Chapter Five

*Nandikar’s Antigone: Agency, Autonomy or Sacrifice?*

Although we have, in the previous chapters, managed to trace the course of the major political events that mark the period chosen for this study, I use this concluding chapter to present an analysis of what I consider a significant theatrical representation of female political agency during the period of the national Emergency in Calcutta. I also attempt to raise questions here about the kind of politics theatre may do and the efficacy, if any, of such a politics in a state of complete suspension of democratic rights/resistance in the *realpolitik*. I would also like to admit at the very start that I have not attempted to map directorial intent or the exact political positioning of the theatre group concerned vis-à-vis the Emergency. What kind of resistance, if any, was *intended*\(^\text{547}\) in the directorial endeavour is not driving question of this analysis. Instead, perhaps unusually even for this thesis, this chapter hinges itself primarily on the statements of the leading actress of the production, *her* interpretation of the political intent of the character she plays and some of the anecdotal memories of her performance by members of the audience writing after her death, which point at a kind of complex politics that may never have been explicitly stated or even entirely intended by the production as a whole. This chapter also stands apart methodologically from the previous chapters, in undertaking a prolonged comparative textual and theoretical analysis of two dramatic versions of the Antigone narrative – Sophocles’ and Jean Anouilh’s, thereby

\(^{547}\) We have learnt in the previous chapter that Rudraprasad Sengupta had been present at the tea party given by Indira Gandhi at the Raj Bhavan in Calcutta during the Emergency in 1975, though it is difficult to draw direct empirical conclusions of political support and intention from this. Keya Chakraborty, on the other hand, seems to have been quite supportive towards the more radical leftist strand of politics in West Bengal and also rather daring. Just before the Emergency, a regular theatre-goer Prabir Dutta died from a police bullet while watching Badal Sircar’s performance at Curzon Park. There was a lot of uproar and varied reactions from the theatre community. Sircar stated in an interview given just before his death that Keya Chakraborty was the only person from *Nandikar* who joined the protest show of Sircar’s play ‘Michhil’ that was organised soon after this death. Bandikishore Mitra and Sabuj Mukhopadhyay, *Sabcheye Sasta to Manusher Mangsha. Sheyta Khelei Damta Komto: An Interview with Badal Sircar* (Calcutta: Unajan, 2011), 30-31.
evaluating the implications of each text for the immediate political context of Calcutta between 1975 and 1977.

_Nandikar’s_ production of *Antigone* was first staged in Bengali in Kolkata on the 25th of March, 1975. Keya Chakraborty played the lead role while Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay played the part of Creon. The adaptation and direction was by Rudraprasad Sengupta who names both Sophocles and Jean Anouilh as his sources. According to Professor Samik Bandyopadhyay: “There is a clear difference between the Sophocles text and the Anouilh text of *Antigone*, Anouilh’s text working out a perfect balance between Antigone’s position and Creon’s to fit the situation in which he was staging it in Paris under German occupation. With the _Nandikar_ version, which uses both Sophocles and Anouilh, there was a shift towards the balancing between Antigone’s impulsive rebellion and the state’s need to retain order.”

But Keya Chakraborty, who played the part of Antigone, writes in a short piece titled ‘About Antigone’ (*Antigone Proshonge*):

> The subject matter of the play _Antigone_, as far as I have understood, is protest. _Antigone_ is a multilayered play, the protest is similarly multilayered. **Our play is mainly an adaptation of Jean Anouilh’s French play: there is only one section in the text that has been taken from Sophocles’ ancient Greek play. Anouilh’s play has a particular political context behind it. During the Second World War, when France was under German occupation, there was no possibility of protesting against the victorious German army. All plays that were performed were censored. It was in this sort of political situation that Anouilh chose to write on a mythical subject perhaps expressly in order to avoid censure from the alien regime. One of the principal characters of the play _Antigone_ speaks in support of the state’s domination, in support of dictatorship and authoritarianism. As a result, the German rulers saw in the figure of Creon a support of Hitler and his ideology and that is why the play was cleared by the German censors for performance. But for the patriotic French, the play meant something completely different. _Antigone_ says ‘no’ many times to Creon, the representative of Hitler and his regime. In this clear, resounding ‘no’ that _Antigone_ throws at Creon, the French people found an echo of their silent protest against the alien dictatorship. And this is the political background of Jean Anouilh’s play. Besides this, of course, there are many other kinds of protest in the play.**

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549 Undated. But perhaps written not long before her death which was in March 1977, since the editor confesses that the piece was acquired late, hence went into the appendix and not the main body of the text in *Keyar Boi*, published by _Nandikar_ in 1981. Which would mean that it was written either during or freshly emerging from the experience of the Emergency.

550 *Keyar Boi*, 364. [Translation and emphasis mine.]
Keya outlines the political context in which Jean Anouilh’s 1942 play was written very succinctly, but the fact remains that the interpretative legacy of Anouilh’s *Antigone* and readings of its political implications have always been characterized by controversy and conflict. While some have read it as clearly ‘proto-fascist’\(^{551}\), most others have seen the play as a largely ambivalent text – where Antigone as an infantile and somewhat irrational character stands somehow outside the realm of politics, while Creon represents the political necessity of pragmatic state action. Creon can, in some ways, be easily read as a victim in Anouilh’s play – a cog in the wheel of a larger political machine that moves in ways far exceeding the understanding of individuals like Antigone. Read like this, and performed in the period between 1975 and 1977 in Kolkata under the national Emergency, the play could indeed be seen as reactionary rather than radical, the latter being how Keya seems to unequivocally interpret it. But I wish to go a little deeper into this analysis in a way that brings us back to Keya’s statements about the play so that we are better able to understand the politics that she attempts to point at. In doing so, I will set against each other the Sophocles text, the original text of Jean Anouilh and a little bit of the performance text of *Nandikar’s* adaptation.\(^{552}\) Keya goes on to say in the same article: “Antigone says at one point in the play: ‘All my life, haven’t I cursed the fact that I am a girl? That I have no right to this vast world outside, that I have no right to believe in any ideology?’ What could be a stronger protest against the diminution of the rights of a woman in a male-dominated society?”\(^{553}\) It is the denial of access to political life for women that Anouilh’s Antigone speaks about here and Keya finds in this an expression of another layer of political protest, this time explicitly feminist. But what sort of access to political life is the female protagonist claiming in Anouilh’s play? Just like in the Sophocles text, Antigone here insists on burying her brother


\(^{552}\) This last, since there is no video recording of the original production, is an undated DVD version of the play published by *Nandikar*. This was perhaps recorded it was produced for Doordarshan by *Nandikar* much later, perhaps in the late 1980s or early 1990s. Swatilekha and Rudraprasad Sengupta here take on the roles of Antigone and Creon respectively. It is unjust to attempt to read the performance text of a play from a televised production but this was the only possible visual record I had at my disposal, besides photographs. Therefore, I have used it sparingly. It is perhaps not irrelevant to mention in passing that this, of course, points towards the difficulties of garnering actual raw material, especially if you are not working in the contemporary period, in the work of writing performance history in a country like India where archiving of performance texts has been considered less than necessary.

\(^{553}\) Keya Chakraborty, ‘Antigone Proshonge’, *Keyar Boi*, 365. [Translation mine.]
Polynices, against the express orders of Creon who is her maternal uncle and the new king of Thebes after the death of her father Oedipus and both her brothers. Creon has decreed that Eteocles, the brother who represented the state in the fatal battle be given a royal burial with full state honours while Polynices’ body is left to rot and to be eaten by vultures outside the city limits. This is because Polynices has rebelled against the state of Thebes by bringing foreign armies to its door in order to fight his own brother Eteocles. He does this when Eteocles refuses to give up his kingdom to Polynices after a year’s rule as was initially agreed after the death of Oedipus.

However, amongst the several other things that the Anouilh text changes, there is the fact that it moves the entire textual concentration of the play towards a prolonged political and ethical debate between Antigone and Creon. This debate appears in the Sophocles text as a fairly quick and stark argument between two incommensurable political forces – the authoritarian rule of the state and a woman who wishes to honour, against the express orders of the government, kinship ties that bind her to her dead brother. There, Creon is clearly a tyrant with no wish allow a woman to disobey him and Antigone the rebel who questions and defies his authority, and is punished for it by death. I quote: “Antigone: Now you have caught, will you do more than kill me? / Creon: No, nothing more; that is all I could wish.”

This seems to be the clear, hard voice of the state that is determined to follow its own rule of law. But contrast this to Anouilh’s Creon: this is what he says to Antigone when she has been caught burying Polynices by the guards: “Creon: Don’t you realize that if anyone other than those three louts gets to know what you’ve tried to do, I shall have to have you killed? If you’ll only keep quiet now and give up this foolishness, there’s a chance I may be able to save you. But in five minutes’ time it will be too late. Do you understand?”

This is the first and rather unavoidable difference between the two Creons – Sophocles’ Creon has no doubts that Antigone must die according to his own orders and Anouilh’s seems eager to do everything he can to avoid killing Antigone. Unlike Anouilh’s Creon, Sophocles’ king is not a man divided against himself, not split between his ‘authentic self’ and the ‘political authority’ he represents and is bound to perform. Sophocles’ Creon shows no separation from his own position as sovereign – he and his kingship are one. His conversation with Antigone is quick,

matter of fact and marked by expediency. In answer to his previous statement, Antigone says:

Antigone: Why then delay? There is nothing that you can say
    That I should wish to hear, as nothing I say
    Can weigh with you. I have given my brother burial.
    What greater honour could I wish? All these
    Would say that what I did was honourable,
    But fear locks up their lips. To speak and act
    Just as he likes is a king’s prerogative.
Creon: You are wrong. None of my subjects thinks as you do.
Antigone: Yes, sir, they do; but dare not tell you so.556

The rebel and the sovereign have nothing much to say to each other; the argument that ensues seems to be over before long. The dialogue between them after this is brief and cursory, with expedient events taking over. Creon’s last words to Antigone are brief:

“Antigone: My way is to share my love, not my hate. / Creon: Go then, and share your love among the dead. / We’ll have no woman’s law here, while I live.”557 When he orders the guards to take Ismene and Antigone inside, he says: “Creon: […] Take them, and keep them within – / The proper place for women.”558 With this, Creon lays out clearly the nature of Antigone’s transgression – as a woman it is not her place to participate in, let alone disrupt, political life. Ismene tells her: “O think, Antigone; we are women; it is not for us/ To fight against men; our rulers are stronger than we, / And we must obey in this, or worse than this./ May the dead forgive me, I can do no other/ But as I am commanded; to do more is madness.559 This Antigone betrays no fear at the thought of impending death, only a heroic resignation towards her fate. She says to Ismene: “Leave me alone/ With my own madness. There is no punishment/ Can rob me of my honourable death.”560 Equally unbending is Creon’s espousal of the authority of the state:

No other touchstone can test the heart of a man,
    The temper of his mind and spirit, till he be tried
In the practice of authority and rule.
[…]

556 Sophocles, Antigone 140.
557 Ibid, 141.
558 Ibid, 142.
559 Ibid.
560 Ibid, 129
And no less damned is he who puts a friend
Above his country; I have no good word for him.
As god above is my witness, who sees all,
When I see any danger threatening my people,
Whatever it may be, I shall declare it.
No man who is his country’s enemy
Shall call himself my friend. Of this I am sure –
Our country is our life;\(^{561}\)

But by the end of the play, this confidence in Creon’s voice has begun to falter. He is questioned in his actions first in his encounter with his own son Haemon, Antigone’s betrothed, who tells him that the people of Thebes disagree with his decision and that should be reason enough for him to reconsider it. Haemon asks whether Creon alone represents the state and whether the opinions of the citizens of Thebes matter, thereby giving voice to a different notion of statecraft:

Creon: And was not this woman’s action dishonourable?
Haemon: The people of Thebes think not.
Creon: The people of Thebes!
Since when do I take my orders from the people of Thebes?
Haemon: Isn’t that a rather childish thing to say?
Creon: No. I am king, and responsible only to myself.
Haemon: A one-man state? What sort of state is that?
Creon: Why, does not every state belong to its ruler?
Haemon: You’d be an excellent king – on a desert island.\(^{562}\)

