and the assumed locale of abduction, violation and killing of the victims. At the same time, Agneta, the psychiatric researcher, conducts her keynote lecture using visual references to Ralph's damaged brain. The image of a blinking brain is projected behind the sexual predator, during the scenes in which he is examined by the expert psychiatrist. This visual serves to underline the neurological basis of the text's main argument – the possibility that the criminal brain is physically damaged.

6. Updating

Technology proposes fresh conventions of contemporary naturalism by facilitating connections with the here and now. In recalling Philip Auslander's idea of "televisual intimacy", according to which a contemporary audience whose existence is dominated by moving video images sees in those images a more convincing representation of the real than a live theatrical performance (1999, 12-16), Peter Campbell argues that the intimacy and shared space and time of live theatrical performance, ironically, becomes less "real" because it is "less familiar than the hegemonic media to which many of us are now accustomed" (Campbell 2021, 230). This perceptual shift is notably present in updated readings of a classical works, where digital media reframes the correspondence between their timeless properties and the contemporary spectator's needs in a particular moment in time. To resolve whatever may feel foreign, incomprehensible or irrelevant in the source (the original) text, it proposes new criteria for accepting the 'other' as 'own.' The practice of applying current and familiar visual references in performance is certainly

widespread.[11] The cultural coordinates of a global society we all can relate to through language, sounds and images daily broadcasted and reproduced in the mass media, continue to appear in many theatre experiments. By intersecting with diverse dramatic traditions and styles, such digital references can generate geographies, time frames, and identities that may inform and illuminate those embodied by the live performers and experienced by the live spectators.

During this revisionist process, the media is essential in recontextualizing setting and story and undermining existing representational conventions and modes of characterization, as well as in tampering with perspective and making things appear either bigger or insignificant, intimate or distant. Digitally induced patterns may contrast ironically with what is physically taking place on stage. Other times, they give detail and depth to those actions performed live, serving as a kind of subtext to what is happening in the foreground. In *Phaedra I—*, for example, the protagonist's existential anguish is reciprocated by Aphrodite's mediated presence. The play opens and closes with the dominant presence of the goddess, who appears as a constant vocal reference but who is also portrayed as a mirage of fire spreading wide and setting up the scene for the drama to unfold. Here, technology both domesticizes the 'other' and defamiliarizes the banal.

7. Constructing and Perceiving the Digital Double

Significantly, digital media instigates fresh ways of looking at character and interrogates the multiple ways in which we perceive identity today: faces can be split and merged; voices are intercepted, substituted, altered and regained. In this sense, technology is a determining factor of identity construction. Decomposing body from image, authentic voice from its sonic reproduction, it also stimulates a tension in the audience, who needs a creative leap in order to bridge those clashes into a credible 'character whole'. The competition between the corporeal self, the bodily voice and their digital reincarnations is taxing, if also exciting, in that it forces the spectator to work doubly in order to make meaning out of this duality.[12]

[11] One also recalls Lehmann's conceptualization of the "real" and the "extra-aesthetic" in postdramatic theatre:

> The aesthetic cannot be understood through a determination of content (beauty, truth, sentiments, anthropomorphizing mirroring, etc.) but solely – as the theatre of the real shows – by 'treading the borderline', by permanently switching, not between form and content, but between 'real' contiguity (connection with reality) and 'staged' construct. (Lehmann 2006, 103)

[12] For more on how the body and its double pervades digital performance, see Dixon 2007.

In the production of *A Doll's House*, visual and auditory framing was crucial, given that some performers became both actors in and observers of the world on stage. During the two fraught meetings between Nora and Krogstad, the characters' video portraits looming over the performers blur the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, as the mediated images take over not just as a visual correlative of the live narrative but also as an essential, ontological agent, which dictates the actions of the two opponents. Causey reflects on the "uncanny" use of screens in performance as a "space wherein we double ourselves and perform a witnessing of ourselves as other" (2003, 384), pointing out that "the question of the drama is not one of representation, of the thing and its reflection, but of the splitting of subjectivity" (386). As the two actors enter the scene of crisis, their digital doubles hanging above them appear to be dictating their arguments and prepping their actions. Their presence on stage is highly authoritative: in their stillness they assume a power that neither the nervous, if resistant Nora, nor the coercive, if emotionally injured Krogstad, can own in their carnal presence, alone. Furthermore, in the final, most iconic scene of the drama, the path to Nora's future emancipation is revealed in the video projection of a young girl who – arms wide open – rushes out to a wheat field. While using these video sequences as a mechanism of ironizing the play, we also wished them to generate affective impact, either by juxtaposing live and mediated storytelling or by revealing the essence or mood of the scenes in a particular form or scale. In the end, video addressed the question of how many conflicting identities one person can hold and for how long one's different selves can co-exist surreptitiously before they eventually surface to fight against one another in moments of extreme personal crisis.

Sometimes, digital media concretizes and validates missing characters on stage. In *Phaedra I—*, technology adds an further layer of interpretative complication to the original premise that the title character vocally incorporates all characters present in the myth, who are actually indicated as separate *dramatis personae* in the script. Auditory manoeuvring further recalibrates representations of selfhood: the performance is interspersed with alienating voice-overs by means of pre-recorded voices that stand for Aphrodite, the chorus of women, the mixed crowd in the nightclub, and Theseus. The audial evocation of character works hand-in-hand with digital embodiment. On stage, the performer interacts with herself as performer and the projected snapshots of her life, but more importantly, with her other selves. In fact, she constantly addresses her electronic counterparts, caught in an internal conflict to reconcile different personas as well as subjectivities. Each scene conveys this narrative convention in different ways. The absent actors are bestowed a digital body and a face. In most cases, this is a fragmentary identity, torn into pieces scattered all over Phaedra's costume and adding to the

overall impressionistic effect of the show.

However, Phaedra's antagonist, Hippolytus, stands out from the rest of the characters. He is given a full (digital) body, his mediated carnality drawing attention to Phaedra's sexual fantasies. In the play's most emblematic scene, in which Phaedra confesses her love to her stepson, also speaking his lines, the male character is digitally personified in the video images of three different men's semi-naked bodies crawling up and down Phaedra's body. The body multiplication is there to suggest that Phaedra is enamoured not with one specific person, but with the idea of falling in love and being sexually fulfilled. The division/multiplication of the self ultimately destabilizes our spectator's perception. The fact that the self can now be split, multiplied and manipulated at the director's will no longer concerns the "death of character"[13] but rather the "character's rebirth or re-incarnation as a hybrid, existing in a state of liminality between corporeality and imagination" (Sidiropoulou 2018b). The paradox of seeking completion through division is, after all, a recurrent trope in mediatized performance. Inevitably, the audience wavers between empathy and estrangement, which produces a kind of "nostalgia for the pure body", uncontaminated by the "noise" of mediation (ibid.). Such nostalgia falls into what Lehmann understands to be "a quest for anthropophany", an impulse to "realize the intensified presence ('epiphanies') of the human body" (2006, 163).

8. Permission/Seduction/Indulgence

In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann identifies the break of the theatre dramatic mode and the turn towards the postdramatic to be theatre's response to the "caesura of the media society" (2006, 22-23). In analysing the new landscape of media-saturated performance, he interrogates the fascination that the image exerts on the spectator, pondering on what "constitutes the magic attraction that seduces the gaze to follow the image when given the choice between devouring something real or something imaginary" (170). Answering his own question, he argues that "there is something liberating about the appearance of the image, which gives pleasure to the gaze", as the image is "removed from real life". It is the gaze, Lehmann thinks, that can "liberate desire from the bothersome 'other circumstance' of real". The gaze, in fact, can produce bodies and transport desire to "a dream vision" (ibid.).

Multimedia performance can transport audiences to sites of desire and fear, to a haunting liminality, an in-between space of vulnerable corporeality and imagined spaces of potential. As such, it can be invariably entic-

[13] An idea introduced by Elinor Fuchs in her seminal title study (1996).

ing, enigmatic, addictive and slippery. The seductiveness of the non-defined, the abstract, the fusing qualities of intermedial strategies on stage may well have to do with a permissive attitude to both making and perceiving art. By reconceptualizing the notions of reality and representation, technology alleviates the director's pressure of having to comply with familiar conventions and meaning-making structures. This is not so much an 'anything goes' attitude to creativity, but rather, an opening up of creative vistas. As far as the spectator is concerned, the virtual present provides a field of endless possibility. In fact, "the electronic image allows and demands to see even the most impossible things. There is no void of another efficacy here, only evident reality" (Lehmann 2006, 174). The reaching out and grasping of other realities, the experience of the interminability of representation is a major source of pleasure. As semiotician Anne Ubersfeld points out in her essay "The Pleasure of the Text":

> Making this exciting pleasure possible, letting all kinds of images appear, leaving the spectator with the feeling that his pleasure of seeing has not been exhausted, that a whole series of signs has not been fully analysed or really seen, that he could have looked elsewhere, focused on something different – do we not have here some of the distinctive traits of good staging? It is the pleasure of the ephemeral and of the struggle against the ephemeral.
> (1982, 130-1)

The kind of pleasure Ubersfeld describes involves an element of transcendence, a struggle to capture the intangible (what is not palpably *there* but can be reached through imagination) and, subsequently, an effort to keep it well sheltered in one's mind and soul. In other words, it is a pleasure that is active and committed.

Passive pleasure, on the other hand, leads to overindulgence. Using technology purely as a means of flaunting spectacle and production values can either oversaturate interpretation or make it irrelevant. On the artist's part, it can paradoxically slacken imagination, limited as it is to showcasing the medium's diverse possibilities instead of generating an experience of visceral engagement. For the audience, while digital wizardry is undoubtedly seductive, this seduction is ephemeral, and perhaps ultimately devoid of the promise of change, which almost always accompanies a transformational theatre experience. Infatuation with technological acumen can lead to experiments "undertaken to present new technological paradigms for performance, rather than creating an intellectually or dramatically fulfilling piece of theatre" (Dixon 2007, 392).[14]

[14] Dixon is here referring to more advanced and pervasive uses of digital technologies, which often use performances as a pretext to demonstrate "complex and fascinating software research" (2007, 392).

In the recent years, theatre has been inadvertently placed in a position where it has had to cross hard representational boundaries in order to keep up with the speed of film and the efficacy of the media. As contemporary performance keeps metamorphosing, theatre virtuality continues to propagate heterotopic zones of hybridity and fragmentation Fresh notions of dramaturgy as an operation of theatre-making rather than of textual analysis call for revised ways of training the spectator to appreciate mediatization as a compelling factor of narrative construction and of sensual engagement. In this new landscape, far from being a self-reflexive staging tool, technology becomes a vital compositional language in both the *mise en scène* and the dramaturgy of the artwork, reflecting on the complexities of our mediatized experiences on and off the stage.

1. *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen. Directed by Avra Sidiropoulou. Technochoros Ethal, Cyprus, 2019. Photo Credit: Christos Avraamides.

2. *Phaedra I—*. Text-direction: Avra Sidiropoulou. Tristan Bates Theatre, UK, 2019. Photo Credit: Michael Demetrius.

3. *Frozen* by Bryony Lavery. Directed by Avra Sidiropoulou. Skala Theatre, Cyprus, 2020. Photo Credit: Sofoklis Kaskaounias.

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Simona Brunetti*

Connections: A Virtual Theatre Experiment in a Medieval Village

Abstract

During the 22nd edition of *Collinarea, Festival di Teatro Arte e Tecnologia* (*Collinarea, Theatre, Art and Technology Festival*) the event *Connections*, created by Mirco Mencacci and by Artistic Director Loris Seghizzi, took place in Lari. The whole village was cabled with optic fibres to set up the first theatre experiment with different and separately located stages. The social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic offered the occasion to stage a polytopic performance in the streets of the village, located in the Tuscan hills. The play, just like any TV broadcast, was coordinated remotely from a control centre at the municipal theatre. Each of the three sites set up for the event included a stage for live performances and used screen mirroring to stream the event in a sort of intertwined narrative. This paper describes the performance with a focus on its contemporary rewriting of Sophocles' *Ajax* by the theatre companies Civilleri-Lo Sicco and Scenica Frammenti.[1]

Keywords: virtual stages; polytopic performance; Sophocles' *Ajax*; contemporary rewriting

1. Virtual Theatre in the Tuscan Hills

In July 2020, the project *Connections* was presented in Lari during the 22nd edition of *Collinarea, Festival di Teatro Arte e Tecnologia*.[2] Lari is a charming medieval village in the province of Pisa, between Livorno and Pontedera. This unique event was the outcome of the project of the same name by Mirco Mencacci, in collaboration with the artistic director Loris Seghizzi. Over the years, the historic festival organised by Scenica Frammenti[3] has become for two reasons a point of reference for Italian contemporary theatre. First, for its interesting artistic cross-fertilizations and for the important international collaborations it has hosted and promoted. And second, for the deep roots it

[1] Thanks to Edward Tosques for his prompt and close revision of the English version of this essay. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

[2] For more information about the *Collinarea* festival see CF.

[3] For more information about the activity of the company see SF.

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has struck in the surrounding towns through its annual presentations of an intense, widespread cultural and educational activity.

The project *Connections* offers a new way of experiencing performances through an innovative and advanced technology. As the organisers have said, it is "a permanent, interactive and immersive infrastructure" designed to enhance the artistic identity of the small localities, and thus enhance their available theatrical space. It is also a flexible model, easily replicable and adaptable to different settings on an as-need basis. In the case of Lari, which was the pilot site of the project, the characteristic medieval features of the local architecture were first thoroughly evaluated to best exploit their features for the event; in particular, the long road surrounding the Castle that overlooks the valley, which interspersed with squares, striking views and the municipal theatre. Subsequently, the village was cabled after on-site studies by SAM Studio and its director Mirco Mencacci to balance the audio signal and avoid frequency interferences.[4] And last summer it was decided that a performance experiment through separately located stages would be organised for the upcoming annual *Collinarea* event.

As Seghizzi stated in a radio interview, social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic fostered the initiative and its planning, "perché è stato l'anno delle connessioni e perché molte persone sono state costrette a rimanere a casa. Questo distanziamento sociale . . . limita molto la possibilità di accoglienza del pubblico" (Raponi 2020; "because this was the year of internet connections and many people had to stay at home. Social distancing . . . greatly limits the possibility to welcome the audience"). The pre-pandemic logistical plan of the *kermesse* included squares crowded with people for ten days in a row and a programme with at least three performances nightly; access restrictions imposed on the plays for Summer 2020 (in particular, seating arrangements ensuring a 1 metre distance between participants, contact tracing and face masks) would have probably led to a drop in ticket sales. Thus, the idea of integrating a virtual way of enjoying the event turned into a useful resource capable of "riportare le persone nelle piazze" (Pino 2020; "bringing people back to gather in the squares") after months of lockdown.

For the inauguration of the festival three specific areas of Lari (the Vicari Castle, Piazza Matteotti and the municipal garden) were equipped with a powerful sound system, video projectors, microphones and cameras, all coordinated remotely from a control centre located in the municipal theatre. The performances offered a showcase by Francesco Mandelli, a TQS concert (Tutto Questo Sentire) starring Olivia Salvadori, Sandro Mussida and Rebec-

[4] SAM is a recording studio on an international level which, since the 1980s has provided, digital and analogical technology, as well as a qualified staff to assemble musical products for diverse uses and applications. To learn more about the studio see SAM.

ca Salvadori, and the *Ajax* play (a project staged by the Scenica Frammenti theatrical company and the association Civelleri-Lo Sicco).

Throughout the evening, actors, musicians, and technicians worked in a traditional interactive way of using 3D projection mapping and sound addition for both an on-site selected audience and two other groups of viewers in two other iconic locations in Lari. In fact, as the map included in *Collinareas*'s complete programme shows (fig. 1), in each of the three sites, near the live performance stage spectators could view simultaneously what was going on in the other two sites, and this created a polyphonic interweaving of voices and actions.[5] Consequently, by purchasing a full ticket for the entire evening in Piazza Matteotti – in which the event was scheduled at 10:15pm – spectators could also attend the screening of the event performed at Vicari Castle (starting from 8:00pm) and at the municipal park (from 9:00pm).

However, watching a live performance in a square and then following another event on-screen, would not be such an important subject of discussion if, along with this peculiar use of technology, a more innovative and not yet tested solution had not been staged. The *Connections* project also had a single performance developing in different, reciprocally connected locations. For instance, an artist might be painting inside the Castle while, simultaneously, an orchestra played a musical accompaniment from a square with a church in the background, a *corps de ballet* danced in the theatre, some actors played in the municipal park, etc. In this case the director's role would become central, just as in a TV studio, not only in checking the quality and the power of the broadcast signal, but also in deciding what to project on the various screens.

Fig. 1 – Collinarea 2020 Festival Map.

[5] On the relationship between show and spectator, see Mazzocut-Mis 2012, 11-22 and Tavani 2012, 49-67.

While the theoretical and practical potentialities of the project are still under consideration, before examining the main characteristics of *Ajax* (performed live on three digitally connected stages), it is important to stress how, theatrically, the operation sets up, in a modern virtual key, a type of secular polytopic space of medieval ancestry, which "non si sostituisce ma si sovrappone agli spazi . . . nei quali si colloca" (Allegri 1988, 231; "does not replace, but superimposes itself on the places . . . in which it is located").

As is well known, early medieval theatre stages were usually itinerant and moved around cities in pageant wagons, and medieval theatre transformed existing architectures by implementing them with moveable structures which changed their usual function and scope (232). In both cases, the architectural structure did not change, while the whole city became a spread out theatrical space, freeing audiences to interact with this double typology of itinerant theatre, for example by choosing what to see, regardless of the scene sequence. While the succession, or points of view, of the audience did not change the substance of the scenes which were being represented, what did change was the spectators' perception of the event they were attending.[6] Moreover, as Sandra Pietrini observes:

> Nell'Europa tardomedievale e rinascimentale convivono . . . due tipologie totalmente diverse di rappresentazione, basate su concezioni opposte dello spazio. Mentre la scenografia rinascimentale si fonda sulla concentrazione del luogo d'azione in uno spazio unitario, con eventuali cambiamenti successivi di scenografia, i Misteri (come già alcuni drammi liturgici) prevedono la compresenza di elementi che rappresentano posti diversi.
> La struttura scenografica a *mansiones*, benché sia utilizzata fino a un'epoca molto tarda, è una tipologia propriamente medievale, fondata sulla stessa concezione spaziale delle arti figurative precedenti al Rinascimento. Si fonda su una disposizione paratattica, con sequenze di azioni compresenti a suggerire uno sviluppo narrativo . . . Mentre in Italia si affermò la scena prospettica unificata, nel resto d'Europa la concezione multipla e simultanea dello spazio continuò a dominare l'immaginario figurativo almeno fino al XVI secolo, sia nelle rappresentazioni dei Misteri sia nelle arti figurative. (Pietrini 2017, 77-8)

> [In late medieval and Renaissance Europe . . . two completely different types of representation coexisted, based on opposing conceptions of space. While Renaissance set designs were based on the place of action and its focus in one single area with possible scenographic changes, Mystery plays (such as liturgical dramas) implied the coexistence of elements which represented different places.
> *Mansiones* set designs, though used until a much later period, were typically medieval, relying on the same conception of spatiality that we find in pre-Renaissance fine arts. They were built using paratactic dispositions, with simul-

[6] On this subject, see: Weimann 1989, 173-193.

> taneous sequences of actions suggesting a development in the narrative . . . While in Italy the unified perspective scene became established in architecture, in the rest of Europe the multiple and simultaneous conception of space continued to dominate the figurative imaginary at least until the sixteenth century, both in Mystery plays and in the fine arts.]

As I have argued elsewhere, in 1637, with the inauguration of the Amsterdam Schouwburg, Jacob van Campen put together multiple spaces on the same stage, all characterised by a variety of styles in use in England, Spain and in Flanders, namely typical street performances, panels with painted backdrops, and installed structures (as in the Chambers of Rhetoric), following the model of those used in Jesuit theatre (Brunetti 2018, 203). Thanks to digital technology, which makes it possible to project, on a single, large screen, events taking place at the same time in different and separate locations, in our view, a production like *Ajax* is connected to that vision (paratactic and unitary at the same time) which Kernodle calls "Stage Façade" (1944, 111-54).

2. A Scenic Rewriting of Ajax with Graffiti and Social Media

The contemporary rewriting of Sophocles' *Ajax*, which made its debut at the *Collinarea* festival, is the result of a multidisciplinary project for young people under 20, which saw the collaboration of Manuela Lo Sicco with twelve young people from Lari and Palermo. The play is the result of a joint effort of creation and direction by Civilieri-Lo Sicco and Scenica Frammenti.[7] It revisits and revises the tragedy's main themes through the eyes of the young protagonists. The group availed itself of both SAM Studio's audio direction and Benson Taylor's sound effects.[8]

Sabino Civilleri and Manuela Lo Sicco, both former actors of the Sud Costa Occidentale company, founded in 1997, trained at the permanent workshop run by Emma Dante, which is based on the concept of the actor as author. Through a continuous and exhausting training, the actors acquired a new language, a new modality of representation, in which, as Anna Barsotti wrote, the theatre is work, "dissociazione, malattia, ma anche gioco vitale contro la morte" (2009, 121; "dissociation and sickness, but also a lively game against death"). The actors and Emma Dante created some plays which deeply influenced the Italian theatre at the beginning of the twenty-first century: *mPalermu*, *Carnezzeria*, *La Scimia*, *Cani di Bancata*, *Le Pulle*, *Ballarini (Tri-*

[7] The performance was co-produced by Associazione Civilleri-Lo Sicco, Scenica Frammenti, Collinarea Festival, Teatro Libero di Palermo e TMO (Teatro Mediterraneo Occupato di Palermo).

[8] Taylor is a British composer and producer who has worked for many cult films and TV series. For further information see BT.

logia degli occhiali), *Bestie di scena*. These original productions won several awards, including the Scenario and the Ubu prizes.

In 2009 they founded the Association Civilleri-Lo Sicco in order to carry out, with expressive rigour and hard work, some projects which were utterly and provocatively deemed useless to society but which were artistically significant. At the same time, they engaged in the search for their own artistic identity and creativity. In recent years they have run a great number of workshops aimed at discovering theatrical language, with particular attention to group dynamics and collective listening.[9]

Loris Seghizzi is an actor and also a scriptwriter, a director, and an impresario. A son of artists, in 1998, following the historical-artistic heritage of his parents, he decided to found his own company, Scenica Frammenti. This company is a sort of continuation of the touring company founded in the early 1900s by his grandparents, Fausto Barone and Assunta Tampone, and it is also a continuation of the project of "prosa viaggiante" (lit. "itinerant prose theatre") started by his parents, Francesco Seghizzi and Vincenza Barone. After performing in Italian theatres and squares prose works of some great contemporary writers and some original productions mostly dealing with social issues, his parents settled in Tuscany and started experimenting new forms of performance, such as children's theatre or operetta (Niccolini and Seghizzi 2012; SF). From the very beginning Scenica Frammenti has offered a new-generation artistic project combining traditional Italian theatrical technique with the theories of the great Masters of the late twentieth century (Penzo 2019, 141-3; Perrelli 2007 and 2016) or, more in general, of the Nuovo Teatro (lit. "New Theatre") (Mango 2019, 197-248; De Marinis 1987).

The rewriting of *Ajax* originated through an artistic encounter between artists defined by two different trainings: the theatre of Emma Dante and the theatre of Italian "famiglie d'Arte" (families of professional actors having a generations-long theatrical tradition). Through these techniques they learned two specific acting methods that they intensely explored, internalised and in part re-elaborated, to find new forms of expression to share with young practitioners. Like what Loris Seghizzi plans to do in the Tuscan territory, also Sabino Civilleri and Manuela Lo Sicco also have been cooperating for several years with many Sicilian trends, including La Scuola dei Mestieri of the Biondo Stabile Theatre of Palermo.

As is generally known, in Sophocles' *Ajax* the events that trigger the tragedy have already taken place beforehand: Achilles' armour has unjustly been given to Odysseus instead of Ajax, who has disdainfully refused Athe-

[9] For further information and to know more about the various artists, see their biographies in CLS and their interviews with Patrizia Bologna (Bologna and Lo Sicco 2006, 170-6; Bologna and Civilleri 2006, 177-82).

na's help in battle. To punish him, the goddess has deluded him into slaughtering cattle instead of the Greek army leaders. The action takes place in the Greek camp, just outside Ajax's tent, where Athena shows Odysseus that the hero is still prey to madness, while the king of Ithaca shows compassion towards him. After regaining his senses, Ajax cannot bear the shame of what he has done and, lying to his brother and closest friends about his future, he takes his life in a clearing. However, Menelaus and Agamemnon deny Ajax a proper burial as punishment for having threatened the integrity of their army; Teucer strongly contests their decision and claims his right to give his brother a proper funeral. Eventually, the quarrel is solved by Odysseus, who makes the burial possible, paying respect to the fallen enemy with full honours (Rodighiero 2013, 202-3).

As Guido Avezzù points out, the story relates to some typical topics of classical theatre, above all, the dispute over Achilles' armour and the vision of the hero as the embodiment of a system of values universally recognised and shared (2003, 117). Aside from these arguments, a key element which helps us understand the motives behind the myth's rewriting can be synthesized in the dynamics of vision – "la possibilità o l'impossibilità di vedere o di essere visti" (Avezzù 2000, 108; "the possibility or impossibility to see or be seen") – combined with the theme of the hero's shame: "tornato in sé, [Aiace] può finalmente vedere gli altri quali sono e insieme comprendere di essere visibile nella condizione che a lui stesso è divenuta percepibile, e prova vergogna" (110; "Having regained his senses, [Ajax] can finally see the others for who they really are, he understands that he is likewise visible in his delirium, and he is ashamed of it"):

AIACE
Ma c'è una cosa che credo di sapere: se Achille, vivo,
avesse dovuto assegnarle lui, le armi,
come premio a chi eccellesse per valore,
nessun altro le avrebbe prese al mio posto.
Adesso, invece, gli Atridi le hanno fatte avere a un mascalzone intrigante,
non hanno tributato onore alla mia forza.
E se il delirio che mi sconvolge gli occhi e la mente
Non mi avesse deviato dal proposito,
costoro non avrebbero mai più potuto decretare contro nessuno
una sentenza del genere.
Ma ora la dea, figlia di Zeus, l'indomabile, dagli occhi di Gorgone,
mentre già alzavo il mio braccio contro di loro,
mi ha tratto in inganno, ha iniettato in me un delirio malato,
ha fatto sì che bagnassi le mie mani nel sangue di questi armenti.
E quei due che l'hanno scampata contro la mia volontà, ridono di me:
se un dio vuole colpire, anche l'infame sfugge al più eccellente.
Che cosa devo fare, adesso?

. . .
Lascerò soli gli Atridi per tornarmene a casa, attraversando l'Egeo?
E con che faccia andrò a farmi vedere da mio padre Telamone?
Come sopporterò di guardarmi, quando mi presenterò nudo,
senza i trofei che incoronarono la sua immensa gloria?
No, non posso sopportarlo!
(Sophocles 2004, 107-8, ll. 441-57, 460-66; translation by Angelo Tonelli).

[AJAX
And yet, I think I know this, at least: that if Achilles were alive
and had been going to award the victory for supreme valour
in a contest for his own arms,
no one else would have seized them instead of me.
But as things are, the Atridae have made them over to a man depraved in his character,
rejecting my mighty deeds.
And if my eyes and mind
had not become disordered and swerved away from my intended design,
they would never have voted such a judgment
against another man.
As it is, when I was already directing my hand against them,
the daughter of Zeus, the invincible Gorgon-eyed goddess,
frustrated me by casting a maddening sickness upon me,
so that I bloodied my hands among beasts like these.
And they have escaped, against my will, and are laughing.
But if one of the gods causes harm, then even a coward can escape the stronger man.
And now what must I do?
. . .

Shall I abandon the station of the ships, leaving the Atridae alone,
and go home across the Aegean sea?
And when I appear, how will I show my face to my father, Telamon?
How ever will he bring himself to look upon me, when I appear naked,
bereft of those prizes which he won as a great crown of glory?
The deed cannot be endured.
(Sophocles 2011, 268-73; ll. 441-57; 460-66; translation by Patrick J. Finglass)]

In the early twentieth century, thanks to theorists and directors like Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia and Bertolt Brecht, "una nuova scrittura del teatro basata su una nuova grammatica" (Mango 2012, 106; "a new kind of script writing with a new grammar") was born, though it had already found an important theoretical expression in the mid-nineteenth century in the libretti that Richard Wagner wrote for his operas (Artioli 1972, 65-82; 157-79). Antonin Artaud's subsequent reflections confirm the primacy of action over script (see Artioli and Bartoli 1978), thus clearing the way for

> una dialettica di scritture, quella scenica e quella drammatica, che è dire una cosa diversa da messa in scena e testo letterario, perché si tratta di uno spostamento ulteriore che vede la dimensione drammatica del teatro distaccarsi dall'assoluto letterario e farsi immediatamente atto creativo della scena. (Mango 2012, 110)
>
> [a dialectic of texts (the representational and the dramatic one), which distinguishes itself from the mere concepts of *mise-en-scène* and literary text, because it implies a further step by which the dramatic dimension detaches itself from the literary absolute and immediately becomes an act of creation on the stage.]

The rewriting of *Ajax* is an example of this very compositional process which, also in the light of the theories developed after Brecht's political theatre in the second half of the twentieth century, sees civil commitment as one of its greatest strengths. A dramaturgical intuition is followed by the performance mainly through a long process of training and reworking based on individual and collective improvisation, in which the body of the actor is central.[10] It is worth noticing that not always is this final script preserved on paper. The hard work on the myth (and, accordingly, on the fable) undertaken by Emma Dante and her young practitioners (Barsotti 2008 and 2017; Scattina 2019) has allowed Civilleri, Lo Sicco and Seghizzi to recontextualise the tragedy into the world of youth gangs of graffiti artists and the world of social media. Therefore, instead of Achilles' armour, the dispute revolves around the ownership of his jacket, "giusto premio al writer più meritevole" (*CDRA*, 2; "the just reward for the best writer"); revenge is taken by crossing out the artists' graffiti and removing the group's tags; finally, the cause for the protagonist's suicide in the end is a video gone viral:

> TECMESSA
> È vero quello che si dice.
> Rapito da follia, il glorioso Aiace si è macchiato di infamia. È stato lui a trafugare le bombolette, la sua mano impazzita ha massacrato ogni cosa.
> Trascinava, sollevava e colpiva le nostre giacche come montoni dalle zampe bianche. Ha rovesciato l'urna… urlando insulti abominevoli che un demone, non certo un uomo, gli suggeriva. (*CDRA*, 6)
>
> [TECMESSA
> It's true what they say.
> In a frenzy, the glorious Ajax has disgraced himself. It was he who stole the color cans, his crazy hand destroyed everything.
> He dragged, lifted and struck our jackets as if they were white-legged rams.

[10] Among several monographs on the subject, I recommend De Marinis 2000 and 2004; Mango 2019; Perrelli 2015 and Randi 2020.

He turned the urn upside-down… shouting such terrible things suggested by a demon, not a man.]

It is easy to see that in the original lines quoted above, the Italian translation of Sophocles' text by Angelo Tonelli is significantly cut, interpolated, but quite accurate in its meaning.[11]

3. Real and Virtual Interactions in a Polytopic Space

As already mentioned, Sophocles' *Ajax* takes place "nel campo dei Greci che assediano Troia" e "in una radura, dove ci sono arbusti in riva al mare" (Sophocles 2004, 94; "in a Greek camp where the soldiers are besieging the city of Troy" and "a clearing where some shrubs grow by the sea"). In the Lari staging the scenes are set on three different stages in three different locations of the village. The fact that the choice of a specific setting depends on the specific aspects of the characters is not of secondary importance; in fact, Ajax acts from above, namely from the Castle courtyard, until the moment of his fall and his final escape; Athena pulls the strings from the city park; finally, Odysseus and the Crew mostly act in Piazza Matteotti.

Unlike the classical version of the tragedy, the re-written play also includes a backstory: both the announcement of Achilles' death and the funeral ceremony take place, and immediately after it, the "Crew of graffiti artists", led by Menelaus, elects Odysseus as their leader. The latter represents

[11] "TECMESSA Come posso pronunciare parole indicibili? / Conoscerai uno strazio uguale alla morte. / Rapito da follia, questa notte / il glorioso Aiace si è macchiato di infamia: / guarda dentro la tenda, / e vedrai vittime intrise di sangue, offerte sacrificali scannate con le sue stesse mani. / . . . / TECMESSA ÓMOI Di là! / Di là è venuto, trascinando la mandria prigioniera! / Una parte delle bestie le ha scannate al suolo, nella tenda, / e il resto le ha squartate in due , colpendole nei fianchi! / Solleva in aria due montoni dalle zampe bianche: / a uno taglia la testa e la punta della lingua, poi le scaglia via. / L'altro lo lega ben dritto a un palo, / afferra una grossa cavezza per legare i cavalli / e lo colpisce con questa doppia frusta sibilante, / coprendolo di insulti abominevoli, / che un demone, non certo un uomo, gli suggeriva" (Sophocles 2004, 101, ll. 214-20, 233-44; translation by Angelo Tonelli; "TECMESSA How indeed am I to tell an unspeakable story? / You will learn a suffering equal to death. / Captured by madness, our famous Ajax / has come to grief during the night. / Such are the victims you could see within the hut, / rent by his hands, bathed in blood – the sacrifices of this man. / . . . / TECMESSA ÓIMOI So it was from there, / from there that he came to us /leading the flock in chains. / Of some he cut the troats on the ground inside, / while he slashed the sides of others and tore them apart. / Lifting two white-legged rams, / of one he cut off the head and tongue / and threw them away / But the other he tied straight upright to a pillar, and, / seizing a huge strap from a horse-harness, / struck it with a shrill-sounding double whip, / uttering terrible insults, / which a god taught him, not a man" (Sophocles 2011, 207-213, ll. 214-20, 233-44; translation by Patrick J. Finglass).

the voice of change and he, instead of the incorruptible Ajax, is asked to wear Achilles' jacket. This story is narrated by a Messenger to the audience sitting in Piazza Matteotti (*CDRA*, 1), and it is also simultaneously staged in the Castle courtyard, as follows:

ODISSEO
Accettate dunque il mio consiglio: troppi di noi sono caduti in campo, uno dopo l'altro, ogni giorno. È tempo di cambiare. Votate me, Odisseo.

AIACE
Io invece credo sia il tempo di rispettare il volere di chi ci ha guidato fino a ieri. Votate me Aiace.

VOCE DAL CORO
Il suo migliore amico.
È sempre stato al suo fianco, clandestino nella notte. Aiace!

TECMESSA
Aiace! insieme hanno guidato la nostra Crew.

VOCE DAL CORO
Odisseo! L'unico che può guidarci con forza e astuzia verso un cambiamento.

TEUCRO
L'incorruttibile che difende la nostra identità. AIACE!

VOCE DAL CORO
Odisseo! che ci condurrà in altri luoghi, mai più per strada!

VOCE DAL CORO
Odisseo!

VOCE DAL CORO
Odisseo!

MENELAO
Odisseo! (*CDRA*, 2)

[ODYSSEUS
Take my advice: too many of us have fallen in battle, one after the other, every day. It is time for a change. Vote for me, Odysseus.

AJAX
I rather think it is time for us to respect the will of the one who has led us until yesterday. Vote for me, Ajax.

A VOICE FROM THE CHORUS
His best friend.
He always stood by his side, secretly in the night. Ajax!

TECMESSA
Ajax! Together they guided our Crew.

A VOICE FROM THE CHORUS
Odysseus! The only one who can lead us towards change with his strength and his cleverness.

TEUCER
The incorruptible man who defends our identity! AJAX!

A VOICE FROM THE CHORUS
Odysseus! The one who will take us to different places, but no longer on the streets!

A VOICE FROM THE CHORUS
Odysseus!

A VOICE FROM THE CHORUS
Odysseus!

MENELAUS
Odysseus!]

Once the election declares Odysseus' victory, the Crew moves from the Castle courtyard to Piazza Mattetti. In the meantime, Athena too watches the election from the city park, and she casts a spell on Ajax, who has been left alone on the 'crime scene' with Tecmessa.

ATHENA
Congratulazioni da Athena! La giacca del glorioso Achille è ora vestita da Odisseo. Riscriverò gli algoritmi. I social impazziranno, i followers e i likes aumenteranno in modo esponenziale. Ho deciso: sarai tu il tag del futuro. ODISSEO È L'INFLUENCER DI UNA NUOVA ERA. Questo è il giusto premio al writer più meritevole, colui che è stato capace di portare genio e dialogo. #FUTURO. (*CDRA*, 2)

[ATHENA
Congratulations from Athena! Now Odysseus wears Achilles' glorious jacket. I will rewrite the algorithms. This will make social media go wild, the number of likes and followers will increase exponentially. I have decided: you are going to be the tag of the future. ODYSSEUS IS THE INFLUENCER OF A NEW ERA. This is the just prize for the best writer, the one who was able to bring about ideas and discussion. #FUTURE.]

The intersection of these first scenes and their complex paratactic connection are carried out efficiently through the projection of two different streaming sequences on the screen positioned behind the actress who plays the goddess (fig. 2).

Fig. 2 – Athena (Manuela Lo Sicco) conjuring a spell in front of the projection of two different streaming sequences (Sofocles, *Ajax*, Collinarea Festival, 2020).

This is the first configuration of a virtual stage used in the performance. In this way, while a scene with a single stage is transformed into a polytopic one when necessary, the dynamism of vision expressed in the tragedy through the asymmetrical relationship between humans and gods shifts to a concrete level. From the city park Athena can see Odysseus in Piazza Matteotti, while he can only hear her speak; but at the same time, she can also speak to Ajax and be seen by him.

The spell cast by Athena in her "social" language introduces the second modality of a virtual scene, connected to the projection of images onto monuments with a sophisticated technique called 3D Videomapping. "La realtà virtuale offre . . . un'esperienza completamente immersiva e interattiva al soggetto" ("Virtual reality offers . . . a completely immersive and interactive experience"), writes Elisabetta Locatelli, because it reproduces the process of perception of reality through the use of technology (Diodato and Locatelli 2012, 197).

After threatening war against Odysseus and his companions – "prima crosserò tutti i loro graffiti e cancellerò la Crew" (*CDRA*, 3; "first I will cross out their graffiti and then I will cancel the Crew") – in the Castle courtyard Ajax "*distrugge tutto. Sembra muoversi alla cieca. Prende le bombolette lasciate sul sepolcro e inizia a imbrattare, coprire, cancellare*" (ibid.; "*destroys everything. He does not seem to know what he is doing. He takes the spray cans left by the tomb and begins to paint, cover, erase*"). In the meantime, the hero's wrath is physically represented by the Crew in the square, who move following Athena's directions: all wrapped up in a plastic sheet, they move around at random, interacting with a 3D projection which seems to destroy the arches of the surrounding buildings (fig. 3).

Fig. 3 – The Crew wrapped up in a plastic sheet interacting with a 3D projection which seems to destroy the arches of the surrounding buildings (Sophocles, *Ajax*, Collinarea Festival, 2020).

While the typical medieval configuration of the theatre resumes when the scenes overlap with the urban architecture, a clever use of dual and/or simultaneous actions is employed. In the already mentioned opening monologue in Piazza Matteotti, the Messenger summarizes what is happening in the Castle courtyard in the manner of an estranged Brechtian narrator, at times using the same words. However, this type of repetition recurs several times during the show, both in Tecmessa's words to Ajax (once again repeated by the Messenger), or in Teucer's words.

A further virtual modality used during the show, more basic but also more effective than the previous ones, is having a group of actors rush from one side of the village to the other while part of the audience remains in the same place, thus recreating the illusion of the itinerant medieval theatre, in which the action takes place dynamically in the streets. As explained above, after the opening of the show, Odysseus and the Crew move from the courtyard to Piazza Matteotti. Then Odysseus goes back to the Castle to film Ajax's act of rage and send the video to Athena, but the Messenger too (urged by Teucer to find his brother) goes in the same direction. And while Ajax comes down only to escape to the woods before committing suicide (in a clear metaphorical descent), the Crew chasing after him express through their chaotic movement, the idea of the loss of a guide, a point of reference.

The choice to virtually transform interpersonal relationships through an intradiegetic technique seems particularly apt for keeping abreast of young people's tastes and bringing them closer to theatre. It seems also a good way to face current social issues like cyber bullying. Ajax's rage, the symbol of

the injustice he has suffered, amuses Athena, who asks Odysseus to send her a video just to make it go viral:

> ODISSEO
> Provo pietà per questo infelice.
>
> ATHENA
> Finiscila! Accresci il tuo orgoglio! Inviami il video di Aiace, così, come lo vedi adesso e grazie alla mia opera sarà condiviso all'infinito, tutti lo disprezzeranno. E così sia.
>
> MENELAO
> Quello che ha fatto Aiace è imperdonabile, merita di essere punito. (*Ride*). Guardalo come piange e si dispera, lui che pensava che lamenti del genere si addicessero solo ai vili e ai meschini. Riprendilo nel suo squallore! Inviamo a tutti il video della femminuccia. #La Bella Addolorata (*Ride*).
> *Odisseo riprende Aiace. La scena si chiude con Odisseo che invia il video. Notifiche sui telefoni di tutti.* (*CDRA*, 5)
>
> [ODYSSEUS
> I pity this poor wretch.
>
> ATHENA
> Stop that! Be proud! Send me footage of Ajax, just like you see him now, and I will make sure that it is shared over the internet and that everybody will despise him. And so be it.
>
> MENELAUS
> What Ajax did is unforgivable, he deserves to be punished. (*He laughs*). Look at him, look how he cries and despairs, he who thought that only petty, vile men could cry like that. Capture him in all his misery! Let us share the footage of this cry-baby. #cryingbeauty (*He laughs*).
> *Odysseus films Ajax. The scene ends with Odysseus sharing the footage. Everybody's phones ring.*]

In Sophocles' tragedy, Ajax feels ashamed because he did not succeed in avenging himself. Avezzù writes: "si badi che la follia dell'eroe non consiste nel rivolgere le armi contro gli antichi compagni, ma nell'annebbiamento che gli fa mancare lo scopo" (2003, 118; "note that the hero's madness does not lie in the clash with his old companions, but in his lack of vision, which prevents him from achieving his purpose"). In this play, however, Ajax cannot stand the fact of being exposed on social media.[12]

Nevertheless, the most interesting aspect of this shift of meaning is included in the stage directions at the end of the passage quoted above. It is realised theatrically through 3D mapping, with lots of emojis projected onto

[12] On this topic see Sacchi 2020 and Nicolini 2020.

the façade of the palace in Piazza Matteotti; many "angry emojis" comment on the footage which has been shared by all the members of the Crew (fig. 4). In this case, the power of social media makes even the most inattentive spectator perceive the violence which is unleashed through this stream of "likes" and "dislikes" and which nowadays, for young people, may be the only means for establishing human relationships. The hero's isolation and estrangement,[13] both resulting from the abuse of instant messaging, are perfectly epitomised in the following dialogue:

VOCE DAL CORO
No, dobbiamo bloccare la diffusione del video. Riscattare la sua immagine.

AIACE
Ormai è già virale.

MENELAO
Il suo profilo è già stato bannato.

VOCE DAL CORO
Facciamo un altro profilo allora!

VOCE DAL CORO
Ma non lo capite? È troppo tardi. Il suo destino è ormai segnato. (*CDRA*, 7)

[A VOICE FROM THE CHORUS
No, we must stop sharing the video and redeem his image.

AJAX
It's too late, it went viral.

MENELAUS
His account has been disabled.

ONE VOICE FROM CHORUS
Let's create a new one!

ONE VOICE FROM CHORUS
Don't you understand? It's too late. His fate is sealed.]

[13] To know more about the vision of the figure of Ajax as an isolated hero in the 20th century see: Rodighiero 2010, 29-54.

Fig. 4 – "Angry emojis" shared by all the members of the Crew projected onto the façade of the palace in Piazza Matteotti (Sophocles, *Ajax*, Collinarea Festival, 2020).

