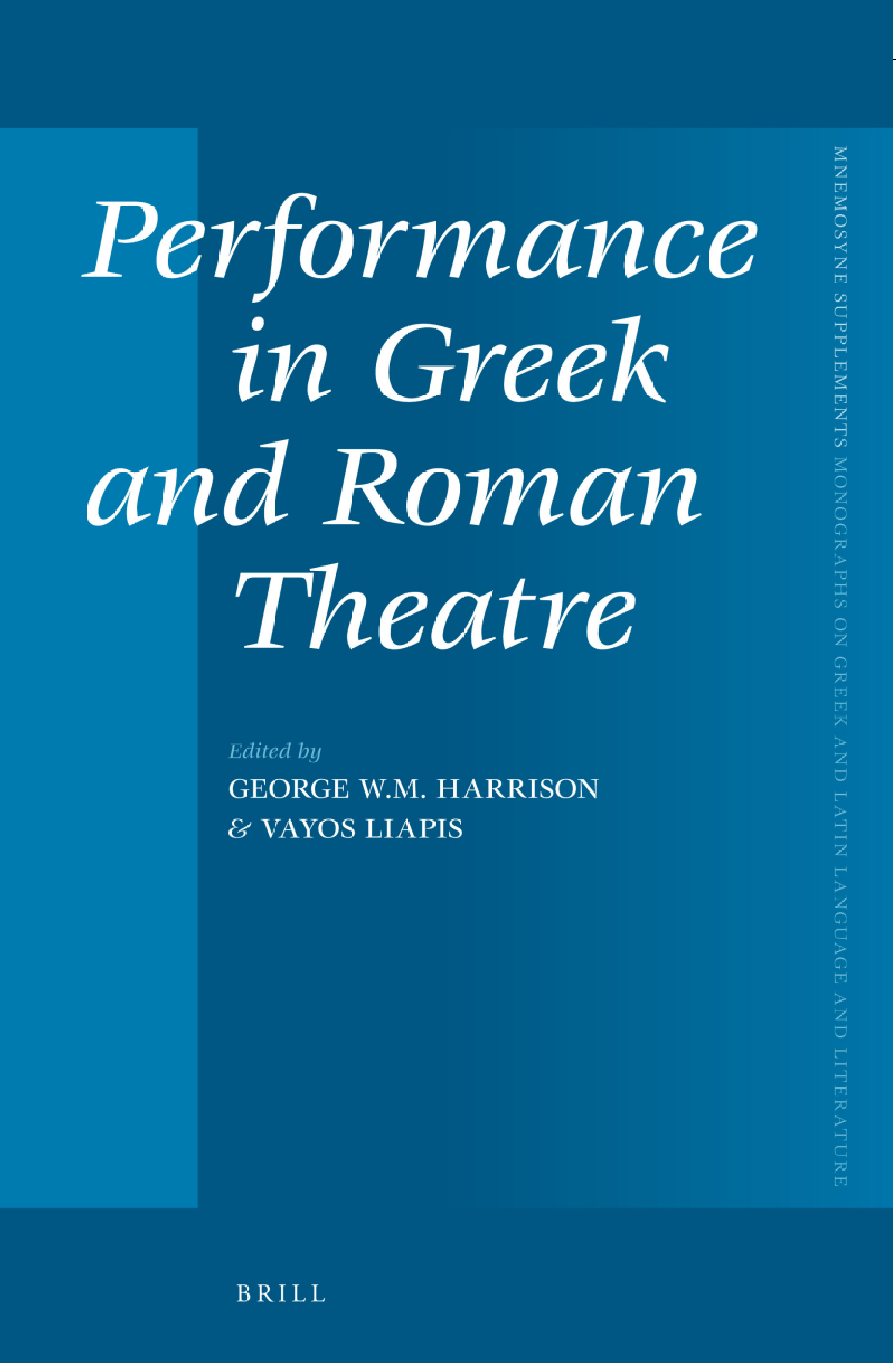

Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre

Edited by
GEORGE W.M. HARRISON
& VAYOS LIAPIS

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ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations follow *L'Année Philologique*, to which are added:

ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin and New York 1972–)
ARV^{2}	Beazley, *Attic Red-figure Vase Painters*, Oxford 1963.
BAD	*Beazley Archive Database*, http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk.pottery.
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, vols. 1–8. Zurich 1981–1997.
LSJ	H.G. Liddell, R. Scott and H.S. Jones (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford 1940^{9}) with Revised Supplement by P.G.W. Glare and A.A. Thompson (Oxford 1996).
OLD	Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford 1982.
PG	Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus, series Graeca*.
PL	Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus, series Latina*.

