National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Department of English Language and Literature

M. A. Programme

"Anglophone Literature and the Greek Element"

The Emancipation of the Contemporary Spectator: Exploring Different Kinds of
Reception in Postmodern Rewritings of Euripides's and Sophocles's Tragedies.

Student's Name: Stavrina Vasilopoulou

i.d. number: 217001

Supervisor: Konstantinos Blatanis

Committee: Konstantinos Blatanis,

Aspasia Velissariou,

Maria Koutsoudaki

Date of Submission: 08 / 02 / 2019

Abstract

This thesis will discuss the role of the chorus in two postmodern rewritings of Euripides's *Bacchae* and Sophocles's *Antigone*, namely Richard Schechner and The Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69* (1968) and Mac Wellman's *Antigone* (2001), respectively. The choruses of these two different plays will be examined regarding the different ways in which they activate contemporary spectators and enable them to develop their own sociopolitical and ontological consciousness. By exploring the chorus's crucial dramatic and theatrical role, I will draw on Jacques Rancière's concepts of intellectual equality and intellectual emancipation in art and education, so as to examine the way the creative process of writing and presenting a play affects the way the latter is perceived by the different members of the audience as they take part in the process of viewing not only as passive spectators, but also as active commentators and creators of their own, unique interpretatios and stories.

Theoretical work on "the society of the spectacle" by Guy Debord (1967) has defined the modern human condition as one having lost its former unity of life, in which individuals have become passive and incapable to think because of the alienation the spectacle causes to lived experience. What is more, in our era when technology has invaded almost all areas of people's lives, real and substantial contact with art as well as with social relationships in general seems to have been lost. Yet, according to Rancière, one should not underestimate the ability and power of the human being to perceive and critically process any artistic or other experience. A perception that holds that a spectator can only be a passive, easily-influenced receiver with no critical thinking and thus one who must be taught the truth by the knowledgeable artist, automatically places the artist and the artifact in a higher, unequal position in relation to the spectator, student, receiver, and this hierarchy negatively affects the possibility of the spectator to develop her views and emancipate herself. Thus, Rancière argues, creating art that challenges established perceptions of spectatorship is crucial for the interests of producing art that freely communicates concerns and ideas on human experience and that facilitates intellectual equality and democratic

dialogue, as a first step towards social and political change and a better future.

By pursuing a comparative analysis of both the ancient texts and their postmodern rewritings, or adaptations, I intend to examine the historical and cultural conditions in which both the ancient and the modern plays were produced, in order to reach conclusions concerning the issue of spectatorship in relation to an art that works the best towards intellectual and social education and liberation. I explore the role and the function of the choruses of both the ancient and the modern plays and the different spectator participation or activation they trigger. Through my research, I aspire to trace the qualities of the modern theatrical play that can manage to contribute to the emancipation of the spectator of the 21st century.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I discuss how postmodern reworkings of the choruses of Euripides's *Bacchae* and Sophocles's *Antigone*, such as in the cases of Richard Schechner and The Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69* (1968) and Mac Wellman's *Antigone* (2001), can be examined regarding the different ways in which they evoke different kinds of response from contemporary spectators thereby enabling them to develop their own sociopolitical and ontological awareness. In addition to examining the chorus's dramatic and theatrical role in each play, I draw on Jacques Rancière's concepts of intellectual equality and intellectual emancipation in art and education, so as to examine the relationship between the creative process of writing and presenting a play on the one hand and the audience's perception of and response to it on the other. Since I agree with Rancière, I argue that the artistic process affects the way a play is perceived by different members of the audience, as they take part in the process of viewing not only as passive spectators, but also as active commentators and creators of their own, unique interpretations and stories.

Theoretical work on "the society of the spectacle" by Guy Debord (1967) has defined the modern human condition as one having lost its former unity of life, in which individuals have become passive and incapable to think because of the alienation the spectacle causes to lived experience. What is more, in our era technology has invaded almost all areas of people's lives, resulting in the loss of real and substantial contact with art as well as with social relationships in general. Yet, according to Rancière, one should not underestimate the ability and power of the human being to perceive and critically process any artistic or other experience, or underestimate the intellectual capacity of people who watch an artistic performance. A perception that holds that a spectator can only be a passive, easily-influenced receiver with no critical thinking and thus one who must be taught the truth by the knowledgeable artist, automatically places the artist and the artifact in a higher, unequal position in relation to the spectator, student, receiver, and this hierarchy negatively affects the possibility of the spectator to develop her views and emancipate herself. Thus, Rancière argues, creating art that challenges established perceptions of spectatorship is crucial for the interests of producing art that freely

communicates concerns and ideas on human experience and that facilitates intellectual equality and democratic dialogue, as a first step towards social and political change and a better future.

In the first part of my thesis therefore I will discuss different views on the nature of spectatorship and on the function of representation, from Plato and Aristotle to Rancière as well as Schechner and Wellman themselves. Part of this examination will be a short research on the particular choruses of Sophocles's *Antigone* and Euripides's *Bacchae* and their distinct audiences. In the second part of my thesis I discuss the different ways in which the modern rewritings treat the choral element; *Dionysus in 69* focuses on the body and the collective aspect and Wellman's Antigone creates a strange, confusing language which triggers the spectator's affect. I intend to show that Wellman's play is closer to Rancière's perception of a theater that can achieve the emancipation of the spectator.

2. THEATER AND SPECTATORSHIP: FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN WESTERN THEORY

2.1 The beginning of the debate on spectatorship

A discussion on theater spectatorship cannot neglect to take into account the long-lasting and still ongoing debate regarding the purpose and function of drama and theater. In order to provide a certain structure to such an endeavor I draw on Raymond Williams's outline of the historical development and criticism of tragedy both as a concept and as a literary form produced in Ancient Athens, from its birth to later mediaeval and then subsequent modern dramatic and philosophical works, and by following his cultural materialist approach in his criticizing efforts to establish a linear and concrete Western "Tradition" and continuity as far as tragedy is concerned. As Williams argues, there can be no such thing as a continuity of tragedy as a literary or theatrical form, since each artistic production of such kind is not but an outcome of the particular culture in which it was produced.

The debate begins with Plato and his work "The Republic" where he attacks tragic poetry, along with poetry of most other kinds, in an argumentation that results in condemning all kind of visual or representational art.[1] Plato blames poetry and mimesis (imitation) of fictional stories about mythic heroes and the gods for morally deceiving and corrupting the individual. Attacking the idea of representation as a bad or even false imitation of life, he declares that drama, as well as poetry, hide the truth and obstruct knowledge which can be gained only in observing real life itself, by focusing on appearances rather than on essential knowledge and truth. Exposed to images that create illusions or to the presentation of examples of the lives of controversial figures, the viewers, Plato says, are seduced into identifying and empathizing with the characters they watch on

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[1] In the Socratic dialogues of the 2nd and 3rd book of The Republic Plato criticizes both arts based on visual representation of reality, such as painting, and mimetic art, that is performance of bodies imitating real life, such as theater.

stage or are told about in the story. As a consequence, viewers, and especially the younger ones, are encouraged to follow those characters' examples, "for the young are not able to distinguish what is and what is not allegory, but whatever opinions are taken into the mind at that age are wont to prove indelible and unalterable" (Plato 378d-c). Plato attacks Homer and the tragedians for being blasphemous to the gods and for setting bad examples to the audience by presenting the failure, humiliation and suffering of human condition as well as the negative aspects of human nature such as resentment or ill judgment, instead of aiming at educating them presenting solely good deeds and virtues. Hence spectators, he implies, are encouraged to also act out of poor judgment and lack of virtue in their everyday, real life as well, as members of the polis [city], threatening the sense of coherence and community.

The style that poetic speech uses, he says, offers an alienated, irrational, limited, version of reality therefore, as an illusion, it is dangerous, untrue and morally harmful, and focuses on *pathos* [passion] and emotional identification rather than intellectual thought. Indeed, the tragedians' use "of rhythm, meter and harmony (601a–b) to seduce their audience into the feeling of being told something profound" diminishes poetry's "cognitive value" (Young 13) and harms the uneducated spectator's intellect, therefore "should be banned from a healthy community" (13). For the art of "the tragic poets and all other imitators … seems to be a corruption of the mind of all listeners who do not possess, as an antidote a knowledge of its real nature" (Plato 595b). They may appear to be the teachers of tragedy but, in reality, they do not speak the truth (595c). Hence for Plato, and this constitutes a point of convergence with his 'opponent' Aristotle, tragedy functions by means of stimulating emotion after addressing the 'weakest' areas of the soul. Thus, what we have is:

> … on the one hand, tragic drama intrinsically disposed to the portrayal of aroused emotion, in particular grief, and, on the other, a part of the soul that yearns to experience such arousal. In other words, what we experience in responding to art carries over to life: artistic portrayals of characters in states of high emotional excitement produce in the spectator (the habitual spectator, he should perhaps say)

the disposition to enter those states in real life. In particular, portrayals of characters expressing violent grief develop the disposition to respond to real-life events in a similar way and so negatively affect the spectator's life. (Young 18-19)

Some decades later Plato's student Aristotle developed his own views on the function of art and the definition of tragedy. While he agreed on a definition of poetry in general as a kind of mimesis and on the emotional impact of tragic drama on the soul, he countered Plato's condemnation of its practice and pointed out the positive outcomes such an arousal of emotional activity can offer to the spectator. In approaching the issue through exploring the psychological distance between art and audience, he examined the nature of the spectators' involvement in the artistic experience. From a very early age human beings take "a natural delight in creating and viewing representations" (Young 22), which distinguishes them from the rest of the animals. Even when the object of representation is something, such as a fierce animal, 'whose sight causes us pain' we still take delight in its image. According to Aristotle, people delight in images either if the latter are savage or enjoyable, "because 'learning is most pleasant, not only for philosophers but for others likewise (however small their capacity for it)' and 'because it comes about that they learn as they observe, and infer what each thing is, e.g., that this person represents that one' (1448b 13–18)" (qtd. in Young 22). In viewing the representation of actions on stage the members of the audience identify themselves with the tragic hero and experience, apart from their pity, her fear. In this way tragedy achieves its primary goal which is the cleansing of these intense emotions through the tragic hero's suffering, what Aristotle calls "catharsis."[2]

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[2] According to *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. Merriam-Webster "catharsis" (in Greek κάθαρσις) is defined as "the purification and purgation of emotions—particularly pity and fear—primarily through art. The term, derived from the medical term katharsis ("purgation" or "cleansing"), was used as a metaphor by Aristotle (Poetics) to describe the effects of true dramatic tragedy on the spectator. Aristotle states that the purpose of tragedy is to arouse "terror and pity" and thereby effect the catharsis (Poetics) to describe the effects of true dramatic tragedy on the spectator. Aristotle states that the purpose of tragedy is to arouse "terror and pity" and thereby effect the catharsis of these emotions. *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. Springfield, Mass: Merriam-Webster, 1995. Print. p. 217.

