ANTONIS K. PETRIDES

PROXEMICS AND STRUCTURAL SYMMETRY IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA* *

❧

The work of anthropologist E.T. Hall (1959; 1966), sociologists R. Hodge and G. Kress (1988) and others, has shown eloquently how cardinal proxemics is, in association with other categories of nonverbal signification and spatial analysis, such as kinesics, for understanding social, and by extension theatrical, semiotics. Kinesics examines the nonverbal signs generated by body movement (gesture, posture, etc). Proxemics, more comprehensively, zooms out to the physical relations between bodies interacting in space and thus structuring space itself as "a specialised elaboration of culture".[1]

Proxemics, therefore, propounds the idea that physical interaction between bodies variously positioned in space produces cultured meaning, which encodes the protocols and the rituals of society at large, and pertains to major determinants of communal identity, such as status, class, gender, social roles, etc. Such substantial configurations of bodies, occasionally fortuitous in social space, are never so in the theatre, where proxemics, like every other system of signs, is overdetermined: even the most meagre detail in the physical organisation of theatrical space (architectural, scenic or interpersonal), even the slightest change in the movement and the positioning of actors on stage (what is commonly known as *blocking*) is framed as a sign.[2] Relations of proximity and distance between two or more interacting

---

1.   Hall (1966) 1.
2.   On theatrical proxemics, see e.g. Elam (1980) 62–7; Aston & Savona (1991) 111–22, 128–9, 153–5. As far as I know, there is no specialised study of tragic proxemics per se, although many valuable insights are to be found in the two best discussions of

bodies can betray varying degrees of intimacy, hence speak to the negotiation of interpersonal dynamics in public and private social space — all the more so in the semiotically much more dense space of theatre. The positioning of bodies relative not only to one another but to significant objects or loci in the field, such as, in Greek tragedy, an altar, a palace door, or the roof of the palace, can also testify to the quality of their interaction.

Moreover, though, as underlined by Hodge and Kress' very important improvement on Hall's schemas, as well as by the work of Henri Lefebvre,[3] proxemic meanings in social interaction are produced not only on the horizontal (distance/closeness, formality/intimacy) but also on the vertical axis of space: thus the positioning of the body on the axis of high/low can index a position of authority or weakness.[4] Disparities in elevation (being positioned on relatively lower or higher ground or using body posture to create a sense of height/level difference between one's body and another's) can thus mark status and power, or indeed, as in the exodos of the *Medea*, the extreme reversal thereof.

David Wiles (1997, 175–86) offers an insightful analysis of the importance of the vertical axis in such plays as Aeschylus' *Eumenides,* Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* or Euripides' *Suppliants.* The vertical axis, we shall argue, and the dialectics of horizontality vs. verticality, are also cardinal for appreciating the value of proxemics in the *Medea.* The vertical axis becomes ever so loaded in the context of this play, insomuch as such general proxemic and kinesic codes as high/low are further charged by two emblematic discourses of Greek culture, where the power game is largely played out in spatial terms, too: the public interface of male and female, itself notionally unimaginable hence theatrically most momentous, and the ethics of supplication,[5] which not only bring to bear their own proxemic

---

tragic space at large, Wiles (1997) and Rehm (2002). See also Wiles (2000) 89–127; Ley (2007). Revermann (2006a) 129–45 showcases the value of proxemics for Aristophanes. Excellent examples of proxemic analysis with reference to Homeric epic are offered by Lateiner (1992) and (1995a). Lateiner (1995b) examines proxemics in the wider context of nonverbal semantics. The study of kinesics, especially body language and gesture, was more fruitful. Cairns (2005) includes a number of intelligent studies of body language across the Greek and Roman cultures with much earlier bibliography: see especially the piece by Llewellyn-Jones, who looks comparatively at the male actor playing female roles in Greek tragedy and Japanese Kabuki.

3.   Lefebvre (1991), quoted and discussed in detail by Wiles (1997) 175–86.
4.   Hodge & Kress (1988) 52–3.
5.   On supplication, the classic reference is Gould (1973) and now Naiden (2006).

and gestural conventions but also enhance the ambiguity of Medea, this grand manipulator of social protocol,[6] as a moral agent.

