

**MONUMENTAL TEXTS IN RUINS: GREEK TRAGEDY IN GREECE AND
MICHAEL MARMARINOS'S POSTMODERN STAGINGS**

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The performance of ancient Greek drama on the modern Greek stage, despite its comparatively short history, is rich, widely debated and ideologically charged. The great interest in Greek drama is discursively constructed rather than dictated by the specific historical and topographical reality of modern Greece; in other words, it has less to do with Greece *being* the originary site of classical drama than with Greece *being credited* as such by the predominant discourse since the foundation of the Greek state. The performance (and the translation) of ancient drama has given rise to many controversies about the preservation and/or the appropriation of what is alleged to be the country's classical heritage.¹ Dimitris Papanikolaou (2005:144) argues that the equivocal experience of antiquity is recently galvanising the emergence of postmodernism in Greece.² Since the production of Greek drama is the foremost cultural practice through which Greece is confronted with the classical past, Greek tragedy offers itself to postmodern revisitings.³ The use of postmodern devices in stagings of tragedy seems to redefine the relationship with the classics, challenging the cherished idea of cultural continuity with antiquity.

Michael Marmarinos's productions of Greek tragedy epitomize both the dynamics of the encounter between postmodern aesthetics and classical drama as well as the peculiar implications that this encounter acquires within the Greek context. Marmarinos has staged several productions of Greek tragedy with the Athens-based theatre company Diplous Eros, founded in 1983 and later renamed Theseum Ensemble: four different versions of *Medea* from 1990 to 1994 in the closed theatre space Studio Ilissia;⁴ Sophocles' *Electra* at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus in the summer of 1998; two different versions of *Agamemnon-The Ghost Sonata* in Theatro Thiseion in 1999 and 2000;⁵ in 2006 Marmarinos returned to Epidaurus with Euripides' *The Suppliants*, a co-production of Theseum Ensemble and the Dutch theatre company VeenFabriek, directed together with Paul Koek.⁶

Greek critics immediately identified common characteristics of postmodern theatre in Marmarinos's production. Although the term 'postmodernism' is recurrent in the reviews,⁷ it was never adopted by the director himself to describe his stagings of tragedy. Marmarinos has made clear that his *Electra* was not meant to be 'modern' or 'postmodern',⁸ while he also explained that he did not intend to 'modernise' the tragic text, but to present it as a piece of 'contemporary' drama (Marmarinos 2000). However, his treatment of Greek tragedy was clearly in line with the aesthetic preoccupations of postmodernism. In the particular cultural context of contemporary Greece his productions were received as a provocation to the classical tradition.

Despite their strong impact on both critics and audiences, Marmarinos's productions of ancient Greek tragedies have hardly received any scholarly attention.⁹ In this article, I examine Marmarinos's take on Greek tragedy as a manifestation of postmodernism in the most esteemed field of Greek theatre, arguing that the postmodern strategies in his stagings undermined the monumental gloss with which the Greeks tend to invest tragedy. In contemporary Greece, postmodern revisitings of

classical tragedy appear to be particularly unsettling precisely because they urge the Greeks to reconsider their established ideas about the(ir) classical past.

CLASSICAL TEXTS IN MONUMENTAL SPACES

Before discussing Marmarinos's productions in detail, it is necessary to say a few words about the condition of the theatrical space and its decisive influence on the treatment of the dramatic text in performances of Greek tragedy. The performance of classical drama in contemporary Greece is largely institutionalized and, consequently, regulated by particular conditions among which the space seems to be the most crucial.¹⁰ The vast majority of productions are part of the Epidaurus and the Athens Festivals or the various local festivals which take place in Athens and the periphery during the summer months. The Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus, Herodes Atticus Theatre in Athens and the other open-air, in many cases ancient, theatres provide the usual performance space of Greek comedy and tragedy. The open-air space imposes specific practical requirements on the acting style (large gestures, strong voice) and the *mise-en-scène* (large set, discernible movements of the chorus); on the other hand, the use of the ancient theatres has implications which vary from the preservation of the monument to a certain attitude towards the text. As Platon Mavromoustakos observes:

[T]he association of staging ancient drama with the ancient theatre endows the ancient texts with a special status, which makes them for the Greek theatrical practice a completely different part of the *repertoire*, which is not (and should not be) staged according to the conditions of the other dramatic genres. (2004: 297–8)

It is not fortuitous that the Epidaurus Festival has been resistant to repertoire beyond ancient drama until very recently. The few exceptions here appear to prove the rule: Epidaurus has hosted productions of plays inspired by antiquity, such as Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* (1960) and Luigi Cherubini's *Medea* (1961), both directed by Alexis Minotis and with Maria Callas in the leading roles, as well as Heinrich von Kleist's *Penthesilea* (2002) directed by Peter Stein. Furthermore, both Minotis and Stein established strong analogies with Greek tragedy: Minotis's staging ushered elements of the Euripidean dramatic economy into Cherubini's opera,¹¹ while Stein turned to Greek tragedy in order to suggest a tragic reading of Kleist's Romantic play. The large chorus of the Amazons that Stein used in the production of *Penthesilea* was an acknowledged reference to Greek tragedy.¹²

