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CONTEMPORARY DIRECTING APPROACHES TO THE CLASSICAL ATHENIAN
CHORUS: THE BLOOD OF ATREUS

by

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ABSTRACT

Theory suggests that the masked chorus in classical Greek tragedy sang and danced and represented the ritualistic and political nature of Athenian society. No manual defining the employment of these elements in performance survives. Therefore, directors must construct their own visions of the ancient Greek elements for contemporary performance.

This study surveys theory concerning the functions of choral conventions in their original context. Then, treatments of costume, mask, movement, music, and text in contemporary productions of the Oresteia follow. The Oresteia is used for comparison because the chorus is an important character in the action and the mythological issues are relevant to the present. Productions by directors Peter Hall, Ariane Mnouchkine, Peter Stein, and Garland Wright are examined for their interpretations of ritualistic aura, textual concerns, and visual appearance.

The variant approaches explore the possibilities of shaping innovative and relevant choruses for contemporary productions of Athenian tragedy.

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

It is clear that the decision of how to create and stage the chorus is really a decision the director must make. You have to decide how you can get these twelve people to speak the same text. We have no tradition of that. It is not only our theatre that has lost it, Greek tragedy itself also dispensed with it. Euripides' plays can easily be played without a chorus. In Aeschylus it's different. In The Oresteia, the chorus is extremely important. (Stein 257)

As Peter Stein has indicated, the tragic chorus is one of the most challenging elements of Athenian tragedy facing the contemporary director. It has also been said that the chorus "proves itself the greatest stumbling-block in modern productions of these plays" (Dale 17). During the 1980s and '90s tragic performances have explored the wide variety of choral possibilities in production of Athenian tragedy. Directors' approaches to the chorus have ranged from so-called "museum" reproductions with actors draped in robes and masks, looking like those of ancient vase paintings, to radical reinterpretations that present a

nondescript time with the actors in dog-like ape snouts (Bryant-Bertail 23). The intention of the playwright and then the style and concept of the director often dictate the appearance, or look, of the chorus. But why does the chorus exist in the first place? Director Dimitrios Rondiris said "[t]he supreme function of the chorus is that of isolating the tragedy making it a thing apart, separating it from everyday life. The chorus is the poetic concept of the greatest value which had to be rediscovered" (180). Because the chorus seems to undergo the most radical interpretations and vary so much from one production to the next, it is important to study how scholars and directors have reconstructed this aspect of the tragedies in order to create effective productions for our time.

Since the rediscovery of the classical Athenian dramatic texts and Aristotle's treatise on Poetics, scholars and critics have striven for an authentic presentation of the classic plays relative to the archetype set forth in their respective period. In 1903, productions in Greece caused riots when the plays were performed in the less formal language of Dhimotiki (Vince 45). Mid-century modernist criticisms from those such as Margarete Bieber and Cliver Taplin challenged directors' interpretations and

styles of presentation in production suggesting that the only legitimate way to produce the plays is to recreate them in their original convention. More recent criticism from John Chioles, Marianne McDonald and others is beginning to appreciate the interpretive and performative focus on the production of tragedy for our time. The gulf between scholars and practitioners alike is not so much over the revival of the classical plays as they may have been originally presented (though there are discrepancies in what that might have been) but rather, with new translations presented in styles of performance that update subject matter, add stage business, and change character traits (Taplin, Greek 179).

The purpose of this examination is to survey contemporary directors' approaches to the chorus of classical Athenian tragedy, bringing together a variety of interpretations and concepts as a resource for directors who are about to embark on the task of directing a tragedy. This study considers scholarship on the subject since the mid-twentieth century, as well as performances taking place within the last two decades, in order to demonstrate that there are viable and important alternatives to the museum-like, "right-way" revivals of the classics.

There are no extant documents that can tell us just how a classical Athenian tragedy was originally produced, no reviews that reconstruct the performances for us. While Aristotle left us his treatise on tragedy, the Poetics is generally concerned with the poet's craft and does not detail the aural and visual elements. No musical scores or choreography survive. We cannot say for certain what the music played on the aulos was like or what the movement of the actors was exactly. Of course, the performances took place in the orchestra, dancing place, before a large audience seated in the theatron, or "seeing place." Therefore, the action must have been highly visual. Yet, all that is left to us are the words. Of the tragedies, there are titles and fragments, but the only full texts that remain are from just three of the many tragic authors competing at the famous Dionysian festival. The rest is left to speculation.

While it is difficult to discern the manner of classical theatrical convention employed in the original productions, sources such as Taplin's The Stagecraft of Aeschylus have examined the tragedies of Aeschylus and suggest that the texts of the plays do offer guidance for stage directions. We can also make certain assumptions

based on the architecture of the theatres, the atmosphere of the event itself, the audience, and the meter of the text. T. B. L. Webster has examined vase paintings and the metrical dimensions of the text in The Greek Chorus and found that together they offer insight into the movement and choreography of the chorus. He suggests that if we examine a vase painting depicting a given scene and we can determine the meter of the text, then the posture and the image of the steps combined with our knowledge of the meter can offer clues as to the tempo and rhythm of the movement.

Still, only so much can be derived from the frozen image on a vase painting that is actually useful for incorporation into live theatre. The convention of the art of vase painting itself limits our understanding of what is actually being depicted in the paintings and leaves much to conjecture. Therefore, "[d]irectors are pushed into reconstructing nearly the entire aural [and choreographic] dimension of the tragic chorus. A freedom generated by the absence of sources, an obligation to reinvent the chorus beyond its speech" (Van Steen).

For all the speculation that the historical perspective on Athenian tragedy gives us, one aspect is clear. It is generally accepted that "[w]e cannot put

ourselves back in the theatre of Dionysus" (McDonald 6). So, how does the unfamiliar audience comprehend a chorus of elders dancing in the contemporary theatre? The chorus can have a great deal of the lines and are believed to have worn masks and sang and danced. So, says director Peter Stein, everyone stages it that way and "[n]obody understands anything and everyone is extremely bored because two-thirds of the text is sung and danced on a monotone" (257). For this reason, among others, the chorus and the images a director incorporates into the performance of a translation often make allusions to the contemporary world and contemporary issues in society.

Contemporary productions contemplate issues such as those surrounding World War II, multiculturalism, gender issues, and the role of women in society. The contemporary trend recognizes that "art cannot be isolated from its historical and political context" (McDonald 11). The trend emphasizes an exploration of the political through the use of imagery and the body-as-text as well as exploring new developments in technology.

The dilemma a director faces in the occidental literature-based theatre is that "Aristotle's plot, character and thought are valued--as they were for the

philosopher--over diction, music and spectacle. In the West, 'drama' has been privileged over 'theatre'" (Vince 45). That privilege is why the contemporary productions continue to draw criticisms, yet it has been said that the postmodernists speak with "seeing" (Chioles 24). As present-era theatre artists continue to push the exploration of visual and aural elements, these elements are becoming as revered for meaning as the text has been in the past.

However, the text is not abandoned all together. There is still a great deal of emphasis on the original author's intentions and yet even the translations employed in production draw criticism. One critic cautions that "the translator's task is not to sit in judgement. He should render what he sees and allow the reader to draw his own conclusions" (Segal 32). In contrast, however, at least one scholar says that "[m]odern adapters do what dramatists should do--that is to depict the world in which we live" (McDonald 6). The adaptations and translations employed in present productions offer vastly different treatments of similar issues and stage conventions.

Because the current production of classical tragedy in various venues all over the world is remarkable in number,

it is necessary to limit the productions this thesis will examine. Therefore, because it is generally accepted that the function of the chorus is paramount to Aeschylean tragedy over those of Sophocles and Euripides, the plays of Aeschylus are best suited to the study of the tragic chorus. The number of professional productions concerned with the Oresteia mythology over the past two decades offer a unique opportunity to examine and compare a variety of directors' adaptations and visions based on the same mythology.

The trilogy is also an example of the few tragedies in which the chorus is a "party to the main conflict" as witnessed in the Eumenides (Dale 18). In Agamemnon, there are 1673 lines and the chorus has "over 220 lines" in their first appearance; consequent odes are also of "substantial length" (Walton, Living 55). Due to the central role of the chorus in the trilogy, productions of the Oresteia will serve as the base of this study.

Though the Oresteia is rarely performed in its entirety in contemporary times, the past several years have seen several professional full productions. Therefore, in order to limit the scope of this study, four performances from the past two decades have been chosen. Two

productions were performed in the contemporary auditorium-style theatre while the other two explored vast spaces in non-traditional theatre settings. Similarly, two of the performances that were clearly modeled on ancient elements have been chosen to contrast with two of a more radical outward appearance. Each production offers an opportunity to explore varying treatments of the tragic chorus. The productions are: Aeschylus: the Oresteia directed by Peter Hall at the National Theatre in London, November 1981; Die Orestie directed by Peter Stein at The Schaubühne in Berlin, 1980; Iphigenia at Aulis, Agamemnon, Electra directed by Garland Wright at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, 1992; and Les Atrides directed by Ariane Mnouchkine with the Théâtre du Soleil at La Cartoucherie outside Paris, 1990-2.

The Wright and Mnouchkine productions have updated the subject matter in their stagings to focus on the Clytemnestra character by incorporating translations of the related mythology from Sophocles and Euripides. The act of updating the material for the present audience is not unique to our period in history. In much the same manner, the three authors themselves also adapted and updated the familiar mythology to their own purposes. The audience of

the original performance waited in anticipation to see the adaptation of the familiar story, the events being subject to the new author's intentions. Though the audience experience is different for a number of reasons, a contemporary audience will similarly anticipate the director's interpretation.

The audience experience is also affected by the stage space. The stage areas for the Hall and Stein productions reflected a historical connection to the original experience, because they were patterned after the ancient theatre at Epidaurus.

The theatrical convention of the chorus gives rise to interesting challenges for directors producing tragedies two millennia after their first performances. How directors solve the challenges an Athenian chorus poses in the contemporary theatre is an important step in fashioning relevant productions of these plays for the present-day audience. Because there is no definitive "rule book" for theatrical production of tragedy, and because the responsible director should know something of the form in its original context before shifting to the new paradigm, this study revisits scholarly ideals of the original chorus. Then the study surveys the four directors'

solutions and approaches to the chorus in their productions of the Oresteia.

The following chapter begins this study with a review of theory and opinion in regard to the original form of tragic performance and the role of the chorus in its original context. The subsequent chapters explore how the contemporary director contends with the conventions of the tragic performance of which Aristotle assumed his audience was aware but that are lost to us twenty-five hundred years later.

The third chapter looks at the interpretation of the chorus in the four directors' productions selected for this study. What meaning does the director convey through the overall production style and concept? How is the chorus functioning in the respective productions? What is the chorus' purpose or goal, both as an element of classical tragedy in performance and as a character in the play?

The fourth chapter examines the choral elements in the new productions. What choices have the directors made regarding voice, movement, mask, and costume? How are the ancient theatrical conventions addressed? In what way is the gender of the actor significant? How is the use of costumes and masks related to the treatment of the chorus

as mass or individuals? What demands do the production styles require of the actors in voice and movement?

The final chapter contains concluding statements regarding observations and discoveries about the tragic chorus for the contemporary theatre.

CHAPTER II

THEORY, FUNCTION, AND CONVENTION OF THE TRAGIC CHORUS

When directors, new to Athenian tragedy, first launch into research concerning the tragic chorus, their experience can be both frustrating and exciting. One of the initial factors to become apparent is the lack of concrete answers to questions regarding the chorus. Due to a scarcity of sources from the original period, scholars, historians, and directors have had to construct the basic principles of the chorus through hypothesis. Words such as "presumably," "speculate," "infer," "probability," "reasonably conclude," and a host of similar others are continually encountered in virtually any source concerning the tragic chorus. These terms will therefore appear frequently throughout this chapter. But, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the lack of a concrete model can also be a source of freedom for the contemporary director.

Aeschylus v. Aristotle

Research for directing a classical tragedy will inevitably include a review of Aristotle's Poetics. However, with the trend to deconstruct and reexamine history and literature, present-day scholars are quick to

point out that Aristotle had written this treatise in the century following the golden age of tragedy. Aristotle's arguments are based on the extant texts of the great tragedians in his own time rather than on their original performances, which he could not have witnessed. During the century previous to Aristotle, the chorus had diminished so that by the time of Euripides the chorus was barely necessary to drama and the end of the golden age of drama was playing comedy without a chorus (Haigh 285-6). Therefore, Aristotle's bias is naturally toward the poet and not the "spectacle" component of theatre, which would include the very visual and aural dimensions of the chorus.

Contemporary scholarship questions previous ideals that placed Aristotle's treatise as the guiding rule for the literature and production of tragedy. John Chioles suggests that Aristotle actually contributed to the demise of the form in that, "[h]e never seriously addressed the other side, the meaning of performance, the meaning for the performer or the spectator. Only what is inwardly mechanistic, outwardly structured, and self-referentially logical seems to have concerned him" (33). In the proper context of the time we should recall that Aristotle is also engaged in rhetoric with Plato which naturally influenced

his treatment of tragedy. Athenian society itself had changed since the classical period; therefore, Aristotle's "attitude can be understood in the context of fourth century cultural developments, but at the same time we might wonder whether it would have made sense to Aeschylus, who was famous for his spectacular productions" (Vince 33). Still, Aristotle considered the plot to be the soul of tragedy and of his six elements he lists song and spectacle as fifth and sixth respectively. He treats "the realization of the tragic effect in performance as incidental, unnecessary and often tasteless" (Vince 33). Aristotle's emphasis is clearly with the text when he says:

The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet. (Aristotle VI.20)

From our historical vantage point, however, we cannot implicate Aristotle as the sole source of changing the

perspective of the "theatrical" to the "literary." The Renaissance rediscovery of his text began a process that evolved his Poetics into a ruling guide. Chioles points to an example in the manipulation of Aristotle's descriptive words "mimesis" and "catharsis" which were involved in describing the whole of tragedy. He says that "[s]ubsequent centuries in our own era have invested these terms with category status more to force poetics into aesthetic theory than anything else" (34).

The aesthetic theory becomes something that is literature about literature rather than the performance. For years the theatre has been studied as literature. The texts of Aeschylus and Shakespeare, for example, have been studied in literature classes around the world. But, the texts of these masters was created for performance. Granted, the literature is all that survives a performance into future generations, however it is the performance that is theatre. Studying the performance as well as the literature gives us a more suitable understanding of the tragedies Aeschylus created for the stage.

