Lacrimae and *uultus*: Pragmatic Considerations on Gestures in Seneca's Tragedies

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1 Introduction

The following analysis presents a pragmatic perspective on gesture.¹ My point of departure will be the operational definition that has been developed by Licinia Ricottilli:

... per gesto intendiamo un comportamento corporeo o facciale che assuma un valore comunicativo, informativo o interattivo nei confronti di un destinatario diretto o di un eventuale osservatore, e per il quale esista una possibilità di controllo da parte dell'emittente.²

The present study focuses on Seneca's dramatic œuvre and investigates, without expecting to be exhaustive, two specific aspects of its gestures: tears and *uultus*.

1 In the wake of Sittl's seminal work dating back to 1890, research on gestures in ancient Greece and Rome has been resumed in recent years and led to numerous studies that would be difficult to cite in their entirety. Thus, it shall suffice to mention some of the most significant ones here, such as Bremmer and Roodenburg (1991); Lateiner (1995); Aldrete (1999, 2017); Corbeill (2004); Cairns (2005). More recently, Clark et al. (2015) inquired into the relation between gestures and emotions. Other studies have focused on specific aspects of gestures and include Fögen (2009) on tears in the Graeco-Roman world; Hagen (2016) on tears as a means of persuasion in Roman historiography; Rey (2017) on the power of tears in ancient Rome; Beard (2014), which faces the topic of laughter in ancient Rome; Naiden (2006) on supplication. I also permit myself to refer to Calabrese (2018, 2019), in which I deal with gestures in Petronius' *Satyricon*.

2 'By gesture we denote a behaviour of the body or the face that assumes communicative, informative or interactive significance towards a direct, intended recipient or a possible observer and over which the sender can exert control.' Ricottilli (2000: 16). Other studies by the same author, in particular Ricottilli (1992, 2016), constitute the starting point for the present study on gestures.

2 The Pragmatics of Tears

2.1 *Not Shedding Tears: Andromache at the Beginning of Act III of Troades*

Among Seneca's tragic works, tears are extensively found in *Troades* with its dominant feminine presence. Here, tears appear at the very beginning, in the context of a funeral dirge. At the end of her first line, Hecuba encourages the chorus consisting of female Trojan prisoners to resume their cries, reminding them of the gestures that had to be associated with their tears:³

[1] Seneca *Troades* 63–65

lamenta cessant? turba captivae mea,
ferite palmis pectora et planctus date
et iusta Troiae facite ...⁴

Do your wailings falter? O throng of mine, captives as ye are, smite breasts with palms, make loud laments, due rites for Troy perform ...

The prisoners must let their hair down and cover it with ashes while beating their bare chests (Sen. *Tro.* 83–85, 87–89, 92–95): Hecuba thus invites them to perform a collective lament according to the typical Roman funeral ritual.⁵

In *Troades*, the collective feminine ritual of mourning is evoked and solicited in the beginning but also questioned in a sense by Andromache, who demonstrates that her own behaviour contrasts with the gestural aspects of mourning and funeral lamentations that are exhibited by the Trojan women. In fact, Andromache enters the scene at the beginning of Act III and distances herself from the very gestures that the queen had previously solicited:

[2] Seneca *Troades* 409–413

quid, maesta Phrygiae turba, laceratis comas
miserumque tunsae pectus effuso genas

3 Šterbenc Erker (2009: 142) observes that the subject of lamenting or performing solemn gestures of mourning is rather common in Latin poetry.

4 The excerpts from Seneca's tragedies are reproduced from Zwierlein's critical edition (21987). The translations are taken from Miller (1917).

5 For more on the various aspects of gestures that are associated with weeping and mourning lamentations, see Corbeill (2004: 67–106).

fletu rigatis? leuia perpressae sumus,
si flenda patimur. Ilium uobis modo,
mihi cecidit olim ...⁶

Ye Phrygian women, mournful band, why do you tear your hair, beat on your wretched breasts, and water your cheeks with weeping unrestrained? Trivial woes have we endured if our sufferings can be told by tears. Ilium has fallen but now for you; for me she fell long since ...

