

OPSIS: The Visuality of Greek Drama

Peter William Meineck

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Abstract

How were Greek plays *viewed* in the fifth century BCE and by deepening our understanding of their visual dimension might we increase our knowledge of the plays themselves? The aim of this study is to set out the importance of the visual (*opsis*) when considering ancient Greek drama and provide a basis for constructing a form of “visual dramaturgy” that can be effectively applied to the texts. To that end, this work is divided into five sections, which follow a “top-down” analysis of ancient dramatic visuality. The analysis begins with a survey of the prevailing visual culture and Greek attitudes about sight and the eye. Following this is an examination of the roots of drama in the performance of public collective movement forms (what I have called “symporeia”) and their relationships to the environments they moved through, including the development of the fifth century theatre at the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus in Athens. The focus then falls on the dramatic mask and it is proposed here that operating in this environment it was the visual focus of Greek drama and the primary conveyer of the emotional content of the plays. Drawing on new research from the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience relating to facial processing and recognition, gaze direction, foveal and peripheral vision and neural responses to masks, movement and performance, it is explained how the fixed dramatic mask was an incredibly effective communicator of dramatic emotion capable of eliciting intensely individual responses from its spectators. This study concludes with a case study based on Aeschylus *Oresteia* and the raising of Phidias’ colossal bronze statue of Athena on the Acropolis and the impact that this may have had on the original reception of the trilogy.

List of Published Works

Books

- The Electra Plays*, with Cecilia Eaton, Justina Gregory and Paul Woodruff, Cambridge: Indianapolis, 2009.
- Sophocles Four Plays, Ajax, Electra, Trachiniae, Philoctetes*, with Paul Woodruff, Cambridge: Indianapolis, 2007.
- Sophocles Theban Plays*, with P. Woodruff, Cambridge: Indianapolis, 2003.
- “Aristophanes’ *Clouds*” in *The Trials of Socrates*, E. D. Reece (ed.), Cambridge: Indianapolis, 2001.
- “Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*” and “Aristophanes’ *Clouds*” in *Readings in Classical Political Thought*, P. T. Steinberger (ed.), Cambridge: Indianapolis, 2000
- Aristophanes’ Clouds* with intro. by Ian C. Storey, Cambridge: Indianapolis, 2000.
- Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus*, with P. Woodruff, Cambridge: Indianapolis, 2000.
- Aeschylus: Oresteia* with intro. by Helene Foley, Cambridge: Indianapolis, 1998.
- Aristophanes Volume 1. Wasps, Birds and Clouds* with intro. by Ian C. Storey, Cambridge: Indianapolis, 1998.

Articles

- “Page and Stage: Theater, Tradition and Culture in America”, *Classical World*, vol. 103, no. 2, 2010, pp. 221-226.
- “The Tyranny of The Text”, *Arion*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2009, pp. 81-98.
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“Aristophanes’ Lysistrata”, *The Classical Outlook*, vol. 74, no. 3, 1997.

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I have been thinking about the subject of visuality in ancient drama ever since I first became involved in staging these works as an undergraduate at University College London in the late 1980's. There, it was Pat Easterling who nurtured my fascination with this subject and though I initially went off to work in the professional theatre, I kept coming back to the works I had first explored as her student in London. Along the way a great many people have helped me explore this subject as a director, translator, scholar and teacher. I particular wish to thank, Brian Rak, my editor at Hackett Publishing who helped guide my translations of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Aristophanes. My sometimes co-translator, Paul Woodruff at the University of Texas at Austin has also been influential and this present study was inspired after reading the manuscript for his brilliant book, *The Necessity of Theater*. My colleagues in the Classics Department at New York University where I teach have been very patient in listening to and encouraging my ideas. The faculty in Classics at Nottingham showed me incredible hospitality and warmth and it has been an absolute privilege to be guided by Alan Sommerstein who was incredibly generous, supportive and inspiring.

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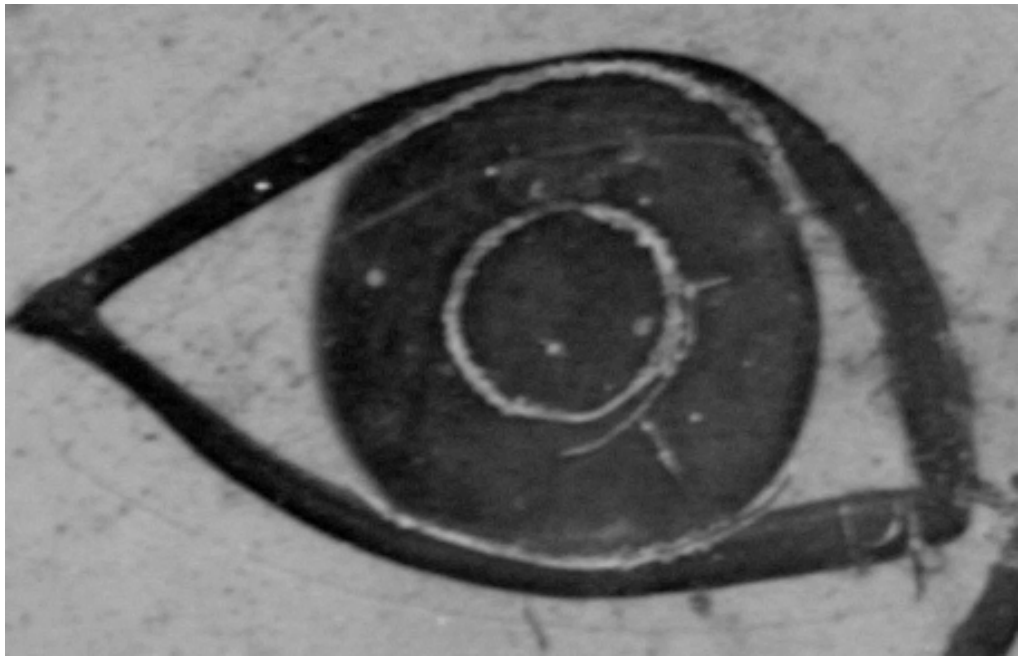
Peter Meineck

Katonah, NY

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Introduction

The focus of this study is to view fifth century Athenian drama from the perspective of the spectator who came to the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus on the southeast slope of the Acropolis to watch these plays. My primary interest is in the “scopic regime” within which these plays operated and how a study of the visual culture of the Greeks might add to our knowledge of ancient plays by providing a kind of “visual dramaturgy” that enhances our relationship to the text.¹ The Greeks called their dramatic playing spaces *theatra*—“seeing places”—and they attended these performances as *theatai*—“spectators.” As Paul Woodruff has written, “for an audience, the art of theater is the art of finding human action worth watching for a measured time in a measured space.”² Woodruff calls theatre the art of watching and being watched and we could apply this to many facets of Athenian society where the idea of being *visible* was central to the citizen’s dual role as member of a polis and a worshipper of the gods. Greek drama shares a good deal of the same performative aspects as the *theoria* (“spectacle festival”) that provided the form for so many rituals, religious and competitive events in the Greek world. It is clear that visuality was of paramount importance to the Greeks, but how did this impact upon the development of theatre and what can we know of the “scopic regimes” that drama operated in?

Charles Segal described the Greeks as “a race of spectators,”³ and in their introduction to the collection of essays entitled, *Visualizing the Tragic*, the editors Chris Kraus, Simon Goldhill, Helene Foley and Jas’ Elsner rightly claim that theatre has a “commitment to embodied enactment before spectators,” adding, “the modality of the visual is an ineluctable constituent.”⁴ Most prior studies of visuality in the ancient theatre have taken on one of two broad paths of inquiry, either seeking to find a confluence between the texts of the plays and

¹ The film theorist Christian Metz (1982), 61, first coined the term “scopic regime” to create a distinction between the theatre and the cinema. Since then the phrase has come to be broadly applied to cultural specific genres of visual culture such as scopic regimes of gender, class, photography and documentary film to examine the cultural underpinnings that operate in the presentation of and comprehension of images.

² Woodruff (2008), 19.

³ Segal (1995), 184.

⁴ Kraus, Goldhill, Foley & Elsner (2007), 6.

the iconography of the period,⁵ or mining the texts themselves for evidence of visual references.⁶ The most notable proponent of the latter approach was Oliver Taplin, who, in 1977, published *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, a highly influential work that claimed all significant action presented on stage was inherent within the text. This view was strongly contested by David Wiles, who proposed that dramatic actions are *most* significant when they are not indicated by words and by Simon Goldhill, who posited that theatrical performances can only be understood if placed within their own cultural contexts.⁷ However, Rush Rehm has eloquently pointed out that all of these approaches are based upon the preeminence of the text and the act of reading stating that “‘tragedy as read’ or ‘society as text’ would have made little sense to the population that attended dramatic performances in fifth century Athens.”⁸ Rehm extensively explores the spatial dynamics of the Greek theatre and is surely right in stating, “[M]issing from the text driven approach is the simple fact that theatrical space demands *presence*—the simultaneous presence of performers and audience.”⁹ Yet, one criticism of Rehm’s work is that it could be said to be equally singular in its approach in favoring space over words and visuality over narrative.

These positions are not mutually exclusive and in this study I take the view that they are brought successfully together in the performative use of the mask in conjunction with its relationship to the space, the performer’s movement *and* words and music. It was the mask, I argue, that was the dominant visual feature of Greek drama in performance, yet the Greek dramatic mask has been either misunderstood or completely ignored by almost every scholar writing on ancient drama.¹⁰ The term “mask” does not even warrant an entry in the index to

⁵ Pickard-Cambridge (1968), Trendall and Webster (1971), Prag (1985), Green and Handley (1995) and Taplin (1993) and (2007) have been able to produce valuable work from both perspectives. For an account of Taplin’s work in this area and a good discussion of the issue of interpreting vase paintings in relation to ancient drama see Lada-Richards (2009), 99-166.

⁶ Taplin (1993), 21, articulated a division between “‘text driven’ philologist-iconographers and ‘autonomous’ iconologists.” However, I am suggesting that there exists a further schism between the “text-driven” scholars such as Taplin and Wiles and again with the “anti-text” position championed by Rehm.

⁷ Taplin (1977); Goldhill (1989) 1-3; Wiles (1993), 181. For an excellent description of the issues relating to performance criticism and Greek drama see Slater (1993), 1-14 and Altena (2000), 303-323.

⁸ Rehm (2002), 9.

⁹ Rehm (2002), 10. What Philip Auslander (1999) has termed “Liveness.”

¹⁰ I survey the existing scholarship in Chapter Four.

Rehm's 2002 work *The Play of Space*,¹¹ and while Wiles has recently published a book-length study on the subject and made many valuable observations, he has left room for a deeper study of the use of masks within fifth century drama and an analysis of how they may have functioned in the eyes of the spectator.¹² In most existing studies masks tend to get grouped together with props and costumes and regarded as secondary theatrical objects or embellishments rather than the essential communicators of dramatic emotion that they were.¹³ This attitude is perhaps first found in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1450b16-20) where *opsis* is seemingly placed at the bottom of a list of the elements that go into the creation of *mimesis* and frequently translated as "spectacle" with all of its derogatory overtones of empty flashy excess rather than the more accurate "visuality." One of the purposes of this study is to place *opsis* in a position of central importance in the performance of ancient drama, despite the attitude of Aristotle, who it should be remembered never *saw* the original productions of Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides.

Another approach to understanding the visual effect of stage movements favored by Michael Ewans, Gregory McCart and Graham Ley is one of research through practice, where staged workshops or even entire productions can, in Ley's opinion "offer up a different set of observations about the material or problem concerned."¹⁴ Yet, there is also a hitch with this approach. Ley bases his entire book-length study on the movement (or "blocking") of the chorus in Greek tragedy on a reconstruction of the Theatre of Dionysos proposed by Scullion and Wiles, one where a circular orchestra is a central element. This has been called into serious question, particularly in the light of recent archaeological findings and the best we can safely say at present is that we have no idea what form the *orchestra* took in the fifth century. If there was no circle, as the existing evidence seems to indicate, then Ley's entire study, already subjective, becomes completely redundant. Additionally, both Ewans' and McCart's works are based on their own productions of ancient drama, which will naturally conform to

¹¹ Although Rehm's earlier introductory book on the Greek tragic theatre does contain some insightful but undeveloped comments on masks and features a reconstruction of a tragic mask on its cover. Rehm (1992), 38-42.

¹² Wiles (2007).

¹³ See Chasten (2009) for an example of a recent study on cognition and stage objects. However, Chasten places masks in the same category as props and this attitude indicates a basic misunderstanding of the importance of the mask in ancient drama

¹⁴ Ley (2007a), 3-4; Ewans (1995); McCart (2007), 247-267.

the prevailing aesthetic judgment of the director and their interpretation of the available research. Like all artistic endeavors the results are highly subjective and while they may well have been perfectly acceptable productions in their own right, the question remains if they actually bring us any closer to the experience of the original spectators. Audiences members who thought they were witnessing a “traditional” staging of a Greek play at Bradfield School at the end of the nineteenth century or by Tyrone Guthrie in the middle of the twentieth or the National Theatre of Greece at the beginning of the twenty-first would have found the three production styles totally alien to each other as prevailing theatrical tastes have shifted and changed. Therefore we must be cautious in analyzing the results of such experiments.

With that being said, I have cited workshop demonstrations in Chapter Four that I have carried out in relation to the recognition of emotional states in faces and these may be a useful addition to the tools at our disposal for tackling these problems, but because of the inherent pitfalls of prevailing aesthetics, personal taste and directorial vision these types of practical reconstructions are of limited value on their own. What is required, then, is a more holistic approach to ancient drama, one that places the philological study of the text in an equivalent position with other forms of contextual evidence. This might be derived from the study of the material culture alongside political, social and cultural information gleaned from other areas of scholarship such as classical archaeology, anthropology, political science and the growing fields of neuroscience and cognitive studies. There is also a definite place for the field of performance studies in any study of ancient drama and I have benefited greatly from the work of, and my talks with, Richard Schechner, whose intercultural approach to drama and a focus on the theatrical environment has been influential.¹⁵

I have divided my study into four major areas following a “top-down” methodology that begins with an exploration of Greek theories of vision and gradually narrows its sights from the peripheral aspects of origins, form and space, to the foveal view of the mask—the focal point of Greek drama in performance. In Chapter One, I examine the prevailing attitudes about vision and the eye in the Greek world and how these ideas are reflected in drama. The

¹⁵ Schechner (1994), (1988); Appel & Schechner (1990). See also Revermann (2006), 25-45 107-178).

Greeks had a notion of vision that was radically different from ours, placing sight in the same sensory category as touch. To look was to feel and to be looked at was akin to being felt. In this context vision could never be passive, but instead, a reciprocal act. This information has a great bearing on the way visual information was conveyed in the Greek theatre—spectators did not watch in a darkened theatre being guided to look at where a director chose to focus their view; instead, they sat in the open-air where they could see the reactions of their fellow spectators, contemplate the stunning views of their city and countryside and gaze on the masked actors that effectively provoked intense individuated emotional responses. Watching a tragedy in fifth century Athens was an entirely different experience to seeing a play today and if this study can go at least some way in establishing those differences then it will have been successful in helping those reading the texts to more fully understand this vitally important aspect of the performance of ancient drama. In this chapter I also examine the appearance of *ophthalmoi* (ship's eyes) on the bows of Greek ships, the use of the symposium eye-cup and its possible relationship to the dramatic mask and the preponderance of "spectator vases" to further help establish a sense of the prevailing visual culture.

Chapter Two delves into the thorny issues of the origins of Attic drama from the perspective of the visuality of performance, particularly as it relates to collective movement or what I have termed "symporeia". Public dances, processions and street reveling all helped ritualize the space they travelled through and provided a cultural basis for later drama's close relationship between narrative and environment. With this in mind, I closely examine the performative elements of an existing organized street revel held every year in the spring on the Greek island of Skyros. This *Apokries* festival, with its shaggy, masked and padded old men and its ship-borne procession, the *Trata*, strongly resembles many of the features of the ancient *komos*, a Dionysian celebration that predated drama but also continued to be a part of the festivities associated with the various festivals of Dionysos in the fifth century. By examining the performative elements of a similar living tradition of street reveling we may be able to shed some light on the cultural function of the *komos* and its close relationship with drama. Processional performances such as the *komos* were an essential part of Greek ritual and theoretic

activity and their primary purpose was to create a visual display and provide collective involvement—what Guy Hedreen has termed “involved spectatorship.”¹⁶

The various festivals of Dionysos were begun by processions with the City Dionysia culminating at the Sanctuary of Dionysos, which lay directly before a natural bowl in the wall of the southeast slope of the Acropolis. In Chapter Three I examine this unique space in depth and propose that we might want to reconsider how we view the fifth century theatre venue. Recent archaeological evidence has further questioned the existence of a circular *orchestra* and suggests a space that held perhaps 6000 people, not the 16,000 cited by so many.¹⁷ This was an environmental space not an architectural one and we should free our minds of the vision of the great late fourth century stone theatres of Epidauros and Lycurgan Athens and instead imagine temporary wooden stands erected before a sanctuary. In this sense the fifth century *theatron* was more of a “grandstand” for observing symporeutic movement-based performance that developed from the procession, whether it was dithyramb, tragedy, comedy or satyr drama.

I also propose that the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus was deliberately established in the 530s BCE with the outright intention of providing a “seeing-place” for the culminating events of the City Dionysia procession and that the idea of a collapse of *ikria* (wooden stands) in the Agora around 500 BCE facilitating a move to the slope of the Acropolis should be firmly rejected. In describing the elements of the fifth century space—*cavea*, *theatron*, *eisodoi*, *skene* and *orchestra*—I hope to demonstrate how this venue was primarily a “movement space” intended to showcase the visual sweep of ancient drama and that this fluidity of action is incredibly difficult to discern when reading the text or visualizing the work in modern theatrical terms. I conclude Chapter Three with an examination of how text and environment function together and provide a holistic experience of sound and vision working in harmony to advance the narrative of a play.

¹⁶ Hedreen (2007), 241, uses the term for the viewing of eye-cups but it can also be applied to the viewing of processional drama or other public symporeutic events.

¹⁷ See Goette (2007a), 116-121.

I end Chapter Four with the statement that without the mask we might not have seen the birth of tragedy in the belief that it was the emotional properties of the mask operating within the visual environment of the movement space that enabled the narrative emotional complexities of tragedy and comedy to be developed and successfully performed. The mask is perhaps the most misunderstood of all the elements that went to make up ancient drama and yet in many ways it was the most important and certainly the visual focus of any performance in the fifth century. Firstly, I establish what exactly the fifth century mask looked like, using only evidence from the period. This has not been attempted before and as I set out, most existing surveys of masks conflate evidence from different genres, periods and cultures and this has led to a general confusion about the form of the fifth century tragic mask (I focus on the tragic mask in this study). In attempting to understand how the mask may have functioned in performance I have applied studies from the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience that have focused on facial processing and recognition, gaze direction, peripheral and foveal vision and the reading of neural responses via brain imaging of subjects observing masks, movement and performance. Most scholars have assumed that the tragic mask held a “fixed” or “neutral” expression throughout the play; on the contrary, I conclude that the mask in performance was entirely capable of appearing to change its emotional appearance and far more effective in communicating those emotions than the human face, creating a deeply personal sense of engagement with each individual spectator on their own emotional and cognitive terms. The neuroscientific fields are constantly breaking new ground in how we understand mental processes and cognition and by applying these new methods I hope to open up a re-examination of the role of the mask in Greek drama.

I conclude this study with a short case study relating to Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, a work that features heavily in these pages, not only because it is our only surviving trilogy but also because I am familiar with it as both a translator and theatre director.¹⁸ Here I propose that when Aeschylus brings his Orestes to Athena’s statue in Athens and then has the goddess

¹⁸ I have worked as a professional theatre director and producer for 20 years and in general within this study I have favored texts that I have come to know in the rehearsal room and in performance. It should be stated that modern rehearsal techniques may have little relation to ancient ones. Nevertheless, having to imagine an ancient play, fully formed on stage is an incredibly valuable process in appreciating its inherent theatrical dynamics.

appear on stage he is forging a relationship with his spectators' immediate visual environment. The colossal Bronze Athena of Phidias, the first monument to be erected on the ruined Acropolis, more than 20 years after the Persian destruction, had just been completed and stood so tall that she could be seen from Cape Sounion. This great *agalma* ("adornment") may well have been one of the first major public works undertaken by the new radical democracy and a symbol of Athenian military defiance in the face of the Spartans as well as a bold expression of Athenian cultural hegemony.

In this way I hope to demonstrate how a reading of an ancient play with its environment in mind might open up another dimension of appreciation and understanding. It should also be stated that although I do believe that visibility was an essential part of ancient drama and one that has often been neglected, it operated in tandem with the aural elements of a play, the music, lyrics and words. Greek drama was not mime and words delivered in the form of live utterances existing in the moment they are spoken or sung in the ears of the audience were as important as a tilt of the masked head, a gesture of the hand or the steps of a dance. In fact the Greek theatrical experience needed both to be complete—but there has been much already written about the words of Greek drama—this study hopes to help balance the scales a little by focusing on the *visual*.

Chapter One

Opsis: The Visual Culture of the Greeks

Now I do frown on thee with all my heart;
And if mine eyes can wound, now let them kill thee:
Now counterfeit to swoon; why now fall down;
Or if thou canst not, O, for shame, for shame,
Lie not, to say mine eyes are murderers!
Now show the wound mine eye hath made in thee:
Scratch thee but with a pin, and there remains
Some scar of it; lean but upon a rush,
The cicatrice and capable impressure
Thy palm some moment keeps; but now mine eyes,
Which I have darted at thee, hurt thee not,
Nor, I am sure, there is no force in eyes
That can do hurt.

William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, III.V

As You Like It is a work about the effects of love at first sight and the notion that sometimes people can't see what is plainly apparent before them because of the social, gender and political barriers that moderate their vision. Phebe cannot understand Silvius' complaint that she wounds him with her cruel eyes and as she glares at him she asks why he hasn't fallen down, struck dead by the hateful power of her gaze. She ridicules the poetic love-struck utterances of Silvius by plainly stating, "there is no force in eyes that can do hurt." Shakespeare's Phebe articulates a modern idea of sight, one that separates the physical operation of the eye from the mental process that interprets the image. To Phebe, what her eyes look on is a purely personal, cognitive experience and it seems ridiculous that they can have any physical effect upon Silvius, let alone strike him dead.

Phebe's attitude reflects our own comprehension of visual perception while Silvius' poetic terms articulate an ancient idea of extramissive vision where seeing is akin to feeling and the act of looking is regarded as the same as actually touching the object viewed. My aim in this chapter is to set out what we know of Greek ideas of vision and relate that knowledge to the visual culture of fifth century Athens. I will propose that Greek drama should be examined with this in mind and that an understanding of the "scopic regime" of the ancient theatre is vital to a study of how the visual aspects of performance operated and influenced the form and content of the plays themselves.

The film theorist Christian Metz first coined the term "scopic regime" to create a distinction between the theatre and the cinema.¹ Since then the phrase has come to be broadly applied to culturally specific genres of visual culture such as scopic regimes of gender, class, photography and documentary film to examine the cultural underpinnings that operate in the presentation of and comprehension of images. Martin Jay has examined what he calls the "scopic regimes of modernity" and proposed that we might "acknowledge the plurality of scopic regimes available to us" and hopes we may "learn to see the virtues of differentiated ocular experiences."² We might apply Jay's appeal to the visual culture of the Greeks instead of looking for one unified theory of vision that encapsulates philosophy, drama, art and architecture. We may also want to approach the theatre from the perspective of a set of developing scopic regimes that reflect the social, political, military and artistic perspectives operating at that moment. With this in mind it is possible to survey the available evidence for Greek visual culture and note diverse, yet interconnected attitudes to the eye and the mechanisms of vision.

Intraocular Fire

The Greeks understood the sense of vision quite differently that we do. Sight was considered in tactile terms as if the eye touched the object under view.³ Thus, there was a general belief in

¹ Metz (1982), 61.

² Jay (1988), 20.

³ Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006), 61.

extramission in that the object emanated some kind of effluence (*eidola*) that physically entered the eye; that the eye itself sent out a ray of fire that touched the object; or a combination of both effects combined to create vision. The act of watching was regarded as an external reciprocal event and great significance was attributed to the power of the gaze to directly impact the person under view, and conversely, for the viewer themselves to be affected by the sight seen. Virtually all of our sources that address the physical operation of the eye prior to Aristotle imagine sight as such an extramissive process, one in which the pupil sends out a ray that illuminates the object or mingles with the emissions given off by the object, before the image produced is able to pass back into the eye and on into the brain. In literature, references to visual perception, the aspect of the eye itself, and the reciprocal act of viewing, frequently mark significant emotional moments, in addition to critical delineations such as life and death, piety and pollution, envy and eroticism.⁴

The eye was a potent symbol for the Greeks as attested by the *ophthalmoi* (ship's-eyes) that adorned the prows of sea-going vessels, the prominence of ocular images on symposium eye-cups that start to appear in great numbers around the middle of the sixth century, and the so called "spectator vases" that represent the mutual acts of watching and being watched. Both the symposium cups and the spectator vases place vision in a performative context that can be related to the subsequent development of the scopic regime of fifth century drama.

This idea of extramissive vision is pithily articulated by Ruth Padel, "Eyes ex-press. Something in comes out."⁵ In Homer, the eyes of warriors "flash" and "blaze with fire" as they enter combat or set their angry eyes against an opponent.⁶ In the *Iliad*, when Agamemnon learns from Calchas that he must return Chryseis, his eyes as described as "blazing fire" (*Iliad* 1.104). Likewise, the Myrmidons cannot bear to look on the divinely wrought armor Athena brings to Achilles, but his eyes "blazed terribly from under his eyelids like burning flames"

4 See Cairns (2005), 138, who prefers the terms "emissionist" for theories that advance the idea of intraocular fire and "interactionist" to describe the notion of effluences emitting from the object merging with emissions from the eye." Cairns rightly warns against generalizing to any universal applicability of these notions but does suggest that Greek theories of vision were materialist in nature expressing vision in physical terms.

⁵ Padel (1992), 60.

⁶ Daniel Turkeltaub (2005) has identified 14 references to "flashing" or "burning eyes" in the *Iliad* and 3 in the *Odyssey*. For detailed discussions of this subject, see Constantinidou (1994) and G. Robertson (1999).

(*Iliad* 19.16-17). Terrifying fire-blazing eyes are also compared to the petrifying glare of the Gorgon: Agamemnon's shield is emblazoned with the Gorgon flanked by Terror and Rout (*Iliad* 11.36-7), and Hector stares "with eyes like a Gorgon's" (*Iliad* 8.350).⁷ Just as Gorgon eyes were envisioned as projecting the power to render the viewer totally inactive and feeble, the sight of a warrior blazing with ocular fire often has the same effect. In Aeschylus' *The Seven Against Thebes*, Amphion is described as "Advancing with Gorgon Eyes" (537), and in his *Persians*, Xerxes on his way to conquer the Greeks has "eyes flashing with the deadly glare of a dragon" (*Pers.* 81). In the *Iliad* when Hector sees the blazing figure of Achilles approaching with "light that played from his bronze gleams of fire and the rising sun" (*Iliad* 22.135-6) he rapidly loses his nerve, panics and runs. It is the sight of a "blazing" Achilles that establishes the moment Hector is marked for death.

The belief that the eye projected a fiery substance was not merely a powerful poetic metaphor for a withering stare. In the early fifth century, Alcmaeon of Croton undertook research into the nature of human sense perception that laid the foundation for later epistemological and psychological enquiries by Empedocles and Democritus.⁸ Later fragments report "that he was the first to dare to undertake an excision of an eye" (DK A10) and he examined its structure by dissection observing that the eye itself is enclosed in certain transparent membranes and is connected to the brain by two light bearing paths which join behind the forehead (the optic nerves). Alcmaeon thought that the eye sees via the water and fire that reside within, with fire being a constituent of the eye and the water emanating from the brain. The two light paths transported water from the brain to the eyeballs and then conveyed the fire that shines from the eyeball back to the brain (DK A5, A10).⁹ Furthermore, a fragment attributed to Alcmaeon posits the notion of intraocular fire stating that "the eye obviously has fire within, for when one is struck (this fire) flashes out" (DK A4).

Empedocles compared the eye to a lantern with the fire being contained within the pupil that was surrounded by a mesh of delicate membranes that allowed the fire to pass through the eye.

⁷ For the apotropaic qualities of the Gorgon, see Phinney Jr. (1971), Lonsdale (1989), and Vernant (1991).

⁸ See Lindberg (1976), 1-17, and Wade (1998), 11-19.

⁹ See Freeman (1983), 137-138.

Like Alcmaeon he thought that the pupil was surrounded by water and that the membranes allowed emanations that were given off by the object under view to pass through into the eye: “When Aphrodite created eyes, primeval fire, enclosed in membranes, gave birth to the round pupil in its delicate garments which are pierced through with wondrous channels. These keep out the water which surrounds the pupil, but let through the fire, the finer part” (DK B84).¹⁰ Following an atomist theoretical view, Empedocles thought that the image (*eidōla*) gave off effluences (*aporroia*) that entered the eye. This was a theory of visual perception based on extramission and touch. Similarly, Democritus, whose views were recorded and disparaged by Theophrastus, held a similar theory of vision. Like Empedocles, Democritus thought that all objects emanated an image of themselves by creating an effluent, which stamped an impression on the air between object and eye like a seal on wax (DK A135).¹¹ Writing on these ancient visual theories, David Lindberg states that “the theory of intraocular fire reached its full development with Plato.”¹² Thus, in the *Timaeus* Plato explains that the “pure fire within” is caused to “flow through the eyes” where it coalesces with the daylight before it reaches the object (*Tim.* 45b-46c). Plato also believed that the object emanated what he termed “whiteness,” which contributed to visual sensory perception (*Theaetetus* 156b-d).

In mythology the close connection between fire and sight is found in the story of Pandora as told by Hesiod, the first woman created to beguile and distract mortal men after Prometheus had given them “far seen fire” - πυρὸς τηλέσκοπον (*Theog.* 566 & 569). Once Pandora is endowed with all her divine visual attributes she is described as a “wonder to behold” - θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι (*Theog.* 581). When she is finally revealed, the visual sensation of the first mortal woman enthalls all onlookers who are “stunned” by the sight.

Another mythological character frequently associated with a fearsome eye that blazes with fire is Herakles. In the *Odyssey* he is depicted in the Underworld, “glaring terribly” and wearing an intimidating sword belt adorned with “fearsome bears and lions with glaring eyes” (*Od.* 11. 605-12). Christopher Faraone has pointed out that the term used here, “terrible gaze” - δεινὸν

¹⁰ Aristotle on Empedocles *De Sensu* 2 437b-24-25.

¹¹ Cited in Lindberg (1976), 2.

¹² Lindberg (1976), 5.

παπταίνων, is also applied to hunters and predators eyeing their prey. Herakles is the great hunter-warrior and his large blazing eyes are a distinctive feature of the representation of the hero in archaic red-figure vase painting.¹³ This trope is also found in Euripides' *Herakles*, where the chorus of Theban elders notice how the eyes of Herakles' children, "blaze with the gaze of the Gorgon, just like their father's," ἴδετε, πατέρος ὡς γοργῶπες αἶδε προσφερεῖς ὀμμάτων ἀνγαί (*Her.* 131-133). This notion of the glaring eye may lie at the root of the concept of extramissive vision where sight is afforded the power to affect. Thus, to be stared at negatively and enviously was to be placed under the "evil-eye" (*baskanos*), what Walter Burkert has described as the "staring eye of the predator," where humans feel constantly surrounded by the glare of dangers that must be averted or redirected.¹⁴

Baskanos

The *baskanos par excellence* was the Gorgon Medusa, whose eyes petrified all who dared to look on her face. Images of the Gorgon may have traditionally originated as apotropaic symbols on buildings, vases and jewelry to divert the negative gaze of the



Fig. 1. Gorgoneion, Tondo from an Attic black-figure Kylix, 520 BCE., Paris, Cabinet des médailles (Inv. 322).

¹³ See Faraone (1992), 58-59, who also finds a link between the large eyes of Herakles and the demonic eyes of the Gorgon and satyr masks.

¹⁴ See Burkert (1979), 73.

evil-eye.¹⁵ However, the Gorgon as presented *en-face*, facing out, fully engaging the viewer with her terrible gaze might be interpreted as challenging her onlooker to return her stare and act as an iconic metaphor for facing one's deepest fears. This aspect of Medusa's gaze is found in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* when Orestes is advised to "place the heart of Perseus in your breast" and to steel himself to the hideous task of killing his mother as he is told to "Go against the Gorgon" (*LB* 831 and 835). Jean-Pierre Vernant envisioned the twisted grimacing features of the Gorgon in the faces of warriors hurling themselves into battle, possessed by rage (*menos*) with bulging eyes and contorted features.¹⁶ This analogy is also found in *Herakles* as Euripides describes the terrifying and brutal insanity of his protagonist as madness takes hold, "Look at him! He rolls his bulging flashing eyes and shakes his Gorgon head," ἦν ἰδοῦ: καὶ δὴ τινάσσει κρᾶτα βαλβίδων ἄπο καὶ διαστρόφους ἐλίσσει σῖγα γοργωποῦς κόρας (*Her.* 867-868). Even Lyssa, the personification of Madness, is described as "a Gorgon of Night" (*Her.* 883), a daughter of the spirit of sightlessness and darkness.

The notion that the sight of a polluted, insane, or otherwise extremely altered person can radiate a negative power into the eye of the spectator and cause harm is also found in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* where the chorus learn of Herakles' demise via the poisoned robe sent to him by an unwitting Deianira. They pray that they will not "die in horror, merely from catching sight of him" (960-961). That this type of negative gaze can cause harm is the very essence of the *baskanos* whose look is often motivated by *phthonos* (envy).¹⁷ This is what Agamemnon most fears if he displays himself stepping on the crimson-dyed tapestries in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (948). He expresses shame at letting his feet "ruin the wealth of this house" (*Ag.* 949), and says, "let no god's envious glare strike me from afar" (*Ag.* 947). In

¹⁵ Rainer Mack has argued that the *gorgoneion* was not purely an apotropaic symbol but may have been used to affirm male identity at the symposium and actualize its allegorical drama "realizing the hero's triumph in the here-and-now of their own encounter with the monster" R. Mack (2002), 571-596. Mack suggests that to look into the face of Medusa was to defy her power to petrify and to overcome her gaze. While this may not be a purely apotropaic function meeting the Gorgon's gaze nevertheless imbues the viewer with a certain power, the power of Perseus. Yet Perseus himself uses the Gorgon's head to protect himself when rescuing Ariadne and in petrifying Phineus; in this way one who conquers the gaze of the Gorgon could be said to inherit her apotropaic powers. See also Hedreen (2007a), 217-246 & 218-219.

¹⁶ See Vernant (1991), 116-117.

¹⁷ For a thorough account of the function of the evil-eye across a number of different cultures see Lykiardopoulos (1981), 221-230.

Plato's *Phaedo* Socrates advises against boastfulness in case an envious evil-eye routs the argument (*Phaedo* 95b) and Strabo recounts the story of the Telchines, mythical Rhodian metal workers who were known as *baskanoi* and destroyed plants and animals with envy poured from the river Styx (Strabo C654), an association also made by Callimachus, who compares his envious critics to "the malignant gnomes of Rhodes" (fr. 1. 1-5. Massimilla). Furthermore, Mary DeForest has shown how the threatened curses of the Furies in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (780-787 & 810-817) of a poisoned earth, pestilence, disease and sterility are typical emanations of the evil-eye.¹⁸ The very aspect of the Furies themselves, with eyes that "seep a repulsive, putrid puss" and "not fit for human sight" or to "stand in the sight of holy idols" (*Eumenides* 54-56) all reflect the envious poisonous glare of the *baskanos*. But this evil can be countered when it is met by "kind eyes" such as Athena's benevolent gaze that sees "great gain for this city" in these fearsome faces of the Furies (*Eumenides* 990-991) who become the "Kindly Ones" with their former curses transformed into a boon for the city of Athens. By seeing the good in the terrible visage of the Furies Athena meets their glare and reciprocates by offering them a place of honor in the city of Athens.¹⁹

Tragedy often displayed the negative aspects of this culture of visual scrutiny with characters desperate to remove themselves from the gaze of spectators and to avoid polluting them with the negative glare of their own *baskanos*. Characters cover their heads with veils or cloaks removing their eyes and faces from public view and essentially take themselves "off-stage" by withdrawing from sight and denying spectators the ability to look. These ocular-negative actions were not confined to fictional characters on stage and Herodotus tells the story of the deposed Spartan king Demartos who was forced to abdicate from the monarchy and take up a post as an elected official. During the Spartan Gymnopaideiai festival, a *theōria* that included choral performances, dances and gymnastic competitions, the new Spartan king, Leotychidas chose to insult his unfortunate predecessor by sending over a slave to enquire how it felt to be merely an official after having been a king. Mortified and deeply embarrassed by the insult, Demartos responded by covering his head and then leaving the theatre. This act of veiling

¹⁸ DeForest (1993), 141.

¹⁹ See Cairns (2005), 139, who notes that diseases such as *ophthalmia* (severe eye inflammation) and epilepsy could be transmitted by sight in addition to *miasma*.

removed his ability to continue participation in the *theôria* as a spectator, as well as the theatre crowd's ability to watch him undergoing such shame (Herodotus, 6. 67). Being seen in the full light of day acting appropriately and honorably lay at the heart of the entire notion of Greek spectatorship where it was considered just as virtuous to participate in the act of watching as it was to be the one being watched.²⁰

Another notable example of negative visual scrutiny is found in Plutarch, who portrays Demosthenes veiling his head after he takes poison rather than fall into the hands of the exile-hunter Archias (an ex-actor, but apparently not good enough to deceive Demosthenes). The Thracian spear-men standing at the temple door mock Demosthenes for his cowardly and unmanly behavior but once the poison has taken effect, he removes the veil, looks Archias right in the eyes, utters his last words, a pointed allusion to Sophocles' *Antigone* about going unburied, staggers out of the temple and drops dead by the altar (Plut. *Life of Demosthenes* 29.1-5). Demosthenes' veiling denies his pursuers the ability to control his actions as he withdraws from their sight and effectively disappears, revealing his eyes only when he has predetermined his own end.

Douglas Cairns has connected the act of veiling with the expression of anger suggesting that removing oneself from sight could be construed as an aggressive mark of defiance. He proposes that Achilles' withdrawal in book one of Homer's *Iliad* represents a physical "veiling" as Achilles denies others the ability to see him.²¹ Similarly, Herakles' veiling in Euripides' play is such a "visual cut-off" motivated by his perception of how he is being viewed by others and the effect of looking at the results of the familial blood pollution caused by his own hand. When Herakles recovers from his insane fit, he asks Amphytrion why he is standing far off and "covering his eyes" (*Her.* 1111-1112). The old man tells him to "look on" (*theasai*) the bodies of his slain children and comprehend what he has done (*Her.* 1131). Herakles is beside himself with grief and hardly has time to process what lies before his eyes when an approaching Theseus comes into his view. His immediate response is to veil himself

²⁰ Isocrates, *Panegyricus* iv. 44-45 articulates this notion and places the spectators of an athletic event in the same honored position as those competing. Goldhill (2000a).

²¹ Cairns (2001), 20.

to conceal his shame, and to avoid harming Theseus fearing that his pollution will “reach the sight of his dearest friend” (*Her.* 1155-1156).

In this extramissive visual culture viewing could never be regarded as passive or introverted as the seen object was able to impinge on the visual senses and cause an active response that was not always under the control of the viewer. Just as the seen object radiates a reflective, altering force so the viewer’s eye could deeply affect those it chose to view. In this context the blindness of Tiresias as depicted in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* could be construed as a protective shield against angry or envious glances allowing him to stand his ground against the threats of Oedipus: “I am not frightened by the glare of your angry face; you could never destroy me” οὐ τὸ σὸν δείσας πρόσωπον: οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ’ ὅπου μ’ ὀλεῖς (*OT* 447-448). When Oedipus blinds himself at the end of the play and reveals his disfigured, eyeless face, Creon ushers him back inside fearing that his hideous aspect will harm the sight of Helios, the sun, “do not uncover and reveal this abomination” - τοιόνδ’ ἄγος ἀκάλυπτον οὕτω δεικνύναι (*OT* 1425-1428). In this respect Oedipus’ self-blinding can be viewed as a horrific manifestation of the harm a baleful image can do to the eyes and an attempt to gain control of the extramissive eye by blocking polluted images from entering the eye and redirecting vision to look only on darkness. These actions are the opposite of the veiled Herakles who wants to shrink from sight. Oedipus is still defiant and he wants his blindness to be *seen* (*OT* 1271-1274).

The act of viewing was frequently described in penetrative terms with glances and stares “hurled” or “darting” (*belos*) like a spear-throw or the flight of an arrow. In Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, Zeus is imagined hurling thunderbolts from his eyes - βάλλεται γὰρ ὄσσοις Διόθεν κάρανα (*Ag.* 469-470)²² and in *Prometheus Bound* Aeschylus calls Zeus’ thunderbolt “fiery-eyed” - πυρῶπόν (*PB* 667).²³ The connection between the all-seeing eyes of Zeus and the thunderbolt, his instrument of divine punishment, is riffed on in a gag in Aristophanes’ *Archarnians* where Lamachus is given a number of divine attributes including eyes that flash

²² Denniston and Page (1957) on 469 thought that a translation that renders “a thunderbolt is hurled by (or from) the eyes of Zeus” is “mere rodomontade” whereas Lloyd Jones (1993) accepted that the passage may be corrupt and advanced a meaning that translates as “for by the eye of Zeus the thunderbolt is hurled.”

²³ Cook (1914), 503.

with lightning, ἰὼ Λάμαχ' ὃ βλέπων ἀστραπᾶς (*Arch.* 566).²⁴ This, as the fiery eyes of Zeus were imagined hurling ocular thunderbolts so mortals thought of their own eyesight darting out like a spear. In a similar vein, when the chorus of Argive elders vividly describe the events that lead up to the killing of Iphigenia in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* they sing, "her eyes threw a last pitiful glance at her sacrificers" - βαλλ' ἕκαστον θυτήρων ἀπ' ὀμματος βέλει φιλοϊκτῶ (*Ag.* 240).²⁵ Likewise, they describe Helen entering Troy and shooting "seductive glances" that "darted from her eyes," causing passion to take root in the hearts of the men who meet her gaze (*Ag.* 741). Also, when Cassandra sees her own death she prays that her end will, "come in one clean stroke," and her eyes will be "thrown together" (*sumbalō*) or "slammed shut" (*Ag.* 1294). This is a violent sudden denial of vision, not a voluntary closing of the eyes to avoid the sight of her killer.

Sight/Blindness

Vision was placed in an oppositional ocular realm of light/darkness, day/night, sight/blindness and life/death. To be dead was to never see the light of the sun again. This concept is articulated by Cassandra, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, who envisions death as the ending of her sight as she goes into the house of Atreus praying to Helios, the Sun, knowing that this moment is "the last time I will see his light" (*Ag.* 1323). Sophocles' Ajax expresses a similar sentiment as he contemplates his suicide and appeals to Death to look at him, saying that he will soon be speaking to him "face to face" - προσανδήσω ξυνών (*Aj.* 858). As he prepares to fall on Hector's sword Ajax says "This is the last time Helios the charioteer will ever shine the light of day on me" (*Aj.* 857-858).²⁶ Likewise, Sophocles' Antigone enters her tomb "Now and forever forbidden to see the blessed eye of light" (*Ant.* 879-880), and at the end of *Antigone*, Creon calls for his own death crying, "I look for the light of my last day," φανήτω μύρων ὁ κάλλιστ' ἔχων ἐμοὶ τερμίαν ἄγων ἀμέραν (*Ant.* 1329-1330).

²⁴ Given (2009), 115.

²⁵ Meineck (1998). However the force of *belos* is not adequately conveyed here as poetic terms for glances and looks in English tend towards passivity. Iphigenia "hurls" this look and it strikes her sacrificers.

²⁶ It should be noted that the authenticity of *Ajax* lines 855-8 have been questioned by many editors. See West (1978), 113-15 and Finglass (2011) on *Ajax* 854-8.

To stand in the sight of the sun and see the light was to be alive, and seeing and being seen were active life-affirming actions. This connection between light and sight is found in Hesiod's *Theogony* (132) where one of the Titan daughters of Ouranus and Gaia is named Theia, a goddess of sight (*thea*), and the mother of Helios, Selene and Eos (*Theog.* 371). These radiant elemental offspring are also attributed to Theia in the Homeric Hymn to Helios (31), where the Sun is described as possessing eyes with a "terrible glare" (9). In this regard, Pindar extols the virtues of competing and performing at the *theôria* ("spectacle festival") by opening his *Isthmian* 5 with the invocation to, "Mother of the Sun, goddess of many names, Theia," μάτερ Ἀλίου πολυώνυμε Θεία (1). Conversely, Death was always associated with blindness, darkness and being hidden from sight. Blindness was a horror to the Greeks and although the blind are often endowed with second sight, such as the prophet Tiresias and the newly blinded Polymester in Euripides' *Hecuba* (1259-1280). However, the chorus of Thebans, at the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tryannus*, echo the general sentiment, "better to die than be blind" (*OT* 1368).²⁷

Reciprocal Vision

Removing oneself from sight was far more than a withdrawal from the society of others, but an active demonstration of a kind of "living death." The non-viewed may still be physically present but the denial of access to the eyes causes a rift in the process of mutual visual communication that affirms presence. This is exactly what moves Euripides' Herakles to veil his head and sit with eyes lowered as he contemplates the horrific events that resulted in him killing his own children. His sight had been deluded by Madness and his eyes are described as "twisted and bloodshot" (*Her.* 933) and as a result he is seen as being "no longer himself" (*Her.* 931). In one heartbreaking moment of visual delusion he is described as staring at his son who has fallen at his feet as a suppliant, with "a Gorgon's savage glare." Too close to use his bow he brings down his great club on his son's head like "a blacksmith smiting hot metal" (*Her.* 990-993). In Sophocles' *Ajax*, Athena similarly visually deludes the titular warrior and redirects his rage from the Greek commanders to innocent livestock. Ajax's delusion is so

²⁷ Deborah Steiner has connected the punishment of stoning with entombment and the denial of vision especially as it relates to the *miasma* caused by the evil-eye. See D. Steiner (1995), 193-211.

complete that a cowering Odysseus fears the insane eye of Ajax will fall on him and he will be tainted by the extramissive power of a madman's eye. However, Athena responds, "I will turn away the beams of his eyes and keep them from landing on your face" - ἐγὼ γὰρ ὀμμάτων ἀποστρόφους ἀνγὰς ἀπείρξω σὴν πρόσωπιν εἰσιδεῖν (*Aj.* 69-70). When Odysseus objects she persuades him that she will diminish the keenness or brightness of Ajax's eyes - ἐγὼ σκοτώσω βλέφαρα καὶ δεδορκότα (*Aj.* 85).

The chorus of Salaminian warriors in *Ajax* expresses their emotional states via the language of reciprocal vision. When they learn that their commander has gone insane they respond by wishing that they could hide their faces in shame and creep away to their ships *unseen* (*Aj.* 245-246), and in contrast, when they believe that Ajax has come to his senses they leap for joy and shout, "Ares has cleared my eyes of dark despair. Now the bright light of day can shine down again!" (*Aj.* 345-346). Emotion affects both the quality of the visual ray emanating from the eye and the aura emitted by those under view. Yet, perhaps the most famous emotional reciprocal gaze in Greek literature is depicted at the end of the *Iliad* in book 24 where Priam goes to the tent of Achilles in the Greek camp to plead for the body of Hector, his slain son.

Then Priam, son of Dardanus gazed in wonder at Achilles
How tall he was and how he looked like a god.
Achilles gazed back, admiring the son of Dardanus
Marveling at the sight and marking his words.

ἦτοι Δαρδανίδης Πρίαμος θαύμαζ' Ἀχιλῆα
ὅσος ἔην οἷός τε: θεοῖσι γὰρ ἅντα ἔφκει:
αὐτὰρ ὁ Δαρδανίδην Πρίαμον θαύμαζεν Ἀχιλλεύς
εἰσορόων ὅψιν τ' ἀγαθὴν καὶ μῦθον ἀκούων.

(*Iliad* 24.629-632)

At this moment the act of looking produces a secondary effect, the sense of wonder (*thauma*), which in turn can produce a significant change in the mind-set of the viewer.²⁸ In this silent mutual gaze it is the shared sense of wonder and respect that binds the two men in guest-friendship over a meal and allows Priam to ask to lay down to sleep, content that he will be able to return to Troy and bury his son. Here, the act of reciprocal gazing is presented as an external event that has a marked effect on both men and the ability to completely redirect emotional states.²⁹

The withering rays of the eye's gaze were imagined as hard to be withstood especially when the emotional force behind the eye is eroticism, as Pindar illustrates in a short *skolion* (symposium song): no man can "catch the glance of the bright rays from Theoxenos' eyes" and not be "tossed on the waves of desire" unless he "possesses a black heart of adamant or iron" (Fr. 123 S-M). Likewise, Danaos in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* describes how men are "conquered by desire and shoot an alluring arrow of the eye at the delicate beauty of girls" as if they are spoiling ripe fruit (*Supp.* 1003-1005), and a fragment of Sophocles' *Hippodamia* (474 Radt) imagines that Pelops has "the flash of lightning in his eyes," which is described as "a charm to trap love" that "scorches me with its flame, measuring me with the steady gaze of the eye." The eye's fire can be unstoppable in the creation of fear, desire, envy and even physical debility on the part of the object of sight, so powerful that Apollonius describes the malevolent gaze of Medea as able to bring down the bronze giant Talos by "bewitching his sight with hateful eyes" (*Argonautica* 4.1636-1693).³⁰

²⁸ Raymond Prier (1989), 25-117, has catalogued the frequency with which the act of viewing leads to a sense of amazement in Homer and describes them under his rubric of "the phenomenology of light and sight." Prier places the eye within a system of sign recognition that forms an "intermediary locus" between the outward force of perceived events and the inner ability to perceive. Although Prier may go too far in imposing a twentieth century semiotic theory onto an ancient text, his collection of Homeric references to sight and light and the discussion of their usage further demonstrates both the primacy of the visual in archaic Greek culture and the notion that for the Greeks reciprocal vision had a profound effect on emotion.

²⁹ Douglas Cairns has pointed out in a yet to be published paper entitled, *Looks of Love and Loathing: Cultural Models of Vision and Emotion in Ancient Greek Culture*, "the widespread belief that vision is a process involving physical contact between perceived and perceiver certainly means that there are particular reasons to pay special attention to the role of the eyes in Greek models of emotion."

³⁰ Fire was also used to purify the *miasma* of death such as at *Odyssey* 12.481-482 where Odysseus used sulfur and fire to cleanse his house after slaying the suitors. For a detailed account of the use of fire in cleansing rituals see Parisinou (2000), 73-80.

The sheer power of extramissive sight to beguile, stun, create passionate emotions and inspire fear is summed up by Gorgias in his *Encomium of Helen* (15-20).

“When belligerents in war buckle on their warlike accouterments of bronze and steel, some designed for defense, others for offense, if the sight sees this, immediately it is alarmed and it alarms the soul, so that often men flee, panic stricken, from future danger (as though it were) present.”

Gorgias goes on to explain how, “sight engraves upon the mind images of things which have been seen,” and that certain artworks produce “a pleasant sight to the eyes,” which means that it is natural “for sight to grieve for some things and long for others.” Here, vision is imagined as a separate sensory device that stands apart from the mind and the soul with the ability to affect them rather than be placed under their control. It is within this scopic regime that Gorgias places Helen, whose eyes were involuntarily beguiled by the sight of Paris and, “presented to her soul eager desire and contest of love.” If love has the divine power of the gods then, “how could a lesser being reject and refuse it?” Gorgias concludes that Helen is blameless and the presentation of the sight of Paris to her soul is regarded as “a divine constraint” and completely beyond mortal control.³¹

Emotion then, can alter the nature of the gaze, healing as well as harming. Thus in *Herakles*, Theseus forces the shrouded Herakles to lift his veil and look him in the eye, telling him that that the bond of friendship is more powerful than Herakles’ own sense of *aidos* or personal shame (Euripides, *Her.* 1214-1228). Aristotle wrote “shame dwells in the eyes” (*Rhetoric* 1884^a34) and *aidos* was perceived as originating in the eyes of the spectator. In a culture of reciprocal viewing the steady gaze of compassionate and friendly eyes could negate the individual’s sense of shame.³² This notion is also found in Homer such as the moment when the naked, bedraggled and animalistic Odysseus is washed ashore on Phaeacia and awakes with “eyes ablaze, a terrible sight” (*Odyssey* 6.130). When the ball-playing girls are confronted by the terrifying vision of the naked and bedraggled Odysseus, they scatter and run

³¹ Translated by George Kennedy in Sprague (1972), 50-54.

³² See Cairns (1993), 158 & 292, who cites the proverb quoted by Aristotle “shame dwells in the eyes.”

in fear. Yet, Athena plants courage within the breast of Nausicaa who stands her ground and gazes on Odysseus face to face. Nausicaa's ability not to be shamed by the sight before her, and Odysseus' sense of wonder at the beauty of Nausicaa, which he compares to a vision that he gazed on for hours on Delos, unites the two in guest-friendship that leads to the house of King Alcinous, the telling of Odysseus' story and his eventual return home to Ithaca. Likewise, Theseus is not ashamed to look on the dejected form of his former comrade in arms and he commands Herakles to "Lift up your eyes to your friend!" φίλοισιν ὄμμα δεικνύναι τὸ σόν (*Her.* 1215). Like Athena looking kindly on the Furies or Nausicaa looking directly at the terrifying visage of the shipwrecked Odysseus, this simple act of reciprocal gazing starts the process whereby Herakles faces his trauma and can be restored back into the sight of others.³³

A Greek "Visual Turn?"

In his influential paper "The Nobility of Sight," Hans Jonas described the visual sense as follows:

[P]ar excellence the sense of the simultaneous or coordinated, and thereby the extensive. A view comprehends many things juxtaposed, as co-existent parts of one field of vision. It does so in an instant: as in a flash one glance, an opening of the eyes, discloses a world of co-present qualities spread out in space, ranged in depth, continuing into indefinite distance.³⁴

Jonas goes on to explain that sight is unique among the other senses as it is not reliant on a temporal sequence of sensations that he describes as "ever unfinished and dependent on memory." The senses generated by sound, touch, taste or smell differ from sight, as they are, "always in the making, always partial and incomplete." Jonas links the sense of detachment the viewer experiences when looking at an image that exists in a static non-temporal reality to the concept of objectivity that he feels has its roots in Greek notions of vision. For Jonas, it is

³³ Something of this notion remains in the English term "barefaced," which has taken on negative connotations but essentially means "unashamed."

³⁴ Jonas (1966), 136.

this detachment implicit in the act of vision that “is the concept of objectivity, of the thing as it is in itself as distinct from the thing as it affects me, and from this distinction arises the whole idea of *theoria* and theoretical truth.”³⁵

Conceptualizing Greek vision in terms of detachment seems to somewhat contradict the literary evidence that overwhelmingly places the viewer and the viewed in a reciprocal ocular relationship. Yet Jonas’ important theories do effectively articulate what may have been a significant “visual turn” that occurred in the late sixth and early fifth centuries BCE and redefined the notion of spectatorship within the prevailing extramissive reciprocal visual culture. W. J. T. Mitchell was one of the earliest proponents of the theory of reading visuality in non-textual terms and sought to define its societal influence in terms of cultural “turns,” a notion inspired by the philosophical work of Richard Rorty, who had explained similar shifts in textual reception and literacy as “linguistic turns.” Mitchell coined the term “pictorial turn” to describe a marked shift in the human sciences and public culture as it related to visual culture:

[T]he realization that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or “visual literacy” might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality.³⁶

When he wrote this statement in 1992, Mitchell felt that the issues surrounding the interpretation of pictorial representation were making themselves felt with “unprecedented force, on every level of culture.”³⁷ A similar moment may well have occurred in Greece, more specifically Athens, in the last quarter of the sixth and beginning of the fifth centuries BCE around the same time that theatrical performances become organized in Athens. There is

³⁵ Jonas (1966), 135-156.

³⁶ Mitchell (1994), 16.

³⁷ Mitchell (1994), 16.

strong material evidence of not only a fascination with the eye, spectatorship and visuality, but a marked change in attitudes to *opsis* and the various scopic regimes in which it operated.

Jàs Elsner has described this Greek visual turn as, “a series of paradigm shifts generated within this moment in Athenian culture, including the creation of tragedy, comedy and philosophy,” and groups them together as “a significant and coordinated reformation of subjectivity.”³⁸ Elsner places this transformation in the eyes of spectators via their changing relationship to objects from archaic to classical art and compares the frontal gaze of archaic sculptural works such as the Kroisos kouros from Anavyssos (530 BCE) with later Classical counterparts such as the Kritian Boy (480 BCE). According to this theory, the archaic *kouros* is a generic, iconic form that “denies naturalism”; its direct frontal gaze meeting the stare of the onlooker, in what Elsner describes as “a direct marking of recognition—of exchanged and mirrored gazes—across the worlds denoted by stone and flesh.”³⁹ Elsner traces the rise of naturalism in classical art to the development of “the glance” where a statue such as the Kritios Youth looks away, “on a specific point which happens not to be in the world of the viewer’s experience but in that of the statue’s own imagined experience.” This shift from the frontal “gaze” to the furtive “glance” creates a sense of naturalism in the artwork under view, where the perception that the object is existing in its own spatial field distances the viewer by placing him or her in the reflective role of a voyeur simultaneously observing and contemplating a visible narrative. Instead of an exchange of gazes that presents the viewer with the frontal sight of a figure in a separate world, Greek art of the classical period places figures “in a visual world *like* that which (the spectator) inhabits, and relates to that world by means of identification.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Elsner (2006), 68-69.

³⁹ Elsner (2006), 75-76.

⁴⁰ Elsner (2006), 85.

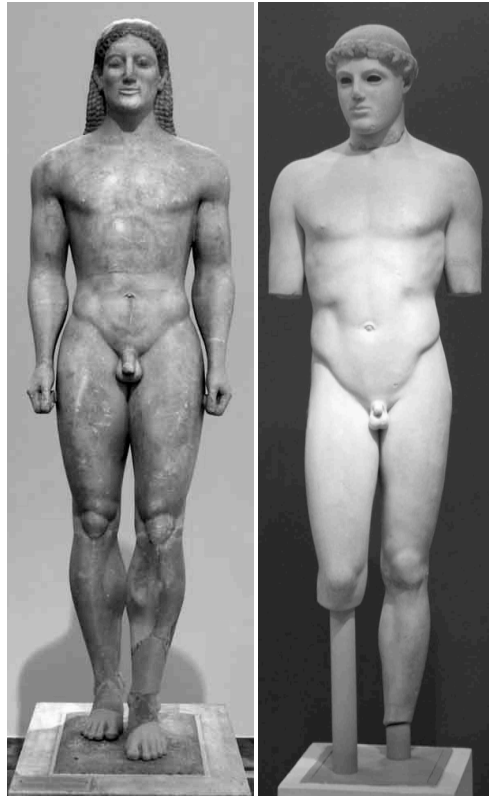


Fig 2. Left. The Kroisos Kouros from Anavysos c.540-515 BCE, National Archaeological Museum of Athens, 3851. Right. The Kritios Kouros c. 480 BCE, Acropolis Museum, Athens, 698.

This turn in Greek visual culture can be applied to the performing arts and especially the theatre. One of the prevailing mimetic arts of the sixth century BCE, choral performance, was not a form that strove for a naturalistic narrative, but instead presented the singular perspective of a choral group watched by spectators who they addressed directly in song and presentational dance. Even the advent of the first actor, who may have developed from the chorus leader, still predicated a direct, frontal exchange with the spectators. It was not until the plays of Aeschylus that the addition of the second actor created a new dramatic narrative form whereby performers could engage in dialogue between themselves. As Elsner states, “What has changed is the nature of audience participation from direct contact to that of collaboration or collusion with the dramatic enterprise.”⁴¹

Thus, the development of the dramatic narrative form may be closely linked to the rise of naturalism in Greek art, which facilitated a shift from the “gaze” to the “glance.” The act of

⁴¹ Elsner (2006), 88.

watching became both a highly personal activity and ever increasingly, a communal one, shared by a group of spectators who were also being defined by participating in the act of watching in a ritual/civic context. This created a multifaceted viewing experience in that the spectator both privately viewed the narrative they saw “on stage,” which elicited a personal and emotional response, and at the same time, they viewed their fellow spectators seated around them who viewed them in return. This act of *seeing* and *being seen* was essential to the whole idea of *theoria* (spectacle festivals) and as will be discussed in Chapter Two, many *theoric* elements are found in the performance culture of fifth century Athenian drama.⁴² Additionally, as spectators in the *theatron* at the City Dionysia watched drama, they were also before the gaze of the mask worn by the performers.⁴³

There is a striking emphasis on spectatorship found in vase painting of the period. This occurs both in the preponderance of symposium eye-cups that start to turn up in large numbers from the mid to late sixth century BCE and fall out of fashion by the beginning of the fifth, and the many vases that depict actual spectators often grouped around a central mythological or agonistic scene that also date from this same period. What is clear from material culture evidence available is that the Greeks were fully aware of the central role visuality played in their artistic and cultural lives and their relationship to the eye and ocular power was marked by significant iconographic motifs. What follows here is a survey of the three main categories of iconographic references to the eye, visuality and spectatorship from the mid sixth century to around 480 BCE—*ophthalmoi* (Ship’s Eyes); symposium eye-cups; and “spectator” vases. This evidence can provide an insight into the prevailing visual culture of the Greeks and help inform us how tragedy may have been *viewed*.

Ship’s Eyes

For the Greeks and in particular, the Athenians, whose culture, economy and military machine were so intimately tied with ships and seafaring, the eye played a significant and highly prominent role in the guise of *ophthalmoi*. These were sculptured marble eyes that were hung

⁴² See Woodruff (2008), 31-48.

