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Comparing Classical Epinician Poetry and Contemporary Dance as Performances: Transgenericity, Transmediality, Transfictionality

Michel Briand, Université de Poitiers (France)

michel.briand@univ-poitiers.fr

In order to examine some theories and models of genres in archaic and classical Greek song, this study proposes two groups of parallel case-studies and intends to compare synthetically ancient epinician poetry, as exemplarily pre-dramatic, and post-dramatic contemporary dance, in a large transhistorical perspective. And as it might be useful to stress some useful paradoxes and tensions, a mostly methodological and theoretical survey will first present a few remarks about a possible comparative history and theory of genres, especially in relation to performance studies.¹

Pre- and postdramatic : when archaic and contemporary performing arts meet

The first important reference is the notion of “postdramatic” theater, often called “body theater” or “image theater”, in opposition to “text theater”, as theorized by Lehmann,² and others since, and as exemplified by a various amount of contemporary performances and theoretical works. This notion may support a transhistorical and transcultural comparison of archaic, that is predramatic, performing arts and contemporary, that is often explicitly postdramatic, practices and concepts. This comparative hypothesis is also inspired by

¹ Schechner & Appel 1990 and Schechner 2003, On the relation between post- and pre-dramatic, see especially Bierl 2009, 2010a and 2010b. See also Briand 2013a and 2014b.

² Lehman 2006.

“ethnopoetics”³ and the so-called pragmatic or “performative turn” anthropological approaches went along with. And it is based on artistic, historical, and even political preferences like: presentation and embodiment rather than representation (or mimesis in a restricted meaning) and expression or role-playing; forces (efficient rituality, e.g. catharsis) rather than forms (formal spectacularity);⁴ working (and “énonciation”) more than work (and “énoncé”);⁵ polyphonic creation rather than monologic authorship; reception oriented construction of communities and identities and multi-medial performativity, partially in accordance with the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, rather than textual discursivity, etc.

This trend is very present among contemporary choreographers and scenographers, which are labeled or call themselves “écrivains de plateau”, who “write” (on) the stage like choreographers “write” dance, rather than “metteurs en scène”, who “stage” preexisting texts. They also refer to Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872) or Artaud’s theatre of cruelty, in *Le théâtre et son double* (1938), that is another way to reconnect, in a somehow fantasized or idealized perspective, archaic and modern / contemporary performing arts.⁶ This perspective may be similar to Foucault’s archeology, here about (neo)-classical and modern genres as they appear from Hellenistic categorizations to their postmodern avatars. The prefix post- in postmodern and postdramatic does not stress exactly the same temporal consecutiveness, but the approach proposed here may still hopefully illuminate the generic polyphony of epinician poetry, previous to Aristotelian / Alexandrian systems, by its comparison with postmodern or contemporary evolutions, claimed as post-Aristotelian and generically polyphonic and hybridized.⁷

³ Calame 1997 and 2006, Calame *et al.* 2010, Kowalzig 2007, Schechner, Stehle 1997, Briand 2003 and 2010a.

⁴ Sauvagnargues 2008 and Sabisch 2011, both in relation with Deleuze 1980.

⁵ Tackels 2005, Pouillaude 2009, Jolivet Pignon 2015.

⁶ Agamben 1992 and 2006, Foucault 1969, and Jday & Nault 2014.

⁷ Brandsetter 1995 and Macintosh (ed.) 2010.

According to feminist or postcolonial studies, there is no universal, essential, or transparent canon, despite the normalized history of genres, which is a kind of “eugénisme consciemment assumé”.⁸ The heterogeneity and complex genealogies of literary and discursive genre names are mostly implied by the variety of criteria they are based on: institutional context, thematic content, formal markers, cognitive and pragmatic processes and devices. More than the relation of “lyric” poetry⁹ to a later prescriptive system or, conversely, of contemporary dance to earlier classifications, a key issue is the literariness of ancient texts, which were not predominantly aiming at aesthetical effects,¹⁰ as well as the rituality of artistic contemporary performances, and the expressive value of both ancient and classical or post-modern works. When defining epinician poetry as “lyric”, in Alexandrian, Latin, Renaissance, Hegelian, or Romantic terms, one is retroactively reassigning those texts, as texts, to a modern typology, conventional, contextual, and connected to representations of what is an author, a poetic text, a reader, a genre or sub-genre. When proposing to provisionally consider epinician poetry as “predramatic”, one also takes risks of anachronistic universalism,¹¹ but in doing it explicitly one may reach other less univocal results, though still problematic or paradoxical.

