POSTMODERN DRAMATURGIES: ADAPTING CLASSICAL GREEK TRAGEDIES FOR THE CONTEMPORARY STAGE

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis advocates for the utility of postmodernism as a critical lens when examining theatrical adaptations of Greek tragedies produced during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It has been prompted by a rise in the number of contemporary adaptations of Greek tragedies on Western stages and is comprised of three case studies, all of which premiered between 1990 - 2015. The featured works include select examples from New York based playwright Charles L. Mee, Parisian director Ariane Mnouchkine and her company Théâtre du Soleil, and performances and events at the Almeida Theatre, London, as curated by Artistic Director Rupert Goold. Referring to a term coined by Fredric Jameson, this thesis suggests that postmodernism is an enduring 'cultural dominant' that informs each of these individuals' processes of adaptation. Via a consideration of wider postmodern cultural issues such as the destabilisation of notions of identity, an emerging nostalgic or revivalist culture, a weakening historicity and changing forms of knowledge and communication, this thesis reveals a correlation between postmodernism and contemporary motivations for, and approaches to, classical adaptation.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This thesis advocates for postmodernism as a critical lens to examine theatrical adaptations of Greek tragedies produced during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Using a selection of contemporary Greek works I demonstrate the efficacy of postmodern critique and its necessity when examining of a range of adaptation practices. My analysis is driven in part by the rise in contemporary adaptations of Greek tragedies and considers three case studies that premiered between 1990 - 2015. A selection of plays written during the early 1990s by Charles L. Mee feature here, as do Ariane Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil's 1990 - 1992 productions of *Les Atrides,* and the Almeida Theatre's 2015 season Almeida Greeks as curated by Artistic Director Rupert Goold. I address wider cultural matters associated with postmodernism by contextualising the case studies with references to their particular cultural milieu and the relevant creative individuals. Working within the specifications of this thesis, the case studies can only feature a mindfully selected sample of Greek adaptations from the chosen time period. However, I incorporate a mixture of examples of playtexts and live performances, and references to a singular individual, a theatrical ensemble and a theatrical institution. My selection is intended to be a range of examples and different forms to best explore the diverse nature of postmodern adaptation.

For each of the case studies I examine why the classical Greek texts were chosen as source materials in that particular moment and context. Further, I consider the dramaturgical and adaptive strategies employed in different productions and how these may arise as a potential result of the postmodern condition. It was Jean-François Lyotard who first attempted to define postmodernism in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) [1979], and though I go on to discuss this at length, at this stage for ease of reference the postmodern

condition can be defined as 'incredulity toward metanarratives' produced by the contradictorily 'nascent' and 'constant' state of the cultural shift know as postmodernism (xxiv, 79).[1] In other words, the postmodern condition epitomises a distrust in totalising metanarratives and encourages a prioritisation of the power of the individual to recount their own narratives; to question and disrupt any narratives dictated by the established universalising truths of history, knowledge, society, politics and culture. The ramifications of this new individualist power, and postmodernism more broadly, impacts on the means of constructing identity given the changing relationship between the individual and institutional or social establishments. The postmodern prioritisation of the individual can influence dramaturgical processes, thus, via the lens of these case studies I examine how the adaptation of the source text reveals and possibly shapes singular and plural identities. Building on recognisable cultural materialist and historiographic methodologies and using the chosen examples, this thesis also prioritises an investigation of how issues of identity intersect with history and culture.

The case studies' premieres all coincided with the period that produced the majority of critical discourse surrounding the postmodern condition. However, I acknowledge that the chronological structure of this thesis presents a substantial passage of time between the premieres of the adaptations by Mee and Mnouchkine, and then the Almeida Greeks season. The thesis began as a primarily historical study considering theatre productions during a brief time span in the early 1990s, placed in dialogue with the growth in theoretical discourse surrounding postmodernism. However, my project began in 2014 and the theatrical events of 2015 presented an ideal context for a timely reconsideration of the relationship between postmodernism and classical adaptation.

[1] Lytoard's *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* was first published in French in 1979 but as I refer throughout to the English translation, I reference that publication. From this point onwards it will be abbreviated to: *The Postmodern Condition.*

The 2015 events I refer to are the numerous 'productions of Greek tragedy [that] suddenly appeared all over the world' (Rodosthenous 2017: 1). Dan Rebellato (2015) referred to the vast number of Greek adaptations on the British stage as a 'Grentrance' and suggested that '2015 looks likely to be the year of the Greeks' (Rodosthenous 2017: 1). With hindsight I can confirm that Rebellato's prediction was correct. In 2015, adaptations of *The Oresteia* were seen at the Almeida Theatre (before transferring to the Trafalgar Studios later that same year), on The Globe's main stage, at Home in Manchester, and at the Citizen's Theatre in Glasgow a year later in 2016. Similarly, there were numerous adaptations of *Medea* including productions at the National Theatre (2014), the Almeida (2015) and The Gate (2015) all in London. In 2016 The Gate programmed another four Greek inspired plays, *The Iphigenia Quartet,* based on the mythology surrounding Iphigenia of House Atreus. Gary Owen's adaptation of the same myth titled *Iphigenia in Splott* premiered at the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff and then toured throughout the United Kingdom (UK) in 2015 and 2016. Also in Wales, as part of the National Theatre Wales' 2015 autumn season, was a marathon performance of Homer's *Iliad* directed by Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes. Further afield on international stages was yet another version of *The Oresteia* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris; Robert Wilson's adaptation of *Odyssey* at Piccolo Teatro di Milano, Italy; while director Ivo van Hove completed a European and US tour of his production of *Antigone* after premiering it in Luxembourg at the Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg.

Greek Tragedies have been periodically in vogue on the Western stage since the inception of the form in the fifth century BCE. However, Edith Hall observed in 2004 that 'more Greek tragedy has been performed in the last thirty years than at any point in history since Greco-Roman antiquity' (2). Throughout this thesis I argue that this is not an anomaly; it is in fact, the onset of postmodernism in the later part of the twentieth century that has produced this phenomenon. I expose a correlation between this wider theatrical trend and the

postmodern concerns that prompted the individuals featured within my case studies to undertake their adaptations of classical Greco-Roman tragedies. There are countless existing discourses surrounding the cultural and historical significance of the classical Greek texts and as such, they retain a superior position within the Western literary and theatrical canons. I suggest that this makes them an ideal choice for adaptation influenced by the postmodern condition and its inherent urge to subvert, disrupt and reject established metanarratives.

The postmodern condition is, however, contradictory, and postmodern art produced in response often operates transparently from within a culture it simultaneously recycles and subverts. Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon explains that postmodernism 'uses the reappropriated forms of the past to speak to a society from within the values and history of the society, while still questioning it (1999: 12). As such, postmodernism as critical framework invites an analysis of history, how it is communicated in the present and the space in-between.

Continuous questioning prompted by postmodernism invites revisionist perspectives of established or historical productions. Equally postmodernism's adaptability and the rich foundation of theoretical discourse also proves advantageous in discussions of a new adaptations. In arguing for the value of a postmodern critical framework in discussion of theatrical adaptation, this thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge. My revisionist perspectives of the adaptations featured in Chapter Two and Chapter Three contribute new arguments to existing analyses of Mee and Mnouchkine and their works and, in its consideration of the Almeida's more recent Greeks season, Chapter Four demonstrates the efficacy and value of a postmodern critique in the twenty-first century while offering an original discussion of three new productions. Read collectively the chapters of this thesis argue that postmodernism exists as an ongoing metamorphosing cultural dominant that continues to evolve and inform cultural production in the contemporary moment. Although I acknowledge

the rich theoretical discourse (and ample contention) that already exists, this thesis argues that there remains unfinished business with postmodernism.

This Introduction now very briefly addresses the history of postmodernism as a critical framework before the lengthier investigation of its origins and definitions in the following chapter. I refer throughout to postmodernism existing within a flexible period of time. I do not wish to limit postmodernism to a finite period as this partly undermines the fluidity of my definition. I also introduce the other key critical frameworks that complement and challenge the methodological approach I use throughout the thesis. I reference cultural materialism, theatre historiography, classical reception theory, adaptation studies, and briefly, theatre of the real and contemporary debates around tragedy and the tragic. For each, I provide an overview of selected methodologies with reference to the relevant theorists and argue for these as useful tools within this particular thesis.

Postmodernism as a Critical Tool

In the late twentieth century theoretical and critical dialogues on postmodernism emerged to investigate the seismic shifts in perceptions, productions and mediations of cultural forms (Lyotard 1984, Jameson 1984, Hutcheon 1988, 1989). Building on earlier deconstructionist and poststructuralist theory and seizing upon this initial interest, the term postmodernism and its divergent definitions found currency in academic fields as broad as literary studies, philosophy, sociology, history, economics, cultural studies, and theatre and performance studies. What began as a theoretical attempt to articulate a distinct cultural moment has altered. The conceptual parameters have now shifted from a definition contested by theorists such as Lyotard (1984, 1993), Hutcheon (1988, 1989), Fredric Jameson (1984), Jürgen Habermas (1981, 1987) and Jean Baudrillard (1994) [1981], to a more fluid idea that can be applied to

fields as diverse as architecture and zoology.[2] It is my belief that the term postmodernism has been alienated from its rich foundation of critical discourse and its potential as a critical framework. Currently, the term postmodern is often condensed and simplified in popular discourse (Livni 2018), and postmodernism has even been vilified as a cause of the post-2015 epidemic of 'fake news' (Kakutani 2018). It is the ongoing reduction and misapplication of the definition that suggests that this is an opportune context to re-evaluate what postmodernism means, and furthermore, consider how it can form a useful critical tool within our present historical and cultural moment.

Historicising postmodernism reveals that it is a predominantly Eurocentric discourse or theoretical framework. The scholars listed above are all writing from positions within the Western academy. The challenge to universalising truths or grand narratives that they describe relies on recognisably Western discourse and so there are limits when understanding postmodernism as a cultural frame. Chapter One details this and the inextricable influence of the multinational or late capitalist economic setting and the corresponding developments in technology, knowledge and communication on postmodern cultural forms (Jameson 1984). Though there are similar developments across much of the globe, the rate of development is not always equitable. My case studies were produced and staged in England, North America and France and so I maintain that the postmodern critical frame is valid here. Further, as the world seemingly gets smaller and the postmodern condition expands beyond Western geographical boundaries, there is scope for the methodology used within this thesis to expand beyond its existing limits.

Within Western theatre scholarship, postmodernism has variously been characterised as a purposeful collapse in the distinction and hierarchy of '"high art" and "popular culture"'

[2] In the 1960s architecture was the first artistic form to have its works labelled as postmodern (Butler 2002, Jameson 1984), and on the subject of zoology there is a real publication entitled *Zoos in Postmodernism: Signs and Simulation* (2006).

stemming from a growth in '*mediatized* culture' (Auslander 1994: 3).[3] It has been characterised as a cultural condition that encourages questioning 'of the modernist faith in legitimacy' (Kaye 1994: 2); or, explained in statements that it, whatever *it* is, 'delights in the eclectic, in unexpected and innovative juxtapositions of material, creating new relationships, effects, and tensions' (Carlson 2003: 168). Terms such as 'pastiche', 'parody' and 'irony' often accompany the description postmodern, particularly with reference to the selection, composition and recycling of material from the available cultural landscape. In the example of adaptation (a form of recycling), there is a perception, noted by Avra Sidiropoulou, that postmodernism encourages 'so-called 'cannibalistic' tendencies' (2014: 31) but it is my contention that this generalisation does a disservice to the complexities of postmodernism.

One theoretical framework that does allow for complex readings of postmodern recycling is Marvin Carlson's influential 2003 study on 'ghosting' in the theatrical medium. Carlson argues that 'the practice of theatre has been in all periods and cultures particularly obsessed with memory and ghosting'; he ascribes the term ghosting to 'recognition' or 'the awareness of witnessing something again' (2003: 6 - 7). The phenomenon of encountering something already experienced, accentuated as part of the postmodern condition, has renewed creative interest in depictions of ghostliness and the academic study of spectrality.[4] Jeffrey A. Weinstock has suggested that the 'current fascination [with] ghosts arises out of the general postmodern suspicions of meta-narratives [sic] accentuated by millennial anxiety' (2004: 5). The metanarratives that Weinstock refers to here are the same as those first highlighted by Lyotard (1984), namely totalising narratives related to knowledge, culture and identity. In light of the disruption to these ontological narratives, ghosts or ghosting perceived in creative works can be viewed as representations of uncertainties of history, time and place. Given the

[3] Emphasis is the author's own. From this point onwards all formatting and spelling will reflect, where possible, that of the original author. If I add emphasis to any quotations I will explicitly acknowledge it.
[4] The onset of the 'spectral turn', as it is referred to in literary and cultural studies, is frequently credited to the 1993 publication of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (Luckhurst and Morin 2014, Weinstock 2004).

ephemerality of the theatrical form and the postmodern cultural transformations that continually disrupt the stability of these three notions, ghosting proves an effective critical metaphor when discussing the examples of adaptation featured within this thesis.

Periodisation and Postmodernism

Alongside certain characteristics that often supplement the definition of what is postmodernism, there is a frequent issue in how the term itself is used. Postmodern and postmodernism can both be used to denote a particular time period, usually the later part of the twentieth and early part of the twenty-first centuries. Acknowledging the specifications of the thesis format I have chosen a clear timeline (1990 – 2015) from within this period to source my case studies. Nonetheless, I must address the inherent complications of periodisation, notably in response to my own classification of this period as postmodern.

Periods are derived from a variety of historical markers. The practice of periodisation can result in a homogenised perception of a timepoint that is quite complex because, as Pantelis Michelakis suggests, it 'does not account for the different positions available within each period, or for the different endpoints from which one looks at the past' (2011: 226). Classifications such as postmodern can therefore be used to impose unwelcome order on complex and disparate cultural features, historical events, and ideological trends. In critical terms some order is helpful, although, my aim is to embrace the divergence of the term postmodernism in order to best capture and represent it for my critical uses.

Dominant artistic practices and intellectual inquiry inform my demarcation of the period of postmodernism and yet, because it is multifaceted, I do not consider it as a stable entity. It is a cultural viewpoint, not a reductive label; for example, when using the term postmodern adaptation I indicate a form of adaptation resulting from the cultural condition. Periodisation does have other benefits despite seemingly advocating for finite parameters

because, as Michelakis also suggests, the act of 'periodization encourages a closer look at the plurality of micro-narratives of which larger historical sequences are constituted' (2011: 225). Periodisation nods to the history or development of different art forms in accordance with what came before, and this is of particular value here as an understanding of postmodernism is reliant upon the earlier period of modernism. Provided I heed Michelakis' warning above and acknowledge the heterogeneous potential within a given (defined) period, I opt to acknowledge a sense of chronology within this thesis as it allows me to consider the classical adaptations in relation to their broader historical context.

As well as referring to a fluctuating time period, the term postmodern is frequently used to refer to a generalised set of performance characteristics. Attempting to offer an indubitable definition of postmodernism in performance is inherently problematic. Philip Auslander articulates the issue of attempting to define and employ postmodernism as a critical lens; 'postmodernism, both as theoreticohistorical concept and as a set of cultural practices, is a complex, contradictory, multidimensional space within which any commentator must inevitably stake out a position and an emphasis' (1994: 7). Although the following chapter will establish my position in relation to the broader discourse around postmodernism, if the full complexity of the debate surrounding a postmodern cultural agenda is revitalised, the scope of its analytic potential is revealed.

Hutcheon has highlighted the 'contradictory phenomenon' of postmodernism as 'one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges' (1988: 3). This notion is paramount when considering the act of adapting classical Greek tragedies, and it is the primary reason that adaptations of classical texts serve as the ideal case studies here. One of the notable concerns in adaptation has been the debate of fidelity, and this highly contested notion is discussed at length in the following chapter. However, here it is pertinent to simply state that acts of adaptation relating to classical or canonised sources must negotiate issues of

fidelity, whether they install the dominant cultural narrative or subvert it. The prevalence of classical texts found within the Western dramatic canon reflects a problematic historical conviction in Western cultural hegemony (Settis 2006); I will advocate that postmodernism is a cultural practice that can, in various ways, disrupt this. Each of the case studies features theatre artists living amidst the (regrettably) demarcated postmodern period and so I also question how, and if, their adaptations can simultaneously critique and remain complicit in the cultural narratives they are responding to.

Positions Against Postmodernism: Twenty-First Century Critique

The contradictory and complex nature of postmodernism is one of the main reasons it features as the central methodological framework in this thesis and, recently, there has been renewed interest in its significance as a critical lens in theatre and performance studies. Hussein Al-Badri utilises a postmodern analysis in *Tony Kushner's Postmodern Theatre: A Study of Political Discourse* (2014), while Eleftheria Ioannidou's work *Greek Fragments in Postmodern Frames: Rewriting Tragedy 1970 - 2005* (2017) and Kara Reilly's edited collection *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre* both highlight the influence of postmodernism within processes of theatrical adaptation. Nevertheless, in other areas of theatrical discourse scholars have highlighted what they perceive as the critical limitations of postmodernism. Andy Lavender (2016), Carol Martin (2010, 2013) and Liz Tomlin (2013) have identified a theatrical 'return to the real' that confronts some of the basic tenets of postmodernism.

The so-titled theatre of the real is a genre that emerged from documentary or verbatim theatre and has since developed, in form and content, amidst growing scepticism of notions such as reality, truth or verisimilitude (Martin 2010: 1 - 2). Lavender suggests that postmodernism, as an epoch, has come to an end as he argues that the theatrical interest in

representation of the real comes after postmodernism (2016: 4). Though Lavender cites the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as the first catalyst for a new form of theatre engaged with representations of the *real,* for him, 9/11 represents 'the most categorical threshold between postmodernism and what lies beyond' (2016: 12).[5] He claims that individuals affected by the postmodern condition so successfully embraced the '[destabilised] assumed norms and notions of the real' that they were unable to engage with 'new scenarios [such as 9/11] that changed our relationship (historically, politically, technologically) to realities and their expression' (2016: 19). World events demanding new forms of engagement overtly concerned with authenticity, meaning and politics lead, according to Lavender, to a cultural paradigm with more acute awareness of the 'ingrained nature of performance in contemporary culture' and questioning of the interconnectedness of modes of representation and the real (2016: 10). Despite arguing that this paradigm is 'definitely beyond the postmodern' as postmodernism cannot meet demands for the desired return to the real, Lavender acknowledges that our cultural space in 2016 still 'continues to trade in certain postmodern strategies' (ibid).

Similarly, Martin cannot completely separate theatre of the real from postmodernism as the two share ideological characteristics such as 'the particularization of subjectivity, the rejection of universality […] and a questioning of the relationship between facts and truth' (2010: 3). However, Martin argues that theatre of the real often uses familiar postmodern dramaturgical strategies to demonstrate that the nature of truth and meaning can be subjective and complex. Her argument is that the scepticism of postmodernism coupled with an ever more mediatised culture and new virtual realities has led to a distortion of conceptions of reality; in other words, postmodern ideologies and the postmodern cultural landscape with its

[5] 9/11 is shorthand that refers to the events of Tuesday 11th September 2001. On this date four passenger airplanes were hijacked by members of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda and intentionally flown into the two towers of the World Trade Centre, New York and the Pentagon, the headquarters for the US Government's Department of Defence. Nearly 3,000 people died as a result of the attacks and more than 8,000 people were injured; it is the deadliest terrorist attack in US history.

epistemological uncertainty has eroded certain important truths. For Martin, twentieth century understandings of postmodernism are inadequate when describing the emerging theatre of the real because it does not allow for the ideological belief that theatre has potential to enact 'positive consequences', 'that there is *something* to be known in addition to a dizzying kaleidoscopic array of competing truths' (2010: 4).[6] Martin's assertion here is that not all truths or realities are equal, and the recent co-opting of postmodernism by the right-wing media to argue against climate change, for example, gives this part of her argument credence.

Tomlin's critique of postmodernism is concerned with the potentially apolitical nature of postmodern performance forms. Considering what constitutes radical manifestations in performance, particularly in verbatim or autobiographical performance, one of Tomlin's central questions is whether postmodern tactics can do more than simply deconstruct or expose the strategies that sustain illusions of reality. Tomlin problematises postmodernism's relativism and suggests a model for radical political practice that 'should be based, not on its simplistic opposition or otherwise to dramatic form, or on the reification of its totalising conclusions, but on a self-reflexivity which can serve to always and already destabilise its own particular claims to authority' (2013: 12). Tomlin recommends that when 'we are increasingly asked to construct our own reality, let us assess with some care what the implications of the reality we choose might be' (2013: 209). In questioning the political potential of theatre, Tomlin actually lands on one of the central features of postmodernism as advocated for by Hutcheon and applied consistently throughout my case study analyses, namely that self-reflexive 'critique is as important as complicity in the response of cultural postmodernism to the philosophical and socio-economic realities' (1989: 26). Tomlin's concern is that ideology is at work in all realities and therefore, in order to be radical, postmodern artists must continually interrogate their own

[6] Emphasis is mine.

understanding and representations of this interrelationship and this is something I consider in my discussions of Mee, Mnouchkine and the Almeida Greeks season.

Lavender, Martin and Tomlin each make a different claim about the limits of postmodernism. Lavender identifies an end to the postmodern period because it cannot meet the new theatrical need for meaning or engagement with authenticity, and he critiques its ability to frame or analyse current world events. Martin believes that postmodern scepticism is limiting because it devalues certain necessary truths and Tomlin questions the political efficacy of postmodern theatrical forms. However, each of these scholars cannot deny that postmodernism is still informing and influencing cultural practice and theatrical dramaturgies, demonstrating its ongoing relevance. I therefore maintain my argument that postmodernism is still the twenty-first cultural dominant. With its ability to encompass questions of history, historicity and the present, and its self-reflexive questioning characteristics, postmodernism remains the most effective critical frame for this thesis.

Cultural Materialism and Theatre Historiography

Given my interest in postmodernism as a cultural condition that informs and exposes different adaptation strategies, it is necessary to acknowledge the cultural materialist perspective within my methodological framework. Cultural materialism, as coined by Raymond Williams (1977) and further defined by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (1994) serves as a model for locating cultural production in its historical, political, social and material contexts. Williams' original use of the term was inspired by Marxist literary arguments, and as such he reasoned that cultural products are inseparable from their means of cultural production (1977).

Within the context of this thesis, the influence of the cultural materialist approach suggests that in order to better understand the cultural product I must consider the means of cultural production. A cultural materialist stance encourages a consideration of how the acts of

adaptation are in dialogue with the wider cultural moment and the material conditions of production, such as the role of the cultural industries and the economic characteristics of production. In Chapter Four in my analysis of the Almeida Theatre for example, I consider the theatre's marketing strategies and the supplementary events built around three mainstage adaptations of Greek tragedies.

The exchange between ideas of theory and practice cannot be overlooked. In the postmodern period Ioannidou finds a mirroring of theorisation and practice stating that 'major playwrights have been amenable to the theoretical investigations of poststructuralist theory, which, in turn, help to articulate the concerns of postmodernism, more broadly' (2017: 7). The link between theory and practice is not guaranteed or applicable to each case study within this thesis. However, 'even when plays are not directly influenced by theory they can still be seen as products of the same intellectual climate', namely in the turn of the twenty-first century period in question, the broader 'theoretical challenges to canon and textual canonicity alongside other forms of authority' are reflected in the 'treatment of the literary [theatrical source] text as a fluid and polyphonic cultural product' (Ioannidou 2017: 6). Therefore, a re-evaluation of the theoretical discourse on the postmodern condition is necessary to best support my intention to re-appropriate the term postmodern and provide the most nuanced reading of the chosen case studies. Additionally, where relevant, the case studies will be read in response to the major social, political and cultural phenomena that intervene and encourage the growth of the postmodern condition.

One of the key concerns of postmodernism is related to history and the communication of knowledge as a legitimate or unquestionable entity (Lyotard 1984). The context of this thesis requires that I acknowledge that one of the strands of my own methodology, theatre historiography, has multiple meanings. Historiography literally denotes the process of writing history and in recent years this meaning has expanded to '[include] the theory and philosophy

of history' (Postlewait 2009: 2). Historiography as a methodological strategy includes collating evidence and documentation, which I designate as the 'facts', *and* the necessary act of interpretatively constructing their new means of presentation. I make the distinction that my methodology is theatre historiography and not theatre history so as to note and acknowledge that my version is just one version inevitably informed by my own agenda and position. However, I have attempted to retain a measure of objectivity (where possible), reflecting Oscar Brockett's (1981) recommendation for a positivist practice of theatre historiography, in which the ideal is objectivity. Brockett, although advocating for objectivity, acknowledges that interpreting the facts objectively is 'extremely difficult and perhaps impossible' and so any historical writing 'depends as much upon the interpretation of the events as upon the factual evidence which forms its base' (1981: 723). Commenting on this statement, Bruce A. McConachie (1985) advocates instead for understanding theatre historiography as inherently postpositive. Understanding my influence as the researcher I have carefully weighed my key research questions and interests and the motivations behind these. Further, I work with a broad range of materials including but not limited to: academic publications, performance reviews, biographies, practitioner interviews, playtexts, websites, photographs and audio-visual recordings, in my pursuit of interpretative objectivity.

A Rapprochement between Classical Reception Theory and Adaptation Studies

Classical reception theory is interested in the ephemera of Greco-Roman antiquity and the ways in which it 'has been transmitted, translated, excerpted, interpreted, rewritten, re-imaged and represented' (Hardwick and Stray 2008: 1). Arguably there are clear parallels to be drawn between adaptation studies and classical reception. The verbs chosen by Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray to describe the interests of classical reception could all feature in a glossary of strategies for theatrical adaptation. For example, Mee's collage-inspired process of

playwriting incorporates verbatim excerpts taken from reading materials as varied as political manifestos and Internet celebrity blogs, while each of the plays featured as part of the Almeida season were rewritten with the hope of producing 'contemporary stories that spoke to their city' (Goold in Icke 2015: 127).

Classical reception theory is interested in the process of exchange between the historical and the contemporary, working with the premise that the study of the anterior artefacts enhances the understanding of present-day receptions and vice versa. The dialogue between two examples prompts an analysis built upon an active process. Hutcheon in part influences my argument as she offers a tripartite definition of adaptation as '*formal entity or product*', '*a process of creation'* and '*process of reception*' (2013: 7 - 8). Adaptation can, as I will argue throughout this thesis, be categorised as an active process. It is my assertion that studies of adaptation can be complemented by the methodologies of classical reception because the act of adaptation is a process that involves an exchange between source material or materials and a secondary product. The body of discourse surrounding classical reception is pertinent to this thesis as my case studies are adaptations of classical texts. Traditionally classical reception theory has been concerned with common disputes of universality, Athenian citizenship and 'faithful' translation (Fischer-Lichte 2008), however, I am interested in the contemporary texts and their potentially elevated statuses given their affiliation with the classical source texts rather than how the new adaptations can shed light on the performance traditions of antiquity. I am also interested in how the texts may be viewed as the ephemera of the classical but are subsequently rerendered through contemporary concerns of adaptation and theatrical production.

Hutcheon argues against the 'disparaging opinions on adaptation as a secondary mode'; she advocates 'that to be second is not secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative' (2013: xiii). Hutcheon's valuation of new adaptations is reflective

of a postmodern sentiment that destabilises the hierarchy between high and low art forms. A postmodern sentiment is now visible in the field of classical reception given its recent 'democratic turn' (Hardwick and Stray 2008). The influences guiding this democratic turn can be traced back as early as the work of Hans Robert Jauβ (1982) [1970] who first launched his theories of reception in comparative literature. Jauβ' argument places the onus on the expectations and experiences of the receiving individuals in line with the constructs of their historical setting, thus beginning the shift similarly identified by Roland Barthes (1977), from object or author to subject or reader as the site for meaning making. Most recently Ioannidou has a highlighted this theoretical approach and, noting the democratic turn, she encourages 'the dialogue between reception theory and the growing literature on adaptation' (2017: 7). Following Ioannidou's recommendation, I too adopt rapprochement between the two disciplines to support my consideration of each classical adaptation as process and product.

Whilst the democratic turn within classical reception refers to the destabilisation of the superior cultural valuation of the anterior materials when compared to the newer literary works, the most recent scholarly debates have shifted yet again to consider contemporary adaptations that are drawn from alternate creative mediums. These debates acknowledge that, with the decreasing numbers of individuals with a working knowledge of ancient Greek combined with the highly mediatised postmodern landscape, the literary source material is unlikely to be the first point of reception for audiences (Hardwick and Stray 2008). As a product of postmodernism and its disruption of established cultural forms and hierarchies, new adaptations of classical sources are now, more likely than ever, to appear in mediatised forms.

Greek Tragedy and the Process of Proximation

From the 'Golden Age' of classical Greek theatre, beginning in sixth century BCE and reaching its peak during the fifth century BCE, there exist 33 extant tragedies attributed to three

playwrights: Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles. Within the classical Greek theatre tradition there are a numerous texts that are lost, and therefore this limited number of surviving plays is representative of the classical Greek tragic theatrical canon. Within this thesis I refer to adaptations of works by both Aeschylus and Euripides, and some of the same sources appear across the three case study chapters. As I stated earlier this is not to offer new insights into the scholarship surrounding these playwrights during the period of antiquity but rather to consider a particular aspect of the postmodern condition, namely the impetus to disrupt historical and cultural hierarchies.

At the turn of the twenty-first century the evolving practice of adaptation and the contemporary scholarly field emerging around it, increased the visibility of alternate dramaturgical approaches and the radical overhauling of classical conventions. The defining conventions of classical tragedy such as the tragic chorus and the use of masks are all but abandoned in the majority of the case studies featured here, as the different dramaturgical strategies transform the source texts to meet the perceived demands of the new performance environment. One dramaturgical choice or adaptation strategy that frequently features within a selection of the case studies is proximation. The term was defined first by Gérard Gennette (1997) and then by Julie Sanders as an act of 'updating or cultural relocation of a text to bring it into greater proximity with the cultural and temporal context of readers or audiences' (2016: 163). The same process that Sanders defines as proximation, is given the name 'actualization' by Margherita Laera (2014: 7). Laera comparably defines 'actualization' as 'an intertemporal adaptation that relocates an old source (either written or set in the distant past) into more recent times' (ibid). A clear example of this can be seen in the Almeida's *Oresteia,* discussed in Chapter Four, when the choral role is replaced by a singular unnamed psychiatrist-styled character, substituting the representative *polis* as the voice of reason with a more intimate and recognisable twenty-first century confidante.

The source texts by Aeschylus and Euripides were written and first performed in a now extinct language. The means of their production and the cultural and social context of the plays are lost, therefore there is a necessity for some form of proximation in the acts of translation and adaptation. Discourses around the translation of ancient Greek to present-day languages indicate a deficit in the vocabulary of receiving languages when attempting to communicate terms that have, in the context of ancient Greece, multiple meanings and resonances. Additionally there are examples in which the meaning of particular words has no obvious counterpart, for example terms such as *hubris* and *catharsis*. Numerous classicists such as Oliver Taplin (2003), Helene P. Foley (1999) and Simon Goldhill (1990) acknowledge that no performance of a classical Greek play can present a truly authentic representation of the classical form due to issues of translation and the lack of evidence surrounding the mechanisms of performance. As the Greek source texts were intended for a singular performance only, any subsequent performance has a different, new use or purpose. In other words, literary translations or performances of classical Greek texts are by necessity (and according to the most literal definition of adaptation), *always* a form of adaptation.[7]

In the postmodern period forms of Greek adaptation are continually shifting and I view this as evidence of the more seismic shift from a modernist to postmodernist cultural agenda. In this shift the prototype or literal source text becomes more open, a vehicle for proximation and many other ambitious adaptation strategies. For example, in Chapter Two I detail how Mee often rejects the logocentrism of his classical source texts, replacing it with an adaptive bricolage of other performance forms. The late 1960s and 1970s, inspired by the second wave of the avant-garde, was also the point when linguistic terms were modified in response; the norm post-1970 became a 'creative blurring of the distinction between different kinds of

[7] I am using the Oxford English Dictionary definition of adaptation: 'the action or process of altering, amending, or modifying something, esp. something that has been created for a particular purpose, so that it suitable for a new use' (2018: n. pg.).

translations, versions, adaptations and more distant relatives' (Hardwick 2000: 12). Ioannidou offers a justification for this, namely a preoccupation with intertextuality that pervades 'the postmodern world of deconstructed narratives, proliferating images, and textual pastiche' (2017: 3). The postmodern influence extends beyond the terminology and thus, from the 1970s onwards 'plays based on Greek tragedy do not just offer reworkings of well-known tragic plots and themes; intertextuality here takes the form of an extended preoccupation with the prototype as textual entity' (Ioannidou 2017: 6). The intertextual preoccupation that continues to develop throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries challenges the conventional associations of what a classical tragedy was, is, and can be.

Ancient Greek Theatre in Context

The extant canonical works of ancient Greece were first performed at an elaborate festival named after the god Dionysus. The City Dionysia, Spring Dionysia or The Great Dionysia as it has been variously titled, was a major cultural and religious festival hailing 'the god of wine, vegetation and drama, [that] featured competitions in tragedy, comedy, satyr plays and dithyramb choruses' (Hardwick 2013: 327). Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* (which features in both Chapter Three and Chapter Four of this thesis) won the tragedy competition at the City Dionysia in 458 BCE.

Reworking or adaptation can be considered a stylistic trait of the ancient Greek theatre. The subject of the plays written for the City Dionysia were often well-known myths or narratives and subsequently, Carlson argues that much drama within the Western tradition 'has been based primarily on the retelling of already familiar stories' (2003: 18), and therefore adaptation as practice is not new or revolutionary. In his *Poetics* Aristotle considers 'the superior and more significant drama to be that in which the material is already familiar to the audience, drawn from a shared body of historic, legendary, and mythic material' (ibid). Even

in the earliest iterations of these staged, classical myths there is an interest in bridging temporal distance. Theatre as a medium, 'provided a bridge between the mythical past and the cultural present in Athens (just as now it provides a bridge between the Athenian past and our own present' (Hardwick 2013: 327). The ephemerality of the theatre space offers a unique frame for exploring issues of temporality. As the 'founding myths and legends of cultures around the world', including ancient Greece, 'have been registered in their cultures by theatrical repetition' (Carlson 2003: 3), there is a historic precedent for myth to traverse temporal boundaries within theatrical spaces.

During the City Dionysia, entertainment was only one feature of what was primarily an ordered civic activity. The festival and all its ceremonies 'stress[ed] the power of the *polis,* the duties of an individual to the *polis*', it provided 'occasion to say something about the city, not only in the plays themselves' but in the highly visible, public nature of the event (Goldhill 1990: 114). For example, the importance of the democratic *polis* is directly reflected in the classical convention of the tragic chorus. The chorus is a theatrical device to allow a collective to witness and pass commentary on the dramatic action of the principal characters; it is a means of mirroring the Athenian democratic senate as it functioned during the fifth century BCE.

Other classical conventions of ancient Greek theatre include: offstage violence and character deaths, an all-male cast comprising a chorus of twelve to fifteen and a limited number, usually three, principal performers; the use of masks in performance, arguably both an aesthetic and pragmatic staging choice given the size of the amphitheatres and the multi-roling required of the principal performers, a dramatic structure that oscillates between principal action (*episodes*) and choral odes (*stasimon*) and the 'non-naturalist use of language (examples are *stichomythia* and *antilabe*)' (Ley 2007, Goldhill 2007, Revermann 2008: 107). It is however, the chorus as theatrical convention that presents the most particular challenge to contemporary playwrights and theatre practitioners.

George Rodosthenous refers to 'the eternal issue of the chorus' (2017: 13); Sidiropoulou addresses 'the 'chorus problem'' (2014: 38); while Foley states that 'gods and the chorus can often be viewed as impediments to performing Greek drama on the modern stage' (1999: 5). Given their presence within the classical performance and more importantly the contribution they make to the progression of the plot, there are major dramaturgical implications of radically adapting the chorus or removing them completely. How to adapt the chorus subsequently proves a recurring point of discussion within the forthcoming chapters, as each adaptation here must employ a dramaturgical strategy to negotiate the chorus 'issue' in accordance to contemporary theatrical expectations. My investigation of the tragic chorus is a methodological strategy to address the concerns of the postmodern condition in its framing of collective identities and its nostalgic interest in community.[8]

Tragedy Then and Now

In his 1928 publication Walter Benjamin distinguished between what he defined as *Tragödie* [tragedy] and *Trauerspiel* [the play of mourning] (1998).[9] Benjamin asserts that the foundations of *Tragödie* are mythic while *Trauerspiel* is 'counter-transcendental; it celebrates the immanence of existence even where this existence is passed in torment' (Steiner 1998: 16). In his separation of the two forms, Benjamin suggests that *Tragödie* can only refer to the performance of the classical tragedies of antiquity within this singular context. Benjamin's description of *Tragödie* aligns with Aristotle and his understanding of tragedy as a mimetic

[8] For an interesting perspective on other contemporary uses of the tragic chorus see Margherita Laera's *Reaching Athens: Community, Democracy and Other Mythologies in Adaptations of Greek Tragedy* (2013). Laera uses numerous adaptations of classical tragedies and the role of the chorus to investigate notions of community and identity predominantly defined as European. Critiquing Western neo-liberal capitalist ideologies Laera successfully deconstructs the notion of democracy as an Athenian ideal and further problematises the hegemonic appropriation of this ideal in Western perceptions of 'freedom, empowerment and participation, which retrospectively elevate Athenian democracy as a model for our current political system' (2013: 6).

[9] *Trauerspiel* refers to the seventeenth-century theatrical genre featured within Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.* He claims the allegory of *Trauerspiel* is drawn from the 'threefold material affinity between baroque and medieval Christianity. The struggle against the pagan gods, the triumph of allegory, the torment of the flesh, are equally central to both' (Benjamin 1998: 220).

act; in his *Poetics* Aristotle states that 'tragedy is a representation of an action of a superior kind […] presented in embellished language, in distinct forms in different parts, performed by actors rather than told by a narrator' (2013: 23). Aristotle's conception of mimesis requires aesthetic and musical spectacle. Yet, he also suggests that *opsis '*(that is, the visible component of a production) represents a matter of secondary importance' (Lehmann 2016: 1). There is therefore evidence, in Aristotle's description and usage of the term, that tragedy was polysemous even within this ancient context.

Reflecting on the surviving classical plays written by Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, contemporary scholars including Goldhill (2012) have identified a transhistorical universalising quality associated with tragedy. Goldhill, however, suggests that this is not a result of the antiquated Greek definitions or representations of tragedy but rather a product of Kantian thought in the modern period. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (2007) [1790] is concerned with aesthetic judgement and suggests that subjective perceptions of beauty have universal potential, thus 'the Kantian subject [can] view Greek tragedy as a privileged aesthetic object' detached from political or moral debates (Goldhill 2012: 147). The impulse to understand Greek tragedy as universalising is fundamental to the modernist understanding of it as an art form, and this narrative still holds sway in the period covered by this thesis. Consequently, recent critical debates around Greek tragedy are often aligned with the manifestation of the allegedly timeless notion of 'the tragic' now used in consideration of suffering in a range of contexts, theatrical, personal and political, amongst others.

Ioannidou (2017) and Hans-Thies Lehmann in his *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre* (2016) have both recently considered the implications of tragedy in contemporary theatre and performance. Tragedy, as literature and drama, has conventionally been 'a strangely convenient and reassuringly comfortable cultural commodity of the educated elite' given its iconic status (Revermann 2008: 104). However, the terms 'tragic' and 'tragedy' now appear more frequently

with greater conceptual fluidity. Ioannidou recognises inferences embedded within these terms, even in their variable use; for example, she argues that the invocation of the term tragedy to 'refer to suffering that occurs close to home' is a conscious usage that marks a hierarchical qualification of suffering for certain individuals, often depending on their agency in said tragedy (2017: 41 – 42). Outside of the theatrical medium the term 'tragedy provides a performative affirmation that reproduces the system of values that defines which lives matter more than others' (ibid), thus here, Ioannidou observes a lingering hierarchy despite the more fluid twenty-first century conceptualisation of tragedy.

There are clear cultural associations with tragedy that persist even now; these include the mythopoesis around tragedy as the foundation of all Western theatre and the already mentioned hierarchical implications of the terminology beyond a theatrical context. There are ongoing debates related to the nature of tragedy and the tragic in contemporary theatre and I wish to acknowledge the conceptual fluidity and complexity of the terms. However, for the specification of this thesis I am principally concerned with a romanticised or nostalgic *idea* of Greek tragedy and its metaphorical weight as a genre that can potentially offer the means to reinvestigate notions of suffering across temporal and geographical boundaries. The narratives of Greek tragedy are historically affiliated with the *hamartia* [the flaw] of the tragic hero and the balance between fate and human agency (Aristotle 2013) and it is, ultimately, a self-reflective genre. The introspection prompted by tragedies coupled with its established metanarratives confirms it as a theatrical form that is primed for the interventions of revisionist postmodern agendas.

Chapter Outlines

Postmodernism, identity and adaptation are the triumvirate of terms that are integral to the analysis of each case study, therefore Chapter One contains an expanded discussion of the

terms and presents the definitions of each as I utilise them in this thesis. Beginning with postmodernism, I draw on two key theorists and texts, Lyotard and *The Postmodern Condition,* as already mentioned, and Jameson and 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984). After analysis, my definition is formulated using Lyotard's discussion of the changing qualities of language, knowledge and metanarratives, Jameson's critique of the economic and political implications of postmodernism as a by-product of the period of late or multinational capitalism; and, briefly, Badrillard's identification of simulacra and the hyperreal (1994).

In my discussion of identity I differentiate between identity and identity politics, focussing on the crisis of representation as explored by Robert G. Dunn in *Identity Crisis: A Social Critique of Postmodernity* (1998). Referencing poststructuralist theorists Barthes (1977) and Julie Kristeva (1981) I argue that identity can be a constructed entity. Postmodernism's rejection of established institutional and social metanarratives encourages the emancipation of the individual, leading to new sense of autonomous agency in the formation of identities. With reference to Salvatore Settis' *The Future of the 'Classical'* (2006) I also question why individuals influenced by the postmodern condition may choose to identify with and adapt ancient Greek tragedies and present them on Western theatrical stages.

In the third and final part of the chapter I survey the existing and emerging literature on adaptation in drama and theatre studies and the field of adaptation studies. My definition relies on a range of different theorists but is most heavily is indebted to Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation* (2013), Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2014), and Laera's *Reaching Athens: Community, Democracy and Other Mythologies in Adaptations of Greek Tragedy* (2013). Drawing on these theorists I argue that adaptation is best suited to a fluid definition.

Chapter Two features the first full case study of the thesis and focuses on a selection of plays written by American historian, playwright and theatre scholar Mee. I feature Mee within

this thesis as I suggest he is the epitome of a postmodern playwright in both dramaturgical style and the means by which he disseminates his creative work. I consider seven of Mee's adaptations and the wealth of extra-textual materials that exist around him and his work to expose the paradoxes between aspirations for his process of adaptation and the texts that are a result of it. Mee draws heavily on the creative practice of collage and takes verbatim materials from his cultural setting and transposes them directly into the world of his plays. The plethora of sources that Mee uses highlights the cultural trend of consumerism and the adaptation of his texts directly challenges modernist ideologies of authorial control and art as a finite entity. Although his playwriting style has developed over the course of the last 25 years, a large selection of his works, including the seven featured in Chapter Two, are adaptations of classical Greek texts that served as inspiration for Mee to re-examine his own socio-political setting.

Mee disseminates his work through an online platform known as the (re)making project. All of Mee's plays are available for free download with the request that the reader-cum-playwright take from the plays what they will and rework, refine and adapt them for their own purposes.[10] By offering the plays as a framework for building something new, Mee's plays provoke a broader theoretical question, primarily whether or not any version of his texts can ever be considered as complete. Mee's body of work is currently divided thematically on his website; it is curated in a manner that encourages an intertextual reading.[11] In order to focus on the issues pertinent to this thesis I address the works labelled as 'Tragedies: The Greeks'. This selection of works includes five plays and two dance theatre pieces; the plays were all written

[10] If the works are performed as published, without any additions then performance rights must be sought from Mee's agency representative (Mee n. d.: n. pg). Copyright versus Mee's ideological mantra is addressed within Chapter Two.

[11] Currently here refers to the period between June 2017 - March 2019. However, the organisation of the plays into this format has altered at some point since the 2014 premiere of *Night and Day*, a two-part dance theatre piece composed of, *Night (Thyestes 2. 0)* and *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2. 0)*. Before the addition of the dance pieces the plays, the Greek tragedies were alternately categorised into 'The Trilogy: Imperial Dreams' and 'Other Tragedies and History Plays' (according to personal notes, September 2015). The constant revisions to the website alter the authority of it as a form of documentation, and this necessary questioning of documentation and historicity is followed up within Chapter Two.

and premiered in the early 1990s, while the dance theatre pieces are much newer, only receiving their premiere in 2014.

Chapter Three focuses on the production *Les Atrides*, the French theatre director Mnouchkine and the company the Théâtre du Soleil. Mnouchkine is 'considered one of the most important theatre directors in the world of the last fifty years' (Glynn 2017: 214) and her exclusive relationship with one company, the Théâtre du Soleil, is largely anomalous within the contemporary theatre environment. *Les Atrides* has achieved its own canonical status within the plethora of Greek adaptations and that is one of the reasons it features within this thesis. *Les Atrides* is a four-play cycle that draws inspiration from Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* (458 BCE). However, Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil extended their interpretation to present a tetralogy that included Euripides' *Iphigénie à Aulis* (406 BCE) as a precursor to the plays of Aeschylus. In the case of this adaptation, the addition of Euripides' text to Aeschylus' cycle is a defiant act of postmodern intervention. This dramaturgical choice serves to scrutinise the legitimacy of established narratives and cultural traditions of the early modern period and before. Additionally, the highly aestheticised mode of performance and the reliance on communication in non-verbal forms supports my argument that this case study is best served by a non-hierarchical consideration of the performance as a postmodern intertext.

Mnouchkine's identity is central to the discussion of *Les Atrides*; her means of identifying herself as merely one member of the collective company is another crucial area of investigation within the chapter. I consider the company identity and the influence of its collective ideologies within the employed dramaturgical strategies of this production. The company has titled its process *création collective* and this is indicative of the community ethos that allegedly permeates all aspects of company life. The company's base, the Cartoucherie, is the centre of the community. It houses rehearsals and public performances and has remained a constant for the company since 1970. Within this chapter I question the importance of this

unique physical space in terms of the company's identity and the way that they approach adaptation. Using Carlson definition of ghosting (2003) I consider the extra-theatrical influence of the physical space as a site of recycling and memory making and question the dramaturgical choice to evoke an ambiguous temporality within *Les Atrides*.

Chapter Four focuses on the Greeks theatrical season at the Almeida Theatre in Islington, North London. The season was commissioned by Artistic Director Rupert Goold. It received excessive critical and media coverage and I investigate why and how the season as a whole captured the *zeitgeist* of that moment in 2015. Goold programmed three adaptations of classical Greek tragedies, *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea,* and a number of other events to complement these. The programming of the Almeida Greeks season was inspired by Goold's interest in updating Greek tragedy while also trying 'to answer some of the questions raised by these classic works' (Rodosthenous 2017: 3). The agenda of the institution (led by Goold) and the promotion of the season as a descendant of the classical Greek tradition opens debates around the postmodern concerns of cultural hegemony, classifications of cultural capital and the destabilised historicity of text.[12] I argue that these plays in collaboration with the other events of the wider theatrical season offer an opportunity to consider the adapted theatrical texts and the character of the culture that informed them.

Despite a range of dramaturgical choices within each of the adaptations, all of the core productions announced their overt link to their source material by retaining a similar title. *Oresteia,* the first and arguably most successful of the main stage productions was both written and directed by Robert Icke. *Bakkhai* was written by poet Anne Carson and directed by James Macdonald. *Medea* was written by Rachel Cusk and directed by Goold. Given the presence of different individuals versus a singular individual in the case of the *Oresteia,* alternate

[12] Each published version of the plays includes an 'Afterword' written by Goold, within it he states: 'the writers of Ancient Greece, [are] the founding fathers as theatre as we know it' (2015: 127).

dramaturgical identities become apparent. The chapter is sub-divided into four parts: a consideration of the season as a whole and a dedicated section for each production to address the different postmodern strategies for adaptation. As a collection of very different adaptations all belonging to one institutional identity, I return to question issues of fidelity, nostalgia and intertextuality via a postmodern lens. I make comparisons between each of the printed playtexts and the premiere productions thus provoking an examination of authorship, aesthetics and adaptation in the postmodern period, issues that are all also pertinent in all the preceding chapters.

When considered together my chosen case studies represent a variety of different approaches to postmodern adaptation and reflect a broader, enduring interest in classical Greek theatre. In spite of the autonomous nature of each act of adaptation, a coherency across my investigation emerges; most notably, there exists a strong correlation between the dominant cultural influence of postmodernism and the motivation to adapt classical tragedy. My analysis advocates viewing these adaptations *as* adaptations, in other words, embracing the poststructuralist tendency to view all texts as intertexts. In the field of adaptation studies in the twenty-first century the valuation of fidelity has largely been debunked as an unprofitable critical stance. However, the three case studies read in tandem reveal that fidelity remains a lingering preoccupation for the featured individuals creatively engaged in theatrical adaptation as each adapter attempts to appease fidelity concerns or radically subvert them. Postmodernism, first defined by Lyotard in 1979, could be seen as an outdated methodology in the analysis of a theatrical season in 2015 but my final case study chapter, as chronological extension of the preceding two, evidences the opposite. Postmodernism proves to be a fluid critical framework that benefits all parts of my investigation into the radical and ever diversifying nature of adaptation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

CHAPTER ONE

A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW: BEGINNING TO DEFINE THE THREE KEY TERMS

Introduction

This chapter introduces and defines my key critical terms: postmodernism, identity and adaptation. Each of these terms has multiple connotations; I therefore contextualise and critically determine each with reference to the key theoretical perspectives relevant to the field and offer my own perspectives for the purposes of my argument. The chapter comprises three parts and each part corresponds to one of the key critical terms. The discussion of postmodernism leads the chapter as I consider it in terms of a metamorphosing cultural shift (Jameson 1984: 55 - 57) that naturally informs my conceptualisation of identity and adaptation and the following discussions of these terms.

Arnold Toynbee first introduced the term 'post-modern' in his 1939 publication *A Study of History* (Docherty 1993: 1). Toynbee coined the term to describe the period of history immediately after World War I, from 1918 until the time of writing. Toynbee identifies the end of the modern period coinciding with the internationally devastating conflict (1939: 43). However, Toynbee was unable to predict the events of World War II and it was much later than his original comment, during the second half of the twentieth century, that inquiries based on postmodernism or the postmodern condition began to reverberate across multiple scholarly endeavours.

Writing in a different historical context to Toynbee, Jameson (1984) and Lyotard (1984) intimated that the beginning of the postmodern period coincided with the economic developments of the post-industrial age. However, as suggested in the Introduction, postmodernism cannot be limited to a purely chronological classification. Reference to the

industrial age suggests a particular period but Jameson does not equivocally define his understanding of the terminology as an epochal position. For Jameson, postmodernism is not a homogeneous period or style but rather a 'cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features' (Jameson 1984: 56). Jameson's multi-layered interpretation of postmodernism considered as an evolving cultural phenomenon is an idea I return to and discuss at length given the complexities and contradictions inherent within debates surrounding postmodernism.

Like Jameson, Lyotard also highlights the inefficacy of periodisation in the attempt to define postmodernism. Working towards his definition Lyotard suggests that the issue with the "post-" is that it gives a 'sense of simple succession, a diachronic sequence of periods in which each one is clearly identifiable' (1993: 47 - 48). As Lyotard problematises here and as I argue throughout this thesis, the definitions of postmodernism, and its implied former period, modernism, are just not that simple. Limiting the scope of the postmodern is endlessly problematic, and it should not, and will not be understood within my definition as a thing temporally defined. Rather it is the rich theoretical lens through which to analyse the selected performances as part of their larger cultural moment. It is a moment that offers an expanding or ongoing definition of postmodernism and the issues of adaptation and identity that I wish to explore.

Working toward my own definition of postmodernism and the postmodern condition I refer to both Lyotard and Jameson independently. Both theorists' contributions to the critical reception of postmodernism are integral to my own definition; Lyotard identified new communicative forms and a breakdown of 'metanarratives' (1984), and Jameson embedded a politicised consumerist critique. Both of their publications inspired a plethora of responses in different critical fields and my own definition is therefore also indebted to Baudrillard's work

on hyperreality and simulacra (1994), and Hutcheon's (1988, 1989) work on postmodernism, among others.

Theorists such as Hutcheon corroborate Lyotard's observation that postmodernism as a cultural condition encourages a sceptical view of the grand narratives of modernism, namely narratives perpetuated by institutional and ideological forms of knowledge (Jameson 1984a). Consequently, this scepticism leads to a questioning of narratives around identity and exposes the constructed nature of the self (Allan 1997). In this chapter I expand this line of questioning to consider how identity in crisis may intersect with cultural production and adaptation practices.

Identity in the modern era is often linked to the consideration of the individual in relation to existing societal and institutional structures. Dunn argues that in the modern period individual identity was more frequently related to 'family, church, and workplace' (1998: 9). In the twenty-first century such identity making structures have been distorted and identity transforms into a more abstract and simultaneously loaded concept that has different implications. For example, the articulation of identity in certain contexts can be much more indicative of the complex relationship between politics of self and other (Said 2003), generally described as identity politics.

For the purposes of this thesis I differentiate between identity and identity politics; I set out to extricate the two ideas in order to consider identity in accordance with the postmodernist consideration of the nature of self as autonomous subject. There is of course a level of political agency within any view of the self, but I clarify the different terms, where applicable, separating my understanding of identity from a contextual or historical moment that produced what I define as identity politics. The choice of critical lines of inquiry that intersect with issues related to identity politics are extensive, with the most recent dominant body of research emerging around post-colonial thought. My definition of identity is thus partially indebted to

post-colonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and his analysis of individual and collective narratives constructed around the concept of the Nation (1990), and Ihab Hassan and his consideration of pluralism or hybridity in identity construction (1986, 1987). The importance of this school of thought and its diversity is acknowledged, but in order to ensure a cohesive methodology, I consider in greater detail the identity debates most closely related to postmodernism. For these I refer primarily to Settis' questioning of contemporary Western identity in relation to a belief in a shared classical Greco-Roman heritage (2006) but prior to this I consider Dunn's work on identity crises as a consequence of the postmodern condition (1998).

