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THE ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA

in the Light of Orchesis¹

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It is well known that Ancient Greek drama plays combine speech with music and movement, which makes the work of the translation more complicated. The intention of this presentation is to show how Orchesis Studies can contribute to a deeper understanding of the plays, in order to make the work of adaptation more relevant to the authentic and contemporary linguistic, social and philosophical needs.

This introduction to the Orchesis research findings, first of all, aims at clearing the definition of the term. Secondly, we will pursue to examine its key-role in the procedure of the understanding of the Ancient Greek Literature. Subsequently, we will attempt to highlight how it can stimulate and enrich the procedure of teaching, dramatizing and translating the Greek Dramas plays. Finally, we aim to feature the contribution of studying Orchesis to the evolution of the contemporary dramatic literature and performing arts.

During the second, practical part of this presentation, we will experiment reading, singing and dancing together, practicing the method pioneered by Anna Lazou, Professor of Philosophical Anthropology in

1. The paper at hand is a development of an oral presentation focusing on both the theoretical premises as well practical applications of the study group *orchesis* method of Athens, taken over by Irimi Kosma during the International Colloque of Theatre Translation, in Belo Horizonte, on May, the 30th, 2016. Another version of the paper accompanied by a demonstration of the teaching technique was presented by both authors during the World Dance Congress of CID – Unesco on June, the 30th – July, the 2nd, 2016, in Athens. Revisão do inglês por Pedro Furtado.

the University of Athens – Theatre Director, foundress and at the head of Ancient Orchestis' Study Group.

Our intention, as Group for the Study of Ancient Orchestis, is to show how the research for the words "rhythm" and "prosody", from the Ancient Greek word *ῥυθμός*, which means the tone or accent of a syllable, livens up and enriches the research with more physical and philosophical elements. Especially the rhythm, which is directly connected with movement, represents an important aspect in better accepting the Ancient Greek Drama. We are going to see why.

1. The choric expression

First of all, what is *orchesis* and why is it so important for the study of Ancient Greek Drama? The word *ορχήσθαι* for the Greeks has a much more extensive sense than the English *to dance*.² Human dancing, which, in ancient Greece represented every kind of movement of the feet, hands, head or even the eyes, did not constitute a self-contained art. It was combined with music and recitation of lyrics, even with individual or collective dramatic action.

Literature and more specifically, poetry, was tightly linked with music and dance, from the earliest eras of its existence. Greek poetry's evolution was very much influenced by the appearance of dance – as indicates, among other elements, the use of the word *πούς*, which means foot, for a part or a metrical unit of a verse. Regarding to this, a fragment of Libanius, a Greek teacher of rhetoric of the Sophistic school, is frequently cited: *Dancing is not made complete by songs, rather it is for the sake of dancing that the songs are worked out*.³

This long tradition of parallel evolutive paths of poetic recitation with dancing that human communities have been following since a long time

2. The term *Orchestés* (dancer) was regularly used in Greek texts for the pantomimic dancer or actor, while the Latin term is *Pantomimus*. Cf. Lucian (*De Salt.* 67).

3. Lib. Or. 64-88. Transl. by Margaret E. Molloy, in *Libanius and the Dancers*, Olms-Weidmann, 1996, p. 86-87. Cf. Lib. Or. 64.4 – 5: a refutation of a lost work by Aelius Aristides, in which the latter might have been engaged as well in the discussion about the relationship between the verbal and the kinetic components in pantomimic dancing and possibly in Greek dance in general. Citation by Peponi (2013b, p. 28).

ago, survived until Greek Drama's birth, during the classical period, establishing a new genre of poetry, connected with the cult of God Dionysus. *The whole Earth will dance at once* says Euripides in *Bacchae*,⁴ a tragedy which is dedicated to the celebration of enjoyment and orgiastic rituals related with Dionysian ceremonies.

At the same time, the play forms a warning against the pride of power, prudery and suppression that was represented by the king of Thebes, Pentheus. If Pentheus lived today, he would certainly be mad against the worldwide famous Brazilian carnival; another, maybe more merchandised, lately, expression of the human desire for the Dionysian experience.