Transgenericity and transmediality: when performative poetry stimulates and simulates

The notion of “transgenericity”¹² may then help to better define genres as non-essential, emic, and evolving prototypes and categories, which should be organized according to evolutionary prototypical logics, fuzzy sets (“ensembles flous”) and Wittgensteinian family resemblance,

⁸ Schaeffer 1989: 60.

⁹ Briand 2008 and 2014a, especially 229-84 “Critique et réception de Pindare: étapes et enjeux principaux”, and Guerrero 1998.

¹⁰ Genette 1991.

¹¹ Loraux 1993.

¹² Briand 2008.

based on versatile and non-binary categorizations.¹³ Every genre might be scrutinized in a transgeneric perspective, since for instance its label as genre can rely on one specific criterion, considered as predominantly defining the multi-criteria system of one genre: epinician poetry is “about victory”, and this eulogistic dominant characteristic, mostly ritualistic and rhetorical, defines the other formal, thematic, or pragmatic criteria. But concerning these other criteria, an epinician poem, when performed, is immediately trans-generic, that is fluidly combining layered and interacting characteristics, for instance the discursive genres it may contain and real or fictional speech-acts it may perform or simulate, like praising and praying humans, cities and gods, narrating myths, telling maxims, etc., in connection with interplays of choral (that is dance-song collective) action and discourse. Classical epinician poetry might well be considered a constitutively not only polygeneric but also transgeneric genre, combining discursive genres and various meter- and theme- based poetic styles, which relate Pindar and Bacchylides with Homeric, Hesiodic, elegiac, gnomic, “pre-socratic”, or even iambic (and blame) diction and fiction.

Transgenericity is generally based on polysensorial and polyesthetical effects and implies transmediality. Epinician poetry, as it combines choreographic, musical, and textual features and pragmatics, is definingly transmedial and polysensorial, just as comparatists and contemporary art specialists assume post-dramatic performances are. The identities and communities these kinds of performances intend to construct are sensorial, based on the creation and reception or better the interactive production of sensations, which in turn pragmatically support common values and ideas. The aural and visual dimensions are closely interdependent and necessary to both the epinician and post-dramatic performance,¹⁴ but the kinesthetic aspect might be reevaluated and considered fundamental, especially for what concerns synesthetic effects: it is crucial to the pragmatics of active reception, pleasure and

¹³ Calame *et alii* 2010, “Introduction”.

¹⁴ Briand 2016a.

empathy, or even tragic but also comic / melic / novelistic catharsis, for instance in spectacular / ritual kinds of catharsis.¹⁵ A both presentational and embodied definition of performance and performativity calls for a concretely and sensorially embodied reception, which combines and reciprocally reinforces psycho-physical, cognitive, imaginary, ethical, rhetorical, or political pragmatics.¹⁶

Finally, as constitutively transgeneric and transmedial, epinician dance-song and postdramatic performance stage a complex negotiation of truth, reality, and fiction, like in the notion of transfictionality.¹⁷ According to “formal mimesis”,¹⁸ “lyric” or expressive genres, as well as in other terms “melic” or performative genres, may be seen as simulating serious speech acts: fiction becomes an important generic feature of first-person discourses, which simulate the “author”’s emotions, for instance in epinician poetry, with what Calame calls “delegation chorale”,¹⁹ and which stimulate the individual and collective emotions of the audience. Thence, in epinician poetry and postdramatic spectacle, as this kind of transfictionality depends more on performativity than on strictly literary devices, ritual / fictional performative genres are based on interplays between spectacular and imaginary visual, aural and kinesthetic effects, e. g. rhythmical gestures or “vivid metaphors”.²⁰ The “performative turn”, completed by what might as well be some kind of “anthropological turn”, redirects the definition of genericity, by focusing on active reception rather than on creation and expression, and on ritual / spectacular synesthesia rather than on mere reader’s response, though this already is an interesting shift from strictly discursive mimesis.

