Greek Tragedy and the Contemporary Actor

A podcast with Zachary Dunbar and Stephe Harrop

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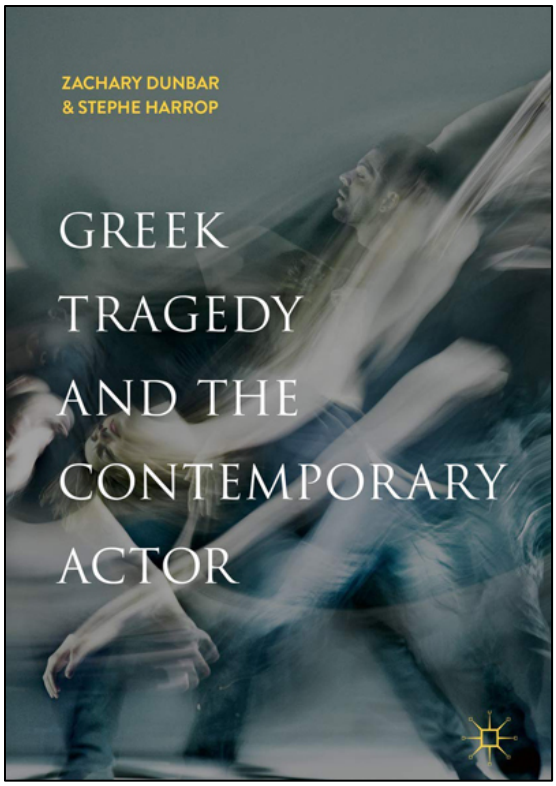

Giovanna Di Martino
Hello everybody and welcome back to the APGRD podcast series “Staging the Archive”. I am delighted to be joined today by Stephe Harrop and Zachary Dunbar to discuss a library item from a very own archive – and it is their recent book *Greek Tragedy and the Contemporary Actor*, which was published in 2018 and has very recently won the Rob Jordan 2020 prize from the Australasian drama Studies Association for the best book in theatre drama or performance studies published in the previous two years. So, just a brief introduction to our two guests before we dive into our discussion of this wonderful book. Stephe Harrop is Senior Lecturer in drama at the Liverpool Hope University. Her research focuses on contemporary storytelling practices, spoken word performance, Greek tragedy, classical receptions and performer training. Stephe also works as a professional storyteller, creating new performances for and

with audiences across the UK and beyond. In 2016, she founded the junior poetry, a groundbreaking student led storytelling club in the heart of Liverpool. Zachary Dunbar is Associate Professor of theatre and performing arts research convenor at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne. Originally trained as a concert pianist, he is interested in theatre making a music led to research in Greek tragedy. He has taught integrative acting approaches in musical theatre taught in director Greek tragedies, and written for the theatre. His most recent works include Florida and investigation into the queerness of masculinity, which had performed reading at La MaMa in 2016 and *Antigone* acts of which he was there actor, writer and producer and which had a full production in theatre works at that midsummer festival.

So welcome, Steffi and Zachary, and thanks for joining us today. So, let's start from the very beginning, from what motivated you to go author this book. So, what were the questions that you were asking which led to writing *Greek Tragedy and the Contemporary Actor*?

Stephe Harrop

Hello! Lovely to be with you this morning this evening – because we're all over the world right now – but yeah, Zachary and I, not that long ago, was going through an old folder of notes and drafts. I found some photographs, the two of us, outside Central Park Swiss Cottage in the sun by the fountain – and yeah, that's in a sense where this book started. The two of us at Central School Speech and Drama in London, teaching Greek tragedy, working with acting students, and particularly in my case (that can speak for himself) a kind of gradual realization that I spent years looking for a book that I wanted to use with the students and realizing that book wanted to use with these students did not exist. Therefore, I was gonna have to talk somebody into helping me to write it. So, for me, that was really the starting point – working with students in the studio, trying to think of how we might act the scenes and these plays, I'm just realising that the book I wanted to help them was not that.

