

and tear each other apart. Offering the image of another's body while inhabiting their own, the performers in the *Bacchae* bring to life a waking dream that turns into a nightmare, where the spaces of the wide world—from the palace to the mountains and back again—come to rest in a fragmented body, through which we measure our distance from the god.

CHAPTER FIVE

SPACE, TIME, AND MEMORY:

SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS*

The eagle, pierced by a bow-spined shaft,
saw the feathered arrow and said—
“Not by others, but by our own plumage
are we taken.”

—Aeschylus, *Myrmidons*

... and time, that has long been my companion.

—Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*

AS WE SAW with Euripides' *Bacchae*, the body parts of Pentheus that appear onstage present a spatial nexus joining the city of Thebes (where Pentheus ruled), the distant space of Cithaeron (where his pieces were gathered), and the reflexive space of the theater of Dionysus (the *prosōpon* of Pentheus' head, and the Pentheus actor who later appears as Agave). The *compositio membrorum* prompts a series of private memories given public utterance by Pentheus' grandfather and mother. Viewed as a series of objects—dismemberment literally objectifies the body—each part generates a specific recollection, the sum of which constitutes a narrative of Pentheus' life reconstructed along with his corpse. Although we have lost Agave's speech, Cadmus recalls how the youth protected him in his old age (*Ba.* 1310–12), a detail that we would not have guessed from Pentheus' dealings with his grandfather earlier.¹ Memories of the body tell a story, but one that can be at odds with, or shed new light on, the drama as previously enacted.

In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, memory and its shadow, forgetfulness, play an essential role in driving a plot based on mistaken identity. As in the *Bacchae*, the body serves to prompt recollection; “that ancient wound, why do you speak of it?” Oedipus asks (1033), but only after the Corinthian Messenger calls attention to his once-pinned ankles. In Sophocles' play, distant places and the information they hold provide a far more immediate spur to memory than the body. Delphi, Corinth, Cithaeron, the place where three roads meet—each provides a strand of recollection whose interconnection reveals the murderer of Laius, the source of the plague, and the truth of Oedipus' identity. His *anagnōrisis* depends on his putting events in the past together to uncover what has long been occluded.

Compared with Teiresias' simultaneous access to past, present, and future, approximating the divine view of a preexisting pattern,² Oedipus' recognition constitutes a job of work, an effortful joining of what has been kept apart. Reuniting characters long separated, Oedipus solves the mystery of who he is by discovering where he has been and what spaces he has violated. Even his name holds valuable clues;³ "swell-foot" (*oide-pous*, 1032–36) also suggests "foot-wise" (*oida-pous/poda*), recalling Oedipus' solution to the riddle of the Sphinx, and also "know where" (*oidi- [oida] pou*), an etymology played out when the Corinthian Messenger arrives at Thebes:

Strangers, might I learn from you where [*hopou*]
is the house belonging to the tyrant Oedipus [*Oidipou*]?
Even better, tell me if you know where [*hopou*] he is.

(924–26)*

The original audience, and most that have followed, understand from the start what Oedipus does not, that he is the cause and cure of the plague at Thebes.⁵ In spatial terms, Oedipus' ignorance arises from not knowing where he comes from—either his native city, or the womb from which he was born. By placing him against the scenic backdrop of the Theban palace, and by featuring his physical and emotional closeness to Jocasta in their scenes together, Sophocles exploits the gap between what the audience sees and knows and what his protagonist strives to discover.

Oedipus' first inkling of the nature of his ignorance occurs when the drunk at Corinth blurts out that he is not Polybus' and Merope's legitimate son, but a child "forged onto his father" (780). This information sets Oedipus in motion. He goes to Delphi to find the truth of his origins, only to be deflected by the prophecy that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother. Vowing never to return to Corinth, Oedipus forgets that the royal couple there might *not* be his biological parents, and he takes the fatal road (back) to Thebes. As his reward for defeating the Sphinx, the Thebans establish Oedipus as king, "first among men in handling normal events / that befall humans, as well as those where the gods intervene" (33–34). But he is drawn inexorably back to the mystery of his origins when forced to deal with the public crisis of the plague.

Oedipus pieces together the solution to these interlocking riddles by concentrating on the significant places in his life: Delphi, the three roads, Corinth, Cithaeron, the house of Laius, the *polis* of Thebes. Stories arising from these places come to light through the characters that represent them: the priest, the Chorus, Teiresias, all from Thebes; Creon, who arrives with the response from Delphi; Jocasta who emerges from within the house to tell her sad tale of Delphi and Cithaeron; the Messenger, who brings news from Corinth, and from the mountain that shadows over Thebes; the Shepherd, sent for from Cithaeron, who also was present at the fatal crossroads; the

household servant, who describes the brutal scene in the royal bedroom; and finally Oedipus himself, whose story incorporates all the others, and on whose person the consequences are played out most fully. By reconnecting the significant places in his life, Oedipus matches his knowledge to that of the audience. He then performs the final act of self-discovery, exposing himself as sightless to those who have watched him grope towards the light over the course of the play.

As often in tragedy, the scenic space where these events unfold represents *oikos* and *polis* alike, both the house of the Labdacids and the political center of Thebes. The space before the palace accommodates general supplication (1–77), civic business (Creon's report from Delphi, 78–150), legal proclamation (Oedipus' curse on the killer, 216–75), public exchange (the Chorus, Oedipus, and Teiresias, 276–462), and political accusation and defense (Creon and Oedipus, 512–623). But it also sustains the sharing of private memories between husband and wife (Oedipus and Jocasta, 696–862) and personal appeals to the gods (Jocasta's supplication to Apollo, 911–23). In the near distance lies the city itself, reeling from a god-sent plague, indelibly conveyed in the opening scenes. Accompanied by suppliants old and young, the priest of Zeus begs Oedipus to use his skill against the blight that kills the crops, cattle, and citizens of Thebes (14–57). "Better to rule a land with people," the priest exhorts, "than one that is empty; for a city-tower or a ship is nothing deserted [*erēmos*] of men who dwell within it" (55–57). After Creon's report from Delphi and Oedipus' response, one set of citizens replaces another. The suppliants depart out one *eisodos* while the Chorus of elders enters down the other, recreating the plague in the *parodos* (151–215), as its reality continues to circulate through the city's political center.

