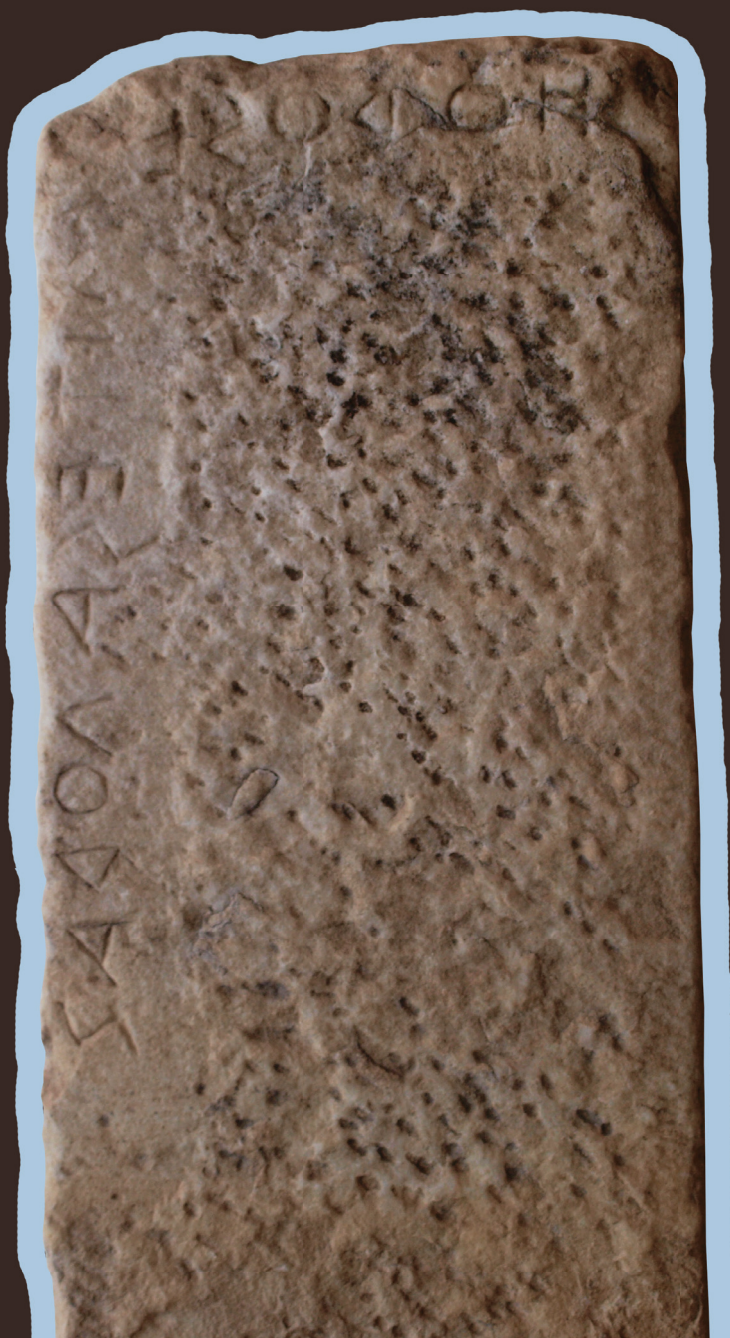


ANCIENT BOUNDARIES AND THE  
ECOLOGY OF STONE

# H O R O S



THEA  
POTTER



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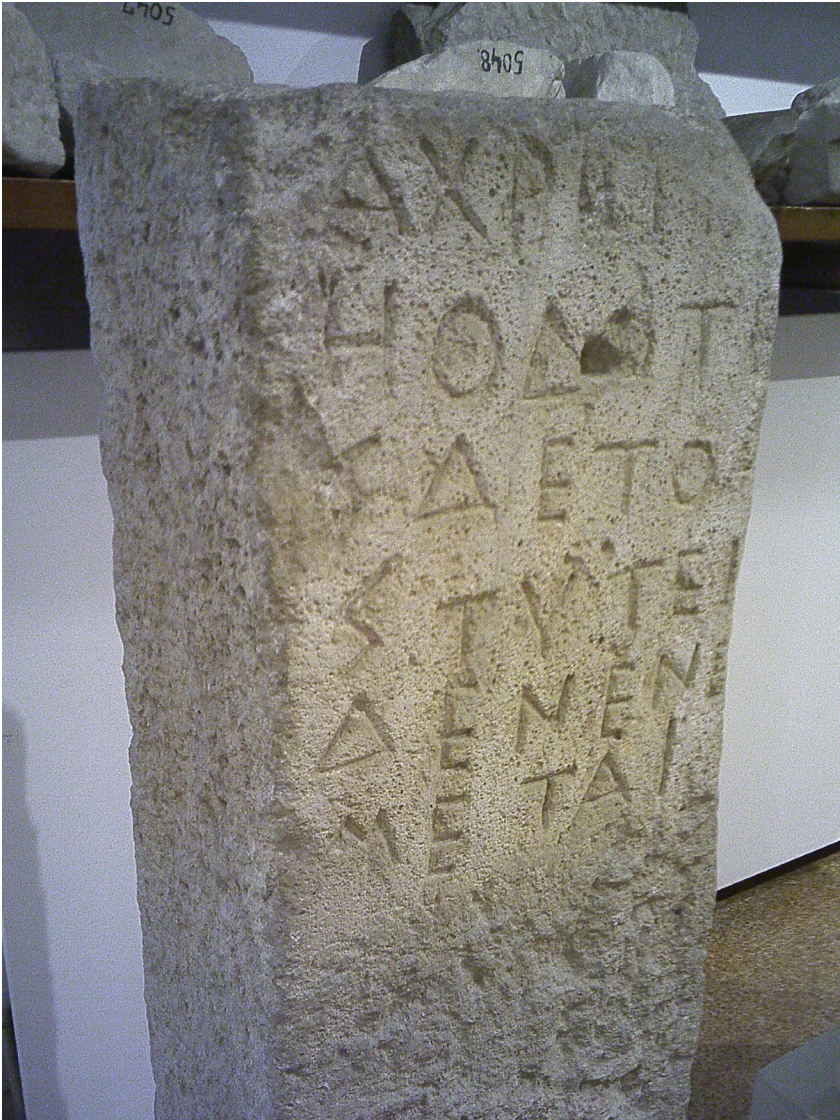


Fig. 2. ΑΧΡΗ ΤΕ[Σ] ΗΟΔΟ ΤΕΣΔΕ ΤΟ ΑΣΤΥ ΤΕΙΔΕ ΝΕΝΕΜΕΤΑΙ 'The city extends up until the edge of this road here,' *JG I<sup>3</sup> 1111*. Photograph by T. Potter, 2021. Rights belong to the Epigraphic Museum, Athens © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.R.E.D.).



## 2. Does the Letter Matter?

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Terminus, Limes, Fines: vt dicuntur regionis vel agri alicuius.<sup>1</sup>

ὄρος, ὄ -*boundary, landmark* [...] *pillar* (whether inscribed or not) [...] in Logic, *term* of a proposition (whether subject or predicate) [...] *definition*.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter raises the problem of the materiality of the letter. The explicit problem confronted in the *horos* is the meaning of matter, where the inscription itself of the word upon stone can be read as the sign of a precedent natural script, of boundaries prescribed rather than inscribed. The stone itself raises this possibility, and this question: how do we read boundaries? Are boundaries written in ‘nature’ with the stone as marker and is the inscription of the word for boundary, then, a secondary script? In what capacity can the word *horos* be read simultaneously as script, stone and boundary? Is the stone itself the original proscription giving us pause, so that the separation of meaning from matter can be deployed into the dualism of the human and the nonhuman? In the hermeneutical course of writing on writing, and also of writing within writing, what is important in such an inscription is that regardless of its professed use the name remains the same: *Horos* is the name given by the Athenians to the words and letters upon the land.

Here I am working on the implicit hypothesis that words and things not only endure in a relation, but that the *horos*—given that it appears in philosophical texts, as in a philosophical ‘term’ or ‘definition’—actually stands in for this relation as a boundary and limit, a point of division, simultaneously relating matter and language, the stone with the signifier for ‘boundary,’ and providing the very material basis for their distinctions. To pull this apart further, what can be seen is that *horos* stands equally within a scale of materiality beginning with

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1 TGL: ὄρος. Estienne (1572) 1465.

2 LS: 1255–1256.

stone, moving then to the inscribed stone, and subsequently (though not chronologically later) the boundary invested in the stone, and the concept of boundary, as well as the word's other textual interpretations, such as definition, term, limit and so forth. Given its materiality the *horos* remains throughout the philosophical developments of Greece, despite claims to separate substance from word.

