

Antigone: where is democracy today? Transcript

Elisabeth Del Prete 0:06

Thank you everyone for being here this evening. My name is Elisabeth. I am UP Projects' Learning and Live Research Curator at UP Projects which is a public arts commissioning organisation based in London but active nationally. I am white woman with curly, long, brown hair wearing a black dress and I go by the pronouns of she/her. This event is happening a few days before the reopening on the 17th May, and we are very much looking forward to being able to experience culture in person again going back to theatres and cinemas and galleries. With this event we would like to offer some thoughts of how we've developed operationally in response to COVID over the past year and how digital methods can be integrated into the way we access culture today. As additional tools to reach people in an accessible and participatory way. So, this event has really come together in response to the development of *The Hall*, which is the digital platform we have all accessed this evening. Which has been realised with the public funding awarded by the Arts Council emergency fund last year. So much of our work as a public art commissioning organisation involves participatory processes and community engagements. But the restrictions related to COVID have meant that a lot of our work had to stop, because we weren't able to do and organise face-to-face engagements. So, we've developed *The Hall* with the idea of a community centre in mind. It wants to be like a civic digital space that enables participation and engagement by combining the two digital platforms like Lili was saying earlier which include polling and Q&A questions and white boards alongside the video conferencing. So, The Hall really wants to be a space where ideas can be put forward, heard and discussed. As part of the development of The Hall, we scrutinised notions of participation, culture and democracy. What they mean, what they mean to us, but also how they can inform the socially engaged work that we do. So, we started asking questions such as does culture promote democracy? And how? But more specifically what type of democracy we're talking about. Is it the participatory democracy that originated in ancient Greece in 5th Century BC or is it the representative democracy which operate in western societies today? So, with this event, we wanted to test out new possibilities, introducing a theatre performance by the theatre company Out of Chaos alongside a more traditional panel of speakers. And we will draw a parallel between ancient Greek theatre and social engaged art, exploring if and how culture, whether that is ancient or contemporary, can enable democratic decision-making processes. So, we will have two presentations - one by Professor Paul Cartledge and one by Harold Offeh, who will explore if there is a relationship between culture and democracy in ancient Greek theatre and today. After the presentations we will have a 20-minute



performance by the theatre company, Out of Chaos, which I will introduce after the presentations by the speakers. And then finally there will be a panel discussion after the play. So, if you have any questions for the panel discussion at the end of the event, just pop in your questions in the Slido bar on the right of your screen. And I will make sure to take as many questions as time allows. Then of course if you have any feedback for our projects about the event, there will be an opportunity for you to feed back in the questionnaire at the end. So, I will briefly do introduction to the speakers before passing the word to Professor Paul Cartledge. Professor Paul Cartledge is A.G. Leventis Senior Research Fellow of Clare College Cambridge and President of the society for the promotion of Hellenic studies. He is author, co-author, editor or co-editor of some 30 books, the most recent being Democracy: A Life published by Oxford University press in 2018 and Thebes: The Forgotten City of Ancient Greece published by Picador, 2020. Professor Paul Cartledge has been awarded the Gold Cross of the Order of Honour in Greece and is an honouree citizen of modern Sparta. Harold Offeh is an artist working in a range of media including performance, video, photography, learning and social arts practice. Harold is interested in the space created by the inhabiting or embodying of histories. He employs humour as a means to confront the viewer with historical narratives and contemporary culture. He has exhibited widely in the UK and internationally, including Tate Britain and Tate Modern, South London Gallery, Turf projects, Kettle's yard, Wysing Arts Centre, Studio Museum Harlem, MAC VAL in France, Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Denmark and Art Tower Mito in Japan. He lives in Cambridge and works in London and Leeds where he's currently a reader in fine art at Leeds Beckett University and tutor in contemporary art practice at the Royal College of Art in London. Upcoming projects include a new video commission exploring the redemptive power of joy through social dance for the Wellcome Collection in London. Offeh will be exhibiting as part of Untitled, Art on the Conditions of Our Time, a major group exhibition of British artists of African descent at kettle's yard in Cambridge. Hail the New Prophets will see Offeh realise his first major public sculpture as part of the Bold Tendencies exhibition in Peckham, London. So, without further ado, I'm going to pass the word to Paul for his presentation. Thank you.

Paul Cartledge 7:06

Hello everybody, I am a white man, rather ancient, sadly, 74, bit grizzled. Those of you who have vision can see behind me an image of the Parthenon in Athens which I will refer to later. I am actually not in Athens; I'm speaking to you from south Cambridge. I'm a Professor of ancient Greek culture, especially ancient Athenian democratic culture of the 5th century BC, or BCE. But I'm also a passionate fan of live theatre and we've not had much of that recently. A cultural practice which of course had its origins 2500 years ago in Athens at the foot of the sacred Acropolis. Which is why I was thrilled and honoured to be invited by Elisabeth and by Lili to take part in this very exciting panel discussion, and to do so with the uber



