The Choruses in Septem as a Choreographic Script: Centrality and Meaning-Making

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Declaration The material contained in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. It is the sole work of the author. Material from the published or unpublished work of others which is used in the thesis is credited to the author in question in the text.

Table of Contents

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Introduction

'They are speaking their experience in words and through their bodies, tongue-tied by the situation'. The line above is a part of my analysis in Chapter 3 of this thesis, where I discuss the layering of fear amongst the chorus and how it manifests in multiple ways. The line in Greek says - *ἀψυχίᾳ γὰρ γλῶσσαν ἁρπάζει φόβος* (Because of my faintheartedness, fear grips my tongue, 159)[1]. The chorus is expressing their inability to speak by singing the words 'fear grips my tongue'. However, the speech is not merely conveyed by the words. It is transmitted through the bodies of the chorus that embody this notion of the unspeakable; when the audience hears 'fear grips my tongue', they recognise the oxymoron because they experience the embodiment of fear through movement and gestures since the words are only suggestive without the accompanying use of bodies. This interpretation shows a 'combination of word and embodiment', and is a microscopic example of what I wish to demonstrate through this thesis. I am by no means the first to have noticed this combination as is clear to any seasoned classicist.

> The power of Greek theatre rests on its extraordinary combination of word and embodiment. To neglect one is to impoverish the other.[2]

Using Oliver Taplin's famous quote from his seminal work *Greek Tragedy in Action* may be considered a cliché. However, I believe, for both the performer and the scholar these words cannot be overemphasised. The pioneering study by scholar and director Carlo Ferdinando Russo, *Aristophanes, an Author for the Stage* (1962), created the performative turn within classics, and was followed by Taplin's application of this approach to tragedy in the next decade in *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, first published in 1977. But the approach does not assume or advocate a complete departure from the text. It grounds the words of the text in embodiment. Drawing on Taplin, my endeavour in this thesis is to move towards a less logocentric approach

[1] The translation is my own.
[2] Taplin, 2003, p. 7

towards tragedy; this does not occlude the text. It proves that a close reading of the text is compulsory in order to understand the significance of embodiment as a part of the literary analysis of the text. While the text holds significant meaning, there exists equally significant meaning in movement and dance that often gets lost when we only encounter tragedy as a textual reading. To exhume the lost or repressed performative dimensions of tragedy, I draw upon and agree with this contribution of Taplin.

In this thesis, I aim to present two arguments: first, I focus on the importance of the chorus as a dual entity i.e. they both dance and sing within ancient Greek tragedy, thereby advocating for their centrality, particularly in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes (Septem)* and its adaptations. Second, I illustrate how a detailed analysis of this text brings to life the gestures and movements in the lyric segments, which are also the dancing segments of the chorus in tragedy. This investigation is valuable because it complicates and deepens the overall meaning of the play, offering insights that a purely logocentric approach to ancient tragedy cannot articulate comprehensively; I do this by examining the affect of gestures and movements on both the chorus performers and the audience. For the purpose of this thesis, I rely on Sarah Olsen for a working definition of dance, since her formulation focuses on chorality by grounding dance in kinesthetic empathy, and highlighting embodiment and affect on the audience:

> From the spectator's perspective, dance provides the visual element of choral performance. For a performer, dance is perhaps better characterised as the embodied, kinetic, or kinesthetic dimension of *choreia* (choral song-dance): the corporeal expression coordinated with the vocalisation of song. Even if this movement is initially received visually by the audience, ancient and modern theories of kinesthetic empathy and proprioception would suggest that viewers can also have an embodied response to dance, a sensation of felt participation or inner mimicry.[3]

This thesis is inherently interdisciplinary in its approach as it engages various disciplines; it encompasses classics and performance studies with regard to both dance and

[3] Olsen, 2021, pp. 158–159.

theatre viewing through a phenomenological lens (this includes the linguistic, affective, and bodily turns within the humanities and social sciences over the past few decades). This approach complicates and adds to the study of tragedy as a genre by focusing on the 'dancing' of the chorus within the tragic play and emphasising non-textual elements.

Positionality

The first week of May this year saw India and Pakistan carry out extensive airstrikes against each other that could have culminated in a long-drawn war, impacting civilians for decades to come. One such night, when the risk of an airstrike around the area where I grew up had created fear in the capital city of India and my hometown, Delhi, my mother expressed her anxiety with a shaking voice to me over the phone across continents. My response, in some ways clinical, firmly asked her to take hold of her emotions and look at the situation practically. The moment I cut the call I suddenly realised that I sounded like Eteocles dismissing the anxieties of the chorus women after the first stasimon of the *Seven Against Thebes* (181-202). From that moment, the pursuit of this thesis became as much real as it was theoretical. I began to empathise with my mother's response to the fears of war, and with the chorus of women in *Septem* who were experiencing war in real time. My positionality as someone who had experienced the fear of a full-blown conflict became clear and active, and greatly aided me in this academic journey.

While my experience reinforces the political reality of war in today's conflict-ridden world, my choice for this thesis is grounded in another factor. My will to focus on the ancient Greek chorus as not just a singing but a simultaneously singing and dancing body is inextricably tied to my positionality as an Indian classical dancer. My immersion for two decades in Bharatanatyam, a classical dance form from Tamil Nadu in the south of India, motivated the exploration of movement and gestures in the tragic chorus. Being a dancer

informs my outlook to life. The skilful unravelling of movement, the process of assigning movement to words, and the deep understanding of the context of lyrics that govern the choice of movements from a grammatically encoded vocabulary are a result of disciplined training in the art form. This rigours training enables me to understand the inter-relationship between text and movements better, and in Greek tragedy, it is the movements and gestures that give life to the lyric segments of the chorus.

I now take an ekphrastic detour to explain the impact of Bharatanatyam on my work. In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I look at the various experiences of the chorus in *Septem*. One such experience examines the layering of a single emotion. In terms of dance, this means that a single emotion, be it love, longing, or fear, can be conveyed in multiple ways by using a variety of movements and gestures. A description of a performance by my teacher, Geeta Chandran, best illustrates this process.

There is an excerpt in the *Bhagavat Gita* where one of the heroes of the *Mahabharat*, Arjun, undergoes a psychological crisis when he faces his own grandfather, teachers, and cousins in the battlefield. He is inundated by a feeling of helplessness, sorrow, and fear. Krishna, the incarnation of the divinity Vishnu, is Arjun's friend, mentor, and for the duration of the war his charioteer. While Krishna finally convinces Arjun to put his doubts aside and fight by showing him his divine form (which is the entire story of the *Gita*), my focus here is on the lines that beautifully capture Arjun's anxieties:

> There, Arjun could see stationed in both armies, his fathers, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, cousins, sons, nephews, grand-nephews, friends, fathers-in-law, and well-wishers.
>
> Arjun said: O Krishna, seeing my own kinsmen arrayed for battle here and intent on killing each other, my limbs are giving way and my mouth is drying up.
>
> My whole body shudders; my hair is standing on end. My bow, the Gāṇḍīv, is slipping from my hand, and my skin is burning all over. My mind is in quandary and whirling in confusion; I am unable to hold myself steady any longer. O Krishna, killer of the Keshi demon, I only see omens of misfortune. I do not foresee how any good can come from killing my own kinsmen in this battle.
>
> …O Madhav (Krishna), how can we hope to be happy by killing our own kinsmen?

> …Yet, O Janardan (Krishna), why should we, who can clearly see the crime in killing our kindred, not turn away from this sin?...
>
> Sanjay said: Speaking thus, Arjun cast aside his bow and arrows, and sank into the seat of his chariot, his mind in distress and overwhelmed with grief. (1.26-1.47, tr. by Swami Mukundananda)

This episode can be told through Bharatanatyam in various pieces. While performing an excerpt *Om Namo Vishva-rupaya* from the *Gopala-tapani Upnishad* of the *Atharva Veda,* in the last line of verse 40, Geeta Chandran chooses to expound this episode. The line *partha-sarathaye namaha* translates as 'salutations to the charioteer of Parth (another name for Arjun)', meaning Krishna. The singer repeats this line with varying cadences multiple times.

In order to show Krishna's power as the director of both the epic and the chariot, Chandran first dances Arjun's plight. She embodies him. Twice the bow is strung and stretched. After looking around, in that stiff strung-bow position, Arjun is unable to release the arrow and puts both on the side. Chandran switches characters between Krishna and Arjun to show a dialogue which in the text comes after Arjun's long monologue. However, the enactment of emotions is true to the text, notwithstanding the order. Arjun points to the warriors opposing him. Then, by depicting a bearded man he points to his grandfather and teacher. A certain hand gesture moving from the bottom to the top with a distressed expression, show Arjuna implying that these men, whom he is about to kill, have seen him grow up and loved him. His hands start trembling; the trembling movement comes closer to the heart to denote anxiety. A gesture outlining the whole body depicts his innate paralysis and fear. Swooning is displayed to show the dizziness of the mind. The senselessness of the act is established by gesturing towards the brain. Another tremble is followed. He tries to lift up the bow but fails under the weight of sorrow and fear. A questioning gesture asks Krishna, what will he gain by this? The hands go on to gesture that implies ruling over the three worlds and return to the questioning gesture. Hopelessness fills the bodily presence. Chandran ends her embodiment of Arjuna with a simple hand movement saying no; no, he will not fight this war, as the embodiment looks at Krishna helplessly.

It may be evident through this ekphrasis how the understanding of movement and gesture has contributed to my positionality and the choice of this thesis.

The Author

Out of the three ancient Greek tragedians whose works have survived today, Aeschylus predates Sophocles and Euripides. Owing to the non-survival of most of his plays – we only have seven complete ones – and the difficulty of his style, Aeschylus remains less studied than the latter two in modern scholarship. In the ancient world, evidence usually suggests that he held a position of regard and prominence. The most relevant example of this is found in Aristophanes' *Frogs* when Dionysus chooses him over Euripides to return to Athens from the underworld. In order to introduce the focus on Aeschylus, I briefly outline the context of his times.

Aeschylus was born around 525/4 BCE when the tyrant Peisistratus was in power followed by his son Hippias. Despite their tyrannous rule, there was relative peace in Athens. Known for their patronage, the tyrants established the Dionysus festivals where ancient dramatic competitions began. Around 508 BCE, Cleisthenes came to power democratically after tyranny was overthrown. A number of reforms were carried out during this period, including a reorganisation of the political systems according to *demes*. Athens gained power owing to its contribution in the wars against the Persians. The Athenian victory at Marathon, and later Salamis played a pivotal role in this process. As a citizen-soldier, Aeschylus participated in battle in the Persian Wars, and probably fought at Marathon where his brother received an injury that resulted in his death. This experience deeply influenced his work.

In 478 BCE, with the formation of the Delian League, Athens was at the helm of its maritime dominance. Political rivalry between different factions within Athens grew. Cimon, adopting a conservative approach, sought an alliance with Sparta. Themistocles, Ephialtes, and

Pericles were the liberal faction, and Aeschylus aligned himself with them as we know from Pericles' role as *choregos* for the tetralogy including *Persians* (472 BCE). Around 462/1 BCE, near the end of Aeschylus' life, political changes that cemented Athens' position as a democracy took place. These included supporting Argos over Sparta, ostracising Cimon, and expanding the power of courts. The political shift from tyranny to democracy, and the furthering of reforms that consolidated democracy are all reflected in Aeschylus' plays. For instance, in the *Oresteia*, references to the Areopagus council are included among other allusions to the political climate.[4]

Aeschylus made two trips to Sicily. He is believed to have produced the *Persians* yet again there, under the patronage of its ruler Hieron, and to have also produced a play, commissioned by Hieron, titled *'The Women of Aetna'*.[5] Not long after he won the first prize at the city Dionysia for the *Oresteia* in 458 BCE, he returned to Sicily, and died there in 456/5 BCE at Gela. There were rumours that Aeschylus never returned homeward, and that the Athenian public had estranged him. However, there is no clear evidence for such speculations.[6]

Much conjecture has gone into pinpointing the contributions of Aeschylus to tragedy. Sommerstein credits Aeschylus with the introduction of a second actor, allowing for more opportunity of interactions between the characters. Aeschylus also introduced a third actor, although not one with large roles. [7] The *skene* or scene building behind which the acting took place was introduced around 460 BCE, as was the introduction of the 'special effect' device the *ekklyklema*. Sommerstein is uncertain if Aeschylus made these contributions, or if

[4] Sommerstein, 2010, pp. 14, 16, 18, 19, 22, 24.
[5] Sommerstein, 2010, pp. 20 For further information on the play and Aeschylus' travels to Sicily look at: Herington, 1967; Smith, 2017; Bell, 2023.
[6] Sommerstein, 2010, pp. 20, 22.
[7] Aristotle in *Poet.* 1449a15-19 claims that Aeschylus introduced a second actor and Sophocles a third. Ten-Hove has positioned Aristotle's claims alongside later ancient writers. Them. *Or. 26.316c-d* and Vita Aesch. *15 = Dic.Fr.76* support the idea that Aeschylus may have used a third actor. Pollux in *Onom.* 4.109-10 goes as far as attributing a third actor to him. The discussion remains inconclusive. (Ten-Hove, 2020, pp. 34–45)

Sophocles did (even though we do not have any surviving works of his from this period), or if neither contributed to the reforms. What remains certain is that Aeschylus deployed the use of these changes in drama within his plays.[8]

R. B. Rutherford explains that Aeschylus relied on the dominance of the chorus within his plays, giving them at least 42% space in the tragedy. Later tragedians reduced this dynamic between the chorus and the characters as the latter grew more prominent; sometimes they included amoebaic exchanges within the *parodos* itself. He also claims that Aeschylus was recognised for his 'richer texture of language' in the lyric passages that declined with his successors.[9]

P. J. Finglass makes certain observations that elucidate the stylistic changes that Aeschylus may have created. Historical tragedy was handled better by Aeschylus in comparison to his predecessors, specifically Phrynichus.[10] He skilfully integrated lyric and epic poetry into the tragic format that left its impact on future playwrights. He may have invented the tetralogy format, where each tragedian produced three tragic plays accompanied by a satyr play at the festival. Later tragedians paid less attention to Aeschylus's predecessors, pointing to the fact that he left a lasting impression on Athenian tragedy, so much so that classicists have called him the 'father of tragedy'.[11]

The Tragedy

First performed in 467 BCE, *Seven Against Thebes* or *Septem* (from the Latin *Septem contra Thebas*) was a part of a tetralogy, and the last play in the tragic trilogy based on the

[8] Sommerstein, 2010, pp. 21–22.
[9] Rutherford, 2012, pp. 40–43.
[10] Based on Herodotus 6.21.2, Finglass exposes the Athenian response to Phrynichus' production *The Capture of Miletus* staged in 492 BCE. A fine of a thousand drachmas was imposed on the author, banning a reproduction of the play on the premise that it reopened past wounds by reminding the Athenians of adversity. (Finglass, 2022, p. 44)
[11] Finglass, 2022, p. 45.

House of Thebes. The other two tragedies in the sequence were about Laius and Oedipus. Enough fragments survive for us to note their basic plot structures. There are references within *Septem* that could aid this process as well. However, *Septem* can very much be viewed as a stand-alone play that intricately engages with the terrors of war, and the precarious position it places rulers and citizens in.[12]

Authors may embellish their work with subtle references from their own times, but it cannot be said with exactitude if people or events referred to in *Septem* took place as is at Athens. In order to contextualise my argument, it is necessary to keep in mind the political background before summarising and analysing any ancient work. Some scholars such as Tucker and J.T. Sheppard argue that Aesychlus' own experience of a city under siege, namely the 480 BCE Persian siege of Athens, may have been an influencing factor in the depiction of Thebes. Tucker also contends that Aeschylus was in support of fortifying Athens, a policy that was initiated by Themistocles but taken forward by Cimon. The veracity of this association has been questioned on the basis that Cimon's wall has been overemphasised for its political importance, and was not a contemporary issue of major concern.[13]

One of the most contestable theories put forward by L.A. Post was the proposition that *Septem* was Aeschylus' way of displaying overt support for Pericles by drawing parallels between him and Eteocles. Podlecki argues that Post oversimplifies the entanglement of Eteocles with the curse of Oedipus, and thus cannot be paralleled with Pericles. According to Post, *Septem* is 'concerned entirely with the theme of self-devotion'.[14] However, Podlecki observes that this idea excludes the point of view of the chorus from whose perspective Eteocles is seen as selfish and egotistical. Moreover, there is no evidence that Pericles had an

[12] Torrance, 2013, pp. 12–13.
[13] Podlecki, 1999, pp. 30, 40.
[14] Post, 1950, p. 51

active and advanced political career when *Septem* was staged in 467 BCE.[15] Suggestions have been made based on Plutarch's *Life of Aristides* that this citizen can be seen in the character of Amphairaus. This may or may not have been true, one cannot say with any certainty.[16] While the political associations of the play with Athens remains uncertain, *Septem* itself gives us a terrifying and real picture of the consequences of politics that create war.

As I summarise the plot of the play, I rely on Martin L. West's division of the structure of *Septem*.

The play begins with Eteocles, the son of Oedipus, speaking to the citizens of Thebes, and convincing them to fight with all their might against the Argive army that surrounds Thebes, led by Polynices his brother. After Eteocles' energetic speech, the scout enters and relays all he sees, seven heroes selected to be situated at the seven gates. Martin West describes this part as the prologue, at the point at which begins the 'charging section' of the play. West divides the play into two phases – the charging and the discharging – as a way of looking at the plot development. The charging section implies 'portraying and accumulating circumstantial detail until it is before us in a quite concrete form'.[17]

The chorus enters at line 78, and dramatically sets up the atmosphere of fear that prevails. The *parodos* begins with an astrophic rendition, then takes a strophic form. The chorus reasons that their fear intensifies because they hear the sounds coming from across the city walls that signal the effect of war, and force them to imagine the terror. Their sensory perceptions are alive. The Argive army is let loose (80). They hear the horses' hooves and the clatter of shields (85, 90). Supplicating themselves at the feet of the gods, they urge them to protect the city.

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[15] Podlecki, 1999, p. 32, 34.
[16] Podlecki, 1999, p. 37.
[17] West, 1990, p. 4.

The same tone of terror is conveyed in the strophe, and the gods are begged to guard the encircled city (109-125). In the antistrophe, they ask each god personally, describing their characteristics, to deliver aid in their capacity as protectors, and to be receptive to their cries. These gods include Zeus, Pallas, Poseidon, Cypris, and Apollo (128-148). The next strophe continues their desperate cry, calling on Hera and Artemis (149-157), and the antistrophe begs, yet again Apollo and Athena (158-165). The upcoming strophic pair continues in the same vein until line 180. The chorus reveals their anxiousness and insecurities, signifying their faith and dependence on the gods, and their own acute desire to contribute to the war through prayer and supplication.

In the first episode, the chorus follows West's structural analysis and 'nests' – they move to a different part of the stage away from the orchestra.[18] Their dialogue with Eteocles, who enters at line 181, enables this move. Eteocles is misogynistic and hostile in his exchange with the chorus. He labels their crying before the gods as irrational, demeans what he sees as their petulant and fearful attitude, and compares the chorus women to the enemy outside the walls. Ordering them to keep calm, Eteocles threatens them with a death sentence if their expression of fear continues. His aggressive and bigoted addressal lasts for about 20 lines, from 181 to 202. This creates an internal conflict within Thebes. While the enemy outside demands an external conflict, the issues internal to the *polis* are still being contested, and thus making visible the charging phase that is in full force.

The chorus does not quiet itself. They are more terrified by the war than by Eteocles' threats. Comparing himself to the helmsman of a ship, Eteocles continues to assert his masculine dominance over the chorus women (203-210). The chorus tries to show that it is the gods who need to be reached out to in times of adversity, while Eteocles fears that the gods

[18] West, 1990, p. 12.

often abandon their grace over a polis that is under siege (211-218). The exchange between them continues for the next 68 lines (219-287). It culminates when Eteocles gives in to the chorus' stubborn insistence on praying to the gods, and advises them to bribe the gods with the promise of sacrifices, if they aid in relieving the situation.

The following three strophic sets are expressions of the chorus conveyed through metaphor and a refined poetic style. They represent Aeschylus the poet at his best. In one of the strophes, a metaphor of a dove and a serpent illustrate the imagery of the predator versus the prey (288-303). In lines 321 to 332, the chorus describes the consequences of war, and how they impact men and women differently. The men lose their lives by the spear, but the women suffer a fate worse than death. Captive and enslaved, they are treated like animals.

Around line 369, the second episode begins with the announcement of the scout's arrival. This episode is characterised by the scout's detailing of each of the seven warriors that stand at the seven gates of Thebes, and the images on the respective shield each holds as a means of illustrating their characteristics and warring techniques. These descriptions aid Eteocles in determining the seven Theban heroes that are to be placed in opposition to them at the seven gates. The chorus reacts to each description by giving their opinion. The heroes and their opposers in the order of the scout's account are Tydeus to be tackled by Melanippus, Capaneus by Polyphontus, Eteocles by Megareus, Hippomedon by Hyperbius, Parthenopaeus by Actor, Amphiaraus by Lasthenes, and finally, at the seventh gate, Polyneices by Eteocles himself.

Another discordant exchange between the chorus and Eteocles begins at this point, from line 649. The chorus, who do not want Eteocles to face his brother, fears the pollution that occurs by killing one's own kin. They accuse him of letting the desire for war and the *kleos*

earned from it, get the better of him without paying heed to the fratricide he will commit. The exchange ends at line 719. Eteocles remains determined and unmoved by the chorus' plea.

The play progresses towards the second 'discharging phase' but does not quite reach it yet. As West notes, this marks the transition – 'the characters on stage depart, and the chorus, left to itself, expresses its feelings…'[19] From lines 719 to 791, the chorus reiterates their concerns with the pollution of brother facing brother, retelling the story of the House of Laius, and the cyclical nature of misfortune that grips the family and, by extension, Thebes. Their fatalistic attitude explains their helplessness.

At line 792, the discharging phase – that includes the culmination of the story. and the consequent lament or recrimination or departure to an appropriate destination – begins.[20] The messenger announces the outcome of the war and the victory of the Thebans. Antigone and Ismene are introduced by references made by the scout. The scout reveals the ironic nature of victory, since both brothers lose their lives at each other's hands. The chorus is in two minds: should they rejoice or lament? They begin their threnodic utterance that takes (in the transmitted manuscripts, although this sequence may have been added on decades after the première; see below) the form of a ritualised lamentation with the coming of Antigone and Ismene on the stage. Their exchange is interrupted again by the scout, who brings a decree banning the burial of Polyneices for having betrayed the polis of Thebes. From line 1032 onwards, Antigone takes on the burden to bury her brother Polyneices and defy the state. The chorus splits into two, one following Antigone and the other Ismene, who is with Eteocles' body. The play ends at 1084.

This summary gives a skeleton of *Septem* with a focus on the chorus. My analysis of the tragedy in Chapter 3 excludes the section on the closing lament episode. Scholars for

[19] West, 1990, p. 15.
[20] West, 1990, p. 6.

centuries have questioned the authenticity of this segment, arguing that Aeschylus is not its author, and that it is a later addition to the text.[21] However, my reasons for not including it in my analysis are entirely based on the lament's relation to gestures and movements. We know a lot more about choral laments, their metres, and performances than we know about other lyric segments and their origins within tragedy. The lament in tragedy has been analysed in detail by scholars,[22] and noting its movements and gestures requires delving into its ritualistic history and evolution that form a separate entity within tragedy. Their analysis requires a different methodological approach that this thesis cannot do justice to within its scope.

Dance, Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Cognitive science within Classics

Scholarship within classics over the decades has focused on theatre and music. Dance remains a relatively unexplored area owing to various methodological considerations with regard to the source materials available. Fredrick G. Nearebout has contributed towards understanding how to handle the limited and precarious evidence available for dance in the ancient Greek world through his work *Attractive Performances: Ancient Greek dance: Three Preliminary Studies.* Despite these challenges, several scholars have left their mark on the study of dance. Steven H. Lonsdale's 1952 *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion* is a first step in this direction. He emphasises the cultural context and non-Western approaches to dance. Apart from the cathartic and homeostatic role of dance, he broadens the scope to include it as a 'metaphorical language with an underlying structure that communicates patterns of behaviour not consciously perceived by the members of a culture'.[23] However, I hope to step aside from the unconsciousness of the culture to focus on the metaphorical language through this project.

[21] Various scholars have commented on this segment including Hutchinson, 2017, pp. xlv–xlvi; Cameron, 2020, pp. 51–56; Torrance, 2013, pp. 19–20.
[22] For lament in ancient Greece look at: Alexiou, 1974; Segal, 1989; Murnaghan, 1999; Robertson, 2000; Holst-Wargaff, 2002, 2022, 2023; Suter, 2003, 2008; Due, 2006, 2012; Cairns, 2009; Tsagalis, 2012; Bakewell, 2016; Weiss, 2017; Cosgrove, 2018.
[23] Lonsdale, 1993, p. 19.

1964 saw Lillian B. Lawler's *The Dance in Ancient Greece* emphasise the continuing necessity for interrogating within the field. She stated in her book that, '…the dance was very close to the lives of the Greeks, and that they danced readily, under all sorts of circumstances. As a matter of fact, the Greeks drew no hard and fast line between religious and secular dancing; and many of the dances in which he engaged informally, to commemorate events in his own life or that of his family, or merely for enjoyment, were offered also to the gods'.[24] Her compendium begins from the prehistoric times in ancient Greece, till the beginning of the medieval era. Ritualistic or not, she gives the most robust overview of Greek dance and all its forms and aspects hitherto written.

In recent years, *Choreonarratives: Dancing Stories in Greek and Roman Antiquity and Beyond*, edited by Laura Gianvittorio-Ungar and Karin Schlapbach, proves to be a volume of significance in this sub-field. In their introduction, Gianvittorio-Ungar and Schlapbach, make a clear distinction between 'narrative dance' and 'dramatic dance' in ancient Greece. Their focus for the volume is the former, thereby excluding certain elements of the tragic chorus that are a part of the 'dramatic dance' of tragedy. Even so, this volume is essential for my thesis since it forms a connection between dance and phenomenology that addresses the use of embodiment and affect as necessary frameworks to locate my argument:

> … dance is often not straightforwardly mimetic. Even if this is a generalisation, most would probably agree that the strength of dance lies in its being ambiguous and suggestive, in addition to imitative. Dance is characterised by the presence of the body, which in its presemiotic 'is-ness' or facticity has been called 'phenomenal'. The phenomenal body affects the spectator on a physical level. But when it comes to its semiotic quality, dance seems to possess some kind of indirectness (which can perhaps be compared to an indirect speech, a speech reported by a narrator, rather than quoted directly). Often, dance does not simply convey actions and characters but rather evokes them by conjuring up emotions, states of being, moods, atmospheres, and other elusive dimensions of the storyworld through the body in motion. In these cases, dance caters to the embodied cognitive and emotional responses of the spectators, compelling them to be active and participating narratees. The type of understanding that dance enables is not analytical but embodied. By its very nature, it is less promptly pinned down to any one proposition, but that does not mean that it cannot be deeply assimilated.[25]

[24] Lawler, 1964, p. 116.
[25] Gianvittoria-Ungar and Karin, 2021, p. 11.

Unpacking this paragraph will help elucidate how my thesis draws on this understanding of dance within classics. First, I engage with the question – what do we mean when we say 'dance is not straightforwardly mimetic/imitative'? It is widely accepted within classical scholarship that the term mimetic does not mean imitation in the sense of 'copying' something exactly, as it were. Alternatively, it focuses on 're-enactment' (be it ritual or not) that at its core implies a freshness in its reproduction. 'Re-enactment' is re-creation; it is not a static process in dance, but constantly forces a reinvention each time through the act of repetition. To exemplify, I draw a connection with the section on positionality a few pages earlier (pp. 4-5) where the layering of emotion in dance demonstrated by Chandran is an example of reinvention through repetition. The concept and emotions expanded through the dance are the same; yet different movements are used to convey them. In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I argue for the layering of a single emotion with regard to the tragic chorus.

Second, I do not see the indirectness of dance's semiotic quality being at odds with the phenomenal affect. Affect can be achieved through both indirect and direct movements and expressions, which I have argued in favour of again in Chapter 3. Directness and indirectness in the semiotics of dance are necessary, and depend in this case on the context and role of the chorus within the lines addressed. In fact, these two semiotic lenses may overlap, creating an ambiguity that enhances the overall affect experienced by the audience.

Third, I agree with the elevation of the audience as participants, proposing the idea that it empowers them as co-creators of meaning alongside the chorus.

Much work with regard to various aspects of the phenomenological perspective mentioned in this paragraph, namely embodiment, cognitive science, affect, and meaning-making has been undertaken by scholars in classics that I shall discuss below. However, most of them do not address the movements of the tragic chorus. Some of them do not consider the role of the chorus at all. For example, in *Choreonarratives* itself, Sophie Bocksberger argues

for a reinterpretation of *schemata* as an assembly of physical features in a dancer's body that indicates both *ethos* (character) and *pathos* (emotion or experience). She stresses that *schema* is not merely a pose or a step, rather it is an embodiment of the *ethos* and *pathos*. In other words, she makes clear the distinction between *schemata* and *deixis*, where the former means 'to tell' and the latter 'to point out' or 'show'. From her training in ballet, she argues that in the art form there is a codified gestic ensemble that one would use to show something, say a king or a queen. In contrast to this, in ancient Greek dance, the narrative aspect takes over, and *mimesis* focuses on embodiment. She also suggests that for the ancients, simply embodying a character may be considered dancing, thereby making the boundary between dance and theatre unclear.[26]

In Indian classical dance, both *deixis* and *schemata* may operate together. You could embody a character while initially showing a gesture to make the character clear, and then using gait and emotive expression to schematise it. I believe Bocksberger's bifurcation of the two, *deixis* and *schemata*, is an oversimplification. Lillian B. Lawler had earlier argued that the words *schemata*, *deixis*, and *phora* may be used interchangeably, and different authors had used them differently in the ancient worlds.[27] If *schemata* reflect embodiment through *mimesis*, the combination of both then could account for a wider interpretation of the term.

A re-reading of the sources Bocksberger analyses may point to a more integrated approach between the two. Plutarch's *Quaest. conv.* 9.15.2 describes *phora*, *schemata*, and *deixis* as such: φορά (*phora*) refers to the motion or movement in dance; σχῆμα (*schema*) represents the gestures, poses, or figures that dancers form, often imitating characters or concepts; and δεῖξις (*deixis*) is a direct indication or pointing to the things being represented, rather than an imitation. It is the plain, direct indication of the very 'things' that poetry achieves

[26] Bocksberger, 2021.
[27] Lawler, 1954, p. 158.

when it simply names Achilles, Odysseus, earth, or heaven. Plutarch argues that both dance and poetry use *deixis* to enhance their expressive power, making representations more vivid and engaging for the audience. The passage also highlights the interconnectedness of poetry and dance, particularly in the genre of *hyporchema*, where words and gestures work together to create a comprehensive artistic expression. This relationship is described as 'mute poetry' for dance and 'speaking dancing' for poetry, emphasising the complementary nature of these art forms in their use of *deixis* and other representational techniques.

In Xenophones' *Symposium* 9.3-9.6 Ariadne comes in first, dressed as a bride, and sits in the chair. Dionysus is not yet seen, but Bacchic flute music plays. Everyone praises the dancing master. As soon as Ariadne hears the music, her movements show she is delighted. She does not get up or go to meet Dionysus. When Dionysus sees her, he dances up to her, sits on her lap, puts his arms around her, and kisses her. She stays modest, yet returning his embrace with love. The guests applaud and ask for an encore. Then Dionysus stands and helps Ariadne to stand, and they act like lovers kissing and caressing. The audience hear Dionysus ask if Ariadne loves him, and hear Ariadne swear she does love him so earnestly that everyone swore the pair truly loved each other. They look not like trained actors holding *schemata*, but like people finally allowed to fulfil long-held desires.

Both these sources depict that *deixis* is not antithetical to *schemata*, but forms a part of it. Plutarch emphasises that *deixis* is the direct indication of the very thing. This implies that it points out or gestures 'that thing' within the dancing. This does not invalidate Bocksberger's interpretation of schemata as mimesis, but enforces the use of *deixis* within the embodied *schemata*. Similarly, the dancing in the *Symposium* is an embodied *schema* of Ariadne. Yet during her dancin she embodies the character of Ariadne as schemata, and she also shows/points out certain elements such as the seat she sits on, the 'showing'/ *deixis* of delight.