*Horos* is the matter that remains in any question of definition or what words mean. It does not just reinvest meaning with matter; it stands as a testament that matter means as much as meaning does. Wordplay is central, as psychoanalytic discourse shows, in revealing what is the matter, and should not be dismissed as *mere* words. Lacan states that 'metaphor is situated at the precise point at which meaning is produced in nonmeaning,' and it is not only the words we use, but also those we fail to use, employ idiosyncratically or poetically that reveal our psychical reality.<sup>3</sup> In human psychical disturbance, there is nothing immaterial about words nor more substantial than letters, though that does not make them any easier to understand. The point being that it does not matter all that much what we intended to say because the words themselves carry meaning independently of our will to use them, revealing what it was that we really wanted to say but did not or what we did not want to say at all.

Of course, that does not mean the existence of speech is absolute; it simply means that words reveal a psychical reality that is otherwise flooded within the babble of wanting to say something else or meaning to say nothing of any matter. If the accidental play of letters allows slips of consciousness to open up and reveal the crisis of symbolic meaning, perhaps there is more to letters than meets the eye. In hermetic traditions the letter has a meaning all of its own that is in no way distinct from its form and owes no debt to its appearance within otherwise meaningful words. The esoteric significance of letters is an earthly, lithic structure into which we must delve, 'excavate,' in order to even begin to understand the allusive and mysterious nature of the particular letters inscribing the word *horos*, and what they could possibly mean.

There is no intention here to reinscribe the *horos* into tradition, for what is significant about this stone is that although its history is unwritten, it

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3 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud' in Lacan (2006) 423.

never ceased to be read. *Horos* (HOPOΣ) appears inscribed upon stones small and large in the region of Attica, from the gardens of the French school of Archaeology to the cemetery in the Kerameikos. They are quite evident if you are looking, though their relation to the site of sight might be no more than formal (ὀράω, ὄρασις). These inscriptions were discovered in extraordinary numbers in the excavations of Athens.<sup>4</sup> This bounty found in such a limited area should alert us to the fact of their wider distribution throughout the city, suggesting a common use of these stones. But are they stones, or are they inscriptions? This is the heart of the problem.

To begin with, this chapter takes lexical definitions of the *horos* in an attempt to understand what the *horos* is, what is essential to the word *horos*. The readings of alternative manuscripts of Harpocration's lexicon entry for the term is taken for granted in the Liddell and Scott lexicon, in which the *horos* is described as 'boundary, landmark [...] pillar (whether inscribed or not, cf. Harp.)'<sup>5</sup> But this interpretation may well be based upon a misreading of the words for 'without letters' (χωρὶς γραμμάτων).<sup>6</sup> Given that Harpocration provides a definition almost word-for-word with that of the Suida, it seems likely that typographical error arose during the copying. Nonetheless this typographical slip, like a slip of the tongue, does not mean that it does not mean something or that it does not matter. The oversight of the copyist or transcriber, the lapse in concentration or proof of ignorance opens up the possibility of a deeper vision into the nature of stone. If the stone itself is the marker, what extraneous role does the inscription play? And if the stone already is read, whence come these lithic letters that draw up the boundaries of our relation with the land?

To begin again, however, it must be stated that *horos* is stone. And it does not cease to be stone once it is inscribed; its inscription is read and interpreted. The matter of the stone does not cease to matter once it is endowed and associated with script. But if it also does not require an inscription in order to be recognised or read as boundary, this poses a genuine challenge to the supposed precedence of speech over writing as well as human activity against nature's passivity or of meaning over

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4 Lalonde (1991); Lewis (1994); Finley (1952); Fine (1951).

5 LS. ὄρος.

6 Harp. (1833) 139; Harp. (1853) 226.

matter. The location of the boundary, assumed to be marked out by the human drive to determinism may well be read into what was already there: a kind of prehistoric script of stone. So, what of the stone? What does it tell us? What is its material, what does its materiality mean to us and what does it matter to the stone?

Aristotle says a synonym is where a single description corresponds to different nouns, 'so that there is no difference between the defined term (*horos*) and the name' (ὥστ' οὐδενὸς τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦνομα ὁ ἀποδοθεὶς ὄρος).<sup>7</sup> In translating the word *horos* can we do any better than simply offering a swathe of synonyms? Perhaps this plethora of proximate meanings is also essential to the *horos*. *Horos*, to paraphrase Aristotle wildly, is the very distinction between words, and the material basis for metonymy and the word itself is synonymous to some degree with its letters, insofar as it is a word inscribed upon stone at once giving and given meaning in terms of the material play of presence of letters.

Ever since Aristotle, if not before, matter has been denigrated in favour of abstract concepts such as the soul and reason. And since Plato, transcendence has been given as the aim of philosophical thought—transcendence beyond the quotidian things of experience. This is described in the figure of the cave, where humans begin locked up in the stone of their own ignorance, lacking the determination to come into the open. Within the cave, our shared, perceived reality is nothing more than a shadow play.<sup>8</sup> So long as we adhere within stone (the cave) we do not know the world for what it is, conscious reality elides us. But once we emerge and see that our previous habitation was nothing but stone, the symbolic (*sym-ballein*) play of meaning falls away and we are subject to a blast of the fresh air of reality.<sup>9</sup> Henceforth, being ensconced within stone, in the cave, becomes the symbol for an unexamined life. This allegory represents the Palaeolithic mind, literally old and stoned on the demands of bare existence, inseparable from nature, embedded within the earth. It could also be an allegory for the cosmic mind, or the world soul, that mythic reminder of meaningfully embedded cohabitation, though this would not make it any less derogatory in Plato's vainglorious eyes.

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7 Ar.*Top.*148a25.

8 Pl.*Rep.*514–520.

9 Ar.*Pol.*1294a35

The material world is not just the basis or springboard for any more abstract thoughts, it is also the hole we fall into when, like Thales, our thought becomes too abstract and we stop looking where we step (βαδίζειν ἀγνοοῦσι).<sup>10</sup> Cohen points out the rocky substrate that underlies philosophical meanderings, from Petros (rock) as the foundation of the church to Latour's agency of the nonhuman: 'Stones are the partners with which we build the epistemological structures that may topple upon us. They are ancient allies in knowledge making.'<sup>11</sup> Philosophy has been based upon the speculation of the natural world from day one, whether that was wonder at the formation of the stars and the planetary bodies or the violent force of the rain and the sea as it wears away rock and crafts habitable zones. That sight (ὄραω 'to see') necessarily plays a part in this speculative world-view (*theoria*) and in the expansion of one's horizons reinforces the material intimacy of the term and stone, *horos*, with abstract human thought. As Chapter One argued, this term is the material representation of the constant motion of base materiality that needs to be passed over *diaporēsai* (διαπορῆσαι καλῶς) in order for thought to be freed from the material and go on into abstract thought, *euporēsai* (εὐπορῆσαι).<sup>12</sup> That there are determinations and certainties, static laws and rules in nature is entirely dependent upon being able to maintain a position within an otherwise constantly evolving world. And if this position is to have any meaning at all it has to exist in more than the symbolic realm of human thought and language, it has to obtain to 'reality.'

Stone becomes history's bedrock as lithic agency impels human knowing. Neither dead matter nor pliant utensil, bluntly impedimental as well as collaborative force, stone brings story into being, a partner with language (just as inhuman), a material metaphor.<sup>13</sup>

The idea that stone undergirds flights of metaphor, of technological, artistic and philosophical creation seems a pretty radical cultural critique, especially as it must claim to be common to all cultures. It is in fact more than radical: roots are superficial in comparison to stone. In contrast, dominant cultural and economic practises today are reliant

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10 Ar.Met.995a27–40.

11 Cohen (2015) 4.

12 Ar.Met.995a27–40.

13 Cohen (2015) 4.



upon stone being exactly nothing but dead matter and pliant utensil to be put to use according to human will. How does stone come to be thought 'dead matter' at all? It might be useful to consider this as a purposeful depletion of the meaning of matter, rather than a natural origin story in which matter begins as mute, base and void. If this is the case, then it is not matter itself that starts as lacking significance but human beings who strip matter of value or significance for or in itself. This stripping of meaning from matter is attributed to the project of scientific rationalism, the point at which the various disciplines of human knowledge abandoned notions of the existence of an immanent demiurge, animistic spiritual beliefs, or the *anima-mundi*, and restructured belief systems around the experimental understandings into mechanical processes of the organic world.<sup>14</sup>

That the world is the substrate or foundation for any more abstract thought rather than the other way around (where thought or *nous* brings the world into being) is also the basis for the supremacy of human meaning attribution. Even according to phenomenology (whose name derives from the things that appear) we experience objects only insofar as they mean something to us. This is the case both nominally or metaphorically and actually. For example, Aristotle's *physics* preceded his *metaphysics*, the stoics could be found in the marbled stoa earning a name for themselves, and even the peripatetics had to walk upon something in order for their name to get around.

## Graphic Slips of the Tongue

Letters might not be as effective at persuading as stones are, but they can open up a correspondence between deeds and words in their indeterminable (a-rist) aspect of non-appropriation. The consubstantiality of letter and stone follows the path of writing crooked and straight (γραφῆων ὁδὸς εὐθεῖα καὶ σκολιή), leading on the one hand to the play of absence and presence, but on the other to the interminable preoccupation with intercourse and copulation.<sup>15</sup>

The earliest extant *horoi* have been dated to the second half of the sixth century BC, and the archaic boundary-stones of the *agora* (which

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14 Merchant (1990) 99f.

