How to Deal with Monstrous Images in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*

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1. Preliminary Remarks

The present contribution examines ancient audience reactions to the gruesome images in Aeschylus' tragedy *Eumenides*, the third play of the *Oresteia* trilogy (458 BCE, victorious at the Dionysia), against the background of the concepts of resonance and performativity, and with a view to ancient and modern literary theory. The first chapter (1) deals with affect-generating elements in the *Eumenides*, as they are described in the play's prologue by internal observer-figures. The next section evaluates the audience reaction to the play as the later *Vita Aeschyli* reports it with regard to resonance and performativity (2). Hence a side view is taken to the ancient documentation of audience reaction to a tragedy by Aeschylus' contemporary Phrynichus (3). The following chapter looks at Gorgias' and Aristotle's theoretical remarks on affects and emotions in the reception of poetry (4), before the final section discusses whether resonance is created or rather destroyed when a theatre audience is confronted with monstrous images on the dramatic stage (5).

2. Responding to Monsters in Aeschylus

In 458 BCE, in the month Elaphebolion (March/April), the citizens of Athens witnessed the theatrical performances of tragedies and other plays on occasion of the Great Dionysia festival. These took place in the Theatre of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis hill. For this year's occasion, the aged poet Aeschylus staged his *Oresteia* trilogy: the first play, *Agamemnon*, had described the return of the legendary commander and king from the Trojan Wars from the perspective of the citizens of Argos. The escalation of revenge starts when Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon, her husband. The following play, the *Libation-bearers* (*Choephoroi*), had opened with the return of Agamem-

non's son Orestes. At the tomb of his father, he and his sister Electra, after performing rites for the beloved dead, plot a revenge against Clytemnestra, which leads to Orestes' matricide. In the trilogy's last play, the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus addresses Orestes' guilt.[1]

The first scene of the *Eumenides* takes place in front of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. As the speaker of the prologue appears the Pythia, an old woman, the god's holy priestess. After praying and announcing that the Delphic oracle is open for consultation, she enters the holy temple. A moment later she reappears, crawling on her hands and knees like a child. Her earlier dignity is overcome by terror and mental disturbance at the sight she has seen (*Eum.* 34-45):[2]

ἦ δεινὰ λέξαι, δεινὰ δ' ὀφθαλμοῖς δρακεῖν
πάλιν μ' ἔπεμψεν ἐκ δόμων τῶν Λοξίου,
ὡς μήτε σωκεῖν μήτέ μ' ἀκταίνειν στάσιν·
τρέχω δὲ χερσίν, οὐ ποδωκείαι σκελῶν.
δείσασα γὰρ γραῦς οὐδέν, ἀντίπαις μὲν οὖν.
ἐγὼ μὲν ἕρπω πρὸς πολυστεφῆ μυχόν·
ὁρῶ δ' ἐπ' ὀμφαλῶι μὲν ἄνδρα θεομυσῆ
ἕδρας ἔχοντα προστρόπαιον, αἵματι
στάζοντα χεῖρας καὶ νεοσπαδὲς ξίφος
ἔχοντ' ἐλαίας θ' ὑψιγέννητον κλάδον
λήνει μεγίστωι σωφρόνως ἐστεμμένον, ἀργῆτι μαλλῶι

(The Pythia exits through the doors then immediately reenters, terrified and scurrying on all fours)
Horrors! Horrors to tell! Horrors before my eyes,
they have repelled me from Apollo's house!
I am terrified, my legs have frozen in fear! I cannot stand,
I have to crawl out on my hands and knees.
A scared old woman is nothing, no more than a helpless child.
I was entering the chamber where the wool wreaths hang,
and I saw a man by the center-stone,[3] stained in
the sight of the gods and crouching in supplication.

1 On the macrostructure of the *Oresteia* trilogy, cf. Käppel (1998).
2 The Aeschylean text in this contribution follows West (1998). The English translation and the annotated stage directions follow Meineck (1998).
3 I.e. the Omphalos, the navel stone situated at Delphi that was said to mark the centre of the earth.

His hands and drawn sword are dripping with
blood, and he is clutching a tall olive branch,[4]
rightly wreathed with a full woolen shank
of silvery fleece. (Transl. after Meineck)

Inside the temple the Pythia has seen a man with bloody hands, Orestes. In the following verses, she describes what else she has encountered in the inner parts of the oracular shrine (*Eum.* 46-63):

πρόσθεν δὲ τἀνδρὸς τοῦδε θαυμαστὸς λόχος
εὕδει γυναικῶν ἐν θρόνοισιν ἥμενος –
οὔτοι γυναῖκας, ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας λέγω·
οὐδ' αὖτε Γοργείοισιν εἰκάσω τύποις.
εἶδόν ποτ' ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας
δεῖπνον φερούσας· ἄπτεροί γε μὴν ἰδεῖν
αὗται· μέλαιναι δ', εἰς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι,
ῥέγκουσι δ' οὐ πλατοῖσι φυσιάμασιν,
ἐκ δ' ὀμμάτων λείβουσι δυσφιλῆ λίβα·
καὶ κόσμος οὔτε πρὸς θεῶν ἀγάλματα
φέρειν δίκαιος οὔτ' ἐς ἀνθρώπων στέγας.
τὸ φῦλον οὐκ ὄπωπα τῆσδ' ὁμιλίας,
οὐδ' ἥτις αἶα τοῦτ' ἐπεύχεται γένος
τρέφουσ'ἀνατεὶ μὴ μεταστένειν πόνον.
τἀντεῦθεν ἤδη τῶνδε δεσπότηι δόμων
αὐτῶι μελέσθω Λοξίαι μεγασθενεῖ·
ἰατρόμαντις δ' ἐστὶ καὶ τερασκόπος
καὶ τοῖσιν ἄλλοις δωμάτων καθάρσιος.