It appears almost as oxymoronic that, although in Greece ancient drama is usually performed on the actual ruins of a theatre, the treatment of the classical text as a fragment of antiquity has traditionally been out of the question. By contrast, the ancient space imposes the treatment of the text as a monument which is to remain intact by all means. This monumentalizing tendency in Greek productions of ancient drama coincides with the first attempts to use the ancient amphitheatres as performance spaces. The director of the National Theatre Dimitris Rondiris staged Sophocles' *Electra* in Herodes Atticus Theatre in 1936 and in the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus in 1938, a decade after Angelos Sikelianos and Eva Palmer's stagings of tragedy in the ancient site of Delphi; his production of Euripides' *Hippolytus* in Epidaurus in 1954 anticipated the inauguration of the Epidaurus Festival in the very next year.¹³

Rondiris introduced a stylised ritualism which could convey to the contemporary spectator the 'tragic thrill' and the 'holy fear.' His monumental stagings, far from being an antiquarian endeavour to revive the actual conditions of the ancient performance,

involved a certain idealisation of Greek tragedy,¹⁴ along with the call for the preservation of Greek classical heritage. In Rondiris's view the production can achieve the tragic effect by emphasizing the: 'voluminous and passionate movements of the chorus' (Quoted in Mavromoustakos 1997: 47), and by 'borrowing material of modern Greek life that displays the sense of unity evident in the Greek tradition from ancient times to this day.' (ibid.) It is apparent that the monumental view of the classical text sustains the grandeur of tragedy in order to authenticate Greek culture as an uninterrupted process.

The director and founder of the Theatro Technis, Karolos Koun is the main representative of Greek Modernism in theatre. Koun (1994:105–6) contested the grandiose formalism of the productions of ancient drama of the National Theatre as both outdated and imported from the school of Max Reinhardt. At the same time, however, Koun repeatedly refers to the 'volume' of Greek tragedy (Ibid.: 65, 79, 102, 103–9). His peculiar view of tragedy is inextricable from the special quality of the Epidaurian stage:

[I]n a closed space you can do more things which are not accepted in the ancient theatre. I will not speak of sacrilege of the space and the similar, but I cannot deny the sacredness that the space itself has. (ibid.:156)

Most importantly, for Koun the condition of the ancient space is related to the issue of Greek cultural identity, entailing certain limitations for the Greek theatre practitioner who tackles ancient drama:

What has been always stimulating us is the Greekness of ancient drama and our privilege as Greeks to reach back to its sources through familiar elements [...] *Tragedy has such a structure that cannot be broken*. Besides, we present it in its space, the ancient theatre, something that necessarily defines its form. (ibid.: 141 [*my emphasis*])¹⁵

Koun sought inspiration in the Byzantine and oriental aspects of the Greek tradition as well as in Greek folk culture. The festive character of his productions of Aristophanes might have broken with the monumentality as far as comedy is concerned, but his impact on the tradition of staging tragedy remained considerably limited. Thus, the National Theatre never ceased being the orthodoxy in the production of Greek tragedy right down to the present day.

The treatment of both the ancient theatre space and the classical text is, thus, a question of self-definition. The monumentality characterizing the performance of ancient drama in modern Greece is grounded upon the premise of Greek *exclusivism* and *exceptionalism*. The management of the monuments affirms the privileged identity of the Greeks as the sole beneficiaries of the ancient past in the same way that the 'authentic' representation of tragedy validates the experience of contemporary Greece, even in cases where this happens merely for the sake of the tourist industry.¹⁶ Given the pervasiveness of this discourse, it is no surprise that productions which challenge this monumentality are uncharitably received. One year before Marmarinos's début in Epidaurus with *Electra*, Matthias Langhoff had staged Euripides' *Bacchae* in Polykleitos' theatre. Langhoff (1997) referred to the theatre in Epidaurus as the 'debris of a theatre', while he had taken significant liberties with the ancient text. His production enraged the critics and the audience as a sacrilege of both the Epidaurian stage and the Euripidean text.¹⁷

