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THE REPTILIAN BRAIN AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FEMALE IN THEODOROS TERZOPOULOS' *BACCHAI*



In this paper I would like to situate Agave, the female protagonist in Theodoros Terzopoulos' earth-shaking performance of *Bacchai* (Ancient Stadium of Delphi, 1986), in three different methodologies that, at first sight, have nothing to do with theatre, but that will elucidate some larger contexts in which this revolutionary type of theatre functions since the eighties.

I. Theatrical level

I choose *Bacchai* for its unique value and position in the history of the western staging of 'classical' tragedy, and more specifically for the way this drama radically questions traditional interpretations both of Greek tragedy and of the Dionysian state of mind. In the last two decades, *Bacchai* has been staged by the most famous directors and artists in order to illustrate western preoccupations with the irrational and the tragic experience (Richard Schechner, 1968; Tadashi Suzuki, 1981; Ivo Van Hove, 1986-7 and 1993; Peter Hall, 2002; Johan Simons, 2002). How interesting and diverse all these productions may have been, it was especially in Terzopoulos' production, premiered at the end of the eighties (17 June, 1986 and travelling around the world for many years), that layers of the personal and collective unconscious were touched as never before on the western stage. At stake here was not a continuation of bourgeois and humanist theatre based upon logocentricity and classicist esteem for *vraisemblance* and *bienséance*, but a radical new theatre of physicality, part of the largest and most important

paradigmatic shift that took place in theatre during the twentieth century. In Terzopoulos' production, Agave, the royal mother who turned into a Maenad, primarily was a body at work, driven by its own internal rhythms, a human body questioning the physical and mental memories stored in the human species over many thousands of years. Therefore, his *Bacchai* was situated in a completely new metaphysical climate that attempted to overcome traditional limits of the body, creating space for an intoxicated climate of ecstasy. In the course of the more than twenty years during which he was the artistic leader of the Attis company, Theodoros Terzopoulos developed a radically new and original methodology that focused upon the actor's body as the most immediate theatrical sign and that relied upon an elaborated network of exercises (Terzopoulos, 2000; Raddatz, 2006), physical and spiritual challenges for a petrified western vision on the body, accurately described and discussed by Sampatakakis, in his 2007 book *Geometrontas to Chaos*.

Terzopoulos' 1986 entry in the world of theatre was spectacular, daring and risky. Did not Deleuze and Guattari, disciples of the Parisian '68 May revolution, and a great number of other 'theoreticians of physicality' (Artaud, Barthes, Lyotard, Butler) remark that in the history of the West, philosophy had simply forgotten what it meant to have a body? In their *L'Anti-Oedipe* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari radically undermined traditional psychological views on castration that dominated psycho-analysis since Freud, and stressed the importance of desire and energy as the ever ongoing mechanisms that motivate life and the body. All over Europe, theatre in the eighties went through a radical change, no longer focusing on the text and its phrasing, but on all other kinds of semiotic categories, among which the presence and the fragmentation of the body on stage was the most important one. This turn was part of an explicit postdramatic (Lehmann, 1999) climate and led theatrical practice from the 'discursive' to the 'visceral body' (Lorraine, 1999), from 'representation without presence' to 'presence without representation' (Žizek, 2004). It was the result of a long process of change in theatre aesthetics and as such it challenged all conceived opinions on the role and function of late bourgeois and capitalistic theatre.

Within this general change of perspective, Terzopoulos' style really occupies a key position that clearly admits its own political agenda. Marianne McDonald describes the physical aspects of his approach as follows: (his theatre is) 'distinguished by his actor's use of their total bodies which necessarily involves long hours of training, dictated by the inner music and

rhythms of the body; their rhythms often run counter to the emotional content of the play (for instance the Blue Danube Waltz as background music for Heiner Müller's *Medea Material*). The actor's body is left to communicate by itself, to interrogate and question all bodily movements and experiences, after having gone through a great number of exhausting exercises, until the body loses the cultural prescribed ways of moving and behaving' (2006: 8-9).



Dionysus (Akis Sakellariou) in Theodoros Terzopoulos' *Bacchai*, Berlin 1987.