In front of this man was an astonishing throng
of women propped against the benches asleep.
No, not women, they were a hideous sight,
more like Gorgons, but worse, much worse.
I have seen paintings of the beasts that plagued Phineus[5]
and stole his food, but the creatures in there have no wings,
they are dark, dank and disgusting. (*They are snoring*)
Their foul stench and hideous breath forced me back,
and their eyes seep a repulsive, putrid pus.

4 Both olive branch and wool wreaths were carried by a suppliant, who sought the protection of the gods.

5 Phineus was a mythical king cursed with blindness and stricken by the Harpies, flying monsters that stole and fouled his food.

They are wrapped in black dismal rags not fit for human sight.
A place of holy idols should not suffer such an evil apparition.
I have never known a race that spawned such creatures,
nor have I seen a land that could boast to have bred them
without suffering some terrible blight – terrible pain!
Apollo must decide what to do with them,
he is the master of this house,
he is the healer, the prophet,
he has the power to purify a house.
(Exit Pythia through the stage right wing) (Transl. after Meineck)

Within the oracular shrine, the Pythia has encountered a terrifying sight that has utterly unnerved her, both mentally and physically. Her description forms an image of what she has witnessed inside. She not only describes the visual impressions she has perceived of the gloomy sight, but also how she heard the snoring of those terrible beings and smelled their foul stench and disgusting breath.[6] Her verbal description that she directly addresses to the audience draws a synaesthetically impressive mental image in the listeners, who with their inner eye behold what they cannot see on stage, things that lurk behind, or rather within, the temple. Thus, in the prologue, the play creates and evokes its own imaginative reality. The corporeality and presence of the Erinyes is both suggestively evoked and simulated by the Pythia's words. What she has perceived vividly appears before our inner eyes. The temple's inner space is thus made visible to us through the imaginative potential of the Pythia's description.[7] However, the Pythia fails to identify the various characters inside, and she adduces and accumulates different qualities, through which the outer appearance adumbrates the deadly symbolic of the Furies, or Erinyes, the wild goddesses of revenge, who have arrived to hunt and to persecute Orestes for his crime.[8] Just as the inadequate comparisons of the Erinyes with women, with Gorgons (*Eum.* 48-49) and Harpies (*Eum.* 50-52),

6 The Pythia is "overcome by terror at the sight she has seen", as Sommerstein (1989), 79, puts it, cf. also 87.

7 For the concept of 'the unseen' on the Greek stage, see Dale (1956).

8 On the Erinyes, cf. Frontisi-Ducroux (2007). A concise description of the visual effect of the Erinyes in the *Eumenides* can be found in Schlatter (2018), 133-136. Zerhoch (2015) offers a comprehensive study of the personified powers Ἐρινύς/Ἐρινύες, which also appear as mythical figures in tragedy, especially in Aeschylus and Euripides; on the Erinyes

this also points to the ineffable experience of those who caught sight of the horrifying creatures.[9]

After the Pythia exits from stage, Orestes appears and prays to the oracular god to protect him. Apollo promises to do so, but also prophesies that Orestes has long wanderings before him until he comes to Athens where judges will give him final release from his troubles. This foreshadows the further events in the drama, in which Orestes is eventually acquitted from his guilt by democratic Athens and the city-deity Athena in an extensive trial scene. At the end of the process, and that is also of the play, the Furies will be transformed into benevolent spirits that protect reason and law in Athens, hence the title of the play *Eumenides*, which means "the kindly ones".

Earlier in the play, however, in the Delphic sanctuary, the still untamed Furies wake up one by one: Clytemnestra's ghost calls them to their duties, while harshly rebuking the sleepy Erinyes for allowing Orestes to escape (*Eum.* 115b-130):

[…] φρονήσατ' ὦ κατὰ χθονὸς θεαί·
ὄναρ γὰρ ὑμᾶς νῦν Κλυταιμήστρα καλῶ.
ΧΟΡΟΣ (μυγμός)[10]
ΚΛ. μύζοιτ' ἄν, ἀνὴρ δ' οἴχεται φεύγων πρόσω·
†φίλοις γάρ εἰσιν οὐκ ἐμοῖς† προσίκτορες.
ΧΟ. (μυγμός)
ΚΛ. ἄγαν ὑπνώσσεις, κοὐ κατοικτίζεις πάθος·
φονεὺς δ' Ὀρέστης τῆσδε μητρὸς οἴχεται.
ΧΟ. (ὠγμός)
ΚΛ. ὤζεις, ὑπνώσσεις· οὐκ ἀναστήσηι τάχος;
τί σοι τέτακται πρᾶγμα πλὴν τεύχειν κακά;
ΧΟ. (ὠγμός)
ΚΛ. Ὕπνος Πόνος τε, κύριοι ξυνωμόται,
δεινῆς δρακαίνης ἐξεκήραναν μένος.
ΧΟ. (μυγμὸς διπλοῦς ὀξύς)
λαβὲ. λαβὲ. λαβὲ. λαβὲ. φράζου.

in the *Eumenides*, see in particular 218-244. The description of the episode by Reinhardt (1949), 149-152 and 154, is still worth reading.

