Local Mimesis and Plateaic Diegesis: Distinguishing the Self-referential from the Metatheatrical in Greek Tragedy

It is difficult to speculate with certainty on the original reception of ancient theatre practice or to attempt to reconstruct it in danger of presentism. Yet, while contemporary presumptions advance and refine documentation, there is a balance to be found to avoid unnecessary anachronism. Some scholars of Greek theatre misapply theories of contemporary theatre to the Athenian stage, assuming the rules are analogues at best and at worst universals of theatre. Of chief concern among these is the question of the twentieth century notion of metatheatre. Originally conceived by Lionel Abel as a generic distinction of modern theatre, characterized by theatrical self-awareness dating from Shakespeare onwards, metatheatre according to Abel is antithetical to traditional Greek tragic and comic forms. Despite Abel’s designation of metatheatre as a genre, the term has rapidly acquired several definitions all of which share the common notion of “theatrical self-referentality.” In his book Spectator Politics for example, Niall Slater appropriates another definition from Mark Ringer, by which “encompasses all forms of theatre self-referentiality.” Slater’s adoption of Ringer’s definition instead of providing his own discussion of metatheatre suggests that scholars are comfortable using metatheatre as an all-encompassing term for any self-referentiality, avoiding critical engagement with the nature of metatheatre and ignoring its and semantic functions. Since self-referential moments saturate Greek theatre there is certainly full of self-referential moments, scholars have begun to describe it as metatheatrical. They apply modern aspects of metatheatricality, such as theatrical double-vision and dislocation to the Athenian stage as though Athenians and modern audiences shared the same experience of theatrical self-referentiality. To combat

---

1 In “‘Estrangement” or “Reincarnation” Performers and Performance on the Classical Athenian Stage,” Ismene Lada-Richards applies the dichotomy of the modern Brechtian theatre of ‘alienation’ and the Stanislavskian “immersive method” to Greek drama, albeit as an extended analogy. In doing so, she applies two modernist schools of thought on drama to texts from two thousand five hundred years prior.


3 Richard Hornby describes metatheatre “as drama about drama; it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, drama itself” (31). Hornby’s definition is too broad to have any real application beyond his general poststructuralist claim that “all drama is metadramatic, since its subject is always, willy-nilly, the drama/culture complex” (31), since all drama is part of a self-referring intertextual web.

4 Slater’s book details ‘metatheatre’ as a tool in Aristophanes’ arsenal, which fosters critical thinking in its readers. Yet Slater omits to define what “metatheatre” is, thus implying that its mere presence always results in a “dislocation” effect. This broad application of twentieth century terminology is troublesome when applied without qualification to works from vastly different cultures, especially when said scholarship purports to explain that semiotic environment.
this anachronistic view of the Greek stage, let us differentiate between mere *theatrical self-reference* and *metatheatricality*. Theatrical self-referentiality can affect any number of semantic missives, but metatheatricality is limited to self-reference that produces an aesthetic “unease, dislocation of perception” in the audience and is described as “estrangement” or ‘alienation’ by theorists.”

Considering this distinction, let us explore why metatheatre cannot systematically function in the Athenian context despite the ample evidence of textual and theatrical self-referentiality. I will investigate the role of *mimesis* and *diegesis*, and *locus* and *platea* in creating the theatre space, and then I will attempt to recalibrate our understanding of Athenian theatrical self-reference as serving a political function rather than an aesthetic one. I thereby hope to demonstrate the merit of understanding perceptions of theatre in its own milieu, rather than study how modern productions of classical texts might make use of metatheatricality.