In *Bacchai*, Agave goes from consciousness to ecstasy, to return, finally, to a state of consciousness. Awakening from ecstasy, she discovers what she has done to her son, and screams a scream without sounds, a situation of complete *aphonia* and *kenosis* of voice and gesture. As I have pointed out elsewhere, referring to what Sofia Michopoulou told me about the part she played (sc. Agave), 'this was the image of a woman totally out of herself, a petrified human being going through the very limits of human existence. First she experienced the shock that did not allow the brain to produce the sounds needed at that moment, *alalia* took over, waiting to become *moirologia*. Pain needs time to get out and a channel to do so, only little by little the destroyed mind and womb started vibrating again and uttered primary

sounds, not yet words. What she expressed was mourning in the most extreme degree, a silent (and therefore very painful) version of *threnos*. Lifting her hands into the sky, she could not understand why she has been deluded in such a cruel way. She who was one of the most respected representatives of that famous Theban royal and divine family, she who lived in that mysterious Thebes, an outstanding *axis mundi*, a city that connects earth and sky, zenith and nadir, suddenly felt the very limits of the human condition. At that very moment, Sofia Michopoulou reveals, in a very eminent way, that good theatre radically questions the bare essentials of life and death, and that, all over again, it has to find ways to express the deepest human sorrows and desires. This Agave, grandchild of Cadmus and Harmonia, mythical a character who experienced frenzy in her body, felt the presence of a kind of reptilian aggression that belongs to the oldest part of our brain. The biological truth that she expressed and that challenged our physical origins, our DNA-like structure, our stardust-like nature, made her growl like a dog driven into the corner, reviving Hecuba's last moments before turning into a bitch' (Decreus, 2006: 202-213; see also Sampatakakis, 2006, 97-100).

In what kind of a world do we situate Agave during her ecstasy, biologically and metaphysically speaking? Apparently, she returns from realms that are forgotten, from a world in between humans and animals. In Terzopoulos' view: 'Ecstasy is a situation where the performer overthrows reality. He finds his way to a reality on a higher level. ... In an ecstasy of reality, the performer's body finds its way to another, energetically denser and more concentrated reality' (2006: 156). At moments like these, the acting body is no longer a centrally controlled entity, and the psychological part the actress is supposed to play leaves for another level, metaphysics (re-)turning to pure physics. Agave is transfigured into a Bacchic woman, which makes her tear apart social and collective identities, distort limbs, utter inhuman primal screams and cause a fundamental distortion of a numbers of Selves involved in the play. She becomes one of the most radical subversive agents Greek tragedy was able to imagine. Western history has been particularly keen on avoiding or extenuating the energy and power expressed by Maenadic women, by Furies, Sphinxes, Hydras, Gorgons, Chimaeras, forces that were felt as daemonic but nevertheless were very present and active in the heart of an archaic cosmology. Creatures like these functioned as primordial beasts and expressed the chthonic energy of the earth, representing its fluid and chaotic dimension, assuming a multitude of forms and

exchanging one monstrous form for another. Of course, this Agave is a woman and a mother, but her gender specific and narrative functions are only part of a more general scope, that of a human person who steps in and out human consciousness and revives on stage a process of a deep cutting memory.

From a methodological point of view, some interesting observations can be made when we compare the stage practices that Theodoros Terzopoulos set up with his Attis group to current practices and beliefs at work in a number of other fields of enquiry. In the table below, I summarize the observations I make in the subsequent sections of this paper. As can be seen, they involve three distinct and disparate approaches:

THEATRE	Agave: from consciousness /over ecstasy/ to consciousness
BIO-ENERGETICS	Re-Remembrance / Biodynamic charging / Re-Signification
MYTHICAL	Chaos Dragon / Hero / Olympian Gods
COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY	Reptilian / Old Mammalian (Limbic) / Neomammalian (neo-cortex) Brain

II. Biodynamics/ Bioenergetics

In this second approach, I want to discuss some aspects of Terzopoulos' staging as part of a larger bioenergetic theory, one that deals with the awakening and transporting of energy and helps us to understand what, from an energetic point of view, happened to the queen mother. As a Maenadic woman who obeys patterns of a long forgotten behaviour, both physically and mentally, Agave recollects memories and prints stored in the interior of the body. This body functions as a channel of energy, as an archaic embodiment and treasure house of memory and it is this flux of remembering and forgetting, of recognizing and repressing, that lies at the heart of Terzopoulos' biodynamic practice. Going back to what is considered to constitute our deepest and oldest layers is one of the central ideas of his methodology. In order to do so, he brings his actors to a state of total exhaustion that obliges them to leave behind all cultural and social inscriptions and makes it possible for them to experience and admit other forms of energy. Among the exercises that take the body back to this 'level zero', two can be singled out: breathing-the-air and stamping-the-earth, two practices used in

many cultures to restore contact with forgotten layers of instinctive consciousness and to reach states of transcendence.

