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**Social Memory and Ethnic Identity:
Ancient Greek Drama Performances as Commemorative Ceremonies**

Vassiliki Lalioti

Submitted for Ph.D. Degree
2001

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic account of ancient Greek drama performances that take place in contemporary Greece. It illuminates an aspect of them that has not been taken into account until today: it treats them as commemorative ceremonies that produce, reproduce, and transmit social memory. The interrelation and interdependence between social memory and ethnic identity construction processes are analysed and it is shown that ancient drama performances, due to specific characteristics, constitute something more than mere theatrical events (as they are defined within the Western tradition). These performances, convey, sustain, and transmit from one generation to the next, perceptions of a glorious culture of the past, and become, for its creators and spectators, occasions for celebrating and remembering their ethnic past.

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Submitted for Ph.D. Degree in Social Anthropology
in the University of Durham,
Anthropology Department

Research Conducted in the Anthropology Department

2001



31 MAY 2002

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

“The adventure of *Antigone* through time and space is characteristic of those great works, which are transformed, in a specific moment, into monuments; into signs that guide memory, and compress time” (Program of the performance, National Theatre of Greece, 1995)¹

“Today, most of these theatres are silent remnants. However, they still ‘speak’ through their broken stones, they are witnesses of the unique culture of the Greeks” (M. Ploritis, Program of the International Symposium of *Delfi*, 1998)

The term ‘ancient Greek drama’ is used to denote drama that was originally written and performed during classical antiquity (5th-4th centuries B.C.) in the city-state of Athens. Although hundreds of drama texts must have been written and performed during classical antiquity, only a very small number of them has been preserved until our days. As a result, when we speak of ancient Greek drama we actually refer to the plays of the three tragic poets: Aeschylus (7 tragedies), Sophokles (7 tragedies) Evripidis (19 tragedies), and the one comic poet, Aristophanes (11 comedies). Ancient Greek drama performances included verbal discourse, music and dance. They were closely related to the religion of ancient Greek society and the worship of the God Dionysos constituted an essential aspect of the selection of the timing of drama performances. Drama performances were taking place as part of the festivities that were dedicated to the God Dionysos twice a year: the ‘En Asti Dionysia’ that had a pan-Hellenic character and the ‘Linea’, in which only the citizens of the city-state of Athens participated. “The close linkage of religion and drama is also illustrated by the fact that in the middle of the open-air cyclical space that would later become the ‘*orchestra*’ of the ancient theatres, there was always an altar dedicated to the God Dionysos” (Kakridis, 1989: 8). In classical antiquity, theatrical performances were part of drama competitions, and the honour for the winner poet was great.

¹ The translations from the Greek texts belong to the author.

The emergence and development of ancient Greek drama was closely related to the prevailing social organization of that time. Theatrical dialogue coincided with the development of democratic institutions. "The cohesion of the city-state of Athens was guaranteed by its citizens' accepting the law, which in turn acknowledged their freedom and allowed them to participate in public affairs" (Blume, 1989: 15).

All the information we have today about ancient Greek drama, besides the text of the plays mentioned above, come from archaeological finds and written records. Our current knowledge about ancient Greek drama thus comes from ruins of the ancient theatres, depictions on vessels, statuettes and masks, wall-paintings, inscriptions, scientific treatises like the *Poetics* of Aristotle, references in philosophical and historical texts, state records etc. We can only guess what the specific form of these performances was. "Academic and drama research on the subject extracts its data from the sources mentioned above as well as from current ethnographic material: dances, rituals of mimicry, usage of masks, etc." (Bosnakis, D. and D. Gagtzis, 1996: 15).

Ancient Greek drama, as an integral part of a glorious ancient culture, was actually rediscovered in modern Greece in the beginning of the nineteenth century, after a 'silence' of almost two thousand years. This rediscovery was part of the new, wider relationship with the past and the ancestors that was been cultivated as part of the cultural enlightenment in the Fight for Independence from Ottoman rule (Kremmydas, 1997). Nevertheless, the regular staging of ancient Greek drama in modern times only begun to take place in Greece during the first decades of the twentieth century. Since 1954, ancient drama performances have been a permanent feature of Greek cultural activity. They are presented in various annual summer festivals around the country, the most prominent of them being the festival of the ancient theatre of Epidavros.

Ancient drama performances and especially the Festival of Epidavros constitute some of the most significant cultural activities in Greece today and some of the most important events for theatregoers. Newspapers and periodicals dedicate many pages in presenting the theatrical groups, commenting upon the selection of the specific actors for the specific roles, criticizing the Directors' views on the plays, comparing current with earlier ways of staging, etc. Theatre people consider it to be a great

honor and significant achievement for their career to direct or take a leading role in an ancient drama performance. However, there is not even one theatrical group or school that works exclusively on the study of ancient Greek drama, while the education of young actors in the drama schools, as far as ancient theatre is concerned, is somewhat elementary. In addition, the performances that finally reach Epidavros pass through a selection process that remains undefined and highly politicized, and they are not considered to be necessarily those of the greatest merit. In spite of this, "once they are given access to the festivals they become the privileged few that may thereafter be regarded as good, if only because of their wider exposure" (Van Steen, 2000: 497). Also, the attachment of ancient drama festivals to the tourist policy of Greece (their administration belongs to the Ministry of Tourism instead of the Ministry of Culture as it would be expected), give some indication about the orientation of official state policy towards ancient Greek theatre in Greece today.

From a historical perspective, since the first years of its rediscovery, ancient Greek drama has constituted a field of negotiations, amongst members of Greek society, on modern Greek ethnic identity. It has been closely related to the processes of construction of the modern Greek nation state. Ancient drama "was tapped as the reservoir of uncontaminated cultural grandeur and ethnic heroism, concordant with the new state's normative ideology" (ibid.: 51). Its perception and interpretation constituted part of the wider ideological movement of that period that sought to define and confirm a special notion of Greekness. This notion, which has been produced, reproduced, transmitted and adjusted to various conditions throughout the whole modern Greek history, has been established on the construct of a direct and uninterrupted descent (biological and cultural) of modern Greeks from the ancient ones. Such a conception of 'continuity' from some, usually 'glorious', culture of the past constitutes an essential aspect of the process of ethnic identity construction, which is not exclusively Greek: it is more generally related to issues concerning the representation and the constitution of the past in the present. Within the wider framework of the construction of modern nations/states of the Western World, 'continuity' from the past is perceived and interpreted by ethnic groups as an element indispensable to the process of construction of current (ethnic) group identities (Anderson 1983; Appadurai 1981; Hobsbawm 1994).

Ancient Greek drama performances thus become theatrical events indicative of current conceptions and interpretations since they seem to directly associate classic antiquity with modern times. Being artistic as well as social events we can detect in them the ways in which elements of a powerful culture of the past are sustained, reproduced, and integrated into current cultural and social practices. Ancient Greece is reconstructed through selective techniques in a 'mythical' fashion, which reflects images of present attitudes and ideas on Greek identity.

Based on theories of identity construction, I conducted my fieldwork to investigate the ways in which perceptions of classical antiquity and the notion of 'continuity' are elaborated and expressed by theatre people, through their staging of ancient Greek drama performances. The main body of the data collected for this thesis comes from participant observation, which was conducted during 1997- 1998, in two theatrical groups in Athens: in the National Theatre of Greece, which staged the Aristophanes' comedy, *Lyssistrati*, and in Teatro Tehnis, which staged the tragedy by Evripidis, *Orestis*. I followed the whole theatrical process, which included the casting of the actors and the constitution of the group, the rehearsals, and finally, the performances. The role of the audience was taken into account since spectators and the ways they perceive of these performances constitute an organic part of the theatrical activity itself.

This thesis is a study of the ways my informants, as members of an ethnic group, remember their remote and more recent past through, either staging or watching, ancient Greek drama performances, and of how this social memory influences and is influenced by the ethnic identity(ies) construction process. Throughout the participant observation phase and through my interaction with the participants, I came to realize that perceptions of time and space play a central role in the process of constructing a Greek (ethnic) identity. Being part of a wider ancient Greek culture, ancient drama is viewed as having a diachronic value, since it deals with issues of morality and 'human nature' that it is believed have not changed over time. The questions about humanity that were posed by the ancient Greeks and were debated in their drama texts, are still perceived to 'torment' people today. The fact, however, that modern Greeks believe that they (in relation to all foreigners) know which is the proper way of staging ancient drama, shows a desire to abolish time and directly connect ancient with modern Greeks as if no time has intervened. In

addition, the ancient theatres as buildings evoke unique feelings to their Greek visitors, the most prominent of them being *deos* (a word that expresses fear, admiration, and deep respect at the same time) for their glorious past. They are characterized as magic places (*magika meri*) since they bear the touches, smells, and sounds of the ancients and remind modern Greeks of the presence of their ancestors. This sense of live memory is characteristically expressed through the attribution of qualities of living beings to a material monument as an ancient theatre. Thus, ancient theatres, according to my informants, are capable of distinguishing between good and bad performances, claim respect, and swallow actors and performances if they do not stand up to the theatre's demands. The way these theatrical monuments are related to the Greek natural environment is also perceived to be unique and unchangeable (from antiquity until today). The sun, the sea, the earth are the same that inspired these works of art in the first place. All the above formulate a rhetoric on time and space that promotes the notion of the biological and cultural continuity of modern Greeks from their ancestors, which is prevalent in Greek society.

Within the wider rhetoric of 'continuity' that has been developed, time and space are considered to be 'responsible' for the construction of a unique Greek identity that is expressed through specific features: feelings, senses, elements of a typical Greek character, behavior, and language. This sense of uniqueness is, for the vast majority of my informants, epitomized in the belief that only 'We', in relation to foreigners, the 'others', are able to stage good ancient drama performances. 'Others' actually comprise two subgroups: those who come from the West and those who come from the East. The group of the West includes '*the Europeans*', who lack the ability to stage good ancient Greek drama performances, although they are acknowledged to be technically and theoretically even better educated than 'Us'. The group of the East refers to ancient Greek drama performances staged by Chinese and Japanese, and were praised by my informants for their quality, since, according to their views, the antiquity and the ritualistic element of these cultures justify a special affinity with the ancient and the modern Greek one (Herzfeld 1982, 1987; Just 1995; Goody 1996).

The experience of fieldwork showed me that probably the central issue, around which all theoretical and artistic discussions on ancient drama in Greece are developed today, is the following: are ancient drama performances that take place in

our days a revival or an interpretation of the performances of antiquity? Theatre people and audiences approach ancient theatre with a peculiar agony that expresses more than mere artistic interest. Ancient drama performances take place in a concrete space and time but contain characteristics, images, and symbols that give them meaning beyond these realities. I noticed that they have an evocative capacity and characteristics such as the recurrence of traditional and ancestral elements, and linkages with deep levels of feelings of group belonging, through which “images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past [...] are conveyed and sustained” (Connerton, 1989: 4). I, thus, analyze them as ceremonies, in a wide sense, that produce, reproduce, and transmit social memory. They are re-enactments of the past, and at the same time attempts to impose interpretation of the past, to shape memory, and consequently, to construct ethnic identity. It is rather this ceremonial aspect of ancient drama performances that creates the sense of shared identity amongst members of the ethnic group with often multiple and even conflicting identities (Hughes-Freeland and Crain, 1998).

For the analysis of the material collected, I use the notion of ‘social memory’ as introduced by M. Halbwachs (1992) and was further developed, through enrichments and contradictions by more contemporary anthropologists. Within the anthropological literature, social memory has been used for the analysis of the relationship of social groups with their pasts and their role in the formation of ethnic and national identities. ‘Collective memory’ has been used to show that the ways in which we remember are determined by the world we live in, which provided us with the categories under which we think about our memories.

More specifically, the focus of this study is the investigation of the relation between social memory and history as revealed by my informants through practices, perceptions, and rhetoric of time and space. The past is constructed, reconstructed, and transmitted from each generation to the next, while current experiences are interpreted in a cultural language that people, as members of a specific cultural group, have learned to use to encode remembered reality. The utilization by informants of a common vocabulary, when referring to ancient drama and Greek identity, makes ancient drama a field for expressing individual and collective experiences and representing reality through the mediation of an ‘institutionalized’ discourse in ethnic terms. The homogeneity, however, of beliefs, expressions, and

interpretations should not cause us to overlook the fact that identities, in general, are embedded in relations of power. Not all identities are equally available to all of us, nor are all equally culturally valued. That is why Greek ethnic identity should also be examined in reference to the wider economic and political divides within modern Greek society. It should also be kept in mind that identity is not something merely imposed upon members of a specific ethnic group, but is rather a construction process that also demands active involvement of the group members (Abercombie, 1998).

What is of crucial importance is the fact that ancient drama performances constitute actual theatrical activities, which have the power to shape and transmit elements of group (ethnic) identities. According to the current, processual view (Schieffelin, 1997), theatrical performances are not something static and fixed, but their analysis should be closely related to conceptions of reflexivity, to collective and individual presentation of the self, to the social construction of reality. Theatrical performance should be related to its wider social and political context (Van Steen, 2000). As is the case in all theatrical genres within the Western tradition, ancient drama performances preserve known forms and call for innovation at the same time. Within this framework, the role of the body and the senses is considered by my informants to be crucial as a means for perceiving and expressing the relation of modern Greeks with their ancestors. Many of the actors made constant references to ancestral qualities, historical permanence, and continuity through the body that affirm, according to them, the uniqueness of a Greek identity. Whether modern performances constitute an interpretation or a revival of the performances that were taking place in antiquity, is a question that actually reflects the need to define patrimony, to define to whom this theatre, this tradition (as my informants believe it to be) belongs, and who has the right to transmit and teach it. Ancient drama becomes a site where the past is represented and protected as ethnic heritage. Memory is actively evoked in the construction and transmission of this tradition, while "the notion of custodianship is of crucial importance" (Sant Cassia, 1999: 259).

CHAPTER 1

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE NOTION OF 'CONTINUITY'

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework used for the analysis of the material collected through participant observation in Athens in 1997 and 1998. It introduces the reader to theories of ethnic (group) identities and the notion of 'continuity', which is a crucial aspect of the subject under study of this thesis. Through ancient drama performances, modern Greeks produce, reproduce, and transmit ethnic identity(ies), in which the notion of continuity (cultural as well as biological) of modern Greeks from their ancient ancestors plays a central role.

The chapter is divided in two main parts. The first reviews the general literature of group identity (Barth 1969; Anderson 1983; Handler 1984; Gellner 1992; Hobsbawm 1994; De Vos and Romannucci 1995; Spiering 1996) with a focus on outlining the ways in which specific perceptions of the past affect and even define present attitudes in relation to the process of nation-state construction. The second part of this chapter focuses on the Greek case and investigates the ways in which the notion of 'continuity' has been 'used' in the process of constructing modern Greek identity. Greece is not some exotic illiterate society with no history. Thus, I find it necessary to present a brief historical account of the transformations and the adaptations of the notion of biological and cultural continuity of ancient to modern Greeks through history. The discussion begins with the Byzantine era and the four centuries of the Ottoman Empire rule over the territory that is now called Hellas. It proceeds with the period of preparation of the Greek populations for the Fight for Independence from the Ottoman rule, which was a crucial period for the formation of the Greek nation-state, and of the emergence of a 'national consciousness', in which the notion of 'continuity' from classical antiquity played a central role.

To present a rounded examination of this subject the chapter also reviews the ways in which Folklore studies have treated the notion of tradition and of biological and cultural continuity. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the role that this notion of 'continuity' plays in defining the relationship between 'us' and the 'others', and the development, through time, of Greek ethnic identity in relation to the crucial other: Europe.

The historical and theoretical account of this chapter is a necessary background that will enable the reader to get a rounded picture of the current perceptions, interpretations and practices which consist the main subject of this thesis and are going to be presented and analytically investigated in the following chapters.

1.1. GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE NOTION OF 'CONTINUITY'

Ethnic identity and the process of its construction is a very wide area of study but a very indicative one, concerning issues such as the representation and the reconstruction of the past in the present. In the context of the present study, focus is placed on the notion of 'continuity' of contemporary ethnic groups from cultures of the past, as this is perceived and interpreted by them. The continuity is an element indispensable to the process of construction of current ethnic identities, as they have been expressed in nations/states of the Western World. The aim here is to provide a general framework that explains how modern Greeks reconstruct their past.

Ethnic groups in the modern world are closely related to nation-states, a comparatively new form of social and political organization based on the existence of specific and clearly defined and separable cultures. Cultures and political organizations of this kind did not generally converge in the past. The mutual relationship between modern culture and state is something new that sprang from modern social and economic demands. Preexisting cultures are reshaped. During this process (of selectively using and transforming cultures of the past) it is possible for dead languages to be revived, traditions to be invented and imaginary primeval

purities to be restored. “Nation-states can only be defined in relation to the era of nationalism and not the other way round” (Gellner, 1992: 105).

In the modern literature on nationalism (Bennett 1973; Jessel 1978; Roosens 1989; Gellner 1992; Hobsbawm 1994; Woolf 1995; Llobera 1996), there are various definitions of the words ‘ethnos’, ‘ethnic group’, ‘ethnicity’, etc., none of them can cover all cases in all different times and places. The term ‘ethnic identity’, also, is very broad and charged with many associated ideas. Those who have written about this subject emphasize and prioritize different aspects. All formulations, however, recognize the importance of continuity and its decisive role in the process of construction of an identity.

1.1.a. Ethnic Identity as a Natural Phenomenon

It is widely accepted that ethnic or national identity is something ‘natural’, an integral, essential part of the ‘self’. A person without a nationality or ethnic identity is unthinkable, almost monstrous. Here, we can discern a huge gap that exists between what most people believe and the prevalent view in contemporary social scientific literature on the subject. When speaking of ethnic identity people always refer to ancestors and to factors such as land and climate, suggesting that they can shape people’s appearance as well as their mental make-up. Thus, it is implied that national identity is somehow genetically transferred. Social scientists, on the other hand, prefer to speak of national identity as a “cultural artefact”, as something which “is not based on facts, forever fixed in time and space, but [...] consists of images that are subject to change” (Spiering, 1996: 117)

Words like ‘survive’, ‘persist’, ‘adapt’ are very common in the folk vocabulary that is used to describe ethnic groups. They directly refer to ethnic groups as if they were natural organisms with a continuous physical existence which can be revived after having hibernated for a period of time. “The renaissance of traditional culture in the form of an objectified ceremonial, institution, or sense of identity is not continuous with the past, but a new construction referring to the past, to be sure, but symbolically created in the present” (Handler, 1984: 57). We could speak of continuity in the sense that the new representations refer to the old ones and that this process of reconstruction and representation recurs continually. In this sense, what is

important is the specific social and cultural conditions under which members of an ethnic group acknowledge a past as 'their own'.

Ethnic groups do not make a distinction between the cultural and biological dimensions of their continuity. The notion of 'continuity' that is perceived and expressed in phyletic terms may also imply a cultural heritage from one's ancestors. There is rather an identification between genetically transmitted material and cultural information, an absorption of the one into the other, which results in experiencing, by members of an ethnic group, of the whole entity as 'natural'.

1.1.b. Selectivity and Authenticity

This process of reconstruction and representation of the past is always characterized by some sort of selectivity. According to the conditions and the needs of the present, groups select some elements of the past that look appropriate and ignore others. So, we cannot say that a culture remains the same for ages because, on the one hand the wider social, economical, historical contexts change, and on the other, the continuous existence of some aspects of a culture do not substitute for the whole entity. Even the elements that have been selected in the present, viewed in a new light and transposed to new contexts, become completely new and gain different meanings for those who consider them, although they may be presented as contiguous with an authentic cultural past.

Authenticity becomes a necessary prerequisite for the recognition of a distinct ethnic identity and this can only be found in the past, a previous, primordial, and pure stage of the group's holy history. "History, language, folk tradition, territory, culture, religion could be used to promote the ancient traditions of an ethnic group, to be used as symbolic indications (signs) of its historic continuity and thus of its authenticity" (Woolf, 1995: 73). Very often the discovery of a folk tradition, of the way and conditions of life of some people of the countryside, is transformed into a wider "ethnic tradition", a process that "most of the times is motivated by a foreign ruling class or an elite" (Hobsbawm, 1994: 148).

Authenticity is closely related to tradition which is seen as something stable and unchanged. It is normally preserved through certain values and norms of behavior

that are inculcated by repetition, a fact which automatically implies continuity with the past. There is “a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition” and has been defined by Hobsbawm (1983) as “the invention of tradition”. This process is signified by the use of ancient materials for the construction of some new tradition reflecting the needs and purposes of the present. The past is like a repository of materials that can be used selectively in order to satisfy current needs. When an old way is alive there is no need to use terms like ‘revive’ or ‘awakening’ that are very common in ethnic identity rhetoric.

1.1.c The Conception of Time

The notion of continuity is directly associated to the ways in which the dimension of time is conceived by ethnic groups within the framework of the ‘new’ organization of nation-states.

The development of the various institutions of the nation-state (universal education, the army, standardized laws etc.) and particular technological progress (printing) allowed people to think of themselves as living lives parallel to those of other substantial groups of people, with whom, although they never met, they were thought to be proceeding along the same trajectory (Anderson, 1991). By analogy, through these novelties, people were in position to understand earlier and contemporary communities as being synchronic, as “coexisting within homogenous, empty time” (Lekkas, 1996: 211). This empty, homogenous time, obscures the historicity of the national phenomenon itself and makes nationalistic ideas look eternal, natural and absolute. Ethnic solidarity is considered to be an invariable characteristic of human history. As a consequence, it does not matter how close or remote is the past where people locate the appearance of their ethnic groups, because “they regard them as entities that are essentially immovable and a-historic, almost transcendental” (ibid).

The accumulation of documentary evidence functions towards the same direction: ethnic groups confirm an apparent continuity that is recorded while it is evident that it has been lost from memory. Continuity is seen as the result of a secular, serial time, and because the experience of continuity has been forgotten, nations need

narratives of identity (Anderson, 1991). Archaeological finds are used as witnesses of evidential things, which must be remembered as 'our own'. Documents become narrations of something lost (we do not remember it anymore) and at the same time they create a conception of personhood, of identity while they are both set in homogenous, empty time.

The notion of a national/ethnic group has a three-dimensional substance, in the present, the past and the future. The absorption in an idealized past could be an expression of feelings of nostalgia for the imagined security of the traditional community, because of the social and cultural realignments that take place in the present. This comparison between a glorious past and a not analogous present that takes place, can function as a motive for action in the future, because the process of reconstruction of the past reinforces the feeling that individuals have a dynamic place in the course of time. Tradition is not one, unified, given, and uncontested, but it consists of partial reconstructions and, thus, is open to interpretations (Lekkas, 1996). The gap between traditional and modern society is erased and an imaginary national continuity is restored.

1.1.d. The Role of History

Invented traditions constitute a crucial element of the national phenomenon. History is used, both as a legitimator of action and the binding material of group cohesion. Also, it becomes part of the knowledge, or the ideology, of the nation not because it accounts for what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but rather for what has been selected (Hobsbawm, 1983).

Ethnic groups approach history with some elasticity: "the critical knowledge of the facts of the past can be so faulty" (Roosens, 1989: 155) that the symbolic transformations of former ways of life, values, facts etc, for current reasons, can be limitless. However, groups often conceive their 'actual history' as an unbroken biological-genetic generational continuity, which gives special inherited characteristics to the group. The need to justify a present social belonging and current group loyalties defined as ethnic, is actually based on a past only recently fabricated. However, De Vos notes that this "collective fabrication of a mythical past may prove to be as socially efficacious as actual history" (1995: 43).

1.1.e Ethnic Boundaries

What is very important and perhaps decisive in the process of construction of ethnic identities is the sense of differentiation from other ethnic groups, which is expressed in the recognition and posing of various kinds of boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Continuity, from this point of view, could be confined to the cultivation and exhibition of particular cultural characteristics, which always differentiate one group from all others. This implies that human groups develop in isolation and that the boundaries of racial and cultural difference (social separation, territory, language, etc) were set in some primeval stage, are fixed and set once and for all.

Fredrik Barth (1969) has elaborated on the notion of boundaries and has stressed that continuity refers to the role of the process of their maintenance. According to his analysis, what is important is the ways in which ethnic boundaries that define the groups are maintained by continual expression and validation. "The cultural features that may signal the boundary may change [...] Yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content" (Barth, 1969: 14). What emerges from this view is the suggestion that the history of an ethnic group is not the history of 'a culture'. Ethnic groups do not have a continual organisational existence because their boundaries (which could also be perceived as criteria of membership) are continually modified. "Certain peoples insist on maintaining symbolic forms of cultural differentiation for centuries, despite a lack of political autonomy or even of a particular territory" (De Vos, 1995: 17). The Gypsies and Jews could be seen as such examples. Consequently it becomes very difficult to define the unit whose continuity is being depicted.

Within this general theoretic framework we will discuss next the transformations and adaptations of the notion of biological and cultural continuity of ancient to modern Greeks through history. This will enlighten current perceptions and interpretations analyzed in the following chapters.

1.2. 'CONTINUITY' AND GREEK ETHNIC IDENTITY

1.2.a. *An Historical Account*

The notion of continuity from classical antiquity, as modern Greeks now conceive it, is an ideological construction first shaped during the 19th century. It was used to support the struggle for Independence (1821) from the Ottoman Empire as well as the establishment of the new nation state. The relationship between ancient and modern Greeks, and its role in the process of construction of a Greek ethnic identity, has undergone, over time, many transformations incorporated into the wider Greek and European socioeconomic environment.

During the Byzantine era and the centuries of the Ottoman rule every conscious link between ancient and modern Greeks had been erased. However, there were still the material documents, such as buildings and artefacts that excited the imagination and "a multitude of traditions were moulded for the people that had created them many years ago" (Kakridis, 1997: 15). What can be deduced from this folk tradition is that the people who created it did not consider themselves Greeks. The main characteristic of the mythical Greeks was their supernatural height and their prodigious bodily strength. Byzantines, in fact, attributed supernatural powers to the ancient Greeks and placed their heyday before Adam.

The words Hellenas and Hellenism were respectively identified with idolaters (pagans) and idolatry, and from the 15th century onwards they were displaced by *Romii*, only to reappear in the 19th century (Tziovas, 1989) with a completely different content and context. It is worth mentioning that all history books available in the Greek territory until the mid 18th century referred only to the Christian past, leaving out the ancient Greeks. But even in those cases where the Orthodox Church identified its flock as Greeks, the characteristic of this 'us' was not located in the past, in descent, but in the present, in the faith. "In this manner, faith and race become identical and the content of 'us' is defined by Orthodoxy" (Politis, 1997: 14).

As the Ottoman Empire grew weaker and less centralized, the Church no longer stood in the way of a re-connection with the Hellenic past. The study of ancient

Greek civilization became more widespread, and the 'Greek idea' steadily gained ground (Browning, 1985).

A radical change of scenery occurred with the impact of the new ideas of the European Enlightenment. From the 17th century, European travelers and scholars began to show an intense interest in the Greek space, initially regarding it as a field for applying and drawing information about ancient Greece. For the first time in the later part of the 18th century a systematic use of the word 'ethnos' in the place of 'race' is made, and the distinction between antiquity and the Byzantine era, a distinction that was based mainly on Christianity as well as on language emerges. Through these processes "Greece was placed in the contemporary geographical consciousness, and was acknowledged as one of the spaces – one of the countries – of the world space" (Giakovaki, 1997: 77).

By the end of the 18th century with the wider prevalence and the strong influence of the European Enlightenment, the Greek people had dissociated the notion of '*Romii*' from the other Orthodox nations that were subjugated to the Ottoman Empire. The new ideology of the nation fighting for its independence emerged. But for this ideology to gain a perspective, the national consciousness was placed within the European context and was aligned with its evaluative system. Greeks had to choose the West if they wanted to survive and be placed among "the new economic relationships that [...] appeared to be the main rival of the Ottoman social system; they could only strengthen and develop politically and ideologically through their reference to the West" (Kremmydas, 1997: 25).

As a result there was a rapid downgrading of Byzantium and an upgrading of classical antiquity because it was the cradle of the ideas of the Enlightenment and provided the best credentials for membership of Europe, whose support was vital for future national independence. Classical antiquity was consciously selected as the hard national core while Byzantium (being a theocratic State) was eliminated as the major reference point. The aim of this linkage with antiquity was not to prove some uninterrupted continuity but to strengthen the common consciousness of Greeks having shared glorious ancestors in order to ensure support by the Europeans.

The relationship that was developed between the new and the ancient Hellenes caused the transformation and, finally, the revolutionization of the society. During the Revolution, classical antiquity was perhaps one of the most powerful weapons Greeks had against the Ottomans. It also served as the most significant argument for claiming European support. Inevitably, the theocratic Byzantium, which represented an old-fashioned political and social organization was 'forgotten': "And suddenly, [...] all, 'greki', 'romii' and whatever else, became 'Hellenes' and got a country named 'Hellas', which was characterized as a fatherland" (Kremmydas, 1997: 28).

After Independence (1832), and until the first decades of our century, national consciousness in Greece was primarily affected by the interplay of two main factors: a) the pursuit of the ethnic integration within the borders of the independent kingdom and b) the liberation of other territories of the Ottoman Empire where Greek populations were still living and which were considered integral parts of the historical heritage of Hellenism. Thus, the main aim of the newborn Greek nation-state was to preserve and expand the notion of the unity of a geographically extensive Greek 'ethnos' and a territorially restricted Greek nation. This was something that could be achieved "through the identification of a cultural with a political identity which would be defined according to a specific perception of Greekness" (Veremis, 1997: 24).

The cultivation of the theory of historical continuity from antiquity until modern times reflected the effort to overcome the contradictions and the cultural inconsistencies of the main elements of the Greek inheritance: classical Greece, on the one hand and medieval Christian Byzantium, on the other. Those two elements were now viewed as integral, complementary, and necessary for the attribution of unique characteristics to the members of this specific ethnic group. But the lack of recognition of the essential differences and the promotion of the supposedly common features between those two different cultures (the ancient Greek and the Byzantine), however, cultivated a unity that "remained fleeting and unspecified except for the intellectuals" (Kitromilidis, 1997: 87)

A completed corpus of historical ethnic theories to scientifically substantiate the newly made Greek ethnic consciousness was performed by the historian K. Paparrigopoulos. According to Tzermias, he "presented with his genius and his

writing talent what the ethnic collective body was claiming at that moment: The duty is double: scientific as well as ethnic ... I will speak the word of the ethnic truth..."(Tzermias, 1997: 140).

Paparigopoulos' main work was the restoration and incorporation of Byzantium as an integral part of Greek history thus ensuring the unity of Hellenism through time. He was clearly against the notion that blood was the decisive characteristic of the ethnic group. He believed that it was the special spirit that Greeks managed to retain from the shipwreck of the ancient civilization that bound the nation. According to Paparigopoulos (1993[1885]), the Greek nation (ethnos) is not differentiated from other nations by its religion, institutions, and way of life but mainly by its language and its consciousness of ethnic unity. This abstract moral and spiritual unity existed among all free and still enslaved (subjugated) Greeks and was further elaborated later by the political vision of the '*Megali Idea*', which appeared in early 20th century (Tzermias, 1997).

The '*Megali Idea*' gave people a sense of Greek unity in space through a new national mission: the liberation of Greeks who still lived under Ottoman rule and the 'civilizing', meaning the Hellenization of the East. It also tried to link the nation with the Church and, against the heritage of the Enlightenment, to emphasize Byzantium and the Byzantine past of Greece. We have thus the full acquiescence of the Orthodox Church of Greece in favor of the wordly values of the Greek nationalism, and its transformation to an official ideological arm of the state. Until then the Church was completely against the "ethnic entrenchment, which threatened and finally ruined the ecumenism of the transcendental values that connected Balkan society within the bosom of Orthodoxy during the centuries of [Ottoman] enslavement" (Kitromilidis, 1997: 70). Its strong psychological and symbolic power helped to consolidate the ethnic unity that had been constructed by the state.

National Education beyond the borders of the Greek state had a similar aim: to extend the symbolic limits of the Greek ethnic group and teach specific social groups to identify themselves with the wider community of the Greek ethnos. "The revival of the language opened the way for the cultivation of sentiments of ethnic identity, for the politicization of memory of ancient past, and the gradual

transformation of traditional religious incorporations into national dedication" (ibid: 93).

After the war with Turkey, which resulted in the destruction of the cities of Asia Minor (1922) and the expulsion of millions of Greeks from these areas, while the borders of the Greek ethnos were shrinking, the '*Megali Idea*' was finally abandoned as the dominant state ideology. The need to clearly define a notion of Greekness was expressed with special intensity during the crucial decade of 1930 through literature and other art forms. This was the first time when a conscious effort was made to bring out both aspects of national identity: "on the one hand to show its bourgeois-cosmopolitan picture: extrovert, modernizing, and at the same time competitive to Europe and, on the other, to present a populist picture discovering Makrygiannis and Theofilos" (Tziovas, 1989: 52). Makrygiannis (1797-1864), participated in the Fight for the Independence, and wrote his memoirs ('*Apomnimonevmata*') referring to the Fight for the Independence and to the civil conflicts that followed the establishment of the Greek nation-state. His style and his language are perceived to express the 'pure Greek soul', free from any scholarly elements. Theofilos was a 19th century painter from the island of Lesbos, who derived his themes from the Greek rural life, the Fight for the Independence and the Greek mythology. References to Makrygiannis and Theofilos, among others, express the effort to establish a new relationship with Europe and reduce the feeling of ethnic inferiority. According to Tziovas (1989) the conflict between liberalism and conservative despotism was the wider framework within which the debate about the definition of Greekness developed. Liberal intellectuals refrained from giving recipes of Greekness, defining it as something indeterminable, a kind of style unique and inimitable. Conservatives, on the other hand, regarded ethnicity in art as something biological, employing the notion of the 'aesthetics of landscape', the identification of Greekness with a specific natural environment, which inspires and conveys the characteristics of an ethnic identity.

1.2.b. *Folk Tradition and Continuity*

The existence of a tradition that lives today and goes back to some dark point in antiquity has widely been used to justify the continuity of Greek ethnos and,

consequently, the direct descent of modern Greeks from ancient Greeks. It is usually located in folk songs, stories, dances or rituals, which supposedly associate the present with distant periods of time and history. "What we call our Tradition is the spirit that has been shaping our intellect and guiding our actions. This unifying element of our historic self, this is what we call our Tradition" (Farmakides, 1987: 164). Whether such a thing exists or not cannot be established and, more important, it would not be of much help, because what is worth is to try to investigate the ways this notion is been used in order to shape a perception of identity.

The notion of tradition and the ways it has been treated in folk studies in Greece, show that it is not irrelevant from the wider socioeconomic framework of the society in a specific moment in time, or as A. Kyriakidou – Nestoros argued: "folk tradition is a notion that does not belong to the field of science but to that of ideology" (1998: 249). During the first decades after Independence from the Ottoman Empire the task of the Greek folklorists was to prove the continuity of Greek culture through the ages. Cultural continuity was rather perceived to be an expression of the biological continuity of the Greek ethnos, which was defined by "the blood that runs in our veins".

In the 19th century ethnicity and the preservation of what was considered to be national heritage (*'ethniki klironomia'*), became the dominant ideology. As a result, the focal point was transferred to the folk, which was recognized as the only genuine creator of culture and to the "rural part of the population, which embodied all the virtues of the nation and acts as the official keeper of the traditional order" (Kyriakidou- Nestoros, 1986: 44). This reflects a major ideological change, influenced by the Romantic ideal that is imported to Greece from Germany.

The official position of folk studies in Greece in the first decades of the 20th century remained more or less the same. The aim was to preserve and promote the idea of unity and ethnic homogeneity even though cultural variation within the borders of the Greek nation posed many problems especially after 1922 and the destruction of the cities of Minor Asia.

Until today Folklore studies in Greece treated folk as a vehicle of continuity of ancient tradition. Rural populations in contrast to urban ones were supposed to have

preserved the tradition as they were isolated, vulgar and illiterate. They are worthy of study not for the traditions they have created but because they are simply "the bearers of pieces of the old cultural treasure, which they had preserved in an irrational form – in the form of “superstitions”–by force or habit" (Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1986: 43). The content of this tradition remained blurred referring only to an idealized past. Modernization, on the contrary, was supposed to be a violent rupture of this past and a contemporary imaginary construction. "Tradition is understood as the substratum, and modernization as the process of its alteration and rationalization. In Greece, in contrast, the very meaning of tradition is problematic" (Faubion, 1993: 105).

1.2.c. Continuity and Identity

1.2.c.a. 'Us' and the 'Others'

As previously demonstrated, the notion of continuity from a glorious past, constitutes a common element of what we call ethnic identity. In the case of Greece the notion of continuity is one of the main criteria of reference and knowledge about the 'self' and the 'other'. The visible monuments of a glorious Hellenic past along with those of the Byzantine and the modern era coexist in Greece, making the Greek homeland as much a state of mind as a place on the map (Kouvertaris, 1987). Hellenism is perceived as diachronic, continuous, unified, and homogenous, historically given, politically prescribed, and indisputable. Although the view of the nation as a construction, meaning a historically and culturally finite being, is prevalent among academics, it is almost unmentionable, even unconceivable, within the wider society.

The belief in an interior essence, which pervades and defines the social process, like a red thread that runs down time, renders the notions of tradition and Greekness appear as if they were established not through tangible historical phenomena, but as if they are abstract, timeless beings, which are intuitively approached and aesthetically perceived. According to D. Tziovas "Greeks do not approach history through the western perspective of progress as being the absolute aim", but "as the

intersection of a kaleidoscope that represents the split picture of the past, and an unbreakable web that symbolizes continuity" (1989: 50).

It is widely accepted that the ethnic 'self' in Greece is perceived through a specific feeling of superiority, which rests initially on the achievements of a culture of the past and consequently on contemporary image justified by the fact that Greeks are "the distinctive heirs of the ancient Greek civilization and [...] that ancient Greece constitutes the perpetual cultural matrix of Europe" (Veikos, 1993: 38). On the other hand, the image of the East is always present, representing and justifying usually the negative aspects of the Greek character and the contemporary inability to keep up with progress in Europe. Both these poles are present in everyday discourse and express a "contradiction, which exists throughout the whole spectrum of the codes through which the collective self-presentation and self-cognition are counterbalanced" (Herzfeld, 1998: 147).

Contradictions are not, of course, a unique Greek problem but a reality that is common to all ethnic identities. In the case of Greece, however, they represent "the counterbalance of self-knowledge and self-presentation against more powerful others" (Papataxiarhis, 1998: xix). They do not constitute a restriction, a limit or anything negative in the process of the construction of an ethnic identity, but rather they create relationships of multileveled negotiation of meaning. For Europeans, Greece has been a place of 'their own' although far away from them in time (ancestral and thus removed through mythic time) and in space, but not 'them'. In the same way, Greeks perceive of themselves as belonging to Europe but as not being Europeans in every sense.

For some Greek scholars (e.g. Tsaousis, 1998), Greece is a country experiencing a crisis of identity because the content of this identity remains obscure and ambiguous. According to this view, "the identity crisis is the central problem of the neohellenic society, the constituent element of the contemporary Hellenism, and the axis around which our modern history revolves" (ibid: 17). Thus, there is a rather defensive definition of Hellenism, which seeks to establish identity not on the affirmation of 'us', but on the rejection of the 'other', leading to an effort to retain its integrity through isolation and ethnocentrism. There is also a tendency of many non-Greek academics to see Greece as a country constantly in pursuit of its identity. This

approach could reflect western rationalistic views of identity as something homogenous and unified, while notions of conflict and competition. It reproduces the notion of marginality of Greece that exists in international affairs and is reflected in "the very marginality of Greek ethnography in the development of anthropological theory, where [...] the Greeks of today are a people neither dramatically exotic nor yet unambiguously European" (Herzfeld, 1987: 20).

1.2.c.b. Greece and Europe

'Europe', another 'key word', has always been a crucial factor in the process of constructing modern Greek ethnic identity. It has been present in the form of the 'other' with whom Greeks either identify with or differentiate themselves from. Moreover, Europe, on a more pragmatic, political level, has been directly and indirectly involved in the formation of the contemporary Greek nation state and its survival in the world system, thus effecting further constructions, interpretations and reflections on the ethnic self. "Our contradictory relationship with the West [...] is nothing but the result of the identification of a cultural identity, which historically had received a defensive character, with a political identity, which in order to function demanded a dynamic and extrovert support" (Tsaousis, 1998: 23). As a consequence, this relationship contains the contradictions and the polysemies of every relationship of this kind.

Long before Greek Independence, English, French, and German travelers made the long and dangerous trip to Greece stimulated by their passionate belief in the idea of Hellas. A feeling of nostalgia motivated these trips as "visiting the land itself, recovering the sites and the works of art, enhances the sense of loss, in that one sees more clearly what once was" (Constantine, 1984: 4). Eighteenth century Europe created, through its admiration and longing for the values ascribed to ancient Greece, its own myth and gave Hellas the dimensions of an ideal.

Europe interpreted ancient Greece according to the needs of the construction of a common western identity, making thus the "control of the image of the Greek past equally essential for Europeans" (Alexandri, 1997: 97). It was part of the wider quest for the genesis of nations that constituted the base of a hierarchically developed civilization. In 1670, Athens became a holy city and the birthplace of the

now secular European civilization. "The European continent will, from now on, become tantamount to the place of civilization, to use the term which the 18th century devised, in order to, among other things, distinguish Europe from other continents, from wildness and barbarism" (Giakovaki, 1997: 80), when Europe discovers the 'other'.

Visits to the land of their ideals led European travelers to compare the remnants of a civilization of the past with the way of life of the contemporary inhabitants. In their eyes, the comparison was revealing: there was nothing left from that glorious past, and what they brought back was a "tension, ideally a creative one, between facts and the ideal, scholarship and imagination" (Constantine, 1984: 211). What European travelers imagined to have found was a loss, which although a historical one, they perceived as a synchronic lack of culture. In both cases, either in treating Greeks as living ancestors or as uncultured Orientals, they denied them having a culture.

During the period of genesis of the modern Greek nation-state (19th century) Greeks used this ambiguous picture to achieve their aim. As mentioned in the historical account, it was very convenient for Greeks to accept "the passive role of the living ancestors" (Herzfeld, 1998: 141), although it later led to criticisms (inside and outside Greece) for their inability to be worthy of that past, and equal to the rest of Europe. Dependence on the West made Greeks cultivate feelings of estrangement inside their own country, which coexisted with a consciousness of the historical and cultural centrality of Greece to European civilization: "What is peculiar to Greece's case is that everyone seems to have appropriated its lost cultural hegemony. And the problem for Greek nationalism was to distinguish an 'us' from 'them' while "the very measure of your fame is the degree to which your definitions of self have been appropriated by others. How, in short, are you to play the role of being exclusively universal?" (Just, 1995: 290).

It has been argued that Greek membership to the European Community has been based on "Europe's collective guilt at its supine stand during the seven-year dictatorship" (Clogg, 1992: 204), and that this membership has sealed its unambiguous Europeanness. Such interpretations, however, overlook the fact that economic and political decisions cannot restore sentimental balances. The myth of Europe's cultural and political debt to Greek heritage was not created in Greece

alone but was part of a European process of identity construction and of handling Greek identity in its discourse with Europe. An anonymous letter in the *Sunday Telegraph* (27-3-1994) claimed that Greece should be evicted from the E.U. because "as Fallmerayer proved, contemporary Greeks have no biological relation to the ancients". This is indicative of the problem as it includes modern Greece in Europe, but excludes it on the basis of its presumed biological discontinuity.

In trying to define the elements of Greekness identifying those that remain constant through time, allowing us thus to speak of continuity, the words of H. Ahrweiler are revealing: "it is the ultimate lesson in liberty and responsibility to make man the absolute measure of all things, of all the natural laws of necessity" (1998: 21). Greekness is almost always described as a way of life and thought. People are thus perceived to be always the same, presenting a fixed Greek character that expresses itself in similar ways under different circumstances. If we restrict the discussion to the issues of whether this is true or not, who invented it first - Greeks or Europe- linearity and direct continuity between modern and ancient Greece, then we reach a deadlock. This is the classical conundrum of the chicken and the egg. To reach an understanding we should refrain from focusing on the issue. We should instead focus on the processes of constructing current Greek identity. The mapping of this process is the objective of this ethnography of theatre in Greece. The relationship of Greeks with classic antiquity is explored through modern performances of ancient Greek drama.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter was to give a brief general theoretical framework and an historical perspective to the subject of this thesis. Ethnic group identity construction and the ways members of modern nation-states perceive it constitute a very wide topic that has been analyzed in depth by current (anthropological and historical) literature. Ethnic identity is perceived to be a natural phenomenon, since its lack is considered to be something almost abnormal. Even the vocabulary that is used to describe ethnic groups is full of words like 'survive', 'persist' etc., which show the close connection that exists between biological and cultural aspects of this identity. During the ethnic identity construction process another process takes place: the

selection and authentication of specific information that concerns the past of the group, and the discarding and ignorance of others that may not serve contemporary needs for specific purposes. Both selection and authentication processes promote a sense of unchangeability through time, providing members of the group with the stability necessary for the recognition of ethnic distinctiveness. As a consequence, a specific conception of time is created through which the imaginary national continuity is being constantly restored. In this way, ethnic boundaries between 'us' and the 'others' are constructed, exhibiting the continuous (temporally) presence of particular characteristics that are perceived to have developed in isolation. The individual psychological dimension of the issue should not be ignored. The need for persons to feel the continuity in belonging to some (cultural and biological) group with, usually glorious, ancestors, is vital for the preservation of the differentiation from other groups.

In the second part of this chapter I gave an historical dimension to the study of the subject of this thesis. I showed that the way(s) modern Greeks perceive their past and handle the notion of 'continuity' from their ancient ancestors is not something fixed and final in time. It is rather something that should be placed within social, economic, and wider historical conditions, which influence its construction, reconstruction and transmission. Thus, we saw that during the Byzantine era and the period of the Ottoman Empire, ancient Greeks were non-existent for the contemporary inhabitants of the territory we now call Greece. Classical antiquity and the notion of 'continuity' (biological descent identified with specific cultural characteristics) actually developed during the period of the preparation and the constitution of the Greek nation-state (19th century). During the 20th century this notion was transformed according to specific needs and circumstances. Folklore studies have also played a crucial role in this process since they tried to prove the existence of an authentic Greek way of life. They turned to the 'pure' Greek folk, mainly of the rural areas, and treated it as a vehicle of continuity of ancient tradition.