Back to the study of ancient Drama, the movement, accompanied by music and song, was a part of every play, for the achievement of *catharsis*, in the form of choric expression. Conclusively, we would describe *orchesis* as the harmonious combination of speech, music and movement, in the form of dancing, where there is always a dramatic and representative aspect. The simultaneous analysis of the movement and the rhythm, as well as the dramatic aspect, the classical element of ancient drama, which the modern western world had been ignoring for so many years, defines the basic purpose of our research.

2. Philosophical premises

At this point we may refer to certain modern philosophical premises pre-termining our study of dance experience and art in ancient Greece – more particularly, also affecting the *orchesis* project itself: starting from the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche at the second half of 19th century.⁵

Nietzsche in the famous *Birth of Tragedy*, not only defined dance and the Dionysian element of music as the "heart" of Greek tragic art apart and far from the philological approach of the German Archaeognostic tradition, but also throughout his whole work he pointed out the importance of the active revival of Greek dance culture. As the German philosopher noticed, through the revival, the human being of his time would overcome the

4. *Bacc.* 105 – 119.

5. See Lazou (2012, p. 41-52; 2013, p. 89-106).

pessimistic rupture between body and mind and be transformed to the artist – creator model that man truly is by nature.

In addition to Nietzsche's influence in the development of a different than the classical model of aesthetics and the art of drama, philosophical anthropology of the end of 19th and the first part of the 20th century, inspired by neo-Kantian idealism focused on the unity of body and mind. Overcoming dualism by incorporating the mythical origin as well as the symbolic impact of all art forms – therefore dance too – ended up to the essential body of philosophical approach of man and his whole cultural creation.⁶

The turn made at the dawn of the 20th century by great dance innovators, like Isadora Duncan, who tried to bring back dancing to nature, promoted the need for a body oriented or physical theatre, inspired by the Ancient Greek Drama. This change underlined the necessity for a more careful reinvestigation of the issue, as the research was fertilized with the physical, social and philosophical elements, which were missing.

Duncan, as Noël Carroll remarks,⁷ related the history of dance with the change of the old world, the need for an initiation to a new pattern of dance, free dance and the overcoming of the more rigid and "tired" classical paradigm. She involved her personal interpretation of the ancient Greek art with plenty of romantic aesthetics and the need for an American vs a European identity of dance enriched by Emerson's transcendentalist natural philosophy (Carroll, 2001, p. 90).⁸

On top of the different trends in philosophical aesthetics of the 20th century that analyzed dance as one of their major art example, lies the phenomenologist M. Merleau-Ponty and his most eminent follower, Sondra Horton Fraleigh.

Dr. Fraleigh formulated her theory of a descriptive aesthetics where she applies the notion of consciousness of dance as an art, through the experience of dancing & the existential and phenomenological literature on the lived

6. Max Scheler, Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer belong to this trend. Cf. Lazou (2016).

7. When he discusses the contemporary analytic aesthetics of George Dickie (*The Art Circle*, New York: Haven Publications, 1984, p. 80) and Arthur Danto ("Thoughts on the Institutional Theory of Art", public speech in the *San Francisco Art Institute*, July 10, 1991 and *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) in Carroll (2001).

8. Cf. Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The American Scholar" (1837), as in Sacks (2003).

body.⁹ This focus of attention of aesthetics to the lived – or consciously experienced body – contributed greatly in seeing dance as a primary art form and therefore reappreciating the importance of ancient Greek dancing culture as a guiding force of understanding human creativity.

3. The world of rhythm

But how, the rhythm is so tightly connected with the social and philosophical meaning of Ancient Drama? If words express ideas, the logical dimension of the human mind, rhythm and movement express the sentiments, unveiling our more instinctive, animal and even cosmic aspect.

The aspect of language or even seeing language as the vehicle for deeper instinctive and rather objective live forms belongs to the area of language philosophy of the analytic trend providing us with notions and arguments in favor of a theory of dance as a language form rather than anti or non verbal communication.