From this point on in the play, just as in Sophocles' tragedy, the hero is gradually estranged from society, a process that leads eventually to his suicide after he is transformed into a wolf. Moreover, in Lari, the long dispute over Ajax's burial has been omitted in order to concentrate the attention of the audience on the hero's tragic choice. As a final scenic solution, after a "soggettiva di Aiace che corre nel bosco" (*CDRA*, 10; "close-up of Ajax running in the woods"), the connection between the three stages is momentarily suspended on the screens, only to re-start in unison (fig. 5).

Aiace è in Municipio sistema la sua telecamera, prende un microfono. Si inginocchia davanti alla corona funebre preparata da Athena. Aiace riprende se stesso.

LUPO/AIACE
Sono pronto. Tu per primo Dio, dammi il tuo aiuto! Non è grande il favore che ti chiedo. Fa che la notizia arrivi per primo a mio fratello Teucro, che sia lui il primo a sollevare il mio corpo, non vorrei che lo gettassero in pasto ai cani. Ti prego. Che mi addormenti con dolcezza, e sia indolore e rapido. Sappiano che muoio infelice, per colpa di quelli che credevo fossero amici. E tu Sole, quando vedrai la mia casa frena le redini dorate e annuncia il mio destino a mio Padre e a mia Madre che farà risuonare per tutta la città le sue grida di dolore. Luce del giorno, fiumi, sorgenti, terra che mi hai nutrito, addio! (ibid.)

[*Ajax is at City Hall, where he sets up his camera and talks through a microphone. He kneels down before a funeral wreath prepared by Athena. Ajax films himself.*

WOLF/AJAX
I am ready. God help me! I am not asking for too much. Please, let Teucer be the first to hear about this, let him be the first to lift my body, I do not want it to be thrown to the dogs. I beseech you. Let me fall asleep gently, may my

> death be as quick and as painless as possible. Let them know I'm dying in misery because of all the people I thought were my friends. And you, Sun, pull the golden reins when you see my house and announce my end to my Father and my Mother. She will cry out in grief and her voice will resound throughout the entire city. Daylight, rivers, springs, earth which nourished me, farewell!]

It is important to note that here the suicide weapon is a plastic sheet like the one used by the Crew to represent his folly, so as to make more evident the connection with Athena's spell (fig. 6).

The final identification of this contemporary Ajax with a wolf introduces another social issue, this time more related to the Tuscan territory than to Sophocles' text. In the last few years, thanks to the intense activity of environmental organisations to repopulate Tuscany with wolves, an unjustified fear has grown of the presence of this wild species in the woods and in the scrub.

Just like Ajax, who is isolated and exposed for his insane actions, also wolves too are accused for preying on livestock to indulge their wild nature. Both are objectively victims of their savagery, and for this reason they are pushed to extinction. The implicit question the play poses to the audience is whether this solution is necessary. At the end of a play like this, in which the virtual aspect is essential, the spectators go back home with the absolute certainty that human relationships are the most important "connections" *Collinarea* can offer.

Fig. 5 – Ajax/Wolf (Stefano Mazza) playing live and in unison on the screens of the other two stages (Sophocles, *Ajax*, Collinarea Festival, 2020).

Fig. 6 – Ajax/Wolf (Stefano Mazza) pushed to commit suicide with a plastic sheet (Sophocles, *Ajax*, Collinarea Festival, 2020).

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Rinde Eckert*

The Virtual

Abstract

"Virtue" is the crux of this essay. What is the virtue of describing a two-dimensional representation of reality as "virtual?" Isn't a screen a screen? Large or small, made of glass or bed sheets, the screen holds an image, a representation, of something that is not present. Whether the image is generated by a 16mm movie projector or a television broadcast studio or a computer, there is no escaping the fact of the screen; all these forms of transmission are two-dimensional, existing on a flat plane. To be sure, there are qualitative differences among all these media, but the images are all animations on screens. Why the term "virtual performance" when the medium has none of the virtues of live performance?

Keywords: live performance; virtual; performance *Breathing at the Boundaries*

Let me start by admitting that I am troubled by the use of the word 'virtual' to describe two-dimensional representations of actual events. My reasons have to do with a respect for language, an appreciation of the particular virtues of language. Look. If I say to a friend that I prefer the cappuccino made by my local barista to that made by hers, she may argue that they are virtually the same, that they are almost identical in size and shape, in taste, in aroma. She is right about their taste and aroma, size and shape, but she is wrong about their being virtually the same. They are, in fact, *practically* the same, not virtually the same. A cappuccino not made by my barista lacks many crucial virtues: my barista's cappuccino has the virtue of my having watched it being made by him, someone I have grown fond of. It's a cappuccino I watched being made while remembering the hundreds or thousands of cappuccinos my barista has made for me over the years, the pleasantries we've shared during the making of those cappuccinos, and the comforting ambiance of the café in which those cappuccinos have been made. So, I tend to be more careful with the word 'virtual' than most people are. It has significant work to do semantically. I think it's important not to say 'virtual' when one means 'analogous'; there are no virtual worlds on television, film,

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or computer. In fact, there are no worlds there at all, only representations of worlds.

Here is a true story – ah, you see, I already have a problem. The word 'true' bothers me in this context. Like 'virtual', 'true' is problematic. This story will be analogous to the event as all 'true' stories are, but it is not a true record of the event. The event is being remembered and related to the listener, filtered, edited, and changed in the recollection. It is not true. Yet it contains truths. But here's the story as I remember it.

In 2006 I was invited to tour a robotics laboratory at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. My guide was an engineering genius who had already earned several postgraduate degrees from that institution. He brought me into a room in the middle of which was what appeared to be a large plush toy – a stuffed animal with big eyes, short legs and arms, and hands with fingers.

My guide told me that the engineers were teaching the toy to identify when "he" was being lied to. Various actors would enter the room and identify themselves, then leave the room, change clothes, and return. Some would then identify themselves by using the names of people whose clothing they had borrowed. "He" (the engineers had given this toy a name I don't recall) was supposed to identify who was lying. I asked my guide (I'm not going to name him either, because names are confusing; I prefer 'guide' in this instance, because, as you will see, this story is about what names do to how we see things) whether the cameras in the eyes of the toy were sufficient to identify the faces of the actors in the experiment. He said no; cameras needed to be placed in the room at steeper angles in order to "recognize" (you see the difficulty already) a face. "So the toy is just for your amusement", I said. "You are building a room that can correctly identify the faces of those who enter it", I said. "So you're building facial-recognition software", I said. "So 'lying' has nothing to do with this", I said. "So, you are lying to yourselves about the scope and character of your project".

I just lied to you. Could you tell? That's not how it went. I didn't make any of those statements at the time. I just thought them. I was worried that bringing up the complications of the use of 'teaching' and 'lying' to describe this programming would start us down a road that might lead to questions that might slow the process of discovery there at MIT. If I had pointed up the anthropomorphic fallacy of the camera 'eyes', those talented engineers might have had to stop and think about the consequences of nomenclature – of using the word 'intelligence' to aggrandize complex, but relatively unsophisticated programming (at least in comparison to that of the human brain), for instance.

We do this all the time, we human beings. We need metaphors that help us reduce complexity to manageable dimensions. We say we are telling a true story, when we are really just remembering something to the best of

our ability, or embellishing it, editing it, polishing it, exaggerating elements of it, valorizing our roles, making ourselves out to have been wiser, more perceptive, more virtuous.

There it is. 'Virtue'. The crux of this essay. What is the virtue of describing a two-dimensional representation of reality as 'virtual'? Isn't a screen a screen? Large or small, made of glass or bed sheets, the screen holds an image, a representation, of something that is not present. Whether the image is generated by a 16mm movie projector or a television broadcast studio or a computer, there is no escaping the fact of the screen; all these forms of transmission are two-dimensional, existing on a flat plane. To be sure, there are qualitative differences among all these media, but the images are all animations on screens.

Masaccio (among others) may have figured out how to create the illusion of depth in a painting, but he didn't call his paintings 'virtual paintings'. They were just another kind of painting. He was comfortable leaving it at that. And painting benefited by this innovation.

Now, of course, we have computer technology that can animate the flat plane in remarkable ways, creating extraordinary depth of field, albeit within the limitations of those electronic screens. Yet, what can be done on those screens is what film has done for well over a century: take us different places in no time at all, enlarge a thing to the point where we can see features we couldn't previously see, switch viewpoints instantly, superimpose images, multiply images, stretch images, cascade images, and on and on. All this is the film- and video-maker's art. It's a long and hallowed tradition taking us from the Lumière brothers, through Jean Cocteau, Jean Renoir, Luis Buñuel, Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, to Lina Wertmüller, Steven Soderbergh, Wes Anderson, Spike Lee, Ang Lee, Jane Campion, and such visual artists as Bill Viola, Bruce Nauman, Andy Warhol, and all the rest of the animators of one kind of screen or another.

But now, we are told, we can do 'virtual performance'.

Why the term 'virtual performance' when the medium has none of the virtues of live performance: changes in air currents as performers move, emission and inhalation of chemicals released by performers, the feel of the crowd (audience) – the collective experience, the feel of the volume of space within the performance room or hall, the vibrancy and nuance of color in the real world, the feeling of actual distance among performers, actual distance travelled in actual space? None of these virtues belongs to the animated screen of a 'virtual' performance.

What I object to in the term 'virtual' applied to computer animations (and I'm using this word as applicable to any moving image on a flat plane) is that it implies that it's unlike all the other animations of surfaces – that it is categorically different than, say, the cave paintings at Lascaux. I worry

that if we let this slide, if we allow this delusion, we will stop caring what we are holding in our hands and what we are not, that we will lose our sense of proportion, our appreciation of the subtlety of the sensual world, substituting for it a desiccated surface of fascinations and spectacle without depth and breadth of sensation. We will lose our ability to feel the weight of the particular object, distinguish its patina, appreciate its richness of character. We might begin to believe (as some video gamers do) that the paltry array of choices we are given within a computer program is 'virtually' the same as the staggering array of choices available to us in the actual world, and that an animation of a dancer is virtually the same as an actual dancer. Worse, we might begin not to care that our array of choices is minuscule. We might get comfortable in these limited 'virtual' worlds. We might start finding the windowless basement preferable to the chaotic and wild world outside.

But here we are, stuck with this term 'virtual', no doubt chosen by the denizens of Silicon Valley to romanticize their work, as the MIT robotics engineers did in my 'true' story above.

I think the word is expressive of a longing for a real world that feels increasingly remote as civilized life shields us more and more from contact with nature, from its dangers and virtues. We don't want to admit we're in a kind of prison, that modern life has made us fear the dark and blunted our senses, that we move from one room to another room via a mobile room (a vehicle) to another room where we sit and stare into yet another room (the computer or phone) and subordinate our imaginations to those of the programmers who decide how many choices we have and what buttons we need to push in what sequence in order to get our reward (as Pavlov's dogs did).

Performance has always been, for me, a way to revive nature in the room. Bodies dealing with other bodies, breath mingling with breath, eyes flashing, volumes of air disturbed with every gesture, every move, sound bouncing off the ceilings and walls, the hand of the drummer shaken with each hit of the drum, the room shaken with each hit of the drum, the ground shaken with each footfall.

The French used to open every theatrical performance by pounding a staff on the stage floor three times. It was an announcement that the show was starting, but also a way of shocking the audience into life. There are Japanese theatre and dance troupes that have their performers get on their hands and knees to wash the stage before every performance, to become intimate with the floor, to feel it as something unique; not just any stage, but a stage they have crawled across, cleansed of the dross of previous performances, readied for new revelations.

And now COVID-19 has hit. And here we are, performing artists – dancers, musicians, actors – wondering how to continue, how to recapitulate the virtues of live performance under this house arrest, wondering what to

pound on, what to clean, what ground we can stand on that will support some revelation.

Which brings me to *Breathing at the Boundaries*, a dance/video collaboration among the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company under Margaret Jenkins' choreographic direction, cinematographer Alexander V. Nichols, composer Paul Dresher, poet Michael Palmer, and writer performer Rinde Eckert (me). Kelly Del Rosario served as the assistant to Jenkins and the voice of the dancers in this collaboration.

All the collaborators, except me, live in San Francisco (or its environs). I was required to quarantine myself for a week after flying in from New York.

At the beginning of this collaboration, we intended it to be a live-streamed event, with five performers, masked and socially distanced. Only the dancers who felt comfortable taking the risk were rehearsing (masked) in a large studio so everyone could be at least six feet apart. The rest would be videotaped. They would create dances in their apartments or on the rooftops of their apartments, or in open spaces. Some of these dances would become duets – in reality, solos built in response to the videotaped solos, then broadcast simultaneously during the live-streamed event. Videos of dancers from other parts of the world – Kolkata, Israel, China – would be projected as well.

Much of the music would be live, with the band (Paul and percussionist Joel Davel) playing in a loft next to the stage. Alex Nichols came up with an elegant design consisting of hanging panels on which the videos of the remote dancers could be projected, along with any other footage he supplied. A poetic text of Michael's served as an initial prompt for the development of movement, narrative and poetic content. I developed a character and context (a janitor in an abandoned office building) that would further frame the experience. So, we had frames within frames within frames. We would all be in a box (a theatre) streaming into a box (the computer screen) telling a story about the walls of a box (the office building) and the denizens, both real and projected who were boxed in (masked and distanced) by the circumstances of the times.

Then one day Margaret came in and dolefully announced that one of the dancers had been rushed to the hospital with appendicitis. Meanwhile the pandemic took an upward turn. We had to regroup and decide whether we could continue at all, and if so, how. We realized, for safety's sake we would have to suspend rehearsals for two-weeks and get re-tested before returning. Given the change in schedule, one of the live dancers had to pull out. This left us with three remaining live dancers and me on the actual stage floor. The remaining 'live' dancers no longer felt comfortable with the long hours and close proximity that a live stream event would demand. We would essentially have to create a film of a live performance.

This would put an added burden on Alex's shoulders. He would have to

replan all the camera moves, restructure and reedit the videos, and shoot some new footage in light of the new character of our work. Meanwhile, Margaret, Paul, Michael, Kelly, and I would contemplate additions to and redactions of the text, music, and movement. It was clear that I would have to take a more active role as a dancer in the piece.

We were depressed by the prospect of having to abandon our original idea, but hopeful that the ghost of the imagined livestreamed event would be evident in the work – the original intent (manifest in the choices, words, music, movement and set design), adding yet another layer (another box?) to the piece. And we would still be in that same room dancing on that same floor with actual distance between us, actual volumes of air being moved by actual dancers while the music of actual musicians bounced off actual walls and bodies.

The extra weeks of contemplation ended up making the piece stronger. My role became more interesting and the character of the piece as a whole came into clearer view. Alex was able to shoot some new footage and expand elements he'd already had in play. Paul had more time to consider musical emendations, as well.

The key for us, was to stay mindful of the actual, to stay mindful of what we had lost of the living performance, to stay mindful of our longing – mindful of what we actually held in our hands and what we didn't. We wouldn't pretend that the world was not what it was. Performers on the actual stage would be masked; they would keep their distance (with the exception of two of them who were living together).

I'm reminded of a word in English: 'cenotaph'. It refers to a plaque, stone, or any other marker commemorating the death of a person whose corpse has been lost. (It is used primarily for deaths at sea). Perhaps Michael Palmer's prompt to the company and collaborators might be pertinent here:

> Clear day, fierce sun. By the lake, a woman dips her hand in an urn. She is fashioning a spiral. She is fashioning a spiral of human ashes in the sand.
> Again and again she dips her hand in the urn, and with care she adds to the spiral, beginning at its center, its heart, its fixed point, and drawing the form outward. The sand glistens with salt. A ritual? An act of grace?
> It is a coil, she thinks, a mortal coil. A helix she thinks, single. She distributes the ashes as if sowing seeds, but more slowly, more deliberately.
> She thinks briefly of a spiral stair, wherever it may lead. She tries to remember whose ashes these are. Perhaps once she knew – someone close to her she's quite certain.
>
> She is a thousand miles from home, at the edge of a lifeless lake. Or are the crystals growing there alive? Soon enough the tide will come in, and the spiral will be gone.

The text, Michael tells us, was occasioned by the story of a friend who made a ritual of spreading the ashes of her friend in a place that would have had meaning for both of them. We are being made aware of what is missing at the same time as we celebrate the spiral of ashes, the actuality of it, its actual ephemerality in the world of wind and water. Ashes become a spiral become part of the lake floor. (Burial at sea?).

Our piece, then, was a kind of cenotaph: a celebration of what is there (images moving on a surface before our very eyes), and what is only remembered to have been there (living dancers in actual places, places with weather, with moving volumes of actual air).

Which brings me back to the word 'virtual' and the importance I have attached in this essay to making critical distinctions between what we call a thing and what it may or may not be.

There is, in my opinion, no such thing as 'virtual performance'. There is live performance and recorded performance. The former takes place in an environment with all of that environment's attendant virtues: actual volume, actual bodies, and actual pounding, on actual floors. The latter has its own virtues: flexibility of viewpoint, allusion to diverse environments, montage, superimposition of images, special effects. But the latter possesses almost none of the virtues of the former. So, to suggest that they are 'virtually' the same is absurd and misses the point.

Missing the point is what concerns me most in the devaluation of language. So much of our lives is spent missing the point of any given moment.

A simple story: I'm driving along at a reasonable rate of speed. Suddenly a car traveling at a much higher speed swerves in front of me, scaring me. I curse the driver, I fume, I become upset. Then, I ask myself some basic questions:

> When you decided to get in the car and drive down this highway, were you under the impression that the traffic would be predictable? Did you think that this many cars each driven by a different person, with different desires, different levels of skill, different temperaments, each distracted by different life issues, would, on entering this highway suddenly become part of a coordinated, orderly, efficient procession? You are, right now, like someone who, wading into a river, complains about getting wet. Drivers like the one you are angry at are part of the nature of traffic. If you don't want to be subject to the nature of traffic, don't drive. If you don't want to get wet, don't jump in the river.

We call something by a name (a metaphor) then we become deeply attached to the metaphor. We forget what we were talking about in the first place. We start arguing over the name we give the object in question and completely ignore the object in question.

So, 'virtual' is not what it thinks it is. It isn't qualifying its object (as in 'virtual reality' or 'virtual performance'). It's qualifying a feeling, or a desire, or perhaps a longing. It expresses, for me, the longing for something real in a world increasingly full of facsimiles. It is no less a facsimile, but in wanting to be something more, it is an exceedingly human expression.

Breathing at the boundaries is what we are all doing right now. We are not in this world and we are not *not* in this world. And yet here we are, breathing, taking real steps in real rooms in real cities in a real world where a real virus lives with us and probably always will. We have real desire to be together, to dance together to sing together, to laugh together, to eat together, to understand something together, to see the same beauty together, in the same room, on a stage, on a wall, or on, yes (I nonetheless proclaim), a computer screen. So 'virtual' art might not actually have any objective meaning, but if it makes us look, we might see something that moves us. And through that experience of being moved we might be changed and, in turn, change the world.

My contention is only that if we're clear about what we are actually looking at and what we are not, what we actually hold and what we only imagine we hold, what our actual choices are as opposed to what we are told are our choices, our effect on the world will be more conscious, more fulfilling, and more compassionate. In short, we will be more virtuous.*

* *Breathing at the Boundaries*, a dance/video collaboration among the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company under Margaret Jenkins' choreographic direction, cinematographer Alexander V. Nichols, composer Paul Dresher, poet Michael Palmer, and writer performer Rinde Eckert.

Antonio Pizzo*

Performing/Watching Artificial Intelligence on Stage

Abstract

In the last two decades, we have observed the experimenting with Artificial Intelligence algorithms as a tool for performances. From the early tests, mostly carried out in the Universities' Labs, to the first public performances, the practice has produced enough evidence to consider the implications, both from the point of view of the design and of the reception. Computer scientists have used performance and drama to test the potential of AI. Artists have used AI to express a new criticism to both presence and disembodiment. As robots became relevant in our society, they walked their first steps on stage; Artificial Agents have been dialoguing with actors; some algorithms have managed the interaction among participants in the interactive performances.
Therefore, we can foresee a new multifaceted practice in theatre, and this may further affect the notion of live event. Yet, the analysis of this practice is not relevant only for the creators but may open new consideration from the point of view of the audience experience. The notion of the "here and now" that instantiated the aesthetic of performance as relation between performer and spectator, might be reconsidered in the light of the artificial agency of the algorithm.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; algorithm; artificial agents; intermediality; drama; audience

1. Introduction: Algorithm, Agents, Robots

In the last two decades we have seen enough examples of algorithms and Artificial Intelligence along the contemporary history of theatre and performance, at least to start wondering if any new relevant elements emerge to the practice. Rather than defining an overall general meaning of their presence, in this paper we wish to verify how they participate in the dramaturgy of the live event. Yet, before we appraise the use of algorithm and Artificial Intelligence both from the point of view of the contents' creation (author and performer) and from that of the reception (audience), it is worth to prompt the basics of these novel protagonists in the theatrical performance.

The simple definition of algorithm is a finite sequence of instructions to perform a task. One of the most used examples is the recipe for baking a

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cake: given some inputs (the ingredients), there is a sequence of instructions (the preparation) that produce the expected output (the cake) (Harel 2004; Cleland 2001). Clearly, the algorithms in computers have by now reached a high level of complexity; they contain a vast number of features such as the conditional role if/then/else, and loops, and variables, and values to consider. However, one has always to remember that algorithms are instructions that describe actions to be executed.

We can continue with the recipe example to define other elements included in the wide topic that usually falls under the term Artificial Intelligence (shortened in AI from now on), thus stretching the basic notion of algorithm toward more specific applications. In brief, we can describe the artificial agent as the one who does not only know the instructions, but also identifies the content of your fridge, detects your cooking appliances, has the goal of baking, and deploys a plan that will allow the delivery of the recipe (maybe it also knows that you are short on flour and you must go shopping). In other words, the agent is able to build a plan with all the needed actions, according to a given situation, to yield the projected outcome. Yet this agent might prefer to select only organic ingredients or can describe each operation using classical examples form cooking books. In other words, the agent can be programmed to show some personality traits that will characterize its actions.

Finally, the robot is the one that is left in the kitchen baking the cake (enacting the planned actions) while you have a drink with your friends before dinner. No matter if the robot resembles a human being or it is a very complex cooking appliance, the important fact is that it will be able to interact with the physical world. It may have a vocal interface that asks your confirmation before beginning each step of the process, and it could also show happiness when the cake is done.

To sum up: the algorithm describes, through some formal language, the instructions to execute actions to yield a predicted outcome. The artificial agent is based on algorithms that allow us to reach a given goal thanks to plans that are based on the specific configuration of facts; the robot is rooted in the ability of the agent but is mainly characterized by its power to interface with the real world.

Clearly, these examples overlook the fundamental question of all the knowledge needed for a machine to function: for example, an instruction such as 'beat the eggs', in a recipe, implies that the machine 'knows' how to execute the action 'beating' and 'knows' what an 'egg' is. The firsts examples of AI were based on explicitly described knowledge (i.e., a human operator coding that knowledge in some formal language). More recently, there are special algorithms that allow the machine to learn from example (i.e., we can show ten images of eggs until the computer creates its 'idea' of egg). This is called 'machine learning'. In late years, thanks to a further development in

the configuration of computational systems (mainly, the neural network), the machine can learn autonomously: fed with thousand hours of TV cooking shows, the machine can learn about baking, and even invent a new cake.

Although those definitions are broad and simple, and even if in real implementation they are often indistinguishable from each other, they are to be taken into account when we discuss the elements of AI in drama and theatre.

There are examples (that we will discuss later) in which the performance puts the emphasis on the instruction (such as Annie Dorsen's *A Piece of Work*), others where the centre of attention is the autonomous agent (such as Susan Broadhurst's character Jeremiah in *Blue Bloodshot Flowers*), and others where the focus is on the presence of robots and machines that take the place of the actors (such as Marcel·lì Antünez Roca's robots in *POL*). And there are even examples in which the computer learns from the actions of the performer and starts participating to the performance (such as *Discrete Figure* by Daito Manabe, Kyle McDonald and Elevenplay dance group).

In the last two decades, we have witnessed an increase in experimenting with AI and algorithms as a tool for performances. However, we may also recall earlier experiments. Why should not we consider *ELIZA*, the first chatbot created in 1966, as the first drama improvisation between a human being and a computer? After all, Weizenbaum, the author, resorted to drama when he explained the program: "Like the Eliza of *Pygmalion* fame, it can be made to appear even more civilized, the relation of appearance to reality, however, remaining in the domain of the playwright" (Weizenbaum 1966, 36). *ELIZA* was paired with a more general effort to bend the newly born mainframe computers toward creativity. In the same decade, in fact, we recall the first examples of automatic story generation. In the early Sixties, linguist Joseph E. Grimes programmed an IBM computer, at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, to generate stories (Ramos et al. 2020; Ryan 2017). For the first time, a machine worked as a storyteller, and produced short stories (just few lines) that made sense for the reader. In 1965 A. Michael Noll used the early computer animation technology to create the first example of computer-generated ballet at the Bell Telephone Laboratories, Incorporated (Noll 2016), where a carefully arranged composition of lines and dots represented a group of dancers (three males and three females) moving on a squared stage. Besides, the whole history of online chat, and the continuous spreading of chatbot, might be intended as a form of drama co-creation between the users and the artificial agents. In the late Nineties, as matter of fact, Nina LeNoir interpreted the role-play world of MUD (the multi-user domains) as a territory that challenges the notion of player and actor (LeNoir 1999). Playing an online text-based adventure and reacting in real time to other players (human or artificial), configured a brand-new kind of performance, in which the skills of a playwright merged with the talents of an actor.

Contemporary dance has been the first to investigate the power of algorithm. In fact, it was the perfect setting to experiment with computer generated music in a live event, but it proved to be also apt to practice with algorithmic driven choreographies, and to test the presence of computer guided elements on stage (Menicacci and Quinz 2001; Sagasti 2019). Notoriously, Merce Cunningham used the software LifeForms to create choreography since 1991, but we may also recall that in 1985 the composer Michael McNaab created the score for *Invisible Cities* (Memorial Auditorium, Stanford University) where the choreograph Brenda Way included the movement of a robotic arm (McNabb 1991). We can track back an uninterrupted development of the integration between dance and algorithms; this assimilation usually took the form of a network of software and devices that allow the dancers to interact with the media contents. Notably, a famous software for interactive digital performance (Isadora) is the offspring of the collaboration between the media artist/programmer Mark Coniglio and Troika Ranch dance company.

Complex algorithms have been used in theatre practice also to enhance the intermediality of the performance. There is a whole category of software designed to gain computational control over a performance, and these types of computer applications have played a key role in the history of the interrelation between performance and computer science/engineering (Birringer 2007).

Theatre and performance came along soon after dance. Take for example the case of Marcel·lí Antúnez Roca's *Afasia* (1998). The artist joined the engineer Sergi Jordà to create soundbots (robots that work as remote-controlled musical instruments) driven thanks to a wearable device (the so-called dress-keleton). For this purpose, Antúnez Roca also produced the first version of a software that runs all elements of the stage technology (video, sounds, lights, robots); this was further developed and named after a 2002 performance (*POL*) (Antúnez Roca 2014; Pizzo 2016). POL software aimed to provide the performer with full control over the entire web of technology onstage.

There is a large list of this type of software; in their variety, they share the goal of capturing and analyzing the events and actions, but they can also be used to create hypermedia, audiovisual, or, more generally, multimedia events. In all cases, they are based on algorithm and may include some form of autonomous intelligence (Damiano et al. 2019).

In 1997, Claudio Pinhanez and Aaron Bobick presented *It/I: An Interactive Theatre Play* at the MIT Media Lab. Again, like *ELIZA*, this was more a test for the application of intelligent algorithms, rather than a proposal for a new theatrical genre. Nevertheless, it offered a glimpse of the integration between AI and dramatic theatre. In this performance, the artificial character was not partaking in a conversation, but was a sort of hidden entity reacting to the human character's actions by means of sounds, lights, and video pro-

jections onstage. The play was composed of four short scenes in which the computer presented the actor with several challenges. Compared to ELIZA, the seminal step forward, in this case, was the fact that the agent, although not personified by a specific line of text or by some anthropomorphic image, was proving that the algorithm could produce a dramatic agency. Rather than reacting to the user's stimuli, as *ELIZA* did, the autonomous agent had its own initiative and cued the human actor to react accordingly. Therefore, the agent – as a dramatic character – was manifested by its own intentionality (Bobick and Pinhanez 1998; Pinhanez and Bobick 2002).

This opened a new thread of research that saw the intentionality of the action as the core element of the dramatic performance to be implemented in the software. Here the early experiments of story generation merged with the goal of creating a software driven agents' behaviour, and this was a step toward an interactive dramatic digital narrative.

In 2005, Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern released the first fully operating dramatic game: *Façade*. The player participated in a dramatic improvisation with two artificial character (Trip and Grace, a married couple) who invited he/she for a drink at their apartment. The game is played in first person on a computer screen where the two characters appeared in cartoons-like shape but talked with real voices (recorded non synthesized) and – most important – showed believable human behaviours. During the game, soon the player realized that the couple was experiencing a marriage crisis and he/she had to cope with the arguments and quarrelling (Mateas and Stern 2007). *Façade* has been one of the upfront experiments to use AI to create a dramatic experience; it puts the player in a situation that resembles a theatre improvisation and is not based on typical game style rewards. Indeed, for his research on this topic, Mateas coined the terms Expressive AI to define a specific area of experimenting with AI and Arts.

2. The Author and the Agent: Performing AI

The early examples that we have recalled so far, were born in university research labs or have stemmed out of the collaboration between scientists and artists. More recently, and as a consequence of more powerful computers and more approachable programming languages, there has been a new wave of artists for whom programming is the central part of their own creative process.

In 2010 Annie Dorsen presented *Hello Hi There*, a performance where two chatbots were used as autonomous player on stage. The piece took a cue from a famous debate between Michael Foucault and Noam Chomsky about the nature of language and human creativity (broadcasted by Dutch TV in

1971) and presented the chatbots dialoguing on stage. As we know, chatbots were invented to dialogue with humans, therefore watching two machine dialoguing with each other produced a hilarious and yet disconcerting effect. Two years later, Dorsen launched her influential idea of 'Algorithmic Theatre' that has proved to be pervasive in the debate, because it foresees a shift in the very nature of the performance (Dorsen 2012). Although, as we have seen, she was not the first to exploit the power of computation in live events, nevertheless she has been successful in embedding the opportunities of playing with algorithm within a coherent and steadily developing artistic career, putting the focus on the cultural, social, and political implications of those opportunities (although, leaning toward the dystopian vision of human computer interaction).

In brief, it is possible to say that, from the early tests in the university labs till the first public performances, the practice has produced a number of evidences, enough to consider their implications both from the point of view of the design and of the reception.

On one side, it is true that computer scientists have used performance and drama to test the potential of AI. In fact, the framework of theatre and drama represents a rich repository of human behaviours and it is a perfect match for the challenge of an AI that aims to create a seamless, lifelike, autonomous interaction between computer and humans. Yet, on the other side, artists have used the new opportunities provided by AI as a new criticism to both presence and disembodiment in theatre (and in the society as a whole).

The pervasiveness of computers, algorithms and AI in our life has been mirrored in the creation of theatre works. As robots became relevant in our society, they walked their first steps on stage; from their birth, artificial agents have been dialoguing with actors; at the dawn of personal computing, algorithms have managed the interaction among participants in interactive performances.

No wonder that most of the time something as pervasive as the algorithm is staged, there is some critique to its function in our life. As much the appearance of video on stage in the Eighties was implicated with the mass media universe, there is no doubt that the representation of algorithm is relevant because of the cultural and political relevance that it has gained in the last decades. And this raises questions about how technologically advanced societies relate to the complexity of the world they have created.

For example, in 1999 Blast Theory's *Desert Rain* engaged the spectators in a mixed reality environment, merging videogame and performance where the theme was to revise the true/false opposition in the mediatization of the Gulf War (Giannachi 2004). Jeremiah, the artificial agent protagonist of *Blue Bloodshot Flowers* (2001), "questions orthodox notions of origin and identity" as much as "subverts assumptions of reproduction and representation"

(Broadhurst 2006, 144). In 2008 robot were fully operational as characters in the famous *I, worker* by Hirata Oriza, where the typical situation of husband and wife was revisited thanks to the presence of a mirroring couple of artificial servants; the overall "message concerns the loneliness and the individualism in which human race has locked itself by means of new technologies" (Toscano 2019, 160).

Overtime, the use of algorithms and AI applications in theatre became a way to consider the consequences of their spreading in contemporary society.

Annie Dorsen reckons that, in her algorithmic theatre, the power relies on "the tension between the understructure, i.e., – she explains – the computer code written by my collaborators and me, and the surface content chosen by the algorithm, i.e., the particular words spoken or notes sung". In her view, the interesting part of those performance is "the interplay between the rules and the results, and how that interplay activates or frustrates the desire of the audience to make meaning from what they see and hear". This certainly brings upfront "the epistemological crisis that algorithms have brought in our culture, and the political consequences of a deep, and ever-deepening confusion about appearances, illusions, fakes, and copies" (Dorsen 2019, 114). Yet, besides the political stance of this performance, the tension, quoted by Dorsen resonates the well-known tension between the written text and its performance on stage.

On one side, this approach aims at gaining an understanding about algorithms by following the tradition of selecting drama as a tool to analyze and expose relevant issue of contemporary society. On the other side, this approach tends to obliterate that also the "surface content chosen by the algorithm" is the consequence of author's choice. The tension quoted by Dorsen has been fueling much theatre works of the whole last century, where the interpretation of some human being (director, actor, …) managed the nexus between the text and the performance. However, Dorsen is right in pointing out this tension because the distinction (and autonomy) that these two notions gained in the twentieth century, is blurred in the case of algorithm, where the difference between the code and the execution seems much more an abstract logic that an instantiated reality. As we have hinted at the beginning of this paper, the very notion of algorithm dims the gap between the instruction and the execution, because the former must precisely describe the latter. Although this is common sense in the abstract world of mathematics, it resonates differently in the world of dramatic theatre. For this reason, the emergence of the use of algorithm in performance became an intriguing subject for artists and scholars. It challenges a core notion rooted in the contemporary culture and forecasts an unknown future for performance.

One of the challenges to algorithmic theatre, as noted by Ulf Otto, is the question of control that plays a key role in understanding the algorithm as

"deeper than its stage appearance; the challenge concerns theatre itself, not its aesthetics but its ontology… What is at stake with the advent of an algorithmic culture is a new regime of power . . . that foregrounds the relation between aesthetics and organization" (2019, 125).

Undeniably, control is a relevant issue because it crosses the notion of authorship. Rather than arguing if the known elements of drama and the codes of performance undergo some transformation, either by disappearance or augmentation, the notion of control looks for an insight on how they are organized. It works as a bridge between the traditional concepts of authoring, directing, and the notion of algorithm. Moreover, it helps to consider the performance as process rather than as a datum. Therefore, the question of control functions as an analytical tool to consider the differences in the procedure that runs the performance. And this seems a more appropriate approach for a technology like algorithm that has the control at its own core.

Otto has built his argument based on the Berlin based Turbo Pascal's production of *Algorithmen* (2014). The whole performance consisted in the rearrangement of the spectators' seats according to different sorting rules. The production used very simple technology, such as a printer that distributes instructions, yet "this implementation of algorithms in the performance space produced a situation that was no longer oscillating between meaning and experience, between semiotics and performativity, as theatre had been during the better part of the 20th century" (Otto 2019, 125). His argument is clearly rooted in the understanding of the aesthetic of drama as based on meaning and semiotic, and that of performance as hinged on experience, and he stresses that this is the sort of binarism that had guided the theatre debate in the last century.

In algorithmic theatre – Otto continues – this opposition is reshaped because the automatic procedure bridges the "signs and body", because there is a meaning (a kind of narrative that makes sense, like in drama) that is directly instantiated in the materiality of the event (the performance). As we said, computational procedure reduces the distance between the written code and its execution; and, in practical application, the two notions overlap. Under this light, we might conclude that the issue of relation between text (meaning) and performance (experience) is overridden by the algorithmic theatre (to use Dorsen's definition) because, in this case, the text is the performance.

The new multifaceted digital practice in theatre has brought new advances in how we consider the live event. The works stems out of an intense transdisciplinary collaboration between dramatists, directors, and computer scientists. The very notion of authorship in theatre is challenged by the idea that the algorithm may be seen as text and performance in the same moment. Furthermore, the design of the performance departs from the traditional practice of the linear ordering of actions; and the score of the live

event is no longer the sequencing of dramatic units. Instead, writing the performance resembles the creation of a hypertext where each node may be the start of different continuations; moreover, the dramaturgy of the performance gets closer to the creation of a rule-based procedure, such as the well-known conditional statements (if/then/else) in programming languages.

Drama and performance, as we know, are centred on the actions of some agent; yet the latter finds a new light within the realm of algorithms. The artist David Rokeby notes that "algorithms often work in tandem with human creativity" but when they simulate aspects of human behavior the situation changes: "the algorithmic performer differs . . . from a human performer in that it will perform its defined behavior with a rigorousness that is non-human. It creates a sort of mirror through which to reexamine what it means to be human . . . The algorithm presents a truly alien subjective perspective on familiar human acts, which can have the fascinating effect of making visible to us again aspects of our humanity that have disappeared into invisibility through familiarity" (Rokeby 2019, 94-5).

The staging of autonomous agent, or any autonomous algorithm, usually brings in a non-human quality that is perceived by the audience as the effect of computation. Yet the well-crafted artificial agent, even if it might mimic the human, (being a machine) will be entirely constructed. Unlike what happens with the human performer, the behaviours of the artificial agent are a direct output of the author's work; even when they take the audience's reactions as an input for their action. So far, thus, the creation of an artificial agent (far from giving birth to a person) looks like the work of a dramatist who can have complete control over the manifestation of the character.

Indeed, also in this case, the intervention of the algorithm shifts the paradigm to which we are accustomed. The use of artificial agents collapses the difference between character and performer. Again, the gap between the written instruction and the manifestation is dimmed, and this impacts on the configuration of the performance. For example, imagine how the notion of live performance could be affected by a computational system that allows the author to design real time actions for the stage (here and now), as much as the modern technology allow the graphic artists to draw characters for an animated movie.

In *Discrete Figures* (2018) five dancers "interact with cubes of images and light, drones, cameras, and machine learning algorithms that emulate them in live time" (Pearlman 2020, 56). There is a moment when "a camera projects a performer's avatar, which appears as a shiny blob. The "blob" learns through live time algorithmic processing of the dancer's movements to simulate, and eventually becomes the exact replica of the dancer . . . The avatar emerges from algorithmic processes that come into being in front of the audience. It creates a displayed virtual self in motion with an actuated self

unique each time it is enacted" (Pearlman 2020, 57). Clearly, *Discrete Figures* was based on the relation between the real and the synthetic dancer, yet it gives insight in the possibility that an intelligent system may produce in real time a new synthetic actor able to dance or enact a drama autonomously.

Rather than foreseeing the obliteration of humans in the live event, this use of AI in theatre rather calls for a new generation of authors. Annie Dorsen believes that the algorithm poses three questions: the first relates to the way theatre can avoid falling into the fashion of "tech-boosterism or gizmo-art"; the second concerns the possibility of developing a new kind of dramaturgy that "accounts for the complex embedded systems of cognition we are living in"; but the third question asks "What would acting look like if it didn't rely on traditional oppositions between realistic and artificial, spontaneous and rehearsed, true and false?" (Dorsen 2019, 119).

This seems the hardest question to answer. Evidently, we are describing the merging of theatre and AI as the rise of a kind of interactive, autonomous environment in which the performance (at least until now) is the outcome of the dialogue between live and artificial agents. Therefore, the performers for this kind of digitally augmented theatre stage must learn to consider this form of interactivity. Learning the lines in a text or the movements in a choreography would not be enough, and the performer should familiarize with the interaction roles, as a game player learns how to play in a new videogame.

For instance, the actress protagonist of *DoPPioGioco*, produced by CIRMA in 2018, had to learn to collaborate with an algorithm that was there to prompt her with the portion of story to be told, once the system had detected the audience's emotional response to the previous part of the narrative (Damiano et al. 2019). But also, the author had to adopt a new form of writing to compile a network of narrative units, each tagged with an emotion that he was intending to elicit in the audience, making sure that each possible narrative path was a well-formed story.

Otto thinks that "Dorsen's 'algorithmic theatre', like many media performance, re-erects traditional theatre scaffolds to re-perform its by now canonical critique". Yet, he thinks that changing the traditional aesthetic parameters might not be so interesting at all. Once more, for Otto the real core issue is agency: "Referring to Aristotle first and Brecht later, [Dorsen] assumes that theatre is generally about action, and action for her is fundamentally based on making a decision – that is (again according to Dorsen), choosing from alternatives" (Otto 2019, 135). In the notions of action and intentionality, Otto sees a core concept to approach the match between algorithm and theatre. As we have seen, intentionality has been put in a new light by the implementation of automatic procedures that can design and execute complex planning. Hence, given that action is the key notion for

drama, and given that intentionality in drama has been rendered mainly as the human ability to make choices, the authors are driven to reconsider the notion of drama once that 'doing actions' and 'making choices' may be artificial processes in a computer.

3. The Audience: Watching AI

Yet, the impact of algorithms and AI in theatre is not relevant only for the creators but may also open a new critique from the point of view of the audience. Miriam Felton-Dansky wonders: "What matters more is what it is like to watch [algorithms], and what it means that we are doing so" (Felton-Dansky 2019, 69). To try to answer that question, I would suggest that our 'watching' depends on what is represented, and the meaning comes out of 'where' the audience is in the act of watching the algorithms at work. In other words, I do not think we can define one overall meaning of the presence of the algorithm on stage as much as we cannot define an overall meaning for the appearance of any proactive entity as such (human being or animal). This attribution will always be the results of how the relation between the performance and the audience is configured. Yet, Felton-Dansky brings out a more important problem when, recalling her attendance at Dorsen's *Hello Hi There*, she writes that the performance "was already asking something urgently new of its audiences, something that, even if our conscious mind were occupied with the pleasure of watching nonhuman interlocutors engage in earnestly silly behavior, also required us to inhabit a mode of being that would become increasingly necessary for survival in the year that followed" (Felton-Dansky 2019b, 67). In this excerpt we can appreciate the four main issues that are currently under discussion regarding the act of watching AI on stage.

First, and very simply, to be perceived AI must be – somehow – manifested on stage. If this goes without saying for any other element of the performance, it isn't a trivial matter for the computational procedure whose manifestation may not be patent as such. It must be noted that the use of AI (as of any other technology) doesn't involve as such a shift in the theatrical codes: AI must gain some form of presence in the dramaturgy of the event, in the setting, in order to be relevant among the other elements. In other words, the question does not concern 'using' AI as much as representing AI.

Second, the 'pleasure of watching' technology at play has been usually one of the assets to resort at, in many of the cases along the history of such kind of performance. But it is true that most of the works that we recall as intermedial theatre, rather than take pride in the advancement of digital technologies, brought upfront an implicit or explicit critic to the influence that

those technologies have on our life. For example, the works of The Builders Association, well known for an original form of mixed digital media in their shows, confronted themes such as fake realities, workers' technological exploitation, citizen surveillance. Thus, that 'pleasure' seems to be both amazement and disconcert.

Third, there are the human-like behaviours. This stems out of a more general impact that digitally augmented performance has had on the audience's appraisal abilities. Following Giesekam's definition, the multimedia theatre may be intended as the use of various technological apparatus "that collectively support performances that are otherwise built around fairly traditional understanding of the role of the text and the creation of character". The more recent term intermedia theatre indicates a "more extensive interaction between the performers and various media [that] reshapes notions of character and acting, where neither the live material nor the recorded material would make much sense without the other, and where often the interaction between the media substantially modifies how respective media conventionally function and invites reflection upon their nature and methods" (Giesekam 2007, 8). This shift in the relation between media require a new audience's competence for decoding the intricate web of meaning created by interconnections of live and mediatized performance. Yet, in the case algorithms and AI theatre, the media participates to the representation of an autonomous behaviour in which it is possible to see a level on intentionality. In other words, because intelligent algorithms bring into the intermedial performance e new level of autonomous agency, the audience perceive actions that cannot be directly ascribed to a human agent. Watching non-human agency may mean to recognize the presence of some sort of artificial agent (no matter if it is a chatbot, a robot, a voice, as far it is somehow recognizable). This artificial agency may also be represented through an entity with no resemblance to the human, as for example the chandelier in the musical opera *Death and the Powers* (2010) by Ted Machover. In short, it may be enacted by any device that shows some understandable behaviours related to what is happening on stage. But it can be perceived also as a system that governs the overall structure of the event, like some sort of behind-the-stage entity that interferes with the action (as we have seen for *It/I*). As much the audience makes sense of human actions on stage, it must learn to read into computer generated behaviours.