Marmarinos's attitude towards the theatre of Epidaurus epitomizes contemporary Greece's ambiguous relationship with antiquity. As the director said in an interview

preceding the opening of his *Electra*: 'Epidaurus is a unique, blessed space. I felt awe toward it. And yet, I enjoy this commonplace.' (Marmarinos 1998c). Marmarinos acknowledges the tremendous impact of the ancient theatre, while also pointing out the platitude that a reverent stance to the ancient heritage entails. In many instances, however, he has challenged the discourse which contends that classical tragedy can only be staged in its supposedly 'natural' environment; in his view, the closed theatre can feature particular aspects of the text: 'I do not reject the open space [...] However, there are dimensions that are lost or altered in it, such as the silence from which these plays spring.' (Marmarinos 1999) Marmarinos has staged tragedy in unconventional, 'oblique' (*loxos*) (Marmarinos 1998d), as he says, spaces such as the non-theatrical building of Theatro Thiseion, an ex-wood-storehouse.¹⁸

What is remarkable is that the different theatrical spaces not only endowed—on imposed—on Marmarinos a different attitude towards the classical text, but affected the reception of his productions as well. In *Medea* and *Agamemnon* the closed space permitted the fragmentation of the texts, while in *Electra* Marmarinos avoided cuts and interpolations to the unabridged poetic translation of Minos Volonakis. *The Suppliants* was performed in the Dutch language with modern Greek surtitles and with some parts also delivered in modern Greek. Both the Dutch translation by the classicist Herman Altena and the Greek translation kept close to the original.

Marmarinos's productions of tragedy, however, triggered critical reactions which ascribed to the director the role of the *enfant terrible* of the Greek theatre. While *Medea* was hailed as an interesting 'postmodern' experiment (Kritikos 1991)¹⁹, *Electra* was denounced as being irreverent to the classical text. Some of the criticism of *Electra* was reiterated in the reviews on *Agamemnon*, but on the whole critics were less hostile. In the case of *The Suppliants* the negative criticism was expressed in terms of otherness. The Dutch were accused of being ignorant of ancient tragedy, while even the use of the foreign language was criticised (Christidis 2006).²⁰ Two decades earlier Koun had made no secret of his apprehension about the tendency of foreign theatre groups to experiment with Greek tragedy:

The Westerners, in my view, do not have the sense of tragedy and they often make experimentations that change the nature of the Greek plays. Thus, on the one hand, I am glad that they are interested in ancient drama, but, on the other, I am afraid that their experimentations expand here as well. ([1984] 1994: 156)

The contradictions that characterize the reception of Marmarinos's productions attest to the fact that in Greece experimentation with classical drama can be accepted as long as it remains within the confines of the laboratory and is not allowed to encroach upon the monumental ancient sites themselves. (see image 1)



Image 1. Amalia Moutousi in the role of Medea in Marmarinos's *Medea of a Suffocating Closed Space*, Studio Ilissia (1991) (Archive of Theatro Thiseion)

THE CLASSICAL TEXT AS A SPACE OF INSCRIPTIONS

After the première of *Electra* in Epidaurus, the critics accused Marmarinos of having caused the 'fragmentation of the text to the extent of incomprehension' (Loïzou 1998) and decried his 'hollow pyrotechnics' (Andrianou 1998); similarly, his *Agamemnon* was dismissed as 'aesthetic defecation' (Georgousopoulos 1998) and 'maltreatment' (Georgousopoulos 2000) of the Aeschylean text. One reviewer blames the rock music used in *The Suppliants* for obliterating the 'stillness [*statikotita*] of the *monumental* theatre,' (Thymeli, *Rizospastis* 2006 [*my emphasis*]). The critics did not fail to recognize the affinities between Marmarinos's stagings and postmodern theatre, but these affinities were deplored as a threat to the ancient theatre as much as to the Greek texts:

Marmarinos is a conscious postmodernist. He deliberately disrespects the texts, because he considers them to be dead, outdated, didactic. He sets the temple ablaze in order to build upon its ruins his postmodern palace of kitch. (Georgousopoulos 1998)

As the above excerpts imply, the Greek Establishment defines the classical text through its resistance rather than its availability to transformation. Roland Barthes (1977: 155–69) introduces a notion of the Text, which is characterized by indeterminacy and open-endedness, and counterposes it to the static Work. According to Barthes, the Text is 'experienced only in an activity of production.' (ibid.: 157). No other text could exemplify Barthes's Text more suitably than the classical text, which is by definition evasive due to the multiple interpretative layers attributed to it by the long philological and performance history. Nevertheless, the traditional discourse and practice in modern Greece advocates the view of the classical text as Work, thus denying any dynamic relationship between the dramatic text and the performance. In

most Greek productions the *mise-en-scène* reproduces a view of the tragic text which is closer to the category of the Work. Marmarinos's productions, by contrast, unveiled the potentials of Greek plays to fulfil Barthes's idea of the Text.