**Mimesis & Diegesis: Why Greek Theatre is Predominantly Diegetic**

Looking at mythical scenes painted on a Greek amphora, the untrained eye cannot differentiate a depiction of a tragedy from a regular mythic scene. Painters avoided representing scenes from the tragic stage literally, as they would have appeared. The image excludes stage properties and theatrical devices. Characters are not depicted wearing masks or costumes, and women appear as women rather than male actors in drag. In many ways, this limits the amount of information we can gather from this type of monumental evidence on the staging of Greek tragedy. The vases do not indicate how the playing space was organized, or what the costumes and masks looked like. The *Pronomos vase* is a famous exception that proves the rule since it includes a few figures holding masks, and does not depict a mythic or dramatic scene, but the performers themselves either before or after a play. Nevertheless, that most vases depict mythic action rather than dramatic performance provides valuable insight on how the Greeks viewed theatricality and what relationship the actors bore to the characters they portrayed. The fact that theatrical accessories are not included suggests that the Greek audience viewed the staging as secondary to the story.

---

5 Richard Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1986) 32. Hornby claims that “this ‘seeing double’ is the true source of the significance of metadrama.” (32).


7 It is significant that vase paintings depicting Old Comedy (*archaia*) do include the literal trappings of theatre such as the padded costumes. In *Performing Greek Comedy*, Alan Hughes claims that this is in part due to the metatheatrical self-referentiality of Old Comedy. Yet, he agrees that depictions of comedy “called for a different convention, because neither the characters nor their story had any previous, independent existence.” (3) Painters lacked the visual vocabulary for representing the scenes from *drama*. Unlike Tragedy and Satyr-play, based on familiar myths, Old Comedy featured original narratives. Therefore, painters situate their images of Old
Moreover, the narrative *diegesis* was more important to the Greeks than *mimesis*, or more precisely, Athenian theatre is more a diegetic medium than a mimetic one.

This may at first seem like an extreme statement considering both Plato and Aristotle identify theatre as mimetic. Aristotle, however, identifies not only tragedy and comedy, but also all other arts as mimetic: “ἕποποιία δὴ καὶ ή τῆς τραγῳδίας ποίησις ἐτὶ δὲ κοιμοδία καὶ ή δίθυραμβοποιητική καὶ τῆς αὐλητικῆς ή πλείστη καὶ κιθαριστικῆς πᾶσαι τυχάνουσιν ὅσα μιμήσεις τὸ σύνολον.” Therefore, we must distinguish between Aristotelian μιμήσις that refers to all “artful representations,” and the μιμήσις that refers to imitation. Examining their definitions closer, it is clear that theatre carries both specific diegetic and mimetic elements. Plato, for one, explains that all stories are diegetic: “ἂν οὐ πάντα διήγησις ή ποιητῶν λέγεται διήγησις ή γεγονότων ή ὄντων ή μελλόντων.” If all stories are diegetic then all theatre, as driven primarily by plot, must also be diegetic. Plato proceeds to distinguish storytelling methods by their mimetic element: “ἂν οὖν οὐχὶ ἀπαγγέλλων ἢ μιμήσεως ἀπαγγέλλων ἢ μιμήσεως γιγνόμενη ἢ δι᾽ ἀμφοτέρων περαίνουσιν.” Plato articulates here a distinction between diegetic and mimetic storytelling meaning whether the story is told (diegesis) or shown (mimesis). His distinction is also a latent assumption in Aristotle’s poetics. Like Plato, Aristotle claims that μιμεῖσθαι, “representation,” can be accomplished entirely or partly through ἀπαγγέλλοντα, “narration,” or through μιμήσις, “imitation.” Therefore, he adopts Plato’s distinction between ‘showing’ a story mimetically and telling a story diegetically.

καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς αὐτῶις καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ μιμεῖσθαι ἐστὶν ὅτε μὲν ἀπαγγέλλοντα, ἢ ἔτερόν τι γιγνόμενον ὃσπερ Ὅμηρος ποιεῖ ἢ ὃς τὸν αὐτὸν καὶ μὴ μεταβάλλοντα, ἢ πάντας ὡς πράττοντας καὶ ἐνεργοῦντας ἃτοὺς μιμομένους.  

