

# CHORUs



ALEXIS MARGUERITE TEPLIN

# CHORUS

a few short Acts.

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*Stick, or Art Aha*, 2010, 149 × 51 × 46cm,  
Plaster, oil paint, metal, industrial felt, book (Martha Graham, 1937)

ACT 1 - Oh Martha OH

UNDINE enters from the left, and crosses to a record player sitting on a small table. She bends down and picks up a record leaning against the table. U removes the record from its sleeve, placing it on the player - Maya Deren's 1953 recording of 'Haiti Voices' begins to play.

Enter from right PAUL, ELSA and LUDOVIC, all wearing plaster hats. They gather behind U. U proceeds to teach P, L and E to dance like Martha Graham. P a leaning step, L a shuffle and E an arm sweep and fall.

The first side of the record finished, U walks up to the player, flips the record over and starts the second side. While her back is turned both L and E begin to giggle and mimic P. P, frustrated, grabs at his hat and accidentally drops it onto the stage. P, L, and E look down at it for a second, then exit left.

U practices on her own, a movement, different from P, L, and E's, ending with a jump. As the record finishes she exits right. The sound of the player turning can still be heard.

The Players:  
P for PAUL  
E for ELSA  
L for LUDOVIC  
U for UNDINE

*The stage is empty except for a large, brightly painted backdrop. The players are spotlit as they enter and throughout the action. They wear costumes of constructed white linen with small bits of painted colour. Their faces and eyelashes are covered in white powder. The women have brightly painted lips, E pink and U red.*

ACT 1, Scene 2 - Precursor.

ELSA enters right. UNDINE follows close behind. They walk across the stage while speaking.

U: (to E, raising an eyebrow). Can't you find it?

E: No of course I can't find it. If I could I wouldn't be looking.

Enter PAUL from right. Walking to the very center of the stage, he looks to the audience and opens his arms and moves back and forth with his Martha Graham lean.

P: Ladies, ladies, ladies!

U: (to E). One can never get rid of him.

E: Really Paul, be of some use. I mean it, be of some use.

LUDOVIC enters from right carrying E's umbrella over his shoulder. He begins to use his Martha Graham shuffle step.

L: Dear o dear Miss Elsa.

E: Ludovic! However did you find it?

L stops skipping to the right of P.

L: Well, my darling you left it behind.

U: Left it behind, left it behind- always behind or ahead...?

E: Ahead, ahead, never behind.

*E walks over to L and stands to his right, he holds the umbrella out to her. She responds with her own Martha Graham step, falling to the ground, then gets up again and take the umbrella from L's outstretched hand.*

L: *(clearing his throat)* Let us start again.

P: Yes, let's.

*The lights go out. All actors exit left.*

## ACT 2

*Lights come up. The stage is evenly lit. The table now sits center stage, a small stool next to it. The record player has been replaced with the three plaster hats and a hand mirror. Players enter one at a time from stage left. PAUL stands at stage right, than UNDINE, than LUDOVIC and finally ELSA at stage left.*

P: *(starting the role call)*. CHORUS

U: *(looks at P and then proceeds)*. Chorus.

L: *(slightly annoyed)*. Chorus.

E: CHORUS.

L: *(clears his throat)*. What is the protocol?

P: Your sensation as one in the audience in relation to the play played before you.

U: *(nodding)*. Your sensation.

*E crosses in front of all players, dragging a closed umbrella while speaking.*

E: *(as if no one can hear her)*. I will throw this umbrella in the mud-

U: *(to L)*. So is that the artistic intervention?

*E continues walking.*

P: I doubt it.

*E stops between U and P, still up-stage.*

L: *(stepping forward to be in line with E)*. Your sensation as one in the audience in relation to the play played before you.

*(then excitedly.)* I say, your emotion concerning that play is always either behind or ahead of the play at which you are looking and to which you are listening. So, your emotion as a member of the audience is never going on at the same time as the action of the play.