In the three successive encounters of Medea and Jason especially, otherwise fairly static scenes kinetically speaking, elevation and body posture (the latter potentially producing difference in elevation, especially in the context of *hiketeia,* where kneeling is frequently attested) are telling signifiers, which create a juxtapositional effect between the scenes. Thus proxemics (including blocking) and kinesics convey not only the theatricality but also, and this is central to our argument, some of the structuring principles underlying Euripides' *Medea*; most importantly, the fact that the *Medea,* like other Greek tragedies, belying the Aristotelian preference (which later became a classicising demand) for linearity and 'unity' in plot construction, relies on patterns of structural symmetry and juxtaposition between characters and scenes. This kind of theatrical narrative, which turns on mirroring, thus on a palindromic rather than a linear flow of the action, and which is not bound by a strict 'necessitarian' logic of cause and effect (κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς καὶ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον) in the arrangement of theatrical material on stage, implicates the spectator in the meaning-creating process, not least by requiring a careful decoding of the visual element of the performance. The study of proxemics, in other words, sheds light not only on Euripides as an *homme de théâtre,*[7] but also on his techniques of theatrical narrative and plot construction (that is, of unfolding the story in theatrical time and space). As an added bonus the combined study of proxemics and structural symmetry in the *Medea* can throw into sharper relief such apparent 'peculiarities' as the Aigeus-scene, an infamous *pierre de scandale* at least since Aristotle's belly-aching in *Poet.* 1461b19–21 (see the concluding section of this paper).

Let us now turn to the main body of the evidence that concerns us here. Proxemics, blocking and kinesics play a very significant, yet underappreciated, role in establishing structural and thematic parallelisms between the three successive encounters of Medea and Jason. This fact demands an audience alert to the intricacies of visual representation in performance.[8]

To stress the importance of these encounters between husband and wife in the *Medea* is needless: they are second only to the filicide-scene in

---

6.   See Allan (2007).
7.   On this see Bordaux (1996).
8.   On the substantial, yet certainly stratified, competence of Athenian theatre audiences, see Revermann (2006b).

dramatic tension and theatrical allure.[9] What is less often noted is Eurip-
ides' ingenuity in securing the most evocative, strategic locations for them,
structurally speaking, in each of the three phases of the action (Medea be-
trayed, 1–626; Medea vengeful, 866–1292; Medea triumphant, 1293–1419:
in-between phase 1 and 2 lies the transitional Aigeus-episode, which begets
the idea of filicide and provides Medea with the necessary hope for a refuge
after the act). The first encounter, in the second *epeisodion* (446–626), *c l i -
m a x e s* the 'betrayed Medea' phase: Medea, angry and hurt, lambasts Ja-
son, who has defaulted on his oaths, in a ἅμιλλα λόγων (546). The second,
in the fourth *epeisodion* (866–975), *u n l e a s h e s* the revenge of the injured
beast, as Medea sets her deadly plans in motion by manipulating not only
logoi but also, arguably, a cultural repertoire of gesture and body language.
Finally, the third showdown of the couple in the Exodos (1293–1419)
c o n c l u d e s the terrible triumph of the child killer, with Medea now con-
cluding her couched threat of 579–85, that Jason's unscrupulous rhetoric
would eventually become his own undoing. Euripides, it transpires, devises
an encounter between his two protagonists, successively, in the *end*, in the
beginning and again in the *end* of each turn of the plot.

  The potent symmetry of this structure should be obvious. To place the
first encounter between Jason and Medea at the end of the first phase is
necessary, for Medea needs the established support and sympathy of the
audience, the chorus and the minor characters, in order for her total victory
in the *agon* later to allow no doubts whatsoever as to where the moral ad-
vantage lies. It is also expedient to position her subsequent encounter with
her husband at the initiation of her vengeful scheme, and to conclude the
play with the third and last one. The reasons for this are not only logistical
(first, to find a way for Medea to send her fatal gifts to her husband's new
wife, and later to rub her success in Jason's face prior to her departure).
First and foremost the positioning of these encounters is symbolic: Medea's
revenge must begin and end with Jason. As for the children, the brutalized
means of this ἐξώλεια: in the *medial* encounter of Jason and Medea they
probably stand *between* their parents, as they are used as practical *media-
tors* in their sham reconciliation;[10] in the end, they are killed in a scene that

---

9. On the conflict in Medea which renders this scene one of the most haunting in Greek
    literature, see most importantly Foley (2001) 243–71.
10. Medea asks the children to come out of the *skene* building, which in the play repre-
    sents the abode of Jason and Medea, and to greet their father by grabbing his hand in

is itself *flanked* by the parents' second and third encounters. The structure of the *Medea* is as masterful as it is un-Aristotelian.

