

CHAPTER 2

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE GODS IN TRAGEDY

The *deus ex machina* is by no means the only way that the gods of the Greek pantheon were represented and remediated on the tragic stage. Indeed, a range of visual epiphanic strategies was available to and avidly used by ancient playwrights and the use of the *mēchanē* therefore constituted a particular theatrical choice which had particular theatrical and theological significance. This section does not aim at a systematic review of all divine presence in Greek tragedy, but rather presents a few other (i.e. non-mechanical) modes of divine appearance specifically as they bring something to bear on the subsequent argument concerning the *mēchanē*.

Internal and External Witnesses

Divine presence was enacted in a number of different ways in Greek tragedy. Plays such as the *Eumenides* or *Prometheus Bound* show that in certain cases, ancient playwrights had no problem with divinities walking the tragic stage. Relatedly, Euripides is well known for displaying gods on stage in divine prologues as well as on the machine. It was also possible for dramatists to invoke divine presence without showing divine characters on stage at all, simply leaning on traditions of divine involvement in human affairs.¹ The case of Athena's invisible appearance to Odysseus at the start of Sophocles' *Ajax* lies somewhere between these two models, and is a good place to start a discussion on the multiple audiences that theatrical epiphany could hold, and which staged mechanical epiphany invariably did hold.

¹ Easterling 1993a, 78.

Scholars have remarked that Athena's invisibility to Odysseus in *Ajax* is based on Iliadic models of epiphany, where divine bodies have no shape or form.² This is held to be in contrast to Odyssean epiphanies, for example, which tend to be anthropomorphic. Instead of looking to literature to explain the treatment of Athena's epiphany in the *Ajax*, however, I want to use this example to shed light on issues relating to the spectators of staged epiphanies in order to ask how this differs from and speaks to mechanical modes of divine apparition. Athena's appearance to Odysseus opens the *Ajax*, and the goddess justifies her presence by explaining that she always keeps an eye on Odysseus.³ The emphasis on Athena's capacity to see the human realm (and thus understand and control what goes on) is marked, and strikingly one-sided, as Odysseus replies that though he hears her voice clearly, he is unable to see his guiding deity.⁴ The exact staging of the scene and, in particular, whether Athena was physically present on stage and invisible to Odysseus, or whether she was entirely absent, is unclear. Donald Mastronarde's suggestion that Athena was on the roof of the *skēnē* seems most sensible, as this dominating position is consistent with her Machiavellian control over Ajax in the opening, which is harder to achieve if the deity is physically absent.⁵

Odysseus responds to Athena's opening words, immediately addressing her by name. The point of the response is less to explain Athena's identity (though this may have been part of the intention if she was in fact absent), and more to emphasise that though he could not see her, the epiphany was validated by the clarity of the divine voice. The playwright intentionally creates room for the fact that theatrical epiphanies have multiple Gellian 'patients' – the 'internal' and 'external' audiences – and that the 'index' (here Athena) exerted a different mode of inference (or sense of 'abduction') on one 'patient' than it did on the other. *Abduction* is the term used to designate the cognitive operation we bring to bear on indexes, and Gell is keen to distinguish the non-linguistic kinds of

² Pucci 1994; Dunn 1996, 39–40. ³ Soph. *Aj.* 1–4.

⁴ Soph. *Aj.* 14–17. On the emphasis on the visual in this scene, see Easterling 1993a, 81–4. On the full sensorium in the scene, see Worman 2021, 2–3.

⁵ It solves other potential issues of staging too, discussed in Mastronarde 1990, 278.

inferences which constitute abduction from linguistic semiosis.⁶ In other words, the index does not ‘mean’ different things to the two patients, but exerts different agencies. Ajax makes inferences about Athena’s agency according to what he hears, the audience according to what they hear and see: possibly Athena herself, certainly the effects of Athena’s presence on the other characters. In Euripides’ *Hippolytus* a dying Hippolytus recognises Artemis by scent.⁷ Again, Hippolytus recognises the epiphany by a different set of inferences (based on smell) while the audience relies potentially on smell (if something was done theatrically such as burning of incense at that moment), but certainly on sight.

