Bruce Heiden
(Columbus, Ohio)

Emotion, acting, and the Athenian *ethos*

> The performance is a happening. It is the intrinsically poetic moment; the moment when, with the spectators' presence contributing the final drop, the chemical precipitate appears. The performance is an act of love: one gives, one gives oneself, exchanges and communes.
>
> Jean-Louis Barrault

What did it feel like to perform in a tragedy at the City Dionysia in 5th century Athens? Did the performers feel stage fright before or even during the performance? Were they filled with anticipation that their effort would be recognized by a prize when the competition had ended? Did the performers feel a sense of love for the audience to whom they gave an experience of such profound emotion? Did they empathize with the characters they played, share the shame of Oedipus, the bitterness of Clytemnestra, the frustration of Haemon? And if they did, how did these feelings consort with their feelings about the performance itself? How did it feel to play a whole succession of roles in single day, to perform as an old man in the *Agamemnon,* as a barbarian slave girl in the *Choephoroe,* as an Erinys in the *Eumenides,* and finally as a satyr in the *Proteus?* How did it feel to play several parts in the course of a single play?

Classicists have seldom worried themselves over questions such as these, even in the past fifteen years, when the aspiration for a holistic interpretation of Greek literature has broadened the scope of exegesis to include genre, social context, and actual performance. Undoubtedly one reason for the neglect of the experience of the performers of Greek drama has been the paucity of ancient testimony about it, a gap in the evidence that is especially severe precisely where the literary remains of the drama are the richest, 5th century

Athens[1]. Holistic interpretation will inevitably be a struggle for classicists, working as we do with a highly fragmentary historical record, and despite our awareness of the need for an inclusive picture the focus of research may tend to remain trained on the areas where ancient testimony leads the way. Thus it has been easy to scant the performers themselves even while taking ever more serious account of their costumes, gestures, and dancing formations[2]. Nevertheless the performers of the Greek dramas were people, not puppets, and if we aim to understand Athenian drama in all its complexity we will need to conceptualize that distinction and incorporate it into our models of the theatrical event. While this conceptualization will necessarily be conjectural, theoretical, and tentative, it may at least save us from assuming that the Greek theater artists worked in an inanimate medium or that their audiences responded to one.

This paper, therefore, will propose a general way of imagining the experience of the performers of the Athenian plays, the choreuts as well as the actors. It will suggest that our appreciation of both the aesthetic and the ideological effects of Athenian drama can be enhanced if we experimentally suppose that this experience constituted the drama's *raison d'être*, so that the playwright in creating the drama in essence scripted an experience for the performers to go through, so that the audience could see them going through it and share it with them. Tragedy, satyr play, and comedy contribute to this experience differently, but in the end the experience is always supposed to be generally the same. I will characterize this experience broadly as voluntarily accepted humiliation or humbling, a public recognition, intimately felt, that one is nothing more than a mortal and all that that implies in pathos, confusion, and shame. It was probably intended to encourage a feeling of solidarity among the Athenians, to cultivate a habit of self-criticism, to facilitate an honest flexibility in the conduct of civic business, and of course to give pleasure. The structure of this experience resembles that of initiation rites, and may have been

[1] For the documented facts on Greek actors, see Ghiron-Bistagne 1976 and P.D. Arnott 1989:44-105. On the feelings of the actors, see Stanford 1983:8-10.

[2] See especially Taplin 1978 and P.D. Arnott 1989.

adapted from such rites. But the drama was bound to differ from traditional initiations because of the relatively open definition of status in fifth century Athens, the most liberal of ancient cities.

I will begin sketching this model of the Athenian dramatic performances by trying to identify the basic features of that kind of activity which we call «performance». A performance involves a person or persons doing something so that they can be observed doing it by some person or persons, who may or may not be identical to the performers themselves[3]. Both performer and audience will understand, at least in retrospect if not all throughout the performance, that the activity performed was undertaken so that the audience could observe it. Both performer and audience also understand, again sometimes in retrospect, what particular activity constituted the performance, and this understanding establishes a scenario of the performance.

In the ancient Athenian theater this scenario assumes a form that is quite specific and easily observed. First of all the performers and audience convene in a structure designed especially for watching performance, the *theatron*, on a day especially designated for performance. Thus right from the start both performers and audience understand that the activities of the performers in the orchestra have been undertaken so that the audience can observe them. The performers come before the audience clothed in costume, a form of dress specifically designed or adapted for the theater and intended to meet certain expectations of the audience there. The performers' movements, which have been choreographed beforehand, are drawn from a repertoire of movements which are functionally exactly like pieces of costuming, that is, tokens adapted for use between performers and audience. The words the performers speak conform in minute detail to a memorized and rehearsed script, and this script itself conforms more generally to certain generic rules of subject matter, meter, duration, and so forth.

[3] Cf. the definition of Schechner 1988:30n10: «a performance is an activity done by an individual or group in the presence of and for another individual or group». Schechner also discusses other definitions of performance.

