Morality as/in Performance
– An Exploration of Morality within the Framework of Performance Studies, with a Case-Study on Medieval Morality Drama and Ancient Greek Tragedy –

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In a contemporary world purportedly proclaimed as post-moral and marked by “the coming of age of performance studies as an acknowledged field of study”¹, a reevaluation of the complex and age-old category of morality becomes necessary in order for it to remain relevant. Starting from the premise that performance is a correlate of, as well as a potentially fruitful method of inquiry about morality, this paper reconsiders the category of “the moral” within the framework of Performance Studies. It thus proposes a view of morality as the site of the creation and negotiation of a paradigmatic behavior in relation to which all behavior (within specific socio-historical contexts) is e-value-ated and legitimimized. While distinguishing morality from ethics, it engages with ethical theories (Platonic, Levinasian), in order to identify multiple dimensions of morality, such as: morality as a continuum in which values are constantly dis/replaced; morality as the/a performance of seeing; moral utterances as performatives; the “face-to-face” encounter in the “theatron”, presupposing a specific positioning of the audience in relation to the performers and the performance; and performance as a site of construction and subversion of morality. These dimensions are then explored in the context of Medieval morality drama and of Ancient Greek tragedy. The paper thus seeks to open new perspectives on the place of morality in dramatic literature and performance, demonstrating that morality is a worthwhile and experimental field of inquiry.

Keywords: morality, performance, morality in/as performance, Performance Studies, theatron

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¹ Theatre Journal first edition review on the cover of Schechner’s second edition Performance Studies. An Introduction
In a contemporary world purportedly marked by “the coming of age of performance studies as an acknowledged field of study”\(^1\) and in light of postmodern discourses which, though greatly diverse, arguably share “the application of the 'performance principle' to all aspects of social and artistic life”\(^2\) (Schechner, 2006: 129), a reevaluation of the complex and age-old category of morality/the moral in conjunction with “performance” is a worthwhile undertaking and a useful strategy for ensuring the relevance of morality in an age which has been widely characterized as post-moral\(^2\). Starting from the premise that performance is a correlate of, as well as a potentially fruitful method of inquiry about morality, this paper attempts to assess the scope and potential of \textit{morality in/as performance} as a field of inquiry within Performance Studies.

While clearly distinguishing between morality and ethics\(^3\), I engage in my approach with several ethical accounts that offer useful insights into the modes in which morality is/can be constructed, such as those of Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Hegel, and Levinas. I do not privilege any of these theories, however, proposing instead (also based on the insights gained) a notion of morality as essentially negotiation. Such an account enables me to discuss both morality as a type of performance with multiple dimensions, and performance (as well as “\textit{theatron}”) as the site of the negotiation of morality\(^4\).

Following in a certain sense Nietzsche’s undertaking, I then continue my discussion with an attempt to provide a “genealogy of morals” as/in performance in an exploration of the Medieval morality play \textit{Mankind} and of the Ancient Greek tragedies \textit{The Bacchae} by Euripides and Sophocles’ \textit{Antigone}. These dramatic works/performances prove to be the sites for the negotiation of two well-recognized moralities – the Christian moral code and Greek morality (its other, according to Nietzsche, 1964) – in which the “language of morals” (to employ Hare’s terminology) gets activated in “a field of social interaction” (Williams, 1993: 121) that necessarily presupposes a face-to-face encounter. Based on this exploration, I suggest that behaviors in performance enforce or subvert
collectively established moral codes and that an adequate reading of performance opens the possibility for a reading of morality.

Morality and Performance Studies

Given the ambiguity of “morality” as well as the traditional association of this concept with transcendence, stability, fixity, and a claim to universality, it is imperative for me to begin by addressing the apparent incompatibility of this category with that of the essentially “wide open” (Schechner, 2006: 1) and unstable field of Performance Studies. Can morality be legitimately discussed within the frame of Performance Studies? Defined as “behaviour conforming to moral law or accepted moral standards” (OED, 1992: online) and as “values in action” (Jokhoo, 2006: online), “morality” shares with Performance Studies an emphasis on behavior. While performance is “showing doing” (Schechner, 2006: 28), morality is concerned, I would claim, precisely with the quality (value) of the doing shown. In light of this, morality is, in my account, the site of the creation and negotiation of a paradigmatic code of behavior in relation to which all behavior (within specific socio-historical contexts) is e-value-ated and legitimized in terms of good/evil, right/wrong, or just/unjust, with a view to regulating the relationships between the self and other(s). According to this definition, the claim to universality and fixity traditionally assigned to morality thus becomes irrelevant and is replaced with a constitutive mutability (of values) that allows for a perception of “ethics” and “theatre” as “inextricable terms” (Read, 1993: 89).

