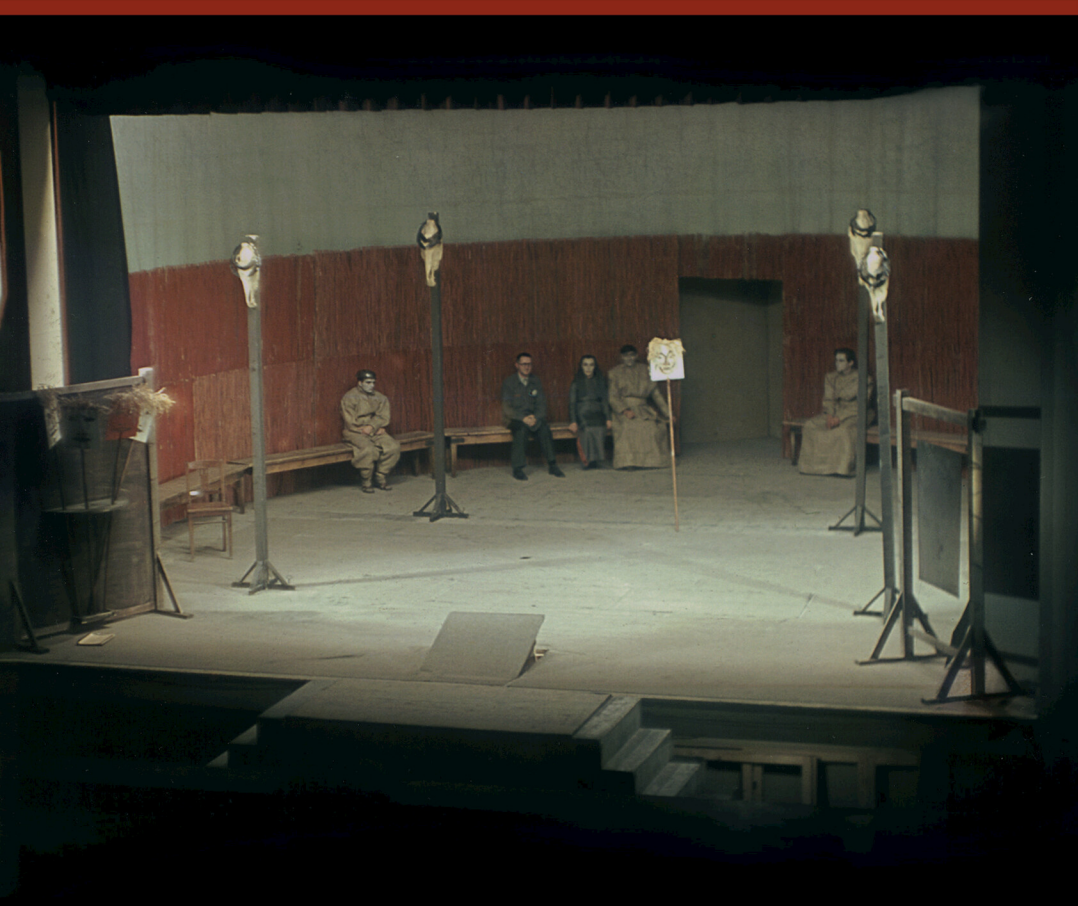


CLASSICS AFTER ANTIQUITY



Martin Revermann

Brecht and Tragedy

Radicalism, Traditionalism, Eristics

Brecht and Tragedy

This wide-ranging, detailed and engaging study of Brecht's complex relationship with Greek tragedy and the tragic tradition argues that this relationship is fundamental for understanding his radicalism. Featuring an extensive discussion of *The Antigone of Sophocles* (1948) and further related works (the *Antigone* model book and the *Small Organon for the Theatre*), the monograph includes the first-ever publication of the complete set of the *Antigone* colour photographs taken by Ruth Berlau. This is complemented by comparatist explorations of many of Brecht's own plays as his experiments with tragedy conceptualized as the 'big form'. The significance for Brecht of the Greek tragic tradition is positioned in relation to other formative influences on his work (Asian theatre, Naturalism, comedy, Schiller and Shakespeare). Brecht emerges as a theatre artist of enormous range and creativity, who has succeeded in re-shaping and re-energizing tragedy and has carved paths for its continued artistic and political relevance.

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3 | Utilizing Greek Tragedy: Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles* (1948)

Sophocles the Barbarian

Es kann sich nicht mehr darum handeln, im Griechentum Kultur aufzuzeigen, als sei's das Höchstmaß. Was die Klassiker der Bürgertums machten, interessiert nur am Ästhetischen allein. (Selbst an der Demokratie nur Ästhetisch interessiert.) Die ganze *Antigone* gehört auf die barbarische Pferdeschädelstätte.

It can no longer be about demonstrating culture in the Greeks, as though it were the highest measure of things. What the classics of the bourgeoisie were doing is only of interest in its aesthetic aspect. (Even interested in democracy only with regard to aesthetics.) The whole *Antigone* belongs on the barbaric horse-skull site. (Brecht Journal 18 January 1948, BFA 27: 265)¹

In January 1948 when this journal entry was made, Brecht was in complete 'Greek mode', just having started rehearsals for *The Antigone of Sophocles* in Chur/Switzerland. The notion of Sophocles as a(nother) barbarian echoes, of course, the end of the important section 33 in the *Kleines Organon* which has been discussed in more detail as part of the previous chapter. Brecht's conviction that the Greeks, like the whole bourgeois classical canon, is only of aesthetic interest can be read as a compliment of sorts: after all, there is interest, and Brecht's mode of discarding them is not to throw them out completely but to engage in a complex process of artistic re-cycling, so to speak. As we will see in a moment, Brecht did throw Sophocles on the 'barbaric horse-skull site', literally – and created something excitingly new.

The *Antigone* production was and always remained a parergon in Brecht's estimation, a kind of transient workshop project. At no point, for instance, does he seem to have considered it as part of the emerging repertoire for his new company, the *Berliner Ensemble*, while other 'classical' plays did make the cut.² In Brecht's view, the sole purpose of this project which he was 'plodding

¹ Strictly speaking, this is a single page inserted into a letter to his son Stefan in which Brecht sent him his *The Antigone of Sophocles* (see BFA 27: 527).

² Molière *Don Juan*, Shakespeare *Coriolanus*, Goethe *Urfaust*, Kleist *Der zerbrochene Krug* and Lenz *Der Hofmeister*, cf. Barnett 2015: 450–2.

through' – the term he uses in a letter to Berlau (in Hecht 1997: 803) is 'Fleißarbeit' – was to provide him and his actress-wife Helene Weigel with the first opportunity since the early 1930s to work properly again as director and actress in an actual German-speaking theatre. The production's actual significance, however, far exceeds these fairly narrow and utilitarian parameters. First of all, it is arguably the best and most fully documented production of a Brecht piece under the direction of the playwright himself, not least because of the model book, the more than 700 black and white pictures and the unique set of 37 colour photographs, all taken by Berlau and published in this book, in their entirety, for the first time. This is the only 'Brecht in colour' that seems to exist (apart from one colour picture from the *Galileo* which I have come across in my work at the Brecht Archive).

Beyond its historiographical value, however, the production is of great significance as an experiment, a theatre lab for Brecht's emerging vision in all its theoretical and conceptual but also stage-related aspects like scenography, blocking, delivery, rehearsal technique, acting and so forth. It functioned, to use twenty-first-century lingo, as an 'incubator', a start-up of sorts for Brecht's Big Project. This larger dimension was in fact clearly sensed by several of the production's early recipients, as will be seen towards the end of this chapter. Within the purview of this book, the Chur production of Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles* from the spring of 1948 is of crucial importance both as the main point of reference for Brecht's genealogical engagement with tragedy on an actual stage and for his relationship with tragedy *tout court*. But more than this, anyone interested in Brecht's work, from any perspective, will find a great deal to discover and learn in this single production.

Sophocles was not an unknown entity for Brecht, even if the previous performative encounter did not involve Antigone but that other big Sophoclean figure, Oedipus, in the form of Leopold Jessner's landmark *Oedipus* at the *Staatliches Schauspielhaus* in Berlin in 1929, a fairly free conflation of the two Sophoclean Oedipus plays, *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*.³ Its effect on Brecht's understanding of (Greek) tragedy as 'Schicksalstragödie' ('tragedy of fate') was so formative that Jessner's *Oedipus*, which featured Helene Weigel in the role of Iocasta's maid, has received separate discussion in this book as part of the [Introduction](#) (to which the reader is referred). It is therefore not unexpected that Sophocles' *Antigone* too is measured with and against the yardstick of 'Schicksalstragödie',

³ On this production see [Flashar 2009](#): 146–8 and [Fischer-Lichte 2017](#): 134–41, cf. also [Hecht 1997](#): 260.

as a snippet from an important journal entry (quoted more fully later) makes clear:

Was das Dramaturgische angeht, eliminiert sich das 'Schicksal' sozusagen von selbst, laufend.

As for dramaturgy, 'fate' eliminates itself by default so to speak. (Journal 12 December 1947, BFA 27: 255)

What exactly the notion of his *Antigone* as a constantly self-eliminating 'Schicksalstragödie' means is nowhere discussed more fully and remains a bit cryptic. Brecht notes in this journal entry and elsewhere that, unsurprisingly, he sensed 'something Hegelian' in Hölderlin's translation.⁴ The constant self-elimination may well refer to the various agents who in Brecht's adaptation, which sought to provide rational motives for the plot ('Durchrationalisierung'), make choices which lead to their own elimination: Antigone and Haemon of course, but in particular Creon and the chorus of Theban Elders who, in full complicity with Creon, embrace (self-) annihilation at the end (in blatant contrast with choruses in Greek tragedy who are designated survivors of the tragic catastrophe, see [Chapter 11](#)).

Returning to the impact of Jessner specifically, Brecht himself drew no connection between Jessner's *Oedipus* and his *Antigone* project in journal entries or in the model book. But his collaborator and photographer Ruth Berlau did, via Helene Weigel. In her memoirs, as taken down by Hans Bunge, she comments:

Die Figur der Antigone war für die Weigel ausgedacht. Vielleicht hat Brecht sich auch an Weigels Darstellung der Magd im 'Ödipus' erinnert, von der er 1929 ganz hingerissen war.

The figure of Antigone was thought out for Weigel. Perhaps Brecht also remembered Weigel's representation of the maid in 'Oedipus' which he was completely taken by in 1929. (Ruth Berlau *Memoirs*, in [Hecht 1988](#): 185, from [Bunge 1985](#))

Berlau's remark regarding Brecht's enthusiasm for how Weigel tackled the role as an actress is aligned with two important writings he produced in the immediate aftermath of Jessner's *Oedipus* in 1929. One of them, the *Dialogue on the Art of Acting*, contains a detailed section on how Weigel performed the maid's eyewitness narrative of Iocasta's suicide (which Brecht had been rehearsing with her privately).⁵ All of this further

⁴ 'Etwas Hegelsches': letter to his son Stefan Brecht, December 1947 (BFA 29: 440).

⁵ BFA 21: 279–82, English translation in [Silberman/Giles/Kuhn 2015](#).

corroborates just how deeply Brecht was impacted by this *Oedipus*. Now, almost twenty years later, a much bigger and more complex female character from Greek tragedy was waiting to be filled with stage life by the art of Weigel.

Genesis

The meeting at the picturesque hotel *Zum Storchen* in Zurich, more or less immediately after Brecht's arrival from Paris and less than a week after his escape from the US, must have been an emotional one. After seventeen years of parallel lives, Brecht and his long-time close friend and collaborator Caspar Neher met again on 5 November 1947. Neher, today widely considered one of the most important German stage designers of the twentieth century, is a crucial figure in Brecht's artistic career, having created the stage design for all but two of Brecht's first productions between 1923 and 1933, and for nineteen Brecht productions in total. 'Cas', as he was affectionately referred to by Brecht and others close to him, was also one of Brecht's best personal friends since their early teenage years in Augsburg where they had been schoolmates. This friendship, like a few others that Brecht made in his teenage years, was to last a life-time (Neher, Brecht's senior by one year, died six years after Brecht in 1962).⁶

The instant renewal of their collaboration was very much on Brecht's agenda, as Brecht had made already clear in his very first letter to Neher after the year-long silence caused by World War II, sent from Santa Monica in April 1946 (BFA 29: 380). A subsequent letter to Neher, from December of the same year (BFA 29: 406 f.), details potential projects, including *Mother Courage* and an 'Aristophanes revue' (which must be the unfinished 'Pluto Revue', see [Chapter 8](#)). But only now that the collaborators were at last physically re-united in Switzerland, a concrete project could be planned and tackled.⁷

⁶ Shortly after his death Neher's work, and his collaboration with Brecht in particular, started to receive the attention it deserves: [von Einem/Melchinger 1966](#), [Willett 1986](#), [Tretow/Gier 1997](#), [Tretow 2003](#), [de Ponte 2006](#) (with a copious number of colour illustrations), [Wüthrich 2015](#) (esp. 109–39). Most of the surviving sketches and drawings are now kept at the *Deutsches Theatermuseum* in Munich.

⁷ Neher was not entirely new to the *Antigone* material: in Essen (Germany) in 1928 he had done the scenography for a production of Arthur Honegger's opera *Antigone* (French libretto by Jean Cocteau), see [Flashar 2009](#): 146. And he would return to it once again after the Brecht project: Neher did the stage design for the premiere of Orff's opera *Antigoniae* at the Salzburg Festival in 1949.

The project materialized in the course of November 1947 as the result of chance rather than intentional design, so much so that Brecht felt he had 'fallen into' the project.⁸ Neher had just been working for the Zurich *Schauspielhaus*, creating stage designs for plays by Zuckmayer and van Druten. The *Schauspielhaus* held special significance for Brecht, as it had been *the* (one and only) performative hub for Brecht during his long years of exile: *Mother Courage*, *Galileo Galilei* (Danish version) and *The Good Person of Sezuwan* were first performed here (in 1941 and 1943 respectively). But things turned out to be trickier than one might have expected. Oscar Wälterlin, the director of the *Schauspielhaus* who was approached early on, showed great enthusiasm for putting on another world-premiere of an exile play by Brecht, the *Puntila*. Brecht, it was agreed, would not be alone but would co-direct with the local director Kurt Hirschfeld, on the grounds that he had no work permit (*Puntila* would premiere at the Zurich *Schauspielhaus* in early June 1948).⁹ But there was some push-back against having Weigel in the cast of *Puntila*, for reasons not quite clear (age? the 15-year-hiatus in her acting career?).¹⁰ Brecht therefore needed to find another project with a big female lead to provide Weigel with the testing ground which she badly needed, and strongly insisted on, after the long years of her stage absence.

Other reasons, more to do with territorialism and internal politics, may have been a factor here, as has been suggested by Mittenzwei.¹¹ The insistence on a co-director looks particularly suspicious – after all, in Chur a few months later Brecht *did* direct, alone and officially, despite the lack of a work permit. In Zurich, on the other hand, this was made into a problem, perhaps because as the sole director of the *Puntila* Brecht would of course have had a different kind of artistic authority and personal presence, something which may not have been an appealing notion to the

⁸ Letter to Berlau from December 1947, BFA 29: 436. Biographically oriented accounts of the whole *Antigone*-project can be found in Mittenzwei 1986: II 251–60, Berlau in Hecht 1988: 183–7 (= Berlau 1985: 209–14), Hecht 1997: 799–815, Knopf 2012: 467–72, Parker 2014: 504–8 and Wüthrich 2015 *passim*. A more conceptual approach, situating Brecht's *Antigone*-project as one instantiation of an artist of the historical avant-garde applying 'the mythical method', is Frick 1988, cf. also Cairns 2017 and Duarte 2017, both of whom are performance-oriented and integrate the *Antigone* model book.

⁹ Officially, there was only one director mentioned, namely Hirschfeld. But tellingly, Brecht himself saw it the other way round: in his journal (6 June 1948, GBA 27: 270) he directed *Puntila*, 'assisted by Hirschfeld'. See also Mittenzwei 1986: II 260.

¹⁰ According to Berlau (in Hecht 1988: 184f.) Weigel was being considered for the role of Smuggler-Emma, a part which ended up being given to another great actress, Therese Giehse (a past and future *Mother Courage*). Berlau admired the composure with which Weigel put up with this set-back.

¹¹ Mittenzwei 1986: II 257.

entrenched powers at the *Schauspielhaus*. Moreover, as Brecht was to discover in no time, Zurich was much less inclined towards *avant-garde* art in general than had perhaps been suggested by the unusual dynamics of the war period when the city was a refuge for many creative outsiders. The post-war period in fact brought out a conservatism that had always been underlying, if temporarily masked.

Innovation had migrated, to near-by Chur for instance. Here Hans Curjel, a German all-round impresario who had to leave Germany for Switzerland in 1933 and became active in the Swiss theatre scene (especially at Zurich's *Corso-Theater*), had over the past couple of years been turning the provincial *Stadttheater* at Chur into an ambitious and open-minded place that was beginning to attract supra-regional attention.¹² Located in a cinema at that time – movies continued to be played there for half of the week, the other half being reserved for theatre productions – the *Stadttheater* offered a mix of its own productions, German classics and visiting companies. It was what later, starting in the 1960s, would become the ever-popular 'found space' – a space initially designed for an industrial or commercial purpose that was subsequently re-appropriated for high-brow art.

Curjel and Brecht were not complete strangers. Their paths had crossed, briefly and without further impact, in conjunction with the *Mahagonny*-project in 1929 when Curjel was working at the *Kroll* opera in Berlin. But Curjel was on the ball, ambitious and entrepreneurial enough to seize the opportunity when it happened to present itself in 1947, entirely by accident: in late November, the two literally bumped into each other on a street in Zurich. Recollecting the events in a piece first published in 1961, Curjel provides helpful details, background information and personal impressions of the *Antigone* production which are worthy of paraphrase here.¹³ He recounts the modest, even minimalist resources available to Brecht and the fact that he found the very scarcity not only appealing but in fact inspirational. There is Brecht's insistence on working with Neher and on Weigel playing Antigone (despite her being forty-seven years old at the time), and Brecht's status as a non-celebrity, an outsider even, upon his arrival in Chur. Curjel quickly picked up on the closeness of Brecht and Neher,¹⁴ and was impressed by the intensity of the exchange between the

¹² Wüthrich 2015: 61–107 takes a detailed look at Curjel's career and the innovative impulses he gave to the Swiss theatre scene. The book also contains pictures of the *Stadttheater* in Chur.

¹³ Curjel 1961, most easily accessible in Hecht 1988: 187–93.

¹⁴ Curjel even went so far as to describe Neher as Brecht's 'second self': Curjel 1961 in Hecht 1988:189, see also Parker 2014: 504 with n. 11.

two friends who spent five or so weeks in cohabitation at the theatre and the hotel. He noted how much Brecht loved the utilitarian, raw and 'empty' character of the 'found space' at the cinema/theatre in Chur. Curjel was deeply impressed by Brecht's sober concentration and the 'strange, unpretentious authority' ('eine eigenartige, unaufwendige Autorität') that emanated from him, as well as the relaxedness and precision of the rehearsal work. While Brecht lacked acting skills of his own, he compensated for this with his communicative talent. Curjel sensed no nervousness on the part of the actors, at least until the hectic final phase of the rehearsal process, and appreciated the director's friendliness, even kindness with the young ensemble (a remarkable statement in view of the fact that at the *Berliner Ensemble*, some years later, Brecht as director would not exactly be known for his empathy). Brecht's insistence on what Curjel describes as a 'harsh, clear, sober, but not at all cold' mode of delivery, which reminded Curjel of Frank Wedekind as an actor, is worth mentioning. The way in which Brecht worked on and with the individual actor caught Curjel's attention and prompted him to make analogies with the work of a sculptor. He was struck by Brecht's anti-illusionist use of lighting and sound as well as his near-obsession with theatrical props as beautiful and well-crafted material objects. Last but not least, Curjel points out that while Brecht's enormous innovativeness in *The Antigone of Sophocles* was lost on the (thin) regular audience, the school students from nearby who attended one performance seemed very receptive to, and appreciative of, the 'depth and artistic reality of the strange theatre event'. In all, Curjel's account is a fascinating, important and perceptive description of Brecht finally resuming his work as a *director*, an area in which he was seen by many others apart from Curjel as second to none.¹⁵

Homecoming with Hölderlin

With Curjel's infrastructure secured, and Neher as well as Weigel firmly integrated into the project, Brecht was clearly energized and worked fast. In an important journal entry, only his second since his arrival in Zurich, he provides an overall assessment of the project, its function and underlying motivation:

Habe zwischen 30.11 und 12.12 eine 'Antigone'-Bearbeitung fertiggestellt, da ich mit Weigel und Cas die Courage für Berlin vorstudieren möchte, dies in

¹⁵ On Brecht as a director see [Mumford 2019](#), [Barnett 2019](#) and the collaborative *Berliner Ensemble* volume *Theaterarbeit* (first published in 1952).

Chur, wo Curjel sitzt, tun kann, dafür aber eine zweite Rolle für die *Weigel* brauche. Auf Rat von *Cas* nehme ich die Hölderlinische Übertragung, die wenig oder nicht gespielt wird, da sie für zu dunkel gilt. Ich finde schwäbische Tonfälle und gymnasiale Lateinkonstruktionen und fühle mich daheim. Auch Hegelisches [*sic!*] ist da herum. Vermutlich ist es die Rückkehr in den deutschen Sprachbereich, was mich in das Unternehmen treibt. Was das Dramaturgische angeht, eliminiert sich das 'Schicksal' sozusagen von selbst, laufend. Von den Göttern bleibt der lokale Volksheilige, der Freudengott. Nach und nach, bei der fortschreitenden Bearbeitung der Szenen, taucht aus dem ideologischen Nebel die höchst realistische Volkslegende auf.