The dual audiences of epiphanies speak to other forms of visual epiphany in Greek culture. The Archinos relief from the Amphiareion at Oropos offers a good example.⁸ Within a single frame three different strategies of divine encounter are presented. In the background and on the right-hand side of the relief is a worshipper praying. In the mid ground, a worshipper reclines in the manner typical of an incubation healing scene with a snake touching his shoulder. In the foreground and to the left of the relief an anthropomorphised Amphiaraos heals the same shoulder of a worshipper. As has been noted by scholars, the three worshippers look identical yet there is no way to tell if the scene depicts a chronological sequence or a single moment in time as would be understood through different levels of cognition. The relief essentially maps a network of religious experiences where the related activities of prayer, oneiric theriomorphic epiphany, and anthropomorphic ‘physical’ epiphany are presented as integral, interrelated components of an encounter with Amphiaraos. The success of the relief thus comes precisely from the intentional ambivalence with which it presents the relation between the epiphanic strategies and the way that the receiver(s) of the epiphany interpret(s) the divine moment(s). Concurrently, the relief refers, through the votive *pinax* seen in the background, to the physical location of the Amphiareion, thus signalling its own role as religious medium which offers another mode through which to connect the divine to worshippers,

⁶ Gell 1998, 14–16. ⁷ Eur. *Hipp.* 1391.

⁸ Athens NM 3369, on which see especially Petsalis-Diomidis 2006, 209–10; Platt 2011, 44–7.

this time those concretely in the sanctuary at Oropos, and ‘external’ to the relief. The Archinos relief is an exemplary but not a unique case demonstrating how votive reliefs often manipulated their potential for creating internal and external audiences where, as in the case of a mechanical epiphany on stage, reactions to the epiphany are multiple and multilayered.⁹ Unlike the characters in the play or the figures on the votive relief, spectators in the theatre and viewers of the relief are not expected to show physical reverence to the gods by falling to their knees or raising their hands in prayer. Yet they are still supposed to recognise the epiphany as legitimate, and any religious media involved as exerting divine agency.

Staged mechanical epiphanies by their very nature had multiple patients. Unlike the external audience – whose viewing experience, as described in Chapter 1, relied on seeing the mechanics at work – the characters within the play presumably did not see the mechanics of the crane, or at least not to the same extent or quite in the same way. Further, the spectators were presumably aware of this distinction between their viewing experience and that of the characters. The space created between internal and external audiences was a deliberate part of the mechanical epiphany, just as Sophocles’ ‘invisible’ Athena deliberately toyed with spectatorship and modes of epiphanic viewing too. As formulated by Platt, ‘epiphanies have a habit of pushing epistemological dilemmas to crisis point’,¹⁰ and what we are seeing with the epiphanies considered so far is a dramatic staging of ways of knowing the divine, of recognising the divine, and of authenticating the divine. The *deus ex machina* is participating in this conversation very overtly: it is a challenge to the audience both to recognise it as an epiphany and to recognise the mechanics that construct the epiphany, and the human involvement in such.

Divine Prologues

Non-mechanical appearances of the gods in Greek tragedy commonly take the form of divine prologues. If, as scholars maintain, the choice to use the *mēchanē* revolved around physically

⁹ Compare discussion of Klöckner 2010. ¹⁰ Platt 2018, 241.

distinguishing the human from the divine by projecting gods ‘above’ the human realm, consistent with their distinct ontological status,¹¹ why would divine prologues *not* use the *mēchanē*? There must be something distinct about the two forms of divine apparitions which scholars are yet to tease apart.

Especially in the tragedies of Euripides, divine prologues are not normally seen by characters of the play but are staged for the benefit of the audience only, and thus eschew the creation of multiple Gellian patients. The unique case of Sophocles’ *Ajax* aside, divine prologues – unlike *dei ex machina* and other staged epiphanies with internal and external audiences – are not playing with epistemologies of *seeing* the divine. Instead, they are about the complexities of divine communication and divine involvement in human affairs. I would not like to claim that the two categories are mutually exclusive by any means (for example the *deus ex machina* in Euripides’ *Electra* drastically questions divine prophecy), but the categories are useful to understand the range of epiphanic manifestations in tragedy and the ways that the visual is used to make theological statements on seeing, knowing, and understanding the divine.