¹⁵ Peponi 2012, and Noland 2009, Forster 2011, Bolens 2000 and 2008. Most useful approaches associate anthropological, physio-psychological, and aesthetic elements: see Destrée & Murray (eds.) 2015, especially R. P. Martin. “Festivals, Symposia, and the Performance of Greek Poetry”, 18-30, D. Steiner. “Figures of the Poet in Greek Epic and Lyric”, 31-46, E. Rocconi. “Music and Dance in Greece and Rome”, 81-93, A.-E. Peponi. “Dance and Aesthetic Perception”, 204-217, A. Sheppard. “Imagination”, p. 354-365, A. Grand-Clément. “Poikilia”, p. 406-421.

¹⁶ See for instance Steiner 1986, Patten 2009, Wells 2010.

¹⁷ Saint Gelais 2011.

¹⁸ Glowinski 1987.

¹⁹ Calame 1997.

²⁰ Patten 2009.

As shown by cognitive poetics,²¹ genres might be codifications of texts and performances requiring competences and protocols, based on a pragmatic patterning of poetry / dance more than on the knowledge of literary / artistic norms. For spectators, simulation and stimulation, rather than representation and expression, are necessary for the illocutionary success of artistic / ritual / social performances. It is at this very point we can connect the notions of transfictionality, transmediality, and especially transgenericity, here the main topic: some genres of performance, ancient or postmodern, cannot exist, that is they cannot produce successful events, without combining so various as possible discursive and poetic genres and registers (like description – narration – argument or tragic, comic, praise, blame...) and perceptive, cognitive, affective modalities and devices (“genres” too), and also without mixing and reciprocally enhancing those genres, modalities and devices. Whenever scholars need the notion of genre, epinician poetry and postdrama might not be seen as subgenres (of ancient lyric poetry or of contemporary theater), but as supergenres (or transgenres), from a discursive, communicational, aesthetic, and cognitive point of view.

Case studies 1

Pindar, *Olympian 1*: a simple model of typically intricate epinician transgenericity

²¹ Lakoff 1987, Lakoff & Johnson 1980 (2003) and 1999, Gavins & Steen (eds.) 2003, Semino & Culpeper (eds) 2002.

A characteristic example of epinician poetry surely is Pindar's first *Olympian*.²² The generic structure of the poem is practically figured for instance by Wells' scheme,²³ which shows how this poetic device offers a simple model of typically intricate epinician transgenericity, joining in a regular ring-composition the major discursive genres and speech-acts defining epinician pragmatics: 1. *eukhesthai* statements, like prayer and praise (first melic frame, v. 1-27 / 114-16; second frame v. 36-51 / 106-11; embedded third frame, in a direct discourse of Pelops to Poseidon, v. 75-78 / 85); 2. *angelia*, i.e. announcements (v. 20-24, here limited and secondary to *eukhesthai*); 3. *gnômai*, i.e. maxims (first gnomic frame, v. 28-35 / 113-14; frame of the mythological narrative, v. 53 / 97-100, 64, 81-84 in the center of the embedded direct discourse); 4. mythological narrative (brief onset v. 25-27, introduction v. 37-51, principal myth v. 54-64 / 65-96, embedded myth v. 79-81); 5. "lyric", that is a reflexive or metapoetic discourse (v. 16-17, 52 / 100-105), to which a traditional denomination of the whole "lyric" genre is applied restrictively. That is all typical for constitutive transgenericity.

For what concerns transmediality, the whole poem could be scrutinized. As examples of synesthesia, as the dialectics of spectacular and imaginary vision, audition, kinesthesia, in relation with various rhythmical devices, all with possible choreographic and musical correspondences, we may look on one hand at v. 1-22 (first strophe and anti-strophe, v. 1-7, 11, 14-15, 18) and compare it with the fourth epode (v. 112, 114, 116), and on the other hand at v. 70-87 (71, 74, 75-76, 82-85). And for transfictionality, the first *Olympian* is a famous example of both mythological revision, about Pelops, and of a tensed reflexivity about what an epinician poem can perform and say.²⁴ It is also a perfect example of ambivalent thence efficient dialectics of myth and actuality. (esp. 54-96)

²² For reasons of space the easily available poems of Pindar and Bacchylides are not quoted here.

²³ Wells 2010: 194.

²⁴ Daude *et alii* 2013.

