Introduction
Toward a Choral History

> For in a real tragedy, it is not the hero who perishes, it is the chorus.
> Joseph Brodsky, Nobel Lecture, December 8, 1987

On January 11, 2015, millions of people marched in the streets, in Paris and all over France, stunned by the attacks against the editorial staff of *Charlie Hebdo* and French people of Jewish faith. Both a procession of mourning and an expression of national unity and reassurance in the face of terror, these demonstrations resembled a collective exorcism: Many citizens felt compelled to participate, regardless of their political affiliation, as if, after a moment of shock, everyone felt the need to get moving again. For the participants, this was a moment of extraordinary intensity, provoking wild and contradictory emotions, mixing fear, hostility, a spirit of vengeance, solidarity and fraternity – in short, they felt they were experiencing a historic event.

The magnitude of this collective reaction gave rise to the greatest hopes. Many saw in the fervor of these demonstrations the opportunity to renew frayed social ties, as if their mutual trauma had opened a breach in time. This is perhaps characteristic of all historic events: to conjure up other ways of 'building society,' of ordering bodies and minds before being confined to the oblivion of history, swept away by official speeches. But through its very emergence, any authentic event opens up the possibility as much of unification as of radical division.

In fact, just as France was experiencing this moment of fellowship in January 2015, several more or less explicit forms of division appeared. Within hours of the attacks, it was clear that not everyone wanted to take part in these collective marches and moments of shared emotion. While many people joined the demonstrations, many others were absent, to the extent that some saw the mammoth processions of January 11 as an expression of the fear of a middle- and upper-class, ethnically homogeneous France. No, decidedly not everyone was 'Charlie': Social networks offered an exceptional sounding board to the voices breaking with the

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united song of the chorus. There was a legitimate distrust of the people's holy union, based on principles too general and generous to be honest and instrumentalized by a flagging president and government who had invited known dictators to join them at the head of the parade.

How to 'build society': Such was the question that imposed itself in public debate during the month of January 2015. Begun even before the opening of this sequence of terror and completed while a pandemic was busy reactivating old fears, this book aims to dig deeper into this issue, following a path that leads to the confines of a famous ancient Greek city, Athens. Calling on Athenian society of the fifth century BC to examine the present, our enterprise may at first seem absurd, given how distant the rules that governed this society are from us. Naturally, it is difficult to relate to a system founded on the political exclusion of more than three-quarters of the inhabitants who lived there (i.e. the free women, the foreigners and the slaves). Yet in the face of this quite understandable difficulty, it is advisable to recall that the Athenians of the fifth century instituted the first political regime based on the participation of a considerable proportion of the population, within which distinctions of wealth did not hinder legal equality in any way, and that to this form of unprecedented communal organization they gave the name of democracy, which continues to offer a backdrop – or an *arrière-pays* – to appraise politics today.

Undoubtedly the return to Athens could not offer us the unmediated 'Lessons of History' that our concerns and our helplessness seem to require. Thucydides and Plato cannot re-enchant our present. The Athenian experience may, however, help us to sharpen several decisive questions of our time: In what form do the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that run through a group build a true society that is more than the sum of its disparate networks? Conversely, by what processes does a society come to tear itself apart, or even disintegrate? How do heterogeneous social arenas and temporalities coexist within it? Under what conditions should the fervor of exceptional situations be maintained without sinking into totalitarian unity? All these questions unfold with clarity in one quite singular moment of the history of Athens.

The end of the fifth century BC marked the end of 'the greatest movement that had ever stirred the Hellenes, extending also to some of the Barbarians, one might say even to a very large part of humankind.'[1] Conceived as a single, long conflict by Thucydides, the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) resulted in the defeat of Athens and the dissolution of its maritime empire. Long marginalized, the Athenian oligarchs took

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[1] Thucydides, 1.1.2.

advantage of the debacle to exact their revenge in the city: With the support of Spartan troops, a commission of thirty Athenians put an end to the democratic institutions that had governed political life for more than a century. Under the leadership of Critias and Charicles, the Thirty drastically reduced the civic body – henceforth limited to 3,000 citizens – and multiplied the number of extrajudicial executions, arbitrary dispossessions and collective banishments.[2]

In the face of these abuses, democrats did not remain unresponsive: At the end of the year 404, Thrasybulus assembled an army of volunteers, made up of exiled Athenian citizens, metics and even slaves. Departing from Thebes, this heterogeneous troupe first seized the fortress of Phyle in northern Attica, before taking control of the strategic port of Piraeus a few weeks later. Taking advantage of the wait-and-see attitude of the Spartans and the divisions within the oligarchy, 'those of Piraeus' won several resounding victories over 'those from the town (*astu*).' Although the negotiations proved long and difficult, a truce was concluded in the early fall of 403.

On the Twelfth Day of Boedromion

Nearly fifty years later, the Athenians could date Thrasybulus' army's victory precisely: Each year, on the twelfth day of the month of Boedromion, they celebrated; more than a simple restoration of democratic institutions, this was the refoundation of the regime inaugurated nearly a century earlier by Cleisthenes in 508/7 BC. On this occasion, the Athenians celebrated their newfound freedom, 'for on that day the exiles returned from Phyle'[3] by making a sacrifice to Athena, allowing the city to thus commemorate the memory of its regained unity.
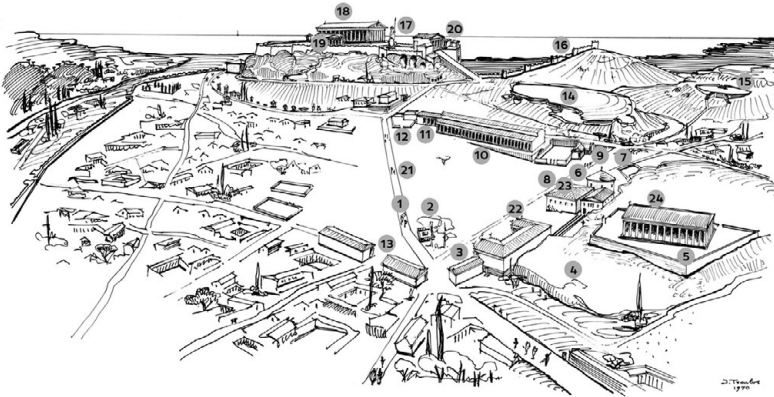
What the Athenians celebrated exactly is, however, far from obvious. Which event in particular marked in their eyes the reunification of the city and the final end of the civil war? On the twelfth day of the month of Boedromion, when the victors took possession of the city, the Athenian community reacted in two diametrically opposed ways. After eight months of civil war, the army of Thrasybulus entered the town and marched to the Acropolis to make a sacrifice to the goddess Athena.[4] Then, going down to

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[2] Ancient sources mention between 1,500 and 2,500 victims of the Thirty: Isocrates, *Areopagiticus* (7), 67; Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon* (3), 235; Pseudo-Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, 35.4. The figures vary greatly depending on the sources: See Canfora 2013, pp. 112–21, and *infra*, Conclusion, p. 310–21.

[3] Plutarch, *On the Fame of the Athenians*, 349e–f.

[4] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.4.38–9: 'And they effected a reconciliation on these terms, that the two parties should be at peace with one another and that every man should depart to his home except the

Fig. 0.1   Map of Attica.

members of the Thirty, and of the Eleven, and of the Ten who had ruled in Piraeus. They also decided that if any of the men in the city were afraid, they should settle at Eleusis. When these things had been accomplished, Pausanias disbanded his army and the men from Piraeus went up to the Acropolis under arms and offered sacrifice to Athena.' The combatants would, however, have

1. Panathenaic Way	**9.** Fountain	**17.** Acropolis
2. Altar of the Twelve Gods	**10.** South Stoa	**18.** Parthenon
3. Royal Stoa	**11.** Fountain	**19.** Erechtheion
4. Colonos Agoraios	**12.** Mint	**20.** Athena Nike Temple
5. Hephaisteion	**13.** Stoa Poikile	**21.** Tyrannicides
6. Tholos	**14.** Areopagus	**22.** Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios
7. Strategeion	**15.** Pnyx	**23.** Boule
8. Eponymous heroes	**16.** Themistocles Wall	**24.** Hephaistos Temple

Fig. 0.2   The Agora, the Pnyx and the Acropolis (view from northwest).

the Pnyx, the victorious general called together an assembly at which all Athenians undertook to respect the terms of reconciliation, 'to be true to [their] oath' and 'to live under the laws that had previously been in force.'[5]

The city had thus offered up two very different visions: on the one hand, that of a procession giving thanks to Athena; and on the other, that of a political community, gathered together in the main venue for democratic deliberation on the hill of Pnyx.