Both she and Dionysus engage in gestures such as caressing and kissing that point out acts of love.

In tragedy, the choruses merge both, making *deixis* embodied and *schemata* deictic. For example, if the chorus has outstretched hands praying to the gods, then the outstretched hands point directly towards the divine entity, while the chorus embodies the fear or grief of the characters they represent. Both take place simultaneously, and are perceived by the audience as such. My analysis uses this simultaneous approach to movements.

Supporting evidence for this argument can also be drawn from Karin Schlapbach's chapter in *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime,* where, based on her interpretation of Lucian's *On Dance* she states that,

> The recourse to demonstration and signification shows that pantomime, on the one hand, conserves some independence from language while, on the other hand, incorporating language by paradoxically being 'audible' just like speech.[28]

Mimesis in her work implies a combination of representation and impersonation where 'the emphasis lies on visual immediacy through the illusion of a virtually perfect identity of performer and character'.[29] In *On Dance*, Lycinus bifurcates myth from narrative using the example of Proteus. The change of Proteus is 'translated back into impersonation'.[30] The artists' skill dominates the equation. The background of the myth is dismantled, and Proteus becomes the pantomime artist. For Schlapbach, 'if what they are doing, actually, is imitating an actor, the Proteus-story becomes a perfect *mise-en-abîme* of pantomime's self-referentiality'.[31] Schlapbach argues that this interrogation is not limited to Proteus' myth, but can encompass all mythical story telling within pantomime. I do agree with Schlapbach's interpretation, and

[28] Schlapbach, 2008, p. 316.
[29] Schlapbach, 2008, p. 320.
[30] Schlapbach, 2008, p. 320.
[31] Schlapbach, 2008, p. 322.

would further like to free this understanding of mimesis from being relegated only to the pantomime artist, finding its presence in most forms of ancient Greek dance.

The tragic chorus too may narrate a story through impersonation, and it is their gestic articulation and body movement that enables them to embody a character; a reflection of their mastery over dance. Even though the tragic chorus is singing words, the demonstration and signification employed through the gestures and movements are equally important; they can articulate animate and inanimate aspects, including thoughts.[32] They allow meaning to be expounded in clearer and empathetic ways. Dance comprises of this process of semiotic signification irrespective of the libretti that accompanies pantomime or the choral lyrics sung in tragedy. It enforces a universal aspect of signification that Schlapbach interprets while looking at pantomime[33], and that can again be applied to the tragic chorus. This is because when one reduces gestures to conventions governed by a particular society, one focuses on their proximity to language, and supports the supremacy of language. By challenging this position of language, gestures and movements can unearth an overall meaning that is comprehensive. Therefore, signification cannot be separated from mimesis or *schemata*, but forms an integral part of it.

What Bocksberger and Schlapbach succeed in is drawing a connection between embodiment and dance that is applicable to the ancient world, and to live performance and choreography alike. Lucy Jackson in 'Greater than Logos? Kinesthetic Empathy and Mass Persuasion in the Choruses of Plato's *Laws*' helps facilitate a connection with the ancient world through her analysis of kinesthetic empathy. She highlights how both performers and spectators can experience similar emotional effects. By demonstrating that Plato recognised this phenomenon, she forms a connection between modern theories of affect and their presence in

[32] Schlapbach, 2008, pp. 324–325.
[33] Schlapbach, 2008, p. 329.

the ancient world.[34] Her article is useful in grounding my thesis by opening up avenues that allow for the exchange of ideas between modern and ancient society. This enables me in avoiding the imposition of modern theories of affect and embodiment on the ancient world. Instead, it opens up the scope to indicate a shared experience of the chorus members and the audience through a diachronic approach.

Another work in this direction is 'Kinesthetic Choreia: Empathy, Memory, and Dance in Ancient Greece' by Sarah Olsen. Olsen explains how kinesthetic empathy governed by memory is actually shaped. She uses earlier Greek sources such as the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* as well as *Laws*, where spectators become virtual performers and feel integrated into the community through chorality, to show the difference from later works such as Lucian's *On Dance*, where empathy shifts from the communal mode to the individual mode and each spectator 'sees himself as in a mirror'[35] because pantomime is a star-soloist performance medium.[36] Olsen, like Jackson, bridges the gap between ancient and modern worlds. Her essay is fruitful for my explanations, as she reads the choral lyrics as choreographic scripts. For her, it is the fusion of song and movement that transforms the viewers into virtual performers. This renews and affirms the chorus as central, a singing-dancing body rather than a feeble, fractured voice beside action. Moreover, she enforces the role of kinetic memory that becomes apparent through the chorus' gestures, movements, and kinetic metaphors, causing an embodied recollection for both performers and spectators, which is what I set out to pursue. Affect comes alive through bodily sensations, and a logocentric reading of the chorus excludes this understanding.

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[34] Jackson, 2016.
[35] Schlapbach has interpreted Lycinus' views that support Olsen's argument. She says, 'the spectator achieves nothing less than self-cognition: he sees himself in the performer as if in a mirror, so that watching pantomime is the easiest way to follow the Delphic maxim Know Thyself'. (Schlapbach, 2008, p. 318)
[36] Olsen, 2017.

In a similar vein, Naomi Weiss stresses the phenomenological aspect of theatre through its impact on the audience. Her work, *Seeing Theatre: The Phenomenology of Classical Greek Drama*, helps provide a useful framework to ground this thesis. She focuses on the visual and affective experience of theatre, and the uncertainties it entails by applying the phenomenological lens to analyse how audiences perceive and engage with theatrical performances. Her embodied and multisensory approach to theatre draws from Stanton Garner's characterisation of theatre as a 'play of actuality'.[37] This play, between the virtual and the actual, presentational and representational, generates the phenomenological complexity that Weiss sees as essential for the audience's engagement.[38]

These concepts have helped me stabilise my argument. Weiss's concept of the embodied and multisensory nature of viewing tragedy aligns with my aim to examine the affective impact of movement and gesture on the audience. According to Weiss, the spectators possess a cultural repertoire that shapes their way of viewing a particular play. Since this familiarity shapes how they perceive and view the chorus, it influences the way in which the audience can contribute to the larger meaning-making process. She also focuses on a non-logocentric approach to tragedy by giving supremacy to 'seeing', which underlies the etymology of the word *theatron*. My thesis expands this notion, and pushes the boundaries of the multisensory approach and the audience's active participatory sense-making, by including physical and emotional embodiment that goes beyond the visual realm.

Another scholar who investigates the meaning-making process is Rosie Wyles through the semiotic role costumes play in tragedy. In her book *Costume in Greek Tragedy*, she argues that a language of costumes emerges by the fifth century that is nuanced, and contributes to the dramatic effect of tragedy. The audience's perception changes based on the way in which a

[37] Garner, 2019, pp. 39–45.
[38] Weiss, 2023, pp. 16–45.

costume is worn and described by the characters. The description may be very direct or indirect. She also emphasises the role of movement in impacting the audience's perception and affect with regard to costumes. According to her, 'movement covers both the idea of the physical manipulation of the costume and also the entrance and exit of characters'.[39] She does not analyse the chorus and their costumes separately, but looks at the chorus of *Suppliant Women* by Aeschylus as characters to show the determinism that costumes indicate, as well as their influence on the outcome of the play.[40] She marks the shift when it comes to Roman tragedy, since meaning-making through costuming is then not possible in the same way as it is in Greek tragedy. She integrates the role of the visual and the auditory senses used in this process. Her focus on affect and meaning-making through features that impact performance beyond the mere text is an immensely useful framework for this thesis.

Similarly, Anne-Sophie Noel in 'What do we actually see on stage?' deploys a cognitive approach that questions the overemphasis on visual effect in current scholarship, proposing a more comprehensive investigation of spectacle that includes multisensory interactions. According to her, visual effects are narrowly perceived as the visible arrangement of materials. Instead, she emphasises the interaction between the senses facilitated by a combination of sound cues and visual effects, alongside the mental process occurring in the audience's imagination during a performance. One of the examples she uses is Apollo's bow near the beginning of *Eumenides* (179-185), arguing that the audience would retain the image that describes the arrow as a 'winged, flashing snake speeding from my golden bowstring', rather than the visual effect of the bow and arrow that the actor may have used as a prop.[41]

[39] Wyles, 2011, p. 52.
[40] Wyles, 2011, pp. 71–73, 82.
[41] Noel, 2019.

I do agree with her on the aural impact of words and the use of multisensory approaches. However, it is uncertain what an actor could use/embody as a prop. For me, this multisensory approach comes to life when we integrate the aural with the movements that enhance its overall affect. It is hard to investigate the character's gestic acting, but the lyric segments of the chorus are ripe with movement and make such an inquiry possible.

Another formidable work in the area of phenomenology is *Kinaesthesia and Classical Antiquity 1750-1820: Moved by Stone* by Helen Slaney. Slaney's work explores how material culture of classical antiquity was perceived and experienced in the late 18th century. It examines the role of haptic senses, particularly touch and kinesthesia, in mediating these roles. While drawing on theories of distributed cognition and enactivism, she proposes that object perception is an embodied action, and objects are perceived through their sensory motor profiles or the possibilities of physical interaction they afford. She suggests that our understanding of objects is shaped by the exploratory movements we make in relation to them, resulting from our embodied interactions with the material world.[42] Even though her work draws on the phenomenological approach, it focuses on material culture and proves to be less useful for this thesis.

However, Slaney's other work, 'Motion Sensors Perceiving Movement in Roman Pantomime', challenges ancient dance research, whose sources are primarily textual. Instead, she proposes engaging with the embodied experience of the ancient pantomime dancer through kinesthetic exercises.[43] While I do utilise some of the same theoretical models, namely kinesthesia and embodiment, I must insist on a cautious response to her work. The exercises are greatly shaded by the engager's own bodily awareness and cultural context, rather than capturing the ancient dancer's experience. Moreover, there is a difference between using

[42] Slaney, 2020.
[43] Slaney, 2017.

kinesthesia as self-awareness versus kinesthetic empathy as a shared embodied experience and interaction with the performer by the audience. Slaney accomplishes both successfully, and I use her insight of the chorus' self-awareness as much as I use the audience's kinesthetic empathy.

Sarah Olsen in 'Sappho's Kinesthetic Turn: Agency and Embodiment in Archaic Greek Poetry' also utilises the theory of kinesthetic awareness, but explains it through ancient examples. Olsen applies Cary Nolan's theory of kinesthetic agency to archaic Greek poetry, where Nolan establishes that, on the one hand, cultural conditioning shapes bodily experiences, and on the other, individuals possess the ability to resist this through kinesthetic awareness.[44] Olsen uses Alcman's *partheneia* and Sappho's poetry to make her argument. She says that Alcman reinforces cultural conditioning using descriptive language and images, only leaving restrictive space for individual kinesthetic awareness. Sappho, however, subverts conventions of embodied experience. She uses familiar and strange imagery to aid this endeavour, and also capitalises on absence in her *Fragment 16* (through Anactoria) to create space for reflection and imagination, and to destabilise the ability of the song to fix the meaning of a body. Olsen suggests that both Alcman and Sappho's works could lead the audience to be aware of their own embodied experiences, potentially engaging in kinesthetic agency.[45]

Two claims that Olsen makes prove to be essential for my thesis. First is her engagement with kinesthetic empathy through the lyric choruses that helps in clearing a non-logocentric pathway to understand the chorus. The movements, through kinesthetic empathy, trigger motor responses in both the chorus and audience to accelerate affect. She argues that language actively frames how bodies are seen and felt in choral performance whilst going beyond it. Second, her claim that choral language can reinforce the hold of habitus, at the same time as revealing

[44] Noland, 2009, pp. 2–4.
[45] Olsen, 2019.

kinesthetic shifts where the chorus and audience find their own agency. Reading the lyric segments of the chorus in tragedy to locate and excavate its gestures and movements also reveals the scope of enhancing this kinesthetic awareness.

Readers of tragedy often view embodiment as 'naturalising'. Nancy Worrman challenges this idea in her book *Tragic Bodies: Edges of the Human in Greek Drama*. According to her, Greek tragedies depict bodies that deviate from the norm. They are often strange, alienated, fractured, inhuman or barely human, oddly assembled, or uncomfortably proximate. Tragedies look at bodies relationally to objects, where they are equally important as objects such as tapestries or statues are, challenging the understanding of the human form as superior. Bodies are interchangeable with objects, while objects gain a liveliness that is suggestive of the human form, blurring the lines between animate and inanimate. Worman explores embodiment as interconnected with the environment, suggesting that embodiment extends beyond the physical limitations of the flesh. Bodies are portrayed as 'strange containers'. Embodiment is reflected through skin, surfaces and folds, considering the confluence of body with material surfaces. She furthers the phenomenological approach by paying attention to surfaces, edges, and sensory experiences that amplify lived-bodied experiences. By focusing on sight, sound, and touch, she argues that tragedies create a rich sensorium that engages the audience on multiple levels. Touch and proximity in tragedy, even though only visually represented on the stage, constitute very important bits for her.[46]

[46] Worman, 2021, pp. 14–28. Worman's understanding of touch is peculiar and effective. Touch is 'viewed as and an object of "haptic visuality" (i.e. enacted through my message on stage) or envisioned and viewed in the mind's eye, (i.e. through diegesis, narration of events offstage). It is thus the one represented sense in which the audience cannot participate directly, at least in its most fully haptic form, i.e., as touch rather than resonance, sense-memory, or multi-sensory experience. And yet, touch is also the most embodied and essential of the senses…' (Worman, 2021, p. 26). For Worman, touch acts as an equivalent for sensory experience, rooted in both classical accounts of perception and modern discussions of embodied cognition shaped through multisensory interactions and memory.

Worman's work is relevant for my thesis in as much as it justifies centring the chorus as a singing-dancing body through embodied intersections between sensory experience and affect. Framing gestures as semiotics, just like objects that are animate and carry resonance, she shows how the dancing body materialises language through gesture and movement. According to Worman, bodies give language weight on stage. However, while I acknowledge her 'naturalistic' approach that collapses embodiment into realism, the efficacy of the chorus in my thesis relies on how ancient performance depends on movement and gesture to create recognisable human cues that generate meaning and affect. These are equally translatable to a certain extent to a modern audience as well.

The scholar that is most influential for this thesis is Afroditi Angelopoulou in *The Body and the Senses in Greek Tragedy*. For Angelopoulou, the importance of kinesthesia or 'the sixth sense' of bodily movements, as well as the use of embodied metaphors where concepts of weight and gravity shape the narrative are imperative to her argument. She focuses on the role of gesture in conveying meaning, and the repetition of these gestures in developing themes. Through an embodied lens, she reconceptualises 'action' where narrated and performed corporeal movements articulate meaning. Her focus is on the senses, and how employing the sensory apparatus as a hermeneutic device can reveal the workings of tragedy. She makes an interesting observation by challenging the auditory and visual senses in tragedy, and arguing that the so-called lower carnal senses of taste, touch, and smell play an equivalent role in the experience of tragedy. She connects intercorporeality to Aristotle's idea, connoted by the verb *sunaisthanesthai* or 'sensing together', that 'intimates the corporal basis of the inter-subjective bonds of *philia*'. The idea of interaffectivity, where emotions are not seen as localised within

individuals, but as a phenomenon of shared intercorporeal space, is applied to tragedies like *Ajax*, *Philoctetes*, and *Medea* where there is a breakdown or restoration of these bonds.[47]

Angelopoulou's work forms the theoretical basis of my thesis, though I slightly differ from her approach. First, by focusing on the chorus, I use kinaesthesia to understand and experience the senses rather than applying a broadly multisensory approach. The kinaesthetic form leads to an affective impact. Second, Angelopoulou focuses on the coming together of communities through embodiment. I extend my focus to the role of embodiment at moments when negative emotions of fear and grief are exposed by the chorus, and are used to tear apart different members of the community (in the case of *Septem* the ruler Eteocles and the men fighting in the battle versus the chorus women), as well as to bring them together. Third, she focuses on the embodied ethics of tragedy. I do not engage in any ethical reading of the play, since by emphasising the value of affective experience over embodied ethics, I wish to highlight the empathy the chorus ignites amongst the audience, irrespective of whether they act ethically in relation to ancient Greek norms or not. Lastly, by interpreting the tragedy as a choreographic script, I do not only look at the sensory and metaphorical textual embodiments that Angelopoulou stresses, but include the entirety of the chorus' lyric segments in my analysis.

Beyond Classical Scholarship: Key Theories and Definitions

The word embodiment has multiple meanings. First, I focus on the perspective of performance studies. Karen Barbour in her work explains her interpretation of embodied ways of knowing, concluding that they can be used as an epistemological strategy for both creative and academic work. As a feminist dancer and academic, she smoothly integrates research with praxis to contribute fruitfully to both fields. She quotes a dancer named Jan in her work, who

[47] Angelopoulou, 2025, pp. 2–19.

says, 'dancing is intelligence in action, kinaesthetic intelligence'.[48] Based on this, Barbour crafts a wide-ranging definition for embodiment:

> Embodiment is a holistic experience, different from 'bodily' experience (which remains differentiated from the 'mind' and is typically based on a Cartesian dualistic understanding of mind and body). I argue that embodiment encompasses an individual person's biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, social, gendered, artistic and spiritual experience, within their cultural historical and geographical locations… Most importantly embodiment can also be understood through movement, an embodied activity.[49]

Her interpretation pays attention to the multiple facets that lead to an embodied presence and experience and then she is able to connect those to dance. She focuses on the individual and their relationship to their environment and culture.

Another way of looking at embodiment is in relation to other bodies. Susan Stuart creates a concept called enkinesthesia that conceptualises a relationship between kinesthetic feeling and communication. According to her,

> Embodiment maybe a nomological condition for agency but it is the agent's capacity to spill over into the bodily experience of others and vice-versa which establishes the community and reciprocity of felt co-engagement.[50]

Campbell Edinborough comments on Stuart's definition, saying,

> The cultivation of this kinetic or kinesthetic empathy serves to create an aesthetic that highlights the shared humanity of the dancer and the spectator… In dance, the spectator is not simply provided with a visual image, he is invited to witness the unfolding of a process.[51]

Providing a basis for his interpretation, Edinborough uses the mirror neutron theory. According to this, 'the discovery of mirror neurons provides one way of recognising how empathetic response does not begin at the point of conceptualisation through higher cognition, but at the perceptual and sensory level'.[52]

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[48] Barbour, 2011, p. 91.
[49] Barbour, 2011, p. 88.
[50] Stuart in Edinborough, 2016, pp. 54–55.
[51] Edinborough, 2016, p. 59.
[52] Edinborough, 2016, p. 53.

With regard to dance and embodiment, Edward C. Warburton proposes an alternative. He suggests moving beyond the traditional divide between phenomenology and cognitive science to create a more integrated understanding of dance cognition. Warburton introduces the theoretical construct of 'dance enaction' to understand how dance experiences emerge from basic processes and how dancing shapes the mind, body, and brain:

> The concept of 'enaction' is a cornerstone of the embodied cognition literature, which claims that cognition is 'for action'—i.e., the function of the mind is to guide action—and is a "situated activity"—i.e., it takes place in the context of a real-world environment. An enactive approach emphasizes the emotional and relational nature of thought in action. The conjoinment of 'dance' with 'enaction' defines the knowledge domain and real-world context of dancer action and performance.[53]

He discusses three types of empathetic responses in dance: somatic empathy (that involves a bodily-based sensing of one's own and another's somatic experience, and allows dancers to sense subtle cues about another's state or intention, contributing to a deep, embodied understanding of movement); kinaesthetic empathy (that enables viewers to feel they participate in the movements they observe, even while sitting still); and mimetic empathy (that involves the ability to put oneself imaginatively in the place of another, reproducing in one's own imagination and physicality the emotional tenor and movement form of another). This last type of empathy is crucial for dancers to embody a choreographer's expressive intention, and to connect with the audience. These empathetic responses form a crucial part of the 'dance enaction', and highlight the intricate cognitive processes involved in dance performance and appreciation.[54]

Susan Leigh Foster examines the historical dimension of arriving at the mirror neutron theory, and exposes how dance elicits emotional responses by engaging the viewer's kinesthetic sense – the perceived orientation, tension, and momentum of one's body while observing others in motion. She identifies three evolving explanations for this phenomenon. Initially, early

[53] Warburton, 2011, p. 67.
[54] Warburton, 2011, pp. 73–75.

twentieth-century critics such as John Martin proposed 'inner mimicry'[55] in which viewers subtly replicate a dancer's movements, even while seated. This concept emerged alongside scientific advancements in proprioception (Sherrington)[56], and a cultural shift emphasising expressive, trainable muscles. Modern dance embraced this idea, using movement as a conduit for meaning and emotion.[57]

A shift occurs in the 1960s–70s, influenced by J. J. Gibson's work. Kinesthesia is reconceptualised as the integrator of all senses, actively organising perception. Dance performances present activity, and viewers' moving attention extract structure, balance, and change from bodies in motion, exemplified by the collaboration between composer John Cage and the choreographer Merce Cunningham.[58]

In the 1990s–2000s, Alain Berthoz[59] and mirror-neuron research reframed this as simulation/resonance. Observing action activates motor circuits that predict trajectories with expertise and habitus influencing the intensity of response. Ivar Hagendoorn[60] applied this concept to dance, suggesting that spectators continuously anticipate the next movement, with confirmations or deviations registering as surprise, pleasure, or tension.[61]

Throughout these models, dance affects viewers by engaging their capacity for movement. Emotional responses arise as spectators co-simulate, co-orient, and co-create the performance alongside the dancers. It is therefore evident that affect theory forms an integral part of my argument. This thesis draws on Donovan O. Shaefer to look at affect as 'the felt emotional texture structuring our embodied experience… this approach creates space for a cross-cutting

[55] Martin, 1939, p. 47.
[56] The term proprioception was coined by Sherrington, 1906.
[57] Foster, 2008, pp. 48–49.
[58] Cage, 1957; Foster, 2008, pp. 50–53.
[59] Berthoz, 2000, p. 58.
[60] Hagendoorn, 2004.
[61] Foster, 2008, pp. 54–56.

of registers from the conscious to the unconscious'.[62] It also connects with this study's phenomenological approach defined by Tilley as 'the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by a subject'.[63] Experiencing the body is, therefore, at the core of both affect theory and phenomenology.

While Foster shows the impact of affect on the audience, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone argues that the dancer does not feel any affect. She is of the view that the dancer's performance, while emotionally charged, does not evoke personal feelings during the act. The typical alignment between emotions and movements in everyday life is absent here. This is because the dancer is wholly immersed in the physical execution of the choreography. The dancer experiences a significant emotional detachment. Rather than being emotionally engulfed in the act/emotion, the dancer focuses on physically expressing its dynamic qualities through movement.[64]

In my view, there is no such thing as an emotionally detached dancer. Even without personal emotions coming into the fray, performers actively adjust intensities of muscle tension, timing, pressure, and emotive expression that are constant creators of affect. Choreography is seen as a source of power, with the dancer both creating and channelling this power. Dance technique is about precisely controlling force and energies, rather than numbing feeling. Moreover, during a performance, affect flows between the dancers and audience. Viewers' kinesthetic empathy interacts with the performer's ongoing adjustments of movement and moments of stillness. This interaction shapes the overall impact of the work. 'Aesthetic distance' thus reflects the careful structuring of the performance and the skill of the performer, rather than a lack of feeling.

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[62] Schaefer, 2019, pp. 1–2.
[63] Tilly, 1994, p. 12.
[64] Sheets-Johnstone, 2012, pp. 50–54.

Sheets-Johnstone, however, provides a pertinent definition of movement from her seminal work *Primacy of Movement*:

> Movement is an ongoing spatio-temporal-energetic dynamic that is felt as such… the kinesthetically felt dynamic is streaming, not a pointillist/punctual event…[65]

According to her, all movements such as running, skipping, writing your name are learnt. As we perceive them, we learn them. Dance comprises of far more complex movements than everyday life. For her 'this learning instance constitutes a perceptive attention to the spatial, temporal, and/or energetic aspects of our movement as it unfolds in a particular surrounding world'.[66] This is kinesthesia. Moreover, 'the meaning of the kinetic experience is in the movement'.[67] I agree with Sheets-Johnstone on these definitions as they provide a productive model to base my thesis on.

Last, I use the work of Lucia Ruprecht to explain gesture. According to her, 'gesture' is defined as movement made comprehensible through interruption. Andrew Benjamin drawing on Bertolt Brecht's *Gestus*[68] suggests that a gesture forms when motion is briefly halted, creating a critical interval that reopens perception. The author defines choreographic gesture as movement marked in time and space, enabling expression and reflection. This marking creates and structures a small 'thinking-space' in performance, without fixing a single meaning. In theatrical contexts, gestures become 'theatrical' signs, extracted from everyday behaviour and placed into a gestural imaginary. Here, they can be altered, misquoted, and used to critique or reframe social norms.[69] They are called second order or surplus gestures:

> Second-order gestures arise from and engage with the radical, non-distinct imaginary, making it distinct and socially shareable through acts of physical articulation.[70]

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[65] Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, p. 511.
[66] Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, p. 517.
[67] Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, p. 511.
[68] For further information look at Benjamin, 2017; Brecht *et al.*, 2019.
[69] Ruprecht, 2019, pp. 28, 29, 31, 32.
[70] Ruprecht, 2019, p. 41.

While I use the word gesture in association and interchangeably with movement, I use this definition to clarify its meaning.

Structure of the Thesis

Based on classical and performance studies scholarship, cognitive theories, and phenomenology, I make clear the purpose of this thesis – to affirm and elaborate upon the centrality of the chorus, and to analyse movement and gesture to uncover its affective impact that a mere textual reading of the play fails to reveal. The thesis is divided into three chapters.

Chapter 1 deals with the chorus problem i.e. it tries to grapple with the lack of understanding that modern directors show towards the presence and role of an ancient chorus. In order to understand and explain this lacuna, the chapter traces historically dismissive attitudes towards the chorus, especially with regard to *Septem*. It then exposes how theories of adaptation/translation, performability, and performativity provide alternative ways to understand attitudes towards the chorus with regard to movements and embodiment.

Chapter 2 comprises an examination of reception studies. It focuses on two modern adaptations of *Septem* – the Italian film *Rehearsal for War* and the production by the La MaMa Experimental Theatre at New York – to locate the use of movement, and the aspects of chorality and community that emerge from a kinetic outlook.

Chapter 3 engages in a close reading of the choral passages in *Septem* to reveal the ways in which an emphasis on movements and gestures enables an alternative interpretation of the play, by expanding and adding to the meaning-making process. In order to offer this complex perspective, this thesis charts approaches to movement on the different experiences of the chorus. Overall, the chapters convey the centrality of the chorus within tragedy by focusing on movements.

Chapter 1: The Chorus Problem[1]

Introduction

In the 2025 West End Spring season, I had the opportunity to witness two powerful adaptations of classical tragedies. The first was *Elektra* at the Duke of York theatre, directed by Daniel Fish using Anne Carson's translations, and starring Brie Larson as the punk rock rebel heroine. The real punch of the performance was the impeccable delivery of the chorus. They did not dance as such, but they sang and recited with such precision and immersion in gesture and movement that this alone conveyed the meaning of the play better than any rendition of collective choral song and dance could achieve. They truly embodied the essence of an ancient Greek chorus.

In contrast, in Ella Hickson's adaptation of *Oedipus* at the Old Vic, directed by Hofesh Shechter and Matthew Warchus, and starring Ramy Malik and Indira Verma, the chorus was only a body of contemporary dancers. The choral passages were removed from the production, leaving the collective to enter at appropriate moments as transition markers and burst into dance. The dance segments were well crafted and performed, but their out of context bursting onto the stage obscured their actual lyrical context. There was emotion expressed through abstraction in movement that could be mapped onto the textual choral odes to assess its meaning. However, the lack of synchronicity of the chorus with the plot did not give the feeling of a sense of community undergoing tragedy. While this production gave dance its due, unlike many others, the method deployed was not in tandem with the conception of the chorus and its role.

[1] Alysse Rich has used the title *The 'Problem' of the Modern Chorus* for her Introduction to her PhD thesis completed in 2012 at the University of Toronto titled *Reconfiguring the Chorus: Adaptations of the Greek Tragic Chorus Since World War II*. While there is some commonality between acknowledging a chorus problem, our chapters are very different. Rich looks into a connection between the audience and its reception of the chorus. She is not directly interested in movement.

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David Sider's review of the 1993-94 production of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, directed by Eva Adamson, mentions two ongoing issues with the production of Greek tragedies. One of these issues was how to direct the chorus. This particular production, Sider explains, had only three chorus members who barely spoke in unison, though he complimented their individualised deliveries. Summing up the issue succinctly, Sider observed:

> The recurrent practical problem is that most modern actors (it would seem) are not trained to speak in chorus, nor do modern directors know what to do with such an odd body during the course of a play.[2]

Not all directors would think of the chorus as an 'odd body', yet they are cognisant that 'too many bodies chanting together wind up droning'.[3] Giving chorus members individual lines has a two-fold advantage – it resolves the question of whom to address, the characters or the audience, as their body language reveals their addressee, and it opens up a way to show differing opinions within a community.

It is the latter that prominently informs the director's understanding of a chorus. In their interviews with Avra Sidiropoulou, Suzuki Tadashi comments that 'overall completely different perspectives are presented by the chorus…'[4] and Ivo Van Hove re-iterates the connection between chorus and community by saying, 'Chorus is people… there are communities, and when you have to deal with Greek tragedy you have to think about what community means today'.[5] In the same interview series, Charles L. Mee acknowledges the 'chorus problem', and labels the attribution of different lines to the members as options in an

[2] Sider, 1994.
[3] Sider, 1994.
[4] Sidiropoulou, 2021, p. 170.
[5] Sidiropoulou, 2021, p. 178.

'unfaithful production'. He finally goes on to pose the main question that needs asking – 'why doesn't it [the chorus] sing and dance?'[6]

It is the answer to this question that I shall attempt to delineate in this chapter. The 'chorus problem' emerges when a director fails to see the chorus from the perspective of its ancient Greek etymology as 'a simultaneously singing dancing body'.[7] They are perplexed by its very presence in the text, and are thus unable to 'translate' it to a unified entity on stage. On a podcast conducted by the APGRD, Ezra Baudou, an academic and dramaturgist, and Struan Leslie, a movement and theatre director,[8] discuss the same issue. They conclude that directors find casting the chorus hard because it goes against the grain of 'star casting' where a famous individual is the focus of the production (and, we might note, often the production's marketing too). Rehearsing and performing the chorus is all about community building. The chorus is not pre-existing, but a process of achieving communality. It is not about illustrating, but about illuminating or revealing ideas that already exist. Thought and breath constitute the first strand on top of which imagery and emotions are layered through movement.[9]

The question I pose in this chapter is – how should we stage the chorus as a simultaneously singing – dancing body today? This marks the starting point as several other enquiries emerge over the course of grappling with this. In the following section, the focus shifts to the historical context of the chorus, examining how philological developments and post-classical changes diminished the chorus' kinetic essence. Through a detailed literature review, I also explore how contemporary Anglophone scholarship continues this trend with

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[6] Sidiropoulou, 2021, p. 162.
[7] The word *choros* in ancient Greece always implied singing and dancing together. As Peponi notes,
'both poetic and philosophical evidence indicates that in choral practices the alliance of body and voice was considered essential to the group's overall coordination, even in cases where the performance seemed to require a distribution of the kinetic and the vocal action between its members'. (Peponi, 2014, p. 15)
[8] He was the founding Head of Movement at the Royal Shakespeare Company from 2008 to 2013 and currently is the Artistic Director of Twenty-First Century Chorus, which he formed in 2014 upon leaving the RSC.
[9] Di Martino, 2020 (APGRD podcast recording available on https://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/podcast/the-chorus-in-contemporary-performance. Accessed on 27/02/2025.

regard to *Septem*. The chapter proceeds to discuss adaptation and translation as processes, drawing on the works of Hutcheon, Sanders, and Barnette, to suggest that tragedy traverses different sign systems (word, image, movement), with the chorus serving as a key medium for this transformation. Then, building on Barba's insights, I argue for dramaturgical texture to be characterised as a dynamic equilibrium between concatenation (cause and effect) and simultaneity (layered action), with the chorus acting as the primary mediator between them. In the subsequent section on performability, referencing Gostand, Bassnett, and Pavis, I suggest that tragic language contains a preverbal or gestural script that translators and directors can collaboratively uncover, viewing the chorus as a choreographic text rather than mere commentary. Lastly, the chapter connects performativity (Austin, Derrida, Butler) with embodiment (Fischer-Lichte's autopoiesis and liminality; Noland's kinesthetic agency), redefining the chorus as a collective that sings and dances, co-creating meaning with the audience during the performance.