Haemon’s argument clearly opposes an incipient notion of reasonable democracy to Creon’s headstrong dictatorship. In contrast to Anouilh’s play (where Antigone is continually referred to by others as infantile) here it is Creon who appears childish and arbitrary. The Chorus (representing the people of Thebes), in its eulogies, makes its admiration of Antigone clear, while conceding that: “[…] authority cannot afford to connive at disobedience,/ You [Antigone] are the victim of your own self-will.”\(^{563}\) But Teiresias, the blind prophet, appears only to turn this around. Now it is Creon who appears to be a ‘fool’, defiant of divine law and driven by his own self-will:

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\(^{561}\) Ibid, 131.
\(^{562}\) Ibid, 146.
\(^{563}\) Ibid, 149.
Mark this, my son: all men fall into sin.
But sinning, he is not for ever lost
Hapless and helpless, who can make amends
And has not set his face against repentance.
Only a fool is governed by self-will.
    Pay to the dead his due. Wound not the fallen.
It is no glory to kill and kill again.\textsuperscript{564}

When Creon defies and abuses him as a traitor, Teiresias reiterates that Creon has no wisdom, and perhaps specifically no political wisdom, since as the result of his actions he will not only lose two of his family members but “every neighbouring city will be goaded to fury”\textsuperscript{565} against him, and therefore against Thebes. It is a double-edged sword that Teiresias wields; Creon’s thoughtless actions are not only a crime against the ‘eternal law’ (which Antigone fights for) that will bring ruination on his family, but also strategically and politically misguided since it will anger the allies and neighbours of Thebes, upon whom the divine curse will also be visited. Sure enough, Haemon’s subsequent suicide, followed by Jocasta’s, irrevocably unsettles Creon. By the end of the play he is a thoroughly repentant, broken man. In fact, as soon as Teiresias has left, having prophesied Creon’s doom, the king changes his mind and wishes to remedy his erroneous actions. He says: “My mind is made; ‘twas I imprisoned her,/ And I will set her free. Now I believe/ It is by the laws of heaven that man must live.”\textsuperscript{566} So Antigone’s antagonist concedes that she was right, the value of her action is reaffirmed by all concerned. Even though it is too late to save either her or Haemon’s life, Antigone is, just as the Chorus had predicted, ‘a living death, but a name undying.’\textsuperscript{567} She will be remembered, if not consecrated, as a rebel for a just cause against a foolish and headstrong autocrat who repents his own arbitrary pride; in the end, Sophocles’ is a tragedy come full circle, its moral conclusion reasonably clear. Creon (the autocrat, the child) must bear the burden of this destruction. The judgement is uttered by his own lips in conclusion. He appears utterly defeated and ready to die, when he says: “There is no man can bear this guilt but I. / It is true, I killed him. / Lead me away, away. I live no longer.”\textsuperscript{568}

\textsuperscript{564} Ibid, 153.
\textsuperscript{565} Ibid, 155.
\textsuperscript{566} Ibid, 156.
\textsuperscript{567} Ibid, 149.
\textsuperscript{568} Ibid, 161.
Though the Sophocles text is perhaps far more complex than this short summary allows, what makes it stand apart from the Anouilh text is that at least the political and/or ethical rationale behind Antigone’s rebellious act is fairly clear. What Anouilh does, by contrast, is that he empties Antigone’s act of its rationale, making it appear meaningless and non-efficacious for all practical (and political) purposes. But we come to that a little later in the essay. Judith Butler, who, in her foundational book *Antigone’s Claim*, concentrates her analysis primarily on Sophocles’ *Antigone*, starts by explaining why she began to think of Antigone as a ‘representative’ political figure for feminists. Although Butler problematises this soon after by saying that “…she hardly represents a feminism that might in any way be unimplicated in the very power that it opposes”\(^569\), she gives her readers a fairly succinct summary of how the figure of Antigone has been read, by a certain section of feminists, as standing for a politics of anti-state resistance. She writes:

I began to think of Antigone a few years ago as I wondered what happened to those feminist efforts to confront and defy the state. It seemed to me that Antigone could work as a counterfigure to the trend championed by recent feminists to seek the backing and authority of the state to implement feminist policy aims. The legacy of Antigone’s defiance appeared to be lost in the contemporary efforts to recast political opposition as legal plaint and to seek the legitimacy of the state in the espousal of legal claims. Indeed, one finds Antigone defended and championed by Luce Irigaray as a principle of feminist defiance of statism and as example of anti-authoritarianism.\(^570\)

So while to certain section of feminists, Antigone has long appeared as model of anti-statist resistance to autocracy, Butler goes on to say that one cannot make of a fictional character an example “without slipping into irreality oneself”.\(^571\) But even while questioning Antigone’s straightforwardly and radically representative (perhaps iconic) function for feminist politics, Butler proceeds to dissociate herself from readings such as those of Hegel. Hegel sees Sophocles’ Antigone as somehow pre-social and pre-political because she makes claims for kinship that, according to him, predate the state and its necessities; her claims are in that sense, somewhat primitive and pre-human. The texts, of both Sophocles and Anouilh (though apparently different in many respects) may, on the face of it, bear this out to a

\(^570\) Ibid, 1.
\(^571\) Ibid.
certain extent (Anouilh’s more so than Sophocles) because of the continual use of bird and animal imagery to describe Antigone’s bodily acts. Anouilh’s Creon frames his primary accusation towards Antigone precisely in these terms: that she stands in her claim somewhat irrationally and childishly outside politics, in fact, outside political life (bios?) and thereby outside human life itself. Butler writes of Sophocles’ Antigone: “What struck me first was the way in which Antigone has been read by Hegel and Lacan and also by the way in which she has been taken up by Luce Irigaray and others not as a political figure, one whose defiant speech has political implications, but rather as one who articulates a prepolitical opposition to politics, representing kinship as the sphere that conditions the possibility of politics without ever entering into it.”

Indeed, Antigone’s words in Sophocles, which reaffirm ‘the holiest laws of heaven’ and her ‘true duty’ to her brother as against the laws of the state, make this reading possible. As against this, ‘Creon comes to represent an emergent ethical order and state authority based on principles of universality’ in these readings. But Butler herself argues against the evaluation of Antigone’s significance merely as a force representative of pre-political kinship ties, by pointing out how complicated Antigone’s own position within normative blood relationships is, given that she is both sister and daughter to King Oedipus. She too, however, highlights Antigone’s liminality in relation to the polis. Reminding us of Hegel who had written in The Phenomenology of Spirit that Antigone is ‘the eternal irony of the community’, Butler writes: “She is outside the terms of the polis, but she is, as it were, an outside without which the polis could not be. The ironies are no doubt more profound than Hegel understood: she speaks, and speaks in public, precisely when she ought to be sequestered in the private domain. What sort of political speech is this that transgresses the very boundaries of the political, which sets into scandalous motion the boundary by which her speech ought to be contained?”

According to Butler, Sophocles’ Antigone transgresses both gender and kinship laws in her act. She becomes ‘manly’ in her claiming of the public space of Thebes; in fact “both Antigone’s act of burial and her verbal defiance become the occasions on which she is called “manly” by the chorus, Creon, and the messengers. […] Antigone thus appears to assume the form of a certain masculine sovereignty, a manhood

572 Ibid, 2.
573 Sophocles, Antigone, 128.
574 Ibid, 129.
575 Butler, Antigone’s Claim, 4.
576 Ibid.
577 Ibid, 4.
that cannot be shared, which requires that its other be both feminine and inferior.\textsuperscript{578} But it is here that Butler complicates her analysis; though Antigone destabilizes gender norms by her actions, she is able to do so only by reflecting the contours of the power she has attempted to resist:

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\ldots\text{ though she uses language to claim her deed, to assert a “manly” and defiant autonomy, she can perform that act only through embodying the norms of the power she opposes.} \ldots\text{ Antigone comes, then, to act in ways that are called manly not only because she acts in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law. } \ldots\text{ Her agency emerges precisely through her refusal to honor his command, and yet the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of sovereignty that she refuses.} \textsuperscript{579}
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It is my contention that the same cannot be said of Anouilh’s Antigone. The Anouilh text also manages to deeply disturb gendered conventions of political praxis, but his Antigone does so in ways that radically question the conventional rationale that forms the very basis of the rule of law which punishes both her and Polynices. Her act seems to be an attempt to destabilize the existence of pragmatic statist ‘wisdom’ as such. It seems that Anouilh’s Antigone is, at first glance, more deserving of the accusation of being outside politics than Sophocles’, since it appears as if it is not simply a particular violation of divine law (Creon’s refusal to bury Polynices) that bothers her, but the whole edifice of the state’s reason, such as it is. In this, (understandably perhaps) she has appeared both infantile and unreasonable to many critics of the play. For example, Rosamund Deutsch writes in her review of a 1946 production of Lewis Galantiere’s adaptation of Anouilh’s \textit{Antigone}:

Although the modern heroine mentions her moral duty to the dead, this is not her real reason for burying her brother. Nor do the ties of family loyalty strongly compel her to act. Negatively, she rebels in principle against a decree which she feels Creon has no right to make, but positively, she offers no convincing reason for wanting to disobey it. \[
\ldots\text{ emotion seems an inadequate substitute for the religious element in Sophocles. It weakens Antigone's case when she is confronted by Creon. } \ldots\text{ instead of refuting his arguments like her ancient counterpart, she ignores them and goes on with her own. The characteristics of the two chief actors are thus almost reversed. It is Antigone, not Creon, who refuses to listen to reason, and the conflict is not}
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\textsuperscript{578} Ibid, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{579} Ibid, 10-11.
between divine and human law as in Sophocles, but between emotion and reason. 

It would be unnecessary to reiterate for readers aware of feminist critiques of the notion of a ‘universal’ masculinist reason why this proposition by Deutsch is problematic. We have seen in our earlier chapters how patriarchal law (and statist-paternalist ‘reason’) routinely undermines what falls outside its limits as no reason at all, thereby often infantilizing and making unintelligible women’s agentic voices vis-à-vis the logic of the state. But it is necessary for us to go deeper into this argument here. Let us first examine how gender is encountered in the development of Antigone’s character in Anouilh’s text. The text begins with the actor playing the Chorus establishing the essential differences between Antigone and her sister Ismene, where Ismene appears to be the prettier, more feminine one – more attractive to young boys and far more popular than Antigone can ever aspire to be. The Chorus can hardly contain his surprise that Haemon, Creon’s son, passed up the opportunity to marry Ismene in order to ask for Antigone’s hand:

The young man talking to Ismene – fair-haired, beautiful, happy Ismene – is Haemon, son of Creon. He is Antigone’s fiancé. Everything combined to attract him to Ismene – his love of dancing and sport, of happiness and success. His senses too, for Ismene is much prettier than Antigone. And then one evening, when there was a ball and he’d been dancing every dance with Ismene, dazzling in a new gown, he went and sought out Antigone where she sat dreaming in a corner, as she is now, with her arms clasped around her knees. And he asked her to be his wife. She looked up at him with those sober eyes of hers, unsurprised, smiled a sad little smile… and said ‘yes’. The orchestra struck up again, Ismene was there across the room, in peals of laughter among the young men…and now, he, Haemon, was going to be Antigone’s husband.

Anouilh’s Antigone seems to stand all the while at the limits of the normatively feminine. She often appears to others, including those close to her, as somewhat masculine in her behaviour and interests, an impression that seems to be accompanied by an expectation of asexuality, especially at the beginning of the play. The action begins when Antigone has just come back at dawn from her first attempt at burying her brother and is found by her Nurse (a character Anouilh introduces in his version of the narrative) who suspects her of having

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gone out for a clandestine meeting with a lover other than Haemon. Finding no other explanation for Antigone’s disappearance from her bed at night, the Nurse suspects her of infidelity to Haemon. It is interesting to note how, in the text, Antigone’s political transgression against the state also pushes her to the margins of other acceptable social behaviour – the norms that govern female chastity and human sanity, for example. Images of whore, madwoman, infant and animal seem to hover continually around her figure, in the speeches of others about her and directed at her. The Nurse tells her:

And yet you used not to be like the others, preening in front of the glass and putting rouge on their lips and trying to attract attention. The times I’ve said to myself, ‘My goodness, this child isn’t vain enough! For ever in the same dress, with her hair all over the place – the lads’ll all be after Ismene with her curls and her ribbons, and this one will be left on my hands!’ And all the time you were just like your sister – worse, you little hypocrite! … Who is it? Some young layabout, I suppose? A boy you can’t even introduce to your family as the one you love and want to marry? … That’s it, isn’t it? … Answer me, you brazen hussy!  

