

**Acting Tragedy in Twentieth-Century Greece:  
The Case of *Electra* by Sophocles**

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The work presented in this thesis is my own.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses the acting techniques employed by actors for tragedy on the Greek stage during the twentieth century. It argues that there were two main acting schools – ‘school’ here meaning an established unified style of acting shared by a group of actors and directors. The first, starting with the 1936 production of *Electra* by Sophocles directed by Dimitris Rontiris’s at the National Theatre of Greece and running through roughly to the late 1970s, developed from a vocal/rhetorical/text-based approach. The second, established by Karolos Koun’s Teatro Technis in 1942 and which can be said to have ended with his death in 1987, was based on a bodily/physical one. The thesis examines the ways in which these two schools combined and influenced acting, creating new tendencies in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

The focus here is on tragedy because this genre is presented on the Greek stage regularly, and, therefore, it is an eloquent example of the evolution of acting in Greece. Sophocles’s *Electra* has been chosen as a case study not only because the play was frequently staged throughout the twentieth century, but primarily because it was acted and directed by important actors and directors who occupied quite different positions within the Greek theatre field. Thus it is a play that provides the most potent example of the development of the acting schools in question.

This thesis is an empirical study using Greek actors and directors as its primary source. In giving them a strong voice, it follows their creative process and their perception of their roles and productions. At the same time, it provides a historical context for understanding the conditions of Greek theatre life and their impact on Greek actors and their work.

## Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page</i>	5
<i>Acknowledgements</i>		8
Introduction		10
1 The Foundations of Greek Theatre, 1830 – 1930		21
2 From the National Theatre to the Theatro Technis, 1930-1942		77
3 The National Theatre and its Legacy, 1936-1978		128
4 Karolos Koun and the Theatro Technis, 1942-1987		185
5 Acting Schools of the National Theatre and the Theatro Technis. Productions of <i>Electra</i> : 1972-1996		235
6 Alternate perspectives. Productions of <i>Electra</i> : 1983-1998. The Attis Theatre		296
Conclusion		352
Bibliography		357

## Illustrations

1. Jean Mounet-Sully as Oedipus in Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*. The play was performed in Athens in 1889 page 34
2. The stage alterations of the indoor venue of the theatre Olympia for Fotos Politis's production of *Oedipus the King* 59
3. The set of the 1927 production of *Hecuba* directed by Fotos Politis at the Panathenian Stadium 59
4. The Delphic Celebrations in 1927 – The Chorus and set of *Prometheus Bound* 69
5. The Delphic Celebrations in 1930 – The Chorus and set of *The Suppliants* 69
6. Katina Paxinou as Electra in the National Theatre's production of *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rontiris at the Herodus Atticus Theatre, 1936 95
7. The National Theatre's production of *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rontiris at the Herodus Atticus Theatre, 1936 – Katina Paxinou as Electra and the Chorus 99
8. The National Theatre's production of *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rontiris at the Herodus Atticus Theatre, 1936 – Katina Paxinou as Electra and the Chorus 103
9. Marika Kotopouli as Electra in the 1939 Kotopouli Company production of *Electra* directed by Karolos Koun 113
10. Nikos Engolopoulos's set for the Kotopouli Company *Electra* 116
11. Clytemnestra, the Pedagogue, Electra and the Chorus – *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1938 146
12. Eleni Hatziargiri as Electra and Hristos Parlas as Orestes – *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1978 154
13. Electra and the Chorus – *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1978 156
14. *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Takis Mouzenidis at the Epidaurus Theatre, 1961 – Electra and the Chorus 162
15. Anna Sinodinou as Electra in *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Takis Mouzenidis at the Epidaurus Theatre, 1961 165
16. *Electra* by the Peiraiko Theatro directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1960 – Electra and the Chorus 168
17. Aspasia Papathanasiou as Electra in *Electra* by the Peiraiko Theatro directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1960 170
18. *Electra* by the Helliniki Skene directed by Thanos Kotsopoulos at the Lycabetus Theatre, 1967 – The Pedagogue, Clytemnestra, Electra and the Chorus. View of the set 174

19. Anna Sinodinou as Electra in *Electra* by the Helliniki Skene directed by Thanos Kotsopoulos at the Lycabetus Theatre, 1967 176
20. Aspasia Papathanasiou as Electra in *Electra* directed by Aspasia Papathanasiou at the Palamidi Fortress in Nafplio, 1977 182
21. Orestes, Pylades and the Chorus in *Electra* directed by Aspasia Papathanasiou at the Palamidi Fortress in Nafplio, 1977 182
22. Dionisis Fotopoulos's set of *Electra* for the Theatro Technis production in Epidaurus, 1984 227
23. Reni Pittaki as Electra and Yiannis Rigas as Orestes in *Electra* by the Theatro Technis directed by Karolos Koun at Epidaurus, 1984 230
24. *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1972 – The Chorus. View of the set 239
25. Antigone Valakou as Electra in *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1972 243
26. *Electra* directed by Minos Volanakis at the State Theatre of Northern Greece – Electra and the Chorus 251
27. Anna Sinodinou as Electra in the production of the State Theatre of Northern Greece directed by Minos Volanakis 253
28. *Electra* by the Theatro tis Anoixis directed by Yiannis Margaritis at the theatre of Halandri, 1984 – The set 260
29. *Electra* by the Theatro tis Anoixis directed by Yiannis Margaritis at the theatre of Halandri, 1984 – The Pedagogue, Orestes and the Chorus 262
30. Natasa Zouka as Electra in *Electra* by the Theatro tis Anoixis directed by Yiannis Margaritis at the theatre of Halandri, 1984 264
31. Leda Tasopoulou as Electra in *Electra* by the Amphi-theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1991 269
32. Leda Tasopoulou as Electra and the Chorus in *Electra* by the Amphi-theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1991 271
33. *Electra* by the State Theatre of Northern Greece directed by Andreas Voutsinas at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1992 – Electra, Chrysothemis and the Chorus. View of the set 278
34. *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Lydia Koniordou at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1996 – Electra and the Chorus 288
35. Lydia Koniordou as Electra and Aspasia Papathanasiou as Clytemnestra in *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Lydia Koniordou at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1996 292
36. *Electra* by the Cyprus Theatre Organisation directed by Mihalis Kakoyiannis at the Epidaurus Theatre, 1983 – The Chorus. View of the set 301

37. *Electra* by the Cyprus Theatre Organisation directed by Mihalis Kakoyiannis at the Epidaurus Theatre, 1983 – Irene Pappas as Electra and Annita Santorinaiou as Chrysothemis 304
38. *Electra* by the Karezi-Kazakos Company directed by Robert Sturua at the Theatre of Epidaurus – Jenny Karezi as Electra and the Chorus 312
39. Jenny Karezi as Electra in the 1987 production of *Electra* directed by Robert Sturua by the Karezi-Kazakos Company 314
40. Marietta Rialdi as Electra in the 1985 production of *Electra* by the Peiramatiko Theatro tis Polis directed by Marietta Rialdi at the Fix ice factory 321
41. *Electra* directed by Nikos Diamantis at the Theatro Semio, 1996 – Ioanna Makri as Electra, Vagelio Andreadaki as Clytemnestra and the Chorus 325
42. *Electra* directed by Nikos Diamantis at the Theatro Semio, 1996 – The Chorus 328
43. *Electra* by the Theatre Company ‘diplous eros’ directed by Mihail Marmarinos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1998 – Amalia Moutousi as Electra and Constantinos Avarikiotis as Orestes 334
44. Amalia Moutousi as Electra in *Electra* by the Theatre Company ‘diplous eros’ directed by Mihail Marmarinos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1998 337
45. *Electra* by the Theatre Company ‘diplous eros’ directed by Mihail Marmarinos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1998 – Amalia Moutousi as Electra and Nonika Galinea as Clytemnestra 339

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## INTRODUCTION

On 8 August 1998, the author of this thesis attended Sophocles's *Electra* directed by Mihail Marmarinos at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus.

Marmarinos's production made various interesting proposals regarding the play as well as the staging of ancient tragedy. Marmarinos cast a mixed Chorus, used film projections and expanded the stage beyond the orchestra and the area of the ancient skênê (σκηνή) of the Epidaurus Theatre. However, what attracted the author's attention was the way in which the director used his actors. The employment of the word 'used' is not random. It was apparent that Marmarinos had subjected his actors to specific conditions that affected the way they acted. For instance, Marmarinos had both Amalia Moutousi's (*Electra*) legs tied to each other with a leather band in order to depict *Electra*'s emotional condition visually as well as her relationship with her mother and her position in the palace. Moreover, by employing this device, Marmarinos enabled Moutousi to experience her part physically.

This discovery regarding Marmarinos's directing approach and Moutousi's acting attempt led, in turn, to a series of reflections on acting approaches to ancient Greek tragedy on the contemporary Greek stage. In 1932, the foundation of the National Theatre had signalled a new era in the Greek theatre. For at least over three decades the National was considered to be the sole Greek company fit for the presentation of Greek tragedy (Hourmouzios, 1978: 263). It was clear, however, that from the foundation of the National Theatre of Greece to the time of Marmarinos's production, the way tragedy

was acted had fundamentally changed. It had shifted from a text-based approach to a physical one, experimenting with the possibilities of acting.

This thesis is an account of the prevailing acting schools of Greece and discusses the acting techniques employed by actors for tragedy of the Greek stage during the twentieth century. It argues that there are two main acting schools in the Greek theatre. The first stemmed from a text-based approach which focused on the text's reciting and pronunciation. The second developed from a physical and emotional approach that focused on actors and their abilities. The word 'school' here means an established unified style or way of acting, sharing common characteristics. It is a style adapted by a group of practitioners – actors and directors – following a founder, who initiated an approach or a new method, and communicated it to his students or colleagues.

The study developed here observes that the first school sprang from the National Theatre of Greece (Εθνικό Θέατρο της Ελλάδας). It was introduced by the 1936 production of *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rontiris at the National Theatre of Greece and ran through roughly to the late 1970s. It developed from a vocal/rhetorical/text-based standpoint because Rontiris believed that, by following the rhythm of the text, the actors had power over their emotions and the way they were expressed (Rontiris, 1961).<sup>1</sup> This school had a very strong impact on Greek acting because it represented the National Theatre's approach, an institution that presented at least one tragedy production per year since its foundation – with the exception of 1944 and 1945 when no

ancient tragedies were presented – and at least three since 1955 and the establishment of the Epidaurus Festival.

The second school of acting was established by Karolos Koun's Theatro Technis (Θέατρο Τέχνης – Κάρολος Κουν) in 1942 and can be said to have ended with his death in 1987. By contrast with the National's acting school, Koun's acting school was based on a pronounced physical approach to work on the stage. Koun did not dismiss the meaning of the text, even though the text was not his primary concern. He focused on emotion and the way it could be transmitted to the audience, while neglecting pronunciation and recitation (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008; interview with Rittaki, 5 December 2008). Koun's school influenced Greek acting in that it changed entirely the way tragedy was performed especially after the international recognition for his 1965 production of *The Persians*. Koun's focal point was the emotional truth of the characters of the ancient plays, the multivocality of the Chorus, ancient tragedy's connection with Greek popular rites and rituals, as well as influences of contemporary currents such as the epic theatre and the theatre of the absurd (Koun, 1981: 62-65).

The thesis also argues that the directors and actors who worked on tragedy after the 1970s were influenced by the explorations of the two main acting schools. It, therefore, examines the ways in which these two schools were combined, leading to new achievements that altered the way ancient Greek tragedy was staged and acted. It studies actors and directors, who were imbued with the teachings of both schools, creating novel productions and initiating new ideas regarding the staging of tragedy in the last three decades

of the twentieth century. Furthermore, it examines those actors and directors, who experimented on the staging as well as the space where tragedy was presented from the beginning of the 1980s until the end of the 1990s.

The focus of this work is on tragedy because this genre is presented on the Greek stage annually – at least three to five productions from the middle of the 1950s and approximately ten since the inclusion of companies other than the National in the Epidaurus festival in 1975 (Fotopoulos, 2000: 50-56; Georgousopoulos, 2002: 247-253). As a consequence, it is a powerful and vivid example of the evolution of acting in Greece. Moreover, the ideas and meanings of the ancient texts have an importance independent of their life on stage. Thus they are open to many readings, which are, in turn, linked to the ways they are presented. For example, the way the Chorus is viewed socially, politically or theoretically defines its presentation on the stage. Or, the accentuation of links to everyday life alters the way the actors act. Thus tragedy can map out the shift from a text-based to a physical approach.

The choice of the play *Electra* by Sophocles as a case study was made because it defined significant turning points in the presentation of Greek tragedy. *Electra* was the production that introduced and established the Rontirian acting style of the National Theatre in 1936. Three years later, following the success of the National's production, Marika Kotopouli staged the same play under Koun's direction in order to show the National the way the play should be performed (Iliadis, 1996: 279-280). Rontiris toured the world with his Peiraiko Theatro (Πειραικό Θέατρο) presenting *Electra* with Aspasia Papathanasiou, which won her the First International Acting Prize at

the Theatre of Nations Festival in Paris in 1960. It was the 1972 production of Spyros Evangelatos's production of *Electra* at the National Theatre that signalled a change in the way tragedy was performed in that institution. When Papathanasiou founded the significant organisation DESMI Centre for the Ancient Greek Drama – Research and Practical Applications (Κέντρο Έρευνας και Πρακτικών Εφαρμογών του Αρχαίου Ελληνικού Δράματος «Δεσμοί») in 1975, she presented *Electra* once more, stressing the connection between the work of DESMI and her master, Rontiris. Finally, it was the 1998 Marmarinos's *Electra* that inspired this study.

Overall, Sophocles's *Electra* was frequently staged throughout the twentieth century, providing the researcher with a wide range of information and data. It was acted and directed by important representative actors and directors who defined the Greek theatre field and who occupied quite different positions within it. It seemed that all actors and directors who were important to this study had directed *Electra* or had acted in this play. For instance, even though Koun's 1984 production of the play was not the most important of the company, it concentrated the Theatro Technis's approach on ancient tragedy. Furthermore, the author of the thesis had performed in the 1995 reprise of the 1991 Evangelatos's production, giving to her the ability to have a direct experience of the staging of the play. Thus productions of *Electra* provided the most effective and eloquent example of the development of acting schools in Greece because they completed the circle and covered the period with which this thesis was concerned. The sole exception was Theodoros Terzopoulos, who never directed the play, but whose work on tragedy was incorporated, nevertheless, in the study. His work was far too significant to be ignored

because Terzopoulos proposes a complete new way of acting and a directing approach to Greek tragedy, which goes beyond the text and focuses on rhythm and imagery (Awasti, 2008: 126).

The purpose of this study is multifaceted. First and foremost, it aims to give a potent voice to actors. It appears that Greek theatre studies and books focus on texts, productions, directors and, occasionally, companies. However, there is very little scholarly interest in Greece in the actor. This thesis's goal, therefore, is to focus on actors and the process they follow when approaching and performing a role. This process is complex and often difficult to grasp and follow. However, it was familiar to the author of the study because she is a professional actress. Therefore, she was able to analyse and follow it, offering insight into the way other actors train and perform. Moreover, she had studied in both the National Theatre's and State Theatre of Northern Greece's drama schools, acquiring a first-hand experience on how tragedy was taught there. She also worked with directors who had studied at the Teatro Technis such as Antonis Antoniou, and important tragedy directors such as Evangelatos and Lydia Koniordou. As can be deduced from the above, this thesis is an empirical study in that it uses Greek actors and directors as its primary source. It became clear from the start that they would be the only ones who would be able to guide the author through their creative process and their perception of their work in the specified productions. As a consequence, a large part of the thesis places attention on their experience, quotes their words and uses their examples, combining them with the analysis of their productions.

Furthermore, this thesis aims to fill a gap. In Greece, there are numerous historical books on ancient Greek tragedy. Yiannis Sideris's *The Ancient Theatre on the Neo-Greek Stage 1817-1932* is a very important book on the staging of ancient Greek tragedy in modern Greece. Sideris presents amateur and professional productions of ancient tragedy, citing reviews, articles and critical observations on them. Nevertheless, he does not always focus on acting and his study finishes with the National's first production in 1932. There are also numerous studies on ancient Greek theatre and ancient tragedy. Scholars such as Horst-Dieter Blume examine the conditions of ancient Greek theatre in ancient Athens. Oliver Taplin in his *Greek Tragedy in Action* and David Wiles in his *Tragedy in Athens* discuss the staging of ancient Greek plays in ancient Greece. Analyses of contemporary productions of ancient tragedy including some Greek attempts feature in Marianne McDonald's *Ancient Sun, Modern Light*, Michael Walton's *Living Greek Theatre* or Wiles's *Greek Theatre Performance*. Olga Taxidou explores Greek tragedy in relation to twentieth-century thinkers and theatre practitioners in *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*. However, there is no exclusive focus on acting in Greek theatre productions. This thesis aims, therefore, to examine Greek acting and Greek productions during the twentieth century, and especially from 1930 until 1998, while providing a historical context for understanding the conditions of Greek theatre life and their impact on Greek actors and their work.

The study places theatre productions and practitioners historically, and analyses actors' and directors' work within this context. As a consequence, a large part of this research is based on archival research. Archives of actors and directors in the Theatre Museum (Θεατρικό Μουσείο), the Theatre Library



(Θεατρική Βιβλιοθήκη), the DESMI Centre for the Ancient Drama and the Greek Literary and Historic Archive (Ελληνικό Λογοτεχνικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο) were researched. Notes of actors and directors found in their texts and scripts were used to illuminate their working process. Newspapers, journals and companies' almanacs shed light on the productions and gave an overview of the productions as well as the companies staging the work. Video and audio recordings of productions were utilised when the author of the thesis had not seen the production live on stage. Finally, interviews of actors and directors comprised the primary source of this study because, as observed above, the aim of this study is to demonstrate to the reader the actors' and directors' working process. This can be best achieved when actors and directors speak directly about their work.

This empirical study has used Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production. It is a theory that provides the tools to discuss a living field such as the Greek theatre in all its complexities. Even though Bourdieu does not write about the theatre, his theory can shed great light on all performing arts.

Maria Shevtsova notes that

Bourdieu pays little attention to theatre. Yet his neglect should not be assumed to suggest that his framework, while apt for the visual and verbal arts, is somehow not open to the performing arts. On the contrary, his theories are extremely pertinent for the study of the theatre as a performing art *par excellence* (Shevtsova, 2002: 36).

His theory of the field of cultural production, which focuses on the dynamics developed within it, is utilised to explain, explore and map out the forces that form and define the Greek theatre of the twentieth century.

This study was structured chronologically, although chapters tend to overlap because theatre, as has already been noted, is a living field, and as every field comprised social agents with different aspirations, goals and plans, it gives life to new tendencies and currents while sustaining the ones already in existence. This means that, for instance, the National Theatre's school continued to present productions following Rontiris's guidelines, while hosting Evangelatos's 1972 production of *Electra*.

The first chapter covers the hundred years from the foundation of the Greek State to the foundation of the Greek National Theatre (1830-1930). It offers a historical context so that the reader can have an overview of the conditions of acting on the Greek stage. It is a framework from which the remaining five chapters take their resonance. Chapter Two reviews the circumstances occurring from 1930 until 1942. During this important period, the institution of the National Theatre was established, the Theatro Technis was founded and the juxtaposition between the two companies begun to be consolidated. This chapter provides an overview of Rontiris's and Koun's ideas within that period, placing them historically and culturally in relation to other companies and their interpretation of tragedy. It also examines Koun's collaboration with the famous actress of the Greek theatre, Kotopouli, and her production of *Electra* by Sophocles, as well as Linos Karzis's ideas on the production of ancient Greek tragedy.

Chapter Three focuses on the National's history from 1936 until 1978 – the dates of the first production and last reprise of Rontiris's production of *Electra*. The chapter analyses the Rontirian and the National's acting school. It

presents productions of *Electra* at the National and productions of *Electra* by former members of the National and Rontiris's students, that is, Anna Sinodinou, Thanos Kotsopoulos and Papathanasiou. The fourth chapter focuses on the Theatro Technis. It covers the period from the foundation of the company in 1942 to Koun's death in 1987. It provides a historical overview of the company and an examination of the company's approach to performance.

The last two chapters present acting and directing approaches during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Chapter Five focuses on productions that combine the influences of the two Greek theatre acting schools identified in this research. These productions were presented from 1972 to 1995 in open-air theatres during the summer, preserving one of the most important Greek theatre traditions concerning Greek tragedy. They were directed by Evangelatos, Minos Volanakis, Yiannis Margaritis, Andreas Voutsinas and Koniordou, who have worked with both National Greek Theatres as well as with private companies. The sixth chapter goes from 1983 to 1998, focusing on the examples of productions of Mihalis Kakoyiannis and Robert Sturua, who studied abroad or were foreign and who were not nurtured by the Greek theatre field. It also discusses productions in open-air as well as indoor theatres, detecting a tendency to include tragedy in the winter repertoires, taking for case study productions by Marietta Rialdi and Nikos Diamantis. Finally, it analyses Marmarinos's experimental production at the Epidaurus Festival.

During the entire thesis reference to the play *Electra* always refers to the play by Sophocles.

Greek words are given in parenthesis next to the English translation, when the meaning of the Greek word is important.

Greek newspapers titles and companies names are transliterated, for instance, *E Kathimerini* rather than *The Daily* (*Η Καθημερινή*).

To avoid confusion the name of every establishment, organism, club, company, union or school is also written in Greek. For the same reason, first names of persons cited are repeated in every chapter in their first appearance in that chapter. Moreover, in each subsection of the fifth and sixth chapters, the first name of the director and leading lady of the production discussed is also repeated. Finally, in the case of common surnames such as Eleftherios Venizelos and Sophocles Venizelos (both Greek politicians), Georgios Papandreou and Andreas Papandreou (Greek politicians and father and son), Emelios Veakis and Yiannis Veakis (actor and director, respectively), and Aspasia Papathanasiou and Vangelis Papathanasiou (the first is female and the second male), the first name of the one who is mentioned second is always repeated during the entire course of the thesis.

All translations from Greek, unless otherwise indicated, are by the author of the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> From a typescript that has no page numbers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Foundations of Greek Theatre, 1830 – 1930

The Greek state was founded in 1830. During the first centennial of the independent Greek state, due to the 400 years of subordination to the Ottoman Empire, Greek theatre and its audience had to discover the artistic currents that dominated Europe since the Renaissance. Greek theatre had also to come in contact with all the prevailing artistic currents of the nineteenth and early twentieth century such as romanticism, realism and expressionism to name but a few. The task was enormous. Yet, the susceptibility of professional and amateur actors to this process and their ability to integrate these currents into Greek cultural life, the audience's thirst for theatre, and the political will of enlightened politicians such as Georgios Papandreou, who set the foundations for the creation of the National Theatre of Greece (Εθνικό Θέατρο της Ελλάδος) by 1930, made this task possible. Moreover, the need of the newly formed state to connect with its glorious ancient past in order to establish its sovereignty and shape its identity was assisted by the use of ancient Greek tragedies and, as well, contemporary plays based on their plots such as *Electra* by Hugo von Hoffmansthal. The way productions of these works were acted developed greatly during these hundred years, as this chapter will demonstrate.

#### 1.1 The Foundations

After the independence of the Greek State in 1830, there existed only amateur companies whose aims were recreational.<sup>1</sup> More often than not, their

members used theatre as an expression of their patriotic enthusiasm, and for educational purposes. These companies originated from the islands of the Aegean such as Syros, which was the wealthiest of Greek islands, and those of the Ionian Sea, which were subject to the Republic of Venice and other Italian principalities and were protected from Ottoman domination. Gradually, Athens became the centre of Greek theatre life, where culturally significant and influential amateur groups existed right through the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. The Society for the Instruction of Ancient Dramas (Εταιρεία υπέρ της Διδασκαλίας Αρχαίων Δραμάτων), a group that aimed at presenting ancient Greek tragedies in the original ancient Greek text and was founded and managed by University professor Georgios Mistriotis, was one of those groups. Furthermore, performance members of influential endeavours came from amateur groups, like the young women who took part in the Choruses of the First and Second Delphic Celebrations (Δελφικές Εορτές), an enterprise that altered the way ancient tragedy was performed. This will be reviewed in the last part of the present chapter.

When the first amateur groups sprang up in the Greek capital, they comprised, nevertheless, several professional players. Next to the amateurs, who treated theatre as a pastime, appeared some members who collaborated with the amateurs, but who aimed to work professionally in the theatre. As the demographic and social conditions matured with time, professional companies were able to support themselves, and appeared beside the amateur groups already in existence. Professional companies initially toured on the mainland, the islands and the Hellenic communities beyond Greece's borders –

Constantinople, Smyrna, south Russia and Alexandria. Touring was necessary because the financial conditions did not allow these companies to perform in Athens regularly. After the late 1860s, they continued to tour during the winter, and performed in Athens in the summertime (Spathis, 1983:19). The actors comprising them were generally self-taught. Legally, these companies consisted of shareholders, who shared the gains and the losses of each production (ibid.).

Theatre ceased to be a hobby. A new world was born, which comprised groupings of people who had a business-related interest in the theatre apart from solely an artistic or a recreational one. These groupings created the professional companies. It is important to note that there existed a strong bond between the aims and intentions of both amateur and professional companies. The progressive development (from amateur to amateur companies with professionals to professional companies) indicates that they interacted on issues of staging and acting as well as ideology. Both types of company performed similar repertoires (contemporary patriotic dramas, adaptations of plays by Friedrich von Schiller, Victor Hugo or William Shakespeare, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century adaptations of Greek tragedies and ancient tragedies) and occupied the same acting spaces (Spathis, 1983: 17-21).<sup>2</sup>

The position of Greek actors within society during this period was complex. The first attempt to establish their statutory and social rights was in 1883 with the foundation of the Greek Actors Association (Σύνδεσμος Ελλήνων Ηθοποιών) (Hadjipandazis, 1992: 273). However, 1901 provided the major

turning point for Greek theatre, socially, structurally and artistically. The Royal Theatre of Greece (Βασιλικόν Θέατρον της Ελλάδος) and the Nea Skene (Νέα Σκηνή), two newly founded theatrical organisations, signalled this significant change and altered the theatrical life of the period. These organisations offered Greek actors a *metteur en scène*, and a permanent venue. At this point, actors become 'employees'.<sup>3</sup>

However, despite the fact that professional companies had existed since the 1860s, the profession of the actor was neither fully established nor socially integrated even during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Thodoros Hadjipandazis offers an explanation by commenting on the social position of actors in relation to an established bourgeoisie and a coherent working class during the first two decades of the twentieth century:

On the one hand, actors were not included in the educational system due to the lack of drama schools and of a valid degree. Thus, they were not considered 'educated', and they were not classified as equal members of the bourgeois professional world. Moreover, their consorting with the demiworld of cabaret 'artistes' and their identification by public opinion with paratheatrical shows rendered their profession disreputable according to bourgeois ethics. On the other hand, the workers considered actors intellectuals and found it difficult to identify with them (Hadjipandazis, 1992: 271-72).

Hadjipandazis concludes that 'pushed away at the edges of the two classes or, rather, in a peculiar void created in between them, actors as a social group had no class identity' (ibid., 1992: 272). He implies that the absence of a degree and of a systematic education affected actors beyond the stage, as well as on it. It can be deduced, from his observations, that there existed a strong link between the actors' social position and their educational qualification. Thus it becomes impossible to separate the one from the other. From this perspective, the attempts to create drama schools, and their actual



formations during the first three decades of the twentieth century can be seen with a different eye. The fact that Greek actors aimed at creating schools which would provide them with an acknowledged degree must be linked with their realisation that this would empower their social position as well as their performance on the stage. It will be useful to keep this interdependent relationship in mind when examining the artistic qualifications and qualities of Greek actors.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'field' is useful for this discussion because it explains, first of all, that there are many different fields such as, for example, literature, law, the theatre, and so on. Each field involves multiple practices and multiple social agents who defend their interests by taking positions in it, and their position-taking shapes their disposition (Bourdieu, 1984). Maria Shevtsova explains:

By 'disposition' Bourdieu refers to such things as outlook, expectation, selection, evaluation and acquisition of knowledge and insight through exposure to art and culture generally, all of which goes under the name of 'taste'. Position and disposition undersign the holder's *prise de position* [position-taking] in respect of the field, that is to say, how she/he assesses it, situates it, places herself/himself in it and takes a position on it, as she/he might take, say, a political position or a moral one. All this concerning artistic fields of any kind helps to explain why, in the case of the theatre, the profession is not uniform, and why theatre practitioners generate an immense variety of styles, approaches and attitudes over and above their differences as individuals (Shevtsova, 2002: 44).

Shevtsova points out that the field comprises multiple individuals, who take positions within it according to their disposition, as explained above. This process of the individuals' different position-taking explains the various currents and styles that pertain to the field of theatre. Moreover, it can be deduced that when a position or a disposition is altered, for example, if a

social agent's political position changes because her/his disposition has changed, then this change influences the field as a whole. This is possible because the field is made up of human beings, who are social agents and as such do not cease to act upon their world (ibid.: 39). The notion that the field is in constant flux can help to map out the struggles undergone within the newly formed Greek theatre, which represented amateurs and professionals from the very beginning and this mixture gave it its specific character. On the one hand, the amateur players, who mostly came from an upper-class or bourgeois background, were not tied to the economic rules of the field, that is, they were not obliged to earn their living from working within it. They had the luxury of enjoying autonomy: they could define themselves, as 'the sole masters of their art while refusing to recognize any other master other than their art' (Bourdieu, 1993: 169). On the other hand, until the beginning of the twentieth century, Greek theatre comprised companies that featured a few acknowledged, well-known actors, who were surrounded by a large number of unknown colleagues. However, the entirety of professional theatre people was subordinated to the economic restrictions that their need for survival imposed on them. In a period during which there was no state support, actors had to rely on the box-office.

After 1901, the rules were significantly altered because, next to the companies that struggled to survive from the box-office's profits, new forces entered the theatrical field. First, the Royal Theatre was established and took a dominant position due to its substantial economic funding and the legitimacy, which the support of the King provided. Second, the Nea Skene, a company that aimed to copy theatres like André Antoine's Théâtre Libre, was

founded, with the aim of representing an autonomous company that could operate unobstructed from any financial restrictions. Finally, a large number of intellectuals, authors, journalists, poets and academics started becoming involved with the theatre, writing new plays or becoming critics, so as to form public opinion and dominate the Greek theatre field. At the same time, a fraction of the amateur groups was able to appropriate their supposed autonomy in order to serve their extra-theatrical interests. This was the case with the Society for the Instruction of Ancient Dramas of Mistriotis, who employed his group in order to strengthen the University's social and cultural position and serve his private aspirations, as will be analysed in the following section of this chapter.

## **1.2 Acting traditions**

Professional Modern Greek theatre can be considered to begin between 1856 and 1862 in Athens, when the first professional companies were striving to establish their position (Spathis, 1983: 19). As noted above, both amateur and professional groups performed Greek tragedies from their very first productions. The professionals' first attempt at tragedy was in Constantinople in 1863 by the Dimitrakos Brothers' Company. The play was *Antigone* by Sophocles translated by Alexandros Rizos Ragavis, and the leading part was performed by Pipina Vonasera (Spathis, 1983: 20; Sideris, 1976: 34-34, 42-5; Sideris, 1999: 212-215).<sup>4</sup> This performance was reprised in Athens at the celebrations of the wedding of King Georgios I in 1867. In this second performance, the majority of the actors were amateurs and only three professionals in total were used for the leading parts. The play was presented

at the Herodus Atticus Theatre (Ωδείο Ηρώδου του Αττικού) – the first occasion in modern times in Greece when an open-air theatre was used for a performance of an ancient tragedy. However, the round orchestra and the open stage were transformed into a stage with a proscenium arch (Sideris, 1976: 42-45).<sup>5</sup>

The play was staged in line with the conventions of neoclassic tragedy: the actors performed on a raised, proscenium arch stage; the Chorus was treated as an *intermedio* as had occurred in the Italian Renaissance theatre; the play was divided into acts; and it was acted more in a melodramatic style than a tragic one. This was the common practice of the period both in amateur groups and in European companies that toured Greece. Neither the actors nor the audience acknowledged any difference between the two genres, melodrama and tragedy.<sup>6</sup> Generally, all productions followed a similar pattern where costumes, sets and props were the same for all productions of a given company's repertoire, including ancient tragedy. The music was composed by famous foreign composers. For instance, incidental music that had been composed in 1841 by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy was used for the 1867 production of *Antigone* (Sideris, 1976: 43; Sideris, 1999: 212-213). The German composer had composed his piece independently of the Greek productions, representing a completely different tradition and culture. The music, which is the only element of the *Antigone* performance preserved to this day, explicitly indicates that the style of each production was deeply influenced by the neoclassical approach to Greek tragedy identified above.

Greek actors tried to improve their acting skills. The famous actor of Greek productions in Bucharest, Konstantinos Kiriakos Aristias, who came to the mainland right after the foundation of the Greek State, tried to educate actors by founding a theatre club in Athens in 1840. He was disappointed, however, and resigned that same year because the Bavarian Regency sponsored the Italian companies in Athens. The next actor-teacher, Nikolaos Lekatsas, who had had a career on the British stage, arrived in Athens, in 1881. He taught acting at the Conservatory of Athens (Ωδείο Αθηνών), formed his own company, toured abroad (Turkey, Egypt, Rumania and Russia), and left Athens disappointed, as did Aristias, in 1897.<sup>7</sup> Thus the majority of Greek actors were influenced by the acting style of the Italian companies, which toured Greece during the second part of the nineteenth century and, especially, by the great Italian actress, Adelaide Ristori.<sup>8</sup> Her large and taut movements and her grandiloquent diction became the model for Greek actresses performing tragedy until the end of the nineteenth century (Sideris, 1976: 41).

At the same time, the foundation of Mistriotis's Society for the Instruction of Ancient Dramas in December 1895 proposed a different mode for the staging of tragedy.<sup>9</sup> The Society's goal was the revival of Greek tragedy and the reconstruction of the presumed ways of performance of the fifth century using the ancient Greek text. It is important to note that the group was born in a University of Athens circle, not in a theatrical environment, and was destined to serve the University's nationalistic interests. The group thus appropriated ancient tragedy, giving to it an almost chauvinistic national significance by rigorously emphasising the link between ancient and contemporary Greece.

The strong bond between the powerful politician Theodoros Diliyiannis and the Society's President, Mistriotis, perpetuated this nationalism.<sup>10</sup> During a period in which the borders of the Greek state had not been finalised, Diliyiannis supported the invasion of Epirus and Thessaly that led to the 1897 war between Greece and Turkey, which was catastrophic for Greece.

The Society presented *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra* by Sophocles, *Medea*, *Iphigenia in Tauris* and offered a different perspective on the staging of Greek tragedy. As noted above, all productions were performed in the original ancient Greek text, a language only the scholars of the University and an educated upper-class minority could understand. The costumes, which were expensive and luxurious, were reproduced from depictions of ancient dress on vases and statues, and were created especially for each character – a practice followed solely by amateur companies. The important daily Athenian newspaper *Aste* (*Ἄστὴ*) noted, in an anonymous editorial, that the costumes of the production of *Electra* cost 5.000 francs (Anonymous, 25 March 1899). Furthermore, the Society never used music composed by non-Greeks. In its Declaration, it stated that it would set all the verses of the Chorus to original music (Sideris, 1976: 116). In theory, this could have been a helpful innovation for the Greek theatre, but, unfortunately, the music scores that were produced did not influence the Greek stage. Moreover, although the Society claimed it understood ancient tragedy, it could not escape the powerful influence of the French and Italian neoclassical tradition and continued to divide the original text into acts (Sideris, 1976: 125). As for the acting space, the Society was allowed to perform in an open-air theatre space on only one occasion. At all other times it had to use an indoor venue.<sup>11</sup>

The Chorus in the productions did not dance or move at all. It merely stood still, even during powerful scenes of the play (Sideris, 1976: 120). This practice, in the case of *Electra*, was opposed by the critic in the *Aste*, who signed as 'Member of the American Archaeological School'. He posed questions concerning the Chorus's stillness, and suggested that this practice should be reviewed and altered (cited in Sideris, 1976: 139). The Chorus's immobility was mostly due to the fact that the members of the Society had not yet grasped the theatrical and social significance of the Chorus. Numerous significant artistic changes, but also historic and social ones, had to occur for the Chorus to have equal importance on the stage with the protagonists.

However, despite its inability to deal with the Chorus, the Society attempted to propose an acting style for tragedy. The critic of the daily Athenian high-circulation newspaper *Proia* (*Πρωΐα* – Anonymous, 28 March 1896) suggests that the actors who performed in the opening production of the Society's *Antigone* were not 'psychopaths', as was usually the case when professional actors performed the play. On the contrary, they acted in a simple, Doric, solid manner, which was fitting for tragedy (ibid.). The important historian of Greek theatre, Yiannis Sideris, points out, when commenting on this review, that the unsigned critic (he insinuates it is Mistrionis himself) castigated Evangelia Paraskevopoulou's acting style, which was strongly influenced by Ristori (Sideris, 1976: 126). Sideris also implies that the President of the Society explicitly objected to the practices of the professionals because he believed that only the Society was capable of presenting the ancient Greek plays. But, even if that was the case, the fact of the matter is that, after its first performance, the Society employed for its following productions Marcus

Sigalas, a well-known teacher of recitation and acting, to work with its actors. This indicates that its members realised that the actors of the Society had to develop their voice, vocal skills, and recitation abilities. Nevertheless, critics still believed that the actors delivered a dry, one-dimensional rendition of a text that nobody could understand (Stefanou, 10 March 1928).

What is important about this venture is that it shows that the Society was in search of an acting style suitable for ancient Greek tragedy. It seems to have been the only theatre company in Greece, at the time, that separated ancient Greek from neoclassical tragedy. Furthermore, the performers were thoroughly prepared for their performance, and did not use a prompter (Sideris, 1976: 127). This was a helpful innovation for the Greek stage, where the prompter had become one of the protagonists of performances because, more often than not, the actors went onto the stage without knowing their lines. These are some of the few positive contributions of the Society to the staging of tragedy.

However, the Society's persistence in the use of the original ancient Greek text held back the Greek theatre's development in an era when a more direct communication with larger audiences had to be established. Generally, the intellectuals and the theatre people of the period were against the Society's productions and its use of the ancient Greek text. The famous playwright, theatre critic and academic, Grigorios Xenopoulos, called these attempts 'vulgar, sad, pitiful and desperate' (Xenopoulos, 1906: 345). He claimed that the Greek theatre needed productions in a language understood by the audience, which would promote the writing of new plays and form theatrically



aware spectators. There was also a need for guidance in all matters concerning staging (ibid.), which came from abroad.

The humiliating war of 1897 between Greece and Turkey, after which Greece had to capitulate on extremely unfavourable terms, resulted in the cancellation of the appearances of Jean Mounet-Sully, who was to perform for the Athenian audience that same year. The Athenian stage had to wait two more years for him to come to Greece. His performance then coincided with the visit of another important European actress, Eleonora Duse, who also came to Greece on holiday in 1899. It must be noted that apart from the productions that were presented on the Greek stage, the mere visit of famous and significant actors instantly gave rise to discussions about the conditions of the Greek theatre. Thus, the presence of Duse, and that of her partner, Gabriele D'Annunzio, stirred up discussions concerning the Athenian theatre.

D'Annunzio read the *Oresteia* under the Lion Gate of the Mycenaean Palace, thus establishing a connection between the ancient text, the palace where the Atreus family lived, and the contemporary world. His tragedy *La città morta* was inspired by the ruins of Mycenae (Woodhouse, 1998: 134).

Sideris remarked that Greece was 'reconnected with Europe the year that Duse and D'Annunzio visited Athens' (Sideris, 1976: 147). By his statement, Sideris noted that Greece had been cut off from Europe for a very long period. He claimed that Greece, after the subordination to the Ottoman Empire, had to seek cultural guidance in Europe in order to reconnect with the existing theatrical traditions. He, thus, highlighted that the Greek theatre needed a European model for its inspiration and development. Regarding Mounet-



1. Jean Mounet-Sully as Oedipus in Sophocles's *Oedipus King*. The play was performed in Athens in 1889

Sully's production, Sideris observed that Mounet-Sully's famous performance of *Oedipus the King* was the first ancient tragedy production presented in Greece by a professional company according to contemporary European theatrical principles (ibid.:148). He considered this performance a turning point in Greek acting and staging (ibid.: 160) because it was the first time that an important professional production was presented on the Greek stage, as opposed to the low quality productions of ancient tragedy by Greek companies or Mistrionis's Society. Sideris claimed that inspiration and guidance for the Greek theatre came from Mounet-Sully rather than from Mistrionis's techniques (ibid.: 158).

It would be more precise to argue that Mounet-Sully brought to the Greek stage the conventions of the Comédie-Française, namely, eloquent diction and movement with elaborate and expensive sets. The question is: How did Mounet-Sully act, exactly? The performance of *Oedipus the King* that Mounet-Sully gave on Monday 28 September 1899 at the Municipal Theatre of Athens received several favourable reviews.<sup>12</sup> The critic of the newspaper *Aste* observed that

his performance was an apocalypse of movements, magnificent postures, inimitable fluctuation of the voice, unattainable wealth and variety; it was ... an exhibition of ancient vases and vessels presenting a picture of the postures of an ancient king (29 September 1899).

Stefanos Stefanou, in a contemplation of his meeting with Mounet-Sully, noted that the French actor had confessed to him several years later that he had spent hours at the Louvre observing ancient Greek statues and vases in order to study them and copy their postures (Stefanou, 29 February 1928).

Based on the analyses of the *Aste* review, it is clear that Mounet-Sully's movements were grand, supple, but at the same time static because the idea of hieratic posturing derived from his perception of the statues and vases. This also indicates that the pace of his performance was rather slow, and that he concentrated on the gravity of movement, which slowed down his speech. His performance gave the audience time to examine and value his elaborate movements and listen to the poetry of the text. It is evident that this was an acting style created for people who could sit back and enjoy themselves in the playhouse. Time was not an issue for spectators at the end of the nineteenth century, and Mounet-Sully took his time on the stage. Thus his slow-paced acting was suggestive and his 'magnificent gestures' were powerful. However,

his 'fluctuation of voice', which had 'unattainable wealth and variety', was, ultimately, pompous and unrealistic. This can be verified by Mitsos Murat, who watched Mounet-Sully in Paris in 1900. Murat observed that he dragged his voice, used conventional recitation and performed 'peculiar' movements.<sup>13</sup> In general, he thought that Mounet-Sully's acting style was declamatory (Murat, 1928: 136).

Murat was a student of Thomas Oikonomou at the short-lived Royal Theatre Drama School and became one of the initiators of the theatre company Nea Skene. In 1901, changes occurred in Athens that were bound to alter the field of the Greek theatre.

### **1.3 The Royal Theatre and Thomas Oikonomou, 1901-1906**

The notion of a National Theatre emerged in 1876, as is clear from the records of the Musical and Dramatic Club (Μουσικός και Δραματικός Σύλλογος – Drosinis, 1938: 69; Rodas, 1931: 55-58). This Club intended to make innovations in the current conditions of Greek music and drama. Gradually, the Club became more interested in its Music Department. However, the records of the first assembly of the Club in 1871 specify that the perceptive and modernizing politician, Harilaos Trikoupis, who was seven times Prime Minister and Diliyiannis's opponent, and who was the head of the Department of Drama, supported the idea of the creation of a theatre (Drosinis, 1938: 70). Five years later, in 1876, the records show that the foundation of a National Theatre had become one of the main concerns of the Club. The second concern was to send students to study theatre abroad because the members of the Club considered the conditions of professional

theatre in Greece inadequate for the young people who might want to become professionally involved in the theatre (Drosinis, 1938: 70-1).<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the idea of the foundation of a National Theatre was always accompanied by a plan to produce adequately educated artists who could staff it. This shows that the founders were aware that, in order for such an organisation to be fruitful, it had to be staffed accordingly. Unfortunately, nothing came of these discussions and programmes.

In 1881, a donation to King Georgios I by the brothers Rallis paved the way for the creation of a Royal Theatre of Greece.<sup>15</sup> At that point, the Greek State was pushed aside as the King decided to build and fund the theatre without any interference from the government. The King acquired land at Saint Constantine Street, and the edifice of the Royal (not National) Theatre was constructed.<sup>16</sup> In 1898, the Royal Theatre was classified as 'an appendage of the Royal House' and was not considered 'national' (Stefanou, 28 February 1928). Both a Royal Theatre and a Drama School, which would provide actors to staff the company, were founded. On 16 July of the same year, Angelos Vlahos, a close friend of King Georgios (Lidorikis, 1949: 64), was appointed Administrative Director, and Stefanos Stefanou, Secretary of the Royal Theatre and Director of the Drama School (Sideris, 1960: 593). Weeks before the theatre had its inaugural performance, Vlahos, who had worked towards the creation of the Royal and had planned its initial structure, resigned because the Royal Trustee interfered with his work (Stefanou, 28 February 1928). After Vlahos's resignation, the administrative direction of the theatre was handed to Stefanou. Vlahos returned to the theatre in 1906, a few months before it became impossible for the King to support the theatre any

longer due to financial reasons (Vlahos, 1949: 10; Lidorikis, 1949: 65). As Murat argued, the Royal Theatre closed because the King refused to support it since the donations of the Greek immigrants, who had funded it for all those years, were used up (Murat, 1950: 35).

Vlahos had been for a period the ambassador of Greece to Berlin and was deeply influenced by German culture (Vlahos, 1949: 7-8). Katia Arfara argues that the King, on the other hand, admired, and was influenced by, the French theatre of the period (Arfara, 2001: 76). This explains the fact that the King aimed to employ a French company at the newly built theatre for the winter season so that the students of the Royal's Drama School could watch and learn 'good' theatre-making (Stefanou, 4 March 1928). Stefanou, however, notes that the Royal was organised according to the German models of the period and that he had to travel to Germany and Austria for the purpose of studying their methods (Stefanou, 3 March 1928). Vlahos's tenure of office as ambassador to Berlin inspired him to prefer the German model because he saw the artistic value of the work of the German theatres.

Generally, the founders of the Royal Theatre aimed to create a theatre modelled on the European court theatres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Spathis, 1983: 30). The actors were acknowledged as palace employees, and were given a salary, a pension, a social position and the honours due to all palace employees (Laskaris, 1900: 57). The King insisted on a dress code that required evening gowns for the ladies and tuxedos for the men (Mavrikiou-Anagnostou, 1964: 155; Stefanou, 5 March 1928). This immediately excluded from the Royal the people who could not afford to buy

or rent such clothes. Moreover, Athens did not have a wide net of public transport and the roads around the theatre were in a state of disrepair. Thus, it was often the occasion that spectators arrived at the Royal with their clothes dirty (Andreadis, 1933: 39-41). Such conditions made it difficult for the audience to attend the theatre, and were some of the reasons that led to the Royal's closure.

The appointment of Director of the Royal was strongly linked with the actions of the circles of the Court and a result of specific political choices in relation to his nationality and his education (Glitzouris, 1996: 68). Thomas Oikonomou, who was born in Vienna and was an artist nurtured by German culture, seemed to be the most suitable candidate.<sup>17</sup> He had trained at the Meininger Company and had been one of its members (Sideris, 1960: 595). He arrived in Athens in 1900 at the age of thirty-five, and became a teacher at the Royal Theatre Drama School (Δραματική Σχολή του Βασιλικού Θεάτρου), as well as the Director of the Royal (Sideris, 1964a: 7). During Oikonomou's entire tenure of office, there were constant interventions from the palace in matters of repertoire, casting, and so on. That and the declining artistic standard of the theatre forced him to leave in 1906.

At the Drama School, Oikonomou taught diction, speech and mimicry. Murat remembers that he used to make the students read with a cork in their mouth so that they would improve their diction and pronunciation (Murat, 1928: 161). Oikonomou conducted sessions on breathing, gestures and walking – elements which Murat finds essential for the first steps of any actor (ibid.: 162-163). It is important to note that the very idea of using an exercise for

accomplishing a goal on the stage or for a part was novel, and Oikonomou was the first to employ such a method in Greece (Sideris, 1960: 594).

However, when the School closed down and the Royal opened, he did not have the chance to choose the actors with whom he had to work. So, he mainly had to try to apply his innovative methods to the 'old' actors of the Greek stage, who made up the company (ibid.).<sup>18</sup>

One of the innovative practices that he introduced was the dress rehearsal. This may seem absurd today, but it was a grand step for the Greek theatre. The professional companies of the period presented two or even three new productions per week. At times, the actors went on the stage having a general idea of what the play was about and relied on the prompter. Thus the notion that the actors could have a rehearsal during which they would be able to try out their parts wearing their costumes and using their props seemed groundbreaking. Of course, it should come as no surprise from a former member of the Meiningen Company. Sideris notes that this practice was greeted with great surprise and admiration by the newspapers (ibid.).

Oikonomou also acquainted the Greek actors with the quest for emotional truth. When he directed Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, he instructed the great leading lady of the Greek theatre and Oikonomou's student, Marika Kotopouli, who was, then, a young actress and was playing the part of Margarita, to visit a mental hospital in order to observe its inmates for the last scene when her character goes mad (Arfara, 2001: 88; Sideris, 1960: 595).

Oikonomou's practice of immersion, through his connection with the theatre of André Antoine, a company he followed while he lived in Europe (Puchner,



1988: 381-408), demonstrates the connection of the Greek theatre with the theatrical developments in Europe. This incident also enabled Sideris to claim that Oikonomou's 'aesthetic belief' was naturalism and that he was the one who introduced naturalism to Greece (Sideris, 1960: 595-6). However, this is a very general statement. Sideris went on to say that his approach was more poetic and romantic and that, in the end, one should call Oikonomou's approach 'poetic realism' (ibid.: 596). This final estimation coincides with the view that Fotos Politis, renowned critic and first director of the National Theatre of Greece in 1932, had of Oikonomou. Politis believed that, as a director, Oikonomou paid more attention to the poetic elements of a performance than to the realistic ones (Politis, 1983: 259). Thus Politis acutely perceived Oikonomou's two roles: Oikonomou the company's manager, who introduced numerous realistic and naturalistic plays, and Oikonomou the company's director, who employed a directorial approach beyond the restricting conventions of naturalism and realism. Oikonomou may have been nurtured in the Meininger Company, and he may have had an uncontested connection with the theatre of Antoine, but, as a director in Greece, he had developed an independent style.

Furthermore, it is important to realise that Oikonomou's quest for truth cannot be classified as 'naturalism', 'realism', 'poetic realism' or any of the above because his intentions were lost in the actual theatrical circumstances in which he had to work. He aimed for 'truth', but he had actors who had been formed in the conventions of the nineteenth-century Greek stage. He was not able to train them from the beginning. Of course, he tried to stimulate and

expand their horizons, but he was not always successful. The actors found it difficult to abandon their declamatory style (Arfara, 2001: 40).

Oikonomou, then, was not able to avoid the conventional, imposing, static postures usually used in ancient tragedy performance during the period. However, he managed to introduce freer movement of the Chorus of the Furies in his 1903 *Oresteia* production (ibid.: 18). Moreover, he managed to break, to some extent, the forced stereotypical postures that Mounet-Sully had bestowed on the Greek stage, and was reproached for this attempt (ibid.: 24). It should always be kept in mind that neither naturalism nor realism had been employed for Greek tragedy, or for any kind of tragedy, in Europe or in Greece. These currents had their own plays such as those of Henrik Ibsen, which resonated with the ideas naturalism and realism aimed to explore and express. In turn, Greek tragedy, especially in Greece, was imbued with notions concerning the Greek people's connection with their ancient Greek tradition and culture or patriotism. It was treated as a 'sacred' genre and the changes were bound to be slow.

Oikonomou directed only four ancient plays at the Royal Theatre (three tragedies, *Oresteia*, *Oedipus the King* and *Phoenician Women*, and one comedy, *Wealth*). Sideris comments that these productions were not 'good' and Oikonomou's contemporaries observed that he did not 'love' ancient theatre (Sideris, 1960: 594; Sideris, 1973: 57; Arfara, 2001: 19). This sweeping statement, which is solely based on an emotional reaction, could have some truth in it. Probably these were badly presented performances because a coherent style had not yet been achieved. Sideris notes that the

actors did not follow a specific acting technique and that the translations were reminiscent of *Merope* by Demetrios Vernardakis (Sideris, 1960: 594-595), the nineteenth-century playwright whose neoclassical tragedies and use of the scholarly language, *katharevousa* (καθαρεύουσα), had been responsible for the formation of ideas about tragedy in Greece. The use of the scholarly language, and the conservative nature of the translations, made it difficult for actors in terms of their acting because they had to speak a language that was old-fashioned and was not used in everyday life. Finally, Oikonomou had to be aware of the politics, that is to say, the social and political position of the Royal, and the King's involvement with the government and the state, that lay behind the presentation of a Greek tragedy at the Royal.<sup>19</sup>

The case of the *Oresteia* and of the *Oresteia*ka (Ορεστειακά), which refers to the riots organised by Mistriotis and his University students because the *Oresteia* was translated into demotic, the Modern Greek, everyday language as opposed to *katharevousa*, the scholarly language, could provide some clues as to why Oikonomou avoided presenting tragedy. An overview of the particulars of the production will shed light on Oikonomou's position. For the *Oresteia*, the *mise en scène*, the sets, the costumes and Uhlrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's adaptation were imported from the Burgtheater of Vienna (Stefanou, 9 March 1928; Sideris, 1976: 191). Oikonomou was asked to present the *Oresteia* based on the Austrian prototype. The music was by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. The translation was by Georgios Sotiriadis, who admitted that he tried to reconcile *katharevousa* and the demotic language, but that he was closer to the former than the latter (Palamas, 1903: 748).

It seems highly unlikely that such a conservative translation could cause such turmoil. However, there was an outburst when the Royal Theatre announced that the *Oresteia* would be performed in the demotic language. Mistriotis, who, as has been noted above, felt that he was the guardian of ancient Greek tragedy and its presentation on the contemporary Greek stage, took the opportunity to incite his students to protest against the production. Moreover, Mistriotis used the *Oresteika* in order to strengthen his own position as well as that of his friend, Diliyiannis. Thus, Mistriotis exploited the fact that the translation of the *Oresteia* was presented at the Royal Theatre, which was an official organisation. When the fact that there had been no public reaction when Constantinos Christomanos had presented *Alceste* two years before, in 1901, is juxtaposed to the events that followed the Royal's production, the *Oresteika* gain a different sociopolitical significance in that Mistriotis's act was an act against the Palace and the King. His close relation to Diliyiannis, who was in the Opposition at the time and on bad terms with the King, determined his actions. In three nights, Diliyiannis, Dimitrios Rallis, the Prime Minister, and the King attended the production while the University students fought in the streets with those who vindicated the demotic language. The *Oresteika* resulted in one fatality and many injured, and, finally, the King was obliged to ban the production (Stefanou, 9 March 1929; Sideris, 1976: 202).

The production of the *Oresteia* indicates explicitly the position that the Royal occupied in the Greek sociopolitical context and how it was exploited to serve extra-theatrical interests. The Royal, being an 'appendage' of the Palace, as has already been observed (Stefanou, 28 February 1928), had to follow specific rules. This means that its productions were associated with, and

linked to, the sociopolitical position of the King, the founder and funder of the organisation. As a result, the Royal, being subordinate to the King and his allies, was attacked, or favoured, according to the sociopolitical conditions.

Bourdieu's theory can, once again, help elucidate the position of the Royal. Bourdieu argues that the field of artistic creation, in this case the theatre, is subject to economic and political power, and can be dominated by the latter (Bourdieu, 1993: 37-38). The Royal was no exception. Furthermore, as part of the dominated theatre field and because it was under the King's patronage, it experienced great pressure from the political climate. The Royal had a dominant position artistically because important intellectuals were gathered to staff it; it had an abundance of funds and the King's support. However, it was never autonomous. Bourdieu's notion of autonomy assumes that artists are not 'subjected to the demands and commands of sponsors and patrons' and are 'freed from the state and from academies' (Bourdieu, 1992: 109). That is to say, that autonomy can only pertain when the artists or artistic institutions are not dependent on patronage, whether it comes from powerful individuals or the state. However, when such a dependence occurs, artists 'rediscover the limits of their autonomy' (ibid.: 110), which means that they realise that their ability to express themselves as they wish is subject to rules imposed by the source that provides funding and/or support. Similarly, the Royal Theatre of Greece never enjoyed real artistic autonomy. Even the National Theatre of Greece was deprived of its autonomy during certain periods – a fact that will be demonstrated during the course of this thesis.

After Oikonomou left the theatre in 1906, Vlahos directed *Electra* by Sophocles in a scholarly translation, and *Oedipus the King* was performed at the Panathenian Stadium in the original text. These were the last productions of Greek tragedy by the Royal before it closed down due to the King's inability to sustain it financially.

#### **1.4 The Nea Skene and Constantinos Christomanos, 1901 – 1905**

Unlike the Royal Theatre, the Nea Skene was a private company that did not have any permanent financial support. Its founder, Constantinos Christomanos, was the first child of wealthy bourgeois parents.<sup>20</sup> He studied and worked in Vienna, where he was a companion to Empress Elisabeth of Austria and a lecturer at the University. Before returning to Athens in 1901, he spent a brief period in Paris, following Parisian theatre life. There he was possibly acquainted with the Théâtre Libre of André Antoine.<sup>21</sup> He was deeply influenced by an article by Oscar Wilde about Shakespeare and the use of costume in Shakespeare's plays published in the *Wiener Rundschau*, a journal that he co-edited (Mavrikou-Anagnostou, 1964: 97). His acquaintance and association with theatre was purely intellectual and he had never directed a production. Walter Puchner argues that his return to Athens was not his choice. He was forced to return to Greece because he was dismissed from the Viennese Court and from his position as a lecturer at the University. According to Puchner, the Nea Skene became a 'therapeutic occupation' (Puchner, 1999: 13) – an argument that could not be considered entirely wrong, when Christomanos's life is examined and taken into account.

On 27 February 1901, Christomanos gathered eight intellectuals (Kostis Palamas, Grigorios Xenopoulos, Pavlos Nirvanas, Giorgos Stratigis, Labros Porfiras, Dimitris Kampouroglou, Yiannis Vlahoyiannis, Dimitrios Kaklamanos) at the Theatre of Dionysus below the Acropolis and presented his Declaration regarding the Nea Skene. He aimed to make a dynamic and impressive entrance in the Greek theatre field and take a highly privileged position, allowing him and the Nea Skene to enjoy artistic, cultural and intellectual recognition. That is the main reason why he aimed to associate the company with Greek intellectuals. However, as will be demonstrated, his aspirations did not meet with success.

Christomanos claimed that the Nea Skene's primary goal was the rebirth and revival of 'dramatic poetry and the art of staging in Greece' (Christomanos, 1951: 90). He stated that the models for his theatre, apart from the obvious influence of theatre life in Austria, were Antoine's naturalistic amateur company, Théâtre Libre, and his professional repertory company, Théâtre Antoine, as well as the symbolist theatre Théâtre de l'Oeuvre of Aurelién-François Lugné-Poe. Christomanos declared that these naturalistic and symbolist influences formed the Nea Skene's aesthetic orientation (Christomanos, 12 March 1902). This is a debatable statement as his actions indicate that he was principally inspired by the names and fame of these companies rather than by their actual ideas, values and aspirations, a fact that, as observed below, will reveal a number of problems for the viability and artistic integrity of the company.

loulia Pipinia argues that Christomanos did not aim to gather round him an intellectual Athenian audience or to create an experimental company, which would oppose the conventions of the bourgeoisie of his era (Pipinia, 1999: 67). She notes that he was not attracted by the social ideas of the naturalists and the symbolists; he was not concerned with the ideological significance of their movements and the problematics explored by their plays (ibid.: 68-70).<sup>22</sup> By contrast, Christomanos paid more attention to refined decoration and rich sets. Pipinia's argument is justified in so far as Christomanos was an aesthete above all else. Michael Peranthis also believes that, even though his directing included naturalistic and symbolist elements, Christomanos's aestheticism prevailed, and the article he had published on Wilde in Vienna influenced his artistic work (Peranthis, 1951: 83). It can be concluded that all his naturalistic attempts had an aesthetic touch.<sup>23</sup>

Mirto Mavrikou-Anagnostou pushes the argument further claiming that aestheticism was his actual driving force. She argues that it was his instinct for beauty that rescued Greek theatre from the declamatory style old actors used when they were acting romantic plays (Mavrikou-Anagnostou, 1964: 98), as his passion for beauty and his persistent attention to detail led him beyond naturalism to aestheticism (ibid.: 99). But one could also argue that this same quest forced him to neglect the management of his company. For instance, he bought an expensive vase while he did not have the money to pay for his other obligations while on tour (Murat, 1928: 103), and he delayed the opening of the performance so that he could fix a bow on the dress of an actress (Murat, 1928: 105; Mavrikou-Anagnostou, 1964: 115). In general, he managed the money of the Nea Skene in such a way that led to the



company's financial ruin by paying far too much attention to the external elements of a production.