*U does a demi-plie, using her Martha Graham step*

U *(to E)*: Where is the artistic intervention?

E: *(desperately)*. I will throw this umbrella in the mud-

P: *(stepping forward, speaking to E)*. And is your feeling at such a time ahead or behind the action the way it is when you are at the theater?

E: *(to P, offhandedly)*. It is the same and it is not. But, more not.

L: What strikes one very much I think is the way in which the feelings or problems that were stated in the beginning are still there, which some people might regard as a proof that we are not making much progress.

U: Ho, Hum.

P: This is a thing to know and knowledge as anybody can know is a thing to get by getting.

E: I have thrown the umbrella in the mud! *(Holding up the umbrella)*.

*Pause, everyone looks at E.*

P: Seriously?

E: Paul, storytelling is natural; we all do it, its part of everyday life.

P: Yes, we all tell stories; it IS the most natural thing in the world, telling stories. One does it all the time- describing one's day as it were. Shaping material into a story form.

L: *(joining in)*. And very often it's a funny story, which is an important fact. *(Pause)*. But we often condemn them, the actual stories; not the characters I mean, for being sentimental or for being fantastic.

U: I am in the passage of a tube station in London. Many people are in front of me; many people are behind me. Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This way to the Exhibition, This way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the exhibition - I want the way out. There are passages to the right and passages

to the left but no exit sign. Everywhere the fingers point and the placards read: this way to the exhibition... I touch the shoulder of the man in front of me. I say: I want the way out.

*Awkward pause.*

E: (*to L*). This thing, the fact that your emotional time of the play is what makes one endlessly troubled about a play, because not only is there a thing to know as to why this is so but also there is a thing to know why perhaps it does not need to be so.

U: (*steps forward, then quietly, with her hand on her chest*). I can't find my voice.

P: (*to E*). Well, we are all making a form out of something that might be formless. This, of course is one of the deep motives. That one is defeating the formlessness. One is cheering oneself up and consoling oneself and also instructing oneself. (*Gathering momentum*). By giving a form to something, which is perhaps anomaly- formless in its original condition- a kind of rubble. As if we lived in a kind of rubble world.

E: (*annoyed by P's obvious statement*). Of course, a rubble world, one's always making forms!

L: Tittle, Tattle...Tuttle. (*Winks at U*).

U: (*to L*). No, I can't find my voice.

*Pause while everyone looks at U.*

U: (*scared*). I can't find my voice.

L: Undine my dear, I think you need a change. Why don't you get yourself to Paris for a bit?

P: You could get yourself some new clothes- you certainly need them... I'll lend you the money.

U: (*looks at the others, surprised*). Is that the protocol?

L: (*to P*). Let us return to the formless. Yes, yes. It is the imposition of form on the formless, in a vast way. But it is something to be suspicious of, one's temptation to produce a hasty form or an inappropriate form in order to console oneself.

U: (*under her breath*). Oh that's right, money, clothes.

L: (*continuing*). The good philosopher is always undoing his own work; this is part of the whole holding onto the whole problem, being relentless.

P: Being dogged, being relentless!

E: (*exasperated*). But philosophy has no personality! It's an investment in an idea.

L: (*to E*). Philosophy is a very counter natural, a very unnatural activity because it involves a very odd sort of standpoint. One has to repeat oneself, it's coming back on the same ground and breaking the form that you've made before.

E: Dribble, Drabbel, Babel.

P: (*interrupting E*). Yes, it is notoriously difficult to define. It's very difficult to say what it is.

L: It's partly to do of course, with words, in the sense that it's about how language relates to the world and that sort of thing.

E: (*stiffens her body, mocking P and L loudly*). I'm a bit of an automaton, but sane surely- dry cold and sane.

P: And, it's to do with conceptual structures, with very deep structures of belief and knowledge. Philosophy is not very unlike Art, it has to do with meaning significance. It means looking at things which one takes for granted and suddenly seeing that they are very, very odd indeed.

