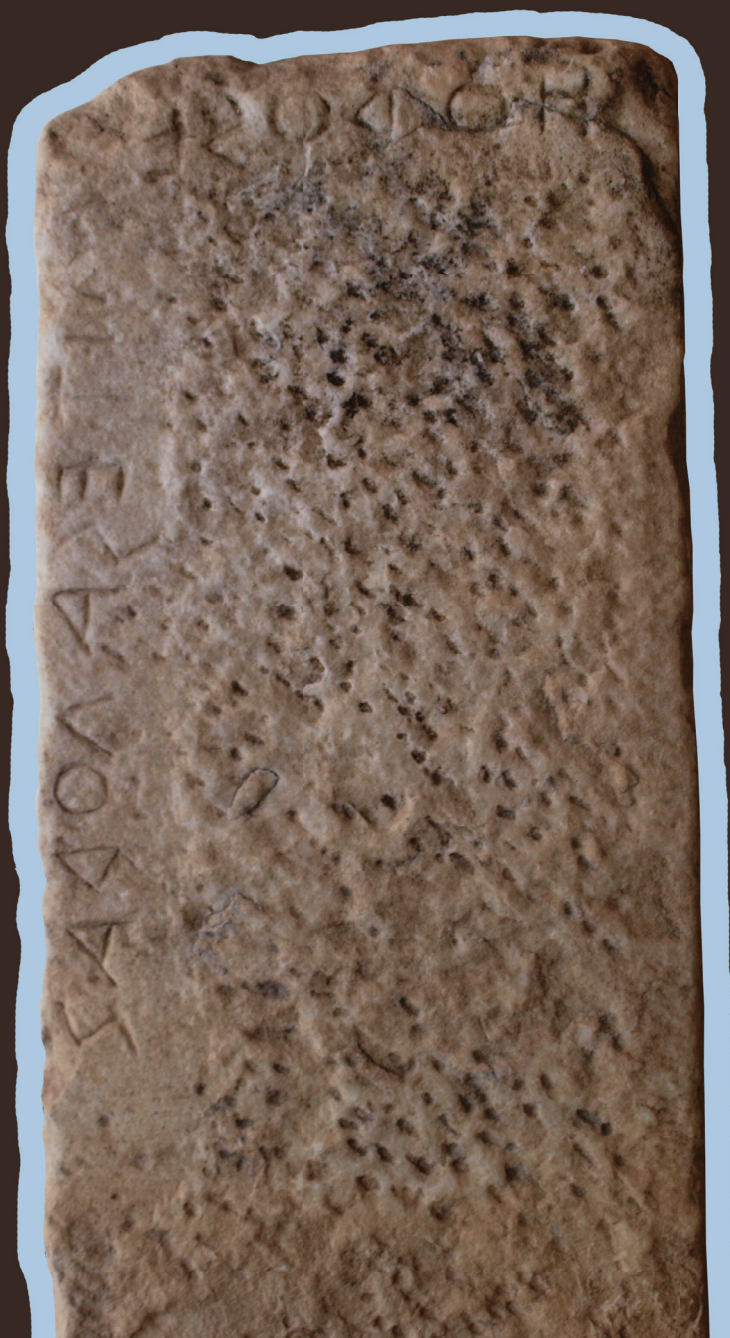


ANCIENT BOUNDARIES AND THE
ECOLOGY OF STONE

H O R O S



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POTTER



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Fig. 6. Gravestones. Photograph by M. Goutsourela, 2013. Rights belong to the Kerameikos Museum, Athens. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.R.E.D.).



Fig. 6a. HOPOΣ MNHMATOS, in Lalonde (1991) [I 7462].



Fig. 6b. HOPOΣ ΣΗΜΑΤΟΣ, in Lalonde (1991) [I 2528].

6. Geophilia Entombed or the Boundary of a Woman's Mind

ὁ ὄρος — metaph. [...] *the boundary* of a woman's mind, [...] *memorial stone or pillar*.¹

Were women marginalised in Ancient Greek society? Was this a norm for the archaic period as well as the Classical? Are there traces in the Greek corpus of a system of matriarchy belonging to the late Neolithic, Iron and Bronze Ages? Are later seventeenth- to nineteenth-century AD interpretations as much to blame for the tone of misogyny that dominates scholarship of the ancient world as they are responsible for manipulating the primary sources into reflecting their own beliefs, rather than clarifying the beliefs of the time? Given the filtration of our sources through the monotheisms of Islam and Christianity followed by the fundamentalist hegemony of the scientific revolution, can we even trust what we read in order to weave some kind of a web to trace us through the truth of what it meant to be a woman in the fledgling Greek *polis*? The intervention of masculine hegemony between then and now as affecting the way we read the city may also have had the effect of obliterating any original documents that may have enlightened us as to the thoughts, the lives and the preoccupations of women. Or, if intervening misogyny is not to blame, then what were women doing—were they sleeping, were they so engrossed with providing a genetic inheritance that they forgot to supply us with an intellectual one?

This chapter will not answer these questions. But that does not mean we must not ask, perched as we are upon the boundaries of Greek thought trying to follow through with all these *aporias*. The archaeology of the *horos* might be traced via the cultic and into the philosophy and

1 LS: 1255–1256.

economics of the Athenian *polis*, but it has to go through women in order to arrive there. One of the basic appearances of the *horos* is as a marker of graves, and as a swathe of texts from archaeological remains to tragic theatre make clear, this realm remained the monopoly of women. Whether a preoccupation with the realm of death was an act of subjugation or whether it reveals the significant power that women held over the existential reality of the society's population depends on how willing the reader is to find an alternative model of freedom to our highly politicised, biologically determined, publicly limited freedoms of today. Here I present a discussion of boundaries and attempt, through something like a game of Go, to place women in relation to these boundaries, on this side, on the other or anywhere in between.

We have already witnessed the possibility that the *horos* described a face-to-face relation, a divisive mark that demands the bonds of hospitality and transgression in friendship alone, where either side embraces the very limit they share, the otherness they have in common or the definition of being whose immediacy is interrupted only by the definition itself. Then again, we have seen *horos* erupt into the continuum of time, as both time's limit and definition and as 'what it was to be' (*to ti en einai*). In all of these, the spatiality of the *horos* is related to a transgression of boundaries and to what is past as what is no longer but nonetheless provides the substratum for being present.

This substratum or what underlies is the topic of this chapter. It might be the earth, or the place of the feminine, that provides the substrate for existence. But it also might be what is past, done, gone and buried. The past of the *horos*, whether it is dead and buried, implicated in those who laid the boundaries or continues to be read in museums today, raises the question of the authority of the mark. Is the *horos* a sign, an intermediary mark drawing up the definitions between subterranean powers and the active imagination of human beings? Where does the *horos* get the power to define and determine from? Is it in us who read or from the dead who placed the stones and drew up the boundaries, or is the power essential to stone itself, emitted from the depths of the earth? In Ancient Greek society how someone was buried was as much the realm of women as was childbirth. And if anyone can be said to have spoken up for what lies underneath, it was Antigone. But there's plenty of time before Antigone enters the stage. In the meantime, there's another boundary to consider.

The Female Boundary

The Liddell and Scott lexicon provides us with a metaphorical example of the use of the word *horos* said to mean 'the boundary of a woman's mind.' It is taken from Aeschylus's tragedy, the *Agamemnon*, which tells of the hero's bloody fate at the hands of his unfaithful wife Clytemnestra upon returning home after ten years from the victory over Troia. Spoken by the chorus of old men, and after condemning Clytemnestra's extramarital affair with Aegisthus, they discuss the possibility of news of the return of Agamemnon. Here I quote several stanzas with a typical translation to provide the context. I then follow with a brief criticism and alternative translation that dramatically changes the meaning of the word *horos* in this context, which should prove the lexicon's entry here as entirely mistaken.

ἐν γυναικὸς αἰχμᾷ πρέπει
 πρὸ τοῦ φανέντος χάριν ξυναινέσαι.—
 πιθανὸς ἄγαν ὁ θῆλυς ὄρος ἐπινέμεται
 ταχύπορος: ἀλλὰ ταχύμορον
 γυναικογήρυτον ὄλλυται κλέος.²

It seems that a woman in temper
 grants consent to what is pleasing before it is apparent.-
 Too easily persuaded, the woman's boundary [*horos*] is encroached upon
 swiftly, but swift-dying
 perishes rumour proclaimed by a woman.

This sexually conservative reading obfuscates the libidinal overtones of these lines and seems to require a special manoeuvre in the translation of *aichmai* as 'temper,' rather than 'spear.' Another singular appearance is the *gunaikogureton* (γυναικογήρυτον) implied to be connected with *guros*, circle, as in 'what goes around,' something, I suppose, like how rumour 'gets around.' But I suggest the implication is to the word *gorutos* (γωρῦτος), 'bow-case or quiver,' so the *gunaiko-gorutos*, would be the woman's quiver, the place where euphemistically speaking 'arrows' are put. Presumably a spear is in this case a particularly well-endowed 'arrow,' hence her easy persuadability. In this alternate reading, a woman gives consent to the pleasure of a spear, her easily persuaded

2 Aesch.Ag.483-487

boundary is broken, and the good name of her quiver dies. The 'female boundary' (*thēlys horos*) can then be interpreted as none other than the hymen. The subsequent lines play around the idea of a woman's consent, an interpretation that, if anything, is apt given the sexual basis of the tragedy and the old men's censure of Clytemnestra's sexual exploits.

And yet the lexicon described this instance as not only 'metaphorical' but also 'the boundary of a woman's mind.' It must be asked what a woman's mind has to do with it? And why is this particular meaning of the *horos* and this alone 'metaphorical'? All the other meanings suggested in the lexicon were unmediated identification but not this one. Woman yet again provides fertile ground for the exception of non-identity. No doubt this could be turned to her advantage. Nonetheless it is also interesting to note the shift towards the metaphorical the closer you get to the hymen.

There is another reference given by the lexicon for the same sense of the 'woman's boundary', again from Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. But this time it is Cassandra, and the boundaries are questionable; they are the boundaries of her prophetic method, the origin of which is posed in terms of possession by the chorus: πόθεν ὄρους ἔχεις θεσπεσίας ὁδοῦ /κακορρήμονας; 'Whence have you the *horoi* of the ill-omened prophetic way?'³ I have purposefully failed to provide a translation for *horos* as I think the ambiguity here is telling. Are these landmarks along the way to prophesy? Or is it the origin of the terms of the art that is being put into question? It is a question of method and knowledge as well as claiming possession (*horous echeis*). Cassandra, at this point, is literally possessed by her art. She is looking into the future at the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra, as well as her own murder. It must be said that these 'boundaries' are if anything excessively expansive, and not at all suited to the senses of 'boundary of a woman's mind.' On the one hand we have the *horos* as 'hymen,' on the other, as the terms along the prophetic way. Either way there is nothing to suggest the metaphorically limiting implication of the definition of the boundary of a woman's mind. Perhaps what we are dealing with, then, is not the boundary of the ancient woman's mind, but the boundary of the nineteenth-century male mind, that is, the mental barriers of sirs

3 Aesch.Ag.1154.

Liddell and Scott when it came to addressing women's subjectivity as the purveyor of truth, not to mention women's sexual parts.