distinguished Harold Offeh. In ten minutes, one can't go altogether fully into every nook and nuance of ancient Athenian 5th Century BCE theatre, with special reference to Sophocles' Antigone, but perhaps 440BC, BCE. So let me first spell out, in skeleton outline, my two headline themes or theses before I put a little flesh on them. Headline theme or thesis number one, ancient 5th century BCE Athens was a foreign country. They did things very differently there across the board. So, one of my main aims with you is to defamiliarise. Yes, the Athenians invented the earliest version of our drama and theatre. But they did so in a radically different context. Headline theme or thesis number two. The specific context in which theatre, not just tragedy, but also satire, drama and comedy, was invented at Athens was a democratic context. And the Athenians too invented the ultimate ancestor of our western notions and practices of democracy. But their democracy was not ours. In all sorts of ways. Let me just specify two of those ways. First, their versions of democracy, meaning literally "people power", were all direct. Whereas ours are all indirect, that is representative. In ancient Athens, we, the people, ruled. They didn't choose others to rule instead of them. Second major difference, in ancient Athens, religion was polytheistic, not monotheistic and there was no separation, as there is at least in principle today, between church and state, because there was no church in ancient Athens. So democratic politics could also be and was religious politics, and that's exactly what Sophocles' play Antigone was, a key part of a state-run, democratic religious festival in honour of Dionysus / Dionysos / Bacchus, shape shifting God of metamorphosis and wine. In case those differences between their theatre and ours aren't yet enough for you, here are a couple more. First, their theatre was staged outside in daylight hours, at the end of March, beginning of April. So that not only was there no separation between the stage and the performers on it and the audience, but the audience also by the way called Theatron, that's where we get our word theatre from, the audience of what 15,000 maybe, two-and-a-half times the size of the Albert Hall, they could all see and interact with each other. They were a vital element of the productions as a whole. Rather as fans of soccer clubs are vital ingredients of soccer clubs today. And Ancient Athenian audiences were notoriously noisy. Partly because they were not only present amongst themselves but also with numbers of persons who visited Athens specifically for the theatre, coming from other Greek cities, and there were about 1,000 Greek cities altogether. Second major difference in terms of performance, all speakers, actors, all chorus members were masked. They wore full head masks. There were only three or four maximum speaking actors - all of them male. There were 12 or 15 chorus members. And often the chorus gave its name to the play, I'll give you one example: Aeschylus' The Persians, the oldest surviving ancient Athenian Greek tragedy. Antigone named for its protagonist was unusual in this, as in indeed many other respects. Third major difference, Athenian tragic playwrights like Sophocles had to compose not just one but four plays. So, Antigone the play wasn't a standalone and it wouldn't have been judged alone. And the playwright was not only the playwright but also the composer, the



choreography and very often the director. Now I used the word judged just a moment ago. By that I mean quite literally. A random selection of audience members chosen by the democratic method of the lot voted for which set of plays by the usually three competing playwrights, they thought was the best. And which actor was in their view deserving of the, as it were, Oscar. Very democratic. Enough about background. The plays, the thing as I believe someone once said. Well in Greek, drama meant the thing done. What about Antigone? Though it's an Athenian play, it's set in a city that in real time was Athens's deadly enemy: Thebes. And it's set of course in a distant mythical Thebes, but in a hugely dysfunctional, regal Monarchical Thebes, one that is polluted, polluted not only by incest, Oedipus was of course not just Antigone's father, but also her half-brother. It was polluted also by civil war and the Antigone play begins when the character defies the edict of her autocratic uncle Creon, her mother's brother not to bury her allegedly traitor brother, Polyneices. By the way Polyneices means "much strife". And sometimes names are speaking, Antigone's name could mean "against generation, "against pre-creation". Well let's cut to the chase finally, how political was Sophocles' Antigone? I mean to what extent in what ways was it a political play? Modern readings, modern productions tend to see it and to play it as political but in modern ways. For example, individual conscience against bullying state diktat, that is certainly an anachronistic reading. Consider on this, Antigone was a royal princess only aged about 15 or so. Hardly therefore, a politically empowered ordinary citizen of Thebes. Far more likely to the point to what I consider it likely to have been Sophocles' point is that Antigone stands for the timeless, the divine, the unwritten laws - in this case the absolute over-ridingly imperative necessity to bury properly one's kindred dead, no matter what. As against the man made, political laws of mundane humanity, which in democratic Athens were by definition written and publicly displayed. Their human laws and therefore are arbitrary and changeable. To conclude, Aeschylus wrote in one of his plays that one learns or one can or should learn by suffering. Well, if Sophocles in 440 was trying to teach any particular lesson, I suspect it was this: That mortals, mere mortals, us - even mortals as powerful and successful and self-confident as his contemporary Athenians who by the way were building the Parthenon as the play Antigone was put on, they should be very, very careful to get their priorities right. First divine law and then a very long way second, human law. No matter how democratic that law might be. That I believe was possibly Sophocles' political position. Thank you.

Harold Offeh 17:48

Hello everyone, my name is Harold Offeh. I am a middle abled black man. I'm wearing a patterned beige top and a stripy black and white cap. And I am in a room surrounded by books, including Paul's book *A Democratic Life* which I very much recommend. So, I am going to talk specifically about a project that I developed in 2013 which was commissioned by Art on the Underground for the London Underground. I should just explain in terms of my practice, I work in performance,



and I work with communities and collaboration often, and this project I'm sort of using as a way to talk about socially engaged art. I think one of the things I am really interested in, I was asked to kind of define socially engaged art, it's an evolving term. I think the fact that it's a very contentious area of practice, one can look at the history of this area of practice, which was formerly known as community art, it's been known as participatory practice, participation practice, social engaged practice, social arts practice, social practice and I think in those evolutions I think there are things to be recognised about not only at status, but also its function. But certainly, maybe one of the things I think characterises socially engaged art is notions of participation and collaboration often between artists and communities. And I think participation is a highly politicised term which we could possibly kind of unpack. So, I'm going to talk, and I have some images to show, and I will talk about the specific dynamics of the project I did with Art on the Underground. So, I will just share my screen. Okay, so, just to give a bit of a narrative context to this specific project. The project was called *Transporter*, it was commissioned by Art on the Underground. Was part of a commissions connected to the 150th anniversary of the London Underground. And I was invited to work with two youth groups based in north-west London, Baraka Youth Association, which is an organisation that supports young people of Somali heritage and the Canalside Activity Centre, which is pretty much as it says it is, it's a canalside activity centre where young people can engage in canoeing and kayaking. And these two organisations happening to be located next door to each other. In the Ladbroke Grove area but hadn't ever worked together. So, the basic premise of the commission was to work with these two organisations and the young people, was to develop an artwork for three stations on the underground: Ladbroke Grove station, which was the closest to the organisations, Notting Hill Gate, which marked one end of the Central Line, and Bethnal Green station, which was in East London. And my starting point for the project was actually a reference to the American jazz musician Sun Ra, who's now known as a sort of Godfather of afro futurism which is a cultural movement that's come to prominence in recent years. But in facilitating the project I was really interested in trying to start the conversation with the young people about the history of the underground. It's 150th anniversary. And not only to connect them to its past, its archives, its narratives, its rich visual culture, but also to engage them in thinking about its future. And also, to remind them that in many ways, the underground as a Victorian engineering marvel, was itself a utopian visionary project. Which over the years has evolved to serve a growing urban centre. So as part of the process of working with the young people, we did a number of visits to London transport museum, to look at archives and posters. But we also visited the stations that we would be designing the artwork for. Along the way, the young people used cameras, recording equipment to capture their experiences and their journey. But also, as a way of facilitating their experience of navigating the system. And I think something that I think is important maybe to, perhaps was a little surprising for me, is many of the young people who were from