Acknowledging the moral as well as the morally subversive potential of theatre (and of performance), Read justly notes that: “The theatre image, unlike any other, is always a possibility without closure, like the ethical relation that awaits creation” (Read, 1993: 90). To complete Read's
thought, I would add that this moral “relation that awaits creation” is performed (though not exclusively) in the theatre, where morality is negotiated. In relation to this observation, it is worth mentioning at this point that (purportedly) the first theoretical engagement with theatre in the Western tradition occurred on ethical grounds. In Book X of his Republic, Plato famously denounced mimesis and with it, theatre understood primarily as mimesis – as a third remove from reality (from truth, from the “Good”), morally detrimental because of its un-truth-fulness as well as because of its power to generate emotional arousal and to induce the desire of the audience to imitate the behaviors displayed. Interestingly, however, recent studies of Plato's theory of mimesis point to a totally different direction in Platonic thinking about “mimesis” and ethics (morality), somewhat consonant with Read's assertion. Engaging primarily with a passage from Book III of the Republic, Stephen Halliwell convincingly suggests that Plato in fact allows for an account of mimesis as a site for constructing morality:

Socrates generalises the principle of ethical form to all mimesis – in fact to the entire fabric of culture. He states that painting is 'full' of formal manifestations of 'character', ethos, and he speaks of mimesis in a way which should be construed, in part at least, as a concept of expression, saying that beautiful form involves mimemata of good character: beauty of form is a matter not just of appearances, but of appearances which embody ethical value. (...) mimesis is taken to be inescapably engaged in making sense of the human world – not just registering appearances, but actively construing and interpreting them. (Halliwell, 2000: 107)

Such an account of mimesis as possessing moral potential (surprisingly provided by a reading of Plato) further disturbs the traditionally assumed incompatibility between morality and mimesis (theatre) and supports the legitimacy of an approach to morality in the context of Performance Studies.
Having established the legitimacy of my inquiry, I will now turn to the relationship between morality and performance. As already implied, one dimension of this relationship consists in a view of morality itself as a continuous performance due to an inherent mutability that presupposes a constant relocation of values in a good-evil, right-wrong, just-unjust continuum. In morality, no behavior is definitively assessed as good or bad, which allows for a diversity of morally sanctioned behaviors throughout time.

From yet a different perspective, morality is (or presupposes) a performance of seeing, whereas immorality can be defined in terms of blindness, as the dramatic works that I explore in more detail below so well suggest. Thus, in the morality play Mankind, the supposedly “absolute” evil Tittivilus conceals himself from the sight of Mankind whom he leads into temptation (immorality), exclaiming: “Ever I go invisible – it is my jet – /And before his eye thus I will hang my net,/To belch his sight.” (Lester, 1981: 33). If Titivillus prevents Mankind from seeing in order to gain him over to the side of “evil”, Mercy – the supposedly “absolute” good – prescribes the performance of lifting up the (believer’s) eyes to Heaven (a performance of seeing) as a fundamentally moral act: “Behold not the earth, but lift your eye up!” (Lester, 1981: 4). This association between morality and the performance of seeing can be identified in Ancient Greek tragedy, as well. In Euripides’ The Bacchae, for example, blind Teiresias asserts about those who refuse to worship Dionysus that “They are all blind./ Only we can see.” (Euripides, 1959: 162), whereas Dionysus tells dress-wearing Pentheus (already undergoing punishment for his “blasphemies”) that “You see what you could not/when you were blind.” (Euripides, 1959: 196). Similarly, in Sophocles’ Antigone, guilty Creon exclaims “Woe is me, for the wretched blindness of my counsels!” and the Chorus responds “Ah me, how all too late thou seemest to see the right!” (Sophocles, online). Consistent with an account of Western Civilization as a culture under the
hegemony of vision\textsuperscript{13}, morality as the performance of seeing further enforces the idea of the \textit{theatron} – the place of vision – as the site of the negotiation of morality.

