

DIDASKALIA 

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About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

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Note

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“First catch your satyrs” — A Practical Approach to *The Satyr-Play(-Like?)*

Anthony Stevens

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At the Isthmian Games – a reconstruction of Aeschylus’ *Isthmiastai* (also known as *Theoroi*) – was performed, in English, on May 11th, 2011, by students at the International Center for Hellenic and Mediterranean Studies (DIKEMES), Athens.¹ The aim of the whole process, from initial research, through improvisations and rehearsals, to final performance, was to try to discover the nature of the satyr play in and through practice. Since we know so little about fifth-century satyr plays and their relation to tragedy, it is tempting, and I think reasonable, to believe that this process of “getting inside” something at least *satyr-play-like* could generate valid insights into the genre. I use this phrase not so much to moderate any claim to success as to echo Aristotle’s assertion that tragedy developed from the “satyr-play-like” (*Poetics* 1449a 19-20), which suggests that there may be some quality that is “satyric” and even definitive of the genre, though proto-generic and presumably lacking many of the genre’s formal characteristics. Thus a “rough approximation” to satyric drama may have more historical value than would a “rough approximation” to tragedy, were we similarly in the dark about that.

In what follows I outline, first, the assumptions about satyr plays from which we started (much of this is known ground, of course); second, some significant issues in the reconstruction of *Isthmiastai*; third, the practical process of developing a suitable kind of chorus-based physical theater; fourth, what I can (fairly confidently) call our discoveries; last, an account of what, as a result of this project, I have come to think of as the celebratory *pre-dramatic* nature of the genre, at least in its earlier phase.

STARTING POINTS

Certain facts and assumptions about the genre as it was in the fifth century formed the foundation for the project. Throughout the fifth century at the City Dionysia, satyr plays were attached to tragedies by the rule that each competing tragedian should present three tragedies followed by one satyr play. The latter is defined by its chorus of satyrs, which inhabits a world that is much (though not exactly) like the world of tragedy. The plots of both tragedies and satyr plays are derived from myth. The costume of the characters, but not the chorus, is of the same style in both genres. The diction of the characters in a satyr play is relatively elevated, much closer to tragic than to comic diction. Moreover, on the whole the theatrical conventions of satyric drama are more similar to those of tragedy than to those of comedy. Nevertheless, there are certain differences between satyr plays and tragedies, apart from the identity of the chorus. The mythic plots of the former tend to be “lighter” and to end happily, some departures from truly tragic diction are permitted in them, and certain theatrical effects that would be inappropriate in tragedy seem to be possible. But more important as a distinguishing feature of satyric drama than such relaxations of the “rules” of tragedy is the way in which the chorus interacts with the characters and relates to the plot or action of the drama.

Euripides’ *Cyclops*, which is the only surviving complete satyr play, is probably not typical of the genre in this respect, for its chorus is relatively restrained or under-used. In fact, *Cyclops* follows more the pattern of tragedy, with an alternation of episodes largely involving the characters (including Silenos, the “father of the satyrs,” who possibly appeared in all satyr plays) and choric songs/dances, or *stasima* (which are here relatively brief). Earlier satyr plays were probably more like Sophocles’ *Ichneutai* (*Trackers*), about

half of which survives; in this play the satyrs are not just involved in the action, but effectively drive it – at least until the reappearance of Apollo towards the (lost) end of the play. During their tracking of the cattle and their dispute with the nymph Kyllene, moreover, they are always likely to sing and dance, not formally but in an expressive, energetic, even agitated way. In other words, satyr play does not strictly observe tragedy's crisp structural distinctions between the spoken and the chanted or sung, and between the simply enacted and the danced.²

Bernd Seidensticker makes a related point: "In Aeschylean and Sophoclean satyr-plays the myth into which the satyrs have been integrated often serves merely as a framework for the antics of the satyrs."³ "Antics," here, goes beyond but also includes the dance, and hints at the comic aspect of the satyrs. But the formulation which seems best to capture this aspect of the genre (and which I adopt to structure the main part of this paper) is due to François Lissarrague: "The recipe is as follows: take one myth, add satyrs, observe the results."⁴ In something like a spontaneous chemical reaction, the satyrs transform and *stretch* (rather than "distort") not so much the mythic pretext, or specific plot-line, as the *world of myth* in which tragedy has its roots and being. For Lissarrague, the key is incongruity: "The presence of satyrs within the myth subverts tragedy by shattering its cohesiveness."⁵ But we should be a little careful in interpreting this. It is not simply that the satyrs are "out of place" in the mythic-tragic world, for it is equally the case that the play's characters, in the way they are resonant of the world of tragedy, are "out of place" in what might be called the *origin-al* world of the satyrs (by which I mean a world of origins). Yet these are not – ultimately – different worlds; they stand in a relation to each other as *commemoration* stands to *celebration*.

For me, the conception of the satyr play as celebratory was strong from the start of the process, and one of my goals was to explore the relations between the celebratory and the comic aspects of the genre. Before beginning rehearsals we had been as a group to see a Modern Greek production of Sophocles' *Ιχθυεῖς* (*Trackers*), directed by Dimos Abdeliodis at the Studio Lydra, Athens.⁶ The exuberant, animalistic, noisy chorus in this production was rarely "funny" – beyond provoking a chuckle – and this seemed right. Their energetic and powerful presence continuously raised the satyrs above creatures to be laughed *at*, whatever the elements of their "lower" nature that showed through. Nor was there any question of laughing *with* them, since they exhibited no parodic tendencies whatsoever. In these ways the production conformed much more to Tony Harrison's idea that "In the satyr play, [the] spirit of celebration, held in the dark solution of tragedy, is precipitated into release"⁷ than to Dana Sutton's assertion that "the humour of satyr plays consists of poking fun at tragedy, in order of course to provide comic relief."⁸

The idea of the genre as celebratory is consistent with the plausible suggestion that it was introduced into the City Dionysia in order to restore the close relation between theatrical performance and its god, Dionysos.⁹ To many, that relation seemed to be breaking down, its disintegration expressed in the complaint that performances of tragedies had come to have "nothing to do with Dionysos." Satyrs (at least from the later 6th century) form the entourage of the god, his *thiasos*, and although in the plots of various satyr plays they are separated from him, his presence is felt in his absence. Above all, it is in their energetic, exuberant style of dancing (the other side of the coin of the genre's "little plots"¹⁰), that the theater is restored to its original association with Dionysos.

One other introductory point must be made here. In spite of greater awareness these days of the value of play production as a way of understanding ancient drama, there is still a widespread over-valuation of text. In saying this I am not for a moment suggesting that what the playwright wrote should be treated opportunistically or with disregard. I simply mean that the text, where we have it, is not necessarily a complete guide to what would have happened in performance. This is obvious in the case of choreography, but it has further special relevance to satyr plays. Surviving fragments include, here and

there, some inarticulate noises made by satyrs. This suggests that the satyr chorus was likely to have made such noises at other appropriate points in the performance that are *not* marked in the text. Moreover, satyrs tend to be physically restless creatures whose presence can relate to the “main action” in different ways, including distracting from it; again, this is something that need not be evident in the text.¹¹ In our production of *At the Isthmian Games*, a great deal of the action and stage business that we arrived at simply could not have been included in the script without making it far too wordy and overloaded with stage directions.

STEP 1: “TAKE ONE MYTH . . .”

Strictly, in starting from the fragments of *Isthmiastai*, we were not initially “taking one myth” to which satyrs could then be added. The plot of this play, though it involves mythic characters, is not based on any known satyr-free story; the satyrs’ own objectives and their breach with Dionysos are essential to it.¹² And naturally the satyrs are already present in the surviving scenes. Nonetheless, the process of elaborating the story-line provided various opportunities of mixing situations, characters and satyrs in order to “observe the results.”