The Acropolis and the Pnyx: two canonical representations of the city, or, more exactly, two ways to build the ideal type of the Greek city. These two representations function most often in an inverted way. Civic rites are

deposited their weapons at the doors of the city before rushing toward the Acropolis: Lysias, *Against Agoratus* (13), 81. This summary of the Athenian civil war is loosely based on Xenophon's testimony in Books I and II of the *Hellenica*. For a more precise chronology of the sequence, see Krentz 1982. On the successive interpretations to which the Athenian defeat in 404 has given rise over the course of history, see the rich special issue of *Ktèma* 42 (2017): 7–205.

[5] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.4.43.

generally considered as a means to build and reinforce the unity of the
political community. The procession of 403 could therefore be seen as the
definitive symbol of the reunification of the city around a ritual in honor of
Athena. It offered the reassuring image of a city united anew, after having
been torn asunder by civil war. Conversely, a public assembly is the place
where disagreement and, potentially, political division are expressed.

However, on this day of October in 403, these two events functioned
the other way around: While the ostensibly inclusive ritual demonstrated
the divisions within the community, it was at the Assembly – a locus of
often violent political confrontations – that the city regained its unity.
It would be wrong, however, to interpret the procession to the Acropolis in
the light of the Panathenaia, the great civic rite at which the city's unity
took center stage.[6] While it followed the same route, Thrasybulus' proces-
sion had a completely different meaning. The scene does not offer any of
the Panathenaia's much-admired order, as illustrated in schoolbooks and
admired at the British Museum by tourists from all around the world.
Beyond a simple reconciliation with the gods, this was the occasion for one
camp to claim victory over the other. Indeed, the procession and the
sacrifice concerned only the democrats of Piraeus: The men remaining in
the city were excluded[7]; furthermore, the participants were undoubtedly
armed, as if the threat still loomed large and the democrats were ready to
throw themselves on the first tyrants they spotted, just like Harmodius and
Aristogeiton, who, one century earlier, had taken advantage of the proces-
sion of the Panathenaia to assassinate Hipparchus, the son of the tyrant
Peisistratus. Rife with division, the procession exhibited the visible separa-
tion between democrats and oligarchs, 'those of Piraeus' and 'those of the
town,' participants in the ritual and simple spectators, all breathing in the
smoke of the sacrifices without being able to reach the feast.

In contrast to this, it was at the Assembly that the recovered unity of the
community became obvious, as the former oligarchs and the exiled demo-
crats stood side by side. All listened to the unifying speech of Thrasybulus,
which, in the form that Xenophon gave it, enjoined the victors to keep
their word and to respect the vanquished. Far from being a place of
dissensus or conflict, the Assembly, on this twelfth day of Boedromion
of the year 403, was the place where the two camps sealed their truce.

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[6] Historians have often interpreted the procession of the Panathenaia as the incarnation of the
community in its unity and its articulations, associating the different social groups. See Graf 1996;
Kavoulaki 1999.
[7] See the remarks of Shear 2011, p. 288.

The City in Chorus(es)

Of the two conceptions of the city we have just described – the 'city at sacrifice' or 'the city in assembly' (both of which are heirs to ancient sources and have been extensively employed by historians of the Greek world) – neither of them alone says anything about the *true* reality of the city. However, there is another noticeable configuration through which the civic imagination likes to represent the *polis* and the different groups that make it up: that of the chorus. In fact, it is not the metaphor of the procession or of sacrifice that ancient authors used to appraise the union of the community. Rather than the procession moving linearly through space, they preferred to privilege the idea of the chorus, which turns in on itself, organizes a common experience and aims to create harmony among its participants.

To understand this, let us go back a few weeks and to the hill of Mounychia in Piraeus, after the great battle between democrats and oligarchs where the bloodthirsty Critias perished, since this provides the first step toward reconciliation. After the democrats' victory, Cleocritus, the herald of the mysteries of Eleusis – who was on Thrasybulus' side – spoke up. He enjoyed considerable prestige because of the bond his family maintained with one of the most important cults of Athenian civic religion: that of Demeter and Persephone in Eleusis. In his vibrant appeal to the defeated oligarchs, he evoked the notion of the chorus in order to discuss what united Athenian citizens beyond their political differences:

> And Cleocritus, the herald of the initiated, a man with a very fine voice, obtained silence and said: 'Fellow citizens, why do you drive us out of the city? Why do you wish to kill us? For we never did you any harm, but we have shared with you in the most solemn rites and sacrifices and the most splendid festivals, *we danced together in the choruses* (*sugkhoreutai*), *followed the same choral formation as children*,[8] and we have braved many dangers with you both by land and by sea in defence of the common safety and freedom of us both. In the name of the gods of our fathers and mothers, in the name of our ties of kinship and marriage and comradeship – for all these many of us share with one another –, cease, out of shame before gods and men, to sin against your fatherland, and do not obey those most accursed Thirty, who for the sake of their private gain have killed in eight months more Athenians, almost, than all the Peloponnesians in ten years of war.'[9]

[8] On this translation, see Fisher 2003, p. 203 n. 67.
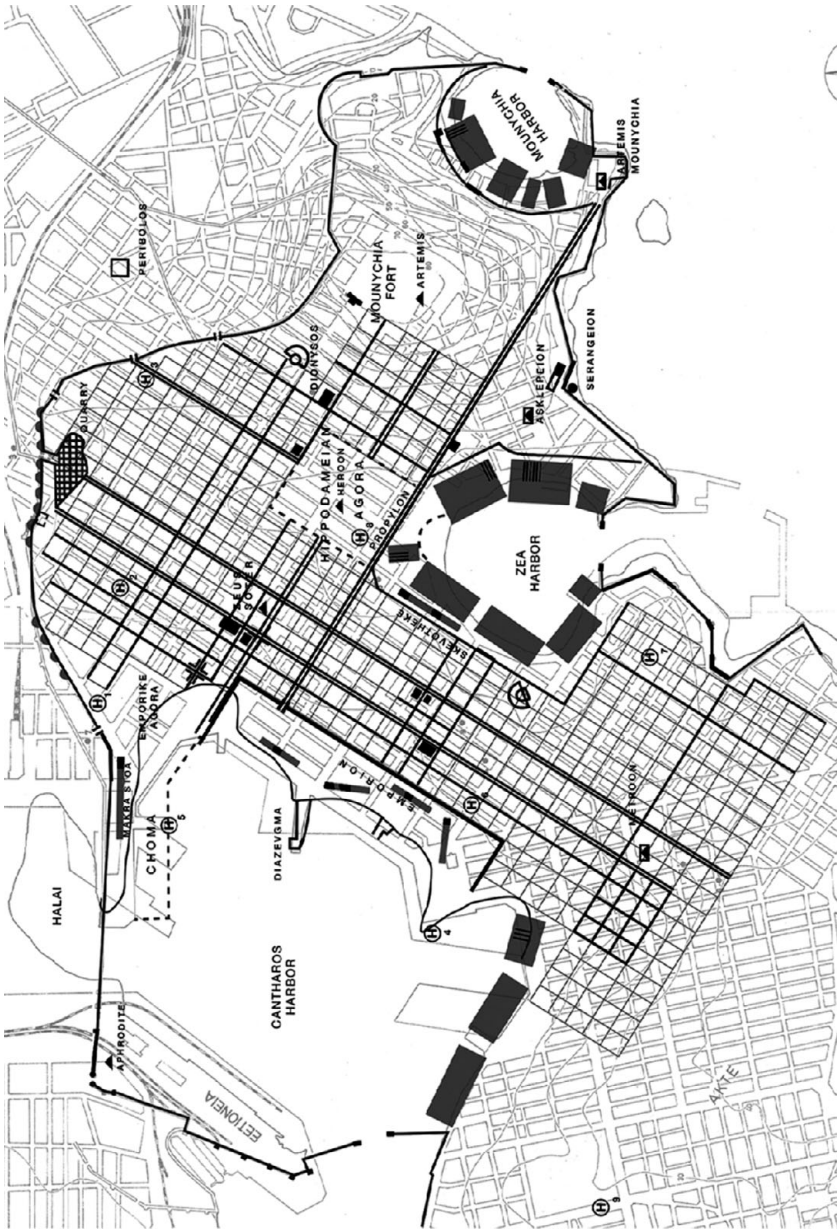[9] *Hellenica*, 2.4.20–2, transl. Browson slightly modified.