Marmarinos's stated intention was to 'scrape the scale' (Marmarinos 1998a)²¹ that the long performance history has deposited upon Greek tragedy in modern Greece. More specifically, the director argued that the classical texts should primarily be reclaimed from the tradition of the National Theatre, which, in his view, still bears the influence of the German School of the 1930s.²² The intention of 'scraping the scale' is reminiscent of Patris Pavis's remark on classical drama:

For a long time criticism of the classics and interpretation of *mise-en-scène* have acted as if time had done no more than cover the text with layers of dust; in order to make the text respectable, it was enough to clean up and get rid of the deposits which history, layers of interpretation, and hermeneutic sediment had left on an essentially untouched text. (1986:5)

Pavis associates the aspiration to uncover the essential text with Modernism, and identifies the tendency to historicize the dust, by exposing elements of the history of the text, as postmodern. Marmarinos did not mean to remove the filters which lie between the classical texts and the contemporary reception in order to reach an essential text. The performance tradition he contested was precisely grounded upon the conviction that the proper staging offers a revival of the authentic tragic text. In marked contrast to the view of the classical text as a monument to be uncovered and reconstituted by the *mise-en-scène*, Marmarinos's treatment of Greek tragedy was to a large extent a reordering of textual fragments.

The display of the fragment as a means to reveal the Utopia of reviving the ancient text was also employed by Michael Grüber in his production of the *Bacchae*, part of the *Antikenproject I* of the Berlin Schaubühne in 1974 (see Fischer-Lichte 1999: 12–18). Yet, Marmarinos took a step further in dispensing with the essentialist view of the classical past. While Grüber's modernist poetics affirm the idea of the authentic, albeit alien and inaccessible, ancient text, Marmarinos exhibited the creative and discursive processes which constitute the classical text. His productions unravelled these processes by taking recourse to the variations, differences and affinities which mark the theatrical and intellectual history of Greek tragedy.

A plethora of explicit references to past productions and adaptations of the classical texts, which were interwoven in Marmarinos's productions, shifted the emphasis from universal meanings of Greek tragedy to the diachronic metamorphoses of the classical texts. Tony Harrison's *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* in 1985, written five years before Marmarinos's staging of *Medea*, demonstrates a similar view of the classical text. Harrison's libretto uses fragments from Euripides' and Seneca's eponymous dramas as well as from modern rewritings of Medea's myth, all of which are quoted in the original languages (Harrison 1986).

A theatre critic recognizes the following quotations from previous productions in Marmarinos's *Electra*:

The 'monster' pieced together by Marmarinos includes scenes from *Agamemnon* by Stein, the mannequin-like stills of the chorus were evocative of Bob Wilson's works, the entrance of the sleeping Orestes (!) was a loan from Sturua's *Electra*, the mixed chorus [...] was a loan from the *Electra* directed by Lyubimov [...] and the small cement hand-cart that brought

Electra on stage reminded us of *Heracles* by Tony Harrison (who had put silos of the cement enterprise 'Heracles' on stage). (Georgousopoulos 1998)

Another reviewer identifies the bottles of mineral water that the actors were holding as an allusion to Langhoff's *Bacchae* (Andrianou 1998), where a large advertisement for mineral water was part of the set. Marmarinos welcomes the idea of some visible loans from the stage tradition of Greek tragedy, and explains that the table of the chorus in his *Electra*—and apparently, in his *Agamemnon*—was a loan from Stein's production of the *Oresteia*.²³ (see image 2). Similarly, the cigarette that the messenger was smoking in *The Suppliants* was reminiscent of Robert Sturua's *Electra* in 1987, where the messenger's smoking of a cigarette in the orchestra of Epidaurus scandalized the audience. Dramatic works which provide important reference points in the reception history of Greek tragedy are often used or alluded to in Marmarinos's productions of tragedy. Marmarinos staged Euripides' *Medea* concurrently with *Medeamaterial* by Heiner Müller in 1991–2; the flies around the dead corpse of Clytaemnestra in his production of *Electra* evoked Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Mouches*.



Image 2. The table of the chorus in Marmarinos's *Electra*, Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus (1998) (Archive of Teatro Thiseion)

What is most important is that Marmarinos does not associate ancient Greek tragedy with the modern Greek cultural tradition. His productions did not integrate elements from Greek folk culture and rituals in the performance of ancient drama in the mode of Koun. Far from being an attempt to unveil any undisturbed continuity between ancient and modern Greece or to pronounce the links between different phases of Greek cultural history, Marmarinos acknowledged the input of European dramatists and directors in the *Nachleben* of Greek tragedy. Such a stance seems to be pertinent in the light of Ioanna Remediaki's assertion that:

... ancient Greek tragedy returned on the modern Greek stage in European attire. That's where its charm lies. How we can nowadays speak of 'exclusive heirs' and 'legitimate and illegitimate children' of ancient Greek dramatic poetry is an interesting question. (2004: 161)

Alluding not merely to the performance history of tragedy, but also to the peculiar ideological parameters of its reception in modern Greece, Marmarinos's production of *Medea* in 1993 amalgamated the Euripidean text, enunciated in the Erasmian pronunciation, a modern Greek translation and a translation in *katharevousa*²⁴ from 1901 by the classicist Georgios Mistriotis. The use of this obsolete translation was not without significance: Mistriotis is associated with the first conflict surrounding the performance of Greek tragedy in modern Greece. He was at the forefront of conservatives, who advocated the performance of tragedy in the original language. His *Etaireia hyper tis didaskalias ton archaion dramaton* [Company for the staging of ancient drama] put on tragedy in ancient Greek. Mistriotis's followers reacted violently to the production of the *Oresteia* in 1903 by Thomas Oikonomou because the director had used the moderate translation by Georgios Sotiriadis, and the ensuing turmoil led to one fatality and several injuries (see Sideris 1976: 186–99).