The notion of continuity from a glorious culture of the past constitutes a common element of what we call ethnic identity. The peculiarity of the Greek case, however, consists in the fact that the relation between 'us' and the 'others' (the Western Europeans mainly) has been constructed and reconstructed in time, through contradictions that represent the counterbalance of self-knowledge and self-

presentation against more powerful others. Greece is claimed by the 'others' as their own, and Greeks perceive of themselves as belonging to Europe but as not being Europeans in every sense.

In the next chapter I will present the fieldwork that I conducted among two theatrical groups in Athens, in 1997 and 1998 in order to collect the material necessary for this thesis. Related methodological issues will also be presented and analyzed.

FIELDWORK AND RELATED METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present the methods of research and analysis of the subject under study of this thesis. The main method I used was systematic participant observation as defined in classical anthropological terms (Ellen 1984; Hammersley 1990; Bernard 1995). I also employed semi-structured and unstructured, informal interviews. Information was also collected through archival research, newspapers, performance programs, and journals. Emphasis was also given to the bibliographical, historical, sociological, and especially anthropological issues related to the specific topic. The last section of this chapter deals with the final step of this research project, the process of writing of the ethnographic text itself, through the related literature.

2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1.a. *Choice of the Topic*

Initially, the reason for choosing the specific topic of this thesis was my personal interest in it. During a dinner party I had with friends in Athens in the summer of 1996, following a performance of 'Helektra' in Epidavros, staged by the National Theatre of Greece the discussion of: "*why another performance of 'Helektra'? Haven't we seen enough of all these plays? Most of the times you do not really enjoy them, because all you see is a repetition of things already known*", spread into the concern about the aims of the ancient drama festival of Epidavros (the ancient Greek theatre near the city of Argos, in the Peloponnisos). Some claimed that the majority of the actors had participated in performances there just because they had the necessary 'connections' ('*ta messa*') with people in key positions rather than some

special talent. Nevertheless, everyone present agreed that most of the ancient drama performances staged by foreign theatrical groups in Epidavros and in other ancient theatres in Greece, rarely were criticized in a positive way, just because they were not staged by Greeks. This observation was the initial motivation for me to investigate the connection between ancient Greek drama and current Greek ethnic identity.

The first question I had to ask before deciding to engage myself in an issue was whether there was any theoretical interest in it. The subject actually comprised two broad issues: a) ancient Greek drama and b) modern Greek ethnic identity. The results of my preliminary investigations through bibliographies and discussions with experts in the field of the history of the Greek theatre were astonishing. There is no comprehensive study of the history of theatre of the 20th century in Greece. There are some publications, containing passing references to the history of ancient drama performances in modern Greece. This was unexpected given the great significance assigned by theatre people, academics and politicians to ancient Greek drama in Greece nowadays. The few publications that exist are mainly critiques and commentaries on specific performances that took place in Greece during the last forty years, as well as a few special editions published by significant theatrical groups of the country. There is, however, a huge amount of information in scattered newspapers. This fact vividly reflected wider contradictions on the subject, and excited my interest and my desire to further examine ancient Greek drama performances in modern Greece.

The picture is totally different as far as the study of the role of classical antiquity in the construction of modern Greek ethnic identity is concerned. There is a considerable amount of Greek literature, especially historical and sociological, while the anthropological literature that deals with these issues is elementary. After contacting members of the staff of the History and Anthropology Departments of the University of Athens, I managed to select a specific, restricted but indicative literature on the topic. From this whole preliminary research I came to realize that the investigation of the particular subject does have a theoretical interest. By bringing together two distinct areas of research for the first time, this study covers a gap in both, drama and anthropological study of modern Greek society.

The next question I had to ask was whether there are adequate resources available for a study of this kind. My access to various libraries in Athens would be easy. Moreover, being a Greek allowed me to develop special codes of communication with potential informants. I also had to define the specific group of people within which my participant observation would take place. I needed a location, where people have an everyday interaction in order to be able to conduct anthropological fieldwork. That is, to actually collect the data "over a period of time by way of first-hand observation, participation, collection of census material, interviewing and questionnaire administration" (Ellen, 1984: 65). After reviewing the anthropological literature on theatre I decided that the approach would be to select some theatrical group(s) that would be working on ancient drama play(s), and follow the whole process on a day to day basis of staging of such performance(s).

2.1.b. Sites and Methods

The National Theatre of Greece was an obvious first choice. The National Theatre is a theatrical institution preoccupied with the staging of ancient drama performances in Greece on a systematic basis over more than fifty years. I was interested in finding out the 'official' view and the current national policy on ancient drama in Greece. After a few discussions I had with Manthos, a friend of mine in his early 30's, who had been a professional actor in the National Theatre for eight years at that time, I discovered that the whole process for the preparation and the staging of a performance would last less than six months. This period of time would not be enough to satisfy the methodological requirements of anthropological participant observation. To overcome this problem I decided to work with one more group. 'Theatro Tehnis' was another obvious choice since it is one of the oldest private Theatres in Greece. It has made a significant contribution to the study of ancient Greek drama, and, for many decades, was considered to represent a 'rival school' to the National Theatre. Manthos could introduce me and facilitate my access and establishment of contact with the people in charge of both theatre groups.

In designing the research process I combined various data collection methods in order to illuminate the topic from as many perspectives as possible. In addition, I could not ignore various written sources since the group I was going to work with

was not part of some exotic, non-literate society. Thus, by investigating the continuities and discontinuities in Greek society, I could also get a picture and evaluate aspects of social change. In this chapter I incorporate an outline and evaluation of the methods and process of research that I followed for the collection of the data necessary for this thesis:

- Preliminary fieldwork in the Drama School of the National Theatre of Greece
- Participant Observation in, and interviews with, the members of two theatrical groups. I followed the whole processes of rehearsing, staging, and performing, by the National Theatre of the ancient Greek comedy *Lyssistrati*, and by the Theatro Tehnis of the tragedy *Orestis*. The time I spent with each group was six months.
- Interviews with members of the audiences of the two plays, *Lyssistrati* and *Orestis*.
- Interviews with people working in the Greek Public Services that are related to ancient drama in Greece: the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Archaeological Services. They also provided me with valuable printed material (laws, statistical data, etc.).
- Research in newspapers and journals: *Eleftherotypia*, *To Vima*, *H Kathimerini*, *To Minima*, *Politika Themata*, *Ta Nea*, *H Avgi*. Research in performances' programs that referred to ancient drama performances in Greece that have taken place during the period 1995-1999. This material was collected from the library of the Theatrical Museum of Greece.
- Attendance of all ancient drama performances that were staged in Epidavros during the years 1997-1999.
- Additional activities: Attendance of the Symposium "The Interpretation of Ancient Greek Drama in the 20th Century: The Perspective of the Director", which was organized by the Center for Study and Practical Realisation of the Ancient Greek Drama "*Desmi*". Also, I participated in a theatre workshop addressed to professional actors (18-22 April 2000) that was organized by the Hellenic-American Union of Athens. The American Director Lee Bruer taught experienced and formalistic methods of interpretative approaches to Greek and other drama texts.

Research of the literature relevant to my subject under study, also took place:

- Review of a representative historical and sociological literature on aspects that concern ancient Greek drama in modern Greece, and the role of the notion of continuity in modern Greek ethnic identity construction processes.
- Review of the anthropological literature on performance in general, and on theatre in particular. In addition, bibliographical research on issues referring to ethnic identity construction processes in relation to social memory, to commemorative ceremonies, and to the role of the body and the senses in collective memory.

2.2. COLLECTING THE DATA

2.2.a. *Participant Observation – Entering the Field*

When I decided to conduct my fieldwork in the National Theatre I had one more discussion with Manthos. I wanted to ask him to inform me about the process that would be better for me to follow in order to establish a contact with the people working there. We agreed that the best strategy was to go and meet the Artistic Manager of the National Theatre, who was a Director, and a very good friend of Manthos'. He arranged a meeting with him and I went to see Mr. Hronopoulos² in his office, at the Drama School of the National Theatre.

My first contact with the world of theatre took place on the 22nd of January 1997. I entered the old building of the Drama School of the National Theatre in Pireos Street, in the center of Athens. The main room in the ground floor was full of young people, 18-19 years old boys and girls, who were chatting, laughing, coming in and going out like in any school's common room. I walked up the imposing wooden stairs that were in the middle of the huge room and I entered the office of Mr. Hronopoulos. After the initial introduction I presented my research project as briefly and concisely as possible. He seemed to be particularly interested in it and then I asked him if it would be possible for me to attend the whole process of staging of an ancient drama play in the National Theatre. He informed me that he was going to stage *Lyssistrati* next summer and he agreed to allow me access to it. He explicitly stated that he does not allow outsiders to watch the rehearsals, except for "*the two or*

² The names of the two Directors are real. The names of the rest of the informants at the end of quotes are changed.

three last ones, because it is a 'matter of principle', since actors feel uncomfortable by the 'intruders'". Nevertheless, [he implied that] for Manthos' sake, he would make an exception, but I should become somehow a member of the group, so that the actors would see me as one of 'their tribe'. I could become the assistant of his assistant, defining thus a 'role' for me into his group. I thought that this was exactly what I needed and we agreed to speak again in April, when the rehearsals were to begin.

In the meantime I had the chance to do some background reading, and also to follow a few classes in the drama school in order to meet young actors and their teachers. Through this preliminary fieldwork I could start defining the aims of my research with more precision, I could learn the 'language of the job' in order to be able to formulate the more sensitive questions, and be able to decipher the meaning of my later observations. For the following two months I attended the ancient drama classes of the third year of the drama school of the National Theatre twice a week. The two teachers I met were both quite cooperative and so were the students. The teachers gave me plenty of information on the organization of drama studies in Greece; the special requirements of an actor performing ancient drama; of the differences and the changes in the way(s) ancient drama has been performed within the last thirty years (they were both over 50 years old). Students were even more willing to talk to me. They wanted to tell me everything about the content of their studies, their expectations from the profession they had chosen, and their thoughts on ancient Greek drama. Through this whole process I learned a lot about the physical and social layout of my field site, and managed to clarify some theoretical and practical axes for the main part of the participant observation that was to follow.

On April 26 I had another meeting with Mr. Hronopoulos in his office at the National Theatre this time. He had no objection to me following the rehearsals. He gave me the script of the play, some introductory information about the procedure and the schedule of the whole process and we agreed to meet a few days after the beginning of the rehearsals at the Theatre. Indeed, on the 8th of May I attended my first rehearsal with the group that was set up for the staging of *Lysistrati* by Aristophanes.

2.2.b. *Phases of Participant Observation*

Working with this specific theatre group was not always the easiest thing in the world. My initial contact with the 40 members of the theatrical group was not exciting. I suddenly appeared inside a huge room that was full of young women and men, wearing dance and exercise clothes, with a piano in a corner, and someone, who was, I guessed, the choreographer in the middle. The rehearsal had already begun, so I sat down and watched everything until the break, when the Director came into the room and introduced me to the group. He briefly explained to them who I was and what I was going to do there. They did not pay much attention, they just said hello, and went to the cafeteria for a coffee. Two or three people, however, came and talked to me, asked more information about my project and said that they would be willing to help me in any way. The first day passed more or less like this: I sat in a chair watching people exercise and later sing with the guidance of the speech trainer. I also had brief discussions with both the choreographer and the speech trainer who appeared to be very interested in my work and offered to help.

Most of the members of the group believed, for a long time, that I was a student at the Department of Drama Studies of the University of Athens, and I was collecting information for some essay. What really surprised me was that although they were willing to talk to me, and most of them seemed extremely friendly, they were not interested in what exactly I was doing and what I would do with all the information they were giving me. Allowing for some exceptions, they gave me the impression that they were rather flattered to be watched.

During the first month very few people approached me, some seemed to be completely indifferent to my presence there. Gradually but hesitantly most of them expressed some curiosity and willingness to speak to me. Others felt flattered, because they thought I had chosen them personally for my work, and a few even believed that I was some kind of theatre critic and were very careful in everything they were saying and doing. I was feeling very uncomfortable and bewildered, because I was (at least for the first two weeks that I was not doing anything else but observing) watching people working, people who already knew each other and all shared a common target. I was the only outsider, who, at least at first sight, was not doing anything but making notes in some mysterious notebook. From what they told me later, they could not imagine what kind of information I was writing down. In

general, I was anxious about my ability to collect 'data', and was constantly wondering if I was taking up the right notes, if I was asking the 'right' questions, if I had the proper attitude, and if my generally introvert character constituted an insurmountable obstacle to my research.

After the first month I began to feel bored because I was watching the same things again over and over, everyday, for what felt like long time, while the changes and the progress in the performance and in my relation with the group were taking place so slowly, that they were almost imperceptible. Nevertheless, the truth is that day after day I felt more and more comfortable and self-assured, because I sensed that people were getting used to my presence and our behavior was becoming more 'natural'. I think all of them liked me, I never heard any criticisms, and only one member of the chorus admitted, when the rehearsals were almost finished, that before he understood what kind of person I was, he was annoyed by my presence there.

As a whole, I was rather a participating observer of the process of the rehearsals. I used to sit in a chair and later in the stalls in front of the stage and watch the actors sing, dance, act, talk, make jokes or argue with the Director. I was observing and making notes of everything that seemed to me to be of special interest, concerning either their work or their relationships as members of a group. Very often the Director used me as his assistant, to make notes of his remarks, and announce his decisions to the group. During the breaks I had brief conversations with members of the group or arranged to meet them outside the theatre for longer conversations.

The most difficult aspect of the process was, however, in dealing with a group that was too big and without much coherence. This was due to the fact that its members did not consist of a permanent group working together for a long time, with clear aims and methods of work. They were people of various ages, with different levels of experience, from various backgrounds and with various dreams for the future, who were suddenly brought together for the needs of a specific performance. This made my presence and my work there more difficult because, on the one hand, I had to detect and examine many different behaviours (ways of communication, work, play, and everything people do) in relation to various attitudes, beliefs, values and perceptions. On the other hand, they were too many, and I was one. It was very

difficult for me to manage to keep many different balances, that is, to be able to respond to many and different attitudes and at the same time be effective in my work. Probably the main part of these difficulties had to do with me being a female researcher. I actually experienced some awkward moments while attempting to gain trust and cooperation from male informants.

After the end of the rehearsals I followed the group to Kavala, a city in northern Greece. The premiere of the play would take place in the ancient theatre of Filippi, outside Kavala on the 26th of July 1997. I stayed at the same hotel as the group for three days. We already knew each other for quite some time and hence the communication was not difficult. Here we had the chance to do many things, different from those we were used to do together such as swim, eat, go out to bars after the performance. Although this was not the first time we socialized outside the theatre (they often invited me to their parties, and I had gone out for a meal or a drink with a few of them), it was the first time we spent the whole day together. I had the chance to develop a few deeper relations with members of the group and to understand aspects of the meaning of my observations that I did not before.

After Kavala I left the group and I met them again in Epidavros. After Epidavros they continued their tour around the country for a few weeks and I met some of them again individually in Athens in September. Until October they continued to give performances in various open theatres in Athens, but they did not do any rehearsals, and they actually did not constitute a group anymore.

During the winter of 1997-1998 I had a long break from participant observation since no ancient drama performances are staged during this time of the year. Nevertheless, I had the chance to do some complementary fieldwork. I visited the Ministries of Culture and Tourism, and the Archaeological Services, where I managed to interview officials and I collected very interesting printed material concerning the national policy on, and the legal context of, ancient theatre in Greece today. I also organized my field-notes and made some preliminary analyses of the information derived from the interviews. I also started to focus my reading on more specific aspects of the related literature. Until May 1998, when the rehearsals in the Teatro Tehnis started, I was much more prepared theoretically and practically, than I was at the National Theatre.

Manthos helped me once more in establishing my contact with the 'Theatro Tehnis', and especially in obtaining permission of the Director, Mr. Koujoumtzis, to watch the rehearsals for the ancient tragedy of Evripidis' *Orestis*, which he was going to stage in the summer of 1998. On May 23 1998, I appeared at the rehearsals of *Orestis* for the first time. The Director introduced me to the group and the process (of the rehearsals and of my participant observation) began once more.

The group of *Orestis* was much smaller (25 members), the atmosphere friendlier, and I was more relaxed and familiar with the situation. The process of the rehearsals was not dramatically different from what I had observed in the National Theatre. It took me less time to develop relations, and I now knew how to present myself and how to treat various behaviours. The group was also more coherent. Almost all of them had similar backgrounds and education, and this facilitated the organization and interpretation of my observations. However, this time, I felt more distanced in my relationships with the members of the group, because I had the feeling that now I knew exactly what I was looking for, and I did not want to spend my time and energy in activities that I thought I knew their results. Thus, I did not socialize much with members of the group, and my conversations were much more focused. The members of the group were much more interested in my work and I enjoyed conversations with them more than the previous time.

During August and September I watched all of their performances in various open theatres in Athens. After that time the specific group was dissolved but I kept in touch with some of the members until I felt that I had collected all the data necessary for the thesis. Of course, this was not exactly the case, since, during writing up the ethnographic text I was communicating quite often with specific members of the groups of *Lysisitrati* and *Orestis*. Usually, I needed to specify something, or clear up something else, or collect additional information and ask questions on aspects I did not think necessary before.

As far as the audiences of these performances are concerned, I was not able to develop a full picture of their perceptions, ideas, and interpretations concerning ancient Greek drama and modern Greek ethnic identity. Part of what I could do, however, was to observe some general features: ages, sex, general attitude inside the

theatre, reactions to specific elements of the performances, comments I could hear from my seat referring either to the specific performance, or to more general theatrical issues. Another thing I did was to interview some of the members of these audiences and these discussions are presented later in the thesis.

2.2.c. *Informants - Interviews*

All members of the two theatrical groups, of *Orestis* and *Lyssistrati*, have been used as informants during the process of my participant observation. I have not regarded some of them as being 'correct' and some as being 'false' in what they expressed through their behavior or their words. I rather treated all of them in an "indexical" way (Ellen, 1984). That is, I tried to discover as much as I could about the relation of the specific informant with his/her job (as an actor, musician, Director, etc.), about his/her perceptions and interpretations of ancient Greek drama, in general, and in relation to ethnic sentiments, in particular. I also tried to trace the relationships that pre-existed or were developed amongst them during the rehearsals, as well as elements of their evaluation of the specific performance, in which they participated. I asked them to compare past and present ancient drama performances and talk to me about their own ideas and interpretations. In general, I tried to deduce as many elements as possible of their relationship to their work and to the environment of their work.

As is always the case in participant observation, there were specific individuals in these groups, who became 'key informants' for my research. I did not choose them from the beginning, but they rather came to be, because I could talk to them easily, they understood the kind of information I needed, and they were willing to provide me with any material available. In the group of *Lyssistrati* two of these key informants were Giannis and Giorgos. Giannis, a young actor (in his early 20's), a member of the chorus, had a limited experience of ancient Greek drama. He approached me almost from the beginning of my participant observation, and he was always willing and interested in helping me. He also introduced me to other actors outside the group, and through him, I had the opportunity to socialize a lot with other theatre people. Giorgos, was another key informant. He was one of the older actors of the group (early 50's), with long experience in ancient Greek drama. He was always willing to help and it was easy for me to relate to him because he was

kind and well informed on many of the issues I was interested in. Theano, a young actress (early 20's) was a key informant in the group of *Orestis*, and so was Klio (actress in early 30's). They were both members of the chorus, and they helped me, not only with the information they gave me, but especially in my introduction in, and acceptance by, the whole group.

Various other persons became key informants due to their central positions in the groups and their generally high status within the theatrical community of Athens. These were both the Directors of the performances, the composer of the music, and the choreographer of *Lyssistrati*, and the speech trainer of *Orestis*.

In addition, a few members of the audiences of these two performances became informants of this research. These were selected rather randomly because the only criteria I could use were age (I tried to select younger and older people), sex (both women and men), and location (from Epidavros, as well as from various small theatres in Athens). Those who helped me in the Public Services are also significant informants, since they gave me information I could not access through any other source.

I had informal conversations with all members of the two theatrical groups. These took place during rehearsal breaks, over a drink throughout the whole period of the participant observation. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a few members of the choruses, all the leading actors, and members of the staff. These started to take place after the first two months of my participant observation in the group of *Lyssistrati*, and from the beginning of my fieldwork in the group of *Orestis*.

Interviews usually took place after arranging an appointment with the person I was interested in interviewing, because I needed more time than what I would have during the informal conversations. Most of the times these interviews were carried out either before or after the rehearsals in the theatre, or in a cafeteria, bar, or in the house of the interviewee. I used a tape recorder to record these conversations with the participants' consent. Whenever time permitted I allowed the informant to open up, exercising the minimum control over responses; when time was limited, a list of questions on the topics I wanted to cover was used. I used that as a general guide but

I usually allowed the interviewee to comment on the general themes of my research. This was usually the case in the beginning, when I had not yet selected a clear 'ethnographic focus' (Spradley, 1980). I used informants' suggestions or advice, and gradually embodied them in my initial hypotheses, which in turn were modified, enriched, and even altered by what I was discovering in the course of investigation.

These interviews as well as the informal conversations helped me very much in establishing my relation with the whole group, and with specific individuals in particular. We had the chance to learn more about each other, to talk openly and without the pressure of time of the rehearsal breaks which lasted for no more than half an hour. Informants also felt more relaxed when we were talking in private, because they could speak openly either about their colleagues or about the performance without the fear of being overheard. I also had the chance to better explain what I wanted from them, and to make them feel more secure that anything they would tell me would be anonymously reported in my thesis. This was a particularly sensitive issue, since my questions related to the environment of their work, and interviewees were very reluctant to risk their reputation or their relationships with their superiors in the theatre hierarchy.

As far as informants in the Public Services were concerned, I preferred to go to their offices personally and arrange appointments for an interview. I thought it would be better for my work to be able to explain what I wanted from them in a face to face interaction, than let them hear an impersonal voice on the telephone. These interviews, which took place after the end of my participant observation in *Lyssistrati*, were structured, since I needed specific information, and I already had a clear picture of the kind of data that would complete my research. Of course my initial structure was always enriched by additional remarks and data I had not anticipated.

Semi-structured interviews also took place with members of the audiences of the two performances, *Orestis* and *Lyssistrati*. The selection of the specific informants was rather random. Usually they were people who were sitting next to me during the performances, or with whom I managed to start a conversation while waiting for the performance to start, outside the theatre. I either asked them a few questions *in situ*, or I arranged an appointment for some other day to talk, depending upon the

circumstances: openness of the potential informant, willingness to speak, interest in my research, time limits.

2.2.d. *Field Notes*

All kinds of notes and written records constitute a very important aspect of the fieldwork operation. I started making notes from the very first day of my participant observation. I made three different kinds of notes during the fieldwork. The first one includes the notes I was keeping during participant observation on a daily basis. I was writing down everything that was happening and attracted my attention. Usually these notes were written in a way that they could function as triggers and help me recall more details later. The second one was a diary: I used to record all my thoughts and feelings during participant observation. This was a rather personal account of the relations I was developing with informants. The third one was a notebook for field notes. In this, I was making methodological remarks on the techniques I used to collect data and I tried to become theoretically aware of what was going on in the field. I was also trying here to do what is called the 'consolidation' (Spradley, 1980: 283) of my notes: I was making the first generalizations about the behavior, and summaries of informants' statements. I was also transcribing here those notes of my everyday notebook that I thought could fit into the analytic categories I was trying to define from the beginning of my fieldwork, and were changing, or enriched with the passage of time.

2.2.e. *Fieldwork at Home*

Being Greek and conducting anthropological research on Greece, positions this work in the 'anthropology at home'. Not only did my participant observation take place in Greece, but more specifically, in Athens, the city I was born, grew up, and still live in. From this point of view, the fact that I was at home facilitated my work in various ways. I already knew the language of the people I was going to work with, I had some vague idea on where I should search for what I was looking for before even thinking to engage myself into the specific project. I also had posed the basic theoretical axes of my research many years (out of personal interest) before starting my bibliographical research on the issues concerning the processes of ethnic identity construction within modern Greek society. I was also fortunate to know people, e.g.

Manthos, whose contribution in my getting access to the field, was of decisive importance. I knew how to deal with the people working in the Public Services in order to get the material I needed and I could also use myself as informant.

On the other hand, while being a Greek, I had to face some difficulties, as far as the practice of participant observation was concerned, which I am not so sure differentiated my position much from that of an 'outsider'. In fact I did have to learn a new language, that is, the 'language' of theatre people. I had never associated much with people of this 'tribe' before, and I did not have the slightest idea about the circumstances, the methods, the demands and the rewards of the work. It was a whole new world for me, a world I had to meet, understand, familiarize myself with, and write about. Concepts of 'us' and 'others' I had, were largely changed under the given circumstances (Gefou-Madianou, 1995)

The people I worked with did not perceive me as the "special, exotic or powerful investigator" (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987: 191), whose 'role' in the field is probably easier to be defined if he/she is not 'from this place'. I found it extremely difficult to overcome whatever *a priori* ideas my informants had about a person called 'investigator'. For example, almost all of them projected on me the image of some drama or sociology student, who would give them questionnaires to fill, and ask specific types of questions: historical information, views and criticisms on particular ancient drama performances, etc. It was the first time they were dealing with an ethnographic research, and whatever I was explaining to them, sounded as exotic as if I was telling them that I was coming from a little island in the Pacific.

Having grown up in the same city and country, been through the same educational system, and being familiar with 'indigenous reflections' on specific theoretical aspects of my research, I found it quite difficult to make a distinction between what I considered to be 'common sense' and what should be taken for 'local cultural genres' (Strathern, 1987: 17). For example I have also grown up listening very often to phrases of the kind "*ancient theatres are magic places*" (*magika meri*'), or "*Greekness circulates into our blood*". The fact, however, that I had not heard theatre people speaking about their world before made it easier for me, over time, to recognize the points, perceptions, ideas, and interpretations that were recurring and appeared to demand further analysis.

Also, the pre-existing historical background I had obtained through studies for my first degree in a Greek University, as well as my personal political beliefs concerning modern Greek society, made it more difficult for me to adopt a different point of view on the same issues, to accept views I considered nationalistic or even ridiculous, and relate them without traces of prejudice into a different theoretical, anthropological interpretative framework.

However, the ways in which people organize knowledge about themselves and develop specific scientific techniques for organizing knowledge, are two distinctive processes although not completely detached. Specific methods of analysis and managing data, theoretical frameworks, techniques of ethnographic/anthropological production actually textualize the 'context of the specific situation' within the "general context of anthropology. In this discursive context the initial differences [native or non-native researcher] are dissolved and replaced by others" (Hastrup, 1987: 105).

2.3. WRITING UP THE ETHNOGRAPHIC TEXT

After completing the participant observation in the Teatro Tehnis with the group of *Orestis*, I decided it was time to start writing up my thesis. The objective was to transfer and transform my fieldwork experience and notes into text. I believed that by that time I had understood the 'stuff of culture' (Van Maanen, 1988), the concepts, beliefs, practices and categories that had been used by the members of the group I worked with, and I was ready to translate them into something different, to write an ethnography.

It would be better to start the process of writing with the first chapter, the theoretical one on 'Ethnic Identity and the Notion of Continuity'. I found this to be more convenient, because it would give me time to digest the ethnographic material, and develop the central message of my thesis; the point I wanted to make. The next thing I wrote was an essay on the theoretical approaches of performance, in general, and of theatre in particular, as viewed in anthropological literature. This helped me

determine the limits and the potentialities of the theoretical elaboration of the subject under study.

After finishing these two preliminary sections of my thesis I took sometime to review all of my notes, diaries, interviews, analytical, and interpretive accounts. I also reviewed all the notes made during the literature review period of the study. I wanted to see the whole picture - what I had collected from the field, and what I could do, on the theoretical level, with material. This stage took me a long time because, despite having foreshadowed the main axes around which my thesis would develop, I found it extremely difficult to decide on the structure of presenting the material. At the same time, the more I read the literature, the more I discovered interesting aspects and themes I wanted to emphasize. I think the view became clearer when I re-examined and took the final decision about the central message of my thesis, made a list of the arguments, and decided on the steps I would take in developing them. This helped me to discover the gaps I needed to fill in my data and the very specific things that I still wanted to find out from additional participant observation. I have actually kept in touch with some of my 'key informants', throughout the whole period of my writing. After revising again and again the lists of my topic and the categories of the related ethnographic material I had created, I began to write the first draft of each section.

As a whole, I think that the structure of my thesis reflects the successive steps of the whole venture. I began with a bibliographic research concerning the general aspects of the process of ethnic identity construction, in general and then, I tried to detect the specific characteristics of the neo-Hellenic search for affirmation of the cultural and biological descendance from the ancient ancestors. The next step was to enter the field, where, in the beginning, I noticed the external features of the group I was working with, and of the process of my participant observation. As time went on, I began to orient my focus in the field, and my analytical notes at home, on more specific cultural themes, and to raise particular issues I thought were crucial to the subject I was studying. The final step I took was to clarify the body of theory I would use for the analysis of my 'data', concentrate on this, exclude all the rest, and organize the development of my arguments.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I presented the methodology employed for the selection of the topic of this thesis, the fieldwork conducted for the collection of the data necessary, and the process of writing the ethnographic text itself. I have explained the reasons why and the process of how I came to choose study Greek identity construction processes through performances of ancient Greek drama. I also presented the development of my relationship with the two theatres where I conducted the participant observation, and the relations I developed with the informants. The chapter closes with explaining how I organized the material of my research ('raw' and bibliographical data) and the steps I took in order to transform all these into an ethnographic text.

CHAPTER 3

FRAMEWORKS

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader into the world of ancient theatre in Greece today. This will take place gradually, beginning with a general framework, which provides the context for the presentation of the data collected during the fieldwork, and the theoretical analysis in the following chapters. Thus, Frameworks begin with some references to the history of ancient drama performances in modern Greece and their perception by the audiences, which are necessary for the better understanding of the role ancient drama has played in the construction, reconstruction, and transmission of (ethnic) group identity(ies).

After a period of almost two thousand years of silence, ancient drama was rediscovered in the parts of the Ottoman Empire inhabited by Greek populations, during the nineteenth century. This rediscovery was part of the wider new relationship with the past and the glorious ancestors that was being cultivated and was preparing the revolutionization of society for the Fight for Independence from the Ottoman Empire. A more systematic engagement with ancient drama performances began in the 1920's with the '*Delfikes Eortes*' (Festivities organized by the poet A. Sikelianos and his wife, Eva) reflecting perceptions of Greekness of that time, and maintaining a bourgeois elitist character. In the 1950's ancient drama became more accessible-however it never lost its elitist character completely-to wider social strata with the establishment of the Festival of Epidavros, and other less prominent festivals around the country.

The chapter proceeds with the presentation of the official state policy on ancient Greek theatre. Elements of this policy, might, however, be extracted from the ways state services deal with individual aspects related directly or indirectly with ancient drama. Some of these aspects are the subsidies to private theatrical groups by the Ministry of Culture, the education of young actors, the connection of ancient drama

festivals with issues related to tourism policies, and the role of the Archaeological Services in the preservation of the ancient theatre complexes.

The chapter closes with the presentation of the two theatres in which my fieldwork for the collection of the data necessary for this study took place: the National Theatre of Greece and the Teatro Tehnis. This presentation focuses on the history of the two theatrical institutions, their organization, current activities, and contributions to the interpretation of ancient drama in contemporary Greece.

3.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANCIENT DRAMA PERFORMANCES

This section presents a synopsis of the history of ancient drama performances and their perception by the audience as well as their place within the wider theatrical life of Greece since classical antiquity. The problem is that there are no historical accounts of theatre in Greece, except for only two that stop in the first decades of the 20th century (Spathis 1983; Sideris 1976). I will, however, try to give a general picture of the appearance and handling of ancient drama in modern times, based mainly on the data available in these two texts.

3.1.a. *The Re-discovery*

Classic ancient Greek drama (tragedy and comedy) was born from the religious cyclical dances round the altar of the God Dionysos, in Athens in the 6th century B.C., was performed in Festivals (*'En asti Dionysia'* and *'Linea'*) and was dedicated to the same god. During the Byzantine Era and the centuries of the Ottoman Empire we have no information about the existence of ancient drama performances in the areas which were inhabited by Greek populations. This was not accidental. It was a consequence of the systematic effort of Byzantine rule to expel everything that was not compatible with the new Orthodox Christian ethics and classical theatre was part of a pagan religion. "All historic books that were written and were available in the

Greek region by the third quarter of the 18th century [...] refer to the Christian past and leave out ancient Hellenism” (Politis, 1997:14).

With the birth of the “Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment” and the Revolution of Independence (1821) from the Ottoman rule, which led to the creation of the modern Greek nation-state in 1832, the situation changed radically. A new relationship between modern Greeks and the antiquity was being shaped, “... a relationship which promoted, on the ideological level, the transformation and finally the revolutionization of the society; it was a political relationship, which was formed gradually and through minor or deeper ruptures” (Kremmydas, 1997: 24). The theatrical life of that period... “is decisively affected by the turn to classical antiquity which accompanies the preparation for the Fight of Independence, and by the ideological orientations which will be dominant in the independent state” (Spathis, 1983: 12).

The first contact of modern Greeks with the ancestors took place in the communities around the Danube, especially in Bucharest and Odessa, but also in Vienna and Venice through performances of European tragedies inspired by ancient plays (e.g. Goethe, Metastasio etc.). In the Ionian islands, then under Venetian Occupation, local Greek authors wrote drama plays based on Italian adaptations of Euripides and other ancient Greek writers. Greek theatre (in areas occupied by both Ottomans and Western Europeans) of this period restricted itself to plays that could sustain historical memory and revive the glorious Greek past, and ignored the wider speculations of foreign and especially European theatre. The enthusiasm with which these first performances were accepted by the audience reflected a satisfaction, which was ethnic rather than artistic. The drama plays that were written at that time did not refer to the difficult circumstances faced by the Greeks at the time. Writers of this era, chose to deal with themes derived from the ancient Greek and Byzantine historical periods, certifying thus the uninterrupted continuity of the Greek world.

After Independence and by the end of the nineteenth century ancient drama was restricted to performances given in educational institutions having thus an amateurish character. Within the wider ideological framework of meeting with the high ancestral inheritance, which would give them national pride, ancient drama performances aimed to “...an historical resurrection of Tragedy, as it was performed

in its time” (Sideris, 1976: 24). Being performed in the original (ancient Greek language) they were addressed to an intellectual elite while the people ignored it and preferred variety theatre and pantomime.

In the twentieth century the picture changed dramatically. In 1901 the Royal Theatre (*Vasiliko Theatro*) was founded, and its directors (Hristomanos and Ikonomou) took the first steps towards the revival – as it is now called – of the ancient drama. Although never abandoned, “the views of a museum representation of tragedy, the ‘restoration’ or ‘rebirth’ of ancient drama which became the bridge to unite modern Greeks with the ancestors, all these ideas failed...” (Spathis, 1983: 49). Emphasis was given to the poetic and dramatic value of the plays as well as to the ideas they convey. This is partly expressed through the impact of what came to be known as the Language Question, a vast and virulent controversy over the dominance of the pure over demotic Greek, which split the country until very recently, and influenced the form and the perception of ancient drama. One could refer to the incidence known as *Orestika*. In 1903, students of the University of Athens, prompted by the ideas of their teacher G. Mistriotis, who believed that ancient drama should be staged in the ancient Greek language, demonstrated against the performance of the trilogy *Orestia*, which was to be staged in modern Greek by the *Vasiliko Theatro*. After the violent intervention of the police the casualties of this demonstration came to be one dead and dozens of injured people (Spathis 1983; Iliadis 1996).

The gradual staging of tragedies in demotic language by professional theatrical groups (*Vassiliko Theatro*, *Nea Skini*) during the first decades of the 20th century resulted in their becoming accessible to a wider audience. With Aristophanes’ Comedies things were still difficult. Audiences were smaller and mainly “...attracted by the prohibitions for ladies and its ‘shamelessness’ (picaresque qualities)” (Sideris, 1976: 246). Fotos Politis (one of the most important theatre people of the century and the first director of the National Theatre of Greece) gives us an idea of the new approach to ancient drama performances which prevailed during the first decades of the 20th century: “It is not, of course, possible for ancient tragedy to be resurrected as a living theatre in our days, neither is it possible for the contemporary audiences to be transformed, even for a few moments, into their ancestors who used to fill, under the same sky, at an other time, the theatre of Dionysos. It has been proven, however, [...] that this ancient theatre may come

closer to our soul, and that our younger soul may come closer, up to a certain point, to feel the shiver of the ancient one. This can be done in two ways: Either the ancient drama will be adjusted to the modern scenic ethos, and aim at the old results through new means, or will preserve its ancient form and try to attain as perfectly as possible, the old scenes on the stage..." (Sideris, 1976: 275-276).

During the following decades interest in ancient drama performances increased due to the fact that the audience started to relate the plots to contemporary incidents, like the destruction of Asia Minor and the problems of the refugees. In 1920, for example, during the performance of "*The Persians*" (Aeschylus), the audience for the first time applauded lines that carried patriotic and political meaning. This became a common reaction, which constituted the only public protest against serious threats to the nation. This was sometimes the case during the Second World War and the German Occupation. Not everyone, however, shared this "contact between the ancient and the modern Greek souls". The socialist scholar and novelist K. Paroritiss writes: "...ancient tragedy is not comprehensible to the contemporaries. ... the modern bourgeois mind (intellect) is incapable of understanding and appreciating the ethics of ancient tragedy [...] the admirers of military law and censorship [he refers to the contemporary political situation], who think that they can conjure up the spirit of Aeschylus in order to justify their despotic measures, can see what the results of true freedom are..." (Noumas, 10/10/1920)³.

3.1.b. 'Delfikes Eortes'

The "Festivities in Delfi" (*Delfikes Eortes*) in 1927 and 1930 were, undoubtedly, a turning point in the attempt for the sanction of ancient drama performances. Inspired and organized by the poet Angelos Sikelianos and his wife Eva, who "...aspired to an imaginary representation of an era and with all its shows – performances and rites accompanying them – he managed to revive a mythical world, lost in the depths of our memory..." (Evagelatos, 1976: 22). These festivities reflected wider ideas of Greekness and the desire for the dissemination of Greece's heritage. Before the Eortes, Sikelianos wrote a pamphlet in five languages (Greek, English, French, Italian, and German) in which he expressed the philosophy of this enterprise: "Wishing to locate a spiritual action into a pure energetic level, in order to enlighten

³ Reference found in Sideris 1976, pp. 284-5.

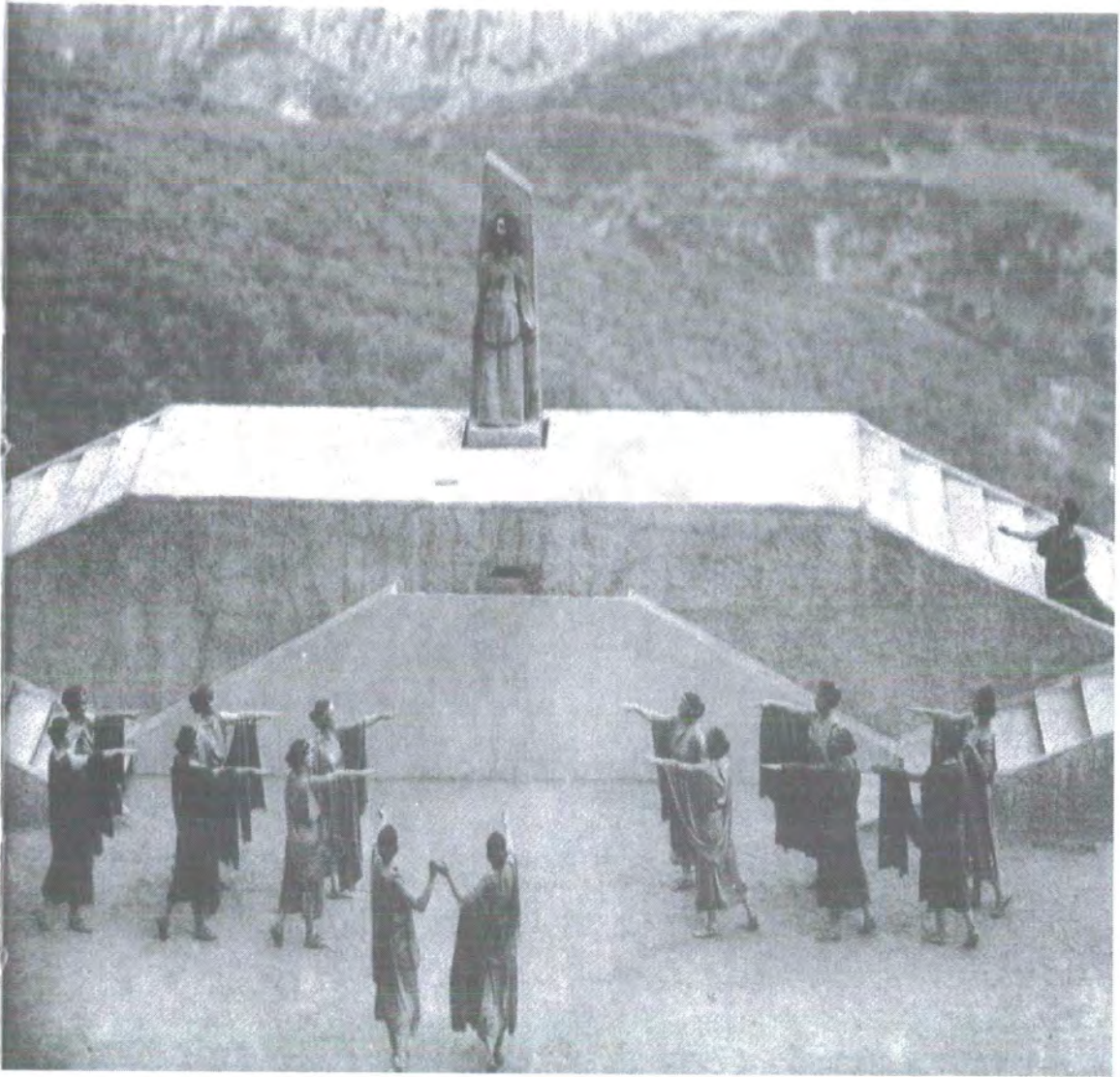
it internally and historically, we followed the method which left to us the Arian or Orphic tradition [...] and looking for a track (field) able to include it in its entirety, we stopped at the holy track of Delfi... In order to seal this thought [...] we gave our preference [...] to the living re-enactment, in the Theatre of Delfi, [...] of the catholic (universal) Titanic hieroglyphic of Aeschylus '*Prometheus Bound*', which seems to subordinate, under its spiritual power [...] all human generations, Eastern and Western" (Sideris, 1976: 344-5).

Angelos Sikelianos did not see *Delfikes Eortes* from a theatrical point of view. It has been argued that in the lectures he delivered in the years before the *Eortes*, we see a man who "was sure that he was god-sent to proclaim to the nation its 'salvation'. He has been brought up with the ancients and he considers them to be his allies and comrades [...] in asking from Greeks to live a heroic life" (ibid: 337). Sikelianos wanted to spread his own worship for the ancient world which he regarded as a model for his contemporaries. But this model was not addressed to everyone. It was aimed at the elite of Greece and Europe. This elitism is demonstrated by the fact that "during the two days of the Festivities villagers were not allowed to approach the periphery of the archaeological areas. Policemen posted at hills and streets would make sure that this was the case" (ibid.: 348). A separate performance for the villagers took place in the same place the following day.

The reactions of contemporaries to Sikelianos' venture varied widely. There were those who praised his 'Greekness' and the fact that he presented something which was purely Greek and cleared of every foreign element and of any artistic or aesthetic impressionism. "This performance [...] will be the defense of the Greek soul before the eyes of foreigners and our own" (Sideris, 1976: 345). Leftists, however, criticized these festivities as "an expression of bourgeois mysticism [...] and of Greek capitalism, and that is why the state and the bourgeois press showed such sympathy and protection to the festivities" and that "the decadent classes recall always with nostalgia the past, and especially that period of the past which is richer in big works [...]. They devoted themselves to scholastic ancestor-worship" (ibid.: 357). Another category of criticism concerned the problem of the revival of ancient drama and the reasons for its performance in our days: should emphasis be given on the element of respect trying to recompose its initial (ancient) form or should it be approached as a piece of art which should appeal to contemporary audiences?

These festivities were, however, generally accepted by the following generations as the first in which ancient drama was performed in its totality, speech, music and chorus (movement), an aesthetic choice that has influenced the development of ancient drama performances ever since. The contribution of Eva Sikelianou to the form of ancient drama performances (picture 1) was very important: the clothes and the movement of the chorus she proposed were critical for the advancement of this kind of performance. Being an American, she carried to Greece information she had had from her contacts with artists who performed ancient theatre in America and Europe. Moreover, these festivities functioned as an incitement for professional theatre to be engaged more systematically in ancient drama.

During the 1930's there was a deepening quest for ways that would make ancient drama more vivid. Artists and critics, regarding it as the best kind of theatre were trying to find "solutions to the special artistic problems of its transference to a modern stage, with its performance in front of a modern audience: translation, scenery, music, acting, the problem of the chorus" (Spathis, 1983:49). The foundation of the National Theatre of Greece in 1932 (picture 2) satisfied a need for cultural development of the country. Its performances were seen as important cultural elements in the life of the capital city. Its repertoire emphasised classical and ancient drama and ignored contemporary and especially Greek writers. Their plays were staged by private theatrical groups. During World War II and the period of the Nazi Occupation, the strict supervision, the censorship that was imposed, as well as the economic problems did not allow for any kind of renewal or development in theatrical activities to take place. Ancient drama performances continued to be staged during that period, although we have no further historical information.