9 Reinhardt (1949), 142, commented on the impressive but puzzling effect of the description of Pythia in his discussion of the stage construction of the *Eumenides* (cf. 141-144).

[…] Mind me, underworld goddesses,
a dream of Clytemnestra is calling you.
(The Furies stir and groan.)
You whine while your man has fled and gone.
Even suppliants have allies, I have none.
(They stir again.)
Too much sleep, not enough pity for my pain.
Orestes, the mother-killer, has escaped!
(The Furies moan.)
You groan, yet sleep. Awake! Awake!
Why else do you exist if not to inflict evil?
(They moan again.)
So fatigue and sleep have conspired
to suck the strength of the furious serpent.
Chorus: (*They stir and groan twice as loud.)*
Hunt! Hunt! Hunt! Hunt! Hunt him!"[11]
(Transl. after Meineck)

Accompanied by moaning and panting sounds, the darkly dressed and eerie figures wake up and slowly enter the dancefloor (*orchestra*), which is located between the stage and the audience. The Pythia's vision has been transformed into reality, when it becomes evident that the aforementioned Erinyes enter the orchestra as the chorus members. Thus, the nonverbal communication and the visual appearance of the Furies complemented, or even outdid, their former verbal representation.[12] This would have been unexpected and unforeseeable to the audience, which might have rather expected, say, a chorus of fellow countrymen of Orestes or servants of the Delphic oracle, such as in both of the preceding *Oresteia* plays. Particularly the combination of mental and visual representations of the Erinyes seems to have aimed at an escalation of visual effects as a shocking combi-

10 The reference μυγμός, which is repeated in the following verses, is a rare case of an ancient stage instruction (termed παρεπιγραφή), cf. Taplin (1977b). Sommerstein (2023) considers these "inarticulate vocalizations" in the *Eumenides* as authentic.

11 The repeated imperatives of λαβὲ imitate the panting and barking of dogs on the trail of their prey – the Erinyes' target is Orestes.

12 According to Taplin (1977a), 365-374, the tension grows continuously until the actual appearance of the monsters.

nation of mental vision and actual apparition.[13] Their sudden appearance formed a complex relationship between their bodily phenomenality and their symbolic corporeality, which had been foreshadowed by the Pythia's verbal description. Thus, the horrific appearance, the movements through the theatrical space, the groaning and the inarticulate shrieks and noises created a unique, yet temporally contingent and fugitive impression of the Erinyes' dramatic presence.[14] This presence must have filled the empty space between every participant, acting, watching, or listening, involved them in the dramatic performance and probably produced a range of somatic effects in the audience. Having witnessed the transformation of the prophetic Pythia's appearance from a venerable prophet into a terrified and crying baby (*Eum.* 38), the spectators could now feel the transformative effect of the Furies in themselves. Thus, some centuries later the ancient commentators of the *Eumenides* praised the artful creation of horror in Aeschylus' portrayal of the Erinyes: they use the Greek term ἔκπληξις, which literally means that "one is driven out of one's senses by a sudden shock or panic".[15]

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13 Podlecki (2013), 136-148, analyses visual effects across the Aeschylean plays. On the oscillation of imaginary and visual representation in Aeschylus, see Weiss (2018), 170: "Aeschylus was constantly experimenting with ways of blurring the line between the material and immaterial, stretching his audience's expectations of what could appear within the performance space."

14 More than half a century after Aeschylus' staging of the *Eumenides*, the playwright Aristophanes in his comedy *The Frogs* (405 BCE) has Dionysus, the god of drama, descend to Hades to bring Euripides back to the land of the living. This initiates an infernal dramatic dispute within the dead poets society, namely between Euripides and Aeschylus. Euripides criticises his predecessor's use of mute characters who made themselves heard only via inarticulate grunting and groaning (*Frogs* 923b-926, transl. after Henderson): "Euripides: And then, when he'd humbugged along like that and the play was half over, he'd come out with a dozen words as big as an ox with crests and beetling brows, formidable bogey-faced things unfamiliar to the spectators. Aeschylus: Good grief! Dionysus: Be quiet!" By this, Aristophanes points to the fact that Aeschylean drama aimed to provide a multisensory, even nonverbal, engagement with his audience, as we have seen when observing the escalation that was caused by the awakening and the step-by-step approaching of the chorus in the *Eumenides*.

15 An M scholium to *Eumenides* (on *Eum.* 1a, p. 42 ed. Smith) praises the artful horror (ἔκπληξις) created by the visionary's report. The focus is on the Pythia's report's emotionalisation and frightening effects on the viewers.

3. *Later Responses to Aeschylean Monsters – Performance and Performativity in the* Vita Aeschyli

We cannot reconstruct the individual subjective experience of the spectators of ancient drama, which they underwent when confronted with the object of their attention. However, there are some written testimonies from antiquity at our disposal, which talk about supposed audience reactions to Athenian drama. These later texts comment on the theatrical performances – as a special case of performativity – and can be considered themselves as 'performative'.[16] In particular, the later commentaries report, or rather construct, a form of participatory relation between the dramatic piece and the perceiving subjects. In the sense of Rosa's concept of 'resonance', these prose testimonies deal with the receptive affect ("Affizierung") and the responsive emotion ("Emotion") of the participants involved in a dramatic event.[17] By this, they display an intrinsic interest in the relation between an artistic product, the drama, and the audience's response to this drama. Despite their historical unreliability, these meta-dramatical texts can be considered aesthetic materialisations of dynamic collective experiences and interactions, and thus as valuable records for our context. Below the question will be discussed,[18] whether the resonant relations between the play and its receiving subjects either succeeded, or rather failed, according to these later texts, and whether the testimonies make offers of resonance themselves.