The three interfaces between Medea and Jason in the play are staged by Euripides with minute attention to detail. I will not reiterate known facts here; instead I shall focus on an aspect, rather a possibility, of that staging, which to the best of my knowledge has gone unnoticed: I will suggest that the relative position of the two spouses' bodies in each of the three scenes is such as to strengthen the structural link between the scenes and, above all, as to intimate the shifting balance of power between the two characters. The vertical axis and particularly the parameter of *height,* i.e. differences in elevation produced either by the level on which the actors stand in relation to one another in each scene or by the posture of their bodies, is of the essence.

In the first scene (446–626), Jason enters from the city-side parodos on stage left (which led to Creon's palace among other locations) to convince Medea to cease her clamorous remonstrations and go quietly, having accepted his charitable hand-outs. Medea and Jason consequently face off in a contest of *logoi* and τιμή. I think it is reasonable to infer that the bodies of the actors in this scene are placed *on the same level*, either on the orchestra floor[11] (from where Medea may have addressed the chorus earlier, as she attempted to win them over), or alternatively on the slightly raised speaking platform, and in a frontal relationship with the audience,[12] who 'adjudicate' the *agon*.

---

a gesture of reconciliation and reunification — like Medea did in their ἐγγύη (894–905). Medea herself is facing Jason and the children up to the point that she cannot take it any longer and she turns the other way (αὕτη, τί χλωροῖς δακρύοις τέγγοις κόρας, / στρέψασα λευκὴν ἔμπαλιν παρηίδα;). Since Aigeus probably exited from the opposite parodos, whence he had entered, Medea may be standing closer to stage right, whereas Jason must be closer to the parodos on stage left. If the blocking here is correctly reconstructed (some scholars want Aigeus to enter from stage right and leave from stage left), then the children come out precisely in-between their parents.

11.   Whether or not actors in the fifth century stepped on the orchestra to interact with other actors and/or with the chorus is a hotly debated issue. Some scholars deny the idea altogether. Others (for instance Mastronarde 1999) concede that actors and choruses may interact on the orchestra, but doubt whether actors regularly played in an orchestral position *surrounded* by a chorus. I subscribe to the view that the sharing of the orchestra space between actors and chorus is as likely in fifth-century tragedy as it is almost certain in contemporary comedy. On this, see Ley & Evans (1985); Wiles (1997) 77; Wiles (2000) 106.

12.   Frontal acting in Greek theatre is necessitated by the acoustics of the mask, see Meineck (2011). This, however, does not preclude semiotic exploitation of this practical necessity, quite the contrary.

The actors playing on the same level at this particular juncture of the action, especially as they embark on a rhetorical skirmish, in which each combatant is given roughly the same amount of lines, would be a theatrical ploy underlining this peculiar equality as the focal paradox in Medea's and Jason's relationship: Medea is master of her own fate, and her union with Jason has been the result of an unorthodox form of ἐγγύη (the shaking of hands between the husband and the bride herself, not her father, whom she has betrayed). The very fact that she is now out and about, turning against the treacherous Jason with a language deeply subversive not only of social protocol but also of cultural stereotypes, is itself a powerful theatrical marker. From a position of spatial equality Medea is demanding the social equity she believes she has earned for herself. Jason has broken his oaths; his vilification is strongly visualised by the fact that *now*, but significantly *not* in their two subsequent encounters, where the parameter of elevation speaks differently, Medea's body is emphatically on an equal footing with her husband's — an equality that is both unflattering for Jason himself and ominous for his house, in front of which this *agon* is played out.