That the 'female boundary' (*thēlys horos*) should be none other than the hymen certainly agrees with the significance the ancient city placed upon virginity and the passage from the semi-sacred role of the virgin to that of the married woman; and yet in Greek 'hymen' as membrane is linked to the uterus, the stomach lining. Hymen is the god of marriages, and variations of the word signify marriage and the marriage song, all dancing around while obscuring the whole point of the matter (which of course is never whole, nor a point). It was plausible for a male physician to argue that the physical membrane of the hymen did not even exist in women.⁴ But perhaps male ignorance about women's bodies was not so significant, given the segregation of the two realms of reproductive or domestic life and political or civic life. At least it may not have mattered until the political started to intrude into the private, subjecting both the woman and the household to a series of legal and religious interventions that focused upon limiting and controlling the sexual, as well as reproductive, activity of a young woman.

The obsessive compulsion to control women's sexuality and reproductive potential was strictly orchestrated within the institutional structures of the city-state. In her analysis of the role of rituals performed for the goddess Artemis, Cole suggests that state institutions introduced the presence of state boundaries into the lives of the people by mirroring biological boundaries in the transition from girlhood to womanhood. The goddess Artemis was often worshipped on geographical margins, close to territorial frontiers. 'The rites of young women at these sites marked important transitions in the female life-cycle, but signified more than the individual female's safe passage across a personal biological boundary. The community as a whole depended on ritual activities undertaken in border areas.'⁵ The festival calendar required that both girls and young women perform public ceremonies at remote sanctuaries, such as at Brauron. Cole argues that these dedications and rituals demonstrate 'the centrality of women's religious role and the crucial part played by their offerings in securing the well-being and survival of the *polis*,' while the 'sacred space on a border defined the limits of a city's territory

4 Keuls (1993) 143 and Merchant (1990) 161.

5 Susan Cole, 'Domesticating Artemis' in Blundell and Williamson (1998) 27.

and protected the transitional area that divided one community from another.⁶

The traditional claim is that sanctuaries were placed on boundaries 'as markers of territorial sovereignty'; however, I could venture another interpretation, given that many sanctuaries stretch back to the time preceding the institution of the *polis*, they may not have marked territorial boundaries at all, certainly not those of the city-state. Or if they did mark boundaries, maybe they did so in homage to the boundary itself, rather than as a mark of possession and dominance. Certainly, in the case of Artemis, the masculine dominance that inhered to the *polis* seems not only anachronistic but also antithetic to the older, more fearsome character of the goddess. That these sanctuaries and rituals were later adopted and reconfigured, as an apparatus beneficial to the propaganda of the *polis* should not be excluded. A reconstitution of the religious character of border zones in order to reinforce social and political dominance was certainly a possibility.

The idea that the security of the city's women mirrors that of the city's borders is a metaphor that could appear intrinsic to ancient political and religious thought. 'There was a recognisable correspondence between the vulnerability of a city's women and the vulnerability of a city's borders,' states Cole, where intrusion and violation on a border, especially one of ritual significance 'was a sign of ritual failure and indicated that the security of the *polis* was threatened by a war with its neighbours.'⁷ Not only was 'lack of respect for the boundaries of another community' expressed in myth by 'lack of respect for the integrity of its women,' but it was also used as the basis for justifying violent acts of retaliation between states.⁸ However, what if the metaphor worked the other way around? Rather than the sexual vulnerability of women representing the vulnerability of the state and therefore requiring the ritual activities of the women in order to secure the state, what if the vulnerability of borders was depicted in rituals of femininity in order to represent women as vulnerable and insecure? To pacify a potential enemy is a much surer tactic than simply disarming them.

If we consider the Artemis rituals from this inverted perspective, the situation as it stands becomes much more interesting. One example

6 Ibid.

7 Blundell and Williamson (1998) 28.

8 Ibid.

that became stock standard propaganda in the expansionist policy of imperial Athens was that of the Lemnian incursion at Brauron, which was then used as a significant part of the rationalisation for the violent Athenian attack on Lemnos as described by Herodotos.⁹ The claim that girls and young women (particularly virgins) were at risk during the festivals and rituals on borders supported a nexus of ideas featuring the masculine assertion for control and domination, over the territory and its borders, as well as over its women (regardless of social standing, girl, mother, slave, etc). An assault upon territorial boundaries (*horoi*) was akin to the violation of the woman, the breaking of her *horos*, and these two ideas were mythically connected and reinforced through ritual performance. The subsequent mythical parity between the 'female boundary' and state boundaries, between the sexual control of women and the security of the *polis* emphasised how an entire community could suffer from untoward sexual license amongst the female population of the city. In contemporary analysis, women are often attributed marginal roles in the Ancient Greek city, and while on the one hand that is absolutely true, there they are dancing on the boundary, it almost seems too obvious, like hiding it in the open. Their marginalisation (as is the case with most minorities) plays a central role in the preservation of the constitution of the state. In religious festivals and liturgies, women literally put their *horos* on the line in support of the state.

My question, then, is whether these women were willingly acting for the benefit of the *polis* or whether these activities were in some way coerced. Were women putting their sexuality on the line in order to consciously reinforce the dominant political and religious framework of the city, or was the control of their sexuality a method of limiting the rebellious force of a considerable part of the population? We know that there was a certain degree of resistance amongst women in the face of the polity of men: Both Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusai* and his *Lysistrata* paint an image of women who are anything but passive in the face of the claim to male dominance in the socio-political and economic sphere. The men go off to war, redirecting state and private funds into these exploits abroad, only to return carrying stolen arms and stolen, foreign broads in their arms. No wonder in Aristophanes' comedies, women are willing to go to great ends to change their economic and social conditions, not

9 Hdt.6.137–140.

to mention the great heroines of tragedy who revolt against the various systems of power they are trapped within. Clytemnestra murders her husband in retribution for what she sees as the criminal sacrifice of her daughter, Medea also responds murderously upon her male children when faced by the abandonment of Jason, Helen simply walks out of the institution of marriage, and Antigone in her refusal to accept 'the way things are' is far from alone in standing up and resisting the status quo. Elektra is in the minority as contributing to the founding myth of a judicial system that reinforces the status quo. Everybody else seems to revolt against it. Might these be representative, not of women as willing contributors to the dominant political power, but as active participants in ongoing social dissent?

In the *Republic*, Plato claims to bring women into the machinations of the state. He permits them to engage in the sphere that was, according to the actual Greek polity, exclusively male. Given mental proficiency and reproductive ability, he grants them equality in some measure to the guardians of his mythical constitution.¹⁰ Perhaps Socrates was aware of how dangerous a force women could be if they remained on the other side of politics. In Ancient Greece the other side is exactly where it is said that women were, the other side of the door, indoors where they belonged.

The household constituted the nonpublic sphere within which the female was subsumed and which therefore defined her. Because the good at which the household aimed was a lesser good than that which was the end of the *polis*, the wife-mother achieved only the limited goodness of the 'naturally ruled,' a goodness different in kind from that of the naturally ruling.¹¹

But that does not mean that the realm of the household was in itself lesser than the public realm. The word *economics* comes from household management, and we know, from the Homeric epics as from archaeology, that the household in the Bronze Age was the main productive and economic organisation, before cities developed and took over this role.¹² And if women were excluded from public life, they nonetheless

10 Elshtain (1993) 32.

11 Elshtain (1993) 45–46.

12 Austin and Vidal-Naquet (1980) 36–47.

remained essential, providing the preconditions upon which public life rests.

The assumption that participation in a particular form of representational government and free-market economics is the front door to social freedom and wholly constitutes public life is today so taken for granted that it actually starts to seem like inter-generational indoctrination. The question, however, should be whether social and political 'equality' within a system structured upon inequality is even desirable given the inherently corrupt constitution of the economy, politics, the law and the private sector. In any case, later legislation took Plato at his word and refigured the state such that it absorbs women within it, along with the requirement that women be subject to the laws, the economic system and the state's constitution even if that means performing roles as perniciously violent as those that were once directed against them. Meanwhile, the ability to even imagine any other form of organisation be that kinship, communitarian, communal or whatever, is becoming increasingly more difficult.

Is this absorption of women into the public realm, even if not entirely, what began to happen in the fifth century that changed the perception of women? For example, the earlier Bronze Age myth of the murder of Agamemnon is attributed to Aegisthus, while the classical *polis* put the weapon in the hands of his wife Clytemnestra. Why this shift in responsibility? Is this a demonisation and denigration of the woman who demands control within her household? Or is it a warning of what women do when they are unchecked and beyond the power of their husbands? That the role of women in myth elucidates the unconscious tensions, ambiguities and fears dominant in society seems obvious to us today.¹³ However, a further question poses itself, especially given observations of contemporary media and the distortions of stories and facts to maintain corporate interests: to what degree were the representations of women purposeful? Or, who was controlling the images, attitudes and opinions portrayed, if anyone? And, consequently, what was gained by the renovation and potential modification of ancient myths as they were staged within the democratic *polis*?

The Ancient Greek *polis* was not so naïve that it did not reconfigure the facts in order to represent the city and its actions to its own benefit,

13 Gould (1980) 55.

nor was it unwilling to manipulate public opinion in order to maintain the status quo, as the great demagogues Perikles and Alcibiades are testament. The funeral oration of Perikles is definitely a fine piece of political propaganda, not to mention Alcibiades justification of the Sicilian expedition.¹⁴ Another fine piece of propaganda may well have been the manipulation of the worship of Dionysus into a city cult and Artemis and girls' rituals celebrating the crossing over into womanhood into festivals securing state power. So, if these publicly sanctioned forms of speech, entertainment and ritual were performed in order to cover over an alternative world-view, what was that other perspective and why was it so threatening to the continuation of male hegemony?