INTRODUCTION

MAKING SENSE OF ANCIENT PERFORMANCE

Vayos Liapis, Costas Panayotakis, and George W.M. Harrison[1]

It is notoriously difficult to define "performance", and it is with some hesitation that the decision was made to adopt the term in this volume's title. Indeed, it has been argued that, far from being susceptible of a satisfactory definition, performance is an intrinsically contested concept: continuing debate and constructive disagreement are inherent in its very nature, thereby necessitating the use of different and often competing conceptual frameworks.[2] For the purposes of this volume, "performance" is to be understood as including all non-verbal means used to establish or promote theatrical representation and the concomitant production of meaning. As such, "performance" refers not only to acting or stage business, but also to what Aristotle broadly described as *opsis* (ὄψις),[3] namely all non-verbal constituents of ancient theatre: these include (but are not limited to) masks, costumes, props, scenography, song and music, theatrical space and the use made of it, and physical surroundings (not just the performance spaces themselves but also such features of the surrounding topography as could be meaningfully exploited by the playwrights). A number of additional elements also come under this category: gesture, stage-directions (explicit or implicit in the script), attribution of speaking parts, rehearsals—and even modern or contemporary attitudes and approaches to the staging of Greek and Roman theatre.

For a long time, Aristotle's presumed dismissal of *opsis* in his *Poetics* made it all too easy for text-centred scholarship to overlook the physical dimensions that bring the words to life and condition audience reception of the spectacle. This view, however, is forcefully contested by G.M. Sifakis in this volume, in a paper that follows in the wake of his earlier publications;[4] a similar view is taken by Konstan in his own chapter in this volume. Moreover, thanks to thorough, original and often ground-breaking scholarly research during the last five decades,[5] scholars have begun aggressively to expand their interpretative horizons to explore the impact of the performative aspect on the ways in which plays are constructed and appreciated. More recently, classicists have turned to theoretical issues related to performance (e.g. performance analysis, or semiotics of performance). A prime example of this kind of approach is Revermann (2006a), an erudite and theoretically sophisticated study of Aristophanic dramaturgy (and often of Greek drama in general), which seeks to assign configurations and taxonomies of meaning to specific theatrical codes and practices, as far as these can be reconstructed from the dramatic scripts or from material evidence.

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[1] Section I of the Introduction was written by Vayos Liapis; section III by Vayos Liapis and George W.M. Harrison; the editors invited Costas Panayotakis to contribute section II of the Introduction, and are extremely grateful for his participation.

[2] For performance as an "essentially contested concept" see Strine, Long and Hopkins (1990) 183; cf. Carlson (2004) 1. The latter also offers throughout his book a broad overview of recent manifestations and categorizations of performance in both theory and practice.

[3] For a discussion of Aristotle's use of ὄψις see Sifakis, this volume.

Playwrights, directors and actors know that re-animating the theatrical text for performance is a fascinating experience fraught with creative pitfalls and possibilities. Scholars who set themselves the difficult task of reconstructing ancient performances surely experience the same frustration and exhilaration. They additionally must face the further challenge of piecing together evidence for performance that is all too often fragmentary, unclear, ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory, even though it sometimes allows precious glimpses into attitudes to the classical repertoire. This volume is devoted to using historical and archaeological, as well as textual, insights to reconstruct as closely as possible the conditions of ancient performance. It also invites reflection on the methodological problems of reconstructing the original physical conditions of the performance of ancient plays. Moreover, it addresses issues of performance history, both in antiquity and in modern times.

I. *Ancient Greek Theatre and Performance Criticism*

Performance Space and Its Uses

Emphasis on the performative aspects of ancient (predominantly Greek) theatre was a development of the 1960s, pioneered by (rather appropriately) one Italian and one Greek scholar. Russo 1962—of which Russo 1994 is a revised and expanded English version—was the first to urge, in a comprehensive study, a performance-oriented approach of Greek drama, in particular of Aristophanes. Although not entirely immune to anachronism, Russo earnestly endeavoured to move away from earlier a-historical approaches to ancient performance towards more sophisticated readings, which sought to take proper account of the historical context and the material conditions of Aristophanic performance. Despite a few idiosyncratic views,[6] Russo had a sharp eye for the mechanics of ancient performance, and a keen sense of the complexities involved in the transition from script to performance.

