

Dramatic Heterotopias and Transformations of Mythic Space:

H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* and Joan Jonas's *Lines in the Sand*

Anna Fyta

University of Ioannina, Greece.

Abstract

In 2004 the visual artist Joan Jonas staged a video/installation/mixed media project of *Helen in Egypt* at the Tate Gallery. Almost sixty years since its composition, Jonas recasts H.D.'s long, neo-epic poem extending and exposing the possibilities of dramatic space and its dialogical connections with media that reinforce, undermine and raise questions about the interplay between dramatic space, poetry and narrativity. In her rendering of the Euripidean *Helen*, H.D. explores the ability of spatial transformation. She conceives Egypt as a locus of "spaceless limbo" or, to use Michel Foucault's term, "Heterotopia," a site "that can be found within the culture, simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted." Within the timeline of the Trojan cycle, H.D. provides a spatial reading of a civilization transfixed by war. In the heterotopic space of the Tate, Jonas, in turn, interweaves through her video installation performance *Lines in the Sand* the originary mythic text with H.D.'s neo-epic and references to H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud*. Both women artists creatively exploit the ever-transformative dynamics of the myth to make a case about its impact on Western literary tradition.

Keywords: H.D., Jonas, Heterotopia, Mythology, Intervisuality, Classical Receptions.

<https://doi.org/10.26262/exna.v0i3.7442>

A classic is a classic not because it conforms to certain structural rules, or fits certain definitions. It is classic because of a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness. (Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* 1934, 12)

Introduction

In "The Education of the Poet" (1994), the American woman poet Louise Glück defines myths as "fundamental referents." Often termed as "specialized receptions" (7), these referents displace their sources, assume the authority of the originals and develop autonomous histories of their own. Given that the myth about Helen of Troy offers abundant hunting ground for the academic, author and artist, it has generated a substantial amount of work on the deeds of this enigmatic transcultural figure. Amongst the first texts that include Helen in their cast, Homer's *Iliad* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (ll. 688-90) appoint to her the role of the iconic *femme fatale* of Western culture. For the latter text especially, Aeschylus invents adjectives in apposition with her catastrophic deed, which constitute etymological echoes of her name triggering an ironic, associative word play: Helen is *helanaus*, *helandros* and *heleptolis*, destroyer of ships, men and cities.¹

¹ The Aeschylean, ironic pun creates a lexical genealogy linking Helen's name to a discourse of "ominous etymologizing" (Allan 16). Ezra Pound uses these exact epithets in the early Cantos: "Eleanor, *ἐλέναυς* and *Ex-centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*; Issue 3, 2019; eISSN: 2585-3538. ©2019 The Authors. This is an open access article under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC-BY-SA 4.0). See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

Other liminal or sidelined versions of Helen of Sparta resonate in Gorgias' *Encomium*, a sophistic exercise that transforms excoriation into praise, and in Stesichorus' *Palinode*, the song-like narrative that aspires to retract, contest and restore the disparaging tales of Helen bequeathed by the father-texts. Herodotus, Euripides and Plato become interested in Stesichorus' *Palinode* in spite of their own generically different work.² In a recent discussion on Stesichorus and his relation to the epic genre, including the common bonds between mythic bodies, Chris Carey contends that the palinode is another version of the myth that reflects the geographical partisanship of the Greeks and Greek diaspora (52). More specifically, contemporary recantations of the myth strive to reinstate Helen's matrilineage (allegedly from Pandora or Nemesis) and to attribute a more transcultural, global dimension to the myth of the abducted queen.³ Amongst the numerous facets of Helen's myth, this essay attempts to illustrate how the neo-epic poem *Helen in Egypt* (1961), composed by the modernist poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and, half a century later, the multimedia production and performance *Lines in the Sand* (2002) by the American post-conceptual artist Joan Jonas, investigate the myth's heterotopic dimensions. The term "heterotopia" was first used by Michel Foucault in 1966 for his essay "Of Other Spaces" and in his introduction to *The Order of Things*. The term attempts "to collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other" (*OT, Preface*) and generate instead, spaces of alternative possibilities, or some kind of "unthinkable space" (xvii). H.D. and Jonas explore the performative potential of their texts and translate it into a heterotopic space in which the boundaries of language are destabilized and allow for the creation of new meanings.

First, the two artists' poetic constructs yield new readings of the myth by exploiting the figural dynamics of space; that is, the *topos* (literally, place/space) of the narrative's *dromena* (actions, or things done during a play or ritual), whether this *topos* takes the form of a theatrical stage, or as the spaces of an art gallery. Motivated by the performative dynamics of Helen's myth, H.D. and Jonas after her are motivated to explore the heterotopic potential of Euripides' *Helen*. Second, the performative dimension of their work is reinforced by their choice of *skeue*, or props, tangible or figural and finally, by the trope of intervisuality,⁴ "the non-verbal, theatrical signs [which act as] repositories of cultural memory" capable of functioning as markers of inter-generic allusion (Stavrinou 106-07). Helen is positioned in the remains of ancient artifices containing texts or inscriptions that decipher, contest and unyoke her from textual antecedents.

ἐλέπτολις!" (Canto II, p.6). I am grateful to Prof. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos for his expert advice in Poundian intertextuality.

² The first in his *Histories*, book 2; Euripides in *Helen*; and Plato in *Phaedrus* (257a3-4n).

³ The vast majority of Helen's mythic edits center on a paradoxical co-existence between absolute beauty and the horrors of war establishing a "basic continuity" in the stories about Helen (Allan 22). See also Constantinidou, 165-241; Jackson, early references to Helen in the *Cypria* (9); for the *Queen of Wands* (1982), the American contemporary poet Judy Grahn derives her Helen-based poems from "other stories of stolen queens" (xii).