northwest London had never been to East London. Some of them had never been on the Underground. So, the whole idea of kind of working with the transport network for many of them was very new. Over the course of the project, we collected this material and then we had a process of trying to collectively decide how we would respond and what our artwork that would be situated in these very public places would look like. And again, I tried to use this kind of framework of thinking about the future as a way into thinking about and facilitating the conversation. Ultimately, the work that was produced was a timeline that tried to imagine each of the stations on the underground from Notting Hill Gate in West London to Bethnal Green in East London, so as a big extended musical score come imaginary future timeline, so ultimately the work was installed at the stations from 2013 and was in situ for over a year. As you can see from these images, the work consisted of these panels. So as commuters used and entered and exited the stations, they would walk, well, not walk but they would move past the images. The young people really thought very specifically about this experience of their viewers travelling through time and space. And we had several conversations really about the idea that the underground was a sort of matter transporter, people shifting through time and space from locations. And they created messages to speak to these commuters, so there are these text pieces, there are hidden messages. But based on an experience of being able to do some platform announcements, the young people proposed the idea of creating messages for the commuters that would be broadcast intermittently within the first few months of the project. So, they recorded these messages, and it was amazing to see how these were kind of broadcast. So, this is just a short encapsulation of this project and there's a lot more I could say. But one of the things I'm particularly interested in is in what is afforded by the engagement with cultural production, with creativity. Something that I think is particularly important is this thing of participation. Also, in addition to that, the nature of the context for this project, which was situated in a real-life public context. So, the young people had to take on the responsibility and role of developing their research, exploring sources and evidence, collectively discussing and working together to make decisions about ideas, but then like a lot of visual artists, contemporary artists, they had to negotiate a production phase, working with designers, to develop and manufacture a design that would exist in a real functioning space and that would have to be seen over the course of a year. Then they had to deal with the presentation and reception of that, through public outcomes like an opening reception and an opportunity to speak to journalists and discuss what they had done. For me I think I'm really interested in what is afforded by that participation in cultural production in the development of those critical analytical skills, production skills and communication skills and I think there is something to be said really about the kind of ownership that is afforded by this. But I mean it's easy to be clear, but I think and say this is a very one-off project. I wouldn't necessarily claim that this transformed the lives of the young people. I think something that I would like to talk about is how this has to be part of a more



holistic process of education of opportunities in order I think to really reinforce the tools and skills and experiences that might come out of a participation engagement with the arts and creativity. Okay, I'm going to come out of this...okay, I think I'm going to stop there, I think I've gone a bit over time.

Elisabeth Del Prete 29:43

Thank you, Harold and Paul, for the very insightful presentations. It was really great to hear how just now about the questions you have raised, what is afforded by that type of presentation, what kind of skills, sorry from that participation, what type of skills do we develop? And it was great to hear about that type of engagement and participation both in contemporary life, contemporary culture through your socially engaged art project, Harold and also the audience participation that was experienced in ancient Athens through theatre. Paul Cartledge talked about there being almost no distinction between the audience and the actors. Well correct me if I am wrong, I am sure there is a better way of saying this. But that participatory role of the audience and what that affords. I am very pleased now to introduce you to the theatre company Out of Chaos who will present a 20-minute-long adapted version of the ancient Greek play Antigone by Sophocles. We have chosen the *Antigone* because it is framed as a play of resistance and it gives us insight into the inner conflicts that most of us, if not all of us experience and have especially experienced over the past year. That conflict between the private and the public, between the interest of the individual and that of the collective, represented respectively by Antigone and Creon. My interest as an individual don't often align with the interests of the collective on the common good: so, what happens when that happens and how do we reconcile these interests? Just wanted to let you know we have added a participatory element to this play, in case you wish to contribute. And your contributions will be anonymous. So, we wanted to let you know that a couple of guestions will be popping up during the play in your poll tab on Slido. So, in case you cannot see Slido, just switch your layout to 2:1, there's a button on the top right. Just make sure it says 2:1 and also make sure you click on the poll tab, it says Q&A and poll tab, so that you will definitely see the questions. Out of Chaos make work which is exciting challenging and generous with a belief in the joy of storytelling in creative and surprising forms. During lockdown Out of Chaos created Reading Greek Tragedy Online, working with the Centre for Hellenic Studies at Harvard University to stage every extant Greek tragedy online in the space of 9 months, bringing together the talents of more than 120 artists from around the world. The play is directed by Paul O'mahony and will feature Tim Delap, Tabatha Gayle, Natasha Magigi and Paul O'mahony himself. The Play was translated by Paul Woodruff, courtesy of Hackett Publishing Company. Please do enjoy.



A Theban 33:25

I am a Theban, a citizen of Thebes. I am a middle age white man, bald, wearing a simple white shirt. My pronouns are he/him. Welcome to Thebes. A city, a state, a city-state in Greece. We're about one day's march north-west from Athens, but that's the least of our problems. You see, we Thebans, we're cursed. It started when Laius was king. He was married to Jocasta and there was a prophecy any son they had would end up killing Laius and marrying Jocasta, impossible to imagine. So, they had a son and given the prophecy they did what they had to do. They disposed of it. Or rather they got someone else to dispose of it. The man they gave the child to, took pity on it and passed the baby to a shepherd who worked for another Royal Family, a king and Queen of Corinth. The king and Queen of Corinth were childless, and they welcomed that baby with open arms. But prophecy knows. This child was called Oedipus. You'll have heard of him perhaps? Oedipus grew up and left Corinth but got into an argument with an old man at a crossroads near Delphi. Oedipus killed this old man, although he never asked what his name was. If he had, the old man would have told Oedipus he was called Laius, King of Thebes. Oedipus then came here to Thebes. We were in a terrible way then, too. Our king had disappeared, and we were terrorised by a Sphinx who killed anyone who couldn't solve her riddle. Oedipus could solve the riddle though. So, we made him king and gave him a wife, our Queen Jocasta. His mother Jocasta. The unspeakable happened. They had four children, two boys, two girls. No-one knew. But then a plague came. We were trapped, panicked, afraid. We were told there was a pollution in the city and that only by removing it could we be free. The truth came out slowly, painfully, cruelly, Oedipus came to understand that he had killed his own father. Jocasta realises she had married her own son. She killed herself, he gouged out his own eyes. Oedipus ended his days a wanderer until he at last found peace at Colonus, but there was no peace for us Thebans. His two sons grew up, Polyneices and Eteocles. Each as unpleasant as the other was ambitious. It was decided they would share the thrown taking it in turns to rule. But Eteocles refused to budge and Polyneices raised an army and attacked his own city. Wanting to take back control. The two brothers killed each other. So, who was left? Oedipus and Jocasta had two sons and two daughters, remember. Enter Antigone and Ismene.