With a single exception, the approximately ninety surviving lines of *Isthmiastai* form an almost continuous section of the play.¹³ Though many of these lines are lacunose, the basic action of this sequence is reasonably clear. It seems that the satyrs, in an act of disloyalty to Dionysos, have decided to become athletes. At the beginning of the surviving text they are given images of themselves (probably masks) by another character, which they attach to the temple of Poseidon, patron deity of the Isthmian Games. Dionysos then enters and scolds them for their treachery. The satyrs defy him and insist that they are now athletes. Someone, possibly Dionysos himself, then offers them new metal “toys” that are somehow apt for the Games, but which for some reason frighten or repel the satyrs. What these “toys” are is uncertain.

Beyond this segment of the play, we know almost nothing of what happened in it. Certain choices had to be made at the start in order to provide a framework for improvisations. These were:

1. The character who presents the satyrs with their images at the start of the fragments should be one or other of the supposed founders of the Isthmian Games, that is, either Sisyphos or Theseus. Of these, the archetypal trickster Sisyphos seemed preferable as the more plausible adversary of Dionysos and the one with greater theatrical potential in this context.
2. Since the satyrs intend to become athletes, a scene of the satyrs in training should be included. This should reflect authentic ancient athletic practices.¹⁴ Hence we needed an athletics trainer as a character.
3. The play should end with a reconciliation between Dionysos and the satyrs, including a celebratory dance. To prepare the ground for this, the satyrs would call on Poseidon, believing him their new protector. Poseidon would then appear, but would refuse to have satyrs as athletes in the Games dedicated to him.

Other decisions were made in the course of improvisations and rehearsals. Here I note only the most relevant. We opted to open the play with Dionysos, given his obvious importance in the fragments. He spoke a prologue, called on his satyrs to enter, then sent them off to dance at Isthmia. This choice required not only a scene change (though with no need to specify any location for the opening scene) – for Dionysos later catches up with his satyrs at Isthmia – but also an *onstage journey* (for the satyrs would not go off, so soon after arriving, only to return almost immediately in the new location). Not only are scene changes relatively rare in tragedy, but onstage journeys are not used as a means to effect them.

However, other (“serious”) theatrical traditions such as Japanese *nō* and Classical Sanskrit drama make extensive use of the device. Moreover, an elaborate example is found in Attic Old Comedy, in *Frogs*.¹⁵ I suggested above that satyr plays could involve some relaxation of the “rules” of tragedy and, if indeed onstage journeys were ruled out in tragedy as a way of changing scene, this was a suitable occasion for greater flexibility. Our satyrs started running rhythmically on the spot, changing direction several times, increasing the energy level throughout, until they arrived, awe-struck, in front of the temple of Poseidon. (Note that something similar must occur in Sophocles’ *Ichneutai*, when, following Apollo’s exit, the satyrs begin their tracking, at some point coming upon the cave where the baby Hermes is secreted.) Now, it is precisely the high energy of the satyrs that makes such a device appropriate here. It is as though the satyrs “burst through” some of the more restrictive conventions of tragedy, allowing “bigger” theatrical effects. The same general principle probably holds true, for example, in the net-hauling scene in Aeschylus’ *Diktyoulkoi*, where the energetic participation of the satyrs allows a more “theatrical” evocation of the presence of the sea than would be possible in a wholly serious tragedy.

Alan Sommerstein translates some (damaged) lines (29-30), spoken by Dionysos, thus: “[I knew(?) . . .], when I saw your [phalli] short like a mouse’s tail, that you were polishing up your Isthmian [wrestling].” In a note, he adds: “The reference is to the practice, regular among ancient Greek athletes, of tying up the penis in a curled shape (just “like a mouse’s tail”) by a string tied round the foreskin and then round the waist. . . . For the satyrs to come on stage in this condition would make a striking contrast with their accustomed state of hyper-erection.”¹⁶ But for the satyrs to come on stage like this assumes either that they had decided to become athletes before the play begins or that they go off, change costume, then reenter. We preferred to make the most of the opportunity provided by the text here. Told to do so by Sisypheos, the satyrs reluctantly, and in apparently great discomfort, tied up their phalli on stage. Moreover, this choice greatly helped in solving the problem of the reconciliation with Dionysos. After their rejection by Poseidon, the satyrs tried to mollify Dionysos, who remained cool. Then the satyrs decided to untie their phalli. The enormous relief of this set them dancing ecstatically, in such a way that Dionysos could not help joining in.

Lastly, we chose to follow David Wiles’s suggestion that the new metal “toys” that (presumably) Dionysos has brought for the satyrs are hoplite helmets. “The nature of these frightening metal objects has been much debated. The logic of the plot suggests that the satyrs are about to engage in the new and physically taxing sport of racing in hoplite armour. . . . [T]he frightening metal object is in all probability a hoplite helmet, which is of course a kind of mask.”¹⁷ The mask-like helmet thus ironically recalls the masks previously given to the satyrs, which first frighten but then enrapture them. This is an effective theatrical “recall.” But there was an even greater advantage for us, since we strongly foregrounded issues of gender in the play, following the textual hint of Dionysos’ complaint (in line 68 of the fragments) that he has been called “effeminate.” Our satyrs were not only tempted to become athletes because it would make them more attractive to females, but also because they saw themselves (or wanted to see themselves) as wholly “masculine.” Visually, the hoplite helmet takes this goal of ultra-masculinity to an extreme, where it horrifies rather than allures.¹⁸

STEP 2: “ADD SATYRS . . .”

Although satyrs are “already there” in the fragments of *Isthmiastai*, in another sense they are not yet there at all. They have to be “added” through the rehearsal process. In a certain sense this is true of any character in any drama, where the psycho-social iceberg that lies below the tip of the text can only be discovered “on one’s feet.” But it is true in a stronger sense of satyrs, for satyrs exist primarily *as bodies*.

We are following a recipe, Lissarrague’s, so the essential first step corresponds to “first catch your hare.”

The whole of this section is an elaboration of what this means. Satyrs cannot be added if you don't have any.

But what is a satyr? There are two ways of answering this question. One is to mine the available textual and archaeological evidence; seen thus, satyrs are mythological male creatures, belonging to wild nature, part human, part animal (more horse than goat-like, at least in the classical period), impulsive, anarchic, hedonistic and strongly group oriented. But the mythological creature is very elusive. The other way is to explore the theatrical process of transforming human performers into credible stage satyrs, thus "catching" them.

My claim that satyrs exist primarily as bodies concerns their theatrical nature. The body's "action centre" is the pelvis. Simply focusing your attention there, as against, say, in the head or the chest, gives you a sense of readiness to act, verging on an urge to get moving, at least if you are already standing. Focusing attention like this creates a *center* – on the one hand a center of consciousness, on the other a particular way of organizing the organism. If you walk around slowly with attention focused in your head, the rest of the body will seem light, ethereal, barely there. But if you focus attention in the pelvis you will also have a strong sense of legs, trunk and arms, and of their movement potential. The limbs will feel quite free, even "charged."

But although purposive movement of the entire body originates in the pelvis, it is not (except in small degree) movement *of* the pelvis. Normally, the "kick" of energy that originates in the pelvis is transmitted outwards. If, instead, it is held within the pelvis and expressed there, the effect is radically . . . but it is difficult to find the precise word here. Before trying to do so, it will help to see what kind of movement is involved.

"Pelvic Graffiti" is the ideal exercise with which to begin the process of turning performers into satyrs.¹⁹ With a large imaginary paintbrush attached to the base of your spine, you write "SATYRS RULE OK" on a wall behind you, in the largest possible letters. Next, the paintbrush is substituted by a large wooden spoon with which you stir an imaginary pudding mix in a giant bowl on the floor (the mix should be thick, to provide a sense of resistance).