The fact that the play opens with two scenes focused on the plague makes it highly unlikely that the Athenian audience saw Sophocles' Thebes as "dramatically other than itself."⁶ As noted in chapter 1, spectators at the City Dionysia could not avoid viewing the theatrical space in the context of the *polis* at large, much of which they could see from their seats. By having two successive groups enter from outside the theater with news of the epidemic,⁷ Sophocles merged the mythic Thebes of his drama with plague-ridden Athens, a city suffering at the time from the effects of "that most calamitous and awful visitation" (Thuc. 1.23).⁸ Thucydides provides graphic descriptions of its effect—"heavily did it weigh on the Athenians, death raging within the city and devastation without" (2.47–54)—made worse by the fact that it never seemed to end: "The plague a second time attacked the Athenians. . . . The second visit lasted no less than a year, the first having lasted two; and nothing distressed the Athenians and reduced their power more than this" (3.87).⁹

If we are right to assume the audience's identification with the plagued city of Oedipus, then the Theban setting did not signal so much an anti-Athens

as an imaginative extension of the city of Athena, suggested by the early reference to the "two temples of Pallas" (*Pallados diplois / naois* 20–21), where suppliants have gathered to pray for release from disaster. Commentators note that Thebes possessed several temples to the goddess, but, as Jebb observes, "It was enough for Sophocles that his Athenian hearers would think of . . . the shrines of the Polias and the Parthenos above them on the acropolis."¹⁰ In a similar vein, Oedipus' suspicion of a cabal involving Delphi, Teiresias, and Creon echoes two contemporary Athenian concerns: the impartiality of the Delphic oracle (frequently accused of taking bribes, especially after favoring Sparta at the start of the Peloponnesian War), and the court intrigues of the Persians, involving the king's confidants (*hoi pistoi*) and scheming court magicians (*magoi*).¹¹ Oedipus upbraids "Creon the faithful [*ho pistos*] . . . who longs to throw me out, setting against me this plot-weaving wizard [*magos*], this treacherous mountebank, who has insight only when it's profitable" (385–89). In addition, Knox demonstrates that the end of the Teiresias scene and Oedipus' subsequent encounter with Creon resemble an Athenian trial, as the theatrical space merges with the civic space of the *dikastērion*.¹² So, too, the future expulsion of Oedipus as a *pharmakos* figure brings to mind the Athenian festival of the Thargelia and the political act of ostracism.¹³ For fifth-century Athenians, it seems reasonable to assume that Sophocles' story of Oedipus at Thebes represented not a myth of difference and distance but one of commonality and proximity, with the setting evoking both the ancient Thebes of myth and contemporary Athens.¹⁴

Moving inside the scenic space to its extrascenic interior, the palace halls initially appear as a place of secrecy. When Creon returns from Delphi, he asks whether to divulge Apollo's response in public or to "go inside" (91–92) and share it privately with Oedipus. As a paternalistic democrat (a trait typical of "good leaders" in tragedy),¹⁵ Oedipus insists that Creon "speak to all" (93), and the city learns that they must punish the killers of Laius to end the plague. Oedipus asks if the former king fell "inside the house, or in the fields, or in some other land?" (112–13), suggesting that the palace interior could breed political intrigue. This aspect of the extrascenic space broadens when Oedipus proclaims that anyone who knowingly harbors the murderer will face, like the murderer himself, social and religious ostracism, "driven from every home" (241): "If he is at the hearth of my own [house] with my knowledge, then let me suffer the curse I have just called down on others" (249–51). For Oedipus, the home represents the sanctity of the city and its gods, and its violation by the murderer will bring expulsion to the criminal and his host alike. That the walls of the house could hide the killer makes it a place of potential clandestine activity that threatens the city.¹⁶

The integral relationship between Oedipus' identity (as "source" of the plague) and his dwelling place emerges in the scene with Teiresias. Rejecting the king's plea to help the city, the seer counters: "You blame my passionate

nature [*orgē*], but you have not seen / your own, although it dwells [*naiousan*] with you" (337–38). As the reproaches fly, Teiresias soon drops the indirection: "You may have vision, but you do not see what evil you are in, / nor where you are dwelling [*naeis*], nor with whom you make your home [*hotōn oikēis meta*]" (413–14). The palace will prove a treacherous anchorage, when Oedipus learns the nature of "the marriage hymn, into whose dangerous harbor / you sailed [by coming] into this house [*domois*]" (422–23). Teiresias concludes the scene by equating Oedipus with the murderer he seeks, a man who is said to be a "foreigner and immigrant" (*xenos* . . . *metoikos*), but is "native born" (*eggenēs*) (452):

He will be revealed as both brother and father
to the children with whom he lives, son and husband
to the woman [*gunē*, also "wife"] from whom he was born, fellow breeder
with, and murderer of, his own father. Go inside
and think about that!

(457–61)

Teiresias' imperative "Go inside!" suggests that the house itself might enlighten Oedipus, if he only could see it as the site of his birth and the source of Thebes' pollution. However, the play does not work by means of such sudden insight. "Flashes of totality" belong to the gods and spokesmen like Teiresias, as Vernant suggests,¹⁷ but the knowledge achieved by Oedipus is of a different sort, resulting from a moment-to-moment effort to solve the problem before him. The murder of Laius—and with it the mystery of his own identity—compels him to track the truth (108–11, 220–21), truth that cannot be given but only found out (1213, 1397, 1421). Unlike Teiresias, Oedipus must retrace the paths that lead to the present, and in the process change it utterly from the thing it had seemed to be.

After Jocasta's intervention in the acrimonious scene between her brother and her husband, the Chorus urges her to usher Oedipus back inside: "Lady, why do you wait to / escort him back into the house?" (678–79). However, Jocasta insists on the openness that her husband urged earlier on Creon's return from Delphi. She demands to hear the genesis of their altercation (680–98), an explanation then and there of why two men would stir up "private troubles [*idia kaka*] while the country suffers from the plague" (635–36). Her effort at public understanding paradoxically leads to a scene of personal confession, the most intimate in the play, as both she and Oedipus share long-buried memories of the past. Following their mutual revelations, the palace seems to offer a place of comfort for the first time: "Let us go inside the house" (861), Jocasta says, trying to calm Oedipus' fears that he might be the murderer of Laius (842–58).

Jocasta returns to the stage to pray at Apollo's altar for her husband's peace of mind. The orchestra altar, locus for the opening supplication led by the

Priest of Zeus, now serves as the altar of Apollo Lykeios (919).¹⁸ By distancing Jocasta from the palace here and in her subsequent exchange with the Corinthian Messenger, Sophocles emphasizes the change in fortune that seems to have come from afar. "My dearest wife, Jocasta, / why have you sent for me here, out of the house?" (950–51). Jocasta's initial joy at the unreliability of Apollo's prophecies dies when the Messenger informs them that Oedipus was a foundling, that Polybus and Merope were not his real parents. She rushes back inside, into the palace she now sees as a den of incestuous horror. The play is not yet done with her, however, for the Shepherd summoned from Cithaeron tells Oedipus, "your wife inside [esō] could best tell you" about the origins of the child he exposed (1171–72). Discovering the truth, Oedipus rushes into the extrascenic space himself, in pursuit of the mother who gave him birth.