Andromache claims that the Trojan women may give vent to recent losses through their tears, but her long acquaintance with pain has made her insensitive and numb (*Tro.* 417). Hector's wife is a stranger to the other women's mourning because her experience was different from theirs and she is in a different psychological condition.⁷ Her rigidity and listlessness affects her gestures and renders her unable to take part in the external manifestations of grief that, on the contrary, characterise the behaviour of the other prisoners.

The tears that Andromache is unable to share with the Trojan women are those that she sees Hector's ghost shed during a vision that occurs while in a strange state of psychic suspension between wakefulness and sleep:

[3] Seneca *Troades* 448–451

non ille uultus flammeum intendens iubar,
sed fessus ac deiectus et fletu grauis
similisque nostro, squalida obtectus coma.
[...] tum quassans caput ...

Not such his face, blazing with battle light, but weary, downcast, heavy with weeping, like my own, covered with matted locks. [...] Then, shaking his head [he said ...]

In these lines, gestural elements that are related to *uultus*⁸ describe Hector's attitude and mark the clear distance between the exhausted shade and the hero

6 Cassandra has a similar reaction to Andromache in Sen. *Ag.* 659–663. See Tarrant (1976: 295–296); Aricò (1996: 142).

7 See Caviglia (1981: 254) on *Tro.* 412–413: 'la contemporaneità ideale tra la caduta di Ettore e la caduta di Troia, che è "luogo comune" della tragedia, è qui sottolineata come esperienza personale, che riguarda soltanto Andromaca, non la comunità (*uobis ... mihi*).'

8 For more on the meaning of the term *uultus*, see n. 21.

of the past: in addition to tears, these include defeated downwards glances and the despondent shaking of the head.⁹ As we know, the model for Andromache's dream is Verg. *Aen.* 2.269–297, Hector's apparition in Aeneas' dream. Virgil's Hector also sheds tears (271 *largosque effundere fletus*). A significant difference between the two passages consists in the fact that, while Aeneas cries in response (279 *ultro flens ipse uidebar*), Andromache is not even able to share Hector's tears. We shall return to this point later on when attempting to clarify the evolution that Andromache's gestures undergo in *Troades*.

2.2 *A Recurring Motif Made Estranged: False Feminine Tears*

In the course of Act III of *Troades*, we see Andromache weep. She does so before Ulysses after giving him false news on the death of Astyanax: her tears are produced within a *fraus* (see *Tro.* 482 and Scolari in this volume), i.e. an attempt to deceive. False feminine tears are frequent in Graeco-Roman literature,¹⁰ but Seneca managed to make particular use of this recurring motif to the point of making it seem estranged and paradoxical. Ulysses describes the weeping Andromache in the same line in which, addressing himself, he wonders whether or not to believe the vow of a mother:

[4] Seneca *Troades* 615–618

scrutare matrem: maeret, illacrimat, gemit;
sed huc et illuc anxios gressus refert
missasque uoces aure sollicita excipit:
magis haec timet, quam maeret ...

Watch the mother. She grieves, she weeps, she groans; now here, now there she wanders restlessly, straining her ears to catch each uttered word; this woman's fear is greater than her grief ...

In this passage, we observe how Andromache exhibits, on the one hand, the typical gestures of *maeror*, above all tears, and how, on the other hand, such ges-

9 A gesture 'of distress or angry frustration', according to Fantham (1982: 281). It is the same gesture found in Verg. *Aen.* 7.292 *tum quassans caput haec effundit pectore dicta*, performed by Juno immediately before venting her sharp pain, in direct discourse, (see 291 *stetit acri fixa dolore*) upon seeing Aeneas and his followers happily disarm the ships after their peace with king Latino. The same gesture also appears, as a sign of sufferance (see Traina 1997: 182), before direct discourse in *Aen.* 12.894 *ille caput quassans* [...]. In Seneca's theatre, the expression is also found at *Oed.* 913 *regius quassat caput*.