Zachary Dunbar

Well, I remembered we were sitting by the fabric so that now that you've queued it up. Yes, I do recall that day. I think it started out with just that sense of disappointment. So, just to mirror what Steph said that, disappointed with the status quo. I mean, who here we were training contemporary actors who might have been pretty much drove an array of techniques and things. Still, they would come to you going “what's my character” and asking all this sort of questions that were probably more fit for the 19th century classical text. I mean, so that was a kind of a disappointment, and it looks what we're thinking, surely you can think outside that little box – that was one.

Two, I think I disappointed not that there should be a book to teach Greek tragedy, but something that could reflect the experience of the encounter of Greek tragedy in the studio space, as opposed to just the classical discourse space or in a historical space. So, I think it's just maybe underlying disappointment that we have. I think there's a gap here. Steph and I, of

course, have worked together and we also studied, I think, with the same supervisor, so I think we also had a legacy to kind of lean on in terms of thinking about this book.

Stephe Harrop
Absolutely. In terms of what the book does something that was really important for me, and I absolutely remember sitting on a park bench just ranting at Zach about this.
Every time I would teach a module or a study on Greek tragedy, I would have to set aside a whole session a whole afternoon – however long the session was – I would have to set aside all one to argue with the students about Aristotle, to argue with all these kinds of preconceptions and myths and stories, and sometimes fantasies that live rent-free in acting students' heads, and that you have to get, at least, shake them up a little bit before you can start to work. So, that was really interesting, too, because doing that every single time I just felt "why am I the only person? Is this just me?" …it may have been just me!

Zachary Dunbar
No, that's not just you! My experience of that thing of living rent-free was that Stanislavski based practices were also living rent-free. I think what it was, it was being reinforced by the paradigms of performances at the National Theatre, which accorded sort of contemporary relevance with realism and character led acting, which is kind of cringe worthy. So, there was that and we thought "well, gosh, you know, we are actually confronting something which is also embedded or preconditioned in the approach to Greek tragedy". So – and that actually because Steph brought that up – I thought "well, if you do the Aristotle part, I'll do the status report". In fact, that was the kind of staging the discussion in the Greek tragedy book – in fact, they sort of open it as a two main chapters.

Giovanna Di Martino
Yeah, actually, that nicely leads into my second question, which is how do you define the contemporary actor in the book? It talks about Aristotle and Stanislavski – so, how do you combine the two?

Stephe Harrop
It's an interesting one. I think, certainly, my definition of the classical actor changed across the – I suppose – about five years that we were working on the book and five years on several continents as well, because nothing stands still in this world. So, I think definitely when we began, the classical actor was our students, our students at Central School Speech and Drama, my students at Rose Bruford college, the various places that I was leading masterclasses and taking rehearsal. So, an emerging performer, someone who's going to work

in the 21st century, someone who expects to work across a whole range of disciplines and genres and styles, someone who lives in their body, someone who is kind of physically attuned, somatically engaged, and yet stops doing all of that as soon as they get to Greek tragedy, and suddenly goes into this fear response when they get to Greek tragedy.
So, I think that's where we started, in terms of who the contemporary actor is – I don't know, do you want to dive in on that?

Zachary Dunbar
Yeah, that actually, that was one of the questions which arose in our consciousness, actually, quite immediately, because we made it a point and we do stress that in the introduction – it's not something to be untangle what's a classical actor, what's a contemporary actor. In fact, historically, they've shaded into each other, in fact, anything contemporary assumes something classical better, but it's kind of modernized, in the sense of what modern meant in those eras. Apart from that, yeah, I would say the fact that people, a lot of performing actors in training would be exposed to all kinds of these somatic practices or psychophysical practices in case of Stanislavski based training, and then, encountering Greek tragedy, they see a text and suddenly they're looking for the character, they're looking for the cathartic moment – this sort of fake Aristotelian projections. The thing that we did think about is that the contemporary actors sit across naturally anywhere, both globally in terms of the leading actor training institutes, across both the psychophysical – because that's just a neologism that Stanislavski created interconnectors as the mind body – also, we mentioned about what the body can do.
Also, alongside that, issues about cognitive relationships. So, these larger discourses loom around what contemporary means, and so we also engage a little bit with that in discovering what we sense contemporary acting is. As I think, it was Steph's word, it is an elusive and illusory, I think, to try to define who is the classic galactic contemporary actor because, in fact, those legacies have always kind of crossed each other historically.
Though, I will say one thing, classical canon seems to predetermine a little bit what people think a classical actor is, whatever classical cannon in head. So, there's sort of leftover in terms of curricula and training.

