CHAPTER I

VIEWING THE *MĒCHANĒ*

It is generally accepted that the *mēchanē* available for use in the Athenian theatre by the late fifth century BCE was probably placed on a base behind the *skēnē* and constructed as an asymmetrical counter-weighted beam with pivoting potential.[1] Mechanically, this model has the advantage of employing principles found in one of the oldest and most widespread devices used in the Mediterranean: the swing beam or *shaduf* used for lifting water.[2] When at rest, the *mēchanē* would have been minimally visible since the bar lay horizontally. Then, when in use, the *mēchanē* would have come into view hovering not over an artificial backdrop, but over the sky itself with a view of Attic hills and the southern city in the distance.[3] The crane would have been able to pivot up to 180 degrees, sweeping across the space in front of the *skēnē* roof as certain plays require.[4] The actor might have been suspended directly from the *mēchanē* by a harness, which would have allowed the actor's body to be entirely disconnected from any additional supportive structure. This option becomes less appealing, however, when we imagine a number of actors harnessed next to each other, as would be required for various plays. Alternatively, actors could have perched or stood on some sort of

[1] This is the model of Mastronarde 1990, 291. Earlier suggestions: Bethe 1896; Dörpfield and Reisch 1896; Bieber 1961; Hourmouziades 1965; Dimarogonas 1992. Various more recent efforts by Chondros 2004 and 2013; Papadogiannis, Tsakoumaki, and Chondros 2010 (Phlius) suggest improvements to Mastronarde's models, not all of which are persuasive. Dating: Bieber 1961, 76; Arnott 1962, 72–8; Taplin 1977, appendix B 443–7; 1978, 12; Mastronarde 1990; Csapo and Slater 1995, 258.

[2] On water lifting in antiquity, see Oleson 1984 with 327–8 specifically on the *shaduf*. See also Oleson 2000; Wilson 2008, 350–5 (*shaduf*), 342–5 (cranes).

[3] For the fifth-century Athenian performance space within the wider contexts of its visual and festival environments, see Meineck 2012.

[4] Mastronarde 1990, 294.

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trapeze which would still give the impression of a floating body but could more comfortably fit two people side by side. A final hypothesis is that the actors stood on a large platform attached to the machine, and this certainly seems to have been the case for plays such as the *Medea* where the title character was not only accompanied by her children but also needed to appear as if she were flying on Helios' chariot.[5] All things considered, it seems most likely that the main base structure of the *mēchanē* remained the same, and that the precise harnessing mechanism and decorative elements were modified according to the needs of individual plays.[6]

One piece of later evidence sheds light on the significance of the visibility of the crane in the moment of mechanical epiphany. Hero of Alexandria, probably writing in the first century CE, is responsible for our only extant treatise on the construction of self-animated machines known as automata.[7] The text contains two types of automata: a self-animated shrine to Dionysus which is termed a *hypagon automaton*, since it moves forwards and backwards, and a miniature theatre, which performed the legend of Nauplius, referred to as a *staton automaton*.[8] Hero was by no means pioneering a literary tradition; in his description of the automated miniature theatre he explicitly states that his model is based on a similar one by his predecessor Philo of Byzantium, who flourished around 200 BCE.[9] Hero has two main problems with the mechanics of Philo's earlier model: that he failed to explain how a thunderbolt accompanied by sound would fall on Ajax, and that he used a crane to bring Athena on stage, which was more difficult (*ergōdesteron*) than it needed to be given that it was

[5] For further on Medea's escape on Helios' chariot, see pages 91–101.

[6] Compare *katablēmata* (curtains/panels) which, according to Pollux 4.131, were also decorated as appropriate to a play's requirements.

[7] For the dating of Hero, see Neugebauer 1938, 21–4; Raïos 2000; Souffrin 2000; Giardina 2003, 8–25; Sidoli 2005, 2011; Masià 2015; Grillo 2019, xxiii–xxviii and appendix 5.

[8] The standard edition of this text is Schmidt (1899–1914) [1976], who offers German translation and notes, but no commentary. Until recently, the only English translation and notes was by Murphy 1995. Grillo 2019 has recently completed a very welcome new edition and English translation alongside commentary on Book I and a thorough introduction. In general, I have used Grillos' translation, modifying as I saw fit. For more on this text, see pages 203–22.