Comedy within the theatre so that the viewer could contextualize what they were seeing. Such a feature was unnecessary for the familiar myths depicted in tragedy and satyr-play.

8 Aristot. Poet. 1447a.9. “Epic poetry then and tragic poetry and still more comedic poetry and the dithyrambic poetry and most aulos and kithera playing altogether these happen to be artful representations.” All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted.

9 Plat. Rep. 392d. “Is not everything that is told by storytellers or poets a diegesis of things that have come to pass or things that are or things that are destined?”


11 Plat. Rep. 392d. “Do they not then proceed by true narration [diegesis] or narration that is produced through imitation [mimesis] or through both?”

12 Aristot. Poet. 1448a. “For in each of these [arts] it is possible to represent the same thing by narrating and becoming another, just as Homer does [i.e. alternating narration and voicing characters], or without adopting the manner of another [as in pure narration], or else the whole action represented as carried out by the imitated.”
Therefore, diegesis and mimesis are not necessarily antithetically opposed, but two aspects of storytelling. All theatre is diegetic insofar as it tells a story, but is mimetic because it tells this story, at least in part by representing the characters. However, Plato must emphasize the mimetic quality of theatre in order to distinguish it from Epic, which features both narration and characterization. So how mimetic is then the Athenian theatre? And what does this have to do with metatheatre?

If it is demonstrable that the Athenian theatre is not entirely mimetic, as Plato and Aristotle believe, then it is not possible for a performer to break the verisimilitude and create a metatheatrical moment. It is precisely this breaking of the mimetic verisimilitude that creates the dislocation and double vision of metatheatre; actors certainly adopt their roles, but how much of the story is really shown to us, and how much is told? On the Athenian stage most of the story occurs offstage and is reported ἀπαγγέλλω, “to report,” to the audience. This is not to say that Greek theatre is a mere recitation of the narrative, but the texts suggest an acute evasion of representing action on stage.

As far as imitation is concerned, after establishing tragedy as mimetic, Aristotle quickly distances it from his initial claim. Throughout the rest of his Poetics, imitation gradually loses its importance. First, Aristotle claims that Tragedy is the representation of action, and that the target of tragedy is the plot. Then, he suggests that character is not as necessary for tragedy as plot: “ἄρχη μὲν οὖν οἷον καὶ οἷον ψυχή ο μῦθος τῆς τραγῳδίας, δεύτερον δὲ τὰ ἡθη.” But if character is secondary in nature, how can theatre be essentially mimetic? If the representation of personalities on stage, the mimesis, is secondary to the representation of the plot, the diegesis, then tragedy is not entirely mimetic. While I am not going to suggest that it would be possible to produce theatre entirely without the representation of a personality on stage, I will argue that on the Greek stage most of the plot is told diegetically. In fact, the only parts of the diegesis that are routinely portrayed mimetically on the Athenian stage are the argumentative dialogues and agon speeches.

In the Bacchae, for example, Dionysus and other missive characters report most of the plot after it happens off-stage. Although they always appear in character when delivering these missive reports, the action occurs elsewhere. These narrative passages

---

13 Aristot. Poet. 1450a “Chief among these [the six aspects of tragedy] is the arrangement of actions. For tragedy is not the representation of men but of action and life.”

14 Aristot. Poet. 1450a. “Therefore the actions and plot are the end of tragedy, and altogether the end is most important.”

15 Ibid. “Yet tragedy cannot be produced without actions but it can be without characterization.”

16 Aristot. Poet. 1450a. “Plot then is the foundation of tragedy, the soul as it were, character on the other hand is secondary.”
are also rife with visceral imagery especially when they describe deaths or other key περιπέτεια, “reversals.” Key examples of this are the messenger speeches from *Hippolytos* and this one from *The Bacchae*:

She was foaming at the mouth.
Her dilated eyeballs rolled.
Her mind was gone – possessed by Bacchus-
She could not hear her son.
Gripping his left hand and forearm
And purchasing her foot against the doomed man’s ribs,
She dragged his arm off at the shoulder. (Eur. *Ba.* 1122)