Forth, and last, there is the broad issue of how algorithms refashion the audience's participation. When David Rokeby remembers his early approaches to interactive design for his installation, he writes: "I was increasingly casting the audience in the role of performer, asking them to activate the work with their movements. The installation was generally silent and invisible until the audience engaged with it. The data generated by their actions were processed by algorithms that generated particular responses

out of the field of possibilities that their code defined" (Rokeby 2019, 89). As matter of fact, when producing algorithmically enhanced live performances, it is common to include the audience in the opera. In other word, the computation introduced interactivity as form of co-creation of the performance. As matter of fact, many reviews and papers that portray digital interactive theatre focus less on the recording of the acting or the plot and more on the what the audience is allowed to do.

Rokeby further specifies: "It was important to me to acknowledge that the audience brings their entire life experience, fears, desires, and confusions to the process of experiencing an artwork. I wanted to make work that acknowledged and opened itself to embracing that contribution" (2019, 89).

Playing with the algorithm, according to Rokeby, does not bring up the randomness of creation, quite opposite; algorithm is approached as a tool for the careful design of the sharing of the event with the audience. Random events can still be part of the work, but the focus shifts toward the investigation of new practices of participation allowed by computation and digital interfaces.

Watching human-like artificial behaviours that are manifested as one of the elements of drama and performance to participate in, as much as taking pleasure from it, is a new asset in the audience's activity.

Nevertheless, there is an effect that must not be overlooked to grasp both the allurement and the uneasiness of algorithms and AI on stage. Otto notes that, "unlike previous media technologies, the digital technologies do not confine themselves to changing what humans can perceive, know, or think, but produce a knowledge that is beyond human access, that is, the world of big data, where only the algorithm can prevail. The effect is that algorithms now know things about us that not only do we ourselves not know but that we cannot even retrace to their origins nor critique because they are based on more than we can process" (Otto 2019, 127).

Maybe it will not be the case in fifty years, but until now, when facing the active presence of some intelligent algorithm, it produces an effect that can be describe as a sort of "grasping the unknown". In other words, the representation of algorithm on stage has to do with the incapacity of grasp it, and – at the very same moment – with the effort to make sense of it. Let us consider for example how Felton-Dansky describes the audience's reading into Dorsen's *Yesterday/Tomorrow*. The performance stages three singers who sing the musical score produced by the algorithm; it begins "with the Beatles' song "Yesterday" and culminate[s] in "Tomorrow" from the musical *Annie*, with an algorithmic procedure leading the singers through each step in between" (Felton-Dansky 2019, 76). Remembering her own response as audience, Felton-Dansky notes: "We recognize that this was the algorithm's plan all along, we recognize the singers' labor in picking their way through

the maze, and we recognize the labor of ourselves as spectators, holding out until 'Tomorrow' come what may" (Felton-Dansky 2019, 78).

This process can be described as the audience 'decoding' the algorithm. In fact, when watching a drama, and maybe having in mind the text or the story, the spectator engages in a very common type of mixed inductive and deductive reasoning. Notably, watching a plot unravelling on stage, the spectator uses general knowledge (about the genre, the historical setting, the author, ...) to deduce information about what is happening. The spectator considers the specific sequence of actions to draw conclusion about what they mean (for example, the boy is courting the girl; therefore, he loves her). In doing so, he/she is also applying an anticipatory reasoning to sketch hypothetical outcomes of the actual arrangement of event (as far as he/she is aware of). This is a source of 'pleasure' because it is the ground where the audience tests its capacity to understand the whole story. No matter how much it fails or succeeds; the pleasure is exactly in the cognitive process of foreseeing what may happen thanks to our problem-solving strategies.

Similarly, this happens when we see the algorithm take control of the events on stage. Once we are made aware that what is happening is the result of a given procedure, we engage in a problem-solving strategy to decode the rules behind that procedure. Like when we read a character that enters the stage, we need to make sense of what the artificial agent (the algorithm) is doing.

Therefore, watching AI on stage includes two facts: first, there must be a perceived intentionality of the algorithm's behaviours; second, the audience does not have a clear insight of the whole rule-based structure that yields that intentionality. Because that intentionality cannot be watched as lines of a written code, therefore the audience's cognition tends to perceive 'liveness' and 'presence' in the actions executed. In other words, the audience tends to embody the action in some autonomous (although synthetic) agency. Otto notes: "As Philip Auslander convincingly showed in 1999, the liveness of theatre was a historical phenomenon, ambivalently relating to television's virtue of not being recorded and at the same time distancing itself from the distance produced by the broadcast. But after years of ongoing debates about this ontology of performance, these discussions are finally of the past, appearing to have been put on ice by a development that fundamentally changed what a record and an archive are" (Otto 2019, 128). Otto defines the unavoidable entanglement of theatre and digital culture not in terms of media devices on stage, but in the cultural shift that algorithmic culture has produced in our everyday experience of reality and social interaction. Thus, the debate on presence has been outdated by the change in 'what a record and an archive are', or, in other words, by the change in the ontology of the real given the pervasiveness of algorithms and AI.

Even if we have so far linked the representation of AI on stage with the presence of some autonomous agency (either as a recognizable agent in front of the audience, or as an entity behind the scenes), we must remember the fact that AI and algorithms may be offered just as a theme. Yet, (maybe even more) in this case too it must be represented by agency on stage. CIRMA has been co-producing a theatre show (*Queer Picture Show*, directed by Irene Dionisio) where the protagonist (the actor Giovanni Ansaldo) is a gender liquid storyteller who recalls the history of queer cinema (helped by several clips from famous movies). Along the show, at given moments, a second character is manifested by a voice who challenges the audience with questions about moral values. The audience is asked to express their stance using a voting paddle; a specifically designed software counts the votes, shows the results, and a content is played accordingly (a clip video, an image, a chunk of text). There are times when the actor reacts against the selected content, and there are times when he consents to it. In the last scene, the artificial agent reveals his identity, but only to allow the audience to see themselves mirrored in a clip that shows a sequence of all the moments when they voted.

This kind of reference to AI as autonomous machine, has a long history. We may think of Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* in 1923 that tells the story of an accountant who is fired because of the introduction of an adding machine that appears on stage in the moment the protagonist is dismissed by his boss. As we have seen, there are works that resort to various technological apparatus to represent the problematic interlink between our life and the power of algorithms. For example, the project *D.A.K.I.N.I.* is described by the creators (the group Ajariots) as "a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary project aimed at investigating and creating dialectic bridges between the theme of Artificial Intelligence, new technologies and contemporary Feminist Theories", with a performance "in which physical theatre and dance-theatre, video projections, interviews and sound experiments will be the key languages of our research . . . How can AI serve Feminist Theory and life? How can women take control of it? What does happen after they take control of it? What do women want to pass on to future generations"? (Pei 2021). Even in cases like *D.A.K.I.N.I*, where the performance makes large use of digital apparatus, AI emerges as a theme rather than a new way to control the production.

Instead, when intelligent algorithms become intertwined with the methodology for carrying out the performance, we may identify a new form of dramaturgy. If, for example, the algorithm takes the form of an autonomous agent, the writing of a dramatic action implies the use of intelligent systems for expressive purposes; the act of writing coincides with the act of coding, and coding a software becomes creative writing. For example, writing a character as *Façade* does, does not consist in defining a specific sequence

of dialogues, but it has to do with defining the rules that govern his/her behaviour, describing the specific type of planning that motivates his/her intentionality, providing him/her with a procedure to recognize and represent emotions. That character will be very much the outcome of all this coding, and his/her performance will vary according to the elements that the author has decided to implement.

The last question to rise is whether the audience may build, with the artificial agents, the same sort of emotional bond that has shaped its relation with characters played by humans. Given the established tradition in cinema where audiences have developed an emotional participation with cartoons and CGI characters, the answer might be positive. Nevertheless, as we said, in theatre lays the question of presence. Therefore, the bond is not with some sort of representation, but with the perception of agency, the intentionality of the act and real time event.

Felton-Dansky resorts to the well-known notion of suspension of disbelief by Coleridge: "an emotional bond between chatbots would be the result of our collective suspension of disbelief – that old theatrical paradigm, couched in double negatives and glittering with new danger in an age of fake news and election interference" (Felton-Dansky 2019, 72).

In dramatic theatre that suspension is commonly applied to the actions that are taking place: i.e., the audience believe that that guy is that character and assume that the actions are motivated by his intentions (the same suspension applies to space, props, etc.).

This does not apply gracefully to the algorithm because its activity cannot be read through the opposition of fiction and reality. What it does is nothing but real. We could accept the algorithm as a prop (like a chair that became *the* chair of Elsinor Castle only because participates in a character's action that depicts it as such). In this case (as the chair) the algorithm enters the fictional world according to how it participates to the action. Yet, the chair does not have any autonomous action, while the algorithm does. This means that also the actions of the algorithm must be 'used' by someone: the actor, the audience, or even the author that have coded it for his/her own purposes.

4. Conclusions

Although it is premature to draw a general conclusion about the intervention of AI on stage, we are keen to reckon the emergence of the autonomous artificial agency as a key fact that impacts both on the notion of authorship and on what we perceive as presence.

Besides we have noted that, from the advent of digitally augmented performance to the rise of AI on stage, there is a sort of substratum of meaning

that hinges of the exposition of technology. Whether it is employed to amuse the audience with high tech solution, or to disconcert them with allusions about the dystopian future of our society, the exposition of technology has become a sort of seduction. Indeed, the perils of resorting to technology to seduce the spectator are becoming more evident. In fact, the Zecora Ura Theatre company has recently challenged the fashion for immersive theatre experience with a post-immersive theatre manifesto that incites to a more politically aware use of technology and that tries to refocus on the intimacy of the relation between actor and spectator (Ramos et al. 2020).

Yet, beside the political and ethical implications of seducing the audience and transforming the experience in a commodity, even if we do not place any judgment on the amusement of watching high tech solution (that is not far away from the enthusiasm for CGI effects in movies), as long we focus on the codes of the dramatic and performative event, there is no doubt that the presence of AI on stage is going to gain more relevance and as such it should catch the attentions of critics and scholars.

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An excerpt of Annie Dorsen's *A Piece of Work* is available on Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/114190127. Excerpts of *Afasia*, *POL* and more Marcel·lì Antünez Roca's performances can be found at the artist's website, http://www.marceliantunez.com/>. Different clips of *Discrete Figure* by Daito Manabe, Kyle McDonald and Elevenplay dance group are available on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hauX-QQhwbgM&feature=emb_logo. There are numerous clips that document Michael Noll's dance animation, for example the one available on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLU2hIV7n_I. More information documentation about Blast Theory's *Desert Rain* is available on their web page, together with a short video trailer, https://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/desert-rain/. The game *Façade* can be still downloaded (Windows operating system only) on Playablstudios, https://www.playablstudios.com/façade. An excerpt from Annie Dorsen's *Hello Hi There* can be seen on Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/49328509. The whole show *I, worker* (2008) by Hirata Oriza, is available within a longer video about Seinendan Theater Company and Osaka University Robot Theater Project (from 23'45'' to 49'45'') on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVPcjuyLfho&feature=emb_logo. An excerpt of Turbo Pascal's *Algorithmen* is available on Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/111923001. An excerpt from Annie Dorsen's *Yesterday/Tomorrow* is available on Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/194698057. Documents and videos about *DoPPioGioco* and other CIRMA's project about theatre and digital technology, are available at the Research page https://www.cirma.unito.it.

Marco Duranti*

The First Greek Tragedy Printed in England: Some Textual and Typographical Notes

Abstract

This article focuses on the first Greek edition of a work of classical antiquity printed in England, namely Euripides' Troades, published by John Day in 1575. This is not a new edition of Euripides' text, but it reproduces the text established in the editions derived from the Aldine one, without any of Willem Canter's 1571 changes. Basing their discussion on a textual and contextual analysis, these notes focus on the book's typographical peculiarities, suggesting that Day's Greek types may have been used later by Dawson. The article also attempts to identify Day's printing purposes and the possible readership of this entirely unusual printing venture.

Keywords: Greek theatrical literature; reception of Greek literature; early modern English culture; reception of Euripides

In the history of the reception of Greek literature in England, the year 1575 is worth remembering. In that year the printer John Day[1] published the Greek text of Euripides' *Troades* (USTC 508002). Beforehand, the publication of Greek texts in the original language was rare, in fact it counted a single book, a work of Christian homiletic literature: John Chrysostom's orations, edited by John Cheke and printed by Reyner Wolfe[2] in 1543 (USTC 503443).[3] Indeed, Day's edition holds a twofold record, as it is both the first English publication of a masterpiece of Greek profane literature and the first single edition of that specific tragedy of Euripides in Europe. Whilst in 1503

[1] https://data.cerl.org/thesaurus/cni00031601 (Accessed 27 April 2021).

[2] https://data.cerl.org/thesaurus/cni00041111 (Accessed 27 April 2021).

[3] If we include devotional texts in our survey, we must add that in 1573 the printer Reyner Wolfe published a *Catechism* in Latin and Greek (ΚΑΤΗΧΙΣΜΟΣ, ἢ πρώτη παίδευσις τῆς Χριστιανῶν εὐσεβείας, τῇ τε Ἑλλήνων καὶ τῇ Ῥωμαίων διαλέκτῳ ἐκδοθεῖσα = *Catechismus, sive prima institutio, disciplinaque pietatis Christianae*, Graece & Latine explicata; USTC 507704). It goes without saying that, given the low survival rate of catechisms, there might have been other editions now lost.

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Troades had been first published with Euripides' other seventeen tragedies by Aldo Manuzio (USTC 828498),[4] and hence in the following editions of the entire Euripidean corpus throughout Europe, it had not yet been published autonomously, unlike other Euripidean plays.[5]

The uniqueness of this book within the English printing environment, which, as different from elsewhere in Europe, had not yet had to deal with with the printing and publishing of Greek, prompts specific analysis. Firstly, it should be understood why the printer decided to publish this tragedy, which raises questions on the context of the publication and its relation to the European and English reception of Euripides. Secondly, we should examine the textual and typographical characteristics of this edition and situate it within the context of other continental editions as well as in relation to current printing practices in England. Finally, one crucial question regards the aims of the printer and the readership he had in mind. As we shall see, this was very probably not a book for scholars, but for learners of the Greek language. I shall argue that this hypothesis allows us to locate Day's *Troades* within the broader context of the apprenticeship of the Greek language and culture in late sixteenth-century England.

The following analysis is meant to offer a first sample of a broader research on the printing and reception of original Greek texts in England. Such a study involves a focus on the cultural context, the purposes of the printers, as well as the formal characteristics of the printed texts. In other words, it will consider the necessarily interconnectedness of the following aspects of early modern printing practices: the reasons behind the printer's selection of the text, his purposes, the Greek types he employed, the editing and textual decisions, and finally his own relation to other English and continental printers. By pointing out the interaction between these various factors, such an analysis will hopefully be able to contribute to the recent debate on the degree of knowledge and scholarship of Greek in early modern England (cf. e.g. Lazarus 2015, Demetriou and Pollard 2017, Pollard 2017).

The frontispiece of the edition under consideration advertises the play as follows: "*ΕΥΡΙΠΙ-|ΔΟΥ ΤΡΩ-|ΑΔΕΣ. | EVRIPIDIS* | Troades. | ¶LONDINI | Apud Ioannem Dayum | 1575. | Cum gratia & priuilegio". The book has 24 leaves, with signatures A-F[4], and contains: A1v: Argument (*hypothesis*) nd list of characters (as in the other editions of Euripides' tragedies), A2r – F3v:

[4] The 1503 Aldine edition is the *princeps* of most Euripides' tragedies, except *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Electra*: the former four plays had already been published in Florence in 1495 by Lorenzo d'Alopa, whereas *Electra* would be published in Rome in 1545 by Antonio Blado.

[5] The list of Euripides' tragedies individually edited in Greek before 1575 in the entire Europe includes *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1520), *Orestes* (1536), *Andromacha* (1537), *Medea* (1539), *Electra* (1545, *princeps*), *Hecuba* (1545), *Alcestis* (1570).

Euripides' *Trojan Women*.[6] As regards the format, it is not specified in the USTC or ESTC entries. However, the reproduction in EEBO shows it to be 14 cm. in height and so plausibly it is in -8°. The only extant copy belonged to the library of Thomas Grenville, a British politician and bibliophile, and is now preserved in the British Library (General Reference Collection G.8570), to which it was donated in 1848. We do not know where and how Grenville acquired the book: the catalogue of his library records that it was in his possession in 1842, when the catalogue itself was printed; however, it does not provide any information on the book's provenance (Payne and Foss 1842, 237). Nor does the copy in the British library have signs of use or marginalia which can help us reconstruct its ownership.[7]

Considering that the frontispiece does not tell us much about the printer's intent, and that no other paratext clarifies it any further, the first question that needs to be answered is why Euripides' *Troades* was chosen for publication. Our knowledge of the cultural environment of early modern England allows us to conjecture a specific interest in this tragedy.[8] The way was paved by the growing fortune of Seneca's tragedies since the 1550s, when "there was intense interest in the author, especially at the universities and early English law schools, the Inns of Court, where students and fellows translated most of the dramas and performed a series of Senecan and neo-Senecan plays" (Winston 2006, 30). The Roman dramatist's tragedies dealt with the nature of kingship, with its virtues and vices, as well as its dangers (37). Moreover, they warned against the constant threat of abuse of power and tyranny. Interestingly enough, the first Senecan tragedy translated in England by the hand of Jasper Heywood in 1559 is *Troades*, a reworking of Euripides' own play bearing the same title. Apparently, Seneca's *Troades* was also staged twice at Trinity College in Cambridge, in 1551-1552 and 1560-1561 (Boas 1914, 18, 387; APGRD 3663 and 3666).

Euripides' *Troades* is connected not only with Seneca's version of that story, but also with *Hecuba*, traditionally by far the most popular tragedy of Euripides: it was the first of the Byzantine triad (alongside *Orestes* and *Phoenissae*), as well as the first Euripidean tragedy of which a Latin translation was attempted (by Leontius Pilatus, fourteenth century, and Francesco Filelfo, fifteenth century).[9] Furthermore, Erasmus also chose to translate

[6] In fact, the edition uses Greek numerals (e.g. ‹A.α´›, A.β´).

[7] Due to current travel restrictions, I could only inspect the digitised copy available in EEBO, which neither reproduces the binding nor provides information about it.

[8] I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for observing that, given the low rate of survival of early modern printed texts, it is possible that Day published also other tragedies of Euripides; therefore, it might be possible that he had a general interest in Euripides' tragedies and not specifically in *Troades*. However, this remains conjectural.

[9] Of course *Hecuba* was also the most popular choice for early translations in Ital-

this tragedy in 1506 (USTC 143156) because of its position in the Byzantine school curriculum (Wilson 1973: 87). *Hecuba* was praised for its depiction of maternal grief, and the intensity of the queen's lament for the the sacrifice of her daughter, Polyxena. To early modern readers, Hecuba's grief evoked that of another mourning mother, the Virgin Mary (Pollard 2017, 8-13). Besides, as Pollard has further remarked, this tragedy impressed the readers also for the quality of its dramatic action pivoting on Hecuba's successful revenge plan against her enemy Polymestor for the killing of her son Polydorus (ibid.). Now, the character of Hecuba is also central in *Troades*, where she is prominent among the captives who must suffer the violence of the Greek conquerors. The queen never leaves the stage until the end, so she may be considered the connecting element within a play which is otherwise characterized by an "episodic character" whereby "the connections among the episodes are not easy to see" (Poe 2020, 255).

However, this lack of unity was arguably one of the reasons for the preference given to *Hecuba* over *Troades* in early modern reception, especially since Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1451b33-35; Aristotle 1987, 41) criticized the episodic plot, arguing that a tragedy should consist in a chain of probable or necessary events. Furthermore, although the character of Hecuba dominates *Troades* too, in her homonymous tragedy she is a more impressive character thanks both to the intensity of her grief for her daughter, and to her ability to progressively acquire an active role, especially at the end of the tragedy.

What has been said so far suggests why *Troades* was published rather late in a separate edition, and also why it could nonetheless elicit interest on the part of publishers. If we now turn to a textual analysis of this edition, we notice that Day's *Troades* is based on the canonical text established in the Aldine edition of 1503 and then regularly reproduced until the Stiblinus edition of 1562 (Euripides 1562; USTC 654877). The English edition does not introduce any changes or variants, it only shows some peculiarities in punctuation: while in some cases they might be errors, in others they seem to have an emphatic purpose, as in the use of two commas at C.δ'r., l. 8 (629), separating two interjections: αἰ, αῖ, μάλ' αὖθις, ὡς κακῶς διόλλυσαι. Day's edition reflects the previous ones also in the use of commonplace marks highlighting moralistic *sententiae* (*gnomai*).

It is plain that Day does not follow Canter's more recent edition (Euripides 1571; USTC 411593). At the end of 41 (A.β'v., l. 14), Day prints πάροιθεν like Aldus, Herwagen (lastly 1551; USTC 654575), and Stiblinus, which is the form that could be read in manuscript P (Palatinus 287); Canter, instead,

ian. The first translation was made by Giovan Battista Gelli and printed around 1519 (Renouard 1825: 408) by Giunta. Poet Ludovico Dolce also published an Italian rewrite of the play in 1543 with Giolito (then reprinted in 1549, 1560, and 1566).

chooses παρθένον, the reading of manuscript V (Vaticanus 909). Another example is provided at 232-4 (B.α'v., 11-13), which Day prints by omitting several words, as in the Aldine and the following editions until Stiblinus':

ἐξανύων.
δοῦλαι γὰρ δὴ
χθονὸς ἥδη.

Here too he clearly follows the previous editions, whereas Canter restores the text, which is supplemented by the hand 'q' in the Harley MS. 5743 (Q):[10]

στείχει ταχύπουν ἴχνος ἐξανύων.
τί φέρει; τί λέγει; δοῦλαι γὰρ δὴ
Δωρίδος ἐσμὲν χθονὸς ἥδη.

Day not only ignores Canter's textual novelties, but also, and more significantly, does not reproduce Canter's colometry, the innovation for which the Dutch scholar's edition is now best known and even then perceived as the most salient feature of Canter's edition.[11] Whilst Canter distinguishes the metres (for instance, he writes *ἀνάπαιστοι* before the chorus intervenes at 98) and indicates the antistrophic structure, as well as the number of the metrical units (*cola*), this information cannot be found in Day. Thus, we can surmise that either Canter's edition was not available to him, or he regarded the colometry as not relevant for his editorial purposes.

In fact, it seems unlikely that the 'new' Euripides by Willem Canter was not available or, worse, unknown to the Days, father and son: in 1575, John Day's son, Richard, had recently returned from Cambridge, where he had become a fellow of King's College, and the *PLRE.Folger* Catalogue records the presence of no less than six books compatible with Canter's edition between 1577 and 1589 (although it is not possible to identify the specific edition). Moreover, in the inventories of the University of Cambridge for the 1535-1590 years, inspected by Lisa Jardine (1975, 16), Euripides appeares among the most frequently cited authors. On the other hand, one must consider the possibility that this recent product of continental scholarship that followed the contributions of Adrien Turnèbe in the early 1550s, culminating in his edition of Sophocles in 1553, could be reproached – especially by John – for too much indulgence in worthless technicalities. This critical attitude, which seems to be linked to a certain Calvinist extremism, also inspires Théodore de Bèze, Calvin's successor, in the "Aux Lecteurs" letter prefacing his tragedy

[10] For the text of the *Troades*, see Euripides 1981.

[11] On the title page of his Euripides of 1597 (USTC 654566), Marcus Aemilius Portus felt bound to point out that it presented the structure ("carminum ratio") assigned to the lyrical parts by Canter.

Abraham sacrifiant (first published in 1550 in Geneva by Conrad Badius), faithfully translated into English by Arthur Golding in 1575 (*A Tragedie of Abrahams Sacrifice*, printed in London in 1577 by Thomas Vautrouillier). This is the part of the text that concerns us, in the two languages:

> Mesme i'ay fact un cantique hors le Chorus, et n'ay usé de strophes, antistrophes, epirrhemes, parecbases, ni autre tels mots, qui ne seruent che d'espouuanter les simples gens, puis que l'usage de telles choses est aboli, et n'est de soy tant recommandable qu'on se doiue tormenter à le remettre sus.
>
> Verily I haue made a songe without a chorus, nother haue I vsed the termes of *Strophies, Antistrophies*, *Epirrhemes*, *Parecbases*, and other such wordes, which serue to no purpose but to amase simple folke, seeing the vse of such thinges is worne away, & they be not so commendable of them selues, that a man should trouble him selfe to bringe them vp again. (8-9)

If Day shares this calvinist perspective, Kirsty Milne's suggestion that "sponsoring domestically produced Greek texts was a gesture of Protestant nationalism, a bid to disseminate classical and Biblical originals without the mediation of Catholic scholars and printers" (2007, 683) may appear relevant to the publication of *Troades*.

But before raising other questions about Day's own reasons for publications, it may be worth considering the typographical features of this text. Day's edition has no connection with the 1543 edition of two homilies of John Chrysostom made by Reyner Wolfe, the first printed edition of a long Greek text. Whereas Wolfe employed a type originally cast by Hieronymus Froben (Proctor 1905, 109), Day's font appears to be modelled on the pica type designed by the French printed Robert Estienne and first used in the latter's 1546 edition of the New Testament (see Proctor 1905, 102; Armstrong 1986, 52; Vervliet 2008, 392-3). One noticeable characteristic of Day's edition is the use of the triangular alpha only in the conjunction γάρ (*γάρ*). This shape of the alpha is found in all three types of Estienne. The same *γάρ* appears in the first book printed with these types – precisely with the Royal Great Primer type (see Proctor 1905, 96; Vervliet 2008, 394): Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica* (1544, 440). It is also registered as one of the possible ways of printing *γάρ* in the *Alphabetum Graecum* of Guillaume Morel[12] (1560, 16), who printed on behalf of Adri*èn* Turn*ѐ*be, Estienne's successor as royal printer. It is peculiar that in the *Troades* edition the triangular alpha is limited to this usage, and surely Day had a single sort for the entire word *γάρ*.

Day's text as a whole, if compared to the continental editions of Greek texts, deploys a fairly limited number of abbreviations. In particular, it does not show any abbreviations common in Estienne: for instance, ε for κα*ὶ*

[12] https://data.cerl.org/thesaurus/cni00099395 (Accessed 27 April 2021).

(the alternative abbreviation  is found only once in the text of the tragedy, at C.δ', l. 30 [683]);  for μὲν,  for κατὰ,  for *μετὰ*,  for *εἶναι*,  for *οὗτος*. If we compare *Troades* with the Catechism published by Day in the same year 1575 and again in 1578, with the title *Christianismou stoicheiosis* (Elements of Christianism) (USTC 508070, 508626), we notice a larger use of abbreviations in the latter work:  for καὶ, which is employed almost systematically,  for *μετὰ*,  for *τοῦ*. The probable reason for this difference is that the Catechism is written in prose: the text extends to the entire line and therefore a more compact way of printing is needed. Indeed, in *Troades* the abbreviation  , as well as two  of the total of three, are found only in the initial *hypothesis*, which is in prose. This observation suggests the need for a wider-reaching survey of early-modern printed texts in order to assess the different printing standards between prose and poetry.[13]

One interesting question is whether Day's Greek types were further used by following printers. When Day died in July 1584, he left his estate to his wife, and it seems that his son Richard did not inherit his materials, which "were perhaps dispersed" (McKerrow 1913, 169). Thus it can be inferred that at least the Greek part of that material was handed down to Thomas Dawson,[14] who in 1586 printed the only Greek text of his career, Demosthenes' oration *Against Midias*. The shape of the types is the same as Day's own types and, most interestingly, we find the peculiar printing of  . As in Day's *Troades*, in Dawson's too the triangular alpha is not used otherwise.

Other formal aspects of this book may help us to reconstruct which readers Day had in mind. This edition has neither a prefatory epistle, nor an apparatus of comments, a life of the author or any introduction to the tragedy, except for the alexandrine *hypothesis*. Moreover, it does not specify the name of any scholar as editor. This sets Day's book apart from the learned editions of Euripides' works published on the continent: to cite but one example, Stiblinus' edition (1562) has three prefatory letters (to the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I, to the reader, to the printer Johannes Oporinus), as well as a short poem on Euripides' tragedies, written in Latin in elegiac couplets by Stiblinus himself. Furthermore, each tragedy is followed by Stiblinus' *praefatio* and *annotationes*, and at the end a few notes by Johannes Brodaeus (Jean Brodeau, about 1500-1573) can also be found.

A different category of publications has more in common with Day's

[13] It mat also be argued that these abbreviations were being cast while *Troades* was being printed, and thus started being tested only towards the end of the printing. This hypothesis may also account for the presence of the abbreviations in the first sheet or printing forme, as this was frequently the last to be printed. I an grateful to a reviewer for this suggestion.

[14] https://data.cerl.org/thesaurus/cni00020474 (accessed 27 April 2021).

Troades: those printed for educational purposes. Some examples can be found in continental Europe. In 1567, the Strasbourg printer Josia Rihel published *Euripidis Hecuba et Iphigenia in Aulide* (USTC 654882), a choice clearly oriented by the very successful pair of translations made by Erasmus, which, as Day's *Troades*, displays only the two *hypotheses* and the *dramatis personae*; no editor is specified. In this case, its educational aim is spelled out in the same title page where we read *pro Schola Argentinensi*, that is, for the Gymnasium of Strasbourg, which was founded in 1538 by Jacob Sturm and soon became a model for the religiously oriented humanist school. One copy, now in the Halle University Library, has interleaved empty pages to allow both teachers and students to take notes. Although we must remember that the addition of extra blank leaves was not specifically designed by the printer, but rather made by the bookbinder upon request of the owner of the book, this addition confirms that the book was used for didactic purposes. Likewise, an *Alcestis in usum scholarum seorsim excusa* (USTC 654568) was issued in 1570 by Theodosius Rihel (one of Josia's brothers), again in Strasbourg, with neither apparatus nor the name of the editor: it has just the *hypothesis*, the *dramatis personae* and the text.

The same low survival rate of Day's *Troades*, of which only one copy is left, confirms that the book was probably destined for teaching purposes. As Andrew Pettegree points out, the early modern books that survive best are the largest and most expensive ones, which "were primarily intended for reference rather than consecutive reading" (Bruni and Pettegree 2016, 3). On the contrary, the most read books "served their purpose, were read for the information they contained, and then discarded", without making their way into libraries (2). Therefore, and paradoxically, the more a book was used, the less it survived. Thus, whereas Day's edition of *Troades* was almost lost, the 23 entries of Euripides' works in the *PLRE.Folger*, dating between 1552 and 1652, most probably refer to the precious editions which were meant to be conserved in libraries. Indeed, they all belonged to scholars. Among them, we find two exemplars of *Hecuba* (*PLRE* 70.30 and 148.83) and two copies of the *scholia* (*PLRE* 67.68, 1585), probably the Venetian edition of 1534 (USTC 810067). In three cases, the catalogue records the title "Rhesus" (*PLRE* 143.43, 121.19, 67.122). However, since the tragedy *Rhesus* was not published autonomously, the title is to be interpreted as referring to the second volume of one of the following editions: Aldus', Herwagen's (either 1537 or 1544; USTC 654573, 654574), or Collinus' Latin translation (Basle 1541, USTC 654885). The second volume of all these editions opens indeed with Rhesus (and has Troades in second position). It is interesting to notice that the *PLRE* records not less than six books which may have contained *Troades* between 1552 and 1575, all mentioned as Euripides' tragedies and in one case as *Rhesus* (in 1558; *PLRE* 67.122). This demonstrates that the tragedy was available in Eng-

land well before Day's edition and suggests that the printer meant to provide a different product: not a complete edition of Euripides for scholars, but a small format book with a single tragedy for Greek learners.

The idea that Day's *Troades* may be an educational book finds further support in the coeval publication of Greek texts in England, which can be divided in two main groups, both related to education: grammars and catechisms. Day himself printed a *Christianismou stoicheiosis*, as we have seen. A Catechism was also printed by Reyner Wolfe in 1573 (USTC 507704). As regards Greek grammars, Henry Bynneman printed one edited by Edward Grant (USTC 508014) in the same 1575 when also *Troades* was printed, and then issued another grammar in 1581, a reprint of the grammar written by Petrus Ramus (USTC 509373). To this category we can also ascribe a manual of rhetorical figures printed by Henry Wykes in 1572 (USTC 516739). Day's *Troades* stands out from these other educational books insofar as it is a work of a Greek classical author: we can guess that Day aimed at providing a new product in a country where not a single Greek play, nor other Greek literary works, had yet been published in the original language.

We do not find in England any other classical text printed in Greek until the 1580s, when the Eliot Court's Press[15] published Isocrates' oration *Ad Demonicum* (1585; USTC 510315) and Thomas Dawson published Demosthenes' *Against Midias* (1586; USTC 510495), the latter using Day's types. Indeed, both texts share the characteristics of *Troades*, likewise suggesting a didactic use: lack of the editor's name and of paratexts. Moreover, each book contains only a single work, not the entire corpus of the selected author: a single oration – or, in Day's case, a single tragedy – was more useful for educational purposes, as well as economically accessible than a ponderous *opera omnia*. The survival rate is low: *Ad Demonicum* is preserved in one copy like *Troades*, *Against Midias* in four copies.

As regards *Troades* and then *Against Midias*, the educational purpose may also account for the use of the relatively simple, unembellished Greek types we have described, unless this feature is due to the lack of a larger variety of types.

These publications invite a revision of the long held idea that "the Elizabethan age is almost a blank in the history of Greek learning in England" (Bywater 1919, 13). In fact, as Micha Lazarus has demonstrated, in the second half of the sixteenth century Greek flourished both in universities – to the degree that "Greek was a matter of ordinary instruction for undergraduates" (2015, 451) – and in grammar schools (453-6), in whose curricula Isocrates and Demosthenes were included (454).

If Day's *Troades* was dedicated to the learning of Greek, it is likely that

[15] https://data.cerl.org/thesaurus/cnco00023863 (accessed 27 April 2021).

it was used in universities. We know from the statute of St. John's College in Oxford that Euripides was included in the list of authors whose works were daily read at 9 a.m. (SCO III [part 12], 49–50). As regards Cambridge, in the inventories of the university a work of Euripides – the exact title is not specified in the lists – appears among the most frequent titles also in non-specialist lists (Jardine 1975, 16). Thus, we can conclude that Euripides was probably a prescribed reading for the preliminary arts course and that the reading of a text like Day's *Troades* is not inconceivable in either university. On the other hand, Day's connection with Cambridge is arguable, as his son Richard, as we have seen, was appointed Fellow of King's College in 1574, one year before the publication of *Troades* (McKitterick 1992, 79); his father John also donated manuscripts and printed books to the College, although *Troades* is not recorded among them (see Munby 1948). If this is the case, John Day may have been informed about the didactic needs of the university and may have decided to make more editions of Euripides available.

Conjectural as these considerations may be, they nevertheless underline the importance of a multifaceted analysis of Greek texts in order to determine the degree of knowledge and penetration of Greek literature in sixteenth-century England. A further step in this direction will be to explore more extensively the cultural relevance of printing and reading these ancient works in those years. As Kirsty Milne puts it, "In this case of convergence between the history of the book and the history of ideas, the material object demands reappraisal of the intellectual milieu, and the Greek title-page stands in defiance of received wisdom" (2007, 683).

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Unmotherly Love: the Medea Model in Mary Sidney's *Antonius*

Abstract

Mary Sidney's *Antonius*, the English translation of Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine*, offers the first example of a closet drama in early modern English that not only used classical resources but was also written by a woman. It is worth exploring the possibility that Euripides's and Seneca's versions have coloured Sidney's reception and re-elaboration of Garnier's play. Although neither has yet been connected with Garnier's and Sidney's plays, Sidney's version effectively shows significant similarities in her construction of the female protagonist with particular reference to the dramatisation of unmotherly love. Through an in-depth investigation of these parallels, I will attempt to illustrate Mary Sidney's approach to the Medea model and her own intervention, which include the influence of Studley's translation of Seneca's *Medea*; I will also explore how this intertextuality leads to the construction of Cleopatra as a stronger female ruler who abandons her children for her lover Antonius, and for her resolution to die after he has died. This article highlights how reading these aspects of Mary Sidney's play in the early modern context may involve the identification of parallels with the situation in England linked to the Elizabethan succession.

Keywords: Mary Sidney, *Antonius*, Robert Garnier, Euripides, Seneca, Studley, translation, Elizabethan succession

1. Introduction

Mary Sidney's *Antonius* (1592) is often regarded as a "line-by-line translation" of Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine* (1578) (Hannay 1990, 140), a play considered "instrumental in introducing Continental neo-classical tragedy into Renaissance England" (Cadman 2011, 1). As Belle and Cottegnies have recently argued, Garnier's sources can be found in the Greek dramatic tradition, "especially in the choruses, in which various echoes of Sophocles and Euripides can be heard" (2017, 3),[1] but also in "the Senecan tragic model" (2) insofar as it addresses the relation between passion and rule as well as "complex moral and political issues from a variety of standpoints" (17). The impact of

[1] See also 134n11, 171n10; Terneaux 2010 161.

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Seneca's tragedies on drama in England is well known;[2] it is also well known that Mary Sidney's brother praised the "well-constructed rhetoric and . . . a properly worked-out moral" (Dunworth 2010, 61) as functional to the unfolding of drama. It is no surprise that Mary Sidney was attracted to the Senecan allure of Garnier's play, as Belle and Cottegnies remark (2). It might be more surprising, instead, if she had been drawn to it by the recognition of echoes of Greek origin in Garnier's play: in fact, there are a few aspects that may suggest research in that direction, and that might hint at her contribution to conveying Garnier's classical model into the English context, thus possibly also influencing the authors who took inspiration from her work.

Garnier's indebtedness to Euripides has mainly been observed with regard to his *Hippolyte*, *La Troade* and *Antigone* (see, for instance, Fournial 2019). In *Marc Antoine*, Belle and Cottegnies have detected hints of Euripides's *Troades* (2017, 134). However, another Euripidean play that has not been examined yet in this context may be relevant: *Medea*. I will argue that by looking at the Medea model as primarily derived from Euripides, with occasional suggestions from Seneca, we can infer that Mary Sidney may have been attracted to the Medea model mediated by Garnier, and that she not only reproduced this model in her translation, but that she also fashioned her own approach through her additions, also by resorting to yet another Medea model, the one of John Studley's translation of Seneca. Mary Sidney's recognition of the Medea influence on Garnier will be observed in the way her own innovations enhance the effect of some elements already present in Garnier's play, and in her choice of an English Medea as her own source. Sidney's literary choices and interpretations of certain parts of the play also demonstrate her independence as a translator and writer. Indeed, her translation of Garnier's text accentuates the importance of Cleopatra's children and depicts Cleopatra as a stronger female character. On the one hand, she delineates a strong ruler who, like Garnier's, is prey to passion and love and seems to put the matter of the state aside for her own feelings. On the other hand, the comparison of Medea's treatment of her children to that of Cleopatra's, as well as their legitimisation as heirs of Cleopatra and Antonius in Mary Sidney's play, contributes to the delineation of Cleopatra's unmotherly figure and her abandonment of her children as a sort of political sacrifice. The new construction of the play in English, derived by Sidney form Garnier's example, might have been read by Mary Sidney's contemporaries as hinting at the uncertainty of the situation in England at the end of the sixteenth century when Queen Elizabeth, who had been constructed by propaganda as the mother of her people, refused to choose an heir, putting

[2] Literature on this topic is vast; see for instance Cunliffe 1893; Braden 1984 and 1985; Perry 2020, Winston 2016 and 2006; and Gray 2016.

the country in jeopardy and possibly at the mercy of foreign invasions.

In the following pages, I will first discuss the relevance of the Medea model in Garnier's play as one of the mythological influences that interweave in the fabrics of the text, and Mary Sidney's translation of it. Then I will focus on the particular issues which seem topical to the historical circumstances of the 1590s, issues of queenship and of royal descent, which are connected to Sidney's own version of the play. I will single out a few textual examples of how she seems to have foregrounded a Medea-like inflection of Cleopatra in order to underscore her female power and her relationship with her children as a reference to queenly power and to succession respectively.[3]

2. Cleopatra and the Medea Intertext

There is no direct reference to the story of Medea in Garnier's and Mary Sidney's plays; however, as will be seen, some structural and linguistic occurrences from the Euripidean and Senecan plays can be detected in the French and English plays. Although indirectly, Garnier suffuses his play with Medean imagery, which is reproduced by Mary Sidney and which is part of a "creative interweaving" (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017) with other mythological and literary references which form the "mythological cluster" (Peyré 2017) of the play. Garnier and Sidney "make the most of classical mythology" by exploiting, each in their own way, "its inherent capacity to invite shifting interpretations" (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017). For instance, both writers utilise the signifying potential of the story and are influenced by the way in which it has evolved through time.[4] Multiple interpretations are collated and juxtaposed onto the story and figure of Medea in the early modern period when myths became repositories of themes and passages to

[3] As I will be moving between texts in a multilingual comparison, for clarity's sake I will use the following abbreviations: *Gar.* (Garnier), *M.S.* (Mary Sidney), *Eur.* (Euripides), *Sen.* (Seneca) and *Stu.* (Studley). All modern translations of Euripides and Seneca are from Kovacs 1994 and Fitch 2002. When references are only to Sidney's play, the discussion assumes its substantial coincidence with Garnier's, which will be mentioned only when relevant differences emerge.

[4] Producing various effects also in Mary Sidney's contemporaries: Abraham Fraunce, Mary Sidney's protégé, provided a catalogue of mythological figures among which Medea was defined as the embodiment of "counsel and advice, . . . knowledge or understanding" (Fraunce 1592, 47). In his *Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney contrasted the positive: "wisdom and temperance in *Vlisses* and *Diomedes*, valure in *Achilles*, friendship in *Nisus* and *Eurialus*" to the negative "remorse of conscience in Oedipus; the soone repenting pride in *Agamemnon*; the selfe deuouring crueltie in his father *Atreus*; the violence of ambition in the two *Theban* brothers; the sower sweetnesse of reuenge in *Medea*" (Maslen and Shepherd 2002, 91).

be adapted for the most varied occasions. Myths do not appear in isolation in early modern works, but they emerge as "a subtle layering of meanings – an intertextual *feuilletage*, to use Roland Barthes's term – that reverberates through the text and beyond" (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017) an intertwining of references which depend on the author's knowledge and can be variously received by the audience. For instance, in Garnier's and Mary Sidney's plays, a similar structural and dramatic pattern associates Medea's and Cleopatra's attitudes towards their children, and this is underlined by the reference to the mythological figure of Niobe who, as will be seen, is employed by both authors in unusual ways in relation to motherhood. The mythological reference to Niobe constitutes one of the "countless interstices and alveoli" around which the texts branch off (Peyré 2017), and its peculiar handling also suggests a mimetic parallel between Medea and Cleopatra.

Garnier's play

> is in itself an instance of interwoven influences: while the overall rhetoric is Senecan, the amplification of Cleopatra's lamentation recalls Virgil's Dido mourning Aeneas's departure. Antony (II.502-13) and the chorus (II.862-5) establish parallels between Egypt and Troy while recalling other tragic tales, mostly from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Sidney translates faithfully, introducing subtle inflections by referring directly back to source material, essentially Plutarch. (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017)

The texts by Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and others were not considered in the early modern period as "independent, individual, autonomous creations un their own right", but they were thought to belong to "a collective textual labyrinth: . . . an open, expanding structure, where all the pleasure consists in endlessly exploring back and forth, prospectively and retrospectively" (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017). Texts or significant passages were often taken out of their original context and used by writers to suit particular occasions in new texts: images blended "so that Ovid and Seneca, Seneca and the Bible, suddenly fuse[d], Athamas, Hercules and Medea merge[d]. This process of coalescence [was] often accompanied by a process of expansion, creating complex reverberations" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 153). All these quotations intertwine in the early modern "general ambience of the Graeco-Roman heritage" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 2) in which classical sources were not considered as a canon but as texts which enabled writers "to explore such crucial areas of human experience as love, politics, ethics, and history" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 2). Martindale's claim about Shakespeare's introjection of the classics to the "effect of ultimately making the[m] . . . almost invisible in his work" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 18) can be applied to the work of other Renaissance and early modern authors, including Garnier and Sidney, who showed the humanist tendency of a "prag-

matic use of earlier literature" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 18).