[9] Hero *Aut*. 20.1. For more on Philo and his works, see pages 129–141.

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possible to make her appear simply by using a hinge at her feet.[10] We can deduce, then, that Philo of Byzantium's model had used a miniature *mēchanē* to reproduce the entrance of the divinity at the end of the play, directly copying contemporary theatrical technologies. While Hero's later model was planned around the ways in which the same visual effect – the sudden apparition of the deity – could be reproduced in the particular genre of the automated theatre, Philo had simply followed real-life stage conventions.[11]

Hero begins his treatise by narrating the legend scene by scene, as depicted by Philo, but does not, at this point in the text, explain how anything works mechanically. Instead, he initially describes how the story looked from the perspective of the viewer, and only afterwards does he break down the mechanics of each element. The scene with dolphins jumping in and out of the ocean is a good example: 'Often dolphins swam alongside [the ships], sometimes diving into the sea, sometimes visible, just as in real life' (πολλάκις παρεκολύμβων δὲ καὶ δελφῖνες ὁτὲ μὲν εἰς τὴν θάλατταν καταδυόμενοι, ὁτὲ δὲ φαινόμενοι καθάπερ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀληθείας).[12] The twelve figures who make up the opening scene are similarly described as the viewer would see them: 'some sawing, some working with axes, some with hammers, others using bow-drills and augers, making a lot of noise, just as would happen in real life' (τὰ μὲν πρίζοντα, τὰ δὲ πελέκεσιν ἐργαζόμενα, τὰ δὲ σφύραις, τὰ δὲ ἀρίσι καὶ τρυπάνοις χρώμενα <καὶ> ψόφον ἐποίουν πολύν, καθάπερ <ἂν> ἐπὶ τῆς ἀληθείας γίνοιτο).[13] Yet in the description of the *mēchanē* alone, Hero specifies the method of arrival via the machine: '<and Athena was> lifted on the *mēchanē* above the stage' (<ἡ δὲ Αθηνᾶ ἐπὶ> μηχανῆς τε καὶ ἄνωθεν τοῦ πίνακος ἐξήρθη).[14] We should deduce from this that the mechanics were intentionally visible to the audience in Philo's miniature *mēchanē*, and that this was the case because it followed regular stage

[10] Hero *Aut*. 20.2–3.
[11] Hero *Aut*. 20.4 also proves this concerning the use of lead balls falling on stretched-out hides to produce the sound of thunder.
[12] Hero *Aut*. 22.5. [13] Hero *Aut*. 22.4.
[14] Hero *Aut*. 22.6. Ellipsis Schmidt following Diel. Alternatively, Prou and Schöne read μηχανή ... (i.e. 'the crane was lifted ... '), see Murphy 1995, 43. The visibility of the *mēchanē* is also observed at Hero *Aut*. 21.2.

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conventions where the crane was also visible, at least in the moment of deployment.

To our modern sensibilities, the fifth-century *mēchanē* seems a highly artificial and intrusive instrument to the realistic illusion that we expect of theatrical entertainment, and of the genre of tragedy in particular. This is why modern productions of ancient plays often opt for other ways to represent epiphany of the divine.[15] It does not follow, however, either that ancient spectators saw the machine in the same way, or, conversely, that to ancient eyes the *mēchanē* would have seemed realistic because they did not know computer-generated imagery.[16] The former is plainly anachronistic given the visual conventions of Greek tragedy, which included other 'intrusive' elements such as masks, and the latter would be attributing a primitive mode of viewing to the Greeks which is neither warranted nor intellectually productive. Taking into consideration the performative conditions of fifth-century Attic tragedy – namely that theatrical performances were held outdoors, during the day and with no use of the modern 'spotlight' to divert attention – spectators would undeniably have seen the beams, ropes, and platform or trapeze bar which constituted the *mēchanē*.[17]

Patricia Easterling in 1993 explained that spectators are always aware that what they are seeing is both real and make-believe at the same time, and that the audience can deal with this apparent contradiction quite comfortably.[18] David Wiles in his more recent monograph on the mask also treats this paradox of literal and metaphorical, and his study is useful as a starting block to think about the *mēchanē* as more than an empty piece of stage machinery, indeed as part of the construction of the divine in tragedy.[19]

[15] Yannis Anastasakis' production of Euripides' *Orestes* at the 2018 Festival of Epidauros, for example, had a plain-clothes actor hidden in the audience serve as Apollo at the end of the tragedy. On staging the *deus ex machina* in modern performance, see Goldhill 2007, 205–6.