E: (*making a sweeping gesture with the umbrella*). But the play, literature that's to do with masks and roles and pretending and imagining in a sense. Story telling is very natural, it's very close to ordinary life.

*E moves towards the small table and sits on the stool, crossing her legs.*

U: (*takes a couple steps towards E, then turns to the audience*). Plays are either read or heard or seen. And, there then comes the question, which comes first and which is first, reading or hearing or seeing a play?

*U begins to jump up and down, using her Martha Graham technique.*

E: (*to U*). But careful, careful!

P: (*to U*). Now, don't get excited.

*U looks at P still jumping.*

P: But, you know what happens when you get excited, exalted, don't you?

*P moves towards U, stopping to her right, with his back to the audience. U looks meekly at P, then E and stops jumping. She shifts her weight between her right and left feet with P's Martha Graham leaning step. P responds with L's Martha Graham shuffle step.*



P: (to U). You know how you collapse like pricked balloon, don't you?

E: (loudly, uncrossing her legs and leaning on the closed umbrella). Having no staying power...

E stands up, walking towards L.

U: (drawing out the word). A marshmallow.

E hands L her umbrella falls to the ground with her Martha Graham step.

L: Now in a real scene, in which one takes part at, which one is an actor- what does one feel as to time and what is it that does or does not make one nervous?

E gets back up again.

P: In a real thing it is a completion of the excitement, in the theater it is the relief from the excitement.

E: And the difference between completion and relief, is the difference between emotion concerning a thing seen on the stage. And the emotion concerning a real presentation that is really something happening.

P: Yes, exactly... so, no excitement.

U walks back towards the table.

U: (muttering, picking up the hats and looking them over). The hats now are very difficult, very difficult. (She tries one on, and uses the hand mirror).

U sits on the stool. E joins her at the table. E takes U's hat off, placing another one on her head.

E: (to U). All my clients say that the hats now are very difficult to wear. (Looking hard at U.) All my clients now are complaining that the hats are very difficult to wear, but I think - I am sure - I shall manage to suit you. (changing U's current hat for another).

L: (moves towards the table with his Martha Graham shuffle step). My God, not that one.

U: (stands up, looking between them both). You know, I am bewildered. Please tell me which one I ought to have?

L and E look to U.

E: The first one I showed you.

L: Oh, my God, not that one.

E: Or, perhaps the third one?

P: (to the audience). The thing seen and the emotion did not go together.

E: I don't want to insist, but yes, that is your hat. (she swaps U's hat for the first one she tried on.)

L: Walk up and down the room in it. See whether you feel happy in it. See whether you'll get accustomed to it.

U walks towards P.

U: I don't like it much, but it seems to be the only one. (She lets out a sigh of relief.)

L: I ask you. (Pauses to bow to the audience.) What is knowledge? Knowledge is what you know and what you know is what you know.

P: In order to know one must always go back. (taking U's hat from her head and dropping it on the floor.)

L: (moves, to the right of P). Well, maybe we should, perhaps, establish say a contrast between imagination and fantasy. Imagination being thought of as a good creative power and fantasy as a sort of private self consolation.

P: (to L). I think artists are very much concerned with removing a veil of fantasy. Which normally perhaps wraps one head as one gazes at the world. And it's looking at the world without this fantastic cover that we are concerned with, to see what is other than ourselves and in a sense to respect it.

L: But Paul, if you tell somebody to describe their room or something, which you might think is a fairly neutral activity- this description will be crammed with value judgments. It's something that one can't avoid. Not only in the choice of what they describe but in the words that they use. Very obviously, words are full of value.

P: Very often, of course the values, which are expressed, are improper ones.

E does U's Martha Graham demi plié and jump.

E: Tittle, tattle...

L: Tut, tut.

E ignores and walks quickly to the left of U.

