Turning Sound into Sight in the Chorus' Entrance Song of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*

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Introduction

The appeal to the imagination in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, first performed in 467 BC, is already clear in the play's title: the seven attackers from Argos under Polynices' command never appear on stage.¹ Still, they have a central role in this play and the spectators are able to conjure up a vivid picture of the Argive enemies based on various descriptions by the characters on stage. The scout gives the Theban king Eteocles an overview in the prologue and a detailed report of the seven attackers in the so-called 'shield scene' in the second episode. The most emotional and vivid description is given, however, by the chorus in its entrance song.

The chorus in this play is a group of Theban girls who panic as their city is about to be attacked. Their behavior and verbal expressions help the audience to visualize the dangers that await the city of Thebes. This chapter explores the remarkable way in which the chorus' entrance song stimulates vision among the spectators. The picture that the chorus sketches of the enemy results from what the chorus says it is hearing rather than seeing outside the city walls. This 'ear-based' image contrasts sharply with the scout's eyewitness report. At the same time, the chorus in its movements and behavior acts out the enemy approaching the city. In this way the audience sees the enemy visualized on stage.

After a few general comments on vision in tragedy, I will analyze the sound-based visualization of the enemy in the *parodos*. Next, I will compare the cho-

1 I do not mean to suggest that Aeschylus himself invented this title. Lech (2008) discusses the question of when the play received its traditional title in relation to the play's revival as a single play between 411 and 405 B.C. I would like to thank the participants and organizers of the *Look of Lyric* Conference, in particular André Lardinois, Richard Martin, Anton Bierl and Claude Calame for their valuable suggestions. The Greek text of the *Seven against Thebes* is that of the Loeb edition of Sommerstein (2008). Translations also are Sommerstein's unless noted otherwise.

rus' description of the enemy with the scout's report and relate their differences to the different characters of the scout and the chorus. Furthermore, I will show how the chorus acts out the enemy, and discuss the opposition between hearing and seeing in the play. Finally, I will briefly examine the rest of the play and make some suggestions about visualization in other tragedies of Aeschylus in order to answer the question 'how exceptional is the use of visualization in the *Seven*?'.

Actual Vision and Visual Imagination in Tragedy

An examination of vision in tragedy can deal with actual or imaginary vision during the performance. What did the Athenian spectators actually see when they watched the chorus and actors performing the *Seven against Thebes* on stage? At the centre of the theater was a circular *orchestra*, in which a chorus of twelve men sang and danced. The chorus members wore costumes and masks impersonating a group of Theban girls.² It is uncertain whether the *Seven against Thebes* was performed with a *skênê* building. There may have been at least a tent where actors could change masks and costumes during their performance. The stage where the actors played may have been higher than the level of the *orchêstra*, where the chorus sang and danced. In the entrance song the chorus supplicates the gods for the city's rescue. Since the chorus addresses eight gods by name (109–152), it is not unlikely that the stage represented the acropolis of Thebes and contained the statues of these Theban gods.³ The girls perhaps carried *peploi* (robes) and garlands and clothed the images of the gods with these.⁴ The audience saw this group enter screaming and running.⁵

2 It is unclear whether the age or status of the women was immediately visible to the audience. Little is known about costumes and masks in drama. On this topic see Pickard-Cambridge (1988²) 208–209, Gould (1989) 24–27, Green (1994), and Taplin (1997).

3 Stehle (2005) 101–102 (with references). On the playing space in the *Seven* see Ley (2007) 20–23. For a detailed reconstruction of the distribution of the statues on stage see Wiles (1997) 114–119 and 197–200. Cf. too Groeneboom (1938) 78 on lines 1–77, 99 on lines 78–180, and 136 on lines 287–368, Thalmann (1978) 88–89 and Edmunds (2002) 106–107.

4 This is suggested by the question the chorus asks itself in lines 101–102. However, if the girls carry *peploi* and garlands with them, this is not mentioned later on by Eteocles, unlike the other behavior of the chorus. See Trieschnigg (2009) 89.

5 This group of anxious girls may convey to the audience a highly contrasting picture to that of the prologue, where Eteocles addresses a probably physically present group of Theban citizens. See Taplin (1977) 130 and Trieschnigg (2009) 63.

The use of masks, a decorated stage and special attributes helps to create the dramatic world on stage. Yet the restrained stage scenery implies that the audience would have needed extra information and had to use their imagination to visualize the dramatic situation: the verbal performance by the actors and the chorus is the main device in the *Seven against Thebes* to bring to life the Argive attack on the city of Thebes. It is no surprise then that the tragedy's text functions as a script containing much information about the dramatic setting.⁶ The prologue in particular helps to inform the audience about the time and place of the dramatic situation. For example, the first words of the play, Κάδμου πολῖται, citizens of Cadmus, indicates that the location is the city of Thebes.

Tragedies narrate also actions that are not visualized on stage. Violence is usually not put on stage. Most cases of murder and suicide take place outside the city or inside the *skênê* building, representing a palace or another building, and are reported by messengers. In the *Seven*, the Argives are never seen on stage because they never enter the city. The confrontation between the Argives and the Thebans, and in particular the fight between Polynices and Eteocles, are discussed extensively on stage beforehand. The outcome is reported by a messenger in the third episode.