Re-centring the chorus

The first point is to trace the history of how the chorus and its movement, community, and unity were undermined. Its origin seems to lie in the history of classical philology, and translations where scholars paid little attention to any aspect of performance. Serious kinetic attention in performance only started with the pioneering productions by the Greek/Polish director Karolos Koun (*Birds* in 1959 and *Persians* in 1965).[10]

The lack of attention to the chorus stretches back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, where the mention of the chorus is minimal, and it is seemingly assimilated as 'one of the actors' (*Poetics*

[10] The first scholars to treat ancient dramas seriously as performance texts were Carlo Fernando Russo. In *Aristofane Autore di Teatro* (Sansoni, 1964), translated into English as *Aristophanes, Author for the Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) in the case of comedy, and Oliver Taplin in *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Taplin, 1977) in the case of tragedy.

1456a25ff). It is not that Aristotle does not engage with the chorus but, as Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi has argued, he does not adequately address the chorus's chief dramatic function. While Aristotle was aware of music's cathartic function, he did not fully explore how the chorus' musical component effects the audience's cognitive and emotional experience of dramatic structure.[11]

Peponi also discusses the diminishing post-classical role of the chorus. According to her, there was a notable decrease in theoretical and critical thought about the chorus after the fourth century BCE. The civic chorus seems to have transitioned from being a central cultural institution to more of a traditional, perfunctory element. Musical experimentations and cultural debates appear to have shifted away from choral performances to other genres, suggesting a decrease in the chorus' role as a site of cultural innovation. The rise of the pantomime in the Roman Empire introduced a new form of performance that incorporated elements of *choreia*, but changed the chorus' role. In pantomime, the chorus served as a background for the solo dancer who was the centrepiece of the performance.[12] Thus, choral performances continued to exist in various forms throughout the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman world, but their cultural significance and the discourse surrounding them appear to have changed.

The Renaissance saw a kind of dismissiveness associated with the chorus expressed through their connection with opera. In Venice around 1640, there was a trend to reduce the number of choruses for economic reasons. Impresarios found choruses costly compared to solo arias, which were becoming more elaborate and popular.[13] In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the concept of 'verisimilitude' in opera led to criticism of choruses as unrealistic. Critics argued that it was implausible for groups of people to deliver 'high and

[11] Peponi, 2014, pp. 24–25.
[12] Peponi 2014, pp. 26-27.
[13] Savage, 2014, p. 122.

erudite speech unanimously'. Critics like d'Aubignac argued that a character could not realistically speak about secret matters with a chorus present.[14]

In mid eighteenth-century French opera, the chorus was criticised for being too passive and uninvolved in the action. The chorus of the Paris Opéra was criticised for its lack of physical action. Even in dramatic scenes, they remained stationary and composed, contradicting the lyrics they were singing.[15] Therefore, the reduction of choruses likely contributed to the development and prominence of other musical forms within opera such as the aria and recitative.

German Idealist philosophers determined the perception of the chorus in the nineteenth century. Despite considering the chorus integral to tragedy, they often relegated it to a secondary position. Schelling viewed the chorus as a functional device. It served as an 'objectivised reflection' that guided spectators towards a serene contemplation of the hero's actions. This interpretation, while highlighting the chorus' role in audience engagement, ultimately diminished its dramatic agency. In British educational contexts, interpretations like Mahaffys reduced the chorus to a 'mere spectator' that is 'selfish' and 'irrelevant', particularly in Sophocles' works. Influenced by Schopenhauer, Wagner relocated the chorus' 'truth' to the orchestra, effectively creating a 'chorus without a chorus'.[16]

In the case of *Septem*, translators and scholars from the beginning have had a tenuous relationship with its chorus as can be seen from some examples in Anglophone scholarship. J. S. Blackie's translation of Aeschylus was first published in 1850, and his introduction to *Septem* was less than favourable.[17] Blackie gives a compelling account of the chorus, its origin, and its

[14] Savage, 2014, p. 123.
[15] Savage, 2014, p. 126.
[16] Goldhill, 2014, pp. 39, 47, 48, 51.
[17] In his view, structure was lacking, war was the emphasis, the ending was a 'blunder', and the likable bits were epic in nature rather than dramatic.

pivotal role in tragedy in the second chapter of his work, but these are general observations as he does not specifically comment on the chorus in *Septem*.[18] Similarly, in A. W. Verrall's 1887 introduction to *Seven Against Thebes*, very little attention is paid to the chorus. Several issues regarding the play are addressed,[19] but the chorus only appears in the discussion of the plot of the play where it is unavoidable. Verrall takes Eteocles' side in describing the cries of the chorus in the beginning:

> The spectacle of the maiden's flight and the noise of their cries have so far disheartened the defenders, that Eteocles is forced to suspend arrangements and return to the acropolis to restore quiet.[20]

In the next few pages, he adopts a balanced stance, neither favouring nor demeaning the chorus but rather disengaging with their position altogether.[21]

Lewis Campbell in 1890 had little to say about the chorus when introducing the play. He addresses the chorus in one line, placing them in opposition to Eteocles – 'the trepidation of the Theban women forms the dramatic contrast to this terrible self-possession'.[22] Unfortunately, Campbell has a non-dramatic and non-performance-oriented approach to the whole play, which only adds to his lack of sensitivity towards the chorus.

In 1908, T.G. Tucker also largely considered the chorus to be unimportant even though he was somewhat sympathetic to their voice and their anxieties. Tucker also questions the lack of action in the play, seeing it from the perspective of a modern audience. Tucker believes that, besides the chorus, *Septem* mirrors the characteristics of an epic. I agree with his argument that the world of oracles, superstitions, and curses may be alien to a modern audience, but I hesitate

[18] Blackie, 1850, pp. 261–262.
[19] The opposition of Cadmeans and Achaeans and the burial of the Argive leaders, are discussed under sub-headings in their own right.
[20] Verrall, 1887, p. xiii.
[21] Verrall, 1887, pp. x111-xvi.
[22] Campbell, 1890, p. 74.

to endorse his view that the play lacks complex characters and gravitas. Tucker appreciates 'Aeschylus' power of language', and I believe therein lies the power of action as well.[23]

One of the foremost Classicists of the twentieth century, Gilbert Murry, has a fledgling relationship with the chorus of *Septem*. His impression of Eteocles is one of admiration, as he states: 'We have a beleaguered city and a cool-headed heroic soldier defending it'.[24] Despite this, he does not conceive of Eteocles and the chorus as at odds with each other and praises the 'realism' that the chorus brings to the play.

He focuses his attention on those lines of the chorus where they say that they sense the war, such as – 'Do you hear, or do you not, the clash of the shields?' (100) – and notes the proficiency of Aeschylus' stagecraft since 'the chorus tried to produce the actual noise of an assault upon the gates'.[25] He highlights that the sensory experience of the chorus gives them credibility as narrators and participants of a tragic plot, while also immersing the audience in their *pathos*. Murray's scholarship is particularly important as he points to the element of dance that had hitherto been ignored by most others:

> We are told that Telestes, the dancer used by Aeschylus, presumably as Leader of the Chorus, was such an artist that by his dancing in the *Seven Against Thebes* he made the audience 'see the things that were being done'. [26]

He then moves on, describing the role of the chorus after the parodos as a warning of what would occur if the city was captured, calling their depiction 'a vivid and most real production'.[27]

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[23] Tucker, 1908, pp. xlvii–xlix.
[24] Murray, 1940, p. 134.
[25] Murray, 1940, p. 135.
[26] Murray, 1940, p. 131.
In the original Greek the lines are:
Ἀριστοκλῆς οὖν φησιν ὅτι Τελέστης ὁ Αἰσχύλου ὀρχηστὴς οὕτως ἦν τεχνίτης ὥστε ἐν τῷ ὀρχεῖσθαι τοὺς Ἑπτὰ ἐπὶ Θήβας φανερὰ ποιῆσαι τὰ πράγματα δὶ ὀρχήσεως. (Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, 22a)
Aristocles thus says that Telestes the dancer of Aeschylus who was an artist such that when he was dancing the *Seven Against Thebes* he made apparent the events and actions through his dancing. (my trans.)
[27] Murray, 1940, p. 136.

His positive stance towards the chorus takes a turn as he compares the choral women to terrified women during the Blitz in London. He questions their movements on stage, saying, 'they rushed to the sacred images like a mob, not like an ordinary chorus'.[28] Further, Murray takes Eteocles' side, adding that the hero gave the women instructions because it would be 'psychologically impossible for them to remain still'. Murray undergoes another change in perspective towards the chorus, saying, 'formerly such a feeble and frightened folk, turn to calm him (Eteocles)'.[29] Murray redeems himself by recognising that the chorus nonetheless indexes the atrocities, pain, and tragedies of war.[30] Murray was writing in the 1940s, and although not entirely sympathetic towards the chorus, he made an effort to include it in his discussion which could be attributed to his extensive work as a director and producer of stage productions.

In 1956, David Grene and Richmond Lattimore say little about the chorus in their translation but acknowledge the 'tremendous effects that dancing accompaniments would have made'.[31] They argue that *Septem* could neither be staged in antiquity nor in our times, which shows a lack of dramaturgical understanding and the centrality of the chorus in the tragic plot.

H.D. Cameron's analysis, first published in 1971, does not focus on the centrality of the chorus, even though he uses choral passages to make his arguments. His focus is on the imagery in the text, but I believe that the chorus should have occupied a more prominent position. In the second chapter, where he gives a detailed summary of the play, his stance towards the chorus is clear, 'the chorus is as much an enemy within as the Argives are outside'.[32] He focuses on Eteocles' leadership and characterises the women of the chorus as a disruptive force within

[28] Murray, 1940, p. 136.
[29] Murray, 1940, p. 140.
[30] Murray, 1940, p. 142.
[31] Lattimore and Grene, 1956, p. 88.
[32] Cameron, 2020, p. 33.

the city walls that must be managed and controlled. He justifies Eteocles' misogynistic behaviour by legitimising his disdain for women and stressing that it is a consequence of the ongoing crisis.[33] From line 677, Cameron sees the role and scope of the chorus as changing from an active to a passive entity as their safety is no longer in question.[34]

Cameron evidently engages with the chorus from a very restricted perspective and patriarchal attitude. A similar lens is used by G.O. Hutchinson in his commentary published in 1985. He momentarily acknowledges Eteocles' harshness towards the chorus but thinks it appropriate. In fact, the atmosphere of the play is determined by Eteocles' character and his hatred for emotional irrationalism; the chorus are only secondary in the frame and a reference point for Eteocles' behaviour.[35]

A massive turn in the scholarship of *Septem* took place with Isabelle Torrance's work in 2007 where she gives primacy to the chorus and calls out Eteocles' misogyny. She is not just sympathetic to the chorus women and their fear of war, but also recognises the validity of their reactions. Torrance emphasises that the chorus represents a collective character of Theban maidens, creating a stark contrast to the heroic warriors. They are representatives of the citizenry, and a metonym for the city of Thebes itself. Despite Eteocles' harsh treatment, Torrance points out that the chorus' actions in seeking protection from the gods and conducting ritual worship are entirely appropriate for women during wartime. Her reading of the play is therefore shaped by her recovery of the chorus' centrality in the play.[36]

Translation and Adaptation

[33] Cameron, 2020, pp. 33–34.
[34] Cameron, 2020, p. 46.
[35] Aeschylus, 2017, pp. xxxv, xxxvii.
[36] Torrance, 2013.

Translations for theatre, as Fiona Macintosh has pointed out, have long been dependent on scholars. The work of academics such as Murray and Wilamowitz inspired drama for many generations. In fact, translation for stage drama emerged in England with the Dramatic Copyright Act of 1833, after which literary piracy came to a halt. Since then, translators for plays have been given a higher recognition on par with the actor-manager and even directors. Translations for performances developed over multiple stages, the first of which comprised of the 'literal translations' given to directors.[37] This step slowly created scope for blurring the line between translation and adaptation. It is not surprising that translation and adaptation theory has not focussed much on theatre, including classical theatre; the chorus has attracted even less attention. However, there are ways of re-reading theory that can aid us in our argument.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* is a seminal work in the field. For her, the first task was to remove the association of a secondary status to adaptation relative to the source text. The appeal of an adapted work, Hutcheon argues, 'comes simply from reception with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise…' However, she acknowledges when the lack of joy in repetition emerges – 'there is something counterintuitive about the desire for persistence within a post-Romantic and capitalist world that values novelty primarily…'[38]

It thus becomes hard for us to emphasise the importance of the re-interpretation of tragedy in various contexts, cultures, and temporalities. Yet this task has been undertaken by directors for at least the past fifty years. If tragedy itself focuses on a variety of universal emotions and storylines adaptable to diverse groups, the chorus is the voice of repetition within the tragic framework. By this I mean that the chorus labours on one or two aspects within the plot that are repeated throughout the tragedy in different ways. It is the voice of the author, the

[37] Macintosh, 2013.
[38] Hutcheon, 2012, p. 4.

people, of reason, of concern, of dilemma, of lament, and the source of repetition owing to its ritualistic origins in the cult of Dionysus. To today's audience, where satisfaction may be achieved through the click of a button, the long-drawn-out process of introspective pleasure derived from immersion in a repetitive ritualised singing-dancing body doesn't hold the same appeal. Directors thus engage minimally with the choral body as a singing-dancing unit.

Hutcheon's definition of adaptation that includes not just the product but the process is helpful in navigating such a conundrum. Therefore, 'as a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-) interpretation and then (re-) creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective'.[39] Focusing on the process makes the question of fidelity to the original text redundant. It also implies that the 'original text' is not in fact 'original' but drawn from the mythical, religious, and oral traditions of that time. *Septem* was not only Aeschylus' brainchild, but also the culmination of a mythic tradition that dealt with the lineage of Thebes from its establishment by Cadmus, through the story of Oedipus, and finally the feud between Eteocles and Polyneices navigating a family curse. Aeschylus was able to adapt the myth, making it relevant to the Dionysus festival, as well as the political context and needs of Athens. Similarly, some of Shakespeare's plays are a reception/adaptation of *c*lassical authors. *Antony and Cleopatra* draws from Roman traditions and ancient sources such as the *Life of Antony* by Plutarch. Even the modern novel, although unique in its form, cannot be dissociated from the history of literary and mythic forms that morph into a plot.[40]

[39] Hutcheon, 2012, p. 8.
[40] Keeping this backdrop in mind, viewing adaptation as an end result is based on its ability to be 'transposed', a process that all authors throughout time have engaged in. Hutcheon used the word 'transposition' to mean 'a shift in ontology from the real to the fictional, from a historical account or biography to a fictionalised narrative or drama'. (Hutcheon, 2012, p. 8)

In Hutcheon's eyes, such flexibility in interpreting a dramatic text does not limit it to a 'formal entity or product but expands its relevance to include the audience/receptor'. This makes the text part of a broader 'process of reception' where its meaning evolves depending on how it is received and interpreted, rather than being limited to its original form.[41] Hutcheon emphasises that this process elevates reception 'to a form of intertextuality' that does not simply replace the original but creates a dialogue. She then engages with the question – what is 'transformed' in this process of adaptation? The crux of her argument focuses on 'sowing a story' which for theatre 'involves a direct aural and usually visual performance experience in real time'.[42] The audience is thus never a purely passive entity.

She goes on to draw our attention to 'translating' that is imperative for adaptation and can be used interchangeably. This is a 'remediation' of 'specifically translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images). This is translation but in a very specific sense: a transmutation or transcoding, that is, necessarily a recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs'.[43]

A new set of conventions and signs are the axis on which drama works as a re-mediation from narrative/text to showing/dramatising. Deriving meaning from a story surpasses language in performance as it expands to 'visual gestural representations', which through contextual associations become the building blocks of meaning making.[44] Tragedy allows the chorus the agency to embody this visual and gestural role; to be the body through which both the characters and the audience derive meaning.

[41] Hutcheon, 2012, p. 8.
[42] Hutcheon, 2012, p. 13.
[43] Hutcheon, 2012, p. 16.
[44] Hutcheon, 2012, p. 23.

Hutcheon was not the only one to grapple with these ideas of translation. Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* iterates that intertextuality is not bound by the text or even drama scripts. She focuses on Julia Kristeva's ideas, urging us to 'views art, music, drama, dance, and literature in terms of a living mosaic, a dynamic intersection of textual surfaces'.[45] In ancient tragedy, while text inhabits the surface, the depth is achieved through music, action, and dance that are used to convey, enhance, and vitalise the text.

Sanders also calls into question a linear mode of viewing adaptation and appropriation:

> Adaptation and appropriation provide their own intertexts such that they perform in cultural dialogue with one another, so perhaps it will increasingly serve us better to think in terms of complex filtration, and in terms of network, levels, and signifying fields, rather than simplistic one-way lines of movement from source to adaptation. In the latter model, certainly, the importance of audience, reception, and contextualised production of meaning is made properly visible.[46]

In my view, this is perhaps one of the most robust interpretations of adaptation that can aid our understanding of ancient tragedy. The model for 'complex filtration' gives a chance for multiple ideas and influences to be filtered and transformed through multiple layers and perspectives that are inclusive of signifying fields such as language, cultural symbols, and various ways of meaning-making. An example may help. In 2021, the Oxford Classical Drama Society performed its first ever online rendition of the tragedy *Orestes* that used ancient Greek only in a few scenes. They used a multi-modal approach, since it was also on Zoom. Very few parts were pre-recorded, and the play was relayed in real time. There was a blending of queer elements and minority characters, but the essence of the production was the collective chorus, each performing from their own rooms at home, yet coming together on the screen in tiny windows. They combined abstract movements created through exercises workshopped earlier. The chorus was the collection of the various characters shedding their identity to form the

[45] Sanders, 2016, p. 5.
[46] Sanders, 2016, p. 33.

citizens of Argos, and bringing together a community during the Covid lockdown without being together in person. The layers of meaning-making tied within the environment of Covid created a space for *Orestes* the Greek tragedy to derive meaning from this adaptation, and for this unique temporal context to illuminate the original text.

Much like Sanders, Jane Barnette[47] in *Adapturgy: The Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation* gives thought to context, in a more sapient way, with dramaturgy at its heart:

> The reception of adaptation – whether it is to be read (written words), seen (visual art), heard (music), or some combination of the above – must be guiding principal for dramatic practice.[48]

By shifting attention away from what is adapted to the question of how it is received, our understanding of adaptation expands to consider cultural context as well as material concerns of accessibility. However, Barnette's research does not delve into performance studies, and is limited to adaptation of script for theatre.

Text as Texture

In order to understand dramaturgical practice, Eugenio Barba's work is extremely useful. He separates the way we use our bodies in daily life from the work of performers. For him:

> The first steps in discovering what principles governing a performer's scenic bios, or life, might be, lies in understanding that the body's daily techniques can be replaced by extra-daily techniques, this is, techniques that do not respect the habitual conditioning of the body. Performers use these extra-daily techniques.[49]

[47] Jane Barnette, critiques Hutcheon's interpretation. For Barnette, Hutcheon's focus on 'repetition with variation' is not suitable to theatre and lacks a dynamic approach. Her work engages in more detail with film. Hutcheon's biological approach, seeing adaptation as a 'transgenerational phenomenon', is also hugely problematic. I find it limited, and riddled with racial assumptions. Those ancient texts that have come down to us are hardly a reflection of the survival of the fittest, but a result of the process of education and rewriting, accompanied by the vagaries of history. Texts can constantly evolve like humans, but the evolution need not be reduced to Darwin's theory, and must be seen within the context of the history of their transmission.
[48] Barnette, 2018, p. 23.
[49] Barba and Savarese, 2011, p. 7.

An example of daily technique can be the tying of shoelaces or picking up something that has fallen, whereas extra-daily techniques maybe carefully curated bite-sized steps that are the building blocks of movement patterns in dance. He then elaborates how these techniques have always been present in Asian theatre and dance practices by giving examples from Japanese and Indian traditions. His engagement with dramaturgy influenced by these traditions gives special significance to the dynamic and dialectical relationship between text and performance. He states that 'the word 'text' before referring to a written or spoken, printed or manuscript text meant a 'weaving together'. In this sense, there is no performance which does not have 'text'.[50] The nuance that his words create make the entire debate in translation studies concerning the primacy of the 'original text' seem moot. Further, his tracing back of the word dramaturgy to the Greek dramata-ergon, meaning 'the work of the actions' helps in looking at performance beyond its text and script, and through work and action frameworks. The action in theatre proceeds to include aspects such as space and lights – 'everything that works directly on the spectators' attention, on their understanding, their emotions, their kinaesthesia, is an action…' And for him, 'the actions come into play when they are woven together, when they become texture: 'text''.[51] It is worth noting here that in tragedy the point at which all these various elements come together for the benefit of the spectator's immersion is during the segments of the chorus.

The texture emerges from two kinds of plots. Concatenation for Barba is the first type and simultaneity the second. He defines them as follows:

> The first type is accomplished through the development of actions in time by means of a concatenation of causes and effects or through an alteration of actions which represent two parallel developments. The second type occurs only by means of simultaneity; the simultaneous presence of several actions.[52]

[50] Barba and Savarese, 2011, p. 66.
[51] Barba and Savarese, 2011, p. 66.
[52] Barba and Savarese, 2011, p. 67.

Barba's two plot modes of concatenation and simultaneity infuse dramaturgy with rhythm. The essence of a performance lies in the tension between these modes: the way it oscillates between propelling the narrative forward, and enriching the present with concurrent actions. This distinction becomes clear when we separate a pre-written dramatic text from the performance text created onstage. The latter is transient, existing solely in its live execution, and no recording can fully capture its blend of sequential and simultaneous cues. While 'traditional' theatre often favours concatenation and 'new' theatre emphasises simultaneity, in practice they are in constant dialogue. Any staging must continually balance these elements – deciding when to advance causal momentum and when to enrich the moment with overlapping action.

The chorus is a prime example of this texturing. The chorus in Greek tragedy serves as a balancing force, often complicating directors' efforts to interpret it today. It intricately weaves the plot of a Greek tragedy, which can be expressed in various ways through concatenation. First, the chorus outlines past events that trigger the current action. For example, in Aeschylus' *Persians*, the chorus of elders opens the play by recounting past events that lead to the present situation, including the queen's exchange and the impending necromancy. Second, this connection is sometimes subtler. In *Septem*, the history of the Cadmean family is not frequently mentioned; the Oedipus myth appears once or twice, but is embedded in the chorus' subconscious, influencing their perspective on fate and the fratricide that occurs. Each event follows a linear progression. Third, this linearity can follow multiple paths – the chorus interacts with characters while developing its own interpretation of the plot, as seen in nearly all tragedies. In *Septem*, while the chorus engages with Eteocles and the messenger, the characters continue their roles parallel to the chorus's fears and actions.

However, these are not the only plot features. The chorus also embodies simultaneity. As a body in conversation with characters, it constantly challenges the plot's linearity, representing the tension and dialectics that drive the performance. The chorus in *Septem*, through its petulance, reveals its vulnerabilities and anxieties, achieved through dialogue with Eteocles, whose responses are less than positive. The chorus' constant pushback against Eteocles' reactions to their fears, in turn, challenges the plot's linear progression. The chorus questions the inevitability of a battle even as it unfolds, becoming an unwitting recipient of the play's consequences. The action is conveyed through the chorus' strengths in dialogue, song, dance, and gesture as a unified body; there is dispersal in unison, clustering in dispersal; sometimes individuals shine within the collective, all while engaging with other characters. The chaos of the chorus, a blend of all actions, verbal and otherwise, constitutes the plot's tension, forming the essence of dramaturgy and embodying its texture.

Performability

Reba Gostand was one of the first to comment on the language of theatre and its non-verbal elements. For her, every stage of production involves a process of translation, and the inclusion of non-verbal elements 'the music (and all the verbal, mechanical, electrical or natural sound effects), the silences, the action, the movement or immobility (including gesture, stage-business, mime, dance), the characterisation, the grouping, the costuming and make-up, the setting, props, lighting and use of colour, the use of contrast or juxtaposition, tension and pace'.[53] All these elements at some point or another are used for symbolism in every stage production. For a tragic chorus, it is never one or the other; they all occur at the same time.

[53] Gostand, 2014, p. 2.

Apart from the words and music that most chorus' display in adaptations, I would lay specific emphasis on gesture, mime, and dance.

Drawing from the above, the question that emerges deals with the semiotics of theatre and performability – to what extent are the non-verbal elements embedded in the source text? Can a translator access them through close reading? If they are already embedded in the source text, then how do we reconcile them without giving the source text primacy over the performance text?

In their introductory chapter, Silvia Bigliazzi, Peter Kofler, and Paolo Ambrosi have tried to clear this distinction by bringing in the 'stage text' that lies between the source text and the performance text. It arises from 'the theatrical potential of the verbal text to be transformed into stage gesture'. Translation for the stage is seen as going beyond 'the semiotic boundaries of verbal art by indirectly pointing to the multitude of signifying elements involved in the theatrical performance'.[54] The understanding of 'the drama text as the locus of stage-craft' is similar to the dialogue that theatre semioticians had forty years ago. For these scholars, the deixis language created transformations into signs that are situational, visual, aural, gestural, and corporal. The gestic-text comes to life based on the idea that 'semiotically speaking, the verbal code, directly or indirectly refers to gesture'.[55]

Susan Bassnett was one of the first propagators for the presence of a 'gestural-subtext'[56] and then, in time, she redefined her stance by denying the presence of performability. She argues that it is almost impossible for a translator to imagine signs including paralinguistic and kinetic signs from their desk. The relationship between power and economic constraints and a

[54] Ambrosi, Bigliazzi and Kofler, 2013, p. 6.
[55] Ambrosi, Bigliazzi and Kofler, 2013, pp. 6–7.
[56] She used the term performability to ascertain that the source text is embedded with characteristics that make it performable. She also expected the translator to access these coded gestures while being cognisant of the time, place, audience, and culture that the adaptation catered to. (Bassnett, 1991)

translator are extremely strong. Further, an acceptance of the performability of a text aids in acquiring the supremacy of the source text and the translator. She felt that the invention of the gestural code was a way of gaining one-upmanship by the translators in their relationship with directors. She also iterates that gesture is at the mercy of culture and varies frequently.[57]

Bassnett was a fierce critic of Patrice Pavis, and through the interaction of these scholars two different approaches to performability emerged. I am in agreement with Pavis' views, since he made some strong arguments in favour of a text's performability. Pavis asserts the connectedness between text and stage, and does not see their interaction as reductive. His definition of *mise en scene* helps us navigate this issue:

> *Mise en scene* is not a transformation of text into performance, but rather a theoretical 'fitting' which consists in putting a text under dramatic and stage tension, in order to test how stage utterance challenges the text and invites hermeneutic circle between the text and it's enunciation (between *ènonces* and *enunciation*) thus opening up the text to several possible interpretations… it is always in a state of becoming.[58]

Moreover, in a dramatic text we are left with only the linguistic traces of the preceding gestural and preverbal process. Thus, to translate the source text to the target text we have to unearth this preverbal element accomplished through an imaginary *mise en jeu* that implies bringing a text to life through a dramatic interactive process that is 'confronted with the bodily gestures of action'. The process of *mise en jeu* aims to find a balance between the 'gestural situation of enunciation' and the 'linguistic utterance'. There is thus a shift from reading to embodiment. Once the preverbal has been applied onto the target text, the '*mise en jeu* is then reduced to a purely linguistic system'. On the stage, the text is re-embodied to a 'global situation of enunciation' i.e. where the verbal and preverbal elements come to communicate meaning effectively.[59]

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[57] Bassnett, 1991.
[58] Pavis, 2010, pp. 29–30.
[59] Pavis, 2010, pp. 142–143.

Such a union of word and gesture creates the language-body that Pavis defines as:

> the specific alliance of word and gesture that the translator notes in the source language and which he tries to imitate ironically in the target text.[60]

Pavis' theory can provide a practical solution to the chorus problem. Reading the tragic chorus from the perspective of retaining this preverbal/gestic code elevates the play to the level of a choreographic script. In ancient Greece, tragedians were well versed in singing, dancing, miming, and acting with an intuitive understanding of all aspects of drama. It may have been probable that Aeschylus did not give his script much supremacy in relation to the performance, and was perhaps more concerned with its overall staging experience (the 'performance text') for the specific purpose of winning a dramatic competition. A modern translator finds it hard to bring the gestic elements to the forefront because of the acute specialisation of roles these days. The solution lies in a collaborative approach between the fields of translation, direction, and performance.

In the second half of this thesis, I will undertake a close reading of the chorus passages in *Seven Against Thebes* with the intention of unearthing the preverbal elements related to dance. Much of this effort will be backed by scholarship – Pavis' theory, and the idea of metachorality deployed by Henrichs and Weiss. My observations will also be imbued with my perspective and lived experience as an Indian classical Bharatnatyam dancer. Therefore, this thesis is a work of both reception studies and performance studies in classics, giving the body a central position. While gestural decoding brings out the performability of the text, embodiment and the action of performing and deriving from the much-debated word performativity cannot be overlooked.

Performativity

[60] Pavis, 2010, p. 152.

Performativity has been researched by scholars from different fields such as language, philosophy, anthropology, gender studies, theatre studies, and performance studies. One of the first academics to coin this phrase was the philosopher of language J.L. Austin. Austin's use of the word 'performative utterance' opened up new ways of understanding how language functions and laid the groundwork for speech act theory. According to Austin:

> A performative statement or performative utterance, or for short, 'a performative'… The name is derived of course from 'perform, the word used with the noun 'action': it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something.[61]

Performatives often resemble regular statements that convey facts, leading scholars to misinterpret them as descriptive phrases and using the term 'masquerading' to argue that these utterances are functionally distinct from statements. Austin focuses on the action-oriented approach of these utterances.[62]

Derrida was immensely influenced by Austin and formally critiqued his theory. Derrida focuses on Austin's non-serious use of language, and argues that the very conditions that make performative utterance possible – iterability, citation, and context dependence – also make them inherently impure and open to 'non-serious' uses. Iterability is the capacity for language to be repeated in different contexts, and is a fundamental condition of language. A 'successful' performative cannot be free from this structure of iteration; it is already 'impure'.[63]

Derrida feels that Austin's notion of performatives depends on the speaker's attention being fully present and transparent within the utterance, but he argues that this is not possible since repetition introduces a 'cleft' or 'brisure' in the utterance – the speaker's intention is not fully graspable. Additionally, the iterability of language makes any context open to reinterpretation and redefinition and no context can be fully 'saturated'. He also questions

[61] Austin, Urmson and Sbisà, 1975, p. Lecture I.
[62] Austin, Urmson and Sbisà, 1975, p. Lecture I.
[63] Derrida, 2020, p. 17.