From this position of spatial equality, Medea, ironically, both destabilises Jason's most loaded accusations (that she, a barbarian woman, represents a threatening, subversive version of στόμαργος γλωσσαλγία: it is Jason who is exposed as the most inanely sophistic of the two) and confirms them: Medea *dwarfs* Jason's supposed competence in *logoi* with a brilliant, and totally 'un-female-like' show of words: proxemics stamps out the challenge that Medea poses to patriarchy in this play. Additionally, even more intricately, the moral advantage Medea gains in the *agon,* her right to exact revenge upon her enemies, cannot easily be undone completely even after the filicide.[13] Standing on the same level as Jason in their first encounter Medea makes for herself a lasting defence out of the heroic code that she embodies and that her husband has relinquished.[14] The filicide, after all, is nothing but the logical, if extreme, corollary of this heroic code.

In the second meeting of the two, Jason must be entering again from the direction of the palace, where he had retired at 622.[15] Once more there is

---

13. See Steidle (1968) 165; Easterling (1977).
14. On Medea and the heroic code see Bongie (1977); Allan (2008) 67-80; and especially Levett (2010). *Contra:* Rehm (1989), who argues that Medea struggles against these very heroic values in an attempt to establish a new feminine ethics.
15. Medea accompanies his exit with the following telling words: χώρει· πόθῳ γὰρ τῆς νεοδμήτου κόρης / αἱρῇ χρονίζων δωμάτων ἐξώπιος (623–4).

no unambiguous textual evidence as to the proxemics and the blocking of the scene, but reasonable inferences can be made, especially since the proxemics here cannot but reflect in some way Medea's manoeuvres with(in) the cultural norm. If the first scene pivoted on the surprising equalisation of male and female, this second meeting of faithless husband and betrayed wife revolves on the equally surprising about-face of Medea. In this scene, which launches her vengeful scheme, Medea literally acts the part of the docile female and the helpless foreigner (878–81), in order to throw Jason off: thus, metaphorically speaking, by adopting the two stereotypes Jason had attempted to belittle her by in the *agon,* Medea *lessens herself,* she pretends to stoop to an *inferior level*, while she is supposedly granting Jason's prerogatives. Since stereotypes have not only mental but visual correlatives, too, we can imagine that the actor playing Medea took pains to physicalise the feigned self-deprecation and submission of his character here — especially since, by virtue of juxtaposition, the second encounter of Jason and Medea plays off Medea's meeting with Creon, too. The nexus of mirrorings in Euripides, after all, is hardly unidirectional.

As in her preceding encounter with Creon, Medea once again appeals to her interlocutor's goodwill, 'humbly' apologising (Ἰᾶσον, αἰτοῦμαί σε τῶν εἰρημένων / συγγνώμον᾽ εἶναι, 869–70) and asking for a favour — then to stay in Corinth for one more day, now to be given the chance to make her contrition manifest to Jason's new bride, whom she has insulted. The Creon episode, however, crucially, was a scene of pseudo-*hiketeia*. It is, I think, safe to suppose that then, Medea did not only speak as a *hiketis* but also handled herself with the characteristic gestures of a suppliant, who traditionally lowers his/her body in front of the receiver of the supplication (μὴ πρός σε τῶν γονάτων καὶ τῆς νεογάμου κόρης, 324, must indicate the common suppliant gesture of touching the beseeched party's knee). Now, playing the role of the submissive woman, Medea is not a *hiketis* proper anymore, but she certainly feigns a comparable position of weakness and disadvantage (880–2). In this scene of pseudo-penitence and regret, as in that previous scene of deception, Medea must be meant to play *lower than Jason,* in a style similar to the one she adopted with Creon. Lower elevation here, as there, is achieved by the kind of body posture that performs, well-nigh metatheatrically (since Medea is consciously *acting*), the role of the suppliant. Thus the deception of both hapless males standing in Medea's way is underscored by the repetition of the same gestural vocabulary, which Medea utilises again for the third time when she becomes a true sup-

pliant, in the Aigeus-scene, and which brings her medial encounter with her husband in sharp contrast with the first and the last. Structural juxtaposition by way of proxemics and kinesics in the *Medea* is dense, and it seems to turn precisely on such triadic schemes.

