"What sort of artistic style would there be which one might derive from the idea of the spectator, for which one might consider the “spectator in himself” the essential form? The spectator without a play is a contradictory idea.”

- Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VII

**Aims:**
To try to solve the historical mystery of the chorus, look at it from the perspectives of ritual and participation, and to propose that it has resurfaced and evolved in another, surprising form alongside the theatre.
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Summary

The chorus was a key part in Attican tragedy, but had waned in importance by the time Aristotle wrote his Poetics, and subsequently disappeared altogether. However, before the Golden Age of Tragedy, drama had no actors, set design or dialogue, only a chorus. Even before that chorus was meant less as a performative and more as a ritual activity.

This paper uses modern understanding of rituals, performance, and participation to look at a possible explanation for the historical context of the chorus, and its very nature.

The core claim is that Aristotle and 2300 years of subsequent scholars have been mistaken in trying to understand the chorus from the perspective of the so-called passive arts: thinking there is a performance and an audience and that the only point of the performance is to be seen by the audience.

Chorus Novus suggests that the original point of the chorus was not to affect the audience but the members of the chorus themselves. The development of tragedy in the coming decades and centuries put more influence in the experience of the audience, and there was less and less demand for the experience provided by the chorus. With the disappearance of the chorus, the transformation from participatory ritual to passive drama was complete.

Comparison between games, rituals, ritual dramas and participatory dramas of today and earlier times are made.

Contemporary participatory storytelling provides an interesting view point into the chorus and allows the scholar of today possibilities not possible for the Romanticist researchers who most troubled themselves with the chorus.

The chorus of Attican tragedy was participatory drama, and getting to know it better opens stronger possibilities also for understanding the participatory storytelling of the 21st century.

Kiivistelmä


Tämä paperi soveltaa nyky-ymmärtämistä rituaaleista, esityksestä ja osallistumisesta selvittääkseen kuoron mahdollisen historialllisen kontekstin ja olemuksen.

Keskeinen väite on, että Aristoteles ja 2300 vuotta hänen jälkeensä tulleita tutkijoita ovat erheyneet yritysessä tulkita kuoroa niin sanotun passiivisen taitteen perspektiivistä: ajatuksesta, että on esitys ja on yleisö, ja että esityksen yleisö on tulla yleisön näkemäksi.

Chorus Novus esittää, että kuoron alkuperäinen tarkoitus ei ollut tehdä vaikutusta yleisöön vaan kuoron jäseniin itsensä. Tragedian kehitys seuranneina vuosikymmeninä ja -satoina lisäsi yleisön kokemuksen merkitystä, ja kuorossa olemissa kokemukselle oli vähemmän tilasta. Kuoron kadotessa oli siirtymä osallistuvasta rituaalista passiiviseen draamaan täydellinen.

Tutkielmassa verrataan kuoroa tämän ja eilispäivän peleihin, rituaaleihin, rituaalidraamoihin ja osallistaviin draamoihin.

Nykyaajan osallistava tarinankerronta tarjoaa kiinnostavan näkökulman kuoroon. Näkökulman, joka ei ollut mahdollinen romantiikan ajan tutkijoille, jotka eniten vaivasivat itseään kuoron ymmärtämisellä.

Attikalaisen tragedian kuoro oli osallistavaa draamaa ja sen parempi tuntemus avaa mahdollisuksia ymmärtää myös 2000-luvun osallistavaa tarinankerrontaa.

Key words chorus, ritual, tragedy, participation, participatory drama, theatre

Avainsanat kuoro, rituaali, tragedia, osallistuminen, osallistava draama, teatteri
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1. INTRODUCTION

This research paper is an attempt to solve a 2300 year old mystery by looking at hieroglyphics, ancient plays, works of Greek and Byzantine historians, and wall mosaics from the ruins of Pompei, as well as contemporary archaeology, anthropology, media studies, ritual studies, and the author's personal experiences in the fields of transmedia, rituals, roleplaying games, and other fields of participatory culture.

Most of contemporary western storytelling from Hollywood films to Russian epic novels is based on theories built upon Aristotle's *Poetics*: You have the audience (spectator, reader), you have the story being told (the president saves his family, a poor student wallows in guilt after committing murder) and the medium through which it is told (movie, book) by the creators (filmmakers, author).

This, it has long been believed, fits in perfectly with what Aristotle wrote about the tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides and Ayschulus: You have the people on their seats in the amphitheatre (audience), watching a play based on Greek mythology or history (the story), being played by one to three actors who wear masks (the medium), and the script for all this is written by the poet (creator).

However, there is an element in Aristotle's description of Attican tragedy that he cannot explain, and which we tend to ignore: the chorus.

Aristotle was the first of many theorists who have tried to explain the chorus, but I propose it cannot be explained in the framework Aristotle provided us. It is not meant for the audience at all! But looking at the chorus as a participatory thing which is meant for the tragic dancers in the chorus themselves, it suddenly becomes much more sensible.

In this paper I will go through several attempts at explaining the chorus, then take a historical look at the development of tragedy from ritual dithyrambs, and use understanding of rituals to explain dithyrambs and the chorus, and finally, ask the
question of whether the chorus could have been a participatory ritual rather than a performance meant for passive spectators.

Much of this research is more like detective work since many key texts have disappeared in time. On the other hand, archaeology, anthropology, religious studies, and the increased practice of participatory arts provides us with tools and knowledge not available just decades ago.

1.1. About myself and the subjective style of analysis

As the topic of this work includes the experience of participating in the chorus and in rituals, it cannot be discussed with complete objectivity or measured empirically. We can look at historical and modern sources, and read descriptions about participating, but reading a description of an experience is not the same as experiencing it yourself.

Therefore this work shares methods from theology, performance studies, experimental anthropology, and game theory, and seeks to understand participation from first-hand experience, and does not dismiss subjective findings. However, these are used to complement and particularize written sources, not as autotelic proofs.

In that light I introduce myself so my experiences are more readily understandable. I am a writer and a participation designer. I have written traditional works such as novels, screenplays, comics, and stage plays. I have designed, run and taken part in participatory works such as larps, rituals, roleplaying games, interactive theatre plays, immersive theatre, treasure hunts, and transmedia. I have also written extensively about designing larps and playing in them.

The main sources of my relevant subjective experiences come from larps.

By larps I mean live action role plays. They are a participatory medium where players take on a fictional role, "character", for the duration of the event, and relate to each other through those roles. The larp is designed to be full of potential for drama, the actual course of the drama is determined through the actions of the participants. Larps
typically last from a couple of hours to several days, and can have a number of participants ranging from a handful to a few thousand. Most larps have no outside audience to observe the events, but everything only exists for the participants of the larp.

I have played in hundreds of larps over twenty years, designed and run dozens both professionally and for pleasure. I have lectured on larps, thought larp design, and written about them in journals, magazines, and books.

To read more about particular kinds of high profile larps, including some designed by me, I recommend the book *Nordic Larp* (Stenros & Montola (eds.), 2010). To read more about larp design and theory, I recommend starting with *The Foundation Stone of Nordic Larp* (Saitta, Holm-Andersen & Back (eds.), 2014).

For following my reasoning, it is not necessary to be a scholar on larps or participation, but hopefully this gives some confidence for my subsequent claims to know what participatory drama or rituals feel like.

2. THEORIES ON THE CHORUS

*Attican tragedy* from 500-300 BC consisted of one to three actors and a chorus of up to fifty men. The actors would wear masks, play different characters, and recite dialogue and monologues written by the poet, who was the writer-director-composer of the tragedy.

The members of the chorus, also called *the tragic dancers*, would also wear masks, and play a group of some sort, such as "the elders" or "the women". The chorus would sing songs accompanied by a type of pan flute called *the aulos* or the lyre. Sometimes the chorus could also have dialogue with one or more characters.

Attica was the area around Athens, so Attic tragedy basically means tragedies performed in Athens. Tragedies typically premiered at the religious City Dionysia festival as part of the games. Awards were given for the group with the best play.
After that the poet, actors, props, masks, the set, and the chorus would be packed on
carts to go on tour playing their tragedies all around the ancient world.

During the two hundred years of Attican tragedy the chorus as well as tragedy as a
whole went through drastic changes, and analyzing anything at the end of that era
might not provide great insight into how things were at the beginning of it.

The function of the chorus may have ranged from a frenzied ritual to a narrator, from
musical song-and-dance troupe to an actor. We will review some theories to gain an
understanding of what scholars have said about the chorus.

2.1. Aristotle on the chorus

Poetics is a transcription of Aristotle's lectures on writing tragedies, probably put
together by one of his students around 335 BC. These would probably have been
fairly recent lectures, within the last few decades. However, the tragedies Aristotle
uses as his examples all premiered 70-164 years before the publication of Poetics, and
22-115 before he was born, so Aristotle had no first hand experience of them at the
time.

As we shall later see, tragedy was very much a new form of art, much like cinema is
today. If one imagines trying to analyze the black-and-white silent films of Chaplin or
Eisenstein based on only having seen 3D 48fps full color surround sound remakes of
them, one can perhaps grasp at the difficulty Aristotle must have had making exact
analyses of the plays of Aeschylus.

This is what Aristotle writes about the chorus in Poetics, translated by Samuel Henry
Butcher in 1902:

“The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should
be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action, in the
manner not of Euripides but of Sophocles. As for the later poets,
their choral songs pertain as little to the subject of the piece as to
that of any other tragedy. They are, therefore, sung as mere interludes – a practice first begun by Agathon [ca. 448-400 BCA]. Yet what difference is there between introducing such choral interludes, and transferring a speech, or even a whole act, from one play to another.”

– Poetics, Part XVIII. Butcher translation

Albert Weiner (1980) has discussed this chapter in its different translations. Weiner points out that not all of Sophocles' choruses are dramatic, either, or in any way take the plot forward, using Oedipus Rex as an example. He points out: "Either Aristotle is dead wrong when, referring to [Oedipus Rex] as the model tragedy, he suggests that the chorus should be regarded as one of the actors (as is clearly the case with Aeschylus's tragedies) or our interpretation/translation of the Poetics is wrong. Our test of the dramatic-ness of [Oedipus Rex] has shown it to be a total failure."

If Aristotle did not mean that the tragic chorus should be regarded as a collective character what did he mean? Perhaps the first clue that a reinterpretation of this point is necessary is the very fact that he has said so little about the chorus. It would seem that because the chorus's lines in even the least choric tragedies comprise such a large portion of the total lines (not less than 2/5), that Aristotle would have devoted at least a proportionate space to it in the Poetics.