When you stand in a normal upright position, with feet quite close together, movement of the pelvis is limited. To attain the necessary size of graffiti writing or pudding stirring, the feet need to be well apart, with the knees bent. This lowers the center of gravity towards the earth – it's also an ideal position for stomping (which, for satyrs, is a way of *enjoying* the earth, nothing like a temper tantrum). Since in the way you engage your pelvis you also engage your imagination, the paintbrush can now be thought of as a *tail*, an extension of your own body. And in stirring the pudding, some movements involve a forward pelvic thrust, which brings the image of an erect phallus into play. It can be noticed at this stage that tail and phallus, both rooted in the pelvis, are "opposed" in the very way that they are connected; the forward (phallic) pelvic thrust tucks the tail under, while left-right swishing of the tail withdraws the phallus from prominence. It is important to explore this as pure pelvic potential. Donning actual satyr costume may be "liberating," like wearing a mask,²⁰ but tail and phallus really need to be "owned" – or there's a danger of looking like performers merely *dressed up* as satyrs.

It's well worth reflecting, at this early stage, that strong movements of the pelvis are not acceptable in public or social situations (some forms of post-1960s dance excepted); we might say that they are, or remain, *ou politikon*, as Plato remarked of Bacchic dancing: "not of the *polis*" (*Laws* 815c). This brings us back to a gap in the text above. If pelvic energy is expressed *in* the pelvis, I said, the effect is radically . . . ? One possible word to complete the sentence is "grotesque." It is a right word insofar as a kind of

deformation is enacted. The result is a deformity of the socially-normative, *self-regulating* body. It is a wrong word insofar as this is liberating. Still, actual physical deformity *is* liberating in a certain sense, a peculiar fact which lies behind the theatrical tradition that runs from the Fat Men padded dancers of Ancient Greece²¹ to the *bouffons* explored by Jacques Lecoq²² – in being deformed, one is an outsider; in being an outsider one is tacitly licensed to deviate in other ways, especially to mock. But satyrs are not “outsiders” at all. They are *other*. Liberating the pelvis to move *as it can* is *not only* subversive. It takes you straight beyond any need or urge to subvert into another domain of pure self-enjoyment. So the effect is as radically *graceful* as it is grotesque. To grasp this is to begin to grasp the paradox of the satyr.

Satyrs are not only pelvis-centered, they are also very vocal creatures. To play them, the voice needs to be rediscovered as a physical extension of the body, as it is for a baby, rather than as a platform for words. True, satyrs have acquired speech, but with no consequent loss of that earlier sense of the voice as a way of being in the world (as distinct from talking about it); we might say that acquiring speech has not subjected them to the (Lacanian) Symbolic. In “Voice Magic,” performers are asked to think of their voices as additional limbs with which they act physically upon the world.²³ An object, such as a small bottle, is placed on the ground. Squatting or on all fours (i.e., close to the ground), the group forms a circle around it, with a radius of about two metres. Each then tries by means of vocal sound alone to take hold of the object and draw it closer, or lift it up, or turn it over. This effort is both individual (for each makes his or her own sounds, with his or her own intentions) and collective (for everyone seems to draw power from everyone else). If the participants are fully engaged in this, their bodies will be full of energy, even contorted; if they are not, their bodies will be slack, mere appendages, and the real point will be lost – that the voice has to come from deep inside the body, carrying with it the specific resonance of its somatic source. Otherwise it has no “magical” power.

Performers are then asked to explore the room using their voices alone. They may walk around, orientating themselves in space, but in doing so they project different sounds along the floor, up and down walls, into remote high corners, finding sounds that “match” the materials and spaces, as though they are touching or inhabiting them with their voices. This exercise is an “opening out” of the previous one, where vocalization is focused on a single small object. It must be done second, only after the voice’s deep-rootedness in the body has been felt, for this needs to be carried over. The point of both exercises is not solely to overcome vocal inhibitions, though these can be very strong. It is also an essential preparation for the next exercise.

“Waking Up” is Jacques Lecoq’s first exercise for neutral mask.²⁴ The performer wakes for the very first time, so everything is new, to be discovered. Adapting this idea, but without using neutral masks, performers are asked to wake for the very first time, all together, and then to explore the world around them, not their own bodies (as often happens in the neutral mask exercise) nor other members of the group. In our variation, moreover, inarticulate vocalizations play a part. When this exercise was done in a very early rehearsal, its effect was striking. Vocalizations added greatly to the impression that the world really was being discovered for the first time, whereas this can sometimes seem a little forced in a silent neutral mask exercise. But why? In normal civilized life, our impulses to vocalize are highly controlled – to the point that often no impulse even surfaces. When these controls were removed, the vocal responses to the world seemed immediate, spontaneous, *precisely to be impulses*, whereas a movement or gesture often seems to have a built-in delay, however slight – to be a “chosen” response to a prior stimulus which can only be inferred by a spectator. But the vocalization is felt as it happens, not decided upon. Watching this exercise, the spectator received a very strong impression of innocence. In fact it revealed a kind of “law”: *satyrs wake for the very first time every day*.

Still, satyrs would never wake all together like this and then ignore each other, for they are intensely

group oriented. The next stage of the process, then, was to build an appropriate kind of group consciousness.

The modern sense of what a classical chorus is and how it should look and behave is perhaps best represented by the exercise usually called “Flock of Birds” or “Shoal of Fish,” in which the group moves together around a sufficiently large space, changing direction in an unplanned way, but apparently all at the same time.²⁵ Such a chorus appears “organic,” neither a drilled regiment at one extreme nor an *ad-hoc* crowd at the other.²⁶ But the collective responsibility and hence the collective identity of the chorus is illusory; one (albeit variable) individual always turns first, the others following *almost* immediately. The impression of spontaneous collective decision making can be given only if the group tacitly agrees that a) each member must try to keep as many others within his or her peripheral vision as possible (consistent with all facing the same way), and b) no member will change direction when aware that s/he is *not* within the peripheral vision of a significant part of the group. The resulting process is complex and involves not just all members’ awareness of others but also their awareness of others’ awareness of others. But it seems necessary to go an important step further in creating a satyr chorus.

The goal here is perfect irresponsibility. Whatever the group does, no individual member can be blamed for initiating it. Without speaking, a group of six or seven members looks around, finds some object(s) in the room and then does something (anything) to or with it (or them). But no individual has overall or even major responsibility for any part of the process. To achieve this, group members must maintain full awareness of each other. While, in the first phase, they look at objects, they must also keep looking at each other looking at objects. At a certain point, they all find themselves looking at the same thing. To go towards it, someone must move first. But that person will not continue unless someone else takes over, a passing on of responsibility that is reiterated until the group truly acts as one. The same applies when they start performing some action on or with the object. Each may have some idea of what to do, and will begin to do it, but will almost immediately stop if no one else not only joins in but actually takes over.²⁷

This exercise, or game, is a little risky and has to be watched carefully. It really can make the group, along with each of its component parts, irresponsible. The result is more a *gang* than a chorus – which is not inappropriate for satyrs (the satyr gang becomes a chorus when it dances). True gangs have leaders, of course, but the essence or “true spirit” of gangs lies in the followers, those who, to themselves, seem absolved of any individual responsibility.

A variation on John Wright’s “Group Association Game” embodies the same basic principle.²⁸ It generates an extraordinary sense of group solidarity. Two groups, each of five or six members, take turns finding and articulating words. Each word must be found simultaneously by all members of the group. Someone might begin with “W –,” others take this sound up, it becomes “Wi –,” then “Win –,” and finally “Winter!” Individuals should not have specific words in mind when they start, just sounds that they want to share. The feeling should be generated of the group itself joyfully discovering the word (even discovering speech). And exactly as the word is discovered – that is, spoken collectively, confidently and for the first time – it is “thrown” to the other group, who must now find an associated word of their own, which is then thrown back as it is discovered. This process continues in a kind of competition until one group, having found the most bizarre association, appears as the “winner.”