⁴ A term I borrow from A. Petridis and his work on performance and performativity in Menander, *New Comedy and the Visual* (Cambridge, 2014). Petridis uses the term intervisuality to mark the "referentiality of the visual" (84ff.); also qtd. in Stavrinou, 106; in Webb, "the notion of imaginative 'intervisuality' is attained when a secondary image (i.e. water) evokes in the play a memory impacting on the primary event on stage and acquiring an equally important role (180).

By exploiting spatial alterity, the weight of the myth shifts from Helen to her surroundings while, at the same time, dramatic space becomes actively involved in the production of alternative performative dynamics.

The two female artists' narratives about Helen of Troy, or the beautiful Helen, ἡ ὠραία Ἑλένη, [*e oreia Eleni*], as she is known in Greek literary tradition, still carry echoes from Homer, Euripides and Stesichorus. In their versions, H.D. and Jonas explore additional conceptions of the ever-transformative potential of this myth by acknowledging its phenomenological dimension in the course of Western literary tradition.⁵ Helen's new narratives become once again pitted against her so-called canonical story and demarcate "the phenomenon of this mythical figure's repetition and reception" (Antin qtd. in Whitbeck 9). Allured by Helen's enigmatic narrative, little critical emphasis has been given to the physical plane around which the Greeks, according to Ezra Pound's *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), developed the *phantastikon*, or "the sundry patches of the macrocosmos" (92). Egypt and its potential to displace the familiar stories and yield new, autonomous ones, becomes a starting point for the poetic works of H.D. and Jonas.

1. H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*: Staging the New Palinode

Hilda Doolittle (1896-1961), better known as H.D., completed her own retelling of the Helen story in her 1961 poetic masterpiece *Helen in Egypt* on which she toiled for more than seven years.⁶ In *H.D.'s Poetics and Euripidean Drama*, I argue that it is the multiformity of the epic poem, including Euripides' and Stesichorus' experimentations with the mythic body, that offer to H.D. the primary resource materials which she later shapes into her new epic, a generic hybrid on *Helen* (261). H.D. revises and ameliorates Helen's myth and produces a new palinodic, restorative narrative; she divides *Helen in Egypt* into three parts –"Pallinode," "Leuké," and "Eidolon," each containing lyric "books" of eight three-line stanzas and provides prose "stage instructions" that introduce each poetic segment.⁷ The compositional outcome is an epic poem about Helen's passage through time and time-old civilizations, as she becomes reacquainted with a syncretic, both Greek and Egyptian, mythic body. During this inner journey, she encounters an array of dramatic characters from other plays by Euripides and brings them on stage at the temple of Ammon in Egypt.

5 The attempt to relate the experience of the sacred, the religious or the symbolic becomes filtered through the production of a myth, or mythic narrative. Cyrena Pondrom eloquently poses the poem's and the readers' central, phenomenological questions: "What is real, what is vision, what is dream, what is illusion, what is fact? Are vision and dream any less real than fact? Who is Helen and what are identity and the human quest?" (84).

6 H.D.'s long poems tend to begin as works in progress. First drafts of *Helen in Egypt* pre-exist in an unpublished essay (1919) in *Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets* and H.D.'s lyric poem "Helen" from the 1924 collection *Heliodora*. H.D.'s Helen project dates back to her early career as an Imagist, a time of near exclusive engagement with Classical Greece. See also Charlotte Mandel's article "Garbo/ Helen: the Self-Projection of Beauty."

7 In her article "The Origins of H.D.'s Prose Captions in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*" Susan Barbour defines them as interpretive "captions."

H.D. opens her poem in scholarly fashion, acknowledging her indebtedness to Euripides' play *Helen* and to Stesichorus' palinodes and asserting the narrative's goal to recreate yet another alternative version of the myth: "Stesichorus was said to have been blinded because of his invective against Helen, but later is restored to sight." Euripides, "in his *Trojan Women* reviles her, but he also is 'restored to sight'" by writing a "Pallinode, a defense, explanation or apology" (*HE* 1; spelling and emphasis in original). In Euripides' and H.D.'s versions, Helen never went to Troy. Instead, she was transferred by divine forces to Egypt and kept under the vigilant eye of King Proteus, awaiting salvation and her return to Sparta. A phantom, an *eidolon*, was sent to Troy in her place. In situating, *palin*, once again, the *eidolon* or the shadow subjectivity of Helen of Troy in Egypt, H.D.'s text declares its intention to revisit the tradition which has contested the Iliadic and pre-Euripidean narratives.

In the course of Helen's journey, Egypt, the main locus and central stage of "an inter-generic give and take" (Stavrinou 105), is transformed into different mythic, historical and cultural loci,⁸ allowing Helen's poetic narrative and performance to function on a series of parallel spaces.⁹ The sites of this other world bear significant resemblance to the otherworldly spaces Michel Foucault identifies as *hétérotopies* in "Des Espaces Autres." He contends that Heterotopias are placeless places that contest, invert and question our understanding of a real site (3).¹⁰ The temple of Amen for instance, becomes the dramatic stage in part 6, Book 1, while in other parts of the poem Helen visits other sacred sites of the ancient world:¹¹

The great Amen, Ammon or Amun temple still stands, so we may wander there with Helen. She and we need time and peace to reconstruct the legend. Karnak? Luxor? Thebes? This is the oldest city in the world. Homer knew it. But we look back, not so far geographically and historically. (HE 11; emphasis in original)

The process of reconstruction, in "Pallinode,"¹² begins when Helen, both real and an *Eidolon*, walks outside the temple of Amen listening to the distant echoes of the Trojan War still resounding in the holy grounds:

It is the burning ember
that I remember,
heart of the fire

⁸ Helen is transposed to Leuké, the island that hosts Achilles after his death at Troy. Her travels allow her to regress in time by following Paris on Mount Ida, locus of the Contest, and by extension, to recapture scenes of the siege from the Walls of the falling Troy.

⁹ In my essay on "Mythopoesis," I show how H.D. crafts *Helen in Egypt*, sustaining theatrical "accoutrements," or dramatic trajectories bequeathed from Euripides.

¹⁰ In English, his essay has been translated as "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias."