Another aspect of the relationship between morality and performance that I will briefly address now is that of moral utterances as performatives\textsuperscript{14}. Dover rightly notes that the utterance of a moral term is “a declaration of alignment” and a performance of “an act of love or hate, affecting the relationship between speaker and hearer” (Dover, 1974: 51). Even though the hearer might not subscribe to it or accept it as a norm, the moral utterance necessarily binds\textsuperscript{15} – it is “overflowing” (to extrapolate Derrida’s term, 1991: 12), eliciting a bi-directional responsibility. On one hand, the responsibility is oriented from the transmitter towards the receiver (due to the changes in behavior that the moral utterance potentially engenders in the receiver). On the other, the responsibility is directed from the hearer towards the speaker, given that – once he/she has received the “gift” (to extrapolate another of Derrida's terms, 1991: 14) – the hearer becomes accountable: he/she becomes liable to punishment\textsuperscript{16}. Even though, according to Austin, performatives uttered in the theatre are “parasitic,” mere “etiolations” (Austin, 1962: 22), I shall argue that moral utterances maintain the potential to “bind” and that this bi-directional responsibility remains in operation in the context of theatre performances\textsuperscript{17}.

This idea calls attention, I would suggest, to yet another aspect of \textit{morality as/in performance}: to “theatre's ethics of the face-to-face encounter” (Ridout, 2006: 32) presupposing a confrontation with alterity. Formulated by performance theorists\textsuperscript{18} in recent years, this approach is based on an interpretation and adaptation of Levinas' philosophy, and rests on the acknowledgment of the co-presence in time and space of the audience and the performers\textsuperscript{19} – a distinctive characteristic of the theatrical experience – as entailing the creation and experience of alterity, and, by implication, of responsibility and “response-ability” (Burvill, 2008: online)\textsuperscript{20}.

In light of the dimensions of \textit{morality as/in performance} outlined above, I will propose that the
“making of morality”– implying the possibility of both de-stabilizing and reinforcing a certain moral paradigm – should be regarded as one of the functions of performance, along with the seven that Richard Schechner enumerates in his Performance Studies. An Introduction (2006: 46), equally important as, for example, “to make something that is beautiful”, “to mark or change identity”, “to make or foster community”. I will now turn to Medieval morality drama and to the Ancient Greek tragedy in order to test this claim.

**Case-Study: A Genealogy of “Morality in/as Performance”**

**Medieval Morality Drama**

Deeply “anti-modern” (Riggio, 1998: 56), intimately connected to an apparently firm and all-encompassing Christian moral code which they are allegedly meant to reinforce (by no means alter or negotiate), the Medieval morality plays are particularly interesting primarily because of the promise of their purported commitment to morality and of the relationship between morality and performance that their denomination entails. Using allegory as their constitutive principle, moral interludes literally bring Christian morality down to Earth: without focusing specifically on Biblical stories but rather on the necessarily abstract lessons derived from them, the moralities concretize virtues and vices in universal characters that the actors impersonate in performance. Perhaps in accordance with the precept of universal equality that the Christian moral code advocates, the main figure of the moralities is a “Mankind” that stands for “Everyman,” trapped in an apparently irresolvable conflict between the soul and the body, virtue and vice, good and evil, right and wrong. The interludes are set outside
historical time and space, arguably echoing the realm of (abstract) morality, where the hero follows a standard trajectory describing a full circle: Temptation, Fall, and Redemption. This circular trajectory suggests, in my view, an always predictable variation in behavior in relation to the paradigmatic behavior that the morality enforces.

Interestingly, in performance, the moralities acquire a new dimension, “plunging vigorously and directly into the here and now of their audience's own immediate experience” (Lester, 1981: 210). Performed by small troupes of actors who generally played more than one role, the moralities in performance have yet another noteworthy characteristic: an actor could (and usually did) play both an inherently good (such as Mercy, for example) and an inherently evil character (like the devil Titivillus in the interlude *Mankind*), the shift being marked by an off-stage change in costume (Harris, 1992: 175). This, I would claim, potentially disturbs the categorical opposition between the inherently good and inherently evil (the devil) that the Christian morality rests on, opening the perspective for a continuum in which good and evil are variables.

