Self and Other in Aeschylus’ *Persians*.
A propos de Gotscheff

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Exponents par excellence of barbaric “otherness,” the characters in Aeschylus’ *Persians* pose a crucial question: how the ancient spectators negotiated their “otherness”? How did it condition their *eleos* (for the “other”) and *phobos* (for the “self”)? Did the performance produce humanitarian sympathy or did it rely on political distanciation? Focusing on the experience of the ancient spectator, as well as the modern one, the paper discusses Aeschylus’ play and a set of modern performances of it, with special emphasis on Dimiter Gotscheff’s production for the National Theatre of Greece (2009). The paper argues that, as Gotscheff’s production showed, for us today the political reading of the play (or, if you prefer, the “tragic”) cannot but rely on self-criticism, on a complex negotiation between “self” and “other.” For us it is more interesting and politically more productive to see that our democracy may entail totalitarianism; that a political aphasia often creeps into our political *logos*; and finally, that our political “self” may be pregnant with our political “self”—and vice versa.

I.

In his *Persians* for the National Theatre of Greece (2009), Dimiter Gotscheff based his approach on four things: the substitution of the chorus of the elders with a mixed chorus of young soldiers and women (which allowed the chorus to represent the Persian society more effectively than the dynasty confidants of the original); the underscoring of Atossa as a Queen-mother who continuously seeks to safeguard the survival of the dynasty; the utter ridicule of the male figures of power (Dareios, Xerxes), yet, eventually, their political supremacy; and, finally, the intervention of a clownesque character who, addressing the spectators, delivered various passages from the play and from Heiner Müller’s *Philoktetes*.

Equally important were Gotscheff’s bold cuts and transpositions of lines, especially in the play’s most emblematic scenes: the invocation of Dareios’ ghost, and the *kommos* (joint song) of Xerxes and the chorus at the end of the play. In the first case, Atossa began the invocation on her own, inciting and gradually obliging the chorus to accompany her until, finally, the latter succumbed and assumed the task of the recalling themselves, with spasmodic cries and even more
spasmodic bodies. But when Dareios appeared, the chorus receded into the audience, and the dialogue with Atossa turned into a private exchange, where Xerxes' actions and responsibilities appeared as a familial affair. Equally familial was the perspective that the performance gave to the arrival of the defeated, devastated Xerxes. Cutting out most of the kommos and converting some of its lines into an exchange between Atossa and Xerxes, Gotscheff presented the Persian catastrophe and, more specifically, its management as an affair that concerned only the royal couple of mother and son—with Atossa embracing Xerxes reassuringly and leading him to the palace, through the space of the audience. In front of this familial and private exchange, the chorus remained marginalized and silent at the back of the stage, dramatically and theatrically (but also politically) exhausted.

In the light of the above, Gotscheff’s approach underscored the responsibility of the Persian monarchs and their desire and need to hang on to power. Yet, at the same time, it also underscored the responsibility of the civic corpus of the citizens, who remained inactive throughout. The huge blue wall, which dominated the orchestra, illustrated precisely these dynamics. At times, it remained immobile, positioned horizontally on the stage, a colossal barrier, oppressing space and bodies; often, it turned around its axis and this rotation swept away the choral crowd, making them run around in panic; and, finally, at times, positioned vertically, it seemed to open up new paths instead of blocking them. The wall as the tide of History, but also as the image of brutal oppression, as well as a gate to alternative routes, which however were never taken by the chorus.

In contrast to the chorus, the clown, Atossa and Dareios, and Xerxes at the end, seemed to be able to manipulate the rotation of the wall—the rotation of History and Power. Except once: when Atossa narrated her ominous dream and bent backwards in terror and the wall receded behind her, leaving her powerless on the ground; and it was from this position that she narrated her dream, bereft of the statuesque and imposing presence she enjoyed on stage until that point. But, it is important to remember the dream’s imagery in order to understand this sudden contraction in both space and body. In the dream, Xerxes appears striving to yoke together two women, one dressed in barbaric clothes, the other in Greek. The first lowers her head eagerly and submissively, the second tosses it defiantly, and overturns the young king’s chariot. Xerxes falls to the ground, and beside him Dareios appears pitying his son. Seeing his father, Xerxes tears off his clothes in despair.