The Medea model here postulated intertwines with all of the aforementioned mythical and literary references to form layers of meanings which enrich the interpretation of the play. Sidney's input does not only consist of her contribution to introducing "the dramatic potential of the Antony and Cleopatra story" to the English cultural scene and to heightening "interest in Senecan tragedy". Sidney also furthers the "delineation of passions through mythological references" (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017) among which the Medea one is mostly linked to, with the reversal of traditional femininity and her relation to her children. Mary Sidney's treatment of the Medea model can show "how a myth is continually reshaped through combinations of sources and adaptation to new concerns" in a context in which "politically inflected classical tragedies could become a medium through which it was possible to comment on the contemporary scene from a safer historical and generic distance" (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017).

Although they have never been highlighted in relation to Garnier's and Mary Sidney's plays, the similarities between Medea and Cleopatra are palpable. Both Medea and Cleopatra are "transgressive classical women" (Heavey 2015, 1);[5] Medea is the "barbarian Colchian" (3) and a charmer; Cleopatra is the Queen of foreign people[6] and a seductress of men, famously captivating first Julius Caesar, and then, later on, Marcus Antonius.[7] Both Medea and Cleopatra boast a "royal lineage" (Tyminsky 2014, 33) and a divine ascendance, Cleopatra identifying herself "with the divine figure of the Egyptian goddess Isis", and Medea claiming "descent from Helios, the sun god" (33-4). Both Medea and Cleopatra have children from a man married to another woman;[8] both experience a totalising love which downplays any other affection, including motherly love; and both experience loss of power: Medea abandons her country for Jason, and he eventually repudiates her for Creon's daughter; Cleopatra is vanquished by Caesar Octavianus and is eventually doomed to become an exile and a prisoner. Both react with acts of blood: Medea kills her children out of revenge, Cleopatra kills herself for love of Antony and to escape from shame and the Roman yoke; as will be seen, both sacrifice their children, although in different ways.

[5] Like Tamora in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, in Heavey's view, Medea is "a threat to patriarchal security" (106); likewise, Cleopatra is a "dangerous foreign queen" capable of destroying Rome's greatness (Tyminski 2014, 32).

[6] *Gar* 4.1783: "Roine des peuples estrangers"; *M.S.* 4.439: "Queene of forraine lands".

[7] *Gar.* 1.112: "enuenime ton coeur"; *M.S.* 1.111-2: "infect[ed]" Antonius' "tainted hart".

[8] It may be recalled that even though Cleopatra was not repudiated, unlike Medea, Antonius "never married her; instead, when his wife Fulvia died, he married Octavian's half-sister Octavia for political reasons. About the same time, Cleopatra gave birth to their twins" (Tyminski 2014, 34).

Before coming to a closer discussion of the question of queenly motherhood in Mary Sidney's translation, and the possible interference of other ancient models besides Plutarch,[9] it is worth making a few comments on the texts that Sidney may have been familiar with and the degree of their relevance. The question evidently concerns her knowledge of Euripides, as Seneca circulated widely in both Latin and English. John Studley's translation had first been published separately in a quarto edition in 1566 before being added to Thomas Newton's 1581 collection *Seneca, His Tenne Tragedies*. Euripides is a more complicated matter since we have no anglicised version, as we do for Seneca, and no edition of his works was printed in England except for *Troades*, which was published in the original Greek in octavo by the printer John Day in 1575.[10] But that was an absolutely unique venture which was not to be repeated until more than a century later when his complete works were published by Joshua Barnes in 1694. However, editions were printed on the continent and by the end of the sixteenth century his plays circulated widely and could be accessed by those who knew Latin, if not Greek.[11]

Warkentin, Black, and Bowen's 2013 inventory of the Library of the Sidneys at Penshurst Place testifies to the existence of copies of Euripides's plays.[12] Although it is unclear whether Mary Sidney knew Greek, Skretkowicz remarks that

[9] *The Life of Antonius* in Plutarch's *Lives* is the source both Garnier and Sidney acknowledge in the play's Argument, however, as Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan claim, Mary Sidney also read Amyot's French translation of the *Lives*, which was also used by Garnier (Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan 1998, 148), and she was also familiar North's translation of Amyot (Ibid.).

[10] For a discussion of this edition, see Duranti 2021.

[11] The first edition of Euripides appeared in Florence in 1495. Based on the Venice 1503 edition of the *Tragodiai heptakaideka* various other editions followed, but only in 1551 the entire corpus of nineteen plays (but naming only "eighteen" of them in the title) was published in Basel by Herwagen and then they appeared again in 1558 in Frankfurt, by Peter Brubach; in 1562 they were published by Caspar Stiblin in Greek and in Latin translation; in 1571 in Antwerp by Willem Canter. (For a discussion of the editions of Greek plays published in Europe from 1495 to 1596 see for instance Pollard 2017, a list is provided on 232-41).

Another Latin translation of Euripides' plays by Melanchthon was published in 1562. A Latinised *Medea* had already appeared in the 1544 edition by Michel de Vascosan of *Hecuba, Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Medea* featuring Erasmus and George Buchanan's translations. In 1568 *Alcestis* and *Medea* appeared in Basel, again in George Buchanan's translation, whose *Medea* was also published in 1576 (Pollard 2017 also engages with the editions of Greek plays translated into Latin and published in Europe from 1501 to 1599. A full list can be found on 242-59).

[12] Under letter E of the inventory the following can be found: two references to Euripides' *Tragoediae*, one in Greek and Latin and one unspecified, and a reference to an edition of Euripides in octavo, with no other indication.

> so widespread had education of women in languages become by 1548 that Nicholas Udall observed, "It is nowe no newes in Englande to see young damysels in nobles houses and in the Courtes of princes . . . familiarlye both to reade or reason" about their religious readings "in Greke, Latine, Frenche, or Italian, as in Englishe". (1999, 15)

While her brothers went to university, Mary and her sister studied at home with tutors; their education followed "the standard humanist curriculum of the classics, the Church Fathers, and Latin, French, and Italian language and literature; they may also have studied the other learned languages of Greek and Hebrew, although the evidence is inconclusive" (Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan 1998, 2). Abraham Fraunce offers some lines of Greek in the dedication of *The Arcadian Rhetorike* to Mary Sidney suggesting that she may have known the language at least at a basic level (ibid.).

The knowledge of Greek, however, was not requisite for Mary Sidney to read Euripides's *Medea* as she very likely encountered at least George Buchanan's Latin "almost . . . word-for-word translation" (Charlton 1946, xlix). As James Phillips argues, Buchanan exchanged letters with members of the Sidney Circle with which he shared poetical and political inclinations concerning "the ultimate sovereignty of the people, the delegated authority of the king, the obligation of the king to govern under the law, and the right of the people to depose a tyrant" (Phillips 1948, 45). Philip Sidney, Mary Sidney's brother, in turn, wrote a letter to Buchanan praising his work and political ideas, and he expressed his desire to meet Buchanan and James VI, Buchanan's own pupil whom Sidney described in his letter as "the young king, in quhome mony have layd their hopes" (*The Warrender Papers*, I, 146). Buchanan's relation with the Sidney circle, although not directly with Mary Sidney, might have favoured her access to his works.[13] Similarly, Garnier may have also used Buchanan's works as a source since Buchanan covered important academic positions in France for many years; Buchanan's translation of *Medea* was even used by his "student, Jean Bastier de La Péruse", for the composition of his own *Medée* staged in a French theatre in 1553 (Wygant 2007, 34).[14]

This is to say that Buchanan's translation may have played a role in Mary

[13] Mary Sidney surely consulted Buchanan's paraphrases for her translation of the Psalms: "Mary Herbert's psalm paraphrases are based on extensive scholarship . . . She consulted many additional sources, including the commentaries of Victorinus Strigelius, Franciscus Vatablus, George Buchanan, and Immanuel Tremellius", *ODNB*.

[14] "La Péruse had available to him the *Medea* of Euripides in Buchanan's Latin translation, and Seneca's *Medea*, and we know as well that he was familiar with the first tragedy written in French, Jodelle's *Cléopâtre captive*, because La Péruse took part in its performances in 1553" (Wygant 2007, 50). In addition, Garnier took Jodelle's play as a reference point for the subject of his play (Ternaux 2010, 20).

Sidney's approach to Euripides's *Medea*.

In a long monologue in Act 1, Antonius calls Cleopatra "fair sorceres" (1.82; *Gar.* "sorciere" 1.82) whom he loves "as one encharm'd" (1.79; *Gar.* "comme vn homme charmé",1.79). Here, Antonius analogizes Cleopatra's seducing power to that of a poison, making his "fair sorceres" the administrant, and the phrase "poisoned cuppes" is added to the original image, which generically alluded to "les poisons de ta belle sorciere" (1.82). Belle and Cottegnies claim that the detail of the "cups" might be referred to "the enchantress Circe in Book X of the *Odyssey* . . . and perhaps also to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, where Acrasia poisons a knight by having him drink from her 'charmed cup' (II. 1. 55)" (2017, 99n 16). However, if Mary Sidney happened to read Buchanan's *Ane Detectiovn of the Duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*[15], she would have found his comparison of Mary Stuart with "Medea" as "a bludy woman and a poysoning witch" who wants to poison the king "quho had alredy tastit of hir louely cuppe" (1571, 65). One wonders whether Mary Sidney's addition of the detail of the "cups" could be further proof of her familiarity with Buchanan's works, or, in turn, of the potential influence on her by Buchanan's own engagement with Medea. But whichever the case, it remains a peculiar coincidence that one must take into account when considering Sidney's possible knowledge of Euripides.

Her probable knowledge of Euripides, either in Greek or in Latin, can be seen as framing her reception of Garnier, from which she takes the Medea model and which she modifies in order to present her own strong and unmotherly Cleopatra.

On his part, Garnier applies the Medea model as bearer of unmotherly and virile features and, alternatively, as the figure of abandonment and despair for love to both Cleopatra and Antonius, suggesting occasional reversals of traditional gender roles.

In particular, in Act 1, Sidney draws from the French play the depiction of a feminine Antonius as the one betrayed by a Jason-like Cleopatra. Differently, in Plutarch's account, Antonius was abandoned by Cleopatra during the battle, but he immediately followed her and eventually forgave her:

> when he saw Cleopatraes shippe vnder saile, he forgot, forsooke, & be|trayed them that fought for him, & imbarked vpon a galley with fiue bankes of owers, to fol|low her that had already begon to euerthrow him, & would in the end be his vtter destruction . . . [He] liued three dayes alone, without speaking to any man. But when he arriued at the head of Taenarus, there Cleopatraes women first brought Antonius and Cleopatra to speake together, and afterwards, to suppe and lye to|gether. (Plutarch 1579, 1001-2)

[15] The book can actually be found in the inventory of the Sidney's library at Penhurst, see Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, 2013.

Moreover, Plutarch characterised Antonius as possessing strong political and warlike capacities, as well as vices[16] traditionally associated to male characters.

Garnier's depiction of Antoine as a feminine and voluptuous character has been interpreted as possibly denouncing the excessive and lavish behaviour attributed to King Henri III[17] and his court (Garnier 2010, 44). Conversely, in Mary Sidney's translation the reversal of the traditional male role in the depiction of Antonius, emphasised by the comparison with Medea, contributes to highlighting the tendency of the play to give relevance to the representation of female figures and female passions.

Although he condemns the "wav'ring" (1.145)[18] nature of women, the Medea-like Antonius of Act 1 is the one who despises Cleopatra, first calling her cruel, unkind, a sorceress, and then lamenting that he has "such a goddes left" (1.106),[19] only to denounce her betrayal and hypocrisy once again.[20] Euripides's Medea and Garnier's Antonius follow a path from self-pitying and longing to die to the desire of revenge which is reproduced by Mary Sidney. For instance, similarly to Euripides's protagonist who had abandoned and betrayed her family in order to pursue Jason, fleeing her country,[21] in Act 1, Antonius regrets having abandoned his own country, family, and friends for the treacherous Cleopatra[22] and then he shares in the irrational lust for revenge which characterized Medea in Euripides.[23] For Antonius, Cleopatra

[16] Plutarch also provides "a vivid example of cruelty in Antony . . . his treatment of Cicero and his glee following the latter's demise" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 183). Differently from Garnier and Sidney, who show Antonius as a victim of the events, who denounces his own behaviour both on the personal and political level, Plutarch also portrays Antonius's "cruelty to adversaries, unworthiness of office, inclination towards tyranny, as well as the more personal vices of drunkenness and concupiscence" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 183).

[17] Ternaux also mentions Aubigné's pamphlets in which the king of France is defined as a woman-king or as a man-queen (Garnier 2010, 9).

[18] Garnier: "le naturel des Femmes est volage" (1.145).

[19] Garnier: "D'auoir … laisse telle Deesse" (1.106).

[20] Iustly complaine I she disloyall is,/Nor constant is, euen as I constant am,/To comfort my mishap, despising me/No more, then when the heauens favour'd me. (1.141-4)

[21] "O father, O my native city, from you I departed in shame" (*Eur.* 166; see also 488-90).

[22] For her haue I forgone my country, / Caesar unto warre prouok'd / . . . For loue of her, in her allurements caught / Abandon'd life; I honour haue despisde, / Disdain'd my freends, and of the statelye Rome / Despoilde the empire of her best attire (1.7-16)

[23] "MEDEA: And so I shall ask from you this much as a favor: if I find any means or contrivance to punish my husband for these wrongs . . . In all other things a woman is full of fear, incapable of looking on battle or cold steel; but when she is injured in love, no mind is more murderous than hers. CHORUS-LEADER**:** I will do so. For you

has become a "cruell, traitres, woman most vnkinde" whom he accuses "dost, forsworne, my loue and life betraie: / And giu'st me up to ragefull enemie" (1.17-9). Differently from Garnier, Mary Sidney's heroine did not disown Antoine's "flammes", i.e. his passion, but she was forswearing his "loue" (1.17). Although at this point she is seen as a traitress, this is the first of a series of remarks which legitimise their relationship as being more substantial than mere passion, and indeed as a loving one, which will culminate in Cleopatra's self-definition as Antonius's "wife" (2.2.170) ("espouse" 2.556) and which contribute to the legitimisation of their children who, as will be seen and as can be seen from this first observation, is stronger in Mary Sidney than in Garnier.[24] Moreover, Sidney's version depicts a Cleopatra who chooses not to hand Antonius over to the enemies because she is "mal-sage" (unwise); her actions are not attributed to her absentmindedness, but she seems to be fully aware of her own actions, which she takes deliberately. The strong and resolute character of Cleopatra is constructed according to Mary Sidney's own interpretation, seemingly portraying a figure in which the audience might have recognised the English Queen's strength and resolution.

While being indebted to Garnier's Euripidean Medea model, this passage shows one of Mary Sidney's first autonomous attempts, which also entails the use of a Medea model derived from Studley. As already seen, the Jason-like Cleopatra of Antonius's account is not only accused of betraying him, but also of abandoning him in the hands of his enemies – Medea was left without friends and with no place to go because of the crimes she had

will be right to punish your husband" (259-67). Although the English translation uses the verb "to punish", ἐκτείσῃ (*ekteise*) actually comes from *ektinomai*: *exact full payment for* a thing, *avenge*, E. *HF* 547; *take vengeance on someone* (τινά) Id. *Med.* 267. The literal translation would thus be: "For you will be right to take vengeance on your husband."

[24] Mary Sidney enhances the legitimacy of Cleopatra's bond with Antonius – and thus of the status of their children as heirs – also in comparison to Plutarch, who remarked that Antony had married Octavia after meeting and allegedly falling in love with Cleopatra and underlined the legitimacy of the Roman marriage while despising Antonius' union with Cleopatra: "it seemed also that Antonius had bene widower euen since the death of his wife Fuluia. For he denied not that he kept Cleopatra, but so did he not confesse that he had her as his wife" (1579, 984). Plutarch also denounced Cleopatra's love for Antonius deeming it as false and only driven by political interests: "Cleopatra knowing that Octauia would haue Antonius from her, and fearing also that if with her vertue and honest behauior, (besides the great power of her brother Caesar) she did adde thereunto her modest kind loue to please her husband, that she would then be too stronge for her, and in the end winne him away: she suttelly seemed to languish for the loue of Antonius, pyning her bo|dy for lacke of meate. Furthermore, she euery way so framed her countenaunce, that when Antonius came to see her, she cast her eyes vpon him, like a woman rauished for ioy. Straight againe when he went from her, she fell a weeping and blubbering, looked rufully of the mat|ter, and still found the meanes that Antonius should oftentynes finde her weeping" (995).

committed for Jason who had repudiated her, abandoning her to her destiny. For Mary Sidney, Antonius sees Cleopatra as a "woman most unkind" like Jason is for Studley's Medea "amoste unthanckfull man" who has dared to "spoyle" Medea of her "countrey . . . syre, / and kyngdom" (*Stu.* 5.Bv*v*) as Antonius had "forgone" his "country", "abandoned life", "honour . . . despised", "disdained" his "friends" and "of stately Rome despoiled the empire of her best attire" (1.8-14). Antonius's address to Cleopatra, "dost, forsworn, my love and life betray / And gi'st me up to rageful enemy" (1.17-9),[25] can be seen as reminiscent of Jason's "and yet forsake me wretche forlorne, to straye in forreyn soyle" (*Stu.* 5.Bv*v*).[26] The construction of the character of a Medea-like Antonius follows Studley also in his invocation of revenge for Cleopatra's betrayal: "But you, O gods (if any faith regarde), / With sharpe reuenge her faithles change reward" (*M. S.* 3.35-36). The reference to "sharpe reuenge" is Mary Sidney's invention, where Garnier used the word punishment: "Ses trompeurs changemens seront d'eux chastiez" (her deceptive changes will be chastised by them [the gods]).[27] Belle and Cottegnies note how this passage in Garnier resonates with "Dido's invectives against unfaithful Aeneas (Virgil's *Aeneid*, V. 519-20)" (2017, 132, note 7) while also spotlighting Mary Sidney's innovative contribution and "ironic play on the notion of 'pietas' (faith / faithfulness)" (ibid.). The apparently inventive use of the concept of *pietas*, however, can be traced back to Medea's first appearance in Studley's translation, where we can also find the invocation to the gods ("O gods" 3.35) and the idea of revenge against a faithless lover ("sharpe reuenge her faithless change rewarde" 3.36):

> *O Gods* whose grace doth guide their gobbles
> …
> O Lord of sad and lowrynge lakes,
> o Ladye dire of Hell,
> (Whom though that Pluto stale biforce
> yet did his troth excell
> The *ficle fayth* of Iasons loue,
> that he to me dothe beare,)

[25] Garnier: I'ay pour elle quitté, / Mon païs, et Cesar à la guerre incité,/ . . . / I'ay mis pour l'amour d'elle, en ses blandices pris, / Ma vie à l'abandon, mon honneur à mespris, / Mes amis dedaignez, l'Empire venerable/ De ma grande Cité devestu miserable: /. . . / Inhumaine, traistresse, ingrate entre les femmes./ Tu trompes, pariurant, et ma vie, et mes flammes:/ Et me livres, mal-sage, à mes fiers ennemis (1.8-19).

[26] In this case we can say that Mary Sidney resorted to Studley and not to Seneca since the latter's account lacks the pathos of his English counterpart and the linguistic and structural elements that recur in Studley, although it contains the main ideas of loss of father, country and kingdom.

[27] Translation mine.

> With cursed throte I coniure you,
> o grysiye gohstes appeare.
> Come out, come out, ye hellish hagges,
> *reuenge* this deede so dire.
> (*Stu.* 1.Bi*r*, 1.Bi*v*)[28]

Through Antonius's words in Mary Sidney's play, Cleopatra becomes the "faithless" Jason, who has abandoned his lover, and who must be subject to revenge.[29]

Cleopatra's embodiment of the male characteristics attributed to her by Antonius is the first step in the construction of a reversed motherhood which will then be developed by the following identification of Cleopatra with Medea in Act 2.[30] As will be seen, Mary Sidney's Cleopatra shares her warlike attitude with Medea, as well as her unmotherly attitude driven by stronger feelings for her children's father than her children themselves. The comparison with Jason endows Cleopatra with a manliness which brings her in closer alignment to Medea's unmotherly characterisation. Sidney also derives from Garnier Euripides's peculiarly sympathetic attitude towards Medea (Hutchins and Lofgreen 2014, 10), and the same attitude is also directed towards Cleopatra who, in Garnier's and Sidney's versions, proves her love and resolution as early as the second act even though she was defined as a traitress at the beginning. Cleopatra's foreignness, excessive passion, and her actions which bring on Antonius's suicide as well as her children's exile, could be perceived as negative traits, however, as Euripides' Medea, she arouses, both in Garnier and in Sidney, the sympathy of the audience who pities her pain, and sympathises with her love sacrifice. In this case, Cleopatra shares with Medea some traits which are traditionally associated to her as a female character, namely her jealousy – Cleopatra is jealous of Antonius and worried he might go back to his wife Octavia, as Medea is jealous of Jason and his new wife – and the exclusive feeling – of love in the case of Cleopatra and of hate, derived from her previous unconditional love of Medea – respectively towards Antonius and Jason. In this sense, Antonius

[28] This quotation from Studley's play retains the spelling except for the italics for names. The emphasis is mine.

[29] In this case, Mary Sidney's text is more similar to Studley's translation than to Seneca's text: Seneca's Medea does not mention Jason's fickle faith and she does not invoke revenge but the vengeful furies against Creon and Creusa: "triformis, quosque iuravit mihi / deos Iason, quosque Medeae magis / fas est precari: noctis aeternae chaos, / aversa superis regna manesque impios / dominumque regni tristis et dominam fide / meliore raptam, voce non fausta precor, / nunc, nunc adeste, sceleris ultrices deae" (7-13).

[30] Antonius and Cleopatra seem to be talking to each other through the acts but actually never meet in the play till after Antonius' death.

can be identified with the treacherous Jason, who has two wives simultaneously[31] and who easily condemns his children to exile.[32]

Euripides's Medea "appropriates a wide range of images and terms from the male spheres of battle and athletics" (Mastronarde 2010, 264), sentiments which are echoed by Cleopatra's status as ruler and military leader, as well as her selfish suicide which leaves her children motherless, all contribute to her depiction as a Medea-like figure, enhanced by Mary Sidney's translation.

At the same time, readers in late Elizabethan England might have recognised in such a strong and belligerent queen hints at Elizabeth I and her rule, and, as will be seen in the following pages, they might have considered the abandonment of her children, heightened to the point of becoming a political sacrifice if seen through the application of the Medea model, as analogous to the political sacrifice of the English people due to of Elizabeth's resolution not to settle the succession question.

3. Cleopatra: Unmotherly Sacrifice

Among the many instances of the motifs that can be traced in Mary Sidney's play via Garnier,[33] one of the most interesting within the English context of the 1590s is Cleopatra's relation to her children. Belle and Cottegnies have remarked that Mary Sidney's translation was connected to the political attitudes of the Sidney Circle about the interests of the Protestants and the widespread preoccupation for the succession (2017, 44). Once brought to England, the French tragedy's political message, obliquely referring to the French civil wars and Henri III, could well be adjusted to the English milieu, especially because "Garnier's lines carry what could be construed as telling allusions to the unfolding succession crisis and the Spanish threat" (Kewes 2012, 250). In this historical context, it is worth pinpointing the implied correspondence that is present between Medea and Cleopatra in their own relationships with their children at the cusp of their existential crisis. As Seneca attracted interest for the depiction of unruly passion over stoic self-control and its effects on politics, so a female version of that same issue could not be

[31] As will be seen, in Garnier and more markedly in Mary Sidney, Cleopatra is considered as Antonius's wife.

[32] Once again, the feminine and masculine attributes associated with the story of Medea are both present in Antonius's character who, like Medea, sees nothing but his love, and, at the same time, as both Jason and Medea, easily sacrifices his children: "Take Caesar conquest, take my goods, take he / Th'honour to be lord of the earth alone, / My sons, my life bent headlong to mishaps, / No force, so not my Cleopatra take" (3.55-8).

[33] These form part of my broader research on this topic.

less attractive. The fact that Cleopatra is a queen makes her a special mother and her motherly affection cannot but have political implications, we can assume (even without considering specific intentions on Sidney's part) that any question of queenly disregard for the royal offspring could have an impact on the political imaginary of the 1590s in England. A Medean inflection in the construction Cleopatra's persona could only add layers regarding issues about royal legitimacy, expulsion, abandonment of her children.

A correlation starts to take shape between Cleopatra's and Medea's characters as early as Act 2 of Garnier's and Sidney's plays; similarly to Medea who is ready to sacrifice her children to hurt Jason, Cleopatra, although driven by a different feeling as we will see later, is willing to renounce her children and her own life[34] for Antonius. In Mary Sidney's translation the construction of Cleopatra's character and her final self-sacrifice, seen through the lens of the Medea example, demonstrates the queen's refusal of her political and motherly rights; this characterisation could be seen as mirroring the incertitude about the future of the English Queen's rule and succession.[35] To highlight the theme of neglected succession, and the consequences of Cleopatra's suicide, such as the sacrifice of her royal descent, Mary Sidney elaborated on Garnier's several references to the royal ancestry of Cleopatra and her children.[36] Moreover, while Garnier suggested moderation to his King

[34] In Plutarch, on the other hand, she delays her death in case this could save her children and assure them a prestigious life.

[35] Mary Sidney's choice of Garnier and of his representation of the Roman conquest of the Egyptian territories could also be seen in the light of her fight in favour of the Protestant cause. Mary Sidney was probably aware of the attempts to influence the decisions of Elizabeth I and to convince her to support the Huguenot cause in which her husband and her brother Philip were involved (Hannay 1990, 46). Mary Sidney was also a friend of Mornay – whose *A Discourse of Life and Death* was published along with *Antonius* in 1592 – who had been an ambassador for the Huguenots to the Queen (Hannay 1990, 46). Through her connections and patronage, Mary Sidney showed her political engagement and disposition in favour of the Protestant alliance. Mary Sidney also personally witnessed some of the crucial historical events which contributed to shaping the political scenario of the time such as the 1588 attack by the Spanish armies and the menace of an invasion. Although the Spanish Armada was defeated, the attack prompted a feeling of vulnerability in the English people, who identified the cause of the foreign threat in the question of succession. See, for instance Kewes 2012, 249.

[36] For instance, allusions to descent from the sun are scattered in various parts of *Antonius* (and they are also reminiscent of Medea, who declared her descent from the sun in Euripides, Seneca and Studley): In *Antonius*, Phoebus is the one who "did with breath" inspire life in the Egyptian people; and Cleopatra, in her final monologue, compares herself to "Phaëton's sisters, daughters of the sun" (5.105).

Cleopatra also knows that by killing herself she will deprive her children of their "royall right" (2.2.171) (In Garnier there is no reference to the royal right but to the "goods of their ancestors": "biens de leurs ayeux" 2.557), and of their "heritage" (2.2.173).

through the condemnation of Antonius' voluptuousness, Mary Sidney's expansion of the references to female and motherly figures seems to be in line with the motherly metaphor cherished by Elizabeth's royal propaganda.[37]

It is apparent in Sidney's depiction of the queen's belligerent behaviour that she applied the Medea model to her interpretation of Cleopatra's character, which Sidney derives from Garnier but renders more forceful. If Antonius is prey to the "destructive power of unruly passion" (Belle and Cottegnies 2017, 46) and shares the irrational lust for revenge which characterises Medea in both Euripides and Seneca,[38] Cleopatra acquires at one point the manly, combative qualities of Medea, stubbornly deciding to go to war out of jealousy for Antonius.[39] Her will to fight is unbending and mirrors the

Finally, in her final speech, Cleopatra asks her children: "Remember not, my children, you were born/Of such a princely race; remember not/ So many brave kings which have Egypt ruled/ In right descent your ancestors have been;/ That this great Antony your father was,/ Hercules' blood, and more than he in praise./ . . . /Who knows if that your hands, false Destiny, /The sceptres promised of imperious Rome, /Instead of them shall crooked sheephooks bear (5.59-69).

[37] As William Camden recalls in his 1615 *Annales,* in her speech to Parliament of 1559, Elizabeth famously claimed that she was "already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England" and asked her subjects: "reproach me so no more, . . . that I have no children: for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children" (27, 28). Although the political representation of the Queen as "mother of her nation" (Dunworth 2010, 34) might provide political stability at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, towards the end of the sixteenth century Elizabeth's decisions not to settle the succession question could result in the destruction of her own children, whether because her people could be left to face civil wars, or the power of unfavourable foreign rulers. As a matter of fact, when Mary Sidney translated Garnier, Elizabeth was 57 and it was clear that her people would have been her only offspring. In 1587 Mary Stuart had died, an event which could have drawn even more attention on the succession theme.

[38] But, as previously stated, he shows closer links with Euripides' Medea for the emotional trajectory that sees him move from self-pity to a wish for revenge and finally a desire to die.

[39] Plutarch's Cleopatra participates in the war too, but initially it is because Canidius brings her with him, only afterwards does she decide to stay, however, not on the grounds of her jealousy for Octavia and love for Antony, but because she had financed part of the war and in order to prevent Octavia from stopping the war: : "*Cleopatra* furnished him with two hundred [ships], and twenty thowsand talents besides, and prouision of vittells also to mainteyne al the whole army in this warre. So Antonius, through the perswasions of *Domitius*, commaunded *Cleopatra* to returne againe into AEGYPT, and there to vnderstand the successe of this warre. But *Cleopatra*, fearing least *Antonius* should againe be made friends with *Octauius Caesar*, by the meanes of his wife *Octauia*: she so plyed *Canidius* with money, and filled his purse, that he became her spokesman vnto *Antonius*" (996). Cleopatra's participation in the battle in Plutarch does not acquire the unfeminine and unmotherly characteristics associated with it in Garnier and highlighted by Sidney.

Colchian woman's refusal, in Euripides, of her biological right to motherhood in favour of combat, as a growing awareness of her own unfeminine agency ("I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once", Eur. *Med.* 250). Seneca offers a dissimilar version insofar as, differently from Euripides, he makes Medea from the outset "even more powerfully angry than Euripides', and more clearly capable of atrocity" (Heavey 2015, 5). Most importantly, Seneca does nothing to connect her to war like Euripides does, especially within the rigid dichotomy present between motherhood and combat.[40] In Euripides, her warlike and anti-motherly character emerges by degrees, precisely as in Garnier's Cleopatra. Besides, as in Euripides, at this point Medea is onstage with the nurse, and it is the chorus-leader who responds to her speech, exactly as in Garnier Cleopatra speaks to her women, Eras and Charmion, in either case being in conversation with, or overheard by, secondary or somewhat external characters; in Seneca, instead, she speaks with Jason. In Sidney's play, 2.2., Cleopatra comes out as a more active character in the Euripidean style than her French counterpart, where she appears more passive and self-critical in recollecting her decision to go to war:[41]

CLEOPATRA
Antoine (hé qui fut oncq' Capitaine si preux?)
Ne *vouloit* que i'entrasse en mes nauires creux,
Compagne de sa flotte, ains *me laissoit peureuse*
Loin du commun hazard de la guerre douteuse.
. . .
Mais *las ie n'en fis conte*, ayant l'ame saisie,

CLEOPATRA
Antony (ay me, who else so braue a chiefe!)
Would not I should haue taken seas with him;
But *would have left* me *fearfull woman* farre
From common hazard of the doubtfull warre.
. . .
But *I car'd not*: so was my soule possest,

[40] When Jason tells her that "Acastus instat" (521) ("Acastus is close by", 363), she actually offers him the opportunity to escape from the war: "Propior est hostis Creo: / utrumque profuge. non ut in socerum manus/armes, nec ut te caede cognata inquines, / Medea cogit: innocens mecum fuge" (521-4) ("A nearer enemy is Creon: escape from both of them. Medea does not compel you to arm yourself against your father-in-law, nor to stain yourself with kindred blood. Keep your innocence, and flee with me", 363).

[41] Quotations from Sidney's play retain the spelling except for the italics for names. All emphasis is mine.

A *mon tresgrand malheur* d'ardente ialousie:	(*To my great harme*) with burning iealousie,
Par-ce que ie craignois que *mon Antoine absent*	Fearing least *in my absence* Antony
Reprint son Octauie, et m'allast delaissant.	Should leaving me retake Octauia.
(Garnier 2.453-56, 463-6)	(Sidney 2.2.67-70, 77-80)

Sidney makes a few lexical changes that increase the sense of Cleopatra's determination about her participation in battle. Narrative distance is interesting in this respect; if in Garnier we read that Antonius "ne vouloit" (did not want) her to go to war, and he "[la] laissoit peureuse" (left her fearful), away from the war, in Sidney the change of the verb mode ("would not", 68, "would have left me fearfull woman", 69) suggests Antonius's *willingness* to leave her rather than his *actual leaving* her behind. While there is no doubt that Garnier's Cleopatra avows she was "peureuse", fearful, in Sidney she assigns this opinion to Antonius, thus stepping back from any acknowledgment of feebleness. Going by Cleopatra's report, we do not know whether she was in fact fearful; what we know is that this is what Antonius thought. Thus, narrative distance here detaches the narrator from the event, suggesting Cleopatra's resistance to sharing Antonius's opinion on womanly weakness, and at the same time her resistance to regretting her own agency. The exclamative "las" (77), revealing her grief in the French play, is done away with; the reference to her ensuing disgrace is more clearly a parenthetical remark (78); and Cleopatra, who "car'd not" for Antonius's concern, becomes central in the last lines, where *her* absence, not his, as in Garnier, is the possible cause of Antonius's own return to Octavia. In these lines, Cleopatra more accurately evokes the image of Euripides's Medea standing with a shield in battle than her French counterpart does (250).

Mary Sidney's construction of a more masculine and belligerent queen goes in the direction of her refusal of motherhood in the name of the love sacrifice she commits at the end of the play. What becomes clear in the unfolding of Sidney's drama is the total erasure of anything outside the monadic identification of Cleopatra's own self with Antony, exactly like Euripides' and Seneca's Medea's before her. While this aspect is observable both in the French play and in its English translation, there is a passage in Sidney's text which seems to imitate Euripides more than Garnier. In 2.2, Garnier's Charmion calls Cleopatra "mere rigureuse" (*Gar.* 170) (rigorous mother)[42], to which Cleopatra significantly responds "espouse debonnaire" (good-natured wife)[43]

[42] Translation mine.
[43] Translation mine.

with a challenging shift of focus from her children to her husband. Mary Sidney's translation of the first line is "hardhearted mother", a peculiar choice that moves the attention from Cleopatra's moral rigour to her unpassionate hard-heartedness. Of course, rigour here is connected to ideas of hardness and possibly, if we assume a Euripidean interference, with Euripides's Greek qualification of Medea as hard as stone or iron: "wretch, you are, it seems, a stone or a piece of iron. You mean to kill the children you gave birth to with a fate your own hand deals out" (1280). Mary Sidney might well have elaborated on the spur of her own invention, but Buchanan's translation does mention Medea's bosom, meaning 'heart' ("Misera, aut ferrum aut silicem gestas / pectore", 1345-6), and poses the question that this might have a connection with Mary Sidney's own choice. On the other hand, it should also be pointed out that this is the only Latin translation circulating at the time that mentions her "pectore".[44] The comparison with the Euripidean anti-heroine serves Mary Sidney to start her construction of Cleopatra's wicked motherhood. Cleopatra is not only hard-hearted as Buchanan's Medea, but she is associated with the concept of wretchedness, like Euripides's Medea who was defined as a wretch in relation to her decision to kill her children (in 819 and 1280).[45] Sidney also associates Cleopatra's wretchedness with her motherhood in discourses concerning her offspring and their destiny. For instance, while Garnier used the less effective "pauvrette" (2.403) in the same occasion,[46] when Cleopatra complains about the loss of her realm and children, she defines herself as a "wretch":

O pauvrette! ô chetive! ô Fortune severe!	O wretch! ô caitive! ô, too cruell happe!
Et ne portoy-ie affez de cruelle misere,	And did not I sufficient losse sustaine,

[44] See for instance Melanchthon: "O misera, num es saxum aut / ferrum" (245); and Stiblin: "O' misera, nimirum saxum, aut ferrum est" (162).

[45] Medea is actually defined in 1280 as a wretch with a heart of stone or iron: "τάλαιν', ὡς ἄρ' ἦσθα πέτρος ἢ σίδαρος, ἅτις τέκνων/ὃν ἔτεκες ἄροτον αὐτόχειρι μοίρᾳ κτενεῖς", since ὦ τάλαν derives from the verb *tlao* which means *suffer, undergo hardship, disgrace*. And in 817-820: CHORUS-LEADER: Yet will you bring yourself to *kill your own offspring*, woman?/ MEDEA:It is the way to *hurt my husband* most./ CHORUS-LEADER: And for yourself to become the most wretched of women./MEDEA: Be that as it may. Till then all talk is superfluous (817-820) [ΧΟΡΟΣ: ἀλλὰ κτανεῖν σὸν σπέρμα τολμήσεις, γύναι; /ΜΗΔΕΙΑ: οὕτω γὰρ ἂν μάλιστα δηχθείη πόσις./ΧΟ.: σὺ δ' ἂν γένοιό γ' ἀθλιωτάτη γυνή./ΜΗΔ.: ἴτω· περισσοὶ πάντες οὐν μέσῳ λόγοι.]. My emphasis.

[46] Mary Sidney uses the word "wretch" two other times, in 1.53 and 1.71, in these cases to translate Garnier's "miserable" referred to Antonius.

Mon royaume perdant, perdant la liberté.	Losing my realme, losing my liberty,
Ma tendre geniture, et la douce clairté	My tender of-spring, and the ioyful light
Du rayonnant Soleil	Of beamy Sunne
(2.404-7)	(2.2.18-21)

The feeling of impending fate is present in each play as both Medea and Cleopatra perceive the threat of imminent exile. This levelling feeling is enhanced by Sidney's translation of Garnier's "misère" (misery) as "loss", repeating it twice("losing") in the following line, where Garnier uses "perdant". However, while she has actually lost her realm and her liberty, she has not lost her children yet. At this point in the play, if she had reconsidered her suicide, she would not have lost her children at all, as they would have accompanied her in exile. Thus, by listing them along her other losses at this stage, she seems already to be foretelling, as Medea does, an uncertain and bleak fate for her children. When compared to Garnier's text, and within the political context already recalled, Mary Sidney's words acquire a different meaning – which is enhanced by Cleopatra's comparison with Medea – as they stress the destiny of the queen's children and her role in preserving their wellbeing.

Also in this case, the Medea model is derived from Garnier and enhanced by Mary Sidney who includes her independent endeavour as well as once again following Studley's footsteps. In the English translation of Seneca, Medea is called a wretched mother since her desire to hurt Jason surpasses her maternal instinct:

NU.
A mother dere art thou,
Fly therefore for thy chyldren's sake.

ME.
Ye see by whom, and how,
A wretched mother I am made.[47]
(11.Cii*r*)

The association of the word wretch with the concept of motherhood argu-

[47] In Studley, the reference to the father is accentuated if compared to Seneca: "NUTR Moriere, MED. Cupio. NUTR. Profuge. Med. Paenituit fugae./ MED. Fiam. NUTR. Mater es. MED. Cui sim vides" (170-1) ("NURSE You will die. MEDEA I desire it. NURSE Escape! MEDEA I regret escaping. NURSE Medea– MEDEA I shall become her. NURSE You are a mother. MEDEA You see by whom", 331), and no reference to her wretchedness is to be found in this passage. Only at the end of Seneca's tragedy does she define herself as a "misera" for having killed the children: "quid, misera, feci? misera?" (990) ("What have I done, poor woman? Poor woman?" 401).

ably derives from Mary Sidney's exposure to various sources, and is a step in the comparison of Cleopatra with Medea on the path that will lead to Cleopatra's final abandonment of her children to be configured as Medea's sacrifice of her children.

Despite her wild passion for Antonius, Cleopatra worries about her children's bleak future in exile, and like Medea, Cleopatra's feelings fluctuate between regret and rage. In both Euripides and Seneca, Medea shows concern about her children, but Euripides's account is closer to Sidney's play because Seneca's Jason banishes only Medea, not their children, and her preoccupation does not concern their fate in exile, but at home where she fears they might be punished for her faults; when Creon consents to saving them and raising them as his own children, she egoistically asks for them to be her companions in exile.[48] In Euripides, the children are exiled with Medea and she is, like Cleopatra, worried about them "wandering as beggars", deprived of their friends and country and abandoned by everybody like herself (*Eur.* 510-5).

In either case, when Cleopatra and Medea decide to 'kill them' it is because they deem the enemies' outrage even worse than death and see their children's sacrifice as the only viable option (*Eur.* 1059-62; *M.S.*5.26-39; *Gar.* 5.1819-30). My choice to use the word 'kill' here is to point out that the two mothers 'murder' their children in their own way: Medea physically as a vengeful act against Jason, Cleopatra imaginatively erasing their memory before committing suicide. Sidney shows at this point very subtle insights both into the psychology of a woman about to commit suicide from the grief of losing her husband and into her emotional response which involves the cancellation of all her affections, including her children, in preparation for the loss of her own life. This is something that cannot be found in the same way in Garnier. Besides, the Medea intertext here suggests a peculiar inflection that likens Cleopatra's suicide to Medea's subjective experience of her children's 'murder' as an act dictated by passion for the man they have lost – Medea for

[48] "Supplex recedens illud extremum precor,/ne culpa natos matris insontes trahat." (*Sen.* 282-3) ("As I depart, I make this last imploring prayer, that the guilt of the mother should not drag down her innocent sons", 341). Creon's reply is reassuring: he will welcome and protect the children as a father, thus removing all doubts about their survival and prosperity: "Vade: hos paterno ut genitor excipiam sinu" (*Sen.* 284) ("Go: I will shelter them in my fatherly embrace like their own parent", 341). Later, however, when speaking to Jason, she replies: "Contemnere animus regias, ut scis, opes/potest soletque; liberos tantum fugae/habere comites liceat in quorum' sinu/lacrimas profundam. te novi nati manent" (*Sen.* 540-4) ("My mind has the power and habit, as you know, of disdaining the wealth of kings. Only allow me to have the children as companions in my exile, in whose embrace I can pour out my tears. You have the prospect of new sons", 365).

hatred, Cleopatra for love. It is a 'murder' that Cleopatra also commits politically, as by depriving them of her support as a mother and as Queen of Egypt, albeit destined to be a captive in Rome, she also deprives them of any possible hope for royal power they may want to regain in the future. This point may indirectly be evinced in Sidney's play in the way she translates Garnier's Act 4 in which Caesar condemns Antonius' decision "when his two children, Cleopatras bratts, / To *Phœbe* and her brother he compar'd" (4.76-7), which was in Garnier: "lors que ses deux enfans deux iumeaux d'adultere, / comparant à Diane et à Phebus son frere" (4.1420-1). The presence of Cleopatra's name – absent from Garnier's play, where Caesar neglects to mention the mother of Antoine's children – does not only give more relevance to her character but also contributes to strengthen her connection with the children. Sidney also implies legitimate lineage by both mentioning her and choosing to elide all reference to adultery, when translating Garnier's "twins of adultery" as "Cleopatras bratts", which evokes Studley's play, where Medea's children are called "tender brats" (7.B7*r*) and "mournyng brats" (16.Cviii*r*), thus enhancing with her addition the ties already detected between the story of Cleopatra and that of Medea. The legitimation of the children's position at this point will further stresses the impact of Cleopatra's suicide in Act 5 on their future: their abandonment is symbolic of political sacrifice; theirs is, potentially, a 'political murder'.