This passage is not mimetic, but pure diegetic storytelling, and rather than being theatrical it is actually quite literary. The vivid imagery typical of these missive scenes suggests the audience should listen to the language to appreciate the tragedy rather than witness the event. The Greek aversion to representing tragic action on stage is difficult to explain, and I do not believe there is any single explanation. Nonetheless, even Aristotle seems to suggest that the power of drama is not in the sight of the spectacle but in the idea of the plot. Thus, he says that a plot should be constructed so that anyone hearing it, even without seeing it, would be just as thrilled with pity and fear.\(^{17}\) While this does not explain the phenomenon, it lends us insight on the Greek aesthetic sensibility and explains why the Greek stage is absent of action.

This may seem a side issue, but it is fundamental that we acknowledge the nature of Greek performance in order to ask ourselves if a metatheatre that affects audience dislocation can truly exist in the Greek diegetic realm. Or is metatheatre a uniquely modern phenomenon born out of and against the nineteenth and twentieth century traditions of immersive naturalist theatre. I for one believe that the concept of metatheatre could only have emerged as part of the response to the darkened theatre of the naturalists by the likes of Brecht, his alienating method of *Verfremdung*, and other anti-realist reactionaries.\(^{18}\) Furthermore, metatheatre is only striking\(^{19}\) (and it is only metatheatre if it *is* striking) if we have constructed our epistemological/semantic conception of theatre to involve a

\(^{17}\) Aristot. *Poet.* 1453b.

\(^{18}\) It is important to acknowledge that the darkening of the theatre is a nineteenth century innovation introduced largely by Wagner in *The Art-Work of the Future* as part of his theory of Gesamtkunstwerk, “total –artwork,” and by André Antoine in his naturalist *Théâtre Libre*. This method makes the audience less aware of their own presence and that of their fellow patrons as they lose themselves in the immersion of the piece.

\(^{19}\) Metatheatre distinguishes from self-reference by being striking.
rigid separation between two worlds, the world of the theatre performance and the world of the diegesis. In order for a metatheatrical theatre to exist for the Greeks, as some scholars would suggest, the Greeks would have to recognize this stark separation of the stage. Applying Richard Weimann’s theoretical description of the *locus* and *platea* playing spaces to the Greek stage I will demonstrate why this stark division would have been alien to an Athenian audience.

### The Locus and the Platea: Situating Theatrical Space and the Direction of the Address.

In *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre*, Robert Weimann identifies two key locations on the stage, each representing a specific mode of performance and expression, and each mode carries a different relationship towards the audience, the playing space, and *mimesis*. Originally, Weimann applied his theory to the dramaturgy of the early modern public stage, as it was derived from the popular traditions of medieval stagecraft. I will show, however, that his theory has far wider applications, especially in the realm of the Athenian stage. Weimann suggests, “that the Elizabethan platform stage – far from constituting a unified representational space – can itself be said to have provided two different, although not rigidly opposed, modes of authorizing dramatic discourse.” The first, the *locus*, is the scaffold and the playing area furthest from the audience associated with the “localizing capacities of the *represented* in the dramatic world.” Namely, this is the space of fixed symbolic locations and steady mimetic verisimilitude. The other, the *platea*, is the ‘un-localized’ playing area closest to the audience, associated instead with the actor, the performance, “and the neutral materiality of the platform stage.” This is the space between the mimetically portrayed diegesis and the audience. It is also a “non-illusionistic mode of performance.” In the medieval and early modern theatre, this area is favoured by clown figures, but on the Greek stage it takes on a wider role.

---

20 Hence the *double-vision* of witnessing two worlds at once, the represented *world* of the story and the actual world of the performance, and the *dislocation* out of the mimetically represented world of the story.


