Unveiling Euripides

Melinda Powers

Since the time of the fifth century BCE, when the ancient Greeks defeated the invading Persian Empire, works such as Aeschylus' 472 BCE *Persians* and Euripides' 405 BCE *Bacchae*[1] have constructed an idea of the Orient that persists in the West today.[2] Regarding these plays, Edward Said in his 1979 book *Orientalism* notes, "[t]he two aspects of the Orient that set it off from the West in this pair of plays will remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography." Said defines this process of constructing an imaginary idea of the Orient as "orientalism." He argues that the West, from the time of ancient Greece, has marginalized and feminized the Orient by promoting "difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')." Orientalism "tries to show that European culture [or the 'self'] gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient [or the "other"] as a surrogate and even underground self."[3] Examining xenophobia in an ancient Athenian context, classicist Edith Hall has argued that "the polarization of Hellene and barbarian was invented in specific historical circumstances during the early years of the fifth century BC, partly as a result of the combined Greek military efforts against the Persians."[4] Such xenophobic inventions persist today, and some contemporary directors of Athenian drama, conscious of this danger, have challenged the East/West polarity by deconstructing the divide inscribed in the original plays.[5] In this article, however, I discuss Bill T. Jones's 2001 workshop *The Bacchae Project,* which, rather than avoiding East/West binaries, instead reinscribes this division, despite the director's attempt to do otherwise. While the meaning and terms of East/West in an ancient and contemporary context are distinct, Bill T. Jones's workshop demonstrates that the current division is nothing new, but rather a repetition, revision, and reinforcement of an ancient, classical model.

Jones's work[6], a student workshop[7] produced at the University of California, Davis, in May of 2001, is significant. The choreographer/director staged it just prior to September 11th of that same year and characterized the chorus of Dionysos' bacchae as "of the Islamic fundamentalist persuasion." In Euripides' day, the Muslim-East/Christian-West religious distinctions did not yet exist, but Jones's

Melinda Powers is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY. Prof. Powers's teaching and research interests include ancient drama, historiography, performance theory, and especially the performance of Athenian drama on the ancient and contemporary stage. She has published an Oxyrhynchus papyrus of Demosthenes XIX as well as articles and reviews on contemporary adaptations of the classics. She is currently working on a book project with University of Iowa Press titled "The (W)hole Story of Athenian Performance."

production contemporizes the play by costuming the chorus in what Jones refers to as chadoor,[8] the black cloak revived in 1970s Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini but which is also worn by women in Islamic communities elsewhere. Jones describes his chorus as dressed in chadoor, and in doing so, he generalizes the garment by divorcing chadoor from its specific socio-cultural context. Implicitly suggesting chadoor is akin to any veil (e.g. *burqa*, *boushiya*, *niqab*), Jones uses the garment as a generic veil to evoke in his U.S. audience a fear of the other. Chadoor, in this case, becomes a metaphor for the other, a metaphor which develops in the production into a reiteration of the contemporary orientalist motif of unveiling, an image with a strong colonialist history and one that persists in the post 9/11 world.[9]

Jones is a dancer and choreographer, so his artistic bias, his interest in bodies and their movement, has largely influenced his decision to unveil the chorus. He says that "there is nothing quite like undertaking a great Western classic and asking it 'Where are the bodies, where is the sexuality, where are the elemental forces of gravity and time, force in the text?'"[10] Jones wants to dignify the chorus's bodies through their dancing, and in doing so his unveiling is not by any means a cliché. He associates peace with the foreign chorus more than any Greek character and aims to challenge his U.S. audience's stereotypes about the veil. Yet, the history of orientalism and the persistence of the East/West divide obstruct his idealized, hybridized view. Engaging with both ancient and contemporary stereotypes of the East at the critical historical moment of 2001, *The Bacchae Project* illuminates orientalism's persistence in the U.S. cultural imaginary, demonstrating that even directors who attempt to critique orientalism can inadvertently reinforce its grip.

Bill T. Jones's *The Bacchae Project*

Jones's *The Bacchae Project*[11] uses Paul Schmidt's translation of the text and dramatizes the conflict between Dionysos, the god of wine and theatre, and Pentheus, the young ruler of Thebes. The translation and production follow the text rather closely with individual lines resembling the ancient Greek version. The production is by no means an adaptation, but a number of scenes are shortened or removed in the interest of time. While Jones uses unique visual imagery that sets the play in the contemporary world, he does little to change the text.