The second Messenger creates the offstage space with memorable vividness, reporting Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' blinding. He claims that the house conceals and reveals untold pollution, such that no river could ever wash it clean (1227–30). As a household servant, he describes from within what we have witnessed from without, how Jocasta "came through the door, / ran straight for her marriage bed / . . . / and, once she entered [the chamber], slammed the double-doors shut from inside" (1241–44), as if locking in the contagion of her bedroom. There she weeps over her marriage to Laius and her incestuous coupling with Oedipus, the past lovemaking that has destroyed her and her family: "She called on Laius, long since [ēdē . . . palai] a corpse, / holding the memory of those seed-sowings of long ago [mnēmēn palaion spermatōn echousa] from which / he himself died" (1245–47). The extrascenic space prompts Jocasta's final recollections as a wife and mother, particularly the bed where she "gave birth to a husband from her husband, and children from her child" (1249–50). Given her lament, it is hard to accept Loraux's conclusion on female suicide in tragedy: "just before a woman leaps into the void, it is the missing presence of the man that she feels for the last time, in every corner of the *thalamos*."¹⁹ Jocasta regrets not the missing presence of her husbands, but the fact that she had *ever been present* with them in that accursed place.

Oedipus too faces the vile wave of the past when he follows Jocasta inside, crying out for a sword to kill himself (and perhaps her as well).²⁰ Earlier Teiresias had warned of the anguished cries he would utter when he learned of the "dangerous harbor" (*anormos*) of marriage he had sailed into, thinking the winds were fair (422–23). Now the Chorus invokes the "one, same harbor that served both son and father, [each] who came as a bridegroom" (1208–10). The scholiast is surely right to identify the harbor with Jocasta and the marriage bed, implied in Teiresias' earlier utterance.²¹ By smashing through the bolted door of the marriage chamber, Oedipus metaphorically wounds the house and assaults the marriage, exposing Jocasta who "hangs by

the neck in a twisted noose of swinging cords" as Jebb translates (1263–64). With his wife dead and the *thalamos* cracked open once and for all (the Messenger and others watch the ongoing horror through the broken door), Oedipus turns on himself, stabbing his eyes with the golden pins that held Jocasta's garments.²²

The account of Oedipus' self-directed violence—like the descriptions of Haimon's death in *Antigone* and Deianeira's in *Women of Trachis*—has strong sexual overtones. Oedipus undresses Jocasta one last time and turns the act of phallic penetration on himself, where the eyes move in their sockets.²³ In a symbolic way he also repeats what his parents did to him as an infant, pinning together his ankle joints (*arthra*, 718, 1032) before exposing him. Now Oedipus "pins" his eyes to their sockets (*arthra*, 1270), locking them in the blind gaze of the mask the actor wears when he returns to the stage. By an act of will, Oedipus puts on the blindness he had previously failed to see.²⁴ "You do not see [*horan*] the evil you are in" (367), Teiresias says, repeating later "you have sight but cannot see [*dedorkas kou blepeis*] the evil you are in" (413). So, too, the Corinthian Messenger tells Oedipus "it is perfectly clear you don't know [*eidōs*, literally "have not seen"] what you are doing" (1008).

The emergence of Oedipus from the house (1294–96), blind and groping for support, reverses the image of his violent exit inside (1185). Instead of smashing through the bolts (*klēithra*, 1262), he cries out for others to draw them back (1287, 1294) and reveal the spectacle (*theama*, 1295) he has become, the nonseeing object of others' sight. With so much made of this revelation of offstage horror, we assume that Sophocles will have done with the palace interior for the rest of the play. Creon enters via an *eisodos* (1416–21), as do Oedipus' daughters, led onstage by attendants (1471–80), and we expect the play to close with Oedipus' banishment (followed perhaps by Creon's entry into the palace as its new king). Exile is first mentioned as the punishment for Laius' murderer at line 100, and it recurs another dozen times thereafter.²⁵ Once aware of his crime, Oedipus himself begs to leave Thebes: "Never force this city / of my father to suffer my living here among them, / but let me dwell in the mountains, that place of my own / called Cithaeron" (1449–52). And yet the play ends with Oedipus forced against his will back inside the palace, following Creon's repeated command, "Go inside the house!" (1515, 1521).

Critics point to this unexpected turn of events as evidence of Oedipus' powerlessness, his broken exit marking the final reversal of his fortunes.²⁶ Such readings fail to do justice to the carefully articulated stages by which Oedipus returns to the center of the drama. The process starts at the low point of the Messenger's speech, when he describes the offstage Oedipus repeatedly stabbing at his eyes, the self-directed punishment for parricide and incest. Uniquely in Greek tragedy, the Messenger quotes no direct speech in his report,²⁷ but the protagonist cannot remain in the third person

for long. Oedipus enters from the palace, physically disabled but a presence nonetheless. Initially "cloaked" in a *kommos* shared with the Chorus, he soon takes the stage on his own, delivering a long monologue in which he insists that he acted properly in blinding himself. Moving from speech to dialogue, Oedipus holds his own with the new ruler, making demands, issuing orders, and driving the plot almost to the end. Memorably, we see him abandon his despair as he resumes the role of a father taking care of his children, embracing his daughters before the house facade. Sophocles mirrors the opening scene where Oedipus stands before the same facade as the city's leader, calling the suppliants *paides* 'children' (1, 32, 58, 142, 147), as Gellie describes:

In the final scene we meet children again, stricken with another kind of plague but similarly dependent on their father and finding available to them . . . the same forceful advocacy of their interests. Creon is back too, giving us a parody of his own performance in the first scene. He is now the man in authority but he is still Creon—kind, anxious, incapable. Then there is Oedipus, now blind and ruined, but in everything else a replica of the controlling stage-presence which in the opening scene dictated the direction in which the play would move.²⁸

The public space has shrunk to the tainted world of his polluted family, but Oedipus forges a new relationship to that pollution, embracing it in public as his own.

Gellie argues that Oedipus' final exit into the palace marks his reincorporation into the community,²⁹ but the fact that he so desperately longs for exile makes it seem like an additional punishment. Oedipus' passage back inside also frustrates the audience's sense that Cithaeron is the appropriate place for him to go. He has discovered the murderer of Laius, he has faced the horrors of his incestuous home, he stands exposed before the city, and he sees what the future holds: "for I know [*oida*] this much, that neither disease / nor anything else could kill me; for I would never / have been saved from death, unless for some stranger fate" (1455–57). Consistent with his own cautious character, Creon demands that Oedipus be hidden inside, indicating a deep misunderstanding of what has transpired.³⁰ For all the recursiveness of the plot, there can be no going back on what Oedipus has brought to light, for the secret is out. His future does not lie inside the fatally wounded house but out on Cithaeron, the wild place that his parents long ago "established for him as a tomb" (1452–53).