Fig. 0.3   Map of Piraeus.

Festivals, sacrifices, choruses and the army: Cleocritus rapidly listed a group of practices that he felt contributed to making the Athenian community what it was. We have chosen to isolate the chorus from among this range of inclusive activities because the Greeks themselves made special use of the notion of the chorus for thinking about how the city functioned.

The Chorus, an 'Absolute Metaphor'

Let us start with an affirmation: The chorus plays the role of an 'absolute metaphor' in Athenian thought – like other images, such as weaving, slavery or navigation.[10] Chorality evokes the ideal ordering of a collective, be it objects in the domestic sphere, various human groups or the cosmos itself. It is in the form of a chorus that Ischomachus, in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, presents the arrangement of the pots in the kitchen of his *oikos* when he affirms: 'There is nothing, in short, that does not gain in beauty when set out in order. For each set looks like a chorus of utensils, and the space between the sets is beautiful to see, when each set is kept clear of it, just as a cyclic chorus (*kuklios choros*) about the altar is a beautiful spectacle in itself, and even the free space looks beautiful and unencumbered.'[11] In the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *On the Cosmos*, it is the stars and the sky themselves that are assimilated to a chorus in which the divinity is the coryphaeus – that is to say, the entity who regulates its moves:

> Just as in a chorus at the direction of the leader (*coryphaeus*) all the chorus of men, sometimes of women too, join in singing together, creating a single pleasing harmony with their varied mixture of high and low notes, so also in the case of the god who controls the universe: the note is sounded from on high by him who might well be called the chorus-master (*coryphaeus*).[12]

From the domestic arena in Ischomachus' house to the ordering of the stars in the sky, all collective forms can be appraised by means of the choral metaphor.[13] Plato's work offers the most striking illustration of this: In the

[10] On the crucial metaphor of weaving (*sumplokè*), see Scheid and Svenbro 1996: As for the chorus, weaving serves to appraise unity as well as the diversity of collectives, political consensus as well as *stasis*. On slavery as a metaphor, see Ismard 2019, pp. 239–41.

[11] Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.20.

[12] Pseudo-Aristotle, *On the Cosmos*, 399a15. Cf. 392a17–20: '[Ouranos] is full of divine bodies which we call stars; it moves eternally, and revolves in solemn choral dance with all the stars in the same circular orbit unceasingly for all time.' Moreover, in the *Republic*, the chorus represents the procession that accompanies all the improper desires that clutter the psyche devoid of any virtue (560e).

[13] On the analogy between dramatic chorus and hoplitic phalanx, see Calero 2018.

philosopher's dialogues, the chorus is used to represent groups of all kinds, both human and nonhuman, from the entourage of certain sophists or politicians to entire age groups of young men, but also groups of animals, gods and even vices and virtues.[14] The metaphor is all the more structuring as it can describe forms of association that are valued, even enchanting – like shining stars – or, on the contrary, very worrying – like the flatterers who, at the court of Alexander the Great, gathered into a detestable chorus under the leadership of a certain Medeus of Larissa.[15]

What sense can we make of this extensive use of the choral metaphor? Hans Blumenberg has shown that metaphor is an integral part of any philosophical discourse, in which statements and concepts are never fully clarified.[16] Any metaphysics is thus carried by metaphors and representations that cannot be translated back into concepts but 'have never ceased to pervade, tincture and structure them.'[17] The world as a book to be deciphered,[18] truth as light, life as a sea voyage[19] are all absolute metaphors that cross intellectual history, offering horizons of meaning through which thinking can ultimately unfold. These metaphors function to orient and represent the world as a whole, and while they go beyond what can be expressed theoretically, they nevertheless produce knowledge.

In this sense, chorality is indeed an absolute metaphor in Greek thought; that is to say, a means of representing – as part of the order of the world – the arrangement or organization of a collective in the broadest possible terms. If the image is prevalent, it is because it is based on experience and knowledge so common that it does not need to be explained.

At the Heart of Civic Life

It is a well-known fact that choral practice was a deeply rooted reality in the lives of ordinary Athenian citizens – particularly through the widespread

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[14] *Protagoras*, 315b (the chorus of the disciples of Protagoras); *Euthydemus*, 276b and 279c (the chorus of the admirers of Dionysodoros and Euthydemus); *Theaetetus*, 179d (the chorus of the followers of Heraclitus); *Politics*, 291c (the chorus of the politicians); *Phaedrus*, 250b (the followers of Beauty); *Theaetetus*, 173b–c (the chorus of the wise men); *Laws*, 665e (the chorus of the children, the adult men and the old men); *Timaeus*, 40e (the chorus of the stars); *Phaedrus*, 230e (the chorus of the cicadas); *Phaedrus*, 247a (the chorus of the gods); *Republic*, 490c, 554b and 560e (the chorus of the vices and qualities). See Trédé-Boulmer 2002, pp. 583–4.

[15] Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 65c–d: '[Medeus of Larissa] was, if I may call him so, leader and skilled master (*exarchos kai sophistēs koruphaios*) of the chorus of flatterers that danced attendance on Alexander, and were banded together against all good men.' Demosthenes describes a chorus of false witnesses, manipulated by three *chorēgoi*, exercising a shared *chorēgia* (i.e. the financing and the direction of the chorus): *Against Aphobos 3* (29), 28.

[16] Blumenberg 2010.   [17] Blumenberg 2010, p. 7.   [18] Blumenberg 2022.   [19] Bodei 2004.

performance of the dithyramb, a singular choral formation involving singing
and dancing in a circle (the *kuklios choros*). During the fifth century, a
thousand citizens (or young men who were about to become citizens) found
themselves directly implicated in such performances every year. Such per-
formances – more than comedy or tragedy[20] – formed the civic spectacle par
excellence and were characterized by a competition between ten choruses of
fifty boys and ten choruses of fifty adult citizens, one from each tribe.[21]
These dithyrambic choruses performed not only during the Dionysia but
also during the Thargelia in honor of Apollo, the Panathenaia and probably
the Prometheia and the Hephaisteia.[22] Furthermore, far from remaining
confined to the large civic cults that were held in the urban center (*astu*),
choral practice occurred at all levels of civic life. Thus, during the Bendideia
of Piraeus, the Tauropolia and in Brauron, choruses in various formations
were involved in collective worship, including both boys and girls and men
and women at the same time.[23]

Choral activity assumed such importance in the democratic city because
it was a part of the *paideia*, or education, of all young Athenian women
and men, and it significantly contributed to preparing them for their
respective roles within the community. If the ancient authors are to be
believed, it was one of the vectors through which the community's core
norms were communicated to the whole city. In the *Laws*, Plato suggests
that a group of choruses should be created in order to instill the right
attitudes in citizens as early as possible, and that these choruses should
subsequently be maintained throughout the citizens' lives.[24] According to
him, the ideal city would therefore be composed of three choruses, each
composed of a different age group: children, those under thirty and men
between thirty and sixty years old. The chorus was subsequently presented
as the ideal medium for educating citizens and conveying community
values, with the city's combined choruses feeding into the 'chorus of
choruses' that constituted the city. Plato evokes in particular 'the duty of
every man and child – slave and free, male and female –, the duty of the
whole city, to charm themselves unceasingly with the chants (*epaidousan*)
we have described, constantly changing them and securing variety in every

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[20] On the tragic chorus, see Calame 2013; Gagné and Govers Hopman (eds.) 2013.
[21] On the social and political implications of that specific organization, see Wilson 2011, p. 24.
[22] See Wilson 2003b, p. 168. Choruses of men sang paeans at the Thargelia (Wilson 2000, p. 314)
and choruses of young girls performed on the twenty-eighth day of the month of Hekatombaion
during the Panathenaia.
[23] Parker 2005, pp. 182–3.   [24] Plato, *Laws*, 2.664b–667a.

way possible, so as to inspire the singers with an insatiable appetite for the hymns and with pleasure therein.'[25]

The various choruses imagined by Plato, which potentially encompassed all members of the community ('every man and child – slave and free, male and female'), were thus articulated in a skillful composition, the coherency of which lay in dancing and singing together. This shared pleasure exerted an extremely powerful link between members of the community, which Plato conceived as being a true enchantment (*epōidē*). This is a delightful definition of the social magic implied by the choral ritual, which created the community by defining an interior (those who participated in the choruses) and an exterior (those who were excluded from them).[26]