10 See Fögen (2004: 228–229, 2009: 187); Ricottilli (2016: 76–77).

tures clash with the typical manifestations and attitudes of *timor*, e.g. nervously pacing back and forth and receiving every word with concern. It is precisely this inconsistency that causes the failure of the deception and leads the interlocutor to understand that the woman is lying. In particular, her tears, which are a gestural sign of sufferance, and her stride (referred to in Latin as *incessus* or *gressus*) do not harmonise. The heroine violates a behavioural principle of the utmost importance in Roman culture that is codified in oratory and philosophy, i.e. consistency between ideas, states of mind, and external behaviours (the latter made up of the union of various elements, including gestures, posture, and gait).¹¹ Andromache attempts to deceive Ulysses by expressing pain caused by the death of her child, but her tears are mixed with concern, which is clearly revealed by her anxious way of pacing. For an attentive observer like Ulysses, all of these elements are clues that reveal the woman's true state of mind.¹²

From a preliminary reading (of course, a more in-depth study would be needed on the matter), we can notice that three elements (*uultus*, *incessus*, and *habitus*) substantially reveal a person's *animus* in Seneca's philosophical reflections¹³ as much as in his dramas. For instance, these are the elements on which the identification between Hector and Astyanax is based:

[5] Seneca *Troades* 464–466

... hos uultus meus
habebat Hector, talis incessu fuit
habituque talis ...¹⁴

... such features my Hector had, such was he in gait, such in bearing ...

11 This principle is clearly codified in passages such as Cic. *De or.* 3.216; Cic. *Brut.* 141; Sen. *Ep.* 114.22; Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.66, 67; Sen. *Ep.* 52.12. See Ricottilli (2000: 84); Corbeill (2004: 114–118). The common principle at the base of these texts is that a person's appearance reveals his or her character: see Graf (1991: 40).

12 In deciphering the state of mind of the interlocutor, attentive and precise observation assumes a fundamental role: see, for instance, the use of the verb *scrutari* in *Tro.* 615 (see [4]) and the importance that is attributed to the act of observation in Sen. *Ep.* 52.12. For more on the matter, see Bettini (2000: 326).

13 See Sen. *Ep.* 114.22. For an explanation on the meaning of the terms *uultus* and *incessus*, see n. 21.

14 *uultus*, *habitus*, and gait are also revealing signs of the grave ill that afflicts Phaedra in *Phaedr.* 363 *proditur uultu furor*, 372–373 *semper impatiens sui mutatur habitus*, 374 *uadit incerto pede*.

Facial expression and gait are also the pivots of Ulysses' description upon entering the scene:

[6] Seneca *Troades* 522–523

adest Ulixes, et quidem dubio gradu
uultuque: nectit pectore astus callidos.

Ulysses is here, with step and look of one in hesitation; in his heart he weaves some crafty stratagem.

In this case, they are completely coherent with one another, to the point of allowing Andromache to puzzle out the hero's intentions.¹⁵ On the contrary, when facial expression and gait are incoherent like in Andromache's case, they deprive words of their reliability and, for an attentive observer, signal the need to further investigate (*Tro.* 618, 625). By juxtaposing different and unreconcilable gestures, Seneca thus subjects the recurring motif of fake feminine tears to a paradoxical treatment that is such that this traditional means of deceit loses its efficiency and even becomes a revealing sign of the deceit itself.

False tears are the gestural element that dominates Act III of *Phaedra*, which opens with Theseus' return from the Underworld. The tired and weary sovereign is greeted with cries coming from within the palace, and he immediately requests an explanation:

[7] Seneca *Phaedra* 850–852

quis fremitus aures flebilis pepulit meas?
expromat aliquis. luctus et lacrimae et dolor,
in limine ipso maesta lamentatio?

But what is this tearful outcry that strikes my ears? Let someone tell me. Grieving and tears and woe, and on my very threshold sad lamentation?