Dunn (1998) maps postmodernism's consumerist traits onto identity-forming processes therefore, I argue within this chapter that postmodernism can encourage the idea that individual identities are constructible and consumable. The prevailing ideology of individualism situated amidst new technological reproductions has revolutionised the potential means of identity formation. Identity becomes another type of cultural product influenced by the dominant means of cultural production. Linking identity to the postmodern interest in representations of history, I question whether adaptations of classical materials can be traced to nostalgic tendencies within identity formation. Furthermore, I suggest that any consideration of the postmodern self warrants the assumption that identity, as constructed object, is partially dependent upon the individuals' narratives about themselves and the experience of their material culture. The role of narratives is explored here as something that is 'key to creativity in the individual' (Butler 2002: 58).

Creativity in narratives of the self automatically intersects with the creativity in the process of theatrical dramaturgy; in theatrical adaptation the choice of source materials and what is retained or altered can be considered as a narrative about the adapter, their reception of the source material and the socio-cultural material conditions of production. Building on the

definition and hypothesis outlined here, I assert in my discussions of the case studies in the succeeding chapters that individual dramaturgies are simply extensions of self-identification. For example, in the work of Mee featured in Chapter Two, I highlight the way in which Mee perceives his own physical and emotional identity and how this then feeds into the dramaturgy of his plays, including the repeated use of classical Greco-Roman tragedies as source materials and general inspiration.

In addition to the works of Mee, all of the other adaptations discussed within this thesis are based on highly influential classical, canonised texts. These adaptation case studies offer a comparable variant to the source material, and thus the influences of postmodernism and identity in the adaptation processes are made visible. Building on my definitions of postmodernism and identity, the third and final part of this chapter exposes the conundrum within a postmodern appraisal of cultural history and production. Postmodernist adaptation can be seen as complicit in mythologising source materials through their reinvention. However, in using such materials there possibly exists an urge to acknowledge and critique the societal cultural structures that encourage the engagement with said source materials. I highlight this because my discussion of adaptation is divided into two parts; the first part addresses the general trend of adaptation in the appropriate cultural moment; part two looks more closely at critical debates stimulated by adaptations of classical texts, primarily Greek tragedies.

The contemporary, exponential growth of adaptations across and within a wide-ranging number of mediums, from theatre to online gaming, literature to musical composition (Hutcheon 2013), supports my consideration of adaptation practices more generally. The plethora of adaptations based on ancient Greek source materials on contemporary Western theatrical stages further cements this. To support my definition of adaptation I offer an overview of the evolution of adaptation practices across mediums and the growing academic field of adaptation studies whilst referring to Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013) [2006]

and Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2016) [2006]. I consider the somewhat defunct but ongoing concern of fidelity within adaptation practices and outline the importance of intertextuality when analysing adaptation in the twenty-first century.

The choice of Greek tragedies as recurrent source materials throughout the later part of the twentieth century is partly 'because Greek drama is, for us, the first fully-developed theatrical tradition we can get our hands on' and so, 'there is an almost primal sense and perception of "rootedness" surrounding it' (Revermann 2008: 108). Therefore, the final section of this chapter considers, in addition to the material adaptations, the ideological influences associated with 'our' theatrical obsession with the Greeks as the antecedents of all Western theatre forms. I revisit Settis (2006) in this section as he is again a key influence for my critique of this aspect of adaptation in accordance with his consideration of concomitant postmodern identity production. Settis' argument helps to trace links between postmodern identity and interest in classical adaptation, and thus enables me to consolidate the interrelated nature of my three key critical terms before moving into the later discussions of the case studies. Settis' work is written from a postmodern vantage point, as is the work of Hutcheon, with Hutcheon even going as far as to collective name herself and her readership as 'we postmoderns' (2013: xi). Given the inherent influence of the cultural condition of postmodernism, I will now identify its origin within theoretical discourse and define it ready for my continued use of the term throughout this thesis.

Postmodernism: Jean-François Lyotard and The End of Grand Narratives

Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* was commissioned by the Conseil des Universités du Quebec to report on the impact of new technologies in various scientific fields. The report relies heavily on an interest in the scientific and technological developments witnessed in the Western world at the time of the commission and publication in the late 1970s. As such

Lyotard's examination of new forms of knowledge relates overtly to these disciplines, most importantly linking the advances in computerised and scientific technologies to an observed 'transformation in the epistemic status of knowledge itself' (Matthewman and Hoey 2006: 538). The transformation of knowledge is described by Lyotard as a challenge to prevalent modernist forms and the metanarratives of Enlightenment; he states in the simplest terms that the 'postmodern' can be defined 'as incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). This direct statement critiques the modernist agenda that supports an unstoppable, teleological progression of history and humanity along its predetermined path. Despite his critique, Lyotard's understanding of the modern remains indebted to the metanarratives or grand narratives of Enlightenment that emerged during the eighteenth century in response to philosophical concepts such as Marxism, Kantianism and Hegelianism (Butler 2002: 13).

To further contextualise Lyotard's 'postmodernism', it is helpful to briefly refer to the definition of modernism that he answers to and is influenced by. In *The Postmodern Condition,* the term '*modern*' designates,

> any science that legitimates itself with reference to metadiscourse […] making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.
>
> Lyotard 1984: xxiii

The Enlightenment grand narratives listed above are some of the dominant political and philosophical ideas that have shaped Western knowledge. Dominant narratives such as the legitimation of state and religious institutions, the potential for social liberation (most frequently cited as Marxism) and the progressive quest for universalisation of knowledge are entangled with both Enlightenment and modernist discourse, and thus important in a rounded discussion of postmodernism. One way of classifying the shifting perspective between modernism and postmodernism is in terms of the hierarchy of narratives.

Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* identifies an entirely new state of knowledge but paradoxically, no knowledge can exist in a vacuum separate from the influence of metanarratives. In Hutcheon's reading of Lyotard, against a backdrop of postmodernism, she finds that '*no* narrative can be a natural "master" narrative: there are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct' (1988: 13). This suggests that an alternate category of narrative exists within the frame of postmodernism. In place of legitimating metanarratives of institutionalised science, religion and other hegemonic superstructures, are smaller, individualistic narratives and knowledge-based language games.[13] Individual small and plural narratives, in opposition to metanarratives, offer no universalising legitimation but rather the capacity for emancipation. This is of particular interest as it impacts upon the individual's exploration and understanding of personal politics.

These new forms of narrative support Lyotard's argument that there must be a revolution for the individual; a new self aligned to the postmodern cultural condition (1984). According to Lyotard, as a consequence of the postmodern cultural condition, each self resides in a complex system of connections that are intricate, fragmentary and fluid. This interconnectedness ensures that 'young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be' (Lyotard 1984: 15). The 'little narrative [*petit récrit*] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention' (Lyotard 1984: 60) and it is the actualisation of these little narratives that form a fundamental element of individual dramaturgies in the theatre.

Over the course of this thesis, I explore how a shift from metanarratives to the 'little narratives' of postmodernism is an empowering cultural model that encourages the creative individual to generate and communicate their *own* independent experience. This is apparent

[13] Lyotard critiques Marxism as a yet another metanarrative but does not use the terminology 'Base and Superstructure' within *The Postmodern Condition.* However, I use Williams' definitions of the Marxist terms here to refer broadly to any ideology, culture and education that ultimately informs cultural production and its products (1980: 31 – 49).

since identical source texts appear across my case studies, but the adaptation of the same source provides vastly different outcomes. The individualist engagement with the source text thus represents a self-orientated artistic process and a political sensibility indebted to plurality instead of unification. Some postmodern adaptations, such as *Oresteia* (2015) and *Medea* (2015) at the Almeida, present a challenge to the perception of classical tragedies as universalising narratives. Rather, these adaptations aim to prioritise an individual reception by, for instance, altering the antiquated setting or language.

Integral to the politics associated with any narrative, grand or *petit*, is the consideration of language games. Drawing on the theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953), Lyotard describes knowledge in epistemological terms and goes on to posit that all communication is reliant upon a different type of language game (1984: 10). Aligned with the scientific focus of the report, Lyotard critiques the relationship between institutional power and narratives facilitated by a specific type of language game, and the legitimation it offers. Lyotard challenges the notion of proof or truth and provocatively states that 'scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power' (1984: 46). It is this more philosophical critique that suggests a crisis of legitimation in the modernist vehicles of knowledge that ushers in a consideration of postmodernist forms of thinking. Lyotard identifies postmodernist-influenced scientific enterprise as responding to new concerns, based on 'undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterised by incomplete information, "*fracta*," catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes' (Lyotard 1984: 60), but I emphasise that this can be applied to a broader cultural context. The transformations in the fields of science and technology have consequently transformed the rules for literature and the arts as well (Lyotard 1984: xxiii). Identifying the fragmentary nature of new inquiries and the abandonment of long established narratives are two of Lyotard's most valid statements about the postmodern condition when applied beyond the limited realms of science and technology.

Continued technological advances coupled with postmodernist ideologies support the potential for a more egalitarian approach to forms of knowledge and narratives. Nuanced and less hierarchical methods of information exchange continuously evolved as more sophisticated technology emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s. As mentioned earlier, the postmodern condition epitomises distrust in metanarratives, and subsequently prompts a different engagement with other forms of narrative. I would suggest, as Lyotard has done in response to the evolution of language games and 'communicative forms' (1984: 15 - 17), that the postmodern self exists as a newly liberated autonomous individual. Lyotard recognises new, complex systems of connection and communicative forms and it is these that provide the postmodern individual with the means to resist any overarching metanarratives and seek their own independent engagement with forms of knowledge. Although I agree that the technological advances enabled a new positioning of the self in relation to meta or little narratives, I also agree with Christopher Butler's critique that the sociological aspect of Lyotard's interpretation is targeted at specific readership. Butler raises the concern that Lyotard's perspective appeals predominantly to a liberal, 'intellectual minority' (2002: 14), and as such it is merely affirming the dominant ideologies of individuals fitting those characteristics.

Another critique levelled at *The Postmodern Condition* is that the universalising statement that the postmodern condition is a distrust of metanarratives is another fundamentally legitimising standpoint and is thus self-refuting. Habermas highlighted this notable underlying paradox when he stated that any definition or condition reliant upon distrust of metanarratives is actually another form of metanarrative (Habermas 1987). Habermas counters Lyotard's ideas about postmodernism and insists that they are not radically different from those prevalent in the period of high modernity. In response, Lyotard has stated that 'postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant'

(Lyotard 1984: 79). The philosophical exchange of (apparently) contrasting ideas continued, but given the inherent similarities of the opposition, and intensely complicated discussion, certain scholars such as Richard Rorty have attempted to 'split the difference' (1984: 42). The equivocation of this complex debate is not entirely profitable in this context, and I thus follow Rorty for my own definition by acknowledging that absolute distinction or periodisation is unhelpful as postmodernism as a definition encompasses a range of metamorphosing cultural factors.

Habermas' critique is still worth acknowledging in terms of the flaws it appears to highlight in Lyotard's argument; flaws such as Lyotard's inability to theorise modernity beyond totalising narratives (Habermas 1987). However, it is Lyotard's astute questioning of the power held by institutions in the modernist hierarchy that challenges the relationship between their privileged legitimation and the production of culture in tandem that proves most valuable for my own definition. Also important is Lyotard's acknowledgment of a new cultural condition, the link between this and the shifting status of knowledge and communication. His concluding comments about paralogy as a means for new legitimation are directly applied to scientific processes but highly transferable to the arts, and theatre in particular (Lyotard 1984: 60 - 67).

For Lyotard, paralogy is a movement against or beyond established forms of reasoning; paralogy encourages the breaking of conventions and abandoning of the rules of established language games. If paralogy is the new form of legitimation then collective consensuses in knowledge-based discussions are no longer a desired end point. Instead, Lyotard views consensus as just one part of a non-teleological process or discussion (1984: 65 - 66). Jameson reflecting on Lyotard describes legitimation through paralogy as a search 'for "instabilities," […] in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework' of the normal (1984a: xix). In terms of theatre, and notably in processes of

postmodern adaptation, legitimation through paralogy supports a distrust of the authority of the 'original' author and questions modernist intellectual frameworks, implying that no work is finished or complete. The logic of paralogy dictates that the lineage of theatrical adaptation can be considered as a type of open-ended conversation; an authoritative or final version of a text is not the desired end point but rather, each adaptation with its specific means of cultural production provides a new and valid addition to an overall cultural exchange.

The Postmodern Condition and Lyotard's suggestion of paralogy thus invites a discourse of ideas beyond the parameters of the established norms. In the artistic context, as well as challenging authorial authority, the modernist hierarchal relationship between institutions and art begin to disintegrate. With consistent technological advances during the second half of the twentieth century, fragments of knowledge could be communicated in the form of sound, text or image, independent from previous vehicles of legitimation. This leads to the next element in my definition of postmodernism, as it is necessary to consider the relationship between technological advances, capitalism and consumer culture. For this I turn to Jameson and his proposition that postmodernism is the necessary cultural discourse for the period of late or multinational capitalism (1984).

Fredric Jameson: Postmodernism and Consumerism

One of the distinguishing qualities of Jameson's analysis of postmodernism is his Marxist left political perspective. As a result of this ideology his discussions have a heightened awareness of the politicised relationship between culture and economics, production and commodification. Consequently, Jameson's analysis of postmodernism complements my own cultural materialist reading of the selected case studies and their means of cultural production. In his seminal essay 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', Jameson states, that, 'every position on postmodernism in culture […] is also at one and the same time,

and *necessarily,* an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today' (1984: 55). For Jameson, postmodernism is symptomatic of the third stage of capitalism, that of late or multinational capitalism, so titled in accordance with Ernest Mandel's definitions (1978).[14]

Although inspired by Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (1978)*,* in order to investigate the notion of postmodernism and posit his particular definition, Jameson establishes some key 'constitutive features of the postmodern' (1984: 58). These include, 'a new depthlessness' found 'in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity'; a 'return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationship of all this to a whole new technology' and furthermore, the observation that all of the above intertwine with what is a 'whole new economic world system' (ibid). Each of these features is worth considering when clarifying my position in relation to the broader discourse around postmodernism.

In his reference to a new culture of image (simulacrum), Jameson is clearly indebted to Baudrillard (1994) [1981].[15] Like Lyotard, Baudrillard identifies the postmodern by advances in forms of information and communication. Baudrillard however, extends his discussion to include the evolution of simulation and the subsequent emergence of the 'hyperreal' during the latter part of the twentieth century (1994). The 'hyperreal' refers to 'models of a real without origin or reality' (1994: 1), an artificial form produced due to the undistinguishable classification between the unreal and the real. It is a state that emerges in the breakdown between the real and the representation of the real, where the object has no directly traceable original or prototype. Simulacra then refers to instances when signs of the real are in place of

[14] Referring to Mandel, Jameson identifies three developments in the evolution of machinery under capitalist means of production since the initial industrial revolution during the eighteenth century. In chronological order: steam driven technology, electric and combustion technology, and electronic and nuclear-powered technology (1984: 77 - 78).
[15] First published in French as *Simulacres et Simulation* (1981).

the real itself; 'that is, to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine' which leads to 'the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference' (Baudrillard 1994: 2 - 3). The hyperreal and the abundance of simulacra are symptomatic of the technological developments referenced by both Lyotard and Baudrillard, but it is Baudrillard who asserts that because of this, his contemporary culture is dominated by images.

Baudrillard's observations about simulation and images are built upon his questioning of the relationship between the sign and the real. He posits that the image undergoes a succession of phases; it begins by reflecting reality, before masking first the reality and then the '*absence* of a profound reality' which ultimately then leads to the image having 'no relation to any reality whatsoever' (Baudrillard 1994: 6). By the final phase the source is completely transformed. Baudrillard's observations can be applied to the case studies within this thesis to offer a potential commentary on the transformative process of postmodern adaptations of classical Greek tragedy. However, it is imperative to note that Baudrillard's 'Precession of Simulacra' (1994) is not without issue.[16] As Hutcheon rightly contests 'Baudrillard's simulacrum theory is too neat' (1989: 223). Baudrillard's line of analysis somewhat overlooks that postmodernism is inherently paradoxical. Due to its self-reflexive preoccupation, I would suggest that postmodernism questions the nature of relationships to the real (for example how to interact with it), rather than support the abolition of them in their entirety. Irrespective of my reading of Baudrillard, it was his interest in image as the new, dominant cultural form that then directly informed Jameson's critique of postmodernism's depthlessness.

Depth is replaced by depthlessness in a consumer driven society where previously revered art forms were made more accessible by the development of alternate means of

[16] This is one of the reasons Baudrillard does not feature as a primary point of reference within this chapter. I only refer to this one particular aspect of his writing to further illuminate my discussion of Jameson.

representation, notably in the fields of photography and media production. In one example Jameson cites, the significant difference between modernist and postmodernist art is 'a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense' (1984: 60).[17] It was Benjamin (2010) [1936] who first highlighted the diminishing aura of modernism as a consequence of the technological developments encroaching upon different areas of the arts, and it is these new means of production that lie at the heart of Jameson's appraisal of his first feature of postmodernism. What began as the mechanical reproduction of images in printed form, has expanded at an exponential rate to include the majority of cultural practices. If we are to accept and expand Jameson's observation, it is possible to suggest that all dominant culture in the postmodern period exists as simulacra, distinct from any origin reality. This would be an extreme position to take - and as outlined above highly contestable - but it is useful when considering whether culture in the postmodern period has a diminished political and social function.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s postmodern cultural products including art and theatre faced accusations that they could not politically critique their superficial means of cultural production because they could not successfully transcend them (Auslander 1994). Oversaturation of information in the form of simulacra can serve to depoliticise the postmodern individual because of the associated detachment from notions of reality. Postmodernism as the cultural dominant is potentially 'capable of absorbing any disruptive [political] action into its economy of signs' however, Auslander argues that within all postmodern culture and text 'there is "a space from which to mount a critical perspective"' (1994: 21, 29). While agreeing with Jameson's identification of depthlessness, Auslander directly addresses and rejects the critique that postmodern theatre and performance is implicitly apolitical because of it. Inspired by Jameson (1984) and Auslander (1994) I view the case studies within this thesis as complicit in

[17] Jameson compares and contrasts Vincent van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) with Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980). To oversimplify his discussion; these examples are chosen to highlight the difference in both formal and political elements, and to analyse each work referencing the subject of the art works and then the completed works' role as individual object.

the postmodern cultural dominant, but the adapters and their works are still capable of offering a deliberately politicised adaptation of the chosen classical materials.

Attraction to classical theatrical adaptation can pertain to a superficial interest in the *idea* of the classical built on a culture of depthlessness, and I will return to this topic when discussing Settis (2006), identity and postmodern processes of adaptation later in this chapter. However, for now it is pertinent to simply acknowledge that the adaptations featured in this thesis are reflections of late twentieth and twenty-first century influences and are working with the template of postmodern forms of representation. Despite using the same means of representation as the cultural dominant it is important for postmodern theatre, in order to be political, to find a means to critique these representations. Auslander suggests that the political element is exposed through 'differences of strategy'; form and content may remain the same, but it is necessary to consider how certain strategies 'are employed, and in what context' to identify underlying political concerns (1994: 27). Alternate aesthetic and dramaturgical strategies are discussed within each of the case studies in order to question whether an equilibrium can be found between complicity and critique in means of postmodern representation. One such example appears in my discussion of Théâtre du Soleil's *Les Atrides* in Chapter Three. I consider Théâtre du Soleil's appropriation of aesthetic features from a range of codified performance forms such as *kathakali* and Peking Opera to explore how their use of aesthetics, detached from the wider performance or cultural context, can be viewed as representative of a complicit and uncritical depthlessness.

In identifying depthlessness as a feature of postmodernism, Jameson also challenges the conventional, institutional expectations of what can be considered to be art. The diminishing 'frontier between high and so-called mass or commercial culture' has been exposed as an already extant cultural condition (Jameson 1984: 54) and can be appreciated when analysing theatre in the postmodern period. Furthermore, the valuation of form has

shifted. What were once considered purely commercial cultural forms can be placed on a par with those once perceived as high culture. To offer further example, I refer again to Jameson;

> the postmodernisms have in fact been fascinated precisely by this whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Readers' Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood films, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and science-fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer 'quote', as a Joyce of Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance.
>
> 1984: 55

The range of cultural works listed encompasses architecture, literature, media, art, and clearly indicates the postmodernist abandonment of distinctions of high and low form. Although Jameson uses somewhat deprecating language, this serves to highlight the radical state of the new cultural landscape in opposition to the old.

Related to the prominence of depthlessness found in the new cultural landscape, the 'culture of the image', is another of Jameson's defining features of postmodernism: the 'weakening of historicity' (1984: 58). The simulacra are already a fragmented form, distinct from the historical, political and social context, and exist in the realm of the spatial not the temporal (Jameson 1984: 64). A waning of affect is a result of the breakdown of temporal distinctions; without time as a legitimising factor there exists no linear framework with which to cultivate a coherent experience. In the spatially driven domain the postmodern subject loses the ability to find continuity in the temporal succession of past, present and future. This is one of the ways in which postmodernism impacts upon the cultural relationship with historicity or the historical as the real. Any cultural interest or question of authenticity lies, as Jameson infers, not in *real* historical referents but rather in highly aestheticised representations. Whilst acknowledging a disintegration in the temporal order, I disagree and would suggest the connection to history is not outmoded. Instead, the postmodern preoccupation with self-reference designates that history is ultimately a human construction built up of narratives available in materiality and text. This potentially reinvigorates engagement with history with

an alternate outlook rather than disregarding it entirely. Examples of this can be seen in each of the case studies and I go on to suggest how these different outlooks can expressly support an individual, political agenda.

Jameson's political perspective is most overt regarding his discussion of the sublime - as defined by Kant (2007) - and its relation to new technologies and the economic state of affairs.[18] The sublime can be defined as that which is 'complicated beyond a human scale of understanding' (Fortier 2002: 119). As such, the philosophical and terminological implications of Jameson's categorisation 'the hysterical sublime' are that it is something that exists beyond human comprehension and as such, cannot ever be wholly represented (1984: 76). Lyotard (1984) comments on the ever-expanding wealth of knowledge or data connections produced and stored by new technologies as an unknowable aspect of the postmodern condition, but Jameson (1984) asserts that his comments only addresses the surface or façade. In Jameson's definition of the postmodern the 'immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely *the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism'* (1984: 79). It is in this aspect of his analysis that Jameson inextricably ties the technological environment to the economic.

Lyotard identified the link between technological development, knowledge and institutional power but Jameson's Marxist perspective offers this additional insight. The link between the aforementioned posits postmodernism as social and cultural formation because it is symptomatic of late or multinational capitalism's commodification of both these spheres. It is within this colossal and pervading framework that a culture of consumerism emerges and with it, the postmodern trait of pastiche. Pastiche is, in Jameson's explanation, an imitation in

[18] Kant identifies two forms of the sublime: the mathematical and the dynamical (2007). For the purpose of this thesis it is sufficient to state that each example is related to human awareness of some inadequacy stemming from an inability to comprehend that outside of us. The mathematical sublime is related to the shortcomings of human imagination in understanding something of magnitude, while the dynamical sublime produces a sense of impotency related to the physical power of nature, all despite a polarising sense of superiority.

a begotten style lacking in any complex meaning that may have once been associated with the source. Pastiche as a creative tool can lead to cannibalism 'without principle but with gusto' (Jameson 1984: 66). Aesthetic production courtesy of new technological and mediatised forms becomes integrated into a commodity driven culture and devalues the worth of the imitation. Quoting Guy Debord (1967), Jameson states that 'the image has become the final form of commodity reification' (1984: 66), but in overlooking the politics inherent within the consumerist acts, Jameson has overlooked the importance of the individual and any conscious representation of the self.

The prevalence of consumerist ideologies of the individual and their society is of upmost importance to my definition of postmodernism, especially with the focus on theatrical dramaturgy. The dramaturgies of the chosen period incorporate countless adaptations, and aspects of pastiche lacking in reverence to an origin become the primary cultural reference point. Contemporary society in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been bombarded with countless nostalgic and parodied forms of its previous history and the postmodern deals explicitly with synchronic interpretation or adaptation. Jameson is clear however, that postmodernism must not be considered as 'a style, but rather as a cultural dominant' (Jameson 1984: 56). I acknowledge that not every cultural work produced in the latter part of the twentieth century can be simplistically classified as postmodern but when analysing the selected case studies and the broader cultural landscape, 'the postmodern is however, the force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulse […] must make their way' (1984: 57). This is why I use it as my primary methodological tool.

An essential aspect of the cultural framework to consider for my own definition is capitalist consumerism and its impact upon notions of identity. However, capitalism can be considered as both 'catastrophe and progress all together' (Jameson 1984: 86). Building upon the theories of Jameson I argue that this conflicted progression leaves a contemplative void

that leads the individual to question their role as a lone entity and their part in a collective formed in a space of multinational commodification. What once defined a collective in the period of high modernism no longer exists, instead there is now spatial and 'social confusion' alongside a problematised relationship to 'public History' and our new, non-linear 'private temporality' (Jameson 1984: 58, 92). Fundamentally what this means in relation to the postmodern, is that identity intersects in a complex way with the new intermeshed social, cultural, political and economic environment.

Hassan (2003) considers the postmodern condition and its impact upon identity construction in his retrospective analysis of the critical furore surrounding postmodernism. Hassan states that 'postmodernism could be understood as autobiography […] linked to an epochal crisis of identity' (2003: 5). The scientific and technological advances identified by Lyotard, and the highly influential network of multinational capital identified by Jameson, consequently impact upon notions of the self and identity. I propose that this results in crisis of identity affiliated with the swift period of cultural transformation. Therefore, in the interest of clarity, I explore what I mean by identity and justify why the concept I use is a worthwhile tool in the analysis of the selected case studies.

Identity and Identity Politics: A Crisis of Representation

In the last fifty years the question of identity has become central to broad scholarly debates of politics and culture. In theatre studies the subject of identity overlaps with a number of other topical critical concerns; for example, in Palgrave Macmillan's series of short *Theatre &* books, identity as concept, definition or ideology can be seen at work in titles such as *Theatre & Globalization* (2009), *Theatre & the Body* (2010) and *Theatre & Feminism* (2016). Driving this interest is the hypothesis that identity once defined by biological or other inherent traits,

has been influenced, distilled or distorted by the proliferation of alternate sources and means of self-identification.

The term identity appears frequently across a wide range of contemporary discourses beyond theatre and performance studies. Like Hassan (2003), sociologist Dunn suggests that the very '*concept of the postmodern itself was an attempt to articulate a growing sense of the problematization of identity as a generalized condition of life in postwar Western society*' (1998: 2). Aligned with Dunn, I propose here that it would be negligible to utilise postmodernism as a critical framework for the cultural medium of theatre without considering the intersection of issues surrounding identity. Dunn's methodological focus is particularly useful as he considers the cultural and political processes aligned with identity formation while also addressing identity in sociological terms. Dunn (1998) considers the postmodern identity crisis on a scale that incorporates both analysis of the self, and the self in relation to institutional structures in a capitalist setting. This complements Jameson's appraisal of postmodernism (1984) and his influence upon my own perspective.

Dunn specifies postmodernism as a predominantly Western preoccupation. As such, the cultural condition already has an inherent geographical identity namely Eurocentric or North American. The crisis of representation, including the issue of identity within the Western cultural and social environment, is aligned with the evolving 'commoditized structure[s] of highly developed capitalist societies' (Dunn 1998: 5). Both the developments within capitalist economies and the new modes of image driven media result in a mounting interest to find new target audiences. This resulted in targeted marketing strategies that aid the identification of new social groupings by cultivating and prioritising criteria that define identities; two such previously disregarded groups to emerge during the immediate post-war period were Youth and Women (Denisoff and Peterson 1972). Since the middle of the twentieth century other such identifiable groupings aligned with race, religious denomination, sexuality, ethnicity and socio-

economic background have become more conspicuous and politicised.

Identity politics, the name assigned to the politicisation of an individual's sense of self is partly a product of the post-war society. Its evolution is due in part to the repercussions of the social revolutions of the post-war environment as groups of individuals began to ascribe alternate shared identities. Identity as a politically charged topic became prevalent amidst the realisation that not all identities and individuals were considered equal. However, any debate of identity politics must be orientated toward the relevant historical context, as it is the acknowledgement of difference or otherness, and the politicisation of this difference, that underpins any informed consideration of identity politics. Social revolutions such as second-wave feminism deliberately targeted the enduring supremacy of certain identity traits, primarily the traits of 'white, male, heterosexual, and middle-class [that] dominated hierarchies of modern Western society' (Dunn 1998: 5). Particular counter-hegemonic movements such as feminism or the American Civil Rights Movement brought issues of identity to the fore of national and international debates, thus developing a narrative around identity that was integrally political and personal.

Identity politics within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are a consequence of the social perception of certain characteristics and definitions built on notions of otherness. The movements driven by emerging identity politics offered a means to attempt to subvert power imbalances that resulted from that influence on the sociological production of identity. Entrenched within the discussion of a singularly defined Western identity, as is relevant to any discussion of postmodernism, is the polarised notion of the other as a diametric opposite. A sense of polarity between identity and its other, or a consideration of majority versus minority, is part of the deconstructionist historical legacy that initiated contemplation of identity politics and influenced the postmodern identity crisis. Historically, the interest in identity politics progressed from broader biological traits to those associated with culture or sub-cultures.

Therefore, identity and difference in the postmodern period are not wholly consequential of biological or cultural factors but are instead 'complexly constructed through the *interpenetration* of these separate forces in a definitional field of social relations' (Dunn 1998: 36). The mediatised erosion of conventional social structures undermines social relations in the postmodern period and alternate cultural practices become the new social norm. Consumerist tendencies in the postmodern epoch have proliferated beyond purely economic territory and now influence the cultural, the social and by default, the individual and their identity.

Cultures of consumerism and postmodernism are the most natural of allies. Jameson's Marxist critique corroborates the link between the postmodern identity crisis and the socio-economic changes brought about by advent of late stage, multinational capitalism. Capitalist interests created a new cultural milieu driven by consumerism, and the means of producing culture adapted to serve this. Madan Sarup investigated this alongside the developing postmodern identity in his posthumous book, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (1996).[19] Sarup posits consumerism as the defining quality of the postmodern era and states that 'consumption is a mode of being, a way of gaining identity' (1996: 105). Sarup stresses the importance of the interrelationship between identity and narrative, more specifically how an individual's history or life-story is created in tandem with their sense of identity (1996: 15). Drawing on contemporary social and postmodern theory, Sarup aligns the idea of identity with postmodernist traits as both are 'fabricated, constructed, in process', but must also be considered in relation to how they are 'localized in space and time' (ibid). This idea is however, resistant to Jameson's theory that the individual exists and is influenced by the spatial rather than temporal domain. Etymologically, a narrative or life-story suggests a linear series of

[19] I make the distinction that this is posthumous publication because the final form of the book is the result of an editing process completed by another individual, Tasneem Raja. As a result, the arguments within the book are at times fragmented, and its tone ranges from academic and jargon-heavy, to more simplistically secular. That being said it does offer some insights into the work of key postmodern and poststructuralist theorists such as Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault. It is presented with a similar left Marxist perspective to Jameson and it complements my already accepted notions about postmodernism.

progression, however, in the postmodern period, little narratives can be simultaneously active and thus invoke a form of intertextuality within identity.[20]

Intertextuality, in the instance of identity construction is closely related to Baudrillard's simulacra and Jameson's culture of the image. The term intertextuality is, for me, inherently related to an understanding of the postmodernist form of culture. Roland Barthes (1977) was one of the most notable poststructuralist theorists to advocate the ideological shift that prioritised the reader's authority in conjunction with the author's diminishing authority. Texts liberated by this new interpretative autonomy altered the modernist valuation of meaning and the recognised prioritisation of logocentrism. The 'inter' of intertextuality suggests a dialogue between objects or cultural works, while the reference to textuality expands beyond the literal meaning of the written word. Barthes proposes within 'The Death of the Author' that language should be removed from meaning in order to deconstruct any closed interpretations signified by the language (1977: 147).

Barthes sentiments in 'From Work to Text' (1977) have been amplified and reinforced by the postmodern awareness of 'the *work as text*, even if it is film or painting or fashion show [the postmodernist] sees any significant cultural product as continuous with all other uses of natural language' (Butler 2002: 31). The inclusivity of the statement 'the work as text' indicates that the majority, if not all, cultural products can be accepted as text and fodder for creative identity construction and representation. The individual interpretation and response to the postmodern cultural landscape driven by a textualising view disrupts the modernist hierarchy that values language, authenticity and meaning. This perceptive shift leads to an important distinction to contemplate in my discussion of the dramaturgical and creative practices of Mee and Mnouchkine, in Chapters Two and Three respectively. Returning to the context of the postmodern identity, it is within this heterogeneity of accepted forms that I suggest that a

[20] I use 'little narratives' here in reference to Lyotard's description of the '*petit récrit'* (1984: 60).

constructed identity can be viewed as another form of text. It becomes a mass of fragmentary contradictions and this is why a revised conceptualisation of identity or narrative is required.

Identity is constructed depending on the access to environmental materials and any sources that can be consumed and re-presented by an individual. In an environment built upon a plethora of images and new forms of information, the potential for identity construction expands beyond the prior constraints of a modernist cultural framework. Dunn argues that the new postmodern environment 'has extended the locus of identity formation beyond the self-other relation to technologically controlled modes of signification' (1998: 10). Furthermore, the growth of individuals accepting and identifying as other expanded with the political agency aligned with identity characteristics. This results in a destabilisation of accepted, predominant identities, meaning here that traits once determinedly other, extend beyond the minority influence according to their increasing cultural visibility.

Part of the consumer driven aspect of the identity is related to heritage. Existing in the postmodern period is what Amin Maalouf (2000) describes as duality of heritages; the need to negotiate these creates a conflict within representation of individual and shared identities. Maalouf states that individuals possess both a 'vertical' and 'horizontal' heritage; 'vertical' derives directly from 'ancestors, our religious community and our popular traditions' while the 'horizontal' is defined by 'our contemporaries and by the age we live in' (2000: 102). Maalouf suggests that the horizontal is the most influential form of heritage but the individual is more inclined to value their vertical heritage, and I address this shortly with reference to the classical and the generalised Western hegemony of narratives around it. I suggest that this fundamental misconception in understanding the facets of the contemporary self contributes to the instability of the postmodern identity, reductively described as a clash between past and present. This translates across to discussions of postmodern creative identity. These summations can be used to illustrate how individual creative artists, collective theatre companies like Théâtre du Soleil,

and theatrical institutions or venues such as the Almeida Theatre experience their own crisis of identity, expressly, how they attempt to reflect their relationship to the simultaneous encounters of past, present and even future society.

Nostalgia and Identity: Questions of Place and Time

Surviving classical texts from the Greco-Roman period hold superior positions within the Western literary and dramatic canons and this ensures that they remain an integral part of the Western cultural landscape. As outlined above, cultural landscapes influence identity formation and so classical texts and the *ideas* of the classical can be seen to inform the identities of the contemporary creative individuals and collectives featured within this thesis.

In his 2006 study, *The Future of the 'Classical',* Settis suggests that during the twentieth century a popular perception of the classical was 'an immutable and perpetual system of values without place or time, and these values were by a happy coincidence codified by the Greeks, spread by the Romans and duly passed down to us' (82). Settis' comment underpins the way in which certain ideological features of Antiquity are ahistorically transferred to become foundations for contemporary Western ideologies. As such, ancient Greek civilisation and the notion of the democratic *polis* still influences core socio-political concerns in the construction of Western identity, namely the belief in the value of democracy.

The classical link between theatre, ideology and socio-political structure is most overt in *The Eumenides,* the final play of Aeschylus' *The Oresteia.* The trial of Orestes forms the core dramatic event of *The Eumenides* and it is cited as the first staged example of 'institutional public justice'; it is a representation of 'the genesis in Athens of a fully visible public law in a community of citizens' (Flaumenhaft 1994: 7 - 8). The perception of this as an exemplary precursor to contemporary democracy is nevertheless flawed given the complexity of recent criticism surrounding identity politics. Froma I. Zeitlin for example, offers a feminist reading

of *The Oresteia* and suggests that, for Aeschylus, the democratic society is built upon 'the control of woman' as '*The Oresteia* stands squarely within the misogynistic tradition which pervades Greek thought, a bias which both projects a combative dialogue in male-female interactions and which relates the mastery of the female to higher social goals' (1978: 150). Although scholars such as Zeitlin are critical of the mythopoesis around the notion of a truly egalitarian Greek democracy, the idealised myth is inbuilt into contemporary perceptions of the Athenian *polis* as an aspirational model for a civilised Western community identity.

In addition to the ideological influences upon identity and community, Settis (2006) argues that Western cultural history is built upon appropriations of Greco-Roman cultural forms and ideals. One consequence of this is a Eurocentric (or general Western) cultural pre-eminence associated with recognising tenuous links to the classical Greco-Roman period. Settis affirms the growing trend of labelling Greco-Roman culture as the 'unequivocal root of all Western civilisation, and the depository of its highest and unfailing values' (2006: 2). Settis rightly highlights an inherent Western hegemony in this trend and suggests that it is the cause of the West's belief in its cultural superiority (ibid), a point I return to in Chapter Four's discussion of the Almeida Greeks season. Various traditional art forms, most notably Greek theatre, have succeeded in traversing geographical boundaries to become identifiable cultural reference points for previously unaffiliated Western nations while retaining a general cultural superiority (Waters 2001). My selected case studies offer evidence of this as the writers and directors featured are nationals of the United States of America, Canada, England and France who all chose classical Greek texts as source material for their adaptations.

When identified as the origins of general Western culture and civilisation, classical Greek texts gain a universalising status detached from spatio-temporal limitations. As a result of the globalising impact of the postmodern period's new technologies, representations (or simulacrum) of classical products such as Greek literature and art become easily accessible

global reference points that impact upon cultural identity. Furthermore, that in turn impacts the means of identity construction on an individual level. The postmodern weakening of historicity as described by Jameson (1984) and outlined earlier in this chapter, leads to a questioning of ancestry and a search for means of identity representation that reflects both past and present. Historical referents have been used throughout history to cultivate and negotiate the process of identity formation; Settis even suggests that 'every era', including the 'post-modern' has 'invented a different idea of the classical to create its own identity' (2006: n. pg.). The resurgence of the classical in the postmodern period is a repetition of earlier cultural processes. However, new technological mediums have helped to remove some of the former elitist, institutional framing of the classical that persisted throughout the Renaissance and other minor renaissances.[21]

As classical Greek cultural products became more accessible and even egalitarian, the means of cultural exchange and experience of the object world radically changed for the postmodern individual. Subjectivity as a feature of the postmodern condition became a key factor in the formation of identity. However, with new subjectivity also came 'the loss of any active sense of history', and identity defined by a 'charged sense of the past […] which had characterised modernism, was gone. At best, fading back into a perpetual present, retro-styles and images proliferated as surrogates of the temporal' (Anderson 1998: 56). Perry Anderson (1998) here alludes to something akin to nostalgia and I suggest in the postmodern period, an environment predisposed to temporal instabilities, certain processes of identity formation can be perceived as acts of nostalgia.

Alongside the temporal fragmentation, in the postmodern period a heightened consumer culture is another cause of nostalgic tendencies in identity formation and creative

[21] I use the terms Renaissance and renaissances here according to Settis' definition: 'the label 'Renaissance' is now used to designate either every movement to resurrect ancient themes, motifs and forms, or more simply a periodization referring to the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era' (2006: 53).

outputs. Dunn suggests that the 'sensory overload of a saturated cultural environment' produced by excess consumerism brings about a type of countermovement, a 'sometimes fervent search for an immutable truth' (1998: 153). The search for 'truth' in the continuing cultural flux of the postmodern landscape is ineffectual given what Jameson (1984) has described as the weakening of historicity and a new depthlessness. In an attempt to negotiate the quest for historical truth linked to the self, nostalgia has a twofold function. In the postmodern period where desires and experiences are anchored in 'a diverse but eclectic range of commodities', nostalgia expresses a consumer's desire for imagined possibilities while simultaneously highlighting that which is lacking in their present experience (Bennett 1996: 5). For example, the classical chorus in its ephemeral performance context is unknowable, however the chorus in the twenty-first century now represents an imagined possibility of a democratic community modelled on the Athenian *polis*. The nostalgia of the chorus represents a mythologised notion of community that is in direct opposition to the multinational, capitalist influenced experience of community in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Nostalgia is an expression of a recurring cultural obsession with history heightened by the material conditions of postmodernism. However, it is only one response to an individual and collective sense of identity crisis. Dunn highlights an interest in nostalgia in his exploration of the phenomenon of binary, conflicting interests within the postmodern identity;

> spanning the contrast between the commercial and political forms of postmodernity is a *revivalist culture* seeking to retrieve a sense of authenticity, often through a reassertion of tradition and the historical past. Precipitating a loss of place and meaning, mass culture motivates a search for personal moorings through an attachment to diverse groups, communities, value systems and cultural traditions. Thus, while destabilizing identity, postmodernism simultaneously produces movements of restabilization and reconstruction.
>
> 1998: 14

Nostalgic traits are one feature of postmodern cultural production that address the broader identity crises; nostalgia or the interest in historicised cultural traditions can be viewed as a means of 'restabilization and reconstruction' of conventional identity traits (ibid). Ultimately

postmodern culture is culture that has been reconstructed; it is remade in the image of that which has gone before. Dunn describes the temporal challenges encountered by the postmodern individual, and within the following chapters I map and expand his hypothesis to consider practitioners such as Mee and Mnouchkine who were (and still are) working within the postmodern milieu. What Dunn classifies as the revivalist culture I alternatively title a postmodernist interest in adaptation in all its forms. Adaptation influenced by postmodernism includes artistic forms and stories revived in response to the cultural demands of the postmodern moment. I argue that the surge of adaptations in the latter part of the twentieth century is a result of postmodern individuals attempting to navigate temporal identity instability.

Adaptation: A Continuum Modelled Definition

Adaptations in the twenty-first century are omnipresent. The wealth of materials available in the cultural domain and the postmodernist influence on culture has led to a prolificacy of different forms of adaptation. Hutcheon in her comprehensive survey, *A Theory of Adaptation,* identifies adaptations 'on the television and movie screens, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade' (2013: 2). Although mainstream media may acknowledge processes of adaptation more readily, Hutcheon is clear that adaptation is not a new cultural phenomenon; even as early as the ancient Greek period, Aeschylus' theatrical trilogy *The Oresteia* took inspiration from the Epic Poetry of Homer. The recycling of different narratives was a well-established theatrical practice by the time of *The Oresteia* and moreover, the practice is acknowledged within Aristotle's *Poetics*. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle recommended the use of recognisable figures and stories to encourage a more affective response from the audience (1992: 37). Building on Aristotle's recommendation, adaptation has remained a feature of Western theatre, up to and including

theatre considered postmodern. Here I undertake my own postmodern consideration of the practice, informed, in part, by Hutcheon, whose discourse on adaptation emerges from her earlier work on postmodernism. Hutcheon uses postmodernism as a lens with which to analyse adaptation across a multitude of mediums, including literature and film, and her study has proven a seminal text for the emerging academic discipline of adaptation studies.

The formation of adaptation studies as an independent discipline was signalled when the Association of Adaptation Studies established in 2006 and promptly initiated a series of international conferences on the subject. Alongside the creation of a dedicated research network working in the field of literature and screen adaptations, the Association of Adaptation Studies founded the biannual academic journal *Adaptation* in 2008. The field expanded further with another journal aiming to fill a slightly different function; the *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance,* also founded in 2008.

Given the close relationship with film studies and literature, adaptation studies is often compared to those disciplines. Despite this affiliation, numerous scholars working in the field of adaptation bemoan the fact that the discipline is perceived to be lacking in the rigour often associated with these more established disciplines (Leitch 2003, Stam 2005, Cartmell 2012). Deborah Cartmell suggests that adaptation, although viewed as an emerging field, is simply the crystallisation of debates that have long existed within foundational works such as George Bluestone's 1957 *Novels into Films* (2003: 149). Thus, it is a misconception that contemporary theories of adaptation offer a less useful or less rigorous methodological framework. Despite agreeing with Cartmell's argument, I have identified a gap when considering adaptation within the same medium. As already stated, adaptation studies derives primarily from literary and filmic studies, and although the theory is transferable to theatre there has, until quite recently, been a significant absence in the discussion of adaptations in the theatre.

Only in the last four years has adaptation emerged as an important research area within theatre and performance studies. The growing interest in the subject of adaptation is reflected in the Palgrave Macmillan series on 'Adaptation in Theatre and Performance', edited by Vicky Angelaki and Kara Reilly. Other key publications, such as Katja Krebs' edited collection *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film* (2014), indicate the mounting interest in adaptation, and several recent studies explicitly focus on the adaptation of Greek theatre. These include *Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy: Auteurship and Directorial Visions* (2017) edited by Rodosthenous and Ioannidou's *Greek Fragments in Postmodern Frames: Rewriting Tragedy 1970 - 2005* (2017).[22]

This emerging discourse marries methodologies of adaptation studies with examples from theatre and performance studies. I draw on a number of important points to inform my own understanding of adaptation; primarily that the term adaptation is itself 'multi-faceted' (Laera 2014: 4) and 'eludes definition' (Reilly 2018: xxi). My use of the term in the analysis of the selected theatrical case studies in the following chapters is fluid, given that a wide range of theatrical processes can be labelled as adaptation. Staging a play involves, as Hutcheon (2013) would define, a 'transposition' across mediums, from page to stage. One of the issues with attempting to define processes of adaptation with examples from the theatre is the often collaborative nature of it. The act of staging requires different dramaturgical processes to complete this transposition; creatives including playwrights, directors and designers feature in my discussions of the case studies as they all fulfil different, interrelated functions that I consider as part of the overall adaptation. Given the many different forms of collaboration and the different ways in which works may be adapted, Reilly suggests that reference to 'specific,

[22] The topic has also been popular across academic conferences and alternate forms of publication; new journals have been established and special issues of journals, including *Critical Stages* (2015), have been released. In 2015 and 2016 the Theatre and Performance Research Association's (TaPRA) Directing and Dramaturgy Working Group featured 'Adaptation' and 'The Tragic' as their annual themes at both the main conference events and the interim events. This interest is, in part, related to the rise of adaptations of Greek tragedies on Western stages across Europe, North America and beyond.

material concrete examples' is 'the only way to explore adaptation' (2018: xxii). Her recommendation to explore adaptation through examples rather than working to rigidly defined criteria highlights the fluidity of the term and the diverse range of processes and products that may be labelled as adaptations. Reilly's proposal aligns with Hutcheon's argument that the most successful way to define adaptation is as a 'continuum' (2013: 172). Here, I do not use a fixed definition of adaptation but rather present the different adaptation case studies to be read as part of an intertextual dialogue within the overarching cultural frame of postmodernism.

As part of my continuum-modelled definition, I acknowledge the 'rich lexicon of terms' (Sanders 2016: 22) that can be used in conjunction with, or as alternate descriptions for adaptation. Terms frequently used to decipher individual adaptive practices include 'variation, interpretation, continuation, transformation, imitation, pastiche, parody' (ibid), and these also notably feature as part of the vocabulary used in discourses of postmodernism. Another term that frequently appears with reference to adaptation and postmodernism is appropriation. Sanders differentiates between the usage of adaptation and appropriation, arguing a demarcation from adaptation because 'appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain' (2016: 35). However, given the recent scholarship in the field of theatre and performance studies and the variety of practices informed by the cultural setting of postmodernism, Laera suggests that it is 'more useful to think of adaptation as a synonym for appropriation, because it is too problematic to draw the line between a 'faithful adaptation' and an 'unfaithful appropriation'' (2014: 5). Laera articulates here two key issues in a rigid dichotomy of terms; the possible negativity associated with appropriation as a less transparent transposition from source to product, and the misplaced concern with fidelity in general discussions of adaptation practices.

Throughout this thesis I do not consider adaptation and appropriation as two distinct practices. Appropriation is only one term, among many, that is part of the spectrum of practices

and products more broadly described by the term adaptation. To 'appropriate' is defined by *Oxford Dictionaries* as: to 'take (something) for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission' (2018: n. pg.). However, this definition could easily apply to an array of postmodern theatrical adaptations, including all of the adaptations of classical tragedies featured in this thesis. Adaptation when used to describe practices in the postmodern context covers a range of transformations and transpositions of a source text with little concern for the 'original' authorial intentions. Rather than distinguishing between the two terms according to the issue of fidelity, which I discuss shortly, I use appropriation occasionally in place of adaptation in order to highlight specific questions about the relationship between source texts or materials, and the means of representation within the three case studies. Sanders states that appropriations 'do not always make their founding relationships and interrelationships explicit' (2016: 43) and when viewed through the lens of postmodernism, a critique can be levelled at any such opacity in the means of representation.

Postmodernism, as the prevailing cultural framework, is inherently paradoxical; it is complicit in reinforcing the cultural status quo whilst simultaneously attempting to destabilise and critique it. A frequently recurring feature of postmodern culture is recycled references to the past, whether in the use of familiar narratives, established aesthetic styles or knowing self-reflexive nostalgic nods. The integral paradox of postmodernism becomes visible when adaptations acknowledge the historical authority of their source materials while simultaneously demonstrating the unreliability of the historicised means of representation. With its 'revivalist culture' (Dunn 1998: 14), postmodern artistic products effectively aid the re-canonisation of the source materials or forms that are adapted. However, the act of adaptation, 'rereading, rerelating and retelling', incorporates both 'the critical interpretation of the existing text and the creative process of remaking it into a new text' (Grochala 2018: 296). This critical interpretation is integral in a postmodern process of adaptation to ensure that the new means of

representation are never presented with an unquestioned authority. Postmodern practitioners that choose to adapt classical or canonised texts must critically consider any previously undisputed hegemonic structures associated with the source texts if they are to fully respond to the metamorphosing cultural and ideological shift that frames their new works.

Sanders argues that 'what distinguishes appropriation from straightforward adaptation at this point is the specific intent behind the act of reinterpretation' (2016: 191). If the intent is to re-function and re-contextualise in a manner that masks the relationship to the source materials or the political implications of choosing them, then I opt to use the term appropriation in place of adaptation to highlight this. In my discussion of the work of Mee, I recognise the use of Greek plays as a type of scaffolding for his own works as an act of adaptation; there is clearly an intervening authorial hand in the new but often similarly titled work. Complex intertextual layering is an essential part of Mee's dramaturgical approach to adaptation, however, his collection of numerous literary and verbatim texts presented as bricolage obscures the origin and context of his chosen source texts. For example, in *Orestes 2.0* (1992), Mee uses verbatim testimonies as a representation of the *real,* specifically as 'evidence of how war is happening today' (Mee 2017: n. pg.) while failing to acknowledge that his representation is a highly mediatised form of simulacra. Some of the content of Mee's play is arguably 'faithful' to the individual source materials as he transcribes them word for word, but the means of representation have radically altered.

The issue of fidelity and the term 'faithful' appear to be perpetually and intrinsically related to debates of adaptation. However, fidelity is not my primary concern within this thesis because the notion of fidelity as an appropriate 'criterion to use in analysing adaptation' is insufficient; the only adaptation 'that [could] have maintained perfect fidelity to the original text would have been the re-release of that text' (Leitch 2003: 161 - 162). The debates around fidelity regularly rely upon a differentiation between the source material and the adaptation of

that, and then a subsequent comparison between the two. When discussing adaptation in the field of literature it is most often the anterior texts that possesses the authorial authority as the secondary adaptation, given its direct reference to the source text, automatically raises questions of originality and creativity alongside any comparisons.

In the Western theatrical tradition, the prominence of the fidelity debate is noticeable in the recurrent linguistic determination that any adaptation is a new 'version' or 'revival' of an established text originally created by an author-genius figure. This is particularly true for those works that form part of the Western canon. Those who stage canonised texts can offer only their own creative 'version' of it; the source text remains the authoritative text and the materiality of its printed form remains unaltered.[23] The value of the new work is often measured comparatively rather than viewed as an independent creative output. For example, *Medea* (2015) discussed as part of the Almeida Greeks season in Chapter Four is described as 'Rachel Cusk's alternately exhilarating and baffling new version of Euripides's *Medea'* (Billington 2015: n. pg.) and 'Cusk's ferociously persuasive update of the play' (Taylor 2015: n. pg.).

The question of fidelity can introduce a rather pejorative vocabulary to the critical debate. There are certain terms such as '"infidelity," "betrayal," "deformation," "violation," "bastardization," "vulgarization" and "desecration" [that] proliferate in adaptation discourse, with each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium' (Stam 2005: 3). The terms indicate a concern relating to *how* source material is used and represented, and moreover belittle the notion that adaptation can be an innovative process. Inherent within this type of vernacular is a critical perspective of adaptations committed with negative intentions that result in less

[23] An example of this model most often seen on the British stage is in the production of Shakespearean texts. In new productions of Shakespeare, the dramaturgical work undertaken on the printed text is evident, most often in the form of editing, however the text remains recognisably Shakespearean. There is often little attempt to update the narrative arc or the language but any season at the Royal Shakespeare Company will present any number of highly esteemed texts framed with an alternate concept, in a different time or place - real or imagined. The text remains sacred in the majority of productions but the outer trappings or dressings constitute the 'new' element of that particular staging. It is in this way that the author-genius figure is maintained and the questions of adaptation, creativity and the influence of dramaturgy and identity arise.

culturally valuable outcomes. Hutcheon directly challenges this by suggesting that a criterion for adaptation is that it is, 'a creative *and* an interpretative act of appropriating/salvaging' (2013: 8). Hutcheon's oppositional terminology (and positive implementation of the term appropriation) demonstrates her critical agenda that attempts to de-hierarchise the cultural perception of adaptation as a lesser form, and I draw on Hutcheon in the following chapters to evidence how processes of adaptation can be innovative. In the examples analysed within this thesis the act of adaptation is an intervention by contemporary theatre practitioners, who rework the text according to their own dramaturgical intentions and politicised perception of self. I propose that it is this that defines these examples as innovative adaptations and not merely new versions of existing texts.

