

Physical theatre as an approach to contemporary stagings of  
classical Greek tragedy

Written documentation submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy  
supporting creative work as thesis submitted by:

**Rubini Moschochoriti**

School of Arts  
Brunel University

March 2009

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere indebtedness to my supervisor, Barry Edwards for his help, guidance, and his insistence in systematic and consistent work throughout the duration of my thesis.

I would also like to acknowledge my theatre group of Municipality of Zographou. Without their help I could not have managed to accomplish my thesis.

Special thanks to the Hellenic centre of Theatrical research - Theatre museum, the Centre of the Ancient Greek drama- Desmi, the Theatre library and the National theatre for their precious help and for all the technical material that they have provided me.

Finally, I would like to thank Miss K. Spanou, G. Kaffe, V. Vavva and A. Stafilaraki who supported me all this period practically and psychologically.

I dedicate this thesis to my family

**Brunel University, Uxbridge; School of Arts;**  
**Rubini Moschochoriti; Physical theatre as an approach to**  
**contemporary stagings of classical Greek tragedy; 2009; PhD**

**ABSTRACT**

This PhD focuses on physical theatre techniques and practices in order to provide acting keys for directing ancient drama. More specifically, the work for stage put effort in the acting method, with which the chorus and the main characters can be approached. For that reason, the basic method adopted was that of J. Lecoq, and especially the 'transference' practice. Moreover, specific elements were selected from the methods of: the Laboratory theatre of J. Grotowski, the Odin Teatret of E. Barba, and from K. Stanislavski's practice of physical actions. Elements were also incorporated from modern dance techniques (M.Graham, P. Bausch and R. Laban), as well as from Dramatic play.

The first part of the PhD summarizes theoretical aspects on the tragedy's structure through the written material that has survived from antiquity. The ancient drama history, the history of acting and directing tragedy, as well as other interpreting matters are analyzed. Moreover emphasis has been placed on Euripides' whole work, on the historical and cultural frame of writing the Bacchae, as well as on ideological aspects and comments on the roles. Finally, material for the most important performances, which took place in Greece, is given.

In the second part of the thesis an experiment has been performed between the classic speech of tragedy and contemporary methods of movement and speech. The aim was to investigate how these function together, by applying them on the text of Bacchae. Although the stress on the body pre-existed in acting methods of several directors, the

specific method of Physical theatre was applied around 1955 from J. Lecoq. Since in Physical theatre the physical expression is symbolic, non-realistic, with a heightened sense of theatricality, this method can provide to tragedy the suitable acting tools for the big statures of the roles-symbols and for the meaningful movement of the chorus. Physical theatre does not emphasize on the character and his behavioural gestures but on the situations themselves and how the actor undertakes them. Therefore it can complement word-based theatre, which focuses on the acts emerged from the myth and on the creation of mimetic archetypes. In that way, the demonstrated actions and the messages conveyed through them, become essential and represent the collective unconscious. Consequently, if tragedy expresses symbols, emphasizes on the myths' acts and detaches from realism then it is proved that the method of Physical theatre can be an appropriate method.

| <b>Contents</b>   | <b>Pages</b> |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Introduction</b>   | <b>3</b>     |
| <b>1. Physical theatre -the term, its genesis<br/>and its components</b>                | <b>9</b>     |
| <b>2. Ancient Greek Tragedy</b>   | <b>17</b>    |
| <b>Euripides, “a stage philosopher”</b>   | <b>19</b>    |
| <b>I. Biography</b>   | <b>19</b>    |
| <b>II. A profile of his work</b>  | <b>20</b>    |
| <b>Prologue. Deus ex machina</b>  | <b>20</b>    |
| <b>Contest of speeches</b>  | <b>21</b>    |
| <b>Messenger’s speech</b>   | <b>21</b>    |
| <b>Choral passages</b>  | <b>22</b>    |
| <b>The divine element</b>   | <b>24</b>    |
| <b>The element of passion</b>   | <b>26</b>    |
| <b>3. The sociopolitical context of the writing of The Bacchae</b>                      | <b>29</b>    |
| <b>The Bacchae in Euripides’ dramatic work</b>  | <b>34</b>    |
| <b>4. History of Ancient Greek Tragedy</b>  | <b>39</b>    |
| <b>Evaluation of Greek directors</b>  | <b>60</b>    |
| <b>5. Key influences on the practical research</b>                                      | <b>67</b>    |
| <b>Some crucial stagings in Greece</b>  | <b>67</b>    |
| <b>Indicative record and drama criticism of The Bacchae<br/>in Greece (1962 - 2007)</b> | <b>73</b>    |
| <b>Three important performances in the context of my<br/>research</b>                   | <b>79</b>    |
| <b>6. The Bacchae: the text</b>   | <b>83</b>    |
| <b>I. Outline of the play</b>   | <b>83</b>    |
| <b>II. Important themes dealt with in The Bacchae</b>                                   | <b>84</b>    |
| <b>III. Comments on the roles</b>   | <b>87</b>    |
| <b>7. The realization of The Bacchae as an original theatre<br/>performance</b>         | <b>97</b>    |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| I. Issues of interpretation in relation to Ancient Tragedy    | 97  |
| II. Basic directorial concept                                 | 100 |
| 8. The Bacchae: the creative process                          | 103 |
| I. Preparatory phase  | 103 |
| II. Improvisation phase                                       | 107 |
| 9. Mise-en-scene  | 110 |
| Scenography   | 111 |
| Costume design  | 113 |
| Original music  | 113 |
| Choreography-movement   | 114 |
| Lighting  | 115 |
| Chorus  | 116 |
| Miracle Play  | 119 |
| Epiphany of God   | 120 |
| Mask  | 121 |
| Roles   | 124 |
| 10. The fundamental acting choices - physical theatre methods | 128 |
| Dionysus and 'his many forms'                                 | 132 |
| Pentheus: 'the ambiguous'                                     | 134 |
| Teiresias, servant: 'the need for form'                       | 135 |
| Cadmus, Agave: 'in the labyrinth of emotions'                 | 137 |
| Messenger: 'the mediator'                                     | 140 |
| The chorus: 'autonomus histories'                             | 140 |
| 11. Conclusion  | 147 |
| 12. Critical evaluation and findings                          | 153 |
| Bibliography  | 156 |
| Appendix: The collaborators                                   |     |
| Comments from by members of the audience                      |     |

## **Introduction**

In a PhD which is a “practice-based piece of research” it is already apparent from the title that the research base is therefore practical. In the case of my research this involved the process of creating a live theatre performance, drawing on research into acting methods and techniques, and developing conclusions drawn from this interaction. This process can be likened to scientific laboratory experiments from which a researcher draws conclusions based on the different mix of elements. At the same time, as the science researcher takes into consideration all of the previous experiments so does the researcher-director, who must acknowledge whatever theatrical research and performances have taken place in order to analyse and focus on the composition of the basic elements of the work. His laboratory is the process of performance and the way of experiment inside this form. The potential results form a proposal to other researchers-directors and teachers of the dramatic arts regarding the specific combination of elements and the method of approaching the performance.

In the case of the ancient tragedy and in particular *The Bacchae*, the experimental process yields some further difficulties as it is a theatre form with particular structural and conceptual features, as well as being a play which keeps some difficulties due to metaphysical elements.

### **Research questions**

From the beginning my interest was focused on the research of the classical plays and the different questions which arose inside me. In what ways do the classical texts relate to our era and its issues? How could they be modernized in order to become more immediate and familiar to a contemporary audience? How could modern elements be incorporated to the mise-en-scene, if in fact they could at

all? How is the interlocution viable with contemporary techniques such as cinematography and the visual arts? In particular, how can the structural elements of the ancient drama evolve or be replaced with other prevalent features of the contemporary era or theatre techniques? In relation to the prosodic speech which rhythmic motif could be used in order to preserve the poetic form of ancient drama? In relation to the music, which was composed using notations since lost, what melodic forms would render it capable of being measured using a new rhythmic motif of speech? In relation to movement, which is so important in the tragedy and especially in the chorus, how can it be transcribed on the body of the actor in order to be expressive and “poetic”? And mainly how will it become a codified recognition by the spectator? Finally, the tragedy raises questions regarding the gods, destiny, catharsis as well as the true meaning that the word “hero” acquires in our age. These questions are essentially the subject matter of my research, which I will again note are based on the creation of the performance of *The Bacchae*.

My basic directing issues were: the role of the chorus; the choice of musical style; the translation and the transference of the ancient speech to contemporary rhythmic motif; the movement and the acting methods. In particular I persisted with the development of a sense of “a bond” through which a unified ensemble of actors give emphasis to a shared voice, thought, emotion and experience and which is realized through a transcendental experience and elevated poetical aspect.

## **Concept**

On a conceptual level I wondered about the role of the individual both as an autonomous existence and as a member of a group, as well as the function of this group in the context of different socio-political issues. I focused on the destabilization of the identity of contemporary man in the face of consumerism and the extreme



intensification of the pace of life which leads to the loss of psychosomatic balance and the affliction of loneliness.

The idea of a group, which expresses itself collectively, functions as a whole and shares ideas and responsibilities, made me search for analogies with contemporary group encounters. The force of the Dionysian element (as an element of return to nature, communication, the function of instinct, the need of entertainment), as the dominant element of the play *The Bacchae*, is a challenge. A challenge contrary to the contemporary, sterile, mass-media dominated, consumerist way of life. Additionally, the Dionysian element depicts our isolation from the simple pleasures of life which one can experience. Dionysus, mainly through the element of the chorus, emerges as the ancestor of the return to a more genuine, spontaneous and instinctive way of existence, even in his most extreme celebrations.

## **Methodology**

The methodology that I used in my approach to *The Bacchae* was based on the creation of an original translation into Modern Greek. My aim was for the translation to suit the form and ideological approach of the performance. The translation is perhaps the most important “structural” element in the transfer of the ancient tragedy to a contemporary environment, because as well as defining the form it also defines the rhythm of the text and how the reading is acted.

Hence, I carried out an examination of the acting approach of the tragic form. I focused on the techniques of physical theatre, drawing mainly on elements from the method of Jacques Lecoq and selectively from the practice of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. In one exceptional instance I also worked with the method of physical actions of Konstantin Stanislavski. Furthermore, I took elements from the dance techniques of Martha Graham, Pina Bausch and Rudolf Laban. Also useful, were the practices derived from the dramatic play text itself. The starting point for my research was the body of the actor

and my objective was to experiment with classic speech through bodily forms.

### **Ancient Tragedy**

It is recognised that Greek tragedy is mainly a theatre of speech. Additionally it is considered to be a theatre of mask, related to the religious faith of Dionysus. The followers of Dionysus painted their faces with make-up, as they drove themselves to the point of losing their personality. Initially the mask was used in order to help the solo actor - who performed the tragedy - to enact the different roles. At the same time the mask enabled man to give voice to the gods and the heroes on stage by portraying characteristics and feelings that the human face could not express. Technically the mask supported the power of speech and the different intonations of vocal pitch. (Poulou,I. 1968)

The artistic goal of ancient Greek drama was not to imitate individuals where facial characteristics would be important, and so the mask became an essential artistic tool. With its immobilized facial expression the mask enabled the actor to imitate different roles (there were about 30 stereotyped kind of masks, depending basically on the age, the sex, the emotional situation and the social level of the hero) and encouraged the audience to focus on the way the speech was delivered and not on details of psychological, facial changes. (Blume,H. 1993) Moreover the mask enhanced the visual presence of the body on the stage, which being covered by the heavy costumes, was generally required to be still and imposing. Consequently, the use of mask on tragic acting aimed to reduce the plurality of realistic gestures, movements and expressions and emphasize rather the function of body as a 'loudspeaker' that projected the voice and through this, the speech. So how can speech be performed using the technique of physical theatre, and in addition, without the support of

the mask? It is this exact issue which I researched practically. (It can be argued that the mask directs attention to the body in certain elements of physical theatre. However, in the case of Greek tragic acting, the body of the actors performing the main characters was always restrained by the massive costumes and the heavy shoes (cothurni) and thus the body was performing almost in complete stillness. In the contemporary understanding of physical theatre on the other hand the body is approached as an expressive and highly mobile force. In this way the masked body in ancient tragedy cannot be considered in the same way as a contemporary physical theatre practice.

The chorus is closer to the contemporary notion of physicality, as it was dressed in lighter costumes and danced. Nevertheless, I am going to argue that the chorus in Tragedy, because it was following specific dancing motifs (orchisi), was not expressing itself physically as is understood in physical theatre. In physical theatre the body can replace speech, becoming a strong narrator by itself. In contrast, in Greek Tragedy the movements of the body were abstract, symbolic, closer to the dance and they supported speech. Consequently, the body in Greek Tragedy was not narrating a story. The issue of the chorus is revealed in relation to the combination of movement and speech.

Working for the stage I gave emphasis to the verbs which indicated physicality through action. The words refer to certain images. Through movement I attributed the dynamics that exists inside the images, in this way embodying the words. I worked on the roles through the element of nature and animals. It is possible to construct a role using some characteristic attributes of an animal, plant or material. These elements arising from improvisation remain and are written as physical traces in final image of the role. The actors searched for an affinity with the text, the images and the words through movement and not interpretation. In other words the approach to the text was not psychological. Generally I relied on a

refinement of the acting, in other words on the removal of realistic details and the preservation of the essence of the elements which are contained in every role, in order to attribute human nature. The conflict with the ancient speech was dynamic.

As the tragic speech gives emphasis to the symbolic archetypes (originating from the myth) I am of the opinion that this involves a strong physicality. This physicality in relation to the physical theatre, in other words through improvisation and the combination of space, rhythm, energies, movement, gesture, passion, activity and conflict created an interesting combination as regards the form of the performance. I perceived the text of *The Bacchae* as a 'construction' of movements, while the thematic units of the play and the corresponding units of action progress simultaneously the acting follows these changes by way of physical codes and styles.

Finally the theatrical form, arising from the creative mix of the above elements, led to a theatrical interpretation which was beyond realism. I believe that I succeeded a poetic form – comparable to the quest of other Greek directors – through a different method of approach.

## **1. Physical Theatre -the term, its genesis and its components.**

Physical theatre is a term that stands for a clear and concrete contemporary theatre practice. Certainly theatre in many periods of its existence uses a strong physicality; a very well known example is Commedia dell'arte. In 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, there was a rediscovery of the physical power of theatre, and of the body's role in this power. From early in the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> there was consistent research into theatre forms of the past that focused on the body, research by important theatre directors and teachers, that include Meyerhold's attempts to reform the old techniques of Commedia dell'arte, Artaud's influence on the role of the performing body and Jacques Lecoq's first approaches in physical theatre method, as it later came to be known.

As a term and as a concept 'Physical theatre' first appeared in certain movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was initially created in opposition to the 'dated' mainstream theatre of the time which was based on realism and naturalism. This new type of theatre was to take a more modern, fresh and lively approach and aimed to challenge the predominance of a theatre which was both verbose and intellectualised. It demonstrated other expressive possibilities in order to free the imagination of the actor. The body was used, through the means of particular exercises and techniques, as the main instrument of expression. The beginning of the eighties signalled a change in the art of acting, it deviated from the psychological Stanislavskian approach to the role and began to use a new working method regarding the creation of the performance. This means that the words and the behavioural gestures, which were the medium of expression in mainstream theatre, became of secondary importance. Instead, physical expression took precedence through the means of movement, symbolic gesture and touch. According to J. Lecoq, *'the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant'*. (Callery, 2001: p. 4)

Thus, in physical theatre physical movements and gestural language are chosen to convey metaphorical images of the world to the

spectator. It is the adoption of an alternative form of stage performance and a new ideological pursuit of the truth in the theatre. Hence, a looser interpretation of the dramatic text in relation to the structure of the performance is evident and also an increased use of the visual elements of the theatre.

The following aspects of physical theatre enable its distinction from other forms of theatre:

- 1) A primary focus on the actor as the creator of a performance rather than as the interpreter of a text.
- 2) Emphasis on collective working methods.
- 3) The training and the techniques (either of the devised piece or of the text-based piece) are primarily through physical means.
- 4) A dialectical relationship between actor-spectator.
- 5) Immediacy, vivacity and a sense of play, which are achieved through the means of an organized yet improvisational relationship amongst the actors and between the actor himself and the role.

The terminology of the physical theatre is captured by the idea that theatre is about craft, celebration and play, rooted in collaboration and made by an ensemble dedicated to discovering a collective imagination. (Callery, 2001)

The physical theatre is based on a collective and collaborative procedure in which the actors feel free to discover and experience their own creativity. This happens because they become able to undertake the director responsibility. This greatly enhances the capacity of the imagination to express itself and be expressed within any given representation of the world. On the other hand, an exact representation of reality predominantly through the means of the spoken word – which is the principal characteristic of the traditional theatre – limits the imagination and leads to a stiff representation of everyday life as a semeiotic reference to staging.

So, it could be said that the theatre is a visual art for the reasons that it is performed on the stage, it is expressed through acting and that is a fictional reality which the spectator chooses to consider as real. Furthermore, the actor presents and performs a role on the stage, comprising one member of an ensemble who reenacts life's moments and events. The physical theatre, on the other hand, differs as it enacts day-to-day life by using particular techniques of expression which symbolize human life in a cultural and historical context. As well as a focus on the body, there is also an emphasis on the voice, the creation of sound, the articulation of the words and the use of voice pitch. The scenography is also influenced to the extent that stage objects and costumes have a use which is metaphorical and symbolic; this codification creates a new means of communicating with the spectator.

Also, the actor-spectator relationship is re-defined in the physical theatre. It demands audience participation which is intensely emotional, impulsive and imaginary. The composition of movements and the gestures which an actor uses in order to convey an image, a symbol, a meaning or even something more tangible must also be correctly construed by the spectator. The spectators must have the capacity to understand the world which is constructed before them. This requires an emotional involvement which is far more than the semiotics of the words used to depict daily life.

In realistic acting, until now, emphasis has been given to the reproduction of a character which is defined by the author and interpreted by the stage director realistically depicting the psychology of the role. In physical theatre, this is replaced by a heightened sense of theatricality, exaggeration and playfulness which the actor adopts in order to perform the role. In this way the acting is focused on the actor himself who becomes a performer of self, rather than acting a character, seeking the experience of reality through task, action and refusal of illusion. The actor as a performer of self pursues a 'self' which is an unproblematic and autonomous foundation for acting. In

this case the 'self' is identified in the theories of the era (1980-1990) as the notion of presence which leads directly to the body of actor and how it is constructed. By 'constructed' we mean not talented or a well trained, but it is based on the philosophical idea that the body and movement – which have been faithfully preserved – present a greater authenticity whereas the sophistry of language deceives and deludes. The fundamentalists supporting the above opinion would say that '*presence is beyond signification, a-historical and a-cultural*'. (Keefe, J., Murray, S., 2007: p. 22)

The theories of physical theatre propose a simple style of acting rather than that of naturalism. In physical theatre each movement and gesture is carefully selected and signifies something. It is a style of acting which presents the essential qualities of the character and their actions. It does not perform the character as just another role; it illuminates the actions and manner in which the character carries them out.

### **The term and its references**

The term 'physical theatre' is ambiguous and it has been misinterpreted without actually becoming fully accepted by the groups which considered its essence. It signified a shift away from the Stanislavski method with the main focus on the training techniques and the process of theatrical creation. At the beginning it has been borrowed in order to name a variety of techniques which were designed by J. Grotowski and his Laboratory theatre. *Earlier on* numerous other practitioners such as Meyerhold, A. Artaud, M. Chekhov, B. Brecht amongst others used it, more to outline an insistence on the use of the techniques of embodiment, physical expressiveness and training methods than to define a theatrical type.

The term began to gain status in the mid-1980s in Europe when the work of some performance groups such are "DV8", "Théâtre de complicité" and the group of D. Glass was characterized as physical theatre. It is worth mentioning that due to the fact the term was not



strictly defined, there were groups who consciously used physical and movement based techniques without abandoning the spoken word, such as “Mabou mines”, “Living theatre”, Robert Lepage, Bob Wilson, “Wooster group”, “Théâtre du Soleil”. In spite of the fact that all of the above groups worked in completely different ways, as much regarding their philosophical ideas and the theatrical aims as their composition techniques, they did in fact have some points in common. There was a common loyalty to the idea of the creative actor, the physical approach to the performance and the fact that the speech is accompanied by imaginative play.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were other theatrical groups which were involved in live, interactive theatrical productions in which the actor was transformed into a story teller approaching the text through improvisation (“Shared experience”, “Wooster group”, “Théâtre du Soleil”, “Théâtre de complicité”). They were concerned with the narration of a story not using a traditional approach but through the means of the fragmentation, repetition and disintegration of the narrative components in their quest to capture some sense of contemporary life and identities. (Keefe, J., Murray, S., 2007)

At this point it is worth pointing out that the dance also wished to adopt elements and limits of theatrical form. Pina Bausch and Rudolf Laban chose to remove the chorus from such a technically codified system and liberate the movement adopting expressive elements of the physical theatre. The physical theatre also utilized circus techniques, modern dance, the French tradition of mime, the tradition of street theatre and even aspects of visual art. It also borrowed elements from Eastern and Asian philosophies like “Butoh”, Tadashi Suzuki and “Noh theatre”.

## **Jacques Lecoq**

The most significant contribution to contemporary European and North American physical theatres was the working methods of Jacques Lecoq. His work on the art of acting, both on preparation and also on his powerful stage presence proved to be a determining factor in the formulation of the dramatic arts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Elements that dominate his system are amongst others: the neutral mask, the essence of play, the quality of collaboration, the dynamic relationship between the performer and the audience and the terms of disponibilit  (openness, availability) and complicit  (rapport, a spirit of the accomplice). Lecoq's methods are detailed below in a separate chapter as the basis of my creative research.

## **Physical theatre in Ancient drama**

A physical element exists in all the different theatrical types, in the sense that it is taken as fact that the body participates in all forms of theatre. So, taking this into account, all theatre is physical at least in the combination of its elements. In this sense there were two major categories where strong physicality informed theatre; the full mask theatre of ancient drama where the presence of the whole body occupied the stage, and the half-mask, improvisational theatre of commedia dell'arte where the actor performed extravagant physical improvisations based on a very short scenario which served as a draft.

However, a distinction has been implied between word-based theatre and physical theatre. Word based theatres reinforce the element of speech over physical actions and make the myth really important. The actors-characters emphasize on the arguments in order to narrate the story which very often is familiar to the audience. This idea featured in Western European tradition and enriched the ancient drama as a form belonging to speech theatre. In physical theatre the body itself becomes a narrator, replacing whole parts of

the speech and stripping away realism in favour of a more overt physical theatricality - in effect a spectacle which can fire the imagination of the audience.

The difference between the theatre that contains physicality and the physical theatre which is based on physical expression lies in the subject matter of the author, the authority and the creative role of the actor. There is a great difference between the actor who has physical ability and gesturing capacity to interpret the text of an author (under the guidance of a stage director), and the actor-performer who is part of a creative team and who examines and deliberates of the text. In this way the issue is transferred from the simple existence of the text to the way the text is worked by the stage director, the choreographer, the set designer and so forth. O.S. McBurney the founder of the group "Théâtre de Complicité" says that: *'he brings the spirit and strategies of devising into all the company's project whether working from a play text, a short story, a novel or a blank sheet of paper.'* (Keefe, J., Murray, S., 2007)

In the ancient drama the speech was not just dominant, but it defined the speaker and the action which is being outlined. The ancient texts contain stage instructions and the spectators already know how the story would evolve. So, what would be the sense of a creative approach to stage direction under such conditions and limitations? In the contemporary theatre the show is prevalent with a tendency towards spectacle which includes the involvement of the body. For example, a murder would be executed very physically in front of the spectator who is used to such visualisation through the endless bombardment of images from the mass media. While in the ancient theatre the violent physical scenes took place off stage and so this issue has been addressed with the advent of contemporary theatre. It may have been addressed to the extent that contemporary theatre would maintain a feeling of balance between the visual and physical integrity of the performance as intended by the author and in the avoidance of an empty visual spectacle.

We cannot ignore or omit the force of the speech in the ancient theatre as it is said to be both important and interesting. In the same way we can not overlook the physical presence of the chorus. However, we can turn our research to the dialogue between these two elements, as through the means of experimentation and improvisation they have the ability dominate together side by side. Perhaps, the solution lies in the body and the voice of the actor who interprets the words through the intonation and pitch of the voice and creating what I would call “utterances of the body”.

## 2. The Ancient Greek Tragedy

Magical and religious rituals date back as far as the prehistoric age. Through them primitive people tried to interpret – and if possible affect the course of – natural phenomena. They performed rites (long before the choral chant of the dithyramb and the Dionysian rituals) that included simultaneous movement and mimesis, in an endeavor to come to an understanding of and propitiate the apparently incomprehensible, deified, forces of nature. During the course of these rites, through the primal, instinctive practice of “*theomai kai dro*” (view and act), primitive people were able to achieve collective expression of their impulses and fulfill their natural inclination to create and enjoy and participate in a spectacle (Grammatas et al, 1999).

One development of these primitive rituals is the dithyramb, which was first performed as an improvised choral chant dedicated to the god Dionysus, in 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The dithyramb was performed by a chorus of fifty men, who danced and sang a homophonic hymn around the altar of Dionysus. The first major innovation in the structure of the dithyramb was introduced by Thespis, who broke away from the chorus, assuming the role of a god and engaging in dialogue with the other performers, responding to them in a verse of different metre, without any melodic element. Other contributors to the evolution of the dithyramb were Choerilos and Frynichos and eventually this simple ritual evolved into the ancient tragedy as encountered in Classical Athens (5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.) (Hartnol, P. 1985)

In his “Poetics” Aristotle provided what became the internationally established definition of tragedy:

*“Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. By “language embellished,” I mean language into*

*which rhythm, “harmony” and song enter. By “the several kinds in separate parts”, I mean that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.”*

One major characteristic of tragedy, according to Aristotle, is that it is an imitation of actions (*praxeis*) – not of men - and indeed great actions. The poet does not imitate through narration; he presents his characters acting and moving before us. The actions are of specific dimensions, meaning that they have a beginning and an end. The medium of imitation in tragedy is “*idismenos logos*”, that is to say speech characterized by rhythm, harmony and melody. The above combination eventually leads to *catharsis*, thus fulfilling the fundamental purpose of tragedy, which is to provide pleasure and stir the emotions.

According to Aristotle there are six basic elements in every tragedy: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. Of these, plot is considered the most important and includes the three elements of poetry, actions, characters and emotions. The listing of character as an element in its own right reflects the importance attributed to the depiction of character, as well as the fact that character is one of the natural causes from which actions spring. However, tragedy without subtle depiction of character is conceivable. What is not conceivable is tragedy without plot: plot is the structure of actions and emotions that constitute the drama (Sycoutris, 1936).

Ancient tragedy was brought to its climax by the three great tragic playwrights: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

## **Euripides: A “Stage Philosopher”**

### **I. Biography**

Euripides was thought to have been born around 485-484 B.C. Little biographical information has been recorded, for he did not like to expose his private life. He maintained a low profile and a tone of moderation in public and political activities, though often questioned his city’s political and social institutions (Lesky, A. 1990).

He was the son of Mnesarchos and Cleito and, according to legend, was born in Salamis on the day of the great naval battle. Euripides’ childhood and youth coincided with what was perhaps the most remarkable flowering of culture in the history of mankind. Athens was at the time a place of refuge for a number of Ionian philosophers and historians fleeing from the tyranny of the Persians. There is no evidence that Euripides took part in any military expedition, but he was a great admirer of Athens and deeply interested in his city’s political evolution. This is confirmed by his plays’ close thematic connection to the political events of his time. At the end of his life he left Athens and moved to Macedonia, where he died in 406 B.C.

Euripides was not widely acclaimed for his tragic drama, at least during his lifetime. Only on five occasions did he win the prize at the Athenian dramatic festival, which compares poorly to Sophocles’ eighteen times. However, he did gain recognition after his death, and it is probably for this reason that a relatively large number – eighteen – of his works have survived (Solomos, 1989).

Euripides was taught rhetoric by Prodicos, ethics by Socrates and philosophy by Anaxagoras, but later he claimed that his true teacher was Aeschylus. What these two authors have in common is that through ancient myths they seek out the timeless element in mankind. Though trained in the art of the sophists, Euripides often questioned its effectiveness. He sought to acquire a deeper knowledge of human behavior and indeed to discover the innermost nature of the

human soul. His investigations took him well beyond the limits of logic. The title of “stage philosopher” that has been attributed to Euripides accentuates the dialectical relationship he established between artistic necessity and sophistic questioning. Judgment, teaching and logic, despite his respect for them, are the medium for his work, not its purpose.

## **II. A profile of his work.**

### **Prologue. Deus Ex Machina**

Euripides contributed to the evolution of drama in many ways. He established the prologue as a permanent component of tragedy. He is also the playwright who introduced “*deus ex machina*” (god from the machine) at the end of the play. In the prologue the audience is given a preliminary introduction to some events of the play in order to create an appropriate atmosphere so that the following scenes can gradually be brought to a climax. There is no action or intensity of pace in the prologue. Tension arises solely from the sense of there being something portentous or mysterious in the words.

The rationale behind this is that the audience needs to be in the required state of mind; that they should start to feel suspense about the way in which events are likely to unfold, not merely about what is going to happen next. The *deus ex machina* provides the tragedy with an overwhelming finale, a supernatural ending, summarizing in a speech the admonitions to the heroes and restoring calm after the emotional turbulence. Given that divine qualities are quite often attributed to the heroes in Euripides’ plays, the visible appearance of a god, and the dialogue between the god and the heroes, serve to underline the supernatural element that is so dear to this author (Murray, 1965).



## **Contest of speeches**

Another typical structural component tending to acquire autonomy in Euripides' plays is the "contest of speeches" (*agon logon*), that is to say the use of all possible arguments by both sides, so that each side can prove itself superior and eliminate the other. Logic takes on new dimensions and a new force, reconstructing and assigning a meaning to reasoned likelihood (*eikos*) (Lesky, A. 1987).

According to Romilly (1997) the heroes strive to display such an eloquence so as to persuade in every way, to move and to make the greatest possible impression, in many cases even to save their lives. The greater the heroes' anxiety, the more arguments they find and the more they try to persuade. Thus speeches, that would sound dry if encountered outside the context of myth, acquire a tragic grandeur when attended by the anguish and the terror of a specific dramatic scene.

In other cases arguments become more intellectual and are elevated to the status of general views or ideas. A person's need to lift his personal experience into the sphere of the general, finds expression in further bursts of passion which serve to render that experience comprehensible to others (the chorus, the audience). Euripides was always interested in the evolution of human behavior and above all the development of the people of his own age. The indirect mode of reference to the contemporary issues of the time through speeches, and so less immediately personal, had precisely the effect of activating both the emotions and the critical faculties of his audience and of people of his era.

## **Messenger's speech**

The messenger's speech (*aggeliki risi*) is another of the basic elements of tragedy that acquired an autonomous dimension in Euripides' plays. The messenger always gives a vivid portrayal of the

events which take place offstage. In the messenger's speech there are constant variations in tension, continual mood changes and fluctuations in stress until the drama is finally brought to a climax. The language is simple and clear, and in fact very similar to everyday speech. In the messenger's speech, as in dialogues, Euripides used informal vocabulary but managed to display people's moral qualities just through the proper positioning of words (Lesky, A. 1987).

He did not adopt Aeschylus' formal and ornate mode of expression but instead he refined the simple, common language of ordinary people. More use is made of descriptive adjectives in lyrical passages, where his writing also tends to become more archaic (he wrote in iambic trimetres and trochaic tetrametres).

### **Choral Passages**

The choral passages are among the most important elements in tragedy. Primitive worship was enacted through bodily movement ("*orchisi*" or dancing) to the point of ecstasy. The practice survived in the form of Dionysian festivals, reaching its peak in tragedy. The tragic chorus has its own special function and along with the roles in the episodes, constitutes the very essence of ancient drama. The chorus imitates – but not in the way that the actors imitate. In general it represents a collective entity communicating the feelings of the audience. The audience, in turn, represents the community as a whole. According to Aristotle the chorus "*poietai tin mimisin en rythmo kai logo kai armonia*", meaning that it moulds the words, rhythm and melody into orchestral schemes. The way in which these three elements were to be combined was up to each of the three great tragic playwrights to discover and to experiment with (Lignadis, T. 1988).

In their works the chorus is present warning, advising, judging or sympathizing with the heroes. It usually does not get involved in the action. Quite often it is not on the same level of the stage as the actors. The chorus serves as a bridge between the audience and the

heroes. Through its reactions the spectators are connected to the actions of the *dramatis personae*.

The choral parts occupy an important place in the plays of Euripides, notwithstanding the fact that some have accused him of reducing their length and downgrading the chorus as a dramatic instrument. According to Frangoulis (2004), the role of the chorus in Euripides' plays is to express the emotions, passions and tempests of the human soul, employing the body more than the mind and speech.

The involvement of the chorus in the action varies in Euripides' plays and is generally determined by the circumstances in each play. The emotional burden of a scene is often transmitted to the following choral part (Lesky, A. 1987).

In other cases choral parts are independent from tragic action; they are descriptive or narrative, or draw their subject from the lyric realm of myths (Romilly, 1997). This happens when misfortunes – which are a characteristic of Euripides' plays - become unbearable even for the tragic heroes; at this point a choral interlude intervenes to relieve the harshness of the heroes' misfortunes and the stage reality. It is a dreamlike contrast to the suffering necessary in the world of Euripides, even if it only serves to emphasize the suffering to which the chorus itself is also condemned, such that it needs to seek refuge in the transcendental. What spontaneously emerges is therefore the secret wish of the human soul to be someplace else and also the sense of unfulfilled desire that accompanies humanity through the centuries. This management of the choral parts is regarded as the greatest of Euripides innovative modifications to the structure of the Greek tragedy (Romilly, 1997).

In any case, his choral parts, with their music, mimesis and overflowing emotion, are admirable in themselves. They are above all vehicles for their author's sensibility and for his attitude towards people and the world.

## **The divine element**

Euripides' age was marked by a generalized conflict of ideas, primarily focused on religion. Most Greeks were god-fearing people: some for practical reasons – i.e. because their experience told them that a critical mind is of no use in everyday life - others out of superstition, to which most were prone because it is rare for a person to be strong-minded enough to face the fear of the unknown, which leads defenseless souls to despair. Ancient Greek religion had no doctrine. Neither did ethics, which was just a varied assortment of general advice and opinions. Justice, which had been a matter for the family, became a matter for the city. Previously the city-state had recognized no unit smaller than the family. Now the concept of the individual was coming to prominence (Delcourt, 2006). Some new issues were thus arising, relating to people's relationships with each other, God, the city, even themselves.

The three great tragic playwrights helped to create a new, clear value system, in which gods and humans had separate roles. In Sophocles and Aeschylus the main idea was that fate and the gods could destroy the life and future of human beings.

In Aeschylus, the godly element is a stable punitive power exercised by divine judgment. Certain unalterable divine principles are prejudged, violation of which leads to punishment of the guilty person. Evil is present from the beginning of the play, and is unavoidable for the heroes, who are called upon to face, what the audience already knows from the outset and the expected dispensation of divine justice. They are required to confront evil with strength and courage, as Aeschylus' heroes represent the ideals of nobility and excellence.