The use of heterogeneous materials from various cultural spheres created a performance text which, like Barthes's Text, appeared to be: 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.' (Barthes 1977: 146). English nursery rhymes and extracts from the *Barber of Seville* by Gioacchino Rossini were integrated into the performance of *Medea*, while in *Electra* a song from Auschwitz was hummed by Pylades and a nursery rhyme was sung by a little girl. The song 'Heavenly Salvation' from Kurt Weil's opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany*, popular and traditional Greek songs, the Greek National Anthem and an extract from the memoirs of a captive in Auschwitz were all interwoven within the dramatic text. In both *Agamemnon* and *The Suppliants* songs composed by the actors were included in the performance.

The technique of *pastiche* provided the means of an encounter between popular and high culture. The fusion of *Agamemnon* with the album by the American rock group Tuxedo Moon, *Ghost Sonata* lay at the very core of Marmarinos's staging. The show opened with an execution of Tuxedo Moon's *Ghost Sonata* in the form of a rock concert. In *The Suppliants* the arrangement of several platforms on the Epidaurian orchestra, the presence of live musicians and the lighting design were more evocative of a rock concert than a performance of Greek tragedy. Although the use of rock music and aesthetics found some response, especially among young theatre-goers, the gatekeepers of tradition could only react against what appeared to them as a corruption of the classical text.

TRAGIC ROLES MADE OF ACTORS' STUFF

The current discourse about ancient tragedy in modern Greece not only advocates the idea of a monumental text, but also credits the tragic roles with a monumental gravity. Playing a tragic role, especially in the ancient theatre of Epidaurus, is supposed to be the ultimate accolade for a Greek actor. As Ioanna Roilou notes:

[t]he involvement of an artist in productions of tragedy became, and still is, by itself a form of consecration, the crowning of a long successful career, whilst the title 'great tragedian' singles out the artist that bears it even today. (1999: 199)

The monumentalization of the tragic roles is not irrelevant to the practical (open-air) and ideological (monumental) implications of the performance in the ancient theatres.

The development of an acting style which befits the high status of the text as well as the particularities of the ancient theatre is a constant question for theatre practitioners. Critics often refer to the legendary renderings of tragic roles by past actors such as Alexis Minotis and Katina Paxinou, in order to laud the established tradition and often to reject alternative acting styles. Marmarinos's dialogue with postmodernism resulted in a subversive approach to the impersonation of the tragic role. In the same way that in his stagings the text is not the ideal that the *mise-en-scène* needs to embody, the tragic character is no more the archetype that the actor ventures to represent. On the very contrary, it is through the actor's self that the tragic role is constituted.

The engagement between the actor and the role has been discussed and practised by eminent modernist theatre artists. The performance theorist Philip Auslander examines the conception of the actor by Konstantin Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht and Jerzy Grotowski vis-à-vis Jacques Derrida's deconstructive theory, arguing that none of these directors corresponds to a postmodern conception of the self, since their practice reiterates the notion of logocentrism, merely conveying the centre from the dramatic text and the role to the actor (Auslander 1997: 28–38). According to Auslander, the psychological method of Stanislavski privileges the actor's subconscious, while Brecht's expectation of the actor to be in a position to comment critically on the role creates an additional persona mediating between the actor and the role; Grotowski, on the other hand, confronts the role as a medium of self-revelation and sacrifice of the actor. Marmarinos's work, by contrast, illuminates the actor-role relationship from a different perspective.

In Marmarinos's stagings of tragedy the wedding of actor and role was achieved through the use of techniques of devised theatre and performance art which contest the authority of the director-*auteur*. The exploitation of the artist's impulses and specialties, which is innate in the art of theatre, becomes a concrete method in Marmarinos's work with the cast. Marmarinos conceives the role, taking into account the special skills of the actor who performs it, as, for instance, the gifted voice of the actor playing Aegisthus in *Electra* became an indication of his power when he entered the stage singing. Moreover, the performance is a shared process in which the actors-participants are allowed to make their own contributions, from personal gestures to lines and songs written by themselves.