We shall come back to the *dramatis interruptio* marked by this final exit, but let us first look at the distanced spaces that play such an important role in Oedipus' life: Delphi, Corinth, Cithaeron, and the crossing "where three roads meet." Delphi appears to dominate from the outset; we learn that Oedipus has sent Creon there before the play begins (68–77), and he arrives from that distant spot to report the source of the plague (95–107). Corruption at Delphi lies behind Oedipus' conviction that Creon and Teiresias are

plotting his overthrow (376–78, 385–89, 555–57, 570–73, 700–706), prompting Creon to urge his accuser to "go back to Pytho and inquire of the oracle, whether I reported it truly" (603–4).³¹ To calm her husband, Jocasta divulges the unfulfilled prophecy that she and Laius received "not from Apollo himself, but from his underlings" (711–12) years before. Relating his own visit to Delphi to inquire about his parents, Oedipus describes how he slew a man at "the cleft road, leading to the same juncture from Delphi and from Daulis" (733–34) where Jocasta says that Laius was killed. The Delphic prophecy about Thebes' pollution now implicates Oedipus, and the Corinthian Messenger enables Jocasta to see the cruel truth of Apollo's earlier pronouncement to her and Laius about their son (992–1061). Delphi returns at the end of the play, when Creon sends a mission back to the oracle to ensure that the command to exile or slay the murderer of Laius still holds (1438–45, 1518–19). Both spatially and temporally, Apollo and Delphi surround the drama, making it cohere. And yet at the end, Oedipus emerges as the new seer, revealing the cause of the plague for all to see. But this seer has no further need of Thebes or of Delphi; he knows that his future lies elsewhere, on Cithaeron.

Although Apollo and his oracle cast a dark shadow over the play, the intersection of the three roads is the distant space that draws the noose tightest. Linking Delphi, Daulis, and Thebes, the crossroads epitomize Lewin's hodological space, marking the literal turning point in Oedipus' life. Not only do the split roads fatally bring together father and son, but they also serve as the place where Oedipus turns his back on Corinth and makes his way to Thebes. And yet for all their importance, the crossroads enter the play by accident. Jocasta's revelation that Laius fell to robbers where "three roads meet" (716, 730) stops Oedipus in his tracks. Her subsequent account—how they pinned together their child's ankles and exposed him on the mountain—fails to enter Oedipus' consciousness, for he zeroes in on the junction of the roads: "Such a wandering in my spirit and movement in my brain / . . . I thought I heard you say this, that Laius / was cut down where three roads meet" (727, 729–30). Writing on space and time in Proust, Poulet notes that "places behave exactly as the moments of the past, as memories." The same applies to Oedipus, whose memories are set off unwittingly by the mere mention of a distant place.³²

Like Clytemnestra reliving the murder of her husband in *Agamemnon*, Oedipus recreates the fatal encounter at the crossroads as if it were happening for the first time:

When I was making my way near the junction
of those three roads, there a herald and a man
standing in a horse-drawn wagon, just as you describe,
were coming in the opposite direction. The one in the lead

and the old one himself were trying to drive me off the road by force. In a rage, I strike at the driver, the one who was pushing me aside, and the old man sees it; waiting until I was passing the cart, he came down hard, right on my skull, using a double-pronged goad. He paid more than his share; all of a sudden, struck by a staff in this hand of mine, he rolls backwards, right out of the wagon. And I kill them all.

(801–813)

The odd juxtaposition of perfect (completed) and imperfect (incomplete) verbal aspect, and the surprising shifts between present and past tense, indicate the immediacy with which Oedipus relives the encounter.³³ The source of memory remains a single place, but one that signals three destinations, beyond which stretch a myriad of others outside the play. Viewed as an identity built on multiplicity, the junction of the roads represents a spatial version of the riddle posed by the Sphinx, where what is one is also three.³⁴ In fact, it is shortly after the event at the crossroads that Oedipus solved the riddle, enabling the stranger from distant Corinth to inherit the palace and rule at Thebes.

Corinth first enters the play when Oedipus tells the story of how he came to those violent crossroads. "My father was Polybus of Corinth" (774), he asserts, mistaking both his parents and his homeland. After Oedipus consults the oracle about his background, he flees "the land of Corinth, forever marking its boundaries only by the stars" (794–96). The Messenger from Corinth (*ek tēs Korinthou*, 936 and 955; *ton Korinthion xenon*, 1119) offers Oedipus a new future in that city, announcing that "the inhabitants of the Isthmian land have named him ruler [*turannos*]" (939–40). But the enabling circumstance—the death of Polybus—takes Oedipus back to the past and the Delphic prediction that he would destroy his parents by murder and incest (964–72, 984–1015): "That is why Corinth has lived far away from me / for so long" (997–98). The odd inversion, with the city presented as an agent, suggests something of the executive power of place in Oedipus' life. Having avoided his distant home these many years, he discovers Corinth was not his birthplace, any more than Polybus and Merope were his natural parents. The Messenger from his ersatz home found Oedipus in a far more mysterious place, "the wooded glens of Cithaeron" (1026).

Cithaeron is the most fully elaborated distant space in the play: the site where Jocasta and Laius have their son exposed (717–19); the remote area where the sole survivor of Laius' party sequesters himself as a shepherd (760–63); the mountain heights where the Chorus will dance to celebrate Oedipus' divine birth (1086–95); the place where the "foundling" (1106–7)

changes hands, from the Theban shepherd to his Corinthian counterpart (1142–45, 1156–61); and finally the destination the blind Oedipus sees as his due, a place of exile and homecoming, where his parents had planned his tomb so long ago (1451–54). Many critics think that the mountain represents uncultivated wilderness, a liminal area outside political borders, standing in opposition to the civilized centers of Thebes and Corinth.³⁵ However, as in Euripides' *Bacchae* (see chapter 4), Cithaeron proves to be more than a natural foil to human culture, or a savage space set against the *logos*-bound city, or liminal high ground opposed to the ordered, cultivated lowlands.

As a place for exposing an unwanted child (a practice more prominent in myth than in life, at least in fifth-century Athens),³⁶ the mountain accepts what Kristeva terms "the abject," the throw-away stuff of the body that cannot be assimilated and yet never fully disappears. Freudians speak of the return of the repressed, locating it in a psychological space, where traumatic thoughts and experiences pushed back into the unconscious reemerge, frequently in a different form. By materializing this Freudian notion, Kristeva hypostasizes the repressed as a rejected thing or person.³⁷ Viewed in these terms, Cithaeron offers a space for what Thebes has discarded, storing it for its eventual reappearance later. This certainly applies to the young Oedipus, "thrown out by the hands of others onto the trackless mountain" (719), who returns unrecognized to the house that expelled him. But it also fits the shepherd-servant of Laius—who begs to be sent back to the "fields and sheep pastures / . . . as far as possible from the sight of the city" (761–62)—once he sees that the new king of Thebes is the man who killed the old one. These two Cithaeronian "throwaways" go unmentioned until a crucial event brings them into Jocasta's consciousness. To calm Oedipus' rage at prophets and oracles, she relates the story of her son (705–26), and then brings up the shepherd who survived the violence at the crossroads (754–69). These belated memories lead to the eventual meeting of the two men before the palace that once had no place for either of them.³⁸