Aeschylus produced the "spectacle" in theatre with enthusiasm, and one of the most creative examples in all of Athenian tragedy is the Eumenides (Kitto 87). The black

and drooling chorus of "Furies" is the most unique in all of extant tragedy.

Ritual

Invariably, research into the tragic chorus will uncover the supposition that tragedy itself is ritual. This idea is likely the outgrowth of the worship of the demigod Dionysos, and of harvest rituals taking place in a circle with an altar in the center. It is plausible conjecture that the orchestra structure evolved from the harvest ritual. Yet, one has to wonder, what of ritual is discernible in the production of tragedy?

Gilbert Murray claims that ritual elements are a part of every extant tragedy (342). Clearly, the Oresteia discusses and even illustrates a number of ritual acts born of the mythology. The sacrifice of Iphigenia, the lamentations of libation bearers over the tomb of Agamemnon, and obviously Orestes at the altar of Apollo in Delphi are just three of the many direct references to the ritual life of the Athenians played out in their theatre.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the tragedies illustrated a ritualistic life of the Athenians. There is also visible evidence of ritual mannerisms in the gestures of figures on vase paintings. The gestures of mourning,

for example, seen in the figures seem to suggest a carry-over of the ritualistic events from life into staging of the tragedies. But is the theatrical event itself ritual?

Taplin disputes the claims of ritual applied to the plays themselves. He maintains that the plays are ritual only insofar as are the events of everyday life, and that no one tragedy fits into any singular pattern of ritual (Greek 161). "Greek tragedy," he says, "reflects and exploits the rituals of the real world, of course: but it is not itself a ritual" (Greek 161). While some of the tragedies may concern themselves with a ritual event as a backdrop for issues addressed in the plot, the ritual in the play does not infer that the tragedies themselves were rituals. More likely, it may be reasoned that the theatrical production within the festival was a social event rather than a ritual.

Contemporary understanding of words such as Religion, Ceremony, and Ritual complicate the discussion of those elements of tragedy. However, there are those who maintain the ceremonial nature of tragedy suggesting that we can detect clues as to the playing of the event in contemporary religious belief. Rondiris offers the mystery of the Holy Eucharist as source for understanding the ceremonial

aspects of Greek tragedy. "By studying the evolution of the Holy Eucharist, we discover a great number of substantial analogies and remnants of Greek religion" (178). The general structure of tragedy is comparable to a Mass, but the mystery of the Mass of the Holy Eucharist offers an interesting ritual parallel in an examination of the chorus and the Oresteia:

The Priestess at Delphi conveys the mood for the pious, religious-like transubstantiation from Furies to Erinyes; a change which involves the very order of the world: a dissolution of the ousia, a blood avenging order, and a realignment—a transubstantiation—of that ousia to another landscape, that of a social order and communal Justice. (Chioles 381)

A change in the order of the world is also suggested by the manner of transformation or resurrection of the Erinyes. Generally, in keeping with the cult of Dionysos, the god or hero is torn to pieces before being reanimated. Here the Furies are diplomatically destroyed and resurrected. Whether the theatrical event itself is ritual or only enacts ritual events within the play, ritual is an important component of tragedy. The form of ritual and the

mood, or emotion, conveyed by the particular ritual determines the character and attitude of the chorus.

Choral Performers

One of the more widely accepted theories of the evolution of the tragic chorus, and subsequently the actor, suggests that the chorus was born of the dithyramb and then the actor evolved out of the chorus. The dithyramb employed fifty participants while the tragic chorus numbered from twelve in Aeschylus to fifteen for Sophocles (Haigh 289, Lawler 81). A. E. Haigh relays a supposition that the fifty members of a dithyramb may have been divided equally for each portion of the trilogy and satyr-piece presented for contest (288). J. Michael Walton suggests an alternate theory which supposes that the chorus and the actor were always independent (Greek Sense 48). His theory proposes that the tragedy was born of the epic rather than the dithyramb and when the "storyteller" assumed a character identity the epic became dramatic.

The members of the chorus were paid participants who trained for months at great cost to the Choregus, the wealthy citizen whose civic duty it was to sponsor the chorus for a given playwright's work for that festival. The choral members were selected from the public at large

and most citizens at one time or another had performed in a chorus. Their experience as participants in the event helped them to judge other tragedies at the festivals (Arnott, Public 23-4). Director Peter Sellars found the last play of The Oresteia most compelling because he supposed that the Greeks used theatre as a training ground; voting for their favorite plays was training for jury duty because they had to decide if a case was just (qtd. in McDonald 93). Ultimately, says Arnott, the chorus "bore the distinctive features of its place and time, an index of a public mentality that recognized arduous and time-consuming service to the state as a necessary component of the well-rounded life" (24).

Theatre was a part of the fabric of life in a society in which affairs of state were discussed in an open public forum. The physical structure of that forum, the Pnyx, is very similar to that of the theatre itself. Chioles suggests that with The Oresteia, Aeschylus:

is revealing the astonishing drama of culture in his century: there is no difference between thought and the theatre since all expression is dramatic. But it is fair to reiterate that these notions become clear only when we take the

protagonist of The Oresteia to be the communal vision of the world, the Chorus themselves.

(377)

A citizen's civic duty, daily life, and art are combined in the chorus of the Oresteia. In light of this public and dramatic life, what is the function of the chorus character in the tragedy?

Function

The tragic chorus maintains two basic functions. The chorus is both a narrator of the events and a character in the story. Both functions are performed simultaneously defying logic in our world of realistic performance (Arnott, Public 30). The chorus can slip in and out of these two functions as required by the dramatic action of the play. The old men in the parados of Agamemnon, for example, explain that they were at home during the entire ten-year battle at Troy, but they communicate the events of the battle nonetheless (Arnott, Public 30). Another vital function of the chorus is that their entrance and exit mark the "formal beginning and ending of the play" (Arnott, Public 25). Within the plays the chorus shifts several times between narrator and character. There are also

technical restrictions with respect to the interaction of chorus in the story.

Arnott says that as narrator the chorus tells the stories, dispenses information, "invoke[s] comparable legend" and "sometimes . . . introduces stories designed to mislead" (Public 34-5). The chorus often places the present in a "wider context" by invoking mythology analogous to the immediate story in order to demonstrate that "what the audience is watching is no mere isolated event, but illustrative of general principle" (Arnott, Public 33). The distinction of tragedy over the dithyramb or the epic is that an actor took on the traits of a character, which meant that the chorus too could become a character. In the Oresteia alone, two of the pieces take their name from the chorus character. A. M. Dale agrees that the chorus did impersonate a group of people in the tragedies and further explains that the chorus was not an "impersonal voice" because it was "in" the story (17). But, is the chorus character itself a protagonist in tragedy?

It would seem that in the Eumenides the chorus is a protagonist because the moral structure of the ordered world is built upon it (Chioles 377). The chorus comprehends the world through a communal wisdom and does

not understand the individuation of the other characters (377). The action of a tragedy shifts back and forth from communal understanding to individual suffering. This "oscillation from Chorus to individual character and back again," said Chioles, "is on the one hand a way for communal wisdom to perfect itself, and on the other a means to reach, and cope with, the tragic chord in their moral world" (377).

We can reasonably state that the chorus takes on a collective moral character in tragedy, however, in interacting with the other actors on stage there appear to be some general rules in regard to how that interaction takes place. Dale perceived that the following observations are true throughout the tragedies. The contribution of the chorus is "lyric or emotional in tone, never rhetorical, and its interventions in the spoken dialogue are kept short" (21). The chorus, Dale said, may interact with other characters but must never: make a "set speech"; "marshal" arguments, try to prove or refute a contention; or speak a descriptive "set-piece" (18). She adds that "the chorus-leader may speak to the actors but he makes no speeches" (18). For an example of Aeschylus' skill in manipulating the craft, Dale offers the Eumenides.

When the chorus and Orestes are asked to give a deposition to Athena, "neither plaintiff nor defendant makes a set speech. The Furies cannot because they are a chorus; therefore, lest the scales should be too obviously weighted against them, Orestes also refrains, but calls upon Apollo to bear witness for him" (20).

The long-held opinion that the chorus serves as an "ideal spectator" is a contested function. That it knows the events of the story only as they unfold is just simply not true according to Peter D. Arnott (Public 28-9). It is possible that the "spectator" construct may have grown from the stage convention that holds the chorus to be the "recipient of reports" (Dale 27). An example from Agamemnon is Clytemnestra's address upon her husband's arrival. Her lines to the chorus decry the tribulations she has suffered in his absence. Her speech shifts person throughout the speech, only addressing her husband directly once; the device is only possible if the chorus is there to receive her report (Dale 27). Many similar speeches in tragedy are delivered to the chorus.

Another reason that the chorus may have been considered as spectator may be due to its dual role as character and narrator. Physically positioned in the

orchestra between the principal characters and the audience, the chorus belongs to both the world of audience and the world of the play (Arnott, Public 34). The ceremony at the end of the Eumenides is a recognizable allusion to the quadrennial Panathenaia, a festival "procession in which all levels of citizenry in Athens were represented" (Lawler 106). When the theatre audience witnesses the change in the Furies dressed in ceremony by Athenian women, they see themselves, and the "[c]horus is absorbed, almost literally, into the citizen body," making the social function of the chorus clear (Arnott, Public 20, 35). The event not only addresses the chorus as representative of the polis, but also exemplifies Aeschylus' political allusion and "updating" of the mythology to the present world in his own time.

Though the chorus may or may not be an ideal spectator, it does perform in the theatrical middle ground, literally and figuratively, as a narrator and a character in the play. Most often, the chorus signals the formal beginning and ending of the tragedy; the spectacle of the choral entrance and exit draws the spectators' attention to the stage. Though it can not lead or direct arguments, it is responsible for the lyrical and emotional tone of the

plays. These functions are accomplished through the theatrical conventions of voice, music, movement, costume and mask.

Convention

Voice

The size of the theatrical venue alone determined that the actor must have a strong voice. The theatres could hold several hundred, even thousands, of spectators. Of course, the actor was aided by the physical space of the classical theatre such as the acoustic marvel at Epidaurus. Even though the Athenian theatre of the classical period was partially of wood construction, the configuration still must have aided the actors, and yet, in mask, with long speeches and multiple characters, before many spectators, the actor must have spent long hours developing a strong clear voice.

Once again, we cannot say for certain how the chorus was handled, but Dimitrios Rondiris believed that "we do know that they had a spirit of reverence and that their relationship to the gods, to the supernatural, even as in the old mystery plays, was very strong" (182). He also held that the incidental instrumental music and the one-voice-in-unison choral units was "used to underline the

rhythm." Rondiris suggested that the changes in rhythm are "governed by the shifts in feelings and dispositions of the characters" (182).

For the sake of clarity in important moments, the chorus may break down into individual or smaller groups of voices. When a single voice speaks for the entire chorus, it is the chorus leader, Koryphaios. There is a scene in Agamemnon when the chorus breaks into individual voices "debating amongst themselves" upon hearing cries from within the palace that announce the king's death (Arnott, Public 27). After the cries and before Clytemnestra brings out the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra, the chorus has twelve individual lines (Agam. lines 1346-70). Because of this one moment in the play, the shift from chorus body to individual clear voices heightens the theatrical moment.

In moments when the division or unison of the choral voices is less clear, we can take clues from the changes in meter to determine if the voices are individual, pairings, or the entire chorus. For example, when the chorus leader speaks to the principal characters, the meter changes to an actor's common speech pattern, the iambic trimeter (Arnott, Public 27). The words were also accompanied by music that acquiesced to the poetry.

Music and Mood

Of all the elements that must be set to conjecture in the reconstruction of tragedy, the music is the most elusive. It is as though "we had the libretti of Wagner's operas, but not the music that he wrote for them" (Arnott, Public 27). With little knowledge of the original music available to us, Rondiis suggested that Greek folk music might offer remnants of the music in classical tragedy (178). Others suppose that the music was simple and subordinated to the poetry, or that the music was "fitted to the words" (Haigh 319). The poetry may have been accompanied by a single flute or harp, but harmony was not a concern in the music just as the poetry was not built on rhyme.

Something of the mood of the music may be discovered in the style of music that might have been applied to the tragedies. The minimal sources that exist tell us that the ancients' music was in modes. The definition of these modes is as elusive as the music itself. The modes were possibly defined by pitch like the "keys on a piano" or by the "major and minor scales as intervals in the octave" (Haigh 320). According to Haigh, the mood of the music employed in tragedy can be found in the various types of

modes, which differed like that of national music in modern times; of the several styles of modes, the severe and sober old Ionic mode was well adapted to the tragedy of Aeschylus (320).

In contrast to the impression one might receive from only reading the text, clues to the mood of the music can also be discovered in meter and movement. Therefore, the "performance" tells us how the chorus feels about the words it says. For example, during Agamemnon's entrance, the mood is believed to be one of celebrating the joy of victory and shifting to "apprehension" (Kitto 37). However, the ode may not include an emotional shift at all. H. D. F. Kitto suggested instead that the same apprehension the chorus experienced for Agamemnon, in the first ode of Agamemnon, is carried over now to the ode concerning Paris and the "dance would link Paris with Agamemnon" (37). The destruction of Paris is not "exulted." His destruction is not encouraging and so we wonder how does the chorus feel about Agamemnon and subsequently then, how do they feel about Paris? Chioles suggests that the "how" and "why" discovered in attitude is more important than the story being told and that the chorus' feelings of ambivalence are discovered through performance (379).

While we must discover the mood and the attitude through performance, the story being told through the words could be heard with clarity and "distinctness" in the ancient theatre because the performers were trained to sing with precision and "distinct utterance" (Haigh 319). The choral voices in unison accompanied by the notes of simple music corresponding to the syllables of the verse, was heard "without difficulty" (Haigh 319). In contrast, it is true that a large part of the play was choral music, but how much did the audience actually hear? Hearing and understanding the chorus may have been a greater concern than we think because it is "noticeable that the playwrights do not rely on the choral lyrics to give information essential to the plot; or if the lyrics do contain such information, it is repeated elsewhere" (Arnott, Public 27).

Movement

To the Greeks, dance was a respected and important component of entertainment and ceremonial forms. Telestes, the choreographer for Aeschylus, was highly regarded while others who could not execute the movements and gestures well lost respect as performers. What the actual dance movements were we can not say, even though ancient sources

tell us a lot about the "choral poets" and "cult dances" (Webster xi-xii). We do know that the audience for a tragedy looked down from their seats upon some form of patterns created by the choral movement in the orchestra (Havelock xvi; Kitto 36). Through those ancient sources, coupled with vase paintings, we can infer to some degree what the dancers were doing in the orchestra.