25 *Ibid*, 286. The theatrical ‘space’ of the *locus* and the *platea* is not strictly speaking a space of theatrical geography. The *platea* tends to be closer to the audience, but these “spaces” are created by the mode of the
Unlike the modern proscenium stage, which often facilitates a fully localized performance,\textsuperscript{26} the Greek stage, like the thrust Elizabethan stage, encourages plateaic performance; the actor must compete with the publicness of the circular theatre where the audience’s attention is free to wander. As a result, acting in such spaces tends to engage directly with the audience and always remains partially in the plateaic space. A localized performance in such a space, with actors aloof and detached from their audience would also distance audience interest and investment. On the Greek stage, the locus is the space where the mimetic action occurs (or at least what little onstage mimetic action actually occurs). The platea is the space occupied continually by the chorus (like the medieval clown), as well as any character delivering an address toward the audience. The line between the locus action and the platea is not ridged and at any time a performer may move from one to the other.\textsuperscript{27} Although Greek staging is still largely a mystery to us, we do know that the chorus occupied the space of the orchestra. That is, the chorus occupies the physical space closest to the audience. While some evidence suggests that the actors remained predominantly on the skene, the area furthest from the audience, we also know that the centre of the orchestra typically commands the strongest acoustic resonance.\textsuperscript{28}

Furthermore, the agon tradition often included speeches that do not appear to be written as direct addresses to their interlocutor, but rather as pleas or addresses to a higher power,\textsuperscript{29} or more often a moral proclamation to an ambiguous listener. I would propose that in terms of staging, where possible, the speaker would address any speeches to the audience from the platea, perhaps even from the centre of the orchestra.\textsuperscript{30} When Hippolytos makes his rebuttal against Theseus’s accusation, he quickly establishes himself on the platea by addressing his audience when he says: “ἐγὼ δ’ ἄκομψος εἰς ὅχλον δοῦναι λόγον, / ἐς ἥλικας δὲ κῶλιγοις σοφώτερος: / ἔχει δὲ μοῖραν καὶ τόδ’: οἱ

\begin{itemize}
\item[performance.] The actor makes the space through their performance and by their relationship with the audience.
\item[26] This is not to suggest that plateaic spaces cannot exist on the proscenium stage, but that the theatrical framing technology of the proscenium stage lends itself to illusionistic localized performance in a way that is more difficult to achieve on a thrust stage.
\item[27] It is difficult to claim that certain hubristic tragic figures such as Oedipus and Pentheus would spend as much time on the platea since their own hubristic insolence isolates them from the world.\textsuperscript{28}
\item[28] See Mastronarde (1990) and Pickard (1893).
\item[29] Hippolytos’s speech at line 616 illustrates such a plea. He directs his lament immediately towards Zeus and then towards a general unspecified audience. He only addresses the Nurse again at line 651. This may, in part, represent Hippolytos’s misogynistic nature, but nonetheless, many of the speeches from this play and others have an ambiguous direction of address.
\item[30] Weimann also discusses how those characters on the platea are “theatrically privileged,” because of their closer and more influential relationship to the audience. (Lin 284) The agon tradition similarly grants temporary special theatrical privilege to the speaker and the holder of the platea.
\end{itemize}
But, who is the crowd that he is speaking before? The only crowd on stage is the chorus of Troezen women, but given Hippolytos’s misogyny, already established in his last speech (where he refuses to even address a woman for fifty lines), it is unlikely that he would be nervous in front of a crowd of women. Additionally, given his hatred for women, it is even more unlikely that he would care to convince them of anything. Therefore, the only crowd left to address is the theatre audience itself. Some commentators may be inclined to identify this as an example of metatheatre, but Hippolytos situates his address on the platea. He stands in a neutral space, and while he is still caught up in his own tragic action, his address takes on a public dimension: “As a matter of course, such platea-directed mimesis could never be strictly representational: “there remains in bright daylight the social occasion inside the public theatre [ . . . ] and the awareness of the theatrical occasion in the dramatic language itself.”32 Therefore, to an audience, to whom he directly engages and one that is always aware of their ‘social occasion,’ the dislocation, which is imperative to metatheatre, is impossible. If the actor stepped out of character to deliver his lines, the effect may have been different, but he does not. Hippolytos remains Hippolytos even when he steps forward to engage directly with the audience. The Athenian stage is fluid and in this instant Hippolytos changes the theatrical space into the ekklesia, he breaks the diegetic frame of the narrative without breaking character or becoming suddenly aware of his own theatricality.