¹¹ In the Euripidean *Helen* the play is set outside the tomb of King Proteus.

¹² "Pallinode," "Leuké," and "Eidolon" are further divided into seven Books or "Cantos" (In response to Pound's long poem, H.D. uses this term in a 1955 letter to her literary executor Norman Holmes Pearson), while each Book is further broken into eight brief lyric poems. "Eidolon" consists of six Books and "*Eidolon*," a final lyric coda (see my essay on "Mythopoesis" esp. ft.10, 221-22).

consuming the Greek heroes
 it is the funeral pyre;
 it is incense from the incense-trees (*HE* 20)

Empty of any temporal confines, the surrounding space has acquired a certain degree of fluidity allowing the *dromena* to shift in unexpected patterns. Whether tracing herself in Egypt or in Sparta as a young woman, at the walls of Troy or at Isle Blanche, Helen is positioned in a space of “timeless time” (39) looking for Achilles’ ghost.¹³ H.D. elides for a moment the obsession of humanity with the present in the prose captions of Part one (“Pallinode”): “*Time values have altered, present is past, past is future*” (*HE* 57). She then recaptures the idea towards the end of Part three in “Eidolon”: “*There is no before and no after, there is one finite moment*” (*HE* 301). In her encounter with Achilles, Helen reassures him that “there is mystery in this place.” Indeed, space and myth are intertwined and, therefore, cannot be understood by adhering “to the old ways” (*HE* 13-14).

In agreement with the Euripidean text, Helen’s past torments have come to a halt since “here [in Egypt] there is a peace” (*HE* 2). Helen embarks on her own Persephonian-like descent into the underworld of ancient, syncretic and mythic lore.¹⁴ The space identified as Egypt breaks the limits of the stage because it is “a kind of spaceless limbo” or, a “fluid chronotope [...] beyond the limits of the closed and fixed tragic chronotope” (Stavrinou 105-10).¹⁵ In *Helen*, Euripides’ protagonist launches her own tale and recalls her roles as queen eloping, half-divine, half-human, and half-monster born from a swan egg, kidnapped, ravished, or used as scapegoat for military enterprises.¹⁶ The task of self-definition in H.D.’s poem seems suspended within the confines of the ancient temple whose walls bear inscriptions of some unwritten text and like a *tabula rasa*, her mind is open to re-inscription. Prerequisites for this task are recollection, interpretation and understanding of an ancient language:¹⁷

¹³ Pondrom suggests that the issue of the poem’s structure is pivotal for a reader-text temporal and spatial alignment. Thus, *Helen in Egypt* relies on a structural concept in which the “palimpsestic human experience” is represented through the spiral, “the repetition of the same structures of human experience through differing times and places” (87).

¹⁴ In line with the classical epic tradition, Helen’s journey into the Egyptian shadow lands finds further intertextual parallels in the Odysseian *Nekuia*, the hero’s *Katabasis* into the underworld to receive guidance from the dead (Tiresias in Odysseus’ case). Ezra Pound’s Canto I is devoted to this timeless world where past, present and future coincide (See a thorough analysis of the Palingenetic structure of the *Cantos* in Tryphonopoulos, *Celestial Tradition* esp. Chapter 4).

¹⁵ In “Anodos Dramas” Helene Foley offers mythic parallels interlacing the journey of the originary *Kore* (Persephone) into the underworld with the Euripidean Helen’s journey to Egypt (303ff.). Stavrinou offers a detailed account of Egypt addressing pertinent mythic connections between Helen and Persephone” (112).

¹⁶ M.L. West suggests that Stesichorus mentions Helen in several of his poems; in fr.86 he refers to her abduction by Theseus (73).

¹⁷ In assessing the narrative pattern of H.D.’s *Trilogy* as a visionary war poem, Sara Dunton provides a succinct angle of this occult experience, “[H.D.] integrates her memories of her 1940’s wartime ‘work’ with visionary experiences from her time in Corfu in the 1920’s, memories of psychoanalysis with Freud in the 1930s, all while

I feel the lure of the invisible,
I am happier here alone
in this great temple,

With this great temple's
indecipherable hieroglyph;
I have "read" the lily,

I can not "read" the hare, the chick, the bee,
I would study and decipher
the indecipherable Amen-script. (*HE* 21)

At this early stage of the poem, Helen instructs herself to "read" and translate the sacred language inscribed on the artifice and to master the art of ancient Egyptian ideogrammatic language, a direct conduit to the inner mysteries of the "invisible."¹⁸ She nevertheless recants any expectations of full mastery because the writing is not contained on the inscribed walls of the sacred edifice; rather, it must be redirected toward a course of repetition and rewriting, a psychoanalytic-like process of regression, recollection and reconstruction.

In H.D.'s first long poem, *Trilogy* (1941-44), Luxor is represented like post-Blitz London, a land of devastation. Ironically, as vacant signifiers of the past, the symbols of ancient prophecy "pursue unalterable purpose" lacking life ("no colour"):

mist and mist-grey, no colour,
still the Luxor bee, chick and hare
pursue unalterable purpose

in green, rose-red, lapis;
they continue to prophesy
from the stone papyrus:

overlapping chronologies, destabilizing narratives" (2). This material provides a part of the organic, poetic tropes developed by H.D. in the *Helen* epic and assimilated palimpsestically by Jonas in *Lines*.

¹⁸ In *Tribute to Freud*, a memoir of H.D.'s psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud, she sees a link between hieroglyphics, dream language and psychoanalysis, the latter used as a translation tool. Her dream vision, a symbolic "Writing on the Wall" may be viewed as H.D.'s personal vision of heterotopia, a barrier-free space in which man has superseded temporal and spatial obstacles or differences.

there as here, ruin opens
 the tomb, the temple; enter,
 there as here: there are no doors:

the shrine lies open to the sky (*TR 3*)

The ancient site of Luxor serves in both poems as an ambiguous *locus amoenus*. The stone papyrus in *Trilogy* overlaps with the Amen-script of *Helen in Egypt*; and the “bee, chick and hare” contain incomprehensible, hieroglyphic rebuses, with or without meaning for the reader. In *Helen in Egypt*, however, the ancient tablet carrying the “indecipherable Amen script” becomes a mediator between time and history. For Helen the tablet on which she will write her story anew will “connect [her] with all the space that surrounds [her]” (Foucault 4). The platform for her rebirth is the theatrical stage which as heterotopia, is a single “real place [containing] several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible [...] the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another”(6).¹⁹ The lost, “seemingly superimposed” layers of her narrative will come to the surface and Helen, now drawn away from her spectral self, will be reborn.