In Euripidean tragedy, divine prologues often include prophecy. Far from simply predicting the course of the play, and thus robbing the plot of any suspense, the audience’s initial expectation set up in the prologues is often challenged, as the prediction is altered, qualified, questioned, or contradicted.¹² Critically, however, the previously established expectations are known only to the audience, not to the characters in the play, since they are overwhelmingly delivered on an empty stage. Divine prologues, then, create a different level of action, and it is this ‘extradramatic action’ (to use Hamilton’s term) which holds theological richness. In *Alcestis*, for example, though Apollo’s prophecy is essentially correct in the facts it offers, the god cannot gauge the human realities of the situation he has created. The disjunct between the two versions offered – the prologue’s sterile description and the play’s emotional tragic action – brings into relief the tensions between divine and human expectations and experiences. At the other

¹¹ Seale 1982; Mastronarde 1990, 280; Wiles 1997, 181–2.

¹² On which see Hamilton 1978.

end of the spectrum is Hermes in *Ion*. On an empty stage, the divinity introduces himself and the background to the story and then prophesies what is to come. He says that Creusa and Xuthus will arrive in Delphi and that Apollo will present Ion as Xuthus' son. Having thus entered the family, Ion will then be recognised by his mother and Apollo's role will remain unknown to all.¹³ Unlike in *Alcestris*, this is not just a question of difference of scale, but, as discussed by Hamilton, presents us with 'the most unequivocal example of a prologue prediction not coming true'.¹⁴ Creusa recognises Ion not in Athens but in Delphi, after having tried to kill him. Athena on the *mēchanē* later stresses the importance of this alteration and the intervention of Apollo making apparent the way that the divine works by sudden interventions as much as by preordained, overarching plans.¹⁵ Yet the theologies – the stories about the gods, and about gods and humans – which prologue epiphanies engender are largely plot based and thus are only tangential to the discussion insofar as they prove *other* ways that divine apparitions serve theological goals in tragedy in comparison to the object of study at hand: mechanical epiphanies.

Static Divine Presence: Altars

Tragedy manifests divine presence in ways that extend beyond masked actor on or above the stage playing the role of the gods. The use of divine statues and altars as part of the theatre space and scenery, and within dialogue, should be seen as elements of tragedy's visual religious media. This is particularly pertinent given new materialist approaches to object agency which have only recently been applied specifically to Greek tragedy.¹⁶ As both a machine of divine presence and a machine of stagecraft, the *deus ex machina* must be considered alongside this category of theatrical equipment which I have collectively termed 'static' objects of divine presence.¹⁷

¹³ Eur. *Ion* 64–73. ¹⁴ Hamilton 1978, 279. ¹⁵ Eur. *Ion* 1563–5.

¹⁶ For example, Mueller 2016; Telò and Mueller 2018; Worman 2021. The *deus ex machina* falls outside the scope of all these wonderful studies.

¹⁷ Static insofar as they are not moving actors, but this should not imply that they cannot be moved or erected around the stage or orchestra as need be. I note, as per Mueller 2016,

Aiming to give an image of the sheer volume of ‘stuff’ that Athenian theatrical performance entailed, and of the resultant expense of production, Plutarch mentions in a single breath theatrical masks, altars (*bōmoi*), stage machinery, and tripods.¹⁸ We know too, from the lexicographical evidence, that Greek theatrical orchestras contained the so-called *thymelē*: seemingly a small (probably portable) altar on a podium.¹⁹ Though details surrounding the *thymelē* are notoriously obscure, a persuasive case has been made for the way that this altar confirms a close connection between sacrifice and the origins of tragedy.²⁰ For our purposes, then, it suffices to note the strong religious charge that the *thymelē* would have carried as a ritual object incorporated into the theatrical space.²¹ Internal evidence from many tragedies also attests to the use of altars placed in the orchestra, whether this was the *thymelē* repurposed, another permanent altar or, most likely, a portable altar structure erected according to each plays’ demands (which we might like to see as Plutarch’s *bōmoi*).²²

Debates continue concerning exactly how and when these were used²³ and I would simply like to stress that a striking number of plays which made use of an altar in the theatrical space also used the *mēchanē*. This fact alone highlights the multiplicity of visual strategies of divine presence that tragic playwrights embraced simultaneously and with enthusiasm.²⁴ Euripides’ *Andromache*, for

that objects can still generate tensions, have agency and affect even when not visibly present on stage.