[16] Mastronarde 1990, 253 argues that the crane strived for realism. Taplin 1978, 15 sees the *mēchanē* as evidence against the non-naturalistic tendencies of tragedy, arguing that it betrays efforts to make flying entrances more than symbolic.

[17] On 'shared light' in ancient theatre and its effect on the audience, see Padel 1990, 338–9.

[18] Easterling 1993a, 79.

[19] Wiles 2007. See too Meineck 2011, 2017, who stresses seeing the mask as part of an assemblage with the body, the physical environment within which it was perceived, and

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Wiles explains that the mask is not a thing sitting on the face to be viewed but is endowed with agency as an instrument of metamorphosis.[20] Using Alfred Gell's terminology, this makes the mask an 'index' pointing at a reality elsewhere (the Gellian 'prototype').[21] The mask brings about a being that was not there before; it does not hide the human behind it but *transforms* the wearer, blending human and mythical worlds. Masks were a way of bringing heroes to life, just as the *mēchanē* was a way of bringing gods to life. As alluded to already, an anthropological theory of art such as Gell's, which entirely eschews aesthetics and style, is particularly useful for looking at the agency of the *mēchanē* since there is no certainty as to what this assemblage of machine with masked and costumed actor atop would have looked like, yet this does not mean that we cannot come to an understanding of the effect of the object's perceived agency on its viewers.[22] I suggest that, much like the mask, the *mēchanē* was visualised in a more nuanced way than through the binary of 'real' and 'artificial'. Ancient spectators were both aware that there was an actor wearing the mask and completely comfortable with the fact that the actor *was* the character. The Pronomos Vase, which depicts a tragic acting troupe on one side, including actors dressed as satyrs, and on the other side 'real satyrs', exemplifies this phenomenon visually. Indeed, this is yet another way in which there is much interpretative overlap between art and technology, and theatrical performance (or 'playing') here is a useful bridge between the concepts. Classical art historians too point out the twofold nature of viewing ancient art where both the entity represented in an image and its created status are recognised.[23] Similarly, the mechanics involved in the appearance of the god may have been obvious, but this did not stop it from being

the non-verbal communication that occurred between actor and spectator. On belief and make-belief as applied to the *mēchanē*, see Budelmann 2022, especially 99–105.

[20] Wiles 2007, 5, 12, 225–6. Compare Duncan 2018 on the mask's ontological duality (both passive *object* and active *thing*) as well as its ability to retain affective force outside the theatre – for example, as dedications (on which already see Green 1982).

[21] Gell 1998, especially 12–50. [22] See pages 17–21.

[23] Especially using the operations of 'seeing in' and 'seeing as' developed by Richard Wollheim and applied to ancient art by Neer 1995; Steiner 2001, 19–22; Platt 2010; 2011, 48–9; 2017, 107–8; Squire 2013, 103–7.

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a manifestation of the divinity. The *mēchanē* challenged the viewer to recognise the epiphany together with the mechanics that construct it.[24]

Seen in these terms, Bolter and Grusin's reflections on the idea of 'remediation' pertain directly to the operations of the *mēchanē*.[25] Modern culture, the authors argue, wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation. Thus, new modern digital media oscillate between the logic of *immediacy* which attempts to erase the medium itself and leave us in the presence of the thing represented, and the logic of *hypermediacy* which acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible. While working with, and in many ways exploiting, ancient Greek theological preconceptions regarding the divine's ability to appear in the human realm, the *deus ex machina* is at the same time uniquely hypermediated in its layered assemblage of machine, actor, stage, performance, theatre, and festival. Where immediacy suggests a seamless and unified visual space – the way that the characters in the play experience divine epiphany – hypermediacy constructs heterogeneous space. In this case, representation is not a direct window into the world, a 'faceless interface' of sorts, but rather 'windowed' itself, with windows that open onto other representations or other media.[26] This idea will be important in understanding the *mēchanē*'s ability to remediate extra-tragic spaces notably, but not exclusively, Olympus.[27]