Austin's distinction between ordinary and non-serious language, arguing that it is rooted in a bias that privileges certain uses of language over others. In conclusion, rather than viewing the 'non-serious' as a limitation of language, Derrida embraces it as a feature of how language operates. The inherent instability reveals the complexity of linguistic meaning.[64]

Drawing from Austin and Derrida, as well as Victor Turner's pioneering work on the anthropology of performance, Judith Butler has etched the concept of performativity as we think of it today. According to Butler, when sex is framed as a substance, it is based on the illusion that sex or gender is a natural state of existence. This seeming naturalness is a result of the performative acts of language and discourse. Language does not simply describe text. The performative twist is the way language and cultural norms give rise to the belief that sex is an objective truth.[65] 'Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is it constitutes the identity it is purported to be'.[66]

In this regard, gender is an ongoing act. Engaging with Nietzsche's work *On the Genealogy of Morals*, there is no 'being' behind action – the notion of a 'doer' is fiction appended to the deed that is itself primary. Similarly, for Butler there is no inherited gender identity – gender is constructed performatively through the repeated re-enactment of behaviours and expressions that are mistakenly thought to be about pre-existing gender identities. Performativity, therefore, reveals that gender is not something that one is, but something one does continuously and contextually shaped by social and cultural norms.[67]

Butler, lastly, creates a distinction between performance and performativity. They argue that 'the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake'. This reduction would

[64] Derrida, 2020, p. 18.
[65] Butler, 2011, pp. 25–26.
[66] Butler, 2011, p. 34.
[67] Butler, 2011, p. 34.

imply that performativity, like performance, is a choice and would take away from Butler's understanding of it as a process of social production that goes beyond individual agency; the repetition of social conventions exists prior to, and independent of, the individual's performance. Butler adopts an anti-theatrical approach as they place performativity in opposition to theatricality (performance).

One of the foremost critiques of this approach is Moya Lloyd. Lloyd relays, 'Butler contends that the practices that produce gender subjects are also the sites where critical agency is possible… that the repetition central to maintenance and constitution of gender is always repetition with a difference'. The latter is a Derridean claim.[68] In Lloyd's understanding of Butler:

> It is in the impossibility of identical recitation and necessary reiteration, in the 'failure to repeat a deformity, or a parodic repetition' (1990b 141), that critical feminist practice and the opportunity for "gender transformation" becomes possible'. Based on the above interpretation Butler calls performance a 'bound act' and places it in opposition to performativity.[69]

Lloyd questions this opposition. Performance doesn't create meaning from signification *ab initio*; it redeploys signs that are already embedded in socio-cultural norms. Individuals performing are not free to choose their expression since it is already constrained by the frameworks that precede them. Performance is itself performative, complicating the notion of a clear boundary between the two. All acts are imitative and constructed and the concept of an original 'impersonator' in theatre is untenable. Moreover, a subversive performance might challenge these norms in a way that parallels Butler's views that performativity can destabilise dominant constructions. Theatrical performances serve as a microcosm of performativity, demonstrating how roles in society – as on stage – are embodied and potentially subverted.[70]

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[68] Lloyd, 1999, p. 200.
[69] Lloyd, 1999, pp. 200–201.
[70] Lloyd, 1999, p. 202.

Richard Schechner enters this debate and divides performatives into two groups. First, he refers to clearly marked performatives that are identifiable speech acts such as promises, contracts, or laws taken from Austin. The second are hard to define, diffused performatives that may involve ideas, concepts, or the overarching notion of performance itself. In theatre, 'as if' refers to fictionalised realities constructed through performance which only exist as long as they are being performed on stage. The 'as if' in performativity are the social realities created through repeated actions and behaviours. Schechner feels that theatricality is limited to visual and auditory perceptions, but performativity includes smell, touch, and taste.[71] Scholars have since argued that audiences may experience all kinds of sensory perceptions including touch and smell while watching a performance.

From a poststructuralist perspective, academics have gone on to develop Victor Turner's model with work on performativity from an anthropological lens. This does not help us much in translating a chorus on stage in a reinterpretation of Greek tragedy. Froma Zeitlin highlights Schechner's obsession with ritual and comments on *Dionysus in 69*, 'while Greek tragedy is itself a ritualised event, it is not, of course, a ritual as such, even if it incorporates actual rituals into its scenario, such as prayer, supplication, or sacrifice'.[72] For Schechner, performativity was repeated ritual acts on stage and the bold gender choices in the play. As Janelle Rienelt states, 'Anglo-American theorists have embraced performance and performativity as central organising concepts, European theorists have stressed theatricality'.[73]

One such scholar has been Erika Fischer-Lichte who was inspired by the German scholar Max Herrmann and his work where he made an argument that was bold for his time regarding theatre but is now widely accepted,

[71] Schechner, 2020, p. 273.
[72] Zeitlin, 2023, p. 317.
[73] Reinelt, 2002, p. 207.

> A game in which everyone is a player – actors and spectators alike… The spectators are involved as co-players. In this sense the audience is the creator of the theatre.[74]

Fischer-Lichte interprets this to mean that the relationship between actors and spectators is not one of subject-object but one between two subjects.[75] She argues that Herrmann does not take into account the process of meaning making during the performance.[76] She goes on to refine his approach, combining the long-standing semiotic approach to theatre (discussed earlier in this chapter), and a phenomenological approach to the construction of performativity.

> Whereas a semiotic approach concerns itself with the conditions under which meaning in a performance may emerge out of its performative process and with the meanings that are conceivable and possible, a phenomenological approach focuses on the performative process as such.[77]

A semiotic approach focuses on the interpretive aspects, considering the symbolic meaning of actions, gestures, or signs within the performance; the phenomenological approach highlights the 'eventness' of performance. The transformative process is recognised where spectators are emotionally, cognitively, or experientially affected by what performers do. Even though distinct, these two approaches are inextricable from each other.

A performance emerges through the dynamic interaction between actors and spectators, unfolding through an autopoetic process of self-generation. Once the autopoetic process concludes, the performance itself ends and becomes irretrievably lost. It exists solely within the process of its enactment, functioning only as an event in the moment it occurs.[78] A performance can be understood as an event where no individual has any authority over the course it takes. Occurring spontaneously, it impacts everyone involved; this is evidenced beyond the physical presence of the performers and spectators, but also in the present-ness of

[74] Herrmann, in Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008, p. 32.
[75] Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008, p. 32.
[76] Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008, p. 36.
[77] Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 71.
[78] Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 79.

the experience and the creation of meaning. It draws them 'into a state of betwixt and between, into a state of liminality'.[79]

A performance temporarily removes spectators from the norms and routines of daily life, placing them in a liminal state that can evoke both pleasure and discomfort. This state involves temporary transformations, such as changes in physical, emotional, or energetic states, shifts from spectator to participant, or the creation of a sense of community among performers and spectators. Unlike rituals where liminal spaces lead to permanent socially recognised changes in identity or status, the transformations in artistic performances are fleeting and exist for their own sake. These changes usually fade after the performance ends. However, they may influence an individual's perception of reality, self, and others, leaving lasting imprints on behaviour and thought for both the artists and spectators.[80]

Fischer-Lichte concludes her argument by agreeing that either the semiotic approach or the phenomenological one may be given more importance than the other, but whatever the audience perceives, even the 'neglected dimension will also be effective'.[81]

Last, I refer to Carrie Noland's use of Butler to establish a connection with embodiment. Noland expands on Judith Butler's concept of subject formation through norm reiteration, incorporating Derrida's iterability to encompass movement alongside language. Noland posits that gestures, akin to speech acts, are conventional and repeatable, capable of reinforcing or destabilising identity. She emphasises the embodied aspect that Butler's theory underexplores: the interoceptive and kinesthetic experiences of performing prescribed movements.

[79] Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 79.
[80] Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 80.
[81] Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 80–81.

Noland introduces the ‘gestural performative’ to describe socially coded, skilled movement units that are learned through repetition, but remain susceptible to ‘de-skilling’ and ‘re-skilling’. This repetition serves a dual purpose: communicating meaning to others and allowing the performer to somatically re-experience the act. The resulting kinesthetic feedback can conflict with the norm's intended purpose, exerting non-linguistic influence on discourse. While acknowledging that discourse shapes bodies, Noland argues that repeated enactment allows bodies to reciprocally shape discourse through their kinesthetic experiences. This creates opportunities for resignification. Noland prioritises the ‘doing-body’ over the speaking subject, as physical practice engages more of the kinetic system and more acutely highlights discrepancies between cultural meaning and lived embodiment. When these sensations become undeniable, they reveal constraints beyond language and can spark resistance and change. Consequently, the trained body is not merely a passive carrier of signs, but a potent site of resistance, capable of transforming the very norms it has been conditioned to embody.[82]

Conclusion

An ancient Greek chorus creates meaning through its performative perceptions. These include four categories. The first is their capacity for multi-medial arts existing within the same moment – dance and song, musical instruments played while they perform such as the kithara, and the masks worn by the members which evince the skill of painters and sculptors. Synaesthesia is the second category, when all the five senses are addressed and transferred to the audience. Kinetic and kinaesthetic synergies are shared as the third component, both between the audience and the performers. Last is the mimetic or gestural imitation of action. While this could be influenced by the performability of the text as addressed earlier in this

[82] Noland, 2009.

chapter, the framework that governs performatives such as rituals and norms also form the basis for it.

The chorus and the audience are both placed in a state of liminality. In fact, the chorus occupies a liminal identity within the tragic play. It is the voice of lament, the voice of reason, the voice of ritual and norms, as well as the voice of revolution. This makes the body of the chorus both the site of the representation of norms through gestic engagement, as well as the site to resist and reframe them and to be left for the audience's consideration. It is neither subservient to the voice of the characters, nor does it degrade them; it does not perform for the audience, and yet is a vehicle for the spectator's connection to the plot. It shows the mind of the playwright, as well as the motivations and concerns of the community as a collective. It is the 'in-between' capacity of the chorus that creates a performative dimension for tragedy to uphold and challenge.

Thus, the use of both performability and performativity in translating an ancient Greek adaptation for the stage would be useful in re-centring the chorus within tragedy.

Chapter II: Adapting Aeschylus – A Moving Chorus

Introduction

The reception of *Septem* has been a rather tottering journey. Much of this is owed to the massive role that the chorus has in the play and the complexity its staging involves. Yet things have not always been this way. The war theme of the play brought back admirers to help get through the dark times. *Septem* became that support system for many of its adaptors and translators. Anthony Hecht (an American poet) and Helen H. Bacon (an American classical scholar) in 1973 insisted that translating *Septem* had become imperative given the context of the Vietnam War. They said, '[This translation] was undertaken, finally, at a time that can be regarded as possibly the most shameful in our nation's history; in which we have prosecuted a war for which there can be no moral, political, or military justification'.[1] Moreover, the mythic universe *Septem* drew from, specifically the fratricidal trope, became immensely useful in allowing for retellings of the play to take form. One such case in point was Antón Arrufat's translation and adaptation of the play to the Cuban context and critique of Fidel Castro, wherein, the invasion of the Bay of Pigs was paralleled with the fratricide between Eteocles and Polynices.[2] Therefore, it can be agreed that *Septem* served as an inspiration on occasion, either too hard to tackle, or too close to home to disengage with.

Isabelle Torrance gives a meticulous summary of the reception of this play that I shall delineate to show the evolution of *Septem* over the centuries, and why it remains relevant today. Although it was probably appreciated in the fifth century, *Septem* was not a regular feature in the fourth-century repertoire. However, the text itself was well-preserved, becoming part of

[1] Hecht and Bacon, 1991, p. 17.
[2] Di Martino, 2020, p. 14.

Byzantine educational programs, copied in numerous medieval manuscripts, and eventually printed in the 1518 Aldine edition.[3]

Ancient authors engaged with the play to an extensive degree. Euripides' *Phoenician Women* may have been based on Aeschylus' play, drawing on a list of heroes and the shield descriptions, while offering new perspectives to the tragedy. Sophocles explored this myth throughout his Theban plays, linking the brothers' fate to Oedipus' curse in *Oedipus at Colonus,* and imbued *Antigone'*s choruses with a civic melancholy that contrasted Aeschylus. In Rome, the narrative was reshaped since Accius adapted the fraternal conflict for a Latin audience. Seneca's *Phoenissae* examined the themes through the lens of Stoic psychology, and Statius' *Thebaid* embodied Aeschylus' curse. Early Christian chronographers and moralists then interpreted the Theban cycle to indicate that the story had evolved into a moral example as well as a drama.[4]

Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, the tragedy traversed various genres and political landscapes. The twelfth-century *Roman de Thèbes*, by an unknown author, reinterpreted the narrative within the context of chivalric and crusading worlds, while Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* offered a moral perspective on the civic order of the times, catering to a Lancastrian audience. French classicists frequently revisited the theme of fraternal conflict to explore issues of sovereignty: Robert Garnier's *Antigone ou la Pieté* (1580)[5] on the Protestant and Catholic conflict, Jean de Rotrou's *Antigone* written in 1637 on the themes of nature to show revulsion, and Racine's *La Thébaïde ou les Frères ennemis* (1996) on the rejection of religion and the portrayal of both brothers as evil. Meanwhile, in English literature, Jane Robe's *Fatal Legacy* (1723) used this play to argue against Jacobitism. These adaptations illustrated

[3] Torrance, 2013, p. 99.
[4] Torrance, 2013, pp. 104–106.
[5] For additional information on Garnier not found in Torrance look at Dudouyt, 2023, pp. 190–191, 194.

how *Septem* created a story that could be related to in different contexts and was used as a means to contemplate political realities such as civil strife and the legitimacy of power.[6]

The modern staging history of *Septem* is less extensive than other plays attributed to Aeschylus. A production at Beloit College in 1888 rekindled an interest in this play. A 1924 staging at Syracuse translated by Ettore Romagnoli became a significant reference point, and was soon appropriated into Fascist cultural displays, highlighting the manipulative nature of ideologies to bend stories towards their aims and perspectives.[7] Later twentieth-century adaptations have been bold in their interpretations of the play, crafting narratives with political change at their heart. Antón Arrufat's Cuban play *Los siete contra Tebas* (1968) reimagined civil war in a revolutionary context and was swiftly banned; Einar Schleef's *Die Mütter* (1986) emphasised the chorus' collective body as the essence of tragedy; Mario Martone's *Rehearsals for War* (1998) juxtaposed *Septem's* rehearsal with the siege of Sarajevo, allowing reality to intrude upon theatre; and Will Power's 2006 hip-hop version of *Septem* reimagined the heroes of the past as superhero archetypes to bring the fraternal conflict into a modern context.[8] This meandering history proves that the potential of *Septem* to be adapted is immense, and reiterates the importance of studying these adaptations further.

In this chapter, I look at two adaptations because of their engagement with movement or dance, namely Mario Martone's film *Rehearsal for War* from 1998 and the La MaMa New York adaptation of the play from 2001 to assess the role of the chorus and the movements within them.

Mario Martone's film *Rehearsal for War*

[6] Torrance, 2013, pp. 119–111.
[7] For further information and details of this production look at Di Martino, 2024, pp. 22–28.
[8] Torrance, 2013, pp. 111-113.

In the last moments of the film, that are more like an epilogue, a newspaper is distributed and circulated around a table of seated actors who had just successfully opened a production of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the *Teatro Comunale* (the richer, revived theatre in Naples that stands in contrast to *Teatro Nuovo*, the poor theatre, where the protagonist Leo is directing an adaptation of *Septem*). Excited at reading their reviews, one of the members inquires about the other group rehearsing for a play, namely an Italian adaptation of *Septem*, to be performed at Sarajevo, the current city seized by war. Franco Turco, the relatively richer director of the Shakespearean play, replies that they never ended up going because Sarajevo needed weapons, not theatre. The ending was solemn, but the journey of the film gave us profound insights into what it means to empathise with war and how community building is at the centre of both theatre, movement, and conflict.

Martone adopts a documentary style approach and decides to actually stage the play rather than make a movie. The latter result wouldn't be satisfactory, so once the play was performed in *Teatro Nuovo* in December 1996 and the following June, the lives of the theatre artists are filmed fictionally, and then integrated within the documentary elements in a smooth, undetectable manner. Andrea Renzi, who plays the character of Leo in the film as the director of *Septem*, is made to co-direct the fictionalised parts to make sure that they were undifferentiated. In order to facilitate the process, the rehearsals of the play are shot in 16mm. There is an overlap with the *Teatri Uniti* (Martone's theatre company) group members, and those who play the actors in the film, some retaining elements from their real life in the movie. The theatre community at Naples features in small ways.[9] Martone's emphasis on the community and its collaboration forms his approach towards this entire enterprise. The value of collectivity at the local and global level are repeated vociferously throughout.

[9] Marlow-Mann, 2022, pp. 172–173.

Torrance gives a very clear argument of all that makes this movie remarkable, even though she does not refer to collectivity directly:

> Mario Martone's adaptation is arguably the most remarkable of all. It addresses the civil war in former Yugoslavia through the Siege of Sarajevo, as well as the gangland violence in Naples, but it also uses the text of Aeschylus to explore the process of acting and the creation of performance pieces by including a narrative of rehearsal for an actual theatrical production through the medium of film.[10]

There are three key elements that guide her that also prove useful to us. First is the context of war – the Siege of Sarajevo[11] and Martone's own interaction with the people and space. Martone wishes to collaborate on his script for the film with the Bosnian author Miljenko Jergovic and the Italian author Fabrizia Ramondino. He incorporates certain suggestions by the latter which include the creation of a Bosnian character in the film that played the role of the librarian. Little further collaboration take place with Ramodino, and Jergovic never makes it to Italy contrary to the hopes of Martone. However, Martone himself visits Sarajevo which deeply impacts him. He sees the destruction of its library, and the use of books to create a barricade and add a layer of protection from the grenades, leaving an everlasting imprint on his soul. All of these find reflection in the film.

Second, the backdrop of the violence in Naples is the reality of Martone and the characters of the film. While Sarajevo reflects the violence of war, the violence in their own backyard is the catalyst for sympathy for violence taking place in the neighbouring country. The neighbourhood of the Spanish Quarters in Naples run by the Camorra becomes a smaller version of the neighbouring country. While they are rehearsing for the play, violence is showering from all sides, both in reality and in the movie. Torrance narrates a solemn experience. On the 30th of October 1996, a peculiar coincidence occurs on the first day of

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[10] Torrance, 2017, p. 30.

[11] The Siege of Sarajevo has a complex political context and remains a focal point of exploration for various interdisciplinary explorations. These include gender theorists (Macek, 2009; Simic, 2012; Golubovic, 2019 and 2020), journalists (Demick, 1996; Lowe, 2021) economists (Andreas, 2004 and 2011), and cultural studies theorists (Ilic, 2013; Donnelly and Norton, 2014) et al.

Martone's rehearsals for the play. Venetian politician and sociologist Gianfranco Bettin is seized by local gangsters and faces a staged execution. Martone's work notes reveal that he drew inspiration from one of Bettin's books, which recount a reading of *Seven Against Thebes* in a small theatre in the war-ravaged city of Sarajevo. This connection to Bettin plays a significant role in Martone's selection of the text. From the outset, the project is deeply intertwined with the siege of Sarajevo and Italian political dynamics, making it appropriate for the film to also explore the situation in Naples, Martone's birthplace, a city that frequently appears in his cinematic works.[12]

Walter Benjamin associates the term/concept of 'porosity' with Martone's Naples.

> Porosity suggests indeterminacy and interruption. In reference to Naples, it evokes the overlapping of the old and the new, the merging of nature and culture, of private and public, of the manifest and the hidden… This understanding of porosity as a model of access to knowledge, where an indeterminacy and ambivalence have the capacity to reveal rather than conceal, provides a useful guide to understanding Martone's cinematic constructions of his native city.[13]

This complexity of Naples is captured with much sophistication, so much so that the rustic and smooth elements appear to seep into one another within the body of the city. The sound of the buzzing motorcycle, the women staring and screaming from tiny windows and balconies onto the crowded streets, the household arguments in the *bassi* or windowless ground floor tiny apartments, the littered piazza full of historical ruins, the sound of the generator while rehearsing the play, the hospital window that opens to the view of a concrete wall, the brutality of the police, and the daily struggle are all examples of the pulsating Spanish Quarters. Within these circumstances and in opposition to the *Teatro Comunale* that was funded with the best of what Naples could offer, the endeavour to stage *Septem* is nothing but an act of resilience and rebellion, choosing empathy and community. The avant-garde theatre shows how 'even if

[12] Torrance, 2017, p. 42.
[13] O'Healy, 1999, p. 241.

modernity had largely bypassed Naples, post-modernity had by now arrived there with a vengeance'.[14]

Third, is a reading and execution of the play from a performance perspective. The movie focuses on the performance of rehearsal, rather than the performance itself. Pantelis Michelakis elaborates on this element in his work:

> Situated between dramatic text and finished performance, rehearsal tends to valorise the presence, immediacy, and dynamism of the theatrical event over the distance and rigidity of the dramatic text. Rehearsals display theatrical performance as something live, both in the sense of evolving dynamically and also in the sense of being intimate.[15]

Rehearsals like most final performances are an act in themselves. Their repetition is a part of the re-enaction and therefore re-creation process. They form the essence of performance. Martone brings out their importance in a very nuanced manner. The actors never get to go to Sarajevo because Leo's friend Yasmin who has organised the opportunity is killed in the movie. Thus, the documentary is a film about the process of rehearsal. Leo gets the news ten days before the last dress rehearsal. He decides to keep the news to himself. There is a scene in the film where Leo receives a letter and then reacts aggressively upon opening the envelope, staring across the window. The viewer may guess what the letter is about, but could also remain in the dark. The second last scene of the movie, before the epilogue, takes place in a three storied apartment with celebrations taking place as the whole community comes together to support the actors' endeavour after the dress rehearsal is over. Leo slowly walks from the theatre to the apartment, realising that he has to reveal to the actors that they are not leaving for Sarajevo in the morning. Two of the members find Leo staring from the rooftop. They guess. This ephemeral moment in the movie marks the heaviness of the situation. It shows how the entire

[14] O'Healy, 1999, p. 245.
[15] Michelakis, 2013, p. 120.

task of rehearsing for the play is far from useless. By failing in taking the play to Sarajevo, the movie succeeds.

The act of performance is more important than the performance itself. It creates passion, kinesthetic empathy, generosity, close collaboration in times of struggle for money and resources, and most importantly collective enaction. The text comes alive adapting to the bodies of the actors, the Neapolitan dialect, and to the body of the city of Naples. Mann answers the question, why perform theatre if no one is there to see it, most eloquently, 'we perform it because it allows us to grow, to understand the world, to improve ourselves… we do so because it is useful even if nobody sees it'. In this regard, by giving primacy to the art of theatre, Martone gives primacy to the act of performance and the community that enables the enaction.

One of the major changes that Martone makes is crafting the character of Antigone, and giving her the role of the chorus leader. In this way, he dismantles Eteocles' misogyny by giving rise to a heroine who was on equal footing with her brother throughout the play and not just towards the end.

The chorus in the play do not dance; they barely sang. Yet there is something enticingly choral about the film that leaves an imprint on the viewer. While the influence of the community life of Naples helps in bringing a feeling of collective action, the rehearsals themselves are framed in a manner that embody the spirit of a choral community. Some of the scenes depict the theatre exercises the actors undertake before rehearsal. These are, at their core, used to build trust and comfort amongst the team members. But they leave an embodied body of actors that carries the feeling of coherence. Stretching the body through gesture and movement in order to put it through emotional instability reflects in their embodiment of the characters.

The first seven minutes in scene 1 are dedicated to collective exercises (interspersed by scenes of the personal characters). A few members are moving on the floor on their knees. Then they transition to jogging in a semi-circle and return back to rotating on the floor. Some of them run speedily for a few seconds only to fall on the floor. This routine takes place as the initial credits roll across the screen. In the second exercise, Antigone is blindfolded on the floor and each chorus member slowly embraces her. All the chorus members raise their hands and move backward in a cluster. Then they scream and run forward together. Bringing their hands in a manner that is protecting each other, they move backwards collectively imagining an attacker moving towards them. Within the first scene of the film this occurs three times.

At the advent itself, Martone fosters a communal working of the cast to set the tone. On the one hand he reveals the process that goes into the training of a chorus as a singular unit where each individual is dependent on the other. On the other hand, he is establishing the dichotomy between the coherence of the team, and places it in opposition to the outside world of chaos.

In scene 2, one man screaming runs blindfolded into an ante-room in the corner of the set, whose door opens onto the main stage. He is sitting half naked on a chair and screaming ‘peace’. Various chorus members, one after another, go into the room to interact with him. The first is a woman whom another member manhandles and brings outside the door. A male member closes the door and throws water a bucket of water at it. Simultaneously, a naked man on the main stage screams. A third man comforts him. Three members go through the ante-room door and comfort the man sitting blindfolded.

From one perspective the men could be Eteocles and Polynices wailing for Oedipus, or Oedipus wailing for his father. More likely this is an impersonation and impromptu scene building activity, conducted to enter the fractured realities of life and war, where community touches and saves us.

Scene 5 has some basic exercises like stretches. A new actress called Sara is playing Antigone in the story. Soon, the exercise space and the play's lines merge. One cannot tell the difference between preparation and performance. This allows the viewers and the actors time to immerse themselves in the process of assimilating a chorus and enacting a tragedy, rather than focusing on the final performance.

There is no final performance in tragedy; it is in the process that the tragedy comes alive and is felt most intimately. Martone has shown that the process crafts and gives meaning to the performance. Martone here might be inspired by other 1960s productions of Greek tragedy where process rather than end result are key from both an acting and audience perspective (e.g. *Dionysus in 69*). On its own the performance is hollow. In fact, this relates to the ending of the film seamlessly. The affect of rehearsal, of immersion with fresh repetition, has transformed them from within.

The integration of the new Antigone makes scene 7 a crucial sequence. There is a discrepancy between her and the others. The rest of the cast asks, 'Why is she running around like that? We cannot understand her'. Leo begins to reprimand her, but the others feel it will only make things worse. It is an exercise that resolves the issue. Everyone stands in a circle with their eyes closed facing outward. Someone leads them there, but it is hard to know who with closed eyes. They all have to together take a turn inward and say the word 'ha'. The exercise can only be accomplished by listening.

Martone demonstrates how the senses and motion are irrevocably tied. In order to be attuned to one another, each chorus member has to be agile in their sensory perception that automatically augments collective movement. Moreover, Martone shows that conflict and discrepancy find their solution in collective bodily movements, be it a protest against the state,

or the staging of a play to create kinesthetic empathy with war. Bodies are movement; and movement is the embodiment of empathy.

Therefore, we witness how the movie *Teatro di Guerra* locates the aspect of chorality within community and collectivity. It captures the methods by which multiple bodies together are able to gesture through movements, including creative exercise routines, the unison of the individuals and their integration into the community. The rehearsal provides a pivotal tool for examining the text by its performance. A mere textual reading of the play without a focus on movements and gestures distracts the text from its performative context, thereby sidelining collectivity and chorality. There is limitation in the meaning-making process that a non-performative focus on the tragedy evinces.

La MaMa Theatre Production of *Seven Against Thebes*

A small basement in the New York of the 1960s became the name synonymous with avant-garde and experimental theatre; the only off-off-Broadway theatre that is still bubbling. Ellen Stewart, then a designer, encouraged by a group of artists, started the Café La MaMa in 1961, which in 1964 shifted to 82 2nd Avenue, officially abandoning the scent of coffee for the legal name of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, before finally shifting to its current location on 74 East 4th Street after getting its first enormous funding in 1969. Initially supporting the theatre through her freelance work as a designer, Stewart gave full freedom to her artists and created the ethos that welcomed all. Monica Cristini in her work on the theatre has nothing but praise to offer writing with certitude that Stewart had begun a culture from which there was no turning back:

> From this perspective, Café La MaMa was actually like an organism growing from year to year and from project to project, living and breathing precisely from the numerous collaborations that Stewart nurtured and supported, between groups from different ethnic backgrounds and artists from various sectors, but also among New York and international theatres and institutions. Hence, 'cross-

> pollination' was a process that opted for collaboration and cultural exchange as the foundation of artistic growth.[16]

Upon admiring the skills of a young Romanian student, Andrei Serban, Stewart arranged for him to come to New York. In time, they began The Great Jones Repertory Company with him as director. Elizabeth Swados with a vision to experiment with music soon joined them. Both Serban and Swados were inspired by Peter Brook. The path led them to immerse themselves in ancient Greek tragedy, and various aspects of ancient languages. Stewart herself began engaging in direction in 1985 beginning with *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In 2001, after a gap of fifteen years away from Greek tragedy, Stewert and Serban created *Septem* with Swados involved in the music, adding Michael Sirotta to the team. The production aligned with the post-modern, avant-garde approach of La MaMa gaining excellent reviews. As one of the few adaptations of this play, its self-reference as an 'operatic dance-drama', and the fact that it was undertaken by The Great Jones Repertory Company, all make it impossible to exclude from this thesis. I am grateful to the La MaMa Archives for access to the video of the play.

In my analysis of this production, I look at the various ways in which it has engaged with the ideas of chorality, Aeschylus' original play, and the contribution of movement to the process of meaning making.

The production focuses on the heroes of the play and not the community of the Thebans or the Argives. This is in line with the epic tradition, opposing the values of tragedy. There is no designated chorus that operates throughout the play. While the production engages with a rich culture of music and dance, both the arts are used to foster the stories of the heroes such as Oedipus, Eteocles, and Polynices. The absence of the chorus produces the absence of the voice of women and the voice of the community. The over dramatisation of certain aspects drawing from eastern traditions helps in the creation of affect, but the lack of community values

[16] Cristini, 2023, p. 30.

adds a reductive quality to this affect, as we shall witness in this chapter. Moreover, the production is a weaving of multiple stories together that focus on the heroes Eteocles and Polynices and the Argives, differing from Aeschylus' text, thereby also conflicting with his emphasis on chorality. However, unlike other adaptations of *Septem* movement and gesture are an intrinsic part of this production. Yet, the approach focuses the use of movement on the individual body rather than a collective embodied experience, in turn effecting the outcome of the meaning making process.

The Prologue – Hyperbolic Affect

The prologue begins with the chorus. It is the only instance where the chorus comes together and sings on stage. There is sporadic collective singing in the rest of the play, but the members are never seen on stage; it is unclear if they sing from backstage, or if the characters themselves join in. The chorus at the beginning are the closest to an ancient tragic chorus, despite the fact that they do not dance. The singing follows a rhythmic pattern: da_da dum dum da_ _ (the underscores here represent the gaps within the beats). The musical mood of the entire production is set with the entrance of the chorus. It is an amalgamation of Asian, Middle Eastern, and African elements with the often-high soprano notes. The music consciously reflects an oriental appeal, a distant time, and a dramatic purpose. Hearing it generates a looming grievous and hollow feeling, adding a unique affect. Giovanna Di Martino discovers that:

> The orchestra (four players) was live, but the production at times incorporated tracks that were layered onto it (such as for Tydeus' and Polynices' weddings). In keeping with a tradition Ito began in 1985 with *Mythos Oedipus*, when electronics had first been integrated into theatrical scores, most of the sounds in the performance were reproduced through digital instruments and 'effects' processed by means of a computer. For the 2001 production, he also bought a 'Roland Hand Sonic': 'a drum machine with segmented rubber pads on which the performers could use hands and fingers', as Sirotta describes it, equipped with an 'impressive bank of sounds and sound-processing modules that offered an enormous library of otherworldly sound effects' (Sirotta 2019).[17]

[17] Di Martino, 2020, p. 146.

The integration of newer technology has been part of the La MaMa tradition. In my view, the music helps in creating a hyperbolic[18] effect that is at the core of the entire production. The La MaMa theatre has managed to place hyperboles within the production as effects that arouse an exaggerated feeling without saying what needs to be said. They focus on the consequences of the plot and actions that the heroes are forced to experience by stretching and garnishing the truth for the spectator. Hyperbole is thus an effective means of transferring affect onto the viewers, and the prologue establishes the context of the play using this effect.

The chorus members stand on one side of the stage, and as they sing Oedipus and Jocasta enter, walking down a set of stairs at the back of the stage. Antigone and Ismene stand on either side. Oedipus realises that he has killed his father and cohabited with his mother. Jocasta is clothed in what may suggest a *peplos*. It is her hair that adds an alluring and tribal effect to her look – two thin strands plaited on either side coming down in front while the majority of her hair is at the back in a bun held up by two elongated hairpins (perhaps wooden). To commit herself to death, Jocasta lets her hair down, throws the pins, and uses the two halves of her hair to metaphorically strangle herself. Oedipus uses the elongated hairpins thrown by Jocasta to gouge his eyes out. The costumes[19] throughout the play accentuate the flow of the choreographed body movements, embodying the action into texture and fabric. In the prologue itself, Tiresias is another such example. His costume, a huge robe and head cover, flows over

[18] Stanivukovic, Goran V. has provided a reflection of hyperbole in Renaissance literature and marked it as one of the characteristics of the era. 'Definitions of hyperbole in modern textbooks of rhetoric primarily focus on its form, that is, its linguistic structure and basic effect. Thus, Richard Lanham defines hyperbole as "exaggerated or extravagant terms used for emphasis and not intended to be understood literally". Here, linguistic extravagance is an indicator of the manipulation of truth, which is also how Warren Taylor defines hyperbole: "[e]xaggerating ideas or emotions in one's statement of them in order to emphasise their importance; the exaggerations are never offered as literal truths". Marvin T. Herrick describes hyperbole as "magnification beyond the bounds of truth". J. Dubois goes so far as to suggest that what is at stake in hyperbole represents a kind of "arithmetical operation", because saying more becomes "a way of saying less"". (Stanivukovic, 2007, p. 10) I believe that these definitions of hyperbole go beyond their textual reference to live theatrical performances.

