

Polis as Palē in Euripides' last Trilogy

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This paper reflects on Euripides' vision of human social and political life in his final trilogy, performed posthumously in 405 BCE: *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Alcmeon at Corinth* and *Bacchae*. Drawing on the philosophical discussions of Kathleen Wilkes, Christopher Gill, Charles Taylor and on the anthropology of art works of Alfred Gell I depart from the ritualist and functionalist legacies of 20th Century scholarship in order to re-assess Euripides in terms of issues of agency and person, which are fundamental in Greek drama. Focussing on these three works and especially the *motifs* there of grappling, binding, holding and evading, I explore what we may usefully say about the late Euripides' concept of persons, what they are and what they do. The imagery of wrestling, of interlocutors as tussling and the dialogue as a grappling both with others and with the projected self, expresses a view of the social world as one of complex and insoluble rivalries, of bodies that behave as minds do and minds as bodies.

Communication – both speech and song – have a binding effect, the city and the household are scenes of entanglement. Individuals and factions are colligated in a world of invisible but effective connections. Equally, certain forms of communication will serve to sever and undo connections and others to charm and enchant. The Euripidean social world forms a virtual network of links perpetually breaking, detached and re-attached. Dionysus, who comes to reassert his relationship, is the god of dissolved and renewed connections – both with others and with self – is the slippery adversary whom the human protagonist can pin down neither in language nor physically. He is the model of Euripidean dramatic personhood: having distinctly concealed intentions while embodying always the spectacular manifestation of intentionality, he exemplifies the doubleness of all subjects and the perilous disjunction of interiority and outward aspect. He is also that figure whose effect is, *en merei* “by turns”, both to bind together and to tear apart, to unify and to destroy. In closely re-examining the imagery and events of this trilogy, we may hope to contribute to more deeply understanding the relationship between Euripides' view of individual persons as both nested and concealed within themselves and also insolubly entwined with others in the affective and actual entanglement, which constitutes human group life as *oikos* and *polis*.