Weiner, Albert (1980): The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus

Even though the Butcher translation is the most widely spread one, American classicist Gerald Else provided a more precise translation in 1967:

"And one [the tragic poet] should go on the premise that the chorus also is one of his actors: it should be a part of the whole enterprise and an aid to him in winning the competition, not the way it was to Euripides but rather the way it was to Sophocles."

– Poetics, Part XVIII. Else translation
Did Aristotle mean the chorus should be one of the characters (such as "Women of Mycenae" as in Sophocles' *Electra*, or "Persian elders" as in Ayschulus' *The Persians*), or that they should merely be given attention in order to win the dramatic competition for which the tragedies were written and where they premiered.

The *Poetics* rarely refers to production, and when it does it is only in passing, and then almost in a casual manner. This fact in itself might go far toward explaining why Aristotle has said so little about the chorus: *he did not consider it a dramatic element*. He considered it an element of production. By interpreting the above passage to mean that Aristotle considered the chorus to be like one of the actors insofar as it should be a part of the whole enterprise and an aid to winning the competition, we suddenly realize that he saw the chorus as a practical element. ... A paraphrase of the passage might go something like this: 'The poet should compose his choruses with the same care and attention that he devotes to his actors, for if he hopes to win the competition the whole must reflect great care. Sophocles, who took as much care with his choruses as he did with his actors, won many competitions, while Euripides, who did not, won few. Euripides' choral odes frequently had little to do with what was going on in the plot, while Sophocles' were well integrated. Nowadays it is even worse. Agathon began the practice of inserting songs into his tragedies which had nothing to do with what was going on in the plays, and that is just as bad as taking songs from one tragedy and inserting them in another.'

Weiner, Albert (1980): The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus

This seems a plausible explanation for what Aristotle may have meant. However, Weiner joins most scholars in finding the idea that Aristotle may have been wrong an impossible suggestion, and like them tries to figure out what he may have meant. For the sake of academic clarity, the author of this paper tries to maintain the possibility that Aristotle might have been wrong about some things.
Even if Weiner was right in explaining Aristotle, this does not really help us get to what Aristotle might have thought the chorus was. Except in the sense that it was or was not a part of the story, and it should be designed with care to assist in winning the dramatic competition.

But let us now look at other attempts at explaining the chorus. (One of the key texts would have been a prose treatise on the chorus by Sophocles himself, but unfortunately that has been lost in time.)

2.2. No singing unless it advances plot

In 19 BC the Roman poet Horace wrote a long poem Ars Poetica about writing drama. He gives much advice on style, originality, tradition, and many other things, but also on chorus.

Actoris partes Chorus, officiumque virile
Defendat: neu quid medios intercinat actus,
Quod non proposito conducat et haereat apte.
Ille bonis faveatque, et concilietur amicis,
Et regat iratos, et amet peccare timentes:
Ille dapes laudet mensae brevis, ille salubrem
Justitiam, legesque, et apertis otia portis:
Ille tegat commisia, Deosque precetur et oret,
Ut redeat miseris, abeat fortuna superbis.

Horace: Ars Poetica (19 BC)

An actor's part the Chorus should sustain,
Gentle in all its office, and humane;
Chaunting no Odes between the acts, that seem
Unapt, or foreign to the general theme.
Let it to Virtue prove a guide and friend,
Curb tyrants, and the humble good defend!
Loud let it praise the joys that Temperance waits;
Of Justice sing, the real health of States;
The Laws; and Peace, secure with open gates!
Faithful and secret, let it heav'n invoke
To turn from the unhappy fortune's stroke,
And all its vengeance on the proud provoke!

Translated by George Colman, 1783.

The Chorus should play an actor’s part, energetically,
And not sing between the acts unless it advances,
And is also closely related to the plot.
It should favour the good, and give friendly advice,
Guide those who are angered, encourage those fearful
Of sinning: praise the humble table’s food, sound laws
And justice, and peace with her wide-open gates:
It should hide secrets, and pray and entreat the gods
That the proud lose their luck, and the wretched regain it.

Translated by A. S. Kline (2005)

Horace wrote in a time of a revival of classic Greek tragedy in Rome centuries after
even Aristotle, and after centuries of Roman remakes and adaptations of Greek plays
where the chorus was removed. But in Horace's time the Chorus was brought back.

However, where Aristotle wrote about the chorus in ambiguity, Horace is dead sure
that the function of the chorus is to sing songs, make commentary on the plot, and
help the audience pass judgement on the characters. So the function of the chorus by
Horace's time, at least according to him, was 100% related to the way the audience
saw it.

Like Aristotle, Horace also frowns upon extra "stage numbers" where the chorus is
used during interludes for singing songs unrelated to the plot. (However, these may
well have served a function for the chorus if not for the audience.)

It seems that during Horace's time the chorus was less like the chorus of Greek
tragedy, and more like a song and dance group of contemporary musical theatre.
2.3. The ideal spectator

August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845) was a German Romanticist poet and philosopher DATES, who wrote about his views on the Chorus. First he gives a summary on prior theories:

Modern critics ... have either believed that [the chorus's] chief object was to prevent the stage from ever being altogether empty, whereas in truth the stage was not at all the proper place for the Chorus; or else they have censured it as a superfluous and cumbersome appendage, expressing their astonishment at the alleged absurdity of carrying on secret transactions in the presence of assembled multitudes. They have also considered it as the principal reason with the Greek tragedians for the strict observance of the unity of place, as it could not be changed without the removal of the Chorus; an act, which could not have been done without some available pretext. Or lastly, they have believed that the Chorus owed its continuance from the first origin of Tragedy merely to accident; and as it is plain that in Euripides, the last of the three great tragic poets, the choral songs have frequently little or no connexion with the fable, and are nothing better than a mere episodical ornament, they therefore conclude that the Greeks had only to take one more step in the progress of dramatic art, to explode the Chorus altogether.

... Modern poets of the first rank have often, since the revival of the study of the ancients, attempted to introduce the Chorus in their own pieces, for the most part without a correct, and always without a vivid idea of its real import. They seem to have forgotten that we have neither suitable singing or dancing, nor, as our theatres are constructed, any convenient place for it. On these accounts it is hardly likely to become naturalized with us.
After that von Schlegel lays out his own views:

Whatever [the chorus] might be and do in each particular piece, it represented in general, first the common mind of the nation, and then the general sympathy of all mankind. In a word, the Chorus is the ideal spectator. It mitigates the impression of a heart-rending or moving story, while it conveys to the actual spectator a lyrical and musical expression of his own emotions, and elevates him to the region of contemplation.

Von Schlegel chose a perspective opposite to that of Horace, while staying within the performer-audience paradigm: the chorus is not an actor but is the ideal spectator, a representative of the audience on the stage.

2.4. The spectator without a play

Before becoming well known as a nihilist philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a philologist who wrote about Greek theatre. His first work was The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music (1872), where he speaks of the Apollonian and Dionysian forces within the artist that need to be combined in order to create perfect drama. (He would later find a contemporary version of this in Richard Wagner’s operas.)

Nietzsche refutes Schlegel’s concept:

This view, combined with the historical tradition that originally the tragedy consisted entirely of the chorus, reveals itself for what it is, a crude and unscholarly, although dazzling, claim.
For we had always thought that the proper spectator, whoever he might be, must always remain conscious that he has a work of art in front of him, not an empirical reality; whereas, the tragic chorus of the Greeks is required to recognize the shapes on the stage as living, existing people. The chorus of Oceanids really believes that they see the Titan Prometheus in front of them and consider themselves every bit as real as the god of the scene. And was that supposed to be the highest and purest type of spectator, a person who, like the Oceanids, considers Prometheus vitally alive and real? Would it be a mark of the ideal spectator to run up onto the stage and free the god from his torment?

... [This] saying of Schlegel’s indicates to us that the completely ideal spectator lets the scenic world work on him, not aesthetically at all, but vitally and empirically.
Friedrich Nietzsche (1872): The Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VII

I find it interesting that in refuting von Schlegel, Nietzsche comes so close to my own understanding, yet fails to take the final step. Yes, the chorus (like the actors) does pretend to believe everything on stage is true. Yes, they are a part of the action, and the world presented on stage. Yes, for them it is, in a way, real.

From the perspective of the audience it serves no point. But for the tragic dancers of the chorus the experience is incredibly powerful.

What sort of artistic style would there be which one might derive from the idea of the spectator, for which one might consider the “spectator in himself” the essential form?
Friedrich Nietzsche (1872): The Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VII

What sort of artistic style, indeed? One based on participation, not observation. Perhaps they were out of vogue in Nietzsche's time, but they are very much alive now.


2.5. Brechtian alienation

Finally, in 1980 Albert Weiner lists some refuted theories regarding the chorus before going on to explain his own:

Many theories have taken on the qualities of known truths and thus are difficult to track down at their sources. One hears somewhere along the way that the chorus exists to elevate commonplace details into universal verities. One hears that the chorus acts as a buffer between actor and audience. This theory seems to imply that there will always be some slack between the two, and it is the role of the chorus to take up that slack. One hears that the chorus exists to transform the passions of the characters, which are necessarily diffused, into sharp focus. One hears that the chorus is an Ideal Audience, that the audience may measure its response to that of the chorus. But this is surely wrong, for frequently choruses misunderstand what is happening in the tragedy while the audience understands, and frequently choruses make comments on the action which seem positively stupid or inappropriate. Furthermore, the Ideal Audience theory must give way to Aristotle, who seems to have said that the chorus must be regarded as an actor. Least, but perhaps not last, one hears that the chorus functions as a decoration. But what, we may well ask, is it supposed to decorate?

Weiner, Albert (1980): The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus

Weiner's refutal of von Schlegel's "ideal spectator" idea seems more credible than Nietzsche's. But what is Weiner's own take on the chorus?

Weiner quotes Bertolt Brecht who describes the effect of watching Chinese actors (Willett, 1964):

The efforts in question were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and
utterances was meant to take place on the conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious.

John Willett (1964, ed. and trans.) Brecht on Theatre. p. 91

Brecht describes his trademark Alienation Effect, which became hugely influential in western avant-garde theatre. That is where Weiner starts drawing parallels:

Western techniques of alienation, however, are dependent less on acting style, the method on which Chinese alienation is based, than on production methods, such as interrupting the action with "irrelevant" songs, dances, and sermons. That is the way it is done in the modern theatre, and I am suggesting that the classic Greek chorus played exactly this role. This theory, then, might go far toward explaining the many choral "interruptions" we find in Greek tragedy. ... how the chorus performs these couplets is more important than that it performs them. The longer choral odes were possibly major interludes of alienation during which the audience could readjust itself, relax, watch the dancing, listen to the music, and perhaps ponder what it had just seen. ... Through this technique the director (we should not forget that the tragic poets were also directors) can simultaneously give an action specific and universal significance.