Both games reflect a crucial way in which the satyr chorus differs from the tragic chorus. In tragedy, it is generally the case that the chorus is “turned outwards” during the episodes and “turned inwards” during the *stasima*. A chorus that is “turned outwards” functions as a *lens* helping focus the audience’s attention on the object of the chorus’s own attention, usually a character or characters in the drama (or maybe the door to a palace). For this reason the direction of the chorus’s gaze is always important; it

guides the gaze of the audience. “Turned outwards” like this, the chorus is intrinsically self-effacing. Its reactions add weight (significance) to the main action, for – quite unlike the exercise known as “Reaction Chorus”²⁹ – where we *imagine* the (unstaged) main action on the basis of a group’s reactions to it, which nonetheless hold our attention as the theatrically-“real thing” – the reactions of the true tragic chorus must capture our attention only enough to bounce it straight back to its true object, which is, as it were, magnified in the process. Yet, at the same time, the “turned outwards” chorus is always *equal* to the character(s) – equal in (another sense of) “weight.” This is the vital point behind Lecoq’s “Balancing the Stage” exercise.³⁰ That one or two individual figures can be *balanced* by a group of twelve or fifteen is precisely what establishes the tragic gravitas of the former. But this necessary equality makes its mark within the *full scope* of our field of vision, even as our *focus* is somehow concentrated by the chorus on something always beyond (and more important than) itself. In the *stasima*, on the other hand, the singing and dancing chorus is “turned inwards,” not literally (though this *may* occur) but in the sense that its primary relation is now to itself. Actual *stasima* vary greatly, of course, in the degree to which some kind of group self-awareness seems desirable to choreograph in.³¹

Very differently from the tragic chorus, it seems desirable that the satyr chorus rapidly alternate between turning outwards and turning inwards (in this case literally), in a way that is not mapped onto any formal divisions of the drama. This is exactly what is achieved in the games outlined above. When, in *Isthmiastai*, they are caught by Dionysos, the satyrs are likely to continually look (inwards) to each other as well as (outwards) at Dionysos, relying on each other for support as they try to find a collective “line” of excuses and defiance.

The last – and crucial – element in adding satyrs is to ensure that the *energy level* is high enough, as high as possible. There are many exercises to raise energy. But what needs to be discovered here above all is that the high energy of a group of *n* members can be far greater than *n* times the high energy of an individual. I shall return to the significance of this in the Conclusions.

STEP 3: “OBSERVE THE RESULTS”

According to Mark Griffith:

[L]ike the choruses of tragedy but unlike those of comedy, the satyrs rarely seem to come into any serious collision with the main characters of the play. . . . Likewise the stage-satyrs’ interactions with the other characters are predominantly collaborative. When they are not, the satyrs are either unsuccessfully amorous, or temporarily distracted by external constraints, or mildly chaotic, but never really challenging or threatening. It is as if the satyrs exist on a parallel plane of their own, intersecting with, but never seriously disrupting, the activities of the more serious and responsible human characters whose story is unfolding around them.

Like perpetual children, or rustic simpletons, or skittish colts, the satyrs caper restlessly but harmlessly around in cheerful and blessed devotion to Dionysos (and Aphrodite), returning at the end to a separate world of their own, a world that is both timeless and apolitical, a world of perpetual childhood and release from toil and worry.³²

I quote this at some length because it seems both broadly true and yet misleadingly over-stated. At any rate, in the later stages of preparing *At the Isthmian Games* I was concerned that we were losing the “darker” side of the satyrs. Are satyrs little more than animated theatrical cuddly toys? If not, it is not because they are also, in Edith Hall’s phrase, “ithyphallic males behaving badly,”³³ i.e., would-be rapists, but for a quite different reason.

Satyrs may not come into serious conflict with other characters (though for part of *At the Isthmian Games* they are in genuine conflict with Dionysos himself), but they are always likely to *upstage* other characters. In early improvisations it became clear that other characters – or the actors playing them – had enormous difficulty controlling the satyrs. Sisyphos, for example, mistaking the newly-arrived satyrs for athletes and inviting them to begin their practice, immediately found himself embroiled in chaos as the satyrs began playing with a discus, javelin and jumping weights, as well as wrestling and running around, making him appear like a schoolteacher with absolutely no control over a class of thirteen-year-olds. Although Poseidon, on the other hand, immediately struck fear into the satyrs, their terror was so “over-expressed” that he was unable to quieten their rowdy pleas, appeals and supplications. Even our Athletics Trainer (who was played by a man of imposing physique) could only call the satyrs to order by means of a whistle, which stopped them in their tracks – temporarily – because it was to them an unfamiliar and unexplained sound.

Now, just as dramatic conflict involves a power struggle, so power relations are involved in this kind of “upstaging” – *but it is theatrical, as against dramatic, power that is at stake*. Actors playing characters had to learn not to be drawn in to the world of the satyrs (or down to their level) if they were to maintain their tragic gravitas. This phenomenon made it clear that satyric drama is not simply mixing incongruous worlds, as Lissarrague suggests (“The joke is one of incongruity”);³⁴ rather, the tragic “weight” of the characters is necessary to balance the hyper-activity of the satyrs. If the characters were to be drawn in to the world of the satyrs, the form would fall apart.

We felt that Dionysos, when onstage with the satyrs, ought not to be faced with any such problem. But it was not immediately clear how this was to be achieved. The satyrs would be no less energetic and theatrically dominant in his presence, especially in conflict with him. Their panic when Dionysos surprises them attaching their images to Poseidon’s temple was among the theatrically “biggest” moments of the play, in fact. Dionysos needed to be coolly aloof – yet not in the same way that other characters had to try to avoid being drawn in. The latter, or more accurately the actors playing them, could achieve this goal by acting *as if* the satyrs were not disruptive, even, in a sense, as if they weren’t satyrs at all, simply waiting for the relatively quiet moments in which to speak. But Dionysos relates to the satyrs as satyrs. Whereas the other characters, played in what might be called a mode of “denial,” seem as a result to inhabit their own relatively small, closed “spheres,” Dionysos’ presence must be expansive, open and accepting, implicitly embracing the satyrs and their world.

Had we enough time, we might have achieved a much more “rehearsed” solution of these problems, that is, a relatively easily repeatable mix of high-energy satyr antics and quieter moments in which characters could be foregrounded. But this seems undesirable. A fully *drilled* performance would suppress and “kill” the very thing we wanted, the impulsiveness and unpredictability of satyrs. It seemed much truer to our goal to retain an impromptu aspect to the performance, although this involved more risk. What the audience would witness was not to be simply “restored behavior.”³⁵ It should involve something of the “happening.” Without this, there would be no sense of actually *sharing a space with satyrs*, as against referring back, by means of performance, to a past, lost world in which satyrs only *were*.

Lastly, as far as this issue is concerned, I was surprised by the fact that a satyr chorus could be significantly bigger – numerically – than a tragic chorus performing in the same space. In that space, the maximum size of a tragic chorus would be eight, but our satyr chorus was eleven strong, without any sense of overloading the space. I am still not entirely sure why this is, but I guess that it reflects the way that *balancing the stage* in Lecoq’s sense is not necessary in satyr plays, or not in the same sustained way as in tragedy.³⁶ When, given the dramatic situation, such balancing becomes necessary, the larger satyr

chorus can achieve it with a tighter grouping than would normally be desirable in tragedy, bodies pressed together, for example, as when the satyrs form a defensive group after their initial mad panic on Dionysos' reappearance.