I suggest (and this is merely suggestion, for the reasons outlined above concerning lack of evidence) that it was not only an attitude but an entire system of relations that threatened the behemoth of state authority, not necessarily exclusively matriarchal, though it certainly had room within for the generative power of birth and the degenerative power of death. In stark contrast to the civic representations of Artemis as protecting territorial borders, was Artemis as Mother Goddess, *Thesmophore*, goddess of childbirth and protector of the ancient laws or customs (*thesmoi*).¹⁵ The Mother Goddess is well accounted for in statuesque form from the Palaeolithic until the Iron Age and is linked with matriarchy or at least the worship of a fertility goddess or the 'great mother.'¹⁶ The problem is that although we have plenty of cultural artefacts that suggest that an overwhelming significance held to the mother goddess, any traces of this worship within the historical period are deeply contested and heavily overlaid with the values of later patriarchally organised, economically constituted societies (that is to say state centralised, non-household economics). That said Benigni does succeed in deploying a plethora of evidential finds, so that it seems that this worship is coming to air, despite the incongruence of present socio-economic conditions.¹⁷

14 Basically the entirety of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* and Herodotos' *Anabasis* can be read as state propaganda. The orators also generally engaged in some form of truth-twisting to the benefit of their cause, e.g., on the funding of martial affairs, the theoric fund and public versus private wealth, in Austin and Vidal-Naquet (1980) 340–358.

15 Detienne (1977) 79–81.

16 See Benigni (2013).

17 Ibid. 1–22.

The dominant cosmology of the classical era that has come down to us is one of mythical, cyclically patricidal, inherited power, where the feminine elements seem to feature only as the exceptions that prove the rule.¹⁸ That said, I do not doubt that mythological narratives had at least two sources of dispersal, and therefore there are at least two versions of the same myth, although there are normally many more. There was the dominant, authoritative narrative deployed by men in the service of political and social allegiances (for example, Telemachos's dismissal of his mother Penelope with the statement that 'myth is the province of men').¹⁹ But there were also the mythical cycles told by women, such as myths sung to pass the time while working, myths told to educate and entertain children and sing them to sleep, myths used to illustrate conversation during hours of leisure, bathing and dining, perhaps accounting for some of the less distributed versions of myth (such as that of Helen's duplicate following Paris to Troia, while the real Helen passed the war partying in Northern Africa).

The overwhelming presence of women in Greek myth should alert us to the fact that patriarchally dominant society never succeeded, if it ever aimed to do so, at obliterating the powerful position of women both in the family and in the community. Many women feature in the mythological canon of Greece, from the well-known goddesses of the first generations of the gods on into the Olympians (Aphrodite, Demeter, Hera, Athena, Artemis, etc.) and the lesser divinities as well as the plethora of nymphs and local deities, including a number of divine female collectives, (the Graces, the Muses, the Fates, the Pleiades). There was no lack of the female in the Greek mythological corpus. But there are also the mortal women famed for their misbehaviour or good behaviour, such as Clytemnestra, Helen, Hecuba, Medea and Penelope. Women from this class also extend over generations, such as Iphigeneia, Elektra, Hermione, Cassandra. For the most part they are from ruling families or that failing of the priestly caste (Chryseis, Briseis). As Blundell states, 'Royalty was one of the bits of traditional social baggage that Greek myth carried with it into the later ages.'²⁰ There are also the female monsters, whose purpose seems wholly to threaten and chastise

18 Ibid. 35.

19 *Hom.Od.*1.356–9

20 Blundell (1995) 17.

the little boys and girls into doing the right thing (Gorgons, Medusa, Sphinx, Furies: Erinyes/Eumenides). There are also plenty of examples of choruses of women within Greek theatre, where women *en masse* were not always represented straightforwardly either as victim or threat.

Symbolic associations of women, or the mythological female, put women on the side of the unbounded, men with the bounded, women with nature and reproduction, men with law and order. Although in the so-called *Pythagorean Table of Oppositions*, Aristotle aligns the unlimited, *apeiron* (ἄπειρον) with the feminine side, against limit (πέρας) on the masculine, we can certainly understand this opposition as having the opposite effect socially.²¹ As Anne Carson argues, the fact that women were considered to be unbounded is perhaps enough to implicate them in the maintenance of common, social boundaries.²² Zeitlin states that the 'boundaries of women's bodies are perceived as more fluid, more permeable, more open to affect and entry from outside, less easily controlled by intellectual and rational means,' and for this reason, as can be seen on stage, women were perceived within the *polis* as a physical and cultural instability.²³

That women were passive may also have been an idea promoted within the city, but it was certainly not apparent upon the city's stages or within the city's myths. An example featuring the culture hero Herakles, a woman's arts and the *horos* appears in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, where Herakles, drawing up the location, *horizei*, for altars and woodland sanctuaries, in the worship of Zeus (ἔνθα πατρώω Διὶ /βωμοὺς ὀρίζει τεμενίαν τε φυλλάδα) receives the poisoned garment from his wife Dianeira.²⁴ That this hero of masculine strength withstood the twelve labours, facing off beasts and monsters, only to die at the soft touch of cloth from the hands of a woman, is telling of the power that adhered to women in Greek society. That power might not be very pleasant, but it is there all the same. It is a power that threatens because it is unbounded, falling beyond the bounds of civic authority, identifying women with everything that men are not.

21 Ar.*Met.*986a24. In these dichotomies evil, *kakon*, is also on the side of women, exemplified by Pandora. See also Carson (2000) xxxiv.

22 Carson (2000) 153.

23 Zeitlin in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990) 65.

24 Soph.*Trach.*743.

The dichotomy aligning men with civilisation and women with nature that was so popular during the enlightenment may find its origin within the Greek *polis* and even continues today to be a favourite mythology both of those supporting the hegemony of certain political forms and those desiring a return to wildness and a unity with nature. As Blundell states:

Prominent among these is the identification of women with the wildness of nature- that is, with whatever exists beyond the boundaries of an ordered civilisation. It is generally assumed that it is women's capacity for child-bearing, and hence their alignment with natural forces beyond male control, that prompts these commonly envisaged relationships with trees, plants, springs, birds, and so on.²⁵

This nature symbolism operates within a nature versus culture model, a dichotomy presumably disseminated by men to demobilise women and women's power to the margins of society (for example the man-eating maenads in Euripides' *Bacchae*). However, this interpretation is presumably as much a result of the propaganda of the classical period as it is our own contemporary conventions still at work.

Considering that most social and economic powers today are based upon the use and abuse of natural resources, and the surplus of profit created by wage inequalities between workers and executives, that women should be separating themselves from the 'forces of nature' and relocating themselves within the workforce, whether as workers or executives, obviously does a great deal to maintain these already existing cycles of natural and labour resource extraction and profiteering. So, if women have also moved over to the side of law, capital and polity, who is left to speak up for the unbounded?

Authority's Attire: Body, Tomb, Sign

Conceptualise the *horos* as a simple lithic confrontation or even an apperceptive, perpendicular arrangement, outlining boundaries run horizontally in closure or are left open, the stone's upper façade points towards the heavens, its base planted firmly in the ground. The *horos* is buried, at least partly. Does it also transversally gesture below? If so,

25 Blundell (1995) 18.

the *horos* stands upon another boundary, the boundary that stands as a point of disjuncture and therefore also conjuncture between those in the 'now' and those below, inscribed within the earth, those who live no longer, the worm-feeders. The eruption of the *horos* in the continuum of time was also phantasmagoric, haunting the conceptual world of memory with an inscription of stone. *Horos* was a sign no less real for all its ghostliness; it was the material representation of the dead. The living engrave stones, and this is a reciprocal relation; sooner or later, the stones engrave us. In this grave subjectification we can catch a glimpse of what was at stake in the *horos* from the first. *Horos* was also inscribed upon gravestones, and this inscription separated the material world of the living from the spectral realm of the dead, a distinction that might be spooky and even petrifying but is not for all that unearthly.

They may not be the earliest examples of *horoi*, but the funerary *horoi* are at once plenteous and have the advantage of an additional inscription which serves to mark them out as different from other *horoi*. Some funerary *horoi* have been found during the excavations of the Athenian *agora*, even though burial ceased to be practised there from the end of the seventh century BC.²⁶ There are some special cases of burial until the end of the sixth century, largely limited to certain family plots. It is assumed that these were aristocratic families whose traditional tomb was maintained while the larger populace was excluded to burial sites elsewhere. This theory is supported by the high-quality pottery discovered in these tombs. The latest of the graves are those of two infants placed in the ancestral burial ground at the end of the seventh or beginning of the sixth century. In the absence of further information, one can only attribute the archaic extension of the spirit of death in the *agora* (such as the cult of the heroised dead) to proverbial idiosyncrasy, old habits die hard.²⁷ The majority of later classical funerary *horoi* have been found in the Kerameikos cemetery.

The lettering of the funerary *horoi* is rough and for the most part epigraphists propose only a vague date up until the third century BC. They are marked by six main inscriptional variations:

26 Lalonde (1991) 16–18; Thompson (1972) 10, 19.

27 Thompson (1972) 119.

ὄρος τοῦ δεῖνος
 ὄρος μνήματος (μνημάτων, μνημείου)
 ὄρος σήματος
 ὄρος θήκης (θηκῶν)
 ὄρος χωρίου
 ὄρος χωρίου μνήματος

Each gravestone is inscribed first with *horos*, and then presented in the genitive there is a choice of inscriptions: a name (for example, *Xsanthio*, *Helikēs*), a memorial or remembrance (*mnēma*), a sign (*sēma*), a receptacle (*thēkē*) which could be either the grave as such or the receptive earth, or ground (*chōriou*), or even the determined place, as the place of memorial (*chōriou mnēmatos*).²⁸ Today, it would be more usual that a memorial (*mnēma*, the neuter noun of memory) of the name of the dead stand in its own right, where the name inscribed in stone is already in memory of the dead. It appears that the ancillary demarcation of the *horos* was, however, often necessary. It seems to me that the inscription of the word *horos* draws attention to the monument itself, rather than to whom the monument was there to serve, or what it was there to do. Perhaps the second word of the inscription served this second function. It is almost as if we were to go into a cemetery and the gravestones were all inscribed with the word 'gravestone of Jane Smith,' for example. Our gravestones tend to leave this word to context, but it is still there. A gravestone might read 'in the memory of,' but what is elided is 'this is a gravestone in the memory of.' So, in a way common usage today is not so different to the ancient inscription; except that they did not elide the reference to the monument, the memorial as object of memory.

The words *horos mnēmatos* and *horos sēmatos* offer an indulgent range of opportunities for translation, though I find it difficult to feel satisfied with any one in particular as conveying what was fully intended in the name of the dead. I could suggest another meaning for the *horos* and translate the first as 'gravestone in the memory of'; that would certainly be easier to understand, though not necessarily true to the original. The second part of the inscription, with the word for sign, *sēma*, is trickier. The lexicon glosses over the possibility of a more complex meaning by simply saying that *sēma* can also mean 'sign by which a grave is known.'