... Surely the body is the most immediate and direct mode of communication, and it is on this plane, the physical, that the chorus exists. Here, I believe, we may give some credence to Nietzsche's theory that tragedy is a child of the marriage between the opposing attitudes of Apollo and Dionysus. The one represents the intellect, the other the body; one contemplation, the other the dance; one the dream, the other intoxication; and, to introduce Freud and take it a step further, the one the Superego, the other the Id. The secret, it seems to me, of producing Greek tragedy in an essentially Greek manner is to think of the characters as Apollonian and the chorus as Dionysian, to approach each as a distinct entity with a distinct
function, but each being an integral part of the whole production. ... 
The chorus does not act as a conciliating influence between 
character and audience as some believe. To the contrary, it is an 
alienating influence, working to insist on the differences not the 
similarities between the two natures of man. 
Weiner, Albert (1980): The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus

Keeping within the performer-spectator paradigm of so many of his predecessors, 
Weiner proposes the function of the chorus is to not to be an actor or to represent a 
spectator but to separate the audience from feeling too much empathy for the events 
on stage, make them think of the events logically and morally, not emotionally.

This theory remains little discussed, but is telling of how differing trends in theatre 
have also influenced the theories regarding the chorus. (This work is certainly no 
different from that, participatory and immersive theatre being currently in fashion.)

3. RITUAL DRAMA

One thing we do know about Greek tragedy with some certainty, is that it arose out of 
rituals. This is agreed upon by historians, is evident in many plays, is shown in 
surviving ancient visual art, is proven by archaeology, and is also mentioned by 
Aristotle:

    Tragedy - as also Comedy - was at first mere improvisation. The 
one originated with the authors of the Dithyramb [hymns sung and 
danced in honor of Dionysus], the other with those of the phallic 
songs, which are still in use in many of our cities.

    Aristotle: Poetics, Part IV

If tragedy sprung from ritual, then what were those rituals like?

According to Schechner, one cannot always tell performance and ritual apart, and in 
prehistoric times they may well have been one and the same:
Events that can be designated "performance" - dance, music, and/or theatre - occur among all the world's peoples and date back as far as archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians can go.

... 

Evidence indicates that people were performing in caves at least 40,000 years ago. What kinds of performances? The words "dance," "theatre," and "music," or their linguistic equivalents, are not universal, but the behaviors are. Of course, such behaviors vary from place to place, culture to culture, and epoch to epoch. But surviving cave art and prehistoric artifacts indicate that rhythmic movement (dancing), beating of bone-to-bone drums and flute sounds (music), wearing masks and/or costumes while impersonating other humans, animals, or supernaturals (theatre) were going on. No one knows if these paleolithic performers were acting out stories, representing past events, experiences, memories, dreams, or fantasies.

... 

What exactly is "ritual," what "entertainment"? In earlier chapters I have offered some definitions, while insisting that all performances are to some degree both ritual and entertainment. In prehistoric times, most probably even more than today, performances were both ritual and entertainment.

Schechner, Richard:
Performance Studies: An Introduction, p. 221

Schechner's point that all performances are indeed "to some degree both ritual and entertainment" is useful for one following the development of Attican tragedy, as I shall later show.

3.1. Abydos Passion Play
There is a historical genre directly between ritual and drama, appropriately called "ritual drama." Understanding it is key to understanding the origins of Attican tragedy.

Perhaps the best and certainly the oldest surviving description of a ritual drama is from Egypt. The so called Abydos Passion Play (existing from ca. 2500-550 BC) was contemporary to Dionysian dithyrambs, which gave birth to Attican tragedy, and also in the same cultural sphere, making the exchange of ideas and practices possible.

The Abydos Passion Play was a part of the cult of Osiris, which has many similarities with the cult of Dionysus, to such an extent that the two gods are sometimes considered the same. Both gods were part human, were crucified, had a virgin birth, died and were resurrected. These characteristics obviously also fit the figure of Jesus Christ, whose worship would emerge many centuries later. (Freke & Gandy, 2000)

One of the key surviving descriptions of the Abydos Passion Play comes from Greek historian Herodotus, a contemporary of Sophocles and Euripides:

> The few then who have been left about the image, draw a wain with four wheels, which bears the shrine and the image that is within the shrine, and the other priests standing in the gateway try to prevent it from entering, and the men who are under a vow come to the assistance of the god and strike them, while the others defend themselves. Then there comes to be a hard fight with staves, and they break one another's heads, and I am of opinion that many even die of the wounds they receive; the Egyptians however told me that no one died.

Herodotus (440 BC): Histories

Martin Ericsson is a Swedish game and transmedia designer, with decades of experience in creating participatory experiences. According to him (2004), the pharaoh "did pretty much the kind of job a megalomaniac larp organiser would do with a few thousand slaves and unlimited resources, instead of a guy with a van and a loan from the local role-playing guild."
However, as the ritual drama is a participatory event, it is not sufficient to only read an outsider's second-hand description of it. Ideally we would participate in it ourselves, but since we are 2500 years too late, we must read a description from someone who actually participated in the Abydos Passion Play. Conveniently, Ikhernofret, the chief treasurer of pharaoh Senusret III, participated in this event around 1800 BC. His description of the events is preserved to our time in the form of hieroglyphics carved in a stone stola:
The stola of Ik hernofret describing his participation in the Abydos Passion Play.
I acted as beloved son of Osiris-Khentyamentiu. I embellished his great barque of eternity; I made for it a shrine which displays the beauties of Khentyamentiu, in gold, silver, lapis lazuli, bronze, sesnedjem-wood and cedar[?]. I fashioned the gods in his train. I made their shrines anew. I caused the temple priesthood to do their duties, I caused them to know the custom of every day, the festival of the Head-of-the-Year.

... I organized the going forth of Wepwawet when he proceeded to avenge his father; I drove away the rebels from the neshmet-barque; I overthrew the enemies of Osiris; I celebrated the great going forth. I followed the god at his going, and caused the ship to sail, Thoth steering the sailing.

... I avenged Wennefer that day of the great fight; I overthrew all his enemies upon the sandbanks of Nedyt; I caused him to proceed into the great barque. It raised up his beauties, I making glad the people/tomb owners of the Eastern Desert, creating joy amongst the people/tomb owners of the Western Desert; they saw the beauties of the neshmet-barque when it touched land at Abydos, when it brought Osiris-Khentyamentiu to his palace; I followed the god to his house, I carried out his purification and extended his seat and solved the problems of his residence [...and amongst] his entourage.

Ericsson comments on Ikhernofret's description, as well:

We have no real way of knowing exactly how pre-scripted these ritual plays were. Our scant sources hint that they were set ... with a scripted core cast at the centre of a violently ecstatic crowd.

Ericsson, Martin (2004): Play to Love

Ericsson arrives very close to what I believe the early Attican tragedies were: A scripted core cast of one to three actors at the centre of a violently ecstatic chorus.
It is not unthinkable that the early tragic dances in worships of Dionysus would have been poor man's versions of these grand celebrations of Osiris. Nevertheless, this type of ritual drama would certainly have been familiar to Greeks.

4. DITHYRAMBS AND DIONYSIAC RITUALS

If dithyrambs arose out of rituals or ritual dramas, then how did they differ from other rituals or ritual dramas? What, in fact, were dithyrambs? We know they were connected to at least the cult of Dionysus, and likely to other cults, as well.

The Romans called Dionysus Bacchus, and celebrations of the god "Bacchanalia." This word is still used to describe crazy parties similar to the ones that were thrown by the Dionysus followers of old, consisting of sex and wine and loud music, such as dithyrambs.

4.1. Physical part

Since Dionysus was affiliated with wine and fertility, it is no wonder he was celebrated by getting drunk and having sex.

The historian Livy is, indeed, livid, when he describes the Roman Bacchanalia, which he calls "the ruin of the youth." He mentions shouting and playing of drums and cymbals, and describes the festivities thus:

When wine, lascivious discourse, night, and the intercourse of the sexes had extinguished every sentiment of modesty, then debaucheries of every kind began to be practiced, as every person found at hand that sort of enjoyment to which he was disposed by the passion predominant in his nature.

- Livy, History of Rome, Book XXXIX
Many Dionysian rituals involved sacrificing a bull, one of many animals sacred to Dionysus. The meat of the bull was then used in a feast. Other sacrifices included grapes, wine, honey, apples, frankincense, ivy, pine, and figs.

Instruments played included trumpets, frame drums, flutes, bullroarers. Dithyrambs and other kinds of songs were sung and danced to.

Attendees were typically dressed in purple robes or skins of goats, foxes, fawns or leopards, wearing crowns of laurels on their heads. Masks were used to summon different persona. Ritual objects carried also included staves, scourges, bowls, and drinking cups.

4.2. Spiritual part

Nevertheless, these were not only festivals of the body, far from it. Alcohol and sex also served as means for getting closer to god. Using alcohol or other drugs to assist in getting magical or religious experiences is called chemognosis.

If one compares these religious festivals to contemporary rock festivals, an attendant might enjoy sex and intoxicants at both, but there would also be a more spiritual element. Becoming one with your god, seeing your favorite artist, experiencing symbolic death and rebirth, singing along to well known songs among hundreds of other celebrants, having an epiphany. (Personally, I have experienced all five through music, in moments that have also been more or less spiritual.)

In these rites the god Dionysus was experienced to enter the worshippers, creating what was called "enthusiasm" or "inspiration" (in-spire).

4.3. Dithyrambs

Key connection between Dionysian rites and the birth of tragedy are the dithyrambs, which were sung and danced to in Dionysian rituals, and probably at other rituals, as well. What were they?
They were ecstatic narrative songs with a special rhythm, danced by large groups of celebrants called a "chorus" or a "tragic dance", which means "goat dance". The chorus consisted of fifty men or boys dancing in a circle sometimes dressed as or wearing the masks of satyrs. Typically each dithyramb had a story related to the life, death or rebirth of Dionysus or some other hero or god. Typically they were accompanied by a flute known as the aulos.