Christomanos's original scheme was to create a Club with regular members and subscriptions, and in targeting this, he was adopting the practice that had enabled Antoine to support his theatre. However, the conditions in Greece were fundamentally different from those in Paris. Antoine was forced to form a club and perform privately due to the censorship imposed by the French State. Censorship was not a problem in Athens, thus the Nea Skene could perform publicly (Pipinia, 1999: 80). If he had succeeded in maintaining the Club he founded, Christomanos might have been able to sustain his theatre and work independently of the box-office. Since he had failed in this venture, the Nea Skene had to be financially competitive with the rest of the commercial theatres that it intended to battle against, and to 'supply products adjusted to the expectations of the various positions in the field of power' (Bourdieu, 1993: 43), which meant that the company had to address a wider audience and put aside its artistic aspirations. This was one of the major factors that led to the company's destruction. Christomanos, in an attempt to preserve his financial independence, published company shares which he offered to wealthy financiers, but this arrangement did not materialise (Peranthis, 1951: 80; Pipinia, 1999: 65-6). His supporters were all driven away because Christomanos did not accept any interference with his artistic work or with any other aspect of the management of the Nea Skene (Rodas, 1944: 19; Peranthis, 1951:70; Mavrikou-Anagnostou, 1964: 51-2).

No matter what his aesthetic principles, administrative qualities or financial inadequacies were, Christomanos followed one artistic guideline dictated by Antoine. He hired amateurs, his 'initiates' as he called them, who had never before appeared on a professional stage. He did not want his actors to be 'contaminated' by the conventions of existing theatrical practices. He wanted them to be able to follow his own guidance, unobstructed by their pernicious habits (Xenopoulos, 1933: 20-1; Peranthis, 1951:70, Mavrikou-Anagnostou, 1964: 53). He also hired a large number of the students of the Royal Theatre's Drama School, which, as already observed, had just closed down. Thus he formed a strong core of actors who had no contact with the existing professional theatre because he wanted his actors to have an acting style in common, which was coherent and would sustain his productions.<sup>24</sup>

Christomanos sought coherence in all the elements of his productions. He always followed a specific procedure in mounting a play. First, he himself read the whole play to his initiates. Then, he explained and analysed the psychology of every single character, and acted out the entire play so that the actors could imitate him. On the opening night, he stood by the stage and prompted the actors, but he did not just act solely as a prompter; he became an orchestra conductor (Mavrikou-Anagnostou, 1964: 101-102; Xenopoulos, 1933: 27). This overt intervention in the performance appears highly unusual by today's standards. However, it was a practice that enabled Christomanos to present a complete, coherent view of the play he was staging. It also indicates that he did not intend to create a method for approaching a role. He believed that an actor should only follow his detailed instructions in order to perform on the stage.

This is also evident in his approach to rehearsals. Christomanos did not see much need for them. He used to say to his initiates that rehearsals were not particularly useful (Mavrikou-Anagnostou, 1964: 103). On some occasions, he simply narrated to the actors the general plot, sent them on stage and prompted them.<sup>25</sup> Sideris, in an attempt to justify this practice, suggests that Christomanos avoided rehearsals in order to force his actors to learn to use their instinct and their subconscious (Sideris, 1946: 1240). This could be partly true as Christomanos was not a practitioner of the theatre and did not realise the importance of rehearsing. His attitude compared to Oikonomou's, who introduced the dress rehearsal in the Greek theatre, illustrates Christomanos's different approach to staging and actor training, which was based on the conviction that any of his actors could perform impeccably under his instructions, even without rehearsals. This conviction, as well as the company's obligation to present three or four plays per week due to financial difficulties, made it impossible for the company to rehearse thoroughly the plays presented.

Antonis Glitzouris notes that, in matters of directing, Christomanos maintained on stage the practices of the nineteenth-century amateur and professional companies (Glitzouris, 2001:82-83). This observation gives substance to the argument that Christomanos did not intend to create a method for training actors. **Nonetheless**, it is possible to detect his innovations on the Greek stage in the coherent staging of production in so far as set design, costumes, acting and dramaturgy were concerned. Critics, theatre people and academics have claimed that Christomanos banned the declamatory style from the stage and introduced a natural way of acting (Murat, 1950: 11;

Mavrikou-Anagmostou, 1964: 103; Rodas, 1944: 23). However, as it is rightly indicated by the influential theatre critic Alkis Thrilos – one of the most significant critics of the contemporary Greek theatre, who wrote from 1927 and for over forty years in important journals and papers such as *Nea Hestia* and *Acropolis* – Christomanos ‘was not a great director, but he introduced, for the first time in Greece, clean, tasteful ... and refined performances. He and Oikonomou ... civilised the Greek theatre’ (cited in Sideris, 1946: 1241). Politis, in turn, notes that ‘Christomanos was not the awaited innovator of Greek theatre’, as was generally believed because he chose plays such as *L’Arlésienne* by Alphonse Daudet and his repertoire comprised insignificant plays (Politis, 1983: 76).

The repertoire of the Nea Skene was similar to that of the Viennese theatres, presenting plays by Arthur Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal.<sup>26</sup> However, Rodas claims that one of the prime concerns of the company was to perform Greek tragedy (1944: 20). This is probably an impression based on the 1901 Declaration of the company rather than on its actual repertoire. Undoubtedly, the fact that Christomanos decided to inaugurate the company with *Alcestis* by Euripides should be related to his first Declaration at the Theatre of Dionysus. The suggestion that he presented ancient Greek tragedy as a means of declaring his duty to the national vision – contemporary Greece’s connection with the ancient Greek past – and of attracting a wider audience (Pipinia, 1999: 80) could be considered one-dimensional, although not altogether wrong because Christomanos wanted to form a regular audience and to establish contemporary Greece’s connection with the past. However, the choice of *Alcestis* had deeper roots. Christomanos, as an aesthete,

believed that ancient Greek tragedy had great beauty and thus it was the most suitable vehicle to express his aesthetic beliefs. In addition, *Alcestis* was presented at the Comédie-Française around that period, as Christomanos was well aware (Sideris, 1946: 1237). By presenting *Alcestis*, he was able to fulfil the promise given, when he presented the Declaration of the Nea Skene and to mount a Greek tragedy that was also popular in Europe. He was also able to perform the plays that exposed the link to the nation's glorious past, which, Pipinia claims, concurred with the nationalistic tendency of his audience.

*Alcestis* opened on 22 November 1901. It had luxurious costumes. The set was constructed according to the model of the Mycenaean Palace, but it was also reminiscent of Mounet-Sully's set for the production of *Oedipus the King* (Sideris, 1976:181). The *mise en scène* of the funeral scene was based on vase paintings (Mavriku-Anagnostou, 1964: 115-6). The music was by Christoph Willibald von Gluck, performed by an orchestra and a piano. The Chorus comprised both men and women (Murat, 1928: 95). The play was divided into acts and was translated into Modern Greek by Christomanos. The language used was simple and had no archaic elements. Although the production was mounted only a few days after the riots of the University students concerning the translation of the Bible into Modern Greek, known as the Evangelika (Ευαγγελικά), there was no public reaction. When a comparison is made between the riots during the production of the *Oresteia* by the Royal Theatre, it is clear that the positions occupied by the two companies within the theatre field were very different. The Nea Skene was

allowed more freedom because it was not an organisation of the establishment.

Christomanos also translated, simplified and directed *Antigone* by Sophocles, (Spathis, 1983:38), which was the second and last tragedy that the Nea Skene presented. At this point, it must be noted that one of the major contributions of Christomanos and the Nea Skene to Greek theatre was the Modern Greek translations of these two plays. In comparison to Sotiriadis's scholarly translation for the Royal Theatre or the use of the ancient Greek text in the Royal's last productions of Greek tragedy, the Nea Skene presented translations in the demotic language. This factor was beneficial to the development of Greek acting because actors acted more naturally, when using a language with which they were accustomed.

Both Oikonomou's and Christomanos's companies made new proposals in relation to staging and acting, introduced new and original plays, and aimed at creating an ensemble theatre (Spathis , 1983: 30). Dimitris Spathis argues that the directorial work of these two directors opened up the road to what is presently known as the revival of ancient Greek tragedy – despite the fact that they both presented plays on a proscenium stage, divided them into acts, and applied to them the convention of French classic tragedy (Spathis , 1983: 31). It is true that they tried to bestow on the Greek stage and actors a model with which to work. However, their significant contribution was not so much in relation to the presentation of Greek tragedy as to innovations in relation to acting, set designing, and costumes.

## **1.5 The Descendants of the Royal Theatre and the Nea Skene. The companies of Marika Kotopouli and Kiveli Adrianou, 1906 – 1918**

The Nea Skene closed down in 1905. However, Kiveli Adrianou, Christomanos's favourite actress, continued to use the company's name until 1908, when she formed the Kiveli Theatre Company. Similarly, Marika Kotopouli also formed a company in her own name after the Royal Theatre shut down in 1906. Both great female protagonists of the beginning of the twentieth century, who had formed their artistic identities under the guidance of Oikonomou and Christomanos became the centre of Greek theatre life, which was still based in the capital. They both occupied an important position within the Greek theatre field, which combined public recognition, a degree of institutionalised recognition and acknowledgement from the theatre people of their time. Bourdieu notes that

the theatre, which directly experiences the immediate sanction of the bourgeois public, with its values and conformisms, can earn the institutionalized consecration of academies and official honours, as well as money (Bourdieu, 1993: 51).

Both of the companies discussed here enjoyed the 'immediate sanction of the public' as well as 'official honours' and, therefore, were secure in their status.

In matters of repertory, Kotopouli and Kiveli initially tried to maintain the repertoires of the Royal and the Nea Skene. However, this was not always possible mainly due to financial reasons. Thus, beside plays by Ibsen, Strindberg, Franz Grillparzer, Shakespeare and contemporary Greek playwrights, revues and French boulevard plays appeared. Murat, who was a close collaborator of both actresses during different periods, informs us that Kotopouli and Kiveli travelled regularly to Paris during the end of the first

decade and the whole of the second decade of the twentieth century to learn about new plays and the productions of the Comédie-Française (Murat, 1928: 118, 134; Murat, 1950: 19-21). Kotopouli, in her letters to Murat from Paris, expressed her enthusiasm for the French theatre and actors, admiring especially Simon Leborgne and Lucien Guitry (Murat, 1950: 21). Murat himself visited Paris and translated a number of French plays for the Greek stage (Murat, 1950: 21-25). The influence of mainstream French theatre on the theatre of Greece was palpable in terms of repertoire. Plays by Emile Zola, Henry Batallie, Sasha Guitry and Tristane Bernard, to mention but a few, were regularly presented. Xenopoulos notes that Greece had become a French literary colony (Sideris, 1976: 146).

As can be expected, ancient Greek tragedy did not occupy a significant position in either company's repertoire because it was not a genre that attracted the wider public and required a large cast. Kiveli performed a few Greek tragedies – for instance, *Antigone* by Sophocles, using a translation by Konstantinos Manos and not the 1903 version of her teacher Christomanos – and *Oedipus the King*, in which she played the part of the Chorus, both in 1910 (Sideris, 1976: 240-244). **Nonetheless**, she was never classified as a tragedian, possibly because she was largely identified with ingénue parts (Spathis, 1983:38). Conversely, Kotopouli was regarded as a great tragedian due to her powerful voice and passionate acting. She occasionally reprised the ancient Greek tragedies presented at the Royal Theatre. However, her great success was *Electra* in Hoffmansthal's play of this name, which was translated by Constantinos Hatzopoulos, the famous writer, poet, translator



and advocate of the demotic language. It was this play that she used when she was giving her honorary performances.<sup>27</sup>

Certainly, Hoffmansthal's play is not the ancient Greek one, even if its plot is based on the Sophoclean tragedy. However, a large number of actors, critics and spectators did not see any difference between these two genres, ancient Greek tragedies and their adaptations. Thus Kotopouli acted in a contemporary symbolist tragedy with ancient Greek-like costumes, and Sideris remarks that she and her audiences were convinced that this was an ancient Greek tragedy (Sideris, 1976:220-221). However, not all critics had the same attitude. For example, the important writer and critic Babis Anninos stressed that 'this *Electra* is not a Greek play' (cited in Sideris, 1976: 221).

**Nonetheless**, the equally significant man of letters, playwright and critic Nirvanas argued the following, in his review of Kotopouli's performance in the daily newspaper *Espera*:

*An Electra, the Electra was revived on the stage. It is not important whether it is old or new, classical or romantic, visual or musical ... We are not interested in Schools when a soul is alive on the stage (16 April 1914).*

Kotopouli must have agreed with Nirvanas. Sideris argues that she approached all ancient Greek tragedies as if they were written by Hoffmansthal (Sideris, 1964: 20-23). As a consequence, Kotopouli performed ancient Greek and symbolist tragedies using the same declamatory and passionate acting style. This fact must be remembered when, in the following chapter, the discussion of the production of *Electra* by Sophocles starring Kotopouli and directed by Karolos Koun will explore the particular aspects of her acting and reveal the tension of the collaboration between the progressive director and the established famous actress.

It must be noted that Kotopouli had taken part in Oikonomou's production of the *Oresteia* and, following Oikonomou's directorial approach, she revived *Agamemnon* in 1924. She also performed *Hecuba* by Euripides in 1927, but this was under the auspices of an independent artistic organization, not her own theatre group. Kotopouli's performance will be examined in the following part of this chapter, when Politis's attempts at directing tragedy will be reviewed.

### **1.6 New Approaches to Tragedy, 1919 – 1927**

Politis represented an autonomous group of people who enjoyed 'recognition by those whom they recognize[d]' (Bourdieu, 1993: 38). He first appeared on the Greek literary scene in 1915, when he started publishing his articles on theatre in the Athenian newspaper *Nea Hellas* (Sideris, 1964: 23). His father was the well known folklorist Nikolaos Politis. The young Politis, brought up in an intellectual environment, followed the Athenian artistic and theatre life closely. He regularly attended the Royal Theatre's performances. In his 1929 article 'Memorial to Oikonomou', he stated that he had seen all the performances of the Royal Theatre, and that, often, he and the British Ambassador were the only two spectators in the auditorium (Politis, 1983a:79-80). In that same article he acknowledged Oikonomou as his first theatre master (ibid.: 81).

In 1908, he went to Germany to study law, but became drawn to cultural and aesthetic studies (Sideris, 1964: 1683; Glitzouris, 2001: 652). Michael Rodas declares that he was a student of Max Reinhardt. Whether this is meant to imply that Politis introduced the German director's ideas to the Greek stage,



2. The stage alterations of the indoor venue of the theatre Olympia for Fotos Politis's production of *Oedipus the King*



3. The set of the 1927 production of *Hecuba* directed by Fotos Politis at the Panathenian Stadium

or whether Rodas refers strictly to Politis's educational qualifications, is not clear. However, Sideris disagrees with Rodas, noting that Politis's article on Reinhardt does not allow the reader to conclude that he had studied with the German director.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, this article shows that Politis had an in-depth knowledge of Reinhardt's methods and techniques. Moreover, it is evident that Politis did not agree with all of Reinhardt's ideas. Hence, he was opposed to Reinhardt's directorial dominance over all aspects of the performance.<sup>29</sup> Politis argued that Reinhardt was concerned above all with the theatre as a spectacle (Politis, 1983: 251). He was wholeheartedly against this because he thought that theatre's governing aspect was the text, the 'logos' (λόγος).

In 1918 in his review of the production of *L' Arlésienne* by Daudet, he pointed out that 'thank God' there is 'no theatrical tradition in Greece yet' (Politis, 1983: 75). By this statement, Politis meant that Greek theatre had not yet created a coherent and representative Greek acting style, unlike the Comédie-Française. The difference between the style of the Comédie-Française and the Greek acting style is a recurrent motif in his articles (ibid.: 30-31, 56). Politis was convinced that, in order for a nation to create its own acting style, this nation had to master, understand and feel the tempo, rhythm and verse of the language. Without this, superior acting would be impossible to achieve (ibid.: 30). Politis insisted that acting was intrinsically linked with nationalism (ibid.: 50), using the latter term synonymously with cultural identity.

Politis also had specific ideas about how tragedy should be performed. He argued that tragedy was inseparably linked with intense acting: a formal tone and powerful and grand 'acting recitation' (Politis, 1964a: 115). Therefore, any kind of realistic acting was not fitting for tragedy. To perform tragedy the actor had to have a powerful voice and a wide range of vocal intonation, and be able to make the audience experience 'fear' and 'pity'; these two words were introduced by Aristotle to explain the emotions that ancient Greeks felt when they watched tragedy. The influence of Aristotle on the Greek theatre dominated the stagings of Greek tragedy for the following decades.

Politis also believed that the performers of the fifth century BC wore cothurni and big masks (Politis, 1983: 31), ascribing these elements to the theatre of the Classical period (middle of the sixth to the fourth centuries BC), while today it is widely known that these devices were employed by the Hellenistic theatre (third to first centuries BC). Hence, he attempted to convey to the Athenian audience of the 1920s the impression that an ancient actor wearing a large, tragic mask and cothurnus had made to his fifth-century contemporaries. However, Politis did not use masks and cothurni in his productions, and he never suggested in his articles that these devices should be used by any other company. He found them inappropriate for the theatre of the twentieth century. Subsequently, he tried to find other ways to make the twentieth-century audience feel 'pity' and 'fear'.

Politis was called for the first time to apply his ideas to tragedy in 1919, when the newly formed Society of Greek Theatre (Εταιρεία Ελληνικού Θεάτρου) decided to mount *Oedipus the King*. This short-lived club that aspired to

become the core for the foundation of the National Theatre of Greece comprised literary men, playwrights such as Miltiadis Lidorikis, and wealthy, upper-class members who funded it. The club aimed to renew the productions of ancient Greek tragedy, and invited Politis to direct (Sideris, 1964: 25; Sideris, 1976: 267-268, 272), and, although he did not have any experience as a theatre director, Politis accepted. As has been observed, his views on the way that tragedy had to be presented and acted were already formed, and were evident in how Politis altered the venue in which the performance was presented (image 2).

The large, indoor venue of the theatre Olympia was fundamentally changed. The curtain was removed and the stage was enlarged. A separate place was created for the Chorus by removing the first rows of seats of the auditorium in an attempt to imitate the orchestra of the ancient Greek theatre. A low wall surrounded this peculiar orchestra, allowing only the spectators seated in the higher levels of the auditorium to see the whole body of the members of the Chorus (image 2 – Sideris, 1954: 1688). It is interesting to note that, once more, Politis follows the Hellenistic configuration rather than the Classical Athenian one by dividing the theatrical space into two levels – the space of the actors and the space of the Chorus.

It seems that the major contribution of this performance was the way in which Politis presented the Chorus on the stage. He realised that the Chorus characterised ancient Greek tragedy as a genre, and broke its passivity by having them move and be engaged in the action (Sideris, 1954: 1688-1689). Politis was the first director to propose that the Chorus was comprised of

individuals – unlike Reinhardt, who viewed the Chorus as a crowd with a common identity. Therefore, Politis did not use *sprechchor*, the German term meaning group recitation, which was adopted by Greek actors, directors and critics in order to describe the way that the Chorus spoke and sang in unison. He included some group chanting in the performance, but his principal aim was to present the Chorus's multivocality. This was achieved by dividing the text between the actors, and having them speak it separately.

Politis followed a similar approach to the Chorus in *Hecuba*, which opened at the Panathenian Stadium on 15 September 1927.<sup>30</sup> The critic of the influential newspaper *Proia* remarks that Politis 'had attributed to the Chorus a multivalent coherent dramatic emotion' (Koukoulas, 18 September 1927). The production of *Hecuba* – along with that of *Prometheus Bound*, which was presented at the First Delphic Celebrations shortly before – was the most significant performance of ancient Greek tragedy presented in an open-air space. Politis believed that Greek tragedy had to be performed in such a space. However, he strongly disagreed with its presentation at the summer commercial theatres of his time. He was convinced that ancient tragedy must have a separate, special space for its representation – a belief already apparent from the alterations that he carried out at the Olympia Theatre. Similarly, when he was offered the open-air space of the Stadium, he divided it and chose to perform solely in the sphendone.

Attention should now be drawn to the significant scenographic innovations that this performance proposed. Politis designed the set with the help of Fotis Kontoglou, the great painter and set designer who also inspired Karolos Koun

and was his mentor. Politis realised that he should not have a flat, painted set. He believed that the open-air space required actual plastic volumes. Thus he constructed a big isosceles triangle two metres high surrounded by dense foliage which suggested a forest (image 3).<sup>31</sup> It was a stylised set. The critic of the popular newspaper *Hellinikos Tahidromos* (*Ελληνικός Ταχυδρόμος*) notes that the actors

tried to remain faithful to the stylisation of the scene, to avoid any kind of realism, and to create, as the director instructed them, harmonised architectural volumes, and adapt the rhythm that becomes ancient tragedy (cited in Sideris, 1964: 22).

As can be detected, the acting followed the stylised concept of the set.

The leading part was performed by Kotopouli. She had a very powerful and imposing voice, and it can be argued that her voice contributed a great deal to the judgement by the theatre professionals and intellectuals that she was a major tragedian. Her biographer Fotis Iliadis remarks that her voice and the way in which she used it characterised her acting, citing important intellectuals and critics such as Spiros Melas, Thrilos and Platon Rodokanakis, who appreciated the power and variety of Kotopouli's vocal abilities (Iliadis, 1996: 20-21). These views, in conjunction with Politis's opinion on the appropriate acting style for tragedy, indicate that Kotopouli's acting was in tune with Politis's staging. Politis did not direct another ancient Greek play before he was appointed director of the National Theatre, where he achieved his major directorial attempts at tragedy.

Two years before the performance at the Panathenian Stadium in 1925, Spiros Melas founded the *Theatro Technis* (Θέατρο Τέχνης).<sup>32</sup> There he experimented with *Seven against Thebes* by Aeschylus. Spathis remarks that,



in his directing of tragedy, he incorporated 'novel directorial approaches' that aimed to present striking staging effects (1983: 47). For instance, the audience had to witness the actual battle between the armies of Eteocles and Polyneices on the stage because Melas wanted 'to make things palpable' (Melas, 1950: 179). Melas aimed to impress critics and audiences rather than to explore in depth the problematics of the staging Greek tragedy. As a director he usually stayed on the surface and viewed in a hurry as many plays and directorial approaches as possible. Thus it must not come as a surprise that, after this production, Melas did not attempt to stage Greek tragedy ever again. His 'innovations' for tragedy were exhausted in a superficial representation of one play. Conversely, Eva Palmer-Sikelianos devoted her entire life to exploring the ways that Greek tragedy had to be presented.

### **1.7 The Delphic Celebrations – Eva Palmer-Sikelianos and Angelos Sikelianos**

Eva Palmer-Sikelianos came from a wealthy and educated American family. In 1890, she travelled to Paris, where she had acting classes, initially with Madame le Bargy and later with Marguerite Moréno, both actresses of the Comédie-Française. She was introduced to Sarah Bernhardt, and accepted Bernhardt's proposal to appear with her in *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck. However, Palmer-Sikelianos soon realised that professional acting was not her inclination (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1992: 57-58), although, she remained interested in the theatre.

Around 1902, Palmer-Sikelianos met Isadora Duncan. The important, unconventional dancer communicated to Palmer-Sikelianos her ideas about

dress (handmade, ancient-like cloaks), and also introduced her to Byzantine and Greek folk music (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1966: 2). Duncan, an admirer of Mounet-Sully's acting, based her choreographies on depictions of ancient Greek vases. Nevertheless, it seems that she managed to create a flowing, continuous whole most probably because she was focussed on dancing and did not have to use words. Duncan's influence on Palmer-Sikelianos was apparent in the continuous flow with which Palmer-Sikelianos choreographed the Chorus. Yiannis Tsarouhis, the distinguished painter, set and costume designer and close collaborator of Koun in Koun's *Theatro Technis*, remarks that, although the Chorus recited pompously, all the independent postures that Palmer-Sikelianos had copied from ancient vases were woven together by simple steps or by the use of steps of folk dances, like *balos* or *sirtos* (Tsarouhis, 1967:233).

It must be noted that Palmer-Sikelianos in her autobiography, objected to some of Duncan's practices in relation to ancient Greek tragedy. She had studied ancient Greek art in depth and observed that Duncan's models were not the classical ancient Greek ones, but reproductions that represented a decadent Greece (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1992: 196). Palmer-Sikelianos used models of vases of the late sixth and the fifth centuries BC. Additionally, Duncan's use of music, inspired by the boys who sang Greek folk music near the theatre of Dionysus in Athens (Duncan, 1955: 342), ran counter to Palmer-Sikelianos's notion of the importance, quality and scope of music in Greek tragedy. While Duncan paid attention to music and its intrinsic power, Palmer-Sikelianos treated music as a medium. Thus her use of music in the performances of the Delphic Celebrations was seen in relation to movement,

whilst the governing element of the entire enterprise was the word. She declared that 'the Greeks alone of all peoples understood the spiritual power of the Word enlarged by melody and interpreted by movement' (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1967: 300). Or, as David Wiles observed, 'Eva insisted that the music of the play should be found within the language of Aeschylus, and not imposed' (Wiles, 2000: 186).

When Palmer-Sikelianos settled in Greece, she developed further her knowledge of Byzantine and Greek music with Konstaninos Psahos, the significant professor of Byzantine music and teacher at the Conservatory of Athens (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1992: 113). Psahos implanted in her the idea that Greek music was subordinated to language, and that it has never been autonomous either in ancient Greece or in the Greek Orthodox Church. He also taught her that the role of the music was to support the text – a practice acquired, according to Psahos, so that the meaning and emotion conveyed by the words were not obliterated in the open space of the theatre or in the congregation (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1992: 113). The subordination of all the elements of the performance to the text was thus Palmer-Sikelianos's central principle in her directorial attempts.

In 1905, Palmer-Sikelianos made the acquaintance of Raymond Duncan, brother of Isadora, and his wife, Penelope Sikelianou. The latter became Palmer-Sikelianos's mentor on Byzantine and Greek Folk music. The two women formed a strong friendship based on their common love of Greece, ancient Greek culture and lifestyle (for example, weaving their own garments and wearing sandals), and music. Finally, Sikelianou invited Palmer-

Sikelianos to Greece, where she met and married her brother, the renowned poet and several times candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature, Angelos Sikelianos. Sikelianos, who had shown interest in Greek theatre life and had been a member of the Chorus in Christomanos's *Alcestis*, had not yet composed the verses that granted him his distinguished position within the Greek and international literary world. However, by the time the Delphic Celebrations were organised, he was well known and his fame helped the organisation of the Celebrations.

Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic capital' can help enlighten the power Sikelianos's name and fame exercised within the field of theatre in order for the Delphic Celebrations to acquire a degree of recognition and prestige. Bourdieu argues that within the field of cultural production the agents occupying it struggle for the acquisition of a power that is not reducible to economic gains – what he terms 'economic capital'. By contrast, it is another form of capital – 'symbolic capital' – which is characterised by the accumulation of prestige, artistic recognition or honour of the agents within the field. This form of capital is 'the only usable, effective capital' within the field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993: 75). Bourdieu notes:

For the author, the critic, the art dealer, the publisher or the theatre manager, the only legitimate accumulation consists in making a name for oneself, a known recognised name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects (with a trademark or signature) or persons (through publication, exhibitions, etc.) and therefore to give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation (ibid.:).

'Symbolic capital', therefore, has the power to 'consecrate', that is, to give status and prestige to the agents who possess it and also to the endeavours they want to support. Similarly, the attribution of the 'symbolic capital' of



4. The Delphic Celebrations in 1927 – The Chorus and set of *Prometheus Bound*



5. The Delphic Celebrations in 1930 – The Chorus and set of *The Suppliants*

Sikelianos's name turned the Delphic Celebrations into an important enterprise.

The idea of the Delphic Celebrations must be primarily attributed to Sikelianos, who regarded Delphi as the place that had a 'universal ideological radiation towards the world' (Kakouri, 1981: 865). As his wife explained in her interview to the American-Greek newspaper *The Athens News*, Sikelianos aimed to create 'a centre where all the peoples of the world might gather and communicate with each other, in the interests of bringing about a universal brotherhood among men' (Binder, 1967: 372). His idealistic notion was that great art had the power to unite nations, and this great art was drama and, especially, ancient Greek tragedy (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1992: 83-84, 121-122). He claimed that only 'ancient Greek tragedy could bring about Divine Truce' so that warring states and religions could be tamed by tragedy's moral power (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1992: 122). It was within this perspective that Sikelianos drew up the programmes of the First Celebrations in 1927 and the Second Celebrations in 1930, including the performance of *Prometheus Bound* and *The Suppliants*, athletic games and folk handicraft exhibitions.<sup>33</sup> Palmer-Sikelianos directed the theatre productions.

*Prometheus* and *The Suppliants* were both presented at the ancient theatre of Delphi. Palmer-Sikelianos was the first director to present an ancient play in an ancient theatre, which she considered as the requirement for staging ancient tragedy because 'it is the most adequate form of architecture for producing the great plays of all times' (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1967: 298-299). On both occasions, the costumes were woven by Palmer-Sikelianos (Palmer-

Sikelianos, 1966: 33) so that they resembled ancient Greek cloaks. The actors who played the characters of the play wore masks, while the members of the Chorus did not. This is a very interesting distinction. Sikelianos, in his article 'The Masks in *Prometheus*', argues that masks had to be worn by the actors of the production due to moral, aesthetic and historical reasons (Sikelianos, 1967: 81-87). He understood the significance of the use of masks for acting: the body had to acquire the different postures while wearing the mask, and actors had to alter their voice. He even encouraged 'each actor to devise a distinctive code of movement' (Wiles, 2007: 91). However, Palmer-Sikelianos, who had been training the Chorus for three years, found it very difficult to incorporate masks in her ideas of movement and reciting. The Chorus had to move, dance and sing. This would have been impossible with the particularly large, heavy and confining masks of the production.

This inconsistency shows clearly that a coherent system of staging was not used. It would be fair to admit that Palmer-Sikelianos was mostly concerned with the Chorus. Thus she allowed masks to be used for the characters, but she did not adopt them for the Chorus with which she was chiefly interested, and, as Wiles argues, she turned 'the female chorus into the central character' (Wiles, 2000: 185). The Chorus used circular movement, a practice that 'was bound up with the idea that Greek theatre was a ritual' (ibid.: 188).

Furthermore, the circle also referred to the circular Greek folk dances that Tsarouhis had distinguished in the Chorus's movements (Tsarouhis, 1967:233), linking Sikelianos-Palmer's work with Dimitris Rontiris's use of the same dances in the Choruses of his productions. Ultimately, her

experimentation with the Chorus's function was her great contribution to the staging of ancient Greek tragedy.

The great influence of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* can be detected in her work. In her article 'What is Great Theatre', which explicitly demonstrates that her focus was on the Chorus, she wrote:

The significant achievement of Greek theatre was that it succeeded in exploiting the Dionysian element; ... and at the same time in stimulating the intellectual element in its highly sophisticated Greek audience. The explanation of this is that the tragic Chorus is an exciting form of art (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1967: 299).

Palmer-Sikelianos explained all the essence of tragedy with this dyadic opposition. According to her, this intrinsic conflict gave Greek tragedy its greatness. Moreover, she used two phrases as her guideline, the first from Plato, who 'defined the Tragic Chorus as the union of poetry, music, and gymnastics' (ibid.; Palmer-Sikelianos, 1992: 123); and the second from the *Poetics* by Aristotle. Aristotle states the 'the tragic Chorus expresses with movement, the character, the adventures and the deeds of human beings' (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1992: 123-4). Inspired by these two phrases, Palmer-Sikelianos created a Chorus that moved and danced, and this was a groundbreaking innovation for the Greek stage. She liberated the Chorus from its confinement. Palmer-Sikelianos's inspiration was, principally, literary rather than practical because it was an approach of grand ideological significance.

Glitzouris argues that the performances of the Delphic Celebrations belonged to the ideology of 'Hellenicity' and to the historic continuity of the Greek identity from ancient Greece to the present. Thus, Glitzouris claims, this attempt can be considered as a 'mature ideological descendant' of Mistriotis's



productions (Glitzouris, 1998: 164; Glitzouris, 2001: 260). It is true that such a link can be detected, but an artistic connection cannot. Palmer-Sikelianos, unlike Mistrionis, was focused on the scenic representation and theatrical qualities of Greek tragedy, while Mistrionis's primary concern was tragedy's literary importance and nationalistic value. However, when these two attempts are regarded from a standpoint that pays attention to the elements related to nationalistic and Hellenic issues, the affinity is palpable. Palmer-Sikelianos's belief in the continuity of the Greek nation had undeniably triggered her creativity. Additionally, these two approaches led to attempts such as Linos Karzis's stagings of ancient Greek tragedy. Karzis had worked with Palmer-Sikelianos on the Second Delphic Celebrations. His production of *Electra* by Sophocles will be examined in the following chapter, together with the productions of Rontiris and Koun. However, his theatrical principles, which aimed to revive the acting and staging traditions of ancient Greece were inspired by Palmer-Sikelianos's theatrical achievements.

These are the circumstances in place by 1930, the year the bill for the Greek National Theatre was proposed and passed. Spathis believes that the foundations for the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy were established during the 1920s (1983: 50). However, the next decade was to be marked by important figures and initiators of acting schools such those of Rontiris and Koun, both influential directors who produced generations of actors and created acting styles. It was also the decade of significant organisations like the National Theatre and the first semi-state theatres. The foundations were laid in the 1920s, but the significant productions of Greek tragedy would be presented in the years that followed.

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<sup>1</sup> Yiannis Sideris discusses the first steps of the Greek theatre in Yiannis Sideris (1970) '1921 and the Theatre or How was the Greek Theatre Born', *Nea Hestia (Νέα Εστία)*, vol. 88, n. 1043, pp. 151-191.

<sup>2</sup> Details about these companies can be found in Dimitris Spathis (1983) 'The Modern Greek Theatre' in *Greece – History – Civilisation*, vol. 10, Thessaloniki: no publisher, pp. 17-29. There Spathis mentions indicative plays performed and names of venues and actors. See also Yiannis Sideris (1999) *History of the Modern Greek Theatre 1794-1944*, vol. 1, Athens: Kastaniotis, pp. 179-193 on professional actors, and pp. 205-218 on amateurs with exhaustive details on all the performances of the period discussed, comments on aesthetics, and tendencies followed by the companies as well as a large number of articles commenting on shows.

<sup>3</sup> The first time was in 1863 when the Dimitrakos brothers signed contracts with their actors for their performances in Constantinople, but this was an exception rather than standard practice. See Sideris, *History of the Modern Greek Theatre 1794-1944*, p. 181 and Spathis, 'The Modern Greek Theatre', pp. 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> *Antigone* was the most popular of all tragedies until the nineteenth century. See George Steiner (1984) *Antigones, The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> On the philological importance of the translation, the general atmosphere in which it was translated, and the significance this translation/production has for the Greek theatre see Yiannis Sideris (1963) 'Old Desires on Reviving Tragedy', *Theatro (Θέατρο)*, n. 8, pp. 35-36.

<sup>6</sup> Sideris comments: '... an outdoors performance with melodramatic or neoclassical costumes. The actors used their usual technique, they could not tell the difference between a character of Metastasio, Alfieri, Voltaire or Sophocles. It was not a production that aimed to define a specific tendency towards ancient drama performance' in Sideris, *History of the Modern Greek Theatre 1794-1944*, p. 214. As will be noted, this differentiation between the genres will take quite some time to be realised by actors, directors, critics and audiences.

<sup>7</sup> Sideris devotes the first chapters of the first volume of *History of the Modern Greek Theatre* to the currents that influenced the theatre in Greece – amateur and professional – since the foundation of the Greek State. Sideris mainly refers to plays. However, he also introduces ideas on acting and performing. Konstantinos Kiriakos Aristias stayed for a very short period in Greece, see Yiannis Sideris (1976) *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, Athens: Ikaros, pp. 22-24. Nikolaos Lekatsas performed for the first time in Greece in 1881 and continued to appear on the Greek stage until the end of the nineteenth century. For further information see also Andreas Dimitriadis (1997) *Nikolaos Lekatsas and His Contribution to the Development of the Art of Acting in Greece*, Rethymno: unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Crete.

<sup>8</sup> Adelaide Ristori appeared on the Greek stage in 1865, made a strong impression and raised discussions concerning the problems of Greek theatre, notably, the creation of schools for actors and a national theatre. See Sideris, *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, pp. 35-42; Sideris, *History of the Modern Greek Theatre 1794-1944*, p. 182; Spathis, 'The Modern Greek Theatre', p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> For the work, theatrical, social and political position of the Society and its President Georgios Mistriotis see Sideris, *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, pp. 101 onwards.

<sup>10</sup> Theodoros Dilyiannis was a famous politician and Prime Minister of the Nationalist Party. When he was murdered in front of the Greek Parliament, he was Prime Minister.

<sup>11</sup> The Society wanted to perform *Antigone* at the Stadium and thus to use an open-air theatre. In the end, the performance was performed at the Municipal Theatre of Athens. See Sideris, *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, pp. 122-123. The Society managed to perform *Antigone* at the Stadium in 1905. This was the first Greek performance presented there. See Sideris, *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, pp. 214. The Society's other productions were: *Electra* at Municipal Theatre of Athens, in 1899 revived in 1906; *Oedipus the King* at Municipal Theatre of Athens, in 1901; *Iphigenia* at Municipal Theatre of Athens, in 1922.

<sup>12</sup> For extracts of reviews and further reference see Sideris, *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, pp. 151-156 and Thodoros Grammatas (2002) *Twentieth Century Greek Theatre Cultural Originals and Originality*, vol. 1, Athens: Exantas, pp. 13-15.

<sup>13</sup> The Greek word used when Murat writes his autobiography is *ιδιόρρηθμες*.

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<sup>14</sup> The other two were related to the musical interests of the Club.

<sup>15</sup> Stefanos Stefanou says that the donation was given by both brothers in Stefanos Stefanou (28 February 1928) 'Memories from the Royal Theatre', *Elefthero Vima* (Ελεύθερο Βήμα). Andreas Andreadis notes that the donation was offered by only one brother. See Andreas Andreadis (1933) *The Royal Theatre*, Athens: Publishers Tzaka-Delagrammatika, pp. 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> For details about the land and building of the edifice, see Stefanos Stefanou, (28 February 1928 – 13 March 1928) 'Memories from the Royal Theatre', *Elefthero Vima* (Ελεύθερο Βήμα); Andreadis, *The Royal Theatre*, pp. 9-13. For architectural information and artistic tendencies see Helen Fessa-Emmanuel (1994a) *The Architecture of the Modern Greek Theatre 1720-1940*, vol. 2, Athens: no publisher, pp. 15-24.

<sup>17</sup> On his life and work see Katia Arfara (2001) *Oikonomou: His Work as a Director at the Royal Theatre*, Athens: unpublished MA Dissertation, Department of Theatre Studies of Kapodistrian University of Athens; Antonis Glitzouris (1996) 'The Creation of Director's Position as the Royal Theatre (1898-1902)', *Mnemon* (Μνήμων), 18, pp. 61-88; Antonis Glitzouris (2001) *The Rise and Consolidation of Stage-Direction in Greece*, Athens: Hellenic Letters, pp. 67-78, 138-147, 641-651; Yiannis Sideris (1960) 'Thomas Oikonomou (1900-1927). Fights for a Genuine Art of the Theatre', *Nea Hestia* (Νέα Εστία), vol. 67, pp. 593-596; Yiannis Sideris, (1960a) 'Thomas Oikonomou (1900-1927). Fights for a Genuine Art of the Theatre', *Nea Hestia* (Νέα Εστία), vol. 67, pp. 651-657; Yiannis Sideris (1964a) 'Thomas Oikonomou: moments from his theatrical life' in 'Actor's Day' Devoted to Thomas Oikonomou, Athens: no publisher, pp.5-12; Sideris, *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, pp. 180-228; Sideris, *History of the Modern Greek Theatre 1794-1944*, pp. 229-278; Yiannis Sideris (1999a) *History of the Modern Greek Theatre 1794-1944*, vol. 2, Athens: Kastaniotis, pp. 15-27, 134-281; Spathis, 'The Modern Greek Theatre', pp. 29-33. Stefanou notes that Oikonomou sent him his Curriculum Vitae, programmes of productions he performed in and a letter requesting to be hired as Director in the Royal Theatre. See Stefanos Stefanou (4 March 1928) 'Memories from the Royal Theatre', *Elefthero Vima* (Ελεύθερο Βήμα).

<sup>18</sup> Of course, there were some exceptions but that was the general pattern. Even Kotopouli, who was then very young came from a theatrical family and appeared on the stage since she was four.

<sup>19</sup> The rest of the ancient plays were presented after the *Oresteia*, but a set of rules had been set and, of course, the situation had altered slightly. However, *Antigone* was banned by the King due to its demotic language and to its democratic translator, see Arfara, *Oikonomou: His Work as a Director at the Royal Theatre*, pp. 28-9; Stefanos Stefanou (9 March 1928) 'Memories from the Royal Theatre', *Elefthero Vima* (Ελεύθερο Βήμα).

<sup>20</sup> On his life and work see Glitzouris, *The Rise and Consolidation of Stage-Direction in Greece*, pp. 79-90, 664-668; Mirto Mavrikou-Anagnostou (1964) *Constantinos Christomanos and the New Scene*, Athens: Fexi Publishing; Pavlos Nirvanas (1951) 'Constantinos Christomanos', *Helleniki Dimiourgia* (Ελληνική Δημιουργία), vol. 8, n. 85, pp. 93-97; Michael Peranthis (1951) 'Constantinos Christomanos', *Helleniki Dimiourgia* (Ελληνική Δημιουργία), vol. 8, n. 85, pp. 77-88; Ioulia Pipinia (1999) 'New Scene and the Movement of Independent Theatres in Europe during the nineteenth Century' in *Constantinos Christomanos and His Era. 130 Years since His Birth. Transcripts of Conference*, ed. Katerina Saropoulou, Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation and Non Profitable Company of Theatre and Mimicry "Aiora", pp. 61-96; Walter Puchner (1997) *Constantinos Christomanos as a Drama Author*, Athens: Kastaniotis; Walter Puchner (1999) 'Constantinos Christomanos as a Dramatic Writer' in *Constantinos Christomanos and His Era. 130 Years since His Birth. Transcripts of Conference*, ed. Katerina Saropoulou, Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation and Non Profitable Company of Theatre and Mimicry "Aiora", pp. 11-31; Michael Rodas (1944) *Personalities of the Theatre*, Athens: Pegasus; Yiannis Sideris (1946) 'Constantinos Christomanos and his Importance as a Director', *Nea Hestia* (Νέα Εστία), vol. 40, n. 466, pp. 1235-1241; Sideris, *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, pp. 180-228; Sideris, *History of the Modern Greek Theatre 1794-1944*, pp. 229-278; Sideris, *History of the Modern Greek Theatre 1794-1944*, vol. 2, pp. 75-87; Spathis, 'The Modern Greek Theatre', pp. 29-33; Dimitris Spathis (1999) 'Constantinos Christomanos and the Establishment of Directing in Modern Greek Theatre' in *Constantinos Christomanos and His Era. 130 Years since His Birth. Transcripts of Conference*, ed. Katerina Saropoulou, Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation and

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Non Profitable Company of Theatre and Mimicry "Aiora", pp.137-155; Grigorios Xenopoulos (1933) 'Constantinos Christomanos and the New Scene', *Erevna (Έρευνα)*, Athens: Kasigoni.

<sup>21</sup> Mavrikou-Anagnostou believes that he was deeply influenced by his ideas. See Mavrikou-Anagnostou, *Christomanos and the New Scene*, pp. 92-93. On the other hand, Glitzouris claims that there is no proof that Christomanos followed any productions by Antoine or Lugné-Poe. See Glitzouris, *The Rise and Consolidation of Stage-Direction in Greece*, p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> Pipinia also believes that, unlike the European independent theatres, he did not insist on presenting native authors. See Pipinia, 'New Scene and the Movement of Independent Theatres in Europe during the nineteenth Century', p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> The placing of dung on the stage at the production of Leo Tolstoy's *Powers of Darkness* can be associated with the naturalistic tendencies, but it can very well be associated with Christomanos's aestheticism, allowing the latter to prevail. A similar approach can be applied to the meticulous curving of the famous club of Hercules in *Alcestis*. Thus the elements that had classified Christomanos as a naturalist, now indicate that he was more inclined to aestheticism, See Walter Puchner (1988) 'Stylistic Problems in the Greek Theatre of the 20<sup>th</sup> century' in *Greek Theatrology. Twelve Essays*, Theatre Library of Crete, vol B, Athens: Cretan Theatre Club, pp. 381-408; Puchner, *Constantinos Christomanos as a Drama Author*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>24</sup> Glitzouris notes that the New Scene was staffed with actors of a different, higher social status to the rest of the companies of the period. See Glitzouris, *The Rise and Consolidation of Stage-Direction in Greece*, p. 81.

<sup>25</sup> This did happen in the production *How We Speak English*, and Theodoros Synadinos appeared in *Alcestis* without being an actor or having rehearsed. See Sideris, 'Constantinos Christomanos and his Importance as a Director', pp. 1239-40.

<sup>26</sup> Mavrikou-Anagnostou has a detailed list of all the plays presented by the New Scene, Mavrikou-Anagnostou, *Christomanos and the New Scene*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>27</sup> The honorary performances were those where entire earnings were given to the actor in whose honour the performance was given.

<sup>28</sup> Sideris must be referring to his articles of 12 November and 14 November 1926 at *State*. See Fotos Politis (1983) *Selection of Critical Articles*, vol. 1, Athens: Ikaros, pp. 247-251.

<sup>29</sup> See John L. Styan (1982) *Directors in Directing. Max Reinhardt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 152.

<sup>30</sup> Politis analyses his approach to the presentation of the Chorus in his interview in Fotos Politis (26 September 1927) 'Hecuba at the Stadium', *Politeia (Πολιτεία)*.

<sup>31</sup> On the disputes concerning the set see Yiannis Sideris (1956) 'Fotos Politis a Man of the Theatre', *Nea Hestia (Νέα Εστία)*, vol. 56, n. 658, p. 1992; Spathis, 'The Modern Greek Theatre', p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> The Theatro Technis was staffed by the students of two drama schools, the Conservatory of Athens (Ωδείο Αθηνών) and the Conservatory of Greece (Ελληνικό Ωδείο), see Spathis, 'The Modern Greek Theatre', p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> Details for both Delphic Celebrations can be found in Anonymous ed. (1966) *Eos (Hώς)*, vol. 9, n. 98-102; Anonymous ed. (1967) *Eos (Hώς)*, vol. 10, n. 103-107; Antonis Glitzouris (1998) 'Delphic Celebrations (1927, 1930): The Revival of the Ancient Greek Chorus in *Prometheus Bound* and *The Suppliants* by Aeschylus', *Ta Historika (Τα Ιστορικά)*, vol. 15, n. 28,29, pp. 147-170; Glitzouris, *The Rise and Consolidation of Stage-Direction in Greece*, pp. 253-260,345-347, 470-475,546-548,565-574; Sideris, *The Ancient Theatre on the Modern Greek Stage 1817-1932*, pp. 320-367, 403-426; Spathis, 'The Modern Greek Theatre', pp. 49-50; David Wiles (2000) *Greek Theatre Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 183-189; David Wiles (2007) *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 88-93, 140.

## CHAPTER TWO

### From the National Theatre to the Theatro Technis, 1930-1942

The years from 1930 until 1942 fundamentally altered the Greek theatre world. During this period, the state decided for the first time in Greek history to play an active part in Greek theatre life. Thus, the Liberal Party (Κόμμα Φιλελευθέρων) of Eleftherios Venizelos took the initiative to found the National Theatre of Greece (Εθνικό Θέατρο της Ελλάδος), and the Dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas made the Kotopouli Theatre Company a semi-state organisation and offered it large funding. It was during this decade that the National Theatre gave its inaugural production in 1932. And, in 1938, it presented the first open-air performance at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus. The use of the Epidaurus Theatre was a major step for laying the foundation for the future Festival of Epidaurus, which was inaugurated in 1954. In 1942, during the German Occupation (1940-1944), the Theatro Technis (Θέατρο Τέχνης) was founded, becoming the rival of the National Theatre of Greece. An antagonism between the two companies was established that would go on for many decades. From this period onwards, ancient Greek tragedy occupied a significant part in the repertoires of several companies. This chapter will give an overview of the conditions formed during that important period. It will offer an overview of Rontiris's *Electra* at the National, and discuss Marika Kotopouli's production of *Electra* directed by Koun. It will also examine Linos Karzis's attempts at ancient tragedy, which aimed to mirror what he thought to be the exact conditions of the scenic representation of tragedy in Classical Greece.

## 2.1 The National Theatre

Greek intellectuals, critics and theatre practitioners – actors, directors and playwrights – aspired to the creation of a National Theatre, and there were countless debates on the matter. Theodoros Sinadenos, an important actor and Director of the Professional Theatre School (Επαγγελματική Σχολή Θεάτρου), supported the notion that a National Theatre should be created 'here and now' (Sinadenos, 28 September 1928). Alkis Thrilos found the need for the foundation of a National Theatre imperative (Thrilos, 1977: 11-14). Grigorios Xenopoulos was also of the same opinion (Xenopoulos, 21 September 1928; Xenopoulos, 1928: 903-4), as were other significant Athenian intellectuals like Pavlos Nirvanas, who was one of the eight intellectuals at the Declaration of the Nea Skene in 1901 (see the first chapter of this thesis).

From theatrical circles, Kotopouli, Spiros Melas and Mitsos Murat joined forces and tried to set a model for a future national theatre by founding the Eleftheri Skene (Ελεύθερη Σκηνή) (March 1929), but this attempt failed for various reasons. Because, even though the general impression in the media and the literary and theatrical circles was that the company could receive money from the government, the company did not apply for state funding for reasons that were not disclosed (Rodas, 1931: 44). Possibly, the fact that Melas decided to withdraw from the company in February 1930 was one of them, but his withdrawal definitely resulted in the weakening of the company itself. Michael Rodas notes that the company was dissolved in the end because Kotopouli decided to tour the USA. Thus in October 1930, she

presented *Electra* by Hugo von Hoffmansthal which was the last performance of the Eleftheri Skene (ibid.: 56).

Fotos Politis, by contrast, in his article 'National Theatre', opposed the idea of the foundation of a National Theatre for years, principally, because he thought that art and theatre had to overcome obstacles in order to achieve greatness. By 'obstacles', Politis meant that art had to face 'great financial difficulties' otherwise it would have 'something fake and rotten inside it' (Politis, 1983: 204). Nonetheless, as he admitted, he soon realised that such a viewpoint could not be of any real value to the development of Greek theatre. So, in that same article, he insisted that a National theatre had to be created, but only if it had solely pedagogic aims (ibid.: 207-208), meaning that the National should aim to educate the Greek audience by presenting the classic Greek poets, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and European authors such as William Shakespeare, Molière or Henrik Ibsen. In another article written two years later, in 1928, Politis argued that Greece should not have a National Theatre, but a State Theatre. He claimed that, in order to use the word 'National' a country should primarily have important playwrights; otherwise the term 'National' had no essential power. However, he believed that Greece needed a state theatre which would ameliorate the poor conditions of the Greek stage such as pitiable costumes and sets and actors who did not know their lines, to name but a few inadequacies, and he asked the state to see to its creation (ibid.: 308-311). It is clear that Politis considered the creation of a state-funded theatre a great responsibility, and this could well be the reason why he constantly tried to define its purpose and to review its structure.

In 1930, Georgios Papandreou , Minister of Education of the Venizelos Government, decided, in turn, that conditions had matured for the foundation of the Greek National Theatre. The foundation of the National Theatre coincided with the celebrations of the Centennial of the Independence of the Greek State. It can be claimed that the National was a result of these celebrations. Papandreou strongly believed that every state must have its national theatre, and that no nation could be considered to be a veritable state unless it had a theatre (Irene the Athenian, 18 March 1930; Papandreou, 1931: 105). As a consequence, the Centennial celebrations brought forward questions concerning the state's achievements in relation to culture as well as politics, and thus stirred up debates and discussions that were related to the conditions of Greek theatre. These questions concerned the quality of plays presented and the way that they were presented in relation to acting, costumes, sets and so on, as well as the goals that a National Theatre had to serve.<sup>1</sup> It seems that these questions paved the way for the foundation of the National. The affinity between Papandreou's and Politis's ideas on the creation of a National Theatre lay in the fact that the state should support the theatre because the notion that 'every state must have its national theatre' went hand in glove with the certainty that such a theatre should be subsidised. Thus the Minister of Education found in Politis a suitable candidate who would be able to play an active role in the foundation of the National Theatre and ultimately become its Director.

During the same year, and before the proclamation of the foundation of the National, there were two attempts that aimed at creating a company that would develop into the National Theatre of Greece. This meant that the two



companies that were founded were not created or funded by the state; nor did they function under the auspices of the state. Nevertheless, the members of these two companies aspired to create a company that would have a successful course and, thus, claim from the state the right to become the Greek National Theatre. These two ambitious companies were the *Theatro tis Efarmogis* (Θέατρο της Εφαρμογής) and the *Ethniki Skene* (Εθνική Σκηνή).

The *Theatro tis Efarmogis* was a company that created considerable unrest within circles of professional actors. In order to understand the reasoning behind the actors' opposition to this company, the *Theatro tis Efarmogis*'s aims and structure have to be reviewed.<sup>2</sup> Sinadenos, who, as noted, was the Director of the Professional Theatre School, initiated, along with Politis, the idea of founding a company that would be mostly staffed by the graduates of the School. However, Politis kept a low profile regarding his involvement in this company due to his character and his wise habit of knowing where he stood before being publicly exposed. The proposition that three quarters of the actors of the *Theatro tis Efarmogis* would be graduates of the Professional Theatre School and only one quarter would be actors from outside the School spread panic through the circles of professional actors, who were plagued by unemployment (Rodas, 1931: 13). It must be realised that the actors of the period did not consider the graduates of the School to be professional actors. It is interesting to observe Kotopouli's reaction to the graduates of the Professional Drama School, and note that she clearly segregated the graduates from the professionals, on the assumption that these students should not appear on the Greek stage.

I find it immoral ... to found a National Theatre, which will be transformed into a state organisation, with students of the school. ... If there is going to be a National theatre, it must be created by professional actors (ibid.: 14-15).

Moreover, the company would use the Drama School's reserve funds, a sum of money accumulated by the tax deducted from the tickets of professional companies. This sum was intended for the support of the School, as the actors argued, and not for the creation of a professional company, which would occupy a commercially competitive position within Athenian theatre life. Therefore, professional companies and actors considered that the *Theatro tis Efarmogis* would jeopardise their financial stability. Furthermore, the entire professional world feared that the *Theatro tis Efarmogis*, if it was actually established, had the prerequisites to be developed into the National Theatre of Greece due to a loophole in an article at the programme of the celebrations of the Centennial, which actually proposed the creation of a National Theatre staffed by the graduates of the Drama School (ibid.: 14). This was something that the professional world, especially the ambitious leading actors, feared the most. In the end, the *Theatro tis Efarmogis* dissolved without presenting a single performance.

The second company, the *Ethniki Skene*, which did not present any productions either, was founded by intellectuals, actors and playwrights who were disappointed by the failure of the *Theatro tis Efarmogis*. Rodas's article of 16 March 1930 in the popular journal *Peitharhia* mentions that the President of the company was Ioannis Griparis, the Vice-president was Pavlos Nirvanas, and its members were Kiveli Andrianou, Spiros Melas, Fotos Politis, Theodoros Sinadenos, Grigorios Xenopoulos and Constantinos Theodorides

(ibid.: 62). When the members who comprised the board of the Ethniki Skene are compared with those of the board of the National Theatre, it emerges that five out of eight members (namely, Griparis, Nirvanas, Politis, Sinadenos and Xenopoulos) were on both boards. This crossover suggests that it was the intention of the Ethniki Skene to become a company that would develop into the National Theatre. It also reveals these companies' importance within the field of Greek theatre because, as Pierre Bourdieu argues:

The fact remains that every new position, in asserting itself as such, determines a displacement of the whole structure and that, by the logic of action and reaction, it leads to all sorts of changes in the position-takings of the occupants of the other positions (Bourdieu, 1993: 58).

Bourdieu's point regarding the influence of one position on another within a given field, in this case, theatre, helps to elucidate the situation of Greek theatre in this period in so far as the dynamic of the field as a whole accelerated the actual establishment of the National Theatre. As already observed, both companies failed in their attempts to stage any productions at all. Moreover, they simply closed down when the state made its decision to create the National Theatre of Greece. The fact that the members of the companies willingly closed down was a further indication that their initial aim was to create a National Theatre.

On 24 March 1930, Papandreou filed the bill for the creation of a National Theatre, and the vote on this was passed on 5 May of that same year. The National took a powerful position within the Greek theatre field. In doing so it signalled its status and the prestige it intended to acquire. As Bourdieu argues, such symbolic capital is a guarantor of artistic as well as economic value embedded in the work of an institution and in the institution itself. When

discussing the conditions of nineteenth-century painting in his essay 'Manet and the Institutionalization of Anomie', he asserts the following as regards the École de Beaux-Arts, an institution of great importance:

The École, that is, the state, guarantees their [the painters'] value, by guaranteeing, like paper money, the value of the titles that they receive and confer. It also guarantees the value of their products by assuring them of a near monopoly of the existing market: the Salon (Bourdieu, 1993: 242).

Similarly, the Greek state also guaranteed the dominance, in quality, of the National over every other theatre company by assuring its 'consecration', to use Bourdieu's language – consecration being the result of acquired status and prestige. The state also gave the members of the National the opportunity to produce works that no other Greek company had the opportunity, or time, to do by guaranteeing them the necessary financial support.

The first production of the National was presented almost two years after the bill was filed. This production was given on 19 March 1932. The plays presented were *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus and *Uncle Dream* (Θείος Όνειρος) by Xenopoulos – an ancient and a contemporary Greek play presented on the same day. This choice indicated the National's intention to marry the old with the new as well as that of its director, Politis.

Griparis, the renowned poet, intellectual, ancient Greek drama translator and civil servant was appointed General Director of the Theatre. Initially, the position of the Director of the Theatre was offered to Melas, who declined because he wanted to 'have complete control of the theatre' (Kanakis, 1999: 18). Melas wanted to be General and Artistic director, and not to be restricted by a board, but Papandreou insisted on this structure (Rodas, 88). The post

was then offered to playwright and journalist Miltiades Lidorikis, who accepted it. However, when the Theatre opened its gates, the position of Director was occupied by Politis. There exists no record of the way that Lidorikis was replaced by Politis, but, in the end, the latter received general acclaim. One of the reasons that he was considered the right person for the position, apart from his work as theatre critic, literary columnist and drama school teacher, was his directorial attempts at tragedy (the productions of *Oedipus the King* (1919) and *Hecuba* (1927)). It can be seen that tragedy's symbolic capital, to use Bourdieu's notion (1984; 1993; 1995; 1996), was increasing for three main reasons: the production of a tragedy was considered then, and even today, a major undertaking; such an attempt raised significant debates among literary and theatrical circles; tragedy belonged to the classic Greek culture and tradition. It is after this period that directors who worked on tragedy were considered accomplished professionally.

On the one hand, the National was staffed by young and old, famous as well as unknown actors. The significant actor Emelios Veakis, for instance, was one of the members of the National's company. On the other hand, the two great leading ladies of the Greek theatre – Kotopouli and Kiveli – were not included as members of the National Theatre. This was believed to be Politis's personal choice, although there is no evidence to support this. Nonetheless, the exclusion of Kotopouli, in particular, triggered the creation of more productions of ancient Greek tragedy, as Kotopouli wanted to play an important role in the revival and presentation of Greek tragedy on the modern Greek stage, which is something that will be developed in the second part of this chapter.

The fact is that Politis did not want these two leading ladies in the newly born National Theatre, and it is not difficult to understand his reasoning. First, they both rejected the idea of having a Greek theatre director, and supported the idea of hiring a foreign director, like Max Reinhardt or Firmin Gémier, with whom they were personally acquainted, and whose work they had seen and admired (Malavetas, 1931: 93-96). Second, Politis aimed to create an ensemble theatre, which would have been impossible if Kiveli and Kotopouli were in the company because they would insist on being treated as the 'stars' that they were. Politis, in his inaugural speech to *The Actors of the Greek Theatre* at the National Theatre, explained that all actors would play big as well as small parts, that they would have equal opportunities, and that ensemble performance was more important than individual performances (Politis, 1964: 109-112). Thus he had to have a core of actors who would be faithful to him, would not question his authority, and would accept the parts that were given to them.

As noted, Politis was the first and sole theatre director of the National Theatre from March 1932 until December 1934, when he died suddenly of a heart attack. During this period, he directed 34 plays of which four were tragedies. These tragedies were *Agamemnon* (the inaugural production of the National), *Oedipus the King*, *The Persians* and *Cyclops*. His directorial work on ancient tragedy is considered to have laid the foundations for the exploration of ancient Greek theatre performances because of his fresh and novel approaches in relation to the acting space, the Chorus and the scenic presentation in general (Georgousopoulos, 1973: 191), as it will be observed below.