Stephe Harrop
Absolutely. I think I did also have a picture in my head. We've talked a little bit about the things that might inhibit or represent challenges for the actor and training the emerging actor working with Greek tragedy, but I definitely also had a picture in my head when we started these conversations, where particular workshop that I did with undergraduates on the European Theatre Arts program at Rose Bruford – I'm waving to you if any of you are listening – long, long ago, we were doing inevitably a workshop on *Antigone* (of course we were) and I started with some work. Then I've kind of gone sideways in some work that I'd actually invented or that I hadn't realised that at the time, but there's just a beautiful moment when the chorus work kind of flexing their muscles and figuring out who they were and what they could do, and they

beautifully, wordlessly and flawlessly made the decision that they were going to throw the king out of the window. So that's one of my very, very happiest rehearsal memories, just the chorus of *Antigone* picking up the king, carrying him across the studio, and putting him out of the window. So, that was very strong with me as a memory of what's possible, of what these emerging actors can do if just given permission and given space and given a few prompts. So, I think there's a sense of real potential as well around the contemporary actor and what they might do if they're just given the space and the permission.

Zachary Dunbar
On that – just on that note – I remember we discussed that these contemporary actors, also theatre maker, a lot of the curricula these days, in fact, create the complementary strand, or the coexisting strand of training, which is theatre making, and therefore people who can create performance decks, and hence quite possibly what prompted these people to take license to throw the king out? Because we are making theatre also…

Stephe Harrop
…actors who can also have a sense of authorship and the authority that goes with that. Yeah, absolutely. So, actors who don't necessarily wait to be told what to do.

Giovanna Di Martino
Well, that, again, leads very nicely into what I wanted to ask, which has to do with theatre making, has to do with translating, has to do with other patients – it's a very big question. So, it's to do with how you understand the role of translation in the theatre making process and the way many of us encountered replay in the first instance is through translation. So how do you deal with that in the workshop or in the practice of acting Greek tragedy?

Stephe Harrop
Absolutely. Well, I feel like I've been thinking about that question for a long time and I've decided to go full on positive, I think we should respond to that situation with delight and with pleasure and with play. Many of us working in acting and drama and in those kinds of fields, we don't have the language skills to be dealing with Greek tragedy in the original and – you know what – that's actually a wonderful opportunity. Because one of the things that really excites me with working with Greek tragedy in translation is that it brings multiplicity back into the picture that there is never one text, there are always thousands, there is never one way of engaging with that story, there are always 10, 20, 30, 100. So, in a sense – I'm going to be provocative now – there's an authenticity in that because one of the things that really excites me about Greek tragedy, in its earliest context, was that we're dealing with narratives that always exist in multiple forms, that are always changing and transforming, that are being malleable, that you might be seen a performance of a story that is familiar, but the exact shape it's going to take is always going to be unpredictable.

So, in a sense, the multiplicity of translation is this wonderful opportunity for the contemporary actor in the contemporary theatre to re-inhabit that sense of provisionality about tragic narrative and what tragedy can mean it's always multiple, you can always take your pick. If you don't like the 100 translations that are out there, then brilliant, let's adapt it a new way. I think it's the most wonderful provocation actually. I first do as human creatures to live with multiplicity and uncertainty, to live in a world where other people imagine the same story in a completely different way. I think that's very good for us, ethically, to well with that because – I don't know how things are in Australia right now – but in the UK, we're not very well at dwelling with each other's multiple narratives.