Completed, between 30 November and 12 December, an 'Antigone'-adaptation, because I would like to pre-study with *Weigel* and *Cas* the role of Courage for Berlin, can do this in Chur where Curjel is located, but need for this a second role for *Weigel*. Following the advice of *Cas* I take Hölderlin's translation, which is hardly or never played, because it is considered to be too obscure. I find Swabian intonations and gymnasium-like Latin constructions and feel at home. There is also something Hegelian around. Presumably it is the return into the German linguistic realm which drives me to the enterprise. As for dramaturgy, 'fate' eliminates itself by default so to speak, constantly. Of the gods there remains the local saint of the people, the god of joy. Gradually, as the scenes continue to be revised, there emerges from the ideological fog an extremely realistic folk legend. (Brecht Journal 12 December 1947, BFA 27: 255)

If, to deploy the nomenclature used by Brecht in a different context (BFA 29: 436), he had 'fallen into' this project, it was evidently something he wanted, even relished, to have 'fallen into'. As accidental and pragmatic as the genesis of the *Antigone*-project might have been, in his journal entry Brecht rationalizes that the return into the realm of the German language 'drives' him into it (a Freudian reading of the events may even deny that there was much or any chance involved in Brecht's decision-making processes). It is worth noting that, unlike most, Brecht was certainly not drawn to the subject matter by the figure of Antigone and the moral complexities of her situation. As the journal entry makes clear, it was *language* more than anything which appealed to Brecht, who started to perceive the *Antigone* project as a homecoming experience.¹⁶ This effect

¹⁶ Note in this context that Hölderlin, definitely by the time of his Sophocles-translations, was like Brecht an outsider who used bold experimentation with his native tongue German as a means of finding some kind of a 'home' (in Hölderlin's case an imaginary and idealized notion of 'Greece').

language could have on Brecht helps to drive home the important point that Brecht was, always had been and continued to be, very receptive to poetic formalism and the notion of poetry as the art of the crafted word. The long years of exile from his native language would only have sharpened Brecht's sensitivity for the German language, and Hölderlin's unorthodox use and defamiliarizing expansion of the German lexicon and syntax in this particular translation (and, of course, elsewhere) aroused his curiosity and satisfied an artistic need in that it presented him with a welcome challenge. Coping with it caused him personal joy, hence Brecht felt no compulsion to smoothen and simplify Hölderlin (BFA 24: 351). A few days after the previous journal entry, Brecht notes that Hölderlin's translation is 'of remarkable radicalism', and that his '*Antigone*-language would deserve deeper study than I was able to devote to it this time round' (Journal 25 December 1947, BFA 27: 258). Berlau (in [Hecht 1988](#): 194) quotes Brecht as remarking to her that in his view Hölderlin's text was the 'strongest and most amusing' – the later adjective being a good reminder of what Brecht must regularly have felt about the lofty register of 'pontifical' poetry more generally (see below).

What Brecht himself, interestingly, does not seem to have realized is that there were certainly poetic affinities between him and Hölderlin. Despite all their fundamental differences, on some poetic level they are indeed kindred spirits. This becomes patently obvious when reading works of the late 1920s in which Brecht was experimenting with what he called the 'grand style', especially the important fragments of both *The Bread Store* and *Fatzer* (on which see also [Chapter 11](#)). Many of the choral odes in particular which Brecht composed for these plays have a 'Hölderlinesque' ring to them, even if Brecht is ultimately (and characteristically) clearer and more concrete in his expression while, like Hölderlin, being very consciously aware of rhythm, word order, timing and disruption. By way of illustration, I would like to recommend reading aloud first the following fragment. The passage sounds choral but is in fact attributed by Brecht not to the chorus but to *Fatzer* himself (in [Chapter 11](#), I will call this mode 'conceptually choral'). The core of the passage – a drastic and graphic comparison of human life with human faeces – contrasts strikingly with its highly elevated poetic style. Afterwards, read aloud the brief choral passage from Hölderlin's *Antigone* (the beginning of scene 2 where the chorus describe the power of *erôs*). I will deliberately not provide English translations this time.¹⁷

¹⁷ For the *Fatzer* passage see also Kuhn's translation in [Kuhn/Ryland 2019](#): 152f.

Ganz unbeurteilbar
 Ist der Mensch dem Menschen.
 So wie gegangen durch
 Ungeheuren Magen
 Der jeden Knochen und Haut durch
 Saft einschmilzt
 So daß du aus dem Kot nicht
 Fisch noch Apfel auskennst
 So liegt in trübem Brei des Menschen
 Leben
 Ist es genossen vor dem Aug der Welt.
 Nach was er griff der Gierigen
 Elend zu stillen
 Gezogen ist's aus Luft und Wasser, und
 Nicht
 Dass er flog, der Vogel, war Grund
 Noch dass er schwamm im salzigen Naß
 Der Fisch
 Als er verschwand dem Fleische zulieb.

(Brecht *Fatzer* B17, BFA 10: 438)

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Geist der Liebe, dennoch Sieger
 Immer, im Streit! Du Friedensgeist, der über
 Gewerb einnicket, und über zärtlicher Wange bei
 Der Jungfrau übernachtet,
 Und schwebet über Wassern,
 Und Häusern, in dem Freien.
 Fast auch Unsterblicher Herz zerbricht
 Dir und entschlafender Menschen, und es ist,
 Wer's an sich hat, nicht bei sich.

(Hölderlin *Sophocles Antigone* 811–9, in [Schmidt 1994](#): 890)

Despite these affinities, the fact that Brecht should feel at home with Hölderlin of all people is remarkable and to some extent genuinely surprising, on at least three grounds: Brecht's lack of familiarity with his work, some previous dismissive remarks, and the fact that in recent decades Hölderlin had become a poet of choice for the German nationalistic right as well as the Nazis. For starters, Brecht's acquaintance with Hölderlin up to the *Antigone*-project was superficial at best, and he appears to have had no detailed knowledge of his poetry or his other works. This makes sense once Hölderlin's peculiar reception history is taken into account. More and

more forgotten as the nineteenth century progressed, with some of his poetry even stigmatized as products of madness, Hölderlin was re-discovered around the beginning of the twentieth century, in part literally so. In particular, Norbert von Hellingrath's discovery and publication, in the 1910s, of Hölderlin's (up to then largely unknown) late poetry in the fourth volume of Hölderlin's works was a landmark event which, in conjunction with Stefan George's well-publicized enthusiasm for these poems, established Hölderlin for good as a model for the likes of Rilke, Hofmannsthal, Celan and not least George himself.¹⁸ A literary sensation in certain parts of the avant-garde rather than a canonized classic, Hölderlin was consequently not part of Brecht's (or anyone's) school curriculum in Germany in the 1910s. Brecht's personal library does contain vols. 1 to 4 of Nober von Hellingrath's Hölderlin edition (as published by *Propyläen* in 1943). But volume 5, which contains the Sophocles translations and is therefore the one volume that Brecht must definitely have been using, is curiously missing, quite possibly because Brecht had been using it so extensively.¹⁹ It is interesting to note in this context that when in the early 1950s Brecht was asked to supply suggestions for the German curriculum (Grades 5 to 8) in the new East German state, Hölderlin was among the authors included by Brecht – but while all his other suggestions were detailed (a specific poem by a specific author), Brecht suggested no specific poem by Hölderlin, just the name of the poet followed by the remark that the current curriculum featured Hölderlin only in Grade 11.²⁰ In other words, even after the *Antigone*-project Hölderlin is for Brecht still 'Hölderlin': a quote, a label, a shorthand, and something of a blank (even if an intriguing one worthy of further study). His translation work, however, continues to impress Brecht: in 1951, as part of the notes for the first performance of his *The Antigone of Sophocles* on German soil (in Greiz, part of East Germany), Brecht calls Hölderlin 'one of the greatest formative agents ('Gestalter') of the German language', which Sophocles' *Antigone* was lucky enough to get as its translator (BFA 24: 351).

His main source about Hölderlin may well have been his circle of collaborators and friends. Walter Benjamin in particular comes to mind here. Benjamin had authored an early piece on two Hölderlin poems (*Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin*, written in 1914/15 but not

¹⁸ One hundred private copies of volume iv had been distributed in 1914 just before the outbreak of World War I. The list of these elite early recipients, selected by von Hellingrath, included George (top of the list), von Hofmannsthal and Rilke (Kreuzer 2002: 422). The volume was published properly in 1917.

¹⁹ Nos. 621–4 in Wizisla/Streidt/Loeper 2007: 93. ²⁰ BFA 23: 159f.

published until 1955) and was deeply impressed by Hölderlin's translations, not least those of Sophocles which are highlighted as close to an ideal translation towards the end of Benjamin's idiosyncratic and seminal 1923-essay 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' ('The Task of the Translator'). It is a reasonable speculation that Hölderlin came up in one form or another during their many conversations, even if this seems to have left no documentary record.²¹ The versatile and widely-read Hanns Eisler was no stranger to Hölderlin either. Whatever the sources may have been, two journal entries illustrate his general notion and perception of Hölderlin. One from 10 November 1943 (BFA 27: 181) links Hölderlin, as well as Goethe and Schiller, with 'already unbearable' early German nationalism, while in an important slightly earlier entry, from 22 August 1940 (BFA 26: 416 f.), Hölderlin is seen as the first representative of a 'completely pontifical branch' of German lyric poetry (with Heine being the first representative of the 'completely profane branch'). Both branches, argues Brecht, begin to exist once the 'beautiful contradictory unity' ('schöne widersprüchliche Einheit') achieved by Goethe has been lost, and both (!) branches are equally indicative of a decline ('Welch ein Abstieg!'). Brecht goes on to trace the 'pontifical branch' up to Stefan George, interestingly concluding that the 'school which *George* has created will only yield something if it sticks to translations'. In other words, only when working with existing content generated in a different language will the 'pontifical branch' be freed from its main (though not only) liability – its self-centred obsession with 'counter-revolutionary' content.

These less appealing aspects of Hölderlin before the *Antigone*-project would presumably have been amplified in Brecht's perception had he been fully aware of how much Hölderlin had started to be co-opted by the Nazi regime, especially in the wake of Stalingrad and the 'total war' that Goebbels had proclaimed in February 1943. Instrumentalized for the regime's notion of German nationalism and the idea of purity and self-sacrifice, Hölderlin's poetry was packaged in special editions for German soldiers. The foundation of the *Hölderlin Society* in Tübingen on 7 June 1943, the centenary of the poet's death, was an institutional marker

²¹ A detailed discussion of their intense exchange and friendship is [Wizisla 2004](#). Also note [Wizisla 2017](#), the catalogue which accompanied the 2017 exhibition 'Benjamin und Brecht: Denken in Extremen' at the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin. The German text of Benjamin's highly idiosyncratic, and justly famous, essay on translation can be found in [Rexroth 1991](#): 9–21 (note that [Rexroth 1991](#): 22–63 also contains Benjamin's actual German translation of Baudelaire, to which his essay was the Preface). [Venuti 2012](#): 75–83 is the most easily accessible English translation of this seminal piece which, interestingly, is very much considered an eccentric outlier among specialists in the field of Translation Studies.

of this appropriation (Joseph Goebbels was made honorary patron).²² The legacy of Hölderlin as a 'Nazi poet' would become an important and problematic part of his post-war reception (and is, in some measure, linked with Martin Heidegger's use of Hölderlin in some of his work). For Brecht, this kind of decline of any classic under fascism was, of course, inevitable, in fact logical. But there is no indication that Brecht was aware of the special case of Hölderlin under the Nazis or, more importantly, that he regarded the *Antigone*-project as means of reclaiming an abused poet for a better cause. All of this said, Hölderlin did cast his spell on the *Antigone*-project, not 'just' as an innovative crafter of words but also as a thinker. To bring up one indicator: half of the programme notes for the Chur production consists of 'aphorisms' by Hölderlin (on dialectics, truth, beauty and poetry)!²³ Hölderlin was challenging, radical, fascinating, strange – hence inspiring and most of all useful for Brecht's work, whatever Brecht's general view of him and his appropriation by others may or may not have been.

Translation – Adaptation – New Play: The Hybrid Nature of the Work

Brecht classified his work on Sophocles' *Antigone* as 'Bearbeitung' or 'Nachdichtung', both loose terms best rendered as 'adaptation'.²⁴ The same nomenclature 'Bearbeitung' is applied in the full title of the published playscript in 1949 (as part of the *Antigonemodell 1948*), with the addition that the adaptation was done 'for the stage' and 'after Hölderlin's translation'. But for all the convenience and flexibility of the umbrella term 'adaptation' (a cultural practice well elucidated in Linda Hutcheon's monograph on the topic), it threatens to obscure the complex and intriguing mesh of strategies which Brecht deployed when working creatively with his source material.

His approach to the plot (being the core site of artistic interest, as per the principles articulated in the *Kleines Organon*) is so interventionist as to make plausible the view that Brecht's work is in fact an entirely new play. By contrast with Sophocles' tragedy (and traditional Greek narrative)

²² Savage 2008: 5–13 provides incisive remarks on the topic of what he calls 'Conscript Hölderlin'.

²³ BBA 1088/14–18, Hecht 1988: 171–80.

²⁴ In the journal entry dated 12 December 1947 (BFA 27: 255) and in Brecht's 'Notes' on the (second) production of *Antigone* in Greiz (East Germany) in 1951 respectively (BFA 24: 350). The English translation of Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles* is Constantine 2003, part of the standard 'Brecht: Collected Plays' edition of Methuen Drama (vol. 8 = Kuhn/Constantine 2003, with introduction and further materials).

where Thebes had been under attack by an alliance of several rulers (the ‘Seven against Thebes’), Creon, ruler of Thebes, now wages an economically motivated war against Argos for the material resources (ore, in this case) of that city. Unlike Sophocles where Oedipus’ son Polyneices fights against his home city of Thebes (and his own brother Eteocles), the two now fight on the same side, for Thebes against Argos. And unlike Sophocles where the two brothers die while fighting each other in front of the city gates, Eteocles now dies in the battle at Argos whereas Polyneices deserts after he sees his brother slaughtered, only to be killed himself by his uncle Creon with his home city of Thebes in sight. Brecht keeps Creon’s son Haemon as the husband-to-be of Antigone who, as in Sophocles, ends up dying with her, but also adds an older son, the bellicose Megareus who sets out to complete the total destruction of Argos. That city seems defeated, but the Dionysian victory celebrations commenced by the chorus of Theban Elders turn out to be premature: the men, women and children of Argos have in fact been fighting back and eventually prevail over the invaders from Thebes led by Creon’s son Megareus (Brecht intended clear parallels to the battle of Stalingrad: BFA 24: 350). A messenger informs Creon of the defeat by the Argive forces which are now marching against Thebes to annihilate it, and subsequently dies on stage. Creon does not resist but actually embraces the prospect of imminent annihilation, as do the members of the chorus who announce that they will follow their leader Creon into the abyss.

Brecht emphasized in the *Antigonemodell 1948* that the underlying motivation for these significant changes of the plot was what he called ‘through-rationalization’ (‘Durchrationalisierung’).²⁵ This strategy meant in particular that the characters’ actions and motivations had to be situated as firmly as possible within the realm of human accountability and intelligibility instead of being shaped by a metaphysical entity like that of the divine or fate in the manner of ‘Schicksalstragödie’. Brecht’s bias explains the introduction of an economic motif to the war, which for the city of Thebes is now an aggressive acquisition of a precious material resource rather than self-defence against an intruder who is motivated by claims for personal power. Most of all, however, this significant intervention is designed to shift the question of culpability from one of moral complexity to simplicity, putting the ethical burden completely on the tyrant Creon: his downfall, and that of the city, is in no way connected to issues of written vs unwritten laws and human vs divine authority but, much more

²⁵ *Antigonemodell 1948* section 2 (BFA 25: 74),

straightforwardly, his own fault, the result of an aggressive over-reach caused by material greed (with the complicit chorus of Theban elders as willing enablers, and a city youth that can easily be misled, exploited and instrumentalized as 'cannon fodder'). Consequently, the main issue of the play is meant to shift from witnessing the moral complexity embodied by the legitimate claims of both Antigone and Creon towards a much more one-dimensional scenario, the inescapable and self-annihilating fall of absolute aristocratic power, which Brecht felt was at the core of the underlying Greek story anyway:

Nach der Vorstellung der Alten ist der Mensch mehr oder weniger blind dem Schicksal ausgeliefert, er hat keine Macht darüber. Diese Vorstellung hat Bertolt Brecht in seiner Nachdichtung durch die Meinung ersetzt, dass das Schicksal des Menschen der Mensch selber ist. Die Änderung ist sehr groß, und sie konnte von der alten Dichtung nur ertragen werden, weil sie im Grunde ganz realistisch ist und mit viel praktischer Menschenkenntnis und politischer Erfahrung einen realen Vorgang gestaltet, den der Dichter überliefert bekommen hat, nämlich den Untergang des Herrscherhauses des *Ödipus*.

The ancients thought that man was more or less blindly subject to fate, he had no power over it. This view Bertolt Brecht replaced in his adaptation with the opinion that man himself is the fate of man. The change is very great, and it could only be tolerated by the old poem, because at its core it is completely realistic and re-configures, with much practical knowledge of men and political experience, a real event which has been passed on to the poet, namely the fall of the ruling house of *Oedipus*. (Notes on the second production of *Antigone* in 1951, BFA 24: 350)

Brecht's *Antigone*, then, turns into an anti-Creon play, with Creon as a transparent stand-in for any autocratic ruler, notably Hitler: the chorus and Creon greet each other with the 'Hitler salute' (Figure 3.8) and at one point the messenger even calls him 'Mein Führer' (185, BFA 8: 205, repeated at 223, BFA 8: 207), which strongly reverberates with any German-speaking audience post-World War II, let alone one in the late 1940s.²⁶

²⁶ Hölderlin had used 'Mein König' ('My king') here, while in the Sophoclean Greek the messenger addresses Creon as 'My ruler' (*anax: Antigone* 223). In a similar vein, the fact that the chorus mentions in the moment of utter defeat that the citizens of Thebes had already been phantasizing about 'sitting for a thousand years at the most remote seas' (1207f., BFA 8: 238) resonates strongly: the German Nazis had habitually been referring to their rule as 'The Thousand-Year Empire' ('Das Tausendjährige Reich').

This fundamental shift of focus obviously had major implications for how the title-heroine was to be presented and perceived. Brecht, for instance, omits the whole passage containing Antigone's crucial reference to divinely sanctioned universal laws (*agraptā nomima*: Sophocles *Antigone* 454 f.) which she obeyed when burying her brother against Creon's express command. Instead, he lets the altercation between Antigone and Creon culminate in an almost aphoristic statement by Antigone which re-defines the term 'human' order:

CREON: 'Immer nur die Nase neben Dir siehst Du, aber des Staats Ordnung, die göttliche, siehst Du nicht.'

ANTIGONE: 'Göttlich mag sie wohl sein, aber ich wollte doch lieber sie menschlich, Kreon, Sohn des Menökeus.'

CREON: 'Always you see nothing but the nose beside you, yet the order of the State/, the divine one, you do not see.'

ANTIGONE: 'Divine it may be, but I would prefer it human, Creon, son of Menoikeus.' (Brecht *Die Antigone des Sophokles* 481–4, BFA 8: 215)

While Brecht's Creon manipulatively co-opts the divine as justification of his autocratic rule, Brecht's Antigone, very much unlike her Sophoclean predecessor, has her eyes firmly set on the human order and the 'here and now'. Her ideal of a just order is one that is 'menschlich' which, significantly, in German means both 'human' and 'humane': a kind, empathetic and benevolent rule by humans over humans. Brecht's usage here hints at the socialist ideal of a world characterized by 'kindness', where man is the friend of man.²⁷

Further 'rationalization' of the plot demanded the excision of fate, as Antigone herself is made to point out to the chorus:

ANTIGONE: 'Nicht, ich bitt euch, sprecht von Geschick,
Das weiß ich. Von dem spricht
Der mich hinmacht, schuldlos, dem
Knüpft ein Geschick!'

ANTIGONE: 'No word, I am asking you, about Fate,/ This much I know.
Speak about him/Who slaughters me, guiltless. For him/Prepare a Fate.'
(Brecht *Die Antigone des Sophokles* 837–40, BFA 8: 227)

²⁷ Cf. the use of 'kindness' towards the end of the poem *An die Nachgeborenen*: 'Ach, wir/Die wir den Boden bereiten wollten für Freundlichkeit/Konnten selber nicht freundlich sein.' ('Ah, we/Who wanted to prepare the ground for kindness/Could not ourselves be kind.', BFA 12: 87).

To get an even better sense of this passage (part of Antigone's final words in the play), the reader is, again, referred to a later audio recording of Helene Weigel reading it which conveys a sense of both the power of the scene and the quality of Weigel's art.²⁸ In Brecht's view, 'Schicksalstragödie' was most seriously flawed instantiation of the tragic genre, both because it flew in the face of the (Marxist) conviction that the world is fundamentally alterable and on the grounds that it was politically compromised, as he put it in a letter to Caspar Neher as early as December 1946 (when Brecht was still in Santa Monica):

Die Nazis hatten ihre Schicksalstragödie mit sich; jetzt fischen sie die Pariser als Existentialismus aus ihren Kloaken. . . . Wir werden unsere eigene Ausstellung machen und unter anderem streng darauf sehen, dass wir Spaß haben, denke ich.