The essential thing about the scenario of a performance, the costume, the gestures, the script, and so forth, is that none of its elements can be ordinary personal attributes of the performing artist when he is not performing; they are possessions of the theater, not of the performer, and their value or meaning as performance is determined solely in that dialogue with the audience for the sake of which they exist. Even if a performer should adopt some piece of ordinary behavior or surprise the audience with some innovation, the success of the adoption or innovation would depend entirely upon the audience's acceptance of it as an element of the performance and not as some peculiarity of the artist[4]. And in fact one of the fundamental pleasures that audiences take in watching performances is just that of seeing fellow human beings subject themselves to the impersonal scenario of the performance, to do what does not come naturally and is therefore difficult; and the more elaborate and difficult the rules governing the performance, the more enjoyment the audience derives from seeing them successfully followed. To quote the drama theorist Michael Goldman, «Theater is here and now, difficulty being overcome before our eyes»[5]. I assume that this was just as great a part of the experience of performance for the ancients as it is for us, and perhaps even greater for them, since we are accustomed to mechanically doctored performances and in any case have come to take the professionalism of virtuoso performers for granted.

Since the scenario of the performance is necessarily separate from any particular performance or performer, it follows that, at least in theory, the same scenario could be repeated by different performers in different places and at different times. The scenario therefore has a paradigmatic, impersonal, atemporal quality that no particular performer, *qua* human being, can have; but *qua* performer, he can acquire some of it by performing. In this sense any successful performer acquires a certain aura that can be regarded as godlike or

[4] For example, if an actor quietly fidgets with his costume, the audience probably will not construe this as part of the performance. But such behavior, like any behavior, *may* be part of the performance if the actor *intends* it to be seen.

[5] Goldman 1975:86.

mythic, since the measure of his success is the audience's acceptance of him as a fulfilment of an impersonal paradigm, the role[6]. My description of this aura as godlike or mythic, which is a metaphor when speaking of the modern theater, is somewhat less so when applied to the ancient Greek theater, because the scenarios of the Greek dramatic performances usually incorporated myths about gods and heroes, so that for the ancient Greek performer successful performance might consist precisely in achieving acceptance as an embodiment of a mythic paradigm, in being hypothetically identified with it. (I stress *hypothetically* because the audience knows at all times that the identification is a theatrical pretense.) And through this hypothetical identification the performer, like the mythic heroes reenacted in the performance, could win lasting recognition, either individually or as a member of the performing group, for in competition with others he could win a prize of victory awarded by the city[7]. Thus in furnishing a role the hero serves as a paradigm for the performance, and the performers who successfully identify themselves with the heroes become recognized as virtual heroes and paradigms themselves. In this respect there is a close parallelism between the dramatic competitions and the athletic competitions. And even the heroes of myth were supposed to become heroes by reenacting heroic scenarios, as we see in the *Iliad* whenever Nestor uses a story about the warriors of his generation as a motivational tool[8].

The quasi-heroic stature of the performer has a downside, however. In attempting to identify himself hypothetically with the

[6] Cf. Goldman 1975:123.

[7] Strictly speaking, only choregoi, poets and protagonists could be recognized as victors. But I assume that all the participants in a successful production would have informally shared in its glory. The Pronomos Vase shows that a whole ensemble of dramatic performers could have been represented and commemorated together, and that the names of chorus members could have been inscribed on private if not public monuments. Winkler 1985:39 plausibly suggests that the vase is the victory dedication of a successful ensemble.

[8] *Il.* 1.54-84, 11.670-764. More generally, cf. the discussion in Nagy 1979:292-295 of the hero as the *therapon* or «ritual substitute» of Ares. We might say that while the hero serves as the *therapon* of the god, the actor in turn serves as the *therapon* of the hero.

paradigm and presenting himself to the audience in this guise, the performer, like the hero, also runs a risk. His performance, that is his effort to enact the scenario and be accepted as its virtual incarnation, may be judged less satisfactory than that of another performer, and in the competition for honor he will be a loser. Or, even worse, he may violate the scenario in some egregious way, for example by mispronouncing a word, as Hegelochos did when acting in Euripides' *Orestes* in 408, and become like Hegelochos a paradigm of disgrace[9]. Aspiring to identify oneself even hypothetically with an immortal paradigm was a presumptuous act[10], and those who let their humanity show too obviously were likely to feel the resentment of the audience. Thus we should imagine the dramatic performer as engaged, much like an athlete or epic warrior, in a dangerous competition for honor. In each case the competitor seeks to be identified with a paradigm and runs the risk of defeat and embarrassment if his identification falls short of a current standard of completeness. Under these circumstances we may imagine that stage fright was a very real component of the ancient performance, and perhaps even a necessary one. The sense of danger inherent in performing must have inspired performers with a fanatical ambition to fulfill the paradigm in every conceivable detail, and it must have provided the enormous access of energy needed to enact every refinement of the paradigm and to control every inner impulse that might interfere with that enactment[11].

[9] On Hegelochos see Ar. *Ra.* 303-304 and the scholium *ad loc.* Cf. Luc. *Salt.* 76, which relates several anecdotes in which the ballet audiences of Antioch ridicule dancers' physiques.

[10] Cf. the discussion in Goldman 1975:77-81 of the «recognized risk of blasphemy» involved in the performance of the medieval sacred dramas. But by «immortal paradigm» I do not necessarily mean the paradigm of an immortal (e.g. Dionysos in Euripides' *Bacchae*) but any paradigm, since a paradigm as such is immortal. Thus to play even a humble role might be seen as overreaching.