Tragedies do not differ from epic or non-dramatic lyric in their appeal to the imagination of the audience through long narratives when telling or singing of other realities. For example, the chorus of Alcman's *First Partheneion* (*PMGF* 1) tells an old story of Castor and Polydeuces. Lack of evidence about choreography makes it impossible to determine whether this chorus acted out this story in its dance movements. Wiles and Foley speculate about the mimetic action of the chorus in tragic songs.⁷ In the *Seven against Thebes*, the chorus probably acted out the movements of the Argive enemy, as I will explain later.

Though the urge to arouse imaginary visualization is an important feature of both tragic and non-dramatic choruses, tragic lyric differs from other lyric in the setting of the choral singing.⁸ A non-dramatic ritual or song is performed

6 Cf. Taplin (1977) 28–39 and (1978) 4–5.

7 Wiles (1997) ch. 4, reconsidered by Foley in a paper 'Reconsidering "The Mimetic Action of the Chorus"', delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association in Philadelphia in January 2012.

8 For want of a better term, I use 'non-dramatic chorus' to refer to a chorus which does not perform in a tragedy, comedy, or satyr play. Alternative terms are 'cultic chorus' (Zimmermann [2002], cf. Calame [1994–1995] 136–138), 'ritual chorus' (Stehle [2004] 121), 'lyric chorus' (Wilson [2000] 134 and Murnaghan [2005] 189), or 'melic chorus' (Stehle [2004] 150, referring to Calame [1999] 151). A problem with these positive terms is that they can also apply to the tragic chorus.

before an audience to whom the context of the performance is already known, for the audience itself is part of the performance: for example, the audience of Alcman's *First Partheneion* would have known the occasion of the song. Although an audience of a tragedy knows the performance context of the Dionysia festival, it must be told about the imaginary world of the play before it can situate the tragic chorus' song.

The Chorus' Sound-Based Representation of the Argives

Let us turn to the representation of the Argives in the prologue and *parodos* of the *Seven against Thebes*. The descriptions of the scout (42–61) and the chorus (79–127 and 151–165) only agree on the outlines. The main part of the scout's narrative concerns a report about the oath-swearing and lot-drawing by the seven leaders of the Argive army (42–56). The scout concludes his account with a short remark to the effect that the Argive army is approaching (59–61). The chorus' description in the *parodos* gives the impression of being mainly an expansion of this final general remark: it contains a vivid picture of the approaching Argive army but adds few details on the seven leaders (124–127).⁹

These different descriptions result from the different ways the scout and the chorus obtain their information. The scout achieves his knowledge about the enemy by visual perception: he has been sent outside the city walls by Eteocles and has actively spied on the Argives, calling himself *κατόπτης* ('overseer', 41) and speaking of his *πιστὸν ἡμεροσκόπον ὀφθαλμόν* ('faithful eye watching during daytime', 66–67).¹⁰

Unlike the scout, the chorus becomes aware of the enemy because it *hears* the Argives coming. I would argue that the chorus bases its description mainly on aural perception, given the numerous words for sounds and hearing and the very few references to sight and seeing. As far as I know, Helen Bacon is alone in noting the dominance of sound in the *parodos* and first episode as well as the contrast with the scout's sight, but she fails to provide an explanation.¹¹

9 Several of the scout's words in lines 59–61 recur in the *parodos*: Ἀργείων recurs in 120 (Ἀργεῖοι), στρατός in 79 and 124 (στρατοῦ), κονίει in 81 (κόνις), and πεδία in 84.

10 The scout once uses a verb related to hearing (64: βοᾷ γὰρ κύμα χερσαίων στρατοῦ, 'an army's wave on dry land roars').

11 Bacon (1964) 29 notes that sound predominates in the first two choral songs and the first episode, whereas the 'messenger, who is the means by which the sights and sounds of the war outside the gates are transmitted is called a *κατόπτης* ('one who sees', lines 41 and

Some scholars, such as William Thalmann, argue for an alternation of visual and acoustic descriptions in the chorus' entrance song, but this view should be rejected, as I will show presently.¹²

The chorus does not consider itself a messenger at the lookout. It presents itself as someone being informed rather than someone informing others.¹³ The dust in the air announces the Argive arrival to the chorus at lines 81–82:¹⁴

αἰθερία κόνις με πείθει φανείσ'
ἀναυδος σαφῆς ἔτυμος ἄγγελος.

The appearance of dust in the air persuades me,
a voiceless, clear, and true messenger.¹⁵

Here at the beginning the chorus sings of the dust it sees.¹⁶ It turns out that being within the city walls, the girls can only see what is (high) in the air, although they are perhaps imagined as standing on the acropolis (240).¹⁷ From their vantage point they can just catch a glimpse of what is happening outside the wall.¹⁸ On the whole, the chorus relies on aural perception for its description of the enemy. It *hears* the horses' hooves in lines 83–84:

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- 369). She considers seeing and hearing as two vehicles of knowledge, rather than in opposition to each other. Lupaş and Petre (1981) 46 on lines 81–82 merely mention the opposition between seeing and hearing.
- 12 On the question whether the chorus can see the attacking army see Thalmann (1978) 89 and 168 n. 24. Mesk (1934) 455 suggests that in the beginning the chorus cannot yet hear the enemy but can only see them. This is incorrect as the enemy's sound is the reason why the girls enter (203–207, quoted below).
- 13 I will return to this active versus passive distinction below (see note 44 below on hearing vs seeing).
- 14 Cf. the scout's words in lines 59–60: Ἀργείων στρατὸς ... κόνιαι 'the Argive army ... is raising dust'. Johansen and Whittle (1980) on *A. Supp.* 180 note that a cloud of dust 'is notoriously the first intimation that an army is approaching', with references.
- 15 My translation.
- 16 Cf. line 155: δοριτίνακτος αἰθὴρ ἐπιμάνεται, 'The air is going mad with the brandishing of spears'.
- 17 The audience in Athens may have been aware that the Theban acropolis was not as high and steep as the Athenian one. See Schoder (1974) 220 on 'The low broad acropolis of the Kadmeion citadel'; I thank Stephan Mols for this reference and his suggestions about the landscape around Thebes.
- 18 Compare the prologue of *E. Phoen.* In Euripides' play the servant has a function similar to that of the scout in the *Seven*. The servant says he is well informed about the Argive

† ἐλεδέμας †
 πεδί' ὀπλόκτυπ' ὥτι χρίμπτει βοάν·

The soil (of my land),
 struck by hooves, sends the noise right to my ear!

It also hears the crash of shields (ἀκούετ' ἢ οὐκ ἀκούετ' ἀσπίδων κτύπον; 100) and the rattle of chariots around the city (ὄτοβον ἀρμάτων ἀμφὶ πόλιν κλύω· 151).¹⁹ Examples of other noises are: the clashing of spears (κτύπον and πάταγος, 103), the whine of the horses' bits (μινύρονται, 124), the creaking axles of the chariots (ἔλακον, 153), a shower of stones struck from afar (ἀκροβόλος λιθάς, 159), and the clashing of shields at the gates (κόναβος, 161).²⁰ In their confrontation with Eteocles in the first episode, the girls emphasize that the sounds of the enemy terrified them and made them run to the gods' statues.²¹ Their first words addressed to Eteocles summarize the noises mentioned in the *parodos*, lines 203–207:

ὦ φίλον Οἰδίπου τέκος, ἔδεις' ἀκού-
 σασα τὸν ἀρματόκτυπον ὄτοβον ὄτοβον,
 ὅτε τε σύριγγες ἔκλαγξαν ἐλίτροχοι,
 ἱππικῶν τ' ἄπυον πηδαλίων διὰ στόμα
 πυριγενεταὶ χαλινοί.

Dear son of Oedipus, I was frightened when I heard
 the sound of the rattle, the rattle of the chariots,
 and the noise of the whirling sockets of their wheels,

situation, because he went to Polynices to offer him a truce (E. *Phoen.* 95–98, cf. [142–144]). In the prologue he is standing on the roof of the palace. He tells Antigone to climb the ladder so she will see the enemies whom he will explain to her (E. *Phoen.* 100–103). This scene recalls the *teichoscopia* in *Iliad* 3, but the explicit explanation of how Antigone sees the Argives may also be a reference to the *parodos* in the *Seven*. Antigone standing on the roof sees more of the enemy than the chorus standing near the statues of the acropolis.

- 19 In the dialogue with Eteocles which follows, the chorus also refers to its hearing: 203–204 ἀκούσασα, 239 κλύουσα, 245 ἀκούω (cf. Eteocles' response in 246: μή νυν ἀκούουσ' ἐμφανῶς ἄκου' ἄγαν).
- 20 Other references to noise are 85 βρέμει, 'it roars' and 89 βοά, 'noise' (but note the textual problems).
- 21 Also see lines 211–213, 239–241; cf. 245–246, 249.

and when the fire-fashioned bits that are horses' steering-gear
howled in their mouths.

Some of the chorus' remarks suggest that it sees more of the enemy than merely the dust in the air, though without altering the overall impression that the chorus bases its depiction of the enemy on sound. First of all, the chorus uses a verb for seeing *κτύπον δέδορκα* ('I see a crash', 103). The use of *δέδορκα* here 'is a fairly common extension of the specific "see" to the general "perceive", because the object of *δέδορκα* is a sound'.²² Being at most an example of *synaesthesia*, *δέδορκα* is the only self-reference by the chorus to seeing in the *parodos* and first episode. This contrasts with the frequent use of verbs of hearing.

Furthermore the chorus uses several adjectives with apparently visual details about the enemy: *λεύκασπις* ('white-shielded', 90),²³ *δοχμολόφων* ('with slanting, nodding plume', 114),²⁴ and *χαλκοδέτων* ('bronze-rimmed', 161). All of these may be considered stock epithets in poetic descriptions of warriors, which may explain their presence in a narrative dominated by sound.²⁵ *Χαλκοδέτων*, in particular, can even derive from aural perception: the chorus says that it hears the clashing of shields, which it calls *χαλκοδέτων*, 'bronze-rimmed'. If the girls cannot see the shields they must have deduced the bronze rims otherwise, perhaps from the noise of the clashing shields or from the tradition that shields are made from bronze.