Antigone 37:12

I am Antigone, I'm black woman dressed in black with an afro.

Ismene 37:18

I am Ismene. I am a black woman with dark brown hair, braided and wearing a black polo neck shirt. My pronouns are she/her/hers.

A Theban 37:31

Antigone and Ismene were left to bury the dead, except the new king, enter Creon.



Creon 37:43

[Inaudible]

A Theban 37:50

Creon was the brother of Jocasta, the uncle of Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles and Polyneices decreed that Polyneices was a traitor who had attacked his own city. And therefore, no-one was to bury him. Not even with the most basic of ceremonies. Instead, his body would remain outside the city walls to be eaten by animals. It's after this decree from Creon, that Antigone and her sister Ismene meet.

Antigone 38:23

Ismene dear heart my true sister, you and I are left alive to pay the final penalty to Zeus for Oedipus. I've never seen such misery and madness it's monstress. Such deep shame and dishonour as this which falls upon the pair of us. They say the general has plastered it around the city. Have you heard this terrible news or not? Our enemies are on the march to hurt our friends.

Ismene 38:50

No Antigone. I have had no news of friends. Nothing sweet or painful since the day we lost our brothers, both of us, on one day. Both brothers dead by their two hands.

Antigone 39:04

I knew it, that's the whole reason I brought you outside, to hear the news alone.

Ismene 39:09

Well tell me. You're as clear as a fog at sea.

Antigone 39:14

It's the burial of our two brothers, Creon promotes one of them and shames the other. Eteocles - I heard Creon covered him beneath the earth with proper rites, as law ordains. So, he has honour down among the dead. But Polyneices' miserable corpse. They say Creon has proclaimed to everyone no burial of any kind, no wailing, no public tears - give him to the vultures unwept, unburied to be a sweet treasure for their sharp eyes and beaks. That's what they say the good Creon has proclaimed to me and to you, he forbids me to. And now he's strutting here to make it plain to those who haven't heard. He takes this seriously. That if anyone does what he forbids he will have him publicly stoned to death. There's your news. Now, show your colours. Are you true to your birth or a coward?



Ismene 40:15

You take things hard. If we are in this noose, what could I do to loosen or pull the knot?

Antigone 40:22

If you share the work and the trouble.

Ismene 40:24

In what dangerous adventure?

Antigone 40:26

If you help this hand raise the corpse.

Ismene 40:29

Do you mean to bury him? Against the city's ordnance?

Antigone 40:35

But he is mine. And yours.

Ismene 40:38

Oh, no think carefully my sister. Our father died in hatred and disgrace after gouging out his own two eyes, for sins he'd seen in his own self. Next his mother and wife, she was both, destroyed herself in a knotted rope. And third, our two brothers on one day killed each other in a terrible calamity, which they had created for each other. Now think about the two of us. We are alone. How horrible it will be to die outside the law if we violate a dictator's decree. No. We have to keep this fact in mind. We are women and we do not fight with men. We're subject to them because they're strong. And we must obey this order, even if it hurts us more. As for me, I will say to those beneath the earth this prayer: "Forgive me, I am held back by force".

Antigone 41:57

I, I won't press you any further. I wouldn't even let you help me if you had a change of heart. Go on and be the way you choose to be. I will bury him. I will have a noble death. And lie with him, a dear sister with a dear brother. Call it a crime of reverence but I must be good to those who are below. I will be there longer than with you.

Ismene 42:33

Please, don't tell a soul what you are doing. Keep it hidden. I'll do the same.



Antigone 42:29

For God's sake speak out. You'll be more enemy to me if you are silent. Proclaim it to the world.

Ismene 42:35

Your heart's so hot to do this chilling thing.

Antigone 42:38

But it pleases those who matter most.

Ismene 42:41

Yes, if you had the power. But you love the impossible.

Antigone 42:46

So, when my strength is gone, I'll stop. So, you just let me, and my bad judgment go to hell. Nothing could happen to me that's half as bad as dying a coward's death.

A Theban 43:04

We have to make decisions every day. Most of them are trivial, but when you're a citizen, your decisions are crucial. Sometimes we can only exist as a state if we make collective decisions or if we follow certain instructions. But what if we believe the instructions are wrong? What happens when our responsibilities as a citizen clash with our values as a person? Do you agree with Antigone? Is this what good trouble looks like? What would you do? No, I'm asking you, what would you do? Here's a question, should Antigone follow the commands she disagrees with for the good of the community? And you can vote now. Should Antigone follow the commands she disagrees with for the good of the community? Tragedy happens when we don't have time, when we're forced into action without the luxury of reflection. That's why watching tragedy prepares us for making decisions under pressure. We can examine our values, question ourselves. What questions would you ask? And Antigone makes her decision. She chooses the divine law and gives Polyneices burial. She disobeys. And when Creon learns his order has been broken, he condemns the perpetrator to death. The guards then bring that perpetrator in front of Creon.

Creon 45:11

I'm Creon, I'm a white man with a dark top and dark brown hair.

A Theban 45:26

The new king stands face-to-face with his niece Antigone



Creon 45:33

You there! With your head bowed to the ground, are you guilty? Or do you deny that you did this thing?

Antigone 45:41

Of course not, I did it. I won't deny anything.

Creon 45:45

Tell me, in brief, not at length, did you know this had been forbidden?

Antigone 45:51

I knew, I couldn't help knowing it was everywhere.

Creon 45:55

Yet you dared to violate these laws.