For example, both Euripides' text[12] and Jones's production follow the same plot. In both works, Dionysos, disguised in mortal form as a priest of his cult, has come to Thebes from the East or Asia (which today refers to Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey) with a devout band of female worshippers, or bacchae, and means to initiate the city into his mysteries. Dionysos was born in Thebes but left as an infant and is now returning to his homeland. As the god explains in the prologue, the daughters of Kadmos, i.e., the sisters of Dionysos' Theban mother, Semele, have spread lies about the god's mother and refuse to believe that Dionysos is the son of Zeus. Because the city denies him and spreads rumors that his mother was seduced by

a mortal and not a god, Dionysos has stung the city's women with madness. As a result, the Theban maenads have become the antithesis of good Greek women, who should be indoors weaving at the loom. Instead they are all on Mount Kithairon dancing for Dionysos. The god tells the audience that if the city does not receive his mysteries, he will go to battle with his chorus of Asian maenads to convert it. However, the stubborn Pentheus refuses to acknowledge the stranger/foreigner (*xenos*) as a god, even though his grandfather Kadmos and the prophet Teiresias have themselves dressed up to honor the god and warn Pentheus to follow suit. To better control the city and its women, Pentheus attempts first to imprison some of the Theban maenads and later to imprison the disguised god himself. So Dionysos takes vengeance by talking Pentheus into dressing up as a woman to spy on the raving Theban maenads on the mountain. In the dressing up scene (which is more like a toilet scene since the actual dressing up takes place off stage), Dionysos slyly directs Pentheus' ludicrous performance as a maenad, for the god will later inspire the Theban bacchae to recognize the intruder and claw him to pieces. After the chorus performs their fourth stasismon, which follows the dressing up scene, a Messenger immediately reports the gory details of how Agaue has killed her son. Believing her son to be a lion, she has attacked him and torn him apart with the help of the maenads. She appears on stage, with her son's head fixed to a stake, boasting to the chorus of her prowess as a lion-slaying huntress. The chorus is both excited and repulsed by her lunacy, and Agaue's father, i.e., Pentheus' grandfather, Kadmos, returns to help his daughter recognize her son's face/mask (*prosōpon*, literally face, visage, also mask) in her hands. Upon the recognition of her fate, Agaue might have lamented, yet a lacuna in the text prevents any certainty about this action. The play ends with Dionysos' appearing *ex machina* to pronounce Kadmos' and Agaue's punishments. Agaue will be exiled. Kadmos, on the other hand, despite his earlier, perhaps dubious, attempt to honor the god, will be changed into a snake with his wife Harmonia. The two will leave Thebes to drive an army against many cities but will eventually be rescued by Ares, who will secure for them a life in the land of the blessed. The distance between human understanding and the god's decrees becomes clear as Kadmos simultaneously accepts responsibility yet pleads with the god to show mercy instead of excessive punishment. As Dionysos and Pentheus vie for control of the city and the women within it, the play pits East/West, male/female, human/god, city/wild, etc. against each other. Without changing this basic plot structure, Jones reframes these structuralist divisions using modern imagery to translate the spirit of the play.

Jones's *Bacchae*, also like the Euripides, is careful to distinguish between the chorus of crazed Theban women, whom Dionysos has driven mad, and Dionysos' chorus, who are his true worshippers.[13] In the Euripides version, these Theban women are described in messenger speeches but never seen; they have left their homes to hunt, dance, worship the god and dress in his trappings of a fawnskin and

thyrsos (a large fennel stalk). Omitting lengthy verbal descriptions of the Theban women, Jones instead allows the audience to witness their transition from reason to insanity in an opening dance routine.

The Bacchae Project begins with the projection onto a large screen of images of racing cheetahs, running to the tunes of techno music. As the video continues to play in the background, the stark white lights come up on a group of pseudo-maenads, the Greek women in Thebes whom Dionysos has driven mad for failing to recognize him. The women dress and act like perverted debutantes, wearing long, elbow length gloves, grotesquely coiffed hair, and colorful ball gowns. The maenads at first stand quietly with their hands folded in front of them. Yet their eyes bulge, and they bare the top and bottom of their teeth, as if they were vampires preparing to attack an oversized prey. At first the women simply move their heads, but the excessive jerkiness of their movements indicates madness. After about two minutes, one woman removes her gown and, one by one, all the women follow. They strip to their white petticoats and black stockings, performing their disjointed dance. Their heads and torso jerk in opposite directions. One shoulder rides up, while the other moves sharply down. The women's movements are stiff, abrupt, jerky, and disjointed. Their torsos undulate like snakes, and then the women quickly fall to the floor and scamper about like animals. They are somewhat aware of the presence of one another. For example, one dancer realizes that she has bumped into her partner, yet they are all out of synch. Each one is in her own little world, oblivious to her surroundings and circumstances. At the end of the piece, when the women depart the stage, a group of U.S. Marines, the henchmen of Pentheus, who is also dressed as a Marine for much of the production, enters the stage and collects the dresses, which are a symbol of the women's former ladylike selves, and which, like their sanity, they have left behind.