Pindar, *Pythian 4*: a complex model of epic-dramatic epinician transgenericity

Pindar's fourth *Pythian* outstandingly exemplifies the dynamic relation between the constitutive transgenericity and possible hybridizations of a higher level, like the integration of epic or dramatic, especially tragic, features in epinician pragmatics, e.g. dactylic rhythms, developed dialogs, unusually long narrative, etc. The general framework is typically epinician, for instance in v. 1-68, before the main myth, with an embedded mythological narrative framed by two *eukhesthai* acts, and v. 247-99, after the main myth, in two parts: on one hand, v. 247-78, an alternation of *eukhesthai* and *gnômâ*, framed by two "lyric" passages; on the other, v. 279-99, an alternation of *angelia* and *gnôma*, with a brief embedded mythological narrative (v. 291 et sequ.), and a final *eukhesthai*, v. 298-99. In the middle of the poem, the long epic – tragic narrative about Jason is framed by two *eukhesthai*, one by the choral *ego*, v. 67-68, the other as the last direct discourse of an epic character, v. 229-231, and structured by five direct discourses, most of them with epinician components and features. Some epic features get dramatic overtones from the choral enunciation of epinician poetry. But it might feel more epic, in a monodic, for instance symposiac, reperformance.

Like for the first *Olympian*, transmediality could be studied in detail in the whole poem. The dialogue between Pelias and Jason is a good example of this crucial issue, especially in numerous aural, visual, kinesthetic correspondences, with rhythmical and possibly choreographic effects, mostly gestural and spatial, and empathetic or even cathartic developments. Something similar goes for transfictionality, especially in Medea's prophecy and in the various embedded discourses of the developed mythological narrative, as well as in the third part of the poem (v. 247-299), with the complex rhetoric and negotiation of power and knowledge Pindar and the chorus stage, when addressing Hiero, his city, the gods, etc.

Bacchylides, *Ep. 3*: a paradoxical model of harmonized though tensed transgenericity

It is interesting to compare Pindar's first *Olympian* with a third and last example, Bacchylides' third *Epinician*, for the same dedicatee.²⁵ This poem could be a paradoxical model of both harmonized and tensed transgenericity. Its metric system is quite unusual and complex, with strophes and antistrophes in iambic-choriambic meters and epodes in iambic-anapestic and dactylic-trochaic systems. That gives the poem a general alternative structure, both regularly based on the progressive succession of seven triads and on their internal contrast, which reinforces the choreographic value of epodes:²⁶ this could be an example of the "conjunctive value of disjunction" in Pindar's art, but not in accordance with the typical features of "austere style".²⁷ We may notice for instance the correspondence of the beginning and the end of the poem, v. 1-3-6 / 55-60-63, related by the name of Hiero, v. 3 and 60: the general structure is based both on a loop system and a progression, since the end is enriched by *gnômai* and concluded by a "lyric" reflexive statement.

On the contrary, the relation of myth and actuality, e.g. the description of the celebration in Delphi, which connects Hiero, Gelo, and Croesus, and the structure of the developed mythological narrative (v. 17-54) are so complex and heterogeneous as in Pindar's fourth *Pythian*. This part of the epinician poem associates a typical epinician transgenericity and some epic and dramatic features, implied for instance by the direct discourses (Croesus, v. 25-31, Apollo, v. 50-54), the ternary reference to Apollo, named three times, v. 19, 38, 50, and the short inserted *gnôma* (v. 34), all in dynamic tension with the choral performance. This

²⁵ Hutchinson 2001: 321-358.

²⁶ Mullen 1982 and Briand 2009.

²⁷ Hummel 1993.

implies also some transfictional features, however more polished as in Pindar. And concerning transmediality, we could study in detail the whole poem, for instance the spectacular overture of the first two triads (v. 1-18), outstandingly synesthetic and choreographic, and the nonetheless powerful and sophisticated coda of the last triad.

All those characteristics, summarized by the figure below,²⁸ may argue for Bacchylides' artistic and performative qualities.