Unlike Plato therefore Aristotle implies that exposition to tragic drama can motivate the spectators into either the same or the opposite - from the hero's - course of action. For Aristotle, tragic poetry presents "important truths about human nature" (Young 24) and purifies the spectator who is then able to choose the right course of action, thereby being the first to support the viewer's intellectual capacity to judge and assess what she is shown and what the proper thing to do is. In this way Aristotle not only defends tragedy and theater but also raises the significance of its function and role in the city; by demonstrating universal truths about human experience and eliminating the manifestation of negative feelings and thereby destructive behavior by the members of the community - once they have left the theatrical venue, it serves as an educational and democratic factor in the polis [city].

Even though we cannot be certain about the tragic poets' objectivity of presentation and their pure intentions, in the competitive context of the festival in which the tragedies were performed (Young 4), one thing remains indisputable; that the dramatists presented their work in front of an audience, and of a very specific identity actually, and that very fact was an integral part of their writing style. Theater had and has a strong effect on the people who watch and on the societies of which they are part, Plato and Aristotle would agree. Their theories may be rather polemical yet both discuss theater and art in relation to its short or long-term impact on its audience. Thus, we have arrived to a point where we can form two main arguments concerning spectatorship. First of all, spectatorship is crucial for the existence, practice and purpose of theater, thus the one is inseparable from the other. Moreover, spectatorship does not remain the same, but changes its characteristics throughout the ages. In the spirit of Williams's perspective on tradition and continuity, it is important that we distinguish spectatorship in the classical age of Athens, for example, and spectatorship today; the spectators of classical Athens have little in common with the spectators of modern theatrical performances. In ancient Athens, spectatorship, citizenship, and any kind of human activity was defined by the very culture and the historical context in which they belonged, "in which the metaphysical and social categories were indistinguishable" (Williams 45). For in 5th century Athens, the political, religious and social spheres were not separated like in modern societies, but were all merged into one common and communal life in Athens, where the one was inseparable from the other

and that applied to everybody. In this way, all human activity was a manifestation of the character of the same community. Theater therefore was not an exception. The dramatists wrote and presented their plays in the polis and for the polis, and their works incorporated both the political, that is what concerns the function and organization of the institutions of the city, and the religious, that is the distinct beliefs and rituals included in their particular system of faith and worship. Hence, what was presented in theater addressed an audience whose members belonged to the same active community with the same history, culture and collective imaginary, not a heterogeneous one, like most of the audiences in our modern, Western societies of globalized capitalism.

In this thesis I argue that a useful way to examine theater spectatorship in relation to the conflict over representation is by examining the choral aspect of tragedy as a crucial element of dramatic action and thus spectators' response to it. In this respect, I view the chorus in the same way Williams views Greek tragedy; "as an *achievement*":

> What for us is a source (in one way rightly, for here European drama was born) was for the Greeks a fulfillment: a mature form touching at every point a mature culture. In some though not all subsequent periods, this major achievement has affected the development of modern tragic drama, in all degrees from general awareness to conscious imitation. Yet there has been no re-creation and in effect no reproduction of Greek tragedy, and this is not really surprising. For its uniqueness is genuine, and in important ways not transferable. (38-39)

Along with tragedy as a form and practice, the chorus was also an achievement, a fulfillment for the ancient Greeks, directly linked with its cultural and historical context. As Williams notes, "in the transition from the classical to the medieval world" (41), the choral aspect of tragedy was largely weakened. Generally dramatic creation in medieval times was hardly a thing, as tragedy was mostly understood and practiced in the form of narration, to the detriment of dramatic action, the cornerstone of which was the chorus, as

I mentioned before. Tragedy in 5th century Athens was a distinctive, shared and collective experience, one completely remote from us, created within a festive and religious context of celebrating the god Dionysus, in which the ritualistic element was executed mostly by the chorus. The latter was a significant dramatic element for the viewing of the tragic fate of the mythic or heroic family as the tragedy of the city for multiple reasons. Most importantly, the chorus offered an additional perspective to the 'problem' of the tragedy discussed by the actors. "As actors in the 'real' world", Kitzinger argues, "members of the audience ha[d] an affinity with the actors' point of view, but they also share[d] the chorus' way of looking at the world, particularly as they participate[d] in choral performances in the cultic festivities of the polis and [were] aware of a [long-standing] tradition" which defined the way they perceived their position in the structure of the world.

2.1.1 Antigone – chorus and audience

Drawing on Kitzinger I support that the main function of the chorus in ancient Greek tragedy was that, "in creating another world on stage by its unique language and movement, [it] gave the audience a different perspective from which to view the play's action" (vii). This was the case with the choruses of all the tragedies, at least the ones that have been saved by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.[3] In Sophocles in particular, the different points of view expressed in his tragedies were reflected in "the difference in attitude and mode of communication between actors and chorus", that is, choral elements such as language, song, dance and shapes were "inextricably intertwined with … its world view" (Kitzinger 1). Sophocles's tragedies are therefore characterized by a certain connection of form and content. What is important to take into consideration is that tragic choruses had a double identity; the chorus had both the identity, the character of the group of people it represented (e.g. the male Theban citizens or the bacchants) and the identity of

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[3] The chorus was a constitutive part of the comedies of Aristophanes as well.

being "participants in a ritual performance" (Kitzinger 3-4). This duality was thus manifested both in the diction and the performance of the chorus.

The difference in perspectives between the actors and the chorus which was expressed through different modes of communication - also according to Kitzinger - "necessitate[d] a different kind of receptivity in the audience" (7-8). "The actors' language", she continuous, "represents a tool for argument and the creation of an action, while the chorus' language articulates a perspective free of the responsibility of action and open to the perception of the divine order, which its song and dance speak to and attempt to affect" (8). Thus, the tentative relationship between the actors and the chorus depicts "a reality outside the theater" (9) in which the spectators will have to choose their actions as members of the city. This relationship, I argue, proves to be crucial for the development of the audience's political awareness. Kitzinger explains:

> Members of the audience see in the fictional world of the drama, constituted by both actors and chorus, different aspects of their responsibilities as citizens of the polis. The audience does not view the authority of actors and chorus differently; rather, different aspects of their lives as citizens within the polis are enacted by actors and chorus and, in that enactment, the tension between the authority of each perspective dramatizes a tension that any member of the audience feels as an individual and as a participant in the community of the polis. (6)

The dynamics of the relationship between actors and chorus and their – often – conflicting perspectives is a central element of Sophocles's Antigone. For instance, in the prologue where Antigone and Ismene debate about the burial of their brother Polyneices, the chorus has a rather distant stance towards the sisters' conflict and decisions. It mostly describes the battle in which Polyneices and his brother Eteocles were killed; through its performance, "it gives the audience an aural and visual image not only of the battle but also of the nature and limits of all human action" (Kitzinger 13). A series of images depict the victory of the city of Thebes "as the manifestation of divine order" (15) and thereby

"erase[s] the human agents in the battle" (15), the two dead brothers. What the chorus reminds us, through the ceremonial, spiritual atmosphere its song and dance evoke, is a macro, large-scale reflection of the world's structure which human agency strives to control by getting involved in war and conflict with destructive consequences (Kitzinger 19-20).

In the chorus parts (stasima) of *Antigone* the themes of the ambiguous and limited human agency and of human's inescapability from her fate are repeated several times as an indirect comment to both Creon's and Antigone's actions, in lines 332-3 and 360-4 for instance. In the second stasimon the chorus insists on the misfortune [ἄτας] the human race is condemned to for transgressing the divine law. (Sophocles 582-4) Referring to both Antigone and Creon as transgressors of different systems of law, it does not choose one over the other but wishes for the audience "to acknowledge the necessity of both and their incompatibility" (Kitzinger 23). In this respect, Sophocles's chorus functions as a reminder to the audience of the importance of reflection before action and of the repeatable patterns - which it portrays in dance and song - in this world and in history that are beyond human power and human action cannot control or change. Antigone and Creon enact the opposite attitude by making decisions without reflection and contrary to the pre-established laws. Claiming singularity[4] and power, they both insist on their arrogant behavior and commit singular, different - from the expected – actions trying to change the order of things. In this way they commit 'hubris' and surrender to their tragic fate. As far as the spectators of the tragedy are concerned, they are offered the opportunity to very vividly and strongly witness the heroes' transgressions and therefore reflect on whether one can change the course of history that tends to be repeated, by singular, radical actions and events, without being totally discouraged from doing so necessarily. In this way they get a deeper insight into and awareness of the arbitrariness of human nature that struggles to be expressed in a world of death and violence.

Antigone, written in 441 BC, in the midst of the golden age of Pericles,[5] is thus a projection of Athenian democracy and, presumably, of the concerns of the time. The tragic poet's appeal for reflection, composure and prudence through the chorus could also

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[4] See Judith Butler's argument on Antigone's singular act in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between life and death.*
[5] Pericles led the city of Athens roughly from 461 to 429 BC (Wikipedia).

function as an appeal to the citizens of his polis, Athens, to reflect on problems of democracy in the exercise of politics and decision-making.

2.1.2 Bacchae – chorus and audience

Even though the function of Euripides's chorus in *Bacchae* does not differ from the other tragedians', it is of considerably different nature; the chorus of bacchants does offer a different - compared to the tragic hero's, Pentheus – perspective on the way human life should be led yet, its view is quite opposite to the opinion expressed by Sophocles's chorus in *Antigone*. For, if in Sophocles's *Antigone* the chorus represented the realm of prudent thought in Euripides's *Bacchae* it celebrates the ecstatic power of religion. Phoutrides writes that "the contrast between religion and wisdom is so prominent that it becomes the very theme of the play" (123). The ideological conflict portrayed in Bacchae concerns the antithetical perspectives or attitudes of skepticism and religious faith, depicted by Pentheus and the chorus respectively. As Phoutrides argues, the "blind acceptance of the divine agency and of the power of faith" (124) is an idea that may "reflect or rather imply the meditations of the [tragic] poet [himself] without violating their own nature" (127). Not being a 'blind' worshipper himself Euripides demonstrates his and his audience's open-mindedness, offering a difficult challenge even to the most profound reasoning and thought.