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[4] Sifakis (2001), esp. 10–11, and (2002), the latter reprinted in translation in Sifakis (2007) 117–146; cf. also idem (2004) and (2009).

[5] Cf. in particular Arnott (1962); Hourmouziades (1965), Taplin (1977b); Wiles (1997) and (2007); also, the contributions in Goldhill and Osborne (1999) and in Easterling and Hall (2002).

A few years later, Hourmouziades (1965) focused on the antithesis between what is visible at the level of production in Euripidean theatre and what is left to the audience's visual imagination to construct. His sensitive suggestions on a variety of issues, though immediately relevant to Euripidean tragedy, often have larger implications for such questions as the function of the *skēnē*-building, the sparseness of the stage décor, the existence or not of a low stage, the use of the *ekkyklēma*, etc. In many respects, Hourmouziades' book shares a number of assumptions with Arnott (1962), and the two scholars seem to have reached similar conclusions regarding, e.g., the notion that the stage action took place before an essentially unchangeable background, or that fifth-century actors performed on a slightly elevated stage. Furthermore, Arnott was a great believer in the power of the word, which in his view could transform a sparse and neutral scenery into whatever the action of the play required, without the playwright having to resort to illusionism.

The following decade saw the publication of Oliver Taplin's epoch-making *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (1977), which redefined the categories through which Greek tragedy had usually been viewed.[7] Among many other things, Taplin argued that the traditional structural divisions (episode, stasimon etc.), although purportedly going back to Aristotle (*Poetics* 1452b17–27), prove problematic when applied to fifth-century tragedy—to say nothing of the fact that the relevant chapter of the *Poetics* may well be an interpolation.[8] For Taplin, it is the exits and entrances of actors around "act"-dividing choral songs that really function as structuring devices. Taplin's analysis of the structural divisions of tragedy has been challenged by Poe (1992) and (1993), but the blow it has dealt the "Aristotelian" categorization is hard to ignore. Taplin also argued that the *skēnē*-building and its central door first became significant theatrical constituents in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, though this particular thesis did not meet with universal approval.[9] Another important thesis proposed in Taplin's book was that any significant stage action can and must be indicated in or deduced from the script; in other words, no stage business is to be assumed unless there is implicit or explicit textual evidence for it. As a result, the "extravagant spectacle and crowds of supernumeraries"[10] sometimes imagined into the production by earlier scholars no longer have a place in the serious analysis of Greek tragic theatre. All in all, Taplin's book urged (and largely achieved) a permanent shift from the largely philological approaches to Greek tragedy that were characteristic of earlier scholarship to a much more nuanced and inclusive type of analysis focusing on the plays as works meant for and perceived through performance. Aristotle's timeless advice, to the effect that playwrights in composing their works ought never to lose sight of the stage business—"setting [the play's action] as far as possible before [their] eyes ... as if they were themselves present [at the action]" (*Poetics* 1455a24–25)—remains indispensable also for critics of Greek tragedy.[11]

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[6] Such as the highly contestable idea that there was a special "Lenaean" theatre for plays presented at the Lenaea festival; see the criticisms offered by Segal (1965).

[7] Some of Taplin's important conclusions had already been set forth in Taplin (1971) and (1972).

[8] Taplin (1977b) 49–60, 470–476.

At about the same time (and the chronological coincidence was no doubt symptomatic of a paradigm shift in the study of Greek drama), there appeared a number of publications focusing on the type of problems Taplin (1977b) was raising. For example, Hamilton (1978) attempted a taxonomy and interpretation of the various ways in which entering characters in Greek tragedy are announced, or not announced. In an ambitious study, Mastronarde (1979) explored instances in which the expected continuity between speech (or rather speech acts) and consequent response seems to be disrupted, as when questions seem to be ignored, or orders to remain unexecuted.[12] The basic question Mastronarde asked is essentially the same as the one underlying Taplin's almost contemporaneous book: "can we ever believe that a truly significant gesture or movement took place which is not verbally marked in our texts?"[13] Although focusing mainly on formal conventions of rhetoric, especially dialogue and rhetorical questions, where he usefully applied concepts from linguistics, Mastronarde duly took account of those aspects of performance, such as exits and entrances or the physical arrangement of actors on stage, that affect or determine the characters' awareness of their surroundings or of other characters, or the simple "logical progression in the give-and-take of dialogue".[14] A few years later, Bain (1981) investigated one particular aspect of the "grammar of dramatic technique"[15] explored by Mastronarde, namely instances in which orders are given by superiors to subordinate *personae mutae*, and argued for the assumption that such orders were immediately executed, even though this may not always be apparent from the script.