2. Joan Jonas and *Lines in the Sand*: A Visual and Performative *Topos*

The generic overlaps between poetic space, theatrical space, and poetry as performance to performed poetic art, incite an equally challenging dialogue between Foucault’s conceptual musings on the nature of heterotopias and Joan Jonas’s performance and installation work *Lines in the Sand* (2002).²⁰ Jonas (b.1936), whose career spans more than fifty years, is an acclaimed American multimedia artist among the pioneering figures in video and performance arts. Critical appraisals of her work stress her “elusive theatrical portrayal of female identity in a unique and intriguing inquiry.”²¹ Jonas infuses her studies of literature, performance, mythology, history, and fairy tales into her own personal visual narratives. Her 2002 rendition of H.D.’s epic poem in *Lines in the Sand* is the outcome of another conceptual performance as a conversation “between dance and sculpture [...] performance [and] shamanism.”²² Paul D. Miller defines the interactive narrative strategies of this performative project: “an art of ‘acts’ in action,” implicating performer and viewer in a shared quest for “new vocabularies,” remaking “new

¹⁹ Tryphonopoulos focuses on Ezra Pound’s treatment of space in its mystical dimension and “the importance [he] attaches to the ‘mysterium’ [which] points to one of his primary topoi in *The Cantos*, [...] the topos of palingenesis or rebirth” (*Celestial Tradition* 3).

²⁰ Jonas explains her choice of title for the project: “*Lines in the Sand* refers to how western powers have divided up countries of the Middle East, and to more recent political events” (*Tate Print Guide* 58).

²¹ See <https://www.eai.org/artists/joan-jonas/biography>; also in Finbow: Jonas is “concerned with the intersection of myth, mythology, history, or more broadly: reality and fiction” (Joan Jonas, *Helen in Egypt: Lines in the Sand*, 2004).

²² Quoted from the exhibition catalogue at the Tate Gallery. In the same text, Jonas describes herself as an “electronic sorceress” whose art is an act of shamanistic performance.

stories from old” (Philbrick 17). The overview of Jonas’s *Lines* exhibition at John Hansard Gallery captures the key dramatic premises of this multi-media production and its “idiosyncratic” language:

Joan Jonas uses interlocking strands of choreographed movements, video and narrative in an exploration of technology, fragmentation of physical space and female identity. Often the performer, Jonas examines the self and the body through layers of meaning, using recurring themes in an idiosyncratic vocabulary of ritualized gesture and symbolic objects that include masks, mirrors, and costuming.

Jonas’s revival and recasting of *Helen in Egypt* into a conceptual performance is perhaps a creative endeavor to re-read H.D.’s epic and, on another level, to make it new.²³ Like H.D., who finds generic contestation, temporal suspension and hybrid texts intriguing, so too does Jonas “not see major differences between a poem, a film, a sculpture or a dance” (Rose, interview).

Jonas sets the scene for another attempt at recounting the tale about the “real” Helen of Troy and her phantom.²⁴ The shadow world of ancient Egyptian sites and their fluid referentiality stages her performative poetic project. In an interview with Robert Ayers, she clarifies that while preparing to set up the installations for *Lines in the Sand*, her primary concern as a visual artist was to create her own stage, her “video sculpture [and her own] little poetic video works” (“Joan Jonas: *Lines in the Sand*). Then, in 2002, she positions her commission for Documenta XI at the liminal space between Museum Foyer and gallery three, “in a dark, curving exhibition space, gallery two” while “a large screen fronts the convex wall enclosing” (Philbrick 22). Jonas’s phrasing creates an almost uncanny, verbal and conceptual parallelism between her understanding of inner spatiality as feminine and H.D.’s phrasing in her reflective *Notes on Thought and Vision* (1919) of “the vision of the womb” (20), or the love vision, an enclosed compound of a physical and inner *topos*, the center of creativity and procreation that all women innately possess. In both 2002 and 2004 performances/exhibitions of *Lines* (2002 and 2004)²⁵ Jonas stresses that she re-envision H.D.’s attempt at articulating a Helen-ic *chora*, or a Kristevan “choric fantasy” (Silverman 100) as she formulates her own space in a highly charged figural *topos* that will host her own installations and performance. Like H.D., she revisits and re-adapts her earlier works and performances to create a “new concept” for which she uses the prop

²³ During an interview with Susan Howe and Jeanne Heuving, Jonas connects a course she took on Modernism at Columbia University with her notion of the poem as image: “I took a course with Frederick W. Dupee on American poetry... The structures I used came from reading poets like William Carlos Williams, H. D., and Pound’s *ABC of Reading* as well as from watching early French, Russian, and German films. I was very influenced by the poems, by the idea of poetic structure — the way a poem is put together in relation to the way I put an image together. That’s why I use the word poetic when I talk about my work, because a poem is like a condensed image. The construction of experimental film has a lot to do with poetry (“An Exchange”).

²⁴ Vassiliki Kolokotroni aptly remarks that “something of the ghostly inhabits Hellenism: coded, spectral, the suggestion that ancient dwellers cannot have abandoned these sites” (3). Egypt and some lesser known spaces of Hellenism with their aura of exoticism and mysticism seem to be the ideal locales for hosting the eidola of the past.