All four of his productions at the National were presented on an elevated stage with a proscenium arch. Minor adjustments were applied to the stage, but the convention of the venue's spatial division prevailed. Hence, the audience in the stalls looked up at the performance space, the spectators in the circle were almost at the same level as the actors, and the balcony spectators looked down from their restricted-view seats. Politis sensed that a proscenium-arch theatre was not adequate for the staging of ancient Greek tragedies because it did not mirror the philosophy of Greek tragedy accurately. He believed that the genre had a different structure, which required a theatre that would offer equal viewing to all of its spectators. Furthermore, in his 1915 article 'The Ancient Theatre', Politis points out that ancient tragedy as a genre has an 'architecture' that cannot be compared with any contemporary form of drama due to the Chorus. Its members were onlookers and observers, but, at the same time, they prompted, advised or scorned the characters. This multivalent function posed the most significant problems in the presentation of Greek tragedy during the twentieth century. (Politis, 1983: 15).

Politis left his mark on the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy. Thrilos gives an account of the Chorus in the production of *Agamemnon*.

The Chorus ... comprises people who watch closely the action, even though they do not take part in it, they get personally involved, they are curious, and they are affected by every change of the plot. I do not mean to say that Mr Politis presented a realistic Chorus. He dressed it homogeneously, chose the colour combinations, instructed schematic movements, plastic and harmonious, but at the same time he divided the chorales, which were recited by his four Coryphaei, and gave the general impression that the chorales were an interlocution between the Chorus members themselves and, also, between the Chorus members and the dramatic personae (Thrilos, 1977: p. 339).

Thus Politis managed to visualise tragedy's dramatic 'architecture' on the stage by using a multivocal Chorus. That is to say, he introduced a polyphonic and not a monophonic Chorus. Its multivocality was conveyed by dividing the lines of the Chorus between the four Coryphaei and accentuating the interlocution that Thrilos mentions. Thanos Kotsopoulos, actor, theatre director, and Politis's assistant, also observed that Politis opposed a monophonic representation of the Chorus. Kotsopoulos did not analyse Politis's choice, but he detected the new proposals that Politis introduced. He argued that Politis was the first to present 'a stylised Chorus divided into semi-Choruses' (Kotsopoulos, 1954: 1703). By 'stylised' Kotsopoulos meant both a Chorus that carried out a choreography which comprised suggestive dance movement, as in the productions of *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus*, as well as the frontal disposition of the Chorus, which was reminiscent of the disposition of the statues on the metopes of ancient Greek and Roman temples that Politis used in the production of *The Persians*.

One of the major inspirations regarding stylisation in Politis's performances was his collaboration with Fotis Kontoglou, who was the representative of a tendency in art to return to 'traditional and Byzantine figures in order to discover the Modern Greek identity' (Florou, 1999: 9). The tendency to seek the Modern Greek identity through the Greek 'tradition, Byzantine and popular art' (Politis, 1983a: 42) was also Politis's intention, and would become Karolos Koun's intention too (Koun, 1981; Koun, 2000). Kontoglou was the mentor of many young artists such as the painter and set designer Yiannis Tsarouhis, who was a student of Kontoglou and became one of the most important collaborators of Koun, and, of course, of Koun himself. According to the above



evidence, it seems that the interconnection between Politis and Koun was very strong as they both had as a starting point the redefinition of the Modern Greek identity through popular tradition, although their work developed in different ways. Moreover, Koun confessed that it was Politis's ancient Greek tragedy productions that made him turn to professional theatre (Koun, 1981: 99-101).

After Politis's sudden death, Dimitris Rontiris, who was his assistant director, took his place as the permanent Director of the National Theatre. Rontiris was a student of Politis at the Professional Theatre School. After working as a professional actor with the Kotopouli Company, he took a state scholarship and studied theatre in Germany and Austria, where he became assistant director to Reinhardt. His first attempt at Greek tragedy was *Electra* by Sophocles, a play that he directed several times through the years with different casts. This first production of *Electra* opened at the Herodus Atticus Theatre on 3 October 1936. Rontiris, in his first production, managed to offer a complete spectrum of his artistic concept of tragedy, which was, in many ways, novel to what was presented on the stage until that period, and divided public and critics because of its staging and acting innovations which will be presented and discussed below.

To begin with, Rontiris believed, like Politis, that the text was the governing element of a performance of ancient Greek tragedy. He paid considerable attention to the poetic aspect of the text of ancient tragedy, namely, the rhythm, the verse and its clear recitation. This brings up a number of significant aspects concerning Rontiris's theory on acting Greek tragedy. This

theory was unique and novel in relation to what was accustomed, namely the leading actors centred performances of the 'stars' of the Greek stage such as Kotopouli, or the dry recitation of the Society for the Instruction of Ancient Dramas. Even Politis, who proposed a new approach towards the presentation of Greek tragedy, did not focus on the actor as much as Rontiris. Rontiris regarded every text as a musical *score*. This applied significantly to Greek tragedy. The idea of a text as a *score*, which, apparently, was the direct influence of Reinhardt, who, in turn, was influenced by Stanislavsky, determined a number of choices in relation to his directorial work such as the translation of the text, the acting techniques and the *mise en scène*.

The translation of *Electra* was carried out by Griparis, who translated all the ancient Greek tragedies Rontiris directed. By 1936, Griparis was no longer the director of the National as he had been replaced by Kostis Bastias. Griparis was a supporter of the Modern Greek language. This factor influenced immensely the quality of his work. The debate concerning the formation of the Modern Greek language, demotic, which was the popular language of the people, and its opposition to katharevousa, the scholarly language, dominated the first two decades of the twentieth century, when Griparis matured as an artist and as a translator.

At this point, it is necessary to present a brief overview of the Greek linguistic situation. Since the middle of the nineteenth century and even until the end of the dictatorship of the Generals in 1974, katharevousa was the language used by the state (the parliament and ministries, important documents and so on), and the majority of the academic world. It was not a natural language, but a

linguistic formation constructed by a powerful minority that wanted, on the one hand, to control an ignorant public, and, on the other, to create what this minority thought to be a link with ancient Greece. However, katharevousa did not indicate a connection to the ancient Greek language. The language of the Greek people was the spoken tongue of the demotic songs (the Greek folk songs and poems) since the thirteenth century, the verses of the Cretan and Ionian Sea plays of the Renaissance. This tongue was widely understood through the centuries and attested to the continuity of the Greek language. By the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, enlightened intellectuals fought for the establishment of the Modern Greek language. There were great difficulties in the effort to establish this language, and the followers of demotic occasionally fell into hyperboles such as the extreme suggestions of Yiannis Psiharis regarding spelling, pronunciation and syntax, who ended up creating an idiom that was impossible to use. Nonetheless, gradually Modern Greek became the language of literature, poetry and theatre.

Griparis was one of the initiators of this effort. He aimed to create a simple, yet poetic language which focused on avoiding all kinds of puristic elements. In the translated text of *Electra*, this aim resulted in decreasing the density and speed of the original text. The outcome produced a faithful and accurate translation, which was easily understood. It should always be kept in mind that the literary people of the 1920s and the 1930s aimed to acquaint the vast majority of spectators with the Greek tragedies, so the issue of comprehension was of great importance. However, this practice also created a translation that, by today's standards, could be considered rather analytical,

meaning that Griparis had to explain thoroughly everything that he was saying.

Fortunately, the fact that Griparis was a poet made him pay considerable attention to the rhythm and clarity of the verse. Hence, the verses' rhythm is pronounced and well organized. Occasionally, Griparis had to invent new words in order to convey the alliterations of the original text. These words were compound, polysyllabic, had many consonants and thus were difficult for the actor to pronounce. For instance, the phrase 'στέρνων πληγὰς αιμασσομένων' (90) is translated only into one long word 'αιματοστηθοδέρνομαι', as Griparis must have realised that if he analysed the syntax of the ancient sentence he would use too much space. Thus he chose to use one word that had the same rhythmic duration, but was difficult to utter. Moreover and most importantly, the conservatism and the aesthetics of his era are projected on the choice of words, which beautify and smooth out some raw and strong words used by Sophocles. For instance, in Clytemnestra's long speech to Electra, when she refers to Iphigenia, Griparis translates:

ΠΟΥ ΕΚΕΙΝΟΣ  
όχι τους ίδιους τράβηξε τους πόνους  
να τη σπείρει, μ' εμέ σαν τη γεννούσα (Sophocles, 1994, 176).<sup>3</sup>

Sophocles writes in the prototype:

οικ ίσον καμών εμοί  
λύπης ότ' έσπειρ', ώσπερ η τίκουσ' εγώ (532-533).

The exact translation would be: he did not feel pain when he seeded her, as I did when I gave birth to her. Clearly, Sophocles's choice of words make an allusion to the sexual pleasure that Agamemnon gained when he contributed

to Iphigenia's birth, as he grants an ambiguity to the word 'λύπης'. Griparis adds the word 'suffer' ('τράβηξε' in Modern Greek) which narrows the ambiguity and, consequently, the sexual allusion. Overall, Griparis offered a rather innovative translation for the 1930s, but it is conservative if it is evaluated by contemporary standards.

It must be noted that this translation was the sole translation that Rontiris used for all his productions of *Electra* (1936, 1942, 1952, 1953, 1958 and 1978) because he thought that this text completed his notion of the play. It was through this text that he had explored the archetypical figure of Electra, her battle with her mother, Orestes's return and the slaughter of his own mother. It was this text that had become the *score* of his performance.

This leads to the next essential point in relation to Rontiris's directing. As Rontiris believed that every text (especially that of a tragedy) was a musical *score*, he had specific ideas about the way this musical *score* had to be executed. As his student, theatre critic and academic, Kostas Georgousopoulos points out, Rontiris's productions relied on an 'unyielding, austere *score*. Thus, he [Rontiris] needed actors who were virtuosi, hard working and spiritually developed' (Georgousopoulos, 2000: 18). Hence, Rontiris believed that every syllable and letter of a text was equivalent to a note on a *score*, which meant that every utterance should have a specific value, that is, a certain duration and intensity. It should belong to a specific musical key, low or high, sharp or flat, and it should follow a set rhythm, slow or fast, diminuendo, crescendo or staccato. By this Rontiris did not mean that there was only one way to present the part of Electra. He meant that the

words of the text had specific values, and that every actor, being a musical instrument, had to interpret these set notes. This approach towards the classic Greek texts influenced the way that generations of actors acted the ancient Greek parts. His directorial principles were passed to future actors, especially at the National Theatre's Drama School (Ανώτερη Σχολή Δραματικής Τέχνης Εθνικού Θεάτρου), and young actors followed Rontiris's model of recitation. This was known as the Rontirian acting style.

Rontiris was very lucky because his first Electra was the great actress, Katina Paxinou, who realised Rontiris's ideal. Paxinou was an ex-opera singer, who could read music, and understand notes and pauses on a score. She used to mark her text with notes and pauses, and she actually created a score out of her written part. Like Rontiris, she believed in the music of the spoken word, and, like Rontiris, Electra was Paxinou's first leading role in tragedy. The press reaction varied towards this production and, especially, towards Paxinou's performance. Some critics found her 'satisfactory', 'worthy of praise' (Rodas, 5 October 1936; Theatricos, 5 October 1936). The majority, however, found her 'inadequate', 'common', 'cold' (K.O., 5 October; Spanoudi, 5 October 1936; Nasos, 6 October 1936). The critic of the rightwing, popular newspaper *Acropolis* compared Kotopouli to Paxinou and found the latter unable to reach Kotopouli's emotional gamut and power of expression (Papadimas, 6 October 1936).

Taking into consideration the above critics' remarks, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the quality and, probably, the intention of Paxinou's performance. It is clear that a large part of the press found Paxinou's



6. Katina Paxinou as Electra in the National Theatre's production of *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rontiris at the Herodus Atticus Theatre, 1936

performance unsatisfactory. This could imply two things, either that Paxinou was not talented and not mature enough to perform such a part, or that she

was proposing a new acting style that was difficult to accept. It seems that the truth lies somewhere in-between because, in 1938, when she reprised the part of Electra at the theatre of Epidaurus, the press unanimously found her exquisite.

Paxinou's performance will be thoroughly reviewed in Chapter Three, when it will be set within the perspective of Rontiris's work on ancient tragedy at both the National and the Peiraiko Theatro (Πειραικό Θέατρο), and will be compared with the performances of the great thespians Anna Sinodinou, Eleni Hatziargiri and Aspasia Papathanasiou. It is important to note, at this juncture, that Rontiris was the inaugurator of an innovative, contemporary acting tradition concerning the presentation of tragedy, and that he offered a system that enabled actors to approach and present ancient Greek tragedy. He managed to alter the existing acting conventions (see the first chapter of this thesis), and attributed to acting a scientific quality by providing a 'key' to 'unlock' ancient Greek plays. In the 1930s, Paxinou became the vehicle of the Rontirian acting system, which was precise, analytical and, undoubtedly, effective, as will be examined meticulously in due course in this thesis in Chapter Three.

Rontiris also had a clear conception of the function of the Chorus. He was deeply aware that the Chorus defined and characterised the genre of ancient Greek tragedy. He believed in tragedy's singular 'architecture', to use, once more, Politis's words, who had been Rontiris's mentor. The critic of the important paper *E Kathimerini* argued that Rontiris combined the three existing theories of the Chorus. The critic considers the first theory to be



Politis's approach, which is identified with the 'realistic approach of the German school'. Probably, a contemporary researcher, who has an overview of the European tradition, could argue that Politis was not as much influenced by Reinhardt as the critic claims for two reasons. First, because Politis was against the idea of the Chorus as a mass, and second, because he did not regard theatre primarily as a spectacle, both of which notions characterised Reinhardt's productions.<sup>4</sup>

The second theory, which the critic calls 'classical' because it 'respects the text', could be identified with Mistriotis's stylistic approach as it has been developed in the first chapter of this thesis, and, maybe, include Linos Karzis's ideas on the staging of tragedy that will be reviewed in the third part of this chapter. Finally, the third attempt, the 'free classical', combines 'respect for the text with imitating movements, like at the Delphic Celebrations' (Nasos, 6 October 1936). However, this review clearly points out that Rontiris was attempting to combine the three existing currents regarding the representation of the Chorus, and thus proposed a fourth, new approach.

The three aforementioned theories had become part of a Greek theatrical tradition. But Rontiris, who incorporated some elements of these theories in his directing, was mostly influenced by two other theatre directors, of whom Reinhardt was the first, and Wilhelm Leyhausen the second. As has been noted, Rontiris studied with Reinhardt and became his assistant director. Thus the notion of the Chorus as a mass, especially as it appeared in Reinhardt's *Oedipus the King*, had a great impact on the Greek director. Even though Rontiris had not seen the performance of *Oedipus*, he knew of the staging

solutions that Reinhardt had offered. In consequence, Rontiris formed a large Chorus. The sixty-six (or sixty-four) members of the Chorus (six Chorus Leaders and sixty Chorus Members) were viewed as one, and were considered to have a common identity. In other words, Rontiris adopted Reinhardt's multitudinous Chorus and the idea of a common identity. However, Rontiris did not attribute to the Chorus the psychology of the mass because all the movements were precise and identical. Unlike Reinhardt, he did not allow each member of the Chorus to develop her singularity. Rontiris directed and choreographed every single movement that the Chorus executed. Consequently, he banished the individuality of each member of the Chorus.

It is evident that the notion of a common identity was initially inspired by Reinhardt. However, Rontiris pushed the thought even further. He had the Chorus of *Electra* execute uniform movement. The girls of the Chorus raised and lowered their hands together. They formed symmetrical patterns (triangles, arrows, circles or semi-circles – image 7). They moved together as one character. What is even more important is Rontiris's propositions on the way that the Chorus spoke. Rontiris introduced *sprechchor* to the Greek productions of ancient tragedy. *Sprechchor* is the German term for group recitation – the entire Chorus speaking in absolute unison. This practice became the way in which the Chorus was expressed and was bequeathed to the following generations. As the years went by, it became the formula for all the National Theatre Choruses.



7. The National Theatre's production of *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rontiris at the Herodus Atticus Theatre, 1936 – Katina Paxinou as Electra and the Chorus

However, it seems that an unknown and insignificant director, Wilhelm Leyhausen, who was an amateur director, and taught speech and diction at the University of Berlin, influenced considerably the productions of ancient Greek tragedy. Leyhausen had also seen the First Delphic Celebrations, and had discussed with Angelos Sikelianos the possibility of directing the tragedy of the Second Celebrations (Mavromoustakos, 2004: 294). Socrates Karantinos, director, founder and General and Artistic Director of the State Theatre of Northern Greece from 1961-1967, points out Leyhausen's impact on ancient Greek tragedy productions regarding the Chorus's recitation and movement (Karantinos, 1969: 28-31).

Accordingly, Thrilos, in his 1936 review of *Electra*, openly compares Leyhausen's production of *The Persians* with Rontiris's *Electra* in matters of the formation and diction of the Chorus, finding the former 'evidently' better than the latter. He notes that in *The Persians* the Chorus's 'voice' which was 'coloured with uncountable nuances of *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, gave life to the text', while the Chorus of *Electra* 'recited rhythmically and unanimously' and was 'monotonous' (Thrilos, 1977a: 174-175). In turn, the aware, educated and inspired critic, K.O. (Kostas Oikonomidis), of the newspaper *Ethnos* argues:

Mr Rontiris thought that he solved them [the problematics concerning the Chorus] by imitating the 'sprechkor' employed by Dr Leyhausen, who presented *The Persians* in 1934 at the Herodus Atticus Theatre. He [Rontiris] used the same military formations ... however, he had the unsuccessful inspiration to extend this mimetic action to the recitation of the text ... thus it was difficult to understand what the Chorus was saying (K.O., 5 October 1936).

It is clear from the above extract that K.O. identifies Leyhausen's use of *sprechchor* with uniform movement and not group recitation, as he attributes to Rontiris the 'inspiration to extend this mimetic action to the recitation of the text', while Thrilos explicitly describes Leyhausen's Chorus speaking in unison and states that Rontiris 'followed the German company's example' (Thrilos, 1977a: 174). This conflict of opinion between the two critics proves that Rontiris did not imitate Leyhausen's production, as Thrilos claims. Rontiris aimed to have a Chorus that would recite 'rhythmically and unanimously' and he did not favour the idea of a Chorus sounding like a German operatic oratorio. He was influenced by the popular poems and songs of Greece and the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25

February 2006), both of which are monophonic and austere not polyphonic and elaborate, as the ‘uncountable nuances of *crescendo* and *diminuendo*’ Thrilos suggests. Hence, it is evident that it was Rontiris’s initiative to develop Leyhausen’s idea and to use monophonic group recitation for the entire part of the Chorus, a practice that will be reviewed in the next chapter of this thesis.

Nonetheless, as Platon Mavromoustakos rightly points out, the affinity between Leyhausen’s and Rontiris’s directorial notions is palpable.<sup>5</sup> They both aimed for the ‘musicality of speech’ as Leyhausen puts it (*Ethnos*, 19 May 1934), or as Rontiris states, ‘if I had time I would inscribe the entire text in notes’ (Georgousopoulos, 1 June 1986), and, ‘the Chorus, slowly slowly will be singing’ (Georgousopoulos, 4 May 1986). Mavromoustakos, who investigated the interconnection between Leyhausen and Rontiris, clearly argues that Rontiris was mostly influenced by Leyhausen rather than Reinhardt. However, it is clear that Rontiris was a perceptive and charismatic director, who developed his own original style in directing. He combined Reinhardt’s and Leyhausen’s notions regarding ancient tragedy, and produced his own approach. The impact of this approach on Greek theatre, and the legacy that it bestowed on it will be analysed in relation to his impact on his students and those whom he mentored in the relevant section of this thesis.

The music, which was composed and conducted by Dimitris Mitropoulos, the famous composer and conductor, intended to create a rhythmical canvas on which the Chorus moved. It was not a lyrical and romantic melody; it was not

loud; it functioned as a mere guideline and provided rises or pauses for the Chorus. Konstantinos Kidoniatis, composer of the 1959 *Electra* by Rontiris, remembered that Mitropoulos and Rontiris fought quite a lot over the importance that music should have in a production of tragedy. Rontiris insisted that the music should be in the background, while Mitropoulos wanted the music to be audible and to dominate the play. In the end, Mitropoulos had to give in (Lalas, 2001: 53-54, 60). The music was performed by an orchestra of forty instruments, which, as at the Delphic Celebrations, was hidden from the audience. The fact that Rontiris wanted to hide the musicians indicated his tendency to experiment between a music that merely accompanied the text of the Chorus, and a music that, as in an opera, dominated the dramatic action. From Rontiris's future productions and the account of Kidoniatis, it is evident that he settled for the former. The power that the Herodus Atticus Theatre, a venue designed as an auditorium, exercised on the director, can also be noted. Nonetheless, the music was evocative, and it sounded as if it came from another, far-off, place. The suggestion of a distant place strengthened the performance's emotional intention and added to its religious aspect, which is characteristic of Rontiris's work. The term 'religious' refers, first, to Rontiris's conviction that Greek tragedy was a genre that sprang from religion, and, second, to the ritualistic elements that were used in his productions and will be discussed in the relevant chapter of this thesis.

The sets were by Kleovoulos Klonis and the costumes by Antonis Fokas, who both became Rontiris's permanent collaborators. Klonis's scenographic brilliance managed to integrate the set into the Herodus Atticus Theatre's architectural principles, by designing a staircase that connected the orchestra

with the elevated scene. This wide and long staircase, which stretched from left to right, became the governing element of the set, and was in absolute harmony with the structure of the theatre. Thus the grand, tall wall that dominated the background of the Herodus Atticus scene was turned into the palace entrance. Moreover, Klonis linked the two separate levels of Hellenistic theatre by this staircase, and Rontiris was able to have his actors communicate easily with the Chorus (image 7).

Klonis's paid respect to the qualities of the ancient Greek theatres, and this is also evident in the second reprise of *Electra* at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus in 1938. The set of that production was integrated into the ruins of the theatre. It is important to note that Rontiris did not ask for the creation of



8. The National Theatre's production of *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rontiris at the Herodion Theatre, 1936 – Katina Paxinou as Electra and the Chorus

two separate levels, one for the Chorus and a different level for the actors. He preferred to follow the classical Greek model, where the actors playing the parts and the members of the Chorus were on the same level. This fact made Rontiris realise that it was impossible to have a multitudinous Chorus, firstly, because he saw that the members of the Chorus would blot out the actors on the flat orchestra of the amphitheatre, and, secondly, because, as he only had one level, he was not able to have so many people on the stage (image 8). Hence, he abandoned the large Choruses inspired by Reinhardt's approach to Greek tragedy, and initiated a compact Chorus of fifteen to twenty members, a practice that prevailed in the Greek theatrical tradition.

Finally, Rontiris was also the originator of another important tradition of the Greek theatre. Unlike Politis, who did not support the idea of using the extant ancient Greek theatres because he thought their constant use would lead to their ruin and wanted to build a new theatre that would serve his notions of classical drama (Rodas, 1931: 87) – unfortunately, he was not able to materialise his plan due to his death – Rontiris believed in the use of ancient Greek theatres for performances in contemporary times, and thus was the first to use the ancient theatre of Epidaurus for an ancient Greek tragedy production. The performance of *Electra* presented on 11 September 1938 in Epidaurus was given in broad daylight without the use of electricity, spotlights or any other electrical equipment. Apart from the effort to present a production as close as possible to the conditions of ancient Greek theatre, the absence of electrical support also had practical considerations behind it, given that it was impossible to bring electricity to the archaeological site of Epidaurus.



Fortunately, Rontiris's attempt found the governmental and state support required for such an endeavour. Political conditions had altered since Rontiris became permanent Director of the National Theatre in 1936. On 25 November 1935, King Georgios II returned to Greece from exile. The consequences of this political change were not mirrored in the infrastructure of the institution, or in the repertoire of the theatre, but were reflected in its name which was changed from National to Royal. However, the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas, which was proclaimed on 4 August 1936 with the compliance and collaboration of the Palace and King Georgios II, was in favour of such endeavours. The use of the ancient theatre of Epidaurus was in tune with the regime's fascist ideology, which looked for links with ancient Greek civilisation, and even organised similar festivities such as the archaic celebrations at the Stadium of Athens in 1937. Even though Rontiris had no ideological connections to the intentions of the dictatorship, he took advantage of the opportunity and brought into being a new theatrical tradition, that of summer festivals of ancient Greek tragedy all over Greece.

## **2.2 Marika Kotopouli and Karolos Koun. The foundation of the Theatro Technis**

In 1939, Kotopouli's company became the first semi-state theatre company of Greece. Bastias, Administrating Director of the Royal Theatre since 1936, submitted a proposal to the government to fund the Kotopouli Company (Iliadis, 1996: 279). It was during the dictatorship of Metaxas, who was Kotopouli's personal friend, that this subsidy was initiated in order to acknowledge Kotopouli's significant contribution to Greek theatre. This

government funding strengthened Kotopouli's position within the theatre field because her company received a degree of consecration that the state's support granted. It enabled the Kotopouli Company to work on difficult plays that had large casts and needed a longer rehearsal period, including ancient Greek tragedies and Shakespearean plays. This generous funding enabled Kotopouli to celebrate her thirtieth anniversary as a company impresario with *Electra* by Sophocles.

A number of factors must be explored regarding Kotopouli's choice of genre and specific play. To begin with, the mere fact that she chose a Greek tragedy for the celebration of her anniversary signifies her need to be endowed with the symbolic capital with which tragedy was imbued. The consecration of a genre acknowledged both by the intellectuals and the public offered to Kotopouli the 'legitimation' (Bourdieu, 1993: 121) and the prestige that she was hoping to attain. Until then, Kotopouli's experience of ancient Greek tragedy was very limited, namely, Oikonomou's and the Royal Theatre's productions of Greek tragedy and their reprises, and *Hecuba* at the Stadium. She usually performed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foreign adaptations of the Greek plays.<sup>6</sup> Hence, as a great artist of the Greek stage, she had to offer a new production of a Greek tragedy.

Furthermore, Kotopouli opposed the National Theatre and its achievements. The National's successful productions of ancient tragedy had shown that she was not irreplaceable, and that made her feel left out (Iliadis, 1996: 279). Therefore, she decided to present *Electra* by Sophocles, which was obviously a calculated choice, as *Electra* had been presented by the National in 1936,

and was reprised annually until 1939. Her biographer, Fotis Iliadis, remarked that this choice indicated that Kotopouli intended to 'give a lesson on how tragedy was performed to the National, which had neglected her for all those years,' (ibid.: 279-280).

In order to compete with the theatrical conditions of the period, Kotopouli had to be innovative; she had to propose something new to the existing field of the theatre, and, as a consequence, she had to choose her collaborators carefully. For this reason, she asked the intellectual Apostolos Melahrinos, who was a regular collaborator of the company, to provide her with a new, Modern Greek translation of the play, and invited the surrealist painter and poet, Nikos Engonopoulos, to design the set and costumes. Finally, she hired Koun to direct the play. At this point, it is appropriate to look at the position that Koun occupied in the theatre field when Kotopouli hired him as the director of her company and entrusted him with directing her in *Electra*.

Koun was born in Constantinople. He had studied aesthetics in Paris, where he was possibly introduced to the work and texts of Jacques Copeau and the accomplishments of the Moscow Art Theatre of Konstantin Stanislavsky. He came to Greece in 1929, and was hired as an English teacher at the American College of Athens. His directorial career commenced in 1930, when he formed an amateur group with his American College students, which presented, among other plays, three plays by Aristophanes, *The Birds*, *The Frogs* and *Wealth*, and *Cyclops* by Euripides.<sup>7</sup> In 1934, Koun founded the short-lived company Laiki Skene (Λαϊκή Σκηνή), with Dionisios (Dennis) Devaris and Tsarouhis. Devaris had been a member of Nea Skene's

production of *Antigone* and had worked as an actor with Raymond Duncan and his wife, Penelope Sikelianos, sister of the poet and initiator of the Delphic Celebrations, Sikelianos, in the USA, where they had performed *Idyllia* by Theokritos and *Electra* by Sophocles (Palmer-Sikelianos, 1966: 37). However, Devaris abandoned his career as an actor to become a journalist.

Devaris became the Laiki Skene's Administrative Director and Koun the Artistic Director. The Laiki Skene inaugurated its performances with the revival of *Erofili* (*Ερωφίλη*) by Georgios Hortatzis, who was acknowledged to be one of the most important Greek playwrights of the Cretan Renaissance (end of sixteenth to end of seventeenth century). *Erofili* had as a prototype *Orbecche* by Giovanni Batista Giraldi and was a tragedy written in Greek idiomatic language and verse. Even though, the language is full of Cretan idioms, it is, nevertheless, regarded as an example of Modern Greek language used for the stage. The play was carefully chosen to signify the aims of the Laiki Skene. In the programme of the production there is a brief note which describes the artistic, cultural and aesthetic intentions of the company:

We believe that every Nation can create and develop only when it senses that the roots of its tradition are strong.<sup>8</sup> Our work may seem poor on the outside because we wanted to bring out the inherent value of the plays and find a way to express this value by using simple means that can touch our soul, a soul which has been misled by evil, foreign imitations (cited in Kallergis, 1959: 21).

The company also presented *Alcestis* by Euripides, *Wealth* by Aristophanes, *Le Malade Imaginaire* by Molière and *The Marriage Proposal* by Nikolai Gogol.

As has been noted, Kontoglou taught his apprentices, Koun and Tsarouhis, to love and respect the Greek tradition. It thus comes as no surprise that their

company intended to look for, and reveal, its ties to this tradition. Taking this as a guideline, the company aimed at discovering the 'inherent value' of the plays that they would present. The Laiki Skene used this term to refer to the core of the play, namely, its storyline, its poetry and its scenic self-sufficiency. In order for the actors, director and set designer to understand and convey this inherent value, every approach had to spring from the inside, 'the soul', and to be guided by emotion. In turn, the emotion had to be guided by the intrinsic link to tradition. Hence, the interconnection of tradition and emotional expression was formed. In 1943, when Koun presented the Declaration of the Theatro Technis, the aesthetic expression of this interconnection was named 'Greek Popular Expressionism' (Koun, 2000: 20-23). Greek Popular Expressionism was the Laiki Skene's artistic pursuit, and became the foundation on which the Theatro Technis was based.

Devaris and Koun also founded a drama school. It seems that the concept of a drama school that could provide trained actors for the performances that would be presented by the theatre company already existed in Koun's mind. Of course, the idea to establish a serious theatrical organisation, for instance, the National Theatre, and to found a drama school in order to staff the theatre was not novel within the Greek theatrical field. However, the influence of the Moscow Art Theatre project on Koun, which will be reviewed in the chapter devoted to Koun's acting school, is also apparent.

Moreover, as Antonis Glitzouris highlights, Koun's approach to theatre was linked with his professional experience as a teacher, and his aim to educate via the theatre (Glitsouris, 2001: 354-366). This background helped Koun

develop into the theatre master that he became. Koun wanted the students of the drama school to be everyday women and men of the 'people' because he was looking for actors 'who would be representative Greek types and not fake-cosmopolitans' (Tsarouhis, 1959: 14). The young boys and girls who comprised the drama school and the company had a more or less common background – no prior knowledge of acting techniques or of the existing theatrical stereotypes. They entered the world of the theatre under the guidance of Koun. This enabled Koun as a theatre master and as a director to create a homogeneous, well-structured ensemble. Some of the actors of the Laiki Skene, namely, Lycourgos Kallergis and Pantelis Zervos, became Koun's faithful apprentices, followed him to the Kotopouli Company and, later, were the founding members of the Theatro Technis.

The Laiki Skene closed down in 1938, but Koun's notion of an ensemble theatre had already been established. Thus, when he was called to direct at the Kotopouli Company, he demanded to have with him seven of his actors (Iliadis, 1976: 281).<sup>9</sup> Koun wanted to have around him actors with whom he could communicate when he ventured into such a difficult enterprise as to direct an ancient Greek tragedy and to have, taking the title role, Kotopouli, the greatest 'star' of the Greek commercial theatre. As he admitted, 'it was a double dare: to rail at Sophocles and Kotopouli at the same time' (Koun, 1987: 70).

The collaboration was difficult. An actress of the company, Eleni Halkousi, who was acting Kotopouli's part (Electra) during rehearsals, recorded this production in her *Theatrical Diary* in detail. The title of the chapter dealing with

the production is 'Two Worlds', and it clearly indicates the distance between the director and set designer, on the one hand, and Kotopouli, on the other. Kotopouli did not come to the rehearsals, and when she did, she ignored Koun's instructions. Five days before the opening night, she decided to attend the rehearsal only to realise that she could not learn her lines. On the opening night, she had to stand as close to the prompter as she could (Halkousi, 1981: 74-80). Koun has stated, in an interview he gave in 1987, that he wished to forget this production. He said:

It was not my production. Some of my ideas were incorporated in the movement of the Chorus. However, it is true that during the last couple of weeks of rehearsals, Marika accepted some of my views. Nonetheless, the concept of the performance was hers rather than mine (Koun, 1987: 69-70).

Kotopouli had hired an innovative director, but was not willing to follow his way of working, or maybe she was not able to accept his directorial guidance. As Koun points out, in that same interview:

She was a tragedian, but not a tragedian of ancient Greek drama. She was more familiar with German classical tragedy. Thus, when she worked on ancient Greek tragedy, she carried with her the old-fashioned way in which she recited, the pomposity and all the tricks she used when she performed *Electra* by Hoffmannsthal, *Iphigenia* by Goethe, and so on (Koun, 1987: 70).

It is clear that, according to Koun, Kotopouli belonged to the 'old-school' of pomposity and grandiloquence in reciting. However, all the above information was recorded years after the performance was presented, when Koun had become the established director of the Greek Theatro Technis. In order to understand the performance, and analyse its staging, it will be more useful and illuminating to review the way in which contemporary journalists and critics reacted to the production.

The unsigned critic of *Acropolis* found Kotopouli's barefooted, simply-dressed Electra, 'realistic, human, extremely human', and observed that she was nothing like she used to be, she was 'transformed'. He also found that there was no pomposity in her acting style; that her movements sprang from the inside; that she appeared 'absolutely natural' (4 November 1939). Emelios Hourmouzios, literary man, writer, Administrative Director of the National Theatre of Greece from 1955 to 1964, and critic of the daily right-wing, highly-esteemed newspaper *E Kathimerini*, praised Kotopouli's performance claiming it was 'deeply human' and 'clearly naturalistic'. Hourmouzios claimed that in this performance Kotopouli 'was the first to abandon ... the typified tradition of recitation' (Hourmouzios, 5 November 1939). Thus the critics did not believe that Kotopouli's acting was 'old-fashioned'.

The question that arises from these reviews is what the critics mean when they write 'realistic' and 'naturalistic'. It is obvious that the period's notion of realism and naturalism is by no means the notion that an audience, a theatre-critic or a researcher might have of them today. It is interesting to note that Kotopouli's acting style was juxtaposed to that of the young Paxinou. For instance, there was a comparison of the two actresses in the review K.O. wrote about the National's *Electra*. The critic pointed out that

the tragic girl [Electra] needs to be played by a top actress, and there is only one such actress in Greece, Marika Kotopouli. Those who saw her as Hoffmansthal's *Electra*, vibrating under the power of terror that the poet suggests, evoking pity and fear to the audience by her violoncello voice ... made the comparison at once (K.O., 5 October 1936).

By combining Koun's and K.O.'s views, it is clear that Kotopouli's acting must have been exaggerated and pompous. Thus, the critics of *Acropolis* and *E Kathimerini* considered as realistic acting a style that Koun found incompatible





9. Marika Kotopouli as Electra in the 1939 Kotopouli Company production of *Electra* directed by Karolos Koun

with his idea of realism. It must not be forgotten that Koun would soon introduce an acting method that would alter the Greek theatre. This method will be reviewed and analysed in the chapter devoted to Koun's productions.

Conversely, Leon Koukoulas, critic of *Proia*, clearly segregated Kotopouli's performance from Koun's realistic intentions evident in the performance of the Chorus. Koukoulas noted that the Chorus followed Koun's instructions and acted 'with realism, raw realism' and spoke 'in an everyday manner'. After condemning Koun's approach, the critic pointed out that his comments 'do not refer to Kotopouli herself' who 'presented a powerful Electra according to this directorial approach' (Koukoulas, 5 November 1939), meaning that even though the performance was realistic, and thus not acceptable, Kotopouli was saved because of her great talent.

Both Hourmouzios's and Koukoulas's reviews gave helpful details about the Chorus. The first approved Koun's approach while the second objected to it. On the whole, Hourmouzios noted that the twelve girls of the Chorus did not move in complete unison, and that Koun had 'to abandon, even more, the schematic rhythmical movement'. This indicates that the Chorus formed some choreographed patterns that, at the same time, allowed the actresses of the Chorus some freedom. Thus Koun's Chorus did not follow Rontiris's tight structure. The insightful Hourmouzios found it useful to compare and juxtapose Rontiris's method to the Chorus of Koun's *Electra* in this article because he diagnosed that the two approaches were fundamentally different, even though he believed that they were both well-founded. Hourmouzios's remark should be remembered when both the productions that the National

presented under his direction and Koun's productions of the Theatro Technis will be reviewed further on in this thesis. Furthermore, Hourmouziou, as a critic, did not seem to show any preference for either tendency. He acknowledged Rontiris's directorial approach to *The Persians* (1938), and accepted Koun's proposals (Hourmouziou, 5 November 1939). Koukoulas, on the other hand, believed that the Chorus should have 'movement and rhythmical speech', otherwise it could not be considered a Chorus (Koukoulas, 5 November 1939).

Koun did not use group recitation. It would have been impossible to use this technique, as *sprechchor* was one of the 'evil, foreign imitations' that he was fighting against. Thus *sprechchor* opposed Koun's and the Laiki Skene's philosophy. Hourmouziou remarked that there was no group recitation at the performance of *Electra*, and understood Koun's intention to 'look for contemporary means in order to approach existing emotions' and 'to bring tragedy up to date' (Hourmouziou, 5 November 1939). He also made an insightful comment regarding the use of group recitation. Even though he argued that *sprechchor* was 'accredited as the historically correct approach' (ibid.), which means that he believed it should be used, he seemed to be one of the first who foresaw the danger of *sprechchor* becoming a brake in the way that the Chorus was presented. The notion of *sprechchor* being an empty form is also recurrent in Hourmouziou's future essays (Hourmouziou, 1978). Hourmouziou's views are of great importance as he became Administrative Director of the National Theatre. Overall, Hourmouziou accredited Koun's directing, and observed the conjunction of the ancient myth and the popular tradition, which was one of Koun's intentions.

Finally, Engonopoulos's set was in tune with Koun's general aesthetic intentions of Greek Popular Expressionism. Engonopoulos was also a student of Kontoglou, thus the notion of Greek tradition was evident in his work. For instance, he used Greek Orthodox hagiographic techniques in his paintings such as the brown lines that defined the faces of figures that appeared on the canvas. His surrealistic work 'was a combination of the European artistic achievements and the Greek tradition' (Kontogiorgi, 2000: 116). He applied archaic and pro-Hellenic elements to the set, alluding to the period in which the myth was set rather than to the era in which it was written (ibid.: 117). He used bright colours such as ochre and deep orange, and put a bright blue sky with white clouds on the background, the painter's leitmotiv (image 10). Within this set, Kotopouli's old-fashioned acting must have appeared out of place.



10. Nikos Engolopoulos's set for the Kotopouli Company *Electra*

Conversely, it can be claimed that both the directing and set designing were out of tune with Kotopouli's acting. As Halkousi mentions, the mistakes made during the opening night were ascribed to Koun's 'bad directing' (Halkousi, 1981: 80).

Kotopouli's and Koun's collaboration ended in 1941. In 1942, Koun founded the Theatro Technis. On 17 August 1943, almost a year later, Koun delivered the Declaration of the company's aesthetic principles. First and foremost, he expressed the Theatro Technis's quest for an ensemble company (Koun, 2000: 11-13, 16-20), which would comprise actors who would work together because 'if one stands alone one is helpless' (ibid.: 12). Further on, he segmented his notion of the theatre from 'the theatre of his time', which aimed at profit, and made clear that the Theatro Technis would never serve commercial purposes (ibid.: 14-16). He also coined the term 'Greek Popular Expressionism' to explain his artistic attempts at the Laiki Skene. This term describes the correlation of Koun's theatre with popular tradition (mainland peasant and island customs, demotic songs, Byzantine hagiographies and ancient vases), and the form with which this tradition was conveyed in a direct and expressive way (ibid.: 20-22). Finally, he declared the aesthetic principles of the Theatro Technis which will be reviewed in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Another model for the Theatro Technis, apart from the obvious allusion to the Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavsky's teaching regarding acting methods, was the company of Yevgeni Vakhtangov (ibid.: 24-26). In his 'Prologue' to the book *The Vakhtangov School of Stage Art*, Marios Ploritis, theatre scholar,

theatrical translator, author and Koun's collaborator, remembers that Koun used to bring to the Theatro Technis's rehearsals Vakhtangov's notes concerning the actors' development of the subconscious and the plasticity of their movements (Ploritis, 1997: 9). Conversely, Koun opposed Alexandre Tairov's 'external schematisation and theatrical conventionalism' (Koun, 2000: 24). For instance, Tairov believed in the importance of speech and diction (Tairov, 1969: 85-89) while Koun paid no attention to diction or pronunciation, and, while Tairov was opposed to the faithful interpretation of the text (Tairov, 1969: 97-99), Koun always praised and respected texts. All the above are brief references to the influences that the important directors and directing schools had exercised on Koun when he departed on his quest for the creation of his acting school, and in the relevant section of this thesis for Koun there will be a detailed analysis of their interconnection with Koun's company. These foundations enabled Koun to present his legendary productions and formulate the Theatro Technis's acting style, which was to develop during the 1940s and 1950s, and to nurture generations of Greek actors.

### **2.3 Linos Karzis**

During the 1930s, another tendency regarding the scenic representation of ancient Greek tragedy emerged. This was Karzis's 'particular attitude towards ancient drama' (Georgousopoulos, 1973: 192). Georgousopoulos uses the term 'particular' to refer to Karzis's tendency to create a production that mirrored what he believed to be the exact conditions of the scenic representation of tragedy in Classical Greece inspired by archaeological findings or books such as *The Dancing of Ancient Greeks* by Ioannis

Chrisafis. Karzis was the representative of what became known as the 'representation of the museum', meaning a production which had as its primary aim to discover and reproduce the way that tragedy had been performed. Thus Karzis did not care about tragedy's contemporary trajectory, but focussed on its historic and philological importance. As a result, his work had some affinity with Mistriotis's productions, although Karzis's productions were performed in Modern Greek. Karzis strived for over 40 years to discover the roots and acting conditions of Athenian tragedy, and thus deserves our attention, even though his attempts were isolated and had no significant impact on the theatrical world and the Greek acting tradition.

Karzis studied law at the University of Athens and practiced law in Athens from 1923. He also studied Literature at the Sorbonne in Paris. He wrote and published poetry, and collaborated with many literary journals. He was a student of Oikonomou, and, as has been noted, worked with Palmer-Sikelianos at the Delphic Celebrations. According to his student and biographer, Helen Sofra, he was 'the person who kept up the flame that the Sikelianoi [Eva and Angelos] lit' (Sofra, 1992: 13). Like the Sikelianoi, Karzis supported the historic continuity of the Greek identity from ancient Greece to the present, and he had a specific notion regarding the scenic presentation of ancient Greek tragedy. Like Palmer-Sikelianos, he was concerned with elements such as the material of the costumes used in ancient Greece and the use of cothurni and masks. Unlike Palmer-Sikelianos, he did not incorporate any contemporary elements in his productions such as the use of Greek popular dances that Palmer-Sikelianos employed in both her productions.

Karzis believed that tragedy required a directing and acting approach that must have nothing in common with contemporary acting and directing. In order to pursue his dream of the revival of ancient Greek tragedy, he formed the Organismos Arhaiou Dramatos (Οργανισμός Αρχαίου Δράματος) in 1931, which was renamed the Thymelicos Thiasos (Θυμελικός Θίασος) in 1939, after the altar that existed in the centre of the Athenian theatre of Dionysus, the thymeli. Karzis served his cause until his death in 1978. During all these years, his ideas on the presentation of tragedy remained unaltered.

All his productions commenced following a certain ritual. The actors chanted the Hymn to Dionysus and then lit the altar in the centre of the stage. This signified the sacrifice to Dionysus, the ancient god of theatre (Giakos, 1978: 683). Karzis had established this ritual because he believed that tragedy was, above all, a religious expression. Sofra cites her master's ideas:

Tragedy expresses the man, his relationship with the divine, and his development through physical and emotional conflicts. But there is another mystagogic expression for Dionysus ... [during which] the unidentified conscience of man aims at the implicit animality, the raw instinct of his existence (Sofra, 1978: 41).

It was because of tragedy's religious roots and essence that Karzis found all contemporary acting and directing practices unfit for tragedy. It almost goes without saying that he despised and fought against all other propositions regarding the Greek tragedy productions. He went so far as to call these practices 'extremely dangerous when applied to ancient tragedy' (Karzis, 1961: 212).

Karzis had a complete concept of how this genre had to be performed. First and foremost, he considered that the 'superhuman beings' of tragedy needed



a 'special appearance' in order to convey their magnificence. Thus the actors had to wear a 'special' costume that would make them seem grand, imposing and that would conceal the individual features of their faces. Therefore, for his productions he always used cothurni that made his actors walk in a commanding manner, long tunics with wide sleeves decorated with geometric patterns that suggested an impressive figure, and masks that gave the actors a neutral face that could be identified with a 'superhuman presence' (Sofra, 1978: 43).

Furthermore, the tragedian who wore this imposing costume had to act in a suitable manner. Hence, the 'basic instrument' of the actor was her/his voice that conveyed the metre and the rhythm of the text (ibid.). It is clear that Karzis did not pay equal attention to the actors' physical/bodily qualities. His focus revolved around the vocal abilities of his company members. In the interview he gave in 1961, he presented his views on the qualifications that should be expected of the actors of ancient Greek tragedy:

We need specialised actors who will revive the magnificent atmosphere of ancient Greek drama under the guidance of *initiators-trainers*. These specialised actors will necessarily be chosen according to their vocal, emotional and mental qualifications (Karzis, 1961: 212).

This idealized approach regarding the tragic acting style does not offer a specific proposition that would enable a researcher to understand the precise style employed by the actors of the company. However, it is evident that this approach disregards the actors' physicality and plasticity. Karzis believes in the grand imposing figure created by the exoteric qualities of the costume rather than in each actor's esoteric physical power. The gamut of emotions is expressed through the voice's fluctuations, while the body's grandness

remains intact within its costume. Probably, it was through this binary opposition, this stylization that Karzis wished to visualise on stage the tragic conflicts of the tragic characters.

An overview of his production of *Electra* can provide some evidence in relation to Karzis's ideas on performing tragedy. *Electra* was performed in the summer of 1934 at the Panathenian Stadium. Koukoulas and Rodas, in the papers *Proia* and *Elefthero Vima* respectively, considered the performance of Stasa Iatrou, the actress playing Electra, 'poor', 'flat' and 'insignificant'. Both critics were displeased with Iatrou's competence as an actress, as well as sceptical towards Karzis's attempt (Koukoulas, 23 August 1934; Rodas, 23 August 1934).

The long and thorough review in *E Kathimerini* offers more details. Fanos Mihalopoulos, who supported Karzis's attempts, stated that, in Ancient Greece, acting 'did not exist due to the long distance between the orchestra and the auditorium and due to the masks', and he continued, saying that, by using the masks, Karzis 'banished the acting of the figure' (μορφής – Mihalopoulos, 23 August 1934). It can be deduced from Mihalopoulos that Karzis did not focus on the psychology and emotional development of the characters, but gave priority instead to the ideas conveyed by the characters. This meant that Karzis's focus was on the voice and ideas embedded in the text. Mihalopoulos argued that there was a different acting approach in ancient Greece which had nothing in common with contemporary acting, as was claimed by Karzis. He also believed that the characters of the tragic plays gained a universal resonance due to the use of masks because, as David

Wiles notes, 'the naked face tends to give priority to character and the creation of unique individuals', while masks 'disrupt our learned ways of viewing' (Wiles, 2007: 287). Karzis appropriated the masks in order to give the characters of tragedy a universal quality, that is, to stress the notion that the ideas expressed by the characters had a worldwide meaning and significance.

It is evident that the critic was aware of Karzis's opinions and quests, and that he familiarised himself with them. Moreover, he offered his own explanation of the leading lady's inadequacy. Mihalopoulos praised Iatrou's acting, but blamed her 'badly-made mask' for not enabling the actress to perform as well as she could (Mihalopoulos, 23 August 1934). It is obvious that there was a problem with the leading lady. Whether this was related to her poor acting and speech techniques, her mask, or Karzis's guidelines cannot be discovered. However, Karzis's productions and actors remained cut off from professional Greek theatre and did not influence the chief acting currents.

Another important aspect of Karzis's work on ancient Greek tragedy is his views on the function of the Chorus. He supported the existence of a Chorus that 'sang and danced' (Karzis, 1961: 212). It would be interesting to explore the quality of singing and dancing that Karzis was aiming to achieve. Karzis was a close collaborator of Konstantinos Psahos, the music composer of the Delphic Celebrations. Psahos's ideas on the affinity between ancient Greek and Byzantine music, and the way that the music supports the text have already been discussed (see the first chapter of this thesis). Karzis was in accordance with these ideas. Thus, even though Psahos was not the sole composer Karzis worked with (for *Electra* the music was composed by

Alexandros Albertis), the idea of the music supporting the word and the setting to music of the entire text of the Chorus remained one of Karzis's requisites.

Karzis also requested 'real dancing' born of 'ecstatic and god-sprung' movement (ibid.: 212). The book *The Dancing of Ancient Greeks* by Chrisafis, Director of the Ministry of Education during the 1930s, with which Karzis was familiar, described several dances that were popular during the era of Homer, and analysed Plato's ideas on dance. It also claimed that there existed a fundamental difference between contemporary and ancient Greek dancing. The author believed that contemporary dancing is performed for social pleasure and personal fulfilment while the ancient Greeks danced in order to present the undivided spiritual and physical beauty of the soul (Chrisafis, 1932: 21-2). It would not be false to claim that Karzis's ideas followed the guidelines proposed by Chrisafis's book. Thus Karzis was proposing a different kind of dancing. His scarce interviews and texts do not explain the way that this dancing was performed, but he mentions that 'the Chorus is the womb of ancient drama' (Karzis, 1961: 212), and it would be just to conclude that the magnificence to which he aspired for his actors also applied to the performance of the Chorus.

In his 1961 interview, Karzis stated with great pride that 'the Thymelicos Thiasos never performed in a closed space' (1961: 211).<sup>10</sup> During the forty years of its life, the company performed in the Herodus Atticus Theatre, the Panathenian Stadium, as well as in other ancient theatres all over Greece. The sets of the productions were architectural plastic volumes that aimed to

depict the places suggested by each tragedy. Thus, Karzis was looking for a representation of an accurate set that had nothing to do with the theatrical tradition of the Athenian tragedy of the Classic period.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, he wanted to have luxurious and expensive sets and costumes because he believed that luxury conveyed to the audience the power and magnificence of tragedy. However, the company's financial condition worsened over the years and failed to maintain the desired luxury. The leitmotiv of the Karzis scenographic representation has been summarised in Helen Fessa-Emmanuel's words:

The preference for architectural sets, the antirealistic standardisation of the props, the priest-like costumes and the undervaluation of the artistic elements, became the characteristics of the Thymelicos Thiasos (Fessa-Emmanuel, 1999a: 44).

Overall, it seems that Karzis was mostly influenced by what can be identified today as the Hellenistic tradition, the period that followed the unadorned Classic period. The Hellenistic period had decorated costumes and larger masks that depicted impressive expressions. Karzis's tendency for luxury and magnificence, and the use of the cothurnus and the imposing masks clearly indicated an affinity with the Hellenistic era. However, this was a common mistake made by many of Karzis's contemporaries. Given these factors, it seems highly unlikely that Karzis's productions looked anything like the ancient Athenian productions of the Golden Era of Pericles.

As for the company's position within the theatre field, the critics of the production of *Electra* can provide us with some indication regarding the way in which the company was viewed. The critic of *E Kathimerini* claims that the production had some defects, but that the company's and Karzis's effort was

'plausible' (Mihalopoulos, 23 August 1934). On the other hand, Koukoulas opposes Karzis's attitude towards Greek tragedy:

The revival of ancient Greek drama and its positioning within the historic and religious era in which it flourished is interesting from an archaeological rather than an aesthetic viewpoint. ... it is more important to bring the ancient Greek drama closer to our contemporary audience, and not look back towards a past that is of no significance to us (Koukoulas, 23 August 1934).

Karzis had no followers, but some people such as Karantinos, respected some of his theoretical ideas, notably, his attitude towards the Chorus and the use of masks, and empathised with his vision. Karantinos points out that:

neither the directorial work of Mr Karzis nor his articles convince us that he is able to provide us with something other than pure enthusiasm and moving love towards ancient Greek tragedy, whose real meaning, I am afraid, escapes him (Karantinos, 1969: 21).

However, Karantinos, in his productions at the State Theatre of Northern Greece (Κρατικό Θέατρο Βορείου Ελλάδος) he would incorporate elements of Karzis's work such as the use of masks.

As has been detected, the third decade of the twentieth century offers diverse propositions regarding the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy. Of the three perspectives that appeared, namely, the National Theatre's, the Theatro Technis's, and the Thymelicos Thiasos's, only the first two would play an active role in the Greek theatre field. These two tendencies would be the opposing poles on which the contemporary Greek acting tradition will be nurtured and developed. The National and the Theatro Technis will follow faithfully the path that they have paved and create award-winning performances in Greece and abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> See Michael Rodas ed. (1931) *Theatrica Chronica 1930*, Athens: annex of *Musica Chronica 1931*, pp. 55-107 and also Fotos Politis (1983) *Selection of Critical Articles*, vol. 1, Athens: Ikaros, pp. 297-302.

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<sup>2</sup> Rodas compiles the most important articles on the Theatro tis Efarmogis in the volume Rodas, *Theatrica Chronica 1930*, pp. 13-38.

<sup>3</sup> «...because he

Not the same pains did he suffer

To seed her, as when I gave birth to her.» The translation from Greek to English is of the author of this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> See also the first chapter of this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Platon Mavromoustakos offers a detailed and thorough investigation of the impact Leyhausen had on Rontiris's directing, see Platon Mavromoustakos (2004) Eclectic or Non-eclectic Kindships: the Directing of Ancient Drama during the 1930s' in *Reception Procedures in Greek Dramaturgy History from the Renaissance until Today. Connection of the Modern Greek Theatre with the European. Paravasis – Essays 3*, Athens: Ergo, pp. 291-302.

<sup>6</sup> For these productions refer to the first chapter of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> With the students of the American College Koun also staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1936) and *The Tempest* (1938) by Shakespeare and presented for the first time in the Athenian stage the Cretan Renaissance play *Stathis* (1933) by Anonymous.

<sup>8</sup> The word 'Nation' is the translation of the Greek word 'Λαός'. This Greek word within the phrase's context means 'people of a country/nation which have a common tradition'. Thus the word was translated 'Nation' rather than 'Country' or 'People' because it seemed that the first would sound too bureaucratic, while the second would be too general.

<sup>9</sup> The actors were hired by the company, but most of them were fired in less than one year.

<sup>10</sup> Karzis refers both to the Organismos Arhaiou Dramatos and to the Thymelicos Thiasos as one, using only the name of the second.

<sup>11</sup> Photographs, sketches and paintings of sets, costumes and props used at the productions of the Organismos Arhaiou Dramatos and the Thymelicos Thiasos can be found in Helen Sofra's two books on Karzis, see Helen Sofra (1978) *Linos Karzis. The Man and His Oeuvre*, Athens: Iolkos and Helen Sofra (1992) *Linos Karzis. Fourteen Years from His Death (1978-1992)*, Athens: Iolkos.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The National Theatre and its Legacy, 1936-1978

The National Theatre had nearly shut down during the German Occupation (1941-1944). However, the Greek Liberation in 1944 and the years following the end of the Second World War had its position re-established. Thus since 1949, the National presented at least one new production of ancient Greek tragedy annually. It was the sole participant in the Epidaurus Festival, which was devoted to ancient Greek drama from its inauguration in 1954 until 1975, when other companies were permitted to participate. The National and the companies created by its former members were the main theatre groups that performed ancient Greek tragedies until 1965, when Karolos Koun presented *The Persians* altering the dynamics of the theatre field. These companies were the Peiraiko Theatro (Πειραιϊκό Θέατρο) of Dimitris Rontiris, the Nea Skene (Νέα Σκηνή) of Kostis Livadeas, the Thiasos Arhaiou Dramatos (Θίασος Αρχαίου Δράματος) of Kostis Mihailidis, the Helliniki Skene Anna Sinodinou (Ελληνική Σκηνή Άννα Συνοδινού) and the State Theatre of Northern Greece (Κρατικό Θέατρο Βορείου Ελλάδος), founded in 1961.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will be concerned with these productions, starting from the National's *Electra* directed by Rontiris (1936, reprised 1937, 1938, 1939, 1952, 1953, 1954 and 1978), whose pre-war productions were discussed in the previous chapter. It will conclude with the 1977 *Electra*, acted and directed by Aspasia Papathanasiou, Rontiris's student.

#### 3.1 A Historic Overview



Since Italy's declaration of War against Greece (28 October 1940), the National had to curtail its productions for two reasons. First, a lot of its members fought in the front, and, second, those who stayed in Athens suffered from poverty and hunger. Moreover, performances were not given regularly and spectators were scarce (Giorgakaki, 18 March 2001: 11). Kostis Bastias remained the Administrative director of the National until the German invasion (6 April 1941) and the arrival of the German Army in Athens (27 April 1941). He was removed and replaced by Nikolaos Giokarinis, journalist and revue author, who was in the employ of the Italians (Kanakis, 1999: 46).<sup>2</sup> Conditions were very difficult during that period. The incident concerning the National's leading actor, Emelios Veakis, who was arrested and imprisoned by the Italians for eight days in July 1941 for no reason other than that he played *Oedipus the King* (Giorgakaki, 18 March 2001: 12), is indicative of the difficulties that the actors of the theatre had to endure. Rontiris resigned from his position as Director of the National in late 1942. In February 1943, Angelos Terzakis, an important critic and playwright, took the place of Giokarinis as Administrative Director of the National following the demand of actors and technicians of the institution, who wanted an intellectual rather than a revue author as Administrative Director (Mavromoustakos, 2005: 44). He was replaced in March 1944 by the historian and writer, Nikolaos Laskaris, who remained in this position until the end of 1944, when the Georgios Papandreou government closed the National (Giorgakaki, 18 March 2001: 12). During the above period, the repertoire comprised mostly reprises, ancient tragedies, plays by William Shakespeare and Molière, and German plays by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich von Schiller and Gotthold

Ephraim Lessing (Mavromoustakos, 2005: 43-44). Platon Mavromoustakos also points out that the National's repertoire continued to be conservative during the following two decades 'due to [the Theatre's] close ties with the government' (ibid.: 58). In other words, the state's conservatism was expressed through the company's repertoire largely because of the state's economic control. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, 'the state, after all, has the power to orient intellectual production by means of subsidies, commissions, promotion, honorific posts, even decorations, all of which are for speaking or keeping silent, for compromise or abstention' (Bourdieu, 1993: 125).

In his autobiography, Rontiris mentions that he visited Papandreou when the latter returned to Athens as Prime Minister in 1944, and insinuates that Papandreou promised him the position of the General (both Artistic and Administrative) Director and Director/*Metteur en Scène* of the National (Rontiris, 2000: 124-125), when the National reopened. However, the Papandreou Government resigned and was succeeded by the Government of Nikolaos Plastiras (2 January 1945), who overlooked Rontiris. On 12 February 1945, Georgios Theotokas, a significant literary man and playwright, was appointed General Director of the theatre. Vasilis Kanakis, actor at the National since 1947, in his book *National Theatre: Sixty Years On Stage and Backstage* notes that the 'syndrome of political affinity' appeared that year (Kanakis, 1999: 56), meaning that from 1945 the General Director of the National was appointed according to her/his political orientation. It has been indicated in both previous chapters of this thesis that state intervention at the National, whether Royal or Governmental, was frequent and significant. This practice continued during the following decades. Mavromoustakos notes that

the criteria for appointing the National's General Directors during the 1950s were 'neither artistic nor cultural, but mainly political' (2005: 70). This is evident by the succession of five different General Directorships during the period from 1946 to 1956, namely Theotokas (1945-1946 and 1950-1953), Rontiris (1946-1950 and 1953-1955) and Emelios Hourmouzios who maintained his position for nine years until 1964.