[19] The costumes for this production were made by Selcuk Gurisik mentioned in the catalogue. He is a multi-medium creator from Turkey and collaborated with the La MaMa theatre on several occasions. A founding member of the Assos Performing Arts Festival, he received his doctorate from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design. For further information on him log into: https://selcukgurisik.wordpress.com/appparel/.

his body to mark his limping movements in a monstrous manner. He also has a nail on his index finger that twists and extends following the back of his hand and going beyond the arm like a long stick, perhaps reminding the audience that he is pointing out the future as a seer. From the very beginning, Stewart decides to make the characters embody the text through movement, props, costume, and music. This becomes pivotal for the transfer of affect to the audience and the creation of meaning.

A giant hand – hyperbolic choral metaphor

After the prologue, the story begins with the duel between Polynices and Eteocles over the ruling of Thebes. Creon enables a truce and each brother is to rule alternatively. It is 'by lot' that the decision is reached as to which brother will rule first. Eteocles wins.

Stewart uses a life size papier-mâché puppet of a hand dancing to aid in depicting the procedure. Di Martino argues that 'the giant hand represents one of the Hollywood-like choices Stewart has employed in her adaptation of Greek tragedy'.[20] While the life-size nature of the hand could easily be a gigantic Hollywood gesture, in my view there is far greater complexity required to analyse its addition to the production. There are three key points to be considered.

First, much like the elongated hair pins, the hand is a prop in the play. Melissa Mueller has written extensively on this subject. Her argument stems from elevating objects to actors and empowering them to 'vest non-human elements in a tragic text with physical presence'. In sharing that status of actors on stage, objects are able to carry out most functions of impact that human actors can create. In Mueller's words, 'props get to the heart of what is humanly – and non-humanly possible… [they are] actors whose formative presence and agency becomes part

[20] Di Martino, 2020, p. 139.

of the very texture – the plot, pacing, and poetics – of certain tragedies'.[21] This argument is beneficial for recognising the role and affect of the hand as a prop.

The entirety of the gigantic hand invokes an awestruck reaction, and holds agency in determining the course of the plot. The space it occupies adds to the hearty physical presence forcing its existence onto the stage. The two performers dancing out the duel look feeble in comparison to the hand. It connects human agency with that which is larger than life; that which is beyond human agency. An inanimate object becomes Stewart's choice in determining the fate of human performers. The hand truly gets to the heart of what is humanly and non-humanly possible. The affect it has on the audience leaves a permanent impression.

Its presence becomes further interesting because it is not mentioned in any ancient text or myths related to this particular play. While most props Mueller includes in her analysis such as Ajax's sword, the tapestry in *Agammemnon*, or the urn in *Electra*, are all mentioned within the ancient texts, Rob Tordoff who has made an extensive list of props that were used in ancient Athenian tragedy acknowledges that the use of props are not always referenced directly in the texts.[22] However, his observations are limited to those that were indirectly assumed to have a reference. Stewart, contrastingly, uses the beauty of modern adaptation to create a prop that is not a textual reference but a metaphor for 'division by lot'. The hand would have come as a surprise to both the lay audience and the scholar. The symbolism of the hand, as with any other prop, plays a distinctive role in establishing the cultural context of the scene.[23] In order to understand this context, it is necessary to focus on the second and third aspect – using a puppet as a prop and combining the arts of dance and puppetry.

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[21] Mueller, 2016, pp. 1–2.
[22] Tordoff, 2013, p. 99.
[23] Rosie Wyles establishes a connection between the use of props on stage, and the role they play in cultivating or questioning the formation of civic identity in Athens. Objects, according to her, have both a social and theatrical life. The 'civic symbolism' inherent in certain props such as voting urns and pebbles, and masks that are used in several plays and by different playwrights, create avenues for meaning and dramatic effect to come through the production and also impact the way the citizens perceive their identity. (Wyles, 2022, pp. 1–5)

Puppetry itself has had a very diverse discourse. Here I engage in detail with Frank Camilleri's work to define puppetry, and understand the technical and non-technical functioning of the hand as a puppet in the production. The etymology and restricted connotations of the word puppet are highlighted by Camilleri:

> Derived from the Latin pupa and pupus (girl-doll and boy-doll, respectively), which in Old French became popette to signify a little doll, the etymological origins of the word 'puppet' in the West are associated with miniature versions of human beings and with the concept of play via the status of these objects as playthings.[24]

He proceeds to provide a fuller conception of puppets in tandem with his theory of 'bodyworld'.[25] Despite being inanimate, puppets appear to possess their own will or agency, giving them a 'wilful' quality. This sense of agency is tied to the puppet's physical nature, which serves as a source of resistance. Through this process, the puppeteer becomes part of a combined human-non-human entity, creating a unique state of being during performance, and emphasising the interconnectedness of the two. In order to explain the notion of bodyworld through puppetry, Camilleri uses the three As – assemblages, affordances, and actants – that are theoretically informed by the ideas of 'vibrancy' of matter articulated by Jane Bannett.[26]

Camilleri's work aids us in not only understanding the workings of the hand puppet, but also in determining the flow of energy as central to its functioning.

The concept of assemblages focuses on the interaction of 'the human and ill-human elements that act together and on each other'. For the puppet the assemblage can easily be seen because it is composed of a variety of parts. However, for the puppeteer it is the 'sociomaterial upbringing (or assembly)' that expands the field to include culture, education, and the interaction with the technology that helps create the assemblage package. There is a synthesis

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[24] Camilleri, 2022, p. 158.
[25] In defining bodyworld Camilleri focuses on the interaction of the performer's body with the environment that also encompasses the non-human and the unnatural including landscapes, technologies, objects etc. (Camilleri, 2022, p. 157)
[26] Camilleri, 2022, p. 158.

between the puppet and puppeteer where the bodyworld comes alive. A transfer of energy occurs both ways between them on which this idea hinges.[27]

Federico Restrepo[28] who created the hand puppet in the La MaMa production and performed the role is a master of his art. Camilleri's idea of assemblage comes alive through the manner in which Restrepo develops and carries the puppet. On his back he carries an inverted trapezium from which arise three vertical long trapezia on which hinges the gigantic hand shadowing his body like an oversized umbrella. In his hands are two vertical cylinders that are used to manipulate the fingers through strings. It is rather interesting that the assemblage here constituts not only of the different parts and joints of the puppet, but Restrepo's whole body's joints are included in the assemblage. The upper and lower body is bifurcated into two functions. The lower body with its position in *chauk*[29] (the square position) carries out intricate foot movements, while the upper body holds the weight of the puppet and moves it into action.

Next Camilleri explains affordances, which implies what the puppet 'allows one to do with it', and they are essential in this exchange of energy. The design, technique, materials used, all effect the movement of both the puppet and puppeteer, thereby relating to embodiment. The techniques used to transfer the energy between the object and the puppeteer include direct ones such as manipulating and controlling the object accompanied by the

[27] Camilleri, 2022, pp. 158–160.
[28] In 1985 Federico Restrepo created the Loco7 Dance Puppet Theatre Company. A designer, art director, and dancer from Bogota, Columbia, Restrepo has been an innovator in his field. The aim of the company is to merge the arts of dance, theatre, and puppetry to create new artistic visions and bring community and diversity together. The company has a very long association with La MaMa Theatre and has and continues to be an integral part of several of their productions, exhibitions, and creative endeavours. For more on Restrepo and Loco7 look at: https://www.laMaMa.org/loco7/, https://www.laMaMa.org/loco7/, and http://restrepodesign.com/profile-2/.
[29] *Chauk* meaning a square is the name given to the half-sitting position that resembles a square/rectangle in which foot movements are carried out. It is prevalent in various eastern dance forms including the Indian Classics forms of *Odissi* and *Mohiniyattam*. It is of particular interest to us because of its use by all the male dancers in the play, and draws heavily from the eastern war dance traditions. Two of them – *Baris* from Bali and *Chhau* from eastern India – have parallels with the dance techniques and grammar shown by the performers.

physical training of the puppeteers themselves, while indirect techniques that aid embodiment include 'the transfer of memories, emotions, or through vectors'. Camilleri astutely observes:

> In both direct and indirect modalities the energy transfer via the puppeteer manifests itself in gestures and patterns of movements (including rhythm) that animate the performing object... it is the assemblage of mind- body- world/object and the inhabitation of affordances available that provides 'life' to the puppet.[30]

Both direct and indirect embodiment techniques are vividly visible in Restrepo's performance. The direct element constituts the working of the strings of the puppet through the assemblage units of the two vertical cylinders attached to his hands, the papier-mâché and material used to create the puppet, and his own training as a skilled dancer. The indirect elements, though harder to spot, are present in his movements. His dancing focuses on the movement of the feet in the *chauk* position, occurring simultaneously with controlling the puppet. The source of energy ensuing from his dance propelles the continuation of the puppet's movements. Restrepo transferred his entire being into the hand – his years of experience in dancing and puppeteering, his understanding of aesthetics and puppet making, and all the emotions that were being channelled from the tension of the duel taking place in real time – that transfers the affect onto the scene by bringing alive the hand.

This brings us to Camilleri's 3rd A – actant which states that the puppet is hardly passive and its energy impacts the puppeteer. Thus, transembodiment occurs where the puppet and puppeteer are one.

The hand in the production is very much an active agent since the movement from its fingers become a catalyst, in turn giving energy to Restrepo's body movements. The lines between the puppet and its controller are diffused, and the performer is in a puppet state of being. Thus, the

[30] Camilleri, 2022, p. 162.

La MaMa production puppet is one of the most apposite examples of bodyworld and transembodiment.

I now turn to investigate puppets in the ancient Greek context, through a juxtaposition of primary and secondary sources.

Puppetry as an art was not unknown to the ancient Greeks. One of the most pivotal functions that puppetry played was to make wonder or *thauma* in the audience. Mali Skotheim has written about the art form, the way it was perceived, and the impact that it had for the ancient Greeks. She begins her article by stating that -

> Puppeteers, known as *thaumatopoioi* ('marvel-makers') or *neurospastai* ('string pullers'), performed in a variety of contexts in the ancient Greek world, which included processions and public theatres. During religious festivals, they were hired to supplement competitions in drama and music.[31]

Skotheim's crucial observations aid us in understanding the context in which puppetry evolved in ancient Greece that further provides helps us in rooting the choice of using a puppet as a dancing alive prop for the La MaMa production. She interprets a positive attitude of the Greeks towards puppetry, and when positioned alongside ancient sources, her work also engages with the marvel-making affect of the art.

Skotheim argues for a positive view of the puppetry tradition which was contrary to what some of the ancient texts reveal at first glance. She does so by classifying ancient puppets into two categories – 'the phallic puppets used in religious processions in the Eastern Mediterranean (found not only in ancient Greece but also Egypt), and small-scale puppetry, which was performed in theatres and possibly also in private contexts'.[32]

[31] Skotheim, 2022, p. 2.
[32] Skotheim, 2022, p. 2.

The experience of marvel that characterised puppetry was found within the religious context expressed towards the Gods as the epitome of the inexplicable. It is notable that this association of marvel was accompanied by the perception of puppetry in igniting 'mindlessness and frivolity' as observed by Skotheim.[33]

We have limited references for puppetry from the fifth century BCE. One of them includes Herodotus' account in Book 2.48-49. Here he is describing the festival of Dionysus in Egypt in comparison with Greece. Referring to the puppets as *neurospastai*, he says that they were used by the Egyptians in contrast to Greece. These were two feet high and it was women who took them around the villages. The phallus was as big as the rest of the body of the puppet. Herodotus then goes on to credit Melampus, son of Amytheon, for introducing this phallus during the worship of Dionysus to the Greeks, as well as many other things he learnt from Egypt. While the historical veracity of Herodotus' words cannot be confirmed, there are three aspects to be highlighted. First, is the gigantic size of the phallus. Second, is an influence of the eastern world on certain practices and traditions or rather a cross-pollination of traditions. Third, the ritual context and role of women. The word marvel/wonder is missing but the scene described by Herodotus does induce that feeling.

The second example of puppetry within the fifth century comes from Xenophon's *Symposium* 4.55 where the Syracusan tells Socrates that he gains his income from putting up puppet shows, and blatantly describes those who come to watch them as senseless or ἄφροσιν. Xenophon does not use puppets in a ritual context, giving him the leeway to make a derogatory remark. Both Herodotus and Xenophon focus on the word *neurospastai* to bring into focus the aspect of the puppets mobility and control operated through strings remaining in human hands. While their wondrous nature is not explicitly stated, the image conjured by a word meaning

[33] Skotheim, 2022, p. 5.

'controlled through strings' consciously reduced the awful aspect. This awe-inspiring aspect is present from Aeschylus onwards.

The awe-inspiring aspect is also present in several other forms of entertainment such as juggling and conjuring. An inscription from 169 BCE uses both the words *thaumatopoioi* and *neurospastai*. *IG*XI, 2. 133 78-81from Delos uses the term marvel-makers for a range of entertainers, out of which puppeteers were called *neurospastai*. After studying other evidence, Skotheim believes that these hired performers were concluding the Delian festival of Demostheneia with the purpose of 'allowing the festival to end on a spectacular note'.[34] Perhaps it was after the 5th century BCE that marvel became an important component of the puppetry experience. Moreover, the mention in this inscription enjoys the security of the context of the Delian festivities and much like Herodotus escapes the scornful attitude.

The hand in the La MaMa theatre production strongly fulfils its marvel-inducing purpose. Like Herodotus' encounter with Egypt, it affirms a coalescence between the orient and a further away occidental culture than the ancient Greeks could have ever imagined. It is very much controlled by strings and reflective of a processional puppet in size and scale. The puppet inhabits the theatrical space and entertainment sphere familiar to our ancient subjects of study. Yet the hand is not responding to a religious context within the plot but to a political one – the battle of rulership between Eteocles and Polynices. This political context is not antithetical to Greek textual evidence. Another scholar helps us bridge this gap. Leslie Kurke in her analysis of Plato's *Laws* provides us with a muscular and compelling argument for the connection between puppetry and politics, including the marvellous aspects of chorality. Using her work, I argue that the gigantic hand puppet can be viewed as a metaphor for chorality.

[34] Skotheim, 2022, p. 11.

Most readers look at Plato's description of puppetry as a derogatory remark on the art form. Kurke warns against looking at this from a negative perspective. She states that 'though we know them [puppets] to be mechanical and inanimate, we simultaneously believe that puppets are alive, for they are infused with motion and voice. And this doubleness is a kind of magic or wonder that itself arouses wonder'.[35]

Kurke's analysis of Plato becomes extremely useful to us because of her stress on chorality. Her argument provides a means of connecting chorality and puppetry at a theoretical level that can be used to establish the gigantic hand of the production as a metaphor for chorality and community.

From 644d-645d, Plato uses the metaphor of a puppet to describe humans in the hands of Gods. Humans are puppets created by the Gods. It is not clear if this is for the purpose of amusement or otherwise. There are internal 'cords' or forces pulling humans in different, often opposing, directions. Some pull us towards virtuous actions and others create ethical dilemmas. One golden superior cord of calculation (reason or judgement) should be prioritised, as it resembles the common law. The state should institutionalise these principles. Individuals should align themselves with the forces of good virtue, so that the difference between vice and virtue are clear. Education will help sharpen this distinction. The Athenian goes on to use the example of a symposium to stress that even trivial matters have moral significance, and their discussion can open up new ways of thinking about what is moral and what is not.

Kurke argues that a re-reading of this passage from Plato helps establish a connection with chorality. First, Plato contrasts the puppet or *thauma* with a living being or *ton zoon*. Humans are not lifeless constructs, yet they are called puppets implying a loss of autonomy. This tension aligns with all the constituent elements of the effects of wonder produced by

[35] Kurke, 2013, p. 126.

choruses in scenes of archaic poetry. Kurke secondly points out the oxymoron in Plato's use of the word *theion* (divine) to describe the puppet. The puppet is lowly or *thauma* which is a creation of skilled craftsmanship and human ingenuity; it is mortal, yet it is made by the Gods and infused with divinity. Much like the puppet the chorus embodies layered meanings. It merges individual and collective voices, embodies a fusion of divine inspiration, mortal experience, and artistic structure. Kurke suggest that it provokes a sense of awe (*thauma*), emphasising its resonance with broader Greek imagination.[36]

It is in Book 2 that Plato's argument takes shape. The first part of this appears in 653c7-654a5. Plato observes that the discipline acquired in childhood erodes with the hardships of life. Recognising this, gods introduce feasts of thanksgiving as moments of relief from life's struggles. These are accompanied by the divine gifts of the Muses, Apollo, and Dionysus that intend to re-connect people with the order of life. Children are inherently restless and full of energy engaging in playful endeavours such as leaping, skipping, and dancing. Like children, the gods have instilled in humans the ability to enjoy and create rhythm and harmony, leading to collective activities like singing and dancing. These are the gifts that play a fundamental role in education by creating joy and connection. A few sentences later this is solidified as the Athenian stranger says in 654b6 that a well-educated man is well trained in singing and dancing (chorus).

Kurke now makes a forceful argument to connect this passage to puppetry. According to her, the initial alignment of pleasure and pain with *arete* becomes slackened (χαλᾶται) symbolising loss of order and discipline. This resembles a puppet whose cords have been neglected. The gods, pitying the humans provide festivals of renewal during which they 'gather up the strings' of the fallen puppet to realign its movements and 'set it up right' (ἐπανορθῶνται).

[36] Kurke, 2013, p. 127.

The gods thus tighten the strings restoring the vitality of the puppet. Kurke emphasises Plato's description of Gods moving humans and leading them in dance through rhythm and music by 'stringing them together' (συνείρειν). This echoes the image of a chorus of puppets, each linked to the other, dancing in perfect synchrony.[37]

Kurke concludes her take on this passage by iterating that the metaphor of puppets illustrates how choral training instils harmony. Through *choreia*, humans learn to move and sing in unison, symbolising the co-operation necessary to function as citizens in a *polis*. Thus, the golden cord is assisted by choral education in habituating individuals to act in a rational order.[38]

The purpose of going into such detail of Plato's *Laws* and Kurke's interpretation of it is not to historicise and to probe whether chorality and the metaphor of puppetry were used as a pedagogical tool to foster a sense of community. While I do agree that this focus on creating community played a role in constructing Athens' status as an imperial power, this discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I am using Kurke's analysis to contextualise and illuminate the use of the hand puppet in the La MaMa production, where the gigantic hand puppet was employed to determine the outcome of the duel between Polynices and Eteocles and to shoulder the outcome acted as a metaphor for chorality and community. At the end of the duel, the puppet chooses Eteocles as the winner. It is significant that the duel taking place does not determine the outcome. Rather, it is the puppet that does.

The puppet is supposed to represent selection by lot. This implies that it is the will of the people that must reign. The puppet itself is an inanimate object, but it has a wilful element and life force behind it. There is a human operating it and moving the fingers of the hand. The human is representing a divine energy that is wanting to restore order to the chaotic situation

[37] Kurke, 2013, pp. 131–132.
[38] Kurke, 2013, p. 132.

in Thebes. The dancing of the puppeteer affords a connection to the rhythm and harmony that the divine energy presents. This divine energy focuses on the wondrous effects that gods have on humans. This energy gets transferred onto the puppet that itself is an object of marvel. The marvellous feeling is the same that is experienced by the chorus' performances because of its connection to the divine, and the harmony and cohesiveness it exudes. The hand puppet could thus be interpreted as a metaphor for the chorus.

Moved through divine intervention, the hand is a sign of the people of the community exerting its will over who should be the ruler, rather than leaving it at the mercy of the duel's outcome. It is the community of Thebes coming together to choose its leader. The harmony created by the dance movements is transferred onto the decision of the people so as to bring about stability. The movement of each finger controlled by the strings and indirectly through the energy kindled by rhythmic dance movements finally 'pulls up' Eteocles as the winner. In this regard, the puppet morphs into the chorus.

A single gigantic hand works as a synecdoche for a string of puppets in unison; in fact, its dramatic force is stronger in affect. It gets rid of the individual to represent the community as a singular entity, and to re-create order that had been disrupted by the trials of human life. It occupies the space between the divine and human. As a mechanised crafted entity, the puppet represents the community that is governed by the divine energy created by the puppeteer. The victory of Eteocles brings back the right nature required to govern the civic society of Thebes. Thus, the extremely powerful use of the puppet as a metaphor for the community, foregrounds chorality in the political sphere, and provides a marvellous moment for the unfolding of the plot. If Eteocles wasn't elected, there would be no further story.

Stories within Stories

At this point, after the selection of Eteocles, the play gains momentum. LaMama's *Septem* is unlike the original ancient tragic text: it does not resemble Aeschylus in style or even plot; and there is no one ancient source from which this production is formed. Resembling a patchwork quilt, this production has sewn together diverse stories from the ancient Greek corpus into a single overarching plot. The focus of the ancient playwright was to garner sympathy at the situation that war creates by focusing on the internal chaos in Thebes. The consequences of war are overlooked by the production as it, in turn, focuses on the heroes.

Tydeus is exiled after killing his uncle, King Alcathous, for allegedly betraying the kingdom. The dramatisation of their conflict involves dynamic choreography with the characters leaping in a circle, emphasising the intensity of the scene. In the myths Alcathous is Tydeus' uncle but not a king. Instead, he betrays the kingdom by conspiring against the actual king, Oeneus, who is Tydeus' father and Alcathous' brother. This story appears in fragments of ancient sources like the *Bibliotheca*.[39]

Further, Tydeus and Polynices, both exiled, meet in the kingdom of Argos, a place depicted as lavish and splendid. Polynices has been banished by his brother, Eteocles, who violated their agreement to share the throne (as recounted in Euripides' *Phoenissae* 74–80).[40] The two exiled heroes initially engage in conflict, embodying their shared grievances and struggles. Their fight is stopped by King Adrastus, who recognises their encounter as the fulfilment of an oracle. The prophecy stated that Adrastus would marry his daughters to a lion and a boar. These symbols appear on the shields carried by Polynices and Tydeus respectively. The shields are richly designed, with golden images of the animals gleaming.

[39] Giovanna di Martino (2020) has found the evidence relating to the myths used by Stewart in ancient texts.

Now in the production Tydeus journeys to Thebes to demand the throne, only to be rejected by Eteocles. This leads to a confrontation with Eteocles' soldiers, whom Tydeus defeats in battle (referencing Hom. *Il.* 4.382–98, 5.802–08; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.5). Before the battle begins Tiresias delivers an unsettling prophecy: Menoeceus must die to save Thebes (as seen in Eur. *Pho.* 911–14; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7). Stewart diverges from traditional myth by altering the fate of Menoeceus. Instead of sacrificing himself for Thebes (as in Eur. *Pho.* 996–1018; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7), Menoeceus takes a more active role. He ventures to Argos in a reckless attempt to assassinate King Adrastus and secure victory himself. His heroic endeavours end in tragedy when he is captured and killed by Alcmaeon, the son of Amphiaraus.

Stewart presents Eriphyle, wife of Amphiaraus, accepting a bribe to persuade her husband to join the doomed campaign against Thebes. The bribe is Harmonia's fabled necklace. (taken from Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.2). It is the only time in the production when a woman dances and that too in a seductive and alluring manner. This sets in motion the war. Amphiaraus reluctantly joins the cause. None of his reluctance appears in the duel scene of the war. It is his heroism that prevails.

The Dancing Duels

The stage is set for the fighting of the seven heroes. A net is brought down from the ceiling to the bottom of the set of stairs at the back end to show the walls of Thebes that are attempting to be breached. Thebes lies at the other side of the net on the stairs. The rest of the stage is the fighting arena. At its end where the audience begins, an arch is placed. Each of the Argive warriors enters through the arch, which is removed when the duel is over and replaced at the beginning of the next. It represents the seven gates of Thebes.

The duels are choreographed dances drawing from eastern traditions of war dance. In my view, the movement styles and patterns are similar to those found in the *Baris* from Bali,

Indonesia, and the *Chhau* from the eastern side of India (Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odissa). Both these dances share a background in warfare, local traditions, and to some extent the Hindu epic traditions, often depicting their own regional variations of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. However, at their core they are war dances, and women until recently were not allowed to practise these forms.

In the first duel Tydeus enters through the arch and runs towards Melanippus. They wrestle and fall over each other. Jumping movements are common, as they hold their arms across one another making the opponent flip. Tydeus kills Melanippus by choking him with his arms. He begins to eat Melanippus' brains out. Athena moves towards them, is horrified by Tydeus. She screams while carrying out a bird like movement, and drops the elixir she is carrying on the ground denying Tydeus of it.

Capaneus the giant is second in line. He enters the arch dragging his feet from one side to another in a skating like movement, with a blazing torch in his right hand. He then lifts up his enemy Polyphontes on his shoulders taking many circles. Polyphontes manages to escape his grip. Capaneus begins climbing the net like wall, screaming out to Zeus. While Polyphontes fails to bring him down, Zues' thunder bold strikes him to death because of his boastful arrogance.

On the backs of two men, each resembling horses, Eteocles and Megareus cross each other with long sticks in their hands. Agility, running, and jumping characterise their moves. They let go of the long sticks, and continue their fight by climbing a hanging ladder on the side of the stage. Once on top of the platform, they carry out movements that include lying and rolling on the floor. Picking up small sticks, they try to strangle one another. Finally, Megareus comes on top of Eteocles who is lying down. Megareus takes his sticks that weigh heavily on Eteocles placing them in a cross. Eteocles suffocates under the pressure.

Before the advent of the fourth duel, Dirce performs a 'water ceremony'[41] to protect Hyperbius. Hippomedon comes down the stairs from the platform representing Argos, in strong and slow movement, rotating a spear in one hand and holding an axe in the other. As he descends, one foot is placed after another, slowly and dextrously lifting the knee at an outward angle, culminating in a high jump down the stairs. His opponent, Hyperbius also has two weapons. Both slowly advance towards each other, then cross their weapons in front of their chest, and run backwards in small rhythmic steps. Both cover the space through jumps and turns with stern alacrity, meeting in combat and splitting again. Hyperbius holds two black clothes in his hand, and carries out movements akin to those used in alluring a bull in bull fighting. Hippomedon loses his weapons and is ultimately strangled by the cloth.

The fifth duel between Actor and Parthenopaeus opens with the latter slowly coming down the stairs of the set denoting Argos while untying the knot to let go his *chlamys*. Crossing the arch, he is greeted with a nine-foot-high wheel inside which is Actor. Two men on either side are turning the wheel backwards and forwards. Parthenopaeus jumps on top of the wheel and both heroes fight inside it. Parthenopaeus is thrown off the wheel and run over.

Both the heroes of the sixth duel, Amphiaraos and Lasthenes, enter and fight with a long stick. Rotating and striking movements dominate. Amphiaraos loses a stick, picks up another, and is close to meeting his end when he is saved by being engulfed within a mountain. The mountain is depicted by women under a white sheet that take Amphiaraos within their folds.

The seventh duel between Polynices and Eteocles is made to stand out by both actors dancing the Boleadoras that uses ropes attached to balls at the end and is best described as,

> Boleadoras originated from Argentina as a part of the *malambo* folk dance and is named for the weighted balls that swing around the dancer and rhythmically tap on the floor. The boleadoras tool

[41] The catalogue describes the ritual on stage as a water ceremony.

> was originally used as a hunting weapon by *gauchos*, but its use has morphed into part of a percussive and powerful folk dance.[42]

Rosa Collantes choreographed this segment that suited the technique and body well of both the performers. Initially there are around five to six men in two groups facing each other performing the signature rotation of the rope with balls standing still. They recede leaving the two in a dance face off mounting tension. Each one then flings the rope around the others' neck as they simultaneously strangle each other.

It is rather stirring that the entire segment of the duels seems to be from the perspective of Argos since the entrance of the Argive fighter is always shown first. While this segment in the play is the one that is closest to Aeschylus' *Septem*, there are still only hints of the original plot. Instead of focusing on the duel between each of the pairs of warriors, Aeschylus has the messenger inform Eteocles and the chorus of the nature of each warrior that is going to be assigned by the Argives to each gate so that Eteocles can have an appropriate opponent waiting to match his calibre. The nature of each Argive warrior is determined through the depiction he has on his shield. These passages become one of the most intriguing elements of Aeschylus' play, inviting scholarly attention.

The La MaMa production does not feature any such overt description of the shields. However, through close observation of each of the duel scenes, one may find references pertaining to the shields in the way the movements of the duels are choreographed. These instances may overlap with other textual evidence regarding certain heroes from the time. I have relied on the analysis of Froma Zeitlin's authoritative work on the semiotics of the shield scene since it can help unravel the meaning behind the dances. I argue that within the duel sequences of the La MaMa production, parsing these gestures and war dances can aid us in

[42] Mitchell, 2021.

mining the signification carried out by specific choreographic decisions. I intend to unravel these scenes below.

The first shield is of Tydeus described thus –

> ἔχει δ᾽ ὑπέρφρον σῆμ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ἀσπίδος τόδε,
> φλέγονθ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἄστροις οὐρανὸν τετυγμένον:
> λαμπρὰ δὲ πανσέληνος ἐν μέσῳ σάκει,
> πρέσβιστον ἄστρων, νυκτὸς ὀφθαλμός, πρέπει. (387-370)
>
> He has this haughty symbol on his shield: a well-crafted sky, ablaze with stars, and the brightness of the full moon shining in the centre of the shield, the moon that is the most revered of the stars, the eye of night.[43]

According to Pichugina, the shield with a full moon and stars could be read in various ways: she talks about moral blindness in general and of the house of Laius.[44] Zeitlin makes a similar point in her study of the semiotics regarding the shields. In her view, the moon represents an aristocratic code because of its preeminent position, and when this is shifted to a military code it signifies ‘la merveille de l’armèe’, meaning the wonder of the army ‘referring to the chief champion of the troops’. However, in the context of Tydeus, the creation of a negative stance can imply that the moon as the ‘eye of the night’ assumes a ‘malevolent power’.[45] Indeed, Stewart engages with this streak in his behaviour that overcomes Tydeus when he eats Melanippus’ brains, and reinforces it through Athena denying him the elixir.

Tydeus’ victory itself is a sign of the decline of Thebes. Potentially some of the circular jumps and rotatory movements by both the performers may be interpreted as drawing from celestial bodies. Zeitlin notes that ‘the moon in the centre of the *sema* reduplicates the shape of

[43] All translations in this section are by Smyth, 1922.
[44] Her reasoning is worded such: ‘This image, on the one hand, can indicate moral blindness, and on the other hand, can serve as a hint at the moral blindness of the representatives of the house of Laius, since the moon reminds of Hecate, the goddess with whom the curse of the royal house of Thebes began’. (Pichugina, 2020, p. 134)
[45] This is through ‘its configuration as the evil eye whose hateful power is more efficacious by reason of its uniqueness and whose possessor aims to dominate men and gods i.e., to overturn the cosmos’. (Zeitlin, 2009, p. 37)

the shield device as a circle within a circle and is itself a *sema* in the natural world…'[46] This 'concentric repetition' is reflected in the circular movements that both the performers danced.

Further interpretations of the shield signify similarities because of the presence of celestial bodies with Achilles' shield, therefore categorising it as a decorative shield, and recognising him as the father of Diomedes, but there are not brought out in the performance. On the whole it is clear that the LaMama duel has a few minimal connections with the shield scene, and I have tried to establish those through semiotics.

The second shield of Capaneus the giant has much affiliation with his character.