A typical morality, *Mankind* displays all the characteristics outlined above. Featuring Mankind as protagonist; Mercy as virtue; Mischief, Newguise, Nowadays, and Nought as vices; and Titivillus as the devil, *Mankind* conforms to the Innocence-Fall-Redemption pattern, within which Mankind (or, rather, Mankind's moral stance) is put to the test. Tempted by the vices, Mankind deviates in his (the protagonist is typically a “he”) behavior from the Christian paradigmatic behavior that this interlude – abounding in bad behavior used as anti-model – as well as moral utterances and prescriptions (performatives) – enables the spectators/readers to identify. In the sermon in the beginning, as well as at several other points throughout the play, Mercy prescribes the negation of the body and of its pleasures, hard work and moderation as key aspects of the paradigmatic behavior. These prescriptions bind not only Mankind, who becomes accountable for not respecting them (Mankind falls victim to the vices; he falls “into temptation”), but also the audience, who is being directly
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lectured about the good/right behavior together with the hero (given that moral utterances are performatives that bind). Interestingly, while Mercy (the virtue) keeps the spectators at a distance, engaging them only as listeners and granting them no “response-ability” (to extrapolate the term used by Burvill), the Vices attempt to fully involve them, by positioning the audience within the performance, by reducing the distances between the self and the other(s) and, thus, making the “face-to-face encounter” (between the audience and the performers; between the purportedly innocent spectators and the vices) more powerful.

Two moments in the play are particularly relevant in this respect: firstly, the invitation addressed by the vices to the audience to join them in the singing of a Christmas song that soon turns into scatological abuse (Lester, 1981: 21-22). In the context of a strict Christian morality, uttering such foul words as those used in the song amounts to committing a sin – an act whose primarily moral consequences cannot be undone (except by obtaining divine forgiveness), even though the utterance takes place in the context of a performance. The other moment is the money collection required of the audience in exchange for the appearance of the devil Titivillus. Taking into account that Titivillus is supposedly the absolute evil causing Mankind's fall (or, rather, Fall), the audience is – ironically – “tempted” to participate in and even pay for the fall of M(/m)ankind. Both these moments are part of "the comedy of evil" (Spivack, 1958: 121) that unfolds itself without restraint in this morality.

To a certain extent consonant with Bakhtin's notion of the Carnivalesque, the “unfolding of evil” in this play is also achieved through the somewhat paradoxical excessive prominence of the body within a performance meant to teach and reinforce a moral code according to which “your body is your enemy” (Lester, 1981: 56). Noting these aspects, Sponsler states:

Using the unruly body as a source for resistance, these dramas of behavior and ultimate repentance provided a way of performing and hence negotiating complex relations between individual desire and social control. (Sponsler, 1997: 81)

This account suggests an inherent ambivalence of this morality (play), proving the potential of
performance to both strengthen and destabilize the morality for which it becomes a site of negotiation.

**Ancient Greek Tragedy**

Stepping back in time, I will now turn to Ancient Greek tragedy and to the moral model that it negotiates – a model that, according to Nietzsche, represents a kind of “matrix” (the morality of the “aristocrats”, of the “masters”) which Christian morality (“the morality of pity”; “the morality of resentment” - 39) derived from and inverted (Nietzsche, 1964: first essay). However debatable Nietzsche’s claim might be, there are a number of parallels and of oppositions that enable me to put the two moralities in relation to one another.

Characterized by a perhaps disconcerting moral undecidability that apparently situates it “beyond good and evil” (to use Nietzsche's coinage), Ancient Greek tragedy perfectly illustrates Read's account of a “theatre image” as “a possibility without closure” (Read, 1993: 90) intimately related to a morality in the making. As Wiles notes:

> In Greek religion, the gods have no morality and represent irreconcilable opposites. (...) These gods are powerful and have to be honored, but have no concern with the criteria of right and wrong. (...) Tragedy allowed Greeks to extrapolate from the anarchy of their religion a viable moral code. (Wiles, 2000: 8)

Wiles’ statement contains an explicit indication of the theatrical performance as a site of creation and negotiation of morality, paradoxically located – in contrast to Medieval moralities – outside religion, yet always limited by the gods (piety being, arguably, an absolutely required virtue, as the two plays discussed in what follows prove).