Perhaps the most important discovery is that satyrs spontaneously and naturally dance, at any opportunity, in an overflow of both energy and community. In *Isthmiastai*, moreover, this habit has a special significance, for Aeschylus sets up an opposition between dancing and athletics, with (at least in our version) the satyrs choosing the latter over the former because it is more "masculine." In this context, their natural tendency to dance implicitly undermines their commitment to athletics, but at the same time it more than compensates for their athletic incompetence.

In early improvisations, there were two particularly important moments at which the satyrs just started dancing. The first was when Sisypheos gave them their images in the form of masks. We worked this scene to pass through the reaction phases of sheer terror, fearful curiosity, pure curiosity, playful pleasure, and lastly narcissistic indulgence. As this sequence moved into the last phase, the satyrs naturally started to dance – it's how they express themselves *as a group* (for their narcissism quickly became collective). The second instance occurred once the satyrs had succeeded in attaching their images to the temple and were singing (over and over) line 22 from the fragments. This scene presented a small problem, since it is followed by the entry of Dionysos, who in lines 32 to 34 implies that the satyrs have given up dancing in order to become Isthmian athletes. Initially, we solved this by having the satyrs suddenly realize that they should not be dancing, then switch to something resembling athletic training before Dionysos entered. But it soon happened that the satyrs forgot that they shouldn't be dancing! This left Dionysos to make his entrance anyway, speaking lines 32–4 ironically – which worked just as well.

The build-up to this dance was also revealing. The situation provided a good opportunity to bring out two sides of satyrs which are at least partly opposed; firstly their incompetence and bafflement, secondly their grace and coordination. How were they to attach their images high on the temple (as in line 19 of the fragments they suggest doing)? They first tried jumping – unsuccessfully. Next they tried climbing (which meant climbing on the audience) – also unsuccessfully. Then they cracked the problem by having one climb onto the shoulders of another, while the rest formed a chain-gang supply line. This business was combined with chanting (over and over) lines 18 to 22. Now, this was an image of the satyrs *working*, something they are not usually happy to do (insofar as work implies deferred – while play implies immediate – gratification), but it was also an image of work transformed, transcended. The rhythmic coordination of chain gang and chant was *already dance* – and it naturally fed into the more celebratory dance that followed.

It also soon became evident that there were very many opportunities for comedy. In fact, it was tempting to build in comic action and effects throughout the play. Naturally this raised the question of how appropriate it would be to do so. The idea that the fifth-century satyr play provided "comic relief" seems to me inadequate and misleading. As I suggested above, it underestimates the celebratory (hence the Dionysian) aspect of the genre. But this does not mean that comedy should be avoided. Comedy that reflects the anarchic, disruptive nature of the satyrs is surely apt. Even so, it seems likely that a certain amount of laughing *at* the satyrs would also have occurred in the original genre, in particular at their incompetence in a range of activities. Even in the mid- (perhaps the early) fifth century, the attitude of the sophisticated city-dwelling audience to the crude rustic satyrs would probably have involved a sense of superiority (though mixed with other attitudes). Through this, the satyrs probably developed as comic anti-types. This, in turn, would have been an extension of the social inversions in the masquerades, which pre-date the theatrical genre, where citizens dressed up as and imitated satyrs and behaved in what would otherwise have been unacceptable ways.³⁷ But, developed in theatrical form, such role playing

would have come to seem *contained* by the “safe superiority” of the audience, with laughter the expression of exactly this “neutralization.”³⁸

We had an ideal plot thread with which to explore this issue, the satyrs’ involvement with athletics. We assumed that satyrs would not make good athletes, not because they lacked the physical capacity but because they could not submit to the discipline required. In our “training” scene we took the satyrs through the events of the ancient pentathlon – discus, running, javelin, long jump (with jumping weights) and wrestling – which generated very many possible gags; too many, in fact. The satyrs proved “incompetent” at all events, so that laughter could enjoy its sense of superiority, but the scene was also pure parody and as such it called into question the ideal behind athletics, thus pulling the rug from under that sense of superiority. This, in turn, reflected (and provoked reflection on) the conflict at the heart of the (at least of *our*) play, between the Dionysian and something else that scorns the Dionysian as soft and “feminine,” that valorizes rigorous, (mechanically) repetitive training, with all its accompanying asceticism,³⁹ and sets itself up as the “true” masculine ideal.⁴⁰

The precise production problem in this scene was how far to follow where comic potential led. It was necessary to keep the comedy “tight and pointed” in order to sustain the parody; otherwise, it led towards clowning. As John Wright says, “In clown, your job is to make us laugh; in parody, your job is to make us think and laugh – at the same time. Meaning is never far away in parody, but it falls apart as soon as we lose sight of what you’re really saying.”⁴¹

Does the principle adopted here run counter to what seems so essential to the genre, the way satyrs tend to take over – to take over the plot and to take over the playing space? No, because it was not the satyrs themselves (that is, the performers transformed into satyrs) who were generating all the comic possibilities that had then to be discarded. These possibilities were suggested to an observer. Left to the satyrs themselves, the scene simply – and quickly – dissolved into chaos. Satyrs are *not* clowns. Clowns are always individual, even (or especially?) in the traditional trio. We needed, of course, to involve only small numbers of satyrs in each athletic event, to maintain clarity. The others became an enthusiastic audience – and this audience had a tendency to usurp the scene. Hence, as soon as the three pairs of participant satyrs had turned the last event, wrestling, into a bizarre form of dance, all the others had to join in – and the scene reached its inevitable, chaotically exuberant end.

Some of the possible gags that were rejected would have involved a tacit acknowledgement of the presence of the audience. The issue of whether or not to acknowledge the audience (something which can be achieved in a variety of ways) arose often, in fact, and it is worth asking why. When Athenian citizens masqueraded as satyrs, no doubt they behaved in a provocative way to their “audience” of fellow citizens. It seems strange that all trace of this should drop out of the satyr play. Yet it is widely assumed that while Old Comedy drew attention to its theatrical nature, necessarily including those who constituted the shared activity *as* theater by means of their gaze, tragedy and satyr play opted to privilege the fiction, the “*otherwhere*.” I referred earlier to a kind of “neutralization” of the satyrs that occurred through this exclusion of the audience, but I suspect that there is another side to this coin. For our production, the audience was in very close proximity to the action. In this circumstance, “ignoring” the audience *increased* the sense of danger. Indeed, there was a real risk of someone’s being accidentally trodden on or hit. When some satyrs actually climbed upon members of the audience in order try to attach their images to the temple, the impression of “ignoring” the audience (as against “involving” it) – treating it as though it wasn’t there – was taken as far as possible, so that it turned into its opposite. Moreover, this was a “natural” extension of the satyrs’ tendency to “upstage” others, which really means to take over and dominate – even to burst – the playing space. As far as we know, there was no such proximity in the fifth-century theater, and even if there were, the far-greater size of the audience would

have greatly reduced the effect of what I might call “over-ignoring” the front row. But the effect we achieved was fully consistent with what I now think is the essence of the satyr play, which I will define as *breaking the container*, an idea I shall develop in the Conclusions. But it does not “break the illusion.” This concept, in fact, is far from adequate for understanding tragedy, but it is even more inappropriate for the satyr play, as I shall also argue in the Conclusions.

The last of our results worth noting here is that we had no need for Silenos. Hence we did not include him. (Notably, he is not part of Lissarrague’s recipe either.) If, from the beginning of the process, we had not had it in mind that Silenos was a conventional character in the fifth-century satyr play, a belief that made us look for ways to include him, we would not even have noticed that we did not need him.

It is not certain that Silenos was a character in all fifth-century satyr plays. His prominence in *Cyclops* (which was probably produced in 408) and his very different treatment in *Ichneutai* (which is probably much earlier) and *Diktyoulkoi* (which is likely to be earlier still), in both of which he interacts much more closely with the chorus, suggest some kind of evolution of the genre over the classical period. In *Cyclops*, Silenos seems to have become an autonomous comic-grotesque character, the prototype of Shakespeare’s Falstaff, even of Barnadine. Euripides’ foregrounding of Silenos and relative sidelining of the satyr chorus are two sides of a coin; both reflect the degree to which this play no longer embodies the qualities that had once been the reason for the inclusion of satyr plays in the City Dionysia.