Metrics and the general structure of the tragedies themselves offer clues to the movement and dance performed by the chorus. Webster lists several gestures from daily life, performance, and art depicted in vase paintings that did not change for centuries ("Introduction"). The paintings depict freeze frames of gestures and postures that are Noh-like in their representation. Gesture accompanying the dialogue or music could be considered dance in the early Greek sense. Dance in a more contemporary understanding suggests a larger movement of both the individual body and the group of dancers.

One suggestion regarding the choral movement is that the chorus moved to the right during the strophe and in the opposite direction on the antistrophe. But, this is probably a misconception carried over from the movement of the large chorus of the dithyramb and applied to tragedy

(Haigh 316, Lawler 84-5). The terms themselves were developed later, in the Hellenistic period, to describe symmetrical stanzas and dance patterns (Havelock xvii). However, poetry, music, and dance were used in combination to tell the story, and dance was not applied just for the sake of spectacle. The words used to describe meter and dance are closely related due to their simultaneous development. For example, the smallest division in metrics is a "foot," while a verse of two feet was styled as "stepping." The words "which denoted the varying stress of the voice in singing originally referred to the raising up and placing down of the foot in marching and dancing" (Haigh 311).

The term "dance" as descriptive of movement for the Athenian tragedy should not be confused with its modern meaning. Rather, the term suggests a movement of "dignity and poise befitting ancient tragedy" (Rondiris 183). Rondiris believed that there is an unbroken continuity from the ancient Greeks to the present, and that we can still see the ancient movement in today's Greek folk dancing which is "austere in movement, and resplendent in form" (183). The chorus movements, he said,

. . . do not employ the feet alone as a means of locomotion through leaps and bounds but by thrusts and schematic motions and gestures. The movements are meant to give vent to human emotions and psychic moods, with the use of the whole body. The movements become passionate and agonized, tense and swift, slow and majestic, following the words as they are recited rhythmically. (183)

The reverent movement is more than just dancing as we understand dancing today; the dances of the chorus incorporated all forms of "gesture and posture" to "interpret and illustrate the words of the poetry" (Haigh 312). Aeschylus was not only a "dramatic poet," but also a composer and choreographer. In his texts, several phrases and words are repeated, which must suggest that the mise en scene was "conceived by him not only aurally, but visually and spatially as well" (Kitto 36). The Agamemnon, Kitto believed, reveals a "ground-plan of an extensive dance-movement which was a very important element in the play" (36). To sum up the role of dance in the ancient theatre, Haigh said that "[t]he purpose then of dancing was to

represent various objects and events by means of gestures, postures, and attitudes" (313).

Costume and Mask

It is supposed that the costumes for drama in the Greek theatre were designed specifically for the spirit of each different genre; for example, the costumes for the actors in comedies and the satyrs were two styles of dress that were not generally worn for tragedy (Haigh 290). The characters depicted by the chorus of tragedy were essentially old men, women, or maidens, and their costume was suited to their station (Haigh 290).

As with each of the elements of tragedy, there were exceptions to every rule. There were some cases when the chorus of tragedy wore special costumes for their extraordinary characterizations, such as the Furies, described by the character Pythia in the Eumenides:

Not women, but Gorgons I call them;

no, not even to the shape of Gorgons can I
compare them.

I have seen before now paintings of those that
carried off

the feast of Phineus; but these appear wingless,
black, altogether hateful in their ways;

and they snore with a blast unapproachable,
and from their eyes they drip a loathsome liquid.
And their attire is such as one should not bring
near to the statues of the gods nor into the
houses of men.

(Aeschylus; Eum. lines 46-56)

Aeschylus is said to have designed the costumes himself, and the snakes he invented specifically for the occasion (also a part of the Furies' costumes) later became a standard attribute of the Furies (Haigh 291). But, this case in costuming a tragedy is a special one.

The costumes for tragedy were "formalized to indicate sex, age, and social status" (Havelock xvi). The tunic and mantle of the chorus were not given the same spectacular treatment as the principal characters because the chorus most often represented ordinary people (Haigh 291). On the other hand, the costumes depicted on vases were not that of everyday clothing but of a higher class, a celebration or ritual clothing. Bieber recommended that the costumes for contemporary productions of the works of Aeschylus "imitate" the original Greek because they were of a religious nature and reflected the heroics and "seriousness" of the hero's "fights against fate" or

submission to fate as sent by the gods (268). Aeschylus' costumes were more likely designed specifically for the stage reminiscent of "what priests would wear at ceremony" rather than everyday life (Walton, Greek Theatre 153).

For all that has been said about taking clues for performance from vase paintings, Walton warns that we should not be quick to take the costumes depicted in the vase paintings literally in application to theatrical performance (Greek Theatre 147). The thin material revealing the body underneath and gods depicted in the nude seem unlikely given the climate of Greece during January or March (Greek Theatre 154).

Bieber warns not to "use Roman costume with high stilts, exaggerated masks, white color! Greek dress was colorful, dignified, and simple" (268). Athenian ceremonial dress was very colorful, which certainly carried over to the stage as one of the elements that provided a portion of the spectacle in tragedy. The footwear, called Kothornoi, in the classical period was not a tall platform shoe, but rather a thin-soled boot coming up to the knee, which was more often associated with women's everyday clothing and used for some reason by actors on the stage (Walton, Greek Theatre 155). There is no doubt that the

Athenian tragic actors wore masks, but theirs were not the huge masks of later periods. If we were to interpret the vase paintings as guides, it would seem that the classical mask was made from a form-fitting material, and included hair that covered the head.

Finally, Bieber demanded that contemporary productions should not update the costumes used for ancient tragedy:

Do not play in modern dress. Our spirit is not the spirit of classical Greece--just as the Renaissance spirit was not the spirit of Latin Terence--and therefore the contrast impresses us as ridiculous. It is a great mistake to play ancient tragedy in modern dress. (268)

The conviction in Bieber's opinion of costuming the tragedies demonstrates the barometer with which new productions are compared to the model discussed in this chapter. Playing the Athenian tragedies is to respect a past culture whose legacy is revered in western thought and development. Therefore, any deviation from the constructed paradigm will bear great scrutiny. Still, there is an exciting energy in directors' treatments of the ritual, function, and conventions of Athenian tragedy for the contemporary theatre.

CHAPTER III

CONTEMPORARY DIRECTORS' INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCEPTS

The world is changing rapidly for the desperate chorus in the Eumenides, "where shifting perceptions become a landscape of past dreams stained with blood, struggling to retain their authenticity" (Chioles 376). Like the Furies, the struggle to retain the authenticity of the ancient authors' craft is ineffectual on today's changing artistic palette. The Furies, of course, are eventually metamorphosed into "The Kindly Ones."

Near the turn of the previous century a shift occurred in the academic study of the classical canon that de-emphasized ancient languages, which surprisingly resulted in an increase in the production of ancient Greek drama (Bieber 258). Now another shift is occurring in the study of history and literature. The classical canon is being reexamined to incorporate a non-exclusive ideal, which in turn has also influenced the production of classical plays. In the "politically correct" climate of our time, scholars and educators are "expected to espouse the causes of feminism and gay liberation, not to mention righting the balance of representation for blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and other ethnic groups" (McDonald 3).

And, at a time when contact between countries and communities around the world is increasing through mass media, and now the internet, another of the benchmarks of contemporary artistic sensitivities are "multi" and "inter" cultural issues. Thus, the current translations and production concepts of the Oresteia mythology remain politically charged, while shifting perceptions of the issues alters emphasis in production. The political ideals are most often demonstrated through the visual, kinetic, and aural elements.

When the performative elements of production overshadow the text, "critical reception has normally included an analysis that distinguished between the authentically Athenian, embodied in the written text, and a modern interpretation" (Vince 46). For example, in true modernist form Bieber commented on the productions she viewed earlier in the 1900s:

The best and most successful performances of ancient drama are those which are given in good faithful translations without trying to bring in modern ideas, but where every effort is made to bring out the ancient conceptions. (261)

Taplin also is not a fan of the directors who add stage business, saying that "free invention" is "rewriting" the authors' intent (175). The artistic director for the Greek National Theatre, Dimitrios Rondiris, had said that "[b]ringing the play 'up-to-date,' changing period, language, conception of character, all this shows a great lack in the directors who do it" (194).

Discourse also tends to compare and contrast the political nature of the theatre. In a less than gushing review of the Peter Hall and Tony Harrison version of the Oresteia, whose production did not emphasize a political polarity, Rush Rehm said that "Aeschylus shows us what we forget at our peril--theatre is politics, an art form inextricably bound to the life of the polis" (509). In a discussion regarding the relationship of the audience to the chorus, Oddone Longos reminds us that we are not the polis who was involved with the plays as part of understanding themselves and their duty in society: our audience is not the audience of the Athenian theatre (12-19). And Bieber had said that our spirit is not the spirit of the Greeks (268). As far as we can know, our present experience is not leaning on the precarious precipice of human experience that created the Athenian culture. It is

difficult for a living era to recognize how it will be perceived by history. A historic moment in time, between the battle at Marathon and Peloponnesian war, spawned the Athenian culture. However, does Bieber's "spirit" devalue the positive aspects of our own society? Should the plays not be performed in our time because our audience cannot observe the plays in their original context, because we are not sitting in that moment 2500 years ago? What relevance does this argument have in the realm of performance? The plays do not continue to convey powerful messages?

The positive aspect is that the messages in tragedy are accessible to the contemporary audience, if need be, through darker forces such as rage and passion (discussed later with Garland Wright's production). Scott T. Cummings explains that there are parallels to be found in the Oresteia which are unchanging across the millennia:

If we ever needed to be reminded of our consanguinity with the ancient Greeks the tabloid headlines of 1994 brought it home to us with the subtlety of Zeus. Exactly 2,452 years before jury selection began in "the trial of the century," an audience in Athens watched a mythic enactment of the first-ever trial by jury: the

prosecution of Orestes, son of Agamemnon, for the murder of his mother, Clytemnestra. And if O. J. Simpson is not Orestes--or if Susan Smith of South Carolina is more Medea than Clytemnestra--the parallels are resonant enough to argue for the universality of Attic tragedy. We are the Greeks; the Greeks are us. (11)

If our relationship is such that we are the Greeks, then we can take suggestions from them in regard to the adaptation of their mythology for the stage.

In response to the previous "updating" accusation by Rondiris, we must ask, why not draw on the wealth of human knowledge and experience since the Greeks? The Greeks did just that; using the past to comment on the present, they employed mythological and historical characters to elicit discourse in address of their own contemporary issues. Aeschylus perfected the form in the Oresteia, which is a perfect example of "grafting a myth--or distant history of Mycenaean Kings onto events having to do with the development of the Athenian state" so that "[h]istory for this new art form, indeed history for the new state, is history of the present moment" (Chioles 16). For example, the Eumenides is widely espoused for demonstrating the

issues facing the Athenian society. Two of those issues introduced are 1) a shift from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society and 2) the democracy of trial by jury. Both issues are demonstrated by adapting previous mythology for their audience. We need to understand that the Athenians did not produce theatre as though it were about a dead past, according to Chioles:

After we have grasped the Greeks' penchant for present history, that is, history recounted in the present for their education in myth and politics, in the arts and in sports, in the telling of edifying stories from a mythic past as events occurring today, then we can re-invent their myths, stage their theatre, and re-view their art in its societal context . . . we need to stage and view the art of the Greeks as "present history", as no less must we see their political experiments as such. (15)

And if we believe that the Athenians were engaged in a past-is-present endeavor, why then should we be engaged in a theatre that is contrary to that model? Why should we maintain their theatre as historical artifact? Theirs was a theatre for the present. However, if we find that their

present is now the past and "[t]he ancient Greek theatre is construed as being less for all time than for its own time, informed and limited by the Athenian culture that gave it birth" (Vince 46), then how do the plays speak to us today? Why are they relevant now? One scholar submits that the experiences of the last century have given our generation an insightful perspective:

Today, a generation which has known frustration and disillusionment—desperately demanding some private identity within a society which seems imprisoned and perhaps doomed by its own prior commitments—can view these plays with clearer eyes for what they are: portrayals of the human dilemma, which forswear the luxury of moral confidence and assured solutions . . . it is therefore possible to respond to the classic tragedy of the Greeks with a directness denied to the more secure temper of [our] forebearers.

(Havelock x)

Therefore, of what real service is the reproduction and presentation of what is ultimately a fabrication of centuries of theory? What good does that kind of reproduction serve? As we have discussed in the previous

chapter, Aristotle essentially removed the political nature of drama leaving only his aesthetic, therefore the association between the Hellenistic Poetics and Athenian tragedy is far from fact--and the paradigm is largely a scholarly construct (Vince 38-46). Granted, the author of this thesis would grasp at any opportunity to "see" an "authentic" Oresteia performed in an ancient theatre. But, would our tourist companions who are not academicians, classicists, or "theatre people," be moved to something other than a passing fancy, as though they were viewing the architecture of yet another church or trying to take in the Louvre in one day? Ronald Vince asks us to examine the value of remounting ancient tragedies according to a scholarly model:

What as historians we sometimes fail to recognize is that our scholarly reconstructions of Greek theatrical performances are equally modern constructs, intended to serve scholarly rather than artistic functions to be sure, and valid only insofar as they provide historical explanations satisfactory to the scholarly community. (46)

Abandoning attempts to put authentic pieces (constructs of theory) onstage allows a freedom to create new productions that are informative and sensitive to a contemporary audience aesthetic. The tragedies have shown themselves to be adaptable to new theatrical modes of production, as in the work of Robert Wilson where the text serves as a base for the director's collage of pictures (Arnott, "North America" 377). It was a long held belief that the production should serve the intentions of the playwright, but now the play is serving as a "catalyst" for the director to create new works (Green 4). The directors discussed in this thesis use the ancient works to question the past in terms of the present. Their productions are less abstract than Wilson's because they maintain the text even while altering the images so that the works they create can be considered to be "new theatrical pieces, rather than as simply revivals of Greek dance" (Green 36).