⁴³ The visual functions of the dramatic mask will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

from the prow of a ship or the rendering of a single eye painted on each side of the ship's hull near the prow. The depiction of eyes on ships is attested as early as the late Bronze Age and images of vessels decorated with eyes are found on Archaic vases and particularly on Attic black-figure vases from the sixth



Fig. 3. Detail from an Attic red-figured stamnos, ca. 480-470 BCE. From Vulci. London, British Museum GR 1843.11-3.31 Odysseus and the Sirens.

century.⁴⁴ In addition, the rams of warships located beneath the prow were often also adorned with smaller eyes that could make the bow of the ship appear like a wild boar or bull. The frequency of animal head depictions on ships' prows might seem to suggest that the ship's eye was a stylistic remnant of a zoomorphic tradition in ship painting, something like the aggressive shark teeth and jaws painted on the front fuselages of U.S. Army Air Corps fighter aircraft such as the P-40 Warhawk and P-51 Mustang. However, many images of these feral ship prows show two sets of eyes; one representing the animal is usually confined to the area of the ram, while the other is situated higher up on the prow and is much larger. The animal eye also tends to look in the direction the ship is heading whereas the larger ship's eye looks

⁴⁴ Carlson (2009), 357-358.

out to the side.⁴⁵ Deborah Carlson has noted this distinctive feature of ship's eyes and how the pupils were painted with colored concentric rings that seem mask like.⁴⁶ Thus, the function of these eyes may have been anthropomorphic—to imbue the ship with a “personality.” However, although evidence from fourth century Athenian trireme lists show that vessels were given female names, most of them indicate some quality of the ship itself, such as *Nike* (“Winning”), *Protoplous* (“Foremost Sailor”) and *Eutyches* (“Lucky”), or a superlative reference to the ship's appearance, such as *Lampra* (“Gleaming”), *Chyrse* (“Golden”) or *Theama* (“Spectacle”). Additionally, many ships possessed geographical names, were titled after moral qualities, or were named after animals.⁴⁷ This would seem to suggest that the anthropomorphic theory of the ship's eye may be questionable and that triremes were not viewed as a representation of some kind of living organism (though the ship's rams may have been). Additionally the abstract rendering of both the large painted eyes, which closely resemble similar depictions of the eye on late sixth century eye-cups, and the smaller, round marble *ophthalmoi*, does not point to any attempt at naturalism or an effort to make the ship itself resemble either a human or animal form.

It would seem then that ship's eyes performed an apotropaic function, protecting the sailors from the perils of the sea while vigilantly gazing out at the open water or more specifically, warding off *baskania* by preventing the negative effects of envy from hampering their voyage. Their frontal, rather than directional, gaze is reminiscent of both the images on eye-cups and the frontality of the tragic mask. Sailing was, and still is, a precipitous business and the fear of the disastrous effects of divine envy on the vessel's good fortune were probably never far from a mariner's mind. This idea is encapsulated in *Odyssey* 13 when Alcinous, the Phaeacian king, reacts to the astounding sight of the ship that returned Odysseus to Ithaca being turned into a mountain and blocking his harbor. He tells of a prophecy that foretold Poseidon's envy (*agamai*) at the Phaeacian's ability to ferry all mankind and never suffer any misfortune (*Od.* 13.173). As we have already seen, one of the main functions of the apotropaic eye was to avert the “negative gaze” of envy.

⁴⁵ See Nowak (2006), 109, fig. 3.12.

⁴⁶ Carlson (2009), 357-9.

⁴⁷ Casson (1971), 351-3.

Further evidence that the ship's eye was regarded as apotropaic has been collected by Troy Nowak, who has demonstrated how both Greek and Roman vessels were decorated with several different types of symbols such as phalli, horns and *gorgoneia*.⁴⁸ This evidence of other apotropaic symbols adorning ancient ships would also seem to strongly indicate that ship's eyes performed the same function.⁴⁹

Whether Greek ships hung or fixed *ophthalmoi*, (small marble orbs,) on their prows, or painted the eyes, they were clearly regarded as an item of great importance to the ship's inventory. The Athenian naval records report ships with damaged eyes (*IG* 2² 1604.68) and report that on some vessels "there is no equipment and *even* the eye is missing" (*IG* 2² 1607.24). Eleven marble *ophthalmoi* have been found near the Athenian military harbor at Zea, and the fragments of three more from the Agora, one unearthed as recently as 2007.⁵⁰ Matthias Steinhart has suggested a tantalizing physical link between the spheres of Athenian seafaring and the theatre via Dionysian cult practices by advancing a theory that the Zea eyes could have been used to decorate the ship-float of Dionysos used during the Anthesteria festival to represent the god's arrival with the new vintage.⁵¹ While this cannot be conclusively proven, an Attic black-figure vase painting on a skyphos dated to 530-500 BCE depicts Dionysos riding in a wheeled ship and does feature a prominent ship's eye at the prow where a Satyr is seated playing an *aulos*.⁵² However, other Attic black-figure vase paintings depicting the same scene show smaller eyes that form part of the face of an animal painted on the ram or a ship and none show anything that might resemble marble *ophthalmoi*.⁵³ Ultimately the ship's eye may be a traditional motif and one that strongly indicates an apotropaic function that should be kept in mind when considering the frontal gaze of the mask in ancient drama and the gaze

⁴⁸ Nowak (2006), 116-137.

⁴⁹ Textual references to ship's eyes include Aeschylus' *Suppliants* where Danaos describes the approaching Egyptian ship with "eyes on the prow, scanning its forward path, obeying the rudder at the stern" (*Supp.* 716-18), Aeschylus' *Persians*, where the Greek ships are described as "dark eyed" *κυανώπιδες* (*Pers.* 558) and a passage in Philostratus, who describes the pirate ship that picks up Dionysos as seeing with "grim eyes set into its prow" (*Imagines*, 1.19.23-24).

⁵⁰ Carlson (2009), 348-349.

⁵¹ Steinhart (1995), 88-103.

⁵² See Csapo and Miller (2007), 157. Fig. 48.

⁵³ Pickard-Cambridge (1968), Fig. 13.

direction of the eyes of the mask itself and important feature of the tragic mask that will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Eye-Cups



Fig. 4. Attic black-figure kylix by Exekias, ca. 530 BCE. From Vulci. Munich Staatliche Antikensammlungen. Eye-cup with battle scenes.

One of the most celebrated images of Dionysos seated aboard a ship is on the interior of an Attic black figure kylix by Exekias from c530 BCE, now in Munich (figs. 4 and 5). The prow of the ship has a small circular eye with a clearly defined pupil that looks directly out at the viewer of the vase, rather than in the direction of the ship, which is where Dionysos seems to be looking, although interestingly, his eyes are not clearly painted. The ship's eye is edged by pronounced tear ducts and the rendering of this eye can be compared to the eyes of the seven surrounding dolphins, which are painted as a simple small circle and are absent of any pupil. But it is the outer body of this kylix that forms a tangible connection between Dionysos, the god of the theatre, the concept of spectatorship and the effects of sight, as this is an eye-cup adorned with two large gazing schematic eyes and bordered at the handles by scenes of warriors engaged in combat.⁵⁴ The Exekias eye-cup is one of the earliest and finest examples on this type of distinctive painted pottery that became wildly popular from around 535-500 BCE with thousands being produced in both Attic and Chalkidian workshops. In fact, from

⁵⁴ Jordan (1988), Plate II.

530-510 nearly all Attic cups recovered are eye-cups and over 2000 examples and fragments have been documented.⁵⁵



Fig. 5. Attic black-figure kylix by Exekias, ca. 530 BCE. From Vulci. Munich Staatliche Antikensammlungen. Dionysos in a ship, sailing among dolphins.

Although the eye motif is found on earlier eye-bowls from Eastern Greece and occur on other forms of painted pottery, the eye-cup seems to have no artistic precursor. It was incredibly popular until around 500 when the motif fell out of favor and apart from a few “retro” red figure versions from 500-480 BCE that seem to be deliberately evoking the earlier style, the eye-cup disappeared. Jeanne Jordan has suggested that this was due to a shift in artistic taste and a desire to utilize the full visual aspect of the cup for the depiction of more fluid figure-filled friezes.⁵⁶ Additionally, the eye-cup emphasized the direct frontal gaze with two piercing eyes sharply rendered by the outline of an oval contour culminating in a fine point at the top with a marked elongated tear duct at the bottom. This contained 1 to 4 compass-drawn concentric circles in red, white or black arranged around a centered black or white pupil (fig.

⁵⁵ See Jordan (1988), 1-2.

⁵⁶ Jordan (1988), 74.

4). These renderings closely resemble depictions of ship's eyes leading to the notion that the eye-cups may have also had an apotropaic function. Indeed, Isabel Raubitschek has even proposed that they are portrayals of actual ship's eyes.⁵⁷ However, it has been proposed that when the eye-cup was lifted to the drinker's lips, it "replaced" the face, creating a kind of mask.⁵⁸ The facial features of these cups are made up not only by the two large eyes, but also a "nose area," which is usually a decorative motif or a figure, such as a Silen, armed warrior, woman, or even Dionysos, and the handles, or other decorative devices that represent ears. Elizabeth Bell and Gloria Ferrari have both argued for a strong correlation between this eye-cup "face" and the mask of Dionysos, noting the associations between the symposium and the festivals and rites of the god.⁵⁹ This cup/mask game has been imagined by Rainer Mack, who describes the mask-like properties of a late sixth century Attic black figure *kylix* with two contour eyes with white circles that contain the face of the gorgon Medusa who stares out with her own two black eyes stating, "this manipulation of the image depends upon the fiction that the image *sees*."⁶⁰

Mack views the eye-cup as performing a social function among a male society of equals and that its gaze was claimed as a visual pleasure "more *geloia* than *baskania*."⁶¹ Likewise, John Boardman has described the sympotic use of the eye-cup in much the same terms: "the full facial effect is got by tilting the vase so that the handles look like ears and the underfoot a mouth: a view enjoyed by the drinker's companion, not the drinker himself."⁶² Yet, as Mack points out, the tondo image painted on the inside of the cup provided the drinker with further visual field that contained another image reflecting a variety of themes. These ranged from the Dionysian (as on the interior of the Exekias eye-cup) to the sympotic, heroic, erotic and *gorgoneia*, among many others. As the drinker drained the Attic black figure *Kylix* from the late sixth century, now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (1879.164) he would have first seen the vine of Dionysos then the god himself running along one edge of the tondo.⁶³ As he

⁵⁷ Raubitschek (1972), 217. For general theories of apotropaism on Greek vases see Hildburgh (1946), 155-158.

⁵⁸ Boardman (1974), 107.

⁵⁹ Bell (1977), 1-15; Ferrari (1986).

⁶⁰ R. Mack (2002), 577, fig. 4.

⁶¹ R. Mack (2002), 594.

⁶² Boardman (1974), 107.

⁶³ R. Mack (2002), 575, fig. 3.

drunk more he would find another pair of eyes gazing back at him, and as he drained the last drop he would have discovered a rather humorous Gorgon at the tondo's center. If the terrifying face of the Gorgon reflected the anger-streaked faces of warriors charging into combat then, in this case, the rather addled features of the Gorgon on the interior of this particular eye-cup may have reflected the state of the drinker who had perhaps by now imbibed far too much wine. Perhaps then, the eyes projecting out on the exterior surface of the cup were not only intended to meet the gaze of the man who watched his companion drink, but were also a representational comment on a popular symposium game. The wine may have obscured the image inside the cup and the recipient of the eye-cup would have discovered it only when the wine had been drunk, thereby creating an opportunity for humor, eroticism, appreciation and discourse.⁶⁴ With this in mind, Bowie has suggested that the symposium put the drinker to a test of his own nature—his behavior under its influence producing a multiplicity of possible identities and revelations just like the eye-cups from which he drank.⁶⁵ This concept of wine as some kind of “mirror of the soul” is found in Alcaeus (“wine is the mirror of mankind”) and Aeschylus (“a mirror is the bronze of beauty, wine of the soul”).⁶⁶

The notion of revelation and split/multiple identities is closely associated with Dionysian rituals and is articulated in the myth of the infant Dionysos and the Titans. According to Nonnos, the Titans distracted the god with some toys and a mirror and while he sat fascinated by his own reflection he was struck with a knife and dismembered. Here, Dionysos visually splits himself in two by acknowledging his own duplicate image in the mirror and is also physically cut in two by the knife of the Titans.⁶⁷ Richard Seaford has compared this Dionysian mythological trope with the description of Pentheus' double vision in Euripides' *Bacchae* (918-922,) asking if the scene may hold some deeper religious significance. His theory is supported by the evidence of a sixth century mirror found at Olbia that bears an inscription indicating its use in Dionysian ritual.⁶⁸ Also, the Dionysian properties of the myth of Narcissus have been noted by Vernant and the unreliability of ancient mirrors, which

⁶⁴ Mixed wine may have taken on a thin tawny appearance and therefore the image may have been somewhat visible, unless the game of “reveal the tondo” was played with the first drafts of unmixed wine that would have totally obscured the image.

⁶⁵ Bowie (1997), 17.

⁶⁶ Alcaeus fr. 333 Voigt, Aeschylus fr. 393 Radt. Taylor (2008), 94. Translated by the author.

⁶⁷ Nonnos, *Dionysiaka* 6.169-70.

⁶⁸ Seaford (1987), 76-78.

tended to be polished metallic surfaces that reflected distorted images, were no match for a reflection produced by liquid.⁶⁹ Therefore, the symposium drinker may have gazed at his own image reflected in the wine before drinking its intoxicating contents and uncovering a different identity at the bottom of the cup.⁷⁰

This concept of duality also underpins the function of the dramatic mask, which itself signifies what Susan Valeria Harris Smith has described as a double existence, “the masker . . . is at once himself and someone else . . . in this duality lies the omnipresent consciousness of the theater, of role playing, of temporary transformation.”⁷¹

The eye-cup itself also operated within the dualistic visual realm of Dionysos. The spectator watching the drinker lift his cup is presented with the “sympotic mask” of the cup’s outer “face”—a *prosopon* “before the face/gaze” of both drinker and spectator. The drinker sees his own reflection in the wine and the image on the tondo once he drains the cup. Just as an empty theatrical mask came to represent the world of the theatre, so the eyes on the cup also indicated its role in facilitating individual visual self-reflection. Guy Hedreen has termed this “involved spectatorship,” which “discourages the singer, drinker and/or spectator from contemplating the work of art or poetry from a cool distance,” embroiling them “fully in the fiction.”⁷² These eyes then, may be less an apotropaic motif than a signifier of cult function even if at a socially playful level. It should not be problematic to reconcile Dionysian cult practice with entertainment if we consider the religious environment of Athenian drama within the sanctuary of Dionysos at a festival in celebration of the god.

⁶⁹ Vernant (1990), 476. This Dionysian concept of the mirror image producing both a moment of self-identification and a sense of personal fragmentation is also found in the work of Jacques Lacan, particularly his theory of the “mirror-stage.” This is an explanation in psychoanalytic terms of the effects of a child between the ages of 6 and 18 months first looking into a mirror and first perceiving the sense that it is a separate and distinct being from its parents. Lacan felt that this was the first action that all later personal subjectivity was founded upon (Sarup, 1992, 64). For Lacan’s theory as it relates to Greek visual culture, see Stansbury-O’Donnell (2006), 54-60, and Buchan and Porter (2004).

⁷⁰ See Frontisi-Ducroux (1989), 163. “Ultimately it is his own face that the drinker encounters while looking into the cup he brings to his lips.” Frontisi-Ducroux describes this image as a “double of himself” but notes that the vase as a mirror can also reflect the negative effects of alcohol, such as sickness, vertigo and nausea.

⁷¹ Smith (1985), 2.

⁷² Hedreen (2007), 241.

Perhaps the demise of the eye-cup in the early fifth century was less to do with changing decorative taste than the result of the rise of drama as an instrument of state and the primary performative event for the rites of Dionysos. It may be significant that around the same time the *cavea* that overlooked the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus in Athens was enlarged. Theatre effectively replaced the interior visual games of the eye-cup, with its ritual associations and multiple perspectives of personal narrative, with a far more visible and public form of Dionysian representation in the theatre. Furthermore, this shift from a direct frontal and personal engagement with the eye-cup to the collective viewing of the narrative spectacles of Athenian drama is also reflective of Elsner's theory of a visual turn occurring at the end of the sixth and beginning of the fifth centuries. Now the personal frontal ambiguity of the eye-cup is replaced by the communal narrative ambiguity of the theatrical mask.

Spectator Vases

Vase painting provides another important glimpse of the visual culture of the Athenians in operation by means of the prevalence of "spectator vases" that became incredibly popular at the same time as the eye-cups in the last quarter of the sixth century BCE. These paintings usually depict a group of viewers standing passively watching a central scene that tends to be mythological, athletic or martial in nature. One such example is an amphora by Group E dated to 560-550 BCE, now in the Staatliche Museen in Kassel (fig. 6.). Side B shows two warriors centrally placed, dueling over a corpse. On either side stand two bearded men, the one on the left holding a spear, and both wrapped in fine cloaks. They stand passively watching, spatially encroaching on the action of the duel and yet in no way part of it.⁷³

The same type of ornately dressed passive spectators adorn an Attic black-figure amphora by Lydos also dated to 560-540 BCE and now in Paris at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Cabinet des Médailles 206). On side A, Herakles is depicted in the center wrestling with a lion and flanked by two men in striped cloaks (*himatia*) and one naked youth on the left. These spectators link this image to Side B, where

⁷³ A. Steiner (2007), 111, fig. 6.11.

two men also clad in *himatia* and two naked youths observe a scene of homosexual courtship. Here the inner spectators, the naked youths, each have one hand raised in a gesture while the clothed outer spectators stand passively watching.⁷⁴ These Spectator vases and the large numbers of similar works from this period raise important questions about the nature of Greek viewing: are these figures meant to be

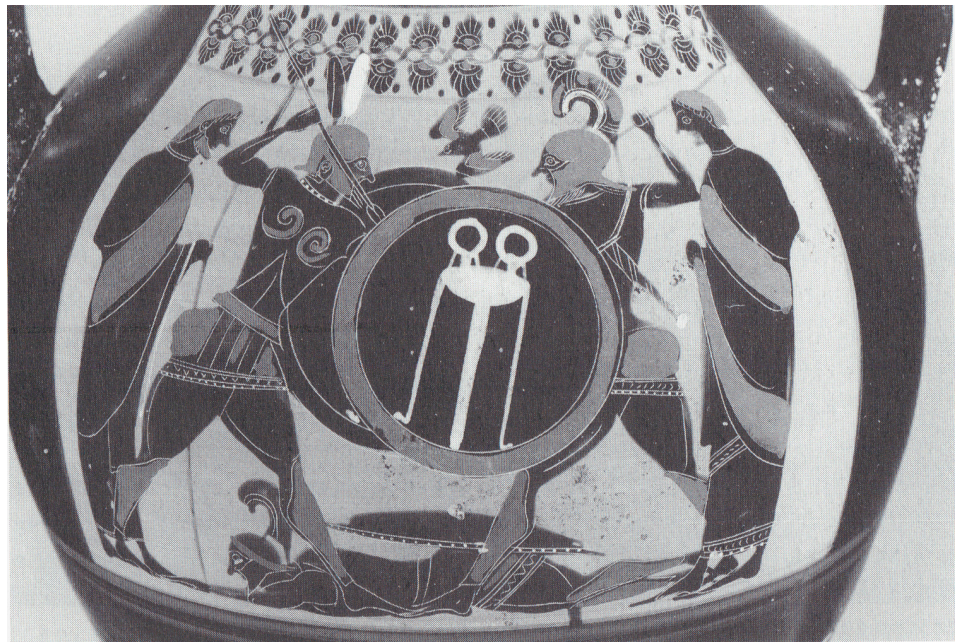


Fig. 6. Black-figure Amphora by Group E. 560-540 BCE. Kassel, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung T.674.

read as an integral part of the scene they are watching or are they intended to mediate the viewing experience of the image? Are they representatives of a certain section of society such as idealized Athenians intended to offer a paradigm of honorable spectatorship or, are they simply a decorative device, an artistic holdover from geometric funerary vases that depict rows of mourners gathered round a central scene of the dead on a bier? Certainly, these enigmatic spectator vases cannot be ignored in considering the visual culture of the Greeks.

Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell has identified four broad classes of spectators on Greek vases:

⁷⁴ A. Steiner (2007), 59, fig. 4.4.

1. *Invested Spectators*—clearly intended to be viewed as participants in the action depicted.
2. *Interested Spectators*—part of the narrative scheme of the painting but no potential to affect the action depicted.
3. *Detached Spectators*—part of the narrative but playing a lesser active role and usually in “contemporary scenes.”
4. *Pure Spectators*—not at all part of the narrative and removed from both the time and place of the scene.⁷⁵

As Stansbury-O'Donnell points out, if gods are included in the list of “viewers” we then have thousands of examples of spectator scenes; “someone is always watching something in Greek pictures.”⁷⁶ In his survey of the available evidence, he finds that the vast majority of spectator vases come from Athens and that there was no discernable difference between vases manufactured for the domestic market and those sold abroad. The dress and elaborate hairstyles of many of the spectators suggest that they represent a paragon of Athenian civic engagement and “their gaze, like the words of an actual chorus, diverts the viewers attention to the narrative example.”⁷⁷ At first sight this explanation might seem to embody the role of the chorus in fifth century drama; however, this comparison between the pictorial Athenian spectator depicted on these vases and the participant in choral performance does not take into consideration the wide variety of characterizations, geographic diversity and social status embodied by different choral groups in different tragedies. However, the analogy may be valid of the late sixth century—a time when a citizen’s social status and civic engagement was expressed by active participation in polis-wide ritual such as processions, sacrificial rites, praise songs, dance forms and *theoric* events where the division between performer and spectator was mutable and fluid. For instance, from at least the end of the sixth century in Athens, dithyrambic choral performances were presented by representatives of the spectators who watched them, many of whom would have themselves at one time or another performed

⁷⁵ Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006), 23.

⁷⁶ Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006), 24.

⁷⁷ Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006), 126.

in the same or at least a similar event.⁷⁸ Likewise the tragic chorus was also recruited from the general populace (perhaps the upper echelons). While the spectator vases are not specifically depicting a chorus in the act of performing, there is a strong aesthetic link between the convention of mediating pictorial scenes via the gaze of representational figures and the function of a chorus involved in the presentation of narrative mediated through song and dance.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the idealized figures on the spectator vases are shown finely dressed suggesting that they are watching the performance of ritual and that the spectators themselves expect to be viewed like the participants of a *theôria* who were also on visual display. They are also frequently shown watching mythological scenes—contemporary Athenians gazing on Herakles for example, and this conflation of temporal visual referents is an important narrative feature of Attic tragedy in the fifth century especially in relation to the presentation of local Athenian aetiologies.⁸⁰

Ann Steiner sees spectators on vase paintings as embodying the narrative device of the “genre-indicator” that alert the spectators to the type of performance they are about to experience. On the spectator vases the scenes are filtered through a recognizable visual system, “endorsed by social types for whom the observing figures in the image have particular meaning.” For example some events are viewed only by men such as athletics, putting on armor, symposium scenes and certain mythological scenes, some by a majority of women, but none by just women.⁸¹ This is akin to the kind of performance-based framing devices associated with formulaic introductions that signify to the listener the formality of the beginning of a presentation—something like “once upon a time” to introduce a child’s story.⁸² A similar “framing device” operates at the beginning of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Hesiod’s *Theogony* and *Works and Days* where divine agents and Muses are invoked in the first lines. We can also witness this operating in tragedy; for example, in the *parados* of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (104-107) where the chorus shifts from the strident anapests that have introduced them to the performance space to the lyric dactyls iambics that accompany their account of the

⁷⁸ Pritchard (2004).

⁷⁹ See Calame (1999), 125-132. For the chorus oscillating between the foveal and peripheral visual fields of the spectators in the *theatron* see Chapter Four.

⁸⁰ On aetiologies see Kowalzig (2007), 24-3, and chapter 3.

⁸¹ A. Steiner (2007), 57. On the difference between male and female spectatorship on vases see Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006), 128-229.

⁸² A. Steiner (2007), 57-59.

sacrifice of Iphigenia.⁸³ As the “music” of their performance changes so they present such a framing device singing that “divine Persuasion breathes through” their song.

In the realm of Performance Theory, Patrice Pavis analyzed the techniques employed by mime artist to create an effective gestural language that can be clearly “read” by the spectator. Just as Steiner proposes that the spectators depicted on vase paintings offer a formulaic motif that frames a narrative exemplum, so Pavis demonstrates how the mime artist frames performative gestural sequences, “by a mark indicating the beginning and end of one action so that it appears quoted like a word.”⁸⁴ This separates the mime’s gestures from everyday movements and alerts the spectator to follow an unfolding narrative thread. These narrative “quotation marks” are a feature of epic poetry, story-telling, song, dance and mime—in short, a performance technique. While modern nomenclature creates a linguistic division between the “visual arts” (incorporating vase painting) and the “performing arts” (such as theatre and dance), the Greeks made no such generalizing distinction. Therefore, the various visual devices employed to communicate the form and function of a vase painting operated in the same visual culture as the theatre and may well have had a direct correlation to the scopic regime within which the performing arts were presented. What we may be seeing depicted then on the spectator vases are articulations of performative acts such as the relating of mythological narratives, the presentation of armor, athletic events, etc. Thus, the painter may be expressing the public and performative nature of these forms via the inclusion of spectators. If the means by which people learned of the stories surrounding Herakles was via song, dance and spoken-word performance, then depicting a Heraklean myth being actively *watched* creates the framing device that indicates the dominance of performance forms within the culture.

While a ship’s eye might have be regarded as fully apotropaic to an Athenian serving at sea as a captain, marine or rower, the same man may have had a very different relationship to the

⁸³ William Scott points out that the entire *Oresteia* is “framed” by the use of these lyric dactyls that although occur sporadically throughout the work are not gathered together in this way again until the final processional song at the close of the Eumenides. Lyric dactyls are also reminiscent of oracular pronouncements and the lyric poetry that communicated the myths of the Trojan War. See Scott (1984), 35.

⁸⁴ Pavis (1982), 39.

representation of a similar eye on an eye-cup at a symposium. Furthermore, the traditional folkloric beliefs regarding the evil eye, the effects of the envious glare and visual *miasma* co-existed with philosophical and scientific theories of vision that sought to understand the eye in physical terms. Yet, taken together the evidence gathered here does display some common unifying factors that can provide some sense of how the Athenians *viewed* while watching dramatic performances.

1. Reciprocity: Vision is often represented as operating on a reciprocal basis. Theories of vision blend intraocular fire rays with *eidola* emanating from the object, a baleful or envious glare can cause harm and pollution can spread by means of vision.
2. Physicality: Sight was a physical sense equated with touch, it could affect the viewer physically. Extreme emotion was displayed by the eyes, which could physically transform (fiery, large, monstrous etc.)
3. Frontality: Direct frontal vision was regarded as the most powerful and the frontal gaze was both an apotropaic symbol that offered protection and a confrontational challenge to engagement (to stare into the eyes of the gorgon). Frontal eyes also suggested a mask, creating duality, the notion of embodying another and an emphasis on gaze direction.
4. Objectivity: Vision was involuntary. The eye processed what it saw mechanically and although what was seen might be regarded as false, this was viewed less as a cognitive function and more as the result of the activity of the image. Objects were not passive images waiting to be interpreted but active participants in the act of viewing. Only veiling, removal or blindness could stop objects from operating on (or in) the eyes.
5. Subjectivity: The scopic regime of spectatorship went through a marked change, a “visual turn,” around the end of the sixth century. The “gaze” became a “glance.”

Frontal presentation was supplemented with narrativity, which elicited a subjective personal response while at the same time operating in the public sphere.

6. Prominence: Sight was regarded as the most important of all the senses. That which is seen (*eidos*) can come to be known (*oida*). Seeing and being seen were highly honorable actions.⁸⁵

The fifth century Athenian tragic theatre operated within a scopic regime that is reflective of all the broad categories listed above. While we must be cautious of oversimplifying Greek visual culture we must also strive to place Greek drama within its original scopic regime and not a contemporary construct based on modern notions of the theatre and spectatorship. For us, viewing is a deeply personal experience and as theatre-goers we act more like voyeurs, watching from the shadows of a darkened auditorium, than the Athenians who sat in the open air on display to all. Questions pertaining to the chorus, masks, stage sets, narrative and physical action should be probed with a sense of the visual culture in which they were placed. Most relevant to this study is the fact that tragedy was presented within the rich visual field of the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus and the shrines, temples, monuments and civic sight available to both the bodily eye and the mind's eye of the spectator that were also intended to be viewed interactively and reciprocally. As will be discussed in chapter three, the view available to the spectators from the southeast slope of the Acropolis was a critical factor in both the reason for the establishment of a new performing space there and the subsequent development of tragedy. With this in mind, the next chapter will place the early development of drama in Athens within the scopic regime of the performance of collective movement and the culture of *theoria* (spectacle festivals) to examine what effect the visual culture of late sixth and early fifth century Athens had on the form of ancient Greek theatre.

⁸⁵ For example, Aristotle begins *Metaphysics* stating the sight is the most loved sense and "most of all makes us know." (*Met.* 980a). For other references sight being more reliable than hearing see Finglass (2007) n. on Sophocles' *Electra* 761-3. Messengers in tragedy often hold authority as an "eye-witness." The fact that they have actually witnessed an event with their own eyes is very important. See de Jong (1991), 9-12 and 183-4.

Chapter Two

Symporeia: The Spectacle of Procession

ἴστε γὰρ δὴπου τοῦθ' ὅτι τοὺς χοροὺς ὑμεῖς ἅπαντας τούτους καὶ τοὺς ὕμνους τῷ θεῷ ποιεῖτε, οὐ μόνον κατὰ τοὺς νόμους τοὺς περὶ τῶν Διονυσίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὰς μαντείας, ἐν αἷς ἀπάσαις ἀνηρημένον εὐρήσετε τῇ πόλει, ὁμοίως ἐκ Δελφῶν καὶ ἐκ Δωδώνης, χοροὺς ἱστάναι κατὰ τὰ πάτρια καὶ κνισᾶν ἀγνιάς καὶ στεφανηφορεῖν.

You surely realize that all your choruses and hymns to the god are sanctioned, not only by the regulations of the Dionysia, but also by the oracles, in all of which, whether given at Delphi or at Dodona, you will find a solemn injunction to the State to set up dances after the ancestral custom, to fill the streets with the savor of sacrifice, and to wear garlands.

Demosthenes, *Against Meidias* 21. 51¹

Demosthenes was furious after being publicly humiliated at the City Dionysia in 348 BCE. He had been an outspoken opponent of the military policies of Euboulos and his costly expedition to prevent Euboea from coming under enemy control. As a result, a certain Meidias, a supporter of Eubolos, saw fit to march up to Demosthenes, who was seated in a place of honor in the *theatron* as the *choregos* (citizen-producer) of the dithyrambic chorus from the tribe of Pandionis and in full view of the entire audience punch him in the face. At the time, Demosthenes subsequently prepared a suit against Meidias that sought to charge him with committing a public outrage against the sanctity of a religious festival. According to him, this impious act was carried out in sight of the people and the judges in the theatre - καὶ τούτων, ὅσα γ' ἐν τῷ δήμῳ γέγον' ἢ πρὸς τοῖς κριταῖς ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ (18). Therefore, Demosthenes called for the death sentence, not to punish a personal attack on him by one of his enemies, but

¹ Csapo (1995), 117.

because the sacredness of the City Dionysia was violated under the public gaze, a festival whose origins were steeped in the very idea of visual display or *theoria*. The case hung on Demosthenes' assertion that as the sanctity of the Festival of Dionysos was inviolable, so was he as a festival *choregos*, and to bolster this claim he included in his brief a reference to certain sacred oracles that called on the Athenians to take to the streets in celebration of Dionysos and perform sacrifices:

Αὐδῶ Ἐρεχθεΐδῃσιν, ὅσοι Πανδίουνοσ ἄστυ
ναίετε καὶ πατρίοισι νόμοις ἰθύνεθ' ἑορτάς,
μεμνήσθαι Βάκχοιο, καὶ εὐρυχόρους κατ' ἀγυιάς
ἰστάναι ὠραίων Βρομίῳ χάριν ἄμμιγα πάντας,
καὶ κνισᾶν βωμοῖσι κάρη στεφάνοις πυκάσαντας.

I say to the children of Erectheus who inhabit this town of Pandion
And regulate festivals by ancestral custom
To be mindful of Bacchos, and give thanks to Bromios
All together in the wide streets and to make smoke
Rise from the altars and to tie your head with garlands. . .

(Demosthenes, *Against Meidias* 52, tr. Csapo and Slater)

Both Demosthenes' own remarks and the recited text of the prophecy allude to the "ancestral custom" of public communal dance taking place in the "wide streets" of the city. Likewise, earlier in the same speech Demosthenes also cited the contemporary fourth century "law of Euegoros" that afforded debtors amnesty from prosecution during various sacred festivals:

Εὐήγορος εἶπεν: ὅταν ἡ πομπὴ ἢ τῷ Διονύσῳ ἐν Πειραιεῖ καὶ οἱ κωμῳδοὶ
καὶ οἱ τραγῳδοί, καὶ <ἢ> ἐπὶ Ληναίῳ πομπῇ καὶ οἱ τραγῳδοὶ καὶ οἱ
κωμῳδοί, καὶ τοῖς ἐν ἄστει Διονυσίοις ἡ πομπὴ καὶ οἱ παῖδες καὶ ὁ κῶμος
καὶ οἱ κωμῳδοὶ καὶ οἱ τραγῳδοί, καὶ Θαργηλίων τῇ πομπῇ καὶ τῷ ἀγῶνι, μὴ

ἐξεῖναι μήτε ἐνεχυράσαι μήτε λαμβάνειν ἕτερον ἑτέρου, μηδὲ τῶν
ὑπερημέρων, ἐν ταύταις ταῖς ἡμέραις.

Euegoras moved: whenever there is the procession for Dionysos in Piraeus and comedy and tragedy, whenever there is a procession at the Lenaion and tragedy and comedy, whenever there is at the City Dionysia the procession and the boys <dithyramb> and the *komos* and comedy and tragedy, and whenever there is a procession at the Thargelia. It shall not be permitted to take security or to arrest another, not even those past-due their payments during these days.

(Demosthenes *Against Meidias* 10, tr. adapted from Csapo and Slater)

It is notable that these three festivals to Dionysos and one to Apollo (the Thargelia) are described in terms of the *pompe* (procession) and although tragedy and comedy are referenced it is the procession that stands out as the central descriptive element for these performing-arts festivals. Thus, the idea of dance and procession being presented in the streets of Athens as both a fundamental element of major civic ritual practice and an ancient custom demonstrates the great importance of the public visual display in Athenian culture. It also situates Greek drama firmly within the context of what I have called “symporeia” (“collective movement”).² This term covers several forms of performative group movement such as procession, communal street reveling, choral dance and dramatic gestural movement—all originally intended to publicly display people moving and dancing through community space, usually on their way to perform open-air sacrificial rites to honor their gods. If *opsis* is to be regarded as a fundamental element in the development, presentation and understanding of Greek drama, then an examination of the theatre’s deep connections to symporeia, where visual display is dominant, may prove illuminating. Symporeia had a profound effect on ancient drama and its influence can be discerned in many interrelated areas, such as the festival environment that drama was placed in, the theatrical use of the chorus, the location and architecture of the

² Alan Sommerstein was kind enough to suggest this term to me.

theatre, and much of the narrative content of the plays themselves. Additionally, performance-based movement forms were closely related to other types of symporeia essential to the community such as hoplite drill, rowing and agricultural work. Thus, in the iconography of hoplite warfare, the aulos player is frequently depicted marching with the troops and is also shown on images relating to both choral dance and drama. This chapter will examine the performative roots of Greek drama in symporeia and its close association with Greek visual culture by exploring the movement forms that influenced drama: dance, *komos*, and the procession to establish how the concept of symporeia influenced and continued to operate within fifth century drama.

Origins

The performance theorist Richard Schechner describes early performance forms as, “natural theatre”—the theatre of everyday life. He divides this into two broad categories: “eruptions” and “processions.”³ An “eruption” is a static event that unfolds in one location where a crowd gathers to watch. This may be a road accident, a piece of impromptu street theatre, a fight, or any notable visual event that has the ability to hold the attention of a spectator. In an “eruption” spectators come and go and engage in mostly interrogative speech where they ask what happened and replay the event to each other in a kind of re-performance of the original “eruptive” event.

Conversely, a procession has a predetermined route and a fixed, final goal. It follows an organized structure and a commonly understood form. Hence, the visual displays inherent in the procession are very important in communicating identity, status and power. Schechner describes how the procession has a tendency to make several stops along its route where associated stationary performances take place. These are processional “eruptions” and spectators can gather to watch, participate and/or continue to follow the procession to its ultimate goal.”⁴ Thus, participation at a procession is far more active than at an “eruption” as processions by their very nature usually require a large number of participant/performers in

³ Schechner (1988), 153-186.

⁴ Schechner (1988), 159-160.

order to achieve their aim of providing a spectacle suitable of transforming the territory they cross from the everyday to the extraordinary. Spectatorship at a procession is also mediated by constantly shifting boundaries between performance forms. For example, the spectators may watch a procession by placing themselves in a static viewing position and observe it passing. Alternatively, they might shift their position and move to one of the several stops of the procession route in order to watch a standing performance (in ancient processions this would usually be a song, dance or a dance-play). Furthermore, as the processional form encourages a general movement by the spectators to observe the several static performances staged along the route, spectators could find themselves swept up by the motion of the procession, moving with it from point to point and on to its final destination.

The idea, cited by Demosthenes, that the roots of Dionysian worship could be traced to the “ancestral custom” of choral performance in the streets, in other words some type of processional event, is also supported by Aristotle who similarly suggested that drama developed from those who “led-off” dithyrambic choruses and phallic processions.

γενομένη δ' οὖν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτοσχεδιαστικῆς—καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ ἡ κωμωδία, καὶ ἡ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐξαρχόντων τὸν διθύραμβον, ἡ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τὰ φαλλικά ἄ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐν πολλαῖς τῶν πόλεων διαμένει νομιζόμενα—

Anyway, arising from an improvisatory beginning both tragedy and comedy—tragedy from the leaders of the dithyramb and comedy from the leaders of the phallic processions which even now continue as a custom in many of our cities—

(Aristotle *Poetics* 1448a10-15, tr. Richard Janko)

Aristotle’s use of the term αὐτοσχεδιαστικῆς (“improvisatory”) recalls the kind of spontaneous performance “eruptions” described by Schechner. Aristotle also uses this same

term to describe rhythm at *Poetics* 1488b23 where poetry is imagined as developing organically from instinctual behavior and there is more relevant information found at 1449a:

ἔτι δὲ τὸ μέγεθος ἐκ μικρῶν μύθων καὶ λέξεως γελοίας διὰ τὸ ἐκ σατυρικοῦ μεταβαλεῖν ὅψε ἀπασεμνύνθη, τό τε μέτρον ἐκ τετραμέτρου ἱαμβεῖον ἐγένετο. τὸ μὲν γὰρ πρῶτον τετραμέτρῳ ἐχρῶντο διὰ τὸ σατυρικὴν καὶ ὀρχηστικωτέραν εἶναι τὴν ποίησιν.

Being a development of the Satyr play, it was quite late before tragedy rose from short plots and comic diction to its full dignity, and that the iambic meter was used instead of the trochaic tetrameter. At first, they used the tetrameter because its poetry suited the Satyrs and was better for dancing.

(Aristotle *Poetics* 1449a20-25, tr. Richard Janko)

Dance

The key term found in the passage of *Poetics* cited above is *orchestikos* or “fit for dancing” (1449a25) and here Aristotle makes a clear connection between the origins of tragedy and its roots in the performance of dance (*choros*). In modern parlance, the word “chorus” has come to denote a group of singers, but in ancient Greek the term has several interrelated meanings all connected to the idea of group *movement*. Thus, it can mean dancers, the dancing place, and the thing that was danced.⁵ In tragedy, the chorus sung *and* danced and the prominence of dance in ancient drama was reflected in the title of the wealthy citizen who received public acclaim for producing the play, the *choregos* (leader of the dance). However, several scholars have come to adopt the term popularized by Herington, “Song Culture” to describe the Greek performance tradition especially in relation to the complex issue of orality and literacy; however, this approach still favors a textual analysis over a visual one.⁶ In ocular terms, and considering the views of Aristotle described above, “dance culture” might be a more

⁵ The term *orchestra* for “dancing place” is first found in Aristotle *Prior Analytics* 901b30.

⁶ See Herington (1985). Also see Havelock (1986); Nagy (1990); Thomas (1992 & 2009); Ford (2003).

appropriate definition.⁷ Yet, choral dance is not the performance of an individual dancer or partnered dancing, it is the manifestation in movement (often *with* song) of a highly organized presentational group interaction with performative roots in the procession as religious spectacle—what Guy Hedreen has described as “an inherently visual phenomenon.”⁸

Dance in a presentational and processional context might be better understood within the terms of spatial configurations that define relationships between individual people, individuals and groups and different groups. Movement analyst Irmgard Bartenieff noted that these movement configurations outline the territory where action-interaction develops and communicates what that action-interaction might become. The individuals within a certain choral group might be placed in files, rows, circles or a variant of them and this basic configuration, “will be critical to the nature of their confrontations with each other and of the confrontations of their group with another group.”⁹ For example, Bartenieff regarded the file, where participants line up directly behind each other, as a predominantly passive movement form for an individual within a group with minimal interaction. It is always deliberately chosen rather than organic and it is used with prisoners or slaves as a configuration of compliance and control. On the other hand, the row, where participants are placed side by side, provides “an interrelationship of equality” and encourages the sharing of the same action and group focus. The row, the form that has been most often associated with the tragic chorus,¹⁰ projects solidarity, and enables both advancing and retreating, “mutual reinforcement” and an unbroken line against an intruder. Bartenieff also notes that a row can most easily lead to a circle. The circle, which is often associated with the dithyramb,¹¹

⁷ Or what Henrichs has termed “dance-song” (*khoreia*); Henrichs (1995), 57.

⁸ Hedreen (2004), 38.

⁹ Bartenieff (1980), 130.

¹⁰ Calame (2001), 34-35.

¹¹ D’Angour (1997), 331-351, has also identified the strengths of the circular dance form for creating group unity especially in the case of dance with vocal delivery. He suggests that the Dithyramb may have originally been a processional event that was organized into a circular form by Lassos of Hermione around the end of the sixth century. Pindar’s *Dithyramb* 2, starts by referring to how the dithyramb was once “stretched out like a like a rope” but now the chorus dances “in a circle.” D’Angour’s theory does highlight what seems to be a marked development from symporeutic performance to stationary performance with symporeutic elements around this time. I argue in Chapter Three that this is due to a reorganization of the festival and the establishment of the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus. The circle-dance was not only associated with the dithyramb but was also a feature of the dance performance of lyric as opposed to the rectangular form of tragic dancing. See Calame (2001), 34-35. Circle dances are found depicted on Achilles’ shield in the *Iliad* (18.504), performed by Phaeacian boys in the *Odyssey* (8.250), led by Theseus around the altar at Delos in *The Hymn to Delos* of Callimachus (300-16) and frequently associated with the Delian Maidens (Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Taurus* 427-430, *Iphigenia at*

promotes group cooperation and collective sharing as there is a universal relationship to the center when the group faces it and therefore each other. In addition to the side-to-side contact offered by the row - “the shared relationship with a center makes body, space and Effort tensions more synchronous.”¹² The circle, where the individual members of the group face inwards, promotes the development of a common rhythm as steps are transmitted equally from side-to-side and across the center of the circle, even to the individual who may be furthest away, thus unifying the group. “In the circle effort flow most easily helps establish the common continuity of the movement and the common order of step directions. A circle thus brings people together, it is one of the oldest forms of social congregation in dance.”¹³ It is notable then, that where processions halt at key locations for static performances it is the circle dance that tends to prevail.¹⁴ Bartenieff’s work also examined the group movement dynamics of spontaneous improvisations and she concluded that they often contained elements of confrontations that appear in communities and their performance by the group helps reinforce acceptable rules of community interrelationships. She notes that when they do break out and momentarily threaten the harmony of the group the tension is often mitigated by the emergence of a common “effort rhythm” that spreads throughout the entire group and helps to reinforce its solidarity.

In *Laws*, Plato finds no real division between dances and processions and posits that the ability to create ordered movement in a chorus is given by the gods and distinguishes men from animals (653e).¹⁵ He goes on to make the famous statement that the uneducated man is ἀχόρευτος “without the dance” (654a). However, Plato’s Athenian wants the right to censor exactly what is performed and determine what is “good” or “bad.” For him, the crossing of genres in μουσική “the arts of the muses” has caused the spectators to become judges and establish a θεατοκρατία (*theatrocracy*) (701a) where their mass approval of what is shown to

Aulis 1054-1057 and *Herakles* 687-690). Heyschius describes the chorus itself in terms of a circle or crown (s.v. chorus X 645 Schmidt) and Callimachus imagines the islands of the Cyclades surrounding Delos like a chorus (*Hymn to Delos* 300-301).

¹² Bartenieff (1980), 132.

¹³ Bartenieff (1980), 132.

¹⁴ See below for a description of the spontaneous circle dances that break out at key locations at the Skyrian *Apokries*.

¹⁵ See Lonsdale (1993), 41.

them has negated the finer points of good taste and what is good for them to see.¹⁶ Dance is a powerful cultural communicator for Plato and dance historian Judith Lynne Hanna has stated, “motion has the strongest visual appeal to attention for it implies a change in the conditions of the environment which may require action. Used extraordinarily in the dance, motion is potentially related to the experience of arousal and motivation.”¹⁷ This is directly applicable to symporeutic forms such as the procession and choral drama that seek to transform their respective environments via the use of group movement, visuality, dance, music and rhythm. Hanna goes on to point out that in dance, the motor/visual-kinesthetic channels predominate instead of the vocal/auditory channels in that language exists in a temporal dimension whereas dance involves the temporal plus the three dimensions of space. Thus, the relationship of a procession to the space it moves through is an essential feature that links the visual display to its environment, both ritualizing the city streets and visiting locations of religious and civic significance to imbue the event with additional power. Additionally, the inclusion of city sights within the rituals of the procession is an element that features strongly in drama where mythological (in the case of tragedy) or metaphorical (in the case of comedy) narratives are often set against the topography of the city, which was within the actual visual field of the spectators.

Komos

A semblance of Greek symporeia is apparent on the many depictions of the “padded dancers,” and reveling figures shown on the so-called *komast* vases mainly dated to the early to mid sixth century BCE. These paintings often have been used as evidence for the roots of drama in ribald dancing associated with drunkenness, physicality and group dance and they seem to provide an iconographic affirmation of Aristotle’s theory that tragedy developed out of “satyr-like” performances.¹⁸ However, Richard Seaford has recently cautioned against adopting such a linear and diachronic approach to this material preferring to make the point that the padded dancers do not allow us to say that this kind of performance was the ancestor of tragedy.

¹⁶ μουσική is usually translated as “music” but Plato may have the performances as a whole in mind—dance, music and visuality.

¹⁷ Hanna (1987), 75.

¹⁸ Csapo and Miller (2007), 8-10.



Fig. 1. Boeotian kantharos c. 550-540 showing a dancing choral group. (München 6010 [419]).

Rather, they exemplify the type of performance Aristotle had in mind, which he related to Athenian satyr masquerades.¹⁹ Both of these forms were still living traditions in the fifth century and enshrined in the several Athenian festivals to Dionysos as the *komos* procession and the satyr play. In this way, both tragedy and comedy continued to inter-relate to these forms and different genres of the performing arts continued to cross-pollinate. This connectivity across performance genres can be seen operating in a number of ways, such as the use of tragic material in old comedy, the processional use of the chorus in tragedy, the padded costumes of old comedy, the wearing of the phallus by comic actors, and the performance of satyr-plays by tragic casts. This “spilling over” of other symporeutic forms into the theatre also included related events such as the parade of the orphans and the display of the allied tribute before the *theatron* that may have been part of the Dionysia at some point in the fifth or fourth century.²⁰ All these forms are tied together by the use of the mask and/or distinctive costuming and movement—visual devices that instantly separate performer from spectator, heightening the event being observed and transforming those performing from

¹⁹ Seaford (2007), 383.

²⁰ Carter (2007), 35-43.

everyday Athenians to theatrical figures worthy of attention.²¹ The mask will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four and while not every participant in the procession was fully masked, the wearing of costumes, wreaths and the garlanding of hair all contributed to the visual heightening of the total ocular experience. This “visual heightening” is apparent on many *komast* vases where we see the depiction of extraordinary clothing in the form of padded costumes that exaggerate bodily features. There are also several renderings of dancing figures in masks and the display of heightened group movement via pronounced and often highly energetic dance steps (fig. 1). Additionally, these *komast* figures are more often than not depicted as “grotesques”—an extreme form of humanity emphasizing the corporeal movement of wildness, excess and an embracement of the extreme.

Seaford describes the padded dancers as depicting an “anti-ideal”; their appearance is a deliberate visual distortion of human norms, they are ugly, obese, sometimes lame and are surrounded by the imagery of the anti-city, wild places, and fierce untamed creatures.²² Yet, one dominant unifying visual motif found in the depiction of these *komasts*, padded dancers, silens and satyrs is that apart from symposium scenes where the subjects are shown reclining, the figures are usually shown dancing, arranged in a procession and moving through space.²³ Seaford relates these grotesque dancers to a similar living tradition of processional dance-drama called the *Apokries*, a spring carnival that still takes place every year in many communities throughout Greece. In particular, Seaford notes how the *Apokries* on the island of Skyros bears a “remarkable resemblance to an ancient Dionysiac festival.”²⁴ While this is not the place to seek to unravel the origins of the modern Skyrian *Apokries* an examination of the performative elements of that festival can increase our understanding of the role that *komos* dance, procession, spectatorship and environment played in ancient Greek performance and provide a valuable basis for analyzing the relationship of the procession to drama.

²¹ On transformation in Dionysian rituals see Csapo (1997), 253-295; Cole (1993), 25-38.

²² On padded dancers and grotesque outcasts see Green (2007), 96-107; Isler-Kerenyi (2007), 77-95.

²³ For a thorough study of the so-called “komast vases” and their relationship to the origins of drama see Csapo and Miller (2007).

²⁴ Seaford (2007), 400, n.4.

Apokries



Fig. 1.2 Masquerder from Skyros c.1904. Dawkins (1904).

Each spring on the island of Skyros in the northern Aegean during the three week period prior to Lent, certain men from the island dress in padded black shaggy costumes and tight stockings and mask their faces with the skin of a young goat. They tie their waists with ropes and attach several large metal goat-bells that all together can weigh up to fifty kilos. These men carry a shepherd's crook and are called *geroi* (old men), they are accompanied by younger men and boys dressed in women's clothes called *koreia* (girls) who are masked by veils and dressed in white. The *koreia* clear a path for the *geroi* as they move through the streets of Skyros in small groups. Another figure that can be seen is the *phragkos* (Frank or foreigner) who has one bell tied to his rear end and carries a large seashell. As the *geroi* move through the hilly streets of Skyros' main harbor town they affect a dance-like running gait consisting of jerky leaps, swaying hips, bent knees and deliberately placed angular foot falls that distinguish their movements from normal everyday walking or running. At certain locations such as small squares, church forecourts and high open areas they stop and form circle-dances by swinging their hips in unison generating a rhythmic aggressive ringing. The journey of a *geros* is arduous and aggressive as it moves through the upper town until its final destination on the main square near the harbor in the evening. On their way, spectators freely exchange insults and barbs with the *geroi* and occasionally pushing and shoving breaks out

between them.²⁵ This goes on over three weekends culminating in a final dance parade and ship-cart-led procession on the last Sunday, called the *Trata*.

An association between the Skyrian *Apokries* and ancient Dionysian festivals was made by a number of British scholars who visited the island in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. J. C. Lawson writing in 1899 described what he saw as a “beast dance” pondering “Whether this custom may be a survival of Bacchic or other orgies.”²⁶ Then, in 1905, R. M. Dawkins made a trip to Skyros from Athens to observe the carnival and provided a detailed account of the festivities. His article collected in the 1904/05 Annual of the British School in Athens included illustrations of a *geros* that differs little from the costumes worn by the participants in the festival today. Dawkins commented that a fully dressed *geros* resembled “a grotesque shepherd plus a mask and bells” and that it was mainly the shepherds who took this part, reasoning that “owing to their remote life, shepherds preserve customs.”²⁷ He witnessed the *geroi* tripping people up with their shepherd’s crooks and preserved a local explanation for the carnival that it commemorates a shepherd who lost all his sheep through exposure to a snowy winter. However, David Shulman and Guy Stroumsa have explained the festival as an articulation of the near madness of the goatherd who will throughout his life, sacrifice and eat the goats he loves.” As the sacrificial rites of Easter approaches with its need for the slaughter of several of the shepherd’s flock, the violent, jagged, exhausting dances of the *geroi* are both a test of manhood and a way to steel the shepherd’s spirits against the killing that is to come.²⁸

²⁵ A video of the Skyros *Apokries* by the Skyrian Society for the Preservation of Skyrian Culture is available for public viewing at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yg4Trxcf36M&feature=related>. The video shows footage from the 2008 *Apokries* where the *geroi* can be seen processing through the streets accompanied by both *koreia* and *Franks*.

²⁶ Lawson (1899), 125-127. Lawson mentions that a steadily increasing influx of Western culture had a marked effect on the festival, observing that several participants were wearing “Ally Sloper” masks, the bulbous-nosed fictional cartoon character created for the British magazine *Judy* in 1867 and one of the first “syndicated” cartoon characters with his own comic strip magazine, merchandise and films. In 2008, some participants in the *Apokries* on Skyros wore masks of Disney characters.

²⁷ Dawkins (1904), 72-80. Dawkins also documented a similar festival held at the village of Haghios Gheorghios near Viza in northern Greece (Thrace) involving men masked by goatskin with a stuffed headdress for receiving blows, and goat-bells tied to their waists. These *kalogeri* processed around the village accompanied by male participants dressed as women, gypsies and policemen. These characters stopped at certain open spaces to perform dance-plays or wordless dramas depicting narrative schemas such as the forging of the ploughshare, phallic play, ritual killing and the flaying of the dead and ritual mourning; Dawkins (1906), 191-206. Ridgeway depended heavily on Dawkins’ observations of these seemingly age-old rituals including them in his *Origins of Tragedy* published in 1910. The dance-dramas or “pantomimes” as Dawkins terms them are suggestive of Aristotle’s μικρῶν μύθων (“short plots”) that he associates with the origins of drama. See also Wace (1909), 232-253.

²⁸ Shulman and Stroumsa (2002), 268-267.



Fig. 2. *Geroi* dancers accompanied by *koreia*. Skyros *Apokries* festival 2007. Note the goatskin masks, passed shoulders and tight-fitting leggings.

The Skyrian *Apokries* carnival is held over the weekends leading up to Lent usually in February/March, the same time that the City Dionysia took place (both are spring festivals celebrating the return of vegetation and fecundity). On the final Sunday during the day, another event takes place called the *Trata* (fishing boat). Here a boat is taken out of the water and mounted on a wheeled trailer and a comic crew of around 20-30 “sailors” and a “captain” assembles wearing black make-up and simple costumes. The boat is pulled through the town accompanied by a procession of “sailors” and spectators who follow the wheeled craft. The final destination is the town’s main square where the boat comes to a halt and is encircled by a large crowd; there, the captain and crew recite rhyming offensive poems from the boat as they are approached by an array of comic foils that try to “arrest” or “impound” the boat and its crew. These tend to be comic policemen, the harbormaster, local government or EU officials. All of them get short shrift from the crew and a quick and clever insulting poem, much to the delight of the watching crowd.²⁹ The array of comic officials that assault the boat bring to mind similar scenes in Aristophanes, such as *Birds* 862-1057, where Peisetaerus is attempting to perform a foundation sacrifice for his new city and is also constantly interrupted by a cast of odious “officials” including a priest, a poet, a prophet, Meton the astronomer, an inspector and a lawyer. In *Acharnians* (719-970) Dicaeopolis is harassed by a variety of scroungers and

²⁹ A video of the *Trata* from 2004 by the Society for the Preservation of Skyrian Culture can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IkvwO2pk&feature=related>.

sycophants, and in *Clouds* (1214-1302) Strepsiades violently dispatches his troublesome creditors. After similarly rudely dispensing with the Skyrian “sycophants” the *Trata* ends with a circle dance performed by the crew and the arrival of the *geroi* who mass for a final evening dance in the town square.³⁰

There are several performative forms existing within the Skyrian *Apokries* that seem to function in a similar manner as those found within our sources for ancient Athenian processions and symporeutic events. These include:

- The use of masks and extreme costumes
- The cross-gendering of roles
- The embodiment of socially marginalized characters (young women, foreigners, old men, grotesques and “wild-men”)
- The varieties of dance (processional, choral and participatory)
- The reenactment of violence and the embracement of revelry
- The use of music, song and invective poetry

There is also the function of the procession itself, which not only propels the various spectacles but also locates them at clear visual points of civic, topographical and religious importance to the community.³¹ This culminates with the *Trata* and the final mass gathering of the *geroi* in the main town square with its potent combination of music, dance, poetry, abuse and satirical drama. The arrival of the *Trata* at the carnival’s temporal and geographic end-point is a case that bears close comparison to similar elements found in Athenian symporeutic performance culture. Several ancient sources refer to the phrase “from the wagons” meaning to offer up an insult and this may be a reference to the practice of parading the image of Dionysos through the streets of Athens on board a ship that had been mounted on a cart.³² This very image can be seen on several sixth century vase paintings and Robert Parker has

³⁰ Amanatidis (2009), 127-140.

³¹ For the relationship of masks, cross-dressing, therianthropy, dance, procession, ritualized violence and obscene behavior to the worship of Dionysos see Csapo (1997), 253-295.

³² Plato, *Laws* 1.637b; Demosthenes, *On the Crown* 18.122; Aristophanes *Knights* 547-550, *Suda* ε 1530 Adler, Photius s.v. *ta ek ton hamaxon* and *Suda* π 2023 Adler, Harpocration s.v. *pompeias kai pomeuin*.

catalogued four black figure *skyphoi* that depict Dionysos riding in a ship cart accompanied by satyrs and a *skyphos* in Bologna that shows the cart accompanied by mortals in a procession leading a sacrificial bull.³³ However, it is impossible to say for certain if these images relate to the City or Rural Dionysia, the Anthesteria or even the Lenaea—all festivals sacred to Dionysos, the god of arrival and the “eternal visitor.” We cannot even be sure if these ship cart depictions are symbolic and meant to represent the spirit of Dionysos inhabiting a processional vehicle, or are a depiction of the way in which the god’s cult statue was conveyed. Although, as Parker maintains, “the problem remains unsolved,” from the textual evidence we have it does seem that at some point abusive song and poetry were hurled by people riding in carts participating in some sort of procession in honor of Dionysos.³⁴ Here the similarities between the ancient Athenian Dionysia and the contemporary tradition of the Skyrian *Trata* are quite profound.

The *Apokries* in Skyros may afford a glimpse of the performance forms that have been associated with the *komos*, the celebratory and processional dance revel that seems to be depicted on over 2000 vases and other artifacts from across the Greek world. Many of these so-called *komast* vases show the dancers slapping and striking each other playfully, another feature found in the Skyrian *Apokries* where the daytime procession can turn into an atmosphere of violence by evening. Violence and physical play at the *Apokries* was reported by Dawkins in 1904 and at a similar springtime festival in Haghios Gheorghios near Viza in northern Greece in 1906 where he saw padded costuming that allowed the spectators to strike blows on the passing “wild-men” characters.³⁵ A similar scene is described occurring at the torch race at the Panathenaea festival by Dionysos in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*:

Μὰ Δί’ οὐ δῆθ’, ὥστε γ’ ἀφαιάνθην
 Παναθηναίοισι γελῶν, ὅτε δὴ
 βραδὺς ἄνθρωπός τις ἔθει κύψας
 λευκός, πίων, ὑπολειπόμενος

³³ Parker (2005), 302-303.

³⁴ Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 12-16.

³⁵ Dawkins (1906), 191-206; Dawkins (1904), 72-80.

καὶ δεινὰ ποιῶν· κᾶθ' οἱ Κεραμῆς
ἐν ταῖσι πύλαις παῖους' αὐτοῦ
γαστέρα, πλευράς, λαγόνας, πυγὴν,
ὁ δὲ τυπτόμενος ταῖσι πλατείαις
ὑποπερδόμενος
φυσῶν τὴν λαμπάδ' ἔφευγεν.

DIONYSOS:

No, by god, they're not. That's why
while at the Panathenaic games
I laughed myself quite pissless—
a slow, pallid, porky runner
went on by—head drooping down—
far behind the rest. In that race
he wasn't very good. Well then,
the folks at Keremeios gate
began to whack him in the gut,
to hit his ribs and sides and butt.
While their hands were slapping him,
he let rip a tremendous fart,
which killed the torch. Then on he ran.

(Aristophanes *Frogs* 1089-1098, tr. Ian Johnston)

On Skyros, this kind of ribald mock violence increases as the evening arrives and alcohol flows, both to the *geroi* in the form of offerings from the houses they visit and the spectators who drink while watching the procession. This is another strong link between the *Apokries* and the ancient *komos*, which also celebrated Dionysos in his guise of god of the new vintage, a connection notoriously formed by Archilochus and applied to the dithyramb:

For I know how to lead off the beautiful dithyramb song of the lord Dionysos, my
mind blasted with wine.