Antigone 45:57

What laws? I never heard it was Zeus who made that announcement. And it wasn't justice either. The gods below didn't lay down this law for human use. And I never thought your announcements could give you a mere human being power to trample the gods' unfailing, unwritten laws. These laws weren't made now or yesterday. They live for all time. And no-one knows when they came into the light. No man could frighten me into taking on the gods' penalty for breaking such a law. I'll die in any case of course I will, whether you announce my execution or not. But if I die young, all the better. People who live in misery like mine are better dead. So, if that's the way my life will end, the pain is nothing. But if I let the corpse, my mother's son, lie dead unburied, that would be agony. This way, no agony for me. But you, you think that I've been a fool? It takes a fool to think that.

A Theban 47:04

Now we see the girls as wild by birth as her father. She has no idea how to bow her head to trouble.

Creon 47:13

Don't forget, the mind that is most rigid stumbles soonest. The hardest iron tempered in fire till it is super strong shatters easily and clatters into shards. This girl was a complete expert in arrogance already when she broke established law, and now, arrogantly she adds insult to injury. She's boasting and sneering about what she's done. Listen, if she's not punished for taking the upper hand, then I am not a man. She would be a man. I don't care if she's my sister's child, or closer yet at my household shrine for Zeus. She and her sister must pay the full price. And die for their crime. Yes, I say they have equal guilt - conniving, one with the other for



this burial. Bring her out. I saw her in there a minute ago. She was raving mad. Totally out of her mind.

Antigone 48:08

You've caught me, you can kill me. What more do you want?

Creon 48:11

For me that's everything, I want no more than that.

Antigone 48:15

Then what are you waiting for? More talk? Your words disgust me. I hope they always will and I'm sure you're disgusted by what I say. But yet speaking of glory what could be more glorious than giving my true brother his burial? All these men would tell you they're rejoicing over that if you hadn't locked their tongues with fear. But a tyrant says and does what he pleases, that's his great joy.

Creon 48:40

You are the only one in all of Thebes who thinks that way.

Antigone 48:44

No, they all see it the same, you've silenced them.

Creon 48:48

Aren't you ashamed to have a mind apart from theirs?

Antigone 48:52

There's no shame in having respect for a brother.

Creon 48:55

Wasn't he your brother too, the one who died on the other side?

Antigone 48:58

Yes, my blood brother - the same mother, same father.

Creon 49:03

When you honour the one, you disgrace the other. Why do it?

Antigone 49:09

The dead will never testify against a burial.

Creon 49:13

Yes, if they were equal. But one of them deserves disgrace.



Antigone 49:18

He wasn't any kind of slave. He was his brother, who died.

Creon 49:22

He was killing and plundering. The other one defended our land.

Antigone 49:26

Even so, Hades longs to have these laws obeyed.

Creon 49:30

But surely not equal treatment for good and bad?

Antigone 49:32

Who knows? Down below that might be blessed.

Creon 49:36

An enemy is always an enemy, even in death.

Antigone 49:38

I cannot side with hatred. My nature sides with love.

Creon 49:43

Go to Hades then, and if you have to love, love someone dead. As long as I live, I will not be ruled by a woman.

A Theban 49:52

Now Ismene stands before the doors and sheds tears of sister-love. From her brows, a blood-dark cloud casts a foul shadow and stains her lovely face.

Creon 50:05

Now you. Hiding in my house like a snake, a coiled bloodsucker in the dark! And I never realised I was raising a pair of deadly, crazed revolutionaries! Come, tell me: how do you plead? Guilty of this burial as an accomplice? Or do you swear you knew nothing?

Ismene 50:23

I did it, I confess. That is, if we are partners, anyway. I am an accomplice, and I bear responsibility with her.

Antigone 50:33

I will not permit this penalty to fall on you. No. I never wanted to give you a share.



Ismene 50:38

But there are your troubles! I'm not ashamed; I'll be your shipmate in suffering.

Antigone 50:44

I have witnesses: the gods below saw who did the work. I won't accept a friend who's only friends in words.

Ismene 50:50

No, please! You're my sister. Don't despise me! Let me die with you and sanctify our dead.

Antigone 50:59

No, you may not die along with me. Don't say that you did it! You wouldn't even touch it. Now leave my death alone!

Ismene 51:08

Why would I care to live when you are gone?

Antigone 51:11

Creon's the one to ask. He's the one you care for.

Ismene 51:15

Why are you scolding me? It won't help you.

Antigone 51:20

Of course not. It hurts me when my mockery strikes you.

Ismene 51:24

But still, I want to help you! What can I do?

Antigone 51:28

Escape! Save yourself! I don't begrudge you that. Just be brave. You are alive. Already my soul is dead. It's gone to help those who died before me.

Creon 51:39

What a pair of children! One of you lost her mind moments ago; the other was born without hers.

Ismene 51:45

That is right, sir. Whenever we commit a crime, our minds, which grew by nature, leaves us.



Creon 51:53

Yours did, when you deliberately joined a criminal in crime.

Ismene 51:57

Without her, why should I live? I'd be alone.

Creon 52:01

Her? Don't speak of her. She is no more.

Ismene 52:05

But will you really kill the bride of your son?

Creon 52:09

There's other ground for him to plow, you know.

Ismene 52:14

But no one is suited to him as well as she is.

Creon 52:18

I loathe bad women. She's not for my son.

Antigone 52:23

O Haemon, dearest, what a disgrace your father does to you!

Creon 52:28

Shut up! What a pain you are, you and your marriage!

A Theban 52:31

Will you really take away your son's bride?

Creon 52:35

Not me. Death will put a stop to this marriage.

A Theban 52:39

So, she will die. Has it really been decided?

Creon 52:43

Yes. By you and me. Now, no more delays.

A Theban 52:49

And now, another question: In one or two words, how did you feel the last time you experienced conflict and disagreement? Because in this conflict, neither side budges. They're trapped on a course of mutually assured destruction. Creon's son,



Haemon, who is engaged to Antigone pleads for her pardon. He is denied. Creon is warned that his actions are putting the city in peril - that even the gods are turning against him. And after being urged by his citizens he at last relents and rushes to undo his commands. He orders the burial of Polyneices. But now picture a cave with Antigone inside. A cave outside the city. Antigone has hanged herself. Haemon is there, but too late to save her. When Creon arrives, Haemon tries to kill him, but he fails. So Haemon turns the sword on himself and dies. Creon has lost his son and his niece in quick succession. Then he loses his wife. Eurydice hears of Haemon's death, and she too takes her own life. But the very last thing we're told is that punishment brings wisdom. Does it?