This philosophical fantasy appears radical in that it anticipates including slaves in this enchanted circle. This exaltation of the choral model is not, however, specifically Platonic: There is indeed a *song culture* common to most ancient Greek cities.[27] But perhaps it is necessary to go further. If the chorus is so important in Athens, it is because it represents a properly democratic aesthetic. The hypothesis can be tested in many different ways. By placing its members in a circle or a square, sometimes under the aegis of a coryphaeus – the chorus-leader – the chorus primarily displays visually the principle of equality between citizens. Furthermore, its circular form presupposes that all of its participants can see each other, thus mimicking the transparency that was specific to the democratic regime and made public visibility of the law and of magistrates' supervision an essential aspect of civic life.[28]

As the visual representation of a collective gathered around an empty center, the shape of the circle can offer a model of the type of order that is characteristic of the civic ideal. Jean-Christophe Bailly even believes he can see in circle dances a figuration of the political operation par excellence, in which 'the space of the city comes to conceive itself as a whole, fueled by a center which gives it measure and legality, but which can only do so because it is an inappropriable point, situated between the men.'[29] The chorus thus appears to produce 'a center effect'[30] of a properly political nature. Built around a place that is at the same time not capable of being

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[25] Plato, *Laws*, 2.665c. On the chorus as 'magical,' see Kurke 2013.
[26] Bourdieu 1982, pp. 58–63. See, for a different perspective, Kurke 2013.   [27] Herington 1985.
[28] The chorus exists in a space that is at once empty and central. See Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.20: 'Just as a cyclic chorus about the altar is a beautiful spectacle in itself, and even the free space looks beautiful and unencumbered (*katharon*).' On the core values of chorality, see the important contribution of Kurke 2013.
[29] Bailly 2005, p. 214.   [30] Bailly 2005, p. 231. See in particular Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.20.

appropriated and under everyone's control,[31] the city could be said to take the ideal form of a *choreia*.

In this respect, the chorus can truly be considered of the same order as 'festivals,' according to the definition Rousseau proposed in his *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758). In this work, Rousseau distinguishes festivals from theater, which, by distancing the spectator, provides a moment of separation between the actor and the role they embody, between the audience and the stage, between the spectators themselves and between the spectators and the rest of the social body:

> People think they come together in the theater, and it is there that they are isolated. It is there that they go to forget their friends, neighbors, and relations in order to concern themselves with fables, in order to cry for the misfortunes of the dead, or to laugh at the expense of the living.[32]

For Rousseau, spectacles steal our being, whereas, at a festival, 'the contagion of public friendship' wins over every individual, turning them into the private actors of a collective emotion.[33] In contrast to this, by creating confusion between the stage and the public when playing the role of an emphatic and empathic commentator,[34] the chorus abolishes the distance that is specific to theater and which Rousseau denounces. In this respect, the chorus should be considered one of the key elements of a true democratic aesthetic.[35]

Democratic Chorus, Oligarchic Chorus

To stick to these general remarks is not enough: The organization of choral practice differs appreciably from one city to another, depending on the

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[31] See Vernant 1983.   [32] Rousseau 1960, pp. 16–17.

[33] Rousseau 1960, p. 126: 'Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united. I need not have recourse to the games of the ancient Greeks; there are modern ones which are still in existence, and I find them precisely in our city.' Certainly, one could object that the choruses of dithyramb put on stage not all of the people but a fraction of them. However, each individual could imagine being part of it: All citizens were, are or will be *choreutai* and can consequently imagine participating in festivals on the same footing as those who play in the *orchestra*.

[34] Dupont 2007, p. 299.

[35] That is, the aesthetic dimension of politics, which is particularly noticeable in Pericles' famous funeral oration: *philokaloumen te ... kai philosophoumen* (Thucydides, 2.40.1). See Castoriadis 1991, p. 122–3: 'Pericles does not say we love beautiful things (and put them in museums), we love wisdom (and pay professors or buy books). He says we are in and by the love of beauty and wisdom and the activity this love brings forth, we live by and with and through them – but far from extravagance, and far from flabbiness.'

political regime that characterizes them. In Athens, chorality was plural, egalitarian and competitive: the challenge being to prevent the emergence of an overly powerful chorus that could represent, even if only for the duration of a ceremony, the city as a whole. It was quite different in other cities of the Greek world. As Leslie Kurke has shown, Pindar's corpus offers a glimpse of a completely different way of organizing chorality in Thebes during the early fifth century. Through the formation of choruses overseen by important families, the Theban elite sought to embody the city as a whole.[36] In Alcman's Sparta, choral dances came to symbolize the close union between civic and cosmic order, and choruses of young girls were meant to incarnate the whole community.[37] More broadly, despite being divided according to age groups, Spartan choruses expressed a homophony in which the *eukosmia* running through the political community was achieved.

In Athens, however, the city as a whole was never conceived as a single chorus capable of incarnating the city itself, except in the writings of Athenian dissenters such as Plato and Xenophon. In the *Laws*, as we have seen, Plato explicitly defended a noncompetitive conception of choral practice. Delighted with its own singing and dancing, the city found unity in choral practice, in what seems like a form of social magic.[38] The same is true of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, in which Socrates chooses to celebrate specifically the Athenian chorus sent to work on civic *theōria* (state pilgrimage) for Delos precisely because the city was presented as a single chorus, unlike the multiple choral performances characteristic of the democratic dithyramb.[39] Socrates' two disciples aimed to redefine the choral phenomenon as it existed in Athenian society in their era, and their implicit condemnation of Athenian chorality was part of their wider criticism of the democratic regime.

Athenian practices present another singularity: They strove to dissociate the roles of *chorēgos*, coryphaeus and poet. In Thebes, it seems that the members of the city's most important families were able to hold both the position of *chorēgos* (thus helping to finance the chorus) and the position of

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[36] Kurke 2007, p. 100. [37] Ferrari 2008; see also Calame 2013b.

[38] While the children's chorus states the doctrine, the young men ask the gods to accept its principles, and the mature men validate the words of the other two choruses as holders of power. See Kowalzig 2013a; Peponi 2013a, 2013b.

[39] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.3.12. The agonistic character of the choral contests in Delos is debated; the main point for our purpose is that Socrates himself sees in this chorus 'of the whole city' the most beautiful expression of Athenian choral practice. See Rutherford 2004, pp. 89–90.

chorus-leader,[40] while in archaic Sparta, poets most probably also played the role of coryphaeus. This was not the case in Athens, where these three roles were clearly separate.[41] This was a deliberate choice, and one that aimed to avert the charismatic authority that came with the dual power of financing the ceremony and conducting the chorus.

Chorus and Social Hierarchies

Despite mobilizing hundreds of individuals (which made it a vector for spreading civic values not only to citizens but to all members of the community) and creating friendship and unity through the repetition of ritualized performances (a crucial aspect of a true democratic aesthetic), choruses should nonetheless not be considered a factor in cohesion and an ever more perfect union.

Beyond the appeasing discourses of Plato and Xenophon, choral activity obscured a series of tensions and even divisions. Within a given chorus, strong rivalries could divide those within it who apparently danced to the same tune. Who could then be seen as the leader, or coryphaeus? Choruses thus embodied a sphere of competition that illustrates the deep-reaching hierarchies within the group.

In fact, Athenian choruses are far from being loci of perfect equality. First of all, the *chorēgos* plays an eminent role there: He has de facto authority over the various people whom he hires, since he provides directly for their upkeep for several months of the year.[42] It is he who recruits, at his own expense, a professional to train the *choreutai*, and he provides a sufficiently large space (the *chorēgeion*) so that the chorus can comfortably rehearse its complex moves; by the same token, it falls to him to manage the entire troupe and to disburse the expenses related to the performance itself, in particular the costumes. It is also he who, in the event of victory, collects the prize of the dithyrambic contest – a large bronze tripod – which he often dedicates to the gods to ensure his success goes down in history. The *chorēgos* thus wields such power that Xenophon compares his authority to that of the head of an *oikos*, an army or a city.[43] It should not be surprising, therefore, that a real king can be compared to a *chorēgos*, making his followers dance like puppets on strings and, beyond that,

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[40] Kurke 2007, pp. 100–11.   [41] Wilson 2011, p. 33.
[42] Wilson 2000, p. 124, does not hesitate to speak of a real 'choregic patronage,' recalling that, by this means, rich individuals directly paid a significant percentage of the civic body for several months each year (p. 128).
[43] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.4.6.

dominating the whole people. It is in this way that Philip of Macedonia allegedly acted, according to the orator Demosthenes, recruiting traitors within several Greek cities who were ready to deliver their fatherland to him.[44] Faced with these choral maneuvers, the *dēmos* thus looked on as it was dispossessed of its own power.