(Fr. 120 W, tr. Csapo and Slater)

Richard Green has observed, “the core importance of the padded dancers rests in them as evidence for public performance in the seventh and earlier sixth centuries. They demonstrate that activity of their general kind took place in a wide range of communities.”³⁶ However, Matthias Steinhart has gone further and argued that many *komos* vases depict narrative scenes, and their dances could be interpreted as being mimetic in nature representing mythic tropes forming what he describes as a “bridge from ritual to drama.”³⁷ He relates these scenes to the *mikroiu muthoi* (small plots) mentioned by Aristotle³⁸ and to later *hyporchema* which Athenaeus described as “an imitation of acts which can be interpreted by words” popular in the time of Pindar.³⁹ But Steinhart’s diachronic and vertical view of the development of drama places “ritual” in a subservient position to “drama” and would seem to suggest that the *komos* dance procession gave place to more refined forms of mimetic performance such as dithyrambic recitals, comedy and tragedy. However, the basic performance forms of the *komos* survived and continued to form an important part of the various festivals of Dionysos and other deities celebrated in Greek communities. What both Green and Steinhart fail to take into account is the notion that what Archilochous describes as a dithyramb may have been more like the symporeutic dance revels that the *komos* vases are invoking (rather than representing), whereas the dithyrambic choral performances of the fifth century were a more formulated version intended for performance in a stationary location as part of a competitive *agon* between ten different tribal groups. Both might be called dithyrambs and one is not the outgrowth of another but another *version* modified for a different set of performance conditions.

Studies of the “origins” of Greek drama have tended to propagate a view that there is some kind of evolutionary distinction between ritual and drama. However, Schechner places ritual

³⁶ Csapo and Miller (2007), 13-21. See also Csapo (1995), 89-95.

³⁷ Steinhart (2007).

³⁸ Aristotle *Poetics* 1499a19.

³⁹ Athenaeus 15d 6-e I.

alongside several other activities related to theatre such as play, games, sports, dance and music stating that, “the relation among these is not vertical or originary—from any one to another(s)—but horizontal . . . there are only variations in form, the intermixing among genres, and these show no long-term evolution from ‘primitive’ to ‘sophisticated’ or ‘modern.’”⁴⁰ This very idea of “cross-pollination” of performance genres can be found in the earliest reference to a *komos* in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes where the eponymous god gives his newly invented lyre to Apollo and suggests different venues where it would be appreciated:

εὐκηλὸς μὲν ἔπειτα φέρειν ἐς δαῖτα θάλειαν
καὶ χορὸν ἱμερόεντα καὶ ἐς φιλοκυδέα κῶμον
εὐφροσύνην νυκτός τε καὶ ἡματος.

Now you can bring it confidently to the rich feast
Or beautiful dance and glorious revel (*komos*)
A pleasure to all, night and day.

(*Homeric Hymn To Hermes* 480-482)

One explanation for the proliferation of *komos* scenes in vases in the sixth century may be that the symporeutic performances in honor of Dionysos (or other gods) were primarily visual in nature and represented an ocular transformation of body, time and place via the means of masks, costume, dance and movement. This is not to diminish the importance of the aural forms of the *komos*, such as the noise of foot-stomping, slapping, cheering, the shouting of abuse and name calling, and at the Skyrian *Apokries*, the clanking of bells. Yet, the function of these sounds seems to be to call attention and draw a crowd to come and watch to the visual display of the procession or dance. As Athena Kavoulaki has asserted, “to move in performance means, this, to perform, that is to differentiate behavior in front of the eyes of a beholder, be that the self, an invisible supernatural entity, or a human collectivity.”⁴¹ Before there can be the performance of song, there must be the “frame” of performance and in ancient Greece this was usually marked by some form of symporeia.

⁴⁰ Schechner (1988), 6.

⁴¹ Kavoulaki (1999), 294.

In the Skyrian *Apokries* spontaneous song breaks out amongst the participants and the spectators when the procession halts at certain key locales in the town. This is often begun by the *geroi* who form a closed circle and shake their hips in a rhythmic unity that generates a loud attention-getting noise and calls the crowd to join them at their location. Likewise, the spectacle of the ship-cart at the *Trata* also forms a visual locus for the gathering of the crowd who then gleefully participate in the call and response of invective poetry.⁴² It is the *sight* of the *geroi* and the ship cart that inspires the outbreak of collective song and dance. These visual markers transform the town into a festival environment and induce the spontaneous eruption of performance. An ancient example of this kind of visual impact is found in Herodotus who tells us that the Lydian king Alyattes planned an attack on Miletus believing the inhabitants were suffering from a severe famine caused by the ravaging of their lands at the hands of his army. Thrasyboulos the *tyrannos* of Miletus got word of the Lydians' intentions and so gathered all the food in the city, including his own supplies, and had it placed in the main square. He then told the Milesians to perform a spontaneous *komos* and when the Lydian herald arrived expecting to see starvation he saw instead the population feasting, dancing and reveling. When he returned to Sardis and reported what he saw Alyattes made peace with Miletus and forged a friendly alliance.⁴³

The power of the visual to inspire spontaneous performance and to *transform* brings us back to Aristotle's famous pronouncement of the origins of tragedy and comedy at *Poetics* 1449a10-15 where he tells us that the improvisational elements can still be seen in the form of the phallic processions of his own day. Aristotle takes a synchronic approach in his discussion of drama and its forms are clearly apparent to him across different genres. However, spontaneity, especially in relation to crowds in public, is also socially dangerous and the visual form of the festival participants creates a separation between the revelers and the spectators providing a context for the often ribald, aggressive and drunken behavior. This can be observed in the distinctive costume of the Skyrian *geroi* where the performer's own identity is completely subsumed by the goat-skin mask and form-altering traditional garb. Likewise, the

⁴² Amanatidis (2009), 127-140.

⁴³ Herodotus 1.20-22.

dancers on the many *komos* vases wear extreme costumes designed to both attract attention and set them apart. The *komast* is afforded a special status via his appearance and this helps visually facilitate the unmediated crossing of thresholds and the obliteration of social boundaries. Hence, in Skros the *geroi* act like a band of mummers and bang on doors expecting wine and may then enter and perform in the house, eroding the barrier of public and private. Something very similar also happens in Plato's *Symposium* where a large group of revelers invade the party from the street and cause an uproar, forcing the *komos* to spill inside where it spontaneously forces the guests to "lose order" and join in the performance of drinking games where they imbibe vast quantities of wine (223b). This is exactly what the conservative Philokleon fears will happen to him if he joins his son in a night's drinking in Aristophanes' *Wasps*. His description of the effects of wine sounds very much like the doings of a *komos*.

μηδαμῶς.

κακὸν τὸ πίνειν: ἀπὸ γὰρ οἴνου γίγνεται
καὶ θυροκοπῆσαι καὶ πατάξαι καὶ βαλεῖν,
κᾶπειτ' ἀποτίνειν ἀργύριον ἐκ κραιπάλης.

No, no,

I don't approve of drinking. We all know what guzzling wine leads to:
busting through people's doors, beatings, smashing things up,
and a hefty fine to pay in the morning,
and I'm not just talking about the hangover!

(Aristophanes *Wasps* 1249-1255)

The public/private dichotomy of the *komos* and its ability to obliterate thresholds and societal boundaries connects it to the worship of Dionysos with its focus on presenting the experiences of liminal exchanges.⁴⁴ The *komos* can bring the unseen out into the open and allow entry into the private, its spontaneous acts are collective, public displays that are intended to be *viewed*

⁴⁴ Seaford (1994).

and the sense of exhibitionism that pervades all aspects of the performative revels can expose social tensions and merge class and gender divisions. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1186-1190) Cassandra sees visions of a reveling chorus of Furies feasting on the blood of the house of Atreus as if it were some deadly *komos* and the Furies chthonic gatecrashers who never leave (βρότειον αἶμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις).⁴⁵ A never-ending *komos* is a nightmare as its performative elements can only function by being set apart from the norms of both landscape and social interactions. When in force, the *komos* defies social boundaries and crosses thresholds, transforming private space into a public event and causing the people whose space it invades to literally “make a spectacle of themselves” by joining the revel until it spills back outside, constantly morphing from interior party to exterior impromptu street theatre. By obliterating these boundaries during the festival, the *komos* actually reinforces their importance during times of normalcy. Thus, it is vital that those participating in the *komos* make themselves look distinct from those who are not by wearing ribbons in their hair, wreaths, masks, padded costumes, and making exaggerated movements and generating noise. Even the act of moving together separates them from normal individual movement and heightens the experience for both performer and spectator. In the house of Atreus the blood-drunk Furies never leave—this is a *komos* that refuses to come outside and it is only the visions of Cassandra that place this deadly *komos* in the public realm of the chorus. The fact that these out-of-control guests cannot be driven away keeps the house of Atreus in a permanent state of bloody “drunkenness.” So much so, that Cassandra recoils at the stench of “bloody slaughter” coming from inside (1309).⁴⁶

Re-visualizing Space

For all the flowing wine, excessive behavior and improvisational performance eruptions, the *komos* was framed by the idea of a highly visible public performance. This is clearly observable in the Skyrian *Apokries* where the energetic leaping, heightened movement and

⁴⁵ Lloyd Jones (1979), 81. Note on *Agamemnon* 1186.

⁴⁶ In Euripides *Alcestis* (773-815) Herakles tries to initiate a *komos* to a household secretly in mourning for their dead queen. But the sorrowful gaze of the serving-man act to visibly reject Herakles' inappropriate revel. The fact that this *komos* refuses to spread and “intoxicate” others with its drinking, dancing and song actually alerts Herakles to the truth about the recent death of Alcestis. Even a suspended *komos* can reveal what is hidden inside.

communal dances are ordered by the procession, which binds the *komos* to the topography of the community creating a narrative of the street. This forms spatial “scenes” that occur in key places such as town squares, forecourts of sacred buildings, marketplaces and meeting grounds. The *komos* moves between these spaces transforming the surrounding environment and projecting differing narrative visual *schemas*. In Skyros, these include the struggle to reach a high point; the celebration when it is reached; the entry into a built-up area of the town, which becomes more aggressive and alarming as it moves into narrow twisting streets; and the exhilaration of moving down from a high point with the renewed energy it brings. There is also the engagement with spectators, whether festive—by incorporating them into their performance and encouraging spontaneous dance and song, or exclusionary—by submitting them to aggressive behavior and rejecting them from their *komos*. This *komos* procession also presents different dance forms depending on the spatial narrative, which is constantly shifting between linear procession when moving through the streets and circular dance when stationary.⁴⁷ Renata Tölle-Kastenbein has identified these same dance forms in Archaic depictions of Greek choral groups and termed them “Kreisreigen” (circular) and “Langreigen” (processional), finding more examples of the latter.⁴⁸ However, Roger Crowhurst has suggested that many of the representations in Greek art that seem to show a linear configuration may actually be depictions of circular choral groups rendered to accommodate the frieze pattern of the vase or sculptural work they adorn.⁴⁹ In any event, Crowhurst does point out the significance of the processional dance form and further subdivides this category into “sacrificial” and “marital.” But this does not take into account the main function of the processional symporeutic form, which is to propel the visual performance of dance and movement through space, “ritualizing” the environment it passes through and leading to a final culminating event such as a sacrifice and performance in a space of significance to the community.

The way in which the processional form visually “ritualizes” space is demonstrated on an inscription dated to around 475 BCE from Miletus that outlines the duties of a small six-man

⁴⁷ See Graf (1996), 56-65 for a study of how Athenian processions incorporated topography within cult practice.

⁴⁸ Tölle-Kastenbein (1964), 58-62.

⁴⁹ Crowhurst (1963).

chorus who were sacred to Apollo Delphinios. These so called *Molpoi* performed songs and dances for the god but their main ritual function was to lead an all-day procession that went from Miletus to Didyma and included prescribed halts along the route where they stopped to perform a variety of paens, dances and sacrifices. This has been seen as a cultic device employed by the Milesians to assert control over Didyma and the territory in between.⁵⁰ This may be so, but the several stops described in the inscriptions clearly demonstrate how processional performance incorporated fixed locales in its performative *schema*. Generally, a procession culminates in a grand finale, usually in the main place of public congregation in the community; for the *Molpoi* this was the sanctuary of Apollo at Didyma over 16 miles from their starting point.⁵¹ In Skyros it is the main town square where the *komos*-like procession of the *geroi* collides with the ship-cart procession of the *Trata* and both perform in the square alongside formal circle dances, musical performance, invective poetry and song. At the City Dionysia the great procession through the streets of Athens and around the Acropolis culminated at the sanctuary of Dionysos on the southeast slope of the Acropolis where the spectators gathered seated on a vast grandstand to observe a similar congregation of performance genres: the dithyramb, tragedy, satyr play, comedy and public processional displays.

Procession

Walter Burkert describes the procession (*pompe*) as “the fundamental medium of group formation” and writes, “hardly a festival is without a *pompe*.”⁵² Processions accompanied sacrifices, they were the most public aspect of festivals—they transported worshippers to sacred shrines, accompanied the idols of gods and conveyed initiation rites. A survey of Robert Parker’s extensive appendix of Athenian festivals produces a list of 39 mostly annual processional events that we know of.⁵³ Clearly the processional form was a dominant one in Athenian culture. Even Plato opens the *Republic* with a processional introduction relating how

⁵⁰ Graf (2009), 89-90.

⁵¹ Dillon (1997), 91.

⁵² Burkert (1985), 99.

⁵³ See Parker (2005), 456-487.

Socrates and Glaucon went to the Piraeus to watch both the old Attic procession and the new spectacle (*theoria*), a mounted torch-race offered by the Thracians.⁵⁴

The procession operated simultaneously within a number of corresponding performative frames, which all developed out of its primary function as a vehicle for visual display; in this sense it was a theatrical event and something intended to be observed. This places the procession within the scopic regime of the *theoria* (the term used by Plato at the beginning of the *Republic*), a “spectacle festival” that provided the performative structure for a community to display itself to its gods, visitors and each other. In addition to the processions staged by a city or shrine the journeys the visiting *theoroi* (sacred viewers)⁵⁵ undertook were frequently in the form of a procession and the cult sites they visited, such as Delphi, Olympia, Dodona and Isthmia, were organized with the movement of the procession in mind. The importance of the procession in conveying the *theoroi* to sacred shrines can be found in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* (9-19) where the priestess of Apollo at Delphi, the Pythia, describes the arrival of her god in *theoric* terms picturing the god traveling from his sacred island of Delos to Athens and then being escorted (*pompe*) to Delphi by a retinue of Athenians in a sacred procession (πέμπουσι δ’ αὐτὸν καὶ σεβίζουσιν μέγα κελυθοποιοὶ παῖδες Ἥφαιστου), who are imagined as “building” the roads and “clearing” the way.

Even when a state-sanctioned *theoria* was not being performed, the sanctuary itself offered the visitor a plethora of images for personal sacred viewing via the visual display of statuary, architectural detail, wall paintings, offerings and monuments.⁵⁶ This focus on the sanctuary as a place of ritual movement can be found in the writings of Pausanias who describes the sites he visits in such terms, his own topographical narrative echoing the processional movement of the *theoric* rituals that were held there.⁵⁷ Thus, in Euripides’ *Ion* (205-218) the Chorus of Athenian women visiting Delphi gaze on the sculpture and architectural details, compare them

⁵⁴ Plato *Republic* 1.327a.

⁵⁵ Rutherford (1998), 131-156, prefers the terms “pilgrim,” but Scullion (2005), 111-130, objects to the religious connotations of the term.

⁵⁶ Herodotus details how Solon left Athens for a period of 10 years after implementing his new laws under the premise that he was embarking on a personal *theoria* that took him to see the sights of Egypt and Sardis (1.29-30). Isocrates also describes a personal *theoria* that was combined with an overseas trading mission (17.4).

⁵⁷ See Elsner (2000), 52-58, who plots Pausanias’ description of the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia in terms of the rituals practiced by the Elians.

to the Acropolis in Athens and demonstrate their knowledge of the mythological scenes on display with the leader saying “As you see, I cast my eye in every direction” (πάντα τοι βλέφαρον διώκω). While certain Athenians, usually from the upper echelons of society, took part in state-sponsored *theoria* to important pan-Hellenic shrines such as Delphi, the city itself developed *theoric* festivals designed to imbue a sense of civic identity and connect the city of Athens with the surrounding cult sites of Attica.⁵⁸ These took the form of processions from the center of the city to liminal cult sites such as Eleusis and Sounion. Thus within the city processions provided the visual context for a large number of cult activities throughout the year and the means for conveying delegates to important *theoria* in non-Athenian communities.

Symporeia and the Acropolis

The procession of the City Dionysia was for much of the fifth century the main event of the festival and was regarded as second only to the greater Panathanaea. The culmination of a procession was always a place of great importance, a cult shrine, place of sacrifice or in the case of the City Dionysia a sanctuary and the viewing place (*theatron*) that stood just above it. But before considering the procession of the City Dionysia and its relationship to the dramas that were presented at its end, we may learn more of the function of processional culmination spaces by examining the Athenian Acropolis and its relationship to the Greater Panathenaia held in honor of Athens’ patron goddess, Athena and staged once every four years.

It might easily be assumed that the Greater Panathenaia and the smaller annual Panathenaia were purely Athenian affairs and yet it is important to consider that they were staged as *theorias* to broadcast the social structure and power of the Athenian state to citizens, women, Metics, slaves and visiting foreigners (who do not seem to have marched but may well have watched).⁵⁹ Like the Dionysia, the Panathenaia formed up at the Pompeion near the Dipylon gate at the Kerameikos and then followed the Sacred Way through the Agora before mounting the ramp and heading up onto the Acropolis. The parade itself was visually vivid - even

⁵⁸ On this aspect of *theoria* see Dillon (1997), 144-148; Kowalzig (2005); Nightingale (2004), 40-71.

⁵⁹ Parker (2005), 317-8.

ostentatious, with colored robes, wreaths and garlands, elaborate clothing and the carrying of sacred objects such as baskets, amphorae, large loaves of bread and garlanded branches. It included pedestrians, horse-riders, chariots and a ship mounted on wheels that was pulled through the streets holding the ornate *peplos* of Athena, which was decorated with scenes from the battle between the gods and giants. This was stretched out on the ship's mast like a ritual sail for all to see. A ship cart was also used in the procession of Dionysos, either during the Anthesteria or City Dionysia or perhaps both (it is also the central visual feature of the Skyrian *Trata*). Once the *peplos* was removed from the mast and folded it was paraded up to the Acropolis where it was presented to the ancient wooden idol of Athena (*bretas*) and there it may have been laid at her feet or on her lap in similar fashion to the description of the *peplos* dedicated to Athena in book 6 of the *Iliad*.⁶⁰

From 480 to around 458 BCE the Acropolis was left as a ruin, a physical reminder of the sack of the city by the Persians and the traumatic evacuation of virtually the entire population. The *bretas* may have been returned to the Acropolis and placed in a temporary shrine built amongst the ruins of the ancient temple, which had stood in the center of the Acropolis site.⁶¹ When rebuilding eventually began, the Athenians memorialized the Persian destruction by first incorporating pieces of the destroyed temples into the new north wall and leaving the ruins of the old temple of Athena Polias as a ruin, never to be built on. The monuments and buildings that began to be erected, from around 458 onwards, transformed the Acropolis into a massive visual display marking Athens as a major religious, cultural, political and military power. Furthermore, Robin Rhodes has shown how the classical Acropolis that was rebuilt in the second half of the fifth century conformed to an architectural scheme and spatial plan that reflected the needs of the procession and created a unified architectural and sculptural visual *schema* that was consistent with the Athenians' own traditional rituals based around the performance of the *pompe*, or what Rhodes has termed "processional architecture."⁶² This is also reflected in the Parthenon frieze that depicts a great procession, possibly the Panathenaea

⁶⁰ Homer *Iliad* 6.269-275. On the appearance of the *bretas* of Athena Polias see Hurwit (2004), 17; Steiner (2001), 91; Robertson (1996), 46-47; Donohue (1988); Kroll (1982); and Herington (1955).

⁶¹ Ferrari (2002), 11-35. See also Linders (2007), 777.

⁶² Rhodes (1995), 42-65.

itself.⁶³ This Ionic frieze with its continuous visual narrative running around the walls inside the peristyle is also illustrative of a culture of reciprocal viewing whereby those streaming by the Parthenon in procession would have caught glimpses of representations of themselves between the Doric columns.⁶⁴ Thus, the architectural plan of the fifth century Acropolis is reflective of a culture that frequently expressed itself in symporuetic terms.

The City Dionysia was such a symporuetic event and its processions, dances, choral performances and environmental visibility place it within the performative context of the *theoria*. The festival itself was begun by a small procession, which escorted the cult statue of Dionysos from the small temple in the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus to the Academy, placing the god outside of the city walls and therefore

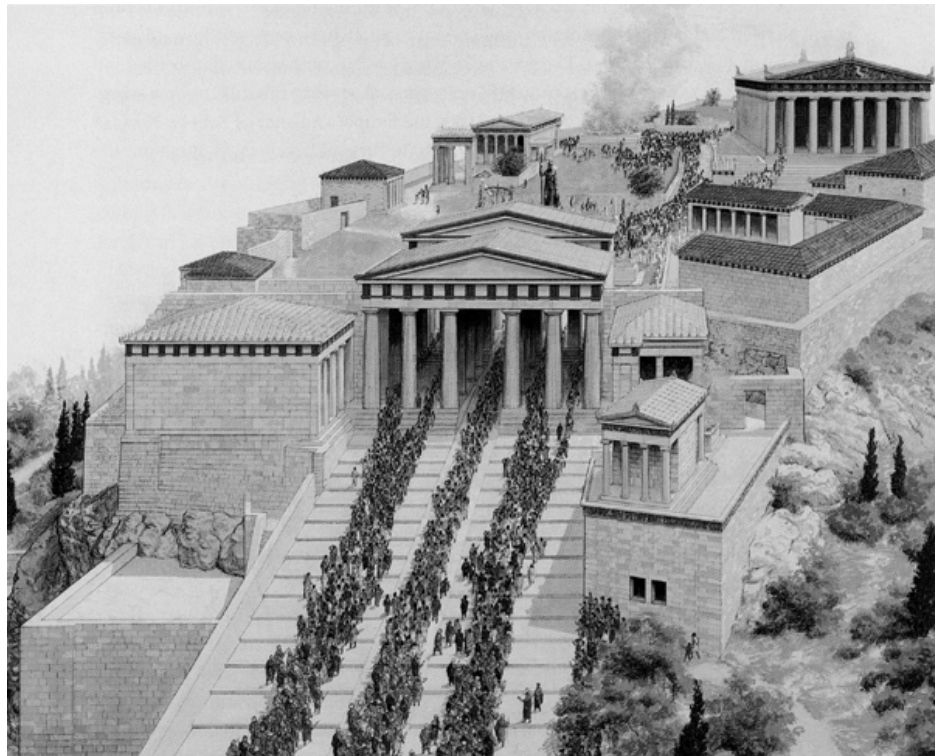


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the Athenian Acropolis (late fifth century) from the West.⁶⁵

“abroad.” Dionysos was a god of arrival and epiphanies and so the main event of the festival was a great *pompe* that brought his image into the city in a re-performance of

⁶³ See Connelly (1996), 53-80; Neils (2001). For a summation of the various current interpretations of the Parthenon frieze see Hurwit (2004), 224-236. For detailed studies of the architecture of the Acropolis and its relationship to the Panathenaea see Robertson (1996); Hurwit (2005); and Gerding (2006).

⁶⁴ Marconi (2009), 156-173.

⁶⁵ Camp (2001), Fig. 76.

his journey to Athens from Eleutherai, an Attic border town close to Boeotia that was said by the Athenians to have been his birthplace. The exact route of the procession is unknown although Sourvinou-Inwood has proposed that the direction may have been changed as the city shifted its focus from the south to the west with the increasing importance of the new agora that contained many significant visual markers of Athenian national identity.⁶⁶ These included the Royal Stoa, where Ephialtes displayed the Solonian laws; the Stoa Poikile that included wall paintings commemorating the battle of Marathon; the monument to the tyrant killers Harmodius and Aristogeiton; and the Altar of the Twelve Gods.

The Agora may have been the locus of the early Dionysian processions in the city before the establishment of the City Dionysia some time in the 530s.⁶⁷ Even then, the Agora would have been an ideal place from which to view the passing procession and the symporeutic events may have been staged there. A fragment of a dithyramb by Pindar included in Dionysios of Halikarnassos' *On Literary Composition* may allude to a procession entering the Athenian agora and performing before the Altar of the Twelve Gods.

Δεῦτ' ἐν χορόν, Ὀλύμπιοι,
ἐπὶ τε κλυτὰν πέμπετε χάριν, θεοί,
πολύβατον οἱ τ' ἄστεος ὀμφαλὸν θυόεντ'
ἐν ταῖς ἱεραῖς Ἀθάναις
οἰχνεῖτε πανδαίδαλόν τ' εὐκλέ' ἀγοράν·
ιοδέτων λάχετε στεφάνων τᾶν τ' ἔαρι-
δρόπων ἀοιδᾶν,
Διόθεν τέ με σὺν ἀγλαΐᾳ
ἴδετε πορευθέντ' ἀοιδᾶν δεύτερον
ἐπὶ τὸν κισσοδαῖ θεόν,
τὸν Βρόμιον, τὸν Ἐριβόαν τε βροτοὶ καλέομεν,
γόνον ὑπάτων μὲν πατέρων μελπόμεν<οι>

⁶⁶ Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 67-99. On the relationship between the procession and the Agora in the case of the Panathenaea see Parker (2005), 202.

⁶⁷ This will be discussed extensively in Chapter Three.

γυναικῶν τε Καδμεϊᾶν {Σεμέλην}.

Come to the chorus, Olympians,
and send over it glorious grace, you gods
who are coming to the city's crowded, incense-rich navel
in holy Athens
and to the glorious, richly adorned agora.
Receive wreaths of plaited violets and the songs plucked in springtime,
and look upon me with favor as I proceed from Zeus
with splendor of songs secondly
to that ivy-knowing god,
whom we mortals call Bromios and Eriboas
as we sing of the offspring of the highest fathers
and of Kadmeian women.

(Pindar Dithyramb Fr. 75 “for the Athenians,” tr. William H. Race.)

The singers of this dithyramb invite the Olympian gods to accompany them on their procession as they approach Athens' “crowded navel” (*omphalos*). As the Altar of the Twelve Gods was regarded as the center of Attica and the song alludes to the agora, we might imagine the procession halting before the altar to take advantage of the open space of the marketplace for a stationary performance before moving off again in procession.⁶⁸ Pindar's dithyrambic chorus also calls on the gods to look on their procession and hear their songs indicating that their performance is a multi-sensory event to be both seen and heard. This is a vitally important aspect of processional performance and as a “spectacle festival” the *theoria* was

⁶⁸ There are differences of opinion as to whether the Altar of the Twelve Gods had been destroyed by the Persians in 480 or not. Gadbery (1992, 447-489) believes it was only slightly damaged and then quickly restored whereas Mark (1993, 101) feels it was not restored until the end of the fifth century. Besides the possible allusion on Pindar, the earliest mention of processions halting to perform at the altar is found in Xenophon's where he also suggests that processions should circle the monuments of Athens (*Cavalry Commander* 3.2).

intended to delight the viewing god. The more splendid the event, and the more participants and spectators involved, the more the god would take delight.⁶⁹

If indeed the procession of the City Dionysia passed through and halted in the Agora, where did it go next? The simplest route would be to continue along the Sacred Way to the foot of the Acropolis underneath the Propylaea and then swing along the southern wall of the Acropolis itself. However, the main entrance to the Sanctuary of Dionysos seems to have been located to the east, next to the Odeon of Pericles.⁷⁰ The procession may then have moved beneath the northern wall of the Acropolis to pass by the Prytaneion and link up with the street of tripods, which fed right into the sanctuary.⁷¹ A route under the north Acropolis wall would also bring the procession into ocular contact with the remains of the old temple of Athena that had been destroyed by the Persians in 480 BCE. Parts of the entablature and column drums had been deliberately set into the wall as a visual memorial to the destruction and are still clearly visible today. The procession would also pass close to sights of cult significance to the Athenians including the Areopagus, the caves of Apollo Pythios/Hypoakraios (Under the Long Rocks), Zeus Olympios and Pan on the northwest slope. Other shrines seen on the way located on the north slope included the shrine to Eros and Aphrodite and, towards the end of the fifth century, the Erechtheion. As the procession joined the street of Tripods, it may have connected with the Acropolis again moving under the east wall under a large and still unexcavated cave and what seems to be a rock-cut sacrificial platform. This route may also be supported by the archaeological evidence from the excavation of Oscar Broneer and the American School of Classical Studies undertaken in 1939. Broneer uncovered a paved road running east-west aligned to the upper diazoma of the theatre of Dionysos on the southeast slope. The paving was Roman but may have lay on a much older road that was used to

⁶⁹ Walter Burkert writes: “The cult in no way demands the repetition of ancient magically fixed hymns. On the contrary, the hymn must always delight the god afresh at the festival; therefore for dance and hymn there must always be someone who makes it, the poet, *poietai*. The gods, like men, take a delighted interest in the contest” Burkert (1985), 103.

⁷⁰ Anon. *On the Mysteries* 1.38, who locates the conspirators of the mutilation of the herms as entering the theatre from here.

⁷¹ Sourvinou-Inwood (2003, 106-110) also favors a route that includes the Street of Tripods but starts the procession at the Prytaneion believing that the rites of the *xenimos*, the receiving of the god, took place there. This would make for a short procession and perhaps be a less than ideal marshalling ground than the Pompeion located near the Dipylon gate and used for many processions including the Panathenaea, the only one larger than the City Dionysia. In the fourth century the actors’ guilds set up their offices either in or near the Pompeion indicating a close link between its function in starting processions and the worship of Dionysos.

connect the street of Tripods to the east with the theatre. The advent of World War II halted the excavation and the roadway has been covered but it may be evidence of a sacred processional route linking the north side of the Acropolis with the sanctuary of Dionysos to the south.⁷²

The procession at the City Dionysia also included foreign visitors in the total participatory experience. For them a visit to the City Dionysia was certainly a *theoric* expedition. An inscription relating to the foundation of a colony at Brea from 446/5 BCE orders the allied states to bring a cow and a panoply of armor to the Panathenaea (presumably as a sacrificial offering and dedication) and a phallus for the Dionysia. This strongly implies that representatives of the allied states actually participated in the Dionysian procession itself.⁷³ Additionally, during the second half of the fifth century the annual tribute collected from the allied states may have been paraded before the *theatron*, an action that was criticized by Isocrates a century later, our main source for this event.⁷⁴ Simon Goldhill has held up the parade of tribute as an example of what he terms “pre-play ceremonies,” together with the parade of war-orphans, and the possible “crowning” of notable personages and other public announcements. However, Goldhill’s view tends to favor the performance of tragedy and neglects the festival’s wider processional context as well as the presentation of dithyramb and comedy. His evidence is also gathered from a disparate range of sources, several of them quite late and perhaps not directly applicable to the fifth century festival.⁷⁵ Yet, whatever the date and purpose of these various ceremonies that became associated with the City Dionysia, they all retain significant elements of symporeutic performance, including the forming up and movement of participants in unison movement (the parade of orphans), successive processional display (the display of the tribute), and the display of extraordinary costuming (the crowning of certain citizens).

⁷² Broneer (1938), 161-263.

⁷³ IG I^s 46.11-13. 446/5

⁷⁴ Isocrates *On The Peace* 82.

⁷⁵ Goldhill (1999), 8-9. For a detailed analysis of Goldhill’s sources see Rhodes (2003), 104-119. See also Griffin (1998), 39-61; Osborne (1993); Sommerstein (1997). For a solid argument against Goldhill’s view of what he terms “pre-play” ceremonies see Carter (2007), 35-43.

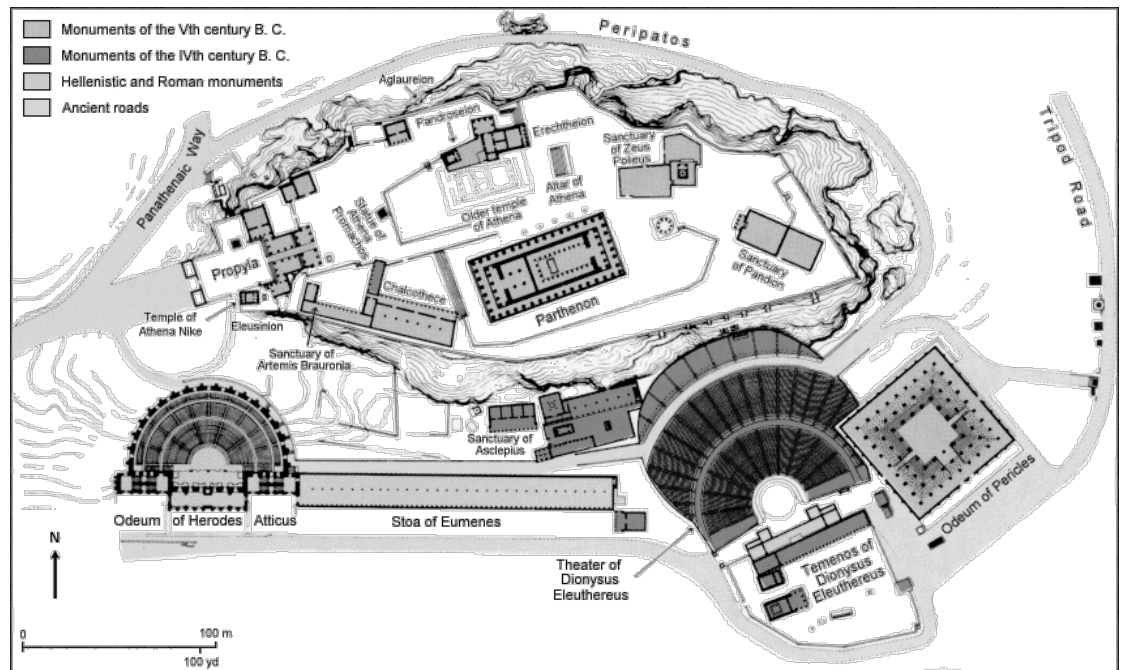


Fig. 4. Plan of the Acropolis showing ancient roads.⁷⁶

The procession culminated at the sanctuary of the gods on the southeast slope of the Acropolis where at least 100 animals were ritually slaughtered before the temple just beneath the location of the *theatron*.⁷⁷ The exact program of performances fluctuated throughout the fifth and fourth century but the basic model included at least a day for the dithyrambic choral performances, which involved 1,000 participants representing the 10 tribes of Attica (50 in a boys chorus and 50 in a men's). Then there were then 3 or 4 days of tragedies each culminating in the performance of a satyr play and then a full day for the presentation of 5 comedies, although later when this was reduced to 3. The comedies may also have been presented individually on the tragedy days after the satyr performance.⁷⁸ At the end of the festival, the victorious parties were celebrated with their own *komos* processions that may have led in celebration from the theatre to private houses.

Throughout the entire festival symporeutic performance forms, with their emphasis on visual display, were the dominant structures that conveyed the various events. For example, the dithyrambs were delivered by a large choral group that processed into the theatre and danced

⁷⁶ Papathanassopoulos (1991) 12.

⁷⁷ Rehm (2002), 45; Cole (1993), 25-38.

⁷⁸ For the various possible performance schedules see Csapo (1995), 106-108.

in unison as it sang; both tragedy and comedy were also predominantly choral performance forms and, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, developed to inhabit a space specifically intended for the presentation of symporeia. Furthermore, the narratives of both tragedy and comedy include the staging of numerous symporeutic events (including dance forms) interwoven within the plots of the plays. These might appear as choral entrances, wedding marches, funeral processions or sacrificial rituals. In comedy, processions are recreated for comic effect such as Dicaeopolis' "Dionysia" in *Acharnians* (241-262), the mini "Panathenaea" in *Ecclesiazousae* (730-756) and the "wedding" procession of Peithetairos and Basileia in *Birds* (1706-1765). Also, comedies also often used symporeutic forms to create movement filled finales:

Acharnians—A victory song, either a paen to Apollo or an Olympic victory hymn.

Knights—The final choral song is probably lost but Demos may be initiating a celebration with his invitation to the public dining hall.

Clouds—Strepsiades' attack on Socrates' school is staged with festival imagery including the use of torches.

Wasps—Philocleon bursts out of his house dancing and the chorus says that they are going to "dance right off the stage."

Peace—Concludes with a wedding procession.

Birds—Concludes with a wedding procession.

Lysistrata—Concludes with a dance in honor of Athena.

Thesmophoriazousae—The women say they are going home but their exit is uncertain.

Ecclesiazousae—The women dance offstage to a "Cretan tune."

Frogs—Aeschylus is accompanied back to Athens by a torch light procession and song.⁷⁹

Wealth—A torch-lit procession to install Wealth on the Acropolis.⁸⁰

Aeschylus' *Eumenides*

⁷⁹ 573 Dover (1993) on 1528-33 thought that Aristophanes had the procession at the end of *Eumenides* in mind.

⁸⁰ It is also worth noting that at the end of nearly every comedy of Menander there is a call for festival wreaths and torches.

Aeschylus' *Eumenides* is an excellent example of a tragedy that incorporates symporeutic forms within its narrative structure. Throughout the entire *Oresteia*, Aeschylus exploits the visual effects of collective movement not only via the use of his choruses but also in the staging of scenes within the trilogy. The entrance of Agamemnon may have visually evoked a wedding ceremony,⁸¹ the movements of the chorus of the Libation Bearers the socially sensitive movements of female mourners at a funeral,⁸² and the "binding song" of the Furies, the circle dances of contemporary ritual practice.⁸³ Agamemnon's entrance to his house has been widely discussed as a re-performance of a sacrificial ritual such as the Buphonia and even the Watchman scene that opens the trilogy may contain references to the processional Athenian Skira festival of which we know very little.⁸⁴ Furthermore, Fritz Graf has described the term *pompe* found in Homer and archaic poetry as meaning "protecting escort, especially one given by a god" and points out that in later use it retains the sense of "space traversed" and "supernatural protection."⁸⁵ The chorus of Agamemnon use the term several times to describe the expedition against Troy (*Ag.* 59-63 and 124), Clytemnestra describes the train of beacons as if it were a sacred procession (*Ag.* 282-3 and 299) and the remains of the dead of Troy are described by the chorus as being sent back home as a solemn procession (*Ag.* 440). Even Helen's arrival at Troy is framed in processional terms (*Ag.* 745). In Libation Bearers, the chorus women are sent out to "escort" (προπομπός) the libations (*LB* 22, 85 and 95-96) and the powers beneath the earth are asked to "send" (πέμπει) their help (*LB* 475-477). It is

⁸¹ Mitchell-Boyask (2006); McNeil (2005); Rehm (1994), 50-52.

⁸² Hame (2004, 2008); Goff (2004), 31-34, 361-364; Loraux (1998); Holst-Warhaft (1992).

⁸³ Easterling (2008), 221-229; Henrichs (1995), 62-65; Padel (1992), 172-179; Zeitlin (1965), 485-486.

⁸⁴ A fragment of Lysimachides reported by Harpocration (Lysimachides *FGH* 366 F3) states that the priestess of Athena, the priest of Poseidon and the priest of Helios all from the Eteoboutad family (the *genos* that was said to be descended from the mythical kings of Athens) walked from the Acropolis to a place called Skiron on the outskirts of Athens; see Parker (2005), 174. Parke (1977), 157, speculated that the route of the Skira procession would have been around 3 miles and taken the participants down from the Acropolis to the Dipylon gate, along the Eleusis road to a place on the banks of the river Kephisos a natural ancient "boundary" of the city of Athens. There is also evidence from the island of Keos that the Skira took place at the height of summer and involved a watchman situated on a high place looking out for the appearance of Sirius who then called out to the community when the star was seen; Burkert (1983), 109-112. This has obvious analogies to the Watchman scene in *Agamemnon*. Additionally, the two brief mentions of the Skira in Aristophanes (*Thesm.* 834 and *Eccl.* 18) strongly suggest that it may have been a women's only festival and the ritual ululation that the watchman says Clytemnestra must make at *Ag.* 28 would seem to concur with this. Robertson believes that the Skira may have originated as a threshing festival, a time of dry winds and associated with the coming of the dog-star at the height of summer and that Sirius was welcomed with a "great din" and a "marshalling of the host" which developed into the Panathenaea festival with its warlike dances and grand procession—an apotropaic mass gathering to ward off the bad weather magic of the dog-star and seek a fair climate that marked the liminal phase between the old and new year; Robertson (1996), 57-60.

⁸⁵ Graf (1996), 56.

also noticeable that at the end of the play Orestes uses the language of the *theoria* when he asks to be gazed upon as he prepares to journey to Delphi carrying a branch and wreath (*LB* 1034).

Eumenides opens with the invocation of an overt *theoric* and symporeutic image, that is highly reminiscent of the *theoria* to Apollo's sanctuary at Delphi. At *Eu.* 12-14 the Pythia describes Apollo's first arrival at the shrine as coming in procession accompanied by the Athenians. Furthermore, the scenario for the Pythia's opening speech is one of awaiting embassies from the Greeks, a *theoric* ritual that is spectacularly ruptured by her discovery of the Furies within Apollo's temple. Aeschylus depicts her hurtling out of the temple doors like a beast on all fours, the opposite of the upright, outward-facing member of a *theoric* procession who moves in harmony with the larger group and presents his face to all those who would gaze on him. Frontality in performance, especially in relation to the mask will be discussed in Chapter Four but it should be noted that humans present themselves on an upright vertical plane as opposed to other primates who are usually on a horizontal plane—running on all fours or lying out.⁸⁶ This has a particular relevance to issues of vision, concerning gaze direction, visual display and cognitive responses to the human face. The sight of the Furies has de-humanized the Pythia; no wonder she can hardly articulate their form. This dramatic device sets up the problem that the *Oresteia* must solve and once the Furies themselves are produced onstage in full view of the spectators the play must resolve how to mitigate this most debilitating of images, one that the Pythia describes as “not proper to be before the images of the gods or under the roofs of men” (*Eu.* 55). After listing their hideous attributes Apollo says, “the whole nature of your appearance indicates as much” (*Eu.* 193). This is a sight that has the power to cripple human interaction and to obliterate visual harmony and it is via a performance of symporeia in the form of a staged procession that this religious, moral and visual problem is finally resolved. The *Oresteia* itself is an object lesson in the importance of symporeia to facilitate the appearance of social justice and visually display united community.

⁸⁶ Skoyles (2008), 108.

The *Oresteia* is brought to a close by the representation of an Athenian sacred procession, which incorporates the Furies into the ritual practices of the City of Athens and leads them to their new sanctuary within Attica. Oliver Taplin cautioned against picturing this finale as a “super-spectacular” stage event featuring a large cast of extras brought on at this point but adds that it visually embodied the reconciliation of Athens and the Furies and “put into action” the final solemnized movement of the once frenetic, and now placated, Furies to their new home.”⁸⁷ Michael Ewans also envisages the procession as simply staged and proposes that the actors who may have played the Athenian jurors helped place the purple robes on the Furies. However, the text at *Eu.* 1027 indicates that the women and children attend the Furies (παίδων, γυναικῶν, καὶ στόλος πρεσβυτίδων), and these are led by Athena and the female devotees who attended her *bretas*, a female ritual that echoes Clytemnestra’s welcoming of the beacon and the female-led rites alluded to at the beginning of *Agamemnon*.⁸⁸

Most scholars since Headlam in 1906 have noticed the close parallels between the description of this procession and the Panathanaea and how the crimson robes given to the Furies reflected the tradition of Athenian Metics marching in crimson cloaks.⁸⁹ The identification of the closing procession of the *Eumenides* with the Panathenaia seems logical as this procession is well known to scholars, but when the final scene of *Eumenides* is placed in the broader context of Athenian symporeutic processional culture it becomes problematic. For example, if this is a representation of the Panathenaia procession then where are the Furies being taken? They should be heading up to the Acropolis yet Athena repeatedly speaks of them going “beneath” the earth (*Eu.* 1003-1009 & 1023). Second, the location of the shrine of the Furies or *Semnai Theai* in Athens was not on the Acropolis but located near the Areopagus. At some point in the late sixth or early fifth century it seems to have been relocated there from an older site to the north of the Acropolis near the Prytaneion and replaced by the Theseion.⁹⁰ It should be pointed out that neither of these shrines was located on the Acropolis.

⁸⁷ Taplin (1977), 410-415.

⁸⁸ Ewans (1995), 2321-2322. This was also proposed by Podlecki (1989), on 1005. On the Skira’s relationship to the Panathenaia in the context of the *Oresteia* see Bowie (1993), 280.

⁸⁹ Headlam (1906), 268-277. Others who have followed Headlam include: Lloyd Jones (1993), on *Eu.* 1028; Thomson (1966) on *Eu.* 1027-1031; Rehm (2002), 97; A. Brown (1984a), 274, n.91; Bowie (1993), 26-29; Griffith (1995), 109, n.146; Sider (1978), 24; Weaver (1996), 559-561; Herington (1986), 155; Burian and Shapiro (2003), 28; Goldhill (2004), 47-48.

⁹⁰ Harris-Cline (1999), 309-320.

If Aeschylus' topography seems confused, or as Brown put it, he "has taken a slight liberty with topographical fact" it may well be purely intentional.⁹¹ Within the processional staging conditions of the *theatron* ("seeing place") Aeschylus can conflate time, place and ritual. His spectators were active participants in the ritualizing of their own city via the Dionysian procession, the public sacrifices, and the open-air performance events that made up the festival itself. When Aeschylus rapidly shifts his narrative focus from the house and *bretas* of Athena to the Areopagus and then to the sanctuary of the Semnai it is because these places were *visible*. Perhaps not in the immediate bodily eye of the spectator looking out over the orchestra to *skene*, sanctuary and the southern city beyond, but in the mind's eye of participants in a processional event whose total festival experience had exposed them to the sacred topography of a city unified by people moving through its space. Aeschylus' procession at the end of *Eumenides* does exactly the same thing by linking a ritual event with the landscape it will pass through and creating a wider meaning for both participants and spectators alike.

It is also important to note that the Furies are accompanied by torchlight (*Eu.* 1005, 1023 & 1029) yet there is no evidence that torches were part of the actual Panathenaea procession. The night before there was a torch race, where young men competed to be the one to light the sacrificial fire on the Acropolis⁹² and there is also fourth century evidence of a torch-lit nocturnal celebration (*pannukhis*) that also took place the night before the procession and included the ritual ululation (*olulugai*) of women.⁹³ This highly distinctive call is referred to by the chorus at the very end of *Eumenides* (1047), ὀλολύξατε νῦν ἐπὶ μολπαῖς (Raise the hallowed cry), and by the Watchman at the beginning of *Agamemnon* (28), ὀλολυγμὸν εὐφημοῦντα τῇδε λαμπάδι (welcome this torch with the hallowed cry).⁹⁴ Torch-lit nocturnal celebrations were also common in the worship of Dionysos, which was reflected in one of his cult titles, *Nuktelios*, and there may have been a nocturnal torch-lit celebration as part of the

⁹¹ A. Brown (1984a), 274. This aspect of conflated aetiologies will be discussed in Chapter Three.

⁹² Parke (1977), 45-46.

⁹³ Parisinou (2000), 158-159.

⁹⁴ Ferrari (1997), 19-23. Ferrari believes these may be references to the torch race of the Panathenaea.

Athenian Anthesteria festival.⁹⁵ Torches were certainly used in many Athenian processional rituals but most are associated with the cult of Demeter and Kore, the Eleusinian Mysteries, rituals involving death and purification, and wedding processions.⁹⁶

However, torches were also closely associated with the Furies in their guise as creatures of the dark and as hunters of men.⁹⁷ In Aristophanes' *Wealth*, Chremylus and Blepsidemus recoil in horror at the sight of Poverty as she enters and at first assume that she must be a Fury until they realize that she has no torch (417-425). Then, later in the same play, a garlanded young man enters carrying a torch and it is immediately assumed that he is going to a festival (1038-1042). *Wealth* concludes when Chremylus calls for lighted torches to lead a procession to install Wealth in the treasury of the temple of Athena (1192-1196).⁹⁸ Torch-lit festivities seem to have been so common in Athenian rituals that in the parabasis of *Clouds* Aristophanes promises that he would never use them in his work (543) and then goes on to produce Strepsiades' torch in hand burning down Socrates' *Pondertorium* (1490-1492).

Even the famous crimson robes of the Furies/Metics may not be a clear-cut reference to the Panathenaea. Parker has shown how Metics may have been included in a number of Athenian symporeutic rituals including the Dionysian processions, but it is not known if they also wore crimson at those events.⁹⁹ Metics marching in the procession were most commonly described as *skaphephoroi* ("tray-bearers") and the social memory of the visual display of processional objects was so strong that the term "tray-bearer" became a form of insult and a sign of inferiority to an Athenian citizen.¹⁰⁰ Initially, Headlam made the suggestion that the final procession of the *Eumenides* might be the Panathenaea due in large part to a reference in

⁹⁵ Parisinou (2000), 160.

⁹⁶ Morrell (1997), 162. He relates the final procession of the *Eumenides* to a marriage procession and notes the use of torches in both.

⁹⁷ Eva Parisinou has noted the prevalence of images of Furies as hunters holding torches on fourth century South Italian vases; Parisinou (2000), 102-103. Aeschines (*Against Timarchus*. 190) mentions the Furies using torches to punish men.

⁹⁸ Torches are also found in *Wasps* (1331), *Ecclesiazusae* (978, 1150) and in the hands of the Chorus of *Peace* (for a wedding procession) and the chorus of Initiates in *Frogs* (316-459), an Eleusinian procession. Pluto also calls for torches at the end of *Frogs* for the procession that will accompany Aeschylus from the underworld to Athens (1525).

⁹⁹ Parker (2005), 258.

¹⁰⁰ Parker (2005), 170 & 258. In Aristophanes' *Knights* (1315) Hyperbolus is imagined as launching a fleet of "trays" rather than triremes. For a depiction of such a *skaphephoros* ("tray carrier") on the Parthenon Frieze see Neils (2001), 151, fig. 113. She notes that it is impossible to determine if the clothing of the youth depicted was painted and that the references to the purple dress of the Metics and even their inclusion in the procession are late.

Photios that Metics marched in the Panathenaea in crimson robes.¹⁰¹ However, Headlam also cited *Suda*, s.v. *askophorein*, “in the processions of Dionysos . . . Metics wore crimson gowns and carried trays, hence they were called “tray-bearers.”¹⁰² Following this evidence, Pickard-Cambridge also posited that Metics wore crimson while marching in the Dionysian Procession and commented how Alcibiades “on more than one occasion walked in a purple robe.”¹⁰³ Therefore, crimson/purple robes were not always confined to Metics and when they did wear them in festival processions it was not only at the Panathenaea but also at the Dionysia, and perhaps at other festivals where the sources are silent. In any event, we cannot automatically assume that the dressing of the Furies in crimson would have suggested to Aeschylus’ spectators that the procession staged at the end of the *Eumenides* was the Panathenaea.

The ritual purpose of the Panathenaea was to deliver a new, richly embroidered *peplos* to the *bretas* of Athena Polias up on the Acropolis.¹⁰⁴ In *Eumenides* the Furies are being led beneath the earth and there is not a *peplos* in sight. While the Panathenaea may well have been the greatest of all the Athenian public processions, it was only one among many such festivals held throughout the year. These symporeutic performance forms bolstered community ties, reinforced social designations and ritualized profane space. The act of moving together combined with the manifestation of a visible display were intended to affirm commitment to a deity and formed the basis of the concept of *theoria*—the “spectacle festival.” Thus, the procession at the culmination of the *Oresteia* is a dramatic demonstration of the effectiveness of symporeia to forge societal cohesiveness. Here, the most despised and abhorrent creatures, the Furies, are successfully incorporated into the ritual life of the Athenian polis, averting their curses and bringing great gain for their new hosts. Though Athena plays an important part in orchestrating this event, Pat Easterling has suggested that the final procession of the *Eumenides* evokes “both the Panathenaea, with its inclusive civic associations and the

¹⁰¹ Headlam (1906), 273-274. Photios, *Lexikon* s.v. *skaphas*; Menander fr. 147. (*PCG*). “The Metics were accustomed to bear trays in the procession of the Panathenaea; some were bronze, while others were silver; they were full of honey-combs and flat cakes and the Metics were wearing purple chitons; thus Menander.”

¹⁰² Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 61, n.6 and Csapo (1995), III. 21A, 21B.

¹⁰³ Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 61-62. Athen. Xii. 534 c.

¹⁰⁴ At some point a *peplos* was included in the annual procession as well. The scholia on Aristophanes’ *Knights* 566a (I-II) report two *peploi*, one conveyed on the ship-cart mast and one that was carried, although this may be a conflation of the lesser and greater processions. See Shear (2001), 98-103.

magnificent procession in honor of the Semnai Theai.”¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, very little is known of the procession of the Semnai Theai but Robert Parker has collected the evidence and suggested that it may have been “one of the most splendid of the year”¹⁰⁶ and concluded that this was the procession Aeschylus intended to portray. Sommerstein has also connected the Semnai Theai with the Areopagus Council noting that it met adjacent to their shrine on their sacred days. Additionally, witnesses swore their oaths to the Semnai and made thank offerings to them if they were acquitted.¹⁰⁷

Diane Harris-Cline has proposed that the Areopagus council moved the shrine of the Semnai, which it historically presided over, to better establish its authority over the growing city and the new Agora to the west. She also points out that after the Persian destruction of 480 BCE several other important shrines and monuments were relocated, such as the seat of the Archon Basileus that was moved from the Prytaneion to the Royal Stoa in the new Agora. She surmises that “Aeschylus may be presenting to the Athenians, perhaps for the first time, a new myth concerning the aetiology of their recently transplanted shrine, endowing a new cult site with an old pedigree.”¹⁰⁸ Her theory proposes that the old shrine of the Semnai was replaced by the newly established shrine of Theseus, the Theseion, where Kimon spectacularly deposited the hero’s “bones” in 475 BCE.¹⁰⁹ Moving the shrine of the Semnai to the Areopagus bolstered the prestige of the old aristocratic court, and “democratized” the Furies by placing them figuratively and topographically “under” an Athenian judicial institution. This may well have been what Aeschylus was staging—a processional ritual that articulated this important recent political and religious act.

A connection with the Theseion may be implicit within the text of *Eumenides* at 1025

¹⁰⁵ Easterling (2008), 232-233.

¹⁰⁶ Parker (1996), 298-299.

¹⁰⁷ Sommerstein (2008), xxi-xxiv.

¹⁰⁸ Harris-Cline (1999), 309-320.

¹⁰⁹ Plutarch *Theseus* 36.1-2. For Kimon’s deposition of the bones of Theseus see Osborne (2010), 56-61. and Podlecki (1971). The chorus men of Aristophanes’ *Knights* say that if the Athenians vote for the proposal of Hyperbolus to launch a naval attack on Carthage, they would defy the law and seek refuge at the Theseion or the shrine of the Semnai (1311-1313). See Scullion (1994), 86, who states that Aeschylus’ primary innovation “is to subordinate the Areopagus court and the cult of the Semnai Theai to the principal deity of the Athenian Polis.”

αἰνῶ τε μύθους τῶνδε τῶν κατευγμάτων
πέμψω τε φέγγει λαμπάδων σελασφόρων
εἰς τοὺς ἔνερθε καὶ κατὰ χθονὸς τόπους
ξὺν προσπόλοισιν, αἵτε φρουροῦσιν βρέτας
τοῦμὸν δικαίως. γὰρ πάσης χθονὸς
Θησῆδος ἐξίκοιτ' ἂν εὐκλεῆς λόχος
παίδων, γυναικῶν, καὶ στόλος πρεσβυτίδων.
φοινικοβάπτοις ἐνδυτοῖς ἐσθήμασι
τιμᾶτε, καὶ τὸ φέγγος ὀρμάσθω πυρός,
ὅπως ἂν εὐφρων ἦδ' ὁμιλία χθονὸς
τὸ λοιπὸν εὐάνδροισι συμφοραῖς πρέπη.

I thank you for your prayers and the vows you make
And will escort you by gleaming torchlight
To the places that lie beneath this earth
With my women who attend my sacred idol.
[either] Let the eye of this land of Theseus come
[or] Come to the eye of this land of Theseus
A glorious band of children and women, young and old.
Clothe them in robes of honor bathed in crimson,
Let the torches burn and their light lead on
Showing this kind company in our land
And the future blessings they will bring to men.

(Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 1021-1031)

The text is somewhat confused and corrupt and scholars are divided on the meaning of ὄμμα (“eye”) here. Sommerstein translates it as “the jewel of the whole land of Theseus” and notes that the “eye” must be a reference to the Acropolis.¹¹⁰ Yet, Athena has already stated that she

¹¹⁰ Sommerstein (2008), 480, n. 195; Sommerstein (1989), on 1025-1026. See also A. Brown (1984a), 273, n. 89. Lloyd Jones (1993) has “You shall come to the very eye of Theseus’ land” and Ewans (1995) hedges his bets with the noncommittal, “the finest place in all of Theseus’ land.”

is taking the Furies “below” (*Eu.* 920 & 1023); this seems incongruous if they are being led up to the Acropolis. However, the reference to Theseus here might point to an association with the recently established Theseion. Podlecki, following Weir Smith, translates differently, preferring, “For the eye of the whole land of Theseus will come forth.” Whichever translation is correct, it is striking that Aeschylus uses the term ὄμμα here. And so we return to the eye, whether in its guise as an object that facilitates vision or as a poetic metaphor for a precious center, each interpretation surely serves to emphasize the importance of the visual aspect of the procession in bringing the Furies to their new home and the *Oresteia* to a close.¹¹¹

Helen Bacon has noted how the *Oresteia* as a whole gradually uncovers the invisible Furies until the final scene of *Eumenides* where they are fully revealed.¹¹² In *Agamemnon* they are invoked by the chorus (59, 463, 749, 993, 112), the Herald (645), Clytemnestra (1433) and Aegisthus (1581) and yet are only *visible* to Cassandra (1186-1190). They inhabit the realm of the unseen, possessing the power to pull mortals down into their darkness, turn them into shadows and render them invisible (*Ag.* 460-467).

At *Libation Bearers* (269-305) Orestes tells how Apollo “revealed” (πιφαύσκω) the nature of the Furies to him and how their nightmarish visions will haunt his sleep. Their pursuit will result in him becoming “socially invisible,” unable to sacrifice, share a meal or live in the company of mortals. Orestes’ only hope is to flee and seek the light of Apollo at Delphi. When the action of the *Oresteia* moves to Delphi at the beginning of *Eumenides*, we are confronted with the Pythia hurtling, beast-like, from Apollo’s temple, crippled by fear. She vividly describes the Furies asleep around the omphalos stone and compares them to Gorgons and paintings of mythical beasts she has seen (*Eu.* 34-63). Yet, she admits that even these analogies cannot capture the hideous visage of the Furies. Then, after the goading of the ghost of Clytemnestra, the Furies emerge into the plain sight of the audience.¹¹³ This famous *trompe*

¹¹¹ See Meineck (1998a). Here I had followed Sommerstein and translated *Eu.* 1025 rather freely as, “come to the core of the city . . . the rock of Theseus” also implying that Aeschylus meant the Acropolis to be understood. However Aeschylus may be being deliberately vague and suggesting a double meaning in both the “eye” of the Athenians and the “eye” of the Acropolis, the ultimate Athenian place of visual display.

¹¹² Bacon (2001), 48-59.

¹¹³ For the first entrance of the Furies there are at least three possible scenarios: 1) The chorus are already positioned laying in the orchestra covered by their cloaks at the start of the play as suggested by

l'oeil had such a marked visual impact that we find a fanciful story in the *Vita*, that children fainted and women miscarried at the sight of them. Now the spectators gazed upon creatures that the Pythia had just described as unfit for the sight of gods or men (Eu. 55). In the scopic regime of reciprocal vision where the sight of the taboo can cause harm to the viewer, Aeschylus' decision to visualize these hidden, invisible creatures was not only an incredibly bold moment of visual stagecraft but also a brilliant dramatic optical manifestation of the problem of aristocratic revenge killing.

This process of visual “re-viewing” is initiated by Athena whose ability to gaze upon the Furies with kindness renders them beneficial rather than harmful (Eu. 988-995), what Bacon described as “bringing hidden fearful things into the light of consciousness.”¹¹⁴ Once the Furies accept their new role as Athenian *Semnai Theai* they are presented to the Athenians in a public act of *theoric* symporeia that places their fearsome visual power at the center of one of the most important ritual apparatus of the polis—the procession. In this sense, the Furies are the ultimate Metics, divine outsiders who up until the end of *Eumenides* have been described as inhabiting an invisible, dark and shadowy realm. Like Athenian Metics, they are clothed in crimson cloaks, a color intended to draw visual attention, and their processional journey introduces them to the city, its shrines, political centers and streets before they are led by a torch to be interred beneath Athenian soil and invested as the new cult of the *Semnai Theai*. Here, they will be worshipped and revered by the Athenians and bring blessings on their land and people.¹¹⁵ Now the Furies become a part of the “spectacle,” the kind eyes of the Athenian

Rehm (2002), 89-92, although the problem here is how they might have got into place in the open air before the spectators. 2) They are revealed on the *ekkyklema* at 64 along with Apollo and Orestes, but this is certainly a large number of people to push out or accommodate on a simple theatrical truck. Sommerstein (1989), on 64-93 and 94-139, has proposed that a smaller number of Furies were visible (but not their faces). 3) They were goaded out of the house at 140 by Clytemnestra's ghost as suggested by Scullion (1994), 71-77; Taplin (1978), 106-107; and Ewans (1995), 196-200. This would seem the simplest solution and create the greatest visual effect. However, Graham Ley has proposed another possibility, that the text was revived at some point and the “incongruities” of stagecraft are a result of this. Ley (2007a), 36-42, admits this is a “strange hypothesis” and his theory of a last-minute change by Aeschylus to accommodate the new technology of the *ekkyklema* seems more an attempt to reconcile the scholarly debate than a reasonable proposal of ancient stagecraft. Any attempt at reconstructing directorial vision from only the information gleaned from a text must be fraught with difficulty and even if we were armed with a full knowledge of ancient stage practices, without an eyewitness account of the play itself we can never fully know how Aeschylus staged this scene. Another possible choral entrance from the *skene* doorway is in Euripides' *Phaethon* (63-101).

¹¹⁴ Bacon (2001), 57. See also Easterling (2008), 229; Frontisi-Ducroux (2007), 572.