In Sophocles, the gods have the power to control people's fate, to guide them and to protect them. However, people are free to decide on their responsibilities towards the gods and each other, to make their choices and suffer the consequences, whatever they may be (Georgousopoulos, K. 1992). In Sophocles' plays, too, evil suddenly

shatters people's hopes, producing the inevitable result that is already decided by fate. Continuous changes of fortune test the endurance of the Sophoclean hero. Sophocles' plays contain people of substance with powerful personalities who have the ability to choose their own destiny, but who finally decide to follow what has already been decided for them, thus performing their sacred duty. Duty and morality triumph over free will and personal choice for Sophocles' heroes.

Euripides, on the contrary, questions the traditional ideas of human behavior and religion which were passed down from Aeschylus and Sophocles. He explores human nature, instincts, passions and motives. He wonders about everything, he doubts and questions everything, including the gods' flawlessness and traditional morals (Spandonidis, no date).

In Euripides the divine order does not guarantee that the reversal of fortunes and actions in human life will make sense, and this paves the way for a more personal religion. The conflict is transferred from the environment to people's "inner world", to their very soul, where passion, sense, moral values and destiny battle through the turmoil. The result of these groundbreaking ideas was that Euripides was characterized as an atheist. The truth is that the gods are present in Euripides' plays, but they fail to secure justice in the world. They are able to freely punish those perceived not to honor them sufficiently; they favor whom they like; they take revenge on people; they act according to their impulses (Romilly, J. 1997).

This raises feelings of doubt and insecurity in people's minds. A characteristic excerpt portraying human insecurity in the face of the gods, of divine providence, luck and the relationship between them, is the following (from a choral section of *Helen*, v. 1137-1143): *What is god? What is not god? What lies between man and god? Who on earth, after searching, can claim to have been to the end of that question's tortuous land? For every man can see the god's plans lurching here and*

*there and back again in unexpected and absurd vicissitudes.*  
(Euripides, 412 B.C.)

In conclusion, the gods leave humans exposed to the reversals of fortune, and people react to their misfortunes with violence, intrigue and deception. But, most importantly, they do not passively accept the gods' will. On the contrary, they act and react, driven by deeper motivations, obeying the dictates of their psychology. Divinity, in the form of passion, is brought to earth by the gods in Euripides' plays (Kott, J. 1976).

### **The element of passion**

The element of passion is ever-present in Euripides' plays. In his work it is the person who is brought into focus, as opposed to the family. People stand their ground and demand their rights, marking the transition to a new era, in which both human nature and each person's individual character are closely studied. Euripides is interested in the core of each person's being, not in a notional, theoretical way, but in a more profound way. That is to say, he studies the innermost aspects of the human soul. What emerge are depictions of great personalities such as Medea, Phaedra, Hecuba, etc. Two major conflicts dealt with by Euripides are (i) the conflict between passion and logic (e.g. Dionysus in *The Bacchae* acts and lives by the rules of passion – in the final analysis he *is* passion personified - while Pentheus seems to represent unbending logic) and (ii) the conflict between two passions, each one of which appears as an obsession (e.g. Phaedra loves Hippolytus with an absolute passion; Hippolytus is equally dedicated to a life of asceticism).

This conflict is brought to light mainly through love (*eros*), a perennial theme in Euripides' plays. Love is an all-consuming passion that leads people to go beyond the limits of logic. It is driven by secret subconscious powers and affects even the strongest of dramatic characters, making them weak and incapable of resistance. People

experience these hidden powers as an intrusion into themselves, to which they surrender. Their emotions and moods as a result become unstable; they are subject to continual mysterious change and are prone to luring them into reckless or foolhardy relationships and situations (Romilly, J. 1997).

Euripides was thus the first of the tragedians to explore the realm of what later, by psychologists and above all by psychoanalysts, was to be given the name of the unconscious; that is, the part of the psyche inhabited by latent tendencies, forbidden desires, repressed needs and experiences. Euripides consciously tried to clarify this part of a person's being and to highlight its decisive significance for the human disposition and the resulting human behavior of the powers that lurk there.

In Euripides the effect of these hidden forces extends to the triggering of other passions, or common sentiments and emotions that finally develop into passions, such as anger, vengefulness, hatred, susceptibility to unexpected temptation, despair, the struggle for life, the lust for power and so forth. In this dramatic universe, where emotions go to extremes, people do not avert misfortunes. On the contrary, they enter a vicious circle of hatred and pettiness, and ultimately cause each other harm. This brings to light an only too human side of the characters, distinguishing them from the traditional heroes of tragedy and transforming them into antiheroes.

Euripides' interest in the dark side of human nature and of reality makes him seem like a nihilist. Severe personal criticisms were indeed leveled against him on this account, notably by Aristophanes. But Euripides does not seem to see darkness as the only aspect of life. There are also high-minded persons in his plays, characters who strive for goodness, behave heroically, and transcend the limits of a self-centered existence, acting out of concern for the greater good. Iphigenia and Macaria are two such examples. These characters become aware of the unhappiness in which they find themselves but eventually show the courage required to choose death, to which they

are in any case fated, rather than perpetuate the vicious circle of cruelty and evil. Euripides' subjects certainly focus on the insurmountable difficulties and problems of human life. Nevertheless, there is an element of optimism somewhere in this darkness. People are able to fight, to make their own decisions, to make choices that lead, in one way or another, to a resolution. There are indeed plays by Euripides that have a happy ending.

To conclude, through a study of the structure and content of Euripides' tragedies one observes his endeavor to blend conflicting elements, such as logic and rhetoric on the one hand (contest of speeches), passion and human nature on the other; the divine as opposed to the human; heroism as opposed to humility, destiny (see prologue: "*prooikonomia*") as opposed to free choice, critical thought (the chorus) as opposed to irrational passion (characters), a solution from within as opposed to a solution from outside (*deus ex machina*). One perceives finally that these conflicting structural elements in Euripides' plays are the conflicting powers that operate on the *dramatis personae* of his work, governing the plot and determining the dénouement to each story.

Most importantly, one realizes that these powers exist outside of the drama too, in each person's individual existence, in human interactions and in social behaviors. In Euripides' plays – as in real life – it is the individual who as the protagonist, who is called upon to act in accordance with his own special characteristics, to be aware of his inner tendencies and tensions, to cultivate his judgment, to acquire – through education – socially functional habits and behaviors and eventually manage to feel free in a complex, multi-faceted, often contradictory environment, which is of necessity bounded by the limits of birth and death. The answer lies in each person's choice and creation of a personal system of spiritual and moral values and beliefs so as to be able to face the challenges of life proactively, rather than passively or fatalistically.



### **3. The socio-political context of the writing of *The Bacchae***

Euripides (485-484 B.C.) was born a few years before the momentous victory of the Greeks over the Persians at the naval battle of Salamis. The years of his childhood and youth were a period of cultural flowering and social dynamism. The years that followed this victory saw an extraordinary expansion of the power of Athens, its wealth, its art, and its literature, crowned by the establishment of the democratic city. Themistocles ordered the fortification of the city. The new wall, ten kilometers in length, linked the city to its ports. Triremes were being built at the rate of 23 per year. Athens was filled with a crowd of builders, sailors and carpenters.

A city undergoing such a renaissance was in need of new heroes and new poets. The wealth of mythological material available was a source of inspiration and a paradigm for politicians such as Themistocles, Solon and others. In religious festivals and ceremonies this material was exploited and the exploits of Theseus, Heracles and other heroes of old were extolled, adulation was expressed and a climate of rejoicing and hope was generated. The “City Dionysia”, the “Lenaia”, were elements in this climate, which sought to influence young people in particular and to contribute to the overall development of human resources and the city. The Athenian attitude towards the future was dynamic. There was a prevailing mood of impatient expectation. The dream of Athenians was that their city should become the number one power among all the cities of Greece.

In 477 B.C. with the Delian League, Athens took the reins and was given the opportunity to implement all its views on democracy, the application of which was to really get off the ground with the advent of Pericles (461 B.C.). Pericles was the catalyst in this intellectual and ideological ferment. He was a magnetic personality – he maintained that the human being was the only value on which one could rely. According to Pericles, by upholding – in a city with a

leading role - the convictions of the citizen, one could attain the unattainable.

In this chronological and sociopolitical framework, educators and philosophers such as Anaxagoras, Socrates, Prodicos, Aeschylus, Sophocles and others make their appearance with an inclination to discuss the issues of the day such as religion, ethics, science, the individual, interpersonal problems and the meaning of truth. There is a step-by-step progression from the free scientific inquiry of Ionia to consolidation of the art of sophistry. (Delcourt, M. 2006)

The sophists were upholders of a new teaching technique and a new way of thinking based on the exchange of arguments from two opposing viewpoints. Dialogue sought not to discover the sole objective truth but to strengthen logical thought, persuasion and the ability of the rhetorician to turn even a weak argument into a more powerful one. A new spirit was to prevail, revealing all the potentialities of the human mind: medicine, history, dialectic, comedy, tragedy and – above all – creating new ways of thinking.

The philosophers moreover, with Socrates as a characteristic example, were reflecting on human nature and ways of becoming familiar with the human essence, their ultimate objective being the discovery of the general laws that govern it. They were, in other words, in contrast to the sophists, seeking out an objective truth, to the extent that this was feasible. The philosophical process aimed at generating “beautiful ideas”, and eliciting general perspectives on important subjects such as religion, art, ethics, love, more than at enforcing a particular argument or viewpoint. All these new routes of inquiry and the questioning of the established order of things and of ideas, whether as a starting point for sophistry or for philosophy, were gradually to lead the individual to a sense of insecurity. This occurred because of the reordering of tradition and established values that these new routes required. (Romilly, J. 1997)

At the same time the accumulation of wealth and the concentration of power in Athens were beginning to lead to a situation

of mismanagement both of the alliance's treasury – which had been transferred to Athens in 453 B.C. – and of sociopolitical institutions. In 453 B.C., in an attempt to preserve existing gains, Pericles was so imprudent as to declare that the Athenians should impose a check on the growing power of the Lacedaimonians. This declaration was the fortuitous starting point for the events leading to the war that was to break out not long afterwards (the Peloponnesian War: 431-404 B.C.). The following series of incidents heightened the tension and finally triggered an outbreak of hostilities between the two cities Athens and Sparta: a policy of force in the question of Megara, a display of indifference regarding the human element, the emergence of negative traits in human behavior such as rage, blind ambition, corruption and arrogance on the part of Pericles.

This tension had visible repercussions on the internal functioning of the institutions of the city of Athens. Athens had been renowned, until then, for the respect it showed petitioners, its loyal adherence to peace treaties and above all the freedom of speech that was accorded to its citizens. This did not prevent Anaxagoras – whose views were contrary to those of the majority – from being put on trial at this time for impiety and ultimately exiled after Pericles succeeded in rescuing him from execution.

The situation that sparked the war was the preparation of the Peloponnesians and Boeotians, in view of the ripening of the harvest, to invade Attica with 60,000 hoplites and plunder the fields. Pericles ordered the evacuation of the surrounding towns and villages that were not sufficiently fortified, and this population was transferred inside the walls of Athens. Before thirty days had passed, Athens experienced a scourge of plague, which lasted two and a half years. During this period of time, Pericles was to die, without leaving any successor to continue his policies.

Athens entered an irrevocable course of decline, decay, loss of control and ruin. It was in this inauspicious climate that Euripides wrote most of his tragedies, some of which include comments on the

then current issues of the war, while others which written in a style more distanced from the events attempted to restore the lofty ideals and concepts that had been established and propagated by the Athenians. Euripides endeavored in this way to provide support to his fellow citizens, instilling in them the energy, courage and conviction necessary for to restore Athens to its former glory. The ideology collapse and the consequent conversion of Athens into a city in the grip of inflexible legalism, the city's betrayal by Alcibiades, Euripides' advanced age – he was approaching seventy – were all contributing factors to his decision to accept an invitation from Archelaos, king of Macedonia, to desert Athens and go into exile.

Macedonia had come to be actively involved in the internal affairs of Greece. Both the Athenians and the Spartans had seen their forces greatly depleted by the war, though Sparta had emerged the victor in 404 B.C. By then the relations between the other Peloponnesian cities were becoming similarly problematic, given that they too were intent on securing their individual share of the plunder. Conditions were ripe for those who were determined to move towards the north and the epicenter of the Hellenic world.

Archelaos had been quick to grasp the challenge and had decided to make Macedonia a country capable of realizing grandiose plans. He began, even before the war had finished, to invite the great personalities of Greece to impart their knowledge and wisdom to his own rising city. Among them were Sophocles, Socrates and Euripides, of whom the only one to accept the invitation was Euripides. Euripides had always been attracted by Northern Greece, and particularly now that Macedonia was reshaping the structures of its city as it was a challenge both intellectually and culturally. It is true that this flight from Athens is something that has preoccupied many of Euripides' biographers and has been regarded by some as unjustified. Nevertheless, above and beyond Euripides' personal interest in Macedonia, another factor contributing to his flight was the consideration that he could offer his services to Athens without living

in that city, the Attic spirit and its policy against its allies probably needed ambassadors (Delcourt, M. 2006).

According to Goossens cited in Meunier, (1968), Euripides' move from Athens and his sojourn to a semi-civilized region which was so new for him and so full of promise seemed to have the best possible influence on his talent. Truly, Euripides' interest in persons as crude as Archelaos – who had taken over the kingship by arranging the murder of his predecessor – stimulated his exploration into the darker areas of the soul and of human character.

In Macedonia, at the festivities established by Archelaos, Euripides wrote and presented his work "Archelaos". In this work, although few fragments are saved, seemed to appear the first signs of the writer's preoccupation with violent emotions and extreme behavior, subjects that were to be developed extensively in *The Bacchae*.

Under these new conditions Euripides, possessed of a deep spiritual calm and freed from ties to Athens and the prevailing tension of the recent years, began to enjoy experiencing the elements of nature and human communication. Moreover, he found the opportunity to relax from the burden of endless contemplation and appreciate the mere logical processing of sensory experience.

### **The Bacchae in Euripides' dramatic work**

In 406 B.C., following the composition of his tragedy "Iphigenia in Aulis", Euripides wrote his swansong, *The Bacchae*. The paradox is that while the geophysical and sociopolitical context of Macedonia made the creation of *The Bacchae* possible, what the writer actually wished to say did not concern the Macedonian public but was aimed at the Athenian public, for two reasons: for a start the predominance of the physical element and of natural imagery that are to be seen in *The Bacchae* was something familiar, and certainly not innovatory, for the people of Northern Greece. By contrast for the Athenians, who had already clearly become distanced from the physical environment, and even from their own human nature, it would be meaningful to circulate this imagery of Euripides. They could quite possibly be guided to rectification and, at a number of different levels, to once again finding their proper bearings.

Secondly, the ideas contained between the lines, in the text as such, were incomprehensible and intellectually inaccessible to the Macedonian public, who throughout this period never came near to attaining the requisite intellectual level for the comprehension of sublime meanings of this kind. The Athenians, by contrast, had for years possessed this capacity. They had cultivated it and broadened its range, so that they were able to recognize and to benefit from the conceptions and the admonitions this work contained.

Euripides certainly believed that these new characteristics of Athenian citizens, their loss of faith, their moral disarray, the obstinacy and practical incompetence of the rulers, the perverted conceptions of justice, the fanatical pursuit of gain, the polarization of opinion around two extremes, the very fact of perennial involvement in war, were something that necessitated ideological intervention. Euripides had always been against the rule of the mob, in the sense of the popular mass that takes its lead uncritically from established power. A power that, at the time in question, had become so blind and

brutal that it no longer had the magnanimity of strength or the vanity of an absolutist political stance. Considering itself equivalent to the gods, the political leadership exercised power for power's sake and not for the sake of the proper functioning of the municipality.

Euripides' endeavors always focused on the task of illuminating heroic and great figures through his works, raising the morale of the public, showing the way to spiritual grandeur even in the midst of suffering. The grandeur of the human, which springs from feelings and from simplicity and takes the form both of acts of compassion and of the normal co-operative functioning of the societal group, was often encountered by Euripides in the ordinary farmer. This is due to the fact that the farmer was neither rich nor poor and worked with his own hands; his home was in the majestic mountains and not in the streets of the city (Murray, G. 1965).

Thus, although the tragedy was born and flourished in an urban environment, its origins are in none other than the spontaneous, unaffected rituals of the appeasement of nature that were conducted in the woods and the mountains, far away from the civilized urban context. In the same way, the Athenian citizen is called upon by Euripides – in *The Bacchae* – to free himself from the rigidity of the prevailing urban/bourgeois logic and rediscover his origins. It was the time for the Athenian to seek for the dual character of the physical element, inside and outside of himself, the natural environment and the innate physical energy of human instinct.

Corresponding to Euripides' critical stance towards the socio-political context, we observe a similar stance towards the religious establishment. As previously indicated, throughout the play, Euripides maintains a stance of questioning the divine element. He attributes to it characteristics of domination and power, but at the same time traits of instability which in no way safeguard a just order of things for human beings.

In *The Bacchae* Euripides introduces the religious cult of Dionysus, a god not among the twelve gods of Olympus, despite his

descent from Zeus. He thus focuses the spotlight on a hierarchically “lesser” god, with whom he associates mysterious and ceremonial characteristics, qualities originating in the realm of nature and wildlife and in this way emphasizes the significance of nature. Identification of the god with the elements of nature goes beyond symbolism, at many points in the play going so far as to condition the dramaturgical development and the plot. In *The Bacchae* we become spectators to the most unpredictable of natural events: the earthquake (lines 594-603 in the original), which is triggered purely by the power of Dionysus. The earthquake clearly highlights Euripides’ intention of addressing the dual character of nature: there is an earth tremor and a fissure in the ground at Thebes, but at the same time the tremor and the fissures that Pentheus experiences within himself are precisely what the scenic action accelerates, heightening its intensity.

The demonization and emphasis on the omnipotence of Dionysus that is to be seen in *The Bacchae* led a number of students of the work of Euripides – notably Müller, Sandys, Paley – to conclude that the author underwent a spiritual reversal at the end of his life and had turned towards acceptance of, and respect for the gods. (Dodds, E. R. 2004)

Wilamowitz, Bruhn, Decharme Weil, Norwood and Verrall opposed to the theory of recantation a theory of antithesis, arguing that not only did Euripides not undergo that aforementioned reversal but that in *The Bacchae* his aversion to religion is even intensified. They characteristically summarized the moral of the play in the phrase: “how much evil is the outcome of religion”. (Dodds, E. R. 2004),

Dodds, E. R. (2004), to conclude, maintains that a closer examination of the work of Euripides shows that the sympathy and understanding that the author expresses in *The Bacchae* for the orgiastic cult of Dionysus, pre-exist in his work in embryonic form and that in that particular play they merely find their most comprehensive expression.



Euripides does not present Dionysus as an incarnation of evil, a demon. After all he has Pentheus opposing him, having assigned to Pentheus the characteristics of a typical tyrant of tragedy. With Dionysus representing the justice of nature and Pentheus the justice of humans, we may conclude that the message of Euripides in *The Bacchae* was that the Dionysian experience could be a source of spiritual strength and good fortune. However, those who go against it, turn its strength into a force for disintegration and ruin, a blind natural force that sweeps away the innocent along with the guilty. In conclusion, in human justice there is room for mercy. In the justice of nature there is no such thing. (Dodds, E. R. 2004)

My own view of Euripides' attitude to, and handling of, the divine element, approximates that of Dodds' analysis. Euripides' stance towards the gods' work truly presents more elements of consistency and development than contradictions and reversals. The idea of the gods' inadequacy as guarantors of a just order for humans is met with in the author's early works. This inadequacy is largely explicable in terms of gods' unpredictable and often unjustifiable behavior. In the author's swansong, this idea is transformed into the inability of men themselves to institute an order of justice. Humans are charged with a flagrant incapacity to approach, understand or respect the dual nature of the physical world. Nature in its twin manifestations – inner and outer – as this preoccupied Euripides in *The Bacchae*, is turned into symbol: on the one hand through Dionysus – the force of nature, on the other through Pentheus – frail, unexplored, uncultivated human nature.

In conclusion, observing on the one hand a Dionysus with a capacity both for regeneration and destruction and on the other a Pentheus negatively disposed towards anything strange and unfamiliar, we have difficulties concluding that Euripides favors either blind submission to the divine or total aversion to it.

At this point it is important to emphasize that the role of the chorus in *The Bacchae* is decisive. It is an important subject which I

analyze separately. Here I just mention that it is the first time in tragedy that the chorus acquires such a powerful voice, elaborating how divine experience is lived. From this point of view, I feel that the chorus in *The Bacchae* is in fact the part that is missing from Pentheus, - that part which presents balance between logic and emotions- the addition of which would make him into a whole person, who would deserve a sympathetic god, not a punitive avenging one.

#### **4. History of Ancient Greek Tragedy Acting**

As already stated the ancient tragedy, as a theatrical form fulfilled the needs of a specific era and a specific socio-cultural group who expressed both themselves and their views through this medium. The ancient tragedy has always been associated with the diversity of opinion between the three ancient writers: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and indeed with the perennial nature of themes of their work.

Interpreting the ancient tragedy in the context of new eras sets its representation against a new set of particular social circumstances. However, since the ancient tragedy functions within specific boundaries of form, it is of crucial importance to understand this form in order to be able to restructure it and then allow it to function once again.

One key way to comprehend the evolution of ancient drama, I would argue, is to investigate how stage directors and the creative movements of each era approached ancient tragedy. Hence, the main focus of this chapter will be to research the innovations that have contributed to this field up until the present day.

Following long years of silence, the ancient drama made a tentative come-back to Greek territory, during the period of the Ottoman occupation (about 1453 to 1821). This particular historical period was not conducive to the attainment of cultural expression; however there were occasional attempts to enact ancient plays. Uncorroborated information reveals that one such performance of ancient drama took place in 1571 in Zakynthos. It was performed by respectable young members of the island who recited and performed an Italian adaptation of *The Persians* by Aeschylus. Their objective was to draw parallels between the then recent victory of the Greeks against the Ottomans, with the Greek victory against the Persians in the naval battle of Salamina (480 B.C). In this way they wanted to

emphasize the continuity of their Byzantine ancestry (as they themselves advocated) from the ancient world.

During the same period more performances occurred in the semi-autonomous states of the Ottoman Empire of the Danube region, mainly by teachers and students of the Greek schools (in Katharevousa which was the official written language of the period). Their aim was to preserve the tenacious bond of the nation with its glorious past. In 1818 the first methodically researched performance of ancient drama was an adaptation of Sophocles' *The Philoctetes*, by N. Pikkolou. It was enacted in Odessa by students in order to '*warm the breast of the colonies in order to resurrect the homeland*' as successfully indicated by A. Korais. (Mavromoustakos, P. 1997)

It is apparent that until the Greek liberation of 1821 the expression of the ancient Greek drama performance was closely related to the conditions of creativity and development of the Greek state.

Throughout the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the need for the revival of Greek drama became more profound mainly for academic reasons. The University of Athens with its faculty lecturer of philology George Mistriotis, and his perseverance regarding the return of the Ancient Greek language, attempted some amateur performances in the original version, however they did not receive a good response from the audience. In 1895 he founded a company which was in favor of acting in Ancient Greek, in order to preserve the features of ancestry and to advance the national entity. In reality however his ostentations and the satisfaction of his own personal interests eclipsed the company. (Sideris, G. 1976)

It was only from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the term stage director appeared in Greek theatrical practice, and this fact resulted in the creation of new terms in theatrical stage practice. The pioneer of this enterprise was Konstantinos Christomanos (1867-1911) and also Thomas Economou (1864-1927), the former with the creation of the *New Stage* theatre and the latter with *Royal Theatre*.

Thomas Economou had lived in Vienna for many years where he had been influenced by the philosophy of Duke of Saxe Meiningen and had performed in the Austrian theatre. In 1903 he was to direct *Oresteia* by Aeschylus in the everyday Greek spoken language of that time, known as demotic dialect (the language issue became a major socio-political affair). This production provoked bloody episodes, known as the *Oresteia episodes*, which were carried out by furious students – incited by G. Mistriotis - who did not hold with the translation of Ancient Greek plays. Contributing to the students' fury was the fact that the translator of the work, Sotiriadis, had used a bad German publication of the text as the original. Generally, T. Economou preferred translations from foreign adaptations and ready-to-hand European music, using the theatrical practices which had been established by the Italian stage and the classical French tragedy. In other words he split the Greek tragedy into acts, he directed for closed spaces, he used musical orchestras, he sought impressive stage costumes made overseas and he almost completely eliminated the chorus.

The emergent Greek state still had a strong need for a link to its past and its roots; though it was no official proposal for the stage performance of the ancient drama. However, T. Economou's choice to translate the tragedy into the everyday demotic dialect (which was not the official language of the new state), automatically became a new proposal in stage direction. He continued his work (at the Royal Theatre which later became the National Theatre), starting a directing tradition which was both conservative and academic and still not in the position to progress to drastic solutions concerning ancient drama.

Konstantinos Christomanos, also having lived himself in Vienna, was influenced by the *Theatre Libre* of A. Antoine, by Otto Brahm and by the movement of symbolism. As the founder of the *New Stage* theatre he approached ancient drama through the living Greek traditions. For him, each performance was a new and important

creation and not a mimesis of the past. He said: ‘... *I do not ask that we construct the Parthenon once again.... Each culmination of culture is the Parthenon*’. (Sideris, G. 1976: p. 180)

In 1901 he staged the *Alcestis* in demotic dialect (this time without a reaction); following the naturalistic style of his time and focusing particularly on the minor realistic details of the performance, in this way the visual appearance of the performance at certain points dominated the essence of the text. He was also to stage *Antigone* separating it into acts, undertaking the translation himself as with the other tragedies. Moreover he used professional actors, original music and a natural setting. He gave particular importance to the actor’s interpretation (avoiding acting exaggeration) as well as to the performance of the choral leaders.

The *New Stage* and the *Royal Theatre* were to close, mainly due to economic reasons and their place was taken by the *National Theatre* in 1932. The management position was to be filled by Fotos Politis, a talented stage director who was extensively involved in ancient drama and the theatre in general. In fact he was the first to truly define the term ‘*stage director*’ in Greece. He initiated a new era in which ancient theatre became the focus of attention for theatre people, both for its own unique structure and also the significance of the meanings it encompassed. In this way, for the first time, the transference of ancient drama to the contemporary stage was addressed.

The first production by Fotos Politis was *Agamemnon* in 1932. Also staged were *Oedipus the King* (1919, 1925, 1933), *Hecuba* (1927), *The Persians* (1934). Influenced by German expressionism and Max Reinhardt, he searched for those Greek elements which established a correlation with the past and the grandeur of the performances of ancient drama. He preferred Greek demotic dialect in his translations, giving particular emphasis to the acting of the tragic speech (he worked with the best actors of the era such as A. Veakis, A. Minotis, K. Paxinou, E. Papadaki). He also proposed solutions for the performance of tragedy in closed spaces, he used contemporary music

by Greek composers and he adventurously handled the issue of the chorus as much at the level of acting as at a notional level. He stressed that the chorus should not be danced following the traditional folk rhythms as they could not fulfill the tragic or lyrical tone of the choral part.

Politis was also inspired by Max Reinhardt, who influenced all European countries, and who founded a reputation based on the interpretation of ancient drama and in particular his handling of the chorus. Reinhardt retained the element of chorus in the ancient tragedy however simultaneously invented the idea of a parallel chorus-crowd which consisted of around one hundred to five hundred people. This large mass of people was scattered around the theatre space and created an acoustic effect which made the spectator feel intensely emotionally bound to the unfolding events. In this way the protagonist of the performance was not the hero of the play, but in fact the chorus of people. Politis was to adopt this idea of the chorus-crowd in order to creating a common feeling of the dramatic. However, he also differentiated it saying: *'The handling of the crowd as one body would be repellent to a Greek citizen of the ancient democracy. [...] in order to give the idea of a unified conscience I introduced into the chorus a group declamation which is sometimes at the beginning sometimes in the middle and sometimes at the end of every choral part. At these specific points of the text this recitation becomes a collective struggle ... Besides, I divided the speech into many choral leaders in such a way that although they are united under a common feeling each actor also appears individually. ... Separate expression comes from every single actor and from every single leader of the chorus. It is neither a simultaneous declamation nor a simultaneous dance'*. (Puchner, W. 1984: p. 58)

It is worth mentioning that for Reinhardt the ancient tragedy aimed to accomplish a continuous transformation and the creation of a feeling of 'play' through the extensive use of technology. By means of contrast, Politis (and his predecessors) looked for answers in the text

itself, following the author word for word, and considered any deviations from the text improper. Being Greek they felt obliged to adhere to the ancient Greek tradition, it was this fact which did not easily permit them to undertake a freer interpretation of past readings.

Reminiscence of the past, and the origins of glorified ancestry, was reinforced with the *Delphi Festivals* which were organized in 1927 and 1930 by the poet Angelos Sikelianos and his wife Eva Palmer at Delphi. The couple shared an unrelenting interest in the revival of Greek antiquity and made an immense contribution to this cause. In 1927 they presented *Prometheus Bound* and in 1930 *Iketides*. The stage direction as well as the choreography was undertaken by Palmer, and also the weaving of the costumes for the dance. She persistently studied the figures on Ancient Greek vessels, sculptures, folk dances and traditional songs, elements of which were included in her stage direction. More specifically the dance movements of the chorus imitated the postures of the sculptures of the 6<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> century, where the head and the legs are in profile and the chest en face. She chose to make the dancer an animated image of the red figures from ancient vessels. She copied many of the stances and linked them together with a simple walk, which had either a light bouncing rhythm (called *balos* which originates from the Greek island dances) or a slower steadier rhythm (called *syrtos* which originates from the mainland dances). In this way she aimed to ensure that each verse of the text was accompanied by a movement of the chorus. She maintained that through '*the chorus meaning, passion and action are expressed. So, the combination of music, speech and chorus should be expressed as the creative will of one being*'. (Palmer, E. 1997: p. 254) She was the first to raise the chorus of the ancient drama to the status of independent protagonist of the tragedy. She adopted the Byzantine notated music to replace the prosody of ancient Greek music, as they were both based on the punctuation and the meaning of the words.



The critics of the time, regarding the two performances, referred to the superb natural environment of Delphi as being an advantage to the performance, as well as the dance of the slender bodied women who complemented the harmony of the setting. However, there was also negative criticism which described the dance poses as a flat, empty and inappropriate imitation of the movements depicted on ancient vessels. Also, the misuse of the Greek demotic dialect as “an instrument of communism”, and the fact that access to Delphi was difficult for the general public tarnished the vision of Sikelianos. In any case, the experimental event at Delphi was important, as the ancient open theatres once again started to attract an audience. In this way the issue of the staging of ancient drama once again emerged, this time in open spaces, which was to be only a good influence on later developments. (Walton, M. 2007)

One case which deserves our special attention is Linos Karzis, the stage director of the Thymelikos Theatrical Company, who proposed the preservation of the authentic language of the ancient drama and its characteristics, an extension of Palmer’s idea. He was a fanatical devotee of the ancient ritualistic approach to the ancient tragedy. His dedication to its revival offered some solutions to the issue of stage performance. As the critic K. Georgousopoulos was to write ‘*in The Persians in 1975, the song of Xerxes in the Exodus ... by singing in ancient Greek the kommos together with the chorus... it leads us revealingly to the root of the problem of ancient drama*’. (Georgousopoulos, K. 1990: p. 70)

As mentioned above, the ancient drama exhibits exceptionality as regards its structural composition. An analysis of this form could be carried out either through the material contained in these plays, or in the *Poetics* by Aristotle, or through the architectural data of the same ancient theatres. According to the researcher Lignadis T. (1985: p. 193) ‘*the theatrical form which interests us is served by two groups of actors: one imitates the acts of the myth and the other dances and sings*’. This means that although we do not have much information

regarding how the ancient actors danced and sang, we do know, however, that they danced and sang. We also know that they performed 'dramatis personae', meaning they imitated roles. At the same time the chorus worked as a united group standing opposite the ensemble of three actors. The synthesis of the above elements is that which has always and still preoccupies each and every stage director.

The above issue had not yet been explored sufficiently. In fact, what was to bring about developments in the performances of ancient drama during the first thirty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was more closely related to the appearance of new demands along with the diversification of the terms in theatrical practice after a series of substantial innovations in the field of the tragedy and its form.

At this point it is important to mention an organization called the *European Cultural Centre of Delphi*, which was founded in 1964 in order to advance understanding of ancient civilization. The first four symposiums which took place there (1981, 1984, 1985, and 1986) were seminal because theatre artists, stage directors and theorists met in order to discuss the problems associated with contemporary performances of ancient plays by giving talks, seminars and workshops (G. Steiner, Oliver Taplin, Bob Wilson, E. Barba and others). The European Cultural Centre of Delphi continues to operate successfully to this day. We thus observe that the interest of the modern world in ancient drama was concurrent and profound in all countries of Europe and in particular, Germany. (Walton, M. 2007)

During the last forty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the situation in Greece changed: better organization secured steady progress and for the first time schools of acting and directing traditions were created. Under these new conditions three companies prevailed: the *National Theatre* with stage direction by Alexis Minotis, the *Peiraios Theatre* with Dimitris Rontiris as stage director and the *Theatro Technis* with Karolos Koun.

## Dimitris Rontiris (1899-1981)<sup>1</sup>

Rontiris was committed with devotion and discipline to the stage interpretation of ancient drama. He insisted on the performance of ancient drama in open theatres, he inaugurated the Theatre of *Herod Atticus*, the *Theatre of Epidavros* (the first time in A.C) with *Electra* by Sophocles in 1938 as well as the Epidavros Festival with *Hippolytus* in 1937. He staged the following tragedies: *Electra* (1936), *Hippolytos* (1937), *The Persians* (1939), *Orestes* (1949), *Medea* (1961), *Iphigenia at Aulis* (1968) numerous times in order to perfect them. Rontiris advocated that the theatre spoke an international language and for this reason his stage direction was a varied collection, incorporating different artistic movements with a particular influence from Reinhardt, German impressionism and baroque.

His basic concern was to convey the tragic and divine element of the ancient texts, which determined the experience of the ancient spectator in relation to the classical masterpieces. The experience of these emotions was fulfilled not through the historical context of the ancient era but through the social-centered opinions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which placed an emphasis on group activities. In this way, *the*

---

<sup>1</sup> Great stage director, actor and teacher of the dramatic arts. He studied in the drama school of the Athens Conservatory of (1919) with T. Ekonomou as a teacher, and as an actor took part in numerous performances (accompanied by M. Kotopoulos, stage direction by F. Politis et al.) distinguishing himself for his great talent. He left as a graduate of the Academy of Athens for theatrical studies in Austria and Germany having as a teacher to the great stage director M. Reinhardt. In 1932 F. Politis asked Rontiris to undertake the position of assistant stage director in the National Theatre. After the death of Politis in (1934) Rontiris was appointed the only stage director of the National Theatre until 1942 when it closed due to the German occupation. He undertook the duty once again in 1946 until 1955 when he was dismissed. In 1957 he founded the *Peiraiikos syndesmos Theatre* (the municipal theatre of Piraeus) and toured , performing ancient drama in the ancient theatres of Greece and abroad. He directed more than 150 classic works and newer repertoires; however his great love was ancient drama to which he was completely committed.