Antigone herself seems interested in testing her worth as a woman before she embarks on her transgression. She tells Haemon that she had gone to him the evening before, all dressed-up, in order that he may ‘take her’. She says: “You asked me just now why I was wearing Ismene’s dress, her perfume and make-up. Well, I was a fool - I wasn't sure it was me you really wanted, and I was trying to make you want me by being more like the other girls.” Knowing well that acting politically would mean losing the right to ever be fulfilled ‘as a woman’ Antigone goes to Haemon seeking sexual experience, at least once, before her imminent death. The inevitable choice to be made between her life ‘as a woman’ and her life (and death) as a political transgressor seems clear quite early on in the play. A little later in the action, when Antigone is caught trying to bury Polynices, Creon’s guards bring her to be presented to the king. Not knowing her identity, they treat her with contempt, and she responds defiantly. It is interesting, however, to note the associations of prostitution and insanity that appear in the Guards’ speech as they attempt to categorise Antigone’s transgressive behaviour. The limits that separate political and sexual transgression and insanity seemed to have blurred in this space, as the Guards, ordinary citizens, try to make

582 Ibid, 7-8.
583 Ibid, 20.
sense of Antigone’s ‘mad’ action. When Antigone tells them who she is, the First Guard says:

Jonas. Oedipus’s daughter, eh? The tarts we pick up on the beat always tell us to watch out because they’re the police chief’s girlfriends!
Antigone. I don’t care about dying – but I won’t have them touch me!
Jonas. Oh? But you’re not afraid of touching earth, or corpses? You talk about dirty hands – what about your own. (Antigone looks at her hands, in their handcuffs, and smiles. They are covered with earth.) They took away your spade, so the second time you did it with your bare hands! The cheek! I turn my back for a bit to get a chew of tobacco, there she is clawing up the earth with her nails like a blooming hyena! And in broad daylight! And the fight she puts up when I try to arrest her! Tries to scratch my eyes out! Shouts and bawls about having to finish the job. Potty, if you ask me.
Jonas. I arrested one just as barmy the other day – showing everyone her backside.584

Female transgression is defined by her stepping into public space illegitimately, as madwoman or whore, and these are the first suspicions that are thrown in Antigone’s direction by strangers and family alike: the Guards think her mad, the Nurse thinks her ‘loose’. But there is something else happening in this particular passage that bears discussion. The animal imagery that is often used to describe Antigone is a legacy of the Sophoclean text. There the Sentry tells Creon: “There was the girl, screaming like an angry bird,/ When it finds its nest left empty and the little ones gone./ Just like that she screamed, seeing the body naked…”585. When she has confessed to her guilt, Creon tells the Chorus: “A little halter is enough to break/ The wildest horse”. 586 Here in Anouilh, Antigone is a ‘tiger’587 instead of an angry bird or a wild horse; and this is not the last of the animal imagery that the text surrounds her with. Jonas tells Creon: “Just like a little animal! In fact, with the air so hazy, that’s what one of my mates took her for at first. ‘It’s some animal,’ he says, but I say, ‘No it’s not – it’s too neat for an animal...It’s a girl!’”588 Suspected of sexual transgression, Antigone is on the margins of polite society; suspected as mad, she is on the margins of human sanity; but in being continually compared to animals (wild animal, tiger, hare), she is a creature, a monster at the edge of the human itself. The action of burial itself never appears as completely human in the text; whenever it comes to light it seems to be accompanied by the inability of ordinary citizens to describe it in human terms. We have discussed how Hegel

584 Ibid, 27-28..
585 Sophocles, Antigone, 137.
586 Ibid, 139.
587 Anouilh, Antigone, 30.
and other thinkers have looked at the figure of Antigone as somehow prepolitical; it would be interesting in this context to look at the definitions that Giorgio Agamben begins his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) with. Agamben writes: “The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word ‘life’. They used two term - zeô, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men or gods), and bios, which indicated the form or way or life proper to an individual or group.” In stepping out of ‘the way of life ‘proper’ to a woman (where she is allowed no legitimate access to political action) with her waywardness in the public space, Antigone allows others to see her as stepping into a liminal space where the distinctions between her and other living beings (who are not social and/or completely lack a capacity for rationality) are blurred. It is my view that this action of stepping out or crossing over is a much bigger one in the case of Anouilh’s Antigone because, in contrast to the Sophoclean Antigone, she holds up no law in opposition to that of the state. No divine legitimacy supports her action; neither does the text validate it by establishing Creon’s complete defeat at the end. She presents her own action as valuable in itself; she asserts that it is worthwhile by its own logic. This involves something of a paradox. To quote Audrone Zukauskaite: “When Aristotle describes man as a rational animal, or when he gives a definition of man as politicon zoon, he points out precisely this animality of man, adding to it some specific traits (differentia specifica), such as rationality and capacity for political existence.” In daring to claim for herself, as a woman, what she sees as a political existence (verbally and in her actions), Anouilh’s Antigone steps out of oikia (the space of feminine silence and toil) into the space of the polis (the space of male political action and compulsory verbal participation in the affairs of the city-state). But thereby Antigone claims an illegitimacy and lets go of (according to the logic of the polis

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591 Stephen Salkever writes: ‘It is difficult to speak with assurance concerning the actual practices of Greek political life in the fifth and fourth centuries; but it is by no means hard to see that the language in which the political life was articulated placed a very high value on political life and maleness. So much is clear from Pericles’ funeral speech, in which it is observed that women should be quiet and remain at home and “we [Athenians] alone think of one who does not participate in public affairs not as a quiet man, but a useless one.” […] The equation of virility and political virtue in prephilosophic Greek political thought is further reinforced by the habit of drawing a sharp dichotomy between the world of the household or family and that of the polis, by the association of oikia with women and polis with men, and the designation of the polis as clearly superior to and even threatened by the household.’ [Stephen Salkever, *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy: Studies in Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 166-171.
and in the way other characters in the text see her) the additional capacity for rationality proper to human beings592 and her proper place within the life of the community. In this she becomes somewhat subhuman, also especially because her action appears senseless, inefficacious593 and unintelligible within the logic of the state. Aristotle sees women as imperfect men whose deliberative faculty lacks authority; they are hence weaker than men in their ability to be rational and are therefore social, rather than political, beings. Even if we

592 Richard Kraut writes about Aristotle’s philosophy of the ‘common good’ as found in Politics in his book Aristotle: Political Philosophy: “He assumes that when conditions are right, it is possible for an entire city to have a common and correct understanding about what human well-being is, and for this common understanding to be transmitted from one generation to another through normal and reasonable methods of education.” (Kraut, 195.) It is this ‘common understanding’, any common understanding, of the good of the polis that Anouilh’s Antigone appears to lack, in addition to her transgression of gendered norms of conduct. But Kraut goes on to say that: “Therefore, part of what makes a city the best city is that it is guided by the best ends. In such a polity, the citizens aim, both individually and collectively, at virtuous activity sufficiently equipped with external resources. They aim at this goal not because they think excellent rational agency is a means to some further end, but simply because this is what well-being is.” (Kraut, 195, Emphasis mine). Antigone too, in Anouilh, claims the value of ‘rational agency’, as she understands it, as valuable in itself and designates this as her only notion of well-being. However, this seems to be out of step with the notions of well-being for the polis and oikia that Creon and Ismene represent and put forward. As for the rest of the citizens, unlike in Sophocles and especially lacking a Teiresias to make Creon ‘see sense’, they seem to be largely unaffected and unconcerned by the goings-on in the royal household. So at the end, it is Creon’s voice of ‘reason’ that stands against Antigone’s, where the latter is designated as ‘unreason’ by most characters in the text. She can be read as having a misguided conception of her own well-being which Creon attempts to put right for the good of the state and for ‘mitigating the harm’ she intends to do to herself (Kraut, 196). But then again, Creon seems only interested in the well-being of the polis for the sake of political expediency without any higher end except the continuation of the stability of his own governance. He sees it fit to adopt any means, including dishonesty, to ensure political stability, which seems a more Machiavellian than Aristotelian position (even this is further complicated, but we will discuss this when we look at Antigone through Foucault’s theory of governmentality). About Aristotle’s ‘exclusion of women from the political realm’, Kraut writes that they are excluded ‘not merely from the politics of the ideal city, but from the political life of any of the constitutions that Aristotle considers. […] he holds the view, prevalent in his time, that they are not as capable as men in the realm of politics. They have the mental capacity to oversee certain household tasks, but Aristotle says that their deliberate faculty lacks authority, and he takes this to be an unalterable deficiency. […] a kindred deficiency that he thinks is more severe in slaves.” (Kraut, 214). Kraut adds that: “It is possible that Aristotle’s statement about women means that although they are equal to men in deliberative capacity, the unruliness of their emotions limits the kind of power that should be entrusted to them. But I doubt that he is willing to pay that high compliment to their rationality.” (Kraut, Footnote 44, 215). Again, if were to map the relationships between men, women and animals as social and political beings, Aristotle provides us with more distinctions. Kraut writes: “Aristotle acknowledges, at one point in his biological writings, that human beings both are and are not political animals. […] human beings are placed in the category of animals that are gregarious (agelaia) – or, as we might say, social. […] Social animals are further divided into those that are political and those that are not, and Aristotle claims that human beings fall into both categories. […] Women and male natural slaves are social but not political, whereas free males are both social and political.” (Kraut, 249). Aristotle concedes, however, that other animals besides men may have the political drive – bees, for example. Reading Anouilh through Aristotle would therefore yield a rather complicated and ambivalent understanding of where Antigone stands in relation to rationality, oikia, political existence and the well-being of the polis. [Richard Kraut, Aristotle: Political Philosophy (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).]

593 To be discussed later.
were to follow this idea, we would conclude that in overreaching herself and claiming a political act, Antigone loses even this imperfect rationality allowed to women (as a quality that makes them part of human sociality) and becomes an irrational and asocial animal. It seems almost as if she has moved back in the eyes of others, along a chronological and evolutionary grid to a pre-human, not just a pre-political, phase. Therefore, the same action that makes her a political agent in her own perception disenfranchises her as a human being with a ‘proper’ hold on the world.

On the face of it, Antigone’s action displays a lack of rationality, because as a woman she is not judged as capable of a political existence *in essence*, hence she goes against not just the basic laws of the *polis* but the common sense about life and gender that governs them. This judgement of irrationality does not depend on what the actual content of her specific action is; she *transgresses simply by acting*. But in addition to this, Anouilh seems to empty Antigone’s act of its most immediate and obvious political rationale; she is doubly non-rational, not simply mad, but animal-like in her anti-pragmatism. This textual sleight of hand by Anouilh turns Antigone into just another living being with no capacity for rational thought, and this is the gap that exists in the text between Antigone’s perception of her own action and the way others see it. To most others, the additional qualities of rationality (albeit defective to begin with, in that she is a woman) and propriety being stripped, Antigone is simply *zoon*. The suggestions of madness, irrationality and the image of a caged animal (in their relationship to human life) appear strongly in Creon’s speech in his descriptions of Antigone and her father. According to Creon, reason, propriety and pragmatic participation in the human community are a kind of incarceration for people like Antigone and Oedipus – for them, the ‘natural sweetness’ of living seems not to exist, human existence is an imprisonment they seem to spend all their life trying to escape from. It seems to me that Creon here points to a certain ‘wildness’ in Antigone and Oedipus, an instinctive aversion to ‘the good life’. And what is the kind of life Creon wishes for her? It seems clear that the ideal life for Antigone in Creon’s eyes would be a life as the wife of Haemon, a life confined to *oikia* and reproductive labour, the proper place of happiness and fulfillment for

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594 To be discussed later.
women. He will not allow Antigone to complete her political action, he will not let it mean anything, he will not even allow her to die. Creon tells her: “Have you put to death? You can’t have looked at yourself in the glass, you little sparrow! You’re too thin. You want to fatten yourself up a bit and give Haemon a nice sturdy son! You’d do Thebes more good that way than by dying, believe me!” Antigone, on the other hand, seems to scorn the very notion that any life that is not political can ever be a ‘good life’. Hence in her own eyes, Anouilh’s Antigone does the exact opposite of what others judge her to be doing; instead of stepping out of rationality, in burying Polynices, she steps forcibly into the world of bios from the liminal space of defective rationality and ‘natural sweetness’ (derived from the simple fact of living) allowed to women within the polis. She does this even though she knows that women, as imperfect men, are excluded in essence from the realm of political existence and any action that defies this would appear unintelligible. It is this defective and liminal position allotted to her as a woman by the force of common sense that Antigone criticizes at the very beginning of the play and which Keya Chakraborty quotes in her interview about it. Here Ismene reminds Antigone of their difference from men:

Ismene (throwing herself at Antigone). Antigone! Please! It’s all right for men to die for their ideas. But you’re a girl!
Antigone (through clenched teeth). Only a girl! The tears I’ve shed because of it!
Ismene: Your happiness is within your grasp – you’ve only to stretch out your hand and take it…. You’re engaged, you’re young, you’re beautiful […]  

But Antigone will have none of such arguments. Later on, Antigone tells Creon that she detests his idea of happiness:

Antigone. You disgust me, all of you, you and your happiness! And your life, that has to be loved at any price. You’re like dogs fawning on everyone they come across. With just a little hope left every day – if you don’t expect too much. But I want everything, now! And to the full! Or else I decline the offer, lock, stock and barrel! I don’t want to be sensible, and satisfied with a scrap – if I behave myself! I want to be sure of everything, now, this very day, and it has to be as wonderful as it was when I was little. Otherwise, I prefer to die […] all you craven candidates for happiness! There’s something ugly about the corners of your eyes and mouths!  