The dream’s imagery indicates that the causes of the catastrophe should be sought on two entirely non-metaphysical levels, both of which concern strictly the responsibility of the mortals: on the one hand, the political level, since the catastrophe appears to be the result of conflicting political ethe/characters (with the Greek woman being identified with the spirit of freedom, while the barbarian with that of servility); on the other, the personal level, since the dream seems to indicate a psychologically “complex” relationship between Xerxes and Dareios,
with a disastrous son driven to despair because of a successful father’s pity. This is a truth that the Queen Mother can hardly tolerate: the wall of Power and History recedes. Yet only momentarily: Atossa will regain thereafter her physical and political stature—together with the wall’s control.

Contrary to the Persian protagonists, the anonymous members of the chorus were repeatedly incapable of resisting the wall’s rotation. In the clown’s hands, however, the manipulation of the wall acquired yet another function: it seemed to suspend momentarily the tide of history and open up new perspectives on stage—the perspectives that its inhabitants chose to ignore. Leaning against the wall, which was at that point positioned vertically, the clown narrated the final part of the Messenger’s speech, where the Persian catastrophe finds its climax, until, firmly stepping on the thymelē, he assured: “This is the truth.” From the same spot, and as the chorus re-entered into the orchestra mumbling once again incomprehensibly, the clown delivered instead of them the second stasimon of the play: “Xerxes, Xerxes led them, Xerxes destroyed them, Xerxes, everything wrongly, everything, everything wrongly he led forth. . . .” This is the section where, in the original, the chorus envisages a great revolt breaking out after the total destruction: the empire’s subjects no longer respect the laws of the Persians, nor do they pay their taxes, nor do they prostrate, “because the king has lost his power.” This is the song of a revolution. But in Gotscheff’s performance, the clown was alone in this song and this revolution; the choral voice was “out of joint,” and so were their bodies. The Persians showed themselves incapable of acting in the only way that could befit the “truth” of their disaster; they showed themselves incapable of revolt.

This political perspective dominated also the performance’s finale. At the centre of an empty orchestra, with all the Persians fused into the audience, the clown challenged the spectators with the words of Heiner Müller:

Is there a city [polis] here? Tell me, is there a city? . . .
Constructs of words and houses of dreams
Traps placed by blind eyes on the empty air, sprout of rotten minds
Where lie pairs with lie,
There are no longer cities, your greens are lies. . . .
Rip up your eyes, they lie, empty
The eye sockets speak the truth. . . .

(Müller 72-73)

The clown’s final words echoed the assurance that marked the narrative of the disaster: “This is the truth.” Yet the message was clear: this is a truth that none on stage (except the clown) seemed willing to see and to recognize, in words or deeds. However, as Gotscheff himself put it in an interview, the aim of the performance was precisely to let “this truth be heard. Silent and unbearable. To let the silence be heard” (Argyriou 2009).

Crucial to this dramaturgical and theatrical approach was the deconstructive way in which Gotscheff treated the chorus, breaking down, systematically, the choral voice. Uncoordinated and spasmodic, dissonant or abandoned to inarticu-
late cries,¹ this chorus seemed to violate the idea of the choral (musical and po-
etical) “harmony,” which is so generically related to the choral voice. It violated,
thus, a basic characteristic of the tragic theatre in general: its wordiness. At the
same time, choosing to fuse them with the audience at various points during the
performance, Gotscheff posed a difficult challenge to the spectators: he chal-
лenged them to identify with this dyslexic and disjointed collectivity, not simply
(and certainly not mainly) in their grief as human beings, but in their inability to
resist as citizens, to question or even to revolt against their fatal dynasty, and or-
organize themselves, at last, as an eurhythmic community, both in terms of music
and in terms of politics.

Together with the clown’s interventions, Gotscheff’s treatment of the cho-
rus and, more specifically, the mechanism of identification and distanciation
between chorus and audience, were, at first sight, his most subversive gesture
in the performance, a gesture which violated a condition, which many see as
crucial to ancient drama: the empathy with the suffering human being. Instead,
Gotscheff put forward an interesting negotiation between “self,” and “other,” a
complex dynamic between role and spectator, the people on the stage and those
in the auditorium. On the one hand, and to the degree that it entailed “identifi-
cation,” this was political not humanitarian, a markedly unquiet and (self)critical
identification. On the other, thanks to the intervention of the clown/Heiner
Müller, the performance invited us to overcome this identification and see with-
out looking at the stage— to see behind and beyond, before and after the “empty
eye-sockets” of its Persian inhabitants. It gave us the opportunity or, at least, it
prompted us to build, together with the chorus, another chorus, which would
leave behind them the aphasia of submission and would be able to “speak the
truth,” and speak it in (political and even revolutionary) unison, and thus build
or at least envision a real polis. At least, outside the theatre—or, better, above
all outside the theatre.