[(1999) *The theatrical approach of ancient Greek drama by Dimitris Rontiris*. Symposium works, book exhibition gallery, Athens, Kastaniotis]

*tragic experience* focused on the element of speech and also on the hero's changing emotions deriving from the internal turmoil which was provoked.

For Rontiris, the text was a way of conveying the poetic speech of the author and required perfect articulation, for this reason the performance was a reverent musical score above which he wrote the phonemes, rhythmic syllables, pauses, punctuation, tonality, intonation and sound. For him sound was an autonomous dramatic element which could be exploited in the changes of the emotions and also as a medium for exploring the musical relation between speech and the human voice. Furthermore, he gave great importance to words and their interpretation. All of the punctuation marks along with the syntax and grammar of the text was important for the acting.

He was involved in the pursuit of how the actor could express feeling through the musical use of speech. He himself said: *'The Greek tragedy has all the characteristics of a musical composition; we strive to convey this musicality. The diversity of rhythms in our interpretation and in particular in the chorus is nothing else but an attempt to reciprocate the variety of rhythms involved in ancient drama and which is proportional to the variety of human emotions.'* (Rontiris, D. 1967: p. 12) In order to achieve this rhythm he drew elements from Greek and Byzantine tradition. The single voiced Greek folk songs and the Greek dances gave him a multitude of material as well as the sacraments of the Blessed Deities.

Rontiris adopted the step pattern of the Greek traditional dances, imitating the movements. Emulating images from compositions on the vessels of the ancient era, body positions from the ancient Greek statues, hand movements which were open in a plea or a prayer to God (also elements in the Christian religion) he adopted a sufficiently stylized, classic manner and strictly formalized acting style.

Rontiris used coded movements for the actors who were acting the roles while the chorus was always performed in configuration. In

the beginning the choral part was rhythmically recited simultaneously by each and every actor and their movements were carefully configured. However, in the staging of *Medea* (1961) we note that Rontiris chose to make the chorus sing and dance instead. He argued against the use of the German system of “sprech chor” (speaking chorus), preferring to adopt the rhythm and melody of traditional songs. He himself maintained: *‘It is indisputable that the chorus of Greek tragedies was sung and danced. Our chorus is recited rhythmically and sung accompanied by a suitable musical instrument. The chorus follows the changing emotions as indicated by the ancient writer. There are moments where the speech passes from declamation to musical and emotional expression ... the movements of the chorus approach a dance’.* (Rontiris, D. 1967: p. 12) Consequently, the stage director had a very close collaboration with the musician and the choreographer.

Acting the tragedy demanded that actors possessed an expressive capacity, good voice technique and strong acting potential (for this reason he made them undertake strenuous physical exercise and also a disciplined system for the spoken word which he himself invented). Actors, who could at any given moment, contend with the stature of the tragic characters of the plays, not with realism, but with existential experience and a full sense of life and the destiny of man. In this same way the heroes of the ancient dramas were regarded as characters who upheld their views with warm and existential agony. Rontiris believed that the tragedy was the poetic medium which touched on the quintessence of human existence and he approached it in this way.

Alexis Minotis (1898-1990)<sup>2</sup>

Minoti's interpretational approach to ancient drama was condensed in the book '*Experimental theatrical education*' and in the autobiographical section of the book '*The actor Alexis Minotis*', and in his text '*Ancient drama and its revival*' in which references are made to his views on stage direction and philosophy. He maintained that the open air theatre was most suitable for the performance of ancient drama. Moreover, he adopted the demotic dialect which he considered to be an extension of Ancient Greek and used naturalistic and expressionistic elements in his direction. For him the most important issue, regarding acting, was for the actors to base themselves on '*the strength of genuine intuition when trying to interpret ancient tragedy... the noblest form of theatre...as the expression of a tragic feeling of life is able to be conveyed by complete artistic emotion*'. (Minotis, A. 1988 cited by Walton, M. 2007: p. 403)

According to Minotis actors should perform based on their own emotions and their natural pitch of voice, however, slightly raised in tone and acting exaggeration and also with sufficient musicality in order to interpret the verse of the tragic speech. Since, the tragedy is the fate of a person and the pursuit of self-knowledge. The person

---

<sup>2</sup> Minotis never undertook academic education, nevertheless he read avidly and extensively throughout the duration of his long career in the theatre as an actor, director and general manager of the National Theatre. This fact combined with his great talent and an outstanding school, which is what the theatre is for an actor, made Minotis a monumental figure in the field of ancient Greek tragedy and the theatre in general. He appeared for the first time on the stage as a leader of the chorus and a messenger in *Oedipus the King* in 1921. He worked closely with important theatre people of his era such as M. Kotopouli, F. Politis, Aim. Veakis, D. Rontiris and etc. Al. Minotis worked for the theatre for over 60 years during which the longest duration he dedicated to ancient theatre. He himself maintained that the acting inspired his stage direction and for this reason it would be difficult for anybody to say what his greatest contribution was whether it was as actor or as stage director.

[(1989) Solomos, A. *Theatre Dictionary* Athens, Kedros]

becomes 'tragic' by voluntarily choosing to seek the truth which inevitably leads to pain. The tragic condition is created when the hero is forced to react to an unseen circumstance which creates a problematic obstacle. Consequently, the object of tragic destiny becomes the tragic protagonist of the myth, combining the dramatic element (the myth) and the lyrical element (the chorus). Structurally, the chorus is the lyrical canvas on which the adventure of the hero is painted. Minotis proposed the division of the chorus presenting each actor as an individual member of the group having the same status as the roles in the play. (Minotis, A. 1987)

The acting style of Minotis, as well as his wife Katina Paxinou who was one of the greatest tragedians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was in itself enough to advance the acting of the tragedy. The crowning glory of his attempts was *Oedipus at Colonus*, a piece which Minotis worked on for 30 years and staged it ten times so that it progressed to its final phase of maturity. Hence, in 1975 the critics agreed that '*Oedipus at Colonus* was one of the greatest moments of acting in Greece. Resulting in a tireless exercise, which took place at Epidavros in a revelatory manner. For the first time this fanatic craftsman of theatre excelled himself reaching the essence of what is the art of acting ... showing how the catharsis is not a literary dispute, but a theatrical ritual'(Georgousopoulos, K. 1982: p. 89).

The greatest contribution that Minotis made to the ancient tragedy is related to the religious aspect. He made the following points regarding the element of the divine. He states that since the period of the tragedy two separate layers of consciousness, Christian and post-Christian, have come into existence defining a religious notion as it was perceived by the era. When the tragedies were written the religious element was based on a sense of fear and awe, this differed substantially from Christianity which was both positive and accessible. This archaic awe encompassed catastrophe which however is converted to an act of salvation and ultimately sacrifice through the noble decision of man to fight even if in the face of defeat. In this way,

the slaughtered pieces of his body become a divine sacrifice and the mythical hero equates to the suffering of a God. The conflict of the two fearsome universal powers (man and God) delivers the tragedy, but it is above all the conflict of the religious ritual including human virtue. It is the equilibrium between Apollo and Dionysus through God. It is the balance between destiny and the will of the divine which represent ethical unwritten codes of behavior (Minotis, A. 1987).

In this way Minotis would agree with C. Malevitsis that: *'the prominence of the ancient tragedy would disclose its metaphysical passing to the divine world'*. (Minotis, 1987: p. 46) He himself was to say: *the tragedy does not have a therapeutic quality but is written in order to acknowledge the conflict of man and the universe... lets distinguish the prominence of the tragic individual as a blazing sign of metaphysical essence, the unique sense of his existence... this sense is his endurance and pride in difficult circumstances... in this way the tragic individual is a chosen tool which manages to overcome the epochal confines of transience... encountering the duration and finally redemption'* (Walton, M. 2007: p. 406).

### Karolos Koun (1908 - 1986)<sup>3</sup>

Karolos Koun was deeply involved in the staging of ancient comedy and Aristophanes, so, his opinions on the ancient drama derive mainly from this. He himself explained: *'The study of*

---

<sup>3</sup> He grew up in Constantinople in a Greek environment with Polish-Jewish influence due to the origins of his father. He studies the Aesthetics (a branch of Philosophy) in the Sorbonne and taught English for eight years at the American College where he staged his first performances (*Ploutos, Frogs, Birds*) with students who would later become distinguished actors. In 1942 he founded the Teatro Technis (Art Theatre), dedicated school of acting in Greece with the aim of rejuvenating theatrical expression. His motto was *we do not do theatre in order to live but in order to enrich ourselves and the audience which follows us*. Teatro Technis succeeded for the first time a performance group with actors and contributors of the same education and style. The result was exemplary performances regarding unified manner and detailed psychological interpretation.

[(2000) *The director's approach to ancient drama of Karolos Koun*. Symposium, Exhibition, Athens]



*Aristophanes betters me, it makes me purer. It is a great blessing for anyone to be relieved of the feeling of guilt, to feel innocent.* (Walton, M. 2007: p. 407) His work in comedy is the reason that his name became widely recognized. The comedy and the tragedy are two types which display basic structural differences as regards the issue of the chorus and also that of the style of the acting. The Attic comedy uses mythological personae and elements from antiquity, satirizing them so that they assert a different approach to contemporary staging. For the exact reason that there are semantic differences between the two types we will only focus on the stage solutions that Koun proposed for the tragedy.

Until now, directors of ancient drama searched for parallels between the historic past and Greek traditions in order to convey to contemporary audiences the essence of the tragedy. They paid attention to the force of the word itself, to the individual sounds making up the spoken word, to the movement of the chorus, and to the music produced either by the human voice or by musical instruments. With this information Koun began his own personal research, also elaborating on other sources. He staged the tragedies of *Alkisti* 1934, *Electra* 1939, *The Persians* 1965, *Oedipus the King* 1969, *The Bacchae* 1977, *Oresteia* 1980 amongst others.

Koun's artistic approach to the ancient drama was described as 'folk expressionism'. The average ordinary individual, his attitude regarding socio-political matters and his quest where important issues that Koun expressed a strong affinity for during the first steps of his career. In the islander, the farmer, the lower income classes, and those trapped in the sudden industrialization of the country, Koun felt that he was at the pulse of the nation. 'Folk expressionism' was exactly this, the aesthetic approach which derived from the civilization and the traditions of the average Greek. These exact elements defined his choice of actor, most of who came from less privileged social classes.

Koun exploited the reality of the city and the countryside and everything within: *'the stones, the earth, the mountains, the seas, the roads, the movement of people, the animals, the night, the light, the sounds... the entirety of pieces which could give material to the authors who wrote in Greece, the gateway between West and East'*. (Walton, M. 2007: p. 408) At the same time he also pursued non-Greek sources, such as the legacy left from the Byzantine years, the traces of the foreign conquests (the Turks, the Venetians, the Franks) western education and finally contemporary Greece within a European, social, political, ethical and philosophical framework.

The fundamental factor which gives meaning to the ancient texts is the chorus. This is what shapes the atmosphere of the play; it illuminates the characters, drives the emotions and projects the messages of the poet. According to Koun, the chorus as protagonist and the mediator of activity to spectators is something which can stimulate the spectator, creating an exaltation which conveys the poetry and the truth of the text. The execution of the poetry of the text is inspired by tradition, modern socio-political reality and also from the contemporary expressive medium of the theatres of today.

The theatre originated in very ancient times from primitive festivals, celebrations and rituals. The tragedy involved, along with a sensual Dionysian magic, an atmosphere of exaltation and a complete passion, capable of enrapturing the spectator with its truths. Truths that have their roots in grand events and grand acts and which take place in a time and place without any constraints. They are inextricably linked to the techniques of articulation, sound and physical expression which therefore acquire a greater stature and volume. The aim is to convey reality, albeit in a symbolic way. Not through psychological changes, but through a variety of rhythms, movements, sounds, musicality and so on. For this reason Koun used the mask in order to hide the limitations of the face and its small sensitivities.

Maya Liberopoulou, member of the Art Theatre group, who took part in the performance of 'Birds' by Aristophanes (historical performance which was banned in 1950) stresses that '*Speech irritated Koun. He waited to see how it would be accomplished from the mouth of one actor to the other. He did not want any exaggeration or refinement of expression. [...] He separated the chorus and shared the speech of the lead actor amongst different actors. Koun perceived the chorus as a stepping stone between the spectators and the actors. The chorus actor is a member of a larger unity, but at the same an individual with a power that allows him to take initiatives. This was expressed through figurative movements which had to be synchronized with the movement of the rest of the chorus. He believed in the sensuality of an actor's body, through which he wanted to achieve the sacredness of the ritual*'. (Walton, M. 2007: p. 410)

The way in which Koun worked with ancient drama was unique. He insisted first on the study of contemporary theatre to provide a realistic and familiar form. When this was accomplished by the actors, he progressed to approach the more 'absurd' elements of ancient drama. He turned to the *Epic theatre* of Brecht and also the *Theatre of the Absurd* by Beckett and Ionesco. Koun, knowing that Brecht was directly influenced by Asia and ancient drama he researched Brecht's theatre for analogies with the ancient tragedy. The detachment, direct contact with the audience and outside opinions of Brecht, pre-existed in ancient texts according to Koun. The *Epic* and the *Absurd* theatre led him to present a man who surpassed the individual internal psychological and emotional changes and came to face the great issues of existence: life-death, love-hate, war, justice-injustice, destiny, fate, the *self* and the *other*.

Nelly Aggelidou, who had also starred in the *Theatro technis*, outlines the profile of the great stage director: '*Koun maintained that the Greek tragedy possesses strong Asian elements. Therefore, he asked us to develop an internal feeling of historical continuity regarding the theatre generally. [...] From the Attic drama until today a man,*

*whenever and if he lived, remains the same, giving us in this way the ability to transfer this ecumenical message regardless of time or conventional measure, so as to create universality'. (Walton, M. 2007: p. 411)*

Koun directed mainly Aeschylus for its rich theatricality and also because he was moved by the way in which this tragedian approached the rules which govern the life of man. The tragedy made Koun examine existential issues and in this way made him take a stance regarding the matter of the myth and its catharsis. *'Catharsis does not exist. The only catharsis is knowledge and it is not the characters or their psychology that interests us, but the myth and the issues that are involved'. (Walton, M. 2007: p. 414)*

#### Theodoros Terzopoulos (decade 1940 - )<sup>4</sup>

The theatre for Terzopoulos is, above all, a matter of physical and ritualistic violence. The passing from one movement to the next, from one gesture to the other, from sound to sound or from rhythm to rhythm, each time comprises a violent change, without psychological consequences or logic. This alternation of movements, rhythms and expressions creates an extreme force and a dense concentration of energy which in turn will lead to actions which are out of the control of the conscious.

This also is the approach that he takes for ancient theatre. He proposes the return to religious fear and the awakening of the

---

<sup>4</sup> He studied theatre in Greece (1965-1967) with K.Mixailidi and later with Hainer Muller in the Berlin Ensemble (1972-1976). In 1981 he became manager of the drama school of the State Theatre of Northern Greece. From 1985 until 1987, he was art director of the international meetings of ancient drama in Delphi. From 1994 he became president of the international board of the Theatre Olympiad. In 1985 he founded his own theatre, *Attis* and from this time he has stages many productions with his group and is also prominent overseas.

[(2000) *Theodoros Terzopoulos and Attis Theatre – retrospection, method, comments* Athens, Agra]

primeval memory within the ritualistic elements of the ancient tragedy. The primeval is recalled by inner commands and primordial needs of the body which are influenced by the *Theatre of Cruelty* of A. Artaud, who refers to the 'power of ancient magic'. The ancient religious rituals, which extended to the ancient tragedy, contain elements of violence which according to Terzopoulos can be revived inside the body.

Terzopoulos' actors, gravitating in a trance like state due to the extreme conditions, try to draw up all of the buried psychosomatic energy and power - through exaltation and frenzy - which existed in the savagery of ancient proceedings and of the 'cavemen', when it was not bound by psychological and idiosyncratic factors. This was achieved by intensive rigorous exercise until the soul left the physical body and was forced by untold pain into ecstasy and immersion in inner recollection. After this point the '*torture of continual movement the body screams its own text*' (McDonald, M. 2000: p. 18).

The ancient drama for Terzopoulos is not about emotions and feelings, but instead rhythmic actions of the body. His stage realization in other words has a start rhythm, which when united with other different rhythms enters the deepest levels of humanity and acquires energy which draws from the world of memory. The breaths, the cries, the pauses, the articulation of words and the rhythm of articulation, the gestures and the tonality do not directly serve the meaning of the text, but instead function as an independent rhythmic system of reactions. Also rhythmic in nature is the intervention of light, color, music and the sound. The music is the one factor which unifies the different elements of the performance. Terzopoulos' performances are musically blended events (dromena) which take shape through the hard work of the actors with their muscles, neurons, voices and bodies. The final form is created through stylized expression and configuration as well as an extremely disciplined theatrical manner.

In this way the individual sense of passion is surpassed and an overall essence of “passion” emerges. The empathy of the spectator is not related to each character, but with the existential importance of the concept of “passion”. This is where catharsis originates.

Terzopoulos looked for his stimuli inside as well as outside of Greece. He reached as much into the traditions of foreign people such as the Japanese, the Indians and the people of Latin America (in particular the Columbians), as he did into the particular moments (religious or otherwise) and particularities of Greek traditions (the ceremony of gunfire in North Greece, ancient remedies in the Temple of Asklipios, lamentations, carnivals).

Terzopoulos himself would describe his method as: *‘My deepest need is the rhythm because I believe that from this the form is born. Rhythm has a logical centre. If you manage to locate this central rhythm in two lines of text, then the rhythm of paragraph and the overall rhythm of the text will be revealed’.* (Terzopoulos, 2000: p. 55) [...] *There are no punctuation marks in the theatre; however there is a temperament below the speech... we search for the work in the seven energy channels of the body. This gives shape to the breathing. [...] Following this rhythm we inactivate the cortex of the brain and the speech is not explanatory it is natural. Many times it is speech-pain.* (Terzopoulos, T. 2000: p. 57) *The speech is the projection of the structure of words, in other words its inner cause... the phrase is revealed through its sound source... I study natural phenomena as sources of energy, nature in its most violent expression. [...] I look for the greatest abstraction, complete minimalism; I search for an image of the fundamental rhythm’* (Terzopoulos, T. 2000: p. 63).

To sum up, the aforementioned stage directors constructed a tradition, at the same time creating acting schools of ancient drama. There were other stage directors and teachers of ancient drama, who also contributed - through sporadic performances - solutions to the presentation of the ancient Greek drama, but who did not create

schools. These include Alexis Solomos, Spiros Evangelatos, Lydia Koniordou amongst others.

## **Evaluation of the Greek directors**

In this part of the thesis I will make an evaluation of the work of the abovementioned Greek directors emphasizing on the innovations they presented and comparing their methods. I will reproduce a vital question from G. Steiner in his book *Antigonis* (1986), '*why is it that a handful of ancient Greek myths continue to dominate and influence our perception of man and the world in such a great extent?*' (Steiner, G. 1986 cited by Patsalidis, S. 1997: p. 26)

The total preoccupation of stage directors, translators and actors as well as academics and dramatists with the phenomenon of ancient Greek drama is beyond question. No other type of theatre (with the exception of Shakespearean theatre) has been analyzed, adapted and studied as much as ancient drama. From the moment of its come-back and during its prominence over the past 100 years, there has never been such an intensive re-approach and this has led to a wealth of performances and adaptations as well as solutions regarding meaning and structure amongst others.

On Greek territory the aforementioned stage directors tried honorably and tenaciously to give form to their ideas *for the sake of man and the world* taking into consideration the variety of ideologies, aesthetic and mainly historical circumstances which influenced our civilization. Many elements were determined by the 400 years of occupation, the invasion of different conquerors and the redefinition of the elements of the Greek nation, until the entrance of humanism (which broadened our perception to a world-wide scale) and today's intercultural framework of the performances. All of the issues of the ancient drama were placed under examination: the structural characteristics such as the chorus, actors, music, movements, masks and their use, the interpretational approach (religious, psychoanalytical, existential or other some approach) the translation, the meaning of catharsis, the definition of the ritual and finally what is tragic and what is tragedy.



Each stage director made a contribution to the evolutionary process. K. Christomanos and T. Economou, being the first who had studied theatre, undertook the difficult job of founding two stages the *New Stage* and the *Royal Theatre* respectively, which greatly contributed to the theatrical development of the country. The absence of any sort of theatrical life in Greece immediately burdened them with the task of creating a new theatrical consciousness which was concerned as much with the repertoire as with the circumstances of the performances. Their efforts ranged from problems due to economic difficulties, the choice of plays (which had to combine the needs of the Greek society with the aesthetic European movements), the absence of theatrical education for actors and generally the lack of favorable conditions regarding the production of the plays. The occupation with ancient drama posed further problems regarding the distinctive treatment of the form as well as the burning linguistic issue which afflicted the country. The result of all of this was an evident awkwardness of the two directors to propose drastic solutions regarding the performance of the ancient drama.

Economou himself chose to abolish the chorals from most of his performances, and wherever he retained them they had a purely decorative purpose. Furthermore, he used the ready to hand European music of classic composers, either as a musical accompaniment or as an intermezzo. Christomanos on the other hand, respected the existence of the chorus and chose musical composers (such as Gluck and Mendelssohn) whose work was based on the prosody of the ancient Greek language, something which was more appropriate to the rhythmic modes of ancient drama, but however still fell short of the real needs of the performance. (Gizi, P. El. 1979)

The important thing is however that both directors still made advances in the establishment of the demotic dialect in the translation of ancient texts; Economou pursued an aristocratic stylized manner and Christomanos adopted a more natural realistic approach. The

latter initiated the separation from the imitations of the past and adapted contemporary Greek elements.

The interpretation of ancient Greek theatre gained new dimensions with the dynamism of F.Politis. It should be noted that he was the first to give special consideration to all of the structural elements which comprised a performance (stage design, costume, acting, and lighting) and placed his directorial emphasis on the spectacular aspect of the performance. As regards scenography, he abolished the curtain unifying the pit with the front of the stage, in this way giving the feeling of the ancient theatre inside a closed space. The actor's costumes, inspired by ancient statues, were simple with pleats. The lighting was used naturally, imposingly and was used to emphasize the emotional tension of the performance. His chorus had little movement and expressed itself through gesture. Finally, in relation to the acting he adopted a style which was simple and with a balanced, psychological interpretation. His stage direction was orientated towards '*aesthetic realism in other words realism with harmonious simplicity such as in German stage direction*' (Sideris, G. 1976: p. 270).

It is worth noting the staging of *Ekavi* at the Panathinaikos Stadium, which was an important event in its era as it was the first tragedy which was directed in an open space (with the exception of the performances of Sikelianos in Delphi), perfected his ideas of stage direction. Politis was to unify the dramatic and the lyrical elements elevating the speech of the ancient tragedy, relating it for the first time to contemporary events. In this way the spectators slowly began to appreciate the poetic sense of the text and to recognize its worth (Spathis, D. 1983).

In contrast to Politis, E. Palmer was to propose the revival of antiquity. She achieved this through her management of the chorus which she made adopt a specific choreography. For the first time in the history of modern theatre the chorus was sung and danced, giving it an autonomous existence. She reinforced the song of the chorus

with the existence of a choir. A further important innovation was the composition of original music for each performance. Palmer wanted the use of only one musical instrument in her performances as she believed that the presence of an orchestra negated the autonomous element of the chorus. Until then the music had been played by a whole orchestra, something that in the end even Palmer did not manage to avoid. Palmer judged Byzantine music as suitable to be heard clearly in the countryside and that it would travel from mountain to mountain. She chose to perform in open air theatres in order to encapsulate the meaning of the tragedy “as travelling into the ethereal in no fixed time”.

The ancient theatres have been officially inaugurated by D.Rontiris during the last four decades. This was an important development as open space presents particular directing and acting choices. In particular, Epidavros (the largest existing ancient theatre) due to its exceptional architecture has special theatrical demands. The issue of “*volume*” in the articulation of the speech, in movement and in the voice finds solutions in the open theatre. However, it also excludes any experimentation which has not been well researched. For example, a realistic reading of the tragedy with psychological and acting modifications would not hold in the ancient theatre where the acoustics and the distance from the spectators would handicap the audiences viewing of the play. Furthermore the myths themselves and their content fill a wider reality of space and time, which preserve the perpetuity of the centuries of poetic truth. The aim is to accomplish the fundamental tragic element which existed before the awareness of man, before the composition of the tragedy and even before history itself and to treat it as a psychosomatic experience.

This written sign is exactly what every stage director seeks to discover: either through the sound of the words or through their interpretation, either through the grammar and syntax or through the punctuation and the breathing; either through the rhythm placed on the words, or through the rhythm which arises from the unconscious

by means of intense exercise. With this as a starting point the director then advances towards a decision whether or not to use music, the declamation or the song, the dance (traditional, classic) or movement (symbolic, inspired by the vessels of antiquity or by the contemporary techniques of dance.)

Rontiris is thought of as the first “scientific director” as it was he that showed unprecedented professionalism in teaching the techniques of acting as both manager and teacher at the National Theatre School of Dramatic Arts. He insisted on absolute psychosomatic control and control of both the acting techniques and voice in order for the actor to be able to enrich the medium of expression and not to leave anything to the chance of inspiration. For this reason his stage direction of ancient drama was always determined from the outset (many of his notebooks have been saved), even the smallest of breaths, pauses, stage whispers, changes of tonality, in order to achieve the objective of complete synchronization – especially in the dramatic and lyrical elements of the chorus.

As regards the chorus, Rontiris following in the footsteps of Politis (he was his assistant at the National Theatre), he approached it with a relatively immobile and simple line of movement, exploiting the hands and the torso more than the lower part of the body. The same simple form was followed in the music. For Rontiris, the experience and revival of the tragedy contribute a human, perpetual, and cultural virtue arising from the physical, psychological and spiritual emotions of the spectator. This assumes a separation from any form of old-fashioned representation and accordingly research into the context of a contemporary Greek reality – such as those elements where were preserved in folkloric traditions – and its unification with antiquity. The religious ritualistic elements, as they were passed down from ancient ancestors (religious ceremonies and processions for the Gods, dances in the open air, civic dances, war dances and cathartic dances) were expressed by Rontiris through the interpretation of the lyrical elements of the dance, through the musical rhythms and the imitation

of the emotions of the heroes. In this way the need for a collective ritual that the classic writers would include in their works led the way to the ultimate functioning of the catharsis of the spectator.

Rontiris was succeeded by his student Miniotis who progressed to a completely religious approach to the tragedy. His performances are distinguished by the intense presence of Christian and Post-Christian consciousness. He believed that the tragedy constituted a collision between two worlds: that of the Gods and that of man. The latter understood that they would collide in order to reveal the truth and finally to become symbolic personae, equal to the Gods. For Minotis the issues of the meaning of destiny, ethical laws and divine justice are the important issues of the ancient tragedy and the problems of humanity in general, and that their expressive medium should be acquired through metaphysical experimentation in the divine universe.

The exploitation of the sacredness of the ritual was proposed by K.Koun however, through the ecstasy and the sensuality of the body of the actor. For this reason he used masks which contributed to the feeling of a heavy and non-realistic acting and emphasized the symbolic nature of the drama.

The greatest invention of K. Koun is related to his management of the chorus, which for the first time was liberated from the geometric movements of Rontiris and from the specific step pattern of the Palmer's folk songs. Koun's chorus moved freely, expressively following beat of the music and also for the first time percussion instruments prevailed. It was especially written for the needs of each performance and led by the rhythm of the drum and not by the flute or the harmonium, as it was until then. He also gave complete individuality and initiative to each member of the chorus, which created a unique emotional tension and passion in the essence of the chorus. He emphasized on the multiculturalism and universalism of the events of humanity seeking catharsis within the myths themselves and also to the knowledge which they could bring.

Terzopoulos would also search for catharsis, not through the particularities of individual cases but extreme exposure to the element of passion. The spectator reached catharsis identifying with the existential significance of the meaning of passion. In the same way the spectator can touch on the meaning of sacredness by means of a universal ritualistic violence which exists as primordial memory of the body and can be drawn on after exceptionally painful exercise, the body is pushed to its limits and begins to express the text on its own.

Terzopoulos' most important innovation was that he did not follow just the meaning of the text in his acting approach; however he explored other directions by physically following the rhythms, the pauses, the reactions and the actions that the rhythmic modes of the text provoked.

After Terzopoulos, 'schools' of acting for ancient drama ceased to exist. Gone was the era in which stage directors created a philosophical and theoretical system regarding the stage direction of ancient tragedy and in general a collective approach to theatre. The idea of a permanent team of collaborators, actors and enlightened people who could unite towards a common goal and devotedly work towards a common activity, was no longer a demand of the era. The sporadic staging of ancient drama by a few directors was not able to create a sufficient perception of its format and development. The best case scenario was the generation of sufficient knowledge about each play. I do not idolize the procedure of detailed research of the ancient drama in order to criticize contemporary performance, but I would like to note the importance of the regular research and involvement with the ancient drama before an attempt to perform it. It is necessary to consult the directing past of the ancient drama and learn from it in order not to be consumed by ineffective attempts.

## **5. Key influences on the practical research**

### **Some crucial stagings in Greece**

I will mention some of the most important performances which took place in Greece the last thirty years in order to illuminate the Greek “directing territory”. I will focus to the individual cases of the directors who made some proposals concerning tragedy. Till now, I have watched around 100 performances of ancient drama, the majority in Epidavros and other open spaces but also some in closed spaces in London and Berlin. From the very first of these performances to the final two this summer (Agamemnon by Angela Brouskou and Medea by Anatoli Vasiliev) I have continued to wonder about this mystic phenomenon of the ancient tragedy: I question how it is staged, how it is modernized, how it is used to stir emotions, how it is structurally approached and how it manages to achieve this collective power. The fact that we are born in the country that invented the ancient tragedy, has placed us in the unique position of being able to understand its idiosyncrasies and manage them accordingly. Even though this theatrical birth took place thousands of years ago, it still functions as an evolutionary reincarnation, existing as a physical memory through which we can express ourselves.

So, why is this expression so difficult? Is it only because the music and the movements of the ancient times have been lost and we do not how to reproduce them? Or is there something else of particular interest which escapes us? The modern performance? The modern interpretation? Exploitation, scathing criticism of the aspects of the era? The new philosophical approaches? Or is it perhaps all of these things? It raises questions which are necessary for the researcher to pose before beginning the journey into the Greek setting of the ancient drama. For this reason it was crucial for me to carry out research into the ancient drama from its beginnings to the present day.

I researched the existing records of performances and I watched DVDs of some of the most representative tragedies of important past stage directors in order to understand their approach. I also concentrated on the most exceptional stagings of *The Bacchae* which took place in Greece, by mainly Greek stage directors (with the exception of the case of Matthias Langhoff and the Dutch group Hollandia). I will continue with a comparative analysis of these findings.

From *Electra* by Rontiris, *Oedipus at Colonus* by A.Miniotis, *Antigone* by Al.Solomos, *Oresteia* by K.Koun, the afterthought of *Medea* by Asp.Papathanasiou (based on the techniques of Rontiris), then following *Electra* by K.Tsianou, *Oresteia* by Mihailidis, *Medea* by N.Kondouris, *Elektra* by M.Marmarinos, *Antigone* by L.Vogiatzis until the last *Agamemnon* by A.Brouskou, the staging has developed significantly, concerning both its interpretation and mise en scene. Amongst these performances if one was to insert *The Bacchae* – which is in fact our subject – then it would be possible to formulate a sufficient opinion of the setting of the ancient drama.

In the previous chapter we came understand the different schools in Greece and their approach to acting the ancient drama, here I will briefly mention these, drawing attention to the individual cases of the stage directors who brought about some of these changes.

A first attempt at the categorization of *Electra* by Rontiris, *Medea* by Papathanasiou, *Oedipus at Colonus* by Miniotis and *Antigone* by Solomos, seems to present some similarities (and of course some differences). The approach of Rontiris and his student Papathanasiou appropriate elements of tradition. Regarding the chorus they adopt a geometric configuration and isolate it to the orchestra section. The chorus recites collectively (*Elektra*), and at times reaches musical recital (*Medea*) and other times it sung under the strains of intense music. Specifically, in *Electra* the music written by the composer D.Mitropoulos no longer functions as an accompaniment but produces a sense of the tragic awe magnifying the



acting of the roles. Emotion is expressed mainly through the tone of voice rather than the body.

In *Oediphus* by Miniotis the music of T.Antoniou functioned differently. It evoked an agonizing atmosphere which at the same time linked the episodes to the chorus. The acting broke away from a purely rhythmic performance and became more realistic and emotional; through the use of this dramatic acting style Miniotis left his mark.

Solomos' chorus was sung based on ecclesiastical and Byzantine melodies. He used very little movement in the chorus, like Rontiris, and in many cases the chorus configuration was differentiated by its immobility and impressed.

*Oresteia* by the Teatro Technis under the stage direction of K.Koun maintained some elements of the more immediate Rontiris-Miniotis history, such as the declamation of chorus leaders and a chorus which sometimes sang whilst keeping a musical balance. Koun was to develop the movement of the chorus liberating it physically and removing from the confines of the orchestra section. The acting was gradually lead from realism (*Oresteia*) to pararealistic stagings (*The Bacchae*) as he himself was to point out.

In 1989 K.Tsianos, a stage director who pursued folk tradition as he was a teacher of traditional dance, staged *Electra* and choreographed it himself. With the great modern tragedy actress Lydia Koniordou in the protagonist role, Tsianos conceived the idea, which until that time has not yet reached its full glory, of using multi-voiced songs and traditional dances from different areas of Greece in all of the choral parts. He proposed using the form of the fifteen syllable verse taken from demotic poems and the traditional ceremonies, something which was ideal for the Arcadian setting of *Electra* by Euripides. The step pattern of the chorus follows that of folk dances, and the whole atmosphere of the performance simulates that of the agricultural life of the countryside. The protagonist performed with great conviction the role a woman that lives according to the ethics

and tradition of a closed society. The performance of Tsianou was pioneering; nevertheless, it was perceptible that the structural solutions taken from the demotic songs and dances were related to this specific work.

The *Oresteia* with stage direction by Mihailidis, an exceptional theatre director, would be staged twice signaling the stage direction of ancient tragedy in a closed space. It was an abstract, symbolic reading, the dominant element being the narration of the story and its imitating representation. Mihailidis adopted all of the techniques that were available to him from tradition, such as collective declamation, prose, songs, the creation of music from percussion, and reconstructed them in a contemporary interpretation. The presence of all of the actors on the stage and their on the spot transformation into their roles likened the story to a fairytale, an allegory which made it more familiar and relative. In this way the spectator was aware of the magic-ritualistic aspect of the proceedings, entering into an agreement with the mythological, while at the same time retaining a reservation of non-belief. Naturally a spectator agrees to the terms and conditions of the theatre in advance. However, the particularities of the ancient drama are based on a powerful mass of emotions and ideas which force the spectator to participate in a psycho-spiritual event, in order to reach catharsis. Stage direction in closed spaces follows certain other rules and is presents certain peculiarities which generally speaking Mihailidis' performance managed to avoid.