Another fundamental issue with the fidelity debate when considering postmodern adaptations is the incorrect assumption that 'adaptations are adapting exactly one text apiece' (Leitch 2003: 164). This assumption automatically discounts the highly influential poststructuralist theories of intertextuality necessary within my discussion of postmodern processes of adaptation. The definition of intertextuality put forward by Kristeva (1980) [1966] asserts that no text exists as a self-sufficient entity. Kristeva highlights the importance of the interrelationship of texts and the subsequent relationship to other cultural systems. Texts are dialogical and therefore, cannot exist within a closed system or maintain their textual autonomy. Ultimately any text is 'a permutation of texts, an intertextuality; in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect' (Kristeva 1980: 36). As a theorist heavily influence by the study of semiotics, the term 'text(s)' as used by Kristeva need not exclusively apply to written examples. Kristeva's terminology is equally applicable to literature, art and cultural objects across an array of mediums in the same way that Barthes' (1977) discussion of the 'work as text' prioritises the meaning-making capacity of alternate creative stimuli beyond language. Kristeva's notion of intertextuality applied in discussions of

adaptation leads to a conclusion that the chronological order often embedded with debates of fidelity is redundant. If all texts are shaped by repetition and transformation in accordance with their interconnectedness to other text sources, adaptation should be a process considered in terms of intertextual webs 'rather than simplistic one-way lines of movement from source to adaptation' (Sanders 2016: 33).

To use the term adaptation is to automatically align the newer product with its source material. Hutcheon readily acknowledges adaptations as independent objects, however, in describing a work as an adaptation 'we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works' (2013: 6). Although the adaptations discussed here are viewed as independent cultural products influenced by the identity of the creatives involved and the material contexts of production, 'it is only as inherently double or multilaminated works that they can be theorized *as adaptation*' (ibid). Thus, where necessary I consider the case studies with reference to source texts and alternate adaptations of said sources. For example, I reference both Euripides' *The Trojan Women* (2005) [5 BCE] and Hector Berlioz's much later 1859 operatic adaptation *Les Troyens* as sources for Mee's *Trojan Women: A Love Story* (1995). Hutcheon suggests that in the twenty-first century postmodern milieu, the source text cannot always be considered as paramount. Rather, given the proliferation of adaptation it is more appropriate to acknowledge that now, 'multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically' (Hutcheon 2013: xv), something that can be seen in the aforementioned example. Acknowledging that any text is intertextual may undermine the notion of originality and individuality; separating the new adaptation from its primary incarnations can, however, prove difficult when the source text is a classical or well-known canonised work, such as a Greek Tragedy by Aeschylus or Euripides.

Adapting Greek Tragedies

As mentioned in the thesis Introduction, since the 1970s there has been a surge in performances of Greek tragedy on Western stages (Hall 2004: 2). This period coincides with the height of postmodern discourse and the symbiotic cultural practice that existed in dialogue with it. Despite a clear geographical and historical origin, consumerist hegemony and the proliferation of versions of these tragic plays almost renders them devoid of religious, political or cultural specificity. The political question of how Western civilization and culture accepted classical tragedy and other forms of Greek art as its predecessor is articulated by Settis (2006) in his critique of the hegemonic practices throughout Western history. Settis prioritises the discussion of art and architecture, while theatre scholar Laera (2013) builds upon Settis and expands his areas of analysis to address the phenomenon within present day theatrical adaptations of Greek tragedies. Laera suggests that the performance of ancient drama reveals a connection between 'the 'origin' of Western theatre and the foundation of Western identity' as any performance of ancient 'theatre becomes a paradigmatic device for blurring the distinction between myth and history' (2013: 3). She goes on to argue that,

> adaptations of Greek tragedy for a contemporary audience function as complex self-reflexive rituals: while taking place here and now, they point to their half-mythical, half-historical counterparts, namely open-air theatre festivals in fifth century Athens; while addressing themselves to contemporary audiences, they raise parallels between them and their 'ancestors' the alleged inventors of theatre.
>
> ibid

Laera's comments outline the complexity of the adaptation process given the cultural valuation of classical texts, namely the mythologies associated with them and their context. There is arguably a kind of hierarchy present in the nostalgia-driven attempts to revisit classical or historical forms, but I propose that the influence of the postmodern cultural landscape may actually serve to free the adapter from said hierarchy. Consumerist and capitalist ideologies prioritise the individual and I am inclined to counter Laera with Hutcheon's statement that the proliferation of different versions leads to simultaneous encounters of different versions or

texts inspired by the same source text (2013: xiii). The hierarchy so frequently associated with temporality is skewed in the highly mediatised postmodern setting.

Ancient Greek texts may still retain a quality of otherness given the temporal, thematic, and in some instances, geographical distance from contemporary Western theatre. Acknowledging this distance automatically raises questions of fidelity because any attempt to stage a classical play 'confronts a profound ignorance of the music, dance, and theatrical context that conditioned its first presentation' (Foley 1999: 4). Every contemporary performance of a classical Greek text outside its initial historical context must be an adaptation. First and foremost, the language requires translation and the material circumstances cannot ever be performed as in the 'original' with any certainty. Whilst in the new theatrical productions there is no shift in medium, there is inevitably a degree of adaptive theatrical circumstance, often including that of the initial act of translation.

Translation is itself a form of adaptation as '*every* act of translation is simultaneously an act of interpretation' (Cahir 2006: 14). Given the clear authorial intervention of the translator, for the purposes of this thesis I consider as translation part of the wide spectrum of adaptation practices. However, I acknowledge Linda Constanzo Cahir's argument that translation, rather than the more fluid description adaptation, is the specific process of

> [moving] a text from one language to another. It is a *process of language* […] through the process of translation a fully new text – *a materially different entity* – is made, one that simultaneously has a strong relationship with its original source, yet is fully independent from it.
>
> ibid

The effectiveness of the language translation, despite the unique form of authorial intervention and the production of a new and different textual entity, is often measured in terms of fidelity. However, any translation or adaptation that seeks to communicate equivalent linguistic meaning across languages, cultures and periods is doomed to fail; 'just as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation' (Hutcheon 2013: 16). In translating

and adapting any antiquated Greek text, there are a number of different transformations that must take place in order to negotiate the alien and unknowable 'original' performance context.

Methods of contemporary adaptation and different dramaturgical choices often aim to reduce this difference and make Greek texts more accessible. The postmodern nostalgic ambition to investigate the historical, coupled with its problematising of history as human construct, is a paradox repeatedly exploited in postmodern adaptations of Greek texts. To negotiate this particular self-reflexivity there are attempts to 'make Greek tragedies'' foreignness ''accessible' to contemporary audiences' (Laera 2013: 30). This both supports and obstructs an individual's connections to these source materials. The theatrical tactic of transposing the adaptation to a recognisable postmodern world means that the 'the historical and cultural distance separating 'us' from 'classical' Athenians seemingly disappears; actualization, therefore, deceives contemporary spectators into the belief that 'we' really came out of Athens' (ibid). Bridging the gap is indicative of an individualising tactic that occurs through the process of postmodern adaptation.

There is an opposing argument that mythologising Greek theatre ensures that it still holds particular power within theatrical hierarchies, partially because of postmodern nostalgia. Laera argues for the demythologising of the classical (2013), but I propose that cultural nostalgia possesses a particular kind of power over postmodern identities that cannot be overlooked. Baudrillard, in a critique of power states,

> power itself has produced nothing but the signs of its resemblance […] in the end the game of power becomes nothing but the *critical* obsession with power - obsession with its death, obsession with its survival, which increases as it disappears.
>
> 1994: 23

Power - as referred to in the above statement - can easily be replaced with either tradition or nostalgia. Power as romanticised notion in Baudrillard's example carries similar traits to that of the authority or authenticity of Greek theatre in contemporary cultural terms. Although, the postmodern renegotiates the hierarchies of art and culture, it also ushers in an acute response

to, and activation of, a particular type of nostalgia. The 'real' of classical tragedy is presumably out of reach for the contemporary individual and thus, as the distance between the then and now expands so too does the obsession. Multiple instances of mediatisation impact upon any perception of the 'real' and Baudrillard in his description of the hyperreal reinforces the challenge to authenticity. In the instance of classical adaptations, an engagement with a mediatised version of historical hyperreality is all that is available. His notion that the 'real' has become redundant (1994), is one possible justification for postmodernist interest in nostalgic representations of the classical.

The classical can be demarcated as epochal; it is a time period that has ended and yet, given the frequent perpetuations and reinterpretations in the hundreds of years since its demise it is evident that certain versions of the past, or certain cultural 'memories', hold more power over individuals and their sense of identity. In the instance of nostalgia-informed adaptation, such as in the works of Mee discussed in the following chapter, references are not necessarily incorporated to popularise the classical with an associated historical reverence. Rather, the act of rejecting the grand narratives of the modern period through active consumption and regurgitation of the classical offers an iconoclastic or ironic reflexivity to history and a challenge to the ideologies that culturally preceded it.

Jameson suggests that the influence of postmodernism and its movement away from the older, high-modernist ideologies of style means that 'the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past; [to] imitation of dead styles', consequently leading to a type of nostalgia found in an obsession with the 'neo' (1984: 65). For my own definition this observation is crucial as I address theatrical adaptations in which the ideologies associated with the source material often prove to be more important than any semblance of genuine historical referent.[24]

[24] In reference to the potential accuracy or engagement with the history of fifth century BCE I acknowledge that the necessary information to buck the postmodernist trend does not exist. However, it will become apparent within my argument in the individual case studies that even had the option of an accurate historical referent been

As already discussed, classical Greek theatre and the surviving collection of plays written during fifth century BCE are frequently cited as the origins of Western theatre (Wiles 2000, Laera 2013). Greco-Roman civilization and the culture it produced are also accepted as ideals and there is a hegemonically enforced superiority related to this (Settis 2006). In the postmodern environment the distinction between high and low forms of culture has collapsed but this is compromised because, although the Greek tragic forms become accessible in a way that is less reverential, there is an economic factor that influences the *choice* of these texts as source material. Adaptation can be used to generate a form of cultural capital associated with the source material, and this prestige can generate economic capital as well (Hutcheon 2013: 86 - 92). In a capitalist setting where new theatrical productions have high economic stakes, adaptations targeting an audience who already have some connection to the source material or the origin myth can potentially mitigate some of the risk.

Another important related factor to consider is the cultural or socio-political acumen that identifies the right timing for a particular adaptation.

> [A]mid the vast body of recyclable material offered on the one hand by the huge corpus of myths, legends, and the historical writings and on the other by the welter of current and contemporary crimes, scandals and other events of popular interest, certain stories or sets of stories in every era *prove particularly attractive for retelling* and for continued popular interest.
>
> Carlson 2003: 22[25]

In the postmodern period, Greek narratives retain popular interest and the supposed universality of the text makes them interesting templates for radical adaptation that has a personalised agenda, political or otherwise. The familiarity of the myths or stories combined with a lack of knowledge about the 'original' staging conventions invites an individualistic engagement from a new playwright, translator or director. Moreover, there are numerous polemic and controversial issues that align with the themes featured in the classical Greek

available, I am doubtful that it would have been a viable dramaturgical choice for the selected practitioners, for a wealth of different reasons.

[25] Emphasis is mine.

tragedies, not least debates surrounding otherness and violence. Such issues reflected through the different lenses of newer, politically aware identities, ensure that these classical texts can respond to the pertinent concerns of the contemporary *zeitgeist* as perceived by those individuals involved with the adaptation process.

Conclusion

The title of this chapter, 'Beginning to Define the Three Key Terms', demonstrated my intention to provide substantive definitions for the crucial terms that appear throughout this thesis and the forthcoming case study analyses. However, here I have demonstrated that inflexible definitions are not productive within my discourse, or in wider discourses surrounding the terms postmodernism, identity and adaptation. Reducing these complex ideas to a singular, rigid definition would fail to meet the demands of the very different theatrical works that they are used in conjunction with.

The discussion of postmodernism led this chapter as I set out to argue for the term as a useful theoretical tool to discuss contemporary theatre practices, and to establish it as a crucial influence on both identity and adaptation. Postmodernism in this thesis refers to a cultural shift, an evolutionary state built on the deconstructivist and poststructuralist theories that first challenged modernist ideologies. The postmodern condition is the result, with noticeable consequences that reverberate through scholarly discourse and means of cultural production.

Moving forward to the analyses of the case studies there are four primary components encompassed in my polymorphous definition of postmodernism. Building on Lyotard's observations (1984), I acknowledge a general incredulity towards metanarratives, replaced instead by the growth of little narratives. In practical terms, this leads to a drive in cultural production that prioritises a sense of individuality. This is visible in the more radical approaches to classical adaptations that discard the metanarrative of Greco-Roman hegemony.

Lyotard (1984) also identifies a transformation in knowledge-exchange and communicative potential due to the rapidly changing technological environment. Technological advances destabilise the power of language and the subsequent result is the growth in the importance of aesthetics in forms of communication. This leads to a noticeable mediatisation within existing and new mediums, and a general prioritisation of the aesthetic forms.

United with Lyotard's acknowledgement of communication in aesthetic form, Jameson (1984) refers to the new sense of depthlessness and the accompanying weakening of historicity that ruptures the teleological progression of time and history. Depthlessness as a defining feature of the postmodern condition promotes an alternate cultural landscape where previous hierarchies, such as those established by institutions, appear antiquated and limiting. Jameson's economic reading of postmodernism highlights consumerist approaches to culture, and this is integral to my own definition. Consumerism increases the quantity of cultural products in line with the general increase of 'goods in circulation' (Featherstone 1991: 120). This in turn reinforces the primacy of the individual in navigating the vast array of cultural content. Although the process is seemingly democratised it is, more than ever, at the mercy of economic forces. Consideration of these economic forces becomes one necessary factor in the examination of adaptations.

Identity is a factor that shapes adaptation processes and products. In this thesis, the individuals and their creative identities serve as the anchors to consider the broader cultural landscape. I have argued that the postmodern condition has brought about an identity crisis. This is primarily related to the economic landscape of late capitalism that drives a consumerist approach to every sphere of life, even the most personal. In the breakdown of metanarratives, there is a subsequent breakdown of institutional and social structures, including family, religion and workplace that were once integral to the formation of identity throughout the modern period (Dunn 1998).

New technology and forms of communication further emphasise the diversified potential of identity; the idea of the '"individual" itself insinuated a new, self-conscious identity insofar as having or making an identity necessitated standing apart from others through the development of a unique set of personality traits' (Dunn 1998: 53). Given the wealth of new resources accessible via new forms of communication, identity becomes a construct and postmodern scepticism enables self-reflexivity to inform the dialogue between individual and their environment. The agency of identity politics must be considered in relation to processes of adaptation. Furthermore, a fractured temporality (as a result of weakening historicity) ensures that an individual's relationship to past and present is problematised, and this is highlighted in the nostalgically inflected choices of source material for adaptations.

Hutcheon's flexible definition of adaptation means that it can refer to an active process, a product or processes of reception (2013: 6 - 9). Moving forward, I also embrace the flexibility of the term insomuch as adaptation can mean both the process of making something anew and the completed product. The crucial point about adaptation related to postmodernism is that the scepticism and rejection of modernist values has encouraged a more democratic creative landscape. The old challenge of fidelity no longer resonates because the reader's authority has succeeded that of the author (Barthes 1977).

The hierarchy that once informed adaptation practices is gone (Leitch 2003, Murray 2012). Historically, adaptations have shifted mediums; as early fifth century BCE epic poetry was adapted on the theatrical stages of ancient Greece. The onset of postmodernism further encouraged the shifting of source material into alternate forms of media and moreover, there are now more attempts to seek aesthetic alternatives within the adaptation process. Thomas Leitch debunks the idea that adaptations are adapting only one source (2003: 164) and this has influenced my choice to define and primarily use adaptation instead of appropriation throughout the thesis. Intertextual blurring of source materials is becoming a more mainstream

practice and the distance between definitions of adaptation and appropriation such as Sanders' (2016) are shrinking. The term adaptation in academic and common parlance has the capacity to describe a range of practices visible within the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and this will be demonstrated with my examinations of the three example case studies in each of the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

CHARLES L. MEE: A POSTMODERN PARADOX

Introduction

> The Greek Man hurries to the edge of the stage
> and speaks to the audience in Greek,
> hoping someone will understand him.
>
> Mee 2007: 37

It is a paradox that the old Greek Man speaking Greek in Charles L. Mee's old Greek play, *Iphigenia 2.0* (2007), will not be understood. Paradoxes abound within Mee's plays and as I discuss throughout this chapter, as a figure, Mee appears to be a paradox himself. Mee's plays are frequently discussed as 'postmodern' (Reilly 2005, Hopkins and Orr 2001, Bryant-Bertail 2000), and this is a fact that Mee appears to actively promote in his work and his outlook more broadly. Mee's process of playwriting is dependent on a compositional strategy that can best be described as a postmodern bricolage. Sanders associates bricolage with postmodernism and defines it as 'a collage or collection of different allusions, quotations and references in the context of a new creative work' (2016: 213). I apply her definition to Mee's works because excerpts from Jerry Springer, snippets of *Reader's Digest* and celebrity astrology blogs feature alongside various texts from the Western canon and music from nineteenth century operas by the likes of Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901) and Hector Berlioz (1803 – 1869). Mee embraces this cultural clash in a bid to represent a transient, polymorphous cultural identity that reflects his influences in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. He asks that his plays be viewed as 'historical documents' of his culture and identity (Mee 2002: 84). Despite the seemingly random compositional nature of Mee's approach I argue throughout this chapter that there is the same clearly defined identity apparent within all his works.

Mee has created his own *oeuvre* through his sheer prolificacy. His written outputs include a personal memoir, ten historical books chronicling European and American history

and over sixty plays and performance texts, twelve of which are adaptations of classical Greco-Roman tragedies. Mee is generous in discussions of his works and personal life, and has his own website, the (re)making project (www.charlesmee.org), that contains additional information about his plays. There is, therefore, a range of extra-textual materials that exist in dialogue with Mee's theatrical or performance texts. As one consequence of Mee's reflexivity, I consider his position as a self-determined postmodern playwright in tandem with seven of his adaptations of classical Greco-Roman tragedies. As this chapter reveals, there are limitations to Mee's self-determined identity and when viewed through a postmodern frame, his works are perhaps not as postmodern as they initially seem.

The seven adaptations of classical Greco-Roman tragedies analysed in this chapter are filed collectively under the heading 'Tragedies: The Greeks' on Mee's (re)making project website (n. d.: n. pg.).[26] They have also been self-published as an eBook collection titled *Greek Tragedies* (2016). The seven individual works that make up this collection and my subsequent case study are: *Orestes 2.0* (1992), *The Bacchae 2.1* (1993), *Agamemnon 2.0* (1994), *Trojan Women: A Love Story* (1995), *Iphigenia 2.0* (2007), *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* (2014a) and *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* (2014b).[27]

[26] Classical texts inform a number of Mee's other plays included in the (re)making project but these are not featured within my case study because Mee categorises them under different subheadings, for example he has a collection of plays categorised as 'Love Stories'. *True Love,* one of Mee's 'Love Stories', is based on Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Racine's *Phaedra* and premiered at the Holland Festival in 1998. It was directed by Ivo van Hove and performed by Toneelgroep Amsterdam. *Big Love*, another of Mee's 'Love Stories', is an adaptation of Aeschylus' *The Suppliant Women* that premiered in 2000 at the Humana Festival and was directed by Les Waters. *Gone* and *Requiem for the Dead* are filed under 'History Plays' and based on fragments 'from the lost plays of Sophocles', while *Odysseus 2.0* filed under 'Wild and Crazy Plays' is based on Homer's *Odyssey.* Though the aforementioned plays are published online, they have not yet had professional premieres. There are also other adaptations of canonical texts included in the (re)making project but after a period that voraciously utilised Greek texts, the wider body of work engages with alternate literary texts, genres or myths. For example, *Summertime* (2000) is a 'sweet, dreamy, romantic comedy from the world of *As You Like It* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Cherry Orchard'* and *The Mail Order Bride* (2006) is described as a 'souffle of five Molieres' (n. d.: n. pg.).

[27] It is difficult to establish a fixed date for Mee's plays as the majority were first published online and therefore, may have been edited or updated over a period of time. All the texts have been published in a more traditional manner in the 2016 eBook only collection but in order to maintain some sense of chronology, given my interest in how the texts respond to their particular cultural moment, I have chosen to date any quotations from or references to the plays according to their performance premieres. For example, *Bacchae 2.1* was first performed

The selection of texts I examine here are not usually discussed together given the apparent lack of chronological coherency. Existing scholarship that considers Mee's work typically addresses his most well-known or frequently performed works and, of those I have chosen, only *Orestes 2.0* and *Trojan Women: A Love Story* have cultivated that kind of traction. My analysis of these particular texts is indebted to articles by D. J. Hopkins and Shelley Orr (2001), Kara Reilly (2005) and Sarah Bryant-Bertail (2000) as their responses to *Orestes 2.0* and *Trojan Women: A Love Story* marry a theoretical discussion of postmodernism with a close reading of the text in performance. Other important publications on the subject of Mee's life and work include *The Drama Review's* 2002 special edition featuring a lengthy interview with Mee, and Scott T. Cummings' *Remaking American Theatre: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company* (2006), which covers the ground suggested by the title while offering commentary on the making of *bobrauschenbergamerica* (2001).

My consideration of the seven plays in dialogue with one another is original as it prompts a discussion of the developments within Mee's work over the course of a twenty-year period. In addition, I use this timeline as an anchor and these productions as a lens though which to reflect on the wider cultural shifts during the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the fairly recent premieres of both *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* and *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* means that, to my knowledge, there is an, as yet, unfulfilled opportunity for critical discussion of these two works.

Chapter Outline

This chapter begins by considering the first of many paradoxes related to Mee's postmodern works. Mee claims that his works exist as both adaptations *and* originals, and so in the opening

as part of Mark Taper Forum's Festival of New Work in 1993 and so I have dated it accordingly.

section I problematise the notion of originality in relation to Mee's creative mantra and the other extra-textual commentary that he offers. The second section provides a thorough introduction to Mee's online (re)making project. Mee's website proves to be an important aspect of his identity as a playwright as it serves as the primary means of disseminating his works and any additional information about them. With reference to the (re)making project I examine Mee's relationship with the Western dramatic canon and the capitalist economic situation of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Through the (re)making project Mee invites other individuals to remake his published works, and thus I refer to Lyotard's suggestion that all postmodern knowledge is legitimated by paralogy (1984) to question the dialogical potential of Mee's adaptations. The following section poses the question: why the Greeks? In order to analyse Mee's persisting interest in adapting classical tragedy, I consider Settis' suggestions about the Western belief in the superiority of classical cultural forms (2006). In examining the mythology associated with classical tragedy, namely its potential for universality and temporal transcendence, I consider postmodern motivations for adaptation as a form of active nostalgia. The role of nostalgia also proves imperative when questioning the impact of Mee's personal history upon his self-determined identity.

Section four focuses on *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* in order to examine the evolution in Mee's dramaturgy. Mee has always relied on a form of bricolage in his adaptations but in *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* I suggest that more mediatised sources are included as a direct response to the cultural setting of the twenty-first century. Drawing on examples from the playtext, I analyse Mee's individual compositional choices and how these might represent an overall authorial intentionality and Mee's desire to document his cultural setting. Discussion of Mee's identity leads to the fifth section of this chapter 'Postmodern Adaptation and Identity: *Agamemnon 2.0* and *Trojan Women: A Love Story'* which focuses on Mee's self-determined notion of identity and its impact upon the dramaturgical structure of his adaptations. Considering Mee's selection

of supplementary source materials in these adaptations prompts me to question whether there are autobiographical features to be found within his classical adaptations.

Building on the work of Herbet Blau (1987), Carlson defines ghosting in the theatre as an object or moment that 'presents the identical thing they [an audience] have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context' (2003: 7). Carlson's concept of ghosting essentially proposes that all theatrical productions are ghosted in some way and, in the postmodern period, theatrical recycling may be a deliberate tactic used in the creation of 'ghostly tapestries' (2003). My examination of *Bacchae 2.1* and *Orestes 2.0* in the sixth section, is driven by my argument that Mee uses ghosting as a deliberate dramaturgical strategy to achieve different outcomes related to the dramatisation of his own identity. Using examples of character ghosting, recycled text and aesthetics I reveal how Mee's identity, political agenda and cultural references haunt these two adaptations.

The final two sections of the chapter consider Mee's dramaturgical process and the way he assembles his works, and then, whether his adaptations can be viewed as incomplete or open texts. Referring to examples from the assembled literary and musical sources within *Agamemnon 2.0* and *Trojan Women: A Love Story,* I consider if Mee's postmodern bricolage is a democratic undertaking or whether a desire to represent his own self-determined authorial identity undermines this ideological objective. Using examples from *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* and *Iphigenia 2.0* I address the development of Mee's dramaturgical process and his tactics to stimulate future collaborative practices in an attempt to undermine the classification of his works as complete.

The Question of 'Originality'

In the introductory 'About' page of his online (re)making project, Mee's opening statement is: '[t]here is no such thing as an original play' (n. d.: n. pg.). Despite appearing to renounce the

possibility of originality in playwriting, Mee then paradoxically uses the example of Sandro Botticelli's Renaissance painting *The Virgin and Child* to argue the opposite (ibid). Mee argues that artists or playwrights may believe the work they have produced is original if the ideas or content come from 'dreams and intimate revelations' or, if the work in some way aims to reflect 'our innermost lives' (ibid). However, every idea has a source and thus, there is always a cultural lineage or a palimpsest of influences in even the most 'original' work. While problematising the idea of 'originality' in the introduction to the (re)making project, Mee subsequently argues for *every* artistic work to be viewed, to some extent, as an adaptation.

For Mee, 'the work we do', namely the creation of any cultural product such as a play, painting or novel must be viewed as 'both an adaptation and an original, at the same time' (ibid). It is the artist's engagement with an existing source that designates the work as an adaptation, but any interventions may render the new work original. In Mee's example of Botticelli's *The Virgin and Child,* the work is a stylistic product of its Renaissance setting and the subject of the painting is an adaptation of a familiar Madonna and Child biblical trope. Nevertheless, Botticelli's representation is noticeably distinct from other Renaissance works by 'Raphael or Ghirlandaio or Leonardo' who all depicted the same subject (ibid). Here, for Mee, the adaptation of the same biblical source does not negate the potential for originality but rather, invites it. The familiar story, image or idea is transformed by each individual who encounters it and the originality is established in the process of remaking it in way that reflects their individual perspective and cultural setting.

Mee views the artist's cultural setting as a type of co-author in the act of adaptation. Allied with Mee's belief that there is no such thing as an original play is what I refer to throughout this chapter as his mantra: 'the culture writes us… and then we write our stories'

(Mee 2002: 84).[28] Mee's mantra is not unique; the notion that individuals are influenced by their environment, and subsequently, dramatic forms are informed by experience, personal politics, society and culture, is almost universally accepted and legitimated by cultural materialist theories (Dollimore and Sinfield 1994). The mantra is a self-reflexive comment on Mee's own dramaturgical process; often within his works he literally transposes the culture he encounters. Mee hopes that his plays will serve as 'evidence of who and how we are and what we do', and the characters within the plays will become vessels 'through whom the culture speaks, often without the speakers knowing it' (Mee 2002: 84). Here, there is an underlying suggestion that Mee's authorial role is passive as he is merely serving as a mirror to reflect the world around him. His mantra prompts questions about the potential absolution of authorial intentionality if he suggests that the plays are actually just products of a particular time and place. However, I do not view Mee's inclusion of particular cultural examples as accidental or inconsequential. Mee makes clear authorial choices when assembling the source materials, and thus the intertextuality that he cultivates is deliberate. Furthermore, it becomes a primary factor in demonstrating the originality of his adaptations.

Mee's adaptations of classical Greek texts often take the title of their primary source and this may obscure the originality in their intertextual means of construction. However, there are extra-textual annotations that accompany the plays to reveal their paradoxical nature as both original and adaptation. Alongside the individual links to download 'The Plays' from the (re)making project are abstracts that list the source materials or literary inspirations for each. The abstract for *The Bacchae 2.1* highlights that 'Valerie Solanas, Georges Batailles and Joan Nestle's Lesbian Herstory Archives find their place in Euripides' classic piece' (n. d.: n. pg.).

[28] This mantra (if not the exact phrase) repeats throughout Mee's documentation of his own practice and in many interviews throughout his career; see Mee (1998) 'Preface' to *History Plays*, Mee (2002) 'Shattered and Fucked Up and Full of Wreckage', Cummings *Remaking American Theatre* (2006) and the (re)making project (n. d.: n. pg.).

On the last page of the complete downloadable playtext Mee offers an even more detailed list of his source materials,

> [*Bacchae 2.1*] based on, or taken in part from, among others, Euripides, Georges Bataille, Klaus Theweleit, Wilhelm Stekel, "insane"; texts from the Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg, Valerie Solanas's SCUM Manifesto, Joan Nestle's Femme-Butch texts, Pat Califia, Jeanne Cordova, Barbara Duden, Mary Maclane, Aimable Jayet, Sei Shonagon.
>
> 1993: 68[29]

With this note Mee confronts his reader with an explicit declaration about his own intertextual engagement with the classical source text. It evidences that *Bacchae 2.1* is an adaptation but one that relies on an original assemblage of other sources. I also view the inclusion of this note as Mee emphasising his mantra that 'the culture writes us… and then we write our stories' (Mee 2002: 84). Mee's list of sources includes a variety of predominantly late twentieth century plays, manifestos, essays and novels, and it demonstrates how this adaptation of a classical play, *The Bacchae,* has been remade in response to Mee's specific contemporary culture. Although Mee's derivative titling suggests that *Bacchae 2.1* is a recognisable adaptation of *The Bacchae,* the detailed notes, quoted above, reveal that Mee has put other texts in dialogue with the named source text. As mentioned in Chapter One, Leitch suggests that a common fallacy about adaptation is that: 'adaptations are adapting exactly one text apiece', that they rely upon 'one-to-one correspondence' between source and adaptation (2003: 164). Mee makes the dialogical complexity of his process of adaptation explicit and consequently challenges this fallacy by highlighting all the different works that feature within *Bacchae 2.1.*

Hutcheon (2013) describes adaptation in a similar dialogical way to Mee. Hutcheon's tripartite understanding places emphasis on the processual nature of any adaptation and her use of the term includes three core components; processes of creation, processes of reception and the formal product as an entity (2013: 6 – 9). Hutcheon suggests that the process of reception

[29] All my page numbers and references to Mee's plays are taken from the PDF versions that can be downloaded from the (re)making project website.

is integral to understanding adaptations (such as Mee's Greek tragedies) because the level of originality is revealed when 'we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation' (2013: 8). Both Mee and Hutcheon's considerations of adaptation and originality have historical precedent in the classical notion of *imitatio,* which can be defined as the deliberate replication of canonical narratives or styles to indicate an affiliation with a particular author or genre (Conte and Most 2015: n. pg.). The fundamental goal of *imitatio* is to reflect the established form while complementing it with sympathetic creative interventions (ibid). As mentioned, Mee's plays often signal a relationship with a singular classical source text in their titles but even the titles, with the inclusion of numerical affixes, indicate that Mee's plays are imitations *with* interventions.

With his titles Mee attempts to negotiate the distance between the classical source and the contemporary moment. The numerical affix as naming device is modelled on a late twentieth century trend seen in technological and software manufacturing. Mee refers to his play *Agamemnon 2.0* to explain that 'in the digital age we do these versions of things, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, that sort of thing. Aeschylus wrote version 1.0 and I've written version 2.0' (2017: n. pg.).[30] The use of almost identical Greek titles can invoke memories or associations with the source texts but Mee's subtle affix becomes an invitation to identify how and when he has chosen to deviate from the classical text. Cummings suggests that the titles of Mee's plays, like continually evolving software, 'can be seen as a metaphor for the symbiotic manner in which a text […] and the convention surrounding its use are revised and restructured over time to suit changing needs' (2006: 61). The titling inspired by Mee's twentieth century setting implies

[30] Subsequent quotations cited as 'Mee 2017' are taken from my previously unpublished interview with Charles L. Mee conducted on Wednesday 8th March 2017. All text is quoted accurately but where applicable I have made minor edits for clarity. These edits include: not indicating extensive pauses, repetitions of one or two words and the removal of any phonemes (such as 'Err' and 'Urm'). Where I have made a more significant edit to the quotation it is indicated with square brackets in keeping with the formatting throughout.

that these plays belong to a new generation, namely that of the digital age. Mee titles his plays in a manner that implies numerous iterations and so his works are presented as an interconnected but original part of the intertextual landscape of countless adaptations, including those that have not yet been created. Mee returns to the idea of originality when considering future adaptations of his own plays in the closing statement of the 'About' page of the (re)making project. He invites 'those who read the plays published here [to] feel free to treat the texts I've made in the same way I've treated the texts of others' (Mee n. d.: n. pg.); namely to take them and remake them into adaptations that are simultaneously, paradoxically, new *and* original.

The (re)making project

Mee was the first American playwright to make his works freely available on the Internet. At the Southeastern Theatre Conference Convention in 2009, it was noted that more than twenty-five years later, 'he's [still] probably the only playwright in America that makes all of his plays available for free' (Wohl 2009: n. pg.).[31] More than sixty of Mee's plays are available to freely download on the (re)making project website, but, despite the generosity of this initial gesture, Mee provides a clear stipulation about *how* his plays may be used.

> Please feel free to take the plays from this website and use them freely as a resource for your own work: that is to say, don't just make some cuts or rewrite a few passages or re-arrange them or put in a few texts that you like better, but pillage the plays as I have pillaged […] and build your own, entirely new piece—and then, please, put your own name to the work that results.
>
> n. d.: n. pg.

In this statement Mee is not advocating for the production of his plays as written but rather for their use as source materials or inspiration for future works. He knowingly subverts the

[31] Websites such as http://proplay.ws make large numbers of already produced plays available online to read in order to encourage further productions of these works. However, it is different to the (re)making project as http://proplay.ws only replicates existing works, no untested works are included. Some practitioners such as Doric Wilson (1939 - 2011) have online catalogues of their most successful plays, these more often than not serve a marketing and promotional function rather than advocating an ideology.

meaning of the pejorative term ‘pillage’ to advocate for a particularly radical form of postmodern adaptation that undermines a hierarchal valuation of different texts.

The (re)making project’s function as a digital platform to access Mee’s collection of plays appears equally radical in its subversion of late twentieth and twenty-first century copyright norms. Mandel (1978) and Jameson (1984) define this epoch in terms of an economic framework, namely late, third stage or multinational capitalism, and it is against this economic framework and its dominant and stringent copyright principles that Mee can be viewed as an anomaly. All the plays are however, still protected by copyright and in order to perform them as they appear on the website, performance rights must be sought and paid for. Nonetheless, Mee’s (re)making project and its problematising of originality embodies a postmodern ideology as the website’s very existence consistently appears to enforce the idea that all cultural products are valid fodder for creative acts of adaptation. There is also a link to ‘Support the Project’ to remunerate what, by Mee’s own admission, is cultural pillaging. Such paradoxical features within the (re)making project reflect a dichotomising tension that appears simultaneously pro and anti-consumerist in both its ideologies and its practical function.

Mee attempts to authenticate the validity of his ideology, namely an egalitarian approach to cultural reproduction, by offering a brief historical justification for adaptation as a foregone conclusion. Building on the reference to Botticelli’s painting (detailed in the previous section), Mee’s ‘About’ page moves on to provide other examples from the theatre in order to claim ‘none of the classical Greek plays were original: they were all based on earlier plays or poems or myths. And none of Shakespeare’s plays are original: they are all taken from earlier work’ (Mee 2002: 84). Mee considers the practice of adaptation as one measure of quality for an artistic product and with the (re)making project, he actively promotes it as means to create better work. In a 2009 interview, Mee stated ‘there were no copyright laws in Shakespeare’s time or in the time of Greek drama and I thought maybe that was connected to the quality of

the work' (Wohl n. pg.). Mee often chooses to refer to the same two renowned examples, the Greek tragedians and William Shakespeare, when arguing for adaptation as model for artistic practice (2005a, Mee 2002). Drawing upon such reputable historical models, Mee's aim is to counter any negative presumptions about his own practice. However, in attempting to align himself with Shakespeare and the Greeks, Mee reveals his own disproportionate valuation of their cultural currency. Subsequently his classical adaptations end up reinforcing an established modernist canonical hierarchy instead of successfully destabilising it.

The influence of the Western dramatic canon is visible throughout Mee's *oeuvre* and has always been a feature of the (re)making project. The first online prototype for the (re)making project was launched in 1990 with an adaptation of Euripides' tragedy *Orestes* (5 BCE), retitled *Orestes 2.0.* The initial publication of this first play on the Internet was an impulsive action, 'not a philosophical principle' (Mee quoted in Wohl 2009: n. pg.). As Mee wrote additional plays the available content for a new website expanded and the (re)making project was officially launched in 1996. With its creation Mee opted to incorporate the already mentioned 'About' mission statement, some information about his identity as a playwright under the heading 'What I like', and a 'Note on Casting'. These extra-textual inclusions repeatedly highlight underlying postmodernist sentiments within Mee's approach to playwriting. For example, under the heading 'What I like', Mee demonstrates a persistent interest in representations of histories known and unknown, and deliberately uses 'nostalgia' as a feature in the 'frame of the plays' (n. d.: n. pg.). The influence of postmodernism as an overarching cultural shift is also visible in Mee's choice to continually disseminate his work via the Internet.

The genesis of the (re)making project coincides with the technological advances that helped to define Lyotard's classification of the postmodern epoch (1984). The new means of Internet communication first described by Lyotard provided a timely opportunity for Mee, a

space to 'put all my plays. […] And in that way, they get out into the world and people can have them for free and they can do whatever they want with them' (Mee 2017: n. pg.). As the most prolific professional playwright to adopt the Internet as a tool for the dissemination of creative works, Mee embraces the possibilities of its global reach. In a 2002 interview Mee commented that,

> every day 100 people download my plays – from all over the world: Hong Kong, France, Germany, Japan, India and Turkey. A play of mine was done in Serbia while the United States was bombing Serbia. So people take my stuff and do it everywhere.
>
> Mee 2002: 92

In a more recent interview, Mee remarked that the number of individuals downloading his plays has increased in line with the global increase of Internet users, and now the number of downloads is closer to 600 - 800 each day (Mee 2017). In tracing the access and download data on his website, Mee is able to track, to an extent, the geographical audience of his work though he is less able to comment on what happens to his plays once they are downloaded.

The plays that Mee makes available to download via the (re)making project are complete, insofar as they are protected by copyright. However, somewhat incompatibly, Mee's stage directions are frequently open and questioning rather than autocratic. For example, in *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* some of the stage directions are simply questions, such as 'what is the music for this?' and, 'while she dances solo with the computer in her open palm / what do we hear? (2014b: 13, 17).[32] Mee embraces alternate receptions of his text as a reflection of his mantra, namely the process of cultural recycling that he employs when creating his adaptations. Mee's practice and intention for the reception of his work echo Lyotard's belief in the postmodernist logic of paralogism (1984). Paralogy is 'the opposite of the idea of consensus' and it 'arises as a result of skepticism [sic] about the possibility of achieving

[32] The / indicates a line break in the downloaded PDF and online versions of Mee's texts. I use this punctuation device from this point onwards to indicate the same in all the printed texts I refer to.

consensus on any issue' (Lipovetsky 1999: 31). In other words, paralogy as a form of logic eliminates the desire for a singular truth in order to pursue the continuation of dialogue with ever expanding insights and innovations. Paralogy diminishes the authority of the 'original' author and as consequence, implies that no text is ever finished or complete. Although the plays on the (re)making website are complete in that they have been published (and copyrighted), I view them as simultaneously incomplete because Mee leaves certain questions unanswered and offers them up as just one part of a wider ongoing intertextual cultural dialogue. This is a topic I will return to in the final section of this chapter.

Mee's frequent use of canonical texts as his primary sources ensures that there are many other adaptations that exist in dialogue with his new works. The twenty-year timeline for the selected case studies featured within this chapter demonstrates Mee's extended engagement with classical sources, specifically classical tragedies. The frequency of Greco-Roman tragedies within Mee's *oeuvre* prompts further consideration of Mee's motives for adaptation and his reason for repeatedly choosing these particular source texts from this one theatrical genre.

Why the Greeks?

The majority of plays written by Mee during the 1990s were inspired by canonical Greek texts. In Chapter One I outlined numerous reasons why the metamorphosing cultural backdrop of postmodernism may have prompted a surge in classical adaptations. Reasons including but not exclusively, the unknowable performance conditions of the text inviting radical acts of adaptation, nostalgic interest in historicised representations of the past, cultural memory as a cyclical process (Settis 2006), and parallels found between the source texts and the contemporary cultural moment. In his role as a playwright, Mee deliberately attempts to reflect his material cultural conditions and thus, may have been influenced by the wider trend for

adapting classical texts. However, Mee also cites individual reasons for his interest in Greek source materials.

In his memoir *A Nearly Normal Life,* Mee suggests that 'America today lies, as it were, in a bed on ancient ruins' (1999: 214). Mee here directly links notions of ancientness with his lived experience in the twentieth century; therefore, the culture that writes *him* is not temporally or geographically limited. Mee's interest in classical texts has persisted throughout his lifetime and he cites Plato's *Symposium,* given to him by his high school English teacher, as a formative influence. In his own words, 'her gift has informed my entire life' (Mee 1999: 32 - 33). The mechanics of memory are important here, and Susan Bennett referring to Michael Schudson (1992) suggests that memory accounts 'for why '[s]ome versions of the past persist more successfully than do others and [why] different agencies of memory operate to different effect'' (1996: 8). Mee's first encounter with Plato was during his recovery from Poliomyelitis (Polio) and the aftermath of that disease is a lifelong physical disability that requires Mee to use two walking aides (Mee 1999: 172). Mee's daily corporeal experience is arguably a continuous reminder of his experience of Polio, and by default a reminder of the *Symposium,* 'the first book I ever read' (Mee 1999: 32). The memory of that time and that text are subject to particular form of repetitive remembrance, hence one possible reason for the seminal positioning of the classical within Mee's personal cultural landscape.

Progressing from classical philosophy to classical drama Mee has since reflected on his interest in adapting Greek dramas, 'I kept going back to the Greeks, because their plays are such amazingly wonderful pieces of construction' (2005: 21). Mee's engagement with these texts and his belief that they offer a superior form of dramaturgical construction reflects the wider cultural hierarchy that bestows upon canonical texts greater value or cultural capital. Mee traces his interest in Greek literature to a specific encounter in his youth however, his desire to return to the ancient Greeks aligns with what Settis has problematised as Western

hegemony within the cultural sphere and an obsession with the classical (2006). According to Settis, this obsession is a cyclical cultural process that has perpetuated 'since Greek culture first glorified itself by promoting a cult of its own past' (2006: 76). Mee is aware of the classical tradition of recycling known narratives and he is complicit in reinforcing the cult of the classical with the (re)making project. He acknowledges the prestigious credentials of the classical, but in a postmodern sceptical turn, he also co-opts and exploits the mythical prestige of Greek tragedy to explore his own dramaturgical agenda.

Given their mythical origins, classical tragedies dramatise what are frequently described as universal themes (Sidiropoulou 2014, Laera 2014, Carlson 1996). Sidiropoulou suggests that tragedy is 'a concentrated form of universal storytelling' that acts as a vessel for myth and 'underlines and occasionally resolves big, timeless questions about our existence' (2014: 33). Mee is interested in the dramaturgical potential of adapting classical texts to address these allegedly universal themes or existential questions,

> I just became so completely captivated by Greek theatre and by the fact the Greek playwrights never took some, you know, easy little problem that was going to be solved by the final commercial break, before the hour is up. They start with matricide, fratricide, patricide, incest, big problems, and then see if there is anything that can be said and done about that.
>
> 2017: n. pg.

War and its aftermath became the first of the 'big problems' that Mee chose to address through the lens of his earliest classical adaptation, *Orestes 2.0.* Mee started writing *Orestes 2.0* as a response to American soldiers returning from the Persian Gulf conflict in Iraq. He found similarities between contemporary news reports and the content of Euripides' classical text 'because it [*Orestes*] was about veterans returning from war' (ibid). Identifying one particular strand within the more complex narrative of Euripides' *Orestes,* Mee found a way to navigate the remoteness of the imagined historical past and its universalising potential. Mee's adaptation comments on his contemporary political events as he made the choice to replace parts of Euripides' classical text, detailing the epic Trojan War, with verbatim accounts from individual

soldiers returning from the recent Persian Gulf War.[33] Focussing on contemporary individual accounts, *Orestes 2.0* seemingly reduces the scale of the Trojan War to a more domestic level but the underpinning narrative of the classical text ensures that Mee still finds a way to investigate the 'big problems'.

In the later work *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* Mee again demonstrates his preoccupation with tackling allegedly universal issues in the style of the Greeks, only this time using the established structure of classical tragedy. The opening monologue delivered by THE WOMAN begins with details of a filicide:

> Act one, scene one.
> Tantalus, a mortal friend of the gods,
> decides to test their omniscience.
> He kills his own son, Pelops,
> chops him up and boils him,
> and plans to feed him to the gods as animal meat.
>
> Mee 2014a: 1[34]

After the description of Tantalus' murder of Pelops, THE WOMAN goes on to list the lengthy and violent mythical history of the House of Atreus. This opening section of *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* functions as an expository prologue that transitions into a sort of *parodos* (entrance song of the chorus) that comes in the form of a rendition of the 1982 Crystal Gale song *Is There Any Way Out of This Dream.* Mee uses the classical Greek structure as a template and then manipulates it in order to insert aspects of his own culture or identity. In *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* the chorus parts are replaced with a range of late twentieth and early twenty-first century musical choices, including music by John Cage and Antony and the Johnsons, in addition to the already mentioned Crystal Gale song. The musical interventions may offer only a lateral commentary on the action of the play and do little to progress the narrative, but they still

[33] The Persian Gulf War also known as Operation Desert Shield took place between August 1990 – March 1991.
[34] Character names are formatted in capitals in order to reflect the formatting used by Mee in his plays. Excerpts from the text are formatted here in an attempt to best represent Mee's own presentational choices, for example, where possible, line spacing is reflective of Mee's text on the printed page. The same goes for his stylistic subversion of certain grammatical rules.

indicate Mee's musical reference points and his personal preferences while imitating the structural or formal features of a classical Greek tragedy.

Personal preferences and Mee's individual reception of the source text frequently outweigh any concerns of fidelity to the Greeks in his process of adaptation. Although the classical Greek texts are a central part of Mee's cultural memory and I theorise his works as adaptations that prioritise a singular classical source, he is not overly concerned with his audiences receiving his works as such. Rather, Mee hopes that his adaptations will serve as a reminder that all cultural forms and stories have a series of antecedents. Mee '[does not] think that the audience needs to know the original Greek play', he only hopes that,

> the audience understands we've grown up in this world and this world has been shaped in part by what people have done in the past 2000 years. […] To understand that the new version comes from cultural history is crucial, but I don't think that people need to know the original play in order to see a new one.
>
> 2017: n. pg.

The above statement is underpinned by Mee's mantra as he emphasises the important role of cultural memory and its influence on individual and collective experience. I argue that Mee's position is influenced by postmodern nostalgia because he suggests that recognising the specifics of each adaptation proves to be less important than acknowledging a shared duty to the ultimately unknowable past that produced it. As part of the belief that the collective 'we' are shaped by two millennia of history and culture, Mee advocates looking to the past in order to better understand the present, and he uses the Greek plays and ideas of Greek-ness as historical or cultural starting points to do precisely that. Mee here is embracing the postmodern weakening of historicity and the possibility of universalising culture that may arise as a result of it.

Romanticised perceptions of history, including those of ancient Greece, are frequently visible in postmodern representations like Mee's. According to Dunn this general trend is due to the rise in historicised cultural information that 'comes predominantly from the mass media

and other outlets of commercialized entertainment' and leads to a shared cultural memory in which 'accurate representation of historical events is clearly less important than the pleasures of entering an imagined or idealized past' (1998: 159). Settis has correspondingly argued that ancient Greco-Roman cultures continue to shape the Western world but the repeated rebirth of the classical has led to an 'increasingly lifeless, standardized and atrophied form' that now signifies a vague or nostalgic sense of togetherness or a shared history or identity (2006: 2). Ideas of the classical most commonly affiliated with Greco-Roman culture have become recognisable for many individuals, although these recognisable features are now, according to Settis (2006), more homogenised and imprecise. In the same way, while the specifics of historical context and plot may not be integral to experiencing Mee's works as adaptations, the references to, or traces of, classical Greek tragedies prove to be an effective talisman when navigating a temporally fragmented and consistently evolving postmodern cultural landscape. Mee (2017) argues that the Greeks influence him and all of his works and, especially with his collection of tragic adaptations, he makes his classical connection explicit in order to fully utilise the nostalgic potential of the source materials. However, Mee also frequently embraces varying processes of adaptation and alternate forms of storytelling and I will examine these as particular features of his dramaturgical practice with further reference to *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* in the following section.

Storytelling with New Media and New Dramaturgy in *Night (Thyestes 2.0)*

Mee's theatrical *oeuvre* and the works featured within this chapter coincide with the exponential rate of technological evolution in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This evolution has permanently altered the way in which Western societies, in general, encounter and experience culture. Furthermore, the awareness of this technological change influences my own examination of Mee's works. For example, in 1980 in the United States,

ten years before the creation of the (re)making project, CNN (Central News Network) launched its 24-hour news coverage. This model was swiftly adopted by MTV (Music Television) one year later with the launch of cable television's first 24-hour music television network (Goodwin 1992). Changes in the medium of television resulted in a new and effectively ubiquitous availability of mediatised content, further intensified by the development of computer and Internet technologies in the following decade. The use of computers and the Internet evolved beyond purely educational or employment contexts to become recognised as an independent leisure pursuit, an activity often encapsulated in the phrase 'Surfing the Internet'.[35] Referencing these new mediums and technological changes Hutcheon has highlighted how 'the conventions of storytelling – and story retelling – are changing daily' (2013: xix) and Mee's process of playwriting, his chosen means of storytelling and his means of distribution are prime examples of this.

This digital revolution and the increasing availability of the Internet ensures that a growing number of people have access to Mee's works via the (re)making project. Census figures indicate that the number of homes in North America with computer access grew from 15% in 1989 to 51% in 2000 (Newburger 2001: 1). By 2015, the American Community Survey (ACS) reported that the percentage of households with 'broadband Internet subscription' had jumped again to more than 75% (Ryan and Lewis 2017: 2).[36] These figures from the late twentieth century evidence that a digital and communicative revolution overlapped with the onset of the postmodern cultural shift, and the figures are significant in relation to Mee's numerous theatrical adaptations. There is a correlation between the ever-increasing range of available materials made possible by new technological mediums and Mee's progressively radical processes of adapting classical Greek texts. The technological advances visibly

[35] 'Surfing the Internet' is phrase most often attributed to Jean Armour Polly and her article in University of Minnesota Wilson Library Bulletin (1992).
[36] ACS reports 78% of homes owning a laptop or desktop and 75% in possession of a wireless handheld computer or smartphone (Ryan and Lewis 2017: 2).

influence Mee's continually developing dramaturgical process. Mee's dramaturgy knowingly reflects his environment and while all of Mee's works are influenced by the postmodern milieu, the influence of diverse cultural mediums and the wealth of different storytelling forms is best represented in two of his most recent twenty-first century Greek adaptations, *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* and *Night (Thyestes 2.0).*

By describing *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* and *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* as a 'dance theatre pieces' on the (re)making project website (n. d.: n. pg.), Mee prioritises the performance quality rather than the literary quality of these adaptations. This is a subtle distinction from his adaptations pre-2000, when the earlier works are described on the site as 'plays'. I suggest that this distinction is because Mee's process of adaptation has become more experimentally transpositional as the postmodern cultural shift continues to expand collective notions of text and textuality. Although Mee's distinction suggests a limited valuation of the printed source text, both of Mee's 'Notes on the Text' reference numerous translations that Mee has consulted or directly incorporated. As a part of the Western canon, Seneca's *Thyestes* (1 CE) has been translated countless times: for *Night (Thyestes 2.0),* Mee consulted five different English language translations of Seneca's play from 1560, 1907, 1966, 1992 and 2004 (2014a: 32).[37] Alongside the rich literary intertextuality that this range of translations offers, Mee incorporates a wealth of other materials from different performative mediums such as recorded dialogue, music or song, solo and group dances. Mee's use of additional forms of performance are embedded within the stage directions and this reiterates that they are as integral to the textuality of the work as any of the words drawn from the different translations of Seneca.

Alongside his hybridised sources, Mee embraces the opportunity to explore an episodic form of textuality in his dramaturgy afforded him by twenty-first century developments in new

[37] The different translations are: 'Jasper Heywood's translation of 1560, the translation by Frank Justus Miller published in 1907, the translation by E.F. Watling published in 1966, the translation by David R. Slavitt published in 1992, the translation by John G. Fitch published in 2004' (Mee 2014a: 32).

media, such as 24-hour television. In response to the changing aesthetic form and content in new media, McConachie has suggested that individuals have become 'trained to discover links of similitude and causation by television viewing' given the 'fragmentation of viewing and proliferation of programming genres, [that] offers greater complexity and a wider range of linking conventions that any previous medium' (2003: 284). In other words, new forms of media require different forms of cognition attuned to finding links and meaning between seemingly unconnected stimuli. This process of meaning-making that prioritises the individual has been further exacerbated by the growth of the Internet, and the excess of information and cultural simulacra that it makes readily available. Often in *Night (Thyestes 2.0),* Mee demands of his audience this new cognitive approach since he uses multiple mediatised forms simultaneously to layer or fragment the narrative structure.

In one such moment devoid of spoken text in *Night (Thyestes 2.0)*, the adaptation is instead scripted through stage directions. Mee determines a physical score for a number of performers onstage, 'someone rolls out a bathtub and drowns someone else in it / the sleek old Mafioso in the chair puts on dark sunglasses (Mee 2014a: 24 - 25). At the same time these actions are accompanied by 'loud deafening discordant music', a 'video of a woman w/foot [sic] in concrete bucket, hammering it' and 'a dozen random youtube [sic] videos / (on five screens that descend from the flies to different heights)' (ibid). Mee exploits the contemporary attunement to fragmented form in his deliberate dramaturgical approximation of shared cultural reference points that overlap, complement or contradict one another. Though part of a disordered whole, each of the individual stage directions invoke their own process of reception and assume familiarity with certain forms or media. However, the importance of receiving the different elements as an intertextual bricolage is explicit because Mee makes the compositional choice to channel them in a single performative moment. There is an almost egalitarian approach as the dialogical exchange means that none of the above stage directions, or forms of

culture, are given any authorial priority.