Finally the descriptive passage in lines 125–127 implies visual perception:

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- 22 Rose (1957) 171 on line 103 (with examples); cf. Tucker (1908) 30 on line 100: 'The verb of seeing is somewhat freely applied in Greek' (with examples). Sommerstein (2008) 163 n. 15 explaining line 103: 'it creates a vivid picture in my mind's eye'. Strictly speaking, this line combines a verb for seeing with an object of sound, which would make it an example of *synaesthesia*. Stanford (1942) 107 argues in favor of *synaesthetic* imagery. Edmunds (2002) 107 also notes the *synaesthesia* in this passage and argues for a dramaturgical function.
- 23 Stock epithet of the Argives, Mazon (1931²) 9 and Groeneboom (1938) 104 on *Th.* 90–93.
- 24 Though this is a *hapax*, the phenomenon of nodding helmet-crests as the warrior moves is familiar from Homer onwards and has a fearsome connotation, Sommerstein (2008) 165 n. 17. For the fearful association of a nodding crest see *Il.* 3.337, 16.138, cf. 6.469, 15.537, *A. Th.* 384.
- 25 In lines 90–91 the chorus uses the word *εὔπρεπής* or *εὐτρεπής* of the Argive army. Hutchinson (1985), West (1998²), and Sommerstein (2008) read *εὔπρεπής*, 'conspicuous', whereas Mazon (1931²), Groeneboom (1938), Page (1972), and Lupaş and Petre (1981) 49 have *εὐτρεπής* 'prepared', 'ready'. Both readings occur in the manuscripts. *εὔπρεπής* concerns outward appearance, implying visual perception. Yet the word does not occur frequently as a description of persons. I therefore consider it more likely that we should read *εὐτρεπής*.

ἐπτά δ' ἀγήνορες πρέποντες στρατοῦ
 δορυσσοῖς σαγαῖς πύλαις ἐβδόμαις
 προσίστανται πάλωι λαχόντες.

and out of the army seven distinguished leaders of men,
 assigned by lot, are taking their stand
 against the seven gates,
 fully armed, brandishing their spears.

I suggest that the chorus derived this information from the scout's report, or from similar reports that the girls may have heard in the city, rather than from its own observation. This assumption would also explain why the chorus does not elaborate on the appearance of the Argive leaders taking their positions.

The references to visual perception are very few in number, while sound dominates the choral song. Lowell Edmunds considers the possibility that at the time of performance sounds were produced off-stage to represent the noise of the Argive army and could be heard by both the chorus and the audience.²⁶ The chorus concentrates its remarks on sounds and hearing. The production of real sounds during performance would reinforce this focus on hearing. The result is nevertheless that the audience is able to *visualize* the approaching Argives. Perhaps Aeschylus employed this dramaturgical technique on purpose, just as horror movie producers do nowadays: when spectators do not see anything but hear particular noises the danger becomes all the more chilling.²⁷

The Chorus versus the Scout

I will now relate the different ways in which the chorus and scout perceive the enemy to other differences. The narratives of the chorus and scout also differ in tone. The chorus' description of the Argive army is punctuated with terrified screams and prayers, conveying a sense of panic to the audience. This contrasts with the restrained report by the scout based on facts and focused on finding an appropriate military response.

26 Edmunds (2002) 107–108. Moutsopoulos (1959) 53 n. 17 states that it is certain that these noises were reproduced in the theater, citing Pl. *Resp.* 3.396a–b, but this view is rejected by Stanford (1973).

27 I owe this suggestion to Richard Martin. One may think of movies by Hitchcock, such as *Psycho* (1960), or the *Blair Witch Project* directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez (1999).

This emotive difference is also evident in the different modes of delivery. The scout speaks in iambic trimeters whereas the chorus sings in lyric meters. This is more than a formal distinction between actors and chorus. Lyrics in tragedy are generally considered to be more suitable to express emotion, and here the chorus' lyric meter can be said to signal panic for two reasons. In the first place, it is striking that the chorus does not enter the *orchêstra* with recitative anapaests, but sings in a lyric meter from the start. In the second place, the meter in itself, consisting of dochmiacs, is suited to expressing urgency or emotion. The dochmiac song characterizes the panic-stricken girls of the chorus, who may also have entered out of formation or conveyed distress in their dance.²⁸

This difference in emotive tone can be explained from the different perspectives of the scout and the chorus. The scout, who has been sent by Eteocles to spy on the enemy (36), is a self-assured messenger: he says he is bringing clear information from the army outside,²⁹ and he calls himself an overseer of the situation.³⁰ He ends his speech by emphasizing the reliability and importance of his observations (66–69):

κάγώ τὰ λοιπὰ πιστὸν ἡμεροσκόπον
ὀφθαλμὸν ἔξω, καὶ σαφηνεῖναι λόγου
εἰδὼς τὰ τῶν θύραθεν ἀβλαβῆς ἔσσι.

And I for the rest will have a trusty lookout, my eye, and knowing by the clarity of my word the things outside you will be unharmed.³¹

The scout is confident that he can provide Eteocles with useful military advice. His confident attitude contrasts with the confusion of the chorus: the Theban girls are struck with panic as soon as they become aware of the enemies' approach. They do not know how to respond. They pose questions to the gods and to each other expressing uncertainty about what is going to happen

28 Scott (1984) 81 and 160 and Stehle (2005) 104. On the use of dochmiac meter in drama see Dale (1968²) 104–119, esp. 110–111, Rosenmeyer (1982) 34–35, West (1982) 108–115 and Scott (1984) 217 n. 26 for further references. Ley (2007) 138–143 (cf. 198) discusses the possible significance of individual meters in tragedy with special reference to Scott's approach.

29 ἦκω σαφῇ τὰ κεῖθεν ἐκ στρατοῦ φέρων, 'I come bringing definite news from the army out there', 40.