Rontiris became the General Director and *metteur en scène* of the National in 1946, when the conservative Government of Konstantinos Tsaldaris won the elections (31 March 1946). He wanted to restore the status that prevailed before 1937 and become the sole director/*metteur en scène* of the company. In 1937, Administrative Director, Bastias, had recommended that the National should have more than one *metteur en scène*, and had taken on board Takis Mouzenidis, who became one of the important directors of the National during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and Dimitris Matsoukis, who directed only two plays and stopped working at the theatre (Kanakins, 1999: 39). In 1945, Theotokas hired Pelos Katselis, who also became one of the important Greek directors, and Socrates Karantinos. However, the first thing Rontiris did when he gained this position was to fire both other directors of the National (Kanakis, 1999: 74). In their place Rontiris took on as his assistant Mihailidis, who had been Rontiris's assistant director before the war. Mihailidis had directed one production at the National during the Occupation and had become the permanent *metteur en scène* of the short-lived State Theatre of Northern Greece (*ibid.*: 97), which had been formed during the Occupation and dissolved in October 1944 (Mavromoustakos, 2005: 45). Mihailidis directed three or four productions under the guidance of Rontiris. Hence,

Rontiris had absolute control over the theatre and its productions and managed to restore the National Theatre's former glory and stability (Giorgakaki, 18 March 2001: 13).

In March 1950, the elections were won by the centrist party of Plastiras and Sophocles Venizelos. As a result, the Administration of the National changed hands, and Theotokas regained the position he had lost four years earlier. He restored his friend Karantinos to the position of the permanent director/*metteur en scène* and hired Alexis Solomos as the second permanent director/*metteur en scène*. Solomos had recently completed his studies on directing in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and had directed a few productions for private companies in Athens (Kanakis, 1999: 111).<sup>3</sup> As a large number of the National's actors had left with Rontiris, Theotokas had to find actors. Hence, he employed two leading actors of the Athenian stage, Vaso Manolidou and Giorgos Pappas, along with their entire company because they were both bound by contracts for the next theatre season and could not abandon the actors they had hired (ibid.: 111-112). Theotokas also wanted to ensure the collaboration of Koun and therefore hired the entire company of the Theatro Technis, which did not have a theatre venue during that period (ibid.: 112).<sup>4</sup>

Also in 1950, Alexis Minotis, the actor and director who was the National's Artistic Director from 1964-1967 and its sole General Director from 1974-1981, and his wife, Katina Paxinou, returned to Greece from the United States where they had lived for almost ten years. During their stay in the United States, Paxinou had successfully worked in the theatre and the cinema.<sup>5</sup>

Minotis, on the other hand, had not been as fortunate. On their return, both were immediately hired by the National. In the summer of 1951, Minotis, in his first attempt at directing, directed and acted the leading part in *Oedipus the King*. In November 1952, the National organised an international tour of the United States, presenting *Oedipus the King* and the reprise of *Electra* by Rontiris. Kanakis claims that Minotis wanted to prove his real value to the managers and agents of Broadway, who had underestimated him during his earlier stay (Kanakis, 1999: 121). It was during that tour that the friendship between Minotis and Rontiris, which had begun while they were taking their first steps as actors in the 1920s, was severed. The reason for this breach lay in the fact that, on the one hand, Minotis wanted to prolong the company's stay in the United States for personal gain and, on the other, Rontiris wanted to return to Athens so that he could take charge of the Direction of the National (Ibid.: 151-152). This resulted in the exclusion of Rontiris as director during the ten years that Minotis was the Artistic and General Director of the National.<sup>6</sup>

The 1952 November elections, which found the National company on tour, brought to power the right-wing party of Marshal Alexander Papagos. Rontiris being a close friend of Spiros Markezinis, Papagos's right hand, was appointed General Director and Director/*Metteur en Scène* of the National. Koun and his company were the first to leave the National, followed by Manolidou, Pappas and Karantinos (Ibid.: 154-5). However, the majority of the company at the National remained, and Rontiris did not encounter any hindrances to the completion of his work. Rontiris's most important achievement during his two years as General Director was laying the

foundations for the creation of the Epidaurus Festival. As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, Rontiris was the first to use the Epidaurus Theatre for an open-air performance in 1938. In the summer of 1954, the National presented *Hippolytus* directed by Rontiris in Epidaurus. This was supposed to be a tryout for the Festival, which Rontiris planned to inaugurate officially the following summer with the *Oresteia* (Anonymous, 1965: 5). However, he was dismissed before he could complete his vision, as Markezinis was no longer on good terms with Papagos (Kanakis, 1999: 174). Rontiris was replaced by Hourmouzios, under whose direction the Festival was inaugurated.

The nine years that Hourmouzios presided over the National (1955-1964), which ended when the party of Konstantinos Karamanlis, one of the most successful right-wing politicians of Greece, lost the election to the Centre Union of Papandreou, are called the 'golden era' (Prousalis, 18 March 2001: 15). Hourmouzios rallied round him directors such as Alexis Solomos, Kostis Mihailidis, Alexis Minotis, Socrates Karantinos, Takis Mouzenidis; composers such as Manos Hatzidakis, Mikis Theodorakis, Yiannis Markopoulos; set and costume designers such as Kleovoulos Klonis, Antonis Fokas, Yiannis Tsarouhis, Yiorgos Vakalo; and actors such as Alexis Minotis, Katina Paxinou, Anna Sinodinou, Thanos Kotsopoulos, Vaso Manolidou and Eleni Hatziairigi, to name but a few (ibid.: 16). He created a second stage solely for new Greek playwrights (ibid.). For the first time he presented at the National and on the Greek stage plays like *Dyskolos* (Δύσκολος) by Menander, the anonymous Byzantine religious drama *Christ Suffering* (Χριστός Πάσχων) and a large number of comedies by Aristophanes (Solomos, 1978: 8). During his administration the National toured Greece and Europe and participated in

international festivals, like the Theatre of Nations Festival in Paris (ibid.; Prousalis, 18 March 2001: 17).

When the Centre Union (Ένωση Κεντρώων) won the February elections of 1964, Hourmouzios knew he was going to be replaced and Minotis aspired to take his place. However, Papandreou did not want to give Minotis the position of General Director – a consequence of the sudden death of Minotis's supporter and Papandreou's collaborator, Sophocles Venizelos. Thus Papandreou decided to split the General Direction into two roles, Administrative and Artistic. On 3 June 1964, a Royal Decree gave Minotis the Artistic Direction of the Theatre and Elias Venezis, author and literary man, the Administrative one (Kanakis, 1999: 378-384). The Theatre's repertoire, aims and style were not altered as the two principal directors of the National, Minotis and Mouzenidis, were also directing when Hourmouzios had been in charge of the Theatre. During the three years that Minotis was Artistic Director of the National, twenty-nine plays were presented and Minotis directed thirteen of them, namely, one third of the entire repertoire. Furthermore, he had a leading part in eleven, five of which were tragedies.<sup>7</sup> Thus he acted all the male leading parts in the tragedies presented during his tenure of office. The remainder of the repertoire was directed by five different directors. Mouzenidis, who was the National's permanent director, directed ten; Leonidas Trivizas three, with one in collaboration with Solomos; Mihailidis one; Solomos one in collaboration with Trivizas; and Zan Tasso one (The National Theatre's archive in [www.n-t.gr](http://www.n-t.gr)). This distinction was significant since it was the first time since the foundation of the National that a play was directed by a director/*metteur en scène* other than the permanent one

(Kanakis, 1999: 400). It is also clear that the permanent director of the company was still responsible for the directing of the majority of the plays presented. However, the use of directors who were not permanently employed by the National was an innovation that Minotis introduced and later fully established when he became the General Director (1974-1980).

The military coup of 21 April 1967 did not at first affect the position of the two directors. However, Venezis was soon the first to resign, followed by Minotis in October. The junta replaced them with a literature teacher, Evangelos Fotiadis, who had not watched a performance since 1927 (Kanakis, 1999: 458-459). Nevertheless, Mouzenidis kept his position as permanent director when Solomos and Karantinos returned. Those three, along with the new director Labros Kostopoulos who had been Minotis's assistant director since 1962, were the main directors of the National. The coexistence of directors and actors with the new General Director was problematical, as Fotiadis knew very little about theatre, but insisted on interfering with the directors' work (ibid.: 479-480). However, Fotiadis did not remain in this position until the end of the junta because the military government founded the Organisation of National Theatres of Greece (Οργανισμός Εθνικών Θεάτρων). The official gazette of 18 February 1970 published the legislative decree of this Organisation, which unified the three national stages of Greece (National Theatre, State Theatre of Northern Greece and Lyric Stage (Λυρική Σκηνή), the opera) thus creating an organisation 'centralistic, slow and ineffective' (Kanakis, 1999: 494). Vasilios Paxinos, a brigadier on the retired list, became the Governor of the Organisation (Solomos, 1992: 14), Tasos Athanasiadis became the General Director, who had no real authority, and Vasilios Frangos



the National's General Director (The National Theatre's archive in [www.n-t.gr](http://www.n-t.gr)).

In 1972, another director, Stryros Evangelatos, was invited to direct at the National. Evangelatos had graduated from the National Theatre's Drama School, undertook Theatre Studies at the University of Vienna, lived for several years abroad and followed the theatre life in Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Italy and France. He was the one to break the National's existing rules by presenting *Electra* by Sophocles. As will be revealed in the fifth chapter of this thesis, Evangelatos directed an *Electra* that had nothing to do with the productions of the National in relation to *mise en scène*, acting, movement, set, costumes and translation. For example, he used a new translation, the Chorus had independent movements, the costumes had touches of contemporary elements and Electra's hair was cut short. Thus the external form that the National had used for tragedy until that day was completely broken.

It is remarkable that such a revolution occurred during the dark years of the junta, something that will be examined in the due course of this thesis, but it is interesting to investigate how it became possible for such an innovative production to be presented, that is, to escape censorship and banning. First, in a long article in the newspaper *To Vima* (Evangelatos, 2 July 1972), Evangelatos attracted attention to the psychological, ontological and dramatic aspects of the play rather than to the social or political ones. Second, in an effort to segregate his production from any political implications, he responded fiercely to Iro Labrou (Evangelatos, 22 July 1972), who wrote an article in *To Vima* on 18 July 1972 claiming that Sophocles in *Electra* had criticised the

way the 400 tyrants had abolished democracy (413-410 B.C). Third, the Generals did not regard the productions of ancient tragedy staged by the National with any suspicion because it was an institution that they controlled and the director of the production had explicitly denounced any political or social connection. Finally, for the regime of the Generals, tragedy signified a link with the glorious past of Greece and, because of this, it was not charged with negative or rebellious connotations. On the contrary, it represented vigour and force, which was precisely what the Generals wished to show, appropriating tragedy as they had appropriated ancient Greek symbols and relics for the celebrations of their first year in power (21 April 1968). As a result, it becomes difficult to understand the real intention of the performance in relation to the political condition of the period, but this can only be explained adequately in this thesis when the performance is fully analysed.

Evangelatos continued his collaboration with the National after 1974, when Minotis became the General Director. Minotis was seventy-four years old at the time. As noted above, he suppressed the position of the permanent director/*metteur en scène*. He fired Mouzenidis and Kostopoulos and invited Solomos to direct a large number of plays. He also invited a number of other directors such as Giorgos Theodosiadis, Kostas Bakas, Dinos Dimopoulos and Mihalis Kakoyiannis to direct at the National (Kaltaki, 18 March 2001: 18; Kanakis, 1999: 565-593; the National Theatre's archive in [www.n-t.gr](http://www.n-t.gr)). Minotis himself directed ten of the seventy plays that were presented at the National during his tenure and held the leading part in seven of them (Kaltaki, 18 March 2001: 19; the National Theatre's archive in [www.n-t.gr](http://www.n-t.gr)). As Matina Kaltaki points out, Minotis had a disagreeable character and leading actors

like Kotsopoulos, Synodinou and Dimitris Horn, as well as directors like Rontiris and Mouzenidis, did not want to work with him (ibid.: 20-21). He was also on bad terms with the Greek Playwrights' Union (Εταιρεία Ελλήνων Συγγραφέων), the Union of Artists of the National Theatre (Σωματείο Καλλιτεχνών του Εθνικού Θεάτρου), and the Actors' Union (Σωματείο Ελλήνων Ηθοποιών – ibid.: 21; Kanakis, 1999: 594-597). By and large, the six years that Minotis presided over the National were regarded as regressive and uninspiring, especially in relation to the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy, which tended to consist of rehashed models created in the 1950s and 1960s (Kaltaki, 18 March 2001: 20).

Outside the National, a few theatre companies presented ancient Greek tragedies in the 1950s such as the Thymelicos Thiasos (Θυμηλικός Θίασος) of Linos Karzis or the Nea Skene of Livadeas. The former has been discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. The latter existed in the margin of Greek theatre life, touring the country and performing in deserted ancient theatres. The leading actors' companies of the 1950s, which, according to Mavromoustakos, had evolved from the leading actors' companies of the 1920s and 1930s (Mavromoustakos, 2005: 91), such as the Kotopouli or the Kyveli companies reviewed in Chapter Two, did not present ancient Greek tragedy. Their repertoires comprised contemporary Greek comedies, light European plays such as *The Great Sebastians* by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse, *Quality Street* by James Barrie or *Gigi* by Colette and Anita Loos, and romantic plays such as *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexander Dumas (ibid.: 89-95; Ploritis, 1957; Ploritis, 1958; Ploritis, 1959). As Mavromoustakos rightly points out:

The success of these companies was based on the appreciation and adoration with which the leading actors were embraced by a large part of the audience, which regarded theatregoing as an integral traditional value, part of the ritual of bourgeois life (Mavromoustakos, 2005: 91).

Leading actors' companies would multiply during the following decades and their repertoire would include tragedy. Sinodinou's Helliniki Skene, which presented *Electra* in 1967, is an example of this practice. Productions in the 1980s such as *Antigone*, which starred the famous screen idol, Aliki Vougiouklaki, and *Electra* (a production which will be thoroughly reviewed in Chapter Six), which featured in the leading role the other famous screen idol, Jenny Karezi, fall into the same category. By contrast, the foundation of the Peiraiko Theatro by Rontiris in 1957 occupies a different position within the theatrical field, representing the establishment of a company that aimed to continue the work Rontiris had done at the National Theatre and to contribute to the development of the interpretation of ancient Greek tragedy. In the same vein was the DESMI Centre for the Ancient Greek Drama – Research and Practical Applications (Κέντρο Έρευνας και Πρακτικών Εφαρμογών του Αρχαίου Ελληνικού Δράματος «Δεσμοί») that was founded in 1975 by Aspasia Papathanasiou, who presented two productions of *Electra* in 1975 and 1977.<sup>8</sup>

However, all the actors who took part in these endeavours during the 1960s and 1970s were either members of the National or were Rontiris's students. Thus they were part of an established monopoly and as such they had authority to define what tragedy was and how it was to be performed.

Bourdieu argues:

The fundamental stake in literary struggle is the monopoly of literary

legitimacy, i.e., *inter alia*, the monopoly of the power to say with authority who are authorised to call themselves writers; or, to put it another way, it is the monopoly of the power to consecrate producers or products (Bourdieu, 1993: 42).

The actors who were involved with Rontiris were part of this type of monopoly, having been initiated by the National or the master himself, and thus assumed that they were the heirs of ancient Greek tragedy and the way in which it should be performed.

### **3.2 The National's Acting School**

The National's acting tradition has become synonymous with Rontiris's acting technique and style, and was mostly developed for the open-air theatres where ancient tragedies were performed. This may seem a paradox if it is considered that Rontiris had neither directed an original performance at the National nor taught at the Drama School since 1955, even though, the fifteen years that he spent at the National surpass any other time spent there by other permanent or General Directors. Moreover, the nine years when he was a permanent director and the six when he occupied both positions were decisive for the National's artistic development because, on the one hand, he laid the acting foundations from 1934-1942, and, on the other hand, he was a teacher at the theatre's Drama School, and he was a teacher-director.

Rontiris's primary concern was his actors. As Georgousopoulos points out, 'Rontiris's legacy [to the theatre] was the actors that he made' (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). By 'made' Georgousopoulos means that he initiated and trained the older actors like Minotis and Paxinou to his approach to grasp tragedy, which he introduced in 1936 when he directed his first tragedy at the National. He also trained the future generations

Kotsopoulos, Sinodinou and Papathanasiou, among them (ibid.).

Rontiris was a teacher at the Conservatory of Athens Drama School (Δραματική Σχολή του Ωδείου Αθηνών) as well, where he succeeded his own teacher, Thomas Oikonomou (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). He had taught all the future teachers, like Kotsopoulos, Stelios Vokovic and Nikos Papakonstantinou, who wrote a book on acting and diction (Papakonstantinou, 1985). Rontiris trained his actors to pronounce, nuance and accentuate their speech, and taught them to follow the rhythm of the language they used. In short, he taught them how to act because, as will be indicated below, Rontiris thought that by following the language's rhythm the actor can control her/his emotion and expression. Rontiris was very close to his students. Indicative of his strong connection with them and of their faith in him is the fact that many of his students went to him for help when they had to act important parts even when they were professional and successful actors (Rontiris, 2000: 225; Sinodinou, 1999: 225).

Rontiris was not the only important and influential director who worked on tragedy at the National. Mouzenidis, who had also studied at the Reinhardt Seminar and shared Rontiris's point of view regarding tragedy (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006), directed sixteen tragedies (Solomos, 1989: 236), while Rontiris directed only six (*Electra*, *The Persians*, *Hippolytus*, and the three plays of the *Oresteia*). There are two main reasons why Rontiris's influence surpassed that of Mouzenidis. First, Mouzenidis directed his first tragedy at the National in 1940, after Rontiris had already established a widely acceptable style for tragedy, and, second, he worked with all the

actors whom Rontiris had trained at the Drama School and had directed in his productions. For instance, the majority of the tragedies directed by Mouzenidis featured Sinodinou in the leading role (Solomos, 1989: 235), and Sinodinou had always been a devoted student of Rontiris. Sinodinou, in her book *Praise the Worthy*, asserts that Rontiris was her great teacher and that he established the method with which she worked in order to approach, understand and convey the 'logos' (λόγος – the spoken word of the written text – Sinodinou, 1999: 216-232). Rontiris's detailed approach towards speech, texts, rhythm and diction will be analysed shortly, but it should be kept in mind that, for him, the text and the way that it was pronounced and enunciated was the guiding element of his directorial work.

Unlike Rontiris, the other great actor and director of the National, Minotis, was not a teacher of other actors (Kaltaki, 18 March 2001: 19-20). Leandros Polenakis, author, theatre scholar and critic, noticeably states:

Minotis did not create an acting 'school' in ancient drama, like Rontiris. Minotis did not have loyal students... He did not even have friends coming from the theatre; he did not have those who would carry on his tradition; he did not have imitators (Polenakis, 17 December 2000: 13).

The main reason why Minotis's acting did not initiate a 'school' lies in his very character. Polenakis argues that all his co-actors, even his wife, Paxinou, in the productions he directed and in which he had the leading parts were there to support him and were overshadowed by him; that he was 'the leading actor of a unipolar company that began and ended with him' (ibid.: 15). He was a man who wanted to keep power in his own hands, and did not want to share his knowledge. An incident with Sinodinou is indicative of this. In 1964, when Minotis became the National's Artistic Director, Sinodinou resigned from the

company because she found him unfit for this position. The relationship between Sinodinou and Minotis had soured when, in 1956, Minotis directed *Antigone* with Sinodinou in the leading role, and he refused to teach her to act the part. Sinodinou stated in her letter to the press:

I would not want any actress in the world to be found in the tragic position in which I was found during that period [the summer of 1956]. For me, the most ignoble act is that of a Teacher who refuses to teach his student (cited in Kanakis, 1999: 386-387).

At this point, it should be noted that during the first decades of the presentation of the ancient Greek tragedies the focus was placed on the text and the actor. Thus when Sinodinou claimed that Minotis did not teach her, she means that she was overlooked and neglected during the rehearsals, that he did not direct her. Furthermore, as Sinodinou was Rontiris's student, she was used to a director who began his work from the actors' speech, abilities and potentials and worked with the actor in order to bring his view of the play to life. Conversely, Minotis focused on himself and did not 'help' his actors.

Even Hatziargiri, who had a good relationship with Minotis and Paxinou, regarded Minotis as her director and Paxinou as her teacher (Hatziargiri, 2000: 23). In the special edition of the newspaper *E Kathimerini* devoted to Paxinou and Minotis, Hatziargiri presented an extract of her script from *Prometheus Bound* (ibid.). On it, Paxinou divided Hatziargiri's text and phrases into bars, and marked the syllables which should be stressed. In other words, she turned the text into a *score*. This was Paxinou's usual practice, which coincided with Rontiris's method (as noted in Chapter Two). Thus Paxinou carried on Rontiris's method at the National. When Hatziargiri



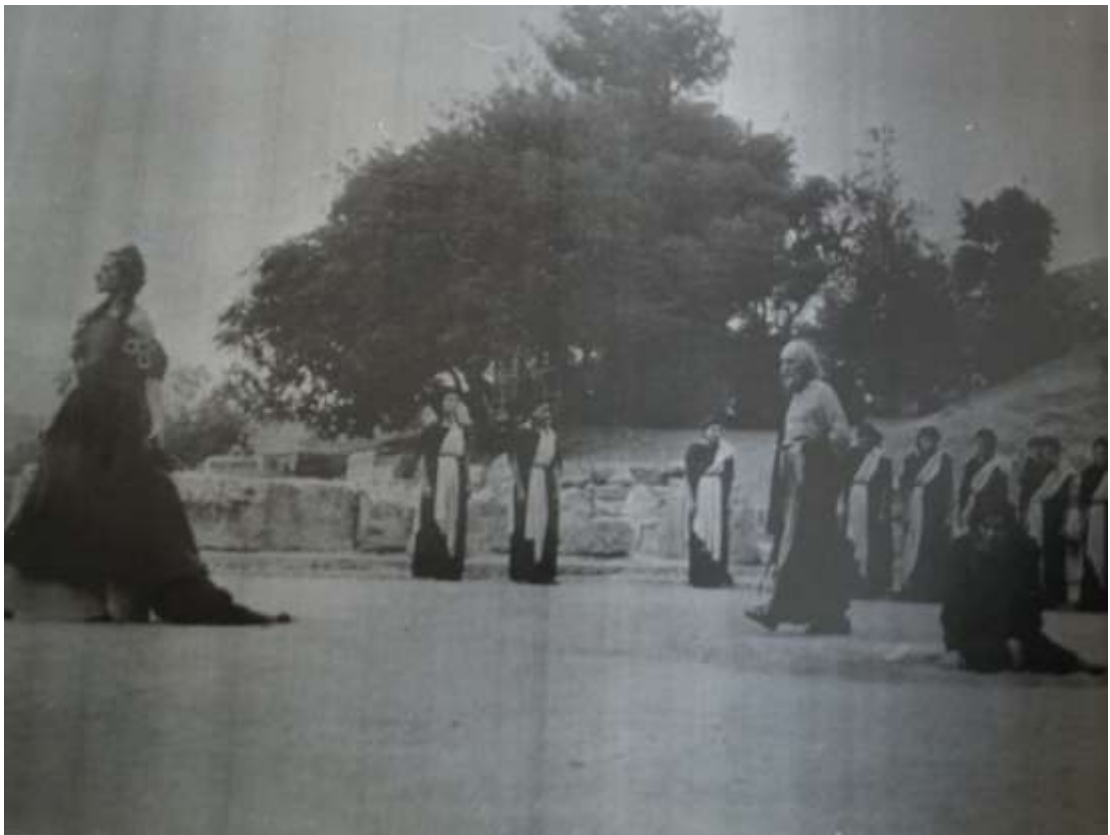
taught tragedy at the Drama School of the National in 1993, she focused on the accentuation of the text, and explained each character's psychological situation by stressing one word or one syllable rather than another.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear from the above that Rontiris's approach towards tragedy affected and influenced deeply the way that tragedies were presented at the National, as well as by his students outside the National. It is now necessary to discuss thoroughly his acting approach as regards tragedy. In order, however, to understand this approach, Rontiris's views and ideas on the origins of this genre, and his notion concerning the Greek qualities of ancient tragedy such as the common Greek land, environment and language should be presented. Finally, his concept should be analysed in relation to his view on the importance of the text and its rhythm.

In 'The Aesthetics of Production of Greek Tragedy', an English-language manuscript written by Rontiris and found in his archive, Rontiris stresses that there exists a strong link between contemporary and ancient Greece because wherever people turn they are reminded of 'some historic past', and that 'we [as Greeks] should feel deeper the moral responsibility to revive ... dramatic poetry (Rontiris, 1952).<sup>10</sup> He points out that, because ancient tragedy is part of the Greek heritage, there is an ethical charge regarding the productions of Greek tragedy, and that Greek artists have an obligation to revive it.<sup>11</sup> Rontiris argues that modern spectators would not be interested in a 'faithful reproduction' of an ancient tragedy: artists should, therefore, be interested in 'the revival of the spirit of tragedy' (ibid.). He believes that this can be accomplished, but that

there is, in my opinion, only one way by which we can communicate the tragic heights and the holy ecstasy felt by the ancient spectator of these masterpieces to the modern theatregoer and that is ... to seek to get the spirit of the play in us by emphasising the eternal human truths that are embedded in the ancient 'logos' of the ancient play (ibid.).

Hence, the 'logos', the spoken word of the written text becomes the governing element of Rontiris's productions of ancient tragedy. The 'logos' should be well delivered by the actors on the stage so that it is well perceived by the audience. Sinodinou claims that Rontiris rightfully occupies the position of the 'last teacher of the art of the dramatic logos' which equals the 'art of the theatre' (Sinodinou, 1999: 216). Hence, if the art of speech and diction is identified with the art of the theatre, attention to the articulation of speech becomes immense, and the accentuation of every word in the text maintains equal importance. The great opposition between the two acting schools,



11. Clytemnestra, the Pedagogue, Electra and the Chorus – *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1938

Rontiris's and Koun's, lies in this persistence in the enunciation of the word. The former insisted on the proper pronunciation of the text, which became bare, one-dimensional and stiff when it was employed by less talented actors because they did not have Rontiris's emotional and expressive power. The latter aimed for an expression of the emotional world of the actor irrespective of her/his ability to pronounce the words 'properly', as will be demonstrated in the following chapter of this thesis.

Georgousopoulos, Rontiris's student and collaborator, explains how Rontiris worked as a teacher. Rontiris, when he wanted to direct a play, read and acted by himself each sentence of every part in it. Once he had perceived the meaning of the play, he sketched out the emotional development of each character, and delivered it according to his inner technique, namely, his sensitivity or his emotional nuances. By these means he reached what Aristotle called *οικείον μήκος* (the appropriate length). Thus he determined how long a monologue or a line would be, how many pauses it would have, how long each pause should be, and so on; in short, he formulated and expressed what he called the rhythm of the text (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). Rontiris's next problem was to put this method into writing so that he could break it down and teach it. Unfortunately, he did not have any musical education (Lalas, 2001: 53-57, 71). However, his collaborator, the musician and composer Dimitris Mitropoulos, suggested a way that would allow Rontiris to map out his ideas regarding a given text. Mitropoulos told him that he could punctuate the text using the marks employed for the beats and pauses of the percussion instruments of an orchestra because those instruments had no melody and no real notes and

were essentially percussion (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). So, Rontiris punctuated his text and reached towards the 'unyielding austere score' of the Rontirian method of acting, which was presented in the previous chapter.

Rontiris in the following extract of a lecture he gave at the Belasco Theatre in New York entitled 'Contemporary Presentation of Classical Greek Plays', justified his use of the *score* and linked his acting method to tragedy:

We tried to fashion the ancient tragedy in its severe architecturally musical form. Ancient tragedy ... has all the characteristics of a complete musical composition. Form and substance, content and purpose, are indissolubly tied together in a harmonious unity (Rontiris, 1961).<sup>12</sup>

This 'harmonious unity' had a tight and strict rhythm. The 'severe architecturally musical form' of tragedy presupposed an inherent rhythm of the language and a rhythm of the 'logos'. It also demonstrated the development of the plot and the variation of the character's emotion. The rhythm of the language can be understood as the rhythm that is dictated by the syntax of each sentence, the position of the noun, the existence or lack of an adjective, an adverb or a conjunction. This is also clear in the extract of Rontiris's notes presented in Georgousopoulos's article, where it is indicated that the position of the nouns and the adjectives played considerable importance in the way that Rontiris accentuated and intoned a sentence (Georgousopoulos, 1 June 1986). Rontiris also believed that he did not present Sophocles's *Electra*, but 'Sophocles's *Electra* translated by Griparis' (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). Thus the syntax and structure of the translated sentence provided the sentence's goal and subsequently this goal provided the sentence's rhythm. Or, to use Rontiris's words once more: 'Changes in rhythm

do not happen for their own sake or for variety. They are directed by the change of emotion and the disposition of the characters' (Georgousopoulos, 1 June 1986).

The *score* and the rhythm did not complete the Rontirian method. Rontiris was also concerned with the breadth of the voice and its gamut. As Georgousopoulos points out, Rontiris provided the rhythm and the actor the melody (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). But this melody was still controlled by the master:

I use musical terms, such as, *crescendo* and *diminuendo* for the characters and the Chorus. This requires an exceptional pronunciation of the words, in the same manner that a singer pronounces the words prolonging the vowels and speaks through those vowels that are distinguished, while the pronunciation of the consonants is dry. This requires tremendous control of breathing ... This is a matter of technique, not of emotion (Rontiris, 1961).

In order to produce these sounds, he used breathing exercises and exercises for placing the voice; and he developed the actors' phonetic means. These exercises were used for many years at the Drama School of the National Theatre. Papakonstantinou, Rontiris's student and assistant, wrote a book that encompassed all these exercises (Papakonstantinou, 1985). This book was the basis of the Phonetics and Speech Training Course at the Drama School conducted by Papakonstantinou until 1993. The same course has been taught by Dimitris Vayias at the Drama School of the State Theatre of Northern Greece from its foundation in 1975 until today. Vayias was a student of the National's Drama School, leading actor of the State Theatre of Northern Greece, teacher and Director of the Drama School and he followed the same exercises.<sup>13</sup> He also taught acting. He explains that the actor has the ability to develop a part fully simply by using the technique provided by this method

(interview with Vayias, 7 May 2008), as Rontiris suggested. This means that an actor can take a part, understand its meaning and emotional charge, divide sentences, choose to accentuate the words that express the part's emotional state and thus produce the role. That being said, neither of the above actors ever neglected their bodies. On the contrary, they exercised regularly and paid attention to the exterior elements of the part such as walking, moving and so on, but all these elements were derived from the 'unyielding, austere *score*'.

The two public, free Drama Schools of Greece used the same teaching method for their actors, thus producing actors who paid attention to the 'logos', accentuation, rhythm and pronunciation. The Drama Schools and the two National Theatres occupied a dominant position within the Greek theatre field primarily because of the good quality of the performances of their actors and their productions, and second, by the mere fact that they were 'national'. Representing the nation and the country granted them even greater influence by sheer virtue of this status over theatre life in Greece as a whole.

The ideal use of the 'logos', the inner and outer rhythm of the word, the correct way of projecting the voice and the large breadth of the voice were some of the elements that comprised the external technique (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). The body and its movement on the stage completed it. Rontiris paid considerable attention to the body, as he was himself an athlete and worked out regularly until he was eighty years old (ibid.). However, his students and the actors of the National did not focus so much on the cultivation of their physicality. Obviously, there were

choreographers working on his productions, and movement trainers such as Loukia who choreographed all his productions of ancient tragedy since 1939, and dance and movement teachers at the Drama Schools of the National and of the Conservatory, but the focal point was on the text rather than on bodily expression. The body, as noted above, followed the speech, but did not determine the way that a part was approached.

The external technique was complemented by the internal technique, which relied on the 'emotional charge' (ibid.). Georgousopoulos explains:

The actor has to grasp the part emotionally, review its range, which means that she/he either should have life experiences or have trained her/his inner world in order to have an automated production of emotions. Rontiris said that acting is the complete control of the muscular and nervous systems (ibid.).

From the above statement it is clear that, first, there is a reciprocal relationship between the grasp of the emotion and development of the part and, as well, the interpretation and comprehension of the text. This happens because, according to Rontiris, the actor has to understand the role rationally first, find its rhythm and then approach it emotionally. And this goes hand in glove with the fact that the actor has to follow and interpret a preset text on which everything is mapped out. Thus the actor has to use the intonations on the text in order to stimulate her/his emotions. Hence, although it is true that the stimulation of emotion can occur without rationalisation, in Rontiris's method it is imperative to combine rationality and emotion. This also leads to the fact that he believes that acting is a matter of control of the muscular and nervous system because, for him, everything in acting is calculated, timed and exact.

The ability of the actor to control her/his voice, body and emotion makes possible the second requisite of Rontiris's internal technique, the 'automated production of emotions'. This means that the actor has to be able to recall her/his emotion whenever it is asked of her/him, that is, to cry, yell, whisper or shout according to what the character of the play feels, which has been determined by the mapping out of the emotional condition of the character and has been imprinted on the text. Georgousopoulos explicates that because Rontiris was a talented and gifted actor, he did not need to develop a method in order to cultivate his emotional expressions (ibid.). By contrast, because his voice was weak (ibid.), the utilisation of a method for its amelioration was imperative. Thus he focused more on the external technique, which he lacked, and less on the internal, which he possessed. Therefore, he did not develop exercises or training for the progress of the internal technique, and tried to explain the emotional development of each character through the *score* that he had formed. Finally, it seems that the operative word regarding Rontiris internal technique is 'emotional charge'. The word 'charge' clearly refers to the power that an actor should have, and her/his ability to maintain this power while acting a part. Hence, 'charge' results in a powerful actor on stage, who can control her/his emotion according to the given *score*.

Rontiris did not believe in talent. Georgousopoulos argues that, in order for Rontiris to stress the fact that the actor was a tool and that talent had nothing to do with acting, he used to say that 'even if a chair trained, it would be able to recite a monologue from *Hamlet*' (ibid.). The Rontirian acting style established deep roots in the Greek theatre, and, until today, there are some monologues from *Electra* by Sophocles or *The Persians* that are recited



based on Rontiris's intonations (ibid.). Georgousopoulos states that one can hear in all drama schools of Athens young students who try to imitate, on given parts, the accentuations and intonations of important actors, without, however, the great actors' emotional charge (Georgousopoulos, 24 November 1985).<sup>14</sup> The next two sections of this thesis will review the way this acting school was used in presenting tragedy, and will expose the dominant ideas regarding the presentation of this genre on the Greek stage.

### **3.3 The National's Productions**

Rontiris's point of view of *Electra* did not alter in the slightest between his first production in 1936 and his last in 1978. This does not only refer to the sets and costumes, which remained in the National's storage rooms and wardrobe, but also to the music and the open-air theatres that hosted the productions of 1938 and 1978. Most importantly, Rontiris's viewpoint remained the same because he used the same translation of the text. According to what has been stated so far, it would be obvious that if he changed the translation of the text he would also have to change his directorial approach and the intonation and accentuation of the phrases and words of the text. It is also clear from the comparison of Paxinou's recording of the lamentation over Orestes's urn to Hatziargiri's recording of the same part of the play that there was a canvas, the aforementioned *score*, on which both actresses worked in order to play their part. However, Rontiris did not only propose an acting school for actors, but a complete, thorough and insightful proposal about the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy.

As noted in the preceding section of this chapter, for Rontiris, tragedy



12. Eleni Hatziaargiri as Electra and Hristos Parlas as Orestes – *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1978

conveyed through the text the 'eternal human truths' (Rontiris, 1952). However, Rontiris did not believe that the main characteristic of the ancient Greek plays was solely their humanistic aspect. He stressed tragedy's religious components, namely, its initiation from the dithyramb (the religious hymn to Dionysus), the link of the Chorus to religious worship, and the general structure of tragedy (division in episodes and choral parts). And, although the text communicated to the audience those 'eternal human truths', the origin of tragedy was linked to religious worship because the religious elements were paramount (ibid.). Thus Rontiris did not regard ancient Greek tragedies as independent artistic creations, but as creations that were a part of a tradition irreversibly and inherently linked to religious worship.

Consequently, his productions aimed at 'preserving the ceremonial, the ritualistic character of the play[s]' (Rontiris, 1961; see also at the second chapter of this thesis). Hence, he aimed to find means that would 'impart to the modern spectator the same feelings that moved the soul of the ancient man' while attending a performance of a tragedy in the theatre of Dionysus in the fifth century B.C. (Rontiris, 1952). At the same time, he kept in mind that every interpretation of Greek tragedy should 'be in agreement with the distinctive morphological features that make ancient tragedy a thing apart' (Rontiris, 1961) such as the Chorus.

Rontiris believed that the only way to convey the essence of tragedy to the contemporary spectator, namely, its 'religious expression and human profundity' (Rontiris, 1961), was to find the elements that constituted the 'uninterrupted continuity' from ancient to contemporary Greece (ibid.). Rontiris found those elements in the ritual part of the Mystery and the Holy Eucharist of the Greek Orthodox Church and in the monophonic Greek folksongs (ibid.; Georgousopoulos, 4 May 1986; interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). The Greek tradition that influenced Rontiris was evident in the way that the actors recited and acted. For instance, in the 1978 production of *Electra*, Hatziargiri in her opening speech (verses 86-120) delivered her lines accompanied by subtle but evocative music, and her monologue sounded like a dirge. Hatziargiri prolonged the vowels and kept the assonance of the words. Her speech was reminiscent of the ecclesiastic liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church. She thus did exactly what Rontiris required of her, as was outlined in his text: 'under pressure of a lyric ecstasy [the actors] cross the boundaries of the spoken word' (διαλογικός τόνος) and ... reach the



13. *Electra and the Chorus* – *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1978

borderland of the song.’ (1952). The voices of the members of the Chorus followed the same pattern. This suggests that, while Rontiris was originally inspired by Reinhardt and Leyhausen (see the second chapter of this thesis), he also utilised Byzantine music and monophonic popular Greek folksongs to develop his notion of the verbal expression of the Chorus, as is evident in the following account of his concept about the speech and the movement of the Chorus:

The Chorus recites in unison, in rhythmic tempo or in a monologue, usually accompanied by music which is used more to mark the rhythm than for any other purpose. The rhythms, however, are varied and interchangeable and they express an internal necessity (Ananghe) which derives from the sentiments to be expressed. The same holds for the movement of the Chorus. This rhythmic monodic action of the Chorus in those parts where the lyric content of the text rises to ecstasy and, by

virtue of its various frequent movements and gestures, often borders on song. Likewise, its movements are a sort of dancing. We must take heed, however, and this is very important, that all of the above derive their meaning from the internal pressure of the action of the dialogue (Rontiris, 1952).

The Chorus did not dance, but the steps, the hand movement and the symmetrical positions that the Chorus occupied suggested dance. And everything was there to serve the text and the 'truths' embedded in it.

Rontiris had a clear and consistent notion of tragedy that found a large number of advocates among his students, collaborators and a large part of the audience.<sup>15</sup> However, there was another group of actors, directors, critics and spectators, who did not agree with his concept. This is clear by the mixed reactions of the spectators and contradicting reviews of the critics regarding the pre-war productions of *Electra* (see second chapter of this thesis) as well as the 1952 and the 1978 reprises. Alkis Thrilos, in his 1 November 1952 review, classified Rontiris as 'a studious executor of his German teachers, not a creator' (Thrilos, 1979: 118). K.O. found that, even though Paxinou was an actress of 'great calibre', she was 'over-ripe' and 'unconvincing' for the part, and noted that the fact she was the first to play the part in 1936 'did not necessarily mean that she could play it for all eternity' (K.O., 16 October 1952). On the other hand, when the 1952 production toured to New York, it was praised by the critics of the *New York Times* and *Herald Tribune* (cited in Argiropoulos, 20 November 1952; cited in Argiropoulos, 21 November 1952). Accordingly, in 1978, the critic of the influential, high-circulation paper *Ta Nea* argued that the 'frugality' of the performance was able to move today's spectators as well as the spectators of the 1930s, and that Hatzargiri gave her best performance ever in ancient tragedy (Margaritis, 14 July 1978).

Irrespective of the positive or negative opinion of critics, Rontiris contributed to laying the foundations for the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy on which the National was able to build its future productions. However, there was a critic who opposed Rontiris's work and whose opinion was of great importance, as he became the General Director of the National from 1955 until 1964; that critic was Hourmouziou. In his 17 October 1952 review of *Electra*, Hourmouziou argued that Rontiris 'fully despised the human element' of tragedy, and that 'Greek directors should cease to handle Greek drama as a ritual' and focus on its human element. It is clear that Hourmouziou did not recognise in Rontiris's work the human aspect which Rontiris claimed he aimed for in his productions. On the contrary, he found Rontiris's production pompous, full of schematic and grand movements, and, in short, a 'typified' product of Rontiris's view on tragedy (Hourmouziou, 17 October 1952). By 'typified' Hourmouziou referred to Rontiris style found in all his productions regarding the movement of the Chorus, the pronunciation of the text and the *mise en scène*. Hourmouziou continued to write critically about Rontiris's work even when Rontiris left the National and Hourmouziou became its General Director. He would refer to Rontiris's work as 'obsessed' with *sprechchor* regarding the presentation of the Chorus (Hourmouziou, 1978: 35) and 'the old school' of acting (ibid.: 65) that Rontiris initiated in the National Theatre during the 1930s. He even cautioned Mouzenidis to follow the new school rather than the old one towards which Mouzenidis tended (ibid.: 71).

Mouzenidis, who had studied in Germany and Austria, succeeded Rontiris at the National. He had been deeply influenced by Rontiris's legacy, as Hourmouziou's cautions above indicated. For the 1961 production of *Electra*,

which he presented at Epidaurus, he used actors that Rontiris had trained. He also used the same set designer, Klonis, and costume designer, Fokas. When Klonis's sets of the 1952, 1959 and 1978 *Electra* by Rontiris are compared to Klonis's set of the 1961 *Electra* by Mouzenidis the similarities between them become clear (images 13 and 14). A large staircase led to the main door in the centre of a rectangular, unadorned palace that dominated the stage. This became Klonis's leitmotiv and permanent solution for the set design of ancient Greek tragedy in the ancient theatre of Epidaurus: a staircase that led to the front of a temple or a palace with one main door and two smaller ones on each side (Kontogiorgi, 2000: 80-81; Grammatas, 2002a: 41). Fokas, the costume designer, used tunics and garments evocative of the ancient Greek world for the Chorus members and the Protagonists. At this point it would be useful to note that none of the directors of the National or mainstream critics of the period imagined that Greek tragedy could be performed in anything other than tunics, or costumes reminiscent of tunics. Mouzenidis states:

If there is no respect for the spirit and the structure of each given play ... we will inevitably reach the outrageous, uncommitted recreations which, in order to bring the classical plays closer to contemporary time, present ... Oedipus in a frock-coat and decorations (Mouzenidis, 11 November 1952).

Both Klonis and Fokas were the permanent set and costume designers of the National for the first twenty years of its operation. New designers started to work at the National in the mid 1960s, but the two permanent designers continued to work there until the 1980s.

Mouzenidis also used Griparis's translation for *Electra*. Thus Rontiris's score was bequeathed to the leading actors, who delivered the text clearly with round vowels and light consonants. However, as the critic of the left-wing

newspaper *Avgi* argued in his review of the 1961 *Electra*, Mouzenidis was trying to form a 'personal way of interpretation' of Greek tragedy, which was focused on the projection of the human element of the characters as well as of the play (Stavrou, 24 June 1961). Mouzenidis's approach went hand in glove with Hourmouzios's quest for the 'humanisation' of tragedy (Hourmouzios, 1978: 47-50). Hourmouzios explicitly explained that

to position the tragic heroes into a contemporary emotional state (even though these heroes give the impression that they are far-off and untouchable, and despite the distance imposed by their mythical substance, which existed even during the period of the tragic poets) in order to establish a direct emotional bond between today and the tragic myth, is what we ... call 'humanisation' of tragedy (ibid.: 49).

Hourmouzios referred to a 'humanisation' that would 'touch our heart' by preserving the 'tragic style of the logos and the tragic style of the interpretation' (ibid.).

Hourmouzios's and Mouzenidis's notions of tragedy and its 'humanisation' seemed to coincide. In his 1952 article, which was a response to Rontiris's *Electra*, Mouzenidis stated that there existed an approach that would bring out the human element of tragedy (Mouzenidis, 28 October 1952). This approach was fully presented in Mouzenidis's 1961 *Electra* (Mamakias, 16 June 1961: 60), and was based on two main guidelines regarding acting. First, he thought that the parts of tragedies should be performed in an 'antirealistic' manner because the characters of tragedy are 'ideal characters' and 'figures of universal values' (Mouzenidis, 28 October 1952). By 'antirealistic' Mouzenidis meant an acting approach that would have nothing to do with everyday, 'vulgar' presentation of characters that deprived tragedy of its 'poetic magnificence' (ibid.). Second, he believed that in tragedy the director and



actors should insist on the poetry of the text in its dual quality as being 'poetic in substance and poetic in form' (ibid.). When Rontiris's productions are compared to those of Mouzenidis, it becomes clear that the two approaches are very close in matters of acting because the 'antirealistic' quality that Mouzenidis required was very close to the ritualistic element which Rontiris was aiming for. It should also be kept in mind that all the actors came from the National Theatre's Drama School, which functioned according to Rontiris's guidelines. Mouzenidis, however, added a lyrical and tender note to Sinodinou's *Electra* that was opposed to the fierce, vengeful and powerful *Electras* of Paxinou and Hatziairigi.

Mouzenidis also introduced some innovations for the Chorus. Group recitation was not abandoned altogether, but *sprechchor* was used moderately in some chosen phrases of the play. Some members of the Chorus recited lines individually and music accompanied some phrases. The text was fully audible. The Chorus continued to execute rhythmically synchronised movements and the formations on the stage were well-organised and symmetrical. However, in the *Parodos*, the first *Coryphaeus* led the way onto the stage followed by the Chorus, thus she was distinguished from the rest of the Chorus members. This had become a practice and in all productions the *Coryphaei* were distinguished from the Chorus and were the ones that spoke with the characters of the play and led the way in the choreography. Babis Klaras, critic of the right-wing, mainstream newspaper *Vradini*, noted that the lines of the Chorus were 'rightly divided into individual speech and group recitation, and at the right moment [the Chorus] chanted discreetly without the music covering the speech' (Klaras, 19 June 1961).



14. *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Takis Mouzenidis at the Epidaurus Theatre, 1961 – Electra and the Chorus

In the production of *Electra*, Mouzenidis used the space of the Epidaurus stage in a novel way in relation to the Chorus and its usual positioning in the productions of tragedy of the period. Directors, actors, artists and theatre critics of the period such as Rontiris, Minotis and Hourmouzios believed that the Chorus should be positioned in the orchestra and not on the set, which was placed where the ancient skênê (σκηνή) was placed (Rontiris, 1952; Rontiris, 1961; Minotis, 1972; Hourmouzios, 1978). The theatre of Epidaurus was built in the fourth century B.C. by the architect Polykleitos the Younger. However, it underwent numerous renovations during the Hellenistic and Roman times in order to follow architectural developments such as the

enlargement of the edifice of the skênê and the division between the skênês, where the actors stood, and the orchestra, where the Chorus danced (Perakis, 18 August 1996: 10; Protonotariou-Dilaki, 18 August 1996: 5; Blume, 1999: 63-94). The theatre in its current condition is representative of the Roman period, when the division between the skênê and the orchestra was completed. Accordingly, the productions presented at Epidaurus by the National since 1954 followed this notion of dividing the space into a space for the Chorus and a space for the actors. Hourmouzios stated:

The place of the Chorus is in the orchestra and its possible transposition is a result of a directorial choice that is redundant, or even falsifying, in relation to the ideal meaning of the Chorus (1978: 68).

Nonetheless, Mouzenidis allowed the Chorus to go up to the set and so to come spatially closer to the Protagonists (image 14). This innovation, along with Mouzenidis's directorial choice to have Aegisthus enter the stage with a suite of twelve soldiers, who turned their heads the other way when Orestes revealed his identity and attacked Aegisthus, infuriated Leon Koukoulas, who had been a theatre critic since the 1920s. Koukoulas argued:

Mr Takis Mouzenidis has obviously every right not to differentiate between the scene and the orchestra, to be unconcerned with the inherent structure of ancient drama and to innovate wherever he believes that his innovations will diminish the distance that separates the contemporary spectator from the ancient theatre of Attica. However, it is unfit to exercise this right within the scope of the National Theatre's efforts to revive ancient drama, an effort that created ... a specific hermeneutic tradition that claims the seal of 'authenticity'. In an independent theatrical organisation, Mr Mouzenidis could have been bolder and more revolutionary. Nonetheless, in the productions of the festival that are mostly addressed to foreign spectators he should have kept in mind that most of those foreigners are familiar with the structure and the spirit of the ancient texts and it is impossible not to be enraged when the orchestra becomes the scene and the scene is rendered useless for the actors because it is used by the Chorus (Koukoulas, 20

June 1961).

This review, apart from its reference to the production of *Electra*, is also indicative of the spirit in which Greek critics and spectators regarded the Festival of Epidaurus from its inauguration until today. The Festival of Epidaurus was a mainstream festival that, as Koukoulas observed, aspired to a touristic audience, but mainly aimed at the revival of the ancient Greek tragedies and comedies. This revival had to follow some rules which, according to Koukoulas, bore the seal of 'authenticity'. Koukoulas openly referred to the productions of Rontiris at the National. However, Koukoulas's comments are more valuable if analysed within the perspective of this thesis and compared to reactions against independent and experimental productions that will be examined in the following chapters. This comparison will demonstrate that the definition of experimentation changes year after year, and that productions which were considered experimental are now considered classical such as *The Trojan Women* directed by Andreas Voutsinas in 1985. It should also be kept in mind that changes introduced in the Theatre of Epidaurus have always been confronted with scepticism and, at times, hostility because the audience in this theatre usually expects a classic presentation of tragedy. For instance, Voutsinas's production of *Helen* in 1982, when the audience booed the director, or Anatoly Vassiliev's *Medea* in 2008, when a part of the audience shouted 'disgrace!' and 'shame on you!' while leaving the theatre, are some indicative examples of the audience's hostility towards innovative and experimental productions as regards the Festival of Epidaurus.



15. Anna Sinodinou as Electra in *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Takis Mouzenidis at the Epidaurus Theatre, 1961

Overall, Mouzenidis's production was very close to Rontiris's notion of tragedy and approach to it, merely continuing a tradition that had been established at the National. Tragedy was a genre that belonged to this institution. This is also evident in Hourmouzios's 1964 article 'The Future of Tragedy', where he argued that there were few actors 'who would be capable of acting tragic parts in the commercial theatre' and that those actors would have 'studied next to experienced teachers in the National Theatre' (Hourmouzios, 1978: 263). This argument was true for the 1950s, 1960s and the middle of the 1970s, as will be discussed in the next part of this chapter.

### **3.4 Productions by Former Members of the National**

Rontiris left the National in 1955 and founded in 1957 the Peiraiko Theatro, a municipal organisation which performed in Greece and toured the world. The city of Piraeus provided the company with the space. Rontiris was the Administrative Director responsible for the funding of the productions (Rontiris, 2000: 137-138). Rontiris's repertoire was comprised of classical plays such as *Twelfth Night* by Shakespeare and *Intrigue and Love* by Schiller as well as contemporary Greek plays such as *The Small Etesian* (*To Μελεμαάκι*) by Pantelis Horn. However, it consisted mostly of ancient Greek tragedies.<sup>16</sup>

In 1959, he presented *Electra*. He kept Griparis's translation because he did not want to change his viewpoint on the production (interview with Georgousopoulos, 25 February 2006). The music was composed by Konstantinos Kidoniatis, who admitted that he took no initiatives, but followed the melody and the sense that Rontiris had suggested (Lalas, 2001: 55). Kidoniatis and Rontiris had agreed that the Chorus's singing would be

minimal, and the music would be in a low key 'so that the music would not overwhelm the production' (ibid.). Rontiris was very particular about the use of music in tragedy. It must be borne in mind that tragedy was for Rontiris a 'complete musical composition', as noted in the second part of this chapter, and that he 'hope[d] to create a combination of dance and song that would belong exclusively to tragedy' (Rontiris, 1952). The set was by Klonis and followed his philosophy of a staircase leading to a dominating palace gate. The costumes were tunics. The Chorus's group recitation and simultaneous movement under the directions of the choreographer Loukia acquired a Hellenic quality as the circular movement resonated of traditional circular Greek folkdances such as kalamatianos and ballos. Nevertheless, the production was by and large a reprise of the National's performance (image 16).

The production's greatest asset was Papathanasiou's performance. Papathanasiou was Rontiris's student from the National's Drama School. She had never undertaken a leading part before, but Rontiris entrusted Electra to her, which won her the First International Acting Prize at the Theatre of Nations Festival in Paris in 1960. Papathanasiou confirms that Rontiris insisted on the rhythm and intonation:

With Rontiris you had to do exactly what he wanted because he had the general concept and you could not stray from the time that he gave you. For instance, he told you that the first monologue [of Electra] should last half a second. He did not actually tell you that it should last half a second, but the rhythm he imposed on you did not let you get away. He regarded himself as the maestro (interview with Papathanasiou, 10 September 2006).

However, her performance also shows that, by using Rontiris's *score*, the actor can develop a personal acting interpretation that is linked to the



16. *Electra* by the Peiraiko Theatro directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1960 –  
Electra and the Chorus

character, background, culture and, in short, to the individuality of each actor.

Thus Papathanasiou's *Electra* was specifically distinctive from the other *Electras* directed by Rontiris. Papathanasiou's distinctiveness lay in her political orientation. She was left wing, politically active, and had been a member of the Resistance in Athens during the Occupation. She even remembers that her teacher's technique helped her when she was walking at night from neighbourhood to neighbourhood chanting against the occupational forces using a twisted cardboard as a speaking trumpet (Papathanasiou, 1996: 81). Thus her performance was charged with her sociopolitical conscience, and in her *Electra* one could identify the post-war Greek woman, who carried the burden of a wounded nation. This generally held notion of the post-war Greek woman was made concrete with the help of the perceptive



and politically and socially sensitive direction of her performance. Rontiris decided that Papathanasiou would wear a scarf over her hair (image 17 – interview with Papathanasiou, 10 September 2006). This scarf referred to the contemporary Greek traditional article of clothing which indicated mourning. In the production of 1959, the sociopolitical circumstances were dramatically different in comparison to the first time that Rontiris had staged *Electra*. Greece had experienced great human loss during the Second World War and the Civil War that followed. Women wearing black scarves were seen in the streets daily. This detail had direct reference to everyday Greek life of the 1950s and 1960s. The female figure left behind, by the patriot who dies for his country, the warrior who fights for his beliefs, mourned him dressed in black and her head covered. Electra was the widow of the war. She became the widow of her household.

When the author of this thesis brought this detail to Papathanasiou's attention, she was surprised at first, but then she admitted:

I carried that inside me ... I brought my life with me. My orientation. The beliefs of my life. I tried, of course, to make it come out from Electra's situation, not to be a catchword. The declaration of a political party. But I had that inside me ... He [Rontiris] knew that this [the scarf] would not become anyone else. That is what every actor brings to a part (interview with Papathanasiou, 10 September 2006).

This detail clearly indicates that Rontiris was extremely perceptive of the sociopolitical conditions of his era. It also contradicts Glitzouris's claim that Rontiris did not present any ideological concerns in his work, but was limited to the logical development of the action on the stage (Glitzouris, 2001: 398-399). Conversely, it shows that Rontiris had ideological concerns, but that those concerns did not overshadow his notion of the play, or, to put it in other



17. Aspasia Papathanasiou as Electra in *Electra* by the Peiraiko Theatro directed by Dimitris Rontiris, 1960

words, they did not obscure the *score* of his production. Hence, he managed to comment on the conditions of his era without using elements that would alter what he thought was the intention and meaning of the play.

Dressed in black with the scarf covering her head Papathanasiou used her powerful voice and its wide gamut. She used the numerous intonations that

her voice was able to produce in order to express Electra's emotional condition and inner feelings while her body moved moderately (image 17). She did not employ imposing, highly expressive movements when she acted, but every movement was calculated and precise. She walked smoothly on the stage, like a trapped feline waiting for her saviour to open the cage. However, after Clytemnestra's and Aegysthus's death, she remained still in the centre of the stage while the lights slowly dimmed. The uncountable variations of her voice communicated the grand emotions that Electra experienced: hate towards her mother, devastation when she heard of her brother's death, or joy when she realised he was alive. The way that she used her voice and body are indicative of the Rontirian acting style, where the focus falls on the text and its recitation and not on the bodily expression of it. This is true of Papathanasiou's, Hatziargiris' and Paxinou's performance, as well as Sinodinou's, which is discussed below.

In 1964, Sinodinou, who was a member of the National, left the company and decided to found her own. Her company was called Helliniki Skene Anna Sinodinou. As noted in the first part of this chapter, Sinodinou's company falls into the category of leading actors' companies as they developed during the 1960s. Moreover, Sinodinou's aim was to create an organisation that would occupy a similar position within the Greek theatre field in the presentation of ancient Greek drama to that of the National Theatre. So, in 1965, Sinodinou built and founded the Theatre of Lycabettus; a theatre on Mount Lycabettus, a Cretaceous limestone hill in the centre of Athens and the highest point in the city. Sinodinou decided to found this theatre in order to create an equivalent of the National Theatre and a theatre space similar to that of the Herodus Atticus

Theatre (Stamou, 19 May 1996) because, first, the Herodus Atticus Theatre was, at that time, used by the National so, since she had left the company, she was not able to perform there anymore; second, she wanted to be able to perform in a summer theatre in Athens and because such a theatre did not exist she had to make one; and third, she had to prove to the National Theatre that she neither needed its help nor its auspices to continue her career in ancient Greek drama.

In the note found in the programme of the production of the 1967 *Electra*, it is clear that Helliniki Skene's goal was to 'cultivate ancient Greek drama' and to educate its young members in order to carry on the tradition and to contribute to 'the great national cause of the revival of ancient Greek drama' (*Electra*, 1967). For Sinodinou, ancient Greek drama productions were 'an affair of the nation' (Stamou, 19 May 1996) because they concerned 'the entirety of our spiritual civilisation'. Sinodinou also called herself and the actors who performed the ancient dramas 'national actors' (ibid.). At this point, it is important to note that the majority of Greek actors and directors such as Rontiris, Minotis and Paxinou considered themselves 'national' directors and actors in the sense that they represented the nation's tradition, even if they did not state it as explicitly as Sinodinou. Respectively, the same has also been true of the Greek people in general, who consider ancient Greek dramas to be their heritage and a confirmation of their continuity as a nation.

The 1967 *Electra* was the third and last production of the Helliniki Skene because the company discontinued its operation due to the dictatorship of the Generals. It was directed by Kotsopoulos, featured Sinodinou in the leading

role and was reprised in 1972. Kotsopoulos had been an actor at the National since 1932 and Politis's assistant director during Politis's directorship at the National (see the second chapter of this thesis). He had also been Orestes in Rontiris's *Electra* at the National from 1936 to 1952, and in the 1961 *Electra* by Mouzenidis. In this production he played the Pedagogue. His directorial approach was in tune with the productions of the National (Varikas, 26 July 1967; Spiliotopoulos, 1 August 1972). The company used Griparis's translation, a factor that made it almost impossible to escape the National's tradition. The Chorus recited and chanted, moved moderately (ibid.) and made symmetric formations in the orchestra (image1). The most innovating element of the production was Tsarouhis's set, which reproduced the proscenium of the Theatre of Dionysus during Alexander the Great's period (Tsarouhis, 1986: 185). The decorated entablature gave the impression of an ancient palace. The set had thirty-six columns made of perspex which, when lit, created 'imposing shadowing' on the stage and orchestra. (image 18 – Fessa-Emmanuel, 1999a: 52). It was one of the first times that lighting was used as part of the scenography in an open-air theatre, thus playing an active part in the function of the set.

Sinodinou's performance did not differ greatly from her 1961 performance of *Electra*. This is also indicative of the fact that, during the three years of Helliniki Skene's life, Sinodinou presented only tragedies that she had acted at the National.<sup>17</sup> Like the 1961 *Electra*, Sinodinou wore an ancient-style costume and had her hair done as if she had just left the hairdresser. Her appearance was spotless and did not coincide with *Electra*'s hapless situation. Her posture was even and smooth. Her torso remained straight.