The continuity between life forms and words, private and social are subjects of Ludwig Wittgenstein's and post Wittgensteinian theories of mind and action. These theories affect our interpretation and use of the text as a carrier of messages or information about culture and ethics, far and beyond "meaning"; the text is open therefore to the dancing experience today as well as revival through the human self and the actual human body.¹⁰

We know that ancients had dances with fast circular figures, which imitated the movements of the celestial bodies. And others, like the renowned Ἰέρωνος of Delos, which was inspired by the rivers' or snakes' tossing.

In addition, zoomorphic dances were very popular in ecstatic rituals, as well as in Ancient Drama plays, like in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. A comedy which narrates the story of Dionysus, who, in despair of the State of Athens'

9. Discussing Mary Wigman's expressionist dances Fraleigh (1996, p. 28) points that "They were an extension of the expressive condition of the human body. Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains the expressive condition of the body this way: 'All perception, all action which presupposes it, and in short every human use of the body is already *primordial* expression'. She also incorporates a fertile interpretation of the existentialist thought of Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber with Paul Ricoeur hermeneutics in an integral effort of understanding dance as a product of the dancer's conscious perceptive dialectic with the invisible, as a primordial nonverbal experience. Cf. Merleau-Ponty (1964; 1968).

10. See Lazou (2016).

tragedians, travels to the underworld of Hades to bring the poet Euripides back from the dead.

The word tragedy itself, coming from the Greek word τραγωδία, is associated to ancient rituals with the presence of goats, in Greek τραγός, either through symbolic mimic movements of the animal and the use of zoomorphic masks or through the tragic sacrifices of the goat itself. Those practices were dedicated to the ceremonies of birth, death and resurrection. Generally, dance was conjoined by public activities, cathartic rituals, educational disciplines and social events.

Conclusively, the study of the rhythm and the movement in Drama enlightens our knowledge about how ancient Greeks perceived their position in the world. It brightens our awareness on the way the Greeks observed the conflict between individual and society, human being and universe, augmenting our knowledge about the moral, social, political and educational aspects of culture.

It's getting clearer now that a deeper comprehension of Greek Drama's emotional, social, political and philosophical effectiveness requires the study of one of its most powerful expressive instruments, ignored for centuries, the rhythm and the body movements. Teaching, studying and interpreting the wise messages of the ancient plays, becomes more effective and joyful, when using the most immediate and expressive means that we feature through our body.

4. The Orchesis research

Is it possible for someone who is not a dancing nor musician or acting professional to use *orchesis* research findings, in order to study, teach or translate the ancient Greek drama? The answer is YES and we are educating and training people how to do it.

It is true that the ancient Greeks considered dancing and musical education as a great component, in the young peoples' improvement process. Plato in the *Laws* supports that dancing and music is identified as the whole education, that the uncultivated person is an un-orchesist and that the deeply educated is endowed by the *orchesis* culture, in ancient Greek, κερχορευτικός.¹¹

It is also a fact that in modern western societies the musical and dancing education has been more or less specialized and is often acknowledged less important or suitable just for a few talented persons who are going to follow a professional career as artists. This approach totally opposes to the traditions of countries like Brazil and Greece, who are equipped with a great indigenous and historical past in orchesis, which illuminates different aspects of social life until today.

On the other hand, ancient Greeks were against professionalism concerning acting, singing, dancing and playing music. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, claims that orchesis constitutes a spring of mental and aesthetic satisfaction of the highest level, but warns that no citizen should reach the professional level.

While, obviously, formal music or dancing education helps a lot, even someone who does not get in dispose of it, can manage to receive the essential information about orchesis and the way it operates in Ancient Drama. After all, we all are born supporting the charisma of the rhythm of our hearts, the heartbeat, as well as the rhythm of our breath. The world of the ancient drama's rhythm is open for us to explore it.