Exercises like these have been re-appreciated in a contemporary context called bioenergetics, a very large research programme dealing with the study of energy in all cosmic and human fields. Bioenergetics is a recent interdisciplinary and intercultural field of investigation, yet it refers back in time to ancient wisdom. It relies upon holistic visions found all around the world, and especially present and developed in the modern avant-garde history of dance, trance, theatre and performance (as practised by Artaud, Grotowski and others, see Innes, 1981).



Dionysus and Chorus
in Theodoros Terzopoulos'
Bacchai, Berlin 1987.

Giorgios Sampatakakis was the first to describe Terzopoulos' exercises in terms of a biodynamic method, grouping them into a succession of five phases, all present in *Bacchai* (2006: 90- 102).

1. 'Re-remembrance' is the work it takes to rediscover a number of lost links such as Nature itself, its firstborn elements earth, water

and mud, and everything that constitutes Nature in ourselves. Also included here are memories that, for whatever reason, have been suppressed and hidden by the body. The act of re-remembrance involves a physical reappropriation of what Dionysus and the Dionysian experience may have been, not only for this production, but for the history of western philosophy and aesthetics. As such, it belongs to the first phase of recollection.

2. 'Biodynamic charging': In this process, historical (personal, social) pain and all forms of repressed energy inflicted on memory are channelled to the surface of the body. The actors are brought back to a state of a fundamental grounding, beating the earth with their feet for hours as they walk round and round in circles, defeating physical pain. A special emphasis is laid on the feet because the consciousness of the body's communication with the earth leads to a greater awareness of all physical junctions of the body. As a prime receiver of stimuli, the feet, when stimulated, spread their energy throughout the whole body. As Terzopoulos explains: 'A performer begins to produce a cycle with his feet. In Asian medicine, a precise connection is made between an area of the body, the organs and a zone of the feet. When the feet are rubbed, these nerve-endings are warmed and if it is done over an hour, the diaphragm is stimulated which sets energy free. This energy rises to the head. ...All the nerve paths end in the foot and when you dance your feet until they bleed, an explosion goes off. That is all within nature. It is about forgetting your head and letting your feet remember' (2006: 156-157). Under his direction, charging the body involves more than 1800 exercises which take place over several hours each day (2006: 165; Sampatakakis, 2007). In *Bacchai*, the Palace scene is built upon a succession of relaxing periods and moments of high energy that signal the possession that Dionysus takes over the bodies.

3. 'Isolation of body parts / Ekstasis': The heart of *Bacchai* consisted of ecstatic scenes that allow the subjects to depart from their normal identity and perform the Dionysian transgression. The objective of this central phase is to reach a generalized state of ecstasy, during which body parts start to function autonomously, causing the 'abolition of the brain-mouth as the single controlling centre' (Sampatakakis, 2006: 94). While in the previous stage, the

Greek festival of Anastenaria was the historical and ritual incident that induces victory over pain, this part of the biodynamic rehearsal involves the Greek Dance of Pontos as the example to be followed, a model 'in which the hands tremble in a mimesis of flying, while the feet march steadily on the ground. Three different, concurrent movements were explored as the dance of the Chorus: the head is quickly shivering left and right, the hands are up with the palms trembling loosely open, while the feet are either fixed to the ground in the kabuki semi-squatting position, or with the knees shaking uncontrollably. Anatomically, the isolation of the pelvic area (vertex of the triangle of corporeal forces) produces the effect of trance: the separation of three independent axes (torso feet, right-left hand, head), moving in different directions and speeds, gives the impression of emotional possession' (2006: 94-96). All this resulted in amazing images presented in the dance of the chorus during the Palace Miracle.

4. 'Re-signification': When relocated in the bodies on stage and expressed in the sacred roundness of the circle, the movements of the actors acquire a new and higher dimension of wholeness, while relying upon energy that no longer reposes in a situation of logocentric consciousness. Head, belly, arms, legs, feet, all assume rhythms and spasms of their own, giving rise to new patterns and kinetic morphemes that act like the Indian *mudras*, engendering autonomous processes and new behavioural associations. The body reaches a new wholeness, experienced as holiness, temporarily turning actors into gods, opening the wondrous feeling of the unleashing of energy over the whole of the body. This state was the dream cherished by Artaud, ever since he saw the Balinese dancers at the Paris world exhibition in 1931.