Another character stands out: the coryphaeus; that is to say, the chorus-leader[45] – of whom Aristotle affirms that by becoming autonomous (as a protagonist, the main actor) he gave birth to tragedy.[46] The very form of the dithyramb, such as it was established in the fifth century BC, gives him a privileged place: Strophes (sung by the coryphaeus alone) alternate with antistrophes (sung in unison by the chorus). It is he who intones the song, provides the melody and strikes the rhythm: Everyone follows him.[47] This prominent position is also reflected in the metaphorical use of the term by ancient authors, who see it as a means of symbolizing the ascendancy of an individual over those around him. The metaphor is notably used in a famous passage of the *Theaetetus*, which depicts the philosophers as a chorus, with Socrates specifying that he is only going to 'speak of the chorus-leaders (*coryphae*); for why should anyone talk about the inferior philosophers.'[48] Better still, as we have seen, the divinity itself, in *On the Cosmos*, can be likened to a coryphaeus organizing the world around him.

But the texts provide a glimpse of other forms of more subtle hierarchies proper to choruses. The aulete thus occupies a central place: It is he who organizes the dance and the song of the *choreutai* evolving around him, probably in concentric circles.[49] Within the troupe itself, some *choreutai* even seem to have been more equal than others. The *geranos* (the 'crane dance'), for example, which took place in Delos in honor of Apollo, distinguished within the chorus not only a coryphaeus (called the *geranoulkos*) but also a 'first dancer,' executing solo rather free variations, and a 'second dancer,' in charge of orchestrating the movements of the rest of the troupe.[50] This specific case suggests the existence of micro-hierarchies,

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[44] Demosthenes, *Third Philippic* (9), 59–60: in Oreos (Euboea), 'many men banded together, with Philip as chorus paymaster (*chorēgos*) and controller.' Cf. Plutarch, *Aemilius Paulus*, 34.1: After his defeat at Pydna, King Perseus marches with 'the chorus of his friends and intimates (*choros philōn kai sunēthōn*)'; Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 63a: Kings, 'like the tragedians, want to have a chorus of friends singing the same tune or a sympathetic audience to applaud them.'

[45] Souda, s.v. *koruphaios*; Pollux, 4.106.   [46] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449a14ff.

[47] Lucian, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, 28; for song, Dion Chrysostom, *Orationes* (56), 4, 1; for melody, Aristotle, *Problems*, 19.22.919a35ff; for rhythm, Pseudo-Aristotle, *On the Cosmos*, 6.399a15. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.11.1018b25–30 and *Politics*, 3.4.1277a.

[48] Plato, *Theaetetus*, 173c–d.   [49] See D'Angour 2013, p. 203.

[50] Delavaud-Roux 1994, pp. 78–9.

undoubtedly quite fluid and difficult to locate given the lack of documentation.

The fact remains that these hierarchies between *chorēgoi*, *coryphaeoi*, *auletai* and *choreutai* are clearly less rigidly defined in Athens than elsewhere in the Greek world. Not only is the *chorēgos* not confused with the poet, nor with the coryphaeus[51] – which would increase his influence on the chorus – but *chorēgia* is a *compulsory* duty that rich citizens and metics are obliged to carry out: This limits de facto the gratitude felt by the *choreutai* toward their (more or less) generous financer, as Pseudo-Xenophon deplores.[52] In the same way, the coryphaeus does not crush the *choreutai* with his magnificence but behaves more like a *primus inter pares*. This is especially the case from the end of the fifth century when the music takes ever greater precedence over the words.[53]

The Chorus Put to the Test of Civil War

These internal hierarchies are sufficiently deep-reaching to raise the question of the coherence of the choral group and the rivalries within it. Far from being a purely harmonious place, the chorus is always also a competitive playing field, where each individual strives to better the next coryphaeus and even replace him. These rivalries are rarely manifest, if only because the group must sing and dance in unison to have a chance of winning the competition while pleasing the gods.[54] But some clues suggest that this little world was far from irenic – as in the case of one poisoned young chorus boy, which resulted in his *chorēgos* coming before the Athenian courts (Antiphon, *On the choreutes*). This internal rivalry is also sometimes dramatized. In some tragedies the chorus is divided into two half-choruses carrying opposing voices: The clearest case stages, in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, the trial of Orestes and the division of the chorus

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[51] Perhaps the *chorēgos* could initially – in the time of Aeschylus – also serve as *coryphaeus* in the tragedies, but this was no longer the case at the end of the fifth century. See Wilson 2000, pp. 133–4, and Azoulay 2014, p. 23.

[52] Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians*, 1.13: 'In the case of providing support for festivals, for athletics in the gymnasia and for manning triremes, they know that it is the rich pay for the choruses (*chorēgiai*), while are paid to be in the choruses [...]. The common people think that they deserve to take money for singing and running and dancing and sailing in the ships, so that they get more and the rich become poorer.'

[53] Moretti 2001, p. 44.

[54] On the tendency of Athenian sources to value chorus unanimity, see Budelmann 2018.

into two camps unable to decide between the adversaries without the support of a god.[55]

Beyond these internal quarrels, the choral experience translates into intense competition *between* the different choruses within the framework of a competition arbitrated by the community. Each *chorēgos* competes to put together the most beautiful ensemble and to win the prize, even if it means spending a lot of money to achieve it. As Xenophon reminds us in the *Hipparchus*: 'For evidence of this [spirit of emulation] I may refer to the choruses, in which many labors and heavy expenses are the price paid for trifling rewards.'[56] This competitive spirit sometimes drove participants to try and destabilize their adversaries, such as when Meidias sought by all means (corruption, destruction of material and assault!) to make the *chorēgia* of Demosthenes the least spectacular possible.[57]

Seen from this perspective, the choral model maintained unique connections with *stasis*, and the chorus should be considered within a spectrum of collective activities that run the gamut from war to peace and harmony.[58] In this respect, the establishment of agonistic choral practices following the clash that opposed Cleisthenes' and Isagoras' respective factions at the end of the sixth century is far from insignificant. As early as 508/7, the reorganization of choruses, in accordance with the Cleisthenic system of ten tribes, can indeed be interpreted as a way of blocking stasis from reoccurring. Through the organization of choral competitions as part of the dithyrambs, a specific form for managing *stasis* was invented, in which the Cleisthenic tribes aimed precisely to break up preexisting cliental ties and factional divisions. By replacing impious *stasis* with healthy competition, the Athenians strove to strike a new internal

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[55] This situation of confrontation between two half-choruses is quite common, since it is also found in *Ajax* by the same Sophocles or in *Alcestis* and the *Trojan Women* by Euripides. In *Hippolytus*, the case is a little different since the play introduces two different half-choruses, entering on each side of the orchestra – that of the servants, then that of the women of Troizen. *Contra* Visvardi 2015, p. 242, which does not take into account the seditious potentialities of chorality.

[56] Xenophon, *Hipparchus*, 1.26.

[57] Cf. Demosthenes, *Against Meidias* (21), 147: 'And yet what act of insolence did [Alcibiades] commit that equals the crime that this man has been proven to have done? He hit Taureas in the face when he was chorus leader (*chorēgos*). But let that go: he did this to a chorus leader when he too was a chorus leader without even breaking this law (the law was not yet passed).'

[58] Toward war: cf. Athenaeus, 14.628e: 'Whoever honours the gods best with dances are the best in war'; toward peace: cf. Pausanias, 5.16.6: The quarrel between the sixteen cities of Elis was resolved by organizing *agōnes* for the Heraia, weaving a *peplos* for the goddess and establishing two choruses bearing the memory of the confrontation. See Scheid and Svenbro 1996, pp. 10–21.

civic balance.[59] Choral confrontation, in the agonistic mode, thus made it possible to depict and overcome divisions by sublimating them.[60]

But these tensions inherent in how choruses functioned should not conceal another form of division, which is less visible but no less structural. Like all collective rites, choral activity radically separated those who participated in it – albeit as part of a competition – from those who would never be part of the circle. Athenian society also included a good number of individuals outside of the choruses, who were the objects of a radical form of exclusion. While choruses offer a privileged way into thinking about unity and division within the Athenian community by using its own categories, the rifts within and between the various choruses that exist in the city still need to be taken into account in order to avoid deluding ourselves with an overly positive and harmonious conception of the social world.