The nurse tells him that *Phaedra* is resolved to die, and he hastens to her to ask why she longs for death. *Phaedra* pretends that her honour had been attacked

15 In other cases, e.g. that of Hippolytus (*Phaedr.* 431–434), the speaker draws mistaken conclusions from his interlocutor's facial expression and gait.

by Hippolytus. Phaedra's false words are preceded by an interesting series of gestures, including weeping, as we may extract from the interlocutor's line:

[8] Seneca *Phaedra* 886–887

quidnam ora maesta auertis et lacrimas genis
subito coortas ueste praetenta optegis?

Why dost thou turn away thy sorrowing face and hide with veiling robe
the tears that suddenly o'erflow thy cheeks?

The rapidity with which tears appear may certainly be a sign of their falsity. However, Phaedra turns her afflicted face away and covers her tears with garments. They are gestures with a twofold communicative value:¹⁶ as well as enforcing the lie by means of a typically feminine malicious attitude, they may indicate the difficulty in which the protagonist finds herself upon perpetrating the deception in the presence of her husband. The act of turning her head away is significant in this context, for it may also be interpreted as a gestural manifestation of refusal of the communicative situation in progress. It appears, in this sense, at the end of a long series of gestural and verbal messages that have an analogous meaning: starting from Theseus' use of the verb *abnuo* a few lines earlier (883) in a comment on his wife's silence and continuing to the frequent resort to abstract *sententiae*, with which she withdraws from the relational appeal in her husband's words.¹⁷

As far as Theseus' appeals to the relationship between the interlocutors are concerned, by which he tries to convince his wife to speak (see 873 and 875), it is interesting to notice how they culminate with an explicit reference to the tears that he sheds and expects his wife to reciprocate:

[9] Seneca *Phaedra* 880

lacrimae nonne te nostrae mouent?

Do not my tears move thee?

¹⁶ Casamento (2011: 218).

¹⁷ For more on *sententiae* as a means to avoid recalling relations, see Calabrese (2009: 93). For more on the stylistic value of *sententiae* in Seneca, see Traina (1974), as well as Casamento (1999a, 1999b), with their specific reference to tragic works.

The tears that Phaedra refuses to shed in response to her husband's will be shed immediately afterwards in order to deceive him.

Also in *Phaedra*, Seneca resorts to the *topos* of fake feminine tears, and again he makes a complex and uncommon use of it: the fact that tears are located within a rather complicated communicative and relational context and that they are associated with other gestures of an ambiguous value indicates the need for an interpretation that is not unequivocal, but rather blurred and problematic.

2.3 *A Structural Use of the Gesture of Crying*

In *Phaedra*, Seneca makes thoughtful use of tears in relation to Theseus: in fact, this gesture accompanies and signals the fundamental moments of the character's on-scene story from his first entrance on the scene to the end of the tragedy. Just after returning from the Underworld, as he approaches the palace, a grieving sound of wailing reaches him (see [7]). In the course of the same act, he himself will cry (see [9]) in the attempt to convince his wife to speak by means of gestures that are not only characterised by strong relational value but are also supposed to be reciprocated by his wife. The gesture of crying frames Theseus' on-scene story within a ring composition, leading to the final amplification of the initial image:

[10] Seneca *Phaedra* 1275–1276

patefacite acerbam caede funesta domum;
Mopsopia claris tota lamentis sonet.

Open wide my palace, gloomy and foul with slaughter, and let all Athens
with loud laments resound.

Theseus' entrance on the scene was accompanied by a grieving sound of wailing reaching him from inside the palace; now, in an amplified mirror image, he orders the doors of the palace to be opened, so the grief of the royal house may spread and all of Attica may resound with its laments.