Another interpretation concerning the role of the chorus in *Bacchae* is one according to which the dialogic parts performed by the characters of the drama represent what is said ("λεγόμενα") whereas the chorus parts represent what is done ("δρώμενα") in the play (Ευριπίδης 36). Through the performance of the chorus the spectator witnesses the primal conflict between human reason and instinct, mainly experienced through the human body. Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* elaborates on the two oppositional forces behind human experience and creation of civilization naming the one Apollonian and the other Dionysian. For Nietzsche, tragedy offers the possibility for the human being to experience

both the Apollonian and the Dionysian state, as he distinguishes them; the Dionysian is characterized by the "suspension of individuality [which] "produces a feeling of extreme joy [and in which one experiences] a sense of 'universal harmony', harmony not only between person and person, but also . . . between man and nature" (Young 176). The Apollonian, on the other hand, expresses aesthetic and intellectual harmony and wisdom, and so if both states are combined together, as Nietzsche proposes that we do, they result in a 'divine' unity of being.

The ecstatic frenzy of the bacchant's dancing and singing, who are in fact women of the city of Thebes possessed by the god Dionysus, raise concerns regarding the limits between the freedom of religious worshipping and civic-mindedness. On the one hand, Pentheus obsession with civic control and propriety leads him into defying divine order thereby humiliating himself and, on the other hand, his mother Agave's ecstatic delirium results into her not recognizing and murdering her own child. The conflict can thus be further elaborated once it is relocated in the socio-political context of a community in search of boundaries between absolute freedom and social justice.

Last but not least, an aspect that is particularly emphasized in Euripides's chorus in the *Bacchae* is the communal one; the entirety of the chorus's action and performance is collective. In their possession by the god of madness, Dionysus, the bacchants act as a mass of bodies inseparable from each other. Until the very end, when Agave realizes her murderous act, they act all together and for the same purpose; to worship their god and enjoy the pleasure of the ecstasy he offers them. In impersonating the ritualistic aspect of the performance therefore the chorus depicts the power of collectivity. The spectator of the tragedy is able to contemplate, on the one hand, the power of collective decision-making and action that the democracy of his polis offers her and, on the other hand, the danger such a strong, uncontrollable power may engender should some limits not be set.

2.2   Modern theories on spectatorship and the spectacle

As Williams notes after the transition from the classical to the medieval times and later to the Renaissance the ritualistic aspect of theater was gradually eliminated as the religious element was replaced by a more secularized and rationalized perception of culture and the world. Tragic conflict and dramatic action were totally abandoned and replaced by a kind of narrative, an account and not representation of the tragic events. The chorus part was consequently abolished, as was its effect on the audience, which some later artists tried to revive or incorporate in other theatrical means. A number of artists and theorists were interested in discussing tragedy's impact on the spectator, such as Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Brecht, to name a few. I focus, however, on a more recent debate on spectatorship and the spectacle, which seems to have revived Plato and Aristotle's conflict on representation in art.

2.2.1 An attack on the spectacle

I draw on one of the most prominent theories on the spectacle by Guy Debord, one of the most influential artists and theorists of the 20th century. In his well-acclaimed work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, written in 1967, Debord heavily criticizes and attacks 20th century capitalism for being the cause of the alienation dominating Western societies and social relationships and of the loss of unity among people, but also within the individual that the nature of production and consumption in 20th century capitalism brought about. He describes "the whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail . . . [presenting itself] as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (Debord Thesis 1).[6] In the age of the screen and of digitalized, virtual reality, Debord claims "images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever" (Thesis 2). According to him, the spectacle has come to signify the dominant "social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Thesis 4). In this way Debord marks a modern

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[6] The source text does not provide numbered pages.

debate over the function of the image in modern societies of globalized capitalism, which is incorporated in the general ongoing debate on the role and purpose of art in general, as well as its impact on the modern spectator.

Debord attacked the power of the image, however not in the way Plato did; Debord did not criticize representation in general, but the spectacular image, that is, the incessant reproduction and consumption of images representation of life that has become spectacle, what characterizes our modern life. According to Debord, this is a phenomenon of our post-capitalistic societies, of an age where the accumulation of capital has passed to the accumulation of spectacle. He argues that the spectacle is not a collection of deceptive, "evil" images but rather a "social relationship between people that is mediated by images" and that this relationship "appears at once as society itself" (Thesis 11). For him, the hegemonic power of the images of lived life that, mediated through the spectacular machine of the digitalized age, they become dead, life is not lived, experienced, but seen, making us passive receivers of commodities, ideas, lifestyles, not being able to think and critically accept or reject them. Hence, in the context of his argument, Debord turns against spectatorship in general, implying that any condition in which the subject is physically passive, a spectator, is against any artistic and political activity for social change.

2.2.2   Activating the spectator on stage

One of the artists who was influenced by Debord and incorporated his views in his work was Richard Schechner, an anthropologist and theater practitioner, founder of The Performance Group which thrived in the field of radical experimentation and performance in the 1960s, along with other theatrical groups such as The Living Theater. For Schechner, the passive condition in which the spectacle placed individuals could be addressed by practicing art and especially theater which would invite the spectator to participate in the performance and thus become active, first in the safe environment of the theatrical venue and, on a second level, in everyday life's social and political matters. That is why he

devoted most of his life experimenting with the performative and ritualistic aspect of theater which, as I developed before, evokes the spectator's communal instincts and the feeling of a shared solidarity. Reminding us of Aristotle's notion of 'catharsis' Schechner argues that people are interested in going to the theater "because witnessing mimetic events relates them to their fellow human beings" (*Performance Theory* 31). He produced mainly experimental performances which, he claims, "are more expressive of social solidarity than orthodox theater" (31). Writing of the spectators of such experimental performances he states:

> [People] often know one another; people know what kind of audience to expect and whom to identify with. Arriving in clusters of two or more, larger groups are soon formed during intermissions and the impromptu socializing frequently continues after the performances. (31)

As he develops in an extensive analysis of how the "actuals" of a performance work, he describes the characteristics of performance, crucial to its success; the focus on the "wholeness" of the event, in the context of "self-determination" and "participatory democracy" that it promotes, the engagement in a "religious transcendental experience" (*Performance Theory* 39), the focus on the "process . . . [what] happens here and now" (50) instead of the outcome, a condition of "contest" (55) and finally the use of space "concretely and organically" (58). In this respect, Schechner's performances focus on the involvement of the body of the spectator in the "actual," as he calls the event of a performance, encouraging a more active, participatory condition which the spectator could hopefully adopt in her life after the performance.

2.2.3   *Emancipating the contemporary spectator*

In my thesis I draw on Jacques Rancière's theoretical concepts of intellectual equality and intellectual emancipation, as he developed them in his works *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987) and *The Emancipated Spectator* (2008). Rancière is critical towards previous theories attacking the spectator passivity and expecting of her to participate in an active performance, as he argues that this reasoning is based, first of all, on a false, cause-and-effect logic of inequality, that is, on a presupposition that the performer, or writer, or director holds a higher, more knowledgeable position on what the spectator *should* do and learn, whereas the spectator herself, such a logic implies, is, apart from passive, also ignorant of what is being done and what should be experienced or learnt. Rancière explains that, as happens in such educational models, this attitude results in the stultification of the spectator, as, through this practice, what is first and foremost affirmed to her is her inferior, ignorant position, in relation to the artist who *must* know better than her. Such an attitude only works for the sustenance of the system of exploitation and injustice we live in and we want to change; the reproduction of hierarchical relations in art, as well as in education, can only keep reproducing the hierarchy in society as well, instead of overthrowing it and making the spectator an active agent of her life, in the context of what an art which works for social change and freedom through the individual's activation pursues. For Rancière thus a different approach in the way the artist builds the relationship with the spectator from the beginning is needed, an approach that does not reproduce this hierarchy but works not only in a participatory but also an emancipatory way for the spectator, a way that verifies for the latter that her intelligence is equal to the artist's or performer's one (10).

Second, for the same purpose Rancière argues that our understanding of what spectatorship actually is should change as well. Spectatorship is not "a passive condition" that has to be turned into activity, "it is our normal situation" (17). In every situation of our everyday lives "we learn and teach, we act and know, as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt." Therefore "we have to recognize the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity peculiar to the spectator. Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action is the spectator of the same story" (17). Playwright Mac Wellman also defends the position of passivity when he argues that "doing nothing is also…a kind of theater in the sense that when you are doing nothing you are still doing something" (*Speculations* 41).

The activity in which the spectator engages in when she watches a performance is what Rancière calls the "poetic labour of translation" which is "at the heart of all learning" and "of the emancipatory practice" (10). The process of translation involves "observing and comparing one thing with another, a sign with a fact, a sign with another sign." The spectator "can learn, one sign after the other, the relationship between what she does not know and what she does know. She can do this if, at each step, she observes what is before her, says what she has seen, and verifies what she has said" (Rancière 10). This is the way learning, but also creating works in all cases. In order for the artist to facilitate this process for the spectator to engage in, one should not only not try to abolish the distance between the subject and what she watches, as if distance is not "the normal condition of any communication;" rather, one should take advantage of this 'distance,' of this space that is unavoidably created, and carefully choose the signs, the words or features, with which the spectator will be able to "practice the art of translating, of putting her experience into words and [later] her words to the test; of translating her intellectual adventures for others and counter-translating the translations of their own adventures which they present to her" (Rancière 11). An art of this kind, according to Rancière, is an art in which different "regimes of expression intersect, creating unique combinations of exchange, fusion and distance" (125). He characterizes this distance "a zone of indeterminacy" (107) and a form of "pensiveness" which "resists thought" – the thought of the person who has produced the artistic form and of the person who seeks to understand it, one "in which art escapes itself" (131).

This distance and the "pensiveness" that it creates are not controlled by either the performer or the viewer and can be, I argue, identified with what Keith Appler describes as the effect of the work of Language writers and their unorthodox use of words and meanings. This state of "confusion" which Appler coins "affective state of intensity" and in which the spectator struggles to construct meaning out of the peculiar language of the play and the also peculiar images it creates is the very moment when the actual emancipatory, liberating process for both the spectator and the meaning of the artwork can take place; the spectator is able to produce her own meaning, make her own associations and gain new knowledge and insight of how she wants to lead her life, after the performance she attends has ended.

