

## THE POLITICS OF GESTURE IN SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE*

The stage 'etiquette' of Attic tragedy calls for actors/characters visually to acknowledge one another or the Chorus before establishing verbal contact.<sup>1</sup> The title character of Sophocles' *Antigone* flouts this custom to interesting effect by keeping her gaze lowered to the ground after the guard, having caught her in the forbidden act of burying her brother, leads her back into the playing space. The Chorus of Theban elders obliquely acknowledge Antigone's presence at 376, expressing their consternation at the sight of 'this supernatural portent' (ἐς δαιμόνιον τέρας ἀμφιωῶ / τόδε). They address her directly as child of Oedipus at 379–80.<sup>2</sup> But Antigone remains unresponsive, reacting neither to the Chorus nor to the guard's announcement a few lines later that 'this is the one who did the deed' (ἥδ' ἔστ' ἐκείνη τοῦργον ἢ ἐξεργασμένη, 384). Instead she keeps her gaze fixed on the ground and stands silently by for over 65 lines, while the guard explains to Creon and the Chorus how she was captured. Readers of Sophocles' play become aware of Antigone's earthbound gaze only retrospectively at 441, where Creon addresses her with a brusque 'Hey you, the one bowing your head to the ground ...' (σέ δῃ, σέ τὴν νεύουσας ἐς πέδον κάρα).<sup>3</sup> The audience in the theatre would have noticed her lowered gaze and her gestural 'silence' from the moment she re-emerged into their line of vision. Why does Antigone hold herself apart like this? What is she saying – and to whom – by refusing to meet the tyrant's gaze?

More 'shocking' even than her willingness to defy the king's decree is the temerity with which Antigone publicly defends herself. Critics committed to a historically contextualized reading of the play 'tend to see Antigone's action as problematic, even shocking, to fifth-century sensibilities', as Philip Holt has remarked.<sup>4</sup> Antigone's verbal rhetoric is bold and masculine in tenor; so much so, indeed, that Creon cries out in exasperation, 'I am now not a man anymore, *she* is the man' (ἡ νῦν ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἀνὴρ, αὐτὴ δ' ἀνὴρ, 484). But, in focussing their attention on Antigone's boldness of speech, these same critics have overlooked another side of her character – one that comes through more clearly in her gestural

<sup>1</sup> D.J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity: Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek Tragic Stage* (Berkeley, CA, 1979) 19, on the 'etiquette of partial contact' following entrances, and at 94 on Antigone's prolonged silence. I have borrowed from G. Ley, *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus* (Chicago, IL, 2007) the formulation 'actor/character' as a reminder of the embodied nature of tragic discourse, and discuss below the retrospective inference that alerts us to Antigone's posture as she re-enters the playing space after her exit at 99.

<sup>2</sup> Whether the *koryphaïos*' address at 379–80 is to be taken as a 'genuine greeting' or a 'self-contained apostrophe' – terms I borrow from M. Griffith, *Sophocles: Antigone* (Cambridge, 1999), ad loc. – is an ambiguity that confronts the reader of the script, though not the spectator at a live performance. I follow Mastronarde (n. 1), 94 and n. 50, in assuming that the Chorus' words are addressed directly to Antigone.

<sup>3</sup> See Ley (n. 1), 10–11, on retrospective inference.

<sup>4</sup> P. Holt, 'Polis and tragedy in the *Antigone*', *Mnemosyne* 52 (1999), 658–90, at 660.

language. For while she may talk like a man, Antigone's physical habitus – in particular, the way that she conducts herself in this scene where the guard leads her back into the playing area – is deferential, perhaps even demure. Her speaking voice challenges gender norms but her body language is inflected with respect for tradition and for the laws of the land. This bodily 'voice', I propose, tempers that of the 'heroic dissident',<sup>5</sup> helping to project an 'Antigone' that would have been more palatable, more familiar at least in this aspect of her conduct, to fifth-century Greek sensibilities.

Grafted onto the body of any other female, the inclined head and lowered eyes would be an appropriate expression of *aidôs*.<sup>6</sup> In connection with the Sophoclean Antigone, however, critics have sought alternative explanations for this stance.<sup>7</sup> Deeply entrenched assumptions about Antigone's character – for example, that she would be incapable of expressing agreement or showing self-restraint – have kept us from considering whether such a physical attitude may, in fact, have been part of her gestural vocabulary.<sup>8</sup> Modern notions about Antigone have been formed on the basis of her transmitted speaking role and, in this regard, bear witness to the persistent textual bias of our discipline. But spectators in the Theatre of Dionysus would have responded to visual as well as verbal cues.<sup>9</sup> Antigone's downward gaze therefore serves as a provocation to think about how body language and vocalized speech combine, as discrete yet mutually interactive components, to shape an audience's perceptions of dramatic character. In what follows I try to recapture the meaning of this one bodily posture in performance.

<sup>5</sup> On the anachronistic tendency 'to make Antigone into a heroic dissident', see Holt (n. 4), 659.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. G. Pinney-Ferrari, *Figures of Speech: Men and Maidens in Ancient Greece* (Chicago, IL, 2002), 55; D. Cairns, 'Bullish looks and sidelong glances: social interaction and the eyes in ancient Greek culture', in D. Cairns (ed.), *Body Language in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Swansea, 2005), 123–55, at 135; L. Llewellyn-Jones, 'Body language and the female role player in Greek tragedy and Japanese *kabuki* theatre', in Cairns, 73–105, at 86.

<sup>7</sup> C. Zimmerman, *Der Antigone-Mythos in der antiken Literatur und Kunst* (Tübingen, 1993), 207, suggests that the slightly extended right hand of the female figure bowing her head to the ground in the presence of a seated king on a fourth-century-B.C.E. Lucanian red-figure *nestoris* (London F175) represents Antigone's attempt to initiate dialogue with Creon, although the Oriental headdress of the 'Creon' figure has raised considerable doubts about whether this figure is to be identified as Antigone; for discussion and bibliography, see O. Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Vase-painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Los Angeles, CA, 2007), 94.