2.4 *Tears, Kisses, and Torn Locks: Andromache at the End of Act III of Troades*

Act III of *Troades* concludes with a use of gestures (including tears) that I found remarkably innovative: on the one hand, this use determines, like in the case we have just seen, the ring-like closure of the entire act;¹⁸ on the other hand,

18 On the concentric structure of act III of *Troades* see Boyle (1997: 76–77).

it solves some essential dramatic knots. When she sends Astyanax to death, Andromache entrusts him with a gestural token to be given to his father, i.e. her kisses, tears, and torn locks of hair:

[11] Seneca *Troades* 799–801, 806–809

oscula et fletus, puer,
 lacerosque crines excipe et plenus mei
 occurre patri
 [...]

 sume nunc iterum comas
 et sume lacrimas
 [...] sume quae reddas tuo
 oscula parenti.

Now, son, take my kisses and tears, take my torn locks and, full of me, hasten to thy sire [...] Take now once again these locks, and take these tears [...] take kisses to deliver to thy sire.

Notice how the gestural elements of this ending are endowed with particular significance by means of the chiasmic structure of the lists in which they appear (*oscula*, *fletus*, and *crines* at 799–801; *comas*, *lacrimas*, and *oscula* at 806–809). Such elements are furthermore tied to those present in the initial verses (see [2]) and enclose the act within a ring composition whose end represents the evolution and resolution of the first. While, at the beginning of the act, Andromache strikes a pose that starkly distinguishes her from the Trojan women with their gestures of grief (tearing their hair, beating their chests, weeping), at the end, these gestural aspects (with the addition of kisses) are precisely the ones that round off Andromache's suffering and mark its final stage.¹⁹ At the end of her complex interaction with Ulysses, Andromache not only manages to express her grief, but through her gestures, she is also able to rebuild her lost relationship with Hector. All of this paradoxically occurs through the son who is sent to die. Astyanax even becomes the means of an exchange of kisses between husband and wife: in fact, not only will he bring

19 In Calabrese (2017: 73–148), I reflect extensively on Andromache's story in Seneca, which I interpret as relational and, at the same time, one concerning identity. From my point of view, a social ritual of utmost importance in Roman culture such as that of the collective (feminine) mourning is used by Seneca in order to convey meanings about the character's identity.

Hector Andromache's *oscula*, but he will also allow the latter to enter into contact with her husband's ashes by rummaging through the clothing that had touched his tomb with her face:

[12] Seneca *Troades* 809–812

matris hanc solacio
relinque uestem: tumulus hanc tetigit meus
manesque cari. si quid hic cineris latet,
scrutabor ore ...²⁰

This cloak leave as comfort for thy mother: my tomb has touched it, and my beloved shades. If any of his dust is hidden here, I'll hunt it with my lips ...

She finally makes good for the embrace with Hector's shade which she desired but was unable to perform at the end of the tormented nocturnal vision (*Tro.* 460) with a kiss that seems as inevitably virtual as powerfully concrete. In *Troades*, Andromache's gestures therefore undergo a remarkable evolution that may be especially noticeable and pronounced in connection with tears: while her initial rigid numbness prevented her not only from sharing in the other captives' grief but also from crying in response to her husband's tears, at the end of the act, she is capable of transforming her tears into a gestural instrument that is necessary to reunite herself with her spouse.

3 The Pragmatics of *uultus*

3.1 *uultus attollere*

Gait and *uultus*²¹ are the elements on which one's attention is focused the moment a character makes their entrance on the stage and encounters other

20 Stok (1999: 130) notices similarities between this passage and Eur. *Andr.* 416–417, which presents gestural elements such as kisses, tears, and embraces within a situation devoid of the paradoxical features that are created by Seneca.

21 For more on not only the lexical but especially the cultural meaning of the term *uultus*, see Bettini (2000: 322–336), who defines it first and foremost as 'l'espressione dell'*interiorità*' (emphasis in original). Being connected to interiority, *uultus* is an ever-changing expression, i.e. a set of attitudes. For more on locating *uultus* in the upper part of the face, see in particular pp. 327–329. Another fundamental theoretical distinction for the present study

characters. This, for instance, is a pertinent feature of the brief description that Andromache makes of Ulysses when she sees the deceitful hero approach (see [6]).²²

Gait and *uultus* also have great relevance in the nurse's description when Phaedra re-enters the scene after failing to convince Hippolytus to indulge himself in passion:

[13] Seneca *Phaedra* 583

sed Phaedra praeceps graditur, impatiens morae.