The Comic Crane

Some of the best evidence for how the machine was viewed in its ancient performative context is – with all the caveats that the genre entails – through para-tragic uses of the crane in Old Comedy.[28] On a basic level, while there is no reason to think that the machines differed at all in terms of mechanics or presentation, we know that

[24] Gerolemou 2022, 35–40 discusses the complementary topic of the capacity of theatrical technological objects to produce *mimēsis*, something the *mēchanē* explicitly refuses through its overt artificiality.
[25] Bolter and Grusin 1999. [26] Bolter and Grusin 1999, especially 34.
[27] See pages 78–87 and especially pages 81–3.
[28] For *mēchanē* in comedy, see Fiorentini 2013.

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the *mēchanē* of tragedy was known as the *kradē* in comedy. Since the word also referred to a fig branch, the '*kradē*' was avidly exploited as a comical image for the awkward way that actors were suspended in space. Two fragments of Strattis, both of which meta-theatrically draw attention to the actor's precarious position up on a piece of machinery, offer good examples, signalling the arresting visual experience of seeing a body hanging disconnected up in the air.[29] Furthermore, the Strattis fragments accentuate that this has been inflicted by a human hand through the intervention of the *mēchanopoios* 'crane operator'.

Various Aristophanic fragments also draw attention to the role of the *mēchanopoios*. Aristophanes' *Gerytades*, for example, included a brief meta-theatrical reference to the crane operator's responsibility in controlling the pace of the machine in the moment of use.[30] In Aristophanes' *Daedalus* the actor not only addressed the *mēchanopoios* directly, but underscored the role of the *trochos* 'wheel' in the machine's deployment overtly signalling the relation between the human and the mechanical components that made up this theatrical device.[31] From what we can tell, the story of *Daedalus* revolved around Zeus making use of the arts of the eponymous master craftsman in an erotic adventure. Given Daedalus' reputation as inventor-engineer, and his particular association with mechanical *technē* through myths such as Icarus' wings, it is not too difficult to imagine why the *kradē* might feature meta-theatrically as a wonderful piece of machinery.

Comic authors were evidently making a concerted effort to integrate the visible mechanics of the crane into the humour of their plays specifically through alluding to the fact that the otherwise fantastical entrances and exits were produced by human action. We should consider the overt mechanics of the machine in Greek theatre and the interpretation of the forces at work in its viewing to be in a symbiotic relationship. The fact that the *mēchanē* works seamlessly in tragedy is attributed by spectators to divine agency; at the same time, it is only *because* the mechanics work seamlessly thanks to human construction that

[29] Strattis 4 *PCG*, 46 *PCG*. On Strattis, see Orth 2009. [30] Ar. 160 *PCG*.
[31] Ar. 192 *PCG*.

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divine presence is confirmed. This symbiosis is intentionally rendered farcical in comedy. In other words, the oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy is intentionally tipped in favour of the latter. Human engineering efforts are observed and often criticised, cutting off any possible intervention from the divine. Since the mechanics of the *kradē* are flawed, there is no chance for the intervention of divine agency, and as there is no divine agency, the mechanics remain obviously and humanly flawed. The *Gerytades* fragment along with the two Strattis passages refer to speed and imply that the machine and its operator were inconveniently slow. While this element of the mechanics was most likely used to advantage in tragedy in order to make the movement of the machine seem imposing, it was just plain inconvenient in comedy.[32]

The *kradē* is also securely used in two extant plays of Aristophanes which situate the crane within a larger plot and within broader themes of the plays. The only mention of the *mēchanopoios* in a comedy which is not devoid of context comes from Aristophanes' *Peace*. The mechanised entrance of the protagonist, Trygaeus, is dramatically signalled by his slave calling attention to the spectacle: 'Oh my god! Come here, neighbours, come here! My master's up off the ground, soaring into the air on beetle-back.'[33] The *kradē* was presumably decorated in some way so as to represent a giant beetle, possibly with wings.[34] Trygaeus' dialogue immediately focuses on the unsteady movement of the machine.[35] He tells his slave that he is heading to Zeus in Olympus, speaking to the way that the *mēchanē* conventionally joined mortal and immortal realms.[36] Various references to Euripides' *Bellerophon* help to hammer home the fact that this is tragic parody.[37] When the elevation or the movement become too much for the actor, he directly addresses the crane operator in good comic fashion, imploring them to take care lest he be ill.[38] Shortly