Translations--Adaptations--Director Concepts

Translating the words of the ancient text into modern languages and yet maintaining the author's intent is an arduous task. Taplin acknowledges that there is difficulty in bringing meanings across language barriers (Greek 180). To also preserve the hexameter, trochaic tetrameter,

anapests, and the more complex metrical forms in the translation is considerably more difficult. In the introduction to the Lloyd-Jones translation of the Oresteia, Havelock notes that the portions of the text that may have been chanted or sung (in the meter mentioned above) are depicted in italics. He says that "to transfer these effects in translation from an inflected tongue quantitatively scanned is impossible," and then he points out that the translation focuses on the reader's "imagination" rather than his or her "ear" (xi). Therefore, contemporary dramatists' translations most often concentrate on the imaginative aspects of storytelling in the tragedies rather than on metrical reproduction.

The imaginative storytelling in the productions of Peter Hall, Peter Stein, Garland Wright, and Ariane Mnouchkine explore theatrical freedoms and contemporary issues in the new events they have created. The ideas and concerns of the directors are surveyed in the following pages. An exploration of each director's treatments of the choral elements follows in the subsequent chapter.

Peter Hall

To convey the essence of Greek tragedy, Peter Hall stylized every aspect of the theatrical experience

(Macintosh 316). Each element, from the masks and costumes to the music, was stylized in such a way that the production began to appear as though it was a revival. However, each element was uniformly manipulated not to be Greek but rather to indicate a nondescript period in time. At the center of Hall's production was the translation by the poet Tony Harrison.

<u>Aeschylus: the Oresteia</u>	
Original Text	<u>The Oresteia</u> by Aeschylus
English Translation	Tony Harrison
Performance Time	Four hours, thirty minutes
Performance Locations Included:	
	The National Theatre, London 1981
	Epidaurus, Greece 1982
Hall's was the first non-Greek theatre company selected to play at the ancient theatre.	

Fig. 1. Performance information for Aeschylus: The Oresteia, directed by Peter Hall.

Harrison not only translated the story but also engaged in a creative event much as the original author may have experienced. As previously stated, the task of bringing the metrical traits of the text across with the

meaning of the words to a new language is difficult. Therefore, Harrison manipulated the use of the English language to create his own application of meter and metaphor. The resultant translation was an innovative experiment in language. As impressive as Harrison's work was, he did not inspire every theatrical reviewer. Rush Rehm called the script "verbally pretentious" ("Oresteia" 509). Martin Esslin said that Harrison had couched the text in a "very peculiar" idiom utilizing "Germanic sounding compound nouns," and contended that the translation was difficult to understand; for example, Harrison used "preybird" for bird of prey, "he-god" and "she-god" to describe the gods, and "clanchief" for ruler (22). To illustrate Esslin's point, here is Harrison's translation of the opening choral piece from Agamemnon:

Mewing warcries preybirds shrilling
 nest-theft childloss wild frustration
 nestling snaffled preybirds soaring
 wildly sculling swirling airstreams
 using broad birdwings like oars
 birthpangs nothing nestcare nothing
 nothing fostered nestlings nothing
 crying mewing preybirds shrilling

But one of the god-powers up above them-
 Apollo Pan or Zeus high he-god
 hearing the birds' shrill desolation,
 birds, guest-strangers in god-spaces
 send down the slow but certain Fury
 to appease the grudge the grieved birds feel

So Zeus protector of man's guestright
 sends the avenging sons of Atreus
 down on Paris son of Priam
 because of Helen, lust-lode, man-hive,
 Helen the she manned by too many hes.

(Harrison, "Agamemnon" 83)

Harrison stated that the "text is written to be performed, a rhythmic libretto for masks, music, and all male company" (qtd. in Chioles 43). It would appear that his intention was to create a production on the order of Aeschylus. The director, Hall, took Harrison's ideas further and "endeavored to unify all the physical production elements to give it the look of Aeschylus," said Chioles, "and this served him well, especially for his performance at Epidaurus" (43). Indeed, of the productions

examined in this thesis (as we will see below) the visual aspects of the Hall and Wright performances most closely resembled the academic construct for Attic tragedy built from archaeological artifacts.

"I wanted men to play the parts, as they did," said Harrison, "not out of archaeological interest but precisely because it reflected the fact that the play was a play written for the male-dominated society, about male preoccupations" (Harrison, "Interview" 145). Early workshop sessions revealed to Hall and Harrison a breakdown in the basic psychological acting cornerstones when women played the female parts, due to the attitude of the play itself toward women. Harrison recalled:

Gradually the idea came to me that it should be, as it were, vacuum-sealed in maleness because the play seemed to have been written in order to overthrow the dynamic female images that seemed to dominate the imagination in the Athenian culture at that time, and to present some kind of male image liberated from this defeat of the female principal. ("Interview" 143)

Three places where the gender struggle is evident in the text are Orestes' killing his mother in The Libation

Bearers, the lineage discussion, and the "pensioning off of the [F]uries" in The Eumenides (Harrison, "Interview" 143).

In another effort to tap the energy of the ancient production values, individuals in the company of actors stepped out of the chorus to take principal roles and then returned to their roles in the chorus. The actors' names remained anonymous in the programs (Esslin 24).

Peter Stein

Stein translated the Oresteia himself because he felt that the older translations lacked clarity and the new were too free; he "wanted a text that was as close to the original as possible" (Case 24). Consequently, he believed that translating the play himself was an important part of the research process, and in doing so he felt better prepared to speak with the actors in rehearsal (Stein 246). Stein said that he takes apart a play to discover contradictions in the text and in the society it was written for in order to understand the play's meaning for the contemporary audience. He called the exercise "intellectual and emotional fun," because by feeling near and yet disassociated, he believed that we learn something from an author as a person for their time and one that is

near us in our time (Stein 245). In Stein's view it is possible to learn something from Aeschylus in the same manner, as he put it, "to have made a telephone call over centuries and centuries; to have the illusion that there is direct contact possible" (Stein 245).

<u>Die Orestie</u>	
Original Text	<u>The Oresteia</u> by Aeschylus
German Translation	Peter Stein
Performance Time	10 hours, 2 one hour breaks
Performance Locations Included:	
	The Schaubühne, Berlin 1980
	The Rock Quarries of Athens, Greece 1980s
	White House, Moscow 1994
	Epidaurus, Greece 1994
The Hugh Lloyd-Jones translation was displayed on either side of the stage when <u>Die Orestie</u> played at Edinburgh, Scotland, August 1994.	

Fig. 2. Performance information for Die Orestie, directed by Peter Stein.

Deeply concerned for the text and spending much rehearsal time with dramaturgical concerns, the text of Stein's piece remained contrary to that of Harrison and

Hall's in that it was "prosaic," as Chioles describes it, and "understated as language" (50). For Stein, the text of the chorus was the most "modern" aspect of the Oresteia because it was highly political in nature. Through the political understanding of the text, Stein found the spirit that connected Aeschylus to the present day. The chorus was not of one mind, Stein thought, but rather it debated issues from different sides:

This kind of chorus language is so stunning and fantastic for us, who at the end of the twentieth century understand that real political thinking involves thinking in contradictions, not having a security exit through some ideology or other. Fighting every moment for the truth, evaluating each side, this is at the heart of all politics, We have been forced to rediscover that at the end of the twentieth century. (257)

Stein's primary concern for sociopolitical issues was reflected in his stylization of Die Orestie, which secondarily addressed his aesthetic concerns (Chioles 50).

When the production played the Schaubühne, Stein aimed the political commentary at the "ideological polarities" of Europe at the close of World War II played out through the

"guilt of silence" in a Germany of the '30s and '40s (Macintosh 318, Chioles 50). Even in Aeschylus, the silence of the chorus in Agamemnon is exemplified in a group of old men who do nothing to stop the events playing out before them except to argue amongst themselves. The actors' study of the text and the political voice were manifest in the "diachronic" style of production that blended costume periods, playing styles, "symbolic spaces" (Chioles 50), and metaphors of blood.

To "clarify the myth" for contemporary audience understanding, suggested Chioles, an "appropriate shock effect" is required (Chioles 50). The shock effect became physically manifested in Stein's production. Scott T. Cummings suggested that if the textbook version of the Oresteia is "stopping the flow of blood" then the idea was literally evident in Stein's production "in which the realistic corpses [were] fitted with pumps which spurt blood into the air" (12).

Directors are challenged by the third play of the trilogy because the dramatic structure is unlike that in the first two plays, and it also includes the gods as characters on stage. Over the last half-century the Eumenides has received varying treatments; in the 1960s

Martha Graham created a "netherworld" and Tyrone Guthrie "turned it into a good natured comedy" (Chioles 42). Stein took a cue from the Guthrie staging and solved the challenge by playing the Eumenides in a comical light. Anthony G. Keen rejected the manner in which Stein played the last play "for laughs" because, he said, the Eumenides is "deadly serious," dealing with justice based on equality versus revenge (2). Keen, of course, overlooked Stein's political intentions, which tied the actions in the play to the guilt of 1940's Germany. The laughter of the audience members implicated each of them in the action of the play, allowing the action to occur without stopping it.

When Die Orestie was performed with Russian actors in Moscow, Stein noticed that the Russian Orthodox actors initially had difficulty understanding the Greek philosophy. Their belief in a static well-defined religion gave them problems with the choral prayer to Zeus in Agamemnon, which begins by exploring the meaning of the god, the god's terrible volatile history and an existence that may also pass (Stein 258). Further confronting the actors in Russia was the famous law derived from the end of the prayer when, "Zeus gives us the possibility of obtaining wisdom through suffering" (Stein 258).

Where the ritual theory of the Athenians was challenging for the actors to grasp, the judicial theory of the final play was just as elusive. Sergei Bardin, who reviewed the Russian performance of Stein's production, wondered if the Russians had "come to understand that democracy is a risky venture, and that three thousand years before the Greeks had trial by jury, which Russians still cannot introduce in their country?" (12).

Garland Wright

The Wright project began as a vehicle to spotlight acting company member Isabel Monk. The "Clytemnestra Project," as Wright referred to it, was to focus on the role of Clytemnestra and that character's dilemma. The production would not be the Oresteia. Instead, a play from each of the three tragedians in which Clytemnestra is a prominent character was chosen. As another branch of the experiment, Wright also decided to use three different translators' versions of the plays (listed on the next page). Though a cumulative message in the Oresteia demonstrates a male dominated world, the aggregate message of the "The Clytemnestra Project" would seem to take a feminist slant due to its focus on the central character.

However, as we will discuss in the final chapter, a noticeable incongruity occurred in performance.

<u>Iphigenia at Aulis, Agamemnon, and Electra</u>	
The "Clytemnestra Project"	
Original Text	<u>Iphigenia at Aulis</u> by Euripides
English Translation	W. S. Merwin, G. E. Dimock Jr.
Original Text	<u>Agamemnon</u> by Aeschylus
English Translation	Robert Lowell
Original Text	<u>Electra</u> by Sophocles
English Translation	Kenneth McLeish
Performance Locations Included:	
The Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Summer 1992	
Dramaturgs	Jim Lewis, Michael Lupu, Thomas Kohn
Performance Time	7 hours (2 hour intermission)
Permission was granted to cut the translations to accommodate playing time on occasions when all three plays were presented as a trilogy on the same day. For other performances, <u>Iphigenia at Aulis</u> was offered on separate evenings from <u>Agamemnon</u> and <u>Electra</u> , which played together.	

Fig. 3. Performance information for Iphigenia at Aulis, Agamemnon, and Electra, directed by Garland Wright.

Wright faced the directing challenge posed by our limited understanding of the original theatrical event, saying that "one is left with the archeological remains of some theatrical event which was specific to its times and social context, and one must reinvent it" (qtd. in Green 5). Working with a team of dramaturgs, Wright found in the research for the project what he termed the "dark forces" of the human experience. Those bestial forces of nature that we cannot understand in a societal context were at the heart of the conflict when the Greeks created their model of civilization. Wright pointed out the contradictions in the Attic culture. The culture gave rise to philosophy, mathematics, music, architecture, and art; yet, its people went to visit priests at "sulfur pits and received visions from the gods, which they passed on as edicts to the citizens" (Guthrie, Guide 93). Wright found that the stories and the superstitions rose from "humanity's inability to understand the Forces of Nature" (Guthrie, Guide 93). In the controlled society of our world today we term the fundamental natural impulses such as rage, passion, and "genuine ecstasy" as "crime[s]" and "aberrations of human instinct rather than as human instinct itself" (Guthrie, Guide 93). The civilized world

attempts to suppress these feelings or instincts; when the forces surface, dramatic conflict ensues.

Wright perceived of the Greek tragedies as "vaudevilles," noting the "scene-song-scene-song structures of the plays" (Lewis 42). Each moment in each of the plays is only about that moment. Rather than concentrating on the "arc" of the entire play or the action of a character throughout the entire course of events in the plays, as would be done for a realistic drama, Wright hoped he could concentrate the actors' work just on the present moment. Therefore, the project was conceived as individual images, of family pictures that would make up the whole (Lewis 42).

Ariane Mnouchkine

Performances of the Théâtre du Soleil tend to combine a variety of religious, mythological and theatrical traditions for political impact on the audience, and to simultaneously instruct the acting company in performance skills. The Théâtre du Soleil is a company of artists who are passionate and political about their work. The passion carries over into an almost ritualistic or religious reverence for the theatre. These elements, reminiscent of our earlier discussion regarding ritual and the ancient theatre, were evident in the production of Les Atrides.

<u>Les Atrides</u> .	
Original Text	<u>Iphigenia at Aulis</u> by Euripides
French Translation ...	Jean and Mayotte Bollack
Original Text	<u>Agamemnon</u> by Aeschylus
French Translation	Ariane Mnouchkine
Original Text ...	<u>The Libation Bearers</u> by Aeschylus
French Translation	Ariane Mnouchkine
Original Text	<u>Eumenides</u> by Aeschylus
French Translation	Hélène Cixous
Performance Time	Ten hours
Performance Locations included:	
	La Cartoucherie, France 1990
	Park Slope Armory/Brooklyn Academy Music, USA 1992
Headsets were available for audiences in New York with an English translation of the four plays by William M. Hoffman.	

Fig. 4. Performance information for Les Atrides, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine.

Robert Brustein suggested that Mnouchkine creates "works based on religious myths in order to urge the holiness of theatre in a world without God" (36). The

holiness of theatre is not always appreciated or understood. Some reviewers missed the point altogether. John Simon said of Mnouchkine's production in New York, "this is a mystical experience . . . I don't think 'characters' souls' can be 'talked of' on stage, and don't look at the theater as an 'avenue to the divine'" (89). As established in the second chapter, whether the theatre is religion or ritual is debatable. However, the ritual-like connection of Mnouchkine's company to Aeschylus served to inform the production.