Elisabeth Del Prete 54:38

Thank you so much. Thank you to the actors and of course to Paul who directed the play. We started talking about putting up this event online back in November. So, it's really, it feels great to see it happening live finally. So, we're going to begin our panel discussion with Paul Cartledge and Harold Offeh. So, I will start by asking Paul and Harold a few questions. But if you do have any questions for the panel, just do write them up in the Q&A tab on the Slido. And I'll take them slightly later. What was interesting about this play and that is also the reason why we chose it is because it presents two opposed equally valid views, the one by Creon that represents the collective government, let's say, and then the one by Antigone which represents the individual and we were asked as members of the audience to make a decision and I have made a note that 70% of audience replied Antigone should not follow Creon's commands. Whereas 30% did, 30% of the audience this evening voted for Antigone to follow the common good, or what is considered the common good. So, I have a guestion for Paul. And I was hoping, and you briefly touched upon it earlier during the presentation, but I was wondering if you could tell us a bit more about the different models of democracy direct participatory on the one hand and the representative on the other? But also, more specifically if it is possible to say that theatre in ancient Athens was an exercise in democracy?

Paul Cartledge 56:57

Very directly and that's not meant to be just a pun. They lacked our technology. The economic and social and technological base of fifth century BC Athens was radically inferior to anything we are familiar with today, which is one reason, only partly, but part of the reason why they had slaves. And the Athenians had not just private slaves, individually owned, but a body of public slaves who enabled functions such as the theatrical festival of which by the way there were two to happen every year. It was democratic because the very first decision that the official whose name gave his name to the civil year, we say we're in 2021 they said we're in the year of "X", let's say, I'll pluck a name from the sky, Archippos and that was how you remembered what happened in each year – in the archonship of Archippos. I chose that name partly because it means "he who leads through



horses". It's a very aristocratic name. But the very first decision that that person who was chosen by lot, democratic method, random, not election, the ancients thought elections were aristocratic, oligarchic, whereas we think elections are democratic. They didn't. Chosen by lot, his first decision was to give a chorus to and then talking about tragedy, the three tragic playwrights, who then were funded by wealthy Athenians who owned property above a certain minimum amount which meant they had to pay as a kind of super-tax, for the chorus, their accommodation, their clothing, the props, and it was a six-month preparation from the beginning of the civil year, late summer early autumn, to, as I have said, March - April. You can't get more political, more democratic than you have a civic religious festival that is so imbedded in the civic calendar, that the very first decision that the chief chosen official appointed by lot makes is about theatre. I can go on. Would you like me to go on?

Elisabeth Del Prete 59:42

Yes, yes, I mean it would be great to unpack this relationship. How...what do we mean by the ancient Greek tragedies when we say they are highly politicised? And what is that relationship with the audience? Why do we call it participatory?

Paul Cartledge 1:00:05

Well, let's start from the very term, demokratia, which means "the power of the masses" or "the power of all the people". The word is actually ambiguous and ambivalent and if you take it in its class sense, democracy is the rule of the masses, the poor, over the elite. And that is how, if you're a radical, ideological democrat you see democracy. It's a great triumph after the previous types of regime, oligarchy, rule of the rich, monarchy, autocracy, tyranny, rule of one man nonresponsibly. In the 460's there was a great upheaval, a terrific revolution - a second revolution, Athens became more democratic, about 20 years before the Antigone. Immediately after the revolution of 462 to 1, one of the main authors Ephialtes was murdered, so in other words, we're in a very fraught, tense political civic context. Now how does theatre fit into that? Well, it's regular, it comes in particular times of the year. And it's part of the political process. It's judged democratically. In all those ways it's political. Can one go beyond that to say that the playwrights and of course we've only got three playwrights out of all the hundreds who actually had their plays performed, whose plays survived, when we only have a tiny percentage of the original plays that were staged. Sophocles - 120, we have 7. Aesculus - 90, we have 7. Euripides and so, I could go on. But we have very little to go on and therefore it's actually very difficult, because we weren't there were we? We don't know what the audience reaction. Remember, these plays are put on once, once only. Yes, later they're revived, but initially one off. As part of a quadrilogy, not trilogy, but a four-part production. So, it's actually very hard for us to imagine what the political impact of any political play was. The best, the most extensive example extant is Aesculus' 'Oresteia' trilogy and people argue



backwards and forwards not just what the play's message as it were, what the resolution at the end of the trilogy means, but what did Aesculus' intend it to mean. That is always a very, very different matter and probably actually undecipherable and undecidable. Sophocles is generally thought, I'm being very crude here, the least political in terms of having a dogma, having a particular political outlook, being right wing or left wing or centrist and also on the other hand, the most in some ways convention religious. I mean we know quite a bit about his personal life, I won't go into that but he was a priest, for example. So, I emphasised in my reading of the *Antigone*, and I was so pleased that the actors chose that central debate between the unwritten laws and the written laws, but it's not just that of course. Why do I side with Antigone against Creon? Why did 70% go for her or the character, or what she stood for? Because Creon is a fake. He's a liar. At one point he says, "I decided this", which is the fact, he's an autocrat, no-one else decides anything in a situation of tyranny. And then he said didn't here to the ordinary Creon, "I and you passed this law" - no they didn't, he passed it. So, if you were an Athenian, you can see a hypocrite and a liar and a tyrant and you saw that he was Theban, you hated him. And you knew Thebans were not democrats in the real world. So, for all these reasons, I'm guessing the Athenian audience sided heavily with Antigone, except Antigone is, well you know the famous Greek saying from Delphi "nothing in excess", isn't the Antigone character just a little bit too extreme? I'll leave it like that.

Elisabeth Del Prete 1:04:45

Thanks Paul. Yes, in a way by showing you the worst possible leader, Creon, the play encourages you to think about what a good leader might do. So, I guess that is also the level of participation that these displays were encouraging. Kind of showing opposite views so that in watching them you can negotiate what might be the right solution. I also wanted to ask a question to Harold and kind of bring back the parallel between ancient Greece and contemporary culture. We've seen how ancient Athens was nurturing democratic thinking through plays, through theatre, and I guess the question is: in today's western society how are democratic thinking processes nurtured and encouraged? not just in the public forum when it comes to voting or expressing a political opinion, but also in the workplace, the family and other institutions of civil society. Does the education that we receive equip us with the right skills to apply the principles of democracy? And do art and culture play a role in improving the quality of that education?