Among the texts that document the ancient reception of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, there is a remarkable testimony. In Byzantine Times a highly educated editor added an anonymous *Life of Aeschylus* to a famous manu-

16 Here I follow Gärtner, introduction to this volume, 3.4. See also below in this chapter.

17 Cf. Rosa, in this volume, 2.1.-2.2., and (2019), 164-174. On theatrical events and aesthetic resonance cf. Rosa (2019), 290-291: "Most concert- and theatregoers [know] moments of transformation, when they no longer need to concentrate in order to follow the music or the plot, when they themselves in a way spontaneously become part of the aesthetic event. A form of self-efficacy is experienced in such moments, as there is something *at work* here, at least in the heart and mind of the recipient. These two forms of collective resonance are often mutually contagious, as resonance among the artists is transferred to the audience and vice versa."

18 See below chapters 4.-5. of this contribution.

script that has been preserved in the *Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana* in Florence. This anonymous, probably Hellenistic biography implies a brief but meaningful 'report' about the effect of the *Eumenides* on its spectators. The anecdote allegedly preserves the cultural memory of the recipients' experience, when confronted with the tragedy. In other words, it comments on the inherent performativity of the play, which is reconstructed from a reader's perspective in Hellenistic times. In order to explain why the famous poet Aeschylus was forced to leave Athens and to go into exile to Sicily, the text (Anonymous, *Vita Aeschyli* 9)[19] reports the following anecdote:

> τινὲς δέ φασιν ἐν τῇι ἐπιδείξει τῶν Εὐμενίδων σποράδην εἰσαγαγόντα τὸν χορὸν τοσοῦτον ἐκπλῆξαι τὸν δῆμον ὡς τὰ μὲν νήπια ἐκψῦξαι, τὰ δὲ ἔμβρυα ἐξαμβλωθῆναι...
>
> In the production of Eumenides some say that Aeschylus brought on the chorus of the Eumenides in a scattered manner (σποράδην) and terrified (ἐκπλῆξαι) the public so much that children fainted and pregnant women miscarried.
> (Transl. M.H.)

This sensational account has usually been considered as being of minor informative value.[20] However, the biographical reconstruction of the dramatic event is highly revealing on the unforeseeable reactions provoked by the *Eumenides* and on the recipients' responsive emotion of ἔκπληξις when confronted with the shocking event.[21] Thus, the episode reconstructs the play's performativity and the effects it exerted on the public.

According to the concept of performativity discussed in the present volume, a dramatic performance is always performative, but not everything that is performative is necessarily bound to performance.[22] We thus have to differentiate the narrower concept of theatricality, or theatrical performance, from the wider concept of performativity. From this wider perspective, texts have their own performativity, too. Accordingly, the process of reading implies cognitive, imaginative, memorial and emotional activities, since what

19 Cf. TA 1.9 *TrGF* III, p. 34,30-32 Radt.
20 Cf. Calder (1988).
21 *Vita Aeschyli* 7 recognises "monstrous terror" (ἔκπληξις τερατώδης) as essential for Aeschylean drama, cf. Pace (2010), 231-234, on the connection to ancient discourses on fictionality. Taplin (1977a), 46, offers further literature.
22 Fischer-Lichte (2013), 53-72. Cf. Weidner, in this volume.

we read can cause somatic effects in ourselves and direct its transformative potential on the readers.[23] This transformative potential of texts depends upon the subjective experiences of the respective readers, but also upon the appellative structure of the textual medium. Texts can, in other words, exert on their readers specific effects of presence, processuality, and materiality.[24] One dimension of such textual performativity becomes palpable, when the practice of listening to a text or of reading it (on which see the next paragraph) transports the recipients into an emotive state that can even imply somatic-sensory effects. Concerning aesthetic resonance as Hartmut Rosa conceptualises it, it is necessary to stress that as a specific self-world-relation the act of reading experiments with different relationships to the world ("Weltbeziehung") in a playful and explorative fashion.[25] The aspects of potentiality, playfulness, and experimentality are a requirement if one wants to grasp the relation between inner subject and phenomenal world.

However, during antiquity, and the pre-modern world as a whole, there was no clear-cut dichotomy between listening to a text and the activity of reading,[26] since texts used to be read out aloud, often to a group of people. Hence, even reading a text involved a sense of collective experience and of constantly developing, and unexpectedly shifting, interactions with other listeners. The ancient reception of a text, as in the case of an Aeschylean drama, could therefore become a social event that caused different effects in the group of people listening. This does not mean, on the other hand, that silent reading is *no* performative event, since a text can create the imaginative, emotional, or somatic conditions that it talks about even in a silent reader.

Against this backdrop, the passage from the *Vita Aeschyli* reconstructs and unfolds four different dimensions of performativity:

I) First, the biographical anecdote comments on the transgressive nature of the *Eumenides*' theatrical performance that stimulated the happening

23 Häsner/Hufnagel/Maassen/Traninger (2011); Fischer-Lichte (2013), 135-145.

24 Thus, Wilamowitz (1914), 249, emphasised in view of the biographical anecdote in the *Vita* that the ἔκπληξις caused by the appearance of the Erinyes in the audience reflected the effect the play had on later readers.