Gotscheff’s performance caused literal uproar in Epidavros, was rebuked
by most critics (Diamantis 2009; Georgousopoulos 2009 a, b, and c; Kaltaki
2009; Lazaridis 2009; cf. also Varveris and Georgousopoulos 2009), praised just
by two (Ioannidis 2009 a and b; Patsalidis 2009), and received with caution by
others (Petasi 2009; Sella 2009). Those who condemned the performance casti-
gated the director’s decision to include women in the chorus, were scandalized
by the ridicule of Dareios and Xerxes, and, above all, were infuriated by his dra-
maturgical interventions in the text of the play.² None of them cared to consider
Gotscheff’s interpretation of the play in its essence.

However, were Gotscheff’s political and theatrical choices indeed decon-

¹. A sound which in ancient Greek would be called rhothos/ῥόθος: rhothos, together with
inarticulate cries, are emphatically connected to the Persians in Aeschyclus’ play (see
below).

². On the sterile, as well as obsessive text-centeredness, which permeates the modern Greek
revival of ancient drama compare with Papazoglou (2014).
structive of the interpretative possibilities that are registered in the “text”? The answer, as we shall see, is not at all obvious.

II.

In contemporary scholarship, the Persians are approached roughly in three ways: as a play that is based on a humanitarian sympathy with the defeated enemy, which transcends cultural barriers and stereotypes (cf. Pelling 1997; Loraux 2002); as a play which contributes to the construction of the stereotypical ‘otherness’ of orientalism (Said 1978; Hall 1989; Harrison 2000); and, finally, as a play which aims at warning the Athenians about the hubristic tendencies and dangers of their very own hegemony over the rest of the Greek cities (cf. Rosenbloom 1995 and 2006).

In the first case, the emphasis of the play is seen to be mainly theological: humans are united in the prospect of the gods’ punishment of their hubris; in the second and the third, the emphasis, while not excluding the divine factor, is rather more political. In the first case, the interpretation requires the Athenian spectators’ identification with the dramatic characters; in the second, their radical distancing; and in the third, a complex negotiation between “self” and “other.”

I side with those who argue that on Aeschylus’ stage the play’s characters are signposted emphatically as barbaric for two reasons. On the one hand, because both their political reality and the way they relate to each other are marked by the totalitarianism and the servility of the monarchy, and on the other, because they mourn with the extreme emotionalism that the Ancients attributed to the barbaric (and female) ethos, in contrast to the “Greek” (and male) self-control. The Persians, in other words, are registered in a condition of radical “otherness” towards the Greeks/Athenians/citizens/men that comprise their audience.

The profound political “otherness” of the Persians is, according to this view, displayed throughout the play: in the subservient, as well as spectacular, prostration in front of Atossa and Dareios (which, for the Greek standards, was fitting only to gods); in their inability to exercise parrhesia in their sight (spectacularly so towards Dareios: cf. Hopman 66); in the political message of the dream, which we discussed above; in the assertion that the Athenians “are nobody’s slaves and subjects” (242); in Atossa’s emphatic warning that in case of defeat her son will not be held “responsible towards the polis,” (hupeuthunos poiei: 211-215) (Goldhill 191), and her equally emphatic care for his monarchic attire, which in the play is linked to his monarchic survival (Dominick 2007); in the markedly “barbaric” (Muntz 2011) character of the chorus’ invocation to the “godlike” (cf. 635, 642, 654-5) Darius; and, I would add, in the idea as such that only a dead “godlike” man can provide a perspective to the present, that is to say that the sit-

3. At the beginning of the previous century some critics even suggested that the play provides no more than an occasion for “jingoistic” Schadenfreude (references at Goldhill (1988) 189, n. 60).

uation paralyses the thought of the mortals and demands a metaphysical intervention. This demonstrates the utter inability (or unwillingness) of the Persians to deal with their reality. This is not simply an inability to rise above desolation, but the sign of a deeply political impairment.