In Marmarinos's stagings of tragedy the construction of the role does not consist in founding the role on the self or the emotional life of the actor in the mode of the Stanislavskian System, but on his/her artistic background. A clear example of this way of working with the actors was the assignment of the roles of Clytaemnestra and Electra to Nonika Galinea and Amalia Moutousi respectively, who are actually mother and daughter. Opposing the psychoanalytic implications that this choice seems to have, Marmarinos explained that the performance did not aim at exposing in any way the relationship between the two women. In this case as well, what the director actually tried to exploit in *Electra* was the different acting style that the two actresses represent. Although Galinea and Moutousi are both graduates of the Theatro Technis of Karolos Koun, Marmarinos explains that 'Nonika is the opposite pole of Amalia',²⁵ since the former belongs to a generation of instinctive and empirical actors, whereas the latter has a deft command of various acting techniques.

The attribution of the role of Pylades to the German author Adrian Frieling was dictated by a similar concept. Marmarinos (1998c) wanted Frieling to function as an 'inoculation', introducing elements of a foreign school that would have an impact on the rest of the cast. Indeed, the tradition of Epic Theatre that Frieling is familiar with

influenced the acting style of the actor playing Orestes, who rendered a less 'psychological' Orestes than the usual representations of the character. In *Agamemnon* the choice of the actress Theodora Tzimou in the role of Cassandra appears to be related to Marmarinos's portrayal of the tragic heroine as a refugee from Eastern Europe. Indeed, Tzimou had played the part of a Russian prostitute in Konstantinos Giannaris's film *Apo tin akri tis polis* [*From the Edge of the City*], released in 1998.

The native language of the foreign actors participating in Marmarinos's productions became an element organically built in the performance. In the production of *Electra* the choice of Frieling in the role of Pylades became a playful suggestion on Pylades' much analysed silence, as if Pylades remained silent due to the actor's very incapability of speaking Greek. Similarly, the role of Agamemnon in Marmarinos's production of the eponymous play was played by Blaine Reininger, a non-Greek speaker. Agamemnon's parts were rendered in English, and at some points the translation was projected on the wall behind him.

The foundation of the dramatic persona not only upon the self but also on the public image of the actor, was among the most dynamic elements in Marmarinos's work on tragedy. Discussing the conceptualization of the body by modernist theatre theorists, Auslander concludes that:

[w]hereas the modernist artists believe that the ideological and cultural codes may be transcended, or even annulled, through transgression, the postmodernist artist recognises that she must work within the codes that define the cultural landscape. (Auslaner 1997: 93)

In Marmarinos's *Electra* the presentation of Clytaemnestra was founded on the glamorous image of Galinea, who is a popular star of the commercial theatre. Marmarinos has often referred to his attempt to take advantage of this image instead of trying to suppress or eliminate it, since it was not incompatible with the idea of a queen. The director confessed that he had been moved by the following statement of Galinea:

Sometimes I don't know who I am, and I mean: from the one side, I wanna get rid of my image, from the other, this is not so easy and that is, of course, because for that image people come to see me.²⁶

The assignment of the title role to the rock singer Blaine Reininger in *Agamemnon* was the most palpable paradigm of Marmarinos's work with the actors. Both the artistic personality and the public image of the rock musician became part of the show. The lines of Agamemnon were mostly sung in the form of a rock-concert. Marmarinos discusses the way in which the participation of a rock-idol in the performance could affect the impersonation of the tragic hero, evoking Barthes's (1977: 165) construal of the myth as a socially determined product of mass culture: 'I thought that it would be interesting if a non-professional actor would lend his own mythology to a role like Agamemnon, who is in need of a mythology.' (Marmarinos 1999)²⁷ (see image 3).

The emphasis on the individual element as a means to contest the monumentality of the performance of tragedy was particularly effective in the treatment of the chorus. For Marmarinos, the chorus is a group of individuals:

If we go to a bus station in a rush hour we have a tragic chorus before us: people maintaining their individuality under a common condition. When the bus comes they act as a group, the door opens and they get on. However, we can approach and see that the individuality of each one is maintained. When

we look from a distance the common providence is the dominant one.
(Marmarinos 1998b)



Image 3 Blaine Reininger in the role of Agamemnon, Marmarinos's *Agamemnon-The Ghost Sonata*, Teatro Thiseion (2000) (Archive of Teatro Thiseion)

Marmarinos broke with the tradition of the National Theatre by replacing, in both choral parts and episodes, any kind of choreography or group-formations as well as conventional signing with songs or short scenes performed by two or three chorus members. Furthermore, some of them were assigned an individual position in the performance—for example, a woman having a hysterical crisis in *Electra* or a solo voice singing a ballad in *The Suppliants*.