²⁵ The Tate Modern hosted an extensive retrospective of Jonas’s work, including *Lines in the Sand* from 14 March-5 August 2018.

as a representational piece of the whole in the same way that an image put next to another yields the “visual poem” (Antonopoulou, interview). The Hellenic and Egyptian worlds translated with the deployment of mixed media in the gallery spaces assist Jonas in the narrativization of her own epic poem.

Jonas unlocks the project’s transformative potential to represent a culturally branded heterotopia. Dipped into an artificially, dimly-lit environment, pyramidal shapes drawn in chalk, “My New Theater” video clips, and a sand-strewn, desert-like stage evocative of the shadow world of Egypt, the project conjures up an ancient site with fragmented structures. Jonas, participant, and protagonist in the performative part of the project, shifts shapes and roles: she becomes auteur, Helen, a masked Isis lying on a chaise longue, wooden recliner side by side with another male performer, a masked Osiris.²⁶ In the opening part, before a podium, Jonas recites the opening lines from *Helen in Egypt* while the male performer intersperses the performance with readings of excerpts from *Tribute to Freud*. Later she transforms into chorus leader, dancer, and into an oracular figure reading from a crystal ball while her prophetic verdict is projected onto a large screen positioned center stage. During the concluding part of her performance and in honor of the Dionysian theater, Jonas, now a maenadic-like presence, dances in rhythm of a ritual beat. The textual, aural and visual outcome is semantically rich and multilayered.

As props for her part in the role of Helen, Jonas wears a blue headdress and a screen mask.²⁷ A contemporary Persephone-like figure for the second segment of the show, the “new” Jonas-Helen has been transposed from the underworld of ancient Egypt into the contemporary Egyptian replica of Las Vegas. The projector sends a stream of images on screen, fragments of footage taken from the Egyptian pyramid-shaped, casino-hotel Luxor. With its emphasis on the artificiality of light and texture, the film exposes and ridicules modern day Luxor as the epitome of American pop culture with its architectonic exhibitionism of massive scale and pseudo-historicized, monumentalized kitsch. Jonas has mentioned that her choice of space combines a commentary on the futility of war charged with ironic allusions to the originary Greek territorial war against Troy. Robert Graves and his treatment of Greek myths embellish Jonas’s intertextuality, offering an added political nuance to her work: “The Trojan War is historical, and whatever the immediate cause may have been, it was a trade war” (Graves 298).

In her visual remake of the world of Egypt, Jonas sustains the elemental constituents drawn from Euripides and H.D. In ritual-like manner, she draws on the floor with chalk on black paper the shadow outline of the great Pyramid. The stage, reminiscent of Egypt’s other-worldliness, contains an extensive reservoir of memory images from the desert while the elongated shadow of Jonas/Helen walks on the rocky, barren landscape drawing lines in the sand and reproducing the

²⁶ For a detailed discussion on H.D.’s use of mythic syncretism, see Friedman, “Creating a Women’s Mythology”; Robinson, *Astral H.D. Occult and Religious Sources and Contexts for H.D.’s Poetry and Prose*.

²⁷ The use of masks and masking is a common trope in Jonas’s theater. *The Tate Print Guide* mentions that this mask has painted features for “Doubling Effect.” Jonas has used it in *Lines* to “refer to the spiritual séances attended by the poet H.D.” (18).

hieroglyphic writing H.D.'s Helen has seen on the walls of the temple.²⁸ Visual representations of the actual, "real" monuments of ancient Egypt appear either as sketchy drawings in white graphite on black sheets of paper or as snapshots of the artifices projected on a screen that merge with parallel images, video-takes from junkyards and deserted slums in the outskirts of Las Vegas.

Lines in the Sand translates *Helen in Egypt* into a heterotopic narrative. Jonas's project enacts what Foucault would define as an act of "mythic and real contestation of different spaces," including spaces drawn from the theatrical, historical, cultural, and fictive. The heterotopias she stages and in which she performs as creator, author, and character reflect the understanding that "each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another" (Foucault 5). However, the temporal fluidity with which Jonas's synergistic project is equipped recognizes and resists the cultural synchrony that dictates "one function or another."

3. *Helen in Egypt* and *Lines in the Sand*: Mythic Tropes Reinvented

The cultural adaptability offered by "synchrony," that is, the time frame determining the possibility of a heterotopia, qualifies H.D. and Jonas's stages as Foucauldian "crisis heterotopias," phantasmal, forbidden, or taboo places offering entry to figures drawn from the realm of myth.²⁹ As both artists immerse their work into the world of projected image and film,³⁰ their spaces become "*heterochronies*," loci which have managed to break away from cultural and spatial timelines. *Helen in Egypt* and by extension *Lines*, build upon this paradoxical temporal fluidity that points to another temporal marker H.D. identifies during the encounter between Achilles and Helen as the "Eternal Moment." Using this cryptic term, the voice-over in the prose captions remarks at first: "*For their meeting in eternity was timeless but in time it was short*" (HE 11). Jonas's *Lines* informs us about the "interplay between cinematic and cultural inflections," or, according to Marsha Bryant, it offers the opportunity to "replay" Helen and Achilles's meetings in Egypt and at the Walls of Troy as "key representations of the eternal moment" (34). Space and time in *Helen in Egypt* and *Lines* seem intertwined.³¹

In her discussion of dramatic space as a type of heterotopia, Joanne Tompkins maps the boundaries of heterotopias as alternate offshoots of spatial order or as "alternative spaces

²⁸ In an earlier essay on *Helen in Egypt*, Susan Friedman pinpoints an essential relation between Freud's hieroglyphs in his translation work with dream language, H.D.'s "hieroglyph of the unconscious" in *Tribute to Freud* (93) and the hieroglyph image in *Helen in Egypt*. The connecting bond between Freud and H.D. seems revived in *Lines in the Sand*; yet, Jonas's extensive quest into cultural archetypes reaches beyond the confines of Freudian territory.

²⁹ The meeting between Helen of Troy and Achilles in H.D.'s poem for instance, unfolds outside the Amen-Zeus temple. At times, however, the setting conflates with the scene of the Siege at the Walls of Troy.