> ἔχει δὲ σῆμα γυμνὸν ἄνδρα πυρφόρον,
> φλέγει δὲ λαμπὰς διὰ χερῶν ὡπλισμένη:
> χρυσοῖς δὲ φωνεῖ γράμμασιν 'πρήσω πόλιν.' (431-433)
>
> For his shield's symbol he has a man without armour bearing fire, and the torch, his weapon, blazes in his hands; and in golden letters he says 'I will burn the city'.

The description is in line with his vaunting nature. Zeitlin observes that 'the second shield now establishes a relationship of iconic mimesis with its bearer (man : man)'. She asserts that the difference between the two – the man on the shield and Capaneus is one of inequality where the former is unarmed (interpreting nakedness and being devoid of protection) even carrying the torch for this purpose, Capaneus is fully armed.[47] The production decides to depict Capaneus entering with a torch of flames in his hand in a rather powerful and terrifying manner. He is shown to represent himself and signify the warrior on his shield by holding the blaring torch. His demeanour itself conveys the words written on the shield that he will burn the city down. The skating like movement upon his entrance creates a bounce in the body, allowing him to hold his upper torso and chin higher, adding to his arrogance while holding the torch.

[46] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 35.
[47] Zeitlin, 2009, pp. 42–43.

The addition of the torch also pretends to make him equal to Zeus whose weapon is the thunderbolt. Although, as Zeitlin explains, 'The lightening of Zeus (divine)… by implication excludes the man-made fire of Kapaneus…'[48] The depiction on the shield is blended with a description of him in Euripides' *Phoenician Women* where he is said to have been screaming Zeus' name, climbing a ladder during stone showers, and dying by Zues' thunderbolt buried under his own shield. The choreography of the duel is very much in line with this description. Both the depiction on the shield in Aeschylus' text, and the description of Capaneus' death by Euripides is embodied by the performer in the sequence.

The third shield of Etecoles goes a step further in its portrayal.

τρίτῳ γὰρ Ἐτεόκλῳ τρίτος πάλος
ἐξ ὑπτίου 'πήδησεν εὐχάλκου κράνους,
πύλαισι Νηίστῃσι προσβαλεῖν λόχον.
ἵππους δ᾽ ἐν ἀμπυκτῆρσιν ἐμβριμωμένας
δινεῖ, θελούσας πρὸς πύλαις πεπτωκέναι.
φιμοὶ δὲ συρίζουσι βάρβαρον τρόπον,
μυκτηροκόμποις πνεύμασιν πληρούμενοι.
ἐσχημάτισται δ᾽ ἀσπὶς οὐ σμικρὸν τρόπον:
ἀνὴρ δ᾽: ὁπλίτης κλίμακος προσαμβάσεις
στείχει πρὸς ἐχθρῶν πύργον, ἐκπέρσαι θέλων.
βοᾷ δὲ χοὗτος γραμμάτων ἐν ξυλλαβαῖς,
ὡς οὐδ᾽ ἂν Ἄρης σφ᾽ ἐκβάλοι πυργωμάτων. (458-469)

The third lot leaped out of the upturned bronze helmet for Eteocles, to hurl his band against the Neistan gates. He whirls his horses as they snort through their bridles, eager to fall against the gate. Their muzzles whistle in a barbarian way, filled with the breath of their haughty nostrils. His shield is decorated in great style: an armoured man climbs a ladder's rungs to mount an enemy tower that he wants to destroy. This one, too, shouts in syllables of written letters that even Ares could not hurl him from the battlements.

Zeitlin comments, 'in the aesthetic code, the emblem displays a higher degree of technical elaboration than the two that went before, both by its mimetic verisimilitude and by

[48] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 43.

the more complex activity of the scene'.[49] This is apt for both the movements used in the production, as well as the textual interpretation it hints towards. The first movement of the performers resembles the riding of horses carrying two long sticks. There are two motivations within the text that could have governed this representation. The first is the mention of horses within the initial lines of the shield's description – the horses eager to attack the gate with their noisy snorting. It is a curious choice within the text itself to use the imagery of horses from the Argive side.

While Thebes has always been known for the production of horses and a good cavalry, the Argives have fallen short in this matter. In the battle of Plataia in 479 BCE the Boiotians, and out of them the Thebans were the primary providers of cavalry. Aeschylus would have been aware of this while writing *Septem*. However, there is a mention of horses with regard to the Argives in the *Iliad* (as 'horse-grazing Argos' or Ἄργεος ἱπποβότοιο in 2.287 and 15.30), though its historical verity is uncertain. Perhaps the presence of horses from the Argive side was to show them as an equally adept force that was challenging Thebes.[50]

The depiction of horses in the production is particularly peculiar because the performances seem to rely on the duel format of the *Iliad* where not horses but chariots were used to reach the war arena. The duel is conducted on the ground with the two heroes facing each other. The dismounting movement of both the performers credits this interpretation.

The scene represented on Eteocles shield was seen in the production. Zeitlin asserts that 'the third shield leaves upon it the representation of the hoplite scaling the walls, a replica and mimetic double of the warrior who bears it'.[51] As Eteocles runs to climb the ladder on the side of the stage, the difference between him and the shield bearer diminishes. He is a mimesis of

[49] Zeitlin, 2009, pp. 51.
[50] For details about warfare, horses, and cavalry in archaic and classical Greece refer to: Spence, 1993 and Wrightson, 2019.
[51] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 50.

his representation. Since, Megareus follows him in his climb in the performance, Megareus also takes on the representation. Both the self and its representation become one with the other/the enemy. The line of sides blurs, as they both represent hoplites, notwithstanding the context of the duel. The heroes are reduced to mere hoplites. The shift of attention from the centre-stage duel, which was embellished with jumping movements across the stage, now moves to the side of the stage on a narrow platform where the movements proceed on the floor.

The shield is not the only glamour object held by Eteocles. The very first sentence attaches a similar glory to Eteocles' helmet. Zeitlin makes another association through this: 'the third (*tritos*) lot has leaped out of the bronze helmet for the third man, Eteocles (*tritoi*)… We might view him therefore as none other than the sign of the return of the Third Age, the bronze, which saw autochthonous warriors spring fully armed from the earth at their birth only to perish at each other's hands. (Hes. *Op*. 143-156)'.[52] This association made by Zeitlin seems a bit far-fetched. However, the movements of rolling on the floor, and trying to suffocate each other within the small platform hint to the idea of springing from the earth (leaping from the helmet) with an urge to return to it together.

With regard to the shield, the significance of the fourth duel is paramount since the shield of the attacker and defender are geared to match each other.[53] The performance incorporated both these representations.

> Ἱππομέδοντος σχῆμα καὶ μέγας τύπος:
> ἅλω δὲ πολλήν, ἀσπίδος κύκλον λέγω,
> ἔφριξα δινήσαντος: οὐκ ἄλλως ἐρῶ.
> ὁ σηματουργὸς δ᾽ οὔ τις εὐτελὴς ἄρ᾽ ἦν
> ὅστις τόδ᾽ ἔργον ὤπασεν πρὸς ἀσπίδι,
> Τυφῶν᾽ ἱέντα πύρπνοον διὰ στόμα
> λιγνὺν μέλαιναν, αἰόλην πυρὸς κάσιν:

[52] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 54.
[53] Zeitlin is the one to make this observation and I'm in agreement with her: 'the enemy's shield for the first and only time in the series, meets its iconic counterpart in the shield of the defender'. (Zeitlin, 2009, 56)

ὄφεων δὲ πλεκτάναισι περίδρομον κύτος
προσηδάφισται κοιλογάστορος κύκλου.
αὐτὸς δ᾽ ἐπηλάλαξεν, ἔνθεος δ᾽ Ἄρει
βακχᾷ πρὸς ἀλκὴν Θυιὰς ὡς φόβον βλέπων. (490-498)

I cannot deny it. The symbol-maker who put the design on his shield was no lowly craftsman: the symbol is Typhon, spitting out of his fire-breathing mouth a dark, thick smoke, the darting sister of fire. And the rim of the hollow-bellied shield is fastened all around with snaky braids. The warrior himself has raised the war-cry and, inspired by Ares he raves for battle like a maenad, with a look to inspire fear.

ἐχθρὸς γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἀνδρὶ τῷ ξυστήσεται,
ξυνοίσετον δὲ πολεμίους ἐπ᾽ ἀσπίδων
θεούς: ὁ μὲν γὰρ πύρπνοον Τυφῶν᾽ ἔχει,
Ὑπερβίῳ δὲ Ζεὺς πατὴρ ἐπ᾽ ἀσπίδος
σταδαῖος ἧσται, διὰ χερὸς βέλος φλέγων:
κοὔπω τις εἶδε Ζῆνά που νικώμενον. (509-514)

For the man is hostile to the man he faces in battle, and the gods on their shields also meet as enemies. The one has fire-breathing Typhon, while father Zeus stands upright on Hyperbius' shield, his lightening bolt aflame in his hand. And no one yet has seen Zeus conquered.

Hippomedon descends the stairs in the play while moving a spear in one hand in a circular manner. He holds an axe in another. In the text, his shield is embellished with Typhon. I suggest the whirling sphere may represent the stormy wind and the axe the fire, both of which are Typhon's symbols. The word circle is emphasised by the messenger, as Zeitlin argues: 'this circularity of time as it turns back on itself is perhaps suggested by the enemies whirling of his shield (*dinestantos*) and by the emphasis given not once, but twice to the shape of Typho's shield as a *kuklos*, a circle'.[54] She additionally states, 'from another point of view, whirling the shield increases the menace of Typhon; it literally animates him…'[55] Hippomedon embodies the divinity, and by vociferously rotating the spear he is representing the wind gushing out of Typhon's mouth; he is representing his own smoky character. Gregory Nagy points out the

[54] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 62.
[55] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 62, footnote 80.

smoke could have several other connotations including 'becoming blind to one's own self, pretension, boasting, vanity',[56] all of which the dance duel conveys with sincerity.

There is also much precision and intensity in Hippomedon's lifting of his feet and stepping. Again, Zeitlin comes to our aid as she cites Detienne and Vernant: ' "one of Typhon's distinguishing characteristics is the undefeatable mobility of his feet… Typhon is in constant movement,"… His motion, in fact, like the whirlwind, promises a return to chaos. (Detienne and Vernant, 115-118 (=1978, 117-118)'.[57] The concentrated lifting of the leg at an angle on stage is a build up to the final jump from the last step that the performer makes, inviting the Typhonic chaos that is to ensue. Further, when both heroes approach each other, they run forward with energy, and step back with mini steps proving their control over their movement and the swiftness of their feet. They also carry out various circular jumps covering the stage well.

His opponent, Hyperbius also has exactly the same weapons in both hands. His shield in the text is a representation of Zeus with his thunderbolt. This is itself a reflection of the cosmogenic battle between the two forces where order must reign over the stormy chaos. The outcome is already decided. In no world can Zeus not win. Thus, in the production the two men end up abandoning their weapons. In a way, the abandonment of the spear and axe seems like an abandonment of Typhon itself, an image that Hyperbius had mirrored at the beginning of the combat. When Hyperbius holds the two black cloths in his hands and begins a movement I best describe as used in a bull fight for the lack of better wording, it seems that Zeus' spirit is being embodied by him. The symbolism of the blackish-grey cloth is, in my view, denoting thunder caused by lightning, and the flapping action is a way of controlling and engulfing all that is around it. There is a circularity to the motion on stage. Zeitlin cites Ar. *Nub*. 379-382

[56] Nagy in Pichugina, 2020, p. 145.
[57] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 62, footnote 80.

pointing out that the word '*dinos* replaces Zeus' powers of lightning and thunder'.[58] Since wind is necessary to create thunderstorms, Typhon's boastfulness embodied by Hippomedon in the beginning of the performance was necessary to push Hyperbius to strangle him. The circle is complete.

The fifth duel between Parthenopaeus and Actor presents the most iconic interpretation in the production. It is, however, only conceptually connected to the shield scene in the text:

> ...τόδ᾽ αὐδᾷ μητρὸς ἐξ ὀρεσκόου
> βλάστημα καλλίπρῳρον, ἀνδρόπαις ἀνήρ:
> στείχει δ᾽ ἴουλος ἄρτι διὰ παρηίδων,
> ὥρας φυούσης, ταρφὺς ἀντέλλουσα θρίξ.
> ὁ δ᾽ ὠμόν, οὔτι παρθένων ἐπώνυμον,
> φρόνημα, γοργὸν δ᾽ ὄμμ᾽ ἔχων, προσίσταται.
> οὐ μὴν ἀκόμπαστός γ᾽ ἐφίσταται πύλαις:
> τὸ γὰρ πόλεως ὄνειδος ἐν χαλκηλάτῳ
> σάκει, κυκλωτῷ σώματος προβλήματι,
> Σφίγγ᾽ ὠμόσιτον προσμεμηχανημένην
> γόμφοις ἐνώμα, λαμπρὸν ἔκκρουστον δέμας,
> φέρει δ᾽ ὑφ᾽ αὑτῇ φῶτα Καδμείων ἕνα,
> ὡς πλεῖστ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ἀνδρὶ τῷδ᾽ ἰάπτεσθαι βέλη. (532-544)

> …the beautiful child of a mountain-bred mother—a warrior, half man, half boy, and his beard's first growth is just now advancing on his cheeks, his youth in first bloom, thick, upspringing hair. But now he makes his advance with a savage heart and a terrifying look, not at all like the maidens he's named for. Nor does he take his stand at the gate unboasting, but wields our city's shame on his bronze-forged shield, his body's circular defence, on which the Sphinx who eats men raw is cleverly fastened with bolts, her body embossed and gleaming. She carries under her a single Cadmean, so that against this man chiefly our missiles will be hurled.

The text gives more words to Parthenopaeus than to his shield. He represents a dichotomy – both man and boy, foreigner and insider, he embodies the femininity of the name Parthenos but also possesses the streak of a warrior. His first movements in the production comprise walking steadily towards the arch while untying his *chlamys*. Usually, a *chlamys* is adorned in a military context. It is rather peculiar to see him removing it. However, no other warrior on

[58] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 62, footnote 80.

either side has worn one to begin with. Therefore, there seems to be some symbolism associated with it. In my view, in order to deal with his conflicting identity, he is made to wear the cloak to assert his manhood and his capability to be an equally robust warrior as his predecessors. The removal of the *chlamys* shows his transformation to youthfulness that brings about an untarnished agility in his movements. This is seen in the way he makes his way up to the nine-foot wheel.

The use of the wheel represents as much a riddle to the viewer of the production as does the riddled past of Thebes that the Sphinx echoes on Parthenopaeus' shield. Zeitlin eloquently asserts this:

> The semiotic energy that builds at the fifth gate depends upon this return of the diachronic process… The movement backwards and forwards along the line of time through the pivotal role of Parthenopaeus ensures that the last act of drama will be a new event…But, at the same time, the return of the Sphinx marks both 'a return to and a return of the repressed past', which determines that a new riddle will also be an old riddle.[59]

This circular notion that is to end with the impending death of the two brothers signified by the Sphinx gives reason for the wheel to be used as a metaphor for time, inside which both the performers fight each other, as the Thebans push the wheel of time forward and backwards. Like the Sphinx of the shield in the text has a Cadmean under her, the wheel runs over Parthenopaeus leaving Actor crushing him underfoot.

The sixth fighter from the Argives, Amphiaraos is depicted by Aeschylus as reprimanding Polyneices for waging this war. He then goes on to describe his shield that holds no emblem:

> τοιαῦθ᾽ ὁ μάντις ἀσπίδ᾽ εὐκήλως ἔχων
> πάγχαλκον ηὔδα: σῆμα δ᾽ οὐκ ἐπῆν κύκλῳ.
> οὐ γὰρ δοκεῖν ἄριστος, ἀλλ᾽ εἶναι θέλει,
> βαθεῖαν ἄλοκα διὰ φρενὸς καρπούμενος,
> ἐξ ἧς τὰ κεδνὰ βλαστάνει βουλεύματα.
> τούτῳ σοφούς τε κἀγαθοὺς ἀντηρέτας

[59] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 73.

πέμπειν ἐπαινῶ. δεινὸς ὃς θεοὺς σέβει. (590-596)

So the seer spoke as untroubled he held his all-bronze shield. No symbol was fixed to his shield's circle. For he does not wish to appear the bravest, but to be the bravest, as he harvests the fruit of his mind's deep furrow, where his careful resolutions grow. I advise you to send wise and brave opponents against him. He who reveres the gods is to be feared.

'It leaves no message but the profound meanings of silence',[60] says Zeitlin in an astute manner. It is interesting that even Euripides in *Phoenician Women* describes the same shield. Pichugina also articulates. 'Aeschylean Amphiaraus is probably the one who does not need a shield at all, since he already knows the outcome of the battle for everyone and himself'.[61] All the evidence by both the text and scholars' interpretation points towards the erudition of the man and his seer-like disposition. However, none of this is revealed through the production or any of the warfare movement patterns. Even though he is shown merging into the mountain rather than meeting his end in the battlefield, the fighting sequence between him and Lasthenes is comprised of two long sticks. His distinct, unconceited character, and role as a well-wisher for Thebes are ignored in the movements.

The seventh shield of Polynices is described in the text as representing justice.

ἔχει δὲ καινοπηγὲς εὔκυκλον σάκος
διπλοῦν τε σῆμα προσμεμηχανημένον.
χρυσήλατον γὰρ ἄνδρα τευχηστὴν ἰδεῖν
ἄγει γυνή τις σωφρόνως ἡγουμένη.
Δίκη δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ εἶναί φησιν, ὡς τὰ γράμματα
λέγει 'κατάξω δ᾽ ἄνδρα τόνδε καὶ πόλιν
ἕξει πατρῴων δωμάτων τ᾽ ἐπιστροφάς.' (642-648)

He holds a shield, a perfect circle, newly-made, with a double symbol cleverly fastened on it: a woman modestly walking in the fore leads a man in arms made, it appears, of hammered gold. She claims to be Justice, as the lettering indicates, 'I will bring this man back and he will have his city and move freely in his father's halls'.

[60] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 79.
[61] Pichugina, 2020, p. 149.

The question of justice is itself at stake here. Pichigina argues that 'The question arises: if *Dike* has already taken the side of the defenders, how can she be on the side of the attackers at the same time. Eteocles ignores the demand for equality, which Polyneices speaks about while explaining his motives'.[62] However, the performance by La MaMa works well in establishing this equality between the two warriors, embodying Zeitlin's words that 'doubling has become self-referential… double reflexivity of the two brothers, which their encounter will act out'.[63] The clever insertion of the Boleadoras in this segment helps foster the equality among the two warriors. The turning of the rope with a ball at its end requires a similar technique that does not depend on the body type of the dancer. Also, there is a dancing face off that occurs between the two performers where their homogeneous prowess is automatically clocked by the spectator. They mirror each other's need for justice represented on the shield, and are finally freed from the 'othering', as both with the same technical precision wrap one another's neck with the rope for strangulation.

Zeitlin's semiotic analysis, combined with a close reading of the text, I have demonstrated how the gestures and war dances of the duel scenes in the La MaMa production can be dissected to detect meaning within the choice of choreographed movements performed. They are an exemplary case of meaning-making that gesture and movement during a performance can contribute to, by expanding and decentring the text. Within this particular production, this process is occupied with reinforcing the ideas of heroism, rather than focusing on the chorus. It denies the chorus the opportunity to invest in the process of meaning-making, thereby divesting from the value of community that Aeschylus' original play and Greek tragedy itself was focused on instilling.

[62] Pichugina, 2020, p. 152.
[63] Zeitlin, 2009, p. 94.

Conclusion

As the duel scenes foreground, the entire approach of La MaMa theatre focuses on the heroes of the play. Following the heroic tradition of the epics to a certain extent, this production takes away from the community ritual and context of classical tragedy. The chorus as a body of women representing the fears of the community are not present. At no point does the community in Thebes or Argos come together to explore the impact of the war. Besides the hand puppet, the play does not try to re-centre the chorus, and values of community in its interpretation of the myths and choreographic depictions. The voice of the collective is overshadowed by the greatness of the individual hero. Further, it is focused on bringing together a ritualised retelling of men that dominate Greek mythology, without the impact on women. The last scene that shows the entombment of Antigone[64] may garner some sympathy, but its fleeting depiction is not enough to make a statement within the production as a whole.

The entire production does not engage with Aeschylus' play, but draws from various other textual sources to knit its story. All the dances are war dances and by convention exclude women. They are based on the individual story and skill of the heroes, refusing to engage with community identity or impact. In this regard, the production is contrary to Aeschylus' approach and the entire concept of tragedy.

The endeavour is what it claims to be - an 'operatic dance drama' - but the extent to which it engages with the coming together of voices and bodies to tell a story remains unclear. Dance and movement do not bring together bodies in coherence within the production. They create meaning by adopting movement to the individual body, and disassociating the value of the community and the chorus from the process of meaning making. While we discover the influence that the performance of movement can have in conveying the meaning absent in text,

[64] The play ends on a solemn note. Antigone defies Creon, tries to bury Polynices, and is entombed.

divorcing the value of community and chorality proves a refusal to create affect through the multiplicity of bodies and voices that are the core of tragedy, considerably reducing the scope and impact of the extracted meaning. In this regard, it stands in opposition to Mario Martone's *Teatro di Guerra* that brings together the community and life of Naples, while depicting the collective consequences of war and violence for that community, Sarajevo, and humanity.

Chapter 3: Movement and Meaning in the Lyric Choruses of *Septem*

Introduction

In Greek drama at its inception, the tragic lyric choruses drew on ritualistic dance traditions such as the paean, the lament, the pyrrhic, etc. The play texts as they exist today have lost the choreography and musical notations of the original. The only remaining elements of Aeschylus' work, for instance, are the basic play-text and the metrical frame. Thus, in this form, it is impossible to recreate the dance, which was an intrinsic part of the totality of the play in performance. My objective is to move past the centrality of the text by excavating potential meaning as it emerges through performance, and specifically through movement.

As detailed in the first chapter, the text has always been given a primary position in classical scholarship. Through this chapter, I challenge this textual primacy in specific relation to *Septem*. My goal is to excavate the gestic movements, articulated within the text, which I approach as a choreographic script.

An exploration of the choice of bodily gestures and movements brings to life the complex meaning of the play as a whole. This emphasises the fact that meaning-making in tragedy is the result of a multimodal method, whereby textual syntax, metaphor, and metre are accompanied by modes of symbolic and emotional embodiment produced through gestic movements. Furthermore, the audience's interpretation of a combination of verbal and gestic cues, producing a visual and visceral experience, elevates them as co-creators of meaning. This process unveils a rich affective exchange between the chorus and the audience. In sum, gestic movements as I will demonstrate here are intrinsic rather extraneous to the process of meaning-making.

This approach recasts the chorus from their already acknowledged role as characters in their own right (commentators, narrators, and reflectors), into embodied agents, thereby reinforcing their centrality. By embodying the lyric segments, the chorus are re-centred as they become the primary active agents in the meaning-making process of the play as a whole. This is because the chorus' lyric metres evoke an emotional register, whereas the non-lyric metres shaping the speeches/dialogues of the characters are mainly narrative in form. Therefore, the lyric strophic, antistrophic, and astrophic segments naturally lend themselves to movement.

In order to demonstrate the centrality of the chorus and its key gestic role in meaning-making, I first undertake a close reading of the lyric passages of the chorus in *Septem*. This is premised on the identification of three kinds of experiences of the chorus through which we can chart the use of movement for the creation of meaning. Thus, in my view, the full meaning of the play can be accessed through these three experiences: textual references to the chorus' sensory experiences (hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling); references made to body parts by the chorus; and the multiple references to the dominant emotion of the choral body in various lyric metres (in this case fear/anxiety).

To elaborate, movement in these experiences can be expressed through three approaches. The first is the direct approach. By direct here I mean that a particular gesture or gestic movement is used to convey that particular word in the text. For instance, I can see the ocean. In order to place movement on 'I can see the ocean', I could easily use a simple gesture that refers to 'I', then 'seeing', and then 'ocean'. It represents a deictic choice where the gesture exactly shows what the word is. To this extent, the audiences associate the gestures and the words together and a semiotic affect is registered.

The second is the indirect approach which generates a certain amount of complexity. Here the choice of where and how to emphasise the gesture/movement focuses on the context

of the line/passage. For instance, in the poem *Hope* by Emily Dickinson, the first line is: 'hope is the thing with feathers'. Here it is obvious that hope is being compared to a bird. The line can be depicted through gesture/movement in many ways. One option would be to emphasise through movement the freedom associated with a bird/or the word feather. Here neither hope nor feather emerges as a single image. But the evocation of movement depicting freedom would be the closest to uncovering the meaning of the line and the affect associated with it.

The third approach, similar to the above indirect approach, demonstrates the layering of a single emotion through multiple gestures/movements depicting the same emotion.

In my analysis, the direct and indirect approaches to movements come together to emphasise the chorus' sensory experiences and its references to body parts. The third approach of emotional layering, in this case the specific layering of fear and anxiety, can be made apparent by following multiple movements that display anxiety and fear.

Analytical Framework

According to Anton Bierl, metatheatre involves theatre reflecting on itself, enhancing performance and genre. In Attic drama, it primarily manifests through self-referentiality rather than self-consciousness. The ritualistic elements, masks, movements, and mythic context provide distance for reflecting on contemporary political issues. The chorus, with its polyphonic nature, introduces self-reflection and facilitates embodied emotional affect and its transfer. Bierl considers metatheatre as total theatre, where all elements become theatricalised through interacting frames.[1]

Bierl later distinguishes self-referentiality (a performance's acknowledgment of its own ritual action) from metatheatre, that according to him reflects on the nature of theatre through

[1] Bierl, 2021, pp. 128-129.

self-reflexivity. Because ritual and performance interact, the two often overlap. He insists self-referentiality is not a postmodern determinant but intrinsic to ancient poetry and drama, where ritual relies on self-reference to validate itself.[2]

Drawing on Calame and Henrichs, Bierl argues that the chorus's references to its singing and dancing enhance performance and are structurally built into choral episodes, sustaining illusion, displaying multivocal roles, and articulating a dual identity that is at once enacting ritual now, while assuming dramatic roles in the plot, thereby linking mimesis to the real-time frame. This configuration is aligned with Dionysus, modelled on the god as *exarchos*/*choragos* leading maenads, nymphs, or satyrs.[3] From Aeschylus and Euripides to satyr play and Old Comedy, he shows that pathos (and *goos*) is underscored by self-referential markers; the chorus, supplying ritual speech and embedding reenactment, becomes the carrier of pathos and self-referentiality.[4]

Adapting Goldhill's self-reflexivity, Henrichs coins the term, 'choral self-referentiality': the chorus's self-description as performers of *choreia*. He argues that by foregrounding their collective performance, choruses embed what they do self-consciously in the play's ritual and dramatic frames, blurring character and performer. Thus, they acquire a more complex identity. Their dance becomes an emotional response to onstage events, and a ritual posture linking the festival's cultic reality to the tragedies' imagined religious world; the audience's illusion remains intact. [5]

Both Bierl and Henrichs are extremely dependent on the ritualistic context. I, on the other hand, agree with Oliver Taplin's assessment that tragedy was not a ritual act in itself, even

[2] Bierl, 2021, p. 116.
[3] Bierl, 2021, pp. 117–118.
[4] Bierl, 2021, pp. 119, 121.
[5] Henrichs, 1995, pp. 57–59.

though it might have included rituals where necessary as a part of the play.[6] My analysis does not include Bierl and Henrichs' ritualistic dimension. However, I do ground my work in the use of both metatheatre and self-referentiality that help me look at the text to illuminate choreographic cues.

Naomi Weiss' book *The Music of Tragedy*, inspired by the works of Henrichs, offers a hermeneutical approach to analysing *mousikē* (that etymologically includes dance and music), albeit with a primary focus on music. Weiss introduces the concept of meta-musicality, defined as 'references to song and dance that interact with the live musical performances'. While her work primarily examines Euripides, she also briefly discusses Aeschylus in the introduction and first chapter. Weiss builds upon Henrichs' concept of choral projections but extends it further. She argues that projections are not limited to the chorus projecting itself; rather, when the chorus vividly describes others' *mousikē* (music and dance), it creates an interaction between the imagined and actual performances. She is cautious not to assume a direct correlation between tragic language and *mousikē*, and proposes viewing *mimēsis* as representation and enactment rather than strict imitation. She suggests that this mimetic process results in audiences experiencing choreography through a blend of imagination and actual perception. The interplay between described and performed *mousikē* exemplifies this mimetic process in action. To strengthen her argument, Weiss also incorporates concepts from auditory reception in sound studies.[7]

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[6] Taplin clearly articulates that Greek tragedy was not ritual. According to him, 'the whole point about ritual is that it should always be the same. It is the aim of its performers to repeat the rigmarole as perfectly, as identically as possible. Tragedy is exactly the opposite'. I would like to stress here that this does not imply that tragedy was not mimetic. As made clear earlier, mimesis is based on recreation and reenactment. Taplin goes on further to ascertain that 'there certainly are some ritual procedures during the course of the events of the play, e.g. supplication, claiming surety, or the hunting promos, but these are used within the plays, they are not imposed on them from without. Greek tragedy reflects and exploits the rituals of the real world, of course, but it is not itself a ritual'. Moreover, while the plays were performed at the Dionysius Theatre, we do not gather any evidence of the ritual aspect of the festival from the plays, making them again less likely to be a ritual act. (Taplin, 2003, pp. 192–193)

[7] Weiss, 2018, pp. 14–16.

Therefore, while choral projections and self-referentiality are at the core of her approach, Weiss finds their scope limiting. Instead, she uses the term ‘imaginative suggestions’. In tragic lyrics this concept encompasses verbal cues that guide the audience's perception of *mousikē*. These linguistic elements create a bridge between the descriptions of performance, and the spectators’ sensory experience. By employing vivid, performance-oriented language, these suggestions enable the audience to mentally construct and engage with musical and choreographic elements. This approach goes beyond mere description, immersing the audience in an experience that blends imagination with perception. Imaginative suggestions often introduce contrasts, such as pairing delicate fragile elements with ecstatic performances, thereby enriching the audience’s interaction with the tragic narrative and its musical components. This technique enhances the complexity of the audience’s engagement, allowing for a more nuanced and multifaceted experience of the tragic performance. [8]

Weiss provides a solid framework that I use in my analysis. I apply her ideas of meta-musicality and imagined suggestions about movement that creates an imagined meta-kinesis where particularly references to movements and gestures craft the live choreographic performance for the audience, both imagined and perceived. Bouncing from the text, the references encompass the entire scope of imagined and real performance, and *mimēsis* through *deixis* and *schēmata* aid in introducing the audience as members of the meaning-generating process.

I now move to recognising the work of scholars pertaining to the experiences of the chorus I have categorised. Scholars have engaged in detail with the sensory experiences of the chorus and their reference to body parts. I have referred to some of them in the introduction. Here I bring to attention the foremost contribution in this domain by Afroditi Angelopoulou.

[8] Weiss, 2018, p. 17.