Mnouchkine's productions must be understood in the context of her international acting company and her personal philosophies toward the theatre, because the style and message of any one show will grow from both of those sources: "[T]he theatre" she said, "is not supposed to represent psychology but passions" (qtd. in Rockwell 5). Her passions in the theatre have been influenced by the ideals set forth by Artaud, Brecht, and Meyerhold. None of those artists were ecstatic about creating the kind of theatre that takes place in a box set. Therefore, it is understandable that she would claim to hate naturalism and realism because "that's not theatre" (Mnouchkine 190). For those who would think that her statement means that she

would abandon Stanislavskian ideals, she continued, "but Stanislavski is not naturalism . . . what he says is that you have to be true. He doesn't say it has to be real" (Mnouchkine 190). Theatrical traditions from both the East and West were brought together for the production of Les Atrides. The performance combined the music of Kathakali, stylized masks, and the text of the Attic tragedies.

As Wright had done in his production, Mnouchkine prefaced her cycle of plays in Les Atrides with Euripides' Iphigenia at Aulis. The placement of this play served to focus the story on Clytemnestra, which helped to develop a strong and sympathetic character, as well as allow for a feminist point of view. The addition of Euripides' play was intended to explain Clytemnestra's future actions in the Oresteia (Salter, "Hand" 73). The use of the play foregrounded the themes well known to Aeschylus' story and altered our perspective on the "male" qualities of violence, ambition, and misogyny used to achieve desired goals (Bryant-Bertail 4). Mnouchkine also placed the male actors behind a mask made of strong theatrical makeup, while the women of the cast were placed in more natural makeup allowing for a "more literal and figurative freedom of expression" (Rich B4).

The feminist point of view may be a decipherable component, but it was not the central theme in Mnouchkine's telling of the mythology: "I wanted to show how strange and how far we are. How strange we are, deep inside. Our unconscious is hidden and the Greeks knew that, and they did theatre with that very far away part of themselves" (Mnouchkine 180). In Les Atrides the unconscious "far away part" of humanity was explored through both East and West performance traditions. The juxtaposition of the Western text and the Eastern Kathakali-like performance conventions created a distancing effect that Mnouchkine used to show the relevance of the historical for our time (Bryant-Bertail 2).

Mnouchkine's work in Les Atrides reflects her passion for bringing together seemingly opposite worlds of the theatrical tradition, just as she had done previously with Kabuki and Shakespeare. The point of this aesthetic with the acting company at the Théâtre du Soleil is to derive inspiration from tradition:

Our inspiration comes from traditional theatres,
real traditional theatres--wherever they come
from . . . any traditional form of telling, any
acting with logic, comes from something very deep

and very religious and very mythological and very theatrical. They are fonts of information, and they are pedagogical. (Mnouchkine qtd. in Delgado 188-9)

The inspiration the company receives for the stage, from the various traditions, carries over into political instruction for both the company and its audience.

Mnouchkine once said in an interview, "as artists our mission is to warn--to yell, to shout and to celebrate any small victory . . . these Greek plays train the intelligence and the senses" (qtd. in Kroll 70). The directors included in this study have attempted to shout through the application of contemporary performance aesthetics so that the new life of the tragedies might continue to train the intelligence and the senses as they did years ago.

In the 1980s, Hall and Harrison asserted with their production that The Oresteia reflected the ancient male-dominated culture for which it was written. Then, a decade later, the very play found to be "vacuum-sealed in maleness" was manipulated to espouse feminist points of view. Mnouchkine and Wright prefaced their productions with Euripides' Iphigenia at Aulis to ground the actions

of the Clytemnestra character. Wright even took to calling the production the "Clytemnestra Project." Wright's "dark forces" production shared with Stein's blood and guilt production a feeling that there were contradictions in the Athenian society. The members of a society that created schools of thought and sciences for all time also visited oracles. Stein saw political contradiction in the chorus of The Oresteia itself. Moments when the chorus members were not in agreement reflected the heart of democratic process. Stein also felt that it was possible to reach an audience through historical allusions. Mnouchkine's "East meets West" production used the historical as a distancing effect. The effect assisted in understanding the material intellectually, though it was experienced emotionally. Language in her Kathakali-like production was explored through a combination of gesture and text, whereas the poetic compound nouns of Tony Harrison's translation were at the center of language exploration in Hall's production. As the Athenian authors had adapted old mythology to address the issues of their present day, so too had the contemporary directors adapted The Oresteia.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL CHORUS

Most people's expectations of a chorus of Greek drama were . . . so terribly refined, best spoken by very well-bred ladies in white nighties, all speaking together. That kind of refined expectation which I felt was performing a Christian operation on Greek drama. And the expectations of the kind of voice in English corresponded to what the level of refinement was supposed to be in the culture. I got different voices. I wanted different voices so that the reactions to that were very mixed and very strange. The people acted as if the wrong guests had been invited to the party.

(Harrison, "Interview" 131-2)

How different is the party now than the one that occurred in the fifth century BC? How were each directors' artistic, philosophical, and political concepts for the productions made manifest through their manipulation of theatrical conventions? This chapter will examine the costume and mask, text and voice, sound and music, as well

as the movement employed by each of the directors to animate the chorus for the contemporary audience.

Scenic design is one of the first elements directly affecting the actors' performance of the chorus in the stage space. The theatre structure imposes itself on the actor's space and movement. Each of the productions discussed in this thesis has incorporated elements of Greek theatre architecture in the scenic design.

Hall wanted a simple space in order to concentrate the audience's attention on the music, the masks, and Harrison's poetic text (Fay 287). The Olivier stage at the National Theatre in London was chosen because the auditorium and stage structure were patterned after the theatre at Epidaurus (Fay 287). The scenic elements for Hall's production were then modeled on the Greek theatrical elements. There was an orchestra circle at the center of the stage where the physical action took place and a three-step unit led to a platform upstage-center, which then led to a tall back wall with double doors at center. The doors opened and closed by no visible means. The entire set was kept very simple without distracting ornamentation.

The scenery for Stein's "blood and guilt" staging at the Schaubühne was also kept simple and unadorned. The

entire theatre space, stage and audience were large and flexible. Stein said that he liked to work in spaces that were flexible so that he could have control of both the actors' and the audience's areas (252). The flexibility he required allowed him to adapt the spaces he worked in to follow the needs of the play and, for Die Orestie, that meant that he "created a kind of small Epidaurus" (Stein 252). The seats were removed from the auditorium, which created an orchestra space for the chorus to dance, and the audience sat directly on the tiers surrounding the orchestra (Macintosh 318, Case 24). A palace wall with doors that exposed the ekkyklema device was constructed at one end of the stage, and there was a "corridor" that ran from the stage through the center of the audience which was primarily utilized by the chorus (Macintosh 318, Case 24). The chorus was used to physically lay tracks for a flat rail car that represented Agamemnon's chariot (Case 24).

The set for Die Orestie revealed the historical theatre of Aeschylus and its remnants in today's theatre, which, according to Sue-Ellen Case, reflected Stein's present search for the historical (24). Case said that Stein's dramaturgical "search for the memory of that history" physically manifested itself in the choral odes of

Agamemnon (24). Just as the Athenian playwrights enjoined history and the present in their productions, Stein took a step further by removing metaphorical allusion, and made a blatant display of the junction. His chorus was seated around a table with a lamp and the text setting on it and then, "[o]ne actor [stood] to speak the original Greek and the others follow[ed] in a line-by-line translation" (Case 24).

The set for Garland Wright's "Clytemnestra" production at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis was designed as a series of concentric circles that included the audience (Lewis 18). It had an "austere elegance" as a sacred place for the ritual of theatre (Lewis 29). The stage was black with a large circle in the center while the upstage area was draped with white scrim. The dramaturg for the project recalled that "[i]n place of the skena . . . hung two simple semi-circles of white starched curtain that extend the concentric circles of the stage up to the rafters" (Lewis 29). The texture of the stage was "a beautifully polished veneer of Japanese black lacquer for the inner circle with a series of stones around it" (Lewis 18). A raked slope surrounded the space itself. The stage space was austere and cold which, Wright felt, was wrong

for the final two plays. Then a discovery was made during the rehearsal period that satisfied his concern:

For both Agamemnon and Electra the center of the raked slope [was] removed, creating a ramp entrance upstage center. The white curtains above the opening [were] fully raised to create what appear[ed] like a massive doorway into an unseen palace. Pillars [were] placed on each side of the opening, giving the entire space the feel of a large temple in which these plays [were] being performed. (Lewis 51)

Wright was also concerned about two other elements regarding the scenery. The change in the scenery design comforted Wright, but he began to feel that the space was "too Greek" (Lewis 18). He was also concerned that everything on the stage had to be "real"; for example, the stones surrounding the orchestra could not be Styrofoam (Lewis 18). The stage remained Greek-like in its spatial relationships, but the stones were real.

To encounter the performance space for Mnouchkine's Kathakali-like Les Atrides was to enter into the "discovery of a buried story" rather like the site of an archeological dig (Bryant-Bertail 10). The playing space itself was a

large square area with a "terra-cotta-colored" dirt floor surrounded by walls. It had "no curtains, flies or wings" (Bryant-Bertail 10). There were openings in the surrounding wall with smaller sections of wall set in front of them.

Marking the rough floor are the traces of what look like previous walls now demolished, and at the back are two large wooden double doors with metal hinges, with those at the back twice as high as those in front and reaching up almost to the pitched roof. (Kiernander 136)

The planks that made up the wall were reminiscent of a "Spanish bullring," while "[a] cerulean cycloramalike curtain surround[ed] it all, and a ramp slanting up through the vomitory allow[ed] a blue board on casters to ferry characters onto the lip of the stage and off" (Simon 89). Above the stage, there was a white canvas roof decorated with Greek designs in black, which appeared to allow sunlight to shine through (Bryant-Bertail 10, Kiernander 136). The large double doors upstage served as dramatic entrances for Iphigenia and Agamemnon as well as the four "differently stylized choruses, which burst through them

before spreading out across the stage in precise geometrical formations" (Salter, "Hand" 64).

Each of the four directors in this study incorporated scenic elements of the ancient theatre into their productions. A walled area upstage with a defined entrance, a central playing space, and a revelation platform were all utilized in one way or another. One has to wonder if the dramatic structure of the tragedy itself is so reliant on the architecture that it demands that the scenic elements of the ancient theatre cannot be discarded. The dramatic structure and the theatre structure appear to be inseparable. In any case, the scenery designs are reflective of the directors' and designers' answer to staging the chorus.

Composition of the Chorus

The classical Greek theatrical space held some fifty men for performances of the dithyramb, and there were twelve male members of the tragic chorus who danced in the space. In contemporary treatments of the chorus, the number of members and their gender is subject to the director's interpretation.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, each of the cast members of Hall's poetic production were male because it is

generally believed that in the Athenian theatre, all of the roles were played by men. There were sixteen company members in the production and each of the actors playing principal characters were also members of the chorus. The principal actors slipped out of the chorus, unnoticed, to assume another role and then returned to the chorus afterward. Therefore, the stage bore between twelve and sixteen chorus members, depending on how many principal characters were needed for a particular scene.

There were twelve members in the chorus of Stein's 1940s styled production and, just as in the Hall production, individual members occasionally broke out to perform one of the principal roles. Stein did not concern himself with the convention of all-male performers, and so women played the female roles in his production.

Stein's productions of Die Orestie were politically driven and he said that he saw the position of the chorus as "[f]ighting every moment for the truth," thinking in contradictions (257). To achieve the contradictions which then demonstrated a democratic ideal, the chorus was presented as though the members appeared to belong to a group and "though they clearly share[d] common opinions, each member ha[d] his own point of view" (Keen 2).

For his black-lacquer stage production, Wright broke from traditional thinking in his conception of the chorus because he did not want it to be considered as a character or group (qtd. in Lewis 43). While the "music" of the choruses gives life to the plays, the choruses "are not even directly related to the content or argument of the plays," according to Wright, they were totally abstract, formal pictures or, as he put it, the "exquisitely beautiful landscape" of ancient Athens (qtd. in Lewis 43). Even though Wright did not want to think of the chorus as a character, he did think that the chorus did more than punctuate the action taking place in front of them: "they are the emotional graph which charts the flow of the play" (Lewis 43). Eventually, in performance, the chorus did appear to be an autonomous collective.

There were generally twelve chorus members in Wright's "Clytemnestra Project." For Iphigenia at Aulis and Agamemnon, twelve were listed in the program, while eleven were listed for Electra. All three choruses entered the stage with a leader or koryphaios and remained on stage for the entire play (Lewis 25). The characters in the choruses of Iphigenia and Electra were girls and old women respectively, while the majority of actors for those roles

were male. Three weeks were spent in rehearsals discussing gender issues as the actors attempted to understand each other in order to play the choral characters and to illuminate the overall theme of the project (Shyer 44-5). One evening, the men and women were asked to walk across the room as if each was a member of the opposite gender. The exercise did not achieve the artistic staff's desired results. The exercise was designed to remove the gender differences in order to discover the neutral territory shared by each gender. The walk across the space instead resulted in a display of stereotypes, and the desired "neutral ground" was never accomplished (Shyer 45).

Wright was perplexed by the Iphigenia chorus, wondering what it was that Euripides thought a chorus of young women at a battlefield could "add to the play" (Lewis 25). It was determined that the "chorus [of Iphigenia at Aulis] is the window through which the audience can view the horror of the events tearing Iphigenia's young life apart" (Lewis 45).

The dramaturgs and director believed that the members of the chorus in Iphigenia at Aulis should appear to be children or friends of Iphigenia, young, nervous and excitable girls, who sang portions of the text (Lewis 25).

They should also appear small in comparison to the size of the gods and the events. The chorus consisted of company members, most of whom were male. One of the problems encountered by playing the mixed-gender cast as a chorus of young girls was that three of the eight men playing chorus members were over six feet tall and weighed at least two hundred pounds, essentially destroying the desired effect (Lewis 45). To account for the variations in the size of the cast members, it was determined that the girls would be considered to be escorted by their "chaperones" (Lewis 25).

The "old men" in the chorus of Agamemnon were conceived of as at one time having been "vultures" who had been "bent by years of dictatorship" and now were just "caned, crippled and bitter" (Lewis 25). The men were "hardly able to move," unable to affect the events that played out before them (Lewis 25). The chorus in Electra was a group of old slave women who literally crawled and scurried, "constantly working," who spoke up "only when they [thought] it safe" (Lewis 25).