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[9] Cf. e.g. Bain (1979a) 172.

[10] Quotation from Diggle (1979) 207.

[11] Taplin's interpretations of Greek tragedy *qua* stage action have also been laid out in more accessible format (and with many new insights) in Taplin (1978); cf. also Taplin (1983) and (1987a) for more specific applications of his general approach.

[12] A digital version of this important work is freely available online since 2008: see http://escholarship.org/uc/item/21k0q422. For a thoughtful review and critique see Rabinowitz (1982).

A number of studies came in Taplin's wake. Seale (1982) attempted to link aspects of staging and production with dominant visual patterns in Sophocles' plays, especially insofar as a play's *opsis* may sometimes reflect, on the visual level, disparities in knowledge that are essential to its thematic concerns. Halleran (1985) focused on exits, entrances and the concomitant announcements (or lack thereof) in Euripides. His discussion includes (pp. 34–40) a useful and interesting section on "surprise entrances", i.e. entrances that ought to be announced (because occurring not directly after strophic songs) but are not. He also explored connections and parallelisms (including visual ones) between lyric songs and the surrounding entrances or exits of actors. Finally, Frost (1988) offered a survey of exits and entrances in Menander, an analysis of their management and motivation, as well as a brief discussion of some general conventions.

Parallel to these studies, which largely followed Taplin's methodologies, there developed, towards the late 1980s, a critical discourse problematizing, from different viewpoints, some of Taplin's underlying or explicit tenets. Thus, while principally attacking Goldhill (1986) for privileging the (theatrical) text over performance, Wiles (1987) included remarks critical of Taplin too, e.g., by criticizing his lack of interest in the intertextuality of Greek drama or in the specific historical or cultural context in which Greek drama was produced. Nonetheless, Wiles affirmed the essential value of Taplin's approach in clarifying "scenic devices used by the dramatist, building blocks no less basic than linguistic devices such as metre and metaphor".[16] In his response, Goldhill (1989) argued that performance criticism, for all its undeniable merit, is quite inadequate as a means of understanding ancient theatre, unless it is firmly anchored in an awareness of the cultural parameters—the symbolisms, the mentalities, the assumptions, the ideologies—that provided a context for and qualified the experience of ancient performance. To explore dramatic technique, Goldhill insisted, is to engage with large issues of interpretation; there can be no such thing as an interpretation-free or culturally unbiased approach to performance. Moreover, Goldhill postulated, there is no real divide between text and performance: from a post-structuralist point of view, performance *is* a text, a set of semiotic and narrative elements whose meanings are constructed by an expectant audience sharing specific communication codes and conventions.

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[13] Mastronarde (1979) 2.

[14] Quotation from Mastronarde (1979) 3.

[15] The term was coined by Fraenkel (1950) ii.305: "for Greek tragedy there exists also something like a grammar of dramatic technique."

Performance and Its Agents: Actors, Masks, Chorus

Since tragedies and, with some exceptions, comedies were performed by up to three actors (though all of Aeschylus' extant plays except the *Oresteia* only require two), producers inevitably resorted to "doubling", whereby actors were required to perform more than one speaking part in any given play. In a relatively recent dissertation, A.R. Cohen (1999) discussed the possible ways in which the three major Greek tragedians exploited "doubling" for special effect—for instance, by capitalizing on the audience's being able to identify actors playing different roles, especially by recognizing their voices. That actors' voices were recognizable, and could be put to dramatic effect, had already been argued by Pavlovskis (1977), although as pointed out by N.W. Slater (1991) 201 n. 9 Pavlovskis had actually been preceded by Hermann (1840) 32–35. To take but one striking example, in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* the same actor played the roles of Odysseus, the False Merchant, and Heracles. An audience attuned to actors' voices would have perceived the appropriateness of having both Odysseus and his instrument, the "Merchant", played by the same actor; they would also have felt the poignant irony of the same actor playing Heracles, who (though in a different way from Odysseus) furthers the accomplishment of Philoctetes' destiny against the hero's own original wishes.