[11] Aaron 1986 offers a brilliant and subtle analysis of stage fright among modern actors. He argues that stage fright is essential to the art of acting and an element of successful performance. I am aware of no ancient testimony of stage fright, but I see no reason to suppose, as has been suggested to me, that it is a culturally determinate phenomenon unknown to the public and oral culture of the ancients. At *Pro Cluentio* 51 Cicero states that, whenever he begins to speak in public, he experiences intense fear, since he feels

Thus the ancient performer can be regarded as a kind of hero, and insofar as he received public honors for his performance he was so regarded. Both the performers and the most important characters of the tragedies were heroic. But the heroic characters of the tragedies and the heroic theater artist were not as a rule heroes of the same kind, for the performers were not tragic heroes. If I may propose a reductive but I hope useful schema, the tragic hero can be regarded as a kind of performer who wins recognition by seeking identification with a certain paradigm, often but not always a divinity[12]. He is typically «godlike» and he may even wear a costume or prop that identifies him with a god or at least places him in a role[13]. Thus kings like Agamemnon and Menelaus manifest their authority by displaying the scepter of Zeus, Hippolytus wears hunting garb like that of Artemis and imitates her virginity, the veil of Phaedra identifies her as a modest wife[14]. But tragedy befalls these heroes when, at some point, they become unable to maintain acceptable identification with their role, and this inability, which reveals them as merely human after all, overtakes them against their wishes and often in the face of their determined efforts to live up to their paradigm. The performer, however, understands that he can identify himself with the paradigm only hypothetically, and that this hypothetical identification is a privilege that he can enjoy only for the prescribed duration of the performance. When the play is over the performer must cease his identification with the paradigm, and both

his entire being coming under the judgement of his listeners. He runs the risk of seeming to overreach himself and being charged with *impudentia* as well as that of seeming to do less than his best and being charged with *negligentia.* See also *de Orat.* 1.121.

[12] Cf. Nagy 1979:295: «As a generic warrior the hero of epic qualifies as a *therapon* [i.e. ritual substitute] of Ares». Cf. also Whitman 1951:73-74: «The heroic assumption means precisely this — the possession of a standard which becomes a kind of fatal necessity ... [The hero's] standard, his vision of himself, brings him near to the gods...». The ideas of the hero as *substitute* for a god, of his action as meeting a *standard* or fulfilling a *vision,* all suggest to me a scripted role to be acted out.

[13] Cf. Nagy 1979:294 on the application of the phrase Ἶσος Ἄρηι to those heroes in the *Iliad* who wear the armor of Achilles, namely Achilles himself, Patroklos, and Hektor.

[14] P.D. Arnott 1989:166-179 has a valuable discussion of the connection between character and costume in Greek tragedy.

he and the audience understand and accept this as a fundamental condition of the performance[15]. The performer who enacts the tragic hero, moreover, voluntarily enacts the hero's change of role, his fall from his paradigm and consequent humbling, and although this enactment is make-believe, it still affects both the performer's feelings and the public's perception of him[16]. Thus while the tragic hero is characterized by an identification with a paradigm that exceeds the scope of performance, one that forgets its human features and dreams of carrying on its identification indefinitely, until a slip occurs and reveals the human being who was always there, the performer deliberately takes upon himself that very failure and makes a virtue of accepting humiliation and changing roles as required by the scenario[17].

[15] Were «curtain calls» part of the performances at the Athenian dramatic festivals in the 5th century? I am aware of no evidence touching this matter, although it is hard to imagine that audiences had no opportunity to express to the performers their appreciation of the show. For testimony of «curtain calls» in the 4th century and later, with discussion, see Ghiron-Bistagne 1976:106-107.

[16] On the feelings of the performers see Stanford 1983:8-10; Pl. *Ion* 535c on the rhapsode's feeling that he is performing the deeds he relates; Pl. *Rep.* 395c-d on how the guardians-in-training must not perform any shameful parts, lest the performance affect their character. On the public's perception, note that actors could carry with them nicknames that recalled their roles: Timotheos was known as σφαγεύς because of his performance in Sophocles' *Ajax* (Schol. Soph. *Ajax* 864), Demetrios was known as πέλεκυς, perhaps because of his portrayal of Clytemnestra (see O'Connor 1966:90, Schneider 1956:220).

[17] Thus the actor experiences two sorts of humbling: (1) that associated with the characters he plays, and (2) that of being a mortal rather than a paradigm. The latter humbling is implied by the changing of roles since a paradigm as such does not undergo change. I am attributing to the poets and performers, therefore, an assessment of acting that is nearly a reverse image of Plato's. For the poets it was a good thing to recognize and accept one's corporeality and mortality and thus not to hope to fulfil a paradigm. But for Plato, accepting corporeality and mortality was the last thing a man should wish to do. Plato claimed that a man's true self was an *immortal* soul that *could* know and assimilate itself to the paradigm of virtue. Thus in the ideal city of the *Republic* (itself a paradigm of justice), where each man may perform only one occupation, i.e. fulfil only one paradigm, the actor's diversity of roles makes his presence utterly undesirable (*Rep.* 397d-e). Plato treats the actor's multiplicity as inseparable from his performance of base roles since for Plato virtue is a unity.

For an ancient text displaying a sense of the theater close to the one I have suggested, cf. Luc. *Nec.* 15-16. Here the discovery that in the Underworld all are skeletons,

Role-changing is of course fundamental to all performance, since performance always consists of the performer appearing as the paradigm, and this skill the performer has of molding himself to a paradigm is, as we have said, one of the great pleasures of performance. To quote Michael Goldman again, «The actor — establishes before us a particularly interesting and energetic human being, who is not simply the actor and not properly the character, but the actor-as-character...»[18]. Audiences do not expect to see performers just being themselves, they want to see them performing as someone else. But this aspect of performance was particularly important in the dramatic competitions of 5th century Athens, because in the tetralogies the same troupe of performers would enact four different plays, belonging to two different genres, in succession. Thus every performer would play out at least four different paradigms during the course of the complete performance, and some would play out even more, since there was doubling of roles within each play.