15 DK 59: 75. In keeping with the theme, there are variations in spellings here.

read 'I am the boundary of the *agora*') are believed to have been inscribed around 500 BC, while inscribed gravestones in Athens recede further back into the seventh century (though those inscribed with the *HOPOS* are conservatively dated to the fifth century).<sup>16</sup> If we accept these rough dates we must also accept with a certain irony the fact that the *horos* of the agora, copulation and all, is among the earlier extant examples in the archaeological records of this stone (fifty years at the very most separates it from its predecessors). It is significant that attempts to date the earliest *horoi* upon archaeological evidence alone would suggest their coincidence with the foundation of the sixth-century archaic *polis*, with the period of the rise of the *agora* and the institutions that mark the beginnings of civic, political life in Athens. And yet, and this is unique, the literature suggests a considerably older heritage, intimated by references in the Homeric epics, as well as the important (if perplexing) role the *horos* plays in the poems and reforms of Solon, as we have received them from Aristotle (pseudo or not).

So, we face a curious problem. Our texts point to a prehistory of stone that the material evidence fails to support. It is more than a mere matter of precedence—the controversial relation between what is written and what is spoken—because here it would appear that the word, or the name of the stone, is older than the stone itself. But surely that is not possible. It is as if this early terminological identification between the stone and its various meanings (mark, limit, term and so forth) ridiculed the notions of precedence assumed in the school of archaeology, by inverting the *archē* and the *logos*. In order to excuse this lapse, of word before matter, the archaeologist may attribute these inconsistencies to the restrictions and limitations placed upon the epigraphist who is compelled to read script as a secondary writing upon stone.

The predisposition towards script can be observed in the self-evident distinction between the sculpted lumps of stone destined for museums and those inconsequent remainders dispersed among the weeds. How do archaeologists choose which stones are endowed with archaeological significance and which are discredited as meaningless matter? Obviously, the role the stones played in human society and culture provides the dividing line here for what is considered 'of archaeological interest' and what is not. But even here the lines are not so clear, since archaeologists

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16 Lalonde (1991) 5–7.

are predominantly employed in the digging up of ancient rubbish heaps, the site dedicated to the remains of matter no longer invested with the significance of use. Matter itself and stones in particular are constantly enduring the recycling reconfigurations of social and cultural significance written upon their surface or implied in their disposal. From a paleontological perspective, of course, such differences break down and reconfigure into a different set of priorities attributed to the hierarchy of stone, but more on that in Chapter Five.

The pre-inscriptional *horoi* that are presumed to have sufficed in pre-literate times are necessarily speculative, as uninscribed stone cannot indubitably verify its name as *horos* to the epigraphist, even given the significance suggested by its position. The fact that ΗΟΡΟΣ was inscribed on waist-high pillars, wall blocks and even cut into natural rock façades would suggest that in pre-literate times more or less any rock surface could have sufficed as a *horos*. One such early rupestral *horos* of Zeus on the Hill of the Nymphs is easily missed and stepped over, carved as it is into the surface of a horizontal rock face.<sup>17</sup> If the words ΗΟΡΟΣ ΔΙΟΣ [retrograde] were not inscribed, it would be unrecognisable as a boundary of any kind. To our eyes this *horos* would be indistinguishable from stone: just another rock. But was this the case for its archaic observer? Does the word itself, '*horos*,' and therefore also the boundary it comprises, refer to its inscription, or did it inhere within the stone? Are boundaries found in language or presupposed in nature? What did the ancients themselves take the word *horos* to mean?

In order to address this problem, I will break the *horos* down into its respective parts: its multiple meanings and translations, its various archaeological remains, its textual examples and the letters themselves that constitute the inscription. The prehistory of the *horos* poses a particular difficulty to the epigraphist in identifying a stone *horos* in the absence of this inscription. As Lalonde suggests:

The history of *horoi* in Athens, as in all of Greece, probably goes back before literate times, but the evidence for pre-inscriptional stones is slight and speculative; we might posit their use on the analogy of a variety of uninscribed natural and artificial boundary markers of the Classical and Hellenistic periods.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Lalonde (2006).

18 Lalonde (1991)

And a note from Finley:

The available evidence indicates that these *horoi* [meaning those later used as hypothecation markers], unlike the boundary-stones, were always inscribed; in fact, their very reason for existence would have been nullified by the absence of an inscription.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, both these statements indicate how the archaeological record cannot help but favour writing and the inscription over an implied act of reading. Both studies also intimate the probability that preclassical boundary-stones were not inscribed with the word *horos*. What is analogous about these arguments is an *argumentum ex silentio*, an archaeological proof of the symbolic invocation of reading—‘I cannot say it because I cannot read it, but I say it anyway.’ Speech from silence is the condition of speech as such; speech always issues out of silence. As Lacan notes in reference to St Augustine’s *De locutionis significatione*, just as the words uttered by God in *Genesis* create *ex nihilo*, so speech is a ‘symbolic invocation’ that creates ‘a new order of being in the relations between men.’<sup>20</sup>

Thus the stone speaks in the absence of script; the archaeologists hear the silence as proof for what they do not see before them, all those uninscribed *horoi*. The stone speaks to us *ex silentio*. In this, the *horos* is analogous with any other stone; it is *ana-logos*, *logos* drawn out of stone. Is this a kind of speech that is engraved upon the land and given to us aesthetically, not purely image but read nonetheless? One dictionary suggests the Indo-European root for *horos* is \*ueru- ‘draw,’ \*uoru-o-, with a further connection in Greek to ἐρύω, also ‘to draw.’<sup>21</sup> But it also bears a close resemblance to seeing (ὄρω ‘to look, see,’ hence the Homeric form οὐρός, meaning ‘watcher’), a theoretical origin which obviously should not be overlooked. In this case, the verbal action of the *horos* is drawn from speculation and said to precede any later attempts at definition (ὀρίζω). The *horos* is from the beginning a theoretical task that begins on the boundary and marks its path into the historical era as the term of the market.

There is also the possibility that the *horos* emerged along with its near neighbour ‘mountain,’ ‘mountain range’ (ὄρος) a natural boundary

19 Finley (1952) 197, n.13.

20 Lacan (1991) 239.

21 Beeks (2010) ὄρος.

par excellence, distinct from the *horos* on account of the oxytone on the first syllable rather than the last and lacking aspiration. It could also be distantly related to the more than verbal arousal, ὄρνυμι, ‘to stir-up, excite, make to arise,’ and would explain the habit of intervening within the texts at the most critical times. Nearby there is also the watery ὄρος, the ‘whey’ or because like engenders like, σπερματικός ὄρος, ‘seminal fluid.’ And yet my personal favourite is that *horos* is linked in some kind of devious way to the verb οὐρέω, ‘to urinate,’ drawing up the boundaries according to dogs, wild beasts and camping logic.<sup>22</sup> There is definitely a sort of libidinal coincidence of opposites inherent to these etymologies, whether originating from a protuberance or cleft the *horos* is indicative of a deeper penetration of stone than normally allowed in our frigid metaphysics. At least we can recognise that there is a bulging, autopoietic sense of boundary-creation, or something divisive, common to these etymologies. The *horos* need not proliferate or multiply since it is itself the same, amphibolous name given to division itself: ‘one *horos*’ suffices (εἷς ὄρος).<sup>23</sup>

The Liddell and Scott lexicon places the potential ambiguity of the word in parenthesis when it defines the *horos* as a ‘pillar (whether inscribed or not...).’<sup>24</sup> The parenthetical equivocation is presumably the result of a lexical comparison between the different manuscripts of Harpocration’s lexicon. Harpocration’s lexicon and the much later tenth-century AD lexical compilation, of the Suida, provide a similar definition for the word *horos*.

Ὅρος· οὕτως ἐκάλουν οἱ Ἀττικοὶ τὰ ἐπόντα ταῖς ὑποκειμέναις οἰκίαις καὶ χωρίοις γράμματα, ἃ ἐδήλουν, ὅτι ὑπόκεινται δανειστῇ.<sup>25</sup>

Horos: thus the Athenians called the letters set upon pledged households and lands, which showed that they were subject to a loan.

The text refers to the fourth-century BC usage of the *horoi* where they were placed upon properties to indicate fiscal encumbrance, a mortgage

22 Cf. *ibid.*

23 Thuc.4.92.4. I agree with Fine’s objection to Wade-Gery’s interpretation of this passage as providing an earlier reference to a mortgage stone, this is clearly the outer boundary-stone of a region. Fine (1951) 50–51. n.40.