¹⁸ Plut. *de glor. Athen.* 348f (καὶ σκευὰς καὶ προσωπεῖα καὶ βωμοὺς καὶ μηχανὰς ἀπὸ σκηνῆς περιάκτους καὶ τρίποδας ἐπινικίους κομίζοντες . . . σκευῶν δὲ καὶ προσώπων καὶ ξυστίδων ἀλουργῶν καὶ μηχανῶν ἀπὸ σκηνῆς καὶ χοροποιῶν καὶ δορυφόρων δυσπραγμάτων λαὸς καὶ χορηγία πολυτελὴς παρασκευαζέσθω.).

¹⁹ Suda s.v. *skēnē*; Pollux 4.123. On the *thymelē*, see Wieseler 1847; Cook 1895; Bethé 1901; Gow 1912; Arnott 1962, 43–56; Poe 1989; Ashby 1991; Wiles 1997, 71–9, 191; Chaston 2010, 193–5.

²⁰ See, especially, Gow 1912 and Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 142–5.

²¹ The *thymelē*’s sacred character has led some to conclude that it was rendered ‘unseemly’ for theatrical use: Arnott 1962, 45. Compare Pickard-Cambridge 1946, 131; Hourmouziades 1965, 75.

²² Though some prefer to see these and the *thymelē* as one and the same – for example, Wiles 2000, 120. Compare Arnott 1962, 59–60 on stage altars as tombs. Contra Wiles 1997, 191. On the *agyieus* altar, see Poe 1989.

²³ For a sense of the (often opposing) views, see Arnott 1962, 46–56; Poe 1989; Ashby 1991, 42–61; Wiles 1997, 70–2; Ley 2007, 46–69.

²⁴ On the altar as aniconic cult object, see Blume 2016, who writes in response to Gaifman 2012.

example, opens with the eponymous widow taking her place as a suppliant at the altar to Thetis who later appears on the *mēchanē*.²⁵ An altar to Apollo is placed in front of the acting area in Euripides' *Electra* and becomes the location of the recognition scene between the siblings, who will later be visited by the Dioscuri *ex machina* and to whom they will vehemently complain about Apollo's prior actions. In *Heracles* there is an altar to Zeus Soter before the house of Heracles where Amphitryon, Megara, and Heracles' three sons sit as suppliants at the start of the play, but it is an altar whose protective force is rendered empty in light of Hera's machinations enacted through Iris and Lyssa's *ex machina* intervention. In *Iphigenia at Tauris* the *skēnē* represents the temple of Artemis in the land of the Taurians and somewhere in the theatrical space was an altar – bloodied and decorated with spoils of Greek victims.²⁶ This visually arresting altar manifested the presence of a goddess who otherwise does not appear in a tragedy which revolves around her cult image, but which sees Athena descend *ex machina*.²⁷ The *skēnē* in the *Ion* represents the temple to Apollo in Delphi with an altar before it upon which Creusa takes refuge from Ion's wrath²⁸ but it will be Athena on a chariot who later appears on the crane 'above the incense-laden temple'.²⁹ This list is by no means exhaustive, but the examples are chosen as a sample to demonstrate the way that the theatrical landscape of Greek tragedy, like the landscape of Greece itself, was dotted with physical manifestations of divine presence. Just as altars and temples were products of human construction, so they were also clearly sacred spaces both within the plots of the plays and in the context of the sacred festival that framed the performances.

²⁵ Poe 1989, 125 goes as far as to suggest that the temple to which the altar was attached must have been visible, perhaps represented by a painted canvas or panel on the wall of the *skēnē*, or even by a free-standing screen.

²⁶ Eur. *IT* 72–6.