Zachary Dunbar
Multiple narratives in the history of Great Britain, of course, have always been a conflicted space, trying to find the one monolithic narrative and all that. Look, I just want to jump on the idea of not translation, but adaptation, which also deals with a kind of uncertainty and yet, adaptation seems to have more of a certain link to it, because it's sort of going to a kind of vision, either or tourist vision or a vision of the group. The reason why I bring up adaptation is I hate the word adaptation. In fact, when I started first doing classical reception, I always loved the word reimagining, I think reimagining is a much more – can I use egalitarian?

Stephe Harrop
Oh, yes please!

Zachary Dunbar
…thinking about it, because particularly today, when we deal with who's translating or adapting, we deal with positionality as such a huge issue, a bigger, in fact, than it's ever been, and, and timely as well. There are legacies and value systems behind the adapter, behind the translator that deals with either experiential or the ideologically driven issues. That's why whenever somebody thinks about adaptation, let's stand behind adaptation and translation, let's talk about just position first of all – is it southern hemisphere? Is it Asia Pacific? Where are you? Is it local? What festival are you talking about? What big group are you part of? Are you part of a little fringe? All these things actually infiltrate the notion even translation and adaptation.
The other thing is – I just like to say quickly – Greek tragedy, just even as part of the creative process where the students' translation adaptation really intrigued me for three reasons. When I look at translation adaptation, what I look at first of all – are they using the models that assumed in Greek tragedy? Are they using the metaphoric richness of it (incest, patricide, matricide, all the methods that are involved in singing and dancing a scenography?). Every time we start doing an adaptation, my mind goes there first. I think I'm deeply informed, really, of the kinds of translations that occur, both historically and contemporarily. I just thought I'd bring up that word positionality, because it's so big. I remember, when doing classical

reception, that wasn't such a central issue, but it certainly is now particularly somebody going to stage translate or adapt Greek tragedy.

Stephe Harrop
Absolutely, I think that's absolutely right, so important. A lot of my thinking on this absolutely comes out of being a storyteller as well. As a storyteller, you are always going to re-perform a narrative that has been told before? So, you're not a good storyteller because you tell a story that no one has heard, you're a good storyteller, if you're a good storyteller, if you're having a good day, because – as Zach said – you find meaning in that story between you and the people you're working with in that particular moment, that time, that place, that setting that context. So, it's finding the fix, the meaning, the congruence, the potential in a particular time place setting.

Giovanna Di Martino
And – you sparked upon this already in different ways – but you talk about the poetry of the text, the poetry compact, and one question I had was how does that reflect it in these ancient texts that are feeding into an active training for the contemporary actor?

Zachary Dunbar
I'll jump in first on this one only because it really preoccupies me – and Steph as you know, behind me with a whip on this one – because I was particularly focusing on voice, sound and actually some of the more musical and musicality aspects of the chapters.
Of course, the poetic for me evokes the music scoreness of the performance stack so, not just the act of course brings feelings and emotions imagination through it, but the very materiality of that word its phonetic, its semantic, its oppositional, its metaphoric, its word craftiness, its repetition, all that is such vital material. Each one of those components can unpack almost like an atom and produce such amazing things to the actor. without us even going to what is the meaning of that line, what was the intention of the character even before we even get there. So, poetry to me – apart from the legacy what poetry means and historically, what it's meant in terms of literature for different countries – is to look at it more not as beautiful aesthetic words on the page (which have a place time or whatever) but actually as music score, which gives all kinds of possible means of expression. That is kind of some of the things I tried to tease out, I think in some of the chapters, particularly to do with acting sound and the chorus.

Stephe Harrop
Yeah, absolutely, I love that stuff and it resonates really strongly with some work from my past life about taking the kind of text or tragedy is provocation for dance and physical performance, again, kind of interpreting it through the body rather than through the brain – how does it feel?