Picture 1 Delfikes Eortes, 1930, *Prometheus Bound* (source: Sideris, 1976)



Picture 2 The National Theatre of Greece (source: 60 *Hronia Ethniko Theatro*, Kedros)

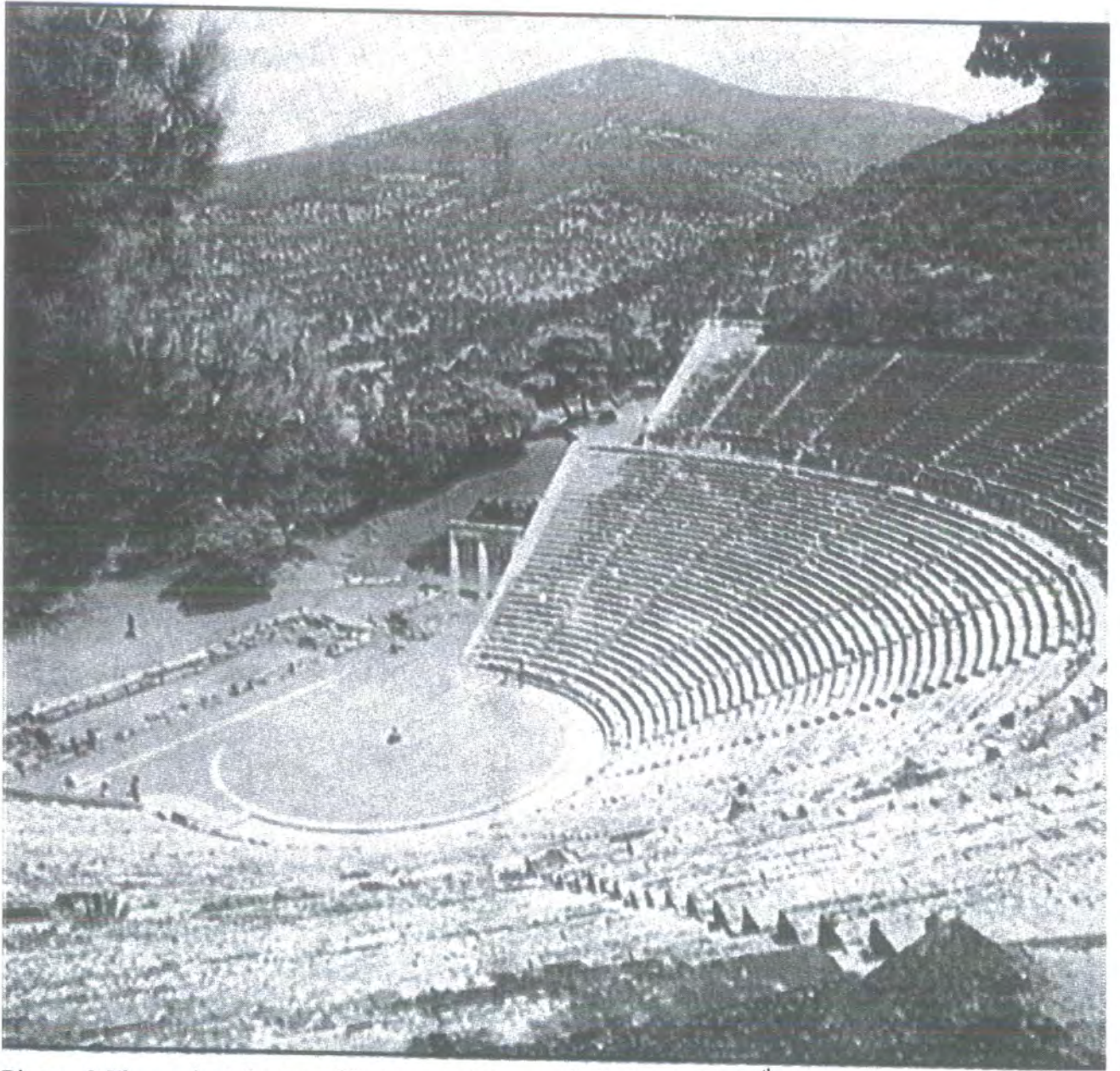
3.1.c. *The Festival of Epidavros*

The ancient theatre of Epidavros (pictures 3-4) was built in the 4th century B.C. and was part of the sanctuary of Asklepios in the ancient city of Epidavros. It was excavated by the archaeologist P. Kavadias in 1881-1887 but was never systematically used until 1955 when the “Festival of Epidavros” was officially inaugurated.

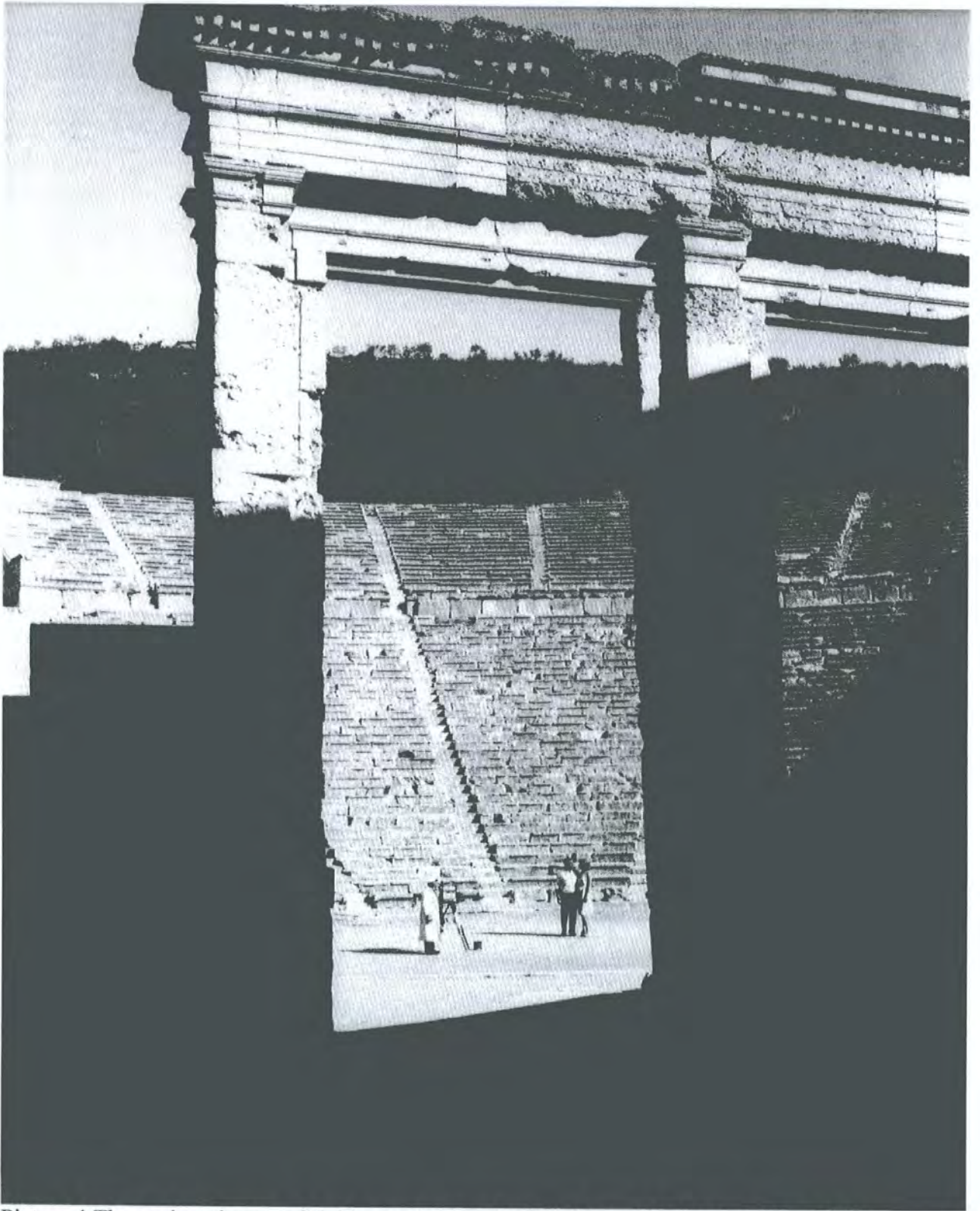
Thoughts of institutionalizing a set time every year, dedicated to ancient drama performances were first formulated in 1885. I could say that they still reflect the general idea about this theatrical genre and the reasons for its ‘preservation’ even in our days: “...this material is rich, precious [...]. If it belonged to an other country it would ‘hit the jackpot’ and through this we ought to do the same [...] Many people would come here with pleasure and even feel gratitude to marvel at a masterpiece of Aeschylus, Sophokles or Euripidis, performed in an ancient theatre, under the holy rock, by their descendants [...]. Since we cannot stand in front of the world as a military nation and as a model kingdom, we will be able to stand as an artistic and antiquity lover nation, and this is no mean thing...” (Hatzidakis, 1996: 12).

Between 1955 and 1975, the National Theatre staged one or two new performances and one repetition of a previous one, every year. In 1975 the National Theatre lost its exclusive rights to Epidavros and other theatrical groups entered the “holy” place. According to Spathis this is due to their achievements and especially to the international recognition of the quality of their performances. It was also “the variety, the breadth, and the radiance of the festival which gave them a strong motive...” (1983: 63), and led to the interest by more people and theatrical groups with issues of interpretation of ancient drama.

Numbers do not say much, but could probably give a very general picture, which we hope will be filled up with more essential ‘data’ in the following chapters. Thus, until 1996, 568 performances took place in Epidavros and 47 directors worked for this Festival. These include, 1 Russian, 1 Japanese, 1 Romanian, 3 Italians and 3 women. The average number of tickets sold for each performance between 1981 and 1997 was 3.201 (statistical tables of the Hellenic Tourism Organization: HTO).



Picture 3 The ancient theatre of Epidavros (source: *H Kathimerini*, 18th August, 1996)



Picture 4 The ancient theatre of Epidavros (source:Stefosi, M. and N. Kostopoulos, 1996)

Of course I should mention that similar festivals, of lower profile, take place in many ancient theatres around the country. The Festival of Epidavros is the most prominent of them and more than any other has the advantage of offering distinction, or casting discredit, on performances and artists. We will concentrate on this theatre in the course of our analysis because here the theatrical events, indicative of current conceptions, interpretations, and reconstructions of a mythical past, are more eloquent.

There are many who believe that after a century full of efforts for the revival of our classical theatre, the whole enterprise has come to a deadlock. Due to the great number of performances, this theatrical kind “has been trivialized, [...] has lost its magnificence...” and “what takes place is rather a struggle for ingenuity and impressionism. The pursuit of the tragic shiver and the dionysian exhilaration is a forgotten aim” (Hatzidakis, 1996: 17).

3.2. ELEMENTS OF A NATIONAL POLICY ON ANCIENT DRAMA

3.2.a. *General Remarks*

In Greece the Office of Fine Arts, Department of Theatre and Dance of the Ministry of Culture is in principle responsible for the mapping out of the policy and the administration of affairs related to theatre. The only things relevant they could provide me with was a list of the drama schools that exist in the country and a list of the private theatrical groups that are subsidized by the Ministry. So, all the data presented below were collected from other sources such as newspapers, pages on the Internet, interviews with people working in the Hellenic Tourism Organization, and theatre people.

The only official statement concerning the national policy on ancient theatre that was found was on the Internet page of the Ministry of Culture (www.culture.gr/3/31/3109/g950906.html): “...we continue with the formulation of the National Policy on Theatre. The significance of the art of theatre, as a cultural

product of a universal range, is acknowledged by the State accepting the comparative advantage, which is for our country the catholic recognition of the Greek area, as the historical cradle of this art for the western, at least, civilization. [...] In order for the National Theatrical Policy to be mapped out, a Working Group is established and, within a reasonable time, no more than six months, it will propose solutions and policies for the whole spectrum of issues concerning theatre, according to the philosophy developed above...". This text was dated the 6th of September of 1995. Since then no mention has been made of the progress and the results of this Working Group. This leads to the conclusion that the official National Policy on Theatre in general and on ancient drama specifically was never developed. As for the general principles, the state 'philosophy' about theatre is only restricted to the formulation of the acknowledgement of its universal acceptance and its fundamental importance for the western, at least, civilization.

Theatres in Greece are either financed by the State and the Municipalities (the National Theatre of Greece and the State Theatre of Northern Greece, and the 14 Municipal District [Regional] Theatres) or private ones, some of which are also subsidized by the Ministry of Culture. The criteria by which the Board of Theatre of the Ministry of Culture selects the groups for subsidies are:

- the repertoire of the groups
- the progress of their proposals
- the composition of the groups and the background of the artists
- the contribution to Greek Theatre in general of the applicants' latest performances
- the technical support (place, means, etc.) of the applicants, and
- the non profit making character of the groups and their proposals.

The average number of the groups that get subsidized by the State every year is 40-50 but there are always complaints about the transparency of the selection process of the group and the size of the subsidies. Comments like this:

"the groups that should be selected according to the quality, their contribution and the consistency of their activity, and not according to their 'right acquaintances' ('to messon')".
(Angeliki, female actress, early 30's)⁴

⁴ The translations from Greek belong to the author

are very common reflecting a general discontent among theatre people concerning issues of meritocracy.

3.2.b. *Drama Schools*

Performing Arts Schools in Greece are not University Departments and only require three years of study. There are two State Drama Schools (the ones that belong to the National Theatre and to the State Theatre of Northern Greece), and 23 private ones. According to data of the Ministry of Culture, 19 of them are in Athens, 3 in Thessaloniki, and 1 in Giannina.

The entry requirements for these schools (State and private) are the senior High School Leaving Certificate and the special examinations by the Ministry of Culture Committee. Candidates who have passed the Ministry's exams have then the right to participate in the examinations of the private School of their choice. The candidates are examined in: Acting, Recitation – Singing, and Elementary History of Theatre and Literature (written exams).

All Drama Schools offer courses such as:

- A. MAIN: Acting – improvisation, Speech training, Movement – Dance, B. SECONDARY: Music – Singing, Dramatology (Greek and foreign Theatre), History of Theatre, History of Modern Greek Literature, History and practice of Cinema, Stage design – Costume design and 'Make-up' and C. OPTIONAL: Fencing – sword play

There is no national curriculum or guidelines about the courses that should be taught in a School like this. The Drama Schools themselves do not have a set study program. They decide what courses to offer according to the availability of the teachers. Drama Schools do not have any complete view about what its graduates should have learned during their three years study. There is no Drama School exclusively dedicated to the study of ancient drama.

In the Drama School of the Teatro Tehnis ancient drama is taught only in the third year although some theory is also included in the first year of study. According to some teachers' point of view this is due to the fact that

“the magnitude of the ancient theatre is too large for a 20 year old child to cope with” (L. Kaponis, 40's, male, teacher in the drama school of the Theatro Tehnis, student of Koun).

Many students, on the other hand, believe that

“we should not deal very much with theory and analysis of the texts, because this would lead to the loss of the innocence and the spontaneity of the actor. The actor must be discharged from the burden of the play in order to be able to approach it and act” (Giouli, 19 year old, female, 2nd year student in the drama school of the National Theatre)

This kind of argument reflects the point of view that Karolos Koun, the first and most important teacher of the Theatro Tehnis, passed on to his students:

“...the ancient drama has a peculiarity. It is what we call the technique of voice, the technique of movement and the chorus of the ancient theatre”.

This means that Karolos Koun did not give much emphasis to the general theoretical equipment of his actors. In every ancient play he staged, he used all the students of the school as members of the chorus, and that was his way of teaching ancient drama:

“He staged almost all ancient plays; teaching and training was part of this process. He emphasised performing over theoretical teaching inside a classroom” (Katerina, actress, student of Karolos Koun)

Students of the school today learn and reproduce these same common codes through audiovisual material, by watching old performances and listening to the instructions of Karolos Koun.

In the National Theatre School the picture is not dramatically different. Emphasis here is also placed on acting itself. Developing a theoretical background is regarded as irrelevant or even damaging. Ancient drama is usually a first year course where students are mainly taught choruses from older performances of the National Theatre “in order to get an idea”. Dramatology, a theoretical analysis of the historical and literary aspects of ancient drama texts is a secondary course, which not many students take seriously since all efforts are focused on acting and improvisation.

In many other drama schools ('Veaki', 'Themelio', 'Piraios Syndesmos', 'Fotiadi', 'Odion Athinon') the situation is more or less the same. Ancient drama is a secondary course at an elementary level.

"Those who graduate from these schools are uneducated, uncultured. Yes, Schools do not do anything; with no exceptions they are all useless, they do nothing". (Kostas, male actor, in his early 50's, who has worked at the National Theatre for a very long time).

This is of course an extreme view, which expresses a general dissatisfaction concerning drama studies in Greece. Some blame the State for this situation and others believe that it is the lack of good teachers.

"I was member of the Examining Committee of the Ministry and I shuddered; but I cannot blame them, you cannot deceive them. If you do not pay their teachers how are they going to stay? They get one or two thousand drachmas (£3-4) for five hours. But they have a house, children, a family. How will they survive? How can they be good in their job?" (Giorgos, male actor, in his early 50's, with long experience in the National Theatre and other significant private theatres).

"There are so many schools and so many teachers. They cannot all be good. It is a very difficult task, you understand? In the old days there were teachers, there were great teachers. Nowadays there are no great teachers anymore". (Kostas)

3.2.c. *Culture and Tourism*

Greek culture and tourism and their interrelationships are a issue worthy of further research and analysis. As far as ancient drama is concerned, tourist purposes play a very significant role in efforts made to preserve and promote it. Placed among the most powerful means by which the concept of the Greek cultural superiority against the rest of the world is constructed, ancient drama performances reinforce the distinctive Greek identity, and function as tourist attractions, which bring more money to the country. Official statements made by politicians, often refer to various ancient drama festivals as economic resources:

"Their [ancient theaters] revival will most of all enrich the content of our contemporary life, but at the same time will give a monopolistic character to Greek tourism, providing its right social dimension. Because especially in Greece, tourism and culture go together... We must, therefore, act while being aware that the goods

of the Greek civilization consist a universal inheritance, and that our monuments are diachronic..." (N. Sifounakis, Minister of Culture, *To Vima*, 23/7/1995),

And:

"The intention of the Hellenic Tourism Organization is for tourism to compliment cultural activities of great interest, something that may attract tourists of high income level" (V. Papandreou, Minister of Development, *Naftemporiki*, 23/3/1996),

And:

"Special emphasis was given to the promotion of these activities, which constitute an attraction for tourists in Athens and elsewhere, being a unique way to resist against the cultural attack we get from Turkey" (K. Livanos, Minister of Culture, *Apogevmatini*, 7/3/1996).

As already mentioned, the Festival of Epidavros is the most prominent festival of ancient Greek drama in Greece. The theatre of Epidavros has been exclusively used for ancient drama performances, every summer since 1955. Being an ancient monument it is under the authority of the Archaeological Services (the local Department of Antiquities and the Central Archaeological Committee). During past two decades the Festival of Epidavros was under the supervision and the administration of the Hellenic Tourism Organization, and in 1999 these responsibilities passed to the private company "HTO – Greek Festival SA".

Being responsible for the protection and preservation of the theatre, the local Archaeological Service and the Central Archaeological Committee (CAC) assign it to the private company "HTO - Greek Festival S.A." eight weeks every year (July and August). The HTO is obliged to pay to the CAC 1.000.000 drs. for each performance and 500.000 drs. for every day of rehearsal in the ancient theatre (4 days for each performance), an amount of money that is used for the preservation of the monument, while the HTO keeps the money from the tickets. The prices of the tickets are such that *a citizen of a medium income group can afford to pay* (D. Gegos, President of the HTO).

A total of 16 performances of ancient drama are staged during the Festival every year by 8 Greek (the National Theatre, the State Theatre of Southern Greece, and 6 private groups) and one foreign theatrical group.

HTO is responsible for the selection of the private groups that stage their performances in Epidavros. A consultative board of seven (comprising the Director of the "HTO-Greek Festival" and directors, actors, musicians, etc.) are appointed by the General Secretary of the HTO. Groups that are interested in participating in the Festival of Epidavros submit their proposals and the committee evaluates them and decides who will finally go to Epidavros. The groups that are successful get a subsidy by the HTO to assist with the cost of the performance. Because the money does not cover all of the costs, the HTO arranges performances in other festivals around the country too.

There are no clearly articulated criteria for the selection of the private theatrical groups that will be chosen to perform in Epidavros. The "Greek Festival" has not defined any general principles concerning its policy on the ancient drama festival in Epidavros. The only criterion, according to the HTO President, is the *artistic value* of the group, which is almost always translated to how many spectators will it 'bring' to Epidavros :

"If for example Mr. A [referring to some very popular cinema actor] proposes to participate and "X" [someone unknown] also submits, of course, you can understand the difference... The example I used shows that Mr. A is better than this X. Of course, we try to give a chance to new artists who have, however, shown samples of their work, so that they will be able to familiarize themselves with the place and sometime to become veterans themselves...". "We try to put them [younger artists] also in Epidavros, in order to bring in some new blood".

Foreign theatrical groups were allowed in the theatre of Epidavros for the first time in 1994 and since then one performance by a non - Greek group has been established. The reason for this practice is that

"we allow them to show their work and we can see how they perceive ancient Greek literature". (President of the HTO)

The aim of this 'concession' is not just to promote the discussion on ancient drama through the presentation of different views but to promote Greek culture abroad:

"...it is our own interest the fact that foreigners give such performances, that we allow them try themselves in these plays; For them it is a life dream to be able to participate in such a performance one day. And imagine what they say when they go back to their country... It is a promotion of culture".

Later in the discussion the informant argued that

"...art is universal. It is not the monopoly of one chosen people. There are no chosen peoples. Besides, there is nothing better than having your inheritance accepted by others. On the contrary, this [the fact that others deal with it] gives it more credit than having it like a sealed secret...". (Marianthi, actress, late 60's, with great experience in ancient drama).

The administrative and financial management of the Festival, have often been criticized. Complaints about the deficits of the HTO are not unjustified given the relevant records:

"Herodio and Epidavros are in danger of sinking this year... economic deadlock (debt of 400.000.000 drs.)... agreements have not yet been made with the artists..." (*H Kathimerini*, 1-2-1996)

"Programme, Bureaucracy, Agents, Corruption, Committee. None knows the grounds on which (the Committee) decides, none can blame it for choosing the x failed productions and not a y that would probably have been a success. ... What is really missing is an artistic director who will be able to develop the programme, to take balanced decisions on cultural politics, and, of course, to shoulder the responsibility for the failures. ... (otherwise) The credibility of the leadership and the institution itself shrink..." (*Ependitis*, 30/3/1996)

3.2.d. Monuments Preservation

An underlying tension between the two Services (the Hellenic Tourism Organization and the Archaeological Services) can be detected. The HTO accuses "the Archaeologists" for treating the ancient theatre as if it was their property:

"They took it from their ancestors. Not you, not me... They lock it and they open it whenever they want, they do whatever they want... Anyway, they are supposed to know better than us".
(President of the HTO)

'The Archaeologists' on the other hand, have often accused the HTO for not respecting the conditions they have dictated for the preservation of the monument:

"According the views expressed in the CAC, the theatre is overflowing by spectators; for that reason they propose to HTO to 'cut' 9.000 tickets for each performance (the seating capacity of the theatre is 12.000). ...If this did really happen (15.000 spectators in Epidavros) then two questions arise: who allowed all these people to enter the theatre for free and who finally has the authority? The CAC

has also ascertained that the conditions of the contract that the HTO has signed with the Ministry of Culture are not maintained: smoking, stilettoes, heavy scenery that disturb the *orchestra* (the round part of the ancient stage), etc.” (*H Kathimerini*, 18/7/1996). It is obvious that the CAC want to restrict entry whereas the HTO want to widen it, also for commercial reasons.

It would be more useful for the needs of our analysis to give an outline of the whole regulation that is in force for the preservation and protection of the ancient theatre of Epidavros in relation to the ancient drama performances that take place there. Every year the Ministry of Culture assigns the Theatre of Epidavros to the HTO, to which the “Greek Festival S.A” belongs, with a contract. In the first lines of this contract we read: “In advance, it is accepted that this assignment is under the self-evident presupposition that the usage of the Monument will take place in a way that will secure, on the one hand, the protection and the avoidance of any physical damage, and on the other, the preservation of its high prestige, as the top element of the universal cultural inheritance and the respect we owe to it” (*Contract for Assignment of the Ancient Theatre of Asklipios of Epidavros*, 1999: 1). In fact it is the Minister of Culture who finally approves the specific activities that are going to take place in the ancient Theatre after consulting with the Central Archaeological Committee (CAC).

This contract includes 14 terms, concerning the number of performances and the physical protection of the Monument (the form and the materials used for the scenery of the performances as well as the behavior of the members of the theatrical groups and the audiences). It also consists of the content of the contracts between the HTO – ‘Greek Festival S.A.’ and the agents of the various performances. In cases of breach of the terms of this contract, the license will be revoked.

The issue of use and overuse (and usually abuse) of the theatre of Epidavros was raised for the first time fifteen years ago. Some interventions that appeared in the stage of Epidavros did not meet with the approval of the archaeologists of the CAC, who requested that from then on they would pre-approve the models of the stage scenery before each performance. The authorities’ decision was not accepted by directors, but is still in force although it has been violated many times usually through political interventions that were ‘justified by the pressure of the

circumstances'. The following incident illustrates the point. In 1996, the British Director Sir Peter Hall asked for permission to use twenty barrels with petrol as lighting effects on the stage of Epidavros, for the needs of the performance of the plays 'Oedipous Rex' and 'Oedipous in Kolono'. "The Archaeological Services made an irreversible decision: either the dangerous objects are removed or the performance will not take place. The Ministry of Culture, however, had a different opinion and finally the performance did take place after it was agreed that the duration of these effects would be decreased. This decision was implemented despite a law (5251/52) that forbids the introduction of flammable materials inside the theatre and the contract between the Ministry and the HTO which is affixed to all the contracts with theatrical groups and includes a specific clause which prohibits the usage of fire and fireworks.

Protests made by directors and other artists who fail to see the advisability of such preservation clauses for the ancient theatre are also not rare:

"I do not sympathize with the archaeologists' obsession with the preservation of the theatre of Epidavros. It may be the most important theatre in the world but, if the problem for its preservation is 7 or 9 performances, then they should close it and turn it to a museum. Of course we must protect it as much as we can, but performances should be staged in Epidavros" (Director of Theatro Tehnis)

The issue of preservation reflects the wider debate that takes place over the museum status of important monuments of a culture of the past, or their active incorporation into the contemporary life. This is something that will be examined in more detail in the next chapters. It should, however, be mentioned here that the tendency to reuse the monuments in Greece was combined with the touristic development that took place during the decades of 1960 and 1970 without the necessary scientific and technical support. Even today the grounds on which the Archeological Resources Fund decides on the preservation and promotion of ancient theatres and castles around the country was that this initiative "contributes to the cultural battery ('oplismos') of the country" and corresponds to the quest of the E.U. for the "parallel development of culture and tourism" (*Eleftherotypia*, 17/7/1996).

In every debate between agents of tourism and culture in Greece, the point that is repeatedly raised is whether the Festival of Epidavros should be under the control of

the Ministry of Tourism or if it should return to «its natural environment» that is, the Ministry of Culture. The debate is far from concluded and one can see other refracted issues in it: culture (protector) versus 'commerce' (tourism); localism versus globalization.

3.3. THE THEATRES

3.3.a. *The National Theatre (Ethniko Theatro)*

The National Theatre of Greece is the descendant of the Royal Theatre (*Vassiliko Theatro*), which was founded in 1901 by King George I, but only survived for less than eight years before it became bankrupt and closed in 1908. For the next 24 years, until 1930, when the Minister of Education (Georgios Papandreou) took the initiative for the foundation of the National Theatre, no political groups showed any interest in establishing a State Theatre in Greece. One of the main aims of the National Theatre, according to its first manager, was "the promotion of Greek dramatic art, through the development and staging of plays of modern Greek literature..." (Panagiotounis, 1993: 64).

The first manager of the theatre was the poet Ioannis Gryparis and the first director the critic Fotos Politis. The first performances that took place at 1932 were one ancient drama (*Agamemnon* by Aeschylus) and one contemporary Greek (*O Thios Oniros*, by Grigorios Xenopoulos). Throughout World War II the theatre remained closed and opened again during the German Occupation with performances of German and Italian writers (Goethe, Schiller, Goldoni, etc.). Some ancient drama performances did take place during that period - e.g. 'King Oedipous' in 1941 - but in general the Institution disintegrated. "The management was disrupted, the theatrical groups dissolved, the building was seriously damaged, and the economic resources were almost nonexistent" (Theotokas, 1992[1946]: 52). Ancient drama continued to be staged in the National Theatre during the next decades. Aristophanes was introduced in the Theatre in 1951. Various groups of the National Theatre toured Europe and the United States, declaring that the way ancient drama is been interpreted by the National Theatre is the only valid one, the authentic way

(Terzakis, 1970). During the period of the military junta (1967 – 1974) the philologist E. Fotiadis, who directed the National Theatre, was dismissed because the staging of an ancient tragedy was not considered proper (the costumes of the performance had references to the modern era). The next step was “the military reorganization of the theatre: the general Vassilios Paxinos was appointed at the head of all state theatres” (Solomos, 1992: 14).

Many famous people, such as A. Terzakis, A. Vlahos, K. Bastias, G. Hourmouziou, and D. Rondiris, G. Theotokas, A. Minotis have undertaken the management of the National Theatre and have directed important performances that have sometimes been decisive for the development of the art of theatre in Greece throughout its history. In addition, almost all the important actors, musicians, etc. of the country have worked for the National Theatre.

Today the National Theatre is a private organization with a special relation to the State since its administrator is still appointed by the Minister of Culture and is subsidized by the same Ministry (Department of Theatre and Dance, Office of Fine Arts).

Among the activities of the National Theatre is the running of the Drama School that is supposed to prepare new members of its own and other, private theatrical groups. Apart from its Central Stage, with a mainly classical (Greek and European) repertory, there are also the Experimental Stage with the “Actors’ Workshop” and the “Empty Space”, a place of expression for young artists, and also the Children’s Stage. Special emphasis is also given to ancient drama according to the international patterns:

“If we look at foreign theatre and we go to London, to their National Theatre, what is the philosophy? They have Shakespeare like we have ancient drama. But it is not only that, they have new things also, the most representative of what exists today”. (Vice Art Director of the National Theatre).

According to its policy on ancient drama, the National Theatre has to stage two ancient tragedies and one comedy every year. There is no specific group that works on ancient drama on a regular basis. Every Spring the Theatre employs new Directors (the Vice Art Director may also participate if he/she wishes), actors, and the rest of the members (musicians, choreographers, etc.), sign contracts for the

current theatrical season only for each particular performance. There are only a few actors who may have contracts for one or two years with the Theatre (these are usually older ones, depend on their experience and quality of their work).

The fact that there are virtually no permanent collaborators to the National Theatre has been criticized by many of the actors, as this policy does not allow the formation of a specific character of the Theatre:

“Normally a National Theatre should express a specific point of view on some kinds of theatre. Its collaborators cannot come and go like this. They do not provide any motivation to young people to work hard... because next year they will be somewhere else and they will not be able to develop and turn their experience to an advantage. It is a shame that there is not even one drama school in Greece orientated mainly towards ancient drama ”. (Antonis, male actor, early 50's, working in the National Theatre for many years)

On the other hand, people who agree with this practice argue that this should have happened a long time ago because until very recently, actors working in the National Theatre had all the features of public servants. Public servants are always accused of not being hired on their merits and most of them are believed to work very little. This policy also led many older and experienced actors to accept to do things (usually to play second or third roles) they normally would not, because they feel that their position in the theatre is insecure and they do not want to upset the various Directors.

3.3.b. *Theatro Tehnis*

‘Theatro Tehnis’ was founded in 1942 by Karolos Koun, a personality that has gained legendary dimensions within the theatrical community of Greece during the past fifty years. According to the widely accepted view, Theatro Tehnis constitutes an almost unique phenomenon because “with the term ‘Theatro Tehnis’ we must not refer only to its Stage, but to its stalls, its amphitheatre, its audience, its friends and believers, all together as a whole: Theatro Tehnis is an ‘artistic religion’ (Sideris, 1972). Karolos Koun was the director, the person who shaped the character of this Theatre. His work has been characterized by a ‘folk expressionism’, an effort to ascribe to his performances the ‘Greek element’, as this was extracted, in his days, from the ‘pure’ peasant life, the folk songs, the Byzantine religious painting,

and the ancient Greek vases. This stance reflected a more general tendency in art of these decades to define the essence of Greekness and rediscover the authentic, permanent elements that constitute it.

The repertoire of Theatro Tehnis included European theatre, older and modern, Greek contemporary writers, and ancient Greek tragedy and comedy. Concerning ancient Greek drama, Karolos Koun and his group were the first who tried to give a fresh look at its performances trying “to avoid anything dead in its external form ... adjusted to the theatrical space and the requirements of the audience of our days...” (Koun, 1987: 40). During the first years of the Theatro Tehnis, Karolos Koun did not stage any ancient drama, because it was the period of the German Occupation, and the civil war. The first ancient play staged was ‘*Ploutos*’ by Aristophanes in 1959 and since then Theatro Tehnis dealt systematically with ancient drama performances except for the period of the 7year military junta (1967-1974), when Koun “*did not want to have any relation with the colonels*” (Thanassis, actor, one of his students).

Nowadays the boundaries between distinctive ‘schools’ are not as distinct as they were one or two decades ago, when the National Theatre and Theatro Tehnis constituted two different points of view, at least as far as the staging of ancient drama performances was concerned.

“It was then, the National Theatre with the ponderous gestures and the recitation of the text, a way of acting which did not suit our time... Today, and I do not say this because of my love for him, if tragedy is been expressed (performed) in a way that it makes its philosophy and its poetry apparent, we owe it to him”.
(Konstantinos, male actor, early 60’s, student of Karolos Koun)”.

Here, again, there is no permanent group working exclusively on ancient drama. Traditionally Theatro Tehnis stages one ancient play every year directed by one of the two directors who were students of Karolos Koun and “inherited” the Theatro Tehnis after his death. Although the Theatro hires other actors too, its composition is more homogenous, since the majority of the members of the groups were students of its drama school who continue their careers working there.

In the Theatro Tehnis contracts with actors are almost nonexistent. The basic collaborators do not sign any contracts or if they do it is a formality. Here, like in all private theatrical groups the status quo of hiring and salaries is somehow blurred:

“The essence is that we do not feel insecurity ... if you feel that the atmosphere of the theatre suits you, you can stay. Koun never asked you to leave, he always had a very big group” (Irene, actress, mid 50's, student of Koun).

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I tried to give some general information concerning ancient drama performances in Greece today, creating thus a framework into which the ethnographic material and the theoretical analysis that will follow in the next chapters, can be incorporated. The brief account on the history of ancient drama performances in modern Greece has shown that ancient Greek drama, like ancient Greek culture as a whole, has played a significant role in the process of construction and reconstruction of modern Greek ethnic identity(ies). The way in which ancient theatre is perceived, reflects wider ideas, beliefs, ideological constructions, and interpretations of the ethnic past, which are crucial in the identity construction processes. In addition, research conducted on the national policy on ancient drama in Greece today has revealed a huge gap. Some indirect elements may, however, be deduced from the low, and even non-existent, level of the ancient drama education, from the attachment of ancient drama in the tourist policy objectives of the country, and from the relations that exist between the Archaeological and the Tourist authorities revealed by the preservation of the ancient monuments' law. Finally I gave some necessary background information about the two theatrical institutions in which my fieldwork took place. Thus, I presented a brief history and a contemporary profile of the National Theatre and the Theatro Tehnis, which constitute the two most important contributors in the development of ancient drama performances in Greece, at least for the second half of the twentieth century.

In the next chapter I am going to present part of the ethnographic material collected during my fieldwork in these two Theatres. This material includes the composition of the two groups that were set up for the staging of the two ancient drama plays, the rehearsing processes, and the final results, the performances that took place in front of audiences.

CHAPTER 4

GROUP, REHEARSALS, PERFORMANCE: ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES FROM TWO ANCIENT DRAMA PERFORMANCES IN ATHENS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present part of the ethnographic material collected during participant observation in the National Theatre of Greece and the 'Theatro Tehnis' in 1997 and 1998 accordingly. I begin by describing the two ancient drama plays, *Orestis* and *Lysistrati*, that were staged by the two groups giving an outline of their plot. Then, following the successive phases of the whole theatrical process itself, I present the theatre groups: their composition, the members and their roles within the group, how they were selected for this job, why they participated in these performances, as well as the relations developed amongst them. I then proceed to the description of the process of the rehearsals for the staging of the plays, the specific requirements for such performances, and the everyday rehearsing experience. Finally, I give a picture of the final result, the form of the performances, as they were presented in front of the audiences. The chapter ends with a presentation of the role of the audiences since they constitute an organic part of the theatrical activity itself. Issues like how spectators perceived the specific performances, and what do they expect from such theatrical events in general, are crucial for the formation of a completed picture of our subject under study.

4.1. THE PLAYS

Aristophanes was born in Athens between 445 and 457 B.C. and died sometime between 390 and 380 B.C. (information on his biography are very few and contradictory). He wrote 44 comedies, but only 11 of them have been preserved until

our days. *Lysistrati* was first performed in 411 B.C. during the festivities of *Linea* that were dedicated to the god *Dionysos* and used to take place every year.

Lysistrati was written during, and referred to, the Peloponnesian War, a war that lasted thirty years between the two main cities-nations of the Greek ancient world, Athens and Sparta and their allies, and had a lot of catastrophic consequences for all participants. During this war Aristophanes wrote a comedy about a woman called *Lysistrati* (her name means she who disrupts the army), who organizes, with the help of women from all the cities involved in the war, a movement against it. Their weapon is the abstinence from sexual relations with men in order to force them to bring an end to the war, since men are responsible for it. What they actually want to do is to make them choose between love and that bloody war. Women take the oath for sexual abstinence and lock themselves up inside the Athenian Acropolis, in order to control the State Revenue Office (that was kept inside the temple of Athina) from which the war was financed. After many comic incidents - women invent various reasons in order to escape and go and make love with their men, disguised men try to enter the Acropolis and get ridiculed by *Lysistrati*), the women achieve their aim. Ambassadors from Sparta arrive and negotiate the conditions for peace with the Athenians. The war stops and the much desired reconciliation seems to be realised since, in a really artistic way, Aristophanes implies its utopian character.

Lyssistrati has been staged in Greece systematically (not yearly, but regularly in the modern repertoire of ancient drama) since 1905, and is one, if not the most popular, ancient greek comedy.

Orestis is a tragedy Evripidis wrote in 408 B.C., during the Peloponnesian War too. He was born in 484 or 480 B.C. probably in Salamina (island in the Saronikos Bay), and died in Pella of Macedonia in 406 B.C. *Orestis* was one of his approximately 90 tragedies, although only 18 of them have been preserved until today. It was the last play Evripidis wrote in Athens before leaving for Pella, where he exiled himself because he had been dissatisfied by the political conditions in his home city.

The play is based on the myth of Atrides, the royal kin of the city Argos (in Peloponnisos). The play begins in front of the royal palace. Orestis is lying down

sick, punished by the Erinies (female deities who punish malfeasance, and especially crimes against close relatives) because he has murdered his mother Klytemnistra who murdered Agamemnon (king of Argos), her husband and father of Orestis. His sister *Elektra* tries to comfort him, although the people of Argos are determined to punish Orestis and Elektra for their crime (Elektra was his accessory to the crime). Their last hope to be saved from the rage of the people of Argos is their uncle Menelaos, brother of Agamemnon, who has returned to the city with his wife Heleni and could propitiate the people. Menelaos, however, denies his help fearing the anger of Tyndareo, father of Klytemnistra, and asks for Orestis' death. The closest friend of Orestis', Pyladis, comes to encourage him and proposes to present themselves in front of the convention of the Argians and ask for their mercy. The convention is not convinced and condemns them to death. Before their death, Orestis and Helektra with the co-operation of Pyladis decide to revenge Menelaos by killing Heleni. They take Ermioni, Heleni's and Meneaos' daughter, as a hostage in order to force Menelaos to help them leave Argos and be saved. They also threaten to burn down the palace if Menelaos does not agree to help them. Heleni's slave comes out of the palace after a while and describes what has happened inside. Menelaos arrives and sees Orestis on the roof of the palace threatening to kill Ermioni and burn down the palace. The god of oracles, Apollonas, appears and gives the solution to a situation that has gone to extremes: he announces the ascension of Heleni, the acquittal of Orestis by the Arios Pagos (the highest court), the marriage of Elektra to Pyladis and of Orestis to Ermioni.

Orestis was first performed in our days in 1940. It is not amongst the most popular ancient drama plays in Greece and during the two last decades it has only been staged three times: in 1982 by the National Theatre, in 1992 by the group 'Mythos Energies Politismou' and in 1997 by the 'Theatro Tehnis'.

Lysistrati and *Orestis*, were the two ancient drama plays that were selected to be staged by the National Theatre of Greece in 1997 and by the 'Theatro Tehnis' in 1998 respectively. Next I am going to present the composition of the two theatrical groups that were established for the needs of the specific performances. The relations that were developed among the members of each distinct group, as they were traced throughout the whole process of my participant observation, will also be

presented since they reflect wider perceptions and interpretations of ancient drama in Greece today.

4.2. THE COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP

Being placed within what is called the “western tradition” of theatre, performers of ancient drama in Greece are high status, professional actors. There are, of course, amateur groups that deal with this theatrical genre occasionally (e.g. Universities’ theatrical groups, local groups, etc.), but in all cases, participating in an ancient drama performance demands a special process of preparation (reading and memorizing of the text, direction, rehearsals), and constitutes an occupation that distinguishes performers from other people within contemporary Greek society. It is never, as far as I know, a spontaneous activity realized by any group of people. In the case of the group with which I conducted my fieldwork all actors and the rest of the members were professionals.

The National Theatre of Greece and the ‘Theatro Tehnis’ do not have any permanent groups (except for some permanent collaborators) but they set them up each time for every performance. In our case, participant observation took place during the whole process of the rehearsals of the groups that were established for the staging of *Lysistrati* in the National Theatre, and for the staging of *Orestis* in the ‘Theatro Tehnis’. The rehearsals lasted – for each group - for three and a half months (April - July) while the performances (July - September) took place in various, mainly ancient, theatres around the country.

The group of *Lysistrati* consisted of 40 actors and 6 members of the supporting staff: the Director, the composer of the music, the speech and song trainer, the choreographer, the stage and costume designer, and the translator of the ancient text (from Ancient to Modern Greek). There were also the prompter, and a band of 7 musicians, who joined the group the last month of the rehearsals.

One of the most characteristic elements of the ancient Greek drama (comedy and tragedy) is that except the specific characters, the roles, who have a name, there is also the chorus, a group of actors who sing and dance the *stasima* of the ancient drama, and they sometimes participate in the action and converse with the characters, often functioning as one person. In *Lysistrati* there are 13 roles played by 10 actors, and the choruses of old women and old men as well as the choruses of the Spartians and the Athenians. The characters of the play are: Lysistrati (an Athenian woman who organizes and summons up the women to stop the war between Athens and Sparta), Kaloniki (neighbour and collaborator of Lysistrati), Myrrini (a woman from the countryside), Labito (a woman who comes with other women from Sparta to Athens), Provoulos (Athenian official, who tries to end the women's rebellion), three women who cannot stand up to the rules of Lysistrati, Kinisias (Myrrini's husband), the baby child of Myrrini and Kinisias, the messenger (who comes from Sparta to Athens), and the ambassadors who come from Sparta in order to negotiate for peace between the two cities-states. There were also 32 actors who constituted the choruses, as we mentioned above.

The Director of the performance had the post of the Artistic Director of the National Theatre at that time, and it was he who decided to undertake the Direction of *Lysistrati*. Most of the members of the chorus (young and not widely known actors) were selected by the Director with the participation of the choreographer and the musician (singing and dancing are of critical importance for such performances), through auditions, while the leading roles' selection was based on different kind of criteria. Four of the leading actors are very popular in Greece, especially, if not exclusively, because of their career in television, while the remaining two are purely theatre actors with long experience in the National Theatre and other significant theatres of the country, but are not widely known. Stelios, in his late sixties finished the drama school of the Theatro Tehnis in 1963. His career started when he was still a student, and he participated in many plays (ancient Greek drama, classical repertoire and modern Greek theatre) during all these years. Although he has a long and wide theatrical experience he became known to the wider public because of his participation in various television series. Fedra is another very popular actress who held one of the leading roles in the performance. She finished a private drama school (R. Pateraki's) in 1979 and she had no contact at all with ancient drama until 1985

and 1986, when she participated as a member of the chorus in the Euripidi's tragedies *Vakhes* and *Elektra* with the National Theatre. Since then she has been working with private theatres with modern international and Greek repertory but she has become famous through comic television series. Kostas, on the other hand is an example of a classical theatrical actor who's name is completely unknown to the wide public. He finished the drama school of the National Theatre of Greece in 1961 and he has been working in this Theatre ever since. He has participated in almost all ancient Greek drama performances that have been staged by the National Theatre all these decades. He has also participated in performances of classical international repertory. In reply to my question regarding the criteria of actor selection the Director told me that

“the view of the administration of the National Theatre is to have in the group actors that cause a stir to the audience and have glamour. I did not depart from this thought. I started with the question of who, according to my view, fits in the role”.

In *Orestis* there were 6 members of the supporting staff: the translator of the text, the director, the designer of the costumes and scenery, the composer of the music, and the choreographer, 10 'roles', and a 16 membered women's chorus. The characters of the play were: Orestis, his sister Elektra, Menelaos (uncle of Orestis and Helektra and king of Argos), Heleni (Menelao's wife), Tindareo (father of Klytemnistra), Pyladis (Orestis' friend), the messenger, Ermioni (Menelaos' and Heleni's daughter), Frygas (Heleni's slave), and Apollonas.

In the *Theatro Tehnis* the situation is quite different from that in the National Theatre. Although here too there is no permanent group that deals mainly or exclusively with the study and performance of ancient drama, the actors who are chosen each time are either still students of or have graduated from the drama school of the 'Theatro Tehnis'. This applies not only for the choruses but for the roles also. The director, who also owns the Theatre, knows these people and chooses whom he needs for the performance he is going to stage. This gives these groups great coherence and the feeling of constituting a team, elements that are very important for such a group work. It is true, however, that actors or actresses, who do not belong to the *family of the Theatro Tehnis*, are sometimes hired for the needs of a play, because this is:

“imposed by the days in which we live now”. “Every performance must have a surprise for the audience. In the old days everyone was expecting this [surprise element] from the genius of Koun (the founder of the Theatre). Now it is we, who must find ways to excite people’s interest...” (Director).

