Greek Tragedy in the Drama Studio:
Lecoq, Agonism, and the Politics of Choral Pedagogy

Stephe Harrop (2024)

The drama studio is a place of contradictions. Like the twentieth-century actor-training systems it came into being alongside, the studio is an environment designed 'to harness the actor's creativity, inspiration, and talent through the introduction of disciplined techniques' (Hodge 2010, xiii). It is a place for consolidating and extending the creative capacities of performers-in-training, both as individuals and as collectives. But it is also a location where (as Ali Hodge indicates) personal expressivity encounters 'discipline' and 'technique'. A place where emerging theatre-artists' energies may be 'harnessed' towards particular cultural, social, and political ends. In consequence, the drama studio represents an important (and under-explored) site for reflecting on formations and flows of knowledge and understanding in relation to ancient Greek tragedy.

The antecedents of today's drama studios were energised by utopian ideals and ambitions. As Tom Cornford has observed, in its earliest form the studio was a 'small, experimental theatre' (2021, 4), incorporating 'elements of both theatre and school' (2021, 5). The emergence of these spaces in the early twentieth century signalled aspirations towards the cultivation of long-term collaborative practices aimed at new ways of making theatrical art:

> […] their approach to making theatre emphasised the creativity of the actor, the crucial function of collective training for the process of theatre-making, and the importance of experimentation with alternative styles and traditions in order to reinvigorate the contemporary theatre. (2021, 8)

Such desires were never without wider cultural and political resonance, including a 'commitment to collaboration' and to 'continually revising their work' which indicated 'at

least theoretical concessions to more egalitarian and democratic approaches' (2021, 8). Since such organisations generated 'models of practice that would shape the curricula of drama schools' (2021, 300), the black-box drama studios of contemporary UK Higher Education, where students in performing arts undertake a large portion of their practical learning, owe at least some of their identity to the idealistic energies of a century ago.

Yet, despite these lofty ideals, the drama studio today is also a site permeated with prejudice, inequity, and legacies of harm. In 2016, Maame Atuah, Mumba Dodwell, and Steve Kavuma founded The Diversity School, a grassroots organisation committed to addressing 'under-representation, access and diversity in UK drama schools' (Rogers 2021, 2). Five years later, The Diversity School's final report testifies to ongoing and damaging discrimination on the basis of race, gender, social class, and disability (Rogers 2021). The impact of the #MeToo movement has revealed that, for many students, the drama studio has been a place where - under the guise of creative freedom and industry preparation - abuses have been perpetrated with near-impunity (Cavendish & Goldsbrough 2021; Cavendish 2021; Yossman 2021). Too often, the drama studio has been a place where talented young people have been taught to abdicate their own judgment and safety, placing themselves at risk to gain the approval of powerful elders. Actor and writer Michaela Coel, whose memoir *Misfits* documents the fact that her London drama school would only permit a black student to star in a classical drama (*Lysistrata*) in a low-prestige venue on the wrong side of the river (2021, 47-8),[2] describes a training culture which actively perpetuated disempowering and harmful tropes: 'We were told at school, if we wanted to pursue this, we should be "yes" people, and expect to be poor for the rest of our lives.' (2021, 44).[3]

[2] 'I was to play a role so important it was the name of the play – Lysistrata in *Lysistrata*, and my year were really happy for me. We only later found out this performance wouldn't be on Silk Street, it would be in South London; a 35-minute drive across the river. My mates were sad. They hugged me. "No agent is going to come to this, Michaela. Not the hot ones. They simply won't cross the river".' (2021, 47-8). Coel does not discuss the fact that, in UK theatre culture, ancient comedy is often understood to be less prestigious than tragedy. But in such a context, this casting also raises important questions concerning the kinds of classical texts and roles that global majority actors-in-training are able to lay claim to.

[3] The drama school in question has since issued a public apology for some of the incidents Coel and her peers have drawn attention to. Coel (2021 42-3); (Harrison 2022).