It is not impossible to think that sometimes trumpets, drums, bullroarers and cymbals were also used in to accompany the dithyramb to make the dancing even wilder. There is no indication that this was a performative dance like the ballet, as an audience is never mentioned. Since it was a religious ritual, it was quite probably more of an experiential dance such as bashing your head at the moshpit of a heavy metal concert, or raving into a trance at a techno party, or waltzing with your loved one at a sea-side restaurant.

Aeschylus talks about dithyrambs in a passage which is lost, but is quoted by Plutarch, a Greek historian and priest of Apollo, (AD 46-120), here in two different translations from the early 20th century.

and they sing the dithyrambic song, filled with sufferings, and allusions to some change of state that brought with it wandering about and dispersion. For Æschylus says: 'It is fitting the dithyrambus, with its confused roar, should accompany Dionysos: but Apollo, the orderly and sober pæan.'

(On the E at Delphi, in Plutarch's Morals: Theosophical Essays. Translated by Charles William King, 1908.)

To this god [Dionysus] they also sing dithyrambic mele full of passions and a modulation that has a certain wandering and dissipation. For Aeschylus says: "It is fitting that the dithyramb with its mingled shouts should accompany Dionysus as fellow-reveler."

But to the other god [Apollo] they sing the paean, an ordered and temperate muse.
Based on Plutarch and Aeschylus, dithyrambs were full of sufferings and/or passion, contain wanderings and dissipations, confused roars and/or mingled shouts, and are very specifically not orderly, sober, or temperate. In other words: This so-called music is certainly very emotional, but it doesn't even have a proper rhythm. And it's too damn loud!
danced by only men. In my interpretation the men in the mosaic are getting ready to sing and dance dithyrambs.

4.4. Dithyrambs at other occasions

Most scholarship considers dithyrambs only in connection with the Cult of Dionysus. William Ridgeway notes in The dramas and dramatic dances of non-European races (1915) that there is not proof of them being only connected to that, and connects them also with cults of the dead.

the white masks, the only kind used by Thespis, were entirely unsuitable for Dionysiac representations, but eminently adapted for those of ghosts. ... In early days the tragic chorus and its dithyramb were closely attached to the tombs or shrines of heroes, and were only performed on festival occasions at sacred spots, as was the case with the Mysteries and Miracles of mediaeval Europe.

Ridgeway, William (1915):
The dramas and dramatic dances of non-European races. p. 11

How Ridgeway knows that Thespis used white masks, or that white masks were unsuitable for the Cult of Dionysus, or suitable for ghosts, we do not know. We do know that in surviving pictures of the era the masks come in many colors and can present both humans, animals and gods. Nevertheless, Ridgeway is correct in saying there is no proof that dithyrambs only belonged to the Cult of Dionysus.

5. FROM DITHYRAMBS TO TRAGEDY

The key difference between singing and dancing to dithyrambs and Attican tragedy is that one is more of a private ritual and the other more of a public spectable. That is to say, tragedy had an audience.

You can certainly have a ritual with an audience, as witnessed in, for example, the Roman Catholic Pope giving his Easter Sermon in St Peter's Square to thousands of
on-lookers, or by the millions of people worldwide watching the opening of the Olympic Games on television. The former is an example of a religious ritual, the latter of a secular one.

You can also have a ritual where there is no passive audience who only observes the ritual, but where the audience are actually active participants in the ritual. An example of a religious participatory ritual is the pan-Christian communion, where all celebrants come forward to eat the flesh of Christ and to drink his blood. One secular participatory ritual is the stag night where the friends of the groom or bride take part in the crazy stuff their soon no longer single friend will have a chance to do for the last time.

As Richard Schechner pointed out, there is no clear division between ritual and performance. Similarly there is no clear division between being in a member of the ritual audience or being a ritual participant. And yet they are different. If you pray while observing the Easter Sermon in St Peter's Square, are you actually participating in the ritual? Yes, and no. Yes from your perspective, you do become an active part in the holy experience. No, other people in the audience might have no idea what you're doing, and your participation will in no way effect the ritual they are observing.

Nevertheless, we know that at least the initiation rituals of Dionysus worship happened in secret, so clearly not all of it was meant for an audience to observe, but only for the initiates to participate in. There were also Dionysian rituals that were meant for the public, such as a procession through the polis streets carrying phalloi -- actual or representative goat penises.

We also know that by Attican tragedy was performed at amphitheatres, so clearly it had at least many components that were meant for an audience to observe. Possibly in the beginning tragedies had more participatory elements, and later on evolved into being more performances and less rituals, also meaning more friendly for a passive audience, and involving less participation.

Let us now look at how this change came to be.
5.1. Dithyramb as literature

Greek legends tell of a citharede (player of cithara or lyre) Arion who invented dithyramb as a literary composition for chorus (Wallace, 1927). Herodotus also tells a fascinating story of how Arion was captured by pirates and saved by dolphins, which leads one to doubt the historicity of the musician altogether. He is known to have been born on Lesbos and lived in Corinth.

Whether Arion was historical or not matters little. The story nevertheless indicates that before about 600 BC dithyrambs were improvised, and after it they were sometimes pre-written and rehearsed.

Singing pre-written songs and even rehearsing songs does not demand an audience. It is quite possibly more meaningful for personal participation to sing a specific song instead of coming up with new stuff and combining old motifs.

Nor does improvisation preclude an audience: simply compare with contemporary impro theatre or jazz jamming sessions. We know there were contests of dithyrambs, but the exact content of those contests remains a mystery. Were they contests of improvised or pre-written tragic dances?

But having pre-written songs opens up the possibility of giving repeat performances of a similar nature, and creates a new role: the poet! In this case the poet would write the lyrics and the music, conduct and direct the chorus, be their producer and manager, and play the aulos or the lyre.

The musician-poet Arion went so far as to teach others in Corinth one or more dithyrambs he had composed. Corinth was close to the region of Attica from whence Attican tragedy got its name, and about 90 kilometers from its capital Athens. For comparison Arion's native Lesbos was four times farther.

5.2. Dionysia Festivals
Soon after this big religious festivals really became a thing in Greece. They had already had the Olympic Games every fourth year, but between 582-573 BC they were complemented by three other such events making Games an annual thing. Games included athletic competitions, but also ritual dramas (comparable to those at Abydos), giant banquets, and cultural competitions such as singing hymns, playing instruments, painting, and eventually singing dithyrambs.

Athens started her own Panathenaic Games in 566 BC in honor of Pallas Athena. One of the programme items was a reading of the Iliad and of the Odyssey, and another a competition in rhapsodic recitation of Homeric poetry. They really liked Homer.

Outside the city gates the foreigners, slaves, women and criminals, i.e. everyone who was not a citizen, celebrated another kind of festival, which is now known as "Rural Dionysia." It was, of course, celebrated in favor of Dionysus, and was like a combination between a harvest festival, a phallic procession, an orgy, and one of these Greek "games" with competitions of all kinds.

According to legend, when the city of Eleutherae became a part of Attica, their citizens bought a statue of Dionysus to Athens. Athenians rejected it, and as a result Dionysus punished them with a plague affecting male genitalia. It was only cured once the Athenians accepted the cult of Dionysus, along with the statue and having his festivals inside the city. In memory of this event citizens carried phalloi in procession each year. (Why the same was done in Rural Dionysia remains a mystery.)

Whether connected to Eleutherae or not, the festival of City Dionysia or Great Dionysia was introduced somewhere between 561-534 BC. This is the first instance where we know for sure competitions in dithyrambs were included.

At a dithyramb competition each tribe would enter two groups of dancers (choruses), one of men and one of boys. Each chorus would be lead by a coryphaeus, serving a role similar to Arion above. The choruses would dance and sing in ecstasy, and be observed by an audience and a jury. The winner would receive a goat as a prize. How intoxicated or enthusiastic the chorus or their leader -- or the audience -- was, we do not know.
5.3. Hypothesis of cultural evolution

We can assume that a quick cultural evolution might have taken shape. Imagine two choruses competing against one another.

The chorus from Athens improvises their song, mumbles among themselves, their wits are "thunder-smitten with wine", and they focus on reaching ecstasy, and finally reach unity with Dionysus.

The chorus from Corinth has rehearsed their song and dance, sing to the audience an educational, humorous and touching story, wear masks that are easily recognizable, and manage to provide the audience an interesting experience.

Most modern juries would probably reward the Corinthian chorus. (An ancient jury who wanted to promote divine experiences might still reward the Athenian chorus, if they seemed to be properly ecstatic instead of just pretending.)

If the Athenian chorus and their coryphaeus were very intent on winning that goat, they would probably make sure that the next time they faced the audience when singing, had masks that didn't cover their mouths, and maybe wrote down some key verses in their goat song beforehand.

This does not mean that the aspects of the chorus which were participatory, religious or ritualistic disappeared. But they were at least sometimes accompanied by aspects which were performatory. Some coryphaei probably wanted to introduce more ritualistic choruses, others more performatory, and this could easily have been a back and forth movement for some hundreds of years.

Trusting too much on a hypothesis such as this can be misleading, but we know for a fact that the first half of the fifth century BC was a period of incredibly rapid cultural evolution in this field.
5.4. Actor introduced

The cultural evolution which began with Arion, moves forward with Thespis. We know very little about him, but he was featured in Aristotle's *On Poets*, meaning that at least Aristotle considered him "a poet" (writer of tragedies) such as Aeschylus and Sophocles. Unfortunately *On Poets* is one of the lost works of Aristotle, and thus cannot be referenced here.

Fortunately, before it was lost, Constantinopolitan philosopher and senator Themistius had a chance to read *On Poets*, and orated about it in the fourth century AD:

Did stately tragic drama enter the theater fully equipped at once with chorus and actors? Do we not pay heed to Aristotle? He tells us that first the chorus came forth and sang to the gods, then Thespis introduced the prologue and the spoken lines.

Themistius:
Oration 26, On Speaking, or, How the Philosopher Should Speak.
Translated and edited by Robert J. Penella.
Published in Robert J. Penella:
The Private Orations of Themistius.

We earlier quoted the Roman poet Horace's *Ars Poetica* regarding chorus. He also writes about chorus. Like Themistius, he wrote many centuries after Aristotle, but as much of our current understanding on the development is based on Horace, Themistius and Aristotle, I quote *Ars Poetica* regarding Thespis, as well.

Ignotum tragicae genus invenisse Camenae
Dicitur, et plaustris vexitse poëmata Thespis
Quae canerent agerentque, peruncti faecibus ora.
Horace: *Ars Poetica* (19 BC)

A kind of Tragick Ode unknown before,
Thespis, 'tis said, invented first; and bore
Cart-loads of verse about, and with him went
A troop begrim'd, to sing and represent,

Translated by George Colman, 1783.