3. POSTMODERN REVISIONS OF *ANTIGONE*'S AND *BACCHAE*'S CHORUSES

3.1 Dionysus in 69: revising the chorus, re-acting with the spectators

Dionysus in 69 was not only a play, a revision of Euripides's *Bacchae*. It was an attempt for a revision, a re-discovery, of the concerns, ideas and values that the ancient text marked in its historicity and, at the same time, "nothing if not a child of its time" (Zeitlin, 49). In particular, *Bacchae* had not been performed in any commercial theater, since the beginning of the 20th century, before Richard Schechner and The Performance Group (also, TPG)[7] decided to study and work with it. The group treated and performed the play in a highly radical and experimental, for the time, way, by re-contextualizing it in their own historical time and place, that is, the late 1960s, a period of huge cultural, social, and political shifts and revolutions manifesting themselves all around the world. The result, *Dionysus in 69*, which premiered in 6th June 1968 in the Performing Garage in the center of New York City,[8] was a theatrically radical, aesthetic, social and political event altogether.

The way the play was revised and performed echoed the general artistic and sociopolitical concerns of massive movements of mainly young students and artists, from all over the world. As I mentioned in the introduction, those movements demanded social and political change; the new generation of people rejected the social and political conformism and its morality that was established after the Second World War. In the U.S. and many other countries, marches and demonstrations were organized mostly by students who advocated against capitalism and imperialism, and for the end of the Vietnam War and generally of the U.S. involvement in other countries' politics. Also, those movements united against sexism and patriarchy, defending women's rights and generally promoting

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[7] A group of artists, led by Richard Schechner, who engaged in theatrical experimentation, using Schechner's research ideas on ritual, anthropology and theater.
[8] Edith Hall, 1.

sexual liberation and aiming to put an end to social and moral restrictions on the human body and free human expression and relationships.

That social and political revolution went hand in hand with a theoretical and artistic questioning of the old enlightenment ideas and ethics, and the modernist meta-narratives. The 1960s were a period full of experimentation in all forms of art and a radicalization of theory and criticism. Both these fields criticized and reacted against the conditions of modern living, as they were formed by late capitalism, the digitalized society, and mass media; what Guy Debord called "the society of the spectacle."[9] Other thinkers, artists, students also searched for new ways of expression, of living, creating art and politics, forming social relationships; ways that rejected the passivity associated with the spectacle and that rendered subjects the agents of their genuine and pure desires and needs. As a child of his time, Schechner was aware and must have been affected by those major figures, thinkers of his time and the critique against the spectacle which makes the spectator passive. I consider *Dionysus in 69* to be the epitome of the art of that time, an art trying to "break" the distance between the artist or the artwork and the spectator, inviting the latter to join actively in the creative process of performance. Theatrical experimentation therefore mirrored the sociopolitical shifts of the time and influenced the notions of spectatorship and performance in general:

> At the same time, experiments with different lifestyles and attitudes went hand in hand with artistic experimentation in theatre, which challenged both actors and audience in new and unsettling ways. Important precedents were set by Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theater (1947) and Joseph Chaikin's Open Theater (1963), but the greatest inspiration was provided by the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, and his so-called Poor Theater (1959). Richard Schechner contributed concepts from anthropological theory and studies of primitive ritual to develop the idea of an Environmental Theater. (Zeitlin 52)

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[9] See previous Chapter 2.2.1

Greek tragedy proved to be a fertile and creative place in which this new idea, along with the sociopolitical and cultural conflicts of the 1960s societies could be expressed and explored. According to Raymond Williams, tragedy is not but an "active and communicated process . . . one of the many powerful ideas through which opposition between humanity and actual contemporary society was expressed and dramatized" (61-62). Later on, Williams adds that "the tragic action, in its deepest sense, is not the confirmation of disorder, but its experience, its comprehension and its resolution" (108). This idea of a place where conflict and disorder can be expressed and experienced connects to Jacques Rancière's theory on spectatorship[10] and of the kind of art that works for the emancipation of the spectator through intellectual and emotional participation.

Finally, the figure and personality of Dionysus, (the last of all gods, and the most peculiar one), apart from having been associated with tragedy as a genre because of "the pattern of arrival and resistance that characterizes several myths about [him]" (Hall 23), matched the sociopolitical and artistic revolution of the 60s as both shared a fierce "disobedience" and transcendence of limits and prevailing rules and norms. Also, existing trends in "exploring other, more interactive and vital forms of indigenous theatre" (Hall 28) shed new interest in the function of the ancient tragic chorus which was used by Schechner and TPG as a vehicle through which they could present and express their ideas on the liberation of the body and spirit and the defiance of any restricting authority. Hall writes on the influence of the Greek tragic theater and chorus on Schechner:

All these trends came together in Richard Schechner's participatory 'Dionysus Group' in Dionysus in 69. Here a very particular target was conventional theatre architecture and design, to which the ritual dancing floor of the ancient Greeks provided a conceptual counterweight. Even more important to Schechner were the barriers between audience and actor, and between individual actors and the performance group. In the subversion of both these boundaries, the convention of the Greek tragic chorus proved [very] inspirational to Schechner. (30)

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[10] See previous Chapter 2.2.3

Richard Schechner was not only interested in Euripides' specific dramatic work, but also in the conditions of its original production. As Froma Zeitlin notes, Athenian tragedies were not abstract artworks but they were "related directly to the social life of Athens" and "were performed in a single circular arena the whole community came to see its reality enacted" (57). Theatrical performance in Athens had therefore a civic nature; it was part of what constituted the life in the polis, a part of the identity of the community and an event at which all the community was present. The plays performed were not concerned but about the very citizens of the polis, the community itself. They were not separated from the function and identity of the polis, as it happened later on with commercial theater, but they were always related to the historical moment and the political life of Athens. The spectators in ancient Athens were actually the citizens of the city who went to the theater not to be entertained; theater's purpose was to teach the spectators something new about their lives, their social reality. Spectators would watch the playwright's commenting on and raising questions about the governance of the polis and the political choices of the ruling party. This element of collectivity in the way the Greeks organized and enacted their political and social life was part of their culture and something that Schechner attempted to revive through his reworking of Euripides' *Bacchae,* and more specifically, of the chorus of the play.

The original chorus of *Bacchae* is constituted by the bacchants, the female worshipers of Dionysus, who were then played by male performers, as was the case with every ancient Greek theatrical performance. The bacchants' role inside Euripides' play is to showcase the atmosphere of the nature of Dionysus power, spirit and cult. When they appear in the play, they sing hymns of adoration and worship addressing their god, and so they express the "madness" and liberation of Dionysus. As far as the historical, sociopolitical context of the play is concerned, *Bacchae*'s chorus could have been a comment on the politics of Pericles and the over-secularization and rationalization of the life in the polis, where the religious, spiritual element had been abandoned and only a revolution by a power such as Dionysus' could bring life in its former glory.

Richard Schechner and The Performance Group tried to revise the chorus of Euripides' play in a way that the new piece would convey the elements of collectivity and

spirituality of the original play and production. The focus on the actor and the treatment of the human body played a constitutive role in this endeavor, as did each and every person, actor or spectator, who took part in that late 1960s collective experience called *Dionysus in 69*. My analysis of the way Schechner and TPG reworked *Bacchae*'s chorus will evolve around the four, in my opinion, main features that characterize it: nakedness, either ritualized or free movement and posture, the circulation of the actors and the personalization of the choral script.

From the very beginning of working with Euripides' text Schechner was aware of the problem with the bacchants' costume, as it should be something bizarre enough "to convey the radical strangeness of these bacchant women under the spell of Dionysus" (Zeitlin 67). After some performances, TPG finally decided to use nakedness as a "costume" and to perform actual undressing scenes during the ritual and the dancing scenes in which the spectators were also invited to participate, after having unrobed themselves as well. Froma Zeitlin recollects that "the audience could strip and join the proceedings; they could reciprocate caresses if the performers invited them to touch." The focus on the body was generally "one of the major appeals of the play for many spectators, especially the numerous repeaters" (69). The naked bodies and the rituals performed by the members of TPG were the things that were mostly remembered and discussed after the production. That was the first time that undressing was used in a rework of an ancient tragedy and, taking into consideration the sexual revolution of the 60s, it was a really radical suggestion. For Schechner "nakedness gets confused for sexuality and sexuality becomes a political matter" (Zeitlin 69), especially in a time of revolution in both these last areas.

As Schechner himself reveals nakedness was not intentionally employed or used as a tool to shock or to promote any specific political agenda, but simply came about throughout the workshops and exercises conducted during the rehearsals of TPG. For Schechner nakedness appeared as something available, a "part of the repertoire of possibilities" that happened to fit organically into the performance, matching its key ideas and themes (7). Schechner used the naked human body neither as a political protest (as The Living Group did) nor as an ideal to be celebrated, but as a simple, possible, alternative state of being, not to provoke but just to make the image of nakedness an – also – visible

and acceptable state of being. He aimed to suggest that anyway the body is, covered or not, it is nothing to be ashamed of or something to necessarily sexualize or fetishize. As he later remarks however, nakedness in Dionysus in 69 "was erotic in a larger sense . . . as life-giving, as accepting" (4-5):

> [It] was not highly erotic. It was playfully naked…it was about this joy and also this beauty . . . Visually it was extremely beautiful, ten or twelve well-shaped exercises with naked bodies. I can understand when the Greeks did the Olympics, it was just to watch those athletes perform. And at that point there was only men, but the Greeks were very un-shy with their nakedness and liked the aesthetic of it, and so do I. It's beautiful, it's never totally drained of its erotic content, but it's so much more than just that…pornography's aim is sexual excitement. Nakedness' aim . . . may include that but goes so far beyond, it's not just that, or it's not mostly that, so, it's also just delight in looking. We are to some degree a voyeuristic species. (Schechner 5)

Nakedness in Dionysus in 69 aimed at making the group members as well as the spectators comfortable with nakedness itself; the naked bacchants playing and dancing with each other and with the spectators offered a glimpse to what the human beings could be like in the absence of civilization, innocent, playful with their bodies, enjoying a kind of freedom and beauty that has been "banned" from our modern, puritan societies. Nakedness was not intended to shock but to "speak" to the most primary truth, common to all humans: all human beings are the same and equal in nature; it is society that "dresses" us with clothes. Clothes in post-classical societies have come to indicate social and financial status, thus hierarchy. With nakedness Schechner uses a different way to abolish the sociopolitical hierarchy of Thebes; Pentheus is ridiculed, stripped and no longer supported by his former indicators of political power: clothes and material possessions. He is left to defend his power only with his words and ideas and that is when and how he falls; that's when the audience realizes how empty, hollow, superficial, unsubstantial, weak his power is; and

when Dionysus' power establishes itself as the dominant one, Dionysus' power means freedom, expression, communion whereas Pentheus' power means hierarchy, exploitation, inequality, superficiality. Thus, Schechner wants to propose a new way of existing and relating to the others and to convince his audience by contrasting this new way to the current oppressing system. He also invites spectators to join in and experience themselves both the ecstatic power of Dionysus and the destructive suffering that it entails as both, power and pain are what constitute real life:

> In nakedness we get the naked truth of the power of Dionysus, which is the power of ecstasy, the power of drunkenness, the power of wine, the power of sexual release; and all these things are both good and bad. Without desire, what would life be like? But with desire, what is life like? The Buddhists would counsel us to give up all our desire... And to some degree I am sympathetic to that, have no desire, want nothing, not just sexual desire but all desire. At the same time life without desire seems like you're taking all the seasoning out of life. And you're taking the danger out of it. If you really have no desire, you are truly enlightened, you are liberated, but so what? If I'd be given the final choice of being liberated and living without any passion or suffering being fully human, I would probably choose suffering being fully human. (Schechner 4)

The posture of the actors' bodies, their different position inside the space and the way they moved were also key elements in the way the play and, especially the chorus, was revised. The actors moved freely and disorderly around all the available space, talking, moaning, singing, dancing and interacting with each other and "mingling with the spectators, as they often did, to appear here, there, and everywhere," frequently improvising (Zeitlin 55). Unlike the theatrical conventions of ancient productions and of orthodox modern theater, there was not an actual stage separating the performers and the audience or keeping the former on a higher level than the latter ones. Also, unlike the performances of ancient drama, there were not specific entrances and exits (to the city or the countryside) or a specific place for the chorus to gather and speak all together,

conducting a common, instructed choreography. The chorus members moved freely among the spectators and the protagonists while, at the same time, constituted a group of people united by something common; equally participating in and co-creating a communal experience, the joyful celebration of life and the ecstatic madness of freedom. Nakedness and disorderly movement did thus "break both commercial and psychological restraints by bonding spectator and actor and by reducing the theatrical illusion of an imagined space and time to one of immediacy and presence" (Zeitlin 53). Schechner wanted to "break down the barriers between person and performer" and "between spectators and performers" in order to "create a more dynamic, spontaneous atmosphere in which the play could function as medium for a dialogue between actors and spectators on an artistic level"(55).

Another experiment TPG initiated was the "Total Caress," which was used to replace the sensual scene among the bacchants in Euripides drama, which occurs right before the intrusion of the men of the city, as the messenger reports. The "Total Caress" actually replaced the former "ecstasy dance," a much more frenzied and risky physical encounter with the spectators based on improvisation and, undoubtedly, filled with an, inevitably, erotic atmosphere. Although the women's indulgence "in illicit sex" was exactly what Pentheus feared and wanted to stop, the bacchants meet to "worship their god and be initiated into his mysteries . . . liberated from their domestic lives at home" and finally being able to "experience freedom in the world of nature" (Zeitlin 71). As Zeitlin notes, Schechner's play "insisted that ecstasy and communion with the god must entail a liberation of those very erotic impulses that Pentheus had initially feared." For that reason, the "Total Caress" was decided to follow Pentheus' (literal) surrender to Dionysus so as to "liberate the energies Euripides describes in the play" in an "open advertisement of sexual freedom" (72):

> The frame of the original text remains: Pentheus' initial threat to lead an army against the women and bring them back is repeated again. The maenads will band together against him; the messenger speech recounting this scene is retained, although it is spoken before Pentheus is dismembered. But Pentheus' desire to see the women on the mountain, even if voiced, has transmogrified into a desire to

belong to the group, which has mocked him, mortified him, and cast him out. It is ecstasy too that he is seeking in their company. This is why Dionysus first offers him any woman in the room to be his, and when this doesn't succeed, the god insists on the homoerotic encounter as the route to that ecstasy—to 'know' Dionysus in a quite literal sense. (Zeitlin 72)

Apart from the liberating, playful movement of the performers, Schechner had also designed two striking ritual scenes performed by the chorus, The Birth ritual scene representing the birth of Dionysus in the beginning of the play and the Death ritual representing the murder of Pentheus. Schechner travelled and was inspired by many tribal communities' rituals and customs. The Birth ritual, in particular,

followed the entrance of Dionysus, when he introduced himself to the audience and announced he was about to be born. Modeled after an Asmat rite of passage in New Guinea, the ritual passed Dionysus through a 'birth canal' composed of four women in alternating formation with five men. The very same ritual, but in reverse, was matched at the end of the play as a 'death ritual' for Pentheus. (Zeitlin 59-61)

In Schechner's own words,

now, instead of facing away from Pentheus, the women faced toward him; instead of helping him through, they raised their bloody hands over their heads. Front and back were reversed in this formation in a perfect symmetrical counterpoint with its opposite, and taken together, these two rituals served as unifying elements of the entire play. (Zeitlin 60-61)

The two rituals of birth and death are excellent examples of what exactly Schechner wanted to communicate through the whole experience of reworking Euripides' *Bacchae*.

He reminds us that the human beings experience both birth and death and are capable of both creation and destruction, the two contrasting forces that exist in the play, and in real life. On a symbolic level, the Birth ritual also represented the "birth" of *Dionysus in 69* by TPG; the performance of the play on the whole – from the script to the dances and rituals – was not but the result of the collaboration and dynamics of the group.

The space in which all the above dances, rituals and improvisations were performed was used "concretely and organically," each time "designed by the event performed in it," according to Schechner's principles of the Environmental Theater (*Performance Theory* 58). According to Schechner, "our culture is almost alone in demanding uniform behavior from audiences while clearly segregating audience from performers and audience from others in the area who are neither audience nor performers" (*Performance Theory* 60). Western theater should follow the example of the tribal world in which "events make shapes" and "the principal architectural element" in a ceremony "is people – how many there are, how and where they move, what their interactions are, whether they participate or watch or do both" (59). Using the example of Grotowski, Schechner insists that new theater should allow the event to flow freely through space and to design whole spaces entirely for specific performances" while directors should indulge in "using very simple elements and combining these with meaningful deployment of the audiences and precise movement of the performers so that the spatial dynamics of the production metaphorize the drama" (59).

In this way, the performers' bodies, in *Dionysus in 69,* do not only move freely throughout the unconventional space of the Garage theater, but also shape space, or rather "spaces" or "props" themselves. In the birth ritual, the bodies of the actors form a vagina, performing the agonizing birth of Dionysus while, later, in the death scene of Pentheus, the bodies unite again, this time to visualize his dismemberment or his "deathly tomb." The powerful and shocking images formed in front of the spectators filled the performative script of the play and also invited the members of the audience to reflect on their life and reality, to question existing taboos and repressing ideas concerning the body, sexuality and social relationships, to be aware of the destructive tendencies of nature, which we, humans also possess, and finally to accept the miracle of life and nature in its entirety.

The third characteristic of Schechner's chorus, unlike the original one, was the circulation or the fluidity of the actors who constituted the chorus. As Zeitlin remarks, "the performers could change roles, in the fluidity of casting," meaning "that any identification between role and person, any influence of personality on role and role on personality, was not necessarily stable within the continuity of performances" (66). TPG wanted to blur the, otherwise, clear distinction between who the protagonists and the members of the chorus are; all played all, in turns, suggesting a different way of social organization, a circular one, thus horizontal and not hierarchical.

The circulation of the performers contributed to the personalization of the chorus and, consequently, of the new script of the play, which is, finally, the fourth way in which Schechner reworked the original tragedy. TPG maintained the plot of *Bacchae* and almost half of its text, while some lines from Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Hippolytus* were also employed:

> The rest of the text was composed by the group, some on their own at home and some in the workshops. The textual montage, arrangements and variations, as well as repetitions, particularly in the use of the chorus, were worked out during rehearsals and throughout the run. The performers wrote their own dialogue in a spirit that respected Euripides' text, even if it was altered, paraphrased, or otherwise personalized. Schechner wanted as much individual expression as possible in a play that deals so effectively with the liberation of personal energy. (Zeitlin 64)

The script, or scripts – since each actor was improvising his/her lines on the basic text and was not replicating his/her predecessor's words – of *Dionysus in 69*, was characterized by a variety and plurality, the composition of which changed in each different performance. Apart from the standard parts of the ancient texts, the rest of the script was either co-created in the group's rehearsals, or improvised each night by each particular performer who used the role to speak about his/her personal conflicts. The references to names, or other personal information of the performers and the "game playing" with the audience served for

familiarizing the spectators with both the actors and the characters and in creating a situation, a "space" where making associations, forming relationships, identifying with others and feeling at ease, part of the group or the general community the one person can identify with another, or form a kind of relationship with the other, or feeling more at ease, at home, comfortable, part of the group, of a community, were all possible so as to enable real communication and real possibility for change.

This technique of "merging identities" was expressed by the chorus members not only through "the simultaneous use of two names – one's own and that of the mythic character," but also through the fact that "the actors spoke colloquially about their own concerns, as if in a psychodrama or group therapy session, while still maintaining their identity as a chorus of worshippers" (Zeitlin 62). By doing this, Schechner attempted to make the text of Bacchae relevant to his own present and to reflect the democratic nature of TPG's composition and political ideas, while he also addressed the central question of Euripides' play, that of identity. "The injunction to 'know thyself', so prominent in Theban narratives . . . addresses a Greek preoccupation about questions of social and personal identity" (Zeitlin 64) that highly preoccupied the social movements of the cities and many of the artists and thinkers of the era.

In Dionysus in 69 TPG attempted to promote active or practical participation. Besides it was the time that asked subjects to be more present and take part in new collective social processes. By exploring the possibilities of performance and ritual and in the context of his generation's artistic and political movement against the spectacle, Schechner managed to stage a play in which he invited the spectators to participate. By employing a variety of experimental techniques, such as nakedness, ritualized movement and choreographies, circulation of the actors and a combination of depersonalization and improvisation, the members of The Performance Group managed to physically activate the audience that merged with the performers and defined the course of the action. Not all shows ended the same way, each one having been defined by improvised action by both the actors and the spectators. The ending was not always the same in every performance, as the text was open to improvisation and spectators were free to intervene and make decisions, therefore even altering the development of the plot. The idea – that actually

worked for as long as the play was on - was that the spectator will also be liberated on a more personal and social level, once she was introduced to a more collective, energetic and self-liberating situation that did not imitate life but also create new paths and choices

3.2 Mac Wellman, Antigone (2001): What chorus? The speculating spectator

In this chapter of my thesis I discuss a different – from Richard Schechner and The Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69* (1968) – way of treating and examining spectatorship by focusing on the chorus of another Athenian tragedy and its postmodern, Western rewriting: Sophocles's *Antigone* (first presented in 442 BC) and Mac Wellman's *Antigone* (2001), respectively. As I explained in the Introduction, this thesis focuses on the chorus parts of the plays it examines and on the way the ancient ones were rewritten into a postmodern context. The possibility that the role of the chorus offers - as an interlocutor asking, responding, contemplating - to examine the response of the spectator to whatever is said or done on stage is actually large. In the previous chapter, I discussed an example of a rewriting of *Bacchae*, that of *Dionysus in 69* by TPG in 1968, where I argued about how the play focused, especially in its reworking of the chorus parts, on the human body through various inclusionary techniques and the use of performance to invite the spectators to react or join physically in the theatrical, communal experience that was created. Wellman's play *Antigone,* on the other hand, focuses on another performative aspect of theater, that is, language. He does not make so much use of the performing body or space to invite the audience into the theatrical experience or the creative process. rather, his tools are his words and linguistic structures. Those tools, combined in Wellman's own special, poetic way, trigger a kind of affect, what Appler Keith calls "an affective state of intensity," that is, an expression that describes the space between reception and response, the mental space in which information is processed and meaning starts to form.