The most apt moment for Medea to lower her body in this disconcerting show of manipulated cultural values and norms must be the entrance of the children, whom Medea instructs (and presumably manhandles to that effect) to clasp their father's hand (894–905) — in an ironic repetition of the gesture which had sealed Medea's and Jason's union,[16] and in an ominous anticipation of the very consolation Medea will deny Jason in the Exodos, to touch the children's massacred bodies. *Standing tall* over his scurrying children and his 'rueful' wife, Medea's condescending spouse is given the illusion of superiority and absolute triumph in theatrically transparent, pathetic and, of course, portentous terms — especially insomuch as in the third and last meeting of husband and wife the children (and perhaps Jason himself at a certain point) will be *prostrated* and Medea will be *soaring high*. Such back-and-forth spectating is *sine qua non* for the audience of the *Medea.*

The semiotic significance of height literally *takes off* in the final confrontation of Jason and Medea in the Exodos, when the infanticide enters the acting area riding the chariot of the Sun (in fact, the crane), in an ironic instantiation of the *deus ex machina*.[17] The spatial dynamics and the proxemics are totally reversed here: not only is Medea not on her knees anymore (factually and/or figuratively), but she is μεταρσία. Jason, on the contrary, is reduced to a hapless, crashed spectator. Medea's final triumph as well as her graduation to something that is beyond the human is theatrically rendered by the drastically elevated position of her body relative to Jason's and everyone else's.

The ironies are piquant. Medea is cursed as a bloodthirsty Beast (λέαινα, 1342), worse than any mythological paradigm of savagery (τῆς Τυρσηνίδος / Σκύλλης ἔχουσαν ἀγριωτέραν φύσιν, 1343–4); yet she appears in the spatial register that pertains to the exact opposite ontological extreme, the God; and that she does by way of a piece of theatrical machinery designed to introduce divinities, indeed ones bringing salvation or respite. Whereas Medea functions as an ἀλάστωρ and an Erinys (1260), that is, as a chthonic

---

16.   On Medea's right hand, see Flory (1978).
17.   On Euripides' handling of this convention see the dialogue between Cunningham (1954) and Collinge (1962).

element of archaic retribution, she is not consigned to the darkness of the underworld (symbolised by the lowest spatial register), as Jason argues she should have; instead, she boasts on Sun's, the light-god's, chariot (1327–8), while Jason himself probably stands again on the exact opposite of the spatial spectrum in terms of the vertical axis, the orchestra. In fact, and this is something we should not lose sight of, Medea is literally basking in the brilliant sun that illuminates the Theatre of Dionysus during this spring performance: the crane must lift Medea in such a height that the body of the actor is not even shadowed by the *skene* building. The actor playing Medea on the crane, the chariot of the Sun, presents himself in the full radiance of direct sunlight. Euripides could indeed count on the bright Attic skies praised by the chorus earlier (828–30) to ensure that the actor playing Medea would be all-luminous in this puzzling moment of climax.

The children continue to be by Medea's side, as in her second conversation with Jason, only the position of their body, too, is tragically altered: they are now *horizontal*. The ironic reversal of the vertical axis is no less mordant here. In a scene that bespeaks Euripides' dexterous manipulation of theatrical conventions, Jason expects to see his children being rolled out, as dead bodies usually are in tragedy: χαλᾶτε κλῇδας ὡς τάχιστα, πρόσπολοι / ἐκλύεθ' ἁρμούς, ὡς ἴδω διπλοῦν κακόν (1314–5). However, the beloved fallen bodies are ironically not *low* but *high,* not on the ἐκκύκλημα of death, but on the μηχανή of the immortals. They are not by the side of the father who had forsaken them, but neither will they accompany to her new abode the mother who has consumed them. Instead they are being *displaced* to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia at Perachora (1379).

As they are being shipped off to their destined place in the subterranean level, the children depart from the highest, most vertical position afforded by Greek theatre: regardless of the fact that the mention of Hera Akraia may be a detail aetiological in nature, it is certainly tempting to suspect that Euripides plays caustically here with Ἀκραία and ἄκρον, height. In a sense, at first sight the children, too, who are *raised* by their mother to the level of ἥρωες, receivers of apotropaic rites, seem to be elevated — metaphorically, as much as literally — in a paradoxical (and hair-raising) triumph of their own. However, hero worship is still worship of the *dead.* The children eventually will be lowered to the ground, as their mother will once again fly off. Significantly, the two boys remain *horizontal* throughout this scene: as they travel to the place where they will receive what are practically immor-

talising honours, the children's horizontality reminds the spectators that death (hence, too, the crime that led to that death) cannot truly be undone.