¹¹⁵ Griffith (1995), 110.

spectators render them benign as forces of abundance and fertility, not hated spirits of familial blood revenge.

In this chapter, I have attempted to establish Greek drama's roots in *symporeia*—collective movement, such as dance, chorality, street revels and processions. These are predominantly visual performative forms staged to attract attention and draw bystanders into the action to become active spectators/participants. *Symporeia* also incorporated landscape and topography in its visual *schema* and as I have shown, was frequently used to ritualize space and help create new aetiologies for physical locations. The Skyrian *Apokries* festival affords us the opportunity to study the performance dynamics of a street revel in action and while it is doubtful that there is any direct connection with ancient Dionysian cult practices there are many similar traditional elements that exist between the ancient *komos* and the *Apokries* that make a comparison of their respective performance dynamics wholly worthwhile. While we cannot say for sure if the City Dionysia in the fifth century was ever regarded as a *theoria* (“spectacle festival”) by the Athenians there are certainly enough identifiable *theoric* elements apparent that we might place theatre within the context of *theoric* culture, where both seeing and being seen were paramount. The focus on movement inherent in *symporeutic* performances was a foundational element in the form of Attic drama and placing tragedy within its performative context reveals a great deal about its origins and its reception by ancient spectators. Thus, we might invert the prevailing view that the chorus provides “interludes” to the narrative “scenes” of the play performed by the actors. Instead, we should see the chorus as the central performative element of tragedy that provided much of the tone, musicality and movement of the entire play. Actor-based scenes emerged from *symporeutic* choral odes and were informed by their tone just as the chorus responded in turn to what they had just witnessed in a scene staged before them. This aspect of the performance aspect of Greek tragedy will be more fully explored in the next chapter.

Symporeia never ceased to be the central element of the performance of ancient drama, which was essentially a new kind of “spectacle festival” (*theoria*) held in a new kind of “seeing place” (*theatron*). The visual environment of this space and how it was incorporated into the

fabric of the plays themselves was a direct influence of the close relationship of symporeia to landscape and topography. Thus the performance space for fifth century drama was an environmental “movement space,” a large viewing stand set up every year so spectators could gather to watch Dionysian performances that had halted at the god’s sanctuary. Although these dramas were now staged in one place and not as part of a procession, they nevertheless retained their symporeutic elements and provided a rich visual display of dance, collective movement, gesture, costume and masks – focused theatrical elements set within the stunning peripheral views available from the *theatron* at the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus – the *seeing* place.

Chapter Three

Theatron: The Seeing Place

The culmination of the great procession of the City Dionysia was the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus on the southeast slope of the Acropolis. This open-air space overlooked the old southern city, its shrines, monuments, fortifications and roadways that led off into the Attic countryside, which was divided by low mountains rolling down to the sea some 7 miles away. The sanctuary was deliberately established at this site because of this magnificent view, its location in the spiritual, historical and cultural heart of Athens and, importantly, because the natural *cavea* provided a large sloping viewing place where a considerable number of spectators could be accommodated. The relationship of this viewing place (*theatron*) to its surrounding environment and the spatial dynamics that developed as a result had a significant impact on the plays that were staged there.

In the fifth century the *theatron* at the Sanctuary of Dionysos never resembled the monumental stone edifices such as the Theatre at Epidauros or the remains of the Hellenistic Theatre of Dionysos that can be seen today. These spaces, with their curvilinear orchestras, tiers of stone seats and vast permanent *theatra* have become the visual paradigm of what a Greek theatre was supposed to look like and have exerted an enormous influence over generations of scholars, many of whom are still searching for the aesthetic harmony of a circular *orchestra*, a sense of monumentality and an audience of many thousands seated across from each other. These are powerfully ingrained images of the Greek theatre but the reality of the available evidence points to a much smaller, temporary wooden, predominantly frontal, rectilinear space that sought to place its spectators within the existing environment of their natural surroundings and civic topography and not erect a new artificial one around them. Being seated in the *theatron* was about seeing far more than the “on-stage” action presented in the performing area. On the contrary, the spectators arrived together imbued with the festival spirit of the procession, and entered a sacred space where they saw performances that were visibly and aurally connected to the specific Athenian landscape they inhabited.

In this chapter I suggest that in order to more fully understand the performance dynamics of Greek tragedy we should seek to situate the plays within their original staging conditions and be aware that the theatrical experience of fifth century Athens was very different from modern concepts of attending the “theatre” and that these differences were primarily visual. Martin Revermann has stated “there can be no doubt that during the actual dramatic festivals the theatre and sanctuary were most closely connected.”¹ In fact it may be misleading to describe the performance space where these plays were performed as “The Theatre of Dionysos” at all. The term is not found at all in fifth or fourth centuries and even a source as late as Pausanias (1.20.4) describes the sanctuary and theatre as separate spaces (“near the sanctuary of Dionysos *and* the theatre”- my italics). When there is a direct reference to the theatre in Aristophanes, his characters say “before the *theatron*” (πρὸς τὸ θέατρον) and always when they are directly addressing their spectators.² Rehm has suggested that the performance space be viewed in terms of “landscape architecture” in that it is composed of three basic elements – the hillside of the Acropolis; a flat area (the *orchestra*); and the *skene*,³ I wish to go further, and suggest that the two long wing entrances (the *eisodoi*) are incredibly important to the structure and visuality of the plays and that the space’s surrounding views, both those that have occurred as part of the prior procession or are lodged in the social memories of the spectators, and those that are physically apparent in the bodily eye, are vital features in the presentation and reception of fifth century tragedy.

I also propose that the sanctuary of Dionysos was deliberately established around 530 BCE to accommodate the newly established City Dionysia and that its location, adjacent to the only large naturally occurring *cavea* on the slopes of the Acropolis, was chosen with the intention of situating a *theatron* there from the outset. In this way the topography of the sanctuary itself reflected the City Dionysia’s primary function as a spectacle festival by providing a “seeing-place” where a large number of spectators could gather to watch the performances and

¹ Revermann (2006), 113.

² Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 628-629; *Peace* 733-4, *Knights* 508. These all come from the *parabasis* of each respective play. Thucydides (8.93.1) does mention a “*theatron* of Dionysos” but it is at Munychia, a hill in the Piraeus, not the Acropolis in Athens.

³ Rehm (2002) 37-38.

sacrifices held in honor of the god, and the god in turn could draw pleasure from watching his worshipers *watching*. With this in mind, the archaeological evidence for the theatre will be surveyed as well as the evidence relating to the establishment of both the City Dionysia and the theatre. The widely held view that the theatre was moved from the Agora around 500 BCE due to collapsing *ikria* (wooden benches) will be challenged and the main structural elements of the fifth century theatre—*theatron*, *eisodoi*, *skene* and *orchestra*—will be examined in the context of their existence within an environmental “seeing place” and how their form was influenced by symporeutic performance. Additionally, sight will be connected with sound and some of the latest research into the acoustical qualities of ancient theatres will be discussed to try to shed some new light on our understanding of the development of the ancient stage. Finally, borrowing a term applied to the work of Gertrude Stein, “landscape,” this chapter will conclude with a brief examination of how the words of ancient drama operated in tandem with the theatre’s visual environment.

Archaeological Evidence

The Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus was located at the foot of a natural bowl (*cavea*) in the southeast slope of the Acropolis (Fig. 2). The earliest structure that has been found there is the small archaic temple of Dionysos dated variously between 550-500 BCE. Pickard-Cambridge examined the 1896 excavation findings of Dörpfeld and Reisch and concluded that the materials used in construction and the shape of the iron clamps indicated a date during the “Peisistratean epoch.”⁴ This temple was fairly small (44’x26’) and consisted of a cella and pronaos with two or four columns and it probably housed the *xoanon* of Dionysos. It was oriented on the usual east-west axis of the Greek temple and situated at the far west of the sanctuary facing over the precinct and across from the entrance. This lay to the east on or close to the later route of the Street of Tripods, which also entered the sanctuary to the east beneath the Odeon of Pericles built around 100 years later in 440.⁵ The date of the temple is

⁴ Pickard-Cambridge (1946), 3-4.

⁵ Gorgos (2008), 29-43. Andocides (*On The Mysteries* 38) reports that in 415 during a night lit by a full moon Diocleides, standing next to the propylaea of the sanctuary, saw men coming down from the Odeon into the orchestra; Pausanias seems to approach the sanctuary from the east along the street of tripods 1.20.1.

also is placed in the third quarter of the sixth century by Fiechter (1935), Travlos (1971) and Korres (1989),⁶ whereas Wycherley dated the temple in the middle of the sixth century.⁷ More recently, Moretti has called for a sixth century date and Goette has dated the temple to 530 BCE.⁸

There is considerable debate as to the date of the other extant remains at the site, which it has been generally agreed all relate in some fashion to a performance space. These are very small sections of walls (1-3 in Fig. 1) and one of them (3 in Fig. 1 or D after Dörpfeld and SM1 after Fiechter) seems to arc in a slight curve. This led Dörpfeld to believe that it formed part of the retaining wall of a circular orchestra dating to the early fifth century.⁹ This identification with slight variations was adopted by Dörpfeld, Fiechter, Dinsmoor and Wycherley and became the prevailing view for much of the twentieth century.¹⁰ In the 1970s, Travlos challenged this theory and reconstructed SM1 as part of a more gently arching curvilinear retaining wall and yet still suggested, with no evidence at all a circular orchestra was situated within it. More recently, the entire notion that SM1 has anything to do with a circular orchestra has been challenged by Gebhard, Pöhlmann, Moretti and Goette.¹¹ Furthermore, Moretti feels that SM1 is a retaining wall used to contain a terrace and should be dated to the mid-sixth century BCE based upon its resemblance to the type of construction and materials used in the ramp to the Acropolis built at that time. This may be evidence for the building of a level area above the sanctuary or a demarcation of space between the sanctuary and *theatron* at the same time the sanctuary was established. However, despite the support of Travlos, Wurster, Kalligas and Hitzten-Bohlen, the date is uncertain.¹² So far no other remains have been identified as belonging to the sixth century although we might posit that there would also have been an altar and some kind of boundary wall or markers that established the perimeter of the sanctuary. It does seem as if the archaic temple was one of the first structures on the site and that there was probably not a sanctuary in this location prior to the mid-sixth century, though

⁶ Fiechter (1936), 66-67; Travlos (1971), 537; Korres (1989), 15-16.

⁷ Wycherley (1978), 183-184.

⁸ Moretti (2000), 380-381; Goette (2001), 50.

⁹ Moretti (2000), 392-395, summarizes the arguments. For both Dörpfeld's and Fiechter's plans of the site see Scullion (1994), 137, fig. 1 and 138, fig. 2.

¹⁰ See Scullion (1994), 3-66.

¹¹ Gebhard (1974), 428-440; Pöhlmann (1981), 129-146; Moretti (2000); Goette (2007).

¹² See Moretti (2000), 394 n. 52.

the presence of natural springs in the area (one of them significantly included in the design of the Asclepieion in the 420s) may be an indication that the area was considered “sacred” and of a great age.

The Sanctuary of Dionysos

We do not know if the southeast slope of the Acropolis was regarded as sacred to Dionysos prior to the building of the temple there c550-530 BCE. Pausanias regarded the site as the “oldest shrine to Dionysos” in Athens but was referring to the archaic temple of Dionysos, which in his day stood next to a larger fourth-century structure.¹³ Demosthenes speaks of an older shrine of Dionysos “en Limnais” (of the marshes),¹⁴ and Thucydides places this shrine in the old southern city and states that the “older Dionysia” was still celebrated there (in the last quarter of the fifth century).¹⁵ Pollux is our only source that refers to another Dionysian theatre and calls it the Lenaeon and this may be too late to be of any significant use.¹⁶ Kolb attempted to place a Lenaeon sanctuary in the Agora but his evidence is highly debatable and soundly refuted by Slater, who sites the Lenaeon sanctuary on the banks of the Ilissos River on the outskirts of the old city.¹⁷ Perhaps Dionysos’ association with “the marshes” is an expression of his affiliation with liminal regions, borderlands, mountains, unsettled areas and the countryside. The question remains open, although at some point it seems as if both the Lenaea and the Dionysia were held at the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus.¹⁸

Mountainsides and wild places are closely associated with the cult of Dionysos, himself a god of marginal places. In Euripides’ *Phoenissae* (227-239) the chorus sings of “the frenzied heights of Dionysos,” the holy cavern of the serpent, the god’s watchtower in the hills and “the sacred snow-capped mountain.”¹⁹ The mountainside is also invoked in Sophocles’ *Antigone* (1115-1154) where the chorus sings of “the twin-crested rock” and the “ivy covered

¹³ Pausanias 1.20.1.

¹⁴ Demosthenes *Against Neaera* 76.

¹⁵ Thucydides 2.15.4.

¹⁶ Pollux 4.121. On a possible Lenaeon theatre see Slater (1986), 255-264, and Russo (1994), 1-32.

¹⁷ Kolb (1981), 20-51; Slater (1986), 255-264. See also Hooker (1960), 112-116, and Wycherley (1965), 72-76.

¹⁸ Slater (1986), 255-264

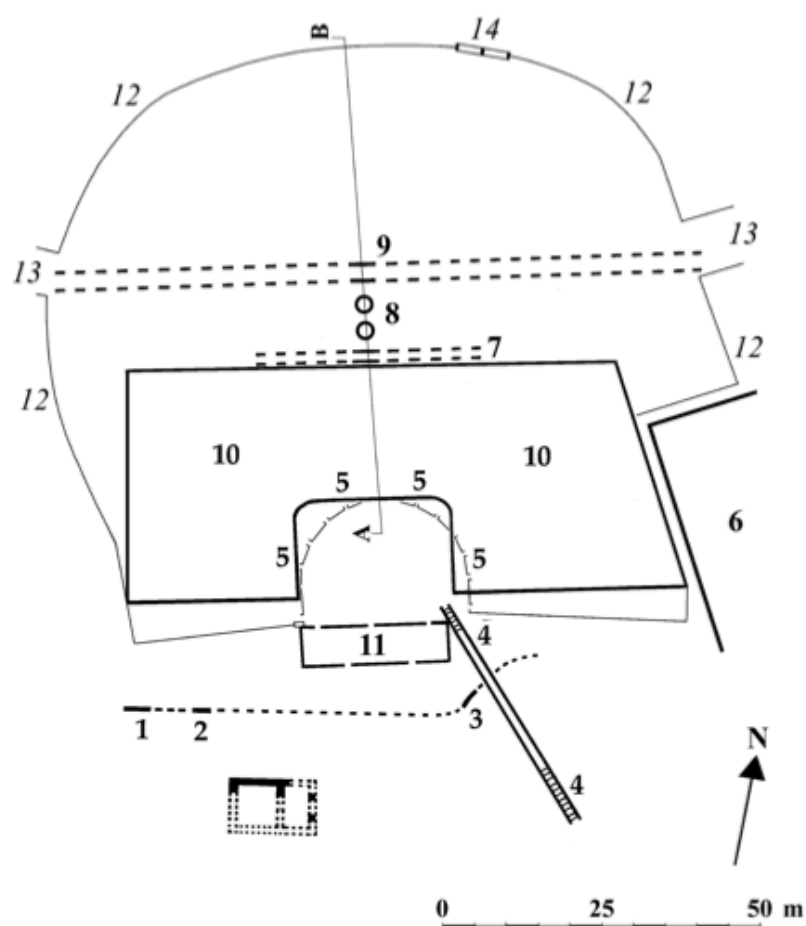
¹⁹ Cullyer (2005), 3-20, and Scullion (1998), 96-122.

slopes” of the Nysian Mountains, pleading with Dionysos to come with “Cathartic foot over the Parnassian slope.” In Euripides’ *Bacchae*, it is the mountain itself that becomes the extra-theatrical stage for the wild ecstatic rites that Pentheus becomes obsessed with witnessing or what Helene Foley has described as “the black double of the play we have seen up to that point.”²⁰ Dionysos is also closely associated with the mythical Mt. Nysa in Asia Minor in the *Iliad* (6.130-135) and the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos* (1.1).

While Dionysos is not the only god associated with the mountain and shrines located on high points, the idea of the mountainside as a place of isolation totally separate from the life of the polis or organized community is particularly Dionysian. This certainly makes sense when looking for Dionysos on the banks of the Athenian river Ilissos as marshlands can also be regarded as liminal places as strange and disorientating environments that seem quite “otherworldly.” In a marsh even the ground one walks on can give way to water at any moment.²¹ But what of a sanctuary located in the heart of the polis in one of the most continually inhabited parts of the city, the southeast slope of the Acropolis, in what way could this space be described as liminal or “Dionysian?” Though its physical location in the religious and cultural center of the polis was important, the choice to situate the sanctuary and *theatron* there may have had much more to do with the view.

²⁰ Foley (1980), 124. See also Barrett (1998), 337-360.

²¹ The eponymous chorus of Aristophanes’ *Frogs* evoke the mystical qualities of the marshes in their famous song as Dionysos and Xanthias cross the Styx (209-221). For the division between city and country associated with the worship of Dionysos see Heinrichs (1990), 257-277.



- 1-3: late Archaic terrace wall: 1: wall SM 4; 2: wall SM 2; 3: wall SM 1
- 4: water channel (drainage for the orchestra)
- 5: *prohedria*
- 6: Odeion of Perikles
- 7: rock cutting for theatre access (or foundation for back wall of theatre)
- 8: two wells belonging to a house
- 9: ancient road (later Peripatos)
- 10: reconstructed *theatron* of the Classical theatre
- 11: reconstructed *skene* of the Classical theatre
- A-B: Doerpfeld's excavation trench through the *theatron*
- 12: outline of the 'Lykurgan' *theatron*
- 13: entry points of the Peripatos
- 14: choregic monument of Thrasylos (320/19 BC) at the 'katatome'

Fig. 1 Reconstructed plan of the Classical Theatre of Dionysos with some 'Lykurgan' additions (bold: Classical; italics: 'Lykurgan').

Fig. 1. Plan of extant remains of Theatre of Dionysos by Goette.²²

²² Goette (2007), 31.

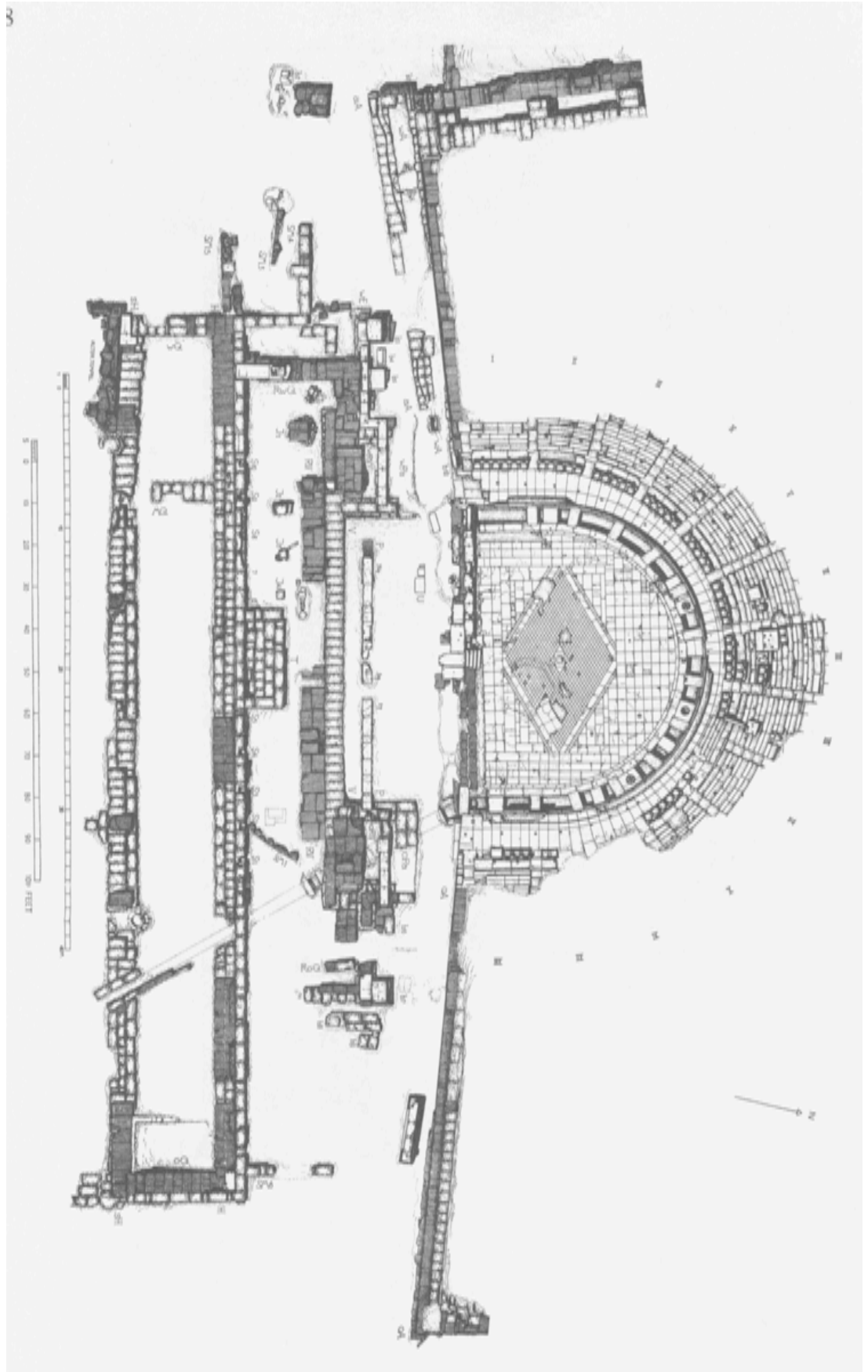


Fig. 1.1 Plan of existing remains of the Theatre of Dionysos in Athens (after Fiechter)

The view from the *Cavea*

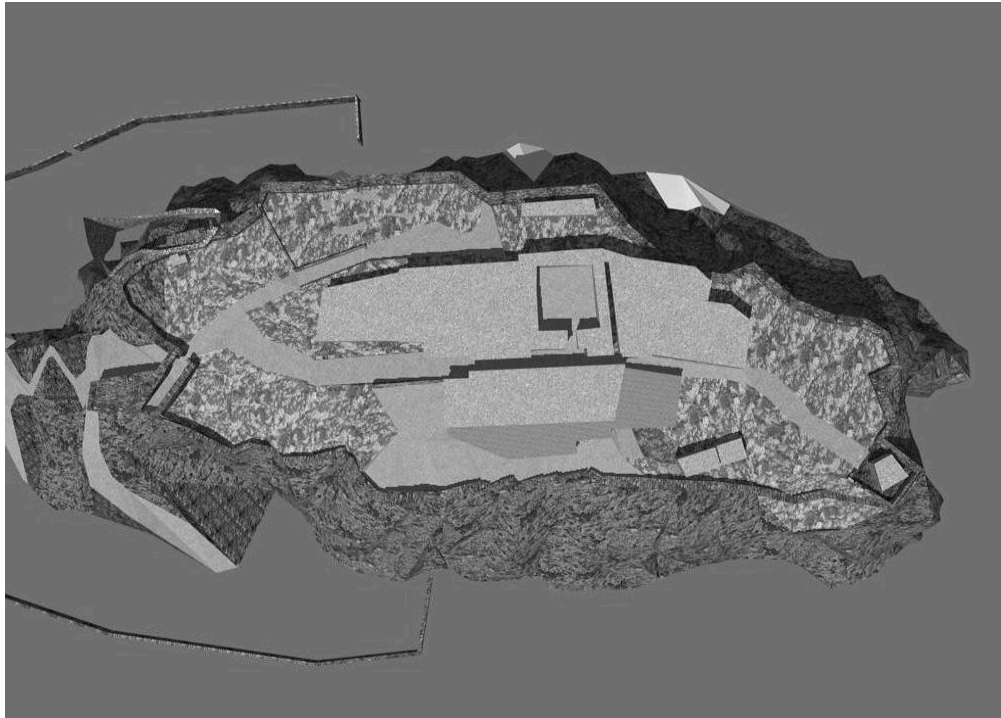


Fig. 2 Computer rendering of an aerial view of the Acropolis during the Mycenaean Period showing the natural cavea in the rock on the southeast slope. (Dimitris Tsalkanis).

The physical site of the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus is less important than its relationship to the *cavea* that stands above it and the view it offered the spectators who gathered there. In fact, this particular location on the southeast slope is the only place on or adjacent to the Acropolis suitable to be developed into a viewing area (*theatron*) as can be seen from observing the line of the bedrock (fig. 2). It was this natural cavea, its location on the slopes of the Acropolis at the very heart of Attica and the view of the old city and Attic countryside it offered a large number of people that were the reasons the sanctuary was established in this spot; thus, the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus was always intended to be a “seeing place.” Today it is still possible to get a sense of the vista offered from the *cavea* by visiting the site; however, extensive modern urban development, including the striking new Acropolis Museum and the planting of a row of trees across from it, between the theatre and sanctuary, has severely obscured the view from the lower seats.

What is still apparent however is the physical relationship of the site with its surrounding

environment. The southern Acropolis wall rises sharply behind the cavea and there is an open view across the *orchestra* into the sanctuary and beyond and to the left and right. The Odeon of Pericles erected in the mid-fifth century on the east side would have obscured the view somewhat to the spectator's left but even this structure was probably built on an open plan without walls.²³ An impression of the ancient relationship between the *cavea* and the surrounding environment can be gleaned from photos and paintings of the site from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A photo of the Acropolis taken from the southeast by Félix Bonfils dated to between 1868-1875 (fig. 3) shows how the Acropolis slopes dominate the surrounding landscape and the panoramic view that would have been offered to the spectators by the *cavea* (the theatre and sanctuary had not yet been excavated when this photo was taken).²⁴ This view across southern Attica was clearly visible even from the front row and even with the use of the *skene*, and assuming that the Lenaea festival was also held in this space, provided the backdrop for nearly all the tragedies and comedies produced in the fifth century.



Fig. 3. The Athenian Acropolis from the southeast 1868-1875. Félix Bonfils, Brünnow Papers, Manuscript Division, Princeton University.

²³ Gorgos (2008).

²⁴ Four good panoramic views can be observed in a 360-degree rotation at <http://www.whitman.edu/theatre/theatretour/dionysos/dionysus.tour.htm> as part of The Ancient Greek Theatre Archive located at Whitman College.



Fig. 4 The Theatre of Dionysos looking down from the Acropolis towards the southeast in 2003. Photo. Thomas G. Hines, the Ancient Theatre Archive, Whitman College.

Dionysos Eleuthereus

The sanctuary named Dionysos Eleuthereus was named after the town of Eleutherai located on the border between Attica and Boeotia some 27 miles to the north. There have been several attempts by scholars to explain the connection with Eleutherai but the very nature of Greek aetiological myths means that any precise explanation is bound to fail.²⁵ Barbara Kowalzig has recently explored the nature of aetiology, in particular its relationship to choral performance, and has demonstrated how aetiological myths deliberately transcend time in order to conflate a mythical past with a ritual present. A sense of sacredness and age-old practice is thus created by attaching myths to certain visible physical locations and local customary practices and often enacted by means of performance. According to Kowalzig, “Aetiology thus transcends real (historical) time by postulating a physical or local continuity of religious place.”²⁶ The identification and ritualization of local physical *and* visible places is central to the effective operation of aetiological myths. We can see this in action at the end of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*

²⁵ In particular see Connor (1990) who argues for a date of around 500 BCE; however, Cartledge (1997), 23-24, is probably right in finding much to admire in Connor’s arguments but still placing the date of the foundation of the City Dionysia at around 530 BCE. See also Sourvinou-Inwood (1994), 275-277, and P. Rhodes (2003), 104-119. See also Chapter Two.

²⁶ Kowalzig (2007), 24-32. See also Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 22-25, where she describes the perceptual frame of Greek drama as “zooming” between the mythic past and contemporary religious practices.

where Aeschylus creates a new aetiology for the Areopagus council, marking its new political and social role in real Athenian society with an ancient foundation myth linked to an actual physical location, in this case Ares' Rock in Athens just a few hundred feet to the west of the theatre. Likewise, the sanctuary of Dionysos and its *theatron* needed to reflect the liminal qualities of the worship of Dionysos and his associations with mountains, the countryside and far off places—the mythic and poetic alternative to the world of the polis. From the seats on the *cavea* the spectator could see far beyond the city to mountains, plains and the sea—the world that existed beyond Athens and the connection with the border town of Eleutherai reinforced this notion of aesthetic liminality that underpinned the festival as a whole.

The name “Dionysos Eleuthereus” has led some to believe that it is a political reflection of the annexation of the previously Theban town of Eleutherai into Attica.²⁷ It is far more likely that the name was intended to serve the aetiology in that Eleutherai was said to have been a mythical birthplace of Dionysos, or at least a town that was founded by the god.²⁸ Eleutherai stands over the pass of Gyphtokastro, which leads to Mt. Cithaeron, especially sacred to Dionysos and the place where Pentheus was torn apart by the Bacchae. One of the myths associated with the foundation of the festival of Dionysos explains how a man named Pegasos, who Pausanias associated with King Amphiktyon (c800 BCE),²⁹ brought a wooden image of Dionysos to Athens from Eleutherai in order to establish the god's worship. The Athenians refused to observe this new god and so Dionysos caused a disease to strike at the men's genitals. Once the god was duly worshipped the terrible affliction cleared up and the Athenians paid homage to the god with phalloi.³⁰ This story adds great age to the foundation of the City Dionysia and connects the sanctuary of Dionysos on the slope of the Acropolis with the border town of Eleutherai. Likewise, the procession of the *eisagoge* (“introduction”) that saw the cult statue of Dionysos carried into the city from the Academy that lay outside the city walls was a ritual embodiment of this aetiological myth that performed a representational connection between one of the innermost parts of the city of Athens and one of its most outlying, mountainous districts. Thus, as Dionysos was the god of wild places, mountainsides

²⁷ Connor (1990).

²⁸ Diodorus 3.66.1 and 4.2.6. See Parker (1996), 94-95.

²⁹ Pausanias 1.2.5.

³⁰ The story is found in the Scholion to Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 243. See Csapo (1995), 110-111.

and borderlands with mythological connections to Greece via Thebes, so Eleutherai stood on the border between Athenian and Theban territories. In this way, the site of the sanctuary and its *theatron* encapsulated the liminal spirit of Dionysos and connected its spectators to both the city it stood in and the wider—and wilder—countryside of Attica.³¹

The Foundation of the Festival

At some point in the mid to late sixth century the city of Athens established a new festival of Dionysos based on the old Rural Dionysia, a processional festival that was held in December.³² The new City Dionysia seems to have been established with the deliberate intention of being a pre-eminent pan-Attic festival that placed the city of Athens at the center of Attic cultural activity, one that was offered to both the members of the *demos* and *theoroi* visiting from foreign states; hence the decision to hold the festival in late March once the sailing routes had opened up. Though the City Dionysia still included a large procession and animal sacrifices, competitive performances grew in importance as the leading citizens of Athens increasingly used them as vehicles for the expression of public prestige by serving as *choregoi* (“producers”).³³ These performances were presented at the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus, which may well have been established with this purpose in mind in order to take advantage of the natural *cavea*, which could accommodate the large number of people expected to attend.

Though the archaeological record indicates a date of around 540-530 BCE for the oldest remains at the sanctuary there has been much debate over the dates that can be attributed to the founding of the City Dionysia and the development of drama in general, especially those prior to 502/1 BCE.³⁴ This is the date generally believed to begin the *Fasti*, an inscription dated to c346 BCE found near the Agora that includes fragmentary records of the victors of the City Dionysia from 473-328, which has been reconstructed back to just prior to 500

³¹ For the *eisagoge* see Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 57-60; Sourvinou-Inwood (1994) and (2003), 72-79; Parker (1996), 93-95 and (2005), 318; Hedreen (2004), 46-47.

³² Csapo (1995), 121.

³³ See Wilson (2000), 120-197, (2009), 8; Pritchard (2004), 208-228.

³⁴ For example, see Connor (1990), who argues for a date closer to the beginning of the fifth century BCE.

BCE.³⁵ Another famous inscription that purports to give date information for key events in the history of Greek drama is the Marmor Parium (Parian Marble), which dates from 264/3 BCE and sets out events from the reign of Kekrops (supposedly 1581 BCE) down to 299 BCE.³⁶ Here, Thespis is credited with bringing a drama with spoken dialogue into the city sometime between 538-528 BCE. The chronology of dates attributed to the development of Athenian drama as cited in various *Suda* entries and by Eratosthenes, Eusebius and the Marmor Parium have all been called into serious question, most recently by West and Scullion, who are rightly suspicious of the all-too-neat triple Olympiad divisions between key dates, which West traces back as least as far as Eratosthenes in the third century BCE.³⁷ Scullion remarks that the difficulty in recovering records of performances prior to the second quarter of the fifth century may be due to the destruction of Athens at the hands of the Persians in 479, and that the *Suda* is “totally unreliable.”³⁸ However, as West points out, whatever the dependability of the sources they do all indicate a date for Thespis around 540-530 and that people in Greece in 264/3, when the Marmor Parium was set up, were connecting Thespis and the founding of drama in the city with the time of Pisistratus. He states: “Obviously the Dionysia grew in magnificence in the second half of the sixth century; they continued to do so in the fifth, it is not implausible that Pisistratus should have assisted the process by some particular initiative of his own.”³⁹ Additionally, there is a parallel tradition that Pisistratus or his sons founded the City Dionysia and this may have developed because the dates for Thespis that seem to have been generally accepted in the ancient world coincide with Pisistratus’ period of influence (c546-527 BCE). Yet sources do indicate that early dramatic forms were indeed patronized by tyrants such as Periander of Corinth and Heiron of Sicily,⁴⁰ and Plutarch also reports how Thespis began to perform drama during the time of Pisistratus.⁴¹ Therefore, questioning of the traditional dates for the development of drama in Athens should not preclude the possibility that Pisistratus presided over the foundation of the City Dionysia around 540-530 BCE, the same time that the first temple of Dionysos was erected on the southeast slope of the

³⁵ I.G. ii². 2318. See Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 101-104; West (1989), 251-254; Scullion (2002b), 81-83. See also P. Rhodes (2003), 104-119.

³⁶ Connor (1990), 26-32) has shown how difficult it is to glean anything reliable from the Parian Marble.

³⁷ West (1989).

³⁸ Scullion (2002b), 81.

³⁹ West (1989), 254.

⁴⁰ Herodotus 1.23. See also Bosher (2006), 1-215, who proposes that drama in Sicily flourished under tyrants and languished during periods of democracy.

⁴¹ Plutarch *Solon* 29, 2-5.

Acropolis and the retaining wall that marked off a large terrace directly above may have been built.

In the absence of any evidence of cult practice to the god of the southeast Acropolis slope prior to the mid-sixth century and the tradition that the cult was founded by Pisistratus it might be assumed that the sanctuary was established with the express purpose of serving the newly instituted City Dionysia as an instrument of social cohesion that served the polis building interests of both the tyrants and Aristocratic factions of Athens. Connor has fundamentally questioned the assumption that Pisistratus had anything to do with founding the festival and sought to connect it with the new democracy after the reforms of Cleisthenes around 500 BCE.⁴² While many of his arguments are compelling they could be just as easily be applied to a reorganization and enlargement of an existing festival founded some years before, as will be suggested below. Parker has also expressed caution in accepting a Pisistratid date for the establishment of the City Dionysia but he does concede that the extant remains of the sanctuary probably date to the mid-sixth century rather than the end as Connor proposes. Parker concludes that “we would have no compelling reason to believe that precinct and festival were founded at the same date.”⁴³ Yet the topography of the site with its deliberate proximity to the *cavea* must challenge this view. What was the purpose of the site, then, if not to stage the performances of the City Dionysia? There is nothing to suggest that it was used for the Rural Dionysia, which was mainly processional, and we know that performances staged during the Lenaea were moved there in 440 BCE, which indicates that they were not held there prior to that date.⁴⁴ Sourvinou-Inwood has also argued for a date of around 530 BCE for the establishment of the City Dionysia and has taken issue with the theories of Connor.⁴⁵

Whatever the reasons for the founding of the City Dionysia, it should be placed within the context of the general urbanization of Athens that took place around the mid-sixth century BCE. At that time, the temple of Athena Polias on the Acropolis became the cult center of all

⁴² Connor (1990).

⁴³ Parker (1996), 92-93.

⁴⁴ *JG II*² 2325 – Victor Lists of comic dramatists competing at the Lenaea. See Csapo (1995), 133-134.

⁴⁵ Sourvinou-Inwood (2011), 19-23 and (2003), 100-104.

of Attica and was adorned with new pedimental sculptures, the Panathenaea festival was reorganized and enlarged and the Acropolis saw the first marble sculptures placed there as dedications. Pisistratus may or may not have had a part in the founding of this new festival, but he did preside over the city during this time. Therefore, taking into consideration the general growth of Athens at this period as a center of power, prestige and cult practice to the wider community of Attica, a date for the founding of the City Dionysia of around 550-530 BCE makes a great deal of sense.⁴⁶

Another element that should be considered in establishing a date of around 530 BCE for the foundation of the City Dionysia, the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus and the erection of a *theatron*, is the existence of other sanctuaries of Dionysos within Attica with a similar topographical pattern. Some of these can also be linked to the aetiological myths surrounding the establishment of the festival and the origins of drama. Pausanias described a sanctuary of Dionysos at Eleutherai (1.38.8) but it has not been securely identified.⁴⁷ However, the extant remains of a theatre at Ikaria, an Attic deme on Northern slope of Mount Pentelikon, can shed light on both the date of the establishment of the City Dionysia and the form the first sanctuary may have taken. Marble fragments of a statue of Dionysos have been found there dating to 530 BCE and the sanctuary itself is also dated to that period—the same time as the establishment of the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus in Athens.⁴⁸ At Ikaria, there is a small theatre that utilizes a natural *cavea* in the hillside; two temple structures, one for Apollo and the other perhaps to Dionysos; a retaining wall; earthen embankments and a rectangular performance space.⁴⁹ The Athenians regarded Ikaria as the place where Thespis “invented” tragedy⁵⁰ and there was a large seated statue of Dionysos on the hillside⁵¹ with a great bronze statue of Athena higher up on the summit of the mountain.⁵² Additionally, Ikaria’s connection with Dionysos extends to its association with the introduction of viticulture to Attica, a myth

⁴⁶ Boersma (2000), 49-56. See also Morris (1991).

⁴⁷ Goette (2001), 317-319.

⁴⁸ I. Romano (1982), 398-409.

⁴⁹ A possible reconstruction of the sanctuary of Dionysos at Ikarion can be seen in Leacock (1984), 5, fig. 11.

⁵⁰ Athenaeus 40a-b. For inscriptions from Ikarion relating to the Dionysia there see Csapo (1995), 125-127.

⁵¹ Goette (2001), 262-264. See also Wiles (1997), 27-29.

⁵² Pausanias 1.32.2.

enshrined in the modern name of the village close by, which is called Dionyso.⁵³

Ikaria is an important site when considering the development of the Athenian *theatron* even though a number of scholars who have surveyed Attic deme theatres have recoiled at the idea of accepting that these simple spaces, seemingly devoid of any sense of architectural harmony or proportion, could have been theatres. Instead, they have supposed that they were mainly civic meeting places that were occasionally used for performances.⁵⁴ Yet at Ikaria there is a both a sanctuary and a *cavea* intended for spectators who gathered to watch performances as attested by both the Thespian tradition and the epigraphic evidence for the Dionysian competitions held there.⁵⁵

While the plan of the sanctuary of Ikaria may make little sense drawn on a page, its physical setting, utilizing the hillside, processional approach, temple location and altar, create a cohesive sanctuary and performance space in keeping with the natural surroundings.⁵⁶ As we have seen, the aetiological myths of Dionysos in Athens connect him with both Eleutherai, the Attic town closest to Dionysian Boeotian territory, and Ikaria, the place where it was believed drama had originated and where Dionysos was said to have first been received in Attica.⁵⁷

Ikaria may also have a political link with Pisistratus who had a vested interest in promoting the mountainous regions of Attica and easing the tensions that existed between the population

⁵³ See also Biers and Boyd (1982), 1-18, and Buck (1889), 461-477.

⁵⁴ For example Pickard-Cambridge (1948), 125, referred to the theatre at Thorikos, which also has a rectilinear orchestra, as “the town’s public place.” See also Ashby (1988), 8. The term “theatral area” has been coined to describe spaces that seem to possess all the requisites of a theatre (*orchestra*, *cavea*, *eisodoi*, etc.) but are found wanting as performance spaces. See Dilke (1948a), 126. Jessica Paga (2010) in her study of Attic deme theatres has suggested that only the larger/wealthier demes had theatres and that they were used for civic as well as festive purposes. She describes these as “hybrid” spaces (13). However, her study does not take into consideration that demes may have erected temporary *theatra* for the sole purpose of accommodating festival spectators and that even the theatre of Dionysos in Athens was put to use for a special meeting of the assembly immediately after the City Dionysia before the *ikria* has been dismantled. Csapo (2007, 107) points out that once the theatre of Dionysos had been built in stone it was regularly used for meetings of the assembly and even preferred over the Pnyx. Thus by Paga’s method the Lycurgan theatre would be termed a “hybrid” space. A better guide to whether a space was used for performance in the absence of literary or epigraphic evidence might be its physical context in terms of its relationship to a shrine, sanctuary or temple or its proximity to a processional route. An example of this is the deme theatre at Rhamnous, which lay below the fortifications of the city and at the end of a long processional route that led down the hill and past the town below. Spectators sitting in the theatre at Rhamnous had a panoramic view of both their community and the sea before them (Gebhard, 1974, 434-436).

⁵⁵ See Csapo (1995), 125-127. For a reconstruction of the theatre at Ikaria see Leacroft (1984), 5, fig. 11.

⁵⁶ For a plan of Ikaria see Wiles (1997), 28, fig. 3.

⁵⁷ Ikaria had its own aetiological myth of Dionysos. It was said that the god was well received there by a certain Ikarios who was given the gift of viniculture in return. In Pausanias (1.2.5) Ikaria is linked to Eleutherai.

in the ever-expanding city of Athens and the people of Attica who resided in the countryside. Herodotus tells us that Pisistratus formed his own faction of *huperakrioi* (“men beyond the highlands) or as Aristotle called them, *diakrioi* (“highlanders”), to rival the two existing groups of *paraloi* (“coastal men”) and *pediakoi* (“plains men”).⁵⁸ Once in power he reinforced this connection between city and country and founded the City Dionysia as a new pan-Attic cult of the god with its associations with mountains, far-off places, viniculture and agricultural abundance, a most suitable deity to help promote his social engineering of Attica and the unification of city and country. With this in mind, Claudia Zatta has also attempted to explain the sudden emergence of Attic vases depicting satyrs from around 540 BCE as an artistic expression of this Pisistratid policy and it is interesting that one of the vases she describes that dates to this period shows Ikarion receiving Dionysos.⁵⁹ In fact, the popularity of Satyrs and Dionysian imagery on Attic ware from around 540 BCE might also be added to the evidence for the establishment of the City Dionysia around this time.⁶⁰

Expansion of the *Theatron* around 500 BCE

During the excavations in the 1890s, Dörpfeld found potsherds in the embankments of the *cavea* that had been used to extend the natural bowl of the hillside. He dated them to around 500 BCE and this date has often been combined with a misinterpretation of lexicographic material relating to the use of wooden benches (*ikria*), performances in the Agora and a collapse of the *ikria*, that have been conflated to suggest the following series of events:

1. Dramatic performances were once held in the Agora, where *ikria* were set up and there was an area called the *orchestra*.
2. Around 499 BCE there was a collapse of the *ikria*.
3. As a direct result of this collapse, performances were moved to the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus around 499 BCE.

⁵⁸ Herodotus 1.59, Aristotle. *Ath. Pol.* 13.4. See also Henrichs (1990), 257-277.

⁵⁹ Zatta (2009), 47, fig. 2b.

⁶⁰ On Satyr vases see Lissarrague (1990), 228-236 and Hedreen (2007b), 150-195.

This has become a prevailing attitude among scholars but there are many problems with this theory.⁶¹ These include some highly spurious dates; a probable tendency on the part of the lexicographers to assume that theatres were built of stone, whereas the evidence strongly suggests that wooden *ikria* were used at least until 411 BCE⁶²; and a general confusion between processional, athletic and performance viewing in the Agora and performances staged at the sanctuary of Dionysos. Most scholars have adopted a diachronic interpretation assuming that the *ikria* set up in the Agora were a precursor of the *theatron* established at the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus. However, both archaeological and literary evidence indicate that *ikria* were in use in the Agora well into the fourth century, if not beyond.⁶³ In 1946, Pickard-Cambridge collected the evidence of both scholiasts and lexicographers on the subject of *ikria* and concluded, “there is a general agreement that a collapse of the *ikria* led to the construction of a *theatron*,” despite the fact that of his 13 cited sources he identified only 2 (*Suda* π 2230 Adler s.v. *Pratinas* and α 357 s.v. *Aeschylus*) that mention the *ikria* collapsing and these do not refer to the Agora at all.⁶⁴ Reflecting Pickard-Cambridge, Dinsmoor wrote in 1973, “In fact, the reason for the transfer to the precinct of Dionysus appears to have been the collapse of the wooden scaffolding or bleachers (*ikria*) which had been erected around the orchestra in the Agora during a performance at about 498 BCE.” He adds, “Both Photius and Eustathius state emphatically that the accident occurred in the Agora before the building of the theatre of Dionysus; and Hesychius and Suidas, while not mentioning the Agora, to be sure, assert that the event occurred before the building of the theatre and that the erection of the theatre of Dionysus was the direct consequence of the accident.”⁶⁵ Yet Photius and Eustathius mention

⁶¹ Scholars who have adopted the theory that performances *moved* from the Agora to the sanctuary of Dionysos include: Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 37-38; Dilke (1948a), 146-148; Rehm (2002), 43-44; Wiles (1997), 25-26; Kolb (1981), 2-3; Walton (1996), 34; Moretti (2000), 377-398; Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 160-161; Dugdale (2008), 49; Cartledge (1997), 23; Holschen (2007), 165; and Beacham (2007), 205. Alternative views can be found in Wycherley (1965), 72-76; Slater (1986), 255-264; and Scullion (1994), 52-66. Fearn (2007), 294-313 places the performance of Dithyramb in the Agora at least until the Odeon of Pericles was completed in the 440s BCE. Miller (1995), 218-219 places performances in the Agora in the archaic Agora to the north of the Acropolis and posits that the northern slope may have been used to accommodate spectators. Miller believes that the move to the southeast slope was made to take advantage of the larger *cavea* found there and the route of the Street of Tripods connected these two spaces.

⁶² Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriasuzae* 395. Also Cratinus *PCG* F 360. See Csapo (2007), 98.

⁶³ Postholes dating to the fifth and fourth centuries BCE have been found in the Athenian classical Agora along both sides of the Sacred Way; Camp (1986), 45-47. Athenaios tells us that a horse commander in the third century set up *ikria* in the Athenian Agora so his mistress could have a grand view of the cavalry display (Athenaios 4.167e-f).

⁶⁴ Pickard-Cambridge (1946), 11-13.

⁶⁵ Dinsmoor and Anderson (1973), 109-110.

nothing of the sort and both just say that people used to watch the Dionysian contests in the Agora before the *theatron* of Dionysos was built.⁶⁶ Hesychios does have a number of entries and descriptions of *ikria* as being planking on ships and benches for spectators but there is no mention of any kind of collapse, just the oft-repeated phrase that the Athenians sat on such benches before the theatre of Dionysos was built.⁶⁷ All in all, we have three strands of information from these sources relating to the *ikria*:

1. Before the *theatron* of Dionysos was built, people sat on *ikria* in the Agora and watched performances at the Dionysia (Photius, Eustathios, Hesychios).
2. There was a collapse of the *ikria* in 499 BCE when people were watching a performance by Pratinas (*Suda* π 2230 Adler s.v. *Pratinas*).
3. There was a collapse of the *ikria* that led Aeschylus to flee to Sicily (*Suda* α 357 Adler s.v. *Aeschylus*).

Performances and athletic contests were likely to have been staged in the Agora for several different festivals throughout the year as the Sacred Way passed through this area, which acted as the main marketplace and town-square for the city of Athens. *Ikria* were likely erected as viewing platforms for the passing processions, foot races and standing performances that occurred there. We must also consider that when the sources tell of performances in the “Agora” prior to the Theatre of Dionysos being built we cannot know if this was the classical Agora to the west of the Acropolis or the archaic Agora to the north.⁶⁸ Additionally, we must also not assume that the term “Dionysian contests” (Διονυσιακοῦς ἄγῶνας) necessarily refers to the City Dionysia or even dramatic performances. Procession, choral song, torch races, dance and dithyramb all predated tragedy as dramatic forms presented in honor of the god and for the first half of the fifth century tragedy may well not have even been the preeminent event at the City Dionysia as the great procession and the dithyrambic performances both involved far greater public participation. Thus, it cannot be automatically assumed that these references to Dionysian contests in the Agora mean tragic

⁶⁶ Photius, *Lex.* s.v. *aigeiros thea* and s.v. *ikria*. Eustathios *Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam*. 1.132.44.

⁶⁷ Hesychios *Lex.* s.v. *aigeirou thea* and s.v. *par' aigeiron thea*. See Scullion (1994), 53-54.

⁶⁸ See Harris-Cline (1999), 309-320.

performances.⁶⁹

While it cannot be ruled out that a section of *ikria* may have collapsed at some point, this event, if it happened at all, almost certainly did not result in the sanctuary of Dionysos suddenly being placed into service as a performance space around 500 BCE. The dates from the *Suda* are confused and while 499 BCE may work for Pratinas it is far too early for Aeschylus and we have already discussed how the system for dramatic dates cannot be trusted. Most important, this would also assume that the *cavea* on the southeast slope of the Acropolis, by far the best naturally occurring place to accommodate spectators, was not used prior to this date and that it was merely topographical serendipity that placed the sanctuary *directly* beneath it. This seems highly unlikely. Pickard-Cambridge fully accepted the *Suda* Pratinas entry comparing the date of 499-496 BCE (the 70th Olympiad) with the evidence of the potsherds proposed by Dörpfeld, which seemed to suggest the building of a new theatre space at the same time as the supposed *ikria* collapse.⁷⁰ While the potsherds indicate that the incline and size of the *cavea* had been increased early in the fifth century they are not evidence for the establishment of a totally new theatre space or for collapsing *ikria*.⁷¹ A similar expansion also happened at the deme theatre at Thorikos where the theatre *cavea* was also expanded by bolstering the existing embankments.⁷²

Connor has proposed a date of c500 BCE for the foundation of the festival but his argument could also point to a reorganization of the City Dionysia that occurred in the wake of the reforms of Cleisthenes in 508/7 BCE. His dating of the annexation of Eleutherai to 506-501 BCE is purely conjectural and as stated above the aetiological nature of the myth deliberately defies any kind of temporal assignation. However, there are two vitally important pieces of information that do point to a reorganization of the festival. First, we do know that Cleisthenes reformed the citizen structure of Athens and Attica sometime in the late sixth century⁷³ (the date of 507/508 BCE is indicated by the Marmor Parium and therefore not certain).⁷⁴ It is

⁶⁹ See Scullion (1994), 61-65, and Csapo (2007).

⁷⁰ Pickard-Cambridge (1946), 11-13.

⁷¹ Dörpfeld (1896), 30-31.

⁷² Gebhard (1974), 428-435.

⁷³ Herodotus 5.66, *Ath. Pol.* 21.2; and Aristotle *Pol.* 1275b 34-40, 1319b 19-27, Plutarch. *Pericles* 3.2-3.

⁷⁴ For the date of the reforms of Cleisthenes see Wilson (2000), 12-19.

widely assumed that this was a democratic reform and was primarily done to facilitate recruitment and access to the hoplite ranks and open up membership to the Council of Five Hundred. Several scholars also believe that the reforms led to a reorganization of the City Dionysia that created the competitive choral structure where each of the newly formed 10 tribes of Attica presented 1 adult and 1 boy's 50-person choir at the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus.⁷⁵ This amounts to 1000 performers actively participating in the Dithyrambs alone; if we then imagine the family members and fellow demesmen that wanted to see them perform it becomes not only plausible but imperative that the *theatron* would be expanded to accommodate this new democratic audience. If Pisistratus established the City Dionysia to help pull the geographical disparate communities of Attica together around a centralized festival, then in reorganizing the Dithyrambic competition and increasing the size of the *theatron*, Cleisthenes or his followers further expanded access to the festival for an increased number of members of the newly enfranchised *demos*.

The "Theatre" of Dionysos

The performance space in place c500 BCE was simply a level playing area, probably rectilinear rather than circular, just above the temple and altar of Dionysos. The natural bowl of the hillside provided terracing for wooden benches and the earthworks undertaken around 500 BCE brought the *theatron* around on two shallow sides to form a low pi-shape with two long wing entrances (*eisodoi*) running left and right of the *orchestra*. In addition to the seating provided by the *ikria*, people may have stood to watch performances in an area behind on the upper slope.⁷⁶ The use of a doorway and upper level in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* indicates that the *skene* (stage building) must have been in use by 458 BCE and perhaps earlier (this will be further discussed below). The *ikria* and probably the *skene* were temporary structures erected specially for the festival and removed soon after its closure and there is evidence that with wood being a valuable commodity the *ikria* were placed into service elsewhere between festivals.⁷⁷ At some point in the fifth century stage machinery such as the *ekkyklema*

⁷⁵ Pritchard (2004), 208-228; Zimmerman (1993); Wilson (2003); and Fisher (1998).

⁷⁶ See Roselli (2009), 5-30.

⁷⁷ Csapo (2007).

(theatrical “truck”)⁷⁸ and the *mechane* were introduced. There may have also have been a low wooden stage that ran the length of the *skene* with a set of wooden “treads” (steps) leading to the *orchestra*. As will be discussed below, this theatre may have been much smaller than scholars once thought, seating around 5-6000.⁷⁹ It is likely that this was the form the theatre took in the fifth century and apart from possible adaptations to the *skene* and machinery was the performance space used by all the Athenian tragic and comic dramatists during the fifth century.

Theatron

The overwhelming reason for situating this new sanctuary on the southeast slope of the Acropolis must have been the view from the *cavea* and the opportunities the slope presented for accommodating spectators who were expected to gather to view both the sacrificial rites and performances associated with the festival of Dionysos.

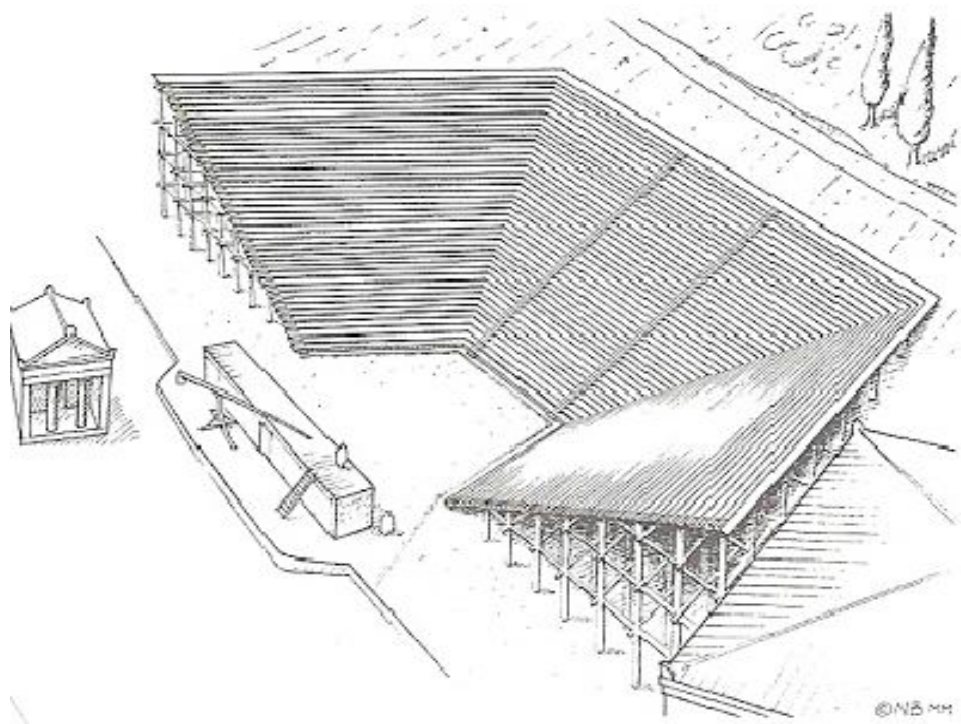


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the fifth century *theatron* as proposed by Moretti by N. Bresh.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ I have argued elsewhere that the ekkyklema was used in the *Oresteia* and was an expected stage device by the time of Sophocles' *Ajax* (c440BCE). See Meineck (2006), 453-460.

⁷⁹ Goette (2007a).

⁸⁰ Moretti (2001), 124.

Wycherley observed that nearly all ancient theatres made use of a hillside in order to provide a raked seating area for spectators,⁸¹ and Moretti has noted that the earliest identifiable theatres not built exclusively of wood date from the fifth century and they all utilized natural slopes to create a *theatron*.⁸² Some are cut into the hill, some have been shaped and several are packed with landfill and use retaining walls.⁸³ The first *theatron* constructed on the southeast slope of the Acropolis may have been quite similar to the one at Ikaria, described above, but larger. The slope of the Acropolis hillside, even before the *cavea* was enhanced by embankments, would have been able to accommodate a significant number of viewers (I estimate around 3000) either seated on wooden *ikria* or simply on the floor of the slope. Essentially this form of performance space may not have been seriously altered apart from the expansion of the *cavea* by means of embankments around 500 BCE. This was presumably to increase capacity, provide more *ikria* and importantly, to enhance the acoustic qualities of the space as the individual's spoken or sung voice became as important to hear as the collective choral voice (the acoustic qualities of the theatre will be discussed below).

In the low pi-shaped seating configuration suggested by Gebhard, Moretti and Goette, the majority of the seating would have been concentrated in the center section directly in front of the orchestra. The two shallow wings that ran along the sides of the playing area would have accommodated perhaps less than a quarter of the spectatorship in total.⁸⁴ This placed the majority of spectators on a frontal axis rather than the three-quarter round as was the case with the later Lycurgan stone theatre and even the side section would have afforded a mainly frontal view of performers on or near the *skene*. At some point in the fifth century the *theatron* was fronted by stone *prohedria*, reserved front-row seats for judges and dignitaries. This frontal arrangement would definitely have been advantageous to masked performance, which

⁸¹ Wycherley (1962), 161-163.

⁸² The term *theatron* and its use in Greek texts and inscriptions has been analyzed by Frederiksen, who concludes that although the term can be applied to any seating area intended for spectators such as oedea, stadiums and meeting places the majority of times where the term is found it refers to a place for the performance of dance and drama; Frederiksen (2002), 69-76.

⁸³ Morretti (2000), 377-378.

⁸⁴ Leacroft's reconstruction of the three phases of the theatre at Thorikos is helpful for understanding how Dionysos Eleuthereus may have developed (1984, 6-7, figs. 13 a,b,c). For his reconstruction of the Theatre Dionysos in the early fifth century, Leacroft followed Travlos and placed the *ikria* in wedges around a circular playing space. However, he does not take the *prohedria* into consideration in his reconstruction; Leacroft (1984), 9, fig 18.

tends to demand an anterior performance plane, and to voice projection and audibility.⁸⁵

Eisodoi

The ground plan of the performance space also strongly reflects the influence of processional symporeia on drama of the fifth century. Two long wing entrances (*eisodoi*, also called *parodoi*) ran from the orchestra out beyond the eye line of those seated in the *theatron* on the left and right side of the playing area. Taplin identifies the *eisodoi* as the place for exits and entrances prior to the establishment of the *skene* (although of course they continued to be used throughout the fifth century in tandem with the *skene*) and notes how two *eisodoi* appear to have been in use in the earliest extant tragedies, Aeschylus' *Persians* and *Suppliant Women*.⁸⁶ Taplin suggests that when using *eisodoi* for entrances and exits the performer never entered or left the field of vision of the entire audience at the same time. He also wonders at what point the actor crossed the divide of the spectator's sight line and moved from "offstage" to "onstage," positing that it must have occurred a number of seconds before he joined the actors in the performance space or after he left them. It is still sometimes thought, based on a comment from Pollux (4.126-127), that the right *eisodos* indicated the direction of the city while the left headed in the direction of more rural areas (there is confusion as to whether Pollux meant the spectator's left and right or the "stage left" and "stage right" of the actors, in effect the opposite). Despite this notion being roundly debunked by the evidence of the texts as far back as 1911, it exists as a "convention" of Greek drama.⁸⁷ Wiles has attempted to revive this old idea articulated by Pollux (4.124) that the left side was inauspicious while the right well-favored and takes a structuralist position, attempting to argue that in every Greek tragedy the *eisodoi* represent a symbolic and topographical opposition between two offstage places and that this principle of "lateral opposition" (which Wiles thinks is influenced by the passage of the sun) "is a key to the aesthetics of Greek theatre."⁸⁸ But here he is far too dismissive of the work of Hourmouziades who surveyed the use of the *eisodoi* in the plays of Euripides and found that there seemed to be no conventional designation of the left and right

⁸⁵ On "frontality" and the mask see Chapter Four.

⁸⁶ Taplin (1977), 449-451.

⁸⁷ Rees (1911), 377-402. On Pollux and the *eisodoi* see Taplin (1977), 450.

⁸⁸ Wiles (1997), 160.

entrances; rather, the playwright could allocate each one at will depending on the needs of the particular play.⁸⁹

Rehm places the *eisodoi* within a category of what he terms “distanced space” in that the places they lead to lie beyond the visible scenic areas available to the audience.⁹⁰ He contrasts these kind of entrances and exits via the *eisodoi* to “extrascenic space” which is accessed via the *skene* doors, promising a glimpse of what lies just behind the scenes, be it the rooms of the house of Atreus, the palace of Oedipus at Thebes or the tent of Ajax at Troy. Rehm points out that arrivals from the *eisodoi* remind the spectators that the setting of Greek tragedy “is contained within larger spaces” and that these distant places can have a “special force when evoked by a “focal” character.” His main example is Cassandra in *Agamemnon*, who both evokes and embodies the destiny of far-off Troy.⁹¹ In this way the *eisodoi* connect the world of the play presented in the visual realm of the spectators with a wider world of far-away places, just as the theatre itself is visually connected to both its surrounding environment and the city, country and sea via its panoramic southeasterly view. Thus, the movement flow created by the *eisodoi* is not only used for the propulsion of narrative but also keeps the performance space constantly connected to an exterior world “outside.”