Inevitably, students' encounters with Greek tragedy within such educational institutions are shaped by a swirl of ideological cross-currents, no less powerful for being largely submerged. Advocating an 'insider approach to practice-based pedagogical arts research' (2022, 537), Jamieson Dryburgh proposes that 'the studio can be considered as a situated cultural site', a 'location wherein shared and learned patterns of values, behaviour, beliefs and language of a culture-sharing group become established' (2022, 541). Accordingly, this chapter considers the ways in which classics education takes place within the drama studio; the understandings of ancient theatre practice and its current meanings which are (explicitly or tacitly) promulgated within studio settings; and the implications of dominant training models and practices for wider cultural understandings and imaginings of Greek tragedy in the UK today. It contends that, in failing to recognise or acknowledge the (culturally conservative) ideological underpinnings of established approaches, the customary pedagogies of UK HE are often unable to confront students with a Greek tragedy capable of intersecting meaningfully with their own lived experiences of power, dissent, struggle, and aspiration. The discussion developed here specifically focuses on approaches to choral training derived from Jacques Lecoq's theatre pedagogy, critically analysing dominant practices currently in use in UK drama studios, and tracing the emergence of an alternative approach to Lecoq-inspired choral training, aimed at empowering students as creative agents, both within and beyond the studio.

Jacques Lecoq is an important figure in studio-based receptions of Greek tragedy in the UK. Exercises and games approaches developed at his *École internationale de théâtre* in Paris (founded 1956), and then disseminated through English-speaking education systems following the publication of David Bradby's translation of *The Moving Body (Le Corps Poétique)* in 2000,[4] have become foundational elements of drama, theatre, and acting curricula nationwide, including in drama school (conservatoire) and university settings. Perhaps the single most recognisable pedagogic device in today's studio-based chorus work derives from a practice briefly outlined in *The Moving Body*:

[4] Prior to this publication, a range of concepts and practices had been disseminated via theatre artists who had studied with Lecoq. See Eastman (2013, 363-4).

> Another type of exercise is when a chorus moves without anyone knowing who is the leader. The internal rule, which spectators are unaware of, but the students discover, is that the leader is inevitably the one visible to all the others. (2002, 140)

In Lecoq's discussion, this is one of several potential approaches outlined, all of them aiming at achieving a sense of the tragic chorus as 'a kind of living cell, capable of taking on different forms according to the situation in which it finds itself' (2002, 139). He also, for example, presents exercises which involve re-enacting political speeches from history (2002, 138), or improvising group reactions to 'a football match, a film, a bullfight' (2002, 138-9). But, despite Lecoq's own experimental variety of approaches, it is the briefly sketched exercise invoking a chorus with no visible leader which has been most eagerly adopted in UK drama studios.

In the course of this adoption, the favoured exercise has been both removed from its experimental pedagogic context, and progressively miniaturised. In her study of Lecoq's choruses, Shona Morris draws attention to the fact that participants in such training may choose the 'metaphor' which defines their chorus' presence at each moment of a tragic narrative, giving as examples: 'a group of animals (a shoal of fish or a flock of birds), elements (a wave or a cloud), matter that changes (glass shatters, paper crumbles, mercury roils)' (2016, 152). However, where Morris' discussion foregrounds participants' capacity and responsibility to make successive creative choices about the nature of their emerging chorus, Helen Eastman's survey of UK receptions of Lecoq's work demonstrates how a single, reduced version of this practice has largely become canonical, citing: 'a group who can move as one body, like a flock of birds or shoal of fish' (2013, 364).

The widespread adoption of this specific exercise was undoubtedly informed by the work of UK theatre company Complicité, whose founder members met while studying at Lecoq's school, and whose artistic director (Simon McBurney) has played a major role in shaping UK receptions of Lecoq's ensemble practices (Eastman 2013, 363). In particular, their 1992 production *The Street of Crocodiles* showcased ensemble dramaturgies in which actors aimed to emulate the in-flight motion of a flock of starlings (Giannachi & Luckhurst 1999, 74; Heddon & Milling 2006, 178-9), an approach which gained significant cultural reach when the