Thespis they say, discovered the Tragic Muse,
An unknown form, presenting his plays from carts,
Sung and acted by men, faces smeared with wine-lees.

Translated by A. S. Kline, 2005.

William Ridgeway in 1915 goes through a list of earlier false theories.

No matter how widely historians of Greek tragedy have differed from each other in details, they were all pretty well agreed that certain main features in its development were firmly established, but, as it turn out, this general agreement was based upon a complete misinterpretation of several vital statements of Aristotle in his Poetic, on which of course their theories had largely to be based. They held ... that Thespis was the first to have established Tragedy on a proper basis, some holding that his grand step consisted in merely separating the leader from the rest of the Chorus and making him interrupt the Choral parts by some sort of Epic recitation, whilst others held that he was the first to apply to moral purposes the sufferings, often undeserved, of heroes.

Ridgeway, William (1915):
The dramas and dramatic dances of non-European races

Ridgeway makes a convincing case saying dithyrambs were not the sole property of the Cult of Dionysus, but were practiced by other cults, as well. According to him, tragedy arose from the dithyrambs associated with the cult of the dead:

Thespis detached his chorus and dithyramb from some particular shrine, possibly at Icaria, his native place, and taking his company with him on wagons, gave his performances on an extemporized
stage when and where he could find an audience, not for religious purposes but for pastime (as he himself said) and for gain ... Thus, not merely by defining more accurately the role of the actor, but by lifting Tragedy from being a mere piece of religious ritual tied to a particular spot into the greatest form of literature, he was the true founder of the Tragic art.

Ridgeway, William (1915):
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Some even say it was not Thespis. The 10th century Byzantine encyclopedia Suda states: "Thespis is reckoned the XVIth Tragic Poet after Epigenes, a Sicyonian; but some say Thespis was the second after him; and others, the very first of all." The confusion is probably due to the definition of a "Tragic Poet". We do not think Thespis was the first, but that he introduced key innovations.

The innovations of Thespis, per modern understanding are: Separating an actor with spoken lines from the dancers (=chorus), masks so the actor can play many characters, a spoken prologue to the dithyramb.

Let us not go further into Thespis the man, but look at the innovations attributed to him. All of them essentially focus on the role of the coryphaeus, the leader of the chorus. Instead of just singing along or with the chorus, he would speak to the audience directly. (Much like a priest at a sermon.)

Given his later career of going around Greece in his wagon full of dancers and performing dithyrambs, we can deduce that this innovation was probably made for the benefit of the audience: "Hello Sparta! Ladies and gentlemen of free birth! And other paying customers! We will present to you the story of Dionysus meeting the King of Thebes." Then the chorus dances as followers of Dionysus. Then Thespis puts on the mask of Dionysus, and says he's going to Thebes. His followers are exalted by the idea. Then Thespis puts on the mask of the King, and says Dionysus is welcome in Thebes. The chorus is horrified. Thespis puts on the mask of Dionysus again, and demands entry. But this time the chorus sings the song and dances the dance of the Theban guards, and block Dionysus' way. And so on... And finally: "Ladies and
gentlemen! We have presented you an interesting dance that hopefully moved you or at least entertained you. If you'd like to leave a little money as a sacrifice to Dionysus, we will gladly take it forward. Thank you, and may Dionysus make your children plentiful and your trees full of figs! Thank you!” (This speculation is based on the concept of Thespis as a worshipper of Dionysus. If his background was in performing dithyrambs at cult services of the dead, the content of his dramas would have been different, but the form could have been the same.)

This still does not preclude the experience of the chorus as a participatory religious ritual. Far from it! They get to live and experience key moments in the life of their god, and even communicate with that god! (Or with their dead hero-king, if Thespis' dithyrambs were originally for dead heros.) This is all still very much in line with what we know about ritual dramas.

Perhaps even some local worshippers of Dionysus or the hero-god could join in the chorus, and sing and dance alongside them. Whether this happened or not, we do not know, but as a frequent organizer of dramatic participatory events it would not surprise me at all. Perhaps a former chorus member or another poet or just a friend walks by and asks to join in the chorus, and Thespis knows he can do the job, and the others do not object, and they don't want to get paid, then why not? If this happened, it would have meant that not only were places available in the audience, but among the participants, as well.

It did not take more than a few decades until Thespis' invention was added to the City Dionysia competition. Alongside traditional improvised dithyrambs and pre-written dithyrambs, we also now had pre-written dithyrambs where the coryphaeus has spoken lines that they perform in dialogue with the chorus. These were called tragedies. The first winner of a tragedy competition at City Dionysia was none other than Thespis himself. (Perhaps slightly unfair, like giving the Nobel Prize to Alfred Nobel.)

5.5. Second actor and dialogue
Tragedies immediately became a big hit in Athens. In early fifth century they were complemented by a competition for comedies at City Dionysia.

Aeschylus, the next big innovator first competed with his tragedies in 499 BC. He was active for almost fifty years, and made many great inventions, which Aristotle describes thus: “Aeschylus first introduced a second actor; he diminished the importance of the Chorus, and assigned the leading part to the dialogue.” (Poetics, Part IV.)

These are essentially the same change: adding another actor who can then have a dialogue with the first actor (perhaps no longer called the coryphaeus). One of the actors would typically be the poet/coryphaeus. The other one would be a gifted member of the chorus, or perhaps another poet who didn't manage to write any tragedies this year. Both would be wearing masks representing the character they played. Each actor could play several characters by changing their mask.

What does this mean for the chorus? According to Aristotle their importance was diminished. But the Poetics was written over a hundred years after these events, so it is possible Aristotle did not fully capture the meaning of the second actor for the chorus. Certainly they would have had less to do, if they stand around while Dionysus and the King of Thebes are having a long conversation. No dancing or singing there is necessary or even welcome. From the perspective of the audience, the chorus might sometimes seem even superfluous, like watching a Disney movie: "Why is the story constantly interrupted by singing?"

But from the point of view of the chorus, things can seem quite different. They are still participating in a festival in honor of the god Dionysus, they have a distinct role in the story and have a presence in most scenes even if they don't actively do anything. They do, however, play characters that are at the center of the action, perhaps interacting which each other in a subdued way, commenting on the action of the main characters, and definitely experiencing it all as if they were there, because they were. For them King of Thebes is not Aeschylus wearing a mask he made last night, he is the King of Thebes!
5.6. The Persians

Let us look at Aeschylus' tragedy *The Persians* as an example of a tragedy with two actors and a chorus. It premiered in 472 BC before Sophocles had made his first play, and therefore before the introduction of the third actor. Greek tragedies usually did not deal directly with contemporary events, but *The Persians* takes place just eight years prior to its first performance. Since we known that the Battle of Salamis took place in 480 BC, and the prophesied future battle of Plataea in 479 BC.

*The Persians* takes place in the Council Hall of the Persian Kings with the tomb of Darius in the background. The play (atypically) opens with the chorus who represent the elders of Susa who compose the Persian council of state. They are joined by an actor wearing the mask of Atossa, the mother of Xerxes. Atossa (also atypically) narrates a dream sequence. Another actor, wearing the mask of a messenger, arrives. The messenger tells of the Battle of Salamis, names the dead, and says Xerxes has escaped and is returning to Susa. The messenger exits. Atossa goes to the tomb of her dead husband Darius, the father of Xerxes. Upon her request, the chorus summons Darius' ghost. The messenger actor now appears again, wearing the mask of a ghost Darius. Darius condemns Xerxes' attack on Greece, and prophesies another defeat at the Battle of Plataea. The ghost disappears. The actor quickly changes costume to the torn robes of Xerxes, returning from battle. Atossa is horrified at the state of her son. She leaves and the king is alone with the old men (the chorus), and together they sing a lyrical song lamenting the Persian defeat.

If the role of the chorus has been diminished, it is hard to see. The chorus continuously play the state council of Susa who receives news that their troops and sons have died in battle, giving them a strong emotional connection to the story. From that starting point, they summon the ghost of the old king Darius, and have dialogues with all the characters. The summoning especially is difficult to comprehend in a light other than that of ritual, and it is easy to imagine Ridgeway correct in saying the roots of dithyrambs also lie in the cult of the dead.

It is not apparent in the synopsis, but there is another speaking role, the "Leader of the Chorus", playing some sort of Prime Minister and also having dialogue with the other
characters. This indicates that at this time the coryphaeus was separated from the actors.

Performed properly the summoning can be an immensely powerful experience for the chorus, regardless of how interesting it is for the audience to watch. (But it can be a powerful experience for the audience, as well.)

If at earlier decades the chorus merely sung enthusiastically in reply to the epic monologues uttered by actors, that is certainly not the case here. This dialogue in the last scene seems like rather a quick back-and-forth between two trained actors, even if the Chorus actually consists of a dozen dancers.

CHORUS
Is all thy glory lost?

XERXES
Seest thou these poor remains of my rent robes?

CHORUS
I see, I see.

XERXES
And this ill-furnish'd quiver?

CHORUS
Wherefore preserved?

XERXES
To store my treasured arrows.

CHORUS
Few, very few.

XERXES
And few my friendly aids.

CHORUS
I thought these Grecians shrunk appall'd at arms.

XERXES
No: they are bold and daring: these sad eyes
Beheld their violent and deathful deeds.

(Translated by Robert Potter, 1777.)

The Chorus is very much an active part of the tragedy.

5.7. Sophocles brings us to classic tragedy

Sophocles first competed in the City Dionysia two years after The Persians premiered. “Sophocles raised the number of actors to three, and added scene-painting”, credits Aristotle in Poetics, Part IV.

It is perhaps not a huge leap to go from The Persians' two actors and the leader of a chorus having a three-way dialogue to having three actors having a three-way dialogue. Nevertheless, this was something that had not been done before.

In Sophocles' Oedipus Rex (429 BC), for example, there are seven speaking roles and the Chorus, but only three of the speaking roles are ever on stage at the same time. Thus it’s quite feasible to perform the play with only three actors, one wearing an Oedipus mask, the other two alternating between various masks and thus playing several characters.

Characters in Oedipus Rex again have dialogue with the Chorus, but this time the Leader of the Chorus does not have lines of his own.

OEDIPUS
Well argued; but no living man can hope
To force the gods to speak against their will.

CHORUS
May I then say what seems next best to me?

OEDIPUS
Aye, if there be a third best, tell it too.