A Choral History: Contemporary Theorization

In order to overcome this risk, this book aims to shift our focus from the ancient conception of the chorus to the contemporary theorization of what we will call a *choral history*. We are arguing, in short, that by writing a choral history, we are able to restore the complexity of the Athenian society at the end of the fifth century.

This position has already been taken up by some of the social sciences.[61] When they turned their attention to the organizational frameworks of social life and the relations between the various groups that compose it, the sociologists of the Durkheimian school mobilized the choral metaphor.[62] For Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, the memory of the ancient chorus

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[59] Wilson 2003b, p. 182.

[60] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.5.16–8: 'When will they reach that standard of obedience to their rulers, seeing that they make contempt of rulers a point of honour? Or when will they attain that harmony, seeing that, instead of working together for the general good, they are more envious and bitter against one another than against the rest of the world, are the most quarrelsome of men in public and private assemblies, most often go to law with one another, and would rather make profit of one another so than by mutual service, and while regarding public affairs as alien to themselves, yet fight over them too, and find their chief enjoyment in having the means to carry on such strife? . . . No, no, Pericles, don't think the wickedness of the Athenians so utterly past remedy. Don't you see what good discipline they maintain in their fleets, how well they obey the umpires in athletic contests, how they take orders from the choir-trainers as readily as any?'

[61] For a very general approach, see Azoulay and Ismard 2018; Kowalzig 2013a.

[62] The Durkheimian school's interest in the choral phenomenon was also the result of a dialogue with British social anthropology. In his 1922 ethnographic study of the Andaman Islanders, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown saw dance as a privileged medium for expressing social unity and harmony (Radcliffe-Brown 1922). In 1928, Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard studied the social role of one of

was used metaphorically to examine a founding moment in the 'realization' of the social body along the lines of a primitive scene, with 'the magical act' at its center: 'A circle of impassioned spectators collects around the action being performed. They are brought to a halt, absorbed, hypnotized by the spectacle. They become as much actors as spectators in the magical performance – rather like the chorus in Greek drama. The society as a whole becomes expectant and obsessed by the rite.'[63] In particular, the chorus provided a way of thinking about the connection between individualism and holism:

> The round, the dance, and the rhythm are the work of the crowd, but each individual brings his or her own personal variation to the theme. Within the homogenous horde, gifts of improvisation are widespread, with each individual following the next in the dance and adding a phrase, which is welcomed and repeated by the crowd, thus becoming part of the common heritage.[64]

Marcel Granet was the scholar who extended the choral paradigm the furthest as part of his study of 'seasonal festivals' in ancient China. Indeed, Granet saw the primordial notion of peasant community life in the choral principle.[65] By directing different choruses that embodied the different

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the most important dancing ceremonies for the Azande: the beer dance (*gbere buda*). For him, the ceremony enacted sexual desire and its condemnation, celebrating the institutions of marriage and family (Evans-Prichard 1928, p. 458). However, neither of these two anthropologists referenced antiquity, and the study of dance was not part of a broader reflection on the choral mode (see the remarks of Rutherford 2013).

[63] Mauss [1902] 2001, p. 162. Mauss continues: 'The rhythmic movement, uniform and continuous, is the immediate expression of a mental state in which consciousness of each individual is overwhelmed by a single idea, a single sentiment, a single hallucinatory idea, a common objective. Each body shares the same passion, each face wears the same mask, each voice utters the same cry. In addition, we have the terrific impression produced by the rhythm of the music and singing. To see all these figures masked with the image of the same desire, to hear all mouths uttering proof of their certainty – everyone is carried away, there is no possibility of resistance to the conviction of the whole group' (p. 163). In an article for the *Année Sociologique* the following year, Mauss (1903, pp. 561–2) again discussed the importance of the choral theme by examining the origin of rhythm: 'Where does [rhythm] come from? From special conditions in which poetry was formed. Indeed, poetry was primitively, regularly, and necessarily sung. Both among primitive peoples and across the various countries in Europe, primitive poetry was essentially something that was spoken in a chorus. "Singing together" and the chorale are what cause rhythm. . . . A primitive chorus presupposes . . . a group of men who manage to agree in their voices and their gestures, forming one and the same dancing mass. A community animated by rhythmic movements, there you have a condition that is immediate, necessary and sufficient for the rhythmic expression of the feelings of a community . . . . Thus, a social reality and a determined group of singing and dancing individuals appears behind rhythm.' See Kowalzig 2013a, pp. 180–1.

[64] Mauss 1903, p. 564.

[65] Granet 1959, 1982;. For the singularity of Granet's work within the Durkheimian school and its reception, see Freedman 1975, pp. 624–48; Hirsch 2011. See also the important comments of

elements composing the community during 'sung jousts,' peasant society revealed different aspects of itself. These rites had a primarily religious purpose. During such solemn and important ceremonies, which unfolded in 'holy places,' human order, explains Granet, was anchored to cosmic order. Next came a political purpose – these ceremonies were decisive moments when it came to building seigneurial authority. But Granet further insisted upon a singular aspect involving the portrayal of division and reunion. Through these ceremonies and the distinction between choruses, society as a whole experienced its own divisions at the same time as it resolved them.[66]

However, we have to admit that the reference to ancient chorality vanished after the mid-twentieth century: While the notions of *philia*, *habitus* or *hexis* are part of the current vocabulary of contemporary social sciences, no one today thinks of describing collective action devices by referring to the choruses of classical Athens. Moreover, it is in the field of literary theory or cinema that contemporary reflections on chorality offer precious resources for the historian. If there is no longer any doubt that cinema and literature can inform history as a discipline – not only as a source, but as a specific modality of historical writing[67] – how can we doubt that in return the historian might benefit from a literary or cinematographic narrative form?

Plurality, Polyphony, Dissonance

Since Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*, the choral novel has provided some of the most beautiful historical reflections within the register of fiction. But the 'choral' mode, far from forming a clearly established genre or having its own aesthetic canon, is embodied in a different narrative logic depending on the way in which the story is 'put together.' One could perhaps attempt to establish a basic taxonomy of the different types of choral films and novels.

Humphreys 1971, pp. 172–96, particularly those on the connections between Louis Gernet and Marcel Granet.

[66] The model of Granet was not entirely ignored by the Hellenists. It is in the background of the study of Louis Gernet in 1928 that is devoted to the peasant festivals of archaic Greece, in which he believed he recognized the expression of 'the social virtue' proper to the world of the cities of the classical time. Gernet 1981, p. 25, writes in particular: 'But in the concrete – in the living organism of festivals – what is the significance of young men acting in unison? Evidently they reinforce the social bond; and their preliminary opposition followed by a rapprochement is symbolic of all the *agônes* that point to a distant past and yet must have their raison d'être in a rural milieu.'

[67] See most recently de Baecque 2008; Witt 2013.

The first involves to varying degrees the omniscience of the narrator, the great architect of a narrative understood as an organic whole and guided by an explicit principle of composition. Conceived in the manner of a ninety-nine-piece puzzle in which 'it is not the elements that determine the whole, but the whole that determines the elements,'[68] Pérec's *La Vie mode d'emploi* offers the most radical example of this in its description of the lives of the characters living side by side in the Parisian building of 11 rue Simon-Crubellier. The second type does not presuppose any a priori unity between the different characters who are presented in isolation from each other and only run into each other at more or less random junction points. The story then unfolds under a regime of narrative uncertainty and very often finishes with an open ending. Robert Altmann's famous *Short Cuts*, adapted from several short stories by Raymond Carver, is a model of this. In the final type of choral work, the different segments of the action – potentially isolated – can be brought together 'from the outside' by the same, more or less distant event, the effects of which are experienced to varying degrees. Laurent Mauvignier's novel *Autour du monde*, which captures the fate of eleven characters across the globe all affected by the tsunami of March 2011, is an example of this.[69]

This brief typology is obviously rudimentary. Indeed, nothing seems to unite the great monophonic tale that is *In Search of Lost Time* (which is, in its own way, a choral novel) or *The Sound and the Fury*, which is centered on three voices over which a superior truth never prevails. More recently, the literary critic Vincent Message has extended his reflection precisely to the choral genre by attempting to define what he calls the '*le roman pluraliste*.' The kaleidoscopic construction of the story in addition to the multiplication of voices and linguistic registers seem to be at the heart of the pluralist novel, the major representatives of which in contemporary literature would be Thomas Pynchon and Salman Rushdie. Yet, if Message is to be believed, the polyphonic nature of *le roman pluraliste* only hints toward the broader forms of composition of the social, which are given a central place in the narrative. 'Instead of charting the arrival of a subject-in-the-making in a preconstituted Whole, the continuous and difficult movement of organizing a Whole that would like to be more than the sum of its parts is revealed for us to see.'[70] Thus, 'the collective effort of a society that is always in the making' would appear to be the true subject of *le roman pluraliste*. It is easy to imagine how much the historian can gain from these reflections surrounding the choral genre and how it has developed. When

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[68] Pérec 2010, p. 17.   [69] Mauvignier 2014.   [70] Message 2013, p. 13.

examined through the historian's lens, choral writing leads us to question in an original way the homogeneity of the social arena, the articulation of the various spheres of action plunged in distinct temporal textures and the contemporaneousness of discordant actions.