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596 Anouilh, Antigone, 34.
Foucault writes: “For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question.” In claiming for herself a political life, in scorning happiness and hope, Antigone’s life appears unmanageable within the logic of governance and her existence as a living being is indeed called into question. In that sense, it might be possible to say that Antigone is ‘modern man’, *a la* Foucault, *par excellence*. In Anouilh, Creon realises, on having offered Antigone the option to escape (by promising to hide her act of burial from the populace) that she is bent on repeating her misdemeanour in spite of the knowledge that she will die as a result - an act that Creon reads, quite simply, as suicide. He then decides to tell her the real truth about the death of her brothers and ‘all the plots that were cooked up’, which, according to him, Antigone in her sad, infantile idealism is tragically unsure of. He tells Antigone that her brothers were a pair of villains – nothing better than debauched drunkards who had tormented their parents in their lifetime. He also reveals to her that both the brothers had plotted to kill their father and adds the final blow in confessing to Antigone that when he found the bodies in the battlefield they were so mangled as to be unrecognizable. But he goes on to say:

> Yesterday I gave Eteocles an elaborate funeral. Thebes regards him now as a saint and a hero. The whole population was there. The schoolchildren pooled their pocket-money to buy wreathes. Old men pretended to be overcome with emotion and made quavering speeches in praise of the virtuous prince, the loyal brother. Oedipus's dutiful son. I made a speech too. And all the priests of Thebes were there, putting on suitable expressions. Eteocles was given military honours. I had no choice – I couldn’t afford to have a scoundrel in both camps!

> But now I’m going to tell you something…something terrible…that no one else knows but me. Eteocles, that paragon of virtue, was no better than Polynices. The dutiful son had tried to murder his father, too. The loyal prince, too, was ready to sell Thebes to the highest bidder. I have proof that Eteocles was prepared to commit the same treachery as that for which Polynices’ body lies mouldering in the sun [...] But it was necessary for me to make a hero of one of them. So I had my men seek out their bodies.

The facts therefore were not only that both the brothers political villains, with not an ethical bone in their body, so that Antigone was clearly not burying a hero, but also that she could

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600 Anouilh, *Antigone*, 44.
not even possibly know which brother - rebel or king - she was burying. This speech of Creon exposes in the Anouilh text the farcical arbitrariness of statecraft, and reveals in Creon’s own affective statements a complete distaste for the politics that he calls his ‘trade’ and a disgust for the political stupidity of the populace that he rules. He speaks for the unavoidability of propaganda and double-speak, for the good of this same patriotic populace on whom a more nuanced understanding of the political situation would be wasted and the dark hopelessness of a world without political heroes would have been too much for them to bear. One might at this point begin to feel sorry for Creon, as the sole and unfortunate bearer of this heavy burden of the absurdity of political life. Indeed, Creon appears here almost as a victim of circumstances, an unwilling statesman, who is forced to make arbitrary and dishonest decisions in order to keep running the business (‘the trade’ as he calls it) of the state. Creon believes that he has now exposed the full extent of the irrationality of Antigone’s undertaking and hence will be able to deter her from repeating an act that would now force Creon to punish her according to the laws of the state. There is no suggestion in the text that Creon has deliberately lied in any of his statements to Antigone, but it is clear that he several motives in preventing Antigone from walking towards certain death. First, of course, he seems fond of Antigone; second, he sees for her a happy future with his son Haemon with whom he hopes Antigone will bear ‘a sturdy son’ to continue his lineage but last and not the least, he is concerned about avoiding another (unnecessary) incident of political instability that her death may precipitate. Creon seems to act even here, in dissuading Antigone, not as some critics have suggested, simply out of a spirit of kindness that sets him apart from the more brutish and tyrannical Creon of Sophocles’ text, but from a sense of political expediency and a consideration of the pragmatic good of the state. He seems interested in perpetuating and ‘managing’ life, maximizing stability and possible happiness, while minimizing instability and unnecessary pain. His primary objection to Antigone’s action is that it is pointless and he wishes to do everything he can to circumvent this pointless death. He says:

Well, all that’s over and done with – times have changed in Thebes. What Thebes needs now is an ordinary king with no fuss. My name’s only Creon, thank god. I’ve got both feet on the ground and both hands in my pockets. I’m not so ambitious as your father was, and all I am at now I’m king is to try to see the world’s a bit more sensibly run. There’s nothing very heroic about it – just an everyday job, and, like the rest of them, not always very amusing. But since that’s what I am here for, that’s
what I’m going to do. And if some scruffy messenger comes down from the mountains tomorrow and tells me he’s none too sure about my parentage, I’ll just send him packing. [...] Kings have other things to do besides souping up their own owes.  

Creon’s mode seems to be the anti-tragic mode and the logic of his argument is clear: he has plans for Antigone’s life, not her death. Unlike Oedipus, he is no exceptional and ambitious sovereign; kingship is his ‘trade’ and his business is to introduce order in the state. It is in this pragmatic ordering of life that Creon stands apart from Oedipus; unlike him, Creon will do all in his power to bypass pain and death for himself and others. And this he claims to do, as opposed to Oedipus and his selfish submission to ‘personal feelings’, in the interest of the population of Thebes. In a discussion that deals with the nature of holocaust in the modern world, Foucault writes about the rise of bio-power in The History of Sexuality:

[...] this formidable power of death – and this is perhaps what accounts for part of its force and the cynicism with which it has so greatly expanded its limits – now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, to optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations. Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone [...] it is as managers of life and survival, bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed. [...] Those who died at the scaffold became fewer and fewer, in contrast to those who died in wars. [...] As soon as power gave itself the function of administering life, its reason for being and the logic of its exercise - and not the awakening of humanitarian feelings – made it more and more difficult to apply the death penalty. How could power exercise its highest prerogatives by putting people to death, when its main role was to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order?  

It is for the efficacious management of life and the good of the state that Creon wishes to avoid Antigone’s death penalty. His managerial logic, of course, also matches the political discourse of Fascism where the state’s system appears valuable above everything. But what consists in the good of the state? It is interesting here to look at Foucault’s arguments about the difference that emerges between the notions of ‘common good’ in conceptions sovereignty and in the art of governance, in his essay on ‘Governmentality’:

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601 Anouilh, Antigone, 33.
What does this common good or general salvation consist of, which the jurists talk about as being the end of sovereignty? [...] 'the common good' means essentially obedience to the law, either that of the earthly sovereign or that of god, the absolute sovereign. In every case, what characterizes the end of sovereignty, this common and general good, is in sum nothing other than submission to sovereignty. This means the end of sovereignty is the exercise of sovereignty. The good is obedience to the law, hence the good for sovereignty is that people should obey it.  

In contrast, Foucault says:

With government it is a question not of imposing law on men but of disposing things: that is, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics – to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such end maybe achieved. [...] the finality of government resides in the things it manages and in the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the processes it directs; and the instruments of government, instead of being laws, now come to be a range of multiform tactics.

Indeed, if we attempt to read Anouilh’s 1942 play through Foucault’s 1978 essay, it appears that unlike the sovereign Oedipus, Creon who calls himself ‘a trader’ in politics and whom Antigone calls ‘a cook’ working in the ‘dirty kitchen of politics’, stands at the crossroads of the sovereignty and the modern art of governance, representing the latter. Indeed, surprisingly precise parallels emerge. The image that Creon uses to describe his work as the ruler of an unruly state is the image of a ship. He says:

For God’s sake! Try to understand for a minute, you little fool! I’ve tried hard enough to understand you! Someone has to say yes. Someone has to steer the ship. It’s letting water in on all sides. It’s full of crime and stupidity and suffering. The rudder’s adrift. The crew won’t obey orders – all they’re interested in is looting the cargo. The officers are busy building a comfortable raft for themselves and cornering all the fresh water. But the mast’s split, the wind’s howling, the sails will soon be in shreds, and the whole lot of them will die together because they think of nothing but their own petty concerns. [...] You grab the tiller, you stand up to the mountains of water, you shout an order [...] The only things that have a name now are the ship and the storm. Do you understand?

If we remember Foucault’s essay, this is the exact image that Foucault points out as the recurring metaphor that is invoked in the newly emerging treatises on the art of governance that set themselves against Machiavelli’s “The Prince.”

604 Ibid, 95.
605 Anouilh, Antigone, 39-40.
This imbrication of men and things, is, I believe, readily confirmed by the metaphor that is inevitably invoked in these treatises on government, namely, that of the ship. What does it mean to govern a ship? It means clearly to take charge of the sailors, but also of the boat and cargo; to take care of a ship also means to reckon with winds, rocks and storms; and it consists in that activity of establishing a relation between the sailors, who are to be taken care of, and the ship, which is to be taken care of, and the cargo, which is to be brought safely to port, and all those eventualities like winds, rocks, storms and so on. This is what characterizes the government of a ship. 606

But in spite of Creon’s exposure of the true facts that determine the imperatives of the modern art of governance and thereby the emptiness of her proposed rebellion, Anouilh’s Antigone, though subdued for a while, remains undeterred in the end. At the end of the play after Antigone has been led away by the guards to be executed, the Chorus confronts Creon about her death and whether it was not possible to save her.

Chorus. You’re mad, Creon. What have you done?
Creon. (staring ahead of him) She had to die.
Chorus. Don’t let her die, Creon! We’ll all bear the scar for thousands of years!
Creon. It was her choice. She wanted to die! None of us was strong enough to persuade her to live. I understand now. She was born to die. She may not have known it herself, but Polynices was only an excuse. And when that excuse wouldn’t work anymore she chose another. All that mattered to her was to refuse everything and to die.
Chorus. She’s only a child, Creon.
Creon: What do you want me to do? Condemn her to live? 607

What seems to be highlighted in conclusion both by Creon and the Chorus (which comments on the action and adds a metatheatrical frame to it) is that Antigone was unsuitable for life, let alone political life, hence her death was regrettable but unavoidable. But even though this seems to be the final stamp that the text leaves on Antigone’s life and death and the ultimate verdict that is delivered on her existence, the overarching impression that the text (as well as Nandikar’s performance of it) leaves in the audience’s mind is of Antigone’s overwhelming unwillingness to die. Whether it is in her expression of her attachment to her pet dog or in love for Haemon, she shows a continual reluctance to face death, a reluctance that builds into terror as the play progresses. What is established along the way is

606 Foucault, “Governmentality”, 93-94.
607 Anouilh, Antigone, 49-50.
the sheer youth – the childlikeness of Antigone – in the way she is perceived and in the way she behaves, starting from her Nurse’s treatment of her as an almost-infant to her own use of a child’s spade in order to bury Polynices. The connections to be made between this systematic infantilization of Antigone that the text seems to undertake and her supposed ‘irrationality’ are not difficult to see. She is everything Creon is not – a representative of vitalism and spontaneity, an ingénue, an innocent and misinformed romantic idealist as best, nothing more. This is, in fact, exactly how Creon would like to see her, as one innocent of the mess in the ‘dirty kitchen of politics’. Indeed, Antigone herself sounds very much like a child at times:

Antigone. I don’t want to be right!
Ismene. At least try to understand.