28 For examples, see IG I³ 1139; IG I³ 1138; IG I³ 1132; IG I³ 1134; IG II² 2587; IG II² 2594. Cf. Lalonde (1991).

But with the word *horos* this would be doubling up, something like the ‘gravestone that is the sign of a grave.’ Presumably not. Suffice it to say here that regardless of how we translate *horos* (term, limit, mark, boundary, and so forth), the real question the grave should pose is how memory and the sign stand in relation to the *horos*. In this question all the remaining genitives of the above clauses are brought into the same relation of correspondence.

Socrates claimed that there was a linguistic similarity between the tomb and the sign. In the *Cratylus*, he gives us a (dubious but interesting) etymology that would describe a relation between the grave or tomb, the body and the sign: ‘are you talking about the body?’ asks Socrates (τὸ σῶμα λέγεις;).

καὶ γὰρ σῆμά τινές φασιν αὐτὸ εἶναι τῆς ψυχῆς, ὡς τεθαμμένης ἐν τῷ νῦν παρόντι: καὶ διότι αὐτὸ τούτῳ σημαίνει ἢ ἂν σημαίνει ἢ ψυχῆ, καὶ ταύτη ‘σῆμα’ ὀρθῶς καλεῖσθαι. δοκοῦσι μέντοι μοι μάλιστα θέσθαι οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα, ὡς δίκην διδούσης τῆς ψυχῆς ὧν δὴ ἔνεκα δίδωσιν, τοῦτον δὲ περίβολον ἔχειν, ἵνα σώζηται, δεσμοτηρίου εἰκόνα: εἶναι οὖν τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦτο, ὡσπερ αὐτὸ ὀνομάζεται, ἕως ἂν ἐκτείση τὰ ὀφειλόμενα, τὸ ‘σῶμα,’ καὶ οὐδὲν δεῖν παράγειν οὐδ’ ἐν γράμμα.²⁹

For some say it [the body, *sōma*] is the tomb [*sēma*] of the soul, their notion being that the soul is buried in the present ‘now’; and also because by this it signifies [*sēmainei*] whatever the soul wants to signify, therefore it is correctly called ‘sign’ [*sēma*]. However it seems to me that it is more likely that the Orphics established this name, as the soul has a penalty to pay, on account of which it has a cage, to keep it safe, that is like a prison: and this is, just as it is named, and until it pays up in full, the ‘safe’ [*sōma*] of the soul, and it is not even necessary to change a letter.

This proximity of the sign, body and tomb is also brought up in the *Gorgias*, where the scholia attribute the idea both to a Pythagorean scholar, Philolaus, and to the mystical Orphic religion.³⁰ Derrida almost quotes the sentiment exactly when investigating Hegelian semiology; he states that the ‘tomb is the life of the body as the sign of death.’³¹ In Socrates’ explanation the convergence between sign and tomb is explained by the soul’s ‘burial’ in the present ‘now.’ One cannot help but expect to find

29 Pl.*Crat.*400b-c.

30 Pl.*Grg.*493a.

31 Derrida (1984) 82.

the *horos* floating around here somewhere, and yet it remains unwritten, un-inscribed within the text, materialised only as the gravestone marked out and defining in the interstices between all these words.

Etymology aside, what is the sign's relation to death? A sign unites a concept and a sensory perception, signified and signifier, however memory is the production of signs, according to Derrida, and is also thought itself: 'The body of the sign thus becomes the monument in which the soul will be enclosed, preserved, maintained, kept in maintenance, present, signified.'³² In his study of gravestones, Sallis states that 'stone comes from a past that has never been present, a past unassimilable to the order of time in which things come and go in the human world.'³³ He continues, 'that nonbelonging of stone is precisely what qualifies it to mark and hence memorialize such comings and goings, births and deaths. As if stone were a sensible image of timelessness, the ideal material on which to inscribe marks capable of visibly memorializing into an indefinite future one who is dead and gone.'³⁴ The tomb is the sign of the dead, but it does not belong to the dead. It is the sign of the living, and the living investment in the dead. This is the beginning of what I call the economics of death. This sign that is both the monument of life-in-death and death-in-life, the 'sepulchre of the soul' and the 'hard text of stones covered with inscription,' is given by Hegel as the 'pyramid,' or as Derrida argues the 'semaphore' of the sign or the signifier of signification itself.³⁵ However,—and this is where a long history of women's rights resolve into a preoccupation with death—Antigone is desperate, and for her, any hole in the ground will perform the task, any covering of dust, as long as it is accompanied by the appropriate wailing, the dirge of the dead.³⁶ But it is not merely the funeral rites of her brother that Antigone demands, it is the immortality of the soul that she is fighting for, the maintenance of the sign and the continuity of its meaning within the entire system of semiotics that the burial of the dead is part of.

Antigone's infamy, in Sophocles' tragedy, is her obeisance to what she defines as the binding precedent of the unwritten and unfailing laws

32 Ibid.

33 Sallis (1994) 26.

34 Ibid. 26.

35 Derrida (1984) 83

36 Alexiou (2002).

that dictate the burial and mourning of the dead. The King, Creon, has decreed that Antigone's brother's corpse go unburied as a punishment for his belligerent claim to the throne. The problem that resounds, not only in the case of the disputed authenticity of the king and the dictates of burial customs, is that of authority. But in this case the question is not who has the authority to control, the authority of power; it is rather an oddly spectral authority, the jurisdiction of women, the mourning and ritualised burial of the dead. When it comes to the obeisance of unwritten laws, Antigone declares the authentic primacy of unwritten customs by means of negation, which does not mean that they are word-of-mouth or in some way give precedence to speech. On the contrary, that they are read despite being unwritten seems to be where the real issue lies, that is the serious issue for mourners and murderers alike of what to do with the body.

Antigone explains the origin of the laws by drawing attention to the gods who she claims did *not* authorise Creon's edict barring the sacred duty to bury the dead, because they already stand as authorities for the opposite.

οὐ γάρ τί μοι Ζεὺς ἦν ὁ κηρύξας τάδε,
 οὐδ' ἢ ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη
 τοιούσδ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὥρισεν νόμους.
 οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ὥοιμην τὰ σὰ
 κηρύγμαθ', ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῆ θεῶν
 νόμιμα δύνασθαι θνητὸν ὄνθ' ὑπερδραμεῖν.³⁷

Zeus was not the herald who gave me that [edict], nor did Justice, who lives with the gods below, determine (*hōrisen*) such laws amongst men. Nor did I believe that your decrees were so forceful, that the unwritten and steadfast laws of the gods could be overcome by a mortal.

The verb used is that of the *horos*, *horizō*; Creon's laws or customs (*nomima*) are not 'determined' or 'circumscribed' by the gods. In contrast, the laws that Antigone does recognise are placed within the horizon of men by the gods. A subterranean Justice earths them and presumably that is where their authority resides, in the earth, which is why the burial (earth to earth) of the brother belongs to their jurisdiction. But it is also a matter of time, for Antigone's customs remain in the

³⁷ Soph. *Ant.* 450–455.

present as a prescription whose origin belongs to the indeterminate past, or in Antigone's own words, οὐ γάρ τι νῦν γε κάχθές, ἀλλ' αἰεί ποτε/ ζῆ ταῦτα, κούδεις οἶδεν ἐξ ὅτου ἴφάνη, these customs are 'not something of now or yesterday, but live forever, and no one knows from whence they appeared.'³⁸ Here she seems to echo the chorus who asked Cassandra in the *Agamemnon* from where she had the *horoi* of divination. It is this indeterminate origin that makes these customs so secure, but it is also the fact that they are unwritten (*agrapta*). Perhaps it is not Antigone who needs these unwritten customs or laws to support her act but the unwritten laws that require Antigone's act: by marking out the grave, the sign of the burial gives form to the unwritten laws. There is no division between the laws themselves and their enactment; the enactment is the 'writing' or 'sign' (*horos mnēmatos/sēmatos*) upon the earth of the continued presence of the laws. This earthly enactment might be the only form these laws ever take. It could be that the laws require the sign of the grave in order to be read at all.

Death's Legal Signature

Antigone's authenticity, raising her up to the level of the legislator and giving her the strength to stand in opposition to legal power, is maintained by her 'right' to death's sign, a mark of authorship that she embraces in the absence of her brother by inscribing with the earth and upon the body of her brother those 'unwritten laws.' As Derrida states, 'the tomb is the life of the body as the sign of death.'³⁹ The tomb and sign of the dead is the 'written signature' that in the case of Antigone claims her presence in the past of her brother. The sign that Antigone writes upon her brother's body may be her own responsibility, but what remains, i.e. the grave (*horos*), cannot be claimed as hers, nor even her brother's. Both authors are eclipsed by the divine origin of the laws themselves, whether it was his tomb or her sign. The signature implies, as Derrida states,

the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present in a past

³⁸ Soph.*Ant.* 456–457.

³⁹ Derrida (1984) 82.

now or present [*maintenant*] which will remain a future *now* or present [*maintenant*], this in general *maintenant*, in the transcendental form of presentness.⁴⁰

Antigone's claim is exactly that her sign breaks into the 'now' of human laws, interrupts them with the silent eternity of the grave, breaking into state-sanctified memory. This is why Creon must object to the burial, not because he wishes to punish Antigone (and Ismene) by deferring the materialisation of their memory of their brother, but because the burial of the brother inevitably becomes a memorial also of dissent and civil-war that contraindicates Creon's reformation of the city after *stasis*. Part and parcel of his post-war authority is the denigration of those who fought on the other side and the commemoration of martial heroes on his side. Similarly, Perikles funeral oration was as fundamental in instituting the concept of Athenian citizenship as it was in memorialising the dead.⁴¹

Antigone's signature is a demand addressed to others to remember the laws of the dead, and in doing so, they must 'read what was never written.'⁴² It is a trope common to poetry that the act of writing tricks death. Horace says in his odes, 'I shall not wholly die' (*non omnis moriar*) and this is because his poems live on. This statement that puts off the fulfilment of death is explicitly in relation to what has been written, which remains a part of the author, even beyond the grave. Antigone stands somewhere near here, and her deed risks all because it (whether intentionally or not) rewrites the accepted history of the city. In the words of Benjamin: 'Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.'⁴³ For Creon, outlaws of the state are punished by legal means, on account of Antigone's act both the laws that permit such punishment and the history that defines her brother as outlaw come into question. In the Machiavellian book of power, this is not acceptable. Every system that is built upon the control and manipulation of its population engages in the twofold denigration and active eradication of dissent.