Harold Offeh 1:06:16

Thanks Elisabeth, yes, I mean, that's a question. I mean I think, I'll go straight to the heart of concern for me, which is education. And it's interesting to hear Paul talking about that effect of the theatre and showing those models of governance. So having that example of the dictator, the tyrant, that perhaps throws into relief the Athenian democracy and to me that speaks to the sort of reflective and critical



thinking that comes with the arts, or an encounter with the arts. I think this is why we listen to music, or enjoy plays, films, or novels, literature, is that they equip us with the tools to reflect on our own lives, and they equip us with those tools of critical thinking to kind of evaluate our position within the world and I hope they engender curiosity and argument and debate and discussion. So, for me I think those things are central, but I think they're also intrinsically linked to education and for me it's interesting to think about the sort of historically, and Paul can speak much better to this than I can, but the barriers to forms of democracy or participation in democracy, has often been education. You know, are you able to write? Are you able to - do you have a certain level of education? Obviously, there are economic considerations, land owning and other things, but you know, even today in supposedly quite well developed democracies, western democracies, so for me that's a very kind of central thing, particularly within a modern western democracy, do the participants in that democracy, are they equipped with those critical tools of evaluation, of reflection that allow them to guestion and challenge and evaluate the kind of narratives, propaganda, different positions that are being presented to us? You know, I think that's the kind of very crucial question at this point in time. And I think something I find interesting is what is beginning to emerge in the area of education Which I think is the erosion of access and provision to the arts. Excuse me getting on a sort of political soapbox, but I can't really speak to this without really being aware of the sort of Government's current consultation about cutting funding to certain arts courses at higher education level. So, Gavin Williamson's instigated this consultation, specifically focussed on the creative arts. We have just seen an amazing dramatic production with fantastic actors, and you know, this possible legislation is targeting dance, drama, art and design, media studies, but archaeology. So, I think that to me speaks to what is about the agenda within the political establishment that seeks to disenfranchise. I think the creative arts, not only at higher education level, you can map this down. I work a lot in schools, secondary schools, where provision of the arts is very inconsistent now. We might be in one school where you might only do either music, drama, art once every two weeks, you know which is radically different to my own educational experience in the late 80s and 90s. And I think for me there's something about the erosion of access to these pedagogical tools that come with participation in the arts, which is that critical thinking, which is that engendering of curiosity, which is those reflective skills and experiences that come about from that participation that I find really worrying and really troubling in terms of the health of our democracy.

Elisabeth Del Prete 1:11:36

Thank you so much Harold. Paul, I saw you nodding there. What would a society where art and culture are not actively promoted look like from the perspective of democracy?



Paul Cartledge 1:11:55

I agreed with absolutely everything Harold said. And he said it very, very beautifully. I was going to make a point which may seem paradoxical or even ironic, going back to the ancients, not many Athenian boys as they are coming up through their teams actually went to school formally speaking. So, education was more socialisation, and it was socialisation within a specifically democratic, that is egalitarian and free context. So long as you were male, pre-born - not a slave, and you were reasonably, not wealthy, but not destitute, and so long as you were civic minded and the way in which the Athenians did this, was they started from the local level. I mean we today don't, we rather disvalue local government. We don't see it as so essential a part of what our politics are and as what goes in Westminster, in Edinburgh, in Cardiff and so on. But for the ancients, they are born and it's part of their name, first their father's name, then where they're from, which village, ward, Parish they are ascribed to. And so a "demos", it's very difficult for outsiders to understand, but a "demos" was not just the people or section of the people, but also this village, where you are originally inscribed and so education is participation in public phenomena of what you and I would call a cultural kind, religion, lots of festivals, tonnes of them, including poetry, including dancing, and so theatre is merely, but of course in a way it's the peak, the pinnacle of formalisation of lots of other things that ordinary people do, take part in a chorus, take part in a choral dance, recite poetry, learn 'Homer', recite it in public. But only relatively very few can act or be in a chorus. So, this is where the point that I made that Elisabeth picked up, between the relative lack of separation between what goes on the stage and in the orchestra, the dancing space where the chorus dance, and the audience, they are all part of one thing, it's much more important in terms of interactive education. And so, theatre in ancient Athens, though it was only twice a year in the central space, there are local festivals, the local deems have their own theatres in some cases, though only occasional, it's what makes you an Athenian. So, though you might not go to school and certainly not to secondary school, O-levels, GCSE and A-levels, nevertheless you're constantly being educated by the city. And there's a very famous passage, it's of course possibly made up, but anyway it's puts in the mouth of Pericles and he's giving a funeral narration, which is of course a great civic occasion in a war unfortunately. And he says, "Athens is an education for all Greece" and he mentions festivals and of the festivals the play festivals were absolutely key as parts of this educational process.

Elisabeth Del Prete 1:15:56

Thank you, thank you Paul. I'm just going to take some questions from the audience. We only have eight minutes. I'm going to put some of these questions together. So, Harold, I'm going to read out three questions addressed to you. I would love to hear you speak on Sun Ra with regard to the projects, his interest in the collective experience through music and creativity. Also, Harold, do you think



theatre and performance can help equipping people with these tools? And lastly, could you add to this, to talk more about the aesthetics of participation in theatre specifically being politicised field? Quite a lot of guestions. But yes.