Antigone. Understand! You’ve always be on at me about that, all of you, ever since I was little. I was supposed to understand I mustn’t play with water – beautiful, cool, elusive water – because it made the floor wet. Or with earth, because it dirtied my clothes. I was supposed to understand that you mustn’t eat your cake before you’ve finished your bread and butter, or give all of your pocket-money to a beggar, or run in the wind till you drop, or drink when you’re hot, or go swimming just when you feel like it. Understand, understand, always understand! I don’t want to understand! I can do that when I’m old! (Softly.) If I ever am.  

This is, on the face of it, very much an unruly child’s rant. But let us look a little closer at Antigone’s reasoning or what appears to be the lack of it. It appears to me that she wants to stand against what Foucault calls ‘the plenitude of the possible’ and the disciplining mechanisms of the “anatomo-politics of the human body”, as also the kind of economism that assumes that the only aims of an effective life are maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. She takes back the question of discipline to its earliest manifestations – the disciplining and punishment of a child’s, especially a girl child’s, body as preparation for life. It is this shaping of the ‘docility’ of her own body, the management of it and the minimization of the risk of harm to it that seems distasteful to her. Juxtaposed with this, is her attachment to her Nurse, to Haemon and to her pet dog Floss, the last an affection which seems to have been enhanced to the level of childish absurdity by the thought of impending death. Anouilh, as playwright, seems deeply concerned to establish Antigone’s entanglement with life and the

608 Ibid, 12.
610 Ibid, 139.
little details of her living, highlighting her vitalism but also her passionate engagement with the various relationships in her life. Militating against Creon’s judgement of her (“It was her choice. She wanted to die!“\textsuperscript{611})), these intimate details serve to establish her reluctance to end all this: not a case for suicide, certainly, one would say. She is worried about what would happen to Floss when she was dead. Having returned from her first attempt to bury Polynices and knowing that death is inevitable, she says to her Nurse:

Antigone. Nurse, you know Floss . . .?

[…] Promise me you won’t grumble at her any more. Even if she leaves pawmarks everywhere.

Nurse: You mean I’m to let her ruin everything and not say a word?

Antigone. Yes.[…] And I want you to talk to her too.

Nurse. (shrugging) Talk to brute beasts!

Antigone. Not as if she is a brute beast! As I do . . . . As if she were a real person.

Nurse. Play the fool at my age? But why?

Antigone. (gently) Well, if for some reason or other I couldn’t talk to her myself any more.

Nurse. What do you mean? Why not?

Antigone. (first looking away, then in a harsher voice). But if she’s too miserable…if she keeps waiting with her nose glued to the door like when I go out without her – then perhaps it would be best to have her put to sleep.\textsuperscript{612}

And at the end of the play, she begins to talk to the Guard who has been appointed by Creon to keep watch over her, while she is waiting to die. She is clearly terrified, like a little girl, a sharp contrast to the Sophoclean Antigone, who, if we remember, betrays no trace of fear:

Antigone. Dying. Does it hurt?

Jonas. Couldn’t say. […]

Antigone. How will they do it?

Jonas. I believe I heard they were going to wall you up, so as not to stain the city with your blood.

Antigone. Wall me up? Alive?

[…] But all on my own […]

Jonas. It’ll be in the cave of Hades, outside the city gates. Right out in the sun. […]

Antigone. Two animals…

Jonas. What about them?

Antigone. Two animals would huddle together for warmth. I’m all on my own.\textsuperscript{613}

\textsuperscript{611} Anouilh, Antigone, 49.

\textsuperscript{612} Ibid, 16-17.

\textsuperscript{613} Ibid, 55.
This is what sets apart, in my view Anouilh’s Antigone from say, Lacan’s analysis of the Sophoclean Antigone and the idea that she represents Thanatos and a pathological desire for death. Neither a martyr complex nor a romantic sacrificial desire would be enough to explain the slow, reluctant steps that Anouilh’s Antigone makes towards death. Her sheer terror and near-paralysis at the thought of death seem to stand in a strangely antagonistic relationship with her adamant and continuous defiance of Creon in spite: an ‘in spite’ that is difficult to explain through common sense. It’s a paradox faced with which ordinary reason seems to be at a loss and this explains Creon’s continual and utter bewilderment in his conversation with Antigone. We note, of course, in the above passage, the recurrence of the animal imagery that, this time, Antigone herself seems to draw emotional succour from – the simple desire for physical warmth that two animals, their bodies pressed against each other, may find, even in dying. But Antigone refuses to be managed in life, refuses sociality and inclusion in Creon’s disciplinary regime; she is therefore irrevocably and ultimately isolated in that she has been declared unfit for human life. It is of course an interesting technicality that (just like in the Sophoclean text) she is condemned to a ‘living death’ in being immured alive; Creon still manages to avoid the death penalty per se and Antigone is, so to say, simply ruled out of life. However, it is important to note that Antigone never for once ‘embraces’ or welcomes death in the Anouilh text. She seems, till the end, to have not accepted its imminent arrival. She is certainly obstinately bent on rejecting Creon’s model of life; but this does not seem to mean that she desires death. A paradox, if ever there was one. It seems clear, however, that it is not just Creon who finds Antigone’s actions unacceptable; everyone, from the Nurse to the Guards who capture her, finds her difficult to fit into their understanding of what is ‘normal’ or reasonable. No Chorus or Teiresias stands in support of her actions; rather, the Chorus here, commenting on the action, finds her as much of a puzzle as the rest of the characters. It is likely that if Creon had decided to pardon her, she would have gone on repeating her transgression endlessly (as she promises to) and the population of Thebes would find her guilty of deviating too far from the norm and thereby unfit for life in the polis. Such is the political world and the distribution of power we encounter in Anouilh’s play. Foucault writes:
[...] a power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms. It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but distributing the living in the field of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in murderous splendour; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm. [...] the law operates more and more as a norm...

But is Antigone really unruly in essence? Or is it that she speaks for another kind of discipline, one that is unintelligible within Creon’s logic of economism? Does she employ another notion of disciplinary mechanism to train her body into submission (one that does not aim at plenitude or the maximization of ‘happiness’) into enduring a pain that she finds terrifying at first? Let us look at the following passage:

Creon. (looks at her in silence). You really want to die then? You look like a little hare, caught already.
Antigone. Don’t feel sorry for me. Be like me – do what you have to do. But if you want to be humane, do it quickly – that’s all I ask. I can’t be brave forever.
Creon. (moving closer) I want to save you, Antigone.
Antigone. You’re the king – you can do anything...But not that.
Creon. You think not?
Antigone: You can’t save me, and you can’t force me to do what you want.
Creon: Proud Antigone! Pocket Oedipus!
Antigone. All you can do is have me put to death.
Creon. And what if I have you tortured?
Antigone. What for? To make me cry and beg for mercy? To make me swear to anything, and then do the same thing all over again when the pain stops? [...] Antigone. Let go. You are hurting my arm. [...] Creon (a twinkle in his eye). Perhaps that’s the answer! Perhaps I ought to just twist your wrist and pull your hair, as boys do when they play with girls. (He looks at her. Serious again. Close.) I may be your uncle - but we are rather severe on each other in our family. So doesn’t it strike you as strange – I, a king, set at naught by you yet listening patiently...an old man who’s all powerful, who’s seen plenty of other people killed, just as appealing as you – and here am I taking all this trouble to try and keep you from dying?
Antigone. You’re twisting too hard now. It doesn’t even hurt. I just can’t feel my arm.

It seems that in spite of her growing terror, Anouilh’s Antigone wishes to discipline herself into performing an act that she sees as essential. This deliberate endurance of pain, when escape is so easy, may seem pathological to some and pointless to others, given that her

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615 Anouilh, Antigone, 36-37.
death is likely to achieve no revolutionary ends in the political world that Anouilh’s Thebes presents. Indeed Creon, in the Nandikar production of the play, is so thrown by Antigone’s statement: “You’re twisting too hard now. It doesn’t even hurt”\(^{616}\), that he lets go off her immediately and is more discomfited than ever before in the play. He looks, for a moment, entirely terrified of a girl whom he has chosen to call an ‘little pest’\(^ {617}\). Looked at differently, it is Antigone’s willed ‘endurance’ of pain that brings her into significance and makes it impossible for Creon to dismiss her. In fact, it begins not to be ‘endurance’ at all, which would imply a kind of victimhood, but becomes an action in pain, or what we could call a willing engagement with pain. We remember here, of course, Talal Asad and his theorization of the possibility of an ‘agent of pain’. Asad writes: “[…] the modern sensibility recoils from a willing, positive engagement with suffering. Pain is not calculated action but passionate engagement …”\(^{618}\) He also states: “What a subject experiences as painful, and how, are not simply mediated culturally and physically, they are themselves modes of living a relationship. The ability to live such relationships over time transforms pain from a passive relationship to an active one …”\(^{619}\) We could therefore say that Antigone’s active engagement with pain is an instance of bodily autonomy in that, as an agent of pain, she is able to abide pain in a way that works on existing modes of intelligibility (so to say, somewhere between ‘action’, as it is commonly understood, and passive suffering) in order to create a moment of unintelligibility which nonetheless cannot be ignored. In willingly subjecting herself to pain and in inhabiting pain as a passion, she makes irrelevant the modes of torture that the Creon’s state threatens to inflict on her – modes that are predicated on the assumption of her ‘natural’ inclination to escape and avoid pain/suffering. Thereby, in activating her ability in pain, Antigone disempowers Creon rather than herself. Why does Creon back down in the face of Antigone’s defiance? Why, indeed, is he scared?

Antigone. You’re not amused – you’re afraid. That’s why you’re trying to save me. It would suit you best to keep me here in the palace, alive but silent. You’re too sensitive to be a tyrant. But just the same, as you know very well, you’re going to have me put to death presently. And that’s why you are afraid. Not a pretty sight, a man who’s afraid.

\(^{616}\) The Bengali line in the performance text is ‘Amar ar lagchhe na, Creon!’
\(^{617}\) Anouilh, Antigone, 37.
\(^{619}\) Asad, 84.
Creon. All right - I am afraid. Afraid you won’t change your mind and I’ll have to have you killed. And I don’t want to.\textsuperscript{620}

It seems clear that Creon’s terror comes not simply from the desire to avoid executing Antigone, and the milk of human kindness so to say, but something greater. He encounters here something that is unintelligible in his moral and intellectual world, a stray thread that threatens to unravel the whole texture of his existence, his ‘trading’ in life. Antigone’s passion stands \textit{in excess} of all measures of rationality and utility that are familiar to Creon and it is this that bewilders and terrifies him. Asad, who, in fact, uses \textit{Oedipus Rex} in order to establish his point, is undeniably pertinent here:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Habitus}, in contrast to this political model of ethics, \textit{is not something that one accepts or rejects, it is part of what one essentially is or must do}. He (Oedipus) acts as he does \textit{necessarily}, out of the passion that is his \textit{habitus} […] not because it liberated him from his past but because it traces his agency to his \textit{habitus} […] he can act creatively \textit{without} aiming at self-empowerment […] The accumulation of events is not reversible. The future is not made, but encountered and suffered.\textsuperscript{621}
\end{quote}

This is not very far from how Antigone herself describes her father Oedipus:

\begin{quote}
Creon. There you go – just like your father!
Antigone. Exactly! Neither of us ever stops asking questions! Right up to the moment when there’s not a spark of hope left to stifle. We’re the sorts who jump right on your precious, lousy hope! […]
Creon. If you could see how ugly you look, shouting!
Antigone. Very vulgar, isn’t it? \textit{Father was only beautiful afterwards} – when he knew for certain that he had killed his father and slept with his mother, and that nothing, now, could save him. He grew suddenly silent. Smiled. He was beautiful. It was all over. He had only to shut his eyes not to see you anymore – \textit{all you craven candidates for happiness}.\textsuperscript{622}
\end{quote}