The priority within this bricolage composition appears to be an overall assault on the senses that symbolises the 'big problems' that Mee identifies within the classical tragedy (2017: n. pg.). In the (re)making project abstract for *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* Mee describes the adaptation as 'inspired by the classic tale of Thyestes, it is all nightmare and despair and darkness' (n. d.: n. pg.). The violent images and discordant music that Mee has selected are somewhat obvious contemporary representations of the concepts of despair, nightmares and darkness. In isolation the images initially appear a little clichéd or intentionally shocking and do not overtly align with Seneca's play. However, the example above comes as part of a longer sequence that immediately follows a stirring vengeful speech:

> FURY:
> […]
> Let havoc rule this house;
> call blood and strife and death;
> let every corner of this place
> be filled with the revenge of Tantalus!
>
> Mee 2014a: 22

This speech is a copied verbatim from E. F. Watling's 1966 translation of Seneca' *Thyestes* and originally appears in Act One. The havoc described by the FURY is dramatised in Seneca's work through scripted text across all five acts, but Mee opts to move the speech to the middle of *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* and radically alter the form of storytelling in his adaptation thereafter. Mee almost completely eliminates text for the remainder of *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* and rather relies on the composition of multiple mediatised sources, different sounds or music and detailed physical scores to alternatively dramatise the 'havoc' that FURY calls for.[38] Mee's compositional choices may appear simplistic or randomised but the authorial intentionality in selection and assembly leads me to argue that this example is more sophisticated than the sum of its parts.

[38] In the ten pages after this point there are only three more speeches delivered by onstage characters.

Mee's deliberate use of intertextuality and, as I describe it, almost randomised bricolage is just one illustration of how the influx of new media continually deprioritises narrative coherency and established conventions of dramatic storytelling. Mee intends that his works serve as cultural artefacts and the materiality of the twenty-first century is writ large in this particular adaptation. The bricolage of the textual construction and the objective to adapt ensures that Mee's dramaturgy in *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* is, in several ways, similar to his earlier works from the 1990s such as *Orestes 2.0* and *Agamemnon 2.0.* However, there in a visible evolution in his dramaturgy given the compositional choices and more deconstructed form of storytelling he favours in *Night (Thyestes 2.0),* and *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* as well.

Mee brings his world, its cacophony of mediatised and performed forms of culture to the stage, to produce a theatrical document for him and the cultural norms that inform him. Sanders has described proximation in adaptation as '[bringing] the text closer to the audience's personal frame of reference' (2016: 26), and so I view Mee's adaptation of his cultural environment as a form of proximation that aims to bridge the distance between the classical source and the contemporary context. Furthermore, if Mee is to enact his mantra and reflect the material conditions of his culture, his dramaturgical strategies must evolve in line with the cultural landscape. Mee has even acknowledged evidence of this evolution as, aforementioned, he arbitrarily shifts his extra-textual classifications of these newer adaptations from plays to dance theatre pieces.

Mee frequently uses established conventional or classical theatrical forms within his dramaturgy in addition to altered forms of storytelling. However, Mee's manipulation of formal convention is executed with a parodic undertone and thus, this can be seen as confirmation of postmodernism's paradoxical artistic influence. I do not refer here to parody as simple ridicule or satire but rather use Hutcheon's redefinition of parodic practises, specifically a 'repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the

very heart of similarity' (Hutcheon 1988: 26). Postmodern art works, such as all of Mee's classical adaptations, 'at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes' and 'to their critical or ironic rereading of the art of the past' (Hutcheon 1988: 23). Whilst the majority of *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* does not make use of conventional narrative structures, Mee ironically prefaces the fragmented bricolage with a moment of oral storytelling that replicates a classical narrative form of storytelling.

Mee gives authority to the classical form of storytelling while creating a self-reflexive and metatheatrical distance with the use of parody. The recognisable practice of a singular character communicating a linear narrative is used in order to critique the paradox between artifice and authenticity in the representation of Seneca's mythical-cum-historical play. The prologue in *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* relies on the theatrical terminology of a five act play to mark the genealogy of the House of Atreus; for example, 'Act three, scene one. Pelops has two sons, Atreus and Thyestes' (Mee 2014a: 2). The complex plot-history is delivered via a downstage centre microphone, and following the overview of events for 'Scene four', THE WOMAN pauses to ask, 'Are you still following this?' (Mee 2014a: 3). This questioning tactic is used again in the description of 'Act Four' 'Scene four' when THE WOMAN mentions Aegisthus and queries, 'remember him? Thyestes' only surviving son?' (Mee 2014a: 4). Given the restrictions on staging and content, and Aristotle's demand for unity of action (2013), a prologue in classical tragedies frequently features to introduce the events and characters within the play. Mee's device of questioning the audience mid-prologue playfully parodies this convention and the general reliance on didactic forms of storytelling. Furthermore, the *mise en scène* and THE WOMAN's acknowledgement of the audience highlights the theatricality of Mee's chosen means of representation. After opening with a relatively conventional form of storytelling and positioning THE WOMAN as the narrator for this adaptation, this character is

never seen again and this storytelling device is swiftly discarded in order to highlight its unreliability. Like Mee's varied choices of materials, his dramaturgical approaches to storytelling continually shift in *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* ensuring that nothing about this particular postmodern adaptation is hermeneutically certain.

Postmodern Adaptation and Identity: *Agamemnon 2.0* and *Trojan Women: A Love Story*

Mee states that his adaptive playwriting process is directly informed by his identity, his experiences and his perception of the world. In his memoir Mee reflects on his experience of Polio and explains that,

> I find, when I write, that I really don't want to write well-made sentences and paragraphs, narratives that flow, structures that have a sense of wholeness and balance, books that feel intact. Intact people should write intact books with sound narratives built of sound paragraphs that unfold with a sense of dependable cause and effect, solid structures you can rely on. This is not my experience of the world. [...] To me, sentences should veer and smash up, careen out of control; get under way and find themselves unable to stop, switch direction suddenly and irrevocably, break off, come to a sighing inconclusiveness. If a writer's writings constitute a "body of work," then my body of work, to feel true to me, must feel fragmented.
>
> 1999: 40 - 41

Mee here offers insight into his self-perception while aligning his dramaturgy with his physicality and his self-identification as 'an old crippled white guy'; he states, 'I want my plays to be the way my own life is: race and disability exist' (n. d.: n. pg.). These particular identity traits are, in part, informed by biology and social constructs, however, I view Mee's classification of his identity in these terms as self-determined because he promotes certain traits over others.

Mee's self-determined notion of identity is made public via his memoir and the (re)making project, and he frequently references it in interviews and profiles (2017, Cummings 2004, Mee 2002). Mee claims that, in the same manner as his plays, he is continually shaped by his environment. His mantra argues that individuals are written and rewritten by their cultural environment and yet, paradoxically, Mee presents a clear narrative around his identity

built upon a secure sense of self-perception. Mee frequently highlights defined identity traits that appear hermeneutically sealed but, given his underlying postmodern ideology, his chosen narrative appears unusual as it opposes a wider acknowledged postmodern identity crisis. Dunn argues that the 'belief in substantial identity determined by birth or inner life experience has been seriously eroded in twentieth century philosophy and social thought' (1998: 3), and yet Mee consistently explains his identity as a self-perceived constant and, furthermore, reiterates that it is integral to his playwriting.

Mee's own narrative about the overlap between his identity and dramaturgy results in his written form being frequently, and somewhat simplistically, recognised as the inevitable response to the trauma of illness. Cummings notes that the recurring imagery of fragmentation 'comes up again and again in Mee's work and in his discussions of it, as if to demonstrate a biological imperative for his rejection of conventional forms' (2006: 33). In opposition to Cummings, rather than considering the correlation between identity and form as compulsion, I suggest that Mee's recurring narrative about his identity is constructed and it indicates a level of self-reflexivity in his writing process. This consequently prompts questions about the nature of postmodern identity as a constructed form and how it influences processes of adaptation.

Drawing on the influence of the poststructuralist claim that the self is a fictional construct (Kristeva 1980), I view Mee's externalised identity as a form of 'text' that is partly subject to compositional choice, like his theatrical adaptations. Acknowledging the importance of choice then highlights a disparity between two versions of Mee's constructed identity. He deliberately emphasises a fragmented identity within his writings and extra-textual statements, but this self-reflexivity is necessitated, paradoxically, by a secure sense of self.

Mee's presentation of his constructed identity is further complicated when he selects aspects of his broader experience and culture to highlight and transfer into his writing. In *Agamemnon 2.0* Mee incorporates, for example, excerpts of writings by Zbigniew Herbert

(1924 – 1998), a Polish essayist and poet who completed a limited number of literary works inspired by ancient Greco-Roman mythology. There is seemingly little correlation between Mee's own constructed identity and this creative compositional choice. Although it may appear random, Mee's secure sense of identity is always integral to the *content* of the adaptations but, by content I refer to the particular *choice* of additional materials used in the retelling of the primary source text. In another example from *Agamemnon 2.0* the character CASSANDRA makes a tragic prophecy. Rather than using Aeschylus' text or another Greco-Roman inspired text as the source for this, Mee chooses to use excerpts from the Book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament. The Book of Revelation is the most notorious scripture within Christian eschatology and it contributes to one of the most persuasive legitimating grand narratives of 'Western Man', that of 'Christian redemptionism' (White 1987: 151). Before he 'lost his faith' in his late teens, Mee grew up staunchly Catholic (Mee 1999: 201), and so his personal experience of religion and its legitimating narratives has arguably informed his own identity and the subsequent content for this particular textual substitution.

Mee's substitutional content is usually diverse and, as explained in the previous section, drawn from a variety of different mediums. Often Mee takes his sources and inserts them verbatim with little concern for narrative coherency. In *Agamemnon 2.0* the characters HESIOD, HERODOTUS and HOMER abandon their discussion of Troy to list objects included in inventories in *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne* [1882] and *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shōnagon [1002]:

> HOMER
> jasmine
> narcissus
>
> HERODOTUS
> scarlet ribbons
> a toothpick case
> an eyebrow brush
> a pair of French scissors
> a quart of orange flower water

four pounds of scented snuff
a tweezer case -
enameled [sic]

Mee 1994: 16

The listing only comes to an end with the entrance of MESSENGER and, as these items are not referred to again, it appears to serve little purpose in the overall plot which generally follows Aeschylus' *Agamemnon.* Although the narrative associations are not obvious, this text, its content and value as historical document, are indicative of one aspect of Mee's identity, namely his interest in producing a historical document as witnessed and recorded by him, and with his identity as the unifying element.

This use of verbatim text can be directly linked to Mee's early career as a historian who wrote about Euro-American political history. Mee, by his own account, became an accidental historian as a result of his pacifist political stance; he 'got very caught up in anti-war activities and also started writing about things on war, which led to writing history books about American international relations and foreign policy' (2017: n. pg.). Part of Mee's self-determined identity is related to his vocation as a playwright but Cummings has argued that Mee's 'identity as a historian must be seen as the chrysalis out of which the playwright emerged' (2006: 14). In his role as historian, Mee often chronicled key events with reference to evidence and documentation, accurately recounting the words spoken by key politicians such as Winston Churchill or President Truman.[39] Mee has stated that 'historians pick up documents from the time they live in, they quote sources, they quote documents, they insert into their texts unedited pieces of evidence of the real world, and I'm still thinking in that mode' (Mee 2002: 87). Mee seems to suggest that he randomly collects texts and documents however, much of his writing

[39] In our conversation Mee described this process and the implication for one of his most widely published historical works *Meeting at Potsdam* (1975);

> if you want to say something about the end of World War II and the peace conference at Potsdam then you don't make up something that Winston Churchill said and say 'Winston Churchill said this, President Truman said that', you find out what they actually said and you quote it. And that is evidence of what they said and what happened at the conference.
>
> Mee 2017: n. pg.

is indicative of his own biography and his plays formulate his identity as a more secure subject than this 'mode' of writing would suggest.

The inclusion of verbatim text as a means to communicate a narrative and its context has translated from Mee's historical writings to his dramaturgical process. In line with his mantra, Mee uses his sources and textual documents as evidence of his cultural landscape and identity in the same way that he uses evolving forms of new media. The amalgamation of this miscellany of historical and cultural artefacts leads to a dramaturgical process akin to bricolage or, what Reilly has described as a 'postmodern dramaturgy' that 'enacts a collage reality' (2005: 56). Mee's collage-style postmodern dramaturgy often produces an aestheticised form of storytelling that is only formally consistent in its inconsistency. The disrupted and disordered structure or form that Mee aligns with his self-identification of being physically 'fragmented' or not intact, is best exemplified in *Trojan Women: A Love Story.*

As the title suggests, *Trojan Women: A Love Story* is primarily based on the play *The Trojan Women* by Euripides [5 BCE]. However, the latter half of Mee's play inexplicably transitions to an adaptation of Virgil's *The Aeneid* (19 BCE). Alongside these two primary source texts, Mee additionally utilises versions of the Women of Troy myth that have been transposed into alternate mediums. Berlioz's operatic adaptation *Les Troyens* (1858) appears alongside sections from the original poem by Virgil and the dramatic text by Euripides. Even before his individual identity overtly intervenes in the process of adaptation, Mee's intertextual weaving of these materials reveals a pre-existing Western obsession with the classical and its recurring role in shaping a generalised Western cultural identity.

There is a fragmentary consolidation of different classical sources that occurs throughout the duration of *Trojan Women: A Love Story,* and yet, it is clearly divided into two parts. The parts are entitled 'The Prologue' and 'The Play'. Despite the suggestion of these titles, in printed form the 'The Prologue' is actually longer than 'The Play'. 'The Prologue'

follows a similar course to the narrative of *The Trojan Women* while the second section, 'The Play', 'draws on *Les Troyens'* and 'Virgil's *Aeneid*, to present a contemporary version of Aeneas's famous sojourn in Carthage while en route to Italy to found the city of Rome' (Cummings 2006: 68). The two parts are dramaturgically separate in Mee's adaptation and this is signalled by the radically different *mise en scène* described within the stage directions. This dramaturgical separation is significant because an awareness of the act of performance is written into the text itself and the overt references to the numerous adaptations of *The Trojan Women* repeatedly reinforce Mee's text as adaptation.

'The Prologue' opens with a visual and aural collage of devastation. Following on from a recorded segment of *Les Troyens* that is punctuated with sounds of gunfire, conflict and emergency, there is a musical segue into a popular 1959 jazz arrangement of Billie Holiday's *All the Way* sung by the female chorus.[40] Visual elements accompany the aural soundtrack and these include a backdrop of a city that 'is a smoking, still-burning ruin. / Black ashes rain down continuously on the stage', atop '100 dark-skinned "3rd world" women making computer components at little work tables' (Mee 1995: 1). Shifting from the war-ravaged setting of Troy, there is a stark contrast to the new setting of 'The Play' that Mee acknowledges with a self-reflexive comment in the stage directions: 'the dramaturgical rules have shifted here: / this is dreamland, a world of drift, heaven' (1995: 77). 'The Play', with an almost entirely new cast of named characters then takes place in the setting of:

> A spa
> Exercise machines of all sorts
> Bowls of fruit
> Bottles of Evian water
> Fresh flowers
> Piles of towels
> A hot tub
>
> Mee 1995: 77

[40] Mee provides individual names for the collective of characters I refer to as the chorus. My references to chorus in *Trojan Women: A Love Story* are references to the characters: EISA, AIMABLE, VALERIE, CHEA and SEI.

Mee makes no attempt to reconcile the differences of tone and setting between the ruin of 'The Prologue' and the spa of 'The Play'. After seeing the 1996 production directed by Mee and Tina Landau, Bryant-Bertail commented that the 'multiple layers in time and space' do not 'move in a predictable arc from one point to another'; familiar patterns or linear transitions 'are interrupted, the action seems to shift without any clear chain of cause and effect to anchor it' (2000: 41). Bryant-Bertail's experience as audience member is verified by the printed playtext because, across the two parts, there is only one suggestion of a shared theatrical heterocosm found in the singular character of AENEAS who reappears after Mee's marked dramaturgical shift. Thematically both parts of *Trojan Women: A Love Story* focus on the aftermath of war but the settings, narrative sources, and the characters bar AENEAS, are completely different. These two diptych parts in dialogue with one another produce a fragmented whole that functions according to the logic of Mee's world view, and as a projection of his self-determined identity within that world.

The fragmented and unpredictable narrative structure of *Trojan Women: A Love Story* partially obscures its proximity to its classical source texts. There are examples of fidelity to Euripides' and Virgil's source texts, including a chorus of women similar to that in *The Trojan Women* and a close reworking of the narrative drawn from Book IV of the *Aeneid.* Nevertheless, the relationship between source and emergent text is complicated by Mee's use of bricolage as a dramaturgical strategy that formally obfuscates the process of adaptation. Often Mee radically transposes his primary source materials by altering temporality, location, perspectives from different characters and the medium in which they are represented; for example, he changes spoken dialogue to contemporary song. In one such illustrative moment in *Trojan Women: A Love Story,* Mee adapts the final exchange between HELEN and MENELAUS into a performance of a contemporary, alternative rock duet. The connection between this moment in the classical tragedy and the Cowboy Junkies' 1992 song *If You Were*

the Woman and I Was the Man is not immediately apparent.[41] The musical interjection is more representative of Mee's identity than his classical source text. The majority of the songs in *Trojan Women: A Love Story* emerge from Anglophone culture, specifically American popular culture between 1950 - 1990s, a period within Mee's living memory. This timeline and the affiliation to Americana appears to be the central unifying element in Mee's subsequent selection and so Mee's compositional choices are tied to his identity in a manner that suggests that Mee's adaptations can be classified as autobiographical.

In order to understand Mee's content or choices in terms of proximity to the source, I argue that his identity be viewed as the conduit through which the source materials are creatively transposed into their new forms. Hutcheon describes creative transposition of a source text as being 'subject not only to genre and media demands, […] but also to the temperament and talent of the adapter – and his or her individual intertexts through which are filtered the materials being adapted' (2013: 84). Hutcheon's comment implies an almost passive intertextuality associated with the material context in which the adapter receives a source. However, Mee is clearly not without agency in his processes of reception and remaking given the self-determined nature of his identity and the self-reflexivity of his mantra. As I have already highlighted, Mee repeatedly vocalises his understanding that 'the culture writes us… and then we write our stories' (2002: 84) while stating that his identity is also paramount in the representations of these same stories. There is a level of intentionality in Mee's extra-textual statements, a suggestion to audiences and readers for how to receive his works in line with his worldview. Hutcheon has suggested that such statements or motives given for and about creative actions 'must be confronted with the actual textual results: […] intending to do something is not necessarily the same thing as actually achieving it' (2013: 109). I claim that

[41] The song is the final segment of the post-war reunion of HELEN and MENELAUS. *If You Were the Woman and I Was the Man* is most famous for its inclusion in the 1994 film *Natural Born Killers*. The movie is based on two serial killers, a husband and wife who gain notoriety and celebrity for their crimes.

Mee does achieve the representation of both his cultural moment and his identity within his adaptations as he sets out to do; this is not accidental, it is the result of intentionality in his compositional choices.

Mee's perpetual recycling of his same narrative about identity and cultural influence points to his attempt to navigate what Dunn has described as the 'jarring experience of multiplicity and fluidity, [the] disturbingly incongruous and disorientating' experience of the metamorphosing cultural shift of postmodernism (1998: 143). For Dunn, personal experience, even self-reflexivity, appear to be inherently negative precepts. Such troubling discontinuities and perpetual transitions in the cultural and social sphere can but undermine identity as dependable entity, leading to a crisis. In producing an extra-textual narrative about his identity and a representation of said identity within the postmodern adaptations, Mee is seeking a sense of stability to counter the effects of the postmodern condition. Although he is evidently not such a victim of 'jarring experience', since his comparatively secure identity is shaped via his adaptations, which iteratively reinforce his identity; Mee's apparent postmodernist claims are in fact a self-fulfilling cycle. Mee intends his plays to document his identity and his experience but given the postmodern compositional choices that he makes, his plays are actually vehicles for a much more complex intersection between notions of self, culture and history.

Ruins, Recycling and Ghosts in *Bacchae 2.1* and *Orestes 2.0*

Mee claims that the template of the classical source texts exist as ruins within his new adaptations. Romanticised notions of culture and history thus align when Mee draws on the classical iconography of ruins to describe his works. Evaluating his process, Mee states:

> I came to think that what I was doing was taking a Greek play, reducing it to ruins, and then, atop of this bed of ruins, writing a new play […] I began to depart further and further from the Greek plays, until only the ghost of the original play remained.
>
> 2005: 211

The presence of the classical source, albeit in 'ruins', marks Mee's works as adaptations

according to my broad-spectrum understanding of adaptation practices in the postmodern epoch. Mee's reference to ruins is appropriate given the recurrence of paradoxes within his works as this chosen metaphor suggests that the classical source is, paradoxically, both present and absent within his adaptations.

Ruins serve a unique function within Western cultural memory. In their antinomic capacity, Mee's works, like the ruins he uses to describe them, become artefacts of cultural memory. Settis has suggested that ruins present a challenge to temporality and memory because they provide a 'point where the visible and invisible meet' (2006: 76). Settis highlights that architectural or cultural ruins are afforded a particular *pathos* in contemporary Western society. This is because ruins maintain a physical or 'real' form in the present that points to a 'victory over the ineluctable course of time' while representing the unknowable material conditions of the past and its demise (ibid). Authenticity in historical representation is continuously eroded by the postmodern landscape and the production of simulacra, and yet the materiality of the ruin as object, landmark or physical text offers a tangible representation of the 'real'. Mee's adaptations with their embedded ruins, function as mnemonic devices that prompt recollections of the classical narratives or culture that are used as his sources. Even though Mee's compositional choices often make a radical departure from the classical sources, by his own admission his works remain haunted by them.

Mee's description of the ghost of the Greek play within his new works is reminiscent of Carlson's theoretical investigations into the phenomenon of theatrical ghosting (2003). Mee occasionally features literal ghosts in his classical adaptations, such as the ghost of TANTALUS in *Night (Thyestes 2.0)*. However, my interest is in ghosting or ghostliness (according to Carlson's 2003 definition) and how it materialises in other dramaturgical guises within Mee's adaptations in ways that reflect his identity and the wider influence of the postmodern condition. Mee's texts are overtly ghosted by the recycling of the classical sources

but there are other examples of ghosting in his works. These include: recycled recognisable images, recycled alternate text-based sources and characters based on figures from history or literary fiction. The ghosting seen in Mee's works is not unusual; Carlson goes as far as arguing that ghosting occurs in every and 'any theatrical production' because the theatre functions as 'a repository and living museum of cultural memory' (2003: 165). I suggest however, that as a result of the postmodern condition and the reflexive self-knowing approach I have already identified in Mee's practice, that Mee sometimes uses ghosting as a deliberate dramaturgical tactic. In the same way that Mee's compositional choices reflect his identity so too does his use of ghosting. Much of Mee's ghosting appears to be deliberate and contributes to the autobiographical aspects of his adaptations. Mee uses ghosting as an additional layer within his bricolage in order to draw parallels between the classical source text and his experience of the contemporary moment, to reflect singular aspects of his own identify or to articulate a particular political opinion.

In *Bacchae 2.1* Mee shows his Democratic political bias by introducing a new character ghosted by the Republican official Tony Ulasewitz (1918 – 1997). Mee retains many of the original characters from Euripides' *The Bacchae* but TONY ULASEWITZ, as character, fulfils the conventional messenger function. In spite of this recognisable function, his inclusion in the dramatic text is multi-layered and haunted by his factual counterpart's role in Richard Nixon's administration and the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s. The Nixon administration, including Ulasewitz, were implicated in their attempt to rewrite history through the corruption and removal of official documentation in the public record.[42]

Directly referencing his own perception of the historic Watergate scandal, Mee labels the character TONY ULASEWITZ 'a spy' who 'enters furtively' and then reports on the

[42] I use lower case here to indicate that I am discussing Tony Ulasewitz the person, not the character as appears in the play.

behaviour of the errant women in the mountains (Mee 1993: 31). Mee was and is staunchly anti-Republican and his political agenda is clear within the unfavourable representation of the character TONY ULASEWITZ.[43] When describing any type of character ghosting Carlson has suggested that audiences do not bring with them a knowledge of singular narratives but 'rather the character traits of one or more familiar figures, who continue to demonstrate those already known traits within changing situations' (2003: 44). In an additional layer of this character ghosting, for Mee, one of the established traits of Ulasewitz and, by default, TONY ULASEWITZ is that they are untrustworthy.[44] Consequently, for any audience members or readers also familiar with Ulasewitz's role in attempting to rewrite American history, the reliability of TONY ULASEWITZ's messenger-style testimony in *Bacchae 2.1* is thrown into question.

Reflecting a different authorial intention, the inclusion of the character FARLEY in *Orestes 2.0* appears to be a form of character ghosting for solely ironic purposes. Mee uses the same tactic of character ghosting as in *Bacchae 2.1* but in *Orestes 2.0* he dramatises a different part of his experience of the contemporary moment rather than his political agenda. For the character FARLEY, Mee turned to popular culture rather than politics for inspiration. The character is an intentional reference to the American celebrity astrologer Farley Malorrus who hosted popular radio and television segments from 1975 onwards. The character only appears

[43] As evidence corroborating Mee's stance against Nixon and the corrupt Republican administration of the time, I refer to his role in the early 1970s as the 'co-founder and chairman of the National Committee on the Presidency, a nationwide, grass-roots organization dedicated to the impeachment of the man [Richard Nixon] he referred to as "the Dark Liar"' (Cummings 2006: 17). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, leading up to the creation of this organisation, Mee was an active protestor against the Nixon administration and the conflict in Vietnam (Cummings 2006: 13 - 14). Furthermore, after the Watergate Scandal in 1977 Mee published a memoir based on a meeting with H. R Haldeman, Nixon's former chief of staff. The memoir entitled *A Visit to Haldeman and Other States of Mind* is, according to Dwight Garner of the *New York Times*, 'moody, patriotic, paranoid […] unbuttoned and deeply literate book about one man's [Mee's] search for what went wrong with the American experiment, and what still might be worth upholding and defending in our politics' (2017: 1).

[44] Three years before the premiere of *Bacchae 2.1,* Ulasewitz released his memoir *The President's Private Eye: The Journey of Detective Tony U. from N.Y.P.D. to the Nixon White House* (1990). This proved to be part of the provocation that led Mee to undertake a renewed critique of Ulasewitz in the dramatic form of *Bacchae 2.1* (Mee 2017).

as a disembodied voice and loosely fulfils a chorus function. Unlike the messenger TONY ULSAWEITZ in *Bacchae 2.1,* FARLEY is never seen in physical form although he does still interact directly with ELECTRA and, like a conventional Greek chorus, prompts her to reflect on the events preceding their dialogue.

As Malorrus is a late twentieth and twenty-first century American celebrity, Mee's reference to him is culturally and temporally specific. The inclusion of FARLEY as character is dictated by Mee's identity and desire to represent his cultural setting. The character is a form of ironic ghosting because Mee means to exploit the audience's previous experience, knowledge or points of reference to, as Carlson suggests, '[reveal] to them an incongruity between the apparent situation onstage and what they know or assume to be the real situation' (2003: 166). The character of FARLEY allows Mee to transpose the mysticism or otherworldliness of the Greek source text into the contemporary setting whilst also parodying it. It appears that Mee intends for FARLEY, the ghosted character, to momentarily fragment the world of the play by merging that world with his reality and, ideally, with the audiences' or readers' reality as well.

Carlson (2003) and Reilly (2018) have suggested that part of the pleasure of adaptation comes through repetition. In *Bacchae 2.1,* Mee recycles bits of text from within the play and texts from his wider body of work and this can be seen as an attempt to heighten the overall pleasure of the adaptation. 'I like anything that falls from the sky. Except sleet' (Mee 1993: 59) found in *Bacchae 2.1* is a slight variation on 'I like almost anything that falls from the sky - you know, snow, hail - sleet even' (Mee 1992: 59) from *Orestes 2.0.* Although the replication of this text and its subtle alteration may go unnoticed by Mee's general audience or reader, he does acknowledge this ghostly recycling as a deliberate feature of his dramaturgy. Mee explains that 'if you think characters can also speak the culture, then more than one character can speak the same text in a different play' (Mee 2002: 88). In *Bacchae 2.1* there are characters

that share and noticeably recycle the same text, or 'culture' if Mee's explanation is applied. DIONYSUS and LAVENDER WOMAN speak the same distinctly repetitive text that is easily recognisable after its first iteration:

> When my happiness is given me,
> life will be a nameless thing.
> It will seethe and roar;
> it will plunge and whirl;
> it will leap and shriek in convulsions;
> it will quiver in delicate fantasy;
> it will writhe and twist;
> it will glitter and flash and shine;
> it will sing gently;
> it will shout in exquisite excitement;
> it will vibrate to the roots
> like a great oak in a storm;
> it will dance;
> it will glide;
> it will gallop;
> it will rush;
> it will swell and surge; it will fly;
> it will soar high – high;
>
> Mee 1993: 29, 45 – 46.

This recycled speech can be seen as Mee's attempt to call attention to the constructed compositional nature of his text and the artificiality of performance or, as proof of his extra-textual statements. Like much of *Bacchae 2.1* there are layers of recycling within this example; the speech occurs twice in the play but it as an excerpt from another literary text, *The Story of Mary Maclane* (1902) by Mary Maclane.[45] Inclusion such as these proliferate in *Bacchae 2.1* and therefore the classical play is not the only text that exists as a ruin within Mee's adaptation.

In *Orestes 2.0* Mee also uses excerpts from literary texts but there are often moments where the compositional nature of the text is less obvious. *Orestes 2.0,* like *Bacchae 2.1,* is a complex bricolage and when examined closely, it reveals a rich intertextual weaving of

[45] Text appears on pages 77 - 78 of the Chicago Herbert S. Stone and Company MCMII publication. *The Story of Mary Maclane* was considered highly provocative upon its initial publication in 1902 and became an overnight sensation in the early twentieth century given its content. The book takes the form of a confessional diary that details the 19-year-old author's inner most desires. For the original publication the title was changed from the more scandalous *I Await the Devil's Coming*.

numerous source materials. This complexity can be illustrated by one singular example speech in *Orestes 2.0* that foregrounds Mee's identity and his anti-war agenda embedded within the intertext. At the moment of MENELAUS's triumphant return to Argos with his wife HELEN, Mee's (new) character TAPEMOUTH MAN begins to recite a roll call of war deaths. The first two, Pedaios and Phereclus, are warriors mentioned in Homer's *Iliad,* and the account of their fates closely resembles the Homeric source (Mee 1992: 25 – 26). The second two names are those of American soldiers, Robert Gilray and Manuel Font, who died in combat during the Vietnam War and the descriptions of their deaths are taken from Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1987). In this one moment of bricolage Mee takes the classical tragedy by Euripides and creates a palimpsestuous overlay with a classical epic, a factual reference to deceased veterans and an academic text that analyses physical suffering. Though these references are not made explicit within the playtext, there are noticeable ruptures within this speech between the archaic and contemporary names and the descriptions of the deaths. Even in this brief example, Mee underlines that the themes of war and death are relevant across temporalities and links them to his own work; his is just one representation of this theme repeatedly recycled within multiple cultural forms.

In all of the above examples the cyclical nature of culture, as described by Mee (2002), is evident. Mee makes an extra-textual argument that it is the cultural norm to repeat and recycle but these particular examples of recycling can be linked to Mee's identity and his self-determined presentation of it through the dramaturgical choices he makes. Mee's chosen sources are often recycled several times, for example, Scarry's *The Body in Pain* also features as a source for *Trojan Women: A Love Story.* The fact that Mee consciously recycles texts he has already used fortifies my claim that he produces works that all belong to a defined and recognisable *oeuvre*. Mee purposely places his works in dialogue with one another and marks similarities within the playtexts and in any extra-textual narratives that he produces. Like many

other playwrights Mee's work possesses certain recognisable stylistic tendencies and I view the majority of these stylistic features as intentional.

Though much of this section of analysis has focussed on aspects of textual ghosting or recycling, Mee's adaptations equally devalue the currency of language as a mode of meaning making by replacing key portions of spoken text with aesthetic alternatives. Mee exploits the communicative potential of these non-literary forms to fragment the original narrative structure and provide moments that act as aural and aesthetic ghostliness within the textual palimpsest. The cathartic climax of Euripides' *The Bacchae* is the moment Agave, awakening from her Dionysian state of trance, realises that she has murdered her son Pentheus with her bare hands. This moment is included in Mee's text *Bacchae 2.1*, however AGAVE's extended monologue cataloguing her grief is replaced by a single ghosted moment of dramaturgy sketched in the stage directions. Following KADMOS' prompt to 'look in your hands, look at what you hold, Agave', AGAVE offers no verbal response but instead 'she looks, collapses to the ground, her head thrown back in a prolonged silent scream' (Mee 1993: 66). This particular gestural stage direction is a remarkable one sourced from the Western theatrical canon. It is an explicit adaptation of a moment from the 1949 production of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* when upon discovering the death of her son, actress Helene Weigel in the title role convulses and releases a silent scream. Adding yet another layer to Mee's dramaturgical choice, in a well-publicised anecdote Brecht discussed this directorial choice as being influenced by a documentary photograph of a woman bereaved during World War II bombings in Singapore.[46] Brecht commented that Weigel's action was a mimetic reconstruction of a 'look of extreme suffering after she has heard the shots, her unscreaming open mouth and backward-bent head

[46] Part of the reason that this particular gesture became established in the canon, despite the ephemeral nature of live theatre, was a film of the production made between 1959 - 1960 that retained Brecht's original directions and central cast. I have little doubt the Mee was well aware of this already existing adaptation given Mee's interest in the life and works of Brecht, as epitomised in Mee's play *Full Circle* (1998) which was an adaptation of Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944) focusing on the fall of the Berlin Wall through the lens of the Berliner Ensemble.

probably derived from a press photograph of an Indian woman crouched over the dead body of her son' (Thompson 1997: 41).

In replicating this moment of maternal anguish, Mee crosses temporal boundaries to add elements of ghostliness, not only in text but in the aesthetics of shared cultural memory. As stated in Chapter One an interest in repetition is a condition of postmodernism, and the repetition in this moment has a precise function. The inclusion of such a recognisable image serves to break with the modernist convention that this text and its tragedy are self-contained. Rather in contextualising this moment in the wider dramatic canon and even further into the realms of factual conflict, Mee emphasises the impact of culture in the world of the play and disrupts the theatrical illusion. Although parody often has ironic undertones, in this moment Mee's parody is what Hutcheon has described as 'repetition with critical distance' (1988: 26) and it is overtly political because it is representative of Mee's influences and his pacifist ideology.

Assembling *Agamemnon 2.0* and *Trojan Women: A Love Story*

Examining the way Mee assembles sources within his adaptations reveals his interest in different methods of storytelling. Often in his Greco-Roman adaptations Mee prioritises one literary, dramatic source text but he experiments with the dramatic form in order to create new works that are better representative of his identity. Like with many other features of his dramaturgical process Mee himself offers commentary about his motivations for the use of bricolage. Mee claims that he sets out to make plays or worlds

> in which I can feel comfortable and welcome and happy and sane and not judged wanting, and, in some way normal – that the norm is me, not something else. And so my plays are shattered and fucked up and full of wreckage.
>
> Mee 2002: 97

Nevertheless, he paradoxically claims that his dramaturgical form is in fact another type of adaptation as he likens it to established avant-garde and postmodern visual art forms (Mee

2017). As part of his broad extra-textual narratives, Mee links his plays to the works of Max Ernst (1891 - 1976) and Robert Rauschenberg (1925 - 2008). In interviews and profiles Mee makes statements such as, 'Ernst and Rauschenberg are my models for how to work' (Mee 2002: 99), or '"[…] what would Rauschenberg have done?" He would've taken the stuff he loved and called it a painting. So I just took the stuff I loved and called it a play' (Haithcoat 2012: n. pg.). Mee reinforces this narrative in his printed playtexts too. According to an author's note at the end of the text, Mee's *Agamemnon 2.0* was 'composed the way Max Ernst made his Fatagaga pieces at the end of World War I' (1994: 54).[47] Moreover, in case this extra-textual narrative commentary does not sufficiently cement the links between these artists and Mee's works, in a highly meta turn, Mee also created *bobrauschenbergamerica* (2001), an adaptation of sorts based on the artist Robert Rauschenberg and his art.[48]

Mee refers to Ernst and Rauschenberg repeatedly because of their use of bricolage and their intentionality behind this as an artistic or creative form. Mee's bricolage reflects Ernst's selection of different formal techniques within the Fatagaga pieces; Ernst includes photomontage of existing images, typography, and the overlaying of crayon, ink and watercolour to existing images. Ernst's multi-textured art form is recognisable in Mee's theatrical assemblage but with Mee replacing Ernst's forms with performative 'textures' that include spoken text, dance, music and new media. For the Fatagaga pieces, Ernst claimed an abstract form of collaboration as his creative tool. He often supplanted imagery from alternate sources and texts, produced by fellow artists within the Dada movement and placed them within his own works. With reference to Ernst's label of abstract collaboration, when probed

[47] Max Ernst was an influential pioneer of both the Dada and Surrealist art movements of the early twentieth century. The Fatagaga pieces were works of collaborative collage whose imagery and framing subverted conventional rationality, in keeping with the Dada, and later, Surrealist ethos. Fatagaga, often emphasised as FaTaGaGa is an abbreviation for fabrication de tableaux garantis gazométriques [manufacture of guaranteed gas meter pictures].

[48] In 2001 Mee collaborated with the SITI Company and renowned director Anne Bogart on the production *bobrauschenbergamerica,* inspired by the postmodern processes and work of artist Robert Rauschenberg. For further reading see 'The Making of *bobrauschenbergamerica'* in Cummings (2006: 159 - 274).

on whether Mee thought his own works could be considered as a type of 'cultural collaboration', Mee agreed, 'yes, I guess I am collaborating, although, actually honestly, I'd never thought of it [like that]' (2017: n. pg.). Mee adapts Ernst and Rauschenberg's style and highlights that he is interested in recreating what he views as the political agenda behind Rauschenberg's bricolage (Mee 2002: 99). Mee believes that Rauschenberg 'contextualises collage as a great democratic enterprise – this sense of openness, and unthreatened-ness, and egalitarian quality' (ibid).

Mee's belief in the democratic power of collage appears somewhat limited because, as previously mentioned, Mee has acknowledged that Rauschenberg adhered to his own personal tastes and presented collages of the things he 'loved' (Haithcoat 2012: n. pg.). Although it may be democratic to pick and mix items for a composition irrespective of source, form or distinctions between high and low culture, Mee, Rauschenberg and Ernst all fulfil an authorial role in their compositions. Mee suggests that the main challenge of assemblage is resisting the urge not to smooth out the rough edges, in keeping with the aesthetic forms that he aspires to (Mee 2002). Via the means of assembly Mee believes that he can show the world as it actually is without the need to 'say run it through my sensibilities so that it comes out differently – [I thought] how would it be if I just took it unedited – raw – from the world' (Mee 2002: 87 – 88). Mee's claim that he can present an unedited view of the world is, however, easily refuted because of the authorial agency present in the very act of selecting source materials. Mee alleges a tentative postmodern removal of the cultural hierarchy even though it appears that the hierarchy has simply shifted to become more author-centric. It is paradoxical that Mee aspires for his Rauschenberg-inspired bricolage to be democratic when his authorial role and intentionality dictate the choice of sources and how they are assembled in his works. Mee's mantra suggests that individuals are vessels written by their culture, but in contradiction to this, in Mee's work, there is always evidence of an individualistic self-determined and defined

authorial identity.

In his dramaturgical bricolage Mee does reflect the culture that surrounds him, it is just intentionally filtered through the frame of his experience and self-determined identity. For example, 'I'll have an idea of seeing something happening onstage or I'll walk through an art gallery and see a retrospective of the work of the artist Robert Rauschenberg […] and think, oh, this is the theatre piece' (Mee 2017: n. pg.). Mee here describes one element of his adaptation process as a type of synaesthesia; he connects and transforms his visual and auditory experiences into a printed playtext. Despite claims that his works may be alternatively classified as visual art or dance theatre pieces, as mentioned Mee often uses a singular literary text, like a classical Greek tragedy, as the primary source for his works. Mee takes the original text and deconstructs it by layering new content atop the source material or replacing it altogether. He intentionally departs from the source text, hence his explanation that the source exists only as a ruin or ghost within the new works (Mee 2005b: 211). In Mee's adaptations the Greek texts are a foundation for the bricolage, or alternatively put, the stimulus to find other sources that can be added piece by piece. But, no matter the difference between the source and the adaptation, Mee insists that the 'the Greek scaffolding or mold [sic] remains as the invisible structure' (ibid). Any sources added to the adaptation feature as part of the dramaturgical bricolage because they are chosen as a result of Mee's associative connections with the source text as he is adapting and literally deconstructing it. Consequently, Mee is the essential frame through which the assemblage takes place.

Mee's identity and his choices appear to be the sole logic of the adaptive transposition and this means that large sections of his works do not easily correlate with their dramatic source text. *Agamemnon 2.0* is an adaptation of *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus but in comparison, sections of Mee's work appear random without considering Mee's identity as a framing device. Example sections include the list of objects taken from *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne*

and *The Pillow Book* (quoted earlier in the chapter), and the 'pornographic, not tender - or tender, and also pornographic' speech of AEGISTHUS near the end of the play,

> I know how to hold you
> my head on your breast
> fingers twined in your hair
> to kiss your breast
> caress it with my tongue
> I know how to slide my hand
> down to your thigh
> let my fingers wander up inside you
> and with my hand thrust deep inside
> to talk with you
>
> Mee 1994: 51 – 52

Mee has described these deviations from the source text as 'riffs' (Mee 2017). These 'riffs' take the form of loosely related musings on events that have occurred or may occur in connection to the prevailing theme identified by Mee. Further, Mee draws parallels between his 'riffs' and classical Greek tragedies; 'with the Greeks you have principals advancing the plot, and then the chorus riffing on it. What the Greeks knew was that, if the audience knows what the story is, they can riff endlessly on it' (Mee 2005b: 211 – 212). Mee does not feature a conventional chorus within *Agamemnon 2.0* and yet, he still using this choral tactic to fragment and frame what may be considered the central part of the narrative. Riffs may include large sections of spoken text, like the one above, and, sometimes, the performance of songs or choreography.

Immediately after AEGISTHUS's 'riff', adapted from text by Mai Lin, an American pornographic actor, Mee returns to the big, existential question that he conceives as the centre of the tragedy using a very different piece of text as bricolage:

> HESIOD
>
> […]
>
> And all things that owe their existence to men,
> all works, all deeds, all words,
> are perishable -

unless men may endow these works and deeds
with some permanence
by making them forever memorable:

and then these things
may enter the world of everlastingness,
and mortal men and women
may find their place in the cosmos.

Mee 1994: 52 - 53

The above speech is a reworking of an excerpt from Hannah Arendt's 'The Modern Concept of History' (1958), and though the graphology is different within Mee's dramatic text, a comparison between the two reveals that Mee's text is almost identical to Arendt's.[49] When placed in proximity to one another in *Agamemnon 2.0,* the two different texts sourced from Arendt and Lin create a jarring juxtaposition that achieves Mee's authorial intention of a 'shattered and fucked up' but arguably 'normal' dramaturgical moment (Mee 2002: 97). Mee initially relies upon the framework of the foremost source, namely the Greco-Roman tragedy, but this is then superseded by a reframing that makes his identity and personal preference the primary influence when assembling his dramaturgical bricolage. The bricolage of *Agamemnon 2.0* predominantly relies on different textual juxtapositions; however, Mee also uses music as another tactic to cultivate a fragmentary bricolage in his other classical adaptations, including *Trojan Women: A Love Story.*

In *Trojan Women: A Love Story* Mee replaces whole sections of spoken narrative with different music or songs. Throughout the work, Mee includes numerous musical numbers taken from the twentieth century American songbook; songs such as *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered*, *When You Wish Upon a Star*, *Blue Moon* and the slightly less respectable but no

[49] The text from 'The Modern Concept of History' appears as:

> All things that owe their existence to men, such as works, deeds, and words, are perishable […] However, if mortals succeeded in endowing their works, deeds, and words with some permanence and in arresting their perishability then these things would, to a degree at least enter and be at home in the world of everlastingness, and the mortals themselves would find their place in the cosmos.
>
> Arendt 1958: 572

less iconic, *I Want Candy* all appear. Mee emphasises the importance of music as a part of the bricolage as certain song lyrics are listed in full within the playtext:

> CHORUS SINGS
>
> Wham bebop boom bam
> I can swing, and I can jam
> Wham bebop boom bam
> I'm a killer diller yes I am
> Wham bebop boom bam
> When you learn it you'll be proud Wham bebop boom bam
> Join the crowd and swing out loud
> […]
>
> Mee 1994: 103

These lyrics again represent 'riffs' on the major themes of the play, as decided by Mee, and provide a different form of storytelling that fragments the central narrative. In the same way that juxtaposed texts collided in *Agamemnon 2.0,* different songs segue into one another without explanation or accompanying narrative exposition.

Some lyrics appear printed but for other musical choices Mee opts to be flexible rather than autocratic by offering different suggestions within the stage directions. For example, shortly after the rendition of Glen Miller's *Wham (Re-Bop-Boom-Bam)* is the following stage direction: 'the Linda Ronstandt arrangement of *Crazy* - or Dinah Washington's *Our Love is Here to Stay* - or use this for the very end?' (Mee 1995: 104). The questioning in the text may be perceived as evidence of Mee's interest in the democratic nature of collage because he invites additional input from his reader or audience member. However, his final 'Note on the Music' for *Trojan Women: A Love Story* reveals, once again, the paradoxical nature of Mee's works and his authorship. The final note reads:

> There are too many songs in this piece. I loved them all so much I couldn't cut any, but there are too many. Also, a director and actors may want to bring in other songs that they feel capture the essence of the piece. Feel free to do it.
>
> Mee 1995: 125

This note affirms and simultaneously destabilases Mee's authority as the author. Mee makes precise choices about the music throughout *Trojan Women: A Love Story* going as far as

embedding the lyrics into the printed text. Further, in suggesting that he 'couldn't cut' any of the music, Mee effectively argues for its inclusion (ibid). Mee here acknowledges that he has allowed his musical preferences to supersede the structural demands of the play. Meanwhile, he also appears to undermine his decision of publishing his version of the adaptation with the invitation, via the (re)making project, for further and future adaptations of the chosen music and the works as a whole. The excess of music creates a dilemma and thus *Trojan Women: A Love Story* and Mee's other classical adaptations can be viewed as open texts because they require further authorial, directorial or performative interventions to respond to the questions embedded within them.

Incomplete or Open Texts: *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* and *Iphigenia 2.0*

Once Mee publishes his play on the (re)making project website, he makes a *de facto* declaration that his texts are complete. Nevertheless, within the plays themselves are invitations to make further interventions given Mee's tendency to include optional stage directions and questions. As part of his extra-textual narrative Mee attests that he is 'not a person who believes there is a definitive version of anything – of civilization, of a history book, or of a production of a play' (Mee 2002: 93). Therefore, in order to stage and even read Mee's adaptations it is necessary to respond to the ambiguities that he intentionally embeds. In her definition, Hutcheon has suggested that one of the ways to describe adaptation is as 'an extended intertextual engagement' (2013: 8). Mee emphasises the significance of his works as adaptations by encouraging his audience and readership to engage with the extended intertextual quality of his works. He creates stage directions that function as suggestions to seek other materials that overlap, influence or may be substituted for his own choices. Mee does this by using linguistic terms loaded with possibility, terms such as 'or', 'maybe' and 'what' are among others that appear throughout the stage directions for *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* and *Iphigenia 2.0.*

The dualistic, both complete and incomplete, nature of Mee's adaptations is related to his own writing process, namely his interest in adaptation as an assembled bricolage. Explaining his process, Mee says that once he has decided upon the primary source, he then gathers additional materials and notes via a process of associative reading (2017: n. pg.). Once he has collected these texts, in whatever form they take, he begins to 'cut and paste the notes […] until I get to the end of it and I think, okay I can't think what else to do so I call that finished' (ibid). Mee's own process is intentionally intertextual and even in the 'finished' version, Mee reflects postmodern concerns in his resistance to hermeneutic closure of the work. Rather, successive creatives, audiences and readers are prompted to create their own intertext and meaning in each interaction in the manner that Mee has completed his own process. This leads Cummings to suggest that after 'experimenting and sticking pieces of found and borrowed text on the scaffold of a classical play, [Mee] came to see authorship more and more as a matter of arranging and juxtaposing his chosen materials' (2006: 85). The notion of authorship is sometimes polemical in Mee's work given his radical adaptation and the ideology that underpins the (re)making project, but, as Cummings identifies, Mee's collage-based process is still a definitive form of authorship. Moreover, I argue that it is a specifically post-Barthesian, postmodern authorship that centres upon the prioritisation of the self as the primary site of meaning-making.

The modernist understanding of artist as genius is interrogated throughout Mee's work as there are numerous examples of Mee offering up multiple staging options, or none at all. In each of these moments, Mee provokes anyone who approaches his text to decide on their unique version of it. Anyone wishing to perform Mee's works as they appear on his website must make dramaturgical choices that tackle both Mee's ambiguities within the text and the extra-textual narratives relating to them. Creatives involved in staging Mee's adaptations as published must adhere to copyright legislation, and yet they are still paradoxically encouraged

to ‘feel free to be creators themselves and to remake the text into a theatrical event’ (Mee 2002: 85). One such example of this active conundrum occurs in the opening moments of *Iphigenia 2.0.* The stage directions or suggestions are as follows:

> In the darkness,
> we hear a male voice singing an ancient Macedonian folk song,
> wailing,
> almost keening
>
> Or Salpinx Call by Nederlanders Blazers Ensemble with Bie Deti Dallget by Arap Celolesakaj, Fatbardha Brahimi, Nazif Celaj & Nikolin Likaj.
>
> Or the male solo from Music of the Turkmen from Primitive Music of the World.
>
> Or it could be Dionisis Savopoulos and Sotiria Bellou sing Zeibekiko.
>
> Or Nikos Xylouris sings the mournful San Erthoun Mana I Fili Mou.
>
> Or the very sad song Ipne Pou Pernis Ta Pedia sung by Savina Yannatou.
>
> Mee 2007: 1

When staging this moment a choice must be made in order to transform this list of suggestions into a theatrical event. Mee references a number of potential contemporary folk songs from different geographical locations and cultures, and though the musical form and genre appear to be imperative to Mee’s storytelling, the specific choice of song is not the most important feature. Mee uses music to disrupt the narrative structure in other moments of *Iphigenia 2.0* but this compositional decision, and its open dramaturgical potential, is there to draw upon the evocative power of music and melody. Mee’s descriptions of the choices as ‘sad’ or ‘mournful’ indicate that this particular moment should be a lamentation; he leaves the final choice undecided and yet his authorial intention is clear. The lyrics and language of the music are almost immaterial as Mee appears to be prioritising an emotive reception over logocentric expression in this performative moment.

Later in *Iphigenia 2.0,* Mee again challenges the dominance of language and relies on a detailed physical score for the performance of the final two pages of the playtext. Some of the stage directions are complete or instructional, ‘Achilles throws a bottle of pink champagne

against the wall', while others are questioning, 'Do they dance? / What do they do?' (Mee 2007: 66 – 67). Mee merely offers a blueprint for performance based on his adaptation of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis,* and therefore his plays must be viewed as incomplete because of the space he leaves for future collaboration. Erin Mee, Charles Mee's daughter, has directed a number of his works and states that Mee writes only a 'fraction' of the performative experience as 'he sets up a situation that requires the director, in turn, to elaborate on what he has written […] He invites other people to co-write the collage – without knowing, without having any control over what they will do' (2002: 85). Mee's attempt to relinquishes control in these performative moments indicates his interest in participating in a cultural dialogue not bound by logocentrism, his own identity or his proximal cultural environment. However, there are conceivably economic benefits to this strategy. If the playtexts are only a fraction of the performance experience, even in their copyrighted form, there is possibility for greater longevity and interest in Mee's texts if there is scope within them to evolve in response to any potential future material means of production.[50]

A progression towards incompleteness in Mee's dramaturgy is also visible within *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* as Mee introduces an alternative tactic to create further scope for adaptation as collaboration. Unlike the formal dramatic presentation of some of his earlier predominantly scripted adaptations, such as *Orestes 2.0* and *The Bacchae 2.1*, *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* at times dispenses with certain conventional dramatic features in keeping with Mee's classification of the work as a dance theatre piece. In opposition to its classical prototype, in *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* language is often secondary to other physical

[50] At the time of writing the most recent production Mee was involved in was a 2015 production of *Big Love* with Signature Theatre New York, directed by Tina Landau. In a promotional video-interview released by the company, Mee and Landau discuss their working relationship beginning in 1989. Speaking about this production of *Big Love* Mee comments: 'after 25 years of working together… I finally get Tina to do it', namely direct it and complete the unfinished aspects (2015: n. pg.). Perhaps this suggests that more recently Mee's approach to the dissemination of his work is shifting: through the (re)making project he still actively encourages radical adaptations of his texts but, where possible, he selects established collaborators including directors, producers or performers to translate his text into performance in ways that support what he initially envisioned.

performance forms, the work as a whole is fragmented, there is little to no narrative coherency and characters are fluid. Lines of the script are not assigned to particular characters; instead Mee suggests that text is distributed somewhat randomly by simply indicating that the speakers are changing:

> SOMEONE
> I like weekends
>
> SOMEONE ELSE
> convertibles
>
> SOMEONE ELSE
> slumber parties
>
> SOMEONE ELSE
> pot lucks
> gray Buicks
>
> SOMEONE ELSE
> telling jokes
>
> SOMEONE ELSE
> giving parties
>
> SOMEONE ELSE
> doing plays
>
> SOMEONE ELSE
> Bugs Bunny

2014b: 16

This writing device is used intermittently throughout this particular work and other characters or speakers are listed as THE GUY, A GUY and YET ANOTHER GUY. This further evidences that Mee's dramaturgical strategy has shifted from his earlier works as he moves towards a less specific formation and representation of character. Furthermore, *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* is 'inspired by the classic tale of Daphnis and Chloe' (n. d.: n. pg) according the (re)making project website but neither protagonist ever makes an appearance in Mee's adaptation.

Mee himself has described his dramaturgical process as 'depart[ing] further and further from the Greek plays' the more adaptations he undertakes (Mee 2005b: 210). The move away

from dramatic conventions and the invitation for future collaboration is more pronounced in his later works and thus demonstrates that Mee is continually exploring the limits of his own definition of adaptation. Inviting, and at times demanding interventions from readers, directors, designers, actors or producers proves the significance of Mee's mantra and his ongoing interest in the potential for culture, and cultural exchange, to alter the way stories are written and rewritten**.**

Conclusion

I stated in the Introduction to this chapter that Mee and his works are often described as a postmodern. Focussing on seven classical Greco-Roman adaptations, Mee's self-determined identity and the manner in which it intersects with these creative texts, I interrogated this label and revealed complexities and paradoxes inherent within it. Hutcheon notes that 'the Greek prefix *para* can mean both 'counter' or 'against' AND 'near' or 'beside'' and so, for example, postmodernism is itself a paradox because the term and all it encompasses signals a 'contradictory dependence upon and independence from the modernism that both historically preceded it and literally made it possible' (1986/87: 185, 180). The paradoxes I have identified reinforce the accepted description of Mee and his work as postmodern and evidenced the significant influence of the postmodern cultural dominant in his work.