A symbolic, abstract reading was also done by N.Kontouri with *Medea* and with the use of the singer (S.Giannatou) in the role of the choral lead that was delivered with a voice improvisation which supported the emotional aspects of the work. The chorus moved symbolically, sometimes as part of the setting, sometimes in a more rhythmic way similar to the action of the hero and sometimes expressing emotions physically, it had the nature of "*poetic execution of the facts*".

If the chorus of N.Kondouris was developed further and had a clearer definition of its structural components, then it could be used as a basis for creative discussion and solutions concerning the staging of Ancient drama. This is because it maintained a stylized acting which moved it away from realism and also marked a collective operation which had a dynamism which could convey the necessary magnitude of tragic meaning. However, the non-harmonious and non-studied use of the speech in relation to the movement in fact limited and detracted from this power.

For *Elektra* by Marmarinos I will refer only to the words of the stage director himself: *'The chorus consists of the unconsciousness of man, expressing above this the traces and what is happening... I draw on elements from collective moments of modern existence (e.g. the wait at the bus stop) while these moments are signs that are written on people and guide them en masse [...] When one draws near then indeed their individualities can be distinguished, however these lost in the group such moments'*.(Marmarinos, M. 1998, DVD)

For a modern stage director to cast his gaze on his own era and to draw from this constitutes, in my view, an excellent quality especially in the use of the chorus. Of course the important issue is the management of the material and the final composition of its staging. The work of Marmarinos on the texts of the ancient drama, although they are done in a manner which is particularly clever and aesthetically pleasing, limits – especially in the chorus – the power of the verse by the improvised use of certain ad-hoc activities, acts and movements which function alongside the meaning of the text and in fact obscure it. However, the ancient tragedy does not keep anything hidden, everything is expressed in order to influence and incite the emotions of the spectator.

In *Antigone* by Vogiatzis – one of the most important directors in Greece, who however has not yet made many attempts at ancient drama – I choose the idea of the 'group' which narrate the story of the play (in an open space) and through this the characters who enact the

roles of the text. Vogiatzis experimented with the system of *sprech chor* in a more modern framework which however did not emphasize the speech.

It is interesting to note that *Antigone* was staged one year after my own version of *The Bacchae* and the idea of using group-narrators, who call out the story of the play and enact it by imitating the roles leaving the group and then returning to it.

Finally, I end this review with *Agamemnon* by A.Brouskou in Epidavros, which took place in Epidavros this summer. It was an interesting performance mainly due to the presence of the chorus which as well as covering each choral part also developed its own independent activity through the characteristics that they portrayed (sailors and workman). It was a folk chorus (it could comprise an advance on Koun, one of his students) which worked, fought, made up, made merry, danced while at the same time reciting and participating in the activity of the chorus. In this way it created a chorus of flesh and bone which lived its own personal history in parallel to the story of its kings, all within an atmosphere of civil decline and for this reason it was cynical and satirical. The disadvantage of the performance lay in the fact that it was acted in the framework of an expressive, critical realism, losing in this way the poetic element and the metaphysical symbolism – which are characteristics of the ancient tragedy. The one thing of interest in Brouskou is that she can place the problematic elements of the ancient tragedy in the environment of modern civil decline and then make comment.

From the above performances I consider the following moments to be inspirational in the ancient drama: the ‘poetic styling’ of the chorus of Kondouris, the persistent interest of Marmarinos in the enactment of moments of collective experience, the group-narration of Vogiatzis and also the social class element of the chorus of Brouskou.

## **Indicative record and drama critics of *The Bacchae* in Greece (1962-2007)<sup>5</sup>**

I made a personal research in different theatre archives in order to collect critics for the stagings of *The Bacchae* and help the reader realize in a better way how *The Bacchae* have been directed until now. In that case somebody can compare and interpret the differences the productions involved.

The Bacchae by National Theatre - 1962

Director: A. Minotis

Music: M. Hadjidakis

The critics emphasized that the music was written without knowledge of the text and led the performance to collapse. Dionysus was an outrageous imitation of Christ.

The Bacchae by National Theatre - 1969

Director: A. Solomos

Music: M. Hadjidakis

---

<sup>5</sup> These drama critics have been selected from the book: Georgousopoulos, K., Gogos, S., group of theatrolologistis (2004?) *Epidaurus: the theatre, the stagings* and from personal investigation in Theatre Museum archives.

## The Bacchae by National Theatre - 1975

Director: S. Evagelatos

The critics maintained that the stage director abandoned the chorus, and did not allow it take part in the miracle play of God. There was no conflict, except for poetic manifestation of the emotions from the depths of time. The naturalistic manner of articulation was irrelevant to the speech of Euripides.

## The Bacchae by Theatro Technis (Art Theatre) – 1977

Director: K. Koun

Music: Ch. Leontis

The chorus which followed the emotional charge of every scene, moved furiously (with movement low in the leg) and was integrated with the whole atmosphere of the work, wrote the critics of the period. The group of Dionysus, who come from the East, comprise the lyrical, devotional element of the work, the initiator of time and therefore should have been more relaxed. The religious and ritualistic elements were emphasized. There was a slight equation of Dionysus with Christ. The Eastern rhythms and strong use of drums drove the movement and the speech to prominence.

## The Bacchae by National Theatre – 1985

Director: G. Sevastikoglou

Music: G. Kouroupos

The critics referred to many cuts in the text due to the fact that the chorus was tragically slow and lacking an identity.

## The Bacchae by Attis Theatre – 1986

Director: Th. Terzopoulos

The director worked with the method of *deconstruction of the body parts* which involved an eight month rehearsal. The basic trait of this is the condition of physical ecstasy, which was searched for in the conflict between instinct and logic within the same person and the hidden abilities of the body. The research of *The The Bacchae* orientated towards the age of adolescence in which this conflict exists in an individual. The critics observed repetition of movements and speech with the accompanying improvised music of the clarinet. A constant fear of death permeated the whole performance.

## The Bacchae by National Theatre – 1990

Director: G. Theodosiadis

Music: Ch. Leontis

For the first time the role of Dionysus was taken by a woman. The critics considered the music as a blessed event, with its eastern, Pontian and original Epirotic folkloric sounds that successfully balanced two cultures. There was an interesting stage design of Asian origin, the chorus richly dressed in tunics and wearing heavy make up.

## The Bacchae by National Theatre of Northern Greece – 1991

Director: N. Haralabous

The critics referred to the fact that the performance was based on iconography with violent and symbolic images in red, black and white which overshadowed the tragedy itself.

## The Bacchae by Amfi-Theatro – 1993

Director: S. Evagelatos

Music: Kypourgios



The critics talked of an Aeschylus chorus, a sweet, anti-Dionysian ballet from Versailles. Of interest were circular movements, falling, relaxed heads, pelvises which gave emphasis to the differentiation of movements and the individuality of the members of the chorus.

#### The Bacchae by National Theatre of Northern Greece –1997

Director: M. Langhoff

A performance with modern elements and lively stage presence (cows, horses, lambs). According to the critics there was a very realistic beginning. The speech followed the events, while until this time the speech was of essential importance and the movement followed, supporting it. The chorus supported the *feminism in duty*, a collective declamation which at times became a song and accompaniment by live music all under the rhythm of large drums.

#### The Bacchae – 2001

Director: B. Nikolaidis

The critics referred to the melody of the chorus in ancient and Modern Greek with an ancient Phrygian manner. There were reconstructions of ancient Greek instruments.

## The Bacchae by The National Theatre – 2005

Director: S. Hatzakis

The critics commented that the imaginative use of a limited number of stage objects was interesting. The voices and breathing of the dancers, the sounds of the thyrsus (characteristic Dionysian emblem made from vine branches) and the hitting of the stones acted as the musical instruments. The chorus was characterized by spiralling, swaying, eastern dances and accompanied by drums. Modern choreography with lifts, jumps and drops were adopted. S. Giannatou took the choral lead using noises which were between animal and human and inarticulate speech which had no relation to the meaning, just the facts of the performance.

### **Three important performances in the context of my research**

*The Bacchae* by Langhoff, *The Bacchae* by Hollandia, *Medea* by Vasilief

It is a fact that the many years of research and commitment to the ancient drama give a more complete result regarding the staging. For example, *The Bacchae* of Hollandia (2002) originate from people who have been involved for many years both in ancient drama and generally in theatre. The translator of Hollandia H. Altena in a personal conversation confided to me his over-whelming and tenacious pursuit involved in the translation of *The Bacchae* for seven whole years. Furthermore, another important director of our era, Vasiliev, in one of his interviews referred to the *Medea* (staged in summer of this year), he commented on the many years of research he carried out on the Platonic philosophers – he then based his stage direction on this theory – and the intensive seminars that he gave to the actors (before the rehearsals started) in order to study them in depth.

The performance of Hollandia was determinative factor in my view on the ancient tragedy, and with the performance of Vasiliev I continue to properly uphold this view. Furthermore, the historic performance of *The Bacchae* by Langhoff, - it provoked a multitude of reactions when it was staged- which I watched on DVD, is indicative of my view on the transference of the world of the ancient tragedy to the modern day. I feel that although these three performances did not take place at the same time (*The Bacchae*, Langhoff 1997; *The Bacchae*, Hollandia 2002; *Medea*, Vasilief 2008), they seem to share some common characteristics.

*The Bacchae* by Langhoff is a new proposal in the perception of the tragic. According to him, the tragic reaches the point of ludicrous in order to make social criticism of contemporary life. His reading is far from any exaggeration or over declamation and scathingly criticizes those who wish to defend a traditional

interpretation of the text. He himself says: *'Enough with the imitation of the charms and beauties of the ancient columns.'* He starts with a realistic base adding contemporary visual elements (advertising billboards, telephones, satellite dishes) as a comment on the images which dominate our lives and which we are obliged to include and mention.

Modern visual elements such as a dominant refrigerator or a washing machine in contradistinction to an entire musical troupe in traditional dress were brought to the performance by Hollandia, with the aim of marking the conflict between the old and new cultural values.

Vasiliev interpreted Medea as a metaphysical farce using a variety of elements from ancient and contemporary cultures, from theatre history, from visual arts and from the customs of different countries. For Vasiliev the traditional meaning of tragic is over and we must seek new ways of interpreting it. In Medea's performance he implied that the sacrifice of the children is symbolic and not realistic. He maintained that making Medea aware of what will happen from the beginning of the play means she knew that the death of the children would not be real. In this way, the conflict loses its metaphysical element – in Aristotelian terms. Medea punishes her mortal husband, making him believe the death of the children is real. With this reading we are not sure who is deceived, the mortal or the immortal who caused this disorder. It is certain that the performance aims to interpret the ancient drama with a mystical, idealistic approach as well as a sacred game of enigmas which leads to a festive ritualistic farce.

In the chorus of Vasiliev, movement patterns were used from different civilizations such as the body positions from the ancient vessels, the theme of tango, flamenco, elements from bull-wrestling and acrobatics, all in an ironic manner. However the articulation of the speech was generally monotonous and split so that in many cases the spectator could not understand either what was being said or the

meaning of what was being said, in this way the speech appeared severed from the central meaning of the performance.

A similar problem was encountered by the chorus of Langhoff, who for all his attempts to stage a realistic entrance of the women from the east (who carried buckets and mops with them in order to clean the place and lay the carpets, as well as needles and threads for the sewing of their blankets), in the end it was confused by the movements forms of different cultures which were not harmoniously bound together. It resulted in a confusion of rhythms: eastern rhythms, which the women danced to as they mopped; Greek songs, used as they were embroidering and inappropriate African choreography awkwardly inserted at different points of the text.

The most correct approach to the chorus was by the group of Hollandia, suitable for the text of *The Bacchae*, which was upheld by the existence of two choruses (that of the Maenads which are in euphoria and that of *The Bacchae* who have come in order to convert). So, there is an entire orchestra of music and singers that enter the stage representing the composed chorus that only sung. At the same time the frenzied chorus is represented by three actors (the same number as the daughters of Kadmos) who move expressively, visually depicting the scenes of Mt. Kithaironas and strengthening the emotional charge of the spectator. The Syrian musicians operate in parallel to the text of the chorus, sometimes as an accompaniment, sometimes melodizing the translated verses, offering to the oration of Euripides an interesting contemporary analogy of the Dionysian conflict.

It can be observed that the three performances are influenced by foreign stage directors. This could be attributed to the fact that these above representations are not weighted down by the burden of national tradition and are freer to experiment. Of course I am not dismissing the Greek attempts at stage direction of the ancient drama; however I am proposing their recrimination as well as the critics who in many cases hinder the experimental attempts. Furthermore, I

believe that their spread into a wider intercultural framework of dialogue can only bring positive elements.

Despite all this, the difficulty regarding the ancient tragedy both for Greek stage directors and for foreign stage directors lies in the issue of the desired harmony of the speech and movement so as it is heard as an important speech but also conveys the tragic emotion from the communal unity of all of the elements.

Greek tradition indeed encompasses a lot of the information which is needed by the stage director in order to deal with the ancient tragedy. However, beyond its sufficient development, the new century of new technology and over-consumerism, it is also crucial to exploit the contemporary practices and theories so as to be able to express our era. The suggestion of a contemporary consciousness of the ancient tragedy through the new techniques of physical theatre could comprise material for exploration.

## 6. The Bacchae: the text

*The God of tragedy is victorious*

*And he shall know Dionysus, son of Zeus,  
in his full nature God, most terrible,  
Although most gentle, to mankind  
(860)*

### I. Outline of the play

Dionysus, son of Zeus and of Semele, arrives at his native city of Thebes, to impose the observance of his cult. The daughters of Cadmus question his divine nature and parentage and for that are driven mad by the god, roaming as Maenads on Mount Cithaeron. Only Cadmus and Teiresias, each for his own reason, defend the new religion and the cult of the god. Pentheus, son of Agave and grandson of Cadmus, rejects the new cult and prepares for a clash with the Maenads. Indeed he arrests and imprisons Dionysus, but the latter is miraculously freed and destroys the royal palace with an earthquake. A succession of different pressures is exercised on Pentheus in order to force him to accept the new religion, but his stance remains unyielding. Finally Dionysus persuades him to dress as a Maenad and go to Cithaeron so as to witness the orgies of the Maenads from close at hand. Pentheus does in fact disguise himself as a Maenad and departs for Cithaeron. Arriving there, he comes to the attention of his mother Agave who, mistaking him for a lion, attacks him and tears him to pieces. Hearing the news, Cadmus goes up onto Cithaeron to gather together the dismembered limbs of his dead grandson. Agave returns to the city in triumph, with the head of her son on her *thyrsus*, symbol of Dionysus, thinking that it is the head of a lion. Following some intensely dramatic dialogue, Cadmus succeeds in

making her aware of her crime. The play ends with the appearance of Dionysus on the divine podium, announcing the punishment of the guilty by banishment into exile (Frangoulis, 2004).

## **II. Important themes dealt with in *The Bacchae***

*'In The Bacchae Euripides explores the mystery of human fate: the relationship between the eternal and the ephemeral, life and death, the body and the spirit, male and female, the face and the mask, knowledge and ignorance, happiness and misfortune, laughter and lamentation. However, these questions still remain unanswered through the ages'* (Hourmouziadis, 1999 - unpublished text\*).

Spyros Evangelatos (who directed the play in 1993) says that: *The Bacchae is perhaps the most exciting and up-to-date theatrical text that has been saved from the ancient world. Like life itself, it includes everything: Transformations and disguises, miracles, characters with psychological depth, a marvelous imagery that simultaneously fascinates and terrifies, triumph of the divine element, the blind insolence of power and the arrogance of tyranny.*

All scholars and directors agree that *The Bacchae* is a very challenging play. *The Bacchae* convey a multiplicity of universal ideas and concepts of a high intellectual quality. This play contains everything, in the sense that the conflicts that are dealt with cover a vast spectrum of human experience, at both a personal and social level. The themes that are developed as of a particular interest to this practical research are as follows:

### 1. The shaping of the system of ethical and religious principles.

The basic question is to what extent such a system is derived from personal or social considerations. This question is of great relevance to present-day Greek society, where the Church is one of the fundamental institutions of society and an inseparable part of individual and social life. At the same

---

\* Included in the programme for the National Theatre's production of *The Bacchae* - summer 2005.



time it fails to respond adequately to the concerns of the present day, remaining at the level of formalism.

2. The desire for power, and the way power is exercised. A group of people needs to be guided. What is decisive is the quality of leadership. It is the decisive factor in determining the favorable or dysfunctional character of the outcome. The modern man, via conceit and a fear of loss of control, becomes deeply and obsessively conservative and is drawn into isolation. Overinvestment in leadership and in materialistic values, instead of focusing on humanity's inner significance and on contact with one's fellow human, has a devastating effect on the human soul and is probably more conducive to insecurity than to reassurance.
3. The intersection of the trajectories of the fated (that which cannot change), destiny (that which can be influenced by our choices), and external conditions (whatever evades human control and appears in the course of one's life). In *The Bacchae*, Pentheus comes from a royal family, from divine origin. Although he is from gentle upbringing, yet he chooses the road of arrogant vanity. He adopts a stance of inflexibility and shows suspicion in the face of an external factor (Dionysus), which could have changed his fate. People, of every age, move within the field of three forces - fate, destiny and external conditions - seeking their ideal equilibrium.
4. The meeting of different civilizations, focusing on xenophobia - the fear of that which is foreign, unfamiliar and different. In today's multicultural communities, encounters with strangers are an everyday reality. Thus there is a striving for the ideal balance between resistance to absorption by "the Other" and the undesirable option of rejection.
5. Eroticism as a component element. On the one hand, Pentheus has to come to terms with his feminine side and especially with the erotic expression of it, being a man. On the

other hand, in the play we witness the primitive expression of feminine sexuality - which also contains masculine characteristics - in the followers of Dionysus. By this I mean that the “traumatized” eroticism that we witness is probably due to a lack of balance between the feminine and the masculine element, either in the same person, or between the sexes. I would like to make clear that the sexual interplay between the sexes per se, was not a particular focus of my research.

Thus *The Bacchae* is a play whose inner structure rests upon a wide spectrum of opposing bipolar forces. For these dichotomies to be identified, a step-by-step immersion was required, first and foremost in the subtext. There follows a choice of the bipolar opposites which are of the most interest: feminine vs masculine, reason vs instinct, collectivity vs individualism, nature vs urban life. Although these dialectics are a permanent feature of human life, they always constitute a serious obstacle to the actions of mankind. These contradictions formed a central element in the process of the work for the stage.

A new reading of a text involves concentration on the themes that are of personal interest to the director and his era. I put the inner aspect of human existence at the center of my present-day reflection on *The Bacchae*, so as to renegotiate the question of individualism. It is something that has assumed disproportionate dimensions in our day. I also reflect on the shaping of a personal system of ethical principles – a disturbing absence from the everyday reality of the present.

I strongly believe that it is important for a director to select and focus only on the important themes concerning his/her era. In our production of *The Bacchae*, we transferred the characters’ conflicts into an intrapersonal dimension. The balanced coexistence of a number of different characteristics may contribute to a safe and stable identity.

### III. Comments on the roles

In this section I outline certain analytical approaches to the roles of the play, including the development of my own pre-rehearsal analysis. This process was a key element in my creative practice that would lead on the staging of the play.

**Dionysus:** There is an abundance of myth pertaining to the god Dionysus. Mythology first refers to Dionysus as the son of Zeus and Semele. Zeus falls in love with Semele, daughter of the king of Thebes - Cadmus, and when the conception of Dionysus has taken place, Hera persuades Semele to ask Zeus to appear before her in all his glory. Zeus indeed makes his appearance on his chariot amidst lightning, thunder and flames, and as a result Cadmus' palace and Semele's room catch fire. Semele is struck by lightning and dies and the Earth allows ivy to grow over the columns of the palace as protection for the child. Zeus sews the child into his thigh to rescue him from the anger of Hera. When the day comes for the child to be born, Zeus breaks the stitches and brings the child forth into the light. There thus comes into the world the fire born, thigh-sewn, two-mothered, twice born Dionysus (Kakridis et al., 1986)

Plutarch (in Dodds, 2004) has attached a variety of attributes and determinations to Dionysus: dendrites (imparting strength to the trees); anthios (god of all blossoming things), karpios (fruit-bearing), fleus (bestowing an abundance of life). He is associated with the liquid element (the sap in a new shoot, blood in the veins of an animal), wild animals and wild plants (the fir tree, ivy).

The archetypal myth of Dionysus tells of the sufferings, the death and resurrection of this child of the gods. It is the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, who was torn into pieces and devoured by the

Titans, which were then in turn struck with lightning by Zeus. The human race arose from the ashes of the Titans. Athena and Rea salvaged the head of Dionysus, joined his dismembered limbs together again, and Dionysus was resurrected. The resurrected Dionysus descended into hell in order to free his deceased mother Semele. He then ascended Mount Olympus and was accepted into the circle of the immortals. The dismemberment and recomposition of Dionysus is a universal myth of eternal return, of renewal, a myth of the death and resurrection of chaos and of the world. (Kott, 1976)

Euripides elaborates the given myths connected to Dionysus and makes a step forward: he presents the cult of Dionysus as a kind of “universal religion” spread by disciples from one country to another. It originated in the mountains of Lydia and Phrygia, with Bacchus as the Lydian counterpart to Dionysus. Elsewhere Dionysus appeared as Thrax.

Although (according to Dodds), at the time *The Bacchae* was composed, the cult of Bacchus was a thing of the past, Euripides nevertheless used the legacy of the God. In 5th century Athens, conditions were ripe for the incursion of strange gods and the myths associated with them. Attic literature abounds in references to Eastern gods, such as Cybele, Sabazios and others. Sabazios has many elements in common with Bacchus, first and foremost the god’s identification with ecstatic nocturnal ceremonies to the sounds of the flute and the drum. (Dodds, 2004)

In *The Bacchae*, which is the only tragedy to relate the sufferings of Dionysus, the god is presented in the way demanded by tradition, as a personification of all the creative powers of nature, as god of vegetation and fertility, as well as a god of death. He embodies all the creative elements of life from water to animal, and above all wine, the gods’ gift to humanity: to the young, to old men and women, irrespective of age, gender or education. It brings elation, happiness, good cheer and relief from pain. He may, though, cause pain to the others, showing his equally powerful and destructive forces.

It's surprising that *The Bacchae* is the only tragedy that features Dionysus as the main character, although we know that the Ancient Greek performances were held during the "City Dionysia" dedicated to Dionysus, the god of theatre.

In the play, Dionysus is identified in turn with a bull, a lion and a goat, thus manifesting violent and aggressive characteristics. He comes to exact vengeance. He appears as the merciless agent of retribution. He unleashes the fury of the elements. He intervenes in the intellectual and spiritual world of the women of Thebes. He is ambiguous: at one moment he wears the mask of tranquility, humanitarianism and charm, at another he becomes the debauched seducer, the merciless divinity, and the accessory to sacrilegious practices.

In my opinion, Dionysus is a symbol: he is what each one of us believes he is. Is he a dangerous and malicious satanist, and the keeper of an unexplained mystic force that demands unconditional surrender in order to savor his merits? Or is he the liberator of the senses and the instincts, the one who can awaken the divine side of our being, as a miracle maker?

No matter how we perceive him, Dionysus stands there in front of us, like a new Goliath challenging us to confront him. We should face him with our fears, regardless of victory or defeat. To the character of Dionysus we must address the fundamental questions of human nature, without fearing or ignoring them.

**Pentheus:** Next to Dionysus is Pentheus, who is ignorant of Dionysus' religion, and uninterested in finding out more about it. He is represented as a conservative Greek aristocrat who despises the new religion as being barbarous. He considers it as a threat to public morality because it abolishes distinctions of sex and social class. He is excessively self-confident, manifesting arrogance and conceit. He is closed to anything innovative or foreign, displaying the characteristic features of a tyrant, of an oppressive leader.

His lack of self-control, his harshness towards the weak, his stupid racial arrogance, his faith in military power as a means of solving intellectual and civic problems, his voyeuristic curiosity, his unbridled conservatism, all these traits lead him ineluctably to “hubris” and, finally, to death. (Dodds, E. P. 2004)

Pentheus has all the necessary background to lead his city with dignity, integrity, intelligence and a broadened social perspective. He nevertheless fails to make proper use of this potential. His error is excessive elevation of the individual, to which he assigns a status superior even to the divine element.

Pentheus exalts his strength as a leader. He exalts himself to the skies, thinking that he himself is capable of facing all, while on the other hand it is the authority itself, which can guarantee the above mentioned result. His excessive belief in leadership and the arrogance of his almighty human strength in fact place the foundations for his punishment. The depreciation of all external forces led him to the blasphemy of the god.

All the above are characteristics of the Athenians against whom, through the character of Pentheus, Euripides levels a scathing criticism. In his view it was the incumbent heads of the city which needed to be awoken from the lethargic routine of a rationalized and well-established habit and tradition. Thus the leader should have the strength to frame a vision for the future, taking into account every innovatory proposal, irrespective of its origins. Punishment awaits every leader who is incapable of perceiving and drawing sustenance from that which is vital and new. (Spandonidis, no date)

It is worth mentioning at this point, the value of being ‘open’ spiritually and psychologically, and also the need for moderation in the challenges of life and its choices (not only for a leader but also for all people). The way we elaborate on our experiences enables us to develop as human beings.

**Cadmus and Teiresias:** Cadmus and Teiresias are two figures that appear in the play as devotees of Dionysus and the new religion. Their devotion is traditional in its inspiration. They appear to be open to new ideas. In reality both of them, each for their own reasons, find it expedient to have adopted this particular stance. Cadmus, for example, because of his position and his age, seeks to avoid tension and socio-political change.

His attitude is not so much an enthusiastic acceptance of Dionysus but a diplomatic support for the conservative side of the tradition and for those who, uncritically, take the side of the gods (e.g. lines 330-340 *“Even if this Dionysus is no god, as you assert, persuade yourself that he is. The fiction is a noble one, for Semele will seem to be the mother of a god, and this confers no small distinction on our family”* – Arrowsmith, 1959).

In my opinion, Cadmus is first and foremost a politician. Moreover, being advanced in years, he has a need for the relaxed well-being that is Dionysus’ promise. Finally it is worth remembering that in accepting the new god, Cadmus is securing a divine genealogy for his own household, Dionysus being his grandson.

Teiresias, for his part, appears in *The Bacchae* as a professional clergyman, whose arguments resemble more those of a lawyer than those of a prophet. Establishment of the religion of Dionysus would bring material gain to Teiresias, as noted by Pentheus in the first scene (e.g. lines 255-258 *“Aha, I see: this is your doing, Teiresias. Yes, you want still another god revealed to men so you can pocket the profits from burnt offerings and bird-watching”*- Arrowsmith, 1959). This naturally gives him a significant incentive to welcome Dionysus warmly.

As we see Euripides, in *The Bacchae*, sketched a different picture of the character of Teiresias compared to that which we know about him as a mythical personage, and indeed from the characteristics that have been attributed to him in numerous works of Sophocles. For example Sophocles in “Oedipus” or “Antigone”,

portrays Teiresias as an inspirational spiritual leader and the bearer of indisputable truth. He is a gifted prophet with unerring judgment, stable and faithful in his convictions, whatever questioning or disagreement may happen to arise. (Evangelatos, 2005\*)

By contrast, in *The Bacchae*, Teiresias appears to lack the characteristics of the prophet and representative of god, resorting to a populist, forensic discourse with sophistic argumentation as if he were defending a local dignitary rather than a god. Identifying the god with its element – Demetre / earth, Dionysus / wine – but also equating the needs and the dispositions of gods and men – *“Think: you are pleased when men stand outside your doors and the city glorifies the name of Pentheus. And so the god: he too delights in glory”*, lines 319-321 (Arrowsmith, 1959) – he makes a bridge in the connecting links uniting us with the divine. Our only connection with this element is now through Dionysus himself.

In my opinion, this relative downgrading of the personality and authority of Teiresias is no doubt to be interpreted as the message Euripides wished to convey. Firstly, he challenges man to search for and discover his inner world, and to focus on the elements that constitute his subjective idea of god, faith and truth. In addition, he criticizes the institution of the clergy, of the diviners and of the prophets of his time, urging man to by-pass any divinatory intervention, which sometimes enhances prejudice and demonizes the concept of fate.

**Agave:** Agave, daughter of Cadmus, mother of Pentheus and sister of Semele, represents the group of women who roam on Cithaeron, possessed by Dionysian ecstasy. She appears in the last scene of the play, following the messengers’ speech, describing the dismemberment and death of Pentheus at the hands of his own mother. The audience first sees Agave as an eerie, not particularly human figure. She presents herself under the power of Dionysian

---

\* Included in the programme for the National Theatre’s production of *The Bacchae* - summer 2005.



frenzy and with the head of Pentheus that she imagines is the head of a lion, transfixed on her *thyrsus*.

The figure of the mother, employed with tragic irony as the instrument of the god, thus represents nature, which on the one hand is regenerative and necessary for the existence and survival of every form of life, but on the other hand inscrutable, dangerous, even catastrophic. This image confirms, in the most shocking manner, the predominance of the god and the achievement of his primary goal of vengeance. The full grandeur of tragic pity is intensified; the action is prolonged, so that we may witness the profound human experience of grief and guilt that follows the dawning of awareness of the criminal act. (Spandonidis, unknown)

The moment that Agave realizes the fact that she has murdered her own child is a momentous scene of recognition in the global theatre. In facing Pentheus' head, Agave is shaken by an awakening of her submerged conscience. The emotional turbulence she is to pass through, makes Agave the sole member of the cast who is not anymore a symbol and becomes a character. This aspect formulated my acting approach.

**Chorus:** Dionysus comes from Asia accompanied by a group of female women devotees who play a missionary role and aim at spreading the new religion. They hold *thyrsus* in their hands, are accompanied by the sounds of drums and Phrygian flutes, drink wine and dance to the hymn of Dionysus. They function collectively as an autonomous community of people and through the ceremonies they carry out in honor of Dionysus; they attain a state of divine ecstasy. These rituals frequently include dismemberment and consumption of raw meat. (Lesky, A. 1993)

This kind of religious experience, communion with the god, has its roots in primitive rituals of propitiation of the elements and glorification of the rebirth of nature. According to Plutarch, during the winter of every second year, on the top of Mt. Parnassus, women

appeared – Maenads, Thyads, and The Bacchae – who roamed on the mountains and ended dancing on the mountaintops. These were spontaneous manifestations of mass hysteria, culminating in the dance, the dismemberment and the consumption of raw meat. (Dodds, E. P. 2004)

The cult of Dionysus channeled these rituals into a biennial organized ceremony, providing a release for this hysteria. The Maenads, in an orgiastic state, slaughtered a goat or a bull and ate pieces of raw flesh. The animal symbolized the god Dionysus who was torn apart by the Titans, having been identified as a totem animal. In this way the Maenads achieved communion with the body of God. (Dromazos, S. 1990)

According to Frazer cited in Dodds, E. P. 2004) if you dismember something and eat it warm, while it is still bleeding, the vital powers of the victim are added to your own, because blood is life. This most probably leads to the conclusion that the victim embodied the vital powers of the god himself, which through the act of consuming the raw meat, are communicated to the believer. The most typical victim was a bull.

Referring to the play, Dodds (2004) notes, *‘the consumption of raw meat and incarnation as an animal reveal that Dionysus was much more significant and much more dangerous than being just a god of wine. It is the sense to feel like animal, bull and bull eater, hunter and game – the untamed power that humans envy in animals and seek to assimilate. Its worship was initially an attempt on the part of humans to accomplish a union with that power. The psychological result was liberation of the instinctive life of humans from the shackles imposed by rational and social morality: the devotee attained consciousness of a strange new vitality which he attributed to the presence of the god inside him.’*

In *The Bacchae* there are two separate choruses: the foreign devotees of Dionysus from Lydia and Phrygia, who embody the tamed aspect of the god, his peaceful and balanced dimension. These

characteristics derive from his deep intimacy with nature and contact with his own inner self. These women have passed through the Bacchic phase and now are ready to initiate others into the religion of Dionysus. The second chorus is made up of the Maenads who under the leadership of Agave, Ino and Autonoe roam on Cithaeron in a delirium of religious exaltation. We learn of their spiritual overexcitement and physical hyper-intensity from the vivid accounts in the messengers' speeches and the descriptions of other characters. As previously indicated, the chorus, as a structural element of the tragedy in *The Bacchae*, is not merely a decorative or ancillary element. It plays an important role in the dramatic development.

In our performance of *The Bacchae* the chorus performs two important functions. On the one hand, the chorus takes the role of the narrator. On the other hand, the chorus is the principal community from which all the roles of the play emerge. In other words it constitutes the 'womb' of the roles of the play. The chorus narrates a story with universal themes and questions. The actors, who form the chorus, bear archaic physical memories, consisted of sounds, smells and experiences. These memories of the past, through the encouragement and guidance of "Dionysus"- as the power of nature and instinct- are brought out on the stage. This working assumption is my own answer to the question of transferring a kind of a past to the present time. In the character of Dionysus and in what he represents, the chorus of *The Bacchae* finds its unifying element. This contributes to the acquisition of group consciousness and shared experience.

My approach is based on the hypothesis that Euripides hints at a merging of individual consciousness into that of the collective. Underpinning my practice is my view that modern society lacks this kind of integration, due to the rise of individualism. That is what I tried to accomplish and convey on stage. Thus, I proposed a transformation of a homogenous 'chorus' to a 'collective ensemble of individuals'. It means a community of individuals, who can live and

experience the world in a more personal, deep way and at the same time they can gather together and share these feelings and experiences, something that can create deep bonds amongst them. It is the same concept as the traditional gatherings in the villages where the people meet to sing, play the music, tell their stories and exchange their goods and ideas. (Allain, P. 1997) The creation of a sense of collective, merging within individual consciousness, therefore is what I tried to create and convey on stage.

## **7. The realization of The Bacchae as an original theatre performance**

### **I. Issues of interpretation in relation to Ancient Tragedy**

How should the ancient drama be approached in our day? How should it be performed? That is the fundamental question. Each and every production must contribute some kind of view on the subject.

The revival of ancient drama in Greece has some particular needs. Firstly, we have to address the fact of continuity in language and tradition. Secondly, we have developed a long and specific tradition of performing ancient drama over the last century. This tradition is strongly related to the way of performing in the remaining open ancient theatres, which necessitate or impose a specific style of staging. Additionally, there is the fact that around ten productions of ancient drama are staged each year in Greece, making the question of a pioneering or innovative view an urgent one. The attempt to revive the ancient text and transform it into a performance necessitates a search for a new kind of approach, given that the information we have on the performances in antiquity are fragmentary and the conditions in present-day theatre entirely different.

For a start, the ancient drama contains numerous descriptions, references to myths, locations, persons and so forth, a high proportion of which are unknown to the present-day spectator. Moreover the prosody, the rhythmic metre of the language as spoken in the ancient world, cannot be transferred to the present. Modern Greek does not possess an equivalent metre. Finally, the strict distinction between the chorus and the characters seems archaic and dated to a contemporary audience.