1-3 praise of gods and Hieron (v. 3)

4-6 *angelia*

7-16 ecphrastic celebration in Delphi

17-54 mythological narrative, about Croesus and Apollo (v. 19)

25-31 Croesus' prayer

34 *gnôma*

Apollo (v. 38) brings Croesus to the Hyperboreans

55-60 *gnôma*

60-61 address to Hieron

62 *gnôma*

62-63 praise and lyric ("nightingale of Keos")

Case-studies 2

²⁸ I follow the verse numbering in the Belles Lettres edition (text by Jean Irigoin), where the fourth line of the strophe is conflated with the third line.

The three contemporary examples I will now briefly present can all, in different ways, be taken as postdramatic and transgeneric performances, which spectacularly stage an intermedial combination of oral and written texts, song, sometimes instrumental music, and always choreographical / gestural actions. The three of them refer to classical, especially ancient Greek, performing arts but the main issue here is not the postmodern reception of classical forms and themes. More important here is the way modern and contemporary choreography is often radically renewing itself by reactivating what artists and theoreticians thought to be ancient Greek performativity. A fine example is the end of XIXth and beginning of XXth with Nietzsche and Dalcroze or Duncan and Nijinsky, before of course Martha Graham.²⁹ There is something of that *Zeitgeist* in the beginning of the XXIst century, especially in Europe, and that is not so much a postmodern situation, since postmodern dance does not refer to ancient esthetics, but altermodern or transmodern creativity, as it questions the very idea of contemporaneity.³⁰ Many other examples were possible for this study, like Olivier Dubois' *Tragédie* (2013) or Carlotta Ikeda / Pascal Quignard 's *Medea* (2012).³¹

Maguy Marin, *Description d'un combat* (2009): a textual / gestural *ekphrasis* of lament

The title of Marin's piece refers implicitly to the *ekphrasis* of *Achilles' Shield*, in the *Iliad*, book 18. The main text the performers proclaim is from the *Iliad*, book 16, about Patroclus' *aristeia* and death, completed by other texts about war and human destiny by Victor Hugo, Charles Péguy, Lucretius, Ezra Pound, Heinrich von Kleist, Dolores Ibarruri, etc. Those texts are not interpreted dramatically, like in a realistic or modern play, but presented, with

²⁹ Brandstetter 1995 and Macintosh 2010.

³⁰ About "altermodernity" see Bourriaud 2009, about "transmodernity" Rodriguez Marda 1989 and 2004, and about "contemporaneity" Briand 2016b.

³¹ Briand 2016b and to be publ. 2016, Quignard 2013 and 2014. Olivier Dubois, about his *Tragédie*, quotes extensively Nietzsche and Loraux 1999.

unnatural distance, in a mix of monodic and choral chants, like in a fantasized archaic, thence transcultural, funeral ceremony, both epic and tragic. The general structure of the performance has been textually summarized by S. Prokhoris, in an introduction to a work-document where the choreograph represented the relations of actions or gestures and texts, in two pages describing the first ten minutes:³²

Au sol, recouverts de tissus de trois couleurs (bleu, or, rouge), vingt-sept mannequins sont disposés, des soldats morts sur le champ de bataille. Les danseurs, tout en disant de façon continue les textes, marchent vers les corps (...), se baissent pour ramasser un tissu, puis se relèvent. Ils recommencent ces trois mouvements - se baisser, se lever, marcher -, suspendus par des temps de pause. Leurs déplacements sont réglés en canons autour des vingt-sept corps de mannequins soldats. Des allers-retours vers le fond obscur du plateau permettent de déposer les tissus. À la fin de la pièce, tous les corps sont dépouillés des tissus qui les recouvraient, il ne reste que les armures sur les graviers.³³

Here, several temporalities are alternating and harmonizing with each other:

- the time of the texts, from ancient slaughters to recent massacres, celebrated and grieved for in epic style, and the time of this celebration and lament, through the performer's voice.
- the time of actions described in the texts, with visual and kinesthetic effects of *enargeia* and empathy, and the time of actions performed on the stage, through the bodies of the performers and their manipulation of the tissues, veils and model figures lying on the stage floor.

³² Prokhoris 2012.

³³ Prokhoris 2012: 327: "Covered by tissues in three colors (blue, golden, red), 27 mannequins are lying on the ground. They are soldiers who died on the battlefield. The dancers, while continuously telling texts, walk towards the bodies (...), bend down to pick up a tissue, and then get up again. They repeat those three movements – bending down, getting up, walking – and suspend them with pause times. Their moves are organized in canons, around the 27 bodies of soldier mannequins. By going back and forth to the dark background of the stage, they lay down the tissues. At the end of the piece, all the bodies have lost the tissues which covered them, only the armors are left, on the gravel."