To put it another way, while the tragic hero and the tragic performer both play roles, the tragic hero is deceived by his role, does not understand it as a role, while the performer understands his activity as one of assuming and changing roles. Now some critics have recognized this activity of the performer and likened him to dramatic intriguers such as Clytemnestra, Helen, and Odysseus, who also assume and change roles. In particular Froma Zeitlin's important essay «Playing the Other» has drawn attention to role-playing as the constitutive activity of the theater, and has argued that the Athenian theater is closely linked to the feminine partly on the grounds that Greek culture associated role-playing with the female[19]. I think that Zeitlin has a tremendously valuable insight here, but I would like to take issue with the way she has developed it. While it is true that both the theatrical performer and the archetypal

the beggar Iros indistinguishable from Alkinoos, leads Menippus to compare a human life to the performance of a tragic actor who at one moment appears as Cecrops and the next as a servant, and then finally when the play is over removes his costume and goes about in poverty and humility (πένης καὶ ταπεινός). The whole passage is worth careful study.

[18] Goldman 1975:6.

[19] Zeitlin 1985.

Greek female characteristically practice role-playing, and that the feminine therefore holds a privileged place in the Greek theatrical enterprise, the kind of role-playing and plotting exhibited by Zeitlin's female intriguer is nevertheless distinctly untheatrical, because it is not offered to an audience to be appreciated as an artistic performance; on the contrary, it intends to deceive and usually harm its object: to mention only one example, Clytemnestra does not dissimulate her feelings in order to entertain Agamemnon or teach him a lesson, but in order to kill him. In contrast the role-playing of the theater deceives no one and confers a benefit[20]. Similarly, while both the intriguers of the drama and the theater artists weave plots, the plots of the plays always engage the audience as their accomplice. The relationship of the theater to the deceptive role-playing female might be compared to that of Zeus and Metis in the *Theogony:* the theater appropriates the female's deceptive and harmful role-playing and turns it to beneficial purposes, one of which is that of learning to recognize roles, one's own and those of others, as roles.

While the dramatic performer is neither deceptive nor unable to bear shame and disappointment, the principal characters of Greek drama are very likely to be both. Take for example Phaedra in the *Hippolytus* and Ajax in Sophocles' *Ajax*, who both resort to deception in order to maintain their honor. As the numerous revenge plots of Greek tragedy make clear, the deceptiveness of the intriguer is usually intended to restore his or her lost dignity, not to effect a true change of roles. The structural definition of Greek tragedy seems to require a central character who displays unwillingness to accept the misfortune that produces a humbling fall from the paradigm he or she wishes to live by. But the performers who played these heroes accepted both the humbling of publicly enacting an experience of disgrace and in particular that of achieving only a hypothetical and temporary identification with a paradigm. This acceptance lay at the

[20] Gorgias, of course, stated that tragedy furnished a deception (ἀπάτη), and that the deceiver was more just than he who did not deceive, and that he who was deceived was wiser than he who was not (DK82 B23). Whatever Gorgias may have meant by this, we may be sure that the spectators at the theater underwent no deception concerning whether what they saw was a play.

core of the dramatic performance, which by casting each performer in at least four roles, often separated by only a very short period for adjustment, ostentatiously displayed his separation from any single role.

Of course the performers who played the tragic heroes were not the only ones to assume multiple roles in the course of the performance, and neither were they the only ones to enact humbling roles. Virtually all the roles of Athenian tragedy, comedy, and satyr play involve humbling. If a performer did not enact the part of a noble figure who underwent suffering and disgrace, he might have enacted a woman, a slave, or a barbarian[21]. Even the role of a god could sometimes be demeaning, e.g. Aeschylus' Erinyes or Euripides' Aphrodite. But in any case no performer could restrict himself to playing gods. To appear in the drama was inevitably to display oneself publicly in a humble persona and as a player of roles. Thus I would characterize the Athenian drama generally as a humiliating or humbling performance of role-playing.

If this description of the Athenian dramatic competitions is plausible, then I think they can justly be compared to rites of initiation into a new status, since these rites, among the Greeks as well as in other cultures, effect change of status for the initiate through performances which, as the anthropologist Victor Turner has stressed, almost always involve an experience of humiliation[22].

[21] Cf. the strictures of Plato at *Rep.* 395c-396e.

[22] Turner 1969:94-130, building on Van Gennep 1960. See also Eliade 1965, and for the Greek materials, Brelich 1969, Vidal-Naquet 1986a: 106-128 and 1986b, Burkert 1985a: 260-264, and Calame 1977, whose particular focus is the function of choral performances in Greek initiations. Thomson 1946:97-196 theorized that numerous Greek cultural institutions, including the theater, developed from clan initiations. Seaford 1981 has now argued that tragedy originated in the initiation rites of the Bacchic mysteries (an idea traceable at least as far back as Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*), and Winkler 1985 attempts to link the theater to the Athenian *ephebeia*.

In associating Athenian drama with initiation I have found useful the inclusiveness of Van Gennep's concept of «passage», which may be illustrated by this quotation from his introductory chapter (Van Gennep 1960: 3-4): «...we encounter a wide degree of similarity among ceremonies of birth, childhood, social puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies, and funerals ... We should ... include among ceremonies of human passage those rites occasioned by celestial changes,

This humiliation separates the initiate from his former status and compels him to regard his society and his new role in it from the point of view of an essential bond of humankindness that transcends social structure and on which the existence of society depends. Turner calls this bond *communitas*. The initiates learn that their social status is a role which society permits them to perform but one with which, as fragile and changing human beings, they can never completely identify themselves. To quote Turner, «Something of the sacredness of that transient humility ... goes over, and tempers the pride of the incumbent of a higher position or office... [The initiates] have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society»[23].