Jameson (1984) argues that one of the dominant features of postmodernism is a crisis in historicity that cultivates a nostalgic desire to recover a lost sense of history. I view Mee's attempts to produce plays as historical documents that represent his identity and the cultural moment as a direct response to the metamorphosing shift of postmodernism. In other words, his *oeuvre* represents a longing to bear witness to his personal history and to moor himself within an increasingly polymorphous cultural landscape.

Mee's recurring interest in adapting classical Greco-Roman tragedies indicates how in

this particular epoch, an individual can attempt to seek a rapprochement between the historicised past and the contemporary cultural landscape. His creative approach is one that privileges both the form and content of historical and contemporary artistic mediums, and this simultaneously offers a means of exploring and critiquing the postmodern age, and its culture through dramaturgy. However, as Sanders has noted, 'it is important to recognize that explicit soundings of intertextual relationships may close down, as much as open up, the possibility for interpretation' (2016: 46), and Mee's carefully cultivated extra-textual narratives around the work are, at times, encumbering as they reveal paradoxes between the work and his claims about it. Using a postmodern lens to examine Mee's works and any extra-textual materials reveals the additional complexities, nuances and contradictions inherent within them.

The interdependency of Mee's life and work has already been the subject of critical studies, however, the most extensive of these have been authored by Mee himself, a member of his family (daughter Erin Mee), or individuals otherwise known to him (Scott T. Cummings, an academic and creative associate).[51] As a playwright and academic Mee is an exceptionally personable individual, generous in discussions of his work. Thus, extant critical readings tend to reflect this in a rather self-perpetuating manner. In utilising postmodernism as a critical tool, in this chapter I have offered a revisionist perspective of Mee's work that challenges the overwhelmingly positive, overly descriptive or self-reflective literature currently available while retaining objective balance. My revisionist chapter, therefore, demonstrates that there are alternate and nuanced critical conversations still to be had regarding Mee's work and his self-determined identity as a playwright.

This self-determined nature of Mee's identity is one of the defining features of his theatrical *oeuvre*. Although Mee has developed and repeatedly publicised his mantra, 'the

[51] Scott T. Cummings author of *Re-Making American Theatre: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company* (2006) directed the world premiere of Mee's *Summer Evening in Des Moines* in 2001.

culture writes us… and then we write our stories' (Mee 2002: 84), it is Mee's self-determined identity and a deliberate theatrical representation of it that unites all of the adaptations featured within this chapter. My interrogation of Mee's mantra revealed that is serves as a catalyst for a strategic dramaturgical approach to adaptation, specifically it authorises creation via indiscriminate and voracious bricolage. The paradox is that Mee (1999) claims that to be truly representative, his body of work should feel fragmented and unpredictable. However, my analysis has proven that this is not the case as the form and content of the work are abstractly autobiographical. Mee admitted 'I write what I love, and since I'm the world's leading expert on what I love, I can't be wrong' (Signature Theatre 2015: n. pg.). I have therefore argued that Mee's curation of the plays, the (re)making project and his extra-textual narratives have in fact created a Charles Mee approved canon of theatrical, literary, philosophical and popular texts. Mee believes in bricolage as a democratic process but in returning to the same source materials repeatedly Mee has, in fact, created his own cultural hierarchy.

Mee's adaptations with their multimedia composition are written for performance. Yet his self-awareness and wealth of extra-textual materials suggest that he is also writing for a readership. Mee has encouraged synthesis between the plays and their context through the frame of the (re)making project. In terms of staging these selected Greco-Roman adaptations, acknowledging Mee's own framing device offers up new ways of performatively interpreting the printed works while critically examining them. I have demonstrated within this chapter that a consideration of the wide range of available materials offers a means to navigate the paradoxical intentionality of Mee's works and potentially, offer revisionist staging choices in the future.

CHAPTER THREE

ARIANE MNOUCHKINE, THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL AND *LES ATRIDES*: CREATING A NEW IDENTITY FOR A CLASSICAL TEXT

Introduction

Marvin Carlson describes the Théâtre du Soleil 'under the direction of Ariane Mnouchkine' as 'one of the best known and most highly regarded theatre companies in the world' and *Les Atrides* as 'one of their most ambitious and highly praised projects' (1992: 153). *Les Atrides* can be considered one of the most important examples of an adaptation of classical Greek theatre from the early 1990s; the production received a high level of media coverage throughout its sold-out international tour, and it remains, more than twenty years on, a landmark production meriting continuing attention.

Since its international tour in 1992, *Les Atrides* has been frequently hailed for its innovative performance of a series of classical plays, made newly relevant for the contemporary stage. Evidence of the persisting interest in *Les Atrides* is seen most recently in Dominic Glynn's *(Re)Telling Old Stories: Peter Brook's Mahabharata and Ariane Mnouchkine's Les Atrides* (2015). The production also features in a dedicated chapter of Rodosthenous' edited collection *Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy: Auteurship and Directorial Visions* (2017).[52] The critical and commercial success was due in part to the iconic status of Mnouchkine and her company, and their collaborative reputation as a theatrical

[52] Other critical discourse that considers the work of Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil is concerned with notable productions from the late twentieth century such as *1789* and *L'Indiade, ou L'Inde de leurs rêves.* In three of the full-length English language studies on Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil - *Collaborative Theatre: The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook* by David Williams (1999), *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil* by Adrian Kiernander (1993) and *Ariane Mnouchkine* by Judith Miller (2007) - the primary focus is on biographical information related to the company and an accompanying analysis of key productions. Only Williams' *Collaborative Theatre* offers an insight into the creation of *Les Atrides,* but this insight is offered through a collection of resources, mostly interviews with Mnouchkine and company members, rather than an academic account provided by Williams.

'institution' (Glynn 2017: 215, *Le Monde* 2014). Glynn suggests that *Les Atrides* has retained interest because it 'represents arguably the last of the momentous productions by established directors' such as Peter Brook and Antoine Vitez, whose productions were able to 'encapsulate the whole of the [individual] directors' practice, but also in a sense the whole of directing history' (2017: 216). Although Glynn is arguably hyperbolic in his suggestion of the capabilities of a single production, I endorse his use of the term 'momentous' as it captures the narrative of much of the critical and popular commentary around the touring production of *Les Atrides.*

Les Atrides was, according to several accounts, a theatrical spectacle (Collins 1992, Rich 1992, McDonald 1992a, 1992b). It was a marathon production that made use of live music, multiple highly physicalised styles of performance drawn from numerous cultural traditions, and purpose-built staging and auditorium areas that both travelled.[53] Despite the many innovations in the staging of the classical text and the interest garnered from its spectacular form, *Les Atrides* is classifiable as a classical adaptation according to the continuum-style definition I proposed in Chapter One. However, I argue throughout this chapter that the full complexity of *Les Atrides* theorised *as* adaptation, cannot be considered apart from its aesthetics and use of spectacle; the 'originality' of the adaptation is found within its performative form.

The previous chapter focused on the classical adaptations of Mee and examined his recommendation that his works be simultaneously viewed as originals and adaptations, and as representations of the materiality and culture of the world as he perceives it. Mee's overtly postmodern form and his embrace of numerous cultural sources leads to a degree of spectacle within his adaptations. As outlined above, Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil produced an

[53] I use the term marathon theatre in the same way as Jonathan Kalb, 'by which I simply mean any production longer than four hours or so' (2011: 9). I discuss the running time and structure of *Les Atrides* in more detail later on in the chapter.

equally spectacular adaptation with *Les Atrides* but through the use of quite different dramaturgical means. Mee attempts to unambiguously represent himself and his present moment by incorporating verbatim speech, contemporary pop songs, audio-visuals and the rest, while, with *Les Atrides,* Mnouchkine sought universality and a means of accurately representing the unknowable or indefinable qualities of antiquity.

Although the creative intentions for *Les Atrides* appear oppositional to postmodern ideology, my postmodernist informed critique offers a contribution to the existing discourse on this production. *Les Atrides* has been chosen for examination because it possesses many of the recognisable performance qualities associated with Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil and, interestingly, it is a singular adaptation of a selection of ancient Greek tragedies. Although *Les Atrides* has recently featured in contemporary scholarship, devised and 'original' works such as *Une Chambre en Inde* [A Room in India] (2016) and *Les Éphémères* [Ephemera] (2006) are now more readily affiliated with the company. However, the recent rapprochement between theatre studies, adaptation studies and classical reception theory highlighted in the Introduction to this thesis, provides me with the opportunity to combine previously unaffiliated critical vocabularies to retrospectively analyse *Les Atrides* and offer new insights according to my classification of this production as a postmodern adaptation.

Chapter Outline

Les Atrides is a paradoxical example of a postmodern performance and evidence of this is provided in the first section of this chapter, 'Translation and Adaptation'. Through a discussion of these processes I problematise the perpetuating concerns of textual fidelity within *Les Atrides*. Mnouchkine's quest for fidelity appears to be built upon a misplaced nostalgia, namely a belief in the universalising power of tragedy perpetuated by the metanarratives of the classical. Her reverence towards the classical texts results in an interest in retaining textual

fidelity, however, as I outline, translation and adaptation are fundamentally processes of interpretation and creativity. The paradox of *Les Atrides* is that it seeks to remain faithful to the texts of Aeschylus and Euripides while challenging the canonicity of those same authors.

The following section considers the historical and political events that shaped the identity of the Théâtre du Soleil and, in turn, how Mnouchkine's and the company's history are made visible within *Les Atrides.* A brief contextualising narrative is required in accordance with my cultural materialist and historiographic methodologies as it encourages an analysis of the localised material conditions through the lens of this production. I refer to the political climate and agenda that informed the origin of the Théâtre du Soleil and outline the key historical events and productions that sparked the company's interest in Asian aesthetics, subversion of authorial authority and collaborative forms of creativity.

In the third section I escalate my argument that *Les Atrides* be theorised as an adaptation because it is an 'acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works' (Hutcheon 2013: 8). However, I insist that the identity of the production is also that of a new work because of the way it incorporates specific creative interventions and innovative means of performance in order to distinguish itself from its source texts. I refer to the company's experimentations in musical composition and physical movement, heightened theatricality, and the epic and nostalgic qualities within *Les Atrides* as evidence of this new identity.

Along with the heightened theatricality that helps to define its identity, in the following two sections of the chapter I highlight the ways in which the Théâtre du Soleil's creative home, the Cartoucherie, must be considered a vital part of *Les Atrides*' identity. I offer a fairly lengthy account of this venue because I draw parallels between the architecture of the building and the *mise en scène* of *Les Atrides* and then employ Carlson's theorisation of theatrical ghosting (2003) to consider the ways in which the Cartoucherie is both a haunted and haunting space. A point of particular focus is the Cartoucherie's antechamber that is used specifically for

welcoming its audiences and marking the transition from the world outside to the physical performance space. My theoretical ground for discussions of the framing of adaptation is built on Carlson's consideration of extra-theatricality, as a form of recycling that is external to the performance proper (2003: 111), and Hutcheon who, in her *Theory of Adaptation*, has described a similar phenomenon as 'hypertext' that can influence receptions of adaptation (2013: 129 – 130). In the same way I consider the extra-textual narratives of Mee's work, I consider the extra-theatrical features within the Cartoucherie's liminal space during *Les Atrides* and examine the potential impact as a frame for the audiences' reception of this classical adaptation.[54]

The majority of scholarship on *Les Atrides* acknowledges the potential critique of Orientalism in the alleged appropriation of Asian performance cultures (Bryant-Bertail 1994, Shevtsova 1997, Singleton 1996). However, this critique is frequently rebuked when Mnouchkine's actions are variously described in terms of 'indebtedness' or 'homage' (Shevtsova 1997: 102), or 'interculturalism' as 'investigation of the self' (Singleton 1996: 624). Using one of the extra-theatrical elements of *Les Atrides* as provocation, I dedicate the next section of the chapter to a selected evaluation of the charges of Orientalism directed at Mnouchkine and her work.

This is immediately followed by a more detailed discussion of aesthetics and source traditions within the adaptation of *Les Atrides*. First of all, I consider the self-determined international identity of Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil as a possible outcome of the postmodern condition. Questioning of the company's global outlook arises in discussion of *Les Atrides* because the production features references to a plethora of international performative traditions. When the addition of costume, music and dance drawn from a range of different

[54] I make the distinction between extra-theatricality and extra-textuality in Mnouchkine and Mee's work respectively because my analysis of Mee focuses mostly on his playtexts while my discussion of Mnouchkine centres on the performance of *Les Atrides*.

cultural sources and epochs is placed in dialogue with the literally translated source texts they create a rich intertextual pastiche that is ultimately postmodern. Throughout this chapter I use the term pastiche in accordance with Sanders' definition: '"pastiche" refers more specifically to a medley of references to different styles, texts or authors' (2016: 135). Sanders understanding of the term aligns with Jameson's (1984) provided in Chapter One, and it proves to be a succinct definition for describing the Théâtre du Soleil's aesthetic imitation. Referring to examples of pastiche within *Les Atrides*, my analysis considers if and how the materiality of the performance event reflects the influence of the wider postmodern milieu.

Translation and Adaptation

Since the scholarly unearthing of the extant ancient Greek texts in the fifteen and sixteenth centuries there have been countless translations into different languages. These translations have led to a number of adaptations across multiple mediums. Despite overwhelming precedent, for *Les Atrides,* Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil sought out the ancient Greek source texts with the aim of presenting completely new and faithful translations of Aeschylus' *The L'Orestie* and Euripides' *Iphigénie à Aulis*.[55]

Aeschylus' *L'Orestie* is a trilogy of tragedies that received the highest accolade at the City Dionysia festival in 458 BCE and it consists of three plays that follow the fate of the House of Atreus after the prolicidal actions of the father and patriarchal figurehead, Agamemnon. The three plays in sequence are: *Agamemnon*, *Les Choéphores* and *Les Euménides.* Although an adaptation of Aeschylus' trilogy, *Les Atrides* as a complete cycle also drew upon one other additional source text, Euripides' *Iphigénie à Aulis* (406 BCE). In opposition to the chronology of the source texts, *Iphigénie à Aulis* appears before the works of Aeschylus in the *Les Atrides*

[55] Titles appear in French throughout this chapter for consistency. Translations of the three Greek source plays that make up *L'Orestie [The Oresteia]* are frequently published in English as: *Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers* and *The Eumenides*. Translations of Euripides' play are usually published in English as *Iphigenia in Aulis.*

structure and I discuss this dramaturgical choice and the intentional intertextuality in due course.

Mnouchkine's interest in completely new translations of the four chosen texts arose because she noticed discrepancies between the English and French translations, completed by different individuals during different times, and raised concerns that some of the meaning may have been lost in translation (Williams 1999: 186). As literal translations simply do not exist (Hutcheon 2013), Mnouchkine's concerns relating to the authority of the source text and the potential lack of fidelity present an obstacle. Continual advances in studies of classical reception, as mentioned in the thesis Introduction, still cannot overcome the geographical and temporal distance between ancient Athens and contemporary performance, thus ensuring that the context of the original staging and the nuances of language are irretrievable. As there will always be some level of mystery surrounding the classical, Hardwick has stated that 'translation is now generally recognised by classicists as interpretative' (2013: 324). Mnouchkine's interest in absolute fidelity is, therefore, flawed and irresolvable from the outset.

Undeterred by these obstacles and her lack of familiarity with the ancient Greek language, Mnouchkine began to translate each of the source texts herself working from allegedly literal translations completed by Claudine Bensaïd. In the foreword to the published playtexts Mnouchkine described her dilemma, 'what [version] to trust?', and then, the subsequent intention for her classical translations: 'I want to take a course of action to find, as difficult, as mysterious, as seemingly illogical as it is for the ears of our time, the text that is closest to the original text' (Théâtre du Soleil and Eschyle 1995: 8).[56] Mnouchkine disregards the practice of proximation and instead venerates Aeschylus and Euripides as the singular authorities of meaning in their respective plays. Mnouchkine's comments point to a modernist

[56] Translation is my own. It is taken from the 'About 'Translation" notes to *Agamemnon:* 'qui croire? […] je veux prendre celui de ceux qui veulent retrouver, aussi difficile, aussi mystérieux, aussi apparemment illogique soit-il pour des oreilles de notre époque, le texte le plus proche du texte original'.

perception that the source texts possess, what Barthes has termed, 'the 'message' of an Author-God' (1977: 146), despite the fact that both 'original' texts are themselves already adaptations of existing texts and recycled Greek mythology. Working in this fashion eventually became too onerous a task for one individual and Mnouchkine recruited Jean Bollack and Pierre Judet de la Combe (both renowned philologists) to complete the translations for *Agamemnon, Iphigénie à Aulis,* and *Les Choéphores*; while Hélène Cixous, also working from Bensaïd's literal translation, attended to the script of *Les Euménides.*

Although there were a number of individuals involved in the process of translation of *Agamemnon* for example, (Homer, via Aeschylus, via Bensaïd, via Mnouchkine via Bollack and Judet de la Combe), *Les Atrides* still advertised the notion that the Théâtre du Soleil's performed translation was achieved as an unfiltered exchange between source and adaptation. Bowles reports that 'Mnouchkine and her Hellenist colleagues make much of the new translations they have provided, claiming [in the *Les Atrides* programme] to have looked "under" each word of the original Greek and to have discovered finally an "exact meaning"' (1992: 128). This rather bold claim about the revelatory nature of the translations can be easily challenged on two counts. First of all, as Sallie Goetsch has argued, 'though [Mnouchkine] did study Greek in order to produce *Les Atrides,* her contact with the ancient poets, like that of most people, has been via translations' (1994: 76). Each individual involved with the translations that culminated in *Les Atrides* came into the creative process with his or her own discerning voice and an agenda impacted by their reception of their own source text. Mnouchkine admitted that her translations were directly informed by supplementary academic sources, primarily *L'Agamemnon d'Eschyle: le texte et ses interprétations I-II* (Théâtre du Soleil and Eschyle 1995). Secondly, the resounding consensus in translation studies and classical reception is that a reproduction of the exact meaning of a Greek tragedy is impossible. Classical texts, such as tragedies, were first performed in a language that is no longer spoken,

with a vocabulary resonant with unfamiliar performative and cultural references. Classical translation, like adaptation, always involves a process of interpretation.

The education required for a comprehensive understanding of ancient Greek language and its contexts ensures that elitist attitudes still occasionally prevail in classical studies (Hall 2015). Though the recent advances in the field of classical reception theory can help counter challenges of infidelity that come from scholars and purists (Macintosh 2008), Mnouchkine's involvement of two renowned philologists points to her awareness of the historically complex cultural and institutional hierarchies at play in matters of the classical. Mnouchkine's reference to the philological support she received can be viewed as a strategic declamation to counter any concerns raised about her abilities as a translator who cannot speak the language of the source materials. Moreover, the publicised interventions of Bollack and Judet de la Comb help to enforce Mnouchkine's own narrative about the authenticity of her translation and its proximity to the 'original'.

Mnouchkine additionally utilises the involvement of Bollack and Judet de la Combe to reinforce the cultural capital often associated with classical Greco-Roman texts and to support her claim of fidelity. However, the four-part *Les Atrides* demonstrates a postmodernist inclination to disrupt cultural hierarchies as it involves a noticeable interpretative and structural change that challenges the canonised versions of the myth of the House of Atreus. Mnouchkine's alteration of the classical structure can clearly be seen as postmodernist as this integral aspect of the adaptation is driven by her individual relationship to the source texts; she prioritises her interpretation as the reader over the Greek playwrights' intentions as the authors. When considering *Les Atrides,* classicist Goetsch suggests that 'the translator [Mnouchkine] exercises tremendous power' and often her 'authority to interpret goes unquestioned'; an interest in fidelity or even a 'familiarity with Greek, however, does not make people immune to their own agendas' (1994: 90). Goetsch cites the influence of personal agenda as a highly

problematical aspect of translation across temporalities and languages in order to critique Mnouchkine's reading 'against' the original text of Aeschylus (ibid). Goetsch disagrees with Mnouchkine and the company's use of Euripides' text as a precursor to Aeschylus's trilogy as she views the narratives as contradictory but, Goetsch fails to realise that this choice is integral to the identity of this particular adaptation.

In order to negotiate a complex field of reception produced by the metamorphosing cultural shift of postmodernism, it is 'necessary for each translation to articulate very clearly its conception of its own identity and positioning within the field' (Glynn 2015: 28). In changing the structure of Aeschylus' *L'Orestie* by adding an additional text by a different playwright, Mnouchkine presents an audacious challenge to the legitimacy of said source texts and effectively, creates an entirely new identity for this newly sequenced collection of plays. Viewing her actions through the lens of postmodernism, Mnouchkine's adaptation evidences a need to generate her own narrative to overcome the weakening historicity that has overproduced and consequently, distorted this popular cultural narrative. Other adaptations, including translations shaped by alternate, possibly unrecognisable cultural environments, did not offer a sufficiently individualising perspective for Mnouchkine. In spite of her comments about the supposed success of the literal translation of the words of Aeschylus and Euripides, Mnouchkine's reframing of the collection of tragedies is a means of asserting her own authorial agenda. Mnouchkine states that her aim was to authentically replicate the 'original' classical meaning, but given her other creative interventions, I suggest that her intentions are not always reflected in the final production.

Though I have been primarily concerned with printed text to this point, Mnouchkine's adaptation was not merely a literary exercise. Mnouchkine and her collaborators undertook the translation with the express purpose of creating a text for performance. When translation is intended for performance, Hardwick suggests that it 'involves a further process in which the

roles of theatre practitioners - director, designer, lighting designer, actors, musicians, choreographers - are equally important alongside that of the translator' (2013: 322). In the case of *Les Atrides,* with Mnouchkine as one of the translators as well as the director, it is helpful to consider Kristeva's (1980) flexible definition of text as I argue that Mnouchkine's adaptation must be considered as an amalgamation of both the literary and active physical processes. Kristeva's model of text and intertextuality designates the performance of *Les Atrides* as a whole text that must be viewed as a permutation of multiple texts residing within the whole. Any directorial choices made in the rehearsal space are considered here as part of the fabric of the whole text. Furthermore, the additional creative interpretations and interventions made by the other members of the Théâtre du Soleil cannot be overlooked, and I return to examine this feature of the adaptation later in this chapter.

Mnouchkine began this process of adaptation driven by fidelity but her initial preoccupation did not overtly transfer to the means of staging. First, the structure and sequence of plays was altered and then Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil's other members chose to include a range of performative forms in order to stage *Les Atrides.* As mentioned in the Introduction above these staging choices included: highly codified costuming, dance and musical accompaniment, and a number of extra-theatrical constructions that were integral to the overall *mise en scène.* Each creative decision is influenced by numerous connections to cultural centres, and each choice is in dialogue with every other choice thus producing an overwhelming intertextual depth to the production as a whole. Mnouchkine began with the ancient Greek text and then continuously added layers to her supposedly faithful reworking of it; it is these layers and the intertextual dialogue between them that indicates why *Les Atrides* must be viewed as a postmodern adaptation.

Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil: The Route to *Les Atrides*

Before the staging of *Les Atrides,* Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil had been creating theatre together for over twenty years. Traces of their previous productions, the company's history, and events that have shaped their identity all contributed to features of *Les Atrides.* These traces include: the use of Asian aesthetics and codified performance forms; an identity as a socialist troupe that informs the choice of materials; a self-defined collective creative ethos and, lastly, an interest in subverting or challenging the classical canon through processes of adaptation. I address each point in turn and align them with brief examples from *Les Atrides,* beginning with the Asian aesthetics used throughout the classical Greek cycle.

From the very onset of her directorial career Mnouchkine has been interested in Asian aesthetics. Her directorial debut for the Association Théâtrale des Etudiants de Paris (ATEP) was a production of *Genghis Khan* (1961) by Henry Bachau. *Genghis Khan,* the play based on the historical figure of the same name, is set in his contemporaneous historical period of medieval Asia. This first encounter with an Asian protagonist and setting enabled Mnouchkine 'to make extensive use of oriental spectacle and colour in the staging', and she cites this production as the first point in which she realised the theatrical potential of the Asian aesthetic (Kiernander 1993: 46).[57] After this revelation during the production of *Genghis Khan,* Mnouchkine left the ATEP to complete an expedition to Japan and Indonesia to further explore codified performance forms. Newly armed with some first-hand experience, the adaptation of alternate aesthetic sources from non-Western cultures became a dominant feature of Mnouchkine's creative approach; the influence of Asian aesthetics first explored in *Genghis Khan* are conspicuous in numerous productions, including *Les Atrides*. For example, the make-up worn by almost all the performers in *Les Atrides* was reminiscent of the *kumadori* make up

[57] I acknowledge that this quotation requires further examination. In order to give the necessary space to consider the complexity of the charge of Orientalism often levied at Mnouchkine, I return to this issue later in the chapter in both 'Aesthetics and Source Traditions' and 'Terracotta Soldiers and an Orientalist Critique'.

worn in performances of Japanese *kabuki*. Mnouchkine and the company had used a similar style of make-up in their earlier adaptations of Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1981) and *Henry IV* (1984), prior to its usage in *Les Atrides*. The plots of these Greek and English plays include no references to Asia, and yet, the aesthetic style in the Théâtre du Soleil's staging of them was heavily influenced by it.

Not content with simply stylistically referencing Asian aesthetics and performance forms, Mnouchkine has sought narrative inspiration from recent Asian history and politics for some of the Théâtre du Soleil's productions. The two productions immediately preceding *Les Atrides* focussed on moments of political turmoil in Cambodia and India. *L'Histoire Terrible mais Inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* [*The Terrible but Incomplete History of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*] (1985) was influenced by the life of the King and Prime Minister of Cambodia Norodom Sihanouk (1922 – 2012), and *L'Indiade, ou L'Inde de leurs rêves* [*Indiade, or the India of Their Dreams*] (1987) charts India's strive for independence between 1937 - 1948. These productions demonstrate the intersection of Mnouchkine's Asian interest and her international political consciousness. Though there has always been a level of political engagement in the works of Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil, including in *Les Atrides,* the two aforementioned examples are some of the most overtly political productions in the company's history.

Politics and theatre were seemingly inextricable during the early years of the Théâtre du Soleil and the company originated with a series of theatrical experiments during the 1950s and 1960s that developed, in part, as a result of the new interest in emerging socialist ideologies following World War II (Kiernander 1993: 9 - 10, 45). After a study exchange at Oxford University and a brief period as a member of the Oxford University Dramatic Society, when Mnouchkine co-founded ATEP in 1961 it was intended to serve as 'a leftist rival to the

Sorbonne's classical company' (Dickson 2012: 12).[58] Inspired by the work of Jacques Copeau and his company Les Copiaus, in 1964 Mnouchkine then co-founded the Théâtre du Soleil: Société Coopérative Ouvrière de Production [Cooperative Worker's Production Company] as part of a collective of nine like-minded students.[59] Abiding by a socialist ethos the company's vision incorporated communitarian social and creative practices, and they set out principles for cooperation in their social and working conditions (Singleton 2010: 30 - 31). The company's full name, though rarely used, immediately established that their political ideology was fundamental to their creative practice and their identity. In a post-war, early postmodern landscape of fractured identities, Théâtre du Soleil self-identified as a company prepared to embrace the possibility of political agency through theatre.

Four years after the company was founded the ideological rebellion that complemented the Théâtre du Soleil's socialist ethos came to full realisation in Paris with the events of May 1968. During this month, the socialist revolution involving student and mass worker uprisings resulted in France's first general strike, which then led to a fortnight of national striking involving over ten million people and influencing multiple public and private industries.[60] During the years leading up to 1968, Mnouchkine and the company expressed their political concerns regarding 'the social inequalities of contemporary European society' with productions such as Gorky's *Le Petits Bourgeois* [*The Petty Bourgeois*] (1964) and Arnold

[58] Although Mnouchkine is the focus for this case study, for the purposes of this thesis her biographical information has been limited. For more detailed information on her earlier life please see: *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil* by Adrian Kiernander (1993), 'Ariane Mnouchkine' in, (Delgado & Rebellato eds.) *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* by Brian Singleton (2010) and *Ariane Mnouchkine* by Judith Miller (2007).

[59] The nine original members were Georges Donzenac, Myrrha Donzenac, Martine Franck, Gérard Hardy, Philippe Léotard, Ariane Mnouchkine, Jean-Claude Penchenat, Jean-Pierre Tailhade and Françoise Tournafond (Kiernander 1993: 10).

[60] On 3rd May the first night of riots took place between Parisian Police and a collection of students protesting against the then President, Charles de Gaulle's capitalist and allegedly elitist leadership of France, including issues within the university system. The student rebellion encouraged a wider revolt of the factory workers who had a different agenda but the same focus in rallying again the government and the control of the trade unions. May 1968 has generated its own mythology within French history because 'the French cultural and sexual revolution of the 1960s was compressed so memorably into four or five weeks' (Lichfield 2008: n. pg.).

Wesker's *La Cuisine* [*The Kitchen*] (1967) (Singleton 2010: 29). In these early works, the company found a way to politicise the staging of existing texts and make them relevant to their cultural moment. In the case of *La Cuisine*, the company toured the production to factories to perform for free for striking workers who were protesting the same anti-capitalist issues that Wesker's play metaphorically critiques.

In *Les Atrides,* traces of the company's political conscience are best summarised by two examples. Firstly, in changing Aeschylus' trilogy into a tetralogy, Robert Bethune suggests that 'a feminist perspective comes into play' albeit, secondary to *Les Atrides* central concerns about the cost of violence and retribution (1993: 189). Bethune points to the feminist stance in *Les Atrides* being that the 'suffering is unselective; both men and women kill; both men and women are killed' (ibid). However, in light of the company's political affiliations, I am more inclined to argue that the addition of Euripides' *Iphigénie à Aulis* more overtly reflects a socialist revision of the narrative. Socialism is fundamentally concerned with equality for all, and the addition of Euripides' play was to ensure that all the characters, and their motives were fully apparent to ensure that audiences could judge them accordingly. Mnouchkine wanted 'everyone to know what happened in Aulis. A public as uninformed as I was before I started working on these pieces wouldn't understand them and, in particular, wouldn't understand Clytemnestra' (Drake 1991: n. pg.). Although Clytemnestra is a female character whose motives for murder are further justified by the addition of *Iphigénie à Aulis,* the textual addition is political irrespective of her sex because Mnouchkine's actual concern is with equality. The importance of this addition is further augmented because the final play *Les Euménides* takes the form of a court trial.

The second political feature affiliated with the company's communitarian ethos is seen in their approach to the collaborative processes that produced the costume, music and choreography for many of their productions, including *Les Atrides.* The company deliberately

puts their political ideology into action in their unique manner of working, the self-coined *création collective*. The term and the ideology associated with *création collective* are centred on dialogue as a means of generating material. This ideology informs the understanding that each individual has a role to fulfil and enables interdependency within the company in order to cultivate a community ethos. It aims to recognise an equal contribution from individuals involved in all aspects of the creative process, including those involved in performance, administration and production. Inspired by Mnouchkine's advocacy for Asian performance forms and a shared interest in experimenting with different means of rehearsing and creating work, the company began their exploration of *création collective* in the early 1960s. The intention was to incorporate more innovative or experimental forms and move away from performance dictated by printed text. One of the most notable shifts in style came with the company's production of *La Captaine Francasse* (1965), as this was the production that signalled a move towards a more stylised physical vocabulary and overtly theatrical aesthetic (Williams 1999).

Even in this early production Théâtre du Soleil demonstrated that they were a collective who were happy to deviate from their source narrative and explore the potential for more radical forms of adaptation. *La Captaine Francasse* was an adaptation that transposed the novel of the same title by Théophile Gautier into a theatrical performance. The rehearsal process directly informed the process of adaptation as the script emerged from 'Mnouchkine and company member Philippe Léotard writing scenes based on improvisations culled from specific moments within the novel' (Miller 2007: 7). Gautier's novel was both well-known and well received in France, and I therefore reasonably deduce that audiences for the Théâtre du Soleil's production were familiar with the text. However, the issue of fidelity was secondary to the company's active engagement with the text as they altered the ending to Gautier's novel

in order to better reflect the aforementioned, political consciousness of the company.[61] As can be seen in this short summary, even in their early years the company were willing to interrogate the notion of authorial authority in the light of their own agenda and this was a dramaturgical feature that was actively repeated with *Les Atrides.*

After the successful adaptation experiment of *La Captaine Francasse,* the company opted to undertake a series of radical adaptations of texts from the Western canon. This aspect of the company's repertoire responds to what Jameson refers to as the 'nostalgia mode' (1998). The inability to truly know the past encourages postmodern artists 'to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past' (Jameson 1998: 8). This wider postmodern trend materialises in the chronology of the Théâtre du Soleil's productions, as reinvestigations of representations of historical figures and events emerges as a persistent theme leading to the production of *Les Atrides,* and after.

The company's series of adaptation began in 1968 with *Le Songe d'un Nuit d'Été,* a heavily edited and translated version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [1605] by William Shakespeare. This production was the company's first adaptation of a classical text but the interest in staging and subsequently challenging the Western theatrical canon was later seen in adaptations of Moliere's *Don Juan* (1977) and Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1981), *La Nuit des Rois* [*Twelfth Night*] (1982) and *Henry IV* (1984).

For *Le Songe d'un Nuit d'Été,* Léotard acted as the primary translator, but there was a deliberate attempt to alter the verbose nature of Shakespeare's language. Léotard 'proceeded to strip the text of its prettiness' and this lead Mnouchkine to describe their adaptation as 'the most savage, the most violent play that you could ever dream of […] Everything in it is direct, brutal, 'natural'' (Kiernander 1993: 58-59). Although *Le Songe d'un Nuit d'Été* followed the narrative structure of Shakespeare's source text, the act of translation demonstrated a

[61] For a more detailed discussion of the *La Captaine Francasse,* see Kiernander (1993: 48 - 51).

determined, creative intervention to alter the authority, and possibly even the very nature of the Shakespearean source. First altering the ending of *La Captaine Francasse,* then transforming the language of *Le Songe d'un Nuit d'Été,* reveals a progressively radical approach in the company's processes of adaptation. In line with the progression of the postmodern cultural shift throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, the challenges to the canonicity of the source texts becomes more overt while Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil explore what those texts signify for the company in their contemporary moment. Given what appears to be a curiosity in the canon and the simultaneous urge to disrupt or rewrite it, it is inevitable that within this series of adaptations, Mnouchkine and the company looked to the origins of Western theatre and the privileged form of classical Greek tragedy.

Les Atrides: Creating a New Identity for the Classical Text

Les Atrides is an overt adaptation of Aeschylus's *L'Orestie.* Nonetheless*,* in a similar way that Mee argues that his adaptations are original, I suggest that the creative interventions made during the process of adaptation for *Les Atrides* render it an original text with its own identity. The new identity of *Les Atrides* is, for the most part, a result of the staging choices even though several of those choices, like the staging of the chorus, came about because of Mnouchkine's initial concentration on fidelity.

One of the most frequently commented on features of *Les Atrides* is its four tragic choruses (Nadler 1993, Rich 1992, Taplin 1996). Observing classical convention, there is one chorus of twelve to fifteen members per play within *Les Atrides*; in *Iphigénie à Aulis* the chorus is made up of female residents of Chalcis, *Agamemnon's* chorus is the old men of Argos, *Les Choéphores* features a chorus of women and female slaves, while the eponymous ancient

goddesses make up the final one in *Les Euménides*.[62] Mnouchkine states that 'creating a true chorus was one of her primary goals in directing *Les Atrides'* (Nadler 1992: 374) but, as I suggest in Chapter One, attempts to authentically replicate any aspect of the 'original' staging of a classical tragedy only exposes our 'profound ignorance' (Foley 1999: 4). As Mnouchkine's version of a 'true chorus' must be imagined, her lingering preoccupation with fidelity reappears as an inevitably flawed dramaturgical strategy. Graham Ley has suggested that the only irrefutable information about the classical chorus or *choroi* is limited to 'the verbal composition, in the scripts or texts of the songs in the play[s]' (Ley 2007: 136). However, there is evidence to suggest that 'the performance of the tragic *choroi* incorporates singing, accompaniment from the *aulos*, dancing and the central fact of rhythmic verbal composition' (ibid).[63] Mnouchkine drew on general supposition such as this in her representation of her idealised version of a tragic chorus, and then experimented with multiple musical and physical styles.

Musical experimentation was necessary because 'a sad fact' of classical scholarship 'is that we know very little of the music for tragedy and the tragic *choros*, and very little indeed about the use made of modes by tragic composers' (Ley 2007: 147). Without any Greek compositions to be faithful to, Mnouchkine and resident company composer Jean-Jacques Lemêtre were forced to make alternative choices about music to invoke their idea of a chorus. Throughout the process of rehearsals with Mnouchkine and the actors, Lemêtre created a completely original score. During the performances of *Les Atrides,* Lemêtre acted as the main instrumentalist and 'he [glided] seamlessly between more than 140 instruments providing a constantly changing musical complement to every shift in the mood' (Grant 1992: 14). Lemêtre's music became part of the meaning making process of the performance as

[62] Around the middle of the fifth century BCE the number of chorus members in tragedies transitioned from twelve to fifteen; there is evidence to suggest that Aeschylus preferred a chorus of twelve, while Euripides opted for a chorus of fifteen (Ley 2006: 30).
[63] An *aulos* is a pipe style wind instrument.

soundscapes accompanied the majority of the character entrances and exits and underscored large portions of the action onstage. The music served as a signifier for the different identities of each text within the tetralogy as it signalled transitions and the changing identities of the four choruses. For example, the musical accompaniment to the first dance of the chorus in *Agamemnon* is a moderately fast paced, rhythmic drumming sequence, and while the first dance of *Les Choéphores* also features percussion, an overlapping of multiple string instruments is the musical texture predominantly associated with the third chorus. Like the choruses, the music of the production became another focal feature for many of the academics and reviewers who saw *Les Atrides* (Taplin 1996, McDonald 1992a, Rockwell 1992). David Grant writing for *Theatre Ireland* even titled his 1992 review 'With *Les Atrides* in Lemetre's [sic] Kingdom' as an acknowledgment of the essential contribution of the musical score. Mnouchkine has acknowledge the vital role of the music, saying that 'if Jean-Jacques hadn't been there, I wouldn't have thought of staging *Les Atrides*' because 'I don't know how one could stage a Greek tragedy without having a musician who loves theatre' (Williams 1999: 191). Mnouchkine's sentiments here reiterate the importance of my consideration of the music as an essential part of the intertextual composition of this adaptation.

Mnouchkine's assumptions about the staging demands of Greek theatre are most likely dependent on her nostalgic understanding of the tragic theatre form. As I highlighted in Chapter One, nostalgia is defined as a longing for lost cultures or lost forms of existence, and it has become part of the fabric of life in tandem with the postmodern cultural shift (Lowenthal 2015, Bennett 1996). Hutcheon has argued that aesthetics of nostalgia are not related to 'simple memory'; but rather, 'invocation of a partial, idealized history [that] merges with a dissatisfaction with the present' (Hutcheon and Valdés 2000: 20). Classical Greek theatre has long since disappeared from living memory but in the postmodern cultural landscape there are more reproductions and simulacra of the classical than ever before. At the same time as this

growth in surface-level representations of the classical, and despite Greek theatre's prominence within the Western dramatic canon, Mnouchkine lamented the lack of formal complexity and spectacle within twentieth century Western theatrical traditions (Kiernander 1993: 94 – 97). Though Mnouchkine's complaint over-simplifies the range of contemporary Western theatre, her main dissatisfaction is with the theatre forms that rely on psychological realism. I suggest it is not merely a coincidence that at the same time Mnouchkine identifies what she believes to be the lack of authentic spectacle in the Western theatre, she returns to Greek tragedy, which is frequently cited as its origins. Her nostalgia is a critique of the present moment prompted by the idealised versions of the classical readily reproduced in the postmodern period. As Hutcheon (Hutcheon and Valdés 2000) suggests, nostalgia is dependent on an incomplete version of the past and as Mnouchkine's nostalgic ideas are given authority over the impossibility of historical accuracy; an idealised approximation of 'Greek tragedy' and 'classical' become part of the performance identity of *Les Atrides.*

Unsurprisingly given Mnouchkine's dissatisfaction with realist forms of theatre, other important aspects of *Les Atrides'* identity are its visceral theatricality and entrenched use of spectacle. The sheer ambition and duration of the work imparted a particular epic quality to the performance identity. When performed sequentially as was the form during the international tour, the tetralogy had a running time of ten hours including intervals. It featured a cast of over 20 actors while numerous additional company members were visible fulfilling other off-stage responsibilities. I consider the extra-theatrical features of *Les Atrides* in the following two sections of this chapter, but for now, I turn my attention to the onstage performance style and how it shaped the production's overall identity.

Like many features of this adaptation, the performance style of *Les Atrides* can be linked to Mnouchkine's interest in fidelity to the Greek source material. However, the style was created using a postmodern pastiche of several different techniques. The company, guided

by Mnouchkine's interest in the Asian aesthetic and their collaborative approach of *création collective,* looked to the physical vocabulary of Indian *kathakali* and the dance abilities of existing company members. Some of the dance forms interspersed with *kathakali* included 'folkloric dance from many cultures and periods, from Greece to Mongolia', another unspecified form of Indian dance, Armenian dance and modern contemporary dance (Salter 1993b: 67 - 69). The amalgamation of these different styles led to an ambiguous and highly theatrical quality of movement throughout the production. For example, when Iphigénie first greets Agamemnon in *Iphigénie à Aulis* she expresses her excitement with a choreographed sequence. Euripides' source text indicates a similarly joyful reunion but while the eponymous character utters the line: 'O father, what joy to see you after such a long time!' (2005: 193), the Iphigénie of *Les Atrides* speaks the text and then proceeds to dance a circle around the seated Agamemnon with an array of expressive hand gestures, quick steps, hops and turns before falling into his arms to embrace him. Though *kathakali* is cited as a primary influence (Salter 1993a), the physicality in this moment and throughout the duration of *Les Atrides* was a layered pastiche that obscured the origins of the movement traditions and any absolute cultural or historical identity.

With an obscured and ambiguous identity, late twentieth century audiences watching the production in geographically Western cities may simplistically observe the physical performance style within *Les Atrides* as other. When describing processes of identity construction in the postmodern period in the Introduction to the thesis I referred to Dunn's stipulation that 'identities are shaped by the notions of otherness on which they depend' (1999: 41). The performance style of interwoven movements from an array of international sources is uniquely understood by the company and, therefore, it possesses the quality of otherness for anyone outside of that troupe. The spectacle of otherness within *Les Atrides* is predominantly due to the appropriation of different cultural forms reassembled to make them unrecognisable.

However, for audiences, this cultural otherness could alternatively be regarded as temporal otherness. Alternatively put, because the performance style of Greek tragedy is lost there is no evidence to counter a perception that the Théâtre du Soleil's staging *is* reminiscent of the ancient form. As with the music of *Les Atrides,* Mnouchkine and the company had no template for movement used within classical Greek tragedies and in trying to fill that gap they are able to metabolise the potential for otherness into a substitute for fidelity. Irrespective of the internationalism behind the performance style and how it is interpreted, the heightened stylistic quality is, like the Lemêtre's music, an essential part of the identity of this adaptation.

The final contributing feature to the new identity of *Les Atrides* is the *mise en scène*, both the onstage scenograpic design and the extra-theatrical elements that frame the adaptation. The entirety of the *mise en scène* is informed by the company's permanent base the Cartoucherie; even when touring and not present in that physical space, the Cartoucherie haunts the performance of *Les Atrides.*

The Cartoucherie: A Haunted and Haunting Space

The Cartoucherie is a converted ammunitions factory located in the Bois de Vincennes on the outskirts of Paris. This unique base has been the Théâtre du Soleil's home since 1970 when Mnouchkine discovered the abandoned property in her search for a company rehearsal space. It is the base from which every production since the early 1970s has emerged, and its architecture remains integral to the company's philosophy and aesthetic. Like all their productions, *Les Atrides* rehearsed and premiered there, and its international tour was only for a limited period.

The Cartoucherie's idyllic location makes it an ideal space for the company's work; 'the company's centripetal structure, a close-knit collective relying on intense commitment from all its members, is constantly threatened by centrifugal conditions' that are a result of the

postmodern condition (Kiernander 1993: 18). The Cartoucherie is a defining feature of the company's collective identity and serves as a constant amidst a postmodern landscape that continually destabilises notions of identity. Before finding this base, the company would occasionally undertake country retreats, like Les Copiaus, to enforce the aspects of communality so integral to their collective dramaturgy (ibid). However, these trips became unnecessary once the company was able to locate a permanent creative home. The Cartoucherie serves as the creative home of the Théâtre du Soleil, not the literal home of the company members; despite their communitarian ethos, the company have never existed as a commune.[64]

After the move to the Cartoucherie the members of the collective each undertook numerous roles in addition to their central ones as performers. For example, performers were responsible for set design and construction, costumes, maintenance and cleaning of the building, and the full array of administrative tasks.[65] As time progressed and the company expanded, more members with primarily non-performing functions joined but the collective atmosphere was maintained with their communal behaviours focused on the sharing of their labour. The post-Fordist definition of labour is an 'all-encompassing life context' that 'has penetrated everyday life itself' (Klein 2012: 11), and at Théâtre du Soleil unification through their work and shared location helped to define the company identity. The building itself gained a level of celebrity as it became an emblem for the Théâtre du Soleil and an influential physical presence within their performances.

Although it now functions as a theatre, as its former usage suggests, the Cartoucherie is an expansive industrial-looking space. The site comprises a number of different buildings and the public theatre space consists of three cavernous adjoining halls used in all the

[64] Mnouchkine has clarified this misunderstanding in the past, 'we spend 12, 15 hours together, we eat together, but we've never lived as a commune' (Kustow 1992: 23).
[65] It is a model similar to that of Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret, the Théâtre du Soleil's exact contemporary. Barba and Mnouchkine have an established relationship, and Odin Teatret are often hosted by the Théâtre du Soleil when on tour to Paris; the most recent occasion being the performance of *L'arbre* in May 2018.

performances, including *Les Atrides.* The size and topography of the Cartoucherie directly impacted upon the staging for *Les Atrides* as the central playing area was equally extensive and open. The Cartoucherie is not a conventional theatre and the staging for *Les Atrides* was also not entirely conventional; the staging design had no links to traditional Western theatre architecture; no proscenium arch or material break between the audience and performer space, and equally it was not created as a homage to the amphitheatres of ancient Greece. The stage was surrounded by bare, terracotta walls with a large double door in the centre of the upstage wall. The staging remained consistent throughout the four parts of *Les Atrides* and although the attempt was to remain culturally non-specific, in a bid to describe it some of the 'spectators have compared the playing space to a sun-baked bullfighting arena' (Bryant-Bertail 1994: 10). Above the central playing space hung a 'large white canvas "tent" roof decorated with Greek designs, through which bright sunlight (actually fluorescent) [seemed] to shine' (ibid). In addition to the double doors another entrance originated from beneath the tiered seating bank and this vomitorium was used at crucial moments throughout the performance, primarily during or immediately following a character death.

Guy-Claude François, the Théâtre du Soleil company member responsible for *décor* has affirmed the importance of the Cartoucherie in his design for *Les Atrides*. While intentionally reflecting the architecture of the building, he claims his sets are a process of 'building something that must serve as a tool […] only invented in response to needs, and these are indicated to me by Ariane, by the actors' (Williams 1999: 211). His comment suggests that he leads in the construction of a bespoke set for each production. However, the set of *Les Atrides* is haunted by the design of previous productions and the architecture of the Cartoucherie itself. After watching *Les Atrides,* Jean-Claude Lallias noted a recognisable construction for the stage and audience seating, in temporary use since '*L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk*, and completed for *L'Indiade*' (1992: 23 - 24). Lallias also

observed that since the Shakespeare series of the early 1980s, the Théâtre du Soleil's stagings have relied on 'the same end on simplicity, the same possibilities for circulation and entrances. [For] the set of *Les Atrides,* the vast acting square was superimposed onto the visible remains of the constructions that served the previous two shows', mentioned above (ibid).[66] The stage for *Les Atrides* is haunted by its recycling of the same practical set configuration and, more interestingly, by the cultural memories or associations with other productions from the Théâtre du Soleil's *oeuvre*.

All theatrical spaces are ghosted by previous productions that have taken place in the same physical space, and the Cartoucherie is no different. Like the recycled texts and characters I discussed within Mee's adaptations in the previous chapter, recycled theatre spaces are, according to Carlson, 'deeply involved with the preservation and configuration of cultural memory' (2003: 132). Further, the haunting of the space 'makes its own important contribution to the overall reception of the dramatic event' (ibid). For returning audience members, the identity and history of the company and their previous productions inform the reception of *Les Atrides* as the venue and stage layout act as mnemonic devices. Furthermore, the costumes seen on stage in new productions are often repurposed from the Cartoucherie's existing stock. On the first day of rehearsal for any production, before anything else happens, all of the costumes from the company's back catalogue are placed at the disposal of the actors (Bryant-Bertail 1994: 12). As the Cartoucherie is the store of all the costumes, set and props from previous productions, the image of a giant dress-up box may be an appropriate analogy for the space. The repurposing or adaptation of costumes is both economically and ecologically sound and it encourages a postmodern form of nostalgic recycling. The repurposed costumes in *Les Atrides*

[66] Translation is my own but as I have both paraphrased and quoted directly, the original text reads: 'Ce dispositif, stable depuis *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk*, et complété pour *L'Indiade*, laisse pressentir qu'une même ligne de recherche dans le travail s'affirme depuis les « Shakespeare ». Même simplicité frontale, mêmes possibilités de circulation et d'entrées. Le plateau des *Atrides*, un vaste quadrilatère de jeu, s'est superposé aux restes visibles des constructions qui servirent aux deux spectacles précédents.'

are haunted by the materiality of the company's previous productions and influenced by the actors' agency when selecting which costume to use as a base for their next character. Recycling of costumes in this manner is indicative of a knowing self-reflexivity that aims to generate new relationships to the company's own history.

In the same way that the costume store is a tool, François' description of the stage serving as 'tool' (Williams 1999: 211) suggests that pragmatism is prioritised over aesthetics and an empty stage is an essential starting point. However, there can be other motivations for starting with, and maintaining a minimalist stage aesthetic. Mnouchkine states 'the stage of a theatre is a very beautiful emptiness. What fills it? It is not the scenery. It is the imagination of the spectator who is invited to do so' (Carlson 1996: 96 - 97). Thus, the bareness of the stage space in *Les Atrides* can be seen as a knowing dramaturgical device that exploits the possibility for theatre as a receptacle for memory *and* imagination.

Theatre relies on repetition, and at the intersection of memory and repetition, there can be unexpected or intentional ghostliness cultivated through performance. Keeping the same layout and scenographic scarcity for all the productions over a ten-year period causes an intentional ghosting of the space in spite of differences in genre, theme and source material.[67] In *Les Atrides,* the set is simultaneously haunted by a number of Shakespearean adaptations and the two theatricalisations of epic political narratives set in India and Cambodia. I suggest that Mnouchkine is intentionally invoking such ghostly associations to prompt reflections on a wider cultural history that exceeds the scope of what can be represented within this singular production; ghosting is, as I have already claimed, equally a manifestation of presence *and* absence.

[67] To clarify, 'source material' here refers to the different plays that are adapted and historical or biographical information that is used as source material for dramatisation by Théâtre du Soleil, for example, the biography of Norodom Sihanouk.

While *Les Atrides* was on tour, a part of its essential performance identity was absent. The Cartoucherie as the setting for *Les Atrides* could not travel in its entirety but the company ensured that it ghosted the production in other ways. The physical setting of the Cartoucherie was considered to be so important that each of the tour venues aimed to painstakingly replicate it and its stage (Carlson 1992). Given the ambience and limited size of available theatre venues, large scale, usually industrial buildings were instead selected to house the production on tour. *Les Atrides* toured to industrial venues in Toulouse and Montpellier (France) in the summer of 1992 prior to embarking on the international leg of the tour. International venues included an old textile factory (Bradford, UK) an armoury museum (Brooklyn, USA) and a multipurpose sport and conference arena (Montreal, Canada). The production then returned home to the Cartoucherie for an extended two month run following the tour's success. Perceptible in the choice of tour venues, there is a rejection of conventional theatrical spaces driven by an unwillingness to compromise the experience of the production, or to use Richard Wagner's term the *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total work of art] (1849). The Cartoucherie is part of the aesthetic identity of *Les Atrides*, and as Mnouchkine 'insists upon the replication of her over-all performance and audience space whenever she tours' the various venues had to find a way to accommodate it (Carlson 1992: 155). This directorial demand ensured that the Cartoucherie haunted all of the tour locations. Although the Cartoucherie had an influence on each tour venue, inevitably there were slightly different settings for *Les Atrides* while touring (Carlson 1992). Nevertheless, one way in which all the venues did attempt to replicate the Cartoucherie was with the inclusion of a designated audience reception space; a space ghosted by the famous antechamber or reception foyer, the *salle d'accueil,* which literally translates as the 'welcome room'.

The Politics of Welcome

As the fame of the Théâtre du Soleil grew, so did that of the Cartoucherie. Even before the success of *Les Atrides* John Rockwell wrote that,

> in Paris, Ms. Mnouchkine can almost be called a cult. When one of her huge spectacles appears, her theater [sic] seems to sell out steadily. The pieces usually run for an entire season, and attendance takes on the aspects of a ritual.
>
> 1987: 17

The ritual that Rockwell describes is connected to the scale, location and welcome at the company's home. The physical location of the Cartoucherie ensures that, even 'just getting to the theatre requires a considerable conscious effort' (Kiernander 1990: 324). The company members swiftly reward this effort with a warm welcome as they set out to draw the audience into their world and the world of the production. According to Adrian Kiernander, once present, visitors to the space and audiences in particular are, 'quickly won over by the strong feeling of community' (1990: 325). However, Rockwell's somewhat provocative description of Mnouchkine as a cult reflects my own postmodern scepticism that this extra-theatrical element of their production is less about the audiences' experience and more about mythologising certain narratives around the company, namely the company's communality that can easily envelop their audiences.[68]

The fairly unique set up of the Cartoucherie is designed to build an atmospheric, collective experience before the start of the production. After alighting the Paris metro at the last stop on the *La Défense - Château de Vincennes* line, audiences are then transported directly to the Cartoucherie via a company shuttle bus. Other Théâtre du Soleil company members act as the front of house hosts who then welcome every audience to the venue. As a geographical location the Cartoucherie has its own mythology, and for the more ardent supporters travelling

[68] Narratives of communality have been disputed by disgruntled former company members; see Phillipe Leotard's interview with Salino (1981) 'Ariane Mnouchkine: démiurge et tyran' ['Ariane Mnouchkine: demiurge and tyrant'].

from further afield ‘the journey is a pilgrimage’ (Dickson 2012: 12). As there was an attempt to recreate the Cartoucherie in the venues that hosted the tour of *Les Atrides*, traces of this mythology were transferred to those venues and those performances. The journeys to the tour venues of *Les Atrides*, such as the one in Bradford, UK, have been similarly described as a ‘pilgrimage’ (Taplin 1996) or ‘odyssey’ (Kustow 1992), in part due to the *en masse* transportation and lengthy queues to enter the venues.