40 Derrida (1988) 20.

41 Thuc. 2.34–46.

42 Benjamin (2005) 722.

43 Benjamin in Löwy (2005) 42.

Agamben's argument that law is the sphere of signatures holds for the law of the state where the signature defers responsibility to a past that can in fact always be rewritten and retracted. Authority depends upon the unremarked past of dissent, the glorification of its heroes and mastery over the sign. The theory of signatures in alchemy is based upon the notion that similarities in form and language are not coincidental and that the signature draws attention to a relation between things, their powers, their forms and how we read them: 'Signatures, which according to the theory of signs should appear as signifiers, always already slide into the position of the signified, so that *signum* and *signatum* exchange roles and seem to enter into a zone of undecidability.'⁴⁴ Adoption of the theory of signatures into the law allows the law to extend beyond the secular domain into theology. A signature does not merely express a semiotic relationship between sign and signifier, 'rather, it is what—persisting in this relation without coinciding with it—displaces and moves into another domain, thus positioning it in a new network of pragmatic and hermeneutic relations.'⁴⁵ In short, whoever controls the signatures is in control.

Diogenes Laertius provides an explanation of the definition of *horos* and the subsequent definition of *hypographe*, which in Greek is literally 'written under' or 'underwritten' (and now means 'signature'), but here is probably used in terms of logic, meaning 'description.' In legal terms, it is also the 'accusation' or 'statement of liability.'

Ὅρος δέ ἐστιν, ὡς φησιν Ἀντίπατρος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ ὄρων, λόγος κατ' ἀνάλυσιν ἀπαρτιζόντως ἐκφερόμενος, ἢ, ὡς Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ Περὶ ὄρων, ἰδίου ἀπόδοσις. ὑπογραφή δέ ἐστι λόγος τυπωδῶς εἰσάγων εἰς τὰ πράγματα, ἢ ὄρος ἀπλούστερον τὴν τοῦ ὄρου δύναμιν προσενηγεμένος.⁴⁶

A definition [*horos*] is, as Antipater said in his first book *On Definitions* [*horoi*], a phrase [*logos*], which according to analysis corresponds to what is said; or, according to Chrysippus in his book *On Definitions* [*horoi*], is the explanation of the word itself. Description [*hypographē*] is a phrase [*logos*] introducing the matters in outline, or a definition [*horos*] that deals with the authority [*dynamis*] of the definition [*horos*] in a simpler form.

44 Agamben (2009) 37.

45 Ibid. 40.

46 Diog. Vit. Phil. 7.60.9.

Although the translation I offer here is not definitive, it is evident that in the Greek a nexus of terms is brought together. Unfortunately, all these terms, *horos*, *logos*, *hypographē*, *dynamis* vary quite significantly in meaning from any exact English counterpart. 'Description' here differs from *horos* insofar as it is definition in outline with recourse to the authority of the sign. The underwritten in Ancient Greek is thus already a synonym for the authority or power (*dynamis*) of a word or term (*horos*). The signature introduces the notion of authority but whether that is in speech or writing is unclear, despite the *hypographē*. As Agamben states, the sign 'signifies because it carries a signature that necessarily predetermines its interpretation and distributes its use and efficacy according to rules.'⁴⁷ As with the signed artwork, or the stamped coin (*signare* in Latin also means to stamp a coin), the signature denotes authority (who has money has power), authenticity, or a complex network of relations of authority. Thus, the signature denotes more than a relation between whoever signs and what is signed; it decides at its base what words mean.

Does this mean that the *horos* has authority implicated within it, without raising that authority as a question? No doubt this is what was significant about the *horos* all along, that the authority or power to describe boundaries, or the potential to define and determine was always already inherent and remains a power that fails to point elsewhere to some external authority. But that does not mean it is not subject to questioning. If we ask of the *horos*, like the chorus to Cassandra, from whence it has the *dynamis*, the power and potentiality to define, bound, determine and limit, it might answer thus: 'HOROS.' Does it say *horos*, or do we read *horos*? Of course, stones cannot speak. But we can read the word *horos*, or that failing the fact that the stone is placed on the boundary, in which case the *horos* insistently points back to us, the ones inscribing or even the ones doing the reading. So, the answer must be that the *horos* has no power to bind and define unless we attribute it this power. But then, to echo the chorus, from where do we have this power? That is for another time, or, in Antigone's words, it is 'not of now or yesterday, but always forever.'

And so, Antigone's act can be disputed not only within the text but outside of it as well, in the text of power relations that is alive and

⁴⁷ Agamben (2009) 64.

well today, and that continues to bolster new readings of the *Antigone* in order to support new authorities, systems and new relations. Her insolence is not merely that she disobeys the edict of the king; the real insubordination lies with the fact that she challenges our hermeneutic position about what law really means or how law should be read. She takes us back to the ground of definition, where the customs and laws are defined. The play poses, even despite itself, the question concerning the authority of these definitions, it asks who the author is that defines the laws. Both Antigone and Creon claim to have insight into the real authorship and power of law, and on the boundary in dispute, the no man's land between the two where nothing is sacred, we see the problem brought into definition, the *aporia* at the heart of the law, or the *aporia* that brings us up short of following the law to the letter. Because they cannot both be right, can they?

The 'sign' of the grave of her brother is for Antigone the sign of justice, a subterranean justice, while for the king it is the sign of her revolt. But more than this, Antigone's act suggests that the grave itself must be read as the unwritten laws themselves, and that here the identification between law, written sign and deed should coalesce in a single interpretation, indisputable because although not legally signed, it is nonetheless read in the sacred laws of burial and mourning.

Foucault states that 'everything would be manifest and immediately knowable if the hermeneutics of resemblance and the semiology of signatures coincided without the slightest parallax.'⁴⁸ This gap is essentially that between semiology and hermeneutics. The gravestone does not fill in this gap, despite its solidity, but it does remind us that the body of habitation, and the 'dark space' of the dead amongst the living bears a certain similarity. Here, we can read Antigone as trying to situate herself in this gap. Her signature, which is really the entire system of those unwritten laws that she in both deed and speech is attempting to give expression to, is supposed to be and is read by the chorus, even though the authority of her own interpretation is constantly slipping away in favour of Creon's. The chorus, however, finds themselves in a dilemma, the only position true to form in the entire play.⁴⁹ They at least recognise the *aporia* in the text. They cannot say one way or the other

48 Foucault (2008) 33.

49 *Soph.Ant.*278, 681, 724.

which is the right interpretation of Antigone's act, at least up until a point.

Ambiguity rests with the grave itself, which necessarily evades an absolute identification with a name or any kind of authority, and becomes a matter of deep time versus present time. The sign, *horos*, is only that of memory, *mnēmatos*, and is associated with the name of the dead only so long as the living hold him and his place of burial in mind. The grave belongs to the dead only so long as he and his site of burial remain in living memory. While the deed of burial itself might be Antigone's signature, the sign itself has meaning only so long as it is read. In this case the grave and sign refer back to the initial problem of the *horos*; how is it to be read? Is it word or stone, and how can it be both? But the sign of the grave does not cease to be supported by *horos*, just as the stone lies under the chisel. It is appropriate that it is on the boundary between signature and interpretation that the *horos*, the gravestone comes, solidifying what remains of the 'unwritten laws' and putting into question any kind of possession particular to one time or another. With typical candour, Antigone asks, 'And yet how could I have gained greater glory than by placing my brother in his grave?'⁵⁰ The grave maintains the always in the 'now,' but if the 'unwritten laws' dictate burial, and the act of burial is the power of these laws in the 'now,' then the grave itself (*read: horos*) stands as the mark that also interrupts the continuity of any kind of law.

The unwritten laws that Antigone invokes would seem to have traversed the 'now'—a definition that interrupts into indeterminacy. And yet Antigone's insistence would suggest that there is only one way that these laws remain so secure, by giving definition to them in the form of a grave (*horos sēmatos*). Hence her repetitive need to act, to follow her responsibility to mark out the dead as buried until the laws are visible upon the body as earth, or written into the land as grave. As laws, they are unwritten, *agraptā*, but they must be read all the same. Likewise, the chorus is unwilling to speak about them, though they know them, until the laws themselves are recognised or read. In the words of Nietzsche, 'it is true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action' until what is sacred about these laws becomes apparent in another's act (Antigone's, or with the ethical support of

50 Soph.*Ant.*502.

Teiresias, or with the help of Haemon as in Euripides' version), the sacred determination through which they make themselves known.⁵¹

These laws are perhaps none other than the limits of political power, the boundaries of secular power, (especially as defined by Creon) beyond which is the realm of the sacred and anyone who transgresses these boundaries without the appropriate ritual is none other than *homo sacer*, cursed to an unbounded death. Hence, as a figure of politics, as Butler suggests, Antigone, 'points somewhere else, not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed.'⁵² But I would respond that once beyond the realm of these limits, there is no political possibility, and any attempt to politicise this region becomes tyranny, like Creon, the totalitarian ruler who can accept no limits to his kingdom. The will to draw attention to these limits is not political naivety on the part of the *Antigone*; on the contrary, it can be read as playing with the exposure and transgression of limits of the political institutions of the classical *polis*, which can be interpreted in turn as providing the framework for Creon's authoritarian rule. It is these limits that the city's legislature repeatedly attempts to drown out or flood with novel proscriptions and seemingly petty legislations upon the body politic, as well as the woman's body (which is purposefully excluded from the body politic).

According to Butler, 'the Hegelian legacy of *Antigone* interpretation appears to assume the separability of kinship and the state, even as it posits an essential relation between them.'⁵³ In Hegel's reading, the binary between kinship and state suggests the existence of a boundary distinguishing a system structured by bonds of loyalty to the household from the duty of the citizen to the state, it is 'the limit at which the self-contained Family' breaks up and goes beyond itself.⁵⁴ For Hegel, the *Antigone* stands first and foremost as a conflict over the boundaries between the laws of the Gods and the laws of the *polis*, between the divine law and the human law. This interpretation has now been realised (*aufheben*) and Hegel's separation seems to be the basis for

51 Nietzsche (1999) 40.

52 Butler (2000) 2.

53 Ibid. 5.

54 Hegel (1977) 275.

the crisis between private and public power today, especially in social welfare states where welfare and policing take on the dual role of carer and punisher (Mummy/Daddy), while the family's role/rule breaks off abruptly when a child comes of age, becoming a legal citizen, leaving family life flailing with the sudden negation.

This is our inheritance, not from Sophocles so much as from later interpretations of Sophocles. For Sophocles, the separation between kinship and the state is just another in a series of boundaries that are overstepped, both by Antigone and by Creon. As Butler points out, Antigone and Creon are chiasmatically related. Their language, their mode of argument, the laws and ethics for which they stand, resemble that of the other, but diametrically. Both Antigone and Creon transgress kinship norms in their relations with one another, while Antigone transgresses gender norms and Creon the norms of political leadership.