CHORUS
My liege, if any man sees eye to eye
With our lord Phoebus, 'tis our prophet, lord
Teiresias; he of all men best might guide
A searcher of this matter to the light.

How common the "Leader of the Chorus" was as a character in surviving ancient tragedies, and at what point did he disappear, would be an interesting topic for another treatise. So would comparing the chorus in the tragedies of Euripides to those of Sophocles, since in Aristotle's opinion Sophocles did a much better job than Euripides.

5.8. Songs not related to the plot

Both Aristotle (ca 335 BC) and Horace (19 BC) frowned upon instances where the chorus sings songs not related to the plot. These special mentions indicate that the chorus quite often sang those songs.

They could have been good jitties loved by everybody (the way a rock band may be asked to "Play Paranoid!") or been darlings of the poet that should have been killed, or perhaps were not intended to serve a function for the spectators in the audience, but for the participants in the chorus.
The fact that they were so persistent could indicate all three. Some of them were loved by the audience, some by the poet, some by the chorus, some by all.

The possibility of those interlude songs sometimes being a part of the ritual function of the chorus should not be overlooked in further study.

5.9. After the Golden Age of Tragedy

According to Aristotle *Oedipus Rex* was "the highest achievement in tragedy," and it is, indeed, still performed today.

Some twenty years after that highest achievement, the golden age of tragedy and of Athens came to an end. Sophocles and Euripides both died around 406 BC, Aeschylus having passed away fifty years earlier. In 404 BC the Peloponnesian War ended, and with it, also the Golden Age of Athens.

This was not an end for the City Dionysia, for tragedy, for poets, for the Cult of Dionysus, or for philosophers and historians writing about tragedy. Quite the contrary.

The philosopher Socrates was a contemporary of Sophocles and Euripides. He died in 399 BC, and his pupil Plato in 348/347 BC. It is Plato's pupil Aristotle who finally gave lectures on drama that have been preserved to this day. One of his students put them down in writing in 323 BC, and that became *Poetics*, which forms the basis of much of our understanding of Attican Tragedy.

Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are mentioned by Aristotle as key poets (writer-directors of tragedy), but he had met none of them and had seen none of their plays in their original form. In his time their tragedies were actively performed, but obviously the form had kept on developing.

For Aristotle the tragedy competitions at the City Dionysia festivals were interesting specifically from an artistic point of view, not ritualistic or religious. He saw the
tragedies from the point of view of a person sitting at the amphitheatre, watching the play. It was not that of a poet or that of an actor or that of a member of the chorus. In line with his epistemological philosophy, he only understands the chorus in relation to the audience, not as an experience in itself.

5.10. Roman theatre

With the hellenization of Roman culture, Greek theatre was obviously introduced into Roman times. Some playwrights re-worked Greek tragedies for the Roman amphitheatres, street theatres and colosseums, such works are known as *fabula crepidata*, plays wearing the Greek boot. A key part of this adaptation work was removing the chorus altogether.

One of the key reasons for this may have been the construction of Roman theatres -- or lack thereof. For centuries, the Roman senate was opposed to building theatres, for religious, political and moral reasons. Yet Greek tragedies, their local adaptations and native plays were performed.

Using recent archaeological findings, the scholar of western literature Sander M. Goldberg has managed to reconstruct what those early Roman stages were like, and how they would have influenced dramaturgy:

Finally, there is the shape of the performance space to consider. The area available for actors and audience before the Temple of the Magna Mater is not 'classical' in its configuration. It had no orchestra, but then again, the Roman comedies of Plautus and Terence had no chorus. Though the Greek models on which they were based employed a five-act structure punctuated by musical entractes, Roman plays were written for continuous performance, and their elaborate musical elements were incorporated directly into the stage action.

...
Lack of an orchestra and a relatively small space for performance may also bear on a striking feature of Plautine drama, the easy and informal relationship it fosters with its audience.


The gradual decline of the chorus was in progress, and soon the chorus would disappear altogether. (Although there were attempts at revival when proper theatres finally were built, as indicated by Horace's *Ars Poetica* quoted elsewhere in this paper.)

6. RITUALS BEFORE DITHYRAMBS

In this chapter, I look at what a ritual is in general, and ask what it feels like to participate in one.

Rituals are studied in many fields, including comparative religion, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and performance studies. They can be seen as a way to explain the world to participants, to help deal with difficult emotions, to uphold society or ideology via symbols and myths, to tell stories and live in, to explore the forbidden, and in many other ways. I include here a table from Marc Verhoeven's article The Many Dimensions of Ritual to give an idea of the various ways in which rituals have been explained and defined.
As the performative and dramatic approach to ritual is closest to this work, we shall begin there with Richard Schechner, one of the giants of performance studies, whose work also borrows from anthropology.

First of all, rituals are not necessarily religious. Schechner lists as examples of rituals great events of state (coronations, inaugurations, funerals of leaders), everyday life (birthday parties, honoring years of service), sports (shaking hands before a match, the opening of the Olympics), and many other activities.

Schechner's examples of religious ritual include "the Passover Seder of the Jews, the five day daily prostrations toward Mecca of Muslims, the Roman Catholic Eucharist, the waving of a camphor flame at the climax of a Hindu puja, the dances, songs, and utterances of a person possessed by an orixa of Umbanda or Candomble".

Mardi Gras and other Carnival celebrations are used as an example of a ritual which combines religious and secular elements such as masking, playing, drinking, and
Many cultures do not separate the sacred and the secular rigidly, some not at all. (Schechner, Richard. Performance Studies: An Introduction. p. 52-56)

Schechner describes rituals in this fashion:

Rituals are collective memories encoded into actions. Rituals also help people (and animals) deal with difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships, hierarchies, and desires that trouble, exceed, or violate the norms of daily life. ... When they temporarily become or enact another, people perform actions different from what they do ordinarily. Thus, ritual and play transform people, either permanently or temporarily. Rituals that transform people permanently are called "rites of passage."

Schechner, Richard: Performance Studies: An Introduction. p. 52

Note that Schechner uses "rite of passage" in the common understanding of the term. Victor Turner and Martin Ericsson, use "rite of passage" or its French equivalent "rite de passage" to refer to all kinds of rituals.

6.1. My definition of ritual

For the purposes of this work ritual is defined as an immediate action performed by one or more people which can be repeated and which has an endemic meaning.

By "endemic" I mean that the meaning does not come from being observed, but a ritual is meaningful for its practitioner. Typically the physical sensation caused by the action is not endemic meaning, but it can assist in having it. Fasting or running really fast can cause physical sensations (dizziness, runner's high), but they are not rituals by themselves. They can, of course, be parts of rituals, and the physical sensation can help heighten the experience of the endemic meaning.

By "immediate" I mean the ritual is non-mediated, it is not recorded or observed through a recording. It can be recorded, but the recording is not a ritual. The concept
of immediacy is also key for participatory art. For more on immediacy, see
Immediatism by Hakim Bey. He writes: "mediation takes place by degrees. Some
experiences (taste, smell, sexual pleasure) are less mediated than others (reading a
book, looking through a telescope, listening to a record). Some media, especially
"live" arts such as dance, theater, musical or bardic performances, are less mediated
than others, such as TV, CDs, Virtual Reality."

The following are not by themselves rituals: Watching television, film, or theatre.
tourist. Taking drugs. Dancing.

Following things are rituals: Eating poison mushrooms and dancing to the shaman
drum until you enter an altered state of mind. Lighting a candle alone on
Independence Day. Saying a silent prayer at an empty church. Singing Christmas
carols with family. Eating the body of Christ at Easter Mass. Religious fasting on
Yom Kippur. Pilgrimage to Mecca. Bowing before you walk on the tatami to practice
martial arts. The opening ceremony of the Olympic games. Shaking hands. Most
ceremonies of marriage, funerals, namings and initiations.

The following things are in the grey zone. They may happen in a ritual (liminal) space
but not be rituals in themselves. Or they may combine aspects of ritual and not-ritual.
Or they may have started out as rituals but developed into something else, or vice
versa. Role-playing games. Participatory theatre. Bull fighting. Taking drugs and
dancing at a rave. Playing a drinking game with friends while watching the
Eurovision song contest live. Going to the temple of a foreign religion to check out
the ceremonies. Being in the chorus of Attican tragedy.

It is in this last category that our topic lies.

6.2. What does it feel like to participate in a ritual?
Based on my two decades of work in the field of participatory art, it is not fruitful to observe participation from the outside. It is not meant to look interesting. It is meant to feel interesting. Therefore to understand rituals, a participatory experience, we must ask what it feels like to take part in one.

Play gives people a chance to temporarily experience the taboo, the excessive, and the risky. You may never be Oedipus or Cleopatra, but you can perform them "in play." Ritual and play lead people into a "second reality," separate from ordinary life. This reality is one where people can become selves other than their daily selves.

Schechner, Richard:
Performance Studies: An Introduction. p. 52

Schechner's friend, anthropologist Victor Turner also wrote a lot about rituals, based on extensive fieldwork among tribal societies. He says rituals are characterized by "liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints". He calls this experience "communitas." (Turner, Victor: Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual. An Essay in Comparative Symbology. p. 44-45)

Individuals participating in a ritual are no longer bound by their everyday identities, their social statuses, their families, their sex, age, caste or class. They absorb a new "liminal" identity for the duration of the ritual, and relate to each other through that identity. The new role can be "celebrant", "man", "god", "bull", "ancestor", or anything else. But the other participants have a similar role, and only see each other through that role. In The Ritual Process (1995) Turner defines communitas as "an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals."

Richard Schechner comments on Victor Turner's coinage:

"Communitas" is a complex term. As Turner defined it, communitas comes in several varieties, including the "normative" and the "spontaneous." Normative communitas is what happens during communion in an Episcopal or Roman Catholic service. The
congregation is united "in Christ" by the Eucharist. However, not every congregant may feel "in Christ" at that moment. The communitas is "official," "ordained," "imposed." Spontaneous communitas - Turner's favorite - is different, almost opposite. Spontaneous communitas happens when a congregation of group catches fire in the Spirit. It can also be secular, as when a sports team is playing so well that each player feels inside the others' heads.

Schechner, Richard:
Performance Studies: An Introduction. p. 70-71

As one of the most developed contemporary participatory art forms, the practice of larps shows what participation and liminoid experiences can feel like. But they also provide another useful perspective on rituals. Larps allow the participant to experience personalities, lives, cultures and events from dozens of perspectives, and even participate in rituals while pretending to believe they are true. Experimenting with and experiencing different sorts of rituals provides one with some tools for understanding actual rituals, as well.