After this opening dance sequence, Jones's play moves to Dionysos' prologue, which is where the Euripides play begins. In the Euripides, Pentheus describes Dionysos as having long, golden locks and fair skin, for Athenian tragedy often characterizes foreigners as having these effeminate characteristics.[14] In Jones's production, however, Dionysos is played by an African-American woman *and* a Euro-American male. The actors are roughly the same size, shape and age. S/he wears long, voluminous, yellow-checked pants with a high waist that reaches to the actors' chests. They also wear a pale green, flowing shirt and a wig of long, tightly-wound curls. Bill T. Jones has described his concept of Dionysos as follows:

> I believe it would be useful if I were to take the concept of effeminacy and androgyny and explode it. Therefore I have chosen to make Dionysos into two persons, one male, one female. In my naiveté I thought that one could just take the character and cleave it right down the middle, and say everything that one

> needed to say . . . but there was the issue about who the performers were. . . . I found two interesting actors who were quite different . . . so I had to make the adjustment so that the audience could understand this concept without them being mirror images of each other, one male, one female.[15]

The two actors playing Dionysos take turns delivering their lines. They have a strong physical connection between them. They lie on top of each other and alternate their lines as they roll across the floor, and this strong physical unity of the diverse actors symbolizes the transgression of boundaries and opposites that Dionysos represents. This unity of opposites also symbolizes the philosophy of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane company, which pioneered the use of partnering between men and the casting of dancers of diverse ethnicities, shapes, and sizes.[16] This innovative company challenged the status quo and was considered other in its own way, as it emerged onto the international scene in 1983 performing pieces that included social commentary on issues of identity related to AIDS, race, and gender.

This interest in social concerns related to identity is reflected in Jones's exploration of Dionysos, the god of mask and changing identity. After Dionysos' prologue, the chorus enters and performs their opening number known as the *parodos*. Euripides' chorus describes themselves as Asian women from Lydia and Phrygia, which in today's terms refers to Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey. They describe their costumes as an ivy-crown, fawn-skin, and *thyrsos,* but Jones's chorus arrives dressed in chadoor with only their faces and hands uncovered. While the Euripidean chorus challenges the typical attire of a good Greek woman, Jones's chorus is dressed modestly in a complete body covering, providing a striking visual contrast to the pseudo-maenad Theban women, who appeared just prior to the prologue and stripped down to their petticoats.

According to Jones, the chadoor best translates the "otherness" by which the Greeks characterized foreigners. However, in the following comments, Jones does not acknowledge chadoor's specific socio-cultural context, and he associates chadoor with fundamentalist Islam, even though chadoor are often worn by observant Muslim women who wouldn't describe themselves, religiously or politically, as fundamentalist.

> The notion of the chorus dressed in chadoor also takes its cue from Euripides' instructions, when they are described as Asian women. . . . I thought, in making a play for a contemporary audience, why couldn't I use an image [i.e. chadoor] that resonates more with us as when you think of that which is Other, foreign, exotic. . . . And one of the most . . . piquant and poignant images in our popular imagination, I believe, is the image of

fundamentalist Islam.

What Jones means by "one of the most . . . piquant and poignant images in our popular imagination" is unclear. However, his use of "poignant" perhaps reveals his own unconscious bias, which he believes is latent in his audience:

> I believe that well-meaning people who do not see themselves as racist or biased have an unconscious negative reaction to the image of these women in chadoor. . . . It seems to represent a kind of subliminal, maybe not so subliminal fear here in our society and to bring the experience of the Athenian Greeks a little closer to us as they would have looked at the Lydian women, I thought, let's make them women of the Islamic fundamentalist persuasion.[17]

Jones explores the contemporary East/West divide by painting the image of fundamentalist Islam onto the Euripidean framework of East/West, Dionysos/Pentheus, female/male, Asian/Greek, etc. Nevertheless, he does not present the chadoor within any cultural and historical context or aim to associate the veil with any particular Muslim sect, culture, or community. The chadoor instead operates more as a generic image to evoke the fear which, as Jones states above, he believes his audience associates with fundamentalist Islam.

Jones sees a value in addressing his own culture's xenophobia by exploring it through the Euripides, yet in generalizing the chadoor and half-realizing his concept in a workshop setting he risks reinforcing the very orientalist stereotypes he wishes to challenge. Jones himself recognizes this problem but has indicated that he wants to follow the Euripidean text's direction of presenting a chorus that is other. "I agree it [the chorus in chadoor] is a complicated image. I am not quite sure if that is completely well-realized at this point. . . . [I]t is [after all] a workshop, but I stand behind it [the image]. I think it's powerful, and I think [it is] in some ways very much in line with what the Euripides was all about."[18] But is it what the Euripides was all about? And is chadoor the best image to translate the taboo of the other in the Euripides? Can Jones use the veil to highlight the East/West polarity without falling into the trap of orientalism? Can anyone?