The revival of ancient tragedy provides an opportunity for a wealth of analysis and discussion on the theatrical character of ancient drama. Some scholars regard the ancient texts as 'museum exhibits'. There is no audio documentation from antiquity. We don't

have any definite knowledge regarding the mode of enunciation of the language. The way the lyric element was deployed and the conventions governing movement are unknown to us.

The decisive point, however, is that ancient drama and its staging were conducted, in a specific socio-political and theatrical context, which completed its cycle with the three great tragic poets.

This socio-political context had the following features: the performance of the tragedy was addressed to a specific audience. Initially the audience consisted only of men from the upper classes, who went to the theatre as part of an initiation ceremony. The actors were likewise exclusively men, three in number during the era of Euripides, who played all the parts in the play with the use of mask. The performances were held in the daytime, with natural lighting. The details of costumes were subject to strict regulation and included archaic tunics and buskins. The scenery was sparse with none of the representational elements, with the exception perhaps of the altar. The distance between the audience and the actors was also large (due to the size of the theatre buildings), which is an additional reason why masks, with an immobilized, magnified expression on them, were in use. This meant that greater importance was attached to the voice and the verbal description of what could not be represented on the stage. For example, the people already present on the stage described the emotional state of a person who was due to make an entrance. The tragic poet would undertake the stage direction and the training of the actors and the chorus by himself. The public, who were already initiated into, and familiar with, the dramatic myth, came to the theatre to watch each author's particular dramatic presentation and individual approach to staging (Blume, H. 1993).

It thus becomes evident that the ancient representational drama was a very narrow and specific artistic genre that cannot be transferred unaltered to the present day, where every aspect of theatrical practice is different. We take into account the fact that the ancient text is always translated, which makes it inevitable that final

result will be different in quality from the original. That is the reason why the translation is one of the most crucial elements in a contemporary production. Nevertheless, one is obliged to approach the ancient drama without violating its own intimate nature and without ruining the pleasure it generates, ensuring that there is proper maintenance of the alternation between the epic and lyrical elements (Lignadis, T. 1988).

In conclusion, what concerns us is not the revival of the performance in the way it was done at that time. We want to explore the way ancient drama functions beyond the time of its initial creation. Taking into account all the aforementioned difficulties I decided to introduce a “metatheatrical action”, which is now going to be discussed in the next chapter.

## II. Basic directorial concept

The basic concept of the production is one of a “metatheatrical action”. We started with the idea of theatre-within-the-theatre. The group of actors who participated in the performance became a group of contemporary young people who gather and start to narrate the story of *The Bacchae*. This narration develops into dramatizing\* different parts of the play - by dramatizing I mean that they don't impersonate the characters. They explore the themes of *The Bacchae* through present-day anxieties, ideas, needs and thoughts. They seek out moments in present day collective life that could sustain analogies with ancient ceremonies. Their findings become the link between today and yesterday. The two stories, that of the *The Bacchae* and that of the group, merge into a common representational narrative. At the end the performance they invite the audience to register its own narrative.

This choice of theatricality illuminates my basic belief that we cannot perform tragedy in a direct way. We need some kind of detachment, a kind of theatrical convention in order to narrate the story of the specific tragedy in a believable way. For this reason I purposely opted for a group of young amateur actors who became the narrators of the specific story. Specifically, this group shares some exceptional characteristics. They have been trained by me for six years, they have participated in six productions directed by me and they share a common acting language. Over this period they have developed a deep love for theatre and they have become conscious of their common urgent need for personal expression although they come from different origins of class and culture. I took advantage of their differences and incorporated their diverse personalities into the acting process. The group's personal issues, the ambiguities of their

---

\* “Dramatizing is an element of dramatic play and is characterized by the absence of predefined roles and restrictions. Children imitate actions in order to narrate a story without identifying with the characters”. (Alkistis, 1991p.5-7)



emotions and their painful memories became the raw material of our early stage improvisations.

I believe that the only part of the actor which resists alienation is his/her body. Thus, I realized that the most appropriate method to enable the actors to express their innermost feelings and to avoid the censorship of the mind is the working method of physical theatre. My proposal is to seek this physicality in the rhythms inherent in nature itself and in the different elements that comprise it. The human body as a part of nature can recall those rhythms and incorporate them into the mode of articulation of the dramatic speech and the shaping of the acting style in general.

Not only the actors, but also I myself brought into the research process my personal experience, my concerns about the recent past in Greece and the rapid change of our society and finally my attitude to life. The experience of my generation has been to a great extent one of loss of contact with nature, and thus with simplicity and frugality, and a lack of human contact.

In Greece the element that sustained the individual up until the 1980s was the family and the intimate environment of blood relatives. Twenty years later urbanization, consumerism, intensification of the pace of life in the city and the individual's focus on the pursuit of material goods have, in combination, led to isolation, lack of creativity and the absence of psychological release. The void that has been created can, in my opinion, be filled through participation in a group creation and expression, which sets common objectives. A group of people sharing common experience through art can serve to counteract creative and communicative deprivation.

Theatre direction is a creative activity that derives its content from personal experience and knowledge and has the potential to fulfill needs that may come to be expressed at a given point in time. In my case what occurred was a maturation of all the above factors in tandem with parallel processes in an entire group of people. This happy conjuncture guided us all, in a frequently magical way, on a

journey of months that yielded some of the answers, at the level of the group and for each of us individually.

## 8. *The Bacchae* : the creative process

*The work of the eyes is over :  
now do the work of the heart,  
In the pictures imprisoned within you.  
For you conquered them, and now you know them not.  
Rainer Maria Rilke*

### I. Preparatory phase

We worked on the project of *The Bacchae* for an entire year. I divided the work into two stages. During the first stage I embarked on studio work for the actors on the one hand and a preparatory work with the collaborators of the project on the other.

I chose to do a lengthy period of studio work with the actors on the main techniques of physical theatre avoiding the restrictions placed upon the actors by the text.

Warm-up exercises: During the studio, we would always warm up for about 45 minutes, through tai chi, yoga, stretching and dance exercises, so as to relax our bodies and concentrate our minds on our different body parts.

The speech: We worked on verbal improvisation, giving the actors – in pairs or small sub-groups – only one limiting condition. For example, I asked them to confine themselves to an imaginary location, in which they accidentally found themselves, requiring that they participate in a natural, spontaneous dialogue, in which the concept to be elaborated would be “hear”, “speak” and “argue”. In this way I wanted to make them realize the power of speech and the intensity of argumentation.

The mask: I was interested in the transference of the energy and expression to the body. Thus, I used the neutral mask- an object with special characteristics- which constitutes a basic element of Lecoq's method. *The neutral mask is a perfectly balanced mask which produces a physical sensation of calm, enabling one to experience a state of neutrality, meaning a state of receptiveness to everything around.* (Lecoq, Z. 2000 p.36) For this reason I used it in order to enable the actor to be more open to experience and to accept new things, such as discovering the economy of movements. Technically, the neutral mask immobilizes the facial expression and transfers the entire emotional tension to the body, strengthening the presence of the actor. As I have already mentioned this function is closely related to masked ancient tragedy.

The music: I used musical pieces of various styles as an initial stimulus for improvisation. The musical stimulus provided an impulse for arising emotions. Music also served as a tempo to regulate the rhythm of the movement. The separate subgroups of actors built many scenarios and movement sequences inspired by the different pieces of music. The ensuing action was thus measured on that particular music. Additionally, the musical element was inscribed on the body as a physical score of movements (though without being danced).

Translation: In parallel to the studio work I embarked on personal research on the text and the problematic area of translation. The first step in the process was to collect and study the existing translations of *The Bacchae* in the Modern Greek language. This thorough study of the existing translations led me to the decision to make a new translation complying with the ideological concept of our production.

I was convinced that the best option was to carry out a new original translation with the necessary assistance of a classicist. The

aim was to produce a simple, minimal but comprehensible text employing everyday vocabulary. At numerous points the language of the ancient text was overly complicated, as it was describing the emotional situation of the actors who were wearing masks and the audience could not watch their emotional state. This convention does not exist to contemporary theatre –as in most performances the actors do not use the mask- so the translation needs to take into account this changes. Recognizing the realities of present-day performance, particularly in the theatre where our performance was to take place, I decided that a condensed text would best serve the purposes of this specific production.

A decision was thus made to remove all repetition that played no essential dramaturgical role, substitution of present-day semantic equivalents for all words that in antiquity had a different meaning (e.g. “*tromeros*” meant not “terrible” but “trembling”, “*daimon*” meant not “demon” but “god”), substitution of words which had no correlation to the style and theatrical concept of the performance. The choice of one word over another was determined for the most part by the atmosphere of the monologues and the stylistic quality of the dialogue sections.

The Ancient Greek metre was not retained because it has no equivalence in the Modern Greek language. Nevertheless, an attempt was made to retain a rhythmic element of the language – the long and short syllables of ancient speech affect the pace: many long syllables mean slower speech. In the Modern Greek text the rhythmic element was achieved through a displacement of focus from the syllable to the words and their composition. For example, at points in the ancient text where there is frequent alternation between long and short syllables instability of rhythm is generated, in Modern Greek there are mostly short sentences (lines) which favour a more rapid rhythm. “*Tis odo, tis odo*” was for example translated as “*Poios einai? Poios einai sto dromo*” (“You in the streets! You on the roads!” - Arrowsmith, 1959).

All the above elements, in conjunction with the voice pitch – the voice rises on an accented syllable when the accent is an acute accent, and goes up and down when it is a circumflex accent – tend to arouse specific emotions in the audience. They are preserved as much as possible in the Modern Greek version.

The group of creative collaborators: A group of people was brought together in order to approach the different aspects of the performance. The group consisted of the following participants: a choreographer, a set and costume designer, a music composer, a lighting designer, as well as scientific consultants: an archaeologist, a psychologist and a theologian.

The choreographer, due to her familiarity with the technique of classical ballet and with modern dance methods, and her extensive experimentation in forms of physical theatre, initially put forward some ideas on how the required movement of the performance might be brought off. The first goal was to break the form of dance movement. So, we tried to get away from the image of elegance and function spontaneously, in order to arrive at a kind of primeval movement. The idea was that the body, once freed from the anxiety of dance performing, should allow its” physical center” to function without thought and without control, so as to move closer to that part of the consciousness that allows instinctual bodily functions and movements.

The set and costume designer and the musician, in this first phase of the project, met to compile material and make certain preliminary proposals regarding a contemporary mode of projecting ancient tragedy. For example, it was decided at this stage that the feminine element of the women should be highlighted. This meant that there would be a fitted costume choice.

As regards the original music for the performance, the proposed combination was of Western classical music forms with contemporary dance music currents (e.g. trance music, garage). More specific proposals were made following observation of the first rehearsals.

The archaeologist compiled information on mythology – chiefly myths related to Dionysus – and historical data from the time of writing of the play. She also provided visual material in the form of pictures from vases with representations of Bacchic ceremonies and of Dionysus.

The psychologist, concentrated on the subject of the text's symbolism – both on the roles and on the form of non-human symbols (e.g. snake, wine) so as to develop a symbolic codification of the content so that they could be included by the director. Psychological analysis of the roles was also carried out, so the actors could approach them more effectively.

The theologian, collected information on the symbolism and ceremonies of the Christian religion. The focus was on the sacrament of holy communion, where the believer, having previously cleansed his body of toxins through fasting and his soul through confession, is judged ready to commune with the “body and blood of the Lord”, that is to say to receive the qualities of Christ. This sacrament and the Bacchic ceremonies have certain points in common, which was one focus of our investigation in this particular project.

## **II. Improvisation phase**

At the end of January the actors started to read the text. Each reading was followed by a discussion and an exchange of views on the basic themes dealt with in the play, and on the roles. Furthering their studio work on the speech, the actors began to bring together textual material such as rhetorical texts from ancient Greek literature, but also contemporary public speeches (20th century), for example

speeches taken from Hitler. We also embarked upon rhythmic readings of poems of different types and in different styles.

Improvisations without theme: In my opinion the actor must always to be energetic and active, so I put aside the readings and a textual focus for a period, during which the emphasis was on improvisation. The themes were often apparently unrelated to *The Bacchae*, but were associated at a deeper level with the play's ultimate aims from the viewpoint of acting and direction. The basis of this improvisational process was the '*transference method*' of Lecoq, central to which is the physicalization of natural elements and phenomena (which I analyze in depth below).

To the above was added a different kind of improvisation, inspired by visual material from antique vessels as well as from Renaissance paintings depicting a variety of human ensembles. This material provided a stimulus for physical improvisations and figuratively oriented experimentation with bodily forms.

Observational method: Apart from the indoor studio rehearsals I organized, for the first time in my directing career, a series of further meetings outdoors in order to practice the *observational method*. Specifically, we visited modern places (clubs, bars, rave parties), representative of contemporary styles of entertainment, in which participants practiced their own "ritual ceremonies": consumption of alcohol and other substances, dancing to recurrent musical motifs, trance. I observed examples of a simultaneous coordination of movement and breathing in the dancing bodies. These observations revealed to me new forms of bodily relations and constructs which differed to those from ancient times and Renaissance. This process proved very valuable because it opened up the possibility that modern rituals correspond to ancient Greek rituals. We were satisfied to discover an element useful for the expression of collectivity.



Going back to the rehearsal room, I tried to find a way to explore our outdoor findings in an improvisational mode. Thus I brought along a variety of objects\* such as wigs, unisex costumes and set objects amongst others, which served as a means of disguise. This was employed as a means of overcoming the inhibitions that accompany the projection of our everyday image and the roles we play in our respective social environments. At the same time, the disguise contributed to the generation of new roles and characteristics that would lead to new forms of movement behavior – which lie in censored regions of consciousness. The experiment took place in real time, making it possible for group members to experience step by step the different stages of ‘divestiture’ of the old behavioral clichés and the ‘investiture’ of the new. Simultaneously, with our research into the idea of transformation and disguise, we strived to keep the concept of group co-ordination in movement and breathing.

This improvisation proved to be a crucial turning point, beyond which the real work began on the play. Using modern technological means for recording rehearsals (video camera, photographs, tape recorder) we began to put flesh on the skeleton of our production of *The Bacchae*.

---

\* Visual sign is an element that is mainly used in dramatic text. A visual sign is a part of the character, the place, the era or the whole story that we wish to represent to the audience. For example, an actor who holds a branch represents the whole tree or a piece of cloth tightened up symbolizes a boat.(Alkistis, 1989)

## 9. Mise-en-scene

Before continuing on my analysis of the mise-en-scene, it is useful to describe the main choices we laid down for the production with my collaborators; In this way the reader will have all the necessary information in order to grasp the unfolding of *the mise-en-scene*.

Confronting the issue of the overall style of the production of *The Bacchae*, my focus was on a text characterized by an unforced, majestic flow of the speech. The performance would be modern and divested of superfluous elements so as to be able to focus on the narration and enactment of the story.

The interpretative starting point was the appearance on the stage of a group of people who had come to tell a story. Their method was one of verbal narrative and then the representations of parts of the story through their physical and emotional engagement with the dramatic content of the play. The group is a symbol of the collective. We are not so much interested in its origins as in the fact that its members are people of our own era, bearing its traits and attempting to highlight memories and experiences that are embedded in the collective body, the collective memory and the collective unconscious of the human race. Emotions and situations recurring throughout the ages are recreated on stage employing present-day codes and the acting language that the specific group has worked collectively to elaborate.

These new stage codes emerged from a synthesis of the experiences and efforts of the specific group: Nineteen people from different parts of Greece undertook the staging of a theatrical project. They are shaped by the influence of the Christian-Orthodox religion; they practice a variety of professions, coming from all social and educational levels. Thus, on the one hand they continue Greek

tradition (traditional music and metre, festive celebrations and religious ceremonies, such as the Carnival, traditional feast days, functions in honor of Christian saints, collective mourning) and on the other hand they absorb newly introduced elements (e.g. new linguistic and musical experiences, the inroads of technology and the habits of the Western way of life).

We ended up with a theatre style that emphasized the contemporary while maintaining elements of the abstract. The set design, the stage objects, the musical setting and the choreography contain semiological references to the present day, which attain a symbolic meaning. Finally, we deliberately kept selective visual signs – mentioned in the text – associating them with the time of composition of *The Bacchae* in order to bring the old to today. These signs were used to reinforce the staging of the performance as structural elements.

### **Scenography**

The predominating idea of the set design was that of the crossroads. The dramatic events unfolded at the city's borders with Mt. Cithaeron – or with other cities – the point where the roads intersect. This was represented by two sloping metal ramps supported by scaffolding which intersected, thus forming a cross. The upper ends of the ramps were not visible. Metaphorically these crossroads are the intersection of itineraries whose beginning and end are unknown to us. The predominant material was metal, a symbol for coldness, and also for Western civilization, and which contrasted with the natural scenic décor of the theatre.

We included the scenes from Thebes and Cithaeron in the same scenic space. This space, of course, was subdivided into imaginary levels enabling the sequencing and alternation of the scenes: a zoning level pertaining to the horizontal axis, that is to say concentric circles imaginarily projected on the stage. The action begins at the periphery

and is transported slowly to the inner circles, with a climax in the last dramatic scene of the play, where it comes to the centre; in this scene, the members of the chorus form an inner action circle with their bodies. This circle symbolises that the emotional cadence is transferred to the centre of their psyche.

Another level of zoning configuration operated along the vertical axis, shaping three individual spaces: balks – the first level – in the front of the scene (wooden rectangular trapezoidal structures), stage – the second level – and scaffoldings – the third level – framing the elevated level, from where Dionysus first appears. The balks symbolize the space where Dionysus acts and dominates, but also a space of imagination, to which followers of the god may end up going. It is mainly the horizontal level of the scenic space that represents the realistic space of the group that begins to tell the story.

The scaffolding, a point of visual intersection, served as a central organizing principle for the blocking. In some scenes it signified Cithaeron – where the most intense and wild action of the play took place, with the corresponding lighting – and in other scenes, it is the space of Pentheus, which with rich, cold lighting appeared as a construction site: the space from which the expulsion of the Maenads and the spread of the new religion was announced. Thus the setting, depicting a crossroad worked both literally and metaphorically in the performance.

We used contemporary objects that served the purpose of modernizing the style of the play, and also involved powerful symbolisms. Such objects were: sun glasses (Pentheus at his first entry), plastic-coated aprons (the chorus in the first episode and from the fourth chorus parts), vases (second choric interlude), military flak jackets (second episode), a flashlight (Dionysus' only lighting during the prologue), microphones (first entry of Pentheus, Dionysus in the earthquake scene). More specifically, the glasses symbolize a modern kind of mask, which serves to hide one's feelings. The microphone, the

most up-to-date technological element employed, created the illusion of multiplication of the individual and magnification of his power.

We also made use of the logic of dramatic act, on the basis of which a single visual sign is enough to signal a role, (i.e. the sunglasses stand for arrogance and distance, suggesting Pentheus) a place (the vases transport the scene to a ritual place) or a situation (the flak jackets symbolise the enlistment of the chorus alongside Dionysus). The microphones, which at a social level are often employed by persons holding positions of power or exerting the power of the podium that the microphone provides, at the same time ensure that the voice – and hence the opinion – of the speaker drowns out those of the others, have been used for two basic reasons: Firstly, to highlight Pentheus' demagogical power and secondly to facilitate imposition of the divine power of Dionysus, who by using the microphone later in the play, effects the subordination of Pentheus, by appropriating his instruments.

### **Costume design**

Contemporary casual dress was used, in a variety of colors and sports shoes, in accordance with the dress style of young people of the present day. The color black – mysterious, a dark force, a portent of death – was used for the role of Dionysus, while the color of ice – hard, neutralizing the face and highlighting of the prevalent feature, which is the rigidity of power - was used for the role of Pentheus.

### **Original music**

The music was in accordance with our main preoccupation of a modern production which bears traits of archaic memories. Thus, we used musical instruments of antiquity, such as the drum, the lyre and the flute, in an endeavor to blend the past with the present. Moreover we used modern rhythms orchestrated with traditional instruments so

as to achieve a modern sound-effect. For this reason, modern electronic music, with elements of garage dance music and recurring rhythmic motifs, which were used principally in off-stage scenes and for the entry of Pentheus, were composed as an audio sign for the contemporary way of life. Proceeding towards the unfolding of the action, its tragic character intensifying, we pass on to sounds taken from the European classical music of the West produced on orchestral instruments (violin, cello).

Music sometimes functioned as background (characteristic of the cinema), at other times as a transitional bridge between one scene and the next (the 'musical *capiamento*' of the Italian stage). Music was at the same time used as the rhythmic basis upon which the articulation was constructed and movement measured. In most cases the musical composition followed the movement options. In other words, when the chorus parts began to be formed through physical improvisation, the music reinforced the already existing style and served the dramatic purposes of that particular moment.

### **Choreography – movement**

We used icons from antique vases, from which we retained only the bodily forms and the poses that had resonance in the present day. Emphasis was placed on the pelvis and the hands. Also emphasis placed on the head, as can be observed in the work of P. Bausch, used in this research to develop the free rotational movement which produces a more general sense of relaxation and physical liberation. The hands in particular, which are an essential form of expression in dance, made a great contribution to maintaining a bodily rhythm, typically rapid. Their extension is often associated with scenes where the chorus is led to a state of ecstasy. Moreover, a bodily stance of openness that is indicated by the use of the hands, at many points signified invocation of Dionysus by the chorus and more generally communication with the divine element.

As far as the individual roles are concerned, the ultimate aim was for a separate movement code to be mastered for each one from which through the process of step-by-step abstraction, a symbolic form would emerge. The transference method was a useful part of this process also and will be subjected to more detailed analysis in the chapter on the approach to acting.

## **Lighting**

Lighting was a key element in the creation of symbolic resonance in relation to the stage action. The lighting designer made some proposals for colored lighting to frame the entire scene. The view that prevailed was that basic colors and color combinations should be used depending on the atmosphere and on what was occurring at each point of the tragedy, so that the audience could draw immediate connections. Red was used from the moment that the cycle of bloodletting started – the dismemberment of Pentheus – until its close, at the end of the play as a symbol for blood. Blue was used in the second chorus part as the symbol of hope for the transition of existence to a serene utopic place. The coldest color, white, predominated in all Pentheus' scenes as a symbol of power and of intransigence. The main aim was that the lighting should operate with discretion, so as not to detract from the speech and the action.

There were three main problems that I was required to solve. Firstly I had to address the crucial structural issue of the chorus and its function in the play. Secondly I had to elaborate on the important ideological themes of the play, and their transference to a different era, where the audience has a different mindset from the audience of the ancient performance. By this I mean the themes of the epiphany of God, and the miracle play. Thirdly I had to answer the morphological question of the mask and its use and function for today's audience.

## **Chorus**

The chorus in the production is the “womb” where the female and male, the divine and human and in general the contradictory elements may coexist. It is for this reason that I decided the chorus should consist of both men and women, contrary to the directive of the author, who wanted the chorus to consist only of women.

Moreover, the text contains two individual choruses, only one of them being present on the stage: Dionysus' followers who came from Asia and the group of women from Thebes who zealously embraced the new religion and practiced it on Cithaeron. In our production, both choruses are present on the stage. This was an important decision to make visible both choruses.

Euripides indicates that the chorus of Maenads comes from Asia. For my reading, Asia has been just another stop on Maenads' way. On their arrival to Thebes, they meet with the second chorus, that of local women. This second chorus bears more traditional and ritual elements and is not characterized by the same richness of experience and multiculturalism as the first one, the Maenads.

As for the first chorus, I took the decision to free it from the narrowly Asiatic identity that has so often been attributed to it. For example, in many Greek productions, and in the Hollandia performance, the Oriental element is conspicuous. I wanted to make it less bound to a specific time and more multicultural. I endeavored from the outset to create a vivid contemporary form supported by current linguistic and semiological codes, so as to enable the audience to reach their own representations concerning their everyday activities.

As for the second chorus, I decided that it should be present on the stage, played by three women from the ensemble, representing the three daughters of Cadmus: Ino, Agave and Autnoe, and the three groups of women practicing their religion on the mountain of



Cithaeron. The action of these women is characterized, according to the textual narrations - the first messenger's speech in verses 660-774, giving a vivid description of them - by intense violence, a bestial impetus, callousness, monstrous impulsiveness, male-type behavior and a complete absence of reason. The scenic representation was carried out in an abstract mode, using symbolic numbers of individuals as well as symbolic movement. The choice of presenting the chorus in this way was meant as an ironic comment on the bombardment of modern civilizations by violent scenes and stimuli.

In Euripides' time, audiences were not confronted with scenes of violence; the depiction of the narrative descriptions was left to the free imagination of the spectator. In our time, the era of the image, we have gone to the other extreme: sequences of images of extreme violence have resulted in immunity to feeling, irreparably damaging our imagination.

For this reason we used a grotesque and distorting depiction of violence - an enormous mouth ready to tear flesh to pieces, a hand that massages a woman's breast, touching of genitals, fragmentary visual stimuli as a cartoon puzzle. The idea was for this picture to function for the spectator as a distorting mirror of himself and the modern way of life. The medium employed was thus that of images familiar to the audience. An attempt was however made to deconstruct it, so that its omnipotence might be drawn into question.

Thus, a chorus, which in the author's conception was meant to remain invisible we put it on the stage. The same undertaking was attempted for certain invisible parts of the story and some roles, which were represented on stage- i.e. the female, as an element in the drama, became a character and a role, taking the form of a second Pentheus, the chorus in the last scene, dressed in military clothing, as an image of the utmost horror. The choice of making the invisible visible aimed at a further mobilization of the audience's feelings.

I have already mentioned that my basic conception in the production was that of the appearance of a group of people who would

tell a story. From a very early stage, I identified the theatre ensemble with the chorus of the play. By default, the chorus undertook the predominant role of the narrator. It constituted the "acting" space from which the roles emerged, acting and then returning whence they came, to the womb of the story. I believe that the practical ways in which this concept was realized was a breakthrough concerning the use of the chorus and how it had been performed till now.

No section of the chorus was sung, and this represented a deliberate choice. The aim was to experiment with the production of a voice and sound effect based on declamation that would evoke similar emotions to those aroused by singing. The absence of singing text was offset through various alternative proposals: 1) Visualization of the words through the body. The meaning of the words created a new rhythm. For example the element of water falling from a high rock and flowing between natural obstacles was represented through a different movement on the part of each member of the chorus, lending a corresponding rhythmic character to the simultaneous group declamation of the text. 2) At certain points the language was stressed, following the rhythm (e.g. 4/4) dictated by the music for the scene in question. In this respect the previous arrangement is reversed and it is the speech intonation that predominates, governing the bodily movement and determining its intensity. 3) At points such as lines 73-119 in the first chorus part there is group declamation of the text, imparting a pronounced musicality and lyricism to the language, despite the absence of singing as such. 4) The repetition of words and phrases, in combination with rapid breathing, creates an emotional tension, which functions as a catalyst for the dramatic action.

## **Miracle play**

The ideological issues of the play have been discussed extensively by numerous scholars and this has proved a taxing process for the directors. The first subject is the portrayal of the element of miracle that pervades the whole play and finds expression, for example, in the scene of the earthquake and the release of Dionysus from Pentheus' bonds. Two different points of views have been formulated on the earthquake: first that it was a natural phenomenon, which served to heighten the intensity of the drama, and second that it was a mass hallucination of Dionysus' followers, who enact the experience of a miracle. (Mossman, 2003)

The text says that the earthquake was caused by the god Dionysus himself, as a demonstration of his force and supremacy. This phenomenon is to be found in religious - and above all in Christian - tradition, as with the most tragic moment of the Christian religion, that of Jesus' crucifixion.

Although the representation of such a scene would be within the potential of modern stage technology I chose a more symbolic reading of the text. I implied an esoteric, rather than a religious approach to the phenomenon. At this particular point - Dionysus was imprisoned and absent for the first time, leaving his ensemble without guidance and encouragement - the chorus seeks within itself those divine elements that will render it once again capable of facing the adverse exterior conditions. The driving force of the Dionysian ensemble springs from the accumulated energy of its members, leading at times to situations of ecstasy.

This outburst of aggregated energy we attempted to reproduce on stage. Each member of the ensemble sought to become the animating spirit both of himself and of the entire group. Here again we return to the significance of the group, which functions as a single body, a single voice, a single person, and embodies the secret of shared experience.

In the earthquake scene, the dialogue takes place between Dionysus and the chorus. In our production the speech was delivered over a microphone by the two members of the ensemble who had undertaken the role of Dionysus – the actor that incarnated the divine side of Dionysus, speaking Dionysus' part, and the actor that incarnated his earthly side speaking words of the chorus.

I placed the two actors on a higher level than the chorus. Both of them spoke over a microphone rendering their voices unnatural. This staging attempted to symbolise the innermost dialogue of the chorus; the first voice prompted them to act and protest and the second voice urged them to accept the prompting. The concept was greatly strengthened through adoption of a concrete movement by the chorus: At the points where the chorus is incited – and thus listens – its movements are followed by a pause and an instant of hesitation; at points when it accepts the incitement by the divine voice – and so acts – the movement is accelerated, becoming more intense and more decisive.

The "miraculous" release of Dionysus, following the earthquake scene, is in accordance with the main directorial viewpoint. A few seconds after the outburst of energy from the chorus – during an intervening blackout – Dionysus appears 'as by magic' on the same scenic level as the ensemble, as if reconstructed from his composite elements. The light shows the god in the centre of the scene, encircled by the chorus, reasserting his role of animator and leader of the group, just as at the beginning of the play.

### **Epiphany of God**

A second question that preoccupied the director concerns the epiphany of the God, namely the stage appearance and the exit of the god Dionysus. In our production we opted for a scenic "splitting" of Dionysus into his component parts of divine and human substance. This was realized through assignment of the role to two different

members of the ensemble. Both aspects of Dionysus, i.e. both actors, were present on stage during the whole play, at each and every moment investigating the element of otherness and the complementary element.

In the first appearance of Dionysus, the actress speaks only with her mouth and eyes illuminated. The black background in combination with her black suit and the sole light of an electric torch creates the scenic picture of a mesh of shadows which, in different permutations and combinations, intersecting diagonally in a variety of ways, comprise the consecutive transformations of Dionysus descending to earth, as a lion, a bull, a snake. At the same time, accompanying the visual alternation and synthesis, a sound texture was in operation consisting of fragments of words heard in the dark from a second voice – the second Dionysus, who was dressed the same way as the first one. Slowly, the fragments join together to become words; the two voices have merged into one, by repeating the same text and visually by becoming one person. The auditory merging is followed by the visual – and on-stage – transformation of the god Dionysus into his earthly form.

A similar sequence occurred at the exit of Dionysus: with an act of human sensitivity (the first Dionysus touches Agave with compassion) she displays showing sympathy to Agave; she rediscovers her divine characteristics and disappears into the ether.

## **Mask**

The mask defined the ancient acting, and the visual aspect of the performance. According to Peter Hall (2000: p.28): *'the Greek mask was enigmatic, uncertain, bearing an ambiguous expression, depicting human confusion and invested with the emotions of the actor'*. The mask is often more expressive than the face because it touches the quintessence of human feeling.

The actor in any performance is invited to act having previously conceived and mastered the form of the theatre style of the specific play. What distinguishes the form of the tragedy, creating the necessary restrictions, is the mask. Limited by the mask, the actor projects his emotional state through expressive means such as his voice and his body, and in this way he achieves the most comprehensive theatre performance and elicits corresponding emotions in the audience. The communication of feeling through a multiplicity of means enables the spectator to live the projected emotions himself/herself, allowing him/her simultaneously to recreate in his/her mind the overall impression they make, and their depth. (Peter Hall, 2000)

Moreover the neutral mask, element from Lecoq's method – a mask without expression – eliminates the face, promoting the body, creating in the actor a situation of neutrality and emotional receptivity as a prelude to action. Donning the neutral mask, the actor renders his body available, for the theatrical action to be registered on it.

We used first the neutral mask in improvisations and rehearsals to energize the body. It was decided then that we would keep some elements of mask in the performance, but only to underline a semiological directorial choice. A black half – mask would be used, with the same expression for all the members of the chorus, from the second messenger's speech until the end of the play. Black was chosen to show the animalisation of the chorus, the dissolution of the individualised elements of its members' personalities and their submission to the rule of the god Dionysus.

In the last episode, where the tragedy reaches its climax with the recognition of Pentheus' head by his mother, Agave, Cadmus and all the members of the chorus are wearing black half- masks. This choice for the characters aimed at intensifying the communication of tragic emotion via the body. The devastating pain of the mother was communicated through the intensification of a movement, which was built around the symbolic area of innards and the womb of the

mother. This scene hints at core issues of the human existence. So the distance generated by the mask against an emotion so intense, plunges the spectator into deeper levels of human sensibility. The use of mask creates a distance that makes the spectator feel, but also contemplate the feelings he is experiencing and he is witnessing. This forms another element of “detachment” in order for the audience to take distance and deal with the big issues of life.

As for the chorus, the masks enhance the initial idea of a group of people beginning to tell a story on which the director’s approach is based. The picture of all members of the chorus wearing the same black masks conveys the idea, with the utmost eloquence, that all of them are equal before the story, it means that they can all potentially play all the roles. Consequently, the group dynamic determines on each occasion who will speak and which role will assume. In the last scene, for example, the chorus, divided into two semi-circles at the edge of the stage, strengthens and animates the actor who, embodying the voices of the whole chorus transmutes them into the huge outcry of Agave.

The use of mask in the last scene was to support my interpretation of the scene and was not intended to refer specifically to the use of mask in ancient tragedy. This choice is also illuminated by the absence of masks in the first part of the play which allowed the audience to create a relationship of familiarity and identification with the members of the ensemble. The spectator thus watches a group of contemporary young people, with expressive faces and a recognisable feature, transform gradually into a group that has lost its personal characteristics, becoming regimented and finally has all the features of a belligerent mob. In conclusion we researched through the medium of mask but the way it was incorporated in the performance, acquired different layers of meaning, thus distancing it from the original ancient Greek practice.

Some of my basic proposals concerning the staging of this play have to do with the interpretation of the roles and the novelty of these choices. I decided to work on the fundamental subjects of the play and the distinguishing characteristics of the roles with all members of the ensemble. This process led to the final decision that all the members of the group should recommend potential roles and all participate in the chorus – the group of narrators – from which the dramatis personae emanate and to which they return.

## **Roles**

### Dionysus and Pentheus

Traditionally, a male actor plays the role of Dionysus – in ancient times only male actors participated in the plays in any case. There have been performances where the role of Dionysus was assigned to a woman - e.g. in the production by National theatre directed by G. Theodosiadis. Ingmar Bergman also used a woman for this role in his version of *The Bacchae*.

In our production two women played Dionysus in order to represent his dual character (divine and human). The role of Dionysus has androgynous characteristics. He is the bearer of the instinct and the champion of contact with Mother Nature. These factors are what have led to the choice of the female sex for this role.

It was considered that the female characteristics of Dionysus as well as the roles associations with Mother Nature – with regenerative and catastrophic forces – would be better symbolised through the aforementioned choice.