In the production of *Electra*, the individuality of the chorus' members complemented the display of the actors' personal data. The projection of the actors' forenames and the street numbers of their houses onto the trees behind the theatre of Epidauros and the enunciation of their names by a little girl left little space for the austerity and detachment that usually characterizes the productions of Greek tragedy, especially in Epidauros.²⁸ Rather than a means to distract the spectator in order to undermine the text—as argued by the critics—or to create a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, this device was employed to make tragedy 'sound familiar.'²⁹ Especially in the case of the chorus, this device promoted a close relationship between it and the audience, something that might have been an attempt to recapture the close relationship of the chorus to the Athenian citizens in the context of the ancient theatre festival. Marmarinos's strategy of creating intimacy between the actors and the spectators was pushed further in *The Suppliants*, where his mother and two of her neighbours appeared in the performance. The programme of the production compiled interviews with well known personalities as well as anonymous citizens who had been asked to share their ideas on various issues, such as the state of the suppliant or the refugee, and the role of religion in contemporary societies.

In Marmarinos's productions of Greek tragedy the method of basing the role on the artistic/public image of the actor complements the display of the various discourses and representations which constitute the classical text. Marmarinos did not aspire to reveal the actor's authentic self beyond the social and cultural codes within which the

personality is inscribed; nor did he try to reach beyond the intellectual and artistic processes which define Greek tragedy in search of an essential tragic text. On the contrary, his productions confronted these codes and processes as a source of play and experimentation. The interface between several selves—the fictitious persona of the role, the artistic, commercial and real-life persona of the actor—as well as the interplay of different diachronic refigurations of Greek tragedy renounced the pursuit of authenticity, which permeates the monumental revivals of Greek tragedy in Greece.

CONCLUSION

The manifestation of postmodernism in contemporary Greece often involves a renegotiation with the ancient past. In this respect, any postmodern refiguration of Greek antiquity would appear to challenge certain convictions about Greekness, no matter how explicitly it addresses issues of identity. The postmodern elements in Marmarinos's productions of Greek tragedy undermine the monumentality which Greeks tend to ascribe to ancient tragedy, and by implication, they challenge the Greek exceptionalism which is grounded on the possession of the classical heritage. Although in this particular context Marmarinos's productions could not meet with a favourable reception, they made manifest that the encounter between postmodernism and Greek tragedy can disclose particular qualities of the texts, rendering them more contemporary than traditional discourses would allow.

Marmarinos's stagings are representative of a broader trend in the reception of Greek tragedy in the last few decades.³⁰ The use of the text, which was demonized by the critics, in fact, characterizes readings, productions and adaptations of the Greek plays outside Greece, problematizing Western attitudes towards the classics in a fundamental sense. If Marmarinos's stagings were deplored as being disrespectful to the classical text, postmodern adaptations of Greek tragedy appear to be no less unsettling in other contexts. Discussing contemporary responses to the classics in Greece, Gonda van Steen (2002:177) argues that: '[w]ith modern Greece as a touchstone, we may come closer to understanding what stakes have been vested in our presentation of sources and what ideologies underlie our own and our audience's historicizing of the past.' An exploration of the wider resistance to postmodern practices in refiguring Greek tragedy can uncover the investments that Western culture bestows upon the idea of a timeless and untouchable classical text.³¹

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ENDNOTES

¹ The bibliography on modern Greece's relationship with the classical past is vast. For an introduction with helpful methodological remarks, see the special issue of the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 20.2, October 2002. Klironomos (2002), Lambropoulos (2002) and Jusdanis (2004) discuss different uses of classical antiquity in Greek modernist and postmodern poetry.

² The emergence of postmodernism in Greece is a complicated issue. Jusdanis (1987) denies the possibility of a Greek postmodern on the basis that the manifestations of Modernism in Greece have been particularly uneven; instead of promoting and celebrating the autonomy of the artistic product, Modernist expression in Greece usually takes the form of a contemplation of modern Greek identity. On the other hand, it has been argued that the focus of the Greek Modernists on the notion of Greekness necessitates and conditions the postmodern revisiting of modern Greek identity, see e.g. Katsan (2002).

³ On the negativity of the Greek critics to theatrical experimentations with ancient Greek tragedy, see Patsalidis (1997: 11–36).

⁴ Marmarinos's project on *Medea* began in 1990 with a staging of Euripides' play; an adaptation called *Medea of a Suffocating Close Space* followed the very next year; in 1992–93 Marmarinos

staged the Euripidean text concurrently with Heiner Müller's *Medeamaterial* and a pantomime drawing on Medea's myth under the general title *Medeas*; finally, in 1994 he produced *Medea III* or *Fragments of Medea*, subtitled *a Play for Actors, Recorded tape and Text by Euripides – Reminding of a Tragedy*.

⁵ The productions of *Agamemnon* illustrated the idea of work-in-progress even more, since the audience had the chance to see a part of the play in June of 1999 before the final production opened at the beginning of the following year. Marmarinos rendered the third episode, the *parodos* and the third *stasimon* in the form of an experiment, displaying key elements of his concept.