²⁷ A fourth-century south Italian vase seems to indicate that the altar was located to one side of the *skēnē* door while lines 167–8 of the play have been taken to show that the altar is in the orchestra: Poe 1989, 127.

²⁸ Eur. *Ion* 1255–60. According to Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1926, 23 this was a great altar decorated with statues, which lines 1402–3 seem to support. Poe 1989, 129 says that the evidence for statues is weak but does postulate that the altar in the play represented (and thus looked similar to) the real Chian altar at Delphi.

²⁹ Eur. *Ion* 1550.

Further, these objects were used to create visual theologies throughout the plays. In Greek tragedy the altar stands less as a place for sacrifice and more as a place of supplication. Aeschylus in his *Suppliant Women*, for example, draws attention precisely to the protective power of the altar, having Danaus note that ‘an altar is a stronger thing than a fortification; it is a shield unbreakable’ (κρείσσον δὲ πύργου βωμός, ἄρρηκτον σάκος).³⁰ Characters take refuge on an altar in the hope that the divine might hear or see their plea and manifest themselves as a result. In this, they engage in one of the many ritual means of invoking heroic or divine presence within Greek religion, and they relied on the safety of the sacred space which the altar designated in order to do so. This contrasts with unsolicited arrivals of the divine for which the *mēchanē* is frequently employed. While sought epiphany stresses the reachability and cooperation of the divine, *theophania* demonstrates the gods’ ability to involve themselves in human affairs as spontaneously and intrusively as they liked, completely detached from human will. Mechanical epiphanies in tragedy manipulate these two structural poles of epiphany: they are *theophanic* within the tragic narrative, but if we think of the way the apparatus was constructed by a human, the play written and enacted by humans, framed by the essentially ritual forum of choral performance, *ex machina* epiphanies stress just how effective human *technai* are to reach the divine. Visually, then, tragedians used theatrical actors, objects, and machinery to present and negotiate the defining elements of the cultural understanding of epiphany – the fact that it could both be solicited through prayer and supplication or occur unexpectedly, for example – on the same stage, in the same plays and, in the case of the *mēchanē*, even collapsed within a single object.

Static Divine Presence: Statues

Another form of static divine presence used in the plays which encourages audiences to think about the ways in which the divine manifests itself within the human realm and how this connects to

³⁰ Aesch. *Supp.* 70. Transl. Bowen.

objects, spaces, and situations is the use of statues.³¹ The festival context again offers an important backdrop, creating positive conditions for interactions between divine and human.³² In Athens the Great Dionysia could not begin until a *xoanon* – archaic wooden statue – of Dionysus was ritually (re)integrated into the city.³³ The statue was taken from the neighbouring city of Eleutherai and installed at the *eschara* ‘hearth’ in a sanctuary of Dionysus near the Academy prior to the beginning of the festival.³⁴ It was then carried in a torchlit evening procession to the sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus near the theatre in the centre of the city of Athens, recalling Dionysus’ first entry into the city. Framing the entire religious festival, within which dramatic performances were embedded, was the movement and integration – in other words, the animation – of an ancient cult statue into the civic and festival space. A religious procession is always both a call and response – a call for the attention of the divine and a manifestation of divine authority at the same time – and the statue stood as the central focus of this cooperative effort between dedication and epiphany.³⁵ The coordinated performance of the statue’s spontaneous movement, overseen, of course, by the god himself, likely culminated with him being installed in the theatre space as a spectator for the theatrical acts to follow.³⁶

A similar picture emerges beyond Athens and the Classical period, too. In Delos, for example, archaeological evidence attests to the way at the Dionysia there, Dionysus was quite literally the principal observer not only the plays performed, but of the spectacles that took place beforehand, too. The Delian monument of Karystios dated, according to epigraphical evidence, to the beginning of the third century BCE, offers clues relating to the festival’s

³¹ For statues in tragedy, see Arnott 1962, 68–9; Wiles 1997, 194–203; Worman 2021, 207–46.

³² For this notion as it relates to the ceremonial setting up of an altar or of a divine image (*hidrysis*), see Pirenne-Delforge 2010.

³³ Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 55–63; Cole 1993, 27; Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 269–90; Csapo-Slater 1995, 110–15.