18. *Electra* by the Helliniki Skene directed by Thanos Kotsopoulos at the Lycabetus Theatre, 1967 – The Pedagogue, Clytemnestra, Electra and the Chorus. View of the set

Her movement was round and her body maintained the elegance of a princess (image 19). She recited her lines immaculately. She pronounced clearly every word. She also prolonged the vowels and kept the assonance of the words, thus following her teacher's, Rontiris, guideline. Her voice was powerful and cultivated. She narrated the trials of her household with a tender, emotional tone provoking pity in the audience, but her sweet voice became a roar when she asked Orestes to strike again (interview with Oikonomidou, 20 November 2006).<sup>18</sup> Like Paxinou, Hatzargiri and Papathanasiou, Sinodinou's verbal expression was more dominant than her bodily one. An example can clarify what is meant by the above phrase. If a

member of the audience closed her/his eyes and simply heard the voice of the actress, then she/he would be able to understand the gravity of the situation that Electra was undergoing even if she/he did not speak Greek because the various intonations would provoke powerful emotions. On the other hand, if the same spectator covered her/his ears and watched the performance then she/he would not be able to feel the importance of the circumstances because movement on the stage was limited and *comme il faut*. The rationale behind this approach was that Electra, being a princess, should mourn with dignity according to her status, virtue and sex. It should be kept in mind that the revolution of May 1968, which freed the body, had not occurred yet, while these influences can be observed in the 1977 *Electra* of Papathanasiou that will be viewed below.

While the 1967 *Electra* followed a conventional production, its 1972 reprise featured an element that was a result of the political situation, namely, the dictatorship of the Generals. At the end of the play the Chorus recited three lines that included the word 'freedom'.<sup>19</sup> In the 1967 performance, the Chorus recited the three lines once. In the 1972 performance, the Chorus repeated the lines several times and especially the word 'freedom' that reverberated on the stage.<sup>20</sup> The allusion was obvious including to the critic of the review *Nea Hestia* who commented:

In the absence of Sophocles and Griparis, the Chorus intended to provoke liberal manifestations in the audience. I think that, especially in tragedy, the ancient text should be respected, and not be prolonged and altered in order to serve any other purpose. As for the much talked about 'freedom' of the Chorus of the Helliniki Skene, it brought to mind the last words of Madame Rolland, the democratic French actress, follower of the Girondists, who, nonetheless, lost her head at the guillotine in 1793. Before the blade fell, she was heard saying: 'Oh, freedom! How many crimes are committed in your name!' (Spiliotopoulos, 1 August 1972).



19. Anna Sinodinou as Electra in *Electra* by the Helliniki Skene directed by Thanos Kotsopoulos at the Lycabetus Theatre, 1967

These were the phrases that concluded the otherwise favourable review of the production. The image of the blade falling on the neck of the French democratic actress explicitly and bluntly suggested that the blade could fall on the necks of the actors of the production. Fortunately, Sinodinou's and Kotsopoulos's reputation and long-term presence at the National 'saved their heads'. The terrorising methods employed by the Junta were constant and



ruthless. Citizens were arrested and tortured for no reason. Trials were a travesty of justice. Censorship was imposed on every written and vocal manifestation.<sup>21</sup> Left-wing citizens who managed to escape abroad stayed there until the fall of the Junta, in 1974. Papathanasiou was one of those left-wing citizens.

Upon her return, Papathanasiou founded the DESMI Centre for the Ancient Greek Drama – Research and Practical Applications. DESMI's primary aim was cultural decentralisation (Papathanasiou, 1996: 131). Although it started out as a small group it was subsidised by the state from the second year of its operation (Kleanthis, 2 July 1977). Papathanasiou's aim was to make people of the Greek provinces familiar with Greek drama because the cultural movement of the 1960s was 'buried by the Junta' (Papathanasiou, 1996: 130) and theatre companies did not reach remote towns and villages. In her interview with the author of this thesis Papathanasiou remarked that 'those who were left behind during the Junta did not care, they were minding their own business' (interview with Papathanasiou, 10 September 2006). Furthermore, Papathanasiou wanted to 'test' how ancient Greek drama functioned in non-theatrical spaces (ibid.). DESMI presented its work in the ancient theatre of Delphi, but most of its performances were put on in squares of villages, town stadiums or the middle of some road (Kotsakaki, 29 July 1975). Papathanasiou remembered that

I put up our platform at a crossroad in the middle of nowhere. Before the show I gave a speech. But, in order not to insult anybody, I said that I would tell you who we were as the poets did in ancient Greece. And we conversed with the audience. ... That is when I saw the real power of tragedy. Because there is a big difference between playing in an ancient theatre and playing in the countryside. At times, farmers had to stop their

cows so that they would not interrupt our performance (interview with Papathanasiou, 10 September 2006).

Everything in the productions of the first years of the DESMI had a social and a political significance. Papathanasiou organised numerous tours in the Greek province which she called decentralising, cultural Greek tours (ibid.).

The first tragedy that DESMI presented was *Electra* by Sophocles. The director of the production was Yiannis Veakis, son of the actor Emelios Veakis. Yiannis Veakis had studied with his father and Rontiris at the National, and in France with a scholarship from the French government. He lived and worked in Bucharest. He had acquired a two-month permit in order to visit Greece and work on the performance.<sup>22</sup> In an interview with the left-wing newspaper *Avgi*, he argued that every play must take into consideration the time and space where it would be presented because this was the only way 'to convey the artistic, mental and social present' (Veakis, 3 August 1975). This was one of the first times that a director of ancient Greek tragedy talked about the fact that every artistic expression belonged to the sociopolitical conditions of its era. This should come as no surprise, as Yiannis Veakis had developed artistically in a communist country familiar with the concept of social realism, and had also been aware of the developments of the 1960s in France, the political theatre there and the Théâtre du Soleil's productions such as *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker and their collective work *Les Clowns*. Furthermore, Greece was coming out of a seven-year period of oppression and the sociopolitical influence on art and, consequently, on the theatre was bound to be strong, meaning that artists were bound to use theatre as a means to comment on the sociopolitical circumstances that occurred.

Nevertheless, Yiannis Veakis's production was not political in its artistic presentation and staging. The political manifestation was communicated by the choice of the spaces where the production was presented. For instance, the company performed in Cyprus at the Greek-Cypriot refugee camp during the events commemorating the first anniversary of the Turkish invasion at the island. Papathanasiou recorded that when the audience saw *Electra*, they identified Electra's attitude with the voice of a Cyprus ready to fight back, and Chrysothemis with the compromising voice of the President of Cyprus, Glavkus Kliridis (Papathanasiou, 1996: 131).

In general, the production kept a distance from the National's acting school on tragedy, employing elements that by then had become popular such as the freer movement of the Chorus introduced by Koun in his *Persians* and developed by Evangelatos in his 1972 *Electra*, or a more abstract set. George Patsas's costumes were reminiscent of the ancient-style costumes used by the National. However, Patsas's set was a wide rocky open door that was placed on an empty stage and had nothing to do with Klonis's imposing sets at the National. Christos Pittas's music was melodic, but also reminiscent of Theodorakis's revolutionary songs. The Chorus sang and its members recited mostly individually. Its movement was freer and less schematic. Yiannis Veakis used K.H.Miris's translation because he thought that it made the tragedy of *Electra* seem as if it had been written today (Veakis, 3 August 1975).<sup>23</sup> Miris's translation was the first popular translation after Griparis's. Miris used less compound words and incorporated in his Modern Greek language ancient Greek elements. This translation enabled the actors to speak the text directly, exactly as Yiannis Veakis had wanted (Modinos, 4

August 1975). Miris's translating work will be thoroughly reviewed in Chapter Five of this thesis when Evangelatos's production, where the translation was first used, will be analysed.

The second production of *Electra* by DESMI in 1977 was overtly political. It was directed by Papathanasiou who kept the music and the translation of the 1975 *Electra*, but completely changed the set design and costumes of the production. Thus the costumes were contemporary. Orestes wore corduroy trousers, army boots and a shirt (image 21) and the Pedagogue was dressed as a political instructor (interview with Papathanasiou, 10 September 2006).

The Chorus wore costumes that brought everyday women of the province to mind and Electra had on a simple black dress. Unlike her 1959 performance of *Electra*, Papathanasiou did not wear a scarf. Her hair was carelessly tied back (image 20). The revolutionary Electra of the 1970s wore only what was necessary. She had no accessories. Her head was free as was her mind.

Yiannis Kirou, the costume and set designer, stated that in the production the costumes were contemporary (trousers, boots, everyday dresses, and so on) in order to project the power of the people (Kleanthis, 2 July 1977). The set was constructed in two levels: the one that represented the encircling of the people and the other that represented the abolition of authority (ibid.). In the 1977 video of the performance filmed in the natural scenery of the Palamidi Fortress in Nafplio, the Chorus and Electra were placed at the bottom of the long rocky staircase leading to the castle, which dominated the area. After the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, Electra, Orestes, Pylades, the Pedagogue and the members of the Chorus lit torches, danced and exclaimed with joy that the tyrant had been overthrown, while ascending the stairs and

entering the palace, a place from which they had been excluded for too long.

Looking back at this production, Papathanasiou argued that 'artistically she had failed' (interview with Papathanasiou, 10 September 2006). A statement that becomes untrue if the performance is set within its chronotopic context, namely, after the Junta, in a country that longed to protest that it had overcome one of the worst periods of its history. Moreover, her own individual performance was far superior to her award-winning performance in Rontiris's production. She presented a direct, everyday woman who, at the same time, had the power and idealising quality of a revolutionary woman. She managed to be human and passionate. Her movement was extremely simple, but not smooth. It was sharp, Doric. She seldom moved her hands and her entire body seemed like a wall on which Clytemnestra's offences crashed and thus became powerless. However, this wall collapsed when she received news of Orestes's death and mourned over his urn. Her body broke, folded and expressed her emotional condition. She fell on the ground and spread her entire body on the earth that had borne her and Orestes (image 20). The use of her body stood at the antipode of her performance in Rontiris's production. In 1959, her body did not visualise her feelings while in 1977 it depicted her soul.

DESMI's productions in 1975 and 1977 were influenced by the acting suggestions that were introduced by Koun during the last years of the 1960s and by Evangelatos and Volanakis at the beginning of the 1970s. However, the link to those two productions to Rontiris's and the National's acting school was Papathanasiou herself, who being a devoted student of Rontiris,



20. Aspasia Papathanasiou as Electra in *Electra* directed by Aspasia Papathanasiou at the Palamidi Fortress in Nafplio, 1977



21. Orestes, Pylades and the Chorus in *Electra* directed by Aspasia Papathanasiou at the Palamidi Fortress in Nafplio, 1977

approached the new translation of the text using her master's system  
(interview with Papathanasiou, 10 September 2006). Thus she proposed a

new, frugal and temperate score that had a rawer musicality than that of Rontiris. It was a style with which the audience could identify because it was simple and direct. It evoked everyday circumstances and had references to contemporary life. For instance, when DESMI performed in the villages of Epirus, a mountainous and remote area of Greece, the audience clapped right after Electra's mourning for Orestes. After the performance, during the conversation with the audience Papathanasiou asked them why. The answer she received was that 'this is exactly the way we mourn our dead' (ibid.).

As has already been indicated, the National school developed and caught up with the consequent developments of the other acting styles. However, the thespians of the National school formulated a canvas on which the future generations of actors could evolve. Their performances became representative of the school of tragedy that would later develop into a school which would combine the two main acting schools of Greece, namely, that of Rontiris and Koun.

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<sup>1</sup> Kostis Livadeas had two theatre companies. The first was Nea Skene established in 1950, and the second the Society of Ancient Drama, established in 1953. In 1958, the two companies became one.

<sup>2</sup> Greece was divided in three occupational zones: the German, the Italian and the Bulgarian, see Kostis Giourgos and Kostis Lontis eds. (2000) 'Greece in the Twentieth Century 1940-1945' in *E Kathimerini 'Epta Emeres' Greece in the Twentieth Century 1930-1950*, Athens: E Kathimerini, pp. 68, 80-84. However, as the Germans were the most severe, the years of the occupation are known as 'the German Occupation'.

<sup>3</sup> Solomos is known for the productions of ancient Greek comedy that he directed from 1956 and almost every summer onwards. His productions restored the name of Aristophanes, who did not follow the moral standards of the bourgeois theatre of the period, and established ancient Greek comedy at the Epidaurus Festival, see Matina Kaltaki (18 March 2001) 'The Self-Centered Era of Minotis' in *E Kathimerini 'Epta Emeres' 100 Years National Theatre*, weekly magazine of newspaper *E Kathimerini*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Koun directed five productions at the National: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare, *Uncle Vanya* and *The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, and *Henry IV* by Luigi Pirandello.

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<sup>5</sup> Paxinou won the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her performance of Pilar in the film *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943).

<sup>6</sup> Rontiris presented only reprises at the National during that period.

<sup>7</sup> *Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Hecuba, Filoctetes* and *The Phoenician Women*.

<sup>8</sup> The word 'DESMI' means 'bonds'.

<sup>9</sup> This comes from personal experience of the author who was a student of Eleni Hatzigiorgi at the National's Drama School during that period.

<sup>10</sup> The same text had been published in Greek in 1949 in the periodical *Helliniki Dimiourgia*, n. 38, pp. 439-441.

<sup>11</sup> The notion of continuity and heritage, of the same sun, earth and sky, in short of the same country, is also found in Koun's view of tragedy, see Karolos Koun (2000) *Creating Theatre for Our Soul*, Athens: Kastaniotis, pp. 33-36.

<sup>12</sup> The quotation comes from a typescript in English that has no page numbers.

<sup>13</sup> This comes from the author's personal knowledge, who was a student at both drama schools (from 1990-1992 at the State Theatre of Northern Greece's Drama School and from 1992-1993 at the National's Drama School) and had both teachers.

<sup>14</sup> This has also been experienced by the author during her training at the Drama School of the National Theatre and the State Theatre of Northern Greece.

<sup>15</sup> The fact that Rontiris had a large audience that followed him and his international recognition is evident by his success with the Peirako Theatro.

<sup>16</sup> He presented *Electra* by Sophocles, *The Libation Bearers, Eumenides, Medea, Hippolytus, The Persians* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

<sup>17</sup> These tragedies are *Antigone, Helen* and *Electra*.

<sup>18</sup> Based also on accounts of spectators and members of the performance interviewed by the author of this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> 'Oh Atreus's seed, after all these disasters  
you finally manage to find your freedom  
that is secured with your force.' (1508-1510)

<sup>20</sup> There existed numerous similar attempts that established and broadened theatre's political active role in society. See also Platon Mavromoustakos (2005) *The Theatre in Greece 1940-2000 An Overview*, Athens: Kastaniotis, pp. 139-140.

<sup>21</sup> For details of the entire style of those years see George Delastic (2001) 'The Revolt of the Polytechnic' in *E Kathimerini 'Epta Emeres' Greece in the Twentieth Century 1970-2000*, vol. 31, Athens: E Kathimerini, pp. 17-23; Platon Mavromoustakos (2001) 'Change of Orientation' in *E Kathimerini 'Epta Emeres' Greece in the Twentieth Century 1950-1970*, Athens: E Kathimerini, pp. 183-184; Othonas Tsounakos (2001) 'The Coup of 21 April 1967' in *E Kathimerini 'Epta Emeres' Greece in the Twentieth Century 1950-1970*, vol. 30, Athens: E Kathimerini, pp. 153-156; Othonas Tsounakos (2001a) 'Resistance Groups' in *E Kathimerini 'Epta Emeres' Greece in the Twentieth Century 1950-1970*, vol. 30, Athens: E Kathimerini, 162-165; Alexis Ziras (2001) 'Censored and...' in *E Kathimerini 'Epta Emeres' Greece in the Twentieth Century 1950-1970*, vol. 30, Athens: E Kathimerini, pp. 179-180.

<sup>22</sup> After the Second World War and until 1981, when the Papandreou socialist government came to power, entry permits were difficult to acquire especially if you lived and worked in a communist country and you had been classified as left wing.

<sup>23</sup> K.H.Miris is the philological pseudonym of Kostas Georgousopoulos.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Karolos Koun and the Theatro Technis, 1942-1987**

Karolos Koun directed his first amateur production in 1930 at the American College of Athens, and founded the semi-amateur Laiki Skene with Dennis Devaris in 1934. From 1939 until 1942 and from 1945 until 1946, he worked as a director at the professional companies of Marika Kotopouli and Katerina Andreadi. In 1942, he founded the Theatro Technis, and the following year he presented its Declaration, as noted in the second chapter of this thesis. Since then the company performed regularly until today with the exception of a period of three years from 1950 to 1953, when it had to discontinue performing due to financial difficulties. The company's first attempt at tragedy was *The Libation Bearers* by Aeschylus in 1945. After that performance Koun did not work again on a tragedy for twenty years. In 1965, the Theatro Technis presented the groundbreaking performance of *The Persians* creating a new approach towards the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy on the Greek stage. This new approach characterised by Koun's focus on the emotional condition and truth of the characters of the ancient plays, the multivocality of the Chorus, ancient drama's connection with the epic and ritual theatre and the theatre of the absurd, as well as other features to be discussed, set the foundations for an influential acting school on tragedy and will be the focal point of this chapter. The production used as an example will be the 1984 production of *Electra* by Sophocles, starring Koun's pupil Reni Pittaki, who had been nurtured in the company's Drama School and performed solely in the Theatro Technis until Koun's death in 1987.

#### 4.1 The History and the Social Position of the Theatro Technis

The Theatro Technis was founded during the second year of the German Occupation in Greece. The mere fact that the company was gathered during a period of oppression and fear can be regarded as an act of resistance and revolution. It also signified a revolution artistically and culturally because the company and its founder commenced to introduce to the Greek audience a novel and innovative repertoire using a new approach to acting that moved away from the text-based approach of the National and placed the human being and her/his emotions, feelings and needs in its centre. The link between the repertoire and the acting was strong and reciprocal. Koun believed that the presentation of plays such as *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello, *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov and *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams required an anthropocentric acting approach that did not exist in the Greek theatre field. As a result of the development of this approach, numerous successful productions of foreign plays were presented along with a large number of new Greek plays by authors such as Iakovos Kambanelis, Giorgos Sevastikoglou and Loula Anagnostaki, who composed their work especially for the Theatro Technis. These authors became the new generation of Greek playwrights. The company also had a social objective that can be detected in the production of plays such as *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky (1944), and in the structure and aims of the company regarding the actors, their training or their salaries.

On 17 August 1943, Koun in a succinct and precise address to the Society of the Friends of the Theatro Technis – a society founded to acquaint the

spectators of the company with the company's goal and to support it financially, when it was necessary – declared the social position and aesthetic perspective of the company (Koun, 2000: 11-28). Koun divided the goals of the company into social and aesthetic. His chief social objective was the need to create a theatre that would be different from any other existing theatre of his time in Greece. He classified this objective as social because he believed that the theatre of his time had untenable foundations due to the obsession of the private companies with money and the wrong attitude of the actors, who, when they were famous, were afraid that an 'opponent' would appear and take away their position in the theatre world from them, and, when they were young or unknown, were terrorised by the producers (ibid.: 16). Koun had acquired this knowledge firsthand when he worked with the companies of Kotopouli (discussed in Chapter Two) and Andreadi, and knew that the productions were poorly presented and that their quality was low. Due to the above circumstances, he argued that the audience had atrophied (Koun, 2000: 16).

Koun thought that theatre existed only if it was addressed to an audience. Therefore, he aimed to create a link between the stage and the audience in order to awaken it, making their awareness and alertness primary goals of the company. According to Koun, this was the best way of creating a strong communicative link between the theatre and the spectators. Thus he formed the Society of the Friends of the Theatro Technis because he believed that through the Society the actors and the audience of the company would be able to share their ideas and create a strong bond that would advance them intellectually, spiritually and artistically (ibid.: 13); furthermore, that the Society

would aid the Theatro Technis financially whenever it was needed. Koun's claim was fulfilled. The Society supported the company morally and financially during its first years, while allowing Koun to work unobstructed, without interfering in his artistic work. It must be noted that when the Society was founded, its president was Emelios Hourmouzios and its vice-president, Georgios Theotokas (Sideris, 159: 9). Both men later became General Directors of the National Theatre. In 1950, when Theotokas was General Director of the National, he invited Koun and his company to the National in an attempt to help and protect the Theatro Technis during a period when the company had to discontinue its operation due to financial difficulties as noted in the third chapter of this thesis, and thus provided valuable help to the company in a difficult period.

Koun wanted to create a 'Theatro Technis', an 'Art Theatre' (Koun, 2000: 14).<sup>1</sup> Such a theatre would not aim solely at entertaining and diverting its audience. It would not care about the success of the box-office. The members of a 'Theatro Technis' would approach 'Art' modestly and respectfully (ibid.: 15), namely, by valuing their ensemble work on a theatrical piece without promoting themselves. As has been indicated in the second chapter of this thesis, when Koun created the Laiki Skene, he wanted the students of the company's drama school to be women and men free from acquired contemporary theatrical restrictions and conventions, and open to his ideas and goals. This also applied to the students of the Theatro Technis Drama School (Δραματική Σχολή Θεάτρου Τέχνης) and the actors of the company, who, under Koun's guidance, tried to 'educate emotionally' and 'elevate the intellectual level of our people' (ibid.). Hence, the company targeted the

emotional and intellectual development of Greek 'people'. By 'people' Koun meant anybody who believed in the Theatro Technis's vision. He made clear that his theatre was not interested in the social position, class or wealth of its spectators. He wanted to create a theatre that would be addressed to everybody and could be accessed by anybody. In order to educate his audience emotionally, intellectually and artistically and to create an accessible theatre, Koun had to create and maintain a strong link between his theatre and its audience. He aimed to achieve this with the aid of the Society, but, primarily, by the high quality of his productions.

As Koun's productions were anthropocentric, meaning, in his words, that they derived from the soul of human beings and were addressed to the souls of other human beings (Koun, 1981: 38), the most important element in his productions was his actors. Consequently, it was imperative that his actors be educated. This did not mean that his actors had to have academic education or experience in the theatre. On the contrary, he was looking for actors whom he could mould according to his objectives regarding acting and theatre, and who had nothing to do with the commercial theatre of his time. Like Constantin Stanislavsky, whose amateur collaborators 'passed into the ranks of the Moscow Art Theatre' (Stanislavsky, 1967: 142), Koun had actors with whom he worked in the semi-amateur Laiki Skene, who became the collaborators in other professional performances, and, finally, the founding members of the Theatro Technis of Greece. Koun argued:

The artist has to be educated from the beginning. He has to learn to love and, most of all, respect his work, to feel the gravity of his mission. On the other hand, Society must give him the means to develop, to enrich his psychical world and offer him an adequately easy life. ... In order to succeed he must be kept away from backstage intrigues, bohemian life,

little parties and cheap quarrels. The ambience in which the artist lives and develops must be clear, modest and serious. Like an athlete who must train his body in order to run a hundred metres, the actor who plays a big part must train his soul (Koun, 2000: 16-17).<sup>2</sup>

Koun talked about different kinds of education – moral, social, mental, physical, emotional, intellectual and professional. He requested from his actors that they become ascetic because this education could only flourish if they were devoted to their art and nurtured themselves as artists. He wanted to create actors who were whole personalities and were ready to undertake the roles of complicated characters. This became possible within the walls of the Theatro Technis and its Drama School because Koun was able to choose his actors-students carefully and implement his ideas on them. The actors of the company kept a distance from the world without being cut off from it. They were able to develop their mental, emotional and intellectual skills in peace, even though the financial conditions were not always favourable, especially during the first years. They would rehearse in the morning, lunch together, perform in the evening and dine together after their performance. They were a family (interview with Antoniou, 20 March 2009).

Koun demanded from the 'Society' that it support and help his actors. For Koun, as well as for other twentieth- and twentieth-first century directors such as Stanislavsky, Jean Vilar and Lev Dodin, society had to offer the means for actors to live comfortably so that they would be able to focus on, and devote themselves to, their work. The work of the actor was not viewed as simple or superficial. It was difficult, time-consuming, demanding and complicated. It was not a regular, everyday job. It was a 'mission', and thus required faith,

devotion and sacrifice (Koun, 2000: 11). The sense that the company had a 'mission' presupposed that the members of the company had to fulfil a purpose. This notion of the fulfilment of a purpose kept the members of the Theatro Technis united and their spirit alive, even when the company underwent difficulties as had occurred when it had to discontinue its operation from 1950 until 1953 due to financial difficulties.

As outlined above, Koun had worked as a director in the commercial theatre, where he had seen the exploitation of actors by theatre producers and the attitude of arrogant leading actors. He wanted to prevent such conduct in his company. Influenced by Stanislavsky's ideas, he declared that, first and foremost, the Theatro Technis would be an ensemble company, the actors in it would be equal, and their salaries would be more or less the same (ibid.: 18). In 1943, when the Declaration was announced to the Friends of the Theatro Technis, Koun had to explain that, by 'ensemble', he did not mean a company where 'for the sake of mediocrity true value and talent would be overlooked' nor that 'the more talented actors would be subordinated to the less talented ones' (ibid.: 19). He explained that each part would be undertaken by an actor suitable for it, and that in 'plays that are works of art there are no small or big parts for an artist' (ibid.). Moreover, he clarified that the company's aim would be to present complete productions to the public and not to satisfy its 'workers' (ibid.).

The choice of the word 'worker' is not a random one. Koun chose it in order to make clear that the actors of his company would have to work hard and put their personal ambition behind if they wanted to be a part of it. Thus it comes

as no surprise that Koun regarded the creation of an ensemble theatre and the need to educate his actors as part of the social requisites of the company. He was also fortunate to find these 'workers' with whom he embarked upon the journey to create the Theatro Technis of Greece. At the beginning, it was difficult to keep all the actors that he trained (Koun, 1972: 32), but his few faithful students such as Pantelis Zervos and Lycourgos Kallergis, were always with him. As time went by, more actors were added to the company's ranks such as Vasilis Diamantopoulos, Nora Katseli and Keti Lampropoulou. After 1954, when the theatre reopened, he found the 'workers' who stayed with him until his death. They were Giorgos Lazanis, Koun's devoted student and Director of the Theatro Technis after Koun's death, Mimis Kougioumtzis, Pittaki and Katia Gerou, to name but a few.

The Theatro Technis commenced its productions in 1942, during the strictest phase of the German Occupation. Koun had to fight the severe censorship of the occupiers, and had to utilise methods to overcome it. For instance, in 1943, the company presented Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* under the title *For a Piece of Land*, supposedly written by a French author. The Greek translator, Sevastikoglou, changed the American names into Spanish and set the action in Mexico (Solomos, 1959:41). The Germans did not want Caldwell's famous play, which dealt with social injustice and oppression, on the stage. They had also forbidden all plays by Russians. Thus Koun could not stage Chekhov's and Gorky's plays, to which he could not make similar alterations. These representative plays of the Moscow Art Theatre, which was Koun's inspiration and model, were not produced until after the end of the War. Nevertheless, Alexis Solomos claimed that the Theatro Technis's



performances and the artistic quality of the company's plays and productions were the Athenians' 'food for the soul' throughout the trying period of the Occupation (ibid.: 40).

The company presented a Greek play by Sevastikoglou and plays by Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Pirandello and Bernard Shaw in its opening year. The choice of plays showed the company's aims clearly. The presentation of Sevastikoglou's play indicated the company's intention to give opportunities to new playwrights to show their work. As a result of this guiding principle, numerous, well known Greek plays such as *The Yard of Wonders (Η Αυλή των Θαυμάτων)* by Kambanelis or *Dadades (Νταντάδες)* by George Skourtis were written for the company, thus promoting the creation of Greek literary theatre and new plays for the stage. The presentation of the work of the other four European playwrights signalled the company's strenuous effort to offer to their audience as many productions as possible of contemporary plays that represented major artistic theatrical currents and important playwrights.

The Theatro Technis presented Pirandello and Shaw for the first time in a Greek theatre in 1942, introducing a long list of foreign plays to be premiered on the Greek stage. In 1945, it was *The Cherry Orchard* by Chekhov. The following year, it was Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, in which Koun played Tom, and Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*. The next to be produced were Miller's *All My Sons* and Federico Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding* ([www.theatro-technis.gr](http://www.theatro-technis.gr)). During the theatrical season 1954-1955, Koun introduced Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos*, in 1959, Jean Genet's *Haute Surveillance* and, in 1961, Eugène Ionesco's *La Cantatrice Chauve, La Leçon*

and *Les Chaises*. He also introduced plays by Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, to name but a few. In 1957, Koun directed Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, three years after the play's German premiere, and became the first director to present the German playwright on the Greek stage.

The fact that Koun staged the above plays contributed immensely to the development of the Greek theatre in relation to the introduction of the Greek actors, directors and audience to those plays. The significance of these productions acquires greater importance if it is taken into consideration that his was the sole company in Greece that presented those plays until the middle of the 1970s. Furthermore, the productions were of such artistic value that the anonymous author of the periodical of Thessaloniki *Techni* noted that the productions of the Theatro Technis had become a 'school' because, as 'the audience had seen real theatre', it could no longer 'tolerate the impromptu productions of low-quality companies' (Anonymous, 1959: 84). From the company's foundation until his death in 1987, Koun directed three to nine productions per season, apart from the three years from 1950 until 1953 when the Theatro Technis discontinued its productions and Koun directed five plays at the National as already noted in the third chapter of this thesis.

Koun also directed William Shakespeare's plays. He started working on Shakespeare professionally when he was at the National Theatre, where he presented *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1952). In his own company, he only produced three: *Twelfth Night* (1959), *Measure for Measure* (1969) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1971). In 1967, after the triumphant tour of *The*

*Persians* in London, he was invited by the Royal Shakespeare Company to direct *Romeo and Juliet* at Stratford-upon-Avon with Ian Holm and Estelle Kohler, and was offered a more permanent collaboration (Sideris, 1972: 8). However, Koun decided he did not want to work with actors whom he had not trained himself, and who did not know his method and theatrical aspirations (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008).

The company's first production of tragedy, *The Libation Bearers* by Aeschylus, was in 1945. However, Koun did not direct a tragedy for another twenty years, for reasons that will be reviewed in the last part of this chapter. He approached Aristophanes's ancient comedies, first mounting *Wealth* in 1957 and the pioneering performance of *The Birds* in 1959, which premiered in Athens and toured Greece and the world (UK, Soviet Union, Switzerland, Cyprus, Italy). In 1965, the Theatro Technis presented *The Persians*, which premiered on 20 April in the Aldwych Theatre in London. Both productions received favourable reviews and national and international acclaim. Nonetheless, a regular presentation on an almost yearly basis did not start until after 1975, when the company participated in the Epidaurus Festival.<sup>3</sup>

From 1942 until 1950, the Theatro Technis did not have a permanent venue. Its first winter venue was the Aliko Theatre (now Mousouri), but, as the company could not afford to pay for the exclusive use of the theatre, performances were presented early in the evening (Solomos, 1989: 193), and the company had to use other venues as well, that is, Aliko Theatre, 1942-1944, 1945, 1946-1949; Britannia Theatre, 1944; Kentrikon Theatre, 1945; and Kotopouli Theatre, 1949-1950. During the summer the company did not

perform regularly (Delphi Theatre, 1944; Park Theatre, 1945; and Makedo Theatre, 1950), but always presented new productions. After a gap of three years during which the company and Koun were hosted at the National, the company found its permanent venue at the Kikliko (Round) Theatre at the Orpheus Lodge in 1954.

In 1956, the Municipality of Thessaloniki gave the Theatro Technis a summer venue for ten years, the open-air Municipal Theatre at the Municipal Park of Thessaloniki. For a decade, the Theatro Technis presented its winter repertoire previously performed in Athens at the Municipal Theatre and toured Northern Greece. In 1975, the company created in the Veaki Theatre, a second venue in Athens in order to expand its audience and better utilize the company's members ([www.theatro-technis.gr](http://www.theatro-technis.gr)). This venue operated for ten years. In 1985, the Greek Government of Andreas Papandreou and the Minister of Culture, Melina Merkouri, granted Koun a second permanent venue in Plaka, at Frinihou 14. Both theatre venues at the Orpheus Lodge and in Plaka continue to operate to the present day, in 2010, under the Artistic Direction of Diagoras Hronopoulos.

Financially, the Theatro Technis had always had support from sponsors. The Society of the Friends of the Theatro Technis was the first to finance the company. There also existed benefactors such as Argiris Hatziarigiris, who gave Koun a hundred gold sovereigns during the Occupation (interview with Antoniou, 20 March 2009). In 1968, the company received a subsidy directly from the Ford Foundation of the United States, which had subsidised companies such as La Mama Theatre, the Open Theatre and Peter Brook's

International Centre of Theatre Research (Melas, 1972: 99), and became the first Greek company to receive such a subsidy. In 1980, the President of the Greek Republic (Πρόεδρος της Δημοκρατίας), Konstantinos Karamanlis, granted the company a subsidy of 30.000.000 drachmas by presidential decree per annum for as long as it existed. From 1981, when Merkouri became Minister of Culture, the Theatro Technis received an additional yearly subsidy. The financial support helped the Theatro Technis materialise its goal, which Marios Ploritis, theatre scholar, theatre translator, author and Koun's collaborator, summarised in the following words:

We dreamt of a theatre freed from the box-office, the stars, the low flattery of the audience; a theatre devoted to noble plays and their worthy interpretation; a theatre-religion, that would enrich mentally its initiators and the audience (Ploritis, 1959a: 37).

## **2.2 The Aesthetic Perspective and the Acting School of the Theatro**

### **Technis**

The aesthetic perspective of the company was included in the second part of Koun's 1943 Declaration of the Theatro Technis. Koun outlined, as noted in the second chapter of this thesis, his first company's, the Laiki Skene's, aims and his quest for 'Greek Popular Expressionism'. He argued that the principles of Greek Popular Expressionism such as the expression of emotions in simple popular, traditional, primitive theatrical forms, had ceased influencing his work. However, the strong link to tradition and the interconnection of tradition and emotional expression had become the basis for the Theatro Technis's aesthetic aspirations, even though the company

focused on differential material in relation to repertoire and acting. Koun explained:

Now we play Ibsen, Shaw, Pirandello, we work on psychological drama that has no correlation with primitive forms of theatre. At the beginning we acted in tones, now we act in semitones. At the beginning we expressed rough, one-dimensional, primitive feelings. Today we try to present the numerous psychological nuances of contemporary cultivated human beings (ibid.: 22-23).

Koun insisted that the specific repertoire forced the members of the company to find new means of expression in acting. He also had to find new directorial approaches. He observed that every type of play had to be presented in a manner that was fitting for it. For example, the Cretan Renaissance, metrical play *Erofilii*, which was presented by the Laiki Skene, could not be acted using the same expressive resources as those for George Bernard Shaw's *Fanny's First Play* (1943) regarding mime, movement and speech. As is clear from the above quotation, Koun's goal was to present the emotional and psychological nuances of a role on stage. He wanted to present each character's truth, as he used to say during rehearsals (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008), namely, a role's inner feelings, sensory condition state, beliefs and aspirations. The affiliation with Stanislavsky's pursuit for truth regarding the actor and acting is palpable (Stanislavsky, 1959: 15).

In order for Koun to present these 'contemporary cultivated human beings' he and his actors had to work on themselves and develop as persons and artists. They had to understand the world within which the roles they acted existed, but also to conceive the world around them and, finally, to be able to express both worlds on the stage. The company aimed to approach each play through

the chronotopic conditions of the period in which it was produced. Thus Koun explained that his goal was 'a contemporary presentation, not only of the form, but of the meaning [of a play] ... that would appeal to the contemporary spectator' (Koun, 2000: 88). He, therefore, sought in every play its diachronic aspects and focussed on ideas, meanings or images that would evoke the reality of life to the contemporary spectator. This, he argued, was the only way with which the scenic action would be contemporary, interesting, meaningful and powerful. For instance, in *The Birds* he dressed the Priest of the play with a costume that alluded to a contemporary Greek Orthodox priest and created a clear allusion. However, the appearance of a Greek Orthodox Priest on the stage also created strong reactions from the audience during the presentation of the production and in the media, accusing Koun that he did not respect the Church and the Greek tradition.

Koun did not aim at a naturalistic representation. He argued:

I believe that the artist is obliged to examine the outside world carefully, to study it, to develop his technical skills in order to present it, but to remember that his final goal is not just to replicate nature. The artist's goal is to render meaning to nature guided by his poetic and philosophic concept of life, by his brain, his blood, his soul. ... Our art's goal is not the object, but the meaning we render to the object (ibid.).

Koun wanted actors who would be conscious of the reality around them and would be able to perform it on the stage, enriched by their sensitivity and emotions. He believed in what he called 'inner realism' (ibid.). This was an artistic expression that would bring to the surface the actors' sensitivity and, most importantly, their personal cerebral and emotional notion of their part within each play. He insisted that he did not want a photographic representation of external life, but a life 'viewed through the inner eye of the

artist, and filtered by the artist's emotions' (ibid.: 24). By 'inner eye' Koun meant the artist's sensitive and aware approach to everyday life. This sentence summarised Koun's view of what an actor should offer when she/he was on the stage, namely, an intuitive perception of everyday life that would not be limited to a naturalistic representation. That, he thought, was closer to Yevgeni Vakhtangov's fantastic realism rather than to Stanislavsky's naturalism (ibid.).

As has been noted in the second chapter of this thesis, both Stanislavsky's and Vakhtangov's theories and theatres were models and inspiration for Koun. It is evident from Koun's Declaration that he had read Stanislavsky's *My Life in Art* (first published in English in 1924) and *An Actor Prepares* (first published in English in 1934).<sup>4</sup> Sevastikoglou, translator, playwright and Koun's collaborator, remembered that he translated from English parts of *An Actor Prepares* and brought them to the rehearsals of the company (Sevastikoglou, 1959: 31). Koun was also familiar with Vakhtangov's 'diary-manifesto' (Koun, 2000: 24). Ploritis argued that Koun had brought some of Vakhtangov's writings in French and that he and Sevastikoglou translated them and gave them to the actors of the Theatro Technis (Ploritis, 1997: 9). Hence, Koun knew part of these two directors' work.

Koun admitted in his Declaration that his artistic aspirations were closer to Vakhtangov's than to Stanislavsky's. However, his theatre was usually identified by others with Stanislavsky's teaching. This is not difficult to explain. First, Koun used the name Theatro Technis, which was a direct reference to Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre, and, second, Stanislavsky's writings were



available in English and the students of the Theatro Technis Drama School were advised to read them, while Vakhtangov's writings were scarce (furthermore, Nikolai Gorchakov's book on Vakhtangov circulated in the 1950s and was first translated in Greek in 1997).

It is necessary to investigate the degree to which Koun used Stanislavsky's teachings. In order to do that it is useful to establish, first, what was internationally known about Stanislavsky's work, which books and in what translations were available in Europe and the U.S., second, which books and translations were available in Greece, and, finally, how Koun used Stanislavsky in his teaching and directing. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, the English translator of Stanislavsky, translated and published *An Actor Prepares* in 1934, *Building a Character* in 1949 and *Creating a Role* in 1961. Hapgood's translations became the vehicle through which Stanislavsky's work was conveyed to an international audience. The twenty-five year span from *An Actor Prepares* to *Creating a Role*, indicates that the European and American actors and directors did not have all the available books of Stanislavsky until the 1960s. Moreover, problematic issues concerning the accuracy of the Hapgood translations were not revealed until after the fall of the Soviet Union and Sharon Marie Carnicke's book *Stanislavsky in Focus*. This book examines the gap between the original Russian texts and what most English-speaking theatre practitioners imagined to be Stanislavsky's ideas. Hence, the western theatre used an inaccurate interpretation of Stanislavsky's system, which had a large number of differences from Stanislavsky's approach. Considering the above, the conditions in Greece should be analysed keeping these facts in mind.

In Greece, *An Actor Prepares* was translated in 1959, *Building a Character* the following year and *Creating a Role* in 1962. Thus the actors and students of the Theatro Technis were acquainted with Stanislavsky through the few translations of articles and parts of books carried out by collaborators of the company such as Ploritis and Sevastikoglou, the English texts and, most importantly, Koun's teaching. For instance, Maria Konstantarou, famous actress and student at the Theatro Technis Drama School from 1950-1953, recalled that she had bought all existing Stanislavsky books in English after the School's recommendation (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). Pittaki, who graduated from the Theatro Technis Drama School in 1966, also recollected that the students were advised to read Stanislavsky's books (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008). Thus the actors of the Theatro Technis were encouraged to take into account Stanislavsky's 'system' when they worked. Nevertheless, only the students that graduated after 1962 would have been able to read Stanislavsky's trilogy in Greek. Taking into account that, at the time, only a minority of Greek actors, Konstantarou being one of them, could speak sufficient English in order to understand and take in Stanislavsky's teaching, the majority of the Theatro Technis students and actors could not have a direct contact with Stanislavsky's English translations, which, as noted above had been inaccurate and insufficient. Thus the students of the Theatro Technis followed Koun's teaching and guidance, who enriched the available Stanislavsky writings, combined his knowledge on Vakhtangov, whose writings were not available to Greek actors, and developed a method for his own theatre. Furthermore, by 1962, Koun had already incorporated in his work Brecht's ideas of *Verfremdungseffekt*, and

acting techniques that were needed to approach plays by Beckett, Albee and Ionesco.

Koun explained that theatre never ceased to develop and that '[e]veryday experiences interact with the old ones and disclose things and circumstances that form new relations' (Koun, 2000: 59). Thus he believed in constant flux. Taking into account all the above, it is obvious that, like every great theatre master, Koun was aware of the existing developments in his field and in everyday life, and he managed to form a system of his own, keeping only what he thought was useful and valid, while enriching it with his ideas and artistic inspiration. As Pittaki commented:

His method was based on Stanislavsky's books, the improvisation, the emotions, the infamous 'situation' (κατάσταση), which later Koun denied. But, what I mean to say is that, on the way, Koun understood the limitations of the method and realized that he had to open up to other methods and techniques (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008).

Considering the above, it is important to understand the manner in which Koun worked with and taught his actors. He believed that every actor had to use her/his body and her/his voice, and to bond with her/his fellow actors on the stage. This connection should happen organically and should not be cerebral (Koun, 2007: 14). For Koun, the actor's centre was his psyche. The soul determined how the actor felt when acting a part and the mind filtered the expression of the emotion. Hence, the actor had, first, to find the 'inner realism' of the role (Koun, 2000: 59), the inner truth, and simultaneously to determine the what, the why and the how of a character on stage (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). Furthermore, Koun did not regard the

bodily and vocal expression of the actor as an element independent from her/his emotional condition. Thus the 'inner realism' of the character had to be linked to her/his somatic expression on stage. For example, a character, who was in a specific emotional condition, had to convey this condition on the stage through the character's movement, the facial expressions, the intonation of the phrases and the articulation of the speech.

Koun searched for plasticity of posture, movement and voice (Koun, 2000: 23). For Koun, plasticity meant the spontaneous and natural development of a movement, the inviolate cry, and the suppleness of a posture (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008; interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008). It had nothing to do with the precise and calculated movement of the dancer, or the choreography of a performance. His notion of plasticity coincided with that of Vakhtangov. The Russian theatre director had explained:

The actor must train in plasticity, not so that he can dance, make elegant movements, gestures and postures, but so that he can be incorporated in plasticity. And plasticity is not found solely in movement. It is found in a carelessly hung piece of cloth, on the surface of a peaceful lake, in a sleeping cat ... Nature does not recognise non-plasticity (cited in Ploritis, 1997: 10).

Thus plasticity was a natural quality that granted to Koun's actors flexibility and the ability to slide naturally from one position or one word to the next.

There lay the great opposition between the two existing Greek acting schools, the *Theatro Technis's* and the *National Theatre's*. On the one hand, Koun enabled his actors to create a character that was part of their own personality, while, on the other, the actors at the National had to follow pre-manufactured verbal scores such as the ones that Dimitris Rontiris constructed, as discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

As a result of the contrast between the two approaches of Koun and Rontiris, Koun was not obsessed with absolutely clear diction from his actors. What he expected from them was the expressive qualities of a specific pitch or volume of the voice, a cry or laughter, that justified the character's emotional state, and not self-conscious verbal delivery. He claimed that he was not concerned with it. He used to say that he did not care how an actor intoned a word, a sentence or what she/he said, but what the actor felt and how this particular emotional quality was communicated in a particular way. He insisted that an actor should not listen to her/his voice (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). His opposition to the National Theatre's acting school, where clarity of the words was a prerequisite, is obvious. His ideas regarding this issue seem to coincide with Stanislavsky's ideas and his opposition towards the verbal expression of the actors of his time as they are found in *My Life in Art*:

We will better talk without clearness rather than talk as the other actors do. They either flirt with their words or take pleasure in running the whole gamut of their vocal register, or they prophesy. Let someone teach us to speak simply, musically, nobly, beautifully, but without vocal acrobatics, actors' pathos, and all the odds and ends of scenic diction (Stanislavsky, 1967: 233).

Koun also aimed at simple and noble speech. Thus, in 1952, after he had established a common code of communication with his actors regarding speech, he called Maria Alkeou, actress of the National, to join the Teatro Technis's Drama School and teach phonetics and speech training (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). However, it was not until after 1965 and his close work on tragedy that a course on phonetics became part of the curriculum of the Drama School (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008).

Conversely, the body and bodily expression occupied a central position in Koun's teaching. The posture of the body, its deficiencies, or, for example, the force with which a hand squeezed another determined each character's being on the stage. Hence, he would ask his actors to find the way that a character walked, moved, sat, stood still or touched their fellow actors (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). Koun also believed that an actor could find her/his emotional 'situation' (κατάσταση) through physical stimulation (ibid.; interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008). He would give life to the environment around the actors and try to make them feel the environmental conditions of a play or a specific scene within it with their bodies. For instance, when he directed the opening scene of the second act of *The Cherry Orchard* by Chekhov, he said to the actors that they had to keep in mind that it was hot (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). The element of heat determined the actors' movement because due to the temperature it was slower, but also their mood because the heat made them act more irrationally. Thus a physical stimulus helped the actors find the emotional condition of the scene. This practice, to provoke an emotion through physical stimulation, was usual with Koun and demonstrated his belief that corporeal incentive was more powerful than verbal. This sustained his disregard of speech.

Koun expected his actors to have initiative and to improvise. The personal contribution of each actor regarding the bodily, psychoemotional and vocal expression of a character was Koun's requisite from his collaborators in the creation of a performance. He wanted his actors/students to contribute to the conception and construction of a production. He never started rehearsing a play having a fixed opinion on how it should be presented (interview with

Konstantarou, 11 February 2008; interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008; interview with Antoniou, 20 March 2009). He left his actors free to propose their ideas and feelings on their character, and then he distilled those ideas and feelings into the final performance. This is also apparent from the remarks of George Vakalo, Koun's collaborator and important set designer:

Koun never confronted directing as a mental problem, so that he would give irremovable solutions from the beginning and before commencing to direct a play. ... During rehearsal he shaped and was shaped. He corrected and, by correcting, he discovered and sought. The internal function of a composition was revealed during its development (Vakalo, 1959: 77).

Koun's rehearsals were an inspiring experience (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008; interview with Antoniou, 20 March 2009). In order to initiate the creative process of his actors, Koun tried to excite their fantasy and he avoided guiding them by given intonations and movements. He used environmental conditions, as was explained above. He also tried to visualise their feelings and their voice. He used to say: 'I cannot see clearly the one in the other's reaction ... Vera, I didn't hear George's hair in your voice...' (Kambanelis, 1959: 73) thus trying to establish an emotional connection between them beyond their physical coexistence on the stage.<sup>5</sup> Kambanelis described the manner in which Koun taught his actors:

His teaching is an inexhaustible source of orgiastic expressiveness! Colours, tastes, perfumes, shapes, images, poetry, paradoxes, surrealism, his unexplored fantasy, his passion for his work, his experience and his instinct are in constant mobilisation and give form to the most subtle, the most insubordinate, the most compound emotional nuances. ... He rushes towards the actors and starts to act... He doesn't speak the text, he speaks the person... He is not twenty-years-old, but lives the twenty-year-old... What he holds is not a knife, it's a spoon... But he transforms it to what he feels... (Kambanelis: 1959: 73-74).

He would get up and act the part by showing the emotional condition of the character. He would not use words from the text. He often did not use words at all. Antonis Antoniou, famous actor and director, student of the Theatro Technis Drama School and member of the original performance of *The Persians*, recalled that, during a rehearsal of *The Persians* in Paris, Koun got up and for approximately four minutes demonstrated to his disciple, Lazanis, who played the part of the Messenger, the sentimental nuances of his character, without using a word from the text, without using words at all. He employed sounds, gestures, movements and silences (interview with Antoniou, 20 March 2009). Lazanis was able to understand him because he was his student and they shared a common code.

Koun had created a common code of communication between himself, his students and his actors. He seldom took on actors who were not students of his Drama School, and when he did he devoted a lot of time to their training. Merkouri, Elli Labeti, a sensitive talented leading-lady, and Dimitris Papamichail, with whom Koun had worked at the National (1950-1953), were some of these few actors. The facts that the School continued its function when the Theatre was forced to shut due to financial difficulties (1945-1946 and 1950-1953), and that he considered the company's Drama School a preparatory stage before entering the Theatro Technis explains the central position that the School occupied in Koun's work. Even today, over twenty years after Koun's death, the School continues to provide the company with actors. Dimitris Spathis, theatre scholar and lecturer at the University of Athens, summarises the School's aims:



The school's ambition is to teach common principles and a common language that will enable the success of ensemble performing; it aims to promote a system of artistic and moral education for an actor who will not care for her/his personal promotion and success, but will serve the ensemble, the production and the notion of the theatre (Spathis, 2003: 465).

It has been made clear that Koun did not have a specific method in approaching a play or a part. This is the common avowal of his students and his collaborators (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008; interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008; interview with Antoniou, 20 March 2009). However, he managed to form the most powerful and influential acting school in Greece. This may seem as a paradox, but it is not. He had acquainted his students and actors with Stanislavsky's method, and treated every one of them with a specific, individual approach targeted to each one's abilities and particularities (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008; interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008). In that manner, he created actors who became flexible, intelligent and, above all, aware of the essence of his process, that is, to detect each one's abilities and to make the best out of them. These actors were able to transmit their knowledge. They became directors and formed companies such as Antoniou's Theatriki Skene (Θεατρική Σκηνή), Antonis Antipas's Aplo Theatro (Απλό Θέατρο) and Takis Vouteris's Theatro ton Exarchion (Θέατρο των Εξαρχείων); took lead parts in Greek theatres as was the case of Ilias Logothetis, Antonis Theodorakopoulos and Timos Perlegas; and, like Nikos Haralambous, became directors.<sup>6</sup> The poet and Noble Prize Winner, Odysseus Elytis, who had been Koun's collaborator, offered his poetic comment regarding Koun's work:

Movements, silences, lighting, voice intonation and so many more, which are unnoticed by us, are the materials that sufficed to lift reality to its authentic level, which is the level of the soul (Elytis, 1959: 68-69).

### **2.3 The Ancient Greek Tragedy and the Theatro Technis. *Electra* directed by Karolos Koun at the Theatre of Epidauros**

The presentation of ancient Greek drama occupied a central position in the work of Koun and the Theatro Technis because Koun believed that there did not exist anything more valuable than the meanings and the humanistic truths that ancient dramas conveyed (Koun, 1981: 65). Koun had produced the first tragedies and comedies with the students of the American College of Athens (*The Birds*, *The Frogs* and *Wealth* by Aristophanes, and *Cyclops* by Euripides) and then with the Laiki Skene (*Alcestis* by Euripides and *Wealth* by Aristophanes). As noted above, in 1945, he staged *The Libation Bearers*. However, in the programme of the 1984 *Electra* in the article concerning the history of the Theatro Technis, the author acknowledged that the company 'began, quietly and exploratorily, but with respectful boldness and combativeness, to enter the world of ancient drama' in 1957 (*Electra*, 1984).<sup>7</sup> It is clear from the above that Koun did not regard *The Libation Bearers* as the initiating ancient drama performance of his company because he had a great deal to explore before he directed ancient drama. As he admitted in 1976, he had to turn to contemporary theatre 'builders' such as Brecht, Beckett and Pinter, who opened 'new horizons to the interpretation of Ancient Theatre' (Koun, 1981: 63). Moreover, he had to establish the company's position within the field of theatre and ancient Greek drama.

Koun entered the professional theatre field with his first amateur performances with the students of the American College of Athens, an established institution, where the offspring of upper-class Athenians studied. As might be expected, the American College, being a school, did not occupy an important position in the professional theatre field of the 1930s. However, because of the quality of the productions and the publicity they gained, and the power of the wealthy, upper-class members involved, Koun's way was cleared for entry into the professional theatre field. It must be kept in mind that during the 1930s the theatre field was undergoing immense changes as a result of the establishment of the National Theatre and the reaction that this establishment caused to the existing professional companies, as discussed in the second and third chapters of this thesis. As a result of these changes, Koun struggled to achieve, and managed to create, a new position within the existing field. Through his presentation of classic texts (*The Birds*, *The Frogs* and *Wealth* by Aristophanes, *Cyclops* by Euripides, *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* by Shakespeare, and the anonymous Cretan Renaissance play *Stathis* (Στάθης)), he had fortified both his symbolic and cultural capital, to use Pierre Bourdieu's concepts (Bourdieu, 1993). This gained for him acknowledgement from the theatre establishment and the wider public as a competent director. This acknowledgement was strengthened by the formation of the Laiki Skene. Hence, when the Theatro Technis was founded in 1942, he had gathered round him people who had economic, political as well as symbolic capital, and were willing to help and support him.

Koun's entrance into the professional theatre field was relatively easy, he enjoyed relative recognition and established a strong position in it, to employ Bourdieu's concepts once more (ibid.). However, he did not easily enter the field of ancient Greek drama because of its close ties to the National Theatre, a state establishment, and because it was linked to a Greek tradition that was, for the large part, accessible only to academics or members of the National Theatre. Furthermore, ancient Greek drama was particular in so far as it was performed in open-air venues during the summer.

The 1945 production of *The Libation Bearers* was presented in the indoor space of the Aliko Theatre as part of the company's winter repertoire. These two elements, namely, the indoor space and the fact that a tragedy was part of the winter repertoire, differed fundamentally from the National Theatre's practice, which was to present Greek tragedies at open-air venues such as the Epidaurus or the Herodus Atticus theatres during the summer, when those theatres were operable. The tradition to present ancient Greek dramas in open-air venues during the summer prevailed because of the National's strong presence in the field of ancient drama. The fact that the Theatro Technis commenced to present those plays regularly during the summer after 1956, when the open-air Municipal Theatre of Thessaloniki was granted to the company, and yearly after the company was incorporated in the Epidaurus Festival, is indicative of the power of this tradition, and Koun had to comply with the rules of the field in order to be accepted in it. Until today, the majority of ancient drama productions are presented in the summertime, in open-air venues. After the 1980s and especially during the 1990s, some experimental, fringe as well as mainstream productions were performed in indoor venues

and created a new position in the field of ancient drama. These productions will be examined in the last chapter of this thesis. However, Koun's intention was not to occupy a minor position in the field of theatre. He wanted his vision to be known, and struggled to take a crucial position in the field of ancient drama.

In 1957, the company presented *Wealth* by Aristophanes in the open-air Municipal Theatre of Thessaloniki. This was its first ancient drama production, although Koun had directed the play twice before in 1933 and 1934. The rationale for the choice of a comedy rather than a tragedy was, first, that Koun had presented four ancient comedies with both the American College's students and the Laiki Skene. Second, comedy was a genre with closer and more direct proximity to the traditional and popular rites and festivities of contemporary Greece, which provided the means with which Koun interpreted ancient drama. Third, ancient comedy had been neglected and overlooked by the National Theatre of Greece, the only theatre that was systematically working on ancient drama. For example, by this time, Alexis Solomos, known for the productions of ancient Greek comedy that he directed at the National, had only started his work on ancient comedy the previous year (1956). Thus Koun was able to construct and set the foundations and the rules of the field for the performance of ancient comedy.

Koun required more time to approach ancient Greek tragedy. The first tragedy (*The Persians*) was staged in 1965, twenty years after *The Libation Bearers*. During the first eighteen years of the Theatro Technis, from 1957 until 1975, when the company started taking part at the Epidaurus Festival, only seven

productions of ancient drama were presented. However, in the following twelve years until Koun's death in 1987, during which the Theatro Technis participated in the Epidaurus Festival, Koun alone directed ten new productions that were presented at Epidaurus and put on several reprises of his old ones. In 1979, *The Knights* was the first ancient drama performance presented by the Theatro Technis that was not directed by Koun, but by Lazanis. The first year the company participated in the Epidaurus Festival Koun put on the reprise of the award winning performance of *The Birds*, and the second the famous, groundbreaking performance of *The Persians*. From then onwards the Theatro Technis presented at least one performance, but usually two, every summer until 2004, when George Loukos became the Festival's director and altered the Festival's image.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1956 article 'On Open-air and Indoor Venues', Koun argues that the open-air venues require a separate repertoire such as ancient Greek dramas, and a different kind of acting (Koun, 2000: 29-30). He explains that

the open-air theatre demands the creation of an atmosphere. Not the atmosphere of the indoor theatre that we are all familiar with, but its own, grand-dimension atmosphere (ibid.: 29)

At this point, it is necessary to review the Theatro Technis's permanent venue and juxtapose it to other contemporary venues and open-air theatres. This will be helpful in order to understand Koun's ideas on open-air and indoor venues, and to realise that the philosophy of the Theatro Technis's permanent venue is linked to the acting style of the company. It will also make the reader become aware that the actors of the company had to act differently in relation to voice, posture and movement when they played in their small winter venue and when they acted in the grand open-air theatres.

The Orpheus Lodge theatre, which became the company's permanent venue from 1954 until today, was a basement. Unlike other theatres of the period, which were level to the ground or above it, the spectator had to walk down two staircases to reach the theatre. This descent acquired a symbolic sense and became characteristic of the initiation into the work of the Theatro Technis. The stage was surrounded by sloping spectators' seats forming a Π. At the back of the stage there was an opening where the set was placed. The actors were on a stage, on which they could be viewed from every angle. They could not turn their back to the audience. They were totally exposed. This space empowered Koun's quest for truth because the actors had to immerse themselves in their parts and stay focused on them (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). The configuration of the stage resembled the amphitheatric relationship of the ancient Greek theatres, where the spectators surrounded and overlooked the actors, and was completely different from the other venues of the period, which had a frontal arrangement and the actors overlooked the spectators. However, unlike the ancient Greek theatres, the Theatro Technis's Basement (or the Basement (Υπόγειο) as it is still called) did not seat over 220 spectators (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008). Thus the proximity between actors and audience was very close, allowing the spectators and the actors to feel close to one another. The venue's configuration mirrored the Theatro Technis's philosophy, which wanted a close, intimate, respectful and direct relationship with its audience.

From the above it is clear that the expression of Koun's approach to acting, as it was presented in the second part of this chapter, was linked to the acting space that he had constructed for his company. However, this acting

expression differed from that used in the large, open-air, ancient theatres, where the company performed ancient tragedies and comedies during the summer. Thus the Theatro Technis actors had to adjust their acting to the space in relation to movement and voice while maintaining their emotional truth (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008). For example, they had to move their head and not just their eyes when they wanted to demonstrate that they looked at something, or they had to make greater movements so that they could be seen by spectators in the last row of the big amphitheatre of Epidaurus, but they had to support their every gesture and movement emotionally. Pittaki claimed that she felt as if she was being 'raped' when she performed the part of Electra of Aeschylus and Sophocles, or Jocasta or Andromache in the huge theatre of Epidaurus after rehearsing for months in the small space of the Basement (ibid.). She explained:

We worked in the Basement. It was like working in a cocoon. And then we went there [to the theatre of Epidaurus], and within four days we had to magnify everything in order to cover the space. This led to a violent 'opening up' that, at times, 'burnt' things. I mean that in order to magnify something you could magnify it more than you should. And then it might not be truthful (ibid.).

It is evident that the space altered the way that the actors of the Theatro Technis performed, but it did not alter the way that they approached, and worked on, their parts. As will be demonstrated below, they were able to act successfully in both types of venues following Koun's guidance.

At this moment, it would be useful to examine, first and foremost, Koun's ideas concerning ancient Greek drama; second, his concept on the approach of tragedy in relation to directing and acting; and finally, the way that this approach was expressed on the stage. Koun took as a starting point that



ancient drama sprang from religious rites and rituals as well as social and political celebrations and festivities (Koun, 1981:65). Therefore, ancient drama was inseparably linked with the sociopolitical reality of its own time and, even though sociopolitical conditions had changed, its themes continued to be relevant across time. Koun also believed that there still existed a strong connection with popular rites and rituals such as those performed during the carnival, and ritualistic forms of theatre from which 'it was impossible to deviate' (ibid.: 66). Consequently, ancient drama's ritualistic element, found in the origins, thematic and structure of the plays, as well as in the Chorus and the characters, had to determine the way that this genre was presented on the stage. According to Koun, this could be achieved if the physical, sensual and emotional Dionysian enchantment that fascinated the ancient Greeks, when the plays were first performed, was transmitted to the contemporary spectators. Thus the actors had to evoke in the spectators strong emotions. In order for this to happen, the actors had to employ contemporary Greek elements still existing in today's rituals and rites (ibid.) such as the Anastenaria, a fire-walking ritual, or the phallus processions and celebrations during the carnival.