³⁰ For H.D.'s engagement with film and the projected image see Edmunds, *History, Psychoanalysis and Montage in H.D.'s Long Poems*; McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film*; Connor, *H.D. and the Image*.

³¹ The Euripidean text also exploits temporal and spatial fluidity. Euripides positions Helen at the tomb of King Proteus, appointed by the gods as protector of Helen during her sojourn to Egypt. Intimating the multi-formity of the mythic body, Proteus is a semi-divine figure, his name suggesting him of the many forms. H.D. renames him as "Formalhaut," symbol of cosmic matter and seer of past, present and future.

distinguished from that actual world [suggested by the theatrical stage] but that still resonate with it”(1). Her approach extends Foucault’s argument, adding that the theatrical stage is inherently heterotopic or a cluster of potentially concrete and abstract loci “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (25). These “actual and imaginary landscapes of performance” (2) seem to have also assisted H.D. and Jonas’s understanding of theatrical space as a heterotopia, especially when targeting the “detailed examination of locations in which cultural and political meanings can be produced spatially” (1).

Helen of Troy has borne the brunt of a war conducted in the name of beauty and yet, the war was the result of an old world driven by political turmoil and cultural upheaval. Countering Homer, Euripides tells us that Helen was Zeus’ scapegoat who decided to cleanse humanity from overpopulation (36-40).³² *Helen in Egypt* still echoes the aftermath of WWII, “the increasingly hostile relations between Britain and Egypt [...] the mob uprising and burning in Cairo” (Edmunds 96) and an ensuing coup that dethroned king Farouk. Jonas edited *Lines* in the shadow of the 9/11 attacks and emerging Islamophobia; Helen and the Trojan War aptly serve as an “ancient metaphor” for property and power.³³

Helen in Egypt and *Lines* yield alternative understandings of mythic variants; they combine a syncretic approach to ritualistic practices, amendments of ancient texts, and the creation of emotional nuances, a visual, performative and narrative “bricolage” (Antonopoulou). The textual and visual props configure both works’ intervisuality,³⁴ an attribute I relate to heterotopic space in which the performative and the ritualistic merge.³⁵ The opening segment “Pallinode” informs the reader of the modernist quest for a new performative poetics. H.D.’s voice-over narrator avers,

According to the Pallinode, Helen was never in Troy. She had been transposed or translated from Greece into Egypt. Helen of Troy was a phantom substituted for the real Helen by jealous deities. The Greeks and the Trojans alike fought for an illusion.

Do not despair, the hosts
surging beneath the Walls,
(no more than I) are ghosts;

³² Daniel Mendelson summarizes the political core of the so-called ‘war’ Euripidean plays. Amongst them, *Helen* comments “with devastating irony upon the destruction wreaked by political decisions made by men in the service of greedy, aggressive, or heroic impulses” (225).

³³ See exhibition guide at <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/joan-jonas/exhibition-guide>.

³⁴ See ft. 3.

³⁵ Beginning with H.D.’s early 1919 treatise *Notes on Thought and Vision*, and extending into her later works of the 1950s, including *Helen in Egypt*, H.D.’s Helen seems to seek a transformative, Eleusinian-like transcendence. Tryphonopoulos ostensibly demonstrates that H.D.’s longer works involve the poet in an act of palingenesis or “soul searching” (“What Kaspar Knew”) while Matte Robinson links the actual quest to heterotopic space: “While there is evidence that H.D. underwent some sort of sustained theurgical operation...the idea of theurgy informed her late poetics by creating possibilities for open spaces that were in flux because they were transformative” (*The Astral H.D.* 42).

Do not bewail the Fall,
the scene is empty and I am alone,
yet in this Amen-temple,

I hear their voices
there is no veil between us,
only space and leisure (*HE* 1-2; emphasis in original)

H.D. transposes Helen into a space of a double geography: one, pointing at the external façade of Amen's temple in Egypt³⁶ and a second suggesting itself aurally through the clamor of the "hosts," the Greek army attacking the Walls of Troy. Helen utters a basic phenomenological assertion: her presence in Egypt closely relates to her phantasmal self, her *eidolon*, a being capable of claiming its right to reality only in heterotopic space. Helen's elusiveness is instrumental in H.D.'s and Jonas's dramatic representations of *Helen in Egypt*.

Central prop for the intervisual staging of Helen's myth is her *peplos*, or veil. In *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, the goddess's Pandora-like costume acts as symbol of female sexuality. It covers "the beauty that belongs to 'well-crowned' Aphrodite [...] the golden aura at the borders of the veil, the sign of all the veil promises" (Bergren 170). Homer has reserved a similar treatment for Helen's radiant presence in *The Iliad* (Book III). In "Leuké," second part of *Helen in Egypt*, the veil that could act as a temporal screen, a theatrical prop, a curtain or a tangible borderline between Troy and Egypt is torn. What separated the two spaces is now penetrable and transparent.

In *Lines*, Jonas sets up a double screen and a double stage - a platform projecting parallel spaces, parallel realities, and parallel time zones. In all its complexity, Foucault's heterotopic stage has been set: Helen is present and absent in any place the interlocutor wishes to transpose her. Jonas positions Helen in Las Vegas, the "Mise-en-scène," according to Hamza Walker, in which "Jonas subtly and not so subtly transcribes a contemporary reality into myth" ("Mirror, Mask, Monitor, Myth"). Constructed in the middle of the desert, Las Vegas is a multicolored hub in a phantasmagoric, carnivalesque world; the Luxor Casino with its faux Egyptian replicas furnishes its immediate internal and external environs. In the middle of "a gigantic counterfeit mummy," Jonas, "wearing a cobalt blue helmet/cap (part Greek armor-part Amelia Earhart leather flying cap), stands on concrete retaining wall, alternately waving a golden plumed stalk and wheeling a trailing white scarf" (Philbrick 24). The white scarf signals Helen's (and Aphrodite's) radiant vesture from the Homeric poems. Shrouded in ambiguity, the scene triggers associations of divine beauty theatrically disclosed and Achilles' memory of Helen's veil waving in the wind at the Trojan walls. Jonas purposefully conflates the subjectivities involving Helen and herself during one of the thespian moments in *Helen in Egypt*: Helen's flight from the