³⁴ Note Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 69, 89–98. Compare Calame 2015, 181.

³⁵ Kavoulaki 1999, 303. Compare Chapter 6 on how processional automata enact this call and response.

³⁶ Euripides, *Bacch.* 1047 with Csapo 1997, 281; Ar. *Eq.* 526–36; D.Chr. 31.121; Philostr. *VA* 4.22.

preceding rituals and how these invoked sacred presence there.³⁷ The monumental stone platform was decorated with two colossal, erect marble phalloi on pillars, probably relating to the procession of phalloi followed by revelry known as the *phallegphoria*.³⁸ The monument originally held three statues in between these: two fat, elderly, hairy Satyrs (*Silanoi*) juxtaposed with a nude, seated Dionysus on a marble throne.³⁹ Evidence exists for similar statues in the theatres of Attic demes including Rhamnous, Ikarion, Euonymon, and Thorikos.⁴⁰

The so-called visual and material turns have prompted a surge in interest concerning the exact nature of the relationship between ancient gods and their images.⁴¹ Of the great number of insights that these studies have revealed, two are most relevant to the present discussion. First, that divine images did not just symbolise the divinity but *were* the divinity, and served to conjure the presence of the god or goddess into the human realm so that both parties could look at and connect with each other.⁴² The most intense divine encounter is deemed to have occurred upon viewing the so-called cult statue usually displayed in a prominent position with the temple.⁴³ There, by virtue of placement and function, the representation was taken to be ‘a living embodiment of the divine, inhabiting the same space as the viewer-worshipper’.⁴⁴

Together with the epiphanic potential of visual representations of the divine, scholars have drawn attention to the great variety of styles, materials, and techniques which coexisted to depict the gods. While certain representations of the divine were thought to have been fashioned miraculously – *acheiropoiētos* ‘without (human) hands’; *diopetēs* ‘fallen from heaven’⁴⁵ – the Greeks on the whole were not

³⁷ Dating: Ridgway 1989, 213.

³⁸ On *phallegphoria* as one of the key stable elements in the Dionysia, see Cole 1993.

³⁹ Cole 1993, 31.

⁴⁰ Wiles 1997, 24–5 (Rhamnous); 27–9 (Ikarion); 29–30 (Euonymon); 30–4 (Thorikos).

⁴¹ Gordon 1979; Donohue 1988; Faraone 1992; Scheer 2000; Lapatin 2001; Steiner 2001; Tanner 2006; Eich 2011; Osborne 2011, 185–215; 2014; Platt 2011, especially 77–123, 2015b; Gaifman 2012, 2016; Petridou 2015, especially 49–51.

⁴² Gordon 1979, 7–8, 16; Tanner 2006, 45–8; Platt 2011, 78.

⁴³ Burkert 1997, 22; Platt 2011, 77. On the terminology ‘cult statue’ and its ambiguities, see Gordon 1979; Donohue 1997; Scheer 2000; Bettinetti 2001; Nick 2002; Mylonopoulos 2010, 1–19.

⁴⁴ Platt 2011, 77–8. ⁴⁵ Discussion of these terms in Bremmer 2013.

uncomfortable with the fact that cult statues were the product of human craftsmanship.⁴⁶ An ancient Greek cult statue could be aniconic, semi-iconic, or anthropomorphic; non-figural representations could coexist with and were not replaced by anthropomorphised cult statues; and a single god could be represented by multiple epiphanic strategies even within the one space.⁴⁷ The doubling of images in a Greek sanctuary was a widespread, well-attested phenomenon demonstrating the diverse visual strategies employed by Greek craftsmen and religious personnel and accepted by the viewer-worshippers to evoke epiphany within sacred space.