From the standpoint of initiation, humiliation and role-playing are necessary and good things both for the initiate and for his society. Paradoxically, a society may not want its members always to behave properly and win its approval; it may want everybody to be subject to some disapproval. Thus to a limited extent it may actually be right to do wrong, as long as one makes sure to get caught and accept punishment. (Think of the Spartan ritual of whipping boys at the altar of Artemis Ortheia.)[24]. For this reason it is very unlikely that Greek society was ever a true «shame culture» as described by E.R. Dodds, that is a society in which «anything which exposes a man to the contempt or ridicule of his fellows, which causes him to 'lose face', is felt as unbearable»[25]. The extreme sensitivity of the warriors of Greek epic and tragedy, which has sometimes been taken as representative of primitive social norms, would appear to be abnormal in all societies.

Thus it is ironically the mythic hero's ambition to be always worthy of his society's admiration that puts him at odds with the expectations a real society like that of the Athenian audience would

such as the changeover ... from season to season ...» Under the same heading Van Gennep also discusses territorial passages, which are of obvious relevance to the *nostos* plots of tragedy.

[23] Turner 1969:97, 103.

[24] On this ritual see Brelich 1969:133-135.

[25] Dodds 1951:18.

have. The scripts of the tragic performances seem to highlight precisely this disagreement between the tragic hero of myth and actual social norms by enacting situations of transition in which the hero must undergo a change of status and the humbling that in a real society would be its ritual concomitant. For example: plots in which the warrior returns to his home and family *(Agamemnon, Persians, Trachiniae, Heracles Mainomenos,* even *Antigone),* many plots revolving around exiles or suppliants arriving in and/or departing from a place *(Choephoroi, Eumenides, Philoctetes, Heraclidae, Bacchae,* and others), plots in which a new king accedes to the throne *(Antigone, Bacchae),* plots featuring erotic liaison, marriage, or divorce (Aeschylus' *Suppliants,* Sophocles' *Trachiniae,* Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Medea*), plots involving the death of a family member (Euripides' *Suppliants, Alcestis,* and *Hecuba,* Sophocles' *Antigone),* and the plot involving a contest resulting in loss of status *(Ajax)*[26]. Thus in watching the tragic hero, as in watching the tragic performer, the audience will be poised to observe how the transitions will be handled. The performer, as a rule, handles them well, but the tragic hero usually handles them badly, resists them, until they are forced upon him. Critics of tragedy, recognizing that the hero's elevated role is socially useful and deserving of honor, sometimes see in his refusal to compromise this role a noble superiority to the demands of ordinary social existence or to cruel gods[27]. But when we recognize that tragedy has to do precisely with moments of transition we can see that the admiration of these critics has been misplaced. Passage through the site of transition requires a humbling loss of status, and for the heroes to misunderstand this and resist it is to misunderstand the nature of social status itself, to overlook the common bond of humanness linking the highest to the lowest that makes possible the social arrangement in which status can exist at all. And while the plots of the tragedies force the heroes to undergo the

[26] Cf. the typology of ephebic concerns in tragedy in Winkler 1985:33-37 and the analysis of failed marriage transitions in tragedy in Seaford 1987.

[27] E.g. Whitman 1951 and Knox 1964. But contrast Knox 1961, which seems to me right on target.

requisite loss of status, they rarely succeed in making them understand and appreciate its necessity and desirability.

The *Ajax* of Sophocles provides excellent illustration of this tragic pattern. As the *Trugrede* makes clear in its ironic focus upon change as such, Ajax faces a situation in which change is called for, and he rejects change of any sort[28]. The central change that Ajax's crisis necessitates concerns his relationship with his father Telamon, and his inability to make this particular change marks him as incapable of initiation, because initiation enacts a kind of adoption, the replacement of putatively natural by cultural identity[29]. Ajax cannot escape the control of his father, whom he erects as the sole standard against which his accomplishments can be measured. Years before Telamon had come to Troy and won honor from the army as the first of the warriors; Ajax has come to the same place (τῆσδ' ... χθονὸς 434, τὸν αὐτὸν ἐς τόπον 437), not less in strength or deeds, i.e. the same, (οὐκ ἐλάσσονι σθένει, / οὐδ' ἔργα μείω 438-9), but he has not won the same honor. Ajax will not be able to bear the presence of Telamon without the same *aristeia* that his father had won (τῶν ἀριστείων ἄτερ,/ὧν αὐτὸς ἔσχε στέφανον εὐκλείας μέγαν 464-5). For Ajax therefore the Trojan War should have been an occasion for reduplicating his father, for reenacting the paradigm of Telamon, not as a role, however, but as an identity. And the audience for this performance would ultimately have been Telamon himself. Failing to do that, Ajax determines to perform for Telamon an act that will at least prove that he has the *phusis* of the man who begat him (δηλώσω πατρὶ / μή τοι φύσιν γ' ἄσπλαγχνος ἐκ κείνου γεγώς 471-2). A noble man, says Ajax, must always be *kalos,* if not in life then in death.

[28] See especially Knox 1979a: 141-144.