company's rehearsals were documented for television in an episode of *The Late Show* (BBC, 1992). Within a few years, modified versions of the Lecoq exercise, filtered through more familiar Complicité manifestations, began to appear in guides to physical theatre training. For instance, Dymphna Callery's 2001 *Through the Body* gives an iteration titled 'Shoal of fish' (94), with a preamble expressly name-checking *The Street of Crocodiles* as inspiration (94). Two decades on, versions of this same exercise have become ubiquitous enough that they circulate without reference to (any of) its originators. For example, in an educational resource prepared by Actors of Dionysus it's simply called the 'Diamond Exercise for Chorus Work', though a note for teachers explaining that students 'should look like a shoal of fish, or birds flocking' makes the debt clear.[5] It's also notable, by this point, that the exploratory range of potential approaches documented in *The Moving Body* has shrunk to a shallow pool of familiar bird-and-fish similes.

As this shrinkage of Lecoq's choral pedagogy indicates, the teaching of Greek choral dramaturgies in the UK overwhelmingly desires to foreground concepts of unity and cohesion, even where such a focus might limit advanced/professional learners' opportunity for creative exploration and artistic self-determination. In recent years, concerns about the appearance of a limited 'canon' of accepted Lecoq pedagogy have been articulated, for example in Amy Russell's group interview 'Against the "Lecoq Canon"' (2020). In the course of this discussion, Jonathan Young reflects: 'when the pedagogy is passed on to students and to the students of students, they can begin to mistake the curriculum for the pedagogy. They lose the spirit of inquiry and start to install a canon' (2020, 371). In many cases, the familiar drama studio exhortation to move like 'a flock of birds' or 'a shoal of fish' represents precisely this: the displacement of genuine pedagogic experiment with choral practices and presences in favour of a superficial appearance of harmonious co-creativity.

In the context of UK HE, such aspirations are frequently imbricated with a pervasive – if often inchoate - sense of tragedy as a rarefied, idealised, and spiritually elevating theatre-form. As Joshua Billings, Felix Budelmann, and Fiona Macintosh have written, modern receptions of

[5] A companion resource on '7 Levels of Tension' does acknowledge Lecoq as a source of inspiration. Both may be found at: https://www.actorsofdionysus.com/education/free-resources (accessed 22 June 2022).

ancient drama predominantly elect to position choral practices 'as harmoniously aligned with the cosmic, social, and political order' (2013, 4). However, in Chantal Mouffe's critical cultural analysis, the desire to conceptualise society as 'an harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble' (2005a, 10) characterises a 'post-political' (2005a, 1-2) worldview 'unable to adequately grasp the pluralistic nature of the social world' and 'the conflicts that pluralism entails' (2005a, 10). At the microcosmic level of drama studio choral pedagogy, a cognate situation may be observed. While UK HE's idealising conceptualisations of ancient theatre practice often enfold a valorisation of classical tragedy as somehow intertwined with the historical emergence of democratic politics,[6] they simultaneously serve to limit the scope of contemporary students to experience tragic dramaturgies as sites open to their own creative self-determination.

Actors-in-training learning to move in flock- and shoal-like ways are rarely required to respond with original critical intelligence to the subject-matter of the ancient plays they're working on. Instead, the mass reproduction of apparently spontaneous and frictionless choral choreographies denotes a training culture which wishes to absorb the cultural prestige of classical tragic plays as an apparently natural, apolitical inheritance, without engaging the qualities of embodied debate and contestation which regularly characterised the chorus-centred dramaturgies of fifth-century BCE Athens (Dunbar & Harrop 2018, 190-1). In their published form, Lecoq's tragic pedagogies hold space for multiple manifestations of choral agency, including those characteristic of a politically-engaged, deliberative community. The chorus, he writes, 'may exhibit contradictions, its members may sometimes oppose one another in subgroups, or alternatively unite to address the public with one voice' (2002, 139). But students only presented with the miniaturised, 'flock-and-shoal' version of Lecoq's experimental pedagogy are denied such opportunities to conceptualise their choral selves as engaged and empowered creative and cultural agents.