But Cithaeron sustains more than the deviant, the wild, and the discarded. The mountain provides spring and summer pasturage for flocks from both Thebes and Corinth (1026–29, 1125–40), evidence for the practice of transhumance, the seasonal movement of herds between upland and lowland pasture.³⁹ Although meat did not feature prominently in the daily Greek diet (particularly in Athens), domestic livestock played an important role in the civic and domestic religious practice of sacrifice.⁴⁰ When describing the effects of the plague, the Priest mentions the "withering away of oxen where they graze" (26),⁴¹ an assault on nature per se but also a threat to sacrificial ritual. The flocks tended by the two shepherds on Cithaeron belonged to Laius and Polybus respectively (1122–27, 1138–40; also 1022, 1028), suggesting that the mountain played an important role in sustaining the public rituals of Thebes and Corinth.⁴²

Tragedy rarely offers a glimpse into such practical concerns as livestock grazing. Why does Sophocles do so here? The plot requires that infant Oedipus be exposed in a minimally populated area that will allow him to be found and transferred from Theban to Corinthian territory. That Cithaeron provides such a space reflects its actual geographical location, lying south of Thebes and north of Corinth, but it also suggests a place of peaceful human interaction. Compare the mutual trust established between Theban and Corinthian shepherds on the mountain with the destructive encounter between the Theban and Corinthian parties on a public roadway. Linking important "civilized" spaces (Delphi, Diaulia, Thebes), the crossroads witness a spontaneous outbreak of violence, where a solitary traveler is beaten like a pack animal (804–9) and responds by killing all but one of his attackers. In the wilds of Cithaeron, on the other hand, two shepherds from Corinth and Thebes spend six months together for three years running (1133–39), taking pity on a helpless infant and cooperating in saving its life (1016–44, 1142–45, 1156–61, 1177–80). Words for giving and gift (*didōmi* or *dōron* at 1022, 1025, 1038, 1040, 1156, 1157, 1161), for taking, holding, and receiving (forms of *lambanō* at 1022, 1031, 1039, 1162, of *dechomai* at 1163), emphasize the human contact that sustains the young and innocent Oedipus. A place purported to represent the raw and the savage actually promotes the cooperative virtues of companionship and pity, albeit with tragic consequences.

On several occasions, characters and Chorus speak of Cithaeron as a sacred place linked to the gods. The Corinthian Messenger describes finding Oedipus "in the deep-cleft groves [*napaias ptuxais*] of Cithaeron" (1026), and the term *napē* (or *napos*) frequently carries religious associations. Pindar applies it to the holy sites of Delphi and Olympia (P. 5.38, 6.9) and Sophocles himself uses it for the sacred grove of the Eumenides (OC 155–64), for "the lofty wooded glens of Mount Oeta" (Tr. 436), site of Heracles' immolation and hero cult, and for the scrub area of beach where Ajax commits suicide (Aj. 892), a place of temporary sanctuary for his family (see chapter 3).⁴³ In the third stasimon, the Chorus suggests the sacred nature of Cithaeron by vowing to honor her with dances during the full moon, addressing her as "countryman, mother, and nurse of Oedipus" (1089–95). They wonder which divinities coupled on the mountain to engender their king—Pan, Apollo, Hermes, Dionysus (a god with strong ties to Thebes and Cithaeron), an unnamed goddess, some flashing-eyed nymph (1098–1109)? From literal mother to the fertile haunt of the gods, Cithaeron represents a place of luxuriant hedonism and effortless procreation, the antithesis of the plague-ridden city of rotting livestock, dead bodies, and stillborn babies evoked by the Chorus in the *parodos*.

Lofty thoughts of Oedipus' divine birth fall back to earth with the entrance down the *eisodos* of the old Shepherd from that very mountain (1100–18).

The terrifying scene that follows reunites the three characters involved in the original exchange on Cithaeron. Freud and his followers postulate a "primal scene" in which a young boy sees his parents having intercourse, crystallizing his desire to do away with his father and possess his mother.⁴⁴ No such scene occurs in the bedroom of *Oedipus Tyrannus*,⁴⁵ but an equivalent takes place in the open spaces of Cithaeron, where the decent instincts of human beings further the workings of an inhuman fate. It is the reenactment of that "primal scene" which Oedipus stages before the palace, inspired "much less obviously [by] the compulsion to act out infantile fantasies than [by] the compulsion to know the truth."⁴⁶ He focuses on the foundling whom he knows to be himself, but whom he refers to in the third person until the last moment. Questioning the Shepherd, he links the child's identity to its location: "Where did you get it? Was it your own [*oikeion* 'of your *oikos*'], or someone else's? / . . . / From which of these citizens and from which house [*stegēs* 'roof'] did it come?" (1162, 1164). Under intense pressure, the Shepherd finally concedes that "the one inside—your wife—could best say how it was" (1171–72), doubly suggestive given that the actor who played Jocasta also played the Shepherd, the character who points in her direction as the source of the child.⁴⁷

The distant spaces of Corinth, Delphi, the three roads, and Cithaeron each provide the setting for a memorable event in Oedipus' past. When he brings those distant events together and holds them simultaneously in his mind, the past overtakes the present and Oedipus discovers his true identity. Bergson claims that we misunderstand the past if we see it cut off from the present by the same divide that separates the nonexistent from the existent. Rather than understanding their difference in terms of *existence*, we should distinguish past and present by the relationship that each has to *action*. Our past never goes away, we just can't do anything about it; the present, however, can summon us to act "on" it and so open up the future.⁴⁸ Bergson's analysis of time applies perfectly to Oedipus, whose past very much exists, continually present in the significant spaces of his life. The conjunction of those spaces takes place before the palace of Thebes, revealing it for what it is (the place of his birth to Jocasta and Laius) and also for what he has made it (the site of incest with his mother). What stands in view for the length of the play holds the key to his identity. Oedipus' past has always been there, waiting for him to remember it; when he does, his past knowledge becomes present, and he sees where he is with such clarity of vision that he must blot out its sight.