24 LS: 1256 (II.b).

25 See entries for ὄρος in Suid. (1854) 786; Suid. (1705) Vol 2. 716 (with Latin translation). and Harp. (1833) 139; Harp. (1853) 266.



of sorts.<sup>26</sup> I've translated *grammata* as 'letters' to try to maintain the proximity to the written word, though the sense here is probably more like a 'deed,' as something that has been drawn up, or draws an outline, like a 'title deed.'<sup>27</sup> The alternate Harpocraton manuscripts differ only slightly from the above definition but in an important way. For where this entry states that the Athenians drew letters 'upon the land,' the Harpocraton manuscripts offer the alternative reading 'without letters.'<sup>28</sup> The *χωρίους γράμματα* (letters upon the land) is replaced in the A manuscript with *χωρίς γράμμα*, in the BC manuscript with *χωρίς γραμμάτων*, and with *χωρίς γράμματος* in the Aldine—all meaning 'without letters,' the 'letter' varying in case or number.<sup>29</sup> These readings have been rejected by the editor Dindorf, as by Bekker, as a corruption in favour of that of the *χωρίους γράμματα*. And, judging by an earlier entry in the same work (*ἄστικτον χωρίον*, 'unmortgaged land') it would appear that the editor's addendum is accurate, for here we read *ὅταν γὰρ ὑποκέηται, εἶθων ὁ δανείσας αὐτὸ τοῦτο δηλοῦν διὰ γραμμάτων ἐπόντων τῷ χωρίῳ*, which is to say that the lender shows that a piece of land is pledged by means of letters set upon the land, with no mention of the *horos*.<sup>30</sup> Considering this coincidence of writing and speech, the *horos* is from the first a theoretical problem, the conjuncture of what is seen and heard as the initial margin of a similarity that is not primarily given to the senses, though it does not, for all that, cease to be represented aesthetically.

The difference is more than just a letter, though it is nothing less than a letter; it comes to provide a definition in which letters are themselves made absent or at least insignificant and even unnecessary, and the stone absorbs whatever remains in the absence of signification. As the Liddell and Scott lexicon states, the stone itself means *horos* 'with or without letters,' but does it mean this only because of a typographical error? Either way, there is a lack of letters, or a lapse of letters, whether in the text of Harpocraton, in the Liddell and Scott, or on the stone itself

26 See Finley (1952).

27 The translation offered by Portus confirms this: *Attici vocabant libellos, vel titulos, cedibus & agris oppigneratis affixos, qui significabant, ea creditoribus obligata esse*. Suid (1705) Vol 2. 716.

28 Harp. (1833) 139; Harp. (1853) 226.

29 Harp. (1853) 226.

30 Harp. (1853) 62. Also in Harp. (1833) 38 (with typographical variations/errors).

that does not need to be inscribed in order to say that it is *horos*. With or without letters, it reads *horos*.

Obviously, the interpretation of *horos* as being synonymous with 'letters' is also not without its difficulties. But, as Moses Finley notes in his study, it is 'more than probable that the two words [that is, *grammata* and *horos*] were here conceived as synonyms.'<sup>31</sup> What is common, then, is spelled out clearly in Aristotle's definition of the synonym:

συνώνυμα γὰρ ὧν εἷς ὁ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος· ὥστ' οὐδενὸς τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦνομα ὁ ἀποδοθεὶς ὄρος, εἰ δὴ ὁμοίως ἐπὶ πᾶν τὸ ὁμώνυμον ἐφαρμόττει.<sup>32</sup>

Things are synonyms when there is a single description (*logos*) that corresponds to the name, so that the defined term (*horos*) is in no way different to these except in name, but is similarly joined to every homonym.

Aristotle introduces the notion of the 'homonym,' making it explicit that definition exists as overlapping boundaries between words. Definitions are paramount in conceptualising language as something more than merely conceptual; language begins to look like an interwoven structure rather than a list of discreet words. *Horos* is the definitory boundary or margin of definition that borders on every term. The *horos* is always there as the joint between the words' differences, and is what is likewise shared or similar, uniting them in a proximity despite nominal differences. *Horos* is there in the interstices as the name of this entire operation. In place of the name '*horos*,' then, one might also say letters, the common 'element' between words, on this at least the lexicographers are in agreement.<sup>33</sup>

'Drawing,' 'writing' or 'letters' are synonyms for the word *horos*. Unfortunately, the references to this 'drawing' upon the land deal exclusively with the later fourth-century *horoi* that undoubtedly have to do with actions taken by men to 'mark' encumbrance of a mortgage of some sort. It is pure speculation, but it is possible that the same language was used to talk about the earlier boundary-stones. If so, what did that earlier, earthly writing mean? Did it have to do with possession

31 Finley (1952) 199, n.22.

32 *Ar.Top.*148a25.

33 Except for Bekker (1814) 285.

and appropriation, with ownership or indebtedness as the later ones? Or were the boundary-stones implicated in 'natural' boundaries, in marking places given over to particular use, such as water holes, fertile land, easy passages between difficult terrain, or linguistic boundaries between tribes?

According to the precedence of speech over writing, it could be said that these stones are the supplement of the speech of the earth.<sup>34</sup> They are the sign of what the earth already signifies. But does the earth speak before it writes? Surely geo-forces take precedent here, and we read them and interpret them to mean something for us; that is what we call geology, geography, climatology and so forth. If, like the first pictograms, images replace sounds, what does the placement of stones upon the land reimagine or represent? Has there not been a prejudice towards literalism in always representing pictograms and ideograms as the first forms of writing, when, on the contrary the letter was never supposed to be taken literally? Writing is taken as a response from outside, a comment framed or outlined upon or against a natural surface, as if humans required a sense of their distinction and separation from the natural organic world, the self-consciousness of differentiation from the nonhuman, in order to 'represent' what they saw filtered through this consciousness. But it could just as easily be a trace that emerges from within. Is there anything more than an intellectual, even pedantic distinction between human script and the mark the dog leaves on the tree so that another dog can sniff it and thereby read into this scent the absent presence of the former dog? What if the traces of writing were read, sensible to begin with, though not necessarily intelligible?

There is a fracture within writing, according to Derrida, on account of the deferral of meaning within the sign that is always pointing somewhere else. There is therefore a spatial difference, but there is also a temporal difference, where writing defers to the meaning that it will be given when it is read in the future. This split within the text means that meaning is always absent, and no particular meaning can ever be definitively present. This slippage between difference and deferral gives rise to Derrida's coinage of the word *différance*, where sound remains one while meaning differs because of the mute phonetic play of a single letter. *Horos*, pronounced in modern Greek *oros* (and written without the

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34 Derrida (2016) 305–306.

aspiration), might not be dissimilar. The letter itself, the archaic trace of an unknown phoneme, plays on the absence and presence of this sound (H) which might have ceased to be there by then, though exactly when 'then' is remains a question.

In any case the *horos* was written with an *H*. This letter remains as a trace of referral or deferral, both spatially and temporally, in the very least because we cannot say what it was originally supposed to mean or why it was kept even when its meaning had changed. That is to say that how the *horos* was supposed to be read as a spoken word remains a mystery, literally unspoken, locked up within stone. Perhaps it is along these lines that we can explain why Derrida disagrees with Lacan's articulation that 'the letter always arrives at its destination.'<sup>35</sup> For Derrida the destination is beside the point, as writing must function in the absence of the meaning-giving addressee of the text. For a letter to arrive it must have been sent. However, the origin of letters remains one of the great mysteries of human culture.

Lacan and Derrida both have innovative ways of escaping the limits of these atemporal boundaries. For Lacan it is to be found in the (literal) procedure or function of the unconscious, which, as Bruce Fink puts it, is 'composed of "letters" working, as they do, in an autonomous, automatic way, which preserves in the present what has affected it in the past.'<sup>36</sup> Or, as Lacan says himself, 'letters *make up* assemblages; not simply designating them, they *are* assemblages, they are to be taken as functioning as assemblages themselves,' and a little later, 'the unconscious is structured like the assemblages in question in set theory, which are like letters.'<sup>37</sup> These material elements have the capacity to break down and reform, where the act of reading meaning into them is never orchestrated fully by chance.

The letter's tendency toward dissolution and reformation marks it out as an element, or as Derrida will say a 'trace' of a structure that is not wholly described by the dichotomy of presence and absence. The letter returns from the past and interrupts, or erupts into, the present, even when its presence merely indicates absence. For Derrida the letter is the trace that always breaks into any predetermined project of

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35 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' in Lacan (2006) 30.

36 Bruce Fink, 'The Nature of Unconscious Thought or Why No One Ever Reads Lacan's Postface to the "Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"'," in Feldstein (1996) 183.