Furthermore, there are plenty of sources, where we can refer to, in order to discover the secrets of ancient *orchesis*. A plethora of studies that have been issued on the subject can help even a totally ignorant to understand the basics, in order to have a more spherical view on ancient Greek drama. Typically, for a deeper research, our sources are separated in seven different stages:

- a) philological;
- b) metrical, which include dissertations and the study of the lyrics themselves, with which ancient Greeks danced;
- c) musical, based in ancient instruments and theoretical texts which were found;
- d) archeological (statues and drawings on walls or ceramics, which have been rescued from the ancient era, offering representations of orchesis and dancers, as well as objects which the dancers used);
- e) inscripational;
- f) linguistic;
- g) anthropological.

11. *Laws*, 779b-81a and *ibid.*, 2.655a.

Practically, these seven aspects are summarized in the following main four ones:

- A. Starting from traditional forms
- B. Adding up formation on music – *prosodia* – text
- C. Combining historical & other archaeo-philological knowledge
- D. Training in Dance-theatre and other Contemporary Physical Theatre Practices

Finally our method attempts to reunite three parts of both theoretical and practical work:

Cultural Memory – Analysis – Embodiment.¹²

The anthropological sources make a live treasure for our research. They include the comparative material which is generated by the study of the dance in different societies. For example, we study traditional dances in the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea, in the region of Minor Asia in Turkey, or South Italy, like *tarantella* and Spain, as well as the other countries where the ancient Greeks had arrived.

As far as the Greek literature is concerned, it constitutes in its entirety an unofficial source of information for the study of *orchesis*. Nymphs, muses, gods, goddesses, half gods, mortals, even animals, dance in its pages. Moreover, literary figures abound in dancing echoes.

5. From The Furies to The Delphic Paean

In order to enhance the understanding on how Ancient Greek literature is approached in the light of *orchesis*, we are going to use two examples, which will be also presented during the second, practical part. The first one comes from the chorus of Erinyes (*The Furies*) in Aeschylus's tragedy, titled

12. It is apparent that such a complicated investigation and multised education and training can only be fulfilled by a collaboration of many subjects – researchers, artists, educators – and is not the matter of the unique visionary or individual creator. The Study group of *orchesis* is spreading the word of such a research to all over the world, keeping stable contact and exchanges with different cultures and individuals in many Universities and all continents.

Eumenides. It is about one of the most impressive choruses who perform a mystic dance without being accompanied by lyre.

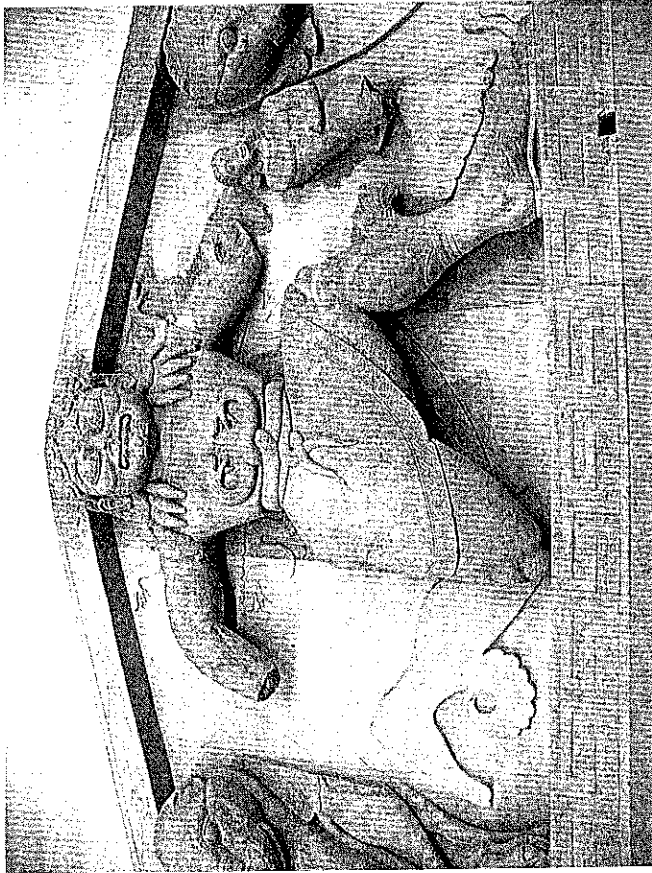
First step in our research, guided by Professor Anna Lazou, was to read the chorus' lyrics, in the authentic ancient and modern Greek language version. The song which the dance accompanies is addressing to *Mother Night* – Μῆτερ Νύξ. The members of chorus, sing for their victim, Orestes, threatening to tie his soul, to surrender and to exterminate him, driving the Greek hero in madness. The choreography was certainly circular, although chorus doesn't surround Orestes, who at that moment has found refuge in a nearby temple.