Just as there existed a variety of visual epiphanic strategies in Greek religious life, it should not surprise us that there existed a variety of visual epiphanic strategies on stage. An analysis of the climactic accumulation of the sacred image(s) of Athena in the closing tableau of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* will demonstrate the point. In the first two plays of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy the audience has been looking at a *skēnē* that represents the Palace of the Atridae in Argos. By the beginning of the third play, the *Eumenides*, the *skēnē* has changed to depict the temple of Apollo at Delphi and it is relatively easy to imagine this change being marked by the removal of the column of Apollo Agyieus and the pillar of Hermes⁴⁸ – both of which routinely stood outside domestic dwellings, and were likely used as markers in tragedy – and their being replaced by, for example, the tripods that stood in front of the Delphic temple and/or the omphalos.⁴⁹ Then, at line 235 of the *Eumenides*, there is another scene change as Orestes enters an empty orchestra to take refuge at the statue of Athena Polias in Athens.⁵⁰ The ancient image of Athena (*palaion*

⁴⁶ Especially Platt 2010.

⁴⁷ This was as true of Dionysus as it was of Athena. On the many anthropomorphic images belonging to the worship of Dionysus in the Athenian sanctuary, including statues, paintings, and tragic masks, see Wiles 2007, 220. Compare Green 1982. On the depictions of Athena on the Athenian Acropolis see Platt 2011, 77–123. On the coexistence of figural and non-figural, see Gordon 1979, and on aniconism, see Gaifman 2012.

⁴⁸ Aesch. *Ag.* 1081 and 525, respectively.

⁴⁹ *hHom.* 3.443. Müller 1853, 51–2, 59–60; Sommerstein 1989, 33. For more on the *agyieus* on stage, see Poe 1989 and, more generally, Gaifman 2012, 271–89.

⁵⁰ For various opinions on exactly where the statue stood and how it was brought on stage, see Verrall 1908, 400–8; Arnott 1962, 69; Taplin 1977, 377–9; Poe 1989, 124–5; Sommerstein 1989, 33n107 says that possibly the *ekkyklēma* was used to bring on the image of Athena Polias. Compare Podlecki 1989, 13–14.

bretas) takes central position at this point in the play, and Orestes clutches the image dramatically in his arms⁵¹ just as he had been instructed to do by Apollo earlier.⁵² If we are to believe Pausanias, the actual version of this image in the city of Athens was particularly sacred because it was unwrought and had fallen from heaven.⁵³ The *bretas* is frequently referred to throughout the *Eumenides* and it is likely to have been visible to the audience at least by line 235.⁵⁴ Unlike the anthropomorphised deities represented in divine prologues who appear alone, and unlike the *dei ex machina* who are untouchable in their isolated bubble of theatrical space,⁵⁵ this replication of the city's most ancient and holy cult statue can be physically clutched by Orestes as he supplicates the goddess. The haptic contact is particularly poignant since Orestes' state of defilement at this point in the play, and what this means for his presence in sacred space, are precisely the issues at stake.⁵⁶

The picture becomes more complex still when, at line 397, Athena enters in anthropomorphic form, represented by a masked and costumed actor. The entrance itself is theatrically controversial, owing to the apparent contradiction in sense between lines 404 and 405 which has left commentators unsure as to her exact mode of entry.⁵⁷ Whether she appeared on foot, on a chariot, or on the *mēchanē*, the dialogue shows her to be at pains to demarcate her epiphanic presence as separate to that of the Athena Polias, who is also still on the stage at this point. Anthropomorphic Athena draws attention to the multiplicity of visual epiphanic strategies framing the encounter of goddess and humans in the moment, noting, rather redundantly, that Orestes is 'sitting close to her image'.⁵⁸ The intention here is not to tease apart the 'real' goddess from the representational 'image' – the *bretas* does not become

⁵¹ Aesch. *Eum.* 257. ⁵² Aesch. *Eum.* 70–80.

⁵³ Paus. 1.26.6. We do not really know what the statue looked like: Kroll 1982; Platt 2011, 92–3.

⁵⁴ Aesch. *Eum.* 79–80, 242, 259, 409, 439, 446.

⁵⁵ Especially Eur. *Med.* 1319–22 on which see pages 91–101.

⁵⁶ For example, Aesch. *Eum.* 445–6. On the body, the senses, and defilement in this scene, see Worman 2019, 251; 2021, 214–15.

⁵⁷ See, above all, Himmelhoch 2005. Compare Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1910, 154; Arnott 1962, 74–5; Taplin 1977, 388–90; Rosenmeyer 1982, 62; Wiles 1997, 180–1.