37 Lacan (1988) 47-48.

archaeology which claims to escape the aporetic task of philosophy, and ascend to the heights of absolute presence: 'Such a *différance* would at once, again, give us to think a writing without presence and without absence, without history, without cause, without *archia*, without *telos*, a writing that absolutely upsets all dialectics, all theology, all teleology, all ontology.'<sup>38</sup>

Language is the structure into which every individual enters, but the role of writing is generally given in second place, just as in the case of the epigraphists, who read writing as a secondary script upon stone. Speech is obviously the main stage for psychoanalytic practice, its instrument, its material and framework. According to Lacan simile is paramount, so the unconscious is structured like a language; it is the place where signifiers loom large and generate the symbolic order. However, underneath, underpinning the symbolic order, sometimes undermining it, is the real. The real is the void of meaning and can never truly be known. It can only ever be mediated by the imaginary or the symbolic. The letter, for Lacan, is found here. The letter is part of the material substrate that buttresses the symbolic order. 'By "letter" I designate that material support that concrete discourse borrows from language.'<sup>39</sup> The letter therefore is always already there, in a peculiar way, found and brought up into the signifying chain. In Lacan's words the letter is 'the essentially localised structure of the signifier,' a component part or element that only gains meaning by being hauled out from the depths and forced into collusion with other letters.<sup>40</sup> Because the possibilities are endless the assemblages that are created are all the more indicative of the state of mind of the speaker, the author of (mis)meaning.

Derrida drew attention to the possibility that letters could be independent from speech in an entirely different way. For him writing does not function merely as a mnemonic device, it is not secondary to phonetic language. Rather, it belongs to the same world as that of objects. The letter is a thing without an inherent meaning attributed to it by the human imaginary. A scientific mind might say that it is therefore dead, an initiate into the mysteries might say that it is therefore full of the mystic depth of being, or something like that. For

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38 'Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time' in Derrida (1982) 67.

39 Lacan (2006) 413.

40 Ibid. 418.



a poet the letter is the raw material to be worked into song, just as stone is to the sculptor.

So, what is the difference between a stone and a letter? Both provide the basic structure of our world, and both support a living structure, into which we are born and grow. How different are they, then, if meaning and mattering are intra-active processes? Lacan asks whether 'the spirit could live without the letter. The spirit's pretensions would nevertheless remain indisputable if the letter hadn't proven that it produces all its truth effects in man without the spirit having to intervene at all.'<sup>41</sup>

Is it a coincidence, an accident, that the stone retains the outdated form of the letter? Or is this immaterial? Perhaps for the letter as such but for the term? Are not these terminal or temporal limits themselves the material boundary against which any system of definition comes? The letter's materiality is in the *horos*, the 'term, boundary, definition, stone, and landmark' etcetera. And yet surely the letter must precede all these definitions, not merely to give them form but even as the potential of reconstituting the similarity and difference of terms? The letters that compose the word, insofar as they draw up the boundaries, must also precede the determination of the stone as *horos*. This is the letter's bondage, not that it requires a master in order to convince the master that it is in fact the letter who reigns. The letter adheres to the term as closely as the gadfly to Socrates, and its protean pestering (or posturing) results in a different death each time. Pulling away from the term, it will reappear to reconstitute and be reconstituted in another term—the bondage of the letter is thus the *horos*.

That the *horos* is letters, with or without the inscription, suggests a regime where that which is already written in stone is more or less the material support of language, but where the difference between this more and less, the with or without, is the literal ground for the possibility of even the most miniscule differences in determination and terminology (hence the Socratic work takes place between these contraries). In order to express this difference is it necessary to coin a new term by changing an *e* to a little *a*? Perhaps it is dangerous and certainly acquisitive to thereby coin a new term (*différance*) and open a new market in the interstices of the text, at the risk of objectifying even fetishising something that has always been there. This name-giving also

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41 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud' in Lacan (2006) 423–424.

gives the impression that one can claim a title to the trace that lingers throughout the history of philosophy, that one can give a name, inscribe one's mark on exactly that point at issue that always evades designation and determination. But this is exactly the mark of ownership that the *horos* proscribes by not even needing a letter to be read.

The stone cannot be left out since the base materiality of the *horos* acts as a dampening force amongst these spirited notions. For the stone is the *horos*, marked upon the land. The Athenians may well have called words and letters *horos*, but it is the stone that they read whether or not it could be said to boast inscription. The name *horos* belongs to the stone; its mark is inscribed upon it. It supports these marks and gives them (and) its identity thereby. The stone is recognisable because it tells us its name, it reads *horos*, and we may presume did so with or without the written word, the inscribed letters.

## Fantatising the Letter

The origins of script are often given as a tool or a material support for human economic activity—that humans first wrote pictographs to begin with in order to represent material objects, to satisfy a need prompted by economic concerns.<sup>42</sup> The Indus-valley glyphs are supposed to be economic devices, the pictographs of Sumer designate quantities for exchange purposes, the logosyllabic script of the Maya primarily records events of the elite, the hieroglyphs are mnemonic devices for the rituals of the priestly caste. Other signs such as those on Greek pottery were supposed to have developed in order to represent ownership or authorship, while the incision of letters, *boustrophedon*, evolved from agriculture and from the most economic method of ploughing furrows.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly enough, these ideas about the origins of script tend to support the dominant economic and political systems, suggesting the development toward an elite-governed society structured around private ownership and an exchange-based economy.<sup>44</sup>

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42 As Powell observed: 'The undoubted economic character of the protocuneiform tablets has coloured general histories of writing, suggesting that all writing has appeared in response to economic behaviour.' Powell (2009) 63. For the expanded economic theory, see Schmandt-Besserat (1992).

43 Derrida (2006) 313.

44 Gelb's language is itself an interesting case study. It is not coincidental that when describing the superiority of phonetic writing, many other assumed superiorities

The ancient cultures themselves had very different ideas about the origins of their scripts. For the most part they tell us clearly that writing came from the gods.<sup>45</sup> In Egypt, before Thoth, Seshat was the goddess who created writing, her name literally means 'scrivener,' so too does the name of the Northern African god 'Al Kutba.' The Sumerian goddess Nisaba was a goddess of writing and scribe of the gods, as was the ancient Mesopotamian Nuba and the Hindu god Chitragupta. In Celtic mythology the Ogham alphabet is attributed alternately to a Scythian king after the fall of Babel or to Ogma who used trees for letters and named the alphabet after himself. Perhaps the most impressive of all these is the story of Odin, who hung himself from the cosmic tree Yggdrasil for nine nights in order to obtain knowledge of the sacred runes. Meanwhile, in Japan, the deity Tenjin lost his former association with natural disasters (untimely) to become the god of calligraphy and scholarship. There are, no doubt, many more examples of scrivener gods amongst other less documented cultures. The monotheistic religions may have departed from the divine scrivener, putting writing into the hands of prophets. Nonetheless, Greek, Arabic and Biblical Hebrew all had mystical interpretations if not practices associated with their alphabets, much like the script of Easter Island and the runes. The actual act of writing as a practice seems to be the main point of interest here, rather than any oral tradition simply taken down in script.

Must we dismiss these origins as fantastic or fabulous and therefore inherently false? What kind of a phenomenon is writing? Did it develop as an economic tool in human hands, or was it created by some kind of transcendent deity? Or finally, was writing something that evolved 'naturally' to reflect our beliefs in our own 'naturally' evolved origins? That is to say, is writing the material proof of an autopoietic fantasy of deterministic evolution?

Given the presence of the origin of script in diverse cosmologies, what role does the letter play in the development of human cultures? If the earliest mythologies were based upon practices of prophecy or shamanism, the sole task of which was to read meaning into the

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sneak in; from his use of the masculine article, his exclusive use of masculine examples, to his talk of primitives and primitive writing. This understanding of writing cannot be separated from its specific socio-cultural framework. Gelb (1952) see for example page 13.

45 Gelb (1952).

natural world around them, then surely the very basis of metaphysical belief is that earthly content or natural text that offered itself to such determinative practices. Perhaps these problems are only discoverable within an ontology of script, an ontogrammatology.

The privileged position that phonetic alphabets have held is not only culturally specific and outdated but, given the former belief in the divine origin of writing, presumably also something along the lines of heresy. The disjuncture between what linguists have called writing and what philologists called writing can be said to have been broken apart entirely by Derrida when he pointed out that the non-phonetic variability within writing should be proof that there is no purely phonetic writing.<sup>46</sup> Writing admits within itself and cannot function properly without the inclusion of non-phonetic signs, such as silent letters, archaic spellings, punctuation, spacings.<sup>47</sup>

The difference between graphemes is a silent play, neither always present to sight (they elude the reader in the dark) nor to hearing (like the *e* in granite), but the play is essential to the maintenance of the structure of language. 'Here, therefore, we must let ourselves refer to an order that resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible.'<sup>48</sup> Do human beings create deontological structures in order to wrestle life from the world around them, reforming it and denuding it within the pages of their control in order to put it to use, and appropriate it for their own ends without suffering pangs of conscious? If this is the case it is not only matter that has been subjected to this process of denuding but everything beyond the human.

Does the death of matter or the non-living of matter coincide with what Derrida calls the 'dead letter' or the death of writing?

Writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death. It exhausts life. On the other hand, on the other face of the same proposition, writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing is venerated.<sup>49</sup>

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46 'Pictographs have no linguistic reference of any kind; they depict an event, or convey a message, by means of a series of drawings. Such a medium can hardly be called writing.' Hooker in Walker and Chadwick (1990) 6.