The Nazis had their tragedy of fate; now the Parisians are fishing it out of their sewers as existentialism. . . . We will make our own exhibition and, among other things, strictly focus on having fun, I think. (Letter by Brecht to Caspar Neher, December 1946, no. 1233 in BFA 29: 406)

Accordingly, Brecht's remedying interventions were aimed at 'cutting out' ('herausschneiden') fate (or *moira* in Greek), thereby getting to the true core of what an idealizing Brecht felt was the 'people's story' ('Volkslegende') underlying the play, as he put it in a letter to his son Stefan from December 1947.²⁹ This entailed creating full accountability for the human agents: there is to be no doubt whatsoever that Antigone, Creon, the chorus and everyone else are to be seen as fully responsible for their actions (or lack thereof). In turn, the presence (verbal and conceptual) of the divine is greatly reduced.

Hölderlin's translation, somewhat paradoxically, had done some preparatory work here in that names of divinities had often been changed to those of more abstract powers. This too a strategy of rationalization which, in Hölderlin's words, was deployed to 'make the myth more provable ('beweisbarer'). Thus Zeus became 'the essence of time' or 'the father of earth', Eros changed to 'spirit of love', and Demeter morphed into 'the impenetrable (verse 1167: 'Undurchdringliches').³⁰ Brecht either kept this rationalizing mode of periphrasis, which definitely did not run counter to his own strategy of 'through-rationalization', or deleted the reference to the supernatural altogether. In addition, the case of the seer Teiresias, a professional agent of the divine so to speak, is instructive. His encounter

²⁸ The recording, which has been mentioned in the [Introduction](#) with regard to Weigel's performance in Jessner's *Oedipus* already, is most easily accessible on YouTube under www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNyFkr_qZGc.

²⁹ BFA 29: 440 (letter no. 1279). ³⁰ Schmidt 1994: 1329f. and 1393.

with Creon is one of the scenes with which Brecht interfered very heavily, particularly towards the end of their altercation (978–1019, BFA 8: 231 f.). In this context Brecht has Teiresias emphasize that he is able to predict the future by careful, alert and commonsensical interpretation of the present and the past (and not, it is implied, by divine inspiration of some sort about what will come to pass).

The notable exception to Brecht's downsizing of divinity is Dionysus, whose role, now defined as the local god of joy and victory, is in fact amplified, most palpably so in the form of the 'Bacchus rods' ('Bacchusstäbe') which the chorus are wielding. As 'spirit of pleasure in the flesh' ('Geist der Lüste im Fleisch': 11, BFA 8: 224) Dionysus certainly appealed to Brecht (as he traditionally does to theatre artists). He also felt (BFA 24: 352) that humankind's hedonistic impulses, which Dionysus embodies and fosters, are so strong that people will even bow to political suppression in the hope of sensual gratification and that, more positively, the Dionysian is intrinsically non-martial, non-aggressive and at least potentially reconciliatory – a view of the Dionysian which few students of Greek religion will unequivocally endorse. Most importantly, however, the Dionysian victory celebrations in the city of Argos, which turn out to be disastrously premature, help to bring out ever more sharply the delusional character of the Argive people, which in turns makes their ultimate fall even deeper. Dionysus, in other words, serves a vital dramaturgical function, the creation of dramatic irony surrounding the play's *peripeteia*, rather than adding a metaphysical level of explanation to the play as it unfolds. Whether or not this Dionysian element owes something to Nietzsche has been discussed in the [Introduction](#) as part of the section on the relationship between Nietzsche and Brecht more generally (to which the reader is referred). If anything, Brecht's early familiarity with the *Zarathustra* may be leaving its traces here, while any familiarity or engagement on Brecht's part with Nietzsche's key work on the topic, *The Birth of Tragedy*, can quite confidently be excluded.

While the over-arching strategy of 'through-rationalization' resulted in alterations of such magnitude that *Die Antigone des Sophokles* bears the marks of an entirely new play, Brecht at the same time also incorporated much of Hölderlin's translation. Slightly less than one third of the play consists of verses directly taken over or adapted from Hölderlin (about 400 of the 1,303 verses in Brecht's version; by comparison, Hölderlin's translation had 1,402 lines).³¹ The co-existence of a strategy of conservatism with one of innovation is far from surprising, let alone debilitatingly

³¹ BFA 8: 493.

contradictory, but rather the natural result of Brecht's predisposition for dialectical thinking and artistic practice. The tension between a plotline which Brecht felt was rational and relevant to a post-war audience and the strange yet intriguing aloofness of Hölderlin's language is precisely a main source of creative energy, and *qua* being 'weirdly familiar' itself a forceful strategy of *Verfremdung* that is to heighten audience alertness.

Brecht's fascination with the language of Hölderlin's translation was, as previously mentioned, profound.³² Since Brecht lacked knowledge of ancient Greek as a 'control skill',³³ the enormous philological deficiencies of Hölderlin's work were never an issue for him. Their complex genesis has greatly been elucidated by the excellent, indeed ground-breaking commentary on the Sophocles translations by Jochen Schmidt in the second volume (published in 1994) of his Hölderlin edition. Among other factors, Schmidt notes the faulty Greek edition which Hölderlin was using for his translation of the *Antigone* (it dates from 1555!); the many misprints in the first edition of Hölderlin's translation, which was published 1805 and, at least for the next 100 or so years, was subject to initial incomprehension, even ridicule, and subsequent neglect rather than anything remotely resembling admiration; Hölderlin's increasingly severe mental health problems; his lack of appropriate linguistic auxiliary tools when dealing with Sophocles' Greek; the apparent fact that he does not seem to have consulted any other German translation; and, last but certainly not least, Hölderlin's demonstrably insufficient grasp of ancient Greek overall.

Since for Hölderlin the main point of doing the translations in the first place was an expansion, inspired by Sophoclean Greek, of his German lexicon and his poetic range more generally,³⁴ philology was, of course,

³² The following translation analysis is very much informed by work done in Translation Studies. While I will sometimes refer to certain concepts specifically, some more general studies to this important field need to be mentioned at this point. Pym 2014 is the best (i.e. most sophisticated and concise) introduction known to me, while Munday (currently in its 4th edition, 2016) is also extremely helpful. Baker (currently in its 3rd edition, 2018) is invaluable for its practical orientation and enormous range of languages used. A (not uncontroversial) history of translation is Venuti 2008. The various slightly different editions of *The Translation Studies Reader* (also by Venuti and currently in its 3rd edition, 2012) provide an excellent and evolving overview of this dynamic field.

³³ Ruth Berlau, however, reminisces that in the preparatory phase of the project she saw a Greek text of the play knocking around, 'because Brecht had found someone who knew a bit of Greek' (Berlau in Hecht 1988: 184). While this clearly came to nothing, the anecdote does underline the seriousness of Brecht's intentions.

³⁴ Schmidt 1994: 1322–32 (general remarks) and 1393–1470 (detailed commentary), Berman 1992 (on translation culture in German Romanticism) and Berman 2012, Böschstein in Kreuzer 2002: 278–89, Billings 2014: 189–21. Schadewaldt 1957 is a thorough and still thought-provoking discussion of this translation (and also that of *Oedipus the King*).

never Hölderlin's principal concern – nor was it Brecht's. The various translation goals and methods of both Hölderlin and Brecht can perhaps best be characterized by the loose umbrella concept of 'abusive fidelity' as developed by Philip Lewis: a staunch resistance to norms that are operative in the target culture combined with a rigorous and most of all imaginative exploration of meaning, both of which create a new space which is somehow in-between the two languages.³⁵ Yet while Brecht does not seem to have one single translation strategy,³⁶ it is crucial to realize that Brecht in fact often *replicates and continues* several of Hölderlin's idiosyncrasies. Like Hölderlin, Brecht does not appear to have used any other, more modern and philologically more accurate Sophocles translation as a corrective of sorts (although Ruth Berlau reports that Brecht had 'examined various translations' prior to settling on the one by Hölderlin).³⁷ This is in stark contrast to Brecht's subsequent translation work as part of his adaptation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, where Dorothea Tieck's rendering was a constant companion and left a lasting mark on the end-product.³⁸ As a poet and artist, Brecht clearly felt comfortable with only Hölderlin's translation and nothing else – itself a telling fact. There were, of course, those 'Swabian intonations' and 'Latin constructions' which created a sense of nostalgia emotionally and which Brecht was able to latch onto

³⁵ Lewis 1985, cf. Pym 2014: 108.

³⁶ More detailed analyses include Weisstein 1973, Doering 2010/2011: 158–67 and Castellari 2018: 312–25. Brecht's range of strategies may even include parody and funny invention, as Gerhard Kurz (in Doering 2010/2011: 167 n. 52) has ingeniously suggested for the otherwise entirely unattested 'Lachmyan brothers' ('Lachmysche Brüder') mentioned by Brecht in line 547 (BFA 8: 218). Brecht made them up! He did so in a funny way amidst all this tragic disaster: the 'Lachmyan brothers' are 'laughable' siblings (German 'lachen' – 'to laugh'). The pun, however, seems to have a serious twist to it, because the myth that Brecht invents for the two brothers is a dark and politically significant one. They are poor, and their wives are not home at night (probably because they are mistresses of rich landowners). During the day, their wives sit around 'secretly in purple diapers' ('heimlich in Windeln purpurn' – a cynical reference to fancy underwear given to them by their wealthy lovers?). The brothers end up killing all their oppressors. At this point of the play the chorus members use this myth to warn Creon not to be too harsh, because the oppressed might rise up, eventually. So the laughter of the 'Lachmyan brothers' may be aggressive *Schadenfreude* more than anything: they had the last laugh. Their story therefore turns out to be tragi-comic, a modality which is quite typical of Brecht (see further Chapter 8 on comedy and the comic).

³⁷ Berlau in Hecht 1988: 184. Brecht's library contains one German translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, by the eminent nineteenth-century classicist August Boeckh, first published in 1843 (as a bilingual edition). The copy in Brecht's library is a re-print of the translation published by the Insel Verlag as vol. 27 of the *Insel Bücherei* (no. 2299 in Wizisla/Streidt/Loeper 2007: 312, who note that Brecht's copy is from 'ca. 1936'). Select comparison of Boeckh's translation with Brecht's suggests that it had no influence at all on Brecht's work.

³⁸ Revermann 2018, where the dynamics of the peculiar 'translatorial triangle' (Shakespeare – Brecht – Dorothea Tieck) in the *Coriolan* project are explored.

artistically.³⁹ Most of all, however, it would seem that the radical nature and emancipatory boldness of Hölderlin's German, its willingness to explore and embrace possibilities of thought and expression, gave Brecht something exciting and inspiring to work with, as two select passages will illustrate.

The first is a somewhat notorious case which occurs early on in the translation and earned Hölderlin much ridicule from his contemporaries who took it as one indicator that he had indeed gone mad.⁴⁰ This is Ismene's concerned reply to her sister's announcement that she has important news to share (*Antigone* 20), which Hölderlin translates thus:

Was ist's, Du scheinst ein rotes Wort zu färben?

What is it, you seem to be dyeing a red word?

The Greek here (*ti d' esti; dêlois gar ti kalchainous' epos*) is challenging because of the very rarely used verb *kalchainô*, which literally means 'to be dyed purple', hence figuratively 'to be dark with worry'.⁴¹ Yet there can be no doubt about the overall meaning of what Sophocles' Ismene is telling her sister: 'What is wrong? For you are obviously quite worried in your speech.' Hölderlin, however, not only takes the expression literally (which is a pervasive strategy of his throughout the translation) but pushes it to a point where the phrase is virtually incomprehensible to any German speaker (past or present): what exactly does 'dyeing a red word' mean?⁴² Is the word red already (i.e. a so-called 'affective accusative') or is it being made red (i.e. a so-called 'effective accusative')? Why is the word red in the first place? And why the question mark at the very end of the sentence (unless this is one of the frequent typos of the first edition, which is probably the best explanation)?

Brecht of course notices that there is a problem (as does any native speaker when being confronted with this phrase). He also has a sense of

³⁹ Brecht is very sensitive to dialect. In the model book for *Mother Courage* he notes that to increase a sense of realism an actor should, if possible, rehearse a German stage text in the dialect of the playwright who wrote it, i.e. in Swabian for Schiller and Hölderlin or in the dialect of the Brandenburg area for the works of Kleist (BFA 25: 180).

⁴⁰ It is, for instance, discussed quite prominently in chapter 5 of Steiner 1975. On the immediate reception of the Sophocles translations by Hölderlin see Castellari 2018: 70–5.

⁴¹ For a discussion, see Griffith 1999: 124f.

⁴² In his commentary Schmidt 1994: 1394 provides no explanation. Böschstein in Kreuzer 2002: 283 implausibly suggests that the phrase is at least in part meta-poetic (the word of the translator creates greater excitement than usual). Steiner 1984: 87 is closer to the mark when he observes that Hölderlin here 'is gambling, as it were, on the archaic resources of a more immediate, bodily condition of human utterance. Like archaic statues, distressing to classical taste, words once wore the strident colours of their intent.'

what Hölderlin may have been trying to express, and accordingly ends up tweaking Hölderlin's bewildering German in such a way that it actually starts to make sense. His solution is as simple as it is ingenious:

Staubaufsammelnde, du färbst mir/
Scheint's ein rotes Wort.

Dust-collecting woman, you are dyeing me/it seems a red word.

The initial key to Brecht's solution here lies not in the translation but the non-verbal stage action. This is because before Antigone's very first words Brecht in fact added a stage direction (the ancient play-script, of course, did not have any stage directions, and did not imply one in the primary text here either; Hölderlin, for his part, added only nine stage directions in total, all very rudimentary and all simply denoting departures).⁴³ Brecht's new stage direction calls for Antigone to collect dust in an iron jar as she is speaking the opening lines ('in einem eisernen Krug Staub sammelnd'). This very scene is captured in a picture published in the model book (BFA 25: 91) and in four of the (hitherto unpublished) colour pictures (Figures 3.3–3.6). It is a very important one, on the grounds that it marks Antigone from the very start as a woman of action. It also more or less instantly turns her into a 'marked woman', or a 'dead woman walking': as she herself will reveal very soon, Creon has decreed that anyone who dares give Polyneices proper funeral rites is to be stoned to death. Ismene's concerned interjection comes just before this disclosure – and again Brecht makes an addition, this time incorporating the stage direction into the spoken text. This 'over-coding' or 'co-coding', as a theatre semiotician would describe it, of action and words loads this stage moment with extra significance: 'Staubaufsammelnde' ('Dust-collecting woman'). The overall mood is therefore one of impending death: Antigone and the audience know that collecting dust will be tantamount to her death sentence (as Ismene will find out presently, and may be suspecting already).

In this context, the meaning of 'dyeing a red word' suddenly becomes clear: it is a word of blood, hence a word of death. In a remarkable and defamiliarizing instance of intensification and reification, it is Antigone's *words* that are spelling (or spilling?) blood and her own imminent doom (although, paradoxically, she has at this point not yet explicitly *said* what exactly she is about to do). This is a considerable shift away from the

⁴³ On the lack of stage directions in ancient play-scripts see [Revermann 2006a](#): 320–5, while the relationship of Hölderlin and the stage is the lead topic for the articles collected in vol. 37 of the *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* (2010–11).

original Greek, which brings out Antigone's agitation, worry and emotional disarray. Yet Brecht's intervention, by means of both translation and stage action, does bring clarity to this somewhat bewildering rendition by Hölderlin. Brecht probably saw his role here as that of an interpreter who 'cleans up' (Brecht did delete the odd final question mark in Hölderlin's text) and selectively adds a few explanatory hints to remove the obscurity from what Hölderlin, in his view, was actually trying to say (and his interpretation may well be correct).⁴⁴ That said, Brecht certainly provides no easy transparency, but requires alertness and imagination from the recipient: linguistic *Verfremdung* in full action. Once properly understood, however, this is a moment of great poetic beauty.

A final twist is the fact that the death-prediction of the 'red word' may possibly be taken to extend to Ismene as well. This is because the exact reference point of the personal pronoun 'mir' in her sentence is ambiguous, since Brecht has, no doubt deliberately, added no punctuation (as would in fact be required by standard German grammar). The phrase could, first, be understood as 'du färbst, mir scheint's, ein rotes Wort' ('you are dyeing, it seems to me, a red word') or, secondly, as 'du färbst mir, scheint's, ein rotes Wort' ('you are dyeing for me [i.e. Ismene], it seems, a red word'). Brecht's decision to insert a line break after 'mir', which creates a very short pause if the trochaic lines are properly delivered, perhaps tilts the balance slightly towards the second reading. It would also seem reinforced by the fact, discussed in more detail below in connection with the Prologue, that Brecht presents Antigone and Ismene as twins who constitute a closely-knit sororal 'community of suffering'. Their twinhood means that there is less of a distinction in terms of individual identity. Consequently, Ismene's 'me' ('mir') always refers, in a sense, to Antigone as well (and vice versa).

One potential dimension of the 'red word', however, can be excluded with some confidence: a political, revolutionary connotation (especially in the Communist sense). This is not because the *Antigone*-material would not lend itself to a radically political interpretation. Quite the

⁴⁴ I add the, entirely speculative, point that Hölderlin's association of 'dyeing an object' with 'doom' may, consciously or not, have been influenced by a striking simile in the fourth book of Homer's *Iliad* (4.141–7) which is used when Menelaus is wounded by Pandarus' arrow (the first injury and human blood in the poem). Here Menelaus' skin and the blood running from the wound (which turns out not to be lethal, as Agamemnon had initially assumed) are likened to a piece of ivory which is being dyed dark-red by a woman, ultimately to be used as a precious ornamental cheek-piece for a horse drawing a warrior's chariot. The young Hölderlin did translate parts of Homer's *Iliad*, at least books 1 and 2, see Böschstein in *Kreuzer 2002*: 270.

contrary, of course, and one might certainly be tempted to assume that Anouilh's widely popular *Antigone* from 1944, which in France ended up being co-opted by both the Résistance and the Vichy-collaborators, would have paved the way for an activist or even revolutionary interpretation of the play.⁴⁵ But Brecht, characteristically, went very much his own way. In particular, the aristocrat Antigone (and, by implication, her sister Ismene) was in his eyes simply not 'the right stuff' to serve as the model of a resistance fighter, as the [next section](#) of this chapter will explore in more detail. In view of her class background, Antigone is as compromised as Creon, hence her 'red word' cannot possibly have any revolutionary momentum or relevance. That said, there is at least one subsequent instance of appropriating Antigone's 'red word' as a means of dissent and resistance, though in a much more subtle way. Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (from 2012, on which see [Liapis 2021](#)) uses 'red words' (i.e. words printed in the colour red) for character names but also in the primary text for select words like 'law', 'her' or, indeed, 'nick of time' (cf. 'Antigonick!'). Carson thereby utilizes the materiality of the medium 'printed book' and the attention-grabbing nature of the colour red to draw attention to the significance and timeliness of Antigone's resistant intervention.

In the case of the 'red word', Brecht's overall intention is therefore formalist rather than political: to capitalize on the highly idiosyncratic nature of Hölderlin's translation (which often entails radically literal renderings of Sophocles' Greek) to create a startling and engaging linguistic immediacy. Incomprehensibility, however, is not to stand in the way of these objectives, hence the frequency of Brecht's adjustments and explanatory interventions. The result of his interventionist work is certainly not a polished, accessible and simplified 'Hölderlin light' but a 'Hölderlin right', still uniquely complex and beautiful yet, at least for the thoughtful and alert recipient, someone who actually makes sense all the time.

Many of these observations will be reinforced by taking a closer look at another passage. In their second song the chorus of Sophocles' *Antigone* reflects on the nature of humankind, its possibilities, challenges and limitations. This philosophical choral ode, sometimes dubbed the 'Ode to Mankind', is one of the most famous passages in all of Greek tragedy and influenced many writers and artists in the twentieth century (Heidegger, himself a great admirer of Hölderlin's,

⁴⁵ On the immediate reception of Anouilh's *Antigone* in France see [Flügge 1982](#). On its subsequent reception history, where the subversive and anti-Vichy reading has often prevailed, see [Zetti 2018](#) who argues that the play is in fact 'open-textured' and 'ideologically ambiguous'.

published his own translation of it). Choral odes in Greek tragedy, not least in Sophocles, also tend to pose significant hermeneutic challenges because of their difficult linguistic character and conceptual complexity. Brecht comments on this in the 'Notes on the Adaptation' from 1951 (BFA 24: 350–3), noting that Sophocles' choral odes often cannot be fully understood the first time around, sounding like 'riddles which demand solutions' ('Rätsel, die Lösungen verlangen'). At the same time, he realizes 'that once they have been studied a bit, they bring forth more and more beauties' ('dass sie, ein wenig durchstudiert, immer mehr Schönheiten herausgeben'). Brecht concludes that the sheer joy of dealing with those challenges means that they have to remain rather than be removed, not least because the *Antigone* was lucky enough to have been translated by Hölderlin, 'one of the greatest creative handlers of the German language' ('einem der größten Gestalter der deutschen Sprache'). What this means in practice can be observed in the following juxtaposition of Hölderlin's and then Brecht's rendition of part of the song, the beginning of the second stanza (Sophocles *Antigone* 355–61):

Und die Red' und die luftigen
Gedanken und städtebeherrschenden Stolz
Hat erlernt er, und übelwohnender
Hügel feuchte Lüfte, und
Die unglücklichen zu fliehen, die Pfeile. Allbewandert
Unbewandert. Zu nichts kommt er.

And speech and airy/ Thoughts and city-ruling pride/He has learned, and
to escape of ill-dwelling/Hills moist airs, and/the miserable ones, the
arrows. All-knowing/Un-knowing. To nothing he comes.