Crucial, even if tentatively implied between the lines, is also the political perspective that the Messenger speech gives to the Persian catastrophe, as the Greek side repeatedly appears in collective order, in contrast to the Persian side, which appears in military disarray. This is a contrast which is signposted mainly with two things: a) the fragmented Persian camp is defined through an accumulation of individuals and nations, while the Greek one through a striking anonymity, which serves the idea of the democratic/organic collectivity (cf. Goldhill 192–93); b) the martial cry of the Greeks is a “holy paean” (393), and they sing (like a chorus would) the famous “Oh sons of Greeks, come forth”, while the Persians can only voice a ρόθος (406), a confused noise (Scott 154).

I would like to discuss briefly the sound that relates to the Persians, as this is attested in the play’s choruses, developing, as we shall see, an interesting and essentially political dynamic between narration and inarticulateness, logos and aphasia.

Inarticulate cries creep into the narrative early on, with the entrance song of the chorus, where the elders anticipate the dirge of the women in the case of defeat: they will mourn, they fear, with inarticulate cries, shredding their linen veils and tearing their cheeks (cf. the interspersion of ωά, which disturbs the syntactical continuity in 114-23). This is not simply a foreboding image. Conveying the inarticulate cries in direct speech, the chorus “ventriloquizes” (Hopman 65) the Persian women, appearing, thus, in a way, to incarnate them on stage.

The chorus abandon themselves to inarticulate cries, even more intensely and desperately, even more disorderly in terms of syntax and metre, after the announcement of the disastrous defeat, in the first stasimon. This is the song which (as we noted above) begins by attributing emphatically the responsibility of the disaster to Xerxes. As the song continues, however, the chorus’ grief seems so great as to drive them away from these political dynamics, and lead them, in despair and exhaustion, to a poignant dirge, musically and syntactically disjointed (cf. the repeated interference of ωά, ιε, φευ, in 568-81). At the song’s finale, however, the elders manage to overcome both the anguish and the inarticulateness of their mourning, but it is important to emphasize that this advancement seems to result from the idea of the revolution. The political perspective, the perspective of revolt, appears capable of giving new impetus to the musical and narrative constitution of the choral body—that is to the civic constitution of the Persian society.

However, at the end of the play, the Persians will be forced to abandon this idea, and, at the same time, to abandon themselves entirely to musical and political disarray and aphasia. The dynamic that unfolds between the elders and Xerxes in the final kommos reveals a political negotiation. While the song begins with the chorus boldly questioning Xerxes about his personal responsibility for
the disaster (appearing, thus, somewhat revolting), Xerxes gradually manages
to take up the role of their musical and essentially political leader, and overwhelm
the chorus (Avery 1964; Kantzios 2004; Schenker 1994), precisely when the elders,
exhausted by grief, give in to acute (and possibly individualized) inarticulate
and metrically fragmented cries, incapable of preserving their choral coordina-
tion, that is the coordination of a regimented society.3

In compliance with the broader “feminization of Asia in the Greek imagi-
nation” (Hall 1993), the Persian men end up incarnating spectacularly the Persian
women, the women that they envisaged wailing in the parodos. In short, the choris
lament, according to ancient stereotypes, as women do, as barbarians do, but
as Greek men-citizens would never do. This is a chorus which the democratic
spectators of the play placed, in many ways, opposite not among them. Thus,
the tragic experience evolves into a process which, eventually, reinforces the
unity of the democratic city-state.4

The kommos is a poignant and deeply affective song. Those who see in the
play Athens’ self-criticism on her own hegemony, emphasize its power to dispel
audience distanciation and achieve the spectators’ empathy with their profound
Persian “others” (e.g. Rosenbloom, “Myth” 125 ff.). Although, as many argue,
this is a rather forced approach to the play, let us for a moment accept it—it would-
n’t alter essentially our conclusion. Through the construction of “otherness,” the
play may not forbid the spectators’ emotional engagement, yet it offers a crucial
safety valve to their pity (for the “other”) and, more importantly, their fear (for
the “self”). Because it manages to leave democracy (or, at least, the idea of
democracy) watertight to the tragic catastrophe, “other” to the tragic crisis. This
catastrophe and, above all, its management, the play seems to imply, could (or at
least should) never happen in a democratic regime. The (self)destructiveness of
the barbarians on stage, clearly intertwined with their deeply cultural and, above
all, political “otherness,” could never infect the idea (or, at least, the utopia) of
democracy, which the spectators so deeply treasured. At least intra muros.