- the rhythmical tension between every sharp visual, aural or kinetic sensation and the over-all flow it is integrated in, a general experience of human condition.

This is, on a thematic point of view, the exact opposite of an epinician festival, but its typically postdramatic, transmedial, transdiscursive pragmatics may exhibit some aspects of the ancient pragmatics we are trying here to understand.

François Chaignaud & Cecilia Bengolea, *Castor et Pollux* (2010): a postdramatic *theoria*, between immersion and precarity³⁴

At a crucial moment of *Castor et Pollux*, a 40 minutes performance, the dancers and choreographers François Chaignaud and Cecilia Bengolea sing some verses from Euripides' *Orestes* (v. 321-333 and 339-344),³⁵ in the first *stasimon* of a play which already in antiquity was famous for its musicality. Some ancient musical notation was published with the papyrus Wien G 2315, at the end of XIXth century, and a CD by the *Kerylos Ensemble*, conducted by Annie Bélis, a French classicist and musician, is easily available. The dance piece is entitled *Castor et Pollux*, in reference to the divine twins and the two brightest stars in the constellation of the Gemini. Its organization is quite special: the spectators lie on the floor of the stage, on yoga mats and pillows, and they watch upwards the two performers dancing in

³⁴ Briand 2012.

³⁵ For instance, v. 321-27, μελάγχρωτες εὐμενίδες, αἶτε τὸν /ταναὸν αἰθέρ' ἀμπάλλεσθ', αἵματος/ τινύμεναι δίκαν, τινύμεναι φόνον, /καθικετεύομαι καθικετεύομαι./ τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονος /γόνον ἔασατ' ἐκλαθέσθαι λύσσης/ μανιάδος φοιταλέου, “you black-skinned avenging spirits, that dart along the spacious air, exacting a penalty for blood, a penalty for murder, I beg you, I beg you! Allow the son of Agamemnon to forget his wild whirling frenzy”, and v. 339-46, Ἴὼ Ζεῦ./ τίς ἔλεος, τίς ὄδ' ἀγὼν/ φόνιος ἔρχεται./ θοάζων σε τὸν μέλεον, ᾧ δάκρυα /δάκρυσι συμβάλλει /πορεύων τις ἐς δόμον ἀλαστόρων /ματέρος αἶμα σᾶς, ὃ σ' ἀναβακχεύει;/ Ὁ μέγας ὄλβος οὐ μόνιμος ἐν βροτοῖς-/ κατολοφύρομαι κατολοφύρομαι, “O Zeus! What pity, what deadly struggle is here, hurrying you on, the wretch on whom some avenging fiend is heaping tears upon tears, bringing to the house your mother's blood, which drives you raving mad? Great prosperity is not secure among mortals. I lament, I lament!”

semi-darkness, with following lights, on flying trapezes, in colorful clothes and strange body and face paintings. Other performers wearing strange outfits, which make them the staff of an imaginary ritual, play music, while ensuring the safety of the two acrobatic dancers, with cables and ropes.

This performance may be presented as a post-dramatic *theoria*, since the spectators here experience the immersive contemplation of an enigmatic spectacle, with at once tragic and philosophical overtones. Like for Maguy Marin's *Description d'un combat*, it would be interesting to have a detailed script of the whole piece, but a text is only presented here during the few crucial minutes when the performers sing the ancient verses, several times, in different voices, with high and low distortions, similar to birds chirping or heavy rhythmical breaths and grunts and growls. Among these raining sounds, even the spectators who do not know ancient Greek can notice the mythological reference (Ἄγαμέμνωνος v. 324) and the pathetic repetition of *καθικετεύομαι* "I am imploring" (v. 323) and *κατολοφύρομαι* "I am lamenting" (v. 340). This transgeneric performance allows at the same time a distanced reception, for some spectators, and a more empathetic and sensitive one, for some others. Again the postdramatic rejoins the archaic, as a modern construction of supposedly universal fears, about the precariousness the performers, like humankind itself, are experiencing, and of universal delights, provided by the heroic virtuosity of their gestures, movements and continuous metamorphoses.