Mnouchkine used the past as a device to comment upon the present in her productions, and in Les Atrides, she said, "the chorus is key to that historical perspective" (Bryant-Bertail 9). The power of the choruses in Les

Atrides was one of its most notable aspects, with a variety of choral groups ranging from "fiercely joyful women" to "soldiers overcome by the horror of war" and finally "black-clad vulturelike harridans" (Rockwell 5).

There were both men and women actors in the chorus of Les Atrides, but they all took on one male or female gender as required by each play. The mix of gender in the cast required the "development of a common gestural language which allow[ed] for individualized stylistic variations" (Salter, "Hand" 63). The gestures helped to hide the true gender of the actors so that the choruses were played as the gender required by the text, but the principal characters were played by their respective sexes. Company member Catherine Schaub recalled that:

Simon played Clytaemnestra for a long time in rehearsal. But Ariane said that if Simon played Clytaemnestra, the entire cast would have to be only men, as in ancient times. Otherwise, audiences would think it was just an idea to have a man play Clytaemnestra: this would be too ambiguous. (qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 73).

In The Eumenides, the chorus broke from the style the others have been played to "become terrifying mythic

beasts, no longer dancing but growling and snarling, led by three harpies" (Rockwell 5).

Three members led a collective body in the Mnouchkine production. Wright did not want the chorus to be thought of as a group, whereas Stein emphasized the individuality of members within the collective. But, all of the productions generally followed the idea that Aeschylus used twelve choral members in his productions. Hall's was the only production to make use of a cast of male actors to play each of the collective choruses. The aggregate visual appearance of the choruses in each production was that of a collective character, representative of a specific gender and faction of society. Masks and costumes helped to illustrate gender and character as well as define the collective state of the chorus.

Mask and Costume

Reaching the contemporary audience is often accomplished through the visual means of masks and costumes, which can speak as loud as the text itself in telling the story. Ancient tragedies were played in masks, but the element is rarely employed in contemporary theatre production. Masks contribute to focusing audience attention upon the issues portrayed rather than on the

individuality of a character. An individual human being's struggle is of little concern in tragedy compared to the illustration of human actions: "The plays [were] not written to depict human beings but to illustrate actions of human concern: issues not people; not the person but the persona, which is the Latin term for mask" (Harrop 18).

Some present-day directors will elect not to utilize masks in their productions. If masks are not used in contemporary staging, actors and directors should be aware that their choice has not suddenly made the play's structure realistic; "the issues are still more important than the individual" and the characters are still archetypes (Harrop 34). It is, therefore, important for the director and the actor to remember that this century's realistic acting style is dangerously applied to the playing of Athenian tragedy.

A mask obscures an actor's face and the small realistic gestures an actor employs to relay meaning are lost behind it. When the actor wears a mask, "[a]s observers, we actually watch for the whole body of the actor to communicate" (Eldredge 51). Watching the entire body for meaning happens especially when a production uses masks that are essentially neutral. In the neutral mask

there is no identifiable expression and yet expression seems to occur with changes in light, head position, character attitude, and the mood of the theatrical moment. An audience will then transfer an actor's body signals to his or her face (Eldredge 51), and for that reason it becomes extremely important that the physical and verbal signals convey the identical messages in performance (Eldredge 51). While the principal roles in contemporary productions of tragedy are often depicted in a character mask, the chorus is generally played in neutral masks, which also serve to illustrate the chorus as a collective.

Because nothing that we create can be essentially neutral, the concept of a neutral mask itself is a construct that, "[o]nce it is consciously, or unconsciously, applied, like any concept it conditions how we look at the world: through its lens we notice things that we might not see otherwise" (Eldredge 49). In tragedy, it can be said that the mask forces the audience to see things from which they might normally turn away, as outlined in Harrison's view on the function of masks:

The mask forces a person to look on horror and the eyes cannot close; so also the audience sees tragedy and is forced to come to terms with

matters usually avoided, particularly those involving death. (McDonald 17)

Harrison believed that masks have an existential purpose like that described above and he used "the ancient mask to force moderns to face their present tragedy" (McDonald 17). However, contrary to a long-held supposition regarding the use of masks, Harrison tells us that the masks in the original Greek performances were not used to amplify the voice ("Interview" 144).

The look of the masks in the Hall production, from which Harrison's poetry was projected, was reminiscent of the original period of tragedy. They were made of glued layers of muslin, which were then varnished and painted (Fay 287). Large eye and mouth holes in the masks were lit from above in order to accent the shadow of those places in the masks. The masks also made it easier for the all-male cast to impersonate the female characters (Esslin 22).

In Hall's Agamemnon, the masks of the old men were a gray tone with beards that surrounded the mouth and briefly extended from the chin.¹ The head was covered with a hat that traced the contour of the mask around the face and covered the ears. Long, wide scarves draped around the actors' necks. The costumes were a layered terry-texture

robe--a thick, textured fabric. The old men carried a short staff, or cane, of wood that split at the top like a divining rod.

Masks of the Choepori in Hall's production had the appearance of once having been white, but had since become dirtied and gray. A long hood draped over the actors' heads and layered over their varying shades-of-gray floor-length robes. Some of the robes had scattered tatters at the edges of the fabric. In the final play, the masks of the Furies were white with long red hair, while black, shredded fabric hung off their bodies.

The costumes in Stein's Die Orestie, according to Chioles, helped to create a distancing effect and contextualize in the production "an immense history of politics" (45). The Elders of Stein's Agamemnon were dressed in dark sunglasses, Fedoras, and long trench coats and the light from above cast a shadow on their faces (Keen 1). The 1940s costumes were purposely evocative of a guilt feeling related to that period in Germany's history (Chioles 45). Unlike the Hall, Wright, and Mnouchkine productions, Stein's performers did not wear masks at all, yet the shadows and the dark sunglasses can be said to have acted as masks. The old women, or Erinyes, of the

Eumenides appeared in "threadbare overcoats" (Bardin 12), while "other intervals throughout the work reveal adapted classical swathing, tunics juxtaposed with contemporary Athenian workers garb or Delphi country folk clothing" (Chioles 45). A purple cloth was used throughout the trilogy to "entwine" the dead bodies, and at the end the Eumenides were draped in the same purple cloth, which Macintosh suggested was a social commentary on the state of democracy in a divided Berlin (318).

In Wright's "Clytemnestra Project," the chorus wore a lightweight neutral half-mask.² There was little if any character decipherable in the smooth masks that were "gold leaf, shiny, and glossy" for Iphigenia, while bald caps and rough beards were attached to the masks for Agamemnon, and in Electra the masks were "almost mud-caked" (Lewis 38). The young girls of Iphigenia at Aulis were draped in long off-white billowing hooded robes (Wright). They appeared as innocents before the dark events which played out before them. The "old men" of Agamemnon contrasted in that the drape of their robes (which were made of much heavier material) revealed the pull of gravity on their bodies. As with the Hall production, these men also helped themselves about with walking sticks. In Electra, the costumes were

reminiscent of poor feudal peasants with aprons tied around their robes.

The costumes and makeup adapted for use in Les Atrides were memorable for their indebtedness to Kathakali dance drama. The headdresses and makeup had obvious ties to the form which complemented the actors' work so that "[t]here could be no mistaking the Kathakali-like use of eye-movements (Shevtsova 101). Specifically, Schaub said that the makeup design was derived more from an ancient form of Kathakali called Kutiyattam than it was from Kathakali itself (71). The actors' makeup took on mask-like qualities which were created by painting on clown-white and adding exaggerated red-lipped mouths, heavy black-lined eyes and hardened wigs. The result was a makeup-covered face that was essentially a neutral mask, which company member Nirupama Nityanandan believed: "heighten[ed] the facial expressions" but did not add to them (qtd. in Salter "Théâtre" 71). Denis Salter observed that the human face did not disappear under the mask "but, strangely, became even more human as it was magnified by its own mask-like features" ("Hand" 63). The heavy paint created a neutral mask quality for the actors in Les Atrides, but unlike hard physical masks, these masks were alive.

Everything the actors wore in Les Atrides, every gesture made had "a power," a "definition," and a "life" said Schaub; the costumes and the actor's movements were not just adornment (qtd. in Salter "Théâtre" 71). The costumes helped to define the shift in society demonstrated in The Oresteia. Most notably, the definition could be seen in the juxtaposition of costuming in the principal characters. The men were dressed in "heavily textured and multilayered" clothing, while the women were in "white shirts, dark breeches, and colorful sashes." The movement and gesture of the men conveyed a "stately, self-serving authority," while the women were "much livelier, more natural, and far less posed" (Salter, "Hand" 63).

The costumes of the chorus were also a layered Kathakali-like creation. Each costume was adorned with brocades, had a headpiece, had "tight-fitting long-sleeved tunics," with a wide waist-band and full skirt that would "fly out into full circles during the more energetic movements of dance" (Kiernander 137, Rockwell 1). The costumes were an "ingenious hybrid of the ethnic cultures stretching from southern Italy through the Middle East to southern India" (Rockwell 1).

In each of the individual plays, the costumes were altered for its respective chorus. The chorus of Iphigenia wore "bright colors, mainly a yellow-gold set off with black, and small bonnet-like headdresses" (Kiernander 137). The "old men" of Agamemnon were in "heavy red and gold, high turbans and obviously artificial beards which recall[ed] the paper make-ups of the Kathakali" (Kiernander 137). One reviewer even saw the chorus as "vaguely Mesopotamian (even Ozian--like ancient Munchkins)" (Brustein 36). The Choephoroi chorus also found itself in black, with red and gold decoration. In the final play, however, the chorus began to reflect a Western influence and the Kathakali remnants disappeared.

The barking-dogs sound that was heard at the end of each of the previous plays finally took a literal shape when the chorus entered for the Eumenides. Led by three bag-lady Furies "dressed in tattered duds and sneakers" (Kroll 70), the rest of the Furies were baboon-looking creatures with "doglike snouts and leonine manes" (Brustein 37). The addition of contemporary costume elements, said Bryant-Bertail, exposed the Furies "as a constructed embodiment of demonic femininity" (23).

The costume thus reflected political allusion in Mnouchkine's Kathakali and Stein's Fedora productions. The costumes in each production served to illustrate the chorus as a collective body and concentrate on the action rather than the individual. The collective was also demonstrated in a full range of mask styles employed in the four productions. The range included the use of full masks in Hall's experiment (to see what language was like in masks) to the use of no mask at all in Stein's production. In each case, the physical masks used in performance were partially determined by the director's concern for the speaking and comprehension of the text.

Text and Sound

Harrison was concerned about discovering what happened to language in using the mask, and he believed that it must have been different from everyday speech or conversation. He wanted to explore the voice and speech in mask to get a better idea of the language (Interview 144-5).

I wanted to theatrically find out what kind of language would be spoken in masks, because that's something that most scholars never even give a thought to; they don't investigate what it means

that these plays were masked. (Harrison,
"Interview" 144)

Hall said that he found himself "using that ghostly, alliterative Anglo-Saxon, Beowulf measure" (Fay 288). It was the perfect dialect to move the story forward, and "quick enough to be pure," yet would also be able to move boulders" (qtd. in Fay 288). Though in full masks, the Hall production did nothing to interfere with the speaking of the text. All of the visual elements were subordinate to the aural presentation. Faces were constantly pointed forward at the audience, and the movement was designed not to draw attention away from the dramatic action of the play. The mask forced the face forward as the presentation of the text occurred--a declarative tradition that would survive on the formal stage through the nineteenth century (and still does in the opera).

Stein's WWII era production was designed to focus audience concentration on its political messages and the text. Therefore, he decided to cut the music and dance to "go totally on the sense of the plays" (Stein 257). Actors have a tendency to want to "fill," "play," or "act" the line, and that tendency gets in the way of a unison voice. Stein discovered that an effective synchronization was

developed through textual analysis and a "unison of common understanding" rather than some applied device, like chanting in unison (Case 26). Therefore, his suggestion to the German and Russian actors alike was to speak the text so that they could be understood.

The result of twelve people speaking together with a common meaning becomes a kind of music itself (Stein 257-8). Breaking up the choral assignments of the text, so that some would take three words and then someone else would take the next three yet speaking as though all were still one phrase, Stein said, is "an enormous exercise in discipline, in thought and reflection" (258). When he took the play to Moscow, Stein was excited to work with the Russian actors because of their emotional strength:

The Russians can go into one emotion and can continue within it, weeping for twenty-five or even forty minutes. They can also speak at the same time . . . for Greek tragedy, it is absolutely stunning to have this kind of visible power there at your disposal. (Stein 258)

Throughout the rehearsal process the chorus also worked on the "tones common to the Greeks" from tapes and Greek voice teachers, "resonating areas in the nasal area and not in

the chest," and on letting the line "fall with the breath rather than rise in crescendo" (Case 26). The women of the chorus would practice what Case called the "high wailing call of primitive tribeswomen" (26). In a combination of the choral vocal work and stage mechanics, the Furies' cry at the end of the Eumenides literally split the stage platform in two (Keen 3).

In Wright's gender-concerned production, the choral voices were underscored with simple music. During the choral odes, solo voices alternated lines and verses for clarity and understanding (Wright). The men's vocal quality was that of a "low drone, like the ululating of Zulu tribesman, or the moaning of the didgeridoo" (Lewis 25). In Iphigenia, the male actors of the chorus that the artistic staff was so concerned about disguising were well hidden behind the masks and costumes, but the timber of their voices unmasked their gender. Though the voices were an aesthetic concern, the text was clearly delivered.

Clear delivery of the text was paramount in the Kathakali-hybrid Les Atrides, where the text represented the western element in the East-meets-West production style. Mnouchkine "frequently emphasized that she d[id]

not want anything to distract from the words of the text" (Kiernander 137). Schaub recalled that during rehearsals:

We tried to let the chorus speak--together, chopping the text, etc.--but finally we decided there were too many changes, we were losing the thread of the text . . . You see, Ariane didn't want to chop the text too much; she wanted the same tempo and the same rhythm . . . It was very hard to achieve both unity and difference in the chorus if they are allowed to speak a lot. (qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 73)

Because Mnouchkine placed importance on the presentation and reception of the text, three chorus leaders shared the responsibility for the choral text. The words were "never sung and only chorus leader Catherine Schaub or other single voices spoke the chorus's lines. Moreover, the chorus never danced while dialogue was being spoken" (Bryant-Bertail 9), and all theatrical focus was concentrated onto the speaker in moments of important textual delivery.