And this perplexing paradox, the irreversible horizontality of death surprisingly displayed to the audience in the final scene from the most *indemnifying* vertical position possible, the register of gods, is the crux of the matter: Medea's last gesture certainly exacerbates Jason's debacle, as it is meant to do, but also, poignantly, it begs the question of Medea's own share in the pain and the blame. Is the virtual apotheosis of hero worship — an intended 'amortisation' of death, if one is allowed the pun — cleaning Medea's slate in any sort of way? The final scene of the play is tactically aporetic,[18] and Euripides' crafty implication of mythical aetiology,[19] as much as clever, juxtapositional blocking, only increases this *aporia*.

To sum up: Medea's confrontation with Jason begins from a place of *parity*, which Jason's treachery upsets despite Medea's protests. Medea is then *diminished*, as she is side-lined by her husband in favour of a new royal bride. She launches her awesome revenge by *lowering* herself even further in a gesture of pseudo-repentance. From this ostensible nadir, her final triumph *shoots up*, physicalized as an imposing flight to safety and to a new lease of life (and crime!), as the children are all the while destined for the low of the tomb and the high of hero worship. Proxemics, mainly on the vertical axis, especially the blocking of Jason and Medea in their three successive encounters, is key in the stagecraft of Euripides' shocking play: not only does it articulate structural juxtapositions between scenes that give cohesion to the stage action in an otherwise 'open' plot structure, it also maps the fundamental conflict of the story on the acting space.

In his fine recent book, *The Art of Euripides* (2010), Donald Mastronarde lays due emphasis on the 'open', audience-centred structuring techniques Euripides often employs in his plots. These techniques are opposed to the linearity and the 'unity' privileged by classicizing poetics in the wake of Aristotle's principles. An author-controlled structure κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς καὶ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, Mastronarde notes, "tends toward concentration and self-containment, creating an impression of totality and unity through a simply organized structure with a single rhythm of rise and fall and through restric-

---

18. For an opposite opinion, see Kovacs (1993), who believes that the denouement of the *Medea* is a manifestation of Διὸς βουλή.

19. See Dunn (1994), 1995); Iles Johnson (1997).

tion to the deliberate actions of a few figures". On the contrary, in an 'open' structure, "the interconnection of the acts or scenes is to be understood by an inductive movement that notes *juxtapositions and implicit parallels and contrasts* rather than by a deductive movement that recognizes a causal connection in terms of 'probability or necessity'" (my emphasis). Most importantly, "some or all connections must be supplied by the interpreting audience".[20]

Mastronarde discusses a number of Euripidean plays in terms of such strategies of juxtaposition (*Troades, Supplices*) and mirroring (*Hippolytos, Heracles, Hecuba, Helen, Iphigenia in Tauris, Andromache*).[21] I hope the preceding pages have shown that juxtaposition is the main structural device of the *Medea,* too. Juxtapositional techniques appear in a variety of forms and guises in Greek tragedy, as plays reflect on one another within a trilogy (such as in the *Oresteia*), or as different episodes and characters play off each other in a single play. Euripides' *Medea*, a play which, unsurprisingly, Aristotle seems to have considered as an example to be avoided in many respects,[22] is a hotbed of juxtapositional structuring. It comprises even the mother of all structural blunders in tragedy in the eyes of the philosopher, namely the "improbable" (ἄλογος) appearance of King Aegeus at the exact moment Medea needs him and without the slightest dramatic preparation — almost like a *deus ex machina*.[23]