Tragedy – and theatre, for that matter – thus appear to have provided the missing regulatory mechanism in Ancient Greece. As a result, I would claim that tragedy (theatre) was a necessity for the Ancient Athenian society, especially if viewed in relation to *demokratia*, to which a great part of the Athenians were fully committed and which they bitterly fought to preserve. In light of this connection
between tragedy and the Athenian society, “being in an audience was a political act” (Rutter and Sparkes, 2000: 4). In this “act”, the spectators were present at the creation and negotiation of the paradigmatic behavior – thrown into debate with every performance in order to find the patterns (of behavior) that best supported *demokratia* and against which all behavior (in Athens) would be legitimized, evaluated, and even punished. Indissolubly intertwined with the political and subordinated to the legal, the moral served as a regulating mechanism that was supposed to ensure the cohesion of the community, and the well-functioning of self-other and other-other encounters\(^{29}\) in ancient Athens.

Before exploring the claims above in relation to two concrete examples, it is worth complementing them with a brief account of Aristotle's potential contribution to what I have here termed *morality in/as performance*. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle asserts that:

> Tragedy is a mimesis not of people but of actions and life... It is not the function of the agents' actions to allow the portrayal of their characters; it is, rather, for the sake of their actions that character is included...Moreover, a tragedy without action would be an impossibility, but one without characterization would be feasible... (Aristotle cited in Halliwell, 1986: 138).

In my interpretation, Aristotle's emphasis on “action” as the fundamental “ingredient” of tragedy can be equated with a focus on the representation of (patterns of) behavior. This insistence on “action” – in relation to its counterpart *ethos* – implicitly indicates the moral potential of tragedy, supporting my account of performance as the site of negotiation of morality\(^{30}\). Moreover, Aristotle explicitly situates his account of tragedy in the realm of morality through the notion of *katharsis* that designates the (morally) purifying emotional responses – primarily fear and pity – that tragedy elicits in the audience and constituting, in a sense, the “telos” (in keeping with Aristotle's metaphysics) of tragedy. In the case of Ancient Greek theatre this powerful emotional response is, I would argue, intimately linked to the radical dimension of tragedy in which virtually everything gets thrown into contest (agon) for the sake of demokratia and the polis.

Euripides' *The Bacchae* and Sophocles' *Antigone*\(^{31}\) offer insights into the ways in which the
agonistic model – at the heart of tragedy and echoing the legal procedures in ancient Athens – relates to the notion of *morality in/as performance* under scrutiny in this paper. *The Bacchae* is particularly interesting in this respect because it brings the god Dionysos down to earth (purportedly from the heights of Mount Olympus) and puts him on display in embodied form in the “*theatron*” – ironically, in front of his own statue – in much in same way that the Medieval moralities bring virtues and vices down to earth from a sky of abstractions. Thus, it is in front of his own statue that this embodied Dionysus is mocked and refused recognition by Pentheus, King of Thebes. The dissenter, the non-conformist, the mocker, Pentheus opens the perspective for a radical undermining of traditional religion, arguably in favor of a (more) rationalistic model, potentially amounting to a shift from a god-dependent (transcendent) principle of morality to a human-generated-and-negotiated one.

The implementation of such an innovative model is however apparently compromised since Pentheus warned about the consequences of his blasphemies both by the Chorus and by Dionysus, and thus made responsible for his behavior – is condemned to madness and death. The charges, as clearly expressed by the chorus, are: impiety, anger, and a specific lack of moderation – a limitlessness that, I would argue, lies at the heart of all Ancient Greek tragedies. This “limitlessness” might perhaps be equated with the lack/loss of the highly valued virtue of “sophrosyne” (approximately translated as “moderation”), anticipating the centrality of temperance (moderation) in the Christian morality, pointed to in my discussion of *Mankind*. (Mercy: “‘Measure is treasure.’ (...) Measure yourself ever. Beware of excess.” (Lester, 1981: 16)). Primarily because of this “limitlessness” Pentheus must be punished.

The legitimacy of the punishment (dismemberment by Agave, his mother – extreme violence regarded as pollution of the “soul” in the Ancient Greek view), however, is challenged by the very a-morality of the brutally ferocious god who is from the beginning seeking revenge in the name of his mortal mother, and who shows no sign of pity or forgiveness throughout the play. Though finding
closure at the level of plot with the death of Pentheus, the highly ambivalent *The Bacchae* still “awaits” completion at a moral level. There is no fully defined paradigmatic behavior in place—though the Chorus operates with moral utterances meant to sketch this behavior such as: “humility is wise, humility is best” (Euripides, 1959: 200)—, but what is done and said during the performance in front of the polis (and the god) cannot be un-done or un-said (it is “overflowing”; it binds): *The Bacchae* thus opens a space of possibilities where there is something to be done (to paraphrase Michel de Certeau through Alan Read).36