The members of the chorus were women with whom the Director was already familiar since they were still students or had graduated from the drama school of the Theatre of Art, and have worked together before. Only three women did not come from the Theatro Tehnis. Margarita, for example, graduated from the Veaki drama school in 1990 and she had a quite significant experience in ancient drama. She had participated in 5 ancient tragedies as member of the chorus and as coryphaeus (the member(s) of the chorus who leads it giving the rhythm in the singing and dancing and converse with the roles [*ipokrites*]) and once with a leading role. She had also participated in a three year ancient drama subsidised seminar, which led to the staging of a performance of *Antigone* by a well-known theatre director in the country. Her dream is to devote her career exclusively to ancient drama. However, she has to do other things occasionally in order to get some extra money because *“it is not easy to find a job two or even three times per year”* (meaning that when a theatrical season, which last for three or four months, finishes, actors have to look for another contract).

The actors and actresses who had the roles in the play, except the one who personified Orestis, have a constant co-operation with the Theatre and are not widely known since they rarely appear on television. Those who know them are mainly theatre-goers and all those who are interested in cultural activities in Greece. From the words of the Director cited above it could be deduced that the selection of a famous actor who did not belong to the personel of the Theatro Tehnis for the role of Orestis was chosen with a view to broadening the appeal to the audience.

Generally speaking, age and demonstrable skill place some restrictions on the performers’ eligibility in this kind of theatre. Younger actors never take the leading roles while it is supposed to be demeaning for an old actor to perform as a member of the chorus. In addition, it is not uncommon for performers to be accused for having taken a specific role not because they *deserve it* (because they are such good actors), but because they have the right social connections and public relations. This

is due to the fact that ancient drama leading roles especially, are perceived to be more difficult to interpret and consequently more prestigious than many others (and according to some extreme views, than all others).

According to my informants the reasons for participating in such a performance was mainly the salary: "*I am here for the job and the salary*", which for the younger and unknown actors in Greece is very rare since most of the private theatres pay only for the performances and not for the rehearsals. The National Theatre, on the contrary, pays enough money including an extra payment for tours outside Athens. From this perspective therefore, a season working in the National Theatre is a very good opportunity, especially because some of my informants actually earned their livelihood from the theatre. Generally speaking, however, only a very small number of theatre people (at least of those who have the actor's qualifications) earn enough money from the theatre, while most of them have other jobs, or have personal incomes. Secondary reasons are Ancient Drama, and participating in the National Theatre itself as a good background experience for their C.Vs. Sofia, for example, was a 23 year old girl who participated in the chorus. She had graduated from the drama school of the Teatro Tehnis and *Lysistrati* was her second ancient drama performance, and the first time she was working with the National Theatre. Within the three years since her graduation she had worked only four seasons (each theatrical season consists in three or four months of work), while the rest of the time she had been doing other things in order to get money. She loved theatre and this is what she wanted to do, but since she had no other financial resources she would accept any good proposition:

"I needed a job and a chorus in the National Theatre is not such a bad opportunity". (Sofia)

For the older actors things are quite different. For some it was an opportunity to appear in Epidavros after a long and successful career in other kinds of theatre but especially in television. Eleni was a characteristic case: she was 45 years old, a very popular comedian, and widely known from her work in television. *Lysistrati* was not her first experience in ancient drama. She had also participated in a performance of *Ippis* (of Aristophanes) in 1973 after graduating from the drama school in Thessaloniki. According to her words, it was not her who chose the specific performance but rather the opposite:

“...it was not my choice. I receive propositions that either I turn down or I accept... the difference here is that I am going to act in Epidavros...”

Eleni was interested in ancient drama although being a professional makes her treat all of her roles with the same respect and responsibility. She did not even consider an invitation from the National Theatre as something special:

“Of course I am honored by this invitation but I feel the same when I am invited and trusted by other theatres too. I do not want this to be taken as an oath (ivris), but I love this job and wherever I am, I feel the same things... Epidavros, however, is a holy place, it is the nicest theatre in the world, we all know that...”

For those who work with long term contracts in the National Theatre, participating in this performance was part of their job:

“I already had a contract with the National Theatre and when the Director asked me to come, I came”. (Giorgos)

Giorgos had graduated from a private drama school in 1976 and had been working in the National Theatre since 1988. His experience in ancient drama was extensive since he had been participating every year in ancient tragedies and comedies from the beginning of his career until today. He considered himself lucky because he had managed to work in important theatres all these years, although he never had leading roles. For 13 years he had been participating in choruses but since he came to the National Theatre he always had a ‘role’.

The same more or less obtains for the Teatro Tehnis as far as concerns the reasons for participating in this particular performance. The only additional element is the fact that in the ‘Teatro Tehnis’ the relationships between ‘employers’ and the ‘employees’ are more personal. The Director and most of the leading actors are permanent collaborators of the Theatre and teachers in the drama school of the girls who participated in the chorus. The members of the chorus participated in the performance because they felt a kind of *obligation* towards these persons, and because they feel this theatre a bit like their *home*, where it is easy to go if they do not have any other interesting propositions. This might counterbalance the fact that the salaries are not as good as in the National Theatre, since the actors of the chorus get paid only for one month (the minimum salary officially defined by the State), and not for the whole period of the rehearsals. Those who are still students just get a

symbolic amount of money, but consider it a great honor to participate in a performance of this Theatre that has such a long and successful history in the country. Theano, a young girl 22 years old, had graduated from the drama school of the Theatro Tehnis the previous year. She was born and grew up in Cyprus, but after receiving a scholarship, she came to Greece to study drama. She was accepted in the school of the Theatro Tehnis and in the second year of her studies she participated in the staging of *Ploutos*, a comedy of Aristophanes. She had participated in other performances of the 'Theatro' and *Orestis* was her second experience in ancient drama:

"...we, the children of the Theatro Tehnis, are very lucky because they give us the great opportunity to participate in a performance while we are still students". (Theano)

They do, however, get paid extra money for the tour as is also the case with the National Theatre, and this also constitutes a very strong motive for participating in the specific performance:

"Yes, theatre is a very difficult place to make money. If you are in a terribly difficult situation you have to do something additional. Most of us do something additional... It depends on the theatre also. Here [in 'Theatro Tehnis'] they pay us one month for the rehearsals and extra money for the tour. Very few theatres pay you for the rehearsals" (Theano)

4.2.a. Inter-group Relations

Daily contact with the two theatrical groups revealed a web of highly hierarchical relations among their members. The general supervision, the final word, and consequently the responsibility for the performance belong to the Director, and by extension, to the Theatre, while the rest of the members of the staff, musician, choreographer, stage scenery designer, etc. are more independent although in very close contact with the Director. The relations among actors, and between actors and Directors had very much in common in both groups of *Lysistrati* and *Orestis*, as well as significant differences.

In *Lysistrati*, the obvious, division that became understood almost immediately, was the one between two subgroups with clear boundaries between them: the first

consisted of the young actors, who constituted the chorus (most in their early 20's with few exceptions of 30 years old persons). They practically had no opinion on any issues related to the performance, they were clearly following instructions, and very rarely contradicted the director, or the older actors. They never associated with members of the staff (although they were closer and had a more open relation to the choreographer and the speech trainer), and they adopted, in general, the attitude of 'employees' toward their 'employers'. The second group consisted of the older actors who had the leading roles in the play. They were obviously more self secure, they considered the performance more as part of their responsibility, since it was their reputation that was also at stake, and behaved more like collaborators and less as employees. This atmosphere was also encouraged by the director, who seemed to have a closer contact with the 'roles', was more 'personal', and discussed more openly his ideas on the performance with these actors. With the actors of the chorus he adopted a more distant and formal behavior, with a clear element of a relationship of power. Between them stood 4-5 people who practically belonged to the chorus, but because of their age (40-50) and their experience in theatre enjoyed the respect of the younger members, as well as of the director (he trusted them more than the youngers and was much more conciliatory towards them). They never openly expressed dissatisfaction, although they felt they deserved a better place in the performance, a better role, probably because they were old enough to risk losing their job, or because they were 'professionals', and they felt it was their duty to support their job, whether they agreed with the director or not. Gerasimos, for example, 'confided' to me that he did not agree with the style of the performance. However, I never saw him expressing any objection openly. Gerasimos graduated from the drama school of the Teatro Tehnis in 1967 and worked with this theatre for three years. He participated in comedies and tragedies directed by Karolos Koun. For many years he co-operated with one of the most important private theatres of the country ('Amphitheatro') with a mainly classical international repertoire. During the last decade he has been working with the National Theatre and he has participated in almost all the ancient drama performances it has staged. He had not worked in television and that is why "*nobody has ever heard [his] name*".

Boundaries between these groups were very clear, expressed even in the different seats they were sitting, whenever they were rehearsing all together. Usually the chorus was gathered in one side of the stage or in the one corner of the room, while

the roles were either dispersed in the room, or sitting in chairs in the other side of the stage. Members of both groups rarely mixed, and whenever they spoke or joked this was a fleeting interaction.

This atmosphere of division between the two groups was reinforced by some practices of the National Theatre itself. In the timetable hung on the notice-board for the hours of the rehearsals, for example, the time and place for “the actors” and the time and place for “the chorus”, were listed separately as if the members of the chorus are not really actors. Another element that sustained the division was also the fact that for a very long time the two groups did not rehearse together (see 4.3.b.). This lasted for almost three months and only for the last 15 days did they work together. This did not allow the members to come closer and feel as one group, since they were not a permanent group but they had just met for the needs of this specific performance.

Between the two subgroups of the actors there was not any obvious contradiction. On the contrary, they seemed friendly and as if they had accepted this division. Underneath, however, there was a diffused dissatisfaction. Younger actors were in a way accused by the older ones of not giving all their selves to the performance because they were so ambitious that they could not stand the fact that they were just a voice among all the rest in the chorus, while they, when they were young, thought of the chorus as a big school, and as a chance to get as much experience as they could. From information collected, however, arguments like this must be seen as expressions of an embellishment of one’s past since all actors in Greece consider a leading role in an ancient drama in Epidavros as one of the greatest honors, while participating in a chorus is *not such a big deal*. From anecdotes I was told about earlier times, young actors of the previous one and two generations did not enjoy at all the endless hours of rehearsals – actors until recently did not enjoy - that were imposed by the directors. And they were certainly not satisfied by the monopolizing of few ‘big’ roles by a few protagonists, while many others, although considered good actors, were excluded and did not manage to become as famous as others.

Furthermore, on the one hand, while most of the the members of the chorus of *Lysistrati*, were not satisfied with the performance, they complained about the

direction and some of them even regretted that they participated at all. Giannis did not hesitate to show his dissatisfaction openly and even to ignore the Director's instructions:

"...this is not a serious staging of ancient drama. I do not agree with the style of the Director. They [the Director and the choreographer] just imitate other performances, they have not studied the play themselves. ...The time we have is very restricted. We do not have the time to become a team". (Giannis)

Giannis graduated from the drama school of the National Theatre in 1994 and he had participated as member of the chorus in two tragedies. With some friends from the school he tried to create a theatrical group in order to be able chose the plays they liked and the Directors of their preference. He liked ancient drama but he preferred to deal with modern international repertoire.

On the other hand, the leading actors were satisfied, at least that is what they claimed, and they tried to support the performance as much as they could:

"This is a Lysistrati seen from a different view... this is what I enjoyed most, and I feel lucky to participate in it". (Giorgos)

Members of the chorus also expressed their dissatisfaction at the selection of the specific leading actors many times:

"being good, and having talent are not enough, you need to have luck. You need to be seen by the right person in the right moment..." (Sofia)

They attributed it, not to their qualifications, but to the need of the National Theatre to make more money out of some very popular names that would attract a bigger audience to the performance. So, in the backstage of the chorus there was an overflowing dissatisfaction, while in the backstage of the leading actors there was just gossiping about their absent colleagues.

The members of the supporting staff of the performance were not actually a distinct group since each of them was rather working alone (except the choreographer and the speech trainer who were working with the actors on a daily basis). Andreas, the choreographer, in his late forties had began his career as an actor, participating in ancient drama choruses while he was still a student at the drama school. He was

interested in actors' movement and especially ancient drama's movement. He attended many seminars and in 1970 he went to the United States to study dance at the Graham School. He stayed in New York for four years and he worked in the staging of three ancient Greek plays. When he returned to Greece he worked with Zouzou Nikoloudi (a famous choreographer) and started his cooperation with the National Theatre which lasts until today. He also has a private dance-theatre group which deals a lot with ancient greek tragedies.

The translator and the costume and scenery designer had a rather indifferent relationship with the rest of the group, except with the director with whom they were directly cooperating. They were rarely present at the rehearsals and they came only whenever they had something specific to do. I could hardly argue that they were members of the group in the sense of the collectivity that characterizes works of this kind. The impression I got was that they had a specific task to accomplish which did not demand the cooperation of any other member of the group except of the Director.

A completely individual case within the group was the prompter. He was around 50 years old, he had been working in the National Theatre for 30 years, and he associated with the older actors, those who had worked many years in the Theatre, and know each other well. The prompter is a permanent employee of the Theatre (no other theatre except the National has a prompter) but after he retires his position will be abolished and no one new will be hired. According to his words, in older days the prompter used to be a very significant member of the theatrical group. He was the one who was dictating the words to the actors, and his role was essential since every week they were staging a new play and the actors did not have time to learn their words by heart:

"The prompter is constantly stressed during the performance, he knows its whole rhythm, every slight pause. He cannot be abstracted a single moment". (Prompter)

It is a technique that he has learned. His voice reaches a special frequency that can be heard by the actors but not by the audience. He was always present in the rehearsals of the roles as well as when the whole group was working together.

I could, in no case, speak for all members of the groups but the general impression I formed from what I saw and what I was told is that it was not possible that there was no real cooperation among the participants. Antagonisms were not rare and although they all kept a satisfactory level of behaviour:

“...the general climate was not that of deep and true coherence. There was not some common vision that could unite us all, and this was reflected in the results of our work”. (Angeliki, chorus-leader)

Angeliki, a 29 year old actress who participated in the chorus as a *coryphaeus*, was completely disappointed by the performance. She even regretted that she participated in it because she discovered that it was not ‘honest’ (*timia*) towards the spectators, since it had nothing to say to them:

“This performance had no reason to take place; it took place perhaps because the National Theatre had to stage one comedy this year and because Keti (the leading actress) had to appear in Epidavros”.

The picture in the group of *Orestis* was not dramatically different than the one described in *Lysistrati* and the hierarchical relationships between members of the chorus and the rest of the members of the group (roles, Director and staff) were similar and clearly defined here too. The fact, however, that the group was significantly smaller (26 persons) made things very much simpler and easier. Another main difference was also the fact that the director and most of the actors of the roles were teachers of the girls of the chorus when they were students at the drama school of the Theatro Tehnis. The girls also knew each other since they were together at the drama school, and they had worked together before. These personal relationships that had already been developed before the setting up of the specific team affected their relationship as collaborators. The girls of the chorus had distinctive feelings of respect and constraint towards the elder actors who *have been deified and mythologized into [their] mind* (Klio, chorus-leader) and some of them were close friends for many years. There were only three actors of the chorus and the actor who personified *Orestis*, who were working with the Theatro Tehnis for the first time. They managed, however to be assimilated by the rest of the group, and this was perceived to be an element that positively affected the process and the result of their work .

This special family atmosphere that exists in the Theatro Tehnis, however, does not mean that there were no contradictions, disappointments and even bitterness over unfair treatment. The most common reason for such negative feelings was the transgression, by the Director, of the hierarchy that exists amongst the members of the chorus, that is, the older actors get more words in the performance and become the chorus-leaders:

"I have been working for many years now, I believe that I deserved something more". (Klio)

Klio and Natasa were the older members of the chorus. Klio graduated from the drama school of the Theatro Tehnis 15 years ago and the Director proposed her to participate in *Orestis*. She had participated in many ancient drama performances in the past and she felt that she should have received a better position in the performance:

"Theatro Tehnis is my home, I grew up and I love everyone there. I love and respect those people who are my teachers and ask me to get on the stage with them now. You must try to keep the balance... I am not one of those who try to be near the Director in order to get a few more words in the performance..."

Natassa graduated from the drama school of the Theatro Tehnis in 1991. She participated in the chorus of *"Ifigenia in Avlida"* the summer of her first year in the school, in 1989. While being a student she also participated in "Troian Women", "Clouds" and "Frogs". She also participated in other classical repertory's performances of the Theatro Tehnis. She went to London for one year where she followed various drama seminars and she returned to Greece where she continues to work with the Theatro Tehnis.

Although here too there was not some vision, some new point of view on the play of *Orestis* that could inspire the actors more in their work, the phantom of Koun, the man who founded the Theatro many years ago is a very strong connective link. Koun directed some of the most important performances of ancient drama (among others) in Greece during the previous century, and is the man that all members of the Theatre consider their *teacher*, while the weight of his work does not, in a way, let them escape from his influence:

“We had Koun as teacher for so many years that it is natural now for us to follow him”. (Director)

4.3. THE REHEARSALS

4.3.a. *The Performance Requirements*

From the information collected, the whole process of the rehearsals for an ancient play is not much different from rehearsals for other kinds of theatre. Emphasis, of course, is given to the special requirements of a performance that takes place in a big open theatre, where the audience cannot see delicate face or body expressions: cultivation of special movement and voice handling. Apart from these, there is nothing special that they are supposed to know or to do in order to achieve the desirable result. There are, however, few individual approaches (e.g. the performances of A. Retsos) that try to reproduce in their performances “ancient ways” like the meter and the language (the language of the majority of the ancient drama performances is modern Greek and not ancient). These efforts are not widely accepted and have a very small audience since they are addressed to a special small group of people who can understand the language, while the wider audience find them stilted and criticizes them as failures.

All of the actors of my group had finished a drama school in Greece though none was really interested in further studies inside or outside Greece. As far as their education on ancient drama is concerned they find the few and fragmentary things they learned in their schools enough, while they consider a further theoretic education would not only be useless but even damaging for their spontaneity and the authentic knowledge of their body. As I indicated there is not any school or theatre in Greece that deals exclusively or even mainly with the study and performance of ancient drama, which consists of an elementary course in drama schools, is considered by many theatre people to be a problem. The hiring of different actors every year for each performance does not allow the accumulation and the exploitation of the obtained experience. Kalliopi, one of the leading actresses in *Orestis*, had a very long experience in ancient drama. She graduated from the drama

school of the National Theatre in 1964, where some of the greatest theatre people of that time were her teachers (Minotis, Paksinou, Katrakis, Rondiris, etc.). She had participated in all ancient drama performances that the National Theatre had staged within the last 15-20 years, except for this year that she was working with the Teatro Tehnis. According to her words, ancient drama is a special kind of drama and needs a special kind of preparation. In the older days the rehearsals used to last for 9 months, while now they last only for 2 or 3 months, which is not enough for a serious staging. She criticised the new policy of the National Theatre to hire its actors only for one theatrical season, while when she was young they used to work in choruses for 15 years continuously before they would get a role:

“...chorus is a great school. You learn how to stand, how to move...they do not give young people motives any more, their work, their experience is not used properly... see these kids here? Next year they are going to be somewhere else and they will not be able to use what they have learned here...” (Kalliopi).

Of great importance, according to my view, is the fact that the group never read the original texts of *Lysistrati* and *Orestis*, or any other translations of them, neither did they do any systematic study of, or reference to, the historic period and the society that produced them; both groups began their work considering the existence of a wider theoretical framework that concerns the play they are going to stage, as not a vital part of their work but rather as a matter of personal choice. Very few, sporadic comments were made during the rehearsals, and only in the first meetings (which in both groups I did not attend but I was told about) by the Director, and the translator, who read the text of the performance (the new translation), made some general introduction to the play. The only persons who complained and considered it to be a deficiency were just the 2-3 persons that had read the texts (of *Lysistrati* and *Orestis*). The rest of the people I talked to did not consider this as a deficiency; on the contrary, they argued that a study of this kind was not necessary, since they were not *philologists*, and could even become dangerous since *it could destroy the spontaneity of [their] body*, which already knew better what it had to do:

“...you have to be discharged from the weight of the text in order to be able to approach it and act. When I was in ‘Elektra’ we were analysing the text for two months like philologists. I was very bored”. (Maria, member of the chorus of *Orestis*, referring to a performance she worked a few years ago)

During the last month of the preparation of the performance, the rehearsals, in both groups took place in open theatres in Athens (in the sport center of *Galatsi* and in the Athens College) because the directors believed that the actors should get used to the open theatre conditions since these performances are created for open theatres and demand different voice and movement handling from closed ones. Many actors, however, complained about it because the acoustics were not only terrible, *but they could even damage their voices.*

4.3.b. *The Rehearsing Process*

The period of the rehearsals is of great importance for the staging of an ancient drama performance since it is the time and the process through which the performance is actually been 'built', and the whole group is getting prepared for the final phase which is the theatrical event itself, the performance of the play in front of an audience. The time and the process of the rehearsals were more or less the same in both theatrical groups, and they lasted for three and a half months, time that is generally estimated to be very limited for such big groups, and such important plays. What never happened although I would have considered it necessary was that the directors never gathered their groups to explain to them what their vision was, why they wanted to stage this play, or what did they expect from them and from such performances in general.

The rehearsals for the two sub-groups, the chorus and the 'roles' in both plays, were taking place every day except Mondays, which is the day off for all theatres in Greece, but separately for each one. For the first two months the whole group was working together only on Sundays, when they were rehearsing the whole play. The chorus was working in the foyer of the National Theatre, a big, high-ceilinged room with big windows and a wooden floor. A piano at one side of the room, used by the director-assistant, accompanied the singing and dancing of the actors. During the first month of the rehearsals the chorus was doing general phonetic and body exercises with the guidance of the choreographer and the speech trainer. The music and consequently the choreography of the performance were not ready from the beginning of the rehearsals, but arrived piece by piece. This made things quite difficult for the choreographer. The director was occasionally present, whenever he



needed to give some specific instructions, but in general, the chorus was rehearsing a part with no coherence among them since none had a clue of what the final result might look like. The costumes and the stage sceneries were not ready until few weeks before the premiere, and the actors were working in their track-suits and comfortable dancing clothes and shoes.

A 'typical' day of the chorus rehearsal starts at 10 o' clock in the morning. They usually all arrive on time at the foyer and leave their bags on the chairs that are dispersed in the corners of the room in order not to obstruct their movement. The choreographer is already here and waits in the bar for all of them to come. A tape recorder and tapes with various music will support the movement exercises since the music for the performance will take sometime until it is ready. At midday there is a break of half an hour, and they all go at the bar to drink something and chat about the performance or about their work in general. The rest of the day, until 15.00 will be spent on phonetic exercises with the guidance of the speech trainer, who is either standing in front of the actors' circle or accompanies them on the piano.

The property-man of the National Theatre, is always present to say that it is time for the break or to help the rehearsal with any technical problem that might appear (e.g. to bring necessary objects, to take care of the lights, to announce the breaks, etc.). The director, as mentioned above, is not continuously present. He comes whenever he wants to give some instructions about the play. This happens more often from the time the music of the performance begins to arrive and he, thus, has more specific instructions to give. Sometimes he is friendly and condescending and others he is hard and demanding. He uses examples from the modern history of Greece (e.g. the 7 year military junta between 1967 and 1974, or asks them to recall their grandparents' narrations from the Second World War) with which the actors are familiar in order to describe to them the feeling he wants them to have in the performance. The actors, and especially the members of the chorus, hardly ever discuss with the director his instructions, although they always try to follow them.

For the first two months the actors who have the roles used to rehearse in the afternoons from 18.00 – 21.00 p.m. in a small room in the main building of the National Theatre. The Director is always present, seated behind a small table with

his notes, while the actors are seated in chairs in front of him and hold the texts with their 'words'. The Director indicates who will speak, which scene they are going to rehearse, and the way he wants the words to be said. For all this period of time there is no movement, just practice that concerns the words of the text. Quite often members of the chorus come to the roles' rehearsals in order to participate in the parts of the coryphaeus. The director asks all of them to say the words in order to decide who will finally say what in the performance. Very rarely the actors ask for clarification to the historical references that exist in the text, and the director, who seems to be informed, answers.

During these first two months the rehearsals were 'fragmentary': emphasis was given to the words of the roles and the singing and dancing of the chorus, but separately one from the other. It looked as if the director did not have any specific image in his mind about the final result of the performance. It was rather as if the direction was being created during the process of the rehearsals. Almost every day the director was trying new ways of speaking, standing, and moving, and very often he was using spontaneous expressions by the actors. The Director, however, argued that he knew exactly what he wanted, even the position of each person onto the stage, even before the rehearsals started:

"I know what I expect from them; I let them improvise, to believe that they do, but I handle them. The things they give me through their improvisation are very few. I know what I must expect".

The performance begins to have a specific form by June, when the whole group works together more often (although separate rehearsals still take place) in one of the stages of the National Theatre. Besides dancing and speaking, the positions, the movements, and the atmosphere of the performance begin to clarify. It is the first time that the director explains to the group what the scenery is going to be like, and to give them directions about their positions. Most of them now know their words by heart and this facilitates the rehearsal.

The first day of July the band of the musicians appear in the rehearsal and during the break, the composer takes them to the bar and gives them information about the play, he narrates the plot, and describes the director's view and how this is going to be staged. From then on the musicians participate in the rehearsals with their

instruments and become an organic part of the performance. What is difficult for them to handle is

“...where to stand, how to move, and how to synchronize our music with the words of the actors, since we are not used to participating in theatrical performances”. (Thodoris, 31 year old, musician)

At the end of July the premiere of the play took place in the ancient theatre of Filippi (picrure 5) near the city of Kavala in northern Greece. This was the begining of a tour which would last for almost a month with performances around the country: in Halkidiki (theatre of Kassandra), in Litothoro (theatre of Dion), in Olympia, in Gianina, in Patras, in Epidavros, and in Athens. During the tour, which is always a combination of work with summer vacations (some were accompanied by families or friends), they had a lot of leisure time, they swam, they relaxed and had fun, although they were still rehearsing the play, mainly a few hours before each performance. After each performance they usually went out to dine either all together or in smaller knots.

If we turn to *Orestis* in the Teatro Tehnis we will see that the the process of the rehearsals was not radically different from the National Theatre, and that is why I will refer only to the elements that differed between the two groups. The chorus consisted only of women, who rehearsed in the morning on the big stage (in the “Basement”) of one of the two buildings of the Theatre. They were also regularly present during the rehearsals of the roles in the evening to work on the words of the text that the two sub-groups had in common, and the



Picture 5 The ancient theatre of Filippi (source: Stefosi M. and N. Kostopoulos, 1996)

dialogues between them. The roles usually rehearsed in the other stage (in Frynihou street), but it was generally a matter of arrangement every time as to which of the two stages they would use. After almost two months of mostly separate work they systematically started working all together in order to put together all the pieces that had been elaborated independently. Here again the situation was similar: the performance was evolved during the rehearsals through the improvisations of the actors and the final decisions of the Director.

When the rehearsals began, the text of the new translation for the performance was not yet ready. The actors started their work with body and voice improvisations on texts others than *Orestis*. When the translator finished the new translation he brought it to the rehearsal and he read it in front of all the actors. From then on they were doing improvisations on the specific text, and the Director was selecting what to keep and what not for the performance. This did not concern only the way the words were been interpreted and the acting part, but also the choreography and the music of the performance that were both composed according to the actors' improvisations. The composer of the music, for example, was watching the actors and when he was seeing something interesting he was elaborating it and returned with its final form. Of course nothing was final until even the last days before the premiere, since both the music and the choreography were often being revised.

The chorus was always working in the presence of the Director who was guiding the whole process, and with the choreographer and the speech trainer. The composer was always present until the music had taken its final form. The costume and scenery designer was rarely present, he was working alone, and had never informed the actors about his ideas. The actors found out what the costumes and the scenery would look like only a few days before the premiere. The only one who knew was the Director but he did not consider it necessary to discuss this with the actors, and this annoyed some:

"...everything is fragmental, and what I miss is the sense of the whole". (Klio)

The last rehearsals before the premiere of *Orestis* took place in an open theatre in Athens (in the "Arsakio School") in order for the actors to be used to the conditions

of the open theatre that are very much different from the closed one where they were working until then.

In the next chart I list the main common features and differences between the organization of the rehearsals for the two plays. This will give a better synoptic understanding of the total situation:

	<i>LYSISTRATI</i>	<i>ORESTIS</i>
THEATRE GROUP	National Theatre of Greece	Theatro Tehnis
SELECTION OF THE MEMBERS	Most members of the chorus were selected through audition, while the rest of the actors and the members of the staff were personally selected by the Director.	All actors and members of the staff were personally selected by the Director.
REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING	Salary, interest in the specific play, performing in <i>Epidavros</i> , prestige of the National Theatre, experience.	The same as in <i>Lysistrati</i> , plus feelings of personal obligation towards the Director.
PROCESS OF REHEARSALS	Chorus and 'roles' mainly worked separately. They all worked together systematically during the last month.	Chorus and 'roles' worked separately and together during the whole period of the rehearsals.
WORK OF THE MUSIC COMPOSER AND CHOREOGRAPHER	Taught the actors.	Used the actors' improvisations.
RELATIONS BETWEEN CHORUS AND ROLES	Clearly hierarchical and typical.	Hierarchical and personal, friendly and family like.

Let us now look at the performances themselves, the results of all these months of hard work presented in front of the audiences:

4.4. THE PERFORMANCES

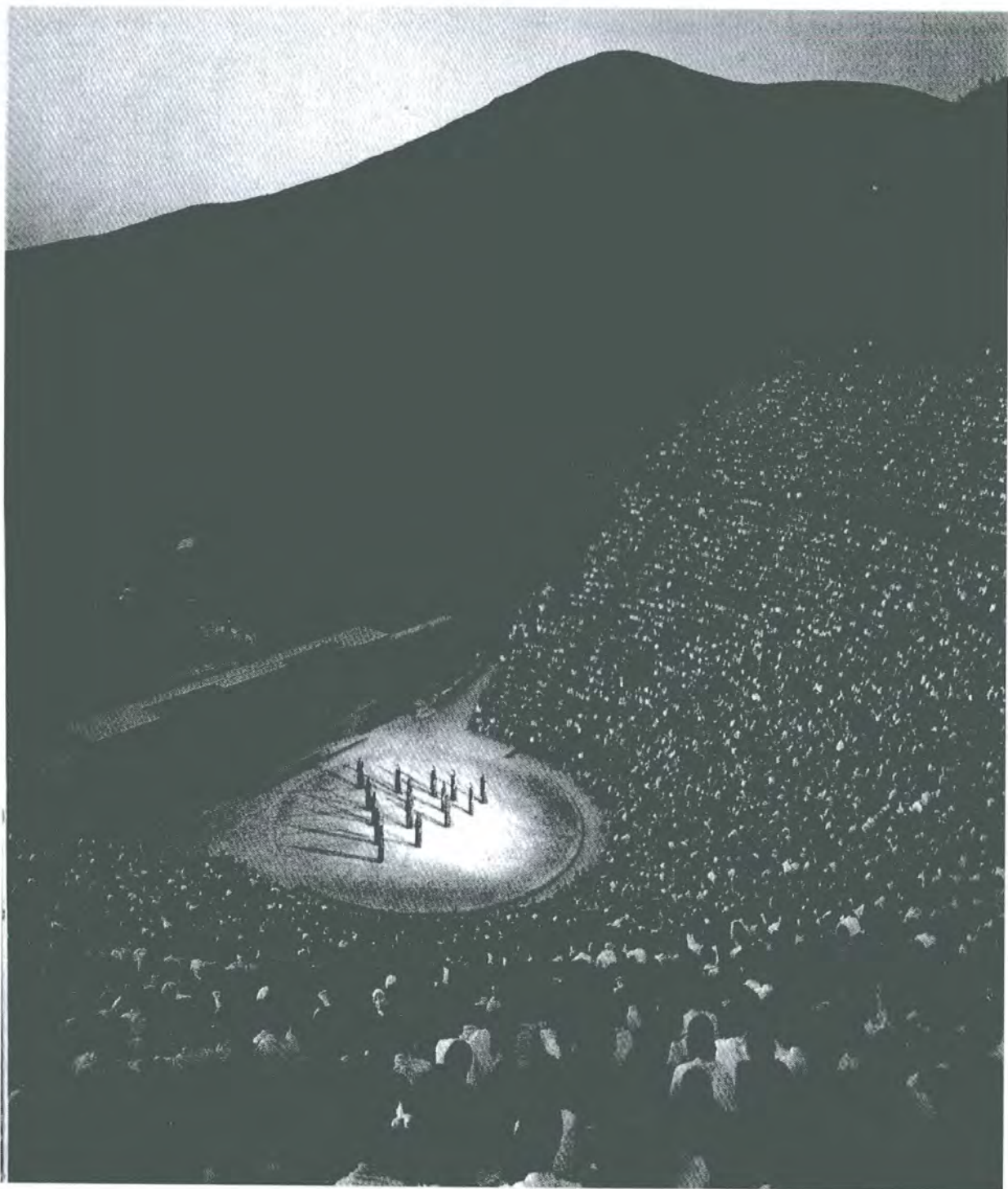
The performances of *Lysistrati* and *Orestis* took place during the summers of 1997 and 1998 respectively. They were both staged in Epidavros as part of its festival, and also in many other theatres around the country. I now try to give an idea of how the

specific performances of these plays that were described in the beginning of this chapter looked like. In all theatres the performances of each play were exactly the same, but for the accommodation of the presentation and the further analysis I will describe the evening of *Lysistrati* in Epidavros, and of *Orestis* in the modern open town theatre of Papagou in Athens.

4.4.a. *An Evening in Epidavros*

The performance was scheduled for 9 o' clock in a Sunday evening of August 1997. People had began to arrive at the area around the theatre since midday. By early afternoon the huge car parking of the theatre was already full. People were queuing to buy their tickets, others were sitting in the cafeteria outside the theatre, others just wandering around. Huge coaches brought tourists for the performance. At 7 o' clock the spectators started entering the theatre (picture 6). I preferred to go and visit the actors, before the performance, at the hotel they were staying near the theatre. Some of the musicians were practicing their pieces, others were getting ready to go to the theatre, others were concentrating, and others were talking with friends who had come to visit them. I asked some of them how they felt. They were surprisingly calm and confident because, as they admitted, the performance had been a success the first day, so they did not have any reason to worry. Besides, the first day in Epidavros is usually the day when critics and news follow the performances, while on the second day there are no such "*dangers amongst the audience*" (Thodoris), and they can be more relaxed.

Around 8.30 I enter the theatre that is almost full. Although there are many foreign tourists, the audience is mainly composed by Greeks, who are well dressed, and arrive in bigger or smaller groups of families and friends of all ages (including little children). They find their seats alone (there are no numbers on the tiers and no usherettes). Some of them discuss the performance they are going to watch, about the actors, or they remember other performances of the same play they have seen and wonder if this one is going to be any better. Most of them arrive on time, while



Picture 6 Performance in the ancient theatre of Epidavros (source: *H Kathimerini*, 18th August, 1996)

2 minutes before the beginning of the performance the Minister of Justice arrives and is greeted with applause. Cameras are everywhere and many people try to spot some public figure (an artist or politician). The atmosphere is festive and formal at the same time.

Twenty past nine and the dark has covered everything. The lights are turned off and nothing can be heard anymore. Gradually the lights turn on but we are not in the 'here' and 'now' anymore. What we see on the stage is completely different: it is a coffee shop in some small Greek village with its characteristic chairs and tables. From the way people are dressed (only men) we can deduce that it must be around the 1950s. Characteristic figures and images of most small Greek rural communities are present: the priest, the village head, the drunk, people who play backgamon and shout at each other, a barber who cuts the hair of a client, a dentist who extracts the tooth of a patient, and all these while comments on the politics of that time in Greece are heard (pictures 7-8): - "*Whom are you going to vote?*" - "*Markezini*" (name of a politician), someone else replies.

The floor of the coffee-shop (which is the whole stage) is covered by a huge map of the Balkans. Suddenly a travelling troupe of actors arrives on a truck: they are all women and shout advertising that they are going to perform a play called *Lysistrati* at the village (picture 9). The performance (inside the performance) begins. The lights turn down and the village men slowly take off their clothes revealing the military uniforms they wear underneath (picture 10). They are gradually transformed to the chorus of the old men, while the women are the chorus of the women of the ancient comedy, who will gather in the Acropolis (which is represented by the truck) and will block it from men.

The music of the performance was composed especially for it and had many references to Greek folk songs, and to songs that were popular in Greece during the the Second World War for the encouragement of the soldiers. There were also many Western songs (a characteristic tango) and elements of modern Greek music. A band of seven musicians (violin, trombone, lute, drums, saxophone/flute, clarinet, and contrabass) perform the music of the performance live.



Picture 7 Characteristic figures and images of small Greek rural communities (source: performance program)



Picture 8 Characteristic figures and images of small Greek rural communities (source: performance program)



Picture 9 The chorus of women (source: performance program)



Picture 10 The chorus of men (source: performance program)

They were all dressed in black formal suits, they were on stage and at some points they became part of the performance itself. Except for the dialogue parts, *Lysistrati*, like all comedies, also consists in *parodos* and *stasima*, which are the first entry of the chorus and the parts that are accompanied by music and dance. The movement here is analogous to the music which we referred to above: with many folk, traditional Greek elements and typical European as well.

The costumes evoke clothes of the 1950s: typical men's trousers with a blouse or shirt and rolled up sleeves and vest. Military uniforms for the men's chorus, and Provoulos, the Athenian officer who comes to disrupt the rebellion, wears a half European and half traditional Greek costume (black jacket, top hat, and Greek kilt) (picture 11). Some women, and *Lysistrati* too, although her name indicates the opposite (she who dissolves the army), are also dressed in military uniforms (pictures 12-13). Long dresses with vivid colours (red, green, purple, et.c.) are also used as well as sexy modern underwear (picture 14). Long and short tunics are also used by men and women, referring to and sometimes parodying, older ancient tragedy performances (picture 15).

The truck with which the troupe of women arrives initially at the village has been transformed to the Athenian Acropolis, in front of which we watch the course of the story. Black anarchists' flags are raised by the women in the Acropolis in order to demonstrate their opposition to the war. Other objects that are used in the performance are: wooden sticks (held by men's chorus), a firepot with which men threaten to burn down the women inside the Acropolis, clay pitchers filled with water with which women put out the fire, a shield and cup that are used in the ritual of the oath the women take in order to abstain from sex, and thus press their men to end the war.



Picture 11 Provoulos with members of the chorus of men (source: performance program)



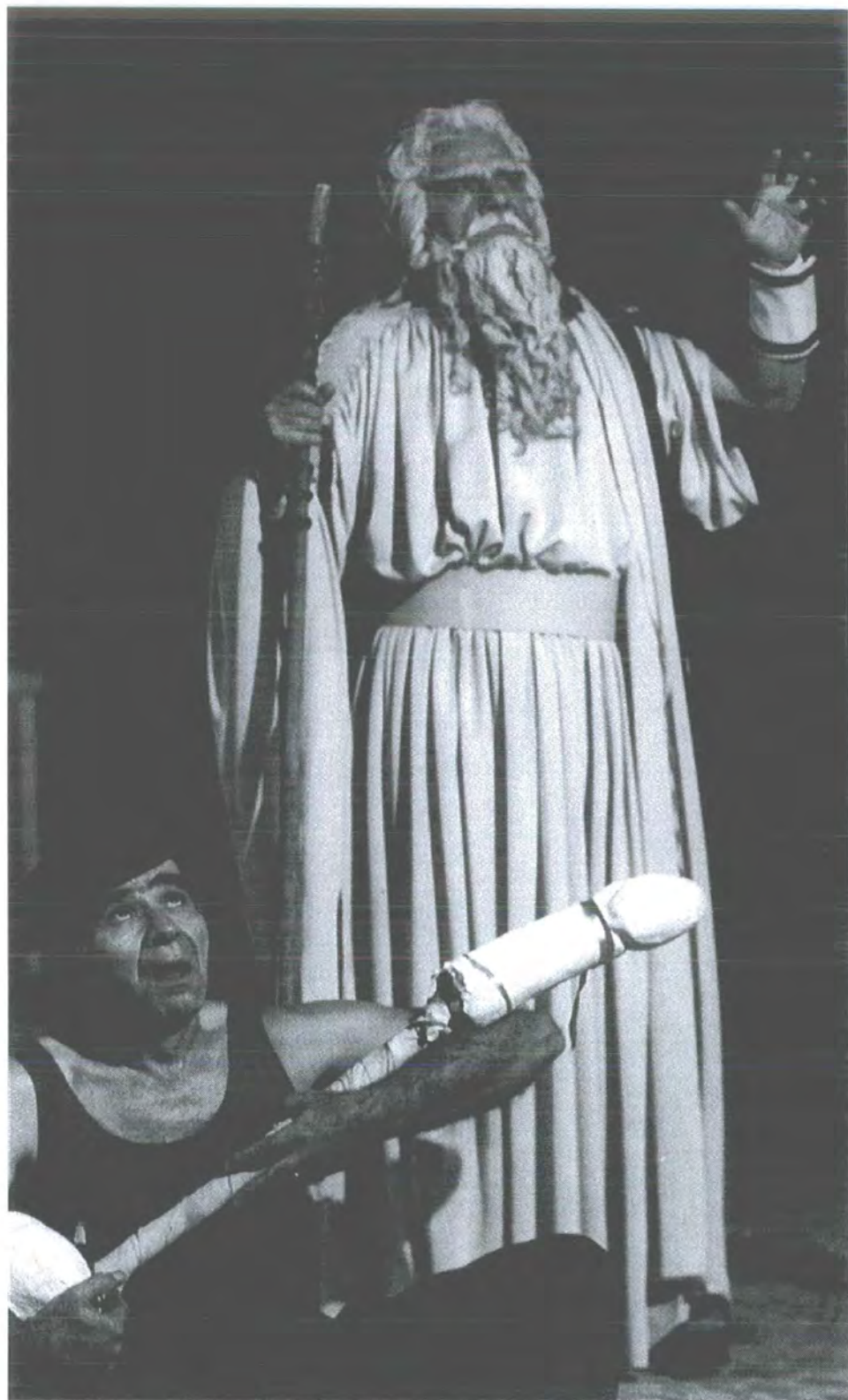
Picture 12 Lyssistrati in military uniforms (source: performance program)



Picture 13 Women in military uniforms (source: performance program)



Picture 14 Women of the chorus in sexy modern underwear (source: performance program)



Picture 15 References to older performances of ancient drama (source: performance Program)

In general, as far as the form of the performance is concerned, there is a mixture, or rather, according to my view, a confusion of styles. Many of the actors and spectators also agreed:

“...the text has not been studied. It is [the performance] just an imitation (copying) from other performances..., it did not arise from the study of the text”. (Andromahi, 42 year old woman, desk-clerk, member of the audience)

There were many rather different and disparate elements, say of the Greek history and the ‘typical Greek character’, without some inner cohesion and logic.

As far as the reactions of the audience to the performance are concerned, I must say that these were the expected ones from the director, who took them seriously into account when he was planning the performance. People applauded when the actors and actresses with whom they were familiar from the television appeared on the stage and remained silent in front of those who were unknown. They laughed when (templates of) phalluses were brought on stage, on hearing modern words and phrases that had sexual implications which translated Aristophanes’ ribaldry, and when references to current political issues were made.

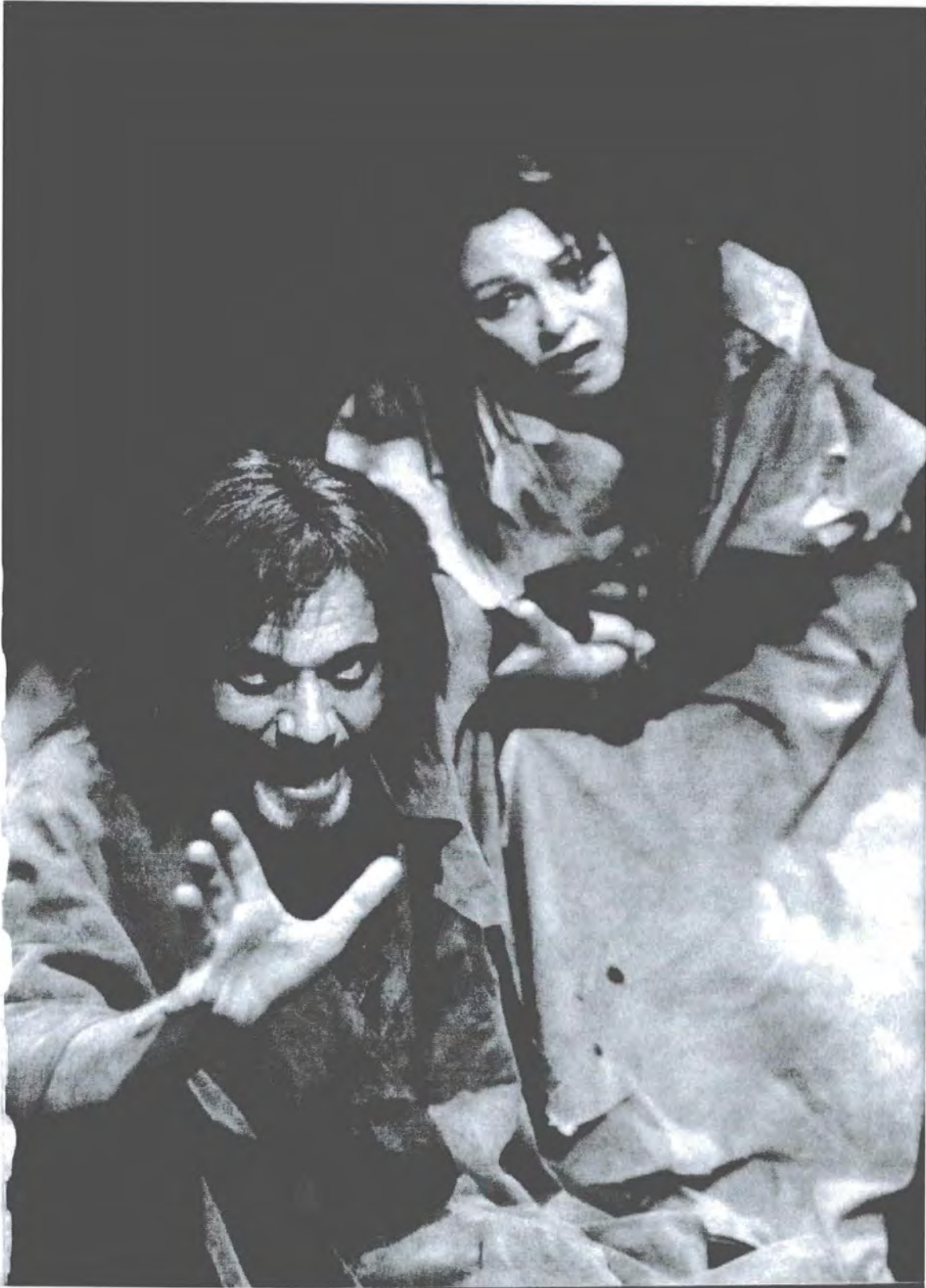
The women achieve their aim, and the much desired conciliation among the warring cities becomes a reality. The lights turn off, and on again showing the whole group on stage together with the Director. The audience applauds enthusiastically, the performance ends. People start leaving the theatre sloping down to the exit. They repeat phrases or melodies of the performance, and comment on the acting, the direction, the celebrities that were here.