The precise mechanics of the three-actor rule have been the object of some debate. A central question here is whether three actors represent an absolute maximum in all surviving tragedies, or whether there are possible exceptions. To take a much-cited example, in *Oedipus at Colonus* envisaging a fourth actor would obviate the need to role-split by assigning the role of Theseus to all three actors in turn.[17] In the fourth-century *Rhesus*, is it meaningful to have the part of Alexander played by a fourth actor, or is the actor playing Odysseus to perform a lightning-quick change of costume (see further Liapis, this volume)? And what about Aristophanic comedy? Is some laxity acceptable there, so that a maximum of four actors may be employed, as MacDowell (1994) argued? Or can most Aristophanic comedies (with the exception of *Lysistrata*) be performed by only three actors, on the assumption that these actors were able and willing to perform demanding tasks, such as ventriloquism or lightning changes of costume and mask, as Marshall (1997) maintains? The problem is addressed once again by Marshall in this volume, with *Birds* as a case study and with interesting speculation on the possible theatrical effects achieved by Aristophanes in that play.

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[16] Quotation from Wiles (1987) 143. For another attack on Goldhill, and on deconstruction, from the point of view of speech-act theory see Clark and Csapo (1991).

Considerable work remains to be done in this field. To establish that the three-actor rule obtained in all or in most cases, and to describe its mechanics is not sufficient. There are central questions that need to be addressed with regard to the operation of this rule, some of which have been admirably formulated by N.W. Slater (1991) 197–198. For instance, how did such a “rule” (assuming it was one) arise? Was it out of financial considerations (fewer actors meant less pressing demands on the city’s finances)? In this case, why were generous *khorēgoi* not allowed, if they so wished, to foot the bill for the occasional fourth actor? Alternatively, it is sometimes assumed that the three-actor rule was meant to ensure that all playwrights entered the contest on an equal footing. In that case, however, it would be hard to explain either the apparent disparity between the three-actor limit obtaining for tragedy and the four-actor limit for comedy, or the seemingly crushing demands a rigid three-actor rule would place on actors, especially in terms of ultra-rapid changes of costume and mask, which would unreasonably increase the likelihood of accident or error. Another possibility, suggested by N.W. Slater (*l.c.*), is that the existence of an export market for the theatre may have exerted a pressure on poets to write plays for a uniform production standard—although one might expect that there were considerable local differences in terms of funds or trained actors available, which would have arguably made the application of a “uniform production standard” a non-starter.

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[17] In favour of role-splitting in Greek tragedy see e.g. Sifakis (1995) 19–21; in the *Coloneus*: Pickard-Cambridge (1968) 142–144; McCart (2007) 255–257.

All in all, it seems we are still a long way from explaining the circumstances that may have necessitated the three-actor "rule". One way to go about it, it seems, is to consider whether the presumed rule has more to do with performance effectiveness than with competition regulations or logistics. In the large space of the Theatre of Dionysus, one might argue, it would have been especially difficult to convey to the audience a clear sense of who was speaking at what time, especially given the additional restrictions imposed by the mask. Admittedly, gesture and body language would have been crucial in helping the audience identify which actor was speaking at any given moment. Still, it is surely no accident that even when three persons are onstage, there is scarcely ever a genuine three-way dialogue: on the contrary, dialogue is conducted between pairs of speakers (A and B, then A and C, and so on). One imagines that it would not always be easy for spectators, especially those sitting in the upper rows, to make out who was talking to whom on stage, even when only three actors were present. If this is a valid point, then it would surely have been pointless to increase production costs by bringing more than three actors on the stage simultaneously.