It is this space which is created by the distance between the performance and each individual spectator that Wellman's technique is based upon. It is in this space where it is actually possible for each and every spectator to achieve "intellectual emancipation," which is how Jacques Rancière coined the effect of better pedagogical, as well as theatrical and other artistic, practices.[11] This space, Rancière writes, is nothing other but the "reasoning distance" (4) created between the position of the artist and the position of the spectator or, according to another frequently used distinction, between the active performer on stage and the "passive" viewer in the auditorium. Such a perception on the passivity of the spectator has dominated theatrical practice and generally ideas on theater, from Plato's critique of the image and theater (mimesis) to Guy Debord's critique of the spectacle in 1967 and onwards. Especially after Debord's analysis of how the spectacle as a social relation, based on the constant reproduction of images, has dominated lived experience, rendering the modern subject almost exclusively a passive viewer who spends her time watching numerous reproduced images rather than being an active agent in her personal and social life, many theater practitioners started searching for the best way to activate the spectator towards the opposite direction. Some of these efforts included reversing the spectator's position with the actor's, including her in the action, transferring the performance to another place,[12] most of which Artaud in his theater of cruelty and other revolutionary theatrical groups - like The Living Theater and The Performance Group - employed in their practical experiments. *Dionysus in 69*, as I argued in the previous chapter, was an experiment which ventured exactly that: to abolish the distance between actors and spectators by including the latter in the theatrical happening and expecting the spectators to change and become more active in their everyday lives as well, once they left the theatrical venue.

Rancière, however, is critical towards this kind of expectation and practice as he argues that it is based, first of all, on a false, cause-and-effect logic of inequality, that is, on a presupposition that the performer, or writer, or director holds a higher, more knowledgeable position on what the spectator *should* do and learn; whereas, the spectator

[11] Rancière develops his ideas, descriptions and proposals of intellectual emancipation through the example of Joseph Jacotot, in his 1991 book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* and further in his 2008 book *The Emancipated Spectator*, both discussed in the first part of this thesis.
[12] The Emancipated Spectator, p. 15

herself, such a logic implies, is, apart from passive, also ignorant of what is being done and what should be experienced or learnt. Rancière explains that, as happens in such educational/artistic models, this attitude results in the stultification of the spectator, as, through this practice, what is first and foremost affirmed to her is her inferior, ignorant position, in relation to the artist who *must* know better than her. Such an attitude only works for the sustenance of the system of exploitation and injustice we live in and we want to change; the sustenance of hierarchical relations in art, as well as in education, can only keep reproducing the hierarchical relations of society in general as well, instead of overthrowing them and making the spectator an active agent of her life, as the very art which works for social change and freedom through the individual's activation supposedly wants. For Rancière thus a different approach in the way the artist builds the relationship with the spectator from the beginning is needed, an approach that does not reproduce this hierarchy but works not only in a participatory but also an emancipatory way for the spectator, a way that verifies for the latter that her intelligence is equal to the artist's or the performer's one (10).

Second, for the same purpose, Rancière argues that the understanding of what spectatorship actually is should change as well. For him, spectatorship is not "a passive condition" that has to be turned into activity, "it is our normal situation" (17). In every situation of our everyday lives "we learn and teach, we act and know, as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt." Therefore, "we have to recognize the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity peculiar to the spectator. Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action is the spectator of the same story" (17). Wellman himself defends the position of passivity when he argues that "doing nothing is also…a kind of theater in the sense that when you are doing nothing you are still doing something" (*Speculations* 41).

The activity in which the spectator engages when she watches a performance is what Rancière calls the "poetic labour of translation" which is "at the heart of all learning" and "of the emancipatory practice" (10). The process of translation involves "observing and comparing one thing with another, a sign with a fact, a sign with another sign." The spectator "can learn, one sign after the other, the relationship between what she does not

know and what she does know. She can do this if, at each step, she observes what is before her, says what she has seen, and verifies what she has said" (Rancière 10). This is the way learning, but also creating works in all cases. In order for the artist to facilitate this process for the spectator to engage in, one should not only not try to abolish the distance between the subject and what she watches, as if distance is not "the normal condition of any communication"; rather, one should take advantage of this 'distance', of this space that is unavoidably created, and carefully choose the signs, the words or features, with which the spectator will be able to "practice the art of translating, of putting her experience into words and [later] her words to the test; of translating her intellectual adventures for others and counter-translating the translations of their own adventures which they present to her" (Rancière 11). An art of this kind, according to Rancière, is an art in which different "regimes of expression intersect, creating unique combinations of exchange, fusion and distance" (125). He characterizes this distance "a zone of indeterminacy" (107) and a form of "pensiveness" which "resists thought" – the thought of the person who has produced the artistic form and of the person who seeks to understand it, one "in which art escapes itself" (131).

This distance and the "pensiveness" that it creates are not controlled by either the artist/performer or the receiver/spectator/viewer and can be, I argue, identified with what Keith Appler describes as the effect of the work of Language writers. As such, Wellman uses language in a playful way in order to create this "pensive" experience for the spectator; more specifically, his technique includes keeping the spectator, for as long a period of time as possible, into an intense, affective state, by keeping the meaning of his words far from being understood, that is by dissociating form from content, words from their usual meaning. This state of "confusion" which Appler coins "affective state of intensity" and in which the spectator struggles to construct meaning out of the peculiar language of the play and the also peculiar images it creates is the very moment when the actual emancipatory, liberating process for both the spectator and the meaning of the artwork can take place; the spectator is free to make meaning herself and meaning is free and open to infinite possibilities as words have, by the playwright, already been set free from fixed, pre-existing, dominant meanings, for the sake of new meanings and ideas to be created. As Appler describes it:

Affect is an unformed feeling that lasts for half a second: it takes a half second for a stimulus response to form affect into an emotion and a direction within the frames of perception and meaning. One effect of Language writing is to extend that half second for the duration of the performance. The Language writer achieves this when his or her forms of expression keep the spectator at the border between meaning and nonsense. (71)

Wellman's forms of expression in *Antigone* incorporate postmodern aesthetics so as to keep us at this border where meaning remains elusive through a variety of techniques inspired by his influence by chaos theory and deconstruction theory.[13] His poetic style as a Language poet has eschewed binary and linear thinking and absorbed deconstruction (Appler 70), thus adopting techniques such as ellipsis, fragmentation and repetition and treating his words in a very peculiar yet careful, unordinary way. The chorus parts of the play, in particular, are characterized by consecutive repetition of small words: "straw, straw, straw" and "snip, snip, snip" (3), the creation of new, uncanny, strange words: "upness," "stuckitude" (3), elliptical sentences: "on that slippery slope/ of the terrible unbidden, oh/ that I had in the wilderness of logic/ a place for wayfaringmen/ Those// Who mind the difference between/ things that are, and things that are not/ things that are, and

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[13] Appler explains the association of Wellman's language writing and the theories of deconstruction and chaos. He writes: "Wellman's strong affinity with Language poetry, which emerges most clearly in them just as deconstruction and chaos theory are becoming conversant with one another. While the Language poets, who emerged in the late 1970s, are a heterogeneous group, they have tended to be politically progressive, theory-driven, and modernist in their self-definition" (70). "Wellman's embrace, in the early 1990s, of chaos theory is compatible with the deconstructive language practices so far described, if we are to understand the singular enunciation as a convergence of different systems (forms of expression, contents of expression, and forms of content) in relations of nonrelation" (71). Concerning the cultural significance of chaos influence, Appler refers to N. Katherine Hayles who wrote that "deconstruction and chaos theory, deriving as they do from the same episteme, had come, by the early 1990s, into productive conversation with one another." Her "point about the cultural importance of chaos at the time had to do with its appropriation, by cultural critics and artists, as a new way of conceiving and deconstructing the edifices of power. For artists and critics (if not for scientists), the ideas associated with chaos theory gave new credibility to nonrational and nonlinear ways of conceiving the world." Appler further demonstrates William W. Demastes's argument about the influence of chaos theory on theater. Talking of the "theater of chaos," Demastes notes that "chaos as a paradigm is revolutionary because it asks us to see the world from a different metaphorical stance. It is the metaphor that hits the mark in ways others to varying degrees have not. In fact, often chaos is quite literal and not metaphorical at all" (72).

things that are not/ things that are, and things that are not" (5), and fragmented speech which he further highlights morphologically, by adding, as the previous quote demonstrates, either single (/) or double (//) slashes in-between phrases and sentences, making the choral parts look like citations of poetry. Apart from resembling the citation of actual poetic lines the slashes suggest - for the performance of these lines - a kind of fragmented speech with breaks and pauses in unpredictable and unexpected points that further confuse and impede meaning. His words are simple yet create complexity and stimulate curiosity making the spectator wonder what he can possibly mean and begin making her own attempts of translation.

Wellman himself supports a theater that is against fixed, easy-to-swallow meanings and characters. He criticizes American mainstream theater for the unrealistic, "spherical" and not "fragmentary" characters it produces (*Speculations* 58) and for its "impoverished dramatic vocabulary" (*The Theater of Good Intentions* 61) and compares its moral world to "children's literature," focusing on provoking solely feelings and not thoughts (69). Such a theater maintains "the tyrannical domination of meanings so fixed, so absolute, as to render the means of meaning, which is to say the heart and soul of meaning, a mere phantom" (59), therefore stultifies – in Rancière's terms - the American spectator. Against this kind of theater and its effect and by means of his postmodern aesthetics Wellman tries to create 'pensive' images and moments by playing with language forms, so as to eliminate fixity of meaning and the association between the sign/word/phrase with the dominant meaning it has acquired. He is attentive not to what language *says* but what it *does*[14] (*Speculations* 37). He ventures to free form from content, offering a possibility for the spectators to ascribe new meaning to given forms. Hence "his dramatic works, always off-beat, suggest his "poetical" preoccupation with producing unconventional and emphatically non-didactic effects through linguistic and theatrical means" (Appler 69). And that is what makes his theater truly emancipatory.