[32] Contrast Mastronarde's (1990) view that the *mēchanē* allowed swift locomotion.
[33] Ar. *Pax* 79–81. [34] Ar. *Pax* 86. [35] Ar. *Pax* 82–4; compare pages 154–172.
[36] Ar. *Pax* 102–3.
[37] Ar. *Pax* 76–7, 135–6, 146–8. For more on Bellerophon as technophile and theomach, see pages 249–50.
[38] Ar. *Pax* 173–6.

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after this, Trygaeus descends to stage level onto the side of the *skēnē* that represents the palace of Zeus. The other far door represents the house of Trygaeus and between the two is a cavern. Instead of arriving from the divine realm and landing in the mortal realm as the tragic *mēchanē* facilitates, Aristophanes has collapsed both spaces together on stage horizontally and then forces the protagonist to undertake a comically perilous journey travelling via airborne means across a distance which he could have traversed in a few steps on the ground. The *mēchanē*, which in tragedy connects seen and unseen spaces with different ontological conditions in an ingenious and theologically profound way, is thus rendered superfluous and ungainly in comedy. This speaks, in fact, to Hero of Alexandria's assessment of Philo's miniature *mēchanē* being more cumbersome than it needs to be and clues us in to a fine line, but an important distinction, between the machine being visible (which it was) and the machine being burdensome (which it should not be) in fulfilling its ultimate goal. Further, the human engineering which lay behind the machine and which was visible on stage to spectators, on the one hand stands as a visual reminder of the ways in which *technai* of various kinds allowed humans to encounter their gods, while on the other hand it also points precisely to the concerns and tensions surrounding the acknowledgement that interacting with the sacred relied on humanly manufactured materials.

A second example comes from Aristophanes' *Birds*, a play which, among other things, questions the air as a 'route' of communication and movement between human and divine realms. Both *Peace* and *Birds* are utopic plays, and both use the *kradē* in their own way as a theatrical tool to dramatise travel between places in the hope of arriving – literally or metaphorically – at a better place. Yet *Birds* has a much more intense focus on space given the premise that the utopic 'Cloudcuckooland' will be somewhere between earth and Olympus. The scene using the *kradē* in *Birds* (lines 1199–1261) takes place about three-quarters of the way through the play, once viewers are aware of the new rules by which the Cloudcuckooland operates. In general terms, the *mēchanē* in Greek tragedy serves to reinforce empirical hierarchies between gods and men, earth and Olympus, nature and

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technē. In *Birds* all these binaries are intentionally turned on their heads. Cloudcuckooland is a place where humans are birds, birds are gods, laws are inverted, and cannibalism is a given. When the rainbow goddess Iris appears aloft on the *kradē* – reminiscent of her tragic entrance on the *mēchanē* in Euripides' *Heracles* – Peisetaerus promptly starts pestering her. Even before she is identifiable, the whirring sound of her wings had alerted Peisetaerus and the Chorus of her proximity. Iris has not come to intervene on any specific issue but, it appears, was simply passing through at the wrong time. Peisetaerus questions Iris about her movements through space like a grumpy air-traffic controller, leading her to ask, exasperated, 'But where else are the gods supposed to fly?'.[39] Unlike Trygaeus in *Peace*, who satirises the tragic use of the machine, Iris is following a model of epic epiphany to her own dismay and misfortune.[40] She describes her course of navigation: flying from Olympus to earth to deliver a message which includes religious instruction.[41] This would have been fine Homeric divine 'machinery', but, unbeknownst to her, she is crossing the skies of a comedy where entirely different spatial and theological rules apply. The use of the *kradē*/*mēchanē* in *Birds* does not collapse seen and unseen space to render the machine obsolete, as in *Peace*, but instead *Birds* changes the rules of the game altogether so that although the Olympian gods can and do still fly, they themselves are redundant, thus making their channel mechanism futile. The point is brought into even stronger relief since the new deities of Aristophanes' imagined *polis* do not need a *mēchanē* to fly but can rely merely on their wings – an innate part of their *physis*. As the final cherry on the cake, the birds of Cloudcuckooland are described as being able to construct a city completely without engineering.[42] Thus, Aristophanes has, in this comedy, rendered the crane useless not only in its theatrical capacity, but in its renowned role as weight-lifting device too!