But Phaedra is hurrying towards us, impatient of delay.

[14] Seneca *Phaedra* 587–588

attolle uultus, dimoue uocis moras:
tuus en, alumna, temet Hippolytus tenet.

Lift thy face, break silence. See, my daughter, thine own Hippolytus embraces thee.

A particular function is entrusted to the term *uultus* in combination with the verb *attollo* at 587: the invitation to raise one's eyes is closely associated to the

is that between *uultus*, indicating facial gestures, and *gestus*, mainly used instead to indicate corporeal gestures (although this distinction is not always clear in concrete linguistic use); for more on this, see Ricottilli (2000: 17–18). For more on the meaning of the word *incessus*, see Köstermann (1933) and Horsfall (1971). Corbeill (2004: 118–120) describes the particular use that Cicero makes of the term *incessus* when describing his political opponents. The terms that define physical appearance have a relevant cultural function, i.e. that of fixing personal identity: see Bettini (2000: 319–322), who singles out the traits that are capable of determining the identity of a person, including gait (*incessus* or *gressus*) and facial expression (*uultus*).

22 The extreme complexity of Seneca's theatre and the unsolved matter of the real scenic destination of these tragedies do not, in my opinion, allow us to speak of real implicit stage directions. Nor may any general conclusions be drawn from the present study's brief observations on the matter about the way in which entrances and encounters are characterised by Seneca. However, one may notice a certain recurrence that should be the object of a more extensive study. For more on the matter of gait interpretation by characters at entrances and exits in particular, as a type of stage direction, see O'Sullivan (2011). On the presence of implicit stage directions in Seneca's works, see also n. 27.

request that a person disperse whatever creates an obstacle for words:²³ it is, therefore, an invitation to enact the interaction with Hippolytus, one that is made iconic through gestures. The gesture of raising one's eyes (*attollere uultus*) therefore has an eminently communicative and interactive function:²⁴ it signals the need to start a communicative exchange.

Finally, we must notice the use of the gesture of raising one's eyes (*uultus attollere*) at the opening of the scene in which Phaedra confesses her love. There she reveals the truth about herself in the most painful and difficult way since she does so directly to the object of her incestuous love. The gesture balances the line immediately preceding the false accusation against Hippolytus (*ora auertere*).²⁵ In both cases, the movement of the head assumes a communicative function, though with opposite meanings: while the gesture of raising one's eyes reveals the necessity to prompt direct interaction with the interlocutor, that of turning one's head, on the contrary, is a sign of refusal of the ongoing communicative act as well as of any relation with the present interlocutor. It is, moreover, possible to notice how the act of raising one's eyes signals a form of communication that, complex as it may be, is honest, while turning them away corresponds to deceptive messages.

3.2 *uultus auertere, uultus referre*

Gestures connected to *uultus* may therefore be characterised by an eminently relational aspect. If at *Phaedr.* 587 *attollere uultus* is the iconic signal of the beginning of an interaction, the gaze fulfils an opposite function elsewhere. We are referring to the final act of *Oedipus*, in which the title character enters the scene after having blinded himself and declares the profound relief that the darkness that envelops his head has finally brought him (*Sen. Oed.* 998–1003).

With blindness, Oedipus feels to have finally attained a *uultus*, a face, an outside appearance that is suited for him (1003 *uultus Oedipodam hic decet*).²⁶ At this point, Jocasta enters: the chorus describes the woman's attitude and

23 For more on the meaning of *dimoue*, see De Meo (1995: 178); for that of *uocis moras*, see Coffey and Mayer (1990: 144).