---

20. Mastronarde (2010) 64.
21. Mastronarde (2010) 68–83.
22. Aristotle mentions the *Medea* three times in the *Poetics*. In the first instance (*Poet.* 1453b29), he seems impartial when he acknowledges that to kill one's φίλοι knowingly and consciously like Medea is *one* method to arouse pity and fear. However, in 1453b36–1454a3, this method is deemed deficient in tragic substance, second only to planning a murder knowingly and then not going through with the plan (τὸ μὲν γινώσκοντα μελλῆσαι καὶ μὴ πρᾶξαι χείριστον […] τὸ δὲ πρᾶξαι δεύτερον). Further down (1453b30–1454b2), Aristotle is clearly derogatory: φανερὸν οὖν ὅτι καὶ τὰς λύσεις τῶν μύθων ἐξ αὐτοῦ δεῖ τοῦ μύθου συμβαίνειν, καὶ μὴ ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Μηδείᾳ ἀπὸ μηχανῆς καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἰλιάδι τὰ περὶ τὸν ἀπόπλουν. The third instance, *Poet.* 1461b19–21, the notorious castigation of the Aigeus scene (quoted below), is contested. Some scholars have argued that Aristotle may be referring here to Euripides' *Aigeus* rather than to the Aigeus-scene in the *Medea*. These doubts, however, are not widely shared.
23. Cf. *Poet.* 1461b19–21: ὀρθὴ δ' ἐπιτίμησις καὶ ἀλογία καὶ μοχθηρία, ὅταν μὴ ἀνάγκης οὔσης μηθὲν χρήσηται τῷ ἀλόγῳ, ὥσπερ Εὐριπίδης τῷ Αἰγεῖ, ἢ τῇ πονηρίᾳ, ὥσπερ ἐν Ὀρέστῃ <τῇ> τοῦ Μενελάου. On the Aigeus scene, see Mastronarde (1994) 281–304, and the specialized studies especially of Buttrey (1958); Dunkle (1969); and Sfyroeras (1994–5).

Modern scholars, of course, recognise that Aigeus is not introduced here merely because he is instrumental for the resolution of the plot (if resolution is at all what happens at the end of the *Medea*): his scene emphasizes major themes in the play (ὅρκος and τιμή, childlessness and the destruction of the *oikos,* the "vanity of *logoi*"[24] as a means of communication, etc). However, I submit, the Aigeus scene justifies itself primarily by way of its structural juxtaposition with the encounters of Medea with Creon and with Jason (especially their first face-off). Aigeus in the *Medea* is an anti-Creon (a king of advanced age, who will receive Medea instead of ostracising her; a king who is given the promise of an offspring, at the very moment that Medea is planning the demise of Creon's child; a king who receives an actual supplication, whereas Creon had received a feigned one, etc.). Aigeus is above an anti-Jason: he is the nobleman who, unlike Jason, will stick to his oaths even against his best interests, introducing to Athens a bloody destroyer of her own flesh and blood, who, as the audience knows, in the land of divine harmony (824–45) will prove just as pernicious as she had been in Corinth.[25]

Aigeus, then, is introduced as an anti-Creon and an anti-Jason: another triadic pattern of juxtaposition, which accounts, at least partly, for the 'abnormality' of the Aigeus-episode. The crosspollination between the Aigeus-, the Creon- and the Jason-scenes of the *Medea,* as well as between the three Medea-Jason scenes themselves, shows how cardinal juxtaposition is for comprehending Euripides' dramatic structures, and especially the *Medea,* where the principle seems to be very strongly at play. Juxtapositional structuring can be achieved by a variety of bridging techniques (linguistic, thematic or theatrical). I hope to have shown that proxemics and kinesics can be as important as any among these.

Open University of Cyprus

---

24. See Boedeker (1991).
25. The Athenian audience knows that Medea's brief spell in Athens would be nefarious, but perhaps not to the effect of being "an ironic replication of her stay in Corinth", as Sfyroeras 1994–1995, 126, wants it, since Medea will try to assassinate Theseus (Aigeus' eagerly-awaited child, for whose conception she is not be credited), but will, of course, fail. This was probably the plot of Euripides' lost *Aigeus.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allan, A.L. (2007), "Masters of Manipulation: Euripides' (and Medea's) Use of Oaths in *Medea*", in A.H. Sommerstein & J. Fletcher (eds.), *Horkos: the Oath in Greek Society,* Bristol, 113–24.

Allan, W. (2008), *Euripides: Medea,* (Duckworth Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy) London.

Aston, E. & Savona, G. (1991), *Theatre as a Sign System. A Semiotics of Text and Performance,* London.

Boedeker, D. (1991), "Euripides' Medea and the Vanity of Logoi", *CPh* 86, 95–112.

Bongie, E.B. (1977), "Heroic Elements in the *Medea* of Euripides", *TAPhA* 107, 27-56.