5. 'Restoration': The return from a state of Otherness to a state of 'normality', guided by more pronounced processes of consciousness, brings the actor back to the perception of the theatrical part he was supposed to play. As at the end of every biodynamic process, the subject awakes from a journey through an unknown landscape which has had the ability to cleanse and restore him. Meeting Dionysus, the prime figure of cruelty and archetypal violence, asks for a *katharsis* of body and mind, not only in the afflicted body of the actor but also in the astonished reactions of the audience.

And as Savvas Stroumpou, one of Terzopoulos' actors, remarks: 'The director insists that the performer has to 'bear' the tragic material instead of psychologically interpreting it. In the work of the Attis theatre the laws of the bourgeois theatre are completely eliminated. The actors are not slaves of their poor feelings of everyday life, which derive straight from the cortex of the brain. Instead they strive for the liberating vital energy of the body, considered as the basis of embodying and codifying the tragic material'. And he specifies: 'The actor continuously works through difficult body stances and demanding physical exercises to attain this optimal psycho-physical state where his/her breathing originates from the pelvis. This 'descent' to the pelvis through breathing permits the triangle, containing the three basic energy zones (1st the anus-base of the spine, 2nd the genital area, 3rd the lower diaphragm) to move autonomously. As a consequence the energy circulates freely throughout the body and the performer experiences a sense of physical freedom and happiness. Optimally, his/her creative imagination is set free and the body is ready to release unknown amounts of energy and produce new codes of expression' (2006: 231). In terms of the Indian theory of chakras, these three levels of deploying energy are the first three chakras. They are described in the holistic medicine of Indian yoga, which refers to the origins and circulation of energy, and which was conceived and written down some 3000 years ago (*muladhara*, the root chakra; *svadhisthana*, located at the pelvic plexus, and *manipura*, the solar plexus, located above the navel).

In this perspective, neither Agave nor any other character is strictly limited to the demands of an Aristotelian vision of theatre. On the contrary, every actor and actress is important for the part they play in the birth of a new creature, a body in constant exchange and production of energy, an illustration of the double snake that Indian philosophy called *kundalini*, constantly at work from the lower back to the top of the head.

Maybe we in the West have become such poor creatures because we wanted to see characters exclusively exchanging words and expressing so called realistic feelings on stage, forgetting in the meantime that we are also bodies, incarnating energy that circulates within us and fulfils us continuously, uniting spine and head, a journey that circulates around our seven major glands and nerve centres. Maybe Egyptian culture, with its constant reminder of the double belonging of the eye of Horus, the divine Sun be-

tween the cobra (Wadjet) and the vulture (Nekhbet), was not, after all, a bad symbol to illustrate humankind's double nature and belonging.

III. The mythological level.

In this third approach, I would like to examine briefly some interpretations of the same Agave as discussed in recent studies on mythology. I ask myself to what extent recent investigation of the mythical persona of Agave goes along with the turn taken by Terzopoulos. Can this new interpretation of theatre in a biodynamic sense be corroborated by similar interpretations of myth as such?

In myth, the scene is set in Thebes, 'the place either of imprisonment or exile, (...) the city of negation and death' as Froma Zeitlin (1990: 147) calls it. Agave is married to Echion (the snake-man), one of the five Spartoi ('sown-men', earth-born warriors, which sprang fully grown, armed and ready for battle from the sown teeth of a dragon). By the end of the tragedy, both her father Cadmus and mother Harmonia are transformed into snakes. At first glance, snakes enough in the family, one would think! But in fact there are numerous other metamorphoses, losses and changes of personal Selves, all ending in variations of *sparagmos* or in radical changes of status (human/divine/animal):

- Pentheus, son of Agave and Echion, returns to Thebes, decapitated, though in Agave's opinion, she is carrying the head of a lion;
- Actaeon, son of Autonoe and Aristaeus: transformed into a stag, and later on torn apart by his own hunting dogs;
- Melicertes, son of Ino and Athamas: thrown into the sea and changed into a dolphin-riding sea-god Palaimon;
- Oedipus, descendant of Polydorus, Labdacus and Laius: loses his eyes and former identity;
- all citizens of Thebes: condemned never to return to Thebes again;
- Cadmus, the dragon slayer, and his wife Harmonia end their lives as serpents themselves, leaving town and civilisation, and getting lost in the woods.