³⁶ See Robinson's detailed discussion on the origins of Amen in H.D.'s later poetry (43ff.).

ramparts of the sieged Troy. Jonas's staged episode combines dancing and, as inter-titles, she makes use of the voice-track whose lines combine and echo verses from H.D.'s epic: "past, present, future/she was never there." H.D.'s rhapsodic prose commentary runs as follows: "*The symbolic 'veil' to which Achilles had enigmatically referred now resolves itself down to the memory of a woman's scarf, blowing in the winter-wind, one day before he had begun to tire of or mistrust the original oracle*" (HE 55; emphasis in original).³⁷

Perched up on a concrete brick wall, Jonas as dancer, performer and protagonist waves in hieratic manner, the white veil in the wind, executing a mock reenactment of the Homeric *teichoscopia*.³⁸ Her choice of *melos* for this part is electronic music, which enhances Helen's ritualistic, ecstatic, maenad-like dance. Jonas's performance of the veil dance looks out-of-sync with the music because sound and vision are disjointed and yet this discordance heightens the intensity of the single female figure pitted against the background of a vacant lot, a dissipating industrial landscape. A red tractor crosses in front of the swaying Jonas/H.D./Helen and temporarily blocks her dance with its bulk. The overt symbolism of this grotesque parade of power serves Jonas's cosmic irony as the red tractor turns the screen incarnadine for an instant and, by association, works as a mocking echo, and a reminder of the onslaught of contemporary technological paraphernalia. But the dance seems to contain an added semantic dimension. Walker concludes: "Jonas's veil dance, as it occurs on a construction site's cement barricade, is reminiscent of her famous outdoor performances" and ends with H.D.'s words, "I saw the world through my double lens. It seemed that everything had broken but that." In context, the lines quoted from H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud* (118) compress H.D.'s telescopic eyesight, the amalgam of her travel experiences to Greece and Egypt between 1920 and 1932.

The attraction of *Helen in Egypt*, a prototype of heterotopic landscape, permeates Jonas's production of the mythic variant on Helen. H.D. crafts an epic poem about Helen as Jonas translates it in *Lines in the Sand* into elaborate time and space zones and transfuses H.D.'s epic into a new sculptural, visual and performative rhapsody. Working with *Helen in Egypt* and *Tribute to Freud*, Jonas sets up another heterotopia that at the time of Euripides and Stesichorus was the theater of Dionysus, a place combining "the interaction of the theatrical, scenic, extrascenic and distant spaces [...] a place that could be 'other' by virtue of being grounded, embedded in a landscape, offering its vistas and affordances, representing 'spaces that matter' in the city to which it belonged" (Rehm 61-62). The consideration of Foucault's heterotopic space in neo-epic poetry as well as in visual and aural performance, along with the added tropes of *skeue* (props) and intervisuality, open new grounds in the study of literary and visual arts. Jonas's avant-gardism is neither unrelated to nor completely divergent from its sources; whether

³⁷ See also my argument on H.D.'s use of the trope of the Veil of Cytherea in "Meta-palinode" (70-71).

³⁸ *Iliad*, 3.146-244. Homer details in cinematographic-like manner the teichoscopic scene during which Helen, the elders and Priam, watch from the Walls of Troy the armies of Greeks and Trojans and the ensuing battle (see Tsagalis). Jonas's positioning of herself as Helen on a brick wall parodies the Homeric division of space between elevated plateau (the walls on which stands the royalty) and the plane, the open space for combat.

echoing classical Greece or modernity, it ardently responds to H.D.'s exhortation to recall "the whole [...] / once remembered / but as a story told long ago, / forgotten and retold" (*HE* 55).

Works Cited

- Antonopoulou, Alexandra. Joan Jonas and her Retrospective at the Tate Gallery. Personal Interview. 15 June 2018.
- Ayers, Robert. "Joan Jonas: *Lines in the Sand* and the Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things." www.jhg.art/event-detail/103-joan-jonas-lines-in-the-sand-and-the-shape-the-scent-the-feel-of-things/. Accessed 12 March 2017.
- Barbour, Susan. "The Origins of H.D.'s Prose Captions in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*." *RES* 63, 260, 2011, pp. 466-90. doi.org/10.1093/res/hgr081. Accessed 20 June 2018.
- Barclay, Adèle V. *Cinematic Projections in the Poetry of H.D., Marianne Moore and Adrienne Rich*. Victoria U. 2009. Ph.D. Dissertation.
- Bergren, Ann. *Weaving Truth: Essays on Language and the Female in Greek Thought*. Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard U, 2008.
- Bryant, Marsha. *Women's Poetry and Popular Culture*. Macmillan, Palgrave 2011.
- Carey, Chris. "Stesichorus and the Epic Cycle." *Stesichorus in Context*, edited by P.J. Finglass and Adrian Kelly, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 45-62.
- Constantinidou, Soteroula. "Helen and Pandora: A Comparative Study with an Emphasis on the Eidolon as a Concept of Eris." *Dodoni, Philologia* 13, 2004, pp. 165-241.
- Dunton, Sara. "H.D. and William Morris: "There was comfort in the table." *MLA* 2017, Philadelphia, PA. Paper presented at William Morris Society Panel.
- Edmunds, Susan. *Out of Line: History, Psychoanalysis and Montage in H.D.'s Long Poems*. Stanford UP, 1994.
- Euripides. *Helen* edited and translated by William Allan. Cambridge UP, 2008.
- Finbow, Acatia. "Joan Jonas, *Helen in Egypt*: Lines in the Sand 2004." *Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art*. Tate Research Publication, 2016. *Tate*, www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/case-studies/joan-jonas-helen-in-egypt. Accessed 8 March 2019.
- Foley, Helene. "Anodos Dramas: Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Helen*." *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*. Princeton UP, 2002.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité*, October 1984, pp. 1-9. "Des Espaces Autres," March 1967, translated by Jay Miskowiec.
- . *The Order of Things, Preface: from An Archaeology of Human Sciences*. foucault.info/documents/foucault.orderOfThings.en/. Accessed 2 Oct. 2019.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Creating a Women's Mythology: H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*." *Signets*, edited by Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, The U of Wisconsin P, 1990, pp. 373-405.