In larps I have been married in churches and temples, holy groves and sacred places, I have been adopted and buried, changed social status, been coronated and dethroned, welcomed people into my family or cast them out. Sometimes these are mundane events within the culture explored in the larp, sometimes highly ritualistic.

Sometimes larp rituals are designed by people who also design rituals for real-life events. With the knowledge and lived experience from larps and surrounding activities, I have also been elevated to ritual designer and ritual master in the real world, acting as "shaman" for real-life weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies, initiation rites, and other rites of passage. Sometimes the role is closer to toast master, sometimes closer to priest.

I share this since it provides me with a rare insight into what rituals can be, how they are designed and executed, how they can be more participatory or less, how the communitas can be designed to be normative or spontaneous, how participation
means not everything goes according to script, and how it feels like to run them and participate in them.

Schechner points out some elements of rituals which also act as useful advice for designing and running rituals:

Spontaneous [communitas] rarely "just happens." It is generated by the ritual process. Across a ritual limen, inside of a "sacred space/time," spontaneous communitas is possible. Those in the ritual are all treated equally, reinforcing a sense of "we are all in this together." People wear the same or similar clothing; they set aside indicators of wealth, rank, or privilege. Formal titles are done away with; sometimes even first names are not used. Instead, people call each other "sister," "brother," "comrade," "you," or some other generic term. In workshops (liminoid experiences), I encourage people to give themselves new names. More than once, a new name sticks: a transformation takes place.

Schechner, Richard:
Performance Studies: An Introduction. p. 70-71

My own ritual design does not come from the experience of directing performers, but directly from designing for participation. I have noted that before the ritual you can actually tell celebrants how they are expected to participate, meaning you could even say "go towards spontaneous communitas," although not in those words. I agree with Schechner, it rarely "just happens," but there are certainly many things you can use to make it happen, including recruiting the participants as your allies in making it happen.

6.3. Dithyrambs and communitas

Comparing with Schechner's and Turner's criteria, does communitas happen for the chorus singing and dancing the dithyramb?
Do they enter sacred space/time? Yes. For example Thebes at the time of Dionysus' visit, or the time when the dead hero was still alive.

Are everyone in the chorus treated equally? Yes. Everyone has the same function, except coryphaeus, who leads the ritual.

Do they all wear similar clothing, and set aside indicators of wealth, rank, privilege? Yes. For Dionysian dithyrambs, animal skins or purple robes, and satyr masks were worn. For graveside dithyrambs, white masks were perhaps used. When everyone is masked it can be difficult to even know who is a slave and who a noble "in real life".

Are formal titles and first names done away with? We do not know exactly, but during the dithyramb members of a chorus would not communicate with each other, except as their characters.

At least say the external circumstances were good for experiencing communitas. As communitas is often experienced in ritual, dance, singing and performance, and it is assisted by these elements, it would be very strange if this dance-ritual-song-performance was participated in without experiencing communitas!

Finally, does the chorus "catch fire in the Spirit"? By all accounts, yes.

I declare that what Turner calls communitas was at least sometimes experienced by the chorus when singing and dancing the dithyramb.

6.4. From participatory ritual to passive entertainment

Schechner, as showed earlier, created the dichotomy between ritual and entertainment, and said all performances are to a degree both. I find also another distinction useful, that between active participation and passive observation.

The Swedish book *Deltagarkultur* divides culture and art into three categories: spectator culture, interactive culture, and participatory culture. The latter two are often mixed together in popular discourse, but in this context it is important to understand the difference.
Spectator culture includes media such as theatre, television, opera, books, circus, photography, painting. (Haggren, Larsson, Nordwall & Widing, 2008) There is a clear division between audience and content: at a cinema, the audience sits still and watches the actions taking place on the silver screen.

Interactive culture includes media such as multimedia, video games, virtual reality, and "Choose Your Own Adventure" books. (Haggren, Larsson, Nordwall & Widing, 2008) The player is given multiple choices from which they can pick their preferred option, which leads to a pre-defined outcome. The dialogue options in a video game allow the player's character to attack the guard, to bribe the guard, or to let the guard imprison the character. All of these lead to new situations, with other pre-defined options.

Participatory culture includes media such as some multiplayer games, online communities, larps, role-playing games. Other elements of participatory culture that are not necessarily media are duels, boxing, tennis, soccer, paintball, horse polo, many children's games, BDSM, picnic, and parties. (Haggren, Larsson, Nordwall & Widing, 2008) The division between creator and participant is blurred, even though someone may design the frame of the participation. Yet the specific outcome and the experience is in the hands of each participant.

An English translation by the author:
If we paint on the pictures in a gallery, play the harmonica during a concert, or climb up on the stage, shouting "No, Hamlet!" we break the mainstream media agreements. Such violations of protocol are usually punished with lower social standing, with the offender being labeled a disruptive fool and/or calling the police.
Participatory art is not a new thing, and has roots in the Boal's Forum Theatre, Grotowski's "rituals", happenings, and earlier than that. Whether there was a direct connection with those forms and the birth of contemporary larp is debated, but knowledge of them has explicitly influenced the development of larp art for over a decade now.

What about audience participation, public meetings, Boal's Forum Theatre, or other performances whose meta-communication is that the playing includes or even demands a blurring of the boundaries separating audience and performers, stage and house? By naming participants "spectators," Boal signals that the Theatre of the Oppressed is most effective when the boundary between spectators and actors is blurred or entirely effaced. Boal's message to spectators is, "This is play, and you must play with us!" During the 1960s and 1970s, signals and rules governing audience participation were often vague or deliberately ambivalent, creating both exciting theatre and confusion onstage and off.


Jerzy Grotowski has also attempted to create participatory theatre which he called "rituals." (Not to be confused with actual rituals.)

Grotowski defines the technical difference between a theatre production and a ritual in relation to "the place of montage." In the production, the spectators' minds are the place of montage. In the ritual, the montage takes place in the minds of the doers.

... Here, the logic and clarity of the Actions are essential and - through these Actions - the process of participants bringing them to life. There is no place for spectators as such.
Zbigniew Osinski (1997):  
Grotowski Blazes the Trails. p. 391-392

Participatory media has huge overlap with Hakim Bey's idea of “immediate art." In another article I describe it as art which "is direct in that it is experienced as it is created and has no use for the division between performers and audience. Role-playing games are definitely immediate, but the definition can also encompass parties, communal storytelling and even improvised music jams." (Pohjola, 2004)

And earlier than that:

Live-action role-playing games as events lack aspects of traditional media, although characters, through which the expression happens, can be considered media. Live-action role-playing games are also bodily and all-encompassing works, in which each movement, sound, taste, smell, touch and even thought are part of the work. However, immediatism’s understanding of play is even larger. Whereas free time is an emptiness that must be filled with entertainment, play is its opposite – a self-fulfilling and self-rewarding thing. Play is anarchy, while free time, entertainment and art are societal.

(Pohjola 2003)

Larp designer and journalist Juhana Pettersson comments on larp and other roleplaying in regards to participation:

Participation is the essence of role-playing. If you don’t participate, you don’t play. ... you cannot role-play without creative participation, and once you participate there’s a part of you in the game as well. It has become your creation.

...  
This focus on creative participation is one of the greatest strengths of role-playing, but it also makes role-playing intimidating to many people. ... In a sense, participation is the reason people don’t want to role-play. Not everyone wants to participate.
In practice people resist role-playing because they have to give something of themselves to play. They have to take a risk, and that’s something many (adult) people are unwilling to do.

Pettersson, Juhana (2010):
Role-Playing and the Mainstream

A person watching a film, or reading a book, is experiencing a passive medium. A person taking part in a ritual or a larp, is experiencing a participatory medium. Watching theatre or live sports is less passive than watching a film, but less participatory than playing in a larp. Singing karaoke or betting while watching sports are even more participatory.

Like karaoke, most experiences are not strictly passive observation or active participation, but fall somewhere in between. What if while reading a book, you comment upon it to someone else, scribble on the margins, or decide to pause in the middle of a chapter? Is the reading experience different if you lay in bed, sit on a bus, or hold the book while walking? What if you listen to a specific kind of music at the same time? Similarly you can choose to not participate or participate less at a party or a larp, and some participatory media can be even designed for that option.

I posit that all experiences are to some degree both passive and participatory.

6.5. Tragedy and Communitas

Did communitas still exist in the Golden Age of Tragedy? I argue that the audience experienced normative communitas, while the chorus (still) experienced spontaneous communitas.

Normative communitas is official, ordained and imposed. You sit in your seat at the amphitheatre, and hope to experience it. Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. Perhaps the best tragedies manage to touch you so much that it happens, especially if
you have drunk enough wine. And then you cry and laugh and experience what Aristotle called *katharsis*.

But maybe you can't really get into the mood, you think the story is cliched, your stone seat is uncomfortable, and the tall Spartan is sitting in front of you, and besides you know you are going to have a horrible day at the agora tomorrow.

Let us see if sitting in the audience watching a tragedy have the elements which help achieve spontaneous communitas:

**Do they enter sacred space/time?** Maybe. If they can get into the mood.

**Are everyone in the audience treated equally?** Certainly not. Some get better seats than others, and pay more for them.

**Do they all wear similar clothing, and set aside indicators of wealth, rank, privilege?** No, just the opposite! You were your best robes and jewelry, so other people can see how wealthy you are.

**Are formal titles and first names done away with?** No. The audience use their real names and titles.

**Does the chorus "catch fire in the Spirit"?** Maybe towards the end, if they experience katharsis.

The circumstances in the audience are not very good at all for experiencing spontaneous communitas. But normative communitas is still possible and desirable.

For chorus the questions and answers remain the same as for the dithyramb. Therefore the chorus can experience spontaneous communitas, and probably at least sometimes does.

**7. COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

We have now gone through what rituals, ritual dramas, dithyrambs and tragedy were, and how they developed. Let us finally analyze tragedies in relation to the concepts
introduced here, namely those of first person audience, participation, and communitas.

### 7.1. First person audience

Let us return to Nietzsche's question from the beginning: "What sort of artistic style would there be which one might derive from the idea of the spectator, for which one might consider the “spectator in himself” the essential form?" I suggested any participatory art might fulfill that demand. Nietzsche would perhaps not have been satisfied with this answer:

> The spectator without a play is a contradictory idea.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1872): The Birth of Tragedy, Chapter VII

A participant in a live action roleplay, or larp, could easily be considered a spectator without a play, and the whole medium of larp an artistic style derived from the idea of the "spectator in himself." Indeed, the term "first person audience" has become commonplace in describing the feeling of being immersed in the story and the character, and seeing everything, "as if you are really there."