Let me be clear that memory in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not the "pursuit and recapture of time in experience" sought by Proust in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Marcel finds his way by avoiding rational intellection, tapping involuntary memories frequently unleashed (as in the madeleine episode) through the "lower" senses of taste and smell. Paradoxically, by reuniting the past and the present, Proust breaks the grip of temporality, transforming a given par-

ticularity into an "out of time" experience.⁴⁹ As Vatsyayan points out, "Proust goes in search of the past with all the time at his disposal, so that already there is a dimension of the timeless in his search."⁵⁰ Oedipus' task is precisely the opposite, driven as he is by a public crisis that will not wait for time to take its course. Oedipus does not make progress toward his own identity by unleashing involuntary memories and letting them run together into transcendent (and solipsistic) self-awareness. Rather he pursues a problem, puts memories together, and tries to understand events as actions *in* time, not causally free of their temporal order. For Proust, time and place are friends; not so for Oedipus. The plague looms, death is rampant, time runs out. The breathless quality of the play reflects both the crisis that sets it in motion and Sophocles' concision in turning that crisis in on the protagonist. By an act of will, Oedipus manages to catch up with the person he always was, to *overtake* himself, and so purge the city of its disease.⁵¹

Having traced that process in terms of the interplay of scenic, extrascenic, and distant spaces, let us return to the problem of the play's ending. When he emerges blind from the palace, Oedipus cries out in bewildered disorientation: "Where am I being carried, wretch that I am? Where / does my voice fly off to, carried on the air?" (1309–10). In his mind's eye he faces the significant people and places of his past, retracing "the four prime locations that mark the circle of his destiny: Cithaeron, Corinth, the crossroads and Thebes."⁵² Oedipus conflates the pain of their recollection with the stabbing of his eyes: "How the sting of the goads sinks into me, / together with the memory of the evils I've suffered" (1317–18). He names Apollo as the god that has brought about his cruel and inhuman suffering (1329). He curses the shepherd who saved his life (1349–66), and the mountain that took him in (1391–93). He faults Polybus and Corinth for covering over the festering wound of his origins (1394–97). He challenges the three roads to remember what he did there, and what he "accomplished" after following the path to Thebes (1398–1403). He assaults the marriage that proved incestuous, "everything most shameful among humans" (1403–8). In his blindness, Oedipus reprises the play we have been watching; only *he* sees it for the first time.

Gradually Oedipus recovers his sense of direction and purpose, moving into high gear with Creon's arrival. Oedipus confronts a man he has treated badly: "In all my past [*paros*] dealings with him I am discovered to have been in the wrong" (1420–21). Creon insists, however, that he has not come to mock Oedipus or reproach him for "any wrong that lies in the past [*paros*]" (1423). Paradoxically, the repetition of *paros*, "the past," suggests that the play has moved beyond it. As an adverb, *paros* means "beforetime" or "formerly"; as a preposition, it means "before," used both spatially and temporally. The compound "before" literally means "presence in front of," reminding us that descriptions of time inevitably draw on metaphors of space.

Waiting (a temporal activity) may be short or long (which is spatial); a moment may lie behind or ahead of us; we recall a point in, or a stretch of, time; we say "hereafter" and "thereafter" (not "nowafter" and "thenafter"); we prefer "always" to "all times."⁵³ In speaking of the past, Creon and Oedipus invoke the different spaces where those bygone events took place, even as they indicate that it is the future, not the past, which is at stake—the meaning of "before" as "what lies ahead [before us]." The scene between Oedipus and his daughters is a *case in point*. Surrounded by their adult relatives (Creon and Oedipus) and a Chorus of elders, the young girls offer an image of the future, frail and wanting protection. But behind their father's concern for their fate we see the care of the two shepherds for the young Oedipus, and his upbringing by the Corinthian couple who were not his true parents.⁵⁴

Oedipus' desire to leave for Cithaeron recuperates the past and transforms it, opening unexpectedly onto the future. He wants to return to the place his parents had sent him to die, to make—in Freud's terms—an "uncanny" (*unheimlich*, literally "unhomely") homecoming.⁵⁵ Cithaeron is certainly un-homelike, a place with no permanent residents, akin to the desolate spaces discussed in chapter 3, fulfilling the Priest's warning that Oedipus could rule over a city "empty [*erēmos*] of men who dwell together within it" (57). On the other hand, the "untrodden mountain" (*abaton oros*, 719) also has aspects of a sacred space, discussed earlier.⁵⁶ Certainly for the infant Oedipus, the site of his exposure proved the place of his salvation, for there his ankles were unpinned and his young life set in motion. Both in spite of, and because of, the fate he was born to, Oedipus' *nostos* to Cithaeron holds the best prospects for a future.

We noted at the outset of the chapter that the name "Oedipus" brings together an odd collocation of "knowledge," "sight," "foot," and "where." Although Oedipus prides himself on his ability to solve riddles, he cannot see what lies at his feet, or where he really is. In the fourth century, popular anecdotes told of "wise men" (*sophoi*) who had no idea where they were going, like Thales falling down a well while contemplating the stars.⁵⁷ Many scholars, none more eloquently than Vernant, have analyzed the pattern of reversals that characterize Oedipus, epitomized by his transformation from a sure-footed, farsighted ruler into a blind man with a stick.⁵⁸ Structuralist critics place the mind-foot dichotomy on a vertical axis that opposes high and low, drawing on the traditional Greek notion that human beings exist between the Olympian deities high above and the animals below. The two parts of Oedipus' name reflect the tension between godlike reason and beast-like physicality, between insight and earthiness, between elevated king and lowly scapegoat. In this scenario, Oedipus personifies an "intersection of contradictions, the simultaneous presence of polarities,"⁵⁹ a man pulled apart by his own identity.

In the appendix, I discuss the difficulty (after Newton) of speaking intel-

ligerly about the relationship between "mind" and "body," due to our lack of clarity about what we mean by the latter—and apparently simpler—term. When early Greek thinkers conceived the cosmos, they enlivened its materiality by seeing living forces behind the processes of nature. Translated into terms relevant to the play, what we might think of as mental activity (thinking, choosing, reacting with emotion) was, for the Greeks, an inseparable part of the physical world. In other words, the relationship between understanding and walking (the mind and the foot of Oedipus' name) were not mutually exclusive but mutually informing.⁶⁰ We meet a modern version of this old idea in Gibson's approach to visual perception, in which we take in information from the ambient optic array, information that changes when we turn our heads and use our bodies, adapting to the occlusions that close off and the vistas that open up as we move through the world.

It may seem odd to apply Gibson's work on visual perception to a blind dramatic character. But Gibson's idea that we are who we are by virtue of the places we have been fits Sophocles' hero like a glove. Oedipus finds himself precisely by retracing his steps, tracking down the killer and cause of the plague and so discovering who he is.⁶¹ After his blinding, he gropes his way out of the endless circularity of his life (epitomized by his incestuous liaison) by thinking ahead to Cithaeron.⁶² Returning to the mountain might at first glance appear regressive, one more backward turning, but Oedipus knows that his future homecoming—unlike the one that brought him from Corinth to Delphi and finally to Thebes—has not yet been scripted. Knowledge as a journey, a finding and following of the right path, occurs frequently in pre-Socratic thought (see the appendix), and tragedy frequently draws on the metaphor. "You have walked to the truth," Clytemnestra tells the Chorus in *Agamemnon* (1551), and the procession of the "kindly ones" at the end of *Eumenides* fully integrates understanding with movement, constituting a homecoming with a difference. The end of *Oedipus Tyrannus* fits this *nostos* pattern, for Oedipus imagines a homecoming to the mountain that both incorporates and transforms his polluted past.