III.

The Persians pose a crucial question: how the present conditions our identifi-
cation with its dramatic characters? What could our negotiation with their
“otherness” be? The reception of Aeschylus’ play, through its performances and
adaptations, shows that this is a theatrical, but, at the same time, a deeply polit-
ical question, which attracted many and diverse answers. Let us look briefly at
six cases:

5. Hopman (2013) and Rehm (2002) see Xerxes becoming re-integrated in the Persian com-
    munity as “chief-mourner” and not as a “military leader.” Rosenbloom (2006) 138 ac-
    knowledges the political dimension of his command.
6. Many argue that this type of “otherness” applies also to all tragic characters (the locus clas-
    sicus is Zeitlin 1990) and that the consolidation of the community of the polis is the ultimate
goal of the tragic experience, in general (Seaford 1995).
First case: On 1571, in the Greek island of Zakynthos, a performance of the play, in an Italian translation/adaptation, was put on in the context of the celebrations for the defeat of the Ottomans in the naval battle of Lepanto. The performance identified Persians and Ottomans as the “others” par excellence to the West (Mavromoustakos 1999, 2007, and 2013). The Westerners identified with the Greeks against the Asians already since antiquity and, to the Western thought, the battle of Lepanto was equally emblematic with that of Salamis (Hall 2007). For the Ancients, however, the triumph of Salamis was emphatically a triumph of democracy—in the context of the Renaissance this perspective was totally inactive.

Second case: Two and a half centuries later, in 1822, Shelley adapted Aeschylus’ play in his Hellas (Erkelenz 1997). With the Greek War of Independence having just begun, Shelley too identified Persians and Ottomans, and, looking forward to a revolution in Germany, treated “the insurrection in Greece [as] both emblem and most urgent example of a much more international and epochal revolutionary endeavour,” while Islam was revealed as the “enemy of Western liberty [emphasis in the original]” (Hall, “Aeschylus’ Persians”182). But it is interesting to see that, in order to succeed, Shelley departed crucially from the original text (and its identifications): his chorus consisted of Greek women captives at the Ottoman court.

Third case: Sixty years later, in 1881, in a performance of the Persians in Prussian and imperial Berlin, the translator of the play cut out the bigger part of the final kommos, and replaced it with a scene between Atossa and Xerxes, where the Queen Mother received tenderly her desolate son and the chorus reassured him, at the end, that despite the disaster, “the King and people are one.” 7 Contrary to Gotscheff’s Atossa-Xerxes scene, this one served as an Apology for the Monarchy. Eight years later, the same text was used in a Greek production of the play, which was put on in the context of the celebration of the wedding of the Prince Royal to Kaiser’s sister (Sideris 87-94; Van Steen 2011). In both cases, what seemed to trouble the production teams was precisely the identification of their audience with the defeated Persians and their disastrous monarchy. But in order to channel this identification away from the prospect of revolt, both Xerxes and his people needed to regain, even if radically violating the original text, their monarchic self-confidence.

Fourth case: Another Greek production of the play was put on in 1920, once again in the context of politico-military celebrations, this time for the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres, from which the Greek territory emerged considerably expanded. After the end of the performance, Manolis Kalomiris’ “Symphony of Valour” (Simphonia tis Leventias) was performed by an Army orchestra, deeply moving (as the preceding tragedy also did) the spectators: and this emotion was manifest through the repeated applauses during the description of the battle and especially at “Sons of Greeks, come forth.” Prime-minister Venizelos was particularly moved and the audience hurrahed loudly, when he and the Army General came in and out of the theatre (Sideris 282-83).

7. Thanks to Miltos Pechlivanos for drawing my attention to this performance.
However, enthusiasm was not unanimous towards the performance (and probably not towards Venizelos and definitely not towards the throne). This is indicated by a review written by the leftist Kostas Paroritis, in the progressive Journal *Noumas*. With his internationalist political agenda in clear view, Paroritis denounced the ethnocentric complacency of the performance and its bourgeois audience, and emphasized, instead, the political responsibilities of Persian imperialism. It was these responsibilities that he saw being silenced within the overall patriotic enthusiasm—together with the political oppression which, in his view, characterized the current regime:

But the bourgeois, who claim that the play is patriotic, long for kings and accept to become slaves themselves in order to create more slaves, whom they will exploit. But bourgeois mentality is incapable of grasping and appreciating the morality of ancient tragedy.

