

Between Tragedy and Horror: Body Horror and Monstrosity in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*

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Background

- Horror has long been associated with Greek tragedy, with scholars identifying tragedy as a foundational influence on the genre.
- Tragedy and horror media both encourage reflection and affect in response to personal and social crises.
- This research explores the connections between contemporary horror and ancient tragedy by applying modern horror aesthetics in a performative context, informing the reinterpretation and staging of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.

Objectives

- Understand and highlight the generic relationships between Greek tragedy and modern horror media, and how each can influence, reinterpret, and redefine the other.
- Shift traditional perspectives on staging Greek tragedy to explore how it can address current social crises and anxieties.
- Evaluate how horror aesthetics can enhance audience immersion and emotional engagement in ancient drama.

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Methodology

In July 2024, we:

- Engaged international horror researchers and scholars at a conference on *Horror Ecologies: Un/human Body Genres, New Materialisms, New Methodologies*.
- Staged a workshop of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* through the lenses of ecohorror, monster studies, and body horror.
- Worked with theatre professionals to enhance affective audience response to the production through sound, makeup, and mixed media.
- Held an audience talkback where classics and horror scholars and theatre professionals responded to a series of questions to evaluate the success of the project and what steps might be taken to further explore the relationship between horror and tragedy in the next project.



Pictured above:
Attic red figure cup, c. 425-400 B.C.
Scene from *Trachiniae* myth: Hercules fights
the centaur Nessos, rescuing Deianira.
From Caskey & Beazley, plate CIII.

Results

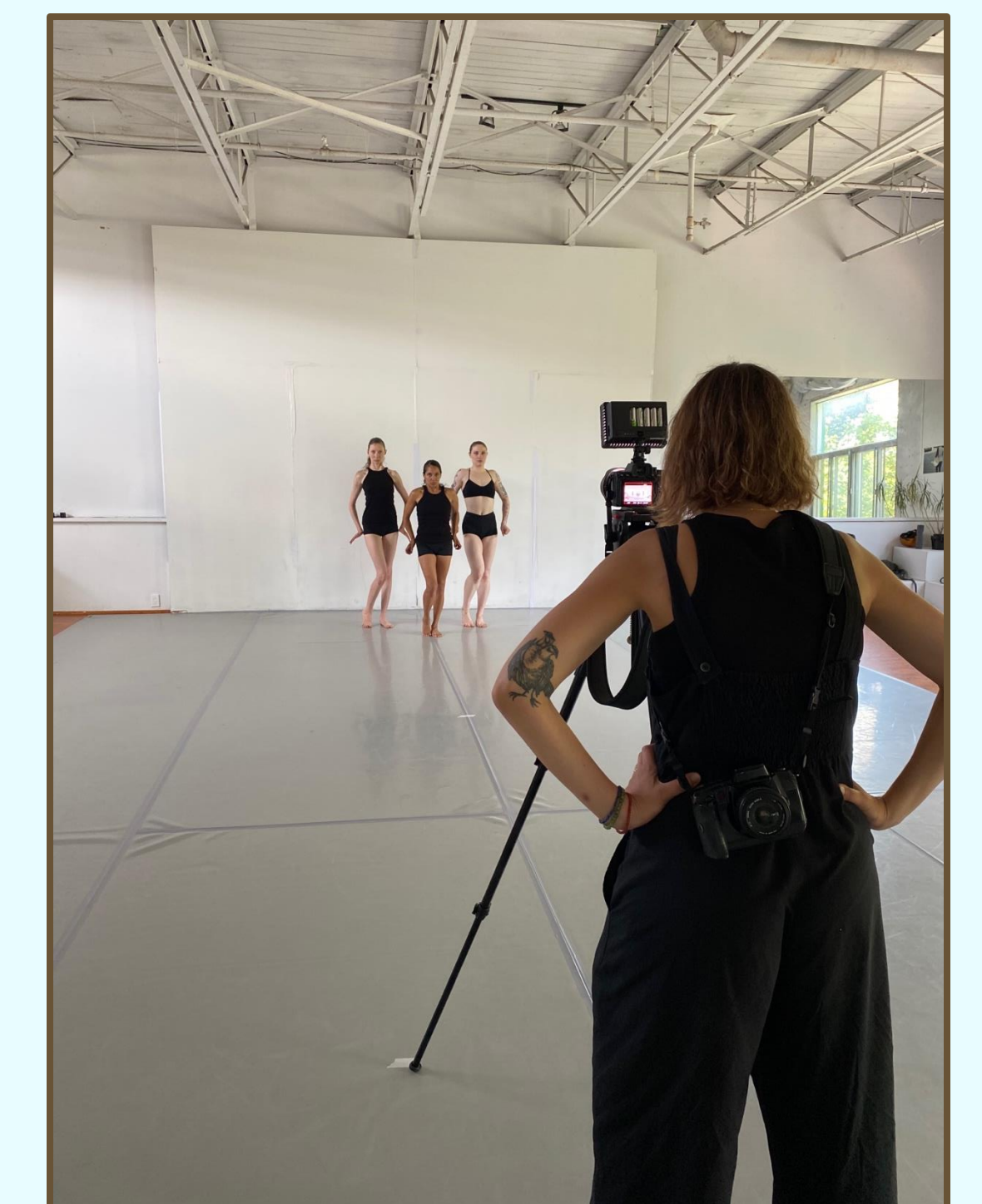


Photo descriptions (from left to right): Makeup artist Lydia Cavaleiro and production assistant Kimberly Hönig apply body horror makeup to performer Frédérique Rodier; Marissa Blair as Deianeira performs a scene from *Trachiniae*; Co-director Tania Dos Santos directs a mixed media projection.

Conclusions

- Greek tragedy can be made more accessible and affective by presenting it applied with contemporary horror aesthetics.
- Performance is an effective research method to investigate generic consonance between tragedy and horror.