The distinctive theatrical characteristics of the *eisodoi* may have been influenced by the roots of the performance conditions of ancient drama in *symporeia*, specifically the procession where performers would enter the visual field of the spectators from a distinctive predetermined direction, stand and perform in place, presumably in front of a viewing area (*theatron*), before moving off again in the same direction, towards a culminating point. Therefore having a “roadway” (*odos*) passing through a performance area was an established feature of the Greek performance space prior to the establishment of the *theatron* at the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus. In fact, whereas the sanctuary area itself is situated at the end of the Street of Tripods, the *theatron* above is given two *eisodoi* reflecting the origins of

⁸⁹ Hourmouziades (1965), 128-136.

⁹⁰ See Rehm (2002), 20-25, who is influenced by the work of James J. Gibson and his theories of ecological space. This is a spatial system that perceives space in terms of smaller units embedded within larger ones, so, for example the theatre of Dionysos inhabits the sanctuary of Dionysos, which is on the slope of the Acropolis, in Attica, within the Mediterranean Sea, etc.

⁹¹ Rehm (2002), 22.

the spatial organization of the theatre in the viewing of passing symporeia.⁹² Hammond made a somewhat similar observation in 1972 and viewed the theatre as a development from early performances in the Agora noting that the *eisodoi* (“in-roads”) or *parodoi* (“side-roads”) were reminiscent of the Sacred Way that ran through the Agora and the relationship of the *ikria* to it.⁹³ Reflecting their function of facilitating movement through a viewing place, the *eisodoi* continued to facilitate a dynamic flow of kinesthetic action in performance across the orchestra suggesting both imaginary off-stage locations and establishing the orchestra as a *movement space*.

The term *movement space* has been used by Mitsou Inoue to describe the fluidity created by the placement of corridors and rooms in buildings in Japanese architecture and applied to the orchestra and *eisodoi* by Kinneret Noy who writes that in an interior movement space the spectator “actually moves through the space, thus shifting his or her point of view,” whereas in the movement space created by the relationship of orchestra to *eisodoi* the sense of movement is created even though the spectator is stationary in the fixed position of a seat.⁹⁴ Noy describes the dual *eisodoi* intersected by the orchestra as a “loop configuration” where the flow across the playing area is determined by the oppositional effect of the two *eisodoi* creating a sense of circularity even within a rectilinear space. The *eisodoi* provide the means of movement through the sight lines of the spectators and the orchestra provides a “halting point” for the movement flow. The introduction of the *skene* created the ability for this loop flow to be suddenly punctuated by the rapid introduction and removal of actors in the performing area. Yet, the onstage movement dynamics of the *eisodoi* continued to exert a powerful dramatic effect on the physical form of ancient drama especially for the chorus and specific entrances that took advantage of the dramatic capabilities they offered. As Taplin has deftly put it, “in the study of entrances and exits the stage movement which is of interest is not the momentary movement in and out of view, but the prolonged movement across the center of attention and back again.”⁹⁵ Therefore entrances from or to the *eisodoi* were always somewhat ambiguous, fluid and based on movement and direction.

⁹² Along one *eisodos*.

⁹³ Hammond (1972), 405.

⁹⁴ Noy (2002), 179.

⁹⁵ Taplin (1977), 7.

Something of this gradual theatrical visual “reveal” indicative of a prolonged movement-based entrance can be seen in the text of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (493-502). The Argive elders who make up the chorus are confused and suspicious of the news from Clytemnestra that Troy has been taken the previous night; they find it hard to believe her almost supernatural description of the trail of beacons that has flashed the news from Troy to Argos. Then they see a messenger approaching from the distance and their hope and confidence grows as he advances along one of the *eisodoi*.

κήρυκ’ ἀπ’ ἀκτῆς τόνδ’ ὄρῳ κατάσκιον
κλάδοις ἐλαίας μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι κάσις
πηλοῦ ξύνουρος διψία κόνις τάδε,
ὥς οὔτ’ ἄναυδος οὔτε σοι δαίμων φλόγα
ὔλης ὀρείας σημανεῖ καπνῷ πυρός,
ἀλλ’ ἢ τὸ χαίρειν μᾶλλον ἐκβάξει λέγων—
τὸν ἀντίον δὲ τοῖσδ’ ἀποστέργω λόγον
εὔ γὰρ πρὸς εὔ φανεῖσι προσθήκη πέλοι.—
ὅστις τάδ’ ἄλλως τῇδ’ ἐπεύχεται πόλει,
αὐτὸς φρενῶν καρποῖτο τὴν ἀμαρτίαν.

But look there! I can see a herald from the shore
his head is shaded with olive branches.
Our witness covered with mud and dust,
Not some speechless pile of blazing mountain
Wood sending smoke signals from a fire.
He will speak with a real voice and bring us
Great news, great joy, or else . . . no not that.
Good is coming! Bring on the good news!
And if anyone does not pray for this,
Let them reap the harvest of a sick mind.

The entrance of the messenger is “covered” by the text, which may mark the time it took the actor to traverse the *eisodos* and enter the full visual field of the spectators, yet this movement-based entrance is also used to heighten tension and anticipation, the fluidity of the *eisodos* entrance helps to create a dynamic momentum that drives the play from scene to scene, heightens interest and conveys new, significant information.

This dramatic dimension of the *eisodoi* and its dynamic relationship with the spectator’s differing fields of vision is in marked contrast to most modern theatres where the performer can appear suddenly from a wing entrance created by the “masking” of a box set with flats or curtains. As Noy puts it, “he is either seen or unseen, with no in-between status.”⁹⁶ On the other hand, the *eisodoi* offered the spectator “successive observation” as the performer or performers using these long entrances could be both seen and yet still remain “off stage.” Entrances via *eisodoi* also suggested spatial transference from an unseen off-stage territory to the on-stage realm of the play in process, and the effect of having that performer revealed gradually to different sections of the audience as they came into view created a dynamic movement momentum that was also reflected in how the visual information of that entrance was communicated.

Something similar can be observed in the use of the *hashigakari* in Japanese Noh theatre. This is a long bridge placed at an angle to the stage connecting the dressing rooms with the performance area at a slight slope down towards the stage. By positioning the bridge at around 45 degrees to the stage the actors using it are seen clearly by the spectators as they move down the bridge before they enter the playing area. Noy vividly describes a scene from the Noh play *Atsumori* where a monk is seen on stage praying for the salvation of a man he once killed in battle. Behind him on the *hashigakari* a figure is seen approaching by more and more of the audience and once he arrives on stage he turns to reveal a mask of the ghost of the young man

⁹⁶ Noy (2002), 179.

who the monk had killed.⁹⁷

The *eisodoi* had a profound effect on the dramatic construction of ancient drama and not only in the way performers “walked on.” Rehm points out that the *eisodoi* afforded ambulatory access to the theatre facilitating the use of chariots, carts, biers etc.,⁹⁸ and, true to its symporeutic origins it was also normally used to bring the chorus in and out of the performance space (although with some notable exceptions including the entrance of the Furies in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*). Before the introduction of the *skene*, placed upstage center of the orchestra, the *eisodoi* were the only means of entry and exit for the actors and extras.

One objective of this study of the ocular aspects of ancient drama is to suggest the application of a method of “visual dramaturgy” to a reading of a Greek play. In this case it is the sense of movement offered by the space itself that would have greatly contributed to the dramatic, emotional and narrative thrust of the plays. When this theatre of mask, movement, words, music and environment is considered against the measures of modern Western theatre practice (and by “modern” I mean Elizabethan theatre onwards) it runs the risk of being misunderstood. When the complaint of “static theatre” is leveled against a Greek play it may be that we just simply don’t know how to “read” it. The *eisodoi* mediated the physical world of the play before the eyes of the spectators with the imaginary resources of the mind’s eye, stimulated by the allusions of poetry, song, dance and music, and created a sense of onward and frequently unexpected action. Rehm also connects the flow created by the actors using the *eisodoi* with the fact that the spectators had traversed a variety of paths from their own homes (and also probably participated in the symporeutic performance of the procession to the sanctuary of Dionysos) and then entered the theatre via one of the *eisodoi* before taking their seats.⁹⁹

A good example of the *eisodoi* in action is the entrance of Eteocles after the parados of the chorus of women of Thebes in Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* (78-181). Eteocles is first

⁹⁷ Noy (2002), 176; Noy goes on to compare this to a possible staging of the ghost scene from Aeschylus’ *Persians*. On Noh space and Greek theatre see Revermann (2006), 52-53 & 134-135).

⁹⁸ Rehm (2002), 17.

⁹⁹ Rehm (2002), 35.

given lines at 182 but as it seems no *skene* was used in this play he must have entered via an *eisodos* and become ever increasingly visually present to the spectators as he emerged into their view. This entrance creates a visual dovetailing of choral ode and the speech of the entering protagonist. The image of the chorus of terrified women lamenting what they perceive an almost inevitable end, the sack of their city, jars with the bravado of Eteocles who has just charged the men of Thebes to man their posts and boldly rebuff the invaders. The women conjure images of city walls, battle clashes at the gates and invasion by an “enemy of alien speech” (169), all of which must have conspired to prompt the memories of the spectators to recall the sack of Athens by the Persians in 480 BCE just 13 years earlier. The effects of which, including the ruined Acropolis, were all around in the bodily eyes of the spectators as they looked out over their own city walls and gates.¹⁰⁰ When he does finally “arrive,” Eteocles’ condemnation of the actions of the chorus indicates that Aeschylus may well have used the visual effect of the gradual entrance via the *eisodos* to create tension between chorus and protagonist. At this point in the play there are three narrative dimensions operating offering a synoptic viewing of the work that combine to create an emotional whole: the first is the live experience of the actions of the Theban women who are physically and emotionally responding to their present situation within the world of the play; the second is the cognitive emotional response of the spectators to both the staged lamentation and allusions to the Persian Wars when their own city was sacked; and the third is the metathreatrical image of Eteocles advancing along the *eisodos* creating a sense of impending conflict.

The *eisodoi* facilitated the same kind of movement flow inherent in the processional and symporeutic forms that drama grew out of. These dynamic entrances and exits helped propel the narrative and operating in the periphery, often provided a visual counterpoint to the action staged in the orchestra or before the *skene*. This kind of fluid merging of entrances and exits is hard to imagine in the modern interior theatre where entrances are instantaneous and an actor is either “on” or “off” but on the ancient stage the *eisodoi* were an ever-present device that placed the spectators within a visually dynamic movement space.

¹⁰⁰ Sommerstein (2009) in his note on 169 points out that the Argive enemy spoke Greek, though a different dialect and observed the same gods. He feels Aeschylus is deliberately evoking the Persian invasion of 480 BCE.

Skene

The *skene* (stage building) was located in the strongest visual position in the performance space the far center edge of the orchestra (upstage center) and it created another opportunity for the presentation of entrances and exits, one that seems to have been an innovation of the *theatron* at the Sanctuary of Dionysos and not an element derived from earlier symporeutic performances. It has been generally accepted that the introduction of the *skene* can be dated to some time shortly before Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in 458 BCE and to be sure the appearance of the Watchman on the roof opening the trilogy by bellowing the first word "Gods!" into the *cavea* would have been an impressive *coup de théâtre* if this was indeed the case. Yet Hamilton has questioned this general acceptance promulgated by Taplin after Wilamowitz and has suggested that we might want to consider that we are severely limited in making any determination based on the dearth of surviving plays and useful fragments from this period.¹⁰¹ In the absence of such material it does indeed seem as though the complete plays of Aeschylus we have dated prior to the *Oresteia*—namely, *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *The Suppliants* and possibly *Prometheus Bound* (both date and authorship remain uncertain)—do not seem to need a *skene* and the *eisodoi* appear to be the only means used for entrances and exits.¹⁰²

If we cannot pinpoint the precise moment the *skene* came into use in the tragic playing space we might assume that the idea of a tent, hut or "tiring house" belonged to the realm of the stationary performance area that was set up specifically with the staging of a fixed performance in mind rather than the transitory and temporary nature of the squares, market places and areas before temples occupied by symporeutic performers as part of larger processional events. Though the fifth century *skene* was almost certainly built of wood and temporary in nature, it was erected in a fixed place upstage of the playing area and provided a

¹⁰¹ Hamilton (1987), 595-599.

¹⁰² On the *skene* see Taplin (1977), 452-459; Sommerstein (1996a), 33-35 & 217-221; Wiles (1997), 58-59 & 119-122; Mastronarde (1990), 247-294; Csapo (1995), 79-88; Rehm (2002), 38 and 315 n.14 where Rehm cites examples from Aeschylus that could be interpreted as indicating a *skene*. See also Ley (2007a), 7-9.

new way for actors to enter the performing area in conjunction with the established use of the *eisodoi*.¹⁰³ What we see in Greek drama from the *Oresteia* onwards is the skillful combination of the movement dynamics created by the *eisodoi* and the dramatic qualities offered by the *skene* with roof, door and later, *ekkyklema* (moving platform). We also do not know the dimensions of the *skene* or how far it extended left and right towards the *eisodoi*. It must have been tall enough to accommodate a doorway, so at least 7 or 8 feet, and this doorway was wide enough to have a wheeled *ekkyklema* emerge. Some reconstructions of the fifth century theatre have depicted a long *skene* that provides a tall wall fronting the entire length of the *orchestra*, whereas Taplin imagined a smaller structure between a terrace wall and orchestra circle.¹⁰⁴

The kind of smaller structure proposed by Taplin seems more likely as it would not have obscured the view of the sanctuary below and it is hard to imagine how a long walled structure could have stood for a house, cave or tent. The very name *skene* derived from the term for tent or small temporary structure also suggests that the main function was to provide a doorway and a place for the actors to change. There must also have been a “stage door” that the actors used to leave the structure out of sight of the audience. This is proven by considering the casting of three actors in the *Oresteia*; however the parts are divided between the three at some point, at least one of them is going to have to exit the *skene* unseen and make a new entrance as a different character from one of the *eisodoi*.¹⁰⁵

Pickard-Cambridge advanced the idea that the *skene* was edged by *paraskenia* (projecting wings) that bounded the actor’s stage area. While *paraskenia* were certainly a feature of the Lycurgan theatre, there is no reason or evidence to suggest that they were in use at the time of the *Oresteia* or at any point in the fifth century.¹⁰⁶ However, Moretti has entertained the idea

¹⁰³ An inscription from Delos dated to 269 BC (*IG* XI.2 203A.38) gives accounts for the setting up of sacred procession and performances and details the costs of a piglet whose blood was to be used to purify the route and the *skene* in the theatre, suggesting that both were temporary in terms of ritual efficacy.

¹⁰⁴ See Dugdale (2008), 51; Taplin (1978), 10-11, figs. 1 & 2.

¹⁰⁵ Marshall (2003), 260 provides a handy casting chart showing how several different commentators have proposed how the roles were divided in the *Oresteia*. If the columns for *Agamemnon* are examined there is no possibility that at least one actor will not be required to leave the *skene* unseen and return in another role from one of the *eisodoi*.

¹⁰⁶ Pickard-Cambridge (1946), 122-127.

that they may have been a feature of the late fifth century stage based on the fact that they were apparent in the fourth century theatre and may have been inspired by the earlier stage design. There is no actual evidence to settle the matter either way, and the dominance of the single doorway in drama of the mid-fifth century would suggest that the *paraskenia* had no practical function until the introduction of multiple doorways apparent in New Comedy and quite possibly used by Aristophanes in the last quarter of the fifth century.¹⁰⁷

The doorway offered a key focal point that would “upstage” any other happening that was arranged in the performing area including the *eisodoi*. An example of this from *Agamemnon* is Clytemnestra’s entrance at 855. Here, Agamemnon has entered via an *eisodos* mounted on some form of wheeled carriage accompanied, at the very least by Cassandra, and perhaps a small retinue (though as Clytemnestra has instructed the messenger to tell her husband to “come as quickly as possible” (604-605) it is plausible that he is unaccompanied and undefended).¹⁰⁸ This is visually impressive, raising Agamemnon’s status and height above that of the chorus in the orchestra and as I have already noted, was reminiscent of a marriage ceremony. Agamemnon makes his speech and prepares to enter his house represented by the *skene* but his movement flow from offstage via the *eisodos* into the orchestra and then offstage again through the *skene* doors is interrupted by Clytemnestra in what might be considered be one of the most notable moments of “upstaging” in Western drama, particularly if the theatre of the *Oresteia* did use a low raised wooden stage immediately in front of the *skene*.¹⁰⁹ This would elevate Clytemnestra to about the same level as her husband and create a powerful visual effect when she may have moved off the stage to come down into the orchestra to prostrate herself to him around 905. This move would also clear the way for the tapestries to emerge from the house.¹¹⁰ This ability of the *skene* to halt the flow of movement in the space

¹⁰⁷ Moretti (2000), 396, and also Mastronarde (1990), 247-248.

¹⁰⁸ On the use of non-speaking “supernumeraries” see Sommerstein (1996a), 233-236. On the issue of what accompanied Agamemnon’s entrance see Taplin (1977), 304-306.

¹⁰⁹ On the issue of the raised stage see below, “A Raised Stage?”

¹¹⁰ It should also be noted that in contrast to the messenger who seems to immediately fall to the earth and embrace the “good Greek soil” (503), Agamemnon’s feet are actually prevented from ever touching the ground and making contact with his native soil and thereby returning home. The cart and tapestries keep him “suspended” in a liminal place neither home nor away.

has been described by Taplin as a “cul-de-sac” – the opposite of the *eisodoi* which lead to “openness and change” as the *skene* is “fixed introverted and enclosed.”¹¹¹

Entrances from the *skene* door also introduced the element of sudden visual revelations into the performance space; whereas anyone entering via an *eisodos* was clearly seen prior to their arrival in the orchestra, the *skene* could produce an interruption or a reversal of what the spectators might have been expecting to see. A case in point can also be found in *Agamemnon* 583-587 where Clytemnestra’s sudden entrance abruptly interrupts the dialogue between the Herald and Chorus Leader. Thus, the *skene* can act as a physical obstacle to the loop movement dynamics of the performance space and intersect the action by producing sudden and often startling entrances and exits. The *skene* had an enormous effect on the stagecraft of ancient drama not only by creating a visual focal point for action but also heightening the importance in the role of the actor above and beyond the dramatic functionality of the chorus. There were many factors that contributed to the lessening of the role of the chorus in drama after the fifth century—financial, social, artistic—but once the *eisodoi* lost their function as facilitators of movement flow in and out of the performance area (eventually to become completely redundant by the *scaenae frons* of the Roman theatre), the chorus lost much of its visual impact and the sense of dynamic movement and sweeping symporeutic visuality of Greek drama was severely diminished.¹¹²

A Raised Stage?

David Wiles is adamant that there was never a stage in the fifth century theatre and calls the whole idea “another important twentieth century chimaera.” For him it is the center of the *orchestra* that is the strongest place on stage.¹¹³ However, this view makes the assumption that a circular *orchestra* existed in the fifth century Athenian space and this has been seriously

¹¹¹ Taplin (1983), 157-158. See also Rehm (2002), 37-38.

¹¹² As theatre in the fourth century became more actor-centered so we hear of various performers known for creating their own distinctive visual effects such as Callippides who Aristotle claims was called “a monkey” and Pindarus, both of whom are accused of using “excessive movement” and “whirling around like a discus” (*Poetics* 1461b 28-36). Timotheus of Zacynthus was apparently famous for bringing his spectators to the point of visualizing Ajax and enthraling them with his acting. He was known as “the slayer” as a result. (scholion on Sophocles’ *Ajax* 864).

¹¹³ Wiles (1997), 63-86.

challenged (see below on the *orchestra*). Whatever the size of the playing area the upstage center position, the site of the *skene* will always dominate any other area “on stage”, unless it is visually blocked, attention is momentarily pulled away from it or it is left vacant of any performers. Sommerstein finds evidence for a raised platform in front of the *skene* from around 417 BCE onwards and posits that while we cannot know for sure if a platform existed prior to then its use would have helped the visibility and prominence of actors performing near the *skene*. He also points out that a raised platform in the *Oresteia* would allow Clytemnestra to “visually dominate” those below her in the *orchestra* and that it was probably raised no more than “a couple of steps” high.¹¹⁴

A raised platform would also do much to solve the blocking problems caused by a chorus of 12-15 actors inhabiting the space downstage of the *skene* doorway. Those who have thought that the steep rake of the *theatron* would have negated the need for a raised stage as the spectators would be looking down on the playing area are both overestimating the size of the seating area and forgetting that the judges and dignitaries sat in the first few rows.¹¹⁵ Taking this into consideration, without a low raised platform the *prohedria* would have possibly been the worse seats in the house.¹¹⁶ Also, the fact that there is no evidence for a raised stage from the fifth century should not exclude positing that one existed. Like the *skene* it fronted it would have been made of wood and been temporary, two features that would preclude it lasting for 2500 years. Furthermore, there is evidence of performers standing on raised platforms found on Attic vase paintings where a *kitharode* (a lyre player) might be depicted on a *bema*—a small raised platform, performing for an audience.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Sommerstein (1996a), 41. Taplin (1977, 441-442) is skeptical about a raised stage. Scully (1996, 62-67) sees the low orchestra, low raised stage and upper level of the *skene* creating a “three tier order.” He lists three main pieces of evidence for a raised stage in the last quarter of the fifth century: The “Perseus Dance Vase” of 420 BCE that shows a low stage; the “suda” and other late sources that take the verbs *anabainō* and *katabainō* as meaning going “up” and “down” from orchestra to stage; and two passages from the *Problemata* which seem to distinguish between songs that come from the stage (*apo skênēs*) and those that come from the chorus. The problem is the part from the Perseus Dance Vase. Scully’s evidence is all from the fourth century or later. However, his proposals for the way a raised stage may have been used in Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Euripides’ *Suppliant Women* are not without viability (67-80).

¹¹⁵ Wiles (1997), 176-177.

¹¹⁶ Rehm (2002, 38, n. 9) is tentative about a raised stage and cites a list of those for and against.

¹¹⁷ For example, on an Attic red-figure amphora attributed to the Andokides Painter and dated 550-500 BCE showing a youth in a *chiton* standing on a *bema* between draped youths leaning on staffs (Paris, Musée du Louvre, G1, Beazley Archive 200002 and fig. 44b in Neils (1992), 67), or on an Attic red-figure calyx krater in the manner of the Peleus Painter dated 430-420 BCE showing a victorious kithara player mounting a *bema* (London, The British Museum (E 460); Fig 99 in Bundrick (2005), 169).

There is one tantalizing piece of vase painting evidence for a raised stage in the fifth century theatre. This is an Attic red-figured chous called the Perseus Dance Vase, which is dated to around 420 BCE.¹¹⁸ This depicts what appears to be a comic Perseus dancing on a low stage with a short ladder leading to a lower level where an older bearded man, wrapped in a cloak, sits on a chair with a younger male figure seated next to him holding either a pipe, a stylus or a reed for an *aulos*. The vase is badly damaged but on the right of the scene, next to the stage is what looks like the representation of stiff canvas like fabric with three seams. Could this be some kind of masking flat, a curtain or scene dressing of some sort? As Csapo has recently observed, the set-up of the stage is very similar to the representations of comic stages we see on South Italian vases in the fourth century, and while this scene may not have anything at all to do with the Athenian theatre space in that it may represent a performance at any number of Athenian festivals, it is indeed contemporary evidence for a stage being used for a performance.¹¹⁹

Skenographia

Aristotle famously mentioned that Sophocles was the first to introduce *skenographia* in the theatre (*Poetics* 1449a18). This has been taken to mean scene painting but apart from what might be unreliably gleaned from fourth century vase paintings that may or may not depict actual representations of theatrical scenes, we really have no idea if scene painting was used and if so what it looked like.¹²⁰ Vitruvius, writing in Rome in the late first century BCE, noted that Aeschylus hired a certain Agatharchus as a scene painter and his work had an influence

¹¹⁸ Athens BS 518.

¹¹⁹ Csapo (2010), 25-27 and fig. 1.10. See also Arnott (1962), 16; and Scully (1996), 80, no. 7.

¹²⁰ On *skenographia* see Csapo (1995), 258 & 273-274; J. Davidson (2005), 203; and Pollitt (1990), 162-164. Those who suggest that scenic painting was employed in the fifth century BCE include Pickard-Cambridge (1946), 124-127; Dover (1972), 25; Webster (1970), 24-25; Taplin (1978), 11; Walton (1996), 35-39; Ley (2006), 23-24; Beacham (2007), 206. For suggestions on use of scene painting in Sophocles see A. Brown (1984b), 12; J. Davidson (1990), 307-315; and Heath and Okell (2007), 364. However, these studies all assume that Sophocles used scene painting. Those who feel that there was no painted scenery in the theatre of the fifth century include: Green (1990), 281; and Padel (1990), 346-354, who thinks the *skene* was painted but did not change for specific plays. Wiles (1997), 161-162, reflects Padel. Rehm (2002), 18 and 38, does not think the *skene* was adorned with a perspective painting although he does state that scene painting attached to the *skene* may have played a role in indicating the setting but scholars have exaggerated its importance. Aylen (1985, 89) states: "Provided the dialogue makes it clear where action takes place, the audience need have no difficulty in relating the images to the actual setting."

on subsequent painters working on perspective. Wall paintings were certainly being publicly displayed and appreciated, such as the works displayed at the Painted Stoa in the Agora, which depicted scenes from the Battle of Marathon alongside mythical Athenian victories and was probably commissioned by Kimon or his supporters sometime in the 460s BCE.¹²¹ While expert two-dimensional art works were exhibited and well known it remains unclear as to whether scene painters were employed in the fifth century theatre.¹²² Walton feels that the introduction of what he terms “scenic decoration” may account for the “change between the non-specific *skene* of earlier Aeschylus and the more specific, though versatile, *skene* of the *Oresteia*”.¹²³ Walton suggests that movable painted panels were placed on either side of the central *skene* door and sees a link between the semiotic and schematic rendering of landscape and objects in Greek art of the period and the form of the paintings used on stage in the theatre. His one proviso is important; how visually effective would these paintings have been in a space as large as the Athenian theatre? Even if we accept Goette’s estimate that places the audience at around 6000 this is still a very large performance space by modern standards, more like an open-air music venue than a theatre.

Ruth Padel goes much further and posits that *skenographia* can mean, “drawing the façade of a building” or “using linear perspective” in the same way Vitruvius connected scene painting with developments in perspective. For Padel the stage “became the most public place to see the new technique, the painting of architecture in recession.”¹²⁴ However, Valakas has argued against Padel by commenting that the sense of a third dimension would already be present due to the “forms and shadows of the bodies of the group of performers, which defined the space of the *orchestra* and the stage as a whole for most of the performance.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, one wonders how the three-dimensional mask may have appeared playing before painted scenic flats, devoid of shadow. Padel’s own rough sketches of the *skene* with *skenographia* and

¹²¹ See Palagia and Pollitt (1996), 20-23, and Camp (1986), 66-72, who dates it between 475-450. Demosthenes *Against Neaera* 59.94, Aeschines *Against Ctesiphon* 3.186, Pausanias 1.15.3 & 5.11.6, Plutarch *Kimon* 4.5.

¹²² Beer (2004), 26-29, has proposed an intriguing theory that when Aristotle used the term *skenographia* he was referring to verbal “scene setting.” According to Beers Aristotle would therefore be recognizing the importance of the *skene* on the development of drama and the way in which Sophocles invested it with a sense of place.

¹²³ Walton (1996), 35-39.

¹²⁴ Padel (1990), 352.

¹²⁵ Valakas (2002), 76.

without suggests that the spectators would have perceived the rectangular scene building as a flat one-dimensional surface.¹²⁶ Yet the *skene* was not a theatrical flat, it was a three-dimensional building that would have cast shadows and with its large doorway lent a sense of solidity and structure to the “back line” of the playing area.. The *skene* provided a focal point for entrances and exits and could be put into service as a royal house, a cave, a tent at Troy or a temple merely by the suggestion of words uttered by the performers. Thus it could become a different location during the course of one play, serve three tragedies, a satyr play and a comedy in the same day and be used again and again, year after year. If it was painted it was not meant to be representational nor suggest a sense of a third dimension.

In Aristotle’s day there were representational and changeable scenic elements such as the *periaktoi*, which were painted flats mounted on turntables capable of quickly changing a scene and post-holes for erecting either a temporary stage or perhaps for holding scenic pieces. However, there is no evidence at all from the fifth century that mentions painted theatrical scenery and one has to question that while Aristophanes gets so much comic mileage out of the *eisodoi*,¹²⁷ *skene*,¹²⁸ doorways,¹²⁹ *ekkyklema*,¹³⁰ *mechane*,¹³¹ *prohedria*,¹³² *orchestra*, altar (whether temporary or not),¹³³ and *ikria*¹³⁴ there is not a single mention of *skenographia*. Rehm counters both Walton and Padel by remarking that the view of the city and landscape would certainly trump any representational painting, make painted perspective “irrelevant” and not be able to offer “a single focused perspective” to people sitting on different levels of the steep *theatron*. Rehm is surely right to stress the importance of the “natural perspective” of the Athenian theatre “where the ambient optic array comes directly from the world to the eye.”¹³⁵ While we do not know for certain if the *skene* was painted or not the visuality of the surrounding environment, the imaginary force of the language and the *skene*’s ability to

¹²⁶ Padel (1990), 353, figs. 1 & 2.

¹²⁷ Aristophanes *Clouds* 327.

¹²⁸ Aristophanes *Wasps* 317-332 and 352-462.

¹²⁹ Aristophanes *Frogs* 460-478.

¹³⁰ Aristophanes *Acharnians* 403-409.

¹³¹ Aristophanes *Clouds* 252, *Thesmophoriazusae* 1098, *Birds* 1199, *Peace* 80-81.

¹³² Aristophanes *Frogs* 297.

¹³³ Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* 695, *Knights* 147-149.

¹³⁴ Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* 395.

¹³⁵ Rehm (2002), 18.

transform into different places and locales even within plays such as *Eumenides* and *Ajax* would strongly suggest that it was not painted in any representational way.

Orchestra

Perhaps no other spatial element of the ancient Greek theatre has elicited more debate than the shape of the *orchestra*. Since the excavation of the theatre at Epidauros with its beautifully proportioned circular orchestra by Kavvadias and Stais for the Athenian Archaeological Society in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the idea of a circular playing space has dominated thinking about the form of the orchestra in the Greek theatre. Built around 330 BCE and encapsulating Pythagorean concepts of harmony and scale, Epidauros was described by Pausanias as “unrivalled in beauty” with its large *orchestra* circle 24.65m in diameter made of beaten earth edged by a stone border.¹³⁶ Since then the belief that a circular *orchestra* was an original and essential element of Greek drama was enhanced by the work of the Cambridge ritualists who advanced the theory that the *orchestra* developed from the circular threshing floor which was put into service as a dancing place at harvest festivals.¹³⁷ Dörpfeld’s excavations of the theatre of Dionysos in Athens from 1885-1895 seemed to prove once and for all that the *orchestra* in the fifth century was circular when he attributed the remains of what he thought was a retaining wall (Dörpfeld’s “R” and Fiechter’s “SM1”) to the perimeter of a circular performance area. Since then, the idea of a circular *orchestra* has been widely accepted, most influentially by Pickard-Cambridge.¹³⁸

Others have questioned whether “SM1” had any relationship to a circular *orchestra* and yet were still wedded to the concept of a circular *orchestra* despite there being no material evidence for one at the theatre of Dionysos in Athens. Travlos interpreted “SM1” as part of a gently curving retaining wall and not the outer edge of an *orchestra*; however, he proposed that it fronted an area that contained a circular *orchestra*, though there is no archaeological

¹³⁶ Pausanias II.27.5. For the Theatre at Epidauros see Gerkan (1961).

¹³⁷ Harrison (1962), 199-211, 331-334m, 341-363; also Ure (1955), 225-230. Despite Pickard-Cambridge’s rejection in Pickard-Cambridge (1927), 126-129, the idea of the threshing floor is found in Arnott (1989), 2; Rosenmeyer (1982), 54; and Simon (1982), 3. See also Rehm (2002), 39-41.

¹³⁸ Pickard-Cambridge (1946), 5-9. For surveys of the history of the scholarship concerning the orchestra see Scullion (1994), 3-66; and Ashby (1988), 1-20.

evidence at all for this.¹³⁹ Travlos' plan of the theatre was adopted by Taplin in his 1978 work *Greek Tragedy in Action*, still widely used by theatre practitioners as a handbook for understanding the staging of ancient drama and this concept of the circle as a key element of Greek drama underpins the work of David Wiles, who wholeheartedly takes up the idea of a circle and promotes "the traditional idea of a democratic Athenian community gathered in a circle in order to contemplate itself in relation to the fictive world of the play."¹⁴⁰ Yet, there is no archaeological evidence at all for a curvilinear theatrical space in fifth century Athens and Wiles ignores the significant numbers of foreigners who were present at the City Dionysia. Indeed, this powerful notion of "an inward facing circle" was also adopted by Ober, who builds on the work of political scientist Michael Chwe to suggest that such shared spaces that allowed maximum eye contact between spectators fostered an environment of the sharing of knowledge via intervisibility.¹⁴¹ He suggests that the Theatre of Dionysos may have been such a space, but the Lycurgan edifice he refers to was not the performance space of the fifth century and the possibility that this theatre never had a circular *orchestra* must now be seriously considered.

The first detailed challenge to a circular *orchestra* came from Carlo Anti in 1947 who, in studying Sicilian theatre spaces and comparing them to Attic deme theatres, proposed that their *orchestras* were rectilinear,¹⁴² although it should be noted that Haigh, in 1898, had already observed "there are several theatres in which the stage is so placed as to make a complete circle impossible."¹⁴³ In 1974, Gebhard revived the debate by proposing that the *orchestra* at Athens was rectilinear, adding the evidence of *prohedria* (stone front-row seats) that had been found in an ancient drain that showed that they belonged to a straight row of

¹³⁹ Travlos (1971).

¹⁴⁰ Wiles (1997), 52, In my own work I have previously advocated that there must have been a circular orchestra, agreeing with Mastronarde (1990, 248, n. 3), "If the Theater of Dionysus had operated for generations with a rectangular orchestra, why was a circular orchestra introduced?" See Meineck (2009a), 174-175; (2009b), 351-352 and Meineck and Woodruff (2003), xii-xiv; I now feel that in the light of recent interpretations of the available archaeological evidence we must not automatically assume there was ever a circular orchestra in the fifth century.

¹⁴¹ Ober (2008), 203-208.

¹⁴² Anti (1947). Anti's views were almost totally rejected by Pickard-Cambridge (1948), 125-128, but warmly received by McDonald (1949), 412-414, despite reservations. Wycherley (1947), 137-138, also rejected the concept of a rectilinear orchestra whereas Johnson (1950), 50-53, was at least convinced of the dearth of evidence for a circular orchestra. See also Ashby (1988), 1-3.

¹⁴³ Haigh (1898), 106, was an early advocate of the circle and thought that it was the development of the *skene* that changed the pure circle of the orchestra.

seats.¹⁴⁴ Of course, as others have pointed out, circles can be bounded by several straight rows of seats.¹⁴⁵ More recently, Moretti has suggested that the *theatron* was pi-shaped and bordered the *orchestra* playing area, which would have been rectilinear (see fig. 5).¹⁴⁶ This view is also supported by Goette, whose short yet detailed analysis of the available archaeological evidence is persuasive both in terms of accepting a rectilinear orchestra and a smaller *theatron*.¹⁴⁷ In addition, Kate Boshier has recently surveyed theatre remains in Greece and of 8 known fifth-century spaces (Aixone, Argos, Athens, Chaeronea, Ikaria, Thorikos, Trachones and Sparta), only one is known to be circular and that is the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, which may have had another function in cult than the performance of drama. Of the 33 fourth-century theatre spaces she surveys 16 have curvilinear orchestras while 8 have rectilinear indicating a shift to a circular orchestra around the same time that theatres began to be constructed of stone rather than wood. It is notable that of the 30 surveyed from the third century none have rectilinear orchestras.¹⁴⁸ The general consensus now amongst scholars is either to accept the premise of a rectilinear orchestra or to at least place it alongside opinions relating to a circular space.

A visual focus on the theatre space can contribute to the debate, which for so long has been primarily concerned with the aesthetics of theatre architecture, rather than the development and dynamics of performance. Some scholars have cited the ancient references to the dithyrambic *kuklios choros* ("circular chorus") as an indication of a circular playing space.¹⁴⁹ However, anyone even vaguely familiar with the circular folk dances of modern Greece must know that most of these are frequently performed in aptly named town *squares* and the circular form of the dance has absolutely no bearing on the space in which they are performed.¹⁵⁰ In the modern theatre, circular playing spaces can be quite disorientating for the

¹⁴⁴ Gebhard (1974), 428-440. See also Pöhlmann (1981), 129-146.

¹⁴⁵ See Scullion (1994), 40.

¹⁴⁶ Moretti (2000), 395-397.

¹⁴⁷ Goette (2007a); see also Goette (2001), 13 and 50-51.

¹⁴⁸ Boshier (2006), 151-160, tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3.

¹⁴⁹ Schol. to Aeschines' *Against Timarchus* 10. According to Proculus (*Chrestomathy*. 12) Aristotle said that Arion invented the Dithyramb and led a "circular chorus." See Csapo and Miller (2007), 11-12; Lonsdale (1993), 92; J. Davidson (1986), 38-46; D'Angour (1997), 331-351. On circularity in Greek dance see Calame (2001), 35-38; and Ley (2007a), xi-xiv, who follows Scullion and Wiles and accepts a circular orchestra.

¹⁵⁰ Sommerstein (1996a), 36, has suggested that an *orchestra* would need to be around 50 feet deep to be able to accommodate a dithyrambic chorus numbering 50 and dancing in a circular formation. This

performer, particularly the dancer, and require a special kind of blocking where the actor must keep shifting their on-stage position in order that the audience either seated in the round or three-quarter round are afforded a good view and not “shut out” of the performance by spending long periods of time watching an actor’s back. This is why many theatres in the round today, such as the Bolton Octagon Theatre in Greater Manchester, England, opened in 1967, make use of vomitorium entranceways (“voms”) that are cut into the raked seating areas and correspond to places on stage where the actor may stand without blocking fellow actors or shutting out the audience for their visual relationship with the actor’s face. The Olivier Theatre at London’s National Theatre was built in an open-plan style with the plan of the theatre of Epidauros in mind, although because it is an interior space, serious problems have been encountered with the acoustical qualities of voice projection from the stage, particularly when the actor faces across the stage rather than directly facing the direction of the auditorium.¹⁵¹ Although not impossible to surmount, the evidence from modern theatre practice is that round stages require specific blocking and staging and acoustical attention that may not have been best suited to the ancient conditions of masked frontal drama.

This in itself is an important factor in considering the arrangement of the ancient stage—the actor’s face, which was, of course, masked. The impact of the mask and its relationship to actor and the spectator will be discussed in Chapter Four, but all indications relating to the use of the mask point to the fact that it works primarily on a frontal plane. While we can never recover the masked acting techniques of fifth century Athens we can observe several commonalities in dramatic mask usage from different masked performance traditions such as Kathakali, Kabuki, Noh, Indonesian theatre and even Commedia and Mime. All of these forms tend to emphasize frontality. The mask is weakened by a side view and when the masked actor is viewed from the rear it as if they are “offstage.” In Moretti’s and Goette’s reconstructions of the fifth-century theatre the majority of the audience are placed on a frontal plain directly before the performers on the *ikria*; this would be the optimum viewing position

seems correct and Goette’s reconstruction (fig. 2) of the rectilinear orchestra measures around 65 feet deep by 78 feet wide, more than enough space to hold 50 dancing men whether formed up in a circle or a rectangle.

¹⁵¹ Barron (1993), 282-285.

for watching the masked actor.¹⁵² If indeed the *theatron* was pi shaped it seems as though the left and right “legs” of this configuration did not extend too deeply along the sides of the orchestra, which would still offer people sitting there a near frontal relationship with the mask, especially of actors performing on or near the *skene*, which was placed upstage center.

Acoustical tests of existing Greek theatres and computer models of those that have not survived have also shown that the vocal quality and output diminishes the closer a performer moves into the orchestra nearer to the seats (something similar is described as occurring at the Olivier Theatre at London’s National Theatre).¹⁵³ Also, the three-quarter in the round audience configuration found in theatres dating from the fourth century and later, where the spectators are wrapped around an *orchestra* circle, provides a less-than-satisfying view of any actors working in the orchestra unless one was seated in the two central tiers of seats.

Acoustical Orchestras

Acoustical research may help provide another reason as to why the circular *orchestra* eventually replaced the rectilinear performance space. It has been shown that the surface of the *orchestra* in stone theatres such as Epidauros acts as a sound reflector helping to project the actor’s voice into the *theatron*. Decibel measurements of the impulse responses to a generated sound from the *skene* area in computer models of ancient theatres shows how the sound reflection generated by the *orchestra* is almost as strong as the original source and is produced very quickly after it is first generated. Therefore, the *orchestra* almost doubles the ability of sound projection at virtually the same frequency. A third noticeable sound reflection is generated by the *skene* but this is considerably later and much smaller and at a lower frequency.¹⁵⁴ Second, the tiered seating and pitted surface of the risers help “baffle” low-

¹⁵² Storey also agrees that the majority of the spectators were seated on a frontal plane; Storey and Allan (2005), 36.

¹⁵³ On this acoustic occurrence see Declercq and Dekeyser (2007), 2018-2019.

¹⁵⁴ Fametani and Prodi (2008), 1557-1567, fig. 8. Vitruvius (De Architectura 5.5.7) mentions the same acoustical qualities of the stage floor and walls, although he was incorrect in assuming that wood resonates more efficiently than stone and proposes that bronze “sounding vessels” be erected to help project the acoustics.

frequency sounds such as ambient noise and wind, further enhancing the higher frequency of the human voice.¹⁵⁵

As theatres strove to accommodate much larger audiences so the *cavea* was extended and seating wrapped around the *orchestra*, which was now (late fourth century onwards) primarily being used to amplify the voices of the actors on the larger Hellenistic *skene*, the larger surface of which also aided vocal projection. Stone reflects sound far more efficiently than wood, and though the spectators would also absorb low-frequency sound the stone risers would enhance the actor's vocals.¹⁵⁶ By placing these risers in high-pitched rakes (inclines) around a circle all the various sound-enhancing elements of the open-air theatre came into play—the reflective properties of the *skene*, the sound “bounce” generated by the beaten earth of the orchestra, the properties of the circle that distributed this bounce evenly around the auditorium and the high steep stone seating enhancing the natural properties of the *cavea* to “shelter” the sound projected directly into it.¹⁵⁷

In the Hellenistic theatre the role of the chorus was either greatly diminished or non-existent and the actors performed on a high stage designed to enhance their visual relationship to the spectators in the much larger *theatron*. In such a space the preservation of the *orchestra* as an essential acoustical aid as well as an aesthetically pleasing design element made sense. It is notable that Vitruvius credited the development of theatre design to “investigations of the ascending voice” by ancient architects using musicians and the application of harmonics.¹⁵⁸ It could be said then that by the Hellenistic period the *theatron* had grown to such a size that it also needed to be an effective *auditorium*. Yet the visual qualities of the theatre remained paramount, including the relationship of the spectators to the exterior environment. In Hellenistic theatres even though the *skene* became a large high structure running along the length of the performance space the spectators were still afforded stunning views of the country, city or seascape outside of the theatre. It was not until the development of the Roman

¹⁵⁵ Declercq and Dekeyser (2007), 2011-2022.

¹⁵⁶ Chourmouziadou and Kang (2008), 514-529.

¹⁵⁷ This can still be experienced at Epidauros. A person speaking while standing in the center of the orchestra circle will hear their own voice reflected back at them, while one standing upstage of the circle near the remains of the *skene* can be clearly heard anywhere in the *theatron*.

¹⁵⁸ Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 5.3.8.

theatre when the high *scaenae frons* was connected to a semi-circular auditorium that the playing space was effectively sealed off from any exterior view.¹⁵⁹

We must accept the simple fact that no curvilinear orchestras have been identified prior to the theatre of Epidauros built around 330 BCE (and closely followed by the stone Lycurgan Theatre of Dionysos, which also had a curvilinear orchestra). The archaeological evidence available from both the fifth century remains of the theatre of Dionysos in Athens and other theatres from the period indicate that a rectilinear orchestra with *ikria* arranged in a low pi-shape on three sides with most of the seating in the center section was most likely the form the theatre took at this period. Finally, though we do not know why the stone theatre of Epidauros was built with a circular *orchestra* we might speculate that this was to help facilitate the view of a large audience who were placed in the three-quarter round to be brought as close as possible to the actors on the *skene* and benefit from the proven acoustical qualities of the *orchestra* in this environment, the circular shape of which efficiently projected sound around the entire enlarged *theatron*. There is still an old tenet taught to apprentice lighting designers working in the theatre today; if the actors can't be seen then they can't be heard, however loudly they speak.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, frontality is essential when staging masked performance. The eye and the ear work in tandem connecting the physical presence of the actor onstage with the experience of the spectator watching and listening from the seats. As the theatres themselves grew in size performance venues had to provide both excellent sightlines and very good acoustics.

Visible Landscape and Verbal *Langscape*

Richard Latta has suggested that the human visual system evolved to quickly recognize, process and understand the environment in which people lived in order to function as

¹⁵⁹ A sense of the difference can be experienced by sitting in the *theatron* of the remains of the theatre of Dionysos in Athens, which remains open to stunning views of Athens, the countryside of Attica and the sea, as opposed to sitting in the auditorium of the theatre of Herodas Atticus on the southwest slope of the Acropolis where the restored *scaenae frons* cuts the spectator off from a view of the environment outside.

¹⁶⁰ This was told to me by Martin Godfrey, technical director of the Bloomsbury Theatre in London and then head of the technical department at the National Theatre.

effectively as possibly within a particular landscape.¹⁶¹ Whereas the human eye is less sensitive to light than nocturnal animals and to small details, a visual acuity found in birds of prey, it does possess a high degree of stereopsis (depth perception) and color processing. Latta explains that much of this ability seems innate but it can be “fine-tuned” by environmental influences such as an increased sensitivity to horizontal and vertical lines that can develop in modern urban populations. Therefore landscapes “are exceptionally powerful stimulants for our visual neurons” and help establish a sense of human control of the surrounding environment.¹⁶² When looking at landscapes, or any scene where there are a variety of objects in view arranged in differing depths of field the eye oscillates between foveal (central) vision and peripheral vision. Foveal vision allows us to focus on selected objects while peripheral vision places that object in a wider visual field and searches where our foveal vision should be directed. Modern theatres tend to be constructed to guide our foveal vision to where the director wishes us to look and this is achieved by a variety of means including: framing the action of a play with a proscenium arch, depriving the audience of a sense of the environment outside of the theatre, both visually and aurally, and by utilizing artificial lighting, which places the audience in darkness while the stage is lit.¹⁶³ Then shifts in lighting color temperature, intensity and placement guide the focus of the spectators and enhance mood, mark scene changes and assist with the flow of narrative.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Latta (1995), 87-88.

¹⁶² Latta (1995), 87.

¹⁶³ Occasionally the environment outside cannot be effectively kept out and can have a marked effect on the emotional mood and focus of the play. An example from personal experience is Aquila Theatre’s production of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* at the 45 Bleecker Theatre, on Bleecker Street in downtown New York City (June-December 2001). The production was temporarily closed due to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 (New York City below 14th Street was closed for a few days) and re-opened two days later to hold free performances to residents and New York University students who lived in the area. The coming together to watch a classic play was welcomed but the atmosphere of the production was changed every time an ambulance siren was heard, a common enough sound in New York City but with the absence of the usual ambient noise of traffic these sirens took on a disturbing quality that reminded actors, staff and audience of the traumatic events of a few days earlier. It became very hard to perform a comedy in this environment and the production became a collective artistic act of defiance, an attempt to carry on as normal or find some kind of sense and continuity with the past. In the theatre the environment *affects*.

¹⁶⁴ On lighting see Padel (1990), 339-340. In 1914 Huntley Carter wrote of the new developments in lighting being explored by the theatre director Max Reinhardt: “The new system of lighting is also bound up with intimacy. As the latter is largely based on emotional effects, so the main aim of stage lighting is to contribute as far as possible to the emotions of the drama. Lighting has in fact become an embodiment of emotion.” (Carter was commenting on new advances in lighting design where directed white light colored with gels that was replacing the old limelights in theatres; H. Carter (1964), 12.

The Athenian theatre operated in a totally different environmental setting: it was open air, it did not attempt to remove the spectators from the world outside the performance space and it did not frame the action on stage with a proscenium or any other framing device (such as lighting in a modern theatre).¹⁶⁵ Even the *orchestra* may not have been a “defined space” with any means of demarking it from the *eisodoi* and where the spectators on the front row placed their feet, unlike at Epidauros where a pronounced curb sets the *orchestra* circle out from its surroundings. If there was one element that indicated that a theatrical performance was taking place it was the mask and this will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four, including how the mask operates within a space where both peripheral and foveal vision are put to use in the presentation of drama. An example of how the eye oscillates between these two modes of vision in the Greek theatre is the use of the *eisodoi* described above, where an actor enters into the spectator’s peripheral visual field before coming into focus in foveal vision. Additionally, the sanctuary of Dionysos was deliberately located within the culturally specific landscape of the Athenian Acropolis and its *theatron* was situated to take full advantage of the stunning views of the southern city and Attic landscape. While watching a play this landscape was always in the spectator’s peripheral vision and rather than deny visual access to this natural “backdrop” as the Romans did with the development of the *scaenae frons*, locations for Greek theatres were typically chosen because they could take visual advantage of the view of the surrounding environment.¹⁶⁶

This relationship to landscape was also made manifest in the texts of the plays themselves as dramatists incorporated the environment and its cultural associations within the narrative of their works. Jane Palatini Bowers has coined the term “landscape” in relation to the plays of Gertrude Stein who believed that the language of landscape could be used to create an extra

¹⁶⁵ See Revermann (2006), 111-115 who applies the Bakhtinian concept of chronotopes to Greek drama and proposes that tragedy favors “closed fixed and linear” chronotopes while comedy is more “open, fluid and discontinuous” (111). This may be an oversimplification and Revermann’s example of Socrates indicating a theatrical sun rather than the actual sun in the sky over the sanctuary during his entrance in *Clouds* seems too literal to be plausible in a theatre that he rightly states “makes an enormous appeal to the imaginative power of its audience” (113).

¹⁶⁶ Hooker compared the comic journey of Dionysos in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* with a topographical journey through Athens that the spectators could see from their seats while watching the show. Hooker compares Dionysos’ visit to Herakles with the sight of the Herakleion at Kynosarges just outside the southern city walls, the banks of the River Styx with the Sanctuary of Dionysos of the Marshes and the entrance to Hades with Agrai a place known for mystery cult that lay across the river Ilissos; Hooker (1960), 112-117. See also Slater (2002), 186.

dramatic dimension and “release language from the requirement that it tell a story.”¹⁶⁷ Stein used language, spatially deploying words as a painter might render objects in the visual field of a painting. While Stein used a notion of the landscape to free her work from the norms of theatre of the period she was no less inspired by her environment and believed that words could perform the same function in placing the listener in a new imaginary spatial realm.

The chorus is frequently used to create “langscapes” in Greek drama and they also often inhabit the spectator’s peripheral visual field while the actors are placed in their foveal vision. Yet their presence and collective act of observing the action and listening, perhaps also slightly moving and reacting, adds an additional layer of emotional depth to the total visual panoply available to the dramatist. During choral songs, where they move into a central focal position, language is often used to describe imaginary or mythical landscapes that help define an atmosphere of place for the action depicted on stage or evoke a sense of longing and desire.¹⁶⁸ These vivid descriptive passages ought to be considered with the surrounding environment of the Sanctuary of Dionysos in mind and fall into two broad categories: what might be termed “visual langscapes” are those which seek to locate references within the play to visual elements within the actual or recent visual field of the spectators; and “visionary langscapes” are those that seek to create an imaginary or mythical landscape in the mind’s eye of the spectators. Although in this second category it seems as if the descriptions are not intended to relate to specific sights available in the visual field, the availability of the physical sight of the landscape, sea and sky would have greatly enhanced their reception.¹⁶⁹

A good example of a “visual langscape” can be found in the first stasimon of Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* (668-719). The chorus, made up of townsmen of Colonus, begin by praising their own community, which was well known to most Athenians laying under a mile

¹⁶⁷ Bowers (2002), 121-144.

¹⁶⁸ For an account of the use of choral language to create imaginary landscapes that evoke a sense of “the escape fantasy” see Swift (2009), 364-382, who writes: “To connect the idealized locations with the action onstage, Euripides draws on the connotations that space holds in Greek thought . . . space is symbolically charged, and the locations the odes describe are overlaid with a deeper significance” (364). Swift cites Euripides’ *Bacchae* 370–433; *Helen* 1451–1511; *Hippolytus* 732–775; *Iphegenia in Taurus* 1089–1152; *Medea* 824–865; *Ion* 1074–1089 and *Trojan Women* 197–229. See also Padel (1974), 227-241.

¹⁶⁹ Mitchell-Boyask (2008), 172-177 has suggested that physical elements of the space could be tied to imaginary places in the play’s narrative such as the *theatron* representing the mountain slopes of Mt. Cithaeron or Mt. Oeta. See also Wiles (1997), 177-179 who suggests a similar idea.

away from the city to the northwest. Additionally it was the birthplace of Sophocles, an Attic deme, and had been in the forefront of Athenian political intrigue as the location of the meeting between the oligarchs and the knights in 411 BCE to plan the coup of the 400 (*Oedipus at Colonus* was perhaps composed around 407 BCE and staged posthumously in 401 BCE).¹⁷⁰ The Athenians had also recently repulsed a Theban attack led by the Spartan king Agis at Colonus.¹⁷¹ Besides the tomb of Oedipus, Sophocles cites a number of deities at Colonus with particular relevance to the Athenians including the Eumenides, Poseidon, Prometheus, Colonus (the eponymous hero of one of the ten Attic tribes), Dionysos, Theseus and Perithoos.¹⁷²

The choral song itself begins with a description of the “beautiful meadows” of Colonus echoing to the trill of nightingales, an aural reference that incorporates the sensory capabilities of the blind Oedipus. Then the focus of the song gradually expands from the grove of the Eumenides, where Oedipus sits, to the wider landscape of Colonus threaded by the river Cephissus which runs from the Saronic Gulf through the Attic plain that lies to the west of the city. Although Colonus and the Cephissus could not be seen from the theatre its sights and ritual places would have been embedded in the memories of most of the Attic spectators as the focus of the song expands to encompass Athens and Attica as a whole with references to fertile fields, abundant crops and the sacred olive, all of which could be clearly seen from the *theatron* in the countryside outside the city walls to the south. Thus, the wild horses of Poseidon are imagined on the roads of Attica and the song ends with a reference to the sea, visible to the south.

Andreas Markantonatos has described Sophocles’ Colonus in this play as “a microcosm of Athens itself,”¹⁷³ its mythical presence is set within the physical environment of the sanctaury. Similarly, Lowell Edmunds has also pointed out how the song changes focus from Oedipus to the spectators in that the initial descriptions of Colonus would have had a direct meaning to

¹⁷⁰ Sophocles died in 406 BCE. For the date of the composition of *Oedipus at Colonus* see Edmunds (1996), 87-91.

¹⁷¹ Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.1.33.

¹⁷² Birge (1984), 11-17.

¹⁷³ Markantonatos (2007), 91-93.

Oedipus within the world of the play but the later references to Athens and Attica seem intended for the spectators in the theatre.¹⁷⁴ This capability of the chorus to shift between differing perspectives has been described by Edmunds as a feature of their “ambiguous status” in Greek drama. Viewing the chorus in terms of the peripheral and the foveal and how they possess the ability to exploit their fluctuating visual status by oscillating between the two might further elucidate Edmunds’ definition. First, Oedipus and Antigone are the focus of this scene and exist in the foveal realm, then the imagined periphery of Colonus is vividly described and set within the physical context of the Attic countryside observable from the theatre seats. As the chorus finish their song, their assertions of Attic pride are immediately taken up by Antigone, who asks for the protection of this splendid place against the aggression of a fast approaching Cleon which is another incredibly effective and tension filled *eisodos* entrance over 8 lines of dialogue. Hence, all Athenians, ancient and modern, are implicit in Antigone’s appeal, “Now this land praised beyond all compare, prove your brilliance with action” (720-721).

An example of a “visionary landscape” can be found in the parados of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (184-204) where the chorus of old men of Argos describe the events that unfolded while the Greek fleet waited at Aulis to sail on Troy. Here, Aeschylus creates a powerful image of the storms that beset the Greeks at Aulis and in so doing sets the decision of Agamemnon to kill his daughter against the desperate situation of the army, who are described as wasting away in hunger as the bitter northern winds prevent them from sailing. Three places are cited: Chalcis, Aulis and the Strymon. Chalcis was well known to the Athenians as a city on the large island of Euboea, which lay just off the eastern coast of Attica. In 506 BCE the Athenians defeated the Chalcidians and their lands were redistributed to 4000 Athenian settlers. In 458 BCE, the year the *Oresteia* was staged, the Chalcidians and their Euboean neighbours were still chafing under Athenian rule and eventually attempted an uprising in 446 BCE that was put down by Pericles. To the Athenian spectator Chalcis was dangerous place both in political and mythological terms. Opposite Calchis on the Boeotian coast was Aulis and the sea between them was known as the Straits of Aulis, it was here that

¹⁷⁴ Edmunds (1996), 57-59.

the Greek fleet assembled and where Iphigenia was killed, although the mythic tradition places the event on both coasts. Euripides combines the two by having Iphigenia killed in Aulis and watched by a chorus of women from Calchis in *Iphigenia at Aulis*. The third place—the Strymon—was a river in Thrace, the region where the bitter north wind Boreas was said to come from. Herodotus (7.189.2) gives an account of Boreas coming to the aid of the Greeks and wreaking havoc on the Persian fleet off the coast of Magnesia, a large promontory to the north of Euboea. The power of Boreas is referred to in the *Iliad* (9.4-8) as possessing the force to suddenly produce a storm from nowhere.

The Athenian spectators gathered to watch the *Oresteia* must have been acutely aware of the power of the wind to destroy ships.¹⁷⁵ Many of them may have served as rowers in the fleet or at least been transported by ship as infantry or when travelling overseas as *Theoroi*. Aeschylus creates a landscape of freezing howling winds, icy salt water, sodden hungry sailors and creaking rotting vessels trapped between two hostile places. The vividness of this storm is matched by the tumult of the emotional storm in the mind of Agamemnon (219-227) and the floods of tears of the sons of Atreus (204). These howling winds are pierced by the shrieking of the prophet and the cries of Iphigenia and though the spectators can neither see nor hear the frigid coast of Aulis, Aeschylus' use of landscape places them right there in the tent of Agamemnon as he makes his monumental decision. What Athenian has not experienced first hand at least the dread fear of the ravages of the wind on ships? Perhaps this tempestuous landscape created an atmosphere that challenged the spectator not to empathize with a desperate Agamemnon compelled to act to save his fleet.

To conclude, a short choral ode from Aristophanes' *Clouds* (299-313) also creates a "visual landscape" but not one based on topography rather dearly held Athenian cults and rituals. The clouds are imagined looking down on a city where great temples, gleaming *agalma* (statues), and religious sites are teeming with holy initiates, sacred processions, sacrifices, choral songs and dances. Thus, Athens observed from the heavens is a city of ritual performance and works of art that visually honor the gods and the song concludes by focusing on the very festival the

¹⁷⁵ See Cullyer (2005), 3-20, who also points out the similarities with Sophocles' *Antigone* 1115-1152, another choral song that could be placed in the "visualized landscape" category.

spectators of this play are attending—the City Dionysia.¹⁷⁶ Strepsiades hears the chorus before he can see them and so Socrates guides him to look to the north in the direction of Mount Parnes and watch them come wafting down towards them αὐται πλάγῃαι, “along these sides” (325). When Strepsiades still can’t make them out Socrates has to revert to an overt theatrical term, παρὰ τὴν εἴσοδον, “There in the wings!” (326), a comic allusion to the fact that these theatrical sky-borne clouds must in reality enter via the *eisodoi*. Aristophanes brings the clouds from on high and spreads these insubstantial, vaporous, puffs of mist all over the *orchestra*. A celestial “landscape” brought down to earth so a simple man from the country can learn περὶ καπνοῦ στενολεσχεῖν “to quibble over nothing but smoke” (321).

παρθένοι ὀμβροφόροι
 ἔλθωμεν λιπαρὰν χθόνα Παλλάδος, εὐάνδρον γᾶν
 Κέκροπος ὀψόμεναι πολυήρατον·
 οὗ σέβας ἀρρήτων ἱερῶν, ἵνα
 μυστοδόκος δόμος
 ἐν τελεταῖς ἀγίαις ἀναδείκνυται,
 οὐρανίοις τε θεοῖς δωρήματα,
 ναοὶ θ’ ὑπερεφεῖς καὶ ἀγάλματα,
 καὶ πρόσοδοι μακάρων ἱερώταται,
 εὐστέφανοί τε θεῶν θυσίαι θαλίαι τε,
 παντοδαπαῖς ἐν ὥραις,
 ἥρι τ’ ἐπερχομένων Βρομίας χάρις,
 εὐκελάδων τε χορῶν ἐρεθίσματα,
 καὶ μοῦσα βαρύβρομος αὐλῶν.