As previously stated, Mary Sidney's Cleopatra had begun to bewail the loss of her children as early as 2.2, after the defeat at Actium, where she seemed to prefigure her own as well as their future disgrace. In her long monologue she listed all her losses, incongruously as if she had already experienced them all in the same way (2.2.18-21). The deeply felt sense of all-encompassing mourning anticipates Cleopatra's behaviour in Act 5. For her, as for Euripides's Medea, the thought of her children being abandoned in exile is unbearable, and the prospect of death is the only possible answer. But, interestingly, this is not an answer they seem to claim agency for. Both Euripides's Medea and Cleopatra bid farewell to their children in tones of heartfelt sorrow (*Eur.* 1066-77; *Gar.* 5.1846-70; *M.S.* 5.55-79), and both hope that their children will reach a better place, both recognise the inevitability of their destiny, and allude to their children's father before being overwhelmed with pain. Both are still in time to 'save' their children, but in different ways, both go beyond the point where they can let them 'live'; and even though Cleopatra does not physically kill them, she kills her own motherly affection for them by murdering herself, leaving them to their destiny of captives, which may very well be one of death. Neither Medea nor Cleopatra take responsibility in this respect; instead, they blame the overruling power of destiny, which both seem to be unable to resist. Thus, at this point, agency becomes something they do not acknowledge as theirs; they move beyond gender

roles and ethical qualifications connected with 'doing'; unable to identify themselves as a woman, mother, or warrior, both feel subjected to fate, a transcendental agent they submit themselves and their children to.

In her final speech, after her children have seen her for the last time, Cleopatra shares yet another psychological trait with Medea, but this time the dialogue is with Seneca. Medea compares herself to Niobe – the emblem of a mother stricken with pain for the death of her fourteen children – after she kills the first child and is about to kill the second in front of Jason, (*Sen.* 953-7; *Gar.* 5.1886-91; *M.S.* 5.95-100). Although this is a famous image of motherly grief which did not need to be suggested by Seneca to slip into this tragedy, its position and function in the unfolding of Cleopatra's tragedy seem to be more than coincidental. The two women's allusion to Niobe, in different ways, subverts that conventional emblem: Medea wishes that she had as many children as Niobe in order to sacrifice them all and make her revenge more powerful; Cleopatra claims that her pain for losing Antonius and her reign is greater than Niobe's own for losing her children. In either case, the two women's use of the Niobe image declassifies the role of their children in the hierarchy of these two mothers' affections, in fact dislocating the sense of Niobe's overwhelming pain to that of the loss felt by a betrayed wife (Medea) and a bereaved lover (Cleopatra).

But in the translation from French to English, this passage becomes even more strongly connected to the Medea myth, precisely as one of infanticide. In Sidney, Cleopatra's imaginary detachment from her children before actually leaving them becomes a fact: "Thy children thou, mine I, poore soule, *haue lost*, / And *lost their father*" (5.101-2). Their loss is given as a fait accompli, precisely as the loss of Antonius. This was not so in Garnier, where the past tense of the verb "perdre" is used for Niobe ("*tu perdis* tes enfans" 5.1892), not for herself ("*ie pers* les miens pauurette / Et leur père ie *pers*", 5.1892-3). By using the past tense for both Cleopatra's children and their father, Mary Sidney underlines Cleopatra's personal experience of different losses in time as belonging to the past, although that of her children has not occurred yet and may be imminent only if she pursues her suicidal intent. Her children are still alive, and it is precisely her decision not to kill herself that could keep them 'alive' for her and leave open for them a possibility for dynastic inheritance in the future. But, as in Medea's case, motherly love is here replaced by the totalising love for a man that shuts away any other affection and the sense of life itself: "I *lost* their father, more than them I waile" (*M.S.* 5.102) ("leur père je pers, que plus qu'eux je regrette"; *Gar.* 5.1893). Because of their love and hatred, respectively, Cleopatra and Medea, in their own ways, sacrifice their children's right to a prosperous future for a man.

4. Conclusion

Mary Sidney's translation (which she completed in 1590) appeared during a turmoiled political period in which Queen Elizabeth's chances of assuring social cohesion and her people's wellbeing were continually undermined by the uncertainty of succession and by the impending presence of foreign sovereigns. For the dramatists of the time, Roman and Greek history, "remote in space and time", allowed for "an investigation of the moral and political consequences" (Kewes 2012, 244) of state decisions.

The historical and mythological frames suggesting a warning against foreign threats also serve to portray the figure of the mother who, in the early modern period, had become "the focus of an emotional account of political concerns" (Dunworth 2010, 52). The representation of the mother in political terms was often associated with historical, literary, or mythological figures which epitomised different kinds of motherhood; figures such as Medea, Agave and Jocasta provided dramatists with a series of *exempla* well suited for representing the political climate of the time. Through the portrayal of classical motherly figures often connected with the "collapse of royal families and the wreck of dynasties" (Ibid.), dramatists could obliquely voice their concerns about the Elizabethan succession.

Garnier's play inserted in the early modern English context becomes something else, the figure of Cleopatra changes, she is not only the voluptuous queen who charms Antonius, and thus the symbol of passion, love, sacrifice and "unjust death" for the canonical Christian thought. In England she is a queen who is giving up her reign and her children's royal right to the foreign enemy.[49]

However close to her source, Sidney's translation does not only introduce innovations in the language and metre of the play, but she also contributes to its new metaphorical construction. By elaborating on the original in her translative approach, Mary Sidney did not only nuance the text semantically, but she also added an interpretative layer. When compared to Medea's children's destiny, the fate of Antonius and Cleopatra's children turns them into the victims of their parents' immoderate passion and selfishness, which foregrounds the theme of "the extinction of the princely line" through civil war – an issue clearly connected with contemporary fear of political unrest. Mary Sidney's translation and depiction of a female-like Antonius and of

[49] As Kewes states, early modern English plays often portrayed countries conquered by the Romans in order to artfully represent European states "currently at war with or annexed by Spain" (Kewes 2012, 253). This must have been particularly true in the period in which Mary Sidney translated *Marc Antoine*, right after the attack of the Invincible Armada in 1588.

a queen so passionately concentrated on her man as to disregard her children's future, acquires a different meaning in the context of Elizabeth I's reign characterised by fears regarding the question of succession.

Discussion of the possible dialogues between Garnier, Sidney and the ancient model of the Medea story needs further research; but the examples provided here suggest that if Garnier was one of several vehicles for the arrival of classical drama into England, its reception was not passive, and Mary Sidney operated a stylistic and conceptual re-elaboration of it in her translation. Admittedly, the story of Medea was well known and the question of Cleopatra's experience of the 'loss' of her children is something that could not be glimpsed in any way in Plutarch, who makes no mention of them in the context of her suicide, nor of her concern about them in his report of her death.[50] Nor would Shakespeare later dramatise anything other than her passion for Antony in his *Antony and Cleopatra*, even though Sidney's play has been listed amongst its sources.[51] In the 1590s, Sidney's emphasis on Cleopatra's motherhood and psychological response to the loss of her children, may well have been favoured by her access to both Seneca's and Euripides's versions of Medea, suggesting revisions of Garnier's play, through which those classical models reached her already digested and integrated into the fabric of drama. Thus, Mary Sidney's *Antonius*, the first closet drama published in English by a woman in the early modern period (Williams 2015)

[50] Pelling 2002, § 85-6; Plutarch 1579, 1009. References to Cleopatra's children and Cesarion occurs elsewhere in the account of the life of Marcus Antonius with no connection whatsoever to her final moments and her decision to die.

[51] "That Shakespeare read Mary Sidney's translation of Garnier during the research or composition of his play is suggested by the many verbal and conceptual parallels between the two works. . . . Bullough prints [*Antonius*] as an analogue and Spevack includes it among the major sources and influences. Ernest Schanzer has shown that echoes of Mary Sidney's *Antonius* – from almost the opening lines of her Argument to the final lines of her translation – run through Shakespeare's play" (Arshad 2019, 35). In his *Cleopatra*, a play overtly influenced by Mary Sidney's *Antonius* (Knight 2011, 2n1), Samuel Daniel shows a Cleopatra who "battles maternal instinct with her royal duty" (Knight 10n57) in a play in which the "themes of lineage and inheritance" (Knight 8n60) are felt very strongly and during a historical period in which succession was one of the major concerns in England. However, in Daniel's *Cleopatra* space is devoted to the character of Cesarion (the son of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra who was killed by Octavian) as the only heir to Cleopatra's reign. Unlike Garnier and Mary Sidney who focus on "all Cleopatra's children, Daniel follows the account of Plutarch more closely. Although Cleopatra does briefly mention her other children, it is Caesarion who is the main character" (8n57). The children of Sidney's Antonius and Cleopatra seem to have disappeared from Daniel's play in which "Egypt will die alongside Caesarion as he is the last heir to the Egyptian throne. Egypt could be being paralleled with Renaissance England and the question of who will inherit the throne after Elizabeth I, as she has no children to succeed her" (10n71).

and a play whose title refers to the male protagonist, in fact interrogated female passion, motherhood and politics, and did so very probably following the model of Medea.

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Grazia D'Arienzo*

Samuel Beckett on Italian Stages. Intermedial Performances Inspired by his Prose and Poems

Abstract

My essay focuses on the Italian theatre of the twenty-first century, examining how digital technology revitalises Samuel Beckett's non-dramatic work. In particular, I want to explore the collision between live performance and digital devices in the staging of the author's prose and poetry. I will be discussing two case studies: Qual è la parola (2006), and *deForma_09* (2009). The former is directed by Roberto Paci Dalò from the company Giardini Pensili and based on twenty-one of Beckett's poems; the latter is staged under the direction of Michele Sambin from Tam Teatromusica, and it features fragments from the prose fictions *Company* and *Worstward Ho*. Both Paci Dalò and Sambin develop an intermedial type of performance, considering Beckett's words as the core of audio and video processing, which also involves the actors' bodies. In these projects, new technologies affect both the soundscape and the visual sphere, composing in real-time on both layers. Qual è la parola employs sampling techniques and live-produced music to generate a harmonious sound flow, together with Beckett's lyrics. Projections of the performers' figures appear on two gauzes, one positioned on the proscenium area and one on the backdrop. *deForma_09* displays a set of sound contents: electronics, spoken words, and noises originated by the actors' movements on the stage. While four microphones manipulate these elements, Sambin virtually paints on the performers' silhouettes using a graphics tablet.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett; Italian theatre; intermedial performance; digital performance; Giardini Pensili; Tam Teatromusica

Over the years, several theatre practitioners have adapted Samuel Beckett's non-dramatic[1] works for the stage. His prose fiction, in particular, appears to be endowed with remarkable performative qualities that may easily be transformed into theatre. The critical literature on Beckett has occasionally emphasised this aspect, most notably referring to his late writing. Enoch Brater, for instance, in his essay called *The Drama in the Text*, asserts that "Fiction and drama, theatricality and textuality" in the author's narrative "seem to come together" (1994, 12).

[1] By the phrases "non-dramatic" and "extra-theatrical" I refer to all Beckett's texts other than the stage plays.

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While extremely and notoriously prescriptive for what concerned the staging of his plays by other directors, Beckett did in fact authorize a certain number of adaptations of his prose pieces (Kalb 1989, 117-43). In a letter from 13 January 1965, he wrote to Siobhan O' Casey, who was about to present a theatre version of *From an Abandoned Work* at the University of California at Santa Barbara, suggesting a minimalist set-up, while the actor should be more of a narrative voice than a proper character (Bair 1978, 578-9, 715). During an encounter in Paris, he also offered advice to Open Theater founder, Joseph Chaikin. In 1981 the American actor-director was the protagonist of a solo production (*Text*), staged under the direction of Steven Kent and based on a medley of the thirteen *Texts for Nothing* combined with excerpts from the novel *How It Is*. On the scene of the Public Theater in New York, Chaikin looked, according to Mel Gussow, "something like a clown, a patchwork fool who has wandered from a forest of Arden into a Beckett limbo" (1981). Another novel, *The Lost Ones*, provided the source for an internationally successful experiment that has been considered "a kind of avant-garde legend" ever since (Kalb 1989, 132). I am referring to the dramatization of the piece presented by Mabou Mines at the Theater for The New City (NYC) in 1975, directed by Lee Breuer. The rendering literally visualized the novel storyline: actor David Warrilow used tiny figures and a miniaturized cylinder to illustrate the text, while the public was seated all around the scene. After all, Mabou Mines is one of those groups whose name is largely – though not exclusively – associated with adaptations of Beckett's fiction (between 1975 and 1986 the collective presented, apart from *The Lost Ones*, *Mercier and Camier*, *Company*, *Imagine Dead Imagine*, *Wortsward Ho*).[2] The repertory of Gare St Lazare Players Ireland, a company created by actor Conor Lovett and director Judy Hegarty Lovett, consists, instead, almost entirely of Beckett's prose stagings.[3] They have toured, since 2016, with a cycle of works including *The Beckett Trilogy*, *The End*, *How It Is*, and a peculiar show *Here All Night* featuring original music by Beckett as well as some of his poems, and excerpts from *Watt*, *First Love*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*.

The Italian theatre has not been immune to the charms of Beckett's extra-dramatic word either. If this trend has received only limited scrutiny, it is due to the fact that the author's stage success in Italy is mainly depend-

[2] See Cohn 1999 and Smith Fischer 2007. An examination of Mabou Mines stagings of *The Lost Ones* and *Imagine Dead Imagine* can be found in McMullan 2010, 133-9.

[3] See McMullan 2007.

ent on his work as a playwright.[4] Yet, in 1967, one of the country's leading actors, Vittorio Gassman, converted the novel *The Unnamable* into a monologue, which he directed and performed in a production called *DKBC*, alongside other texts written by Kafka, Dostoevsky and Campton.[5] At Teatro La Cometa in Rome "l'innominabile narratore, solo e quasi immobile, racconta, mentre voci registrate gli rispondono, lo contrastano, gli si sovrappongono e immagini filmate vengono proiettate su pannelli" ("the unnamable narrator, alone and nearly static, speaks while recorded voices reply to him, oppose him, overlay him, and film images are also projected on panels", Cascetta and Peja 2000, 293). In 1987 Beckett's prose made its breakthrough in the framework of the avant-garde Nuovo Teatro with the project *Com'è* (*How It Is*), staged by the company Magazzini under the direction of Federico Tiezzi. In the same year, a repertory theatre, Teatro Stabile del Friuli-Venezia Giulia, presented a musical piece directed by Marco Sciaccaluga (*Beckett Concerto*), where the actor Vittorio Franceschini recited some of Beckett's poems and extracts from *Murphy*, *The Trilogy*, *Watt*, *From an Abandoned Work*, and *First Love*. In 1989 one of Beckett's foremost devotees, Giancarlo Cauteruccio, and his company Krypton proposed at the Teatro di Rifredi in Florence an assemblage of passages by the Irish writer. During the performance, whose title was Forse. Uno studio su Samuel Beckett, three actors mechanically repeated sentences from *How It Is*, *Sans*, *Company*, *All That Falls*, in a stage set up of metal scaffoldings, video monitors, projections, sound recordings and amplification devices. Regarding the contemporary experimental scene, at least two productions are worth mentioning: *A place* [That again], a "video-performance" created by Motus in 2006 as a tribute to *All Strange Away*, and the staging of *Neither*, designed by the video-artistic group Studio Azzurro for the Opernhaus in Stuttgart in 2004.[6]

In my essay, I will be focusing on two Italian projects presented in the first decade of the twenty-first century, which respond to the paradigm of

[4] Beckett's most frequently performed plays on Italian stages are *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, *Act Without Words I*, and *Act Without Words II*. Among the Italian directors and actors who have distinguished their work on Beckett, we should mention at least Carlo Quartucci, Remondi & Caporossi, Giancarlo Cauteruccio with his company Krypton, Glauco Mauri, Carlo Cecchi, Laura Adani, Adriana Asti, Anna Proclemer. For an overview of Italian productions of Beckett's works, see Cascetta and Peja 2000 and the website https://www.beckettitalianstudies.it/beckett-on-the-italian-stage/.

[5] The production is named after the initial letters of the four writers (Dostoevsky, Kafka, Beckett and Campton).

[6] The staging of the opera, composed by Morton Feldman on a text by Samuel Beckett, is directed by Paolo Rosa. On the production, see Pittaluga 2012 and D'Arienzo 2020.

"postdramatic theatre" (Lehmann 2006): Qual è la parola and deForma_09. The former is conceived by Roberto Paci Dalò from the theatre company Giardini Pensili in 2006 and inspired by twenty-one of Beckett's poems; the latter is staged in 2009 under the direction of Michele Sambin from Tam Teatromusica and features fragments from *Company* and *Worstward Ho*.

By refusing to translate Beckett's extra-theatrical work into a consistent dramaturgical structure, the two productions relinquish "the idea of theatre as a representation of a fictive cosmos" (Lehmann 2006, 30) and elude "the laws of telos and unity" (146). Both *Qual è la parola* and *deForma_09* avoid naturalist representation, linear narrative and mimetic acting, giving prominence to the materiality of the scene, the spatial quality of the stage, and the temporal elements of the performance. Freed from subjection to hierarchies and from the demand for coherency, the textual materials thus become "merely a component with equal rights" within "a gestic, musical, visual, . . . total composition" (46). Whereas Paci Dalò eschews the option of turning *What is the Word* into a staged reading, Sambin has no intention of carving out a monologue from *Company* and *Worstward Ho*, where characters and the literary text are supposed to be dramatized. The two directors, on the contrary, experiment with Beckett's poems and verbal fragments through the employment of digital technology and create a polyphonic texture consisting of different types of sound and musical resources.

My investigation seeks to trace the intermedial dynamics generated by the collision of Beckett's words with live staging and new media. The notion of intermediality in this essay refers to the incorporation of digital devices within the scene ecosystem, a shift that, as noted by Robin Nelson, has "challenged the very conception of theatre" (2010, 13). In fact, "the capacity of digital technologies multi-modally to integrate sound, visuals, words and temporal dynamics (in respect to the ease of digital editing in both real-time and during recording)" has almost radically "extended the multimodality of theatre" (14).

Paci Dalò and Sambin develop an intermedial type of performance, considering Beckett's words as the core of audio and video processing, which also involves the actors' bodies. In these projects, new technologies affect the soundscape and the visual sphere, composing in real-time on the two layers. Qual è la parola employs sampling techniques and live-produced music to generate a harmonious sound flow, together with Beckett's text. Projections of the performers' figures appear on two gauzes, one positioned on the proscenium area and one on the backdrop. deForma_09 displays a set of sound contents: electronics, spoken words, and noises originated by the actors' movements on the stage. While four microphones manipulate these elements, Sambin virtually paints on the performers' silhouettes using a graphics tablet.

1. *Qual è la parola* (2006).[7] Beckett's Lyrics as a Musical Score

Roberto Paci Dalò's work presents as a multi-layered constellation: whereas his background is related to music and the visual arts, he also operates at the intersection of different areas. He applies communication technologies and systems to the artistic sphere, developing projects that span the boundary between art and urban spaces. A theatre director, Paci Dalò has also authored film productions. His foremost research, however, addresses the field of sound design. Sound is understood not only as an acoustic element arranged in musical patterns but also as an array of phenomena:

> La musica, com'è noto, è solo una piccola parte all'interno dell'immenso mondo sonoro. Spesso si tende a confondere le due cose, usando la parola 'musica' come sinonimo del termine 'suono'. Potremmo affermare che il suono contiene in sé, in modo formalizzato, una musica. La musica è allora un momento o una condizione del suono. Parlando del suono ci riferiamo quindi all'intera gamma dell'udibile, ed è necessario, in questo senso, pensare a un processo compositivo che incorpori il rumore e l'intero soundscape. (Paci Dalò, interview with the author 2016)

> [Music, as is well known, is only a tiny part of the immense spectrum of sounds. We often tend to confuse the two concepts, by using the word 'music' as synonymous with the term 'sound'. We should say, instead, that the sound incorporates music, and that music is made up of formalised sounds. In other words, music is a part of or a state of the sound sphere. When we talk about sound, we ought to refer to the whole range of the hearable. It is necessary to imagine a compositional process as something that includes the noise and the entire soundscape.][8]

In addition to writing pieces for ensembles of traditional instruments, Paci Dalò works with electronics, the clarinet and music sampling, composing and reassembling phonic contents in audio-visual installations. In 1985, the artist decided to unite all these interests by founding a performance company named Giardini Pensili. The group aimed at establishing a dialogue between technology and the spoken word, between language and image, between fragments of literature and the phonic dimension in all its variations.

[7] *Qual è la parola*, a scenic execution by Gabriele Frasca and Roberto Paci Dalò, Teatro Studio, Scandicci, 12 March 2006. Performers: Gabriele Frasca, Caroline Michel, Patrizia Valduga. Direction, space design, visual design, lighting design: Roberto Paci Dalò. Music by Roberto Paci Dalò and Morton Feldman. Live video mixing by Filippo Giunchedi. Production: Giardini Pensili, with the support of Regione Emilia Romagna, Provincia di Rimini, Comune di Rimini.

[8] Translation mine.

Its theatrical projects – based on diverse authors' texts – insert the words within impromptu 'executions', exploiting real-time processing of sound and visual media.

Qual è la parola (the Italian title for Beckett's poem *What Is the Word*) was born from the collaboration between Paci Dalò and one of his most frequent stage partners in Giardini Pensili, Gabriele Frasca. A professor in Comparative Literature at the University of Salerno, a novelist, a poet, and a playwright, Frasca is a specialist in Samuel Beckett's work, which he has partially translated from English and French. In 2006 he asked Paci Dalò to create a theatre piece based on some of the author's texts. In that year, for Beckett's centenary, Frasca had already hosted an academic symposium entitled "Beckett in Italia" ("Beckett in Italy").[9] When he was asked by actor and director Giancarlo Cauteruccio to be involved in the 1906BECKETTCENTOANNI2006 festival,[10] Frasca reached out to Paci Dalò. The scholar suggested to Paci Dalò that they stage a performance relying not on Beckett's theatre plays, but on his poems, which in 1999 he had translated into a complete Italian edition for the publisher Einaudi. Considering Beckett to be one of his literary influences,[11] Paci Dalò gladly accepted the invitation. The two developed the overall project of *Qual è la parola*, while the musician-artist took care independently of the sound design, lighting design, and video score. Paci Dalò, who considers the figure of the theatre director in the light of a composer, defined the work with the expression "esecuzione scenica" ("scenic execution", *Qual è la parola*, theatre programme 2006), namely, a theatrical staging conceived as a musical score. The term, in fact, is meant to highlight:

> la componente musicale del lavoro, non la presenza della musica in quanto tale. L'elemento musicale, nel mio teatro, è legato ad un'idea di 'composizione in scena'. Una 'esecuzione scenica' è uno spettacolo in cui non ci sono soltanto le voci, le parole che 'dicono' il testo, ma in cui è presente un'idea più articolata di struttura compositiva; una struttura che è musicale dal punto di vista scenico. (Interview with the author 2016)
>
> [the musical component of the work, not the presence of music as such. The musical element, in my performances, is connected to an idea of 'composi-

[9] The conference was held in April 2006 at the Università per Stranieri in Siena.

[10] 1906BECKETTCENTOANNI2006 was a festival born with the aim of "offering the new generations an in-depth study of Beckett's works". Conceived by Giancarlo Cauteruccio and produced by the theatre company Krypton, the project was divided into different sections (theatre, visual arts, conferences) over three months and hosted by Teatro Studio in Scandicci.

[11] Paci Dalò has paid tribute to Beckett with a sound and video installation called Beck/ett, presented at the Riccione TTV Festival-Performing Arts on Screen in 2004.

> tion on stage'. A 'scenic execution' is a kind of theatrical performance that includes not only words or voices pronouncing the text. It is a performance which depends on a more articulated idea of composition. That is to say, a performance that is a theatrical musical structure.][12]

The show seeks to "fa[r] risuonare i sussurri e gl'inciampi dei versi del grande autore irlandese" ("to echo the whispers and stumbles of the great Irish author's poems", Qual è la parola, theatre programme 2006), drawing attention to the acoustic component of words, enhancing phonemes and their rhythmic arrangement. For Paci Dalò, metrics represents "il vero motore dell'azione drammatica" ("the real engine of dramatic action", 2011, 92), in a vision fully shared by Gabriele Frasca:

> Quando io e Paci Dalò abbiamo cominciato a collaborare nei primi anni '90, abbiamo sempre lavorato io come poeta-performer e lui come musicista-regista. Fin dall'inizio, non abbiamo mai pensato che la parola dovesse essere accompagnata dalla musica. Quello che facciamo, in realtà, è sempre un tentativo di insistere sull'accento metrico . . . Roberto prende l'accento della mia lettura e ne fa un ritmo . . . Già in origine le mie traduzioni beckettiane riservano sorprese nel ritmo. Beckett usa il ritmo, e io penso che sia giusto tradurre le sue opere usando l'Italiano in maniera ritmica. E questo ritmo, volevamo che si sentisse anche nel corso dello performance. [interview with the author 2016]
>
> [When Paci Dalò and I started collaborating in the early 90s, I would always work as a poet-performer while he was the musician-director. From the beginning, we never thought that the word should be accompanied by music. Actually, what we try to do is to insist on the metric accent. . . Roberto takes the accent of my reading and makes a rhythm out of it . . . Right from the start my translations of Beckett's texts already showed surprises in the rhythm. Beckett uses rhythm, and I think it is right to translate his works rhythmically using the Italian language. And we wanted this rhythm to be heard during the performance as well.][13]

Qual è la parola, intertwines the poems with pre-existing musical compositions, such as instrumental pieces by Morton Feldman[14] and by Paci Dalò himself. These materials, subjected to a sampling process, are then mixed with an electronic sound carpet that the director develops in real-time during the performance. Ideally, Paci Dalò imagines the musical dimension and

[12] Translation mine.

[13] Translation mine.

[14] One of the sampled pieces is *For Samuel Beckett* (1987), a one-hour composition written by Morton Feldman in honour of the Irish author. Feldman scored it for an ensemble consisting of a doubled woodwind quartet, brass septet, string quartet, and a trio of harp, piano, and vibraphone.

the words connected as in a sort of *Sprechgesang* (interview with the author 2016).

For the show, Frasca and Paci Dalò selected twenty-one of Beckett's poems from the Einaudi complete collection. For the Italian edition, Frasca had set out to restore the exact chronological sequence in which the author wrote the texts.[15] The script of *Qual è la parola*, on the contrary, was not animated by any desire for philological systematization, but to provide an overview of Beckett's poetic activity:

> Le liriche beckettiane selezionate comprendevano sia quelle del suo periodo giovanile, più strutturate e canoniche, sia le più strane, come le 'filastroccate'. . . Ma, ovviamente, il pezzo più significativo era What Is the Word, perché è un testo ambiguo, che può essere reso in molti modi diversi: è stato letto, recitato, cantato . . . E noi pensammo appunto all'interazione tra le parole e l'elettronica . . . Era necessario portare pian piano lo spettatore verso l'autore, lasciarlo entrare nell'officina beckettiana. (Frasca, interview with the author 2016)
>
> [We selected both poems of his youthful years – structured and canonical – and the strangest poems, as the mirlitonnades . . . Of course, the most significant text was What Is the Word, because it is an ambiguous text, which can be rendered in many different ways: it has been read, recited, sung. And we thought about creating an interaction between words and electronics . . . We wanted to lead the public slowly towards the author, to let them enter the Beckettian workshop.][16]

As the script of *Qual è la parola*[17] exhibits, the stage journey through Beckett's poetic world is divided into two Parts. Part I includes five texts, all recited in Italian: Cosa farei mai senza questo mondo senza né volto, senza né domande ("What would I do without this world without a face or questions"),[18] from the "Poems in French" composed in the second part of the 1940s; Cascando, one of his most famous lyrics; Alba and Malacoda from Beckett's first collection of poetry *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935). Then one of the mirlitonnades appears, Notte che tanto fai ("Night, you do

[15] The complete Italian collection of Beckett's poems is a multilingual edition. Frasca followed both the French and the English complete collections, making several – albeit slight – variations on the chronological order. See Beckett 1992, Beckett 1984 and Frasca 1999, LXI.

[16] Translation mine.

[17] The script is a large format notebook with white sheets kept at the Roberto Paci Dalò Private Archive. The text occupies twenty-two unnumbered pages, on the left column of which the printed texts of the selected lyrics are pasted. The right side of the sheet, instead, presents drawings with scene diagrams and handwritten notes concerning the lighting design, the video score, and the general musical framework.

[18] The original French title is *Que ferais-je sans ce monde sans visage sans questions*.

so much"),[19] closing the first segment of the performance. Part II mostly consists of these short poems written in French in the late 1970s and largely ignored by critics. They are read, together with *Ritorno Ritorno* (the English poem *Roundelay*) both in Italian and in their original language of composition. The performers counterpoint the words according to the musical form of the canon. *Qual è la parola* (*What Is the Word*)[20] establishes the finale of the show. With its sobbing syntax, this lyric conveys the sense of poetic creation as it unfolds and the stumbling attempts in the search for the mot juste, representing, in a way, Beckett's spiritual testament.

Beckett's poems are recited on the stage by three performers: Frasca himself and a mirror figure of him, Patrizia Valduga, a poet and translator of texts from English and French. Then there is Caroline Michel, a French actress who speaks Italian. For the production, Paci Dalò planned an empty space, which is defined by the light component and by its increased or decreased impact on the dark background. A scrim is arranged in front of the actors, and one more on the back wall. The stage is filled with minimal scenic props: three high-backed metal seats, located at the back of the scene on the right side, and three microphone stands, which the actors move as they perform. Frasca, Valduga and Michel wear black coats, and their score involves gradual movements within the stage habitat (crossing the floor, changing position from standing to sitting, moving microphones), with long action times for entering and exiting the scene. On the veils of transparent tulle live-feed footage of the performance is transmitted. Cameras film the actor's bodies, while a video mixing operator morphs their features and blends them with archival images. Details of the human figures are reshaped and re-proposed during the live show, turned into "textures, spectrographies" (Paci Dalò, interview with the author 2016). In isolating physical sections, the shots "diventano altro, una struttura cangiante, in movimento, una struttura di luce, non necessariamente legata a un'immagine riconoscibile" ("become something else, an iridescent structure, in motion, a structure of light, not always linked to a recognizable image", interview with the author 2016).

While the staging presents mostly a static tableau, it is light, sound and image contents that actually produce motion. The visual flow of the performance reveals different correlations with Beckett's iconographic catalogue. The shooting in detail of Caroline Michel's mouth, for instance, is an explicit quotation of *Not I*. Besides, the choice of body fragmentation that characterizes the visual scape leads back to Beckett's theatre, a theatre

[19] The original French title is *Nuit qui fais tant*.

[20] Beckett wrote the poem in French in 1988 with the title *Comment dire*. The following year he translated it into English.

that – in Frasca's opinion – connotes itself as "un sistema di smembramento del corpo" ("a system of body dismemberment", interview with the author 2016). Beckett's words, too, emerge as a visual component, literalized in the video sequences: body pieces alternate, at times, with the appearance of text pieces. Words take shape visually and replace what had been previously projected on the tulle:

> Di tanto in tanto comparivano porzioni di testo, proprio come c'erano porzioni di corpo, quello dei performer. Il fatto che lo spettacolo fosse sostanzialmente al buio, permetteva di ottenere il massimo con il minimo e andare nella direzione beckettiana della sottrazione: sottrarre il corpo quanto più era possibile e farlo apparire di tanto in tanto, frammentato dalle riprese oppure affiorando dal buio. Eravamo tutti vestiti di nero, con dei cappotti fortemente beckettiani, evocativi del suo universo. Dovevamo sparire nel nero anche noi, sulla scena. (Frasca, interview with the author 2016)

> [Portions of text appeared randomly, just as there were portions of bodies, those of the performers. The fact that the show was substantially in the dark permitted the greatest effect with the least effort and, in this way, to comply with Beckett's principle of subtraction: to subtract the body as much as possible and only let it appear from time to time, fragmented by the footage or surfacing from the darkness. We were all dressed in black, with coats strongly evocative of Beckett's universe. We also had to fade away into the darkness of the stage.][21]

As for the sonic fabric of *Qual è la parola*, it is woven from a broad warp (the verses of the text) and a weft of musical phenomena. Beckett's words are inserted into a variegated phonic tapestry, resulting in an extemporaneous composition with a jam session dimension. Live electronics – that is, electronic sounds produced and mixed in real-time – is combined with the sampling of materials previously included in a music database, such as Feldman's and Paci Dalò's pieces. Linguistic ramifications enrich the aural aspect of Beckett's words: the performers give voice to several poems not only in their Italian translation but also in other languages (now French, then English), overlapping the lyrics as in a musical canon. *Qual è la parola* clearly appears to insist on the acoustic signifier of the word, which is treated mainly as a sound unit, creating what Paci Dalò and Frasca define as a process of vocal and linguistic "dispersion" ("dispersione delle voci e delle lingue", *Qual è la parola*, theatre programme 2006).

[21] Translation mine.

2. *deForma_09* (2009).[22] Fragments of a Beckettian Discourse

Tam Teatromusica was founded in 1980 by three members whose experience is not strictly rooted in theatre: Michele Sambin, a graduate in Electronic Music from the Conservatory of Venice, is a painter, a video artist and a director of experimental films; Pierangela Allegro's background is connected to the visual arts, having studied set design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice; Laurent Dupont, instead, trained as a dancer. While Dupont pursued a different path, Sambin and Allegro have guided Tam in multidisciplinary projects that implement the enmeshing of music, space, image and gestural movement.

Being influenced by composer Mauricio Kagel and his theory of "instrumental theatre", Michele Sambin considers music as the underlying pattern in the design of Tam's performances. Commenting their first production *Armoniche*[23] – which can be translated both as "Harmonicas" and "Harmonics" – he writes:

> La musica come punto di riferimento costante: ciò che accade sulla scena da un punto di vista spaziale, gestuale, sonoro è determinato da una struttura musicale e non da una sequenza narrativa. Più un comporre con suoni e gesti che raccontare. Suono e azione vengono composti simultaneamente . . . (2010)

> [Music is a permanent point of orientation: what happens on the stage is determined by a musical structure and not by narrative sequences, whether from the point of view of space, gesture, or sound. [Conceiving a performance means] composing with sounds and gestures rather than telling a story. Sound and action are simultaneously composed . . .][24]

Tam's performance practice generates an abstract kind of music-theatre, with a highly formalistic aesthetic, involving both sound and vision, and having the actor's voice and body as its central focus. Although the group's stagings are not drama-based, that does not necessarily imply the absence of a textual component. According to Pierangela Allegro, using words in performance means "scrivere con la voce" ("writing with the voice", 2012, 483), treating words as sound made voice. In Tam's productions:

[22] deForma_09, concept and direction by Michele Sambin, Teatro Maddalene, Padova, 13 March 2009. Live digital painting: Michele Sambin. Texts from Nohow On by Samuel Beckett. Performers-musicians: Pierangela Allegro, Alessandro Martinello, Alen Sinkauz, Nenad Sinkauz. Sound design: Kole Laca. Production: Tam Teatromusica, Dipartimento di Storia delle Arti Visive e della Musica dell'Università di Padova, Comune di Padova, Audio Art Festival Cracovia.

[23] According to Cristina Grazioli, the project *deForma* is an expansion of this first work. See Grazioli 2014.

[24] Translation mine.

> le parole espresse con la voce sono . . . eredità di altri autori, furti consapevoli che indicano una predilezione per la riscrittura in grado di trasformare la scrittura originaria in una superficie rugosa, materica, dietro alla quale è sempre possibile intravvedere la precedente superficie . . .
> Il senso sta nell'attingere a ciò che ha già una sua esistenza e che può essere trasfigurato attraverso un successivo intervento per trovarsi a vivere un'altra vita oltre a quella d'origine . . .
> Nella scelta ridotta all'osso, le parole possono mostrare la loro potenza senza rischiare la confezione del discorso, il realismo del dialogo (483-4).
>
> [The words delivered through the voice . . . are an inheritance from other authors. It is intentional stealing that reveals a propensity towards a rewriting process. Such process can transform the original writing into a rough, tactile surface, behind which the original one can always be recognised . . .
> The purpose is to draw on what has its own existence and can be reshaped through a further transformation so that it can live a new life in addition to its initial one . . .
> By selecting fragments out of a text, I let the words show their strength without risking the fabrication of a speech, the realism of a dialogue".][25]

The production at the core of my discussion, *deForma_09*, is a striking example of this "rewriting" praxis, arising from a meditation on the nature of sound in relating space. The work is the third part of a broader project which ran from 2007. The first piece, *deForma_07*, was designed for an event dedicated to music and conceived as a sonic promenade experience through a desecrated church. The second 'episode', deForma_08, was held in non-theatre venues, first at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Warsaw and then in a hall of the Conservatory of Music in Krakow. *deForma_07* and *deForma_08* featured similar textual references,[26] taken from notes by the composer Teresa Rampazzi,[27] and an air stage parallelepiped made of elastic material. While maintaining this floating prop, *deForma_09* preferred to present selected excerpts from Beckett's prose fictions Company and *Worstward Ho*.

In the development of the stage project, Beckett' words do not constitute a pre-verbal track. As Pierangela Allegro states: "Non è stato un testo a servirmi da stimolo per creare un'azione scenica, ma è la performance che mi ha suggerito un certo tipo di testo, un certo tipo di autore" ("The text didn't serve as an impulse in creating the performance. On the contrary, the performance itself suggested a specific type of text, a specific type of

[25] Translation mine.

[26] The text of *deForma_07* is found in Allegro 2010a.

[27] Teresa Rampazzi (1914–2001) was a composer and a pianist. One of the pioneers in the production and dissemination of electronic music in Italy, she was a mentor to Michele Sambin.

author", Allegro-Sambin 2015, 172). Therefore, it is the sequence of the actions and the space conformation determined during the workshop phase that leads the artist towards Beckett's writing. In particular, being one of the actors on the scene, she realises, from within the performance, to be in "una sorta di landa desolata, un unico luogo claustrofobico" ("a sort of desolate land, a single claustrophobic place", 172).[28] She clarifies the staging process in these notes:

> A questo punto del percorso, osservando le situazioni e lo spazio scenico creato, riconosco un clima beckettiano.
> Cerco le parole. Le trovo nel testo tradotto in italiano con il titolo di In nessun modo ancora . . .
> Esse aderiscono in modo tanto inatteso quanto naturale all'opera che sta prendendo corpo. Le estrapolo dal testo d'origine e . . . le ricompongo per affidarle poi ai performer perché le agiscano, su partitura, durante l'esecuzione scenica. (Allegro 2012, 490)

> [At this stage of the work, as I observe the situations and the stage space that we have created, I recognise a Beckettian ambience.
> I look for the words. I find them in a text that has been translated into Italian with the name In nessun modo ancora . . .
> They adhere as unexpectedly as they do naturally to the work that is taking shape. I extrapolate them from the source text . . . I reassemble the words and assign them to the actors. This way, they can perform the words during the staging. (translation mine)][29]

It is thereby a matter of a reverb effect between the scene and the written word: it is the stage that seems to call Samuel Beckett to be part of the work. During the preparatory phase of the show, Pierangela Allegro drafts a short script. Although retaining two lines by Teresa Rampazzi as a link to *deForma_07* and *deForma_08*, her efforts are aimed to combine the initial sentences from *Company* with several quotations from *Worstward Ho*.[30]

As a matter of fact, despite being written in different years, the two Beckettian pieces reveal several similarities. A "melodic ritualism" (Brater

[28] Samuel Beckett is an influential figure in Pierangela Allegro's creative work. References to the author appear in Tam's production *Scritto Dentro* (2013) and in a recent art project by Allegro, Calma di Vuoto (2020). On *Scritto Dentro*, see Grazioli 2016.

[29] *In nessun modo ancora* is the Italian edition of *Nohow On*, translated by Gabriele Frasca in 2008 for the published Einaudi. It is composed by three prose fictions that had already appeared individually: *Company* (1979), *Mal vu mal dit* (1981), and *Worstward Ho* (1983). In 1989 they were collected in a single volume published by John Calder, to which Beckett gave the overall title *Nohow On*. The first Italian translations of *Company* and *Worstward Ho* appeared respectively in 1981 and 1988, edited by Roberto Mussapi.

[30] The text of *deForma_09* is found in Allegro 2010b.

1994, 144) pervades these fictions, which feature a fragmented syntax, rhythmic patterns, and profuse use of rhetorical devices such as alliteration, assonance and anaphora. As Brater points out, "sound" constitutes "the body and focus that gives" these texts "breadth, vigour and unparalleled coherence" (135). In *Company* Beckett – with a metanarrative expedient that imposes on the reader-spectator, right from the start, the imperative to imagine a human subject lying "on his back in the dark" – seems eager to photograph the process of imagination in its making. In Worstward Ho, the fading of the narrative aspect goes hand in hand with descriptive hypertrophy of a rhythmic nature, in which, between entire monosyllabic sequences and pejorative superlatives, the word ends up becoming "the ultimate dramatis persona" (138). Excerpts of this "minefield of musical self-quotations" (110) compose the score of the performers' vocal expression in *deForma_09*. The four actors-musicians (Pierangela Allegro, Alessandro Martinello, Alen Sinkauz and Nenad Sinkauz) speak their lines without any interpretative or narrative purpose. Four microphones positioned at the centre of the stage capture and boost their voices, while audio mixers digitally alter and distort the sound. The actual idea of distortion and metamorphosis underlies the entire production. As Sambin states (2009), the title deForma refers, on the one hand, to the verb 'to deform' and on the other hand – considering 'de' as an autonomous preposition and 'forma' as an ablative – it intends to translate the Latin expression, which means 'about the form'. On stage, a big parallelepiped rubber band embodies this idea. The structure is suspended on the ceiling and bonded to the performers through a system of ropes and pulleys over their backs. The bodies' movements determine continuous deformations of the white lines and frequent shifts from light to shadow.

At the beginning of the performance, in a darkened environment, only the tight structure is visible. The actors then emerge, standing in the four corners of the scene. While conceiving this transition, Allegro had in mind these sentences from *Worstward Ho*: "First the body. No. First the place. No. First both" (qtd in Allegro 2012, 491-2). The show proceeds through sounds and vocal juxtaposition ("A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine"), corporeal rhythms, solo and choral moments (looking for a "company"). The performers follow a movement scheme based on continuous approaches, imbalances, and falls, according to the adagio "Try again. Fail again. Fail better". This way, Allegro develops actions suggested by the context of the subjects described in **Company** and *Worstward Ho*. The show aspires to visualize a type of Beckettian space ("a sort of desolate land, a single claustrophobic place" Allegro 2015, 172) and the author's obsession with geometric boundaries. In a set-up recalling that of Quad, the actors experience the limit, as it happens in Beckett's late theatre: "Each play of Beckett's maturi-

ty created a meticulously specified set of boundary conditions . . . The plays are 'about' their boundaries: seeking them, reaching them, using them, living with them" (Scanlan 1996, 163). In this case, thus, the protagonists do not experience anguish. They explore the stage space while meditating on the reshaping of an object. According to Sambin, the reference to the alteration does not only concern the configuration of the parallelepiped; the concept of deformation is also connected to the manipulation that digital devices enact both visually and sonically. In this regard, the image landscape is dominated by what he calls "live digital painting" interventions. During the performance, the director uses Photoshop, a graphics tablet and a projector to draw on the stage and the performers' bodies, continuously morphing their contours while crafting a "dramaturgy of light" ("drammaturgia della luce", Grazioli 2010). The same applies to the audio-sphere. In deForma_09 the microphones and the mixers merge and distort audio contents such as musical sounds, spoken language, noises produced by physical actions (the beating of their chests, the clatter of footsteps). Samuel Beckett's words are remodeled through digital filters and become a sound particle, a sound between sounds, originating a Beckettian fragmented discourse:

> . . . se guardo ciò che facciamo vedo frammenti.
> E frammento aggiunto a frammento e così via darà luogo a un 'discorso' frammentato e quindi più utilizzabile per chi lo riceve . . . (Allegro 2009)

> [. . . if I look at our work I see fragments.
> And adding fragment over fragment a fragmented 'discourse' will take place, eventually more usable for the spectator . . .][31]

Tam Teatromusica introduces Beckett's "phonographic proses" ("prose fonografiche", Frasca 2008, XI) into the performance as frozen words, using them in their intrinsic acoustic qualities, as grids of physical vibrations passing through the stage space.