Masks, especially those of Greek New Comedy and Roman Comedy, have rightly been interpreted as semiotic agents, conveying sets of signs that are part of a wider process of theatrical signification.[18] In a series of influential papers,[19] W.T. MacCary argued that certain types of New Comedy masks were assigned to particular characters, thereby conveying essential information about their identity and role, their attributes and typical modes of behaviour. Thus, New Comedy's highly typified masks made characters both recognizable and predictable. Responding to MacCary's analysis, Brown (1987) argued, on the contrary, that, at least in the case of Menander, masks conveyed only such basic information as age, sex and status.[20] This would no doubt have made some stock characters immediately recognizable; however, personality traits or behavioural patterns would have been established in the course of the play, by the words and actions assigned to each particular character. To date, the fullest treatment of the New Comedy mask as "the privileged 'master sign' of New Comedy's signification system in performance" is Wiles (1991).[21] Using a wealth of comparative material spanning several cultures and ages, as well as a spectrum of theoretical insights (mainly from structuralism), Wiles explores the ways in which masks crucially contribute to a nexus of "semiotized" information, organized in sign-systems.[22]

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[18] For a refreshingly introductory essay on masks in the ancient theatre see Marshall (1999), who also puts forth some challenging propositions regarding the function of the ancient theatre mask (e.g. that it was simple and unindividuated ["minimalistic"], or that its effect was not an alienating one).

[19] MacCary (1969), (1970), (1971) and (1972).

[20] See also, on this point, Marshall (1999) 190–191 for the six basic mask types (Old Man, Mature Man, Young Man; Old Woman, Mature Woman, Young Woman). Marshall denies that status or rank was conveyed by the mask, and argues that "above all else, clear visual communication over distance seems to be the principal benefit of fifth-century mask-wearing" (191).

For modern audiences, the mask can be an alienating, even disturbing device, but Wiles (2007), in a work hailed as "one of the most important books on Greek drama to appear in the last twenty years",[23] has argued that masks in Greek drama were sacred objects, literally effecting the transformation of their wearers into the mythical persons enacted onstage. For Wiles, Greek drama was primarily a religious experience, and the mask was instrumental in instantiating the presence of gods and heroes in the context of Dionysiac drama; one senses here the influence of Schechner's (1988) emphasis on the affinities between performance and ritual as effective actions. Wiles' book also covers a very large range of mask-related topics, from the manufacturing of masks in antiquity to modern theatre practitioners' use of and experimentation with masks,[24] and provides valuable insights into the implications of the mask for the performers' use both of their bodies and of their voices.

The chorus is at once the most emblematic part of Greek drama and the element that causes the greatest perplexity to modern theatre practitioners staging Greek plays.[25] This is at least partly due to the chorus being regarded, implicitly or not, as somehow distinct from the stage action, no doubt owing to what is perceived as the chorus' spatial separation from the actors. However, this is an anachronistic misconception prompted by modern bourgeois notions of the theatre as a segregated or "framed" activity, in which the exclusive focus of attention is the proscenium-arch stage, typically spotlighted as opposed to the darkened auditorium which causes the audience literally to fade out.[26] By contrast, the open-air ancient theatre is aggressively inclusive, as it forces the spectators to *participate* in the spectacle rather than merely to view the stage action as if it were an isolated or "framed" activity.[27] This is achieved not least by the (arguably) circular shape of the orchestra, which enabled "a democratic Athenian community" to gather "in a circle in order to contemplate itself in relation to the fictive world of the play".[28] This heightened sense of collective identity was undoubtedly enhanced even further by the audience's awareness that the event was financed, organized, and enacted by their fellow-citizens; indeed, the chorus consisted of a not-inconsiderable number of Athenians, given that each year, in just the City Dionysia, some 1160 citizens must have participated in tragic, comic, and dithyrambic choruses. As a result, in ancient theatre there was no such thing as the quasi-proverbial "fourth wall", the notional boundary separating the fictive world enacted onstage from the everyday world of the audience. By occupying positions in the tiered, semi-circular auditorium, which could be perceived as an extension or projection of the circular orchestra, citizen spectators integrated themselves into the citizen chorus, as well as merging with their fellow spectators, who were in full view of each other. And as the orchestra was, at most, only slightly lower by comparison to the mildly elevated stage, the border separating the citizen chorus from the actors was blurred. The audience was encouraged to contemplate itself in relation to the fictive world of the play. Play and audience became mutually permeable, spilling over into each other.

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[21] Quotation from Hall (1997b) 156.