However, as the remainder of this chapter will propose, this is not the only way in which Lecoq-inspired choral pedagogies can operate in relation to the drama studio teaching of Greek tragedy. The discussion which follows reflects the development of a personal teaching

[6] The arguments are considered more fully in Harrop (2018, 100).

practice (my own),[7] rooted in the progressive emergence of new studio responses to principles and exercises laid out in *The Moving Body.* The resulting pedagogic practice responds strongly to Lecoq's foregrounding of spatial relationality between protagonist and chorus (2002, 137). It centres upon the creative interplay of 'balancing' and 'unbalancing' (2002, 141-2), taking these as catalysts for an emergent studio chorality characterised by playfulness, spontaneity, and spatial agency.[8] And it is alert to the potential of such practices for engaging and exploring agonistic energies within Greek tragic dramaturgy. Actively seeking alternatives to disempowering modern clichés of choral performance (erroneously understood by many actors-in-training, and sometimes their teachers, to represent historical truths), this approach aims to help students recognise themselves as culturally situated re-interpreters of classical drama, with both the capacity, and the creative authority, to re-imagine ancient theatre practices in a range of modes and moods, including those responsive to their own experiences of cultural or political dissensus.[9]

In tragic playwriting of the fifth century BCE, the *agon* was a pair of speeches pitting diametrically opposed views against one another. The term was related to competitive sporting culture, where it could refer to the struggles and confrontations which took place in an athletic contest, or wrestling match. Notions of agonism have been revived in contemporary political theory, primarily in Mouffe's formulations (2005a; 2005b; 2013)[10] where the term is used to describe a politics which challenges the pursuit of (neo)liberal consensus, insisting upon the necessity for ongoing processes of democratic debate and

[7] This work took place at a number of institutions, especially Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance and The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. I am deeply grateful to all the students I worked with during those years for their creative courage, and spirit of critical contestation.

[8] This sits within a wider conceptualisation of tragedy as: 'a serious play on a mythic or heroic theme (incorporating a sizeable dose of suffering, grief, or anguish), containing music and dance, its dramaturgy rooted in interactions between individual actors and a collective chorus' (Dunbar & Harrop 2018, 11). This final part of this formulation is in turn indebted to Goldhill (2007, 46-53).

[9] Thanks are due to TaPRA's Performer Training Working Group for their feedback on an earlier version of this discussion. Also to Marcus Louch, who supported preliminary research for that paper while undertaking a Summer Research Scholarship at Liverpool Hope University.

[10] See also Fisher & Katsouraki (2017)

confrontation. Agonistic practice, Mouffe proposes, requires a pluralistic society to acknowledge, and openly choose between, the range of passionately-held (and sometimes irreconcilable) positions occupied by its citizens. The aim is to 'mobilize those passions towards democratic designs' (2005b, 103), rather than forcing dissenting voices beyond the margins of acceptable discourse. Mouffe's work identifies ongoing and impassioned 'agonistic struggle', rather than the pursuit of an illusory – and, in practice, often exclusionary - consensus, as 'the very condition of a vibrant democracy' (2013, 6-7). Drawing inspiration from these ideas, I have previously proposed the value of 're-conceptualizing Athenian tragedy as a form permeated by agonistic structures and practices', challenging 'prevalent notions of ancient tragedy as a catalyst for the creation of unified, consensual audience/communities', and instead 'asserting the critical importance of disunity, contention, and struggle' to the contemporary 'experience of tragedy' (Harrop 2018, 112-3).

In the context of the contemporary drama studio, such agonistic perspectives and approaches intersect provocatively with some of the essential principles of Lecoq-inspired pedagogy. Mouffe's political thinking envisages democratic practice as a rule-bound play of adversarial passions,[11] while Lecoq's famous emphasis on play (*le jeu*)[12] requires that performers cultivate a 'readiness to explore the circumstances of the moment', within 'a set of rules or expectations germane to the style or form of theatre under investigation' (Murray 2003, 50). Both formulations envisage essential (democratic or creative) freedoms as emerging in relation to an agreed set of rules, which confer structure and meaning upon passionate energies. And both position the practices they describe as open-ended, exploratory processes, rather than programmatic means towards pre-determined ends. In a late-life conversation with Dario Fo, Lecoq gave a sense of the intersection of political and artistic potential which facilitated his experiments in a newly-liberated, postwar Europe: 'There were no more rules. We had to make up the game again' (Murray 2003, 14).[13] This discussion, Simon Murray suggests, 'reveals a strong feeling of optimism following the defeat of Fascism,