As I have already mentioned, in each of the *Les Atrides* international tour venues, along with the stage design, the *salle d’accueil* was also reconstructed. These two features were replicated as a direct result of ‘Mnouchkine’s concern with the ‘politique d’accueil’’ [politics of welcome] specifically, ‘the importance of the audience’s pathway to the performance’ (Carlson 1992: 155). A replica pathway was more or less achieved in each venue as the audience reached their seats only after travelling through a carefully curated preshow *salle d’accueil* that included a makeshift foyer with ‘a box office, souvenir shop, snack bar, rest rooms, light towers, dressing area’ all leading into audience seating and the staging area (Nadler 1993: 373). Mnouchkine’s insistence on the specifics of the *salle d’accueil* and the inclusion of these extra-theatrical devices implies that she hoped to influence the audiences’ reception of this Greek adaptation, even before the performance began with the opening prologue of *Iphigénie à Aulis*.

The merging of pre-performance, backstage and onstage as part of the politics of welcome initiates a blurring of temporalities, identities and locations. This consequently challenges any conventional interpretation of the classical narrative within *Les Atrides*. The pre-performance foyer area perfectly reflects the postmodernist preconception with the classical and the contemporary. It features a mix of historicised objects and nostalgic features alongside highly commercialised reproductions of the classical. A snapshot of the foyer would include: ‘a large political map of the ancient Mediterranean world, with a red line representing

the voyages of Agamemnon' (Bryant-Bertail 1994: 8), designated reading areas with selections of books and images related to the cultural history of ancient Greece, a snack bar, a souvenir stand; the place to 'buy disks, T-shirts and what not' capturing and commoditising the supposedly ephemeral aspects of the upcoming performance (Taplin 1996: 210 - 11). This collection of variable representations of the classical are designed to inform the reception of the forthcoming theatrical performance. The snack bar serving Greek inspired dishes is a way to transport some of the audience, via their senses of smell and taste to the desired location, albeit a contemporary approximation of it. While the (pseudo-) historical map and books about ancient Greek culture support the narrative that Mnouchkine has created for *Les Atrides,* namely that this production provides an authentic or previously unrevealed representation of the tragic plays.

Like the majority of Théâtre du Soleil productions, after the company members of *Les Atrides* had checked tickets, served refreshments and completed any other front of house roles, they entered their highly visible dressing areas and began changing into their performance attire. The Théâtre du Soleil's intention of showing the dressing area is to open up the 'mystique of "backstage", shifting the boundaries between actors and audience' and creating ambiguities in conventionally defined space (Kustow 1992: 23). Exposing this transformation can be seen as a postmodern tactic as it highlights the constructed nature of the theatre performance. Additionally, it blurs the sense of time within the space of the *salle d'accueil*; as the performers change from their late twentieth century clothing into their costumes there is an active, physicalised process that symbolises the shift from the present to the ancient.

With the *salle d'accueil* there is one other extra-theatrical feature that disrupts the temporality of the space; a vast installation consisting of four trenches containing sculptures resembling 'life-size terra cotta figures of the four choruses, modelled on the Xian "armies" uncovered in China' (Taplin 1996: 210 - 11). Due to the financial and practical complications

involved with the transportation of this feature, it was only fully realised at the Cartoucherie, however, it warrants further discussion because it offers a foundation to briefly discuss the issues of Orientalism within Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil's practice.

Terracotta Soldiers and an Orientalist Critique

The Terracotta Army figures appropriated for extra-theatrical use in *Les Atrides* are both historically and geographically distant from the Greek source material. Therefore, there is a reasonable critique of Orientalism to be levied at the adaptation of these statues as a means to present otherness. Orientalism was first defined and addressed at length as a feature of nineteenth century literature and economy, and Edward Said's *Orientalism* made an invaluable contribution to the debate in 1978. Said (2003) identified the colonial history that influenced the Western perceptions of the 'Orient' in terms of viewing its culture through the lenses of fantasy or anxiety. Orientalist aesthetic practices dependent upon the hegemony inherent in such classifications dichotomises cultures, distinguishing particularly between the East and West or the Orient and Occident (ibid).

The only direct aesthetic link between the terracotta figures featured in the *salle d'accueil* and the performance of *Les Atrides* is the costuming of the figures that foreshadows the costumes worn by members of the living chorus. The statues remain markedly othered from contemporary and ancient Western cultures despite these being the, presumably, dominant cultural factors at play within a French, contemporary adaptation of a classic Greek text. I reference Orientalism in discussion of these particular objects because the model of antiquated Chinese culture appears fetishised as a shortcut to highlight a vague quality of otherness within the performance; the figures can be seen as an extra-theatrical feature with the sole purpose of cultivating spectacle through Orientalising or othering.

The life-sized carved figures produce a spectacle due to their means of presentation

within the *salle d'accueil.* The statues are displayed in pits viewed from wooden ramps above in a pastiche of an image of an archaeological dig. Company member Erhard Stiefel designed the figures and their presentation, in a state of excavation, points to the narratives that often surround the rediscovery of previously lost cultural artefacts. Namely, narratives that suggest that artefacts or ruins offer a new means of understanding past cultures and civilisations. There is a parallel between the imagery of unearthing the Terracotta Armies of Qin Shi Huang and Mnouchkine's claims that her translations for *Les Atrides* have looked 'under' the text of the original Greek plays to unearth their authentic meaning (Bowles 1992: 128). The reference to newly unearthed artefacts, reinforced by the derivative terracotta figures, suggests that *Les Atrides* offers a unique opportunity of, on a certain nostalgic level, connecting with the *real* ancient world, which, otherwise, remains forever elusive.

One explanation for the inclusion of these figure comes from Mnouchkine herself; she has suggested that, like the Asian traditions used in her preferred performative forms, her creative choices are driven by her interest in 'sourcing geographically or historically distanced subjects or forms in order to objectively represent the contemporary Western world' (Singleton 1996: 624). However, her failure to acknowledge that objective cultural exchange cannot happen without careful consideration of historically complex power dynamics is precisely why scholars such as Patrice Pavis (1992) and Herbet Golder (1996) have described her work and outlook as Orientalist. For example, describing the representation of Indian culture in *Le Nuit des Rois*; Pavis argues that Mnouchkine fails to understand the complex culture she adapts and 'the 'Indianization' of the play is not thematically motivated; it appears what it attempts to be: an aestheticizing phantasmagoria that offers no rereading of the play' (1992: 195).[69] Though

[69] Pavis uses a comparison between Brook and Mnouchkine as a primary study to address interculturalism in contemporary *mise en scène* in his highly influential *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992). The issues of Interculturalism and Orientalism in *Les Atrides* are also raised in a direct comparison with Brook's *Mahabharata* in Maria Shevtsova (1997) in 'Interculturailsm, Aestheticism, Orientalism: Starting from Peter Brook's *Mahabharata'*.

Pavis' description refers to *Le Nuit des Rois,* it could, arguably, also be applied to *Les Atrides.* The Asian forms used in performance and the imitative installation of the terracotta figures have no overt links to the culture of ancient Greece and are, to use Pavis's term, 'aestheticizing phantasmagoria'. However, poststructuralist and postmodern thought encourages a consideration of all the textual contributions, in this case comprising the printed text in dialogue with the aesthetics. In opposition to Pavis' statement, this means that aesthetic interventions in performance *can* produce a rereading of a play. Though the semantics of the language within *Les Atrides* are not altered by Mnouchkine's Orientalist aesthetics, in performance the aesthetic framing can cause radical changes in processes of reception.

When questioned about the recurring charges of Orientalism, Mnouckine responded by saying that,

> I take what oriental theatre teaches. I think that taking someone's teaching is the most beautiful gift you can give them. You don't plunder a master. You value him. You honour him. If, on the other hand, you plagiarize or vulgarize something… well, I don't think I do that. No, I don't have the impression that I plunder oriental theatre.
>
> Shevtsova 1995/96: 10

This argument may satisfy some of the criticism of the Théâtre du Soleil's stylised acting and performance aesthetics, given Mnouchkine's clear reverence for Asian theatre forms, but questions remain about this line of defence when considering the example of the terracotta figures in *Les Atrides.* An interest in learning from 'oriental' forms does not explain the framing of a quintessentially Greek play with contemporary statues that imitate classical Chinese artefacts. Despite my concerns of Orientalism in this particular feature of *Les Atrides' mise en scène*, an argument for intentional theatrical ghosting could justify the inclusion of the derivative terracotta statues. Drawing again on Carlson's definition of theatrical ghosting, an intentional ghostliness is presented in the 'still-life representations of the living bodies about to appear on stage' (Singleton 1996: 618). In other words, the statues act as a static palimpsest that refers directly to the historicised nature of the play while ghosting the chorus throughout

the live performance and after.

The Terracotta Army statues prove to be a complex reference point for simplistic charges of Orientalism in the postmodern period. They are the product of a historical dynasty in China and remain, for the most part, in situ at the Emperor Qin Shi Huang's Mausoleum Site Museum near Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. However, they are simultaneously considered a global artefact as shown by the 1987 designation of the original archaeological site as a United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Site™. The site's identity as global property is partly an effect of the postmodern condition described in Chapter One; changes in communicative forms have led 'to a radical shift in the disjuncture of what was owned and what was foreign in terms of culture' (Singleton 2013: n. pg.). In an ever more fluid postmodern landscape the very idea of cultural ownership as a geographically defined concept is slowly becoming obsolete, as are the established means of defining identity according to cultural ties.

Ariane Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil: International Citizens

Mnouchkine, like Mee, has a relatively clear narrative about her own identity; '"I feel myself to be entirely French and European," Mnouchkine has said in an interview, "but I know that the history of the world is my history."' (Carlson 1996: 89). Much of Mee's self-determined identity is dependent on his corporeal form, while Mnouchkine here draws on nationality and geography as the dominant features for her self-identification. The acknowledgement of the global aspect of her history and subsequently her identity further indicates Mnouchkine's postmodernist-influenced attitude to identity, culture and history.

For Dunn (1998) identity in the later part of the twentieth century has been described as in a state of crisis because the stable institutional and social centres that previously supported identity construction have been transformed. For Mnouchkine, in the twentieth century and

now, the identity of Western theatre is also in crisis. As I have already mentioned, Mnouchkine's directorial style is influenced by her dissatisfaction with popular Western theatre. Specifically, Mnouchkine believes there exists 'no living Western theatre tradition capable of providing the desired combination of theatricality, spectacle and metaphorical distance from the everyday world' (Carlson 1996: 94). This belief coupled with her post-student pre-Théâtre du Soleil expedition to Indonesia and Japan led Mnouchkine to the conclusion, like Antonin Artaud before her, that 'the theatre is oriental' (Carlson 1996: 96 - 97). Mnouchkine elaborates on this statement, specifying that theatre is a 'perpetual metaphor which the actors produce' and thus, her interest is in seeking out a theatrical form that can encourage a wholly embodied, expressive means of performance for the actor (ibid). As Mnouchkine believes that Western theatre does not offer the same opportunities as the codified forms of *kathakali* or *kabuki* for example, she opts to align herself in relation to the cultures that can meet her needs. If the theatre is 'oriental' and Mnouchkine is a theatre director, then, by a strange approximation, she can access and even claim ownership over any theatrical form she chooses.

As a means of educating herself and authenticating her identity as internationalist theatre director, Mnouchkine repeatedly undertakes visits to Asia. She also regularly invites 'master practitioners to give workshops and performances in her theatre' in order to share this aspect of her identity with the rest of the Théâtre du Soleil company members (Singleton 2010: 39). Over time, Mnouchkine's well-documented interest in international theatre has attracted a collection of individuals who share her ambitions for the company. In 1991, when asked about the internationalism of the company, Mnouchkine stated that it was never a deliberate priority and despite frequent comparisons with 'Peter Brook's Paris-based company, [it] is purely coincidental. "Peter does it on purpose," Mnouchkine says. "I don't. It just happens."' (Drake 1991: n. pg.). Nevertheless, by the premiere of *Les Atrides* the Théâtre du Soleil included

company members from over eighteen different countries including 'actors from Armenia, Brazil, India and elsewhere all of whom speak perfect French' (McDonald 1992a: 13). The human impact of twentieth century globalisation, economic migration and diaspora is directly reflected in the ethnic make-up of the Théâtre du Soleil and, although the company is based in Paris and rehearses and performs in French, under the guidance of Mnouchkine, it intentionally promotes its identity as international. In a self-fulfilling cycle, the internationalism of Mnouchkine's and the company's identities are transferred to their creative works, and vice versa. For *Les Atrides* the company drew on the various physical forms already known to the company, including mask work and *commedia dell 'arte*, and once again turned their gaze east in search of source traditions and an aesthetic that would complement the chosen Greek texts.

Aesthetics and Source Traditions: Costume and Heightened Theatricality

The heightened stylistic performance of *Les Atrides* took inspiration from a number of Eastern source traditions. The theatricality and aesthetics are two of the defining features of the production's identity, and yet they are difficult to describe and define because the Théâtre du Soleil avoids precise imitation. Though the company claim not to simply imitate their aesthetic sources (Salter 1993b), the fundamental questions surrounding pastiche as a postmodern creative tactic remain. Specifically, whether pastiche is as a result of a reverence for the source form, or whether the source is recycled in a way that reveals a particular critique. The Théâtre du Soleil's recycling of their chosen sources involves a process of transformation that often obscures the initial imitation and their agenda behind its use.

One such example that combines ambiguous aesthetics and physicality comes early on in the second play of the cycle, *Agamemnon.* After the first two cycles of *episode* and *stasimon* featuring Le Chœur [The Chorus], La Guetteur [The Watchman] and Clytemnestra, the third episode begins with the entrance of L'Émissaire [The Emissary]. L'Émissaire's arrival is

heralded with a lively rhythmic drumming that causes Le Chœur to hurriedly depart the downstage playing space and disperse behind the bare walls that mark the perimeter of the square stage. Le Chœur remain visible, peering around and over the walls as the music shifts to incorporate an overlapping of string instruments all contributing to a melody in a minor scale. As the music swells, the large double door of the centre upstage wall slowly opens to reveal the L'Émissaire kneeling on the ground.

The most striking visual feature of the character's first appearance is his costume and theatrical makeup as it provokes an aesthetic curiosity. The shape and style of his costume are similar to the costumes of the choruses, 'broad, layered, skirted robes reminiscent of *kathakali,* on the one hand, and of dervishes on the other' (Bethune 1993: 185).[70] L'Émissaire's costume additionally includes a headpiece that appears to be designed as a hybrid between styles traditionally seen in *kathakali* and *noh.* His makeup is clearly modelled on the aesthetic of *kabuki* which I deduce from the white base and the way in which his facial features are emphasised. However, it is, like the rest of the costume, not an entirely accurate reconstruction of the source it appears to imitate. Once he has struggled to a standing position, L'Émissaire then begins a controlled walk reminiscent of the *suri-ashi* [sliding feet] walk used in *noh*. After a momentary choreographed stumble, the music increases in tempo and L'Émissaire's slow controlled movement gives way to what might be a European Renaissance-era parading step, with an accompanying static, formal arm position. Once he arrives downstage he sits and begins his opening speech detailing the Argive victory over the Trojans and his joy at returning to 'Ma patrie' [my homeland] (Théâtre du Soleil and Eschyle 1995: 30).

The indiscriminate use of multiple aesthetic and performative forms is part of what makes *Les Atrides* a postmodern adaptation. Postmodernism takes an egalitarian approach to

[70] When referring to a specific example of a chorus as character, I use the name as it appears in the printed script. When I use choruses or chorus more generally, I am referring to more than one of the choruses featured in *Les Atrides,* or using the term to refer to the dramatic convention more generally.

cultural materials ‘as well as evincing an interest in intertextuality’; it has ‘a penchant for pastiche and quotation as simultaneous acts of re-creation and fragmentation’ (Sanders 2016: 95). The imitation or quotation of certain sources within *Les Atrides* is used as a springboard for creativity; the aesthetic and codified forms are recycled, but equally, they are adapted to meet the needs of the company and this specific production. At no point in the sequence I describe is there evidence of direct imitation of any source forms, only traces of them. In this singular example featuring one character, lasting no more than a minute, *Les Atrides* possibly references the aesthetics and movements of four different codified performance forms, not to mention the culturally unspecified music, the contemporary staging elements and the ancient Greek text, translated and performed in French. The creative aesthetic form is somewhat fragmented here and this is a staging choice that is replicated throughout the duration of *Les Atrides.* Denis Salter suggests that the voracious adaptation of different forms ‘could have easily led not only to derivative performance styles but to a kind of muddled eclecticism, baffling to a contemporary audience’ however, ‘over the ten hours of the tetralogy, we in fact come to understand even the nuances’ (1993a: 63). Salter acknowledges that a form of logic emerges within the pastiche of performance styles, and there is a similar logic found within the costume choices too.

Like the codified performance forms, the aesthetic sources adapted for the costumes of *Les Atrides* are disparate when considered individually. However, in the materiality of the performance, pastiche as a design choice again, somehow, creates a cohesive whole. The costumes are a central unifying feature of the materiality of *Les Atrides* and they create their own intertextual exchange. Yet superficially, they bear no relationship to Greek source texts. For example, three of the four chorus costumes are a similar design with only slight variations in colour and costume accessories, and all are inspired by the costume of *kathakali*. Each of the individual costumes of the choruses appear as a colourful and living reimagining of the

costumes on the terracotta statues seen *en route* to the staging area. An intertextual exchange therefore variously exists between the past, present and future iterations of the chorus, and their unchanging image in motionless terracotta.

The costumes, as alluded to in the example above, are predominantly influenced by Asian aesthetics and the majority of the characters, in addition to the choruses, wear theatrical makeup and 'heavy, layered ornate costumes in saturated colours [that] are one of the most overwhelming aspects of the whole experience' (Taplin 1996: 212). The costumes adhere to a particular colour palette influenced by traditional colour schemes in Japanese *noh* and *kabuki*. They incorporate black and white, and against the monochrome, splashes of red, blue and gold.[71] The makeup is reminiscent of *kabuki* given its white base, dark eyes and red lips that serve to emphasise the actor's natural facial expressions while simultaneously operating like a theatrical mask. I view the facial makeup as a type of mask because its careful application is part of the extra-theatrical, pre-performance ritual in the *salle d'accueil*. The audience are invited to witness the application of this mask-makeup and see the performers' transition aesthetically from contemporary to ancient. In this way the makeup functions like a conventional mask, as it disguises the performers' identity and signals their character role.

Concealing the actors' faces can be viewed as homage to the mask tradition of classical theatre but in *Les Atrides* it is only a gesture, not a total commitment to the material conditions of classical tragedy. There is however, one use of mask and costume within *Les Atrides* that is anomalous amidst the general Asian-esque aesthetic. The final chorus of *Les Euménides* do not wear a faithful reconstruction of classical masks or *kathakali* inspired costumes; they wear snouts, large, shaggy black wigs and dark loosely fitted jumpsuits that, along with the sound

[71] These particular colours have implications within the Japanese source traditions, 'white is often the color [sic] of death, black of power and the gods, red of passion and youth, and black and gold of royalty' (McDonald 1992a: 14). However, the cultural significance of these colours does not feature in *Les Atrides* as, for example, the chorus of women and slaves in *Les Choéphores* are costumed in black while the chorus of old men in *Agamemnon* are costumed in red, and the goddess Athéna appears in *Les Euménides* dressed all in white.

of barking that forewarns and accompanies their onstage presence, signifies them as dogs. Their costumes are a sharp contrast to the Orientalised aesthetic seen throughout the cycle. They offer yet another, rather peculiar layer to the aesthetic intertextuality of the tragedies, one that this time disrupts the established temporal setting by invoking recollections of popular culture. The characters Les Euménides were variously described by reviewers as 'goofy ghouls [who] seem a bit too much like something from Oz or *The Planet of the Apes*' (Winter 1991: n. pg.); 'snarling, mutated hellhounds, part canine, part simian, and reminiscent of the furious apes in Stanley Kubrick's *2001*' (Rich 1992: n. pg.); and, 'terrifying mythic beasts, no longer dancing but growling and snarling, led by three harpies straight from a Brechtian proletarian netherworld' (Rockwell 1992: n. pg.). These critical comments indicate the power of reception over creative intention and reinforce that all cultural forms exist in intertextual webs, subject to unexpected influence from their present context and any associations brought about through memory or past experience. A postmodern audience, like the one attending *Les Atrides* in the early 1990s, is prepared to receive the work intertextually because of the new ways of meaning-making in their cultural setting. According to Carlson in the later part of the twentieth century, the '"intertextual" attitude, approaching the text […] as an open-ended "tissue of quotations," has become now quite familiar' (2003: 4 - 5). Texts in performance such as *Les Atrides* are, like all forms of knowledge and culture, subject to individualised meaning making at the point of reception.

Audience associations with *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Planet of the Apes* were not part of Mnouchkine's intention for her faithful staging of *Les Atrides.* On the other hand, her intention to other this final chorus of deities by altering her already established aesthetic devices was successful. There was another successful attempt to aesthetically other a character in order to influence the reception of them. During *Agamemnon,* the character Cassandra is demarcated by the most notably mimetic Orientalised aesthetic (Bryant-Bertail 1994: 22 – 23).

Cassandra is the epitome of otherness within Aeschylus' play, and in *Les Atrides* the character remains the other woman from the other culture. Cassandra played by actress Nirupama Nityanandan is dressed all in white, in a costume clearly inspired by the shape and style of the ceremonial robes worn in *noh* performances. Though other characters, including Le Guetteur in *Agamemnon* and Athéna in *Les Euménides* are also costumed entirely in white, Casandra's arrival onstage and her movement amidst Le Chœur and their blood red costumes, creates a strong differentiation between her identity; young, female and Trojan, and theirs; old, male and of Argos. Cassandra's costume is completed by a rod or staff, which she wields emphatically moments before her death during her final highly theatrical choreographed outpouring of her feelings of rage and injustice.

Since *L'Âge d'or* [*The Golden Age*] (1975), the Théâtre du Soleil has sought a heightened theatrical aesthetic in all of its works and has used pastiche as a tactic to achieve it. With *L'Âge d'or* it began with the intention of 'reinventing the principles of traditional popular theatres', through 'the actors imagined characters inspired by those of the *commedia dell'arte*' (Théâtre du Soleil 1975: 13).[72] The different sources that have influenced the company have evolved over the years since *L'Âge d'or,* and the methods of generating the aesthetic and physical elements of production have increasingly become more varied. In one of the most recent adaptations, *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir* [*Castaways of the Mad Hope*] (2013), Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil even theatricalised and re-presented the form of European silent cinema.[73] Although each creative process purposefully amalgamates a number of different sources, there is usually one that dominates. In *L'Âge d'or* the primary aesthetic

[72] Translation is my own: 'en réinventant les principes de théâtres populaires traditionnels. Les acteurs ont imaginé des personnages en s'inspirant de ceux de la commedia dell'arte'.
[73] This production is beyond the remit of this thesis, but the processes of adaptation and framing of source materials are fascinating; for a full account see, Singleton's 'Performing Orientalist, Intercultural, and Globalized Modernities: The Case of *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir by the Théâtre Du Soleil*' (2013).

reference was *commedia dell'arte,* for *Richard II* it was *kabuki,* and in the case of *Les Atrides* it was *kathakali.*

Kathakali as a performative form has primary origins in Kerala, a south Western state of India. The codified form of dance-drama emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its form was popularised during the eighteenth century upon earlier conventions of the tradition and at the start of the twenty-first century it exists as:

> (1) an inherited collection of established ways of feeling, thinking and doing passed on through generations, and (2) the active and ongoing process of transmitting what has been handed down orally, through entrainment, enculturation and/or written records.
>
> Zarrilli 2000: 17

The cultural implications of this lineage are embedded as the narratives of *kathakali* dance-dramas remain constant given their derivations in Hinduism's religious epics, the *Ramayana, Mahabharata* and *puranas* episodes. *Kathakali* has contemporary relevance and yet its heritage, narrative origins and means of storytelling inform every aspect of the performance, and most likely, a southwest Indian audiences' reception of it.[74]

The codified form of *kathakali* is culturally specific and as such it relies upon heritage and narrative. It is demonstrated through presentational means that include character types determined by elaborate costume and makeup, musical accompaniment and gestural language that incorporates the hands, face and eyes.[75] When the Théâtre du Soleil opted to use *kathakali* in *Les Atrides* they disregarded the complexities of its cultural specificity and instead relied on simulation. I use Baudrillard's term here because simulation 'is the generation by models of the real without origin or reality: a hyper real' (1994: 1). Though *kathakali* has form in reality,

[74] I specify here because I do not wish to imply that all Indian identities are homogeneous. Referring to Shevtsova, I acknowledge that India is a nation of 'fourteen major languages, some 220 dialects and an indeterminate number of religions (1997:100). The language of *kathakali* is a highly Sanskritised Malayalam and its religious basis is Hinduism, and so *kathakali* will provoke different processes of reception for audiences in India depending on how they identity themselves ethnically, culturally and religiously.

[75] *Kathakali* is identifiable as an Indian performative form for the reasons already discussed. However, according to dance scholar V. P. Dhananjayan it is an inter-cultural form because 'Kerala, situated as it is on the coast of the Arabian Sea, claims ancient contact with countries like Egypt, Syria, Rome and Greece […] It is said that even *kathakali* shows traces of the influence of other countries' (1991: 26).

the Théâtre du Soleil's pastiche is only concerned with surface aesthetic traits. Théâtre du Soleil's motivation for aestheticising *kathakali* in a type of pastiche can be viewed as a result of the postmodern condition. Jameson considers pastiche a decidedly postmodern trait and he claims that it arises as a part of postmodernism because 'stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles' (1998: 18). If stylistic innovation is dead, as Jameson claims here, then the Théâtre du Soleil's pastiche can be viewed as a means of overcoming this issue and instead finding a way for innovation *through* imitation.

Performer Simon Abkarian has confirmed that the performance style for *Les Atrides* was built on adaptation and pastiche; he said 'we borrow, we steal; all great artists do this. We have to copy from each other. Everything is here. There is nothing to invent any more, but lots of things to create and recreate' (Salter 1993b: 68). His statement echoes Mee's (re)making project philosophy (outlined in Chapter Two) that there is 'no such thing as an original play' (n. d.: n. pg.); the only difference in their sentiments is that Abkarian is referring to movement and Mee to dramatic narratives. By removing the apparently impossible challenge of finding complete originality in adaptation, the Théâtre du Soleil are able to place greater onus on their reception of the source texts to find new ways of staging it. Processes of creating and recreating become about understanding what is personally essential about the source materials and finding a way to reframe it accordingly.

For Mnouchkine, the essential part of the adaptation process for *Les Atrides* was about finding a faithful way to stage an ancient Greek tragedy. As such, the company began rehearsals armed with the four 'exact' translations of the plays originally written by Euripides and Aeschylus. During the rehearsal process, the company guided by Mnouchkine came to the consensus that the Greek text demanded alternate forms of communication in the cultivation of physical and musical interventions. Describing the connection between spoken text, music and dance in *Les Atrides*, Mnouchkine advised that, 'if the music and dance interpenetrate to

such an extent, it's because Aeschylus and Euripides required it of us' (Williams 1999: 203). Rather incompatibly, Mnouchkine once again reiterates her irresolvable fascination for textual fidelity as her justification for less logocentric forms of performance. Nevertheless, musical accompaniment and heightened performative forms were embedded consistently throughout *Les Atrides,* most impressively during the choral interludes. Given the recurring appearance of the four different choruses within *Les Atrides,* a choric gestural vocabulary emerged that relied on repetitions of the same motifs or refrains throughout the duration of the performance.

Aesthetics and Source Traditions: The Choruses

Choric identity in *Les Atrides* was established by unifying costumes and then driven by the medium of dance. The choreographed sequences followed a regular structure in the first three parts of *Les Atrides* as the choruses oscillated between the static delivery of their spoken text and their physical responses to it. This structure emerged as a result of the company's engagement with the source materials; as they searched for the corporeal form of the text, they decided that the choruses needed to communicate through dance or song in addition to spoken words, though never at the same time (Williams 1999: 215 - 217). Much more is known about ancient Greek song than dance and there was the option to pursue another aspect of fidelity with the materiality of the performance. However, Mnouchkine's preference was for dance and so her deviation away from the possibility of fidelity must be seen as a definite authorial act.

This new bipartite structure for the choruses, speech *then* movement, did not replicate the *strophe-antistrophe* structure of the printed text and the classical chorus. Rather, in another deviation from the ancient model, the dance breaks became abstract physical expressions of the emotions or themes within the spoken text. For example, in the opening *parodos* of *Les Choéphores,* Le Chœur describe the ghosts of the House of Atreus while inciting revenge for their violent deaths:

Those who are underground,
with all your anger accuse
and rail against those who have murdered you.

[Que ceux qui sont sous terre,
accusent de toute leur colère
et grondent contre leur meurtrier.]

Théâtre du Soleil and Eschyle 1995b: 14[76]

At the end of this speech, led by the speaker, Le Chœur burst into rapid stamping and hopping movements that attempt to capture the frenetic energy of their anger and bloodlust. This brief physical sequence is accompanied by fast tempo drumming with the same forceful energy of the choreography. Once the choreography is complete, Le Chœur continue with the spoken *parodos* in place until they are once again compelled to express the content of their spoken text through more physical means.

In a subversion of the classical convention, the choruses delivered none of the spoken text in unison; the oration of their text was always singular. Some of the choreographed sequences were also solo while the rest of the chorus members looked on. More frequently, for the first three parts of *Les Atrides* the choreography incorporated the entirety of the chorus. When dancing in unison, the choruses maintained a presentational perspective and they aligned themselves to face the end-on audience seating. For almost all the choreography, the spatial topography was linear, usually with two or three lines and four to six equidistant individuals per line. In this front-facing linear formation the choruses moved within horizontal, vertical and diagonal planes. Their physical vocabulary incorporated expressive hand gestures including, open up-turned and outward facing palms, flicked wrists, clenched fists; various combinations of travelling steps and on the spot, hops and jumps; turns, complete, accented and fragmented (with poses struck at ninety-degree intervals). Often individual moves were repeated in even rounds of four, six and eight and Catherine Schaub as Le Coryphée [Chorus

[76] Translation is my own.

Leader] vocally signalled the transitions between steps. The different parts of the physical vocabulary were assembled in different orders with variable tempos, but the core features and aesthetics remained highly recognisable therefore enhancing the intertextuality between the different choruses.

A chorus often presents a challenge to contemporary adapters of classical Greek tragedy (Sidiropoulou 2015, Ley 2007). Herbert Golder and Stephen Scully have even suggested that 'more often than not [the chorus'] spectral presence proves the impossible otherness of the Greeks' (1995: 1). Mnouchkine embraced the spectral nature of the chorus and reinforced it by cultivating additional intertextuality in the performance and extra-theatrical framing of *Les Atrides.* It is noteworthy that Golder and Scully (1995) highlight the chorus as the defining feature of Greek tragedy and yet, Mnouchkine did not pursue a fidelity driven agenda with this fundamental feature in *Les Atrides.* As consequence, one of the most conventional features of the text in printed form became one of the more overtly postmodern when in performance. The choruses with their abstract representation of text and aesthetic gloss produced by 'borrow[ing]', 'steal[ing]' and 'copy[ing]' (to use to Abkarian's terms), are postmodern (Salter 1993b: 68). The aesthetic forms are a pastiche because they imitate and celebrate a medley of aesthetics and source traditions, and, for clarification, imitation or parody in a postmodern guise does not always have to be ironic.

Parodic imitations achieve distance through critical or ironic rereading of sources (Hutcheon 2013) but any sort of imitation, even a celebratory pastiche like that in *Les Atrides* can encourage a re-examination of canonised Western texts. In *Les Atrides,* Mnouchkine's initial fidelity to the printed classical text dissipated in the materiality and theatricality of the performance event, thus reinforcing my argument that the originality of this adaptation was in its performance form. The promotion of the identity of *Les Atrides* as performance event over printed text is clearly one that the Théâtre du Soleil favours. The extra-theatrical documentation

of this production (some of which is still available through the Théâtre du Soleil's website) includes the playtexts and more importantly, four individual audio recordings of Lemêtre's complete soundtrack, two commemorative books filled with images of the production and one special edition of *Théâtre Aujourd'hui*. In legacy, the extra-ordinary materiality of *Les Atrides* continues to destabilise the authority of text – the postmodern condition *par excellence*.

Conclusion

Mnouchkine's initial choice to stage *Les Atrides* and her subsequent adaptation process can be located within the context of the postmodern condition; the most compelling reason, I contend, is the visible influence of postmodernist, nostalgic tendencies. In Chapter One I highlighted nostalgia as a driving force for the postmodern interest in classical adaptations. Nostalgia is a product of an idealised or memorialised version of the past, which Mnouchkine can be seen to possess. Hutcheon suggests that such 'nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near', and it arises partly from a 'dissatisfaction with the present' (Hutcheon and Valdés 2000: 20). In interviews preceding the creation of *Les Atrides,* Mnouchkine was certainly vocal about her dissatisfaction with Western realism and the limits of the form (Carlson 1996). Here, I have argued that Mnouchkine's nostalgia is based upon the imagined potential for a particular antiquated text to offer some universalising or essentialist truth through the medium of contemporary theatre. At the time of *Les Atrides*, this desire collided with the cultural mythology surrounding classical tragedy (given the universal themes it allegedly addresses).

Drawing on Jameson (1984), an aspect of the postmodern condition is that of temporal disruption and a weakening historicity; this influence can be seen in the *choice* to stage *Les Atrides.* The classical Greek texts' fairly unique position as living ruins links them both to the present and the ancient world, rendering them a perfect source for experimentation with the

instability of time, a key feature of the postmodern condition. Greek texts appear more frequently as recurring features within the postmodern cultural landscape, but as they remain ancient, and to a significant extent unknowable, they will continue to present never wholly answerable questions that act as an invitation towards imprinting a new and individualistic authorship. Although the company demonstrated an interest in re-authoring texts through adaptation earlier in their history, choosing to adapt a classical text in the early 1990s reflects the wider concerns of that cultural moment, and to this day *Les Atrides* is the only adaptation of an ancient Greek text in the company's repertoire. The source texts and ancient Greek language of Aeschylus and Euripides provided Mnouchkine with the tools to negotiate her relationship to the classical past but there is simply no way of *de facto* establishing how those texts appeared in the original performance context. Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil substituted temporal distance for a geographical or cultural distance and looked to performance traditions that could render the aesthetic elements of the adaptation extra-ordinary. As early as the fifth century BCE, representations of otherness appeared on the stage; the Théâtre du Soleil's approach has great precedent.[77] However, the intertextual layering of the variety of different codified forms, foregrounded by the ambitious attempt to offer a rereading of Aeschylus's original trilogy with a prequel from an alternate author, makes *Les Atrides* overtly postmodern and iconoclastic, rather than universal.

The intertextual framing of the tragedy is one of the most radical features of the adaptation. From the pre-show installation of the faux Terracotta soldiers to the post-show memorabilia in the form of an 'official' photography book and original soundtrack CD (compact disc), there was a demonstrable interest in cultivating a narrative beyond the sum parts of the four dramatic source texts. The post-performance souvenirs help to define the

[77] Scholars such as Zeitlin (1990) have cited the representation of otherness in *The Persians* [472 BCE]. Additionally, Euripides' *The Bacchae* [405 BCE] features the god Dionysus in human form and in the Epilogue, he describes his origin, the distance he has travelled and the alien customs he brings with him to Thebes.

identity of *Les Atrides* while also providing additional forms of economic revenue. This commodification of the theatrical experience is a by-product of late stage or multinational capitalism, a concern I revisit in the following chapter with reference to the Almeida Greeks season, and the manner in which the Almeida sought to enhance its economic benefits.

Mnouchkine acknowledges intertextual forms of communication as a new cultural norm and exploits this in her own work. In response to this and to fully appreciate the complexity of this adaptation process, as I have repeatedly argued, *Les Atrides* must be considered an entirely new work and analysed in terms of all its deliberate intertextual richness. Since she acknowledges that her history is a shared global history and her cultural identity is fluid, Mnouchkine identifies as a postmodern individual (Carlson 1996: 89). If Mnouchkine holds this belief, then a critique of Orientalism is paradoxical. In the appropriation of alternate performance traditions, Mnouchkine may be simply seizing on the egalitarian ideology of the postmodern condition, by dispensing with cultural hierarchies and imitating its proclivity for rapid and indiscriminate cultural consumption.

As postmodernism collides with an increasingly globalised environment, Jameson observes that 'cultures around the world are placed in tolerant contact with each other in a kind of immense cultural pluralism […] expressed by a new richness and variety of cultures in the new world space' (Jameson 1998: 57). However, this explanation and Mnouchkine's tendency towards Orientalism cannot be unequivocally accepted. Postcolonial scholar Said, who so rigorously analysed Orientalism, has articulated that cultural exchange even in the twenty-first century is not equitable (2003: xii). Said claims that despite lingering cultural hierarchies, neither the concept of the 'orient' or 'the concept of the West has any ontological stability' (ibid). Nevertheless the perceptions and misconceptions remain influential because identity 'of self or of "other" is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as contest involving individuals and institutions' (Said 2003: 332). If cultural

exchange is in fact a contest then Mnouchkine must be more sensitive to this and her own privileged position. As there has not yet been a complete dismantling of cultural imbalances, Mnouchkine's one dimensional response to the charges of Orientalism exposes that she lacks a self-reflective understanding of her own cultural setting and her power within it.

Postmodernism as a cultural shift encourages the individual to be both complicit and simultaneously critical; one cannot 'escape representation' and thus it is necessary to 'deconstruct [one's] own representational means' (Auslander 1994: 31). In *Les Atrides* Mnouchkine fails to acknowledge her own complicity in othering the source traditions, particularly given her own status and her cultural power as a successful European director. Consequently, Mnouchkine's explanation that the use of these traditions to create a deliberate 'theatre of images' that would allow the audience 'to know in what ways you share my world, in what ways do we live in the same world' (Williams 1999:214) seems less than fully fleshed out.

Epilogue: *Kanata - Épisode I - La Controverse* and *École Nomade*

Recent events have revealed that Mnouchkine, a self-proclaimed citizen of the world (Carlson 1996: 89), still feels a personal entitlement to global history and an array of international cultural forms. In 2015 Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil began a collaboration with Quebec national, theatre practitioner and playwright Robert Lepage on a production entitled *Kanata*. The intention for *Kanata* was to tell the story of the cultural genocide of indigenous peoples in Canada. In the early stages of rehearsal Mnouchkine and Lepage consulted with artists and representatives from First Nations communities. However, as the scheduled premiere drew closer, a group of twenty First Nations artists and activists published an open letter stating that their histories have been told too many times by those outside of the communities and as 'no First Nations people or organisations are [directly] involved in the production' that 'our invisibility in the public space, on the stage, does not help us' (*Le Devoir* 2018: n. pg.).[78] This statement prompted a renewed dialogue between Mnouchkine, Lepage and the signatories of the open letter but public controversy resulted in a loss of funding and the Canadian premiere was ultimately cancelled.

The production has since been reworked and premiered later in 2018 at the Cartoucherie under the name *Kanata - Épisode I - La Controverse* [*Kanata – Episode One – The Controversy*]. With reference to the production, Mnouchkine was asked for her understanding of the term 'cultural appropriation'; she claims that the term,

> evokes nothing for me because there can be no appropriation of what is not and has never been physical or intellectual property [...] The stories of groups, hordes, clans, tribes, ethnicities, peoples, nations, finally, cannot be patented, as some claim, because they all belong to the great history of humanity.
>
> Gayot 2018: n. pg.[79]

[78] Translation is my own: 'qu'aucun Autochtone ou organisme autochtone ne prend part dans la pièce' and '[n]otre invisibilité dans l'espace public, sur la scène, ne nous aide pas'.

[79] Translation is my own: 'n'évoquent rien pour moi car il ne peut y avoir appropriation de ce qui n'est pas et n'a jamais été une propriété physique ou intellectuelle [...] Les histoires des groupes, des hordes, des clans, des tribus, des ethnies, des peuples, des nations enfin, ne peuvent être brevetées, comme le prétendent certains, car elles appartiennent toutes à la grande histoire de l'humanité.

Mnouchkine's response presents a vision of an almost utopic world without a colonialist history. However, lingering colonial systems and structures remain in effect in the twenty-first century. Mnouchkine made follow up comments that stated that the response to *Kanata* was a form of artistic 'censorship' (ibid) and this only emphasises that she has not or is not willing to engage with the emerging debates about the importance of representation within the arts. At the time of writing the production is touring internationally, and the questions remain as to whether Mnouchkine's future endeavours will be more sensitive to topical cultural debates.

Alongside their theatrical performances, in 2015 the Théâtre du Soleil also initiated a concerted effort to expand their international reach and influence through the founding of the *École Nomade*, a series of internationally focused community workshops held in affiliation with prestigious institutions around the globe. Workshops took place throughout the summer and autumn of 2015 in Chile in association with the Fundaçion Teatro A Mil, in Sweden in association with Stockholms Dramatiska Högskola and in England with the support of Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) at the Classics Centre, University of Oxford. As recently as January 2018, the company completed a three-week workshop in Puducherry in association with the Indianostrum Theatre, India, and the French Institute of India.

The *École Nomade* workshops are intended 'to establish an exciting new international experiment in creative collaboration', and if the promotional materials are to be believed, 'the adventure that is *École Nomade* has only just begun' (APGRD 2015: 1 - 2). The aim to create a forum for international creative collaboration appears to be a repetition of the company's own practice of *création collective*. Although it is too early to fully dissect this ongoing activity, it is useful to close this chapter with a few concluding thoughts about this project.

Questions arise as to whence the intentions of this project emerged and, in light of the discussion within this chapter and the recent controversy surrounding *Kanata*, whether or not

encouragement of a truly internationalist theatre form can be democratic in the contemporary climate. In titling the project *École Nomade*, there is a nominative suggestion in 'École' that the workshop will be didactic. Demonstrating the international appeal of the company and Mnouchkine as one of the most famous female directors of the twenty-first century, each workshop so far has been oversubscribed, thus further proving the capacity for theatre (and celebrity) to breach national borders. In a globalised world, geographical and national borders are continually losing traction but practitioners such as Mnouchkine must be astutely aware that unfortunately, there still exists a Western hegemony that influences even postmodern cultural exchange.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ALMEIDA GREEKS SEASON: NAVIGATING THE *ZEITGEIST*

Introduction

As noted in the Introduction, in 2015 the number of Greek adaptations on UK stages was so great that it was heralded as a 'Grentrance' (Rebellato 2015: n. pg.); and, the Almeida Greeks season was a highly visible part of this phenomenon. The landscape in 2015 was so saturated that productions based on the same classical source text appeared in different theatres almost simultaneously. Given that 2015 and the surrounding years reflect a similar resurgence in classical adaptations as seen in the early 1990s, I consider a selection of case studies from the latter period to complete my analysis of postmodern adaptations of Greek tragedies. A topical study engaging with contemporary adaptation theory stands to benefit from more recent examples, and the scope and ambition of the Almeida Greeks season coupled with its large audiences, artistic impact and critical acclaim, make it a suitable choice for my final case study.[80]

Alongside premieres of *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea,* the Almeida curated a season that incorporated a number of other Greek inspired events and performances. In this chapter I argue that these plays combined with the other events of the wider theatrical season offer a unique model for considering the adapted theatrical texts as well as the character of the cultural context that informed them. Further, the postmodern adaptive strategies used throughout the season provide a holistic example of the Almeida as a theatrical institution that is attempting to respond to some of the key concerns of the early twenty-first century *zeitgeist.*

[80] Robert Icke's *Oresteia* was particularly well received and earned a total of four Olivier nominations in 2016; Best Actress Lia Williams, Best Set Design Hildegard Bechtler, Best Lighting Design Natasha Chivers, and Best Director for Icke, who won his category. The Greeks season as a whole was positively received with the *Evening Standard*, for example, describing it as 'one of this year's abiding glories' (Almeida 2015j: n. pg.).

Rupert Goold, as recently appointed Artistic Director of the Almeida, commissioned three tragic adaptations specifically for the 2015 Greeks season. Each of the dramatic source texts was adapted by a different individual and produced as a stand-alone performance. An adaptation of *Oresteia* was both written and directed by Robert Icke. *Bakkhai* was written by Anne Carson and directed by James Macdonald. *Medea* was written by Rachel Cusk and directed by Goold himself. Goold claims that the writers of the three primary source texts, Aeschylus and Euripides, 'took society's old myths and made them new: changed them, exploded them, set them loose as contemporary stories that spoke to their city […] We want to follow their example' (2015: 127). Goold suggests that the classical tragedies at the centre of the Greeks season were an early prototype for adaptation and they responded directly to their contemporary moment. In commissioning new adaptations of these tragedies Goold set out to achieve a similar result, except two millennia later. Prompted by Goold's mission statement, in their writing Icke, Carson and Cusk undertook their own processes of adaptation, attempting to navigate the distance between the antiquated source text and their subjective experience of the broader *zeitgeist.* Additional processes of adaptation then occurred in the transpositional staging of the written playtexts. Each of these various approaches comply with my continuum definition of adaptation while, still, producing dramatically different outcomes. As such, my postmodernism-driven critique considers the broader Greeks season and each of the adaptations independently.

Despite the overt association with the original material I view the Almeida's productions, similarly to those featured in the earlier chapters, as new texts. Proceeding from Hutcheon's argument, these productions must be theorised as adaptations due to the revisioning process undertaken (2013: 7 - 8), namely the intertemporal shift that attempts to present the ancient tragedies as topical or accessible to contemporary audiences visiting the Almeida in 2015. Though new, the classical plays and by default the adaptations featured within the

Almeida Greeks season maintain canonical status in the Western World and Goold's choice to programme them acknowledges and reinforces this cultural capital. Working within the context and epoch of postmodernism I thus examine whether and to what extent these contemporary adaptations question established ideologies or preconceptions about these works and the Western canon more broadly. All adaptations, even those that do not intentionally seek to reflect the cultural, social or political *zeitgeist* require acts of '(re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation' (ibid). Therefore, I address the different creative interpretations and interventions to highlight how the texts are altered in the act of adaptation, and what, if anything, remains unaltered.

The relatively recent nature of the Greeks season means that there is, currently, limited available critical discourse. However, Laera's 'On Killing Children: Greek Tragedies on British Stages in 2015' (2015) and Rodosthenous' Introduction to *Contemporary Adaptation of Greek Tragedy: Auteurship and Directorial Visions* (2017) offer some brief useful commentary on selected productions. As evidence of the continually evolving nature of postmodern knowledge and communication, my analysis within this chapter relies more noticeably on digital content; I make use of newspaper reviews and articles, published interviews, selected blogs and marketing materials produced by the Almeida.

Chapter Outline

In the same way I considered the extra-theatrical elements of *Les Atrides* in Chapter Three, in the opening section of this chapter I examine the entire Almeida Greeks season as an elaborate framing device for the three plays at its centre. Expert panel discussions and post-performance 'talkback' sessions were built around the three core plays, *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea* and I consider the different parts of the season interdependently because of the deliberate links between them. The plays were commissioned and produced as explicit adaptations of chosen

source texts from the fifth century BCE Greece. However, the other events and activities represented different, more interpretative or abstract forms of adaptation. I outline what these events were and question why they were included as part of the broader Almeida Greeks season.

In the second section, I explore the relationship between the Greeks season, potential theatre communities and the Almeida's artistic and institutional identity. Theatre can be a site for forming transitory communities and as the Greeks season was 'inspired in form and spirit by the Greek Dionysia' (Goold 2015: 127), I question if this season may have represented an attempt to cultivate an idealised form of community built on the classical notion of the *polis*. With reference to what Dunn (1998) has described as the postmodern identity crisis, I consider how the Almeida constructed and promoted a self-determined identity, which is articulated within their mission statement. Close examination of this mission statement leads to discussion of the theatre architecture, the historical functionality of the space and its geographical location in relation to the Almeida's institutional and artistic identity. The following section considers the cultural, economic and political context of 2015 and the years immediately preceding it to address the rationale behind the programming of this season at the Almeida Theatre. I briefly consider the influence of the historic and political, reflecting on whether 'Brexit', austerity, war and terrorism are potential factors that motivated a season entirely built around tragedy.

With the aim of interrogating the dramaturgical and adaptive interventions offered by the different playwrights and directors, the final three sections comprise of a close reading of the printed playtexts for *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea* as well as an examination of the live productions. In *Oresteia,* Icke uses numerous postmodern-informed strategies throughout his adaptation. Selecting specific examples from the performance I analyse its fluctuating temporal quality, including the deliberately implicit tactics that invite the audience to question the reliability of the narrative and of time itself. I describe the carefully crafted aesthetic of the

mise en scène in order to establish the technological and media interventions as radical dramaturgical revisions. I focus on Icke's revisionist approach to fidelity, examining the implications of prioritising audience and reception over the classical source material to propose that this evidences a clear postmodern agenda.

The issue of fidelity in adaptation also arises in my discussion of *Bakkhai.* Within the broader context of the Greeks season, this production appeared to be the most concerned with the notion of fidelity. I question how Carson's adaptation of the source text negotiated a fidelity agenda and Goold's request to take 'the Greeks out of the Attic' (2015: 127). I examine the chorus of BAKKHAI as presented in the playtext and performance and consider whether, within the postmodern context, adaptation that is performatively reverential of its ancient Greek source can ever fully respond to a more contemporary cultural *zeitgeist.* Furthermore, certain dramaturgical choices within *Bakkhai* provoke questions about the representation of gender and the political implications of overlooking such a topical concern.

Analysis of extra-theatrical materials reveals that Cusk and Goold intended their adaptation of *Medea* to prioritise the new context of the adaptation rather than the ancient one. I question whether their chosen dramaturgical strategies such as unreliable narrators, multiple modes of storytelling and an almost episodic form supported this aspiration or created an uneasy duality between the two temporalities. Cusk opted to revise fundamental aspects of the classical source according to her reception of it, leading me to consider whether this *Medea* could be described as an adaptation of Euripides' classical source and, simultaneously, as an autobiographical adaptation.

The Greeks Season: Context and Rationale

The Almeida Theatre was founded in 1980 and the building that houses the main stage was originally constructed as the base for the Islington Literary and Scientific Institute in 1837.

From the beginning this space and those engaging with its activities were, as the theatre now claims, invested in undertaking worldly inquiry (Almeida n. d.: n. pg.). The Almeida's architecture and geographical location are thus, centric forces in the formation of its artistic identity. Located in Islington, in North East London, the Almeida defines itself as an advocate for British artists while acknowledging that the theatre and those same artists now exist as part of broader, global theatrical landscape. Following the tenures of founder Pierre Audi (1980 - 1990), Jonathan Kent and Ian McDiarmid (1990 - 2002), and Michael Attenborough (2002 - 2013), Goold became the Artistic Director of the Almeida Theatre in September 2013. During the earliest stages of his tenure, Goold worked with a 'timely' desire to 'reboot the theatre by asking how did it all begin, why are these [canonised] stories still relevant[?]' (Galton 2015: n. pg.). In seeking answers to these questions, ultimately Goold deemed it necessary to return to the origins of Western theatre and this was the incentive for the Almeida Greeks season.

Initially the plan was to take a full year in order to stage every extant, complete Greek play however, 'it was deemed a little, well, hubristic; a season was considered quite enough' (Goold quoted in Williams 2015: n. pg.). The singular Almeida Greeks season took place between May and November 2015 and featured three core productions of *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea* and other events to complement them. These included a series of ticketed *Proagon Events;* panel discussions focusing on the central topic explored in the selected plays and other canonical Greek texts. Basing the discussions on the 'Socratic model of enquiry and provocation' (Almeida 2015a: n. pg.), Goold designated the content for three of the panels after conversing with the lead artists on each production.[81] The debates featuring the creative artists and other relevant expert individuals aimed to address the issues that still retain contemporary relevance despite the mythical origins of the Greek tragedies.

[81] Tickets for the *Proagon Events* were £7 full price, £5 for concessions. The title *Proagon* derived from the name of the pubic and 'official theatrical presentation which took place a few days before the Great Dionysia began […] to give an exposition of some kind of the dramas with which they were to compete' (Wilson 2015: n. pg.).

In the case of *Oresteia*, a panel of philosophical and religious scholars met on 2nd July 2015 to discuss the notion of justice under the title 'From Atreus to Pistorius'. Writer and director Icke featured as part of the public panel and declared justice the core theme and key dramaturgical driver embedded within his production.[82] For the second production, *Bakkhai,* the expert panel met on 20th August 2015 this time focusing on the notion of the divine – with the rather pithily titled conversation 'From Dionysus to Dawkins' – and featured experts with specialisms in religion, politics and theatre.[83] The third panel on 15th October 2015 worked with a provocation 'From *Medea* to Mumsnet' and rather than addressing a theme, used a quotation from Philip Larkin 'They fuck you up, your Mum and Dad' (Parr quoted in Almeida 2015i: n. pg.).[84] The experts of this panel were conspicuously all female unlike the other panels and included notable feminist journalists and authors including Cusk, playwright for *Medea*, and Polly Vernon.