[39] Ar. *Av.* 1219.
[40] Ar. *Av.* 575 has previously referred to winged Iris in *Hymn Hom. Ap.* 114.
[41] Ar. *Av.* 1230–3. [42] Ar. *Av.* 1133–69.

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Theatre and/as Media

As well as conceiving of the *mēchanē* as an individual object with agency, as the discussion has largely done thus far, we should also consider it as a constituent part of the institution of the theatre. Put differently, it is worth thinking about the theatrical crane from a sociologically inflected perspective where the object is produced and circulated within a specific institutional framework which provides further context for its interpretation. Ancient theatre was a rare form of ancient mass media. It was also religious. Even if scholars continue to debate the possibilities of plays having theologies, the extent to which the plays reflected the practices of civic religion, the relationship of tragedy to ritual, and so on, the theatre as an institution undeniably formed part of a city-wide religious festival.[43] Media and religion have a long, and tremendously instructive, relationship lasting to the present day where television and radio are used to diffuse sermons and blockbusters are produced to present biblical stories.[44]

When media began as an area of study in the 1920s, media communication was understood as a linear process from sender to audience. In the latter part of the twentieth century, however, alternative ways of thinking about media and human behaviour arose from observing the impact of media on society. Media began to be regarded not just as neutral, unidirectional channels, but as part of the dynamic of society itself. In the context of media and religion, this prompted a shift from analysing religious organisations' use of media and the effects they achieved to looking more broadly at religion *as* a mediated phenomenon (just as the whole of society and culture is perceived to be mediated too).[45] Media, then, do not carry fixed messages, but are sites where construction, negotiation, and reconstruction of cultural meaning take place in an ongoing process. The catchphrase to explain this fundamental

[43] For a sample of the most important (at times opposing) views: Seaford 1976, 1981; Burkert 1977; Mikalson 1983, 1991; Cole 1993; Easterling 1993b; Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 1997, 2003, especially 289–92; Friedrich 1996; Vara 1996; Parker 1997a, 2005 especially 136–52; Lloyd-Jones 1998; Cropp, Lee, and Sansone 1999–2000, 177–291; Mastronarde 2002a, 2010, 153–206; Nielsen 2002; Rozik 2002; Scullion 2002; Wildberg 2002; Csapo 2003; Henrichs 2004; Csapo and Miller 2007; Calame 2015.

[44] Compare page 5, note 12.

[45] Horsfield 2008, 113.

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idea common to many media-theoretical approaches is still Marshall McLuhan's notion that 'the medium is the message' from his 1964 book *Understanding Media*. The *form* of a medium, McLuhan demonstrated, massages the communication by favouring certain kinds of messages over others and by adding particular (sensory) preferences to the content. Emphasis is placed on the material structures of technologies and the changes these introduce into culture, not on the ways in which these are used or the content of the messages that pass through them. Decentring the human and understanding media technologies' cultural and social agencies have thus been at the core of media theory from the discipline's inception, though subsequent media theorists have gone on to defend much stronger technological determinist positions than McLuhan.

Writing in direct response to *Understanding Media*, the work of Friedrich Kittler too is concerned with channels and their properties rather than the semantics which are transmitted. Where Kittler diverges from McLuhan, however, is his stronger materialist focus. As the title of his book suggests, McLuhan posited ways to *understand* media, an idea which Kittler rejects outright.[46] While Kittler deems it possible to understand the effects media introduce into social relations, the possibility of understanding media itself is absurd to Kittler in that one cannot possibly understand a technology. Kittler instead interprets media in terms of their capacity for storage and transmission.[47] This is a useful idea to help to contemplate how the *mēchanē* stores and transmits ideas of the divine, particularly as it relates to their ontology and communication. Different ontological realms (human and divine) as well as different epistemologies (theatre and reality) are channelled by the medium of the *mēchanē*.