<sup>8</sup> R. Jebb *Sophocles: Works: Antigone*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1885), ad loc., suggests disengagement; A. Brown, *Sophocles: Antigone* (Warminster, 1987), ad loc., resignation; Griffith (n. 2), ad loc., disdain. I postpone to the next section discussion of A. Boegehold, *When a Gesture Was Expected: A Selection of Examples from Archaic and Classical Greek Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 59–63 (henceforth Boegehold 1999a); and A. Boegehold, 'Antigone nodding, unbowed', in F. Titchener, F. and R. Moorton Jr. (edd.), *The Eye Expanded: Life and the Arts in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), 19–23 (henceforth Boegehold 1999b); but note that Boegehold 1999b, 20, compares various translations of Creon's address and concludes: 'Translators differ among themselves as to single words and phrases here, but the overall sense of their interpretations leads a reader to suppose that Antigone is downcast, frightened, or ashamed of what she has done.'

<sup>9</sup> On interpreting Greek tragedy as a performing art rather than merely as a text, see further D. Wiles, 'Reading Greek performance', *G&R* 34 (1987), 136–51.

## DECODING ANTIGONE'S STANCE

According to Bäuml and Bäuml's *Dictionary of Worldwide Gestures*,<sup>10</sup> the lowered head has been found to signify, in various parts of the world, adoration (387), concentration (389), confusion (389), depression (390), gratitude (392), humility (393), modesty (393), obedience (395), piety (395), a plea (395), pleasure (395), respect (396), reverence (396), submission (397) or surrender (397). And there is a similarly diverse semantic range for head-nodding. Gestures, in other words, are culturally coded expressions whose meaning in drama, as in life, must be extracted with reference both to a general 'grammar' of body language and to the idiosyncrasies of individual 'speakers'.<sup>11</sup> Even when a culture's proxemic norms are known, challenges remain in trying to decipher, on the basis of a written script, how a particular gesture would have been enacted. We are not looking at Antigone directly, after all; we 'see' her only through Creon's appellation.

I have postponed until now offering a more precise account of Antigone's stance during the guard's speech because such a description is predicated upon an analysis of how Creon addresses her. The phrase that Creon uses – *σὲ τὴν νεύουσιν ἐς πέδον κάρα* (441) – attests that Antigone inclines her head to the ground. But is she bowing or nodding? Alan Boegehold has taken the phrase to indicate Antigone's affirmation of what the guard alleges she has done.<sup>12</sup> In ancient Greece, he reasons, to nod down at the ground (*κατανεύειν*) was the gesture for expressing agreement, whereas the upward thrust of the head – *ἀνανεύειν* – indicated disagreement, or simply 'no', as it still does today in modern Greek.<sup>13</sup> Because her head is tilted toward the ground (*ἐς πέδον*), Boegehold infers that Antigone must be making the head-nodding gesture of assent: she agrees with everything the guard has said about her violation of Creon's edict.

But it is hard to reconcile Boegehold's thesis with the way in which Creon addresses his niece. If Antigone were silently signalling her agreement, Creon would have been more likely to comment on the self-condemnation implicit in her gesture, phrasing his question along the lines of 'You agree, don't you?'<sup>14</sup> That

<sup>10</sup> Lanham, MD, and London, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> D. Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile: Nonverbal Behavior in Homeric Epic* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), 3–17, offers a good overview of different approaches (anthropological, semiotic, linguistic, etc.) to gestures in life and in literary sources. Lateiner's focus is on the Homeric poems, but his observations pertain to the reading of tragic gestures. General studies of gestures and their cultural significance in ancient Greece include C. Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig, 1890); Boegehold 1999a (n. 8); T. Fögen, 'Ancient theorizing on nonverbal communication', in R. Brend, A.K. Melby and A.R. Lommel (edd.), *LACUS Forum XXVII: Speaking and Comprehending* (Fullerton, CA, 2001), 203–16; and Cairns (n. 6). On gesture and physical contact on the tragic stage, see Mastronarde (n. 1); M. Kaimio, *Physical Contact in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Stage Conventions* (Helsinki, 1988); M. Telò, 'Per una grammatica dei gesti nella tragedia greca (I): cadere a terra, alzarsi, coprirsi, scoprirsi il volto', *MD* 48 (2002), 9–75; and idem, 'Per una grammatica dei gesti nella tragedia greca (II): la supplica', *MD* 49 (2002), 9–51.

<sup>12</sup> Boegehold 1999a (n. 8), 59–61; see also Boegehold 1999b (n. 8).

<sup>13</sup> Boegehold 1999a (n. 8) at 60, taking *νεύουσιν* as a form of *κατανεύειν*. See Sittl (n. 11), 93–4, on the derivation of ancient expressions for disdain such as *ὑπεροράω* and *despicio* from facial expression and eyebrow movements.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Boegehold 1999a (n. 8), 60–1: 'Creon cannot believe his eyes. Here is a blood relation, who very much appears to be a lawfully apprehended lawbreaker. But how can that be? Still, she stands there and says with her posture and gesture, "Yes, I did it." Creon must accordingly ask Antigone to say aloud that she has done it, so that there cannot be any possibility of misunderstanding.'

he calls her to attention with the initial σὲ δῆ of 441 (σὲ δῆ, σὲ τὴν νεύουσιν ἐς πέδον κάρα) suggests that she has shown no indication of reacting one way or the other to the guard's speech. Creon's abrupt address, followed by his question: 'Do you admit or deny that you have done these things?' (442), challenges Antigone to take a stand.