E: (sarcastically to L and P). I think that you may as well admit (U starts to step backwards) that you are going to be involved in making moral judgments and revealing your morality.



L: (to E). There is a kind of moral challenge involved.

E: Oh, that's right, to console oneself.

U: (stops moving back, then nervously). Are we discussing the protocol?  
Or is it moral judgment?

*P starts to jump up and down. U watches P for a second and then starts to jump at a different tempo than P. P continues to jump with her, then stops.*

P: This that the thing seen and the thing felt about the thing seen not going on at the same tempo is what makes the being at the theater something that makes anybody nervous.

*U stops jumping.*

L: Well, in the first place, at the theatre there is the curtain and the curtain already makes one feel that one is not going to have the same tempo as the thing that is there behind the curtain.

*L stepping back to be in line with U, points at the curtain, holding up the umbrella with his other hand.*

E: Yes, yes. The emotion of you on one side of the curtain and what is on the other side of the curtain are not going to be going on together.

L: (lowering his arms). Then also beside the curtain there is the audience and the fact that they are or will be or will not be in the way when the curtain goes up, that that too makes for nervousness...

P: But nervousness consists in needing to go faster or to go slower so as to get together. It is that. that makes anybody feel nervous.

U: One will always be behind or in front of the other.

*E starts to do L's Martha Graham shuffle step, quickly. She then walks over to L and takes the umbrella, L starts P's leaning step.*

L: It is the certain proof that the emotion of the one seeing and the emotion of the thing seen do not progress together.

P: (Moves towards center stage). And it is a mistake that that is what the theater is or is not.

E: And then this damned old fur coat slung on top the last idiocy, the last incongruity.

*E falls to the ground.*

U: (walks to the left of P, looks at the audience and shrugs). Ho Hum.

*E stands up, she walks upstage joining U. They peer out at the audience. L, dragging the umbrella, joins them, to the right of P. P inches towards L, the men now stand shoulder to shoulder. They, the men, grab hands and close their eyes.*

*Lights.*

### ACT 3

*Lights come up to PAUL, ELSA, UNDINE and LUDOVIC standing center stage, equidistant apart, facing the audience. The table has been removed.*

*A deadpan conversation.*

P: Qua.

E: What.

U: Hum.

E: What?

P: (covering his ears with his hands). Qua.

E: WHat.

*Pause.*

L: Ah

U: ha.

E: Ahhhh!

P: Yes.

L: (with drawn out enunciation). Poi.

U: And Then.

L: Poi.

U: And Then.

L: Poi.

E: And Then. (Pointing at U).

U: What?

*P jumps with arms open, a kind of jumping jack.*

P: (Shouts) Poi.

L: And Then.

P: Poi.

L: And Then.

E: What?

U: Ahhh.

L: PuuurQua?

E: Hum.

P: Ho Hum, (*pauses*). Yes!

L: Boy oh boy.

U: Hum,

P: Ho.

E: Fickle, Foe.

L: What!!

*E bows.*

P: Ah.

E: Yes!

P: No.

U: Fi...ckle??

E: PLEAS!

L: Qua, Qua, Qua.

*Curtain.*



*POI*, 2011, 133 × 144, oil on linen, with Anthon Beeke prints



In Act 1, movement technique from Bonnie Bird- Martha Graham 1938-39:  
P - 4:42-5:07; L - 7:07-7:27; E - 6:10-6:26, followed by a fall - 8:27-8:30;  
U - 6:44-7:05, 7:36-7:55

Act 2 includes text from Gertrude Stein's American Lectures, 1935,  
Iris Murdock's 1977 interview with Brian McGee, and Jean Rhys, Good Morning  
Midnight, 1938.

Above image: taken from *Voices of Haiti* LP, Maya Deren, 1953.

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Centrefold image, *With Collar and Cuff*, 2010, 260 × 370 × 30 cm, oil on linen  
Image courtesy of the artist, Mary, Mary, and Car Projects

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