30 αὐτὸς κατόπτῃς δ' εἴμ' ἐγὼ τῶν πραγμάτων, 'I am myself an overseer of the things', 41.

31 My translation.

and what they should do. They scream and run. Thus, the *parodos* opens with the words *θρέομαι φοβερά μεγάλη ἄχη* ('I shriek heavy fearful pains', 78).³²

The Chorus Mimicking the Argive Army

The differences in perception, emotional expression and self-confidence do not lead to a clash between the scout and the chorus in the play. Yet the chorus' panic and terrified behavior is criticized vehemently by Eteocles in the first episode. He accuses the girls of endangering the city by their wild screaming and running, which spreads panic and cowardice among the citizens while aiding the enemy (191–194). Like the Argive army, the chorus is an enemy to the city. This parallel can be drawn further. First of all, just as the Argives are said to produce a lot of sounds, the chorus itself makes a lot of noise: this already becomes clear from the chorus' first words in line 78 (quoted above). They pray to the gods with cries and wails (*ἀγάστονοι*, 'loud-wailing', 99, and *αὐτοῦσαι*, 'crying', 145). Eteocles' words also indicate the girls' noise: *αὔειν*, 'to cry', and *λαχάζειν*, 'to howl' (186). Eteocles orders the chorus several times to be quiet (232, 250, 252, 262) and not to terrify the Thebans (262) but to give them confidence (270).

Secondly, many of the words for sounds, which the chorus uses to describe the enemy, can be used of choral performative actions.³³ For example, the verb *βρέμει* in line 85, referring to the clash of arms, can denote the sound of music.³⁴ *κτύπον* in line 100, meaning the crash of shields, can also be used of voices and music. *ῥοβον* in lines 151 and 204 denotes the rattling of chariots, but can also refer to the sound of a flute. *σῦριγγες* in line 205 concerns the holes in the naves of wheels but can also refer to musical pipes. The use of these words enhances the semblance between the Argive army and a chorus.³⁵

Thirdly, when referring to itself, the chorus once uses a word that can also apply to a military group: *λόχος* in line 110. Its usual meaning is 'ambush', but it can also denote the men who tend the ambush, a band of armed men or a

32 On the panic and behavior of the chorus in the *parodos* see Stehle (2005) and Trieschnigg (2009) 67–101 with references.

33 I thank Anton Bierl for this suggestion.

34 Cf. *βρόμος* in lines 213 and 476.

35 For performatives of choral dance see Bierl (2001) 59–60, 107–110 and 130–150 (with a discussion of Ar. *Th.* 947–1000; this passage contains *κτυπέται* (995) and *βρέμονται* (998b) in a choral sense). For *ῥοβος* used as the sound of a flute see s. *Aj.* 1202. For *σῦριγξ* in the sense of a musical pipe see *Il.* 10.13 or s. *Ph.* 213.

group of people in general. It is used twice in the rest of play, both times by the scout to refer to troops of soldiers of the Argive enemy, in lines 56 and 460.³⁶ Dawson also notes that *λόχος* both occurs in 56 and 110, and he explains: 'the group Eteocles has to cope with inside the city is similar to the enemy outside'.³⁷ So by *λόχος*, the chorus uses a word that elsewhere describes the enemy in the play and has a military connotation.

The resemblances between the Argive army and the chorus provide the audience with another means to visualize the enemy: the Theban girls themselves mirror the Argive army with their wild running and screaming.³⁸ The chorus of Theban girls brings the 'chorus' of the army to life. Behaving like a disordered army, the chorus visualizes war.

The resemblance between the chorus and the Argive army exists only to a certain degree and is mainly confined to the domain of sound. Visually, the chorus on stage represents young girls. The chorus' sounds, however, are not merely girlish screams but also resemble the noises of the approaching enemy. A closer look at the presentation of the second strophe and antistrophe (150–157 and 158–165) can illustrate this. Both strophe and antistrophe start with a cry from the chorus: *ἔ ἔ ἔ ἔ*, an exclamation of pain or grief. The second and fourth lines of both strophes describe noises from the enemy (151, 153, 159, 161, mentioned above). The third and fifth lines are invocations of the gods by the chorus. Together, the first five lines of the second strophe and antistrophe present a close alternation of sounds by the chorus and the enemy.

Hearing versus Seeing

I have shown the way in which the chorus visualizes the enemy: it gives a sound-based description and mimics the approach of the Argives in its noise and movement. The chorus' hearing contrasts with the scout's seeing, and these different ways of perception can be related to their contrasting characters and attitudes. In this section, I will take a closer look at the contrast between

36 The scout uses a derivative of the word when describing the seven leaders of the Argive troops in line 42: *λοχαγέται*, 'troop leaders'.

37 Dawson (1970) 43. Several scholars have noted that the chorus in the *Seven* mirrors the Argive army: Cameron (1971) 33 and 80–81, Zeitlin (1982) 29–30, Jackson (1988) 291, Giordano-Zecharya (2006) 71 n. 64; cf. Torrance (2007) 95.

38 On similarities between an army and a chorus in ancient Greece in general see Trieschnigg (2009) 50–52 with references.

hearing and seeing.³⁹ I suggest that this contrast at the beginning of the play represents a hierarchical relation and belongs to a broader set of dichotomies, which is thematized in the play also in other ways.