This brings forward the question concerning the cultural identity and substance that these elements had to have in order to stimulate emotionally a contemporary Greek audience. Koun was aware that geographically and culturally Greece stood at the crossroad of the West and the East (ibid.: 62), and he believed that tragedy was closer to the latter. He claimed that 'the ancient theatre has a scent of the East' (Mihalitsianou, 1984: 35), thus proclaiming that the eastern elements of tragedy were inherent in it. The

ancient Greeks' constant contact with the Middle East and Asia Minor, by sea and land, rather than with the West, which was not known during the fifth century B.C., can verify this claim. Moreover, the close ties of the Byzantine Empire with Asia Minor and the four hundred years of Ottoman occupation preserved a large number of eastern (Turkish, Persian and so on) elements in Greek culture in terms of music, physical and verbal expression and movement.

Furthermore, Koun believed, as did all Greek actors and directors who worked on ancient tragedy and comedy, that Greeks are the direct heirs of ancient Greek drama (Koun, 2000: 33). According to Koun, the fact that Greeks are the heirs of the ancient dramas entailed advantages and disadvantages:

We are offered great advantages regarding the interpretation [of Greek drama], but we also face great dangers. On the one hand, we face great dangers because we have to be very careful and to have a deep knowledge of Greece so that we are not carried away by directorial brainwaves, which are allowed to foreigners, but are unfit for Greek reality. And we also must not be confined to a lifeless, museum representation of the external form of the Ancient Theatre as a result of cowardice or pedantry or misinterpreted respect. On the other hand, we are offered great advantages because we live in the same land as the Ancients. This allows us to draw inspiration from the same sources and to utilise everything that the Greek tradition has developed (ibid.: 33).

Koun believed that a Greek director had to create productions that were in proximity with contemporary theatre, while always keeping in mind that she/he was Greek. He argued that, even though the Greek race had undergone changes, he could not ignore that Greeks lived 'under the same sky and sun and were nurtured by the same soil' (ibid.). Thus Koun considered that, as a Greek he had an obligation to interpret the Greek dramas with elements that derived from the Greek country, namely, the land, the language, the tradition and the people.

However, Koun did not believe that the way directors like Fotos Politis, Rontiris or Takis Mouzenidis approached ancient drama was faithful to the way he perceived Greek identity and culture, namely, closeness to the Greek tradition, land and everyday people. He, therefore, wanted to move away from their interpretation, which he found influenced by foreign schools and directors, and which lacked the particular Greek qualities that he sought (ibid.: 36; Grammatas, 2002a: 39-40). Koun was also not interested in the way that Greek dramas were presented by directors such as Max Reinhardt, who came from a country that was more theatrically advanced than Greece, but which had a different climate, people and customs. He explained:

Even though every human organism reacts in the same way all over the world, the expression of this reaction differs: grandeur and fear are depicted with different ways in the East and the West, and a cry of despair sounds different in the Equator and the Steppes (Koun, 2000: 36).

The cry in the Equator sounds different in the Steppes because people are different and this also applies to theatre all over the world. According to Maria Shevtsova 'the theatre is not the same across the world' but 'unique according to cultures' (Shevtsova, 2002: 52). And this happens 'irrespective of how traits may be similar from theatre to theatre because they belong to the one discernible field across a gamut of cultures' (ibid.). The idea of uniqueness introduces the notion of cultural specificity, namely, something that is confined to a culture. Koun believed that Greek people and Greek culture were bound to express the Greek perception of Greek tragedy in a specific, singular way in relation to movement, voice and acting.

The above statement brings forward the need to clarify what constituted Greek culture and tradition according to Koun. For him the Greek tradition was

characterised by a strong link to carnival popular rites and rituals. It was influenced by its proximity to Asia Minor and the Middle East. It was determined by the knowledge of a glorious ancient past combined with four hundred years of Ottoman occupation. It included the legacy of the Byzantine Empire and the Orthodox Church. It was influenced by the 1922 Asia Minor Disaster, the rebetika (ρεμπέτικα) songs, and Dionysios Solomos's, Konstantinos Kavafis's and Kostis Palamas's poetry. Finally, it was interconnected with the weather, the sun and the sea, which gave to Greek people an extroverted, open and emotional way to express even the deepest grief.

Moreover, as noted in the previous part of this chapter, Koun also insisted on bringing out every play's relevance to contemporary times. He argued that if Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides presented their work today, they would take under consideration 'contemporary theatre, contemporary scenic conditions and the mentality of the contemporary spectator' (ibid.: 35). As a result, he aimed to combine his interpretation of Greek culture and tradition, as explained above, with present-day elements that spoke to the soul of the Modern Greek woman and man. For example, he focused on the element of suspense in the narrative structure of *Electra* by Sophocles, which he thought would attract the contemporary audience, rather than on the poetry of the play (Angelikopoulos, 1 August 1984). Koun claimed that 'the first thing I look for in a tragedy is whether or not it is contemporary, direct and addressed to the man of today' (Koun, 2007: 14). Thus he tried to find analogies between ancient dramas and contemporary conditions, and he created productions that were addressed to Greeks of the twentieth century.

Koun's quest for contemporary elements must not be confused with a modernization of tragedy, namely, presenting fragments of the plays, setting them in conventional everyday spaces such as apartments, or using props like machine guns or cigarettes. He did not accept such readings. He was categorical. He claimed that important foreign directors like Peter Stein might be allowed, to a degree, to bring a tragedy up to date 'because they have always something to offer', but that he was generally opposed to such productions (Mihalitsianou, 1984: 37).

I've seen pictures of a performance of *Antigone* in Stuttgart, where they tried to present the heroine's environment as plutocratic, or in another production, where she had a handbag round her shoulder, smoked and drank whisky. Or in a kitchen. All these seem too far off for me; as is Reinhardt's spirit (ibid.).

All the above seemed 'too far off' for Koun because the contemporary sets, props and habits such as drinking whisky or smoking deprived from tragedy its universal and humanitarian qualities and rendered it small and trivial.

For Koun, the very heart of tragedy was the struggle of the human within the universe. In order to bring out this struggle and present it on the stage Koun turned to contemporary theatre. He argued that

the Dream Theatre reveals aspects of Ancient Theatre; Ancient Theatre helps us interpret the Epic and Ritual Theatre; and the Theatre of the Absurd open paths towards the Ancient Theatre and the Classics. Poets like Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter bring us closer to Shakespeare, Aeschylus and Aristophanes and, in turn, they enter in the space of the contemporary theatre (Koun: 1972: 32)

Koun, therefore, believed that plays by contemporary playwrights such as Beckett or Brecht gave a key to ancient tragedy (*Podium*, 1 February 1969 cited in Sideris, 1972: 7). Olga Taxidou, in her *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, where she reviews ancient Greek tragedies and twentieth-century

approaches to performance, argues that both Brecht's and Beckett's work 'respond to the same question: the question of tragedy. Both projects seek to create a theory and performance (a praxis) for tragedy within modernity' (Taxidou, 2004: 199). Similarly, Koun looked for a way to stage tragedy within his time. Thus, being an enlightened theatre master, he utilised the material supplied by these great theatre people. Koun also argued that these plays were a prolongation of ancient theatre because via them contemporary theatre returned to the origins of the theatre 'banishing the conventional logic of time, space and plot'. Thus theatre's focal point became 'the Human, within society, within the Universe' (cited in Sideris, 1972: 7-8).

Koun insisted on the universality of tragedy. He outlined that

the Epic Theatre and the playwrights of the Avant-Garde broke the restrictions, eliminated the limits that singular psychological and emotional cases conveyed because they render no meaning today in comparison to the universal conditions. They redefined and repositioned man within the open space and untimed time facing the grand questions of his existence (Koun, 1972: 63).

For Koun, the ancient Greek tragedies dealt with the core, the heart and soul of the human being and thus gained universal significance. Koun's culturally specific productions managed to be understood across cultures and to gain international recognition. This became possible because, as Shevtsova noted, 'traits may be similar from theatre to theatre because they belong to the one discernible field across a gamut of cultures' and this 'underpins the issue of universality' (Shevtsova 2002: 52). The great Greek-theatre historian, Yiannis Sideris, notes that contemporary Greek theatre owes to Koun and the *Theatro Technis* the notion that ancient tragedy and the theatre of the absurd are linked and spring from the same roots. This sense of connection of the two

genres makes possible the understanding of ancient tragedy today and of the eternal suffering of the human being (Sideris, 1972: 8).

Koun, in order to present tragedy on the stage, turned to Brechtian theatre. In Brecht's theatre and theories, he found the means to understand the function of the Chorus and the characters. It can be argued that the structure and function of the Chorus of *The Persians* or *Agamemnon*, namely, its multivocality, its sociopolitical significance and its critical opinion regarding the development of the plot, might be linked to the use of choruses in Brecht's plays. Moreover, like in Brecht's plays, tragic heroes became symbols of their actions and thus engaged the audience to think. Further on, the use of music, speech and expressive movement in Brecht's productions opened the way for Koun. He argued that

the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the direct contact with the audience, the critical opinion, and, finally what is called total theatre, are not primary elements of the Epic Theatre. They are the basis of ancient theatre, which was the well from which contemporary poets derived their material (Koun, 1981: 63).

Koun was aware of Brecht's ability to take from ancient theatre its basic elements, to incorporate them and develop them in his own work, and, finally, to give them back to contemporary theatre practitioners. Thus Koun recognised Brecht's immense contribution to the Teatro Technis work on ancient drama. He explicitly stated that it was Brecht who was initially taught by ancient theatre, and who, in turn, helped Koun find through the Brechtian approach the theatrical analogies with the ancient Greek Theatre. From all the above, it is clear that Koun had to spend twenty years working on contemporary theatre in order to return to tragedy and renew it.

Koun claimed that the 'renewal' of tragedy in relation both to its external/scenic presentation and to the intrinsic meaning that it conveyed relied upon bringing forward 'the situation of the heroes in a plain and austere manner' (Mihalitsianou, 1984: 37). He made clear that actors 'cannot act tragedy like they act a psychological drama' (ibid.). This comment connects Koun's work with his observations in relation to Brecht's work, but brings up the question of how ancient tragedy was performed by the actors of the Theatro Technis, who had to combine the ritualistic essence of tragedy with the Greek traditions while giving a contemporary performance. This will be reviewed in the proceeding paragraphs.

Koun analysed the way in which his actors had to achieve their performance. Initially, he repeated what he always thought was true, and which was presented in the second part of this chapter, that the pronunciation of the speech, the power of the sound and the kinetic expression of the body within the space, had to be inseparably linked with each other (Koun, 1981: 67). Further he explained that, given the space of the open-air theatres where the plays were presented and the magnitude of the emotions that the characters expressed, 'it would be necessary that they [the speech, the sound and the movement] obtained different dimensions from the ones we knew' (ibid.). He also revealed that in tragedy he and his collaborators 'rarely came across psychological swings, emotional conditions and nuances in speech and movement of the kind we come across in contemporary drama' (ibid.). Nevertheless, he clarified that the 'psychological chain', namely, the what, the why and the how of a character on stage, 'had to be maintained intact' (ibid.). He concluded that 'we must experiment so as to convey with plasticity and



within different dimensions the truth' (ibid.). In the rehearsals of *The Persians*, in order for his actors to understand the manner in which they had to talk and move, he told them that they had to feel as if the air around them was thick and that they had to make an effort when they spoke or walked (interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). Konstantarou argued that if the actor was immersed in this notion of the thickness of the air, automatically and naturally she/he had to make the vowels longer and the consonants sharper (ibid.), thus achieving via a different path what Rontiris requested of his students, as analysed in the third chapter of this thesis.

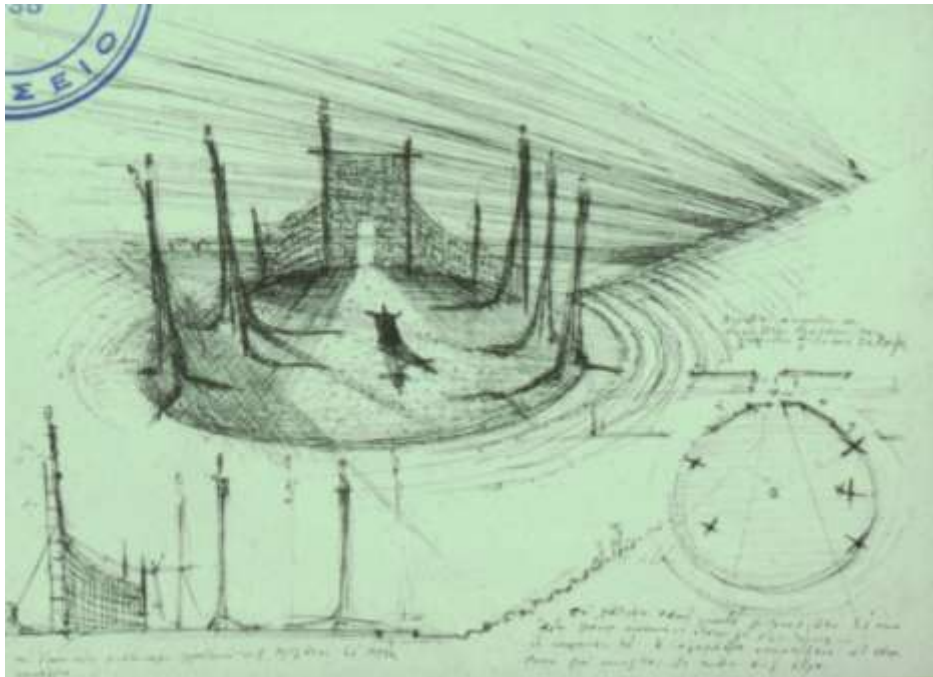
An element that Koun used in order to accomplish the magnitude of the emotions and the figures and to 'cover the limiting, size wise, emotional expressions of the face' (Koun, 1981: 67) was the mask, which he employed for all the Aeschylean plays and the *Bacchae* by Euripides that the Theatro Technis presented.<sup>9</sup> The mask was by no means an effort to restore the conditions of ancient Greek theatre performance, as were Linos Karzis's attempts. It was a result of experimentation, knowledge of the Greek popular rites, and affiliation with the epic and popular theatre.<sup>10</sup> It gave the actors the ability to express the inherent ideas of universality that tragedies conveyed. In the production of *Electra* (1984), as well as in the productions of *The Trojan Women* by Euripides and *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles, Koun had to remove the masks because he believed that they had an abundance of realistic elements. Thus:

*Electra* is based on realistic elements. The actors 'touch' one another. There is emotion in the speech, there is suspense. The actors do not address the audience frontally. They speak with each other. That is the reason why we had to remove the masks (Agelikopoulos, 4 July 1984).

However, Koun did not refer to a realistic, everyday approach to the play. As explained above, the speech, the sound and the movement 'obtained different dimensions' and there were no 'psychological swings, emotional conditions and nuances in speech and movement of the kind we come across in contemporary drama' (Koun, 1981: 67). Thus the make-up of the actors resembled masks. Their faces were white; their eyes were distinguished with dark eye shadows and black horizontal lines from the top of the eyebrow until their hair; all the male characters had trimmed beards. Nothing appeared everyday or familiar.

The set and the costumes were by Dionisis Fotopoulos, who used mainly three colours, black, white and red. The Mycenaean palace was a huge black and red net that brought to mind the net with which Agamemnon was trapped and murdered. The orchestra of the theatre was covered with wheat dyed red. Thus, as the actors moved, it seemed that the earth was bleeding and suffering with Electra. There was blood everywhere on the actors' clothes, on their faces and on the earth. On both sides of the stage there were constructions made of iron on which stood six totemic symbols representing the silent presence of the gods. From those iron constructions hung long black fabrics with which the members of the Chorus were bound (image 22). The Chorus wore black dresses and a net covered their faces; Electra wore black; Clytemnestra and Aegisthus wore purple and red; Chrysothemis's clothes were white and gold; and the three men (Orestes, Pylades and the Pedagogue) who came to save Electra were dressed in white. The red and black colours symbolised death and blood, darkness and passion, mourning and revenge. The white symbolised purity, hope and innocence. Fotopoulos

created a clear allusion with aesthetic excellence. Therefore Koun alluded to a realism that was tied, on the one hand, to the humanitarian elements that Koun detected in Sophocles (Agelikopoulos, 4 July 1984), and, on the other, to Stanislavsky's 'psychological chain' that the actor had to maintain (see above).



22. Dionisis Fotopoulos's set of *Electra* for the Theatro Technis production in Epidaurus, 1984

Moreover, Koun noted that the ritualistic element would not be taken out of the production of *Electra*:

We will have it [the ritualistic element] in the Chorus. But we will also have it in the 'abstraction' that will characterise the realistic elements in our production. Because we need realism, but with great terseness, by abstracting anything redundant. The small movements of the bourgeois drama are out of place here. Here the movements are grand; as are the situations (ibid.).

Koun's remarks were linked to his general beliefs regarding the way that tragedy had to be acted and directed, as detailed in the preceding paragraphs. He also addressed the major problem of the Chorus.

The enormous innovation that the production of *The Persians* introduced in 1965 concerned the Chorus. First, he chose experienced professional actors such as Haralambous and Spiros Kalogirou for members of the Chorus actors. Second, he picked students of the Theatro Technis Drama School, who had been trained according to the Theatro Technis's philosophy. Thus the entire Chorus was comprised of actors, as opposed to the National Theatre's practice of using professional actors for the Coryphaei, but employed choreuts (χορωδοῦς) for the rest of the Chorus: the choreuts were actors or dancers whose sole occupation was to take part in the choruses of ancient tragedies (interview with Antoniou, 20 March 2009). Third, he divided the lines of the Chorus between all its members, taking as a guideline for division the emotional and physical condition underlining each line. Thus, for instance, the lines that referred to old age were given to one actor, the lines that spoke about homesickness to another, and so on (ibid.). Fourth, he gave each actor individual movement, which sprang from the character's emotional and physical situation after each actor's improvisation on how he perceived his character. Fifth, a distinct costume (ibid.; interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008; interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008). As the Russian critic P. Markov remarked: 'there was not a single repetition in the positioning and movement of the actors during the entire performance' (Markov, 1966 cited in 1972: 28). Finally, Koun allowed the Chorus and the characters of the play to interact on the same level, thus establishing an approach different to the *mise*

*en scène* of ancient Greek tragedy that prevailed in contemporary theatrical Greek tradition and forced the characters to act on a different level from the Chorus, as noted in the previous chapters of this thesis. Koun's contribution regarding the alteration of this tradition will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

However, Koun's first production found a large number of opponents, especially from the circles of the National Theatre. Viewers of the performance protested that they could not hear the words of the text. Witty spectators commented that 'it was the first performance of *The Persians* in Persian' (interview with Oikonomidou, 20 November 2006). Pittaki, a member of the audience, noted:

I did not understand the words. I understood that this expression was the extreme lamentation of an entire nation. So I understood the essence, the core of the play (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008).

Thus Koun, who, as observed above, disregarded the well-recited text, had produced a performance in which you could not understand what was being said. For that reason, he later hired voice teachers in his Drama School (see above), and insisted on the clear deliverance of the speech (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008), but he never ceased to insist that feeling 'could not be imprinted in the meaning of the text, but in the hue of the voice' (Koun, 2007: 11). Koun continued to work in similar ways with choruses, namely, he allowed freedom for improvisation, individual movement and expression (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008), as was apparent in the production of *Electra* in which the actors of the Chorus stood out with their voice, posture and acting, and, nonetheless, were part of a unified group. This was accomplished because Koun, as a director, set the guidelines within



23. Reni Pittaki as Electra and Yiannis Rigas as Orestes in *Electra* by the Teatro Technis directed by Karolos Koun at Epidaurus, 1984

which the Chorus members had to move, and incorporated in his synthesis every actor's personal expression.

Similar freedom was allowed to his actors playing the parts. When Pittaki played Electra, she had the opportunity to improvise and try out different postures, movements and tones of voice. Thus she constructed her own Electra. She performed in a simple and unforced way. She was barefooted. She walked on her knees. She fell on the red ground. She looked as if she was bleeding from her entire body. She was in contact with her earthly side. The spectator could see transparently that there was a ritualistic quality through which Electra, by her contact with the ground and the red earth around her, was trying to summon help from her dead father. This element strengthened Electra's request from Chrysothemis not to offer Clytemnestra's offerings to the grave of Agamemnon.

Pittaki expressed her emotional pain physically. Like Aspasia Papathanasiou, her body broke and collapsed when she received news of Orestes's death, but her physical reaction was sharper and bolder. Pittaki took the urn with Orestes's ashes and pressed it fiercely against her womb, her abdomen. She caressed the urn as if it was Orestes's head. She cried without tears, while her voice was broken and deep. During the entire run of the play, her speech was simple, direct, but extremely powerful. She spoke the words; she did not recite them.

Yorgos Himonas, translator, author and psychiatrist, who had produced his translation for the production of the Cyprus Theatre Organisation of *Electra* the previous year, a production that will be reviewed in the last chapter of this

thesis, created a poetic, simple, contemporary translation, which helped Pittaki communicate her unbearable pain to the audience. The majority of the words he used were common and easily understood. However, the way that he used them gave them grave importance. For instance, the opening line of Electra's first monologue in the ancient text is: 'ὦ φάος αγνόν' (86), namely, 'Oh, light pure'. Ioannis Griparis translated: 'ὦ, ἅγιο φως', which means 'sacred light' and is direct reference to the Greek Orthodox religion and prayer. K.H. Miris wrote: 'Καθάριο φως', which stands for 'clear light' and is very close to the ancient text, however, Miris did not use exclamation. Finally, Himonas translated:

Φως  
Ἄσπρο

Each word was written in a different row and the first letter of each word had a capital letter. Himonas also used the word 'ἄσπρο', which is the common, everyday word for saying white in Greek, and not the word 'λευκό', which is usually used in a poetic, formal context. Nevertheless, the power that the word 'ἄσπρο' acquired when it was spoken was enormous, granting to 'light' a cruel quality, which could be associated with the revelations that would follow the course of the play. Himonas provided Koun with a translation focused on mourning and death (Toutountzi, 2003: 89), and Koun put on a performance imbued with death and revenge (Koun, 1 August 1984).

One of Pittaki's concerns when she performed Electra was knowing how to act references to ancient gods like Artemis and the religious elements that were mentioned after the recognition scene of Electra and Orestes. She noted:



In *Electra*, after the recognition, there was a tense allusion to religion; to gods; to prayers. All these had no real meaning for me, they did not touch me. I did not feel that the divine presence in the thematic of *Electra* could be acted. So I focused on the plot and the theatricality. What happened after that in relation to justice and retribution (δίκη), I didn't know. My problem was how I would be able to sustain allusions to religion such as Electra's speech to Clytemnestra with all those references to Artemis, and how this could be presented today (interview with Pittaki, 5 December 2008).

However, Koun's directing and suggestions of ritualistic elements in relation to movement, proxemics and posturing communicated to the audience a religious analogy that rendered these references clear and comprehensible to contemporary spectators and acceptable to them. Koun managed to accomplish it because he had the complete trust of his actors and because they enjoyed their work with him. As Thanos Kotsopoulos noted, Koun had to have actors who loved the parts they were playing and the process they followed while working on them. In that manner, Koun complemented his actors while taking from them their best qualities (Kotsopoulos: 1959: 56). This was necessary because Koun's journey was based on ensemble work, experimentation and a vision of an innovative Greek theatre. Koun concluded in his speech about the Theatro Technis's contemporary performances of ancient tragedies:

We search, we work, we let ourselves be influenced by our country's tradition, the contemporary sociopolitical reality and the expressive means of today's theatre in order to project our poetry not as static speech, but as contemporary theatre (Koun, 1981: 68).

Koun's contribution to the presentation and direction of contemporary performances of ancient drama was immense, as was the influence that his teaching and productions exerted on his students, successors and the Greek theatre in general. The following chapters will discuss how the combination of

the two major schools concerning the interpretation of Greek tragedy resulted in a new school that dominated the Greek theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> Theatro Technis means Art Theatre.

<sup>2</sup> The 'S' in Society is capitalised in Koun's Greek text.

<sup>3</sup> A list of all the ancient drama productions including casting and extended bibliography and reviews can be found in Mavromoustakos, Platon ed. (1999) *The Interpretation of the Ancient Greek Drama in the Twentieth Century*, Athens: DESMI Centre for the Ancient Greek Drama – Research and Practical Applications, pp. 18-63.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Koun said that 'Stanislavky wrote that he intervened in his co-workers' private life' in Karolos Koun (2000) *Creating Theatre for Our Soul*, Athens: Kastaniotis, p. 17. Koun's reference can be found in Konstantin Stanislavski (1967) *My Life in Art*, transl. J. J. Robbins, London: Penguin, p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> He talks to his students Vera Zavitsianou, who had an extremely successful career in the Greek theatre, and Giorgos Lazanis, who succeeded him as Artistic Director of the Theatro Technis after his death

<sup>6</sup> All these actors were members of the Chorus of *The Persians*.

<sup>7</sup> The translation is taken from the multilingual programme of the production.

<sup>8</sup> George Loukos wanted to alter the profile of the Epidaurus Festival. Thus he changed its programme, maintaining the three productions of the state theatres (two for the National Theatre of Greece and one for the State Theatre of Northern Greece), but banning companies such as the Theatro Technis and the Amphi-theatre of Spyros Evangelatos, which had been performing since the 1970s. Loukos invited at least two foreign productions per season to the Festival, independent companies and Municipal Theatres.

<sup>9</sup> *The Persians, Oresteia, Prometheus Bound and Seven against Thebes*.

<sup>10</sup> See David Wiles (2007) *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 165.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Acting Schools of the National Theatre and the Theatro Technis.

#### Productions of *Electra*: 1972-1996

It was established in the preceding chapters that two main acting schools existed in Greece involving the production and presentation of ancient Greek tragedy. This chapter will demonstrate how these two acting schools came together and created new approaches regarding acting, directing, the *mise en scène*, the characters and the Chorus of tragedies encompassed by the two existing acting styles, using productions of *Electra* by Sophocles as case study.

All these productions of *Electra* were presented at festivals in Athens and abroad during the summer, thus keeping to one of the most important field rules, namely, performing tragedy in an open-air venue in the summertime. It will be argued that the various directors who undertook these productions of tragedy were influenced by the two main currents dominating the field of tragedy, while contributing their own ideas and perspectives to it, thus altering and redefining it. The five directors, Spyros Evangelatos, Minos Volanakis, Yiannis Margaritis, Andreas Voutsinas and Lydia Koniordou, whose work will be reviewed chronologically, presented their work at the National Theatre, the State Theatre of Northern Greece and with private companies. Thus: Evangelatos, 1972 (reprised in 1973, 1975 and 1981) and Koniordou, 1996 at the National Theatre; Volanakis, 1975 and Voutsinas, 1992 at the State Theatre of Northern Greece; and Margaritis, 1984 at the Theatro tis Anoixis (Θέατρο της Άνοιξης) and Evangelatos, 1991 (reprised in 1992, 1993, 1994,

1995) at the Amphi-theatre (Αμφι-θέατρο) both private companies. These directors took powerful positions within the field of tragedy, became dominant figures and representatives of the Greek theatre field, and their work influenced, broadened, developed and fundamentally altered the production of tragedy.

### **5.1 *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1972**

The year of 1972 signifies a turning point regarding the presentation of ancient tragedy at the National Theatre and in the Greek field of tragedy as a whole. This change is signalled by Spyros Evangelatos's performance of *Electra*. As observed in the third chapter of this thesis, his production was novel in relation to *mise en scène*, acting, movement, set, costumes and translation. Evangelatos managed to combine the text-based school of the National, which focused on elements such as the clear recitation of speech and the choreographed and identical movements of the Chorus, with the Theatro Technis's physical approach, which enabled freer movements, improvisation, psychological analysis of the characters of each play and placed emotion at the centre of its attention. Thus Evangelatos created a directorial approach that insisted on the clear recitation and pronunciation of the word because he believed that understanding the text was vital for the spectator (interview with Evangelatos, 22 March 2009). Moreover, he insisted on elements of the Theatro Technis's approach such as freer movements in the choreography of the Chorus. He also introduced a set using asymmetrical

forms and broken stones which were part of the stage design by Giorgos Patsas for the presentation of the ruins of Agamemnon's palace.

For his first production of ancient tragedy, Evangelatos asked his collaborator K.H. Miris, pseudonym of Kostas Georgousopoulos, to produce a new translation. This was Miris's first attempt at translating Greek tragedy. The literary man, theatre critic and translator created a poetic text. He concentrated on alliterations such as the use of words beginning with 'φ' ('f') 'φως' ('light'), 'φέρει' ('brings'), 'πτερωτών φωνούλες' ('winged voices') in Electra's opening speech (verses 86-120). This evoked images of morning and light suitable for the beginning of the play, when dawn breaks, because the word 'light' seemed to resonate within the entire speech. Miris used a mixture of short and compound words and was able to play with the rhythm and pace of the text, making it faster, when there was tension, and slower in lyrical parts. He also incorporated in his Modern Greek language ancient Greek elements, namely, nouns in old declensions like 'άναξ' or 'Διός'.<sup>1</sup>

Miris made a new translation that included, on the one hand, phrases and words inspired from the Greek Orthodox Liturgy, which granted to his language a ceremonial quality, and, on the other, simple poetic words of traditional Greek folk poems, which made the translation sound familiar to the audience. Miris continued, developed and enhanced the ideas regarding the presentation of tragedy of Dimitris Rontiris, his master, who aimed to merge elements from the Greek Orthodox Church and the Greek folk tradition, as explained in the third chapter of this thesis. Thus Miris's translation enabled

the actors to speak the text in a terse yet poetic way, which was in tune with Evangelatos's intentions.

Evangelatos wanted to 'be cut off from the National Theatre's tradition without insulting it' (interview with Evangelatos, 22 March 2009). He desired to propose his conception regarding the presentation of tragedy while respecting the work of the directors who preceded him. He believed that his duty as a director was to perceive and communicate the inherent ideas of a play without offending what he thought was its meaning and what he regarded as the original intention of the author. At the same time, he aimed to employ a contemporary, novel look in relation to the interpretation of the meaning of the play and its scenic representation (ibid.). He aimed to present a 'right' interpretation of the play (Evangelatos, 2 July 1972).<sup>2</sup> He argued:

The word 'right' inevitably comprises elements of subjective aesthetics. However, if an interpretation is indeed 'right', this, according to me, means that it projects the theatrical, philosophical, social and aesthetic problematic of the plays in the light of the era during which this interpretation is attempted (ibid.).

Evangelatos clearly views his works from a point of view similar to that of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the 'chronotope'. Bakhtin argues that every piece of literature within a specific time and place or 'chronotope' acquires different meaning according to the social agents who interpret or produce this piece (1981: 84-258). Maria Shevtsova notes that Bakhtin's theory is centred on language. However, she observes that it is also applicable 'to the wide range of different signs that make up any production' (Shevtsova, 2002: 38).

Correspondingly, Evangelatos overtly stated that he was influenced by his own time and aimed to create a contemporary piece of work. Thus he focused on his interpretation of the text's ideas and of the character Electra – her

struggle, torment and how she develops as a character throughout the play (Evangelatos, 2 July 1972). By placing the emphasis on Electra, he brought forward the play's 'philosophical, social and aesthetic problematic'. This led him to alter fundamentally the external form that the National had used for tragedy until then.



24. *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1972 – The Chorus. View of the set

Evangelatos's new approach was initially evident in the set of the production by the important set and costume designer, Patsas. Like Evangelatos and Miris, this was the first time that Patsas worked on ancient Greek tragedy. Patsas also took into consideration the existing tradition of the National. He designed a gate that dominated the scene. However, his gate had nothing to do with the symmetrical, well-constructed and solid gates that Kleovoulos

Klonis had been creating for the productions of the National. Patsas's gate was old, half-rotten. There was nothing solid about the remains of the broken columns that represented the desolation and despair of the cursed palace of the family of Agamemnon. The stairs that linked the gate with the orchestra consisted of uneven pieces of stone in trapezium and parallelogram shapes (image 24). The whole transmitted a sense of destruction and ruin. Patsas used statues that resembled Cycladic figurines to refer to the presence of divine forces and to remind contemporary spectators of ancient Greek tradition and religion.

The costumes were reminiscent of tunics. The two royal figures, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, had crowns that resembled jewellery of the 1970s, which the audience could easily recognise. The Chorus were identically dressed in long tunics with sleeves and their heads covered with a long veil. Even though the Chorus's costumes were the same for every member, each woman's movement differed. Koun's tradition of independent movements for the Chorus members had influenced the Greek theatre. As Evangelatos wanted to 'be cut off from the National's tradition', as cited earlier, he could not use the National's tradition regarding Chorus configuration. Maria Hors was the permanent choreographer of ancient tragedy at the National and also taught at the National's Drama School until 2000. She had participated in the 1936 Olympics as a priestess in the Olympic flame-lighting ceremony and continued to choreograph this ceremony until 2006. She choreographed the production giving plasticity and expressiveness to the Chorus's movement. Hors had worked in the Epidaurus theatre since the 1960s with directors such as Alexis Minotis, and was aware of its vast size. Thus she insisted on accentuating the



movement by instructing the Chorus to 'prepare' a step by taking a breath before making the first move, which gave the impression of flux, or to hold a position at the end of a movement, which stylised the outcome.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, the Chorus's movement brought to mind the stylised Choruses of the National, but had an added quality, which differed fundamentally from the previous National Choruses: each member had independent movement. The women stretched their arms, twirled around themselves, ran and fell on their knees in their own time (image 24). They spoke some lines in unison and some independently. They danced and screamed. They sang in the music of Dimitris Terzakis, who introduced electronic music elements. This was also an innovation that occurred for the first time in the ancient theatre of Epidaurus. Thus all the proposals concerning the Chorus were novel for the venue of Epidaurus as well as the institution that was the National Theatre.

However, the groundbreaking step in this production was the way that the Chorus reacted to the development of the plot and the psychological condition of Electra. It was connected emotionally with her state of being. In the final scene, after the Chorus had recited the closing lines of the play, all its members gathered around a Cycladic figurine, and melted like wax below it while Electra 'walked empty and destroyed without a purpose in life' (interview with Evangelatos, 22 March 2009). Evangelatos managed to link the function and emotional development of the Chorus with Electra's state. The critic Angelos Doxas observed that the Chorus 'emphasised' Electra's emotional condition 'beyond Sophocles's intention' (Doxas, 12 July 1972). Hence, Evangelatos had stripped the Chorus of its usual function as a detached entity

having the ability to observe the development of events. He gave to it a metaphysical function because the emotional empathy between the women of the Chorus and Electra was not verbal. It appeared to be communicated mentally and was expressed physically. Thus the Chorus was intrinsically linked with the character of Electra, and this was clear in the Chorus's reactions and movement. Evangelatos's point of view influenced the way that the Chorus was presented hereafter. His concept would be adopted and developed by directors such as Nikos Diamantis, for example, with his 1996 *Electra* in an indoor venue, as will be demonstrated in due course.

Antigone Valakou's *Electra* was in line with Evangelatos's direction. The thin, fragile figure of Valakou presented an unconventional version of *Electra*, as Evangelatos claimed (interview with Evangelatos, 22 March 2009). She wore a tunic of felt. She had her hair cut short, in a token of mourning, just as the ancient Greeks had cut and offered their hair to the dead (image 25). The practice of presenting *Electra* and female heroines in mourning with short hair became a tendency, and directors such as Voutsinas and Margaritis subsequently also used it in their work. Her appearance indicated her condition – that she lived like a servant, with worn-out clothes. It was the first time on the Greek stage that *Electra*'s attire pictured her position within the palace explicitly.

Even though Valakou was nurtured in the bosom of the National, where she undertook leading parts, she was aware of the work of Koun's Theatro Technis. Like all important and talented actors of her generation, she incorporated Koun's ideas in her work. It must be indicated that, by the 1970s,

Koun's teaching had become common knowledge in the Greek theatre field and actors, while not educated by the master himself, followed his guidelines



25. Antigone Valakou as Electra in *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1972

(interview with Konstantarou, 11 February 2008). Valakou presented an Electra of emotional variety and strength. She made the transition from joy to sadness and vice versa, justifying her every emotion. Her acting was intense. In the lamentation scene, she caressed the urn, talked to it and treated it with care and love, while her pain reached the edge of madness. Valakou communicated all her emotions with impeccable pronunciation. As was Evangelatos's intention, the National's tradition and Valakou's training, the text was heard clearly, and, even though Valakou did not have a large vocal range, her words were heard without any need to shout. Overall, Valakou was

an asset to Evangelatos's performance because she expressed on the stage his intention to view *Electra* through the eyes of the twentieth century, creating a human being who looked into herself, and thus became an individual.

As has been observed in the third chapter of this thesis, it was remarkable that such a revolution regarding the theatrical and dramaturgical elements of the production occurred during the junta, when censorship controlled the Greek theatre. Evangelatos stated that none of his productions had ever been censored (interview with Evangelatos, 22 March 2009), and it is easy to understand why. *Electra* focused on the play's psychological, ontological and dramatic aspects rather than on the social or political ones, as Evangelatos had argued in the text published a few days prior to the performance of *Electra* in the newspaper *To Vima* (Evangelatos, 2 July 1972). The performance broke with the tradition established by the National regarding acting, stage design, the function of the Chorus and its movement, but it was not a revolutionary statement against the junta regime. Evangelatos's work was never explicitly political neither during that period nor later, when he formed his own company. He was always concerned with the dramaturgical, philosophical and humanistic aspect of the plays that he directed and not with interpretations of a political nature.

Evangelatos's production managed to establish Miris as a translator of importance in the field of ancient Greek tragedy, Patsas as a set and costume designer, Valakou as a leading lady of ancient tragedy and himself as a director. A comparison between the National's established tradition, Koun's approach and Evangelatos's work is here useful. Rontiris and Takis

Mouzenidis focused on the structure of tragedy and the meaning of the text trying to discover an approach that enveloped equally all the elements of the play by foregrounding the words of the text. Koun approached tragedy in a ritualistic way by using masks or imposing make up or tried to find ties with the Orient, thus giving tragedy a universal quality that linked ancient and contemporary humanity through an atavistic and subconscious path. Evangelatos distinguished himself from Rontiris, Mouzenidis and Koun by aiming, directly at the human beings of his time. He analysed ancient tragedy with the rules of nineteenth- and twentieth-century dramas such as those of Ibsen, Strindberg or Pirandello, which focused on individuals and their psychology. The insightful critic, Thodoros Kritikos, argued that all the actors 'heroically fought to convince' the audience that they took part in 'a family drama' (Kritikos, 15 July 1972). Evangelatos, therefore, established a new pole within the field of ancient Greek drama by taking a powerful position, which aimed to bring together ancient tragedy and contemporary drama in a completely different way from Koun. Koun utilised contemporary theatre trying to define the struggle of humans within the universe. Evangelatos tried to define the struggle of humans within society. Thus Evangelatos became the first director who overtly broke the ties with ancient Greek tragedy's universal and holistic intention, but maintained the structure intact, although he undermined it, and opened the path for new approaches to tragedy.

## **5.2 *Electra* by the State Theatre of Northern Greece directed by Minos Volanakis at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1975**

The year of 1975 was the year of political changeover, when the military regime of the Generals was ousted and democracy was restored. That same year the field of ancient Greek tragedy underwent a major transformation. It was during that year that the Theatro Technis and the State Theatre of Northern Greece were incorporated into the programme of the Festival of Epidaurus, which, until then, had hosted solely productions of the National. Thus the Festival obtained a degree of multivocality, and became representative of the developments that were unfolding in the field of tragedy, namely, the emergence of approaches differentiating themselves from those of the National.

Minos Volanakis, the director of the 1975 *Electra*, had been a collaborator of Koun and the Theatro Technis's Drama School during the 1950s. He had studied in the UK and had directed ancient Greek tragedies in London at The Old Vic, Oxford and Tel Aviv. Upon his return to Greece, he began directing at the State Theatre of Northern Greece, where he became the General and Artistic Director. Volanakis's production of *Electra* was his first attempt at ancient Greek tragedy in Greek in an open-air theatre such as the theatres of Epidaurus and Filippus, an ancient theatre situated at the city of Kavala in Northern Greece, where the State Theatre held an annual festival in an effort to create an institution similar to the one of Epidaurus. Volanakis argued:

Before, as I was undergoing a period of research and rebellion against tradition, I avoided using ancient Greek theatres because I did not want to be tied to the demands and directorial guidelines that these theatres impose. ... Now, I want to try the ancient theatre using a different directorial approach (Volanakis, 6 August 1975).

Volanakis, upon entering the field of ancient tragedy, was aware that his different directorial approach had to take into account preceding productions,

as well as the ancient theatre's spatial impositions such as the orchestra and the entrances on both its sides. He knew that a tradition based on preceding productions and preceding use of space existed for the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy. Thus, being an ingenious director and human being, he realised that he had to be inspired and driven by the configuration of the theatres where he performed, and that he could not disregard the work of his predecessors; he had to consider and respect their contribution to the field. Nevertheless, his work was innovative, and he presented a 'direct, dramatic and naked' *Electra* (Volanakis, 6 August 1975a), just as he had intended.

Volanakis also translated the text, using sensual words such as 'flesh' in «Πεινούσε ο Άδης για τη σάρκα των παιδιών μου;» ('Was Hades hungry for my children's flesh?' – 542) in Clytemnestra's first speech, and descriptive words such as 'celestial' in «Ουράνιο φως κι αγέρα» ('Celestial light and air' – 86) in Electra's opening speech and combined them with the mythic elements, and grandeur of tragedy. He also structured fast-paced sentences using elaborate as well as simple words in an elliptical syntax, for example, «Αδέσποτη γυρίζεις πάλι / λείπει ο Αίγισθος που πάντα σε μαζεύει από τις πόρτες» ('Astray you run around again / away is Aegisthus who always stops you from standing at doors – 516-517), aiming to immerse the audience in a twisted, dangerous world.

His translation was the vehicle for a production that introduced the audience to another world, which was cruel yet fascinating and intriguing, simple and complex at the same time – 'simple' because the events were concrete and irrevocable, and 'complex' because the actions that led to these events had to

be carried out by human beings who turn out to have been helpless. The mere creation of this different, far-off world emphasised the tragic condition of the characters because it was a world from which escape appeared to be impossible. As Irene Kalkani, the critic of the daily newspaper *Apogevmatini*, argued, Volanakis created 'a place not implicitly familiar, a bit far-off, a bit mythical' (Kalkani, 20 August 1975). The production introduced an alternative world that captured the audience's imagination.

Nevertheless, the production was not cut off from contemporary Greek reality because Volanakis, like Koun, believed that 'in order to present a tragedy today the play needs to correspond with the historic moment in which it is presented' (ibid.) He thought that *Electra* was 'the tragedy of the emancipation of the human being from her/his fate' (ibid.). As a consequence, it seemed appropriate to present this play in the year of the restoration of democracy. Moreover, Volanakis believed that Sophocles encapsulated the pain and bitterness of the human soul better than anyone else. He argued that Electra's motives were human and that she acted without divine guidance (ibid.). This meant that she was alone and responsible for her own actions. Volanakis focused on Electra's complex character and decoded it using his knowledge of Samuel Beckett (ibid.). The link between Beckett and tragedy is recurrent. Olga Taxidou, argues that 'like tragedy, Beckett's work is concerned with the large questions of death, loss and suffering' (Taxidou, 2004: 195). She observes that 'if tragedy is seen to occupy the metaphysical, the inevitable, the unaccountable, which is translated into the 'human', then Beckett is seen as its main representative for the twentieth century' (ibid.). The sense of the 'human being' who is caught within her/his world and struggles to escape



brings together Beckett and the way Volanakis viewed *Electra*. Volanakis constructed a world in which a powerful and trapped human being stood alone and fought; a world that combined the grandeur of a mythological era and complex characters such as those of Beckett.

Dionisis Fotopoulos, the acclaimed artist and set and costume designer, assisted Volanakis in the creation of this world. He designed an archaic structure that had a plain, stone gate at its centre with an extra parallelogram stone on top. From its left and right side were four diagonal sets of columns, two on each side. The external line of the columns was longer, the internal shorter and it defined, as well, a slightly sloping corridor that reached the edge of the orchestra. In the theatre of Epidaurus this imposing set was positioned on top of the remains of the ancient skênê. It gave the impression of being the gate of a huge palace, making the human figures in it look small. The set also alluded to a funnel that could suck in and destroy every single one of the characters, thereby conveying the idea that this was an unfamiliar and dangerous environment.

Fotopoulos's costumes were long tunics for the female characters, the Chorus, the Pedagogue and Aegisthus, and short ones for Orestes and Pylades. The latter had strips of leather wrapped around their legs and hands forming diagonal patches, indicating that they wore a particular fashion of this far-off world. Similarly, the royal figures, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus and Chrysothemis, had long, big, imposing hennins, whimples and collars. The Pedagogue wore a coif that enveloped his head. Electra did not have anything on her head; her hair was carelessly tied back in a bun, and her long black

tunic did not flatter her at all. This was a transgression for Anna Sinodinou, who had performed *Electra* twice in the past, where she wore charming costumes and had immaculately groomed hair (see Chapter Three of this thesis).

Generally, Fotopoulos's costumes contributed to the creation of a world where *Electra* mourned wearing black; *Orestes*, and *Pylades* wore earthy colours, the Chorus dark grey, the Pedagogue and *Chrysothemis*, the more detached and unengaged characters, wore white, and *Clytemnestra* and *Aegisthus* purple-red. All the actors of the performance used heavy make-up, necessary for the big open-air theatre where they performed. The set and the external appearance of the actors clearly delineated an absolute world, where the characters represent major figures and take an active role in determining situations.

The music of the well-known music composer, Theodoros Antoniou, also assisted in the creation of a mythic world. There were parts that were chanted unanimously and others done in solo, their voices constructing a polyphonic composition. This was also Volanakis's intention (interview with Hronopoulou, 2 June 2007). He allowed the actresses a great deal of improvisatory freedom (Volanakis, 6 August 1975a), so the Chorus members proposed their own vocal expression and intonation for some lines, but also talked in unison. Volanakis chose four Coryphaei, who had different vocal qualities and tones, and he divided the verses according to the vocal quality of each of them, for example, the lyric parts to the Coryphaeus, whose voice was sweeter, or a deeper voice for divine invocations (interview with Hronopoulou, 2 June



26. *Electra* directed by Minos Volanakis at the State Theatre of Northern Greece – Electra and the Chorus

2007). All this is reminiscent of the way that Koun divided the Chorus's verses in his productions. Moreover, the Chorus had independent movement in certain parts, but also formed specific, calculated groups, executing symmetrical movements (image 26). Volanakis left his actresses free to propose and then he distilled their propositions and kept what he wanted. He played with the presence and absence of the Chorus on the stage. Thus during some lines of the episodes, the Chorus members hid behind the grand columns of the set and then appeared, slowly, when the chorales started, or when they participated in the episodes of the tragedy. This hiding and appearing gave flux and movement to the entire performance.

Volanakis did not believe that emotion motivated actors, or that they had to follow a score. He argued that the human beings' and actors' driving force in the contemporary world was their will. He thus tried to make his actors realise what their characters wanted, enabled them to express it on stage, and managed to do it without ever proposing an intonation because he claimed that every intonation was correct if the actor meant what was being said (interview with Hronopoulou, 2 June 2007). However, he paid considerable attention to rhythm and pace. He had a definite notion of how long a line or a scene should be, and he used a metronome to time his production (ibid.). Thus he trained his actors to channel their emotion within the specific timeframe, albeit disregarding some nuances and intonations, and, in close contact with his actors, he managed to produce a well-timed frame that both guided and freed the actors, at the same time.

This close attention to rhythm was the common ground on which Volanakis and Sinodinou communicated. It was Sinodinou's third *Electra* (fourth, if the 1972 reprise of the 1967 production is taken into account). As has been explained in the third chapter of this thesis, Sinodinou was a faithful student of Rontiris and had been nurtured by the National. However, her acting in Volanakis's production was considerably different. Keti Hronopoulou, an actress of the State Theatre of Greece, a teacher in the theatre's Drama School and Coryphaeus in the production of *Electra*, noted that Sinodinou 'forgot everything she knew and did something completely different' (interview with Hronopoulou, 2 June 2007). Sinodinou's performance was succinct. Her voice and speech did not have the eloquence of her previous performances, which was characteristic of the Rontirian acting style. They were sharp. When

she recalled her father's murder and narrated the way he was butchered by her mother, her sentences seemed like the keen edge of a knife.



27. Anna Sinodinou as Electra in the production of the State Theatre of Northern Greece directed by Minos Volanakis

Using Volanakis's fast and concise translation, Sinodinou put aside her lyricism and did not produce round, well-nuanced phrases. Her pronunciation was, nevertheless, immaculate, since the audience could hear every single word, but there was no grandiloquence, no pomposity. Moreover, her bodily appearance and expression were altered. In previous productions of *Electra* her appearance was spotless; her posture was smooth; her movement was round; and her body maintained the elegance of a princess. In this 1975 *Electra*, her black costume was wretched; her hair was scraped back in a careless bun; her movements were abrupt, sharp and earthy; and, overall, her physical expression had an animalistic, raw quality. In the mourning scene, she held the urn in which she thought were Orestes's ashes as if it was the body of a little baby, and she looked devastated and empty (image 27). All the above would have been impossible if Volanakis had not persevered with his emphasis on rhythm.

Volanakis's *Electra* was indicative of the combination of the two acting schools. He proposed an approach that allowed freedom to the actor, while insisting on a tight rhythmical frame. In his production, a student of Rontiris met a former student of Koun and created a unified, complete and powerful performance. *Electra* established Volanakis's dominant position within the field of tragedy in that he influenced the way tragedy was staged. He was especially capable when it came to guiding his actors (Hristidis, 2002: 26; interview with Hronopoulou, 2 June 2007). During his entire career, he chose to give leading tragic parts such as Medea or Oedipus to famous 'stars' of the Greek theatre who played in a tragedy for the first time and who had had a text-based training at the National Theatre's Drama School. These were

actors such as Melina Merkouri, Nikos Kourkoulos and Alike Vougiouklaki. Volanakis found that text-based training was a prerequisite for actors working on ancient tragedy (interview with Hronopoulou, 2 June 2007), even though, he did not pay any attention to intonations. His work influenced important Greek directors such as Yorgos Mihailidis, whose work on tragedy was characterised by his allowing complete freedom to his actors.

### **5.3 *Electra* by the Theatro tis Anoixis directed by Yiannis Margaritis at the theatre of Halandri, 1984**

The Theatro tis Anoixis's *Electra* is one of a number of both ancient tragedy and comedy productions presented outside the programme of the Epidaurus Festival during the 1980s. After 1981, when PA.SO.K., the socialist party, came to power and Merkouri became the Minister of Culture, a large number of festivals, funded to a considerable extent by the Ministry of Culture, were held in municipalities in Athens and Attica as well as all over Greece. These festivals enabled, funded and coproduced a large number of ancient drama productions in an effort to shift the focus away from the Epidaurus Festival and to produce good quality performances by non-commercial and experimental companies. Merkouri's first and foremost aim during her tenure of office from 1981 until 1989 (when PA.SO.K. lost the elections) and from 1993 until her death in 1994, was the promotion of the theatre. Therefore, the Theatro tis Anoixis's *Electra* represents those companies that staged tragedy outside the Epidaurus Festival. These companies were introduced to the field of ancient drama as an expression of a counter-position to the existing dominant positions that defined the field.

The Theatro tis Anoixis was founded in 1976 by Yiannis Margaritis and did not have the money to afford a permanent venue.<sup>4</sup> It had presented productions of plays such as Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*, Georg Buchner's *Woyzeck*, Genet's *The Maids* and plays based on actors' improvisations on themes related to the Revolution of 1821 and contemporary issues such as unemployment. The 1984 *Electra* was the company's first production of tragedy, and Margaritis was only twenty-nine years old at the time. Three years later, he would become the youngest director to direct a production at the Festival of Epidaurus. It is clear that, Merkouri's aim, which she managed to achieve, was to nurture a number of directors and actors, who would be able to try out their skills in a broadened field of ancient tragedy and become the future of the Greek theatre.

Margaritis had studied at the National Theatre's Drama School in Athens and the University of Paris III. He also had attended seminars on how to teach acting with Giorgos Sevastikoglou, Koun's close collaborator. Thus he had studied in the two major Greek acting schools in existence. His production was, on the one hand, imbued with the National's persistence on a rhythmically, well-recited text and, on the other, the Theatro Technis's notion of ensemble acting and the actors' physicality. However, Margaritis also suggested groundbreaking innovations.

Margaritis used Volanakis's translation, one not used since Volanakis presented his *Electra* in 1975. As has been observed above, it was a translation that had the power to introduce the spectator to another world and to an environment governed by ancient rules in which fear, cruelty, poetry and



the ritualistic qualities that Margaritis and the company sought, were a component. In his 'Director's Note' in the programme of the production, he explained that the production's goal was to approach and explore the myth which existed prior to 'logos', namely, the spoken word of the written text (*Electra*, 1984a). Margaritis used the word 'myth' referring to a timeless story of archetypal figures that explored the fundamental qualities of human nature such as life, death, love or hate. He argued that, if the text and the 'logos' were the core of the production, this would lead to a 'strictly psychological approach' and result in limiting the understanding of the myth (ibid.). Therefore, he did not want to base his production on the psychological development of the characters that could be detected in the 'logos'. This fact did not contradict Margaritis aim to have a well-recited text, as will be explained. It merely expressed his intention to abandon a psychological approach and go beyond the text, utilising the myth as raw material.

The above is consistent with Jerzy Grotowski's claims that if an old text contains concentrated human experiences, illusions, myths and truths that apply today, then 'the text becomes a message that we receive from previous generations' (Grotowski, 1971: 93).<sup>5</sup> What Grotowski referred to as 'previous generations' became visible in the ritualistic and ceremonial elements that Margaritis employed and in the way that the production was structured: all the actors emerged from the Chorus, alluding to rituals, ceremonies and the birth of tragedy from the dithyramb. Taking the myth and the ritual as a starting point, Margaritis created a production that focused on what he called the 'scenic language' (*Electra*, 1984a). He placed the actors and their bodies at

the centre of his production, and concentrated on colour, movement and sound.

Margaritis argued that the myth of *Electra* represented 'the tragedy of revenge and death', the tragedy 'of reversals and transmutations', and 'the black tragedy', and that this 'trilogy', as he called it, 'had formed the axis for the staging' of the production (ibid.). This axis was strengthened by Margaritis's ritualistic and ceremonial intentions and the focus on the physicality of the actors. He explained:

By way of the rite that is most familiar to us, that of the Christian Orthodox Church and its ecclesiastical ritual, we may cautiously approach the ritual aspect of tragedy: the sacred area of mystery; detachment from the familiar; a god who is absent but strongly present at the same time; gestures which emit signals; and an actor who transcends the limits of the interpreter to become the master of ceremonies, the bridge between the myth, language and the public (ibid.).<sup>6</sup>

Margaritis used music, movements and groupings that suggested the Greek Orthodox ritual, with which his actors and spectators were familiar, in order to establish a connection and embark on a journey that explored 'the detachment from the familiar'. The actors of his ritualistic production were to 'transcend the limits of the interpreter', go beyond the text and appear to execute a rite that aimed to capture and engage the audience, as Antonin Artaud was attracted and amazed by the ceremonial qualities of the Balinese theatre (Artaud, 1958: 60). Moreover, Margaritis and the company wanted to create a link, 'a bridge'. The resonance of Grotowski's 'bridge', which every creator builds 'between the past and himself, between his roots and his being' (Wolford, 1997: 53), is apparent. The *Theatro tis Anoixis*'s bridge aimed to link the archetypal myth, the contemporary spectators and the ancient Greek

and Modern Greek language. Hence, Margaritis used Volanakis's translation for the entire play, but employed ancient Greek during the Chorus parts, and equated them to the ecclesiastical language of katharevousa used in the Greek Orthodox Church. Thus he tied the ancient Greek language to the language of the church, and appropriated the congregation of the church, a strong reference point in Greek life, in order to bring together the myth and the spectators.

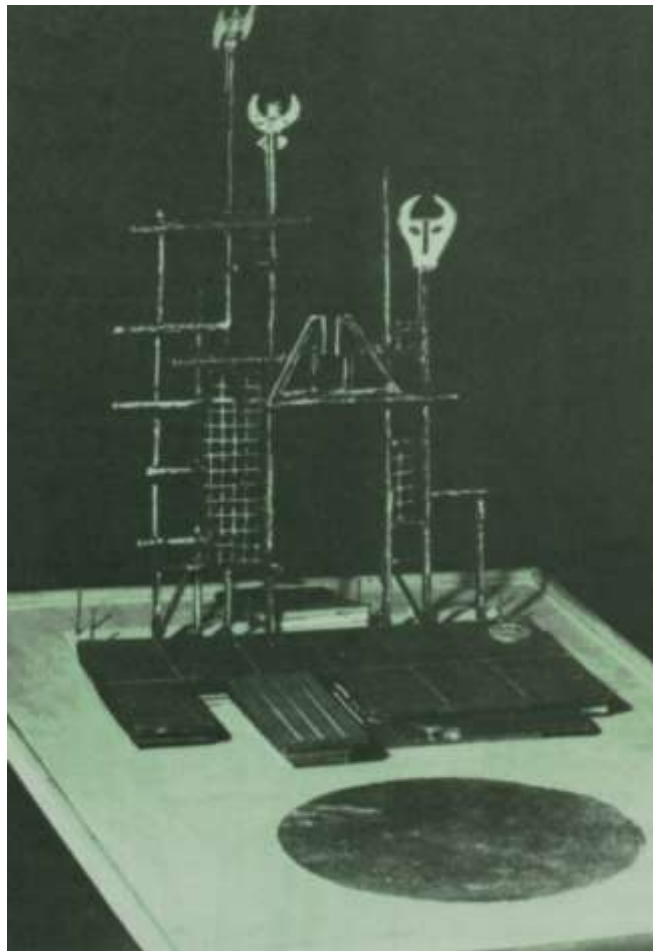
The sense of congregation, namely, the assembly of a coherent group attending worship, was found in the Chorus. Margaritis strengthened the Chorus's power within the play and the sense of belonging of the people to the ritualistic group, by including all the characters of the play as part of the Chorus. Thus every character, except Electra, who was separated from the Chorus, would spring out of the masked Chorus and become the character taking off her or his mask, disclosing a white face that alluded to a mask, revealing hidden costumes and using props which were ritually handed to them such as Orestes's sword, the instrument with which he murdered his mother (image 29).

This special use of the Chorus and its connection to Electra defined the dialectical relationship between the Chorus and Electra. Electra was in constant juxtaposition and dialogue with the Chorus. She appeared to exercise power over it, but there occurred also a reversal of power and Electra became subordinate to the Chorus. She would keep her distance and contradict its members, but, at times, she would be encompassed by it. The relationship of the two expressed a love-hate situation. During the entire

performance, Electra tried to define her relationship to the Chorus, which included both her beloved Orestes and Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, whom she hated. Margaritis noted:

The Chorus is the master of ceremonies who determines sequence, intensity and passion relative to Electra, who is found in an almost permanent delirious state – cut off from the main body (Chorus), but almost in a fierce, even obsessive, association with it (*Electra*, 1984a).

Hence, the performance was conceptualised and presented as a ritualistic ceremony. The Chorus performed the ritual and prepared each actor to take her/his position opposite Electra. The intensity of the relationships between the Chorus and Electra ‘created the need for other characters’ and ‘determined the moment of their appearance’ (ibid.).



28. *Electra* by the Teatro tis Anoixis directed by Yiannis Margaritis at the theatre of Halandri, 1984 – The set

The play was performed in the small theatre of Halandri that was surrounded by trees and a round, amphitheatric stand where the audience sat. The production commenced with the lighting of a fire and the procession of all the members of the Chorus, who entered and stood next to a red, perfectly round floor that was the orchestra on which the actors performed. The acting space was defined by a long and narrow construction placed at the top edge of the round floor. This structure consisted of a short, wooden, oblong platform that had a raised spot, and a gate made of uneven vertical and horizontal intertwined timber bars with three totemic figures at its top. The set brought to mind the round orchestra of the ancient Greek theatre and the ancient skênê that was a small construction at the back of the orchestra. Savas Haratsidis, who was an accomplished set and costume designer and had already worked for many years on ancient drama before his collaboration with the young Margaritis, created an open and abstract set that served the needs of the production (image 28).

The costumes of the production, also designed by Haratsidis, were simple and frugal, a mixture of bare tunics, unadorned cassocks and ceremonial attire. All the characters, with the exception of Electra, who had her hair cut short in indication of mourning, had long hair. All the characters had their faces painted like masks. The Chorus comprised the female and male actors who performed the parts and who had masks that left their painted white mouth free. They all wore long, identical black cloaks. The costumes of the Chorus clearly suggested the Chorus's function, namely, the putting together and execution of a rite, a ritualistic ceremony, as Margaritis indicated in his 'Director's Note'.