CONCLUSIONS

Richard Seaford describes the satyr as an ambiguous creature, “cruder than a man and yet somehow wiser, combining mischief with wisdom and animality with divinity.”⁴² He goes on to note “a similar ambiguity of satyrs in festival and ritual. On the one hand they are men and boys, dressed up for frolics at the festival; and on the other hand they are, within the *thiasos*, the attendants of the god and the initiated custodians of a solemn and secret tradition.”⁴³ His words imply that those who dress up as satyrs, in masquerade, *are* satyrs, if only in their cruder, more-mischievous manifestation. This resonates strongly for me, for through the production process I developed the conviction that, while satyrs are mythological creatures belonging to wild nature, they are also *what you turn into when you imitate them*. A character in a drama is always “elsewhere” – that is, the audience consents to treat the actor *as* that character, in the (authentic) character’s absence. There is always a gap, a kind of space, between the signifier, the actor, and the signified, the character. This holds for even the most convincing performance. But it seems to me that it does not hold for satyrs. Satyrs are not “characters.” Nor are they contained within a drama. For satyrs *are their presence*. The presence of satyrs lies in – or *is* – their energy, which is necessarily the energy of the performers. The energy of satyrs is what “breaks the frame” within which they appear.

I referred earlier to the high energy level needed in a satyr play. In this respect the genre is comparable with Commedia dell’Arte, which is also a high-energy form of theater. Lecoq remarks that the intensity of Commedia makes it *non-linear*.⁴⁴ The linearity of plot, with one event simply leading to another, is not only frequently suspended to accommodate the *lazzi*, but even as the plot is unfolding it is warped and in a sense “up-ended” by the way in which the characters “die of everything: of desire, of hunger, of love, of jealousy.”⁴⁵ The horizontal plot-axis is knocked into a crazy, jagged graph by the vertical highs and lows of an *extreme way of being*. Now, something very similar to this is true of satyr plays too, with the added dimension that the energy, or intensity, of a group of **n** can be much more than **n** times the energy, or intensity, of one, as I remarked before. Commedia characters do not *quite* break the container. Satyrs do.

From this point of view, the “container” that the satyrs break is the plot. By extension, it is the mythic-

tragic world that is the concomitant of plot in this context. In this way, the satyr play returns the theater to its *here-and-now*. Old Comedy does this too, but in such a radically different way that it amounts to a wholly different thing. Old Comedy does it *intellectually*, through its semiotically multi-layered self-subversion. Satyr plays do it *physically*, through the body – above all through the body’s return to self-celebration, that is, through a “wild” form of dance – a dance *event* that transcends the plot in which it is motivated; a dance event, moreover, that is like an eruption of nature into the domain of culture.

Tradition has it that the satyr play was invented by Pratinas towards the end of the sixth century (but not invented *from nothing*, of course), and that it was included in the City Dionysia soon after in response to the complaint that tragedy, as it was developing, had “nothing to do with Dionysos.” Rather than seeing this as the (albeit reiterated) complaint that the plot of such-and-such a tragedy was about, say, Heracles rather than Dionysos, it is more appropriate to see in it a criticism of the *new form of theatrical drama itself*. Not only does drama require new plots, it shifts the emphasis to these plots. Ritual, in contrast, repeats something. As Seaford notes, the satyr play was also subject to this demand for newness of plot,⁴⁶ but its plots were “little,” a feature Aristotle ascribes to the “satyric” form from which tragedy developed; “little” may be taken to mean not only slight but also relatively insignificant. What matters in the satyr play, then, is not so much the newly invented plot but the repeated ritual, the displacement of the drama by the dance.

If the satyr play was a conservative reaction to the very emergence of theater (as something generating drama), shifting the weight of the event back towards ritual, then it is possible that it also retained an improvisatory element, at least in the early stages. This would certainly feed into the way the satyrs seem to “break the container,” for it would have the consequence that they are not fully “contained” by the rehearsal process either. Pratinas invented the satyr play as a *scripted* genre, but this does not rule out all possible improvisation.

Guy Hedreen says of silens (an alternative Attic name for satyrs) that “the fifth-century poetry, like the sixth-century vase painting, suggests that choral song and dance, an activity characterized by precision and discipline, was part of the everyday lives of beings that epitomize instinctual behavior.”⁴⁷ In itself, the idea of choral song and dance as characterized by precision and discipline is unproblematic, but it is contained in an argument in which Hedreen frequently uses the word “regimented” to describe the dancing of the silens-satyrs; describing the image on a neck-amphora in Malibu, for example, he says, “[t]he dance steps and movements of the [two] silens are highly regimented: each is high-stepping with his left leg, bending the right leg, looking back over the right shoulder, carrying the nymph on the left shoulder.”⁴⁸ Now, this “regimentation” may be simply a visual convention used to convey the *idea* of dance, but Hedreen tends to assume it holds for performance practices too. Richard Seaford, in the same volume, takes this argument a step further: “rehearsal, and control by a central individual, are facilitated by the transformation of the procession into a stationary hymn and make possible the kind of regimentation that Hedreen stresses in some sixth-century vase-painting of satyrs” – though this is not a point being made specifically about satyr plays.⁴⁹ The problem here – if it is not simply the ill-chosen word “regimentation” – is that too much of a binary opposition is assumed between the improvised and the rehearsed. The improvised can be something simply “made up as you go along,” or a re-mixing of previously worked-out routines, as in *Commedia*, or a subtle interaction and complicity between highly trained artists, as in jazz. The rehearsed can be self-displayingly rehearsed, like a group of college cheerleaders, or it may hide its own highly rehearsed nature, as in any convincing stage fight. Rehearsal does not necessarily lead to regimentation; nor does improvisation necessarily imply the opposite of regimentation, whatever that is.

However, the assumption that “precision and discipline” were *overt* (that is, self-displaying, at least up to

a point) in choral performance *in tragedy* seems to me a reasonable one. I would go on to assume, however, that this is a good reason for their relaxation in satyr play.

For the satyr play is the "release" of the chorus.

It helps if we assume here that the same group of individuals performed as the choruses in all three tragedies and the following satyr play. P. E. Easterling stresses the audience's awareness of this as part-constitutive of the satyr play's significance for them,⁵⁰ but it is also important to see it from the chorus's own point of view. The day-long performance constituted a kind of journey for that chorus, a journey towards and culminating in the satyr play. The physical and mental demands of this were very great, but even so, the wilder and hence even more physically demanding satyric dancing of the last play can be seen not only as a kind of "arrival" but also as a "reward" (though this may be a slightly demeaning way of putting it). It expresses the chorus's *return to centrality*. To understand this idea fully we need to see that tragedy rests on a kind of paradox; the tragic chorus is *theatrically* central, but *dramatically* marginal. Broadly, the theatrical aspect of a performance of a play covers anything that draws the attention of the audience to the performance event or to any of the constitutive elements of that event. Its dramatic aspect inheres in the fiction, both in the plot and in the represented "world of the play." Within the theatrical structure of tragedy, it is as though the action is presented *for* the chorus to witness, an intention marked by the repeated "suspensions" of dramatic development in the *stasima*, in which the reactions of the chorus are transposed to a different, supra-dramatic level of song and dance. During the *stasima*, in fact, although the chorus remains within its dramatic or fictional identity, it also reasserts its constant single-play-transcending role, a role, moreover, that largely defined the institution of performance for Athenians, for whom performance meant, quite simply, *choroi*. Within the dramatized fiction of the tragedy, however, the choric role is restricted to witnessing and reacting to *someone else's story*. Over the course of the fifth century, in fact, no doubt as a kind of consequence of this restriction, the chorus tends to become less and less involved in the action.