How does it move? How does it breathe, rather than how does it make me think? But I I would also add – one of the things I really love about Greek tragedy is its non-realness. I just love how can relentlessly and unapologetically not real it is. Of course, this drives me mad when I see a work that tries to make it realist – I do understand, but I'm not happy, it makes me uncomfortable.

I think the unrealness and not realness of the of worlds that are presented in Greek tragedy is, again, a gift, it's a provocation – and it's a gift for the contemporary theatre to make it because I cannot think of a single excuse, for example, in Greek tragedy to cast according to a character's gender, or according to a character's ostensible racial identity, or according to whether your body is like, their body, the unrealness of Greek tragedy, it feels to me off of this wonderful opportunity to be very brave, and to be very challenging of ourselves in terms of who can play what, who can represent what, who gets to say which words, who gets to occupy which positions and the hierarchies of plays.

As I said, does race in terms of gender, in terms of identity, in terms of ability and what body might or might not be able to do? It just feels to me like such a wonderful provocation to say everyone can be in this space, can be part of this process, can be exploring and enjoying and creating meaning through these theatre artefacts – whatever they are. I've reached a point where I can say plays, but these races of past performances, can – I think – provoke us to make work today that really pushes us to be brave about who owns this stuff, who gets to make choices, who gets to explore, who gets to be seen and heard and take up space?

Stephe Harrop

…and I just want to say – Steph also I think probably – I'm not immersed in Classics as a status, and I think the idea of the poetic in ancient texts is a really interesting notion, because, of course, when contemporary actors look at whatever translation, whether it's Anne Carson's very poetic one, or Ted Hughes', to something much more literal, they see dialogue. They say "Oh my God, this long, monolithic core moments" They see sometimes that "it's, oh, it's diverse, isn't it?". And then suddenly, they look at different translations and they go "Well, that's not so poetical actually rather fragmentary". That's so in fact, the way one reads or gauges the eye, what's on the page is already shaped and reshaped. Greek tragedy is one of these protium forms, it like keeps changing because of that. So, in fact, it's the idea of the poetic is this creates not so much form and already forms but intractable in the intractability of language, about the ineffability of language, what is supposed to do to you as an actor.

So – and that's what I think when we talk about the poetic of the ancient texts – it's not so much "Oh, here's a verse and here's a stichomythia and here's…" no, it's actually the entirety of it is asking for a poetic response, not a poetic recitation.

Giovanna Di Martino

Thank you for that. One other question is if you think it's possible for a classicist to engage fully with ancient plays without undertaking performance as an embodied experience.

Stephe Harrop
…no either or is about to be presumptuous enough to make any kind of statement about what the limitations of a theoretical classes might be. I guess more broadly, I would never discourage anyone from exploring through performance, through embodiment, through… why would you not want to try this experience and see what you learn from it?

Zachary Dunbar
Yes, thanks for disarming that bomb… Yeah, who are we to presume actually what it means to engage, what is it embodied experience in any case, and it can be absolutely passive reading something and your hormones absolutely go through the roof because she needs suddenly feel something your heartbeat goes, it doesn't mean that you're running around a studio and suddenly becoming somatic about one word. I will say something anecdotally – in the other genres I'm working on, a film script with somebody (I mean, I'm way behind in terms of the skill and this other person goes on) what we tell screenwriters is that in order to become a director, actually, is that you should take acting lessons.
So, there was something about that I can't understand why because you start from going from behind the camera to in front of the camera – So, in a sense, classes are going from the front of whatever to what's actually on the other side. So, there are two sides to the reception of the experience of Greek tragedy and one should not preclude the other – I mean, they're both necessary and complimentary to the more embodied experience, or a deeper experience of it.