The Theatro tis Anoixis rehearsed for over six months to produce the performance. All newspaper and magazine articles remarked on the long



29. *Electra* by the Theatro tis Anoixis directed by Yiannis Margaritis at the theatre of Halandri, 1984 – The Pedagogue, Orestes and the Chorus

period of rehearsals, which was unusual for the beginning of the 1980s. The articles also observed that the majority of the company's actors had to have morning jobs in order to survive the rehearsal period. The long rehearsal period resulted in the harmonious effect presented by the company, following Margaritis' instruction for a ritualistic performance. The ritualistic element was evident through the entire performance. For example, Orestes, Pylades and the Pedagogue emerged from the Chorus, which performed slow and evocative movements. When their scene finished, they returned to become, once more, part of the Chorus and to prepare for the emergence of the next character following the same ritual. The actors stood still or calculatedly

moved and talked. They walked ceremonially from one place to another, stood, paused and spoke their lines. Every single movement was important, intended and deliberate.

Margaritis's and his actors' intentions can be summarised in Grotowski's argument that 'at a moment of psychic shock, a moment of terror, of mortal danger or tremendous joy, a man does not behave 'naturally'' (Wolford, 1997: 31). There was nothing natural in Margaritis's *Electra*. The actors' painted white faces had one expression. Each one of the actors had created Grotowski's 'life- mask' using the muscles of her or his face, and 'wore' the same face for all the duration of the play (Grotowski, 1971: 27). They would not address each other directly. They would look at a specific direction to recite a verse, then pause and clearly turn in a different direction if they wanted to continue speaking. The spectator was immersed in another ritualistic world of fear and revenge.

In his 'Director's Note', which was translated in English by the company, Margaritis used the word 'exarch', a word that does not exist in the English language, to interpret the Greek word 'εξάρχων' (exarchon), which means the one who stands out of a homogenous group and leads it. Electra was the 'exarch' of this performance, as he clearly stated. Thus Natasha Zouka, the actress and choreographer who performed Electra and who was also responsible for the movement and choreography of all the actors, led and defined the Chorus and the entire production. She, like all the other actors, had created her 'life-mask' which she had on for the entire performance. Her body had plastic movement and reacted to her emotion and the situations that

arose. She ran, fell on the floor and curled herself, but she did not cry or change the expression on her face. When she executed the lamentation scene, she demonstrated a well-trained voice that easily passed from whispering to crying. She uttered the words in a way that granted importance



30. Natasa Zouka as Electra in *Electra* by the Theatro tis Anoixis directed by Yiannis Margaritis at the theatre of Halandri, 1984

to them and dragged the vowels, however, without making her speech sound pompous. It was the utterance of a psalm that revealed pain and destruction and augured her fierce reaction at the end of the play (image 30).

Finally, the Chorus did not sing or dance like any of the Choruses that have been presented so far in this thesis. There were no songs that could be sung independently. Every sound and utterance was part of a planned ritual. The music seemed to emerge from the Chorus, and, even though there was a pre-



recorded tape that accompanied the performance, the actors of the Chorus performed sounds with their mouths, hummed and created the music. The Chorus appeared to be performing a ceremony that was part of the Greek religious tradition. For example, in the third chorale, a male member of the Chorus would recite the ancient text like a Greek Orthodox priest. The rest of the Chorus would repeat the same text in Modern Greek, in shorter or longer phrases divided among themselves, resonating and stressing some words or verses by repeating them.

Overall, Margaritis presented an ensemble performance that explicitly stressed the ritualistic and ceremonial qualities of tragedy, and this opened up a new path in the presentation of ancient Greek tragedy. He advanced and pushed further Koun's ritualistic propositions and appropriated the National's recitation to compose the psalm-like utterance of the text. His suggestions regarding the ceremonial acting of tragedy can be viewed as a preamble to Theodoros Terzopoulos's and the Attis Theatre's acting proposal, which will be reviewed in the last chapter. Even though Terzopoulos developed a specific acting school that pertained exclusively to his company, Margaritis introduced to the Greek theatre an acting approach that overtly appropriated ceremonial and ritualistic elements in order to present Greek tragedy.

#### **5.4 *Electra* by the Amphi-theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1991**

The Amphi-theatre company was founded in 1975 by Leda Tasopoulou and her husband, the director and academic, Spyros Evangelatos, who had directed successful productions in the two Greek state companies and whose

1972 *Electra* at the National was reviewed in the first part of this chapter. In the declaration of the company's policy, the company members played with the meanings of the word 'αμφί' ('amphi') in relation to the word 'theatre' (*Electra*, 1991: 2). They explained that the word 'αμφί' meant for the company 'near, all around [in relation to the audience]', 'from every side [in relation to the art of the theatre]' and 'in between, with [in relation to the contemporary era]' (ibid.).<sup>7</sup> The Amphi-theatre aspired to become an open organisation that would approach theatre from every side.

The company declared that its two main aims were to focus on ancient drama and the presentation of unknown Greek plays from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, an area in which Evangelatos was an expert. Thus, along with plays by Shakespeare, Strindberg and Brecht, the company presented pre-Renaissance, Renaissance and post-Renaissance Greek plays for the first time on the Greek stage, as well as an ancient Greek drama every year. Finally, it established an institution in the Greek theatre, which was the inclusion of the text of each performance in the programme of the production.

The Amphi-theatre occupied a distinguished, dominant position within the theatre field, relevant to the position of the two state theatres and the Theatro Technis, due to its longevity, the wide range of its repertoire and the quality of its performances. Until today, the Theatro Technis and the Amphi-theatre are the only private companies in the Greek theatre that present a minimum of three productions annually, of which one is ancient Greek drama. In 1980, five years after the company's foundation, the Amphi-theatre commenced its

participation in the Epidaurus Festival. This participation was uninterrupted until 2004, when George Loukos became the director of the Festival.

The production of *Electra* was one of the most successful of the company. It was first presented at the Epidaurus Festival, but toured festivals all over the world (Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Russia and China, to name but a few).<sup>8</sup>

The role of *Electra* was acted by Tasopoulou, who had participated in almost every performance of the company since its foundation.<sup>9</sup> Tasopoulou was its leading lady and, until her death in 2005, undertook all major female parts.

She was also director of the Laboratory of the Art of Acting for the Opera and the Theatre (Εργαστήριο Υποκριτικής Τέχνης για το Θέατρο και την Όπερα), which the company founded in 1989 and kept for four years.

Evangelatos used for this production of *Electra* the same translation that his collaborator, K. H. Miris, had produced in 1972, after revising it with Miris, and Tasopoulou. Evangelatos employed Miris's poetic canvas to make a production that had a broader scope than his previous one. Thus, while, in 1972, Evangelatos aimed to define the struggle of the human being within contemporary society, in 1991, he went back to *Electra* and sought tragedy's universal quality. Yiannis Varveris, who had seen the 1981 reprise of the 1972 production of *Electra* argued, in his review of the 1991 production, that the 1972 production was the 'preamble' to the one in 1991 (Varveris, 25 August 1991). He claimed that, in 1972, Evangelatos offered 'a dynamic renovation of realism' by revealing the characters' psychological condition, and that, in 1991, Miris's translation was the vehicle on which

Evangelatos, in the renewed version of his *Electra*, defined the characters' psychological rage as the means by which they transcended

to a place of uncommon experience. ... The passion was exceptionally enlarged and, even though it was recognisable, it was reconstructed as something 'horrifying' that communicated with the mystical world of the psychic depths (ibid.).

It is clear that Varveris recognised in Evangelatos's new production the intention to present a chthonic world governed by dark rules and grand, implacable, archetypal characters. This reading of the play was also dictated by Tasopoulou's passionate acting and powerful appearance on the stage.

Tasopoulou's fervent emotions for Electra were projected and visualised through her body. Hence, her tall, slim and elegant figure, which looked like a beautiful statue, would shrink, bend and collapse, when she heard of her brother's death, from a pain that sprang from her womb. She used unusual reactions and unfamiliar gestures, which she completed sharply and intensely, but her movements were also supple, plastic and precise. For instance, she would walk smoothly, as if skating on ice, and suddenly start to run. Or else she would be standing still and abruptly raise her arm to the sky, creating an uneven and challenging image that captured the spectator's glance and provoked her/him to understand Electra's torment (image 31). This happened because Tasopoulou was very much aware of the scenic spatial arrangements. She had confessed that the first thing she did when she read a part was to imagine how this character would move within the space; then, she would slowly add the remaining details in order to complete her work on the part (Tasopoulou, 1999: 31).

Her voice was very powerful and clear. She had the ability to nuance it finely, talking very loudly in one instant, in a whisper, in the next. Similarly, she would recite one phrase intensely and, in the following, pronounce directly and

extremely simply. These constant variations, along with her inclination to stress and prolong some vowels, won her a large number of adversaries.



31. Leda Tasopoulou as Electra in *Electra* by the Amphi-theatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1991

Varveris mirrored a common belief when he noted that her acting was 'intense' and 'offensive', and that she had not 'reconsidered her idiosyncratic movement and vocal efforts' (Varveris, 25 August 1991). However, Tasopoulou was a hard-working, educated and cultivated actress, who had a text-based training at the National's Drama School and participated, as a Chorus member, in the National Theatre's ancient tragedy productions in the 1970s. She also admitted that she was influenced by Stanislavsky's teaching because he was able to guide her through the development of a character's psychology (Tasopoulou, 1999: 32). She identified with, and immersed herself in, her part; she was full of energy when she acted; and communicated impeccably with her fellow actors on the stage.<sup>10</sup>

George Ziakas, the famous set and costume designer, was responsible for the set and the costumes of the production. His set was simple and earthy. Ziakas designed a simple, rocky, round fence that encircled the Epidaurus orchestra, creating an arena in which the characters were to resolve their differences. A simple, rocky gate was placed at the edge of the orchestra at the top of the stage, and, facing it, at the other side of the circle, in front of the front row of spectators, was an altar with a burning flame, where Clytemnestra conducted her prayer to Apollo, and Electra and Orestes their invocation to the gods. The existence of the altar gave to the performance a ritualistic, religious air that did not exist in Evangelatos's 1972 production.

All the costumes, except that of Chrysothemis, which was white, displayed a gamut of colours from black to dark and light grey. Hence, the dark figures of the actors stood out against the light grey set. The patterns of the clothes were vertical so that the actors would look taller and imposing. The costumes contributed to the projection of these grand, archetypical figures.

Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus's costumes consisted of long garments reminiscent of royal Byzantine imperial clothing of black shiny velvet with gold ornate details, an embroidered bust and a small gold crown. Orestes's, Pylades's and the Pedagogue's costumes consisted of dark trousers, lighter blouses and long dark capes. Electra had a long, V-necked black dress with a belt around her waist and a torn cape. Her long black hair was tied in a plait at the back of her head. The Chorus's dresses were similar to Electra's with the exception of a hat that covered their head and a round collar that hid their neckline. The Coryphaeus had a gold detail on her costume in order to stand

out, and the rest of the Chorus's costumes were identical. The affinity between the costumes of Electra and the Chorus visually suggested that there existed a strong connection between the two. This was a directorial guideline that had remained unchanged from the 1972 production.

Nikos Kipourgos's music was lyrical and melodic, as if trying to soothe the pain that gushed from the tormented Electra, who was at the centre of all the chorales. The Chorus moved, danced, sang and spoke either independently or unanimously. The lines were divided between the Chorus members, but the



32. Leda Tasopoulou as Electra and the Chorus in *Electra* by the Amphitheatre directed by Spyros Evangelatos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1991

Coryphaeus recited most of them. During the entire performance, the women of the Chorus were by the side of Electra. The Chorus existed for her and she

was strengthened by the Chorus. At the finale of the performance, the Chorus melted, once again, as it did in the 1972 production of *Electra*, and disappeared behind the short fence, leaving Tasopoulou curled up in front of her murdered mother's body like an embryo, looking ahead with an empty, devastated gaze – an idea that was suggested by Tasopoulou and adopted by the director (interview with Evangelatos, 22 March 2009). Tasopoulou, as Evangelatos's permanent collaborator, influenced his directing immensely, even though Evangelatos's conception of the Chorus had not altered since the 1972 production. She worked closely and experimented with the Chorus because the relationship between *Electra* and the Chorus was very intimate. The Chorus was trained physically by the choreographer, Maria Alvanou, but the *mise en scène* and final decisions were made in consultation with Tasopoulou.

Overall, Evangelatos created a production that had a similar philosophical, social and aesthetic problematic to the one he presented in 1972, namely, exploring the struggle of the human within society. However, ceremonial elements such as the altar and Tasopoulou's expressive and intense acting differentiated the 1991 production. Tasopoulou's influence strengthened the performance's metaphysical problematic, apparent in the function of the Chorus in 1972. She broadened it and focused it on questions concerning the struggle of human beings to define themselves in relation to death, the afterlife and the primary relationships between mother and daughter, as the embryonic position that Tasopoulou took at the end of the performance overtly indicated. As was noted in the programme of the company, the production stressed that 'the limits of common sense were broken', 'a dialogue with the



Unknown was pursued' and 'the hunting of the Absolute' became the aspect that characterised the 'real tragic hero' (*Electra*, 1991: 3).

Evangelatos directed in the theatre of Epidauros under the auspices of the National Theatre, the State Theatre and his own company more productions of ancient drama than any other Greek director (Georgousopoulos, 2002: 122). As a director of the Ampitheatre, he annually presented productions of ancient Greek dramas from the company's foundation, in 1975, until today, and participated annually in the Epidauros Festival from 1980 until 2004. His directing and Tasopoulou's personal acting style comprised the Ampitheatre's acting school. However, due to the particularities of Tasopoulou's acting, namely, 'her idiosyncratic movement and vocal efforts' (Varveris, 25 August 1991), she did not influence the way tragedy was acted in Greece. Nevertheless, as indicated above, she influenced immensely the work of her collaborator and spouse, Evangelatos, who was one of the most important, internationally acclaimed Greek directors of ancient tragedy. Evangelatos worked with hundreds of Greek actors. His approach reworked the heroes' tragic condition utilising modes of expression found in plays such as Strindberg's *The Father*. The death of the Captain tied with the straitjacket in the last scene of the play can be linked with Electra's embryonic position at the close of the production as both characters remain unjustified and are destroyed by their families. It also combined the National's attention to the poetic text and the Theatro Technis's focus on the actors' emotional development and physicality, creating an approach that dominated Greek theatre from the middle of the 1970s until the end of the 1980s.

## **5.5 *Electra* by the State Theatre of Northern Greece directed by Andreas Voutsinas at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1992**

The State Theatre of Northern Greece was second in importance and power in Greece after the National Theatre. When it was founded, in 1961, the State Theatre's Artistic Director, Socrates Karantinos, aimed for an approach to ancient drama that would be distinct from the National's tradition (Karantinos, 1969: 146). However, Karantinos's and the State Theatre's attempts did not have a great impact on the Greek field of ancient tragedy. This is so because, until 1975, the State Theatre performed mostly in Thessaloniki, which was not an important theatrical centre, and it toured Northern Greece, which was isolated geographically from the heart of Greek theatre life. Second, it did not participate in the Epidaurus Festival, and, hence, it could not influence the main directorial currents. Third, the company did not create a major performance that could tour abroad and return to be acknowledged in Greece, like Koun's productions of *The Persians* and *The Birds*. Finally, when it first participated in Epidaurus in 1975, it recruited Volanakis, a director who had understood and absorbed the contemporary currents concerning ancient tragedy and had incorporated them in his innovative work. Moreover, since its foundation, the State Theatre recruited innovative and progressive directors, who were not explicitly tied with the Rontirian tradition of the National, while the National, with some exceptions, Evangelatos's 1972 *Electra* being one of them, preserved a more conservative approach until 1981, as argued in the third chapter of this thesis.

In 1982, Andreas Voutsinas, the talented, provocative and innovative director, who had studied in the New York Actor's Studio under Lee Strasberg, and who had worked in the United States and Paris, directed his first ancient Greek tragedy production, *Helen* by Euripides. This production gave Voutsinas a powerful and dynamic position within the field of ancient tragedy, first, because he represented a state organisation, and continued to represent it for many years. Second, because he projected the play's comic elements, and changed the play's reading forever afterwards. Third, because he was the first director to show disregard to the audience's booing and enraged public opinion with his action, to gesticulate that the audience's booing was suitable for his genitals. Finally, he brought to the productions of Epidaurus a direct approach demonstrated in the style of the actors' acting, combined with the glamour and abstraction mirrored in the sets, visual effects and costumes of the production. Moreover, Voutsinas, although he had studied and worked abroad, was, nevertheless, in close alignment with the contemporary Greek theatrical tradition because, on the one hand, his apprenticeship to Strasberg brought him close to Koun in relation to the style of the actors' acting and the quest for direct, emotionally charged characters on the stage, and, on the other hand, because he did not disregard the State Theatre's and the Greek theatre's tradition in relation to the Chorus, which moved, danced, sang and recited the text clearly. His productions were innovative, alluring and always respected the actors' possibilities, stimulating them to construct their characters as part of their own personalities, in the same way that Koun encouraged his actors to do.

For his *Electra*, Voutsinas used Yorgos Himonas's translation. As has already been noted in the fourth chapter of this thesis, Himonas had created a translation that focused on mourning and death (Toutountzi, 2003: 89). Himonas argued in his 'Translator's Note' that he used a 'contemporary Greek idiom' that was 'direct and frugal' which aimed to bring out 'human beings' passionate lyricism' (*Electra*, 1992). He explained:

I don't believe that there exists a theory on how tragedy has to be translated. ...This translation is theatrical, it is not philological. This means that my text interpreted freely the ancient text, either by remaining faithful to it (and I mean the words the translation kept) or by walking away from it (ibid.).

Himonas constructed a text which was a mixture of very simple Greek words and words that allowed the ancient text to resonate. Voutsinas in his 'Director's Note' claimed that Himonas's views coincided fortuitously with his own, and that Himonas had outlined the way he 'read' and 'saw' ancient Greek tragedy (ibid.). Voutsinas paraphrased:

I don't believe that there exists a theory on how tragedy has to be presented. This production is theatrical, it is not philological. This means that it interpreted freely the ancient text, either by remaining faithful to it or by walking away from it (ibid.).

Thus Voutsinas explicitly declared that Himonas's text was the 'prerequisite' for his production. It was the text that formed and, at the same time, complemented his point of view (ibid.). Following the productions of Kakoyiannis (1983) and Koun (1984), Himonas's dark conceptualisation of the play found one more reading in Voutsinas's directing.

The set of the production was designed by the important set and costume designer, Apostolos Vettas. Vettas, who had been Voutsinas's collaborator in the State Theatre's 1990 production of *Medea*, constructed a bronze theatrical

machine on whose round base, at the centre, was a tall and thin rectangular metal construction. The construction had two levels. Two pairs of round stairs on each side of the construction connected the gate of the first floor to the ground floor. It was a complicated set that allowed the spectator to follow the action of all the actors on the lit stage. The set brought to mind an ancient clock or a kind of complicated alchemistic machine that turned and defined the plot (image 33). This twisting machine full of openings clearly delineated a world where everything was spied upon and manipulated. It provided the perfect environment for a production set in the Byzantine era, as desired by the director. This was a period during which deceit, spying and revenge were common among the imperial families, and Voutsinas believed there were many similarities between those families and the Atrides (Vougourtzi, 8 July 1992). The ability of the set to define a precise environment, which was not necessarily dictated by the text, but rather by the director of the play, and in which the plot was unravelled, was distinctive of Voutsinas's productions. For example, he set his production of *The Trojan Women* in a car cemetery and *Medea* outside the wrecked boat that Medea and Jason had used for their return from Colchis.

This innovative and resourceful set was completed by Yiannis Metzikov's elaborate costumes. Metzikov depicted in his costumes the Macedonian Byzantine aristocratic style of 1500 A.D. (*Electra*, 1992). Orestes's and Pylades's hose, sleeved vests and scarves were in tints of blue and beige and their head bands were dark blue. The Pedagogue had a long, dark blue surcoat with light beige and blue details; Chrysothemis a barrette on her head and a multilayered robe in the shades of gold and purple; Clytemnestra an



33. *Electra* by the State Theatre of Northern Greece directed by Andreas Voutsinas at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1992 – Electra, Chrysothemis and the Chorus. View of the set

imposing velvet and satin gown in red, purple and dark blue with gold details and a decorated hennin. Aegisthus costume was similar to Clytemnestra's. The Chorus had identical black pelicons that revealed a simple white dress, black and gold elaborate epaulets and hennins with gold chains. All the

costumes appeared immaculate and expensive. These royal colours contrasted with Electra's sleeveless, worn-out black dress. Her dress's red lining, which appeared whenever she walked, left the impression that her body was bleeding, emphasising her state of mind (image 33).

For Voutsinas, Electra was irreconcilable and revengeful (Vougourtzi, 8 July 1992). Moreover, he believed that both Clytemnestra and Electra were anti-heroes, who came from a family entrapped in an obscene past, fated to death and destruction (ibid.). Hence, Clytemnestra died, and, when Electra got her revenge, she ended up feeling more devastated and empty because revenge is a negative feeling that torments and destroys the subject who feels it (ibid.). Voutsinas focused on the characters of the play, their emotional condition and their interpersonal relationships. He presented an Electra that embodied her mental and emotional state. This embodiment can be understood and analysed by Chris Shilling's 'view of the mind and body as inextricably linked as a result of the mind's location within the body' (Shilling, 1993: 13). This means that that the state of the mind can affect the body's reactions and condition, its force, its health or its illness (ibid.: 115-117). Thus 'her body expressed what she was not able to clarify through discourse' (ibid.: 124).

Therefore, the kernel of Voutsinas's production was Electra, who was a psychological and, as a result, a physical wreck. She executed her first monologue leaning on a crooked wooden stick (image 33), which she used as a cane, because she was exhausted and unable to stand up straight. There was no pomposity or grandiloquence in Filareti Komninou's Electra. Her speech was direct. She sat on the small steps in front of the big staircase with

her hands hanging down, and spoke her lines in the same key to express her exhaustion. She appeared miserable and neglected. Her emotional and mental state was overtly depicted in her physical reactions: thus she crawled, fell, knelt, bent, ran and froze. Moreover, her craving for revenge was shown in her restlessness. During the entire performance, she could not find a moment's peace. Komninou was in constant motion and thus was physically worn out. The power of the emotions that Electra felt was grand, but her body was human and perishable. She had become a slave to her passions and this resulted in her own destruction.

Voutsinas's virtue as a director was that he created his productions on the abilities of his actors, or else he chose actors who were close to the way that he perceived the parts. He never imposed a prefixed notion on them, even though he took a definite and concise standpoint in his direction of the actors. He could be harsh and cruel with them, but he was able to shift his perspective if an actor proposed something interesting, or if he understood that she/he was not able to carry out his intention, as Hronopoulou, who was Coryphaeus of the production, verified (interview with Hronopoulou, 2 June 2007).<sup>11</sup> Hence, Komninou was considered to be the most suitable choice for Electra as well as for the dynamics of the production as a whole. She had worked with Voutsinas on ancient tragedy before, as Andromache in *The Trojan Women* (1987). Her energy and dynamism as an actress embodied Voutsinas's viewpoint of an Electra who never ceased fighting and expressing her anger. She opposed her mother, the Chorus and her sister and manipulated her brother in order to murder their mother.



Komninou's Electra was also offensive. Her strong voice recited the verses in a direct, prosaic manner that mirrored her rage and emotional pain. She seemed like an aggressive feline, ready to gather up all her forces to attack. Voutsinas, as explained above, believed that revenge created negative people and such people could not have friends, companions or loved ones. As a result, even Electra's relationship with Orestes was not based on love. In Orestes, Voutsinas presented a weak, irresolute young man who merely executed Electra's command. Electra made Orestes her instrument to fulfil her need for revenge. That is the reason why, at the end of the production, she remained in the centre of the orchestra, frozen, empty, without purpose in life. She was not redeemed.

Similarly, she had a difficult relationship with the Chorus, which was evident in how she shouted at them. She would endure their presence because she was not able to do otherwise, but she did not enjoy their presence or find solace in them. This is the only production in which the Chorus and Electra displayed such a relationship. In all other productions of *Electra*, the Chorus empathised with Electra or objectified her condition, but this sour and angry Electra could not have any friends. This approach towards the relationship between the Chorus and Electra is indicative of Voutsinas's innovative and provocative approach to ancient tragedy. His depiction of everyday relationships inspired theatre critics to accuse him of turning tragedies into dramas. He responded to them saying that 'in a drama there is always the possibility of changing the final outcome, in tragedy the ending is inescapable' (Katsounaki, 8 July 1992). Voutsinas was not concerned with the problems posed by Greek tragedy such as the function of the Chorus. He created a production in which the characters

stood out and the Chorus complemented them. He managed, Nonetheless, to maintain the equilibrium between the Chorus and the characters and to present a Chorus that sang and danced.

Yorgos Kouroupos's chorales were melodic and lyrical. They were reminiscent of Greek Orthodox Church music, a suitable allusion given the Byzantine references of the production, but they were hummable songs. The members of the Chorus sang both unanimously and separately creating a well-tuned, polyphonic composition. They spoke independently and recited together very few chosen words or lines. Voutsinas, even though his Chorus was homogenously dressed, believed in the uniqueness of each member (Vougourtzi, 8 July 1992). Hence, there were no identical movements, postures or expressions. Each woman had her own individual emotional and physical response to the plot.

Kouroupos, who had successfully worked with Voutsinas before and who composed music for films and theatre, wrote a harmonious and evocative musical score. Voutsinas used music to underline some actors' speeches in order to strengthen his directorial intentions. Thus, in Orestes's opening monologue, evoking music accompanied his narration of Apollo's oracle, stressing Orestes's irresoluteness and owe of the god. Voutsinas also employed loud and powerful musical phrases that alerted the spectators to accentuate theatrical incidents such as the ingenious spilling of Orestes's ashes during the scene between Electra and Orestes. This incident took place when Orestes tried to convince Electra that the ashes in the urn she was holding were not her brother's. There was a struggle between them and the

fake ashes in the urn were accidentally scattered to the air, leaving Electra desperately trying to collect the remains of her brother. This incident, which Voutsinas invented in order to strengthen the sense of Electra's emotional destruction and to underline the lie behind Orestes's appearance, was a *coup de théâtre* representative of Voutsinas's directing. Voutsinas aimed to take the audience by surprise, and he often used music in order to accomplish it.

Voutsinas's directing, like Volanakis's, created an alternate world and engaged in it the spectators. He focused on the development of the characters and their relationships. He explained their reactions according to their psychological condition, aiming to present a production engaged with issues concerning the contemporary human being such as Electra's isolation and destruction due to her anger. Therefore, he proposed that Electra's inescapable ruin stemmed from herself. This proposition empowered the fact that Electra was responsible for her condition and, simultaneously, weakened the sense of helplessness provoked by external intervention, divine or human. Voutsinas's concept of the responsibility of the tragic hero made the production contemporary and innovative because it placed the individuals at the centre of his work and suggested their accountability for their actions. Furthermore, his provocative and groundbreaking ideas regarding the plays and their mounting, and his tendency to challenge all preceding, consolidated standpoints, altered the way tragedy was presented. Voutsinas's productions opened the path to directors such as Mihail Marmarinos, who appropriated, fragmented and adapted ancient tragedy, and whose work will be reviewed in the next chapter.

## **5.6 *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Lydia Koniordou at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1996**

In 1981, when the socialist party came to power, the National Theatre underwent a transformation. Merkouri opened the doors of the company to established directors such as Volanakis and Mihailidis, the founder of the Anoihto Theatro, as well as young and new directors such as Margaritis, all of whom changed the National Theatre's attitude towards ancient tragedy. Nonetheless, until 1990, the National continued to present productions by Minotis, whose directorial view towards tragedy had not changed. Thus the National Theatre, on the one hand, preserved its tradition, and, on the other, it incorporated directors who had made their presence felt in the field of ancient Greek tragedy production. Their presence transformed the whole field of Greek tragedy because representatives of dominant positions within it, who had never directed in the National Theatre before, became a part of the status quo represented by the National. Hence, the National legitimised the dominant currents of the Greek theatre field. Therefore, it was expected that Lydia Koniordou's 1996 *Electra*, which combined in the most creative, insightful and sensitive way the National Theatre's and Rontiris's tradition with Koun's, was presented at the National.

Koniordou studied English Literature at the University of Athens and trained at the National Theatre's Drama School. Soon after she graduated in 1975, she worked with Aspasia Papathanasiou (*The Suppliants*, 1977) and Minotis (*The Phoenician Women*, 1978). Then, she went to the Theatro Technis and worked, for nine years, with Koun. There she worked in productions of

contemporary plays as well as tragedies and played Clytemnestra in the 1984 *Electra*, reviewed in the previous chapter of this thesis. Thus, on the one hand, she had her initial training in the text-based school of the National Theatre and, on the other, she developed as an actress next to Koun, the master of emotional development and physical acting. Thereof, because of her profound knowledge of both acting schools, she became an amalgam of the different approaches.

In 1988, she was Electra in Euripides's *Electra* at the Municipal Theatre of Larisa (Δημοτικό Περιφερειακό Θέατρο Λάρισας – also known as the Thessalic Theatre (Θεσσαλικό Θέατρο)) directed by Kostas Tsianos. This *Electra* was an insightful production that utilised the Modern Greek tradition of traditional costumes of the Greek provinces, circular folklore dances, demotic poetry and demotic music. Demotic music is the name of the anonymous music of the popular musicians living in the provinces of Greece, bequeathed to contemporary Greeks from generation to generation. Tsianos explicitly linked all the above elements with ancient tragedy, developing Koun's appropriation of popular rites and rituals, while approaching the text with devotion, creating a well-balanced outcome. Thus he masterfully combined the two major Greek acting schools. However, this production would not have been possible if Koniordou had not participated in it. In Koniordou, Tsianos not only found a powerful actress whose acting expressed on the stage the equilibrium between the two schools, but also a collaborator who supported, complemented and inspired his directorial concept. Similarly, Koniordou's approach to tragedy was defined by her collaboration with Tsianos because

she was able to put to use her acquired knowledge of the two schools in a well-balanced and successful production.

In her 1996 production, Koniordou, who directed and played the leading part, created a performance that was inspired by the contemporary culture of the Greek villages and provinces. She also respected the tradition of the field of tragedy and made a production that spoke directly to the Greek spectator.

The following summarised her viewpoint:

All my efforts these past years that I have been probing into ancient tragedy focused on ... how we would be able to speak in a contemporary language about things that are archetypical, ancient, interwoven with human existence and which are ideally expressed, diachronically and diatopically, in ancient tragedy. We use the experience of the past respecting the previous generations' accomplishments, we keep what we think is important in relation to the essence of tragedy ... Finally, we investigate our own living tradition, a precious experience I obtained in the Thessalic Theatre and also next to Karolos Koun, because we believe that our tradition maintains a wisdom of the past in wise and concentrated forms of expression such as dances, rituals, gestures or music (Rallis, 27 October 1996).

Koniordou explained that she was looking for a 'language' that had to be used in order to express the archetypical characters and myths of tragedy. She used the word 'language' in its literary as well as in its metaphorical sense, addressing the choices she had to make about directing, acting and set design. She explicitly acknowledged that she had to respect 'the previous generations' accomplishments', namely, Rontiris's and the National's legacy, while she also used Koun's teaching in which she was immersed and her acquired knowledge as an important contributor to the 1988 production of the Thessalic Theatre. It is essential to investigate what she kept from every master and how she put together her production.

The sets and costumes were designed by Dionisis Fotopoulos, the famous artist and the set and costume designer of Volanakis's *Electra*. Fotopoulos created an open set in the Epidaurus orchestra. The entire orchestra was covered with light yellow sailcloth the colour of straw. The round orchestra was reminiscent of a threshing floor. Around it there were a few branches struck into the ground. At the centre of the orchestra there was a large, round, grey pan filled with water. This pan signified an altar around which the action revolved, as if this altar gave power to the characters of the play and as if the play existed because of it. It gave an eerie, mysterious and ceremonial quality to the production. Orestes dipped his entire head in the water of the pan before going to visit his father's grave, and it was lit from the inside when Clytemnestra prayed and gave her offerings over it and when Electra mourned before it. Overall, the set was very simple, effective and provided an open space in which the figures of the characters stood out, moved freely and defined their relationships.

Fotopoulos dressed the actors in clothes inspired by the Greek folk tradition. The Pedagogue was dressed like a Greek shepherd with light beige trousers, a white shirt with a black belt and a cape. Orestes and Pylades had long, beige overcoats and white trousers with black belts and their chests were bare, a mixture of shepherds' and warriors' clothes, depicting their hidden identities. Chrysothemis's light pink dress, simple light purple overdress and long, golden beige shawl, referred to the simple woman of the people, who was not ready to take action. Clytemnestra had a straight, unadorned long, velvet, dark purple dress and a long silk red-mauve cloak that trailed on the ground. Her costume was that of an older woman's, while Aegisthus's black

trousers, leather vest, leather armbands, black boots and purple cloak juxtaposed the age difference between an ill-matched, illegitimate couple. Finally, Electra was dressed in a black dress, a simple long black overdress and a black shawl manifesting her mourning and her neglect of her external appearance. Her long black hair was tied at the back of her head.

The members of the Chorus had their hair tied back and wore white stockings, simple midi dresses and scarves. There were slight differences in their décolletages, but, overall, their costumes were identical. Koniordou did not



34. *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Lydia Koniordou at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1996 – Electra and the Chorus

adopt Koun's concept of the Chorus's multivocality, as can be immediately detected by their indistinguishable costumes. She regarded the Chorus as a unified group, who moved and spoke together. Her approach as regards the Chorus was very close to that of Rontiris. Therefore, the Chorus followed a



precise choreography, formed symmetrical patterns and executed identical movements (image 34). However, as was ascertained in the third chapter of this thesis, Rontiris's Choruses did not actually dance, although their movements were suggestive of the circular Greek folk dances.

Conversely, the Chorus in Koniordou's production actually danced those circular dances. Koniordou developed Rontiris's conceptualisation and pushed it further in that she used traditional folk dancing in order to invoke emotion and engage the audience. Her appropriation of folk dances was inspired by Koun's appropriation of rituals and rites such as the *Anastenaria*. Koun used those rites in his effort to make the audience become aware of a living common tradition that could evoke powerful memories and emotions. Similarly, Koniordou used folk dancing the way that Koun used popular rituals, aiming to establish a connection with the audience and communicate the powerful emotions that tragedy could provoke. Hence, she managed to combine the two masters' ideas by creating a unified group that consisted of actresses who expressed unity, but also individuality, when the Chorus members spoke independently.

The way that Koniordou handled the Chorus clearly signified that tragedy was a distinct theatrical genre, and that what was occurring on the stage was a ritual. For a start the Chorus was present on the stage from the beginning of the play until the end, giving the impression that its members were taking part in a ceremony. Further, it was distinguished by the way that it stood, danced or sang in relation to the ongoing action. Thus it encircled Electra with homogenous, rhythmical movements during her lamentation, or executed

deliberate reactions. The sense of the ritual was also fortified by the opening of the performance and the procession of actors and musicians, who entered the stage and took their position: the members of the Chorus at the top of the orchestra divided into two semi-Choruses with their backs to the audience; the characters of the play backstage; and the musicians at stage right. Moreover, all the actors, except Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, were barefoot. This was not only a costume design choice, but also an acting choice. The actors became participants in a ritual where their bare feet were in direct contact with the ground – Mother Earth, which gave life to the figures of the tragedy. Koniordou insisted on training and acting barefoot because it gave the actor a direct sensation of the physical surroundings.<sup>12</sup>

Koniordou's production contained very few naturalistic elements. The juxtaposition of all the characters acquired a ceremonial quality, an importance that was grave and went beyond the characters on the stage, giving them a grand dimension that transcended their human quality. This was a directing guideline that was followed by all the actors of the production. The precise and large movements used by the actors clearly signified that they were participating in a ceremony. The proxemic disposition between them was arranged in such a way that the actors seldom approached or touched each other, except in the scene of the recognition of Orestes by Electra. Thus the distance made the characters seem grand and detached. However, there was neither pomposity nor grandiloquence in the speech, which allowed directness. The characters' imposing movements were driven by the magnitude and potency of their emotions. Koniordou was inspired by the directness and force of contemporary Greek rituals to create a production that

was powerful. This power did not come from the use of startling effects, but from the range and depth of the characters' emotional expression.

Music played a central part in this production. Takis Farazis composed music inspired by the Greek folk tradition, using traditional Greek musical instruments such as pipes, bagpipes and drums. The musicians led the procession at the beginning of the play and were on stage during the entire performance, thus becoming an inherent part of the ongoing action. The music was used in such a way that it defined and guided the development of the plot. For example, it evoked and punctuated Electra's movement during the opening scene and it accompanied Clytemnestra's prayer. The chorales comprised elements of the Greek Orthodox Mass and popular folk songs, hence, creating sounds familiar to a Greek audience. The music also contributed to the fast pace of the production. Koniordou gave it a fast tempo because she wanted to draw attention to the development of the plot. Therefore, the ceremonial quality and the ritualistic constituents of the production were succinct, allowed the audience to be emotionally carried away by them, while keeping their focus on the storyline. The fast pace of the production, as well as the allusion to traditional music and dance, made the production engaging and readily accessible to the audience.

Another asset of the production was Papathanasiou. This was the first and last time that Papathanasiou collaborated with the National Theatre, during her long and important career. As has been noted in the third chapter of this thesis, she had already incorporated Koun's teachings in her work. Thus she and Koniordou had a common ground on which to work, and Papathanasiou

easily expressed Koniordou's concept of the play through her acting. Koniordou referred to Papathanasiou as her teacher (Sariyiannis, 30 May 1996). She had explicitly admitted that her work with Papathanasiou, when she was a young actress, had advanced her perception of ancient tragedy, (ibid.), that is to say, that it had broadened her concept regarding the acting of tragedy during a period when she was evolving as an actress because



35. Lydia Koniordou as Electra and Aspasia Papathanasiou as Clytemnestra in *Electra* by the National Theatre directed by Lydia Koniordou at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1996

Papathanasiou used Koun's teaching, even though she was an emblem of the Rontirian acting school. Thus Papathanasiou had initiated Koniordou to ancient tragedy and paved the way for her future development. In the 1996 production, both actresses combined Rontiris's imposing, text-based acting

with Koun's emotional truth and physicality, and found the golden mean between the two schools.

Koniordou, as noted above, also played Electra. She had a strong and powerful voice, which she could nuance and project with great ease. She was able to start a sentence in a low tone and steadily reach a well-calculated outburst, managing to prepare and surprise the audience, at the same time: prepare it so that the outburst did not appear out of place, and surprise it because the tame beginning did not predict a fierce ending. This was possible because of the importance that she granted to music when she structured her part, as was evident by her effortless slide from one tone to another, and the use of music during the whole play. This continuity offered support when it complemented a character's emotional condition or punctuated an exceptional moment.

Koniordou also used music to compose her part physically. Her body had a rhythmicity that was calculated and precise, while expressing extreme emotions such as Electra's rage towards her mother, or devastation when she heard of her brother's death. Her stance appeared Doric and effortless, yet, it was grand and imposing. Her personal training as an actress, which combined Tai Chi and text-based exercises, as well as speech and pronunciation training, gave her the ability to appear impressive and simple, while maintaining a relaxation that made everything seem easy.<sup>13</sup> During the lamentation scene, she held the urn close to her abdomen and womb; she kneeled next to the altar; and then, at the end, she stood up, unmoved staring into the distance. Her body articulated her immovable physical and moral

position and expressed her stubbornness and determination. Her immaculate pronunciation and clear speech verbalised the psychological development and emotional range of a dominating, enraged and devastated Electra.

Koniordou, who after Paxinou and Papathanasiou, can be considered the next great Greek tragedian, devoted her career to ancient Greek tragedy as an actress as well as a director. Since her 1988 collaboration with Tsianos and her first directing of tragedy in 1996, she acted and directed tragedies at the National Theatre, with Municipal Theatres and collaborated as an actress with international directors such as Anatoly Vassiliev, exploring tragedy's staging possibilities, while always maintaining an equilibrium between the text and physicality. The success of her productions and her talent as an actress and a director, have won her a dominant position within the field of ancient tragedy. Finally, the seminars she conducts on ancient tragedy at the DESMI Centre for the Ancient Greek Drama – Research and Practical Applications, have initiated a large number of Greek actors in her concept regarding the combination of the two schools and the acting of tragedy.

In summary, the six productions reviewed in this chapter created new approaches stemming from the two dominant acting schools of the Greek theatre. Evangelatos formed an acting school that viewed the text through the influence of nineteenth- and twentieth-century dramas. Volanakis created an approach that strengthened the mythical and unfamiliar world of tragedy, while allowing his text-trained actors complete freedom. Margaritis focused on the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of directing and acting. Voutsinas insisted on the characters development and involvement with the plot, aiming

to construct a provoking, engaging production. Koniordou, for her part, established a strong link with the contemporary Greek tradition in order to unleash the powerful emotions that tragedy's evoked. Overall, together, they formulated a diverse field that was ready to receive the contributions of future directors.

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<sup>1</sup> In Modern Greek the declension 'άνακτας' instead of 'άναξ' and 'Δίας' instead of 'Διός' would be used.

<sup>2</sup> Evangelatos put the word 'right' in inverted commas in his text.

<sup>3</sup> This comes from personal experience of the author who was a student of Maria Hors at the National's Drama School until 1993, and worked with her in one production in 1995.

<sup>4</sup> The Theatro tis Anoixis acquired a permanent venue during the 1990s.

<sup>5</sup> The translation from the Greek book is mine.

<sup>6</sup> The translation of Margaritis's text is taken from the bilingual programme of the production.

<sup>7</sup> The translation and structure is taken from the bilingual programme of the production.

<sup>8</sup> The author of this thesis participated in the 1995 reprise of the performance, which toured Russia, China and Albania.

<sup>9</sup> She did not participate in six (Stanislav Stratiev – *The Suede Jacket*, Alexandrou Rizou Ragkavi – *Koutrouli's Wedding*, Dimitrios Moshou – *Neera*, Stanislav Stratiev – *The Roman Bath*, Aristophanes – *Clouds* and Unknow's – *Digenis Akritas*) of the thirty six productions presented by the Anphi-theatre until 1991.

<sup>10</sup> This comes from the author's experience.

<sup>11</sup> This also comes from personal knowledge of the author, who followed some of Voutsinas's rehearsals of the 1987 production of *The Trojan Women*.

<sup>12</sup> This comes from the author's knowledge, who trained with Koniordou at the National Theatre's Drama School.

<sup>13</sup> The knowledge concerning Koniordou's training comes from personal experience: the author, who followed Koniordou's classes when Koniordou taught at the Drama School of the National Theatre.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Alternate perspectives. Productions of *Electra*: 1983-1998.

#### The Attis Theatre

Major transformations took place in the field of ancient drama after the 1980s and until the end of the twentieth century. First, the Epidaurus Festival opened its gates to important Greek film directors such as Mihalis Kakoyiannis (1983) and foreign directors such as Robert Sturua (1987), who presented productions of *Electra* starring the internationally acclaimed actress, Irene Pappas, and the Greek film actress, Jenny Karezi. Second, productions of ancient Greek tragedy were presented in indoor venues and were successful artistically as well as financially. Thus the sole use of open-air theatres, a dominating standpoint of the field of ancient drama, was modified. Marietta Rialdi's 1985 production of *Electra* in the old ice factory represented the tendency to appropriate alternative spaces for theatre productions, and Nikos Diamantis's 1996 *Electra*, in his small fringe theatre, testified to the fact that tragedy became part of the winter, indoor theatres' repertoire. Moreover, Mihail Marmarinos's 1998 *Electra*, signalled the incorporation of experimental, progressive companies in the programme of the Epidaurus Festival. Finally, this chapter will review the contribution of Theodoros Terzopoulos to the transformation of the field of ancient drama. Terzopoulos presented innovative and groundbreaking productions and approached tragedy like no other director in Greece, in the past or the present. For this reason, an account of his work and acting method has to be incorporated in this thesis, even though he had not directed an *Electra* yet. However, during his interview with the



author of this thesis, Terzopoulos admitted that he was planning to direct the play in the following years (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009).

## **6.1 Productions of *Electra***

### **6.1.1 *Electra* by Mihalis Kakoyiannis at the Cyprus Theatre Organisation, 1983**

In the course of time, as more and more companies started to work on ancient tragedy, the Epidaurus Festival, in close contact with the developments in the field of ancient drama, included more companies in its programme. Cyprus's proximity to Greece, linguistically, culturally and ethnically, and the Greek state's political guideline to provide cultural and educational assistance to Cyprus, especially after the 1973 Turkish invasion, led the Cyprus Theatre Organisation (Θεατρικός Οργανισμός Κύπρου) to be incorporated in the Epidaurus Festival in 1980. The Cyprus Theatre Organisation was the first company, after the three major Greek companies (National Theatre, State Theatre of Northern Greece and Teatro Technis), to take part in the Festival in 1980, along with Evangelatos's company, Amphi-theatre, as observed in the previous chapter. In the 1983 *Electra*, the Greek-Cypriot international film director, Mihalis Kakoyiannis, joined forces with the world-acclaimed Greek actress, Irene Pappas, and the famous Greek music composer, Vangelis Papathanasiou, who had just won an Oscar the previous year. The translation was carried out by the successful and accredited author and psychiatrist, Yorgos Himonas, whose work was reviewed in the fourth chapter of this thesis. The set and costumes were designed by the sculptor Takis (Vasilakis)

and the painter Marina Karela, who had both studied, worked and lived abroad.

The Cypriot company's goal, in its third participation at the Festival, was to establish a powerful position within the field of ancient drama by employing internationally acknowledged artists, since the two productions that the company had presented in the Festival the past three years had not been considered extremely successful, either commercially or artistically.<sup>1</sup> The company introduced to the Festival a practice that would be adopted in the following years, that is, the recruitment of artists acclaimed in other artistic fields such as the cinematographic field for Mihalis Kakoyiannis, in order to fortify and establish a position within the Festival and the field of ancient tragedy. This practice was the exact opposite of what was customary until then, namely, the consecration and acknowledgement of artists by their participation in the Festival and their involvement with ancient drama. Thus a reciprocal relationship was established during which the famous artists involved in the productions offered the symbolic cultural capital of their name to the Festival, and their participation in the Festival strengthened their symbolic cultural capital for their career.

Kakoyiannis was born in Cyprus, studied Theatre in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, and worked at the BBC Radio and in the theatre as an actor and director from 1945 until 1951. He came to Greece in 1953 and started working in the cinema. He directed successful Greek films such as *Κυριακάτικο Ξύπνημα* (*Morning Awakening*) and *Στέλλα* (*Stella*) starring important Greek actresses Elli Labeti in the first and Melina Merkouri in the

second. In 1961, he directed the film *Electra* by Euripides with Pappas in the title role, followed by *The Trojan Women* (1971) and *Iphigenia* (1974). He was hired at the National by Alexis Minotis in 1974, where he directed, among other plays, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. He also directed ancient Greek tragedies in France (*The Trojan Women*, 1965) and the United States (*Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1968 and *Bacchae*, 1981). *Electra* was his first attempt at Greek tragedy for the Greek stage, in Greek, in an open-air ancient theatre.

Kakoyiannis claimed that the country or language in which a play was performed was not instrumental in a production (Tsagarousianos, 19 October 1986). This claim clearly separated him from all other directors who had worked on tragedy in Greece and have been reviewed in the previous chapters of this thesis such as Dimitris Rontiris, Karolos Koun and Minos Volanakis, who considered language and the ancient theatres an important parameter in their work. His notion on presenting a production was poles apart from the notion that every director had had until then. Hence, while Greek directors who worked on tragedy in Greece took into consideration the legacy of their predecessors, Kakoyiannis did not refer to this tradition. This can be easily understood because Kakoyiannis did not study in Greece and was not part of the existing theatrical field, as he chiefly worked in the cinema. Moreover, he segregated himself from this field, when he claimed that he wanted his production to be free of 'prejudices, schematic arbitrariness and museum references' (*Electra*, 1983).

Kakoyiannis argued that 'theatre speech' was always intended for the stage and this 'speech' had to become 'action' because a play was not intended to be read (ibid.). Consequently, a director's goal was to present each play as a set of actions, and 'to overwhelm the spectators', making them feel as if they saw the play for the first time. This would be accomplished 'by inventing the truth and expressing it through his living material', his actors and collaborators (ibid.). He called 'truth' a subjective viewpoint triggered by his perception of the author's intention, and expressed his aim to present the play 'directly, freely' and with 'a rightful respect' (ibid.). He aimed at presenting a production that would engage contemporary spectators through the 'action' on the stage. He intended for his production, as he intended for his films, to acquire a universal quality (Tsagarousianos, 19 October 1986). By 'universal', Kakoyiannis meant the power for his work to speak to the soul of his audience and to be understood beyond a specific culture, irrespective of the exoteric elements such as costumes, sets and make-up. Or, as Maria Shevtsova noted, when speaking of Peter Brook, who believed that 'when theatre is performed it comes from, and speaks to, universally shared and universally understood signs, the signs of our common humanity' (Shevtsova 1993: 28). Thus Kakoyiannis's production focused on the connection between the intrinsic meaning of the drama and the soul of the spectator (ibid.) because he considered that *Electra* was a contemporary play (Lignadis, 29 June 1983) that drew attention to human development and happiness and dignity and the quest for truth (*Electra*, 1983).

Kakoyiannis used Himonas's new translation, which was poetic, simple and contemporary. Himonas's text offered him a direct medium of communication

with the audience, on which he based a symbolic and abstract *Electra*. Takis's metallic set for the production was suggestive and abstractive. It comprised four tall rectangular pieces that were placed at the centre of the edge of the orchestra creating an opening that alluded to a gate of a palace or a tomb;



36. *Electra* by the Cyprus Theatre Organisation directed by Mihalis Kakoyiannis at the Epidaurus Theatre, 1983 – The Chorus. View of the set

three tall and thin spiral totems, stage right, that symbolised the triangles of the play (Clytemnestra – Agamemnon – Aegisthus, Clytemnestra – Electra – Orestes, Electra – Chrysothemis – Orestes and Pedagogue – Orestes – Pylades); and two spheres, a big and a smaller one, stage centre left, that referred to the world and femininity (image 36). It was an imposing set that aimed to engage the spectator on a metaphysical and symbolic level, the latter implied by the triangles and the spheres.

Within Takis's simple and bare set, Karela's costumes were displayed to full advantage. The costumes were a well-calculated blend of oriental, Renaissance and ancient Greek influences. In the opening scene of the production, Orestes, Pylades and the Pedagogue wore overcoats that were a mixture of Samurai dresses and tunics. The three men wore white parallelogram garments tailored to broaden their shoulders, which covered their entire bodies and trailed on the floor. Their presence on the stage gave the impression that something unnatural was occurring. This sense was strengthened by the evocative music and the abstract set, thus introducing the spectator to a different world. In their second appearance, Orestes and Pylades took off their overcoats and revealed a mixture of Japanese warrior-like dress and ancient Greek costumes that left their legs and hands bare, allowing them to take action quickly. Chrysothemis wore a long white dress and a cape, and her long hair fell over her shoulders. Clytemnestra had an imposing long and dark costume with red details, an elaborated bodice and a train. She wore a big tall and round decorated hennin. As the director intended to indicate, the women of the Chorus were servants to Clytemnestra, the Chorus members were dressed with similar costumes and hats, which

were individually designed. Electra stood out. She was barefoot, wearing a long, bulky black dress with slits that revealed her long legs when she moved.

The costumes were syntheses of Elizabethan and Japanese dresses, yet maintained the sense of the long ancient Greek tunics. Karela balanced a blend that transcended cultures and created a sense of common, universal identity. Moreover, the costumes aimed to accentuate grandeur, and give the actors an imposing air. Due to their volume and length, the costumes forced the actors to alter their movement, making it more supple and suave. Minas Hristidis's, the significant theatre critic and former actor of the Theatro Technis, noted that the costumes were so voluminous that they 'called for' the use of masks and that 'the actors' and actresses' little human heads' seemed 'funny' in relation to the big costumes (Hristidis, 28 June 1983). Hristidis alluded to a mask that would enlarge the human faces and would make the actors' faces seem as grand as their costumes.

Acting, costumes and masks have a reciprocal relationship. Big costumes oblige actors to change the way they move on stage and masks usually require an enlarged, physical way of acting. David Wiles, when discussing the force of mask, quotes Hugo Ball's account of the Dadaists' mask, where Ball observed the way that the masks altered their expression: 'Not only did the mask immediately call for a costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture, bordering on madness' (cited in Wiles, 2007: 78). The use of the verb 'call for' by both Hristidis and Ball clearly delineates the need for a specific kind of acting when large costumes or masks are used. This was the case when the actors of Margaritis 1984 *Electra* used masks.





37. *Electra* by the Cyprus Theatre Organisation directed by Mihalis Kakoyiannis at the Epidaurus Theatre, 1983 – Irene Pappas as Electra and Annita Santorinaiou as Chrysothemis

Kakoyiannis did not use masks. He did not even have his actors use make-up as a mask, as Koun had done. He wanted the faces of his actors to be natural, and thus he allowed the spectators to come closer to the characters and identify with them, something that would have been impossible if the faces of the actors had seemed unfamiliar.

Kakoyiannis intended to create a potent production that would engage the audience. The insightful and important theatre studies expert and theatre critic, Tasos Lignadis, noted that Kakoyiannis's directing was direct, mature and followed a clear guideline from the beginning until the end (Lignadis, 29 June 1983). However, he claimed that Kakoyiannis's production was intended for an indoor venue, a fact that can be easily assumed from Kakoyiannis's

previous works and his intention to ignore the rules of the open-air theatre.

This intention influenced the execution of the performance in the grand, open-air theatre of Epidaurus. Lignadis also argued:

It is obvious that the director's start point is the indoor theatre and that factor, inevitably, leads him to see tragedy as a psychological drama both in its interpretation and its form (ibid.).

This meant that Kakoyiannis focused mostly on the psychological development of the characters.

His directing also deprived the Chorus from taking on dramaturgical and morphological functions such as acting as the objectified observant of the action or as the vehicle of common sense. The members of the Chorus appeared to be servants to Clytemnestra. Overall, he conceived the Chorus as static. The women of the Chorus did not dance. They did not sing. Vangelis Papathanasiou's electronic short musical phrases underlined their words and they spoke their lines independently. The members of the Chorus were well-trained, moved supplely and were choreographed in such a way that they managed to walk and form symmetrical patterns effortlessly, without the audience understanding their intention before the positions were taken. The fact that the Chorus took symmetrical positions in the orchestra did not mean that Kakoyiannis's directing of the Chorus's movement was influenced by the Rontirian concept. The exoteric form at very few instances alluded to Rontiris's notion. However, the overall formation, speech and conceptualisation of the Chorus stood poles apart from the Rontirian guideline. The Chorus of the production not only lacked the mystical and ceremonial qualities of the Rontirian Choruses, but, as Lignadis claimed, Kakoyiannis managed to 'morphologically level the Chorus' parts with the

episodes' (ibid.), making the Chorus members a group of servants who commented on the development of the plot. Lignadis argued:

The Chorus' parts, however, are not just another poetic kind, it is another dramatic genre. Their difference to the episodes provides to the spectator the delight of interchange. The mutilated Chorus of the C.T.O. did not dance or sing, it did not even move rhythmically. Vangelis Papathanasiou's electronic sounds, which worked like accompanying punctuation marks, enabled or were culpable for the Chorus's condition. ... this realistic walking around became dull (ibid.).

Kakoyiannis proposal of the Chorus was a contemporary, realistic approach.

The Chorus members, as their costumes suggested, were ladies-in-waiting who merely walked around the stage. Kakoyiannis's concept of the play did not focus on the Chorus; it focused on the development of the plot and accentuated the 'action' of the drama.

Moreover, Kakoyiannis, in order to bring out the horrifying elements of the play and emotionally engage the audience, brought onto the orchestra the slaughtering of Aegisthus by Orestes, a murder, which in the play, is executed backstage far away from the audience's gaze. The fact that he presented the murder on stage is representative of Kakoyiannis's concept of ancient tragedy. Kakoyiannis emphasised presenting 'action', such as the murder, on stage with the aim of impressing and engaging the audience.<sup>2</sup> Thus his *Electra* had its culmination in a violent, bloody murder scene. This clearly shifted the focus from the character of Electra and placed it on the 'action'. Finally, it broke a convention of ancient tragedy that chose not to have murders executed in front of the audience and disregarded the association of the house in Greek tragedy with death. This association, which was insightfully noted by Wiles (2000: 118), explicitly applies to the house of

Agamemnon, and Kakoyiannis weakened the ramifications that this association brought to the audience's mind.

Pappas's acting was simple. Her experience as a film actress made her speech direct, without pomposity. She presented an Electra who was psychologically wounded and weak. As Hristidis remarked, only to strengthen Lignadis's viewpoint regarding the psychological mounting of the play, tears did not stop pouring from Pappas's eyes and her acting inclined towards 'family drama' rather than towards tragedy. This constant crying, Hristidis argued, rendered Pappas's Electra a hurt daughter in a contemporary family drama (28 June 1983). However, her voice was powerful and her pronunciation impeccable. She projected the words so that they would be clearly heard. Moreover, her movement was grand and precise. She moved elegantly and when her movements were choreographed with those of the Chorus she occupied a central position in the space. For instance, in the Parodos, she would unceasingly move on the orchestra and the Chorus would revolve around her, changing positions according to her movement, creating a constant flux and placing her at the centre of the performance. Overall, her performance had the potency and volume that the vast theatre required, while maintaining the emotional psychological nuances that Kakoyiannis requested.

Kakoyiannis's production can be viewed as part of the current to introduce to the Epidaurus Festival established and acknowledged directors, actors, composer and designers of the theatrical, cinematic, musical, scenographic and visual fields. This participation highlighted a cultural tendency that mirrored the need to broaden and enrich the Festival; a propensity for

glamour; and an economic objective that aimed to bring more spectators to the theatre. During the 1980s, famous actors such as Alikì Vougiouklaki and Yiannis Voglis, and famous directors such as Luca Ronconi took part in the Epidaurus Festival. Similarly, the Karezi-Kazakos Company's *Electra* directed by the internationally acknowledged Georgian director, Robert Sturua, which will be reviewed in the next part of this chapter, falls into the same category.

### **6.1.2 *Electra* by the Karezi-Kazakos Company directed by Robert Sturua at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1987**

The Karezi-Kazakos Company was founded by the famous Greek cinema idol, Jenny Karezi, and her husband, Kostas Kazakos, a slightly less famous Greek cinema actor. As noted in the third chapter, this Company was part of the leading actors' companies that were successful due to the appreciation of the audience, 'which regarded theatregoing as ... part of the ritual of bourgeois life' (Mavromoustakos, 2005: 91.). During the 1980s, many popular, famous actors, such as Alikì Vougiouklaki and Nikos Kourkoulos, who were leading actors of commercial bourgeois companies, attempted to consecrate their careers by presenting Greek tragedies, a difficult genre performed by actors recognised 'by the autonomous self-sufficient world of 'art for art's sake'' (Bourdieu, 1993: 51). Thus they tried to turn 'the consecration bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers' into 'the recognition granted by the set of producers who produce for other producers' (ibid.: 50-51).

This consecration became possible during the 1980s because Greece was undergoing an infrastructural change. The coming to power of the socialist party of Andreas Papandreou in 1981 gave authority to the middle-class,

which had been marginalised, to take active part in the Greek government and decision-making process. There was 'the mood of the majority for 'change' that was

driven by the fact that the fall of the junta had not been accompanied in 1974 by the predominance of a new political formation and the exhibition of new powers, but rather by the assumption of power by the conservatives (Afentouli, 2003: 176).

The result of this need for change, which allowed the appearance of directors such as Yiannis Margaritis in the field of ancient tragedy, also granted the possibility to famous leading actors to redefine their position within the field and produce ancient tragedy performances at the Epidaurus Festival.

In 1951, Karezi was accepted at the National Theatre Drama School, where she studied alongside Angelos Terzakis and Dimitris Rontiris. Upon graduation, she was hired by the National Theatre and was given leading parts such as Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Cordelia in *King Lear*, playing alongside Alexis Minotis and Katina Paxinou. In 1955, she made her massively successful cinema debut and, until 1972, she starred in several movies of the Greek cinema that became classic and she became one of the most famous screen idols. She abandoned the classical repertoire and acted contemporary Greek comedies and boulevard plays in commercial companies. During the junta, she married Kazakos, who was leftwing and is currently a member of the Parliament for the Greek Communist Party. In 1973, a year before the junta fell, they produced the political and socially oriented production of *Our Big Circus (Το Μεγάλο μας Τσίρκο)* by Iakovos Kampanelis. However, the majority of the company's productions were light comedies and dramas. It was not until the 1980s and the change of the political scenery that the company

tried to redefine its position by presenting Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*.

Karezi's first attempt at ancient tragedy was in 1985. The company presented *Medea* directed by Volanakis, a production included in the Epidaurus Festival the next year. During the winter season 1986-1987, the company collaborated with Robert Sturua, and, in the summer of 1987, it presented *Electra* at the Epidaurus Festival under his direction. Sturua began his career at the Shota Rustaveli Theatre, and was acknowledged world wide for his masterful interpretation of Shakespeare's plays, including *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. This was the first time that he had staged ancient tragedy.