Zineb Sedira comments on any artist's double-edged dilemma when representing the veil. In her article "Mapping the Illusive" she asks,

> How do I write about the subject of the veil in the West without worrying that my writing reinforces Orientalist fetishes, commodifying experience? . . . Can the artist escape the burden or cultural responsibility of representation? Is the artist, or

> indeed the curator, responsible for reinforcing the stereotypes of an audience? Mapping out an environment is not enough; instead, we must, as bell hooks suggests, transform the image—providing new strategies and readings—if we are to move the debate forward.[19]

Jones does attempt to transform the veil, an image that is highly charged with the politics of gender and colonialism, but the question is whether he can do so without reinforcing ideas of Eastern exoticism. In the following I suggest that, on the one hand, Jones challenges his audience to rethink any stereotypical associations with fundamentalist Islam by setting the veil in a diverse, harmonious context; however, in the process, he reinforces orientalist imagery particularly by unveiling his chorus.

Appropriating the Veil

One major way in which Jones redefines the veil is by mixing the gender of its wearers. *The Bacchae Project's* chorus consists of about fifteen men and women who first arrive, by running and sometimes rolling down a moderately raked hill, about 5 feet high.

> When I originally thought of doing the *Bacchae* as the *Loud Boy*, I thought to jettison completely the notion of the chorus' being women. I wanted a chorus that was multi-racial, multi-gendered, as a matter of fact. I wanted them to be men and women, every color, ever class, every shape, size. I have made some compromise in that I have covered everyone [in the chorus] in chadoor, male and female . . . with full knowledge that the public watching this will know that some of those persons are men, but that is beside the point.[20]

Jones's choice to include men in his chorus is significant. While in the Euripides, all of Dionysos' followers are women, their roles in the drama would have been played by men; and in the contemporary world, only women typically wear chadoor. In this case, Jones's choice to dress both men and women in chadoor follows neither the text's direction nor contemporary customs. Like his ambi-sexed, ambi-raced Dionysos, he defines the chorus and the veil in his own terms. These men and women of diverse ethnicities, shapes, and sizes also embody the philosophy of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane company whose diversity, as earlier discussed, challenges the homogenous aesthetics of dance. Jones uses the veil to add a degree of conformity to the appearance of his diverse chorus, which he characterizes as a peaceful, multi-racial, multi-gendered group; so the veil both unifies the dancers and identifies them collectively as other, perhaps again serving as a metaphor for

the Jones company's own degree of otherness.

The ways in which gender, diversity, and harmony are performed through the veil challenge typical orientalist associations with the garment, for "veiling – to *Western* eyes, the most visible marker of the difference and inferiority of Islamic societies – became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies."[21] While the West has stereotypically constructed the veil, regardless of its specific context, as a symbol of oppression, Jones challenges the ideology at the foundations of such notions. By showing both men and women dressed in chadoor, Jones shifts the focus away from the image of the veil as a tool for women's oppression. His veiled chorus dances. They, like the chorus in the Euripides, are liberated in their worship of their god. In *The Bacchae Project*, wearing the veil is depicted as a choice, not a constraint from which to be liberated. Jones's bacchae do not uniformly unveil themselves as if unveiling were an act of liberation; instead the different members of the chorus choose when to wear the garment or not. The choreographer suggests that bodies belong to their beholders who have the choice to characterize and express their local, national, and gender identities as and when they choose.

Hybridizing the Chorus

In this way, Jones's chorus can be read in conjunction with the Euripides to present an optimistic, utopian vision of a unified, hybridized chorus. While xenophobia undoubtedly pervades the Athenian imaginary, *Bacchae* itself may question as much as reinforce this cultural prejudice. Scholars such as Hall have suggested that "by presenting the cult of Dionysus as a barbarian import the poets thus found mythical expression for his role as the god of epiphany, and revealed his promise of liberation from the norms of Hellenic *sōphrosynē* [moderation/balance], his responsiveness to primeval instinct, and his danger."[22] However, despite Hall's claim that Dionysos promised liberation from *sōphrosynē*, a close reading of *Bacchae* reveals that the play ironically associates the concept more with Dionysos and his foreign, Asian chorus than with any Greek character in the play.[23] In all cases, the acquisition or possession of *sōphrosynē* is contingent upon the appropriate worship of Dionysos, for one consistent use of the term throughout all of Greek literature and especially in *Bacchae* is to honor the gods. To honor the gods is to be *sōphrōn*, and being *sōphrōn*, one honors the gods.[24]

In Euripides' *Bacchae*, the chorus is hybridized in their dual identity and harmonized through their synchronized singing and dancing. The chorus dances in both *strophē* and *antistrophē*. They sing sacred and violent hymns. They are a foreign yet civic voice. They "see" the mystery in reality, divinity in humanity, compassion in vengeance, and scornful laughter in tears. Their hybridity, fluidity,

and *sōphrosynē* rest in their ability to find calm in their movement, song, and dance. The chorus alone negotiates these opposites, and the reconciliation of polarized meaning and differences is one of *Bacchae*'s major themes, a theme which the chorus embodies.

Jones's workshop production also presents an idealized view of the chorus. The hybridized, multi-gendered, multi-racial chorus articulates a harmonized balance (*sōphrosynē*) through a choreography and physicality of peace, presence, and control that their dancing affords them. Their groundedness and security in the face of trauma (and the god who smiles at it) is comforting if not inspiring. They maintain a cool, calm comportment and belief in Dionysos, despite their recognition of and repulsion at the cruelty the god inspires.