[22] For a definition of semiotization see Revermann (2006a) 50: "Semiotization […] is the term used in theatre semiotics to describe the fundamentally artificial nature of theatrical communication between manipulators in the world of the play and an audience willing and expecting to collaborate." The main consequence of this semiotic collusion between stage agents and audience is that, from "the viewpoint of the theatre audience, everything on stage, 'improvisation' included, is construed as happening for a reason, the product of careful manipulation and engineering on part of the actors, the director, or anyone else involved in the theatrical event." On semiotization see further Elam (2002) 7–9.

[23] Ewans 2008.

[24] On this last point see also Wiles (2004). For a modern practitioner's viewpoint on ancient theatre masks see McCart (2007).

[25] See e.g. Goldhill (2007) 45; Ley (2007a) 114.

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[26] Cf. Revermann (2006a) 35. See also Meineck, this volume.

[27] See further Wiles (1997) 52.

[28] Quotation from Wiles (n. 27). On the controversy over the shape of the orchestra in the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens (circular vs. rectilinear) see Scullion (1994), esp. 38–41 and Wiles (1997) 44–52, both making an eloquent case in favour of a circular orchestra; see however Csapo (2007) 99, 106 and Meineck, this volume, for counter-arguments in favour of a rectilinear shape (both of them with further important bibliography). Whatever the truth may be, Wiles' (1997) 49–50 use of Andocides, *On the Mysteries* 38 as evidence for a circular orchestra is misguided. Andocides' report that the conspirators of 415 BC stood in the orchestra of the Dionysiac theatre κύκλῳ ἀνὰ πέντε καὶ δέκα ἄνδρας does not mean that they arranged themselves "in a perceptible circle" dictated by the circular space of the orchestra. As M.L. West (2000b) pointed out with reference to a similar argument put forth by Revermann (1999) with respect to Heniochus fr. 5.6–8 K-A, "κύκλῳ means simply 'on all sides, all round', and does not (any more than English 'round' < *rotundus*) imply a circular area."

Performance and Iconography

One of the criticisms levelled against those scholars who seek to reconstruct a grammar of dramatic technique for ancient plays is that their effort entails a severe risk of methodological circularity. As was pointed out by Goldhill (1989) 176–180, our notions of ancient stagecraft must rely principally on the dramatic texts themselves—that is, the very texts that those notions purport to elucidate. This would be tantamount to making arbitrary assumptions about the meaning of a coded text, then using the "deciphered" text to confirm those assumptions. Given the paucity of non-textual information about ancient performances, several scholars turned to the study of the archaeological and pictorial record in an attempt to locate independent evidence supporting (or challenging) current assumptions about ancient performance.

In the 1960s, T.B.L. Webster pioneered a new approach to the history and reception of Greek drama by publishing a series of wide-ranging and painstakingly researched volumes cataloguing artefacts that may be taken to reflect performances of tragedy, comedy, and satyr-play.[29] At a time when "interdisciplinarity" had not yet entered academic parlance, Webster's path-breaking and ambitious project in many ways anticipated (in the face of dogged and often contemptuous opposition from more text-centred scholars) the now well-established tenets that Greek drama cannot be adequately understood unless contextualized in its proper frame of reference, and that the meticulous study and interpretation of theatre-inspired artefacts is a tool of cardinal importance in this long and arduous process of contextualization.

In later times, the study of iconography as a means towards a fuller appreciation of the performance of drama was undertaken by Taplin (1993), who investigated a number of South-Italian vase-paintings, which bespeak a familiarity with Attic tragedy and comedy. Already in 1980, the publication of the so-called Würzburg Telephus vase had been interpreted as evidence for the performance of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* in South Italy within a few decades of the original performance.[30] For Taplin, such vases, far from representing an indigenous tradition of *phlyax*-farce, are potential evidence for performances of Attic drama in South Italy, especially if their details can only be made sense of through a knowledge of the relevant tragic or comic play, or if their overall understanding is enhanced by such knowledge (cf. also Taplin 1997). At about the same time, Green (1994) used a large array of archaeological evidence, ranging from vase-paintings and sculptures to terracottas and mosaics, as a heuristic tool to gauge the impact of dramatic genres on society, including popular culture, over a vast period of time, covering over a thousand years. Green argued that the experience of the theatre was truly central to the lives (both emotional and social) of a considerable chunk of the population, not only in Athens but also in the Greek world at large.[31] Adopting a similar approach, Revermann (2005) published an exemplary case-study of the "Cleveland Medea" Calyx Crater (a Lucanian vase dated to ca. 400 BC), in which he provided insights into the cultural history of Greek tragedy in the fourth century BC by attempting to situate visual evidence into its social, aesthetic and intellectual context. The central questions here concern, first, the process whereby the painter reconfigured a theatre-inspired topic in order to achieve a personal (re)telling of the narrative; and, second, the context of use within which the vase was designed to perform and interact with its target viewers.[32]