24 The expression *attollere uultus* seems to essentially have communicative value, even in a passage that is in many respects similar to that just commented on in *Phaedra*: *Ov. Met.* 4.142–144 *'Pyrame' clamaui, 'quis te mihi casus ademit? Pyrame, responde! tua te, carissime, Thisbe nominat: exaudi uultusque attolle iacentes'*.

25 See [8].

26 For more on the expression *uultus Oedipodam hic decet*, see Boyle (2011: 343): 'a strong metatheatrical conclusion to Oedipus' opening speech in the final act [...] The metatheatrical effect would have been enhanced here if the actor playing Oedipus had pointed to his bloody mask'.

appearance²⁷ and implicitly indicates the nature of the ongoing tragedy before her line makes it clear. Jocasta desires and fears, at the same time, to speak to the man who is already on the stage and then finally decides to do so, but her words remain stuck in her mouth (see *Oed.* 1004–1009).

As I have attempted to explain elsewhere, the last scene of *Oedipus* represents a powerful attempt on Seneca's part to tackle problems related to the impossibility to name that which cannot be named.²⁸ For Jocasta, the main problem in initiating interaction with the man who has revealed himself to be her husband and son at the same time is disturbing in its simplicity: what should she call him (*Oed.* 1009–1011)? In a scene centred on words, a significant gesture takes place at this point. The initial communicative blockade is overcome by Jocasta in virtue of her will to reactivate a dialogue (1011), and therefore a relationship, with Oedipus. He responds to the relational appeal contained in his mother's words by turning his head to the other side:

[15] Seneca *Oedipus* 1011–1012

quo auertis caput
uacuosque uultus?

Why dost thou turn away thy head, thy sightless face?

This type of gesture reveals his desire not to communicate and therefore transmits, on a relational level, a message that opposes the verbal one conveyed by his mother.²⁹ Oedipus' gesture follows Jocasta's agitated questions and immediately precedes his utterance. The analysis of these words enforces the relational interpretation of the gesture that precedes them but also provides further important elements in order to deepen the analysis of the interaction:

27 In relation to the way in which the Chorus announces Jocasta's entrance on the scene, Boyle (2011: 344) observes that their description contains implicit stage directions. According to Boyle, such instructions were erroneously interpreted as a supporting element of the thesis that Seneca's tragedies are 'Rezitationsdramen', and that Seneca could have been influenced by the pantomime genre, in which a narrative description (which is often performed by a Chorus) accompanies a dancer's gestures and movements.

28 See Calabrese (2008).

29 A similar gesture to Oedipus' is executed by Dido in Verg. *Aen.* 6.469 *illa solo fixos oculos auersa tenebat*, where the participle *auersa* represents the gesture of turning to the other side as having already been performed and also presents the element of the fixed gaze. With this series of gestures, Dido manifests her refusal to communicate with Aeneas, with whom there will, in fact, be no exchange (see Ricottilli 1992: 215).

[16] Seneca *Oedipus* 1012–1014

quis frui tenebris uetat?
quis reddit oculos? matris, en matris sonus!
perdidimus operam ...

Who wills not that I enjoy my darkness? Who restores my eyes? My mother's, lo, my mother's voice! I have worked in vain ...

The compresence of these two types of communication, i.e. gestural and verbal, makes this part of the interaction particularly interesting. The gesture of turning one's head to the other side, as previously mentioned, indicates that the character does not wish to speak with his interlocutor. However, Oedipus' words contain more information than the gesture, whose relational function they indicate, along with its uselessness. As we have seen, the character enters the scene with a feeling of realisation, and more precisely that of now having a face that is suited to Oedipus: the black cloud that envelops his head finally makes him feel at peace with the gods. The darkness that he wants to be surrounded by is pierced and somewhat dissolved by his mother's voice, which attains the paradoxical effect of restoring his sight. This powerful synaesthesia contains the core of the tragedy of Seneca's Oedipus: his empty eye sockets, when diverted from his interlocutor as a gestural signal of desperate refusal (see [15]) are somewhat filled by the voice of his mother, who in fact gives him back his eyes (see [16]). His mother's voice has the power to bring Oedipus back into a relationship with her³⁰ (one that has already been irreversibly contaminated by incest), thus thwarting the effects of his self-blinding, an act which, also in light of the part of the interaction that has just been analysed, may be interpreted as being finalised towards the interruption of every sort of relation and contact with the outside world.³¹

uultus is, therefore, a vehicle of relations. This very aspect of *uultus*, namely the relational aspect, comes to the fore in a scene that has similar features to the