After the performance the whole group went to *Lygourio*, a village near the theatre, and had dinner at the tavern of *Leonidas*. This tavern actually constitutes part of the festival of *Epidavros* since for the past 40 years now all the theatrical groups that have given performances in the ancient theatre have dined there. The owner knows almost all theatre people in Greece and has close personal relationships with many of them. It is here that theatre people discuss the impressions that the performance left them, they criticise the results of their work with their colleagues, or they accept congratulations for it.

4.4.b. *A Performance of Orestis*

One year later, during the summer of 1998, the performance of *Orestis* took place in an open modern town theatre in a northern suburb of Athens called Papagou. It is a small theatre (1000-1500 seats) inside a big park, which is used for various cultural activities every summer. The performance was scheduled to begin at 9 o'clock in the evening. I arrived at the theatre at 8.30 and a long queue was still in front of the cashier for tickets. The atmosphere here is very different than that in Epidavros. Although the picture of the audience is more or less the same (family and friends groups, almost all ages, well dressed, some discussions about the play and its various performances, etc.), there is no "glamour" at all. There are no cameras and flashes, no celebrities and their fan clubs. It is a nice, quiet summer evening out.

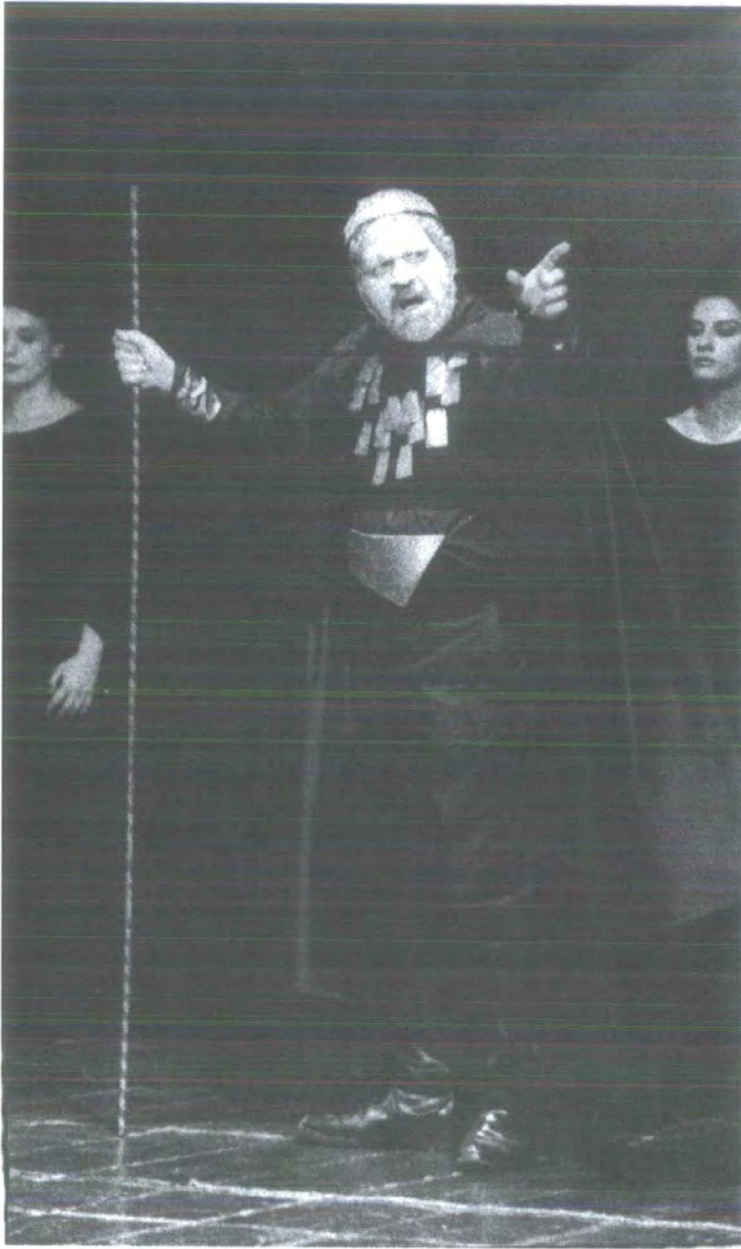
By 9 o'clock the theatre is full. The lights turn off and the performance begins. The lights turn on again and suddenly we find ourselves in front of the palace of Atrides in Argos. Orestis, dressed in ash-coloured rags like a beggar, is lying down a blanket. His sister Elektra (who will later appear in a long, plain, red dress) with analogous clothes (picture 16) is sitting next to him and tries to comfort him over their misfortunes. The whole performance will develop within this scenery. Menelaos dressed in a modern military greatcoat, army boots, and an ancient Greek helmet arrives (picture 17). He listens to the Orestis' and Elektra's request but after Tindareo's appearance, a figure dressed in dark clothes with a cape, a cap on his head and a long stick in his hand (picture 18), he refuses his help and demands the death of Orestis. The chorus is consisted of women dressed in long, frugal dresses half of which are black with purple and half are black with brown (picture 19). Except Hermioni, who wears a simple white dress, *Heleni* is the only one who appears in a luxurious, fine-woven white costume (picture 20). The most impressive of all is the figure of Apollonas (picture 21), who appears on the roof of the palace and informs the audience about the course and the end of the story. He wears a sparkling gold costume while the sun shines from his head.



Picture 16 Orestis and Electra (source: performance program)



Picture 17 Menelaos (source: performance program)



Picture 18 Tindareo (source: performance program)



Picture 19 The chorus of women (source: performance program)



Picture 20 Eleni and Ermioni (source: performance program)



Picture 21 Apollonas (source: performance program)

The stage scenery, an abstract construction that looks like a scaffolding in front of a skeleton building, with long pieces of cloth hanging, as well as the music and the choreography of the performance do not have any specific references. Sometimes we are reminded of older ancient tragedy performances, and others of some futuristic films.

After the appearance of Apollonas, who announces to the heroes as well as to the audience, the course and the end of the story, the lights turn off slowly. They turn on again, and like in Epidavros (This is a common theatrical convention) all the actors and actresses together with their Director bow, while the audience applaud with satisfaction. The group leaves the stage and the spectators start leaving the theatre, commenting on the performance and especially on the actor who personified Orestis, a very famous actor, as this was his first appearance in ancient drama.

4.5. THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

4.5.a. *General Remarks*

The average price for a ticket for an ancient drama performance is 5.000 drs. (= £10). A part of this money goes to the theatrical groups and the rest to the Archaeological Services for the preservation of the ancient theatre (when performances take place in one). The role of the audience in ancient drama performances is very important since without it the event cannot be called a performance. What is characteristic of the relationship between performers and audience is its complementarity and community since an ancient drama performance without audience is something unthinkable, and the role of the spectator as a critic of the whole result cannot be ignored. Appreciation or displeasure at a performance is always manifested in the accustomed traditional way of western theatre: with applause and clapping or with verbal expressions of dissatisfaction (insults towards the Director, actor or whoever is considered to be responsible for the displeasure). On the other hand, performers 'feel' the dynamic presence, the indifference, or even the hostility of the audience and this can contribute to the creation of a different

'atmosphere' during the performance, which can be either positive or negative. This, of course, does not effect the guiding lines of the form of the performance, since this is something that has been finalized by the director during the rehearsals. Margins of improvisation are always present but they do not drastically affect the whole result.

Within the traditional framework of the Western Theatre, actors and audience in ancient drama performances are two distinctive groups. They are clearly distinguishable in space (the stage for the performers and the rows of seats for the spectators), reflecting in a way the fact that their different roles are fixed and the fact that the members of the audience do not share (unless they are actors themselves) the skills being used in the performance (knowledge of the specific text, techniques of the body and the voice, specific director's instructions). Theoretically, the audience is not expected to have any general information concerning the play it is going to watch, but practically someone who knows about the period the play was written, and the socio-political context it refers to, may enjoy it more.

People tend to come to the performances in bigger or smaller groups, families or friends (children between 10-17 are not rare, but not under 10), usually there are more women than men, while a considerable number of tourists is also present. Spectators start arriving at the theatre half an hour before the «curtain rises» and take their seats waiting for the performance to begin. During this time they talk with each other either about the performance they are going to attend or other irrelevant topics. What is considered to be very bad manners is late arrival at the theatre and non-compliance with the standing rules for the protection and preservation of the monument (stileto heels, cigarettes, loud voices, etc.).

4.5.b. *Reception of the Performances*

Since it is impossible to know and transfer the impressions of all members of the audiences that attended these performances of *Orestis* and *Lysistrati*, I will describe those that I managed to detect, either through interviews with some of them, or through the general atmosphere, the reactions, and the comments heard inside the theatres before, during and after the performances.

While the protagonists of *Lysistrati* were very popular actors and actresses due mainly to their television career, members of the audience were making comments upon their participation in an ancient drama performance. In a way, this was the main issue around which expectations, criticisms and various arguments were developed. Some of the people I talked with perceived the participation of specific actors and actresses to be a positive and others a negative element of the performance. Some believed that they were not *qualified* for ancient drama and others that “*they had the right to do whatever they wanted*”. Margarita a 27 year old woman, school teacher, inhabitant of Kavala (the city near the ancient theatre of Filippi, where the premiere took place), told me that she did not expect much from these specific actors but she decided to come because she

“...trusted the National Theatre and the Direction. Besides, the play is a guarantee for a good theatre evening... At the end of the performance I realized that I was right. I was not surprised by their acting. I must admit that I laughed a lot but she [the actress who personified Lysistrati] is not good for such plays. Her job is television (disparagingly)”.

Kostas, a 54 year old Public Servant from Athens, on the other hand, admitted that he was pleasantly surprised by Kaloniki and Mirrini, who

“...as actresses, they confirmed through ancient comedy their talent as comedians”.

Yet, he made no comments about Klio, an actress with a long theatre career and a great experience in ancient drama, but not so popular to non-theatric audiences.

During the performance, however, the fact that the audience applauded every time the female protagonists were appearing on stage, gave me the impression that they were mainly expressing an admiration towards specific persons and less towards the play, the Direction and acting of these persons. The Direction was criticised, after the end of the performance, on the one hand as *clever* and *inventive*, and on the other as *kitsch* or as a collection of repetitions, of “*things we have seen a thousand times before*”. In addition, the things with which the audience mainly laughed during all the performances of the play I attended were almost the same: jokes with sexual allusions and references to modern political situations. The music and the choreography were accepted with enthusiasm almost by everyone, and were

acknowledged as the most powerful elements of the performance. The costumes and the scenery, however, were considered to be a failure or *absolutely indifferent*.

The case of *Orestis* was rather different. Except for the protagonist, a quite popular actor in theatric and non-theatric audiences, all the other actors and actresses were either young and unknown, or very well known only to a restricted part of theatre lovers. While waiting for the performance to begin, people were talking about the protagonist, and how anxious they were to see him performing ancient drama (this was his first attempt):

“I was very curious to see him in a role like this. That is why I came to this performance. And, of course, it is the ‘Theatro Tehnis’ that also attracted me. I watch its ancient drama performances every summer” (Vangelis, 33 year old male, dentist).

The fact that members of the audience knew the protagonists and also trusted Theatro Tehnis and its long and successful tradition in ancient drama performances were the main motives for attending this performance. Most of my informants were not disappointed by the result and were generally satisfied with what they had seen. The actors and the translation of the text were widely appreciated, while the Direction was mainly considered mediocre:

“The performance did not offend its audience. But I think that we should not come to the point to consider as an achievement something that is good but inefficient” (Katerina, 37 year old female, music teacher).

The music, choreography and scenery of the performances did not make any special impression to my informants, while the costumes were characterized as *simple and evocative*.

4.5.c. Variations on an Audience

According to information obtained through participant observation and interviews with actors and members of the audiences, I draw a distinction between four main ancient drama audience categories: a) the audience of tragedy, b) the audience of comedy, c) the audience of *Epidavros*, and d) the audience of the rest of the ancient and non-ancient theatres. This categorization does not mean that there are some clear boundaries between clearly defined groups of people. It is somewhat impossible for

someone to argue that any audience has specific and unique characteristics. Nevertheless, I refer to this because it was described to me by my informants, and also supports my personal impressions.

As far as comedy is concerned, it is supposed to be a more popular spectacle, often less important but more direct than tragedy. Comedy makes people laugh with all its references to modern life, "*which are more obvious than the Oedipus complex*" and as a consequence, "*it is considered to be an easy theatre*". As a result, more *popular (folk)* people go to an ancient comedy performance than to a tragedy. The audience of tragedy is supposed to be a more highly educated one, with special interests, since tragedy is *serious* and you need a proper education to understand and follow it. Those who do not go to see tragedies consider them as *Chinese*, that is, as something incomprehensible, and certainly *as something that does not concern them*.

The audience of Epidavros is a very controversial one. Athenian in its majority, it is either *a very well educated and sincere in its interest in ancient drama*, or a *fake* one. Epidavros, both as an imagined and a (real) substantial place seems to compress all the different attitudes towards ancient drama. Epidavros as an ancient theatre is, on the one hand considered to be a place where memory of the culture of the ancestors is sustained and conveyed, and on the other, with the Ancient Drama Festival that takes place there regularly during the last decades. It is considered to be the theatre that, more than any other in Greece, recognizes or 'buries' performances and artists. Artists and performances who appear there are usually considered to be of general acceptance and high quality, and thus, their audiences of a high educational and social status. Nevertheless, Epidavros is often accused of hosting to performances that do not deserve to be there but are there because of the good social connections and public relations of their creators. At the same time parts of the audiences of these performances are perceived to be *fake*, since a lot of show off, gossiping, and public relations take place and consist of the main reason for some to be there. Ancient drama in Greece has, in a way, been identified with Epidavros, and in this sense, everything presented and analyzed next concerning ancient drama could also apply for Epidavros. The audience of the other ancient and non-ancient theatres is more difficult to characterize. It is mainly composed of local people who treat an ancient drama performance as a different summer evening out since theatre

and cinema in the Greek provinces are almost nonexistent. It thus becomes a significant social activity for small communities.

4.5.d. *What does an Audience expect from an Ancient Drama Performance?*

From the material collected one could make the safe conclusion that the reasons for which people attend ancient drama performances are rarely the performances themselves. As everywhere, people who decide to go to an ancient drama performance do not all have the same reasons. Some go in order to have something to discuss in their living-room or in their office, to gossip, to criticize. Some go because they have nothing more interesting to do, and want to pass their time. For many, the most powerful motive for attending an ancient drama performance is:

"the participation of famous artists, and promoted persons and names..."

Some go out of curiosity but there are also those who go for

"...the 'catharsis' in the ancient Greek sense... and the aesthetic pleasure" .

Sometimes it looks like an obligation with a lot of social conventions:

*"The audience understands what is happening; it is like with the tax office that everyone knows steals from them but do nothing. In theatre also, they understand that they may be assisting at a bad performance, that the humour is ridiculous, but, nevertheless, they agree and laugh". (Konstantinos, 46 year old male, Bank employee, member of the audience of *Lysistrati*).*

The prevalent incentive for someone to go to an ancient drama performance, especially for those who prefer Epidavros seems to be the nice drive from Athens to the ancient theatre, the opportunity for a weekend excursion:

"... combine it with the excursion, without wondering what will I see and why".

*"The most slender of reasons is an interest in ancient drama. They have a weekend to go to an excursion, they combine swimming, sea, and watch a play having, thus, the alibi that they fulfilled their duty towards the theatre of Epidavros. There are people who have never been there; scientists, doctors. I have heard that they have never been there or they been there only once..." (Marianna, early 30's female, member of the audience of *Orestis*)*

As mentioned above, tragedy is thought to need education, a general *paedia* in order to be understood, and it is widely accepted that modern Greeks lack this education,

this culture. This is due to many reasons, according to my informants, but the consequence remains that

"...the level has declined because everyone hires 'names that sell' in their theatrical groups, and they do not care for anything else. The audience on the other hand does not have the necessary 'paedia'..." (Konstantinos)

Of course, according to all accounts, there are those who are originally interested in ancient drama, they have seen the same plays many times and they keep on going in order to see a *"different view of that Director"*. This group, however, according to evaluations made by members of the audiences, consists of a small minority of the average audience:

"There are educated people who want to see tragedy, but..."
(Athanasia, 24 year old female, student)

"Some people go because they know the play, they have seen it once, they liked it and they want to see it with different actors. I have the impression that those who will go because they know the play and want to listen again to things that occupy human nature and life in general, are not many". (Grigoris, 38 year old male, journalist)

"...very few will go in order to see how the specific director will stage familiar plays, in order to see a new view". (Katerina)

What is interesting here is that all the above statements constitute evaluations that members of the audiences of the performances of *Orestis* and *Lysistrati* made when I asked them to define why they believe Greeks, in general, go to an ancient drama performance. Similar were also the answers I received from the members of the theatrical groups when I asked them the same question. When speaking for themselves, however, members of the audiences replied:

"(I am one of those who) expect to feel a shiver (caused by following a very good performance)... I am amongst those who will go [to Epidavros] for the souvlaki and the excursion, for the chatting after the performance. And this is very good because I know I am going to see a very good play ...". (Thymios, 46 year old, male, tradesman)

"Obviously because I know what I will see. I trust big plays. I have seen them thousands of times and they want to see how a play is directed this time". (Grigoris, 61 year old male, retired civil servant)

"I could go for some specific actor or actress that I know from television and I admire. But actually it is Aeschylus or Evripidis that function as touts ('krahtes')... It is nice that people combine

theatre with excursion, because this is what the ancients used to do, after all". (Katerina)

"Nowadays it is not some elite that goes to Epidavros. It is very good to see common people combine swimming at the nearby beach with ancient drama because this is not some cheap entertainment, and this is what I do also".

"Theatre is an entertainment and will remain one. We could not demand 'deos' or respect. Theatre is entertainment that offers other, very significant things, like knowledge. It is through plays that we learn after all". (Lydia, 58 year old, female, dancer)

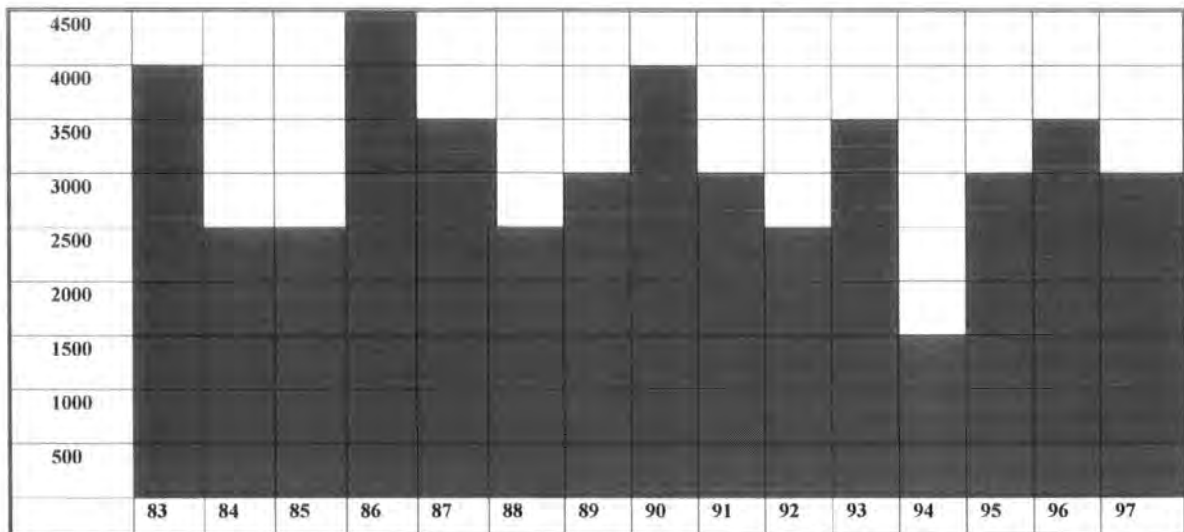
Next I quote some numerical data obtained by the 'Museum and Centre of Study of Greek Theatre' and by the Hellenic Organization of Tourism, which might add something to a more completed picture of the audience of ancient drama performances in Greece:

PERFORMANCES PER YEAR 1990-1997

YEAR	TRAGEDIES	COMEDIES
1990	10	4
1991	8	6
1992	14	4
1993	13	5
1994	12	7
1995	42	13
1996	16	9
1997	7	5
FOREIGNERS IN GREECE	5	1
GREEKS ABROAD	15	7

Source: Museum and Centre of Study of Greek Theatre

NUMBER OF TICKETS (in thousands) PER YEAR IN EPIDAVROS



Source: (Hellenic Organization of Tourism)

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I presented part of the ethnographic material collected during my fieldwork in the National Theatre of Greece and the 'Theatro Tehnis'. This material concerned aspects of the practices that are related to the staging of ancient drama performances in Greece today. I followed closely, through informants' every day routine, the selection of the specific plays, of the members of the groups, their inner dynamics in relation to the individuals, the rehearsing process and the final results, the performances as they were presented in front of their audiences.

In the next chapter I am going to complete the presentation of the ethnographic material that concerns the subject of this study. I will show how perceptions and rhetoric of Time and Space that refer to the ancient Greek drama are related to wider ideas, prevalent within contemporary Greek society. Thus, the sense of biological continuity of modern Greeks from their ancestors, and the unchangeability of the Greek natural environment from antiquity until today establish my informants' notion of uniqueness of a Greek ethnic identity. This uniqueness and distinctiveness from the rest of the world is most characteristically expressed in the belief that only 'us' in relation to the 'others', the foreigners, are able to stage good (authentic) modern ancient drama performances since 'we' are the ones who hold this tradition.

TIME AND SPACE IN ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA PERFORMANCES: ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES ON 'US' AND THE 'OTHERS'

INTRODUCTION

From my whole interaction with the members of the two theatrical groups, and especially through the open interviews I had with almost all of them, I came to realize that perceptions of Space and Time are central in the process of construction of specific Greek ethnic identity(ies). Ancient Greek drama is perceived to be diachronic, since the moral values it conveys have not changed, and the questions it poses on the 'Human Nature' have not found any satisfactory answers yet. Moreover, when individuals participate in or follow an ancient Greek drama performance inside an ancient theatre, they experience unique feelings, the most prominent of them being *deos* (combination of fear, admiration, and deep respect), evoked by the monuments themselves. As it is shown in this chapter (through the ethnographic material) this rhetoric on space is combined with wider perceptions concerning the Greek natural environment, and the biological continuity of modern Greeks from their ancestors that are considered to be prevalent within Greek society. A unique Greek identity is thus constructed, which is most eloquently reflected in the belief that only 'we', in relation to foreigners, the 'others', are able to stage good ancient drama performances. The features of this unique Greekness are considered to be special feelings, senses, elements of typical character and behaviour, and language. In relation to these features the 'others', are divided into two subgroups: on the one hand, there are the Westerns, a homogenous group called 'the Europeans', who although may be technically and theoretically even better educated than 'us', cannot perform like 'us', even though foreign audiences are capable of appreciating Greek performances. On the other hand, Eastern (mainly Chinese and Japanese) performances of ancient Greek drama are praised for their quality since the

antiquity, the ritualistic elements, and the remote position (geographically and historically) of these cultures justify their affinity with the ancient Greek one, without threatening the Greek sense of uniqueness.

5.1. TIME AND SPACE

5.1.a. Time

The performances of the plays took place from July until September of 1997 and 1998. They constituted part of the ancient drama festivals that took place in the various, mainly ancient theatres, around the country at that period of time. Such theatrical festivals occur in Greece regularly (every year) and always during the summer and early autumn. The preference for this time of the year is due to the prevailing view according to which ancient drama should be staged in its *natural environment*, that is, in the open ancient theatres, something that cannot happen during wintertime.

Performances took place during the evening and lasted for one and a half hours (as it is usually the case in all kinds of theatrical performances). It is an informal convention that ancient drama performances take place in the evening and not during the day, as was the case with the drama festivities of antiquity. The time of the beginning of the performance is fixed and mentioned on the ticket (although delays are always expected), while the moment of its ending is determined by the text itself and is made obvious to the audience by the stopping of the action and by turning off the lights. The actors stand still on the stage, and then bow in front of the audience that is applauding.

The theatrical time of *Lysistrati*, the time in which the action is placed was the decade of the 1950's. This was a difficult time for Greece. The Second World War, followed by a civil war, had many serious consequences that affected the political life of the country deeply for decades. In addition to this, the map of the Balkans on the floor of the stage referred to the contemporary bloody war in the former Yugoslavia, and its socio-

political consequences for the whole area. These examples selected from the modern history of Greece and its wider area were considered by the Director, to be analogous to the historical circumstances described in the play: the long fratricidal war between the two Greek city-states and their allies. The scenery, the costumes, the music, and the choreography of the performance supported this temporal interpretation. Present in the performance were also the elements that are considered to be diachronic, like the "Greek character" that was personified in the figure of *Karagiozis*, and the folk tradition (costumes, objects, and music) that is perceived to remain unchanged through time.

In *Orestis*, time is not clearly manifested. The action could be taking place at any historical moment and this is reinforced by the costumes, the music, and the scenery, which do not refer to some specific time, but rather combine various, mainly abstract, elements.

What can be deduced from these two performances, and from my extensive immersion in this kind of theatre, is that ancient drama performances do not all establish one particular fictional time, nor do they obey some specific relevant convention. It is rather up to the Director to define the temporal framework of his/her specific performance.

5.1.b. *Rhetoric on Time*

Although the temporal framework of these performances is not fixed but, as indicated, depends on the Directors' vision, people do have a specific way of perceiving historical time, which reflects perceptions and aspects of an ethnic identity, a process that is influenced by, and expressed in, among other things, watching and participating in ancient drama performances. Ancient Greek drama (like ancient Greek civilization in its totality) is considered to be diachronic, that is, it itself justifies a consistent presence in time through its quality characteristics, and it is our duty, as modern Greeks, to transmit it to the following generations as we inherited it from our grandparents. Great emphasis is given to the significance of the texts themselves because of the diachronic values they are believed to convey regardless of the way they are staged:

"Sometimes you get shocked! You think that it is not possible that these texts were written over two thousand years ago; it is as if

Aristophanes is a modern Greek writer... Wherever there is a war aren't there some voices that are against it (like in Lysistrati)?... This is his genius: he has psychoanalyzed the people of his time so well, that you can see that people are always the same". (Giorgos)

"You can see that history repeats itself and the story of Orestis and Helektra could have happened today. It is not a story that happened and ended. It is this fight with the Erinies that takes place inside all of us. We all fight with our personal ghost, our guilts". (Theano)

Although the distinction between the form and the content of the ancient drama texts is made very clear, the above quotes show that, although the former changes with time, the second can never be surpassed. All the important questions about humanity have been raised in these texts but they still have not found any satisfying answers, since people are still tortured by them. People change only in the ways they handle these fundamental questions but these questions do exist and are not replaced by others through time. This view was best expressed by Niovi an actress in her early forties who was a student of Koun and today is one of the leading members of the Theatro Tehnis. She graduated from the drama school of the Theatro in 1979 and the same year she participated in the performance of "Trojan Women" that was directed by Koun with the role of Cassandra. This was her debut in Epidavros and since then she participated in many ancient drama performances staged by the Theatro. Her career, has not been focused only on ancient theatre since she enjoys very much many classical and modern, Greek and international plays. According to her view, however, ancient Greek drama texts are *incomparable*:

"They are poetic texts that we will never exhaust their potential. They are texts with such a pulse ('palmos') that your heart beats whenever you read them and you are sure that as long as people exist they will be interested in and perform them. What might change is the way these texts are performed because humans change, constituting thus the object of unending study..." (Niovi, actress in her early 40s, student of Koun, and one of the leading members of the 'Theatro Tehnis').

In addition to these general and vague questions about the human condition, social-economic conditions and even many specific events at different historical times are

considered to be analogous and sometimes even similar. Time has been disrupted, and this leads to a mechanistic comparison between different historical eras:

"Do not forget that the Peloponnesian War was a world war of that time in our territory. And if you see what was happening until ten or fifteen years ago, during the cold war, it is clear that Sparta was the Soviet Union and Athina was the United States of antiquity". (Giorgos)

"Yes, of course, nothing has changed. Don't you see that the words of Lysistrati are today's words? Don't mothers still give birth to children that will later be killed in the war? Why do these things happen? For money; everything bad happens for money. Nothing has changed, nothing ever changes" (Fedra,).

"A ten - year war, Occupation, and a civil war with poverty, starvation and thousands of people killed and wounded. The decade of 1950 is very crucial for Greek history because it was a period of great despair, as was the Peloponnesian War, when women were also desperate and tried to do anything to stop the war" (Stelios).

5.1.c. Space

Orestis and *Lysistrati* were both performed in the ancient theatre of Epidavros and other ancient theatres in Greece (Filippi, Dion, Olympia) as well as in other open-air theatres around the country (in Patras, Halkidiki, Giannina, Athens, Kalamata, etc.). The places where ancient drama performances take place are not necessarily ancient theatres (although it is believed that these plays are fully developed there), but almost exclusively (with very few individual exceptions) in open-air theatres. This is due to the fact that ancient drama was created to be performed in the open, and to the prevailing view that, we have the duty today to be as close as possible to the original circumstances, we must stage them if not only in ancient, at least in open-air theatres.

The space of the theatre (with its clearly demarcated stage and rows of seats) is not the only physical requirement that is considered to be necessary for these specific performances. The costumes, scenery, music, and choreography also have a very significant contribution for the final results: the creation of the illusion of a fictional world. In the case of *Lysistrati* the theatrical space contained the interior of a typical village coffee-shop, a road in Athens, and the inside and outside areas of the Athenian

Acropolis. In *Orestis* there was the city of Argos, the façade of the palace of Atrides (the royal kin of the city), and the *theologion*, the space above the palace, where the god Apollonas appears and informs the audience about the final turn of the play and the fate of the heroes.

5.1.d. Rhetoric of Space

I now examine the images and the words people employ to describe their experience inside ancient theatres. As I will show, the way people perceive of the space and the kind of relationship they develop with it, are essential factors in the process of construction of their ethnic identity. Performances of ancient drama inside ancient theatres can be considered to be unique experiences not only for their artistic significance but also for the elements that they reveal of the relationship between modern and ancient Greeks.

The people I worked with showed a great willingness to discuss the way they experienced their contact with ancient theatres either as performers or as members of an audience. The use of words and clichéd expressions does not deny the relative differences in the meanings that people assign to them, although the almost reflective and identical responses and descriptions reveal how deep ethnic sentiments are to individuals, irrespective of their age, sex, or educational and socioeconomic state.

As in most personal relationships, the notion of a feeling is the key to the exploration of the relationship between modern Greeks and ancient space. The word *deos* (awe), with all its associated meanings (feelings that combine fear, admiration, and deep respect), was used, even in those cases where this was not considered to be prevalent or even existent. *Deos* is almost always correlated with an inexplicable and impossible- to- be-described sensation, which is reflected in the word *magia* (magic). Ancient theatres are always described as *magic places* (*'magika meri'*) that you must not be afraid of, but you must respect them if you want to survive inside and be assimilated by them. More analytically:

5.1.d.1. *Deos and Magia*

The term *deos* is, in most cases, used to describe an almost metaphysical experience people have inside an ancient theatre, either performing or watching an ancient drama performance. *Spirits, ghosts* and other supernatural images are employed in order to describe such an experience:

"I feel deos inside ancient theatres. It is the charge ('fortisi') of the place but also the myth that has been created. They are all together. For example, a friend from the School saw my 'avra' (the radiance that is believed that is emitted from the body forming a light sheath, visible only by specific persons with metaphysical and spiritualistic powers) inside Epidavros. How can you explain all these, how can you claim that they did not happen?" (Giannis). "It is as if these places are 'haunted' by older great performers" (Panagiotis).

"But you do not feel peculiar only because of the ghosts of all these great spirits [older performers] but of the Word ('Logos') itself, the unique meanings: no other text has followed human adventure in such a way" (Niovi).

Within this framework, the notion of *magia* as something unique in the whole world and inexplicable that takes place inside ancient theatres, is interpreted in many ways. It may be the unbelievable fact that contemporary Greeks meet with the ancients and discover that, although precedents, they were more advanced. This view was most eloquently formulated by Pavlos. Pavlos was a thirty seven year old actor, one of the leading members of the chorus of *Lyssistrati*. He had finished a private drama school (Theodosiadi) in 1984 but he was also Law student in the University of Athens, although he never graduated. He did not have much experience in ancient Greek theatre since he had only participated in one more Aristophane's comedy (*Aharnis*) in 1995. The performance was staged in the National Theatre too, with the same Director. According to Pavlos the superiority of modern Greeks' ancestors is indisputable:

"It is that so many years ago people had the need to build such places of mental activity and today, after all this time, we cannot stand beside them and say things equally important".

Magia is also associated with fear of unknown situations and beings. *Deos, magia, and fovos* (fear) are all combined together and ancient theatres are charged with characteristics of living creatures:

"(I feel) *Deos* for these people who sit up there [the audience] and are ready to devour you. The place, no matter how beautiful it is, it frightens you. Especially in Epidavros, where the route from the dressing room to the stage is long, it is like you are climbing on Calvary. Your pulse reaches 150, you see them and you pray to the Virgin Mary to help you. It is because of your responsibility in front of the audience and the texts, these colossus..." (Gerasimos).

The image of the theatre as a terrifying living being that is ready to devour anything or anyone who is not worthy of the place is very common:

"*Epidavros* itself, as a place, might swallow a performance, eliminate it. If you are not big enough you cannot stand up to this theatre". (Stelios)

"You must not allow the place to swallow you. There are people, colleagues, who have been swallowed by the theatre, because their fear, their *deos* was excessive, it inundated them, and when they had to come out, in front of all these people, their performance was not as good as one would expect from them". (Giorgos)

But what everyone acknowledges as the distinctive characteristic of these ancient monuments is their special *fortisi* (charge), which related to their *magia*, constitutes a phenomenon unique in the whole world:

"It is magic, I cannot describe it, it is a charge. It is something you read in books, and you become an accomplice to a re-enactment. It is touching, it is strange, it is not like the sensation you have when you act in any other theatre". (Stelios)

"It is magic. I have visited all ancient theatres in Greece and Dodoni is my favorite. It is very wild, and imposing. It is a terrifying theatre... I feel *deos*, because of its magnificence... not in the sense of fear". (Gerasimos)

Fear is finally completed by *ecstasy* ('*ekstasi*'), which is incited by the harmony that exists between the natural environment around the ancient theatres and the beauty of their construction:

"The nature in the place where the theatre was built is wonderful. You feel completely ecstatic. It is terrible. It was the full-moon, the place, the ancient ruins beside. And then it is the scientific mind that has created all these; this austere beauty; this size". (Natassa)

5.1.d.2. *Deos and the Past*

The *deos* that people feel inside ancient theatres is mainly due to the past, to the history of these monuments. Sometimes this history refers to significant Greek actors, Directors, and generally theatre people of this century, who have worked here (especially in Epidavros):

"These places certainly have a peculiarity because all the significant actors and Directors have worked here and this makes me feel deos". (Nikolas, actor, 21 year old, member of the chorus of Lysistrati).

"It is the tradition they convey. If we were little children and we did not know what we know now about them, we might had fewer feelings. It is a great honor for me to perform there". (Vassiliki, 30 year old actress, with extensive experience in ancient drama)

Most of the times it is because ancient theatres remind us of the presence of the ancient Greeks and the bond that exists between 'us' and 'them', that we have such peculiar and unique sentiments inside these places. These sentiments cannot be clearly defined but come out inside ancient theatres and are founded *"on the belief that there is a past that joins us together with the ancients"*. The knowledge that the ancient Greek tragic poets staged their plays in the same theatres is enough to create the sense of identification between past and present that is predominant in my informants' attitudes:

"These places demand a greater respect, a greater deos from the actor. Inside these theatres our ancestors acted for the first time; it was the first time that these texts, which we still stage today, were heard". (Evanthia, 27 year old actress, member of the chorus of Orestis)

"The fact that you step on the same earth (ground) that some other actors stepped on too, 2500 years ago, creates a terrible charge. The fact that you address yourself to an audience that you cannot see, makes you think that you are speaking to people who have been sitting there for 2500 years". (Stelios)

"These are weighty words but you feel them. The difference from other theatres is that you know that other people have stepped on them, people who believed in their gods, and they were our ancestors, who gave the light to the rest of the world, and this is not funny... You do feel different. I do not know if it is deos, because if it is, you should not step on it anymore. But you feel that you become one with your past and this is a very beautiful feeling". (Margarita)

Vassilis was a 35 year old musician (contrabass), who was member of the band which participated in the performance of *Lyssistrati*. He had worked many times before in theatrical performances, especially in revues, but this was his first time in an ancient Greek drama. He had co-operated with a few famous composers (e.g. Mikroutsikos, Hatzinasios) and Directors (e.g. Lazopoulos) in Greece. He was particularly interested in composing music for picture in general (cinema, theatre, documentary films). His experience in Epidavros was unique. He did not believe that he would have such feelings inside an ancient theatre. According to his view, ancient theatres are also considered to be the only places that link us with antiquity since the feeling of affinity with the ancestors that is created inside them is incomparable. As if no time had elapsed, people believe that it is the same earth, the same sun and dusk, the same stones on which ancient people were sitting 2000 years ago like we do today. And the fact that this past, this history is ours compels us to respect it:

"If you do not respect your past and your history you will not have any future either". (Vassilis)

Foreigners, who do not have such an obligation, however, adhere to it, thus confirming its great significance:

"We must do everything we can for Epidavros because it is a magical place and we are not the only ones who believe it; even foreigners, who have seen performances there, believe it too" (Vassilis).

The best way to show our respect is to keep ancient theatres alive by systematically staging ancient drama performances there obeying, of course, certain rules that will prevent us from offending the place as if this were a person:

"We must respect these places but not to the point of turning them to museums. If you leave them without any activity, they will die". (Giorgos)

"Maybe what I do is not worthy of this place but, anyway, I do have respect and I try, at least, not to offend it by following some rules. (We still perform in ancient theaters) in order to preserve the spirit of antiquity" (Director of Orestis).

5.1.d.3. *Ancient Theatres as Living Beings*

The attribution of qualities of living beings, to a material monument such as an ancient theatre is very common. Images of Epidavros swallowing an actor, a Director, or even a whole performance if they do not have the ability to stand up to the theatre's demands are not rare. Theatres also demand respect and truth, and even innocence, to allow you to stage a successful performance. It is not the audience that will judge, but the theatre itself since it has a special power, which is due to the energy that has been accumulated by time:

"You feel the energy inside these theatres... I do not feel stage - fright within ancient theatres like everyone else who trembles. Maybe it is stupid but I don't feel it; on the contrary, I like it very much. It is the place, where I have the feeling, that all the energy of all these centuries has been encircled and remains there. It feels like you receive and not that you give. I love it very much... I do feel respect for every place where a theatrical act takes place. Even the street theatre that takes place in squares must be respected because it is a holy place. Ancient theatres, of course, demand our greatest respect". (Giorgos)

"The place yes, has a special charge ('fortisi'), has a memory of so many years...It is difficult to describe it, it is a sensation". (Niovi)

5.1.d.4. *Ancient Theatres as Holy Places*

As we mentioned in the beginning of this sub-chapter, *deos* also means admiration, which, in our case, expresses a purely religious feeling that contemporary Greeks usually have for ancient theatres. This stance is supported by a Christian terminology that is very often used to describe feelings and moral obligations towards these places:

"Whenever I enter Epidavros it is as if I enter a church, a holy place"

"You cannot deceive ('koroidepsis'), you are not allowed to deceive. It is as if you are entering a magnificent temple of Virgin Mary and you light a cigarette... It is the difference between a closed and an open theatre; the second creates immediately the element of ritual; it is beyond theatre". (Stelios)

"It is a great deos. I had given up theatre for some time and when I came back I could not enter Epidavros. During the first rehearsal in Epidavros my feet were shaking, because I stepped on this earth again... Even now, every time I open the door of the

National Theatre I make the sign of the cross; I think I am entering a church". (Kostas)

"I don't know how we can manage that (to preserve the spirit of antiquity), but with some knowledge, some care (caution), and some study of the texts, someone can avoid being blasphemous inside these theatres and towards these plays. We must be cautious not to grow arrogant and provocative, not to promote our ego through them". (Director of Orestis)

People, however, cannot describe exactly the feeling, the reason why they compare ancient theatres with churches, the places of Christian worship, and only very few gave me some vague idea, referring mainly to their age and their universal value. The use, however, of the word '*metousiosis*' (transubstantiation) is very interesting. Here it is used in the sense of someone becoming deeply, essentially changed inside an ancient theatre, in contradiction to a surface change, a change only in the form. The religious implications of this word become obvious: '*metousiosis*' in Church terminology means the transformation of bread and wine into the body and the blood of Jesus Christ during the performance of the ceremony of the Holy Eucharist:

"It is an inexpressible sensation. You are suddenly transubstantiated ('metousionesai') inside this place; you immediately become aware of the special sense of the place, you catch its smell". (Director of Orestis)

"I would characterize these places holy, because they are places of MAN (in capital letters)". (Pavlos)

"I mention it [Epidavros] because everyone knows that it is the best theatre in the world; it is a holy place because these stones have seen and heard so much". (Eleni)

Many people refer to the phenomenon that when they enter the space of an ancient theatre, whether they want it or not, when the lights go out, they are under its spell, they enter a different process. They would not use the term *church*, to describe the place but they perceive it to be a holy place after all, since it has an age that relates it with various periods of Greekness; memories, feelings, even people who passed from there have left their prints:

"It is like an old furniture that has absorbed the touches ('aggigmata') of the people who used it. In this sense it is holy, but not in the sense of a sanctum". (Angeliki)

"I do not want to use such sonorous expressions. They are too strong. Of course, ... I do feel the responsibility and the

magnitude, and I think that destroying something inside an ancient theatre, material or artistic, is a criminal act; but it is not a religion... If you treat it as a religion, it loses its human dimension. It is not some god there, but those who were there before us. And our greatest responsibility is towards contemporary people". (Natassa)

Even those who argue that they do not believe in God and never go to churches can, however, imagine and actually do have the feeling that they enter a place that deserves or demands a deeper than a usual respect, when they enter the space of an ancient theatre. This religious feeling, this sensation, has rather to do with the respect towards its history and the reverberations ('*donisis*') of the people who were there in the past, and not with some explicit belief in God. Sometimes, this sensation becomes more specific and the exclusion of Christian references from ancient theatres is logically justified:

Look, the main element of ancient drama is the ritual that it conveys. But today's church has nothing to do with antiquity. Even the religious element that ancient drama bears does not exist today. Christianity has no elements from ancient drama, and we cannot compare the God we believe in today with the God the ancients believed in. There is no relation". (Director of Orestis)

According to the translator of the ancient text of *Lyssistrati*, Lykourgos, it is impossible for modern spectators to perceive of the ancient Greek notion of oath ('*ivris*') since they have been raised with the foolish notion of the Christian sin. Of course, ancient Greek and Christian elements coexist, but the situation is very complicated. Lykourgos was in his early fifties, he had studied Greek Literature and he had translated three more comedies for the theatre: "Birds" of Aristophanes and "Samia" and "Epitrepontes" of Menandros. He had also translated foreign poetry, theatre, and literature. He is also a theatre critic and a poet. For him ancient theatres and Christian churches have nothing in common:

"Inside a church, you have some codes that are so restrictive and specific, that prevent you from being a unit and you function as a part of a whole. You follow some rules which restrain you and you cannot let yourself free. Ancient theatre needs this individualization; to behave personally, individually. And this process has nothing to do with a church".

Only two of the informants explicitly rejected any sense of *deos*, *holiness*, *fear* and the similar inside ancient theatres. The peculiarity of these places, for them, is centred on

the effect of an audience of 8000 people looking down on them while performing, and on the ancient texts themselves, which are the only ones that should be staged inside them:

"If I was told to stage an other play [not ancient Greek] in Epidavros, I would not do it". (Director of Lysistrati).

Next I will show how theatre people handle their ideas and perceptions on the issue of the tradition and continuity of ancient drama performances in modern Greece since classic antiquity. By 'tradition' I mean the sense in which my informants use the term: the knowledge and experience of ancient drama performances that are transmitted from one generation to the next, from antiquity until today. This is a key aspect, which, with the dimensions and the contradictions it reveals in many levels, will help enlighten the analysis of the process of construction of a Greek ethnic identity that will follow.

5.2. TRADITION AND CONTINUITY OF ANCIENT DRAMA

Participant observation and the material collected lead me to make a special reference to the ways people perceive of the notion of continuity and tradition of ancient drama in Greece. A more analytical account of the appearance and history of ancient drama performances in Greece has already been presented in Chapter 3. Here I will concentrate on presenting the ideas and the perceptions of my informants on the issue of the tradition of ancient drama performances in Greece. By 'tradition' I mean the sense in which they use the term: the knowledge and experience of ancient drama performances that are transmitted from one generation to the next, from antiquity until today. This is a key aspect, which with the contradictions it reveals in many levels, will help enlighten the analysis of the process of construction of a Greek ethnic identity that follows in the next chapter of this thesis.

What is important for our subject is the fact that although it is widely known that ancient drama was rediscovered in Greece within the first decades of the 20th century, people consider this to be irrelevant to how they feel and what they believe about it.