On to Athens, maidens bearing rain
 The hallowed land of Cecrops’ race,
 Full of the bravest men

¹⁷⁶ The reference is to festivals of Dionysos held in the spring so it could imply the Rural Dionysia, Anthesteria or the Lenaea except that Clouds placed third at the City Dionysia in 423 BCE. The text we have seems to be a later revision possibly made sometime between 419-417 BCE and perhaps never performed. See Storey in Meineck (1998b), 401-405. See also Sommerstein (2009), 176-191.

Where the initiates seek to attain
Acceptance to a sacred place.
The house of Mysteries for holy rites.
Where the heavenly gods gave
Massive temples with statues grand
And godly processions to sacred sites
The splendid sacrifices that crown the land.
Celebrations held throughout the year
Then sweet Dionysos comes in spring.
And the resonant tone of the pipes we hear
As the joyous chorus dance and sing.

Aristophanes *Clouds* (299-313)

Chapter Four

Prosôpon: The Tragic Mask

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person.

Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.

Oscar Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*

Greek tragedy, comedy and satyr plays were performed in masks and as far as we know neither the actors nor chorus members ever performed barefaced.¹ However, no actual theatre mask dating from the fifth century has survived and there is a dearth of evidence for Athenian masks from the period, both literary and material. What little we do have is in the form of renderings in non-theatrical art forms such as vase painting, sculpture, and terracotta votive offerings and a very few references to masks in texts of the period.² Popular notions of Greek masks, with their stony faces, gaping eyes, “megaphone” mouths and elongated headdresses emanate from the Hellenistic or Roman theatre and are often architectural representation of masks, sculptural adornments, or votive offerings rather than anything that was actually worn on stage.³

This image of the tragic mask with its fixed expression, empty eye-sockets, monochromatic complexion and exaggerated downturned mouth now sits next to its comic counterpart as the very emblem of the live theatre, as the intertwined masks of “Comedy” and “Tragedy” such as in the logo of the American Actors Equity Association and the Actors’ union, Equity in the

¹ There is no reason to assume that the Dithyrambic choruses were masked. At the *proagon* held prior to the performance days the dramatic performers did appear unmasked although they did not perform at this event. See Marshall (2004), 27-45, and Easterling (1997), 153.

² Aristophanes *Birds* 674—taking off a mask is compared to peeling an egg; *Knights* 230-232—the mask makers are too scared to make a mask that resembles Cleon; fr. 31 (Henderson), Scholium on *Peace* 474—a reference to hideous goblin masks of Mormo; Fr. 130 (Hederson)—a reference to *mormolukeia* (goblin masks) being hung on display at the Sanctuary of Dionysos; Cratinus *Seriphioi* fr. 218—may be a reference to a tragic mask being handed to a comic Perseus. See Bakola (2010), 159-160; Aeschylus *Theoroi* (POxy 2162) may also contain a reference to the masks of the satyrs that are hung up on a temple wall. See Taplin (1977), 420-422.

³ A famous modern stage production that helped reinforce the notion of the oversize Greek tragic mask was the 1954 *Oedipus Rex* at the Stratford Ontario Festival and subsequent film directed by Tyrone Guthrie with masks and costumes by Tanya Moiseiwitsch and Jacqueline Cundall.

United Kingdom. This is most people's image of the ancient Greek mask, including many theatre practitioners who often approach ancient drama with notions of masking derived from European *commedia dell'arte* or from observing masking traditions in the performance forms of other cultures such as Japanese Kabuki and Noh and Indian Kathakali theatre. In the theatre world masks are one of the most misunderstood aspects of ancient drama and in the realm of classical studies the impact of the mask on the text and presentation of ancient plays has been vastly underestimated.

This chapter's primary purpose is to examine how the tragic mask operated in performance from the perspective of the spectator and its relationship to the surrounding environment. The comic mask will be left aside as the principal focus of this work is tragic performance in the fifth century BCE. Comic masks operated in much the same way as their tragic cousins but looked different with bulbous, exaggerated features and whole heads, rather than the facemask of tragedy. In fact, due to the wide influence of New Comedy the comic mask had a greater impact on the way we assume the Greek dramatic mask looked.⁴ Therefore, only the available iconographic evidence of tragic masks from the fifth century will be examined with the proposal that the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10) provides our best evidence for creating a reconstruction of the tragic mask.

In seeking to analyze the use of the mask in tragedy from the point of view of the spectator this study will take advantage of some of the new research coming from the field of neuroscience. In particular, the studies concerning the operation of neurons in cognitive function and their relationship to imitation, empathy, spatial awareness, face recognition and vision. If facial recognition, reciprocal eye contact and mental connectivity to the movements of others are some of the most important ways in which humans communicate emotional states between themselves, then what happens when the face is denied by the mask, the eyes hidden and movement choreographed and heightened? Did the mask challenge normal human neural responses and produce a higher cognitive experience more dependent on comprehending movement and processing language, and did the fixed and unmoving surface

⁴ On comic masks see Wiles (2008), 374-394, and Csapo (1997), 253-295.

of the mask stimulate a profound personal empathetic visual experience that deepened emotional responses and accentuated the visceral experience of watching the drama? Ultimately it will be proposed that the tragic mask mediated an ocular experience that oscillated between foveal (focused) and peripheral vision and possessed the ability to seem to change emotions in the eyes of the spectators and that these visual and cognitive qualities of the mask were fundamental to the performance of tragedy.

David Wiles has written, “Within mainstream Classics, the theatre mask sits in a curious limbo, welcomed neither in literary criticism nor in the analysis of Greek religion.”⁵ Wiles credits this lack of enthusiasm for the mask to an association with theories of early religious theatre emanating from the Cambridge ritualists. The problem was further compounded by Pickard-Cambridge, who collected much useful visual evidence for masks from vase painting and sculpture but grouped them under the heading of “costumes,” viewing them as accessories to performance rather than the central communicative element in the delivery and reception of a play. He did draw attention to what he described as the “melting” of the faces of at least two of the performers represented on the Pronomos Vase of 400 BCE (fig.10), where the faces of the actors seem to be the same as those of the masks they carry (fig. 10.5). Yet he simply stated, “the exact metaphysical status of the ‘actors’ need not concern us.”⁶ However, Pickard Cambridge did point out the difficulty inherent in mining vase painting for evidence of the theatre noting that these depictions were their own independent artistic form and it is often impossible to distinguish between an image of a performance and the rendering of a myth. Recently Csapo has reexamined much of this evidence and found that we must further distinguish between representations of the dramatic chorus that he feels start to appear around 490 BCE and those of actors, which are found in Attic art from about 430 BCE.⁷ This has an important bearing on providing additional evidence for tragedy’s focus on the chorus and

⁵ Wiles (2007), 9.

⁶ Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 187. T.B.L Webster’s 1956 book, *Greek Theatre Production* was also very influential and followed the same methodology as Pickard-Cambridge but favoring later sources such as Pollux for information on the kinds of masks that may have been worn in the fifth century. Both works tended to conflate evidence from different periods, which may have contributed to confusion over which masks were used when. However one of Webster’s main contributions, often overlooked, was to organize his material geographically indicating centers of drama in Athens, Sicily and Italy, Mainland Greece, the Islands and Asia and Africa.

⁷ Csapo (2010), 23-31.

leads to questions about the function of masks in the portrayal of a choral group and how they operated in the visual field of the spectator.

John Jones' work on masks within his book *Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* in 1962 proved highly influential and helped reinforce several concepts about Greek masks that still prevail today, especially in introductions to Greek drama found in general works on the theatre or acting guides for drama students.⁸ These include that the primary function of the mask was to create disguise and facilitate easy doubling of parts; the cross-gendering of roles; projection of a larger than life face to the back of a huge open-air theatre; and amplification of the actor's voice via a megaphone within the mask itself.⁹ Yet, none of these points stands up to serious scrutiny based on the evidence at hand. First, actors have always found ways to effectively double and cross-gender roles without the use of masks. One need only consider that characters such as Lady Macbeth, Kate in *Taming of the Shrew* and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* were played by young male actors in the Elizabethan theatre. In fact, the role of Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* required a male actor to play a young woman pretending to be a young man who pretends to be a young woman! As for doubling, one might point to the pair of photos of Ruth Draper as both a haughty middle-aged wife and a shy secretary in the same play found in Gombrich's famous essay on the mask and the face published in 1960.¹⁰ Draper looks completely different in each photo, an effect achieved with minimal change of costume and make-up and generated by posture, facial expression and a change of costume and wig.

Next, Jones' statement about large masks projecting to the back row shows that he was thinking more of the oversized high masks of the Hellenistic period than the fairly naturalistic and face-sized masks that we see depicted clearly on the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10), our best visual evidence for the appearance of masks in the fifth century. Even the masks held by the chorus members on the Pireaus relief (fig. 7) are no bigger than their own heads,¹¹ and apart

⁸ For example the section on Masks and Costumes in Oscar Brockett's influential college textbook on the history of the theatre; Brockett and Hildy (2007), 27-20.

⁹ Jones (1962), 43-44.

¹⁰ Collected in Gombrich (1982), 105-136.

¹¹ See Taplin (1977), 14.

from comic masks, which were deliberately bulbous and covered the whole head, it seems that tragic masks fitted snugly over the face and were held in place by a soft skullcap with realistic hair attached.¹² Again, the Pronomos Vase offers several views of this type of mask (in this case both satyr and tragic masks) and we can even see clearly into the back of one mask held by a chorus member. This figure leans his arm on his chorus mate and casually, yet carefully, holds his mask by a small strap on its head against his hip (fig. 10.4).

As for the megaphone mouth there is absolutely no evidence from the fifth century that the construction of tragic masks aided the projection of the voice, yet of all things generally “known” about Greek masks this misconception prevails. None of our evidence for fifth century masks show anything more than an open mouth and in keeping with the decorative style of the mask itself this mouth aperture was probably larger than a naturalistic mouth but not so large that it distracted from the overall depiction of the face the mask conveyed. This can clearly be seen on the Pronomos Vase and other representations of masks from the period such as a fragment in Kiev of an Attic red figure column krater from Olbia in dated to 430-420 BCE and showing two performers masked as maenads (fig. 6).

Fifth century masks were probably constructed of linen, cork or wood.¹³ Practical experiments conducted with reconstructions built in a similar fashion in the theatre of Epidauros, the stadium at Delphi and the theatre of Dionysos in Athens have all resulted in the performer’s voice being completely unhindered by the mask as long as it fits the face properly and the performer faces in the direction of the listeners.¹⁴ As discussed in Chapter Three, it was the spatial dynamics of the theatre that created the acoustical reinforcement necessary for voice projection and not the mask.¹⁵

¹² See Sommerstein (1996a), 41.

¹³ Wiles (2007), 62.

¹⁴ Mask experiments conducted by Peter Meineck and members of the London Small Theatre Company at the Ancient Stadium at Delphi at the Delphi Festival 1990; by Peter Meineck and members of the Nauplion Greek Drama Training Program at Epidauros, 1992; by Peter Meineck with members of Aquila Theatre at the Theatre of Dionysos in Athens, 2007.

¹⁵ See Vovolis and Zamboulakis (2007) who propose that the fifth century mask created a “resonance chamber” that affected the quality of the actor’s voice. However, these findings are based on the use of the masks of stage designer Thanos Vovolis, which are rigid constructions that cover the whole head like a helmet. The evidence for fifth century masks indicated a face-mask and soft skull cap, which would not have resonated. In fact, in my own research with this type of mask I have found that it needs to fit the

Yet, Jones did at least pose the vital question “why mask?” However, his own answer was frustratingly vague, simply stating that anthropology did not provide a single answer and that “masks state different truths for different people.”¹⁶ Jones was surely right in suggesting that the mask was essential to the presentation of characters on the Greek stage and not just a prop or article of costume and yet he felt strongly that it was a blank canvas, its neutrality a major factor in the production of what he described as a distancing effect for the spectators. For Jones, this idea played neatly into his understanding of Aristotle’s theories of the supremacy of *mythos* (plot) over *ethos* (character) and the purpose of the mask was to distance the actor from the emotional responses of the spectators and become a visual and verbal prop in the theatrical display of *praxis*.

Since Jones there have been several important studies of dramatic masks and their relationship to the culture within which they were displayed. Vernant visited the subject several times applying the structuralist theories of Lévi-Strauss to the use of the mask within the context of the worship of Dionysos and proposing that the mask assisted in differentiating between the civic Dionysos and the ritual Dionysos.¹⁷ He compared the tragic mask to the gazing face of the Gorgon and, influenced by Lacanian theory, explored the effects of the mirrored gaze especially within the narrative of Euripides *Bacchae*.¹⁸ Vernant described the mask as conferring “on the tragic protagonist the magnified dimensions of one of the exceptional beings that are the object of cult in the city,” despite the fact that many of the characters found in tragedy were not affiliated with the cults of Athens. He then tempers this with characteristic structuralist duality by adding: “the language used brings him closer to the ordinary man.”¹⁹ For Vernant, the mask was a symbol of tension between the ritual of religious practice and the articulation of the needs of the polis and that Dionysos as the “god of the mask” was

actor fairly snugly in order to not inhibit vocal production or clarity. Pickard-Cambridge (1968), fig. 33, describes this as a *sakkos*. See also Wiles (2007), 22-23, plate 2.3a.

¹⁶ Jones (1962), 44. On Jones’ impact see Wiles (2007), 275-277.

¹⁷ Such as Vernant (1990, 1991, 2004).

¹⁸ Vernant (1988), 381-414.

¹⁹ Vernant (1988), 34.

recognized not by the same ritual performed and re-performed but by the spirit of innovation and renewal that is inherent in tragedy.²⁰

Going further than Vernant, Frontisi-Ducroux places the mask squarely within the cultic operations of the rites of Dionysos and analyzes representations of the mask in connection with his worship on vase paintings.²¹ She focuses on the images that depict a disembodied mask hung on a pole representing the god surrounded by worshippers and assumes that a cult based on the mask emerged in the sixth century projecting the idea of disconnection of the self through ecstatic rites. Her theories might seem to lend credibility to the view that the tragic mask developed out of a religious totem but it must be remembered that the use of masks in worship was not the sole preserve of Dionysos.²² Frontisi-Ducroux does make some valid points about the mask “obliterating” the identity of the actor behind it but she remains wedded to the notion that the tragic performer performed a liturgical role and was merely the animator of the mask in a performance rooted in religious cult practice.²³

The sacred origins of the mask were also explored from an anthropological perspective by Napier who, like Vernant, made parallels between the tragic mask, representations of the Gorgon and symposium eye-cups. Napier made cultural and typological connections between the seventh century terracotta votive masks found at Orthia and masks depicted in Egyptian, Anatolian and Phoenician representations proposing that masked acting in Greece developed from a “ritual theatre” performed by priests, an influence on Greek religious practice that spread from the East during the Orientalizing period. This idea is also reflected in the work of I. Nielsen, who applies an interpretation of what she sees as early cultic theatre spaces to the kind of cross-cultural comparisons of masks made by Napier. I. Nielsen goes so far as to propose that masked ritual theatre was the missing link between the movement driven masked *komos* and the narrative of tragedy.²⁴

²⁰ Vernant (1988), 181-188.

²¹ Frontisi-Ducroux (1991).

²² For example, masks have been found in connection with the sanctuary of Artemis at Orthia and Pausanias (8.15.3) relates how a priest of Demeter in Pheneos in Arcadia wore a mask of the goddess.

²³ Frontisi-Ducroux (1995), 40. For some astute comments on her theories in relation to the mask see Wiles (2007), 256-258.

²⁴ I. Nielsen (2002).

One of the most intelligent approaches that has emerged comes from Stephen Halliwell, who takes an aesthetic approach to the mask, comparing it to other art forms of the period and striving to place it within the visual culture of the fifth century BCE.²⁵ However, as this chapter hopes to demonstrate, he is completely wrong in his conclusion that the fixed features of the mask were unable to form different emotional aspects and it therefore conveyed a sense of “heroic dignity even in the midst of destructive sufferings.” Yet when relating the mask to the use of the performer’s body he does add the following important proviso: “Given a fuller technique of expressiveness on the part of the actor, perception of the mask (as careful modern experiments can help us to grasp) is likely to be affected by the total sense of a figure’s emotional deportment and demeanor.”²⁶ This connection between mask and movement is key to understanding the mask in performance and will be discussed below.

All in all, Halliwell tackles three big questions regarding the mask: first, he looks into the notion of its possible religious origins and makes the excellent point that theatrical masking cannot be treated as indicative of Dionysian worship or the experience of ritual self-transcendence, refuting many of the claims of Vernant and Frontisi-Ducroux. He also reminds us that masks were not worn in dithyramb or in other cult practices related to the worship of Dionysos and questions the “automatic presumption” of a connection between the worship of Dionysos and the wearing of masks. Furthermore, he points out that when Aristotle says that the inventor of the comic mask was unknown this implies that an inventor of tragic masks *was* known and if the tragic mask was religious in origin then by the fourth century that idea had been completely lost.²⁷ Halliwell tackles Jones’ belief that the mask was needed to facilitate multiple role-playing and cross-gendering, concluding that this view remains highly speculative based on our dearth of evidence from the sixth century BCE and the fact that the doubling of roles is not in itself dependent on a mask. He also addressed the issue of the actors’ visibility by sensibly pointing out that at the time when tragedy was being formed in the late sixth and early fifth centuries BCE performance spaces were likely to have been much

²⁵ Halliwell (1993), 211.

²⁶ Halliwell (1993), 195-211, and n.45 where he relates that Pat Easterling had stressed to him that the play of light on a moving mask can create an impression of changing expression.

²⁷ Aristotle *Poetics* 1449a37-b1. *Suda* s.v. Thepis.

smaller than the later theatre. In addition, he relates that the evidence from vase painting shows absolutely no evidence that the masks were larger than life-size.

Most recently, David Wiles has produced the first book-length study on the subject of the Greek tragic mask and juxtaposes his contextual interpretations of the ancient evidence with accounts of twentieth-century mask makers, directors and practitioners. Wiles breaks down the previous work on Greek masks into four broad areas which he terms “major debates.” The first concerns the “ownership of Greek tragedy” (is tragedy a text that happens to be performed, or is the text a recording of only the words and just one part of an entire “acoustico-visual event”?). Next, he articulates questions concerning actors in masks and asks whether they remained in control of their work or somehow gave themselves over to the god. Here Wiles is right to remind us that for the modern actor wearing a mask “changes everything,” but we might also want to point out that performing in a mask more than likely required a great deal of training, enormous discipline in connecting word and gesture and acute spatial awareness due to the restricted view the mask offered the actor.²⁸ The third issue Wiles takes on is the debate between an aesthetic mask or a ritual one and he asks us to consider whether such a division is even valid opting for an acknowledgement of the mask’s mystical qualities and then appealing to scholars to wholeheartedly embrace them without any further elucidation.

Most interesting in respect of the issues discussed in this chapter are Wiles’ remarks about the visual aspect of the face and issues of personal identity in relation to the mask. Here he cites the work of Paul Ekman on the face’s ability to communicate emotion and fleetingly discusses the new findings of neuroscience in the fields of face recognition, visual perception and social interaction.²⁹ However, the groundbreaking studies into mirror neurons, spatial cognition, visual learning, language, emotions and empathy are not mentioned. Wiles proposes that the tragic mask transformed the performer and could hold power over the spectator in a theatre where the aesthetic realm was not divorced from the religious and that the spectator projected

²⁸ Wiles (2007), 2.

²⁹ Wiles (2007), 130-131 and 288.

his own conceptions upon the features of an almost blank mask, which created a powerful emotional connection between masked actor and spectator.³⁰

This theory is the opposite view to that of Calame, who proposes that the primary functions of the mask were: to hide the performer beneath, to quickly identify the character the mask was representing and to distance the spectators from the experience of observing the mask allowing them to have a more objective response to the play. Calame describes this as the “mediating quality” of the mask, believing this was a facility of its “blank” surface, which was punctured by the two eyeholes and mouth, enabling the actor to be revealed.³¹ Wiles is right to challenge this theory and points out that the southerly direction of the Theatre of Dionysos would place the sun behind and above the performers, placing their eyes and mouth apertures in shadow. Furthermore, most of the depictions of masks that can be dated to the fifth century show that the mask-maker filled the eye sockets with a white sclera that contained a small iris cut in a tight circle, just enough for the performer to see, but affording absolutely no peripheral vision. This would make it incredibly difficult for even the spectators seated in the front rows to see the eyes of the performer.³²

The Tragic Mask

What type of mask did tragic actors wear in the fifth century? This is a vitally important question as the features of the mask were essential to its successful function in performance as an effective communicator of emotion. Our evidence is limited to representations of dramatic masks on vase paintings and relief sculpture and here we have to be careful. Some vase

³⁰ Wiles (2007), 225. Csapo (1997, 253-295) holds a similar view: “Masks are the concrete embodiment of the power of Dionysus, because Dionysus works his particular magic through possession, especially through the eyes, creating a kind of enthusiasm in the etymological sense of *entheos*, the god being inside one.”

³¹ Calame (1986), 125-142, and Calame (2005), 113-114 & 119-123. Calame may be influenced here by representations of Roman masks, which had large mouths and bigger eye sockets left open and not filled by a sclera. A sarcophagus lid fragment from the late third century CE depicting a theatrical scene has such a mask on each end. On the left section, now at New York University, the mouth and eyes of the actor are clearly discernable behind the mask; Bonfante and Fowlkes (2006), 179-183.

³² On an Apulian Gnathia fragment attributed to the Konnaskis Painter, c.350 BCE in Würzburg, Martin von Wagner-Museum (H 4600) an actor is depicted in tragic costume holding a mask. It has been noted that this actor has shaved, presumably to assist in the close fitting of the mask. His face does indeed display white stubble but the dark “five o’clock shadow” around his mouth seems too localized to be a representation of stubble and I suggest that this may be a depiction of dark theatrical make up applied to further disguise his mouth behind the mask; Taplin (2007), 12, fig. 3.

painters and sculptors are clearly indicating masks by delineating human skin from mask with a pronounced edge separating the two (figs. 3 & 6), while others chose to represent a mask merely by the depiction of a “severed head” (fig. 5). Then occasionally we see one performer holding a mask while another is already masked and there is no attempt to signify that the worn mask is anything other than the head of the character the performer is playing. If we were only able to see the masked actor on the pelike from Cerveteri by the Phiale Painter (fig. 5), we might have deduced that this was simply a depiction of a dancing woman and not a masked performer. Indeed, it has been frequently pointed out that vase paintings are not photographs, they are their own distinct artistic medium, and this must be constantly borne in mind when considering this type of material. What follows then is a brief survey of the evidence available for tragic masks from vase painting and sculpture limited to the fifth century. There is not a great deal as descriptions of masks and theatrical scenes start to occur with much greater frequency in the fourth century and several of the works discussed below as the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10) are dated around 400 BCE right at the edge of this period of interest in the theatrical representations.³³ Images of Dionysos as a mask on a pole have not been included, as these seem not to be dramatic representations but depictions of either cult practices not directly related to the performance of tragedy, or mythical scenes of Dionysos and his followers.³⁴



Fig. 1. Attic red-figure column krater, 500-490 BCE (Basel BS 415) showing 6 men dancing before an altar with a bearded figure.

³³ See Csapo (2010), 38-40.

³⁴ For these see Carpenter (1997), plates 25B, 31, 32B and 39A.

1. Attic red-figure column krater 500-490 BCE. Six men dancing before an altar with a bearded figure.

This famous vase (fig. 1) has been cited as among our earliest evidence for the performance of tragedy and yet it remains uncertain exactly what this vase may actually depict.³⁵ We see 6 young men arranged in 3 rows of 2 moving in unison, leaning back in what seems like a dance move, with feet stepping, both arms raised and heads up. They are wearing what looks to be military garb, consisting of a short tunic and decorated linen cuirass with no sleeves and they appear to be crossing in front of an altar or small structure with 3 steps. On the top of this structure is a cloaked figure with a beard seemingly emerging from it with fabric ribbons streaming over the edges and it has been suggested that this is a depiction of a “dead-raising scene” or a representation of Dionysos.³⁶ Each of the 6 male dancers has much the same beardless facial features with open mouth and, as Csapo points out, chin lines that extend beyond the ear to the hairline and this has suggested to many that they are wearing masks.³⁷ They also wear diadems and their hair is uniform and painted with each curly strand emphasized, adding to the look of artificiality. However, there are some problems with assuming that these dancers are wearing masks: first, their beardless faces are of young men, which corresponds to their costume (a lightweight version of Greek battle dress, minus greaves and weapons), is it therefore likely that young chorus men are masking to play young men? Perhaps. There is a young male second chorus in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, and almost certainly in Aeschylus’ *Youths (Neasnikoi)* who may have worn beardless male masks.

Under close observation, we see several elements that might question the premise that this vase depicts a masked performance. First, the facial complexions of these 6 dancers are not rendered differently from their arms or legs so the artist has not tried to indicate a difference. Second, although at first sight the chin lines seem to run to the hairline, on closer inspection, they are not rendered uniformly and some are not rendered as an unbroken line.³⁸ Third, though the open mouths appear to indicate masks the presence of text emanating from their

³⁵ Csapo (2010), 6.

³⁶ See Wiles (2007), 18-19; Green (1996), 18; and Csapo (2010), 6-7.

³⁷ Csapo (2010), 6-8; Taplin (2007), 29; Green (1996), 256; and Csapo (1995), 57.

³⁸ I had the opportunity to scrutinize this vase closely at the Getty Villa in Malibu, California, in September 2010, where it was featured as part of “The Art of Ancient Theater” exhibit.

lips would suggest that they are singing. Finally, the fact that the painter seems to have taken pains to render their eyes in a uniform style gazing upwards with large irises may be a technique of the painter rather than an attempt to denote the eyes of the mask as they are not significantly different from the eyes of the unmasked satyrs depicted on the vase's reverse.³⁹ One striking feature that could indicate masks is the rendering of the hair, which does seem somewhat artificial and uniform. Although the Basel column-krater has recently been described by Eric Csapo as “unambiguously tragic,”⁴⁰ we perhaps ought to accept that we could just as easily be looking at an unmasked dithyrambic chorus of young men as much as a masked tragic one. Yet, the overall impression that these dancers are wearing masks is, at first sight at least, quite compelling.



Fig. 2. Attic red-figure fragment of an oenochoe, 470-460 BCE. Boy with mask (Athens Agora Museum P11810)

2. Attic red-figure fragment of an oenochoe 470-460 BCE. Boy with mask.

Here there can be no doubt that we are looking at a mask. David Wiles has observed that the vase painter has attempted to depict the mask in motion—in effect, the very essence of the

³⁹ For a view of the reverse of this vase see Wiles (2007), 19, plate 2.1(b).

⁴⁰ Taplin & Wyles (2010), 96.

mask and what distinguishes it from the static qualities of a sculptural face.⁴¹ Close inspection of the fragment reveals hanging cords used to fasten the mask to the head, which are depicted as swinging, reinforcing the sense of movement. The mask is painted in white, in contrast to the complexion of the boy, suggesting that this may be a female mask. Wiles also points out that its shorn hair suggests mourning and therefore marks it as tragic mask. While the mask itself seems large in comparison to the frame of the boy carrying it, if it is compared to the foot of the figure next to him, it seems only slightly larger in scale. The mask's eyes are also carefully rendered with a distinct pupil clearly seen in the eye to the viewer's left. The mouth aperture is also small and the mask has finely delineated features with pronounced eyebrows and areas of shading around the eyes and nose, which suggests soft, rounded features. On the viewer's left there seems to be the depiction of either an ear or a space left open for the performer's ear. If facemasks were a feature of fifth-century tragedy then the performers' ears would have been unobstructed, allowing them to hear both music and lyrics, essential when the mask itself offered the wearer no peripheral vision.⁴²



Fig. 3. Attic red-figure krater from Spina. c450 BCE (Museo Archeologico Ferrara. Valle Pega 173c). Boy with mask and masked maenad.

3. Attic red-figure krater from Spina. c450 BCE. Boy with mask and masked maenad.

⁴¹ Wiles (2007), 20-21.

⁴² Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 181, thought incorrectly that the eyes were filled in and found it hard to accept this mask as a good representation of a tragic mask as its mouth aperture was too small for "acting purposes." My own experiments with linen reconstructions of fifth-century masks have found that an actor only needs a small mouth aperture and a facemask that fits correctly to be clearly heard.

This vase (fig. 3) shows two figures, the one on the left is a young beardless male dressed in female clothing wearing boots and holding what appears to be a female mask gazing out from the center of the composition.⁴³ This mask has shoulder-length tightly curled hair with a long chin and large eyes. The eyes are rendered with white sclerae and dark pupils more clearly seen in the left eye. The right eye seems to have a larger pupil, which may be the vase painter's attempt at depicting motion. The nose is long and thin and the eyebrows raised and pronounced in similar fashion to the mask held by the boy on the Attic oenochoe (fig. 2). The mouth is close to the nose and quite small and the youth holds the mask by a strap situated on the top of the mask's head. The figure on the right is already masked and dancing or rehearsing a gesture. It is interesting to note this pronounced gesture with elongated arms and foot and the fact that the painter has chosen to emphasize the outstretched hands and tension in the fingers.⁴⁴ This kind of taught gesticulation is a feature of masked acting where the performer must express emotional states by emphasizing bodily movement and signifying emotion via hand gestures and overall coordination between body, limbs and mask.⁴⁵ This performer is also dressed as a woman and clearly identified as a Maenad by the animal skin draped over the shoulders and swaying in motion, capturing the sweep of the movement. The mask he wears is observed from the side and is clearly a facemask that comes to the ears attached to the head by a cloth *sakkos* or skullcap. The performer's own ear is exposed as is his own hair that can be seen just under the *sakkos* on his neck and the mask has dark hair running down its sides. The artist has taken pains to emphasize the difference between the white face of the mask and the darker skin of the actor who wears it angled in an upward direction. (This trait can be observed in practical mask workshops where the mask is more visually successful if the performer extends the neck and looks up, just as the performer is doing here.)

⁴³ Wyles (2010, 236-241) has recently suggested that theatrical boots (*korthonoi*) were not a "standard" part of tragic costume but worn by actors as required by the role that they played as with the other elements of their costume.

⁴⁴ On gesture and the chorus see Golder (1996), 1-19. On movement and the use of the body in tragedy and satyr-play see Valakas (2002), 69-92.

⁴⁵ In mask workshops the masked participant is first asked to move normally, even casually, and the tragic mask seems out of place on the body. Once the participant centers their body and moves in clear, committed and taut movements the mask and body work together as a visual whole. Of particular importance are the fingers—slack fingers or small single finger gestures seem weak in a mask. The kind of taut open hand depicted in this vase is typical of hand gestures made by actors successfully working with a mask. These kinds of gestures can also be observed in Kathakali, Balinese, Kabuki and Noh theatre. For example, see Dibia (2004) and Fig. 15.

The mouth of the worn mask is shown open but not large and the eye is dark and empty as if to contrast the living eye of the unmasked performer who stands opposite and gazes intently on his companion's mask. The mask he is holding seems at first sight rather inept and crude but this may have been a way of highlighting the difference between the human face and the rigidity of the mask.⁴⁶ What the vase painter may have been depicting here is the effect of the mask on the spectator—while disembodied the mask draws our gaze but seems inanimate and false, an object to be held rather than a *prosopôn*—something worn “before the gaze/face” of both the wearer and the viewer.

The masked performer on the right is shown in animated form with elongated gestures and in swift movement in contrast to his companion who stands rather awkwardly and gapes as if held by the “performance” of the masked figure. He almost seems dumbfounded by the mask and the artist has rendered him with large gazing eyes that fall directly on the mask across from him. Even the unmasked youth's slack fingers are juxtaposed against the taut gesture of the masked figure. Notice also how the arm and hand of the masked figure to the viewer's right are somewhat foreshortened suggesting that he is also turning and in doing so has brought the mask into play, arresting the gaze of his companion. Additionally, the feet of both performers expressively communicate this sense of contrasted movement. Although both wear theatrical boots the unmasked actor has 2 feet planted forward, which suggests that he has suddenly turned his head to look at the mask before him. The foot of the masked performer to the spectator's right is hard to see due to damage but it is not shown facing the direction one expects and seems involved in a turn. The Ferrara Vase clearly shows the connection between mask and body essential in masked acting and the powerful effect the masked performer had on the spectator.

⁴⁶ Wiles (2007), 22-24.



Fig. 4. Red-figure chous or oinochoe fragment c. 430 BCE. American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations (P. 32870).

4. Attic red-figure fragment from the Athenian Agora c. 430 BCE. Satyr performer holding mask and aulos player.

A fragment of an attic chous or oinochoe was found in 1997 in the southwestern area of the Athenian Agora at the western end of the Middle Stoa and published by Camp.⁴⁷ A male figure dressed in shorts with a phallus holds a satyr mask in his right hand and gestures with his left. A bearded aulos player wearing the distinctive long-sleeved robe associated with tragedy and satyr drama looks on holding an aulos and wearing a *phorbeia*—the strap used to hold the aulos in place while it is being played. The mask is of the traditional satyr type with long beard and hair, snub nose, and large ears. However, unlike the satyr masks on the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10) or on the bell krater by the Tarporley Painter (fig. 13) that seem to indicate face masks with hair attached to a soft *sakkos* that attached at the forehead, this mask is shown balding on its forehead and crown, which might suggest a “whole head” type mask.⁴⁸ However, it is not possible to know if the vase painter was attempting to accurately depict a

⁴⁷ Camp (1999), 257.

⁴⁸ It is notable that the head of the Papposilenos mask on the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10), a figure traditionally bald, is framed by a wreath or diadem which would also indicate a facemask.

theatrical mask of the period or indicate a mask by painting a severed head as seems to be the case with the mask of chorus women shown on the pelike by the Phiale Painter from around the same period (fig. 5). The satyr mask depicted here appears to be smiling, something absent from the more ambiguous facial features of the satyr masks found on the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10) and an Apulian bell krater (fig. 13). Additionally the appearance of a discernable eyelid might support the theory that this representation of a mask was rendered more as a real face than an attempt to depict the features of a theatrical mask with any great accuracy. Yet, the ears are highly distinctive and overly large and might suggest that the performer's own ears could still be exposed, allowing the performer to hear; these type of large horse- or donkey-like ears are also found on the masks on the Pronomos Vase and Apulian bell krater.

This mask seems to be fully engaged with the performer holding it and it is interesting that he cradles it in his open palm wrapping his fingers around the beard near the ear, which suggests solidity, not the open structure of a mask. Conversely, on the Pronomos Vase several of the satyr performers are clearly holding their masks by placing their hands inside (fig. 10). This animated and highly expressive mask/head is shown actively drawing the gaze of the aulos player who seems somewhat surprised. This coupled with the strong, open-handed gesture of the performer might suggest that the mask has almost "come alive" in his hand, perhaps a playful study on the effect the satyr mask had on its spectators.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Taplin has recently speculated that perhaps this vase can be taken as evidence of a curtain call where the performers removed their masks; Taplin and Wyles (2010), 261.

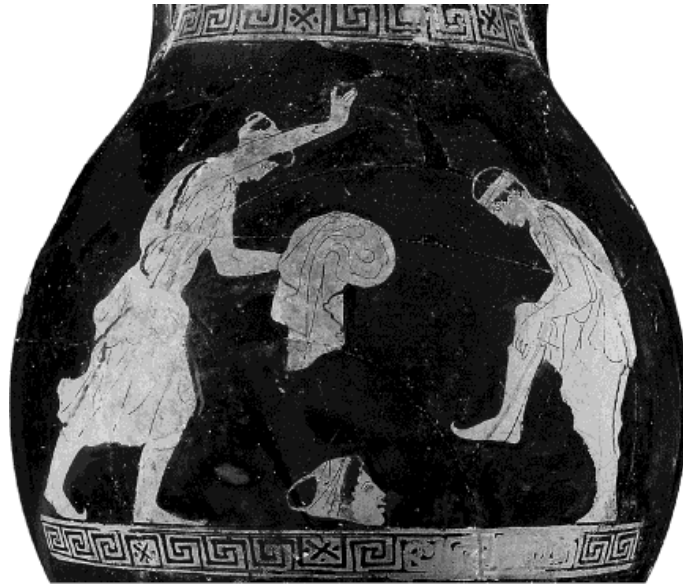


Fig 5. Attic red-figure pelike from Cerveteri by the Phiale Painter c 440-435 BCE (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. 98.883). Chorus member putting on boot with mask on floor with chorus member masked as maenad.

5. Attic red-figure pelike from Cerveteri by the Phiale Painter c 440-435 BCE. Chorus member putting on boot with mask on floor with chorus member masked as maenad.

This pelike also depicts two performers, one masked and moving and one unmasked who is pulling on a theatrical high boot. The unmasked figure is a beardless young man suggesting that these are members of a dramatic chorus.⁵⁰ They are both dressed in female garb and the figure on the left is wearing a female mask. However, it would be impossible to identify this as a mask if not for the ability to compare it with the mask placed on the ground between the two figures, which is of a similar visage. The masked figure is leaning forward with one arm raised in a pronounced gesture, again with emphasis on a very precise rendering of the hand and fingers. The other arm is holding a bolt of fabric. Wiles has assumed that this must be a cloak for the actor who is dressing and this may be the case but he is wrong in his observation that the dressing figure is not yet wearing a cloak while the masked figure is. The masked performer is indeed wearing a cloak or shawl, which is edged by a dark border; however, this same border can be seen on the back on the dressing figure. Therefore, the fabric may be a prop, which in the context seems more likely—otherwise this is quite an elaborate gesture to

⁵⁰ For the theory of *epheboi* being selected for the tragic chorus see Winkler (1990) although his claim that the term “goat song” was derived from the breaking voices of the young boys seems very far-fetched. See also Wilson (2000), 75-82; Ley (2007a), 191; Csapo (1995), 352. In Plato’s *Laws* 665b the notion of anyone over the age of 30 performing in a tragic chorus seems strange. The iconography does indeed show beardless males as chorus members (figs. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13).

pass a piece of costume to a fellow chorus member. Indeed, it does not appear as if the masked performer is handing the fabric to the dressing figure, rather the mask gazes intently at the fabric and the performer seems fully engaged in a performance of some kind which involves the bundled cloth.⁵¹ In addition, the mask on the floor raises some questions, such as the reason for its placement on the ground when all of our other visual evidence shows masks being carefully held. Placing something so fragile on the ground would be a recipe for disaster by a misplaced step and might give an ancient stage manager serious concern.⁵² The placement of the mask may be suggestive of vase paintings that depict “hoplite arming” scenes where the helmet also is situated on the ground.⁵³

This mask appears rather helmet-like and might be taken at first sight as evidence that the whole head mask was employed in tragedy. Yet, this mask needs to be examined with its visual context in mind, as it is not necessarily an accurate depiction of the type of mask worn in the fifth century, rather an artistic device that presents the “head” of the woman the actor is about to become at his feet. This scene seems to be about the transformative power of the mask in that the figure on the left has become a young woman while the youth on the right is still untransformed despite wearing women’s clothing. It is the mask that creates his character and it is only when he places the mask over his face that he will fully embody the chorus woman he is about to play. His posture is of the everyday action of pulling on footwear and his closed mouth and small eye is contrasted to the open mouth and larger eye of the masked figure. Thus, the two figures seem in different realms, the masked figure is already performing while the dressing youth is focused on his tasks and seems closed off and introspective. The artist who painted this scene may have been less interested in presenting an accurate depiction of a tragic mask than presenting the concept that the dressing youth is about to physically

⁵¹ Fabric is of great importance as both a visual prop and narrative device in tragedy. For example, the crimson tapestries in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, the poisoned wedding robes in Euripides’ *Medea* and the potion-infused robe sent to Heracles by Deianira in Sophocles’ *Women of Trachis*. On cloth used as a prop in tragedy see Barber (1994), 232-256; McNeil (2005), 1-17; Morrell (1997), 141-165; Lyons (2003), 93-134.

⁵² Some have seen a reference to masks in the description of theatrical equipment lying on the ground at the feet of Euripides in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* 451. However, a mask is not among the costumes and props Dicaeopolis requests from the dramatist, but of course, this is a comedy and we are not really meant to infer that a few old lettuce leaves and a sprig of chervil were the very essence of Euripidean tragedy. Halliwell (1993, 202, n. 21) finds references to the masks of Oeneus at 418 and Bellerophon at 427. See also Sommerstein (1980), 175 on 418-419.

⁵³ Boardman (1974), figs. 331 and 281.

inhabit the *persona* of the woman whose head, rather than mask, he has chosen to depict. While this vase may not tell us a great deal about the actual construction of the tragic mask itself, it does perhaps reveal a great deal about attitudes to the power of the mask in performance.⁵⁴



Fig. 6 Fragment of an Attic red-figured column krater from Olbia, 430-420 BCE (Kiev, Museum of the Academy of Sciences). Two masked “maenads,” an aulos player and a seated boy.

6. Fragment of an Attic red-figured column krater from Olbia, 430-420 BCE. Two masked “maenads,” an aulos player and a seated boy.

This fragment clearly shows white facemasks placed in front of the performer’s ears and attached by a *sakkos*-type headdress. The long-sleeved aulos player indicates some kind of performance and that the two similarly masked figures formed part of a larger female chorus. Both are masked and therefore their gestures are typically pronounced and exaggerated. Once again, note the attention paid to the fingers. The masks have slightly open mouths, pronounced eyebrows and deep eyes with white and iris clearly shown. The small boy seated before the masked figure on the left is more problematic—Wiles thinks he is clapping or presenting

⁵⁴ Wiles (2007), 26-28 and drawing 2.3, includes another work attributed to the Phiale painter in the Vatican (Astarita 42). This shows female figures and an aulos player suggesting a performance connection. One of the figures is depicted with a *sakkos*-type headdress and a strong jawline that might perhaps indicate a mask, but the mouth is closed and the figure is not wearing any other form of theatrical costume. I do not believe that this is a depiction of a mask although the muffled female figures that stare out of the scene and engage the viewer with only their eyes are quite compelling in terms of a representation of the power of the gaze.

something, whereas Csapo suggests that the boy is holding the aulos player's reed case rather than a thumb and comments that the tragic performers are depicted with "unambiguous realism," as opposed to Wiles who feels that the masks hark back to the cruder devices of Thespis.⁵⁵

The powerful simplicity of these masks as depicted on this tantalizing fragment may be among our best evidence for fifth-century masks despite Wiles' antiquarian view. Even on this fragment, which must have originally been part of a much larger theatrical scene, we see the power of the mask's gaze to enthrall the aulos player's assistant who has diverted his attention from his maestro and almost abandoned his duties, turning around to gape at the mask of the dancing performer on the left with a face transfixed by wonder. The masked performers wear theatrical garb identified by the strong bordering and their connection to the music of the drama is iterated by the presence of the aulos player (also depicted in figs. 10 and 11).



Fig. 7 Marble relief from Piraeus, c 400 BCE (Athens National Archaeological Museum 1500). Chorus and Dionysos.

7. Marble relief from Piraeus, c 400 BCE. Chorus and Dionysos.

This small relief on Piraeus measures only 55 cm x 93 cm (around 22 x 36.5 inches) and shows 3 figures in theatrical costume and masks standing next to a reclining Dionysos, with a seated figure perched at the end of his couch. The figure on the left has had its face obliterated

⁵⁵ Csapo (2010), 7-10; See also Taplin (2007), 29-30.

but is holding a tympanum (a large flat drum like a tambourine) and dressed in a long-sleeved robe with boots. This figure was presumably once shown wearing a mask and the dowel hole in the head area might point to a later repair or the attachment of a separate mask piece now lost.⁵⁶ The other 2 standing figures are both beardless young men and hold masks, the middle figure has a mask of a bearded middle-aged man that he holds by a strap on the top of the head while the other figure holds his mask at his side upside-down by the mouth. The seated figure is a female maenad, identified by the fawn skin she wears. Slater felt that the 3 performers were the protagonist, deuteragonist and tritagonist of a tragedy but the fact that 2 of them are holding tympana, the similarities of their dress (although the central figure wears an overgarment not worn by the other two) and their youth suggest that they may be members of a chorus.⁵⁷ Both masks depicted here can be compared to those on the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10) as a good indication of the appearance of tragic masks in the fifth century and although they are depicted in low relief the plastic craft of the sculptor is closer to that of the mask-maker than that of the vase painter.⁵⁸ The features of the mask being held upside-down have been somewhat eroded but it appears to be another older bearded man.



Fig. 8. Salmis Stele, c 400 BCE (Piraeus Museum). Head of a young man gazing at a mask.

8. Salmis Stele, c 400 BCE. Head of a young man gazing at a mask.

⁵⁶ Slater (1985), 333-334, n.5.

⁵⁷ Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 188, and Wiles (2007), 44-45, both identify actors and not chorus members.

⁵⁸ On this important point see Wiles (2007), 44-70, who devotes a chapter to what he calls "the sculptural art of the mask-maker."

A fragment of a grave stele from Salamis in the Piraeus museum was also discussed by Slater 10 years after its publication in 1974 by Tsirivakos.⁵⁹ This piece is 70.2 cm high by 73.2 cm wide (approx. 27.5 by 29 inches) and shows a young man holding a mask by a strap on its head. Slater identified the mask as female because of the long hair but Wiles has posited that the mask may be male and that long hair was a feature of the male tragic mask used to conceal the neckline.⁶⁰ Whatever the gender, the sculptor who rendered this depiction in low relief filled in the mouth and eye apertures although these may have both originally been painted along with the mask. The attention paid to the hair of the mask is notable and as with the rendering of hair on the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10.5) there is no attempt to define any difference between the mask and the subject, suggesting that tragic masks had real or realistic hair.



Fig. 9. Fragments of at Attic red-figure krater found at Taras (Martin Von Wagner Museum Würzburg H4781). Aulos player and performers holding masks wearing theatrical costumes.

9. Fragments of at Attic red-figure krater (school of the Pronomos Painter). Aulos player and performers holding masks wearing theatrical costumes.

⁵⁹ Slater (1985), 340-344. Tsirivakos' original report can be found in *Deltion. Mel.* 20 (1974), 88-94.

⁶⁰ Wiles (2007), 48-49.

This badly damaged fragment shows four masks held by what may be actors, judging from their ornate robes.⁶¹ The masks have been heavily restored but show the same type of facemask with realistic hair and small mouth aperture depicted on the Pronomos Vase (discussed in detail below).

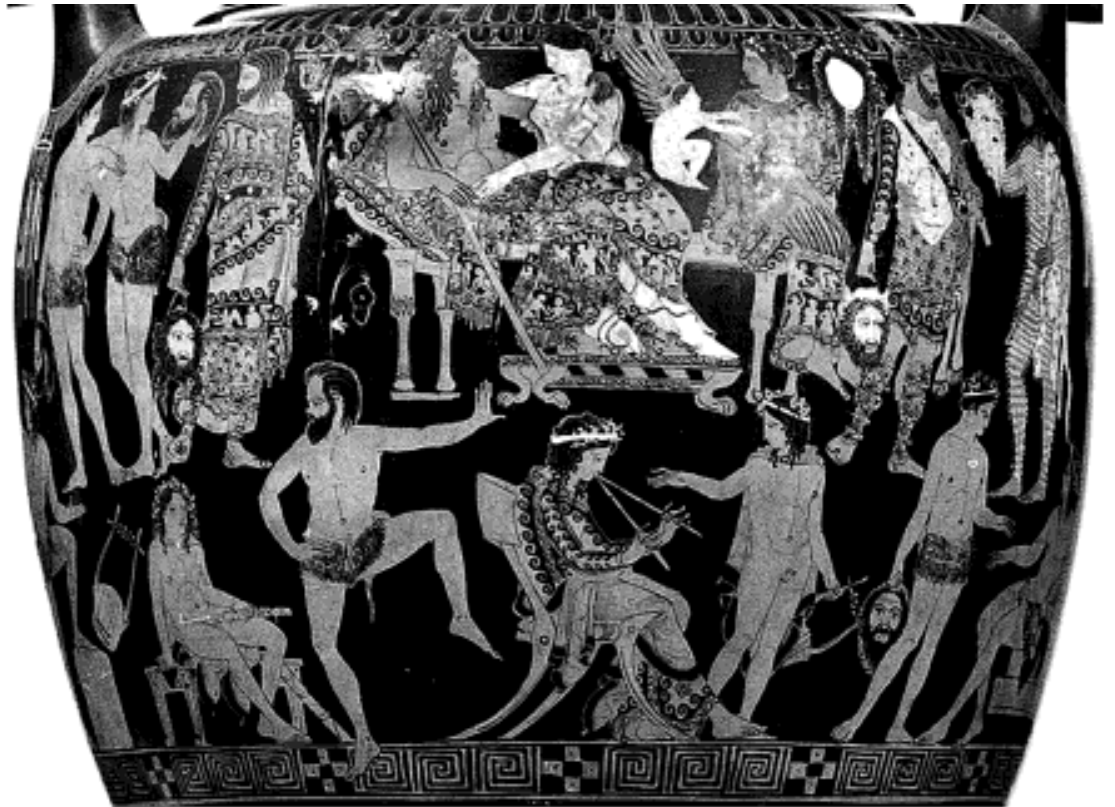


Fig. 10. "The Pronomos Vase." Attic red-figured volute krater by the Pronomos Painter, c400 BCE (Naples, NM 81673). Theatrical cast dressed as satyrs with actors around an aulos player with Dionysos and Ariadne.

⁶¹ For an image of the complete fragment including the fourth mask on the upper register, see Hart (2010), 31. Pl. 14.



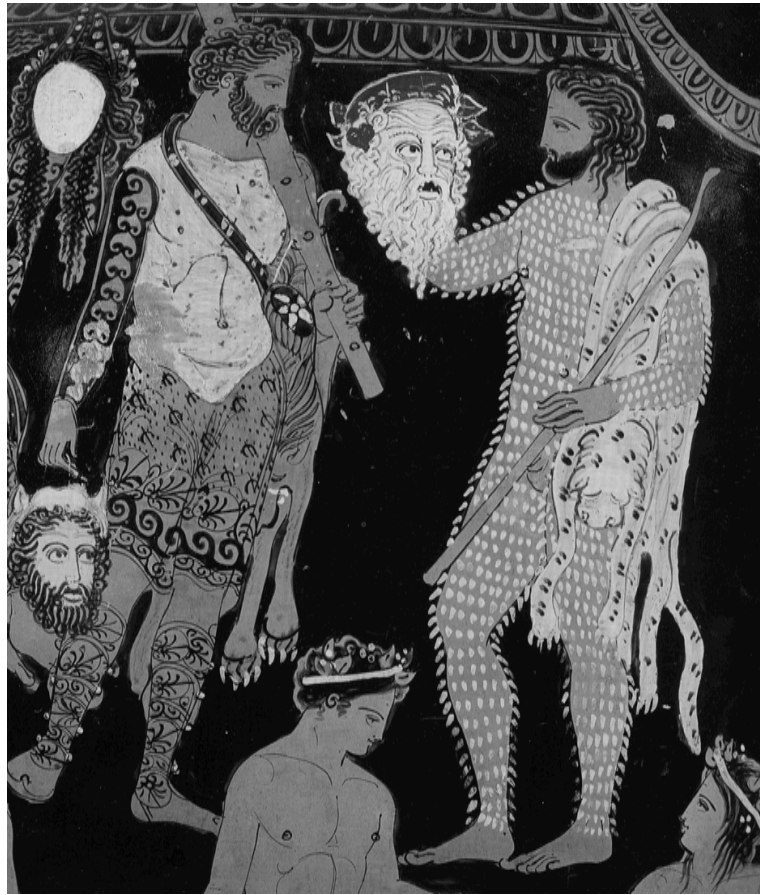


Fig. 10.2. Detail of the Pronomos Vase showing the Herakles and Papposilenos performers and faces of 2 chorus members and a female mask.



Fig. 10.3. Detail from the "Pronomos Vase" (fig. 10). Mask of Herakles.

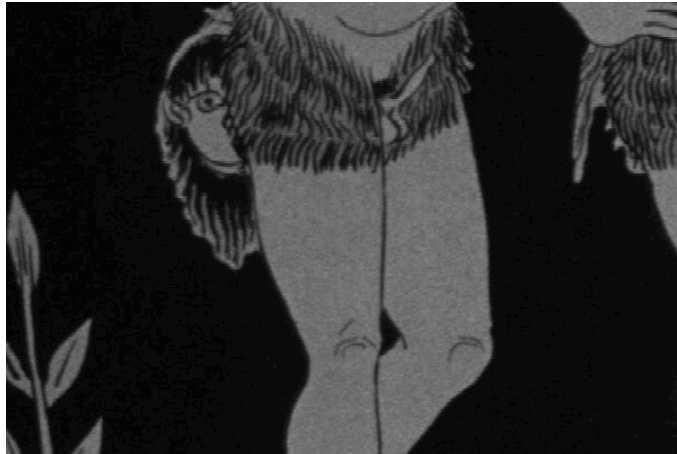


Fig. 10.4. Detail from “Pronomos Vase” (fig. 10). Showing the inside of a satyr mask.



Fig. 10.5. Two details from the “Pronomos Vase” (fig. 10). The Herakles mask (left) and the Herakles actor (right)

10. “The Pronomos Vase.” Attic red-figured volute krater by the Pronomos Painter, c 400 BCE.

Theatrical cast dressed as satyrs with actors around an aulos player with Dionysos and Ariadne.

Preeminent among representations of the mask on Attic vase painting is the Pronomos Vase, a red-figure volute krater dated to around 400 BCE. The vase depicts a theatrical company of 18 figures surrounding Dionysos, Ariadne and a small winged figure seated on a couch on one side, and Dionysos, Ariadne, two maenads and four satyrs on the other. The theatrical group includes 10 beardless young men dressed in the shaggy trunks, tails and phallus of the satyr chorus costume; 8 of them are holding masks, 1 is wearing his mask and dancing and 1 (with his foot perched on a block) has no mask. Another youth on the lower right of this group also holds a similar mask but is dressed in an ornate costume and sleeveless tunic, perhaps

denoting that he is a chorus leader of some sort or a principal satyr-actor. The company members are arranged in two rows with Dionysos in the center of the upper row, directly beneath is the aulos player, Pronomos (who the vase is named for) who wears richly embroidered theatrical dress and is seated playing his instrument. Beside Pronomos is a naked youth holding a cithara gesturing towards him. Another beardless naked youth is depicted seated on the right side of the lower register, named Demetrios, and he seems to be holding a scroll with a scroll holder propped up against his bench, perhaps one of the earliest depictions of a play script or dramatic musical score?⁶²

On the upper register are two figures both holding masks and both dressed in an animal pelt. One appears to be a tragic actor and his breastplate, greaves, ornate long sleeves, lion skin and club are features of the hero, Herakles (the painter has also named him “Herakles” just to the right of the hand holding the club). He is faced by another bearded actor wearing the shaggy suit of Papposilenos, the leader of the satyr chorus, with a ragged panther skin and twisted staff. He seems like a tattered version of the hero he faces and the placement of the name “Herakles” seems to link them both.⁶³ To their immediate right is a figure seated on the end of Dionysos’ couch variously identified as “Tragedy” or a muse.⁶⁴ But it may be that this is the third actor from the tragedy who is playing a female role and “her” proximity to Dionysos may reflect the concept of theatrical transformation via the mask. Another actor stands to the left of Dionysos and also wears richly decorated actor’s garb and boots. All 3 of the tragic actors and the Papposilenos hold incredibly detailed masks.

All together there are 13 masks depicted on the Pronomos Vase, 14 if the mask on the head of the dancing satyr-chorus member is included. This masked figure is also the only one “performing” as he is captured in motion with raised leg, outstretched arm and hand on hip and here again we see the pronounced fingers and pointed toes that are a feature of depictions of masked performers (figs. 3, 5 & 6). None of the other figures is performing (apart from

⁶² See Hall (2006), 40-41.

⁶³ Papposilenos’ Herakles costume is reminiscent of Dionysos’ Herakles disguise in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* 45-48. Wyles notes how the painter has depicted a lion head on both the belt worn by the Herakles actor and his mask; see Wyles (2010), 323-236.

⁶⁴ Hall (2010), 420.

Pronomos who is playing his pipes), and no other is wearing their mask. The performers hold their mask 2 ways; 6 of them have one hand inside the mask so that it is perched on the presumably open hand (this method of holding a mask can be commonly observed by workshop participants), or by a small loop-strap situated on the top of the mask. The hand-in-mask method allows for engagement between mask and performer and 3 performers are depicted gazing into the faces of their masks (the satyr-chorus member on the upper register, third from left; the Papposilenos; and the “lead” satyr on the bottom register, second from right). The “female” performer seated on Dionysos’ couch also holds the mask in this fashion and her head is turned to Dionysos. The other 2 figures that hold their masks in this way are both on the outer flanks of the upper register and are turned inward in a similar seated pose framing the scene. The remaining 7 masks offer a rare glimpse into the form and construction of the fifth-century masks, mainly because the painter has chosen to depict them being held by figures in a variety of poses. Most interesting is the mask in the hand of the chorus member of the far left of the lower register. His mask is held casually at his hip as he leans on his companion (who has no mask). If we look closely (fig. 10.4) we can peer into the inside of the mask and see that this is a facemask, the soft *sakkos* allows the mask to be perched on the performers hip.

All the mask head and facial hair shown on the vase is painted in the same fashion as the performers’ own hair and this strongly suggests that the mask had realistic hair. These masks are also clearly lightweight, demonstrated by the 2 tragic actors who hold their masks by the head strap with casual ease and only 2 or 3 fingers. The chorus member on the bottom register fourth from right seems to be only using one finger to hold his mask, supporting the theory that they were probably constructed from stiffened linen, which made them not only very light but also comfortable to wear, as the porous linen would allow the performer’s own skin to “breathe.” This was essential for the mask to be worn for long periods and danced in.

The masks are all depicted as somewhat realistic, with the slightly stylized features and eyebrows observed in other fifth-century depictions of masks on vases (figs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 13). Although these chorus-satyr masks are all of a type—with small equine ears and

pugnacious features—each one is also slightly different suggesting that the chorus could be presented as a unified collective but also project a certain sense of individuality.⁶⁵ Beards and hair are all slightly different as are the facial features, particularly the eyebrows. For example, the mask held by the chorus member fourth from right on the lower register has a fairly large open mouth and two lines above the eyebrows that suggest furrowed brows, whereas the mask held by the chorus member on the upper register, third from the left has a smaller mouth and much less pronounced furrows on the forehead; the eyebrows are also thinner and longer. Facial hair is also slightly different from mask to mask, although following the same basic style of longish beard and shoulder-length swept-back hair.⁶⁶

Notably different are the masks of the actors on the upper register. The male masks have been painted in a lighter shade than the satyr masks, which are rendered in plain red-figure and black paint. The fact that the actors' masks have been painted makes them stand out from the surrounding figures. We cannot know if this is a device on the part of the painter to emphasize the actors' masks or a feature of theatrical masking that further distinguished actors from the chorus. The Herakles actor and Papposilenos actor are also emphasized by the use of yellow paint on the breastplate of the actor and the rather sad-looking comic panther skin of Papposilenos. This bearded dark-haired performer stands opposite his tragic counterpart and holds an incredibly detailed mask with white skin, wrinkles, long white beard and an ivy-clad diadem. It has large white eyes, pierced by smaller black irises are rendered much larger than the irises of the performer holding it as if to emphasize that these are mask eyes and meant to be looked through by the performer. Traces of irregular teeth can also be seen in the open mouth of the mask. This impressive mask seems to be locked in a mutual stare with its performer as the actor who plays the tragic Herakles looks on.

The counterpart to the Papposilenos mask is the mask of Herakles (fig. 10.3), which is held next to the thigh of the actor playing the role. This mask has similar eyes to the Papposilenos

⁶⁵ Such as when the chorus of Argive elders in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* split into 12 different voices when they hear the dying cries of their king (1348-1371).

⁶⁶ E. Maylon's drawing of this scene from the Pronomos Vase (reproduced in Csapo, 2010, fig. 1.9) does not accurately reflect the diversity of facial features depicted by the masks on the actual vase. A better reconstructed image (although in black and white) can be found in Green (1995) fig. 5, although the features restored on the female mask do not agree with those on the vase itself, which are very hard to see.

mask except that the irises appear to be looking upwards and this may be the painter's attempt to place this mask in the same visual narrative as the faces of the 2 performers and mask above. The painter has taken pains to indicate the realistic nature of the hair and the long curls reflect the same hair pattern between mask and actor (fig. 10.5). A lion's head sits atop this mask, appropriate for Herakles (and yet there is also a lion's head on the pelt he wears). A small white strap provides the means by which the mask is carried, which may be the same strap that was used to fasten the mask on the actor's head. The mouth is open but not overly large, the eyebrows are pronounced and the forehead is painted with light furrows.

Next to the Herakles actor is a smaller white mask held by the figure seated at the foot of Dionysos' couch. The facial features have become very difficult to see. Additionally, several pictorial reproductions of the vase have reconstructed the face quite speculatively.⁶⁷ However, it is clearly a female mask—there is no beard and it wears an Asiatic headdress of the kind seen on certain depictions of Andromeda.⁶⁸ She has long, flowing, slightly wild hair and fine features with a small mouth, long nose and thin dark eyebrows. It is impossible to tell where the eyes of the mask might be looking. Because the mask is beardless we can see the edge of the form of the face coming to a rounded end just below the chin and how the face of this mask comes back to the ears before it joins the hairline, which was probably attached to a soft *sakkos*. This is certainly not a "helmet" type of whole-head mask. Most intriguing is the figure holding this mask. Is this a woman or a young man? If this is a woman how might we reconcile this image with the knowledge that women did not perform in the fifth-century Athenian theatre? It has been suggested that this may be the personification of the spirit of drama or tragedy, though neither of these intriguing explanations seem totally convincing.⁶⁹

Next to this figure is a winged Himeros who seems to be reaching for the mask and smiling. One might imagine that this spirit of sexual desire could be imbuing both performer and mask with the kind of emotional energy for the portrayal of a role such as Deianeira, but this can only be speculative. Another theory is that this unmasked seated figure has been

⁶⁷ Such as the drawing by E. Maylon (fig. 10.1) and in Csapo (2010), 18, and the uncredited drawing in Green (1995), 22-23.