25 Rosa (2019), 285-286.

26 Cf. Weidner, in this volume.

of an event which involved and transformed its participants by the immediacy of their experience. Through the aesthetics of its performance, the play subverted the relation between actors and audience, between art and life, which during this process ceased to be separate entities; when the gruesome Erinyes appear, boundaries between actors and spectators dissolve, whose transgression implies the potential, and possibly the danger, of unforeseeable transformation.[27] The ultimate danger for the community attending the play, the Athenian demos, is a lethal one, leading directly to the partial extinction of the polis' population, as represented by its future members, the children. Hence, the anecdote revolves around a dangerous threshold at the very heart of tragedy. It sounds like the consequences of a dramatic performance being perceived less as an imitation of reality, but rather as a part of life itself. Accordingly, tragedy involves and transforms the lives of anyone attending to it, implying the lethal potential of ultimate transgression. Here we can wonder whether according to this account the *Eumenides* achieved or over-achieved, and thus necessarily missed, the performative goal of tragedy: does the audience's reaction exemplify the huge impact of the play within its social and institutional context, or does it reveal the institutional failure of the performance? When we compare the statement of Isocrates in the 4th c. BCE, that tragic poets, if they "desire to command the attention of their hearers [...] must say the kind of things which they see are most pleasing to the crowd",[28] Aeschylus clearly failed in these terms. On the contrary, the visions and sounds of his *Eumenides* were far from pleasing the audience. When viewing the historical record of

27 On the aesthetics of performance and the blurring of boundaries between art and non-art, cf. Fischer-Lichte (2008).

28 Isocrates, *Ad Nicoclem* 49 (= *or.* 2) (transl. after Norlin): οἱ δὲ τοὺς μύθους εἰς ἀγῶνας καὶ πράξεις κατέστησαν, ὥστε μὴ μόνον ἀκουστοὺς ἡμῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ θεατοὺς γενέσθαι. Τοιούτων οὖν παραδειγμάτων ὑπαρχόντων δέδεικται τοῖς ἐπιθυμοῦσιν τοὺς ἀκροωμένους ψυχαγωγεῖν ὅτι τοῦ μὲν νουθετεῖν καὶ συμβουλεύειν ἀφεκτέον, τὰ δὲ τοιαῦτα λεκτέον, οἷς ὁρῶσι τοὺς ὄχλους μάλιστα χαίροντας. – [T]he tragic poets have rendered the myths in the form of contests and action, so that they are presented, not to our ears alone, but to our eyes as well. With such models, then, before us, it is evident that those who desire to command the attention of their hearers must abstain from admonition and advice, and must say the kind of things which they see are most pleasing to the crowd.

Aeschylus' artistic achievement, however, a failure seems highly implausible since the play was originally awarded the first price at the City Dionysia. The question what exactly Aeschylus' overwhelming and violent dramatic art,[29] on which the biography focuses, can offer its recipients will recur at the end of this study.

II) Secondly, the anecdote is a comment on the structural performativity of the play.[30] This implies, but also goes beyond the theatrical dimension of the *Eumenides*. The biography's anonymous scribe thus focuses on the transformative structure of the drama, which transcends the singular event of its staging at the Dionysia in the year 458 BCE and rather records how the text as an artefact achieves to establish an ever-new relation with its particular audience. As we have seen, Aeschylus experimented with blurring the lines between the material and the immaterial in order to create monstrous images in the play. During the original dramatic performance, the dreadful presence of the Furies was felt by their bodily movements through the theatrical space, which is their material presence, which, however, had been preceded by the Pythia's vivid verbalisation. Thus, the Erinyes remain to be *implicitly* present also when reading the Aeschylean text, since their terrifying corporeality becomes explicit and palpable from the prologue onwards, from the Pythia's words, who acts as the internal beholder of the creatures that form the dreadful chorus of the play. Even for the *Eumenides*' later readers, a conflation of different modes of visualisation continued to exist. The biographical anecdote, in other words, focuses on the unexpected ways in which the play structurally mediates the presence of the Erinyes and its transformative power: the anecdote responds (whether provocatively or humorously) to Aeschylus' play. It takes the Pythia's internal speech literally, with fatal consequences. In Aeschylus the prophetess has confessed to have become "a helpless child" after she confronted the

29 On the aesthetics of violence on the stage of Attic tragedy, see the contributions in Seidensticker/Vöhler (2006).

30 About this term and the concept on which it is based, cf. Fischer-Lichte (2013), 139: "Strukturelle Performativität […] lenkt die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Ebene des *discours*, des Erzählens, also die Vermittlungsebene zwischen Text und Leser." ("Structural performativity [...] draws attention to the level of *discourse*, of narration, i.e. the level of mediation between text and reader.", [Transl. M.H.]).

Furies in *Eum.* 38. The biography, however, extends the reaction of this *internal* recipient to an alleged reaction of the *external* recipients – and thus to a drastic collateral damage of the polis ("children fainted and pregnant women miscarried").[31] The biography, in other words, revolves around the nature of the *Eumenides* as a highly response-provoking tragic play.