[29] Not that initiation is an option for those in the mythic world of the *Ajax*, where it is never mentioned, but it is for the 5th century Athenians, who (I assume) could recognize in the tragedy the traces of initiation's absence. Cf. Seaford 1987: 125n195 on hinting allusions to ritual in tragedy, and Zeitlin 1986 on the Thebes of tragedy as the implicit antitype of 5th century Athens. With specific reference to Sophocles' *Ajax* cf. Goldhill 1990:117-118 on the need to set the play in the context of the ceremony of the war orphans at the City Dionysia and the contrast thus observed between Ajax's «heroic extremism» and the civic devotion of the orphans.

Ajax defines his own son's identity in the same way: Eurysakes is to be more fortunate than his father, but in all other respects like him: τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ὁμοῖος (550-551)[30]. His paternity determines his temperament: he will not be afraid when he sees the slaughter around Ajax, if (or since) he really belongs to Ajax (ἐμὸς) with respect to patrimony (τὰ πατρόθεν) (545-547). From the earliest years he is to be reared in the ways of his father (ἐν νόμοις πατρός) and become just like him in *phusis* ([ἐ]ξομοιοῦσθαι φύσιν) (548-549). When he grows up his father's enemies will become his, and he will show them that he is exactly like his father by birth (δείξεις ... οἷος ἐξ οἵου 'τράφης 557). Just as Ajax had hoped to display himself as a natural reduplication of his father, so Eurysakes is to be seen by an audience as a reduplication of Ajax, who hopes that this resemblance of son to father will not be a role, but a natural identity, a *phusis*. The name Ajax has given his son perfectly reflects his way of first casting his son in a role and then treating this role as an identity. Eurysakes is of course named after Ajax's shield, which may be regarded as an article of costume as well a tool of warfare precisely because it signifies its possessor; Ajax is known as ὁ σακεσφόρος, the shield-bearer (19)[31]. By actually naming his son after this costume, Ajax has attempted to make it inseparable from his son, a costume that is not a costume, a role that is not a role.

Ajax's idea that, at least in his family, each generation of males must exactly and naturally reproduce its predecessor is of course entirely inimical to initiation, which calls for acquiring an identity that is social rather than (putatively) natural and for making this acquisition through a process that includes, among other things, putting costumes on and taking them off, and humiliation. Ajax is an exemplar of the man who cannot undergo initiation into adult society. This inability is made especially poignant by the fact that Athena actually puts Ajax through some of the steps of initiation, but he still will not succumb to it. According to Odysseus in *Odyssey* 11 it was Athena, along with the Trojan captives, who made the judgment

[30] Cf. Holt 1981:281.

[31] Nielsen 1978:24 points out that the unbreakable (ἄρρηκτος) character of Ajax's shield makes it a symbol of the changeless form to which the hero aspires.

against Ajax in the contest for Achilles' armor. Thus she might have prepared for Ajax the humiliation which he ought to have been able to accept and survive[32]. When instead he set forth to kill Odysseus and the Atreidae, she saved him from a deed that would have meant his death by diverting his anger onto animals in whose blood he is drenched, suggesting a ritual of purification by blood[33]. The animals that Ajax slaughters perform, in essence, as substitutes for Odysseus and the Atreidae. But the man who named his son after an article of costuming is completely deceived. Eventually Athena reveals the truth to him, a truth that is humbling but also should instruct him in the inevitability of substitution and role-playing. But Ajax, uninstructed and unable to accept humiliation, determines to preserve his honor by taking his own life, suggesting yet another element of initiation when he ironically states that he will purify himself in the sea (655). Even then Ajax might have been saved if only he could have been kept indoors for the length of a day, a detail that recalls the stipulated period of seclusion that is a regular feature of initiation rites[34]. But he eludes the searchers and kills himself at the shore. This act ultimately does not exempt him from change and humiliation, but it does foreclose any possibility of a normal accommodation to society and turns him into a paradigm of how a man should not behave. The tragedy of Ajax was performed at the City Dionysia as part of a competition, but we may be certain that Sophocles, his choregus, and his performers had no intention of killing either the judges or themselves if they lost. Just by acting out the play they accepted the humbling and changes of role that Ajax could not.

Of course the performances at the City Dionysia were not limited to plays like the *Ajax*. Each group of three tragedies was followed by a satyr play, a performance whose plot usually acts out some humiliating form of entrapment from which escape is achieved

[32] Sophocles' *Ajax* never suggests that Athena was involved in the judgment. But its vague allusions to the judgment do not exclude the version of the *Odyssey* as a possibility. On the judgment of the arms in the *Ajax* see Rosivach 1976:47.

[33] On purification by blood in Greek initiations, see Burkert 1985a: 80-82.

[34] On seclusion in Greek initiations see Burkert 1985a: 260-264.

through a combination of trickery and divine grace[35]. Thus I would suggest that the tetralogy that formed the basis for the dramatic performances at the Athenian City Dionysia in the 5th century roughly followed a pattern in which performers first enacted stories of heroes who undergo suffering and death because of their entrapment in a role and their inability to accept the humbling which, according to the mythology embodied in initiation ritual, is necessary to the successful negotiation of life's transitions. This enactment of suffering was then succeeded by a performance in which acceptance of humbling and change of roles facilitates survival. Sometimes we find this whole movement enacted in the course of a single tragedy, as for example in the *Eumenides*, the *Helen*, and the *Heracles Mainomenos*.