There is also a grammatical issue to consider. Of the verbal aspect of νεύουσιν, Boegehold writes: '... the Greek verb νεύω, "nod", tells of motion, and in its present-continuative aspect implies repeated noddings'.<sup>15</sup> But when νεύω is used to mean 'nod in assent' it is found in the aorist.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, instances from tragedy in which 'nodding in assent' is at issue all involve a power differential, with the character who 'assents' invested with the authority to grant a favour to someone less well situated. This type of nodding requires a certain measure of social authority. In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, for example, when Philoctetes supplicates Neoptolemus to take him back to Oitaia, he beseeches the young man to 'nod' (that is, 'grant') him this favour (484–85): νεῦσον πρὸς αὐτοῦ Ζηνὸς ἱκεσίῳ, τέκνον, / πείσθητι.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, instances of νεύω in the present tense lack the performative dimension of the benefactor's 'nod'. In its present-continuative aspect, νεύω indicates, rather, the action of bending or bowing.<sup>18</sup> We can see this illustrated in Euripides' *Electra*, where the Messenger describes Aegisthus as 'bending down' (τοῦ δὲ νεύοντος κάτω, 839) over the entrails of his sacrifice, just moments before Orestes deals him a fatal blow with the cleaver. Moreover, an example from Aristophanes that Boegehold cites in support of his reading of Antigone's gesture may actually undercut his interpretation:

Aristophanes' *Wasps*, line 1110 presents a use of νεύω that is suggestive if not so clear: the old heliasts (i.e., chorus of wasps) describe themselves as *nodding* toward the ground, barely moving, like larvae in their cells (νεύοντες εἰς τὴν γῆν μόλις ὥσπερ οἱ σκώλακες ἐν τοῖς κυττάρῳις κινούμενοι).<sup>19</sup>

In his commentary on *Wasps*, MacDowell explains the Chorus' position as being 'bent over somehow toward the ground', a description that admittedly baffles Boegehold.<sup>20</sup> For Boegehold, movement is already implicit in the participial νεύοντες, which he translates as 'nodding'. But MacDowell adheres to the stricter sense of νεύω (in its present-progressive aspect) when he describes the heliasts' posture as one of being *bowed* toward the ground, the slight movement of their 'larval' bodies indicated not by νεύοντες but rather by κινούμενοι. In Antigone's case, too, the present aspect of νεύουσιν points lexically to a bowed head and prolonged gaze at the ground; it contains no suggestion that she is moving, or nodding, in agreement with the guard's narrative.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Soph. *OC* 248; Soph. *Phil.* 484; Eur. *Alc.* 978.

<sup>17</sup> Also significant is Philoctetes' framing of his appeal to Zeus Hikesios, since Zeus has supreme authority to make a wish come true by a simple nod of his head (e.g. in answer to Thetis' supplication at Hom. *Il.* 1.528).

<sup>18</sup> Aesch. *Supp.* 355; Eur. *El.* 839; Eur. *Frag.* 153 (Kannicht).

<sup>19</sup> Boegehold 1999b (n. 8), 21 (my emphasis).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 23, n. 14, on D.M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford, 1971), ad loc.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that the aorist aspect in itself does not predetermine the performative sense of the verb; for instance, the guard's description of how he and his cohort bowed their heads – ἐς πέδον κάρα / νεῦσαι φόβῳ (269–70) – deploys an aorist infinitive, perhaps implying that they hold this posture for a shorter amount of time than Antigone.

Having determined the physical contours of Antigone's posture, let me now move on to its meaning in performance. Like speech, gestures can be polysemous, and they can signify different things to different people. A moment from Euripides' *Hecuba* illustrates well the potential for a single gesture to elicit a divided response, resulting in intense dramatic irony. Already plotting revenge against her enemy, Hecuba feigns modesty (*aidôs*) by purposefully avoiding Polymestor's gaze and rationalizing her body language in the following way (968–72):

αἰσχύνομαί σε προσβλέπειν ἐναντίον,  
 Πολυμήστορ, ἐν τοιοῖσδε κειμένη κακοῖς.  
 ὅτῳ γὰρ ὤφθην εὐτυχοῦσ', αἰδώς μ' ἔχει  
 ἐν τῷιδε πόντῳ τυγχάνουσ' ἵν' εἰμι νῦν  
 κοῦκ ἂν δυναίμην προσβλέπειν ὀρθαῖς κόραις·

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I am shy about looking you in the eye, Polymestor, being in such a state of wretchedness. Especially since you once saw me faring well, it causes me shame to be seen by you the way I am now, nor could I meet your gaze.

Hecuba's words disguise the fact that her downcast gaze is a superficial enactment of modesty. Polymestor suspects nothing of Hecuba's deceptive designs from her reluctance to meet his gaze. Hecuba performs *aidôs*, mimicking to perfection the demure female, so that she will earn the trust of the Thracian king and be better able to execute her gruesome revenge. Taken in by Hecuba's modest posturing, Polymestor adopts a reassuring, protective tone, calling her a friend and promising help (981–5). But the audience recognizes the hypocrisy of Hecuba's averted gaze. The same posture that signals feminine modesty to Polymestor also conceals the barely containable anger of a woman bent on vengeance – a mother who will use any means at her disposal to punish the man who has killed her son.<sup>22</sup> Only the audience recognizes these two antithetical 'messages' contained in Hecuba's single posture.

Antigone's downward gaze may similarly be soliciting a twofold response. Creon's brusque address suggests that he does not see anything conciliatory about her gesture – and readers have tended to agree. But what if Antigone, like Hecuba, is 'speaking' to two audiences simultaneously? I propose that her gesture signals deference to those below at the same time that it indicates a kind of disengagement from those who are physically proximate – the living. Although the character of Antigone survives today entirely in the form of disembodied words and images,<sup>23</sup> by keeping in mind that an actor's movements and physical presence originally mediated the audience's perceptions of her spoken words, we gain access to qualitatively different aspects of her stage persona and of the drama that unfolds between her and Creon. The next section is an attempt to rediscover, through this exemplary gesture, the spatial coordinates that were key to the play's meaning in, or better yet *as*, performance.

<sup>22</sup> See further Cairns (n. 6) on anger as expressed through the eyes.

<sup>23</sup> For what may be an illustration of the Sophoclean Antigone, see n. 7. On visual representations of Antigone from a lost play by Euripides, see Taplin (n. 7), 185–6.