--

Und die Red und den luftigen Flug
Des Gedankens und staatordnende Satzungen
Hat er erlernt und übelwehender
Hügel feuchte Lüfte und
Des Regens Geschosse zu fliehen. Allbewandert
Unbewandert. Zu nichts kommt er.

And speech and the airy flight/Of thought and state-ordering statutes/He
has learned and to escape of ill-blowing/Hills moist airs and/Rain's bul-
lets. All-knowing/Un-knowing. To nothing he comes.

First, Brecht keeps Hölderlin's memorable aphoristic ending, which itself mimics Sophocles' equally memorable Greek (*Antigone* 360: *pantoporos/aporos ep' ouden erchetai*, remarkable not least because of the *asyndeton*, i.e. the lack of connecting particles). In particular, Hölderlin (and therefore Brecht) imitates both the word order and the lexical ambiguity of the Greek (*poros* in the sense of 'road to travel on' and of 'resource to accomplish something'), which the German 'bewandert' tries to replicate. Initially misled by the punctuation in the Greek edition from 1555 which he was using (the Greek text is re-printed in [Sattler 1988](#): 300), Hölderlin had proceeded to distort completely the meaning of the passage. For Sophocles' chorus had expressed the (positive) view that mankind was 'all-knowing' to protect itself from inclement weather and was 'un-knowing' towards 'nothing that is to come in the future' (360 f.: *aporos ep' ouden erchetai/to mellon*) with one exception, death itself (361 f.).⁴⁶ Hölderlin, on the other hand, turned this into a *negative* portrayal of humankind which, despite all its technological resourcefulness and competence in social organization, is ultimately lost and defenceless. This view is fully taken over by Brecht (itself a clear indication that he did not consult any other German translation).

Secondly, Brecht's agenda in the earlier lines is, again, to clarify Hölderlin by making a series of superficially subtle, but thoughtful and very effective changes: 'städtebeherrschender Stolz' ('city-ruling pride') becomes 'staatordnende Satzung' ('state-ordering statutes'), 'übelwohnend' ('ill-dwelling') becomes 'übelwehend' ('ill-blowing') while Brecht correctly infers that Hölderlin's 'arrows' refer to rain, which in consequence is now spelt out in the phrase 'des Regens Geschosse' ('rain's bullets' – incidentally a fairly accurate rendering of Sophocles' original expression, *dysombra belê*). Here Hölderlin's language has been 'explicitated', as the process is referred to in Translation Studies.⁴⁷

By far the most important intervention, however, is that Brecht goes on to completely re-write the evolutionary narrative as Sophocles, and Hölderlin in his wake, had continued it. The original Greek, and Hölderlin's translation, continues the moral ambiguity of what humankind is capable of, especially the notion of transgression (which will then be narrowed down to the case of *Antigone*). Brecht, on the other hand, seizes the opportunity to outline his view of lies at the root of

⁴⁶ The Greek text which Hölderlin was using is re-printed in [Sattler 1988](#): 300. On the whole passage see [Schmidt 1994](#): 1414f.

⁴⁷ In the wake of [Vinay/Darbelnet 1958](#), see [Pym 2014](#): 11–16.

humankind's tragedy – not a super-human entity like 'fate', but human-kind itself:

Überall weiß er Rat
 Ratlos trifft ihn nichts.
 Dies alles ist grenzlos ihm, ist
 Aber ein Maß gesetzt.
 Der nämlich keinen findet, zum eigenen
 Feind wirft er sich auf. Wie dem Stier
 Beugt er dem Mitmensch den Nacken, aber der Mitmensch
 Reißt das Gekröse ihm aus. Tritt er hervor
 Hart auf seinesgleichen tritt er. Nicht den Magen
 Kann er sich füllen allein, aber die Mauer
 Setzt er ums Eigene und die Mauer
 Niedergerissen muss sie sein! Das Dach
 Geöffnet dem Regen! Menschliches
 Achtet er für gar nichts. So, ungeheuer
 Wird er sich selbst.

Everywhere he knows counsel,/Nothing hits him without counsel./All of this is without limit for him,/But there is a measure./For whoever finds no enemy,/ Makes himself his own. Like the bull's/He bows his fellow-man's neck, but the fellow-man/Tears out his guts. When he steps forth/Hard he steps on those like him. His stomach/He cannot fill on his own, but the wall he builds around what he owns and the wall/Must be torn down! The roof/Opened to the rain! Humane things/He considers nothing. Thus, monstrous/He becomes to himself. (Brecht *The Antigone of Sophocles* 296–310, BFA 8: 209, cf. [Constantine 2003](#): 18)

Brecht has ended up re-configuring the key concept of the entire choral ode, the Greek term *deinos* with its two extremes of (positively) 'awe-inspiring' and (negatively) 'monstrous' (the song had started by noting that of the many things which have the quality called *deinos*, humankind has it to the greatest extent). In Brecht, the nuances are flattened and the polarities dismissed. What remains is a pessimistic view: despite its many accomplishments (technological, cultural, socio-political) humankind, at its core, always remains monstrous:

Der Mensch, ungeheuer groß, wenn er die Natur unterwirft, wird, wenn er den Mitmenschen unterwirft, zum großen Ungeheuer.

Humankind, monstrously great when it subjugates nature, becomes a great monster when it subjugates fellow human beings. (Brecht *Notes on the Antigone Adaptation (1951)*, BFA 24: 351)

As in Sophocles (and Hölderlin), this choral ode operates both on the level of great time-transcending generality while at the same time being grounded in, and applicable to, the particular dramatic situation that the chorus are currently involved in (Antigone's bold action and Creon's imminent response). In the *Antigone* performance, Becht underlined this self-reflexive, philosophical character of the ode by having the chorus members deliver the ode 'walking around with their heads down' ('wandelnd die Köpfe gesenkt': *Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 103, nicely illustrated by the accompanying picture). But unlike the corresponding passage in Sophocles where the chorus end up alluding to Antigone as morally problematic and worthy of social exclusion, in Brecht the unambiguous monstrousness of humankind is clearly embodied in Creon. The greed, cruelty, inhumanity and nihilistic violence of humankind generally are, throughout the play, exemplified by Creon in particular (with the complicity of the chorus and the city of Thebes itself, as Antigone points out in clear reference to this choral ode shortly after at 442–4, BFA 8: 214). On Brecht's stage, the tragedy of humankind is humankind as embodied by Creon.

The Problem of *Antigone*

There are indications that the figure of Antigone posed challenges to Brecht, and that his views on this central character oscillated before, during and after the stage productions in early 1948. The view that ended up in print, hence the view 'on record', is the following:

Für das vorliegende theatralische Unternehmen wurde das Antigonedrama ausgewählt, weil es stofflich eine gewisse Aktualität erlangen konnte und formal interessante Aufgaben stellte. Was das stofflich Politische betrifft, stellten sich die Analogien zur Gegenwart, die nach der Durchrationalisierung überraschend kräftig geworden waren, freilich als eher nachteilig heraus: die große Figur des Widerstands im antiken Drama repräsentiert nicht die Kämpfer des deutschen Widerstands, die uns am bedeutendsten erscheinen müssen. Ihr Gedicht konnte hier nicht geschrieben werden, und dies ist umso bedauerlicher, als heute so wenig geschieht, sie in Erinnerung, und so viel, sie in Vergessenheit zu bringen. Dass von ihnen auch hier nicht die Rede ist, wird nicht jedem ohne weiteres klar sein, und nur der, dem es klar ist, wird das Maß von Fremdheit aufbringen, das nötig ist, soll das Sehenswerte dieses Antigonestückes, nämlich die Rolle der Gewaltanwendung bei dem Zerfall der Staatsspitze, mit Gewinn gesehen

werden. Auch das Vorspiel konnte da nicht mehr tun als einen Aktualitätspunkt zu setzen und das subjektive Problem zu skizzieren. Das Antigonedrama rollt dann objektiv, auf der fremden Ebene der Herrschenden, das Gesamtgeschehen auf. Diese Möglichkeit, eine Staatsaktion von Ausmaß zu objektiver Darstellung zu bringen, war jedoch gerade durch den (andererseits fatalen) Umstand gegeben, daß das alte Stück durch seine historische Entrücktheit nicht zu einer Identifizierung mit der Hautgestalt einlud. Auch seine formalen Elemente epischer Art kamen hier zu Hilfe und bildeten für sich selbst Interessantes für unser Theater.

For the present theatrical enterprise the Antigone drama was chosen because it was able to gain a certain contemporary relevance and posed formally interesting tasks. As for political material, however, the analogies with the present day which, after through-rationalization, had become surprisingly strong, turned out to be more of a disadvantage: the big resistance figure in ancient drama does not represent those fighters of the German resistance who have to appear to us as most significant. Their poem could not be written here, and this is all the more to be lamented as so little is being done these days to bring them into remembrance, and so much to bring them into oblivion. That there is no talk of them here either will not be self-evident to everybody, and only he to whom it is self-evident will muster the amount of alienness required to see with profit that of the Antigone play which is worth seeing, namely the role of force during the collapse of the head of government. The Prologue, too, could not achieve more than to hint at contemporary relevance and sketch the subjective problem. Then the Antigone drama proceeds through the whole plot objectively, at the alien level of those in power. This possibility, however, of objectively representing an act of state of some magnitude was provided by the (otherwise fatal) circumstance that the old piece, by way of its historical detachment, did not invite identification with its protagonist. Also, its formal elements of the epic variety came to aid here and constituted, in and of themselves, something interesting for our theatre. (*Preface to Antigone* 1948, section 2, BFA 25: 74)

This is a most unusual take on the Antigone-figure, but it is hardly a surprising one. While the ancient Antigone figure would naturally suggest some notion of resistance, Brecht feels that this cannot be transferred to the present context of resisting fascism or capitalism (kindred ideologies in his view, of course). As yet another 'brilliant dynast' (to use the catchy title of an influential article on aristocrats in Greek tragedy),⁴⁸ Antigone was, is and remains an integral part of the ruling class, despite her eventual rebellion: 'She too once ate/From the bread that was baked/In the dark rock' as the chorus comment while watching

⁴⁸ Griffith 1995.

Antigone exit towards her own death (BFA 8: 228). She is part of the problem rather than part of its solution.⁴⁹ Her class, family association and long-standing complicity render her *ineligible* for any kind of positively connoted heroism that Brecht could endorse, namely resistance by the working class. The Antigone-problem therefore highlights an aporia which Brecht had been experiencing with German resistance to Hitler more generally for years: despite his high and intense hopes, the German working class had not risen up against Hitler, not even after the battles of Stalingrad and Smolensk 1943 and the Allied Invasion in 1944 when the German defeat had become certain and only a matter of time.⁵⁰

Conversely, Antigone cannot even function as an anti-heroine, a role which Brecht in general is very keen on developing (Brecht's conception of Mother Courage and even of Grusha is a case in point). His stance towards Antigone as a character must be described as largely indifferent. For him, she is not a resistance fighter (at least not a credible one worthy of his endorsement), by stark contrast with Anouilh's near-contemporary *Antigone* whose heroine has, rightly or not, been taken by many to be just that.⁵¹ Nor does she embody some larger principle – the divine order or the family – as she does in the highly influential Hegelian interpretation of the play (where there is a dialectical conflict between individual and collective, family and state, Antigone and Creon, each of whom represents a legitimate cause). Brecht lets his Antigone 'do what Antigones do' (bury

⁴⁹ In the *Antigone* model book too Brecht emphasizes Antigone's roots in the corrupt ruling class and the limits of audience sympathy with a character of this pedigree (BFA 25: 106, cf. also 156 and 133, the bridge verses of the chorus).

⁵⁰ An exceptionally nuanced and insightful discussion of why Germans kept on fighting despite the certainty of complete defeat can be found in Ian Kershaw's remarkable book *The End* (= Kershaw 2011).

⁵¹ See (again) Flügge 1982 and Zetti 2018 (with extensive further literature). It is not entirely clear whether Brecht knew Anouilh's *Antigone* (first performed in early 1944) and, if so, what influence it had on him. He does not mention it in his various writings relating to the *Antigone*-project or, indeed, anywhere else (for one possible exception, see the end of this footnote). Nor does the project seem to be any kind of response to it (unless the *Antigone* poem or the new prologue from 1951, on both of which see the main text below, are somehow responses of sorts). In addition, there is no copy of Anouilh's play in Brecht's personal library, nor is there evidence to suggest that he saw it during his brief stay in Paris in November 1947 (or at any other time). But that he had at least heard of it seems very likely in view of the popularity which Anouilh's *Antigone* (and French writers like Sartre) enjoyed in post-war Europe, including Germany. In general, the French intellectual scene always remained alien to him (see the comments in Mittenzwei 1986 II: 211–15). A statement like the following has to be seen in this context: 'The Nazis had their tragedy of fate; now the Parisians are fishing it out of their sewers as existentialism' (letter by Brecht to Caspar Neher, December 1946, no. 1233 in BFA 29: 406). This dismissive remark could be seen to refer to Anouilh's *Antigone* (among other works), but it certainly need not.

the brother, then resist paternal authority to the bitter end), but there is no engagement, positively or negatively, with this character: Antigone is *of no use* to Brecht's concerns and interests, which centre around watching the collapse of power. If there are any characters in the play which invite identification, it would be two collectives, the chorus (and with them the people of Thebes) on the negative side and the people of Argos on the positive side. While the chorus function negatively in their role as Creon's enablers, with their gritty resistance to Creon's aggression the people of Argos (men, women and children) are the true heroes and heroines of the play. Brecht will pursue a similar strategy of glorifying the resisting 'people's collective' a few years later in his adaptation of another Western classic, Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, where the previously divided people of Rome end up collectively resisting the army of their Volscian neighbours (under the command of the Roman Coriolanus).

There are further nuances and oscillations. The programme notes of the Chur production are opened with a three-stanza poem entitled 'Antigone' where she is hailed as kind and determined, someone who, being 'terrible to the terrible ones', was unwilling to compromise, struck no deals and forgot no injustice:

Antigone

Komm aus dem Dämmer und geh

Vor uns her eine Zeit

Freundliche, mit dem leichten Schritt

Der ganz Bestimmten, schrecklich

Den Schrecklichen.

Abgewandte, ich weiß

Wie du den Tod gefürchtet hast, aber

Mehr noch fürchtetest du

Unwürdig Leben.

Und ließest den Mächtigen

Nichts durch, und glichst dich

Mit den Verwirrern nicht aus, noch je

Vergaßest Du Schimpf und über Untat wuchs

Ihnen kein Gras.

Salut!

Come out of the twilight and walk/Before us awhile/Kind one, with the light step/Of the one who is really determined, terrible/To the terrible ones.//You who have turned away, I know/How much you feared death, but/Even more you feared/Unworthy living.//And you cut the powerful/

No slack, and struck no deals/With those who like to confuse, nor did you/
 Forget disgrace, and over the bad deed/Grew no grass for them./Salut!
 (BFA 15: 191, also cf. the English translation in [Kuhn/Constantine 2019](#): 942)

This kind figure – a personal trait which is always very positively connoted in Brecht – who is fully determined and who commands our greatest respect is not quite the perspective on Antigone which Brecht had scripted for her in the written play. But the key to these shifts in perspective probably lies in Helene Weigel's performance as Antigone. After all, the poem does conceptualize the Antigone figure performatively: she walks 'before us awhile', like the actress on stage, and 'with the light step' (the lightness and quick speed of the *Antigone* production are mentioned more than once by Brecht in the model book). It is clear that Brecht's scripted Antigone and Weigel's performed Antigone are being merged here. This hybrid adds nuances and complexities. Multi-layers also seem to apply to the poem's emphatic stand-alone ending: 'Salut!', which can be taken in several ways. Pronounced in German, it is a formal, usually in fact military mode of expressing respect, which contrasts wonderfully with Antigone's counterpart, the war-monger Creon. But it could, of course, also be pronounced in French! The poem, placed as it is at the beginning of the programme notes, would then be both an (informal) welcome to the character who will enter the stage shortly, and an (informal) good-bye to the doomed heroine who will die shortly. One might even be tempted to speculate here about a subtle gesture towards Anouilh's Antigone (on which see fn. 51 above) who is very different from Brecht's creation (and Weigel's acting) but whose main characteristic is her 'purity' ('pureté'), her determination, her unwillingness to compromise.⁵²

The model book's view on Antigone too was subject to fluctuations, in the form of an earlier, unpublished draft of another Preface which dates from late 1947 (BFA 24: 349 f.). The typescript contains hand-written complements by Caspar Neher and is therefore collaborative in nature. At this early point, Sophocles' play is described as 'the strong renunciation of tyrannical rule and a turn towards democracy. It is a drama which, in a fighting manner, intervenes in the contemporary events of its age ('die betonte Absage an die Tyrannis und die Hinwendung zur Demokratie. Es

⁵² This also opens up the possibility of a meta-textual and meta-performative dimension: Brecht's *Antigone* greets Anouilh's, and the Antigone of Weigel, the forty-seven-year-old experienced actress, extends a welcome to whoever her counterpart in a production of Anouilh's *Antigone* might be (definitely not another forty-seven-year-old actress, since Antigone's youth is crucial to Anouilh's conception of the role).

ist ein Drama, das kämpferisch in die damaligen griechischen Zeitgeschehnisse eingreift', BFA 24: 349). It is unclear what Antigone's role is in this scenario, which attributes to Greek society at least some receptivity to a democratic mode of governance and assumes that the world of tragedy could and did assume political relevance. But subsequent mention of criticism against Creon 'among the people' seems to suggest the masses as the prime agent of this incipient, if unsuccessful political transformation. Yet, Antigone is at least not singled out as a reactionary force who abandons the complicity with the tyrannical system only once her own aristocratic family has been adversely affected.

Finally, in the (unpublished) 'Notes on the Adaptation' (BFA 24: 350–3) for the 1951 German premiere of the play in Greiz, however, Antigone suddenly emerges as a model of resistance, with clear parallels to the German situation in World War II:

Die große sittliche Tat der Antigone, die sich gegen den Tyrannen Kreon auflehnt, besteht darin, dass sie, bewegt durch tiefe Menschlichkeit, nicht zögert, durch offenen Widerstand das eigene Volk in die Gefahr des Besiegtwerdens in einem Raubkrieg zu bringen.

The great moral deed of Antigone, who rebels against the tyrant Creon, consists in the fact that, moved by profound humanity, she does not hesitate to bring, by an act of open resistance, her own people into the danger of being defeated in a predatory war. (Brecht Notes on the *Antigone* Adaptation (1951), BFA 24: 350 f.)

The word 'humanity' in particular, loaded as it is in the play and for Brecht in general, instantly commands attention. This Antigone is humane, a source of genuine resistance which transcends the individual and her narrow concerns (in this case the deceased brother) and fights for the common good, even if this means bringing deserved destruction over her own people so that they can start re-building themselves from 'Ground Zero' (which is clearly what Brecht felt post-Nazi Germany needed). Instead of being the complicit aristocrat who ends up rebelling for personal reasons, Antigone is now 'the part of the ruling house which goes with the people' ('Teil des Herrscherhauses, der mit dem Volk geht': BFA 24: 350) once she has 'woken up' (*ibid.*).

Whether the play as Brecht had written and staged it in 1948 actually lends itself to this more positive take on the title-heroine as a proto-revolutionary catalyst of political change is another story. On the contrary, the play as scripted appears to resist it. But these oscillations in Brecht's attitude towards Antigone show that he himself remained open and

malleable as far as the ongoing interpretation of his own work was concerned. During the actual production in early 1948, Weigel's performance and the constant exchange with his stage-designer and life-long friend Caspar Neher were certainly crucial influences which added diversity. And Brecht's life changed significantly in the period between early 1948 and late 1951 (the date of the 'Notes on the Adaptation'): the outsider residing in Switzerland had started to become the government's star-playwright with a mission to accomplish in (East) Germany. In these novel circumstances, Brecht evidently spotted some positive identificatory elements in his Antigone-character that he had not, or not quite, seen in her three-and-a-half years prior. All of which, finally, also demonstrates the power of a truly great piece of art – pardon the old-fashioned nomenclature used here – which Sophocles' *Antigone* certainly is (by all accounts, including Brecht's own). Its in-built and meticulously engineered complexity calls for constant re-appraisal, and it demonstrably provoked divergent reactions even in one of its most utilitarian, polemical, self-assured and accomplished recipients.

Scenic Instantiation: Hyper-ritualization and Anti-classicism

Any attempt at a 'production historiography' of Brecht's *Antigone* is greatly facilitated by the level of documentation which is unusually high, certainly by the standards of its time. As a result, the Chur-production of the *Antigone*, together with his *Mother Courage* production in Berlin in 1949, is the best-documented Brecht production of all (well presented in the collection of 'materials' by Werner Hecht as well as in Werner Wüthrich's rich and detailed monograph).⁵³ With its combination of select pictures, scenic commentary and general introduction, the model book (*Antigonemodell 1948*) in particular is invaluable. So are the personal recollections of the production by two insiders, the photographer/collaborator Ruth Berlau and the Managing Director of the *Stadttheater* in Chur, Hans Curjel.⁵⁴ In addition, there is the visual treasure trove kept in the Brecht Archive in Berlin: over 700 additional black and white pictures taken by Ruth Berlau that ended up not being selected for the model book, together with the 37 colour photographs by Berlau which are being

⁵³ Hecht 1988 and Wüthrich 2015. One particular merit of Wüthrich's work is the extensive contextualization of Brecht's production within the Swiss theatre environment of the 1940s.