47 Derrida (1984) 5.

48 Ibid. 5.

49 Derrida (2006) 17.

Interpretations of the natural world as something to be read cast the earth as a book: the 'world is a manuscript' (Jaspers) and when we observe its phenomena we 'read in the great book of Nature' (Descartes).<sup>50</sup> The book of nature is the visible side of a deeper metaphor, 'which forces language to reside in the world, among the plants, the herbs, the stones, and the animals,' says Foucault.<sup>51</sup> The idea of the book of nature has given a privileged place to the notion of an 'original' writing, while human writing is posed as secondary. And yet the two are indissolubly linked. These ideas of the book of nature were formed in the sixteenth century, just as scientific rationalism was gaining ground within the academies of Europe. What was important in generating new forms of knowledge was the non-distinction between 'what was seen and what was read, or between observation and relation,' an identification that provided the basis for the scientific method.<sup>52</sup> This secondary writing served to implement the first as the basis for the laws of reason, of man and his dominance. First writing was associated immediately with the instigation of Law, whether as a product of a supreme demiurge, the hand of the Hebraic God or Scientific Man's laws of nature, the physical laws. These laws led to the unrestrained development of human technologies both of convenience and of death, which in turn led to the denuding of matter, the brutalising of matter, because behind matter were said to be laws, at once immutable and omniscient that governed whatever happened here below regardless of human actions, laws that could be understood only by human reason, and more specifically well-educated men inscribed in the institutions of power.

This first writing, the laws of the physical universe, was supposed to convey full-presence, fully legible in the world around us, indubitable and immutable, present to itself as subject. Of course modern physics, quantum physics, has proved that this was nothing more than a dream, a fantasy of clarity, control and unequivocal in a much more complex and involved universe. In fact the structure of the universe is much closer to what Derrida interpreted as the indefinite play of signs, where any sign is a representation of something else which is in its turn the representation of something else and so on ad infinitum: an assemblage

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50 Ibid. 16.

51 Foucault (2008) 39.

52 Ibid. 43.



beyond imagining. Addressing the same problem from the other direction, Barad explains that

Bohr's philosophy-physics (the two were inseparable for him) poses a radical challenge not only to Newtonian physics but also to Cartesian epistemology and its representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers, and things. Crucially, in a stunning reversal of his intellectual forefather's schema, Bohr rejects the atomistic metaphysics that takes "things" as ontologically basic entities. For Bohr, things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings. Bohr also calls into question the related Cartesian belief in the inherent distinction between subject and object, and knower and known.<sup>53</sup>

The traditional (non-magic) definition of the sign is that it is a substitute for a thing, and that this substitution is secondary to the sign's substitution for the sound that the sign refers to. It is a threefold substitution in which the original material is lost earlier down the path on the way to advanced linguistics. But what if matter itself was already a sign for something, that is not fully present in the first place? According to Plato the material world was merely the shadow play of the realm of ideas. Nonetheless, for Plato language is quite sufficient at expressing both realms equally. In contrast, the reality of Brahman (also *Tattva*, *Sat*, *Padārtha*, *Paramārtha*) in Indian philosophy is not receptive to discursive intellect or speech, and nor is it sensible.

Writing need not be limited to a grapheme with a linguistic reference and a series of drawings representing an event or conveying a message can still be classified as writing. Writing therefore does not need to be a privileged, progressive medium limited to certain types of societies and cultures, and instead any pictorial depiction that conveys ideas in one way or another can be considered writing. Obviously drawing in caves or writing in the sand is writing, but what about a snail trail or the squiggles of a woodworm? Both of these can be read to mean something, that my lettuces have been nibbled on, and that the shelf is no longer strong enough for the weight of books. But how far can this go? If nature writes, it has then to be asked if nature also makes plans. Is our fate to be a punctuation mark in the book of nature, a very recent, brief, exotically musical and surprisingly destructive mark at that?

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53 Barad (2003) 813.

Writing raises the question of the relation between human language and the environment in which this language is steeped. If there is no insensible realm of ideas from which human language devolves down to script, then the relationship must be the other way around, from the ground up. Observing a stone house Sallis reads into it the possibility of an inscribing that implicates the historical as well as the natural at play, evidence of the past marking its way into the present: 'If it is an old house, one will sense also in its worn stones the traces of an obscure lineage, a certain human history inscribed—without having been, in any active or intentional way, inscribed—on the stone. Nature and history—the opposition again violated, confounded.'<sup>54</sup> Is writing a kind of deep materialism, where letters themselves originate from an intimate connection to the objects that we share the world with? Is matter itself the origin of writing?

As Karen Barad states,

matter is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification, nor is it an uncontested ground for scientific, feminist, or Marxist theories. Matter is not immutable or passive. Nor is it a fixed support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse.<sup>55</sup>

*Horos* poses similar problems. The question, Does the stone mean *horos* in the absence of the inscription and in the absence of a reader? appears close to the breach intrinsic to writing. Again, if we take the *horos*, the typographical error of a letter is not even necessary because *horos* already is this non-identification between materiality and meaning, between sign and signifier. Is it identified as *horos* because it is inscribed with the letters, or is its identification found elsewhere, in the reader perhaps or some other earthly elsewhere? Despite itself, the *horos* does seem to be an unremitting example of arche-writing, in that it never is able to be identified with a single meaning or with itself as subject. The *horos* is never reducible down to its definition. There is always a slippage when it comes to definition, and yet the trace remains that cannot help but keep pointing to the gap within the definition. This gap is not however devoid of substance, it is stone and though its meaning is not present to it, it still matters.

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<sup>54</sup> Sallis (1994) 17.

<sup>55</sup> Barad (2003) 821.

Is matter a blank page upon which human actions are written? In a sense Karen Barad returns to the book of nature when she comes up against the matter of meaning for Derrida. The dynamism of matter, she states, is noncontemporaneous with itself, it is 'regenerative un/doing.'<sup>56</sup> In the same sense as Derrida states that there is nothing outside of the text; for Barad the absence in the heart of presence is a concretely textual matter because matter and how matter performs, reconfigures, and differs from itself is a work of deconstruction. Paraphrasing Bohr's concept of complementarity, Barad explains that the intimate relationship between discourse and materiality paralleled with the discovery of quantum discontinuity undermines the notion of 'an inherent fixed (apparatus-independent, Cartesian subject-object) distinction.'<sup>57</sup> Entities cannot be said to be individual actors interacting with one another, rather 'boundaries and properties of objects become determinate by virtue of a cut between observed and agencies of observation which is enacted by the material-discursive apparatus.'

Boundary-making practices, that is, discursive practices, are fully implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity through which phenomena come to matter. In other words, materiality is discursive (i.e., material phenomena are inseparable from the apparatuses of bodily production: matter emerges out of and includes as part of its being the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries), just as discursive practices are always already material (i.e., they are ongoing material (re)configurings of the world). Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to one another; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity. But nor are they reducible to one another. The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other.<sup>58</sup>

Barad calls into question the ground upon which are enacted the boundary-making practices that draw up the distinction between

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56 Barad (2010) 268 n.11.

57 Barad (2003) 818.

58 Ibid. 816.

humans and nonhumans. For Barad discursivity is not a capacity that can be said to belong exclusively to humans, for the very reason that both the content and form of discourse is generated in conversation with the nonhuman and material world. 'Human' refers to a phenomenon, another part of matter that shifts, becomes and reconfigures, and if the boundaries and properties that humans attribute, interpret and observe in the world, like magma, rise, crust, melt and reform along with what it means to be human 'then the notion of discursivity cannot be founded on an inherent distinction between humans and nonhumans.' Discursivity is implicated in matter. She calls this a 'posthumanist account of discursive practices.'<sup>59</sup> Barad therefore uses the verbal neologism 'mattering' to explain how matter and meaning become-determinate as well as indeterminate.<sup>60</sup> In other words mattering is the process of coming-to-meaning that takes place across the division of the human/nonhuman and the organic/inorganic. As Barad concludes when she addresses the problem of what or how matter means, 'Nature is not mute, and culture the articulate one. Nature writes, scribbles, experiments, calculates, thinks, breathes, and laughs.'<sup>61</sup>

This reference to nature as subject of script is placed in a footnote, strange given the significance that such a concept of nature must have. Here it could be said that Barad's image of nature writing, breathing and laughing, resolves her new materialism in the same place where Derrida began his critique:

The science of writing should therefore look for its object at the roots of scientificity. The history of writing should turn back toward the origin of historicity. A science of the possibility of science?<sup>62</sup>

It is interesting that contemporary theory in physics would take us back to the book of nature, as it were. However, this time the term 'nature' functions differently. It would seem to have become an all-inclusive term, crossing the boundaries generated by earlier versions of the 'book of nature,' bringing together the human and nonhuman, the organic/inorganic, but potentially also cosmos and chaos into the discursive processes of mattering. It is also a much more playful concept

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59 Ibid. 818

60 Barad (2010) 254.

61 Ibid. 268 n.11.

62 Derrida (2016) 30.

of nature, one in which chance probably plays a more significant role than any all-powerful deterministic divinity, while the old physical laws resemble the gods of animism.