Antigone seems to suggest that Oedipus became most fully ‘himself’ when he was most destroyed. It is not difficult to see the uncanny similarities here with Asad’s idea that Oedipus does what he does \textit{necessarily}, living a passion that leads him towards the fullness of his own being, even as his life was torn apart by the consequences of his uneconomical,

\textsuperscript{620} Anouilh, \textit{Antigone}, 38-39.
\textsuperscript{621} Asad, 96-99. [Emphasis mine.]
\textsuperscript{622} Anouilh, \textit{Antigone}, 47.
wasteful quest. This ‘wastefulness’ is unintelligible to Creon; he cannot ‘trade’ in excess and must hang on to modest, measured hope. It is this managerial logic that Antigone seems to scorn. However, it is not as if Antigone’s honing of her own ability in pain involves no discipline; but the logic of this self-disciplining stands sharply in contrast to Creon’s accounting of manageable happiness. Antigone seems interested in creating the possibility of an emotional, political and ethical surplus in her body in order to fashion a death for herself that Creon cannot possibly bring into his calculations - one that cannot be contained or balanced by his logic of governance. Antigone appears to be aiming for a death that would destabilize the state’s logic in essence, even if it were unintelligible in terms of its efficacy in the realpolitik. Hence, I would say that unlike Sophocles’ Antigone, who according to Butler ‘hardly represents any feminist politics that is not implicated in the very power that it opposes’, Anouilh’s Antigone willfully revokes citizenship and its logic; not for any greater cause (not even a sacrificial or pathological desire for her own death) but for its own sake. She chooses to be the first citizen to be eliminated from the economy of Creon’s polis. Since she both acts and suffers, empowers herself by disempowering herself, she becomes the aporia of managerial power – what it cannot come to terms with or assimilate, the surplus it cannot digest, but that which manages to destabilize its rational base. She inhabits a passion, and as an agent of pain, she cannot but be what she is. She is therefore, like Oedipus, most essentially herself in the excess that destroys her in Creon’s world.

Standing against Creon’s vision of moderate ‘happiness’, Antigone aligns herself with what she understands to be her father’s way of pursuing a painful passion to the bitter end.
end and trains herself into submission even as her body recoils from pain and terror. In not
protesting her death and insisting on repeating the action of burial, even in the face of the
possibility that torture would manage to debilitate her temporarily, Antigone does not
assume the visage of a passive sacrificial victim of some fantastic religious adherence to the
sanctity of kinship (she agrees with Creon that the ritual itself is ‘ridiculous’ ‘mumbo
jumbo’). But she does subject herself to the authority of kinship in the sense that she
declares her allegiance to her father’s ‘madness’ and admits to being entirely driven by a
similar passion for self-realisation at the cost of destruction. In this sense, she sees her future
(just as the Chorus does) as Oedipus’ daughter, as already determined and not something she
constructs out of any faculty of ‘unprecedented’ autonomy. The only difficulty is that this
kind of disciplining or realisation of the self makes no sense in Creon’s world. It seems to
me that, rather than being representative of an infantile unruliness, animality or a
pathological desire for self-sacrifice, Antigone is the bearer of a notion of discipline that
simply stands in a different register from Creon’s. This is perhaps the kind of disciplining
(leading to the development of a certain kind of agency and ability) the cultivation of which
Saba Mahmood wishes to point at when she writes of:

[…] a virtuoso pianist who submits herself to the, at times painful, regime of
disciplinary practice, as well as hierarchical structures of apprenticeship, in order to
acquire the ability—the requisite agency—to play the instrument with mastery. Importantly, her agency is predicated on her ability to be taught, a condition
classically referred to as docility. Although we have come to associate docility with
abandonment of agency, the term literally implies the malleability required of
someone to be instructed in a particular skill or knowledge—a meaning that carries
less a sense of passivity and more that of struggle, effort, exertion, and
achievement.

Mahmood goes on to say that:

Such a way of thinking about agency draws our attention to the practical ways in
which individuals work on themselves to become the willing subjects of a particular
discourse. Importantly, to understand agency in this manner is neither to invoke a

624 Anouilh, Antigone, 35.
625 Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the
self-constituting autonomous subject nor subjectivity as a private space of cultivation.\textsuperscript{626}

In this sense, training in revolutionary agency (which Antigone’s repeated articulation of a ‘No!’ to Creon certainly is in my view; also a ‘wasteful’ practice so to say) could be seen as the cultivation of a kind of docility and submission to pain. It points at a different notion of discipline where the practice of saying ‘No!’ is a nurturance of the ability to be wasteful, to defy economism and the lure of happiness (or even efficacy and a simple recognition of one’s actions). But why do we keep coming back to this idea of ‘efficacy’? Why indeed is Antigone’s action ‘wasteful’? First of all, as we have discussed, Antigone’s action appears ‘meaningless’ to Creon because both her brother were political villains (not ‘revolutionaries’ in any sense) and because she does not even know which of her brothers she is burying. Secondly, unlike in Sophocles’ Antigone, the action closes without any sense that the true import of Antigone’s action will be recognised. There is a clear indication that the people of Thebes would support Creon in his ‘unwilling’ judgement; if Creon did not kill her they would probably lynch her to death themselves (whether or not instigated by Creon’s propaganda). It is not as if Antigone is not aware of this possibility; in fact, towards the end of her confrontation with Creon, she screams out her crime so that Creon would be forced to follow through on his order and the secret would no longer stay confined to them.

Creon (twisting her arm). I order you to be silent!
Antigone. You order me, scullion? Do you imagine you can give me orders!
Creon. The ante-room’s full of people. They’ll hear you. Do you want to destroy yourself?
Antigone. Open the door! Let them hear!
Creon (putting his hand over her mouth). Quiet, for god’s sake.\textsuperscript{627}

Is Antigone not aware that the ‘majority’ of the people of Thebes will in all probability support Creon? Is she hoping for a popular recognition of her heroism? It does not appear to be so. She does not contradict, at the beginning of the play, the reasons that drive Ismene’s fear of ‘the mob’ and its violence; she only scorns the fear itself. If we are to lend any credence to Creon’s statements, the people of Anouilh’s Thebes are politically apathetic, easily misled by concocted facts and not very astute. Whether or not this is true, it is clearly

\textsuperscript{626} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{627} Anouilh, Antigone, 48.
established that state’s propaganda is well able to convince them of political ‘truths’ that have been ‘cooked-up’ by Creon especially for them in his ‘dirty kitchen of politics’. For all practical purposes, then, it seems that Antigone’s death would not generally be understood as a ‘heroic’ action of any political import, unlike that of the Sophoclean Antigone. It would in all likelihood be seen by the general populace as Creon sees it (and influenced by him, no doubt) as an irrational action by an unruly, adamant child – or worse, as willful treason (which it is, in a sense) worthy of no particular glory. The final conversation between Creon and the Chorus after Antigone has been condemned to death confirms this possibility:

Haemon (struggling to escape). But they are taking her away! Father! Tell the guards to bring her back!
Creon. She has spoken now. All Thebes knows what she has done. I must have her put to death.
[…]
Chorus (approaching). Can’t you think of something – say she is mad, have her shut up!
[… Can’t you try to gain time, and have her escape, tomorrow?
Creon. The mob knows already. They’re all round the palace, yelling. I can’t turn back.
Haemon. The mob! What does it matter? You are the master!
Creon. Under the law. Not against it.  

However, a little earlier, Antigone had indeed managed to acquire the support of one person; her sister Ismene wished to die with her. She claims that she too helped to bury Polynices, claims an act she did not perform, and asks that Creon execute her too. Antigone refuses to allow her to do this but seems heartened by her late solidarity.

Ismene. Creon! Creon! If you kill her, you’ll have to kill me too! […]
Antigone. Hear that, Creon? Her too! And how do you know it won’t spread to others when they hear me? What are you waiting for? Why don’t you call your guards to silence me? Come on now, Creon, be brave – it won’t take long! Come on, scullion! You have no choice – get it over with!  

It does seem strange that even though she is aware of the faint possibility that by living on and bargaining for life a little longer, she may turn ‘it’ into something can ‘spread to others’, infect a few more people with the disease so to say, Antigone chooses to die. By screaming

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628 Anouilh, Antigone, 50.
629 Anouilh, Antigone, 48-49.
out to a hostile crowd, Antigone herself chooses to put a final stamp on her death, leaving Creon helpless and unable to save her. She does this despite recognizing that most of the mob outside may never recognise the true nature of her act if she died immediately. Does she make some mental calculation (like Creon) about the number of people likely to catch the disease as against the number of people who would remain convinced by Creon’s all-consuming propaganda? We do not know. However, going back to Saba Mahmood, we find:

[...] if the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes “change” and the capacity by which it is effected), then its meaning and sense cannot be fixed a priori, but allowed to emerge through an analysis of the particular networks of concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity. [...] Viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may very well be a form of agency [...] 630

While dissociating myself to where Mahmood takes this argument, I would like for us to hang on to the idea that we need to avoid fixing beforehand what constitutes the content of agency and political efficacy. Butler writes of Sophocles’ play:

Creon wants his word to be known and honored by the entire polis. Similarly, Antigone does not shrink from the possibility of having her defiance known. When Ismene counsels her early in the play, “Tell no one of this act beforehand” (84), Antigone responds, “Ah, tell them all! I shall hate you far more if you remain silent, and do not proclaim this to all” (86–87). Like Creon, then, Antigone wants her speech act to be radically and comprehensively public, as public as the edict itself. Although her defiance is heard, the price of her speech is death. Her language is not that of a survivable political agency. Her words, understood as deeds, are chiasmically related to the vernacular of sovereign power, speaking in and against it, delivering and defying imperatives at the same time, inhabiting the language of sovereignty at the very moment in which she opposes sovereign power and is excluded from its terms. What this suggests is that she cannot make her claim outside the language of the state, but neither can the claim she wants to make be fully assimilated by the state. 631

I do not agree entirely that the actions of the Sophoclean Antigone are not ‘politically survivable’; Creon’s defeat and destruction at the end of the play, Teiresias’ condemnation of his acts and the Chorus’ witnessing of the whole action ensures some vindication for her.

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631 Butler, Antigone Claim, 28.
The Chorus in Sophocles (unlike Anouilh’s ironic and rather blasé Chorus, very much an individual, cynical commentator) is representative of the people of Thebes and certainly far more sympathetic of Antigone than the ‘yelling mob’ in Anouilh. In contrast, it does appear that the actions of Anouilh’s Antigone are indeed politically not survivable in any which way (she has a sole supporter in Ismene and that at the very end, when it is certainly too late to prevent her death). Neither does she speak in or reflect anything close to Creon’s governmental, managerial language; nor does she seem unaware of the ultimate inefficacy of her choice in the world of real political events. This has led critics like Normand Berlin to write:

We cannot help feeling that Creon is right in pinpointing an instinctive desire for death that Antigone and he and we cannot find a reason for. This despite her oft-repeated assertions that she wants to live. A deep disappointment with life seems to be the motive for her behaviour. She is a pure idealist who cannot live in a sordid world that lacks ideals. [...] It is a cause, however, that touches neither love nor the gods; it reverts to self, to the personal feelings of a child disappointed with the world as it is. And it reflects, we must assume, Anouilh’s own attitude towards a world that deserves no respect. Antigone’s death in this context is purely microcosmic, and, in fact, meaningless.632

This is familiar criticism for us by now. It seems to draw a line between Antigone’s articulated feelings (an unwillingness to die and a deep attachment to life) with what seems to be the ‘true’ affective motivation for her actions – an acute and childish ‘disappointment’ with the ‘real’ world as against her ‘ideals’. The need here is, to put it simply, reconcile ‘feelings’ with ‘actions’; otherwise of course the characterization does not hold together, nothing makes sense. But going back briefly to Saba Mahmood will allow us to see ‘feelings’, ‘actions’ and ‘behaviour’ as differently aligned with each other and ponder the implications of this when applied to modes of revolutionary praxis, which could then be looked at a practice in a certain kind of docility in contradistinction with what we could now envision the ‘unruly’ agency of repressive states in action. Mahmood writes of:

[… the conceptual relationship […] between memory, bodily acts, and the constitution of the self. To begin with, what is striking here is that instead of innate human desires eliciting outward forms of conduct, it is the sequence of practices and actions one is

engaged in that determine one's desires and emotions. In other words, action does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them. Furthermore, in this conception it is through repeated bodily acts that one trains one's memory, desire and intellect to behave according to established standards of conduct. [...] The complicated relationship between learning, memory, experience, and the self undergirding the model of pedagogy followed by the mosque participants has at times been discussed by scholars through the Latin term habitus, meaning an acquired faculty in which the body, mind, and emotions are simultaneously trained to achieve competence at something (such as meditation, dancing, or playing a musical instrument). [...] Aristotelian in origin and adopted by the three monotheistic traditions, habitus in this older meaning refers to a specific pedagogical process by which moral virtues are acquired through a coordination of outward behavior (e.g. bodily acts, social demeanor) with inward dispositions (e.g. emotional states, thoughts, intentions). Thus habitus in this usage refers to a conscious effort at reorienting desires, brought about by the concordance of inward motives, outward actions, inclinations, and emotional states through the repeated practice of virtuous deeds. As a pedagogical technique necessary for the development of moral virtues, habitus in this sense is not a universal term applicable to all types of knowledges [...]".