III) Thirdly, the biographical anecdote testifies to the functional performativity of the *Eumenides.* Evidently Aeschylus' play has triggered the production of the later text from an anonymous recipient. It provoked the later author to write a social commentary on the *Eumenides*' affective reception within its cultural context, among the Athenian audience.[32] In this sense, the play not only constituted a collective identity, but eventually led to its ultimate disruption. According to the *Vita Aeschyli*, Aeschylus' *aesthetic* drama effected a *social* drama within its real cultural context:[33] the anecdote focuses on the realisations, and redefinitions, of liminal space between text and world. Thus, the horror that serves as the subject *of* the play effects the

31 In *Eum.* 38, the Pythia calls herself "baby-like" (ἀντίπαις). For Lefkowitz (2012), 74, the *Vita* derived from passages in the *Eumenides* themselves. In fact, there are several passages in the *Eumenides* that seem to have prefigured the biographical anecdote of the anonymous *Vita*, which speaks of small children fainting during the performance and of miscarriages – the biographical fiction thus pretends that the Erinyes curse directed at Athens had been fulfilled.

32 On 'functional' in comparison to 'structural' performativity, cf. Fischer-Lichte (2013), 139: "Während die Frage nach struktureller Performativität darauf fokussiert, wie der Text das *macht*, wovon er spricht, oder gegebenenfalls etwas anderes macht, als er behauptet, zielt der Begriff der funktionalen Performativität auf das ab, was der Text *auslöst*. Funktionale Performativität bezeichnet zunächst die Wirkungen und Dynamiken, die ein Text an der Schnittstelle mit seinem Rezipienten entfaltet. […] Des Weiteren zielt der Begriff der funktionalen Performativität auf die gesellschaftliche Zirkulation von Texten, durch die Produkte der schriftlichen Kultur in performative Kulturpraktiken eingebunden werden." ("While the question of structural performativity focusses on how the text *does* what it talks about, or possibly does something other than what it claims, the concept of functional performativity focusses on what the text *triggers*. Firstly, functional performativity refers to the effects and dynamics that a text unfolds at the interface with its recipient. […] Furthermore, the concept of functional performativity aims at the social circulation of texts, through which products of written culture are integrated into performative cultural practices.", [Transl. M.H.]).

33 On the connection of 'social' and 'aesthetic' drama, with regard to Schechner, cf. Fischer-Lichte (2013), 49-50.

horror *at* the play, that is, the inside (dramatic fiction) and the outside of the drama (real life) intersect. The passage from the anonymous biographer thus condenses the effects that the monstrous images of the *Eumenides* exerted on later recipients and recalls the terror during the play's original performance. By visualising the fatal consequences among members of the Athenian demos, the anecdote negotiates the uncontrollable effects caused by the play as they become palpable still in the text version of the drama. Thereby, the anecdote creates a higher sensitivity for the transgressive potential and the liminal experiences that are connected to the functional performativity of Aeschylus' drama.

IV) Fourthly, and lastly, the anecdote is not only a commentary on, and rather arbitrary appropriation of, the *Eumenides*' performativity. It thus testifies not only to the particular performative aspects (see above I) as well as the structural (II) and functional (III) performativity of the *Eumenides*. What is more, the prose biography can itself display its own performativity. By this, the reported *social* drama that took place in the world outside of the play and the 'real' consequences for the Athenian audience when confronted with the former Aeschylean *aesthetic* drama are transformed into a *new aesthetic* drama, which is mediated between the biographical anecdote and its readership. Thus, we are dealing with a transposition of the Aeschylean verse drama into a biographical prose text, which stimulates its own performativity under changed cultural and media conditions. Whether read as an interpretative paratext to the *Eumenides* or as a literary text in its own right, the *Vita* gives an idiosyncratic interpretation of the *Eumenides*. It has itself the potential to captivate its recipients through the strange and unheard account, which offers to relate one's own reactions to Aeschylus' play to it. The biography thus emanates the possibility of a resonant experience – be it a second-order aesthetic resonance, or another resonance on a primary level, enabling potentially indefinite responses.

4. A Sideways Glance at Phrynichus' The Fall of Miletus

The historian Herodotus offers a meta-dramatic report that focuses on a parallel situation of liminality which had also been caused by a tragic play among the Athenian audience. His account deals with another tragedian

of the early 5th c. BCE in Athens, Aeschylus' contemporary and rival Phrynichus. Herodotus' episode revolves around Phrynichus' now lost play *The Fall of Miletus*, which was composed and staged shortly after the conquest of that city by the Persians during the Ionian Revolt in 494 BCE (*Histories* 6,21,2 = Phrynichus, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* T2 (ed. N. G. Wilson):

> Ἀθηναῖοι μὲν γὰρ δῆλον ἐποίησαν ὑπεραχθεσθέντες τῇ Μιλήτου ἁλώσι τῇ τε ἄλλῃ πολλαχῇ καὶ δὴ καὶ ποιήσαντι Φρυνίχῳ δρᾶμα Μιλήτου ἅλωσιν καὶ διδάξαντι ἐς δάκρυά τε ἔπεσε τὸ θέητρον καὶ ἐζημίωσάν μιν ὡς ἀναμνήσαντα οἰκήια κακὰ χιλίῃσι δραχμῇσι, καὶ ἐπέταξαν μηκέτι μηδένα χρᾶσθαι τούτῳ τῷ δράματι.
>
> At Miletus' fall they [the Athenians] made their grief apparent in many different ways – most notably when Phrynichus wrote and produced a play called *The Fall of Miletus*. So close to home were the evils about which he reminded them that the entire audience fell to weeping and fined the writer 1,000 drachmas. They banned the play from ever being staged again. (Transl. after Holland)