Dividing Athenian Society Differently

In this respect, the *stasis* of 404–403 offers an exceptional area of study, since the event shows how the various elements of Athenian society were decomposed and recomposed. Indeed, according to Plato – through the mouth of Aspasia – the event resulted in a great blending (*sunmixis*):

> So kindly and so friendly was the way in which the citizens from the Peiraeus and from the city consorted with one another, and also – beyond men's hopes – with the other Greeks; and such moderation did they show in their settlement of the war against the men at Eleusis. And the cause of all these actions was nothing else than that genuine kinship (*suggeneia*) which produces, not in word only but in deed, a firm friendship founded on common descent.[71]

Despite its ironic tone, this vision is well in line with Platonic fantasies of unity – a city first divided in two, then reunited in a single chorus, now singing in unison. However, we would like to take a step back from this grand narrative of reconciliation by showing that the 'great mixture' created by the *stasis* led to the formation of multiple choruses with shifting contours, dismantling and recomposing themselves well beyond the Assembly of the twelfth of Boedromion and the official end of hostilities.

Such a choral approach makes it possible to break away from a set of schematic representations of society and, in particular, to challenge two principles that generally organize its description.

The first usually separates the different spheres of action at work in the city. In this way, political life is considered part of an operational logic distinct from that of economic activity, which is itself independent from religion, and so on. Yet the choral model cuts across these various realms of

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[71] Plato, *Menexenus*, 243e. Certainly, this presentation of the civil war must be interpreted with care. The speech, as we know, is a pastiche, maliciously placed in the mouth of Aspasia the foreigner: The philosopher lets his irony show in relation to one of the great democratic myths, the autochthony, which, since the middle of the fifth century, had allowed the Athenians to present themselves as brothers; in the same way, he makes fun of the supposed moderation of the winners, insofar as the war against 'those of Eleusis' was far from a minor skirmish. On the Platonic irony of *Menexenus*, see Loraux 1986, pp. 264–8. On the harshness of the repression of the oligarchs of Eleusis in 401/0, see Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.4.43, and here, *infra*, Chapter 3, pp. 126–128.

action, making it possible to avoid confining analysis to areas of activity that have already been defined. In this respect, the choral approach makes it possible to observe both politics (which is composed of citizens taking action in places where civic decisions are made) and the political (which is defined as all of the practices that contribute to the expression of a civic identity).[72] It should also be noted that, by its very existence, the chorus in Athens was the product of political institutions (politics) – since, within the dithyrambic framework, it was constituted according to the principle of the Cleisthenic division of the civic body into ten tribes – but that its activity in fact consisted of the ritual celebration of Dionysos (the political).

The second principle seeks to describe this society according to its own classifications of status by distinguishing between metics, citizens and slaves, as if they were distinct and impenetrable groups. Here, each category has attached its own subjective rights that, like property, define the position of every individual in society. A citizen thus 'possesses' the right to do such and such a thing, and this right is sometimes accorded to metics, free women married to full citizens, freedmen or slaves. This kind of description is undeniably efficient, in that it provides a convincing representation that allows us to explain some of the configurations presented in the ancient sources. But it is limited and, in practice, sometimes erroneous. Thinking about Athenian society in choral terms makes it possible to examine in greater depth the various levels of social intensity without considering them to be immediately determined by specific status positions. It should be recalled that the tragic chorus – which was at once the 'voice of the city' and that of other 'marginal' people, women, foreigners and even slaves – shows the city in precisely all its diversity. Let us think of the *Helots* of Eupolis, in which Athenian citizens embody a chorus of Spartan helots, or the *Babylonians* of Aristophanes, with their chorus of tattooed slaves.[73] Similarly, certain choruses were able to welcome and blend citizens and metics, such as the dramatic *choroi* of the Lenaia performed each winter.[74] As for the *chorēgoi*, they could be citizens as well as metics: Holding this office was a question of wealth, not of status, at least in most cases. On another level, numerous female choral rituals in

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[72] See Azoulay 2014.
[73] According to Storey 2003, p. 176, the play may have concerned helots taking refuge in Athens after the massacre at Cape Taenarum. Cf. Aristophanes, *Babylonians*, fr. 67 K.-A, with the comments of Norwood 1931, p. 286. As for the poet Pherecrates, he put on stage, in the *Didaskalos*, a chorus of slaves whose master taught them domestic service.
[74] See Wilson 2000, pp. 28–31.

classical Athens are known to have existed, from the *arktoi* for Artemis in Brauron to the dancing *parthenoi* for the Erechtheidai, to the Eleusinian cults, which included female dances.[75]

In this perspective, the choral phenomenon cannot be understood in terms of identity and otherness, according to a binary structuralist scheme, but must rather be considered a blurring, displacement or even 'estrangement' of distinctions of gender, origin and status.[76]

Rethinking Collectives through the Chorus' Lens

The choral scheme thus makes it possible to engage in a novel description of Athenian society that seems a priori to be in line with contemporary interpretations based on the notion of networks. This latter approach has given rise to numerous works in ancient history over the last twenty years: The network even seems to have become a fetishized concept capable of defining collective action in its most diverse forms – whether it aims to shed light on the relationships between different characters or groups within a single city or to describe the circulation of information patterns.[77] The contribution of a choral history lies first of all in the fidelity that it claims to a certain 'emic' representation of the social world, since we intend to borrow a descriptive category through which, under the term of *choros*, the Athenians themselves imagined collective action. But this is perhaps not the main tenet of our argument. We suggest that the concept

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[75] On the *arktoi* for Artemis at Brauron, see Kowalzig 2007, p. 284; on the *parthenoi* dancing for the Erechtheides, see Euripides, *TrGF* 65; on the Eleusinian cults, which included female dances, see Pausanias, 1.38.6. See Budelmann and Power 2015, who highlight the importance of female choral culture in Athens and Attica – often underestimated due to scholars' focus on the Great Dionysia.

[76] On the dithyramb chorus as a way of reconciling openness and inclusiveness on the one hand and social cohesion on the other, see Kowalzig 2013b (for the Archaic period).

[77] We leave aside here all the numerous works that refer to the notion of network to describe relations between cities or between groups of individuals on the Mediterranean scale. See recently, to remain within the Athenian case: Ismard 2010; Karila-Cohen 2018; Ober 2008; Taylor and Vlassopoulos 2015. See also Latour's reservations against the all-out use of the notion (Latour 1999). He insists on the ideas of transformation and translation originally implied. Against the Durkheimian tradition, Bruno Latour and his close relations intended to deconstruct the commonly shared conception that makes 'the' society a 'substance' providing a specific type of causality to all the fields of activity. But Actor–Network Theory was not content to take up the reservations formulated for a long time by ethnomethodology, and it claimed to go beyond the canonical opposition between structure and *agency*. In this sense, it was not so much a question of giving back its place to the actor and to interactions as of highlighting the processes of assembly and composition (going beyond the nature/culture distinction) between heterogeneous elements that would form the heart of the social, conferring on sociology the status of 'science of associations.' On the uses of the notion of network in the framework of Actor–Network Theory, see Latour 2005.

of *choros* allows us to overcome the difficulties generated by the immoderate use of the notion of networks. Indeed, the new rhizomatic landscape of the classical city has too often tended to neglect the breaking points, the discontinuities and the conflicts between the different components of the city in favor of a grand integrating narrative.