3. Conclusion

This essay has investigated two intermedial productions inspired by Beckett's prose and poetry, showing how digital devices offer new ways to embody his words and visions. In the conception of *What is the Word* Roberto Paci Dalò and Gabriele Frasca focus on the interrelationships between Beckett's lyrics, electronics and acoustic interventions. They also embed the author's different languages in the vocal stream, delivering an alterna-

[31] Translation mine.

tive aural perspective of his verses. In deForma_09, Beckett's imagery acts as a stylistic and aesthetic influence that strongly impacts the performance configuration, while his prose is nestled in a polyphonic composition able to enhance the rhythmic-sonic value of the words. The two projects thus succeed in reinterpreting Beckett's non-theatrical legacy by applying his own approach to the stage work. A work that, in the author's own words, was "a matter of fundamental sounds" (Beckett-Schneider 1998, 24).

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Alison Middleton*

'Homer' Tackles Aeschylus: Theatrical Adaptation as Process in Anne Washburn's *Mr Burns* and Robert Icke's *Oresteia*

Abstract

This article explores the limitations of Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as distinct "product" and "process" (2013), when applied to ancient theatre and its reception in twenty-first century performance. Two modern productions are used to problematise this binary: Anne Washburn's *Mr Burns* (2014) and Robert Icke's *Oresteia* (2015), both of which showcase theatre's inherent status as ephemeral 'process'. This article borrows Paul Davis' notion of "culture-text" (1990) alongside terminology from Lawrence Venuti (1995) to describe the multiplicity of influence and interpretation that is so central to theatrical adaptation. Erika Fischer-Lichte's theorisation of theatre as constituted by "co-presence" (2008) is also used to distinguish live performance from other forms of creative adaptation (e.g. film, literature), as is its inherent futurity (Hall 2013, Langer 1953). Interpretation and memory, integral processes within adaptation, are considered as subjective and fragmentary, following Saidiya Hartman's perceptions on chosen inheritances (2006) and Donna Haraway's conception of "situated knowledges" (1988). Margherita Laera's non-linear temporal conception of both theatre and adaptation (2014) is explored, revealing the cyclical dialogue of temporalities particular to the theatrical adaptation process.

Keywords: Greek theatre; adaptation; translation; memory; Aeschylus; Anne Washburn; Robert Icke; *Oresteia*; *Mr Burns*; *Orestes*

1. Introduction

Greek tragedy is, in essence, mythical material adapted for the stage. These ancient plays were dependent on reworkings of well-circulated stories, which evolved into a variety of different versions through their repeated retellings. This dynamic process formed a genre whose rules and tropes were influenced and changed by each new tragedy or performance.[1] In this sense,

[1] Bakhtin on literary genres: "during the process of their formation, they absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion" (1986, 62). This is to say that literary genres are informed by non-literary types of speech (e.g. storytelling) that occur and shift within the writers' own linguis-

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classical theatrical adaptation has always been a process built upon multiple influences, and subject to varied interpretations. Whilst there may not be any 'universal' modern equivalent of ancient myth, there are analogous story-patterns which are broadly familiar to today's audiences within their specific cultures, and which Paul Davis has termed "culture-texts" (1990, 4). Davis distinguishes between 'original' texts and their lasting memory, using *A Christmas Carol* as his primary example. He compares the Dickens novel with the well-known story, the cultural importance and survival of which has been propelled by its theatrical (and later, its cinematic) adaptations (4).[2] Whilst there are marked differences between the Dickens text and its various retellings, these innovations are often more widely known, since the popularity of the story far exceeds the readership of the novel. Arguably, without such consistent refashioning, the text might not have earned its cultural status. This story has gained its lasting prominence by fracturing into multiple, different, and often ephemeral versions.

Whilst it is a common assumption that a playwright must first read a source text to adapt it, the concept of culture-text allows for adaptation to develop outside of this direct engagement.[3] This is especially the case for canonical works; as beyond their text exists "a generally circulated cultural memory" (Ellis 1982, 3), an audience can experience a work through culture-text without consulting the original. Similarly, artists need not engage directly with ancient texts for their works still to be recognised as adaptations, versions or appropriations. For the sake of consistency, I will use 'adaptation' throughout this article as an umbrella term to cover all of the creative reworkings discussed, whether they are announced or otherwise.[4] Though the term 'appropriation' may be appealing for unannounced or radical reworkings, Julie Sanders notes that the sense of "hostile takeover" the word implies is not exclusive to appropriations. Indeed as "adaptation can be oppositional, even subversive" (2016, 19), for my purposes it seems superficial to distinguish between the two.

tic culture. On reperformances in the classical period: see Csapo and Wilson (2015) on reperformances outside of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries; Braund, Hall and Wyles (2019) on theatre and performance culture around the Black Sea from the early archaic age until the Roman world.

[2] Miller notes the Victorian practice of regularly adapting novels played a key part in this process, with theatrical adaptations of novels being "the first step toward abstracting . . . a 'culture-text'" (2017, 58).

[3] E.g. Snyder takes direct engagement for granted, positing "a screenwriter must read a source text to adapt it" (2017, 105).

[4] My definition of adaptation departs here from Hutcheon: "an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works" (2013, 7); I might prefer Saoudi's (2017) term 'tradaptation' to deliberately include translation, but as he too concedes, 'adaptation' is more commonly used.

Both Anne Washburn's *Mr Burns* (2014) and Robert Icke's *Oresteia* (2015) had their UK debuts in consecutive summers at London's Almeida Theatre, and each received a great deal of critical attention. *Oresteia* was deemed a highlight in a season of *Greeks*, and the production received multiple awards and a West End transfer to London's Trafalgar Studios (August-November 2015).[5] *Mr Burns* was less widely celebrated, receiving mixed reviews in national newspapers. *The Guardian*'s Michael Billington noted its "cult" appeal (2014), whilst it was dubbed as "three hours of utter hell" by Tim Walker at *The Telegraph* (2014). Nevertheless, Washburn's work has continued to be programmed at the Almeida: *The Twilight Zone* (2017) and *Shipwreck* (2019) both premiered there, the former receiving a West End Transfer to London's Ambassadors Theatre (March-June 2019). Robert Icke directed both *Mr Burns* and his own *Oresteia*, and personally thanked Washburn for her influence on his Aeschylus adaptation (2015, 3).

Although in starkly different fashions, these two plays appear to stem from a common culture-text: the Orestes myth cycle as mediated through the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.[6] Icke's *Oresteia* was marketed as an adaptation of Aeschylus, even though it also interacts with Euripidean tragedy and other versions of the myth, whilst Washburn's *Mr Burns: A Post-Electric Play* only reveals its classical themes in its final act. Ostensibly, it is about the process of adaptation through performance, and follows "Cape Feare" (an acclaimed episode of the popular television cartoon *The Simpsons*)[7] into an imagined postapocalyptic future, after nuclear disaster and the total loss of electrical power. Over the course of the play, Washburn depicts the slow redevelopment of societal structure and theatrical performance, and the *Simpsons* narrative in turn becomes something more inquisitive, urgent and archaic. In the third and final act, Washburn presents a masked, poetic, choral rendition of "Cape Feare". In this distant future, the *Simpsons* episode emulates a Greek tragedy, and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in particular.[8]

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is comprised of three tragedies (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi* or "Libation Bearers", and *Eumenides* or "Kindly Ones"), and is the only extant Greek trilogy that survives from the fifth century. Although *Mr Burns* is not an announced Aeschylean adaptation, Washburn cites the Greek influence on the tripartite structure of her play (Icke and Washburn 2017), and it is telling that both Washburn's three-act play and Aeschylus'

[5] Laurence Olivier Award; Evening Standard Award; Critics' Circle Award.

[6] Alongside other influential modern translations and adaptations: e.g. Carson 2010, *An Oresteia*; Harrison 1981, *Oresteia*; O'Neill 1931, *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

[7] *EW* (2014): "Cape Feare" placed second in their list of twenty-five best *Simpsons* episodes.

[8] Grossman notes the classical influence, describing *Mr Burns* as "a Sophoclean Simpsons event" (2015, 189).

trilogy follow the development of one singular familial narrative: the Oresteian myth of the House of Atreus and the *Simpsons* family in "Cape Feare" respectively.[9] Moreover, *Mr Burns* contains many structural and thematic similarities to Aeschylus' trilogy and the Orestes myth cycle. As Aeschylus' *Oresteia* depicts the fallout from the Trojan War, *Mr Burns* also begins in immediate posttraumatic circumstances, and features characters trying to reconcile their memories of the past with the need to reconfigure their uncertain futures.[10] Even Washburn's subtitle "post-electric" may well hint, in addition to its dystopian context, towards its Orestes/Electra roots.

Ultimately, both plays centre around a family narrative as a microcosm for societal and political processes at large. Aeschylus' trilogy shifts in focus from personal vengeance and the cyclical intrafamilial murders of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*), to Orestes' trial and eventual acquittal by a collective jury (*Eumenides*). Similarly, Washburn maps the development of the *Simpsons* "Cape Feare" episode from a fireside storytelling exercise amongst anxious companions, to a favourite number performed by a travelling band of entertainers, to, finally, a formal and public piece of theatre. As the episode develops into this dramatic performance, it begins to bear striking resemblance to the *Oresteia*. The theatrical adaptation of the *Simpsons* episode now ends in grief, as the destruction of the Simpson family isolates Bart Simpson as an Orestes-type survivor navigating his personal loss in the changing society of a postelectric America.

Both *Mr Burns* and *Oresteia* also respond directly to their distinct cultural contexts. Despite its mythical narrative, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* engages with the real historical shift from oligarchic rule to democracy in sixth- and fifth-century BCE Athens, reflected in the literal change of setting from Argos (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*) to Athens (*Eumenides*). Although the extant fifth-century dramatists primarily wrote for Athenian theatrical festivals, *Eumenides* is one of the few surviving tragedies set in Athens, as tragedians generally opted for more removed Greek or non-Greek cities as locations for their narratives. As the trilogy results in divinely ordained resolution, its patriotism has been noted, and it has been described by Edith Hall as "the democratic charter myth" (2010, 287). In a similar vein, Washburn imagines the resilience of modern day capitalism and its chaotic persistence beyond the apocalypse, depicting the re-emergence of a violent and dystopian mar-

[9] The staging of trilogies, with or without the addition of a satirical drama, was a characteristic practice at the Dionysian festivals. But not all Greek tragic trilogies were continuations of the same narrative. Three connected trilogies of Aeschylus are attested in addition to the *Oresteia* (Wright 2019, 13), but none survives beyond fragments.

[10] E.g. The chorus of *Agamemnon* mourn the past and yet look forward to the future (Aesch. *Ag.* 139): αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω ("Cry sorrow, sorrow, but may good prevail!", translation Sommerstein 2009, 17).

ket economy based on the trading of remembered *Simpsons* fragments in exchange for commodities.[11] In doing so, she engages with contemporary anxieties of late-capitalism, ironically staging the famous quote "it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism" (attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek by Fisher 2010, 2). But in the third act of *Mr Burns*, the evolved theatrical adaptation of "Cape Feare" features a strikingly similar narrative to Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and shares its optimistic tone.[12] If Aeschylus mythologises the foundation of democracy as an alternative to oligarchic violence in his *Oresteia*, Washburn draws on both "Cape Feare" and *Oresteia* as central culture-texts to imagine the "charter myth" of a postapocalyptic, postcapitalist future.

Mr Burns is evidently not a straightforward adaptation of the *Oresteia*. Rather, these similarities are left implicit as Washburn emphasises multiple and varied, contemporary and traditional influences on her work, of which Aeschylus' play is one significant culture-text. Whilst *Mr Burns* is not overtly a classical adaptation, the play is paradigmatic of Washburn's approach to adaptation as process. What is little known but key to understanding Icke's *Oresteia* is that its success as a contemporary version of the Aeschylean text owes much to Washburn's dynamic approach to adaptation. To elucidate her personal practice, this study begins with an analysis of Washburn's earlier work *Orestes: An Antic Tragedy*. This production not only reveals Washburn's interest in both Greek theatre and the adaptation process, but also uncovers the ancient culture-text which underlies *Mr Burns*, and subsequently comes to the fore in Icke's *Oresteia*.

2. Translation: Foreignisation versus Domestication

Despite not having classical Greek, Washburn's writing career began with adapting Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and her continued interest in this particular myth is evident in her later adaptations (Soloski 2015). Prior to *Mr Burns*, Washburn 'transadapted' *Orestes: An Antic Tragedy* (alternatively titled *Orestes: A Tragic Romp* 2011), a reworking of Euripides' *Orestes* – itself a tonally ambiguous tragedy whose relative unpopularity today belies its ancient renown.[13] First performed fifty years after Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Euripides' *Or-*

[11] In *Shipwreck* (2019), Washburn stages contemporary American politics including scenes featuring then-President Donald Trump, in a play that "unpicks the messy demise of democracy" (Billington 2019).

[12] See section 4.

[13] Wright notes that Euripides' *Orestes* used to be "one of the author's most admired and well-known tragedies" (2008, 15-16), repeatedly re-performed from the fourth-century BCE onwards and parodied in multiple comedic sources (e.g. Aristophanes' *Frogs*

estes depicts events following Clytemnestra's murder (*Choephoroi*) but prior to Orestes' trial and pardon (*Eumenides*).[14] It portrays an Orestes plagued by Furies, facing capital punishment at the hands of the citizens of Argos and desperately plotting a retaliative murder of Helen with his accomplices, Electra and Pylades. 'Resolution' only comes with the arrival of Apollo *ex machina*, who sets the myth back onto its traditional course by sending Orestes to Athens for trial, instating Helen among the gods and arranging the marriages of the young characters.[15] Orestes, most incongruously, is instructed to marry Helen's daughter Hermione, at whose throat he brandishes a knife.[16] The tragedy's tonal irony is not lost on Washburn, who plays with language and concepts of genre even in her *Orestes* subtitles, "Antic" particularly hinting at the ludic quality of the classical source and equally suggesting its 'antique' and 'Attic' roots. The alternative "Tragic Romp" also undeniably markets the work as simultaneously tragic and comic, and as such Washburn emphasises the porous nature of the ancient theatrical genres, particularly in this late Euripidean example.[17]

This spectrum of tone is complemented by Washburn's multifaceted "transadaptation" approach, which combines translation and adaptation processes in her reworking of *Orestes*, and evokes the similar term "tradaptation" (reportedly coined by director Michel Garneau; Laliberté 1995, 524).[18] Bechir Saoudi makes a compelling case for the use of 'tradaptation'

303-4). Conversely, Macintosh confirms that *Orestes* was not performed professionally in the UK until the 1990s, but was staged in the US at Berkeley in the 1960s (1997, 320 on Lawrence Boswell's *Agamemnon's Children*, Gate Theatre, March 1995; 2011 on Jan Kott's *Orestes*, Durham Theatre, February 1968).

[14] Wright describes *Orestes*' tone as "peculiarly self-conscious, ironical and even playful", and Euripides as "deliberately exploiting the fact that the mythical tradition was full of inconsistencies and alternatives" (2008, 20-4), since none of the onstage events of *Orestes* are found in any other extant version of the myth. Hall also notes that *Orestes*' debut on the *Oresteia*'s fiftieth anniversary is "probably no coincidence" (2010, 285).

[15] 'Resolution' is certainly a matter of interpretation, as Holmes notes: "A tragedy like the *Orestes* seems to mock the very convention of the *deus ex machina* capable of restoring order and meaning" (2010, 232).

[16] Burnett observes the commonalities between the threat posed by Orestes to Hermione's life and Clytemnestra's killing of Cassandra in *Agamemnon* (1971, 210). In these final moments before Apollo's divine intervention, Euripides depicts the potential for the cycle of vengeance to continue unchecked.

[17] Euripides certainly made an impact on Old Comedy, as he was explicitly caricatured in three extant Aristophanic comedies (*Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Frogs*). The extent of Euripides' relationship with humour and the 'comic' is contested. See Gregory 1999-2000; Seidensticker 1982; 1978 for comic readings of select scenes.

[18] Washburn also "transadapted" Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in 2015, another tragedy based on the Atreidic myth cycle.

to encompass the translation and adaptation of texts for theatre and beyond, observing "the apparent act of translation could not be other than an act of adaptation and vice versa" (2017, 185). In support of this fusion, Saoudi cites Georges L. Bastin's emphasis upon the shared characteristics of the two approaches (1993, 476): namely the acts of apprehension, conceptualisation (or deverbalisation) and expression, and Susan Bassnett's reflection that distinguishing between a 'version' and 'adaptation' of a text seems "a complete red herring" (1985, 93). In a later article, Bassnett further emphasises the complexity of the theatrical translation process, where a playtext or script is "a priori incomplete in its source language", whilst containing a "concealed gestic text" that also requires translating and reencoding into the target language and culture of the translation (1991, 100, 110). Just as there are multiple and varied approaches to reading a theatre text (1991, 107), so too must there be allowances for a multiplicitous translation-adaptation process.

In actively acknowledging and presenting her process as hybrid, Washburn draws attention to the multiple layers of translation and adaptation inherent in all theatrical productions, particularly as they draw on culture-text(s). The language of translation theory helps to analyse these multiple processes, particularly Lawrence Venuti's concepts of "domestication" and "foreignization" (1995, 17-39). In Washburn's *Orestes*, anachronisms serve to situate the tragedy in the present day. For example, the cultural anxiety surrounding the figure of Helen is translated into modern terms, and she is given the 'domesticating' epithet "radioactive packet" (2011, 18).[19] Yet a simultaneous 'foreignising' method is evident when Electra suddenly begins to quote the transmitted Greek. The lines Washburn selects to incorporate from the ancient language are in a high emotional register, as the chorus and Electra lament the city's decision to put her to death alongside her brother. In Euripides, Electra addresses her ancestor Tantalus in lyric, from which Washburn includes transliterated excerpts in her script. The Greek, for which Washburn provides a translation in the playscript's appendix, begins:

> hin en threenoisin
> anaboaso
> geranti pateri
> Tantaloi
> (2011, 43; transliteration of Eur. *Or.* 984-5)

> ["My most sorrowful cries boil upwards
> To the most aged father Tantalus"
> (2011, 67; translation by Alan Katz)]

[19] Radiation, incidentally, becomes the key anxiety of *Mr Burns*.

Although the use of the ancient language is undoubtedly alienating for her twenty-first century Anglophone audience, Washburn and her collaborators Alan Katz and James Sugg (2011, 67) select only a limited number of lines from the Euripides and they also adapt the text.[20] The transliterated Greek corresponds to lines of Electra and the chorus (spanning Eur. *Or.* 968-89), but Washburn, Katz and Sugg rearrange the order of the Euripidean phrases, omit certain words and adjust some grammar.[21]

The accuracy of the Greek here is not as important for this study as the decision to adapt rather than simply quote the ancient source. Instead of using the transmitted Euripidean wording, it appears that Washburn deliberately bookends the excerpt with phrases that maintain resonance in English. Her Electra discusses the myth of Tantalus at length in the play's prologue (2011, 9-11), and in the lines directly preceding the Greek (2011, 42), and so Washburn's audience are likely to recognise the sense of 'Tantaloi'. Similarly, Washburn ends the excerpt on the repetition of "Hellas, Hellas, Hellas", an adjustment of Euripides' Ἑλλάδος "of Greece" (Eur. *Or.* 970). Her alteration from the noun's genitive form to its nominative 'Hellas' both evokes the Middle English lament 'alas', capturing the character's grief in more familiar traditional Anglophone terms, and etymologically hints towards the play's next narrative focus: the plot to murder Helen. Thus, even in the most linguistically alien section of her *Orestes*, Washburn still domesticates aspects of the Greek language, liberally adapting the Aeschylus to provide modern resonances.

The distancing effect created by this juxtaposition of ancient and modern language is similarly adopted by Icke in his *Oresteia*, and he also chooses a highly emotional moment to revert to the Greek text of Aeschylus. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra is onstage for 300 lines without speaking, arguably providing Greek tragedy's "most interesting surviving silence" (Taplin 1972, 77). Heavy with anticipation, her exchange with the chorus undeniably becomes the climax of the play, with her exit signalling a key turning point in the narrative: the murders she foresees, of both herself and Agamemnon.[22] Notably, Aeschylus' Clytemnestra doubts whether Cassandra is able to understand or speak Greek at all (Aesch. *Ag.* 1050-61), but this is disproved when she erupts into lyric and, shortly after, speaks in verse.[23] Cassandra recounts her pun-

[20] Washburn: "arranged from Ode 3" (2011, 67).

[21] Washburn's transliteration roughly corresponds to Euripides, as follows: 984-9; 994; 968-9; 976-7; 970.

[22] Mason posits Cassandra's vision of her own death as an Aeschylean invention (1959, 86).

[23] See Pillinger for a concise account of scholars' various interpretations of Cassandra's shift from lyric to verse (2019, 58n73). Each identifies an important change in Cassandra's cognition, identity or role in the narrative, indicating that Aeschylus' Cassan-

ishment from the god Apollo, namely that she sees the future but that others do not understand her pronouncements. Her exchange with the chorus depicts her curse in real time, as they understand her words but do not grasp their implications regarding the impending horrors of their near future. Using Venuti's terms, Emily Pillinger notes that Aeschylus avoids domesticating Cassandra entirely for his Athenian audience through his incorporation of familiar and non-familiar elements of Greek speech (2019, 45). But for a Greek audience versed in myth, her meaning is clear, and Aeschylus' spectators are the only witnesses of Cassandra's words who can appreciate their dramatic irony.

In Icke's adaptation, Cassandra's communication begins: "(*Cassandra suddenly speaks in Ancient Greek from the original Aeschylus – passionate, furious, tearful. It's terrifying to listen to*)" (2015, 77). Whilst this stage direction captures the emotion of her Aeschylean lyric outburst, introducing classical Greek for Cassandra's speech has the opposite effect of the ancient text, as Icke's Cassandra is immediately linguistically and temporally 'foreignised' by her language. Not only does Icke intend for his audience to fear her "*terrifying*" monologue, but his use of classical Greek also renders his Cassandra incomprehensible to his English-speaking characters and (at least the vast majority of) his Almeida audience. Her internal audience is not *Agamemnon*'s chorus of sympathetic Argive elders, but Icke's Orestes and Electra, who repeatedly express their inability to understand her words at all (2015, 77-8). When she switches to English, her speech is fractured and confused:

> Cassandra: catched in a trap. same story. it's same story
> doesn't stop doesn't cease it's same same
> story my story is your story is –
> (78)

As in the *Agamemnon*, she alludes to the house's curse, the Furies, and the death of the eponymous king (2015, 78-9), but there is no mention of Apollo or explanation of her prophetic abilities. As opposed to the Aeschylus, in which Cassandra's vision of her murder forms a central scene, Icke's adaptation uses her death as a foil for Agamemnon's, which he stages simultaneously with her speech.[24] Finally, rather than defiantly casting aside her prophetic insignia and entering the house to face death,[25] Icke's Cassandra

dra is by no means a simple or one-dimensional character.

[24] On the Aeschylean treatment of the deaths of Cassandra and Agamemnon, Wohl notes "in the poetics of this play, her death is given more space and more emotional elaboration . . . in terms of dramatic effect, hers replaces his" (1998, 24n41).

[25] Doyle considers the Aeschylean Cassandra's undressing as a reclamation of autonomy and protest towards Apollo, as she "spurns him as both master of her prophecies and of her body" (2008, 64).

mysteriously perishes: "Orestes: The girl is dead. I don't – remember how she / died" (2015, 80).

On *Agamemnon*, Oliver Taplin observes: "The mysterious foreign woman who remained so long silent turns out to be the one who tells most and who is least confusing" (1978, 104). However, in Icke's adaptation, Clytemnestra's xenophobic assumptions about Cassandra's language proficiency are confirmed, as the Trojan princess is ironically 'foreignised' by her fluency in ancient Greek. The irony and miscommunication of the Aeschylean scene are maintained, but this comes at the cost of the audience's connection to Cassandra and their comprehension of her personal story. The Aeschylean Cassandra, whose exceptional circumstances as both cursed prophet and enslaved Trojan princess inform her insight and set her apart from the House of Atreus, becomes another female casualty subsumed by Icke's adaptation of the narrative: "Cassandra: everywhere dead girls, dead / girls" (2015, 79).[26] Venuti argues that foreignising methods of translation into English "can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism" whilst domesticating approaches to translation can reproduce "cultural elitism" (1995, 20-2), as they assimilate texts to their receiving cultures, overwriting the source text and its difference. Yet this Icke example indicates that Venuti's distinction may be a fallacy: by limiting Cassandra's speech in service to the familial narrative and forgoing the genuinely external perspective Aeschylus has her give as both isolated individual and cultural outsider, Icke's overt linguistic 'foreignisation' serves politically and ideologically to 'domesticate' this character.

The tone and effect of the third act of Washburn's *Mr Burns* rely on similar translational principles, only Washburn replaces the juxtaposition of ancient and modern references with modern and invented future ones. Instead of the inclusion of classical Greek language, the audience are presented with contemporary American references, intermingled with ancient echoes, adapted for a distant and distinct future audience. For example: "Chorus: Moe passed around pitchers of Chablis" (2014, 75). This confusion of ancient (*oinochoe*) and modern (Moe the *Simpsons* bartender, Chablis wine) cultural referents presents an unfamiliar image, particularly as it is spoken by a chorus, a feature that is central to Greek tragedy but largely absent from the *Simpsons*. Evidently present culture is just as dislocated from this imagined future as modernity is from fifth-century Athens, and so Washburn alienates her audience from their own contemporary context by presenting its

[26] Mitchell-Boyask 2006 and Doyle 2008 compare the Cassandra scene with the sacrifice of Iphigenia as narrated by Aeschylus' chorus (Aesch. *Ag.* 205-54). It is important to note these resonances, whilst also appreciating the multiple factors that set Cassandra apart as an individual.

(mis)translation. In her *Orestes*, Washburn draws attention to the inevitable amalgamation of cultural influences inherent in the act of translation and adaptation; and here in *Mr Burns*, she similarly oscillates between 'domesticating' and 'foreignising' processes, evoking Greek theatre through modern references and presenting a simultaneously futuristic yet ancient evolved form of a *Simpsons* episode. The result is uncanny, and as Washburn presents the future evolution of contemporary American culture, she invites her audience to reflect upon the way in which they interact with texts of the past.

In this sense, whilst *Mr Burns* and *Oresteia* initially appear to be very different adaptations, they both contain fusions of classical and contemporary influences. *Mr Burns* appears modern, but its future is as distant as the ancient past; and Icke's *Oresteia* is structured as an ancient text unfolding in present-time. Both are hybrids of varied times, tones and influences; and both demonstrate that Venuti's 'domestication' and 'foreignisation' are not mutually exclusive translational preferences but are often co-existent and coterminous forces within adapted texts.

3. Adaptation: Process versus Product

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as both a "process" and a "product" (2013, 7-8, 15-32). Time is the distinguishing feature of the former: adaptation as a process acknowledges change and fluidity. It is simultaneously an act of interpretation and creation.[27] 'Product' is fixed: the resultant text is the final result of the adaptation process. Yet the description of theatrical adaptation as 'product' is problematic, as it assumes a fixity of the work that is impossible in live performance. Theatre, as an ephemeral art form, is arguably always concerned with time.[28] It exists in performance, which Erika Fischer-Lichte has theorised as relying on a constantly fluctuating "feedback loop" between actors and observers that is enabled by their "bodily co-presence" within a distinct physical and temporal space in the present (2008, 38-43). The liveness of theatre also gives the sense that the performance's future is still potential, non-determined, and suggests "the immanent power of the collective to alter that future" (Hall 2013, 25).

As such, theatrical performance is constructed upon a relationship in flux, simultaneously between co-present actors and spectators, and present and future temporalities. Susanne Langer has similarly posited this distinct tem-

[27] Hutcheon's "the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation" implies a linearity in this process that is not always the case (2013, 8).

[28] Following Peggy Phelan who posits: "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance" (1993, 146).

porality distinguishes drama from narrative literature; they are concerned with the "virtual future" and "virtual past" respectively (1953, 307). Indeed, the plots of Greek tragedy rely on forward-driven narratives, concerned primarily with what will happen next.[29] This sense of futurity exposes the limitations of the term 'product', and both *Oresteia* and *Mr Burns* are illustrative of theatre's status as a dynamic process, especially through their depiction of time and memory. By revealing the multiple and different influences and interpretations that the memory process enables, they offer useful approaches for deconstructing the binary 'product' and 'process' model of adaptation theory.

The 'source text' of *Mr Burns* is itself a complex parody. "Cape Feare" is a *Simpsons* episode based upon the Scorsese remake (1991) of the film *Cape Fear* (1962). This film in turn is an adaptation of *The Executioners* (1957), itself a novel by John D. MacDonald. Washburn emphasises the intensely interwoven intertextuality. For example, the characters of the first act establish that the tattoos of *Simpsons*' villain Sideshow Bob are influenced by American cinema – specifically a trope from the film *Do The Right Thing* (1989), which itself is "stealing from" (2014, 17) *The Night of the Hunter* (1955). The intertextuality even comes full circle as the group discuss the casting of the character in question from *The Night of the Hunter*: "Matt: Who's also Robert Mitchum…who plays De Niro's character in the original *Cape Fear*" (2014, 17). Yet since Washburn's characters ultimately prioritise remembering and re-enacting the *Simpsons* episode, these sources of parody and their specific interconnections are soon eclipsed by their *Simpsons* culture-text. By the second act, which is set "7 years after" the first (2014, 7), many famous cultural references have been subsumed into the *Simpsons* narratives. Notably, the legacy of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* endures through the punning title of another famous *Simpsons* episode: 'Much Apu About Nothing' (2014, 64), and this drastic inversion of the literary canon gestures towards the subjectivity and fallibility of cultural memory.

In his review of the Almeida production, established theatre critic Michael Billington (2014) comments: "I find it a melancholy thought that art, architecture and literature may perish in the collective memory but a popular TV show will be the last relic of western civilisation." What Billington fails to observe is that this same sense of loss is genuinely experienced by many individuals and communities today: namely queer, trans, disabled, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) persons whose histories and cultures have been devastated or actively marginalised by colonialist,

[29] Whether deciphering events that have already happened (e.g. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*), or unexpected reversals (e.g. Euripides' *Helen*).

fascist and capitalist forces, often too in the name of "western civilisation".[30] The theorists who research these obscured or buried histories offer important critical approaches to memory, history and tradition, and an example from writer and academic Saidiya Hartman may help to elucidate the process that Washburn projects and Billington finds melancholy. In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman recounts her travels along a historical slave route in Ghana, reckoning with the route itself as "both an existent territory with objective coordinates and the figurative realm of an imagined past" (2006, 9).

Describing her physical experiences of the geography and architecture entwined with slavery, Hartman asserts: "Every generation confronts the task of choosing its past. Inheritances are chosen as much as they are passed on. The past depends less on 'what happened then' than on the desires and discontents of the present. Strivings and failures shape the stories we tell" (2006, 100). As Washburn's characters 'choose' their inheritances, favouring a 'low' art form from popular culture in the process, she depicts a future culture that is uncomfortable for those that laud the traditional literary canon today. In *Mr Burns*, Washburn acknowledges that the full intertextual resonances of works will always be lost, and what remains will depend on the text's present emotional, social and political relevance for individuals and groups. By emphasising the loss inevitable in the process of adaptation, *Mr Burns* questions the authority of inherited canons and 'source texts', instead demonstrating the importance of culture-text in present time for a work's endurance and survival. Through depicting this future displacement of Shakespeare's currently canonical play by the popular *Simpsons* cartoon, Washburn appears to echo Hutcheon's dehierarchising approach to adaptation, demonstrating that indeed "multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically" (2013, xv). As, ultimately, it is changing social and political contexts that shape cultural values, Washburn stresses that classical and canonical 'source-texts' are no more valuable than their corresponding culture-texts.

Moreover, the construction of culture-text is a complex and idiosyncratic process. Indeed the group's initial recollection of the "Cape Feare" episode depicts a seemingly accidental form of remembrance. Gibson, a new arrival, remembers a joke from the episode but admits that he has never seen *The Simpsons*: "Gibson: That bit comes from an ex-girlfriend…she used to have this little thing this little routine" (2014, 37). Gibson has engaged with

[30] Appiah 2016, historicises and critiques the construct of 'western civilisation'. See Phillips 2017, on the alternative temporalities and futures offered by radical liberation movements; Love 2007, on the politics of engaging with queer history; Gabriel 2018; 2020, on the harmful approach to transgender identities as 'metaphor' in classical tragic scholarship and reception; Silverblank and Ward 2020, on how the critical methodologies of disability studies may inform classical reception; Hanink 2017, for a history of European idealisations of classical Greece and their political resonances today.

the source exclusively in adaptation, through an isolated performance or 'routine' recalled from his past relationship. It is his fragment of memory that spurs on the group's task, ultimately leading to the episode's performance and survival, and yet it is entirely coincidental. This part of the episode has survived solely through its culture-text, already twice removed from its *Simpsons* source. The significance of Gibson's subjective, emotional memory reflects the importance of a text's resonance for its transmission, its interaction with personal and social "desires and discontents" (Hartman 2006, 100). As the context of reception changes, so too does the relationship between a source text and its receiving culture.[31] Memory, on an individual and cultural basis, creates a dialogue between texts of the past and present lived experiences. Similarly, theatrical adaptation, always happening in the now, and always looking to the future, is a process that reconciles stories of the past with present contexts.

Like Washburn, Icke draws on the classical culture-text around Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, incorporating other ancient versions of the myth. Unlike Aeschylus, he chooses to dramatise Iphigenia's death, and in doing so presents a narrative reminiscent of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*. He stages the royal family arguing over their dinner, in a subtle parody of the debated end of Euripides' tragedy: Iphigenia's replacement on the altar by a deer (Eur. *IA* 1475-532; see Weiss 2014, 119). In this modern *Oresteia*, Icke's Iphigenia protests about eating venison, inadvertently hinting at her own fate: "Iphigenia: It's a *sacrifice*" (2015, 29). By drawing attention to a specifically contested piece of Euripides, Icke reveals the complexity and intangibility of his classical sources. Even extant scripts are not uncontested fixed or final 'products': differences and ambiguities in transmission are commonplace in classical works, thus making adaptation's sources flexible and open to interpretation.[32]

Much like Washburn, Icke presents the myth reassembled from a variety of fragmented sources, drawing attention to his adaptation's dynamic mediation of past myths for a contemporary audience. He engages with Euripides' *Electra* too, specifically in the tragedian's parody of Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. Whilst Aeschylus' recognition scene pivots on Electra's recognition of Orestes' hair and footprints, identical to her own, Euripides' Electra openly questions the likelihood of these shared characteristics (Aesch. *Ch.* 212-34; Eur. *El.* 524-45). In Icke's production, Orestes' recollections reach a climax at

[31] Hence Martindale: "*Meaning*, could we say, *is always realized at the point of reception*" (1993, 3).

[32] Indeed, the beginning of *Choephoroi* was not preserved in manuscripts, but has been largely restored by its identification in Aristophanic scholia and quotation in *Frogs*; see Brown 2015 and West 1990, 228-33.

the death of Clytemnestra, where his memory becomes increasingly fragmented. The existence of Electra is even questioned: "Doctor: I think we have to consider the possibility that those were *your* footprints, that that was *your* hair" (2015, 102). Here Icke turns a source of parody into a plot-twist, engaging with an almost comically ironic ancient culture-text and reworking the common motifs into his psychological thriller.[33]

This confusion of influence and innovation encourages the audience to interpret and reinterpret the events of the play, presenting a range of possible narratives and realities. Orestes appeals to the court: "Orestes: as I say *this* now, in each of your minds you create your own versions, different lenses pointing at the same thing at the same time and *seeing that thing differently*" (2015, 110). Orestes' memories have been the basis of the entire production, but have been proven to be unreliable, confused and open to interpretation. Here in the final play of the trilogy he calls upon the court, and implicitly the modern audience, to consider their own biases when approaching texts. As Donna Haraway has theorised, each individual has "limited location and situated knowledge" (1988, 583), that naturally informs their perspective and therefore their interpretive experience.[34] Orestes' memory has thus far served as a microcosm of the individual interpretive experience, and here he acknowledges the impossibility of fixed objectivity from his jury and his observers.

Indeed, adaptation, much like memory, is a process of assembling fragments of the past in a manner that fits the present. Just as the legacy of performance exists only in memory, here past trauma affects individual memory, as with Icke's Orestes, or collective traditions, as in Washburn's *Mr Burns*. Not only is memory fallible, but its ephemeral products are emotional, subjective and fragmentary. In simple cognitive terms, "remembering is always re-remembering" (Fernyhough 2012), and therefore memory is also always a creative process which changes and develops with every new experience. These two adaptations embrace this process, acknowledging themselves as processes of remembrance and recreation: any attempt to conceptualise them as fixed and isolated 'products' is insufficient.

[33] Although outside the scope of this study, Robert Icke openly cites the American television drama *Sopranos* as inspiration for his *Oresteia*, and it should be considered a formative culture-text for the production (see Clapp 2015b).

[34] Haraway advocates for feminist objectivity, which "makes room for surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production; we are not in charge of the world" (1988, 594).

4. Processes of Memory: Temporalities in Dialogue

Mr Burns and *Oresteia* illustrate the problem of defining theatrical adaptations as products, as they simultaneously depict processes of memory and function as microcosms of that process in action. Whilst theatre has a distinct relationship with the future (Fischer-Lichte 2008; Hall 2013; Langer 1953), Margherita Laera notes that it also "repeats, and incessantly so" (2014, 1). As past and future temporalities are brought into dialogue in the present, she posits that theatre's temporality is non-linear, a feature it shares with adaptation (2014, 3). This common temporality is especially evident in theatrical adaptations, which, despite being future-oriented, are also littered with repeated resonances from the past. The result is a simultaneous sense of change and cyclicity, evolution and repetition. *Mr Burns* and *Oresteia* particularly demonstrate this temporal process distinct to theatrical adaptation; these plays use theatre as a process to create non-linear and indeed cyclical temporal dialogues between distinct time scales: present and mythological. The former exists in the present-time experience of the audience, whilst the latter is the portrayed past of *Oresteia*, and projected future(s) of *Mr Burns*.

The first act of *Mr Burns* is set in "the very near future" (2014, 7), and characters are dressed "in normal clothes" (9). Initially these characters visually resemble their contemporary audience, and Washburn's use of "largely verbatim" (8) speech makes for a highly naturalistic and 'domesticating' effect. Yet the introduction of a severe and immediate existential threat fractures the play's context from the audience's reality. It quickly becomes apparent that the characters are navigating a postapocalyptic world in which they face a constant and unpredictable threat of nuclear radiation. Understanding of its scope and longevity is only speculative: "Matt: I heard fifty miles but only for a few months. I heard a hundred, for a hundred million years" (31). The theatre audience's present has already become an increasingly removed past for Washburn's characters, who engage with their memories of it to escape their dystopian reality. Simultaneously, this imagined future is mythical to Washburn's audience, who witness the mythologising of their own present culture. For these two temporalities, the *Simpsons* text (and culture-text) becomes a shared history, acting as a touchstone between the audience and characters. In the near present-time yet dystopian setting of the first act, Washburn creates a reciprocal dialogue between present and mythological times.

In marked contrast to the first act, the performers of *Mr Burns*' third act are costumed like *Simpsons* characters in pieces that "don't look quite right to our eyes" (2014, 9), and masks (Grossman 2015, 209). It is eighty-two years after the recollection in act one, and the episode has narratively, aesthetically

and formally developed into (a twenty-first century conception of) a Greek tragedy. Like a Greek chorus, the performers' lines are now set to music, and they sing and dance as a collective unit in a chorus line (Fig. 1). Their

masks and robed costumes give them visually ancient silhouettes, but the plastic and metallic materials that form their costumes are distinctly modern (Fig. 2). The act is a melting-pot of temporalities, performance traditions and

Fig. 1-2: Dress rehearsal for Act 3 of *Mr Burns*, London Almeida production (2014). Photographs by Manuel Harlan.

culture-texts. Although ostensibly still an adaptation of the *Simpsons*, multiple and varied culture-texts inform this performance: catchphrases from *Scooby-Doo* are mixed with visuals of *Nightmare on Elm Street*, and echoes of modern pop-music (Britney Spears, Eminem) mingle with operatic Gilbert and Sullivan (2014, 82-4). The palimpsestic style is familiar from parody yet the tone is sincere, and this stark juxtaposition indicates that the *Simpsons* episode has amalgamated new meanings and resonances for this future production's imagined audience.[35]

This is the only act within *Mr Burns* where Washburn's performers acknowledge that they are performing to an audience. Due to the naturalism of the verbatim first act and colloquial second, the actors do not address or directly face their audience before this point, but here, the performers play front-on to their spectators in the manner of a tragic chorus (*Figures 1-2*). However, since this is where the play's time is most removed from the present, it is implied that the intended spectators are not the Almeida theatregoers, but the imagined apocalypse survivors' first generation of descendants. It is a play-within-the-play, outside of which nothing about the future society and culture is revealed. All Washburn's audience may experience is the text in performance, a relic from a future age that is simultaneously familiar and alien. *The Simpsons* survives in this society much like a classical text in the modern world, and here Washburn presents her audience with a performance model for conceptualising texts of the past as 'process'. In depicting modern culture as mythology, Washburn emphasises the wide potential meanings and contexts of extant ancient texts, which have undoubtedly been similarly (mis)remembered and (re)constructed over time.

The projected mythological future of *Mr Burns* is at once most removed from the audience's present and is most recognisably classical, as the distant future appears so culturally ancient. At this great temporal remove, the relationship between the contemporary modern present and classical mythological past is made most overt, as Washburn engages most clearly with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Much like Orestes, Bart Simpson is presented as an adolescent survivor of a family tragedy and faces an uncertain posttraumatic future. The play's antagonist has morphed from Sideshow Bob (as in "Cape Feare") into Mr Burns, the owner of the nuclear power plant in *The Simpsons*. The human vendetta of Sideshow Bob has developed into the threat of a force of nature, just as in the Oresteian myth cycle, where Clytemn-

[35] Cavaliero posits that parody need not be necessarily comedic, though it relies on a discrepancy between what it shows and what it tells (2000, 23-4). The incongruity theory of laughter relies on a similar principle, which might explain parody's popularity as a comedic trope. See Carrol for succinct descriptions of the most popular competing humour theories, including incongruity (2014, 4-53).

estra's unlawful killing of her husband is eclipsed by Orestes' vengeance, a *miasma*-inducing matricide.[36] Mr Burns is depicted as the embodiment of radiation, personifying the invisible but ever-present fear of the play's first act. Fittingly, Washburn now removes his humanising title, emphasising that this *Simpsons* character is punningly named after one of radiation's harmful effects on the human body: burns.

The development of the antagonist Sideshow Bob/Mr Burns character parallels the role of the *Oresteia*'s Furies, who are evoked throughout Aeschylus' trilogy but do not appear as characters until the third play.[37] Burns promises to hound Bart as relentlessly as Orestes' Furies:

> Burns: I don't go away I'm here for
> a hundred years I'm here for a thousand
> years a hundred thousand a *million* I
> will be here Bart Simpson for Forever
> (93)

Burns cannot disappear but he can be rehabilitated, just as Aeschylus' Furies are contained and instituted within the city as Eumenides or "Kindly Ones". The show closes with the once-nuclear Burns physically "(*powering a treadmill*)", providing a hopeful "(*blaze of light*)" (2014, 95) that visually evokes the end of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: the torchlit procession that escorts the reconfigured Furies/Eumenides to their new shrine at the Athenian Acropolis.[38] The play-within-the-play and *Mr Burns* end here, at their most ancient and futuristic, and at their most Aeschylean. The accumulation of these classical resonances acts as a strong reminder that just as *The Simpsons* is a cultural touchstone of the twenty-first century, *Oresteia* too existed in the real contemporary context of fifth-century Athens and interacted with the anxieties of its present. In both cases, ancient and modern, theatre is the process by which these texts can adapt and survive through time, taking on new meanings and significance in changing cultural conditions.

Icke also establishes multiple temporal settings in his *Oresteia*, creating a dialogue between present and mythological temporalities. Icke situates his text in the present, his notes stating: "Double square brackets [[like this]] indicate text which should be updated to reflect the precise date and time of the events in each performance" (2015, 8). These brackets do not appear until

[36] Burnett observes that *miasma* pursues Orestes in both the Aeschylean and Euripidean tellings of the myth (1971, 217).