**Debate Culture and the Didascalia:**

**The Purpose that Self-reference Does Serve in Greek Theatre**

If we return again to Hippolytos’s speech we may find that, despite his claim to the contrary, his speech is quite well composed. He begins humbly enough by making a subtle parrhesiastic invocation, implies that he will speak frankly claiming that he is not skilled in refined speech. He has also already refuted the value of fine words in his first remark to Theseus: “τὸ μέντοι πρᾶγμ’, ἐξ’ ὑπὸ καλοὺς λόγους, / εἰ τις διαπτέξῃν ὡς κάλον τόδε.” 33 In this well calculated move Hippolytos has not only suggests that his father’s speech is baseless, but more intricately implies that Theseus used fine rhetoric to cover a

---

31 Eur. Hipp. 986. “I am unskilled at giving speeches before a crowd. I am more skilled amongst a few people of my own age. This is respectable. For simple men amongst the wise are more accomplished speaking before a mob.”

32 Weimann (1983) 40. Author’s emphasis.

33 Eur. Hipp. 984. “And yet to be sure your case makes for a fine speech, though if someone were to unfold it, it would not be pretty.”
weak argument, while saying Hippolytos’s own speech by contrast will be unrefined and therefore truthful. What makes this manoeuvre especially impressive is that the opposite is closer to the truth. Theseus’s speech is passionate and unguarded, while Hippolytos’s speech is self-conscious and carefully moves from one argument to another.\footnote{Aristot. Poet. 1450b. “Ancient writers make their characters speak politically; modern writers, rhetorically.”}

Hippolytos’s speech is not merely a dramatic monologue but also a brilliant exercise in rhetoric. Aristotle too identifies a trend in characterization that makes the characters sound more like rhetors. “οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄρχαίοι πολιτικῶς ἐποίουν λέγοντας, οἱ δὲ νῦν ῥητορικῶς.”\footnote{Eur. Hipp. 990. “Nevertheless, necessity, brought by this misfortune, forces me to release my tongue. But first, I will begin to address where you first entrapped me, since you’re going to murder me without my rebuttal.” Hippolytos suggests here that he will ἀφεῖναι, “release”, his tongue, as though he has until now been restraining. This is another rhetorical ploy to suggest his speech will be sincere. Yet his next sentence is self-conscious of the act of argument. He lays out what he will be arguing against and draws attention to the calmness of his own ἀντιλέξοντ, “rebuttal.”} As a rhetor then, in this speech Hippolytos exists on an extra-diegetic space and an extra-theatrical space. He is performing both on the Athenians stage as a tragic character and as a public figure addressing the Athenian people. Politics are endemic to the Greek theatre. Perhaps before Athens developed its democratic tradition, the characters spoke like statesmen, but by Aristotle’s time the characters spoke like rhetoricians. They spoke like rhetoricians because they performed an analogous role to the rhetor in public debate. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Aristotle considers λέξις, “diction,” as being one of the six elements of theatre.\footnote{Ibid. “The fourth principle then is lexis. By lexis is meant the expression through words, which holds the same effect in both metre and prose.” It is notable that the effect of diction is the same in both poetry and prose. Hence, Hippolytos’s in-verse-pseudo-rhetorical address might have the same effect as a genuine rhetor’s address in the assembly or before the courts.}