What is common to Nordic larp is that it is primarily directed at a first person audience: the participants are the primary audience of the performance. If I play a mother of a family in *Ground Zero*, I try perhaps to remain calm and composed in order to avoid frightening my children, performing a strong mother to the other players. At the same time, however, I probably try to engage emotionally with the horrible tragedy, playing an ordinary scared civilian to myself. Everyone in the shelter is engaged in these two performances for the whole 24 hours, pretending to be a refugee in a bomb shelter.

Markus Montola (2014):
Nordic Larp: Performing for the First Person Audience.
Grotowski used these words to describe his attempts at participatory theatre: "In the ritual, the montage takes place in the minds of the doers." (Osinski, 1997) That is another way of saying "first person audience."

Similarly, perhaps a tragic dancer in a chorus could be a "first person audience" for the events of the tragedy.

**7.2. The participatory chorus**

If all performances are indeed "to some degree both ritual and entertainment," (Schechner, 2002) and "all experiences are to some degree both passive and participatory" (see above), it is impossible to find a specific point in time when ritual dithyrambs for participants turned into artistic tragedies for spectators. Even trying to find such a point becomes meaningless.

In this light it seems entirely possible that Attican tragedy slowly developed from what was more of a participatory ritual to what was more of a passively observed performance. Aristotle clearly sees tragedy as the latter, and perhaps it was that for everyone in the audience in his time.

We do not know at which point tragedy became a spectator sport, but since Thespis added an actor and a prologue in the latter half of the sixth century BC, it is clear that the tragic dances were already performed for the audience at that point. Or, at least, the dithyrambs which were danced to by their participants, were also observed by an audience. One can dance to the beat of the music at a disco, and others can watch. One can sing alone for the enjoyment of oneself, and others can secretly observe, finding enjoyment in the song.

Around the same time, the last ritual dramas were played in Abydos in Egypt, and the City Dionysia festival started in Athens, and would soon include competitions in tragedy, as well. We can say that around this time, tragedy probably still had at least some ritual elements.
My proposition is that around 550-500 BC the experience for the people in the chorus (the tragic dancers) was that of a participatory ritual, and the experience for the people in the seats of amphitheatre was that of a passive audience observing a combination between ritual and entertainment. But in 335 BC (when On Poetics was published) the experience for the people in the chorus was closer to that of actors performing a play, and the experience for the audience was very similar to passive audiences of theatre and film entertainment today.

This would mean that at some point during those two hundred years there was a shift in tradition. It is not at all surprising that there would be one, since the City Dionysia competition obviously emphasized the entertainment aspects of tragedies, and de-emphasized the ritual experience of the tragic dancers, since it cannot be evaluated by the jury.

Probably Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were a part of this change, even key figures in making it happen. Aeschylus, particularly, came to a field still dominated by traditions of ritual, and through trial and error, and vision, forged the elements of Attican tragedy from it. Sophocles and Euripides by contrast, came to a table already set by Aeschylus (and Thespis), and could hone the medium to its fullest.

A topic for more study would be whether Sophocles and Euripides viewed tragedy and the chorus in different ways, as Aristotle indicates: “The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action, in the manner not of Euripides but of Sophocles." Perhaps Aristotle's dismissal of Euripides' take on the chorus stemmed from ideas related to participation or ritual, ones that were incomprehensible to Aristotle, looking at tragedy only through the lens of passive entertainment?

The Theatre of Dionysus was refurbished in stone and made more respectable during the period of Athenian statesman Lycurgus (338-326 B.C.), that is to say, at a time very much influenced by Aristotle's Poetics.

The Theatre of Dionysus, with its tall and wide auditorium, made actors small and distant: the masks, costumes, and stylized gestures
of the Greek stage developed in part as a way for them to work their magic under these conditions. Even more serious is the fact that so large a part of the Athenian audience looked down on the actors. It is especially hard for an actor to project forcefully under such circumstances, which is why good theatre design today keeps half the audience below the actors' eyeline. Anything less puts actors in too weak a position. One consequence of this weakness for fourth-century actors is observable in the restriction imposed by later Greek comedy on appeals to the audience from the stage.

The remodelling of the Athenian theatre which is associated with the financial administration of Lycurgus (338-26 B.C.) extended the auditorium farther up the hillside and established an orchestra over sixty feet in diameter. These proportions put considerable space between actors and audience and necessarily limited the intimacy of communication between them. The result is most apparent precisely where Attic drama traditionally encouraged recognition of the audience's presence, the expository prologue.


This indicates that the fashion of the time was very much to avoid communication between the actors and the audience, therefore moving towards passive performance and away from participatory ritual. That such an undertaking was under way would mean that the style had been in vogue for quite some time, and that Aristotle would perhaps have only had first hand experience with that kind of theatre.

7.3. Larp and communitas

I will later ask, whether the chorus of the dithyrambs, and the audience watching a tragedy have the characteristics of communitas, as defined by Turner. First I will ask whether larps can be seen to have communitas. Game designer Martin Ericsson sees it very fit to compare communitas to the feeling of participating in larps and other roleplaying games:
This [communitas] is the hard-caught experience that makes role-players return to the forests and cellars of larpdom year after year. [Character i]mersion is but one of the tools to reach it - it is the individual's way to approach this collective state of grace, but it is an empty sacrament without the company of other celebrants.

... Turner views this shift from Liminal to Liminoid mainly as a process of liberation and diversification, but there is also a fundamental shift in the relationship between the role of audience. ... Larp, as stated before, shares the traits of liminal and liminoid. Participation and co-creation are the bridge between the intensity of grand ritual drama and the freedom of modern art.

Ericsson, Martin (2004): Play to Love. 44-45

Let us look at the circumstances of larp in relation to experiencing communitas:

**Do larpers enter sacred space/time?** Yes, although sacred could be taken to mean "fictional" or "mythical" or simply "non-real". Time and space of the larp are different from the world outside it.

**Are everyone in the larp treated equally?** They are treated according to their status in the "sacred space/time," not according to their status in real life.

**Do they all wear similar clothing, and set aside indicators of wealth, rank, privilege?** They set aside all indicators of their "real" identity when entering larp, and wear clothes appropriate to the "sacred space/time" and their characters. The costumes may not be similar for all, but might denote differences in status, culture, and personality within the "sacred time/space".

**Are formal titles and first names done away with?** Yes, completely. And replaced with titles and names specific to the "sacred space/time". Sometimes these names stick and follow the participant in the mundane world.

**Do larpers "catch fire in the Spirit"?** Ideally, yes. Sometimes it is hard to reach, just like sometimes a ritual or a performance does not feel just right. But quite often catching fire in the Spirit is a key reason for participating in larps.

A key difference between the communitas in larp and the typical ritual described by Turner would be the very specific nature of the "sacred space/time." Everyone is not
the same in the otherworld, but the otherworld is very clearly defined. Yet the feeling is very much the same.

7.4. Conclusion

The chorus served many functions. The function may have been different for the tragic dancers in the chorus, for the audience, for the poet, for the actors, and for the jury of the dramatic competitions. It clearly changed over time from a participatory ritual to a performance meant for the audience, and Aristotle may have been instrumental in hastening this transformation.

Nevertheless, even today, performance and especially performing shares attributes with ritual. Only analyzing chorus from the perspective of the audience or the jury, as Aristotle does, automatically leaves out a major part of the importance of the chorus.

The chorus had aspects of first person audience, participation, and communitas, which are shared more by ritual than by theatre.

Today those aspects live on in participatory media, including transmedia, larps, improvisation, multiplayer digital games and dance battles. To better understand and develop these recent and emerging media, it is useful to look at what has been done before. Similarly, the practice of these contemporary "ritual dramas" provides unique insight to the chorus 2500 years ago, such that was not available to earlier researchers.

The chorus lives on.
APPENDIX I: TIMELINE OF ATTICAN TRAGEDY

Compiled by the author from various sources.

561-534 City Dionysia (religious festival in honor of Dionysus) possibly started in Athens. Includes competitions for dithyrambs which include singing and and tragic dances, what would later become the chorus.

c. 550 BC The last Abydos Passion Play events in Egypt

c. 560-501 (Semi-legendary.) Thespis, a singer of dithyrambs, adds an actor with spoken lines, masks (for different characters), and a prologue to the dithyramb. Separating the tragic actor from the tragic dancers (=chorus), and essentially creating the roots of Greek tragedy.

c. 534 or c. 501 Tragedies (dithyramb and tragic dance with the addition of one actor) added to City Dionysia competitions. Thespis won the first one.

c. 525 BC Pratinas of Phlius introduces Satyr drama to Athens

508/507 Athens becomes a republic


c. 501

500 Persian Wars begin

499 BC Aeschylus makes first appearance

(ca 497/6 BC Sophocles born)

Between 499-456 Aeschylus adds second actor

Between 499-456 Aeschylus diminishes the parts of the Chorus, cuts amount of members from 50 to 12

Between 499-456 Aeschylus gives prominence to the dialogue

Between 499-456 Meter changed to Iambic by Aeschylus

487 Comedies added to the dramatic competition at Dionysia festivals

480 Golden Age of Athens begins

470 BC Sophocles' first production, probably Triptolemus

468 BC Sophocles wins at Dionysia theatre competition over reigning master Aeschylus
Between 470-456 Sophocles adds third actor

456 BC: Aeschylus dies, after which Sophocles becomes Athens' master playwright
Between 470-430 Sophocles adds scene painting
455 BC Euripides' first play
448 BC Persian Wars end
ca 440 BC Herodotos' Histories published, including a description of Greek 'tragic dances'
ca 440-400 The philosopher Socrates most active (estimation). Plato studied under him.
438-405 BC: Euripides most active
431 Peloponnesian War begins
ca 429 BC Sophocles' Oedipus Rex performed. "Highest achievement in tragedy", according to Aristotle

406/5 BC Sophocles dies
ca 406 BC Euripides dies
404 Peloponnesian War ends
404 Golden Age of Athens ends

All of fourth century BC: Greek tragedy is in decline
400-350 The philosopher Plato most active (estimation). Aristotle studied under him.

338-326 BC The Theatre of Dionysus refurbished
336 BC Alexander the Great begins his conquests
335-323 BC The philosopher Aristotle most active.
ca 335 BC: Aristotle's *Poetics*
323 Classical Era ends. Hellenistic Era begins
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