For example, in the choral entrance song, known as the *parodos*, three dancers group together and walk to and fro, as they lift their arms up and down shaking their open-fingered hands over their ears like women in mourning on Greek vases. Other dancers sit on swings or dance on their own. They stop and form a tableau, as they begin to speak a translation of the Euripidean chorus, sometimes individually, sometimes collectively. Meanwhile two members continue to swing symmetrically on opposite-facing swingsets, framing the playing area. The overall picture is one of unity, melody, harmony, and calm-assertive energy, a stark contrast to the frenzied, disjointed Theban women who opened the play.

In stasimon three, the choreography shows the dancers' balance and control in the use of their bodies. They support themselves and walk on their hands as well as feet. The dancers lift themselves up and bow themselves down, making use of various planes. Then one dancer stands perfectly balanced with one arm raised, only to fall backward into the trusting arms of the other chorus members. The synchronicity and control among the dancers are evident. The whole chorus can move quickly and stop in an instant, and even in the midst of their different individualized movements, the whole company can freeze in an instant to join together and show their solidarity and unity, while they pronounce the Euripidean refrain: "What is wisdom?" They are individuals, but, as a group, they are well in tune.

At the end of stasimon three, the sounds of the chorus's spiritual song blend into the techno music to which the chorus of Theban maenads danced, and this musical cue again distinguishes the two types of maenadism. Pentheus, who was formerly dressed as a U.S. Marine, wears a teased, curly wig and a long, lavender gown with violet, elbow length gloves and puffy sleeves. His movement is jagged and perverse and resembles that of the Theban maenads in the production's opening scene. Pentheus and the Theban women's maddened worship is clearly distinguished from the calm, controlled reverence of the chorus.

The fourth stasimon, which occurs just after Pentheus walks offstage toward Mount Kithairon where he will be murdered, is danced vigorously in the same

contemporary dance style of choreography but maintains the synchronicity and control of the previous odes. The mood is energetic and fiery, but the complex choreography requires that the dancers have even more control and awareness of their bodies, particularly in relation to one another. For example, the chorus will break off into separate dances and then quickly, without missing a beat, join together again to dance in unison. While the image is an excited one, the skill involved in its execution makes demands of the dancers' training, timing, and bodily control. The ode ends with the chorus hopping up and down in fury but nevertheless in unison as the rhythm of the bongo escalates until the arrival of the Messenger who reports Pentheus' death.

While Dionysos' Asian chorus is excited, they are always self-possessed and remain in synch, unlike the chorus of Theban maenads, Pentheus, and his mother, Agaue, who arrives wearing a white petticoat, drenched in blood, with hair wild and teased. Agaue holds a round ball covered with a bloody white sheet which serves as Pentheus's head. The chorus stands apart from her, and she enters the stage speechless, interpreting the Euripidean text through her jerky movement more than speech, until Kadmos arrives to talk her down.

In Jones's *The Bacchae Project* there is no mistaking the distinct choreographies of Agaue and the dressed up Pentheus as compared to Dionysos and his chorus of Asian women. The juxtaposition of the two styles emphasizes the contrast between the male U.S. Marines, led by Pentheus, with their maddened bourgeois women and the reverent, religious, veiled, multi-gendered, multi-racial chorus. Instead of joining in the violence, the chorus realizes that they must respect and remain humble before the gods who send it. Pentheus, Agaue, and the rest of the Theban women do go mad under the influence of the eastern god,[25] but, as Dionysos clearly indicates in the prologue, their rejection, not their acceptance of him, has led to their demise.

On the other hand, the chorus's performance suggests that perhaps it is somehow their continued belief that keeps them from being violent in the first place.

> [The chorus's final lines suggest that] there are truths that we can never possibly understand. And the things that gods do is not for us to understand. . . . I [Bill T. Jones] decided to be an artist. . . . I am a movement artist. . . . I am looking for a way to sing in my tradition, the African-American tradition has been the stuff of political protest, it has been a healing, it has been community building. . . . Therefore making art, using song and dance, is a social pact. . . . Here my imagination has been used to encourage people to be brave, to be outrageous, brave, sexy, to do the big dance, which is to be born, grow, to mate, have children, make something beautiful, and die with grace and dignity and

to encourage others to live.[26]

The chorus's song and dance physically harmonize the city's internal violence, which is embodied in the image of the crazed debutants and the materialistic luxury and traditional gender roles that they represent, and the control exhibited in their dancing makes them the bearers of peace and harmony in contrast to their Western counterparts. Although Jones appropriates the East to create his vision, the ideal he suggests is one of a hybridized world of unity where West/East, male/female, self/other coincide, create a "social pact," honor diversity, and "do the big dance." Jones's technique harmonized hybridity, but, just as hybridity is usually hard-won in the post-colonial world, *The Bacchae Project*'s harmonized hybridity, embodied by the chorus, is constantly threatened by Pentheus and only fully secured through the violence of the young king's sacrifice.