Very few mentioned the disappearance of ancient drama for almost 2000 years, and even they, did not consider this to be a significant fact. On the contrary, everyone believes that modern Greeks hold a tradition of ancient drama performances, which comes directly from classic antiquity to our days, without any interruption. And although there is no information on the way(s) ancient Greeks used to stage this drama, theatre people believe today that these forms constitute a special kind of knowledge that is existent inside their body, and that it is easily recalled to them by the natural environment of Greece, which is the same that inspired these works of art in the first place. The existence of a literally unique Greek body, a particular Greek gene (*'to elliniko kyttaro'*), related to a unique Greek natural environment produces, according to my informants' views, the 'authentic' way of performing ancient drama. A particular notion of continuity is thus created confirming the uniqueness of a contemporary Greek ethnic identity.

"...these things [the correct way of performing ancient drama] have passed inside us" (Alexandros, actor, early forty's, 15 years experience in ancient Greek drama in the National Theatre of Greece)

This *inside us* (*'mesa mas'*) refers, according to informants' words, to a special Greek gene, in the sense of the biological genetic material, that has survived from the classic period through the Byzantine era and down the four centuries of the Ottoman Conquest until our days:

"I want to believe that there is inside us a continuity that cannot be proved ... but these things circulate inside the Greek's blood..." (Kostas)

"...this proves that there is a very concrete imprint on the Greek DNA, that is, a key with which some doors can be opened". (Hristos, composer of the music of Lyssistrati, early forty's with a considerable experience in music for ancient drama performances, quite famous in Greece because of the music he has composed for television series, and popular singers of the country)

This special *imprint on the DNA* is perceived to be something unchangeable, something that has survived in spite of the biological and cultural interbreeding with many other peoples with whom Greeks came into contact during all these centuries, and is reflected, is made visible in a specific, unique way to see life: *"This is for me the Greek civilization. It is not its outer (acquired) characteristics ..."* (Stelios). The image of

blood as something independent and alive, as something that bears and transmits cultural inheritance, is the image that epitomizes the views of my informants on this issue. Here I could characteristically mention the case of Niki, a young woman from Cyprus, has lived in Greece the last 5 years, and considers herself Greek although she admits that the main body of her influences are British:

“ From the moment I entered this area (theatre) in Greece, I found no difficulty in feeling it... Not at all, it was inside. It was inside. It just had to come out from somewhere ... You do not have to watch theatre for 400 years to have this tradition. It is inside us, It is in our blood”.

But the Greek gene alone is not enough. It needs to be stimulated by the *natural environment*, the special Greek natural environment that inspired ancient Greeks and still inspires modern Greeks. According to Melina:

“Yes, the things that inspired those people are the same; out there nature is still the same.... (What are important) is the natural environment and the gene that cannot be effaced... You know, even the country paths, along which the ancients walked, still exist... the natural environment, which gives us the manners and the customs, everything, carries out indigenusness and this can never be debilitated”. (Melina)

Melina, 29 years old, was a speech trainer. *Lyssistrati* was her third work. She had also worked in *Antigone* (in a private theatre) and in *Elektra* of Sophokle's the previous year. She had studied choir-mastery in Moscow for six years. Mikis Theodorakis invited her to work for the orchestra of the Greek Radio and Television. The last year she had been working in the National Theatre and she had also been teaching in its drama school.

The continuity of the tradition of performing ancient Greek drama is also due, according to informants, to the mentality and the psychology that remain unchangeable through centuries, and certify *absolute* kinship between ancient and modern Greeks. Although the way of life has been changed especially by technological progress, this mentality, which is considered to be unchangeable, is expressed in political, social, and even in religious behaviour that remains the same as we can ascertain if we read Aristophanes and other ancient drama writers. The changes and the adjustments that took place through the close contact of Greeks with other cultures are acknowledged, but reading

the drama texts people feel that the relationship with the ancients is such that it is as if they lived yesterday:

“This continuity is not a matter of biology. I locate it in the mentality we have today. What we keep from antiquity are the social relations, the political process. All these factions (cliques) that are created in politics, the “mesa” we need for a job existed in antiquity too. These are the relations that make us say we are the descendants of the ancients” (Panagiotis).

The argument, however, usually ends up again in biology, probably because biology represents something objective in relation to culture, something that constitutes incontestable truth and obvious to everyone: part of which is also expressed in language:

“But mentality and psychology are the same... some characteristics do exist in our genes. Contemporary Germans, for example, Europeans in general, have no relationship with the ancients, they do not look alike; we do and this is unquestionable...” (Klio).

The continuity of this special tradition is very often compared to a braid or rope, usually a red one where ancient Greeks hold the one end and modern Greeks the other. Performing ancient drama is described as if actors actually tie a knot on this continuous rope from antiquity, while future actors will tie another one and will further develop it.

The composer of the music of *Lysistrati* said:

“It is not to bring those times back to life, I am not much interested in this, but it is rather the joy I get from composing music for ancient plays because I tie a braid. I want to have a music that could stand in 1800, in 1600, in 1000, and today; I mean a piece of music whose combination would be cohesive... This is the rope of continuity ... it is not to see how they [the ancient Greeks] were living, but to feel that they hold the one end of the rope and you the other” (Hristos)

Only two of my informants referred to some visible side of the ancient drama tradition that exists in Greece. According to their words, elements of it can be detected in folk tradition and mainly in folk songs, the rhythm and the meter that exist especially in laments, which exist and preserve that tradition [= the continuity] from the classic antiquity.

Especially interesting seems to be the fact that only two of the younger actors of the group explicitly argued that they do not consider themselves to be an *extension* of ancient Greeks, considering statements such as “*the continuity of tradition inside our genes*” as *ridiculous*. What makes these arguments especially interesting is the fact that even though these informants renounced such views, they however, referred to them, showing how extensive such beliefs are within Greek society. In both cases it was argued that what mainly differentiates ancient from modern Greeks is religion:

“No, we are not the continuation of ancient Greeks, because Christianity has intervened and has destroyed that philosophy. For example, ancient Greeks could laugh at their gods, while for Christians this is unthinkable, at least on stage, although we Greeks say jokes about Jesus. Catholics do not even think of it. We do not have the same ‘paideia’ (culture) and conditions. No, we are not continuation” (Margarita).

Informants with conflicting ideas and feelings on the matter under discussion also existed. The essence of their uncertainty is that, on the one hand, they acknowledge that Modern Greek society is distant from the ancient one (without denying the kinship between these two), but on the other, they cannot deny the fact that the past actually leaves somehow its traces on people:

“I do not feel proud for being Greek concerning our classic inheritance. We still eat from what has already been cooked (an idiomatic expression meaning that you derive all the benefits from something you haven’t created) without having contributed to anything new... (on the other hand) I do not know what it is exactly, but it exists, the past, your ancestors definitely influence who you are today”. (Angeliki)

“No, I do not feel I continue any tradition... I find these things very nationalistic, against my beliefs. Yes, maybe they do exist inside our genes, but I don’t know; when I act I just feel the tension. I just feel what can be felt interpreting a character, but... well, maybe I feel them so simply, like someone feels that continues the cycle of life, some die, some others are born”. (Eleni)

The feeling of responsibility that everyone admits to have, is a consequence of the possession of the ancient drama tradition. This sense of responsibility is directed, on the one hand, towards the ancient plays because they are so important: “*to say even one*

phrase in ancient tragedy, is a great responsibility", and on the other, towards the audience.

Next, I will try to investigate the ways in which my informants conceive the distinctiveness and the uniqueness of the Greek ethnic group in relation to the 'other'. A unique Greek identity is constructed on the basis of the exclusive privilege of staging the 'right', in the sense of the authentic, modern performances of ancient Greek drama by contemporary Greeks.

5.3. US AND THE OTHERS

Investigating the encounter of Greek theatre people with their foreign colleagues and non-Greek audiences reveals a lot about their current perceptions of identity and Greekness in relation to 'Difference' and the 'Other', which is a decisive factor in the process of construction of an ethnic identity. The widely accepted view is that modern Greeks, among all other peoples, possess the 'authentic' interpretation of ancient drama, the essence of its form and meaning, according to which foreign performances are judged. With only a few exceptions that can be counted in the fingers of one hand, all the informants agree that non-Greeks are not able to stage an ancient drama performance as well as a Greek group can.

"I have never seen any good performance by foreign Directors. None has understood anything. They do not know what is this. I really am a chauvinist because only Greeks can understand and correctly express the content of ancient drama. It is like Shakespeare. Only English can make good performances. Although we do not have any long tradition, it has been 100 years that we have been performing and we stage 15 performances every year". (Director of Lysistrati)

"I have seen some performances, which were, allow me the term, ridiculous. No other country can stage Aristophanes. I have seen Aristophanes by French and Italians and they were awful, although Italians are close to us. Even the performances of Peter Hall had many arbitrary elements, extraneous to the writer's

spirit. Peter Hall is, of course, a great Director and his study on ancient drama very important, but there is something they cannot reach, they cannot understand... ” (Stelios)

The most widely held viewpoint is expressed by people who believe that foreigners can stage good ancient drama performances only “*up to a point*”, because they will never reach the sense of totality, which Greeks have, and which always remains undefined:

“Yes, foreigners can stage good performances but they will be partial. They will present one aspect of the matter, while we can give the many-facets of the text; It is like a diamond with many sides”. (Kalliopi)

“I have seen good performances but only up to a point; they cannot reach the point Greeks reach”. (Giannis)

“They have every right to experiment with ancient drama, it is not our property, but there is always something missing”. (Angeliki)

“My answer has nothing to do with nationalism; (I state this) in order to discourage any advocates and allies. I do believe, however, that every people and every culture, every foreign Director has the right to approach another culture with his own view and his own tools (‘oplismos’)... But I do not believe that he will find any keys [of ‘authentic performing]... ” (Lykourgos)

5.3.a. Greek Gene (‘to elliniko kyttaro’) – Natural Environment

If we turn to the reasons that justify the exclusively Greek privilege of staging good ancient drama performances, we will discover that they reveal the perceptions of the notion of Greekness itself, which is literally defined as a natural phenomenon, as information transmitted from one generation to the next through genetic material (genes). The elevation of the natural environment, however, as an agent and instigator of culture in modern Greece has been widely discussed in relation to ethnic identity issues (Tziovas, 1989). Especially the notion of ‘light’ (‘*to fos*’) far from being only something physical it might also refer to the ‘light’ of civilization that ancient Greeks gave to the rest of the (western) world. The Other, who is used as an example of foreign inadequacy, is always located in West Europe and more specifically is *the English* and *the French*, and more rarely, *the German*:

“It is the light, it is the sun, it [ancient drama] has passed into our genes and foreigners cannot perform this”. (Georgia, 26 year old actress, member of the chorus of *Orestis*)

“They do not have the light, they miss this relationship with the natural environment that only we have”. (Fedra)

“I believe that art is like the grass that grows from the earth. And here in Greece these are the plants [i.e. theatre] that grow; if you take a poppy and you try to cultivate it in Alaska you will fail. Alaska has other species that do not grow here. Even the air is different from one area to another, even the sky and the color of the light is very much different, Why should art be universal? Ancient drama is Greek, and thus Greece is the only place, where it can exist in its complete form. Even a bad performance has a more honest and right approach”. (Hristos)

“There are things that cannot be learned, they must be inside the genes. Our genes have probably something from the antiquity... You see, the people who wrote these texts come from our germ (‘sporos’)”. (Kostas)

5.3.b. Feeling-Sense

Theatre people believe that what authorises them, as modern Greeks, to have the exclusiveness in the ‘correct’ perception and interpretation of ancient drama is also a special ‘feeling’. The emotions and the feelings that someone has when dealing with ancient drama are supposed to be completely different from people from other countries. These texts are closer to modern Greeks because they are the only ones who can feel them so deeply: *“maybe I am wrong, but I have this sense”* (Niovi):

“It is something we have inside us. It is our roots. We have discussed what is this exactly many times, but no-one has been able to be more specific. We feel it, we feel it”. (Giorgos)

“We are in the position to comprehend these things more than anyone else. No matter how racist this may be, I think it is true. There may be ways of performance that are impressive, but the senses, the instincts are our history, which is transmitted by the soil (earth), the trees, the sun...” (Gerasimos)

“They cannot perform like we do simply because they are not Greeks. (Pavlos)

5.3.c. Character - Behavior

What join modern Greeks to the ancients are also elements of a character and a behaviour that is unique and typical. This gives an additional advantage in relation to their foreign ‘competitors’:

“I have never seen any foreign performance but I am sure that they will not have the same temperament. I have worked with foreign musicians and they did not have the spontaneity, the

brilliance that we have as a people. They know very well what they must do and how to do it, everything is organized and studied perfectly, but there is no spontaneity... It is this element of the unpredictable that the Greek has". (Niki)

"Everyone can stage ancient drama, even foreigners; why not? ...But we live with passion [like our ancestors]". (Gerasimos)

"They [foreigners] have a different way of behaving, there is an other spirit, another attitude, different reactions to phenomena". (Georgia)

5.3.d. Language

Surprisingly, language is not considered to be the strongest evidence of the continuity from ancient Greeks to modern Greeks, allowing them, thus, to have the most valid ancient drama performances. Linguistic continuity was almost always the third or fourth argument employed to justify the modern Greek exclusive privilege to stage good performances. A possible explanation for this could probably be the fact that the linkage of modern Greeks to ancient Greeks is considered to be self-evident for the majority of people. Thus, there is no need to substantiate it:

"The job of the translator is to bridge the distance... It seems to be self-evident that although time stands between ancient and modern Greeks, there is an uninterrupted web that is obvious in these texts... This umbilical cord does not exist in any foreigner except with his own tradition". (Lykourgos)

The elements of the ancient language that are considered to be significant for ancient drama and are preserved in the new language are mainly its "poetry" and its mode of everyday expression:

"No matter how much language has changed in New Greek, it still bears the poetry of ancient drama. Translation does not count. It is always good". (Kostas)

"But current Greek language and especially the everyday language is very close to the ancient everyday language. The abridgement of meanings, the versatility, and the hints that pass through the sounds of the language and its complexity are exactly the same with ancient Greek". (Stelios)

There are, however, people who bemoan the fact that modern performances of ancient drama are always, with very few exceptions, staged in new and not in ancient Greek:

“...is a great loss. Poetry in ancient Greek was a different thing than it is now with its rhythm and everything”. (Giannis)
“Language itself distorts; translation is a great distortion. Translation from ancient to modern Greek is already a distortion ...It depends on the translator...” (Angeliki)

But if there is any doubt about the validity of the translation of the ancient drama texts in Modern Greek, no one would contemplate a translation into a foreign language:

“The Greek language is incomparable. Ancient drama was written in a time when this language was at its peak. The language of the English or the French can never reach the level of the Aristophanes’ dialect. Unfortunately”. (Lykourgos)
“The Word (‘o logos’) of Aristophanes cannot be expressed by a foreigner, it is impossible. But Aristophanes’ vocabulary is closely related to our, today’s vocabulary. We are not much different, the way people talk, the ways they behave are exactly the same, and nothing has changed. Of course translations play some role but they are faithful to the actions and the words we do even today ourselves. And these words are not spoken by the French nor the English”. (Director of Orestis)

5.3.e. Various

Various other reasons, but not as important as the previous ones, have also been suggested as being responsible for the foreign incapacity to properly stage ancient theatre. This includes the relationship of people with space, their cultural background, and the whole attitude of a people towards life:

“I do not know what it is. Maybe it is the fact that we grew up next to the ancient ruins (‘sta marmara’). Foreigners do not understand this». (Angeliki)

“Look, theatre is a matter of personal experiences and how you have grown up. I read it in one way and you in another. A foreigner will read and interpret Oedipus according to his cultural experiences”. (Giorgos)

“Foreigners see it in a different way, their philosophy is different; they cannot fathom things like we can”. (Hristos)

The obvious example that is used in almost all cases of justifying the significance of the role of tradition in the perception, interpretation, and performance of ancient drama is that of the English people and its relation to the theatre of Shakespeare. Like us, only

English people can stage the best performances of Shakespeare plays because they have the tradition and it is part of their mentality. However, very often is mentioned that even Shakespeare had been strongly effected by the ancient Greek tragedy, and very rarely that modern Greeks actually lack the tradition of the ancient drama.

“Like, for example, we probably cannot perform Shakespeare like the English, they cannot stage Aeschylus like we can” (Niövi)

On the contrary, Japanese performances of ancient Greek drama are believed to contain the closest positive examples of successful foreign efforts, revealing a belief in the metaphysical affinity that exists between the two ancient civilizations:

“Although I did not understand what they were saying, I felt all the emotion. I do not know what is this with the Japanese; is it a matter of movement, of expression, of the image?” (Niövi)

“Yes, I really liked the performance of ‘Medea’ by the Japanese group, it was a sensational performance. But what did the director do? He had been watching for years the performances of our National Theatre and married that with their own elements. They are very interesting too... I do not believe that it is accidental. Among the foreign performances we see that some people, like the Japanese, are closer to the ritual aspects of the ancient drama, and they approach it in a more suitable way” (Director of Orestis)

It could be argued that, the antiquity of both civilizations as well as the fact that both theatrical traditions contain the element of ritual, made my informants respond favourably to the Japanese efforts. In contradiction to the Europeans, who claim to have appropriated ancient Greek culture as its heir, the Japanese are a distinct group that constitutes no threat for the distinctiveness of the Greek ethnic identity.

5.3.f. Ancient Drama and Foreign Directors

Comments and critiques on ancient drama performances created by foreign Directors, very often include some direct or indirect references to the ethnicity of their creators. It is not uncommon for performances to be judged not as bad or as artistic failures, but as ethnic insults by some foreigners, who come to our country to show us how ancient drama is supposed to be staged: “...T. Suzuki, with whom we are familiar, made the Thivians (the inhabitants of Thiva) to do hara kiri; will he now transform Elektra? ... Why don’t all these people write something of their own with their own money, to see if

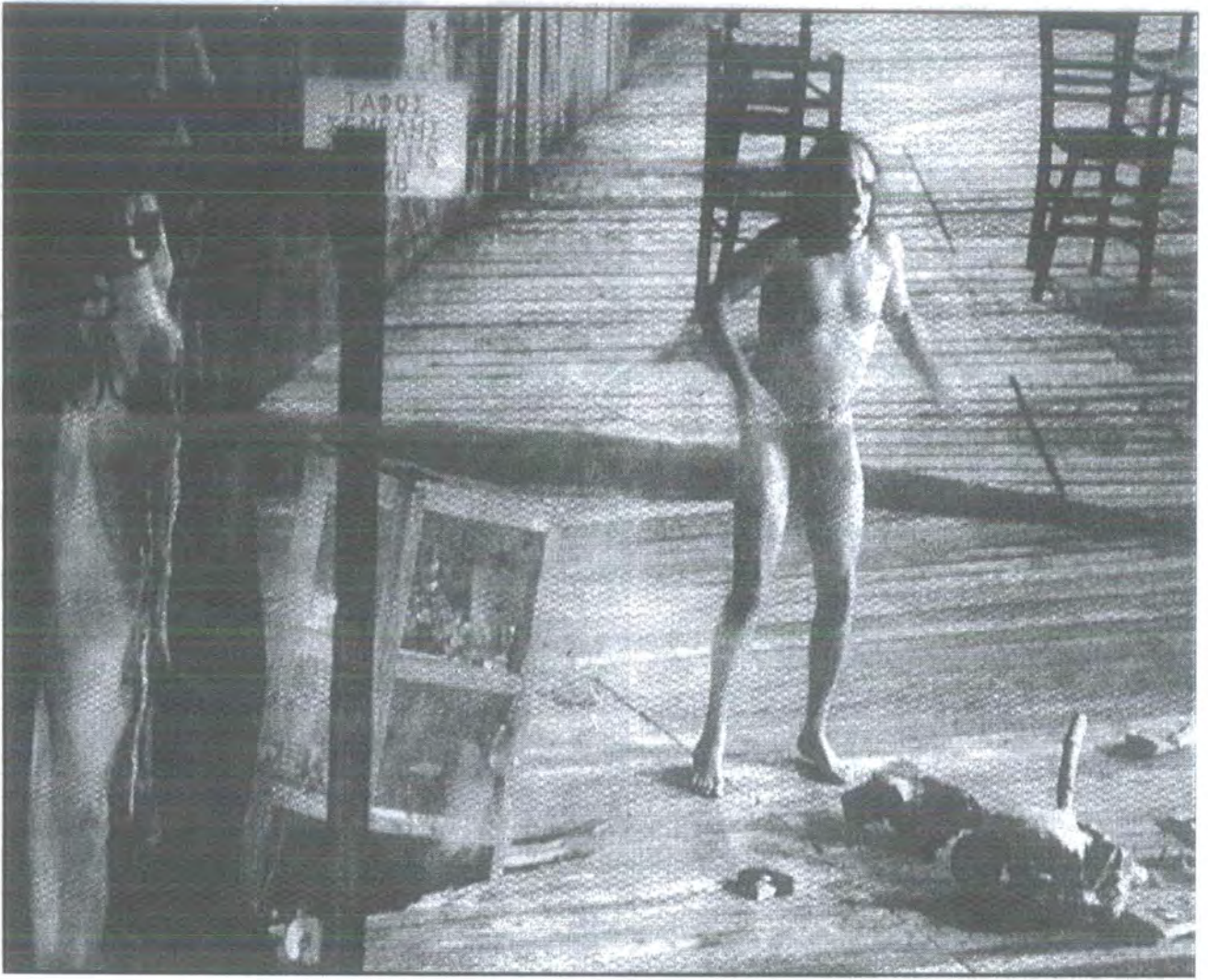
we will invite them to present them in Delphi (the international conference on ancient drama that takes place every summer in Delphi)” (A. Synodinou, elder actress, Interview in the journal *Politika Themata*, 7/7/1995).

“I think that what caused the trouble was the means that were used, and by extension, they (the Greek audience) tried to react to their descent and their arrogance. What was mostly annoying was the provocative and the arrogant behaviour of the director, because he was the one who began, with his statements before the performance, to disparage the Greek audience. He was the one who adopted a nationalistic attitude”. (Director of *Orestis* about Matthias Langhoff, see below).

As an indicative incident of such a stance against foreign ‘bad’ performances I may refer to the scandal that broke out about the tragedy of Evripidis ‘*Vakhes*’, of the State Theatre of Northern Greece on 1997, which was directed by the Swiss Matthias Langhoff. In the premiere of the play in Thessaloniki as well as in the festival of *Epidavros*, where the play was also presented later, the audiences reacted with unprecedented protests and derision while various elements of the performance (naked actors, pieces of meat hanging like in a butcher shop, urinating on stage, etc.) (Picture 22) were perceived to be an “intentional insult to the customs, the traditions, the relations, and the ideas that survive until today in Greece, and constitute part of its history and its civilization” (D. Salpistis, Vice President of the Cultural Capital of Europe [Thessaloniki], *Eleftherotypia*, 21 August 1997).

Not many people in Greece accept that foreigners have the right to put up bad ancient drama performances. In the case of Matthias Langhoff, almost everyone focused on the behavior of the Director, who had been provocative with statements he made before the performance, saying that “the only thing he likes in Greece are the butchers’ shops in *Thiva*” (a town near Athens known for its good quality meat) (sic). And as a consequence, they became very critical and harsh on their judgements that concerned his performance:

“And the performance itself was provocative, since he hanged slaughtered lambs as part of the scenery... These things are not proper...”. (Alexandros)



Picture 22 Vakhes by Matthias Langhoff (source: *Eleftherotypia*, 21st August, 1997)

This performance was considered to be an insult, an offence against common decency. Emphasis was mainly made on the violation of the places themselves, the ancient theatres, where the performance was staged, because they are supposed to have been made:

“ ...in order to shelter the plays of these specific poets, and where the religious sentiments were entangled with the everyday problems of those people. Not everyone could stage a performance there. There was a devotion like today when we go to the church. I felt like they committed a sacrilege, because some things are not allowed to penetrate into these places; inside these theatres we must preserve the balance, the aesthetic, and some control over our ambitions.

You cannot allow people to urinate inside Epidavros. It is not a matter of conservatism, it is just ugly. We must safeguard this aesthetic. We cannot shit anywhere, there are some laws that we must have inside us”. (Director of Orestis)

It is very rarely argued that artists should not be free to express themselves but, nevertheless, they should show respect to the restrictions that are imposed not by us but by the places themselves:

“it is not appropriate inside these places; none can forgive it easily... If such a performance were to be staged in a garage it would not be such a blasphemy. Of course, it would offend the text but in combination with the place, the blasphemy is enlarged”
(Niovi)

Those who were responsible for the organization of the festival and who actually invited Matthias Langhoff to direct the performance were more conciliatory, for obvious reasons, although they did not hide their special feelings for the ancient space:

“I would be very annoyed if someone had tried to prevent me from seeing it. Some people tried not to allow it to be performed in Epidavros after the riots in Thessaloniki. There were ten, twenty people who started to swear and all the rest felt constrained to applaud as a reaction to them, although in another case they would not. They tried to show that the audience has the right to see and judge a performance without the intervention of people who tell them what to like and what not, what is allowed to be staged and what not. Of course here there are some limits”.
(Manager of the ‘Festival of Athens’, Hellenic Organization of Tourism).

Apart from a few young actors who believe that everyone is free to do whatever he wants, that everyone has the right to deal with the ancient drama inside ancient theatres as in any other place, the widely accepted view, and the one that appeared more in the media is the one described above. Whether or not an effort will be approved by the audience or not, it is a different matter. But the general impression that arose from my research seems to confirm that "Greeks are deeper and more severely disturbed by a bad performance, in comparison to French in front of a foreign performance of Racine, to Germans when they see a performance of Schiller or Goethe by a foreign group, or to Russians of Chekhov. It is as if we have to deal with a demonstration of a wounded ethnic consciousness that sometimes gets to the point of a peculiar cultural nationalism" (Varopoulou, E., *To Minima*, May 1999).

It is a deep wish that Greeks should prove in deed that they understand better, and, thus, by right, they consider ancient drama to be their ethnic affair, since they are capable and destined to perform in the authentic way:

"We must be more careful, our performances must show that we deserve to be the unique heirs of ancient drama" (Niovi)

Ancient Greek drama could, thus, be seen as a cultural resource, which modern Greeks strive to maintain as a verifiable product within the modern European context. The 'fear' of being appropriated by another group lead modern Greeks to believe that ancient Greek drama needs 'authentification', while efforts should be made to keep it 'at home' (Herzfeld 1982; Just 1995).

5.3.g. *Ancient Drama and Foreign Audiences*

By contrast, all Greek performances that have been staged abroad (without distinguishing among different peoples) "have been received with enthusiasm and their magnificence has been appreciated by foreign audiences". These kinds of statements are very frequent and reveal a contradiction, which could be very indicative: although foreigners are able to enjoy and appreciate ancient drama performances, which are presented by Greeks, they lack even the ability to produce good performances themselves, as if these two are not related:

"I have never felt so nice; it was a silence like they were swallowing it, ... I do not think it is contradictory: to conceive something is one thing and to create it is another". (Thomas)

Not even the foreign language seems to constitute a problem, since all of the actors who have a long experience in performing abroad, declare that the language has never really prevented foreign audiences from enjoying the performances. On the contrary, it greatly contributed to it. What is conceived to be more important is the awe and the respect that ancient drama inspires to foreign audiences, eliminating thus, any other communication problems:

"The audience was pure, receptive, and positive. The language was not a problem at all". (Kostas)

"...and although they had a translation they preferred to hear the performance in Greek". (Niovi)

"I have acted in many places in the world. When we were in Japan with Oedipus, they built a new theatre for this performance. And when the performance finished, they (the audience) stood voiceless, and then they started to applaud for a quarter of hour with respect; although they did not understand the language". (Giorgos)

The reason for this is again the universality and the diachronicity of Greek civilization that has 'educated' all foreign peoples, and has rendered them familiar with it:

"Yes, foreigners have been educated by the ancient Greek civilization. When I was in Poland with an amateur group ... the performance was warmly received". (Kostas)

Among all the informants one person only related the two things together and argued that perception and creation of one thing constitute aspects of the same process, on a potential level at least:

"No, a foreign audience cannot enjoy a Greek performance: the Italians say 'traduttore traditore'. The intervention of the language has already removed the soul of the thing. Every linguistic hybrid is charged with such elements that it is impossible for a foreigner, no matter how well he knows the language or the grammar, to come to a close contact with the Word, first of all. With the Word in its Aristotelian sense, and thus, with the intellect and the ethos. I believe that they pretend that they like it although they do not. They cannot deeply understand it because it is a problem of mentality that we would also have if we were watching a Lapp performance"... (Lykourgos)

A very significant aspect of the matter, however, has been the contradictory stance of theatre people against Europe and their western colleagues. From the above, what can be deduced is that it is widely accepted and clearly confessed that foreigners and especially western Europeans are incapable of performing ancient drama as well as Greeks can. At the same time many of the informants praise the depth of the European knowledge on the subject, denoting at the same time the level of the contemporary Greeks. This leads, inevitably, to the fortification of ancient Greek drama through the European appreciation of it:

"Technically they might be perfect, even better than us. But they will not have the Greek element". (Melina)

"Although they do not understand the language, I have the impression that they understand it more than us. They have read, they know the plot, they know. Most people know. And the foreigners who come to Epidavros know the play and they understand. Many Greeks, however, do not really understand". (Kostas)

"Many times they give the impression that they know more than us, more than our audiences. What is certain is that they were coming to our performances, they applauded and you could trace, I say this in the nationalist sense, a jealousy. You could see jealousy in their eyes: (as if they were wondering) how is it possible for such a small country, with a destroyed economy, to have such a good theatre, to have such a tradition. I believe that we have the best theatres in the world, and some of the best actors in the world". (Giorgos)

"I am not talking about knowledge, because they (foreigners) might have a better knowledge. Germans, at least, who have studied ancient theatre systematically, have the knowledge but they cannot 'act it' ". (Thomas)

"It is very common for Greeks to honor a foreign famous Director just because he is English, instead of a Greek one. If, for example, a Greek Director had created a performance equivalent to 'Oedipus' of Peter Hall, none would have paid any attention, or they would have 'buried' it". (Natassa)

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I completed the presentation of the ethnographic material, which was collected during my fieldwork, concerning the ways theatre people in Greece experience and express their sense(s) of continuity from classic antiquity until today.

The rhetoric of Space and Time that has been developed amongst members of the theatrical world was investigated in relation to perceptions of the Greek natural environment and of the biological continuity of modern Greeks from their ancestors that are considered to be prevalent within Greek society. From these, a sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness of a Greek ethnic identity can be deduced. The uniqueness of this identity is most eloquently reflected in the belief that only 'we', in relation to the 'others', the foreigners, hold the ancient tradition and we are able to stage good (in the sense of 'authentic') ancient drama performances today.

In the next chapter I will put the ethnographic material presented in chapters 4 and 5 within a theoretical framework. Using the notion of collective memory as a means for analysis I will show how perceptions of an ethnic past and ethnic identity construction processes are correlated and interdependent in this case study.

ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA: SOCIAL MEMORY AND MODERN ETHNIC IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I analyze and place the ethnographic material described in the two previous chapters within a theoretical framework. As an analytical tool I will use the notion of 'collective memory' as was introduced by M. Halbwachs and was further developed, through enrichments, and contradictions by more recent anthropologists. First I investigate the relation between social memory and history as is revealed by my informants through practices (the form of the performances of *Orestis* and *Lyssistrati*), perceptions, and rhetoric of time (history) and space (natural and built environment). In addition, the language and the utilization of a common vocabulary by all informants, will show that ancient drama constitutes a field for expressing individual and collective experiences and representing reality through the mediation of an 'institutionalized' discourse in ethnic terms. I then examine the relation between 'Us' and the 'Others' as is perceived and interpreted by my informants. Ancient texts and spaces in relation to a unique natural environment are perceived to constitute solid proofs of the stability and continuity of the Greek ethnic group from classical antiquity until today. In conceptions of this distinctive ethnic group all 'others', all *foreigners* are excluded since they are not capable of staging ancient drama as well as 'We' do. Finally, I examine the interrelation of perceptions of ethnic identity(ies) and wider social and political differentiations. From the data collected (concerning theatre people and not audiences) I deduce that attachment of national feelings to what people call their heritage is so intense that there is not much room left for individual, local, regional, or other fundamental variations.

6. 1. GENERAL REMARKS ON THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF MEMORY

“From the moment I entered this area (the ancient theatre), I found no difficulty in feeling it... It was inside me. It was inside me. It just had to come out from somewhere. We do not feel that gap in our tradition... because continuity exists in memory, in music, in the atmosphere ”.

(Niki, describing how she knew the ‘proper’ way to perform ancient drama)

It is widely known that memory is a function of decisive significance for the health, development, and effectiveness of an individual in his/her everyday life. According to the dictionary definition (Babinotis, 1998) the word *memory* is used in Greece in order to state the “ability of the mind to retain facts, images, past experiences etc., and recall them when the appropriate stimulus appears” (ibid.:1117). It is also the ability of someone to remember, as this is reflected in his/her actions and decisions, and consequently, the total of the images and the experiences of the past, as well as the action of recall itself, the recollection.

Memory has occupied scientists of various disciplines and its ‘mysteries’ have also inspired artists. Psychoanalysis and Experimental Psychology have been occupied with the individual and personal aspects of memory. Biological sciences have focused on the analysis of the brain construction. They treat memory as the result of the suppleness of the nervous system (Kouvelas, 1999). Contrary to the dictionary, the prevalent view among scientists today is that remembering does not imply the reproduction of something already existent and fixed inside the brain or the sensory apparatus, but rather a mechanism capable of storing, selecting, organizing, and recovering information.

Either in the scientific field or in ‘everyday life’, memory, as a means for understanding and handling time, is critical. People think about the past (the recent or the remote, the personal or the collective) because it affects their present, which is mainly what matters to them. But thinking about the past is a process that is not always and everywhere the same, although it always and everywhere affects peoples’ present. It constitutes a cultural activity effected by time and place and is always present in taking decisions (Davies,1998).

Memory, thus, is not only an individual characteristic. Being members of wider social frameworks, people influence and are influenced by collective processes. During the 1920's Maurice Halbwachs explored what he called the social frameworks of memory (1992) and posed the basic guidelines in the investigation and analysis of memory in the social sciences, introducing the principles of "collective memory". His description and analysis of the social aspects of memory has continued to influence recent questions and research on the issue of memory.

In this chapter I examine the ways in which social memory is conveyed and sustained through the practice and the rhetoric on ancient Greek drama performances in modern Greece. I analyze how current experiences of ancient drama performances are interpreted in a cultural language that people, as members of specific cultural group, have learned in encoding such a remembered reality. At the heart of such an approach to an ethnography of ancient drama performances in Greece today lies the notion of 'collective memory' as was introduced by Maurice Halbwachs. Although this idea is not new, it still provides a useful tool for the analysis of the relationship of social groups with their pasts and their role in the formation of ethnic and national identities. In Sociology as well as in Social Anthropology 'collective memory' has been very often used to show that the ways we remember are determined by the world in which we live and "even gives us the categories in which we think about them (our memories)" (Teski and Climo, 1995: 24).

My topic will be examined through the main principles of the "social framework of memory" (Halbwachs, 1992) and their further developments, enrichments and contradictions posed by more recent anthropologists (Teski and Climo 1995; Coser 1992; Wachtel 1986; Connerton 1989; Samuel 1994; Gillis 1994; Zerubavel 1995; Friedman 1992; Nora 1989; Bloch 1977, 1991, 1998b) concerned with issues of political power, history, cognition, narrative, time, and space, and the ways these are related with ethnic group memories, to the "construction of the past", the "invention of tradition", and the formation of ethnic identities.

It is actually very difficult to draw a line between what we call personal and wider, social memories since individuals' memories contain both aspects, a personal and a social. Memory is a social fact, but only in part since some of the memories we

recall seem to be more private than others. "Typically, our memories are mixed, possessing both a personal and a social aspect" (Frentress and Wickham, 1992: 7).

Maurice Halbwachs defined the relation between individual memory and its social framework arguing that the individual is capable of remembering only as long as he/she places him/herself within the perspective of a group, but someone could also affirm that the memory of the group is manifested and realized in individual memories. He also argued that the search for the location of individual memory is insignificant since memories "are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them" (1992: 38). Recollection of individual memories that make sense is possible to the degree one places oneself within a social framework and becomes part of the group(s)'s shared memory. Memory implies reasoning, comparing, and feeling in relation and contact with a human society that can guarantee the integrity of individual memory. Membership, thus, in a social group (kin, ethnic, class, religious, etc.) is what renders one able to acquire and recall his/her memories.

As a result, it is not rare that the memories that members of the same group recall at specific occasions are similar. The similarity of memories recollected by members of the same group in a specific time is due to the fact that the group focuses on them for purpose of creating a specific image of the past, which must be in agreement with the thoughts that are considered as predominant, in this time. Remembering events of one's past means to discourse upon them, which means "to connect within a single system of ideas [one's] opinions as well as those of [his/her] circle" (Halbwachs, 1992: 53).

Collective memory expands beyond the limits of autobiographical memory since it is transmitted from one generation to the other through individuals although it refers to communities. For Halbwachs, however, collective memory is distinct from both the historical and autobiographical memory since he considers them to be two polar representations of the past. Collective memory is presentist, it reflects new readings of the past in terms of the present needs. There is rather, a dialectic relationship between past and present, which is best expressed in the content and the quality we attribute to memory. Our recollections of the past are built on ideas, thoughts, and practices of our present. We "experience our present differently in accordance with

the different pasts to which we are able to connect that present; ... it is difficult to extract our past from our present because present factors tend to influence – distort – our recollections of the past, but also because past factors tend to influence – distort – our experience of the present” (Connerton, 1989: 2).

The turn to ‘historical’ data in order to support current views of the past is a familiar practice reflecting the discursive aspect of social memory that expresses both: the present aspects of social life and relations, and the ways in which members of a group actually experience ‘history’ (Halbwachs 1992; Friedman 1992; Collard 1993). Being a type of discourse on both past and present, social memory reveals the meaning people give to the conditions of their lives and their social relations, reflecting the ways in which these are actually lived by the community with its norms, expectations, and the ‘popular mentalities’.

Social memory and the construction of the past are directly related to issues that concern identity, with all the problems this construct may raise (Gillis 1994; Handler, 1994). In anthropology, analyses of the formation of ethnic identities were influenced by a static conception of the past that was supposed to leave its invariant traces in the present. Identity was perceived to be something rigid, and immune against human activity and related to references concerning the ‘cyclical’ notions of time (Sahlins, 1981). Recently these ideas were replaced by arguments about the existence of mythological elements in all ‘histories’ (Rappaport 1990; Samuel and Thompson 1990), while the view of traditions as something invented or constructed by active subjects that may lead to preservation or change became very popular amongst historians and anthropologists (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Cohen 1985) dealing with issues related to tradition, collective memory, and ethnic identity.

Nowadays, however, there is a strong view - theoretically opposed to the notion of ‘invention’ - that treats with scepticism the disauthenticification of culture and the demystification of cultural-historical constructs (Friedman 1992; Zerubavel 1995; Briggs 1996; Abercombie 1998). Identity is not considered as something rigid, clearly defined, perceived, accepted or denied by its agents. People engage in constructing and reconstructing themselves without any wish to be liberated from their pasts. And, in one sense, the endeavor of the anthropologist is to demonstrate that the “categories that inform their ethnographies are not based on empirical data

but are imposed by (their) ideology's classification of the larger world" (Friedman, 1992: 851).

Before starting the analysis of our case study I refer here to an element that is considered by my informants to be peculiar to the Greek case; this is the fact that the same ancient heritage is available to everyone independently of their place in the social structure. The striking homogeneity that characterizes the words and attitudes of the majority of my informants reflects the deeply ideological view that all contemporary Greeks share the same blood ties with their ancient ancestors, transcending the divisions between rich and poor, powerful and weak. Although this is an area of great interest, there is a gap in the anthropological literature about Greece concerning the relation of contemporary views and perceptions of Greekness with the specific socio-economic formations of the country and the wider political arena. The group with which I worked in the field, was a rather homogenous group, as far as its place in the wider social construction of the country is concerned, and as a consequence I could not correlate their perceptions and general attitudes to specific political contests. The general remarks that I could make, are:

- The majority of my informants give similar answers to the same questions, usually using the same expressions when referring to issues of descent and continuity, of the relation between 'us' (Greeks) and 'them' (foreigners), about time and space and perceptions concerning Greek ethnic identity in general.
- The main differentiation (although negligible in proportion and essential content) in the views of my informants is between younger and older actors.
- Theatre people mainly belong to the middle and upper strata of the social structure, where very often their higher education levels are combined with a comfortable economic base. In addition, professions related to theatre are considered to be of high social prestige within Greek society.
- None (except few individual cases) of my informants correlated his/her views on ancient theatre to a wider political or ideological set of principles.

6.2. TIME AND SPACE IN ETHNIC IDENTITY MEMORIES

At this point I will examine the relationship between social memory and ethnic identity, a relationship that is a crucial one since it conveys images and

representations that are considered to be of great significance by the members of the 'community' I have worked with. Memory is a major component of Greek ethnic identity, as was formulated by my informants, and what I will investigate now is the ways in which they perceive and express the contribution of memory in the process of ethnic identity construction. The staging of ancient drama performances is perceived to be 'compressed' memory, which preserves and reproduces elements of a more or less consistent ethnic identity from classical antiquity until the present. Memory is rather organized as knowledge, and justified as part of ethnic culture since it is attributed with particular qualities. Conversely, each different memory is organized and justified as part of an ethnic identity, while ancient drama itself has been accepted as an ethnic characteristic.

Ethnic identity is widely accepted to be a natural component of self and group definitions, which is somehow genetically transferred from one generation to the next (Handler 1984; Spiering 1996; Lekkas 1996). During this process of self definition members of ethnic groups select elements of their past that are appropriate and ignore others ('social amnesia') according to the conditions and the needs of their present. In this way the past functions as a means for authentication of a current culture, which is perceived to be the survival of an ancient, significant one, that has remained stable and unchanged through centuries. Perceptions of the community, thus, related to time and space are considered to be of great importance for the development of the notion of continuity, which is so central in the process of formation of an ethnic identity within the framework of the organization of nations/states.

6.2.a. *Social Memory and History*

History, as a way of elaborating and perceiving time, both in the 'objective', scientific sense of the term and at the level of the everyday social life, is closely related to collective memory since it is 'elevated' to the realm of knowledge that legitimizes action and binds group cohesion. Through 'actual history' an unbroken biological-genetic generational continuity is verified and a present social belonging is justified.

"We, as Greeks have a special, strong bond with our past. We feel that staging ancient tragedy is an easy thing because we rely on our history, on our tradition, on our gene [“to elliniko kyttaro”].

We take many things for granted, however, and we make many mistakes. Foreigners, on the other hand, keep a distance, and because these things are not theirs, they are more careful”
(Margarita)

“Ancient Greek history is the Greek history. We are the Greeks. It does not belong to the Indians nor to the Chinese... Of course we do not have the same way of life today... but this history has entered our genes” (Director of *Orestis*)

There is, consequently, an interdependence between the way(s) people confirm and handle their own identity and the way(s) they view and deal with other peoples' identities. The construction, preservation, and change of various 'boundaries' among human groups could, thus, help our investigation for revealing as many aspects of the ethnic identity construction process as possible.

Within recent literature that explores the contribution of social memory to the process of ethnic identities' formation, there is a growing interest in history on the level of everyday discourse, as a means for groups to handle time. Questions about the past in general, and history in particular, take place because people perceive time to be an element of crucial significance for all aspects of social life, and especially for the process of ethnic identity formation, since “social life actually takes place through time” (Layton, 1994: 70). The notion of historical continuity appeals to ethnic groups, in general, and to nations in particular, since historical emptiness might negate their 'natural' existence, and hence “a connection with the past appears extremely desirable” (Llobera, 1996: 9).

During the era of nation-states the building of perceptions of history and memory were radically transformed. History “from the tradition of memory had become the self-knowledge of the society” and the nation, instead of a cause became a given. For Nora the relation of nation to its memory was “the last incarnation of the unification of memory and history” (1989: 11). From then on history is clearly a social science, while memory a purely private phenomenon. Nevertheless, the interconnection of history and social memory is not a simple one, since it acquires a different content and meaning in various historical periods and for different groups. Aspects of this interrelation are traced in the ethnographic material on ancient drama performances collected in Athens, which are presented next.

If we take a look at the performance of *Lysistrati* we see that the Director selected a specific period of Greek history to locate the action of the play. This is the 1950's, a particularly difficult time for Greece, when a world war that was followed by a civil war deeply affected and still influences the political life of the country. The costumes, the music and the choreography supported this temporal framework of the 1950's. Other elements derive from other historical periods. The figure of *Karagiozis*, for example, refers to the long period of the Ottoman Occupation and so are the kilt and the tunics. The phalluses refer to the classic antiquity; the long brightly-coloured dresses, the underwear, and the military uniforms to our times. The folk songs and costumes are diachronic. The map of the Balkans on the floor of the stage refers to the contemporary war in the former Yugoslavia and its socio-political consequences for the whole area.

In *Orestis*, however, time is not clearly manifested: it has only slight reference to any specific historical moment. The impression that prevails is that the action of the play could be taking place in the present, the past, or the future. There are references to ancient Greece (the helmet of Menelaos), to the contemporary world (military greatcoat and army boots), combined with rags (*Orestis*), and a palace that looks like a scaffold in a skeleton building that could be seen in futuristic films.

To summarize:

	<i>LYSISTRATI</i>	<i>ORESTIS</i>
GENERAL TEMPORAL FRAMEWORK	Decade of 1950s	Not specific
VARIOUS HISTORICAL REFERENCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ottoman Occupation - Classic antiquity - Modern times - Diachronic Greek folk culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classic antiquity - Modern times - Future

The questions that could be posed now are:

- Why is *Lysistrati* filled with historical references, while *Orestis* has only slight, if at all to any specific historical period?
- Why are certain historical references selected and not others?

I believe that both performances are the two sides of the same coin. The underlying logic that is common in these two cases is that their creators wanted to promote the diachronic (which could also be described as a-chronic) value and the timelessness of ancient Greek drama:

“...these plays are classical, they are diachronic; they have been and they will be played as long as people exist, because they managed to break the barrier of time, because they touch the truth” (Niovi)

Selecting specific periods of the Greek history, as well as ignoring others (e.g. the Byzantine Era), is not without an inner logic. If we look closely we will see that the references are made to the most ‘heroic’ moments of the Greek ethnos: classical antiquity which has had universal acknowledgement, the victory over the Germans in the World War II, the throwing off of the Turkish yoke, the celebration of the pure Greek folk. “There is a constant interplay between remembrance and forgetfulness that takes place in all commemorative narratives. This interplay and constant tension between these two forces contribute to the dynamic character and explain why memory has not vanished in the modern era in spite of the rise of history. They also account for the emergence of multiple representations of the past over time by different groups” (Zerubavel, 1995: 214). The fact that although there are texts from other periods of antiquity that are never or very rarely staged (e.g. the comedies of Menandros, and the Roman comedy) might show a particular adherence to a specific period of Greek history.