Bordaux, L. (1996), "Quelques Remarques sur Euripide, Homme de Théâtre dans *Médée*", *Pallas,* 45, 169–79.

Buttrey, T.V. (1958), "Accident and Design in Euripides' *Medea*", *AJPh* 79.1, 1–17.

Cairns, D.L. (2005), *Body Language in the Greek and Roman Worlds,* Swansea.

Collinge, N.E. (1962), "Medea *ex machina*", *CPh* 57, 170–2.

Cunningham, M.P. (1954), "Medea ἀπὸ μηχανῆς", *CPh* 49, 151–60.

Dunkle, J.R. (1969), "The Aegeus Episode and the Theme of Euripides' *Medea*", *TAPhA* 100, 97–107.

Dunn, F.M. (1994), "Euripides and the Rites of Hera Akraia", *GRBS* 35, 103–15.

Dunn, F.M. (1995), "Pausanias on the Tomb of Medea's Children", *Mnemosyne* 48, 348–51.

Easterling, P.E. (1977), "The Infanticide in Euripides' *Medea*", *YCS* 25, 177–91.

Elam, K. (1980), *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama,* London.

Flory, S. (1978), "Medea's Right Hand: Promises and Revenge", *TAPhA* 108, 69–74.

Foley, H.P. (2001), *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy,* New Jersey.

Gould, J. P. (1973), "Hiketeia", *JHS* 93, 74–103.

Hall, E.T. (1959), *The Silent Language,* Garden City, NY.

Hall, E.T. (1966), *The Hidden Dimension,* Garden City, NY.

Hodge, R & Kress, G. 1988. *Social Semiotics,* Cambridge.

Iles Johnston, S. (1997), "Corinthian Medea and the Cult of Hera Akraia", in J.J. Clauss & S. Iles Johnston (eds.), *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, Princeton, 44–70.

Kovacs, D, (1993), "Zeus in Euripides' *Medea*", *AJPh* 114.1, 45–70.

Lateiner, D. (1992), "Heroic Proxemics: Social Space and Distance in the *Odyssey*", *TAPhA* 122, 133–63.

Lateiner, D. (1995a), "Proxemic and Chronemic in Homeric Epic: Time and Space in Heroic Social Interaction", *CW* 98.4, 413-21.

Lateiner, D. (1995b), *Sardonic Smile: Nonverbal Behaviour in Homeric Epic,* Ann Arbor.

Lefebvre, H. (1991), *The Production of Space,* tr. D. Nicholson–Smith, Oxford.

Levett, B. (2010), "Verbal Autonomy and Verbal Self-Restraint in Euripides' *Medea*", *CPh* 105.1, 54-68.

Ley, G. (2007), *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus,* Chicago.

Ley G. & Evans, M. (1985), "The Orchestra as Acting Area in Greek Tragedy", *Ramus* 14, 75–84.

Mastronarde, D.J. (1994), *Euripides: Medea,* Cambridge.

Mastronarde, D.J. (1999), "Knowledge and Authority in the Choral Voice of Euripidean Tragedy", *Syllecta Classica* 10, 87–104.

Mastronarde, D.J. (2010), *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context,* Cambridge.

Meineck, P. (2011), "The Neuroscience of the Greek Tragic Mask", *Arion* 19.1, 113–58.

Naiden, F. S. (2006), *Ancient Supplication*, Oxford.

Rehm, R. (1989), "Medea and the λόγος of the Heroic", *Eranos* 87, 97-115.

Rehm, R. (2002), *The Play of Space: Spatial Transformation in Greek Tragedy,* Princeton & Oxford.

Revermann, M. (2006a), *Comic Business: Theatricality, Dramatic Technique and Performance Contexts of Aristophanic Comedy,* Oxford.

Revermann, M. (2006b), "The Competence of Theatre-Audiences in Fifth- and Fourth-Century Athens", *JHS* 126, 99-124.

Sfyroeras, P. (1994–5), "The Ironies of Salvation: The Aigeus Scene in Euripides' *Medea*", *CJ* 90.2, 125–42.

Steidle, W. (1968), *Studien zum antiken Drama, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Bühnenspiels,* Munich.

Wiles, D. (1997), *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning,* Cambridge.

Wiles, D. (2000), *Greek Theatre Performance,* Cambridge.