In their own way, each of the directors placed a great importance on the text. Mnouchkine paused the dance for moments of textual importance while supporting the actors'

voices with intricate sound Stein omitted the masks, dance, and music altogether, while Wright's actors wore half-masks which left their mouths free. Hall worked with Harrison to experiment with what language would be like in masks; the text in their production was supported, or underscored, with simple music throughout the trilogy.

Music

The only aspect of the Hall production to receive "unanimous critical acclaim" was the music created by composer Harrison Birtwhistle (Macintosh 316). Birtwhistle used three groups of instruments. He utilized percussion instruments to govern the pace and keep the rhythm, harp to punctuate the dramatic as well as to "span the silences," and these were complemented by instruments from the clarinet family (Fay 289). Birtwhistle used the wind instruments to sustain notes in unison during "bursts of incidental music that cover the entrances and exits" (Fay 289). Filling the silence was exactly what the instruments did. The tragic form requires moments of profound silence and these moments were filled with music in the Hall production. The moments of silence were heightened and given their due in the Mnouchkine production because she believed that the West was uncomfortable with silence and

always worked to fill the void. In the Hall production, the music noticeably intruded on the silences.

In the Wright production, wind chimes, finger-cymbals, and girlish laughter entered with the chorus of Iphigenia at Aulis (Shyer 45). The sound production for the "Clytemnestra Project" was kept simple through the use of basic ingredients such as drums, bells, flutes, and the actors' voices (Lewis 30). The sound was employed to accent the dramatic moments in the play versus using the constant underscore that occurred in the Hall production.

The music of Eastern cultures that influenced Les Atrides was far more complex and ranged from Eastern folk improvisations to Kabuki percussion. It was composed by Jean-Jacques Lemêtre who also played the some 140 instruments during the performance (Rich B4). The overall score of the music, described by Chioles, included "Greek and Asia Minor mountain music from a variety of reed instruments," . . . "Balinese dance music," . . . "Indian Kathakali (the stutter step)," and "Kabuki aragoto" (36). The multiple instruments varied widely from the antique to the exotic; some were even homemade (Simon 89).

Lemêtre began each of the plays with a five-minute crescendo on drums building from an imperceptible level to

an overwhelming roar (Kiernander 137). Then, he used the instruments to underscore the lines of the principal characters (Rockwell 5). He had three assistants but played the music himself because the rhythm was closely allied to the actors' speech patterns. The musical accompaniment guided the actors' rhythms and enhanced the lyricism to the point where it sounded like the speaking actors were singing or chanting (Schaub qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 70). Recorded accompaniment was utilized for the choral dances because it would have proved too expensive to have a troupe of musicians to play during the choral dances (Rockwell 5).

Music was used to support the drama of the text and the actor's presentation. In Hall and Wright, the simple elements of music underscored the action, while in the Mnouchkine production the music was integrated to the point that it was sensitive to and supportive of the actors' speech patterns. The music coupled with the other elements discussed supported the choice of gesture and movement of the actors' bodies and the choral group.

Movement

Movement in Hall's poetic production was very precise, calculated and moderately paced overall. In fact,

Clytemnestra's relatively rapid gestures were jolting because the previously employed movement had a somniferous effect. It was as if the actors took a beat between each step. Esslin thought that the chorus of Elders in Agamemnon "dodders and totters around like the most ragged chorus in a third rate opera company" (24). To further understanding of the text, he suggested that the actors be allowed greater size in gesture, as in Noh theatre, so that the interlocutor could be more easily determined (22).

In the final scene of Hall's trilogy, the Furies, who had been transformed into benevolent deities, were draped in glistening red robes as the audience was prompted to stand. A solemn hymn was heard from the back of the auditorium as they began to file out (Esslin 24). Athena then led the chorus of Eumenides out of the space through the auditorium with their arms extended outward from shoulder height.

For Stein's Agamemnon, the Fedora clad chorus of elders was obviously old and lethargic, unable to stop Clytemnestra from proceeding with her plans. The chorus of the Libation Bearers was more active and "whirl[ed] around Agamemnon's tomb, occasionally breaking away to a conspiratorial huddle" (Keen 2). In the Eumenides, the

Athenians draped robes and garlands on the members of the chorus, leaving them completely enclosed and "tricked into powerlessness" (Keen 3).

Wright's production concentrated on movement conceived in a "timelessness" to match the needs of the individual story and character rather than on a reproduction of the ancient Greek (Lupu). In rehearsal, the actors trained in Indian and Burmese dance styles "to expose the company to a stylized system of gender-specific gestures from which they [would] develop their own dance vocabulary" (Lewis 19). The resultant dance in Iphigenia at Aulis, for example, was smooth and flowing like the light fabric of the choral gowns that billowed in the wind of movement (Wright). The choral movement alternated between large and small groups. When not performing in odes, the chorus stood together in groups of varying sizes outside the orchestra (Wright).

The action was focused into the orchestra and the scenes were played inside the circle. When the scene was completed, the characters left the space and the chorus took over. When the ode transpired, a principal character entered the circle and the chorus gave way to the character.

During the third ode of Iphigenia at Aulis, distant military drums accented by tambourine were heard as the chorus echoed the choral leader and the chorus took over the space in a pattern consisting of parallel lines across the stage (Wright). The pattern appeared to be largely derived from the formations believed to be utilized in the Athenian theatre, a militaristic "rank and file" (Haigh 298-9). As with the lethargic men in overcoats in the Stein production, Wright's chorus of "old men" in Agamemnon was less mobile and their singing and dancing was minimal (Lewis 38). The sluggish "old men" in Mnouchkine's Kathakali-looking chorus became comical, and it too moved in the geometrical patterns.

Mnouchkine believed that the role of choral dance was vital to the ancient productions (Bryant-Bertail 9). The dance should have a living energy rather than a lifeless and flat construction from paintings and theory. Therefore, the dance in Les Atrides was developed through improvisations with the living "Kathakali and Bharata Natyam dance theatres" (Bryant-Bertail 9-10).

Two members of the company recalled what it was like to train for the dance used in the production. Nityanandan said that the international cast members who danced brought

pieces of their traditions into rehearsals (qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 67). Schaub, who had apprenticed with an Indian Kathakali teacher in Paris, instructed that "the principle of Kathakali is imitation. There is no explanation. You never talk, never" (qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 68). Schaub went on to explain how the teacher showed the student the movements and gestures, then the student was expected to remember and do it. There was no psychological mind game to be played. Intensity in the eyes was most important and Schaub remembered that the teacher said, "'this is sadness' and he shows you how to express it with the position of the eyebrows, the mouth, and so on" (qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 68). The facial gestures were complemented by the Kathakali hand positions. Like the Greek, said Schaub, you learned the text in the original language first, then you learned the "language of the hands" (qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 68). Combined, the elements of Kathakali created a manner of communication described by Schaub:

Since it's dance-drama, the whole body of the actor is an instrument of expression. For example, with the hands you can create 24 figures; and with those figures, combined with bodily movement, you can make words. It is a

very precise language in which you can say anything! The hands give the sense, and the body follows. (qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 68)

The discipline is demanding and requires many years of training to master. Therefore, the "energy" of Kathakali was employed in the choral dance of Les Atrides but it was not actual Kathakali (Schaub qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 68). Essentially the dances became a mixture from each of the dancers' respective dance vocabularies and improvisations (Schaub qtd. in Salter, "Théâtre" 69).

The dance of the chorus was one of the most notable aspects of Les Atrides, and reviewers have described it as having possessed "an energetic, ecstatic quality" (Kiernander 137), "fervor, precision and ethereal lightness" (Rich B4), and a "gleeful joy that [was] very close to barbaric fury" (Rockwell 1). Kiernander gave us a more complete description:

[U]sually during these sequences the chorus members are arranged rank and file, and the dancing consists mainly of stamping, stepping and kicking movements with the arms lifted and gesturing, and occasional leaps high into the air or whirling spins at moments of climax. (137)

Jack Kroll considered the chorus to be "a dancing, chanting body politic," and he commented on their movement as "swarming like acrobats over the high walls that flank[ed] the stage, leaping down again to reform in a battalion of blazing color" (70). The chorus moved around the stage area in "the chess-like spatial patterns" (Bryant-Bertail 19). The wonderment of color and movement in the choruses of the first play gave way to lethargic old men in Agamemnon, and eventually to three bag ladies with a pack of dogs in the Eumenides.

The chorus of "old men" was also challenged to dance, but the energy required appeared taxing to the chorus character. Though they tried to execute the necessary requirements, the inflexible and clumsy men were easily exhausted. After each dance they collapsed on the floor in exhaustion (Bryant-Bertail 19, Simon 89). In the Eumenides the dances were more static (Kiernander 137). The Furies were leaping "snarling, mutated hell-hounds, part canine, part simian, and reminiscent of the furious apes in Stanley Kubrick's '2001'" (Rich B4). In most other sections of the plays, when the chorus was not dancing its odes, it remained visible to the audience, even gathering around the principals, but it was not intrusive on their textual

passages. Though the previous choruses were free to move about anywhere in the playing space, the Furies were trapped by metal grates that blocked the entrances (Bryant-Bertail 23).

The chorus was also called on to assist in other ways. When it was time to remove the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus lying on a mattress, the piece appeared to be immobile and the chorus was asked to assist in its removal (Brustein 37). To focus attention on the story in other moments, the chorus members would stop all movement and then stare; they became spectators, and when they did so, the effect would transfix the audience attention on the textual action of the play (Lupu).

Movement, like the actors' costumes and masks, is readable as text, and contemporary directors illustrate allusions to the present in the manipulation of these elements. The choices of movement varied in each of the productions examined in this study, ranging from very refined to those that explored the extreme limits of bodily expression. But, each was always cognizant and supportive of the text. Just as Aeschylus represented the Eumenides in robes and a procession like that of the Panathenaia, Hall, Stein, and Wright draped their choruses in garments that

signaled the changing world. The dog-like Furies of Les Atrides further demonstrated that bloody vengeance was replaced by diplomatic means of reconciliation when they left all-fours to stand on their hind legs (Kroll 70).

Challenges and Criticisms

Challenges naturally arise in theatrical experiments of the kind we have discussed. The wall between contemporary and ancient aestheticism, sensibilities, and philosophies becomes grandly apparent when brought back to life on the stage. Even in masterful restagings of classical theatre, there are moments of incongruity, a feeling that something is out of place.

The masks used in ancient theatre continue to intrigue and perplex theatre practitioners to this day. For all of the acclaim that the Hall production received, there were noticeable practical problems in Harrison's desire to discover what happened to language when the actors wore masks in performance. The full masks worn by the chorus left an open space for the mouth, but the actor's mouth could not be seen moving and the physical movement of the actors did not draw attention to individuals, which made it difficult to understand who was speaking (Esslin 22). Macintosh also lamented that the mask "clearly affected the

audibility" of the translation (316). Even though the choral passages were divided between the chorus members, which helped with "comprehension," it was still difficult to determine who was speaking (Esslin 22).

Does a reliance on audibility for comprehension point up the difficult junction between textual and visual components of storytelling for a text-based society? Is it possible that, as any lighting designer will portend, we need to be able to see in order to hear? Or, do we need to hear in order to see? The visual would seem to be more powerful in the theatre because the pictures and postures can be read when the words cannot be heard (or are in a language foreign to the observer). It follows then, that when masks are used to communicate, a series of economized gestures and movements should be employed to create a picture that conveys the messages of the story, rather than just placing the actors on stage to stand and recite. Though the text was the focus for the Hall and Harrison production, there is more to mask than the sound that comes out of it.

Brustein addressed the mask in Mnouchkine's production by commenting that the heavy make-up mask limited the actors' expressiveness and facial gestures (37). The

limitation clearly frustrated him, and yet he defined exactly what a mask does for the performer. The makeup in this case served to simplify and to condense the number of facial expressions and gestures. The economy of gesture gained power through its simplicity. Masks, of course, function in a much similar way except that there is a great skill required to unlock the gestures in masks. These gestures must be employed by the actor and interpreted by the audience to have meaning.

As mentioned in Chapter III, any attempt at mounting a "new" production of the classical draws comparison to the original. The language in Harrison's translation naturally brought comparisons to Aeschylus. Macintosh noted that for the Hall production "the cumulative effect of the persistent trochaic base was to diminish rather than reflect the complexity of Aeschylus' verse" (316). Esslin said that the music of Hall's piece was percussive and the action was "underlined by drumbeats" (24), but Esslin questioned the rhythm of the piece in terms of the original meters of Aeschylus versus those that Harrison had created.

The application of translations and adaptations in performance is also very challenging. A noticeable incongruity occurred during the performances of Wright's

"Clytemnestra Project." The production was designed to draw attention to Clytemnestra, and by joining three of the myths in which that character is a part, the production essentially created a Clytemnestra trilogy. A feminist perspective emerged; however, the intentions of the original dramatists seeped through in performance and undermined the goals of the project. Another problem the artistic staff noticed with Wright's experiment was that on evenings and days when the pieces were performed as one, there was a sense that the story did not end. A necessary end to the cycle of blood was not evident, and the production suffered from the lack of the Eumenides to suggest closure (Lupu). Without a satyr-piece to follow a cycle of tragedies, closure is necessary.

The guests invited to the party of contemporary production of Athenian tragedy, suggested by Harrison at the beginning of this chapter, have not always met the expectations of the Aeschylean model constructed over the centuries. However, contemporary director's interpretations and the implementation of the newly conceived theatrical elements push the boundaries between the past and present, sparking continued discourse in the field.

NOTES

¹ See Performing Arts Journal 45 (1993) for a pictorial record of the choruses in the Hall (p. 19), Stein (p. 10), and Mnouchkine (p. 20) productions. A telling photo of the Furies in Hall's production is in The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 317. A photo of the Agamemnon chorus in rank-and-file formation for the Mnouchkine production is in American Theatre May 1992: 24.

² Pictorial documentation of Wright's production accompanies " 'The Clytemnestra Project' at The Guthrie Theatre" by Jim Lewis in The Production Notebooks, ed. Mark Bly (New York: TCG, 1996) 1-62. A close-up image of Wright's chorus for Iphigenia at Aulis can be found on the cover of American Theatre Jan. 1993.