The belief that writing began as an economic aid or tool apparently serves to strip human artistic endeavours, such as poetry and literature of an originary, fantastic ingenuity. Basically what it effects is the banalisation of practical activities. However, there is nothing to say that the practical activities of finding food, of noting water-courses (for example in Aboriginal dot paintings) or describing the aim of the hunt (cave paintings in Sulawsi, Chauvet) cannot also be the subject of enlightened artistic and literary exploits, possibly accompanied by song, but also remaining in place to be read at later times. However, it could also be argued that writing does not begin and end with us. Despite the ubiquity of our signature upon the land, the earth is not inhabited exclusively by *Homo sapiens*, and we ought to be able to read the presence of other beings on the land with as much respect as we do our own. What is the justification for an economy of the nonhuman as a resource that can be used without natural limits and how does the history and philosophy of script intersect with the economic precedence of humankind? Economy in this sense is the management, organisation and redistribution, and extortion of the nonhuman beyond a philosophy of interspecial care or sense of ethical or ecological boundaries.

Where does the idea that the world and the nonhuman are ownable and disposable come from? It is certainly not an idea common to all peoples of the world; in fact, animism generally obfuscates the possibility of outright ownership.<sup>63</sup> The polytheism of Greece did include the powerful idea of *hubris* and of not challenging or offending the gods with human (overweening) pride, and yet nonalienability of property was introduced into the Athenian city with little resistance, as far as we know. Ownership of land tends to go hand in hand with its use and abuse, unfortunately, as does the ownership of anything. Obviously, slaves were owned and disposed of in whatever way the master saw fit, as were animals, according to his dictates and his economic interests.

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example in the Australian setting, *Dark Emu* by Yuin writer Bruce Pascoe, who argues that non-ownership does not necessarily foreclose the activity of land management. In contrast see also *Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers? The Dark Emu Debate* by Sutton and Walshe, arguing for an archaeology that reinfuses native practices of land-management with spiritual propagation, magic and the Dreamtime.



In Ancient Greece we see the requisite conditions for subjecting the nonhuman to human economic interests, but how possible would this be without the mark of ownership, authorship or authenticity? And, is it possible to reconfigure writing in order to obfuscate the demand or desire to own?

## With or Without Letters

By the fourth century the term *horos* appears to be outdated and yet in continued use, this is what can be read into the appearance of the *eta* (H) that by this time had been dropped entirely. But on the fourth-century stones, is the inscription of the *horos* the remainder of a prehistorical letter? Here, the play of presence and absence, where the letter is read but not written and heard out of silence, has been capitalised upon (by Solon, the Athenians, epigraphists and archaeologists alike). The *horos* resembles, in time it comes to dissemble the capital 'H.' More or less than a letter, H is an aspiration.

A peculiar detail of the *horoi* is their retention, even into the Hellenistic era, of the archaic H (now known as the vowel-sound, lower-case η). The presence of the H where later literary texts substituted the sign for the *spiritus asper*—that is, the inverted apostrophe of a rough breath (´) suspended over the subsequent vowel sound—is a trope misleading to epigraphists who tend to use such forms as indications of proximate dating. The spelling of HOPOΣ with the sign H for the *spiritus asper* is potentially misleadingly archaic and, as epigraphists maintain, continued to be used in conventional formulae until the period of the archonship of Euklides, fourth century AD.<sup>64</sup> Later, when the H was no longer used as a separate letter to indicate a rough breath, but the long vowel sound 'e,' the original H was cut in half vertically, where the first half was used to indicate a rough breath, the latter the soft breath. Finally, the trace of the eta was retained only as two right angles, facing in opposite directions. These then resolved into the diacritical marks marking the smooth breathing, ψιλὸν πνεῦμα or *spīritus lenis*; and the rough breathing, δασὺ πνεῦμα or *spīritus asper*, or simply *dasia*.<sup>65</sup>

64 Roberts (1905) xiii.

65 Christidis (2001) 990.

In contrast, with the *horoi* the continued usage of the H makes assigning a certain *terminus ad* or *ante quem* with which to date the *horoi* particularly difficult. And yet, a *terminus post quem* is easier to confer, as the H on the *horoi* is the open H, not the closed h of the earlier script, which was in use in inscriptions for the years around 600 BC. Toward the end of this period, there are remains of inscribed vases (which are considered to be the forerunners of change on account of the ease of adopting the cursive script on pottery and the reduced size of the inscription) by the painter Sophilos where the H is still closed, in which case the open H of the *horoi* can be assigned a later date, such as late sixth, early fifth century.

It can be viewed as more than mere coincidence that our information for the time of the *horos* in the archaeological record is dependent upon the letter. The *terminus* for the *horos* is the *letter*. Here synonyms abound, reduced though they are to a mere terminological difference where what remains is *horos*. Translating this in any way cannot evade the *horos'* resistance to further identification. So, when we try to date the *horos*, to assign it temporal boundaries by breaking it down into distinct and separate letters, we find ourselves confronted once again by a literal boundary, *horos*. As Jeffrey states, the letter H,

ḥēt- seems to have been learnt originally by the Greeks as hēta = hé, the whole, both aspirate and following vowel, being a more vigorous sound than that of hé. In dialects which used the aspirate, i.e. those of the Greek mainland (except Elis and Arkadia), the Doric Pentapolis, the central and southern Aegean islands (except Crete), and which needed therefore to express it in their script, the initial sound, the aspirate, naturally predominated over the following vowel.<sup>66</sup>

How exactly this initial sound was to be pronounced or heard remains a mystery. We do know, however, that in the absence of the *spiritus asper* ( ' ) that is amongst those peoples who dropped the rough breath and pronounced (-)oros, with a *spiritus lenis* ( ' ), the texts produce alternate spellings with an additional letter, such as the Ionic οὔρος, the Megarian ὄρος, the lengthened Cretan ὠρος, not to mention the Corcyrean ὀρφοῖς / ὄρβοῖς, where the much older *waw* intercedes. It might be a case of substitution, where the absence of one letter calls for

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<sup>66</sup> Jeffrey (1990) 28.

the presence of another. It is an ambiguous tendency to lament a silence, juxtaposing the dead nature of the letter's character with writing as a temporal gesture. As a rule the letter is capitalised upon, the *horoi* are never in lowercase. What can be remarked in any case is that given its presence or absence, this capital letter in particular, H, serves to mark the linguistic boundaries of the Greek-speaking world. And yet in the *horos* inscription dated from the period of the Athenian expansion, the letter ceased to convey such differences because it remained out of time. Perhaps it is itself nothing but the trace that remains when such differences disintegrate.

Letters have an esoteric interpretation, though in the Greek context this is not nearly as evident as in the Hebraic or Arabic traditions. In *Magical Alphabets*, Pennick describes the esoteric significance of the Greek letter, H:

It is a character of balance, that quality of being in harmony with the world, being in the right place at the right time to achieve one's full potential. More specifically, as Eta this is manifested as the divine harmony of the seven planets and seven spheres of pre-Copernican cosmology. It can thus signify the music of the spheres. The Gnostic Marcus connected Eta with the third heaven: 'The first heaven sounds Alpha, and the one after that E (Epsilon), and the third Eta.'<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile reinforcing the appropriateness of its place in the word *horos*, in the Hebraic tradition the earlier Hebraic form of the letter *cheth* means 'fence' or 'hurdle.'

The fence is that which divides the inner from the outer. It is a barrier which serves an owner of something. It keeps those things in which the owner wants kept in, and keeps out those things which must be excluded. It is thus a letter of discrimination, the separation of things of worth from the worthless. Another related interpretation of Cheth is abundance and energy, the basic characteristics that separate the living from the dead. Esoterically, Cheth means 'distribution,' the primary function of energy. It has the number-equivalent of 8, Shemonah, fertility, and is connected astrologically with Libra.<sup>68</sup>


The advantage, as well as problem, with magic is that it is not easily subject to debate, but is a wily thing that slips beyond reason's grasp.

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<sup>67</sup> Pennick (1992) 51.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 17.

Nonetheless, that writing is something in human history that was more than mere tool is a notion that should not be dismissed and should inform our subsequent conceptions of what writing does within culture. The important point being that there are traditions in which form cannot be wholly separated from content, or put otherwise, that the matter of the letter does matter, and the letter itself carries meaning distinct from its presence within words.