This was corroborated by the improvisations we conducted, through which I ascertained that the group's emotional response was better when a woman played Dionysus, rather than a man. I was led empirically to this particular choice because Dionysus, himself a member of the chorus, would function in the play as animator to the



ensemble. Besides, a female actor would also make for better contrast with the role of Pentheus, the undisputed representative of the male sex and inflexible logic.

The role of Pentheus was also shared between two men. Pentheus is characterized by extreme and intensely contradictory traits – e.g. his extreme conservatism and obsessive voyeurism. My intention in doing this was to investigate the two extremes in depth, to their most subtle nuances, and also to demonstrate the inner conflict in Pentheus. In real time this clash could have been a lifelong affair for Pentheus; the scenic splitting of the two aspects into two individuals enabled the audience to monitor them simultaneously. The staging choice thus bridged the gap between real and scenic time. This meant that on the stage there were two women facing two men.

The double casting was based on the twin aspects of every person, male and female, but also on other contradictory forces and influences that all of us experience within ourselves. – i.e. reasoned thought as opposed to instinctive action, group action and co-existence with others as against individualism. Moreover, as far as Dionysus is concerned, we tried to show his dual nature, divine and human.

In conclusion, from the viewpoint of theatrical semiology, the splitting tactic best served the fundamental assumption and the original idea that *The Bacchae* is based on a series of bipolarities. It was on account of this finding that I was led to a similar decision for the chorus, which finally consisted of both men and women.

### Messenger's speech

The messenger's speech is the main means for narrating events that take place offstage. It constitutes an important dramatic tool with interesting scenic functions, also carrying out a parallel role beyond the narrative one.

In this play the first messenger arouses erotic fantasies in Pentheus, principally by the way he narrates the excess and wilderness of the actions of The Bacchae. Furthermore he awakens the deeper fears of Pentheus, who will soon stop listening to the real content of the speech, entering the prohibited space of suppression.

### Second messenger's speech

This speech is considered as one of the most powerful description of a murder scene in the international repertory. Precisely for this reason I wanted to find ways of rendering its dynamic and reinforcing its already intense drama. I thus decided to split the speech among all members of the chorus, thus turning a speech which is normally delivered by a single actor into one shared among many actors - so that the energy and the emotional intensity of each actor might function cumulatively, adding further power to the stage narrative.

In the scene of the dismemberment of Pentheus, it is the chorus itself that performs the unhallowed act. In the messenger's speech, where the murder is described in every detail, the perpetrator-narrators each bearing a red ribbon – they all come forward in turn, each helping to expand the circle of blood – they admit to the crime, almost in confessional mode, in an endeavour to find a way of managing their guilt. The horror following the “anthropophagi” (man-eating), which is unbearable for each individual separately, is shared among the group, in this way diluting the responsibility.

This marks the achievement of transition from the chorus to the ensemble. The members of the group in dealing with their complicity come closer and unite under a common, although unbearable situation, “*gaining fullness*”. (Allain, P. 1997) The group closes the story as it started its narration of it: narrating coherently and with a collective conscience. Beyond the mere facts, the maintenance of the group spirit is a key objective of our approach to staging.

This group spirit which formulated the main directing choice gave me also a dramaturgical key for the handling of the myth. We elaborated on the predominant element of performances in Ancient Greece, which was that the audience was supposed to be completely familiar with the content of the myth and thus able to focus on the handling of the myth by the playwright. In order to achieve this, prior to the commencement of the performance various group members moved among the audience and told them about the myth, the period of its composition, the writer, making them communicants of the story and awakening interest in its imminent staging. This element is not common in the staging of Tragedy. It contributed to the formation of a broader group – actors and spectators – who would be imparting the same story and communicating through a theatre act.

## 10. The fundamental acting choices – Physical Theatre Methods

In this chapter I outline the core of my working method for the realization of the ancient Greek text drawing on the techniques of physical theatre as practised over the last forty years and especially those applied by the method of J. Lecoq. My basic methodology was an organic one developing interpretative choices in the rehearsal room while applying physical theatre principles.

The analysis of body movements, the physical projection of the dynamics of nature, *'the transference method'*, *'the identifications'*, and the strong emphasis on physical acting by the actor all constitute a new tool for the acting of ancient tragedy. I believe that this combined with the classical text offers theatrical practice a new direction.

Lecoq's teachings and methods about creative theatre and in particular the *'transference method'* had a major influence in my approach to acting practice. Aspects of the methods developed by the following practitioners (Stanislavski, Grotowski and Barba) were incorporated, although it is not my intention to isolate this or that precise instance of technique. Suffice to say that their practices as a whole played a role in informing my own practice and research, and I note the key characteristics of this influence here.

Stanislavski –though always emphasising the notion of the character- in the last phase of his work proposes a score of physical actions to enable the solo actor to acquire inspiration, presence, creative mood and the sensation of existing fully within the immediate moment. (Hodge, A. 2000) His approach to the actor's score comprises a set of external moves and strategies to create an inner purposeful action arising from the text and the specific scene. Stanislavski refers to this sequence as a physical score which must be executed in silence. In such a convention, the actor carries out the physical score of actions which has already been identified by the inner, purposeful actions of the textual elements that fit the character. *'Such non-verbal acting helps physicalise the scene. Actors avoid pantomime, however,*

*using credible gestures and blocking that could conceivably be transferred to a spoken performance. If the actors successfully communicate the key elements of the scene in a 'silent étude', they have created useful scores for performance'. (Hodge, A. 2000: p.27)* In this approach, acting work is mediated by the director and the writer. The physicality in this case is only one component –amongst others – in the development of character and situation.

Grotowski's approach to the art of acting was underpinned by his persistent effort to help the actor *'live more truthfully on stage... and how this truth might best be expressed within an aesthetic framework'*. (Hodge, A. 2000:p.193) He argued that a naturalistic approach which emphasizes aspects of daily social behaviors obscures a more profound level of "truth". For that reason in the centre of the Grotowskian approach is the solo actor and his/her physical potential for extraordinary acts. He supports the actor's presence on stage through a process of revealing and in pursuit of this goal, Grotowski pushed physical training to the extreme to enable the actor to gain expressive control of his movements and gestures. He created the *'holy figure'*, whose physical ability is able to accomplish the *'total act'*. This is seen as a culminating moment in the actor's presence, one where he transcends not only the performance score but also the technical skill in order to reveal a universal truth.

Barba explores a theatrical poly-glot identity. He pursues a theatre of cultural pluralism, through his research and his training. The training resulted from the synthesis of the group of actors who taught each other anything they knew. All the different cultural backgrounds were foregrounded and informed the training of the multi-cultural group. Difference and not homogeneity was their goal. Furthermore the process of training became the form of performance. So he used training as a form of performance research and as a process of actor's self-definition. For Barba *the mise-en-scène took precedence over interpreting the author's vision...in favour of an episodic montage.* (Hodge, A. 2000: p. 210) For Barba the actor's

presence is a function of what he called '*scenic bios*', a state in which the actor can be present on stage in a mental and corporeal process of reduction in daily and inculturated habits in order to tap the '*Pre-expressive body*' and its skills.

At this point I will focus on the central practice of Lecoq's method – '*transference method*'- and thereby illuminate how it differs from the aforementioned approaches to physicality.

Neutrality is the starting point for Lecoq's approach to bodily expressivity. The actor develops a state of openness in order to respond to stimuli from the outside world. According to Lecoq this can be achieved if he/she eliminates the focus on facial expression and shifts his/her energy to the body. In this way the body becomes the key vehicle for expressing feelings.

Lecoq's method places an interpretative emphasis on the elements of nature, animals and materials. He develops this relationship to include colours, rhythms, spaces and so on. He asks the actor first to imagine an element, then to think about its different components and finally to imitate it. His method is called the '*transference method*' and is defined in this way: '*we count on the dynamics of nature itself, on animals, on materials using them for the reason of creativity and best imitation of human nature. We opt for a level of theatricality far from realism*' (Lecoq, 2000: p.71). There are two ways: First, an element of nature can be humanized adopting a human behaviour and second, reverse the process. There is the role and inside it the different elements of nature or animals or materials that can be projected. These elements feed the roles with different characteristics analogous to the behavioural ones. The '*method of transference*' provides the actor with bodily memories which will emanate at the time of acting as traits that exist inside the body, and which the body remembers.

I selected this method as my key approach to the acting roles. Symbolic roles such as those in tragedy transcend individual human elements and characteristics. They do not prioritise individual identity as such (age, biography) and they therefore better stand the test of

time. They can be made recognizable independently of the considerations of space and time. These symbolic roles involve a predominant feature that determines the course of their dramatic development in the play, just as the same characteristic has a determining effect on the life of the person bearing it (e.g. Pentheus: symbolizing the element of intransigent power, as typified by intransigent leaders in world history, such as Hitler or Bush).

In our work, to develop the predominant characteristic of a role, we visualised the elements of nature, animals, and materials and allowed this to inform our acting.

### ***Dionysus and 'his many forms'***

I decided to use two actors for the role of Dionysus in order to create a way of evolving his characteristics through the course of the play. Once he comes to earth, Dionysus' divine form undergoes successive metamorphoses through the qualities of the animals that he embodies. Once he is securely on the ground, the human element in him comes to the fore, coexisting briefly with the divine and prevailing finally in the second part of the play.

I approached the role of the first Dionysus by working successively on the elements bull, lion and snake (the successive transformations of Dionysus), using Lecoq's '*transference method*'. My aim was that the actor should 1) observe, 2) become and 3) embody the characteristic traits of these animals. I placed most emphasis on concentration of energy in the *face*, particularly the eyes and mouth, which were transformed into the eyes and mouth of a bull (transference method). In this way I discovered that the metamorphosis functioned as a mask and consequently the face became the mask. Through this improvisation a suitable voice timbre was achieved. The voice was to become speech. Emphasis on consonants – "s", "m", "r", "d" – and elongation have stressed syllables – i.e. verse 1: "*Ir-tha. Tou Di-a o gi-os, o Di-o-ny-sos*" – were instruments for work on the articulation of the first monologue.

The articulation of speech was enriched through a multitude of paralingual elements –*inarticulate cries, exclamations, and violent exhalation of breath, hissing*. The linguistic and paralinguistic elements in conjunction with facial expressions of harsh mimicry, created the impression that the figure they were seeing and hearing had something of the animal about it, potentially of the god, but certainly nothing human.

The stage appearance of Dionysus in the *first episode* includes a combination of human and divine characteristics and attributes. The



animal elements are at a minimum. The voice timbre is retained but what emerges is a more human person, literally and metaphorically.

These human aspects are developed in a totally contrary manner in the figure of the second Dionysus (2<sup>nd</sup> part of the play), where they become visualised and symbolic.

In the case of the second Dionysus, I focused the acting work on certain specific attributes borne by Dionysus – the seducer, the corrupter – and linked them dramaturgically to the plot as it develops in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part – the god seduces the conservative Pentheus. The second actor playing Dionysus must therefore embody the element of seduction.

In the improvisations, the spider was used as a symbol – a creative force for building webs, aggressiveness, incessant destruction and creation, a spiralling, circular movement (Cirlot, 1995). What interested us was the strategic behaviour of the spider and only secondarily the movement element. The ultimate objective was that the scene with Dionysus and Pentheus should achieve the rhythm and atmosphere of a spider's spiralling manoeuvres.

To conclude, we attempted on the one hand to make the role of Dionysus an embodiment of animal characteristics (1<sup>st</sup> part); on the other to adopt animal attributes transformed theatrically to human behaviour (2<sup>nd</sup> part). These are functions of Lecoq's method.

## ***Pentheus, 'The Ambiguous'***

The idea of the individual who can determine a constant course in life whilst remaining open to external influences is of great interest to me, it has been a basic issue in my investigation and theatrical representation. Following the same train of thought that determined the theatrical approach to Dionysus, I carried out a similar dichotomy regarding the role of Pentheus. The distance that separates the first from the last appearance of Pentheus is great, involving different personality characteristics that received in-depth study. From the viewpoint of staging, this study is illustrated through the personalization of these different characteristics and attributes of the role of Pentheus by two persons.

Pentheus is introduced at the beginning of the play as a young leader, extremely conservative, absolute in his judgements, sexually repressed, characterized by a lack of self awareness and clinging to the surface aspect of power. I related all these characteristics to the element of fire, an element of nature which is applied via the method of 'identifications' with the natural world. 'Identifications' are a sub-category of Lecoq's *'transference method'* where the actor experiments by embodying the different elements of nature: water, fire, air, earth. I identified the 'inflammable' Pentheus with the element of fire, as according to J. Lecoq: *"Fire is fire, the most extreme and demanding of the elements, because it is nothing more than itself"*. (Lecoq 2000: p.43)

We worked on the first monologue of Pentheus, following his entry, subjecting the actor to fire-like conditions in which he begins to get burned until he himself becomes the element of fire. The high levels of inner intensity and energy were maintained as an inner driving force of Pentheus' behaviour in the production. This extreme tension strongly contrasts with the rhetorical mode of speech, based on argumentative speech, a challenge for both the director and the actors. We used both juridical and rhetorical speeches, along with the speeches of political leaders. We also brought in the work on our

personal observations of lawyers' orations, so as to be able to reproduce the style, the atmosphere and the non-verbal behaviour of the speakers.

The same structural elements of the role were used for the acting and working on the second Pentheus role, with a different acting objective. Instead of the element of fire we used the element of water in the sense that it can lead to drowning, a metaphor for Pentheus who drowns in his forbidden desires and fantasies.

The scene where Pentheus dresses up as a woman is an important point in the action from both the acting and the directing viewpoint. But it poses serious challenge to the actor (the psychological resistance was strong for an amateur actor). The acting approach aimed initially at familiarizing the actor with the female side of his character, both as a bodily expression and as inner traits such as vanity, emotional sensitivity and curiosity. To this purpose, experiential improvisations were carried out with the repeated use of disguise, often bordering on a hilarious, carnival atmosphere. Disguise is a key element of the dramatic text but it also helps an actor's inhibitions to be dispersed.

To sum up, our guide in the case of Pentheus was the study and the physical embodiment of the elements of nature -through the 'identifications'-, energetic depiction of instinct, together with the attempt to understand thoroughly the structure and inner logic of rhetorical speech.

### ***Teiresias, Servant: 'the need for form'***

Our acting methods were used and adapted depending on the needs and the difficulties of each role but also of each actor. A sub-category of the 'transference method' as I have already mentioned is the '*method of identification*' which can be applied to materials as well. I developed this method during the acting work with the roles of

Teiresias and the servant, trying to achieve a level of theatrical transposition.

As far as Teiresias is concerned, I encountered a certain difficulty in relation to the articulation of speech. The actor had a very high-pitched voice and a rapid and truncated rhythm of breathing, which was a hindrance to properly articulated, comprehensible speech. I thought that if the actor held his breath and allowed it to be exhaled slowly; this would help him to control his speech. However, I needed an image to help him achieve the desired result.

A balloon being slowly filled with air, along with a continuing exhalation of breath was the image I was looking for. The actor playing Teiresias adopted the sense of the inflated balloon, and experimented with different levels of tone, nuances and rhythms of speech delivery. Once he hit the right tone of voice, we then focused on a study of the sequence of arguments and the – notional and scenic – approach to religious representations of our day. As for the body form, in order also to portray age as well as the stereotype of a religious leader (i.e. the recognisable figure of the Pope), we adopted the device of a hump.

The actor who played the servant was obliged to adopt a stiff body stance implying the rigidity and aggressiveness of a follower of Pentheus. Borrowing elements from the compact molecular structure of lead, a strict, spare body form was developed for the stage. During the rehearsals there was an investigation into the temperature and the image of melting lead, which was used as a form of body expression in the scene where Dionysus ‘hurls thunderbolts’ at the servant (2<sup>nd</sup> episode, entry of Dionysus onto the stage).

The identification of the two actors with materials (balloon, lead) was initially employed to increase their technical means of expression. The work on the materials- lead and balloon- foregrounded the deeper personal characteristics of the roles and so enabled a more complex form of presentation to be devised.

### ***Cadmus, Agave, 'in the labyrinth of emotions'***

The actor playing Cadmus faced two problems: first, his real age was very different from that of the role and second his movement expression was characterized by hyperactivity, uncoordinated body movements and in general, characteristics that were rather remote from the style of a regal leader.

We thus used the symbol of a calm, almost motionless river, which the actor watched, slowly incorporating its calm, the harmony of its slow-flowing waters, and the predominance of the river within the natural environment. Through the given imaginary material, the actor slowed down the rhythm of his breathing and also introduced a sense of flow both into both his speech and his body movement (i.e. a continuous flow of movement). Finally he maintained a physical score of movements by identifying the role with the element of water, playing the river. This gave to the role a particular body form and gesture.

The result was the creation of the feeling of a royal figure, simultaneously overcoming the obstacle of the age difference, which was blunted by the slow, measured movements of the actor. This movement style, which introduced rhythms and movements from tai chi, underwent even further development in the last scene of the play, resulting to an abstract form of movement similar to that of the Japanese Noh Theatre.

In this scene, as the chorus delivers the second messenger's speech, Cadmus, on the third level of the scene (the scaffoldings), is searching for Pentheus' dismembered limbs. At the same time Agave is looking for Cadmus in order to show to him, in great pride, her final trophy: the head of Pentheus. In this way she visualises an off-stage scene that is not included in the play but only as verbal description. The meeting between Cadmus and Agave on the second level of the stage area is a continuation of their off-stage action and the dialogue between them. It reveals the truth about Pentheus and the anguish of his mother which all evolves as a slow, choreographic dialogue. This

choreography follows the pace of the escalating dramatic intensity. When it reaches its climax, the form explodes and falls apart and finally at the end is deconstructed.

Almost instantaneously we are transported to a traditional mourning ceremony. In her boundless grief, Agave returns to her roots and to her familiar behavioural routines: the level and the quality of emotion can no longer be restrained within formal limits. Movement is liberated as an expression of exploding energy. Inarticulate animal cries convey the inner anarchy. We are confronted with the most human moment of the play. Agave, the symbol of motherhood, of Mother Nature, the archetypal maternal figure, possessing the power of creation and destruction, undergoes transition to the character of a mother who is mourning for the loss of her child.

It is precisely here that the greatest acting difficulty lies: how to succeed this arousal of the required emotions in the bodies and souls of the two actors – Cadmus and especially Agave – in order to convey the perception of human nakedness in the face of absolute pain? Let me repeat the definition of emotional memory from the method of Stanislavsky *‘An actor can awaken a required emotion in himself because he has many times experienced the same emotion in his own life.’* (Mour, S. 1992)

This experience of Cadmus, let alone of Agave, is exceptionally difficult for any actor. It is rare to have had a similar experience and it is hard to represent it on stage. Thus, reframing the above definition, I would say that an actor can attain his professional objectives only if he/she can recall characteristics of emotionality, self-knowledge and the ability to process to his/her own experiences. Possessing such characteristics, one will be in a position to be emotionally moved, tapping the emotional resources demanded by any relevant role.

The actress playing the Agave had the experience of losing her brother. She tried to recall this memory by remembering her physical behaviour in her bereavement. In our rehearsals we tried to recall this

bodily memory and to carefully elaborate on it. For that reason we improvised a physical score of actions deriving from the method of Stanislavski in order to set accurate and repeated movements which could evoke the feelings. It was then created a more abstract form of interpreting the role which sustained an archetypal persona.

The most important improvisation that we worked upon at length and in depth was that of the labyrinth. The actors – Cadmus and Agave - were initially put together in a hypothetical labyrinth. At some point in their common course, they were separated, suffering their first loss, the loss of one another. Continuing the improvisation, which was accompanied by high-intensity music in order to elicit feelings of fear, stress and threat, they went on looking for each other in the midst of a centripetal movement of intensifying rhythm that produced a sense of vertigo. This circular movement of agitation in space led to gradual emergence of mnemonic bodily experiences of loss.

Beginning with the given common stimulus emerged two different, personal types of searching and grieving. The improvisation was repeated many times so that the particular movement would become a bodily memory and the final representational form would be a ritual expression of pain, both the role and the actor's.

The process of approaching the role of Agave, and the physical improvisation were of exceptional importance. One of the most important findings in working on such a complicated part as Agave was a certain limitation in Lecoq's method. For Agave there arose the necessity to combine the 'transference method' (the hypothetical labyrinth) with the more traditional approach of Stanislavski's method of physical actions.

What occurred with Agave was the emergence of identification between the internal and external aspects of her behaviour and a corresponding theatrical elaboration of the emotional and physical elements respectively, in keeping with the fact that Agave is at the same time an archetypal role and a character role.

### ***Messenger, 'the mediator'***

Both the first and the second messengers' speeches are dealt with as structural elements and vehicles for narrative action rather than speeches of *dramatis personae*. In this way the rhythm and the meaning were studied as dictated by the text itself. The first messenger revealed the rhythm and the dramatic tensions of the text and followed them verbally and emotionally. The dramatic effect of the music also contributed to the part of the messenger's speech together with a simultaneous escalation of sound. In the second messenger's speech the subject-matter [of the description has to do with a certain event of a specific duration from the moment where Dionysus places Pentheus high up in a fir tree so that he can watch the orgies of the maenads until the moment when the maenads uproot the fir, throw Pentheus to the ground and dismember him, (lines 1045-1155)].

From the viewpoint of the *mise-en-scene*, these same members of the chorus have just carried out the dismemberment in the preceding scene – it is the same chorus members who play the roles of the Cithaeron murderers. In this way, the narration differs, for the narrators are not merely describing the event but are experiencing it in the utmost intensity, transforming the dramatic time of the story's unfolding into the real time of stage narration.

### ***The chorus: 'autonomous histories'***

The chorus constituted the central "*dramatis personae*" of the play, including all the roles in it. It was because of this central function of the chorus that I decided to work in depth on its acting approach. Two dimensions of the stage presence of the chorus were my main preoccupation: the way that the chorus articulates the speech and the way the chorus delivers the movement expression. In



general, the chorus, as a role, introduces many of the important questions of the play. It is both the recipient of the stimuli, and a witness to the conflicts given in the episodes. The chorus also develops the unfolding story and occasionally suggests a balanced resolution.

At an early stage in my direction I decided that the speech and movement would have to be combined; the rhythm of speech sometimes guided the movement (e.g. at the beginning of the second choric section, verses 370–385), other times the movement preceded the speech (i.e. first chorus part, verses 74–113), or the movement frequently visualised words and emotions (e.g. first chorus part, verses 141–150).

The directorial option of close and harmonious coexistence of speech and movement led me to the decision not to have any of the choric sections sung but to let the musicality come from the use of the body as a loudspeaker for natural sounds; that is to say we wanted to create an alternative musical score, where a ‘melody’ is produced by the combination of linguistic, paralinguistic and visual elements and not by musical notes. This approach required my close collaboration with the choreographer, with whom I worked on all the choric sections. I will examine each choric section separately.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> choral part. “ Later came the bees”

In the first choric section (1<sup>st</sup> part), the chorus makes its entrance in a light-hearted climate, with enthusiasm, curiosity and a desire to see the new surroundings, to get to know them, and communicate its ideas. The actors worked in pairs on exercises of fall and recover - exercises usually adopted by modern dance techniques. Thus, a sequence of movements was produced for each pair including at least one recovery, as an element of euphoria and uplift. The speech was then shared out among the pairs (verses 64–72, cf. next page), with each pair making their speech at the moment of their recovery.

The movement sequences of the pairs were combined as follows:  
 a) when one pair acts the recovery the remaining pairs remain in a low position and b) when one pair acts the fall another pair has already begun the movement of recovery. It thus created a specific tempo of speech delivery and musicality that was diffused throughout the space. This reached a climax with the whispered, repeated articulation of Dionysus' name by the members of the chorus.

| <b>Greek Text</b>                          | <b>English Translation</b>               |
|--|--|
| <i>Irtha apo tin Asia</i>                  | <i>Out of the land of Asia,</i>          |
| <i>Perasa ton Tmolos to iero vouno</i>     | <i>For Bromius we come!</i>              |
| <i>Ki akoloutho to Vakho</i>               | <i>Hard are the labours of God;</i>      |
| <i>Me pono gliko</i>                       | <i>Hard, but his service is sweet.</i>   |
| <i>Me kourasi analafri</i>                 | <i>Sweet to serve, sweet to cry:</i>     |
| <i>Alalazontas evi, evan.</i>              | <i>Bacchus! Evohé!</i>                   |
| <i>Poios einai, poios einai sto dromo?</i> | <i>You on the streets!</i>               |
| <i>Na figei makria, na sopasoun olio.</i>  | <i>You on the roads! Make way!</i>       |
| <i>Giati irtha edo, gia na imniso</i>      | <i>Let every mouth be hushed.</i>        |
| <i>me imno aionio</i>                      | <i>Let no ill-omened words profane</i>   |
| <i>to Dionyso, to Dionyso, to</i>          | <i>your tongues.</i>                     |
| <i>Dionyso, to Dionyso.....</i>            | <i>Make way! Fall back!</i>              |
|  | <i>Hush.</i>                             |
|  | <i>For now I raise the old, old hymn</i> |
|  | <i>to Dionysus.</i>                      |
|  | <b>(Arrowsmith, 1959)</b>                |

Studying the first choric section, I formed in my mind the image of a group of people invading a space and staking a claim to it just as a swarm of bees besiege a place and claim the pollen of the flowers in it. The bee image fired my imagination and I started looking into their physical and social behaviour. During my research I collected the following interesting information: (i) the community of bees consist of its queen (the only female individual that is fertilized –

by the drones), the workers and the drones (who do all the work in and outside of the beehive, taking care of the queen). (ii) The bees communicate through dance, often of lively rhythm, and through emissions of sounds and odours. (iii) They construct the beehive with wax that they excrete from the glands of their abdomen. The queen has a long abdomen and a sting.

Elements such as the lively rhythm of the movement, the bees making way to let the queen pass, the fact their movement are centred on the abdomen, were used as stimuli for improvisations while working on the first choric section (2<sup>nd</sup> part, verses 74–85 and 105–120). At the same time we worked on movement of the pelvis as in the system of Martha Graham. Chorus members practised imitation of the bees through a variety of improvisations, the movements being centred on the pelvis. We broke up into three groups, each group working as a community of bees with distinct roles: queen, workers, and drones. To the sequence of movements, which were improvised, we added speech segments. Then, after numerous repetition, and incorporation of the speech into the movement we minimised the elements pertaining to bees, while keeping the initial feeling, transferring it to the human level.

In the third part of the first choric section (verses 143–165), the meaning of the text itself led us through movements to a visualisation of elements like milk, wine, nectar and water, and objects like a torch or a drum. Sometimes physicalization of the elements was carried out individually and sometimes in groups, which is to say that the whole group, as a single body, physically visualised one of the elements (e.g. the drum).

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Choral part. 'Erotic'

The second choric section constitutes the conflict between two opposite forces: Pentheus and Dionysus. These forces were expressed in two different movement forms: legato movements for the erotic and

liberating element of Dionysus and staccato movements for the rigidity and violence of Pentheus. At the same time, through improvisation in pairs, with one actor “playing” Dionysus and the other Pentheus, we created a physical score of movements comprising each of the three types of movement (pushing, pulling, weighing). The rhythm of speech was then based on this physical score. In the course of the choric section (verses 370–400), the abovementioned elements were developed into a chorus of erotic atmosphere, possession and domination expressed, in 4/4-tango rhythm.

The last part of the choric section (402–431) includes the climax of erotic release of the *The Bacchae* and their transportation to a place where they can freely express this need. This was based on representations of the type of erotic scenes seen in paintings such as those of the Renaissance period. The *The Bacchae* are longing to be in contact with nature, instinct, and God. It is through these three elements that the movement and the verbal articulation emerge. The opening to the divine element and the invocation of God are then signalled by a choreographic ritual movement, taken from ancient vessel painting. It is one of the few choreographed parts of the play and it included a more classical sequence of movements dating from the past. There was an effort to use movements depicted on ancient vessels in our production, in our attempt to stress the universality and the importance of the subject matter of this choric section.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Choral part ‘In the maelstrom of inner agitation’

The third chorus part is one of the most difficult scenes of the play, from the viewpoint of mise-en-scène. It poses the question of how to represent and symbolize an earthquake in an acting approach: as a natural phenomenon, and as a demonstration of the power of Dionysus, or as an inner experience and need of *The Bacchae*. In order to represent the gathering of *The Bacchae* and their demonstration of support to Dionysus, we made use of the rhythm of

a group of people taking part in a demonstration in the streets. The pattern of movements which was followed was formed by visualisation of specific words (e.g. "womb" = congregation of the group into a concave formation) or symbols (.e.g. two spiral-shaped circles = a call on Dionysus and an appeal to him for salvation).

In the main earthquake section, when *The Bacchae* are led into a state of ecstasy, the movement is supported by a "question-answer" pattern and the choreography is based on four movements expressing the sequence of situations undergone by the chorus during the earthquake: 1) causing the earthquake → rhythmic blows by the hands on the ground and the body 2) losing balance and a sense of equilibrium → the body moves backwards and stops just before falling 3) trying to hold on → stretching the hands forward 4) calling on Dionysus for help → opening of the body towards the sky.

Each verb is a movement. The acceleration of movements and their dynamics lead to an ecstasy, a climax of energy and collapse. During the earthquake Dionysus intervenes with his speech; he urges *The Bacchae* to freedom, triggering a release of energy, so that they break the human limits and find a divine element within themselves. Dionysus addresses *The Bacchae* who listen to him and answer through their movements. Their speech is articulated by the second Dionysus.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Choral part 'On wisdom'

In the fourth choric section, *The Bacchae* after having achieved transcendence during the earthquake rest, contemplating on the great subjects of life. Their movements are minimal, often reaching immobility. The speech is delivered by a member of the chorus, while the other members express the same thoughts with their bodies. This is the only choric section where the music was written before the acting procedure, functioning to partner the member of the chorus who delivers the words. This forms an atmosphere full of emotion and

poetic expression. An intense lyricism is generated, lending a poetic atmosphere to the choric section, without it acquiring a classical singing format. This combination is reminiscent of the experimentation of present-day Greek musical theatre.

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Choral part 'Demonic fury'

In the last chorus part the chorus loses its human substance and is gradually transformed into an animal-like entity (a transformation assisted by the use of masks). The movement arises out of improvisation, through Lecoq's transference method. The music in this last choric section gives a dramatic effect to the movement. Speech articulation is enriched with paralinguistic elements those of animals. Dionysus, preacher of the game of disguise, initiates them into his world, shortly before the disastrous finale and the implementation of his vengeance.

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Choral part 'The deconstruction'

The play ends when the members of the chorus divest themselves of the visual signs of their on-stage roles (masks, aprons, flak jackets). The bodies of the actors remain still, evoking a primeval immobility. Then, every actor takes a foetal position around the perimeter of the stage. Finally the most basic element, speech, is gradually eliminated as the actors perform a fade-out repetition of the most important lines of the play, which ends in silence.

## 11. Conclusion

My doctoral thesis is based on two main ideas, which I have had constantly on my mind whilst writing these pages- which are the idea of the individual and the idea of individual related to the group. I am interested in all the complications and ambiguities of this relationship. My main preoccupation has been the formation of an identity, in the sense that the individual forms a stable personal system of values, constant enough to act as a “hallmark” of personal character. Also, as far as the group is concerned, the focus has been on the loss of group identity and the rule of the masses; namely the fact that the voice of the community in general tends to be silenced, subordinated to the roaring of the crowd. Thus, the core question remains: can the individual acquire elements of individuality and achieve an inner balance which is capable of inclusion in a collectively functioning group and also of contributing to the development of that group?

To my mind, there is a possibility of mankind developing an individual conscience in a collective body. The answers to these questions I seek mainly in the arts, and above all in theatre. In the course of this quest, my first acquaintance with *The Bacchae* did not occur by chance.

The use of a plural form in the title of the play “The Bacchae” (*in plural*) impelled me to investigate the way from the “I” to the “We”, from the “singular” to the “plural” of the group. Thus, in my production of *The Bacchae* I focus on what is directly related to the individual and group identity.

The morphology of *The Bacchae* as a play is a most expedient text for creativity and experimentation both for the actors and the director. The text combines the classic speech of ancient tragedy, as the bearer of sublime insights and concepts, with a thematic focus of timeless relevance.

The greatest challenge to the director stems from the conflict between classical and modern elements. Therefore, I considered it feasible to work on the classic structures of ancient tragedy via contemporary theoretical tools, theatre means and techniques.

My conclusions can be divided into three categories covering both the notional and theoretical elaboration of the text.

### **Directorial choices that highlight the importance of the formation of the identity of the individual**

1. The Transfer and analysis of the conflicts and questions of the play into the inner world of the individual.

2. The dichotomy of the two main roles (Dionysus, Pentheus) was a form of stage representation of contradictory forces fighting each other within the human soul.

3. The visualization of characteristic traits, attributes and feelings of the individual illuminated the archetypal and archaic origin of the psyche; It also revealed the non visible aspects of the play and the life of the roles on stage.

### **Directorial choices that highlight the value of the group as a collective body**

1. Creation of new, modern theatre imagery that can more powerfully highlight the functioning of the individual within the modern way of life. We sought out present-day moments of collective life, elements of which were included in chorus parts. Thus we created modern perceptions of the chorus.

2. The chorus as a narrator. Members of the chorus tell the story of *The Bacchae*. They do not act: they dramatise. They share the words, dispensing with a leading part.

3. The chorus becomes the “womb” from which all roles emerge and to which they return. They return enriched by



experience, the energy of which is transmitted to other members of the chorus.

4. The chorus faces the other roles in the play. The chorus as a unit is part of a more balanced spiritual world, implying a link between logic and instinct. In this way, the chorus stands in contrast to the one dimensional attitude of the roles.

5. The chorus becomes a group. When events become excessively intense and tragic, chorus members share the emotional involvement and jointly undertake responsibility for the action. The individual members of the chorus support each other, so as to be able to bear the weight of the tragic story. Man needs other people to bear the weight of his existence.

6. Autonomy of chorus parts. Each chorus part is a potentially autonomous story, revealing a moment of collective human life. It shows an inherently rich life of collectivity which advances the development the each individual member of the chorus one step further.

7. Our theatrical ensemble as chorus. The acting ensemble, consisting of both men and women write their own collective story and finally present on stage the scenic encounter between the play itself and their new story. In this way, they become two groups from two different worlds: yesterday and today.

I will try to indicate the transitions from ancient forms to contemporary ones through transformation of the elements in order to help the reader realize more clearly the differences.