The play also draws on other transformative patterns discussed earlier. As Oedipus' future destination, Cithaeron shares the qualities of eremitic space, allowing for the new or abnormal to occur. We have glimpsed such a possibility already when Oedipus defies expectation and embraces the children of his incestuous union, challenging both the power of pollution and the conventional wisdom that it must be kept out of sight. Cithaeron offers the spatial version of this new dispensation, a heterotopic wilderness there not for conquest or colonization, but to take in a human cut off from normal society. What path Oedipus' new life will follow remains undetermined, but we recall that Odysseus' surprising defense of Ajax' burial, Neoptolemus' change of heart regarding Philoctetes, and the Oceanids' solidarity with Prometheus each takes place in an ostensible no-man's-land, a space open to the unpredictable.

Oedipus will journey to the mountain tapping his way with a cane, fulfilling in Teiresias' words the "dread-footed [*deinopous*] curse that will drive you from this land" (418). "What Cithaeron will not soon echo your cries?" (420–21), the seer asks before predicting Oedipus' fate: "Blind instead of seeing / . . . / [you] will cover the ground by feeling it with a stick" (454–56). This passage suggests the importance of the body (foot, voice, eyes, physical contact) in defining and transforming the space around it, a subject addressed in chapter 4.⁶³ The image of a blind man making progress by feeling the ground revitalizes the connection, usually taken for granted, between human beings and their terrestrial environment.⁶⁴ Part of the satisfaction in Gibson's work derives from his emphasizing the obvious that has been overlooked, namely our perceptual relationship to the earth. The same applies to the walking blind: to see what's ahead, Oedipus must touch what lies at his feet and "see it feelingly," as the eyeless Gloucester says in *King Lear*.

The future unfolds as that which sustains, and Oedipus must stay in close contact with it in order to make progress. His grounded future implies no irredeemable loss in perception but rather a change in its speed and precision. As the architect Louis Kahn was fond of saying, "to see is only to touch more accurately."⁶⁵ Without the ease of sight, Oedipus can move ahead so long as he never forgets what gives him "eyes," affording apertures for progress and obstacles to be avoided.

At the end of the play Oedipus is once again a man in motion, and one with time on his side. After his *anagnōrisis*, the Chorus tells him that "all-seeing time [*ho panth' horōn chronos*] has found you out against your will" (1214). But from the moment of self-discovery—when past time and space conjoined in the present—Oedipus' relationship to space and time begins to change. As the possessor of his own identity, he now meets a future that does not inevitably lead back to his past. "You would be better no longer living than living blind," the Chorus insists, prompting Oedipus to respond, "Don't try to instruct me or give me advice, / that what I have just done was not done for the best" (1367–70). Unlike Jocasta, whose corpse he cuts down, the immediacy of death is not for Oedipus; some other, strange fate lies ahead (1455–57). "Soon" (*tacha*, 421), Teiresias predicts, Cithaeron will echo his lamentations. Oedipus pleads for exile "as soon as possible" (*tachista*, 1410, 1436), and Creon assures him that once Delphi confirms the punishment, he will "receive it soon" (*teuxēi tacha*, 1519).⁶⁶ In spite of his being forced back into the palace, time will give Oedipus the exile's homecoming he longs for.

Oedipus' changing relationship to time returns us to the puzzle posed by the Sphinx, "Man" is the answer, but as such it fails to address the larger implications of the riddle (*ainigma*, 391). Let us look at the version that has come down to us, probably predating Sophocles' play:

There is on the earth [*epi gēs*] a thing two-footed and four-footed and three-footed, with one name. Of all things that creep on the earth [*epi gaiān herpetā*],

move through the air and over the sea, it alone changes its form [in this way]. But whenever it walks [*bainēi*] with the most feet, it is at its weakest for all its limbs.⁶⁶

To solve the conundrum requires that we perceive continuity over time, *the* problem for someone ignorant of his own identity. Critics focus on Oedipus' failure to understand that the answer to the riddle points not to a species (man) but to an individual (himself), a person uniquely confused about sameness and difference.⁶⁷ Although true enough, this judgment overlooks the way that the riddle translates time (as the creature ages) into bodily change linked to mobility. Locomotion requires a medium to sustain it (the earth, for human beings), and it implies a destination (imaginary, virtual, temporary, or real) toward which the creature moves. However, the Sphinx' song fails to mention any place or places that these variable limbs move toward; the only suggestion of a destination involves the passage of time. A human being moves from crawling to striding to walking with a cane only insofar as he or she moves from infancy toward old age. Therefore, the answer to the riddle is "Man" only if his destination is the future, and if he arrives there by moving over the earth. Oedipus *per se* is not its solution, but Oedipus tapping his way toward Cithaeron is.

Considering the future as a destination recalls the classic meditation on time in book 11 of *Confessions*. Augustine comes to realize that time is a distension of the soul, stretching out to embrace the past and future in a mental act of attention:

If the future and past exist, I want to know where they are. And if I cannot yet know this, at least I do know that wherever they are, they are there not as future or past, but present. If wherever they are they are future, then in that place they are not yet; if past, then they are there no more. Thus wherever they are and whatever they are, they *are* only as present. . . .

Perhaps it would be more correct to say: there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things future. For these three things exist in my mind, and I find them nowhere else: the present of things past is memory, the present of things present is direct perception, the present of things future is expectation. If we are allowed to speak thus, . . . there are three times.⁶⁸

Adapting Augustine, Heidegger introduces the idea of "temporality" to express the "ever current unity of future, past [having-been-ness] and present," incorrectly understood as separate entities.⁶⁹ Temporality for Heidegger is like Augustinian consciousness, a continuity that stretches over the three "times" represented in the acts of retaining (remembering), presencing (perceiving directly), and expecting.⁷⁰ When we stand apart from this continuity (what Heidegger calls *ekstasis*, literally "standing out from"), we come to think of

time as cut up into the segments we label past, present, and future. In Augustine's words, "although it is incorrect, custom allows it."⁷¹ Construed as a mental space, consciousness converts the diachronic unfolding of events into a synchronic simultaneity. As Bergson famously puts it, "We juxtapose our states of consciousness in such a way as to perceive them simultaneously: not one following the other, but one alongside the other; in brief, we project time onto space."⁷²

For Bergson and his followers, the spatialization of time happens in consciousness, in our mental awareness of things, events, memories, dreams. The theater—a mercifully, and mercilessly, concrete medium—projects time onto space in a far more physical manner, exemplified by Oedipus' linking his future directly to Cithaeron. His desire to return there may seem at first symbolic, a manifestation of poetic justice that brings him back to the place of his early exposure. But the physical details of that exposure (pinned ankles, his transfer from hand to hand) and the blindness that affects his mobility at the end suggest that Oedipus' projection of his future onto the mountain is more a corporeal acknowledgment than a poetic idea. His own cries will echo in his ears as he blindly makes his way tapping the ground with a cane, answering the riddle by living it.