Readings of the *Antigone* that attempt to stress the ethical or sexual aspects of the play tend, whether they mean to or not, to place Antigone on the other side of politics, beyond the realm of the political. For example, Lacan's fascination with Antigone turns her into some kind of resuscitated virgin goddess of pure desire, while reviling her mother Jocasta as harbouring impure lust, and thus reiterating typical binaries of womanhood and down-playing the political reading of the play.⁵⁵ According to Irigaray, this version of Antigone is seductive precisely because she is beyond the political. 'It suits a great many people to say that women are not in government because they do not want to govern' states Irigaray, 'But Antigone governs as far as she is permitted.'⁵⁶ Irigaray's reading of Antigone seems to call for a new conception of the civic realm in which female sexuality is taken into account, as if a different kind of political power, a Creon more well-disposed towards the unwritten laws perhaps would arrest the tragic outcome of the play.

It might be seductive to simply invert the power relations and replace Creon with Antigone. This would automatically suggest that Antigone's position was initially the weaker of the two. But as we know from the end of the play, it is Antigone who emerges victorious, dead admittedly but triumphant. The strangest thing about the *Antigone* is how the tyrant

55 Miriam Leonard 'Lacan, Irigaray, and Beyond: Antigones and the Politics of Psychoanalysis' in Zajko and Leonard (2006) 130–134.

56 Irigaray (1994) 68.

Creon suddenly accedes to the recommendations of the chorus and goes off to free Antigone and bury her brother. But too late; the plot is in free-fall and the suicides, of Antigone, Haemon and his mother Eurydice, flow.⁵⁷ But Creon, having only just seen his mistake and changed his mind, suffers all the more for his wrongs, which also takes away the *Schadenfreude* we the audience might have felt witnessing his sufferings. The moral of the story, though ancient Athens was not what you'd call a moralistic place, all the same, the moral of the story might be that tyrants, or their democratic understudies must listen not only to the old men (the senate) but also to their Antigones (disenfranchised youth), if they are to successfully rule.

Does this mean Antigone, and with her the women of the city, should be included within the institutions of power in order to 'give them a voice' or does it mean that a smart tyrant will include women in order to suppress the possibility of dissent coming from the margins of society? While individuals may contribute to increased dissatisfaction in the structures of political authority, the alternation of sex within the same structures of power will not magically transform the political system into a more inclusive one. On the contrary, the more inclusively a political power presents itself, the more exclusive are its methods, until we arrive at a system where there is no conceivable valid alternative of political power beyond neoliberal corporate capitalist representative democracy. And anybody thinking otherwise is branded a fool, a dreamer or a terrorist.

Antigone, with her seemingly innocent obsession with her brother, her claim to follow the unwritten laws and her death wish, could be all three. Her act and her rebellious speech in the face of Creon's edicts refusing burial rites to her brother interrupt, if nothing else, the continuous flow of legal hegemony. Antigone asserts her responsibility for her insubordination three-fold; in the symbolic deed of burying her brother, by refusing to obey Creon's edict against it, and then testifying to her refusal to obey. Thus, as Judith Butler states, her claim 'becomes an act that reiterates the act it affirms, extending the act of insubordination by performing its avowal in language.'⁵⁸ In doing so, Butler argues, Antigone appropriates the voice of authority even while

⁵⁷ Creon's about face begins and the suicides follow immediately, *Soph.Ant.* 1099.

⁵⁸ Butler (2000) 10.

she refuses to assimilate her own acts to that same authority. She can do so only because she claims that she is following an alternative system of justice and has the language to do so having the privilege to be born into the royal house. Her defiance of the latter and reverence of the former is indicated in her authorial iteration of those unwritten laws, which she signs three times upon the body of her brother. This maintenance of the grave is by definition the sign and signature of her double act, her insubordination against the laws of Creon, and her self-proclaimed obedience to those other laws.

Economics of Death

Maybe the *Antigone* is a cipher for whatever interpretation most benefits the reader: for Hegel the play represents the separation between traditional kinship and later political systems, while the character of Antigone represents the nexus of the feminine (passive, unconscious, disobedience and guilt); for Lacan, the character of Antigone is pure desire; for Loraux she stands for the possibility of the politicisation of desire; for Irigaray, Antigone is the sexual difference of the unconscious; for Morales, she is rising up against gender discrimination; for me, the play draws attention to all those boundaries, in words and stones.⁵⁹ Underneath this cipher, Antigone is woman idealised such that she is whatever we want her to be. She moves at our bidding, changes sides with our whims. Here she is the other of masculine power, there she stands for universal ethics; here she supports the incestuous heredity of the royal bloodline, there she is revolutionary spirit; here she is subservient to the unwritten laws, there she is subversive femininity rising up.

Antigone might ask of this manipulation of herself and the play, 'is nothing sacred anymore?' and she would surely get a firm negative. The theatre is no longer an act of worship, a set of rituals presented in the name of Dionysus, the great trilogy of tragedy that followed the procession of the phallus through the city, and preceded the comedy that was, at least for Aristophanes, the institutionalised satire about the Athenian

59 For a discussion on these interpretations, see Leonard in Zajko and Leonard (2006) 122ff. Irigaray on interpretations to suit the day (1994) 68. For Antigone as the symbol of challenging gender norms, see Morales (2020).

demos. That is where the *Antigone* was originally situated, and perhaps it is worth refiguring the play in its original setting, if only because our interpretations have become so saturated with contemporary biases, beliefs and political allegiances that to read something truly other into the play is becoming more and more difficult.⁶⁰ Which also means that the play is becoming less threatening, doing nothing other than reinforcing our present values. That said, how challenging the play was to its original audience remains an intriguing matter for speculation.

I mention the social and political setting of the play's performance to point out where Sophocles' inspiration was embedded and to what he would have been responding, opening to debate topics that the play's audience would have felt moved by or at least implicated in. Given that the *horos* stood as the boundary separating tribal regions or private lands, it can be seen to be intimately involved in drawing up the boundaries of kinship, especially in its role as marker of grave in the name of the dead. That both death and kinship rituals underwent significant change during this time, from the end of the archaic into the beginning of the classical periods, should alert us to a shift in significance of the *horos* as well. Within the classical period the *horos* becomes a tool for marking the boundaries of the Athenian market-place, abandoning its exclusive use in the sacred and the natural. The following will describe these shifting allegiances and existential alterations.

That the *Antigone* represents a conflict between a previous system based upon the ties of kinship (founded upon relations between wealthy and powerful households of royalty) and the institutions of the democratic *polis* is, I think, beyond doubt, particularly given the aristocratic leanings of its author.⁶¹ That said, the dramatic festival was not an autonomous product of the author; it was a collective production in which, as Longo states, 'the concepts of artistic autonomy, of creative spontaneity, of the author's personality so dear to bourgeois aesthetics, must be radically reframed, when speaking of Greek theatre, by considerations of the complex institutional and social conditions within which the processes of literary production in fact took place.'⁶² Longo

60 Osborne 'Competitive Festivals and the Polis: A Context for Dramatic Festivals at Athens' in Rhodes (2004) 18ff.

61 Rhodes (2003) 104ff.

62 Oddone Longo, 'The Theatre of the Polis' in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990) 15.

has also argued that the 'dramatic spectacle was one of the rituals that deliberately aimed at maintaining social identity and reinforcing the cohesion of the group' but that does not mean that there was exclusive agreement about the topics presented on stage.⁶³ No doubt the audience would have comprised both champions and critics of the democracy.

The theatre might also have comprised some women, whose presence in the democratic institutions was notably absent, though nonetheless essential and whose interactions with male citizens cannot have escaped having some effect upon those institutions. Loraux states that tragedy was the main genre that, 'as a civic institution, delighted in blurring the formal frontier between masculine and feminine and freed women's deaths from the banalities to which they were restricted by private mourning.'⁶⁴ It also allowed women to orchestrate the deaths of others, even if unintentionally. If only few women actually were permitted to attend the theatre I am not sure that this would help them much. The idea that tragedy allowed women to take death into their own hands is particularly interesting given the fact that death was already in their hands, insofar as it was the women in charge of the funeral rites. It would be very intriguing to read the unfortunately mostly lost Euripidean version of the same myth, given that Euripides was a little more sympathetic to the democratic system of the classical city or at least had a sense of humour about the shortfalls of citizen rule. It would be even more interesting still if Aristophanes had written a comic version.

That Antigone is the heroine of the previous system of aristocratic, inherited rule is, however, not without its problems. While she is the daughter of wealth, and her ancestry is (on both sides) descended from the royal household, she is however of the cursed house of Thebes, the mythic alter-ego of Athens, much as Sparta was the city's political alter-ego, though the representation of an enemy sympathetically was definitely within the scope of tragedy (*The Trojan Women*, *The Persians*).⁶⁵

63 Longo in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990) 16.

64 Loraux (1991) 3.

65 Antigone states of herself that she is the sole survivor of the royal house of Thebes (apparently forgetting her sister and her surviving brother). The chorus compare her noble lineage and fate to Danae et al. Soph. *Ant.* 940ff. On Thebes as 'the negative model to Athens' Froma Zeitlin 'Thebes: Theatre of Self and Society in Athenian Drama' in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990) 131.

As Zeitlin states, 'for the tragic poets Thebes represents the paradigm of the closed system that vigorously protects its psychological, social, and political boundaries.'⁶⁶ This over-protection of boundaries can be seen to be the downfall of the house of Thebes, given the cyclical incestuous tendency that finally brings it to its end. Antigone was the immediate offspring of incest, a big taboo for the Greeks given its saturation in myth, and she was also the descendant of a throne inherited by patricide and tainted by rape. She was unmarried, despite her age, a more serious transgression of the city's laws than may at first seem apparent. Meanwhile in the name of family bonds, she disregarded the distinction between sides of internecine war in her bid to bury the city's assailant. In her very person Antigone appears to break the boundaries in many directions, and for the original audience these original transgressions (but not 'sins' as they are forced upon her rather than enacted by her) are what make her a tragic, rather than heroic, character.