The other discussions that completed the series of debates aimed to explore alternate texts and their themes, and were entitled 'From Aristotle to Albert Square', 'Why Greeks Matter' and '*Oedipus* Explored' and more generally debated the mythology and history that influenced Athens and the theatre of fifth century BCE.[85] The titling of the majority of the sessions with the comparative binaries that draw upon popular culture references may serve to

[82] 'From Atreus to Pistorius': the panel, inspired by the notion of justice as exemplified in the *Oresteia,* featured writer director Robert Icke, academic and philosopher A. C. Grayling and Literature/Comparative Drama scholar Dr. Jennifer Wallace.
[83] 'From Dionysos to Dawkins': the discussion was led by Artistic Director Rupert Goold who was accompanied by Dr. Joan Taylor a Professor of Christian Origins and Second Temple Judaism, and broadcast journalist and President of Birkbeck University, Joan Bakewell.
[84] 'From Medea to Mumsnet': Dani Parr, the Almeida's Director of Participation was joined by writer, and adapter of *Medea,* Rachel Cusk, Sarah Crown the editor of Mumsnet and feminist writer and journalist Polly Vernon.
[85] 'Why Greeks Matter': hosted by Rupert Goold was primarily a discussion about how and why contemporary directors adapt Greek plays. Accompanying Goold was Deborah Warner and Ivo van Hove. Took place on 8th June 2015.
'*Oedipus* Explored': featured director Bijan Sheibani, Professor Edith Hall from the Department of Classics and Centre for Hellenic Studies at King's College London, and psychoanalyst Dr David Bell, Past President of the British Psychoanalytic Society. Took place on 6th September 2015.
'From Aristotle to Albert Square': featured Classics Professor Edith Hall, Charlotte Higgins Classicist and chief cultural writer for *The Guardian, The Guardian* columnist Giles Fraser and actor/director Fiona Shaw. Took place on 22nd October 2015.

highlight a growing public interest in adaptations of classical theatre. However, it is more likely that the potential correlations between ancient and contemporary culture are used for publicity purposes; the marketing of these discussions can be seen to exploit the tendencies for nostalgia in the postmodern period. The panel titles reference the contemporary media landscape in an attempt to reiterate the relevance and appropriateness of these theatrical adaptations in this particular moment. In the production of *Oresteia,* according to Icke, 'there are shades of *The Sopranos* and *House of Cards* (Icke even says he had the ultimate statesman-like couple, the Clintons, and their much-publicised marital disputes in mind for Klytemnestra and Agamemnon)' (Allfree 2015: n. pg.).[86] The titling of one of the panel sessions, 'From Aristotle to Albert Square', references British television directly as Albert Square is the primary setting for the residents of the long-running British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) soap *EastEnders.* There is also a reference to a high-profile celebrity murder trial, that of South African Olympic and Paralympic athlete Oscar Pistorius. Pistorius' trial proved to be a 'legal saga that has attracted worldwide attention' between 2014 - 2016 after he was accused and found guilty of shooting his South African girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp (Tran 2016: n. pg.).[87]

Alongside panel debates built around the adapted texts, the Almeida attempted to capitalise on other cultural aspects related to the dominant perception of classical Greek theatre and the theatre programming looked to the City Dionysia in other ways. There was, for example, an attempt to embrace a Dionysian spirit in the *Dionysos Events*:

> musical celebrations with acclaimed EARLY OPERA COMPANY, *Bakkhai* composer ORLANDO GOUGH alternative all-female ensemble GAGGLE, and celebrated DJs playing in our café bar late into the night […] and the "phenomenal" (*Time Out*) award-winning drag artist DICKIE BEAU.

[86] As with previous chapters when referring directly to character names and titles of plays I use the format that best replicates the individual adapter, hence the spelling here of Klytemnestra and the capitalising of character names.

[87] Double, transfemoral amputee sprinter Pistorius fatally shot Reeva Steenkamp, in their home on Valentine's Day 2013. Throughout his trial Pistorius claimed that he had mistaken Steenkamp for an intruder. Pistorius was found guilty of culpable homicide in 2014 for which he received a five-year prison sentence. The leniency of this charge has since been appealed after public outcry when Pistorius was released on house arrest in 2015. In 2016 the Supreme Court of Appeal overturned the original conviction and on 6th July 2016 Pistorius' was sentenced to six years imprisonment for murder (Tran 2016).

Almeida 2015a: n. pg.

Alongside the *Dionysos Events* there was the *Eos Events* and the *Satyr Events*. *Eos Events*, titled after the ancient Greek goddess of the dawn, included performative events of a durational quality that took place throughout the night or extended over the course of many hours and locales.[88] Events such as the *Midnight Run,* a twelve-hour reading of *The Odyssey* in locations across London and a 50-member cast reading of the full *Iliad* expanded beyond the walls of the theatre, re-enacting a replica of the Dionysia festival tradition of procession (Goldhill 1990). *Satyr Events*, titled to suggest the ancient Greek tragi-comedy satyr plays, included staged readings of three adaptations of classical comedies by Aristophanes; *Frogs, Wasps* and *Lysistrata.* The texts were only performed twice each and they were publicised as 'revitalised and reimagined' adaptations (Almeida 2015a: n. pg.).[89] These were staged in the main house but, like the satyr plays of the City Dionysia, these performances appeared secondary to their more prestigious tragic counterparts. Other programmed *Satyr Events* focussed on interaction with community and included events titled 'The Big Fat Greek Quiz' and 'Family Day', the latter consisting of activities aimed at children between the ages of 5 - 14 and their families.

Part of the Greek season attempted to target a young adult demographic with the performance event *Labyrinth*, five short works generated by a series of young artist workshops.[90] The plays presented in *Labyrinth* were inspired 'by the Greek canon and look at themes such as family, friendship, love, death and social media' and were 'written, performed, directed, stage managed and produced by talented Young Friends of the Almeida' (Almeida 2015f: n. pg.). The Young Friends of the Almeida (YFA) is a now defunct outreach scheme

[88] The goddess Ēōs is referred to within *The Iliad* [8 BCE] and *The Odyssey* [8 BCE] by Homer.
[89] A new version of *Frogs* written by Ben Schiffer, Blanche McIntyre and Alex Andreou was directed by Blanche McIntyre and performed on 21st/22nd August 2015. *Wasps* was both adapted and directed by Fiona Laird and performed 18th/19th September 2015. The final play of the three *Satyr Events* was performed 16th/17th October and it was an adaptation written by Germaine Greer and Phil Willmott based on the source text of *Lysistrata* entitled *Lysistrata: The Sex Strike,* directed by Rebecca Hill.
[90] *Labyrinth* was performed twice on Sunday 9th August 2015.

designed for individuals aged 13 - 25 who lived in Islington or its neighbouring boroughs.[91] YFA Membership offered free participation in workshops and performances related to the scheme, and reduced ticket prices to see performances on the Almeida's main stage in an attempt to attract individuals with limited financial resources. The *Labyrinth* performance was a consolidation of the theatre's broader outreach initiative and the community intention that inspired the satellite events of the Greeks season.

The diverse range of performances and activities featured within the Almeida Greeks season can be seen as the theatre's contemporary interpretation and adaptation of the City Dionysia. The model of the City Dionysia with Greek tragedies at its core permits multiplicity in forms of adaptation because it is such a recognisable starting point. The tragic plays, *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea,* are the most recognisable cultural reference points and, consequently, the main theatrical events. However, the other satellite performances and activities fulfil specific functions within the season. The use of the expert panel model and the inclusion of individuals across public and professional spheres (albeit primarily academia, journalism and theatre) demonstrated the broader cultural and educational aspirations of this season. The educational properties of the discussions reference the persisting presence of the classical in cultural, theatrical, historical, literary and classical studies to underpin a sense of worthiness in this type of examination and the season as a whole. In aligning the ancient tragedies with contemporary cultural references, the Almeida sought to collapse the difference between the past and the present. The titles of the panels promoted the three key productions which, when paired with the contemporary references, suggest the potential urgency and immediacy of the Almeida's adaptations and season as a whole.

[91] Individuals had to apply and audition in order to become members of YFA. The scheme has since been disbanded and replaced in 2014/2015 with other models of youth engagement: the 'Young Critics', 'Young Producers' and 'Young Company' schemes, with even more rigorous application and interview processes.

Labyrinth and the *Dionysos Events, Eos Events* and *Satyr Events* relied on nostalgic *ideas* of ancient Greek-ness such as bacchanalian revelry or the idealised community (*polis*) and, according to my continuum model of adaptation, these events must still be classified as adaptation as they are openly derivative. They offered alternate, somewhat immersive opportunities to engage with the same themes of the core tragic plays but in alternate performative forms; a (tame) version of the revelry that is the downfall of the Theban people in *Bakkhai* was, for example, encouraged at the late night *Dionysos Events*. Each one of the satellite elements within the Greeks season independently and interconnectedly fortified the transhistorical nature of idealised interpretations of Greek-ness. The different events were designed to appeal to different audience demographics most likely because, as David Lowenthal has suggested, 'it is nostalgia that pays the bills' (2015: 536). The Almeida season adapted historicised generalisations about the ancient Greeks in order to diversify their programming, to appeal to broader audience demographics and to find alternative economically valuable opportunities.

In the twenty-first century, in a climate of austerity and funding cuts, there are economic factors such as the generation of revenue and adherence to funding requirements that influence a programme designed to expand the theatre's audience or community. The Greeks season, programmed and led by Goold, had a specific artistic mission intentionally related to its ancient inspiration while still aiming to be commercially viable. However, I suggest that the Greeks season can also be seen to contribute to the theatre's self-determined identity (as introduced above with reference to the theatre's origins and historical context) and its subsequent relationship to its postmodern social, cultural and geographical influences beyond the architecture of the theatre space.

Institutional and Artistic Identity: Responding to the Postmodern Identity Crisis

As outlined in Chapter One, Dunn (1998) considers the unpredictable and accelerating socio-cultural changes of postmodernism as the cause for an identity crisis in the late twentieth century. The effect of postmodern culture has destabilised individual identities and, equally, 'threatened communal ties even while creating new symbolic possibilities of individual and community formation' (1998: 76). Dunn describes the individual and collective identity crisis in terms of destabilisation of the self in relation to changing institutional structures in a late capitalist setting. Institutions that were once essential for identity and community formation in the modern period have less sway over new communities and identities formed amidst the backdrop of postmodernism. Dunn defines new postmodern institutional structures and processes as 'the mass media, the workplace, and other institutions [that] are sites of social practices and technologies that produce and reproduce prevailing structures of identity' (1998: 42). In the twenty-first century these sites may include highly mediatised ones such as social media platforms and online gaming environments alongside physical sites of social performativity such as sporting events and the theatre. I maintain that Dunn's comments about the postmodern identity crisis and processes of identity and community formation are equally if not more relevant in the twenty-first century and thus, applicable in my discussion of the Almeida's institutional and artistic identity.[92]

The Almeida Theatre, led by Artistic Director Goold, has an autonomous artistic identity while simultaneously existing as an institutional structure that is a site of specific identity forming social and cultural practices. Like Mee's (re)making project discussed in Chapter Two, the Almeida has a mission statement on an 'About Us' page of their website that demonstrates an awareness of its social function within the twenty-first century. Evidence of

[92] In line with its own publications and marketing information, I use the terms 'Almeida' and 'Almeida Theatre' interchangeably throughout this chapter.

this is seen in the theatre's aims to 'make brave new work that asks big questions: of plays, of theatre and of the world around us'; work that 'makes the argument for theatre as an essential force in an increasingly fragmented society' (Almeida n. d.: n. pg.). The fragmented society that the Almeida refers to here is a feature of the postmodern condition and thus, their mission statement outlining their self-determined identity can be seen as a response that counters the corresponding destabilisation of established forms of identities and communities.

Reflecting the Almeida's interest in stabilising a community identity, Goold used Athens and its democratic *polis* as a model for promoting community with the programming of the Greeks season in 2015. In order to question the theatre and the contemporary world around it Goold asked,

> What does it mean to be a theatre in a community? What does it mean for a community to speak to itself through the language of drama in the way that Athens, that incredibly small, extraordinary state all those years ago did?
>
> Almeida 2015b: n. pg.

Goold's queries are based on a nostalgic interest in a mythologised Athenian model, the myth of the *polis,* rather than an informed understanding of it. Laera has argued that re-enacting the myth and the significance of Athens as the root of all Western civilisation 'immediately creates an idea of community – that is, a Western community, which can identity itself with the myth of its own 'origin'' (2013: 19). In the same way that certain aesthetic features became a shortcut for 'otherness' within the Théâtre du Soleil's adaptation *Les Atrides* (Chapter Three)*,* Goold's invocation of the mythic *polis* is a shortcut to help the cultivation of an idealised version of community. Laera, describing a similar exploitation of ideas of the 'classical' warns 'against essentialising mythologies about community and identity that are so often uncritically attached to revivals and adaptations of 'classical' theatre' (2013: 23). Goold's interest in establishing a stable audience community or identity is wholly valid however, his use of a mythologised version of community as a model is almost inevitably doomed to fail.

Before explicitly drawing on the Greeks as a model for community identity in 2015, the Almeida theatre looked to other histories to define features of its artistic and institutional identity. The 'About Us' mission statement demonstrates that part of the Almeida's identity is negotiated in terms of the history of their physical theatrical space in the UK and its functionality. The opening of the mission statement asserts that:

> [t]he Almeida exists to launch the next generation of British artists onto the world stage. A small room with an international reputation, the Almeida began life as a literary and scientific society [...] From the beginning, our building existed to investigate the world.
>
> Almeida n. d.: n. pg.

The Almeida Theatre's concern with promoting new British talent can be viewed as a direct response to the postmodern, capitalist setting of the twenty-first century. According to a report published by *The Stage* in 2013, in the Borough of Islington alone there are eight other professional theatres and across the whole of London there are close to 200 (Smith n. pg.).[93] The competitive capitalist economic market and the sheer number of theatres within London encourage each venue and company to identify a niche and establish themselves accordingly. For the Almeida, the historical uses of the building and its geographical placement are manifested as tangible parts of its identity amidst the wider institutional and cultural shifts that destabilise other means of identity formation.

Though the geographical influence on the Almeida's identity has remained constant, the temporal influences are more fluid. Furthermore, the Almeida's mission statement outlines the desire 'to interrogate the present, dig up the past and imagine the future' (Almeida n. d.: n. pg.). The Greeks season overtly sought a rapprochement between the present and the past and the new adaptations of the classical tragedies were commissioned with guidance from Goold to take the ancient texts and make them anew, to find ways to make them 'alive and resonant' in the present moment (Goold 2015: 127). The ephemerality of the theatre event and the stage

[93] The other theatres listed in the Borough of Islington are: King's Head, Sadler's Wells, Little Angel Theatre, Pleasance Theatre, Hen and Chickens Theatre, Old Red Lion and Park Theatre.

viewed as a site for cultural memory ensures that such temporal transposition can be readily achieved.

The Almeida's interest in multiple histories, past present and future, can be viewed as an attempt to make sense of the temporal disruptions of postmodernity. With excessive and highly mediatised new forms of culture, various temporalities find new representation that designate them as belonging to a perpetual present (Jameson 1983: 119). Thus, the weakening of historicity, identified by Jameson (1984), suggests that postmodernist logic is devoid of limiting notions of time. Using this same logic, the Almeida does not limit its temporal scope either. The Almeida's mission statement embraces a collapse in 'authentic' historical or teleological progression and subsequently suggests a distrust of the authority of prior histories. This distrust sets a tone for creative individuals, such as those involved in the Greeks season, to interpret those same histories with both a casual disregard and an autonomous approach to means of reception and interpretation. This creative freedom to adapt any text without limitations in this postmodern cultural moment is one explanation for the Greeks season, however, there are other broader contextual issues at play that are reflected in the 2015 season, as I go on to discuss.

Greek Tragedy in 2015

Settis states that ancient history has become universal and despite a continually renewing postmodern scepticism, this lens through which culture in Europe is viewed is already too widely established and recycled to enable a robust dismantling (2006: 1 - 8). As a result of this, in the expanding globalised culture the 'landscape is becoming increasingly dominated by the image of 'classical' civilisations (particularly the Greek one) as the sole and unequivocal root of all Western civilisation' (Settis 2006: 2). Goold acknowledges this cultural lineage and throughout the Greeks season implicitly seeks to establish a connection between past and present.

Classical tragedy in the postmodern cultural environment escapes limitations of time and space but it still retains a semblance of its previous cultural status. Adaptations of texts, ideas or figures associated with the classical possess a particular type of cultural value, no matter how radical the adaptation or how tenuous the link. This status is knowingly utilised in the main three adaptations, *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea,* as they retain the classical titles while offering seemingly major reworkings of their source materials. The choices made by the different adapters affect the fundamental nature of the source text by changing the form, narrative, dramatic context or structure. For example, *Oresteia* writer and director Icke restructures Aeschylus's trilogy into four parts instead of three; and *Bakkhai* director James Macdonald uses metatheatricality to highlight the artificiality of the tragedy in performance and eliminate its elusive *catharsis*.

A contributing factor in the rise of Greek adaptations in the twenty first century, and 2015 specifically, is the ongoing cultural penchant for recycling inspired by the persisting ideologies of postmodernism. Writing in 2013 and reflecting on the seven years since the first edition of her seminal *A Theory of Adaptation,* Hutcheon observes that 'proliferation of adaptation has continued apace, of course; our thirst for retelling stories has not been quenched in the least' (xix). One explanation for this is economic. Another explanation is that recycled cultural materials, if recognised, can lead to individuals questioning their previous relationship to, or encounters of, any of the antecedent source materials.

Postmodernism is based on forms of questioning and accordingly, postmodern uses of recycling can subvert any pretence of original authority by raising questions about authorial agendas, political positions or cultural traditions. As discussed in Chapter One, Settis highlighted that the historic rebirth and recycling of all things classical has had different context or identity specific agendas (2006). Irrespective of these different agendas, in the twenty-first century the cyclical history of classical rebirths has resulted in general representations of the

classical being more visible than ever. Amidst this mass of representations are numerous multimedia adaptations of Greek tragedies that exist in complex intertextual webs. Greek tragedy has become a persistent object for postmodernist questioning as the repeated recycling makes it a recognisable cultural reference point with a dense palimpsestuous nature. Recycled tragedy offers a wealth of associative and intertextual counterparts and this includes the mythologised perception that the tragic genre is part of the origins of Western theatre.

The Almeida Greeks season acknowledged the Greek tragedies as the origins of Western theatre. Further, the Almeida emphasised the frame of tragedy in *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea* as these adaptations intended to pose 'big, provocative, sometimes uncomfortable questions; ones which, two thousand years later, we still struggle to answer' (Goold 2015: 127). Laera (2015) and Rebellato (2015) have both suggested other imperatives within the Almeida Greeks season related to the frame of tragedy and its potential to comment on the present moment. Laera argues that 'as the "real" Greek tragedy and the Eurozone crisis unfolded in the news, British theatres responded by programming an unusually high number of "classical" tragedies' (2015: 3). As mentioned in the thesis Introduction the high number of tragedies programmed in UK theatres in 2015 included: four adaptations of *The Oresteia,* three *Medeas,* two quite different adaptations of *Iphigenia in Aulis,* an *Antigone,* a *Bakkhai* and an *Iliad.* Rebellato (2015) also came to a similar conclusion to Laera suggesting that the political undertones in the classical tragedies aligned with topical political debates around austerity. He argues that 'the reason the Greeks seem to be speaking to us so clearly now is austerity […] There is something austere that we can find in those plays' (2015: n. pg.). Following on from the European Union's (EU) third economic bailout of Greece in 2014 and the "real' Greek tragedy' alluded to by Laera above (2015: 3), there has been larger scale political and economic unrest that crystallised around the tensions of National versus European identities. By 2016, this crisis had resulted in the UK 'Brexit' referendum and a vote that confirmed that Britain

would leave the EU.[94] Rebellato and Laera's comments about austerity are pertinent but with the benefit of critical hindsight, I suggest that the greater political undertones in the Almeida's tragedies of 2015 appear to be related to the fragmented politics of self and citizenship. With tragedy as a theatrical frame, the pertinent issues of the contemporary *zeitgeist* as perceived by each of the individual playwrights find their way into the new adaptations. In *Oresteia* for example, AGAMEMNON must make a choice as to whether he takes a course of action that MENELAUS describes as 'putting this country before your family *in real terms*' (Icke 2015: 38). This dilemma framed as state versus domesticity can be viewed as a representation of the complexity of different types of citizenship and the possibility of conflicting duties.

Another recurring feature of all three plays, *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea,* is, perhaps unsurprisingly, violence and tragic death. Greek tragedies typically containing high body counts are often seen on British stages around times of heightened international conflict and war. Following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 and George Bush's ill-informed War on Terror and subsequent invasion of Iraq in March 2003, there was an almost immediate influx of Greek adaptations and Shakespearean military styled revivals.[95] '[T]he world awakened to the threat of ISIS in the summer of 2014' (Stern and Berger 2015: 13) and so in the year preceding the Almeida Greeks season another middle-eastern conflict had come to dominate international debates.[96] ISIS, fighting under the premise of sectarian driven military jihad, solidified in June 2014 when they identified themselves as a caliphate, a

[94] At the time of writing the EU crisis continues to escalate, negotiations have broken down and yet the threat of a 'hard Brexit' has not deterred other European nations, including France, Hungary and Sweden, from debating their own EU exit.

[95] Catherine Silverstone dedicates a chapter to this phenomenon in *Shakespeare, Trauma and Contemporary Performance* (2011) with her analysis of *Henry V* (2003) directed by Nicholas Hytner at the National Theatre; Vicky Angelaki (2012) considers it in *The Plays of Martin Crimp: Making Theatre Strange* with a reference to Crimp's *Cruel and Tender* (2004), an adaptation of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*.

[96] ISIS is the most common acronym used for the organisation Islamic State and derives from the title Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham. Alternative the organisation is known as ISIL, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and Daesh 'a derogatory term extracted from its Arabic acronym' (Stern and Berger 2015: 8).

political-religious Islamic State led by a successor to the prophet Muhammad.[97] Since 2014, ISIS has engaged in ongoing and high-profile terrorist assaults on numerous Western nations, alongside the countless atrocities in every territory their members occupy. Further, the ongoing technological advances of the twenty-first century, including the developments of multiple social media outlets, has ushered in a new arena for the dissemination of conflict content and resulted in a prolific exposure of ISIS and their violent regime.[98]

The ongoing news coverage and the technological advances with their altered means of communication ensure that the proliferation of terror-related imagery pervades the public and personal media space through the presence of hand-held devices. This form of violence becomes almost omnipresent content propagated by digital media. The language used to reference these particular events or images often settles on etymologies of tragedy given the large-scale loss of life and barbarity of the images circulated by ISIS and certain Western media corporations. With the contemporary conceptualisations of tragedy entering public debate internationally it is useful to reference the Introduction to this thesis and the outline of the renewed scholarly interest in tragedy and 'the tragic' which, according to Terry Eagleton, is 'a metaphorical deviation from the actual artistic thing, a view which converts a historical development into an ontological priority' (2003: 14). Tragedy has transformed from a singular artistic genre into a question about the very nature of what it is to be human, offering a vehicle for the contemporary and urgent re-examination of issues such as suffering, citizenship and war, all of which were highly topical in 2015.

[97] Like many Arabic words, the term jihad has multiple meanings with varying interpretations. Essentially it is a word that translates as '"struggle". It has been used to describe a broad range of actions from spiritual struggles to armed conflict' (Stern and Berger 2015: xv).

[98] I refer here to violent propaganda videos such as the 4 minute and 40 second video of the beheading of American photojournalist James Wright Foley released on the social media platform Diaspora on the 19th August 2014 (Friis 2015: 725).

Oresteia: Attempting to Democratise the Classical Source

Icke's primary intention for his adaptation of Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* was not textual fidelity. Rather, he sought to make his *Oresteia* accessible for non-specialists and those audience members unfamiliar with the original mythology or tragic Greek trilogy. Icke said that:

> fifteen-year-old me would have had no idea what that story was, and would have been profoundly alienated by someone coming on the stage at the beginning, saying, "Previously, on Greek…" I suppose, for me, it was always about wanting the 15-year-old to have a really good evening and feel like they had everything available to them even if they hadn't read a word of classical Greek.
>
> Almeida 2015c: n. pg.[99]

Icke's intentionality became the inspiration for altering the structure of Aeschylus' trilogy and dramatising the narrative exposition usually found in the first choral ode of *Agamemnon.* The new, extended introduction to the action was the longest part of Icke's *Oresteia*. This is noteworthy as it was based on only 300 lines of text spoken by the Watchman and the Chorus in Aeschylus' source text.[100]

Act I of *Oresteia* served as an initiation to the myth of the House of Atreus for audiences new to it and, for those individuals already familiar with Aeschylus' *The Oresteia,* Icke's adaptation was made anew through its alternate framing. After the structural deviation of Act I, the other three parts more closely aligned with the three texts of Aeschylus' *The Oresteia*: Act II closely follows the plot of *Agamemnon,* Act III adapts *The Libation Bearers* and the final Act IV, adapts *The Eumenides.* In its full-form Icke's *Oresteia* became a four-part adaptation like Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil's *Les Atrides* which did so with the addition of a play by Euripides intended to encourage audiences towards a more sympathetic reading of

[99] In his role as Associate Director at the Almeida theatre, Icke is well placed to understand the theatre's identity and the artistic intentions for this particular theatrical season. The Almeida aims to engage with individuals not yet familiar with any forms of theatre through outreach programmes such as youth theatre (Almeida Academy, YFA) and school liaison partnerships. Therefore, Icke's direct reference to 'fifteen-year-old me' closely aligns with this focus demographic.

[100] According to information on the Almeida's website and posters distributed around the theatre on 13th June (matinee) and 1st July 2015, the running times were approximately: Act I: 1 hour 10 mins, Act II: 40 mins, Act III: 45 mins, Act IV: 30 mins.

Clytemnestra (Drake 1991). Icke's alteration, like Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil's *Les Atrides,* was equally related to audience as his act of interventional dramaturgy intended to prioritise the audience and their processes of reception over fidelity to the classical text.

Although exact replication of the source text was not a priority, Icke did still consider the role of fidelity in his process of adaptation; 'I feel [that] you have be [sic] 100 per cent faithful not to the letter of the original but to the impulse that motors the whole thing forward' (Clapp 2015a: n. pg.). The highly structured classical verse of Aeschylus was replaced with a more contemporary lexicon in order to help communicate said impulses. There are however, certain examples with *Oresteia* that are paraphrased directly from Aeschylus. This is best exemplified in the famously misogynistic speech of Athena in the final moments of Aeschylus's *Eumenides,* which comes in Act IV of Icke's *Oresteia.* Aeschylus' Athena states: 'in all things but marriage I wholeheartedly approve the male' (2010: 154); whilst Icke's ATHENE pronounces that 'in the practice of our lives, we favour men in all things (2015: 124).[101] When asked how much the adapted text in this section was like the 'original', Icke answered 'that's line-by-line Aeschylus' (Almeida 2015c: n. pg.). The text has clearly been altered so this is not entirely true; nevertheless, the impulse or meaning has remained the same.

The revised or paraphrased classical language indicates that Icke's textual adaptation involved a process of proximation. His interest in bringing the text closer to the audiences' frame of reference was also evident in the scenography of *Oresteia*. Icke worked with set designer Hildegard Bechtler to create a staging of the text that was allegedly 'timeless and geographically unspecific' (Rodosthenous 2017: 6). The set was minimalist and the furniture maintained an essential-only aesthetic design that efficiently served the dramatisation of the text.

[101] For clarity in the main body of the text I refer to the playtexts of the Almeida's new adaptations according to the new writer, for example Icke 2015, Carson 2015 and Cusk 2015. However as these authors are only credited in the titles of the plays in publication, the Almeida adaptations are listed in my bibliography according to the author of the source text, either Euripides (*Bakkhai* and *Medea*) or Aeschylus (*Oresteia)*.

> A huge working bath serves almost as a sacrificial altar and later Athene sits atop it in judgment on Orestes. Moving panels which can be either transparent or opaque allow for a multitude of spaces and images to be in play at one time. A family table is almost ever-present […] It's a wonderfully fluid and clinical set – a place where anything can happen.
>
> Collins 2015: n. pg.

The design of the space and the contemporaneous but non-specific costumes did not offer a defining epoch; it was definitely not ancient Greece but equally, it was not London in 2015. Bechtler's design was for the most part faithful to the suggestions about period and staging in Icke's brief notes on production: 'to be staged with a bare minimum of props (other than exhibits: essential to the story) and to be performed on a bare stage' (2015: 8).[102] Though the period was undefined there were persistent references to time throughout *Oresteia* that materialised with the use of one specific scenographic element.

The ambiguous temporality of the piece is a dramaturgical initiative that supports the questioning of the theatricality and construction of the theatre event. The scenographic element that most overtly queries the passage of time is a LED ticker display screen that shows the time, date and selected stage directions at particular moments of performance. The electronic contribution to the performance is an important dramaturgical one as information about the screen and its contents are explicit in the playtext and Icke's notes on production (2015: 5). This LED ticker is used to convey essential information; it highlights exhibits such as the weapons used in the various murders. The screen also marks the literal time and death of each character displaying first of all '*IPHIGENIA. TIME OF DEATH: [[TODAY'S DATE, THE TIME.]]*' (Icke 2015: 57). In highlighting the exact time of death of each character, Icke deliberately plays with the audiences' perception of time and consequently, their relationship to this historical text. The proclamations of the times of death reflect real-time interruptions within the fictional timeline.

[102] In the stage directions Icke also suggests, somewhat ambiguously that '[…] the text assumes that what will be staged is for the most part not the literal action' (2015: 8).

Time is a defining feature of Icke's *Oresteia*. Sidiropoulou suggests that in adaptations of Greek tragedy one 'integral part of re-contextualisation is the construction of a self-contained universe on stage that bears its own rules and celebrates its own semiology' (2014: 37). In *Oresteia* Icke does create a self-contained universe but, representative of his postmodern framing of the classical text, he persistently breaks the rules of this universe by challenging the temporal restrictions of it. For the majority of the production in Acts I, II and III, events progress according to the linear narrative structure found in Aeschylus' *The Oresteia*. There are, however, distinct ruptures within this structure. The whole sequence and its authority as a 'true' version of history are interrogated in the final Act, which I discuss shortly. Before the *coup de théâtre* of Act IV, one such example of the ruptures in the linear structure of the narrative comes in the middle of Act One. Icke establishes a domestic dinner scene with AGAMEMNON, KLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, YOUNG ORESTES and IPHIGENIA. Without any change of set or explanation the following exchange disrupts the domestic scene:

> ORESTES: There's a dead girl.
> DOCTOR: Where? Did you dream her?
> ORESTES: No, she's real, she was real. I don't sleep. But it's like a dream: it's hazy – in the middle, falling between.
> DOCTOR: That's true of most things now.
>
> Icke 2015: 30

The duologue continues for a few more lines without referencing the scene before or the one that follows. Once the duologue is complete the central linear narrative is picked up approximately where it left off without explanation or acknowledgment.

These DOCTOR and ORESTES duologue interjections can be viewed as performed paratexts. In other words, these scenes are an extra-textual commentary that function 'as self-reflexive signals to assure the reader as to the historical credibility' of the central text (Hutcheon 1989: 85). The *Oresteia's* paratexts, like their postmodern literary equivalent, 'disrupt our reading - that is, our creating - of a coherent, totalising fictive narrative' (ibid).

Postmodern paratexts in printed form are most conspicuously used as a devise to offer supplementary information; in the form of footnotes they can offer historical corroboration and commentary. Shifting focus from the central plot to a form of paratextual commentary also has precedent in classical Greek tragedies as the chorus performs a similar function during their *stasimon.* ORESTES' interjections should offer an affirmative account of the main narrative as he bears direct witness to the events. However, the paratextual commentary provided by the DOCTOR and ORESTES 'scenes' actually fragments the central plot rather than corroborating it or merely reflecting on it. As the performance progresses the paratextual interjections become increasingly frequent and disconcerting as it transpires that ORESTES is attempting to recollect events of his personal history. In attempting to describe events from the past ORESTES explains that his recollection 'was solid then. And now it crumbles - it breaks into memory - and I force the pieces back but […] there's holes' (Icke 2015: 67). By the character's own admission, his memory construction is unreliable and he is therefore unable to thoroughly narrate his own history.

ORESTES' reflections on the unreliability of memory recur throughout *Oresteia* but the earliest indication that the constructs of history, memory and narration are suspect comes in the opening moments of Act I. During their first exchange CALCHAS informs AGAMEMNON that '[t]his has all happened before. And more than once' (Icke 2015: 13). This statement is polysemous as, in the world of the play, it refers to the human sacrifice required by the gods and, as a self-reflexive comment, to the adapted source narrative and the practical repetition throughout the theatrical season.[103] Icke does seemingly encourage a postmodern reading of *Oresteia* as he incorporates numerous similar self-reflexive statements and uses metatheatricality in the means of representation. I will briefly discuss examples of

[103] Icke's *Oresteia* opened the Almeida's Greeks season and ran from May to July 2015.

this as seen in the ghosting of characters, the palimpsestuous ghosting of aesthetic images, the speeches of the printed text and the projection of mediatised images in certain performance moments. Though different in execution, all these strategies highlight that *Oresteia* is a retelling; a familiar story that is performatively reconstructed.

The previous theatrical conventions within Icke's *Oresteia* are undermined in Act IV when the bare stage is transformed into a dreamlike courtroom. Memory becomes a self-referential framing device for this final act as ORESTES is placed front and centre and asked to give testimony on the events of the previous three acts. In Act IV Icke prompts the audience to question the structure of the adaptation and their reception of it up to this point. As Act IV opens '*the company reassemble. They wear court robes. They are simultaneously the characters they have already played this evening, and representatives in the court case*' (Icke 2015: 104). Icke intentionally ghosts the final act with the corporeal presence of the previous characters for added significance; the female characters take on the role of prosecutors while the male characters provide ORESTES' defence. While the company adopt these new roles as representative in the court case, in the printed text their character names do not change. Consequently, KLYTEMNESTRA as prosecutor is arguing for justice for her own murder; she is both a living character and the embodiment of a spectral presence. Icke's intention may be to raise the stakes of the trial but in actuality the multi-role characters and self-reflexive frame act as illusion-compromising devices that emphasise the constructed nature of the whole theatrical event.

Part of Act IV involves recounting prior events and undertaking mimetic reproductions of those historicised moments. CALCHAS now playing the role of a court clerk, stands in the same place onstage to repeat the opening prologue and later reads, as evidence, a section of KLYTEMNESTRA's earlier text. The text from Act III is first delivered while ORESTES and KLYTEMNESTRA are knelt on the ground facing one another:

KLYTEMNESTRA:
I know what's right for you. I am your *mother.*

KLYTEMNESTRA unexpectedly bares her breast

I fed both of you from this breast, inside me,
Iphigenia – and you. You were given *life*
,

Icke 2015: 99

In Act IV it is prosecutor KLYTEMNESTRA that suggests that the courtroom 'witness it again' before getting up from behind the desk where she is seated to reposition herself in the tableau of the image from the last act (Icke 2015: 113). While CALCHAS recites the same lines from Act III, prosecutor KLYTMENESTRA replicates her previous gestures mechanically, including pulling back her robe but this time revealing only her costume underneath. This sequence is ghosted as it is a repetition with revision. The component parts are all present and yet they are made strange as prosecutor KLYTMENESTRA completes a mute demonstration of her actions immediately before her murder in tandem with the disassociated lines. The effect of the palimpsestuous ghosting is to invoke the memory and a reassessment of what has transpired previously because this reconstruction lacks the urgency of KLYTMENESTRA's earlier desperate plea for her life. This ghosted aesthetic moment reads as ultimately postmodern given its self-reflexive, ironic framing.

Alongside aesthetic self-reflexivity in Act IV, questioning self-reflexive statements are included throughout the playtext in order to challenge the authority of both the source text and the performed adapted text. In Act IV CALCHAS describes in forensic detail the injuries that resulted in KLYTEMNESTRA's death. His clinical recitation emphasises anatomy and fact with direct reference to the size and location of inflicted incisions: 'it measures four and a half by three inches in length and is found diagonally orientated at the level of the superior border of the larynx' (Icke 2015: 118). Images of the items related to the murder are projected onto the sliding panels on the main stage and simultaneously onto smaller monitors placed around

the theatre. Images such as '*EXHIBIT: TORN AND BLOODSTAINED CLOTH*' accompany the written accounts of injury to further authenticate this forensic framing (Icke 2015: 116). However, the 'factual' text is punctuated with references to its unreliability: 'some text has been lost here […] there are gaps in the text here too […] the text here is corrupted' (ibid). In response ORESTES directly challenges the reliability of events and in particular any historically corroborated version of events as epitomised by the documentation used in the courtroom.

> ORESTES:
> There *isn't* one true version. There isn't. There isn't one story - a line of truth that stretches start to end. That doesn't happen any more […] as I say *this* now, in each of your minds you create your own versions, different lenses pointing at the same thing and *seeing that thing differently.*
>
> Icke 2015: 108

Complexities of 'truth' abound within Icke's adaptation and ORESTES' speech argues for divergent receptions over a singular meaning dictated by the author. I view this speech as an indication of Icke's authorial perspective as the adapter and a deliberate challenge to the notion of a definitive text.

Hutcheon has made a similar statement regarding the problem of chronological hierarchy when critiquing adaptation; 'to be second is not secondary or inferior: likewise to be first is not to be originary or authoritative' (2013: xv). Icke's *Oresteia* does not disconnect itself from its historic source material but it seeks to dismantle the lingering modernist prejudices that venerate any source text as the definitive text. With statements that argue the absence of a singular true version, as above, Icke invites his audience or reader to consider their own position in relation to the classical canon. Icke has said that 'one of the joys of […] the Greeks is that you don't have to make a single closed-down interpretative decision' (Clapp 2015a: n. pg.). Icke here highlights his own postmodern reception-prioritising logic and further, asks his audiences to construct their own meaning and experience of this adaptation in relation to their cultural perspective.

Viewing *Oresteia* in performance, Icke's cultural perspective is clearly informed by his twenty-first century milieu. Icke changes the mode of performance from telling to showing in Act I and uses media technologies to frame other parts of the adaptation. As already discussed these dramaturgical shifts are driven by Icke's intention to make the text more accessible to a wider range of audiences. However, changing modes of performance from telling to showing in Act I enables Icke to explore alternate means of representation 'from imagination to actual ocular perception' (Hutcheon 2013: 40). During the murder of IPHIGENIA, Icke uses this opportunity with particular effect to force the audience to witness the prolicidal act rather than only hearing a spoken account of it. The visual elements of IPHIGENIA's death exemplify the clinical setting of the staging but in this instance the aural element is equally notable. Icke does not stage the account of Iphigenia led to her sacrificial altar at Aulis as described in Aeschylus' source text. Instead Icke's stage directions refer only to '*EXHIBIT: SILVER TRAY WITH THREE PAPER CUPS*' (2015: 55) to indicate the means of IPHIGENIA's death. Once IPHIGENIA ingests the contents of the cups, the aural soundscape is directed as thus: '*there's a long, long, long, long, sharp pause. Total stillness and silence. We're waiting for the child to die*' (Icke 2015: 56). This adaptation choice is a radical one as it is a marked deviation from the source text; the death is shown onstage which is a reversal of the aural means of storytelling. In the source text the events of Iphigenia's death rely entirely on spoken communication with the means of representation relying on logocentrism. In Icke's version the death relies on visual representation and the absence of language and sound. In the space and silence, Icke subverts the conventional form and encourages his audience to question the politics of AGAMEMNON's decision.

In another update to the conventional theatrical form of Greek tragedy, Icke incorporated digital media in his *Oresteia.* The LED ticker used to convey essential information was revealed in Act IV to be part of the fundamental framing device for the adaptation. Its

incorporation was directly inspired by Icke's visit to the Old Bailey in London to see the sentence hearing of a mother accused of murdering her children.[104]

> [W]hen I went to the court they had these monitors that had screens that said when court was resuming, and if you weren't back in on time you couldn't get in. At the Old Bailey there are lots of courts and there's a real sense of 'tick tick tick tick tick'.
>
> Icke quoted in Bridges 2015: 8

The use of a similar uncompromising timing device was implemented directly into the performance technology and the dramaturgical structure of *Oresteia*. At the end of each act a countdown timer began and, in the same draconian fashion, if audience members did not return in time, re-admittance into the auditorium was only possible at the next designated interval.

The *coup de théâtre* of Act IV was its implication that the audience has been watching a court re-enactment since the beginning and this prompts a complete re-examination of everything that came before. For example, moments before the end of every act the house lights came on and CALCHAS made the following announcement or a variation on it: '[p]lease be upstanding. We pause there for the first time. Thank you' (Icke 2015: 59). On first viewing these moments created a jarring liminality between the performance and audience reality. There was a clear acknowledgement of the audiences' presence in merging CALCHAS' direct address and the conventional lights-on signal that performance was finished. It initially seemed to be a self-referential or metatheatrical comment on the constructed nature of the adaptation. However, in Act IV these moments, like several others, were revealed as part of a much more elaborate and complex metatheatrical multilayering that imploded any presumptions about the narrative, frame, characters and structure. The LED ticker countdown took on a whole new function in the final act, as did the earlier use of audio-visual digital media.

On first viewing the use of digital media appeared to be part of Icke's process of proximation, of relocating the ancient text closer to his twenty-first century setting. Icke's

[104] Icke attended the Old Bailey sentencing hearing of Tania Clarence. Clarence was a 'mother from New Malden who admitted manslaughter by diminished responsibility after killing her three disabled children, a four-year-old daughter and three-year-old twin sons' (Allfree 2015: n. pg.).

Oresteia utilised technology in such a way that it made direct reference to mainstream media culture and the large scale, controlled images that are mediatised precisely for mass consumption in a digital era. During Act II video cameras were brought onstage in order to live stream parts of the action. The roving camera operators became part of the *mise en scène* and the action that unfold in real-time could be viewed via the larger than life images projected onto the back wall, or via the unmediated physical form of the characters.

The combination of both live action and digitised imagery directly refers to means of communication within the postmodern period. 'The postmodernist notion of human identity as essentially constructed like a fiction' (Butler 2002: 53) is captured, as the public personas of AGAMEMNON and KLYTEMNESTRA disseminated through the electronic devices are directly at odds with the representations of the private self in the domestic setting. Icke even notes this difference in the playtext: '*KLYTEMNESTRA is interviewed. She is more open in public than in private'* (2015: 64). The versions of identity projected by the characters within these overtly mediatised moments are visibly constructed and it is apparent that their impetus is on controlling their narratives, irrespective of their authenticity. This critique of the voyeurism this digital technology augments brings yet another meta-feature to the *Oresteia,* and it reinforces Icke's inherently postmodern approach to the overall process of adaptation.

Bakkhai: **The Issue of Reverential Fidelity**

To achieve the Almeida Theatre's aspiration for the Greeks season, to take the classical tragedies 'out of the Attic' and make them anew (Goold 2015: 127), each production needed to engage with the 2015 cultural and social *zeitgeist.* However, Carson's playtext and Macdonald's direction for *Bakkhai* (the second of the main stage productions) both appeared to prioritise fidelity to the antiquated source over their own contemporary context.[105] *Bakkhai*

[105] *Bakkhai* ran from July to September 2015.

relied heavily on nostalgic and pastiche representations of Greek-ness in the adaptation of Euripides' classical *The Bacchae* and thus, *Bakkhai* appears somewhat anomalous when compared to the other adaptations of the Greeks season. Within this section I assert that this production was presented as an unintentional and uncritical postmodern parody as Carson's and Macdonald's preoccupation with fidelity produced inconsistent poetic language and kitschy aesthetics that mixed pedestrian and overtly theatrical performative forms.

Bakkhai, like *Oresteia,* aimed to mark its status as adaptation and new work by removing the definitive article normally used in the translations of the title of Euripides' play. Playwright Carson, who is also a Professor of classics and a renowned poet, essayist and translator, altered the spelling of the title from the Latinised form to imitate the archaic orthography and better reflect the Greek influence.[106] Neil Forsyth suggests that this choice serves to 'underline the strangeness of the play' (2016: n. pg.). However, I view Carson's use of the Greek language, rather than the more Anglicised translation of it (*The Bacchae*) as one of the first subtle iterations that her adaptation sets out to retain aspects of fidelity.

In the years prior to the Almeida's commission for *Bakkhai,* Carson completed other high-profile translations of classical texts for the stage and for print, frequently revisiting the classical Greek text to produce a new translation, rather than updating a pre-existing English language translation (as both Icke and Cusk did with *Oresteia* and *Medea* respectively).[107] Carson's understanding of classical Greek gives the option of closer linguistic fidelity in her adaptations and yet, despite working from the ancient source, her translations are often 'stylistically more economical' (Simon 2007: 112). For example, as part of *An Oresteia* her

[106] Carson has received numerous awards throughout her career including the PEN America Award for Poetry in Translation in 2010 and the Guggenheim Fellowship for Poetry in 1998.

[107] Biographical information about Carson listed on the cover of *Bakkhai* notes that she has translated Sophocles' *Antigone* which 'received its world premiere at Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg, in collaboration with the Barbican in London […] Classic Stage Company in New York has produced Anne Carson's *An Oresteia* (a trilogy adapted from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Orestes*) in repertory' (Carson 2015: n. pg.). Carson has also published *Grief Lessons: Four Plays by Euripides* (2006) containing translations of *Herakles, Hekabe, Hippolytus* and *Alkestis* with brief introductory essays to each of the plays and her approach to translating them.

adaptation of the House of Atreus myth, Alistair Elliot commented that by process of Carson's translation, 'the 1,693 lines of Euripides' *Orestes* have been reduced to 1,324 lines of English' (2010: 197).[108] A reduction of over 300 lines is a substantial difference, and this streamlined approach to translation was evident in *Bakkhai* with its running time of 110 minutes without interval.[109]

Carson's streamline translations often attempt to fuse the classical source with relevant aspects of her late twentieth and early twenty-first century *zeitgeist.* Thus, Carson's process of translation and her prioritisation of fidelity appear somewhat inconsistent. In the foreword to her translation of *Electra,* Carson expresses her interest in retaining aspects of source text fidelity while exploiting linguistic and temporal idiosyncrasies brought about by her contemporary setting:

> [t]ranslating is a task of imitation that faces in two directions at once, for it must line itself up with the solid body of the original text and at the same time with the shadow of that text where it falls across another language.
>
> 2001: 41

Carson describes a Janus-face process of adaptation given her choice to look both forward and backward in the search for language. Noting this temporal contrast Ian Rae has suggested that Carson's poetic translation be viewed as a type of composition that splices together 'different epochs and speech genres, rather than an exercise in maintaining a uniform identity for the text across languages and periods' (2000: 24). *Bakkhai* has this same Janus-faced quality informing its identity as adaptation and although this duality is, possibly, to be expected with any classical adaptation, I detail shortly how Carson repeatedly emphasises the gap between the ancient and the contemporary. In the choice to highlight the distance between source and adaptation, certain

[108] *An Oresteia* was, however, not a complete translation of Aeschylus *The Oresteia*; Carson's trilogy was compiled of the works; *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus*, Electra* by Sophocles and *Orestes* by Euripides.
[109] Running time is from my own record after seeing the matinee production on 12th September 2015. This is corroborated by the production information available on the Almeida website (2015j).

features of Carson's writing appear oppositional to the Almeida's objective for the Greeks season.

The merging of two different languages and styles provides *Bakkhai* with a jarring postmodern tone which arguably does reflect and parody the twenty-first century *zeitgeist.* Interspersing the different vocabulary and styles led *Observer* critic Susannah Clapp to describe the translation as shifting between 'teasing demotic bathos (its least good mode) to tumbling lyric waterfalls and an extraordinary, jazz-like swing for the Chorus' (2015b: n. pg.). Another review by David Nice highlights Carson's tactic of 'blending irony with pure poetry' (2015: n. pg.). For example, Carson intersperses contemporary turns of phrase and references to more modern objects such as, 'You were always hotheaded – now your sounding unhinged' and 'you look like a lampshade', with heightened poetic metaphors and similes such as, '*Holiness* / is a word I love to hear / it sounds like wings to me / wings brushing the world, grazing my life' (2015: 24, 21, 25). The distinction between the different stylistic tendencies of heightened and everyday parlance means that Carson's writing has an ambiguous temporal and tonal identity. There may be a political agenda in Carson's blending of two different styles; the sharp contrasts highlighting the discrepancy between what a hermetic or elitist version of a classical text could or should be, and what a more revolutionary adaptation of the same text may be. However, as Carson incorporates both seemingly without irony, as a complete text *Bakkhai* falls short of politicised parody.

In addition to this mix of styles Carson adds untranslated Attic utterances to her text. Exclamations such as 'EUOI', 'EA' and 'PHEU PHEU' (2015: 18, 65, 66) that, 'like OIMOI or O TALAINA', can feature in her adaptations to represent 'bursts of sound expressing strong emotion' (2001: 41). Carson explains that 'it has been generally assumed that [these Attic sounds] represent a somewhat formulaic body of ejaculatory utterances best rendered into English by some dead phrases like Alas! Or Woe is me!' (ibid). Rather than attempting an

inaccurate or insufficient translation, Carson simply transposes these utterances directly from Euripides' source without further explanation and so, in these moments, the distance between source and adaptation is once again made evident. The presence of these sounds within the printed playtext alludes to Carson's interest in representing the temporal and cultural otherness of the source and yet, as *Bakkhai* was commissioned for performance, the task of deciphering and vocalising the ambiguity of the untranslated sounds becomes the responsibility of Macdonald and the actors who must perform them.

Aside from these untranslated moments, Carson's authorial intentions for the performance of *Bakkhai* are evident within the printed script. As a suggestion to include the singing and dancing conventions of the classical chorus in this contemporary performance, Carson uses a specific formatting device on the page.[110] Carson makes the dramaturgical distinction between principal characters and chorus by altering the printed graphology according to the speaker. Extended choral odes belonging to the BAKKHAI are scattered across the page with irregular numbers of words per line, an absence of normal grammatical rules and alterations in font. For example, the fourth choral ode is presented as follows:

First
his mother will spot him
ducking and dodging,
hopping and hiding,
sneaking and sniffing
from cliff to crag
and
she will call out to her maenads:

Who is this man
come to our mountain
to hunt us from peak to peak,
O Bakkhai?
Who gave him birth
Surely no woman!
His mother must be some lion, some Gorgon!

[110] Classical conventions of the tragic chorus as described by Ley (2007) are discussed in Chapter Three in the section titled: *'Les Atrides*: Creating a New Identity for the Classical Text'.

Into the throat
of
the
ungodly
unlawful
unrighteous
earthborn
son
of Echion
let justice
sink her sword
!

Carson 2015: 52

As a classicist Carson is familiar with discourse on the chorus and I view her use of this particular printed format as representative of her interest in retaining fidelity to ancient dramatic conventions. Established scholarly discourse suggests that the tragic chorus of fifth century BCE remained onstage throughout the duration of the action and 'sung' their text while performing choreographed movements (Silk 1998, Ley 2007, Goldhill 2007). I argue that Carson's graphology for the BAKKHAI be read as an authorial demand to find a heightened performative form, namely one that utilises different movements or rhythms to that of the principal characters whose text is presented in a more organised or prosaic dramatic form. Carson intentionally presents the choral text as other in keeping with the identity of the chorus of foreign, impassioned women found in Euripides' source text. In response to Carson's textual indication, director Macdonald sought a unique performative register for his chorus of BAKKHAI in the live stage production.

When directing *Bakkhai,* Macdonald acknowledged the canonised status of the classical chorus in Western drama and opted to explore dramaturgies that could reflect on history and 'listen to how things were done in other times and other theatres' (Trueman 2016: n. pg.). Macdonald's impulse led to collaboration with Orlando Gough and the creation of original choral compositions that could fittingly reproduce the dramatic conventions of the tragic chorus and Carson's printed graphology. In Carson's adaptation there are six main choral odes: the

choral entrance or *parodos* and five choral odes or *stasimon*. In performance the ten women of different ages and ethnicities that formed the chorus of BAKKHAI predominantly sang these odes using a cappella 'often 10-part philharmonic harmonies with time signatures that change nearly every bar' (Carvel quoted in Almeida 2015e: n. pg.). Such complexity was intentional as Macdonald wanted to highlight the polyphony of voices within the chorus instead of creating a homogeneous one (Almeida 2015e).

Composing the score in response to Macdonald's direction was a complex and 'painstaking slow' process; chorus member Aruhan Galieva commented that,

> the music is so intricate. A lot of the time it's almost like a soundscape as opposed to a musical piece. That was brilliant to do, because everyone's come from loads of different musical backgrounds and vocals and accents.
>
> Almeida 2015e: n. pg.

Another chorus member, Kaisa Hammarlund, added that the soundscape quality emerged organically because the majority of lines are 'owned' by one chorus member and there is 'a different accent for each line. So if it sounds a bit psychotic, it's because we're doing each other's accents and individual intonation' (ibid). The accent and characteristics of each individual voice were used to create the choral melody, and then, to enhance the erratic musicality, 'lots of whoops, yelps, ascending siren-wails and syncopated panting' were added (Cavendish 2015: n. pg.). In performance, the lyrical odes and non-verbal sounds are performed largely in unison by the ensemble and the singular origin is blurred amidst the assortment of voices replicating the original. As well as singing the text, the BAKKHAI moved and danced in unison, completing simple choreography and punctuation of their text with rhythmic beating of their *thyrsi*.[111] The protean quality of the odes created a marked distinction between the spoken text of the three principal actors and the chorus. In a similar way that Mnouchkine aimed to cultivate a highly stylised aesthetic otherness for the choruses in *Les Atrides*,

[111] '*Thyrsos*: the ritual sceptre used by the Bakkhai, made from a straight staff or wand of wood'; *thyrsi* plural of *thyrsos* (Edwards 2015: n. pg.).

Macdonald and Gough attempted to present the chorus of *Bakkhai* as other through their aural representation. Dominic Cavendish suggests that 'the idea behind Orlando Gough arrangements is to echo 405 BC practice and take us somewhere poetic-primal' (2015b: n. pg.). An attempt to reflect the poetic-primal was likewise present in the stage design and the aesthetic choices for the BAKKHAI.

The aim for the stage design was to divide the space into areas designated to the two central characters, DIONYSOS and PENTHEUS; ideally, an aesthetic representation of ancient 'conflict between rationality and irrationality' (Edwards quoted in Almeida 2015e: n. pg.). Aligned with PENTHEUS the central playing area was a stark, flat square lit in a way that it 'represents scrutiny and analysis and examination and the sort of cold, clinical, structured world' (ibid). Surrounding this square was a large mound of earth suggestive of the natural world reflecting the characteristics of DIONYSOS. The construction of the hilly mound was meticulous as the dramaturgical aim was to recreate the environment of the original staging of Euripides' *The Bacchae.* The view from the seating within the 'theatre of the great Dionysia in Athens, the contour of the skyline you see is the exact contour of these hills [onstage]. That's the kind of natural geological environment' (Carvel quoted in Almeida 2015e: n. pg.). Consequently, the primal historical site ghosted the contemporary stage design for *Bakkhai*. Carlson suggests that 'theatre spaces like dramatic texts and acting bodies, are deeply involved with the preservation and configuration of cultural memory' (2003: 132). Replicating the physical topography of the theatre of Dionysus in Eleuthereus in the fictional space of the Almeida ensures that iconography of this landscape reverberates in contemporary cultural memory. The sacred or ritual aspect of classical theatre is often lost in the process of adaptation and although the *Bakkhai* audience may have been unaware of the resemblance to this formerly sacred site, the intertextual layering of aesthetics was a dramaturgical intention.