Unlike Jocasta dead inside the palace, Oedipus is drawn to the "not yet" of the future, the privileged *ekstasis* for Heidegger that reflects the human quality of "Being-ahead-of-itself," of "Being toward the potentiality-for-Being."⁷³ Sartre puts the challenge more simply: "Becoming what you are," which requires an authentic projection toward an uncertain future. For Sartre, "authenticity consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibility and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate"—a description that fits Oedipus at the end of the play.⁷⁴ After the revelation that he murdered his father, committed incest with his mother, and fathered his own brothers and sisters, Oedipus goes over those facts again and again in a "definitional fondling of the truth."⁷⁵ But the truth, as the riddle of the Sphinx suggests, has a future, which Oedipus has not yet moved through. He "knows the worst, but he does not yet know everything," Halliburton reminds us, and that fact—befitting a character who will not stop short of finding out—draws him on.⁷⁶

My focus on Oedipus' desire to move into the space of the future strains toward the existential, emphasizing the protagonist's trajectory through time. In *Le temps dans la tragédie grecque*, de Romilly links the development of subjective or psychological time to Sophocles' concentration on individual heroic figures.⁷⁷ For her, as for some existentialists, the spatial component drops away in favor of the isolated, psychological self, cut off (more or less) from the world. In a sense, the present study has followed a similar path, moving from space for returns (involving a clear relationship to the social), to eremitic space (necessarily isolated from the normal world), to the space

of the body (individuated by definition), and finally to that most inner of relations, memory and time. As Kant construes human perception, space is the a priori condition of our experiencing the external world, and time the a priori condition of any experience whatsoever, including internal phenomena, because time determines neither shape nor position but only the relation of representations in our inner experience—which is where Oedipus seems to have brought us.⁷⁸ However, the movement in tragedy from the distant spaces of *nostoi* to the inner spaces of consciousness does not lead to a psychic dead end. Like Oedipus, it keeps going. The external world re-emerges as the manifestation of remembered, lived, and projected time—the memories of Corinth, Delphi, the place where three roads meet; the ever-present palace revealed for what it is; the re-creation of the original triadic scene on Cithaeron; and the return of the mountain as a concrete image of Oedipus' future, calling for his slow, earthbound *nostos*.

The spatialization of temporal relations also fits the self-referential and the reflexive spaces of Greek tragic performance, which allowed the heroic world of the plays its special purchase on fifth-century audiences. Having discussed the relationship between Oedipus, his plague-ridden Thebes, and Athens of the early 420s, let us turn to the self-referential space that the play evokes and takes advantage of. In the famous second stasimon, the Chorus considers the implications of an apparent breakdown in religious observance. If someone commits with impunity acts that should outrage the gods, "Why is it necessary for us to dance?" (*ti dei me choreuein*; 896), or, in Lloyd-Jones' translation, "Why should we honor the gods with dances?" Given that the Chorus addresses this question while performing a dance at the City Dionysia, it resonates beyond its immediate dramatic context, as Dodds observes: "If they mean merely 'Why should I, a Theban elder, dance?', the question is . . . slightly ludicrous; the meaning is surely 'Why should I, an Athenian citizen, continue to serve in a chorus?' In speaking of themselves as a chorus they step out of the play into the contemporary world."⁷⁹

In his Greek National Theatre production in the United States (performed in modern Greek), Minos Volonakis had the actors in the Chorus stop their dance, face the audience, take off their masks, and utter the lines in English—"If such crimes go unpunished, / why should I join in the sacred performance?"—after which they put their masks back on and resumed their lyric in Greek. In his review of the production, Knox does not find the gesture gratuitous but rather an attempt "to recreate in modern times a remarkable feature of the ancient play."⁸⁰ The Chorus questions the function of tragic performance generally, suddenly turning the theater into a place that challenges its own validity. How can tragedy continue if it fails to serve the gods, if it honors behavior that threatens the basis for its performance at the City Dionysia? The near impossibility of posing such a question in the contemporary theater reveals the limitations of our own metatheatrical inge-

nities, which rarely rise above a game-playing notion of "performance" (or "performativity") carefully positioned for a postmodern elite.

We learn in the final antistrophe that the Chorus's fear arises from the patent unreliability of oracles, demonstrated in the previous scene by Jocasta's proof that the prophecy of Laius' death did not come true. The Chorus prays that Zeus restore Apollo's credibility by preventing "the utterance of false oracles in the future."⁸¹ If not, the elders will never again travel to Delphi or to other oracular sites for divine guidance (897–903), meaning that festival dancing and holy pilgrimage will disappear. Sacred dance represents choreography tied to language and music, a "movement event" that literally goes nowhere, but that gathers a human community around it by honoring the gods. Such is the performance of the Chorus in this stasimon, and in the next when it offers a dance to Cithaeron in celebration of Oedipus' divine birth.⁸² Pilgrimage to a sacred site calls for movement of a different sort, a journey in pursuit of distant knowledge, like the visitations of Oedipus, Creon, and Laius to Delphi. This, too, will cease, if "divine things pass away" (*errei de ta theia*, 910). If the Chorus can find no reason to dance, then the audience has no reason to travel to the precinct of Dionysus Eleuthereus and there enter the place "where three roads meet," the two *eisodoi* and the doorway that opens onto the orchestra,⁸³ the space of the theater where the *polis* gathers to confront itself.

By questioning the purpose of its performance, the Chorus reminds the Athenians in the audience of the stakes for their own city in Oedipus' quest for the truth. Dubious critics point out that the word *polis* occurs for the twenty-fifth and last time at line 880, implying that the play discards its concern for the city's well-being and concentrates instead on Oedipus' self-discovery.⁸⁴ But the ongoing presence of the civic-minded Chorus, Oedipus' self-exposure that transforms his blinding from a personal to a public act, his insistence on his own exile to cleanse the city of its pollution, and the telling instance of choral self-reference maintain the public thrust of the play and direct it out to the audience.⁸⁵ Without knowing that the blind old man will make his way to Colonus in Sophocles' last tragedy, posthumously produced at the City Dionysia in 401, we still sense that the play of space and time in *Oedipus Tyrannus* moved the original spectators beyond the ironic relationship with which they started. Finding that oracles are true may justify tragic performances for the Chorus, but the audience never doubted their validity (at least as regards the play). Sophocles answers the Chorus's question not by justifying oracles, but by taking his protagonist beyond them. He moves Oedipus back through the past of prophecy and circumstance, to the places that made him what he is. He reencounters those places, embraces the worst that happened there, and then moves on to an uncertain future, one that the audience cannot yet remember.