ANTIGONE *METOIKOS* AND THE VERTICAL AXIS

Antigone adopts the identity of a metic in connection with her impending *katabasis* as an unmarried woman (867–68): ἄγαμος ἄδ' / ἐγὼ μέτοικος ἔρχομαι. She twice uses *metoikos* self-referentially (852, 868), and in this way represents her imminent death as a kind of political disenfranchisement that has been inflicted upon her by Creon, a punishment for her devotion to the dead. Although Antigone's engagement with the underworld has received its fair share of scholarly attention, analyses have tended to cluster around certain tropes, such as 'marriage to death' or the 'imprisonment' of tragic females.<sup>24</sup> But these metaphors first manifest themselves in Antigone's embodied stage persona. Even before the verbal tropes make her underworld proclivities explicit, her gesture anticipates where the action of the drama is headed. 'Marriage to death' is more than a literary metaphor in this tragedy. The embodied semantics of her final exit are prefigured already in her downcast gaze, as becomes clear if we attend closely to the texture of Antigone's spoken discourse, as well as to her non-verbal 'somatics'.<sup>25</sup>

Oliver Taplin's 1977 study raised awareness of how the exits and entrances of characters to and from the playing space are basic elements in the 'grammar' of movement through which dramas produce meaning.<sup>26</sup> With actors and Chorus making frequent entrances and exits along the *eisodoi*, spectators would have developed an acute awareness of the theatrical significance of the 'horizontal', east–west axis.<sup>27</sup> And it is, I believe, because of this movement on and off the ramps that the east–west axis of the horizontal plane has received more attention than theatrical evocations of the vertical axis.<sup>28</sup> One important dramaturgical difference

<sup>24</sup> For Antigone as a bride of Hades, see S. Murnaghan, 'Antigone 904–20 and the institution of marriage', *AJP* 107 (1986), 192–207; M. Neuburg, 'How like a woman: Antigone's "inconsistency"', *CQ* 40 (1990), 54–76, at 66–76; R. Rehm, *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), 59–71; W. Tyrrell and L. Bennett, *Recapturing Sophocles' Antigone* (Lanham, MD, 1998), 97–121; and K. Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Austin, TX, 1999), 79–103. On her confinement to an underground bridal chamber, see R. Seaford, 'The imprisonment of women in Greek tragedy', *JHS* 110 (1990), 76–90.

<sup>25</sup> On reading the tragic body in performance, see F.I. Zeitlin, 'Euripides' *Hekabe* and the somatics of Dionysiac drama', *Ramus* 20 (1991), 53–94; K. Valakas, 'The use of the body by actors in tragedy and satyr-play', in P. Easterling and E. Hall (edd.), *Greek and Roman Actors* (Cambridge, 2002), 69–92; and A. Duncan, *Performance and Identity in the Classical World* (Cambridge, 2006), 32–47 and *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> While I will not be concerned here with precisely this aspect of stagecraft, I take my cue from O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1977), 30, that gestures that have been recorded in the script of a play are significant, and will repay close analysis. For a critical appraisal of Taplin's approach, see Ley (n. 1), 2–3.

<sup>27</sup> Eg. in Euripides' *Bacchae*, Mount Cithaeron is a space beyond the city where, freed from their looms and shuttles, the women of Thebes worship Dionysus and engage in gestures and behaviours that contrast sharply with those of their 'civilized' life in the *polis*. See further C. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), 111–24, on the horizontal axis in the *Bacchae*.

<sup>28</sup> See especially D. Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning* (Cambridge, 1997), 133–60 on the east–west axis and 175–86 on the vertical axis. Although technically comprising both east–west and north–south axes, the horizontal plane in Wiles's discussion comes to be designated metonymically by the east–west axis, which he also names the 'horizontal axis', reserving 'longitudinal' to refer to the north–south axis of the horizontal plane; I follow Wiles, 175–86 and *passim*, in using 'vertical axis' as shorthand for the vertical plane.

between these two spatial axes that has not perhaps been adequately appreciated is that actors' gestures can activate the vertical but not the horizontal. A simple look up at the sky, for instance, can evoke the divine realm of Olympus, just as a nod to the ground may conjure awareness of the nether regions. For these two realms (Olympus and Hades) persist as fixed coordinates in theatrical space. The *eisodoi* have only topical relevance, their meanings changing from play to play, depending on the specific settings assigned to them by individual dramatists. Wherever the 'marriage-to-death' theme or other underworld tropes were present, therefore, they could be evoked quite economically through actors' bodily gestures.

Interactions between gods and mortals within the *polis* were normatively construed along a vertical axis pointing up towards Olympus. It is with this religious norm in mind that Creon invokes Olympian Zeus in various forms to bolster his own kingly authority. First naming Zeus at 184 as 'the one who sees everything always' (Ζεὺς ὁ πάνθ' ὁρῶν ἀεί), Creon later takes for granted the universal and Olympian aspect of this god. He dismisses with sarcastic irony the Zeus who guards family ties – Zeus Herkeios (487) – and the Zeus who protects the rights of blood relatives: 'Let her bring these prayers to Zeus Xunaimos' (πρὸς ταύτ' ἐφθυμνείτω Δία / ξύναιμον, 658–59), says Creon to Haemon about his betrothed, apparently unaware of the ominous punning on his son's name contained in the epithet of Antigone's Zeus. The actor playing Creon may have deployed gestures in vocalizing any of these references to Zeus, but a pointing to the sky is actually scripted into the deictic form τόνδ' Ὀλυμπον ('this Olympus here') by which Creon swears his oath at 758. Creon utters this imprecation at the climax of his *agon* with Haemon, and he follows it up directly with the threat of killing Antigone in his son's presence. The deictic τόνδε further articulates the spatial dynamics of the conflict between Creon and his niece. Creon gestures upward to the heavens to evoke his own authority as father and king, for *his* Zeus is the Olympian father. Antigone's gods, on the other hand, subsist underground, as does her father. The conflict between Creon and his niece calls into question the limits of *polis* authority (in the face of familial prerogative), as has been well argued.<sup>29</sup> But at the same time it poses an even more basic question of cosmology: where does 'Zeus' reside?