While disengaging myself with the connections that Mahmood makes between this theorization of agency and the social and religious practices that 'aim toward continuity, stasis and stability', I would like for us to rethink what this would mean for revolutionary discipline and its relationship to revolutionary agency. If we now look back at Antigone's progress (albeit pointless and non-teleological, in that it has no accountable 'end'), she articulates her determination to continue the act of burial till she is killed; she announces to Creon that after every act of torture by the state of Thebes she will return to the burial ground. She says clearly that she will capitulate when she is in pain, only to go straight back to her work as soon as the pain subsides. The act itself is literally pointless at the crudest level, in that every time Antigone manages to cover the rotting body the Guards uncover it. Yet Antigone insists on endless repetition. Critics like Normand Berlin find Antigone's

634 Mahmood, 212.
635 The above analysis of Antigone’s actions in Anouilh’s play might seem to some to be quite close to the existentialist position that Jean Paul Sartre takes in relation to human freedom in his foundational philosophical work *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* [Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)]. This might especially seem so since Anouilh happens to be a contemporary of both Camus and Sartre and was writing within the same historical context, negotiating with a political reality where the overwhelming force of German Fascism appeared almost impossible to resist. In fact, it is indeed true that shadows of existentialism as an ideology, as well as direct echoes of, say, a work like Albert Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus* appear quite directly in Antigone. [Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*]
The repetitive and futile cycle of Antigone’s act of burial (given that every time she successfully buries the body, the guards cover it up again and the fact that she still insists that she will return to perform the same action as soon as the pain of torture subsides, as discussed before) are quite obviously reminiscent of Sisyphus and his endless, ostensibly fruitless ‘action’. More crucially, however, it is important to examine the connections of Antigone’s ‘action’ to Sartre’s theorizations vis-à-vis what he sees as the human ability to transcend the conditions of their facticity, their absolute freedom and absolute responsibility for this freedom. As Jack Reynolds writes in his book Understanding Existentialism: “[…] (a consciousness that could not negate the “given”, and their facticity, would not be human) and in this regard it is important to recognize the historical context of the Second World War and the German occupation of France, which motivated much of his theorizing. Sartre had been horrified at people disavowing responsibility for their situation, and his notion of absolute responsibility is an effort to awaken these people from their lethargy and their offhand acceptance that things are just happening to them. He wanted people, and the people of France in particular, to recognize that ultimately they could change their situation and were responsible, both collectively and individually, for the circumstances that befell them.” [Jack Reynolds, Understanding Existentialism (Chesham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2006), 69]. Sartre’s contention is that man’s relation to adversity is determined ultimately by the element of ‘free choice’. In Being and Nothingness, he writes of this through the example of a man standing in front of a cliff face: “[…] the coefficient of adversity of the given is never a simple relationship to my freedom as a pure nihilating thrust. It is a relation, illuminated by freedom, between the datum which is the cliff and the datum which my freedom has to be; that is, between the contingent which it is not and its pure facticity. If the desire to scale is equal, the rock will be easy for one athletic climber but difficult for another, a novice, who is not well-trained and who has a weak body. But the body in turn is revealed as well or poorly trained only in relation to a free choice.” [Jean Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 489]. While in Sartre’s conception, choosing not to exercise this ‘free choice’ is an act of what he calls ‘bad faith’, for thinkers like Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir, there is the need to admit to a degree of embodied habituation and subjection to external conditions of oppression that may add constraints human freedom. It seems to me that Antigone’s choice is one where she affirms her desire not to act in ‘bad faith’ or submit to the mere contingencies of her facticity, and is, in this sense, close to the Sartrean existentialist position. However, in many other ways, the modes of her speech and action in the play, allow us to recognize both the limitations of embodiment and habit on human freedom, as well as contain an amount of concern for the freedom of others that causes her to depart significantly from Sartre’s absolutist account of ‘free’ human choice. Antigone is ‘condemned to be free’ and she also refuses, in the Beauvoirian vein, to ‘become woman’ by marrying Haemon, bearing him a sturdy child and staying out of the life of the polis. However, in my view, her position is closer to Beauvoir’s than Sartre’s and is, in that sense, far more feminist than it is existentialist. I will try to explain why I think this is so. Beauvoir, in The Second Sex, recognizes that it is often women’s consent towards their own oppression that allows subjugation to continue and argues that it is often easier to avoid responsibility by giving up liberty. However, she also points out that often, long years of subjugation ensure that women find it difficult to envisage another state of being: the possibility of a ‘free choice’, so to say. She does not consider this latter to be acting in ‘bad faith’. “[…] it was neither a changeless essence nor a mistaken choice that doomed her to immanence, to inferiority. They were imposed upon her. All oppression creates a state of war. And this is no exception.” Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathon Cape, 1956), 674.] According to Beauvoir, therefore, Ismene, though subjected to the common contingencies of having ‘become woman’, would not have been acting in ‘bad faith’ when she asserts that women have no other choice but to obey. In Anouilh’s text, Ismene does not appear to be a character that is beyond ethical redemption. In fact, Ismene’s support of Antigone at the end of the play could be seen as, finally, through an open declaration of the war that already exists, an assumption of responsibility and freedom, as also the possibility of a future collective - a free community. For Antigone, liberation does not bring ‘happiness’ (which she discounts, like Beauvoir, as a value or experience to be cherished), but anguish. Beauvoir had written: “To forbid her (the woman) working, to keep her at home, is to defend her against herself and to assure her happiness.” [Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 676]. Antigone herself recognises the imprisonment of bodily habituations that have been imposed upon her from childhood and it never appears that for her, ‘being-for-others’ (with Haemon, the Nurse or even Ismene) appears as ‘hell’ or objectifying imprisonment. In fact, she seeks out these attachments actively and desires the presence of another human body to warm her when she goes towards her death. When
admission of fear before death unattractive (it is certainly not befitting a political 'hero'), but the point appears to me not whether Antigone is afraid or in pain or whether her ‘true’ feelings are an acute reluctance to face death. It is through the action of burial and not preceding it as a determinant, that Antigone creates her true feelings; the revolutionary affect that shapes herself as an agent of resistance, just as a musician shapes herself in relation to an instrument. In a sense, Antigone’s body, just like a performer’s, is her instrument of insurgence; she trains it into submission only so that she may reach a kind of radical agency. Creon, on the other hand, wants to allow her to escape so that her life becomes manageable within his political logic; her death is the only event that will unsettle him. Could we then also look at the meaninglessness and apparent inefficacy of Antigone’s death differently?

What kind of political efficacy is possible in a repressive regime where the state’s propaganda has all but entirely convinced ‘the mob’ that any resistance is treason? What is the space of revolutionary agency in such a world, if we were to judge its valence only in terms of ‘efficacy’ in the crudest sense of the term? What power does revolutionary action have to influence political events in a state of complete governmental control of all machineries for the public exchange of information and all channels for the expression of political opinion? While we consider this, let us try to remember the two contexts of performance of this play that we have discussed and that Keya Chakraborty connects so astutely at the beginning of her interview about the 1975 production. If we look only at the national Emergency in India\(^6\) (1975-1977) and the public reaction to it, we would be hard put not to see it as an entirely silent and bloodless coup. To quote journalist Kuldip Nayar, who writes of the complete absence of even a minimal resistance to the curbing of political freedom by the state during the nineteen months of the national Emergency and especially when it was first imposed:

Most of the Delhi newspapers did not appear because the power supply to their presses was cut off before midnight; the official explanation was that the

\(^6\) Antigone says, on gaining Ismene’s support: “Hear that, Creon? Her too! And how do you know it won’t spread to others when they hear me?”, she is asserting the possibility that her acceptance of freedom and anguish, may goad others towards undertaking the same responsibility for an authentic existence. She recognises the importance of this possible collective and is enthused and strengthened by it. In this desire and assertion of the need for reciprocity, in her belief in the reality of embodied existence and the materiality of oppression, Antigone is, in my view, far closer to Beauvoir, the feminist than to Sartre, the existentialist.

\(^6\) Discussed at length in the previous chapter.
powerhouse had developed “trouble”. [...] In Punjab and Madhya Pradesh also presses were denied power. [...] On the morning of 26 June censorship was imposed on all press writings relating to the internal situation. All messages had to be submitted to the government for scrutiny. By the time the ministers arrived at 1 Safdarjung Road for the cabinet meeting, most of those on the arrest lists were in custody. [...] The proclamation of Emergency was placed before them for ex-post facto approval. Everyone kept quiet. [...] The people were dazed; they did not know what the emergency – her dikta meant. It gradually dawned on them that the democratic system that had functioned for more than twenty-five years had gone into eclipse. Was it permanent? They wondered. [...] The whole operation had been painless, it was noted with satisfaction. There had been almost no resistance; ‘incidents’ were few and quickly tackled. [...] Bansi Lal\textsuperscript{637} said that as he had expected not even a dog had barked.\textsuperscript{638}

Indeed, the predicament of having unclaimed and uncremated bodies lying around on the streets of the city had been a familiar occurrence in Calcutta for several years before the national Emergency had been declared. Beginning with the Khadyo Andolan (the food crisis and the popular resistance that developed around it, intensifying in 1959 and continuing till the mid 1960s), declaration of President’s Rule after the fall of the two successive United Front Governments (1968 and 1970), the beginnings of the Naxalite movement in 1967 and severe repressive measures by the State and Central governments (through the late 1960s to the mid-1970s) had ensured that the urban space of Calcutta had been unrecognizably altered.\textsuperscript{639} Ashoke Kumar Mukhopadhyay writes of the year 1970 in the introduction to his book *The Naxalites through the Eyes of the Police: Select Notifications from the Calcutta Police Gazette: 1967-1975*:

Besides draconian laws, the unchained police force was adequately encouraged to liquidate Naxalites through ‘encounters’. The City Police raised ‘resistance groups’, ‘guerilla squads’ comprising lumpen proletariat and the police guerillas were paid handsome allowances. Each of them was given ‘a gun and was authorized to shoot down Naxals – of course always in self-defence.’ (Vide *The Naxalite Movement* by Sankar Ghosh). Several thousand police guerillas were believed to have been posted all over the city. The sole motive was to kill the enemy by any means. Legal procedures were given a go by. On getting a green signal from the top, a section of the police force happily turned Calcutta and its suburbs into their hunting ground. [...] As per eye witnesses, the armed police in those days used to raid Naxal hideouts in North Calcutta or east Calcutta, select some young boys (who were suspected to

\textsuperscript{637} Bansi Lal was the Chief Minister of Haryana and one of Indira Gandhi’s most trusted cohorts during the Emergency. 

\textsuperscript{638} Kuldip Nayar, *The Judgement*, 40-44. 

\textsuperscript{639} This has been discussed at length in the previous chapter in the section on Utpal Dutt’s work.
be Naxalites), make them stand in a single file and riddle them with bullets. [...] In a
statement, Jyotirmoy Bosu and three other Members of Parliament said that they had
‘received letters at Delhi from a sanyasi, who sits in one of the burning ghats in
Calcutta. He mentioned in his letter that everyday at night he is watching the
policemen coming between midnight and early mornings and burning bodies of
young people, aged between 14 and 30.’ [...] (Vide A Liberation Anthology, Vol. II,
edited by Suniti Kumar Ghosh).”