Media take various forms and do not need to be technological, yet in the case of the *mēchanē* and other religious media discussed in this book, that is precisely the category that interests us. Technological media have specific physical, social, and epistemic characteristics that become an integral part of the communication

[46] On the influence of McLuhan on Kittler, see Gane 2005; Gane and Hansen-Magnusson 2006.

[47] Kittler 1999, xl–xli; 2010.

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itself. Material technologies also offered a particular source of fascination for Kittler which feature most prominently in his work from the early 1980s onwards.[48] Over the course of his oeuvres, Kittler documented the historical conditions of the emergence of various technological media alongside the structures of communication and understanding they subsequently made possible.[49] *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, originally published in 1985, analyses the changing structures of communication systems at two historical junctures: 1800 and 1900, respectively. While the 'discourse network' of 1800 relied exclusively on the book, by 1900 new technologies such as the typewriter, gramophone, phonograph, and film had emerged, and their cultural and social effects were taking root. This second set of technological media which, towards the end of the nineteenth century, broke down writing's monopoly then formed the basis for Kittler's 1986 *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. In later work, Kittler came to focus on optical media and writes the narrative of artistic, analogue, and digital media to show how these and other technological media do not just attune, take on qualities of, and even override or deceive, human sense perception but in fact enable philosophical reflection and cultural concepts to be elaborated.[50] So Kittler writes that 'the only thing that can be known about the soul or the human are the technical gadgets with which they have been historically measured at any given time'.[51] This provocative statement is precisely the sort of idea which proves useful for exploring our subject matter.

The ancient theatre was used as a channel of (for its day) mass media which did not just communicate but also constructed all sorts of cultural stories, expectations, and understandings including ones pertaining to religion.[52] The *mēchanē* was not employed to 'symbolise' the god, but instead worked to create, illustrate, and authenticate stories about how gods worked and particularly how

[48] Though note Krämer 2006, who argues that it is not Kittler's penchant for technical media that defines him as a media theorist but rather his insight in the linking of media with the technique of 'time axis manipulation'.
[49] Gane 2005, 28–9. [50] Kittler 2010 (based on 1999 lectures). [51] Kittler 2010, 35.
[52] Compare Henrichs 1978, who breaks down any distinction between 'historical' and 'mythical' maenadism and analyses the influence of the *Bacchae* on later maenadic cult.

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they appeared, intervened, and transmitted messages in the human realm. When it comes to understanding the *mēchanē* as tool of divine epiphany, we must think of it not simply as a solution to stage pre-existing conceptions of gods (those 'already evident' in literature, for example), but equally as a way to propose something new about divine ontologies and about how human and divine were thought to interact through technology.

The *mēchanē* was just one way to (re)present divine epiphany in ancient Greek culture, and it is a way that prioritises sight (unlike auditory or olfactory epiphanies, for example), participates in a discourse on the form of the divine, couples this visual emphasis with notions of the divine's spontaneity, their locomotive distinction, and their ontological and haptic distance from humans, at the same time bringing to the fore the possible passages of connectedness between mortal and divine. Mechanical *technē*, in other words, tunes the signal in specific ways. The epiphanic experience created by the *mēchanē* is by its nature collective (received by many at once) and in the same way as cinema needs a showing room, the crane needs the theatre and the festival. It collectively confirms, (re)draws, and questions epiphanic orthodoxy; it does not merely represent the god.

The very fact that the *mēchanē* is used to delineate and to transmit ideas about divine transcendental powers tells us something about the use of technology in ancient religion to begin with. It is not about suspending disbelief as one sees the clunky mechanisms of the crane dangle the god(s) overhead, but about seeing those mechanisms as precisely the point of the message: as paradigms of how divine encounter works. Ancient Greek religion was always mediated through man-made objects representing the divine and inducing epiphanic presence, the *mēchanē* is novel in what it contributed to the ways that objects are used as religious media in term of pace and patterns. The *mēchanē* simultaneously made viewers aware of its material nature and eschewed its materiality completely. Viewers are aware of it and aware through it: the *mēchanē* both *defers* (points to a reality elsewhere), and in the way that the medium materialises it *performs* (and is the god in the moment of performance).

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