Stephe Harrop
I think also maybe I more work on, with, around, through Greek tragedy, the more I doubt that fully is a word that any of us should be using, because of how long Greek tragedy has held the place it has in the academy. There are so many facets, there are so many approaches, so many disciplines – one lifetime cannot contain even all of that, never mind everything you might potentially know about acting, about theatre making, about performance makers. I increasingly see these kinds of artefacts of tragedy, these traces of past performances as being something that maybe exceed all of us or maybe that's part of why they are interesting to work with and good for us to work with. I think it's really good for us to work with something that exceeds us, it's good to work with something that makes us say "I cannot encompass this, I will not own this, I will engage with, this I will encounter with this and maybe there will be transformation as a result of that – certainly, there will be an unsettling and a crumbling as a result of that". I think that's maybe useful to you…

Zachary Dunbar
…yeah. yourself embodied with an accurate Chinese scarf has kind of lost its sheen. It used to be one of these things like Oh, yes, we must get into a place. And now I just thought means

everything that is authentic, and anything else is inauthentic. So, it's actually what I don't use it as much anymore because of that, but it wasn't terribly useful in its time.

Giovanna Di Martino
So, I guess one of the last few questions has to do with the chorus, as you might expect. So, you describe the chorus as one of the most daunting challenges facing a performance today. Can you talk a little bit about why that is?

Zachary Dunbar
Should we both dive in together chorus like, Steph?

Stephe Harrop
Why not!

Zachary Dunbar
If we spoke together at the same time, of course, nobody would understand us, would they?

Stephe Harrop
That might be appropriate?

Zachary Dunbar
Thinking about this question, you know, it just sort of brings up again, this whole bugbear of the individuality collectivity dilemma, particularly if we're talking about from the contemporary actors perspective and who want their part and who want their role and want to know their intention and how they're going to prepare for, all this kind of basic questions – which even the post dramatic world cannot get rid of – you come face to face with not so much the binary of individual collectivity, but that kind of conflict. Within that, of course, within opera music, you can harmonize different intentions but, of course, in speech cacophony rules if somehow those sounds and meanings aren't managed.
So, for contemporary actors it has become daunting for that very reason – okay, I'm prepared for that but I can't here myself, I play this part but none saw my intention, who's watching me. Then, at the same time, just the group intone the individuals' mood or the individuals intone the group's mood. We fall right back to the same classic – or contemporary – problems, it's why it's daunting, a challenge. But daunting challenge also is a gateway to, possibly, the greatest phenomenon of Greek tragic performances, that to behold a chorus can be one of its magical things.
The last thing I'll say about that is that it's darkly particular today because what do we do about the intersectional chorus, one word individuality in itself, the authenticity of an individual is question in any normative way, that you can identify as one thing at any one time – you know,

what is a queer chorus? I don't mean Dionysian, I mean, what is that chorus? where disrupts the normal structures of individuality or collectivity? It does not want to fit in either.
So, that's an extra daunting challenge, when we think of collective or even community – the assertion that there is such a thing these days, particularly intersectional voices are saying be cautious of what you call your community, because I may not belong there, do not assume for instance, a marginalized community, which a lot of courses are, is something that a contemporary actor can necessarily identify acting in.
So, there are these new issues that have actually emerged, apart from just the normal bugbear of individuality and collectivity.

Stephe Harrop
Absolutely, I would agree with all of that, and maybe picking up from some of those references of harmony and all the other notions of the coral. If we think about ballet, if we think about the corps de ballet, how do they know they're doing it? Well, someone will stand in the studio and tell them, more likely tell them that's wrong – but there will be someone who stands outside who has perhaps a memory of previous productions, who has a memory of having kind of danced those roles in the passenger seat, yes, that's right, you are doing it right. Well done! There is that kind of external source of validation.
I think one of the really tough things about working with Greek chorus is where does that come from, you are trying to do something that is extraordinarily challenging in terms of breath, in terms of body, in terms of voice, in terms of space and – as Zach has identified – also, in terms of self, identity and communicating. You're doing this astonishingly difficult thing that is both technically difficult, and kind of soulfully difficult. It's very difficult, you know, around the kind of boundaries of the self and who we think we are and how we think we inhabit the world – so, it's already difficult on all those levels. You also don't know what it's supposed to look like, you do not know what success is. So, I think something that's really huge with chorus is how do you set the terms for when you've done it? Because we don't have those models, we don't have survivals from the fifth century BC, that would tell us “I have now done my chorus right!”.
So, I think something else that's really important, really challenging about choral work is being brave enough to say “this is our aspiration for this chorus”. This is when we'll know that we've done it and to say “we are going to set the terms by which we succeed” or otherwise “that feels huge” especially when, as we've already talked about, in Greek tragedy actors will so be looking for a source of authority, will so be looking for someone to tell them how to do it right. So, setting the terms of our own success in chorus is actually quite horrifying to many, many people who might otherwise be very excited about Greek tragedy.