Several sources testify to the hierarchical relation between seeing and hearing in ancient Greece. According to Heraclitus eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears.⁴⁰ The Greek verb 'to know', οἶδα, derives from the stem ἰδ- of the verb 'to see', which recurs in εἶδον and in the Latin *vidēre*.⁴¹ In his invocation in *Iliad* 2, Homer contrasts the Muses, who are present and know everything, from himself, since he only has the κλέος, the rumor, he hears, and knows nothing (*Il.* 2.484–486). Herodotus regards information derived from what he has seen himself to be more reliable than that based on hearsay.⁴² In tragedy, reports are considered more trustworthy when the messenger himself has witnessed the story he tells.⁴³ Seeing entails presence and first-hand knowledge, hearing absence and second-hand knowledge.

At the start of the *Seven against Thebes* the chorus' hearing does not concern hearsay but the direct perception of sounds. Still, the contrast between hearing and seeing is here also related to a difference in knowledge and presence. The chorus' references to hearing imply that the chorus, being within the city, has a less immediate perception of the enemy than the scout, who went outside the city to spy actively upon the Argives. He has seen the enemy up close and his report contains reliable information for Eteocles.

This difference in knowledge and presence is related to the different ways in which the scout and the girls have been prepared for the war. The scout has

39 Christopher Brown, in his paper 'Pindar's Vision of Archilochus (*Pyth.* 2.54)' delivered at the original *Look of Lyric* conference in Delphi also discussed the relation between eyes and ears: eyes would be more trustworthy than ears.

40 Heraclit. *vs* 22 B 101a (*ap.* Plb. 12.27): δυνεῖν γὰρ ὄντων κατὰ φύσιν ὡς ἂν εἴ τινων ὀργάνων ἡμῖν, οἷς πάντα πυνθανόμεθα καὶ πολυπραγμονοῦμεν, ἀκοῆς καὶ ὀράσεως, ἀληθινωτέρας δ' οὐσης οὐ μικρῶι τῆς ὀράσεως κατὰ τὸν Ἡράκλειτον· ὀφθαλμοὶ γὰρ τῶν ὥτων ἀκριβέστεροι μάρτυρες, 'For we have by nature, as it were, two organs by the aid of which we learn and inquire of everything: hearing and sight. And of the two sight is much more truthful according to Heraclitus, for eyes are more accurate witnesses than the ears' (my translation).

41 Chantraine (1968) 455 s.v. ἰδεῖν and 779–780 s.v. οἶδα.

42 Herodotus 2.29.1–4, 2.99.1–4. Cf. 1.8.10–11: ὧτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν ('ears happen to be less trustworthy for people than eyes'). Plato and Aristotle also rank sight over hearing and closely associate vision with reason. *Pl. Ti.* 47a, *Th.* 156b, *Arist. de An.* 3.3.428b.30 f., *Sens.* 3.437a.3 ff. and 5.445a.4 ff. The first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* also shows a favoring of sight over the other senses. References found in Vinge (1975) 18 and Chandler (1994) *Graphocentrism*.

43 E.g. *A. Pers.* 266–267 and *Ch.* 852–853; see de Jong (1991) 9–12.

received orders from Eteocles to spy actively. The girls, however, do not await the enemy actively or with instructions from Eteocles. Rather, their hearing of the enemy is something that happens to them unexpectedly, and this passive perception confuses and frightens them. Unlike the scout, the chorus is presented as being informed rather than informing others.⁴⁴ Once they have arrived at the statues of the gods to pray, Eteocles tells the girls to be silent and stay inside (200–201, 232). Because the scout and the chorus receive different instructions from Eteocles, they perceive the enemy differently: the scout is outside the city and sees the Argives, whereas the chorus is inside the city and hears the Argives.

The dichotomy between seeing and hearing reflects traditional patterns of relations between masculine and feminine and the conventional dichotomy between men and women which was prevalent in ancient Greece.⁴⁵ Separation of the sexes was an important (though not an absolute) value. Women's knowledge was often confined to the domain of hearing, whereas men were often witnesses of events outside. Andromache in *Iliad* 22 is an example: she knows nothing of Hector's death because she is weaving inside.⁴⁶ Upon hearing a lament she wants to check her suspicions by looking outside.⁴⁷ The situation in the *Seven* also illustrates this traditional separation between masculine and feminine. The Theban girls resemble Andromache. Hearing the clatter of arms and chariots, they get frightened and run outdoors to the statues of the gods to pray to them for protection. Eteocles, however, claims that because they are women, they should stay indoors and keep quiet: war is an out-of-doors affair and is the concern of men (200–202, 230–232).⁴⁸ Eteocles' demand for a strict separation between men's and women's duties and whereabouts suits the traditional separation between men and women.

44 See lines 81–82, discussed above (p. 221).

45 McClure (1999) 19–24, and Trieschnigg (2009) 118–120. Blok (2001) 115–116 argues that this convention is part of a system of values which determined the opportunities for women in ancient Greece to perform; under certain circumstances women could act and speak in the public space.