Angelopoulou's articles 'Gesture, Metaphor, and Body in *Trojan Women*' and 'Feeling Words: Embodied Metaphors in *Seven Against Thebes'* remind us of the kinesthetic empathy that I elaborated in the introduction. Angelopoulou's focus here in on the concept of embodied metaphor that encompass all aspects of kinesthetic and sensory experiences, enabling the evocation of affect among the audience. Using Guillemette Bolens' work, she argues:

> …the play has the potential to engage its audience by eliciting their kinesthetic knowledge and interpretive participation in the creation of meaning. According to Guillemette Bolens (2012, 36–9), narratives can encourage such participation also through the use of metaphors grounded in bodily experience, which evince how a writer thinks in terms of sensorimotor configurations, drawing on her audience's linguistic, conceptual and cultural knowledge. The semantic retrieval of these metaphors relies on 'an act of embodied cognition, which welds the literal with the figural'.[9]

Angelopoulou emphasises how metaphors in *Trojan Women* are used to convey complex ideas and emotions by drawing on the audience's physical and sensory experiences. For example, she says: 'Part of the pathos of Astyanax' scene results from the sustained emphasis on his young and delicate body, especially how the (soft) skin (1220: *chrôs*) comes into contact with "rough" surfaces – how "Loxias' fortifications have shorn the locks of [his] head that [his] mother so often tended with care and kisses." (1173–6)'. The focus on the haptic imagery adds to the visceral empathetic experience.[10] She also situates the use of metaphors in body movements and motion. For instance, 'In the opening scenes, Hecuba exhorts herself to follow "the surge of *tuchê*" (102–4; see also 686–97), while her gestures fuse the literal with the metaphorical as she imitates the rocking of a boat (116–17)—one that Helen, as she bitterly complains, "has run aground to ruin" (137: ἐς τάνδ ἐξώκειλ ἄταν)'. Thus, spatial movement becomes a key conceptual framework for understanding misfortune and reversal in the play.[11]

She makes similar points with regard to *Septem*. She focuses on Aeschylus' use of gustatory metaphors, particularly those related to anger and disgust. These metaphors, often

[9] Angelopoulou, 2021, p. 600.
[10] Angelopoulou, 2021, p. 617.
[11] Angelopoulou, 2021, p. 601.

embedded in a wider system of agricultural metaphors, are seen as cognitive and psychological devices capable of triggering affective responses in the audience. She further notes that gustatory embodied experiences may affect moral processing. The metaphorical extension of taste words like πικρός (bitter) can evoke implicit emotional responses and influence moral judgment.[12]

Overall, Angelopoulou gives a heavy scaffolding for my argument; I keenly note her understanding of motion and sensory experience. I use these embodied metaphors in the play as areas where the impact of movement can be conveyed. Sometimes they are self-referential, as in the case of body parts that the chorus talks about; sometimes they are sensory. By coupling the presence of motion with these experiences, I note the kinesthetic empathy that typically emerges. My analysis imbued with this multisensory and embodied kinesthesis leaves the impact of movement to tell its affective story.

Lastly, in this discussion I feel the process of emotional layering requires further explanation and I am taking a short detour into the work of A.M Dale and Fiona Macintosh to expound it clearly. By using the word 'layering' in this chapter, I suggest a fluctuation in the intensity and nature of the emotion, as well as the actions used to express the emotion contextually. In *Septem*, it is the combined effect of the emotions of anxiety and fear that repeatedly shapes the responses of the chorus throughout the play, almost like a refrain. Each of these takes place in different passages with distinct lyric metres. I will argue in the analysis, following Dale and Macintosh, that the metrical layering of emotion has a choreographic counterpart: it is legible in the chorus's variety of movements/gestures to express the same emotion across lyric metres.

[12] Angelopoulou, 2020, pp. 67, 73.

A.M Dale argues in her commentary on Euripides' *Alcestis* that there is a relationship between stage lyric and dialogue. She says:

> The thread of action does not necessarily run continuously through both of these in a strict sequence of time. There are many scenes where, a situation is realised first in its lyric, then in its iambic aspect – that is to say, first emotionally, then in its reasoned form... Alcestis' visions of death, the darkness closing over her eyes, the farewell to her children, all belonging to her last minutes on earth; yet now we find her making a long speech, listening to Admetus' reply, and then at the end of the following stichomythia the darkness falls again and she renews her farewells... Euripides has simply juxtaposed these two aspects of Alcestis' parting from life, rather than leave either incomplete. The anapaest of Admetus afford perfunctory transition, so that the echoes of her lyric farewell can die out before her speech starts…[13]

Fiona Macintosh calls this the 'second' death in her analysis of the deaths that do not occur on stage. She articulates that 'the second death scene in *Alcestis*, conducted in iambic trimetre seems almost to acknowledge the fact that this is indeed not the first death that has occurred'.[14] This is the case not only because the 'language of consciousness is repeated, almost to the word',[15] but also because of the curious use of tenses made by both Alcestis and Admetus.

Macintosh realises that the aorist participle κατασήσασα points towards her partial death. Admetus' last words to her were spoken 'as if she were already dead' (328 - 330). A few minutes before her actual death Macintosh argues that 'Alcestis speaks as a disembodied presence providing at two points (387, 390) what can only be called a post-mortem commentary... Her final word χαῖρε (391) is thus, strictly speaking, spoken from a world beyond the world of the living'.[16]

It can be opined through her analysis of the first and second death scene that Macintosh shows how death in the play is conveyed through layers. In contrast, A. M. Dale depicts the same situation as realised in the first and second death but with a change in metre, Macintosh embellishes Dale's argument to show an emotional layering between the first and second death

[13] Euripides, 2017, pp. 74–75.
[14] Macintosh, 1994, p. 140.
[15] Macintosh, 1994, p. 140.
[16] Macintosh, 1994, p. 141.

alongside the change in the metre. Dale's argument differentiates between the first death in the lyric metres exhibiting an emotional side and the second death in the iambic metre evoking a rational approach. Macintosh complicates this approach by showing the layering of emotions between the first and second death. She recognises the consciousness that the second death expresses towards the first death, and thinks of the two deaths as two pieces that complete the puzzle. She conceives Admetus' words as a buffer between the two and a middle layer that creates a base for Alcestis' speech. The emotions, although appearing to be separated by time because of Admetus, end up coming full circle. Her argument dismisses a linear movement of the theme, preferring to follow the cyclical connection between emotion and time.

Drawing on the approaches of Dale and Macintosh, I will demonstrate how this layering of emotion is not only a feature of metre but is also applicable to movements/gestures present in the chorus within the various lyric metres.

Analysis

The analysis is divided into four sections based on the approaches to movements. The first section deals with the direct approach, the second the indirect approach, the third is dedicated to expounding the emotional layering in the choruses, and the fourth comprises a synthesis of these three parts. The direct and indirect approaches use the sensory experiences of the chorus and their references to body parts. The emotional layering is based on the fear and anxiety felt by the chorus throughout. The last section brings together these three approaches, and the experiences of the chorus to create a synaesthetic experience.

I: Direct approach

I begin the direct approach by referring to the sensory experience of touch and hearing. The sense of touch experienced by the chorus in *Septem* marks an important point of entry. For

instance, in the line ἀκμάζει *βρετέων ἔχεσθαι·* (It is the right time to hold on to your statues, 98),[17] the chorus clasps the images of the various gods on the stage. Similarly, in line 258, Eteocles references the actions of the chorus holding the images – *παλινστομεῖς αὖ θιγγάνουσ' ἀγαλμάτων;* (you say ill-omened words again, holding the images, 258). In both these cases, clasping the images gives the audience a direct glimpse of the supplication and desperation that fills the chorus. Touch introduces a visceral affect, which for the audience combines seeing with the 'imaginative suggestion' of feeling the texture. A direct movement here helps the audience as a semiotic devise to experience this affect of clasping.

Hearing is the most frequent sense experienced by the chorus. [18] The chorus hear the sounds of war coming from across the town walls. In each of these lines a simple gesture conveying hearing can potentially be used - *ἀκούετ' ἢ οὐκ ἀκούετ' ἀσπίδων κτύπον* (Did you hear or did you not hear the din of the shields? 100); *ὄτοβον ἁρμάτων ἀμφὶ πόλιν κλύω* (Around the city we hear the noise of the chariots, 151); *ὦ φίλον Οἰδίπου τέκος, ἔδεισ' ἀκούσασα τὸν ἁρματόκτυπον ὄτοβον ὄτοβον* (Dear child of Oedipus, we were afraid upon hearing the clattering and clash, clash of chariots, 203-204); *καὶ μὴν ἀκούω γ' ἱππικῶν φρυαγμάτων* (And we hear the violent neighing of the horses, 245); and *μεγάλα μεγαληγόρων κλυούσᾳ* (Having heard the loud boasting of these unholy men, 565).

[17] All translations in this chapter are my own. I have translated most first person singular verbs as 'we' instead of 'I' to emphasise the chorus as a collective of individuals, rather an individual identity to emphasise their communal role.

[18] Caroline Trieschnigg argues that in the *parodos* the chorus detects the enemy's approach by hearing the sounds of the Argives. She proposes that the chorus's descriptions are rooted largely in auditory perception, as indicated by the abundance of terms related to sound and hearing, and the scarcity of references to sight. She also says that the visual references were either drawn from the account of the scout or were widely known aspects within society, such as the fact that bronze was used to manufacture shields. (Trieschnigg, 2016, pp. 220–223) In my view both these aspects were true. There can also be another possibility. Since the chorus calls upon the gods for help and the gods are already considered as all-seeing and intervening in human affairs, the reference to visual aspects of the war are a reference to what the gods must be witnessing based on widespread societal practices in war that the chorus are not privy to.

It is needless to say that the demeanour of the bodies is imbued with fear and anxiety as the gestures of clasping and hearing are shown. The desirability of this direct overlaying of movement and word evoking sound helps in the creation of semiotic meaning for the audience. The deictic embodiment of that particular sense creates an instinctive feeling, enhancing its meaning for the chorus and the audience alike. For instance, in line 151 (*ὄτοβον ἁρμάτων ἀμφὶ πόλιν κλύω*), if the focus of movement was only on the noise of the chariot, the reason why the noise is important would be lost. The chorus' 'hearing' of the noise makes it relevant to the play. By describing what they hear, the chorus draw attention towards the feeling that the noise of the chariot evokes. The audience perceives a disturbance through the hearing gesture; a sensory experience is felt by the chorus and the audience alike through this meta-kinetic process of semiotic signification.

In these sense-based direct gestures, the chorus are experiencing and then reacting to external stimuli; a synesthetic fusion is taking place. One single sense such as hearing the sounds of war across the city walls and clasping the images of the gods evokes emotions both for the chorus and the audience through a ripple effect. For the chorus, using the hand to convey the hearing gesture itself is improbable without a change in their bodies' conduct and the faces' expression (since the chorus wore masks, this may have been limited to the eyes that were visible through them or indicated by the tilt and angling of the mask) to display a sense of dread, alarm, and discomfort. Absorbing this sensory experience of the chorus viscerally, the audience mirrors the emotions emanating from the chorus based on the idea of kinesthetic empathy. Thus, directly, the use of gesture creates emotional depth and deictic signification, thereby adding meaning to the text.

In contrast to the sense-based direct gestures, the chorus' reference to body parts, while making direct gestures pointing to them reveal a distinctive function of the chorus – their role

as a commentator and mediator. The body parts are a tool of transmission within the plot. For instance:

> κλύετε παρθένων κλύετε πανδίκως
> χειροτόνους λίτας (171-172)
>
> Hear (you all) hear the all-just
> prayers of maidens with outstretched hands.

In these lines the word *κλύετε* (hear) is in an imperative, and therefore is not only pertaining to the sensory experience of the chorus themselves. In fact, it is used by the chorus to instruct the gods to hear their prayers. Therefore, the focus of these lines is not on *κλύετε*. It is on *χειροτόνους*. I propose that any choreographic interpretation of these lines requires the hands of the chorus moving in an outstretched manner because the chorus are citing their own movement here in the text. There is no reason to discount their self-referentiality. Similar is the case, with all other references to body parts made by the chorus.

> παντοδαπὸς δὲ καρπὸς χαμάδις πεσὼν
> ἀλγύνει κυρήσας πικρῶν
> ὄμμα θαλαμηπόλων (357-359)
>
> The varied fruit having happened to fall on the ground,
> Distress the eyes of the shrill chamber maids.

The metaphor of the fruits falling with heaviness mirrors the regret of the chamber maids who look after the household items. By directly gesturing to the eyes, and the adjective describing the look of the eyes, this image conveys the impact of a powerful gaze. Here metaphor and movement work together to disinter the meaning of the lines. The chorus here are pointing to the plight of the chamber maids in contrast to describing their own plight. They have retained their narrative function in these lines, and also have absorbed the role of a

mediator between the chamber maids, their relevance to the plot, and the audience. The movement aids them in conveying that meaning to the spectators.

> ὅ τοι κατόπτης, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, στρατοῦ
> πευθώ τιν᾽ ἡμῖν, ὦ φίλαι, νέαν φέρει,
> σπουδῇ διώκων πομπίμους χνόας ποδῶν. (369-371)
>
> The scout, it seems to me, regarding
> the army is bringing to us, oh friends, some new tidings,
> with haste setting in motion the guiding joints of his feet.

Again, the chorus are the narrator. It is possible that the chorus spotted the messenger from afar, and are preparing the audience for his arrival on stage. The chorus imitate his scurried movements.

> κεραυνοῦ δέ νιν βέλος ἐπισχέθοι
> πρὶν ἐμὸν εἰσθορεῖν δόμον… (453-454)
>
> May the thunder-bolt keep him in check
> Before he leaps into my house…

These lines are a part of the chorus' response to the messenger's description of Capaneus. The leaping of the chorus is an assertion of their territory, an unwillingness to let the threshold of their houses be violated, and a recognition of the consequences if Zeus' blessings on them fade. Here a combined supplicant and mediator, the chorus bring to life for the audience the severity of the situation for the leader on the gate. By emphasising the leaping movements using the feet, the affect is conveyed.

> πρόσθε πυλᾶν κεφαλὰν ἰάψειν. (525)
>
> (This man) will wound his head before the double gate.

In this line, the chorus are answering to Hippomedon's shield's description. The reality of a wounded head enters the imagination of the audience through the visuality of movement, and adds an emphasis to the meaning of the words.

…μελάναιγις
εισι δόμων Ἐρινύς, ὅταν ἐκ χερῶν
θεοὶ θυσίαν δέχωνται. (699-701)

with their black aegis,
will not the furies exit your house, when from your hands
the gods receive a sacrifice?

Trying to explain to Eteocles that he needs to break the cycle of killing his kin, the members of the chorus advise him that the sacrifices made by his own hands will cause relief from the torment of the past. Given that words are accompanied by the direct action of the hands – which in this case hold the entire fate of the Thebans – the situation acquires a weighted solemnity.

ἱκνεῖται λόγος διὰ στηθέων,
τριχὸς δ᾽ ὀρθίας πλόκαμος ἵσταται (563-564)

His words come through my breast,
The locks of my hair stand straight up.

The description of Parthenopaeus' shield here triggers this intensive reaction in the chorus. The chorus express the pain of his words that pierce their breasts, leading the straight locks of their hair to stand up through shock. Here, strikingly the fear engrained in their minds manifests itself physical in bodily symptoms. In this case, the chorus are not the narrator but the conveyor of their sensory experience of pain based on direct gestures. Furthermore, in this instance, the chorus retain their function in mediating between the scout carrying the messages, Eteocles' response to them, and the body of citizens they represent, bringing alive the meaning of the lines.

II: Indirect Approach

I now move to the second, indirect approach, emphasising the sensory experiences of the chorus and the body parts mentioned by them. Typically, a simple gesture of hearing or seeing would suffice in conveying a semiotic affect. However, in some instances, unlike the ones mentioned above, direct reference is replaced by indirect references. In each of these cases the context needs to be carefully observed before choosing a movement to add meaning to the word.

One of the most responsive and cloying lines of the *parodos* is related to the sensory experience of the chorus covering both hearing and seeing – *κτύπον δέδορκα· πάταγος οὐχ ἑνὸς δορός* (I have seen the sound – it is not the clatter of a single spear, 103). The chorus has very carefully used 'seeing' instead of 'hearing', yet interestingly, conflating the two sensory experiences.

By conflating the direct association of the word 'seeing' with 'hearing', the boundaries between the senses collapse. It is a collective assertion of everything they have heard until then in the *parodos* – the neighing of the horses and the sound of their hooves, the dust flying around, and the shields and spears clattering. This auditory experience is so overwhelming and disorienting for the chorus that a visual response is triggered; this creates a sensory overload mitigated by the chorus through an embodied visualisation of that which cannot be seen.

The purpose perhaps is to immerse the audience in the noises that they experience – to make them conscious of their own hearing. The chorus has demonstrated the 'imaginative suggestion' of the word 'seeing' to empower the audience to visually engage with what is heard. In order to transfer those feelings onto the audience, the chorus uses movements to depict what they hear. Rather than a deictic response where the chorus reinforce the text's meaning in a

singular manner, here the chorus infuse the textual language with sensory and affective energies.

Similarly, in certain places where the chorus describes body parts, the gesture /movement is governed by an indirect reference to them.

διὰ δέ τοι γενύων ἱππίων
μινύρονται φόνον χαλινοί· (123-124)

The bridles on the horse's jaws
Are singing melodies of slaughter.

To illuminate the meaning in these lines, it is perhaps fruitless to focus on the jaws/mouth of the horse. Instead, we need to listen to how the bridles are bringing the sound of slaughter to the chorus. The gestic movement mimics the movement of horses controlled by reins.

…θεοῦ δ᾽ ἔτ᾽ ἰσχὺς καθυπερτέρα·
πολλάκι δ᾽ ἐν κακοῖσιν τὸν ἀμήχανον
κἀκ χαλεπᾶς δύας ὕπερθ᾽ ὀμμάτων
κριμναμενᾶν νεφελᾶν ὀρθοῖ. (226-229)

…But the strength of the god is superior,
And often in bad times it raises
The one without means out of harsh misery,
When the mass of clouds are hanging over his eyes.

The next indirect reference to bodily parts (about 100 lines later) mentions the eyes, and the first three lines ground the use of the metaphor. It is not the literal image of the eyes that calls for our attention, but a metaphoric gesturing of dark times falling over his face like 'the mass of clouds'.

Within the indirect references related to the body, multiple mentions of blood often appear. It may be suggested that wherever blood appears in the choral lyrics, the focus is on its characteristics and the consequences of its spilling, rather than the word 'blood' itself; these

images of blood are anchored in the idea of *miasma* ensuing from the killing of kin. For example, the gestic focus in the following lines will be on the action of drinking and the blackness of the blood, quickly shifting to the cleansing/bathing movement:

> …καὶ γαῖα κόνις
> πίῃ μελαμπαγὲς αἷμα φοίνιον,
> τίς ἂν καθαρμοὺς πόροι; (735-737)
>
> and the earth's dust
> drinks the black-clotted murderous blood
> Who might offer a purifications/cleansing sacrifices?

Unlike body parts, blood is fluid and uncontainable. One movement or gesture cannot show the fluidity of blood. The consequences of the spilling of blood are usually irrevocable. The aim is to make the audience feel an emotional awareness of morality and fate. Empathy with the chorus must be infused with understanding the cycle of fate, and questioning the actions of the heroes. A single symbolic gesture fails to create that affect. By transferring the focus of the movement from the word 'blood' onto its blackness and the earth's drinking of it, the chorus enlarge the meaning viscerally. Thus, here we can see how an affective response aids the audience's cognitive meaning-making.

III: Emotional Layering

I now progress to the third approach covering the enactment of movement by the chorus - i.e. one that assigns affective meaning to a single emotion through layering. The arguments of A.M Dale and Fiona Macintosh have been discussed earlier in this chapter to provide a framework for this argument. All the references to fear and anxiety expressed by the chorus in *Septem* reveal the various gradients that govern a single emotion.

The first line the chorus utters firmly establishes their fear. They do not mince words or speak through metaphor. They simply begin by echoing their primary emotion that runs like a thread throughout the play.

θρέομαι *φοβερὰ* μεγάλ᾽ ἄχη· (79)

I cry out great, fearful distress.

Here crying out is the consequence of distress that is both great and fearful. The focus of the movements remains on the two descriptive terms – 'great' and 'filled with fear' – rather than crying and distress. The descriptive words (adjectives or adverbs) easily evoke movement and help the audience in gauging the varying levels of impact. Since it is the first time the emotions of fear are mentioned by the chorus, a simple gesture depicting anxiety near the heart is adequate to establish the emotion clearly to the audience.

As the lines progress, different levels of fear unfold. The next few lines of the beginning of the *parodos* (as described later in this chapter), provide evidence of the fear arising: the flood of horsemen gallop forward (80), the high clouds of dust (81), the impact of the horses' hooves (84), the noise flies and roars like an unconquerable torrent (85), the noise coming from over the walls (89), and the men with white shields (90). All these cumulatively show the audience that the chorus' fear of ongoing war is not unfounded.

The chorus uses this evidence to reach out to the gods and beg them for help. In the first strophe that follows, the consequences of the war on their lives becomes clear – *look at the young women supplicating you, save them from slavery* (110-11). Starting with Zeus, they call upon each of the gods to save them. This time, the use of the word fear is accompanied by a devotional outburst. It is not a reaction to the sounds that come from across the walls, but is situated in their belief in the gods. There is a desire for hope in their prayer:

ἀλλ᾽, ὦ Ζεῦ πάτερ παντὸς ἔχων τέλος,

πάντως ἄρηξον δαΐων ἅλωσιν.
Ἀργέϊοι δὲ πόλισμα Κάδμου
κυκλοῦνται, φόβος δ᾽ ἀρείων ὅπλων
<θράσσει>, διὰ δέ τοι γενύων ἱππίων
μινύρονται φόνον χαλινοί· (116-123)

But Zeus, father of all that comes to pass,
By all means prevent us from being captured by enemies.
The Argives are encircling the citadel of Cadmus
The fear of the war weapons shakes us,
The bridle on the jaws of the horses are singing melodies of slaughter.

Here the line that focuses on fear drives the chorus into a cluster - *φόβος δ᾽ ἀρείων ὅπλων* (121). Their bodily presence conveys the shaking and trembling. Much like the Argives that have surrounded the city walls (120), the chorus may be sticking to each other as if they are being encircled by warriors equipped with weapons such as the white shields mentioned earlier (90). They remain defenceless. It is Zeus on whom they call in the hope that he will shield the city. They again talk about the horses to provide a rational explanation of their fear and connect their prayer to the earlier sounds and imagined sights. Through a recollection of the sounds, an 'imaginative suggestion' is made that, accompanied by the physical and metaphorical encircling, together plants the affective meaning.

In the antistrophe that follows, different gods are evoked – Athena, Poseidon, Ares, Cyprus, Apollo, and Artemis. It is in the first few lines that the desire for hope takes the form of the desire for release from fear:

σύ τ᾽, ὦ Διογενὲς φιλόμαχον κράτος,
ῥυσίπολις γενοῦ,
Παλλάς, ὅ θ᾽ ἵππιος ποντομέδων ἄναξ
ἰχθυβόλῳ < > μαχανᾷ·
ἐπίλυσιν φόβων, ἐπίλυσιν δίδου· (129-135)

And you, battle loving power, born of Zeus,

Become the city's savior,
Pallas (Athena)! And the ruler of the sea and lord of horses (Poseidon),
With your fish-striking weapon,
Give us a release from our fears, give us a release.

After addressing the characteristics of both Athena and Poseidon, the chorus ask for a release from the fear that is holding them – the release from the fear may enable them to find a solution to the ongoing battle. The solution is rooted in reminding the gods of their duty to liberate the city, and is not born of their own agency. However, the praying is an action in the direction of doing something to alleviate the situation from their end, rather than continuously recalling the reasons for their fear. The huddled chorus enacting a tense bodily presence begin to relax and loosen the close-knit proximity. The space between the members of the chorus expands, as they beckon the multiple gods whose statues might have been placed on the stage to denote the citadel. The release of tensions leads to a larger gesture in addressing the attributes and powers of Ares, Cypris, Apollo, and Artemis.

Affective meaning, in these lines, arises from the transfer of one state of emotion to another. The somatic bodily change from a huddled chorus to a relaxed and outstretched combination of bodies makes the chorus the site of emotional development experienced by the audience.

Thus, in the *parodos* and before the first episode, the chorus express their fear in a wide range or intensities. First, they state it clearly - *We cry out great, fearful distress* (79). Second, they request the gods for protection from the enemy - *The fear of the war weapons shakes us* (119). Third, they request the gods for a release from the fear itself in an attempt to move towards the possibility of some kind of solution that the gods may bestow on them – *Give us a release from our fears, give us a release* (133). The *parodos* here becomes a micro-site for the layering of fear and anxiety that runs through the whole play.

The first episode begins when Eteocles enters after the *parodos*, and there is an exchange between him and the chorus. In my view, this exchange determines the marrow of the whole play. By establishing the dynamic between the chorus women and Eteocles, it creates the fulcrum where the anxiety of the play resides. In this regard, fear is the stable emotion of the exchange, and is expressed in a very direct and wise way by the chorus. Eteocles too feels the pressure of the fear of battle but absorbs it and then loses his temper and reacts to the chorus in words that pinpoint his misogyny. In lines 182-202, Eteocles severely denigrates the chorus by referring to them as *θρέμματ' οὐκ ἀνασχετά* (unbearable creatures) (182), and spurns them as the enemies within the city, inculpating them for causing havoc and spreading unrest through their behaviour:

> καὶ νῦν πολίταις τάσδε διαδρόμους φυγὰς
> θεῖσαι διερροθήσατ᾽ ἄψυχον κάκην:
> τὰ τῶν θύραθεν δ᾽ ὡς ἄριστ᾽ ὀφέλλεται,
> αὐτοὶ δ᾽ ὑπ᾽ αὐτῶν ἔνδοθεν πορθούμεθα. (191-194)

> Now having established these rushing flights (implying that the chorus women are rushing around frantically)
> You stirred up faint-hearted cowardice,
> The forces of the ones outside the gate are most excellently strengthened,
> We ourselves are destroyed by those within.

This accusation made by Eteocles is rooted in his observation of the chorus' fear, and justified by Eteocles through an attack on their character:

> δείσασα δ᾽ οἴκῳ καὶ πόλει πλέον κακόν. (190)

> Afraid she (women in general which includes the chorus) is an even greater danger for the home and the city.

The word *κακόν* could imply evil, menace, danger, wickedness based on interpretation. I have chosen to translate it as danger for two reasons. First, the chorus' fear is based on the danger that they face. Second, for Eteocles their fear poses a danger for the city just like the

danger the enemy poses. The chorus are equated with the enemy. Using evil or menace to translate *kakon*, as scholars have done in the past, attacks the innate character of the women. Alternatively, danger is giving supremacy to the current situation in which the women are, and highlighting their fear. Eteocles sees a ripple effect in the terrified reactions of the women that gets passed on to the city. These emotions, contrary to Eteocles belief, are not innate to women but have emerged given the immediacy and severity of the circumstance.

Moreover, by establishing the situation and the women as dangerous, Eteocles can create an opposition between himself, the chorus, and the enemy. He is fearless and spirited. He also clearly marks his position as the one in power, and declares that anyone who follows the behaviour of these women, irrespective of their gender, will be punished with death by stoning. He is trying to combat fear with fear and is unsuccessful in his endeavour.

The response of the chorus to Eteocles is interesting. The fear they were hoping to be free from at the end of the *parodos* refigures and their answer mirrors the beginning of the *parodos*:

> ὦ φίλον Οἰδίπου τέκος, ἔδεισ᾽ ἀκού-
> σασα τὸν ἁρματόκτυπον ὄτοβον ὄτοβον,
> ὅτε τε σύριγγες ἔκλαγξαν ἐλίτροχοι,
> ἱππικῶν τ᾽ ἀπύαν πηδαλίων διὰ στόμα
> πυριγενετᾶν χαλινῶν. (203-207)
>
> Dear child of Oedipus, we were afraid upon hearing
> the clattering and clash, clash of chariots
> and when the whirling hollow sockets of the wheel screeched,
> and we heard the sound of the steering-paddle of the horses,
> and fire-wrought reins through the horse mouths.

Both *ἔδεισ*᾽and *ἀκούσασα* are aorist in the sensual aspect, denoting not only that these sounds were heard in the past but they are individuated and discontinuous single emotional responses. Rather than describing the sounds that they hear in the present, the chorus in the

episode shifts to narrating what they had heard in the *parodos*. There is a shift in movement from showing the fear and noise to depicting the source of the fear and noise through gesture. The chariot, the sockets of the wheel, the paddle, and the reins become visible to the audience. The words that describe the actions or nature of these objects – 'clattering and clashing' with regard to the chariot, 'noise and hollowness' of the wheel, 'the sound' of the paddle, and the 'fiery-natured' reins – are not where the movements are emphasised. They exist in song to keep reminding the audience of what makes the chariots, the wheels, and the horses' paddles and reins frightful. However, the chorus, looking towards Eteocles since it is the first time they are directly addressing him, focus on forming the objects so that the reference to the objects in the first place makes sense to the plot. They may form a montage of the chariot by clustering together. Then they may be opening up the montage to focus on gesturing the whirling wheel. It is with dour straightness of the spine and magnanimous hand gestures that the paddle and rein of a controlled horse are gestured clearly. These create a larger than life affect that is not present in the text by itself.

In the antistrophe, the chorus then explains to Eteocles that they did not sit idle upon hearing these noises but found their way to the citadel:

> ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ δαιμόνων πρόδρομος ἦλθον ἀρ-
> χαῖα βρέτη, θεοῖσι πίσυνος, νιφάδος
> ὅτ᾽ ὀλοᾶς νειφομένας βρόμος ἐν πύλαις:
> δὴ τότ᾽ ἤρθην φόβῳ πρὸς μακάρων λιτάς, πόλεως
> ἵν᾽ ὑπερέχοιεν ἀλκάν. (211-215)
>
> But we speedily came upon the ancient images
> trusting the divine gods, when came the
> thundering noise of the deadly snow thudding on the gates.
> Exactly then we rose up in fear towards the blessed in prayer,
> so that they may shower protection over the city.

After the depiction of the horse's reins, in these lines the chorus' emphasis is on the ancient iconic images. The movement refers back to the *parodos* where each member is running and clasping a particular god. By staying in that position and gesturing patience for the next line, a ritualised re-enactment of the supplication evokes a feeling of civic communality in the audience. Beginning with a combination of rhythmic feet stamping to echo the thudding and hands gesturing snow, they sit at the feet of each of the gods. Line 214 is a self-referential cue for the chorus rising up from the ground with trembling bodies, raising their heads towards the sky. The next line (215) could create pause in movement.

Unlike the strophe, the focus here is neither entirely on the objects nor entirely on the verbs or adjectives but on the essence of fear in each line. The emotion from the *parodos* is recalled and embodied; the bodily memory is re-enacted. Fear becomes a process where the stimulus from the enemy creates a supplicating response. The images of the gods on the citadel are like a source of water for the thirsty. Touching them gives the chorus physical relief from both proving to Eteocles that they were not inactive in the situation and creating hope for themselves. The repetition of the action helps in associating that particular action with the current fear that still occupies them, thereby constantly generating the same affect on the audience.

While depicting snow that is meant to be a metaphor for the stones that the enemy is showering on the gates, having the hands symbolising snowflakes is not enough to evoke the severity of the situation. Snowflakes can be both subtle and damaging. This is in contrast to the strophe, where showing merely the chariot and not the 'clattering and clashing' of it was optimal since the chariot was itself a powerful object already related to war. The symbolic hand gesture of a snowflake must be accompanied by a beating of the feet/heavy movement to evoke the association of fear. The impact of this gives rise to a kinaesthetic contradiction by juxtaposing snow and war. The gestic movement is oxymoronic; it is resistant in its flow.

Further, sitting at the feet of the images is an opposition to the thundering noise and a reiteration of the supplication. The fear this time is experienced in the moment as the chorus re-imagine what they heard in the *parodos* and display it for Eteocles. This double layering within the line *δὴ τότ' ἤρθην φόβῳ πρὸς μακάρων λιτάς* requires regulated and slow movements, expressed more through the demeanour of the body than the ferocity of speedy movement. It gives the chorus, the audience, and Eteocles space to pause and ponder. Through such pacing of the tempo meaning is generated in the body's response to rhythm and gesture to create emotions. The merger of gestic movement to augment fear with kinetic energy, makes the chorus stage instead of state the affective meaning. The choreographic progression of fear and its re-enactment is achieved.

The impact of the pause aligns well with Eteocles' response to the chorus. It is not as dreadful as most of his dialogues. He says that if they are indeed praying for the enemy to depart then that may well take place. Expressing his own fear, he asserts that when a city is beleaguered its own gods abandon it (216-218). Even if for a brief moment in the play, the chorus manage to bring out Eteocles' own vulnerability.

Eteocles makes his view of the role of women clear before the third strophe in this episode. Making sacrifices to the gods was the man's domain. They were supposed to stay silent, relegated to the indoors.

The chorus' response to this assertion of Eteocles is a clever one. The women rebuff his attempt to silence them by questioning his egregious attitude towards the gods that brings forth his opposition to the women honouring them.

διὰ θεῶν πόλιν νεμόμεθ' ἀδάματον,
δυσμενέων δ' ὄχλον πύργος ἀποστέγει.
τίς τάδε νέμεσις στυγεῖ; (233-235)

Because of the Gods we dwell in an unconquered city,

And the tower repels the throng of the ill-willed.
What proper sense of justice resents these things?