⁵⁴ Both are most easily accessible in Hecht 1988: 183–93. Berlau's account was first published in 1985, Curjel's in 1961.

published for the first time in this monograph (Figures 3.1–3.36 and the cover photo of this book). Some form of film documentation of the production (or parts of it, rather), presumably taken by Berlau, also existed. The film material is considered lost (Wüthrich 2015: 338 f.), although at the Brecht Archive I have been able to locate a tiny snippet of it (three seconds of black and white footage in total).⁵⁵ Finally, the local theatre photographer at Chur, Theo Vonow, secretly took black and white pictures of Brecht's production, for which the reader is referred to Wüthrich's monograph (Wüthrich 2015) where they have been published for the first time.⁵⁶

Brecht's directorial approach to the staging very much involved his old friend and esteemed fellow-artist Caspar Neher. Ruth Berlau describes their collaborations as follows:

Die beiden arbeiteten, wie sie immer gearbeitet hatten. Neher saß mit einem Block da und zeichnete, während Brecht erzählte und Vorstellungen über die Inszenierung entwickelte. Am Schluss übergab



Figure 3.1 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

⁵⁵ Accessible in the Brecht Archive under BBA AVM 13.0044, time 11.08 to 11.11 (the chorus leader bangs the alarm plate; the collapsing Creon is being held by two female servants).

⁵⁶ Wüthrich 2015: 338 and figures 38, 42, 44, 45, 47–51. The Vonow pictures differ from those of Berlau in that they are much more focused on close-ups and group blockings than Berlau's more holistic and 'panoramic' approach.



Figure 3.2 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

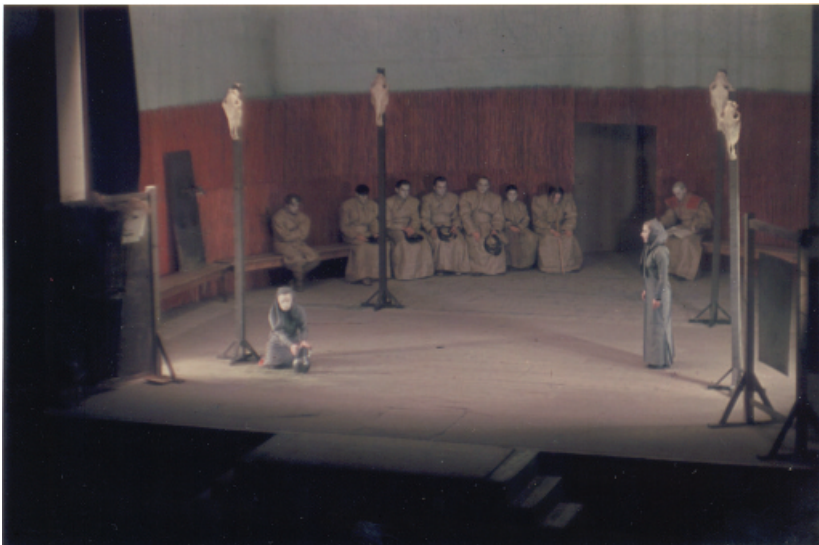


Figure 3.3 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.4 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

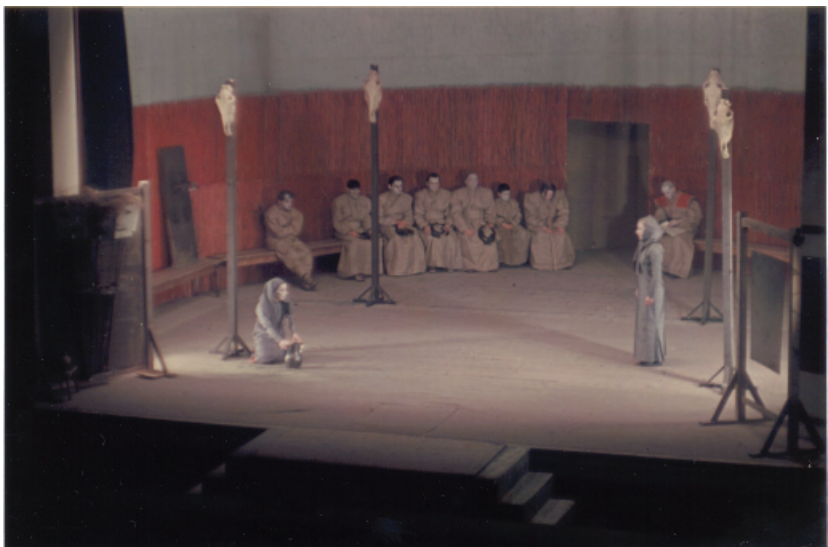


Figure 3.5 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.6 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

Neher einen Paken Skizzen mit Arrangements, Haltungen, Gesten, Dekorationsentwürfen, Kostümen und so weiter. Beim Inszenieren kam Brecht leichter voran, wenn er Neher's 'Protokolle' – ich sage es in Anführungszeichen, weil Neher ja viele eigene Ideen einbrachte – als Erinnerungshilfen vor sich hatte.

The two worked in the way they always had. Neher was sitting with a sketch-book in his lap and kept drawing while Brecht was talking and developing ideas about the *mise-en-scène*. At the end Neher would hand over a pile of sketches with arrangements, postures, gestures, decoration plans, costumes and so forth. When directing, Brecht's work was easier if he had Neher's 'protocols' – I say this using quotations marks, because after all Neher contributed many ideas of his own – in front of him as *aides-mémoire*. (Berlau in Hecht 1988: 184)



Figure 3.7 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.8 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.9 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.10 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

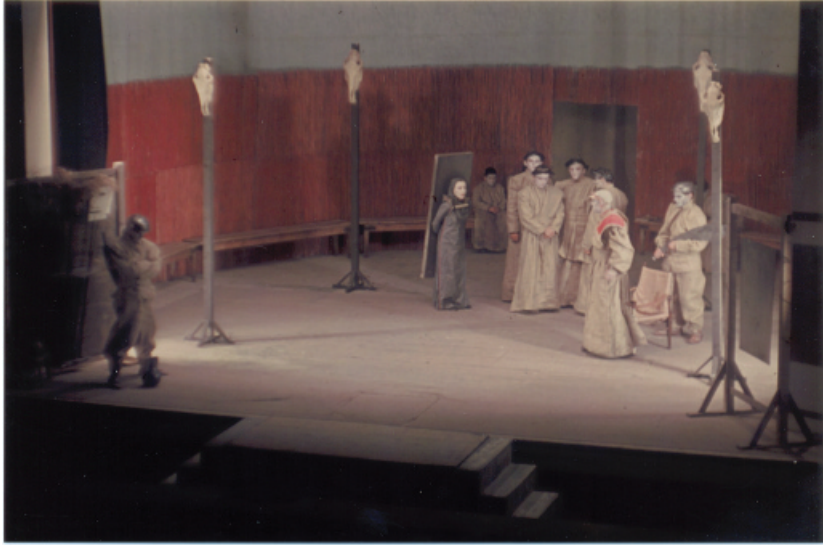


Figure 3.11 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

This collaborative nature of the Brecht-Neher stage design is brought out by the fact that the model book, which lists Brecht and Neher as co-authors, contains some of Neher's sketches (BFA 25: 162–8). One overarching theme in Brecht's vision for the staging – and I will continue to speak of 'Brecht' in this context rather than 'Brecht-Neher', out of convenience and because the individual contributions of each artist usually cannot be determined anyway – was his response to the *ritual aspect* of Greek tragedy. Rather than trying to downplay or naturalize the ritual dimension, Brecht exaggerated and defamiliarized it while at the same time undermining it as inhuman, unproductive and wasteful.⁵⁷ The stage was arranged in two concentric semi-circles. The outer semi-circle was formed by the actors themselves (including the chorus members) who, when not performing in the inner semi-circle, would sit down on wooden benches to watch the(ir) tragedy unfold. The inner one was created by four tall posts with horse skulls suspended from the top (see, for example, Figures 3.7, 3.8, 3.18, 3.26). These horse skulls on tall posts were a later idea in the creative process, as an earlier Neher sketch shows much smaller posts with ribbons (or small palms?) on top (BFA 25: 163), whereas the concentric semi-circles seem to have

⁵⁷ Stimulating work on Brecht and ritual (and the topic of theatre and ritual more generally) has been done by Rainer Friedrich (see Friedrich 1983 and 1985).



Figure 3.12 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

been part of the stage design from the beginning. The visual allusion to the semi-circular shape of the ancient Greek theatre is self-evident. But the shape of the circle itself also has ritual connotations, of course: festivals are often part of ritual cycles, and cyclical conceptions of time are rampant in ritual thinking and practice across times and cultures. The circle is also a central theme in Brechtian theatre in general, in the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, for instance, or in the famous 1949-production of *Mother Courage* in Berlin. What made it particularly suitable for him is the fact that the circle naturally lends itself to conveying, in a straightforward and memorable way, the sense of a vicious cycle which is constituted by the status quo and which Brechtian protagonists

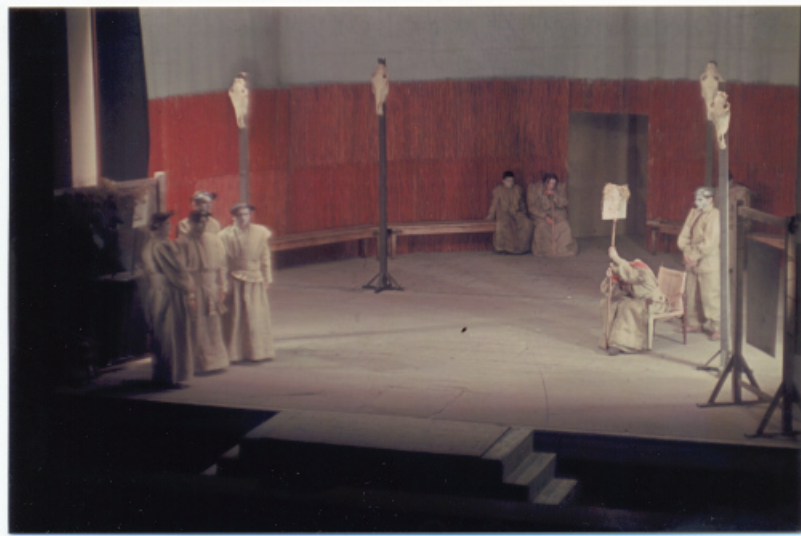


Figure 3.13 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.14 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.15 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

are unable or unwilling to end, disrupt or to escape from. A sense of asymmetry and power is suggested by the vertical axis with its high posts and the horse skulls looking down on the human plain (Ruth Berlau recalls with horror how the horse heads were delivered and then had to be boiled down).⁵⁸ But it is brutal, destructive power: a proper 'Pferdeschädelstätte'/Golgotha, emblematic of Creon's ruthless rule over the city of Thebes. There is also a sense of pointless, even self-destructive waste: who sacrifices horses, the pride of aristocrats and their prime means of distinction from the common foot soldier on the battle-field? This is indeed a ruling class which is running itself into the

⁵⁸ Berlau in Hecht 1988: 186.



Figure 3.16 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

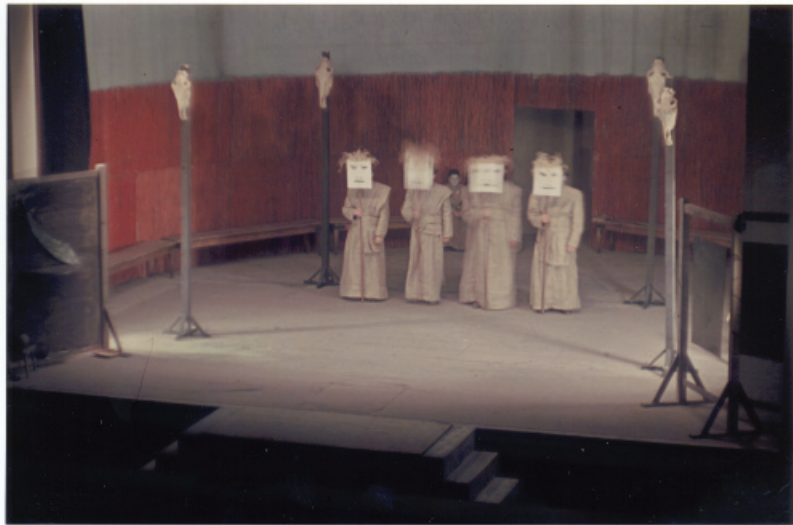


Figure 3.17 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.18 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.19 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.20 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

ground. Last but not least, the horse skull tableau looks primitive, and it too has strong ritual connotations in that it evokes the ancient *boukranion* ('ox-skull'), an ornament frequently used in Greco-Roman art (and subsequently in Renaissance, Baroque and Neo-Classical art) and associated with animal sacrifice.

This sense of primitivism is amplified when considering what these horse-skull poles are clearly inspired by and, through their sheer placement, designed to 'stand in' for: ancient Greek columns! In this context, the remark by Hans Curjel, the artistic director of the *Stadttheater* in Chur, that in Brecht's *Antigone* production there was 'not even the trace of a Greek column' (quoted at the very beginning of this book), appears in a new light. In their staging, Brecht and Neher set out to transform and re-materialize

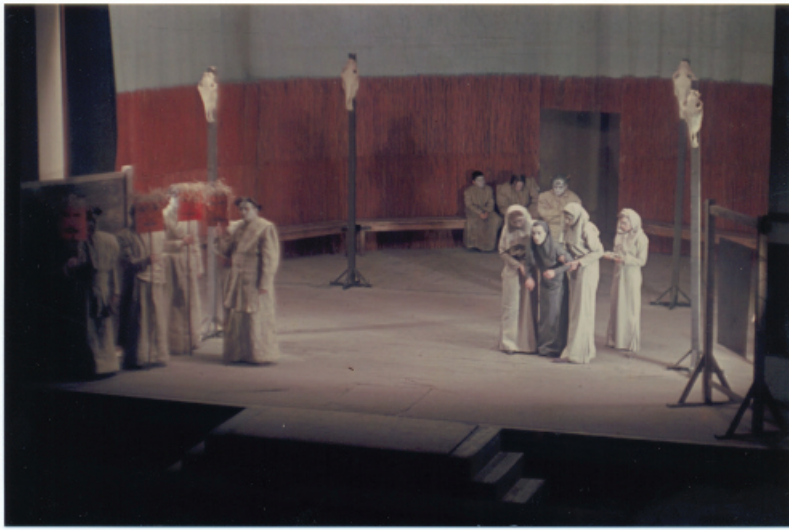


Figure 3.21 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.22 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.23 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

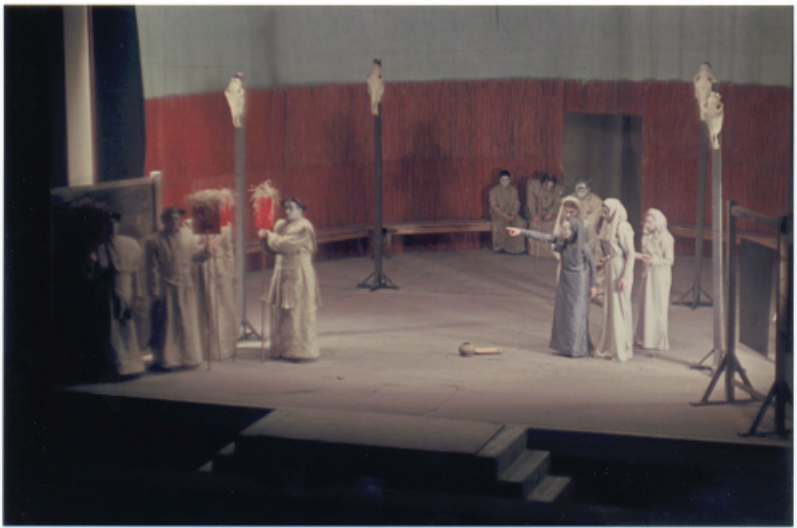


Figure 3.24 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

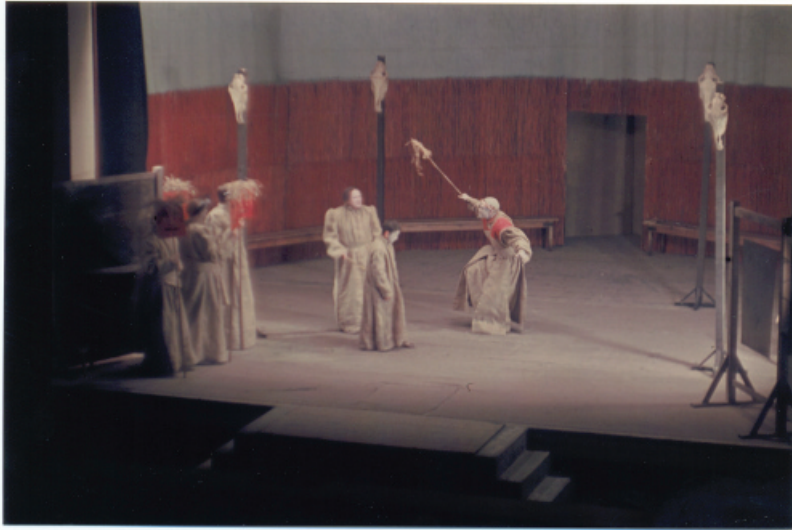


Figure 3.25 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.26 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.27 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

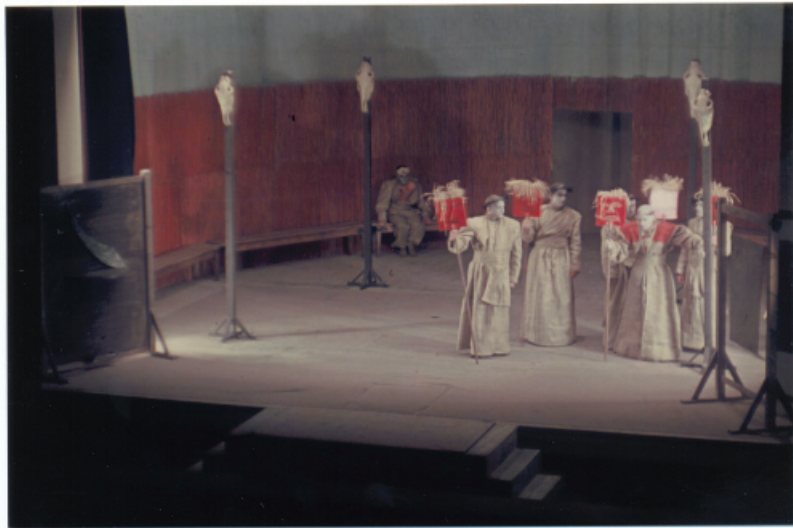


Figure 3.28 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.29 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)