46 *Il.* 22.440 $\mu\chi\acute{\omega}$ δόμου ὑψηλοῖο, 'in the innermost part of the lofty house'. Cf. *Il.* 22.437–439 ἄλοχος δ' οὐ πῶ τι πέπυστο / Ἑκτορος οὐ γάρ οἱ τις ἐτήτυμος ἄγγελος ἐλθὼν / ἥγγειλ' ἔττι ῥά οἱ πόσις ἔκτοθι μίμνε πυλάων, 'but Hector's wife knew nothing yet, for no true messenger had come to tell her that her husband remained outside the gates'. Andromache becomes frightened when hearing the lament (*Il.* 22.447–452). She wants to see what has happened (22.450, cf. 463). Translations adapted from Wyatt (1999).

47 I owe many of the examples in this section to David Rosenbloom.

48 Cf. Hector's remark to Andromache in *Il.* 6.490–493.

The polarity between seeing and hearing, outside and inside, men and women, illustrates the conflict between two contrasting perspectives on war in this play. These dichotomies are not unique for the *Seven*, rather they fit traditional ancient Greek views. The scout and Eteocles embody a masculine view focusing on military strategies and achieving glory. The chorus embodies a feminine view concerned with suffering and pain. The play does not present the dichotomies in a hierarchical way such as would suggest that Eteocles is right and the chorus is wrong. The tension between their perspectives is problematized. At their entrance, for example, the Theban girls may have expressed their panic too vehemently, but Eteocles' command to them to be completely silent strikes us as being excessively harsh. Under certain circumstances women were allowed to perform in public. At the end of the first episode, Eteocles adapts his instruction: the girls can stay outside and are allowed to express a prayer.

Rest of the Play

After the first episode, the visualization in the *Seven* does not continue in the same way through sound and hearing. The scout returns with a description of the seven Argive leaders, and he gives Eteocles an eyewitness report. He gives an account of what the Argive leaders look like, what they say, and what their shield emblems look like. The chorus does not hear the enemy anymore, but only hears the scout's report. Neither does the chorus seem to mimic the Argive army anymore. Vision and sound are important in the scout's descriptions because all the Argives attempt to make an intimidating impression by looking terrifying and speaking horrifying words, except for the prophet Amphiaraus: he does not want to appear an excellent warrior but to be one (592), which indicates that vision can be deceptive too.

In this scene, the dramatic conflict is between the scout's reports about the Argives and Eteocles' responses concerning the Thebans who will take position against the Argives. Because the audience does not see the military leaders, this scene appeals to the spectators' imagination. The chorus combines visualization with an emotive reaction in lines 419–421: *τρέμω δ' αἵματη/φόρους μόρους ὑπὲρ φίλων / ὀλομένων ιδέσθαι*, 'but I tremble to see the bloody deaths of men who perish fighting for their dear ones'. Once the chorus refers to its hearing in combination with a reaction of fear in lines 563–566:

ἰκνεῖται λόγος διὰ στηθέων,
τριχὸς δ' ὀρθίας πλόκαμος ἵσταται

μεγάλα μεγαληγόρων κλυοῦσαι
ἀνοσίων ἀνδρῶν·

The word comes through my breast,
and each lock of my hair stands on end
as I hear the boastings
of vaunting impious men.⁴⁹

The play never brings onto the stage the Argives, nor the battle between Eteocles and Polynices; only their two corpses are eventually brought before the audience, following the tragic convention not to stage violence.

Other Plays of Aeschylus

We may wonder how unique this manner of visualization at the beginning of the *Seven* is: is the act of seeing in general done better by characters on stage than by the chorus? Does a tragic chorus usually combine perception with emotion? I will offer a few tentative answers to these questions. Several other plays of Aeschylus suggest that a character on stage can see better than the chorus. In the prologue to the *Agamemnon*, a watchman, sitting on the roof of the palace, sees the agreed beacon-signal that indicates that Troy has been taken. When the chorus of old men enters, it does not know that Troy has fallen, nor does it know about the beacons, but wants to question Clytemnestra about the sacrifices being made in the city on her instruction (85–103).

In Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, Danaus twice tells his daughters what he is seeing. The first time, he sees Pelasgus and his men arriving (180–185). Danaus' perception recalls the chorus' words in the *Seven* in lines 81–82 (quoted above). In both descriptions, the dust (χόνις) is the first sign that some people are coming, and it is called a voiceless messenger (ἄναυδος ἄγγελος). Danaus also informs the chorus when the Egyptians are coming (713–723). He twice mentions his act of seeing. At the start he says: ἵκεταδόκου γὰρ τῆσδ' ἀπὸ σκοπῆς ὁρῶ / τὸ πλοῖον, 'from this lookout post, which received you as suppliants, I can see the boat' (713–714). He continues by saying that it is conspicuous and that the sails do not escape his notice (οὐ με λανθάνει, 714). Later on, the chorus refers to Danaus' watching: πατρός σκοπαὶ δέ μ' εἶλον, 'my father's lookout has trapped me' (786). There is no indication that the chorus sees Pelasgus and his men or the Egyptians before

49 My translation.

they enter the stage in lines 234 and 825 respectively. Apparently Danaus can see better than his daughters from his position. Perhaps this would be easy to understand for the spectators in the theater, when they saw Danaus and the chorus at their different positions: the chorus in the *orchêstra* and Danaus on what was probably a raised stage.

On the whole, one may assume that individual characters are better able to see what is happening than the chorus since they can leave the stage to investigate or go onto the roof of the *skênê* building to claim a better view of who is approaching. Usually the chorus relies on other characters for information about what has happened or is happening elsewhere.