“Ancient drama performances have rather become a kind of museum re-enactment of a piece of the ancient Greek civilization, thus destroying the conception of their continuity and liveliness that reaches into our days”. (Giorgos)

The selection of these specific periods of Greek history was justified by the Director and the other members of the group on the basis of the analogies that exist between the historic circumstances of these periods and the contemporary ones:

“You can see that history is being repeated and the story of Orestis and Helektra could have had happened today. It is not a story that happened and has finished. It is this fight with the Erinies that takes place inside all of us. We all fight with our personal ghost, our guilts”. (Theano)

"A ten year war, Occupation and a civil war with poverty, starvation and thousands of people killed and wounded. The decade of 1950 is very crucial for Greek history because it was a period of great despair, as was the Peloponnesian War, when women were also desperate and had to do anything to stop the war". (Director)

From the above we can detect the sense of tension between the linear and cyclical perceptions of history that often underlies the construction of collective memory. A unique character is attributed to the events (a unique and exclusively Greek history), so that the narrative indicates the recurrence of historical patterns:

"Contemporary Germany, for example, Europeans in general, have no relationship with the ancients, they do not look like them...It is our history of 2000 years, it is the light that can touch only us". (Klio)

Within the framework of current developments, it seems that the traditional view of history as a chronological sequence of events that are causally related and unfold a specific story that takes place through linear time do not justify the determining role of the past for a community (Anderson 1983; Connerton 1989; Papataxiarhis 1993; Llobera 1996; Le Goff 1998; Benveniste 1999). The so called *New History* renounced the linear temporality and highlighted the multiple experienced times of people on the social and collective levels. Positivist views gave their place to a history that is not interested only in the reconstruction of the past but in the methods and the processes through which this takes place. The shift of interest in the ways people remember and understand their world as members of groups has led modern literature on the topic to emphasize the invented, the fabricated character of both, history and memory. In addition, collective memory is no longer searched out within the framework of great historical events and texts. Its preservation and resurrection take place through speech, gestures, images, celebrations, and rituals. The power of the body and the senses to convey and transmit social memory (an aspect that will be further explored in the next chapter) attracts increasingly more attention from anthropologists who seek to overcome the traditional western dichotomies between mind and body, nature and culture, biological data and social constructions.

On the level of every-day life, however, the way(s) in which individuals perceive history and shape their consciousness of time is largely affected by the awareness of the society's continuity, or more exactly of the image of that continuity which the specific society creates. In our subject under study this becomes obvious by the fact

that although it is widely known that ancient drama was rediscovered in Greece within the first decades of the 20th century, people consider this to be irrelevant to how they feel and what they believe about it. Very few mentioned the fact that ancient drama had stopped being performed for almost 2000 years and even those that did not mention it consider this to be a significant fact. On the contrary, almost everyone behaves and constructs his/her building of arguments based on the belief that there is an uninterrupted continuity in the tradition of ancient drama performances, which comes directly from the classic antiquity to our days:

"...we [modern Greeks] know how to perform because ancient drama runs into our blood...it exists in our senses... these senses and instincts are our history that has been transmitted from one generation to the next..." (Fotis)

This attitude could be paralleled to the case of the Zionist memory, for example, where, although Exile is acknowledged as a very long period "(often marked by the formulaic reference to 'two thousand years'), it defines it by its lack, as if it were 'empty' in substance. As a result Hebrew education expanded greatly on Antiquity, with a special emphasis on the two centuries of national revolts... and denoted relatively little time to the history of Exile" (Zerubavel, 1995: 33).

History is very often identified with memory, while communities authorize historians to reconstruct history for them as a guarantee of their memory. However, this reconstruction has many social and ideological implications since historical memory in this way looks as if it is univocal, unitary, and unifying; it invites all members of the society, however diverse their situations and respective points of view, to be united in a collective past identifying thus history with national memory:

"We Greeks are in the position to comprehend these things [ancient drama] more than anyone else... it [ancient drama] was created by people who were our ancestors... you feel that you become one with your past..." (Pavlos)

Greek culture becomes thus a singular entity and a common possession and the history of the Greek ethnos is conceived as a line of continuity from Homeric Greece to the present, so that folk traditions from various parts of the country seem to be reiterating the same movements, style, "or at the very least fundamental 'spirit' that influenced the choruses of the classical tragedians" (Just, 1995: 293). Characteristic are the words of G. Makridis (composer of the music of the performance *Eklisiazouses* staged by the National theatre in 1997): "Our folk songs are written in the language of our people and remind us of the spirit and the

expressive ways of ancient poetry. The similarities are so obvious that we may argue that they [folk songs] continue the line of the Greek poetic creation” (program of the performance).

The obvious homogeneity of the words and expressions employed by my informants to describe the uniqueness of the Greek performances of ancient drama seems to refute any possibility of a variance in perspectives. For example, the words used by the Director of *Orestis* in order to describe this uniqueness are characteristic:

“the words we use today are not used by Germans nor by French. Their behaviour is different, they have a different ‘spirit’, a different way to respond to various phenomena”.

The almost reflective and identical responses and descriptions reveal how deeply ethnic group sentiments are prescribed to people, almost irrespective of their age, sex, or educational and socioeconomic status. As we will show next in this chapter (6.2.e. *Social Memory, Identity and Power*), however, history and memory are not two completely different processes operating in totally detached, opposite directions. The relationships between them are characterized by conflict as well as by interdependence. Collective memory is a continuous process of negotiations between available historical records and current social and political agendas; even the historians’ “choice of topic is unlikely to be independent of social identity, as historical construction rich in the imaginary, which claims us all” (Tonkin et al, 1989: 73).

Another view on the issue of the relationship between history and memory is the one expressed mainly by Pierre Nora in his book *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire* (1989). For Nora memory and history are two completely different things that in our consciousness exist as rivals since history’s task is perceived to be to suppress and destroy memory. “Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering [...] unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulative appropriation [...]. Memory [...] is the eternal present (Nora, 1989: 8). [...] History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism [...]. History’s procurement, in the last century, of scientific methodology has only intensified the effort to establish critically a ‘true’ memory (Nora, 1989: 9).

This aspect of contradiction between social memory and history as described by Nora (ibid: 9) could be best detected in the refusal of my informants (mainly the actors) to read the texts (the ancient, or translations other than the one made for the performance) of *Lysistrati* and *Orestis*, as well as to study the historic period and the society that produced them. Both groups began their rehearsals without having done any historical or theoretical study of the texts they were going to stage and their authors. When I asked them if they considered this to be a gap that would affect negatively their performance, they replied, almost unanimously, that the few and fragmentary things they learned in their drama schools were enough, and argued that a further theoretical education would not only be useless but even damaging for their spontaneity and the authentic knowledge of what they were supposed to do. The lack of any deep knowledge of the texts and of the history of their performances, however, that characterizes the majority of the audience of ancient drama, supports this view of the opposition between social memory and history:

"I cannot prove it theoretically, but when I see a performance of an ancient tragedy I know that it is mine, I do feel it..." (Margarita)

According to the same writer (Nora) what is called memory today is not memory but already history. When people speak of memory they actually search for their history, and what they call memory is rather "deliberate, experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous; psychological, individual, and subjective; but never social, collective, or all-encompassing" (Nora, 1989: 13). A sense of obligation is present, which in the form of an inner voice, demands from individuals to be agents of a specific memory; "people are persuaded that their salvation ultimately depends on the repayment of an impossible debt" (ibid.: 1989:16):

"If you do not respect your past and your history you will not have any future". (Vassilis)

"I do feel the responsibility... I think it is a crime to let it [ancient drama] disappear...". (Giannis)

"... It is our duty to pass it [ancient drama] to the following generations...". (Kostas)

"Distance memory" (ibid.) also indicates the memory of our origins, which are lost somewhere in the remote, 'mythological' past, an assumption that we know to what we owe our existence":

"[when you are] inside an ancient theatre, it is as if you are watching a documentary film about the life of your grandparents... you as a Greek say: look! They are just like us!" (Hristos)

The study of history and memory should, according to Nora, focus on the *loci* of collective memory (*lieux de memoire*), on places where history and memory interact and where there is a formulated will by people to remember. These sites are material (portable, topographical, monumental), symbolic (commemorative ceremonies, anniversaries), and functional (imposed always from above). Ancient drama performances could be studied as a *locus* of this kind, a place where social memory and history interact deliberately, renouncing the linear temporality "to the advantage of multiple experienced times on the levels where the individual takes root within the social and the collective" (Le Goff, 1998: 140). Within this framework ancient drama performances contain a material aspect (texts, monuments), a symbolic (they could be treated as commemorative ceremonies), and a functional aspect (interest in ancient drama is imposed by established interests based on state authority).

People's need to make sense of their world, to understand, is what could probably link history and memory:

"When I read the ancient texts I have stronger and more vivid feelings ('zontana synesthimata'), than when I read the translations... These words make you more sensitive, suddenly I get a better understanding of the world... So, don't we have the right to be closer to the ancients than the Scandinavians, or the Germans?" (Director of *Orestis*)

The past is not history but the object of history and memory. R. Samuel has suggested that far from being merely passive receptable or storage system, an image bank of the past, [memory] is rather an active, shaping force. "What Aristotle called *anamnesis*, the conscious act of recollection, was an intellectual labor very much akin to that of the historian: a matter of quotation, imitation, borrowing, and assimilation. After its own fashion it was a way of constructing knowledge» (Samuel, 1994: x). Memory in the sense of tradition and habit is also necessary for human societies since the dialogue that is developed between preservation and change is necessary for the survival of the group. In addition, its contribution to the formation of individual and collective identities, an essential process for individuals and social groups is decisive.

6.2.b. *Social Memory and Images of Space*

Within the discussion on social memory, space, (either in the form of material buildings or the natural environment within which social groups exist) occupies a critical place. The natural environment as an agent of inspiration, preservation, and transmission of characteristics peculiar to a unique, diachronic Greek identity, as well as ancient theatres as material places that contain and convey the whole history of the Greek ethnos, requires further analysis.

Ancient theatres have become symbols of classic antiquity, they are perceived to contain the whole Greek history in a compressed form, and at the same time they are witnesses and records of collective memory: "*It is like old furniture that has the touch of the people who used it*" (Fedra). They have become emblems "that are called to legitimize and sanctify social and historical continuities" (Mavragani, 1999: 181):

"Look, the only place that joins us with antiquity, the only places that make me feel this way, are the ancient theatres. When we are there, we feel closer to our ancestors, because they are the same stones, the same earth, the same sun, the same sunset that existed then.... And you realize that two thousand years ago some ancient was sitting here also" (Director of Orestis)

The revival of the ancient theatres through ancient drama festivals that take place all over the country every year ("this weekend a dead space will live again, and human voice and musical instruments will sound again for the first time after 23 centuries..." *Ta Nea*, 19/7/1995, "their revival will mainly enrich the content of our contemporary life", Minister of Culture, *To Vima*, 23/7/1995) consists of an expression of the need for historic preservation of something considered to be even more important than the continuous presence of great works of art. We can trace here the deeper relationship that exists between history and heritage and how groups handle them both. Heritage and perceptions about it could be viewed as the means for 'consumption' of the historical knowledge. And since this consumption "is realized through the signification of preservation, history and heritage are closely related enabling us to see: history and heritage-as-tradition as joint productions and celebrations of the past" (Sant Cassia, 1999: 260).

Built environments are used in such a way "in order to construct collective memories of neighborhood, voluntary associations, generations, class, gender or

nation [...]. This process consists of discursively using building – pasts to ‘build’ these collective pasts that give continuity, stability, and familiarity to particular social configurations in particular historical contexts” (Koshar, 1994: 216):

“Today, most of these ancient theatres are silent remnants. Yet, they do not cease to ‘speak’ through their stones; they are witnesses of the unique civilization of Greeks”. (Thomas)

Through a specific rhetoric of space, a poetics of space is constructed. This constitutes the prevailing view of social memory within the area of ancient drama. The space of the ancient theatres themselves and the oldness of the texts, validate the current preoccupations. Ancient theatres are thus described by my informants as *magic* places that contain *spirits, ghosts*, and supernatural beings that are responsible for the experience of metaphysical incidents within them. Ancestral spirits and great actors of the past *haunt* these places: *“The belief that there is a past that join us together with the ancients”* in relation with the special *charge* (*‘fortisi’*) these places radiate because of the imprints that all those before us *have left on these stones* make the abolition of the three dimensions of time (past, present, and future) easy and natural since all of them are joined into a unique present. The personification of the ancient theatres that are very often described by my informants as living beings that *demand respect, allow or do not allow experimentations*, threaten to *swallow actors, directors, and performances*, if they are *not up to the standards that the theatre itself poses*, shows, from one point of view, the need of people to confirm the abolition of time:

“I believe that the space of Epidavros does not allow anything to enter it. There are some places that insist on some level of quality” (Vassilis).

Images, however, of the ancient theatres as *holy places* supported by a Christian terminology: *“I feel like entering a church of Virgin Mary”*, express a religious aspect that rationalizes perceptions of the monuments as *places of MAN*. The idea of the Holy, according to Rudolf Otto (1928), is a word with clear references to ethics, since (God’s) holiness is the perfect goodness. But beyond this, holiness contain an element that epitomizes the supernatural divine power that is combined and “made one with the rational elements, assuring us that God is an all-righteous, all-provident, and all-loving Person, with whom a man may enter into the most intimate relationship” (ibid.: xvii). Thus, ancient theatres are perceived to contain an essence that is diachronically, and universally unchangeable, and appeals to everyone. They

are perfect constructions, functionally and aesthetically, and inside them the perfect Word ('*logos*'), and all the big issues that refer to the Human Nature, were heard for the first time and still do. We see here the analogy that exists between the way God is perceived and the human nature of reason and personality. Although informants cannot explain exactly what is this special charge ('*fortisi*') they feel inside ancient theatres, they find it easier to conceptualize and communicate it through a widely accepted notion of God and of the divine. Since God is something that can be grasped, analyzed and defined by thought, *fortisi* may consequently be termed rational. According to the analysis of Charles Stewart (1991), this coexistence of seeming contradictory elements that refer to Orthodoxy and classical antiquity actually reveal a dialectical interaction between them. The homologies and similarities that are revealed assert the existence of both within the Greek society, they are complementary, while this obvious antithesis strengthen them both.

Perceptions concerning the landscape, the natural environment support this poetics of a-chronicity and un-changeability:

"Being Greeks, we have our own way of formulation, which is related to the memories and the traditions of our people, to the landscapes in which we live and are the same with the landscapes of our ancestors ..." (Thomas)

Objects, buildings and landscapes that surround us are agents and carriers of the imprints, of all the people that preceded us. Although the material environment that surrounds us also evolves, it, however, gives the impression that it always remains the same, creating thus a feeling of stability and permanence for the specific group. Space (natural and built) is, thus, reconstructed in a way that, in our case study, conveys a sense of stability and continuity from antiquity until nowadays that history does not support – the natural environment has evolved and the theatres had not been used for two thousand years.

6.2.c. *Language of Social Memory*

What struck me from the first days of my participant observation at the rehearsals, the performances, and the wider interaction I had with the group, was the homogeneity of the words and expressions people used to answer my questions and to describe their experiences with ancient drama performances. This brings to mind

what Halbwachs has said about the development of sets of verbal conventions that “constitute what is at the same time the most elementary and the most stable framework of collective memory” (1992:45). The rhetoric that is used about ancient theatre and drama texts in general by my informants legitimizes them not only as remnants of a glorious past, but also serves as a bridge that unites classical antiquity with modern times overlooking all the intermediate historical phases: “They [ancient drama texts] are bridges that eliminate time and join successive generations with the unique perennial spring [of the ancient Greek culture] (D. Kakogiannis, 1997, Director of the performance Trojans, program of the performance)

This, according to the literature is not some unique phenomenon. In Western societies, at least, there is some vocabulary that is commonly used in order for people to justify the uniqueness of their ethnic identity based on the existence of unique characteristics. Precedence, antiquity, continuity, coherence, heroism, success, stability, progress are words widely used by people in order to refer to aspects of their heritage. Language, thus, becomes a symbol of “both self-ascription and imposed stereotype. Language is a focus of identity just as it is an act of identity” (Peltz, 1995: 42).

People have learned to use specific words and expressions that are considered to be ‘right’ for a particular topic; while memory is mediated by language what is remembered is not events themselves but rather feelings of identity and of closeness to those who use the same word and expressions too. By conforming to a specific vocabulary it is as if people perceive it to be more significant to prove that they remember in the same way like everyone else in the same group. In this way, individuals experience the merging of the moment in the present with the past that is completed by the creation of the identity of the persons in the present.

This verbal framework of the social memory does not necessarily contain all memories but, like all representations, it is selective and is used rather as an emblem. Most of my informants were not in position to place their views within some wider social framework of the modern Greek community, and gave me the impression (with only two or three exceptions) that they had never thought about them, although their answers seemed to come out entirely spontaneously. It was as if they were using a specific vocabulary in order just to identify themselves with the

rest of the members of the same group. In this way, language has become a necessary link, the absence of which would interrupt "at certain number of detailed points" the "contact between their thought and the collective memory" (Peltz, 1995: 46).

The impact and the significance of ancient drama as a symbol of ethnic identity is expressed through narratives inspired by the power of collective memory. "The significance of the effects of this narrative does not lie in its accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance" (Zerubavel, 1995:8). The relation, however, between social memory and knowledge that has long occupied social scientists in general, and anthropologists in particular (Bartlett 1932; Vygotsky 1962; Rumenhart 1975; Bloch 1991, 1998(a); Coleman 1992), has led us to view narration as something that cannot be identified with memory since knowledge is not only verbal and pre-exists its expression. What could be argued that takes place in this case study is rather that informants 'know' and 'remember' not what was really happening in the antiquity, but their last narration about the same subject.

Ancient drama, through the mediation of an 'institutionalized' discourse, constitutes a field for expressing experiences and represents reality in ethnic terms. With the contribution of this discourse, ancient drama becomes part of the historic continuity, "while knowledge of this discourse and memory of experienced facts are identified in the consciousness" of my informants (Exertzoglou, 1999: 111).

6.3. SOCIAL MEMORY AND IDENTITY

6.3.a. *Us and the Others*

Ancient Greek drama (as part of a distinctive and glorious culture) is perceived to be diachronic, that is, it itself justifies its consistent presence in time through its quality characteristics:

"They are [ancient drama texts] the footprint of a whole culture, of a whole way of thinking for the mankind, not only for Greece"
(Niovi)

And it is our duty (as modern Greeks) to transmit it to the following generations as we inherited it from our parents: «*this is what our grandparents [the ancient ancestors] left us, and we cannot let it perish*» (Alexandros). The space (landscape and monuments), which inspired and into which this culture flourished is also perceived as something stable and unchangeable through time:

"It is the place [the ancient theatre] where I have the feeling that all the energy of all these centuries has been encircled and remains there...". (Angeliki)

As Bender (1993) notes, landscape is something people appropriate and contest. "It is part of the way in which identities are created and disputed, whether as individual, group, or nation-state" (ibid: 3). The way in which people engage with their surrounding world is not independent from the specific time and place and historical conditions.

Stability and distinctiveness are two elements necessary for the construction of collective identities. Social memory provides groups with both of them since it [social memory] creates a time-span that is related to a specific space. History and landscape offer the sense of 'us' in relation to the 'other' through a collective memory that is personal and fundamentally different from the memory of another social group. Collective memory creates a sense of otherness, where possession of a past and of history that are not shared with other groups, offer the group its distinctiveness, its identity. And since neither ideas nor artifacts have any territorial bounds, images of group identity and social memory use heritage in order to promote or refute ancestry and continuity that define the group and exclude others.

The majority of my informants argued that only modern Greeks, among all other peoples, know how to stage ancient drama, they hold the *authentic key* to its interpretation and presentation. They were many who argued that foreigners can stage good ancient drama performances but *up to a point*, because they will never reach the sense of its totality, something that only Greeks share, and usually remains unidentified. We should not, however, take this to be an exclusively Greek characteristic. It is rather common for all groups to feel distinctive, to believe that they possess something that they cannot share with anyone else. Being open to others it would lose its value as an emblem of solidarity. This leads to the logical

consequence that people do not know much about other peoples' heritages: *It is like Shakespeare, only English can make good performances.* The phenomenon is not unique; in Germany, for example, there is a controversy over whether this country has a peculiar path through which time diverges in significant ways from Western history. "Such pasts are also by definition inaccessible to the 'other', even though, paradoxically, all individuals and collectivities are said to have pasts" (Koshar, 1994: 215).

In this way the essence of what is left from the ancient to the modern Greeks as their heritage is that which renders their separate identity by definition incomparable to anything else in the world:

"If it is worth becoming an actor, this is only to have the opportunity to participate in, and deal with, ancient drama... Because all the magic of theatre, all the beauty is there. Every actor's dream is to interpret a chorus or a role from a play of Aeschylus...". (Kalliopi)

A point of view like this is based on the (probably unconscious) assumption that memory and tradition give people the means to function in the present and to plan ahead. "For all but amnesiacs, heritage distills the past into icons of identity, bounding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own earlier selves, and with our promised successors" (Lowenthal, 1994: 43).

This view about the exclusive rights to emblems of heritage, like ancient drama has turned to be for Greeks, is closely related to a sense of superiority against the rest of the world:

"It is the bedrock of everything. It has given birth to the best [people] and the best [things]. In my view – and this is certainly something that has been heard many times – they [the ancient Greeks] have said everything. That is, they caught all the aspects, all the sides of life, of ideology, of politics, of society. Everything after that was just a specialization. Ancient drama, for me, is the totality and all the later developments are just its specialization(s)". (Niovi)

"I think it is definitely the best theatre in the world. And Shakespeare comes after, but he knew the ancients very well!". (Giorgos)

We can clearly see here the stereotype of national identity that is reflected through the distinction between 'us', the cultured, and 'them', the barbarians, where what is treasured most is what sets us apart from the rest of the world.

There is a way, however, in which Greeks are supposed to be different, as far as the way they handle their sense of superiority, is concerned. Classical antiquity does not only symbolize a specific culture, and convey a great national significance for modern Greeks. It is also perceived to be the origin of the past of Europe as well. The reconstitution of homogenous identities largely through appeal to an ancient ideal is not a unique phenomenon, but it is only in Greece that the revival [of an ancient ideal] is supported by the agreement of almost the entire world. So ready are others to accept the idea of Greece as ancient that Greeks themselves at times find it difficult to insist on their modernness. But for Greeks "to be modern is to discover tradition, to exoticize it" and Greece as a country in the margins of Europe is characterized by two diverging forces: "the certainties of [its] past (often manufactured by the State and its elites, often in association with the West), and the uncertainties of [its] modern vulnerability" (Sant Cassia, 2000: 298). We could also detect here perceptions of polarization between East and West that are prevalent, and according to which Europe (the West) has the ability to modernize while the rest (the East) can only copy, perpetuating thus the division of the world into modern and traditional, advanced and primitive (Goody, 1996).

The wide appreciation of the Greek heritage is definitely one source from which Greeks' pride springs, but this general acceptance makes them also feel that they should share their heritage with others in a larger degree than other peoples. This could be linked to the issues of the appropriation and return of the Elgin Marbles. One of the strongest arguments of the refusal of the British Museum to return them to Greece is that Elgin Marbles have furnished new standards of art to Western Europe and permanently modified the whole view of ancient art (McLeod 1987; Greenfield 1989). What places Greece in a distinctive place is not only the dispersal of its antiquities but also the diffusion of classical values. As native heirs to, and general custodians of, this legacy, Greece and its people have a "role of great honor fraught with onerous responsibility" (Lowenthal, 1988: 733):

"...of course I feel responsible. We [modern Greeks] must preserve all these things [ancient drama texts]... it is our responsibility towards the rest of the world". (Alexandros)

However although ancient theatre emerged in Greece, its presentation and transmission occurred elsewhere. This creates an ambiguity: "...we owe everything to the famous foreign scholars, because of the known circumstances that estranged our race from its origins [the four centuries of the Ottoman occupation] ..." (K. Georgousopoulos, Theatre Critic, *Ta Nea*, 11 September 1995).

This creates a vocabulary of counter-justification whereby although my informants praised the depth of the knowledge of Europeans on the subject they retained a critical component, probably the most important, for themselves – ‘the feeling for acting’:

"...as far as technique is concerned, foreigners may be even better than us. You know, all European Universities have Departments of Greek studies. But it is this sense, this feeling, this way of acting that cannot be learned... at least not intellectually, mentally ('egefalika')". (Vassiliki)

The West and Europe is however, a potent, even dominating symbol in Greece. In the last century it was used to tie all Greeks to a particular identity and at the same time dominated it to other, more powerful societies. Seen from the point of view of cultural hegemony, Greece is a culturally dominated society (Argyrou, 1996), which treats the countries of Western Europe as “the site of the highest culture [...] and appeals to ‘higher authorities’[...] serve to legitimate (this) legitimation” (ibid: 3). The fact that my informants believe that they lend more prestige to ancient Greek drama referring to the fact that it is taught in European Universities, constitutes a recognition of Western superiority. At the same time this superiority is denied, since there is something, ‘*this way of acting*’ that is kept only for Greeks, verifying, thus, their own superiority or at least ‘specialness’. According to Argyrou, this ambiguity reproduces the conditions of the Greek subjugation to the West. Greeks, on the one hand, promote their ‘authentic’ tradition verifying, thus, their inferior position in the world, and on the other, they reject ‘modern’ performances, abandoning any claims to the advantages they confer.

Social memories, however, are not all equally accepted within a group. As we will see next, multiple memories can highlight social and political divisions, and may coexist, with or without apparent tensions according to the wider circumstances. The issue of who identifies him/herself with a particular past is related to issues of

'owning' this past, and could be incorporated into the wider framework of social and political differentiations within a 'homogenous' ethnic group, on the one hand, and among various groups, on the other.

6.3.b. *Social Memory and the Politics of Identity*

Current anthropological literature on social memory and its relation to history, and processes of identity construction, give much emphasis on peoples' histories about their pasts, and the political aspects of their social memories (Abercombie 1998; Llobera 1996; Samuel 1994; Connerton 1989; Friedman 1992; Teski and Climo 1995; Davies 1992; Wachtel 1986; Koshar 1994; Comaroff 1992). Images of the past that are produced and reproduced through social memory usually legitimate present social order. Until recently archaeology, as a field of study very closely related to debates referring to ethnic memory, was used as a means of legitimizing existing social orders, although issues concerning the preservation of ethnic monuments were thought to be free of political ideology. However, current developments have shown that "questions about what should be protected, and why, are linked with legal, economic, and political problems in a very complex way" (Kristiansen, 1989: 24). Moreover, it is during and within social action that perceptions of descent and ethnic identity arise and are further deployed. Since relations of power are something that people experience and constitute dimension of social life that cannot be neglected, they constitute an important aspect of their accounts. In this sense "ethnographic and historical projects cannot be extricated from power-laden contexts, and projects of colonial, imperial, and national states, nor can ethnographers or historians rise above the fray" (Abercombie, 1998: 20).

Social memory and the processes of construction of the past always take place within pre-existing historical and social frameworks. Events and characteristics are organized in such a way as to create "an appropriate representation of life leading up to the present, that is, a life history fashioned in the act of self-definition. Identity, here, is decisively a question of empowerment" (Friedman, 1992: 837). The dominant place of classic antiquity in the management and promotion of Greek identity could thus be elaborated through the notion of *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1985) or, through a similar concept developed by Giddens (1984) as an "authoritative resource" in modern Greek society. The symbolic capital of classical

antiquity is exchanged for economic capital (although never directly) or for national profit. In our case, the connection of ancient drama festivals that take place in Greece every year, with tourism as one of the main sources of profit for the Greek economy, is indicative: “[about ancient theatres] Their revival will most of all enrich the content of our contemporary life, but at the same time will give a monopolistic character to the Greek tourism, providing its right social dimension. Because especially in Greece, tourism and culture go together [...]. We must, therefore, act having the awareness that the resources of Greek civilization consist of a universal inheritance and that our monuments are diachronic...” (Minister of Culture, *To Vima*, 23/7/1995).

Reactions to the controversial performance *Vakhes*, which was staged by Matthias Langhoff (see chapter 5, pages 162-3), are indicative of the ambiguity that characterizes relations between ‘us’ [Greeks] and ‘them’ [foreigners]. They demonstrate the attribution of such qualities to ancient Greek drama that render it an ethnic symbol of the highest significance. Judging from what was reported in newspapers, the disapproving reactions of the audience were direct (whistles, laughs, insulting comments, etc.). When the performance was repeated in Epidavros a few days later, a larger than normal number of policemen were present in order to discourage possible quarrels amongst the spectators (*Eleftherotypia*, 21/8/1997, 1/9/1997, *To Vima*, 31/8/1997). In the debate that arose some of the comments were: “the State Theatre of Northern Greece is subordinated to Mr. Langhoff, who had anything he might have asked for, even baby-sitters for the children of the members of his team” (*Eleftherotypia*, 21/8/1997). Very few theatre people focused on the content of the performance and refrained from judging it as a sacrilegious act against a holy national heritage. The personification of the theatre of Epidavros was used once again: “Epidavros has been cleansing itself from every dirt, for centuries now, and offers its magic self every year. Yelling cymbals cannot hurt it” (*Eleftherotypia*, 15/9/1997), in order to render their judgments with added authority.

The whole debate actually took the dimensions of an ‘ethnic’ issue since all critics were referring to the nationality of the Director, attacking his Germanness, and not concentrating on the good or bad result of a theatrical performance as such. The image of the bad German who comes here to show Greeks how their theatre is supposed to be staged was expressed very vividly: “...when the bad god [Vakhos]

saw the foolish arrogance of the German, put his evil plans into action, like he did with Pentheas (another character of the ancient play). That is, he let him do all the humiliating stupidities that were passing through his mind, he took judgment and good taste from him, and in the end he killed him" (*Eleftherotypia*, 3/9/1997). What strongly supports this 'nationalistic' view is the fact that even politicians took sides in this 'theatrical debate', commenting upon the programme of the performance that contained quotations from the British scholar E.R. Dodds (*The Ancient Greeks and the Irrational*) that modern Greeks are descendants of the semi-barbarian Macedonians and that the Macedonian King Arhelaos was not Greek. In one particular instance, the politician (S. Papatthemelis, Minister of Public Order) criticised the performance without referring to the artistic aspect of it but giving arguments in support of the Greekness of Macedonia (*Eleftherotypia*, 3/9/1997).

It is worth noting here that Greek audiences are more charitable to non-European ancient drama performances. All of my informants mentioned some Japanese and Chinese ones when asked about some good foreign performance they have seen or heard. T. Suzuki's *Medea* was praised for its success (see analysis in chapter 5, page 161). Taste, what is considered to be a good or a bad performance however, that is also posed here, is not something objective and neutral. It is rather something deeply founded in the social background of individuals and groups. According to Pierre Bourdieu "a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code into which it is encoded"(1999 [1984]): 2).

In their effort to legitimize the formation of a specific political identity people feel the need to use historical information to lend authority to their shared memory. Contemporary views on deeply political issues like justice and human rights are perceived to be found identical in the ancient drama texts:

"these texts are alive, they are deeply political, they contain the issues of justice, of religion, of fate ... that still preoccupy us today". (Niovi)

My informants do not hesitate to use a negative characteristic, and one that is believed to be responsible for the misfortunes of the Greek public life for many decades, a characteristic of modern Greek political identity itself, in order to 'prove' the similarity with the ancients: the lack of meritocracy and the success only of those who have the right social and political interconnections, *ta messa*:

"...All these cliques that exist in politics, «ta messa» we use in order to find a job existed in antiquity too. These are the relations that make us say that we are the descendants of the ancients".
(Dimitris)

This works in two ways. First it denies heirship of ancient Greek culture to the modern non-Greek Europeans who would deny that to the modern Greeks. And it does so by saying to Europeans that it is precisely because they claim to be meritocratic that they are not the heirs to ancient Greek culture that was flawed. Second, it absolves modern Greeks of responsibility for their modern political culture by claiming the antiqueness of that culture. In short it holds up a flawed reflection in the mirror to the rest of the world as an accurate representation of modern Greeks.

The material collected seems to confirm the view that "the attachment of national feelings to what people call their heritage is so intense that there is not much room left for individual, local or regional variations or even fundamental differentiations" (Lowenthal, 1994: 43). There seems to be a specific discourse on social memory and ethnic identity that has been developed and is available to everyone to think and speak in terms of it since it is widely shared within Greek society. According to Frenress and Wickham, this kind of social memory although it seems to be accepted by all social classes and usually with enthusiasm, "is essentially bourgeois [...] in origin, and expressed more emblematically by the various strata of the national bourgeois" (1992:130). "Such images will last only as long as, an in so far as they have or acquire a real and permanent place in popular memory which itself, therefore, has often been carefully manipulated" (ibid.: 132).

Since the establishment of the Greek state all governments have placed emphasis on the uniqueness of Greek antiquities (material monuments, artifacts, and texts) and on the uniqueness and superiority of the Greek ethnos (Herzfeld 1982, 1991). These views were systematized, organized and became widely accepted by the intelligentsia of the first decades of the 20th century and still constitute the prevailing ones within Greek society. The elaboration, formation, and expression of collective national memory belongs to the political elites of the community and are not easily questioned by other social groups. When there is such questioning, it is rarely successful. Ethnic superiority is thus established on supposedly purely aesthetic

criteria, “on an aestheticism which presents the aesthetic disposition as a universally valid principle and takes the bourgeois denial of the social world to its limit” (Bourdieu, 1999 [1984]: 5). The discourse on the past elaborated by these elites is dominant and functions as a legitimizing factor of the existing structures of political and economic dominance, justifying, in turn, their place in the community as elites.

This social memory that is elaborated by the social elites of a community constitutes what Zerubavel calls the *Master Commemorative Narrative*, a general history, “a basic ‘story line’ that is culturally constructed and provides the group members with a general notion of their shared past” (1995:8). But according to the analysis of the same author, apart from this generally accepted view of the social memory of a group, there are also other memories, memories that belong to and express the view of “marginalised individuals or groups within the society and cover political conflict”. These memories are called *countermemories* and are “essentially oppositional and in hostile and subversive relation to collective memory” (Zerubavel, 1995:10-11).

As in the case of Germany, where the larger political goal of building pasts, of creating images of continuity, stability and identity in the built environment, was actually subverted by various micropolitical debates, political contests and asymmetries of power are hidden behind or revealed through various perceptions and practices of ancient drama in Greece. It would be very interesting for further study to focus on the various levels of political interaction in Greece and consider collective memory as a social practice that is “historically conditioned, changing color and shape according to the emergencies of the moments that so far from being handed down in the timeless form of ‘tradition’ it is progressively altered from generation to generation” (Samuel, 1994: x). Shedding light on such aspects of ancient theatre in Greece would fill a huge gap that exists in the study of this field. Ancient theatre performances and the often oppositional interpretations of the past that they reflect, show that memory is a central issue in contemporary Greek culture, where, like in the case of the modern Israelis, Greeks try to negotiate the meaning of the present within the framework of their understanding of the past (Zerubavel, 1995).

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I used the notion of social memory, as this was introduced by M. Halbwachs and was further developed by more recent authors, in order to analyse the ethnographic material. Memory, as a means for understanding and handling time, is not an individual phenomenon only, but contains social aspects too. People remember as members of specific groups, and this explains the similarity of memories recalled in specific occasions by members of the same group. In addition, memory is not the recollection of information stored somewhere inside people. It is rather an active process that contains the construction and reconstruction of the past according to the needs of today. Social memory is thus closely related to issues of group identity since it reflects processes, where people engage in constructing and reconstructing themselves.

The rhetoric of time (history) and space (natural and built environment) in relation to specific practices (the form of the performances of *Orestis* and *Lysistrati*), reveal elements of the role that time and space play in ethnic identity memories in Greece today. The promotion of perceptions such as the diachronicity or timeliness of ancient Greek drama (like all aspects of ancient Greek civilization), of the most glorious moments of the Greek history, and of the parallelisms of the situations described in the ancient texts with today, are enlightened by the analysis of the relationship between history and social memory. As far as space is concerned, the natural environment, on the one hand, is perceived to be an agent of inspiration, preservation, and transmission of characteristics peculiar to a unique, diachronic Greek identity. Ancient theatres, on the other, as material places with special characteristics (they contain *magia*, *fortisi*, *ghosts* and *spirits*, are personified and treated as *holy places*), contain and convey the whole history of the Greek ethnos. Their perceived unchangeability gives a feeling of stability and permanence for the members of the group from antiquity until today.

The utilization, however, by all informants, of a common vocabulary for describing this relationship, demonstrates that ancient drama in Greece today constitutes a field for expressing individual and collective experiences, and representing reality through the mediation of an 'institutionalized' discourse in ethnic terms. Language

becomes a link between thought and collective memory, that could otherwise, be interrupted.

All the above constitute elements of a specific ethnic identity construction process, which becomes explicit in the perceptions of the relationship that exists between 'Us' and 'Others'. Distinctiveness and uniqueness of the group identity is expressed in the belief that all 'others', are excluded, since they are not capable of staging ancient drama as well as 'We' do. As a consequence, perceptions of ethnic heritage emblems, often express a sense of superiority against the rest of the world, although this is not peculiar to the Greek case. The peculiarity of the Greek case rather rests in the fact that only Greek antiquities are perceived to be origins of the past of Europe. This peculiarity, combined with the politics of cultural hegemony of the Western Europe might count for the ambiguity that characterizes the position of Greeks towards the Europeans.

Finally, the interrelationship of social memory with wider social and political distinctions, as far as ethnic identity is concerned, was investigated. From the data collected (concerning theatre people and not audiences) I deduced that attachment of national feelings to what people call their heritage is so intense that there is not much room left for individual, local, regional, or other fundamental variations.

Within this analytical framework, I am going, in the next chapter, to analyze ancient drama performances in Greece today as commemorative ceremonies. Through presentation of the issue of *revival or interpretation* that torments the world of ancient theatre in Greece, I am going show that these performances are more than other theatrical events: they actually constitute (among others) occasions for celebration, construction, reconstruction, and transmission of (ethnic) group identity(ies).

***REVIVAL OR INTERPRETATION?
ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA PERFORMANCES AS
MODERN COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONIES***

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I analyze ancient Greek drama performances in Greece today as theatrical performances that shape and transmit elements of group (ethnic) identity(ies). I begin the theoretical analysis by presenting some general ideas developed by anthropology in the study of performances. The study of theatrical performances constitutes part of a wide field of interdisciplinary studies that is called 'performance studies', where the performance paradigm is used to interpret social behavior in general. As far as theatre is concerned, anthropology has mainly focused on the laws that differentiate the biological and cultural behavior of man in theatrical situations from those of daily life. Current theoretical developments, however, have led from symbolic interactionism and various theories of practice that treated performances as something static and fixed, to a processual view. This view is closely related to the analysis of the social construction of reality, to conceptions of reflexivity, and presentation of the self, individual and collective. What is of special interest in theatrical studies of our days is a special focus on the dialectic that exists between performance and its wider sociocultural and political-economic context. The analysis of our subject proceeds with the presentation of one of the most crucial aspect of the perceptions that concern the staging of ancient drama performances in Greece today. The issue that is raised is whether these performances constitute a revival or an interpretation of the drama performances that were staged in the classical antiquity. Ideas, conceptions and interpretations of this issue led me to approach ancient drama performances in Greece today as being something more than other theatrical activities. I have treated them as commemorative ceremonies, as re-enactments of the past, as acts of memory, but also as attempts to impose interpretation of the past, to shape memory, and thus to construct social identity. Within this framework, the role of the body as a means for perceiving and

expressing the relation of modern Greeks with their ancestors is also taken into account since, according to my informants, it constitutes a crucial aspect of the process of construction and transmission of group (ethnic) identity(ies). The chapter closes with the analysis of the power of theatrical performances to shape and transmit collective identity(ies). Through preservation of known forms and constant innovation, the past shapes the present and vice versa, and historically justified ethnic memories are conveyed and sustained. Although there are multiple and often conflicting identities within any social group, the ceremonial aspect of ancient drama performances create a sense that there is only one single collective identity. Thus, although the 'invention of tradition' is always present, since power relations are always present, a more ethnographic approach should treat identity construction rather as a process, and as something people make for themselves, instead of something fixed and final.

7.1. GENERAL REMARKS: ANTHROPOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE

'Performance' is a very wide and ambiguous term that is used in anthropology as well as in a broad range of activities in the arts, in literature, and in the social sciences (Psychology, Sociology, Linguistics) and has become extremely popular in recent years. It is used to describe something as vague as human behavior in general, and also a specific field of studies ('performance studies'), a field where different disciplines work within a performance paradigm. The use of the word 'performance' to describe many different and often undetermined aspects of social behavior, as well as an intellectual mode of describing and interpreting it, constitutes a specific point of view that seems to have resulted from the acknowledgement of the intrinsic connection that exists between human experience, whether natural or social, and aesthetic form. More specifically, as far as theatre is concerned, anthropology has mainly treated it as behavior, and study has focused on the laws that differentiate the biological and cultural behavior of man in theatrical situation from those of daily life (Burns 1972; Schechner 1973 (a), (b); Barba 1978; d'Aquily et. al. 1979; Schechner and Appel 1990; Carlson 1996). It is the socio-cultural and physiological behaviour of man in performance situations that the anthropology of theatre has mainly

mainly focused on, while efforts are made to determine the principles that are recurrent in all such situations and differentiate them from the daily conduct.

In the past, 'modern' anthropology viewed performances as symbolic and aesthetic modes of action (symbolic interactionism), while theories of practice treated them as representations of cognitive and emotional meanings. Performances were thus, considered to be reflections of the social structure, of significance, of texts or stories. The static character of these definitions has today been replaced, under the influence of the postmodern turn, by the processual view. Performances are treated rather as processes of practice and social constructions, giving emphasis on the action of creating of time, of presence itself rather than being structures of representation (Turner 1979, 1982, 1985, 1986; Fabian 1990; Emigh 1996; Rostas 1998; Schieffelin 1998; Hughes-Freeland and Crain 1998). As Victor Turner has noted: "the processualization of space, its temporalization" has replaced "the spatialization of time" (1985:181).

Performance today is mainly related with the notions of the 'social construction of reality' (Cohen 1985; Lincoln 1989; Berger and Luckmann 1996), where "the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, the context-sensitive meanings, and the conflicting ideologies" are put "into a reflexive arena where they can be examined critically" (Bauman, 1990:60). Reflexivity arises from the fact that performance is viewed as heightened behaviour, publicly displayed, and twice behaved. The ambiguity between the composed and the spontaneous that is produced by the fact that everything is planned, staged and arranged in a performance, like in all religious, and civic and political pageants, could be answered by posing the question "what is raw and what is cooked? Is there anything that could be called as human nature unmediated, direct, unrehearsed experience?" (Schechner, 1985: 309).

Performances are also conceived as social and cultural processes that contain, and elaborate, perceptions and presentations of the self (Aloon, 1984). More specifically, theatre is a field where the self and otherness meet. What is created is a persona, a character, something that has an organic integrity. What the director of a play tries to do is to find a way to embody and set in motion a script, while the actor tries to give flesh and bones to the words and actions of a (fictional) other. This search reveals a process of constructing a meeting ground between the locus of 'I' (memories and

experiences as the actor's self) and that which begins as outside the self ('his' and 'hers', 'it' 'you', another person's story, another way of talking and being) (Emigh, 1996). Experience and self-understanding coexist in performance and their interaction is crucial within the framework of performance, which is an act of retrospection that enables communication and provides a context for the negotiation of individual and shared identity(ies).

Performance is viewed as a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative processes. A sensitive ethnographic study of how its form and meaning index a broad range of discourse types, stressing the cultural organization of these communicative processes is required. Performers and audience members should be treated not simply as sources of data but as intellectual partners who can make substantial theoretical contributions to such a project. Within this framework, greater attention is required to the dialectic between performance and its wider sociocultural and political-economic context.

Being cultural products (Manning, 1983), theatrical performances actually generate myths, ways of life and even worldviews. According to that view, within modern societies cultural productions have taken the place of the traditional economic productions as bases for the constitution of social relations. However, performance shapes and is shaped by various social factors like gender, social class, ethnicity, age, time, space, etc. The issue of social power and control should be raised, for example, in the case of a drama text that is being performed in different times and social contexts, and most probably for different reasons every time. Elements like differential access to texts, differential legitimacy in claims to and use of texts, differential competence in the use of texts, and differential values attaching to various types of texts contribute and express the construction and assumption of "authority"; a notion that is grounded at least part, in the knowledge, ability, and right to control the recontextualization of valued texts (Bauman, 1990). This constitutes part of the social framework and places constraints on how they may be further contextualized. The content of theatrical performances is something that results from contingent historical processes, and cannot be generated from abstract, transhistorical principles. Social differentiation and ideological disagreement among members of any group renders the content and form of theatrical performances "a

vocabulary of symbols through which individuals and groups negotiate identities, positions, and power relation...” (Cowan, 1990: 231).

In this chapter I examine performances of ancient Greek drama in Greece today as actual theatrical performances (I will not use the term as an analytical tool). In Chapter 6 I discussed the theoretical framework on social memory and modern Greek identity. I now wish to embed this in an examination of the two ancient drama performances (*Orestis* and *Lysistrati*) as ritual ceremonies, where “images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past [...] are conveyed and sustained” (Connerton, 1989: 3-4). The subject will be approached through the ideas and notions developed in current anthropological literature under the term 'commemorative ceremonies' by Paul Connerton (1989) as well as by other writers with similar pursuits (Coser 1992; Peltz 1995; Burke 1989, 1997; Abercombie 1994, 1998; Gillis 1994, Zerubavel 1994, 1995; Schechner 1985, 1993; Turner 1982; Moore and Myerhoff 1977; Gluckman and Gluckman 1977; Hughes-Freeland and Crain 1998). By placing within the framework of the issue raised in 7.2.a. concerning the *revival or interpretation* of ancient drama performances nowadays in Greece, the two performances will be examined as *rituals* (the term ceremony will be used in the same sense). More specifically, they will be analysed as “re-enactments of the past, as acts of memory, but also as attempts to impose interpretation of the past, to shape memory, and thus to construct social identity” (Burke, 1997:51).