For the Greeks the theatre was more than a place for the representations of stories. Tragedy or comedy, it always served a political discursive purpose. It is for this reason that the theatre conventions turn the theatre space into a plateaic debate hall. The characters on the Greek stage speak out toward the audience moralizing on the situation they find themselves in. The convention of having agon speech competitions represents a uniquely Greek tradition, a tradition equally at home in the theatre and in the assembly. As Peter Arnott explains, Greek theatre didascalia served a duel function of entertainment and education.\footnote{See Arnott (1970). Also, note that didascalia, the Athenian term for the tetralogy of plays that structured the city Dionysia, stems from the same root as didaskalos, “place of teaching.”} We observe this element in Hippolytos’s speech, which is at once dramatic, rhetorical, and didactic in the manner that it highlights the judicial process (and the lack of
The theatre itself became a centre of debate within which the citizens of the city could be introduced and informed on various issues from a moral or intellectual point of view. A playwright’s job therefore was to present both an argument for a certain course of action, and unlike medieval morality plays, to also allow other arguments a voice, in essence to theatricalize the debate culture of the ekklesia. As Blanshard points out, it is quite possible that the assembly of the jury and the audience at the theatre are identical institutions convening in different locations. This also explains the coinciding increase in the size of the theatre, from a smaller wooden theatre for the Athenian elite to the stone theatre of Dionysus, and the parallel increase in the number of jurors attending the ekklesia after Pericles’ decree promised payment for jurors.

The self-referential features of Greek tragedy serve a rhetorical function, not to create a metatheatrical experience. The Greek theatre was a centre of debate and each play an argument within a greater cultural debate, and just as the Greeks were trained to argue by citing the flaws in their antagonist’s argument, the playwrights practiced citing and refuting each other’s moral claims. Since the Greek stage was an open-air theatre-in-the-round where the audience member was free to talk with their neighbour, appreciate the landscape and perhaps even eat, the theatre would have required a style of acting that made frequent use of the platea. Actors would have usually made their addresses to the audience in order to maintain a connection and to hold audience interest.

Yet, this would not be metatheatrical. Metatheatrical requires the audience, immersed in the localized mimesis, to experience a dislocation when a performer refers to their own theatricality. On the plateaic stage, which, on the other hand, is already un-localized, the line between the two worlds of the play’s diegesis and the world of the performance itself blurs. Characters move seamlessly from locus to platea. There is no metatheatricality in the Greek theatre, only extra-theatricality, the staging and theatricalizing of the agon culture

---

38 Eur. Hipp. 1055. “You’ll banish me from my country untried by a cross examination, without oath, without argument, without the oracle’s prophecy?” This line highlights the failure of due judicial process.


40 It is noteworthy that the Greek architecture of the theatron (literally the seeing-place) favours an expansive view of the landscape beyond the stage, unlike the Roman auditorium, which blocks the view with a large architectural skene. Therefore, the Greek audience’s attention, unlike a modern darkened theatre, is free to explore the landscape in broad daylight. Beyond the actors’ performance, ancient theatre has very few technologies besides direct, un-mimetic audience address to hold the audience’s attention.

41 It is important to note Slater’s point on “Old Comedy [as] nonillusionary drama. It is not a theatre of illusion occasionally disrupted by primitive choral interventions […] illusion is not “broken” and then seamlessly glued back together.” There is no illusion in the first place. The audience is primarily aware of their presence in the theatre and their actions, thus the acting style would not have exhibited even an approach to naturalism.”(21).
that exists beyond theatre. Metatheatre draws attention to theatrical practices themselves and how to criticize them. The theatrical self-references on the Athenian stage emphasize the political culture around the theatre and serves to train Athenians on how to criticize the performance of rhetors and other public figures. Metatheatre could not exist until theatre makers in the twentieth century questioned the conventions of their naturalist illusionistic stage. Therefore, it is inappropriate and academically improper for theatre scholars or classicists to apply metatheatricality anachronistically to the Greek stage.

Aaron Golish

Bibliography

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:

Mastronarde, Donald J. “Actors on High: The Skene Roof, the Crane, and the Gods in