### **The crossroad between the ancient and the contemporary**

*Table 1*

| <b>CLASSIC<br/>STRUCTURES AND<br/>SYMBOLS</b>               | <b>THEATRICAL<br/>MEDIA AND<br/>TECHNIQUES OF<br/>MODERNISATION</b>  | <b>RESULTS</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| Ancient speech  | Original translation   | Translation of ancient words into semantically equivalent modern Greek terms; use of modern Greek vocabulary                 |
| Prosody – rhythm of ancient speech (long & short syllables) | Transition from syllables to words and the composition of phrases (shorter or longer)                      | Preservation of the rhythm of speech   |
| Accentuation with acute and circumflex accents              | Variation of voice pitch depending on the stressed syllable  | Preservation of emotional involvement and variety  |
| “Idismenos logos”   | Visualisation of words, speech metre based on the rhythm of the music, articulation of speech by the group | Music written on the body as rhythmic performance. Musicality and poetic qualities more globalized. Paralinguistic elements. |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Ancient Greek Musical instruments                      | Use of instruments for modern compositions   | Combination of classic and modern sounds   |
| Pentatonic scale                                       | Western classical music and modern electronic music                                  | Enhancement of tragic, musical references and comment on the modern way of life  |
| Images and physical representations on ancient vessels | Maintenance of the physical form and combination with primordial movement            | Visual representation of group scenes of ceremony and ecstasy, suggesting parallels with moments in modern collective life |
| Classical acting approach                              | Modern techniques of dance and physical theatre                                      | New acting language with symbolism, visualization of emotions and contemporary movement forms.                             |
| Symbolic roles   | Transference method  | Visual projection of the main characteristic of each role so as to make it recognizable                                    |
| Ancient Greek mask                                     | Neutral mask, half-mask, glasses used as mask. Alternative use of the face as a mask | Symbolic use of the mask as a means of depersonalisation. Successive transformations and disguise.                         |
| Minimal setting and typical stereotyped costumes       | Minimal setting – use of modern combined with classic stage objects. Modern          | Contribution to the modern aspect of the play  |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | costumes  |  |
| The tragic framework of ancient tragedy                            | Improvisation, dramatic play, disguise                                    | Dramatization, acting flexibility between experience and narration. Metatheatrical action  |
| Prior knowledge of the myth by the audience                        | Narration of the myth to the audience before the beginning of the play    | Interaction between actors and audience  |
| Ancient speech including descriptions and mythological information | Intense use of images. Use of elements from other forms of modern art     | Maintenance of elements of speech pertaining directly to modern life. Visualization of symbolic elements. Communication with audience. |
| Classic symbols  | Abstract representation, classic symbols, transference to the present day | Detachment from theatrical realism, symbolic stage representation of emotions, attributes, relations and situations                    |

## **12. Critical evaluation and findings**

Despite the fact that the adaptation of ancient tragedy to the modern day presents a number of difficulties, I believe that it is enormously rewarding to study these texts. The potential benefit is huge. The timeless relevance of the thematic content, the grandeur of the ideas, the superb artistry in the delineation of the roles, are a major source of inspiration for artistic creation. They do however require radical realignments of their structural form and other changes to make them relevant to our present day.

The devices I suggest concerning the structural form and particularly speech and movement can help unlock the ancient play.

One basic precondition is the existence of a new, vital and modern translation, which does however not ignore the innate rhythm of the ancient text. The vocabulary of the translation has to bear a dynamic quality that inspires bodily responses from the actors. This is an alternative proposal for externalisation of the speech and articulation.

The acting approach starts with the body of the actor – that is to say the human body, as a part of nature – bearing memories of experiences, primordial movements, natural rhythms, and involves those elements that can emerge through experimentation with modern techniques of the chorus and acting methods of physical theatre.

Our production experimented with modern techniques of dance and acting methods of physical theatre, specifically the method of Jacques Lecoq (particular emphasis has been placed on the transference method).

One element I would like to single out and recommend is the visualization of feelings, attributes and characteristics and the physical projection of the elements of nature. Adapting the ancient speech to modern life requires conversion of words to pictures. I believe that these devices have not yet exhausted their functionality and still offer ample room for experimentation.

I believe that the modern approach to ancient tragedy is based on systematic conversion of every theatrical element. The concept of “conversion” both at a notional and at a representation level is basic to my directing proposal. Each new staging has to incorporate modern codes of communication with the audience. One should not be afraid to use modern devices in the approach to classical texts, because this handling is in itself at the heart of the conversion procedure. In that way we did not attempt to present the tragic heroes and the tragic element of their fate. The era of the tragedy with this meaning of blind choice/rigid order of fate is over. In a modern interpretation the hero reproduces and dramatizes a tragic situation, however, while retaining a sense of detachment. In this sense audience attention is transferred from what the tragic hero represents to the tragic situations he/she suffers and to the way he/she faces them. At the same time the actor’s collective function creates a new contemporary transformation to the elements of the chorus.

At this point I want to make a comment about the participation of the young amateur actors. I am really happy that I had in my disposal a group of actors which was so open to experiment and so willing to follow my ideas. This made things easier as we all worked for a common purpose. We should not forget that important directors preferred to work with actors that had no previous experience in acting in order to train them by themselves. However, I must note there are further levels to be reached using this approach if somebody could combine the disponibilitate (openness) of an amateur with the technical expertise of the trained professional.

The communication of the content of each play and the form in which it reveals itself to a modern director is a personal matter. I wanted to tell the story of the play and share it with a group of persons, my ensemble, and beyond that with the audience. The ensemble embraced my reading and enriched it and consequently told it in its own way to the spectators.

Thus, a story travels from mouth to mouth, from body to body, over the centuries, leaving room for different versions. For me, the essence of theatre lies precisely in the message that is delivered by every individual story. In our production, this message was revealed on stage through narration and through the dramatisation of the events and the relations between the heroes. Placing yet another milestone on the journey of *The Bacchae* through the centuries, we release the story to continue on its journey, at the same time inviting new narrators to present their particular interpretation.

## Bibliography

- Alkistis (1989) *The book of Dramatizing* [Το βιβλίο της δραματοποίησης]. Athens, Alkistis
- Alkistis (1991) *Dramatic play for children* [Η δραματοποίηση για παιδιά]. Athens, Alkistis
- Allain, P. (1997) *Gardzienice Polish theatre in transition*. Amsterdam, Overseas Publishers Association
- Anton, P. J. (ed.) (1997) *Eva Palmer-Sikelianou's letters about ancient drama* [Επιστολές της Εύα Πάλμερ-Σικελιανού για το αρχαίο δράμα]. Athens, "Nea Sinora" - Livanis Publishing
- Antonoula, I. (ed.) (1989) *Katinas Paxinou, Alexi Minoti: Long way to Ithaka* [Κατίνας Παξινού, Αλέξη Μινωτή: Πολύχρονος πηγαϊμός για μια Ιθάκη].
- Aristotle, (1936) *Poetics* [Ποιητική] (translation in demotic dialect Simos Menandros). Introduction & commentary I. Sykoutris, Athens, Estia
- Blume, Horst-Dieter (1993) *Einführung in das antike Theaterwesen*. Trans. in Greek Iatrou, M., Athens, Educational Institute of National Bank
- Callery, D. (2001) *Through the body – A practical Guide to Physical Theatre*. London, NHB
- Chekhov, M. (1991) *Lessons for a professional actor*. Trans. in Greek Alexandraki, A., Athens-Ioannina, Dodoni
- Cirlot, H. (1995) *Diccionario de simbolos*. Trans. in Greek Kappatos, R., Athens, Konidiari
- Delcourt, M. (2006) *La vie d' Euripide*. Trans. in Greek Giannakopoulou, L., Athens, Okeanida
- Dodds, E.R. (1996) *The Greeks and the irrational*. Trans. in Greek Giatromanolakis, G., Athens, Kardamitsa
- Dodds, E.R. (2004) *Euripides The Bacchae - edited with Introduction and commentary*. Trans. in Greek Petridou, G., Spatharas, D., Athens, Kardamitsa
- Dromazos, St. (1990) *Ancient Drama Analysis* [Αρχαίο Δράμα]. Athens, Kedros



- Euripides, (1959) *The Bacchae [Βάκχες]*. Trans. in English William Arrowsmith, Chicago, The University Chicago Press
- Euripides, (1992) *Eleni [Ελένη]* (translation in demotic dialect Roussos, T.). Athens, Kaktos
- European Cultural Center of Delphi, (1987) *International Meeting of ancient Greek drama*. Athens
- European Cultural Center of Delphi, (1998) *VIII International Meeting on ancient Greek drama 1995 – “Theatre Olympics: Crossing millennium”*. Athens, “Nea sinora” – Livanis Publishing
- Georgousopoulos, K. (1990) *Keys and Codes of theatre – I. Ancient Theatre [Κλειδιά και Κώδικες Θεάτρου – I. Αρχαίο Θέατρο]*. Athens, Estia
- Georgousopoulos, K., Gogos, S., group of theatrolologistis (2004?) *Epidaurus: the theatre, the stagings [Επίδαυρος: Το αρχαίο θέατρο, οι παραστάσεις]*. Athens, Politistiko Idrima Trapezis Kiprou, Militos
- Gizi, P. El. (1979) *Ancient Greek theatre from the 19<sup>th</sup> century till 1930 [Το αρχαίο ελληνικό θέατρο στην Ελλάδα απ’ τον 19<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα μέχρι και το 1930]*. Athens, Kalidoskopio
- Glinos, A. G. (1964) *Fotos Politis: 30 years from his death (1934-1964) [Φώτος Πολίτης: 30 χρόνια από το θάνατό του (1934-1964)]*. Athens, Tipografia “Kontou”
- Glitzouris, A. (2001) *The art of directing in Greece [Η σκηνοθετική τέχνη στην Ελλάδα: η ανάδυση και η εδραίωση της τέχνης του σκηνοθέτη στο νεοελληνικό θέατρο]*. Athens, Ellinika Grammata
- Grammatas et al. (1999) *Theatre semiology [Η σημειολογία του θεάτρου]*. Athens, Ministry of national education and religion
- Grotowski, J. (1971) *Towards a poor theater*. Trans. in Greek Kondylis, F., Athens, Arion
- Hall, P. (2000) *Exposed by the mask*. London, Oberon Books
- Hartnol, F. (1985) *A concise History of the theatre*. Trans. in Greek Pateraki, R., Athens, Ypodomi
- Hodge, A. (2000) *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group

- Kakridis, I. (ed.) (1986) *Greek Mythology - volume B [Ελληνική μυθολογία – τόμος Β']*. Athens, Ekdotiki Athinon
- Keefe, J. Murray, S. (2007) *Physical Theatres – A critical Introduction*. Abingdon, Routledge
- Kott, J. (1976) *Gott-Essen*. Trans. in Greek Verikokaki, A., Athens, Exantas-Nimata
- Lecoq, J. (2000) *The moving body: Teaching creative theatre*. Trans. Bradby D., Great Britain, Methuen
- Lesky, A. (1990) *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellene - volume A*. Trans. in Greek Hourmouziadis, N., Athens, Educational Institute of National Bank
- Lesky, A. (1993) *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen, volume B*. Trans. in Greek Hourmouziadis, N., Athens, Educational Institute of National Bank
- Lignadis, T. (1988) *The animal and the monster [Το ζώον και το τέρας]*. Athens, Erodotos
- Lignadis, T. (1987) Thoughts on contemporary stagings of Ancient Greek Tragedy. In: European Cultural Center of Delphi, *International Meeting of ancient Greek drama*. Athens. pp 191-201
- Mavromoustakos, P. (1999) Ancient drama on Greek stage: From the *Persians* of 1571 to 20<sup>th</sup> century approaches. In: Επτανησιακή Γραμματεία Ελληνιστών, *Productions of Ancient Greek Drama in Europe during modern times*. Athens, Kastaniotis. pp. 77-87
- Mavromoustakos, P. (2005) *Theatre in Greece 1940-2000 [Το θέατρο στην Ελλάδα 1940-2000]*. Athens, Kastanioti
- McDonald, M., Suzuki, T., Varopoulou, E. (2000) *Theodoros Terzopoulos and Attis Theatre – retrospection, method, comments [Θεόδωρος Τερζόπουλος και Θέατρο Αττίς – Ανασκόπηση, Μέθοδος, Σχόλια]*. Athens, Agra
- Minotis, A. (1987) *The revival of ancient drama [Το αρχαίο δράμα και η αναβίωσή του]*. Athens, Astrolavos/ Efthini
- Mour, S. (1992) *Stanislavski's system: The professional training of an actor*. Trans. in Greek Tsakas, A., Athens, Paraskinio

- Murray G. 1912 *Four stages of Greek religion*, Columbia University Press
- Murray G. 1965 *Euripides and his age*, London, 1913, translation in Greek K.N. Papanikolaou, Editions Bookstore of Estia, Athens
- Patrikiou, E. (ed.) (1998) Ancient Greek drama translation in languages of all over the world. Athens, Research and practical applications Center of the ancient Greek drama – “Desmi”
- Patsalidis, S. (1997) Greek Tragedy and the theory of 20<sup>th</sup> century [(Εν)τάσεις και (Δια)τάσεις – Η Ελληνική Τραγωδία και η Θεωρία του Εικοστού Αιώνα]. Athens, “Tipothito” – Giorgos Dardanos
- Patsalidis, S. Sakellaridou, E. (ed.) (1999) *(Dis) Placing Classical Greek Drama*. Thessaloniki, University Studio Press
- Poulou, I.X (1968) Introduction to Ancient Drama [Εισαγωγή εις το Αρχαίον Ελληνικόν Δράμα] Athens, Poulou
- Puchner, W. (1987) Max Reinhardt, Fotos Politis and Ancient tragedy. In: European Cultural Center of Delphi, *International Meeting of ancient Greek drama*. Athens. pp 49-62
- Research and practical applications Center of the ancient Greek drama – “Desmi”, (1999) *The director's approach to ancient drama of Dimitris Rontiris – 100 years from his birth*. Symposium, Exhibition, Athens
- Research and practical applications Center of the ancient Greek drama – “Desmi”, (2000) *The director's approach to ancient drama of Karolos Koun*. Symposium, Exhibition, Athens
- Research and practical applications Center of the ancient Greek drama – “Desmi”, (2004) *The director's approach to ancient drama of Alexi Solomo*. Symposium, Exhibition, Athens
- Romilly, J. (1997) *La modernité d' Euripide*. Trans. in Greek Skiada – Stasinopoulou, A., Athens, Kardamitsa
- Sideris, G. (1976) *Ancient Greek theatre in contemporary stage 1817-1932* [Το αρχαίο ελληνικό θέατρο στη Νέα Ελληνική σκηνή 1817-1932]. Athens, Ikaros

- Solomos, A. (1989) *Theatre Dictionary [Θεατρικό Λεξικό]*. Athens, Kedros
- Spandonidis, P. (no date) *Euripides [Ευριπίδης]*. Athens, Daidalos
- Spathis, D. (1983) *Modern Greek Theatre [Το Νεοελληνικό θέατρο]*. Greek History and Culture, part 10, Athens, Malliaris Pedia
- Stanislavski, K. (1950) *On the art of the stage*. Trans. in English Magarshack, D., London, Faber and Faber limited editions
- Varveris, G. (2003) *Crisis in Theatre – Texts of theatrical criticism 1994-2003 [Η κρίση στο θέατρο – Κείμενα θεατρικής κριτικής 1994-2003]*. Athens, Alexandria
- Walton, M. (2007) *Living Greek Theatre: A Handbook of Classical Performance and Modern Production, [Το αρχαίο ελληνικό θέατρο επί σκηνής: η τέχνη του θεάματος]*. Trans. Arvaniti K., Manteli V., Athens, Ellinika Grammata
- Wlodzimierz, St. Hodge, A. (2004) *Hidden territories, the theatre of gardzienice*, London, Routledge

### **Theatre Programmes**

- Euripides, (1993) *The Bacchae*. Directed by Evangelatos Spyros, Aphitheatro
- Euripides, (2001) *The Bacchae*. Directed by Vasilis Nikolaidis, Larissa Municipal and Regional Theatre
- Euripides, (2002) *The Bacchae*. Directed by Peter Hall, Royal National Theatre of Great Britain,
- Euripides, (2005) *The Bacchae*. Directed by Hatzakis Sotiris, National Theatre of Greece

### **Theatre Critics<sup>6</sup>**

- Kalkani, Ir. (1975), -, *Rizospastis*,

---

<sup>6</sup> The newspapers didn't have all the relevant details concerning the theatre critics

Georgakopoulou, V. (1986), -, *Avgi*,  
Papasotiriou, El. (1988), -, *Mesimvrini*  
Vidos, K. (1990), -, *To Vima*  
Vatopoulos, N. (1990), -, *Kathimerini*  
Paggourelis, V. (1990), -, *Eleftheros Tipos*  
Karali, A. (1993), -, *Ethnos*  
Sarigiannis, G. (1997), -, *Nea*  
Kontogoulidis, V. (1997), -, *Apogevmatini*  
Lotsopoulou, G. (1997), -, *Tempo*  
Grammeli, A. (2001), *To allo vima*,  
Marinou, E. (2005), *Eleftherotipia*,  
Aggelopoulos V. (2005), -, *Kathimerini*

### **Translations of “The Bacchae”**

Euripides, (1979) *The Bacchae [Bárκxεs]* (translation in demotic dialect Karagiorga Ol.). Evdomo theatre  
Euripides, (1985) *The Bacchae [Bárκxεs]* (translation in demotic dialect Heimonas G.). National Theatre  
Euripides, (1962) *The Bacchae [Bárκxεs]* (translation in demotic dialect Prevelakis P.). National Theatre  
Euripides, (1993) *The Bacchae [Bárκxεs]* (translation in demotic dialect Giannaris, G.). Athens, Kaktos  
Euripides, (1996) *The Bacchae [Bárκxεs]* (translation in demotic dialect Georgousopoulos, K.). Athens, Pataki

### **DVDs**

*Antigone* directed by Solomos A. (1992) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens  
*The Bacchae* directed by Evaggelatos S. (1993) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*The Bacchae* directed by Koun K. (1988) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*The Bacchae* directed by Langhoff M. (1997) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Electra* directed by Rontiris D. (1939) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Electra* directed by Marmarinos M. (1998) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Electra* directed by Tsianos K. (1993) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Medea* directed by Kondouri. (1997) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Medea* directed by Papathanasiou A. (1986) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Oedipus at Colonus* directed by Minotis A. (1989) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Oresteia* directed by Koun K. (1982) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Oresteia* directed by Mihailidis. (1994) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

*Oresteia* directed by Mihailidis. (2003) [DVD] Athens, Hellenic Centre of Theatrical Research – Theatre Museum, Athens

## **General**

- Armstrong, F., Pearson J. (ed.), (2000) *Well-tuned women*. London, The women's press
- Bakonikola, H. (1994) *Important themes in Greek Tragedy – volume I [Συγγμές της Ελληνικής τραγωδίας – τόμος Ι]*. Athens, Kardamitsa
- Bakonikola, H. (1997) *The tragic element, the ancient tragedy and the philosopher in 20<sup>th</sup> century [Το τραγικό, η τραγωδία και ο φιλόσοφος στον 20<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα]*. Athens, Kardamitsa
- Barb, E., Savarese, N. (1991) *A dictionary of theatre anthropology, The secret art of the performer*. London, Routledge
- Bataille, G. (1982) *Theorie de la religion*. Trans. in Greek Kouremenos, K., Athens, Ypsilon
- Braun, Ed. (1982) *The director and the stage*. London, Methuen Limited
- Elam, K. (2001) *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. Trans. in Greek Diamantakou, K., Athens, Ellinika Grammata
- Evangelou, I. (1978) *Firewalking and anastenarides [Πυροβασία και Αναστενάρηδες]*. Athens, Pyli
- Gouhier, H. (1991) *Le théâtre et l'existence*. Trans. in Greek Bakonikola, H., Athens, Kardamitsa
- Mitter, Scomit, (1992) *Systems of rehearsal*. London, Routledge
- Mossman, J. (2003) *Oxford Readings in Classical studies, Euripides*. Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Pearson, M., Shanks, M. (2001) *Theatre Archaeology*. London, Routledge
- Schechner, R. (1993) *The future of ritual*. London, Routledge
- Touchard, Pierre-Aime (1991) *Dionysus, apology for the theatre*. Trans. in Greek Bakonikola, H., Athens, Eikostou protou
- Tsatsoulis, D. (1999) *Semiological approaches of the theatre phenomenon [Σημειολογικές προσεγγίσεις του θεατρικού φαινομένου]*. Athens, Ellinika Grammata



## The colaborators' viewpoint







## Translator's note

The work of translating a piece of ancient drama in Modern Greek is much more than a matter of replacing the ancient Greek words with their modern meanings. It is a matter of exploring a fascinating world of surprising integrity –a world that is different from our own– and trying to create a bridge between the ancient poet and the modern audience. Therefore, it is mostly a matter of thought and judgment –that is to say, a matter of choices.

For that reason, the translation of the Bacchae was not the result of solitary work. On the contrary, the director and I cooperated on this project, trying to produce natural and effective discourse in Modern Greek that would be as faithful to the original text as possible and would by no means disregard the poet's style.

But when we started giving shape to our ideas, we faced a major problem: An ancient tragedy is a poetic work, whose choral parts were sung and whose rhythm is on the whole based on syllabic quantity and determined by laws of prosody. That is to say, in the original text rhythm is determined by the succession of long (-) and short (˘) syllables. Consequently, this succession shows how fast a verse was supposed to be uttered in an ancient Greek performance, and whether the rhythm of a passage would be steady or not. Thus, it reveals in a way what the speakers' feelings were according to the poet –distress, confusion, contentment, etc.

However, in Modern Greek there is no such thing as prosody and syllabic quantity, and rhythm is a matter of stress accent. This probably means that nowadays the art of using the text's rhythm to show how people feel lies mostly in the hands of the director and the actors. Hence, we decided that in the target text the choral parts should have a rhythm of their own, which would be determined mostly by the length of the phrases and would hopefully correspond to the chorus' feelings. As for the rest of the play, we thought that non choral parts –and especially dialogues– should be naturally spoken, with no particular rhythm. In these parts, the words, the length of the phrases and the manner of speaking in general were carefully chosen, so as to be in agreement with what each speaker symbolizes, with their character, status and morals. I believe that this was the only way for us to put across the messages of the original text and to ensure the poet's communication with the modern audience at the same time. After all, in the original text too these parts were composed in the common language of the time that the play was created.

During our conversations on this matter, the director posed an interesting question: what if we situated the play in a nightclub where the characters would stand for certain types of modern people, identifiable by the audience? In my point of view, that could not happen, without changing the text too much, as the words themselves keep our choices within certain limits. For example, if we situated the play in a nightclub, Dionysus couldn't possibly be a god, Cadmus couldn't be a king, Teiresias couldn't be an oracle and the young prince couldn't be killed by his own mother –and that could only happen if there were no words, that is to say if we had to do with a dance performance, not a play.

The Bacchae directed by Rubini Moschochoriti was my first attempt to design ancient Greek drama.

With no particular academic training in the field of tragedy my approach was 'fresh' and very much based on the directors' view at the time. One of my first recollections of our early discussions was her need to explore the themes of the Bacchae from a contemporary point of view. The task was to establish a language that a modern audience could relate to in a familiar way. This purpose was particularly well served by the translation we were working on. The language was simple and direct without any of the poetic frills that we often find in 20th century translations of ancient drama in Greek.

## Scenographer

A threshold in my approach was Rubini's very clear idea that the Bacchae are not animals. The women that surrender to the absolute ecstatic powers of Dionysus up in the mountain of Cithaeron are not simply representing the savage side of human nature. Their behavior is not atavistic and is not stemming from primordial chaos. My key understanding and development of such an approach is that their catastrophic mania is the outcome of a trauma, caused primarily by the hubris of the city against the God, reaching its' peak when it fights the atheist, brutal behavior of Pentheus. It is the women revolting against the absolute power of male authority. It is the outcome of the imbalance brought to the kingdom as Pentheus decides to ignore the rules set by the god and act 'blinded' by his passion for absolute power. From this idea stems the army look of the Bacchae who gradually prepare themselves for a battle with Pentheus as the plot unfolds. As the play progresses the chorus members lose their individuality and gradually turn into the masked anonymous soldier of Dionysus.

The location we decided to work with was the edge of a city. A non-descript periphery space with obvious marks of construction that is taking place and interferes with the natural environment. This idea came primarily from the actual location of the performance space that includes natural elements, trees and earth on the stage. I wanted to somehow accentuate the manmade constructions against the resident natural elements as a metaphor for the way human civilization is in a constant antithesis with the natural environment. The scaffolding worked as a good base for different purposes; the descending of the God, the space for the characters in contrast to the chorus and for the Bacchae in mount Kitheronas.

My initial attendance of rehearsals gave me a strong sense of a young happy group who rehearse and act with a clear unified identity. The idea of partying and raving in the open (edge of the city) celebrating the joys of Dionysus worked as a guideline. I was interested in portraying their sense of unity, and supporting visually the idea of the youth group which follows a modern dress code. A touch of 80s hairstyle and make up was chosen as a slight extravaganza to the contemporary viewer. An outburst of color in contrast to the grey 'soldier' was serving the earlier part of the play rather well. As the idea of role-playing evolved in rehearsal the main characters had to add costume elements for their part and then easily change to their colorful chorus outlook i.e. a grey shirt for Pentheus, a stick and a gown for Tiresias etc. Black was chosen for Dionysus as a symbol of the dark deity who punishes hubris with no mercy.



## Composer-Original Music

My aim was a Meta – modern music composition, with musical flashbacks to the past. I used therefore, a contemporary, free music frame, with rhythms deriving from a special rhythmic form, like 4/4; a contemporary rhythm produced though using archaic membrane constructed musical instruments (e.g. a tympanum). For example, the final scene of the first chorus entrance, the beat (used as a pulse) at the earthquake, the musical background for the anabasis to Kithaironas.

Moreover, from the middle stages of the play and onwards, I based my work on the western European music tradition and orchestral instruments. On the musical *capiamenta* and on the parts where Pentheas made his appearance, I created using solely modern electronic sounds processed through filters and reverbs, utilising the element of modern electronic music based on the repetition of certain rhythms, the so-called loop.

More analytically:

- A fundamental motive, used in three cases, was the sound recorded women voices, functioning as the female memory throughout the centuries and as a prophecy for the tragic end, where the voice becomes a sob (the chorus entrance, the earthquake, Pentheas raw-eating).
- The tympanum was used on the end of the first chorus scene, initially with its original sound and subsequently, altered, to imply the deterioration of the modern way of living and pre-telling the – first- Pentheas' entrance.
- In the second chorus scene, the sound of the tympanum becomes a drums sound to attribute the wounded erotic nature and the violence (tango dance on 4/4). The tango rhythm was preserved, but with the introduction of certain musical elements its initial erotic symbolism was altered.
- The ending of the second chorus scene, presenting the nostalgia of Vakhes for the land of their erotic freedom, is the turning point where the contemporary and classical elements unite, just like modern sounds blend with classic sounds (harp).
- The Earthquake. Contemporary garage dance music was used, blended with many rock and repetition elements, to express an out of this world sense and ecstasy.
- The Messenger. The music written for this part was based on Byzantine ceremonial elements, more westernised, based on a classical form with intense dramatic characteristics, which underline the script's powerful moments and reflect the sentimental load of the character.
- In the fourth chorus scene, music is used in a more general sense, as if it is not a part of any age and supports sentimentally the oral interpretation of the script.
- At the scene of Pentheas dismemberment, we return musically to the primitive society and the tympanum improvises.
- At the part where Agavi recognises Penthea's head, we pass into an orchestral form (musical instruments for European orchestral music) combined with the flute (a fifth century instrument) thus producing lyric sounds. The use of the pipe refers to the archaic tool of musical expression.
- At the last scene of the messenger's speech, I used phonetics in combination with the lyric sound of the flute in order to develop the Byzantine ceremonial elements. The result leaves a question mark for the ending of this story.

Concluding, setting as the starting point of my music composition electronic sounds and their mix with ancient sounds, I ended up gradually in a minimal result and the creation of a westernised form of classical music of the 21st century. In this way I consider that this Euripides's tragic play, was contemporary presented in the best way.

**Michalis Kalabokis**

## Archaeologist

Dionysus and his worship were the most beloved subjects of potters from the archaic years until the end of the Roman era (6th century B.C. - 5th century A.C.).

Consequently, the collection of visual material was relatively easy. For example, a simple search in the internet (web pages specialized in archaeological subjects) had as result above 6.000 pictures. The search and collection of these pictures were limited chronologically in the classic era (6th to 4th century B.C.)- and mainly in the 5th century B.C.-, but thematically they were limited exclusively in the worship of Bacchus. It becomes obvious then, that there were rejected subjects like Dionysus' mysteries, myths concerning Dionysus' life, his marriages to Ariadne, theatrical performances etc.

As far as the subject of Bacchus' worship is concerned, the legendary (mythical) troupe of Dionysus is always depicted: the maenads and the satyrs, that the mortal worshippers imitate in their actions. These representations are found mainly on drinking vessels or in vessels of transport or mixture of wine (urns, craters, wine cups etc). All these vessels are also presented in the performances, emphasizing thus the use of wine.

The observations made during the study of the representations of pottery can be grouped into three categories: the first one concerns Dionysus, the second one his troupe- and mainly maenads-, and the third one concerns dance and generally movement.

The appearance of Dionysus varies: sometimes he appears young (without a beard) and some other times he appears older. When he wears clothes they are luxurious and usually they have elements that refer to the East. He is also presented naked or half-naked. Moreover, he can keep a vessel or horn with wine, thyrsus, a branch from vine that grows and unfolds round the troupe, a lyre or an ivy. It is observed, however, that all the objects-symbols that accompany usually a man are absent: equipment of battle, formal male clothing, cane, while his hair is long and caught in curls.

He actively participates in the dance of maenads and satyrs, dismembering animals, dancing, playing music or being drunk, supported by the maenads or the satyrs. In our performance, Dionysus participates, almost in the whole play, as an integral member of the troupe, and particularly in the entry (I came from Asia) but also in the second chorale (insult, tango, Pafos). This identification of god with his worshipper appears also in the word "Bacchus" which refers equally to both of them.

Some times he is upright and calm, as an Olympian god, and he watches the frantic dance of his troupe, its ecstasy, while other times he attends completely frontal and schematically, as one of his surfaces. The play begins with god's surface in Thebes. Dionysus is presented upright, frontal to the public, with his characteristics degraded from the use of lighting, giving the sense of an alienated and not-human person.

The maenads do not lose their feminine nature. On the contrary, their femininity is emphasized: their clothes seem transparent, their body silhouette- particularly the legs - are apparent under the tunic or the veil and their breast is shaped intensely through the tunic's pleating (maternity, food, milk, eroticism, birth, nature). Their forms are elegant, full of charm. They acquire, however, some masculine characteristics: they wear skins of animals- symbols of brave hunters-warriors-as for example Hercules. They dismember animals with their hands, their movement is impetuous and their hair is untied and mixed. The thyrsus they hold in the hands, resembles some times with martial arm (sword or spear). Their size is bigger and more imposing than the male members of the troupe: the satyrs.

The satyrs are always naked and usually in erection. They have animal characteristics in their face but also in the posture of their body, and they are small. It is observed also an inversion concerning the status (position) of sexes, related to the real society in classic antiquity. The woman, who is a citizen of minor quality, according to Thucydides' epitaph, is right only when she is not distinguished for something villain or for something good. She dominates in Dionysus' troupe and she does not lose her human and civilized characteristics, nor she dismembers animals. On the contrary, man is degraded into animal, always instigated from his sexual excitation.

The sexual desire of satyrs is expressed either with teases (they raise the clothes of maenads, they approach them when they sleep) or aggressively (they chase them and grab them

with force). The reaction of women varies. Some of them turn the satyrs away, using thyrsus as a gun, some others run to escape. Some of them, however, seem to accept the satyrs' teases (they dance with them, they are presented embraced with them) or they succumb in the erotic call reaching even in the erotic action). The eroticism is so diffuse that some maenads appear to focus in their own sexual excitation. They are indifferent concerning their clothes and they are presented half naked or even naked, while some others appear embraced.

In the theatrical performance, women do not only maintain their femininity but it appears as a dominant element, almost aggressive. Men, on the other hand, do not lose their human substance. As long as they agree with sovereign "feminine" they coexist with the women in harmony, as it appears in the first chorale (I came from Asia). When, however, they dispute and they try to follow Penthea's commands, they seem uncertain about their actions (tango). They bend in front of the aggressiveness of women (staccato - legato) and they are finally given in a ritual, erotic initiation (pafos). Here we have a small contradiction concerning the representations on vessels. In these, satyrs are those who try to drift women in the sexual intercourse. For the women of that period, it was transcendence to abandon their houses, their men and their occupations and question the roles and the power of their society. In our times, this is not enough in order to show this contestation and the inversion of roles. Thus, in the theatrical performance women are presented to possess the secrets of love and they lead naturally and without shame the embarrassed men to their discovery. The inversion of erotic roles shows the supremacy of the erotic nature of woman in front of the force of arms of man.

The masculine element makes its appearance when they are threatened directly: when their head is arrested, instead of skins of animals they wear waistcoats of expedition and they are coiled with almost a military timing while the posture of their body becomes upright. In the end, they become hunters-warriors, but since they are not men their ferocity becomes rapacious, their arms are their hands, their mouth, their nails and their teeth. Their body is coiled, as that of a wild animal, which is prepared to attack, and they conclude to dismember their enemy.

In the representations of vessels, the movement of forms was studied carefully. In the archaistic and in the pre classic era, the edges have intense corners, almost inflexible, in order to declare the intense movement. From the mature classic era and afterwards the bodies acquire plasticity and the movement becomes more naturalistic with curves.

The intense movement is usually declared from the opposite, almost unnatural placement of the body. The legs are in section, as well as the head but they look at the opposite direc-

tion, while the body remains frontal. Great emphasis is given to the hands, which most of the times are stretched out, in complete extent, bent, or even moved above the head.

In their movement also participate clothes that wave. The skins of animals are more lively on which tails and edges move to every direction, the ivies that keep in their hands or sprout from the hands of Dionysus, the snakes that they wear in the head or stretch out with their hands. Their hair is untied and shake mingled. Their clothes are often used by themselves. They keep the sleeves of the tunic and wave them with their hands stretched out or above the head, or neckerchiefs that they have removed from their heads and shake lightly. Some times they step in the noses of their legs and thus their movement becomes fast and light, while some other times they have big strides that declare run and intensity.