Romeo Castellucci, *The Four Season's Restaurant* (2012): multi-layered transmediality and critical transdiscursivity³⁶

³⁶ Castellucci. 2001, Bierl 2010, Briand 2010b and 2013b.

Our last example is not the easiest, but one typical of what is called “postdramatic” or “body (embodied) theater”, in contemporary “scenic arts”, which do not any more separate music, dance, text, light-show, etc, and use provocative and powerful transmedial and transfictional effects, explicitly inspired by Artaud’s “théâtre de la cruauté”. Sometimes with some risks, like when in Paris, in 2011-12, catholic fundamentalists, that is the kind of public who cannot understand the tension of truth and fiction Castellucci tackles, succeeded in interrupting several representations of *Sul concetto di volto nel figlio di Dio* (*About the concept of the face of God’s son*). Concerning Romeo Castellucci’s relation to ancient performing arts, there should also be mention of spectacles like *Orestea*, after Aeschylus, in 1995, recreated with some transformations in 2015, under the title *Oreste (une comédie organique?)*; *Tragedia Endogonida*, from 2002 to 2004; or *Oedipus der Tyrann* in 2015.

The title of the 2012 work, *The Four Season’s Restaurant*, refers to the well-known New-York place and to the painter Mark Rothko who, in 1958, finally refused to expose his works in this rich but for him terribly frivolous place. The main issue is the uses and abuses of pictorial, imaginary, and spectacular images, and the paradoxical main reference is again Greek tragedy, with the satiric drama, not as the dramatic representation of a plot, but as an unrealistic ritual of adjuration, purification, and an embodied and vivid reflection about “the relation between representation and negation of the appearances which, since Greek tragedy, organizes any relation between Western man and images”.³⁷

The structure of the piece is simple: after an explosive sound disruption, and a scene when they successively cut their tongues as if they were sacrificing human language, ten female performers proclaim in Italian some extracts of Hölderlin’s *The Death of Empedocles*, which are also screened at the back of the stage, in French for instance. The texts are underlined, sometimes as a counterpoint, sometimes as an enhancement, by expressively symbolic

³⁷ « le rapport entre représentation et négation de l'apparence qui, depuis la tragédie grecque, soutient tout rapport de l'homme occidental à l'image », in the written programme for theaters.

gestures and movements, often frozen in sculptural tableaux. After the performers have left the stage, naked, the “play” presents several scenic images, like a dead horse or round rocks, and it ends in a gigantic “black hole” invading the whole stage with a cosmic flow.

The textual effects of visual and kinetic *enargeia* are completely replaced here by scenic effects of intensity, and the classical reference is filtered by Hölderlin’s idealized tragedy, framed by an elementary violence, which reflects some original (Presocratic) vision of human destiny and world. This example perfectly shows what can be meant here by the notions of postdramatic transgenericity, transmediality, and transfictionality. And it is quite significant that Castellucci intends to revitalize some predramatic performances, especially choral, which are, at least imaginatively, similar to what can have been, in more optimistic ways, Aeschylean tragedies and even epinician poetry.

Epilogue: about varieties of transgenericity

As a short conclusion, one obvious fact can be emphasized: to compare archaic and contemporary performing arts implies to be aware both of similarities and differences. But that does not mean to compare two works of art, since our knowledge is not the same for these two kinds of performances: an epinician text is only a part of the epinician performance we cannot attend any more; the participation to a postdramatic performance, even one of the most text-centered kind, is really something much richer than the reading of a text. A solution, not perfectly practical, could be to define the transgenericity of a predramatic or postdramatic performance as the interaction of several levels of transgenericity: discursive, including textual, formal, spectacular, pragmatic, political. The six examples we focused on, from ancient epinician poetry and from contemporary postdrama and dance, may confirm, in

a methodological and theoretical perspective, while pushing it to its limits, the “performative turn” which is so crucial for the study of ancient poetic genres.

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Biographical note

Michel Briand is Professor of Ancient Greek Literature at the Université de Poitiers (France). Two last books published: 2014. *Pindare. Olympiques*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, and (ed.) 2012, *La trame et le tableau. Poétiques et rhétoriques du récit et de la description dans l'Antiquité grecque et latine*, Rennes : La Licorne 101.