Besides, his choice to rewrite Sophocles's *Antigone* in particular is not random. *Antigone* carries the "stamp" of a "classical text". In the case of a classical text "the relationship between narration and expression" is interrupted as pensiveness comes to

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[14] Emphasis in the original.

doubt the end of the narration and suspend any conclusion that has already been drawn (Rancière 122-123). That is what renders Sophocles's *Antigone* maybe the most open-to-interpretation Athenian tragedy, one whose meaning is always "in reserve" for every new spectator or reader to expand or create anew. The function of the chorus in Sophocles's text contributes to the creation of this result to a great extent; the chorus of *Antigone*, "in creating another world on stage by its unique language and movement, gave the audience a different perspective from which to view the play's action."[15] The tragedian, by first making use of an – also – poetic language in the chorus parts and, second, by involving the chorus in the episodes and dialogic parts apart from the lyric ones, adds a sense of plurality and diversity in his play. The chorus functions as an additional character of a different quality and expression and "the difference in attitude and mode of communication between actors and chorus allows [Sophocles] to explore the action of the play from two radically different points of view" (Kitzinger 1). Specifically, the chorus's "mode of expression entails another way of thinking about the action of the play, one circumscribed and defined by what can be said and thought in the medium of song and dance, as opposed to speech and action" (1). Kitzinger claims that the language of the chorus in Sophocles attributes to it its own particular identity and dramatic "character" – "a character very different from the actor's and formed in part by the nature of its performance" (2), one which determines "how its performance is received by the audience" (4).

Wellman extends the function of the plurality of voices of the Sophoclean chorus in the way he rewrites it in his own postmodern historical context. The character of the chorus in 21st century Antigone cannot be the same as in ancient Athens. In our contemporary world of globalized capitalism, of an extensive exercise of biopolitics and recurrent states of exception, identities have been destabilized and blurred rendering the solidity and fixity of character something impossible. Wellman depicts both the plurality of identities in the modern world and the blurring of the identities of whole communities in the globalized society, by implying the presence of more than one choruses - thus perspectives - in his play, as denotes the addition of the indefinite article "a" or the determiner "another" before "chorus" (Antigone 3) as well as the specification of "a

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[15] Kitzinger, Preface.

chorus of citizens" later on (6), and, respectively, by "depersonalizing" the chorus as the indefinite "a" in every announcing of the chorus suggests and as no further information about the identity of the last "chorus of citizens" is mentioned – as opposed to Sophocles's chorus that is clearly referred to as being a chorus of Theban male citizens. In Sophocles's tragedy, content and form are "married"; thereby, if in Sophocles the chorus represented the point of view of the citizens of the polis, then in Wellman the depersonalized and abstract chorus/-es can be viewed as showcasing the "other" of our postmodern Western societies: the undocumented, deprived of her political or even human rights, subject, the contemporary "apolis" who has been rendered merely a case of "bare life" for the globalized state of exception, on whom the latter exercises its biopolitical power.[16]

Instead of naming it "the chorus" or "chorus" Wellman chooses to leave the information of the identity of the chorus of his play open for the spectator to speculate about, thus activate her thought as well as the "pensive" mode of his text. The audience is left wondering whether there is one chorus or more, what its or their meaning is in Wellman's rework of the ancient tragedy, and whether it is a character in the play in the same way the characters of Antigone, Creon, Haemon etc. are presented. As the narrator states in the beginning, "all parts are played by the THREE FATES, also THREE FACTS, on their way to becoming the THREE GRACES" (1), suggesting that all the characters the chorus included, with the exception of the one who plays "! . The Shriek Operator," are played by three performers who take their turn to speak every time they exchange hats. Moreover, it is unclear if the chorus parts are performed each time and in their entirety by the same person or if performers speak all together or uttering random phrases of the fragmented, separated with slashes, text. Wellman leaves the rest of the creative process to be conducted by the directors, performers, or spectators, and all of them together. At the end of the play he orders for the performance to be repeated so that each performer will have played all the characters of, including the chorus:

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[16] Michel Foucault in *Society Must Be Defended* refers to biopolitics as "a new technology of power" that deals with the "man-as-species", in other words not with the individual body but with the population as a whole as both a scientific and political problem. That is the exercise of a biopower, a sovereign power that controls the "bios", the naked life of a population, so as to succeed a "homeostasis" that secures and protects itself from "internal dangers" (249). The extermination camp of the Nazi state of exception and, as analyzed by Giorgio Agamben in *State of Exception*, has been the epitome of biopolitical power in recent history.

> Repeat the whole X 3 so that each may play
> ANTIGONE, each CREON. So that each may
> be a whirlwind. Repeat X 3 exactly the same
> (only different). The first repetition,
> being partially erased, is seven minutes
> long; the second, only three. Silence.
> Pause. Silence. The third repetition takes
> no time at all. Now the play is truly
> finished (some may not think so). (14-15)

Such fluidity, in which every person becomes and speaks from the position of both Antigone and Creon, of both the chorus and a named character, of both a citizen with an identity and an "unknown," an "apolis," suggests the absence of a stable, fixed characterization and weakens the identities and personalities of the major figures of the story, weakening therefore the hierarchy or superiority of some characters over others, of the protagonists over the chorus. Wellman changes the dynamics of the distribution of parts, reduces the protagonists' dramatic presence and speech and gives prominence to the choral element, upgrading its function and, in a way, materializing the concepts of anti-hierarchy and equality his play inspires.

Dramatic action is nearly absent in Wellman's *Antigone* and its place is taken by the performance of story-telling. Action, that is, is narrated rather than conducted. As opposed to Sophocles's, Wellman's play is not one of acts but one *telling* the story of Antigone, so the story-telling itself becomes the play's action, "το δρώμενο." It is actually, as the playwright informs us, the first narration of Antigone's story, as the play brings us in the beginning of time when the story is first weaved by the three Fates. By focusing on the act of story-telling rather than of the acts themselves and the consequences and feelings they would entail, Wellman almost eliminates the dramatic tension, abandons the plot and draws the spectator's attention to the way and the fact that the story is told, and not on the content of the story, which is, more or less, already known. In his *Speculations*, he

advocates that language in theater "is deeply theatrical" and that "storytelling is at its best a wayward and beanstalking art" that "knows that resistance to plot is as much a part of telling a story as plot" (87). In *Antigone*, the playwright supports the significance of stories and their re-telling, providing the example of the Fates who "enacted the story that was to become that of Antigone" and "in this way they learned their nature and their nature of things and became the three Graces" (13). We learn and we grow through the narration and enactment of stories, and their association and comparison with other stories and our personal stories, as Wellman and Rancière would agree. The materiality of Wellman's play, that is his poetic language, the fragmentary and chaotic presentation of the scenes and the vague and disordered plot, depicts the openness to dispute and speculation of the end of Sophocles's tragedy, as it is re-contextualized in our historical moment.

In his rewriting Wellman finds the opportunity to depict "a broken world," his metaphorical demonstration of contemporary societies in the light of the 21st century:

> The way I thought of Antigone was a play of a broken world, and we Americans, of course, try not to think like that. We'd like to think that we live in a fixed world, a world that's ultimately repairable and that all difficulties are problems–and by a problem I mean something that has a solution. I was trying to write a play that challenged the way of looking at things. (Hughes 60)

His language in the play's choral parts creates images of destruction, death and chaos in a world where both individual and collective action and life has been conquered by the systems of political and economic power by means of technology and the global media. Represented in the play by the voice of the "! . Shriek Operator," this "uncanny" power described as "unknown god" and "bodiless shadow," which is controlled by the media and digitalized means, and watches everyone, sarcastically expresses not only its complete idleness and indifference to the suffering of humanity but, also, its pleasure watching "all this slaughter, this horror, this misfortune. Misfortune out of contrast, sprung hinges, what creaks, what is fundamentally broken" (2-3). Wellman depicts the roughness and the

"bestial" character of this all-controlling power in a recurrent animal imagery that occupies the whole play; from "dog and cat facts," "wheelbarrows" and "insects" to "spiders" that "howl" and "creep" (5). Moreover, he emphasizes the elusiveness of this global power that renders it unbeatable. By insisting on the repetition of the image of the spider creeping and crawling and by comparing it to "the King of Spiders" (3), Wellman reveals this terrifying authority's deviousness and power to hide and mistreat the facts and reign over the confusion of the masses:

> once you allow the Facts to slide// (Slide, slide, slide.)// All down the slope to chaos will glide/ and what is not yet hidden/ will learn to hide, hide, hide/ and to abide// (Hide, hide, hide)// There on that slippery slope/ of the terrible unbidden, oh/ that I had in the wilderness of logic/ a place for wayfaringmen/ Those// Who mind the difference between/ things that are, and things that are not/ things that are, and things that are not/ things that are, and things that are not. (5)

Wellman depicts the confusion caused by the misinformation and fake news spread by contemporary media, rendering communication impossible. The chorus portrays a world filled with holes: "The hole and the patch should/ be commensurate, as the/ dog to his man should/ be obedient" (8), hollows: "Let us invoke/ the rupture of silence in the hollow of uncanniness.// (…) Let us invoke the pause before the silence before all of this;/ for earth, hollow earth,// (hollow, hollow, hollow)// is the house of the dead, and the place/ of engendering. The branching of facts, / facts which are opposed, contradictory" (4), symbolizing and associating them with the chaos and confusion that dominate our societies:

> …or the / / fallacy of too many questions, the / / fallacy of affirming the consequent, or the/ fallacy of denying the antecedent, or the/ fallacy of hasty generalization, or the/ fallacy of irrelevant conclusion, or the/ fallacy of misplaced concreteness, or the/ fallacy of many questions, or the/ fallacy of accident; or the fallacy of bad faith. (8)

The three Fates enact the story of Antigone in a scenery that resembles "a battle field" with "heaps of dead clothing," corpses "and the stench of death" scattered all around the place. A place of despair where all hope seems to have been lost. The chorus parts, representing a more distant and universal perspective in the play, speak of the absurdity and ambiguity of human action and the "limitations of human agency," which is a central idea in Sophocles and a recurrent subject in all the stasima of the tragedy,[17] and which is explicitly stated by the original chorus in the beginning of the second stasimon: «Πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει» (lines 332-333).[18] This phrase is repeatedly paraphrased in various ways by Wellman's chorus as well: "A Chorus. Humankind is the most terrible, / the most terrible of all things" (5) or "Another chorus: What is more weird than man?/ What is more weird than man/ and woman?" (8). At the end of the play the phrase is repeated for the last time, this time through the puppet-Sophocles: "There is much that is strange, but nothing that surpasses man in strangeness…" (14). The word "δεινό" in Greek can refer to both a wonder, an incredible thing, something that cannot be explained or conceived by human reason, and something terrifying, terrible to experience. Wellman conveys both these connotations by means not only of his translation but also of the form of his text and the confusion and strangeness that, as I argued before, it reflects. The concept of strangeness as both form and meaning, a real condition of our life, is something he also discusses in his *Speculations* where he writes that "the strange is the new dimension that is formed. We are all aware of the strange, but there is no easy way to talk about this in terms of appearance" (69).