[11] See, for instance, Mouffe 2005a (20-21; 32-3; 52).
[12] On 'play' in Lecoq's pedagogy, and its legacies, see Coletto & Buckley (2016, 112-118).
[13] The conversation quoted by Murray originally appears in Jean-Gabriel Roy & Jean-Noël Carasso's film *Le deux voyages a Jacques Lecoq* (1999). See also Murray (2003, 39-40).

and a sense that artists could – and should – empower themselves to invent afresh the rules of their particular creative work' (2003, 17). Although he never wished to frame his work as political,[14] Lecoq's pedagogies are infused with both a positive spirit of artistic agency, and a pragmatic willingness to 'make up the game again' in response to changing circumstances and opportunities.

My own studio-based re-imaginings of Lecoq-inspired pedagogies as prompts for agonistic choral experiment emerged over a decade, initially through successive mis-rememberings of, and classroom improvisations around, the exercise known as 'A Balanced Stage'.[15] In its classic (published) form, actors-in-training enter a stage, one by one, each choosing either to sustain or disrupt the spatial 'balance' already established by their peers. So, within the exercise, an actor might opt to take up a position which enhances an emerging sense of symmetry, or they might move in a way which deliberately 'unbalances' an existing pattern of bodies (2002, 141-3).[16] This first exercise then develops into a second, more complex, iteration, in which every new entrant temporarily assumes a 'weight' equal to that of all the other players combined, so that 'each new actor who comes on will cause those already on stage to regroup' (2002, 143-4). This version of the exercise also leads directly into the playful embodiment of tragic dynamics, as the final figure to enter the space 'will be the first hero, facing the first chorus' (2002, 144).[17]

My creative misremembering of these exercises was doubtless informed by my own encounters with the work of Complicité, especially their performances and workshops showcasing swift, playful choreographies created through dynamic flows of un-balancing and re-balancing space. Certainly, in my own studio pedagogy, a recurring game gradually crystallised in which a singular figure – metaphorically imbued with a 'weight' equal to that

[14] On his role in 'the "denazification" of Germany' see Lecoq (2002, 5).
[15] On the genealogy of this exercise see Morris (2016, 153-4).
[16] See also Morris (2016, 151).
[17] Lecoq uses the term 'hero' for this figure. In my own practice, I prefer the term 'protagonist', which in addition to being more inclusive, contains the stem *agon*, recalling the argumentative and competitive function of the ancient tragic actor. In this discussion, the composite 'hero-protagonist' is sometimes deployed to indicate thinking drawing on both traditions.

of the rest of the group combined - is given licence to disrupt the balancing-act being attempted by their peers. In the basic form of the game,[18] the singular figure is picked by the teacher/trainer. Sometimes, with more advanced groups, the protagonist has the option to pick their replacement via a game of 'tag' (the former protagonist immediately re-joining the co-operative collective). This accidental elaboration of the exercise adheres to tradition in building ensemble skills, encouraging heightened awareness, unspoken communication, and fluid collective motion. As with the classic version, it creates dynamic spatial configurations which can form the basis of scenic compositions. However, what's different in this version is that the rest of the group (the 'chorus') are expressly empowered to take collective action to mitigate the protagonist figure's wilful unbalancing of the space. They can resist. They can work proactively to defend their territory and values. And this slight shift brings into play an agonistic relationality between chorus and protagonist which diverges in some significant ways from Lecoq's conceptualisation of Greek tragedy.

In *The Moving Body,* Lecoq writes: 'The shape of tragedy is marked by two main features: the chorus and the hero' (2002, 135). The former's role is to clear 'a space for tragedy' (2002, 139), into which a singular hero-figure will step. Morris explains the key relationships of Lecoq's tragic universe in this way: 'Fate is implacable. The laws of the Gods prevail. Heroes respect the laws, but passion, revenge or misadventure intervene, causing these laws to be broken. The Chorus keep to the laws of the Gods and accept Fate. These are the dynamics of Tragedy: Fate vs. Hero vs. Chorus' (2016, 151). In this account of classic Lecoq pedagogy, chorus and 'hero' engage in 'discourse', resulting in 'a constant shifting of balance to reflect their arguments' (2016, 151). However, there are also stated limits to this chorus' agency. Lecoq instructs that: 'the great rule governing the tragic chorus is never to be active, always reactive' (2002, 140).[19]

[18] Which appears in *Greek Tragedy and the Contemporary Actor* under the title 'Protagonist v. Chorus' (Dunbar & Harrop 2018, 175-6).