[37] Padel notes that by presenting a chorus of Furies in *Eumenides*, Aeschylus confirms that the 'mad' visions of Cassandra (*Agamemnon*) and Orestes (*Choephoroi*) were real (1995, 80).

[38] See Pestell 2017 on how Aeschylus combines mythical and political thought in his staging of the Furies' shift to Eumenides.

the end of his first act, then are used with increasing regularity throughout, reminding the audience that the action is happening live, in present time, rather than being entirely predetermined. Similarly, the intervals of the Almeida production were signalled by a countdown on an LED ticker, indicating when the action would continue (Tripney 2015). The increasing frequency but shortening length of these intervals helps to assimilate the stage action with the audience's own experience of time passing, contributing to the production's "terrifying immediacy" (Clapp 2015a). Indeed Edith Hall describes a sense of "chronometric pressure" on the audience, whose breaks from the narrative are dictated so visibly (2015, 17). This synchronicity emphasises to Icke's audience that the play is a process, existing in present time, and with genuine effects on its spectators.

This immediacy is complemented by the simultaneity of action: the three plays are presented laterally rather than in linear order. The trial of *Eumenides* shapes the structure of Icke's adaptation, as Orestes relates the murders of *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* in order. His memories build a partial linear narrative, punctuated by scenes of Orestes' recollection of events to a doctor figure. Crucially, however, Icke does not reveal that Orestes is on trial until after his account of Clytemnestra's killing. The structure allows for this temporal ambiguity: the narrative reliance on Orestes' memory stresses that everything has already happened, but the use of present-time recall draws attention to the immediacy of the action before the audience. As the stage develops into "(*a dream-like version of a court*)" (2015, 104), the audience are made aware of the present-time trial that has always been the purpose of Orestes' recollection. Icke has presented Orestes' memories as increasingly changeable, but here they break down further as they are scrutinised in the binary 'true/false' trial process.

This is manifested literally in the breaking down of the staging, as now "(*the room itself is crumbling*)" (2015, 106). The memories, and process of recollection, are exposed as increasingly unstable foundations. Ambiguity and subjectivity abound in this surreal setting, which is where Icke actively encourages his audience to implicate themselves in the court's decision on Orestes' fate: "Calchas: Think clearly of one word and hold it in your mind – either 'innocent' or 'guilty'" (125). The augur asks the audience to judge Orestes based on unclear and insubstantial evidence, making a choice between binary alternatives.[39] Just as neither option is nuanced enough to fully capture Orestes' culpability, nor is a model of adaptation as separate 'prod-

[39] An ironic request from the diviner whose own interpretation resulted in Iphigenia's sacrifice, beginning the cycle of familial vengeance. This is likely not lost on Icke's audience, who have witnessed Calchas' involvement in Iphigenia's death at the beginning of this *Oresteia*.

uct' and 'process' sufficient. The process of the trial may appear to rest on facts, but these apparent 'products' of Orestes' memory are evidently fallible and subject to change. Glenn Jellenik posits that by announcing its source, a text invites you to think about where is has come from, rather than where it is going (2017, 49). Yet despite being an adaptation of an ancient play, Icke's emphasis on memory as a process in present time stresses that theatre is indeed always concerned with the "virtual future" (Langer 1953, 307), because this dialogue with a past text is happening in present time.

The multiple time scales set up an interesting paradox: the audience are aware that the events presented are Orestes' memories, but they are also actions depicted in the theatre's present. Repeated lines from characters remind the audience of this temporal duality, such as: "Klytemnestra: She's been dead since the beginning" (2015, 56; also at 102, 114). Double determination is a key feature of Greek tragedy; events occur both because they are willed by the gods and because they derive from human autonomy (see, for example, Swift 2016, 58). Here Icke creates another layer of determination: that of mythological time, and fidelity to the Aeschylean text. The characters are unable to escape their fates precisely because the events have already happened, preserved both in the memory of Icke's Orestes and in Aeschylus' tragedies. This text-defined temporality becomes an almost divine force in Icke's *Oresteia*, as the source text dictates the content of the adaptation. Yet however 'determined' Icke's adaptation may be, it is also open to interpretation and innovation. Ironically, Clytemnestra's comment also draws attention to Icke's aforementioned departure from Aeschylus by choosing to depict Iphigenia alive, before her sacrifice. For his audience, she has not been dead since the beginning. Thus Icke simultaneously emphasises the fate-like force of mythological time in his play, and his decision to innovate around the ancient text for his present-day audience.

Just like *Mr Burns,* Icke's *Oresteia* is a living process which mediates between present and distant times. Venuti's language is helpful here: Icke's use of time is increasingly 'domesticating', as the focus switches from Orestes' memories to the present-time trial and the audience are increasingly implicated in the action. In contrast, Washburn's approach is undoubtedly a 'foreignising' one, as her narrative becomes increasingly stylistically and temporally distant from the present. Both, however, reveal the paradoxical effect of adaptation in performance: its ability to assimilate both present and mythological times within the one work, creating a reciprocal and non-linear dialogue between temporalities. With a haunting similarity to the three ghosts of *A Christmas Carol*, past, present and future are all at play in theatrical adaptations.

5. Conclusion

This article has considered some of the limitations in applying Hutcheon's adaptation theory to theatre. While both theatrical examples draw on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as a key culture-text, Washburn's *Mr Burns* adopts a theoretical approach, whereas Icke's *Oresteia* is a self-defined instance of classical adaptation. Venuti's terminology, though problematic as a binary, helps to provide a more flexible language to account for the hybridity of theatrical adaptation as process. Both playwrights' engagement with culture-texts uncover memory's ability to create numerous possibilities of influences and receptions: Washburn exposes the multiplicity of influence, and Icke emphasises the multiplicity of interpretation. The binary of 'product' and 'process' that pervades adaptation theory has been revealed as inadequate for a discussion of performance. Theatrical adaptation, much like memory, is instead always a process. It is ephemeral, an amalgamation of fragments, and a dialogue between multiple temporalities that always exists in the present.

Both Washburn's *Mr Burns* and Icke's *Oresteia*, though distinct, need to be understood in conjunction with each other. As theatrical adaptations, they each create a cyclical and non-linear dialogue between present and mythological times. In *Mr Burns*, the play's time is fractured from that of the audience, as the action becomes increasingly surreal and temporally distant; Icke's *Oresteia* uses a trial format to create a temporal immediacy, contrasting urgent present time with the recollections of his Orestes. Along with temporal fracturing, Washburn alienates her audience from contemporary American cultural references by presenting their unfamiliar future adapted forms; the 'products' of Icke's Orestes' memory are fluid and dependent on the dynamic process of remembering, highlighting the inherent subjectivity of knowledge and interpretation. Both playwrights depict the effect of the memory process on seemingly 'fixed' works, whether the American literary and cultural canon(s) or classical Greek tragedy. These theatrical adaptations are paradigmatic: as they mediate between past and present, present and future, and as they unfold in performance, they are ever fluid and never fixed products.

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Form, Event, Theatre

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

Abstract

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

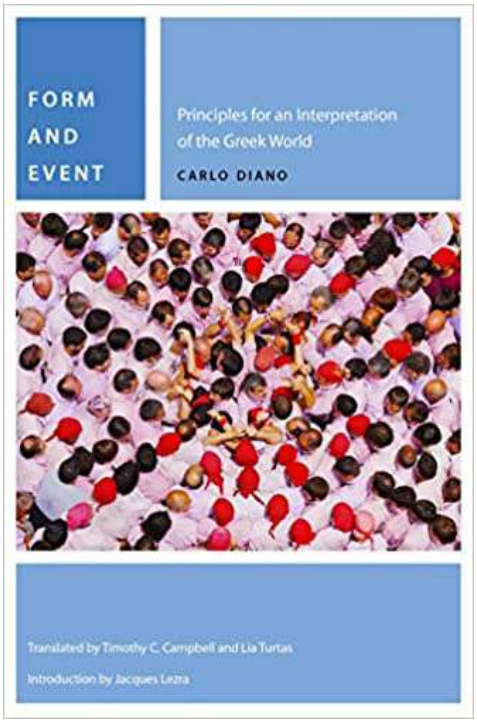
[7] The Italian has "portatore di evento", something like "bearer of the event", which perhaps better succeeds in penetrating the character of the function (the message implies a *tertium* with respect to its bearer and recipient).

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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Delia Gambelli*

Guido Paduano, *Teatro. Personaggio e condizione umana*. Roma: Carocci, 2020, ISBN 978-8-8430-9957-3, pp. 209.

Abstract

In this book the author analyses those theatrical masterpieces in which the ability to represent and give meaning to humanity's principal hopes and needs is to be most clearly discerned. Beginning with the tragedies of Ancient Greece and Greek and Latin comedy, it continues with the rejection of Aristotelian conventions and the reaction against tradition by the twentieth-century European avant-garde. En route it pauses to consider Seneca, Shakespeare, French classicism and the theatrical output of the nineteenth century, from Goethe's *Faust* to Wagner, before targeting the analysis towards Pirandello, Brecht, Ionesco and Beckett. The quest in search of a meaning for the human condition and thus for the art of representation is staged through the changes in interpretation of the concepts of freedom, guilt, responsibility and fate, embodied by turns on the part of the characters and through the theatrical transformation of the relationship between the individual and society. This exploration, despite its complexity, is rendered straightforward and informative thanks to the logic of its structure and the successful linking of the many and various filaments of the argument. The approach to the great theatrical works is both exact and impassioned. The plot summaries, both stringent and incisive and, furthermore, having the capacity to convey the inherent meaning, make for engrossing reading. Ample space is given to differing interpretative positions and lively discussions arise, thus lending an atmosphere of intellectual adventure to the whole discourse. Finally, the special relationship Guido Paduano maintains with the texts, and his extensive knowledge in many different spheres allow him to retrace themes and situations which recur in various works, both theatrical and musical, creating, in this way, suggestive echoes which become in their turn an unexpected source of fascination.

Keywords: theatre; character; the human condition; individual; society

Despite the extreme brevity of the title, Guido Paduano's latest book promises great things. The explicit correlation of theatre, character and the human condition immediately gives an indication of the fact that 'theatre' signifies something more farreaching and profound than simply a literary genre. As in Pad-

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uano 2013, once again the investigation goes beyond the mere workings of the enigmatic and uneasy connection between text and world. Here, too, the author is tracing the interplay and reciprocity of mirrorings and allusions that flicker among the warp and weft of theatre and reality.

During such a difficult undertaking, indeed an *étrange entreprise*, the pathway is full of pitfalls, but this author has at his command unique resources which enable him to avoid them. Just for a start (and I emphasize the word 'start'), should be mentioned the astonishing and exceptional knowledge he has of the different periods of the drama (and of literature in general) and in particular of Greek drama (as already proved by Paduano 1991, 2005, 2006), which is the mandatory basis for the reliable interpretation of all subsequent works whose origins inevitably derive from this.

The analysis develops from ancient theatre up to the European avant-garde of the twentieth century. However far from being intended as an all-inclusive discussion of drama it is, more precisely, a quintessential florilegium of plays which lend themselves most happily to contributing body and meaning to the project as a whole. These plays are scrutinized wherever there is to be found "uno sguardo capace di scendere … più addentro alle istanze primarie dell'umanità" ("a glance capable of reaching down … into the most arcane origins of the essence of humanity", 11).[2]

In this way a subjective, and at the same time highly motivated choice of texts is implicitly instigated. Their action and development are then summarised with an extraordinary capacity for synthesis and with an intense and discerning attention towards the work's most recondite intentions, besides that towards its literal component. At the same time the interpretation of each work is weighed against the most relevant exegetic contributions from previous critics, quoted in the notes, which instead of giving the impression of simply constituting an erudite appendage, enhance the discussion and make it into a sort of lively dialogue.

Other significant features intervene to fascinate the reader of this complex work, one that is rich in opportunities for reflection and in fresh perspectives. I am thinking, for example, of that 'telescopic' dimension (like the one Proust claimed for his own writing, as he implicitly invited the reader to recall to mind far distant pages in the *Recherche*), which interweaves connections between the most distant and diverse texts, so as to engulf the reader in spellbinding echoes. It is not the case of a simple and at times specious discovery of intertextual links: here we have sudden flashes of light that end up by expanding the boundaries and creating almost musical contrapuntal effects (and not only because, on occasion, the reference is to drama in music).

But before approaching the abovementioned features in greater detail, the salient points of the book as a whole must be explored.

The first chapter, "Libertà, colpa e destino" ("Freedom, guilt and fate"), is devoted to a consideration of the existential cornerstones defining the human

[2] Translation from Paduano's book is to be intended as mine.

condition around which the characters of the plays examined are structured, from *Oedipus* to *La forza del destino* and back again. It is also worth noticing the novel propensity to clear the ground of certain interpretational ambiguities and commonplaces which have revealed themselves to be particularly persistent. Another consummate feature is that of the concise and definitive rebuttal of the critical blunder inspired by Sophocles' *Oedipus* (to which the author has dedicated an indispensable study: see Paduano 1994), which, thanks to the particular exemplary significance of this tragedy, identifies the ancient as the realm of necessity and the modern as that of freedom. What *Oedipus*, often cited by Aristotle as the acme of the tragic genre, really puts on stage, leaving aside the mythic issues of parricide and incest, is in fact the cognitive process, which undergoes furthermore a misdirection on the part of none other than Tiresias, spokesman of the god. So much so that Oedipus may be interpreted as an icon of human liberty, put in crisis by the burden of an unwitting and involuntary guilt.

Although the case of Phaedra, in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, is a different one (lacerated by the fatal struggle between the desire induced by Aphrodite and moral conscience, and by the agonizing attempt, thwarted by her nurse, to keep it a secret) she, and the play with her, ends up by confirming the humanistic and secular nature of Greek drama. In point of fact, it is in the sphere of freedom, and therefore of human choice, that Attic tragedy carries out an investigation of the human condition, and the dynamics of these choices are those which structure western drama as the theatre of the word, given that scenic discourse is the fulcrum of personality understood as subject of the action. Indeed, according to Aristotle, tragedy is nothing else but the 'imitation' of an action. However, human will (to which both dignity and existential relevance are also conceded) does not have control over reality, since the result of conflict with the divine and also with other antagonists is always in the balance. On the comic side, the passage from Aristophanes to the New Comedy sees the protagonist's omnipotence vanish, as he realises he is subject to another deity whose name is 'fortune'.

The pages dedicated to Shakespeare are particularly suggestive (his work will later be the subject of a whole chapter). Here too past and often careless interpretations are challenged. These, it is argued, were perhaps conditioned by an inapposite comparison with the Greeks dictated, in its turn, by an erroneous evaluation of the importance, in this case, of fatalism. In reality the traditional idea of destiny is absent in Shakespeare, and just as in Greek tragedy it is human will that is emphasized and here it imposes itself in circumstances which are impossible to overcome. It is only necessary to cite the case of Othello, dragged into catastrophe not by an uncontrollable passion but by the manipulative deceit of Iago.

If the Oedipuses of the Jesuit versions must admit their responsibility (with the advent of Christianity a hostile god is no longer conceivable), the investigation of the balance between freedom, guilt and fate becomes extremely intricate in Calderón's *Life is a Dream*, where it is the father's unjust and vengeful behaviour that ends up by making what was prophesied actually happen, thus

bringing about a reversal of the relationship between cause and effect. In Schiller's *The Bride of Messina* the attention is focussed on an obsessive fatalism together with an equivocal formulation of the prophecy. Ángel de Saavedra's *Don Alvaro, or the Force of Fate*, which became famous thanks to Verdi's operatic version, marks a turning point in Spanish Romanticism, with a radical vulgarization of the plotlines of freedom, guilt and fate: here the blame deriving from the strength of passion is laid on fate. An extreme case of such 'trivialization' is to be found in Antonio Ghislanzoni's libretto for another of Verdi's operas, *Aida*, where at a certain point the heroine's father wrests a military secret from Radamès, the enemy commander and Aida's lover, and immediately pardons him: "No, tu non sei colpevole, / era voler del Fato" ("No, you are not to blame, / it was the will of Fate", qtd at 32).

Consequently, it is possible for fatalism to have an apologetic function; and this becomes involved with a rejection of the idea of a chaotic and arbitrary world order in favour of the propensity to entrust the task of reestablishing an ethical balance specifically to representation, through the exercise of a sort of 'poetic justice' that rewards the good and punishes the bad. The argument, at this point, can only return to the 'case' of Oedipus, whose original innocence is here, too, effectively advocated (for that matter, for Sophocles guilt is never the main issue). In Aeschylus there may indeed seem to be delineated a certain moral theory of human action, contradicting the widespread tendency to attribute adversity and violence to the envy of the gods, but although the habit of blaming the whole *ghenos* for any misfortune was rife, there is little room for the theme of guilt in Euripides' theatre, "sperimentale e inquieto" ("experimental and disquiet", 36; see also Paduano 1968). The treatment reserved for the character of Medea is particularly conclusive: even in the face of infanticide, the shouldering of guilt and the awareness of the inevitable condemnation painfully proclaimed by the protagonist paradoxically result in the spectator feeling a kind of empathy towards this ultimate atrocity which will inevitably reveal itself to be an act of self-destruction. So it is not fortuitous that the question of responsibility remains a crucial point in drama right up to the crisis of the twentieth century.

In the area of comedy (for which D'Angeli and Paduano 1998 is central), concerning poetic justice, in Menander there is to be seen an exponential influence of positive effects resulting from a virtuous action, while in Aristophanes the theme of justice was in any case of little import. As regards comedy in general, a value system based on the balance between human goodness and satire tolerant of its shortcomings has been maintained up to and including the present. In tragedy however an essential change has come about and at the centre of the action, following in the wake of Seneca, is often to be found the negative character.

In the second chapter ("Ascesa e declino dell'individuo nella tragedia greca, "The rise and fall of the individual in Greek tragedy") and in the third ("L'eroe comico", "The comic hero") the object of the research is the presence of a protagonist, the process through which individuality is asserted on the stage, first in Attic tragedy and then in ancient comedy. In tragedy, contrary to what is

true in the Homeric poems which concentrated on "individualità … smaglianti" ("resplendent individualities", 41), it is usually the presence of the Chorus that defines the paradigm of communication (sometimes becoming an actual protagonist itself) while acting as mediator between plot and audience. This conventional function does not however coincide with the absolute truth, but nevertheless its role remains a basic one. A special emphasis is placed upon Aeschylus' *The Persians*, a social tragedy and "forse la più solenne affermazione dell'autonomia dell'espressione artistica rispetto alla realtà" ("perhaps the most serious affirmation of the autonomy of artistic expression over reality", 43), where the Chorus, made up exclusively of Persians, causes the Athenian spectators to feel empathetically the grief for a people that they themselves have conquered and destroyed (for a more detailed reading see Paduano 1978). A perturbing character is to be seen in the Clytemnestra of the *Agamemnon*, "il più antico personaggio teatrale a mettere in atto una finzione di secondo grado" ("the most ancient theatrical character to implement second-degree deception", 44) in her relationship with her husband before the murder.

But it is with Sophocles that a quantum leap is made in this regard in comparison with theatre preceding him. We need only think of the eponymous heroine of his *Electra*, whose implacable desire for revenge – which is, moreover, shared by the audience – causes her to be isolated and different from those around her, a solitude aggravated by the absence of Orestes and the false reports that he is dead. Or what about Ajax from the play of the same title, whose suicide makes him the first to proclaim the victory of different values from those recognised in a world to which he knows he does not belong. Indeed, in the final tragedies the difference of the hero is functional in recreating social bonds.

The first tragedies of Euripides focus on strong, dominant personalities which are always female. A typical example is the *Alcestis* where the heroine gives up her own life in the name of love. She takes part in a predisposed plan concerning her marriage which is both rational and audacious, like the arrival in the unknown territory of eternity as she identifies her tomb as their future home, applying in this way "in modo paradossale il principio della stanzialità femminile e l'attesa del ritorno dell'uomo dalla navigazione della vita ("in a paradoxical way the principle of female stasis and permanence and the anticipation and expectation of the male's return from the navigation of life"). Thus, at this point there is the appearance on the scene of "non solo la prima costellazione storica del binomio eros-thanatos (*sic*), ma anche la più alta, almeno fino a quando il *Tristano* di Wagner gli conferirà la cifra definitiva" ("not only the first historical configuration of the pair eros-thanatos, but also the greatest, at least until Wagner's *Tristan* will confer upon it the ultimate degree of intensity," 50). Medea's choice, too, as we have seen, positions itself in its own way, through her decision to be the most unhappy woman, against the principle of conservation; but it is in the *Electra* after the matricide that, together with the possibility of entering Euripides' workshop, a fatal crisis can be perceived of the essential certainties and also of the official religious values. Until the roles of the protagonists become

fixed on passivity, as happens in *Heracles* and in the *Bacchae*, where "l'illuminismo euripideo" ("the Euripidean enlightenment", 54) and the need for an ethical religion risk reducing myth to absurdity and to drag tragedy itself to the verge of nonsense. So much so that in some of the works the protagonist is defined by absence, given the fact that the action is characterized by variable focalization (*The Trojan Women*, *Heracleidae*, *The Suppliants*, *Andromache*, *Orestes*, *The Phoenician Women*). The most disconcerting tragedy remains the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in which the conflicts are as unfocused as the characters.

Significant and clearly perceptible differences in the affirmation of individuality may be found in the area of comedy, too. In Aristophanes the comic hero acts under the compulsion of a powerful narcissistic drive, despite the fact that his field of action is an exclusively social one. The affirmation of the ego always has a happy outcome and even the conclusion of the *Birds* really pays tribute to a triumph, revealing on the way a shameless model of narcissism which calls out hidden responses in every human being. A generation gap is the focus of two great comedies which both have an anomalous structure: *The Clouds* and *The Wasps*. At the end of the first the son's emancipation goes as far as physical aggression of his father; in the second (which the author already analysed in Paduano 1974), the conclusion is surprisingly the loss of power: the very idea the father had of himself guarantees the triumph of the son's libido.

The passage from Aristophanes to Menander is astutely compared to a change of social mores which is also demonstrated by the tendency to conclude the action within the family unit and limit what is at stake to the issue of sexual contentment.

In Plautus the action hinges on pretence, duplicity and intellectual manipulation usually carried out by the *servus callidus*; sometimes the comic setup is based on an ethical premise, but more often than not it involves transgressive stratagems staged, naturally, by the crafty servant, which are not without metatheatrical effects and metalinguistic overlapping with the poet himself. The transgressions are neutralised by a setting which recalls Greece or at least characters who are not identifiable with the Roman public. In other comedies it is the manifest inadequacy on the part of the fathers that reassures the spectator that it is not he who is the butt of the humour, it is not he who is ridiculed and tricked. In the *Bacchides* and in the *Mostellaria* the protagonist has no hesitation in adopting both stance and idiosyncrasies of a hero to hilarious burlesque effect. In the *Miles Gloriosus* Pirgopolinice throws himself head first into the deceipt "squadernando un narcisismo compatto e abbagliante" ("unleashing a dense but dazzling narcissism", 73), in a combination of sexual and military vanity which makes him a worthy archetype for Falstaff. And *Amphitryon* is assigned a special place in the corpus because Plautus coins a neologism, *tragicomoedia*, to classify it: a term which will find extraordinary favour and here is particularly apt since the tragedy of human powerlessness when confronted by the god's deceptions coexists or better is anticipated by the theft of a servant's identity, a character who is humble and ridiculous.

Terence challenges many of the specific features of tradition, diminishing the importance of the *servus callidus*, denying the validity of the commonplace incompatibility between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law and defending the social dignity of a courtesan. But the most subversive dramaturgical change is that of the way in which trickery is reduced to simple role-playing. So that once the *imbroglio* is recognised as a communicative code, the truth which is no longer recognised as such is considered as second-degree deception (in *The Self-Tormentor*).

The fourth chapter ("L'eredità di Seneca", "The legacy of Seneca") opens with an enquiry into the many reasons why this author has been so neglected. Even without mentioning the undeniably fundamental role he played in history and philosophy, it was he indeed who conveyed the repertory of dramatic situations inherited from the Greeks into western culture. His literary 'misfortune' arises from the intersection of two false problems: the possible staging of his plays, which are confused as far as their intrinsic theatricality is concerned, and the comparison of his dialogue, rich in description and sententious rumination, with the Greek, and in particular with the Aristotelian exemplars (even though in this case the issue has been mistakenly rendered categorical). It is however true that Seneca follows psychological and intellectual paths which are singularly contorted. The new dramatic time he introduces can often "indugiare nel vuoto e nella stasi ("linger on in emptiness and inertia", 77). His Oedipus is unquestionably the model for modern Oedipuses, and nobody but Paduano indeed has greater authority to maintain this. At the centre of every action there is in all circumstances the question of political power, the constitutive icon of evil, as is exemplified in *Thyestes*, the only Senecan tragedy lacking a hypotext. Atreus, the protagonist, is the essence of malign power; vengeance and tyranny combine in him, both in appearance and in action, to become absolute evil, which brings him to the nightmare fantasy of subjugating the gods themselves. On to the backcloth of this is projected the shadow of Shakespeare: "senza Atreo, non so se avremmo Riccardo III" ("Without Atreus, I doubt that we should have had *Richard III*", 84). Another new dramaturgical constant is the ratification of eros. Whereas in Euripides Medea's love for Jason belonged to an irrecoverable past, Seneca's version renders it immutable while inventing uncontrollable dark psychological depths: even the murder of her children paradoxically confers a definitive nature to her relationship with Jason. In the *Hippolytus* Phaedra, through the destruction of her beloved and of herself, perversely reaches the otherworldly union that she invokes as she is dying, an invocation that will become a dramatic *topos* (e.g. the finale of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*)

The whole of the fifth chapter is devoted to Shakespeare, the greatest amount of space reserved to one author (to whom the author has already dedicated Paduano 2007), and with good reason. While returning to and corroborating Coleridge's opinion, Paduano focuses on the ontological balance between people and things, so that the characters "*sono* la condizione umana tutt'intera, nella misura in cui . . . attraverso i tratti specifici riformulano ogni volta lo stesso universale,

dandogli il respiro dell'esistenza, l'anima, la carne, il sangue ("*are* the human condition as a whole, in that . . . through their specific features they reformulate every time the same universal, giving it the breath of existence, the soul the flesh and blood", 89). And from the vault overflowing with gemstones he takes three examples: Desdemona's "Am I that name?" (*Othello* 4.2, qtd at 89), Lear's "Thou art twice her love" (*King Lear* 2.4, qtd at 90), and in *Macbeth* King Duncan, murdered in his sleep, becoming sleep itself.

The analysis of the plays chosen begins with *Richard III*, and immediately Paduano tactfully but conclusively defines his critical boundaries by jettisoning overhasty comparisons (for example with "la macelleria compiaciuta del *Tito Andronico*", "the complacent butchery of *Titus Andronicus*", ibid.) and highlighting previously unobserved connections. The only wholly negative Shakespearian protagonist (who, as we have seen, owes much to the *Thyestes*) follows the Senecan paradigm of the indissolubility of the bond between power and evil (an almost identical position with that of Alberich, the antagonist of Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*: although he has chosen power over love, he too manipulates sexual union to gain power just as Richard does). In Macbeth, the other great tyrant of the corpus, may be seen to coexist the criminal and the moralist: the complete deadlock of this situation is only surmounted by the intervention of Lady Macbeth, who demolishes the remorse, scruples and anguish of her husband in an overwhelming scene (which finds its greatest interpretation in the duet "Fatal mia donna, un murmure" from Verdi's homonymous opera). Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene will eventually interrogate herself upon the terrifying reality of her situation so that remorse will emerge in dreams and, in a paradoxical reversal of the Freudian concept of dreams as the terrain of the libido, will permit moral repression to gain an egress.

The analysis of *King Lear* is indeed suggestive. By his own definition the king is "more sinned against than sinning" (*King Lear* 3.2; qtd at 96): here in fact there may be perceived a trace of the ambiguity to be found in the Greek verb *hamartano*, but in reality Lear is guilty of moral blindness, which is not only cognitive, and his behaviour is determined by despotism and solipsism. Even the love test he makes his daughters take defines his tendency to treat words as things, something which is common both to madness and childhood. In Paduano 2018, the author identified in Lear the symptoms of a dual madness (the first coinciding with blindness, the second with illumination); here he pauses to consider the explosion of insanity on the part of the king, coincident with crucial change and with the discovery of the other, which with the unleashing of the tempest creates a devastating symbolic equivalency; a shining example of how the poignant truth of Aeschylus' *pathei mathos*, a founding element of Greek wisdom, in this context becomes scenic reality. With the death of Cordelia, the king must finally confront (here, in truth, blameless) the most agonizing moment of human experience, the loss of the only being he really loved.

The reading of *Hamlet* clears the field of some of the common misinterpretations that no longer stand the test. The least significant, but most disconcert-

ing, is that of considering Claudius a good king; others are the incompatibility of thought and action, for which Hamlet himself is responsible but which are contradicted in other passages, and last but not least the interference religious doctrine would seem to have on his behaviour and the famous Freudian interpretation of the Oedipal triangle. Another Freudian suggestion is however accepted for its textual validity: the son's identification with an admired father. Hamlet's tendency to expand any event into an idea transforms the obligation to avenge his father into the responsibility of remedying what is rotten in the state of Denmark and to restore order to universal chaos (both imperatives in his mind): in this way his sense of inadequacy and the consequent vacillation become devastating. The most painful aspect of his situation is the suspicion and then the realization of his mother's moral fragility which conditions his relationship with Ophelia, one nevertheless based on sincere love. Thus, after the annihilating discovery of a world and a language which are both equally unreliable, Hamlet falls back on the staging of a deception and then of a double deception (the play-within-the-play and his madness). Nevertheless, in the final dialogue with his mother he rediscovers authentic communication and a love of truth and "rivela ... la madre a se stessa" ("reveals his mother to herself", 107).

A love of this kind suggests a parallel with the protagonist of *Coriolanus* who fights against the unnecessary use of words, against the hypocrisy of political relations and against mystification, particularly of one's own image. In this context the speech in which Coriolanus expresses his amazement for the lack of agreement on the part of his peers with his intolerance of such things is particularly significant. As proof of the integral quality of Shakespeare even more than of his versatility, the presence in the corpus of *Anthony and Cleopatra* is signalled, a tragedy close in date and in its derivation from Plutarch: here all is played out within the theme of pretence, a theme which is rendered ambiguous and not a little fascinating, so much so that Enobarbus regards Cleopatra's behaviour as demonstrating the dignity of the forces of nature. But it is with a pretended will to live after pretended suicide that Cleopatra tricks her interlocutors and the audience.

The reading of the comedies which follows evinces the radical change that Shakespeare carried out on this genre. Now the happy ending (and the achievement of a happy world) is replaced by a bitter ending (and by the end of a world full of negativity and anguish).

From this point of view the interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* proves particularly eloquent. Here there is a reciprocal social loathing between the protagonists, never denied by Antonio but concealed by Shylock beneath specious and misleading excuses until his celebrated outburst of bitterness reveals an insatiable desire for vengeance. The rest, if not silence, is a final leave-taking from his enemies and from the public, an exit that has "nella sua dimessa brachilogia tutta la dignità di una morte simbolica" ("in its resigned brevity and concision all the dignity of a symbolic death", 113).

Less brutal but in the final analysis not less disquieting are the issues con-

fronted in the romantic comedies. Whether it is a question of a young couple trying to pass their blindness off as rationality (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a sort of *Così fan tutte* by Mozart, but without music and above all without his power of redemption), or of the recognition of the necessity to accept the world as it is, full of flawed people (*Measure for Measure*: and here Angelo is compared to Scarpia in Puccini's *Tosca*), or of the suffering inherent in a love affair, even if it has a happy ending (*Twelfth Night*, where the part of Viola stands out, with some of her characteristics returning in Liù in Puccini's *Turandot*), the experience ends up by being emptied of meaning, or with its meaning replaced with a too accommodating common sense, often under the sign of a "sinistro rapporto fra i sessi" ("sinister relationship between the sexes", 114). In this way, all the comedies leave a bitter residue in the soul.

Finally, in his analysis of Falstaff in the two parts of *Henry IV*, Paduano highlights the ceaseless conflict between the pleasure principle and the reality principle which is going on beneath the flamboyant admixture of genres occurring in the alternation between scenes located at the court and in the tavern. Oscillating between the role of victim and that of prevaricator, Falstaff embodies the instability of the division between being the object or the subject of laughter. This is no longer a stable condition but rather an incessantly interchangeable one: a "consolante verità" ("consoling truth", 120) that Verdi will skilfully pick up in his *Falstaff*.

Even faced with the challenge of the sixth chapter ("Il classicismo francese e il regno del super-io", "French Classicism and the reign of the superego") to analyse the *siècle d'or*, the most critical and most creative period of French theatre, Paduano manages to focus on the fundamental problems and the most complex predicaments with authority. He has, moreover, no difficulty at all in engaging in a rigorous discussion with the most eminent scholars of the subject. The authors he chooses to examine could, by themselves, have shaped the history of French theatre: Corneille, Racine and Molière.

In the dramaturgical strategy of *Le Cid* he manages to detect the eloquent presence of the body and follows its traces through the caesuras of the alexandrines. And after observing the pathos of the "contorsioni del pensiero, che formano il vero asse drammaturgico" ("twists and turns of thought that constitute the real dramaturgical axis", 123), he concludes that even more affecting is the fact the instinctive physicality of the body is set free from the terrible incarceration of duty. In *Polyeucte* the ethics of 'duty', eluding the facile dispute between suppressed and suppression, is connoted as libido; and in *Horace* even leads to the erotisation of the conflict. Such confused victories of duty have many variations and are to be seen in their most refined form in *Pulchérie*, where the final choice of bridegroom rules out any idea of sexuality, and in their most extreme configuration in *Pertharite*, in which Rodelinde demands of her future husband the murder of her own son, giving him reasons which echo those of Euripides' Medea.

In Racine's case, Paduano adopts a particularly effective approach to his sub-

ject. He decides to analyse Racine's poetics and practice through the comparison of *Bérénice* (in which the action coincides with the whole spectrum of emotional deprivation) with a play by Corneille on the same topic: *Tite et Bérénice* (constructed on the positive affirmation of the personality). Among the many conspicuous differences between the two plays, perhaps the most important one is that of the fundamental role in Racine's work of the third character, Antiochus, the main channel for dysphoria in the play, and also both the victim and accessory of a strategy of reticence which is even prepared to use alternative modes of signification such as simple exclamations of grief. In *Andromaque* everything revolves around unrequited love and the general collapse of the heroic tradition. Paduano points out that the dilemma that precedes the heroine's decision to place her son's life before her fidelity to Hector finds its origins in Seneca's *Trojan Women*, while her decision to violate the pact will become a *topos* in melodrama (from Leonora in Verdi's *Il trovatore* to Ponchielli's *Gioconda*). In *Iphigénie* there is an attempt to reconcile two incompatible themes: the futility of the scapegoat figure and poetic justice. It is the final tragedy, *Phèdre*, which comes the closest to ancient models. And if Aphrodite's will is no longer credible, "l'inquieta e acuta percezione che l'esperienza amorosa è sempre e comunque dipendente da qualcosa che non è nelle disponibilità dell'io, dall'ignoto che risiede nel partner" ("the disquieting perspicuity of the realisation that the experience of love is always unequivocally dependent not on something that is within the agency of the self, but on the unknown which lies within the partner", 133) is made overwhelmingly obvious. In conclusion, with the innovation of a Hippolytus in love there can be see the motive for an increase in Phaedra's protagonism, ravaged as she is by jealousy, which is a crucial theme in Racine.

The same torments of eros and jealousy become factors not so much of growth but rather of vulnerability in the tragedies based on the dynamics of political power: *Britannicus* and *Mithridate*. In *Athalie*, a biblical tragedy where there is no eros but instead the power of divine will, the protagonist is possessed by an agonizing inner conflict, typical of all Racine's characters, between an oppressive sense of royalty and a mysterious *sombre chagrin*.

As for Molière, the reading of *L'Avare*, conducted of course with the Plautian hypotext as background, signals a 'blackening' of the protagonist. At the same time, the play's appeal originates precisely in its capacity to generate, beside and beneath an inevitable aversion from the ethical point of view, an attraction deriving from the unavoidable nostalgia or envy of an infantilism manifested without shame. A similar but less obvious childish regression is to be seen in *Le Malade imaginaire*, and also in this case it is a state not without its drawbacks. Indeed, the protagonist sinks into a condition of moral culpability when he tries to arrange his daughter's marriage to his own benefit. The analyses of these plays, whose protagonists are representative of the basic affirmation of vitality, are then followed by two comedies, *Tartuffe* and *Dom Juan*, on the theme of hypocrisy, a psychological procedure that also acts as a social strategy. In the first a touch of genius is demonstrated in the choice of aiming all the ridicule not at the

false devotee but at his victim, guilty of being too easy a prey of manipulation (for Molière credulity is never innocent or harmless). *Dom Juan* is centred on the violent antithesis between false religiosity and agnosticism (while on stage shadows of dubious provenance blur the limits of a debate between agnosticism, sincere faith and superstition). The commentary on the *Misanthrope*, incisive and significant, focuses on the successful balance obtained between the ethical and the comic, as in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, although (Paduano points out) Alceste's windmills are "piuttosto quelli di Amleto: il cancro della mistificazione di parole e gesti che corrompe le relazioni umane" ("rather Hamlet's: the cancer of the mystification of words and gestures which corrupt human affairs", 143).

Goethe's *Faust* opens the seventh chapter ("Uomo e cosmo, singolo e collettività", "Man and the cosmos, the individual and society"). The play is seen as the epochal icon of that continual effort towards the reconstruction of harmony between the individual and society, since, from the times of Aeschylus' perpetual exploration of the problem, the individual had been centre stage for more than two thousand years "in un'analisi del sé rifratta dai rapporti sociali" ("in an analysis of the self refracted by social relationships", 147). The study of Goethe's drama introduces the presentation of a series of works in which the central concern is precisely the constant tension in the relationship between man and society.

The series opens, a few years before the French Revolution, with an ideological scandal: Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro* (the inspiration for Mozart's most lovable opera). Despite its strong and unconcealed social polemic this work escapes the flat rigidity of a merely political statement thanks to the intensity of its pathos and the mingling of class and gender conflict.

With Schiller's *The Robbers* the harshest representation of the struggle between the individual and society is analysed. The problem of the legitimacy of violence comes up again at the other extreme of Schiller's theatrical career in *William Tell*, but there too can be perceived scruples and uneasy justifications that allow the hope of a coexistence between people and values to emerge. What is more, this idyll of a rustic existence will be made unforgettable by Rossini's opera; and another musical reference is to be found in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, when Wolfram advices the titular character to travel to the Pope in Rome. In point of fact, Schiller's *William Tell*'s ends with the opening to a new harmony between the classes. Further musical references to other plays by Schiller are scattered through the analysis. Verdi's *La traviata*, just as Schiller's *Intrigue and Love*, is structured on the theme of social inequality. Verdi will then adapt Schiller's *Don Carlos*, where the oedipal syndrome is the best expressed and most complex example of this condition among any other of its artistic representations. Besides which, the tyrant's personality is subjected to a sympathetically contradictory treatment that changes its traditional outlines (and here the citation of Alfieri's *Saul* could not be more apposite).

Büchner brings to the theatre "l'evento assiale della storia moderna" ("the crucial event of modern history", 158): in *Danton's Death* the topics and ideological incentives which justified and authorized the reign of terror during the

French Revolution are confronted. In this case there are no musical referrals but instead precise literary references (to Aristophanes' *The Assemblywomen* and Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) are indicated along the way during the summary of the plot, which dwells upon Danton's final exhaustion and need for peace that coexist with a sort of deathwish paradoxically saturated with sensual vitality. *Woyzeck*, a tragic hero, is, on the other hand, a humble victim: however, his is not so much a case of simply belonging to the exploited lower classes but of "una dinamica della costrizione sociale capace di devastare il privato e l'interiore ("a dynamics of a social constraint able to destroy the private and the interior", 161). In his conditioning into a state of induced jealousy the traces of *Othello* are to be clearly perceived; even more blatantly so is the presence of *Macbeth* when the murder weapon appears to Woyzeck in a dream, almost to suggest that the Shakespearian inspiration has also been assumed in a metalinguistic sense as a charter of nobility.

In Kleist's *Prince of Homburg*, whose ending is quintessentially ambiguous, the whole point is the fatal conflict between the formal and indeed universal character of the law (in this case military discipline) and freedom of choice on the part of the individual. The conflict is resolved at the moment in which the hero's conscience internalizes the law and recants even the ethics of success. With *Penthesilea* we reach, in Paduano's opinion, the most perturbing of all the plays considered in the book. In this reengendering of a myth, Achilles embodies a conception of the love relationship so violent as to efface the image of the dragging of Hector's corpse. The finale sees the titular character, in the throes of madness, maul Achilles before regaining control of herself (a deed weighed against that of the murderous mother in Euripides' *Bacchae*), at the conclusion of a disorienting crescendo triggered by the inexorable torrent of the discourse, and of its inherent action, from the metaphorical register (to eat his face) to the most bloody and appalling literalisation.

With Ibsen the analysis of the nerve centres of society moves into the domain of the middle-class family, a sphere in which the marital relationship is of primary importance. Whether it ends, as it does in *A Doll's House*, with "il più duro attacco portato prima del Novecento al regime patriarcale" ("the harshest attack on patriarchal rule carried out before the twentieth century", 167) and the arduous realization on the part of the protagonist of her irremediable divergence from society, or that the new beginning actually happens, as it does in *Little Eyolf* through the socialization of the parents' love, Ibsen's work is dominated by the search for meaning and value in a true marriage (attainable through a choice which is difficult but free: *The Lady from the Sea*). The ideological obstinacy of a fanatical moralist to establish its absolute fulfilment leads, in *The Wild Duck*, to the sacrifice of the most moving and 'truest' character in the play. The conflict between the individual and society is clearly exemplified in *An Enemy of the People*, in which the protagonist pronounces an 'explicit' confirmation of his human condition: "l'uomo più forte del mondo è quello che è rimasto solo" ("the strongest man in the world is he who stands alone", 173). Solitude and protago-

nism are, in particular, the hallmarks of the characters in Ibsen's last plays. They are also brought together by the central theme of ascension and of verticality, and of the opportunity of salvation offered them through the intervention of a female character (only, however, if previously committed sins do not entail a tragic ending).

In the theatre of Chekhov, through the alternation of resonances of anguish and elegy a progressive tendency begins to delineate itself which could be seen as 'enlightened', bearing in mind the social and political context. At the centre of the action are to be found myths (the myth of Moscow in *Three Sisters*, synecdoche of the affective frustration between the sisters) and also idols (for example that of work, which by countering frustration feeds the need for renewal and the utopia of a future society). The work ethic in *The Cherry Orchard* is applied in a tangible way to the momentous change from "la staticità di un'agricoltura sonnolenta … al frenetico attivismo della speculazione edilizia" ("a sleepy agriculture … to the frantic activity of property speculation", 176-7). The diffidence towards unscrupulous speculators is however overtaken by that felt towards nostalgic myths that conceal an attachment to the social injustice of an *ancien régime*. Meanwhile, hope and disappointment, happiness possible but shunned (Varya's marriage in *The Cherry Orchard*) foster the bittersweet atmosphere which pervades all the plays by this author.

With Wagner the circle beginning with the theatre of Goethe is closed, since the tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelung*, which almost constitutes a reply to *Faust*, makes the history of the world coincide with the tragic story of an individual. Here the god Wotan nurses the infinite desire to possess both love and power, a desire that will in fact be the cause of both his own and the whole world's ruin. But it is the theft of the Rhine gold by a Nibelung dwarf to violate the sacredness of nature and cause the founding of an industrial empire "che ha le sinistre connotazioni della fabbrica ottocentesca" ("which has the sinister connotations of the nineteenth-century factory", 178). Paduano places the tetralogy at the heart of an epoch making reform of musical language; the analysis calls upon his abundant experience as an music expert particularly in the case of Wagner (here I need only cite Paduano 2011).