Tragic choruses themselves usually do not have a purely informative role, unlike the primarily informative function of a messenger or, in the *Seven*, a scout. Choruses also have an emotive and a performative voice.⁵⁰ Aeschylean choruses in particular often express fear. In the *Seven*, the chorus sings of the enemy, utters fear, and prays to the gods. In the aforementioned *Agamemnon*, the chorus does not immediately believe Clytemnestra who tells the old men how the news about Troy's fall reached Argos (281–316). They first hear the news confirmed by a herald coming from Troy and then see it confirmed when Agamemnon appears on stage. But in the following song the chorus admits that, though it has seen the return with its own eyes (πεύθομαι δ' ἅπ' ὀμμάτων / νόστον αὐτόμαρτυς ὦν, 988–989), it is still not confident. Choruses are not mere receivers or reporters of information but tend to offer an emotive response towards the action on stage.

It is no surprise, then, that the chorus in the *Seven* combines the description of the Argives with emotive interruptions, although the degree of panic is exceptional. I am inclined to think that the sensory play between eyes and ears is unique to the *Seven*. It is possible that the special sensory perception of the chorus and its difficulty to see the enemy is especially significant for the Oedipus myth, in which blindness both literal and metaphorical plays such an important role. But since we know so little about the other plays in the trilogy, it remains a matter of speculation whether the vivid sound-based picture elaborates on a theme about vision, blindness, and knowledge in the preceding play.

50 Calame speaks of a hermeneutic, emotive and performative voice: Calame (1994–1995), (1999), esp. 126–129, and (2005), esp. 217–218, discussed in Trieschnigg (2009) 42–43. On the complex role of the tragic chorus, see among others, Goldhill (1996) and Foley (2003) with further references.

Conclusion

I have explored the ways in which the chorus stimulates vision among the spectators at the beginning of the *Seven against Thebes* through sound and hearing. Spectators of tragedy have to use their imagination to visualize the dramatic situation. The chorus in the *Seven* helps the audience to imagine what is happening by describing what it is hearing and by acting out the Argive enemy outside the city walls. This description gives a different impression of the Argive army than does the previous report by the scout. The chorus' narrative of the enemy is based on sounds and is interjected with screams and desperate questions to the gods. The scout has been spying outside the city and offers Eteocles a clear account of the Argive leaders. The chorus derives its information from sounds, but at the same time it also produces a lot of sounds itself: according to Eteocles, the chorus' screams pose a danger to the city comparable to the Argive noises. Both the chorus' description and its behavior help the audience to imagine a frightening enemy outside the city walls.

The contrast between seeing and hearing is part of a broader set of dichotomies in the play. The chorus' description contains less detailed information than that of the scout, and more expressions of fear. The differences between the chorus and scout can be related to differences attributed to gender. In ancient Greece, hearing, fear, confusion, and being inside the house were associated with the domain of women, whereas seeing, self-confidence, and taking care of the things 'outside' were associated with the domain of men.

The differences between the chorus and the scout can also be ascribed to the different modes of delivery. The chorus' lyrics are more suitable to express emotion than the iambic trimeters of the scout. In this respect, the chorus of Theban girls resembles non-dramatic choruses who can express feelings of uncertainty as a response to a frightening situation. Yet, there is a difference: non-dramatic choruses also provide the audience with a 'model' of how to overcome these emotions, by demanding a critical stance and a certain amount of self-control.⁵¹

Pindar's *Paeon 9*, for example, can be considered a response to a frightening situation. It was performed at Thebes after a solar eclipse, probably in 463 B.C.⁵² The speaking 'I', either a male solo singer or a male chorus, asks for divine aid to avert a threat against the Theban community. Also the entrance song

⁵¹ Calame (2005) 229.

⁵² On this song see Stehle (1997) 46–51, Rutherford (2001) 189–200 and Stehle (2004) 138–139.

in the *Seven* bears signs of a supplication to the gods to avert evil. Yet there are some crucial differences between these two songs. Unlike the chorus in the *Seven*, the chorus of Pindar's paeon does not express vehement emotion: in spite of the supplication, the song does not contain explicit references to fear or indications of running or shouting. Furthermore, Pindar's song displays a change of emotional tone in the course of the prayer from 'an admission of helplessness' to 'an assertion of confidence', as Eva Stehle has argued.⁵³

In the chorus' entrance song of the *Seven*, however, confusion prevails over an encouraging prayer and the girls display little self-control. The vehemence of the chorus' emotion at the start of the play can be explained better by reference to the chorus' identity as frightened girls rather than by attributing it to the emotive expressions of (non-dramatic) lyric. In the course of the play, the chorus' strong emotions disappear and it is able to comment on the situation with more self-control.⁵⁴ This way it becomes more like a non-dramatic chorus expressing and modeling the emotions of a larger community than merely a group of girls.

The contrast between hearing and seeing contributes to the contrast between two irreconcilable views on war in the play. On the one hand the play presents a 'male-associated' view, represented by Eteocles and the scout and focused on achieving glory. On the other hand the play shows a 'female-associated' view, represented by the chorus, which is antimilitaristic and focused on suffering. The beginning of the play shows how different these views are, as their views already start from two literally different ways of perception, seeing and hearing.

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53 Stehle (1997) 50.

54 Stehle (2005) 105–108 argues that the chorus already shows more self-control in the course of the *parodos*.

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