Comedy, of course, may not have been part of the City Dionysia until around 486 BC, and even then comedies may not have been performed on the same days as the tragic-satyric tetralogies until the Peloponnesian War. Nevertheless when the program of the City Dionysia was changed so that one comedy would follow each tetralogy, the resemblance of the total performance to a ritual of initiation was undisturbed. The resemblance of comedy to a rite of initiation is if anything more evident than that of tragedy. The performers appear in the most undignified costumes imaginable, anti-costumes really, since they emphasize and exaggerate exactly the parts of the body that a normal costume would ordinarily hide and thus draw attention to the transient carnality of the human organism[36]. The performers speak an indecorous language in which obscenity is prominent. Direct address to the audience furthermore exposes the actual performer who wears the costume and involves both him and the audience personally in the humbling of being the bodies they are. As regards the plot of the comic performance, it almost always leads to a change of status that affects a whole community, for example the rejuvenation of Demos in *Knights*, the

[35] On the typical themes of satyr play see Seaford 1984a: 33-44.

[36] On the grotesque image of the body, with specific reference to Rabelais, see Bakhtin 1984: 303-367.

establishment of Nephelokokkygia in *Birds,* and the revival of Aeschylus in *Frogs*.

Thus the performers of the Greek dramas work through a kind of status change by seeking public identification with one impersonal and humbling role after another, first in a series of plays concerning figures who on the whole resist humbling and role-change and who exemplify unsuccessful transition, then in plays in which some humbling is accepted and some degree of transition achieved. Now of course the performers undergo this experience in the presence of an audience for whose explicit benefit the performance takes place.

In working through this status change for an audience of onlookers the performers allow the onlookers to learn how it is done and moreover allow them to participate in it. The experience of the audience like that of the performers can be conceptualized as one of role-playing[37]. In order to experience the performance, the audience must do more than show up and sit still for it. Each member of the audience first of all must actively select the elements of the scenario from everything he senses around him — the theater, the rest of the audience, the Attic countryside, etc. — and from those elements he must reconstruct a version of the scenario. This scenario, far from producing an illusion that compels the audience to respond, provides them with instructions telling them how they should respond. The scenario encodes these instructions in the associations of its elements — rituals, dance schemas, metrical patterns, musical modes, and especially the emotions the performers project with their limbs and voices. Since the spectators are in the theater to experience drama they follow the instructions, as best they understand them, willingly and perhaps not fully consciously, but without ever being deceived

[37] Plato's image of the rhapsodic performance as a chain of magnetized rings, the Muse being the magnet, the poet, the rhapsode, and the audience being the rings (*Ion* 533d-536a), likens the audience's experience to that of the performer, without, however, specific reference to role-playing. On «the role of the theatergoer» see Goffman 1974:130, 134-136. On audiences «mirror[ing] processes that are central to the actor's work» see Aaron 1986:68. On the «dramaturgy of the spectator» see De Marinis 1987 and Carlson 1990. As P.D. Arnott 1989:24 points out, many of the spectators at the Athenian City Dionysia will have had experience in choruses and thus will have felt able to share the emotions of the performers.

by the performance. In other words, from the performance in the orchestra the spectator provides himself with a scenario that he enacts in performing his role as a spectator.

Thus the audience of drama attends with the intention of participating in an experience of performance, of molding its attention as much as possible to a scenario, just as the performers in the orchestra do. In watching tragedy the audience undergoes an experience of humbling as it empathizes with the wretched and with the performers who enact the wretched; like Odysseus in Sophocles' *Ajax* when the raving Ajax is revealed to him, it recognizes itself in the victim and learns of its own wretchedness[38]. Odysseus perceives that «all of us who live are nothing more than images or empty shadow» (εἴδωλ[α]...ἢ κούφην σκιάν 126), suggesting an analogy between human life and role-playing (both of them transient and insubstantial), and the audience of tragedy may simultaneously recognize the fragility of the characters' roles, the performers' roles, and of its own role as a spectator feeling self-induced empathy. But unlike the tragic hero, and like the tragic performer, the audience can take pleasure in this experience, because it undertakes it willingly and survives it, because it shares its misery with a lot of company, and perhaps also because it feels it is fulfilling the social duty of initiation[39].

This initiation, however, probably should not be thought of as a true initiation of the traditional sort, because after undergoing all the transitions of the performance neither the performers nor the audience seem to have arrived anywhere. They have divested themselves of a series of roles without ultimately finding one to keep. This inconclusiveness in the quasi-initiatory scenario of the performance may be reflected in the ironies that disturb the conclusions of the comedies of Aristophanes and such satyric or

[38] On Odysseus in the prologue as the spectator of tragedy see Cresci 1974:217-218.

[39] In initiations sometimes only representatives of the initiated group would actually perform the ritual; thus the division of roles between performers and audience in the Athenian theater need not have excluded the spectators from participation. For evidence of representative initiates in Sparta see Brelich 1969:192-193. At Eleusis the initiation of *mystai* was observed by an audience of the already initiated, the *epoptai*: Burkert 1985a:287.