During the *parodos*, the BAKKHAI enter the 'structured world' area of the stage and then change from their everyday contemporary costumes into uniform full-length fawn skin dresses replete with commando like face paint, ivy headdresses and an accompanying *thyrsus*. Scholars Goldhill (2007) and Taplin (2003) confirm the semiology of *thyrsi* and fawn skin for the god Dionysus and his followers. Yet, the legitimacy of representation here was undermined because of the metatheatrical implications of watching the performers carefully 'put on' or 'dress up' in their Bacchic guise before moving around the complete staging area. Nevertheless, the choice of costume and props for the BAKKHAI demonstrated Macdonald's nostalgic interest in retaining aspects of the ancient socio-religious context.

Macdonald's casting decisions likewise reflected a fidelity agenda as *Bakkhai* replicates the ancient convention for three principals to play multiple roles throughout the tragedy. All eight of the principal character roles in *Bakkhai* are distributed among three male actors despite one of these roles, AGAVE mother of PENTHEUS, being female. Contrastingly certain other ancient theatrical conventions were abandoned in *Bakkhai*, for example none of the performers wore full facial mask and in the casting of the eponymous chorus Macdonald attempted a politicised adaptive intervention. As mentioned above the BAKKHAI roles were performed by ten women of various ages despite robust academic evidence to suggest that the roles of the tragic choruses of fifth century BCE Athens were played by *ephebes,* adolescent men younger than the men playing the principal roles (Winkler 1990).[112]

During the *Bakkhai Talkback* Assistant Director Jessica Edwards explained this dramaturgical choice. Edwards stated that Euripides' *The Bacchae*

> would have been [performed] to a sort of mono-gendered audience so certainly that was something we wanted to unpack and that is why we chose to have the Bakkhai

[112] In his assertion about the ages of the performers in the City Dionysia, Winkler references a fifth or early fourth century BCE Pronomos Vase. A pictorial representation of a theatrical scene on the vase indicates the different ages between the chorus and the other actors through the iconographic signalling of beardless and bearded respectively. There is of course other evidence that suggests this and for a more detailed analysis (and some loosely evidenced but interesting speculation) see John J. Winkler (1990) 'The Ephebes' Song: *Tragōidia* and *Polis.*

> performed by women, rather than some adolescent boys, but I think certainly it promotes an interesting dialogue.
>
> Almeida 2016e: n. pg.

The mono-gendered Greek audience that Edwards' refers to here is, unsurprisingly, males who belonged to a specific economic and political classification.[113] The theatre audience of ancient Greece directly reflected its *polis*, namely the city and those individuals eligible to contribute to the political sphere.[114] I propose that Macdonald set out to adapt the concept of the *polis* to better reflect the Almeida's audience in 2015. As the audience is considerably more diverse, Macdonald maintains a fidelity to the community idea of *polis* while simultaneously responding to Goold's aspiration for the season to reflect the contemporary *zeitgeist.*

Edwards implies that Macdonald's gender swapped chorus is an attempt to critically reread Euripides' source text and the material means of production in fifth century BCE (Almeida 2015e). However, I argue that in many ways the choice to alter the gender was counterintuitive as the political potential of this adaptive intervention was relatively unrealised. This is due to the limited consideration given to issues of gender overall. Zeitlin argues that 'it is essential to understand that in Greek theatre, […] the woman is [always] assigned the role of the radical other' (1990: 68), and Zeitlin's argument is particularly pertinent when considering the women of *The Bacchae* and any representations of them. Representing the chorus in *Bakkhai* as other does duplicate the source text. However, given this production's postmodern framing, rather than a launching a successful critique or debunking this outdated (meta)narrative, I view the *Bakkhai's* representation of the women as complicit in it.

For further clarification I refer to Goldhill who, as recently as 2007, described the Bacchae 'as fearsome and alluring women from the East' (43). Goldhill goes on to question,

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[113] In ancient Greece, in Athens for example, 'price of a ticket [for the City Dionysia] was distributed by each local town council (*deme*) to the citizens of good standing on their record; theatre attendance was thus closely linked to citizenship' (Winkler and Zeitlin 1990: 4).

[114] Although *polis* literally translates as city, I use it here to refer to citizenship and citizens of said city more broadly.

seemingly without irony, 'what director would resist the spectacle of a group of possessed Eastern women in animal skins dancing ecstatically?' (ibid).[115] His heteronormative and objectifying statement relating to contemporary adaptations of this Greek chorus exemplifies that a counter-narrative to a readily accepted othering (and implicit sexualisation) is necessary. Changing the gender of the actors was one move toward exploring the *zeitgeist* and its awareness of gender politics, but, the representation of the women onstage was antithetical to it. I contend that the aesthetic choices conveyed a nostalgic and problematic idea of what twenty-first century audience may think a Bacchic chorus *should* look, and these presentational trappings alone ensured a performance of their otherness in an uncritical manner.

Hutcheon has suggested that in order to understand the process of adaptation it is necessary to question intentionality and the urge to adapt; specifically, 'we need to know "why"' (2013: 107 - 109). To answer this query Hutcheon recommends a careful consideration of any extra-textual statements of intent or motive. In the case of *Bakkhai* the intentions for staging and for creating the text have been articulated by Edwards and Macdonald and, consequently, following Hutcheon's recommendation first mentioned in Chapter Two, 'these statements can and must be confronted with the actual textual results' (ibid). Responding to the extra-textual statements I maintain that the dramaturgical choices for the BAKKHAI did not adequately consider the intertextual, political and socio-cultural landscape of 2015. Furthermore, evidence of the lack of consideration for the 2015 *zeitgeist* was seen in some of Macdonald's other aesthetic choices. Most noticeably in the miscalculation of the audiences' intertextual framing of the adaptation and the unwitting popular culture references that impacted upon the way the performance was received.

[115] Inconsistencies in spelling of ancient Greek character names are due to the differences in different translations. Here, I use the standard translation however when referring to the character's in Carson's *Bakkhai,* I use the spelling as they appear in the playtext, for example: BAKKHAI and DIONYSOS.

Proving the impact of a socio-cultural setting in the reception of adaptations of classical tragedy in the twenty-first century, several reviews, detailed shortly, opted to draw upon popular culture references to describe moments within *Bakkhai.* The universalising potential often recognised within Greek tragedy coupled with the overarching postmodern cultural dominant encourages such individualistic receptions and cross-cultural connections. An adapter in the postmodern period has access to the Internet, 'painting, portraiture, photography, film and musical composition [that] all become part of the rich treasury of 'texts' available' (Sanders 2016: 148). However, the individuals receiving the adaptation have access to those same materials. Some of Macdonald's dramaturgical choices overlooked this and appeared indifferent to the fact that 'adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context - a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum' (Hutcheon 2013: 142). Although Macdonald did not actively seek to recycle contemporary cultural references, examples still found their way into the adaptation of *Bakkhai*.

There are two key examples from the 2015 cultural landscape that impacted upon the intertextual reception of *Bakkhai;* these examples were mapped onto the costuming of the protagonists and the revelation of PENTHEUS' tragic fate. The costumes of both DIONYSOS and PENTHEUS drew comparisons to figures from popular culture and politics. After the Prologue delivered in contemporary dress (jeans, white t-shirt and converse trainers), DIONYSOS undergoes a costume change into a full-length fawn skin dress replete with fur shawl and *thyrsos*. Actor Ben Whishaw in this costume, with his facial hair and a long dark wig, was repeatedly compared to Austrian artist and 2014 Eurovision Song Contest Winner, Conchita Wurst (Billington 2015a, Cavendish 2015, Hitchings 2015, Lukowski 2015, Brooks 2015).[116] In stark contrast to this faux ancient aesthetic PENTHEUS, who repeatedly shares

[116] Conchita Wurst is the stage name and female persona of Thomas Neuwirth. Wurst's win at the 2014 Eurovison Song Contest turned her into an internationally recognised celebrity and a highly visible figure in the movement for LGBTQ+ rights.

the stage with DIONYSOS, is costumed in contemporary attire: a navy blue suit, white shirt and striped tie. Bertie Carvel's appearance in this costume led several critics to comment on his likeness to the then UK Prime Minister David Cameron (Clapp 2015b, Haydon 2015). These costume comparisons were made in various reviews however, it was Carvel's final role as AGAVE and the costume for this scene that generated the most widespread critical brouhaha.

Three years prior to his appearance in *Bakkhai,* Carvel originated the role of Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda the Musical,* receiving an Olivier award in 2012 for his portrayal in this critically and commercially successful production. The role of Miss Trunchbull required Carvel to cross-dress, and as he performed the female role of AGAVE in *Bakkhai,* almost every reviewer made the connection between the two.[117] One such example from Lucy Brooks of *Culture Whisper* reads:

> Carvel's career defining, cross-dressing Oliver-winning role was Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda the Musical*. And with a wig and dress as the inconsolable murderous mother in this Greek tragedy he brings more kitsch comedy than pathos to the role.
>
> 2015: n. pg.

Natasha Tripney writing for *The Stage* also describes the reveal: 'Carvel now Agave, mother of the dead Pentheus, raving in negligee, smeared with dirt to the elbow. It's a scene that's initially almost as daft to behold as it is startling' (2015: n. pg.). This final scene was played in sincerity but the cross-dressing appeared to several reviewers be a kitsch interpretation of Carvel's previous role. The costume change coupled with the rubber head prop and smatterings of dirt and blood created a spectacle and marked a shift from the more pedestrian MESSENGER speech that immediately preceded it. Carvel as AGAVE entered while singing text in a similar fashion to the BAKKHAI: 'O Bakkhai! / O women of Asia!' (Carson 2015: 59), and this only served to further heighten the overt theatricality of the moment.

[117] It is possibly easier to list the reviews that do not mention Carvel/PENTHEUS' likeness to Miss Trunchbull. However, a selection of some of the reviews that do, includes: Cavendish (2015), Taylor (2015), Nice (2015) and Billington (2015a).

This sample of reviews highlight that the importance of the postmodern cultural dominant and its encouragement of intertextual reception was overlooked by Macdonald in his approach to this classical adaptation. In the interests of fidelity Macdonald had three actors playing multiple roles of different genders, he included a singing chorus and replicated ancient socio-religious symbology. These integral parts of the adaptation all link to either the Greek mythology or the mythologised performative form of Greek tragedy. Sanders clearly states that mythology, like that presented in *Bakkhai* for example, can 'never [be] transported wholesale into its new context; it undergoes its own metamorphoses in the process' of adaptation (2016: 81). Metamorphoses can be a result of the adapters intention or merely as a by-product of the new material means of production. Therefore, for myths to translate effectively, particularly over such a temporal distance they must be actively 'evoked, altered and reworked, across cultures, and across generations' to retain relevance (ibid). In other words, there has to be a process of proximation. I contend that *Bakkhai's* strict adherence to a historicised or mythologised version of what it *ought to* be undermined the capacity what it *could* have been. Despite some potentially postmodern traits in Carson's text and Macdonald's staging, there was a disjunction between the adaptation and the social experience of the audience and what they contributed to the adaptation process. The production team, according to Edwards 'played fast and loose between being faithful and what would be most useful for us for communicating the story to the audience' (Almeida 2015e: n. pg.). Regrettably, caught somewhere between a fidelity agenda and Goold's quest to represent the *zeitgeist, Bakkhai* appeared as an uncritical or merely superficial parody of both its ancient source and a contemporary reworking of it.

Medea: An Adaptation of Dualities

The third and final main stage production of the Almeida Greeks season was the adaptation of Euripides' *Medea* written by Cusk and directed by Goold.[118] As with *Bakkhai*, the adaptation process was the culmination of the work of a different playwright and director. However, Cusk and Goold's working relationship was more collaborative than Carson and Macdonald's. Cusk is credited as the writer of *Medea* but, by her own admission, she received a wealth of input from other individuals involved in the production with 'ideas being passed back and forth between [herself], Goold and the actors' during rehearsals (Rustin 2015: n. pg.). With Goold (and his vision for the Greeks season) playing such an integral part within the adaptation, of the three main stage productions *Medea* appears the most visibly responsive to the social and cultural *zeitgeist* of 2015. In addition to its collaborative approach, this adaptation was created using a pastiche of different performative modes and embraced the resulting idiosyncrasies to challenge the cultural authority of the classical source. Cusk was adamant that 'the text invited this contemporary reading while also forbidding it' (2015a n. pg.). Thus, in what emerges as a decidedly postmodern strategy, Cusk set out to challenge both the authority of Euripides' *Medea* and the mythology or cultural narrative that has emerged around it by rewriting the well-known tragic climax.

Changing the ending of Euripides' *Medea* proved to be a source of contention within the adaptation process. The character Medea is synonymous with the act of infanticide and so Cusk and Goold 'tussled' over the choice and ultimately agreed that 'Cusk's decision to spare the children their deaths at their mother's hand is provocative' (ibid). *The Guardian* critic Michael Billington expected this new adaptation to centre on 'a woman driven to kill her own children'; however, his surprise was evident in the review of the final moments and his

[118] The premiere of the production was the 25th September 2015 and the run lasted until November of the same year.

accusation that Cusk 'radically alters the climax to deny us cathartic satisfaction' (2015: n. pg.). Opposing Billington's interpretation, Cusk (2015a) believes that the tragic nature of the original remains within her adaptation, and furthermore, she insists that this altered ending better reflects the context of 2015.

Rather than committing the infanticide as revenge, Cusk's MEDEA abandons her children. In the final scene JASON relates their different but still arguably tragic fate via telephone:

> I'm at the hospital […] They killed the fucking dog. They kicked her to death like a pair of fucking delinquents. Then they locked themselves in their room and ate a bottle of painkillers between them. You did this to them. This is your fault. Can you fucking hear me? They ate a bottle of painkillers. They fed them to each other like fucking smarties.
>
> Cusk 2015: 98

Cusk is resolute that the dog is the only fatality in her tragedy, however, Goold's dramaturgical choice for the staging of this moment creates ambiguity about the fate of the children. Regardless of how the audience may interpret their fate, they can at least be certain that this MEDEA does not physically murder her children in the same manner as Euripides' Medea.

Cusk claims that her decision to alter the ending is because, 'in our world, a play about a mother who kills her children is a different kind of play altogether […] that play is about psychosis' (2015a: n. pg.). Within her adaptation, Cusk wanted instead to reflect an experience of the contemporary moment; she wanted audiences to think '[h]ere are some things I recognise, little echoes of my own experience' (Rustin 2015: n. pg.). Cusk felt that to adequately 'bring the play into the here and now would mean reconstructing its controversial heart [...] Euripides was a controversial writer, whose dramas dismayed and unsettled their audiences' (Cusk 2015a: n. pg.). What Cusk reiterates within each of these statements is her consideration and prioritisation of the reception of her adaptation. Also evident is her interest in adapting Euripides' overall authorial intentions but not the literal source. Though there is a nebulous fidelity in Cusk's hunt for controversy, it is still subject to her choices and adheres

to her authorial agenda. I suggest that Cusk's autonomous authorial agenda for *Medea* acknowledges that literal fidelity to the source material is an outmoded approach to adaptation in the twenty-first century and this subsequently allows her to take a more revisionist approach in the creation of her new text.

In a direct response to the Almeida's determination to produce new texts that are 'alive and resonant, as far away as possible from being dusty cultural heritage' (Goold 2015: 127), Cusk chose contemporary London as the setting for *Medea*. More precisely, the action takes place predominantly in '*a middle class, vaguely bohemian domestic space. There is a kitchen on one side and a large sofa in the middle*' (Cusk 2015: 9). The live production adheres to this description and adds a raised office space (upstage), furnished with a desk, an office chair and Apple Mac computer that is used as a writing prop for author MEDEA. The staging design aims to reflect a particular *zeitgeist,* namely twenty-first century Western domesticity, albeit a distinctly privileged version of it. Clapp reviewing the production for *The Observer* suggests that the set 'breathes 21st-century wealth' and 'Cusk lasers her way to the centre of Euripides's drama to come up with a coruscating 21st-century version' (2015: n. pg.). This setting could belong in many parts of London, including the more affluent areas within the borough of Islington where the Almeida is located. It may likewise resemble a version of domesticity for those members of the theatre-going community with similar economic profiles who live outside the London area.[119]

Despite its upper or middle-class setting, Cusk claims that her adaptation of *Medea* can appeal across economic disparities as it draws on the allegedly universalising themes of family and love (Rustin 2015: n. pg.). More precisely, Cusk claims both the source and her adaptation are about a 'couple fighting and fighting is an eternal human predicament. Love turning to hate,

[119] The London Borough of Islington is described as 'a borough of stark contrasts with areas of affluence neighbouring areas of high deprivation' (Gov.uk 2010: 3). A Gov.uk report acknowledged that, 'despite being one of the most deprived local authorities in the country, Islington ranks highly nationally on a prosperity index […] Islington's prosperity score of 163 places it in the top 20 most prosperous districts nationally' (2012: 3).

it's like splitting the atom, such destructiveness comes of it' (ibid). Many of the vitriolic exchanges between MEDEA and JASON, played by Kate Fleetwood and Justin Salinger, are performed by the actors live onstage.[120] Clapp writes that 'scenes between impervious Justin Salinger and Fleetwood contain the most convincing row I have ever heard on stage: every word hurled, yet every word heard' (2015: n. pg.). However, reflecting the digital age and the changing modes of communication, the technological features of the domestic space, such as the answerphone machines and mobile telephones become instruments in some of the emotional battles between the protagonists.

The use of different forms of media supports the episodic form of storytelling throughout this adaptation. There is no discernible pattern to the weaving of live and recorded scenes, which include, for example, live and recorded exchanges that have naturalistic tendencies, more heightened theatrical monologues delivered directly to the audience and choreographed movement sequences. The linear temporality or timeline of the narrative is called into question due to the changing modes of performance and the somewhat erratic leaps between the scenic episodes that make up this adaptation. Frances Baggage explains that 'old assumptions about linear narrativity have been permanently unsettled in the twentieth and twenty-first century [adaptation process]' due to the 'development, expansion and impact of new communication technologies' (2016: 1). I suggest that what Babbage identifies but does not name is the influence of the cultural dominant of postmodernism. *Medea* does appear to follow a chronology but, responding to its cultural context, Cusk's use of an episodic form breaches the accepted authority of teleological progression. The dramaturgical form of Cusk's *Medea* actively and repeatedly encourages a sceptical distrust of its means of storytelling. This distrust is also encouraged by exploitation of the recognisable dramatic role

[120] Some exchanges took place as an onstage response to pre-recorded telephone answer messages and in other moments only one individual was audible (staged as a phone call or a dictated email or text message). Although the audience were only privy to one side of the argument, it remined clear from the content of the speech and the vocal intonation that these were acrimonious exchanges between the protagonist and deuteragonist.

of the narrator.

Much of the central exposition is communicated via the protagonists MEDEA and JASON. However, several secondary characters fulfil a narrator-role in different scenes. For example, the opening scene features a lengthy rather oblique monologue from the character NURSE (who only appears once more in Scene 8). NURSE's speech provides minimal exposition amidst descriptions of her domestic tasks and her own childhood before her brief exchange with MEDEA and TUTOR (another secondary role). As the scene changes, the mode of storytelling changes and the following scene, Scene 2, is comprised solely of an answerphone recording:

> *The room is empty. A telephone rings and the message is recorded.*
>
> JASON
> It's – ah – it's me. Look, about yesterday – the thing is, we've just got to stop this ridiculous fighting. It's bad for us and bad for the – ah – boys. […] You're getting – it's just getting completely out of control […]
>
> Cusk 2015: 9

The message continues in a similar vein offering crucial exposition about the conflict between MEDEA and JASON, their separation and impending divorce. Scene 2's version of events belongs to JASON and this is just one of the several accounts offered by the characters within *Medea*. Sander's suggests that in postmodern works, the 'investment in highlighting the mode of unreliable narration draws attention to the bias implicit in the singular point of view' (Sanders 2016: 71). I suggest that Cusk consciously utilises different storytelling strategies and multiple narrators in order to problematise the narrative 'truth' of the play. There is evidence of a postmodern paralogy-inspired logic in Cusk's challenge to the notion that there is a correct, singular interpretation of the narrative. This dramaturgical strategy also reminds the audience of their receptive role within the adaptation as they are forced to consider their own perception of each moment.

The audience are repeatedly acknowledged in the moments of direct address and there is one speech, delivered by MEDEA, that materialises as a self-reflexive indictment of the voyeuristic nature of performance.

> What have you come here for?
> Why are you watching me?
> Go on, have a good look - help yourselves, feel free!
> […]
> It gives you a thrill to watch me suffer.
> The less I pretend the more of a kick you get.
> I enact what you disown about yourselves.
> […]
> That's why you watch me.
> That's why you're here.
>
> Cusk 2015: 59

Goold's direction enhances the metatheatricality during this speech; the audience house lights come up and the boundary between theatrical illusion and reality is almost completely suspended. The intention is, I argue, to directly confront the audience with their role within this performative scenario. As Ioannidou has suggested, metatheatrical interplay within classical adaptation 'entails a reflection on Greek tragedy' and it can expose 'certain tensions with both the classical texts as well as tragedy as a genre' (2017: 77). There are liminal spaces between reality and theatrical illusion from the outset however, MEDEA's accusation that 'the less I pretend the more of a kick you get' suggests there is a perversity in the very nature of tragedy as theatrical performance. Via MEDEA, Cusk skewers the desire to watch tragedy and to seek a cathartic release as the culmination of the experience of witnessing another person's suffering.

In order to stage Cusk's scripted challenge to theatrical illusion, Ian MacNeil's design and Neil Austin's lighting employed corresponding techniques in their respective creative areas. To reveal the artifice of theatrical illusion MacNeil and Austin embraced peculiarities within their design choices; the theatrical world of *Medea* appears as a distorted, funhouse mirroring of a pedestrian, contemporary space. The domestic space is reminiscent of an

industrial-cum-residential loft space with its spacious layout and exposed brickwork highlighted by a number of domestic looking down lights. Around the perimeter of the upstage area there is a trench filled with soil; it is there throughout but only revealed when MEDEA proceeds to shovel out its contents in the final scenes of the play. The twenty-first century furniture, which I have already mentioned above, is at second glance off kilter. All the surfaces of the kitchen island are slanted as a result of mismatched abstract angles and the stage floor has imperceptible levels and hidden compartments that are uncovered throughout the course of the play. The lighting design becomes more abstract as time progresses and the domestically-inspired style is replaced by bold colour washes and large media projections.

The change in the lighting design is gradual in the first half of the performance, however, there is a sudden aesthetic change to emphasise a pivotal moment within Cusk's adaptation. Cusk believes that the source text and her new *Medea* are fundamentally 'about the end of a marriage; more specifically, it describes the last phases of that ending, in which the private world of the married couple is finally broken open' (2015a: n. pg.). The metaphorical breaking becomes the catalyst for a visible fissure in the staging. When MEDEA has decided upon her method of revenge the set is literally broken apart and mythical elements that appear to hark back to the antiquated source start to appear. There is a crescendo of sound and then, as part of a choreographed and scored movement sequence, features of the main stage are deconstructed and removed by the cast. MEDEA and JASON undergo an onstage costume change; from this point onwards MEDEA's contemporary jeans and t-shirt are covered in a grey, full-sleeved bodice with an attached skirt, whilst JASON wears a metal chest shield, an oversized leather jacket with a large fur shawl atop his contemporary attire. These costumes, placed over their earlier ones, seem to Cavendish 'to evoke ancient times' (2015a: n. pg.) even though they are culturally and historically nonspecific. Though they are a pastiche of an unplaceable historical costume (appearing more Medieval than fifth century BCE Greece)

these costumes coupled with new aesthetic of the set are alien enough to signify a change in the spatial and temporal states of the previously established onstage environment.

Once the world of the play has been figuratively and physically broken open, it is described as '*a barren landscape with one or two large boulders in it, and MEDEA's desk*' (Cusk 2015: 59). The stage is now almost empty and replicates the structure of an ancient Greek *orchestra* (playing space). Projected on the back walls behind the makeshift *orchestra* is a silhouette of a desert landscape with a bright red lighting wash. The projection is, ironically, a highly mediatised replication of a natural environment and the juxtaposition of this produces a surreal or otherworldly quality. Nevertheless, some aspects of the contemporary world still linger in the periphery of the playing space or remain visible beneath the protagonists' costume additions. The collective presence of these contrasting elements, even in their pastiche forms, draws attention to the distance between past and present within this adaptation. Like my imaginary snapshot of the *Les Atrides* Cartoucherie foyer described in Chapter Three, a snapshot of this scene from *Medea* would illustrate a highly postmodern collision of antiquity and the contemporary, and the mythical and the ordinary.

Within this barren landscape comes yet another shift in performance mode, this time in the form of classical messenger-style speech. Scene 18 begins:

> MESSENGER
> One tries to keep a balanced view
> of humans and the things they do;
> but speaking for *moi* and *moi* alone
> this is too naughty to condone.
> What could be easier to condemn
> Than a mother abandoning her children?
> A mother's task is to protect:
> unnatural should she defect.
> […]
>
> Cusk 2015: 92

The entire monologue is written in rhyming verse in stark contrast to the prose found throughout the rest of the play. The MESSENGER speech is, in accordance with the classical

Greek convention, pure exposition; occurring immediately after MEDEA abandons her children, the speech details how MEDEA then exacts her revenge upon JASON. The language is heightened through the use of rhyme but retains a contemporary vocabulary, and the aural effect of this is jarring. There are allusions to the mythical origins of the play, with MESSENGER repeatedly used the phrase 'we gods' (Cusk 2015: 92 - 96). In Cusk's printed script MESSENGER is highlighted as other through a stylistic use of language and in performance 'the climactic Messenger, who delivers the crucial plot information, is distractingly played as a mixture of man and woman' (Billington 2015: n. pg.). To be more explicit, the costume is designed to reflect male and female gender normative Western-dress; half a suit and half a dress both reminiscent of 1960s fashions. The clichéd gender split is emphasised as MESSENGER also wears half a long blonde wig and half a slicked back short brunette wig with an accompanying pencil moustache on that side of their face. The choice to costume MESSENGER is this way is a clear gesture towards the gender politics at play within Cusk's framing of the adaptation; it is simultaneously a literal embodiment and ironic representation of male-female dichotomy. It is just one example of how irony as a subversive dramaturgical strategy is implemented throughout Cusk's text and in the subsequent live performance of *Medea.*

There is politicised irony in Cusk's decision to embed part of her own identity within *Medea*. Lyn Gardner, writing about the production, suggests that when 'men write about their experiences for the stage, it is often perceived as being universal. When women write about their experiences, it is too often dismissed as personal, marginal or domestic' (2015: n. pg.). Cusk's choice to merge the universalising quality of Greek theatre with her personal female experience, is a political act. MEDEA is created in Cusk's image as she is a writer whose strength comes from her ability to articulate her emotion in the written medium. MEDEA gains notoriety through writing, and this replicates one of Cusk's own experiences. Prior to the

commission for *Medea,* Cusk was better known as a novelist who received critical attention for the visceral content of her loosely autobiographical material centring on her experiences as a mother and wife (Cusk 2008). Cusk wrote with 'frankness about the incarcerating pressures of motherhood in her 2001 memoir *A Life's Work* and stirred controversy again by anatomising the break-up of her marriage (*Aftermath*, 2012) in unsparing detail' (Cavendish 2015a: n. pg.). Hutcheon proposes that adaptation involves taking 'possession of another's story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one's own sensibility, interests, and talents' (2013: 18). Given Cusk's talent for autobiographical writing and her interest in documenting the implosion of her own marriage, it is unsurprising that, as I mentioned earlier, it is the implosion of a marriage that Cusk places at the centre of her *Medea.*

Cusk has publicly talked about the ramifications of divorce for any children exposed to that process, including her own (Cusk 2012, 2015, Rustin 2015). There are verbatim excerpts of conversations from Cusk's own life within the script for *Medea*. For example, in an article for *The Guardian* Cusk offered an account of her familial relationships following the breakdown of her marriage: 'my children have been roused from the unconsciousness of childhood […] "I have two homes," my daughter said to me one evening, clearly and carefully, "and I have no home."' (2012: n. pg.). In Scene 14 one of MEDEA's sons makes a similar observation:

> B2:
> […]
> What's a broken home?
>
> MEDEA:
> A home that's been divided into two homes.
>
> B2:
> There's no such thing. There can only be one home. If you have two homes than you have no home.
>
> Cusk 2015: 80

In this moment Cusk draws from her own life and creates an intertextual layering of her identity within her adaptation of this classical text. Like the classical adaptations of Mee featured in Chapter Two, Cusk's identity is self-reflexively rendered in fictional form. The biographical links between Cusk and her interpretation of *Medea* demonstrates the ongoing postmodernist impact of individual identities informing adaptation.

Carlson has suggested that the theatre, in its ability to recycle, can function 'as a repository and living museum of cultural memory' (2003: 165), and I propose it can also serve as an individual repository for more personal experiences and memories. Medea, as the most notorious tragic heroine, already exists within a complex intertextual framing and Cusk has inserted herself into this in what I view to be an overtly postmodern political act. Cusk's *Medea* is haunted by the playwright and her experiences. As the term adaptation in the postmodern period covers a plethora of practices and approaches, I therefore posit that *Medea* is an adaptation of the classical text *and* an adaptation of aspects of Cusk's own life.

Conclusion

There is a twenty-eight-year time gap between Théâtre du Soleil's *Les Atrides* (1992) analysed in Chapter Three and the Almeida Greeks season featured within this chapter. However, I have argued that the postmodern cultural dominant is ongoing and the impact of this cultural condition is visible in the programming of the Greeks season and in the adaptation strategies used in each of the three main stage productions, *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea.* Goold's mission statement indicates that the inaugural season of his tenure was intended to make an impact; Goold programmed performances and events that would, hopefully, enable 'us' to 'continue to discover why Ancient Greek culture still resonates with us as artists and you, as our audience' (Almeida 2015: 127). Responding to Goold's direction, every aspect of the

season involved different processes of adaptation, and further, the strategies for adaptation were coloured by quite different postmodern concerns.

Despite these different postmodern concerns, the various adaptations were all inspired by features of the City Dionysia and endeavoured to recreate them in order to revisit the beginnings of Western theatre and civilisation. For example, the participatory community-focused *Satyr Events* aimed to adapt the classical notion of the *polis* and the *Dionysos Events* set out to adapt the ritualistic and euphoric characteristics of Dionysus, the god of theatre, wine and ecstasy. After interrogating the nostalgic representations of Greek-ness demonstrated in the different events of the season, I proposed that every form of adaptation in all activities and performances had a dual purpose; to reinforce the visibility and value of the Greeks (whether educationally, historically or popularly), and to make the season more economically successful.

Goold's interest in staging a series of Greek events is, I argued, also indicative of the ongoing identity crisis produced by the still dominant cultural influence of postmodernism. Conventional means of forming identities and communities continue to be destabilised in the twenty-first century and the Greeks season, inspired by its nostalgic view of ancient Greek society, looked to imitate an established historical model of community identity. In addition to the influences of the postmodern material means of production, contemporary conceptualisations of tragedy driven by international events, including violent conflicts and austerity, surfaced in popular and academic discourse around 2015. I have suggested that the Almeida Greeks season's reinvestigation of the dramatic model of tragedy was reflective of this broader context and that the mainstage adaptations prompted a timely questioning of how the classical understanding or definition of tragedy can be transposed into the twenty-first century.

The exchange between historical and the contemporary was a recurring feature within each of the three mainstage adaptations of tragedy. Jameson suggests that postmodernism has

‘a momentous effect on what used to be historical time’ (1984: 66). This weakening of historicity dictates a return ‘to the question of temporal organization’ and ‘to the problem of the form that time, temporality and the syntagmatic will be able to take’ once the postmodern subject has lost the ability to differentiate and organise past, present and future (Jameson 1984: 71). In *Oresteia, Bakkhai* and *Medea* there were clear attempts to negotiate this phenomenon described by Jameson (1984), and aspects of all the adapters’ dramaturgies reflect subsequent ruminations on time. *Bakkhai* attempts to reject the disordered temporality of postmodernism and aspires to replicate the source material’s primal setting. This adaptation maintains the Aristotelian unity of time, to better organise its singular temporal setting. *Oresteia* exploited the unreliability of temporal classification with Icke’s text finally revealing in Act VI that the narrative had leapt between events happening in the present (marked by the LED ticker), reconstructed events from the past, ambiguous events that are misremembered and, potentially, events that have not yet happened. Like *Oresteia, Medea* made use of fractured temporality and adopted an episodic formal structure. The dramaturgical construction embraced fissures and even a figurative breaking open of the timeline in what I argued was a formal challenge to the accepted grand narrative of teleological progression.

Linked to alternate representations of temporality, I argued that there was evidence of nostalgia in the processes of adaptation for *Bakkhai* and *Medea*. *Bakkhai* was the Almeida Greeks production that most overtly embraced nostalgia which manifested in a preoccupation with fidelity to the source material and its antiquated means of production. *Bakkhai* attempted to honour a number of theatrical conventions from antiquity and my analysis focussed on the chorus and the major role it played in the production. The chorus of ten women sang and moved in unison and wore identical costumes and I argued that this was a uncritical nostalgic representation of what the adapters believed an ancient chorus *should* look and sound like.

Postmodern creative strategies such as pastiche and nostalgia are not inherently critical or parodic, and this means that acts of postmodern adaptation can be positive or lovingly crafted homages to the source forms. However, as I have stated in Chapter One, and reiterated throughout my discussion of *Bakkhai* I align with Auslander's argument that within a postmodern work, particularly in one outwardly presented as an adaptation, there always exists '"a space from which to mount a critical perspective"' (1994: 29). With reference to extra-textual materials I demonstrated that an overt critique of the source text and its contextual framing was not evident in *Bakkhai*. Carson's playtext and Macdonald's direction appeared perpetually reverential towards the source text and less accommodating of their audience and the intertextual impact of cultural references within 2015. Viewing the production through a postmodern lens as I have done, exposed that a reverential fidelity for any source can be counterintuitive to a process of adaptation.

Medea did embrace nostalgia in search of a mythical quality in the latter half of the adaptation. However, I evidenced that the metatheatrical performative framing of this exposed the productions' simultaneous complicity and critique of the tragic form. Different modes of performance and conventions for storytelling were established throughout the course of the adaptation and then systematically dismantled as the performance continued. *Medea* constantly challenged the authority of its own narrative using fragmented, episodic scenes and jarring aesthetic devises such as the intentionally postmodern aesthetic dichotomy of the MESSENGER costume.

Postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon has faced challenges that it is apolitical (Auslander 1994). However, this chapter has highlighted a number of overtly political choices within the mainstage productions. In discussion of *Bakkhai,* I suggested that the political aspirations were evidenced in extra-textual materials but not within the final live performance. There was an intention to address the gender politics at play within Euripides' source text.

However, this attempt was underrealised given the insufficient acknowledgement of the cultural landscape of 2015. *Medea* is both postmodern and political as Cusk chose to adapt both the classical text and aspects of her own life as part of her adaptation process. I argued that, like Mee featured in Chapter Two, Cusk takes verbatim material from her life to supplant parts of Euripides' text. I contend that Cusk's incorporation of her own female identity into the canonical source text and her subversion of the tragic climax must both be seen as a highly personal and political creative interventions. Viewing *Oresteia* through my postmodern critical lens revealed that Icke looked to contemporary as well as classical sources to make his *Oresteia* less elitist. Icke 'magpies freely, but unlike the generation above him he's borrowing from musicals, from computer games […] from mainstream television shows' such as the *Sopranos*, and there are subtle nods to all of these within this work (Lewis 2017: n. pg.). Icke claims to value each audience member, and even prioritises those who may not conventionally engage with more classical forms of culture (Almeida 2015c: n. pg.). Thus, I argued that Icke makes a postmodern and political choice to embrace cultural egalitarianism to subvert any lingering modernist hierarchies.

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This thesis has been concerned with classical adaptations of Greek theatre that respond, in playtext and performative form, to the material conditions of postmodernism during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In this epoch, interest in adaptations of Greek texts appears more prevalent than ever and, using three key case studies featuring works from Charles L. Mee, Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, and the Almeida Greeks season, I examined this cultural trend. Further, I have argued throughout that there is a fundamental interrelationship between postmodernism and evolving adaptive strategies used in contemporary dramaturgies.

Reinvestigating Postmodernism

Given the course of the research in this thesis, I suggest Lyotard's (1984) early definitions of postmodernism and the postmodern condition may appear somewhat outdated in 2019. The innovative developments once lauded by Lyotard have now been dramatically superseded by the continuing evolution of technologies in the twenty-first century: the Internet, mobile communications devices, multiple platforms for information and knowledge exchange and on-demand streaming services for music, television and film are all relatively new inventions. Yet this thesis argues that the broader implications of the postmodern condition, as first identified by Lyotard, remain highly relevant when examining the cultural milieu, and theatrical interest in adaptations of Greek tragedies particularly, some forty years later.

This thesis argues for a reinvestigation of the term postmodernism and its potential application as a critical framework in discussions of twenty-first century theatre. Since the wealth of critical interest in postmodernism began to wane at the turn of the twenty-first

century, I suggested here that the term became alienated from its rich and polymorphous critical origins.[121] Postmodernism however, remains the 'cultural dominant', a term used by Jameson to describe 'a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features' (1984: 56). In other words, postmodernism cannot be understood simply as a theatrical style for example, but, as seen so often in the adaptations of the Greek works here, rather as an active, paradoxical, evolving force within the cultural sphere that still requires critical attention.

Four key characteristics of my reconsideration of postmodernism have been most purposeful for my discussion and feature in the analysis of the last three chapters. Firstly, indebted to Lyotard (1984), I acknowledged the continuing growth of little narratives in response to a general incredulity towards metanarratives and a rapidly changing technological environment. This changing environment is evidenced in transformations in knowledge-exchange and communication, and greater mediatisation. In Chapter Four, for instance, I argued that *Oresteia* sought to expose the unreliability of legitimising narratives through a series of reflexive comments that undermined both the structure and narration within the adaptation. Writer-director Icke also incorporated moments of intermediality to reflect the technological advances of the postmodern world and embraced these as metatheatrical devices to further communicate his critique of the authority of the performance form and the very politics of adaptation.

I referred to Jameson (1984) for the other two key characteristics and recognised a postmodern sense of depthlessness as a consequence of still weakening historicity coupled with consumerism as fundamental ideology. A culture of consumerism and the disruption to the teleological progression of time and history serve to underline the rising primacy of the

[121] See reference to Lyotard (1984), Jameson (1984), Hutcheon (1987, 1988, 1989, 2000), Habermas (181) and Baudrillard (1983, 1994) in Chapter One.

individual in navigating the postmodern cultural landscape, and links with the development of deconstructionist and poststructuralist theories. Postmodernism as the cultural dominant disrupts established cultural and social hierarchies, and the cultural landscape has become, generally, more democratic ever since individual perspectives and receptions came to the fore. I applied these characteristics in Chapter Two's analysis as I examined Mee's approach to playwriting epitomised in his mantra: 'the culture writes us… and then we write our stories' (Mee 2002: 84). Mee's mantra proposes that all forms of culture are valid and apt for (re)making and that meaning making often occurs in the exchange between an individual and their culture. Mee's (re)making project intentionally disrupts traditional notions of transcendental authorship by prioritising the individual and their reception. The plays that feature within the (re)making project are developed via Mee's own responses to different source texts, and I have suggested that Mee radically overwrites the Greeks according to his self-determined identity and then invites other to do the same, by adapting or (re)making his texts in the same manner.

Postmodernism's destabilising of cultural hierarchies is of particular importance in theatrical adaptations of classical plays. Using each of the playtexts and performances from Mee, Mnouchkine and the Almeida, this thesis illustrated the link between what Lyotard described as 'the postmodernism condition' in 1984 [1979] and the post-1970s revival in adaptations of classical Greek tragedies. Hall (2004) first identified the resurgence in adaptations of Greek plays on Western stages, beginning her chronology with Richard Schechner's and The Performance Group's production of *Dionysus in 69* (1968).[122] Hall cites this 'reawakening of interest in Greek tragedy' as a result of the 'seismic political and cultural shifts' of the late 1960s (2004: 2). It is no coincidence that Hall's observations regarding a surge of Greek adaptations coincided with the onset of postmodernism in the late twentieth

[122] *Dionysus in 69* was first performed on 6th June 1968 and ran until July 1969 (Hall 2004).

century; the findings of this thesis clarify that the key cultural shift identified by Hall is postmodernism. Hall's analysis ends in 2004 (the date of publication) but the sheer number of productions on Western stages after that time, including those featured here, evidences an enduring cultural interest in adaptations of Greek tragedy linked to the continuing influence of postmodernism.

Since Hall's initial observations on the seismic shifts of the 1960s and 1970s, the Western world has seen other political, social and cultural evolutions but I maintain that postmodernism, in its ever-evolving state has remained an incongruous constant. In Chapter Four, featuring the most recent case study from 2015, I argued that Goold's motivation for the season revealed a postmodern interest in the relationship between past, present and history. It was a distinctly postmodern influence expressed in Goold's desire to bring Greeks into the now. Furthermore, it was Goold's nostalgia and the de-historicised perception of the Greek society as the origin of Western society that inspired the programming for the other activities with the Greeks season.

Due to its metamorphosing quality, postmodernism as critical lens has both rigorously established and nascent properties. It has therefore proven valuable in providing revisionist readings of historical works, such as *Les Atrides,* and timely commentary on new works, like those included in the Almeida Greeks season. Given the iconoclastic tendencies of the postmodern condition, a postmodern lens proves particularly useful when considering adaptations of classical or canonised dramatic texts. I have argued throughout that the postmodern condition impacts upon adaptation, informing the sources selected for adaptation and, more importantly the different dramaturgies and strategies used within the very process.

Adaptation: An Evolving Practice

Drawing on Hutcheon (2013) and Sanders (2016), this thesis has advocated for an active and

evolving definition of adaptation. Adaptation can refer to playtexts or performances and the act of reception. It can be a process, or even a series of processes; adaptation is a term that can be applied to an ever-diversifying series of artistic practices and theatrical dramaturgies and consequently, like Hutcheon (2013), Laera (2014) and Reilly (2017), I argue that its definition must be viewed as a continuum.

Applying this argument in Chapter Four I considered each aspect of the Greeks season as adaptation regardless of the different strategies or forms it took. For example, the main stage theatrical adaptations retain overt connections to the source material in their imitation of archaic titling and the research and community events were adapted from and inspired by the events of the City Dionysia (Almeida 2015). The Almeida theatre café bar even served an adaptation of Greek cuisine during the season. In Chapter Three I again demonstrated the validity of my continuum definition in discussion of *Les Atrides* and the diverse forms of adaptation visible in everything from the scripted text, to the intertextual pastiche of codified performance forms, and the intentional ghostliness of the partially excavated Terracotta Solider chorus featured in the *salle d'accueil*.

My continuum definition of adaptation supports a consideration of intertextuality and, as there is a broad preoccupation with intertextuality enforced by the cultural dominant of postmodernism, I have argued throughout that no text exists as a self-sufficient entity. Each case study chapter has proven that any extra-textual or extra-theatrical materials, particularly those provided by a theatrical adapter to cultivate narratives around the text, are relevant in the analysis of the playtext or performance. Drawing on Auslander's recommendation that theatre in the period of postmodernism must walk the 'tightrope between complicity and critique' (1994: 31), I drew on extra-theatrical materials to argue that *Les Atrides*, in performance, was complicit in supporting certain Western hegemonies without an accompanying critique. Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil were vocal about their intention of providing a new yet

faithful interpretation of Euripides' and Aeschylus' source materials to better communicate the ostensibly universalising potential of the classical tragedies (Williams 1999). However, in their attempt to achieve this, I argued that *Les Atrides* openly and uncritically utilised the notion of the cultural other in the aesthetic choices of the production (the appropriations of codified performance forms), the extra-theatrical spectacle and the dramaturgical motivations. Embracing an intertextual analysis thus exposed the distance between the aspirations and accomplishments of this marathon adaptation.

Intertextuality featured as another aspect of my continuum definition of adaptation as I argued in Chapter Two that it can be used as a self-reflexive adaptive strategy. All Mee's works exist within the carefully curated framing device of the (re)making project and an outline of Mee's collage-inspired approach to adapting texts is also included. Considering a number of Mee's plays in an intertextual dialogue with one another in Chapter Two led to my argument that intertextuality is one of the foundations of his writing process given the way he associatively 'riffs' on the source material to find alternate content (Mee 2005b: 211 – 212).[123] Mee sources directly from his environment and uses found materials and verbatim texts to create a palimpsest of recycled words, images and music. Furthermore, he goes so far as to adapt his own texts to reinforce his mantra and ensure that identical cultural sources appear as intentional intertextual echoes across his *oeuvre.*

Studies of adaptation have traditionally been concerned with the issue of fidelity, namely the explicit intertextual relationship between the source material and the new work. A long-held fidelity narrative, which suggests that adaptations are inferior to their sources, is akin to other metanarratives that postmodernism seeks to counter. As such, I proposed that adaptations influenced by postmodernism often feature more radical or subversive

[123] Chapter Two's analysis included: *Orestes 2.0* (1992), *The Bacchae 2.1* (1993), *Agamemnon 2.0* (1994), *Trojan Women: A Love Story* (1995), *Iphigenia 2.0* (2007), *Night (Thyestes 2.0)* (2014a) and *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)* (2014b).

dramaturgical strategies that defy concerns of fidelity. I suggested in Chapter Four that *Medea* abandoned concerns of fidelity to better explore the politics involved in the process of classical adaptation. Using overtly contemporary aesthetics, theatrical conventions were frequently set in motion and dismantled, with playwright Cusk even altering the notorious infanticide at the climax of Euripides' tragedy.

In the same chapter I argued that postmodern adaptation that is overly concerned with fidelity can prove antithetical to the cultural moment. With *Bakkhai,* Carson's writing and Macdonald's direction maintained a modernist preoccupation with fidelity and a simultaneous postmodernist aspiration to scrutinise the *zeitgeist.* Unfortunately, however, their fidelity aspirations inevitably fell short and the attempt to use only some postmodern tactics with a lack of critical nuance meant that *Bakkhai* did not critique its source or the *zeitgeist,* and fell into realm of accidental or unwitting kitsch.

Identity: Prioritising the Individual

Another integral aspect of my revisionist reading of the three case studies is connected to issues of identity as I have claimed that all adaptation is directly (and indirectly) influenced by an adapters' identity. In other words, any process of theatrical adaptation first involves the action of individual reception. Questions of identity automatically intersect with adaptation as the choices of subject or source material, the medium in which the adaptation is produced and the reason for undertaking it in the first place are all influenced by the creative individual (Hutcheon 2013: 92 - 95). In Chapter Two, I considered Mee's identity, acknowledging that he is often referred to as a postmodern playwright (Reilly 2005, Hopkins and Orr 2001, Bryant-Bertail 2000, Mee), although this is not a description he applies to himself. Rather, Mee's alternate definition of self, as a product of his culture, is embedded within his work and the (re)making project.

In order to take revisionist approach to Mee's plays, his definition of self and the dominant narrative within existing scholarship, my argument focussed on the textual and the extra-textual materials available. This dual approach subsequently revealed certain paradoxes inherent within Mee's works. Mee claims to subvert established cultural hierarchies, however, as he also attempts to embody his identity and lived experience within his plays, I have shown how he actually creates an alternate cultural hierarchy using his subjectivity as the new benchmark. Mee attempts to challenge the notion of authorship by claiming 'the culture' as an authorial force within his works and favouring collage as a democratic dramaturgical strategy. My analysis revealed that Mee's works are largely autobiographical because of the choices he makes, and his work does not, as he claims, reflect a democratic use of collage because his creative choices are deliberate and self-regulated.

Mee writes his plays with the intention of producing a historical document and this is indicative of the postmodern identity crisis outlined by Dunn (1998). The effects of the postmodern condition include historical scepticism and distrust of legitimising narratives, and Mee's interest in documenting his identity in a particular moment represents an attempt to navigate these issues. Mee negotiates his cultural setting, his relationship to past and present and produces a tangible evidentiary object meaning that the plays, as objects, can serve to solidify his identity in a time of crisis.

Dunn (1998), in his discussion of the postmodern identity crisis, also highlights the temporal inconsistency of the postmodern period as a key contributor to a disordered understanding and representation of identity. In Chapter Three I have found that the temporal instability and reception-orientated process of meaning making encouraged Mnouchkine to prioritise her individual perspective when adapting *Les Atrides*. I argued that as result of the postmodern condition Mnouchkine was preoccupied with nostalgia and, therefore, uses an approximation of other cultural forms as a tactic to reproduce a lost, idealised othered version

of the past. Driven by a fidelity agenda, Mnouchkine wanted elements of the production (such as the choral interludes) to be staged in accordance with her nostalgic view of the source material despite little substantiating evidence that reveals how the tragedies of antiquity were staged.

Dunn refers to nostalgia in 'revivalism' and '*revivalist culture*' (1998: 57, 14) as a tactic for negating the identity crisis, and I have redesignated this as interest in classical adaptation in all forms, corroborating it with reference to Settis (2006). Settis proposes that 'the 'classical' past has an enduring contemporary relevance because it contains and distinguishes the common roots of Western civilization'; it embodies values that 'unite European cultures with others that have a European background, from America to Australia' (2006: 2). However, Settis also acknowledges that the belief in the importance of the classical widely held across Western culture is predominantly superficial. Nevertheless, the classical is an unavoidable feature of Western identity and I have demonstrated that ancient Greek-ness, in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, represents a familiar or stable centre around which identity can be inflected.

In Chapter Three I argued that this central feature of postmodern identity materialised in Mnouchkine's adaptation of *Les Atrides* in her desire to communicate an ancient universalising quality. Goold's intention for the Almeida Greeks season was almost the antithesis to Mnouchkine's *Les Atrides* as Goold wanted to radically update the Greek adaptations that he commissioned to better reflect the 2015 *zeitgeist.* Despite the canonical status of the source texts and an overt form of nostalgia inspiring the 2015 season, Goold's intention was to produce adaptations that remade the sources in order for them to speak to contemporary audiences. However, I contended that the connection to the historical remained an integral part of the new mode of representation, and in response to cultural nostalgia, the Greeks season's various examples of adaptation authorised the importance of a historical

resonance even in the most contemporary setting. Viewing the Greeks season and the surge of adaptation in 2015 holistically, I conclude that an individualised interest in classical adaptation cannot be detached from the material means of production and the cultural dominant of postmodernism.

Beyond the Postmodern?

This thesis and the selected case studies were drawn from a specific time period, 1990 - 2015. These years exist within a loosely defined period of postmodernism originating in post-war twentieth century aligned with the developments of the post-industrial age (Lyotard 1984). Over the course of half a century, the primary influences upon the postmodern condition may have evolved, but I indicated within each of my analyses the benefit of embracing postmodernism's characteristic fluidity and complexity. The use of a flexible methodology subsequently exposed particular postmodern concerns within each of the case studies, even the most recent example of the Almeida Greeks season.

This thesis aligned the growth in the number of classical adaptations with the evolution and expansion of postmodernism within the Western world. I acknowledge this thesis is Western-centric and each of the practitioners fits into this postmodern classification because it is a primarily a Western preoccupation (Dunn 1998). However, Dunn offered this observation back in 1998 and although it may still hold some truth, the monumental advances in digital technology and the economics of a globalised, international marketplace evidenced at the time of writing, make his rigid boundaries somewhat contestable. Therefore, though geographically specific, this thesis offers one example of a methodology that may be used to examine how any number of different individuals may attempt to negotiate a complex relationship between past and present, self and history via theatrical adaptation.

The sample of theatrical productions within a twenty-five year period indicated a shift

in practices of adaptation and the ways in which they are perceived and received. There has always been an interest in retelling familiar myths or stories within the theatre (Carlson 2003), and I have no reason to doubt that while postmodernism remains the current cultural dominant, adaptations of a diversifying nature will continue to proliferate. However, what is adapted and the means of adaptation are directly affected by the cultural moment and means of production, and these too may continue to evolve.

As I have demonstrated throughout, postmodernism as a critical methodology applied to classical adaptation has offered particular insights to me. A broader implication of aligning postmodernism with the increase in classical adaptation is a shifting democratising view driven by a transformation in the scepticism surrounding elitist narratives. Greek theatre and the interest in antiquity have historically existed within the study of classics in a particular institutional narrative, and this fostered a sense of elitism. Postmodernism, with its distrust of legitimating narratives, ensures that this perception is now more readily challenged. Therefore, the recent 'democratic turn' in classical reception theory, as described by Hardwick and Stray (2008) and mentioned in my Introduction, is yet another by-product of the postmodern condition.

Ancient Greek theatre is established as the mythologised and somewhat mysterious beginning of Western theatre and society. These qualities ensure that it remains a curiosity and, therefore, coupled with the democratic turn, I see no reason for the interest in classical theatrical adaptations to stop. Notwithstanding the selected nature of this thesis, I contend that it offered valuable insights into how postmodernism as a critical frame exposes culturally, politically and socially driven concerns within contemporary adaptations of classical texts, and furthermore, how it can inevitably continue to do so in the future.

I did not set out to solve contention around the term postmodernism; in many ways the term remains polemical because it cannot be defined as a stable state or entity. In spite of this,

I insist that the use of a postmodern critical lens is vital because we are still living within a period with postmodernism as the cultural dominant. Though I argue aspects of these adaptations emerged as a result of a specific cultural condition, they cannot be reductively labelled as postmodern works. In 2019, in Western culture, we are now so enculturated to the postmodern landscape that we fail to notice it, and actively using a deliberately postmodern critique exposes the cultural hierarchy rather than simply enforcing it; my own revisionist agenda has demonstrated how to identify the fine line between complicity and critique of the cultural dominant. It is hard to see beyond the contemporary as postmodernism appears to exist as its own type of continuum moving forward. And so lastly, I simply advocate that my selected examples, and future adaptations be read in response to the cultural environment that informs and influences the individuals involved with adaptive processes.

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