Sophocles' *Antigone* offers another variant of the old/new debate in the form of tradition/state, allowing for a different account of *morality as/in performance* (though proposing the same invariability of the hero’s behavior as *The Bacchae* does). In her book *Fragility of Goodness*, Martha Nussbaum offers a particularly insightful reading of this debate that I will now engage with. Starting from the premise that there is a necessary tension among different values within morality, as well as that not a single value can “be assumed to be conflict-free” (Nussbaum, 1986: 54), Nussbaum argues that both Creon (who gives the edict that forbids the burial of his nephew Polyneices, traitor of the state), and Antigone (who disobeys the secular law and buries her brother, thus “choosing” death), attempt to eliminate this necessary conflict between values by employing the strategy of “making all values commensurable in terms of a single coin” (Nussbaum, 1986: 58). Two derivate (and deviant) moralities emerge through a “violent shifting of the values”, annihilating one another when thrown into performance and contest: Creon's “civic theory of the good” and Antigone's “devotion to the *philia of the family*” and to the gods (Nussbaum, 1986: 58, 63). The behaviors that Antigone and Creon display on account of these self-constructed moralities are purportedly wrong in relation to an implicit paradigmatic behavior (harmoniously reuniting both of these derivate behaviors) dominant in the polis. Moreover, they are both characterized by that “limitless-ness” identified in *The Bacchae* that, I argue, lies at the heart of Ancient Greek tragedy and is related to the Christian prescription of moderation.
(temperance): Teiresias - “Boy, lead me home, that he [Creon] may spend his rage on younger men, and learn to keep a tongue more temperate, and to bear within his breast a better mind than now he bears”; Leader of the Chorus – “The maid [Antigone] shows herself passionate child of passionate sire, and knows not how to bend before troubles.” (Sophocles, online). For this reason, they both get punished, after they have both been made responsible: Antigone has been warned by her sister, Ismene, that she is in the wrong, that she is committing an injustice, whereas Creon has been made accountable both by Teiresias and by the Chorus, who warn him that he is acting unjustly. Noteworthy in this respect is the paradox that the Chorus clearly sympathizes with Antigone, even though the Chorus – as “guardians of the mandate” – know that Antigone is violating a law as well as, possibly, “political norms about the place of women in politics” (Allen, 2005: 174). From this point of view, Antigone (among its other implications) draws attention to the relation of the legal to – and as part of – the moral, revealing the subversive potential of performance towards both of these categories.

Despite the apparent annihilation of the alternate (“deviant”) moralities in Antigone (through the harsh punishment of the protagonists), this successful challenge to the legal as well as “Creon's sweeping ethical innovations” (Nussbaum, 1986: 59) in terms of attempting to impose a notion of “the good” that disregards all dimensions of existence except for the civic one point to an account of performance as a site for the experimentation with morality. Acknowledging this aspect, Dover observes that “Tragedy can afford to give an airing to ideas which may be novel to many members of the audience and perhaps may not always be easily grasped” (Dover, 1974: 17). I would bring this claim on step further, and argue that it is true of performance (and “theatron”) in general. As the site of the negotiation of the site of the negotiation of behavior, performance creates the event in which, in a face-to-face encounter, the audience is exposed to these “innovative ideas” (purportedly related – in final analysis – to the paradigmatic behavior that is being negotiated). Thus, both the performers and the spectators become responsible for and response-able to them, potentially by engaging in further
innovation in and reconsideration of morality: as and in performance.

## Conclusion

Though not yet fully exploited, a consideration of morality within the framework of Performance Studies opens new perspectives on both performance and morality. Most importantly perhaps, it acts to reinforce an awareness of the high stakes in performance and to enable a reevaluation of the category of morality/the moral that prevents it from being discarded either as irrelevant or as “a holy lie” (Halm, 1995: 59). As revealed by this paper and by the proposed explorations of the Medieval moral drama and the Ancient Greek tragedy, *Morality in/as performance* is, I would contend, a worthwhile and experimental field of inquiry within Performance Studies.