But in the satyr play (at least in the Aeschylean and Sophoclean kind) the chorus takes what we might call "center stage," and this status surely functions as a kind of recognition of their role *throughout* the tetralogy. It is also a kind of *return*. As drama develops historically, certain features of the forms and practices from which it originates become attenuated, even lost. But the satyr chorus brings with it an origin-al world, a world of origins, and thereby the theater briefly recovers its own source, which is *prior to the dominance of drama*.

To this account, another key fact must be added. Plays were performed in Athens in honor of the god Dionysos. The chorus was thus engaged in a celebration of the god. But satyrs too are celebrants of Dionysos. Thus, after three grueling tragedies in which the discipline of the chorus was in large part exerted to keep it in its "proper place" with respect to the *drama*, a place of (mere) witnessing, the members of the chorus were required to enact, and in that sense become, *what, as a dance troupe, they already were*: celebrants of Dionysos.⁵¹ In this change lies a kind of *liberation* from their de-centering and restricting roles in the tragedies. In this light it is entirely apt that the plots of numerous satyr plays (including *Cyclops*) themselves enact such a liberation, with the satyrs being freed in the end from their bondage to someone other than their god.

In the plot of *At the Isthmian Games*, the satyrs have not been enslaved by another; they have chosen to renounce their allegiance to Dionysos. But the play turns upon the key visual image of tied-up phalli. At the end of our version, as a necessary precondition of their danced reconciliation with Dionysos, the satyrs' phalli have to be set free.

Tragedy enacts a loss. Or rather, in a certain sense it *re-enacts* that loss, and thus commemorates it, for the mythic location of tragedy is both a past and an elsewhere. This is not to suggest that the audience thought of Hippolytos or Agamemnon or Ajax as once having lived and died in the way depicted, for that very same audience would have expected the depictions to be varied, as it were “re-fictionalized,” with each festival of new plays. Rather, any tragedy is “distanced” from the world of the theater and audience. This feature is often inadequately described, especially as tragedy is distinguished from Old Comedy, as its “maintenance of illusion.” Many factors, which cannot be analyzed here, contribute to it. Among them is the “*disguise*,” the entrapping or limiting fictional identity, of the chorus.

We are on the verge of a crucial paradox. If tragedy projects itself elsewhere and back in time, satyr plays also do so and to an even greater extent! The world of the satyrs is pre-civilized or pre-political. The mythic context is typically very early, dealing with origins, the first musical instruments, the first wine-making, the births of gods. But the celebratory quality of a satyr play also invokes the *here-and-now* to an extent impossible in tragedy, where the commemorative function entirely privileges the *there-and-then*. Crucial to this effect is the sense, shared by chorus members and audience alike, that this chorus of satyr-celebrants belongs both to mythic pre-history, to the wild, and (*pace* Plato) to the civic present, to the city.

In the case of satyrs, to *play* is to *be*. This holds for “real” satyrs: their very being lies in their playfulness. It holds for those who “dress up” as satyrs: to play a satyr is to become one. Therefore, in the satyr play, *there is no illusion to break*.

But in the satyr play, the chorus breaks the container of “drama” – and thus liberates the dance. It is the satyrs’ natural tendency to dance, along with their natural aptitude for it, that becomes the larger container (without which, satyrs would be menacing, truculent, uncouth).

To dance is to celebrate the gift of dance.

Thus, while satyrs may “lose out” in some plots (their plans or their desires are frustrated), they always “win” on another level. It is hard to imagine them leaving the orchestra in a defeated way (like, say, the chorus in *Agamemnon*) – for better than any “last word” or even any “last laugh,” *they have the last dance*.⁵²

It may be that *At the Isthmian Games*, as we staged it, differed in many significant ways from the (early- to mid-) fifth-century satyr play. But insofar as there may have been something *like* the original genre in it, in other words, insofar as we may have created something *satyr-play-like*, it is possible that insight was gained into the even earlier type of performance from which Aristotle says tragedy originated. It is also possible that the actual satyr play was invented and instituted to recover certain qualities of this earlier form. Still, it is hard to see how one might become certain of any of this. But in trying to “play our way back” to what came to seem a *pre-dramatic* form, a modern performance of this kind can at least be seen as *post-dramatic*, and this understanding begins to open up the question of its potential relevance for modern audiences.⁵³ But that is another topic.

notes

¹ The “Attic Tragedy in Translation” course, which is part of the College Year in Athens Program at DIKEMES, always includes a “workshop production” of a version of an ancient play, often of an experimental nature. In teaching this course, I have worked on and directed theatrical reconstructions of fragmentary plays on three occasions prior to this one. Those productions foregrounded the fragmentary nature of the original material and played with the “openness” of reconstruction. In this way, they confronted and explored the lost. This production, though based on fragments, had a different

motivation; it was precisely the “fullness” of the satyr play (as something presupposing, though going far beyond, the continuity of text) that we were trying to recover.

² “The choral songs of *Cyc[lops]*, although five in number as in tragedy, resemble the songs of Old Comedy in their shortness, metrical simplicity, and tendency to accompany action. And the last two songs are astrophic. In the satyric fragments the choral songs appear to be more frequent than in *Cyc.*, and in the *Ichneutai* [by Sophocles] we find both *astroph* and strophic pairs divided by spoken lines. In these respects the fragments resemble Old Comedy more closely than does *Cyc.* But the regularity and simplicity of rhythm characteristic of *Cyc.* is found only at A[eschylus] *Dikt[youlko]* 806–20; the other surviving songs tend to express agitated action or reaction, notably with dochmiacs, runs of short syllables, and rapid alternation of metres.” R. A. S. Seaford, Introduction to *Cyclops of Euripides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 46.

³ Bernd Seidensticker, “Dithyramb, Comedy, and Satyr–Play,” in *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. Justina Gregory (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 44.

⁴ François Lissarrague, “Why Satyrs Are Good to Represent,” in *Nothing To Do With Dionysus? Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, eds. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 236.

⁵ Lissarrague, “Why Satyrs . . .,” 236.

⁶ This production had its first performance on October 16th, 2010.

⁷ Tony Harrison, *Plays 5* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 7.

⁸ Dana Sutton, “The Satyr Play,” in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Volume 1, Part 2: *Greek Drama*, eds. P. E. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 95.

⁹ Seaford, *Cyclops*, 11.

¹⁰ Aristotle ascribes this characteristic to the “satyr–play–like” from which, he says, tragedy developed (*Poetics* 1449a 19), but the surviving evidence suggests that the plots of actual satyr plays were relatively simple or slight.

¹¹ George W. M. Harrison makes an extraordinary claim about Euripides’ *Cyclops*. Shortly after the *parodos*, “[t]he satyrs, bored by Odysseus’ travelogue and Silenos’ gestured tour (106–30), must wander off–stage since the plot requires that they not be present when Silenos discovers that Odysseus has wine (139) and bargains Polyphemos’ possessions for wine for himself.” (George W. M. Harrison, “Positioning of satyr drama and characterization in the *Cyclops*,” in *Satyr Drama: Tragedy at Play*, ed. George W. M. Harrison (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2005), 238.) Presumably, then, they must also “wander” back onstage ready for line 175. It is certainly notable that the satyr chorus has no lines between 81 and 174, and this reflects the strong “separation out” of Silenos from the chorus in this play, but there are many better ways to solve the problem in production than arbitrarily removing the satyrs. Nevertheless, whatever way is chosen, it will go beyond what is strictly “in” the text, an ironic result in relation to Harrison’s suggestion, which seems rooted in the idea that “if it’s not in the text, it’s not there.”