Zachary Dunbar
Would you say stuff that this also is the philosophical point of view, the freewill and pre determinism of “stand here, do this and you'll be okay”. Actually, in this very moment, I'd like to just step to the right a little bit more and be, you know, be me and go like “you've just ruined

the whole chorus". Actually, it sounds more like what happens in musical theatre than in Greek tragedy.

Stephe Harrop
A lot of people working with Greek tragedy would love to be told "no, you just ruined it go back there. It's quite often drives people crazy the great existential terror that both of those choices might be right and how will we know? Because we have to choose.

Giovanna Di Martino
Wonderful, thank you! The last question has to do with few fundamental elements in Greek tragedy, staging Greek tragedy today, that has to do with space and audience. So, you open up the introduction with an exploration of the idea that in Greek tragedy it's important to know who you're talking to you and the visual keys that are inherent or not in costume masks, etc. Then, in chapter 6 you address the role of access space and environment then I guess the questions that I'm about to ask has very much sort of informed by the pandemic that we've all sort of missed through, and hopefully pretty again to put behind at some point.
So, how has this impacted your own practice and this book which, of course, was published three years ago (2018), and has gained further prominence in 2020 and we're now talking to you in 2021. Word mark, a different type of Mark has to be worn and visual cues have gained a very different significance in the world, especially distance performances, or more usually theme, which we're using to record the podcast, by the way.
So, how do you understand the role of audience and identity in theatre made during the pandemic?

Zachary Dunbar
Steph, I'm just gonna give the ball over to you, establishing your opening line in the book. Also, I was going "okay, what does that mean, it's important to know who you're talking to". So, I'll hand it over to you to start with and then hope I can riff off something…

Stephe Harrop
…absolutely! I guess, for me, something that's always been really important in kind of my thinking about working with tragedy, but also more broadly, is what the director Emma Rice says about the importance of why, the importance of beginning a project with why, and not just why this play, why this story, why this narrative, why this character, but why this story for this community, these people for this place at this time. So, for me, as a scholar, from his storyteller about that why is so important.
Also, for me, as a storyteller, that ability to be there with the audience – so much of the job is monitoring what the audience are doing, how they're responding, you're trying to hear the audience imagine, as a storyteller, you are honestly standing there, your mouth is moving, and

you're talking, and maybe you're doing things with your hand that you're trying to hear the audience imagine. So, all of your attention is kind of in that space with them.
Of course, the past year or so it has been really, really challenging, really difficult for that. I was thinking on the results in this basket – actually, I haven't seen a lot of Zoom theatre in the past 12 months, also I have seen an awful lot of Zoom storytelling, I've been kind of really embedded in that world and are really working quite deeply there. There's something that the storytellers I'm working with a moment keep talking about, keep reflecting on, which is trying to imagine the response of the other. So, we're talking down our camera, we're doing whatever we're doing and you can see the performer, the maker, pausing, and really intensely trying to imagine what is not available to us have the responsibility. I've seen a wonderful storyteller feeling the edges of Zoom frame, like is there a place where she can put her fingers and put her hands where she can where they could be some surrogate touch? It's really something that has been engaging and exercising storytellers.
I don't have an answer to any of this, but maybe something we are learning is to really be attentive to what we do not know about the audience, the other the people we are addressing the people we are making work for and with. I did a thing before Christmas, sort of remaking of a project that I'd been playing around with for a while, it's called *Alcestis: in bits*. It's an attempt to tell Phrinic's *Alcestis*, that's a lost play, so it's an attempt to tell the story of a lost play in and through fragments. I spent days sitting on my kitchen floor in lockdown, kind of talking to a camera and asking questions, asking questions to this audience that I couldn't see, or hear, or feel, or touch – that to me is really interesting and I kind of hope that might be a legacy of this moment that we get braver about actually asking questions, rather than making assumptions about who we're working for. I think there's something about that longing for the absent audience or the remote audience that I think we can be braver and more ethical, in our engagements with those essential participants in whatever it is that we're doing – I don't know if that makes any sense, but anyway…