Figure 3.30 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

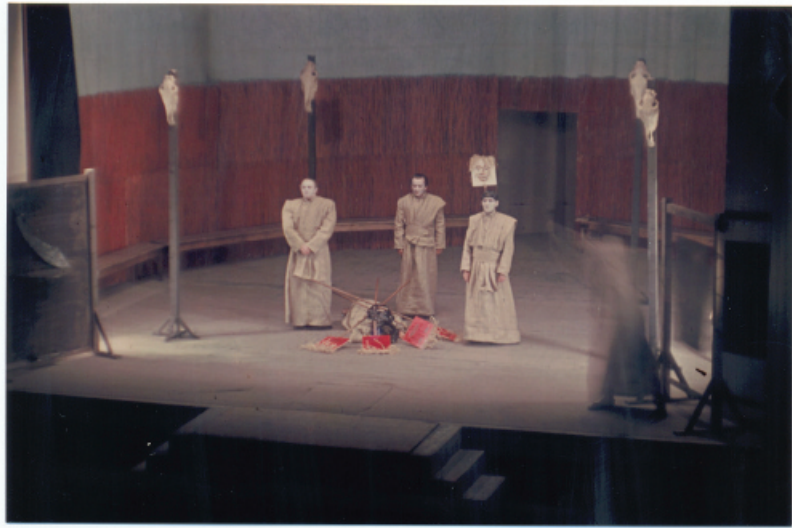


Figure 3.31 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

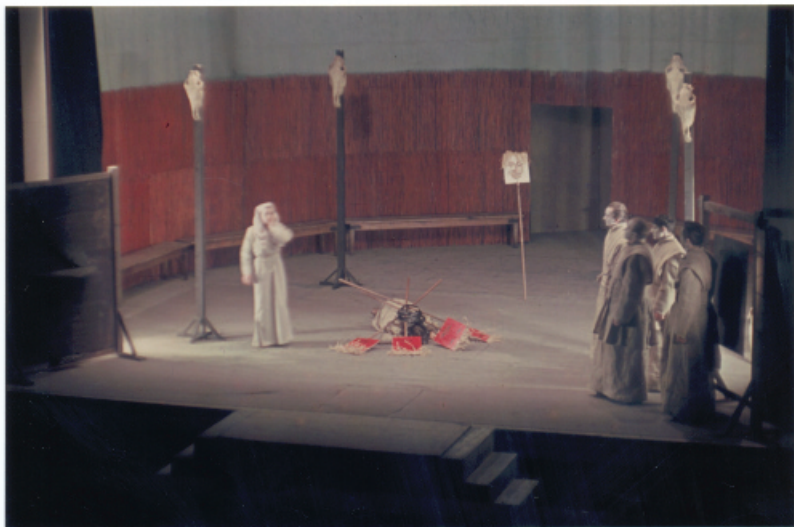


Figure 3.32 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

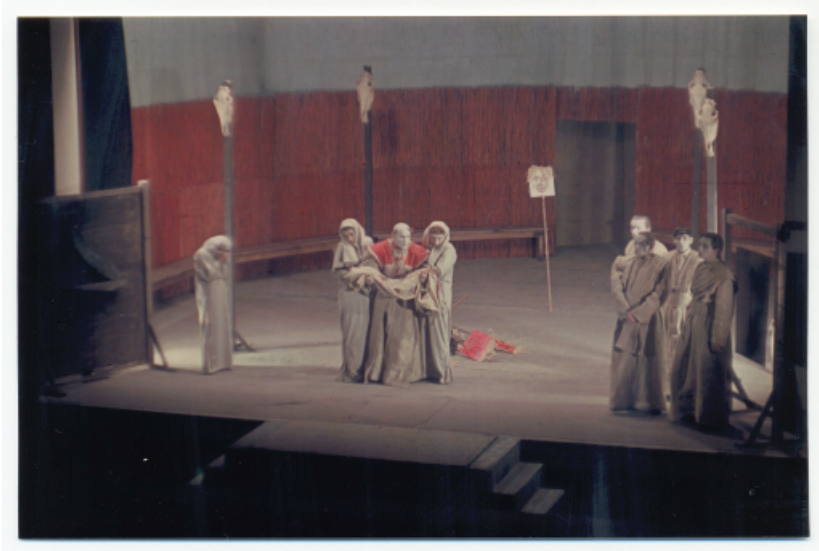


Figure 3.33 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

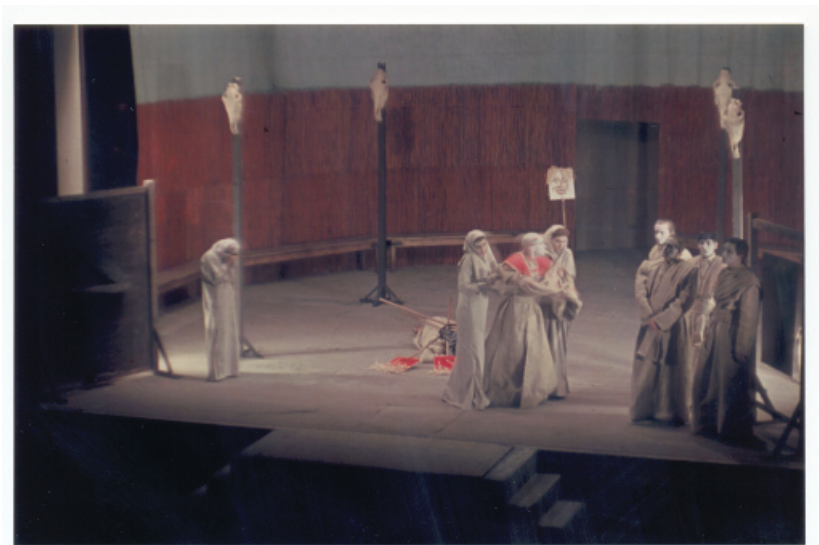


Figure 3.34 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

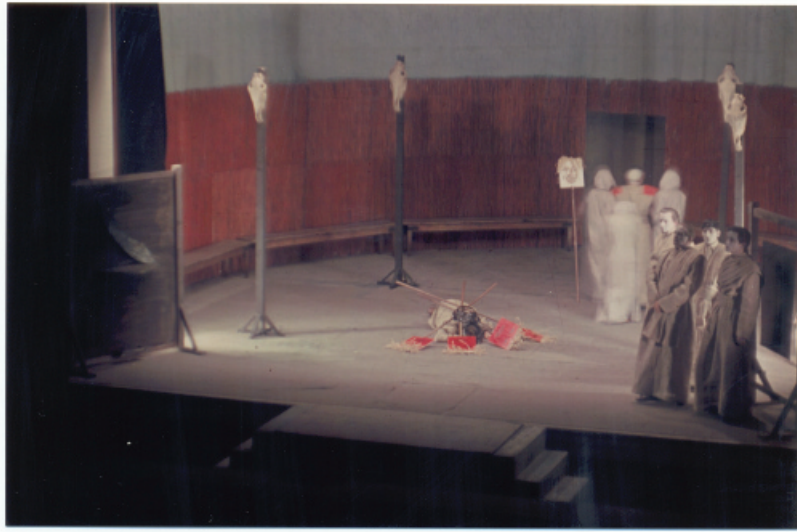


Figure 3.35 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

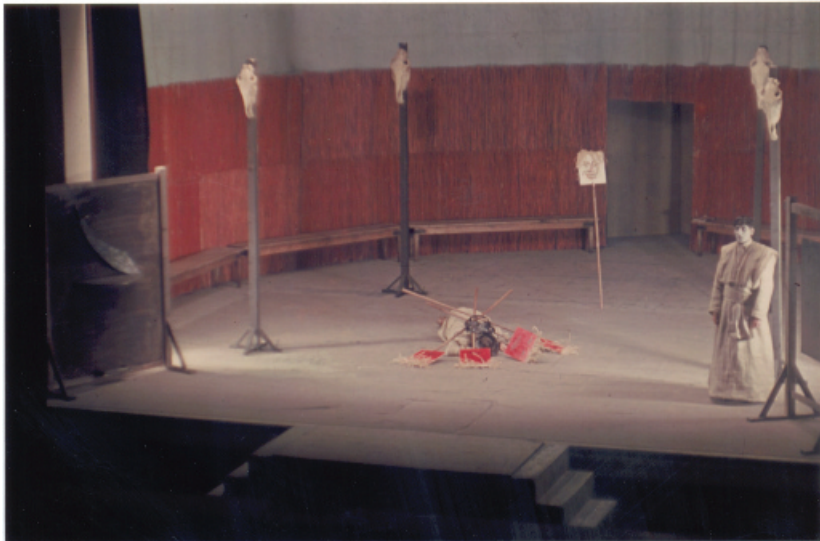


Figure 3.36 Detail of Brecht's *Antigone* production in Chur 1948 (copyright R. Berlau/Hoffmann)

the ancient Greek column: from marble to wood, from fleshed-out beauty to skeleton-like bareness, from majestic greatness to terrifying horror, from constructive art to wasteful sacrifice, from temple to slaughter-house. In combination with the semi-circular arrangement evoking the shape of the ancient Greek theatre, the columns-turned-horse-skull-poles are provocatively anti-classical. The overall objective is unambiguous: to strip Greek theatre of its glamorous, awe-inspiring veneer and expose it, literally, as 'barbaric theatre', as Brecht had put it with memorable polemical verve in the *Kleines Organon* (section 33, BFA 23: 78). Brecht's self-professed overall strategy of 'through-rationalization' therefore manifests itself not only in the language and structure of the play but also in the stage design where rational analysis ends up un-masking and visually exposing the true nature of ritual, divinity and the oppressive exercise of human power.

The ancient Greek theatre tradition was very much characterized by the use of *masks*: apart from the on-stage musician (the player of the *aulos*, an oboe-like instrument), everyone on stage, that is the individual (male) performers as well as the (male) members of the chorus, was wearing a mask throughout the whole performance. Brecht was not only fully aware of this, but also considered masks to be a prime means of *Verfremdung* (section 42 of the *Kleines Organon*, BFA 23: 81). Their striking use in the *Antigone* is therefore only to be expected. All solo performers wore mask-like white face painting, a somewhat eerie sight in combination with the greyish-white simple costumes made of burlap (the same material used for the scenic background: Curjel in Hecht 1988: 192). This effect seems to have been particularly striking in the case of Helene Weigel's *Antigone* (see especially Figures 3.6 and 3.20). Her pallor continually reinforced the sense of *Antigone* being a 'marked woman' which the act of collecting dust at the beginning of the play had already evoked. At the same time, masks and make-up were not used for creating the illusion of plot-fitting age, thus deliberately exposing the performers' biological age and the performer/actor duality. This typically Brechtian contradiction was particularly striking in the case of the forty-seven-year-old Helene Weigel (whose counterpart and 'uncle', Hans Gaugler as Creon, was thirty-five). Conversely, there was no attempt whatsoever to turn the young choral performers into the Elders of Thebes of the script, since 'neither wisdom nor poetry are predominantly found in old men, and in order to make wars one does not have to be old but merely belong to those in power' (*Antigonemodell* 1948, BFA 25: 102).

The masks used by the chorus were square, outsize and carried on poles (Figures 3.17–3.19 and 3.21–3.36). They would be put 'on' (and 'up') by the

chorus during their choral odes, who would collect them from the 'equipment board' ('Gerätebrett') and return them back there afterwards, all in full view of the audience (Figures 3.37, 3.23, 3.13–3.14). One chorus member would remove his mask when speaking while the other three would keep theirs in front of their bodies (Figure 3.18). The masks were white on one side and red on the other, with both sides being changed by the chorus members on a regular basis (Figures 3.17–18), while the red side became the predominant one as the play progressed (Figures 3.21–3.36). Both sides had primitive faces painted on them which had the character of what the twenty-first century has termed 'emoticons': a cheerful face for the white side and an angry one for the red side (the contrast is especially pronounced on Creon's mask, see Figures 3.15 and 3.28–3.29). Which side was turned towards the audience at what point, and whether any systematic rationale prompted the alteration, is not documented and not always recoverable from the extant colour photographs. In general, the red mask with its angry 'emoticon' was surely associated with blood, violence, war and defeat (and white, by implication, with the exact opposites). The two colour images taken of Creon's interaction with his son Haemon nicely illustrate a bi-polar shift from paternal care (white mask) (Figure 3.15) to despotic aggression as Haemon has put on his helmet and is about to depart for good (Figure 3.16).⁵⁹ Also the fact that the red side of the masks is up when the messenger is being symbolically buried by the chorus, in a manner which is very much reminiscent of the title heroine's funeral in *St Joan of the Stockyards* (on which see the final section of this book's Introduction), is surely consistent with such an interpretation (Figures 3.30–3.36).⁶⁰ The white side of Creon's 'Mask of Peace', which was planted in the ground with the white side facing the audience when the final messenger arrived and visually dominated the final sequence of the play with the white side still in full and unobstructed view (Figures 3.29–3.36), stood out for being painted with particularly cheerful 'smiley face', giving those final moments of the play a macabre, almost demonic feel comparable to that of evil clowns in horror movies like Stephen King's *It* (and Brecht does refer to Creon as a 'bloody clown').⁶¹ The closest comparator to Brecht's use of visual bi-polarity in the *Antigone* production is the change of mask, and personality, from Shen Te to Shui Ta in the *The Good Person of Sezuan* – even if Shen Te's

⁵⁹ Creon had touched his son's face with the mask twice but retracted it quickly when Haemon showed him his clenched fist (*Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 116).

⁶⁰ The fact that the red sides of the masks are up in this scene is also mentioned in the model book (BFA 25: 150) – which is the only time that the dual colour scheme of the masks is at all mentioned (or implied, rather).

⁶¹ 'Blutiger Clown', Hecht 1988: 26, cf. *Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 138.

shift is an act of necessity, whereas the bi-polarity of Creon and the chorus is one of depraved choice, the result of tyrannical hubris and blind obedience respectively.

These chorus masks (which have also been discussed at the end of the [Introduction](#)) generate a sense of *Verfremdung*, in particular because they do not match the physiology of the human face. Their primitive, almost childish look is designed to astonish, bewilder and provoke the spectators (especially those who might expect some attempt at recreating an ancient Greek theatre mask). Creon's mask is particularly conspicuous and closely linked to his movements (often used in ways reminiscent of a sceptre or a weapon) before being stuck into the ground by Creon like a pole or post ([Figures 3.13–3.16, 3.25–3.27](#) and [3.29–3.36](#)). Towards the end of the play, with Creon's mask almost presiding over the proceedings, all chorus masks are being used in the death ritual for the messenger who collapses after having informed Creon that their city is under attack from the army of Argos ([Figures 3.29–3.36](#)).

In the *Antigone* model book, Brecht repeatedly connects the masks with Bacchus, a connection which is supported in the Brechtian script and performance by frequent references to the chorus members as worshippers of Bacchus/Dionysus. A rather cursory remark by Brecht in the model book hints at another layer of meaning that he saw as inherent in these striking masks: the reference to them as the 'mask of peace' ('Maske des Friedens'; BFA 25: 145 and 149). This must refer to the self-delusion of Creon, and the city of Thebes as a whole, to think that they have already prevailed in the predatory war against Argos when in reality the push-back from Argos and the subsequent annihilation of Thebes are imminent. This 'peace' has always been a mask in that this war was always about exploitation, and the initial victory proved to be an illusion. Masks in Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles*, then, are connected with three key notions, all of which are unambiguously negative: primitivism, deception ('mask of peace') and death (use in funeral rite). Of these notions, however, primitivism is clearly the most pervasive and well-articulated.

Further props in the production were few, highly exposed and fully visible to the audience throughout in all aspects of their 'stage life' (to use Andrew Sofer's helpful terminology).⁶² Such full transparency is as much characteristic of Brecht's theatricality as his emphasis on the use value of objects and the 'radical separation of elements' ('radikale Trennung der Elemente': *Notes on Mahagonny* BFA 24: 79). This found its clearest expression in the juxtaposition of, in Brecht's deliberately technical lingo,

⁶² Sofer 2003.

the 'mask board' ('Maskenbrett', for the chorus masks and Creon's outsize sword) (Figure 3.37) and the 'alarm-plate construction' ('Alarmplattengerüst') (Figure 3.38), a huge gong the sound of which was to convey a sense of danger.⁶³ Both props framed the stage tableau on either side. A prop like Creon's outsize sword (Figure 3.39) (commensurate with his lust for power) was seen by some contemporary theatre critics as an element of symbolism,⁶⁴ although Brecht would probably have regarded it as a realistic expression of Creon's true nature (based on the assumption that a person like Creon will actually choose an object like this one).



Figure 3.37 Detail of the 'Maskenbrett'

⁶³ *Antigonemodell* 1948 25: 162 (with one picture reserved for these two props only).

⁶⁴ Thus Andreas Brügger in his review (in *Hecht* 1988: 200).

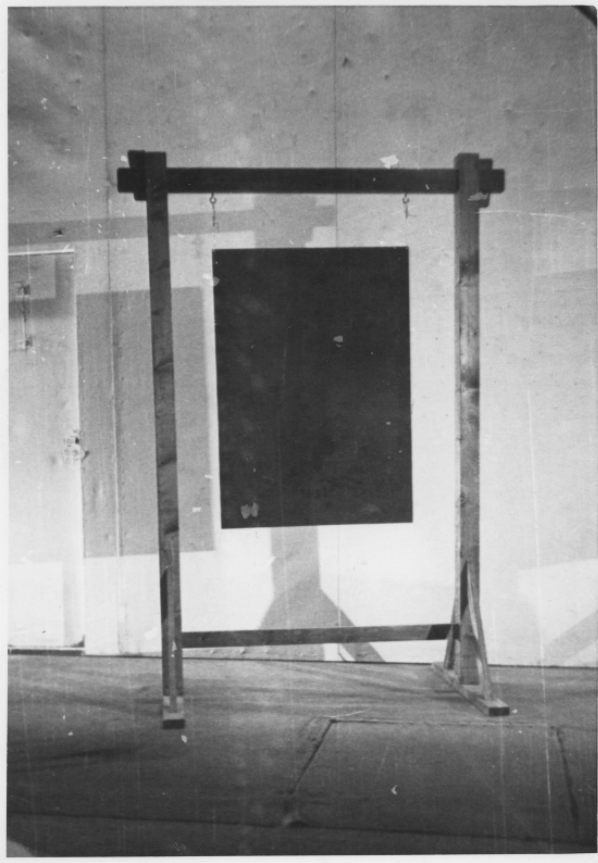


Figure 3.38 Detail of the ‘Alarmplattengerüst’

Overall, Brecht the director was always very detail-oriented and appreciated good craftsmanship, for which the *Antigone* production is an excellent example. The careful selection, production and handling of props like Antigone’s jar was an integral part of Brecht’s version of realism, as he sets out in ‘The Props of Weigel’ (‘Die Requisiten der Weigel’, *Messingkauf* BFA 22: 869), one of the theatre poems that was meant to be part of the *Messingkauf* treatise.⁶⁵ Hans Curjel, the production’s instigator and close observer in his function as Managing Director of the *Stadtheater* in Chur, recalls that the

⁶⁵ Another important text for this topic are Brecht’s observations on a French actor trying to choose the right hat for the role of the beggar Filch in the Paris production (1937) of the *Threepenny Opera* (BFA 24: 71–73, written in 1937 and first published in 1952 as part of the collaborative volume *Theaterarbeit*). Meticulous reflection on the object – its history, materiality and relationship with its owner and/or user – is key to Brecht’s thinking here.

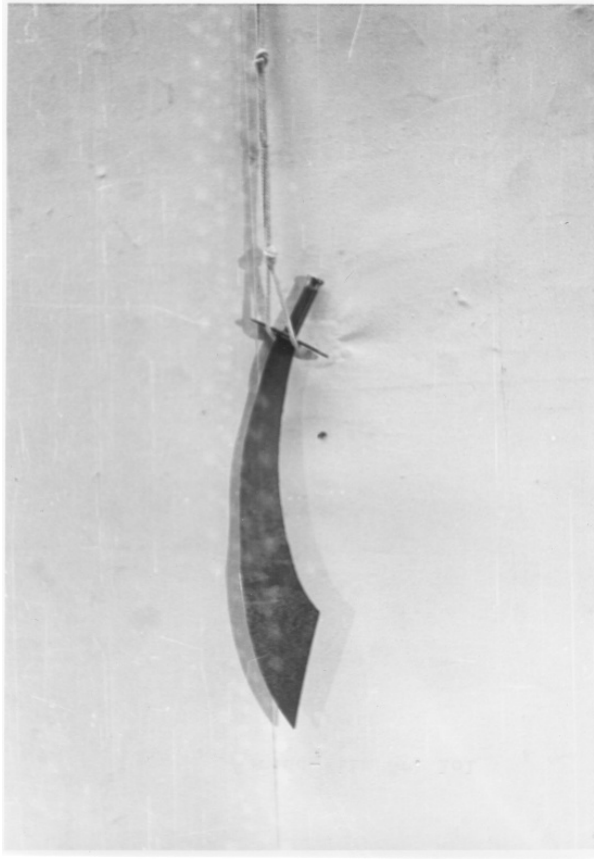


Figure 3.39 Detail of Creon's outsize sword

actors were to be accompanied by 'beautiful objects',⁶⁶ with the understanding that these objects were at work as meticulously and professionally as those holding or wearing them on stage. He adds the interesting detail that Creon's chair was also being used by Brecht as his director's chair (an indication, Curjel felt, that Brecht identified with Creon!).⁶⁷

The prop of the play was the large wooden board used to restrain Antigone in her encounters with Creon (Figure 3.40). Brecht refers to it simply as 'the board' ('Das Brett': *Antigonemodelll 1948*, BFA 25: 102, 104) or, in his theatre poem on props, as 'the board of shame' ('Schandbrett': *Messingkauf*, BFA 22: 869 and 12: 331). It was put on her, in full view of the audience, by the watchman as he was announcing her arrival (lines 311–17). Its material characteristics – it is heavy, big, unwieldy – are cleverly exploited throughout.

⁶⁶ Curjel in Hecht 1988: 191f. ⁶⁷ Curjel in Hecht 1988: 191.

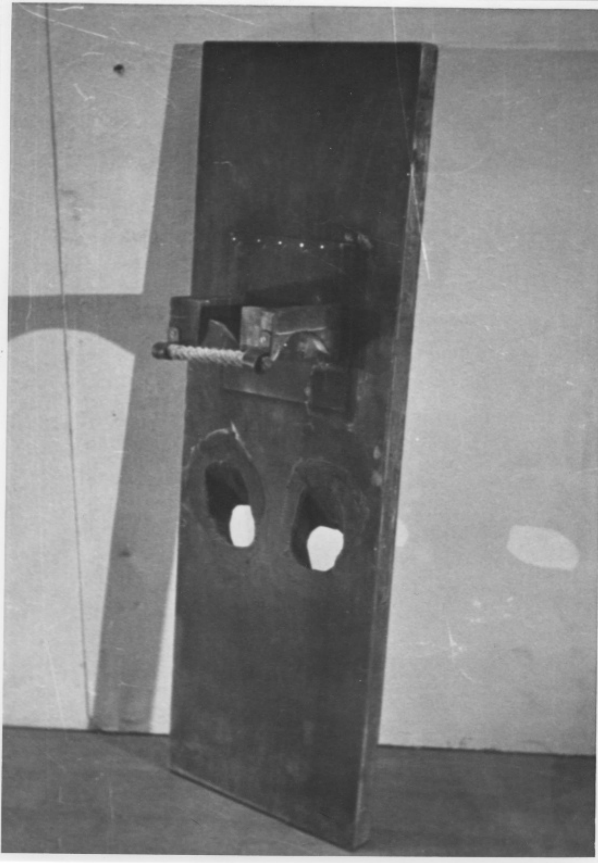


Figure 3.40 Detail of 'the board'

Thus Antigone 'is staggering under the weight of the board' (*Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 102) during the watchman's report detailing her deed, thereby providing a physiological translation of Antigone's psychological state (anxiety and fear under the magnitude of the accusation). Brilliantly, Brecht realized that 'carrying the board around turns Antigone into a centre of unrest ('Unruhezentrum'), since it translates her actions and reactions in a physically big way' (*Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 104). Functioning as an amplifier, the large board is capable of physically communicating attitudes, moods and psychological developments. Brecht therefore continues:

Bei ihren Vorstößen gegen die *Alten* (421) und gegen *Kreon* (455, nachdem *Kreons* Verurteilung sie beinahe hat zusammenbrechen lassen) hat sie einerseits das *Brett* zu schleppen, andererseits treibt das Momentum des Brettes sie. Im Kampf scheint das Brett leichter zu werden.