Four of Cadmus' grandchildren lose their human consciousness and return to an animalistic state, a world of instincts and primordial chaos, a

state of not-fully-being. Agave, just like all other Thebans, does not know where to go, what to do. Like the others, she collapses into a more animalistic, instinctive stage, victim of the violent appearance of Dionysus. As Zeitlin mentions, Pentheus 'discovers his true identity as the son of the autochthon, Ekhion', while Dionysus is 'sending Kadmos and his wife back to the beginning, or, more accurately, to a stage before the beginning. They are to regress back to a state and a form that preceded the very foundation of the city. In fact, they will be turned into serpents like the serpent of Ares whom Kadmos slew in order to establish Thebes, sowing the dragon's teeth from which the autochthons sprang. And Kadmos, the Phoenician and bringer of culture, will revert back to the negative side of his barbarian origins, since he is destined in the future to bring a foreign army to invade Greek territory' (1990: 153).

What is at stake here is the meaning of this regression, and contemporary investigation of myth takes this problem more seriously than ever. From the fourth century B.C. on, and especially since the Enlightenment, it has been common to interpret stories of old dragons, archaic snakes, or the chaos daemon (see the wild beast of Genesis) in a somewhat triumphalist, euphemistic and euhemerism manner. The mythos-logos debate, conducted at many moments in western history, was believed to have been settled once and for all and translated into a definite victory for *logos* over *mythos*, of Zeus over the Furies (see *Oresteia*), of the sky-god over the mother goddess. Serpent Gods were demonized, Christianized and expelled from paradise, identified as the Devil and the supreme seducer.

The best possible illustration of all these transitions is given by the mythology of Delphi itself. In the beginning there were Delphi and the Python. At the start of every Genesis-story and every archaic cosmogony, literally all over the world, there is the quest for a centre and a battle against archaic forces. In Greece, Delphi served as the place in the collective imagination and memory where the old forces met the younger ones, where the dragon or the ancient deity, revered all over the Near and Far East, was superseded by gods of a newer consciousness. Among both our Indo-European and Semitic predecessors, the serpent had been revered as the supreme god. But the history of the West, both in its pagan and Christian versions, turned into a specific construction that never got tired of discrediting the oldest layers of consciousness. This is the story of the serpent deity we know as Python who predated the Olympian Apollo, of Medusa who chal-

lenged the Olympian Athena and of Typhon who was the last chaos demon to provoke the Olympian Zeus.

However, upon closer inspection, and relying upon Austin's very astute analysis of Greek mythology, both Zeus and Apollo are 'the dragon slayer and the dragon, both in one'. In the traditional interpretation of the Delphian Apollo, the dragon was an enemy to be chased from the oracular place. However, Python, as its name reveals, both means 'he who achieved understanding' and 'the rotting carcass' of the slain serpent. It is not by accident, then, that both interpretations of the name of the Python, he 'who really sees', and he 'who supersedes the rotten carcass', confirm the names given to Buddha: 'he who achieved understanding' and he who 'reached enlightenment by meditating on disease and decay'. It is typical of the western tradition that this latter interpretation had to go underground and leave its full expression to eastern religions (Austin, 1990: 95).

However, '[i]f Python is the Enlightened One, the treasure that the Delphic dragon guards is consciousness itself. With the old god dead, the new god can rest secure in the belief that all wisdom originates with him. But Python, whose death is celebrated in the great Panhellenic festival at Delphi, whose name is attached to the site, to the cult, to the priestess, and to Apollo himself, attests that every pilgrimage to Delphi, the site of understanding, is an encounter with the old serpent who lurks in the new god's shadow. Though slain, Python does not die as mortals die' (Austin, 1990: 95-96). Apollo himself becomes the Python god, honouring the old serpent in his name and cult and regenerating it in the cult and very person of his son, Asclepius, the dragon god who as a snake chose his shrine on the borders of Rome's Tiber. In antiquity some even argued that Apollo and Python were related as brothers. And as Austin remarks (*ib.*): 'whatever of the old dragon's nature Apollo did not appropriate was transferred to Dionysos, Apollo's unruly brother, to whom Apollo was obliged to surrender his lordship of the Delphic shrine during the winter months. Dionysos is the old serpent born anew every year'.