Herodotus makes explicit the Athenians' shocked reaction when watching Phrynichus' dramatic reenactment of the Milesian catastrophe. Since the city of Miletus was a colony of Athens, it was traditionally held especially dear to its mother city. The audience was moved to tears by *The Fall of Miletus*, with the poet being fined by the Athenians "for reminding familiar (or "their own") misfortunes" (ὡς ἀναμνήσαντα οἰκήια κακὰ). As a result, the play was banned from stage. As the historian Christian Meier has observed, this tells us much about the political dynamics of collective memory in 5th c. BCE Athens.[34] Moreover, when placed next to the anecdote in the *Life of Aeschylus*, Herodotus' passage throws into relief extra-literary processes and sociopolitical negotiations concerning the art of tragedy.[35] According to both meta-dramatic commentaries, the mythical horror in Aeschylus and the historical horror in Phrynichus caused terror and fear among the audience itself when confronted with the particular play. In parallel to the testimony of the *Vita Aeschyli*, Herodotus not only comments on the structural and functional performativity of Phrynichus' play. The

34 Meier (2010), 15-17.

35 The aspects of boundary-crossing and retribution are also likely to have played a role in Phrynichus' depiction of immediate contemporary history, cf. Rosenbloom (1993), 176-179.

historiographical episode itself visualises the strong affection felt in the city of Athens for the Milesian evils, which point in a proleptic way to the approaching Persian Wars in central Greece that threaten the existence of Athens as well. At the same time, Herodotus invites his audience to relive the historical situation and to understand how in the face of the Persian threat the boundaries between tragic fiction and real danger, that is between art and non-art, or life, dissolve.[36] Both texts, in other words, convey the message that tragedy, like life, is played out in the grey area of what is controllable and what lies outside control.[37]

There are also differences between both testimonies: Herodotus stresses the riskiness of a subversion of boundaries between art and civic life, which is sanctioned by the Athenians, who rather opt for a *damnatio memoriae* of Phrynichus' play that stirred so many disruptive emotions about the historical event. Aeschylus' biographer, by contrast, indirectly heightens the value of the *Eumenides*, since the collective affect and the social rupture it causes highlight the transhistorical impact that the horrific objects and figures in the play exert on its audience. According to the respective anecdotes, however, both tragedians are punished for putting unexpected and overwhelming horrors on the Athenian stage: Phrynichus is fined, and Aeschylus even exiled. These alleged reactions thus illuminate the extraordinary impact that art can have on civic life.

5. Literary Criticism, Resonance, and Performativity – Gorgias and Aristotle

It is worth raising the question whether according to the anecdote the *Eumenides* fulfilled or over-fulfilled their performative goal, in other words, whether we should consider the resonance offer made by the play to its

36 On such aesthetic concept of performance, cf. Fischer-Lichte (2008).

37 According to Rosa's resonance theory, uncontrollability is crucial for a successful resonant relation (Rosa [2019], 431). Especially a creative process like art is "an uncontrollable balancing act […], it can fail" (283). Rosa (2020) elaborates further on uncontrollability as a condition for a successful resonance relation. Cf. also his contribution to this volume. However, the overwhelming transformative effects produced by the *Eumenides* and Phrynichus' play raise serious doubts as to whether they might serve as stimuli for a successful resonance relation: see below my chapter 6.

audience as potentially successful or not. According to the sophist Gorgias (5th/4th c. BCE), poetry achieves its effect by portraying the suffering of others, a suffering which is transformed into the internal suffering of the self through the power of language (*Encomium of Helen* 9,1-4 [DK 82 B 11,9], ed. J. Schollmeyer):

> τὴν ποίησιν ἅπασαν καὶ νομίζω καὶ ὀνομάζω λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον· ἧς τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσῆλθε καὶ φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολύδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθής, ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίων τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίαις καὶ δυσπραγίαις ἴδιόν τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἡ ψυχή.
>
> All poetry I consider as call speech with metre. Into those who hear it comes fearful fright and tearful pity and mournful longing, and at the successes and failures of others' affairs and persons[38] the soul suffers, through speeches, a suffering of its own.[39]
> (Transl. after MacDowell)

For Gorgias, metrically, that is poetically crafted language (λόγος), affects the soul. According to his psychological considerations, the invisible λόγος causes a mental image in the receiving subject that sets the soul swinging. Comparably, successful poetry results in a specific experience, a suffering, in the soul (ἴδιόν τι πάθημα) of the subject that willingly delights at the *Horrorshow* of others' misfortunes – misfortunes that are artfully depicted in poetry. This receptive psychosomatic affection formulated by Gorgias comes close to the audiences' experience described in the anecdotes about the *Eumenides* and *The Fall of Miletus*, respectively. However, Gorgias' logocentric approach does not encapsulate the effects of nonverbal images and actual visions. Moreover, Gorgias clearly presupposes an 'otherness', a suffering other which he differentiates from the personal, private, or separate experiencing of the receiving soul.

Aristotle (4th c. BCE), too, reflects on the recipients' receptive affection and the responsive emotion when dealing with poetry. He focuses in particular on the emotions of thrill, or fear, and pity which are according to the *Poetics* famously aroused and cleansed by tragedy (chapter 4, 1449b24-28).

38 σώματα literally means "bodies".

39 On this passage from Gorgias' *Helen* and its parallels in, e.g., Plato and Aristotle, cf. Schollmeyer (2021), 236-244.