Unveiling the *Bacchae* in 2001

However, despite Jones's attempt to honor his chorus, he still falls into the trap of orientalism. He appropriates the veil and imposes his own view upon it. This orientalism is evident in the image of unveiling, which occurs in three different choral odes. In the second stasimon, three men unveil themselves. With their veil removed, they wear pants but no shirts. They perform gymnastics, while the other dancers, still veiled, perform a short contemporary dance piece just before the earthquake strikes.[27] This first instance of unveiling occurs only with men, so in this way, the image does not simply fall into a typical voyeuristic scenario discussed below.

However, in the third and fourth stasimon, women are also unveiled. The third stasimon begins with the chorus forming a tableau on the stage while some members dance and others stand. A couple of actors take turns singing the lyrics like an African-American spiritual, a musical choice which again demonstrates the hybridity of this veiled group. The mood is somber and reserved, as some of the women chorus members remove their chadoor to dance in black pants and short black, midriff baring leotard tops. In the fourth stasimon, a much more excited number, an opera aria is heard in the background, while vigorous bongos beat a rhythm on top of it. In this ode, the whole chorus dances, and now almost the entire company unveils itself, removing the chadoor to dance in black pants and a short half-leotard. Although Jones rewrites the typical prurient scenario by unveiling both men and women, unveiling cannot be divorced from the history of its meaning.

Unveiling also cannot be divorced from the context and historical moment in which it is situated. *The Bacchae Project* presents an image of unveiling that both anticipates and participates in the orientalist discourse surrounding the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. In March 2001, Jones attempted in his workshop to explore a "subliminal fear" about the veil, and his acknowledgement of this fear suggests

that 9/11 did not ignite but rather inflamed already prevalent emotions about the veil, emotions which Jones had hoped to evoke in his U.S. audience by costuming his chorus in chadoor. Veiling conjures fear; unveiling, liberation and prurience.

The chadoor, however, is clothing, the meaning of which preoccupies the West far more than the women who wear the garment. Although some Muslim women reject the veil, others just choose not to wear it. Some wear it proudly and by choice. Others are forced to wear it, but many women just don't think about it at all. Each of these scenarios depends on the individual and her specific cultural environment. For the West, however, and for some of Jones's U.S. audience, the veil signifies difference. This difference can evoke fear that leads to the over-generalization of a cultural practice and the orientalist construction of unveiling, regardless of its context, as an act of liberation.

Just seven months after *The Bacchae Project* the trope of unveiling continued to metastasize in the discourse surrounding the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in November 2001. As in Jones's workshop, the U.S. reports refer to the veil in a generalized sense and also indulge in the trope of unveiling. Ayotte and Husein have discussed some of this post 9/11 rhetoric:

> [T]he fetishization of "unveiling" so pervades many U.S. accounts of Afghan women's oppression that it has come to serve as its own complex rhetorical trope. . . . [A]ccounts of "unveiling" objectify Afghan women with less than subtle sexual figurations. In a story on women living under the Taliban regime, Tom Brokaw enticed viewers by explaining that this story would provide "a rare look behind the veil".[28] The *60 Minutes II* segment entitled "Unveiled" promised that the viewer would meet young Afghan women who "unveil more than just their faces."[29] This last instance is particularly noteworthy as an example of how many of these seeming celebrations of the liberation of Afghan women from the burqa implicitly rely on the voyeuristic Orientalism of a promise to uncover women's bodies.[30]

As Alison Donnell comments, "Indeed, if Afghan women are now receiving the kinds of international attention that many had worked and hoped for, then it has to be noted that they are doing so very much on the West's terms."[31] The image of unveiling, which appeared in Jones's March 2001 production, later became a fixation in the post 9/11 discourse surrounding Afghanistan. The "subliminal fear" of the other that Jones wished to explore and challenge in Euripides' *Bacchae* metatheatrically appeared in the workshop itself, demonstrating the relentless persistence of orientalism in the historical moment of 2001.

Conclusion

Bill T. Jones's *Bacchae* workshop, performed in March 2001 just six months prior to the September 11th attacks, in some cases challenged but in others reinforced the orientalist East/West paradigm. On the one hand, the production offered a hybridized image of East and West that challenged the typical polarized view, and Jones's attempts to associate the veil with the healing art of dance that can harmonize political and social tensions. At the same time, Jones's image of unveiling is orientalist. He is a U.S. artist presenting images of the East for a U.S. audience, but while the production attempts to address what Jones calls a "subliminal fear of the other," it nevertheless reinforces this fear.

Euripides' depiction of the East is also double-edged. *Bacchae* exoticizes the East, associating it with femininity, luxury, and danger. However, the play also presents the Western Thebans in negative terms. Dionysos is after all Greek and not Asian, and because the Greeks hubristically mock Dionysos' divinity, the vengeful god (*not his Eastern followers*) punishes his transgressors. The chorus, on the other hand, is Asian. They accept the Theban-born god, and in this play they alone embody the calm and control to avoid violence and disaster.