The relationship between performance and ritual is a big chapter of the study of the anthropology of performance (Turner 1982a, 1982b, 1985, 1986; Schechner 1973(b), 1986, 1993; Moore and Myerhoff 1977; Aloon 1984; Hastrup 1998; Rostas 1998). Ritual, rite, ceremony, public spectacle, celebration, etc, distinctions between ritual and non – ritual, symbolic and real, religious and secular, ceremonial and everyday, all consist of elements in a discussion of the greatest interest amongst anthropologists. The limits of this thesis do not allow entering the huge discussion on these vague and controversial terms, but the definitions and the basic principles of the analysis made by Paul Connerton and the above mentioned authors will be used as guidelines in the study of this subject.

7.2. PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL MEMORY

7.2.a. *Revival or Interpretation? Towards Raising an Issue*

“The distinction that is made between directors (mainly), who are, by definition, considered to be appropriate to serve the holiness of tragedy, and the rest, who are judged more or less sacrilegious, is clear... Those who go to the arena of Epidavros must fight with the texts, or with the role, or with the translations, or with the actors’ interpretations, and the directors’ views that prevailed in the past, and especially with the place itself... Next to this lies the fight of the creators with themselves; the comparison to their last summer’s performance, or the desire for the vindication of their theatrical autobiography. Eventually, what predominates in Epidavros is the relation of the performance to history, the danger of repetition, and the sense that everything is at stake: theatre is obsessed by agony. The festive becomes a fight with shadows (a sciamachy)” (*Eleftherotypia*, 20/6/1999).

I could not find better words than agony, arena, fight with shadows, to convey the aura of the ancient drama world in Greece today. The whole of the ethnographic material collected during fieldwork in Athens, which, in a way, confirmed my always existent personal impression that practices, discussions, evaluations, and controversies amongst theatre people and audiences have, among others, as their starting point a wish to define the relationship between the origins and the present condition of ancient drama performances. Creators, performances, and audiences are haunted by the question that is, consciously or subconsciously, always present: do ancient drama performances in our days constitute a *revival* (*‘anaviosi’*) of the performances of antiquity, or can they be subjected to various, *modern interpretations* (*‘erminia’*)? And if it is accepted that ancient drama is theatre (Schechner, 1973b), and consequently something alive that refers to modern audiences, are there any restrictions (others than generic) that should be imposed in its experimentation and interpretation?

From its beginnings in the early decades of the 20th century until today, the staging of ancient drama performances in modern Greece has been beset by a constant

pursuit of the *right form* of these performances. Contradictions that very often become rivalries and antagonisms among groups or persons that maintain different views on the subject are present throughout the whole history of modern performances of ancient Greek drama (Sideris 1976; Diethnis Diaskepsi Theatrou 1976; Spathis 1983; Lignadis 1990, 1996). Attempting a very brief historical flashback we will find out that these questions that torment creators and audiences are the same throughout the whole history of the ancient drama performances in modern era. In the decades of the 1940s and the 1950s, theatre people were looking for the “contemporary means that will transmit to the audience sentiments similar to those that ancient Greeks had in their soul”(D. Rontiris, Director and Head of the National Theatre of Greece, 1999: 197). They wanted to give up the museum representation and touch the audience through a “true artistic enjoyment, emphasizing the immortal human truths that are contained in the ancient Word (*‘arhaeos logos’*), and express them according to the spirit of Tragedy” (ibid.).

During the 60's and 70's theatre people accused the previous generation of museum re-enactment of ancient drama and for placing it *on a pedestal* out of an irrational respect, thus rendering it inaccessible to wide audiences. What is mainly argued again is that ancient drama characters are human and that the universality of the situations they find themselves in require the active participation of the audience and the replacement of the lifeless “*robots that declaim their verses*” [referring to the highly stylized way of performing that had prevailed during the first years of ancient drama's re-staging]. Solutions are searched for through the analogies of the incidents described in the ancient texts with their equivalents in the modern (Greek) world. Emphasis is thus given on the need to make ancient drama alive and interesting for contemporary audiences through “the analogies in shapes, colours, rhythms, and sounds, ritual and festal traces that survive [from antiquity] into our folk tradition” (Koun, 1976: 39). For its creators, the aim of the *revival* of ancient drama is to relive a glorious era through the reconstruction of something unique for human inheritance: “... we try to revive the whole beauty of the ancient tragedy so that its eternal teachings will become possession of all humanity” (G. Tsarouhis, a Painter who made great contributions to the design of theatre sceneries and costumes, 1976: 81). But they also agree that reconstruction, i.e. a modern re-enactment of ancient drama, should happen *in the correct way* because otherwise the universal truths and meanings it contains could be lost.

Today (according to my fieldwork experience) the speculation on the subject has not been radically differentiated nor developed. What has been added to the objectives of the past is some, seemingly contradictory, voices that explicitly argue that performing ancient drama today in Greece has reached a deadlock that has led to *colourless and tasteless performances*, in a word, to boring evenings inside ancient theatres. And what they propose is “*to let the land of Epidavros lie fallow*” (S. Doufexis, Director, said during the Symposium on ‘The Interpretation of Ancient Greek Drama in the 20th Century: The View of the Director, 1998, organized by the Centre for Study and Practical Realisation of the Ancient Greek Drama “Desmi”), meaning that ancient drama should stop being performed until its meanings and necessities in its staging are restored.

Ancient Greek drama was actually re-discovered in Greece during the first decades of the 20th century. The performances that took place during the festivities of *Delfikes Eortes* (see chapter 2) in 1927 and 1930 were the first after a pause of almost two thousand years. Having that, as well as the fact that no information on the way(s) ancient drama was staged in antiquity, in mind, it seems to me that the views mentioned above, although they look completely opposite, they actually reflect the same agony. Thus, on the one hand, there are those who see ancient drama performances in our days as a revival (*‘anaviosi’*) of something that used to live two thousand years ago. As if nothing has intervened, they argue, we should treat ancient drama with the respect it deserves, remaining faithful to some diachronically and universally true essence. On the other hand, there are those who believe that ancient drama should stop being performed until it evolves and changes, through experimentation like any other theatre, in order to appeal to modern audiences. However, according to the latter view, experimentation should be subjected to some restrictions, which are not generic but are imposed:

“...*by the places and by the spirit of antiquity, which survives through time into the natural environment of Greece and inside the Greek body, into the blood*”. (Director of *Orestis*)

In either cases, informants argue that modern Greeks, as descendants of the ancient ones, have the exclusive privilege of the *correct* staging of ancient drama performances. Although the practice of staging of this theatre was interrupted for almost two thousand years, contemporary Greeks claim that they know, or they are able to find, the proper way(s) of performing it because *their body remembers*:

Even if our technical experience is less rich than other peoples that had an uninterrupted continuity of theatrical tradition for centuries in the field of directing as well as in that of acting, Greek actors, however, and Greek directors teach ancient drama better, beyond any comparison, even in the most unsuccessful cases. This means that it runs in our blood". (Hristos)

The issue that resulted from the total of my research experience and was raised above, gave me the incentive to think that ancient drama performances are not like other theatrical activities in Greece. Perceptions, rhetoric, and practices reveal aspects that could be rather analyzed within the theoretical framework of commemorative ceremonies. The role of the body as a means for perceiving and expressing the relation of modern Greeks with the ancient ones is also taken into account since it constitutes a crucial aspect of the process of construction and transmission of group (ethnic) identity(ies).

7.2.b. *The Commemorative Aspect of Ancient Drama Performances in Modern Greece*

Having the analysis of social memory that was developed in chapter 6 in mind, and according to Halbwachs (1992), all social groups provide their members with the proper means for recalling and reconstructing their memories at any time. Monuments, spaces, artifacts, various material substances, etc may be perceived to contain and recall social memory (Nora 1989; Kuchler and Melion 1991; Koshar 1994; Lowenthal 1994; Seremetakis 1994; Mavragani 1999). Public and private ceremonies also have a significant role in the production and transmission of social memories, especially in cases of memories that are passed from the one generation to the next, becoming, thus, the social and cultural memories of a group. The study of the social aspects of memory is actually identified with the "study of those acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible" (Connerton, 1989:39). In this sense, commemorative ceremonies or rituals, official celebrations, festivals, or however else we may call them, preserve, transmit, and fuel the vitality of social memory.

Using the performances of *Orestis* and *Lysistrati*, as well as the Festival of Epidavros as paradigms, indicative of current conceptions and interpretations, I will try now to shed light on an aspect of ancient Greek theatre in Greece today that has not been taken into consideration by drama nor by anthropological studies on the subject. Ancient Greek drama performances can be seen as ceremonies that produce, reproduce and transmit social memory. The role of the body and the senses is perceived to be crucial in these ceremonies since ancient drama performances as a whole, actually reflect on current interpretations of the past and on the relation of modern Greeks to their ancestors that influence the process of group (ethnic) identity(ies).

I begin the analysis of our case study by referring to the first of the characteristics that are attributed to the commemorative ceremonies by Paul Connerton (1989): the “calendrical” mode of articulation. According to him, commemorative ceremonies are “expressive acts by virtue of their conspicuous regularity” (ibid:44), through which the rhetorical re-enactment of the past works. Commemorative ceremonies enable their participants to experience recollections of the past in the form of specific images, while at the same time they are selective, structuring time and space in a certain way. A kind of bridge, thus, is built between past and present emphasizing the affinity that exists between particular elements of different times and spaces, while ignoring others ('social amnesia'). Through repetition in time commemorative ceremonies become 'calendral celebrations' that strengthen social memory.

The festival of Epidavros in Greece, has taken place every year since 1955 although suggestions for the establishment of ancient drama festivities in Greece were first aired in 1885, i.e. 50 years after the establishment of the modern Greek nation-State. The general idea for the organization of such festivities has not changed much since then: “...many people would feel pleasure and even gratitude to marvel at a masterpiece of Aeschylos, Sophokles or Evripidis, performed inside an ancient theatre, under the holy rock [the Acropolis], by their descendants [...] Since we cannot stand in front of the world as a military nation nor as a model kingdom, we will be able to stand as an artistic and antiquity loving nation ...” (Hatzidakis, 1996:12). Until 1975 the National Theatre of Greece staged one or two new performances every year and one repetition of a previous one. In that year the

National Theatre lost its exclusive privilege in Epidavros, and more theatrical groups entered the *holy* place: 'State Theatre of North Greece', 'Theatro Tehnis', 'Amphitheatro', 'Attis', etc. The National Theatre, however, continues until today to follow the rule according to which, it must stage three ancient drama performances (two tragedies and one comedy) every year, while other theatre groups (amongst which the ones mentioned above) stage at least one ancient drama performance every year.

In total, 16 performances of ancient drama take place during the Festival every year by 8 Greek theatrical groups (the National Theatre, the State Theatre of Southern Greece, and 6 private groups) and one by a foreign theatrical group. Foreign theatrical groups started participating in the festival in 1994, something that was accepted by many theatre people in Greece to be a concession:

"... we give them the opportunity to present themselves, because for foreign artist this is a life dream. And imagine, what they say when they go back to their country... It is a promotion of our culture" (Director of *Lysistrati*).

The time of the festival of Epidavros, which "aims to the renewal of the interest in the legacies of the past" (Program of the Athens Festival, 1997), is fixed: July – August. Performances take place every Friday and Saturday evenings (two performances for each group), while no other kind of cultural activities (besides ancient drama performances) are allowed to take place inside the ancient theatre. The fixed regularity that exists in the time and place of the performances of ancient drama gives participants the impression that each performance is the exact reproduction of the other. At the same time, this repetition makes them feel that no time has intervened from the previous festival or from the one that took place many decades, or even centuries earlier. The public display of the continuity that is implied through repetition make people feel that "there are no empty spots in the lives of the groups and societies; an apparent vacuum between creative periods is filled by collective memory in symbolic display" (Coser, 1992:25). Through repetition people get the message of predictability, that the essence of ancient drama and its performances are durably true, now and in the future, affirming for them the continuity and stability of their group memory.

The second characteristic of commemorative ceremonies is the "verbal" repetition (Connerton, 1989: 66), which also contributes to the rhetorical re-enactment of the past. In our case, the acknowledgement of the need for repetition of the specific drama texts is of great importance for the commemorative aspect of ancient drama performances: "The poetry, the lyricism, the beauty and the rich language of the poets [the three tragic poets] are the unique elements of these texts, which will fascinate and entertain us..." (*H Avgi*, 10/8/1995).

The insistence on the need for the eternal repetition of these texts, although very often in each performance a different translation of the original ancient text is used, actually reveals another need: to restore and preserve the original, the first performance of this play. Because this cannot be the case, since every performance adds new and rejects older elements (Schechner, 1973b, 1986) what is crucial in this verbal repetition is actually the need for the idea of total repetition, as a means of preservation of some authentic, original performance.

The third characteristic of commemorative ceremonies is the fact that they play a very important role in the process of shaping of shared memory by explicitly claiming they commemorate a continuity from the past:

(We still perform in ancient theatres) *in order to preserve the spirit of antiquity.* (Hristos)

"I say to young people that they must not experiment with ancient drama... this kind of searching is for those who have not understood their inheritance..." (A. Synodinou, *Eleftherotypia*, 12/5/1996)

"... it is our duty [as modern Greeks] to transmit it to the following generations as we inherited it from our grandparents".
(Kostas)

In addition, the form of the two specific performances, *Orestis* and *Lysistrati*, explicitly claim to commemorate the uninterrupted continuity of modern Greeks from classic antiquity through all historical periods in between (see analysis in chapter 6, page 177).

Another characteristic of commemorative ceremonies is that they "explicitly refer to prototypical persons and events, whether these are understood to have a historical or a mythological existence" (Connerton, 1989:61) In ancient drama performances the

references that are made to prototypical and archetypal persons and events are clearly manifested:

“They are perfect creations. They are perfect because they are archetypes” (Aggeliki)

“...Their dimensions are not human. They are rather archetypes; their aim is to show all the big questions that torture humans in all ages, since no satisfying answers have been given to them yet...”
(Niovi)

In addition to the above I must also refer to the fact that commemorative ceremonies, as performances are not formalized, although there is a deep wish to be stylized, and stereotyped. This means that although they are not subjected "to spontaneous variation", they are "at least [...] susceptible of variation only within strict limits." (Connerton, 1989: 44). As far as the form of the ancient drama performances is concerned, texts and tradition on this theatrical genre imposes no restriction. Theoretically, directors are free to create their own version of the play as is the situation in the western theatrical tradition. Practically, however, there is a huge contradiction on this subject. On the one hand, artists feel free to express themselves in any way they prefer, while on the other, they cannot surpass some limits, which although not clearly defined, are implied and definitely affect their artistic options:

“Tragedy needs constant experimentation but there are some limits... if you were to stage these plays in a garage, for example, it would be OK; because the blasphemy would be addressed only towards the text; but inside an ancient theatre the blasphemy is bigger...”. (Director of Orestis)

“...I try, at least, not to offend it [ancient drama] by following some rules.

“...this kind of drama contains the ritualistic element... something that takes it beyond theatre”. (Panagis, early 30's, male, member of the audience of Orestis)

We turn now to the burning question that torments theatrical life today in Greece: do current performances constitute a revival or an interpretation of the drama performed in antiquity? What are people's expectations from such theatrical events? According to my informants there are those who believe that experimentation on the form of these performances is strictly forbidden, while others maintain that experimentation is necessary, although it should be restricted by some rules. These are not aesthetic rules since they have to be followed in order that the performance to be considered *proper*. Spontaneous variation does exist in the form of these performances (during

the rehearsals), but only within some limits that are posed by the *spirit of antiquity*, and prevent them from becoming *blasphemous*.

What we can detect here are feelings of fear and agony, either for preserving or for finding, not some artistically satisfactory form, but rather the *correct way* of performing ancient drama. This resembles the intricacy and ambivalence, which is often implicated in the acts of commemorating the past. It could be the sense of bewilderment people experience seeing their tradition been "progressively altered from generation to generation" (Samuel, 1994:x).

Each act of commemoration, in our case each new performance of ancient drama, introduces new elements and interpretations of the past while the recurrence of these performances contribute to the creating of an overall sense of continuity of collective memory. What is remembered is not only the "motifs and the particular sequence of these motifs that reflect the structure" of these theatrical performances (Kaeppler, 1991:11). It is also a set of expectations that participants (directors, actors, members of the audiences, etc.), as members of a specific (ethnic) group, have for such performances. These expectations structure a specific rhetoric of continuity and change that constitutes a significant dimension of the process of construction of collective memory and tradition. Also, the fact that these public forms, these shared conventions do not negate the existence of individual articulations, which may lead to innovations, imply that "the meanings of these [celebratory practices] are always subject to negotiation [...] themes are posed and explored" (Cowan, 1990: 234).

What should also be taken into account is the fact that the ritualistic aspect of these theatrical performances locates them in "betwixt-and-between", in the "no-man's-land" of the subjunctive mood of rituals' "liminal phase" (Turner, 1985). Liminality is characterized by ambiguity that contains the potentiality for cultural innovation. Rituals thus, are not just conservators of cultural behavior, but generators of new images, new ideas, and new practices. The characteristic that commemorative ceremonies share with other 'secular rituals' is that their form "makes and marks change as often as it celebrates repetitions and continuities" (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977: 12), and constitutes one of its paradoxes. Through repetition people get the message of predictability, that the messages of ancient drama and its performances

are durably true, now and in the future, affirming for them the continuity and stability of their group memory. People are thus trapped in the dilemma posed by, on the one hand, their appreciation of the new, as this is found within Euro-American cultures, where "works are praised simply for being 'new'" (Schechner, 1985: 19); and on the other, by their need to remain stable and perpetuate something they perceive to be traditionally given to them from classic antiquity. Trapped between the current needs that impel people to refashion the ways they perform ancient drama while at the same time trying to keep past epochs alive through a common code and a common symbolic canon even amidst contemporary revisions, they fall into the contradictions generated by the question of *revival or interpretation* of ancient drama in Greece today.

Ancient drama performances today in Greece belong, from the point of view of this thesis, to ceremonies that link the past, present and future. They are what Abercombie calls 'memory paths', where people "recall and intone the names of many ascendant ancestors and [...] of ever more distant mountains, plains, and other sacred places, mapping out in their minds a centripetal journey across the living landscape that embodies their past" (Abercombie, 1998:6). The fact that there is, on the one hand, a declared desire, at least as far as the State Theatres and few private groups are concerned, to stage ancient drama on a regular basis, and on the other a direct or indirect wish to be faithful to a *proper* form of performance, and to repeat the texts eternally, indicate that these performances can be seen as something more than 'just' theatrical performances. They can be seen rather as ceremonies, as occasion for creators and spectators to consciously repeat the past coming, in a way, to a 'mythical identification' with it. Innovation and introduction of new elements are part of the creativity that characterizes commemorative ceremonies and are very often criticized as *blasphemous* or *inappropriate* signifying, thus, the need of people to restrict commemoration within the limits of the 'manipulations' of the historical records with deliberate suppressions and imaginative elaborations that production and transmission of social memory dictates. As a consequence, the whole area of ancient drama performances seems to be something more like an *arena*, a place where much more than a good or bad theatre performance is at stake.

7.2.c. *The Role of the Body*

"I do not need to read any of these texts [the ancient drama texts and modern analyses of them]... This could destroy the spontaneity of my body, which already knows how to perform..."
(Giota, 24 years old actress, member of the chorus of *Lysistrati*)

Within recent anthropological literature there has been a growing interest in the study of the body and the senses as crucial aspects of human experience and culture (Fernandez 1971; Jackson 1983; Johnson 1987; Connerton 1989; Bourdieu 1990; Howes 1991(a), (b); Frenness 1992; Lock 1993; Csordas 1994; Lyon and Barbalet 1994; Seremetakis 1994; Stoller 1994; Papagaroufali 1999). Bodily experience as something on which even stands and attitudes that are usually thought of as abstract meanings, actually do depend, has become a crucial dimension of social analysis. Perceptions, ideas, theoretical notions are approached as being grounded "on bodily movement within a social and material environment" (Jackson, 1983:332).

What is mainly emphasized through these developments is the social aspects of the human body, since emotions, feelings, even expressions of imagination are not considered to be private, or elements peculiar to the person who experiences them. They all constitute part of what is shared when people communicate within a community and understand one another. Culture helps those who share it to interpret and codify their felt experiences, which thus become "shared cultural modes of experience that help (them) determine the nature of (their) meaningful, coherent understanding of the world" (Johnson, 1987:14). Bodies are always part of a community, of a culture that exists in specific historical context and have social character. Within these frameworks people learn to recognize, to give culturally constructed names and to communicate their subjective senses and feelings, "making it thus impossible to capture them as either cognitive or visceral reactions" (Lock, 1993:139).

Not a long time ago, the human body was considered to be a tool, an object through which people express other purely mental operations of a reified social rationality. This dichotomization between biology and culture is now considered surpassed within current developments in anthropology. The body is not perceived to be a "biological raw material on which culture operates" because this might result in "excluding the body from original or primordial participation in the domain of

culture” restricting it, thus, to a “pre-cultural substrate” (Csordas, 1994:8). The boundaries between body and mind become even more blurred when references are made to issues like knowledge, or memory. The fact that people have bodies that are always already cultural while culture is always grounded on the human body, may lead social scientists to rethink the “nature of culture and our existential situation as cultural beings” (Lyon and Barbalet, 1994:6). What is of special interest is that people experience the world having and being bodies at the same time, although, according to Csordas, biology and culture are both “forms of objectification or representation” and social analysis should be suspended between them “in favor of an experiential understanding of being-in-the-world” (1994:269).

As has analytically been presented in chapter 6, memory is not a passive receptacle but rather a process during which active restructuring takes place, elements are retained, reordered, or suppressed. Bodily performance memory, in particular, which is of our concern in the study of ancient drama performances in Greece today, belong to a form of memory that modern Greeks, according to Connerton, “do not recall how, or when, or where (they) have acquired the knowledge in question; often it is only by the fact of the performance that (they) are able to recognize and demonstrate to others that (they) do in fact remember” (1989:23). The relationship between bodily memory and knowledge is a very important aspect of the study of social memory with wide theoretical implications, which will not be included in our analysis. Here we will restrict in showing how the two theatrical groups (of *Orestis* and *Lysistrati*) and members of their audiences employ the phrase *our body remembers* in order to prove that according to them there is a special kind of knowledge that is bodily transmitted from antiquity until nowadays. The existence, however, of dilemmas and contradictions concerning the form of ancient drama performances that were described in the issue of *revival or interpretation*, (see 7.2.a.), shows that there is more than one version of this knowledge. This leads to the thought that what is actually meant by the phrase *our body remembers*, is not an *anamnesis* from antiquity concerning the *right way* of staging and performing ancient drama. But then, what is remembered? It is rather the community of modern Greeks and their ancestors that is being recalled and transmitted during these commemorative ceremonies, in which, as performances, the body plays a decisive role.

What struck me from the first moment of my contact with the members of the two theatrical groups was the extensiveness of their belief in the existence of a unique *Greek body* that *preserves* and *recalls*, when necessary, that *remembers* the right way of performing ancient drama today. What is interesting in these statements is not the fact that people believe that memory has its bodily and sensorial aspects; it is rather the contradiction that exists between this and the fact that ancient drama was not performed in Greece for almost two thousand years. Having that in mind as well as the fact that no information has been transmitted to our days (orally or written) concerning the form of these performances in antiquity, the analysis of this perception turn out to be a very interesting and enlightening aspect of our subject under study. Although aware of these historical facts, my informants argue that:

“...there is a very concrete imprint on the Greek DNA, that is, a key with which some doors can be opened” [to the proper ways of performing and staging ancient drama]. (Hristos)

Through statements like these we see that the body is clearly perceived to be a site of memory, a site where the past is reified through the embodiment of memory that is enacted in the present. The unique *Greek body* is perceived to be a concrete, imperishable, unchangeable in time object, onto which memory is engraved, and this memory is also true because it is unchanging since it is embodied in unchanging material things. Within ancient drama performances the eternal presence of this body is confirmed and the sense of continuity is preserved and transmitted. Performativity is a central aspect of transmission of social memory, according to the analysis of Paul Connerton (1989), and is always embodied. Social memory is transmitted through incorporating practices during ancient drama performances, which as recurrent events may be called “ceremonies of the body”. These ceremonies have references to avocations and privileges that “affirm the principle of hereditary transmission” (Connerton, 1989: 87):

“The consciousness of a country is not constructed by abstract and metaphysical concepts, values and symbols. It is constructed by ... memories and experiences of the senses of touch, taste, and hearing. All these are preserved only if you turn every time [in every ancient drama performance occasion] to your roots and you search in the yard of your memory” (K. Georgousopoulos, *Ta Nea*, 8/5/1996)

As a consequence, the exclusive privilege, according to informants, of modern Greeks to fully understand and properly stage ancient drama than any other people,

is due to their ancestors, whose achievements and merits are held to have endured in the senses and the blood until today. Blood relations become, thus, "signs cognitively known and recalled", which "make sense only by constant reference" (Connerton, 1989: 87) to the organising principle of ethnic uniqueness and differentiation. The authority with which Greek (in relation to foreign) performances are rendered, rests not on real data or documents that concern the *right way* to perform ancient drama, since these are non-existent. It rather rests on the ancient drama performances of the modern era, on the tradition of our days, that is legitimized as a standard by which foreign performances are evaluated, just because modern Greeks are the descendants of the ancient Greeks. Thus, when informants speak of the knowledge of the Greek body, they do not refer to a knowledge that comes from the antiquity, but to all those respected theatre people of our era, who carry on their own bodies a specific performance knowledge. The original, the correct is not something fixed, since no one has any idea of how it looked like. Through bodies, it is specific persons' particular interpretation, or rather incarnation of the imagined original that is passed on. In this way, past performances and esteemed individual appropriations turn to be reference points of current performances. Recollections and memories do not concern the original but previous theatrical events of the modern era:

"I am sick and tired of watching performances of Aristophanes with big breasts, huge bottoms, and erected phalluses. I am tired of this fair (*'panigiri'*); why should Aristophanes be a fair? Is it written somewhere?" (G. Rigas, Director, *Eleftherotypia*, 16/8/1996)

What is thus recollected and transmitted during ancient drama performances, although rarely stated, through body memory and references to it, is the current tradition of performing ancient Greek drama and the message of the uninterrupted continuity of Greek culture from antiquity until our days. Modern Greeks, through their *unique body*, are the ones who convey the originality of the ancient culture confirming themselves (as members of the same ethnic group) and outsiders (usually a homogenous group called *the Europeans*) about their uniqueness.

The *Greek body* is a means of articulation, a necessary precondition for the social sharing of memory that is transmitted through repetition of the known (drama) texts and through bodily, non-verbal performance. Ancient drama performances as "re-

enactments of the past" become actions through which memories are transmitted, "collective representations", and physical sites that help people objectify their memory. Obvious contradictions between memory and reality –in our case the existence of a performing tradition that is much more recent than what people actually believe- may, thus, be overridden through "coherence and support provided by (these) socially held memories" (Frentress and Wickham, 1992:38).

In closing this section, I will return to the co-existence of biological and cultural interpretations of somatic memory. People (as members of groups) remember what they choose to remember since, according to Merleau Ponty "before any contribution by memory, what is seen must at present moment so organize itself as to present a picture in which (people) can recognize their former experiences. Thus the appeal to memory presupposes what is supposed to explain: the patterning of data, the imposition of meaning on chaos of sense-data" (Ponty, 1965:19). The way participants perceive of ancient drama and of the role of their bodies in it reflects a ready-made recognition interpreted, at first sight, by them as an ancient *anamnisis*. Places themselves, that is, ancient theatres, as parts of an (ethnic) group material culture, are substances that evoke social memory since, according to Seremetakis, memory is "stored in substances that are shared, just as substances are stored in social memory which is sensory" (1994:28). The desire to continue to stage ancient drama performances inside ancient theatres suggests that theatrical events of this kind are a privileged site for the constitution of a somatic identity that is ultimately nationalized. And while the relation between the self and the senses is not a matter for private life alone, ancient drama performances undertaken in the pursuit of group expression, become "the experience, performance, and public visualization of mass identity" (Seremetakis, 1994:132).

The human body is an agent and shaper of culture. Consequently, what it perceives and remembers are not independent from the wider social and ideological processes of a specific time and space. The way contemporary theatre people and audiences remember, is a process incorporated within the wider framework of the process of identity construction. Through ancient drama performances modern Greeks 'perform' their ethnic identity. Inside ancient theatres they come into close contact with their remotest past and a strange identification between time and space takes place, allowing them to deal with their Greekness through a notion of continuity,

which matches more with the notion of incarnation rather than that of a biological or cultural heredity from their ancestors. What is transmitted through bodily memory is not the *right way* of performing ancient drama; it is rather the sense of continuity from classic antiquity that contributes to the group identity(ies), which is shaped and transmitted during commemoration of common ancestors and traditions:

“Aristophanes makes you see pictures, colors, hear sounds of a time that is lost for 2500 years. With Aristophanes you are again in the city of Athens, in the city of the 5th century B.C. (a good performance) Makes your travel in time easier. Because this place is here” (*Eleftherotypia*, 7/10/1996).

7.3. PERFORMANCE AND IDENTITY

7.3.a. General Remarks

Persons need a sense of self, a sense of uniqueness that is defined by the concrete evidence of their own body, and by the selective memories that continually shape a unique personal history. In the same way, every enduring group of people, whether a family, an association, or a nation needs a sense of identity. In our case study, a concrete body - the unique *Greek body* – is perceived to convey and transmit an ancient knowledge, and to express the criteria of membership and behavior that justify a common consciousness of history. Through the visible presence of body and text [the ancient drama texts], the diachronic component of collective memory is verified, and the significance of ancient drama performances as commemorative ceremonies lies exactly in the fact that they are performed.

Inside ancient theatres, the celebration of the diachronic and universal value of ancient drama, takes place. During and through ancient drama performances the relation between modern Greeks and their ancestors is commemorated. Into the distinct and well-defined context of these performances, persons and social groups strive to define their relationship(s) with their past. A unique Greek identity is thus constructed and transmitted, and its uniqueness is signified by all unique achievements of a unique culture. From this results the belief in the superiority of the quality of the modern Greek against all foreign ancient drama performances, which is based on the existence of some authentic ancient tradition that has been

transmitted from one generation to the next, until today. The fact that, as members of a specific ethnic group, modern Greeks participate in a common consciousness, contributes decisively to their sense of identity, since, through ancient drama performances, “information of the archaic past, that come from the deepest layer of memory” (Petrou, 1989: 87) are perceived to be transmitted.

7.3.b. *Elements of an Ethnic Identity Construction Process*

Ancient drama performances, as theatrical performances, contain the element of reflexivity that allows people to construct and transmit the social and cultural components of their identities (ethnic, cultural, gender, etc.). It is actually because of their reflexive nature that performances have the power to “create, store and transmit identity” (Fine, 1992:8). To use Turner’s words about performative reflexivity that is existent through and during performances, people turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves, upon relations, actions, symbols, meaning codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public selves (1974). As in the process of rehearsals, where people decide what they will keep for the performance and what they will leave out, they also determine their past as they choose what to keep and how to interpret it so as to agree with the image they have or they want to create for themselves. The notion of ‘restored behavior’, however, developed by Richard Schechner (1985) offers, to both individuals and groups “the chance to re-become what they once were – or even, and most often, to re-become what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become” (ibid:38).

Theatrical performances are vehicles that encode and transmit information about oneself (individual or collective) contributing, thus, to the construction of a specific personal and social image. They are not only shaped by culture but they also create the possibility of cultural sharing. Performances constitute a universal characteristic, a human universal and this can be used as basis for the transmission of trans-cultural messages about identity whether shared or not. Transcultural approaches of specific ‘ethnic’ theatres allow for the critical issues of ownership, authority, and identity to emerge. Thus, the need of my informants to certify that ancient drama is Greek, it belongs to Greeks, and only Greeks can stage it in the right way:

“Ancient drama is Greek, and thus Greece is the only place, where it can exist in its complete form. Even a bad performance has more honest and correct approach [than a foreign one]” (Giorgos)

implies more than is said. Informants experience and interpret the specific forms that they have learned and the conventions they have adapted in performing ancient Greek drama to constitute some ‘pure’ and ‘original’ form. The emphasis is given rather on the ethnic origin of a performance, and on an effort to define something as ‘ours’ or ‘theirs’, than on its artistic evaluation. This is a process that has nothing to do with the borrowing of conventions in some ‘pure’ and ‘original’ form; it has rather to do with forms that have been learned and conventions that have been adapted in the process of creating an imaginative world that can (hopefully) be experienced as organic and whole (Emigh, 1996).

Judgments about the ways in which the content is realized shows that a performance may or may not fulfill expectations based on a specific tradition, genre, or culture. This may be due to the fact that innovation is always present in theatrical performances but because ancient drama plays also the role of commemorative ceremony, creativity is not easily accepted by participants. Many subjective and objective factors influence the actors’ performances while the fact that the audience is different every day creating different energies (Schechner, 1985), contributes to the introduction of new elements in each performance. Performances not only conserve cultural behavior but also produce new ideas and practices. Instead of something stable and fixed in time and space, performances are rather “testaments of our capacity to endlessly bring new possibilities into being without entirely relinquishing the old, prior understandings that have given rise to them” (Myerhoff, 1990: 249).

The past shapes the present and vice versa, and in the case of theatrical performances, historically justified ethnic memories are conveyed and reproduced. Performances, however, are not just selections of data arranged and interpreted; they are behavior that carries in itself kernels of originality, making it the subject for further interpretation. As a result, the notion of originality rather refers to matters that concern group identity(ies), while the idea of continuity, which goes back to some dark point of antiquity could be perceived to be “an ideological construction serving today’s needs for a specific image” (Schechner, 1985: 50-51).

However, looking at the 'mythical' (Samuel, 1990) elements that the 'master narrative' of these commemorative ceremonies contain - common characteristics of behavior and idiosyncrasy between ancient and modern Greeks, the unchanging natural environment, the cultural information contained and transmitted through biology, the analogies of historical facts of then and now - and restricting our analysis to the uncovering of the 'invention of tradition' constitute the first steps of studying the relationship between ancient drama performances and modern Greek identity. What should rather happen is placing these findings within their wider historical and cultural context. Very often, commemoration has been viewed as a deception, as something imposed by the ruling elites on the subaltern classes as a means of social control and legitimization of the existing status quo by reference to a mythologized version of the past. Within a Marxian tradition of thought current interpretations of the past have usually been treated as expressions of a 'false consciousness', or as 'bad faith' by existentialists. However, a more ethnographic approach should approach the 'invention of tradition' as "a process rather than an event, and memory, even in its silences, as something which people made for themselves" (Samuel, 1994: 17).

Social memories and identities are things we think with and not things we think about, and consequently they do not have existence outside the social groups and relations in which we are members and agents. While commemorative activity is by definition social for it involves the coordination of individual and social memories, it is also political since these memories "may appear consensual when they are in fact the product of intense contest, struggle, and in some instances, annihilation" (Gillis, 1994: 8). People do not have one but a set of multiple memberships within the wider frame of an ethnic group, which overlap in some aspects but not in others, which produce creative possibilities as well as tensions and conflict; while the historically established conditions of power and oppression should not be ignored. The multiplicity of texts about the past, of interpretations and narratives about it may lead to different and occasionally even conflicting commemorations of the past. "Collective memory can turn into a contested arena that highlights social and political divisions" (Zerubavel, 1995: 235), and commemorative ceremonies may in fact encompass competing performances and identities. Collective identity may thus be based on the combination of the element of continuity of ancient drama

performances (regularity in staging) and the fluidity that characterizes the form of these performances.

The shared ritual itself, through the performing of ancient drama provides a symbolic strength through public identity for members of a homogenous ethnic group whose uniqueness needs affirmation in front of a homogenous European 'Other', who is perceived to be more powerful than the Greeks. Through and during these ancient drama commemorative ceremonies, a collective connection with a common activity becomes visible, while at the same time disconnections and conflicts are minimized. By suspending oppositions or conflicts amongst various persons and subgroups that participate (actually or potentially) in these ceremonies, what is promoted is "an amalgam of the collective past..." (Moore and Myerhoff, 1990: 9).

Through ceremonial celebration, production and reproduction of collective identity(ies) a sense of 'communitas' (Turner, 1985) is generated, a sense of creating one single collective identity through the act of performing different identities within its context (Davies, 1998). Rituals confirm to their participants that what is culturally created actually constitute a physical reality. Performances, thus, become arenas where ethnic identities are affirmed in the 'inside' while also we speak to 'outsiders'.

It would, however, be more useful to talk about ritualization rather than ritual since, according to Hughes-Freeland, this can enable us to engage with the "processual aspect of ritual action" (1998: 3). In this way we may become conscious of the multiplicity of the ways in which we frame our reality(ies) and realize how variable framings actually change our roles, our self-images, and our identities. What should be analyzed in some further study in the future is the ways in which diverse identities are created within the specific context of ancient drama performances, while shifts and transformations of these identities take place and these are negotiated, affirmed or contested over the course of time. If various performances were studied in relation to an in depth examination of the social and economic background of their participants, and all were placed within a wider social framework, this could lead to the revelation of various aspects of collective identity

that are entailed in different forms of “self-expression, or self-definition which distinguish particular selves from others” (Hughes-Freeland, 1998: 7).

Ancient drama performances (as theatrical performances) have the power to shape, reflect, and embody individual and collective experience, by which social groups define and create themselves. In this sense the past, and the tradition do not have an a priori existence but is rather a process of communication between past and present ideologies and re-interpretations. By being commemorative ceremonies, these performances have the power to produce, reproduce and transmit identities through which participants, as members of an ethnic group may interpret and experience the world at the same time.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I focused on particular aspects of the ethnographic material collected during my fieldwork, and were presented in detail in the chapters 4 and 5. Using the analysis of social memory (chapter 6) and current developments of the anthropological literature on the analysis of theatrical performances as a theoretical framework, I focused on an aspect of ancient drama performances in Greece today that has not been taken into account by Dramatological nor by Anthropological studies. Contemporary ancient drama performances are treated in this thesis as commemorative ceremonies, as acts of memory and attempts to impose an interpretation of the past, to shape memory, and to construct social identity.

What has led me to see ancient drama performances as commemorative ceremonies was the observation that creators and audiences are tormented, consciously or subconsciously, by one main question: do current performances constitute a revival or an interpretation of the drama performed in antiquity? Focusing thus on the analysis of people's expectations from such theatrical events, I concluded that ancient drama in Greece today is considered to be something more than other theatrical events. They are rather occasions for the celebration, transmission, and construction of (ethnic) group identity(ies). The way(s) my informants refer to their (performing) body further supports my conclusion. Their references to their (performing) bodies can be seen as a means for perceiving and expressing the

relation with their ancestors, a point that is crucial in the process of construction and transmission of group (ethnic) identity(ies). In addition, the power of theatrical performances to shape and transmit collective identity(ies) is finally developed. The issue of *Revival or Interpretation* is an expression of the agony for the preservation of old forms and the simultaneous need for constant innovation that exists in all theatrical performances. Although the 'invention of tradition' is always present, since power relations are always present, a more ethnographic approach should treat identity construction through ceremonial performances as a process, and as something people make for themselves, instead of something fixed and final.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis I gave an ethnographic account of ancient Greek drama performances in Greece today. My aim was to investigate the ways in which classical antiquity and ethnic continuity are perceived and interpreted in Greece, and how these perceptions and interpretations affect aspects of the modern Greek identity construction process. More specifically, within this field, the issue on which my research focused was the role of social memory in the process of formation of specific elements of a modern Greek ethnic identity.

I began by placing the subject under study within the wider theoretical framework concerning ethnic group identity construction and the ways it is perceived and experienced, individually and collectively, by members of an ethnic group. From the literature referring to modern nation-states creation, it can be deduced that ethnic identity is perceived to be a natural phenomenon connecting biological with cultural aspects, while at the same time it is characterized by a process of selection and authentication. Not all information concerning the past of a group contribute equally in this process and some that do not serve contemporary needs for a specific image are even completely ignored. Unchangeability and continuity through time are significant aspects of ethnic identity since they provide members of the group with stability and the sense of distinctiveness that they need. All these features promote the construction of boundaries that differentiate 'Us' from 'Others', since they are exhibited as existing continuously in time. As a consequence perceptions of time are crucial for restoring the imaginary national continuity.

Keeping the issue of ethnic continuity as a central point of my analysis, I restricted the above theoretical framework to the study of the case of Greece giving, thus, an historical dimension to my topic. By this I mean that I showed that the way modern Greeks perceive their past and handle the notion of 'continuity' from their

ancient ancestors is not fixed and final. It is embodied in the wider social, political, economic conditions of each historical era. It changes through time and acquires different contents according to the specific needs of each time. From a brief historical account we saw that during the Byzantine era and the period of the Ottoman Empire ancient Greeks were non-existent for the inhabitants of the territory we now call Greece. The notion of 'continuity' in the sense of the biological descent identified with specific cultural characteristics was developed in the years before the Fight for Independence from the Ottoman Rule that led to the constitution of the Greek nation-state. It was also part of the wider ideology of 'Greekness' that, supported, among others, by Folklore studies turned to the 'pure' Greek folk and to the natural environment in order to verify the continuity of ancient traditions. What is peculiar, however, to the Greek case and is widely acknowledged, is the fact that Greece and its ancestors are also claimed by the 'others' as their own. Contradictions that characterize the stance of Greeks against most powerful 'others' (mainly the West Europeans) are summarized in their perception of themselves as belonging to Europe but not as being Europeans in every sense.

If we take a look at the few and fragmentary accounts of the history of ancient Greek drama performances in the modern era, we will discover that it has not been performed in Greece for almost two thousand years. Ancient drama was re-discovered at the same historical moment that the whole ancient Greek culture was re-discovered in an effort by Greeks to claim a position among the nation-states of the West. Ancient drama constituted, and still is, a field where the continuity of the modern ethnic group from the ancient ancestors is demonstrated. The ways these theatrical performances of ancient drama have been perceived through time reflect wider ideas, beliefs, ideological constructions, and interpretations of the ethnic past, which have been crucial elements of the modern Greek identity construction process.

Ancient Greek drama in modern times has been systematically staged since 1954. These performances constitute a permanent cultural activity in Greece. They take place every summer in various ancient and modern open theatres around the country. The contradiction, however, lies in that although ancient drama is

considered to be of high significance, by politicians, artists and audiences alike, and attracts wide publicity, the official state policy on it is practically non-existent. Moreover, what all my informants stressed and I myself ascertained, is the fact that there is not even one drama school in the country that teaches ancient Greek drama. All the drama schools (State and private ones) dedicate only a limited time to the ancient Greek drama curriculum. In addition, the administration of the ancient Greek drama Festivals being under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, and its squabbles with the archaeological services illustrates the practical dimension of the contradictions.

Throughout participant observation I investigated the practices related to the staging of ancient Greek drama and also the experiences and expressions of theatre people concerning their sense of continuity from ancient ancestors. I came to realize that the distinctiveness of their ethnic identity, is established on the belief that the natural environment of Greece is unchangeable and that there exists a unique 'Greek gene' (*to elliniko Kytaro*) that survives, from antiquity until today within the 'Greek body'. From these the sense of uniqueness of the Greek ethnic identity can be deduced and is most eloquently expressed in the belief that only 'We', in relation to the 'Others', the foreigners, are the keepers of the ancient tradition and are able to stage 'authentic' ancient drama performances today.

Within this framework, perceptions of Time and Space play a crucial role. Since the tradition (in the sense of the continuous staging of ancient drama from antiquity until today in Greece) is non-existent, it is reconstructed through, and expressed in, the rhetoric of time (history) and space (natural and built environment) that has been developed. The construct of 'social memory' as an analytical tool, perceptions of time as the timelessness of ancient Greek drama, of the most glorious moments of the Greek history, and of the analogies of the facts described in the ancient texts with today, illuminates another aspect of the relationship of members of the ethnic group with their history. The natural environment is also perceived to be an agent of inspiration, preservation and transmission of characteristics peculiar to a unique, diachronic Greek identity. Ancient theatres as physical spaces with special characteristics (they contain *magia, fortisi* (magic, charges), ghosts, and spirits, are personified and treated as

holy places) contain and convey memories of the history of the Greek ethnos. In addition, the specific language, the common vocabulary that is used in order to describe the relation between the ethnic past and present through ancient drama, is utilized as a link between thought and collective memory, that could otherwise be interrupted.

All these elements that characterize the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Greek ethnic identity are explicitly demonstrated in the relationship between 'Us' and the 'Others'. According to my informants no foreigner is capable of performing ancient Greek drama as well as Greeks can. Ancient drama becomes part of the national heritage expressing the sense of superiority against the rest of the world. The rest of this world, however, refers specifically to Western Europeans, who at the same time are acknowledged to be more educated and theoretically advanced than the Greeks. This contradictory stance is due, on the one hand, to the fact that Greek antiquities are perceived (both by Greeks and Europeans) to be traces of the past of Europe. On the other hand, within the framework of the cultural hegemony of the West Europe over the periphery, Greece seeks to become modern by discovering and exoticizing its tradition.

Viewed from the analytical framework of social memory, ancient drama performances become occasions for celebration of a shared past that is reflected in the present and differentiate 'us' from the 'others'. Focusing on some specific characteristics, amongst which are regularity, repetitiveness, the fact that ancient theatres are used exclusively for ancient drama performances, the feeling of making a concession by allowing foreign groups to appear in the ancient theatres, appeals to ancestral elements, as well as explicit claims that they commemorate continuity from the past, reminded me of acts described as rituals. However, the fact that the central issue that, implicitly or explicitly, preoccupies all parties, artists, audiences, critics, etc. is whether modern performances constitute revival ('*anaviosi*') or interpretation of the drama performed in antiquity, made me conclude that these performances in Greece today are considered to be something more than mere theatrical events. They are commemorative ceremonies during which the sense of continuity from the ancient ancestors is publicly displayed. The agony for the preservation of old forms and the simultaneous need for innovation

in these performances shows that the “invention of tradition” is also present here, since power relations are also present within modern Greek society. However, a more ethnographic approach should treat identity construction through commemorative performances as a process, and as something people make for themselves, instead of something fixed and final.

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