[19] In *The Moving Body*, Lecoq presupposes a sustained physical distance between the chorus and a tragedy's protagonists, taking as a given the (possibly Hellenistic) principle that 'the Greek chorus was not on the same level of the actors' (2002, 140).

This is definitely not how it went with my own drama studio choruses who - given permission to playfully compete against the hero-protagonist - proved themselves capable of becoming skilled and spatially assertive theatrical players, collectively monitoring and managing the space of their interactions. They might even find moments to assert their collective agency, actively taking steps, within the playful parameters of the game, to defend their space against the risks posed by the disruptive spatial presence of the singular hero-protagonist.[20] Once text is layered onto these spatial encounters, the outcome is a chorus with a strong sense of their collective presence and capacity, certainly able to clear or cede space (as per Lecoq's formulations), but also to challenge or contest the destructively self-willed positions adopted by tragedy's singular hero-protagonists. Simon Goldhill has described 'the contrast between the collective chorus and the individual hero' as 'one of the structuring principles of tragedy' (2007, 47). In this view, 'the hero goes too far', making 'the boundaries of normal life problematic' (2007, 47):

> The hero is often destroyed – or destroys himself – in pursuit of his own goals, and this passionate self-belief and self-commitment is set in juxtaposition to the cooperative virtues of the community (2007, 47)

Increasingly, our drama studio explorations of modified of Lecoq-inspired pedagogy began to probe what might happen if a chorus were to become conscious of their collective power to oppose (even occasionally to halt) such destructive displays of tragic individualism. Working in this way, student choruses can become active players in a game of embodied agonism, where a given drama's balance of personal and political loyalties is always in shifting, unpredictable spatial play.[21]

This sustained sense of play indicates another point of connection between agonistic experiment and Lecoq's legacies. As Mark Evans has outlined:

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[20] There are resonances here with Murray's Exercise 4.7 (part of 'Towards The Dynamics of Tragedy') (2003, 141), although Murray's discussion is strongly informed by the idea of tragedy's actors as driven by external forces: successive exercises embed the sense that 'forces stronger than yourself are provoking you' (145).

[21] Compare Morris (2016, 151).

> Throughout his teaching, Lecoq exploits the overlap of meanings within in the word 'play', allowing it to draw together associations with children's play, games and sports, as well as with acting and performance, all of which he allows to resonate within his pedagogy. (2012, 168)

Evans' work – together with that of Murray - has drawn attention to the importance of sport in the emergence of Lecoq's theatre pedagogies,[22] in ways which might offer valuable new provocations for studio explorations of tragic and choral acting. Turning the measured process of balancing the stage into a competitive game may run counter to some of Lecoq's premises concerning classical Greek aesthetics, but it also invites choral performers to invest their spatial play with 'the collective effort of the sports team', channelling their 'openness and intuitive responsiveness' towards shared goals (Evans 2012, 173). And although 'Lecoq never openly encouraged competition', Evans notes that he 'did not discourage the competitive atmosphere that would build up' in the course of his actor training. In Evans' judgment, Lecoq 'seemed to consider the tension, anticipation, energy and focus that it generated as beneficial for the quality of the students' work' (2012, 174). Perhaps tellingly, Lecoq's Paris school found its home in *Le Central* which had been 'a gymnasium devoted to boxing' (Murray 2003, 17), suggesting that a sense of embodied, agonistic struggle may not have been entirely alien to his conceptualisations of the actor's work.