This interpretation of the Euripides is also present in Jones's work. However, because the political and religious structures of East/West have changed so much in over two thousand years, the analogy creates quite a different connotation. Jones asks, "Why do the gods inflict horrible unimaginable vicissitudes on innocent people?" The vengeful god, in this case, is the god of the chadoor-clad chorus. The chorus does show the audience how "to live, and die, with grace and dignity, particularly in the face of the horrible, unimaginable, unfair vicissitudes that the vengeful gods inflict." However, the same god that keeps the chorus balanced also wreaks havoc on the irreverent Westerners. Jones's frivolous U.S./Theban debutantes are in a frenzy, but it is not late-capitalist excess and Western ideals that have driven them mad. Their neglect of Dionysos has, for the god clearly states in his prologue that he has inspired the women with his frenzy because of their refusal to recognize his divinity. So, while *The Bacchae Project* dignifies the chadoor wearing dancers, whose movement, dancing, performing, and communicating bodies serve as the model for a sound, healthy, and harmonious culture, the production still cannot escape the biases of its own culture and instead unwittingly descends into orientalism, appropriating the veil and making it susceptible to a domineering gaze that seeks to unveil its other.

Notes

1. All references to line numbers in *Bacchae* refer to Richard Seaford's edition of *Bacchae* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1997). All translations of Seaford's ancient Greek text are my own.

2. See Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989) for a thorough discussion of ancient Greek xenophobia and ethnocentrism.

3. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 53, 43, 3.

4. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* 1 - 2.

5. See Edith Hall, "Aeschylus' Persians via the Ottoman Empire to Saddam Hussein," *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars*, ed. Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P. J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1997) 167 – 200.

6. Jones, who is the son of African-American, Southern Baptist migrant workers, began his career with dance partner Arnie Zane, who was physically quite smaller than Jones and hailed from an upstate New York Italian-Catholic/Jewish-Lithuanian home. The two met while attending college at the State University of New York at Binghamton in the 1960s. They fell in love and eventually formed the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane company: "Together with partner Arnie Zane, he helped introduce elements now common in contemporary dance: partnering between men; the casting of dancers of all shapes, sizes, and colors; involvement of entire communities (professional performers and amateurs alike) in the creation of key works; use of spoken text and movement simultaneously; an exploration of autobiographical truths in his work (presaging much of the identity politics of the 80s and 90s); and the use of a full amalgam of movement styles and collaborative strategies" (*Walker Art Center.* 2009. Walker Art Center 24 April 2009 <http://air.walkerart.org/project.wac?cat_id=-2767>). The company received critical acclaim, but the partnership came to an end when Zane died of AIDS-related lymphoma on March 30, 1988 at his and Bill's home in Valley Cottage. However, Jones's company still retains Zane's name, and Bill T. Jones, an AIDS survivor, continues the pair's vision. Jones has received the MacArthur award for his contribution to the arts and a Tony award for choreographing *Spring Awakening*.

7. One of Jones's goals in the student workshop was to explore the text more thoroughly and to gather information for a future production he had in mind called *Loud Boy*, which would free itself from the Euripides. In 2000, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Jones gathered new material for the piece: "The company worked with a broad cross section of the community to explore cultural and personal images of God, a thematic issue at the heart of the Greek tragedy. A series of interactive discussions called 'What Does Your God Look Like?' provided Jones with rich source material for the work while giving community participants an active and meaningful opportunity to engage with each other, the company, and the creative process. Additional workshops, master classes, and a lecture/demonstration were presented." (*Walker Art Center*. 2009. Walker Art Center 24 April 2009 <http://air.walkerart.org/project.wac?cat_id=-2767>). Despite the variety of research and workshops conducted on *Bacchae* and *Loud Boy*, Jones was unfortunately never able to secure the necessary funding to bring the final project to fruition.

8. Bill T. Jones, interview, *The Bacchae Project* (U. of California, Davis, unreleased videocassette, 2001). This interview, conducted prior to September 11th (interviewer and exact date unknown), was taped at the University of California, Davis, and a version of it is available at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, Oxford.

9. For a discussion of the marginalization of the veil in a colonist context, see Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge: MIT P, 2003) 72 - 87. For an example of post-9/11 discourse on this matter, see Michael Owen-Brown, "Uproar as Nile Seeks Clothing Ban," *Hobart Mercury*, November 22, 2002, 15 October 2008, <http://www.lexis-nexis.com>, where Owen-Brown reported, "Reverend Fred Nile has sparked outrage by calling for a ban on Muslim women wearing their traditional clothing in public. The Christian crusader and New South Wales upper House MP stunned Parliament by saying terrorists could use the loose-fitting clothes to hide guns and bombs. His views were met by a chorus of condemnation, with Prime Minister John Howard calling for Australians to be tolerant and respectful of religions. Critics asked why he did not also demand that nuns be stripped of their habits. Mr. Nile called for garment such as the burka, hijab and chador to be banned in public areas like city streets and shopping centres."