Irigaray describes Antigone's stand as a call to respect the 'economy of the cosmic order.' Antigone 'reminds us that the earthly order is not a pure social power, that it must be founded upon the economy of the cosmic order, upon respect for the procreation of living beings, on attention to maternal ancestry, to its gods, its rights, its organization.'⁶⁷ This cosmic order is also a matter of time. Aristotle's *horos*, the 'now,' linking past and future and permitting the continuum of time in tragedy must be maintained in the presence of the grave. For Thebes, burial or the lack thereof is a central problem that interrupts the proper flow of time (think of Oedipus as he searches for a place to die in the *Oedipus at Colonus*). Zeitlin suggests that the issue of the proper place of burial, under the earth and outside the city, problematises the very notion of time, where 'inside and outside, above and below, are factors that come to determine the most important boundary of all, that between before and after.'⁶⁸ Burial keeps time in joint, but has failed in Thebes so that 'no future time opens out in Thebes.' Antigone is both the end of the line and the recurring point; she is, as her name suggests, 'anti-generation,' or 'in place of the parent.' And in the *Antigone*, this distortion of time is played out, where 'the linear advance of the narrative events turn out in the

66 Zeitlin in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990) 148.

67 Irigaray (1994) 69.

68 Zeitlin in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990) 152.

end to be circular.⁶⁹ In contrast, the healthy burial and ritual mourning of the dead comes to exemplify a harmonious cosmic economy because in the common entombment of family members, the household of death acts as a reminder of the continuation of the shared household of the living.

Because the economy of death has broken down in the household of Oedipus, for Antigone the grave becomes a desirable site, a site of reunification that in a sense conjures up bonds formed in the womb. The most cogent and challenging interpretation of Antigone's will to provide her brother's burial rites is the shift from attributing Antigone with some kind of incestuous obsession with her brother, when she should be thinking of her husband, to putting the stress on the matrix of generation that is shared in common between sister and brother. Antigone seeks to live out some kind of eternal return in order to feel at one with the family that she has lost. This interpretation offers an alternative reading that might not be what Sophocles had in mind, but it does provide the *Antigone* with an eternal significance, beyond quarrels over state boundaries and one that does link her to some kind of 'cosmic order.'

Antigone clearly invokes the ground for her absolute obligation to bury her brother in their joint standing for, as well as having in common a space of co-generation not simultaneously with each other, as in the case of twins, but as a space of sharing that defines a primary ethical order of co-being, that is about connectivity and co-response-ability (Ettinger's term) and not the solitary, celibate individuality of the phallic order. Invoked, but waiting to be *heard* in Antigone's pathos, is this feminist heresy: that the condition of being humanly generated and born is an ethical ground *ab initio*, a form of linking, an already trans-subjectivity conceived as primordially, irreducibly relational—in a form that appears transgressive to a phallic autism when its archaic foundations are activated and invoked politically, ethically, aesthetically, symbolically as the basis for human thought and action.⁷⁰

The gravestone is also an ethical marker of responsibility and care for the other, a mark of death shared within the family tomb, all the more significant if the matrilineal origin was also shared.

69 Ibid.

70 Griselda Pollock 'Beyond Oedipus: Feminist Thought, Psychoanalysis, and Mythical Figurations of the Feminine' in Zajko and Leonard (2006) 104.

What is at stake is not merely a distinction between two sets of laws, such as the Hegelian dichotomy of kinship versus politics. Burial is a marker that indicates how one is mourned; it is a very tangible sign of household allegiance, of love and friendship. The relation of hospitality itself drives toward this sign, since burial ceremonies appear repeatedly in classical literature as the highest duty that one undertakes both for friends involved in the relation of *philoxenia* and family (for example the importance of Achilles mourning Patroklos, and the funeral games that always follow upon the death of a respected warrior in the Homeric epics). Although in Antigone's case it is her immediate kin who requires burial, the problem is then inverted. By the time Antigone is facing her own death it is also she who is in need of and refused the rituals of burial. Both of these refusals are suffered by Antigone as a woman. To deny burial to a man is an insult to the women of his family who would lay out the body, adorn it and mourn. To deny burial to a woman is an insult to the woman whose rightful place is to be concealed, as when alive, within the familial folds of the household. Hence the challenge that the *Antigone* poses is also directed towards the place and function of women in relation to death.

In Athens, the economy of death belonged to the household, the *oikos*. The death of a woman was a private matter, something to be kept within the household. The death of women in tragedy is the opposite, often murder, more often suicide, these deaths are spectacular and out in the open. While they were no doubt exciting to watch, they mostly had the effect of reinforcing the need for maintaining the privacy of the women within the household. At least the period subsequent to Sophocles saw no women's uprising to prove otherwise. Plato stresses the self-willed nature of this privacy of women, when he states in the *Laws*, 'accustomed as they are to live in concealment and darkness, if one would drag them into the light, they would resist with all their might and be far stronger than the lawgiver.'⁷¹ This dark concealment suggests that women were already entombed within the household. And, as Keuls shows, the symbolism of marriage was saturated with the same symbolism and rituals as those of death.⁷² 'One of the motivations

71 Pl.*Laws* 781c. quoted in Keuls (1993) 128.

72 See for example, the nuptial vessel used as a tombstone and deceased women dressed as brides on funerary monuments, on pages 131, 136, 151 in Keuls (1993).

behind the strong drive toward the continuation of the hearth, or *oikos*, was the desire to maintain the ancestral tombs, and to have one's own tomb cultivated by future generations.⁷³ The place of women in Ancient Greece, from marriage on was always on the side of death, and the household was intricately linked with burial rites and the maintenance of the tombs of the dead.

Keuls states that the preparation of bodies for burial 'a kind of reverse birth, was performed by women.'⁷⁴ The importance of burial seems to be a theme of some significance to Sophocles. Obviously, it is one of the topics, if not the main topic, in his *Antigone*, but it is also of key import in the *Ajax* and *the Seven Against Thebes*. I argue that it is the significance of burial rites that was Sophocles' main focus, perhaps on account of a barrage of laws that were brought in controlling the orchestration of such rituals and limiting them.⁷⁵

The connection between women and death finds its acme in the monument of the Leokorion, the monument erected in honour of the myth of the sacrifice of the three daughters of Leos, situated in the corner of the ancient Athenian *agora* right beside the *horos* that marked the *agora's* limits.⁷⁶ The theory that this continued to be a site of the sacrifice of women within the classical *polis* (during the plague years 430–429) might be discordant with what most people would prefer to think of as founding democratic institutions and bloodless accountancy, though it does seem evident that in one way or another the ancient city was fundamentally structured around the use or abuse of virgins. This might be considered one amongst many institutionalising discoveries experimented with in order to subjugate and obliterate the gestational powers of women in favour of the autistic productivity of the market.⁷⁷

Perhaps it is in this economic light that we should consider the second burial that takes place in Sophocles' tragedy, that of Antigone herself. Hers is a living burial, buried alive and provided with the victuals of life in death. It is also brought into direct relief with marriage. As a virgin promised in marriage to Haemon, the son of Creon, her fate

73 Ibid. 150.

74 Ibid. 149.

75 Discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

76 Keuls (1993) 137.

77 See Keuls on ancient biology, e.g. (1993) 142–147.

is reversed and, in her own words, she becomes the bride of death (ἀλλ' Ἀχέροντι νυμφεύσω) a result that she almost seems to glorify in.⁷⁸ She greets her tomb with the ecstasy of a bride: ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, ὦ κατασκαφῆς/ οἴκησις ἀείφρουρος, 'Oh Tomb, oh bridal-chamber, oh deep-dug eternal prison-house.'⁷⁹ The tomb thus doubles up and reinforces the proximity that already existed in the social mores of Athens between the bridal chamber (*numpheion*), the household (*oikēsis*) and the tomb (*tymbos*):⁸⁰ This burial ordered by Creon also signifies his transgression of the laws of the dead as well as the household bonds of *xenia*. Even the chorus find that the situation has gone beyond all limits, νῦν δ' ἤδη γὰρ καὺτὸς θεσμῶν/ ἔξω φέρομαι τάδ' ὀρῶν ἴσχειν δ', 'But now, witnessing this, I too am carried beyond the bounds of loyalty.'⁸¹ Creon furnishes Antigone with victuals as if he is giving her a place to stay, a temporary residence, when he is actually burying her alive in an unmarked tomb. Creon did not have Antigone stoned, but he did hide her behind stone.

Her grave doubles as her home where the stone that Creon uses to block up the cave is a parody both of a door (that she will never open) and of a tombstone, his sign, this time, of her living-death. The stone is a door that accepts her entry but refuses her exit. It signifies her entrance into his own familial customs, a twisted rendition of the future that was to be but never will be, in which she was to become part of his household, more than a guest, married to his own son. And yet in the cave, he provides for her. She is neither daughter nor guest; she is, rather, condemned to living and dying in a house that will strip her of her familial connection to her own household, by depriving her of her family tomb. She is henceforth homeless, a stranger (*metikos*) even in death.

ἔμπας ξυμμάρτυρας ὕμμ' ἐπικτῶμαι,
οἷα φίλων ἄκλαυτος, οἷσις νόμοις
πρὸς ἔργμα τυμβόχωστον ἔρχομαι τάφου ποταινίου·
ἰὼ δύστανος, βροτοῖς οὔτε νεκροῖς κυροῦσα
μέτοικος οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσιν.

78 *Soph.Ant.* 815.

79 *Ibid.* 891–900.

80 *Ibid.* 892. Also, 1069.

81 *Soph.Ant.* 800. Trans. Jebb.

you, at least, will bear me witness how unwept by loved ones, and by what laws I go to the rock-closed prison of my unheard-of tomb! Ah, misery! I have no home among men or with the shades, no home with the living or with the dead.⁸²

Her tomb is 'new' (*potaniou*), not the family tomb that her royal descent had promised her, and in a repetition of her brother's fate her death must go unmourned. For Antigone, what is 'homely' (οἴκησις) about her tomb is exactly the fact that she is not at home anywhere else, not just because her family are all dead (if not buried), but also because family, household, mourning and burial are a complex that must be enacted together in order for them to hold firm. Because these have been deprived her, she thinks of herself as a guest and stranger.

Her tomb is in fact no proper tomb, not only because she enters it alive provided for with the victuals that are to keep her alive, but also because she must go unwept. Similarly, the result of her unmourned burial is that she goes to her death as a stranger; she might be welcomed in Hades, but, unlike her parents, whom she washed and dressed with her own hands and poured offerings at their graves (ἐπεὶ θανόντας αὐτόχειρ ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ/ ἔλουσα κάκóσμῃσα κάπιτυμβίους/ χοᾶς ἔδωκα), she will never be at home there because of her lack of burial rites.⁸³ The gravestone not only takes shape in the gift of grief but as a demand made upon the living both to mourn and to die. The gravestone underlines and draws attention to the singularity of the repetitive alterity of death, a rupture that reduces all differences to a common limit.