To this Eteocles gives a sanitised response, respecting the gods, and requesting the chorus to not express invincible fear so that it is not passed on to the citizens.

The antistrophic response given by the chorus to Eteocles refers to their fear. It was essential to establish the context of the exchange before discussing the lines. The chorus repeats its reason for coming to the citadel:

ποτίφατον κλύουσα πάταγον ἀνάμιγα
ταρβοσύνῳ φόβῳ τάνδ᾽ ἐς ἀκρόπτολιν,
τίμιον ἕδος, ἱκόμαν. (239-241)

Then having heard the confused clashes,
We came with trembling fear into the acropolis,
our revered seat.

It is as if the chorus has suddenly frozen in time in the antistrophe. Instead of directing the conversation towards an appropriate response to Eteocles' request of keeping the fear within bounds, they drag him back to the sentiments at the beginning of the episode. This is also in contrast to their reprimand of Eteocles' condemnation of their praying in the strophe. Besides than offering a curated and unified rebellion to Eteocles, the chorus are responding based on their feelings. The lines represent the repetitive fixation of their anxiety on what they heard. *Κλύουσα* is a present participle ending. It focuses on the sounds still resonating in their ears. Homing in on *ποτίφατον κλύουσα* by showing to the audience the addressing of a continuous hearing of clashes, the chorus' body and hands gesture towards the passage of time and its reverberation both through the sounds of clashing and the repetitive nature of temporality during war. It is an echo of war sounds, an echo of time, an echo of words, all hinged on the echoing fear present in their movements.

The weight of the emotion lies in this temporal looping. The repetition of fear here elucidates a physical truth about how trauma operates in echoes and reverberations. The echo is a physical stammering that reveals what words cannot stabilise, the persistence of dread through which affective meaning arises.

The next line *ταρβοσύνῳ φόβῳ τάνδ' ἐς ἀκρόπτολιν* draws on these reverberations, and hastens the movements to stress on trembling fear. The chorus in the second half of the line moves with those hastened echoing steps to form a circle in the centre of the acropolis. The reverberating movements stop. The members pause in supplication to the revered seat of religiosity. The emotional tone shifts from scattered panic to solemn reverence. The pause is a ritual (through supplication) containment of emotions. Stillness becomes a distilled form of meaning where emotion is held and offered.

Before the episode ends, within the dialogic exchange there are two lines of the chorus that bluntly assert their fear. In 249 the chorus repeats the clashing sound but this time focus on the gates - *δέδοικ', ἀραγμὸς δ' ἐν πύλαις ὀφέλλεται* (We're terrified, the rattling at the gates is increasing). Since this line is not very far from 239-241, the chorus repeat their fear filled sentiments while holding each other's hand and curating circular movements. The line is a simple return to the fact of the matter. Holding each other's hand gives a basis for their unity in front of Eteocles, and explores their disbelief in his ability to tackle the situation. In the previous line Eteocles avouches for his ability to deal with the issue (248). Their faith in the gods is far more steadfast than their faith in their leader. The repetition of this line is motivated by a belief in the crisis. The sounds heard are no longer a recollection of the *parodos*, but occurring in the moment. They are far from fading away. No matter what Eteocles plans, the chorus cannot help but circle around their fear multiple times, just as all the seven gates have been circled by the enemy. A continuously increasing beat of doubt brought out through another strong declaration only adds to the rotatory expression in their movement and in their emotions.

The episode moves towards a conclusion with the fear and anxiety now taking hold of the body – *ἀψυχίᾳ γὰρ γλῶσσαν ἁρπάζει φόβος* (Because of our faintheartedness, fear grips our tongue. 159). *ἀψυχίᾳ* in this context implies being spiritless and faint-heartedness. Some may choose to refer to it as a lack of courage. However, in my view the chorus women have depicted nothing but courage in their relentless commitment to praying to the gods, and recognising the intensity of the situation, despite the pressure to behave in a certain way expressed by Eteocles. Beginning with a gesture that could depict swooning and anxiety with their hands, they move towards expressing a closing of their mouths. They are speaking their experience in words and through their bodies, tongue-tied by the situation. This irony is held by their gestures and they sing out the line. Their bodies are the site of speechlessness. By embodying the unspeakable and by speaking it out simultaneously, an affective contradiction is brought out.

Eteocles' words end the episode. He directs them on how they must pray. Instead of wailing in fear, Eteocles applies a more transactional relationship with the gods. He asks the women to pray to the gods by bribing them. In the event that the city is saved, the people will shower them with sacrifices, build monuments of victory, and will give the spoils of war to the temple treasury (274-278).

The opening lines of the strophe of the first stasimon is a response to Eteocles. It is perhaps the most eloquent expression of their fear in the play, elaborated by a simile.

> μέλει, φόβῳ δ' οὐχ ὑπνώσσει κέαρ:
> γείτονες δὲ καρδίας
> μέριμναι ζωπυροῦσι τάρβος
> τὸν ἀμφιτειχῆ λεών,
> δράκοντας ὥς τις τέκνων
> ὑπερδέδοικεν λεχαίων δυσευνάτορας
> πάντρομος πελειάς. (288-294)
>
> We hear him, though the heart does not sleep because of fear,
> Close to my heart

Anxiety fuels terror
With regard to the men surrounding the walls
Just like when an all-trembling dove,
on behalf of its children, fears snakes
in its nest who make evil-bedfellows.

Κέαρ and *καρδίας* in the first two lines both indicate the heart. Shirley D. Sullivan has analysed all the psychological terms in Aeschylus' corpus. Occurring in singular form, these two terms are found located physically in the 'chest region'. According to Sullivan, 'they range in meaning, therefore, along the continuum that extends from physical to psychological'.[19]

Her argument helps us understand the relationship between the terms *kear* and *kardia* that can be used as a tool to ground the impact that movement for this passage will generate.

She says, '*kear* is full of fear; cares, troubling *kardia* give rise to even more "fear" in the form of τάρβος'.[20] I observe a range in Sullivan's understanding of fear. The *kear* feels the first bout of fear, and the *kardia* feels its heightened effects because the anxieties or cares are severely impacted by it, since they reside beside it. The cares and *kardia's* positionality is determined by their proximity; the *kear* is not positioned at all.

Second, Sullivan also says that: 'Aeschylus uses "cares" (μέριμναι) for the first time with *kardia*. What they do while abiding near *kardia*, is to make terror flame out as the chorus thinks of the attackers of Thebes'.[21] Observing this interpretation, one can recognise 'cares' as the main catalyst for increasing fear. They have their own agency. These anxieties are not driving the *kardia* to accelerate the fear, but are pumping up the terror, forcing it to burn of their own. The heart just happens to reside close to them and is already consumed by fear in its form as

[19] Sullivan, 1993, p. 109.
[20] Sullivan, 1993, p. 113.
[21] Sullivan, 1993, p. 113.

kear. Through this lens, *kear* and *kardia* maybe used interchangeably by the author to mean heart.

Since the heart resides in the chest and for the ancient Greeks, it is not impossible that anxiety or feeling, like desire, may be present in the diaphragm or *phren*.[22] For some of the ancient Greeks, a cardio-centric approach to the human body was not improbable. In fact, the Aristotelians thought the heart was the centre of cognitive function.[23]

Such interpretations can aid us in reading the movement patterns from the text. The chorus begins by using a hand gesture symbolising hearing to make sure the audience is aware that they heard Eteocles. Then they focus on contradicting him by making their own feelings paramount. They are listening but reclaiming their emotional space. A movement denoting the heart in the chest region accompanied by a fearful body attitude, moves into a soothing hand gesture of slumber. Then, moving closer to each other in a huddle while holding their stomachs in anxiety, the chorus bursts into groups moving like flames. They may form an outward circle to show the men surrounding the walls of the city.

This position links well with the simile. The chorus embody the slithering serpent. Next, they emphasise cosiness and nesting feeling. Finally, they tremble splitting away in different directions imitating a fluttering dove.

The layering in this strophe shows how fear morphs and multiplies. It does so by focusing on the core of the internal body, the heart, and externalising the internal turmoil. Moreover, the simile is a cognitive anchor supporting the experiential texture that movement and gesture establish. The simile is not superfluous, but rather aesthetically signifies the metaphorical embodiment. In this process, the chorus embody both the serpent and the dove through gestic

[22] Webster, 1957.
[23] Clarke and O'Malley, 1996, pp. 1, 8.

movement. This emphasis of movement on the serpent, nesting process, and dove is necessary to interpret the simile in a way that the distinction between the predator and protector become blurred, showing the circularity of fear rather than a simple comparison between the two. Movement glossing the cosy closeness of the nesting period helps one fade into another.

In the second strophe we see a mixture of fear with melancholy. The chorus are narrating in detail the gruesome reality that will unfold if the war is lost.

οἰκτρὸν γὰρ πόλιν ὧδ᾽ ὠγυγίαν
Ἀίδᾳ προϊάψαι, δορὸς ἄγραν
δουλίαν ψαφαρᾷ σποδῷ
ὑπ᾽ ἀνδρὸς Ἀχαιοῦ θεόθεν
περθομέναν ἀτίμως,
τὰς δὲ κεχειρωμένας ἄγεσθαι,
ἔ ἔ, νέας τε καὶ παλαιὰς
ἱππηδὸν πλοκάμων, περιρ-
ρηγνυμένων φαρέων. βοᾷ
δ᾽ ἐκκενουμένα πόλις,
λαΐδος ὀλλυμένας μιξοθρόου:
βαρείας τοι τύχας προταρβῶ. (321-332)

For it is lamentable thus to hurl headlong
A primeval city down to Hades, a servile
prey of the spear, shamefully destroyed in crumbling ash,
by an Achaean man through divine will,
While the women are man-handled and lead away,
Ah! Ah! Young and old
Dragged by their hair like horses,
Their clothes ripped. Shouts
the emptied-out city,
A destroyed booty with mingled cries,
Heavy is the fate, we fear.

The pitiful condition of a city being destroyed conveys the sentiment of grief. Grief can be understood as the aftermath of fear, when reality is being reconciled with it and the situation that is feared has been actualised. This strophe presents the pivotal point of transition between

what is feared, and what is accepted as the lamentable future that may come to pass. The strophe starting with the lament builds up to return to the chorus' emotions of fear. The word *οἰκτρὸν* operates as the lamentation guiding the words. It is connected to Hades through death. For the first two lines, focusing on lament and Hades in the movements is sufficient to get the meaning across.

The next focus is on the men and consequently the use of the enemy's spear and the shame that it imposes upon the city of Thebes, providing the primary emotional impetus of the next three lines. The shame or dishonour is experienced by the men. Strong warlike masculine tendencies reflect in a body held with aplomb. Its defeat can be seen as a movement of withdrawal by the collective chorus body.

Then arrives the collective fate of the women, a step more humiliating than mere assault by the men. The chorus gestures scattering, crawling and writhing on the floor to convey the equal shattering of the lives of both old and young women; dragging themselves across the stage like a horse being dragged by its mane, gesturing the ripping of their clothes.

In the second last line, they lift themselves up after the lying floor movements. The last line – heavy is the fate we fear – shows how nothing matches the weight of heaviness but acute stillness on stage. Active suffering blends into resigned devastation. It sends a shiver down the spine and cycles back to fear.

Grief here is portrayed as a projection of fear. Mourning is not retrospective, but present and prospective. The chorus proposes an 'imaginative suggestion' of the suffering by becoming the bodies that undergo it. By pre-living the destruction, the interpretive and narrative role of the chorus are mapped onto one another to create affect. Beginning with grief and ending by returning to fear which is no longer anticipatory but internalised, and then externalised through movement, meaning is realised through this emotional loop.

There is a long gap before the chorus express fear again.

κακῶν δ᾽ ὥσπερ θάλασσα κῦμ᾽ ἄγει:
τὸ μὲν πίτνον, ἄλλο δ᾽ ἀείρει
τρίχαλον, ὃ καὶ περὶ πρύμ-
ναν πόλεως καχλάζει.
μεταξὺ δ᾽ ἀλκὰ δι᾽ ὀλίγου
τείνει, πύργος ἐν εὔρει.
δέδοικα δὲ σὺν βασιλεῦσι
μὴ πόλις δαμασθῇ. (758-765)

It is as if a sea of evils hurls its wave,
As one falls, it lifts another,
Cleaved in three, that rumbles/crashes (frothing in foam)
Around the city's towers,
In the middle of a small defence it stretches
– the width of a wall,
We fear lest that the polis will be
overpowered with the kings.

While earlier the fear of the chorus stemmed from the consequences of the war for women, by this segment in the play it shifts to the pollution that will occur if two brothers end up killing each other. This fear is wrapped in the fate of lineage and legacy, more than that of war. In the chorus' eyes it is avoidable. The evil of fate is compared to the undulating sea. The chorus members together expand outward to show swelling, and individual members rise and fall alternatively, showing the ebb and flow of fate. They are the waves of evil.

Three chorus members take one step forward, and then rejoin the circle to show the cleavage of the waves and the fragmented emotional state of the chorus itself. The chorus then reduce the diameter of the circle, and collect themselves inwards to show the surrounding of the city walls. Their hand gestures depict the frothing of water, as their bodies continue to move in waves. The fear is adequately conveyed by their embodiment of the sea. It overpowers their

kings, represents the evil of fate, and the uncertain vagaries that fear induces. The sea is also the perfect metaphor, indicating the waves of emotions and the layering of fear.

In these lines, since the chorus becomes the sea in its waving and undulating form, it becomes the structure of fear. The wave is the medium through which affect moves. Going beyond a metaphor, it represents the shared somatic experience of the female bodies in the chorus. By embodying the sea, they become the conduits of history, spilling, foreseeing, and fearing collapse. Cleaving shows the emotional fracture, the splintering of the sea, and the chorus. When a collective body disintegrates under pressure, the individual body continues to persist in its fragmented form. The overwhelmed chorus brings out its vulnerability to birth this splintering affect for the audience.

The frothing gesture adds another layer; pressure that is uncontained spills. The excess in action to represent frothing, conveyed through imprecise gestures gives an affective overflow implying that even gestic movement with all its imperfection is not sufficient to convey meaning, but it is the feeling of overflow and instability excised from it that bears the weight of meaning. Here the affect is an atmospheric force that circulates amongst bodies of the chorus and audience alike to feel. The sea is a carrier of the past, and reminder of the spillage of fate across generations as are the chorus.

The final reference of fear takes place when the messenger comes to convey the news of Eteocles and Polynices' death at each other's hands.

> τίνες; τί δ᾽ εἶπας; παραφρονῶ φόβῳ λόγου. (805/806)
>
> Who? What did you say? We're besides our senses with fear for your words.

Shock takes over the bodily presence of the chorus. Carrying forward the emotion, they use their hands to gesture what simple enhances the desperation they feel. The interesting reference here is the connection between sense/mind and fear. Women in general in tragedy

were depicted as lacking *sophrosyne* or wise sense. Openly admitting they have lost their mind upon hearing the news, creates the scope for the combination of bafflement and fear. Also, they have comprehended the message because they have been anticipating it. The request for repetition is the inability to convert utmost fears into reality. Once the anticipation fades, so does the fear. All these sentiments must be embodied by the chorus while the hand gestures the loss of sense. The chorus huddle together one last time, as jitters mark their collective presence.

This line is the apex and dissolution point; the rupturing of fear by repetition occurs through the struggle of acceptance. Events exceeding the linguistic and gestic register, manifest the psychic disintegration of trauma in their affect. Movement and collective stillness archive this emotional residue of fear. It is the culmination of the chorus' affective trajectory of fear.

Their role slowly shifts to characterising lament; their worst anxieties have come to pass and fear is no longer relevant.

This intricate analysis of all the references of fear in the chorus demonstrates how the chorus' movement and gesture can bring to the forefront the affective implications of the layering of a single emotion. In doing so, it has highlighted the chorus' emotional capacity and trajectory in helping us visualise the choreography of the play.

V: Synthesis

In this last stage of my analysis, I explore through movement the first astrophic part of the *parodos* from lines 78-105. The reason for choosing these lines is twofold. First, they bring together all the aforementioned perspectives – the sensory experience of the chorus, the body parts mentioned by them, both directly and indirectly, and the layering of emotions, namely fear/anxiety. In a way, they synthesise the three approaches towards movement to provide an alternative reading of the play, one that shows how an interpretation based on movement can aid us in allocating meaning that a mere textual analysis fails to provide. Second, the primacy

of the multi-modal approach is seen through a kinesthetic synthesis of the experiences felt by the chorus when a section of lines is taken together. This also makes it possible to complicate the choices of mapping chosen approaches to movement onto specific experiences of the chorus. We shall see through the following reading that sometimes the direct and indirect approaches intersect to create a cumulative effect, blurring the boundaries between them. This does not invalidate the use of the three approaches to movement. It only ascertains that, when lines in a play are taken together, these approaches may overlap to create a synthesis.

The play begins with Eteocles' speech to all the male citizens, represented by 'extras' who do not speak, reminding them of their duty as they are about to begin battle. After the men exit the stage towards the city-walls in order to fulfil their duty, the messenger sent by Eteocles comes with words that provide a vivid image of the enemy. Seven leaders perform a sacrifice at the enemy camp. The enemy's war tactics become clear as each of the seven leaders is to be allotted a separate vantage point from which to attack the city; the messenger recommends that Eteocles stations defenders at each of the seven gates (55-59). Terror resides in the messenger's eyes. The enemy is not to be taken lightly. He exits to gather further intelligence. Eteocles speaks to the gods, alone on the stage, requesting their support (66-78). And then he departs. Our chorus of young Theban maidens take over, as they enter in panic along the *eisodos* from the assumed direction of town. The play's *parodos* commences as the atmosphere grown sullen.

The *parodos* is divided into three parts. After the first part (78-107), the strophe and antistrophe begin to alternate. Hutchinson notes how the scenery becomes significant at this point: 'On the bare Attic stage', Aeschylus 'placed tombs, altars, and statues, objects which enabled him to present religious rituals of a particularly striking and emotional kind'.[24] The collected objects are described as forming an assembly of gods (220, 251) and 'each god is

[24] Hutchinson, 2017, p. 47.

represented by a statue' on the mound that Sommerstein specifies.[25] This is for the purpose of supplication that we shall see.

Hutchinson argues that the chorus enter together. He makes this statement to refute some scholars' suggestion, that the chorus' opening lines are delivered by separate sub-groups or individuals.[26] In my view, both these may be possible. However, I find Hutchinson's view is more aligned to my argument. For me, it is not merely the text that determines this. The entire mood and setting call for an entry together, and the collective movements are what bring about the effect required. The chorus are representative of the entire civic society, as well as a section of its women. By coming together, they firmly establish the distinction between the rulers/heroes and the ruled. To be considered seriously, whatever the chorus embody must be pursued at a collective level, so as to be impactful enough to fuel change and draw rapid attention to their plight. The chorus as a single organism are in motion; their body language is reeking of constraint – fear grips each limb and each arm. The collectiveness generates the effect on the audience.

The beginning of the first, astrophic part of the *parodos* entails a combination of prompts to movements that represent three categories – the senses that display the chorus' reaction to the beginning of battle; the verbs that express movements; and the fear and anxiety that the chorus hold in their mind that are revealed in their body language.

The first line of the *parodos* < > *θρέομαι φοβερὰ μεγάλ' ἄχη* (We cry out great fearful distress, 78) sets the context for both the chorus' role within the entire play, as well as for the present moment of the *parodos*. The impending suffering that the end of war will bring is camouflaged within the ephemerality of this moment. 'We cry' (literally 'I cry') as an iterative present active middle ending is meant to enhance the urgency of the suffering felt now, and

[25] Sommerstein, 2008, p. 153.
[26] Hutchinson, 2017, pp. 48–49.

create a basis for the increasing fear that will ascend throughout the play. Outstretched arms followed by a gesture towards or next to the heart will bring the meaning alive.

In line 79, the chorus collectively enacts the verb *μεθεῖται* derived from *μεθίημι* meaning 'We (again literally 'I') set loose'. The adjective *πρόδρομος* (running headlong, 80) applied to the enemy army excites the chorus' anxiety, with speed as the marker of the advent of battle. The chorus gestures forward sensing the *κόνις* (dust, 81) in the air mimicking the rush of horses that pour forth on the field. Dust is the messenger that makes certain without words the beginning of battle; it is as unsettling as the layers of fear in the bodies of the chorus acting as a singular organism. However, it is the senses that drive the chorus to movement. First, the dust is visible in the air (81), and the chorus point towards it by showing it to the audience; the sensory assault is more than that – the silence of the dust itself is like a truthful messenger (*ἄναυδος σαφὴς ἔτυμος ἄγγελος*, a messenger with no voice yet clear and true, 82); the noises of the horses' hooves force it to reach the chorus' ears (*πεδί' ὁπλόκτυπ' ὠτὶ χρίμπτει βοάν*, the plains, as they still are, bring the impact of the hooves, its noise near my ears, 84). A simple gesture marking both silence and the truth will provide a clear understanding to the audience for line 82, as the idea of less is more can be helpful when the lines themselves are simplified in meaning. For line 84 however, a strong combination of foot and body movements to add effect to amplify the words, so that the audience feels the impact the chorus are feeling is advantageous. The adjective *ὁπλόκτυπος* (hoof-struck) denotes the sound the chorus are hearing and focuses on the progression of the already accumulated anxiety and speed.

Movements are often drawn from nature as a means of making the experience feel real and relatable it to the audience. And so, the mountain torrent (85-86) is used to help imagine the dusty blinding hurricane on the battlefield. As the audience imagines the mountain, the chorus (or perhaps the ground between them and the horses) becomes the mountain: *ποτᾶται, βρέμει δ'/ἀμαχέτου δίκαν ὕδατος ὀροτύπου*, (this noise flies here and there and roars like an

unconquerable torrent, gushing down the mountain, 85-86); the flying and the roaring describe the movement of the sound as it assaults them and makes them move in turn – what they are sensing through sight and sound, they carry out that movement. The hurricane on a mountain, an imagined force, and the unseen battle being felt, are occurring beyond the audience's visual field, yet apprehended in the immediate moment. Logically, the focus of movement is therefore first on showing the flying and roaring, and then producing the image of frenzy that the word gushing evokes, scattering around the stage to form the montage of a mountain.

It is only the gods that can show mercy in their plight. Thus, the chorus now gesture upwards with hands towards the sky - *ἰὼ ἰὼ θεοὶ θεαί τ'* (Iō, iō, gods and goddesses, 87). The shouting comes from across the walls, and the chorus move near them to hear it. The hearing transforms into an imaginary vision, since the chorus are calling upon the all-seeing gods – (ὁ λεύκασπις *ὄρνυται λαὸς εὐπρεπὴς ἐπὶ πόλιν διώκων <πόδα>* (the men with white shields rushing on headlong swift-footed against the city, 90-91). The warrior pose of the heroes holding white shields may be accompanied by movements that displays the swiftness and alacrity of the foot – the movements that may recall Achilles' prowess of his brisk footwork.

While the clamour of the battlefield and the plea to the gods continue, the chorus now directs themselves to action – they beckon to one another to go clasp the images (clasping becomes a sensory action carried out through touch, 98), and adorn the gods (101-102). Hutchinson remarks that offerings such as a *peplos* were unlikely to be carried by the chorus, as it would restrict their former movements until here. This may not necessarily be the case. Offerings could be carried by just one or two of them, or put down. Yet they are not compulsory. Thus, both interpretations are plausible. Adorning the statues does not have to mean the possession of props. Simple suggestive gestures that are accentuated by the words of the chorus could create the same effect. The women are holding onto and prostrating themselves towards the statues placed on the stage. These movements of prostration continue as they repeat - *κτύπον*

δέδορκα· πάταγος οὐχ ἑνὸς δορός (We see the clash—it is not the clatter of a single spear, 103). This strange locution—that they see an audible phenomenon—must have been reflected in their postures and gestures. They are showing the audience through movement what they are hearing such as the clattering of spears. The audience along with the gods (whom the chorus have already recognised as onlookers to their plight) also begin to see the noise; hearing with their ears and seeing the hearing with their imagination. In this way, new meaning in given to the words *κτύπον δέδορκα* and the audience is absorbed into the visual affect.

After line 103 the spirited movements recede. From 104-108 the chorus come together, more mellow in their bodily presence but as emphatic in their tone, thereby questioning Ares and his intentions. The first part of the *parodos* comes to an end.

This analysis of the *parodos* has demonstrated that my opening categorisation of assigning direct gestures to certain sensory experiences and body parts, indirect ones to those driven by context, as well as those that enhance the layering of emotions are not static, boxed categories. They often overlap with one another to generate meaning-making in a section of lines taken together. While on the whole the categorisation is essential to establish the concept of meaning-making, once the process is in action the categorisation can be loosened and expanded to achieve a resonant affect.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have mapped the various approaches to movements, namely the direct and indirect, and the layering of a single emotion, onto the various experiences of the chorus – their sensory experiences, their reference to bodily parts, and their experience of the variegated intensities of fear and anxiety. Cumulatively my analysis has exposed a way of reading the text that transcends words and beckons us to look at the totality of the play, including the particular effect it generates through gestures and movements.

The value of the chapter lies in how it defines the emotional landscape of the consequences of war, by tracing the chorus' stress on movement and gesture; this is achieved not in heroic terms (the character of Eteocles) but in human terms (the character of the chorus), by focusing on the power of affect. It has shown how by centralising the chorus, and by decentring the text, this thesis has activated a multimodal approach to tragedy.

By appreciating the centrality of the chorus, this chapter also recognises how the chorus' various roles can be brought to life. The direct enaction of the sensory experiences affirms the chorus as an experiencer, a dynamic entity The chorus adds value by signifying the deictic meaning, which helps create a direct semiotic affect, so that the audience not only registers, but identifies with the sense of touching and hearing, thereby identifying with the experience of war endured by the chorus.

Even in the one case where an indirect movement is used to express the sensory experience - we have seen the sound (103) - the same semiotic affect is present, but is accompanied by a confluence of senses. As explained in the chapter, the synaesthetic experience of the overlapping of hearing and seeing creates an impact and synaesthetic experience, to be both identified by and instilled in the audience. The chorus as experiencers draws in the audience as experiencers of the senses.

Complementing the chorus' role as experiencer while talking about their sensory experiences, wherever movement is generated to facilitate the chorus' references to body parts, both direct and indirect, the chorus become narrators and mediators. The meaning generated is very different from a synaesthetic affect. In some instances, it may retain its semiotic effectiveness, but this is often accompanied by a reflexive and cognitive affect as well. For example, in line 171-172 (prayers of maidens with outstretched hands) that have been analysed in the body of the chapter, the chorus creates a semiotic affect by citing its own movement of

hands. Here their role as facilitators between the community and the gods and narrators of their troubles and prayers, overlaps with their role as experiencers; the semiotic affect overlaps with the reflective/cognitive affect. Similarly, in 371 where the chorus claim their role as narrators when the joints and movements of the scout coming towards them are addressed, it creates a reflective opportunity for the audience by engineering a cognitive effect.

When we reach the segment of the layering of fear and anxiety, the audience is not only empathetically affected, but the chorus elicit a response that is simultaneously emotional and experiential.

Finally, the astrophic bit of the *parodos* produces a cumulative affect, by demonstrating that when it comes to generating meaning, the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts. We clearly see the mapping of the various approaches to movements over the experiences of the chorus not holding steadfast. Gesture and movement derived from the text begin to be realised and appreciated in an organic and malleable manner. It is the collective meaning and impact of the lines taken together, and performed in real time that creates an overall impact that is at once semiotic, cognitive, reflective, emotional, and experiential.

Movements and gestures, therefore, become the axis on which meaning-making (that the text uncovers insufficiently) is turned, and this meaning-making is then recognised by the impact it has on the audience. The chorus, as collective performers of these movements and gestures, are able to evoke the affect (alongside the other characters in the tragedy), thereby affirming their position at the centre of the tragic play. Such an alternative reading opens new ways of interpreting tragedy.

Conclusion

I set out to achieve two things in this thesis: first, to establish the centrality of the chorus in classical Greek tragedy, and second, to emphasise movement and physical gestures in the original play and adaptations of *Seven Against Thebes*, by focusing on the text as a choreographic script. I have elucidated how this approach adds affective depth and resonance to the play otherwise lost, opening up the meaning comprehensively.

The thesis posits an alternative reading of *Septem*, differing from the purely textual approach, and instead, highlighting one based on movement, gesture, dance, and embodied signification overall. Moving beyond words – i.e. the text – as the only source-making, I have opened up a new avenue of interpreting the play and investigating tragedy.

The chorus are an essential part of ancient Greek drama. Recent scholarship demonstrates an increasing interest in their role, since choruses were aboriginal constituents of drama and became inextricable from it. However, critics left tragic choruses and their function relatively under-explored. I hope to have contributed to filling this gap through the example of one play. While dramatic action and music find spaces within classical discourse on tragedy, the dancing of the chorus has struggled to assert its importance. My objective has been to give importance to dance by demonstrating that movements and gestures provide a unique way of conceptualising the plural meanings of tragedy itself, whereby references to them craft the live choreographic experience for the audience. Movements convey emotions in visceral ways. The body 'speaks' independently of or without a correlation to words. My analysis discovered that this approach to movement re-establishes the chorus as central and pivotal to the tragic experience.

The first chapter shows how the reliance on conventional classical scholarship dismissive of the choruses within a tragic plot can be countered by using newer theoretical

frameworks from other disciplines. These include adaptation/translation theory, text as texture, and performability, all of which aid us in uncovering the gestic code from within the text to access the extra-textual meanings that emerge from it – as well as the role of performativity through embodiment to create affect.

The second chapter analyses the centrality of the chorus by integrating it within community values. In most ancient tragedies, the chorus are the voice of the people juxtaposed with the heroes. By focusing on movement, one can appreciate the play through the relevance and power it bestows onto the voices of the community. Martone's film generatively succeeds in embedding community value, and justifying the use of the word synonymously with chorality to lend meaning to tragedy. The hand puppet in the La MaMa production attains this in a hyperbolic manner.

A focus on dance in the La MaMa production helps us understand what is lost in meaning when this sense of communal chorality is ignored, and a hero-centric approach is cultivated. It provides an important example of how the central meaning of tragedy can emerge in dance, and that this is lost if individual bodies and voices are over-emphasised relative to collectivities of multiple bodies and voices.

The third chapter recognises the role of movement and gesture in establishing the primacy of the chorus through a close reading of Aeschylus' *Septem*. By charting different approaches toward movement over the experiences of the chorus, my analysis gives value to the meaning-making process in shaping the dynamics of tragedy and producing kinesthetic empathy. Drawing on Weiss' theory, the meta-kinetic approach helps in analysing the text to include movement as modes of semiotic signification.

In *Septem*, movement helps to evoke a more sensitive and empathetic response to the experiences of women in the play, while countering the hero-centric approach and the deep

analysis of Eteocles that scholarship has hitherto advocated. Gestures and movements have focalised the crucial role that women play in society by responding to adverse circumstances while uncovering the various degrees of emotional expression they engage in. Their fears and anxieties expressed through movement and gesture are not static, irrational reactions; they are nuanced ways of exploring the implications that adversity has on marginalised groups.

Kinetic motion creates space to measure the fluctuating embodied pulse during the practical reality of human uncertainty and contingency. The women of the chorus in *Septem* carry these wavering intensities within their bodies. They become the catalysts for the propagation of peace in times of war; and for the need for certitude in times of chaos. The impact of war is given a vital position through their embodied voices that a logocentric reading of the play obscures. Thus, the kinesthetic empathy that ensues from a performance-oriented approach to the text infuses gravitas into the art of tragic drama itself.

If there is something lost in a mere textual reading of the play, then there is something, tangible and intangible, found and recovered through an embodied experience of dance. Such interpretations lay the bedrock for the urgent need of interdisciplinary work – beyond the textual fixity of language in the classics, and for the leveraging of value of emotional expression within the humanities. For a PhD, I would like to explore how Indian classical dance as an embodied tradition can help us understand the movements of the tragic choruses of Aeschylus in more nuanced ways -- and how this analysis can contribute to the way in which gender dynamics played out in classical Athens, on and off the stage. After all, what are the humanities besides a methodological study of what it means to be human?

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