⁶⁸ See Trendall (1971), III.3,10 (Berlin).

⁶⁹ Csapo (1995), 69; Hall (2010), 420; Hall (2007), 221-256.

“transformed” by the act of playing a female role and that this is a young man who now resembles a woman.⁷⁰ The identity of this figure would be clearer if a name was placed adjacent to it. All the chorus members are named in this way but none of the actors, except the Herakles actor who is named “Herakles.” The merging of identities between the actors and their mask has been pointed out several times and certainly both the Herakles actor (fig. 10.5) and the actor to the immediate left of Dionysos strongly resemble their masks.⁷¹ It is certainly not beyond imagination that the painter was making a statement about the transformative power of the mask. This can be observed both on the dancing performer on the lower register, who has to all intents and purposes “become” a satyr, and the actors whose faces have merged with the masks of the roles they are playing.⁷²

Thus the Pronomos Vase offers us the most detailed information concerning the type of mask used in tragedy and satyr play in the fifth century and is supported by several other fragments and sculptural monuments that indicate a lightweight face mask was used, probably made of linen, that fitted the performer’s face comfortably. It had white eyes with small iris holes that the performer looked through and these would have resembled dark pupils to the spectators. The masks had a relatively small mouth aperture and there is absolutely no evidence for any kind of megaphone or any other device to enhance voice projection or quality, although the plastic features of the mouth did aid the ability of the mask to seem to change expression and this will be discussed below. The mask was attached to the performer’s head by a soft hood or *sakkos* with hair attached and this realistic (probably real) head and facial hair gave the mask a sense of liveness and movement. These masks were not that much larger than the head of the person who wore it and they seemingly left space for the performer’s own ears so that the performer could hear clearly, essential for acting, singing and dancing. The mask was held

⁷⁰ See Csapo (2010), 21.

⁷¹ Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 187; Griffith (2002), 215, n. 63; Wiles (2007), 29-30; Csapo (2010), 20-21.

⁷² I have observed this same phenomenon only in reverse. In 1987, students of the Departments of Greek and Latin at University College London staged a masked production of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* at the Bloomsbury Theatre. Twelve chorus masks were made based on the form of the masks observed on the Pronomos Vase. These modern masks were made on a vacuum former, which is a machine that recreates a plastic mould form over and over. They were then painted following to the form of the Pronomos Vase, though as old men, not satyrs, and had realistic hair attached to a soft *sakkos* that was fixed to the light plastic facemask. Each of the 12 chorus masks was distributed randomly to the 12 male undergraduates who would be forming the chorus of old men of Argos. The students rehearsed in the masks from the outset for several weeks and then mounted one week of public performances and each mask did indeed start to strongly resemble the person who was wearing it.

either by inserting the hand inside facilitating visual engagement between actor and mask (figs. 12 & 13), by a small head strap (figs. 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10.3), or by the mouth (figs. 7 & 9).⁷³

11. Other iconographic evidence for masks from the late fifth century BCE.

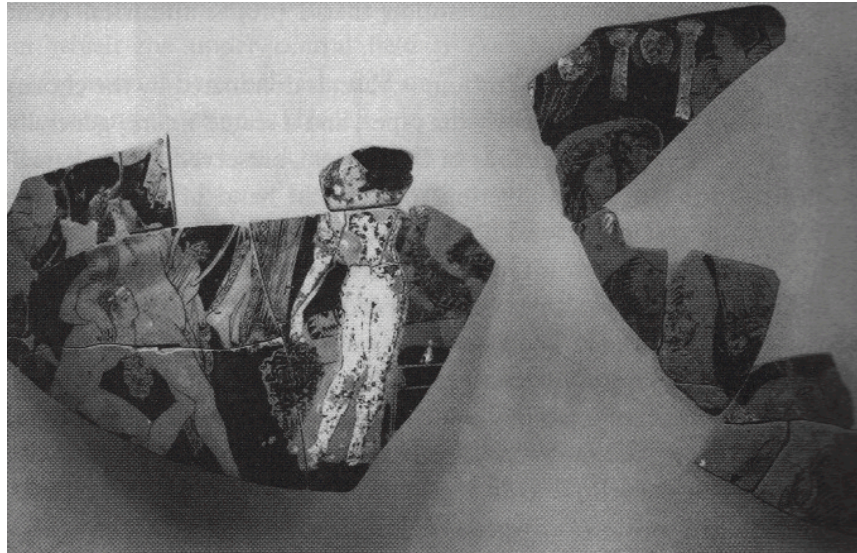


Fig. 11. Fragments of an Athenian volute krater, c 400 BCE (Archaeological Museum of Samothrace 65.1041). Dionysos with masks.



Fig. 12 Attic bell-krater from Spina, c 400 BCE (Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina T 161C). Actors with masks.

⁷³ For a detailed analysis of the Pronomos Vase in terms of the representation of the face see Calame (1995a), 116-136. For a thorough recent survey of the vase and its meaning see the collection of essays in Taplin and Wyles (2010).



Fig. 13. Apulian bell-krater by the Tarporley Painter, c. 400 BCE (University of Sydney (47.05)). Three satyr actors with masks.



Fig. 14. Detail of Attic red-figure vase fragments from Ampurias showing a Dionysian celebration (Barcelona 33). A mask is held in the raised hand of a figure on the right (Drawing by Bacher).

The Mask in the Visual Field

How did this type of mask operate within the fifth century theatre space described in Chapter Three and what was its relationship to the spectator seated in the *theatron*? If, as has been shown, the mask had no megaphone, was not much larger than the human head and possessed no greatly exaggerated features, what practical value, if any, did it offer the staging of ancient drama? Was it then simply inconceivable that the characters of tragedy (plus comedy and satyr drama) could have been realized without the use of the mask? Halliwell points out that the familiarity of the mask as an almost universal symbol for drama has today rendered it “increasingly superficial” and detailed how theatre practitioners in the eighteenth century such as Carlo Goldoni viewed the mask as a barrier to any kind of truth in theatre, branding it an “intolerable anomaly.”⁷⁴ Thus, in today’s Western contemporary theatre the mask is mostly misunderstood and regarded as the accoutrement of an earlier age, a forgotten aspect of ancient ritual, or a prop inherited from carnival intended to disfigure and disguise. But the Greek mask was no mere stage property, nor a throwback to an earlier form of “ritual drama” populated by priests—a kind of onstage religious anachronism—rather, it was a major focal point in the entire visual experience of watching ancient Greek theatre. The mask’s function in performance dictated the presentation of every element of ancient drama including speech, movement, narrative, costume and emotion.

The tradition that Thespis invented dramatic masking by whitening his face and using wine lees for make-up is surely apocryphal but may point to the creation of the tragic mask.⁷⁵ However, this does not necessarily mean that masks were not in use in Greece in earlier ritual, dance and folk-tradition. Evidence of votive masks from Orthia dating from the seventh century and their close resemblance to masks found in Phoenician and Carthaginian settlements indicate that masks were once a part of certain Greek ritual practices, perhaps as influenced by Near Eastern or Egyptian customs.⁷⁶ Yet the tradition of the ritual mask and the

⁷⁴ Halliwell (1993), 195-196.

⁷⁵ *Suda* θ 494 Adler and *Suda* θ 282 Adler, Athenaeus 14, 622c. See also Calame (1986), 126, n.6 and Csapo and Slater (1995), 89-102.

⁷⁶ For the masks of Orthia see Carter (1987), 355-383. For a superb Carthaginian mask found in Mozia, Sicily dating to the sixth century see I. Nielsen (2002), pl. 43.

use of the mask in drama may not be as closely related as some have assumed, apart from their common role in disguising the wearer and providing the means to embody another “persona” be it that of a god, an ancestor or a dramatic character.⁷⁷ Indeed, the tragic mask may have been developed specifically for the theatre and were quite separate from the masks that can be seen on some komast vases dating to the sixth century, which may have had more influence on later “grotesque” comic masks. We must also consider that masks were a part of the general revelry that surrounded the worship of Dionysos or at least an iconographic symbol of the god’s presence and vase paintings depicting masks on poles surrounded by Dionysian scenes start to appear around the last quarter of the sixth century.⁷⁸

The idea of the mask is also inherent in the *gorgoneia* face in Greek art and architecture, which may suggest a strong connection between the notion of the *baskanos* (avertor of the evil-eye) and the theatrical mask. After all, in a culture of reciprocal vision where one could not look on another without being affected, the mask may have also served to protect spectators from gazing directly on scenes of taboo actions such as familial murders, gross impiety against the gods and other socially unacceptable violations presented onstage and thus prevent them from being tainted by the sight. In Euripides’ *Herakles*, Theseus receives such a warning not to look upon a man who has killed his own children for fear that he too will be polluted (*Her.* 1155-1156). This protective function may have even extended to offering a similar protection to the actors themselves. Pausanias saw first-hand this vivid connection between the theatre and the gorgon when he described a gilt head of the Gorgon Medusa, complete with snake hair, on the south wall of the Acropolis facing the theatre (1.21.3).⁷⁹ But, despite these implied connections we have no actual depictions of a Greek tragic mask prior to 470-460 BCE (fig. 2) or perhaps 490 BCE if the dancing warriors in Basel are taken as

⁷⁷ Napier and I. Nielsen both posit a theory of Greek ritual drama that predated tragedy and may have involved priests wearing masks and enacting scenes from ritual stories; see Napier (1986), 217-222; Napier (1992), 85-86; and I. Nielsen (2002), 12-15 and 81-87. Pausanias 8.15.3 relates how a priest of Demeter in Pheneos in Arcadia wore a mask of the goddess and beat the ground with a rod.

⁷⁸ On Dionysos masks see Carpenter (1997), 79-82 and 93-97. Carpenter makes the point that the term “mask” may be misleading and these depictions of a “disembodied frontal face” are not shown being worn, nor offer a disguise, nor allow anyone to take on another identity. See also Frontisi-Ducroux (1991), 17-63. It is interesting to note that this interest in Dionysos on Attic vase painting corresponds with the founding of the City Dionysia. On masks in revels see Csapo and Miller (2007), figs. 1 and 69. Aeschines is accused of reveling in the komos without a mask implying that it was usual to wear one (Demosthenes 19.287).

⁷⁹ See Vernant (1991), 116-117.

masked (fig. 1). Therefore, although we find references and depictions to masks and the mask-face in the tradition of the Gorgon and perhaps even the schematic “mask faces” of symposium eye-cups, none of these resemble the tragic facemask of the fifth-century theatre.

Furthermore, the mask’s appearance on vase paintings does coincide with the advent of organized drama at the Athenian City Dionysia and therefore its particular form may have evolved to suit the specific needs of the *theatron* at the sanctuary of Dionysos. Further evidence that the dramatic mask “developed” for a specific purpose can be ascertained by observing the continued development of the tragic mask from the late fourth century onwards. At this time, the emphasis was on monumental theatre buildings, large raised stages and the actor (as opposed to the chorus) and this manifested itself in the appearance of the mask, which became larger than life with exaggerated features and a large mouth aperture.⁸⁰

Beyond the connections to ritual and carnival traditions and any apotropaic considerations, why wear a mask? Dionysos is associated with the mask and the ritual tenets of his cult may have encouraged masked acting to develop although his relationship to the mask may have been a later aetiological affiliation once masks became associated with drama at the City Dionysia. Perhaps most importantly, in performance the mask was an incredibly effective way of instantly establishing a sense of theatricality when viewed in an open-air space. The wearer of the mask is immediately separated from the spectators and as the vase paintings show, just the simple act of donning a mask indicates a performance. Lastly, in an open-air space that allowed the external environment to inform the aesthetic experience of watching drama, the mask provides a visual focus for emotional communication and is able to stimulate a deeply personal response from the spectators. The mask demands to be *seen*.

Peripheral and Foveal Vision

As any theatre director or performer knows an open-air performance is a very different experience from watching a show presented within an interior space. There are distractions

⁸⁰ This development of the mask can be observed on the terracotta masks from Lipari; Wiles (2007), 52-56.

that constantly compete with what is being presented on stage, whether this is the other spectators, or the views available beyond the stage area. Open-air spaces tend to lack the kind of focus offered by a modern proscenium or thrust stage where the spectator's peripheral vision is negated by darkening the auditorium and the framing of the performance space with the proscenium arch.

When we watch most modern plays the actors are clearly within our central or “foveal” vision. This is named after the part of the retina at the center and back of its curve. Foveal vision is used for focusing on detail and scrutinizing objects while peripheral vision orders the entire spatial view, allows us to look upon large items, and helps to direct our narrower foveal vision. Margaret Livingstone suggests looking at the world through a small tube or our hands made into a telescope to get an idea of how limiting foveal vision can be without the wider visual context supplied by peripheral vision.⁸¹ Thus modern theatre directors and designers work hard to earn and keep both our visual focus and our mental attention not on the peripheral sights of fellow spectators and the surrounding environment (regarded as distractions), but on the action they have placed before us on stage. This was certainly not the case in the fifth-century theatre. Here, the particular visual environment of the southeast slope of the Acropolis with its panoramic views of the city, countryside and sea, combined with the location in the religious, civic and cultural heart of Attica, meant that dramatists became highly skilled in manipulating the interplay between peripheral and foveal vision offering a multi-layered visual experience. This is reflective of the kind of diversity of viewing discernable in other Greek art forms, what Lissarrague has called “various modalities of representation” as applied to viewing images on symposium cups,⁸² and Marconi, referring to the Parthenon frieze, as spectatorship that is “on the edge between visibility and invisibility, between seen and unseen.”⁸³

An excellent demonstration of how this interplay between foveal and peripheral vision operates can be found in Livingstone's work on the biology of sight in relation to looking at

⁸¹ Livingstone (2002), 69-71.

⁸² Lissarrague (1994), 12-27.

⁸³ Marconi (2009), 156-173.

art. She tackles the enigma of Mona Lisa's famous smile by suggesting that we see it change from a frown to a smile because we are unwittingly, constantly shifting between modes of vision as we look at the painting. Leonardo deliberately blurred the expressive edges of his subject's mouth (*sfumato*) and our gaze is directed to fall between her face, which is in our foveal vision, and the landscape in the background, which is in our peripheral vision. Livingstone suggests gazing hard at the smile and then looking at the background then back at the smile. As the smile moves from our foveal vision to our peripheral vision it seems to change and then change back again and the viewer becomes slightly confused but more fully engaged with this famously perplexing feature of this painting. Leonardo's technique pushes us beyond our normal visual expectations, exploiting the eye's duality of vision and in so doing making us active spectators of his work of art.

The mask functioning in the environment of the open-air theatre operated in a similar way. First, as will be further examined below, neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists have demonstrated how the human face or its representation elicits a very strong (if not the strongest) visual response. Our eyes are immediately drawn to the human face and our minds can quickly process facial features, recognize thousands of distinct faces and create very fast cultural, gendered, ethnic and social determinations.⁸⁴ It is notable that on the Pronomos Vase and several of the other ancient representations described above the mask is rendered in a lighter shade than its background allowing it to stand out from its surroundings just as the face of the *Mona Lisa* is also lighter than its surroundings, which immediately engages our foveal vision. Yet the background of the Pronomos Vase also draws the eye to other objects and figures and then back to faces.

Sitting in the *theatron* at the Sanctuary of Dionysos the spectators could clearly see the southern city and countryside laid out before them; the mask inhabited this expansive space without the benefit of artificial directional lighting or complex settings and the actor needed to

⁸⁴ See Snowden (2006), 284-315, for an excellent introduction to the subject of face recognition, especially figs 10.3.1-3. Here 64 small photographs are placed side to side in three montages. Within the first montage there is a human face and it is remarkable how quickly one is able to find it, a matter of a few seconds. Our eyes are drawn quickly to the face and its features. When we try again with the second montage and look for an animal face it takes several seconds longer and when we look at a series of scrambled photographs in the third montage it takes more than a minute and the eye must scan over each photo until something that resembles a part of the face is found.

earn the focus of the open-air spectator. The mask does this by drawing the eye to the actor but also mediating its presence within the peripheral sights of the ancient spectator's vast visual field. Speech, song, gesture and dance support this ocular process in that they are all subservient to the mask—speech must be frontally directed with a focus on articulation and precision and movement must be expertly coordinated with what is being sung or spoken. As the mask amplifies the spectator's visual response to the entire body, everything must be perfectly coordinated to communicate effectively. Note again the elongated fingers, precise gestures and well-placed feet on the masked characters we see on the vase paintings. This is also apparent in most mask performance forms that can be observed today (Fig 15).

These focal “shifts” are also discernable from the text of the plays, which can take the spectator from a focus on the personal concerns of a character on stage, to a visual and aural relationship with their own environment and back again. This enhanced the personal connection to a story and created new parallels with ancient mythic material via mask, space and landscape. Sourvinou-Inwood described this as “zooming,” a device that conflates the geographic, political, social and religious references in the play to those of the Athenian spectators. In one of her examples, the geographical distancing of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* facilitates the “exploration of problematic notions at a symbolic distance.”⁸⁵



Fig. 15. A scene from Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Aquila Theatre, New York. January 2011. Directed by Desiree Sanchez.

⁸⁵ Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 24-25 and Sourvinou-Inwood (1989), 134-148.

Yet, this is just one dimension of the foveal/peripheral interplay, which not only constantly “zooms” in and out but also operates simultaneously as a bimodal form of theatrical viewing.

The opening scene of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* (*Ag.* 1-39) provides an excellent example and demonstrate how Greek tragedy directed foveal vision to action while placing its masked characters in a wider peripheral world. The first word of the *Agamemnon* is the attention grabbing θεοῦς (“God!”) followed by a direct appeal for freedom from some onerous task. In a large open-air space with no house lights to prepare an audience for the start of the performance the Watchman’s appeal would have immediately directed the spectators’ visual attention onto his mask, even more effective if he indeed appeared on the roof of the *skene*. The text then immediately widens the narrative of the spectators’ visual field by incorporating the *skene* and establishing it as the house of Atreus. Then the focus is pulled back to encompass the sky above, but instead of the present daytime the Watchman evokes an imagined night sky, the stars and the whole celestial realm. This image of the rising and setting of the stars would have been familiar to the spectators who knew their night sky as farmers, seafarers or people who navigated by the stars and set their calendars by them. The Watchman draws comfort from these heavenly bodies and their familiarity is contrasted with the first mention of the far-off Troy and the knowledge that the Trojan War is under way.

After taking the mind’s eye of the spectators on this journey via the stars to Eastern shores, the Watchman places their focus back on his own predicament via his complaints of a sopping bed and sleepless fearful nights. When he does see the distant beacon fire, his joyful exclamations are tempered by the ominous mental image of what could appear as a new woman-made star suddenly appearing in the male firmament. These opening lines are flecked with references to the man-like qualities of Clytemnestra. Throughout this scene, Aeschylus expertly shifts his spectators’ focus from a disheveled little dog-like man on a roof to the great myths of the house of Atreus, then up into the majesty of the night sky, across the seas to the Trojan War and back again to the Watchman. He then calls to Clytemnestra to “rise-up,” as if

she herself was a heavenly object and welcome the signal fire with the *olulogmos*, the distinctive female ululating song.

His introduction complete, now the spectators, suitably transported to the ancient House of Atreus on the night that Troy fell, will get to *see* the events unfold before them. We cannot know when exactly the chorus arrived in the *orchestra*. Perhaps they waited to set off until the Watchman had completed his speech, but, with what we know about the use of the *eisodoi*, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the chorus could be seen approaching just as the Watchman clams up (“A great ox is standing on my tongue [46]). Then he slipped away, down from his roof, as the spectators watched the chorus enter via the *parodos*.⁸⁶

Face recognition and the mask

If the mask did indeed hold a privileged position in the foveal vision of the spectator how far was it able to respond to the emotional narrative of the plays themselves? A simple acting exercise applied to the text discussed above might stand to illustrate the emotional complexities that I propose were inherent in the masked performance of tragedy. Actors working on a text will often find an emotional interpretation that they call “finding the objective” and choose to concentrate on playing that objective before working on the delivery of the text with the notion that action develops from cognitive intention prior to the articulation of language. This is of course a highly subjective exercise and what is offered below is intended as an example of this process rather than any kind of definitive opinion on the emotional state of the watchman in the *Agamemnon*. The translation of *Ag.* 1-39 reproduced below also includes a chart of proposed emotional shifts using Ekman’s categories of “basic emotions” which are used extensively in clinical face recognition research. Ekman

⁸⁶ Sommerstein notes that the women of the house may have been seen and heard at this point engaging in various ritual activities such as burning incense on altars alluded to later in the play (89-97). This would also have been an effective dovetailing of different actions on stage and created a powerful female-driven atmosphere for the chorus to enter into. Yet, one wonders if the door of the house of Atreus would have been opened at this point. Perhaps these women if presented here would have entered from an *eisodos*; see Sommerstein (2008), 7. Taplin opposed what he called “an elaborate dumb show” based on his theory that, “in the whole of Greek tragedy there is no single indubitable case of significant stage action which is not indicated at the same time by words, still less for actions totally unaccompanied by any words.” One might ask how then could he possibly know if the dramatist chose to present stage action without the accompaniment of words; see Taplin (1977), 278-280.

first proposed 6 basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise, all of which he felt could be universally shown by facial expression alone. Influenced by Darwin, he then went on to add: amusement, contempt, contentment, embarrassment, excitement, guilt, pride in achievement, relief, satisfaction, sensory pleasure and shame as basic emotions that are not always indicated by the face.⁸⁷

God! Free me from these labors!	[ANGER]
I've spent a whole year up here, watching.	
Propped up on my elbows on the roof	[CONTEMPT]
Of this house of Atreus, like some dog	
How well I've come to know night's congregation of stars,	[PRIDE}
Those blazing monarchs of the sky, those that bring winter	
And those that bring summer to us mortals.	
I know just when they rise and when they set.	[SATISFACTION]
So I watch, watch for the signal pyre,	[CONTEMPT]
The burning flame that will tell us, Troy is taken!	[ANGER]
I take my orders from a woman who waits for news	[CONTEMPT]
She's a woman all right, one with the heart of a man.	[DISGUST]
So, lie here, tossing and turning all night,	[CONTEMPT]
This sopping bed unvisited by dreams	
Fear sits by my side and keeps me awake,	[FEAR]
Oh, I wish I could just close my eyes up tight and sleep.	
So I sing to myself or hum a little tune,	
A musical remedy in case I drop off.	
But it always makes me miserable and I start to cry,	[SADNESS]
For this house and how things used to be run, in the old days.	

⁸⁷ Ekman (1999). Any attempt to assign emotional content to a text is purely interpretive and Konstan (2006), 3-40, reminds us that the Greeks may have possessed different emotional responses. Ekman's categories are also not without controversy but they do at least provide a systematic approach to organizing emotional states, something also found in the naming of poses (*kata*) in Japanese Noh theatre (see note 119).

But if only tonight could come blessed freedom from these	
	Labors [ANGER]
Oh, let the fire of fortune light up our darkness.	
Oh! Oh! Welcome! Beacon of the night, bright as day!	[SURPRISE]
They'll be dancing all over Argos, rejoicing this moment.	[HAPPINESS]
Yes! Yes!	[EXCITEMENT]
I'm shouting to wake the wife of Agamemnon	
She must rise out of bed, quickly, wake the house	
And welcome this signal fire with the hallowed cry.	
If Troy has been taken as these flames	
tell me then I'll be the first	
to sing and dance in celebration.	[SENSORY PLEASURE]
This blazing torch has thrown triple sixes for me!	[HAPPINESS]
Just bring my king home and let me clasp	[RELIEF]
His most welcome hand I mine. As for the rest,	
I'm saying nothing, a great ox is standing on my tongue.	[SHAME]
Now if this house could speak it would tell quite a story,	
I've only got words for those in the know,	
For the others I can't remember anything.	

(Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1-39)

By applying Ekman's system of basic emotions to the Watchman scene we see that in just 39 lines he displays at least 19 marked emotional shifts and 13 distinct emotional states. Of course this is a highly interpretive reading of the text but one that any actor or director must undertake in order to enliven the words in performance and any emotional reading will produce a variety of emotional shifts.⁸⁸ When the Watchman sees the beacon his emotional state rapidly shifts from anger to surprise, to happiness and then excitement and at the end of

⁸⁸ Actors call this process "finding the objective" whereby they seek the emotional meaning of a section of text and strive to play that emotion. This is a particularly useful exercise when working on classical texts.

the speech he radiates a sense of shame. How then can a Watchman's mask of a similar shape and type to those on the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10) with a solid surface and fixed expression project all these emotional states in such a short space of time? Or was the mask, as most believe, a neutral face and the spectators had to look elsewhere for the emotional content of the play?⁸⁹

David Wiles has stated that an audience projects expression onto a neutral mask, and posits that the spectators' own imagination paints the masked face with an expression.⁹⁰ Yet, this statement is only partly correct. The iconographic evidence explored above indicates that the features of the Greek tragic mask were not at all "neutral" and the notion that the spectator "imagines" the expression of the mask needs to be much more thoroughly understood. If this is the case, then what part does the performer play in this imaginary process, and how much control does the dramatist have over the presentation of the emotional content of the play? These important questions might be answered by examining the form of the mask itself and understanding how when combined with the movements and words of the actors, the environment of the theatre of Dionysos, and the cognitive and neural responses of the spectators, it was able to produce a compelling visual display of emotional and narrative drama.

First, let us examine the construction of the mask. We have already seen how Leonardo used his *sfumato* technique on the corners of Mona Lisa's mouth and the area around her eyes knowing that these were the most expressive parts of the human face. The tragic mask seems

⁸⁹ Lada-Richards (2009, 2005, 2002, 1997a, 1996, 1993) has produced significant body of work on the embodiment of character and emotion by tragic and comic actors and posed the question of whether the tragic actor really felt the emotions of the part he played or did he "skillfully display the signs of each passion?" (2005, 459). She points out that in Greek drama the "notion of self-annihilation before the 'character' is born is always tacitly present." (2005, 463). Performing in a mask can be a difficult undertaking for modern actors who are often trained to "internalize" their own emotions and recall them in order to craft a "truthful" performance. Mask work requires an opposite approach where the external signs created by the actor create a kind of emotive choreography that is projected outwardly. Lada-Richard's has eloquently described this as the creation of "a channel of communication between stage and auditorium sustained by the transfusion of emotion, the identity of shared feelings." (2002, 414). It is notable that in all of the several meta-theatrical scenes that she cites as examples of attitudes to acting (2002, 395-418; 1997a, 70-94) the mask is never referred to. It seems that once an actor dons the mask it becomes a theatrical "face" and to acknowledge the artifice would break the illusion. This can be seen in the dancing chorus member on the Pronomos Vase (fig.10) - he wears his satyr-mask and is performing a dance and the artist has chosen to indicate nothing that would denote that this is not a depiction of a satyr except perhaps his costume trunks and phallus, no mask in discernable, just the face of a satyr.

⁹⁰ Wiles (2007), 220-222.

to have been constructed with rounded features (fig. 10.5) and operated within a performance space that was back and top-lit by the sun as the *theatron* at the Sanctuary of Dionysos faced the south. This would have cast gentle shadows on the features of the mask, which as we see on the Pronomos Vase (figs. 10-10.5), were built with dimensionality in mind. Although the features were not exaggerated, forehead, eye-sockets, eyebrows, cheeks and lips were pronounced, and as we will see below from experiments carried out with Japanese Noh masks, these were intended to assist the mask in seeming to change emotions.⁹¹ Furthermore, it is important to note that the neurons at the center of the visual process respond primarily to higher resolution (fine) images while those responsible for processing “the bigger picture” respond to images at a much lower (blurred) resolution (what is seen in one’s peripheral vision appears blurred until foveal vision is engaged to focus on the area). This is the difference between low and high spatial frequency neural processing and when the two are combined, as with Mona Lisa’s blurry smile set against a distant landscape, or a Greek tragic mask within the open-air setting of the Theatre of Dionysos, it can have the effect of tricking the eye whereby facial features to seem to change.

This visual oscillation between fine and blurry features on a face and how it can stimulate and trick both our peripheral and foveal vision has been demonstrated by the illusion below created by Oliva and Schyns (fig. 16).⁹² These two faces are hybrids of fine and low facial features. The face on the left seems angry while the one on the right calm. Step away from the page (or squint) and look again and the faces change dramatically. This illusion works because our high spatial frequency neural processing abilities dominate close up but our low spatial frequency processors work better further away.

Experiments conducted by Yarbus that recorded the saccades (tiny flickers) of the eye as it scanned scenes have shown how people concentrate their vision most heavily at human figures first and then scan to objects that appear in high contrast (fig. 17).⁹³ When the face is

⁹¹ Edith Hall makes the point that “the facial contours of the masks in tragedy seem to have been softly rounded, rather than using sharp angles and planes to represent three dimensions”; Hall (2006), 101.

⁹² Oliva, Torralba and Schyns (2006), 527-532.

⁹³ Gregory (1997), 44-47.



Fig. 16. “Dr. Angry and Mr. Calm.” Created by Aude Oliva and Phillippe G. Schyns.

observed, the system Yarbus devised to track the saccades showed how the eye looked mainly at the eyes and mouth and then moved on to scan the outline of the head. His findings showed that people look intently at facial expressions searching for emotional markers and when they

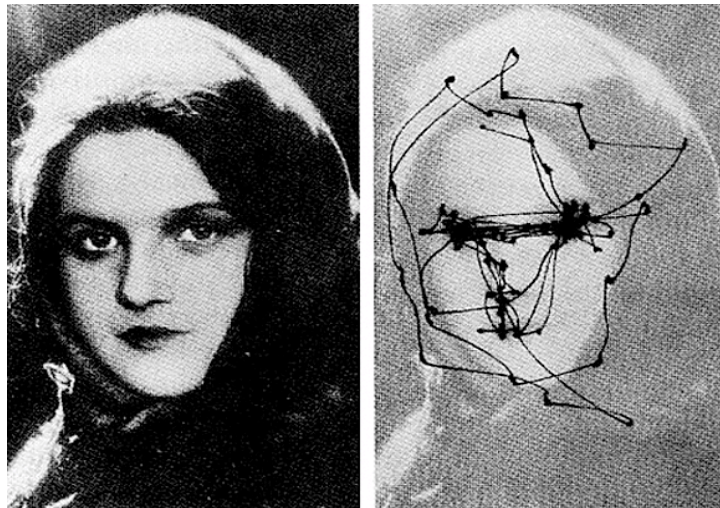


Fig. 17. Eye tracking experiments conducted by Yarbus.

survey an entire scene they will always alight on a human figure even when the surrounding environment dwarfs it. If one looks at a good image of the Pronomos Vase it is the faces of the performers and their masks that draw the eye, especially those of the principal actors and Papposilenos. The eyes and mouths of those masks are particularly noticeable and the gaze direction of the eyes of both masks and performers seems more apparent from a distance than when looking close up. Calame thought the mouth and eye areas of the mask were nondescript

“holes” that revealed the actor behind and therefore dead areas in terms of emotional information, yet the biological operations of the eye and the fact that Greek tragic masks had painted sclerae would suggest otherwise.⁹⁴ Just as the viewer of the *Mona Lisa* is compelled to search for her expression, so the mask is incredibly effective in stimulating our neural visual responses and creating active and engaged spectatorship.

Another way in which the Greek mask focuses foveal vision is via visual contrast and this is apparent on the Pronomos Vase. The figure seated at the foot of the couch of Dionysos is identified as a woman, primarily because of the white face of the mask “she” holds (fig. 10). The face of this figure seems feminine although the facial features might have been rendered to suggest that they have “melted” with the face of the mask just like the Herakles actor (fig. 10.5) and the actor dressed as a king or noble to the left of Dionysos (fig. 10). It is the white mask that stands out in high contrast to its background and the darker face of the seated figure holding it. A white face is usually indicative of a depiction of a woman on a Greek vase, but while this enigmatic figure has a feminine hairstyle, “her” facial features are very similar to the young men of the satyr-chorus and the complexion has been painted in the same red-figure skin tone as the male figures on the vase. The contrast the painter wants to highlight then is between the face and the mask and this is also apparent by comparing the rendering of the face of the Herakles actor with the lighter complexion of the mask he is holding (fig. 10.5).⁹⁵ There is also a question of gender identification operating here, as the female mask is in much higher contrast than the male masks, perhaps reflective of the practice of Greek women whitening their faces.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Calame (2005), 113-114 and 119-123.

⁹⁵ See Marshall (1999), 189-192.

⁹⁶ On the practice of whitening the faces of Greek women see Griffith (1998), 247-248.



Fig. 18. Gender Illusion by Richard Russell. The same face appears female (left face) when the eyes and mouth are in higher contrast to the face.

Recently, Richard Russell has demonstrated how visual contrast is a key factor in determining the gender of a face and posited that high-contrast faces appear female while low contrast seem male. Hence, in many cultures, including ancient Athenian, women are portrayed with darkened mouths and eyes to highlight this contrast, as is the case with female tragic masks. Russell created an illusion that demonstrates this notion of gender and contrast (fig. 18) where two photographs of the exact same face are displayed side by side with the face on the left having a higher contrast between eyes and mouth than the face on the right. To most people that face on left appears female while the one on the right seems male.⁹⁷

Contrast is also a factor in the costuming of tragic actors. It is noticeable how the 3 actors portrayed on the Pronomos Vase all wear highly decorative and embroidered or stenciled robes (the young “chorus leader” also wears a short version of this type of fabric, better suited for dancing). There has been much speculation as to the reason why tragic actors (and *aulos* players) were often depicted with this type of distinctive long-sleeved robe and it is the fact that they were so distinct that contributed to the overall effect of enabling the actor to stand out in contrast to his surroundings.⁹⁸ Additionally, the patterning of these robes creates a marked border along the arms of the actors and the edges of their costumes. On the Pronomos

⁹⁷ Russell (2009), 1211-1219.

⁹⁸ Ley (2007b), 268-287; Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 197-209; Rehm (1992), 64-67; Sommerstein (1996a), 47-49; Geddes (1987), 307-331; Green (2002), 93-104.

Vase, even the boots are fringed with small white fabric balls that emphasize the outline of the lower leg and foot (fig. 10.2).⁹⁹ Strong borders can also be observed on the fabric held in the hand of the dancing chorus performer shown on the pelike from Cerveteri (fig. 5), the garment worn by the unmasked performer on the krater from Spina (fig. 3) and on the borders of the masked maenad dancers shown on the fragment of a krater from Olbia (fig. 6). These borders may have been used to help accentuate the outline of the performer within the space itself. Certainly, the emphasis placed on the arms of the Pronomos actors (fig. 10) strongly suggests that this was a decorative device meant to heighten outline and provide contrast.¹⁰⁰

The Chorus in the Visual Field

There is another important aspect of this relationship between foveal and peripheral vision that was fully exploited in the fifth-century theatre to create a dynamic form of drama that seemed in constant emotional and physical motion. This was the chorus whose almost continuous presence in the spectator's visual field created yet another level of contrast between peripheral and foveal vision as they moved from the centrality of their odes to the periphery of the actor scenes and back again. Yet, the chorus was not "off stage" or even diminished when they were not fully engaged in the choral dance and song of the odes as we encounter them in the texts. Instead, their perpetual masked physical presence, silently listening and observing, and even occasionally audibly reacting to the events taking place before them, kept the emotional force and narrative direction of the play in both areas of the spectator's visual field. Even during an actor's speech or a dialogue scene the gaze direction of the chorus and their physical actions would have done a great deal to contribute to the emotional intensity of what was being presented on stage.

⁹⁹ Wyles has recently suggested that the Herakles actor may not be wearing boots at all but soft shoes and greaves attached by a "stirrup strap" that runs under the feet. She regards these "white dots" as eyelets and an indication of lacing and goes on to challenge the view that *kothornoi* (boots) should be regarded as an essential part of an actor's garb. "It seems reasonable to say that if a tragic actor or chorus member is depicted in boots, these should not be assumed to be worn through the necessity of tragic convention, but rather that they, like any other part of the costume, should be assumed to have been chosen because they are appropriate to, and significant for, the role being played"; Wyles (2010), 239.

¹⁰⁰ On contrast in costume and theatrical costuming in general see Wyles (2008).

The mask helped this visual interplay allowing the chorus to present itself both as a unified group but also as individuals with perhaps different concerns from each other and a plethora of opinions expressed in the movement of a gesture, the tilt of a masked head or the subtle aspect of the fingers showing tension, pleasure or pain.¹⁰¹ Thus, choral odes grew from a visceral connection with the narrative scenes and those scenes developed from the emotional atmosphere set by the choral odes. They were not “interludes” meant to punctuate the action, but part of a seamless expression of public gaze, collective listening, group reaction and shared movement.¹⁰²

The peripheral action of the chorus solves the dramaturgical problem of what to do with them between odes—rather than giving place to the scenes performed by the actors, the chorus fully contributed as a visual reactive device existing within the peripheral vision of the spectator and adding an ocular emotional dynamism to the plays. Thus the chorus constantly *listened*, and were likewise constantly *watched* as they listened, their emotional state adding to the overall dramatic reception of the play and when they left the stage such as in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* or Sophocles’ *Ajax* their absence was keenly felt.¹⁰³ Something of this “peripheral emotionality” can be detected in the dialogue between the chorus and Clytemnestra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* 268-271 where it is as if Clytemnestra is aware of the hidden sentiments of the chorus against her and calls attention to their eyes and faces as the true harbinger of their emotions and not their words.¹⁰⁴

Χορός

πῶς φής; πέφενγε τοῦπος ἐξ ἀπιστίας.

¹⁰¹ On the relationship between gestures, communication and cognition see McNeill (1992).

¹⁰² Aristotle made a distinction between the chorus and the rest of the play coining the term *epeisodion* (episode) to describe the part of tragedy between choral songs (*Poetics* 1452b20-21). See Halleran (2005) and Taplin (1977), 470-476.

In a workshop with theatre lecturers at the Association of Theatre in Higher Education conference in Los Angeles in July 2010, I placed 12 people in a half circle around a masked performer and asked them to just watch listen and gently respond without “pulling focus.” The result was mesmerizing for both spectators and participants and all agreed that the text spoken was enhanced by having this added visual dimension.

¹⁰³ On choral mediation see Henrichs (1995), 56-111; Calame (2001); and Scullion (2002a), 131-132.

¹⁰⁴ Neuroscience may also offer some insights into the cognitive responses that an Athenian audience might have had to watching a chorus comprised of members of their own social group embodying another, often foreign or outside group, what Zeitlin (1996) has termed, “playing the other.” This is a fascinating area of the presentation of Greek tragedy and neuroendocrine (neural effects on hormonal responses) experiments into intergroup interaction and anxiety may have much to offer. See Amodio (2010), 1-54; Nelson (2009).

Κλυταιμήστρα

Τροίαν Ἀχαιῶν οὔσαν· ἤ τορῶς λέγω;

Χορός

χαρά μ' ὑφέρπει δάκρυον ἐκκαλουμένη.

Κλυταιμήστρα

εὖ γὰρ φρονούντος ὄμμα σοῦ κατηγορεῖ.

Chorus

What are you saying? Your words escaped me, they were so incredible.

Clytemnestra

That Troy is in the Achaeans' hands: am I expressing myself clearly?

Chorus

Joy is suffusing me, and calling forth tears.

Clytemnestra

Yes, your eyes betray your loyalty.

(Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 268-271, tr. Alan Sommerstein)

Mirror Neurons and the Mask

When Clytemnestra gazes at the faces of the old men of Argos and says that she sees the truth in their eyes, she is acknowledging the fact that the face is the primary form of interpersonal social interaction, just as Penelope scours the face of Odysseus, looking repeatedly to verify if this is really her husband home at last.

ἡ δ' ἄνεω δὴν ἦστο, τάφος δέ οἱ ἦτορ ἵκανεν

ὄψει δ' ἄλλοτε μέν μιν ἐνωπαδίως ἐσίδεσκεν.

A long while she sat in silence . . . numbing wonder

Filled her heart as her eyes explored his face.

(Homer, *Odyssey* 23.94, tr. Robert Fagles)

John Skoyles calls the human face a “motor exposure board” in that it contains hundreds of muscles capable of generating a number of easily identifiable macro-expressions and a much larger number of seemingly imperceptible “micro”-expressions. When engaged in communication with another, the face is in a state of almost constant movement.¹⁰⁵ It has been shown that newborns are particularly sensitive to faces and respond to properly ordered faces over faces that have had their features re-arranged or have parts removed.¹⁰⁶ To this end, researchers have identified three main cognitive processes connected with facial perception and recognition:

First Order—This is the processing of simple canonical arrangements that create the basic form of a face but does not provide any information to distinguish the face from any other.

Second Order—This is the visual and cognitive processing of the relative distance of facial features (eyes, mouth, ears, nose eyebrows, cheeks, etc.) to each other.

Holistic Processing—This is a gestalt theory of facial processing whereby the viewer perceives the face as a combination of first- and second-order processing. Thus, what makes a face resemble a face is the particular configuration of its features in totality.

The argument for holistic processing has been advanced based on experiments where subjects were shown composite faces, usually made up of one half of a famous personality. When two halves of a different face were placed together but misaligned most subjects tested had no problem identifying the two different personalities each half belonged to, but when they were

¹⁰⁵ Skoyles (2008).

¹⁰⁶ Chambon (2008), 73-76.

more closely fused together to create a new facial pattern the subjects had much more difficulty in recognizing the faces.¹⁰⁷

Studies conducted with newborns are also relevant here because it has been observed that an infant will mirror the facial expressions of its caregiver. As the child has never seen its own face and therefore has no visual sense of how manipulating certain facial muscles produces a smile or a frown it has been recently posited that this is an innate quality and may be connected to the function of what have been termed “mirror neurons” in the brain.¹⁰⁸ Mirror neurons form connections between the visual and motor cortexes allowing humans to quickly learn behavior through both observation and kinesthetic understanding. The theory of “mirror neurons” and their role in creating empathetic responses between the viewer and the viewed was first advanced in the neuroscience community by a research team at the University of Parma led by Giacomo Rizzolatti in the early 1990s. At Parma, they were conducting cognitive research on macaque monkeys and recording their neural responses to picking up food items by means of the then new technology of fMRI (neural imaging) that shows brain activity. When a researcher inadvertently picked up the food item that had been situated for the test, the monkeys had the same neural response.¹⁰⁹ This has led to an enormous amount of research to determine if humans possess this same kind of “empathy response” and to establish if our brains will respond similarly to both the action performed and the action shown.¹¹⁰

Yet, this bold theory has not been without controversy. Though he admits that the discovery of mirror neurons is incredibly exciting, Gregory Hickok has cautioned against the rush to view them as transmitters of “action understanding.” Hickok has questioned the research of the past 10 years and proposes that mirror neurons are both more complex and more fully integrated into an overall system of sensory motor learning where the act of moving creates the basis for the learned or modeled behavior not the act of empathetic watching. Yet, Hickok states;

¹⁰⁷ Young (1987), 747-759.

¹⁰⁸ Sugita (2009), 39-44.

¹⁰⁹ di Pellegrino, Fadiga, Fogassi, Gallese and Rizzolatti (1992), 176-180; Rizzolatti and Craighero (2004), 169-192.

¹¹⁰ A thoroughly readable guide to the major strides and experiments relating to mirror neurons is Iacoboni (2008).

“Mirror neurons are a fascinating class of cells that deserve to be thoroughly investigated in the monkey, and explored systematically for possible homologues in humans.”¹¹¹ Likewise, Dinstein, Thomas, Behrmann and Heeger have also proposed that there is a great deal more work to be done in understanding the functioning of mirror neurons and that some of the early findings may be too much of a stretch; however, they too accept that mirror neurons “may underlie certain social capabilities in both animals and humans.”¹¹² Yet, mirror neurons may just be the tip of the iceberg in understanding human visual cognition and although we may be at the outer edges of our understanding of visual neural cognition the work carried out thus far in attempting to understand the human mirror system might begin to reveal much about the visual emotional function of the tragic masks.

Before the discovery of mirror neurons most scientists held the opinion that humans used logic to interpret and process the actions of others. However, mirror neurons may create cognition via a form of empathetic response. For example, research on mirror neurons has shown how the emotions projected by the face are processed by the viewer and may result in an empathetic response that can involve the neural processing of similar actions and even a mirroring effect in the viewer’s own facial expressions.¹¹³ So, how might a mask operate within such a visual and cognitive field? Its features are fixed and the intricate muscles and soft tissue that makes the face such a vivid emotional canvas are absent from the hard, unchanging surface of the mask. Halliwell believes that the tragic mask held a blank, fixed expression and that it is a mistake to attempt to reconcile it with what he sees as a “thoroughly modern” interest in the nuances of facial expression. For Halliwell the masks radiated the “ethos of heroic dignity in the midst of destructive settings.” This proverbial stiff upper lip harks back to an old-fashioned view of tragedy that suggests the spectators watched a “tragic hero” caught up in some inevitable fate out of his or her control.¹¹⁴ Though his observations about the aesthetics of the mask and Greek art are astute, he completely misses the fact that

¹¹¹ Hickok (2009); see also Catmur, Walsh, and Heyes (2007).

¹¹² Dinstein, Thomas, Behrmann, and Heeger (2008).

¹¹³ Carr, Iacoboni, Dubeau, Mazziotta and Lenzi (2003), 5497-5502.

¹¹⁴ Halliwell (1993), 211.

Greek masks were meant to be seen in motion and were moved in unison with spoken word, dance and song.¹¹⁵

On the other extreme is Wiles, who sees the primary function of the tragic mask to transform the wearer and “take power” over the audience in a theatrical fusion of civic identity and quasi-religious experience. He is right to insist that the mask is no mere actor’s prop but his work places the mask in the realm of the mysterious and epiphanic and does not attempt to explain how the spectators may have engaged with it emotionally.¹¹⁶ Between these two poles—the purely aesthetic of Halliwell and the spiritual and transformative of Wiles—lies Marshall, who imagines the mask as a uniform “type” where the spectator could see himself reflected back. For Marshall, “simple faces are more personal and meaningful.”¹¹⁷ However, in terms of the actual appearance and function of the mask itself each of these positions is a variant of the same notion, that the mask was a simplified face, with a neutral or “idealized” (to use Wiles’ term) expression. Yet, if we look again at the mask of Herakles from the Pronomos Vase (fig. 10.5), it is clear that we are not looking at a neutral or even “idealized” face.

While we cannot be certain that the rendering of the masks on the Pronomos Vase are accurate depictions of actual fifth-century masks, the attention to detail paid by the artist to the masks shown from a variety of angles, the means of carrying them and the detailed costumes suggests that what we have here is our very best informed guess at what tragic masks actually looked like and there is not a hint of “neutrality.” First, it is clearly Herakles as indicated by the lion skin headdress on a strong middle aged man with copious hair and beard. At first sight, the mask appears to have one expression, which might first be described as “slightly troubled” with large eyes, relaxed eyebrows, a furrowed brow and open mouth with a slight downturn; its gaze seems to animate the face and even on a vase painting the viewer is invited

¹¹⁵ The issue of aesthetics and the mask are also discussed by Hall, who is more sympathetic to the notion of a mask that operates within the consciousness of the spectator but still seems confined to the idea that the mask offered just one fixed expression; Hall (2006), 99-141.

¹¹⁶ Wiles (2007), 205-236.

¹¹⁷ Marshall (1999), 189.

to follow its stare. In this two-dimensional form it seems as if the painter is trying to indicate a fluidity of expression.

While we might at first regard the expression of the Herakles mask as fixed, research carried out on traditional Japanese Noh masks would indicate otherwise.¹¹⁸ Here a Noh mask was tilted in different directions and subjects were asked to report the expression they read in the face when it was placed at various angles (fig. 19).¹¹⁹ When the mask is tilted backwards most of the subjects saw happiness and when tilted forwards the face became sad. One interesting facet of this study was that there was a marked divergence in interpretation between different cultural groups with the Japanese control group reading different responses compared to the British group. Yet, both groups saw different emotions in the same face depending on how the mask was manipulated. This cultural difference might also be explained by mirror neurons, where facial recognition and processing of gesture and head movements is keyed to the learned environment in a given culture, where each group has mirrored the motor actions inherent within its own social group.



Fig. 19. Full Magojiro Noh mask at different angles of inclination. Note the marked difference in expression between the face on the far left and the face on the far right.

¹¹⁸ Lyons, Campbell, Plante, Coleman, Kamachi and Akamatsu (2000), 2239-2245.

¹¹⁹ In Noh drama the movement of the mask in combination with the body are choreographed in movement sequences called *kata*. For example, the expression of grief is called *shiori* where the masked head is lowered and hands placed just off the face and eyes covered. *Terasu* involves the mask being tilted slightly upwards and denotes laughter or joy and *kumorasu* is the downward tilt that denotes sadness. See Nakanishi (1983) and Perzynski (2005), 176.



Fig. 19.1 Three views of the same Noh mask under natural lighting. Only the tilt of the mask has been changed. Note the softening of the facial features and the curve of the mask.

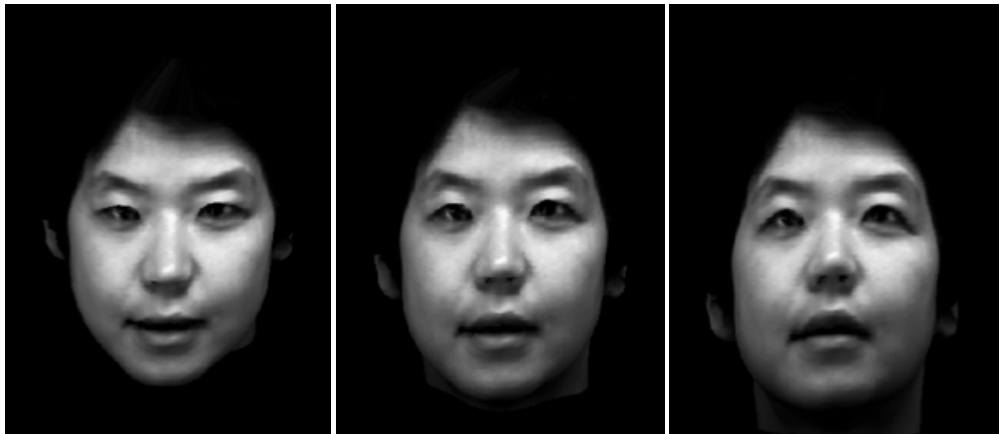


Fig. 19.2. Three views of a human face that demonstrate that it does not suggest different emotional states when viewed from a variety angles as the Noh mask does.¹²⁰

The researchers of the Noh mask experiment noticed how certain features of the mask were fashioned in order to assist with the mask being able to change its expressions depending on aspect.¹²¹ For example, they noted how the mask's bottom lip was rendered to protrude and was much more exaggerated than the lips of a human face. If we turn again to the Herakles mask (fig. 10.3) the same feature is apparent on the thick bottom lip, which the artist has clearly chosen to emphasize. If we compare the mouth of the mask of Herakles to the mouth of the actor holding it, we note that the actor's mouth has not been rendered in the same way

¹²⁰ For an account of the findings of the experiment that produced this result see Lyons et al. (2000).

¹²¹ Another team in Japan also performed a similar test on facial recognition and emotions of Noh masks and found similar results. See Minoshita, Satoh, Morita, Tagawa and Kikuchi (1999), 83-89.

(fig. 10.5). Thus, the exaggerated bottom lip of the Herakles mask may be reflective of a similar feature of Noh masks that emphasize certain facial features in order to produce multiple emotional “looks.” The Noh mask study also noted that minor movements of the masked actor’s head could deceive spectators into thinking that the face is animated and the internal features are actually moving. This effect may also be linked to our cognitive prowess at recognizing faces, in that we store thousands of physiognomies in our memory and match them to the holistic configuration of the face before us (what might be called the “haven’t I seen you somewhere before effect”). Very recent research also suggests that each face has its own neuron, which fires only when that particular face is observed.¹²² In this sense, our mirror neurons might actively seek to connect with the mask and to read its emotions creating the illusion that a static mask is changing expressions.¹²³



Fig. 20. Hollow Mask. In Gregory’s experiment as the mask rotates the inside appears to be a normal three- dimensional face rather than a concave hollow.

¹²² Quiroga, Mukamel, Isham, Malach and Fried (2008), 3599-3604.

¹²³ Further research in this fascinating area is needed where controlled neural experiments can be conducted with subjects observing the same actions performed by masked actors and non-masked actors and neural responses to each recorded and compared.

A famous demonstration of this type of facial visual processing is Richard Gregory's hollow mask illusion (fig. 20). Here a simple mask is lit normally and rotated slowly; as it turns to reveal the inside the hollowed out features suddenly seem to form into a three dimensional face. The more realistic the face, the better the experiment works (Gregory used a plastic "Charlie Chaplin" mask from a joke shop). Gregory used this experiment to demonstrate how we use "top-down" object knowledge (conceptual knowledge - perceptual knowledge – hypothesis generator) to process faces rather than "bottom-up" signals (the object - signal processing – hypothesis generator).¹²⁴ What our mind is doing is collecting the visual evidence of the mask's facial features and reordering them so that a concave face appears convex and "normal." Likewise, Craig Mooney created a series of faces rendered in high-contrast black and white that demonstrate how little visual information the mind actually needs to create a face.¹²⁵ An example of three "Mooney faces" is shown below (fig. 21).



Fig. 21. Mooney Faces.

In many respects the painted mask is just a suggestion of a face and it is only via its expert manipulation by a skilled performer in conjunction with movement, music and text that it comes to vivid emotional life, and yet the human brain is conditioned to detect faces and

¹²⁴ Gregory (1997), 207-210. Gregory's experiment in motion can be viewed at <http://www.richardgregory.org/experiments/>.

¹²⁵ Mooney (1957).

observe macro-expressions from the merest of information. In this sense the mask is analogous to a facial caricature and research into the facial recognition of caricatures has shown how sometimes less is more when it comes to placing a face or being drawn to watch one.

For example, Brennan experimented with a schematic system where a famous face was automatically compared to a prototypical face, then the differences between the two were magnified in a line drawing caricature and set alongside another line drawing of the real famous face. It was found that subjects strongly preferred the caricature face, which tended to be identified far more quickly than the realistic line drawings of the same face.¹²⁶ As Gombrich noted, writing on what he termed the borderland between caricature and portraiture, “we generally take in the mask before we notice the face.” A “mask” could be a caricature or even a photograph where the sitter’s emotional state of mind and facial expression might actually communicate something entirely different in another context. Gombrich’s brilliant example of this is the famous photo of Winston Churchill taken in Ottawa by Yousuf Karsh. Churchill was annoyed and pressed for time and right before he took the shot Karsh snatched Churchill’s cigar out of his mouth. The resulting look of anger and annoyance that Karsh captured was perceived as encapsulating the fighting spirit and steely determination of the British at war.¹²⁷ Gombrich showed that for portrait artists and photographers it was the ambiguity of an expression that is important, not neutrality. Expressive ambiguity in faces leads to increased spectator engagement as our visual processing systems work to complete the picture and make emotional and situational judgments. The schematic painted surface of the Greek tragic mask provided just such an ambiguous façade.

¹²⁶ Brennan (1985), 170-178; Benson and Perrett (1994), 5-93.

¹²⁷ Gombrich (1982), 112-118.

Choral Symporeia: Mirror Neurons and Movement

Rizzolatti's pioneering work on mirror neurons led him to divide them into two broad categories: somatosensory neurons respond to actual touch whereas somatosensory/visual (bimodal) neurons are triggered only by visual stimulus that occurs in the vicinity of the tactile receptive field. This led Rizzolatti to conclude that mirror neurons work empathetically in that humans are able to learn quite complex movement actions just by observing the motions performed by another. According to Rizzolatti this is the basis of how humans process the emotions of others and are able to understand their individual predicaments and situations.¹²⁸ V. S. Ramachandran has gone so far as to suggest that the development of mirror-neuron systems in humans 40,000 years ago significantly contributed to our evolutionary development as social beings able to understand the intentions of other humans and exchange skills and knowledge including language via imitation.¹²⁹ This ability of mirror neurons to control motor goals rather than basic muscle action has been neatly summed up by John Skoyles:

(O)ur perception of bodily movements happens not in terms of objects but in terms of knowledge held in the motor cortex as to how our own movements could carry them out. In a sense, the brain sees the actions of others by parasitizing its own knowledge of the actions it can do with its body.¹³⁰

What the neuroscience community is finding is that our cognitive abilities to imitate, learn, speak, understand and empathize are linked to embodiment—our minds and our bodies are connected in experiential cognition and we process the emotion of others through a system of “action representation.” Thus, “we ground our empathic resonance in the experience of our acting body and the emotions associated with specific movements.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ Rizzolatti, Corrado Sinigaglia and Anderson (2008), 242.

¹²⁹ Ramachandran (2007), and Oberman, Pineda and Ramachandran (2007), 62-66. See also Iacoboni (2008), 38-46 and 116-125, and Gazzaniga (2008), 158-202.

¹³⁰ Skoyles (2008), 103.

¹³¹ Carr, Iacoboni, Dubeau, Mazziotta and Lenzi (2003), 5502.

If we cautiously apply these recent findings from the cognitive and neuro sciences to ancient drama then it follows that symporeia (collective movement) has a particular role to play in human cognition and emotional intelligence beyond its usual proscribed role of creating social cohesion and reinforcing group identity. In neural terms, movement is the essential interpersonal communicator of emotion and empathy. Furthermore, the role of mirror neurons in cognition has also been linked to proprioception, which is the sense of the relative position of different parts of the body in relation to each other, or what might be termed the orientation of one's limbs in space. Proprioception is what allows us to walk without looking at our feet and why people who have consumed a large quantity of alcohol and have impaired proprioception are asked to prove their soberness by closing their eyes and touching their nose.

These connections between facial recognition, emotional empathy, moving in space and kinesthetic communication have a direct relevance to understanding how the mask might have functioned in the Greek theatre within a masked symporeutic environment where proprioception was an essential element of the performance. Masked actors had no peripheral vision and could not see their arms and feet or even each other for most of the time. A heightened sense of proprioception and an acute spatial awareness was therefore essential and elicited a direct physical response from the spectators, further enhancing their emotional connectivity to the play they were watching.

Our ability to recognize movement is quite remarkable. In 1973, Johansson created a series of films of what at first resemble random tiny dots. In actuality, these were light diodes attached to the joints of a human figure and impossible to discern until the figures moved and it became perfectly clear that a human was being displayed. What Johansson found is that from this most basic of information humans can very quickly identify people known to them by the way they move and can even recognize themselves, which is all the more remarkable considering that most people do not watch themselves move.¹³² This is a characteristic of proprioception and

¹³² Johansson (1973), 201-211.

this ability seems also to be regulated by mirror neurons that forge links between specific movements and the visual perception of those same movements in other people.¹³³

One important aspect of the mask already mentioned is the masked performer's dependence on choreographed bodily movements and pronounced gestures in conjunction with words and emotional objectives. The use of the mask may subconsciously favor the body in the eyes of the spectator, thus enhancing emotional empathy and even visceral participation in the action being presented.¹³⁴ Studies have shown the muscles of audience members are stimulated when watching dance performances where they experience a kinesthetic sensation known as motor simulation. Additionally, it has been found that neural activity in those watching increases significantly when the dance form is physically known by the spectator.¹³⁵ This was demonstrated in 2005 by a team led by Patrick Haggard. In a controlled experiment, professional ballet dancers watched ballet and then the Brazilian dance/martial art form known as capoeira; then capoeira dancers watched capoeira followed by ballet. The dancers watching their own dance form responded more strongly, suggesting the influence of motor expertise on action observation. The conclusion of this study was that the neural "mirror-system" integrates movements seen with movements known and, "the human brain understands actions by motor simulation."¹³⁶

The spectators watching tragedy could all be classified as "expert dancers" whether Athenian or Hellenic visitors; dance was an enormous part of Greek cultural identity not to mention the equally symporeutic activities of hoplite drill, rowing a trireme, riding in a cavalry formation or being part of a procession. Of the Athenians, it might be safely said that almost everyone in attendance was highly familiar with dance at a cultural participatory activity from an early age. The Dionysia itself involved 50 boys and 50 men from each of the 10 tribes competing in the dithyramb, a total of 1000 performers recruited exclusively from the population of

¹³³ Gallagher (2005), 65-85.

¹³⁴ The visual supremacy of the body over the face is reflected in Plato's *Charmides* 154d-e where Charmides' physical beauty is compared to that of a statue to the point where if he were to disrobe he would have "no-face" (ἀνρὸςωήος)

¹³⁵ Jola (2010).

¹³⁶ Calvo-Merino, Glaser, Grezes, Passingham and Haggard (2005), 1243-1249. See also Calvo-Merino, Grezes, Glaser, Passingham and Haggard (2006), 1905-1910; Brown, Martinez and Parsons (2006), 1157-1167.

Athenian males. In addition, the tragedies also involved a chorus of 10-15 and the comedies 24, placing around 165 dramatic chorus members in each Dionysia (not to mention another 150 or so in the Lenaea). Therefore, even if they were not performing the spectators may well have performed at one time themselves, if not at the Dionysia or a city festival at the very least in their deme or at family events.¹³⁷

The hymn sung and danced by the women of the chorus of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriasuzae* (947-1000) illustrates this strong connection between spectator and masked dancer as they invite the spectators to watch them form their circle dance. It is as if their appeal to join hands reached across the *orchestra* and out into the *theatron* to be felt by everybody. To *watch* dance was to *feel* dance: spectatorship was also participation.

ὄρμα χώρει
κοῦφα ποσὶν ἄγ' ἐς κύκλον,
χειρὶ σύναπτε χεῖρα,
βρυθμὸν χορείας ὕπαγε πᾶσα
βαῖνε καρπαλίμοιν ποδοῖν.
ἐπισκοπεῖν δὲ πανταχῇ
κυκλοῦσαν ὄμμα χρὴ χοροῦ κατάστασιν.

Come on and dance!
Light feet forming the circle
Join together, hand in hand
Everyone feel the rhythm of the dance
Quicker now, move those feet!
Let everyone's eyes everywhere
Watch the formation of our circle dance.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Aristophanes' *Frogs* 729. Plato *Laws* 7. 814e-817e. See also Revermann (2006) 99-124 and Ley (2007b), 150-166.

¹³⁸ On the ritual association of this hymn see Bierl (2009), 83-125.