Nowhere is the potential rift between upper and lower realms more spectacularly dramatized than in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. Although denounced by Apollo as dwellers of shady Tartarus and objects of hatred to gods and men (71–3), by the end of the tragedy the Erinyes nevertheless impress upon Athena the necessity of honouring their presence in Athens. For the city to flourish, these chthonian inhabitants must be placated; and legitimate holders of the 'land' they will be (ἐξεστί γάρ σοι τῇσδε γαμῶρωι χθονός, 890), the Olympian goddess assures them. In *Eumenides*, Athena's mediation resolves the cosmic struggle between Olympians and chthonians, averting the pestilential disaster threatened by the Erinyes. The vertical axis, which had been pointing dangerously downwards during Orestes' trial and in its immediate aftermath, once again confirms the pre-eminence of Olympian Zeus, a theodicy that all agree to recognize. No such resolution repairs the breach between Creon and Antigone, however, with the result that cosmic inversions the

<sup>29</sup> E.g., C. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 183: 'Antigone defends herself against the male-oriented, civic ethic of the polis. She makes kinship a function of the female procreative power: she defines kinship in terms of the womb (*splanchna*)'. Creon, by contrast, is focused on the patrilinear kinship on which civic identity is based.

likes of which were only hinted at by Aeschylus' Furies begin to ravage Sophocles' Theban landscape.

In *Antigone*, the two *eisodoi* initially divide between them the realms of the living and the dead, with the right ramp leading towards the city interior, the centre of life and light, while the left takes Antigone to the battlefield and wilderness, first to bury her brother and later to bury herself.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, then, the horizontal plane reinforces the audience's 'vertical sensibility'. Movement in every direction in this play takes place along a 'vertical' axis. Antigone's first exit along this *eisodos* is at 99, at the end of the first scene; at 937 ff. she bids farewell to the city of Thebes, its gods and the Chorus of elders as she makes her final exit. But, as the dramatic action unfolds, this distinction between left and right, death and life, begins to fade. In returning from the hinterland with the corpse of Haemon, Creon reaches the royal palace only to be greeted by news of his wife's death.<sup>31</sup> The royal palace itself is now a place of death, to which Creon, himself a 'breathing corpse' (*ἐμψυχον ... νεκρόν*, 1167), will be consigned to live out the rest of his days.<sup>32</sup>

However, even in cases where there are no dramatic entrances *apo tēs mēchanēs*, or action on the rooftop of the *skēnē*, the vertical axis can be brought actively into play through the gesturing of actors/characters, as I have already mentioned.<sup>33</sup> Gesture is the bodily counterpart to verbal deixis. Antigone relies on deictic adverbs to articulate her ethical commitment to the gods below. In the prologue, for example, she contrasts her own loyalty to dead relatives 'below' and 'beyond' (*τοῖς κάτω*, 75 and *ἐκεῖ*, 76) with Ismene's obedience to those in power 'here' (*τῶν ἐνθάδε*, 75). For his part, Creon's use of deictics belies his view that there is no meaningful distinction between the *polis* – that is, the civic domain – and the land of Thebes.

In his language, Creon subtly draws the outlying territories where Polynices' corpse lies mouldering into the civic space. In his first speech we already see signs of what will turn out to be a fatal conflation on Creon's part of the land itself (*χθών*) with the political entity of the *polis*. He claims he would never consider a 'traitor to the land' a personal friend (*οὐτ' ἂν φίλον ποτ' ἄνδρα δυσμενῇ χθονὸς / θείμην ἐμαντῶι*, 187–8), the reason being that 'this is what saves us' (*ἧδ' ἐστὶν ἡ σώιζουσα*, 189). The deictic *ἧδε*, technically referring to 'land', nevertheless acts as a bridge between the *χθών* Creon has just mentioned and the *τῇνδε πόλιν* that he will utter one line later (191). He recognizes no difference between *χθών* and *πόλις*. As ruler of the *polis*, moreover, he considers it his prerogative to decide who has access to the earth, who is to be called its enemy or friend and who, by extension, is to get a share of it in death. At 736 Creon performs the same conflation, referring to the city that he rules as *chthōn*: *ἄλλωι γὰρ ἢ 'μοί χρηίμε τῇσδ' ἄρχειν χθονός* ('Should I rule this land for anyone else's benefit than

<sup>30</sup> Wiles (n. 28), 152: 'The major confrontations of the play are between Creon, who is associated with the city (right), and Antigone, who goes into the wilderness (left) to bury the body and later returns to the wilderness to die.'

<sup>31</sup> The sacrificial altar of Dionysus, situated perhaps just south of the playing space, may have provided the audience with a visual reminder of the altar of Zeus Herkeios, which must be imagined as lying within the *skēnē* in *Antigone*; it is at this altar of Zeus that Eurydice will later stab herself after cursing Creon (1301).

<sup>32</sup> O. Taplin, 'The place of Antigone', *Omnibus* 7 (1984), 13–16, at 15–16.

<sup>33</sup> On the theatrical use(s) made of the roof of the *skēnē*, see D. Mastronarde, 'Actors on high', *ClAnt* 9 (1990), 247–94.



my own?'). Understanding that by *χθονός* his father refers to the city, Haemon responds: *πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἔσθ' ἤτις ἀνδρός ἐσθ' ἐνός* ('It's not a *polis*, that which is the property of one man'). The Theban elders, however, do not regard *chthôn* as a synonym for *polis*, a point that emerges clearly in their first stasimon (368–70):

*νόμους γεραίρων χθονός  
θεῶν τ' ἔνορκον δίκαν  
ὑψίπολις ...*

Whoever honours the laws of the land and the gods' oath-protected right, his city is lofty ...<sup>34</sup>

In the context of the ode, which traces the civilizing agenda that mankind has imposed on the physical cosmos, gradually conquering sea, sky and the 'unwiling earth' (*Γᾶν ἄφθιτον*, 338–39), *chthôn* designates a pre-*polis* landscape, with its natural laws subsisting in tension with those of the superimposed *polis*.<sup>35</sup> Respect for these laws of the land helps the civilized *polis* to thrive, they sing. Such an evocation of the *nomoi* of the land may be meant to serve as a warning to Creon, who is not yet on stage to hear it. In any case, the Chorus' words suggest that Creon's conception of the coterminous boundaries between *chthôn* and *polis* will not go unchallenged within his own city.

In Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, Danaus coaches his daughters on keeping boldness out of their gaze when they appeal to Pelasgus, the king of Argos, for suppliant status (197–9). A placid expression (*ὄμματος παρ' ἡσύχου*, 199), Danaus explains, will garner the king's sympathy. Indeed, once Pelasgus has learned their pedigree, he acknowledges that the Danaids' 'share' in the land of Argos reaches far back in time: *δοκεῖτε <δὴ> μοι τῇσδε κοινωνεῖν χθονός / τάρχαϊον* (325–6). He grants them what amounts to 'metic' status (i.e. housing and protection), if not full citizen rights. In both their bodily posture (if they have followed their father's advice) and their political standing as virtual metics, the Danaids mirror Antigone's precarious position in Thebes. But, whereas Creon dictates unilaterally, Pelasgus 'must refer the matter to the polis as a whole'.<sup>36</sup> As the king himself puts it (368–9),

*ἐγὼ δ' ἂν οὐ κραίνοιμ' ὑπόσχεσιν πάρος,  
ἄστοις δὲ πᾶσι τῶνδε κοινώσας πέρι.*

I would not make this promise before including all the citizens in the discussion about these things.

Pelasgus here acknowledges their ancestral ties to the Argive land but withholds extending to the Danaids the rights of citizenship within the polity, making their suppliant status contingent upon the consent of Argos' actual citizens. Antigone

<sup>34</sup> See Griffith (n. 2), ad loc., for emendation of manuscript *παρείρων* and on the ambiguity of *ὑψίπολις* (either 'he is high in his city' or 'his city is high ...').

<sup>35</sup> Cf. S. Benardete 'A reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*', *Interpretation* 4 (1975), 148–96, at 192 (my italics): 'As the surface of the earth, moreover, no less than its depths, is linked through dust and burial (247, 256, 409, 429, 602), the city and Hades are never far apart. The roots of the city, however, do not all reach to Hades, for it is also founded on the violation of the earth ...'.

<sup>36</sup> G. Bakewell, 'Μετοικία in the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus', *CLAnt* 16 (1997), 209–28, at 223–6, quotation from 225.

also has ancestral ties to the land of Thebes, and it is tempting to hear, in every occurrence of '*chthôn*' in this play, an echo of the autochthonous inheritance of Oedipus' children.

In an autochthonous city such as Thebes, the body politic can be imagined as having risen directly out of the earth (*chthôn*), a coherent polity from the very beginning and a human expression of the land itself. *Chthôn* generally specifies a visible entity – land or earth – whereas *polis* refers to an invisible collective (the entirety of the citizen body).<sup>37</sup> In the well-governed democratic city, there is no meaningful distinction between the two, as the earth/land is considered to be the collective property of the *polis*. In Periclean Athens, furthermore, the citizen was defined as one who 'had a share' in the *polis*, the city here being figured as something concrete and divisible.<sup>38</sup> *Chthôn* would appear to furnish the fundamentals of civic law and citizen identity (cf. 368–70). Yet the two realms are categorically distinct, as becomes readily apparent in the case of the city whose king treats the land as his personal property and subjects it to his political authority. Creon's failure to recognize that *chthôn* does not come under the legislative purview of the *polis* is symptomatic of his tyrannical frame of mind and of his autocratic leadership style.

As if consciously playing to the Chorus' anxieties about Creon's conflation of the two realms, Antigone in her *kommos* song presents herself as a 'metic', a resident, that is, of the land but not a citizen of the city. She begins with the imperative, 'Look at me', a command that she addresses to the citizens of Thebes (806): ὁρᾷτέ μ', ὦ γᾶς πατρίας πολῖται. Tyrrell and Bennett interpret Antigone's words here as a speech act accompanied by her lifting of her bridal veil; 'the theme of the bride of Hades', they argue, 'is reified in the Antigone who stands before the elders commanding them to see her'.<sup>39</sup> Antigone's command may indeed be a variation on the traditional wedding rite of 'unveiling' (*anakalypteria*), otherwise construed as the moment of consent, when the gaze of the husband first penetrates his wife. But her speech act also has a political dimension, and her naming of the elders as πολῖται paves the way for her later description of herself as μέτοικος. The leader of the Danaid chorus in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* similarly commands Pelasgus to regard her (350) – ἴδε με τὰν ἰκέτιν ('Look at me, the suppliant') – hoping to appeal to both the king's emotions and his ethical conscience through his gaze.

The verbal imperative in both instances functions as an act of supplication. 'Look at me' is a sublimated gesture: it seeks to create a visual connection between suppliant and supplicated similar to that which was usually effected through physical contact. It is furthermore significant that both Pelasgus and the Theban elders are asked to acknowledge, and to pity, the suppliant's precarious position within the city she inhabits. The metaphor of the 'metoikos' as Antigone deploys it (I shall return to her specific language shortly) certainly conforms to David Whitehead's description of the pathos-laden reaction that *metoikia* tends to evoke in its tragic contexts.<sup>40</sup> But, whereas Whitehead treats *metoikos* in tragedy as 'too vague a

<sup>37</sup> This is the case when an adjectival place-name modifies the noun, as in expressions such as Οἰτᾱίαν χθόνα (Soph. Phil. 479).

<sup>38</sup> As it is rendered at *Ath. pol.* 26.4, Pericles' law established birth from two citizen parents – two *astoi* – as a precondition for Athenian citizenship, denying a 'share in the city' to whoever did not meet this standard (μὴ μετέχειν τῆς πόλεως ὅς ἂν μὴ ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ἀστοῖν ἢ γεγονώς).

<sup>39</sup> Tyrrell and Bennett (n. 24), 101.