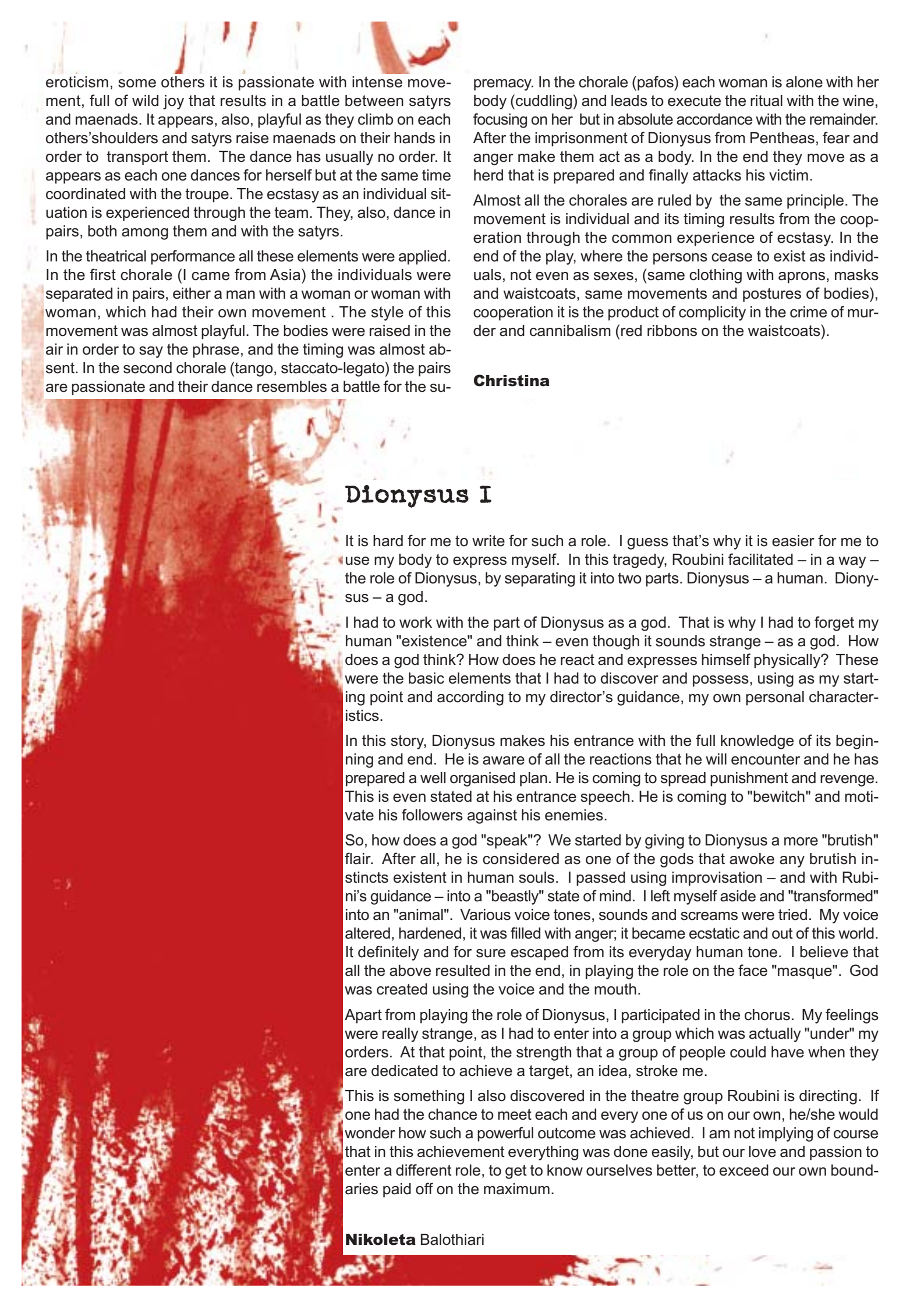
Other movements: the body is bent to the front; one leg is raised bending to the front, one hand, also, stretched to the front and the other above the head turning intensely at the bottom. Another movement that could be the continuity of the previous one is the body stretched falling behind, the head turned to the sky, one leg touching (reaching) nose and the other bending behind. Some other times they, also, have the two hands raised, the body stretched, the head left behind and they step on the noses of their legs while their clothes' pleating declare swirling around themselves.

A lot of these moments of the movements that the potters have attributed with the ways mentioned above, could be found scattered in the chorus of the theatrical performance. However, they were used more clearly and almost statically, during the earthquake. In the earthquake, the choreography was substantially a concatenation of pictures that each woman repeated in different time and with increasing intensity. In that way, the instability that an earthquake causes was, also, attributed but simultaneously it appears that these same women cause the earthquake with their ritual movements. In the representations on vessels, the pictures of calm and peacefulness are obvious.

The maenads often appear with their bodies and their hands loose and relaxed, the head falls behind or to the side, the legs heavy and bent, drunk and supported by each other in order to advance. They, also, seat in the roots of some tree or they sleep, having most of their clothes lost, naked or half naked, with a peacefulness that only the tiredness can give. This is the picture that the theatrical performance begins with: Dionysus' troupe resting after a tiring trip, the sweet tiredness of Bacchus' worship that they taught to every place they have been to and that will make the voice of god that calls them faded.

In the representations on vessels the dance of maenads and satyrs has a lot of forms. Some times it is full of charm and





eroticism, some others it is passionate with intense movement, full of wild joy that results in a battle between satyrs and maenads. It appears, also, playful as they climb on each others' shoulders and satyrs raise maenads on their hands in order to transport them. The dance has usually no order. It appears as each one dances for herself but at the same time coordinated with the troupe. The ecstasy as an individual situation is experienced through the team. They, also, dance in pairs, both among them and with the satyrs.

In the theatrical performance all these elements were applied. In the first chorale (I came from Asia) the individuals were separated in pairs, either a man with a woman or woman with woman, which had their own movement. The style of this movement was almost playful. The bodies were raised in the air in order to say the phrase, and the timing was almost absent. In the second chorale (tango, staccato-legato) the pairs are passionate and their dance resembles a battle for the su-

premacny. In the chorale (pafos) each woman is alone with her body (cuddling) and leads to execute the ritual with the wine, focusing on her but in absolute accordance with the remainder. After the imprisonment of Dionysus from Pentheas, fear and anger make them act as a body. In the end they move as a herd that is prepared and finally attacks his victim.

Almost all the chorales are ruled by the same principle. The movement is individual and its timing results from the cooperation through the common experience of ecstasy. In the end of the play, where the persons cease to exist as individuals, not even as sexes, (same clothing with aprons, masks and waistcoats, same movements and postures of bodies), cooperation it is the product of complicity in the crime of murder and cannibalism (red ribbons on the waistcoats).

**Christina**

## Dionysus I

It is hard for me to write for such a role. I guess that's why it is easier for me to use my body to express myself. In this tragedy, Roubini facilitated – in a way – the role of Dionysus, by separating it into two parts. Dionysus – a human. Dionysus – a god.

I had to work with the part of Dionysus as a god. That is why I had to forget my human "existence" and think – even though it sounds strange – as a god. How does a god think? How does he react and expresses himself physically? These were the basic elements that I had to discover and possess, using as my starting point and according to my director's guidance, my own personal characteristics.

In this story, Dionysus makes his entrance with the full knowledge of its beginning and end. He is aware of all the reactions that he will encounter and he has prepared a well organised plan. He is coming to spread punishment and revenge. This is even stated at his entrance speech. He is coming to "bewitch" and motivate his followers against his enemies.

So, how does a god "speak"? We started by giving to Dionysus a more "brutish" flair. After all, he is considered as one of the gods that awoke any brutish instincts existent in human souls. I passed using improvisation – and with Rubini's guidance – into a "beastly" state of mind. I left myself aside and "transformed" into an "animal". Various voice tones, sounds and screams were tried. My voice altered, hardened, it was filled with anger; it became ecstatic and out of this world. It definitely and for sure escaped from its everyday human tone. I believe that all the above resulted in the end, in playing the role on the face "masque". God was created using the voice and the mouth.

Apart from playing the role of Dionysus, I participated in the chorus. My feelings were really strange, as I had to enter into a group which was actually "under" my orders. At that point, the strength that a group of people could have when they are dedicated to achieve a target, an idea, stroke me.

This is something I also discovered in the theatre group Roubini is directing. If one had the chance to meet each and every one of us on our own, he/she would wonder how such a powerful outcome was achieved. I am not implying of course that in this achievement everything was done easily, but our love and passion to enter a different role, to get to know ourselves better, to exceed our own boundaries paid off on the maximum.

**Nikoleta** Balothiari

## Dionysus II

Assuming the role of Dionysus constituted a very interesting challenge for me, from both acting and personal point of view.

Concerning the acting, I feel there are three specific circumstances in our performance: the fact that the role was divided in to two sub roles, the director's choice concerning the enactment of the role by two women and the way Dionysus' character emerged from the chorus – as any other character of the play.

The division of Dionysus was mainly based on the will to represent two pairs of opposite or complementary elements: male and female side of each person, as well as godly and human dimension of Dionysus – his father was Zeus and his mother Semeli. I made my appearance as Dionysus in the prologue, but in a rather unorthodox way: I only whispered few words of the monologue, which was spoken by Nikoleta, the actress that embodied the "female" and godly existence of Dionysus. This double appearance in combination with our both wearing black costume created pretty early to the audience, the sensation that this character brings up to stage an obvious and a hidden side, which was left to be revealed later on.

Indeed, after the scene of the earthquake, during which, Dionysus shows off his godly power and his unquestionable potential to prevail over Pentheus, the character begins to unfold the male characteristics and to play a human game with the enemy, based on the manipulation of fairly human needs, wishes and restricted thoughts of Pentheus. This manipulation is mainly supported by Dionysus' body language and his movement code, which refers strongly to male characteristics (the hunt, the aggressive, the person who takes the initiative and gains control).

So, from a technical point of view, I had to switch parts with the other actress, to try to continue and develop the atmosphere and frame she had created. The most helpful factor towards this was the fact that we were all members of the chorus and present on the stage during the entire performance. Consequently, I had the opportunity not only to hear the plot evolving but also to be a constant member of the group that created and developed the story. This coexistence, as well as the simultaneous stage function both as the other side of the god and as the member of a team, which narrates a story, contributed to my natural passage from Dionysus' "shadow" to Dionysus himself.

Although the adaption of a male aura was a clear director's aim from the beginning, we tried to approach the appropriate characteristics – movement, tone of voice, rhythm of speech, look – through a number of improvisations. The method of transference suggested by Jacques Lecoque was a method that suits me. I was guided to embody the spider, move my head and adjust my glance according to a snake, to put myself into situations where I surround and threaten another human being, who is caged in a small room, flooding with water, to let my speech come out in a free, uncensored way, concerning the appropriate articulation, the tone, the rhythm, the image of myself speaking or moving. I believe that all of the above managed to unlock areas of expression that would have been unreachable if we had worked more directly – e.g. "try to imitate a male, move and speak like a male", or "let us see how you can be threatening".

In conclusion, my experience from both rehearsals and performance is a very rich one, since I had the chance to approach unknown expressive means and dormant aspects of myself. In addition, I was lucky to experience a deep dimension of that thing called "group of people with a common purpose and vision".

**Vicky Vavva**





## Pentheas I

The meaning of Pentheas in the first part of the play Pentheas symbolizes the authority and the power. He carries the excitement and the obstinacy of his youth but still come out as an authoritarian figure, trying to have everything under control, never letting his inner feelings appear in the public. Acting guided by his logic and always keeping in mind that he is the king of the city, he cannot accept anyone disobeying him. Conservative and sexist he appears to be the perfect opposite of Dionysus.

As far as my approach of the role is concerned, I searched for the combination of authority and youthfulness. I tried to approach Pentheas, having in mind other leading figures such as Hitler (who had the absolute authority), Mussolini (an element of madness) and Bush (to a certain extent naive, childish). Still, I always wanted to retain the fact that he is a young king, powerful but inexperienced, who feels that he loses his power and his people.

How the role was approached during the rehearsals  
Trying to find a natural element symbolizing Pentheas, we agreed that fire is more dominant in this character. Our first approach was to reveal the feeling of someone who is slowly burned, with the heat slowly becoming stronger and stronger, to the point that he cannot take it anymore. Another approach was to present Pentheas as a lunatic as a madman, with very big gestures and grimaces, with many different tones in his speech. The elements of instability, eagerness, childishness were also attempted to be added in the character. The final result, through a lot of effort was a combination of all the above elements together with the feeling of authority that Pentheas

should carry through the stage. It was a very hard process, as it was very difficult to find all the elements of Pentheas' character

The Participation in the chorus

As Pentheas, I still had the opportunity to participate in the chorus. That was where I was coming out of and that was where I was returning every time my character would finish his dialogue. This innovation was very important for me as I could understand better the words and the text (particularly in the chorus parts), communicate better with the rest of the group, realise that we were forming an entity leading the story and not following it. Finally, I believe that the words of the second messenger said by the members of the chorus were a unique and –emotionally- one of the strongest moments of the play.

Amateur theatre, the theatrical group of Zografou  
Amateur theatre for me is a pleasant recess from my everyday programme. It is an escape from the stress and the neurotic rhythm of the reality. Still, it helps me understand different emotions, even ones that I had never felt and collaborate with a group of very different people, who all have the same goal. In addition, I am always amazed by the process we follow to the final presentation of the play, the magic that hides the fact that we bring life to a text using ourselves as the mean.

The group I worked with, has a core of people that have been together for many years, some of who have a strong passion for the theatre. Trying to explore new theatrical forms, those are the ones who pull the rest of the group in a level of work which could easily be compared to the professional theatre.

Yiannis Ambazis





## Pentheas II

One of the dominant symbols of the play "Bacchae", is the role of Pentheas . Power, conservatism and controversy, at the beginning of any new condition, as well as rage and animosity toward anything radical, consist the main characteristics of Pentheas. This character , as a symbol against instinct, unconcern and the release of sentiments ,contributes to the evolution of the play. Penthea's role was "elaborated" by two actors, in order to provide an explicit (clear) picture of Penthea's double substance:

### Ruler-liberated

More specifically, Pentheas as a person liberated- by prejudice- consists a focal (central) point in the play. Moreover, it becomes clear –throughout the play- that every human consists of both masculine and feminine nature.It is very difficult to confront with this. At the beginning, when I was proposed for this role, I was opposed to it with no obvious reason..... I did not like it, it was not me. After I accepted this specific role –due to the fact that I trust my director and the whole team- I realized why I had reacted (opposed) to that: " I did not want to get dressed like a woman". It is not easy to meet your masculine or feminine nature (side).Social restrictions as well as social conditions often prevent our own evolution. That happened also to me,since –influenced by all this social prejudice- I did not want to study for the role. Hence, when I started working on my role .....things changed. After personal pressure and many hours of study over Penthea's liberated nature, I managed to reach my feminine nature. And this is very important : if we manage to balance these two natures , then we could become better people.Finally, Penthea's voluptuous side, is also one of his dominant features. His fantasies – taboo – become apparent. Influenced by Dionysus, king Pentheas has to confront with (face) his inner desires. Accepting the truth of your fantasies can become very laborious (painful) since it is opposed to the reality society has defined.This is the way it worked for me..... Acceptance of your inner sides could make you feel embarrassment and perplexity about your self. In reality , however, we feel allthese because of the stereotypes and prejudice that our society has determined.

### Study of the role

Penthea's role was mainly elaborated by the use of improvisations. Focusing on the self restriction of the role , an improvisation with the use of natural elements was realized. Water – the element of life and power- was the mean used for Penthea's self restriction / "drowning". The way he feels when he is about to drown , as the level of the water increases, is the same way he feels when his fantasies and his feminine nature start emerging. Slimy insects ascending on my body were also used as a condition for improvisation.

### Chorus

My participation to the chorus , on the other hand , was of great importance. The positiveness and vitality , that each member of the chorus transmits to the other, creates a stable ,energetic level on which we all move. This influenced me and helped me develop the role of Pentheas. Playing with the team / chorus , creates a feeling of security and trust. Result : better performance for both the team and each one separately.

### Amateurism

Amateurism consists one of the purest forms of art. This happens because amateur's motive is his love for art and not his need for economic profit , as it happens in professional art. Audience's participation in an amateurish performance is different from a professional company or team, since they realize the amateur's motive and feel free to participate and express themselves during the play.

Georgios Lountzis





## Cadmus

In *Bacchae*, Cadmus appears as the former king of Thebes, the "pillar" of the dynasty that rules Thebes at the period of time the play is evolving. His grandson Pentheas is the "natural" heir of this dynasty.

Euripides uses this role in two ways. In the first part, Cadmus is the aged king who decides to follow this new faith and its ceremonies, not so from sincere belief but from an interest for the benefits of his family. As the action unfolds, he is used as the last logical resort of the writer to convince the young and unfaithful Pentheas to follow the new religion. On the last part of the play, he is used to unveil the disaster to Agavi, land her on the reality of her crime and hence to set the closure of the play for the audience.

Cadmus symbolizes the voice of self-interest motivated "wisdom", derived by the years of power and ruling. The will to survive for the benefits of the family and its belongings. A series of logical thoughts are used in the mind of Cadmus, i.e. follow the new "cult" = rewarded, survive. Objection = destruction, punishment. Tradition and a feeling of belief (maybe fear) to the gods and religion issues constitute a part of this "wisdom" but up to a certain level.

On a personal level, this role, even though at the beginning it was a bit difficult to find personal references, finally these did come out. Not so the self-interest part (I do not act in this way generally, apart of course from the basic need for self improvement and "decent" ambition for life) but more on the tendency to think and analyze issues a bit too much. As this play deals with the battle of emotion and steer logic, I found myself suddenly on the logical side of the camp. It helped me to try and break this a bit, put me into thoughts, and allowed me to come in contact with my emotion that is sometimes locked. I sympathised Cadmus, as I believe his stance came not from a "wicked" point of view, as from his grandfather way of thinking. The will to protect his family and well established world that suddenly is deeply threatened by a battle among Pentheas and the god, in which he is unable to control. And this lack of control is fearsome. He is in desperate need to have always with him the good old times. To die peacefully. That is why at the end of this story he is devastated and he collapses. Everything he worked for suddenly disappears.

The way that Rubini and I, with her instructions, approached this role was very interesting and helpful. More or less she was the motivator for a personal approach to Cadmus using improvisation techniques and referral to natural elements in order to construct Cadmus on the stage. For example, being a hyperactive person that never settles, the role of an aged

king was at least technically very difficult to contain, as the first attempts were followed by a lot of body movements. An improvisation exercise with a referral to a big river, with a steady flow, not wild, or "violent", with an extra effort to control the body and the voice did help greatly. At this point I have to mention that the way that Rubini works with improvisation is excellent. She gave us the stage and we (the actors), using a great improvisation that I will never forget, full of emotions, derived the last scene with Agavi. She then skilfully managed to control this a bit technically and to evolve it on a strong closing scene. A wonderful experience altogether! I also found the idea of all of us (the roles) participating also in the chorus as great and innovating. Personally, I was very comfortable with this; I enjoyed it and it did not destruct me from playing Cadmus. On the contrary it helped me a lot. I would have to note here that this worked I believe successfully in this version of the play, due to the nature of the team and its members. On the communication that is existent and the emotions we have for each other. The timing was also great for such a proposal, as many of the members of this group know each other for some years now, they have tried and survived many experiences together and this helps the bonding.

What does it mean to be an amateur actor? I believe that amateurism first of all allows you to behave freely. To approach any play differently. You are motivated simply from your love for theatre and its excitement. You are not interested in financial rewards and also you never have the extra strain if your play will be successful and survive the season (financially and by the bad critics). You are much more open to experiments and innovating approaches to plays, as this will help you as a person. You are not afraid to present this publicly, as you don't have anything to lose or make a bad mark on a well-built career. It is a great feeling, tiring and yet rewarding. It also works as a good therapy for all the tensions of your daily life and struggles.

There is also a down side. Having your normal working life and 9 to 5 job, puts a strain on your commitment for this as you want to pursue more, but you are restrained by simple factors. Like for example financial troubles, or an out of the blue business trip that cannot be altered (poor Rubini has experience on this, at least by me) and this on the final rehearsals for a play. Furthermore, the endless juggling of everybody's free time to organise a proper rehearsal. Serious manager skills are needed for this! Above all it needs personal commitment and sacrifices (i.e. a weekend of relaxation). If this lacks better forget it.

Philippos Frangoulis



## Teiresias

In *Bacchae*, Cadmus appears as the former king of Thebes, the "pillar" of the dynasty that rules Thebes at the period of time the play is evolving. His grandson Pentheas is the "natural" heir of this dynasty.

Euripides uses this role in two ways. In the first part, Cadmus is the aged king who decides to follow this new faith and its ceremonies, not so from sincere belief but from an interest for the benefits of his family. As the action unfolds, he is used as the last logical resort of the writer to convince the young and unfaithful Pentheas to follow the new religion. On the last part of the play, he is used to unveil the disaster to Agavi, land her on the reality of her crime and hence to set the closure of the play for the audience.

Cadmus symbolizes the voice of self-interest motivated "wisdom", derived by the years of power and ruling. The will to survive for the benefits of the family and its belongings. A series of logical thoughts are used in the mind of Cadmus, i.e. follow the new "cult" = rewarded, survive. Objection = destruction, punishment. Tradition and a feeling of belief (maybe fear) to the gods and religion issues constitute a part of this "wisdom" but up to a certain level.

On a personal level, this role, even though at the beginning it was a bit difficult to find personal references, finally these did come out. Not so the self-interest part (I do not act in this way generally, apart of course from the basic need for self improvement and "decent" ambition for life) but more on the tendency to think and analyze issues a bit too much. As this play deals with the battle of emotion and steer logic, I found myself suddenly on the logical side of the camp. It helped me to try and break this a bit, put me into thoughts, and allowed me to come in contact with my emotion that is sometimes locked. I sympathised Cadmus, as I believe his stance came not from a "wicked" point of view, as from his grandfather way of thinking. The will to protect his family and well established world that suddenly is deeply threatened by a battle among Pentheas and the god, in which he is unable to control. And this lack of control is fearsome. He is in desperate need to have always with him the good old times. To die peacefully. That is why at the end of this story he is devastated and he collapses. Everything he worked for suddenly disappears.

The way that Rubini and I, with her instructions, approached this role was very interesting and helpful. More or less she was the motivator for a personal approach to Cadmus using improvisation techniques and referral to natural elements in order to construct Cadmus on the stage. For example, being a hyperactive person that never

settles, the role of an aged king was at least technically very difficult to contain, as the first attempts were followed by a lot of body movements. An improvisation exercise with a referral to a big river, with a steady flow, not wild, or "violent", with an extra effort to control the body and the voice did help greatly. At this point I have to mention that the way that Rubini works with improvisation is excellent. She gave us the stage and we (the actors), using a great improvisation that I will never forget, full of emotions, derived the last scene with Agavi. She then skilfully managed to control this a bit technically and to evolve it on a strong closing scene. A wonderful experience altogether! I also found the idea of all of us (the roles) participating also in the chorus as great and innovating. Personally, I was very comfortable with this; I enjoyed it and it did not destruct me from playing Cadmus. On the contrary it helped me a lot. I would have to note here that this worked I believe successfully in this version of the play, due to the nature of the team and its members. On the communication that is existent and the emotions we have for each other. The timing was also great for such a proposal, as many of the members of this group know each other for some years now, they have tried and survived many experiences together and this helps the bonding.

What does it mean to be an amateur actor? I believe that amateurism first of all allows you to behave freely. To approach any play differently. You are motivated simply from your love for theatre and its excitement. You are not interested in financial rewards and also you never have the extra strain if your play will be successful and survive the season (financially and by the bad critics). You are much more open to experiments and innovating approaches to plays, as this will help you as a person. You are not afraid to present this publicly, as you don't have anything to lose or make a bad mark on a well-built career. It is a great feeling, tiring and yet rewarding. It also works as a good therapy for all the tensions of your daily life and struggles.

There is also a down side. Having your normal working life and 9 to 5 job, puts a strain on your commitment for this as you want to pursue more, but you are restrained by simple factors. Like for example financial troubles, or an out of the blue business trip that cannot be altered (poor Rubini has experience on this, at least by me) and this on the final rehearsals for a play. Furthermore, the endless joggling of everybody's free time to organise a proper rehearsal. Serious manager skills are needed for this! Above all it needs personal commitment and sacrifices (i.e. a weekend of relaxation). If this lacks better forget it.

Christos Simos

## Agave

Agave's role is "haunted" by a constant agony. I felt an agony of where my role stands. When she becomes aware of what she has done (the murder of her own son), her pain is tremendous. The real question though is, whether this woman finally accepts the sole responsibility of the facts to herself, or does she try to ease a bit her case by blaming Dionysus? I haven't yet managed to answer this! I believe that we carry the sole responsibility of our actions during the course and at every point of our lives. Rubini on the other side though, supports the idea that we are affected by external factors. In this play, the responsibility was laid on the god. This was done for a certain reason: for the advancement of people's knowledge.

I think that Agave's role in this play is a bit revolutionary for an ancient play. She heard and responded to the call of her instincts and nature. She stands for two ideas: a mother and a woman. She is separated amongst motherhood and challenge and lying claims to a better life.

By using improvisation I found myself lost in a labyrinth. This played a decisive part in the shaping of my role. I felt my soul being broken into numerous small spaces, small rooms, some of them in darkness some of them full of light. My soul was searching for my own reasons for living. I would move with my whole body round and round to reach a climax: a whirlpool. I wasn't thinking of my own personal story. If I did this it would have been impossible to control myself. In front of me I had the grotesque view of brains spilled all over the place, I focused on the awful and vomiting feeling that this brought to my stomach. (Sometimes I was thinking aspects of my personal issues that have to deal with my mother's illness). I was receiving an energy flow from the chorus. But, I knew that they could just understand me but under no means could they be held responsible for my actions. This was my own personal drama. In the scene with Kadmus, I felt the projection of my guilt he presented with his words, his body, and his eyes. He passed that on to me and this was dreadful.

I was really assisted by transition since there was a "deep charge" coming out of the group. I participated in the chorus and the marginal point of my transition was at the scene with the three women on Kithaironas. At that point I felt like a marionette; I felt coming out of the chorus under a certain command and transforming myself as one of the three Kadmu's daughters.

Amateur theatre works for me as psychotherapy. I have been involved in amateurism since 1990. With this group we are all co-workers in a common goal, with the absence of any vendettas or animosities. Rubini as the motivator of this team has managed to create a forceful, highly energetic group of people. Personally, my involvement has helped me a lot to socialise and I feel now as being part of a wider circle. A circle that looks like a big bicycle wheel. With its reference points and spokes. During the course of time, I am moving away from the edge and I am now "travelling" on the spokes towards the centre, claiming my little part. I am no longer afraid of being visible by others.

Mairy Tsadima

## The Messenger

It was actually the first time that I had the chance to study a role and perform it. This was a considerable and yet rewarding and interesting challenge for me. It was so interesting to live the whole process: trying to present my part using different methods, thinking of various things when I was on stage, trying to concentrate, trying to live & capture the moment. The part of the messenger has altered me as a human being. I followed certain thought procedures that up to then I never knew that I possessed. For example, the director's advice to try and view the people's actions and to taste and feel every word, has taken my personality one step ahead. I erased my embarrassment. It opened up a new window in how I view the world: that every issue of life could have various aspects or various motions and that you need to discover them.

The messenger role was ahead of the unfolding events. He had to communicate to the audience using concise language and feelings of what has happened. Or to pass on his sentimental experiences successfully.

Rubini's guidance assisted me a lot in achieving awareness; each word has its meaning, its sentiment. You have to feel it before you spell it. She placed me in a big picture frame; I was standing in front of a picture, a painting. The music composition also assisted in achieving my sentimental status. I also found that the script led the way by imposing a certain tempo or rhythm full of sentimental ups and downs that I had to perform. I had to observe this painting and all the action depicted in this frame on "real time" terms. This helped me to stay alert and full of intensity for the whole period of my performance. Moreover, I felt that my concentration level affected the group's whole energy.

I feel fulfilled as a man by participating in amateur theatre. It is like having a little magical stick (a wand) that suddenly unites a group of twenty or so different individuals into a group, without wondering how and what but set for a common goal. Without really being aware of why they follow the team builder or they loosen themselves up and allow him/her to bring out of their souls deeply rooted feelings and instincts. This process, each time, is really helping me to advance as a better human being.

Dimitris Doudoumas





## Member of the chorus

The Chorus part in the play.

In between the boundaries of this Euripides story, black and white, good and evil, old and new, the composed force of the chorus brings in the equilibrium, the evolution, the conclusion and closure of it. The chorus part in the play is beyond from "practical"; it is by all means the catalyst.

Practical, since on a first stage it places the audience in the mood of the performance. It holds their attention on those intense moments by "pressing" a pause. It leaves a moment on the viewer to take a breath, to examine the issues on a clearer basis, to calmly remind him/her of the need to abstain a bit from the facts. Yet, on the critical and relevant point it will interfere, take a stand and drive the development of the story. Memory – reconstruction – action = wisdom. This is how the chorus "sets its drive"; It doesn't forget, it remains calm but also acts when is needed, it is overwhelmed when it feels so.

At first sight I could consider the chorus being passive, but it is not. Roubini used the notion of the water element. Water is on a constant flow. Nothing can stop this flow. It is as if it exists on its own merit. But it is water that nourishes all the rest. It leads its cyclical motion and ends. This is how the chorus is everywhere, watches everything, flows, constantly changing. It is the voice of the viewer.

It's also a catalyst. It follows the development, which the heroes seem to ignore and know on the same time. It tries to stay a mere observer, but it interferes. It steps in the "river", it is carried away and yet it manages to control its flow. It is magical how this double concept that exists in Euripides play is revealed and hidden in the chorus. A marvellous democrat. All is presented; all is skilfully mixed, debated...

What was there for the Chorus to explore.

Following the above frame, the answer to what the chorus had to search, find and perform lies in the notion of memory, reconstruction, action and wisdom. A spiritual and physical state; set always on a group level. This is the most difficult point of the amateur project, as individually one can, at his/her own place and time find this state and succeed. Yet on a group stage, through our individuality (and so our differential ties), we had to find a common code, a common reference point, to achieve all the above. A complicated and tricky fact, since we had to deal with "primitive" emotions and memories (sexuality, me, us).

How work was done on the Chorus.

It is needless to say that the physical side of things was developed thoroughly. As far as all the rest that had to be discovered and developed: personal memories that needed to "brush up" and the necessary procedures to facilitate this, was I think a bit neglected – justified by all means, given the lack of time and experience. On ideal conditions, the chorus – group, could have scratched on internal "corners", rediscovered memories. Following this, the essential processing of all the above, would lead to a proper management and at the end a correct portrayal and performance on stage. An essential precondition, for all the above "perfect" procedure, the lack of any taboos – I believe that this part was the most developed, given a sexual approach.

Amateur Theatre.

Definitely, through amateurism, everybody seeks to fulfil some emptiness'. So, why at the end do we need amateur theatre? I haven't certainly answered this yet, but I think that the first and foremost tool that has to be left aside is the selfish I. Following this a series of facts that are under scrutiny. Certainly, the joy of presenting our creative production at the end plays an important role; all the above speaking in general terms. I consider the plays we perform more than just an amateur effort – with all its pros and cons. On the pros, the result and the performance level is often envied by many. On the cons, the unfortunate stress of certain subtle limits – bounded on the one side by the "healthy" ambitions of Roubini and our limited free time for a hobby on the other side. A rather difficult issue to handle.

Christofallou **Philippa** Martha

**The set was minimal** for such a play. The performance had some weaknesses, mostly due to the amateur nature of the team. It revealed strength but it was left meteoric. The monologues were quite good. On the contrary the dialogues seemed to lack on real communication among the actors. The reveal of the objects used (masques, aprons etc.) was done in a simple and magical way. The entrance monologue at the start of the play and the whole setting was original and imposing. I also liked the staging of women on Kithaironas. Generally speaking there was a sense of dare and yet restrain. Yet, a specific character of the play was not delivered. And when the play started evolving I feel there was not enough time spent to let the things duly unfold. Even though it started on a good pace, from a point onwards things went a bit too fast. The Penthea's masquerade, didn't take its time. The two Dionysus' looked like two collaborators. I enjoyed the music. It was fit for the set. I was not tired. I would see it again.

**The group coped** really great with the whole project, which was to start with at least difficult being an ancient tragedy and what's more Vakhes, by Euripides. The chorus performed the Dionysian element and seemed well co-ordinated in all its kinesis. Dionysus performed with an excellent expression the sensuality and motion of his character, while on the contrary Pentheas didn't manage to convince us for his austerity as a monarch. However, the play didn't betray you and a sense of a decent effort was left.

**The performance** had a special energy and dynamic – a representative feature of ancient tragedy – which pinned down the audience.

The myth unfolded quickly. Even though amateurs, the protagonists contributed to the imposing nature of the play. The same can be said for the chorus, which with its motion and in conjunction with the ingenious lighting, seemed to change continuously the setting of the story. And all the above were nicely tied together in a way that did not allow the viewer to escape from the myth.

Most probably the absence of singing by the chorus, fuelled the austerity of the play, but it escaped us from the classical interpretation of such a play, which we are used to, without minimising on the whole sentimental outcome. An out-

come overall rated as positive, since it managed to pose questions, to sentimentally charge us and above all to revive the tragedy's ideas and metaphorical word in the modern era.

**Overall the comments** were very positive. They all seemed to accept the innovations of the presentation, commenting that even though the forms were modern, the acting part in its core was very classical. They agreed that we formed a uniform group, even though there were some negative comments on

## Comments by members of the audience

the ability of certain of the actors to carry out successfully their roles. Still, they believed that this presentation of "vaches" could easily stand out even in the professional theatre.

**Both persons** (more or less they commented on the same issues), were initially caught by surprise and felt a bit strange as soon as they realised the whole setting and performing choice for such a play. They thought it was aggressive. Certainly, they did not reject it and on the contrary they later described how effortlessly it swept them away! None commented negatively on the sexuality that was – on certain levels – projected. The set was found to blend harmoniously with the play. They had an issue though, understanding the trainers! They also commented on that "travelling" feeling coming from the music. Those who had some theatre experience, mentioned that the double personality of Pentheas was clearer, while for Dionysus they had some difficulty understanding this; who represented the divine side and who the human side at the end?

**Underground music.** The verse: "Io, lo..." and you thought that you were transferred in a party, a dangerous party. Everything there had double faces, double entity. Two creatures? Two women? A double-faced Dionysus, two different sides of his personality. A two-sided Pentheas; two different faces. Myth and illusion are mixed. On stage, a group of 20 people, at one time drifting you away and on another time,

threatening you. Aprons spilled with blood, you could almost smell the slaughter... and all this coming from an amateur team, from a team that dared, along with its "maestro", the experiment and succeeded. Initiating a powerful feeling that seemed to develop at the course of the rehearsals. These experiences were their offering to the audience and that is why we have to thank them.

**A mature staged** and directed, avant-gard, modern and powerful performance that charms the audience with all the soul-searching issues and influences it allows to emerge. Impeccable psychological character analysis and achievement in fully understanding their ideological and emotional charge. An interesting plot, extraordinary energy and a dynamic state of action and reaction. An original presentation of images using visual surprises, like in the first scene - the monologue of Dionysus and the earthquake scene.

As for the acting level, all the performances were really interesting, with the only minor setback (fully justified however, as we are dealing with an amateur production) some of them being splendid, of a professional standard, others of an amateur character and some, few that is, rather bad.

The performance was harmoniously tied together. The set, the costumes, the script, the movements, the lights, all nicely put together in a modern spirit addressing a theatrically aware audience. They succeed in blending the emotional status of the audience with the action. The set is minimal and yet it conveys the general feeling. The choice of using a common, everyday speech form in an ancient tragedy was ingenious. The script full of deep meanings became alive with anything pointless missing. The absence of singing brings closer the production to the reality of the viewer, to his everyday living, without this creating a feeling of deficiency. Maybe the volume of music could have been a bit lower to balance the relation of music - voice in the performance. A vulnerable part of the show was the sound production, which did not reflect the high standard of the performance.

Generally speaking, the "thirst" of the viewer and his/her parallel puzzling for life and nature issues, make this performance not only successful but also enchanting.