Zachary Dunbar
…yeah! Really, the huge dimension of that question probably will talk about is how the pragmatics gave rise to new aesthetics. So, you know, the Greek tragedy, we kind of idealize the idea of lightness, the immediacy, the kind of directness and the understanding of the reception, as it is happening is. So, all that lightness and organicness is lost, of course, in virtual lightness, because all the acoustical physical properties are transposed into the virtual digital world. Having said that, they will generate intergenerational wars, there was a Greek tragedy, and that the young generation absolutely new sleight of hand digital techniques to create in place of lightness the cinematic, the filmic, the way immediacy was approximated by other means. However, that did not solve the problem as Steve pointed out of this sense of what is out there, who is the outcome? What, what are they getting? And therefore, how do I create the feedback loop to change. There's almost a kind of pre-set way of doing things and that's what the digital world does – digital was supposed to analogue presets the algorithms as

it were, of the performance of the line that is lost. One thing I did notice, at the end of the day, there's a lot of shared Performing Arts trainers around the world, saying “what are you doing in your space? How do you solve the Zoom problems?”. Inevitably, of course, they all miss bodies in space and bodies emerging out of the sweat and the tears in this somatic breath, because you can't even hear the breath or the breather, you can sort of see the breathing, but you can't hear it.

So, that was a poverty. Yet anything that looked a bit Greek tragic, or chorus like, in any of these Zoom performances, reminded me of Schlegel’s ideal spectator, because in that sense he kept saying it's both distancing and yet immersing you – you know, the sense that's what the chorus should do. In a sense, that's what zoom did, it really created more distance, but at the same time, it allowed the motion almost immediate in another way, in other words, I could be immersed with somebody across the world immediately, yet I was incredibly distanced from the feeling of it.

So, I think Schlegel’s 19th century – well, a lot of people have sort of debunked it and so that's not the ideal, but in essence, we will return to that, in the experience of at least the core-like elements that when one assumes Greek tragedy can generate.

Stephe Harrop

No one will be surprised to discover that I have not been heading back in the direction “I wrote beautiful things about *Greek tragedy and the Contemporary Actor*, by the way. I think, Zack and I can be relied upon to disagree on most points. So, it's a book that is never gonna lay down the law, because mostly authors don't even agree among themselves, which I think is a real strength actually of the project and how we work together – but one of the places I have been going in terms of sort of Zoom working with students with workshops, Zoom is brilliant for agonism! I don't know why this came as a surprise to me, because it's so like a TV format, which is such a kind of fighty format, but we've had a great time working here with the formal agon, but also just with that idea of Greek tragedy as struggle, as contest, as argument. It can be a fantastic platform for finding the argument because you've got these kinds of talking heads locked into this kind of formal symmetry. It can be really exciting and interesting – that’s something that maybe rewards for the play.

Giovanna Di Martino

Wow! Thank you, thank you so much. Thank you both for a really exciting and fascinating conversation, as I'm sure our listeners will agree and will now want to borrow this book from our archive library when things will open up again.

If listeners would like to check out Stephe’s or Zachary's work, they can do so by visiting their personal websites at https://hcommons.org/members/stepheharrop/, and Zachary's work at https://www.zacharydunbar.com/