⁵⁸ Aesch. *Eum.* 409.

obsolete once the actor enters. On the contrary, at the end of a play we witness a triumphal procession where it is the goddess herself who, once again, takes care to explain that she will accompany the priestess of Athena Polias as well as the female attendants who are guarding (and probably at this stage carrying) the sacred image.⁵⁹ In the closing tableau of Aeschylus' trilogy, the ancient image of Athena would thus have been walked in sacred procession alongside both the anthropomorphised Athena that the actor embodied and the priestess to the goddess who, in certain ritual contexts, was herself considered to be Athena. It was a tableau that spoke directly to the realities of Athena's epiphanic presence in the sacred space of the Athenian Acropolis to which the play is referring, as well as to other visual representations of theologies.⁶⁰

This is not the only play which demonstrates the importance of the statue on stage to manufacture, authenticate, and at times multiply, sacred presence. Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, for example, revolves around the theft of the cult statue of Artemis: a portable object whose divine aura is consequential enough to be used in the founding of a new cult.⁶¹ A lost Sophoclean play, *Lakainai*, treated the theft of a statue of Pallas. In Euripides' *Hippolytus* there were statues of both Aphrodite and Artemis on the stage, images vital in creating divine presence and in depicting the two deities in tension with each other (as the play does more generally).⁶² The *Suppliant Women* of Aeschylus was visually dominated by the twelve statues representing the twelve Olympian deities lined up horizontally between the orchestra and the *skēnē*.⁶³ At a critical juncture in the play, the chorus women hang off these statues like votive offerings hung in a shrine, hoping the Olympians will afford them protection from the incoming Argives.⁶⁴ Statues in Greek tragedy were not 'empty' props or

⁵⁹ Aesch. *Eum.* 1021–5. I agree with Podlecki 1989, 16 who suggests that the actual prop must have been at this moment taken up and carried in the procession.

⁶⁰ On the epiphanic strategies on the Athenian Acropolis, see Platt 2011, 77–123. Allusions to the Panathenaea in the *Eumenides*: Bowie 1993, 27–31 (with further refs); Weaver 1996. For visual theologies and self-reflexivity in vase paintings, see Marconi 2011; Platt 2014.

⁶¹ Eur. *IT* 1449–65. Wiles 1997, 201–2 on *IT*.

⁶² On their precise placement, see Wiles 1997, 79–80. ⁶³ Aesch. *Supp.* 189–90, 222.

⁶⁴ Aesch. *Supp.* 354–5, 463–5. Wiles 1997, 195; Bowen 2013, 25.

decorative objects,⁶⁵ but integral ways of representing the divine which not only proved vital to the plots in various ways but, critically for the present discussion, also interacted with other visual techniques used to mediate the divine.

Over the course of the discussion thus far, we have touched on ways that the *mēchanē* differed from other techniques of manifesting the divine on stage. The mechanical epiphany will always have both internal and external witnesses, it plays with the structural epiphanic poles of sought and unsought epiphany, it will be spatially separated, and it resists haptic contact between deity and worshipper. These general features, which the *mēchanē* enables as an object of divine epiphany, should be enriched by analysis in situ too. We turn now to ascertaining what it is that the mechanical epiphany ‘did’ and how it worked to manufacture a sense of the divine, not just compared to other strategies but as a strategy in its own right, by analysing a selection of plays where the use of the machine is, though not uncontested, fairly secure, and which best demonstrate the range of uses for mechanical epiphany in Attic tragedy. Later, in Part II, we will deconstruct further the way that the mechanical mode of epiphany, already shown to be a feature of the fifth-century theatrical landscape, reached a climax in the Hellenistic period notably by seeping outwards to other parts of the festival as seen in the use of religious technologies in the *pompē*.⁶⁶ One should not see this as a technological ‘progression’ in depictions of the gods, but rather as recalibrating our vision of the network of Greek visual epiphanic strategies. Far more than a bizarre theatrical anomaly, the *mēchanē* offered an important cultural and religious precedent for mechanical epiphany.

⁶⁵ Compare Mueller 2016. ⁶⁶ Chapter 6.