Gaze Direction

One of the most notable features of the Pronomos Herakles mask is the rendering of the eyes, which are larger than life, each with a highly visible sclera (white) and dark pupil or iris (fig. 10.3). The irises are looking up and to the right but these may indicate that the mask has been turned, is under motion, or could be the vase painter's device in connecting the gaze of the mask with the Papposilenos Herakles mask above. It is significant that nearly all of the fifth-century representations of masks indicate prominent sclerae and this strongly suggests that mask eye sockets were filled in with only a small hole to allow vision and to represent the pupil. Additionally, in the south-facing *theatron* at the Sanctuary of Dionysos, the light source of the sun either behind or above the performers would have made it very difficult for the spectators to perceive a human eye behind the mask. Furthermore, the eye sockets appear to be sunk back in the head with a large prominent brow that would also cast shadows on the eyes.

A large sclera is almost unique to humans as other mammals have none or hardly any white exposed at all. This is because animals do not wish to be seen by predators and so their eyes tend to be dark. Human eyes are supposed to be seen and the large sclerae allow us to track the direction of another person's gaze.¹³⁹ Humans present themselves on an upright vertical plane as opposed to other primates who are usually on a horizontal plane—running on all fours or lying out. Therefore, the face and the eyes are vitally important for interpersonal communication. Work at St. Andrews University on neural responses to the face found that around 60% of the cells responsive to face perception were also sensitive to the gaze direction and that subjects with damage to the area of the brain responsible for face recognition also suffered from an impaired ability to follow gaze direction.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, it has been observed that people with autism also have severe difficulties in reciprocal gaze and making

¹³⁹ Tomasello, Hare, Lehmann and Call (2007), 314-320.

¹⁴⁰ Perrett (1995), 117-122.

eye contact and it has been posited that perceiving another's gaze direction is vital to interpersonal communication.¹⁴¹

Wiles commented "that the mask feels alive when the viewer has a sense of existing in the mask's eyes."¹⁴² This is reflective of Merleau-Ponty's famous statement "I live in the facial expression of the other, as I feel him living in mine."¹⁴³ The gaze direction of the Greek mask may have been an important factor in establishing reciprocal gaze between spectator and performer, one in which emotional states could be easily communicated and the viewers' mirror neuron responses would have created empathetic feelings with the masked fictional character presented before them. The artificial sclerae painted in the eye sockets of the masks as indicated by vase paintings would have assisted greatly in creating this visual bond but whereas a real face establishes communication interpersonally, the gaze of the mask was directed not at the other masked characters on stage but at the spectators. In actuality it would have been highly unlikely that masked characters faced each other during performances as the type of facemask used in tragedy strongly favors frontal performance.¹⁴⁴ This frontality was not only a matter of visual engagement between the spectators and the masks but also a factor of audibility. Although we cannot measure the acoustic qualities of the fifth-century wooden *theatron*, it remains a practical theatrical fact that in open-air or even fairly large (500 seats or more) enclosed theatres vocal projection is severely limited or even impossible if the performer faces "upstage" or away from the spectators.¹⁴⁵ The face mask further limits vocal projection to the sides by forcing the voice through the mouth aperture of the mask in a fully frontal direction and although up to three quarter turns would have been possible both visually and acoustically the effect would have been diminished in both respects. We can therefore deduce that it was unlikely that tragic actors stood opposite each other to engage in dialogue

¹⁴¹ Cole (1998), 74-76.

¹⁴² Wiles (2007), 284.

¹⁴³ Merleau-Ponty, Toadvine and Lawlor (2007), 174.

¹⁴⁴ On the connections of the frontal gaze with Dionysos see Csapo (1997), 256-258. On the frontal face in archaic vase painting see Korshak (1987), who regards the face as the place where individuals show their emotions rather than a façade to hide behind. Therefore, the mask is not something used to hide behind, it is its own face, which is why it had pupils and irises.

¹⁴⁵ A similar acoustical problem is encountered by actors facing into the wings on the thrust stage of the Olivier Theatre at London's National Theatre.

and hardly ever turned upstage except to make exits via the *skene* door.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the mask itself offers the performer no peripheral vision meaning that the performer is also visually engaged with the spectators rather than the other performers.

The frontality created by masked theatre was reflected in the anterior aspect of the *theatron* where the majority of the benches were on the frontal plane, and even the side wings still place the performers on a frontal axis, especially considering the location of the *skene* upstage center. It was not until the development of stone theatres of the late fourth century that we start to see auditoriums enveloping the *orchestra* on three sides. This was at a time when choral performance was much diminished, if staged at all, and the focus was definitely on the actors on the stage placed upstage center, which would still have required a predominantly frontal engagement.¹⁴⁷

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the effect of the mask on the staging of Greek tragedy is to analyze a scene with the mask in mind. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 782-974 (the "tapestry scene") provides an excellent example. A choral song is interrupted by the arrival of Agamemnon in a carriage via one of the *eisodoi*. This entrance starts in the peripheral vision of the spectators and is then brought suddenly into focus by the chorus at 782 who announce "Come then, King, conqueror of Troy." The spectators then heard 28 choral lines that presumably covered Agamemnon's entrance into the *orchestra* elevated on his carriage and accompanied by Cassandra.¹⁴⁸ Agamemnon's arrival in the *orchestra* radiates the power of the visual to completely arrest and redirect dramatic narrative and it is significant that at this point the chorus makes several references to visibility. For example, at 788-789 they say, "Many

¹⁴⁶ Presumably, the chorus would have had more flexibility of movement especially during songs but when speaking would have still needed to face the *theatron*.

¹⁴⁷ Perhaps an example of this kind of frontal performance is shown on the "Oedipus" vase of the Capodarso painter dated to 330 BCE. (Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi, Syracuse 66557). Here an elderly figure usually identified as the herdsman from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* faces directly to the front with a raised arm and seems to be telling his story. A bearded male figure (identified as Oedipus) is turned to the side and looks down at the floor while a veiled female (Jocasta) seems to cover her mouth in horror. Two children are depicted as is another male figure turned in the other direction. The columns and raised platform suggest a stage and this may be a representation of a performance albeit without any attempt to depict masks. Or it could be a key scene from the myth, which has been influenced by fourth-century performances of the Oedipus story. However, the figures are wearing theatrical costume with long-sleeved clothes edged with prominent borders and boots. See Taplin (2007), 91-92, and for the opposite view see Billing (2008). Csapo sees this scene as reflective of messenger speeches in New Comedy where the actor frequently faced the audience while gesturing to the characters behind him; see Csapo (2010), 68-69.

¹⁴⁸ On attendants and other non-speaking roles see Sommerstein (1996a), 233-236.

men praise appearances/and overstep the bounds of Justice” (πολλοὶ δὲ βροτῶν τὸ δοκεῖν εἶναι/προτίουσι δίκην παραβάντες); then at 793-794, “Some pretend to share in a man’s glory,/forcing their faces into a smile” (καὶ ξυγχαίρουσιν ὁμοιοπρεπεῖς ἀγέλαστα πρόσωπα βιαζόμενοι), and at 796 they add that a good leader “is not fooled by eyes that lie” (οὐκ ἔστι λαθεῖν ὄμματα φωτός). Even their quite shocking reference to his actions at Aulis at 800-801, “I made a very ugly (ill-formed) picture (etching) of you” (οὐ γὰρ σ’ ἐπικεύσω, κάρτ’ ἀπομούσως ἦσθα γεγραμμένος) seems to acknowledge the prowess of the carved and painted theatrical mask to reflect deeply personal emotional views. It is not insignificant that the word “character” is derived from the Greek term for etching or engraving.¹⁴⁹

Reconstructing the performer’s stage movements (“blocking”) of an ancient play that comes to us with no stage directions is a highly subjective activity despite Taplin’s efforts to convince us that all significant action is inherent in the text. It has already been stated that we should be cautious of this view of drama where the entire burden of the performance is carried within the text and accept that at times the visual action may either be conflicting with the words or affecting them significantly. Nevertheless, Taplin’s method is a starting point in attempting to comprehend the stage dynamics of the Greek theatre and here at least we have Clytemnestra’s line at 905 that explicitly asks Agamemnon to “step down” from his carriage. So we might reasonably infer that Agamemnon has been raised up on his wheeled platform from his entrance to this point and we might also say with some security informed by practicality that this carriage must be in the *orchestra* and not on the small raised stage, if indeed there was one at this point. If there was a low, narrow raised stage, then in *Agamemnon* it is certainly Clytemnestra’s territory lying on the threshold of the House of Atreus between interior and exterior, *oikos* and *polis*, and the oppositional realms of female and male. As Agamemnon confidently announces that he will enter his house accompanied by Victory, it is Clytemnestra’s domination of this stage area, directly in front of the *skene* doors, that completely arrests him forcing him to stay in the *orchestra*.

¹⁴⁹ Hall (2006), 101-105.

If we then take the practical considerations of the mask into account then Agamemnon would have faced out to the spectators during his speech to the chorus (810-854). Perhaps at 913 he may have turned upstage marking his decision to enter the house, or it could have been a simple half-turn to the side. Even if he stayed facing front at this moment Agamemnon is visibly upstaged by Clytemnestra, who enters from the strongest visual point on stage and at the same height as him so that both are raised above the height of the chorus. With the performative function of the mask in mind, what might be reasonably inferred is that this whole scene is played on the “split-focus,” with both actors facing out, towards the spectators.¹⁵⁰

We might also assume that Clytemnestra clears the doorway to allow for the laying out of the tapestries and even descends into the *orchestra* and moves off the raised stage. Agamemnon’s rebuttal of her actions suggests that she is physically “groveling” to him (917-918). Perhaps, but in any event Aeschylus skillfully uses the split focus of the mask to make Agamemnon seem exposed and vulnerable and reinforce the sense of public view that compels him to engage with Clytemnestra and be persuaded to walk on the tapestries. It should be noted that from a visual perspective Agamemnon is not actually permitted to return “home” as his feet never touch the ground. Having Agamemnon order the removal of his boots and then step directly down from a wheeled platform onto the crimson cloths visually emphasizes this aspect of the scene. This is in marked contrast to the entrance of the Herald, who immediately and viscerally engaged with his native soil (503).

The final image of this scene is a powerful one—Agamemnon turns to walk up the tapestries, perhaps in silence, or more likely accompanied by the incantations of Clytemnestra (958-974).¹⁵¹ If this was indeed so, then it matters not if her words can be heard by Agamemnon or not as for all intents and purposes he is dramatically “offstage” facing away from the spectators and slowly walking into the house. One might call this powerful visual image “a

¹⁵⁰ Denniston and Page (1957), 143 on 854-855 found it remarkable that Clytemnestra would address her speech to the chorus and not to her husband. However, if the scene was played on the split focus with both Clytemnestra and Agamemnon facing forwards towards the spectators then this would make more sense and emphasize the public nature of their reunion being played out in the open under the gaze of all.

¹⁵¹ McClure (1997), 123-140.

dead man walking.” As if to emphasize the theatrical power of *opsis* Aeschylus has Agamemnon step onto the cloths wishing that “no god’s envious glare” will strike him from afar. The chorus watching this scene hoped that it would not; the spectators in the *theatron* knew that it would.¹⁵²

Emotional Masks

In *Memorabilia* (3.10.1-8) Xenophon describes Socrates visiting with Parrhasios the painter and Cleiton the sculptor and asking them how they went about achieving a lifelike quality in their respective art forms. Socrates asks Parrhasios if he is able to capture the “ethos of the soul” (τῆς ψυχῆς ἦθος) and lists a number of examples of good qualities such as lovability, friendliness, attractiveness and desirability. Parrhasios responds that this would be impossible, as these are qualities that cannot be seen and therefore, cannot be reproduced, either in form or in color. So then Socrates enquires if people usually express empathy and disgust (τό τε φιλοφρόνως καὶ τὸ ἐχθρῶς) by their looks, whether or not these feelings can be imitated in the eyes (οὐκοῦν τοῦτό γε μιμητὸν ἐν τοῖς ὄμμασι), and if so is it possible to make a copy (ἀπεικάζω) of these expressions as well as the look of joy and sorrow. Parrhasios replies that this is of course entirely possible. Socrates adds to his list: magnificence (μεγαλοπρεπής), dignity (ἐλευθέριος), dejection (ταπεινός), servility (ἀνελεύθερος), self-restraint (σωφρονικός), prudence (φρόνιμος), insolence (ὕβριστικός), and vulgarity (ἀπειρόκαλος) and says that they are all shown on men’s faces and the aspect of the body whether they are still or in motion (καὶ διὰ τοῦ προσώπου καὶ διὰ τῶν σχημάτων καὶ ἐστῶτων καὶ κινουμένων ἀνθρώπων διαφαίνει). Parrhasios responds that he feels sure that these can all be imitated by art. Then Socrates visits Cleiton the sculptor and asks if the imitation of the emotions (πάθη) that affect the body delight the spectator (τὸ δὲ καὶ τὰ πάθη τῶν ποιούντων τι σωμάτων ἀπομμεῖσθαι οὐ ποιεῖ τινα τέρψιν τοῖς θεωμένοις). When Cleiton responds in the affirmative Socrates adds that in that case the fierce look in the eye of a fighter should be copied and the look of pleasure in the face of a victor imitated. Cleiton agrees and Socrates concludes that the sculptor does indeed represent the workings of the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς ἔργα).

¹⁵² On the staging of this scene see Taplin (1977), 302-316.

Xenophon's story proposes that a person's ethos can be visually replicated via mimesis and that their character and emotions "show through" (διαφαίνεiv) the face, eyes and movements of the body.¹⁵³ This description could be just as aptly applied to the tragic mask, a crafted object whose formation involved the plastic skills of the sculptor, the two-dimensional mastery of line and color of the painter and the form-fitting expertise of the third artist Socrates visits, Pistias the armourer (3.109-115).¹⁵⁴ In fact, Socrates' description of the visible display of emotions to Parrhasios the painter (3.10.5) could also be equally applied to the mask. The four key terms *prosōpon* (face), *schema* (form), *stasis* (stillness) and *kinesis* (movement) are all essential elements that come together in the performer's mask and body to communicate the emotions of the character portrayed on stage. *Prosōpon* is a remarkable term for "face" or "appearance" projecting the meaning of "before the gaze" and indicative of the idea of the face's role in outward communication; the term itself implies that a face is defined by being actively looked on. By the mid fourth century BCE we find *prosōpon* also applied to the mask in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1449a35) referring to the disfigured features of the comic mask.¹⁵⁵ Xenophon's Socrates says that the face displays both a person's character and their emotions, but not in isolation as both the face and body move together to convey this information.

Many neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists are concerned with the study of face recognition and one criticism of their approach has been that in using only static photographs of faces in their experiments the subjects are denied the abundance of interpretive visual emotional information communicated by the body and face in motion in tandem. Thus, the term "schema" describes what might be called "the complete picture" of an entire body and it has been applied to theatrical gestures and posture.¹⁵⁶ A masked performer must be acutely

¹⁵³ See Halliwell (2002), 122-124.

¹⁵⁴ The relationship between Xenophon's description of the work of Pistias and mask-making has been pointed out by Hall (2006, 103); "Presumably the mask-makers aimed at making a mask fit the actor, and thus feel to him like an 'accessory' rather than an 'encumbrance' (terms Pistias applies to a good breastplate)."

¹⁵⁵ The earliest occurrence of the term applied to a mask seems to be the word *prosop[on]* (though it was restored at a later date) found on an Attic inscription dated to 434/3 (*IG* 1³ 343.7.) This may relate to the use of a mask in ritual practice.

¹⁵⁶ Aristophanes' *Wasps* 1485—describing Philocleon's dance; Aristotle's *Poetics* 1455a29—describing theatrical gestures; Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* 488—the tremendous form of Hippodemon;

aware of their *schema* ensuring that every part of their body accurately communicates the emotional state of the character at each given moment, right down to their fingers and toes. These pronounced and carefully placed gestures with articulated fingers and an emphasis on posture can be observed in the iconographic evidence listed above (figs. 3, 5, 6 & 10) and fig. 15.¹⁵⁷

Kinesis (movement) encapsulates not only blocking, movement and dance but also the movement of the mask itself. The Noh mask experiment showed how subtle tilts of the masks at different angles could project different emotional states and how realistic hair, the painted surface, rounded features and dimensionality of construction all contributed to animate the mask in performance. The painter of the “Boy with Mask” oenochoe fragment (fig. 2) may well have been attempting to capture these qualities of the theatrical mask by choosing to depict it moving.

Finally, we must not overlook *stasis* (stillness), an essential quality when dealing with the mask. The Greek film and theatre director Michael Cocoyannis has described this element of mask work as “being centered.” This involves the performer being hyper-aware of the position of the feet, their stance, including their chest and shoulders with their head raised high (“as if your head is connected by an invisible thread which is pulling your whole body up” to quote Cocoyannis).¹⁵⁸ This centered stance is completely still and is used as a place of resolution between movements. Such stillness is compelling and allows the mask to establish itself as the center of focus. One might imagine its force on a character such as Cassandra in *Agamemnon* who remains totally silent during the entire tapestry scene and when Clytemnestra attempts to speak to her (1035-1068). Her presence is easily forgotten when the scene is only experienced as a text but in a live performance Cassandra’s silence (and her stillness) may have been gripping.¹⁵⁹

Euripides’ *Medea* 1072—the bodies of her children (she also refers to their lips, faces and skin but not in terms of changing expressions). On *schema* in relation to the mask see Halliwell (1993), 207-209.

¹⁵⁷ McCart (2007), 247-257, has conducted experiments with masks and concludes that they are not neutral but are combined head and body movements (*schemata*) to become “a powerful dramatic tool.”

¹⁵⁸ Greek Chorus Workshop by Michael Cocoyannis at the Sophocles’ *Electra* in Performance conference held at Northwestern University, May 1993.

¹⁵⁹ Other famous silent and still characters (often seated and veiled) in Aeschylus include Niobe in his play of the same name and Achilles in *Myrmidons* and *Phrygians*. For the comic response to this aspect

We can readily accept that a great painter or sculptor is able to create a striking image of a man in pain or an athlete flushed with the joy of victory, and acknowledge that we are adept at reading the emotional states presented by the face. But what of the mask? Can it portray the array of emotions necessary for a compelling portrayal of a character in a Greek tragedy? Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* displays a wide range of emotional states in the course of the play including confidence, anger, fear, confusion and revulsion. The blind prophet Tiresias says he cannot be frightened by Oedipus' "angry glare" yet it remains for the sighted in the *theatron* to visualize this look on the mask worn by the actor playing Oedipus (448). Likewise when the chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* sees Clytemnestra after she has killed Agamemnon and Cassandra; they proclaim her to so crazed that they "can even see blood streaked in your eyes" (1428). However, I can think of no example from tragedy where one character says that they have read a changing emotion just from the facial features of another unless it is a reference to the eyes or tears.¹⁶⁰ Even in Sophocles' *Electra* where Orestes tells his sister to feign a "radiant face" (φαιδρὸν προσώπῳ) when she returns to Clytemnestra (1297), Electra replies that her grief prevents her from doing this and she cannot even show her brother the elation she feels at his return (1310-1312). There is of course one famous example of an expressive mask that is constantly cited, that of the so-called "smiling" mask of Dionysos in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Helene Foley asserted that the Dionysos mask was presented with an unchanging smiling face, but the first reference to it in the play is placed in the past (439) and the only other is a future hope expressed by the chorus (1021). There is no real evidence in the play that this mask was depicted smiling.¹⁶¹ This notion of the unchanging mask has dominated the thinking of classicists writing on the ancient theatre. Pickard-

of Aeschylean stagecraft see Aristophanes *Frogs* 907-936. See also 302-316. Taplin (1977, 306) articulates the oscillation between foveal and peripheral vision when he writes that during this scene Cassandra is "a disquieting presence seen out of the corner of the eye."

¹⁶⁰ See Griffith (1998), 244-245, who lists references in tragedy to eyes, tears, eyebrows, some to hair color and a few to lips (where foaming at the mouth is a sign of madness as at Euripides' *Heracles* 934). Griffith does accept that the mask could be very expressive (though he puts this down to shadows cast by the sun) but thinks that the actors' faces were reduced "to the size of pinheads" in the eyes of the audience because of the "sheer size" of the *cavea*. This is far-fetched and does not take into consideration the eye's ability to focus on objects in its foveal vision and also assumes that the *cavea* was far larger than evidence now indicates. See also Halliwell (1993), 200, n. 11. Pickard-Cambridge lists examples of characters crying in tragedy; Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 171-172.

¹⁶¹ Foley (1980), 107-133. This idea of the "smiling mask" of Dionysos was also put forward by Dodds (1944), 131. Marshall (1999, 196) also feels that "it is not self-evidently true." For discussion see Wiles (2007), 220-22, who also questions the notion of a "smiling mask."

Cambridge claimed, “It was only facial expression that was unalterable, owing to the use of masks.”¹⁶²

Recently, David Konstan has stated, “masks represented a uniform expression throughout the drama.”¹⁶³ But the texts require masked characters to play numerous differing emotional states often in rapid succession as demonstrated by tracking the possible emotional responses of the Watchman in *Agamemnon* and we have seen how the brain’s normal neural cognitive response to the merest suggestion of a face will work hard to supply the missing visual information. Additionally, the ambiguous facial expressions we see on representations of Greek masks and their method of construction aided their visual fluidity as did the shadows cast by the sun and the peripheral landscape offered by the open-air setting. Furthermore, the Noh mask experiments clearly demonstrate that it is possible to signify emotional shifts by changing the position of the mask. Yet, in order to connect these *katas* (a term borrowed from the intricate system of Noh mask movements) to an organized narrative framework—a plot—the mask must operate in tandem with space, words, music and movement. In fact, these other elements that make up a performance are in a sense “conveyed” by the mask, which acted as the focal point of the entire theatrical experience.¹⁶⁴

Perhaps this is exactly what Aristotle had in mind in the *Poetics* where he cites *opsis* as the single “mode” of realizing tragic mimesis, one that encompasses the other five elements of speech (*lexis*) and song (*melopoiia*) as the “means employed” and narrative (*mythos*), character (*ethos*) and intention (*dianoia*) as the “object represented.”¹⁶⁵ According to Aristotle, *opsis* conveyed them all. Konstan has detailed how many have sought to create a catalogue of

¹⁶² Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 171-174, who comes up with some very odd “directorial” ideas about how Greek actors dealt with the expression of changing emotions in the text “from any incongruity that might be felt between the unchanging image of the mask and the momentary expression of emotion implied by the actor’s words.” His rather bizarre solutions include embraces that would hide the mask (and the voice, which he did not consider here) and actors constantly facing away from the spectators whenever something dramatic happened on stage such as the appearance of a god on the *mechane*.

¹⁶³ Konstan (2006), 271, n.41.

¹⁶⁴ Llewellyn-Jones (2005), 73-105 related the *katas* used in traditional Japanese drama with the *schemata* of Greek tragedy. However I fundamentally disagree with his notion that “the body of the masked actor has to overcompensate for the lack of facial expression lost beneath the mask.” (81). Rather, body movement worked in tandem with text and mask to help suggest facial emotions.

¹⁶⁵ Aristotle’s *Poetics* 1450a8-15. On this aspect of *opsis* in *Poetics* see Calame (2005), 106-107; Taplin (1977), 477-479; Halliwell (1998), 337-343; Bonanno (1997), 121-123.

basic human emotions including Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas and Darwin.¹⁶⁶ Ekman continued the Darwinian tradition of describing emotion in evolutionary terms and proposed 6 basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness and surprise (recently Ekman has expanded his list of basic emotions and added 11 more including some that are not communicated by the face).¹⁶⁷ Ekman has conducted experiments using his basic emotional states with the use of photographs and posits that these are universally recognized across cultures. Konstan disagrees and believes that in many respects the Greeks had a different set of emotional responses than we do and cautioned against translations of Greek emotive terms that fit too easily with modern concepts. It is notable that several of the demeanors listed by Socrates in *Memorabilia* (empathy, disgust, joy, sorrow, magnificence, dignity, dejection, servility, self-restraint, prudence, insolence, and vulgarity) seem more like the value judgments of outside observers than something felt personally. Perhaps this is a factor of the Greek people's culture of shame and honor where one's self-worth was placed in the eyes of others.¹⁶⁸ To explain this disparity Konstan cites the work of Russell, who follows a cognitive model that supports the notion that the nature of emotion is strongly conditioned by social environment. Russell challenges Ekman's findings by suggesting that humans read facial expressions from moving faces not fixed photographs and that interpretations of the face are affected by the context in which they are viewed.¹⁶⁹

We have already examined how the neural system of the brain responds to the visual stimuli offered by the face and works to provide information not visually apparent (for example the Mooney faces shown in fig. 21). The mask certainly exploits these responses but it does not operate in isolation. In order to communicate emotion effectively it needs a narrative context (what Aristotle termed *mythos*). This has been famously demonstrated by the 1917 film experiment of Russian director Lev Kuleshov (known as "The Kuleshov Effect"), which he used to demonstrate the effectiveness of film editing to create emotional contexts. The same

¹⁶⁶ Konstan (2006), 12-14.

¹⁶⁷ Ekman (1999); Ekman (2003); and Ekman and Friesen (2003).

¹⁶⁸ The oppositional shame culture/guilt culture dichotomy made famous by Dodds in 1951 in "The Greeks and The Irrational" is called into question by Cairns (1993), 27-47. See also Konstan (2006), 91-110. That a sense of shame is closely connected with being in the sight of others was discussed in Chapter One. In Pindar's *Pythian* 8.81-87 the young athletes fear standing in the sight of their countrymen if they return home as losers.

¹⁶⁹ Russell and Fernández Dols (2006), 295-320.

shot of the face of Actor Ivan Mozzhukhin in the heavy make-up of the silent film era is shown 3 times. In each shot that lasts around 3 seconds the same facial expression is seen: a man staring intently ahead and then swallowing. Interspersed between this repeated facial shot are 3 different short scenes. The first shows a bowl of soup and then cuts to the face of Mozzhukhin and he seems hungry. Then the film cuts away to a shot of a child in a coffin and when it returns to the actor, the same face now seems incredibly sad. The last scene is of a sexually desirable woman and when the film cuts back to the face it now appears lustful. The purpose of Kuleshov's experiment was to demonstrate the power of a visually depicted situation to dominate emotional response. The facial expression does not change physically but our different emotional responses to the 3 scenes affect the way in which we view the meaning of the facial features.

Recently researchers at University College London replicated the Kuleshov experiment using functional neuroimaging (fMRI) scanning on 14 subjects who viewed 130 facial images that were zoomed in and out on and juxtaposed with film clips in order to create a dynamic movement effect.¹⁷⁰ Fourteen supplementary images of humans, animals and objects were also used to provide valence to the experiment. The results showed that faces paired with emotional film clips elicited strong neural responses in various regions of the brain that differed depending on the type of emotion shown. In particular, differing responses in the amygdala (a key part of the brain's limbic system responsible for memory and emotional processing) suggested that it acts to tag affective value to faces. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that a network of brain regions is deployed in "the storage and coordination of contextual framing." The anterior temporal regions store contextual "frames," which are then compared to the information gathered by the superior temporal sulcus (involved in processing gaze direction and motion) and this stimuli is then tagged by the amygdala, which is in turn influenced by "top-down" signals from the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for executive functions. This study offered a neurobiological basis for contextual framing effects on social attributions and in so doing, provides a glimpse into how the human brain

¹⁷⁰ Mobbs (2006), 95-106. See also Halberstadt, Winkielman, Niedenthal and Dalle (2009), 1254-1261, where findings from electromyography (EMG) strongly suggested evidence of concept-driven changes in emotional perception highlighting the role of embodiment (the role that the body plays in shaping the mind) in representing and processing emotional information.

operates when watching a mask in a drama. The narrative of the plot offers such a contextual framing against which the mask is compared. If the mask is altered by the performer in conjunction with the schema of the body within this context then the mind works to read and even place an expression onto the mask.

Two experiments conducted as part of an acting workshop on the mask also highlight the brain's role in processing faces and can also demonstrate how the tragic mask functioned.¹⁷¹

The first is simple: a volunteer is secretly told to walk to a chair set in front of the other participants, to sit down and "do nothing." The other participants watch the sitter for around 5 minutes, then they are asked a series of questions: What is she thinking? Where might she be? Why is she there? How does she feel about this? The responses to these questions vary enormously and might consist of answers such as, she is incredibly pensive, she is waiting outside a doctor's office for the results of a test, she is very worried, or she is worried but thinking about her children, job, and so on. The same experiment is repeated with another volunteer who is also told in secret to perform the exact same exercise. The observing participants are asked the same questions again and now the responses are entirely different and a completely diverse scenario is imagined for the sitter.

The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate 2 things: First, it is impossible for a human to sit and do "nothing," as the simple act of being watched creates an activity that leads to contextualization on the part of the observers. Second, observers will interpret the same situation completely differently based on the facial and bodily signals they receive from the sitter. Third, each person will play doing "nothing" completely differently and it is their facial ambiguity that prompts the minds of the observers to create different scenarios. When the experiment is repeated with masks, the effect on the observer is even stronger, the mask being far more ambiguous than the human face. When the face of the person (who they may know or at least make judgments about) is replaced by the mask, the observers become immediately aware that they are looking at a *dramatis persona*. Then, the experiment works much faster as

¹⁷¹ Most recently at a workshop presentation on the mask I presented the Association of Theatre in Higher Education conference in Los Angeles, August 2010 with 23 participants (theatre instructors).

the mask immediately establishes “theatricality” setting up a boundary between sitter and observer and creating a “performance” the instant the mask is revealed.

The second experiment involves 3 stages. In the first a volunteer is asked to stand and create facial and body expressions of an emotion he has been secretly given; the observers are then asked to name the emotion. It is rare that everyone agrees as every “emotion” is seen and processed differently by each observer. Next, a second participant is introduced and asked to perform a secret action (“go and retrieve the money he owes you, you must get it back, your life depends on it”) while the other might secretly be told “you have never seen this person before in your life.” The ensuing “scene” is most entertaining but also fascinating in that when the observers are asked to describe the emotional state they saw in each participant they overwhelmingly tend to respond “anger” in one and “fear” in the other. It is as if the participants, in not consciously focusing on emotion but playing a scenario where these emotions will flourish, are more effective at conveying that emotion to the observers. Thus, it is the context of the emotion that is more readily processed by the observer than the staging of an emotional concept in isolation. This experiment concludes with an actor trained in mask work. The observers are asked to say an emotion for the mask to perform and the actor tries to create that emotion (this is almost a live action version of Socrates’ questions to the artists in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*). Only basic emotions work in this context, more complicated concepts such as “jealousy,” “envy,” “greed” and even “love” that may seem to be emotions tend to visually fail (the actor only moves and does not speak), whereas Ekman’s 6 basic emotions always seem to communicate well visually.¹⁷² But there is a caveat to this experiment: the observers, in naming the emotion they wish to see, have already created a context within which the mask and body performs, and although it is possible to stage the same basic emotions without priming from the observers, there will be a difference of opinion in what each gesture means. For example, “anger” can sometimes be read as “triumph” or “lust” (as with the Kuleshov Effect). What seems to alter the appearance of the mask is the

¹⁷² This experiment has been staged many times but always to North American or British observers. One might well wonder what might happen if Socrates’ list was attempted. I suggest that it would fail further supporting the theory that emotions are understood based on societal contextualizations and ordered in the brain via top-down processing.

incarnation of the emotion on the body of the actor and the contextual information provided by the word.¹⁷³

Taken together, the Kuleshov Effect, the results of the performance-based experiments and the neurobiological findings should lay to rest the notion that the Greek tragic mask displayed a fixed, neutral, idealized or unchanging expression. In fact, the mask allowed the tragic dramatist a far greater control over the presentation of the emotional content of his work by closely coordinating masked movement with music, song and spoken word and then allowing the ambiguity of the mask to provoke a highly personal response in the mind of each individual spectator. Their neural processing mechanisms would have been stimulated by the context of what was presented and then fired to create a deeply personal emotional image. In this way, the visual ambiguity of the mask greatly enhanced the presentation of tragedy. One might consider how effective scenes such as Clytemnestra's response to the news of her son's death in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* (691-699), or her appeal to Orestes to be spared in the same play (908-930), might have played in masks that elicited deeply personal and perhaps differing emotional responses from those watching. Likewise, the ambiguity of Ajax's famous speech in Sophocles' play of the same name (646-692) is further heightened when performed in an ambiguous mask. This is the kind of dynamic ambiguity the mask added to the performance of tragedy—an entire visual level of reception and interpretation that cannot be discerned only from the text. As we have seen, faces—even fixed ones—can seem to change as they oscillate between foveal and peripheral vision and the mind processes soft edges and blurred features filling in the facial information that is not provided. Thus, the ambiguous tragic mask was far more powerful than the real face of an actor as it constantly changed reflecting the emotional realities of each person sitting before its compelling gaze.

¹⁷³ Two masks are used in this experiment. One is the mask of "Aegisthus" from a masked production of *Agamemnon*; the other is a comedy mask of Mnesilochus from a masked production of *Thesmophoriasizae*. The bulbous and exaggerated features of the comedy mask does tend to produce a different movement form in the wearer who becomes lower to the ground, bends limbs and performs more jerky, quick movements. If worn with a padded stomach the movements seem "led" by that stomach with the mask responding to great comic effect. The tragic mask lends itself to centered, slow and deliberate movements. Any naturalistic movement seems to break the illusion of the mask and renders it comic. This also happens if the mask is touched by a human hand (a hand gesture to the face can be performed but held off the mask), or by the putting on or taking off of the mask in front of spectators. Gregory McCart (2007, 364) has also documented his results from working with masks in productions of Greek drama.

Whatever we might make of Aristotle's seemingly conflicted attitudes to *opsis* in *Poetics* he is surely correct in his assumption that the effectiveness of the visual in tragedy is the preserve of the mask-maker (1450b 20). However, where he must be called into question is his notion that the work of the mask and that of the poet were somehow separate (ἔτι δὲ κυριώτερα περὶ τὴν ἀπεργασίαν τῶν ὄψεων ἢ τοῦ σκευοποιοῦ τέχνη τῆς τῶν ποιητῶν ἐστίν). In fact, it was the mask that enabled the detailed cognitive engagement necessary for the effective performance of a narrative-based drama and in this respect its relationship to the spatial environment it operated in was essential. The open-air Athenian theatre was a symporeutic *theoric* space developed to visually link the Athenians and their guests to the civic monuments of Athens, the landscape of a wider Attica and the imaginary environment of aetiology and myth. Here, the mask created the focus that guided the spectators between the foveal and the peripheral, provided the visual means to denote a performance and most importantly produced the intimacy necessary to facilitate individual emotional responses.

What is also being proposed here is an appeal to scholars and practitioners to recognize the importance of the mask when considering ancient drama and that the texts we have were created with the mask in mind. It was not an afterthought to the creative process of playmaking, merely a means of disguise, an accoutrement, or just another piece of costume—the mask was actually the focus of the entire visual and emotional experience of ancient drama. In fact, it may not be too bold a statement to say that without the mask we might never have seen the birth of tragedy.

Epilogue

The Bronze Statue of Athena and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

In this study, I have sought to place the Athenian fifth-century theatre within the scopic regime in which it operated and explore how the major visual elements of performance came to shape ancient drama. We will miss this entire vital optical dimension if we envision tragedy and comedy operating in isolation from the topography, landscape, monuments and the prevailing visual performance forms that existed within the culture. Influenced by the work I have done on cognition, I chose to set out the preceding chapters following a “top-down” structure. Thus, Chapter One introduced concepts of sight and vision in Greek culture to provide a cultural context for the study as a whole. Chapter Two explored the influence of the visual aspects of collective movement (*symporeia*), its relationship to environment and how it influenced the form of subsequent drama and the space where it was presented. Chapter Three provided a thorough examination of that “theatre” space, positing that the Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus was established around the 530s BCE to house the newly instituted City Dionysia and what has come to be called the “Theatre of Dionysos” was in fact a temporary *theatron* and *skene* and a leveled playing area within the sanctuary. I also proposed that the relationship of the *theatron* to the environment it stood in is of paramount import and that the plays themselves reflect this. My final chapter dealt with masks and sought to change the way both classicists and theatre practitioners think about the Greek tragic mask in performance.

I have benefited from the incredibly exciting recent work coming from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology and in applying some of the relevant findings to the mask I hope I have demonstrated the incredible emotional range the tragic mask was capable of displaying. It is vital to place Greek drama within the performance context of the mask and I hope that I may have made some small additional contribution to our ability to consider ancient drama in performance and, in so doing, help to bring further illumination to the texts. Without the emotional focus the mask provided, narrative drama may never have developed

into the complex, detailed and often deeply affecting works that trace their origins back to the surviving plays of fifth century Athens.

Throughout this study I have focused on the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus - not only a great work of artistic achievement in its own right - but also our only complete surviving trilogy and a vitally important text for our understanding of the political and social atmosphere of mid fifth century Athens. It is a piece I have come to know well as a translator, director and producer.¹ The work stands as a preeminent example of how the visual environment that surrounded the spectators and the narrative of the play were unified to produce a piece of theatre that transcended the confines of the space it was staged in. In this respect I wish to conclude this study by focusing specifically on the end of the *Eumenides* and propose that when Aeschylus brings Orestes to the statue of Athena in the play he is making an immediate and overt reference to the brand-new bronze statue of Athena that has just been erected on the Acropolis and would have been standing behind the spectators. This was the first piece of new monumental building to take place on the Acropolis since the Persian destruction of 480/479 BCE and the erection of this massive statue was a significant and highly visible act that had a direct relationship to the form and content of the trilogy that Aeschylus staged beneath it.

First of all, what did the audience *see* in 458 BCE? Any visitor to Athens from Attica or abroad must have surely been struck by the destruction wrought by the invading Persians in 480 and 479 BCE upon the sacred buildings on the Acropolis. Apart from some clearing of debris and the shoring up of a retaining wall, the Acropolis had been largely left untouched despite the rapidity with which the Athenians had rebuilt their homes and civic buildings.² For nearly 20 years, the Acropolis was left as a ruin, a physical reminder of the ravages of the Persian destruction and a deep scar on the landscape of the city of Athens. With this in mind, Paul Cartledge imagines the spectators attending the production of Aeschylus' *Persians* in 472 BCE glancing backwards at the sight of the actual destruction and registering the "potent

¹ Meineck (1998a), *Agamemnon* – UCL student production, Bloomsbury Theatre 1987 (producer), *Agamemnon* – UCL student production, US tour 1989 (producer), *Agamemnon* -international tour and Bridge Lane Theatre, London 1991 (director/translator). *Oresteia* - student production, University of South Carolina 1997 (translator), *Oresteia* - Pearl Theatre, New York, 2000 (translator), *Agamemnon* - with Olympia Dukakis, John Jay Theatre, New York 2004 (co-director, translator).

² See Thompson (1981), 343-355.

political message.”³ Thus, Argyro Loukaki has written, “ruins are partly social constructions because they depend on social will for their perpetuation.”⁴ So, when the Parthenon was begun in the mid-fifth century it was deliberately situated to the south of the old ruined temple of Athena Polias, leaving the original footprint of the building undisturbed. Likewise, the Erechthion was located to the north, lining up with the old temple’s foundations, with the famous Caryatid porch looking out over the remains.

Ancient visitors to the Acropolis must have been struck at the sight of the vast empty space where the old temple once stood and people looking from below would have seen the column drums and fragments of the entablature from the unfinished Older Parthenon (begun in 489 BCE) set into the north wall and still visible today.⁵ By leaving the Acropolis in ruins, the Athenians created a visual memorial to the evacuation and destruction of Athens, a deeply traumatic event that affected every Athenian regardless of class or social status, a architectural plan that Gloria Ferrari has described as “a choreography of ruins.”⁶ There has been much debate as to why it took the Athenians so long to develop a comprehensive building program for the Acropolis. This may have been because of financial constraints, the distraction of having to rebuild homes and government structures, or the energy of the state being focused on external campaigns and building the long walls linking Athens with its harbor at Piraeus. However, though it was once regarded as a fabrication, the Oath of Plataea, which was reputedly sworn by the Greeks before the battle of Plataea in 479 BCE, has recently regained credibility as a possible reason for the delay in rebuilding the Acropolis and leaving it as a highly visible ruin. In particular, the final clause of the oath as reported by Diodorus:

I will not rebuild any temple that has been burnt and destroyed, but I will let them be, and leave them as a memorial of the sacrilege of the barbarian.⁷

³ See Cartledge (1997), 19.

⁴ See Loukaki (2008), 16.

⁵ See Gerding (2006), who has argued that the area was left clear to provide space for the Panathenaic procession.

⁶ See Ferrari (2002), 11-35.

⁷ Diodorus 11.29.3, translated by Meiggs (1972), 504.

The literary evidence for the Oath is late and the clause concerning the temples does not appear in the related epigraphic record from the fourth century.⁸ However, the archaeological evidence does seem to suggest that from 479 BCE to the mid-fifth century no major rebuilding of any Athenian cult site took place.⁹ Yet sometime between 460 and 455 BCE one of the most visible monuments in all of Athens was erected on the Acropolis—a colossal bronze statue of Athena sculpted by Phidias and standing 30-50 feet tall. Pausanias reports that the spear tip and helmet could be seen 30 miles away by sailors rounding Cape Sounion and heading into port and that the statue was financed by the spoils from Marathon.¹⁰

Demosthenes wrote that she was paid for by the Greeks in recognition of Athenian valor in the face of the Persians and was named “Athena Promachos”—implying a warlike stance with thrusting spear.¹¹ However, she seems to have been depicted standing with an upright spear and holding a shield at her leg, not in the more aggressive pose usually associated with the “Promachos” type.¹²

An inscription dating to 455-450 BCE lists the costs of the statue including the workforce, materials and wages for the public officials in charge.¹³ This act of public accountability is characteristic of a project undertaken by the state as an instrument of the democracy rather than a personal, aristocratic monument meant to glorify an individual or family. It has been estimated that the total cost was the substantial sum of 83 talents and that it took 9 years to cast and erect.¹⁴ Thus, the nature of this public inscription combined with the inference that that the erection of the statue may have been perceived by Sparta as an affront to the spirit of the Oath of Plataea seems to strongly indicate the work of a newly emboldened democracy keen to assert its civic and military pride.

⁸ Isocrates. IV. *Panegyricus* 156, Cicero. *De Rep.* III.15, Pausanias 10.35.2, Plutarch *Pericles* 17. For the epigraphic evidence see Krentz (2007), 731-742.

⁹ For discussion on the existence of an Oath of Plataea see Mark (1993), 98-104, and Rhodes and Osborne (2003), 440-448.

¹⁰ Pausanias 1.28.2

¹¹ Demosthenes *De Falsa Legatione* 272, and the scholiast on Demosthenes, *Against Androtion* 13 (597.56).

¹² On the evidence for the appearance of the bronze Athena see Davison (2009) 1 279; Hurwit (2004), 79-84; Pollitt (1996), 28-34; Lundgreen (1997), 190-197; and Mattusch (1988), 168-172.

¹³ IG I³ 435.

¹⁴ Dinsmoor (1921), 118-129. Hurwit (2004), 80-81 makes the suggestion that the statue may have been ordered by Kimon to commemorate his victory at the Eurymedon c 470-466.

The Bronze Athena stood across from the entrance to the Acropolis in front of the earliest extant remains, the ancient Mycenaean retaining wall. She was positioned on an axis with the old destroyed temple of Athena Polias and looked to the west—in the direction of the naval victory at Salamis. Even after the building of the Parthenon, Erechtheion and Temple of Athena Nike, the statue still dominated the Acropolis skyline and the Propylaea was built to line up with her so that the first sight encountered when entering the site was the colossal Athena.¹⁵ Furthermore, she would have been visible from all over the city of Athens, her burnished bronze shining brightly on sunny days. Perhaps Sophocles had her in mind when the chorus of Salaminian sailors in *Ajax* imagine themselves rounding Cape Sounion and hailing Athens (1219-1221). The Bronze Athena of Phidias was in every sense a true *agalma*—a brilliant adornment, aptly described by Jeffrey Hurwit as “an early classical Statue of Liberty” and dominated the Athenian skyline for perhaps 700 years, until she was taken to Constantinople, where she may have stood mounted on a pillar in the Forum of Constantine.¹⁶

Aeschylus’ staged his *Oresteia* in 458 BCE when the bronze Athena was either well under way and clearly visible or, quite possibly, newly completed. The domestic political ramifications of the *Oresteia*, with its inferences to the tension between the new democratic government and the Kimonian faction are by now, very well known.¹⁷ In addition, in the spring of 458 BCE, the Athenians were in conflict with Corinth, Aegina and Epidaurus, 3 of the most important Spartan allies, and had recently made an alliance of their own with Argos against Spartan aggression.¹⁸ For the Athenian democracy, the Bronze Athena was a symbol of a new defiant, pugnacious spirit and by erecting it they were knowingly creating a highly visual symbol of Athenian hegemony and power. If the Oath of Plataea had indeed been a real event binding Athens and Sparta, at least superficially, together then the erection of this statue may well have been observed as a very visible breach. In any event, just a few short months after the performance of the *Oresteia* 14,000 Athenians faced a Spartan army in direct conflict at the battle of Tanagra.¹⁹

¹⁵ For a possible reconstruction of the Bronze Athena see Hurwit (2004), 63, fig. 56.

¹⁶ Hurwit (1999), 151.

¹⁷ Podlecki (1966); Bowie (1993); Griffith (1995); Goldhill (2000b).

¹⁸ See Kennedy (2006), 35 -72.

¹⁹ See Kagan (1969), 84-95, and Samons (1999), 221-233.

In the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus conflates the symbolism of the Athenian past with the imagery of the new democratic present by placing one of the most sacred Athenian icons, the small ancient wooden idol (*bretas*) of Athena, in a dynamic visual relationship to the colossal brand-new statue standing on the Acropolis. At *Eumenides* 80, Apollo tells Orestes to “come to the city of Pallas and sit clasping her ancient image in your arms” (μολῶν δὲ Παλλάδος ποτὶ πτόλιν/ῖζου παλαιὸν ἄγκαθεν λαβὼν βρέτας). This was the ancient *xoanon* (crude wooden idol) or *bretas* (small statue) of Athena Polias (“of the city”), reported by Pausanias to have been of great age and to have fallen from the sky.²⁰ The *bretas* has been described by John Kroll as “a protective talisman of the city” and was reportedly taken to Troezen aboard a ship when the Athenians evacuated.²¹ Unfortunately, there is little consensus as to exactly what this statue actually looked like, although Tertullian writing around 197 CE described it as “a rough stock without form and the merest rudiment of a statue of unformed wood.”²² Other than that we know very little of its appearance though there is epigraphic evidence from late 370 BCE that lists ornaments that the idol wore including: a diadem, earrings, a neck band, five necklaces, a golden owl, a golden *aegis* with *gorgoneion* and a gold *phiale* (libation bowl) that she held in her hand.²³ In addition to these accoutrements, the Athena Polias was dressed in a highly ornamental saffron-colored *peplos* embroidered in purple with images of the mythic battle between the gods and giants that was delivered at the climax of the Panathenaic procession. It may well this *peplos* that is depicted at the culmination of the Parthenon Frieze.²⁴ The idol was housed in the Temple of Athena Polias, before it was evacuated in 480 BCE in advance of the Persian destruction and the knowledge that it was paraded at the Panathenaea festival and of representations of other *xoanon*-type idols suggests a statue of no more than a few feet in height.²⁵

²⁰ Pausanias 1.26.6.

²¹ Kroll (1982), 65. Plutarch *Themistokles* 10.

²² Tertullian *Ad nationes* 1.12.13. See also the supposed comments of Aeschylus cited by Porphyry (*On Abstinence* 2.18) on the virtues of archaic, crude idols relating to poetry. See Sommerstein (2002), 160.

²³ *IG II²* cited by Kroll (1982), 68 n. 18. For the various opinions on the appearance of Athena Polias see Hurwit (2004), 17; D. Steiner (2001), 91; M. Robertson (1996), 46-47; Donohue (1988), 143-144; Kroll (1982); and Herington (1955).

²⁴ See Hurwit (2004), 147, fig. 107.

²⁵ Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 98-100. There is an image of a small *bretas* on south metope 21 of the Acropolis and Hurwit has suggested that it could be a representation of Athena Polias. Hurwit (2004), 17 & fig. 19.

The term *bretas* occurs another 6 times in the course of the *Eumenides* making it clear that Aeschylus intended his spectators to imagine the statue of Athena Polias.²⁶ Yet, it is not known where the statue was housed after 479 BCE until the completion of the Erechtheion in 406 BCE. Gloria Ferrari has suggested that the charred and ruined *cella* of the old Temple of Athena Polias may have remained standing after the Persian destruction and been bolstered to receive the *bretas* on its return from Troezen or Salamis.²⁷ Wherever the *bretas* was housed the presence of the brand new and highly visible statue of the Bronze Athena at the gateway to the Acropolis would strongly suggest that Athena was now to be envisioned as maintaining a vigilant and defensive gaze over both shrine and city. Whereas the *bretas* placed out of public sight for much of the time, the Bronze Athena was on display as a sentinel for all to see all the time. This exact sentiment is reflected at *Eumenides* 920 where Athena is described as “the guard-post of the gods,/the protector of their altars, the delight (*agalma*) of the divinities of Greece.”²⁸ Here the age-old continuity of the ancient idol that had to be removed from the city in 480 BCE is contrasted with the immovable permanence of the new colossal bronze statue.

We cannot be certain if Aeschylus used a prop statue of Athena Polias in *Eumenides*, or simply placed his Orestes at the altar in the center of the *orchestra*.²⁹ However, he does produce Athena on stage at *Eu.* 397 and this representation clearly resembles the new bronze statue of Phidias. Here, Athena describes herself as having “rapid and unwearied foot” and “flapping the folds of my aegis” from the shores of Scamander in the Troas, where she says she has claimed new territories for the Greeks.³⁰ This is not the embodiment of the small sacred idol spirited to safety from the Persian invaders in 480 BCE, but a confident, martial Athena coming from battle and describing herself in vigorous motion. Deborah Steiner has shown how artists, poets and historians “blur the lines between the actions of gods and their representations” and fuse deity and cult image through a sense of their mobility. For example,

²⁶ Aeschylus *Eumenides*; 80; 242; 259; 409; 430; 446 and 1024.

²⁷ See Ferrari (2002), 11-35. For discussion on the existence of what has been called the *opisthodomos* see Hurwit (2005), 24-25; Hurwit (2004), 76-78; and Linders (2007), 777.

²⁸ See Aeschylus' *Persians* 808-817.

²⁹ Taplin (1977), 377; Sommerstein (1989), 123-124; Ewans (1995), 201; and Rehm (2002), 91, all envision a prop statue and Wiles (1997), 195-200, has pointed out the importance of statues in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, and *Seven Against Thebes*. Taking the tradition of the “hidden *xoanon*” referenced above into consideration, it is possible that no on-stage statue was depicted and the frequent textual references may indicate that it was not. See Meineck (1998a), 127.

³⁰ There were recent Athenian engagements at Abydos, Sestos and Byzantium. See Kennedy (2006), 35-72, and Sommerstein (2008), 404-405, n. 101.

Euripides has the idol of Artemis turn away and avert her eyes to avoid witnessing an impiety (*IT* 1165-67) and Herodotus relates how the idols of Damia and Auxesia fell to their knees rather than allow the Athenians to remove them from their sanctuary on Aegina (5.86.3).³¹ This amalgamation of inanimate statue with animate deity is reflected in *Eumenides* by Athena's sweeping, movement filled entrance coming immediately after the Furies have sung and danced their "binding song," an incantation that roots Orestes in place clutching the *bretas* and stands in marked contrast to the stress on the rapid mobility and freedom of movement of Athena when she enters.³² Additionally, Aeschylus emphasizes this fusion of statue and deity by developing the way in which Orestes addresses Athena; at 235-243 Orestes speaks to the *bretas* as if the idol was the goddess; then at 287-298 he calls to a far-off Athena hailing her to come to his aid and once Athena arrives he addresses her directly (443-469).

As for her physical appearance in the play, Alan Sommerstein has written, "it is likely that she (Athena) appears as the warrior goddess, in gleaming bronze armour" and, "the very brightness of her armour would make an effective contrast with the dark garments of the Erinyes."³³ The sight of the on-stage Athena would have strongly evoked the brand-new shining statue (*agalma*) of Athena standing over the theatre on the Acropolis. Armor of any kind is noticeably absent from the description of adornments worn by the *bretas* from 370 BCE.³⁴ The term *agalma* ("glorious adornment") is used extensively by Pausanias to describe the statues he encounters on his travels but is found only once in the *Iliad* (4.144) where it describes a gleaming, highly valuable cheek plate for a horse. It occurs 7 times in *The Odyssey* and is applied to descriptions of jewelry or offerings and at 8.509 it is used of the Trojan horse as a delight for the gods.³⁵ In the *Oresteia*, *agalma* occurs at moments when the value of something is being emphasized; for example, when Agamemnon is wrestling with the decision to sacrifice his daughter he calls Iphigenia "the *glory* of my house" (*Ag.* 208). Helen is described as resembling "a gentle *adornment* of wealth" (*Ag.* 740) and when Electra sees a

³¹ D. Steiner (2001), 157-168.

³² At *Eumenides* 297-8 Orestes appeals to Athena as "liberator" to come and free him from his troubles. After this the Furies sing their "binding song."

³³ Sommerstein (1989), 151.

³⁴ Kroll (1982), 71-72, make the point that a helmet may not have been listed as it might have not been considered "jewelry" and that Athena could still wear a diadem under a helmet tiled back on her head. See also Hurwit (2004), 17, who suggests that the *bretas* could have also been seated.

³⁵ *Odyssey*, 3.274; 3.438; 4.602; 8.509; 12.347; 18.300; 19.257.

lock of hair on her father's tomb she says it gives, “*glory* to this tomb and honor to my father” (LB 200). In the *Eumenides* Aeschylus draws a distinction between the dank and dark Furies and the brilliance of Athena particularly at 55-56, the first time in the *Oresteia* the term is used to describe statues of divinities and where the Pythia says that a place of sacred *agalmata* should not suffer the sight of the Furies (καὶ κόσμος οὔτε πρὸς θεῶν ἀγάλματα/φέρειν δίκαιος οὔτ’ ἐς ἀνθρώπων στέγας).

The term *agalma* is connected to the verb *agallo* meaning “to take delight in” or “to make glorious”; when applied to a statue it implies something that is clearly meant to be seen and admired as opposed to the *bretas* or *xoanon*, which existed within a tradition of mediated viewership in that they were displayed at key festive moments to invigorate the god's presence in the community and their concealment and display had significant meaning depending on the deity represented.³⁶ Like the theatrical mask, statues operated within an extramissive scopic regime in that they were both gazed upon but also gazed out. This notion of a statue of a deity actively watching was also encapsulated in the presence of the *xoanon* of Dionysos, which formed the primary visual focus of the procession at the City Dionysia and may well have also been placed in the *theatron* where it acted as a divine spectator.³⁷ The capacity for divine statues to possess the power of sight is reflected in the mythic tradition that statues averted their eyes at the sight of an impiety and that the often highly ornate inlaid eyes of bronze, and occasionally marble, statues held both positive and negative powers.³⁸ We see this in *Agamemnon* where the “deities who face the sun” are implored by the messenger to “let these eyes of yours be bright” (519-520) and Menelaus is portrayed longing for Helen, clutching at phantoms and hating beautiful statues “with empty eyes / devoid of desire” - ὀμμάτων δ’ ἐν ἀχηνίαις/ἔρρει πᾶς Ἀφροδίτα (418-419).³⁹

³⁶ Vernant (1991), 151-9. Faraone (1992), 138-139. D. Steiner (2001) 106-109.

³⁷ See Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 60, and Wiles (1997), 19.

³⁸ See D. Steiner (2001), 173-181, and Frontisi-Ducroux (1995).

³⁹ The question is are these Menelaus' eyes or the eyes of the statues and are these statues carved to resemble Helen? D. Steiner (1995), 180, suggests that the ambiguity of the language is deliberate and this may be another example of the reciprocal gaze “to establish a dense network of relations between Helen, Menelaus and the statues.” D. Steiner has also collected several different interpretations of this difficult passage (179, n.26).

Athena herself was often associated with the power of sight and she is variously described as *glaukopis* “silver-eyed” or “owl-eyed,” *oxhuderkês* “sharp-eyed” and *ophthalmitis* “eye-goddess.” She wears the petrifying apotropaic *prosopon* of Medusa on her Aegis and possesses the power to delude the sight of mortals as she does do effectively in Sophocles’ *Ajax* (1-133). Yet, she is also depicted as looking kindly upon what seems hateful as at *Eumenides* 406-407 where she immediately sees the Furies as “new visitors” and says they “amaze” her eyes. At the start of *Eumenides* the Pythia said that their very appearance (*kosmos*) was not fit to bring before statue of the gods or under the roofs of men and that she has never before seen such a sight (55-57). In contrast, when the Furies eventually accept Athena’s offer to become the “Kindly Ones” and reside in Athens, she looks on their “fearsome faces” and sees “great benefit coming to these citizens” (990-991).

Athena’s kind gaze is reciprocated in the countenance of the Furies who offer “kindly powers” in return for being “kindly given great honour” (992-993) and at the end of the *Oresteia*, Athena offers to escort the Furies, visually accentuated in crimson robes and under the full public gaze, in procession to their new home in the “eye of the whole land of Theseus” (1025-1026), namely, the Acropolis, still in ruins, apart from the brand-new Bronze Athena. The Furies are encouraged to offer the Athenians the fruits of the earth and plentiful flocks (907) that will “give greater fertility to those who are pious” and “cherish the race to which these righteous men belong” (909-910). They reply that they foresee “that the bright light of the sun may cause blessings beneficial to her life to burst forth in profusion from the earth” (923-925). These are apt pledges for a people who have been struggling to rebuild their city and help to further reinforce the *Oresteia*’s status as a work that advocates political, social and urban renewal. As the chorus of Athenians rejoices at their new blessings “under the wings of Pallas” (1001), the spectators seated in the *theatron* would only need turn their heads and look up, or remember the image of the new statue of Athena towering over the Sacred Way as they had paraded the statue of Dionysos a few days before, to appreciate the full significance of those words.

As well as creating a new aetiology for the Areopagus council, the *Oresteia* might also be understood as a “foundational production” that not only actively linked its themes to the current socio-political situation but also orientated its content to the visual presence of a city at a key moment of civic renewal. Perhaps then, even more than the Parthenon, the production of the *Oresteia* under the newly completed Bronze Athena marked the moment when Athens began to both materially and socially *rebuild*.⁴⁰

The connections I have set out above are part of a process that I term “visual dramaturgy”—a method of connecting Athenian visual culture with the texts of the plays to gain a greater understanding of how the plays functioned in performance. The aim of this work has been to place the visual elements of Greek drama within its performative and cultural context to emphasize the importance of *opsis*. “Spectacle” has become a dirty word in the theatre, ever since Aristotle supposedly placed *opsis* at the bottom of his list of the elements that create tragic *mimesis* and described it as ἀτεχνότατον (*Poetics* 1450b16-20). This negative attitude to the visual has stubbornly prevailed—Malcolm Heath translated this as “very inartistic” and Richard Janko as “very artless,”⁴¹ yet the *bretas* of Athena Polias was a simple, basic object and she represented the very divine soul of the Athenians as they evacuated their city and let it fall to the Persians.

Elsewhere in *Poetics* Aristotle names *opsis* as the mode that is the “manner” of realizing tragic *mimesis* (1450a10-15), the way in which it is organized/displayed (*kosmos*) and a necessary part of tragedy, πρῶτον μὲν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἂν εἴη τι μῦθον τραγῳδίας ὁ τῆς ὀψεως κόσμος (1449b31-33). His later commentators may have done him a disservice to translate and interpret *opsis* merely as “spectacle”—a term used to describe a low form of mass entertainment that aims to merely titillate and not engage on any kind of deep emotional and

⁴⁰What became of the Bronze Athena? Niketas Choniates wrote of her (if it was her) in 1204 and told how she had been installed in the Forum of Constantine after being removed from Athens. In 1203 many people, fearing the oncoming Crusaders, thought that the “pagan” deity’s outstretched hand (that formerly held an owl or Nike) was beckoning to the Western armies to come and destroy their city. Convinced of the statue’s maleficence an angry mob set upon her, tore her to the ground and the Bronze Athena of Pheidias was completely destroyed. Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. van Dieten (1971), 558-559. See also Jenkins (1947), 31-33, and Jenkins (1951), 72-74.

⁴¹ Heath (1996), Janko (1987).

personal level.⁴² Aristotle never saw the original productions of any fifth-century plays and like us, he could only engage with those works through reading the text or watching revivals that were, by the end of second half of the fourth century, being staged in a very different environment and performance style. In this sense, he was blind to the *opsis* of the original production.

A large part of this study of the visual aspects of ancient drama has focused on the emotional power of the mask and its essential role in conveying emotion, especially as it relates to human cognitive abilities concerning face recognition and nonverbal interpersonal communication. Neurologist Oliver Sacks has stated “It is with our faces that we face the world, from the moment of birth to the moment of death.”⁴³ Yet, Sacks himself suffers from a condition called prosopagnosia (“face-blindness”), an impairment of the ability to recognize the human face which denies a crucial visual mechanism of social interaction. Sacks has said of his own prosopagnosia that “what is variously called my ‘shyness,’ my ‘reclusiveness,’ my ‘social ineptitude,’ my ‘eccentricity,’ even my ‘Asperger’s Syndrome,’ is a consequence and a misinterpretation of my difficulty recognizing faces.”⁴⁴ Similarly, if we merely *read* ancient Greek plays without attempting to comprehend their inherent visuality we may be unwittingly afflicting ourselves with a kind of cultural “face-blindness” to the crucial dramatic dimension of *opsis*.

⁴² Janko (1987), 8, has “the ornament of spectacle” for 1449b32. See also Halliwell (1998), 337-343; Calame (2005), 106-107; Taplin (1977), 477-479.

⁴³ Sacks (2010), 82.

⁴⁴ Sacks (2010), 85.

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