- Fyta, Anna. *H.D.'s Poetics and Euripidean Drama*. Ioannina U., 2015. Ph.D. Dissertation.
- . "Translation as Mythopoesis: H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* as Meta-palinode." *The Classics in Modernist Translation*, edited by Miranda Hickman, Lynn Kozak, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, pp. 65-76.
- Grahn, Judy. *The Queen of Wands*. Crossing Press, 1982.
- Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths* (Volume 2). Penguin Books, 1990.
- Glück, Louise. "Education of the Poet." *Proofs and Theories: Essays on Poetry*. Ecco Press, 1994, pp. 3-18.
- H.D. *Helen in Egypt*. New Directions, 1974.
- . *Notes on Euripides, Pausanius and Greek Lyric Poets. H.D. Papers*. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale U. New Haven.
- . *Notes on Thought and Vision*. City Lights, 1982.
- . *Tribute to Freud*. 1945. New Directions, 1974.
- Heuving, Jean. "An Exchange between Joan Jonas, Susan Howe and Jeanne Heuving." *Joan Jonas*, edited by Julienne Lorz and Andrea Lissoni, Hirmer, 2018, pp. 100-135.
- Hollenberg, Donna Krolik, ed. *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. Iowa UP, 1997.
- Jackson, Peter. *The Transformations of Helen: Indo-European Myth and the Roots of Trojan Cycle*. J.H. Roll GmbH, 2006.
- Jonas, Joan. "Mirror Mirror: Joan Jonas on the Fairy tales that have Cast a Spell over her 50-year Career" *The Guardian*, March 22, 2018. *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/mar/22/joan-jonas-exhibition-tate-modern-london. Accessed 30 July 2018.
- Kolokotroni, Vassiliki. "Modernism's Turn to Greece." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 1-24.
- Mandel, Charlotte. "Garbo/Helen: The Self-projection of Beauty by H.D." *Women's Studies*, 1980, vol. 7, pp. 127-135, www.imagists.org/hd/hdcmfour.html. Accessed June 4, 2018.
- Marcus, Laura. "The Contribution of H.D." Introduction. *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, edited by James Donald, Anne Friedberg, Laura Marcus. Princeton UP, 1999, pp. 96-104.
- Mendelson, Daniel. *Gender and the City in Euripides' Political Plays*. Oxford UP, 2002.
- Philbrick, Jane. "(Re)viewing *Lines in the Sand* and other works by Joan Jonas" *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. vol. 26, no 3, September 2004. *MIT Press Journal*, www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/1520281041969057. Accessed June 28, 2018.
- Pondrom, Cyrena, N. "Approaches to Teaching *Helen in Egypt*." *Approaches to Teaching H.D.'s Poetry and Prose*, edited by Annette Debo and Lara Vetter, *MLA*, 2011, pp. 84-91.
- Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading*. 1931. Faber & Faber, 1991.
- . *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. 1934. New Directions, 1993.
- . *The Spirit of Romance*. Faber & Faber, 1953.
- Rehm, Rush. *The Play of Space: Spatial Transformation in Greek Tragedy*. Princeton UP, 2002.

- Robinson, Matte. *The Astral H.D.: Occult and Religious Sources and Contexts for H.D.'s Poetry and Prose*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- Rose, Rachel. "Interview- Joan Jonas, the Performer" *Tate Etc.*, Issue 42, Spring 2018. *Tate*, www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-42-spring-2018/interview-joan-jonas-rachel-rose-the-performer. Accessed 27 Feb. 2019.
- Schaffner, Ingrid. "Conversation with Joan Jonas." *Joan Jonas: They Come to Us without a Word*. MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2015, pp. 114-131.
- Silverman, Kaja. *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Indiana UP, 1988.
- Stavrinou, Skouromouni Aspasia. "The *Opsis* of Helen: Performative Intertextuality in Euripides." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 55, 2015, pp. 104-132.
- Tompkins, Joanne. *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Tryphonopoulos, Demetres, P. *The Celestial Tradition: A Study of Ezra Pound's The Cantos*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1993.
- . "What 'Kaspar Knew': Reading H.D.'s Trilogy as *Palingenesis*." *H.D. and Modernity*, edited by Hélène Aji and Antoine Cazé, Rue d'Ulm, 2014.
- Tsagalidis, Christos. "Viewing from the Walls, Viewing Helen: Language and Indeterminacy in the 'Teichoscopia.'" *The Oral Palimpsest: Exploring Intertextuality in the Homeric Epics*, chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6001.6-viewing-from-the-walls-viewing-helen-language-andindeterminacyinthe%E2%80%98teichoscopia%E2%80%99#noteref n.80 Accessed 7 Feb. 2018.
- Walker, Hamza. "Mirror, Mask, Monitor and Myth" (2004), renaissancesociety.org/publishing/50/mirror-mask-monitor-myth/ Accessed 12 March 2017
- Webb, Ruth. *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*. Ashgate, 2009.
- West, L. M. "Stesichorus: Epic Lyric and Lyric Epic." *Stesichorus in Context*, edited by P.J. Finglass and Adrian Kelly, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 63-80.
- Whitbeck, Caroline, N. *The Palinodic Strain*. 2013. Pennsylvania U, Ph.D. dissertation, repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3594995.
- Worman, Nancy. "The Body as Argument: Helen in Four Greek Texts." *CQ* ,16.1,1997, pp. 151-203.