Secondly, we analyzed the ancient poetic meters and rhythms in relation to the interpretation of ancient Greek dance, with the precious contribution of two professors, Demetrius Lekkas, the composer, and Stelios Psaroudakis, Archaeomusicologist. The song is written in repeated lyrics, which impact as an echo of magical songs that existed, as we know, in certain rituals. Its rhythm or metrical foot – μετρικός ποὺς –, anapaistos, is composed of two short and one long syllable.

At this point, it is necessary to mention that in antiquity, language, speech and metrics were based in prosody, the successive pronunciation and alteration of long and short units or syllables. So, the difference between the long and short syllables was the basis of meter and rhythm, an element which certainly affected the evolution of dances, since most of them followed musical instruments and singing.

Third step, we exchanged ideas on the political, social, philosophical and artistic dimensions of the play and more specifically, on the key-role which chorus kept in it. In Greek mythology, Erinyes were chthonian deities. They hunted people who had committed crimes of moral order. In the famous Aeschylus' tragedy they hunt Orestes who murdered his mother, Clytemnestra. At the end of the play, the matricide gets exculpated and the deities convert from *Erinyes* into *Eumenides*, after the interference of goddess Athena. The murder of a mortal becomes an object of dispute between deities of different perceptions and ages, marking the end of the old and the start of the new era. Athena establishes a court of mortals in a play which coincides chronologically with the historical establishment of the court of Areios Pagus, in the city of Athens. The tragic chorus of Erinyes, like almost every ancient drama's chorus moves marginally between the play's world and the world of the political, historical and social frame of its era.

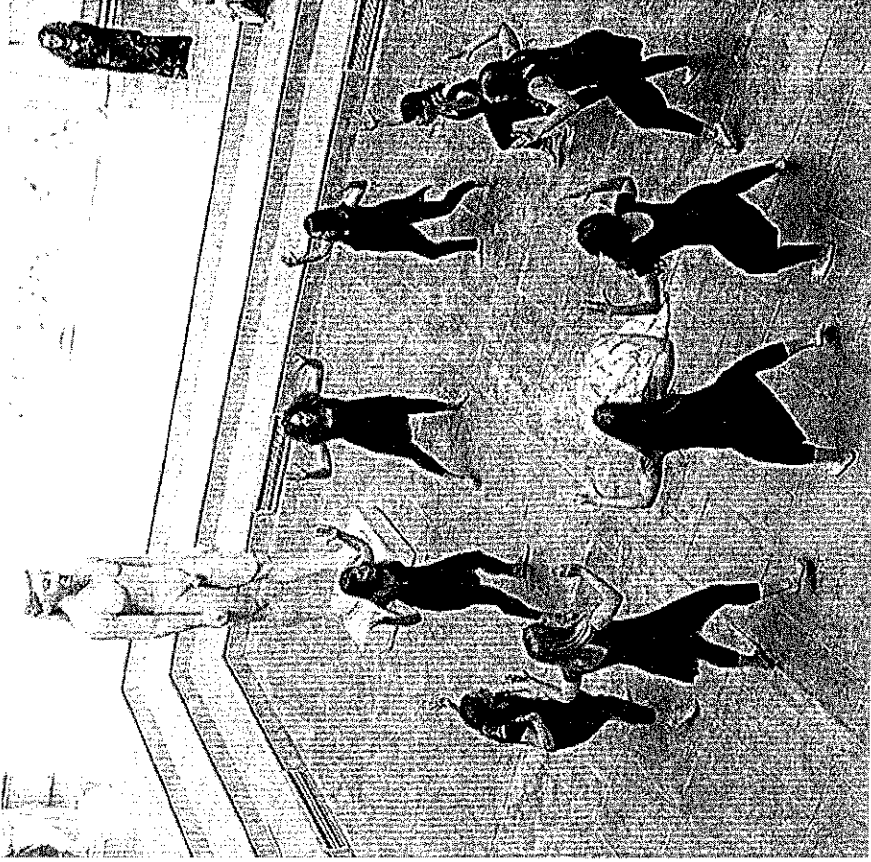
Fourth step, we searched for archeological objects which represent every kind of chthonian deities, in order to study their forms, postures, and movements.