30 The fact that the voice is a vehicle of relations also seems to be proven by passages such as Sen. *Tro.* 962–963 *hac sola uocor iam uoce mater* (see Calabrese 2017: 33), *Phoen.* 224–225 *ego ullos aure concipio sonos, per quos parentis nomen aut nati audiam?*

31 In recent years, Fornés and Puig have dealt with eye gestures in Latin literature. Fornés and Puig (2010) (which owes much to Ricottilli 2000) in particular is dedicated to the gestures that implicate movements of the iris, like diverting one's eyes and rolling them repeatedly. Fornés and Puig (2011) recalls other aspects of eye gestures.

one from *Oedipus* analysed above. In *Phoenissae*, Jocasta, upon arriving on the battlefield, has a long discussion with her rival sons Eteocles and Polynices by first addressing both and then each one alternately. The first addressee of her words is the exiled Polynices:³²

[17] Seneca *Phoenissae* 471–474

uinculo frontem exue
tegumenque capitis triste belligeri leua
et ora matri redde—quo uultus refers
acieque pauida fratris obseruas manum?

Unbind thy brow, take the grim helmet from thy warlike head, and let thy mother see thy face. Why dost thou look away, and with fearful glance watch thy brother's hand?

The invitations to disarm culminate in that of turning the son's face back towards his mother (*ora matri redde*). The process, however, is interrupted midway and Polynices, instead of facing Jocasta, turns away from her and looks fearfully towards his brother's armed hand. In this context, *uultus referre* means turning one's gaze to observe something other than the direct interlocutor, thus depriving the latter of the gaze and fixing it on other and different sources of interest (and concern).³³ This type of *uultus* gesture is made all the more significant by the fact that (based on the configuration of the interaction that we can retrace through Jocasta's words) it seems to be how Polynices responds to the invitation to turn his face towards his mother—obviously a negative reponse, i.e. one of refusal. As the subsequent lines, which are centred on the matter of *fides* (*Phoen.* 475–480), demonstrate, the relationship itself is at stake in the midst of this movement of glances. It is a relationship that Jocasta tries to visually restore by means of Polynices' gradual disarmament but one that he, on the contrary, by means of gestures rather than words, shows to be incapable of re-establishing.

32 For more on Jocasta's complex change of interlocutors in the first sequence of the scene where she interacts with her sons, see Mazzoli (2002).

33 In the expression *uultus referre*, *refero* seems to be a synonym of *conuerto*. According to Frank (1995: 205), *refero* is used by Seneca here instead of *auerto*. Nevertheless, the use of *refero* in place of *auerto* seems to be suitable for the context since Polynices not only looks away but even focuses on another interlocutor, i.e. his brother Eteocles.

4 Conclusion

The pragmatic analysis of gestures in Seneca's tragedies led to some new observations. In the case of *Andromache*, the focus on gestures allowed us to notice the evolution that they undergo in the course of Act III of *Troades*. The gestural evolution, as I maintain in a more in-depth study,³⁴ is the visual, iconic sign of the profound dynamics that the character undergoes on a level of identity and relationship. The study of gestures also allowed us to show the particular (alienated and paradoxical) use that Seneca makes of a traditional and recurrent motif. Moreover, gestures appeared to have a structural function. With specific regard to the gestures connected to *uultus*, their eminently interactive and relational aspect led to a better comprehension of the dynamics which take place in the passages analysed. Through these pragmatic considerations, Seneca's theatre should begin to appear not only as a theatre of words but also as a theatre of gestures.

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34 See n. 19.

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