If there is one place in Greece where the reptile and the 'reptilian brain' were kept alive, then it certainly is Delphi. But unfortunately, the survival of Greek mythology in the West has been the history of a long process of reduction, atrophy and purification, since it was almost solely the illuminated male deities who were appreciated in a dominantly patriarchal and apollonian society.

Camille Paglia, in her much debated book on the constitution of western male and female identity (*Sexual Personae*, 1990), elaborates the difference between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, not as two main aesthetic patterns as Nietzsche did, but rather as the reflection of two totally different patterns in nature. Since perfect harmony in our human lives is impossible to reach, she argues, Greek tragedy can be seen as a specific western male attitude that chooses to get 'through action to identity' in which every action undertaken by male tragic characters is a 'route of escape from nature'. Therefore, in her opinion, the actions of tragic women are always 'under a chthonian cloud. Woman introduces untransformed cruelty into tragedy because she is the problem that the genre is trying to correct'. And further, 'art reflects on and resolves the eternal human dilemma of order versus energy. In the west, Apollo and Dionysus strive for victory. Apollo makes for boundary lines that are civilization but that lead to convention, constraint, oppression. Dionysus is energy unbound, mad, callous, destructive, wasteful. Apollo is law, history, the dignity and safety of custom and form. Dionysus is the *new*, exhilarating but rude, sweeping all away to begin again. Apollo is a tyrant, Dionysus a vandal. Every excess breeds its counterreaction' (1990: 72-98).

In order to understand what happened to the house of Cadmus and to Agave in particular, Paglia situates their story within the whole network of Dionysian associations, and therefore integrates it into a more complete understanding of Greek myth. Volatile and mobile as he is, 'Dionysus is *hoi polloi*, the Many. He is daemonic energy and plural identity', *Lusios*, the Liberator (Dodds), who incorporates the fundamental and necessary principle at work in nature of tearing apart, since nature constantly "lives by sparagmos". Nature itself 'is forever tearing apart in order to remake', she concludes (1990: 95- 97).

Hence Agave is a mother who, under the spell of Dionysian force, sends back her son to nature, dissolves human identity and takes part in the cosmic brutality of nature. But seen as part of the continuously competing Apollonian and Dionysian forces both in nature and culture, the part she plays, just like her sisters and all descendants of the house of Cadmus, is just a small but nevertheless completely understandable function in a much bigger network of significations, by which a complete vision of personal and collective identity was constructed in Greek culture.

IV. Biology and Cognitive psychology

Finally, I turn to biology and its tripartite division of the human brain. Its differentiation into a reptilian, old mammalian (or limbic) and neomammalian brain (the neocortex) implies three different forms of subjectivity and intelligence, with their own perceptions of time and space. One of the major questions at stake here is the coherence of the human subject. This is another aspect of the already mentioned *logos/mythos* discussion, but one that focuses now on the question of whether or not the human person necessarily constitutes a unity: in religions that require a revelation, Man is believed to be shaped by God and therefore ultimately credited with characteristics of unity and teleology. However, dependent on the type of cosmology, philosophy, psychology or scientific approach one relies upon, answers to this question widely diverge. By and large, a discussion between them even is either impossible or simply not wanted. Just consider the following three branches of psychology (illustrating the history of just one discipline), in which the threefold dimension of our brain is interpreted in terms of different basic metaphors or worldviews, mostly considered irreducible to each other: behaviourists analyse behavioural patterns and conditioning processes in men and animals, psychoanalysts study emotions and motivations, and cognitive psychologists deal with problems of storage and interpretation of information. More specifically, is it not disgraceful for religions of revelation and for Cartesian humanism to accept how contemporary cognitive psychologists explain the functioning of the human mind in terms of three types of brains that constantly interfere with each other and connect us with the lowest creatures on earth (reptiles) those cursed by Yahweh himself (Vroon, 2006: 13-47).