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[29] Webster (1960), (1961), (1962), followed by second and, in some cases, third editions (see bibliography); Trendall and Webster (1971); cf. Trendall (1959/^{2}1967).

[30] See Csapo (1986); Taplin (1987b).

The use of iconography as a means of providing privileged access into near-contemporary perceptions of ancient performance was forcefully contested by Small (2003), who argued that ancient images seemingly inspired from the theatre cannot in any way be "illustrations" of any given performance, even when they include inscriptions pointing to specific plays. The vast majority of such images, Small insisted, reflect a variety of sources, including oral traditions such as free-floating mythic narratives, which simply happen to be based around the same mythic cycles that inspired specific plays by specific authors. Thus, the pictorial record can be no safe guide to the performance (or any particular performance) of ancient drama, much less to the reconstruction of lost plays. In a similar spirit, a few years earlier Giuliani (1996) had concluded, with reference to depictions of the Rhesus myth in art, that vase-paintings are not illustrations of specific dramatic performances or epic narratives but representations of mythic matrices configured (under the influence of epic, drama, or other vehicles of myth) in a specific society at a specific point in time. Indeed, Giuliani interestingly conjectured that Apulian vase-paintings seemingly bespeaking theatrical influence may actually reflect mythic narratives embedded in funerary declamation by orators familiar with classical tragedy.[33] Whether one accepts Giuliani's interpretation or not, he has drawn attention to a parameter that is all too often ignored, namely the context of use that the vases were made for.

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[31] For a more specific discussion of the relation between tragedy and iconography see Green (1991), esp. 33–44.

[32] Cf. Revermann (2005) 4. More recently, Revermann (2010) published a significantly expanded version of that article.

The tide, however, may be turning yet again. Recently, Taplin (2007) reasserted his view that a significant number of surviving Greek vase-paintings can be related to tragedy, and that an awareness of the interplay between theatre and visual arts can lead to a fuller appreciation of both media, as well as to a more complete picture of the cultural history of antiquity. Against the tendency to isolate image from text, Csapo (2010) ix has made the important observation that the artists' selectivity and distortions, while certainly making for an unstraightforward relationship between image and dramatic production, may actually enhance the value of iconography as a source of evidence for theatre history. For "[s]election and distortion have a great deal to tell us about the way ancient artists saw or liked to see or, better still, thought their customers liked to see drama in the ancient world. Because what is or is not present in a picture is due not to the mechanical reproduction but the imaginative reconstruction of a performance, the artifacts can reveal what caught the fancy of theater viewers and how this changed with time, place, usage, social class, or political orientation."[34] The interrelation of image and stage has been once more proclaimed by Hart (2010) 57: "While knowledge of the play as it has come down to us is essential for comprehending the iconography fully, an awareness of the many ways in which performance must have inspired and influenced these depictions plays a critical role in our understanding as well."[35]

Contextualizing Performance

Despite the advances made by scholars towards a genuine understanding of the use and function of the ancient scenic space, on the basis of material and artistic as well as textual evidence, such approaches may be thought by some to project an anachronistic image of theatre as a secluded, autonomous

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[33] Against Giuliani's hypothesis see Taplin (2007) 165 with nn. 21–22. Further, J.R. Green pointed out (*BMCR* 2007.10.37, n. 5) that famous passages from tragedy might have been recited at funerals "by out-of-work or second-grade actors".

[34] See also Csapo (2010), chapters 1 and 2, where he eloquently discusses a number of pictorial renderings of known plays.

[35] The subject of the depiction of myths in art is one that exceeds the scope of this introduction. One may consult with profit, e.g., March (1987); Carpenter (1991); Shapiro (1994); and most recently Woodford (2003), who gives a judicious account of the processes whereby artists transform myths into images, often through radical selection, adaptation or even distortion.

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