quasi-satyric plays as the *Cyclops, Alcestis,* and *Helen* of Euripides. These ironies suggest to me that the plays of the Athenian dramatic festivals were not expected to complete a transition to a new status for the participants. For in the city of Athens, what new status could that have been? It is true that the Athenian polis, like any ancient society, maintained distinctions of status between slaves and free men, citizens and non-citizens, men and women, men and boys. However, the relatively lax observance of status distinctions was considered a special mark of the Athenian character. The Old Oligarch, for example, states that the Athenians have established *isegoria* between slaves and free men and between metics and citizens (Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.*1.12), and while this exaggerates the true situation, it shows how that situation could be interpreted. Pericles makes the same general point about Athens in the Funeral Oration, where he praises the Athenian character by showing that the Athenian citizen was not restricted to the narrow pigeonholes that applied in other polities: members of any economic class could hold office if they had the ability; eccentric pleasures could be cultivated without fear of public disapprobation; work was frequently interrupted for recreation, in public or at home; the taste of the Athenian consumer embraced not only local products but products from all over the world; Athenians could perform brilliantly in battle without practicing all the time for it; nobody specialized in philosophical contemplation, or money-making, or politics; Athenians could both discuss policy and make decisions (Thuc. 2.37-41). Pericles culminates his account of the Athenian *tropoi* by suggesting that each individual Athenian could apply himself to the widest range of activities and do it with exceptional grace (καθ' ἕκαστον δοκεῖν ἂν μοι τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνδρα παρ' ἡμῶν ἐπὶ πλεῖστ' ἂν εἴδη καὶ μετὰ χαρίτων μάλιστ' ἂν εὐτραπέλως τὸ σῶμα αὔταρκες παρέχεσθαι, 2.41.1).

Plato seems to have the same idea of Athenian versatility in view in the description of the democratic character in *Republic* 8, where Socrates disapprovingly describes a man who engages in a wide range of activities at whim, stating that this man is «full of a very great number of personalities» (πλείστων ἠθῶν μεστόν 561e). It would appear front these passages that the Athenians regarded themselves

as typically changing roles and thus as existing in something like a permanent state of transition. Among such people a traditional civic initiation would have been somewhat anomalous, for the traditional categories of civic status had lost a fair degree of meaning. To some extent, among the Athenians transgression was the norm, and the theatrical experience may have prepared them for this norm[40].

This is not to say that the Athenians lived in a state of anarchy, or that their dramatic poets intended to encourage such a state. The Athenian dramas seem to prepare the citizens for a condition of order, but one that does not depend upon fixed social boundaries. Instead it depends upon a feeling of affection for one's fellow mortals arising from a recognition of the humbling bodily experience one shares with them, and from the pleasure of their company on a fine occasion like the City Dionysia. As the comedies of Aristophanes show, this recognition was supposed to make the Athenians a critical audience for glamorous generals and politicians, especially those who sought to foster division within the community, and to give the Athenians the flexibility to play a variety of roles as situations might require, especially the role of friend to a former enemy.

But the drama's perspicacious vision of the transient human self behind all its costumes and roles was difficult to achieve and maintain, because the human head is after all part of the body, and it is ultimately not more beautiful or perfect than any other part. Thus it would not have been possible for the Athenian dramatists to initiate their people irreversibly into the dramatic idea of citizenship. The people would have to struggle one by one and day by day against

[40] Thus I differ from Goldhill 1990, who identifies Athenian civic values with hoplite service and argues that the drama questions and subverts these values. Both Goldhill and Winkler 1985 appear to overestimate the centrality of military service in the Athenian notion of citizenship. Pericles' Funeral Oration — a speech at a military funeral and a *locus classicus* of civic ideology — gives great prominence to non-military activities and particularly stresses that the Athenians are capable of fighting effectively without spending all their time preparing for it as the Spartans do. A civic ideology that closely identified citizenship with military service would not have been Athenian, and therefore in questioning the values of such an ideology the Athenian dramas do not place at risk the values of their own city as Goldhill suggests. For criticism of the view that warfare was central to the ancient Greek polis, see Humphreys 1971:191-193.

the deception, self-deception, pride and hatred that were just as inescapable a condition of their humanity as humility and love. But a few times a year the dramatic poets and performers could provide help by sharing with them an especially intense and memorable experience of the contradictions that go with being human[41].

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Suzanne Saïd
(New York)

Tragic Argos

The purpose of this paper is to locate Argos in the «mental map»[1] of the Greeks. I shall start with two qualifications.

First, I shall only consider the surviving plays in which the action is set in Argos, that is to say the *Suppliants* and the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, the *Electra* of Sophocles and the *Electra* and the *Orestes* of Euripides.

Secondly, I shall concentrate on Argos as a *topos* in a literal sense, that is a geographical site[2].

In Greek tragedy, Argos, like every other city, is given a textual reality. It is defined by its names, its distinctive geography and its monuments. Accordingly, I shall begin by presenting the different views of Argos in the different plays, for «each tragedy has its own mythical topography and flexible πόλις concepts»[3]. Argos has also a theatrical reality, both as a staging and as a theatrical direction that extends beyond the stage limits. It is sometimes represented by one of the eisodoi, whereas the other one leads abroad, to Egypt in the *Suppliants*, to Troy in *Agamemnon*, to Delphi in the *Choephoroi*. But in Sophocles, *Electra* as well as in Euripides, *Electra* and *Orestes*, the stage directions are less straightforward and Argos extends in both directions.

Of course this Argive reality has to be comprehended in its framing, in relation to the other places that are alluded to in the play.

[1] I borrow this expression from Easterling 1989:5.

[2] I shall exclude the figurative sense of the word and shall not examine, as F. Zeitlin did for Thebes, Argos as a «commonplace», that is «certain clusters of ideas, themes and problems ... that can be identified as proper to Thebes» (Zeitlin 1986: 102). For a study of Argos as a geographical place in Greek tragedy, see Bernand 1985: 36-43, 105-106, 245-256.

[3] Willink 1986:267.

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Paestan bell-crater. Museo Provinciale, Salerno.