<sup>40</sup> D. Whitehead, *The Ideology of the Athenian Metic* (Cambridge, 1977), 35–8.

concept to be equivalent to any actually, contemporary connotation',<sup>41</sup> Bakewell sees a more direct line of communication being opened up between tragedy and politics: 'For citizens in the theater', he writes, 'μέτοικοι were individuals they saw and dealt with on a regular basis'.<sup>42</sup> If Bakewell is right, Antigone's self-referential use of the term *metoikos* may have struck her viewers as a kind of political commentary on Creon's policy. She and her brother are earthborn children of Thebes, who have now become part of the city's 'metic' population, finding permanent residency neither above nor below.

The earlier verbal *agon* between Creon and Antigone, containing Antigone's famous lines on 'unwritten customs' (*ἄγραπτα ... νόμιμα* 454–5), offers a preview, as it were, of this more fully fledged 'metic' discourse. Although she has remained silent for some 65 lines by the time Creon addresses her (at 441), Antigone evinces no hesitation when she is called upon to speak. She not only offers a temporal defence of her actions, contrasting the ephemeral laws of the city with eternal and divine justice, but also gives Justice a new spatial inflection. For Antigone, Justice (Dikê) is to be found underground. By this point in the play our gaze, following that of the heroine on stage, has been drawn to the ground and what lies below. We are invited to visualize the *oikos* of Oedipus not as the *skênê* building that stands before us but rather as an invisible, yet very real, space underneath the earth.<sup>43</sup> The prone gaze that we have analysed Antigone as making acquires special significance when viewed in the light of her programmatic 'underworld' discourse.

Creon has asked her if she dared to transgress 'these laws' (*τούσδ' ὑπερβαίνειν νόμους*, 449) – the laws, that is, that he had recently made against burial – and Antigone articulates in speech what her downward gaze already indicated: she obeys a different law and a different Justice.<sup>44</sup> 'For Zeus did not legislate these things, nor did Dikê who lives with the gods below' (*ἡ ξύννοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη*, 451). Dikê is normally thought of as residing with Zeus up on Olympus.<sup>45</sup> So unusual is it to hear of Dikê living with the underworld gods that one editor proposed emending *κάτω* in line 451 to *ἄνω*.<sup>46</sup> But Antigone's placement of Dikê with the gods below makes sense in light of the heroine's autochthonous pedigree and her earth-focussed gaze.

It may be objected that this vision of an underworld Justice is only a figment of the heroine's overcharged imagination. The guard's long rhesis, however, provides independent confirmation of the existence of Antigone's underworld Zeus. In recounting to Creon how Antigone was captured, the guard describes a mysterious dust storm that, arising suddenly out of the ground, covered the corpse in a cloud

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>42</sup> G. Bakewell, 'Εὔνοος καὶ πόλει σωτήριος / μέτοικος: metics, tragedy, and civic ideology', *SyllClass* 10 (1999), 44–64, at 47.

<sup>43</sup> Compare Taplin (n. 32) at 13: 'There are two houses in Sophocles' *Antigone*. One is the royal palace at Thebes, where the play is set. The other, invisible, is the "underworld". Antigone addresses her tomb as a *κατασκαφῆς οἰκῆσις* ('underground house') at 891–2.

<sup>44</sup> Antigone avoids applying the legitimizing term *νόμος* to Kreon's proclamation, e.g. referring to it obliquely as *κήρυγμα* at line 8.

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Hes. *Op.* 259, where Dikê is described as 'seated next to Zeus' (*παρ Διὶ πατρὶ καθέζομένη Κρονίωνι*).

<sup>46</sup> Griffith (n. 2) ad loc: 'So Blaydes here proposed *ἄνω* for *κάτω* (cf. 1072–3 *τοῖς ἄνω θεοῖσιν*). But the gods below have "their own" Justice too, which requires that the dead be buried and allowed to join them (cf. 75 *τοῖς κάτω*, 1070–71; also 458–60, 538–9, 542–3nn.).'

and forced the guards to shut their eyes, as if enduring a ‘god-sent plague’ (θείαν νόσον 421). He calls the dust storm a ‘thunderbolt’ from the earth (417–21):

... καὶ τότε ἐξαίφνης χθονὸς  
 τυφῶς αἶρας σκηπτόν, οὐράνιον ἄχος,  
 πίμπλησι πεδίον, πᾶσαν αἰκίζων φόβην  
 ὕλης πεδιάδος, ἐν δ’ ἐμεστῶθη μέγας  
 αἰθήρ· μύσαντες δ’ εἴχομεν θείαν νόσον.

And then suddenly, a whirlwind raising from the earth a thunderbolt, a pain reaching to the sky, filled the plain, destroying all the foliage of the wooded plain, and the air was filled up greatly. We closed our eyes and endured the god-sent plague.

Griffith comments that ‘usually σκηπτός = “thunderbolt”, but it can be used of any “shaft” or “beam”, traveling up, down, or across’.<sup>47</sup> But in this instance we need not resort to the less colourful readings of *skēptos*. ‘Thunderbolt’ is an entirely appropriate expression to convey the mystery and divine agency of what the guard and his companions have experienced. The guard’s choice of words also places the audience in mind of the strong forces at work beneath the earth, upon whose strength Antigone herself will draw. There is only one god who controls the thunderbolt on Olympus. That a ‘thunderbolt’ now blasts forth from the earth is as clear a sign as any of the workings of Zeus below.

Although the original penalty for burying the corpse of Polynices was to be death by stoning (34–5), when it comes time for Creon to inflict this punishment on Antigone, he instead chooses to have her buried alive in a subterranean enclosure. His change of mind appears to have been dictated by Antigone’s own intense focus on the ground. Creon tells the Chorus that he and the city will be free of pollution (*miasma*), since he has left a small amount of food with the girl (774–6). He says it will be up to Hades – ‘the only god she worships’ – to save her down there (777–80). Antigone’s words and gesture have had a performative force. She has directed Creon’s attention, through her own gaze, to the subterranean level. Her death, moreover, is precisely what will constitute the underworld Dikē’s power to undermine Creon’s rule above. To the force of her rhetoric, Antigone adds the pollution from both her own and Haemon’s dead bodies. Their two bodies below conspire with the one kept forcibly above the ground to turn Creon’s world upside-down and stand his Justice on its head. As Tiresias puts it in no uncertain terms, Creon will pay for having put below what should have been kept above – τῶν ἄνω βαλὼν κάτω – while at the same time keeping above (ἐνθάδε) what should have gone below (1068–71).<sup>48</sup> Together, in other words, Creon and Antigone have created the dynamically inverted vertical axis, by switching the normative dwelling spaces of the living and the dead.