In her forays against the *Old Men* (421) and against *Creon* (455, after *Creon's* condemnation almost made her break down) she, on the one hand, has to haul the board, but on the other hand the momentum of the board drives her. In the fight the board appears to become lighter. (Brecht *Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 104)

The final sentence here, as often in Brecht, provides the most startling insight: the board, symbol of oppression and brute force, over time becomes a force of liberation. It is a dialectical prop, so to speak, since it is both the instrument of repression while at the same time enabling resistance to the intolerable status quo and setting free new energy in those courageous enough to act in the spirit of this resistance. Antigone is now, truly, a 'centre of unrest' in the political sense.

In his design, Brecht was clearly inspired by the pillory, a medieval and early modern instrument of punishment, torture and public humiliation (hence also Brecht's reference to it as the 'board of shame'). He deviated, however, from the pillory design in that the hands are now fastened not in the front but at the back, by fixating the delinquent along a vertical rather than horizontal axis, by turning the pillory into a mobile device that could be carried, and by making the pillory so conspicuously large while allowing full movement of the delinquent's feet. As a result, this signature prop acquires enormous versatility and stage presence, and notably works from every audience angle so that the performer can move with it at her discretion (just watching Antigone's hands at the back is a memorable sight). Taxidou, who mistakenly refers to the board as a 'door', has suggested that the prop evokes crucifixion,⁶⁸ and although this is probably wrong (one would expect some stretching of the arms that is characteristic of crucifixion), an element of passion play theatricality is surely present. Thus Antigone's breaking down when confronted with Creon's condemnation is reminiscent of Jesus Christ's breaking down under the weight of the cross as he is forced to carry it to the site of his execution (a standard feature of passion play dramaturgy to the present day). And Brecht, it may be remembered from the quote at the very beginning of this chapter, had stated that 'the whole *Antigone* belongs on the barbaric horse-skull site' (Journal 18 January 1948, BFA 27: 265). The German noun used here, 'Pferdeschädelstätte', is an allusion designed to remind a German native speaker immediately of one thing: Golgotha, the site of Jesus' execution

⁶⁸ Taxidou 2008: 241–62. The article is marred by Taxidou's exclusive focus on the photographs of the model book without also engaging in detail with the text of the model book (which was only available in German at the time). The (mis)interpretation of the board as a door crops up in Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (from 2012), with explicit reference to Brecht (see Liapis 2021: 381f.).

mentioned in the New Testament (Matthew 27:33, Mark 15: 22, John 19:17), which Luther (and many other German translators in his wake) had translated as 'Schädelstätte'. Brecht, who had a deeply religious mother of Protestant faith and, perhaps even more importantly, a maternal grandmother who was a keen biblical story-teller, was, by his own admission,⁶⁹ profoundly influenced by the Bible (which is of crucial importance for plays like *The Good Person of Sezuwan* or *Mother Courage*, see [Chapters 13](#) and [10](#) respectively). Such use of biblical themes, language and imagery was therefore both natural and obvious to him. If we are indeed watching 'The Passion Play of Antigone',⁷⁰ the hyper-ritualization that characterizes this production overall acquires yet another layer, and the absence of any closural redemption (or at least some prospect of redemption, however distant) in the play's final moments becomes even gloomier if seen as a deliberate contrast with the Christian passion play where the suffering of Jesus Christ is precisely not presented as pointless and in vain but serves to pave the way for the eventual redemption of humankind. Brecht's hyper-ritualization exposes religious forces as inane constructs and de-mystifies what the audience see taking place on stage.

For Brecht theatrical lighting always served the principal purpose of clarity, transparency and proper illumination. He needed spectators who were alert and attentive, hence 'mood lighting' or other psychologizing uses of stage lighting were completely out of place: 'Let them dream in brightness!' ('Lasst Sie in der Helle träumen!'), Brecht exclaims early on in his theatre poem on lighting that was to be included in the *Messingkauf* (BFA 22: 867). Accordingly, the *Antigone* stage was to be lit fully and brightly. Hans Curjel reports that even the primitive lighting system that the *Stadtheater* in Chur⁷¹ had to offer was not basic enough for Brecht, that he had two large aluminium light-bowls placed on either side of the stage instead, and that the sequencing of the lighting functioned as what Curjel called 'optical hinges'.⁷² Berlau's photographs, both the black and white and the colour ones, give a sense of the exposure, exhibition, directness and rawness created by this kind of light dramaturgy. At the same time, as one reviewer of the production pointed out, the technical resources available were not quite sufficient to provide the desired effect in full: only the actual

⁶⁹ In a survey by the women's magazine *Die Dame* (*The Lady*) Brecht replied to the question which book has had the biggest impact on him: 'You will laugh: the Bible' ('Sie werden lachen: die Bibel'; [Hecht 1997](#): 253, entry for October 1 1928).

⁷⁰ George Tabori's 2006 production at the *Berliner Ensemble* featured two long, white footbridges made of wood, joined together in the shape of a cross.

⁷¹ On the theatre and Curjel's role in it as the new impresario see [Wüthrich 2015](#): 88–107.

⁷² Curjel in [Hecht 1988](#): 192.

playing area was completely bright, whereas the side and the back of the stage were semi-dark.⁷³

The same general principle of transparency that informs Brecht's approach to light also applies to his handling of *sound*. In the 1928-production of the *Threepenny Opera*, for instance, the musicians were, of course, within the audience's sight. Such exposure had also been envisaged for the one instrument that featured in the *Antigone* production, a piano that was being used as a percussion instrument with its strings being banged on by hand or with a small wooden mallet. But financial considerations in this (very) low-budget production made obsolete the initial plan of a visible on-stage piano that was to be 'operated' by two people (*Antigonemodell 1948* BFA 25: 120). The rhythm (not dissimilar to that of Ravel's *Bolero*, in fact) was the following (metronome at 58 for the quarter note):



Figure 3.41 Rhythm of the music for *The Antigone of Sophocles*

It was played monotonously in low ('piano') volume throughout, with those slight variations in the means of sound production. The recording of the piano music by Hans Curjel which ended up being used instead is available at the Brecht Archive in Berlin (BBA AVM CD 097 [1–4]). While listening to the twenty-eight-minute recording, labelled as 'Geräuschmusik' ('noise music'), I compiled the following list of personal impressions and associations: eerie, martial, metallic, dark, sombre, threatening, rhythmical, repetitive, luminal, transcendental, sinister, diabolical, same rhythm minimally varied in orchestration, disturbing/disturbed, primal, primitive, apocalyptic, ritualistic, execution, sacrifice. The music, then, complements and magnifies in the aural dimension what Curjel refers to as the production's 'intellectual and optical harshness' (one might add linguistic harshness to this list as well).⁷⁴

The Prologue(s): Contextualizing Tragedy

Brecht's play does not start with the dust-collecting 'marked woman' Antigone, but is prefaced by a Prologue set in Berlin in April 1945, during the final days of Nazi rule and the pointless bloodshed in the battle over

⁷³ Reviewer 'Be.', in Hecht 1988: 197, cf. Ruth Berlau's remarks on the lighting conditions in Chur (*Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 82).

⁷⁴ 'Geistige und optische Härte': Curjel in Hecht 1988: 193.

Germany's capital city (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). The sheer existence of such a Prologue is noteworthy, because it implies that Brecht sensed a fundamental aspect of Greek tragedy that has challenged playwrights and audiences since antiquity: given that Greek tragedy takes its subject matter from the mythical past⁷⁵ which, by definition, is beyond what its audiences can possibly have experienced for themselves, how can this art form be relevant to its audiences? How can it speak to them about their own concerns in such a manner that they feel integrated and acknowledged rather than left out and disconnected? While the three classical Greek playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides came up with complex and often subtle strategies involving intertextuality and aetiology to close this 'relevance gap', Brecht chooses a much more blatant technique: montage and jarring juxtaposition.

Formally, the Prologue is one of Brecht's most innovative dramatic creations (and can be a very engaging actor-exercise piece in its own right). The 'First Sister', clearly echoing the Ismene-role of the main play (and played by the same actress), regularly and seamlessly shifts from an epic mode of narration (in the 1st person plural past tense or, once, in the 3rd person singular past tense, always turning to the audience) into a dramatic one (in the 1st person singular present tense, turning to her fellow-actress). The effect is a constant and audible juxtaposition of narrator and (en)actor, observer and agent, performer and character. Brecht emphasized that her mode of delivery in the epic ode of narration had to be 'simple and in the tone of a poem', avoiding any sense of being emotionally charged by the events which she was supposed to demonstrate rather than embody (*Antigonemodell* 1948, BFA 25: 86).

All is this is very similar, in both form and function, to the so-called 'bridge verses' ('*Brückenverse*') which Brecht had been using in rehearsal as training tools, and which subsequently became an integral part of the *Antigone* model book where they serve as captions, so to speak, for the

⁷⁵ The documented exceptions to this pattern occur early in the history of Greek tragedy and stand out, especially the (lost) tragedy *The Capture of Miletus* by the tragic playwright Phrynichus which was staged shortly after 494 BCE and, according to Herodotus (6.21), angered the Athenians so much 'for reminding them of their own troubles' that they fined the poet 1,000 drachmas and prohibited any reperformances. The other historical event which is known to have become the subject of tragedies shortly after was much less problematic, namely the momentous victory of the Greeks over the Persians, dramatized in Aeschylus' *Persians* (produced in 472 BCE) and in a (now lost) tragedy by Phrynichus. A good discussion is Wright 2016: 23–7. At the other end of the spectrum, tragedies could occasionally have entirely fictitious plots (Aristotle *Poetics* chapter 9, 1451b19–21).

pictures.⁷⁶ Being written in hexameters and the 3rd person past tense, these 'bridge verses' are markedly epic in character and 'demonstrate', as Brecht would say, the action (instead of 'being' the action). They were recited by the respective actors in rehearsal as they moved from the 'neutral' outer into the inner circle of the actual performance space. Twice, however, Brecht even wrote 'bridge verses' into the script (to be delivered by the chorus), at two very important moments in the play as Antigone and Creon are making their final exits (BFA 8: 227 and 241 respectively).

Metrically, the Prologue follows a simple A-B rhyme pattern in a loose form of blank verse. Formal mimicry of Greek tragedy may be seen in those passages of the conversation where one sister takes over from the other in mid-line (the so-called *antilabê*, frequently used by Greek tragic playwrights, usually in moments of escalating tension between two characters). While Brecht's German is very clear, there can be a certain harshness vaguely reminiscent of Hölderlin's language which the audience is about to be exposed to more fully in just a few moments.

The plot of the Prologue is a self-contained mini-tragedy which nonetheless firmly connects with the whole thanks to clear connections with the main plot, all designed to close the 'relevance gap'. At dawn two sisters return home after a night at the air-raid bunker, shouldering a gas mask container, to find their building undamaged. Upon noticing food and some belongings of their brother who is a German soldier in the war, there is an initial sense of joy and relief. The shift (*peripeteia*) ensues instantly, and by a dramatic device all-too-familiar from Greek tragedy, the off-stage death cry:

DIE ERSTE

Ich wollt dich nicht verstören.

Und als wir schweigend saßen, da an unser Ohr

Kam von jenseits der Tür ein Laut, dass unser Blut gefror.

Ein Brüllen von

draußen.

DIE ZWEITE

Schwester, da schreit wer; lass uns nachsehn gehn.

⁷⁶ Brecht discusses them in section 6 of *Antigonemodell 1948* (BFA 25: 79f.). According to Curjel (in Hecht 1988: 190f.) Brecht wrote new 'bridge verses' almost every day for the rehearsals, even though apart from Helene Weigel none the actors seemed to know just how to utilize these 'pedagogical experiments' (as Curjel calls them) for their own acting. Brecht would write 'bridge verses' for rehearsals again as part of the *Urfaust* project in 1952 (BFA 24: 427-9). These ones are not written in hexameters and are of significantly lower quality than those published either in the script or the model book of his *Antigone* play.

DIE ERSTE

Bleib sitzen, du; wer sehn will, wird gesehn.

FIRST SISTER: I did not want to make you worried./ And when we were sitting in silence, a sound/ Reached our ears from beyond the door so that our blood froze. (*Screaming from outside*). SECOND SISTER: Sister, someone is screaming; let us go and look. FIRST SISTER: Stay seated, you; who wants to see, is being seen. (Brecht *Antigone* Prologue 26–30, BFA 8: 196)

The off-stage scream, described by one theatre critic as ‘a long cry of lamentation, as if someone were calling from the grave’,⁷⁷ is repeated once more, before it is time to go to work and the First Sister notices that the screams came from their brother, the soldier, who had been hanged in front of their house. The Second Sister, a character doublet of Antigone (and consequently cast with Helene Weigel), is about to leave the house and cut her brother down trying to revive him when an SS-soldier suddenly enters:

SS-MANN

Das ist der und wer seid ihr?

Aus eurer Türe trat er mir.

So rechn ich aus, dass ihr am End

Den Volksverräter draußen kennt.

DIE ERSTE

Lieber Herr, mit uns geh nicht ins Gericht

Denn wir kennen den Menschen nicht.

SS-MANN

Was will die mit dem Messer dann?

DIE ERSTE

Da sah ich meine Schwester an.

Sollt sie in eigner Todespein

Jetzt gehn, den Bruder zu befrein?

Er mochte nicht gestorben sein.

SS-MAN: This is him and who are you?/From your door, I think, he stepped out./So I reckon that in the end/You know that betrayer of the people outside./(*FIRST SISTER*) Dear Sir, do not judge against us/For we do not know this man./(*SS-MAN*) What is she up to with her knife, then? (*FIRST SISTER*) Then I looked at my sister./Should she now, suffering her own death,/Go to free the brother?/He should not have died. (Brecht *Antigone* Prologue 83–93, BFA 8: 198 f.)

⁷⁷ ‘ein langer Klageschrei, so, als rief jemand aus dem Grab’ (‘C.S.’ in Hecht 1988: 203).

The first sister's denial of knowing her brother echoes Peter's denial of knowing Jesus on the night of his arrest (Mark 14: 67–72; Luke 22: 55–62; Matthew 26: 69–75), an early and subtle yet clear infusion of the Christian passion play which will be picked up later in the image of Antigone tied to 'The board'. This mini-tragedy ends with an open closure: will she or will she not? should she or should she not? The answers are provided by the subsequent tragedy of Antigone, to which the audience is now abruptly transported: after the visible scene change (conducted in semi-darkness), the large gong was sounded twice, which also functioned as the cue for the two actresses to leave the outer semi-circle and enter the inner one as Antigone and Ismene (*Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 88–90).⁷⁸

As much as this mini-tragedy pre-enacts, and in this sense replicates, the full tragedy that is to follow, it must be noted that it also extends the tragedy in a rather obvious but very important way: the already quite considerable stage time that Antigone (= sister 2) and Ismene (= sister 1) spend on stage alone together in Sophocles' script – pretty much exactly 100 lines, without even the chorus present – is roughly doubled by the addition of Brecht's Prologue. The effect is that, for all their differences, the sisters are even more likely to be perceived by the audience as one pair, much more united in their suffering than divided by their individual response to it. Brecht not only sensed this, but went one step further and highlighted their sorority both in the script and on stage by treating Antigone and Ismene not only as sisters but, ingeniously, as *twins*.

The time investment of a micro-analysis pays dividends here. First, the text. Sophocles had put a strong emphasis on the commonality and shared bond of the sisters in the play's very first line:

Ô koinon autadelphon Ismênês kara

O common sisterly head of Ismene⁷⁹

Hölderlin fully picked up on this in his rendering, and took things further:

Gemeinsamschwesterliches! o Ismenes Haupt!

Commonsisterly! O Ismene's head!

Not only does Hölderlin, as usual, follow the Greek word order. More than that, the Greek adjectives *koinon* ('common') and *autadelphon* ('sisterly'),

⁷⁸ The beginning of the Prologue had also been signalled by the large gong (this time sounding only once: *Antigonemodell 1948*, BFA 25: 84)

⁷⁹ Griffith 1999: 120 quotes Jebb on this line: 'The pathetic emphasis of this first line gives the keynote of the drama. The origin which connects the sisters also isolates them.'

which are conceptually linked, have now, in Hölderlin's rendering, been completely bonded in form! The two words have become one, melted together in the novel creation 'gemeinsamschwesterliches'. While two acts of sexual union resulted in the birth of the two sisters, Hölderlin's language has re-created that primordial 'oneness' with which everything started. Death, Antigone knows, will soon violently and brutally tear them apart forever. But Hölderlin makes his Antigone address her sister in a language which re-creates, for a split second of performance time, that oneness of birth within the body (or should I say womb?) of language. The exclamation mark which follows dictates a pause in the performer's delivery and emphasizes the separation from the remainder of the line (thereby further strengthening the bond between the two elements which form the new one-word compound).

Brecht, in turn, both clarifies and normalizes Hölderlin's language and the mode of delivery – with a brilliant twist:

Schwester, Ismene, Zwillingenreis

Sister, Ismene, twin shoot

That 'oneness' which Hölderlin had re-created in language Brecht has transformed into a biological reality within the fictional world of the play. Antigone and Ismene are twins: they *are* the same, as much as human being physiologically can be. Characteristically, Brecht thinks things through in materialistic terms and makes things concrete.

This concretization of sisterhood as twinhood was continued and reinforced by the staging and the resources of material theatre. In the Prologue, the two sisters are identically dressed with a head scarf, a trenchcoat, black shoes and a metal container each for their gas mask, with only the colour of the coats being different (sister 1 (Ismene) is wearing a grey-beige one, sister 2 (Antigone) a black one) (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). The head scarves in particular convey the sense of the two sisters being near-identical and help obliterate the age difference of twenty or so years between Weigel and her counterpart Marita Glenck as Ismene. In the play proper, Antigone and Ismene are identically dressed in a greyish-black, with head scarves and one-piece robes (some spectators may have associated this look with that of nuns). Their look is in distinct colour contrast to that of the maids, the other female characters in this production, who are dressed in greyish-white like all other (male) characters (Figures 3.20–3.24 and 3.32–3.34). This makes the black of the two sisters stand out all the more: they are mourners, to be sure. But since, as was previously shown, in the first actions of the performance Antigone is

additionally characterized as a 'dead woman walking', the identical costume of the twin-sisters underlines that they are bonded not only in mourning but also, somehow, in the catastrophe which is imminent.

Brecht's brilliant reading and staging of Antigone and Ismene as twins in fact anticipates, and answers, a discussion about Ismene's role and agency which has fuelled feminism-inspired discussions of Sophocles half a century later.⁸⁰ Honig in particular sees considerable agency in Ismene by virtue of the fact that, as the result of a 'forced choice', she decides to live on, leading a life of 'living death' in the house of her sister's killer.⁸¹ For this choice to be significant in Brecht's version, however, there would need to be an indication that Ismene decides not only to live on but to live on *differently* and as an agent of constructive change (however small). Instead, Brecht's point is a different one: by presenting the two sisters as twins, he brings out the sense of a 'community of suffering', at the micro-level of two individuals with blood-bonds. This is a very important notion in Brecht's *Antigone*-version which persistently emphasizes the repercussions of war on much larger suffering communities, be it the city of Argos (which will collectively resist and prevail) or Thebes (which is collectively complicit in Creon's crimes and will be annihilated). While Antigone and Ismene are not resistance fighters and belong to a corrupted elite that has eaten 'from the bread that was baked in the dark rock', they are also suffering – together.

The Prologue, for all its thoughtful innovativeness, continued to be work-in-progress for Brecht. Above all, despite his efforts in the Prologue to close the 'relevance gap' between the ancient tale and the contemporary world, the problem persisted, at least in Brecht's mind. For when the challenge re-surfaced in the form of the subsequent 1951-production of the *Antigone* in the city of Greiz in East Germany (the first time the play was performed on German soil) Brecht came up with a new solution in the form of a radically different new Prologue, at the instigation of the theatre company at Greiz. It clearly mattered to Brecht that the play should matter to its audiences, and to achieve this goal Brecht felt it was necessary to embed, in one way or another, the ancient play within a less remote and

⁸⁰ Honig 2013, who does not mention Brecht's play, stresses the bond of sorority in Sophocles' *Antigone*, while Goldhill 2012: 231–48 draws attention to sisterhood, the language of sharing and the marginalization of Ismene in interpretations of Sophocles' play (here Brecht's play is mentioned, but in a different context (p. 54) and in passing). Contrary to Honig's view, the detailed linguistic analysis in Hahnemann 2019 shows that Sophocles both invokes the close ties between the two sisters and presents their relationship as irrevocably ruptured from the start. An overview of influential gendered discussions of Sophocles' *Antigone* can be found in Holmes 2012: 150–83.

⁸¹ Honig 2013: 153–6.

more contemporary context. I have, however, not been able to ascertain whether or not this new Prologue for the Greiz production, the only other production of this play during Brecht's lifetime under the direction of Otto-Ernst Tickardt on the basis of the model book, has ever actually been performed (in Greiz or elsewhere) until George Tabori used it in his production of the play at the *Berliner Ensemble* in 2006.⁸² Since the new Prologue is currently only available in German (= BFA 25: 509 f.), I provide the full text in English first (with the German added in brackets below):

New Prologue to Antigone

On stage come the actors playing Antigone, Creon and the seer Tiresias. Standing between the other two, the Tiresias actor turns to the audience:

Friends, unaccustomed
 May be the high language
 In the poem, thousands of years old
 That we have rehearsed here. Unknown
 To you is the content of the poem, which to its ancient listeners
 Was deeply familiar. So allow us
 To present it to you. This is Antigone,
 Royal offspring from the line of Oedipus. This here is
 Creon, tyrant of the city of Thebes, her uncle. I am
 Tiresias, the seer. This man over there is
 Waging a predatory war against remote Argos. She
 Confronts the inhuman and he destroys her.
 But his war, now called inhuman,
 Collapses for him. The inflexibly just one,
 Disregarding the sacrifices of her own enslaved people,
 Has put an end to it. We ask you to
 Look in your souls for similar deeds
 In the nearer past or for the absence of
 Similar deeds. And now
 You will see us and the other actors,
 One by one, enter the small show area
 To play, where once under the
 Animal skulls of barbarian sacrifice cults
 In times most remote humanity
 Rose big.