(Paroritis 1920)

**Fifth case:** The identification with the defeated Persians was also at the core of Karolos Koun’s production in 1965. However, this was a humanistic rather than a political identification, based on the spectator’s empathy with the suffering humanity. In Koun’s production, the stamp of the East was paramount, especially in Yannis Christou’s famous music, and it was spectacularly attested in the presentation of the chorus as Dervish dancers. However, what prevailed here was the oriental not the orientalist—and this was what gave inspiration to an exploration which was *theatrical* not *political*: the quest for a ritualized theatre, an “other” theatre.

**Sixth case:** In the same decade, an East-German production, directed by Mattias Braun, was performed with great success from 1960 through to 1969. In this case, the presentation and the negotiation between “self” and “other” was complex. On the one hand, Xerxes was equated with Hitler, while the performance decried the way in which “a nation could allow its leaders excessive power” (Hall, *Aeschylus’ Persians* 186); on the other, it was seen as an attack on American imperialism and the wars in Korea and Vietnam. This dynamic negotiation between “self” and “other” lies also at the heart of many American productions of the play, such as Peter Sellars’ *Persians* of 1993, which are in dialogue with the Gulf Wars, denouncing both USA hegemony and Saddam Hussein’s totalitarianism (Hall 2007).

Back to Gotscheff. In his production, the “Sons of Greeks, come forth” was

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8. For a totally different reading see Hall (2007) 185, who claims that Karolos Koun identified the Persian “other” with the “barbarian within,” “the internal tyrant embodied in the hard right wing of Greek politics” which in subsequent revivals was identified with the Greek junta. Hall claims, furthermore, that this approach produced, for the first time in the history of the play’s reception, a self-critical discourse. Personally, I cannot see this type of identification in the performance—but even if it existed, I can’t see how it could possibly invite the audience to a self-critical discourse. Aren’t juntas the ultimate “other” to the nations they suppress?
delivered as a murmur, like a nightmarish echo. We heard the cry, threatening and ominous, through the ears of the Persians. Thus, the line did not manage to provoke the applause, which it regularly gets in Greek performances of the play. Because, indeed, even in performances that invite us to empathize with the devastated Persians, the “Sons of Greeks, come forth” seems to emancipate itself both theatrically and ideologically; the audience always reacts with enthusiasm (Mavromoustakos, “Ancient Drama Performances” 475), in an almost metatheatrical and “narcissistic” patriotic fervour, a fervour which violates, even momentarily, the humanitarian identification with the suffering characters. However, it is important to see that it is not democracy which applauds itself in this cases—it is the nation. And the difference is crucial.

One could argue that Gotscheff’s aim was to draw a parallel between the Persian hegemony and the hegemony of the globalized, fragmented West. However, I think that Gotscheff’s focus and, especially, the intricate nexus of identifications and distanciations he created between the chorus and the audience, went beyond this stage and called us to reflect on the nature of our (bourgeois) democracy as such, not very far from Paroritis: to ask ourselves if there is, indeed, a polis among us. Besides, it was to us that the clown/Heiner Müller addressed this question at the end of the performance.

In any case, for us today the political reading of the play (or, if you prefer, the “tragic”) cannot but rely on self-criticism, on a complex negotiation between “self” and “other.” For us it is more interesting and politically more productive to see that our democracy may entail totalitarianism; that a political aphasia often creeps into our political logos; and finally, that our political “self” may be pregnant with our political “other”—and vice versa.

CODA

In Gotscheff’s performance, the line that met with enthusiastic applause (by those spectators who did not shout in protest) was the “Is there a polis here” at the Müllerian finale. This was a gesture that pertained simultaneously to theatre and politics, or rather to the political dimension of the theatre. Because the effort to cancel a performance displays an essentially political bigotry (Mavromoustakos 2009).

In Epidavros, uproar is often raised by productions which are (or are seen as) “alternative” and “experimental”—which only means that they present an other interpretation of tragedy/of the tragic, strange to what spectators and critics consider familiar and authoritative. Because, in essence, the problem is that these productions put forward an “other” antiquity, they defamiliarize the Ancients and, thus, disturb the continuity fantasy. Hence the noise: to cover up (experts might say, to “project”) the collective (and profoundly political) existential crisis.

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