The western dream has been to forget the existence of the reptilian brain and to stress the beneficent activities of the neocortex, not acknowledging that our brain has to do its utmost best to coordinate all our heterogeneous and disrupting mental and emotional activities, keeping constantly at work a trillion neurones in an enormously complicated network (LeDoux, 1996; Servan-Schreiber, 2003). One of the leading cognitive neuroscientists of the moment, Antonio Damasio, in his first book *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (1992), was proud to present a scientific refutation of René Descartes' famous seventeenth century dualism of mind/body. His position has been reformulated by Kelly Bulkeley in her

book *The Wondering Brain. Thinking about Religion with and beyond Cognitive Neuroscience* as follows: 'In contrast to Descartes' view that the rational soul is distinct from the physical body, Damasio argues that all our feelings, sensations, and experiences are products of the neural workings of the brain. Damasio's theory rejects Cartesian dualism and affirms in its place a forthright materialism that defines all mental phenomena as the secondary after-effects of natural bodily processes' (2005: 25). Put in plain and simple terms, there is no primacy of reason over emotion and the highest form of human consciousness is not pure rationality without any taint of emotionality. To put it even more simply: reason and emotion cannot be separated (Bulkely, 2005: 26).

If man's oldest brain is basically reptilian (aiming at occupying territory, hunting, mating, breeding, choosing leaders), the limbic brain (with its influence on emotions) and the neomammalian (bringing into consciousness processes of conscious perception, creating languages, gods and rituals) both constitute additional and conflicting parts. These three parts cause the conflicts in our brains but nevertheless invite us to create patterns of unity. Of course, it is not by accident that many Greek philosophers, from Platon's *Phaedrus* and *Politeia* on, already conceived this tripartition in terms of the three parts of the soul: *epithumethikon*, *thumoeides*, and *logistikon*.

But of course, the deployment of the neocortex never succeeded in radically supplanting the functions of the old brain, only to modify and enrich it, introducing 'analysis, conjecture, and hypothesis into a process once automatic and instinctual. With its symbols and signifiers the neocortex evaluates, and thus brings into conscience the processes that would otherwise lie below the threshold of conscious perception. The neocortex creates gods. The conflicts, which figure so prominently in our myths, are the shadow play of the conflict within our brains, which are nature's experiment to adapt three separate structures, with their conflicting modes of perception and behaviour, into a single harmonious organ. The neocortex introduced conflict into the human organism by imposing will upon impulse, cogitation upon instinct, evaluation upon sensation' (Austin, 1990: 103). At this point, it is worth recalling Savvas Stroumpos' formulation of Terzopoulos' training method: 'The actors are not slaves of their poor feelings of everyday life, which derive straight from the cortex of the brain. Instead they strive for the liberating vital energy of the body, considered as the basis of embodying and codifying the tragic material' (2006: 231).

Camille Paglia, in her *Sexual Personae*, explicitly contradicts the idea that the reptilian brain is fiction, since it does not stop manifesting itself regularly to contemporary women: 'Biologists speak of man's reptilian brain, the oldest part of our nervous system, killer survivor of the archaic era. I intend that the premenstrual woman incited to snappishness or rage is hearing signals from the reptilian brain. All hell breaks loose, the hell of chthonian nature that modern humanism defies and represses. In every premenstrual woman struggling to govern her temper, sky-cult wars again with earth-cult. Apollo's great opponent Dionysus is ruler of the chthonian whose law is procreative femaleness'. In her opinion, the daemonic archetypes of woman filling world mythology represent the uncontrollable nearness of nature (1991: 13). 'Apollonianism', she argues, 'cold and absolute, is the west's sublime refusal. The Apollonian is a male line drawn against the dehumanizing magnitude of female nature. Dionysus was identified with liquids — blood, sap, milk, wine. The Dionysian is nature's chthonian fluidity. Apollo, on the other hand, gives form and shape, marking off one being from another. All artefacts are Apollonian. Melting and union are Dionysian; separation and individuation, Apollonian. Every boy who leaves his mother to become a man is turning the Apollonian against the Dionysian' (1991: 28-30).

Therefore, she concludes: 'Our brains are split, and brain is split from body. The quarrel between Apollo and Dionysus is the quarrel between the higher cortex and the older limbic and reptilian brains' (1991: 96).

And as Austin remarks: 'The serpent is the signifier of what is most alien, yet this horrifying Other is at the same time most near and most desirable. The Oriental theories of kundalini and our modern theories of the tripartite brain converge to intimate that the mythical combat between the serpent and the Olympian patriarch may well be the representation of the conflict deep within ourselves, between the old brain and the new, dating perhaps from the time when vertebrates parted company with reptiles and insects, and the one party took the path toward instinct, the other toward intellect' (1991: 7).