In contrast to this, the choral scheme systematically sketches out a closed space in which a circle of participants is distinguished from those who are excluded; at the same time, these choruses, shot through by hierarchies of differing strengths, unceasingly recompose themselves in a dynamic way and, above all, position themselves in relation to each other in a competitive field. Thinking of the Athenian city through the choral prism consists of choosing an observation post at a good distance from both Plato's indivisible *polis* and a radically decentered city of networks.

Our proposal of choral history thus promotes a certain vision of collectives and their mode of composition. What are the salient features?

First of all, the chorus allows us to find a path between individualism and holism. Clearly, chorality does not imply defending the primacy of the individual, much less considering society as a collection of individuals, according to the presupposition of methodological individualism. The chorus offers the spectacle of a collective, created by its monophonic singing,[78] which does not presuppose the independence of each of the participants but immediately considers them collectively. In other words, the chorus represents a more or less stable aggregation of individuals who are never more than (to use the expression of Cornelius Castoriadis) 'moving fragments of the social.'[79] For all that, the *choreutai* do not act as an indistinct, even fusional mass either: Within the group, certain figures stand out – the coryphaeus, the aulete, perhaps the first and second dancers. Above all, the staging tends to distinguish the participants at certain key moments of the performance: In the tragic setting, for example, the *choreutai* seem to enter in three rows of five, or five rows of three, and not as a unified group.[80] According to this perspective, choruses were the supreme embodiment of the 'singular plural' form perfectly illustrated by Attic tragedy, in which chorists often sang the same text, sometimes saying 'I' and sometimes saying 'we.'[81]

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[78] Aeschylus in the *Libation Bearers* and in the *Eumenides* thus fragments a chorus between several voices: Dupont 2015, p. 38.
[79] Castoriadis 1986, pp. 223–4.   [80] Delavaud-Roux 1994, p. 100ff.   [81] Nancy 2013.

Secondly, a choral perspective highlights the mixture of constraint and adhesion that is present not only at the origin of the collectives but also in their dissolution. While the Athenian choruses were in principle based on voluntary commitment, the *chorēgos* nevertheless held coercive power – for example, that of imposing fines – in the event of recruiting challenges.[82] This balance between obligation and voluntary commitment was also valid for the *chorēgoi* themselves: Obliged to assume these costly charges, the richest Athenians very often voluntarily accepted the call to be able to boast of their generosity during a possible future trial. It is precisely such a combination that presided over the emergence of many choruses in the turmoil of the civil war – be they the successive rallies to Thrasybulus' troops or the constitution of the Three Thousand, who made the choice to remain in the city but at the same time had to obey the orders of the Thirty. It is also what can make them fragile: a lack of sufficient institutionalization.

In fact, this 'choral model' also has the advantage of taking into account forms of grouping that are not necessarily set in stone. Choruses, which were created by repeated performances, had no other existence or duration other than that of the activity of the collective. They subsequently made it possible to approach any social elements as a provisional construction that could indeed find a stable form (e.g. by taking on a legal status that ensured the group's permanency) but without this being a rule. The civil war of 404–403 provides an opportunity to examine the surge in moving choruses that were recomposed numerous times because of the turmoil. The duration was quite similar: In the case of the dithyramb, the experiment lasted a few months, during which the participants met with each other continuously before confronting their rivals and determining a winner. Better still, even though the choruses were destined to dissolve after the competition, they nonetheless produced long-term bonds that could be reactivated periodically within the tribe – the latter serving as a recruitment framework not only for the choruses but also for the army or the Council of Five Hundred. In the same way, if many choruses, active during the few months of the *stasis*, disappeared after the reconciliation, the links that had been forged in them did not vanish all at once.

An analysis in choral terms allows, moreover, the role of emotions in the city to be underlined. For choruses also function – perhaps even

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[82] See MacDowell 1985, p. 70; Wilson 2000, p. 83, according to whom the power given to the *chorēgos* was all the more exorbitant as it was not subject to accountability.

primarily – as emotional communities, where everyone feels the same joys and sorrows, even if this expression is ritualized.[83] Plato affirms this in his own way by maintaining that choral practice gives rise to joy, a feeling of elation experienced by the participants, not by the spectators.[84] In its tragic dimension, the events of 403 brought to a climax the emotions that build collective identities: The democrat Thrasybulus is well aware of this power when he incites the exiled, just before the battle of Mounychia, to advance 'with the same heart' to the sound of the paean; the oligarch Critias says the same thing when he defines the political regime by the participation of all its members in the same hopes and the same fears, as we will see.

Finally, a choral description of Athenian society avoids analyzing each chorus individually as a social world closed on itself. By multiplying the scales of analysis, it makes it possible to highlight the relations – harmonious or conflictual – between these various choruses. Far from the Platonic dream of a unified choral city, the investigation must give full scope to the phenomenon of competition and complementarity between choruses that are not necessarily placed in the same spheres of action.

To write a choral history of Athens is therefore to specify how the collectives that spread throughout the city functioned. It is to underline the hierarchies and the internal tensions that run through them; it is to estimate their duration and sometimes their institutionalization (or their disappearance); it is also to insist on the role that collective practices and shared emotions play in them; it is finally to scrutinize the relations between the different choruses by paying acute attention to the intervals that separate them and to their exterior aspects. In short, it is to reconstruct a plurality of collectives, without starting from preconstituted and already organized aggregates, and especially without presupposing the existence of a unique whole – 'Athenian society' – clearly hierarchized into distinct groups.

Our approach will consist of starting from an individual, playing the role of coryphaeus, and trying to systematically reconstitute the choruses that surround and encircle them. A crucial question then arises, which is

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[83] Plato, *Republic*, 5.462c–e, according to whom 'the best governed city (*hē arista politeuomenē polis*)' is the one in which *all* the citizens rejoice and grieve over the same things, as if the whole community behaved as a single individual.

[84] The philosopher plays here on the homophony between choral practice (*choreia*) and joy (*chara*). On the community of emotions created by the chorus, see Plato, *Theaetetus*, 173b and *Phaedrus*, 250b. See Peponi 2013b, pp. 222–3. See also Calame 1977, p. 420ff, on the link between chorus and eroticism.

both an epistemological issue and a writing challenge: How are we to select the individuals who will allow us to observe this choral functioning? Is it not a huge risk that further contributes to the history of great men, as has been written since Antiquity? How can we avoid being prisoners of the documentation that sheds light on certain characters more than others, leaving whole sections of society in the dark? If the historian must necessarily make do with the limits of their documentation, perhaps it is possible to try and mitigate its effects by following two main principles. First of all, we will be attentive to the plurality of the collectives in which each character, even the well-known ones, is involved and which they contribute to structuring. Thus, rather than analyzing the actors of the event by classifying them, following the ancient sources, into two watertight camps – the democrats and the oligarchs – we will try to grasp the dynamics of the heterogeneous groups that temporarily gather around Critias and Thrasybulus, swelling or shrinking according to the circumstances (Chapters 1 and 2). Above all, we will try to bring to light more unexpected figures who serve precisely to thwart this supposed bipartition of political life: Such is the case, in particular, of the numerous 'centrists,' who came from both camps and gathered around Archinus, one of the leaders of 'those of Piraeus,' shortly after the reconciliation (Chapter 3). In the same way, we will highlight all those who do not enter any of these political choruses, by necessity or by choice, of which Socrates is certainly the figurehead (Chapter 4).

But in order to escape from the 'great men trap,' we have also set up a device that ensures an oscillation between two types of chorus-leaders with very different profiles. In an expected way, several chapters of the book are interested in real *coryphaeoi* (i.e. in individuals who, de facto, exert a structuring influence on the groups which surround them, such as Critias, Thrasybulus, Archinus or the priestess of Athena, Lysimache; Chapter 5). However, our investigation also highlights individuals who do not exert any notable influence on those close to them but whose figures benefit from sufficient documentary light to be able to reconstitute the various choruses in which they evolved: The poor worker Eutherus (Chapter 6), the rich heiress Hegeso (Chapter 7), the former slave Gerys (Chapter 8) and the bureaucrat Nicomachus (Chapter 9) are cases in point. As for the orator Lysias, while he appears only at the end of the story, this is because he occupies a special position in the narrative device as the main producer of sources on the civil war (Chapter 10).

This oscillation between structuring figures and small lives is a way of expressing, as a form of unresolved tension, our questioning of the nature of the Athenian community as it appears in the context of *stasis*. It is an attempt to study, from the ground up and without any preestablished hierarchy, not 'Athenian society' – as if such a thing existed – but its mechanisms of composition and recomposition, activated and illuminated by various events.