10. Jones interview.

11. Despite Jones's reputation as a choreographer, I will critique his production less in terms of dance criticism and more, according to my own expertise, as a theatrical performance in dialogue with its ancient Greek precursor.

12. Some key studies of *Bacchae* include: E.R. Dodds, *Euripides' Bacchae* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1951), Helene P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1985), Helene P. Foley, "The Masque of Dionysus" *TAPA* (1980) 110: 107 – 33; Barbara Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women's Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 2004); Bernd Seidensticker,"Comic Elements in Euripides' *Bacchae,*" *AJP* 99 (1978): 303 – 320: Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1982); Jean-Pierre Pierre Vernant and Vidal-Naquet. *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. Trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books [distributed by MIT Press]

1988); R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the Bacchae* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1948); Froma Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama" *Representations 11*. (Summer 1985) 63 – 94. Revised version in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago: Chicago U P, 1996) and Froma Zeitlin and John J. Winkler, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos (*Princeton: Princeton U P, 1990).

13. See Dodds, *Bacchae* 279, n. 18, and Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 405, for discussions on the two types of maenadism in this play.

14. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* 82 – 83.

15. Jones interview.

16. See note 6.

17. Jones interview.

18. Jones interview.

19. Zineb Sedira, "Mapping the Illusive," *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge: MIT P, 2003) 63 - 64.

20. Jones interview.

21. Leila Ahmed, "The Discourse of the Veil," *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) 43.

22. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* 152 – 153. Cf. Winnington-Ingram, R. P. *Euripides and Dionysus* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1948).

23. Teiresias first introduces the theme of *sōphrosynē* (314) in response to Pentheus' rant against the maenads (221 – 5): "Dionysos does not compel women to be moderate (*sōphronein*) toward Aphrodite (the goddess of sexual love) but moderation (*sōphrosynē*) is in their nature . . . For a woman who has moderation (*sōphrosynē*) will not be corrupted in Bacchic revels" (314 – 317). At the end of this speech, the chorus then congratulates Teiresias for showing himself to be *sōphrōn* (329). In 504, Dionysos tells Pentheus, who is about to bind him, that "I who am *sōphrōn*, tell those who are not *sōphrōn* not to bind me." Then Dionysos, expecting Pentheus' blustering entrance upon the god's escape from prison, says, "A wise man exercises *sōphrōn* gentleness of temper" (641). The word is later used in the messenger speech to describe the Theban maenads' appearance while they were sleeping, i.e., before they attack the villagers in a frenzy (686), and Dionysos also uses it ironically when he says to Pentheus in the dressing up scene, "You will consider me your best friend, when, to your surprise, you see the *sōphronas* Bacchae (941). Then in stasimon three, the chorus say how death is a teacher of *sōphrōn* (1002) and the third Messenger ends his speech about the brutal death of Pentheus by saying, "To be *sōphrōn* and to honor the things of the gods is the best" (1149 – 50). Finally, Dionysos tells Kadmos and Agaue that had they been *sōphrōn*, they would have been fortunate (1341). The play often illustrates the lack of *sōphrosynē*, not through the characters' words, but through their actions, such as the maenads' alleged promiscuity and Pentheus' rushing, binding, and flustered panting. Dionysos' calm demeanor identifies him as *sōphrōn*. See my Ph.D. dissertation for further discussion of the importance of this theme: *A Genealogy of Corporeal Culture in Bakchai*. Diss. U of California, Los Angeles, 2007. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2007. 3272338.

24. For further discussion on *sōphrosynē* in ancient Greece see Helen North, *Sōphrosynē: Self-knowledge and Self-restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1966) and Adriaan Rademaker, *Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-Restraint: Polysemy and Persuasive use of an Ancient Greek Value Term* (Boston: Brill, 2005).

25. Cf. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* 148.

26. Jones interview.

27 . In Jones's piece, the earthquake scene is staged with a sound effect eerily reminiscent of a jet plane flying overhead and a single spotlight shining on a sandcastle, earlier used to represent the palace of Pentheus, that collapses.

28. "Life of Women Under Taliban Regime in Afghanistan," *NBC Nightly News*, 4 October 2001, NBC, 28 May 2008, <http://www.lexis-nexis.com>.

29. "Unveiled," 60 *Minutes II*, 10 October 2001, CBS, 25 May 2008, <http://www.lexis-nexis.com>.

30. Kevin J. Ayotte and Mary E. Husein, "Securing Afghan Women: Neocolonialism, Epistemic Violence, and the Rhetoric of the Veil," *NWSA Journal* Vol. 17.3 (Fall 2005) 119.

31. Donnell, Alison, "Visibility, Violence and Voice? Attitudes to Veiling Post-11 September," *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge: MIT P, 2003) 135.