VI. Conclusions

The topic of Agave, as a typical Maenadic woman, remains a difficult one to cope with in an so-called enlightened western civilization, a civilization that aspires to live by the supremacy of logos and head and that suffers from the non-integration of the rest of the body. Agave, as a literary character, re-

veals how a woman can be tossed between different states of mind, losing her 'normal' self and how she penetrates into older layers of instinctive life. Greek mythology kept this wavering between states alive, telling stories about snakes and chthonian monsters, about the functioning of primal and raw energy and about the slowly developing consciousness of creatures which helps them to walk straight and look at the sky. This awareness has been expressed in the most diverse ways by a whole network of values and propositions based upon the antagonism Dionysus vs. Apollo. However, for about 2500 years, Dionysus has been tamed, cursed, misused, misunderstood, mostly on purpose by those who have enlisted in an ideology of monism, essentialism and onto-theology, disciples of ONE truth, one science, one religion, one sexuality.

This was the basic truth that Theodoros Terzopoulos tackles in his productions, also the reason why he asks to pay attention to dimensions that were misinterpreted, covered up, feared. His Agave no longer obeys the principles of a logocentric staging and representation, but goes so much deeper, looking for contact with the deepest layers of memory and human energy.

By staging and energizing Agave in her Maenadic state of mind and drastically reducing the number of lines spoken, he makes us ask many questions. Is the creation of tragedy not one of the most convincing techniques to illustrate the working of the neocortex, as an Apollonian technique to create order in disorder? Is tragedy not an excellent attempt to arm us against the ever-emerging force of nature and to discuss the threefold processes of the brain at work here? As the three parts of the brain never fully constitute a unity, but like three different 'biological computers' (MacLean) always fight/mitigate/inspire each other, tragedy perfectly illustrates the fundamentally cleaved and split brain which obliges us to assume an everlasting schizoid existence (torn between schizophysiology and schizopsychology):

— as a permanent evocation of our instinctive drives (sex and reproduction, hunger, territory, aggression, violence), tragedy speaks about the primary experiences that are phylogenetically stored in our warehouse;

— as a field covered with emotions, tragedy also illustrates the functioning of our mammalian or limbic brain, and deals with emotions that are not exposed in a direct, but rather indirect way (filtered

and rendered through words and symbols, though still strong enough to lead to a *katharsis* of emotions);

— as a literary plot and invention of thematic lines and characters, tragedy engages our sense of order and clarity, and our proclivity for intellectual exercise, thereby illustrating the functioning of the latest part of the brain.

The history of tragedy in the West privileges the second and third storage compartments of our warehouse, and restrains, as much as possible, contact with the first one. However, Greek tragedy, not a universal, but a Western invention and cultural product, has proved to be an excellent vehicle to remain in touch with all three of them and to illustrate the idea that there is much unity in our nonsense, and, vice versa, that there is much nonsense in our presumed unity. Greek tragedy explicitly deals with savagery in ourselves, with the stranger and the Other, with fear and horror, with the Freudian Id, the Jungian Shadow, the Lacanian Real. Therefore, Greek tragedy is ‘radical theatre’ (Rehm, 2003), always tearing apart what one believes to be one and simple, and hence first and foremost Dionysian.

It is for these reasons that, as observed by Marianne McDonald, productions made by Theodoros Terzopoulos are dangerous: they reveal ‘mysteries about ourselves, dangerous mysteries. Theatre is nothing, if not dangerous’ (2000: 15). The theatre that Terzopoulos makes refuses to be guarded and protected by a city of words. On the contrary, it runs across all forms of traditional humanistic theatre that often enough resulted in what Peter Brook called ‘deadly theatre’. His theatre is revolutionary, announcing a new and more global vision of man and his history, not simply repeating what a civilisation based upon the functioning of the neocortex has produced, but creating each time again, a *parole*, ‘a speech of kinetic morphemes’, as Sampatakakis defined it, one that refers to ‘pre-expressive areas of knowledge’ (2011: 116). And therefore, of all places in Greece, it is with good reason that Delphi is considered the *omphalos* of the world. It is in Delphi that the old reptilian monster continuously meets the younger god of consciousness. It is Delphi that connects us with our past and helps us to interpret the one and only ultimate lesson for humanity: *Gnothi seauton*, ‘Know thyself’, inviting us to understand that this appeal also includes ‘know where you came from’.

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