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE

The chorus is the defining factor in the playing of tragedy because it so different than anything we have today and because it encompasses practically every element of the theatre. Each of the productions examined in this study combined original physical elements of producing tragedy with a contemporary aesthetic. Also, according to the directors, the text was never abandoned and was indeed central to each production. However, the visual and aural choices made to illustrate the action and the issues were dramatically distinct to each production and provide a spectrum of possibilities for the new director of tragedy.

Scholarship has come to embrace contemporary treatments of the visual aspects of the classical theatre. Scholars such as Vince, McDonald, Macintosh, Delgado, and Chioles recognize the visual and kinetic as text itself rather than just interludes to the action of the play. Chioles posits that the postmodern theatre is a visual theatre to be witnessed as the ancient plays were, in a "seeing place." He cites Taplin and Walton as wanting to put theatre in an "audi-torium" or "place-for-hearing," and says that style of presentation forces the artist to

appreciate the ancient plays as museum pieces (24). While there is a place for that style of theatrical production, performances that enlist visual allusions to the contemporary world have opened a new manner of seeing the ancient plays.

Similar elements were incorporated into each of the productions, although the physical spaces for the world of the chorus are very different. The audience space, stage, and sets for each performance blended elements from the original structures with the contemporary spaces, or at least revealed the resemblance and the heritage of contemporary theatre to the originals. Hall and Stein both modeled their spaces on the theatre at Epidaurus (which is interesting in itself because they both ended up playing at Epidaurus). The scenery in Hall's piece most resembled the physical fifth-century Greek theatre structure. Wright's "Clytemnestra Project" suggested the ancient theatre space by employing a representation of the orchestra on the stage floor. Even Mnouchkine's "bullring" environment employed elements of the early Greek theatre. While not initially recognizable as a fifth-century Greek theatre space, elements of the original stage technologies were employed in her production. A large central playing space, a huge

set of doors upstage-center, and the use of an ekklyklema device were all traces of the ancient theatre that played a part in the convergence of East and West in the production. The Stein and Mnouchkine pieces purposely lacked comfortable seating to involve the contemporary audience in an experience similar to the way the original audience may have observed the work of the chorus.

The chorus was consistently represented as a collective body in each of the productions, even though Stein worked toward individuality and Mnouchkine separated and individualized the Eumenides by using three bag-ladies to speak for their chorus of ape-like hounds. Acting as a part of an anonymous collective, losing one's identity or individuality within a body or group, is not in an actor's nature. It is difficult to attain the selflessness and giving required for an actor to integrate into a collective group by hiding one's own profile. To break down the walls of self-orientation, Wright's cast engaged in exercises designed to concentrate each actor's attention outside themselves and onto the person next to them. The prolonged exercise met with difficulty and frustrations on the actors' part (Lewis 32). Similar behavior among actors was

exposed during this author's recent experience directing a tragedy.¹

Another difficulty in this author's production occurred when masks were integrated into rehearsal. The actors were accustomed to realistic acting techniques and they became confounded when their faces were covered with masks. A director should always be aware of the actor experience and how it affects the production. For example, Hall observed that even though they were part of a group, the actors in his production became "lonely behind the mask" (Fry 289). According to Walton, a loss of vision is the first practical thing an actor will experience, the "peripheral vision is cut to a dark edge" (Greek Sense 43). Working in a mask is not something that an actor adopts one day in rehearsal. Masks should be introduced early in the rehearsal process because it is a style of acting that requires training and should not be taken for granted. The small facial gestures of the screen style realistic actor are lost behind the mask and an actor must "reorganize the balance of the senses" (Walton, Greek Sense 43). It has also been said that the mask takes over the body and the feelings of the actor (Harrop 18). Learning to allow the mask and the body to express the emotion and feeling once

reserved for the face, the mask can once again be read for the expression originally lost.

Having successfully made peace with the mask, the actor should remove the mask in order to communicate in a voice other than that of the character (Eldredge 42). When it is necessary for the director to speak to the actors who are still in mask, he or she should be aware that Hall's actors looked at him as though he were "mad" when he gave notes. He had "discovered that they could only be spoken to collectively . . . To speak to an actor by name was to break the spell" (289). The three productions that used masks on the chorus exercised the use of essentially neutral masks. None of the masks resembled any in the other productions.

When Stein chose not to put his actors in physical masks, this demonstrated another way in which he did not allow anything to interfere with comprehension of the text. However, the commonality of their dress may have served to mask the individual identity of the chorus members. The use of masks can also make the playing of collective gender possible with a gender-mixed cast. The gender of the chorus in each of the four productions was played as required by the text, thereby often requiring the actors to

play the opposite gender. Specifically, in the Wright production, because of the mixing of cast members from different genders to play one gender, the experiment gave itself away. Whereas in the Hall production, the gender of the cast was composed as it had been in the fifth century BC, and avoided the vocal challenges found in the performance of the Wright production.

Even if we could construct a clear picture of how the choral elements were employed in the original productions, how is that relevant to our playing of the chorus today? Without sufficient knowledge of the choral functions and performative elements, one may be tempted to cut the chorus from the play. But if the chorus is cut, is the result still tragedy? Understanding the ritualistic and social aspects of the ancient society goes a long way in finding relevance for contemporary production. The chorus is instrumental to that understanding. If the theory of the chorus as "ideal spectator" is even partially true, and it was through the chorus that the ancient audience saw themselves reacting and interacting in the world at large, can that concept still apply in the contemporary theatre? As discussed earlier, Mnouchkine has said that a "distancing" concept, like that of Aeschylus' use of a

distant kingdom, allowed her to show the audience something about themselves. Stein, on the other hand, chose a more immediate time period and dressed his chorus in clothing recognizable to the present age. The audience at his production saw themselves, real and tangible, like the Athenians watching Aeschylus' allusion to the Panathenaia at the end of the Eumenides.

The allusion to the Germany of the World Wars, described by Chioles, was designed to work on the guilt that resulted from the period (50), the guilt of silence. Silence is an important component to tragedy that is not read from the text; as Peter Sellars described it, "many of the most powerful scenes in . . . Greek dramas, are the scenes without words . . . where the moral center of the play is mostly silent" (qtd. in McDonald 95). In a number of Greek tragedies, including the Oresteia, the moral center Sellars alluded to is often the chorus itself. When the chorus is not audibly silent, it is still silent in action, for the group does very little to stop Clytemnestra from carrying out the acts that set the trilogy in motion.

This thesis set out to emphasize that productions of ancient theatre in the present day demonstrate the visual aspects of the theatre over that of the text. Certainly,

the exploration of the visual element in the pieces ranged from the subdued Greek-like costuming in the Hall and Wright productions to the ape-hounds and Eastern influences in Mnouchkine to the 1940s blood-spurting corpses of Stein's production. While the visual is of great concern in connecting the contemporary experience to the original works, it has become clear that each of the directors of the plays examined placed a special emphasis on the presentation of the text. The emphasis was derived from the directors' desire for audience comprehension and understanding, though each director treated the text differently.

Stein's translation found power in simplification by removing Aeschylus' metaphors. Removing the metaphor from the plays of Aeschylus diminishes the elevated language, and strips away a portion of the craft that made the ancient playwright a contest winner. Whether or not it is right to eliminate the poetic metaphor, Stein illustrated one avenue in which the contemporary audience could clearly understand the action in the play.

Harrison's poetic translation of the text in the Hall production was a new creation with inspired imagery and attention to the metrical phrase. Critics naturally

compared Harrison's poetry to that of Aeschylus. Though the piece lacked a central political statement, knowing he would draw criticism by speaking the ideas of Aeschylus in the "Northern England" dialect was itself a political statement. One reviewer rebuked him for the use of vulgar language that degraded the elevated poetry of Aeschylus (Esslin 22). Vocal presentation and choral voice was also a consideration in presentation of the text. Hall and Wright utilized some singing of the lines as well as dividing the chorus into smaller groups. Stein's work with the chorus in regard to speaking the lines was designed to arrive at a unison voice through a "common understanding" rather than imposing chant or singing (Case 26). Mnouchkine gave the chorus lines to three chorus leaders.

Much of the acclaim that the Mnouchkine production received was concentrated on the international influence it conveyed through the visual presentation. The visual dimension of the production was so moving that the text appeared to have been somehow altered or cut. However, Mnouchkine maintained that the text remained intact within her production. For all of the improvisation designated toward movement in rehearsal, those elements were curtailed when it was time for important textual passages to be

heard. Dance and movement were not allowed to distract during textual passages.

Recognizable elements of Kathakali were present in the Mnouchkine production, yet it was the blending of multiple forms that gave the movement its style. Salter thought that the blended movement style would confuse a contemporary audience. It was initially "difficult to decode the shifting pattern of visual signification," he said, "but, over the ten hours of the tetralogy, we in fact come to understand even the nuances of what [was], in effect, an updated synthesis of many ancient types of body language" (63). The movements and gestures were read as text and Mnouchkine believed that the dance should be alive and vital rather than flat as a lifeless painting. Movement or dance took place in varying degrees in each production. Mnouchkine's was the most kinetic and extraordinary, while the Hall production kept the movement simple. During the rehearsal period, Wright decided to limit the movement so that the choral passages were presented as "pictorial rather than kinetic" (Lewis 41). Stein cut the dance altogether and visually emphasized his political allusions through costume and scenery.

A blending of style, culture, and sociopolitical interpretations create a connection to the world at large, bringing the Athenians' work across centuries to our present moment. The manipulation of the plays for political and aesthetic ends is not a new application; it has been present in the theatre since the time of the Greeks themselves. However, the continuing growth in our knowledge of the original tragedies, coupled with a search for deeper understanding of the time in which we live, creates new treatments toward human issues that breathe life into ancient tragedies.

The contemporary audience will enter the theatre with expectations much like Harrison and Stein described, expecting virgin maidens, Roman togas, chanting, and dancing. When they are confronted with contemporary costume and poetic language, some audience members will never forgive the director for not meeting their expectations. But, those who do understand the attempt to say something about the world in which we live through the production of ancient plays will connect with the "spirit" that bridges the gap of centuries of human experience. How the chorus question is solved is an important step in fashioning relevant productions for the present era.

NOTES

¹ Sophocles' Antigone was presented as a November 1997 workshop production at the University of Arizona. The play was performed in the directing studio with all of the actors in half-masks. Michael Grittner directed the production with movement and choreography by Lorie Heald. Lauren Brody designed costumes and Shilo Lord was the lighting designer. The sound designer and multi-media coordinator was Evan Andrews.

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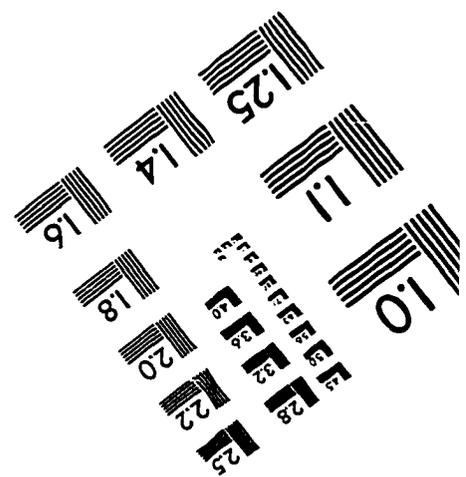
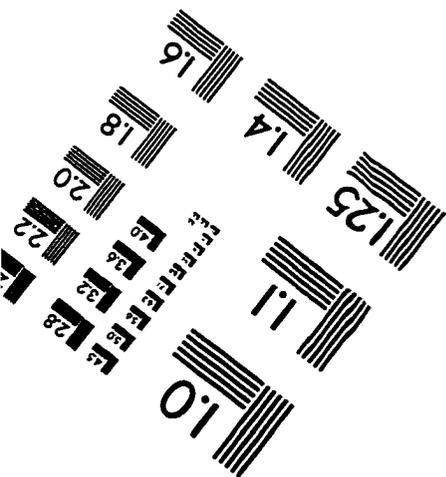
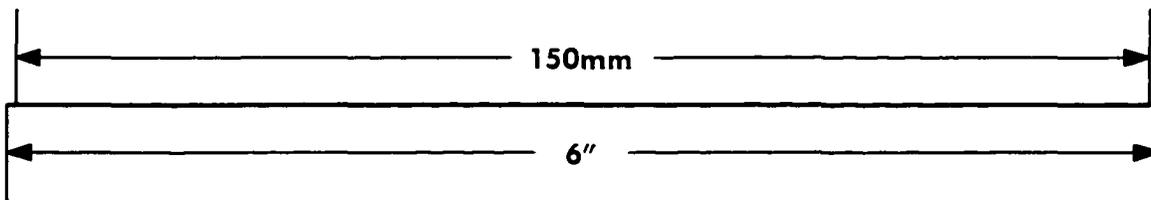
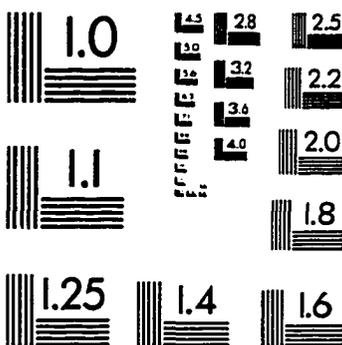
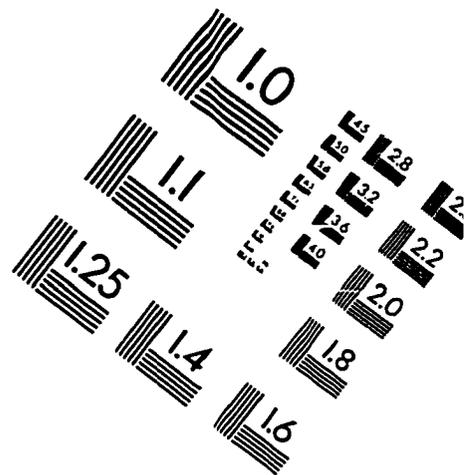
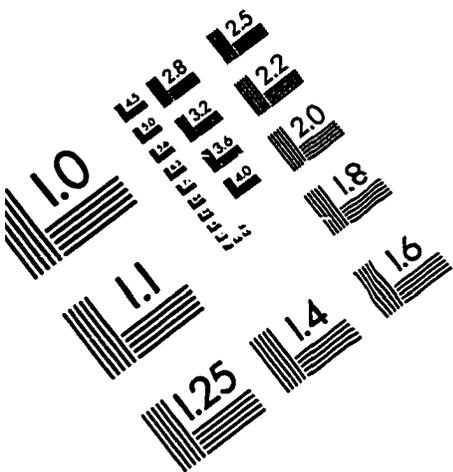
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