An archaic Gorgon (around 580 BC), as depicted on a pediment from the temple of Artemis in Corfu, on display at the Archaeological Museum of Corfu.

Fifth step, we incorporated elements from traditional Greek dances, like the Pyrrhic dance [Πυρρικός] according to the rhythm dictated by the lyrics and the belligerent style that should characterize the chorus of Erinyes. The movements had to be threatening and frightening.

Finally, working on professor's Anna Lazou choreography, in parallel with professor's Demetrius Lekkas music, we realized how speech, movements, music and acting, all based on the same rhythm, constitute an unbroken unity, which guiding the dramatization, services essential needs of the play. The magical dance, performed by the chorus dressed with the costumes of the terrifying Erinyes, had to contain an impetus of great ferocity, symbolizing the enormous crash between the old and the new values.



It is clear that in tragedy, free and various choreographic shapes were regularly used, transfusing great value in the effect of the plays and serving different needs.

The second example refers to the Paean, significantly famous between the ceremonial dances. The Paean was performed under the sounds of lyre or flute. The writer of the Homeric hymn dedicated to Pythius Apollo narrates how a group of Cretans arrived at Delphi in order to inaugurate a temple, singing and dancing the paean, with Apollo himself leading.

The god plays the lyre and goes ahead with high and nice steps. Indeed, the paean seems to come from the island of Crete. It starts in a classical form of procession and turns to a dance, accompanied by song. The Dorian music denotes the majesty and the imposing characteristics of the paean, composed of three short syllables and one iog.

aesthetics such as Joseph Margolis and Richard Shusterman are also related to the revival practices we undergo.¹³

The effects of *orchesis* studies can be beneficial to the field of translation and transformation of plays as well, promoting a conceptual and more essential access to Ancient Greek drama and its philosophy. This path offers more liberties in the work of adaptation and transcription of the plays from the Ancient Greek reality to the reality and the needs of today's academic, literary and artistic communities in Brazil, a country with a rich ritual, indigenous tradition.

After all, it is good to remember that Sophocles, one of the three Ancient Greek tragedians whose plays have survived, known, as the great innovator of ancient drama, was himself a poet, dancer and musician of the highest quality, at the same time.

Finally, the dance, one of the first and most basic forms of art, at least in Greece, I believe in Brazil, too, although it has ended up to be the poor relative, constitutes a clear element or an intermediate to the years coming, concerning the cultural creation.

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13. See Lazou (2013).

STROPHE I

For more theoretical information over *orchesis*, the works of the philosophers Plato and Aristotle and those of the writers Xenophon, Strabo, Plutarch, Pollux, Lucian, Athenaeus and Libanius, are very useful.

6. The effects of *Orchesis* Studies

Concluding, how can *orchesis* constitute a tool in the hands of researchers, teachers, translators and artists, in order to enrich and make the ancient drama more attractive for the audience and the students? As many studies have shown, the immediate, physical and interactive approach of teaching and performing, which involves the philosophical and social awareness, is very effective and, furthermore, illuminates new aspects of knowledge on ancient drama. In a more recent publication, pragmatist and somatocentric

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