Sturua wanted to give to the production political implications and to make clear to audiences that they were watching a performance. Thus the production started with all the actors entering the stage, looking directly at the audience before taking their places: the actors who played the parts left the stage and the members of the Chorus were integrated into the set. Sturua appropriated Brecht's technique of narrating what was going to happen next by making the audience become aware that they were watching a performance. He intended the spectators to become aware of the fact that they were watching a production and he tried, from the start, to give the audience the sense of emotional detachment acquired when a person is conscious that she/he is following a storyline.

The set was created by George Ziakas, who designed a large and wide triangle that framed the palace gate. The entire set and Epidaurus orchestra was covered by a black fabric that indicated mourning and a sense of

mystification. Thus the set became a symbol of dark authority, a valid reference of a political production that aimed to stress that the rulers are dark and evil and that they have unjustified power over people. Moreover, within the set was hidden the axe with which the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus were executed, implying that the system created the instruments of its own destruction. Finally, the black fabric covering the orchestra had spiral printing of the words of the text, indicating that this is one more reading of Sophocles's text.

Within this dark, ominous and symbolic set, every character except Electra stood out dressed in bright, dazzling and striking white, silver and gold colours. Thus every figure that served the ruling system was similarly dressed, and contrasted with the black figure of Electra. Sturua also emphasised his political critique using Ziakas's costumes. He mocked and degraded the fallen ruler, Aegisthus, who, moments before his death, lost his shoe, thereby revealing a ridiculous, bright turquoise sock. In this production, even Orestes, who came as Electra's rescuer, was clearly part of the ruling system and arrived to replace the existing ruler. That is why, at the end, when the murders were committed, Electra stood alone and unjustified.

When the production started, the members of the Chorus were parts of the set, as noted above. During the parodos, they slowly awoke, becoming conscious of their bodies and of their position within the space. They did not sing or dance. They recited their lines either independently or unanimously. As the performance developed, they did not represent a specific, homogenous class of citizens. They interchanged identities. The women of





38. *Electra* by the Karezi-Kazakos Company directed by Robert Sturua at the Theatre of Epidaurus – Jenny Karezi as Electra and the Chorus

the Chorus changed costumes and became either members of the ruling class (image 38) or maidens of honour or servants. The fact that the Chorus was born from the set, a dark symbol of power, and that they took interchanging identities, meant that the Chorus represented the multilayered political strata of a society Sturua was criticising. This society created and sustained its own monsters.

Georgy Alexidze's choreography brought out the Chorus's plasticity and expressiveness. The women of the Chorus woke up and became aware of the possibilities of their bodies. They stretched their arms and legs, bent their knees and flexed their torsos. They reacted physically by sudden, precise and calculated movements to the development of the plot. These movements

were fortified by Giya Kancheli's sharp music, which combined short musical phrases of stringed instruments, piano and church bells. The internationally acclaimed Georgian composer also incorporated thunder and sounds of an imminent thunderstorm in his music, referring to the cosmic disruption that this society has caused. During the parodos, his music sounded like a volley of bullets that shot at, and tortured, Electra and the Chorus. Then, before Chrysothemis's entrance, the Chorus members changed identities, now appearing as spoiled ladies of the ruling elite. Kancheli's jazzy music and the Chorus's elegant movements were in sharp contrast with Electra's appearance and disposition. This contrast strengthened Sturua's political intention, which presented Electra as a socially marginalised heroine, who was fighting against the dark rule of her mother and Aegisthus and was determined to restore social justice by the return of her brother.

Karezi's black, worn-out long dress, her short hair and her bare feet created an image of a tormented and neglected Electra. Her emotions were expressed by her flexible body and her plastic, simple and precise movements. She stood still, paused and then attacked. In her first appearance on the stage, she was concealed under a black fabric, identical to the one covering the set. She crawled under it moving towards the centre of the stage. She seemed to be a living entity created by this dark and obscure construction, just like the members of the Chorus.

Her raucous, deep, powerful voice and her intonations gave the impression of a stubborn, offensive, yet tortured human being. She recited simply. Like



39. Jenny Karezi as Electra in the 1987 production of *Electra* directed by Robert Sturua by the Karezi-Kazakos Company

Pappas, her career as a film actress made her vocal and physical expressions concrete and effortless. Her studies with Rontiris, in the National's Drama School, helped her to give substance to the meaning of the text she was reciting. The words were pronounced immaculately and the text was understood clearly. It can be argued that, when she first opened her mouth, the timbre of her voice brought to mind, for Greek spectators, the light comedies and patriotic dramas in which she had starred for over three

decades. However, as the performance developed, spectators were captured by the concentration and strength of her acting.

Karezi's attempts at ancient tragedy did not grant her the consecration that she was looking for. Her past was extremely powerful and her films are still broadcast on Greek television weekly. Nonetheless, her work was favourably received by audiences, who crowded the theatre of Epidaurus, and the acknowledged critic Hristidis (Hristidis, 20 July 1987). By contrast, the majority of the critics, notably Yiannis Varveris (Varveris, 1991: 211-213) and Theodoros Kritikos (Kritikos, 20 July 1987) opposed her work. Similarly, Sturua, like Ronconi, was not part of the Greek theatrical tradition. He represented those foreign directors, who worked with Greek actors and approached Greek tragedy using a foreign theatrical tradition. His collaboration with Karezi established a precedent, paving the way for collaborations with important foreign directors such as Mattias Langhoff and Anatoly Vassiliev in the *Bacchae* and *Medea*.

### **6.1.3 *Electra* by the Peiramatiko Theatro tis Polis directed by Marietta Rialdi at the Fix Ice Factory, 1985**

The actress, director and author, Marietta Rialdi, trained at both the Stavrakou and the Ioannidis Drama Schools. There she studied under important and talented actors such as Andreas Filippidis and Mihalis Bouhlis, who came from the National Theatre, and Lykourgos Kallergis and Giorgos Thoedosiadis, who had trained alongside Koun. She was, therefore, initiated in the methods of both Greek acting schools. She completed her three-year acting training while she was finishing her high school degree, and, at the age

of eighteen, she started working in the theatre. Three years later, in 1962, dissatisfied with the existing theatrical conditions she founded the Peiramatiko Theatro tis Polis (Πειραματικό Θέατρο της Πόλης – interview with Rialdi, 17 May 2006).

The motto of the company was: ‘a theatre by young people for young people’ (ibid.). The company initially occupied a position of autonomy and low degree of consecration within the Greek theatre field, to use Bourdieu’s notion to indicate that, when a young artist enters a cultural field, she/he occupies a position that is not recognized and powerful (Bourdieu, 1993: 48). The company’s position was shaped in line with the company’s disposition, that is, its aim to address young people and provide a company that would experiment with theatre. It was also economically dominated in relation to the structure of the theatrical field because it did not represent the dominant currents within the field, namely, bourgeois or commercial theatre. However, the company presented productions annually for three decades, and, gradually, received a degree of consecration, that is recognition in Bourdieu’s sense of the word, due to Rialdi’s and the company’s persistence in keeping principles such as the alternate interpretation of, and experimentation with, plays and texts in relation to staging, acting and set design (interview with Rialdi, 17 May 2006). After 1980, the company was acknowledged and was granted annual subsidies, providing Rialdi the means to fund her work and to continue to challenge the established theatrical forms.

Her 1985 production of *Electra*, which she directed and in which she performed the leading part, can be regarded as such a challenge. Rialdi

created a production that defied the governing rule of the field of ancient tragedy, which dictated that productions of ancient drama should be performed outdoors. She presented her work in an indoor space, an old, abandoned and empty beer ice factory. Henri Lefebvre argues that every society produces its own space, and constructs the triad perceived-conceived-lived that characterises this space. Perceived space, or what he calls 'spatial practice', refers to the way that social agents lead their life within the space; conceived, or 'representations of space', refers to the scientific conceptualisation or analysis of space; and lived, or 'representational' space, refers to the way space embodies 'complex symbolisms', coded or not, as interpreted and appropriated by the imagination (Lefebvre, 1991: 33, 38-40). This means that every society creates a space that people construct in order to live while they analyse it and imbue it with symbolism. In the same way, this factory was a social space produced at the beginning of the twentieth century, a period during which Greece was trying to catch up with the industrial and economic developments and address a shortage of light industry. It was constructed by a wealthy Greek, who was ultimately not able to maintain it. The businessman went bankrupt, the factory closed down and the building was confiscated by the State. The building remained closed for many years, and was first used as an acting space by Rialdi in the production of *Electra*.

At the time of Rialdi's production, the factory space had outlived its former purpose and social significance. Thus, Rialdi not only used an indoor space, but an appropriated one. Lefebvre's concept of 'appropriation', which he defines as a spatial practice in which nature has been modified in order to

satisfy and expand human needs and possibilities (ibid: 164-168), puts Rialdi's practice into perspective. Lefebvre argues:

Appropriation should not be confused with a practice which is closely related to it but still distinct, namely 'diversion' (détournement). An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the *raison d'être* which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one (ibid: 167).

Thus the old ice factory was transformed into a performance space, which inspired Rialdi. She claimed that she was looking for quite some time to find the appropriate space where she would be able to produce *Electra* (interview with Rialdi, 17 May 2006).

The social connotations embedded in the old, empty and abandoned space were apparent, as Rialdi and Simos Karafilis, the set designer, incorporated in the set the broken machines and half-torn walls. Rialdi brought forward the associations that this ruined factory communicated to the audience, parallelising the disruption of the space with the disorder in the palace of the Atrides. The space acquired a power of its own, dominating and guiding the production. Or, to use the words of the insightful critic, Lignadis:

The space seemed like an industrial... temple, of which the 'rites' have fallen into misuse and the entire attitude of the space brought to mind impressions of a monument. What I mean to say is that this dead plant automatically exercises a power over the spectator (Lignadis, 15 December 1985).

The indoor space defined the production. This was the primary reason why, when the production was presented in the open-air theatre of Herodus Atticus, it was a disaster (interview with Rialdi, 17 May 2006).

The space was oblong. It had pillars that surrounded the acting space and there were rows of seats that seated around three hundred spectators. There

was a balcony over the stage, where there was a golden, mortuary mask of Agamemnon, signalling his presence and symbolising Electra's and Orestes's need for revenge. Black curtains hung from the ceiling, revealing rather than concealing the half-torn walls of the factory, which appeared wounded. The red lights gave the impression that the entire set was bleeding. Lili Pezanou's dark and pleated costumes enabled actors to move like shadows within the grand space. Within this set, which gave the impression of a suffering, red and black organism, there was an old industrial scale, on which Electra leaned (image 40), a wooden bench and an old white stretcher, on which Electra entered the stage, making clear to the audience that she was ill and helpless.

There was also a dialectic relationship between the space, on the one hand, and the style of acting and directing, on the other. Rialdi noted that the actors could not act in a 'classic way' in that space (ibid.; Kagios, 17 November 1985). She used the term 'classic' to refer to the way that tragedy was performed in the big, open-air theatres, where the actor had to make an effort to project her/his voice in order to be heard. She explained that the distance between the actors on stage and between the spectators and the actors in the ice factory was smaller, enabling the actors to lower their voices, even to a whisper (interview with Rialdi, 17 May 2006). Moreover, the space dictated an exacting, precise, direct and austere acting approach, which complemented her concept regarding the production. She argued:

When a grave and grand disaster occurs, national or personal, at that point the doors close. No sounds, no tricks, no light atmosphere. That is when thick darkness comes, thick silences. If you are found in a hospital or a cemetery, then, your voice, your body, the way you walk changes. The environment also influences you (ibid.).



With these words, Rialdi aimed to define the reciprocal relationship between the space, the play and the actor. The space reflected the grave disaster that tormented Electra and, in turn, influenced her emotional expression.

Furthermore, the actors had to take in their surroundings and express them in their acting. The acting was simple and direct. Lignadis noted that the Rontirian training was apparent in Despina Nikolaidou, the Coryphaeus of the Chorus, 'who intoned and pronounced correctly', and that all the actors exposed emotional depth and development (15 December 1985).

Rialdi's warm and deep voice expressed a traumatised Electra. For Rialdi, Electra was at the edge of madness (interview with Rialdi, 17 May 2006). She did not speak rationally, and thus her speech was not directly addressed to anyone. Her voice floated, as if she were in a trance, in a detached environment. Yorgos Himonas's translation, which focused on darkness and death, assisted her intention. Only when Orestes appeared was she able to regain her sanity because he granted her wish to fulfil her desire. He was able to save her from her misery. Rialdi explained that her reference point for the torment that Electra was undergoing was the scandal at the Kostalexi, a small village outside Lamia, a town about two hundred kilometres from Athens (ibid.). During the Greek Civil War (1945-1949), Eleni from Kostalexi, a teenage girl from a nationalist family, had a sexual relationship with the village teacher, who was a communist. When her parents and three brothers found out, they locked her in a room in the basement, fed her through a hole and did not even allow her to go to the toilet. Twenty-nine years later the scandal was revealed. Eleni's story triggered Rialdi to present Electra like a slave, who was tortured and despised.



40. Marietta Rialdi as Electra in the 1985 production of *Electra* by the Peiramatiko Theatro tis Polis directed by Marietta Rialdi at the Fix ice factory

Electra curled and could not walk up straight. The instability of her emotional condition was apparent in her body. She was, momentarily, enraged and erect when she attacked her mother, but, when she was not aggressive, she was a physical wreck. Her body was undergoing such strain because of her mental and emotional exhaustion that at some point she tore the top of her dress and revealed her breast. Rialdi decided to employ this gesture in order to express the heroine's need to be freed, to unleash the pressure that was burning her (ibid.); this tearing of the clothes that confined her, enabled Electra to feel a sense of freedom, as she was not able to be freed by her mother and Aegisthus. Overall, her acting combined the physical expression of the emotional condition of her character with clear recitation and diction.

Although Electra's relationship with the Chorus was not direct, it was an extremely powerful relationship. The Chorus could not approach her because a person who succumbed to such enormous pain cannot be touched. The physical distance between the members of the Chorus and Electra

strengthened Electra's loneliness and signified their inability to help her. The women of the Chorus were kept at a distance, but they also had a strong emotional connection with Electra. They moved surreptitiously like shadows, sang dirges in low voices and repeated Electra's words, as if whatever happened to her was also happening to them. At the end of the production, after the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, they rolled up their sleeves and washed their hands in big, bronze pots, in order to be cleansed from the murder and continue with their new lives.

Similarly, Electra and Orestes also experienced catharsis because, for Rialdi, catharsis was accomplished when the tyrants were murdered (ibid.). In this human and tangible production, justice and catharsis were achieved when the malefactors paid with their existence for the wrongdoings of their lives. As Rialdi argued, 'we don't know what happens beyond this life, everything is paid during this one' (ibid.). The fact that the course of a person's life defined her/his end indicated that redemption was accomplished within the material world. Moreover, the notion of justice taken into a person's own hands made Electra and Orestes equal to gods in the sense that they fulfilled their desire for revenge and righteousness. Thus divine power was given to human hands. The absence of a god implied a sense of freedom because the individual was capable of deciding her/his own destiny. However, it also implied loneliness and isolation because the existence of a supernatural power was denied. This, combined with the secularity of the industrial environment, added a sense of cruelty, and resulted in a sharp and dark production.

Rialdi's *Electra*, presented in the ice factory, was the second production, after the 1977 production of Yiannis Tsarouhis's *The Trojan Women* in an old garage, to be presented in an indoor space. As has been noted, the use of an indoor space for the presentation of an ancient tragedy was rare, and it was linked with experimentations regarding an alternative gaze on the text within a confined and dominant space. However, after the middle of the 1990s, more subsidised, non-commercial companies included ancient tragedy in their repertoire and mounted tragedy productions in their permanent venues. The 1996 Semio's production of *Electra* is indicative of this practice.

#### **6.1.4 *Electra* by the Theatro Semio Company directed by Nikos**

##### **Diamantis at the Theatro Semio, 1996**

Nikos Diamantis studied theatre in Thessaloniki at the Review of Dramatic Art (Επιθεώρηση Δραματικής Τέχνης), a drama school that focused on a somatic as well as a cerebral approach to theatre created by Roula Pateraki, the school's founder. Her school aimed to create a technique that would enable the actor to express physically her/his mental and emotional condition (interview with Grigoropoulos, 12 July 2009). As the well-known actor and student of the school, Haris Grigoropoulos, explained, the school's training intended to create actors able to interpret the rationale and emotional range of contemporary human beings, and approach every part through an intellectual analysis that would be expressed through their body and movement (ibid.). This was Diamantis primary training. When he came to Athens and began to work as a director, he was also acquainted with a text-based training through his close collaboration with Kostas Georgousopoulos, who was Rontiris's

student (interview with Diamantis, 25 April 2005). Thus he became aware of the Rontirian school, while being already imbued with a physical and intellectual method.

In 1985, he founded, with his wife, Ioanna Makri, the Theatro Semio (Θέατρο Σημείο) on the ground floor of a residential building. The company was one of numerous companies, like Yiannis Margaritis's company, reviewed in the previous chapter, that were created during the 1980s and were subsidised by the Ministry of Culture and the Minister, Merkouri. Semio occupied a marginal position within the theatre field because Diamantis and Makri were two unknown young artists when they started their company. However, Theatro Semio's position was gradually strengthened and fortified due to the state's support, the continuity of its presence in the field and the success of some of its productions. Diamantis directed plays by Pinter, Strindberg and Bernard-Marie Koltès, as well as contemporary Greek authors such as Pavlos Matesis and Stelios Litras, and was soon called to direct outside his company and to teach acting and directing at the Universities of Patra and Nafplio. In 1996, playing a leading part in the inclusion of ancient tragedy to winter repertoires, he directed *Electra* in the company's small theatre.

The venue of the company seated less than a hundred spectators and had a small, square stage, which had no backstage area. The walls of the building were the walls of the stage, painted and modified to suit each production.

There were two grand, square pillars, which supported the building's foundations, on stage left. Those pillars provided the space's permanent set design. Actors entered onto the stage from stage left and from a door next to



41. *Electra* directed by Nikos Diamantis at the Theatro Semio, 1996 – Ioanna Makri as Electra, Vagelio Andreadaki as Clytemnestra and the Chorus

the seats of the audience. The spatial configuration demanded specific acting and directing approaches. For instance, the actors could only enter from the one side of the stage; their every movement could be observed; and their slightest whisper was heard.

For the production of *Electra*, the walls of the stage were painted ochre to dark brown and two mattresses were placed in front of the back pillar, giving the impression of a dirty and neglected area. An over-ground ledge covered the walls at stage right and most of the walls at stage left as well as those of the centre. This ledge served as a corridor, on which the actors moved, as well as a hiding place for the Chorus members and Electra. The two-level configuration allowed the director to expose visually the dynamics of the characters' relationships on stage. For instance, Clytemnestra occupied a

dominant position overlooking and keeping a distance from Electra during their scene (image 41), or the Chorus members moved on it, while Electra stood below them, expressing visually and spatially Diamantis's directorial choice that the Chorus members were fragments of Electra's personality (ibid.).

At the stage-right top of the central wall, there was a small oblong icon stand (εικονοστάσι), which looked like the icon stands hanging in many Greek Orthodox homes. It symbolised divine presence and power. Candles burnt in it during the entire performance. When the characters prayed or tried to contact the gods, a light shone from within it. Thus the religious aspect was constantly present and was expressed in a fashion that the audience could understand or, even, identify with. Encircling the stage were transparent glass pots, in which off-white candles burnt during the entire performance. This added a mystical and ceremonial quality to the production, while also referring to the Greek Orthodox Church. All the props used were of transparent glass, an element that was used symbolically. Clytemnestra's and Chrysothemis's offering urns, the urn with Orestes's ashes and the holding candles signified that the supernatural and the sacred forces were contacted with a crystal-clear, almost non-existent material, which implied the purity of supernatural forces and, at the same time, their absence. Moreover, the glass from which the Pedagogue drank while narrating Orestes's false death was a non-realistic element that did not refer to realistic water drinking. It was a symbolic action that 'watered' Orestes's plan for revenge.

Visually, the transparent glass created a contrast with the ochre and brown gamut of colours utilised for the set and costumes, signifying the contrast between sacred lucidity and secular opaqueness. As Diamantis explains:

The ritualistic element of ancient tragedy has been corrupted ... by the influence of the Church and its rituals, the Byzantine era, the popular tradition and rites, but also by the theatrical tradition of our century, namely, the productions of the National and Koun (Palaiologou, 4 February 1996)

His production presented a hidden and obscure world. It took the audience on a journey of symbols and feelings, aiming to engage them by making situations and emotions visual, and expressing them physically. He constructed an environment that contained all the above influences, which had ruled the way ancient tragedy had been staged, distilled through his gaze. He thus created a religious referent that spoke to the Greek audience. Moreover, while he was aware of the developments regarding acting and directing within the field of ancient tragedy, he chose a different path that stood poles apart from the National's balanced and well-structured approach as well as from Koun's affinity to popular and secular forms of theatre. Diamantis created his own symbolic and ritualistic world.

Before the beginning of this production of *Electra*, the spectator entered the auditorium and found the five women of the Chorus on the stage. Their bodies appeared integrated in the set. Their costumes followed the colours of the wall, and they seemed like statues or petrified women. There was live music resonant of Greek Orthodox liturgy combined with popular folk songs, all of it composed by Yorgos Boudouvis. A female musician played the lute and the tambourine, and sat on a chair between the two pillars. The lights dimmed, leaving a sole spotlight on the bust of the Chorus member, who was





42. *Electra* directed by Nikos Diamantis at the Theatro Semio, 1996 – The Chorus

positioned at the centre of the back wall of the stage. She kept on tapping her hand on her left breast, like a heartbeat. A monotonous sound of water dripping echoed through the theatre. This sound effect signified time, a drop, dripping slowly and painfully on the ground day in and day out. The heartbeat suggested the torture and agony that Electra felt in her anticipation of Orestes's return. From the beginning, the performance aimed at expressing Electra's emotions and tried to communicate Electra's condition visually.

Electra was lonely and exhausted. She appeared crawling behind the back pillar and did not have the power to stand up straight. Her cries and their echoes, the 'λάλος' – 'αντίλαλος' (108-109) as K.H. Miris poetically translated, awoke the women of the Chorus. They gradually came to life using small movements, as if their bodies had just discovered the ability to move, while

Electra called out the names of the gods of the Underworld, Hades, Persephone and the Furies (image 42). The visual presentation of this awakening, which referred both to the awakening of the supernatural spirits that Electra summoned and the coming to life of the female Chorus, signalled the unravelling of Electra's painful story. By this summoning, the members of the Chorus became mental and physical extensions of Electra (interview with Diamantis, 25 April 2005), that is to say, that they were images that represented Electra's psyche and experienced every feeling Electra felt. At the end of the production, next to the devastated and exhausted Electra, the Chorus's bodies were shattered, laid helpless, incapable of moving. They could only utter the few remaining lines of the play in a broken voice, fragmenting the verse. Diamantis explained that

this reading of the tragedy wants to present the play's lyrical side and bring out the poetry of the text. Positioned in a future world, trapped in a land of tears, Electra experiences her desperate loneliness trying to overcome her absolute pain (Nassou, 11 February 1996).

Thus Electra was the focal point of the production. The action revolved around her. The Chorus expressed her mind and her emotions. The rest of the characters contradicted or assisted her, but at the end she remained alone.

Makri's Electra was sensitive, fragile, but also powerful and full of revenge. Her Electra was obsessed and passionate, but not impetuous. Her movement and emotional development was mapped. The audience could see an idea or an emotion being born and expressed through her voice and body. The close relationship between the audience and the actors allowed the audience to follow Electra's intellectual and psychological evolution attentively. The small space defined Makri's acting. Electra's powerful emotions were

expressed with the deep notes of Makri's voice. She did not shout. Her voice was strong, however, she used whispering and soft tones. Her articulation was impeccable, and she recited her text effortlessly. She uttered Miris's poetic words without stressing them. Thus she turned the force of the words into her, expressing them visually through her body. As a result, her body as well as the bodies of the Chorus were in constant pain manifested by contractions of the torso or the touching of their womb. Chris Shilling argues that:

the body is ... conceptualised as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon which is transformed, within certain limits, as a result of its entry into, and participation in, society (Shilling, 1993: 12).

Metaphorically, Electra's and the Chorus's bodies were 'unfinished' and thus transformed when they entered the cruel theatrical world of the play, and communicated their transformation physically and visually.

During the lamentation scene, Diamantis used a spotlight, which gave the impression that Electra was isolated, as if the news of Orestes's death tore her away from the place where she was. It also created a space for Electra to mourn her beloved. Makri did not seem to have any contact with her surroundings. She was cut off in a world of her own, in which the urn of Orestes's ashes became a little boy, whom she addressed tenderly. She appeared to be chanting a nursery rhyme to the little Orestes that she had sent away many years ago. She was close to madness, but she did not shout or weep. As she continued to speak, her body crumbled. Even though her lamentation was spoken out aloud, it was not shared. Conversely, it provoked more pain in her. It was a soliloquy that had no recipient. Her lamentation scene concentrated Diamantis's concept of the play. He argued that:

the entire tragedy tries to touch the universe; to sing a song; to express a human thought regarding our helplessness here on earth; to speak about our confrontation with the night and the day, the things that transcend us, life and death (Nassou, 11 February 1996).

### **6.1.5 *Electra* by the Theatre Company 'diplous eros' directed by Mihail Marmarinos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1998**

The actor and director, Mihail Marmarinos, founded the Theatre Company 'diplous eros' (Εταιρεία Θεάτρου «διπλούς έρως») with actress, Amalia Moutousi, in 1983. The company was based at the Ilisia Studio, a space constructed in the basement of the big, commercial Ilisia Theatre, which was leased and managed by the famous and wealthy Greek leading lady, Nonika Galinea. Galinea, who was Moutousi's mother, provided the young couple with an acting space where they were able to experiment and work, unobstructed. With Galinea's help, the company solved one of the most important problems that tormented Greek young artists who wanted to form new companies, which was the financial difficulty involved in supporting a permanent venue. The quality of their work won them an annual subsidy a year after their first production by the Ministry of Culture.

The 'diplous eros' entered the theatre field with a huge advantage because the company did not have to pay rent for its venue. Bourdieu argues that 'economic capital provides the conditions for freedom from economic necessity' (Bourdieu, 1993: 68). Consequently, the company was able to enjoy a degree of autonomy from the usual economic restrictions suffered by most young and upcoming professionals. Its members had the time to focus on their work and acquire status and recognition, while escaping 'discredit'

forced by the logic of the field and the 'negative relationship ... established between symbolic profit and economic profit' (ibid.: 48). In other words, they did not have to depend on the box-office or compromise the quality of their work in order to survive; and they were recognised by the recognised theatre practitioners of the theatre field. When, in 1998, fifteen years after its foundation, the company participated in the Epidaurus festival, it was still considered a progressive, experimental company that enjoyed recognition by what Bourdieu calls 'the autonomous self-sufficient world of 'art for art's sake'' (ibid.: 51). Marmarinos's inclusion in the Epidaurus Festival testified to the fact that these works belonged to a Festival that aimed to broaden its scope and include in its programme more of the currents that comprised the Greek theatre field.

Marmarinos studied biology and neurobiology at the University of Athens, and trained as an actor at Pelos Katselis's Drama School, a drama school founded by Pelos Katselis, the National Theatre's director and the student of Fotos Politis. Thus Marmarinos had a text-based training, but his studies in neurobiology altered his approach to acting. He noted that his background in the exact sciences made him realise that there was a scientific methodology pertinent to acting, and that acting was 'a psychobiological phenomenon, which followed specific natural laws' (Mavrikakis, 1999: 46). Consequently, he developed a method based on 'psychobiological laws', as he called them, which explored the fundamental binary opposition between stimulus and reaction. This opposition, on the one hand, resulted in spontaneity (ibid) because the actors developed the readiness to respond directly to given

circumstances, and, on the other, it gave a tangible dimension to acting because everything could be explained with scientific rules.

Marmarinos constructed an approach to acting that was mentally and physically understood by his actors. This approach aimed to address the actors' physiology, namely, the function of their bodies. This resulted in a physical expression of the emotional condition of the characters, as well as of the situations that defined the plays he presented. Hence, in the 1998 production of *Electra* at Epidaurus, Electra had both her legs tied to each other with a leather band that looked like an instrument of torture. Electra's bodily confinement visually represented the state of her soul, her relationship with her mother, her position within the palace, but also enabled Moutousi, who played Electra, to experience physically her inescapable imprisonment and to express it through her movement and speech on stage.

As can be understood, it was impossible for Moutousi to execute a complete movement due to her tied legs. She could not walk or run without restraint. More often than not, she would commence a movement and, in order to complete it, she jumped, or stopped because she knew she was not able to do what she intended to do, or fell in her effort to finish it. Her condition was, therefore, a visual representation of her inability to take action into her own hands. Like the character of Electra, who was pushed away by her mother and was unable to find justice for the death of her father, Moutousi was unable to act as she would have wanted. Electra was controlled by the band around her legs, like she was oppressed and tyrannised by her mother. This binding of her legs also visually represented Marmarinos's quest for the

action/ reaction opposition because Electra's attempts to react and escape from her condition were prevented by her inability to move properly.



43. *Electra* by the Theatre Company 'diplous eros' directed by Mihail Marmarinos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1998 – Amalia Moutousi as Electra and Constantinos Avarikiotis as Orestes

Physically Moutousi made tremendous efforts to stand up straight and to move around. Her tied legs also forced her to occupy only a confined space at the centre of the orchestra. Thus, within the vast orchestra of Epidaurus, she was allowed to occupy a very small area, where a single chair stood (image 44). This chair was the only support that she was offered during the entire performance. On it she leaned and sat. She found some moments of rest. The chair, this inanimate object, was her only comfort. Even when Orestes arrived, he exercised violence over her by forcing his hand over her mouth so that she would not express her joy at his arrival (image 43). This Electra was

oppressed even by her saviour, who, at the end of the production, left her standing in front of her chair with her legs tied.

Her physical strain was also depicted in her verbal expression. Moutousi's clear and powerful voice recited the text sharply. Minos Volanakis's text, which combined poetic and everyday elements, suited this Electra, who was physically confined, but verbally free to express her anger, pain, hate and anticipation. Because of her confinement, the recitation of the text acquired greater importance. Electra did with her words what she would have liked to do with her hands. She attacked, insulted, but also expressed her pain and isolation. She pronounced the verses simply, without pomposity or exaggeration. The words appeared to come from her mouth effortlessly and express her physical condition. The words were pronounced with deliberation and aimed to create the action/reaction opposition because every word that was uttered redefined the entire theatrical space and created new conditions within which the actors had to respond.

Marmarinos explained the characteristic that defined his work:

The first is that an alternate, new scenic dramaturgy is created, which springs from the dramaturgy of the text, but does not follow the spelling of the text and this new dramaturgy aims, especially during the rehearsal period, to capture signs from reality and to gather them like a spider's web. Also the other element that characterises what we are talking about is that this line of accidents, moments, and reactions, is organised in a musical manner (Mavrikakis, 1999: 42).

Thus Marmarinos took the text as a starting point, enriched it with the actors' and his own individual and personal stimulus that corresponded to his notions regarding the text, and he organised all this in a musical score. This practice was compatible with his text-based, Rontirian training, as well as with his



scientific background. The construction of a musical synthesis enabled the physical realisation and verbal expression of the 'spelling' of the play, that is, his reading and intentions regarding the text as a performance. Moutousi created a harmonious score of her part that incorporated Marmarinos's quest for spontaneity, which was expressed visually through her precise and sharp reactions and utterances, while also composing a well-balanced entity from her opening line till the end of the production.

The performance space was spread beyond the orchestra and the theatre's remnants of the ancient skênê, occupying the open space behind them. There were few props. Two big wooden tables surrounded by two or three chairs that were used by the Chorus, and Electra's chair. A long, narrow, metallic corridor linked the orchestra with a platform stage right that led to the palace. Clytemnestra with her high heels and tight dress had to walk down the wobbly corridor, signalling that her journey towards her daughter was an unpleasant one, and Chrysothemis walked on it, carrying the enormous metallic column, which visually expressed the burden that she carried. Overall, the set was very simple, allowing the actors to fill the space with their presence.

Marmarinos always aimed to use the 'essential' (αυαγκαία) props for the construction of a set, meaning a set or props that suggest complete environments. He noted that he did not refer to 'essential' (αυαγκαίο) as something that is 'indispensable functionally', in that it pertained to the architectural meaning of the word. His own interpretation of 'essential' was different:

What is essential exists in a way that invades the imagination of the spectator, travels over and onto the dramaturgy of a performance in

such a way that a chair is not just one chair but implies an entire dramatic space (ibid.: 43).

For example, Electra's chair signified her environment, signalling a reference point for Electra's space and her emotional and physical condition (image 44).



44. Amalia Moutousi as Electra in *Electra* by the Theatre Company 'diplous eros' directed by Mihail Marmarinos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1998

The costumes used in the production were contemporary: cotton blouses and trousers for Orestes and Pylades, a shirt and trousers for the Pedagogue and a long grey dress for Chrysothemis. Electra wore a simple, off-white suit that seemed to be the kind of dress chosen by a mother. Thus Electra was dressed 'properly' and she appeared to be forced to wear the clothes that a mother would like her daughter to wear. Conversely, Clytemnestra's tight, and provocative evening dress suggested that her character was a voluptuous woman. It also referred to the career of Galinea, who was playing the part. Her gown brought to mind her glamorous productions of boulevard and dramatic plays that had expensive sets and costumes. Dimitris Tsatsoulis argued that the choice of Galinea to play Moutousi's mother was also a metaphor suggesting the relationship of the mother-actress/daughter-actress and Clytemnestra/ Electra (image 45 – Tsatsoulis, 2007: 75). Moreover, it engaged the spectators because they were aware of the relationship between the two, and it added an autobiographical aspect to a production that insisted on autobiography and individuality.

Similarly, the members of the Chorus, which comprised both men and women, were prompted to project their individuality and refer to their real identities. So, a girl from the Chorus went to the trees behind the orchestra and the skênê and started pronouncing the names of the actors who comprised the Chorus.

Tsatsoulis observed that

the tactics of the individualisation of the members of the Chorus... can be interpreted as an attempt to individualise the collective speech and the universal truth that the Chorus supposedly incorporates: the members of the Chorus express personal and, hence, relative truths (ibid.: 73).



45. *Electra* by the Theatre Company 'diplous eros' directed by Mihail Marmarinos at the Theatre of Epidaurus, 1998 – Amalia Moutousi as Electra and Nonika Galinea as Clytemnestra

Tsatsoulis argued that Marmarinos's intention was to formulate a production that had autobiographical references in order to strip the Chorus's speech of the universal truths that it incorporates. However, it seems clear that by announcing the names of the Chorus members he aimed to establish a sense of a common community between the spectators and the actors, who were, in the end, people just like the spectators. Thus Marmarinos enforced the actor/audience relationship, and granted to each a social significance similar to the significance it had in the fifth century, when the members of the Chorus were citizens of the polis of Athens known to the spectators who watched the performance. Likewise, by including both sexes in the Chorus Marmarinos broke the homogeneity that an all-male or all-female cast offered, and addressed an audience comprised of men as well as women.

Marmarinos's first attempt at tragedy in the open-air theatre of Epidaurus, aroused much opposition among some members of the audience, who reacted against the production, as well as opposition from critics. Georgousopoulos, for example, claimed that Marmarinos disrespected the text, the theatre of Epidaurus and the Greek theatre tradition (Georgousopoulos, 24 August 1998). Varveris found the production filled with vague symbolisms and disorienting decorative destructions, which managed to shift the audience's focus from the play to unsubstantial happenings (Varveris, 23 August 1998). However, Marmarinos's attempt found fertile ground and prompted inclusion of the works of directors such as Angela Brouskou and Theodoros Terzopoulos in the Festival.

## **6.2 The Attis Theatre and Ancient Greek Tragedy**

The Attis Theatre (Θέατρο Άττις) was founded in 1986 by actor and director Theodoros Terzopoulos. Terzopoulos graduated from Kostis Mihailidis's Drama School, in 1967. His dissatisfaction with actor training in Greece forced him to seek guidance abroad (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009). His brother's connection to the German Communist Party led him to East Germany and the Berliner Ensemble, where he was acquainted firsthand with Brecht's ideas on detachment and the actor. Brecht's teaching, first and foremost, formed his artistic identity and helped to develop it as a director because he acquired a critical attitude towards his work and the work of others as well as towards art and life (ibid.). In Berlin, he studied with important directors such as Manfred Wekwerth and Ruth Berghaus, and was

mentored by Heiner Müller (Terzopoulos, 2000: 48), whom Terzopoulos introduced to the Greek audience in 1988.<sup>3</sup>

Upon his return to Greece, in 1977, Terzopoulos was sent to work at the theatre workshop of Thessaloniki because he had a commitment to the Communist Party, which had helped him with his studies in East Germany. During his stay in Thessaloniki, he argued that he was under surveillance and had to report to the Party. As he claimed, his life was very similar to the script of Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's movie *The Life of Others* (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009). In Thessaloniki, Terzopoulos met and worked with a number of talented actors such as Aneza Papadopoulou, Eleni Gerasimidou and Pavlos Kontoyiannidis and he put the knowledge he gained to use by presenting plays by Brecht, notably, *The Bakery* (1977) and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1977).

Thessaloniki gave Terzopoulos the opportunity to present his work right away. There was only one permanent theatre organisation in the city, the State Theatre of Northern Greece and this allowed space for the introduction of new companies. Thessaloniki was the second largest city of Greece and had a strong university student population, who were interested in the political engagement of, and questions raised by, Brecht's theatre. It must be kept in mind that the fall of the junta was very recent and that audiences yearned for plays that raised political issues. Thus Terzopoulos had ready audiences for his work.

Terzopoulos entered the Greek theatre field in Thessaloniki, occupying a marginal position in Greek theatre life, whose core was, and still is, Athens.

When he founded the Attis Company in Athens, his position within the field continued to be at some distance from the mainstream, although it ceased to be marginal. Terzopoulos managed to alter the field slowly and steadily and to create a space within it for his own company, a subsidised experimental theatre company that tours the world and enjoys recognition from scholars and theatre practitioners internationally, as will be demonstrated shortly.

After his work on Brecht, Terzopoulos wanted to distance himself from the narrowness of Brecht's detached critical approach towards acting, seeking, instead, a more visceral approach and linking it to his exploration of his personal 'existential and ontological issues' (ibid.). As a result, in 1979, Terzopoulos presented *Huis Clos* by Sartre and two years later *Yerma* by Lorca, both at the State Theatre of Northern Greece. These productions were the turning point of his career because in them his 'idiom', as he called it, was already visible (ibid.). Terzopoulos 'idiom' was inspired by Grotowski's idea that texts needed to be met and developed from rather than merely be interpreted. As Grotowski had 'met' his texts and managed to create his work 'within the context of his own life and being' (Wolford, 1997: 53), so Terzopoulos wanted to meet texts and to be immersed in them. He wanted to be in constant vigilance and form an 'erotic relationship' with his material (Terzopoulos, 2000: 49).<sup>4</sup> His aim was to create productions that would reflect and complement his life. This is the reason why he wanted to move away from Brecht and approach his own existential issues.

Terzopoulos's 'idiom' was expressed through the physicality of his actors, the way they used their voice, speech, body and movement. It also involved

focusing and presenting on stage what he thought were the inherent meanings of each play. For this intimate approach that would link the actors' work and the plays' and texts' meanings, Terzopoulos claimed that tragedy was the suitable material (ibid.). The important Brazilian director Antunes Filho argued that Terzopoulos's work was 'a struggle against a stereotypical view of tragedy' (Filho, 2008: 277), and the scholar, Marianne McDonald, characterised him as 'a *monstre sacré*, dedicated to his individual art and style, which had to be invented from the ground up' (McDonald, 2000: 15). Taking these into consideration, it comes as no surprise that he had invented and developed a different acting approach in which his actors had to be initiated and trained from scratch.

In 1985, a year before he formed his own company with which he presented the groundbreaking performance of the *Bacchae* in 1987, Terzopoulos became the artistic director of the Greek Drama International Meetings organised in Delphi by the European Cultural Centre of Delphi. Inspired by Tadashi Suzuki's *The Trojan Women* and Andrzej Wajda's *Antigone*, both of which productions were presented in the Delphi Meetings, he decided to take the 'next step' (ibid.: 50). He argued:

I began my study of ancient drama with Euripides's *Bacchae*. I was seeking the root of those situations, which would establish the basis for understanding my own origins. ... I began exploring ... remnants of Dionysiac performances in search of clues about the body's source of energy (ibid.).

Terzopoulos wanted to explore the actor's body, its possibilities and potentials. He looked for the 'primary sources of energy and ecstasy', but also he aimed to create a method in order to evoke and provoke the body's source of energy (Terzopoulos, 2000: 51).



For Terzopoulos, the most significant element in a performance was the actor (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009). Thus he wanted to explore the driving force of the actor's body. In his quest to reveal the source of the body's energy he came across a book that described the therapeutic methods employed at the Amphiaro sanctuary in Attica.<sup>5</sup> He explained:

Patients, who were about to be operated, began walking around naked in a circle on the humid ground at sunset. After the first hour, they had to accelerate their step and, after the second hour, they had to quicken it even more. During the fourth hour, they had to bend their knees, as in Kabuki. During the fifth hour, they had to bend their elbows and, as they kept on going around and accelerating this motion with their bent limbs, they proliferated energy similar to that of the African performances. They engaged in this exercise for eight hours and their bodily pain vanished. They were in a trance, like the Bacchae (Terzopoulos, 2000: 50-51).

Inspired by the trance-like state that the human being and the body could reach, he decided to use this knowledge for his own actors. Hence, the experimentation he began to utilise in 1986 formed his approach, which aimed to activate the actor, her/his body and her/his primary source of energy, as he described to the author of this thesis in 2009.

He noted that the first thing that an actor had to do when starting to work with him was to forget whatever she/he knew about acting and to leave behind all her/his social references (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009). In order to reach this condition the mind had to be unable to give orders and, therefore, the actor had to seek to attain a state of liberation where the body was free of all conventions. This could only happen through physical strain. Terzopoulos described the work process:

We start in a circle. The body must gradually be annihilated. So we begin by walking in the circle and then, slowly slowly the body starts to bend: first the elbows, then the knees, and, while we continue walking in a circle, the body begins to lose its dignity, its bourgeois attitude, its socialization. Then the thoughts disappear; everything that we know and

is useless to our work abandons the body; it is shed from the body, and the body remains clean. The actor must get tired, fall on the ground. This is the point at which it all starts (ibid.).

The similarity between the process used at the Amphiaro sanctuary and by Terzopoulos and the Attis Company is apparent.

Terzopoulos takes his actor at this exhausted, trance-like stage, during which there are no social and bourgeois restraints and thoughts, and then begins to develop his work. When the company first started working, in order for the actor to be in the position to work on a part or a play, she/he had to have had at least one month of eight hours training per day. However, today this condition is achieved in ten days of intense training (ibid.), utilising a number of exercises that have been mastered through the years. The training comprises breathing and physical exercises that the actors of the company employ on a daily basis. After that, the actor begins to exercise her/his physical fantasy, which is a kind of fantasy that is not linked to rational thought. It focuses on the possibilities and potentials of the body. For example, as Terzopoulos claims, a finger can tell its own story. It can be considered as a unique, detached part of the body and can move independently (ibid.). However, when an actor and her/his body begin to work on a piece, Terzopoulos has to set the concept within which the physical fantasy has to develop such as the play, the idea that has to be explored, or the goal that has to be reached. This becomes necessary because, as Terzopoulos points out, at this point the actors have the tendency to become autobiographical (ibid.).

Yiorgos Sambatakakis, scholar and lecturer at the University of Patras, in his book on Terzopoulos argues that the Attis Theatre's approach to performance

is what he calls a 'biodynamic method' (Sambatakakis, 2007: 68), which has been inspired by Meyerhold, the initiator of biomechanics (ibid.: 70).

Sampatakakis explains that Terzopoulos's method has five objectives:

- a) To stimulate a process of self-exploration, going down as deep as the subconscious reservoirs, yet channelling the unleashed energy in order to codify and deposit the required reactions.
- b) To eliminate the resistances and obstacles, mainly pain, both physical and emotional, in an attempt to feel that death can be banished.
- c) Consequently, to resist the idea that the acting body is a centrally controlled entity, and then deconstruct the body into smaller kinetic morphemes.
- d) To be able to systematise this process into an anti-memory and an anti-body.
- e) And finally, to relocate the body architectonically according to geometrical patterns (ibid.; Sampatakakis, 2008: 92).

This analysis of the process that the actors of the company undergo summarises Terzopoulos's process that has been presented so far and maps out the actors' process of creating a new body that will be able to move and function freely within the performing space.

Allowing the body to function independently enables the actor to function naturally and discover the body's own rhythmical laws. As a result, the actor starts to listen to the body's needs and gives to the body time and space so that it can express its own rhythm. Savvas Stroumpos, actor of the company, notes that this is the way employed in order for the body 'to sense the birth of a basic rhythmic element', which will help the actor reach and explore an 'unknown territory of codified psycho-physical expression' (Stroumpos, 2008: 230). Using this process, the actor will be able to *be* rather than *pretend to be* a part, while freeing the soul from the 'burden' of the part that she/he acts. As Terzopoulos explains, the actor is 'not charged' or 'burdened' with the sickness or the troubles of a character such as Raskolnikov from *Crime and*

*Punishment.* On the contrary, she/he has to be sane and healthy, feel happy about the process and use her/his supplement of energy that has been created through the physical work (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009).

Sound plays an equally important part. For Terzopoulos, the body is a whole entity and sound cannot be regarded as an element that is forced from the outside (ibid.). It is something that is born within the body and is vocalised, or not, through the mouth. Thus the set words of the written text can be as important as a groan, or a moan, or complete silence. Consequently, sound becomes one more expression of the body and the text, when and if there is any, and acquires its meaning through the entire performance. Or, as Artaud observed, 'the sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer words, is liberated' (Artaud, 1958: 54). Tassos Dimas, actor of the company for over twenty years, argues that during all those years the actors of the company 'explored the quality of perseverance and its means of expression together with the emergence of speech from physical action' (Dimas, 2008: 79).

These few words summarise the objectives of the actors of the company, meaning that sound and physical action form a strong unity. As can be assumed from the above, the text derives from the movement and the 'physical fantasy' of the body. Therefore, the company does not aim to present complete pieces of classical texts. It focuses on appropriating the texts, using fragments in order to convey what it considered to be the expression of the body's 'physical fantasy', which articulated what the texts intended to say, thus forming a tight relationship between the text and the

bodily expression. For instance, in the performance of *Ajax, the Madness*, which lasted for one and a half hours, a sole extract of no more than ninety verses of the Sophocles's *Ajax* (verses 214-221, 232-244, 257-262, 271-178, 284-330) was repeatedly used throughout the performance. The limited use of words allowed the well-trained bodies of the actors to tell the story of Ajax employing their physical language to communicate to the audience the torments of the soul of the tragic hero rather than the storyline narrated by Sophocles.

Stroumpos in his essay 'An Approach to the Working Method of the Attis Theatre', explains that none of the aforementioned physical and vocal achievements would be possible if the actors of the company did not work on breathing (Stroumpos, 2008: 231). He describes that the breathing has to originate from the pelvis and that through the 'descent' to the pelvis 'the triangle, containing the three basic energy zones (first the anus-base of the spine, second the genital area, third the lower diaphragm)', is allowed to function 'autonomously' (ibid.). This results in the circulation of energy, the physical freeing of the body and the actor's happiness, allowing the imagination to be 'set free and the body ... to release unknown amounts of energy and produce new codes of expression' (ibid.). According to Terzopoulos, the activation of the three zones helps the actor find the wide gamut of her/his voice and facilitates her/his work on a part in its entirety (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009) because Terzopoulos believes that in tragedy the characters are archetypes of human beings (Stroumpos, 2008: 232). Therefore, these characters have to be dealt with beyond the restrictions imposed by the characters of contemporary European drama.

Terzopoulos's ontological and existential approach towards tragedy paves the path towards the bacchic ecstasy, namely, 'the source from which all actions originate' (Terzopoulos cited in Stroumpos, 2008: 232). He calls this path the Dionysiac way, and it is a governing aim of his work (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009), The source of the action, and, hence, the creation of energy, is linked back to rhythm, which Terzopoulos acknowledges as the core of all art, because 'rhythm is, substantially, the upshot of energy' (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009). In this manner, energy and rhythm are intrinsically connected and reciprocally maintained. This explains why Terzopoulos tries to make his actors find their energy in order to reveal the inherent rhythm of the text. For Terzopoulos, the core rhythm can be contained 'in a couple of lines', and if this rhythm is found, 'you will be able to feel the rhythm of the relevant section and subsequently of the entire text' (Terzopoulos cited in Stroumpos, 2009: 232). This interconnection makes any part of the text equally important and thus renders the entity of the whole text useless because, if the actor's energy and rhythm can be initiated, expressed and communicated in a fragment of the piece, then the attempt to interpret the entire text becomes of no use. Or, as Terzopoulos puts it, the established connection between the actor's energy and rhythm 'leads to the process of deconstruction, analysis and reconstruction of a text, without any prior dramatic study or written stage direction' (ibid.).

In Terzopoulos's productions, the actors do not speak with each other. The fragmented, deconstructed and reconstructed characters, members of the Chorus or vehicles of the psychophysical projection of the interpretation of a part, do not converse. If verbal interlocution were to exist then the archetypical

figures would be reduced to everyday creatures. Those characters stand alone. The persons next to them are an 'alibi' to face the god, because

in tragedy the dominant figure is the god(s). We are engaged by the will to communicate and/or fight with the god(s). Thus, the 'other' exists as a 'stairway', which leads the hero to a conflict/meeting with the current godlike figure (ibid.).

Terzopoulos's approach aims to touch upon the eternal questions that have troubled human beings for centuries: the need to understand whether a supernatural power exists and whether it intervenes in a person's life; and whether a person wants to be in spiritual communion with this divine entity or oppose it. This viewpoint grants to tragedy an ontological significance because it focuses on one of the most crucial questions posed by human beings. Thus the actors who express such ideas have to exist on stage beyond their 'daily physical limits' and they have 'to expand' their 'expressive means' (Stroumpos, 2008: 232-233).

Terzopoulos's ontological and metaphysical quests are in close contact with contemporary Greece. His productions aim to reflect upon, as has already been observed, a more visceral approach that can be linked to his exploration of his personal 'existential and ontological issues' which are tied to his perception of the twentieth century Greece (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009). Sambatakakis remarks that Terzopoulos 'creates a personal methodology' which 'landscapes his personal history, reflecting, at some point, a version of a once marginalised and oppressed Greekness' (Sambatakakis, 2008: 98). Sambatakakis refers to Terzopoulos's family leftwing background and his sense of social, cultural and psychological defeat due to his family's position following the Greek Civil War (ibid.; Sambatakakis,

2007: 68). He concludes that it was therefore expected of Terzopoulos 'to resort to dramatic genres that substantiated the structural ontology of theatre such as Greek tragedy' because Terzopoulos's concept of the theatre is presented as an inherent impulse (ibid.). This interpretation clarifies Terzopoulos's need to create his own 'idiom', as explained in his interview to the author of this thesis (interview with Terzopoulos, 8 April 2009), his path as a director, his tendency to approach his existential issues and his intuitive work on Greek tragedy.

Terzopoulos's impressive work on acting and tragedy has occupied an important position within the Greek theatre field as a whole and within the field of tragedy, specifically. The company acquired symbolic capital by the recognition of such figures as his mentor, Müller. Müller argued that Terzopoulos's *Bacchae* was 'a search for the lost keys of unity between body and speech' (Müller, 2000: 35). Theatre scholars such as Varopoulou and Fischer-Lichte acknowledged and recognised his work, Varopoulou claiming that he 'discarded certain conventional representations and character development according to Greek drama' (Varopoulou, 2008, 80), and Fischer-Lichte saying that his productions 'helped forge a way back to a breakthrough in the understanding of theatre' because they provided the audience with a 'threshold experience' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 105). Finally, the company was known due to the numerous successful international tours that it completed.

In the main, Greek actors and directors have not incorporated Terzopoulos's method into their acting. This was due to the fact that he was not interested in starting a school. His method derived from his own perception of a play and



the way that he intended to present it. It was a process that was developed and was practised within the company, utilising the theories of practitioners such as Brecht and Grotowski with whom the Greek directors and actors were familiar and whom they had chosen to include in their work in different ways. Nevertheless, the way that he worked with his actors was adopted and adapted by foreign theatres and drama schools, notably, the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, which organised workshops with Terzopoulos and his actors in Greece and Italy. A similar adaptation occurred with the Turkish company Studio Oyuncuları - Şahika Tekand.

In Greece, his work during the 1980s was regarded, according to Fischer-Lichte, as a 'violation of the prevailing depiction and interpretation of Greek tragedy' (ibid.) because he altered the way tragedy had been presented until the present time, fragmenting the text and deriving action from ritualistic forms of performance. This is the reason why a number of influential theatre critics such as Georgousopoulos continue to oppose his unique approach. Nonetheless, Terzopoulos has continued to produce new internationally acclaimed productions that tour the world and to maintain his theatre comfortably in the centre of Athens. McDonald summarises Terzopoulos's directing work in this way:

Terzopoulos' style is distinguished by his actors' use of their total bodies, which necessarily involves long hours of training. He is very popular in Asia, South America, Russia, Germany, and, of course, Greece, all countries that enjoy a long tradition of physical theatre and music; his work is dictated by the inner music and rhythms of the body. ... music is kept to the minimum and silence is as important as sound (McDonald, 2008:8).

These are the conditions in place by the end of the twentieth century. As has been observed, the last two decades introduced vast changes to the field of ancient Greek tragedy. The field was broadened to include productions of foreign directors such as Sturua, who represented a different theatrical tradition, or Kakoyiannis, who had a successful career in the film industry. The use of indoor venues was legitimised and productions of tragedy were presented in small indoor spaces altering the way tragedy was acted and directed. Finally, Marmarinos's and Terzopoulos's physical approaches to tragedy opened the path for reconstructing and deconstructing texts providing directors and actors possibilities of experimentation, paving the way for future groundbreaking and innovative productions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Cyprus Theatre Organisation participated in 1980 with Euripides's *Suppliants* and in 1982 with Euripides's *The Trojan Women*.

<sup>2</sup> In his film of *Electra* (1962) by Euripides, he also presented the murder scene where Agamemnon is slaughtered by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, as well as the scene depicting the murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra by Orestes.

<sup>3</sup> *Despoiled Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts* was presented in 1988 and the *Quartet* the following year.

<sup>4</sup> The English text quotations of this section are from the English versions of books on the Attis Theatre. Only Terzopoulos's interview with the author of this thesis is translated by the author.

<sup>5</sup> The Amphiareion was an ancient sanctuary - the shrine of an oracle – of the god Asclepius. Amphiaraos was a mythical king of Argos who had the gift of clairvoyance.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis presented an overview of acting for tragedy in the twentieth-century Greece. The study commenced by looking at the conditions of the Greek theatre since the foundation of the Greek State in 1830, aiming to provide a historical background for the reader and to view the governing influences on Greek actors' acting. Two main discoveries were made. First, Greek actors did not distinguish Greek tragedy from other genres such as nineteenth-century adaptations of ancient Greek tragedies, melodramas or patriotic plays. They acted Greek tragedy using the same costumes, sets and props, but, most importantly, the same acting style (Spathis, 1983: 17-21). Second, the actors imitated acting clichés and techniques brought to Greece by touring Italian companies or by important actors such as Adelaide Ristori and Jean Mounet-Sully (Sideris, 1976: 41, 158). Thus there was neither an acting style pertaining solely to tragedy nor an approach that sprang from within Greek theatre companies.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Thomas Oikonomou tried to initiate a training approach for actors at the short-lived Royal Theatre's Drama School (Murat, 1928: 161; Sideris, 1960: 594). However, the drama school closed down, leaving his work unfinished. As for his work on tragedy, the 1903 production of *Oresteia* was based on the *Oresteia* presented at the Burgtheater of Vienna (Stefanou, 9 March 1928; Sideris, 1976: 191). Georgios Mistriotis and his Society for the Instruction of Ancient Greek Dramas aimed to find a Greek acting approach for ancient tragedy. Yet the Society's acting was poor, it served the University of Athens' interests and failed to influence the

staging and performing of tragedy (Xenopoulos, 1906: 345; Stefanou 10 March 1928).

In 1919, Fotos Politis's staging of *Oedipus the King* was the first time that a coherent notion on the staging of tragedy was presented on the Greek stage. (Sideris, 1954: 1684). Politis believed that the appropriate tone for acting had to be a powerful and imposing recitation (Politis, 1964a: 115). He also focused on the Chorus, arguing that it defined the genre of ancient tragedy, and presented the Chorus members as individuals who were engaged in the action (ibid: 1688-1689). Eight years later, two productions established that Greek actors and directors sought a style that would be appropriate exclusively for tragedy: Politis's 1927 production of *Hecuba*, which developed the director's ideas visible in his 1919 production of *Oedipus*, and *Prometheus Bound*. *Prometheus* was directed by Eva Palmer-Sikelianos in the Delphic Celebrations organised by her and her husband, Angelos Sikelianos. This production, among other significant achievements managed to find a connection between tragedy and contemporary Greek tradition, which was visible in the Chorus's movement by the implementation of steps of traditional Greek folk dances such as mpalos and sirtos (Tsarouhis, 1967:233).

The developments were gradual, but it became apparent that a complete acting and directing style for the presentation of tragedy on the contemporary Greek stage had to be developed. In 1936, the production of *Electra* signalled the birth of the acting school of Dimitris Rontiris and indicated that such a style had been created. A few years later, in 1942, Karolos Koun's foundation of the Theatro Technis led to the initiation of his school and, in the 1965

production of *The Persians*, he proposed his own approach regarding the staging and acting of tragedy. These two schools formed the mode and system according to which tragedy had to be performed. Both directors, each in his way, created directing and acting approaches that linked Greek tragedy with the contemporary Greek life and theatre.

Rontiris defined the way tragedy was acted and directed for over four decades from the 1930s until the 1970s. He developed a school that created actors who approached their parts through the rhythm of the text and the way that they pronounced and accentuated their speech. Conversely, Koun focused on the emotional development of the characters of plays, while paying no attention to pronunciation and accentuation. His acting school influenced his students at the Theatro Technis and Greek actors in general and can be said to have ended with his death in 1987. Both directors' achievements were viewed and analysed in this thesis through the productions of *Electra* by Sophocles. Rontiris's legacy to the National Theatre of Greece was also analysed through the National's *Electra* directed by Takis Mouzenidis, which featured Anna Sinodinou in the leading role. The impact that Rontiris had on his students was scrutinised through Sinodinou's 1967 and 1972 productions of *Electra* and Aspasia Papathanasiou's 1975 and 1977 stagings of the same play.

Furthermore, the play *Electra* provided an eloquent and powerful example to examine the development of acting on the Greek stage. Spyros Evangelatos's 1972 and 1991 *Electra* approached the text using the guidelines of nineteenth- and twentieth-century dramas, guiding his actors to present

contemporary human beings on the stage. Volanakis used rhythm to guide his actors, while allowing them complete freedom regarding pronunciation or intonation. Yiannis Margaritis intended to present a ceremonial and ritualistic way of acting. Andreas Voutsinas focused on the abilities of his actors and aimed to bring forward their strong elements. Lydia Koniordou, being an amalgam of the two dominant Greek acting schools, combined Rontiris's and Koun's teachings, creating an acting approach that respected the text and placed attention on emotional truth as well as physicality.

*Electra* also helped detect acting and directing attempts on tragedy by internationally acknowledged Greek directors and actors such as Mihalis Kakoyiannis and Irene Papas, who approached tragedy with the directness they used in their work on the screen. Robert Sturua's and Jenny Karezi's production of the play was an example of the collaboration of Greek actors with foreign directors, who came from a different theatre field and offered their own perspectives on the Greek play. The three *Electra* productions by Marietta Rialdi, Nikos Diamantis and Mihail Marmarinos provided a perspective on the numerous experimentations of directors and actors on tragedy during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Finally, the overview of Theodoros Terzopoulos acting and directing approach to tragedy concluded this thesis's evaluation of the evolution of Greek acting for tragedy.

Overall, this study discovered that contemporary Greek directors and actors formed and sustained two influential acting schools for the staging of Greek tragedy. Actors' and directors' work on Greek tragedy was contextualised within the historical theatrical conditions providing an overview of the Greek

theatre life and its impact on Greek actors. At the same time, this thesis demonstrated that Greek theatre practitioners were aware of the developments of theatre internationally and incorporated these developments ingeniously and constructively on the Greek stage. Since the 1930s, they created styles, productions and performances that represented each director's and actor's concept of the play, combining Greek and international theatrical traditions. Their achievements during the entire twentieth century were extraordinary and express the field's openness to give voice and support to artists with different views, concepts and positions.

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