According to chapter 14 of the *Poetics* (1453b4-6), tragedy produces thrill (φρίττειν) and pity (ἐλεεῖν) in the recipients. Aristotle follows this with a warning: if a tragedy does not have a frightening, but terrifying impact on the spectator, this no longer has anything to do with the particular art of tragedy. For its specific aesthetic achievement, the 'pleasure' (ἡδονή) arises in the audience according to the psychology of mimesis from a skilful imitation, deriving from fear and pity by means of nothing other than mimesis.[40] When compared to Aristotle's terms, Aeschylus' monstrous images and the reported reactions to them show that the *Eumenides* transcended the boundaries of art and were far from generating pleasure in the recipients. Aristotle, by contrast, stresses the role of emotional difference: affection is not created by the depicted object itself, but through the *artistic character* of the depicted object that is appreciated by the recipient.[41] The question remains to which extent we are affected ourselves when confronted with a 'suffering other': according to Aristotle's theory of affects in the *Rhetoric*, pity arises when we might expect to suffer ourselves, or at least someone close to us. But the suffering *only potentially* approaches, it *does not reach*, the recipients.[42] Similarly, for Aristotle tragedy – to use the words of Manfred Fuhrmann – only *vaccinates*, but it does not *infect* ("Dichtung steckt nicht an, sondern impft")![43]

In contrast to these accounts of literary criticism, for Aeschylus' unknown biographer tragic poetry has indeed the lethal power to *infect* its receivers. In *Vita Aeschyli* 9, and less so in Herodotus' account of

40 Cf. Hose (2023), 49-54.

41 Hose (2023), 218-219, on Aristotle, *Poetics* chapter 4. This is reminiscent of Gorgias' remarks about the affection felt when others' misfortunes are artfully presented.

42 On which cf. *Rhetoric* II 8, 1385b13-19 ed. R. Kassel, transl. after Kennedy: ἔστω δὴ ἔλεος λύπη τις ἐπὶ φαινομένῳ κακῷ φθαρτικῷ ἢ λυπηρῷ τοῦ ἀναξίου τυγχάνειν, ὃ κἂν αὐτὸς προσδοκήσειεν ἂν παθεῖν ἢ τῶν αὑτοῦ τινα, καὶ τοῦτο ὅταν πλησίον φαίνηται· δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι ἀνάγκη τὸν μέλλοντα ἐλεήσειν ὑπάρχειν τοιοῦτον οἷον οἴεσθαι παθεῖν ἄν τι κακὸν ἢ αὐτὸν ἢ τῶν αὐτοῦ τινα […]. – Let pity be [defined] a certain pain at an apparently destructive or painful evil happening to one who does not deserve it and which a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer, and this when it seems close at hand; for it is clear that a person who is going to feel pity necessarily thinks that some evil is actually present of the sort that he or one of his own might suffer.

43 Fuhrmann (2008), 161.

Phrynichus' *The Fall of Miletus*, Gorgias' and Aristotle's distance between receiving self and poetry as a trigger of emotions – a distinction between subject and object relevant for an aesthetics of reception or, in Rosa's terms, aesthetic resonance – is subverted and collapses. For Rosa in particular, resonance only occurs when the aspects of receptive affection, responsive self-efficacy and transformation coincide. An art form that violates the audience, by contrast, does not offer resonance:

> "When theater shows and musicals advertise themselves as *overwhelming* their audiences with *gigantic light shows and spectacular audiovisual effects*, this sensory overload is offered as a simulacrum of resonance. But this is an error: overpowering an audience in this way is more akin to *violating* them than *resonating* with them, inasmuch as it impedes accommodating, responsive self-efficacy, and so is more likely to lead subjects to close themselves off than to effect an adaptive transformation of world. Here subjects encounter not the power of art, but the violent force of entertainment."[44]

From the perspectives of both Gorgias and Aristotle, again, Phrynichus, who reminded the Athenians of "familiar misfortunes", and Aeschylus, whose horrific aesthetic objects caused a veritable social drama and real-life consequences for its audience, may have neglected the *as if* aspect of poetry by causing *actual* disturbances in their audiences, at least according to the later testimonies *Vita Aeschyli* 9 and Herodotus 6,21,2 (= Phrynichus T2). On the other hand, both playwrights' dramas were obviously quite successful in eliciting strong subjective experiences and emotions from their audiences.

6. Conclusion – a Simulacrum *of Resonance?*

Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, the last play of the *Oresteia* trilogy, displays the transformation of the Erinyes, cruel *goddesses of revenge, into benevolent city deities. Here the difficult question arises again whether the Eumenides* facilitated offers of aesthetic resonance and whether the undermining of a clear-cut distinction between receiving subject and object of art either

44 Rosa (2019), 295.

enables, or rather subverts, aesthetic resonance. Do the monstrous images, in other words, either stimulate us to enjoy, or rather prevent us from enjoying, Aeschylus' drama? Are we, the recipients, overwhelmed and cast in a rather passive state which undermines any condition for a potential resonant relation? Or did Aeschylus create a successful dramatic experiment that had long-lasting effects on its audience(s), including ἔκπληξις as a widely accepted device of Greek tragedy to stir emotions?[45]

Many things are being done in this drama (the verb δρᾶν literally referring to the "action" on stage), but the play itself also does something to its listeners and readers. In terms of structural performativity, it does bring before the eyes terrifying images of figures and objects. In terms of functional performativity, however, it does invite the audience to be involved through the immediacy of aesthetic experience, to enter into a relation and respond to it. Such responses are witnessed by impressive later testimonies; responses that invite ever-new responses; and so on.

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45 Looking at Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and its huge influence on ancient culture, Easterling (2005), 27, points out that an ekplectic effect was "something the ancient theatregoer might expect to get out of a fine dramatic sequence".

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