It is to these inverted spatial relations that the metaphor of *metoikia* speaks with particular resonance. Antigone uses ‘metic’ twice during the *kommos* to describe her liminal status among the living (*metoikos*, 852, 868). That Creon then echoes

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., ad loc.

<sup>48</sup> Taplin (n. 32), 16. See too P. Easterling, ‘Women in tragic space’, *BICS* 34 (1987), 15–26, at 22, on Creon’s misuse of space: ‘His treatment of both the corpse of Polynices (exposed on the plain) and of Antigone (shut up alive in her rocky tomb) proves to be a misuse of space – public and private alike – and his attempts to keep public and private separate are shown to be a disastrous failure’.

this metaphor (at 890) is a significant indicator of the political effect of Antigone's rhetoric and of her deictic gestures to the world below. When Creon boasts that he will have his hands pure of Antigone's death by burying her alive, he says that she will be 'relieved of her metic status in the world above' (890). Creon's language – *μετοικία τῆς ἄνω* – comes from Antigone, who earlier described herself as a 'metic' (850–2):

ὡς δὺστανος, βροτοῖς  
οὔτε νεκρὸς νεκροῖσιν  
μέτοικος, οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανούσιν.

Ah, wretched me, neither a living mortal resident [*metoikos*] among the living, nor a corpse resident among the dead.

These lines can be read to reflect Antigone's feeling of alienation from those around her as her death approaches. But it is not just the cognitive landscape of our heroine that has been transformed. As a result of her conflict with Creon, the city itself, to which Creon earlier pointed with such confidence, has radically changed its contours into a place unfit for human habitation. Antigone here expresses to the Chorus a cognitive dimension of her fate, but the metaphor she chooses – *metoikia* – has to do with the displacement of the individual from her natural habitat. In bowing to the dead, Antigone has not only brought herself closer to them but she has also brought the dead closer to us. The space of the *polis* itself will soon become filled with death, turning all the living inhabitants of Thebes into *metoikoi*, like Antigone.

The second time she uses the 'metic' metaphor, Antigone adds the qualification that she is *agamos* (867). Antigone will go back to her father's house unmarried, entering a state of double negation, as it were: neither living nor married, except in so far as she may be considered Haemon's (or Hades') bride in death. *Metoikia* effectively captures the spatial dislocation wrought on both of their lives by the conflict between Antigone and Creon; as a *metoikos*, Antigone is estranged from what lies both above and below. But the metaphor also, perversely, conjoins her fate to Creon's. We saw earlier that his son's death turns Creon, in the words of the messenger, into a 'breathing corpse' (*ἐμφυχὸν νεκρόν*, 1167). He is a metic in all but name, suffering the very condition that he has imposed on Antigone. Neuburg puts it well: 'Creon is reduced to death among the living, as he reduced Antigone; but he suffers the more, for having to live on (1288, 1322). The irony is immense'.<sup>49</sup>

*Polis* is not coterminous with *chthôn* in *Antigone*, we learn at long last from the blind prophet. Tiresias' verdict that the city is 'sick' from its ruler's diseased mind reprises the theme of *νόσος* (1015): *καὶ ταῦτα τῆς σῆς ἐκ φρενὸς νοσεῖ πόλις*. This time, however, the announcement is made in the voice of one who has the divinely invested authority to be able to authenticate the guard's earlier report of a *θείαν νόσον* (421). Underworld Zeus did indeed cast his vote against Creon by sending up the chthonic 'thunderbolt' to obscure burial of Polynices' corpse. The share of earth that Polynices receives is 'his own' (*οἰκείας χθονός*, 1203), as reported by the messenger. It is made his own in burial although, as we now

<sup>49</sup> Neuburg (n. 24), 75.

realise, it was never the city's to deny him. Antigone's chthonian cosmology has been vindicated.

### CONCLUSION

How to stage Antigone's gesture is a question that at first sight might only interest an archivist of ancient Greek theatre performance. Upon closer examination, however, this gesture has revealed its pivotal position between the upper and lower realms, pointing up the tensions between them that constitute the play's vertical axis. While bodies are always the medium of theatrical mimesis, they can sometimes also be the message itself. Gestures such as the one we have excavated here are integral to what a play means and *how* it means. From the script of *Antigone* I have extracted significant clues about the Antigone actor's non-speaking role, for tragedy was (and is) an embodied performance genre. We miss out on important aspects of a play's meaning if we attend only to the verbal action. In *Antigone* especially, where the two central characters project very different realities onto the shared space they inhabit, viewers are likewise prompted to respond to non-verbal cues in forming their judgements.

In focussing her gaze fixedly on the ground, Antigone reinforces her commitment to transmigration (*metoikia*), gesturing a promise that she will soon fulfil. She not only speaks the language of devotion, she actually embodies this reverential attitude toward the dead. Her bowing to the ground is part of a larger strategy of resistance, one that acquires sharper articulation retroactively, in the light of the 'metic' discourse that she mobilizes to win over the Theban elders. In short, Antigone's spoken discourse is directed outwards to the city and its male constituency, while her body language draws upon more traditionally female 'speech' patterns. Through the inspired combination of these two speech registers – 'disenfranchised citizen-turned-metic' on the one hand, and 'dutiful daughter' on the other – Antigone succeeds in toppling Creon's regime while keeping her gaze focussed on the ground, a remarkable stance indeed for a political revolutionary.<sup>50</sup>

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