¹² The majority of satyr plays that we know anything about take their basic plots from existing myths (such as Odysseus’ defeat of Polyphemos) in which satyrs play no part. Some reason for the satyrs’ presence in the play (such as their capture and enslavement by Polyphemos) is then needed. In *Isthmiastai*, however, there seems to be no such prior story.

¹³ We used the Loeb Classical Library text of the play: *Aeschylus III: Fragments*, ed. and trans. Alan H. Sommerstein (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 82–99.

¹⁴ Advice on this was provided by Nigel Kennell.

¹⁵ Dionysos and Xanthias leave the *skene*, which represents the house of Heracles, and journey into Hades – Dionysos going by Charon’s boat while Xanthias has to walk round the lake – ultimately arriving at the same *skene*, which now represents Pluto’s palace. The process lasts some 260 lines (from ca. 180 to 440), though these include choral passages.

¹⁶ Sommerstein, *Aeschylus* III, 89.

¹⁷ David Wiles, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207. Wiles also cites as evidence Dionysos’ reference to a satyr hiding behind a shield, “so we may infer that the satyrs have been learning to carry a hoplite shield.” But if this is the case, why is the helmet such an unwelcome surprise? The scene is much more effective if the threat of the *oplitodromia* is the final straw for satyrs who have already been finding athletic training very arduous. We therefore interpreted Dionysos’ reference to a shield metaphorically, having a satyr hiding behind another even as he spoke “defiantly.”

¹⁸ What alternatives are there to the hoplite helmet? Javelins might be frightening, but in our version the satyrs had already been using them. Taplin’s suggestion of shackles may be consistent with the sparse textual evidence, but it would give a completely different, harsher mood to the play, presenting Dionysos as a slaver. And it is far less “neat” as a solution. See Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 421–2.

¹⁹ The exercise is described, not quite as here, in Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), 30.

²⁰ Wiles, *Mask and Performance*, 210.

²¹ There was probably some similarity between the dances performed by the padded dancers and those performed by satyrs, and “[i]t is as if the satyrs, once developed, took over the territory of the padded dancers.” J. Richard Green, “Let’s Hear It For The Fat Man,” in *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*, eds. Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105.

²² Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body*, trans. David Bradby (London: Methuen, 2002), 124–34.

²³ My memory may well be at fault, but as far as I am aware, this and the next exercises are my own – but both are highly influenced by Grotowski’s work on voice.

²⁴ Lecoq, *Moving Body*, 40.

²⁵ I do not know the origin of this exercise. It is described or referred to in numerous texts.

²⁶ “A chorus is not geometric but organic. In just the same way as a collective body, it has its centre of gravity, its extensions, its respiration. It is a kind of living cell . . .” Lecoq, *Moving Body*, 139.

²⁷ This “Group With No Leader Game” is taken from John Wright, *Why is That so Funny? A Practical Exploration of Physical Comedy* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2006), 48–9. Wright comments that this game “gives you the safest feeling of being out of control that you’re ever likely to experience.”

²⁸ Wright, *Why is That so Funny?*, 316.

²⁹ See Lecoq, *Moving Body*, 138–9.

³⁰ Lecoq, *Moving Body*, 141–4. The playing area is imagined to be a plate or disc which is balanced on its center point. A person standing in the center will maintain that balance, but if s/he moves away the disc is imagined to tilt. Someone else must then enter and find a position that returns the disc to “horizontal” balance. In the “1 = 1” version, the second person will then cease to balance the disc, going wherever s/he likes, requiring a third to enter and find the position that maintains overall balance. But in the “1 = n”

version, a group of *n* individuals is balanced by one. Note that if the *n* move around, “shoal-of-fish” like, as they wish, so that the one has the responsibility of balancing the disc, the effect is often of a person who seems anxious, frightened or threatened. But if roles are reversed, so that the *n* must balance the one, a *chorus* appears in its relation to a protagonist.

³¹ It is sometimes claimed that, in the *stasima*, the original tragic chorus commonly maintained a rigid “block” formation (5 x 5 x 5), all facing out towards the audience. But the structure of many stasima makes this seem unlikely. Perhaps the best choral song with which to experiment with the way some kinds of “turning inwards” seem written into the text is not strictly a *stasimon* but the *parodos* in *Agamemnon*, all 218 lines of it. A chorus may occasionally “turn inwards” during an episode too, as in *Agamemnon* 1346–71 – though this marks a kind of “fragmentation” of the chorus.

³² Mark Griffith, “Satyrs, citizens, and self-presentation,” in *Satyr Drama: Tragedy at Play*, ed. George W. M. Harrison (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2005), 171–2.

³³ Edith Hall, “Ithyphallic Males Behaving Badly, or, Satyr Drama as Gendered Tragic Ending,” in *Parchments of Gender: Deciphering the Body in Antiquity*, ed. Maria Wyke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13–37. Also as Edith Hall, “Horny Satyrs and Tragic Tetralogies,” in *The Theatrical Cast of Athens: Interactions between Ancient Greek Drama and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 142–169.

³⁴ Lissarrague, “Why Satyrs . . .,” 236.

³⁵ “Restored behavior is the key process of every kind of performing, in everyday life, in healing, in ritual, in play, and in the arts. Restored behavior is ‘out there,’ separate from ‘me.’ To put it in personal terms, restored behavior is ‘me behaving as if I were someone else,’ or ‘as I am told to do,’ or ‘as I have learned.’” Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 34. In performance, in other words, enacting is always (in some sense) re-enacting. I am not at all sure that this is true.

³⁶ See note 28. In tragedy too, of course, certain events will pull the scene “off-balance”; but balance tends to exert a strong and almost immediate counter-pull, as something always to be returned to, like the “tonic” or “home key.” This is essential to the formality of tragedy.

³⁷ “[M]any pictures of satyrs suggest that men and boys dressed up as satyrs for [the second day of the Anthesteria]. Beliefs about the mischievous and frolicsome nature of the satyrs derive no doubt from the actual behaviour of the satyrs on this and similar occasions.” Seaford, *Cyclops*, 7.

³⁸ With a hint, perhaps, of “neutering”?

³⁹ The satyrs were naturally appalled when told they had to give up wine and sex.

⁴⁰ There are evident parallels here with the opposition between Dionysos and Pentheus in *Bacchae* and with that between Dionysos and Lykourgos in Aeschylus’ lost tragedy *Edonians*.

⁴¹ Wright, *Why is that so Funny?*, 253.

⁴² Seaford, *Cyclops*, 7.

⁴³ Seaford, *Cyclops*, 9.

⁴⁴ Lecoq, *Moving Body*, 119.

⁴⁵ Lecoq, *Moving Body*, 121.

⁴⁶ Seaford, *Cyclops*, 16.

⁴⁷ Guy Hedreen, “Myths of Ritual in Athenian Vase-Paintings of Silens,” in *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*, eds. Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181–2.

⁴⁸ Hedreen, "Myths of Ritual," 170.

⁴⁹ Richard Seaford, "From Ritual to Drama," in *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*, eds. Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 386.

⁵⁰ P. E. Easterling, "A Show for Dionysos," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39.

⁵¹ "[T]he citizen actually was a servant of Dionysos when he danced in a satyr chorus." Wiles, *Mask and Performance*, 208.

⁵² Of course, we know almost nothing about the way satyr plays ended. It seems likely to me, however, that many if not all would have ended with a celebratory dance. This is even possible in the case of *Cyclops*, notwithstanding the two perfunctory "exit lines" given to the chorus; but to sustain this idea we have to imagine a dance that is not accompanied by any scripted song. After all, the satyrs are on their way to reunion with Dionysos. An alternative "processional" exit would seem very flat.

⁵³ The concepts deployed here are due to Hans-Thies Lehmann. See Hans-Thies Lehman, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London; Routledge, 2006).

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