⁶ Marmarinos and Koek's *The Suppliants* premièred in Leiden in April 2006 and toured across Holland before it was performed at the Ancient Theatre of Epidauros in July.

⁷ See, e.g., Kritikos (1991), Georgousopoulos (1998) and Andrianou (1998).

⁸ Marmarinos (1998b). [The translations from the Greek in the quoted passages are mine, except in the case of bilingual editions].

⁹ This partly reflects the broader lack of Greek critical evaluations of contemporary productions of ancient tragedy. Patsalidis (1997), 11–36 also points out how this lack is in marked contrast to the large amount of press criticism.

¹⁰ For a genealogy of staging tragedy in modern Greece, see the full-length book of Sideris (1976), Bakopoulou-Halls (1987: 261–95), Mavromoustakos (1997: 77–89) [bilingual edition] and Andreadis (2005: 21–66) [bilingual edition]. On the Epidauros and Athens Festivals in particular, see Mavromoustakos (2005: 101–3). See also van Steen's (2000) study on the reception of Aristophanes in Greece.

¹¹ Bakounakis (1995: 75) notes that: 'Minotis took from the beginning the liberty to restore the function of the myth closer to the ancient original, emphasising essential parts of the action and intervening to the finale by using the *deus ex machina* [...]'.
¹² See Stein's note in the programme of *Penthesilea* (2002: 7–8 and 47).

¹³ On the use of ancient amphitheatres in the modern era, see Mavromoustakos (1997).

¹⁴ The tendency to monumentalize Greek tragedy might culminate in modern Greece, but it is by no means confined particularly to Greece or to the modern era. Easterling (2005) illustrates how the Aeschylean *bigness*, which is parodied by Aristophanes, was gradually associated with volume and grandeur in post-classical antiquity, corresponding to the change in aesthetics. This analogy would appear to confirm van Steen's claim that the paradigm of the reception of the classical past in modern Greece can unmask the intellectual processes which have participated in investing the classics with the position they acquire within the Western cultural edifice. See van Steen (2002).

¹⁵ See also 33–6, 104, 111, 115–6, 156.

¹⁶ Patsalidis (2004: 243–62) refers to the institution of theatrical festivals and their link to the tourist enterprise.

¹⁷ Apart from the reviews, the videotape of the production in the Athens Theatre Museum provides interesting testimony of the reception of Langhoff's production, since it records some negative reactions of the audience too.

¹⁸ His production of *Medea* in 1991 was entitled *Mideia asfyktika kleistou chorou* [*Medea of a Suffocating Closed Space*].

¹⁹ This is one of the earliest uses of the term 'postmodernism' in Greek theatre criticism.

²⁰ Georgousopoulos (2006) compares Marmarinos and Koek's production to *The Suppliants* of the Theatrikos Organismos Kyprou in 1978, arguing that the recourse to elements from Greek folk culture in the latter was far more pertinent to ancient tragedy than the postmodern *pastiche* created by Koek and Marmarinos.

²¹ Cf. Langhoff (1997): 'I belong [...] to those that want to defend the texts from "tradition" and from those that bring their verdict on productions by judging whether they correspond to "the spirit of the text" or whether they are "in accordance with tradition" or whether they "respect the text". None of these things is based on the text; *but rather on what has been done on the text up to now.*' [*my emphasis*].

²² On the influence on Wilhelm Leyhausen and Max Reinhardt on Dimitris Rondiris and Fotos Politis, see Mavromoustakos (2004).

²³ Marmarinos (1998b) and Papastathis's (1998) documentary on *Electra*.

²⁴ *Katharevousa* is a term used to define a specific form of modern Greek that is largely based on ancient grammatical structures and vocabulary and is contrasted with *demotike*, which is the vernacular Greek.

²⁵ Papastathis (1998), documentary on *Electra*.

²⁶ Papastathis (1998), documentary on *Electra*.

²⁷ According to Reininger himself, Marmarinos chose him because he recognised a basic quality of Agamemnon in him, 'a kind of melancholy.' See Reininger (2000).

²⁸ The programme of the production mentioned the zodiac signs of the cast, something that did not escape derisive comments.

²⁹ Programme of *Electra*. Marmarinos has often articulated his conviction that tragedy must sound familiar to the spectator.

³⁰ The comparison between Marmarinos's productions and other recent European productions of Greek drama extend beyond the purposes of this article, but deserve further exploration.

³¹ I would like to thank Dr Fiona Macintosh, Professor Lorna Hardwick, Professor Platon Mavromoustakos, Dr Dimitris Papanikolaou and Dr Elton Barker for their insightful comments and suggestions. Many thanks to Carol Gillespie and Rena Fourtouni for their help. I am grateful to Michael Marmarinos for the access to the archive of Theatro Thiseion and the permission to reproduce the images.