The earliest Greek form of the letter h (ḥēt) is the ancestor to the earlier Phoenician word for fence, wall or barrier (ḥēt). This would depend upon the assumption that a letter develops out of an image attributed with a meaning, that is to say Saussure's process of linking (the bar) signified and signifier. But what if in these early letters it was just this that was proscribed by the letter, that is to say the bar itself (unified materially as the hyphen)? After all, H is a letter, not an image and not a concept. All the same, fighting against meaningful resemblance even on the most literal level would appear to be a lost battle. As Aristotle was quoted saying, a noun, name [*onoma*] or a verb on its own 'resembles meaning (or concept) without combination and disjunction' (ἔοικε τῷ συνθέσεως καὶ διαιρέσεως νοήματι)<sup>69</sup>. If the name of the letter resembles the meaning of a word which it forms as in this particular case, admittedly in conjunction with other letters, it might be a case of, as Walter Benjamin puts it, 'non-sensuous similarity.'<sup>70</sup> And this is how we can read the history of this particular letter. Originally placed on its side by the Phoenicians, the precursor to the Greek letter H, outlines a stark physical resemblance to this hurdle of similitude. The letter is said to have taken form as an 'image' which means 'fence' or 'barrier' . Three posts, two on the extremes and a middle one separating unfilled space, while the horizontal lines protrude implying indefinite extension.

Put otherwise, and linking us back to the Suida, the letter is like a boundary (barrier/bar/hyphen) while the name of the letter is boundary (especially when it comes to distinguishing one letter from another). And in this sense perhaps every letter is a boundary imposed between meaning and non-meaning, marking out a word as something that can not only be read but also understood.<sup>71</sup> Since we are concerned

<sup>69</sup> *Ar.Int.* 16a14.

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin (2005) 697.

<sup>71</sup> Derrida (1995) 94; Derrida (1981) 16.

with letters, which Lacan defines as the 'material support' of language, the base elements for any chain of signifiers, any resemblance that they evoke must be purely circumstantial (we must therefore remain with the boundary, even if this means verging upon the position, not on it, but nearby or 'around' it). That is to say that any mimetic aspect of the letter ought not be wholly ascribed to the letter as our device for expressing meaning but could be equally ascribed to us who read it as the fence or barrier that draws us up short. Since the whole is already implied in the (Saussurian) 'bar' that would claim to perform the meaning-giving function, of jointure and division, it should go without saying that neither the *horos* nor the letter are defined (fully) by their aesthetic appearance.

But that is not to say that they are not material, that they cannot be seen or heard. Whether or not the Athenians were familiar with this particular semantic association between form and content, there does remain in the term (*horos*) that sense of 'joining' (ἐφάρμοττει), *hinging*, of coming in between *two*, whether this obtains to the letter or its time. But it is the *horos* that claims this task, not the letter. In fact, if anything, the letter made upright and deprived of two of its rungs, insists more on a relation between two poles rather than their disjunction. As if, to get the bar and the closed concept of linguistics we need to employ all forms of the letter, and bring them to their conclusion, their logical fulfilment in the spiritual caesura of the breath. But if we were to accept this schema we would have to resolve ourselves to recognising a distinction between the *horos* and the stone, the *horos* and the letter, the term, the limit and the end, that is by abstracting the name as a mere variation of speech, the modulated out-blowing of spirit.

The *horos* simultaneously divides letters (meaning they can be taken out of order, of a particular word) and joins them as what is common (meaning they can be reconfigured to produce a new word). This is the principal function of the *horos*, where the boundary is a material concept whose intent is both to create a barrier and offer trespass. It can never be a full concept and can never be wholly abstracted since it remains material whether any particular letter (for example the H) is marked as presence or absence.

This letter, then, might in its first impulse suggest some kind of barrier, but could more effectually be transferred into the metaphor

of a linguistic portal. The letter defies the barrier; it always carries something over as what is left over from the past in the present. Is the problem raised by the letter seen better anywhere than in the institution more or less concurrent to the adoption and development of the Greek script, the *polis*? No doubt, the rapid proliferation of walls and fortifications and the corresponding need for doors, gates and passageways in the archaic *polis* (and their consequent protection in the form of property laws, immigration laws and so forth), coincide with the obsolescence in Ancient Greek of the closed form of the letter, and its lasting replacement with the open form (H). In the enclosed surrounds of the city and household walls, the blustery winds, along with the strange refuse carried upon the air, interrupting the clear categories of political allegiance (women, foreigners, gods and animals) could be momentarily shut out with the closure of a door and, with its opening, willingly admitted. Along the same lines, the aspiration came to lose its substance in the letter H, becoming a mere fixture or appendage that could be open (´) or shut (´). A door cannot afford a view or prospect, but it can give onto a hall or passageway, even an arcade. In the door the wall is brought to breaking point, where h or H is resolved into a moment of punctuation. A pause for breath. Everywhere, that is except in stone, HOPOS.

And not even that any more. For even those stones have been subjected to classification techniques and a total subjection to the development and progress of letters, replaced *in situ*, installed in museums, set up in gardens, rubbed for squeezes elaborated upon in books. For in the aspirations of capitalist economies there is no time for what is lost to the past, or rather the glimmer of what is lost is relegated to dim corners in the floodlight of progress and punctuality. Henceforth, punctuations and dead spacing must bow in service to the hastening urge to press on, where simple breathing spaces are wasted breaths. So, the aspiration that marked the elision itself was elided, and in its most recent transformation, in the contemporary linguistic state, in place of the letter there is now as an unmarked elision, a term with no connection to its material past: ὄρος, what was in the past a marked elision, is remarked by nothing more than a lapse.

And yet, there is no call for resuscitating an unpronounceable phoneme in a new guise, nor to move ever forward with the 'storm of

progress' excising any letter that no longer pays its due in speech.<sup>72</sup> But to have the time to recognise what is lost, even when this loss presents itself as a simple hiatus or caesura in the present, remains a marked possibility for thinking in an untimely way. A letter is more than just a sign, it is the briefest instant which stops our breath when we expire. The dead letter of the H, what we now cannot help but read as a capital or even as an entirely different letter from an entirely different language, succeeds 'cutting the breath short' as the 'principle of death and of difference,' where writing only presumes to interpolate itself from the beginning as the *aporia* that remains.<sup>73</sup> The point of the H is not to betray presence, to menace 'substantiality, that other metaphysical name of presence and of *ousia*.' The *horos* is not an inherently destructive force, not even a deconstructive one. On the other hand, what it is cannot be expounded by the dictates of identical reasoning.

Essentially, the *horos* is already drawn up in this outline of a letter. Any rhetorical exclamation (*apostrophē*) that would attempt to pronounce the letter would only come up against the apotropaic barrier of elision. Any claim to the possession of this letter has already been proscribed with the inverted possibility of an apostrophe (ὄρος). Always opening onto the other, exposed in quotation, the *horos* is the merest mark that distinguishes my word from yours, or brings into relief the bond of our communion, as Aristotle said 'the *horos* of life is breath' (τοῦ ζῆν ὄρον εἶναι τὴν ἀναπνοήν).<sup>74</sup> Is the *horos*, then, the door which can only be open or shut in its relations with other words or is it the switch in cybernetics that closes the circuit as it opens? When we read its inscription regardless of its form, the letter breaks open the barrier and maintains it, because the letter itself is exactly what is not represented in the image of a fence. Unlike the *horos* there is nothing aesthetic about the letter, certainly not, on principle, and yet that is not to say that it cannot be seen, heard or have its limits. You might not see the inscription in the dark, as 'the graphic difference itself vanishes into the night, cannot be sensed as a full term,' and the letter becomes illegible, indeed you might not even see the *horos*, but that does not mean you will not stub your toe against it.<sup>75</sup> So why have recourse to the other letter, to an alternate

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72 Benjamin thesis IX in, Löwy (2005) 62.

73 Derrida (2016) 27–28.

74 *Ar.Ath.*404a9.

75 Derrida (1997) 27–28.



*différance*, which would itself reinscribe difference into the sensible text? Why? Perhaps because even here, a limit, that is to say a 'term' (even one that claims to defer its fullness) is required as a marker. Even Derrida at his most de(*con*)structive wants to mark the site between speech and writing, to fill it, albeit with something that it is not.<sup>76</sup>

The question is, however, whether these limits are imposed upon the letter from without, or within? Perhaps it is the interminability of this question that is posed in the *horos*. For what is fence-like or like a barrier in the letter is, of course, the boundary itself, the word that draws up the limits of identity and resemblance, without however becoming a bar for the very reason that it is simultaneously composed of letters, and the name of the letter. The *horos* provides the necessary scene onto which the letter steps, and knocks out a passageway through which every word must pass in order to become a word.

Just as you cannot abstract the letter from the *horos* (or vice versa), nor can you eliminate transgression from a barrier—such rules are made to be broken. And it is the letter that brings it to breaking point, by always going two ways. The letter is always implicated in the *horos*, which, however, brings it to its limit in the word by drawing up the limits, in definition, between one word and another. This is because there must be limits, even in the various combinations of letters—otherwise the fraternisation that is facilitated by an open door would erase any difference between inside and outside, would suppose that those who constructed the barrier are one with those who suffer to resist it. The *horos* literally limits the possibility of fraternising with the enemy, while it supposes the necessity of breaking the clear determinations between enemy and friend in the symbolic infringement of barriers. Hence all those thrown stones—projectiles of insurgency—against a regime that would follow the law to the letter, but of course, in this case the letter and the spirit of the law are indifferent.

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76 'Différance,' in Derrida (1982) 5.