The performers move to the back and the other performers enter the stage.

⁸² It was certainly not part of the opening-night performance on 18 November 1951, which had no Prologue at all and which is the reference point of the extant reviews (collected in Hecht 1988: 217–27). In fact, Brecht only sent off the new Prologue on 20 November 1951, in response to a request by the ensemble at the *Stadtheater Greiz* (Hecht 1988: 213 and 227, cf. BFA 8: 492).

Neuer Prolog zu Antigone

Auf die Bühne treten die Darsteller der Antigone, des Kreon und des Sehers Tiresias. Zwischen den beiden anderen stehend, wendet sich der Darsteller des Tiresias an die Zuschauer:

Freunde, ungewohnt/Mag euch die hohe Sprache sein/In dem Gedicht, tausende Jahre alt,/Das wir hier einstudiert. Unbekannt/Ist euch der Stoff des Gedichts, der den einstigen Hörern/Innig vertraut war. Deshalb erlaubt uns/Ihn euch vorzustellen. Das ist Antigone,/Fürstin aus dem Geschlecht des Ödipus. Das hier/Kreon, Tyrann der Stadt Theben, ihr Oheim. Ich bin/Tiresias, der Seher. Dieser da/Führt einen Raubkrieg gegen das ferne Argos. Diese/Tritt dem Unmenschlichen entgegen und er vernichtet sie./Aber sein Krieg, nun unmenschlich geheißен,/Bricht ihm zusammen. Die unbeugsam Gerechte/Nichtachtend des eignen geknechteten Volkes Opfer/Hat ihn beendet. Wir bitten euch/Nachzusuchen in euren Gemütern nach ähnlichen Taten/Näherer Vergangenheit oder dem Ausbleiben/Ähnlicher Taten. Und nunmehr/Werdet ihr uns und die anderen Schauspieler/Ein um den andern den kleinen Schauplatz/Im Spiele betreten sehn, wo einst unter den/Tierschädeln barbarischen Opferkults/Urgrauer Zeiten die Menschlichkeit/Groß aufstand.

*Die Darsteller begeben sich nach hinten und die anderen Darsteller betreten die Bühne. (Brecht, *New Prologue to The Antigone of Sophocles*, BFA 25: 509 f.)*

Regardless of whether or not it was ever performed, the very existence of this new Prologue and its precise content are noteworthy. At first glance, this is an ‘information prologue’ (a dramaturgical device that Euripides is particularly fond of), performed, fittingly, in character by the clairvoyant seer Teiresias. The communicative function of any ‘information prologue’ is to facilitate access to the play as it unfolds (bearing in mind that different audience members bring different levels of competence to the play).⁸³ Access is indeed an unusually strong concern for Brecht here, for the structure and rhetoric adopted in the new Prologue show obvious signs of anxiety about pitch and the possibility of losing his audience (a danger which the original Prologue with the two sisters had apparently not fended off well enough). The ‘unaccustomed’ (‘ungewohnt’) nature of the play is the first concern articulated by Teiresias, closely followed by worries about the millennia-old plot being too remote and detached for a 1950s audience. Did the fact that Anouilh’s *Antigone*, the considerably more successful Antigone-play of the day, did have an extensive (and highly

⁸³ On audience competence in classical Athens see [Revermann 2006b](#).

meta-theatrical) ‘information prologue’ influence Brecht’s new prologue for the Greiz production in any way? This seems impossible to answer, as is the question of whether Anouilh’s entire play had any significance for Brecht at all (see footnotes 45 and 51 above). Some kind of cross-fertilization is certainly not unthinkable.

Such anxiety is alien to the Foreword of the *Antigonemodell 1948* from six years prior, and is typical of the ambivalent status that the Antigone-figure continued to have for Brecht (see ‘The problem of *Antigone*’ above). It is probably also indicative of Brecht realizing, in the wake of the play’s lack of stage success and (at best) lukewarm general reception, that his *The Antigone of Sophocles* was a complex work and no easy sell. This may explain why, in a parallel move, Brecht emphasizes the trans-historical and universally human: the new Prologue closes by remarking that ‘humanity (‘Menschlichkeit’) rose big’ in those inhuman times where Antigone opposed the inhuman ruler and his inhuman war. This sentiment, picked up again in the (unpublished) ‘Notes on the Adaptation’ (BFA 24: 350–3), is also alien to the Foreword in the model book where Brecht had been keen to point out what Antigone is *not* (not a resistance fighter, for instance) – without specifying what he thought she might positively do stand for. The humanist interpretation of the Antigone-figure is, needless to say, a common-place of the play’s traditional (and, if you will, bourgeois) exegesis, up to the present day. This interpretation would resonate even more strongly with audiences in the 1950s, a decade where *Humanismus* (‘Humanism’) was a buzz word for German artists, critics and scholars alike (in the East as well as the West). Brechtian twists remain: the appeal to the audience to check for similar deeds, or the lack thereof, in their own past is certainly one of them, as is Brecht’s provocative insistence, familiar to the reader of this book by now, that the world of Greek tragedy is barbaric.

Significance and Reception: A Silent Revolution

Starting in the 1960s, stagings of Greek tragedy across the globe have been a major hub for avant-garde theatrical experimentation.⁸⁴ In fact, they have so much been at the forefront of innovations in stage design, directorial approach, plot experimentation and artistic autonomy vis-à-vis the

⁸⁴ On this period of (Greek) tragedy reception, see [Hall/Macintosh/Wrigley 2004](#) (foundational), [Revermann 2008a](#) and [Fischer-Lichte 2017](#), esp. 221–346.

received script that it is easy to misjudge just how novel and ahead of its time Brecht's 1948- production of *Die Antigone des Sophocles* actually was: the pervasive hyper-ritualization and essentially every other aspect of the stage design by Brecht and Neher, the hybrid nature of the underlying script (translation-adaptation-new play), the unprecedented acting style that was aiming for demonstration rather than total engrossment – all of this was not only new but in fact revolutionary by the standards of its time, across the theatre landscape in Europe and beyond. It also bears recalling that in 1948 Brecht was re-entering the European scene as somewhat of a revenant, albeit with a notorious track record of unconventionalism. For theatre critics and informed audience members in the German-speaking countries, Brecht was an *enfant terrible* of 1920s-Berlin, known primarily for the success of the *Threepenny Opera* and the scandal caused by the *Mahagonny* opera, a notoriety which for some might have included Brecht's theoretical underpinnings, in particular the attempt to create a new kind of 'epic' theatre.⁸⁵ But Brecht's project was very much unfinished, a veritable torso, because like many of his generation he had been cut off and out of sight for a decade and a half. His reappearance was therefore met with interest and curiosity, if not necessarily great enthusiasm. Brecht was certainly known in the German cultural scene and in some parts of Europe but, to bring the point home by using drastic urban slang, he was not exactly 'hot shit'. And an(other) *Antigone* was an improbable play to help change that for starters, especially considering the resounding pan-European success of Anouilh's version at around the same time.⁸⁶

The opening performance of *The Antigone of Sophocles* on 15 February 1948 did attract supra-regional audience from Zurich and Germany. It was, for example, attended by Bruno Snell, a leading German Hellenist at Hamburg University who was around this time starting to be a formative figure both in the discipline of Classics and in the cultural politics of the young West Germany. Snell went on to write a favourable and open-minded review (without concealing his preference for the

⁸⁵ Also note that the programme of the Zurich performances of *Mother Courage* (in 1941) and *The Good Person of Sezuan* (in 1943) contained the schematic juxtaposition of 'epic' and 'dramatic' theatre from the *Notes* on the *Mahagonny* opera, which had first been published in 1930 (BFA 6: 442).

⁸⁶ There is also Carl Orff's opera *Antigona* which premiered at the Salzburg Festival in 1949, with Caspar Neher (!) doing the stage design. Like Brecht, Orff also used Hölderlin's translation, in fact the full and unchanged version. Brecht was aware of this work and wrote an incisive (unpublished) note on it (BFA 23: 114f.) in which he criticizes the opera as exoticizing and superficially formalist.

Sophoclean version) in the social-liberal Swiss daily newspaper *Die Tat* (reprinted in Hecht 1988: 205–7). The two subsequent productions, however, found only a sparse local audience. In Curjel's view 'the educated audience members [in Chur] were in silent opposition to the intellectual and optical harshness which they were met with from the stage.'⁸⁷

Who, then, did see the significance of the *Antigone*? It is certainly true that the contemporary theatre critics who reviewed the production felt that they had witnessed something special. The sentiment of 'pz' (*Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* 16 March 1948, in Hecht 1988: 208 f.) that this was 'a theatre event sustained by the greatest consequentiality' and an 'exceptionally interesting theatre experience' is echoed in three of the four other reviews of the Chur production (all published in Swiss regional newspapers), while the East German production in 1951 was invariably met by its four (East German) theatre critics with an eerie reverence towards Brecht and his theatre as the emerging flagship of the young East German state.⁸⁸ Although the parallels with most recent German history are, of course, not lost on any reviewer of either production, there is little actual engagement with it. Crucially, the central issue of collective complicity with depraved absolute power which Brecht did so much to foreground is not really taken up by any reviewer. Instead, there are various forms of escapism: if the play's political dimension is thematized at all, East German reviewers tend to emphasize what they see as Antigone's early example of resistance to elite power (doomed, because not carried out by the masses) whereas reviewers of the Chur production prefer to rise to the lofty realm of the play's 'trans-temporality' ('Überzeitlichkeit').⁸⁹

Across all reviews, much attention is given to the formal and theatrical features of the production: enunciation and acting style (where the deliberate gap between the emotionality of the situation and the more restrained mode of delivery is duly noted),⁹⁰ stage design, blocking and so forth. All of this is a clear indication of how strikingly novel and in need of explanation Brecht's theatricality really was at the time. As Brecht had intended, it was a theatre lab where new discoveries were made. Often, however, the critics lacked the conceptual reference points to describe what they had seen in a way that did justice to Brecht's practice and intentions. While 'C.S.' makes

⁸⁷ 'In Chur machten die Gebildeten gegen die geistige und optische Härte, die ihnen von der Bühne entgegentrat, stille Opposition' (Curjel in Hecht 1988: 193).

⁸⁸ The reviews for both productions are reprinted in Hecht 1988: 195–209 and 217–27.

⁸⁹ Jürgen Rühle (on the Greiz production) in Hecht 1988: 220, Andreas Brügger and Bruno Snell (on the Chur production) in Hecht 1988: 200 and 206f.

⁹⁰ Thus Andreas Brügger (in Hecht 1988: 200) calls the acting style 'realistic-stylized' ('realistisch-stilisiert') and 'subdued' ('verhalten').

the ultimate *faux pas* when speaking of 'Brecht's tendency towards naturalist theatre' (a statement which would have made Brecht livid),⁹¹ the term most often used by several reviewers is 'symbolism' for what Brecht regarded as logical extensions of realism or instances of *Verfremdung*.⁹² Somehow, it seems, no one quite knew what to make of this novel kind of theatre, and it turned out that Helene Weigel had been absolutely right to suggest to Brecht that he needed to write the *Kleines Organon* 'so that they see what you want'.⁹³ The most attuned reviewer is, again, 'pz' who realizes that the *Antigone* production was done 'in the purest form of epic theatre'.⁹⁴ Sadly, however, the prediction of 'Be.' also proved true: 'this work is likely to have a hard time becoming a fixture'.⁹⁵

In this context, two individuals need to be singled out who, in their own different ways, were closely exposed to Brecht and as acute observers acquired the sense of his artistic topography needed to place the *Antigone* production within a bigger scheme and realize its overall significance. There is, for starters, the theatre's Managing Director Hans Curjel who throughout his important account of the production conveyed a knowledgeable admiration for Brecht's unpretentious and focused work with actors who were being required to do things that no one had asked of them before. He also showed a nuanced and mature understanding of how and why the different audiences at the few performances responded in the different ways they did. Most tellingly, however, Curjel had a real sense that what he saw was, if perhaps not *the* theatre of the future, then at least *a* theatre of the future. For he concludes his narrative with the observation that Brecht encountered his most receptive audience when the *Antigone* was done as a special performance to students of the *Gymnasium* (the highest level of High School) from Chur and its environs: 'they grasped . . . the depth and artistic reality of this strange theatre event.'⁹⁶ Had he lived to be able to read these lines (published in 1961), Brecht, who certainly at this point of his career felt very strongly that he was writing not so much for the present but most of all for the future (those 'children of the scientific age'

⁹¹ 'Brechts Tendenz zum naturalistischen Theater', in Hecht 1988: 204.

⁹² Interpreted as 'symbolic' are Helene Weigel's age ('Be.' in Hecht 1988: 195), the erasure of fate ('in favour of the symbolic': Andreas Brügger in Hecht 1988: 199) as well as the nature and use of props and decoration (Andreas Brügger and Jürgen Rühle in Hecht 1988: 200 and 220 respectively).

⁹³ Weigel in Hecht 1988: 183.

⁹⁴ 'in der reinsten Form des epischen Theaters', in Hecht 1988: 209.

⁹⁵ 'wird sich das Werk wahrscheinlich nur schwer durchsetzen', in Hecht 1988: 198.

⁹⁶ 'begriffen . . . die Tiefe und künstlerische Wirklichkeit des seltsamen Theater-Ereignisses': Curjel in Hecht 1988: 193.

mentioned time and again in the *Kleines Organon*), would surely have felt an immense amount of validation. Further testimony to the early appeal of Brecht's little-known play to curious learners and theatre explorers is the fact that in the summer of 1963 the twenty-six-year-old Claus Peymann, who would go on to be not only one of the most notable German-speaking directors of his generation but also the head of the *Berliner Ensemble* for nearly twenty years (until 2017), directed Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles* in Hamburg at the local student theatre (*Studiobühne*).⁹⁷

The second individual to be singled out here is Werner Hecht (1926–2017), the notable Brecht scholar and some-time dramaturg (since 1959) at the *Berliner Ensemble*.⁹⁸ Although far too young at the time of the production to have been personally involved, it was Hecht who as early as 1965 published the first edition of his invaluable collection of 'materials' pertaining to Brecht's *Antigone* with *Suhrkamp* publishers, to this day the go-to collection of sources on this topic (in its fully revised second edition from 1988). As a scholar-practitioner Hecht (like Siegfried Unseld, the *Suhrkamp* publisher and friend of Brecht's) felt compelled to give the whole *Antigone* project the kind of attention and accessibility that it had lacked during Brecht's lifetime.

What about Brecht himself? The initial impression has to be that for him the whole enterprise was little more than a workshop experience in preparation for the eagerly anticipated Big Return to Berlin (with *Mother Courage* as the showcase production), a kind of preparatory theatre laboratory in the province which would give him (and Helene Weigel, of course) the long-awaited opportunity to do practical theatre work and test ideas on an actual stage. The fact that he was in Switzerland, working in a Swiss theatre for a Swiss audience (at least pre-dominantly so) cannot have helped: this was not the target audience of his tragic tale of complicity in abuse of power, and this was not the country where his re-building was needed. Brecht was still not at home yet, but remained an artist in transit. At the same time, the sheer existence of the *Antigone* model book (and its re-publication, in a different format, in 1955) is sufficient proof that Brecht himself felt the production had a programmatic and potentially trend-setting value. This in and of itself justified the considerable amount of effort on his and his collaborators' part which was required. It was undoubtedly a project that Brecht *wanted* to be widely known (even if

⁹⁷ Breloer 2019: 12f. The production was also exceptional in that it prompted an invitation to perform at an East German university (in Leipzig).

⁹⁸ Barnett 2015: 249f. Hecht reiterated in passing the significance of Brecht's *Antigone*-project in his final book (Hecht 2013: 17).

the reality turned out to be different), and which he felt represented his thinking on theatre in an exemplary fashion. Its overall significance is therefore fully implied, if not overtly expressed.

Brecht's *Antigone* was, and continues to be, a marginal entity as far as subsequent stage productions are concerned. Werner Hecht lists close to sixty performances between 1951 and 1988, often in university-affiliated settings.⁹⁹ There were far more performances in West Germany than in the GDR and only a few international productions. The young Claus Peymann, who would become the head of the *Berliner Ensemble* for many years (1999–2017), has a special role here: after that just-mentioned early Hamburg production in 1963, he subsequently took the play to Berlin (*Schaubühne*, 1965) and the *Theater am Turm* in Frankfurt (also in 1965, a month before his legendary production there of Handke's *Offending the Audience*). More established 'provincial' West German theatres put on the play more regularly as part of the Brecht wave in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but even then it did not exactly become a household item either. When the play did arrive at a major German stage in the form of Tabori's production at the *Berliner Ensemble* in 2006 (which used the 1951 prologue), it received a mixed reception. But René Pollesch in *Bühne frei für Mick Levčik* (*Schauspielhaus* Zurich, 2016), an adaptation of Brecht's *Antigone* based on resurrecting, in material terms, the Chur production and the *Antigonemodell 1948* model book (*mise-en-scène* with poles, horse-skulls, Antigone board and all), showed which strategies can be used successfully to create a fresh and attention-grabbing Brecht: comedy, lightness of approach and playing style, colour, montage and associative juxtapositions – a re-building of Brecht in the most literal sense of the word.¹⁰⁰

Erika Fischer-Lichte (2017: 202 f.) has interestingly raised the imaginative 'what if' question: what would audience reactions have been had Brecht's *Antigone* not been confined to Switzerland (a neutral country in World War II, now with a strong sense of detachment from Germany) but if it had been widely performed on the main stages of West and East Germany in the 1950s? This is helpful, for only in this thought-experiment does it become entirely obvious just how *provocative* Brecht's version actually was at the time of its creation. The play's central and most resonating theme is that of complicity and collective guilt: of the enablers that make up the chorus, of the Theban citizens as a whole, even of

⁹⁹ Hecht 1988: 302–5.

¹⁰⁰ Pollesch's play (on which see Lehmann 2018 as well as Chapter 4 below, in the context of the impact of the model books) was also shown at its material point of origin, the *Stadttheater* in Chur, and at the *Berliner Ensemble*.

Antigone herself who only starts to resist once her immediate family is being adversely affected by Creon's tyranny and hubris. The play therefore went right to the heart of a question that continues to haunt any German with a conscience and moral compass to the present day. It was a question that, in the post-war climate of both East and West Germany, probably only an outsider like Brecht could, and would, ask so bluntly.

The failure of people in both German states to confront Brecht's piercing question seems, by hindsight, strangely logical. Throughout the 1950s and for much of the 1960s, capitalist West Germany assiduously cultivated a climate of oblivion and collective repression, while the ideology of the socialist East Germany was profoundly shaped by a sense of a completely new, hence automatically purged (!), society that had 'risen from ruins and was turning towards the future ('*aufstanden aus Ruinen und der Zukunft zugewandt*'), as East Germans had been singing since 1949 in their national anthem.¹⁰¹ The immediate reception of the *Antigone* therefore very well exemplifies Brecht's position in the trenches of cultural politics in post-war 1950s Germany more generally: a provocative nuisance in the West and an inconvenient, if useful, icon in the East who could be instrumentalized or ignored at will by the powers of the state. And it would not be until 1967, in the production of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* at the *Deutsches Theater* (in East Berlin) by the Brecht-'disciple' Benno Besson, that a Brecht-inspired approach to Greek tragedy would re-surface in the (East) German scene, while the same year saw a new avant-garde from across the Atlantic re-invent theatre once again: *The Living Theatre* based their *Antigone* production on Brecht's text, infusing it with a new, Artaud-inspired lease of life.¹⁰²

The resurrections went on. In a 1991-film the cinematographic art of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub juxtaposed the magnificent environment of the Greek theatre in Segesta (Sicily) and matching Greek-style theatricality with the radicalism of the Brecht-Hölderlin language and sound framings which invoke Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.¹⁰³ In this montage the rhythm and beauty of the language emerge with great clarity, as does a trans-temporal sense of Brecht's messaging. Just how much life and interest continues to be in Brecht's *Antigone* for audiences and actors alike became again apparent in 2019 during a Berlin co-production of the

¹⁰¹ Written by Johannes R. Becher and performed to music composed by Brecht's close friend Hanns Eisler.

¹⁰² On Besson's production and that of the *Living Theatre* see Fischer-Lichte 2017: 228–37 and Foley 2012: 132–8 respectively.

¹⁰³ Michelakis 2013: 83–90 and Jovanovic 2017: 82–93. The film by Huillet and Straub has started to become more easily available on YouTube.

Hochschule für Schauspiel Ernst Busch with the *Berliner Ensemble*. During sold-out performances at the recently created smaller acting space of the *Berliner Ensemble*, the young actors, under the direction of *Berliner Ensemble* member Veit Schubert, captivated audiences with their intensity and energy. In an age of populism, the play was taken to show the rise of fascism rather than its demise or lingering danger, and it consequently ended not with obliging words of the self-destructing chorus but with Creon's 'So will ich's dann.' ('Thus I want it then', BFA 8: 241). The unfamiliarity of the language which Brecht created did not repel audiences but in fact drew them in, a process that was facilitated by the guitarist who opened the performance (a subtle gesture, it would seem, to the young guitar-playing Brecht who would be a familiar figure in the pub-scene of his native Augsburg). It all felt fresh and vigorous, and as with the original Chur production there was again a special appeal to very young audiences: during a post-performance talk the actors shared their amazement at how well the play had been received during a recent school performance! There is good reason to believe, then, that Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles* has many futures.