## Notes


2. In her book *Evil After Postmodernism*, Jennifer Geddes raises the following question: “Is there such a thing as evil after postmodernism?” (1). To prevent the dissolution of the categories of good-evil, right-wrong, just-unjust – intimately related to morality – (to which Geddes points), I believe that a reconsideration of the category of the moral is required. The reasons for the necessity to maintain these categories, as well as the category of the moral, are multiple. On a formal level, these categories offer a vocabulary for categorizing and differentiating among different types of behavior. Secondly, the value-terms “good-evil”, “right-wrong”, “just-unjust” ground prohibition, punishment and praise in specific collectivities. In a sense, these categories represent principles of order(ing) on a public and on a private level; they “introduce order into life: some things may be done, others may not be done – discipline, strictness hence arising.”
(Nietzsche, 1964: 202). Most importantly, however, moral principles and the evaluative words that accompany them guide behavior and ensure that “What ought I to do?” (Hare, 1952: 1) remains a relevant question to be asked before engaging in action of any kind (rather than simply acting without consideration of the implications of the actions undertaken).

3 My interest in this paper is in “morality” (or, in what has been often termed “popular” morality), rather than in a specific ethical theory. In line with Dover (1974: XII-XIII), I differentiate between the “essentially unsystematic” morality and the necessarily systematic moral philosophy (ethics) – teleologically, rather than deontologically oriented, according to Ricoeur (1995: 170). In my view, ethical theories are systematic reflections on, variations and refinements of morality, useful to be taken into consideration for a more in-depth assessment of the dimensions of the latter.

4 This is a significant move, given that charges to dramatic practices have been traditionally brought on the ground of theatre’s “inherent” immorality (see, for example, Plato, St. Augustine, Rousseau’s famous critiques of theatre)

5 Schechner bases his account of Performance Studies in behavior: “Behavior is the ‘object of study’ of performance studies” (Schechner, 2006: 1)

6 In the opening of his book The Language of Morals, R.M. Hare underlines the indissoluble relation between morality and behavior when he writes: “If we were to ask of a person ‘What are his moral principles?’ the way in which we could be most sure of a true answer would be by studying what he did.” (Hare, 1952: 1)

7 Term used interchangeably with “morality” in this context

8 Term used interchangeably with “performance” in this context

9 philosophical

10 By implication, about visual arts and theatre, as well

11 In relation to this claim, Prof. Rebecca Schneider raised the legitimate question of whether a dualistic morality is necessary or whether it is contingent – in which case a nondualistic morality would be just as justified. In response to this point, I would briefly note that the duality lies at the basis of the notion of “morality” that I am operating with in this paper. I would argue that discarding the “good/evil”, “right/wrong”, “correct/incorrect” duality in an account of morality would entail either the formal replacement of these dualistic categories with other terms – different in form, yet equivalent in meaning and function – in terms of which behavior can be assessed, or a relativist paradigm (which would imply the annihilation of the category of morality/ the moral altogether)

12 In the work How to Observe: Morals and Manners, Harriet Martineau offers an account of a variety of morally-
sanctioned behaviors in different times and places.

13 For a detailed account of the centrality of vision in Western Culture, see David Michael Levin Sites of Vision (1997; Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: MIT Press)

14 The notion of “performative” employed here is that put forth by Austin, implying that “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (Austin, 1962: 6)

15 temporarily or provisionally, depending on context

16 In Christian morality, for example, once a subject knows that a certain type of behavior is a sin, he/she is held accountable for the display of that behavior. Similarly, once the hearer “receives” the moral utterance, he/she becomes responsible for the behavior he/she adopts in response to the prescription.

17 I will explore this claim in my case-study by discussing the positioning of the audience in relation to the performance and the performers.

18 Tom Burvill, for example, is one of the performance theorists who employs such a reading in his paper 'Politics begins as ethics': Levinasian ethics and Australian performance concerning refugees

19 For Levinas, “Proximity, difference which is non-indifference, is responsibility” (Levinas, 1981: 139).

20 In light of this, Burvill, for example, identifies the (re)presentation of an ethnically and culturally determined “other” (in this case, asylum-seekers in Australia) in performance as an ethical act consistent with Levinas' theory. In my view, however, this is a limited (though potentially fruitful) application. Rather, I would propose – closer to Levinas' account of alterity – the opening up of the category of the “other” to contain any/everyone who is “not myself”. In such an account, the responsibility towards the “other” manifests itself in the type of behavior that one chooses in response to the (socially and historically) context-conditioned participation in the negotiation of the paradigmatic behavior (the behavior that ensures harmony in the community) in performance.