Harold Offeh 1:16:49

Yes, a lot of questions. I might have to recap on the third one. But yes, I mean happy to speak to Sun Ra, I don't know how many people are familiar with Sun Ra, an American jazz musician who I think has a very direct political action, disavowed his name, what African Americans would call their slave name and developed a whole myth narrative and identity that was rooted in his belief, however outlandish it was. But that the African Diaspora were from extra-terrestrials and with this myth narrative came a claiming of ancient Egypt and other African civilisations. While it's a fantastical project, for me what it represents is a radical strategy as a kind of everyday embodied living performance. You know, so he didn't switch on and off his persona, he completely inhabited this persona. I mean actually, there's an interesting sort of like quote that Kodwo Eshun, whose artist and a writer, part of the Otolith Group in his book 'More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction' talks about Sun Ra, in relation to this idea of like mythopoesis, so like selfmythologising and I think for me that's one of the attractions of Sun Ra, the political action of creating a narrative around your own identity. For me Sun Ra becomes a prophesier of the kind of digital age, if we think about what is available to us now in terms of social media platforms, multiple identities and personas that can be projected globally, simultaneously paralleling in tandem. But also, to do that as a kind of political provocation. I've forgotten what the second question was, but if we're out of time. Theatre and performance, I think? I think for me this there's this very crucial thing about the participation, the very nature of performing in relation to this idea of presentness. And what comes with that in terms of being situated within a context. So, the kind of processes and mechanics of theatre and performance. Particularly that are kind of rooted in empathy, so an embodiment. So physically your body in a given situation often trying to navigate and imagine an alternative scenario or embody an alternative kind of position. And that strikes me as engendering a number of critical and important tools through this direct experience of placing your body within a historical or other context. So, I think again, just speaking to the, you know the value, the pedagogical value of I think the direct and active participation in terms of performance and theatre. I've forgotten the last one, forgive me.

Elisabeth Del Prete 1:20:45

I think I might pick up some of the other questions for Paul. But thank you Harold for answering so quickly, sorry if it's slightly rushed. So, Paul, I'm going to read some of these questions together. Do you think that the play encouraged the audience to think about what good can a dead leader do? What if Antigone decided to live and start a revolution? Also, Paul, can you talk more about how the people



of Athens chose the performances to be shown to the audience? It's very fascinating. And finally, does the chorus represent also the voice of the people in the play *Antigone*?

Paul Cartledge 1:21:37

Thanks - 3 questions, dead leader, Oedipus, Oedipus as was pointed out by Paul O'Mahony ends up not too bad. And there's a very specific Sophoclean link -Colonus is just outside the city walls of central Athens. And it is the "demos", the village, Parish, ward, of Sophocles. So, Sophocles' final play, not published, not produced in his lifetime but produced by grandson after his death, has Oedipus, this terrible man having sat with his mother and killed his father. He is a homicide, a patricide and an incestuous man. In the end, I think this is Sophocles' resolution, if he can be received and become a kind of blessed spirit for all the Athenians, not for the Thebans - notice he's come to Athens to die. Then that provides as it were a very happy ending and that's quite unusual, tragedy very often leaves one with a question mark. And in fact, I think that's part of its point - on the one hand, on the other hand. Which is the right answer? Who knows, go away and think. And that's part of education. Have a debate where you honestly face up to the possibilities on either side of an argument. Very often it is two-sided rather than multiply sided. Greeks were very binary and polar sort of thinkers. And tragedy very often sets out risks, some of the most basic values of your society, it might be honouring the dead by burial. But doesn't necessarily give you the answer to a specific case of conflict. Question about revolution was there Elisabeth, could you just rephrase that for me?

Elisabeth Del Prete 1:23:40

Yes - what if Antigone decided to live and start a revolution?

Paul Cartledge 1:23:48

Yes well, obviously in real-life, A: she's underage, she a sub-adult female, and she would have been, what, 15? Because she's not married remember and women in ancient Greece typically married at the age of about 15, 14, 15. So, she can't be much older than that. Women simply were the unrepresented, as it were, the suppressed half of a typical ancient Greek population. These princesses are very, very weird dim, distant past figures. So, no-one like anything resembling an Antigone figure could possibly have in real-life sparked a revolution. As to revolution, the Greeks were ambivalent about that. As with the Romans who called revolutions new things, the Greeks had a similar word. Revolution was not necessarily positive. You could never predict it would come out well. I spoke of a revolution happening in Athens 20 years before the *Antigone*. Well, it resulted in the murder, political assassination of one of the two principal protagonists of the peaceful ballot box as it were democratic revolution. So, was that good? And then the third question, something about the audience Elisabeth?



Elisabeth Del Prete 1:25:21

Yes, I am afraid we might to wrap up very soon, but yes, I'm going to read out that last question. Does the chorus represent also the voice of the people in the *Antigone*?

Paul Cartledge 1:25:34

Yes and no. Sometimes the chorus in ancient Greek play is an actor, actually takes part in and takes the side of one or other of the main antagonists. In others this is an example, the chorus is as Paul O'Mahony brilliantly presented himself, as a Theban - that's exactly what they do. They are actually elders; Paul is much too young. But in so far as the audience identified with a collectivity on the stage, in so far as that collectivity was speaking not just for themselves but for their city, then the issue arises are they speaking well and then it's for the audience to decide. As with the individual actors, which side or which particular programme or platform they think is best for the city. Always the ancient Greeks were typically collected minded. So, what's best for the city was often the question, rather than what strictly is justice in any particular individual case.

Elisabeth Del Prete 1:26:40

That's great. Thank you so much, Paul. And thank you Harold, that was brilliant. I'm just, we've received some questions that we don't have time to answer, but I'm going to read them out. And then I'm conscious Katie Marshal from the audience wanted to raise her hand and ask a question which unfortunately we don't have time to. But I am going to pop my e-mail address in the chat. If you send me that question, I will make sure to send it, to share it with the relevant speaker. And just briefly reading out the last couple of guestions that came through that I thought were brilliant. Would Augusto Boal's text, 'Theatre of the Oppressed', be a text that could be used as a tool that could relate with what has been discussed today? Also, not a question but a consideration, theatre is very expensive today and very few can afford it. Today theatre is not democratic - a huge difference with Greek theatre. And then last one, do we know how the spartan defeat of Athens and subsequent rule of the thirty may have temporarily impacted theatre's role in the political sphere of Athens? We don't have time to answer these questions, but so rich, insightful and a big round of thanks to everyone involved. Professor Paul Cartledge, Harold Offeh, Out of Chaos theatre with all the actors: Tim Delap, Tabatha Gayle, Paul O'mahony and Natasha Magigi. Thank you to Paul Woodruff for translating the play. To the wonderful UP team, to you in the audience and of course to the Arts Council for making sure this event could happen. So, thank you all, thank you so much. And there's a survey that would be great if you were able to complete that helps us with our reporting. Thank you so much and have a nice evening. Bye.