As witness to the rigorous structure of the book's development, the concluding chapter, "Il Novecento contro Aristotele ("The Twentieth Century versus Aristotle"), follows the strategies which during the last century aided the rejection of a 'traditional' idea of representation, beginning with Pirandello, whose dramaturgy radically contradicts the basic theory of the *Poetics* where the personality of the characters is adamantly declared to depend upon their actions. The protagonists of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* are instead actually in search of a plot, after their creation on the part of the author has been interrupted. "Questa attestazione surreale di esistenza è subito bilanciata dall'attestazione di un vissuto esperienziale 'doloroso'" ("Such a surreal attestation of existence is immediately offset by the account of a 'painful' life experience", 182) narrated to the manager, who judges it impossible to perform (wrongly so, as exposition has

always been an integral part of dramaturgy). In this way the consolidated practice of metatheatre becomes in the twentieth century the instrument of a new conception of theatre paradoxically based on the actual impossibility of the performance itself. *Each in His Own Way* seems to return to the same relationship between existence and representation, but a last-minute reversal ascribes the victory over life to the art of the theatre, which had foreseen what the two protagonists, whose stories have become the plot of the play, would have done with their lives, driven by unknown and uncontrollable forces which constitute the deeper core of the drama. In *Tonight We Improvise* the freedom of improvisation that the director wants to experiment with does in fact liberate the actors from the rigidity of an established text, but produces in them a dangerous identification and empathy with what is happening on stage, thus engendering serious risks for their life balance and also "per quello della loro professione, quale l'ha definita Diderot" ("for that of their profession, as Diderot defined it", 186). After Pirandello a special mention is reserved for Genet's *The Maids* as a successful example of metatheatre (which has become a commonplace often with tedious and cloying results in its staging).

At the opposite pole of another of the fundamentals of Aristotelian poetics towers the 'epic' theatre of Brecht which sets itself, explicitly and deliberately, against catharsis as empathy with the passions unleashed on stage. His intention is instead that of enabling in the spectator to acquire a knowledge which is of use in the hoped-for participation in the real world. However, to the clearcut division between feeling and reasoning Paduano proposes an integration whose aim is that of emphasizing the presence of a decided strength of feeling in reasoning as well. He cites as proof of this his own experience and the profound emotion he experienced when reading the conclusion of *The Exception and the Rule*, a miniature masterpiece of hopefulness whose underlying message is as intense as it is humble:

> quello che non è strano, trovatelo sorprendente!
> . . .
> Quello che è normale, trovatelo inspiegabile!
> . . .
> Quello che è la regola riconoscetelo come abuso,
> e dove avete riconosciuto l'abuso,
> lì procurate rimedio!
> (qtd at 189)
>
> [Whatever is not strange, find it surprising! / . . . Whatever is usual, find it hard to explain! / . . . Whatever is the rule, realise it's an abuse, / and where you have discovered an abuse, / Provide a remedy!].

What is more, the opposition between the rule (generated by the dominant class) and the exception (the single gemstone of humanity) loses the definition of its contours and enters an area of chaotic uncertainty. In *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, the pitiless violence of the male protagonist, a wealthy producer of

canned meat and typical representative of the capitalist system, is juxtaposed with the female lead Joan Dark (who retains traces of the character of Joan d'Arc from both Shakespeare's *Henry VI* trilogy and Schiller's *Maid of Orleans*). However, although she is moved by the best of intentions, Joan does not manage to find a solution and ends up by realising the heavy weight of Marxist conditioning on human behaviour, meanwhile attracting suspicions of ambiguity on her own part. Another ambiguous personality is the protagonist of *The Life of Galileo*, structured on the insidious relationship between science and power and between conscience and basic needs. In any case, the human being's fatal dependence on the social and economic context makes it impossible to gain any stable positivity. This indeed is the lesson of *The Good Person of Szechwan*, in which the protagonist, guilty of having loved her neighbour better than herself, in the end finds a source of absolute vital energy in motherhood. And it is also motherhood that ignites a spark of hope in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, where a good deed sets off a positive chain reaction, surprisingly resurrecting the old-fashioned category of poetic justice in a body of work which began from the most radical dramaturgic reform.

The theatre of the absurd is also founded upon a definite challenge to Aristotelian poetics, with Ionesco's defiance of the principle of causality, together with that of the identity and unity of the characters. Contradiction is now the name of the game, while violence on stage (and not only institutional violence as we have in *Victims of Duty*) is disconcertingly inevitable. In one of the most anomalous of his works, *Exit the King*, the principle of contradiction affects the original narcissism (among other things the king believes himself to be the author, not only of various inventions and enterprises, but also of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, an attribution Paduano judges as the wittiest solution to the Homeric question he has ever met with). This narcissism is empowered and at the same time thwarted by the subjective nature of his despotism. On top of all this there is his clinging on to life. And even if he admits the presence of others when he looks for someone to die in his place (just as Alcestis' husband did), what removes consistency both from his personality and from the story are the glances of real attention bestowed on things outside himself. Before this, in *Rhinoceros*, the transformation into a monster, always hovering on the edge of reason for human beings, is multiplied by a contagion which imitates the mechanism of mass psychology. The relationship between normality and deviation loses all meaning and value and is reduced to a simple quantitative ratio between majority and minority: so much so that accepted normality ends up by becoming an aesthetic standard. And yet, at the point of collapse, the unexpected voice may be heard of a humanity that will not surrender.

The volume ends with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: not a casual choice, as the reduction of dialogue to a purely phatic function and the breakdown of any real rational structure, together with the removal all possible means of orientation, represent the culmination of the anti-Aristotelian revolution. Above all, the choice is not casual because what is principally at stake here is time, the most

significant and disquieting factor of human life, here marked by an estranging 'waiting', at the mercy of unreliable perceptions. "Il tempo, che per Amleto era 'uscito di sesto', qui si dissolve nell'incosistenza irredimibile del vivere" ("The time, which for Hamlet was 'out of joint', here dissolves into the irremediable inconsistency of life," 203). The concluding words of *Teatro. Personaggio e condizione umana* put the finishing touch, in this way, to a profound coherency as they link up explicitly with the title and in the end express anguish before silence.

This evocative conclusion is typical of the particular characteristics of Paduano's writing which do indeed deserve a closer glance.

To start with, in a study made up in part of plot narration, the technique of summarizing, the choice of essential segments and their assembly is innovative. Even tangled narrative paths are made compelling and the storytelling is always able to capture the spectre of the human condition. The readers who already know the stories find themselves just as fully engaged in the unexpected suspense, almost as if they were cast into a landscape that was indeed familiar but had never before been accurately observed. From such a scrupulous critical progress there emerges at times a degree of feeling which is contagious and witnesses the presence of emotion within the exactitude of reason. All this is only possible to a scholar who is also a true story-teller, as indeed Paduano is (the temptation here is to suggest the writing of a novel, but this is already the case: see Paduano 2020). Besides this, the possibility of venturing into the *détours obscurs* of the text is encouraged by the reading of the original version of most of the material presented (and it is striking how German terminology is frequently used, as the author is aware that these words habitually lead the reader back to the original meaning, in a way similar to that of the Greek language). Another valuable resource that the book possesses should also not be forgotten: Paduano's remarkably extensive and prestigious experience as a translator. This is naturally a great advantage from a hermeneutic point of view. It is my belief that only a person who is faced with the often insuperable challenges of translation is able to understand the dizzy fascination of the word that comes from afar, or can recognise the enticement of jewels that risk perpetual burial in darkness and oblivion.

Other salient aspects of the volume have already been pointed out at the beginning: the ample space reserved for the secondary sources for a scrupulous and unembarrassed comparison which assumes the form of a diary of an intellectual adventure. During its development the author experiences the inevitably enigmatic nature of any text, and at the same time confronts the necessity for a responsible interpretation, reiterating the unacceptability of arbitrary or improvised judgements.

But here it is not simply the case of a need to offer the reader a comprehensive choice of interpretations. Paduano's commitment and dedication to his task demonstrates the special relationship he has with many works of art. It is always one of respect and awe, and it is transformed almost into an act of *pietas*, as if the

scholar were moved by the duty to protect the fragile trembling masterpieces from any misunderstanding or incomprehension.

Perhaps it is simply this special relationship which is the inspiration the incessant evocation of harmonies, leitmotifs, rhymes between the material presented. Certainly, there is the necessity for a wide and detailed knowledge here, but there is also an essential requirement for penetrating sensitivity, empathy and almost for an emotional tie, besides a passionate enthusiasm for and attention to mysterious affinities and correspondences. And last but not least a musical taste not simply reducible to mere competence, however fierce (it is not by chance that Paduano is the author of many brilliant programmes for opera and concerts and also of innovatory studies such as Paduano 1992, 2009).

Thus, the coming together of images and words apparently distant from and strange to one another seem to create a single shared desire to question the meaning of life, of art, of the world. In conclusion, the meaning of the human condition, of character and finally of Theatre.

Translated by Susan Payne (University of Florence)

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Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body (Le Corps Poétique). Teaching Creative Theatre.* New York: Methuen Drama, 2020 (third ed.), ISBN 9781474244770, pp. 232.

Abstract

The Moving Body. Teaching Creative Theatre is the third English edition of *Le Corps Poétique: un enseignement de la creation théâtrale* by Jacques Lecoq, originally released in France in 1997. This edition includes a foreword by Simon McBurney, an introduction by Mark Evans and an afterword by Fay Lecoq. It presents Lecoq's philosophy and pedagogical ideas on dramatic mime, through the account of his personal aesthetic journey and of his teaching methods. The book's structure parallels the students' program at Lecoq's Parisian school and is divided into four parts, describing the progression from the exploration of movement to its application to different dramatic territories to creation. In a very accessible language and with clear exemplifications and illustrative drawings, Lecoq shades light on a vision of mime considered as training for theatre and for life. Though its real substance is beyond words, its documentation finds in this book a reference point for theatre students and for researchers willing to learn more about Lecoq's ideas and methods. It also instantiates the idea of the expressive body that transversally influenced the performing arts in the Twentieth century.

The Moving Body. Teaching Creative Theatre, originally released in France in 1997, is the translation of *Le Corps Poétique: un Enseignement de la Creation Théâtrale* by Jacques Lecoq. First published in Great Britain in 2000, the translation is now at its third English edition, which was released in 2020. The third English edition also includes a foreword by Simon McBurney, an introduction by Mark Evans and an afterword by Fay Lecoq.

The book is structured into four parts. The first is an account of Lecoq's "Personal Journey", featuring his experience "From Sport to Theatre" and with the "Educational Journal" that is the foundation of his pedagogy, which in fact is summed up in the succeeding two parts, "The World and its Movements" and "The Roads to Creativity". These were crucial to describing both the first and second-year students' program and the activity of the L.E.M. (the Laboratory for the Study of Movement) that was added to the school in 1976. Finally,

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the fourth part mentions the "New Beginnings", e.g. the transmission and the global success of his pedagogy in time.

In *The Moving Body*, Lecoq provides not simply a handbook or guide for the actor, but a clear and illustrative "description of the evolution of a philosophy and of a set of teaching methods" (xvii). He illuminates his idea of mime as an essential part of theatre training that is indebted to Jacques Copeau's vision of mime, and targeting not only actors and mimes, but also directors, playwrights and scenographers. The concepts of replay and *mimisme* concretely imply a progression from silence to voice countering the expressive limitations of pure mime; they were even found to instantiate a learning process based on embodied action that was clearly informed by Marcel Jousse's *Anthropologie du geste* (1969). In fact, the gesture encompasses both of them; movement is the main element of study, but its exploration and understanding enables the full expressivity of the actors and their appreciation of life. Throughout the entirety of this reading, Lecoq's vision leaks out of the exercises, the principles and the pedagogical progression of the school program, which consequently finds the most accurate documentation in this book.

By taking us through this journey, Lecoq also transposes the modernist idea of a universal body that modern dance pursued in a different way, by disciplining the body through codified vocabularies. The connection he builds—between the inner and the outer world of the actor—is reminiscent of François Delsarte's laws of correspondence and succession; in general this connection elucidates the idea of an expressive body constructed through formal action that gave movement a pivotal role in the renovation of theatre forms in the twentieth century. Lecoq clarifies throughout the book that freedom sprouts out of constraints in acting, reminding us of a basic assumption shared by Theatre Anthropology, too. His motion laws are analogous to Eugenio Barba's pre-expressive principles, particularly regarding the balance and tensions at the heart of the body-in-life. We can, therefore, use his words as a guiding source to see how this vision of the body is exemplified and translated within a theatre learning process.

In the foreword, McBurney provides a personal memory of Lecoq's teaching at the L.E.M: he describes how Lecoq looked as he walked along the corridors of the school, what Lecoq asked the students to stimulate their imagination—in order for them to join in a journey that would reflect back at them the contours of their own imaginations (xi)—while doing, and not discussing, "experiencing, not speculating" (xii). Even though the real substance of the training is beyond words, according to McBurney, this book provides a resource for personal investigation and a reference point for life: "Because we are in a state of conscious movement. Because we are also constantly looking to situate ourselves in the world, this book will provide a moment when we can do that" (xv).

In his introduction, Mark Evans reminds the reader that the original title was *The Poetic Body*, which he considers closer to Lecoq's pedagogical view.

In fact, "the body not only moves but also expresses, it creates; it not only imitates but also brings to life" (xvi). However, Evans' critical remark is meant to point out that the specific scope of this book is not the training for the actor, but a "training for life", which is targeted both at actors and at any other artist working in theatre. Its discourses are within a network of text and video sources including the following: the film *Les Deux Voyages de Jacques Lecoq* (1999), Patrick Lecoq's book *Jacques Lecoq, un point fixe en movement* (2016), the archive video material, *Autour de Jacques Lecoq* (2016), and further tools offered by Evans for the understanding of Lecoq's philosophy and methods. In his contextualization, Evans also suggests that Lecoq was exposed to several experiences during and after the Second World War within Europe, and more specifically in Italy, where Lecoq lived for eight years. Moreover, he he was influenced by earlier movement theorists and artists as diverse as Etienne Marey, Georges Hébert, and Gaston Bachelard besides the already mentioned Copeau and Jousse. And these names are briefly quoted by Lecoq throughout the pages of this book.

"Personal Journey" is divided into two sections: "From Sport to Theatre" and "The Educational Journey". Lecoq discovers the "geometry of movement" (3) at seventeen and, in 1941, he attends a college of physical education where he meets the person who introduces him to theatre—Jean-Marie Conty. However, the continuity between these two apparently distant fields is given by Lecoq's knowledge of movement. During his first theatre training with Claude Martin, a pupil of Charles Dullin, and a former dancer, Jean Sery, Lecoq describes his experience with a gestural language that was based on the sports he had practiced, thus discovering the connection between sports, movement and theatre. After the liberation of France in 1944, Lecoq's learning process complemented the experience of teaching, so he assumed responsibility as physical trainer of the theatre company Les Comédiens de Grenoble, directed by Jean Dasté, which Lecoq considered as "a natural extension of the gestures acquired through sports" (4). Since the beginning, teaching consequently became his research method: his pedagogical endeavors actually catalyzed the discovery of new forms, from masked performances and Japanese Noh theatre, to Jacques Copeau, whom he considered a reference point for his work, alongside Dullin. Furthermore, his Italian adventure produced an impact that was just as relevant in nurturing his imagination as the contents of his teaching illustrate.

Studying the succinct account of his Italian transit, between 1948 and 1956, readers found the evolving Italian theatre scene in the beginning of the First Republic. Lecoq is introduced to Commedia dell'Arte in Padua, and meets Amleto Sartori, who recreated the leather masks that had almost disappeared from the theatre. In fact, Lecoq is invited to the Piccolo Teatro—founded in Milan to grant theatre as a public service—by Giorgio Strehler and Paolo Grassi. Neither the Institution the Piccolo represented, nor the political context are mentioned by Lecoq, who nonetheless shows a profound appreciа-

tion of the Italian cultural scene of the time. This is a moment of personal discovery for him. Among the various adventures he recalls, *Commedia dell'Arte* and Greek tragedy are given an essential role in Lecoq's personal journey that was brought to light by the opening of his school in Paris in 1956. That's when Lecoq chooses to devote himself completely to teaching (8). The journey also becomes the feature of his school, a "school in motion" going in two directions: "across the broad, horizontal landscape of dramatic styles" and "up and down the vertical axes, both scaling the heights of different acting levels and exploring the depth of poetry" (12).

In "The Educational Journey", Lecoq offers a brief presentation of the two-year program, which evolves through the study of improvisation and movement technique and analysis that are supplemented by the *auto-cours*. In the learning process, first comes the acquisition of physical skills, followed by their application to the "dramatic territories" and, finally, by their renovation into new work. This journey is subdivided into "A dynamic theatre of new work" and "The search for permanency". The first section deals with the students' own discovery of themselves through an observation of the external world stimulated by training, which is also meant to provide "an education in seeing" (20). Alongside improvisation, students practice movement analysis, which corresponds to the search for the immutable laws at the basis of "the human body in motion: balance, imbalance, opposition, alternation, compensation, action and reaction" (21). In this section, Lecoq unveils his broad vision of mime as "an integral part of theatre" while also combining life and art: "children mime the world in order to get to know it and to prepare themselves to live in it. Theatre is a game which merely extends this action in different ways" (22).

Part two, "The World and its Movements", is structured into three chapters that detail the issues addressed in the "Education Journal" in a progressive path, focused on "Improvisation", "Movement Technique", and "The Students' Own Theatre", referred to the *auto-cours* and based on the students' creativity. To prepare for the start of this journey, students need to put their learned behaviour patterns aside and become like a "blank page": "in this way they can be awakened to the far-reaching curiosity that is essential to discover the quality of play. This is the objective of the first year's work" (27). The progressive stages of learning correspond to the sequence of subchapters presented in this part of the book: "Improvisation", "The Neutral Mask", "Approach to the Arts", "Mask and Counter-Masks", and "Characters".

Improvisation starts in silence and includes two phases: "Replay and play" and the "structure of the play". "Replay involves reviving lived experience in the simplest possible way" (29); play (e.g. acting) comes later, through an improvisation articulated around the variables of rhythm, tempo, space, and form. Lecoq makes no secret of his defiance of the introspective modes so widespread in the actor's training. Since movement is not inherently mechanical and since imagination and memory are triggered by action, Lecoq

believes that the interior worlds of the actor should be considered. However, these are "revealed through a process of reaction to the provocations of the world outside" (30). Through a rising dynamic scale, similar to the musical scale, he rather guides students "towards the structures of the play" in order to discover the dramatic motor driving the action, which is also prior to the use of the words.

After these initial exercises, the study of "the neutral mask" is undertaken and given a central role. It implies a progression from "neutrality" to "identification with the natural world" to "transposing". The mask abstracts the action and favors the universalization of movement, thus giving birth to the poetic body—the actor's face disappears with the mask, while the body becomes more noticeable and "every movement is revealed as powerfully expressive" (39): "the neutral mask puts one in touch with what belongs to everyone, and then the nuances appear all the more forcefully" (41). In the first lesson, the students discover the object, then they are guided through the exploration of different themes. The main one is "the fundamental journey", a journey through nature involving different actions. The third phase of the work is "playing at identification" (43): sensations are the means towards a "universal poetic awareness" (45), which is at the basis of a further step within the students' learning process in which they are asked to transfer this knowledge into the dramatic dimension by transposing natural or animal qualities to their actions "in order to achieve a better playing of human nature . . . going beyond realistic performance" (45).

In "Approach to the Arts", Lecoq describes the second approach to the mask, consisting of what he calls the "universal poetic awareness", where all elements are abstracted (space, lights, colors) and the students learn to master expressivity through gestures — having no reference point in the real world — in order to transfigure emotions. These specific gestures go under the name of *mimages*, consisting of the expression of emotions and states of the characters through movement. Afterwards, the separate elements of colors, lexical words, and sounds are embodied and observed through the action as well as inscribed within the context of the arts in which they are composed — such as painting, poetry and music.

In "Masks and Counter-Masks", Lecoq describes the students' training with different masks: the neutral mask, which he considers "the mask of all masks" (54), the expressive mask, which shows the characters' emotion, and the larval mask, which is utilitarian and not intended for theatre. In a progressive ascent towards creativity, the masks are vehicles for human qualities to appear by transposing the form of acting. In order to achieve this goal, students are requested to work with masks and also to try the opposite of what the mask suggests, revealing the counter-mask — a different character beyond the mask, eventually arriving at an interplay between the two. No cultural traditions are relevant in this process, but life is observed and recreated through abstraction. Character acting is consequential to these prior studies:

restrictions encourage the invention of dramatic forms by letting the characters appear out of images that the actor, in the end, carries from stage to spectator.

In "Movement Technique", Lecoq illustrates the second axis of his teaching, which is still developed during the first year of the course and includes physical and vocal preparation, dramatic acrobatics, and movement analysis.

Physical and vocal preparation is directed towards expressivity and connects the inner motivations with the outer forms. This preparation is based on the term, "dramatic gymnastic", "in which every gesture, every attitude or movement is justified" (70) based on indications, actions, and the inward states of the actor that corresponds to the major dramatic modes: pantomime, Commedia dell'arte, and drama. Then comes 'movement analysis', which is applied to the human body and to the elements of the natural world, both material and animal. In the research on the human body, Lecoq identifies three basic movements: undulation, inverse undulation and eclosion, which are first studied separately and are secondly explored in various ways in order to expand the student's expressivity while also "researching the economy of physical action" (82). The separate movements are gradually fit into dramatized sequences that the students continue to work on in the *auto-cours*. Both the technical and dramatic contents of the movements are consequently explored. Some basic principles of theatre emerge from this path — for instance, that "the body must be disciplined in the service of play, constrained in order to attain freedom" (86). Alongside this theorization, Lecoq's gradual essentialization of movement springs out of movement analysis. He particularly abstracts and highlights two actions: to pull and to push, which make what he calls "the rose of effort" (86). In the end, he sums up all-encompassing laws of motion, which engender a dynamic point of view on performance that the students will be asked to explore in autonomous thematic sessions in the *auto-cours*, adding production, playwriting and collaborative work.

This preparation is instrumental to pursuing the "roads to creativity" that Lecoq describes in the third section of *The Moving Body*, and it is fundamental that the students are exposed to in the second year of the course. After a selection is made among them in the beginning, those continuing will start a "geodramatic exploration", e.g. an exploration of the territories leading to dramatic creation (103). A shared vocabulary is built based on "Gestural Languages", including different types of body languages: pantomime (gestural translation of words), figurative mime (representing objects and architectures), and cartoon mime (which is made of images like in silent movies) up to the higher level of *mimages*. These body languages are applied to "The Main Dramatic Territories", which Lecoq describes in a parallel order to the study program: "Melodrama", "Commedia dell'Arte", "*Bouffons*", "Tragedy" and "Clowns". Again, they are approached through direct action, with no reference to any historical or cultural reading, in order to encourage the actors' creativity and imagination. The subject that gathers them all is actually the constant search

for creative processes that the students partly need to find in themselves.

In "Melodrama", the grand emotions are studied through the universal themes of "The Return" and "The Departure", which find different potential applications. No specific performance style or mode of acting is set, as the main scope is to shed light on "very specific aspects of the human nature" (114). As Lecoq states, "melodrama is not outdated, it is of today, and is all around us, in the man waiting for the telephone to ring to hear if he has a job, in the war-torn family, in the migrant worker, etc." (114). After the body has searched for the right timing and gesture to express melodrama, dramatic texts are added to the learning practice.

The process of actualization that is intrinsic to Lecoq's pedagogy reinvents itself in the other territories. In fact, the Commedia dell'Arte that he had discovered in Italy, mainly through Sartori and the Piccolo Teatro, finds a new interpretation in his teaching, which makes use of self-made half-masks in the beginning, traditional masks as the training evolves, and scenarios in an advanced stage. Throughout the work, the Commedia dell'Arte is transformed into a de-historicized human comedy, freely employing the traditional masks on the assumption that "The *commedia* belongs to every time and every place as long as there are masters and servants which are essential to it. These timeless elements of the human comedy . . . can enable the students, who are of course 'contemporary', to invent a new theatre of their own time" (124).

How do "people who believe in nothing and make fun of everything" act? The Bouffons evolve out of this question through parody and the construction of a different, bouffenesque figure, made by altering the natural body with removable prosthetics that have the scope to emancipate the actors from inhibition so that they can, finally, push their parodies to speak the unspeakable. In fact, the bouffons deal essentially "with the social dimension of human relations, showing up its absurdities" (126).

While for the bouffons Lecoq moves from the creation of the character to the construction of the "gang", in the preparation of the Greek chorus at the basis of the Tragedy, he works on the crowds and orators he deals with in the following dedicated paragraph. He does not attempt an historical view of ancient tragedy but, consistently with his method, seeks "to reinvent the tragic form" (135), by investigating the relationship between the chorus and the heroes with a focus on the definition of the space and the use of the text, which is more relevant to the process of creating this territory than to the others. However, as for the prior areas of exploration, the text is approached through the mimodynamic method, never sitting down and discussing it but rather "working through movement" (146) to grasp its images, words and dynamics. Going beyond the specific actualization of themes and texts, Lecoq's modern approach to tragedy clearly shows in this teaching method: while the ancient Greek chorus comments on the action, his "reaction chorus" acts in response to the events, as if it were another player of a dramatic contest.

Paralleling the gradual learning practice, "The Clown" comes at the end of

the book. It frames the activity of the school standing in a specular position to the neutral mask. Its first research consists of "finding one's own clown", meaning that the actors should look for their ridiculous side, for the clowns in themselves. Only then are the "comic varieties" explored among different variations, such as the burlesque and the absurd, from which the students can choose for their final show. In the end, Lecoq consequently goes back to the individual: "While the neutral mask is all-inclusive, a common denominator which can be shared by all, the clown brings out the individual in his singularity" (159).

The author concludes his text with a short presentation of the L.E.M. (The Laboratory for the Study of Movement) and an account of the dissemination of this method by the schools' former students. Allegedly, he would have wanted to write another essay on the L.E.M, as Marina Spreafico states in her foreword to the Italian edition (2016) of *Le corps poétique* (1998), because Lecoq hints that the openings of the story in the last section are not totally exhausted. However, the major contribution of his writing lies in the overall vision of theatre. *The Moving Body* documents its intrinsic invitation to learn more about the school. Both for the actor, and for the researcher interested in Lecoq's theatre, this book is an essential read; for the theatre historian it is also a theoretical source on "dramatic mime" and on the expressive body that transversally influenced dance and theatre in the twentieth century.

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Luis Alfaro, *The Greek Trilogy of Luis Alfaro*. Edited by Rosa Andújar. London: Methuen Drama series, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020, ISBN 978-1-3501-5540-4, pp. 304

Abstract

The much-acclaimed and award-winning *Griego* ('Greek') trilogy of Chicanx and Latinx performance artist, playwright, writer and social activist Luis Alfaro is published for the very first time in an edition by Rosa Andújar (King's College London) for the Methuen Drama series (Bloomsbury, 2020); the book has recently been awarded the 2020 London Hellenic Prize. Equipped with Andújar's excellent introduction to Alfaro's work generally and to each adaptation, plus a production history and interview with Alfaro, this book not only makes the scripts of three very successful plays available for the first time for everyone, but also presents a unique and fascinating way of engaging with the ancient Greek dramas of which Alfaro's plays are adaptations, something that Andújar repeatedly highlights in the introductions. These adaptations, Andújar comments, are already beginning to "chart a new course for the three most popular Greek figures [Electra, Oedipus, Medea] onto the US stage" (6).

Keywords: : Luis Alfaro; Chicanx; Latinx Theatre; North American Urban Theatre; Greek Tragedy; Greek Tragedy Reception; Electra; Oedipus; Medea

It was around 2002 in Tucson (Arizona), and more precisely at the juvenile detention centre, where Luis Alfaro was conducting a poetry workshop: there he heard the story of a thirteen-year-old girl who had killed her mother because the mother "had put a hit on the dad, who was a drug dealer" (Alfaro and Carrillo 2016). On the same day, Alfaro recalls, he lingered at the bookshop of the Arizona Theatre Company and bought a copy of some ancient Greek plays for cheap, ten plays for ten dollars (Alfaro and Andújar 2020b). Amongst these was Sophocles' *Electra*, which contained a story of "revenge killing" that much resonated with the one he had just heard (Alfaro and Andújar 2020a, 282).

Thus began Alfaro's journey with, through and beyond the Greeks, which eventually led to his much-acclaimed *Griego* trilogy, recently edited by Rosa Andújar (King's College London) for Bloomsbury; the book has been awarded the 2020 London Hellenic Prize. Andújar provides a general introduction

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to Alfaro's work (1-12) as well as one to each play (20-3; 110-14; 180-6); a very detailed production history for each play (238-65); a helpful 'Glossary' to navigate through Alfaro's hybrid language (266-81); and a very useful 'Further Reading' section divided by topic (292-5). The book also contains Andújar's rather fascinating interview with Alfaro (282-91).

As we read in the production history (238-45), *Electricidad*, the first of the *Griego* trilogy and an adaptation of Sophocles' *Electra*, premiered in 2003 at the Borderlands Theatre in Tucson under the direction of Barclay Goldsmith; it was brought to Chicago (the Goodman Theatre) and LA (the Mark Taper Forum) in 2004 and 2005, respectively, and counts no less than sixteen other productions in a number of states across the US (Florida, Texas, New York, New Mexico, California).

After its premiere at the Getty Villa Auditorium (Malibu) in 2008, the second play of the trilogy, *Oedipus El Rey*, an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, was brought to many other locations, including the following major cities: San Francisco (2010 and 2019), San Diego (2015), Washington DC (2011), Portland (2012), Dallas (2014), Chicago (2012), and New York (2017).

After a few productions of *Bruja* at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco and the Borderlands Theatre in Tucson in 2012 and 2013, respectively, this unconventional (to say the least) adaptation of Euripides' *Medea* was heavily altered and morphed into a new play, *Mojada*. *Mojada* has toured major US theatres since its premiere in 2013 at the Victory Gardens in Chicago; it was then adapted for the Getty Villa (Malibu, 2015) as *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles* and presented as *Mojada* again at the New York Public Theatre in 2019, with the roles of the Mexicans Josefina (Aegeus) and Armida (Creon) recast as Caribbean migrants – the former, now named Luisa, from Puerto Rico, and the latter, now Pilar, from Cuba – to reflect the different demographics of the city (183).

Yet, as Andújar details in her introduction, Alfaro is more than a playwright: the issues brought to life in his *Griego* trilogy breathe into the "different worlds" and "intersecting identities" that Alfaro embodies all at once as a Chicanx, Latinx, queer writer, performance artist, social activist, filmmaker, director, journalist, producer and associate professor (1). The breadth with which he has engaged with different underrepresented communities across the US seeps from the striking situations that give the characters of his adaptations breath and life, each character ingrained in the broader context of Chicanx and Latinx life and theatre in the US.

Electricidad (Electra) is based on that 13-year-old girl Alfaro met in Tucson, but she also represents the "old ways" of a "patriarchal gang culture" (20) that Clemencia (Clytemnestra) – a "feminist", glosses Alfaro (Alfaro and Andújar 2020b) – wants to eradicate from their *barrio* (neighbourhood), thus justifying her killing of Agamenón as a progressive act aimed at creating a better future for the other women.

On the one hand, Agamenón, 'El Auggie', incarnates the "old ways", the

cholo ways (46);[1] he is the protagonist of an archaic system of retributive justice: an "eye for an eye" (100), explains Electricidad – "you mess with me, I mess with you back" (46). On the other hand, Agamenón also provides comfort and protection. A chorus of *las vecinas* (the neighbours), who incessantly and rhythmically sweep the stage with their brooms and comment on what happens, provide the audience with the broader context into which we are to read the unfolding of events and the characters' actions:

LA CONNIE What a *tristesa.*
LA CUCA To lose someone.
LA CARMEN A father.
LA CONNIE *El rey.*
LA CUCA Yes, the king.
LA CARMEN Even if he was a *cholo.*
LA CONNIE A warrior.
LA CUCA A parolee.
LA CARMEN Protected his family.
LA CONNIE Protected his territory.
LA CUCA And all of us.
LA CARMEN But from what?
LA CONNIE The elements, *mujer.*
LA CUCA The city.
LA CARMEN The other gangs.
LA CONNIE The thieves.
LA CUCA La *policia.*
LA CARMEN And the politicians.
LA CONNIE Thank *Dios* for *cholo* protection (34-35).

Both a protagonist of the "old ways" and a protector, Agamenón perfectly captures the hybrid and contrasting nature of *el barrio*, "a siloed yet sheltering space", explains Andújar in her general introduction (6). Andújar helpfully charts the *barrio* of Alfaro's plays onto Chicanx historians' formulation of it as both the "enforced" and "segregated" space to which Mexican people were confined in the 1920s in Southern California (6), as well as the "community-enabling *place*" into which it was reformulated in the 1960s (Raúl Villa qtd ibid.).

Abuela, Agamenón's cheeky mother, who is trying to pound some sense into Electra, remarks upon this idea of the *barrio* as an "enforced" space from which she feels like there is no escape. After she has told Electra that her hus-

[1] For the term *cholo*, see Andújar's entry in the Glossary: "Person(s) of Mexican descent who participates or identifies with a gang subculture, characteristic features of which include bandannas, tattoos, and white shirts for men as well as dramatic makeup and large hoop earrings for women" (269). See also James Diego Vigil's own glossary entry in Melinda Powers's chapter on Alfaro's plays: "A Chicano street style of youth who are marginal to both Mexican and Anglo culture; also used historically for cultural marginals and racial hybrids in Mexico and some parts of Latin America" (qtd in Powers 2018, 58).

band and two children were killed in one way or another, Electra asks:

ELECTRICIDAD Then why do you stay?
ABUELA The same reason we all do, young chola.
Where do cholos go in a world that won't have us?
This is the mundo we know. Good or bad.
Es lo que es. (75)

The only character who seems to represent an alternative to the *cholo* system is Ifigenia, 'la Ifi', who joined a convent, which she describes as "just like jail, but with better food. / And silence" (54); she preaches "forgiveness" (54) and "unconditional love" to her older sister as the only way out of "prison" (80). "Unconditional love", la Ifi reveals, is "love beyond the *barrio*" (80), one that Electra can only see as a betrayal to her own history and identity.

Like Electricidad, the main character of *Oedipus El Rey* draws from a real story, one coming from Alfaro's direct engagement with the youth programme known as Homeboys Industries, particularly at the North Kern State Prison in Kern County (California), one of the places where the play is set (111, 119). "I started doing interviews with young men out of Homeboy Industries", explains Alfaro in an interview, and "there was an Oedipus there, who told me his story, and I thought, oh my God, this is the Oedipus!" (Alfaro and Carrillo 2016). "Oedipus is the 52 percent of young men in California, ages seventeen to twenty-four, who will get out of a state prison and go back at least once more in their lifetime", explains Alfaro (Alfaro and Andújar 2020a, 289). Andújar provides some interesting data in this regard in her introduction to the play, indicating the US as the country with the highest total number of inmates and the highest "imprisonment rate" (112). Oedipus, modelled on the (over?) confident Sophoclean character, wants to break off from history; he does not believe in the "old ways" of the *barrio* that Jocasta and her brother Creon live in after Laius' death:

JOCASTA Then what do you believe in?
OEDIPUS I believe in myself.
JOCASTA Well, you know what, don't run around telling that to the people here. We're border people. We've always been. It's who we are. We're the stuff underneath the cement. Do you get that?
OEDIPUS Not really. (153)

Oedipus, the adopted son of a widowed Tiresias, and for whom "all [he] knows is behind bars" (158), wants a different future: he wants to be "the one", says one of the chorus members at the beginning of the play, "*el mero mero*" (boss), echoes another, as they prepare to not just tell, but also enact, the story of Oedipus (122). Oedipus wants a new "history", a different "past" (154), but Jocasta warns him: "We all got destiny. We all got a story that was written for us a long time ago. We're just characters in a book. We're already history and we just started living. Our story has already been told. We're fated" (153). Fate, "the

prison system" which seems to "dictate human destinies as powerfully and cruelly as any Greek god", Andújar argues, is the "political and institutional power" which the play exposes as heavily limiting, if not annihilating altogether, the possibility that some people can change (112). *Oedipus El Rey* is a "story about the system", a chorus member tells us at the beginning of the play, in which "choices . . . are made for you" (120).

With respect to *Mojada*, the name of the play itself is indicative of the issue that is at the heart of it: "Mojada", "wetback", is a "derogative term", explains Alfaro, used to designate those crossing the US border from the Rio Grande river in the 1930s (290). *Mojada* tells the story of a migrant family from Mexico in search of a better future and their experience as undocumented migrants on US soil; it also offers a flashback scene in which the family's *sirvienta* (servant) Tita, together with Hason (Jason) and Medea, enact their journey to California, from which it becomes apparent that Medea was raped by one of the soldiers at the border as the price of moving on. Medea's crossing is yet another "true story that I was told one night in Chicago working with these Dreamers";[2] in fact, Alfaro later learnt that "more than half of all the women who cross the Southern border from Mexico into the US . . . are sexually assaulted". Medea is another "disturbing case" from the Latinx and Chicanx communities which we are shown in vivid detail (Alfaro and Andújar 2020b).

But Medea is only one of the Mexican migrants that is given voice in the play: Josefina is from a humble background, with a husband working the fields far away from her whilst she sells *pan dulce* (sweet bread) on the streets, and Armida is a highborn migrant who now owns the business Hason works for. Aegeus and Creon are recast into female characters and along with Tita and Medea make up this "world of women" that has replaced the one of men in the original Euripidean drama (182). We are thus presented with a complex and diverse world of experiences of these Mexican women who are all trying to succeed in a new world – a world that is often (and with humour) criticised from their perspectives. Josefina subtly critiques the hypocrisy of attempting to make everyone feel like they are "treated the same, though they [this country] know not everyone is" (200), as well as the country's work ethic, according to which a promotion, instead of meaning "less work and a few more *pesos*" (money), means "twice" the work and no social life (202).

Though hugely benefitting from her family's money, Armida seems to have worked hard to adapt to, and make her way through, her new life: "She was the first immigrant, the first generation to come to the US and had to really deal with the kind of sexism in our culture", Alfaro explains (Alfaro, Andújar 2020b). Thus, though she is indeed "horrible" in the way that she manipu-

[2] The term 'Dreamers' refers to those protected under the Deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a 2012 presidential directive enacted by Barack Obama, which permitted those "who had been brought to the US illegally as children to have access to study and work rights" (Walters 2017).

lates Hason into marrying her "for the business", using the fact that Medea is not only an undocumented migrant but also not legally married to Hason, Armida has also contributed to creating a better world for the "next generation to come forward" (ibid.). Much like its Greek counterparts, there is not a straightforwardly recognisable 'villain' in Alfaro's plays; each character is in fact made more complex by her/his own story, which is written into, and influenced by, a much complicated world of diverse experiences, feelings and identities.

Yet, as Andújar repeatedly flags, Alfaro's adaptations are not just about transposing the Greek plots onto the "now" (ibid.) – and in this sense he goes 'beyond' the Greeks as was asserted at the beginning of this review. The 'now' is in fact part of a rich and ancient history and mapped onto the mythologies of the Chicanx community that are written into these plays.

"The Greeks offer you structure . . . they offer you wonderful, compact stories", said Alfaro in an interview in 2011 (qtd in Alfaro and Andújar 2020a, 4), which he then fills with the "old" and the "new" of the "intersecting identities" he embodies and the "different worlds" he inhabits. Andújar details these "worlds" as she places Alfaro's plays into the long tradition of Chicanx and Latinx theatre, identifying in *El Teatro Campesino* (The Farm Workers' Theatre) the major influence on his creative work, something that Alfaro himself concedes (286). It was a theatre which emerged out of the "1965 farmworker strike in Central California, demanding civil rights for Mexican-Americans" and whose founder, Luis Valdez, developed into the dramatic form of "the *mito* ('myth'), a ritualised performance containing Native American elements, often invoking and even reviving the legends of the Aztec and Mayan civilizations", but also "influenced by the Greco-Roman classical tradition" (8-9). It is this form of theatre, which addresses contemporary social issues as well as incorporates the history and mythologies of the Chicanx community, that Alfaro draws from. "I take Aztlan,[3] my spiritual home, everywhere I go" (Alfaro and Andújar 2020b). Alfaro's choice of a hybrid language, Spanish and Spanglish, also writes his plays into, and engages with, Latinx identities and theatre tradition. "I take my *barrio* in my language", and it is by "honour[ing] that language" that Alfaro attains his "own authenticity as a playwright" (Alfaro and Andújar 2020a, 282).

Mojada begins with Tita praying in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs – an ancient language that, Alfaro points out whilst speaking about adapting his

[3] For the meanings and history of the term Chicano/Chicana, alternatively spelled Xicano, Chicano/a, Chican@, Chicanx, Xican@, or Xicanx, see Andújar's introduction (7-12) and footnote 53 (14-15), where she reports the words of Chicanx writer, feminist, activist and playwright Cherríe Moraga in an article published in 1992: "I call myself a Chicana writer. Not a Mexican-American, not a Hispanic writer, not a half-breed writer. Chicana is not the mere naming of one's racial/cultural identity, but it is a politic, a politic that refuses integration into the US mainstream, a politic that recognises that our pueblo originates from, and remains with, those who work the land with their hands, as stated in 'El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán'".

Mojada to the audiences of New York's Public Theatre (291), is spoken by over 3500 Mexicans in New York. Tita comes from "a long line of *curanderas*, healers" (192), she explains to the audience at the start of the play, and has taught Medea everything she knows. Medea is this magical and "ancient" (232) character who is desperately holding onto the world she comes from and is trying to teach it to her son Acan. She can, and even suggests doing so at some point, put a curse on Armida, "*un mal de ojo*" (227); and she does eventually work her magic with the dress she sewed for Armida to put on so she would die, just like Euripides' Medea does for Creon's daughter. As Andújar argues in her introduction to the play (182), Alfaro's inscribing Medea into Native American cultures follows in the steps of a number of contemporary productions of Euripides' play, amongst which is Chicanx playwright Cherríe Moraga's *Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (US, 1995).

But references to Aztec culture are also present in *Oedipus El Rey*, in which the Sphinx is "a three-headed Azteca serpent" (170), and in *Electricidad*, in which an eager Electra recalls the history of the *cholo* myth to the dead body of her father (a very daunting, Aeschylean-like presence occupying the performance space for most of the play). "We were Aztecas, huh, *Papa*?" and "Coatlicue", the goddess of "human sacrifice", "made the first *cholo*" and then cut into four pieces one of her "four hundred daughters, *Coyolxauqui*" when she tried to challenge her power, and used the four pieces to create the "*cholo* world" (50). The story is deliberately told in a biblical-like manner, the same manner used by *las vecinas* when they trace the beginnings of *cholo*:

> LA CARMEN In the beginning
> . . .
> LA CARMEN There was the cholo.
> LA CONNIE And the cholo was no myth

The *cholo* world is linked to Native American mythologies in a language that references the Christian tradition, one of Alfaro's "competing homelands" (10) because he was brought up by a Catholic father and a Pentecostal mother. "Religion is a big part of my development", Alfaro tells Andújar in the interview published as a coda to the edition of his plays. He continues: "Ritual has been the connective tissue between my own personal narrative and the theatre", it is where his "intersecting identities" and "different worlds" not only communicate with one another but also come together (288).

Thus, the Greeks not only provide the skeletal structure for telling very contemporary stories about these different worlds, but they allow these worlds' own history and mythologies to get across to those audiences who would not otherwise 'see' them performed on stage. Alfaro's versions of these ancient Greek plays not only represent a "door opener into the regional theatres" of the US (283), but also enable "Anglo-American audiences to access the plight of Chicanx and Latinx peoples" (6), whilst "community audiences" are hearing the stories of Electra, Oedipus, and Medea "for the first time" (282).

With his "episodic" adaptation technique (285) – a subdivision of the play into titled scenes – Alfaro gives the audience a sense of these different worlds, Chicanx, Latinx, Greek, coming together with their different temporalities and mythologies, whilst creating new stories out of them. As Andújar rightly notes, Alfaro's plays have already begun "chart[ing] a new course for the three most popular Greek figures onto the US stage" (6).[4]

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[4] See Hall, Macintosh, Taplin (2000), and Macintosh, Kenward, Wrobel (2016), amongst others, for Medea's rich reception history; Foley (2012), Bosher, Macintosh, McConnell, Rankine (2015), Andújar, and Nikoloutsos (2020) for the reception of Greek drama in the Americas.

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