The national Emergency further succeeded in intensifying the silence around this litter of
unnamed deaths by imposing the strictest control and censorship of all mainstream and
alternative media. Citizens were disallowed by law not just to speak about, but even to witness,
the state’s crimes. Governmental double-speak had reached unprecedented heights; as we
have seen before, all happened in the name of the ‘socialist’ aims of Indira’s celebrated
‘Twenty-Point Programme’. Much of the propaganda was silently swallowed, if not entirely
bought, by a large majority of the middle and upper classes (the poor, of course, had no
choice: forced ‘nasbandi’ was their lot); people praised the increase in efficiency in the general
work culture, the growing discipline and the undeniable boon of trains running on time. The
state was, like Anouilh’s Creon, merely interested in trying ‘to see that the world’s a bit more
sensibly run’ and not certainly in the interests of sovereignty but for the sake of the
multitudinous populace of India. But deaths were witnessed in Calcutta and were written
about and acted; not just in Utpal Dutt’s plays from the mid 1960s onwards but also in the
work of other Bengali playwrights like Asit Basu. Basu’s 1973 play Kolkatar Hamlet (‘The
Hamlet of Calcutta’) centers on just such an unclaimed dead body, a dead body that comes
to be the protagonist of the play and tells its own story, thus claiming its witness in the
audience of a city where it has had no witnesses in reality. Unlike in Anouilh’s play where we
never actually see Polynices’ body but only hear descriptions of the rotting corpse, here the
play begins literally on the streets where the unclaimed dead body lies abandoned, while two
drunkards discuss the political atmosphere of the city. One false move and anyone could be
in danger of becoming a martyr, seems to be their general thesis:

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640 Ashoke Kumar Mukhopadhyay, The Naxalites Through the Eyes of the Police: Select Notifications from
641 See Chapter Five.
642 As is shown by many writers on the Emergency. These have been discussed at length in Chapter Five.
643 Anouilh, Antigone, 33.
[A street light. In the small sliver of its light, you can see a dead body lying on stage. Midnight. At intervals, one can hear the sounds of police vans, military guards and one lone fire engine. In the midst of all this, two nonchalant drunkards walk in. Their hands are raised above their heads.]

First Drunkard: Ah, don’t hurry so much. They’ll shoot you straight. Tomorrow’s newspaper will carry a martyr-like photograph of you as an armed – sorry – as a terrorist intent on bombing the city.

Second Drunkard: I do that to your newspaper. [Makes an obscene gesture.]

First Drunkard: [...] Don’t you have any self respect? Just because two CRPs threatened you…


In the meantime, the corpse sits up and asks the drunkards for a cigarette. The drunkards are terrified. The corpse speaks out:

Corpse: No, no don’t be scared of me. [...] When I was alive no one was afraid of me. Am I so terrifying now just because I have died? What’s the difference between you and me? Your heart is still beating and mine has had two bullets through it. Isn’t that all? It could have happened to you too. What would you have done then?

Just as Antigone’s act in Anouilh remains without a true witness or judge and no one but the audience ever finds out what she actually said to Creon, the corpse-without-witness in the open city spaces of Calcutta speaks to two drunkards, who will perhaps wonder in the morning if they dreamt the whole episode: just a normal day in the life of the ‘nightmare city’. The corpse here belongs to a leftist theatre director whose crime was to have sheltered a Naxalite in his rehearsal room; his transgressive action also ends in a death that remains without witness, understanding or any real efficacy in the Calcutta of the time; one could say, another ‘wasteful’ death. But let us not simply impose our belated understanding on what the real connections between the performance of Anouilh and the urban political scenario in contemporary Calcutta might have been in 1975, without consulting some

644 Central Reserve Police Force.
646 Ibid, 12.
647 The title of Utpal Dutt’s 1974 play on contemporary Calcutta - Dusshapner Nagari translates as such.
testaments from the time. In an essay titled ‘Keya, Antigone and I’ written as a memorial piece for the volume Keyar Boi commemorating Keya’s death (in March 1977) published by Nandikar in 1981, Gourkishore Ghosh writes of Antigone:

At the time when Rudra was staging Antigone, the political face of India was on the verge of a profound change. I had had a premonition of this imminent transformation on having read some early signs. The democratic climate in our country was slowly being eroded. I had been able to smell this decay and I was terrified of the coming autocracy and the imminence of dictatorship. [...] it was exactly at this time that they staged Antigone. I wanted to write a full review of Antigone for Anandabazar Patrika. There was a reason why I could not do it. If I had written an open, all-out piece on the production in Anandabazar at that time, I am quite certain they would not have been able to perform the play anymore. It would have alerted the authorities. If I had exposed in print the thoughts and questions that the implicit sensibility of the play was raising in the audience, I can bet on the fact that the government at that time would have put an end to the performances. I did a clever thing. I put in Keya’s message – I mean the message Keya delivered through Antigone – in an article on another subject in ‘Kolkatar Karcha’. I was arrested a few days after that. Probably that very week.”

There seems to be a similar inability to separate Keya, the actress, and the political voice she ostensibly represented from her role in Antigone in several writers who remember her performance in the play in their essays. This is aided, no doubt, by Keya’s own acute identification with the role – a deeply personal identification she admits to in several of her interviews and articles. One remembers here Walter Benjamin’s assertion in his foundational essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ about the differences between the stage actor and the film actor:

The aura which, on the stage, emanates from Macbeth, cannot be separated for the spectators from that of the actor. However, the singularity of the shot in the studio is that the camera is substituted for the public. Consequently, the aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays.

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648 Nandikar’s Antigone was first staged in Calcutta in March 1975. The national Emergency was declared in India in June of the same year.

649 One of the leading mainstream Bengali news dailies in Calcutta.


[Emphasis mine.]

In playing Antigone therefore, Keya came to represent, for at least one of her audience members, a certain kind of political voice, a voice of resistance and ethical refusal, which had become difficult to bring into public hearing in the political atmosphere of the day, in a city where resistance to governmental oppression had become increasingly ineffectual since the early 1970s. It is this growing sense of the actual pointlessness of all resistance (whether democratic or revolutionary) in terms of what it could achieve the realpolitik, which reached intensified to a fever pitch during the Emergency. This was perhaps what made the ‘un-witnessed’ conversation about death in Anouilh’s Antigone and Antigone’s unqualified, unbending refusal of ‘life’ seem so poignant. Most deaths and most such ‘conversations’ between the resistance and authority (that perhaps inevitably ended in someone’s death) had begun to become perforce un-witnessed in the city. Such deaths were a ‘meaningless’ (almost farcical and hardly heroic) surplus in Calcutta by this time and the smell of rotting corpses really hung about the urban space just as it does in Anouilh’s Thebes, as we clearly see in other contemporary plays like Kolkatar Hamlet (1973) and Dusshapner Nagari (Utpal Dutt, People’s Little Theatre: 1974). In fact, just as Creon puts it, the state perhaps ‘wished to rub people’s noses’ in these deaths a little further, so that memories were framed to both remember punishments and to forget what they witnessed and minds were trained to accept without question official narratives of ‘facts’, so that the ‘reason’ of the state reigned supreme. What politics of resistance with a clearly ‘progressive’ telos, with achievable ends in sight, was possible in such a scenario? By mid-1976, most people had begun to wonder whether the national Emergency would be permanent. Evidently, no end seemed in sight.

For almost exactly the period of the Emergency, Keya performed Antigone in Calcutta (March 1975 – March 1977). Elections were declared in January 1977. Keya died on 12th March 1977 before she could witness the results. Gourkishore Ghosh, who was imprisoned during the Emergency, writes of how the memory of Keya’s performance kept coming back to him during his year in jail:

Of the few memories that kept me feeling alive through that year were some faces of friends and Keya’s face, especially the memory of Keya’s performance as Antigone. The dialogues kept ringing in my year. This uncompromising refusal of all autocracy – it was unthinkable how acutely it came through in Keya’s acting. […] In the hospital, when I was on the respirator, I would see Keya’s face and it would slowly turn into Antigone’s. […] Beyond how the production was done, everyone’s
performance, it was the image of Keya as Antigone with that child’s spade in hand. It was not just acting; I felt she was a symbol of the time. […] What I was trying to do with the ‘Kolkata Patrika’ they were doing much more effectively with Antigone. […] They had stopped all music and poetry on the radio at that time. They never figured out that Antigone had been much more detrimental to them than all of that. […] Nandikar managed to fool the rulers and inspire the audience.”

The difficulty, no doubt, is that ‘inspiration’ cannot be measured indubitably. And if the play did inspire, what did it achieve? What harm could a single Bengali theatre production (part of an admittedly minor middle class practice of alternative non-commercial ‘group’ theatre) possibly have done to the ruling government? Perhaps it did achieve some real political ends, just like (but not as much as) Utpal Dutt’s unprecedented Kallol (1965) had done in its time. But an assessment of the concrete influences of this cultural product in the world of political events is not one of the aims of this piece.

I would like, instead, to go back to the statement by Keya Chakraborty I had begun this essay with: “Antigone says ‘no’ many times to Creon, the representative of the Hitler and his regime. In this clear, resounding ‘no’ that Antigone throws at Creon, the French people found an echo of their silent protest against the alien dictatorship.” We have examined closely the intent of this ‘resounding no’, but what is its content? What does Antigone wish to set up against the governmentality she refuses? Creon tries to empty Antigone’s act of content and expose it as being contrary to pragmatic political reason. He does manage to effectively assert that it is both pointless (in having no real influence on the political future of Thebes) and meaningless (because Antigone cannot know which villainous brother she was burying); in response, Antigone seems to contend that her action is reasonable in itself, non-instrumentally. Her act is, if we were to look at it simply, an act of refusal. The question then arises: what indeed is the content of this ‘no’? Does political action need necessarily to have a ‘yes’ in order for one to be able to say ‘no’? Does every refusal need an affirmative content? Antigone’s ‘no’ appears to me, in this sense, an absolute refusal, one that does not contain a possible ‘yes’ within its folds. It is a ‘no’ without a pragmatic directionality or a definite telos that can viably be translated into concrete eventualities. She is the exception – the sheer liminality – that exposes the limits of the state’s reason and like every aporia worth its name she is not teleologically calculable. Her action is performative in

652 Gourkishore Ghosh, Keyar Boi, 459-460.
essence, like a ‘curse’ or a ritual chant, its content does not inhere solely in what it ‘states’. But in being performed, her action brings into being something that is in the nature of an unorganized surplus that cannot possibly be subsumed within the logic of the state, even though and especially because, it achieves nothing instrumentally. Antigone’s action is therefore not an instrument of anything; in freeing her act of the need for instrumental justification, Antigone adds to it a symbolic value to it that turns it into a supreme ethico-political gesture. She wishes to continue to perform the burial as an empty ritual (a ritual which she knows is ‘mumbo jumbo’ and has no real meaning, either religiously or in terms of the *realpolitik*) but the performance of this ritual, every repetition of it, creates a surplus – a surplus that says ‘no’, without necessarily defining the content of an accompanying ‘yes’.

It seems productive to me to keep these questions in mind when we attempt to interpret the apparently ‘politically fruitless’ obstinacy of Anouilh’s Antigone and the refractions of this in the ultimately politically impotent space occupied by the Bengali group theatre during the national Emergency in India. This appears especially crucial when we set out to assess the political valence of cultural products like *Nandikar’s 1975 Antigone*. The production was admittedly a comment on the national Emergency, the ‘impact’ of which is impossible to measure concretely vis-à-vis the context in which it was performed, under conditions of severest censorship by a repressive governmental machine which had effectively turned all resistance into pointlessness. Antigone persistently refuses to judge the political valence of her action in terms of its efficacy in the world of Creon’s ‘trade’. In doing so she seems to assign some sort of an inherent politico-ethical value to the act itself, independent of its consequences (or lack thereof) in the world of political events. As a result, a separation of meaning and efficacy in the world of political action takes place. Read this way, in Antigone’s claim, and in Keya’s assertion of the importance of saying a repeated and resounding ‘no’ in the face of a most depressing knowledge of the ineffectuality of one’s agency, we are perhaps looking at a significant destabilization of the concept of what conventionally counts as political ‘action’ itself.