Wellman refers to Sophocles's Antigone as "an example of the Impossible play . . . impossible because the play consists entirely of contradictions: Between age and youth; state and individual; gods and humankind; man and woman; duty to principle and duty to loved ones. Hopeless and thoroughly impossible" (*Speculations* 58). Central in his play and emphasized in his chorus's discourse is the idea that there are repeatable patterns in the world and in human history that are beyond human power and which human action cannot control or change. Antigone and Creon may strive for the opposite, by making decisions contrary to the "law" of fate and by trying to achieve singularity and identity in

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[17] Kitzinger, 21.
[18] Citation of Stampoulou's commentary on the original text.

a world where the same stories are repeated and human condition remains ambiguous. The spectators are invited to reflect on whether they can change the course of history that tends to be repeated with singular, unexpected, contradictory to the universal pattern, actions and events. Dissident and unpredictable figures like Antigone have existed from the beginning of time, as the time of the play suggests.

As opposed to Schechner's rewriting of *Bacchae*, Wellman does not desire the participation of the spectator in his play, but her making use of its "pensiveness" and of the "affective state" he, as a playwright and, most and foremost, as a Language writer, tries to extend and intensify in order for her intellect to co-create with him, or independently, the "poem" of the play. I have intended to show how the treatment of the chorus by Wellman contributes to the further intensification of this effect by means of a variety of postmodern aesthetics. Like in Sophocles, the chorus parts in Wellman's *Antigone* offer additional perspectives and also demonstrate the confusion of arguments and ideas in our societies where the waging of war and the exercise of political power have become even more absolute and threatening, inviting the spectators to consider their real life and future as well.

Wellman's depersonalized, ambiguous chorus generalizes and universalizes human experience to show, through a form of repetition, that the story of Antigone is above its personae. It is the story of humanity, a story of suffering and death, of futility and absurdity. The playwright presents his audience with the condition of human experience that suggests a terrible realization; that the human being is trapped in a condition of constant defeat by the primordial patterns of existence that dominate her. But Wellman is not necessarily a pessimist; the atmosphere of discomfort and entrapment he creates can be perceived as an alarm while, in its frustration, the realization his play offers can put things into a new perspective from which the human being could start to construct life meaning from the beginning

4.   CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the effect of the chorus - as a dramatic and theatrical element - on the spectator of the performance of a play. Through the examination of different postmodern plays, I discussed different kinds of reception in adaptations of Euripides's *Bacchae* and Sophocles's *Antigone*. My research focused on the distinct ways each modern playwright/director studied the nature of the chorus of the original tragedy and employed the dramatic and theatrical possibilities that it offers.

By exploring the possibilities of performance and ritual and in the context of his generation's artistic and political movement against the spectacle, Schechner managed to stage a play that invited the spectators to participate in the action of the play. Using a range of experimental techniques, such as nakedness, ritualized movement and choreographies, circulation of the actors and a combination of depersonalization and improvisation, the members of The Performance Group managed to physically activate the audience that merged with the performers and defined the course of the action. Not all shows ended the same way, each one having been defined by improvised action by both the actors and the spectators. The ending was not always the same in every performance, as the text was open to improvisation and spectators were free to intervene and make decisions, therefore even altering the development of the plot. Wellman, as a language poet on the other hand, by almost abandoning the bodily, physical aspect of the performance, focused on the rewriting of a totally new play whose poetic, peculiar language makes it inevitable for the spectator to make meaning should she not speculate and mentally strive to form an understanding. In this respect, my analysis led to the following conclusions; Schechner's play may have managed to respond to the cultural and political demand of its time that art 'activate' the modern subject by getting her involved in participatory processes. However, according to Rancière's theory, such an event does not guarantee the actual emancipation of the spectator in social and political terms, as the change of mentality and way of thinking requires much more time and practice, and habitual relationships to be established, something that is clearly much less effective in the case of entering or

viewing a play. Because for Rancière the very reasons for and the ways the processes of constructing meaning in art, as well as in education, should be shared with the spectators, or students, and not be regarded as a privilege of the artist, or teacher. Wellman, on the other hand, with his special treatise of language and postmodern aesthetics, manages to take advantage of the little 'space' that forms between performance and response, and, in this way, to offer the spectator the freedom and possibility to intellectually choose herself how and what to make of what she witnesses. In this respect, I argue, Wellman's rewriting can be more easily characterized as emancipatory art, in comparison with Schechner's one which, although a unique and revolutionary event in its historicity, it does not manage to refrain from reproducing the hierarchy between artist(s), professional performers and spectators, in the sense that, unlike in Wellman's *Antigone*, the spectators in *Dionysus in 69* were given a specific and controlled context in which they could physically participate, being invited to do so by the performers and not whenever they wanted.

Nevertheless, the question concerning which kind of theater, or art truly works for the emancipation of the spectator and the society she lives and acts in, cannot easily be answered. Surely one which manages to get the spectator involved - in either a physical or an intellectual process. An art that is created and presented in a way that facilitates any kind of engagement in it, be it physically, emotionally or intellectually. In any case, the characteristics of an art whose purpose is social change and liberation are yet to be further explored.

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα θέση θα συζητήσει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο σύγχρονες μετεγγραφές των χορών των Βακχών του Ευριπίδη και της Αντιγόνης του Σοφοκλή, όπως στις περιπτώσεις του *Dionysus in 69* (1968) του Richard Schechner και του Performance Group και του *Antigone* (2001) του Mac Wellman, μπορούν να εξεταστούν σχετικά με τους διαφορετικούς τρόπους με τους οποίους ενεργοποιούν τους σύγχρονους θεατές και τους καθιστούν ικανούς να αναπτύξουν τη δική τους κοινωνικοπολιτική και οντολογική συνείδηση. Μέσω της χρησιμοποίησης του κρίσιμης σημασίας δραματικού και θεατρικού ρόλου του χορού, θα βασιστώ πάνω στις έννοιες του Jacques Rancière περί διανοητικής ισότητας και διανοητικής χειραφέτησης στην τέχνη και την εκπαίδευση, έτσι ώστε να εξετάσω τη σχέση μεταξύ της δημιουργικής διαδικασίας της συγγραφής και της παρουσίασης ενός έργου και της ανταπόκρισης του κοινού.

Το θεωρητικό έργο πάνω στην «κοινωνία του θεάματος» του Guy Debord (1967) έχει ορίσει τη σύγχρονη ανθρώπινη συνθήκη ως μια συνθήκη η οποία έχει χάσει την προηγούμενή ενότητά της ως ζωή, στην οποία τα άτομα έχουν γίνει παθητικά και ανίκανα να σκεφτούν εξαιτίας της αλλοτρίωσης την οποία προκαλεί το θέαμα στη βιωμένη εμπειρία. Επιπλέον, στην εποχή μας στην οποία η τεχνολογία έχει εισβάλλει σχεδόν σε όλες τις περιοχές των ανθρώπινων ζωών, η πραγματική και ουσιαστική επαφή με την τέχνη όπως και με τις κοινωνικές σχέσεις γενικά φαίνεται να έχει χαθεί. Ωστόσο, σύμφωνα με τον Rancière, δε θα έπρεπε κανείς να υποτιμά την ικανότητα και τη δύναμη του ανθρώπινου όντος να προσλαμβάνει και να επεξεργάζεται κριτικά οποιαδήποτε καλλιτεχνική ή άλλου είδους εμπειρία. Μια τέτοια υποτιμητική θεώρηση του υποκειμένου αυτόματα τοποθετεί τον καλλιτέχνη και το έργο τέχνης σε ένα υψηλότερο, άνισο επίπεδο σε σχέση με τον θεατή, μαθητή, αποδέκτη, και η ιεραρχία αυτή επιδρά αρνητικά στη δυνατότητα του θεατή να αναπτύξει τις απόψεις του και να χειραφετήσει τον εαυτό του. Επομένως, η δημιουργία τέχνης η οποία θέτει προκλήσεις σε καθιερωμένες προσλήψεις της θέασης έχει κρίσιμη σημασία για το στόχο της παραγωγής τέχνης η οποία επικοινωνεί ελεύθερα ανησυχίες και ιδέες σχετικά με την ανθρώπινη εμπειρία και διευκολύνει την κοινωνική και πολιτική αλλαγή προς ένα καλύτερο μέλλον.

Επιδιώκοντας μια συγκριτική ανάλυση τόσο των αρχαίων κειμένων όσο και των μεταμοντέρνων μετεγγραφών τους, ή διασκευών τους, έχω σκοπό να εξετάσω τις ιστορικές και πολιτισμικές συνθήκες στις οποίες τόσο τα αρχαία όσο και τα σύγχρονα θεατρικά έργα παράχθηκαν, προκειμένου να εξάγω κάποια συμπεράσματα σχετικά με το ζήτημα της θέασης στην τέχνη αλλά και τι χρειάζεται μια τέχνη που να οδηγεί με τον καλύτερο τρόπο προς τη χειραφέτησή της και του ανθρώπου. Ερευνώ το ρόλο και τη λειτουργία των χορών τόσο των αρχαίων όσο και των σύγχρονων θεατρικών έργων και της διαφορετικής συμμετοχής του θεατή την οποία προκαλούν. Μέσα από την έρευνά μου, σκοπεύω να ανακαλύψω τα χαρακτηριστικά του σύγχρονου θεατρικού έργου το οποίο είναι ικανό να χειραφετήσει πνευματικά αλλά και πρακτικά το θεατή του 21^{ου} αιώνα.

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