21 It is interesting to note that the interludes were not called “moralities” in the Middle Ages; this term was attributed to them by modern critics (Richardson and Johnston, 1991: 97), indicating – perhaps – a first step towards the reconsideration of morality that I am proposing here.

22 In accordance to the Christian moral code, these categories are firm binaries. However, as proved in this paper, they seem to become the ends of a continuum rather than of a fixed (immutable) binary system once the morality in/as performance is employed as a principle of investigation.

23 The variety of bad behavior in this play, ranging from foul language, to mockery (of Mercy and Mankind), to whipping,
rape and other crimes (“sins”) raises the question of whether the moralities might not in fact have the exactly opposite
effect to that which they – as didactic plays – are supposed to have on the audience. The dilemma of “how to present sin
without counteracting the didactic purpose” (Sponsler, 1997: 81), underlying my observation, further draws attention to
the ambivalence of the moralities.

24 Here is an example of Mercy's fully-consistent-with-the-Christian-morality lessons for Mankind: “‘Measure is treasure.’

(...) Measure yourself ever. Beware of excess.” (Lester, 1981: 16)

25 Thus, the audience also becomes responsible for its own fall, in a sense, given the name of the protagonist and the
allegory in operation in this play.

26 Despite its apparent moral undecidability, however, Ancient Greek tragedy is by no means a “moral holiday” (to
extrapolate William James's expression through Crotty, 2001: 118): it is not neutral (indifferent) from a moral
standpoint.

27 It is interesting to observe at this point, that the relation between Ancient Greek tragedy and morality appears to be that
of making (morality out of “chaos”), whereas the Medieval morality appears to un-make (which is, at the same time,
also necessarily a making) the established (Christian) morality, at the same time that it is supposed to enforce it

28 It is significant to note here that the birth of democracy and that of theatre occurred largely at the same time and that the
Athenian theatre contributed to a certain extent to the triumph of demokratia, by negotiating and enforcing a morality
that suited the political system.

29 In accordance with Burvill's understanding of the “other”, in Greek tragedy “others” are women, slaves and metics –
thus, non-citizens.

30 understood, in turn, as the negotiation of behavior

31 In line with Hegel in The Phenomenology of the Spirit, I see these tragedies as interesting variations of the old/new and
religion (tradition)/state (the secular) debates. I analyze both in this paper in an attempt to draw a “genealogy of morals”
in/as performance.

32 The mocker is the figure who is invariably sentenced to death in Greek tragedy – perhaps because it represents the
greatest threat to demokratia, I would claim – primarily based on my reading of Plato’s Apology (of Socrates).

33 Dionysus to Pentheus: “I warn you once/again: do not take arms against a god.” (Euripides, 1959: 188)

34 Impiety is possibly one of the most serious charges in Ancient Greece, on which Socrates himself was put to death (as
shown in Plato's Apology).
This prescription of moderation reminds one of Aristotle’s ethical theory of “the golden mean” and is suggested in Euripides’ *The Bacchae* in lines such as: Teiresias - “The man whose glibness flows/ from his conceit of speech declares the thing he is:/ a worthless and a stupid citizen.” (165); Chorus - “A tongue without reins, / defiance, unwisdom – / their end is disasters / (…) unwise are those who aspire/ who outrage the limits of man/ (…) Wherefore, I say,/ he who hunts a glory, he who tracks/ some boundless, superhuman dream,/ may lose his harvest here and now/ and garner death. Such men are mad, / their counsels evil.” (Euripides, 1959 : 170)

For de Certeau, “Ethics is articulated through effective operations and it defines a distance between what is and what ought to be. This distance designates a space where we have something to do.” (de Certeau cited in Read, 1993: 90)

The punishment is, arguably, in equal measure, even though – as in *The Bacchae* – it is the “ mocker” (this time, Antigone) who dies.

Ismene to Antigone: “we must remember, first, that we were born women, as who should not strive with men; next, that we are ruled of the stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet sorer.” (Sophocles, online)

Teiresias to Creon: “Think, then, on these things, my son. All men are liable to err; but when an error hath been made, that man is no longer witless or unblest who heals the ill into which he hath fallen, and remains not stubborn.” (Sophocles, online).

– perhaps a moral response based on a “face-to-face encounter” with the “other” (both in my understanding of alterity and in that of Burvill, for Antigone is “other” both as woman and as mocker in the Athenian society)

**Works Cited**


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