In a similar way, infusing the teaching of Greek chorus with of a sense of competitive spatial play can lend a sense of immediacy, intention, and excitement. Creating a game which endows tragic choruses with active spatial agency raises the stakes of speech and scene studies, meaning that student actors in protagonist roles must work, moment-to-moment, to engage and maintain alliances with their physically engaged and assertive choral peers. In its foregrounding of spatial encounters and negotiations between the individual and the collective, or between different groups, this approach heightens the sense of tragedy as an agonistic theatre-form; its plots powered by irreconcilable differences of judgment and

[22] On receptions of 'Ancient Greek physical culture' in Lecoq training see Evans (2014, 148).

aspiration; and its embattled bodies permanently struggling to navigate contradictory currents of ethics, law, politics, inclusion, exclusion, alliance, vengeance, grief, and love.

Evans rightly cautions that: 'Sport, movement training and indeed even theatre itself are not, for Lecoq, essentially or primarily political' (2012, 168). Rather:

> […] actions, gestures and movements left unfilled with intention (psychologically or politically) are then ready to participate in an exploration of theatrical and emotional dynamics in space in a manner that maximises the creative choices for the student and minimises the limitations on creative and imaginative play. (2012, 175)

However, Murray's evaluation of Lecoq's ongoing relevance is also apposite: 'his legacy will continue to be an open one, in which his ideas and practices are regularly given new life and different shape and are re-contextualised according to the circumstances of time and place' (2003, 159). Accordingly, this chapter has proposed that one important way in which the 'unfilled' form of Lecoq's balanced stage (and its variants) can generate meaningful imaginative play in relation to tragic drama is through the creation of space for embodying and exploring ancient plays' agonistic energies.

For emerging performers in present-day drama studios, pedagogic encounters with Greek tragedy are often understood as learning experiences in relation to which they have little or no intellectual and creative agency. Translated texts derived from ancient tragedy are frequently used to instil foundational principles of vocal and physical practice (Dunbar & Harrop 2018, 43-4), with the aim of producing disciplined, fluent, and ostensibly harmonious cohorts of learners. Across both drama school (conservatoire) and university programmes, practical experiences of classical drama are framed by de-contextualised and uncritical readings of Aristotle's *Poetics* (2018, 27), serving to reinforce many students' tacit learning that they lack the creative authority to interpret classical plays for themselves, and that 'a tragic play's meaning is singular, fixed, and non-negotiable' (2018, 45).[23] Almost universally,

[23] For a fuller account of this critique, see Dunbar & Harrop (2018, 27-49).

too, they are encouraged to emulate birds and fishes, creating an aesthetic display of de-politicised, apparently spontaneous consensus which is vaguely supposed to correspond to tragedy's status as a serene, unchanging, and idealised cultural form; but which might more accurately be read as corresponding to deep-seated (neo)liberal anxieties about the potential consequences of allowing students' diverse experiences and aspirations to inform their explorations of high-status ancient plays. However, this chapter has contended that it's worth attending to Lecoq's description of tragedy as 'the greatest form of theatre that is still open to renewal' (2002, 135), and his insistence that: 'Far from taking an historical view of ancient tragedy and its imagined codes of communication, we seek to reinvent the tragic form for today' (2002, 135).

In this spirit, the pedagogic experiments described in this chapter set out to endow learners with the 'confidence to play imaginatively and creatively' (Murray 2003, 103), preparing them to engage as active, embodied agents in relation to a theatre-form which recurrently stages unresolved disputes and confrontations emerging from the most challenging cultural, ethical, and political territories. Beginning from processes of collective spatial play, and proceeding to embed playful forms of physical contest and confrontation as foundations of a tragic dramaturgy, this work seeks to re-position the acting of tragedy as an explicitly agonistic process of co-creative, ethically engaged, and imaginative citizenship. As Billings, Budelmann, and Macintosh observe, the Greek chorus is a phenomenon perennially open to imaginative transformation, 'appealed to, longed for, or imagined' (2013, 5) in a variety of forms. This chapter offers a reimagining of choral practice in the drama studio as an experience which invites learners to bring their whole (embodied and intellectual) selves to the process of reinventing ancient drama's confrontations and struggles, fusing Lecoq-inspired choral pedagogy with an agonistic conception of tragedy to bring classical dramaturgies into new creative conjunction with students' contemporary experiences, commitments, struggles, and aspirations.

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