The funeral rituals glorified in the Homeric epics were not limited to a family affair, and the archaic as well as classical city was strongly influenced by the prototypes of myth. Before Solon decreed a limit to the expression of grief over the tombs of non-family members (and the very fact that he thought this necessary would suggest it was a significant part of ritual grief) mourning was an extended matter for friends and loved ones. This is not a description of familial obligations within a nuclear family. It is not even limited to bonds of blood; it is extended within the obligations of *philoxenia*.

82 Soph.*Ant.* 845–852. tr. Richard Jebb.

83 Ibid. 891–900. tr. Richard Jebb.

A Stranger Tomb

Relationships of *xenia* would no doubt have formed a major, if not the major factor in inter-tribal, inter-household, and then later inter-city relations as well as in their dissolution (for example the Trojan war commenced because Paris had broken the rules of *xenia* by abducting his host's wife). *Philoxenia* is not, even if it once was, the essential factor in politics, but this is not the point.⁸⁴ *Philoxenia* in its ancient form was not merely a matter of being friendly to strangers, or being well mannered and behaving oneself in another's home. It can be defined along much more sombre terms, as care of the other not only unto death, but beyond it as well.

In what appears to be a *hapax legomenon* in Homer, the initiation of a relation of hospitality is expressed with the otherwise apparently formulaic ἀρχὴν ξεινοσύνης προσκηδέος.⁸⁵ To translate the meaning of the phrase, while leaving aside its syntax, would be something like 'the initiation and principle of care for the foreigner/friend until death.' And beyond death as well, for the *kēdos* (κῆδος) is the funeral ceremony. The word preceded by the relative *pros-* is said to express the notion of 'bringing into an alliance' or creating a relation of kinship. So, the word that describes being in a relation of kinship literally already has the funeral rites implied within it. The principle (*archē*) is that of *xenia*, where *philoxenia* begins with a mutual relation that promises care for the dead. At its simplest, the verb *kēdō* (κῆδω) means simply 'to care' extending then to 'mourning.' So, this relation of caring with those who are not blood relatives, who are strangers in the Greek sense of the word (*xenos*) means that one accepts responsibility for the life of the other as well as undertaking to perform the rites required and outlined by all those 'unwritten laws' of the dead. But the noun *κηδοσύνη*, *kēdosynē*, means 'yearning,' so while the cognate verb *κηδεύω* (*kēdeuō*) is 'to tend to the dead, bury,' it also has the additional undertone of desire. Along with the rituals in the name of the dead there is also the living intensification of the bond of hospitality through the marriage ceremony; hence *kēdeuo* (κηδεύω) also means 'to ally oneself in marriage,' again bringing to mind the correspondence between death and marriage.

84 Seaford (2003) 18–19.

85 Hom.*Od.*21.35. Hesychius defines this as τῆς τῆν οἰκειότητα ἐμποιούσης. The more succinct ξενίην συνεθέκατο appears more frequently.

Here, then, a complex of love, grief and ritual meet in a single relation. And since both grave and boundary are marked by the *horos*, the beginning of the relationship with the stranger is bound to find its fulfilment in the same place, when crossing a boundary in friendship. This relation finds its expression, in what must have been the signature representation of burial rites and mourning, toward the end of the *Iliad* with the triple events of Achilles mourning for Patroklos, his vengeance upon Hector, the funeral games of Patroklos and the return and dressing of Hector's corpse. After Hector's death, 'they put him on the carved bed, and stood singers beside him, leaders of laments, who lamented in grievous song, and the women wailed. And white-armed Andromache began their wailing.'⁸⁶

Lament, as Alexiou has illustrated, was essential to funeral rites within the Homeric epics and obviously was such a big deal for the society that it attracted all sorts of legislation limiting its practice within the classical city.⁸⁷ In the *Iliad*, Achilles is said to grieve for Patroklos with so much passion that he is heard by his mother in the depths of the sea, he covers himself with ash and tears out his hair.⁸⁸ Homeric lament must be understood as being intrinsically linked with burial, dressing of the dead, funeral games, all as necessary privileges due to the dead. Since these acts are constantly reinforced by the retelling of these burial rites immersed within myth, the actualisation of the rites within the household and the society creates 'the substantial unity of myth and ritual,' and this is what Benveniste calls the 'potency of the sacred act.'⁸⁹

The interesting thing here is that this care unto death does not cease with death. The host or guest is not off the hook once the other dies; the care extends through the death rituals, burial and into grief and mourning and intergenerationally, in the maintenance of the tomb as well as in the inherited relation of *xenia* (one also plays host to the guest's children and grandchildren). A good example in the literature of this extension of the bonds of hospitality beyond the bounds of death is in Euripides' tragedy, *Alkestis*, which revolves around Herakles' reception as a guest, *xenos*, into the house of Admetos. Admetos is in mourning

86 Hom.*Il.* 24.720f.

87 Alexiou (2002) on heroic lament, 55; on legislation limiting lament, 14.

88 Hom.*Il.*24.513–514.

89 Cf. Agamben (2007) 22, 69.

for the death of his wife, Alkestis, and rather than revealing his grief to his guest, he tells the 'true lie' that she was a stranger who has died, in order to receive his guest with goodwill untainted by grief. The word for stranger, *othmeios* (ὄθνεῖος), provides the pun and stands in opposition to someone who is a relation in the sense that they are 'of the household,' *oikeios*.⁹⁰ Strictly speaking Admetos tells no lie; it is literally true, his wife Alkestis is not of his house. She was from another household, introduced into the household of her husband upon marriage and then deeply involved in the generation of a new family, but she did not cease to be a stranger. On account of this white lie, Herakles accepts the hospitality and starts drinking and carousing, but it is not long before he learns the truth that it is in fact a woman of the house who has died. Herakles then confronts his host and accosts him for depriving him of the right to grieve and allowing him, albeit unwittingly, to offend the customs of grief: ἐγὼ δὲ σοῖς κακοῖσιν ἡξίουν/ἐγγυὺς παρεστῶς ἐξετάζεσθαι φίλος, 'but I should show my worth as a friend in your grief, and stand right beside you in proof of my friendship.'⁹¹

By welcoming Herakles into his house and not implicating him in his grief, Admetos betrays the pledge (ἐγγυὺς) of hospitality which should first and foremost be in the immediacy of giving and receiving, even or especially when this gift takes the form of grief. Therefore, Herakles' accusation is directed at the core of the hosts' claim to have granted hospitality, for all of the value or worth of the relationship is located exactly in this ἐγγυὺς παρεστῶς, 'being present beside.'

But it is more than a matter of presence, because while it is easy to recognise the offer of hospitality as a gift, in this ἐγγυὺς παρεστῶς there is encrypted a further indebtedness in which both host and guest are enshrouded: on the one hand we see the stranger assigning liability to the host for not recognising his guest's *value* (ἡξίουν, 'I was worthy'), on the other hand the very nature of *xenia* is to hold the guest safe, this is the security (ἐγγυος, ἐγγύη) the bond that hospitality offers. One might, as Derrida says, call the guest a voluntary hostage, and yet this does not exclude the possibility that the host is just as much hostage to the guest by whom he is temporarily substituted as master of the

90 Eur.*Alk.*530.

91 Ibid. 1010.

house.⁹² In Greek, it is linguistically impossible to tell the host (*xenos*) apart from the guest (*xenos*), and the demand to substitute the one for the other is thus already inscribed in their names. The moment a relation of hospitality arises, a certain substitutability of the one for the other is supposed. And this substitutability of guest/host, rather than the exchange of gifts, is what makes *philoxenia* essentially a kinship economy.

The precedence of the *xenia* relation, even before an exchange of gifts shows that the economy of *philoxenia* is usually conceived of the wrong way around. That is, that the host gives the gift of hospitality, whereas in fact he is in the position of receiving it, in his reception of the presence of the other. Thus, the host receives the guest and the two are bound in a mutual relationship of strangeness, but estrangement from themselves, as they must share a name that simultaneously describes their bond and relation, *xenos/xenia*. Tending to one another's death is one, but not the final, act implicated in the *xenia* relation. The reception of the stranger as present includes making him a gift of the *pathemata*, the emotional involvement, of the host. In this doubling of the gift of hospitality, where reception is granted in the person of both host and guest, all the worth of the stranger-come-guest is in the proximity of presence, which as the resolution of dialectic of self and other cannot be evaded. In the receipt of this gift, host and guest become properly 'akin' (ἑγγύς).

Hospitality outlives the individual, enacted in death but also inherited in turn by descendants. While the relation is not written in blood, its inheritance is. It is, as Derrida states, a familial or genealogical pact that 'is not only a question of the link between birth and nationality; it is not only the question of the citizenship offered to someone who had none previously but of the right granted to the foreigner as such, to the foreigner remaining a foreigner, and to his or her relatives, to the family, to the descendants.'⁹³ The security or pledge follows the bloodline, while the relationship of *xenia* administers to the stranger as stranger, remaining in the house temporarily but as if he were a member of the family and no guest. That the guest's stay is temporary is the one sure factor that permits the host to defer to the guest. And yet the 'substitution' of guest for host reflects back upon the host, whose

⁹² 'Hostipitality,' in Derrida (2002) 376; 'Word of Welcome,' in Derrida (1999) 57.

⁹³ Derrida (2000) 23.

stay in the house is also subject to temporal limits. Both guest and host are bound to forfeit inhabitance; the difference is merely a matter of time. Thus, in the *oikos* that bears witness to the stranger, there is an enactment of the final *oikēsis*. It is not so much that the stranger places himself, his life and death, into the security of the host, whereupon the host takes upon himself the role of protector, custodian or caretaker. Rather, the guest stands as the marker for the host's future, in promise of reciprocal hospitality, by honouring the other's name from afar, in the proliferation of familial, social and economic ties through marriage as well as in mourning. In this sense the host is indebted to the guest first and can only repay the debt by putting himself on the line as stranger, as 'security' for needing security. The pledge in the person of the substitutability of the guest/host is dependent upon the principal of possession, of homely possession and the household as something that can be said to belong to the host rather than the guest.

Death in ancient Athens was not experienced as a private affair, and yet the nature of death is that it is irrevocably one's own and no else's. In this sense the uniqueness of the death ritual as a part of *xenia* also remains appropriate (and for this reason not entirely appropriable) as a proper beginning (*archē*) to give expression to what is uncommonly strange about the end.⁹⁴ Levinas described the problem of possession as resting with the feminine, that the house 'is possessed because it already and henceforth is *hospitable for its owner*. This refers us to its essential interiority, and to the inhabitant that inhabits it *before every inhabitant, the welcoming one par excellence, welcoming in itself—the feminine being*.'⁹⁵ Gestation or the womb, therefore, is the first experience of *philoxenia*, as well as the endogenous metaphor of the earth, where the problem of what is proper comes into being as self and the fracturing of self from place; the matrix of codependent, shared mortality and the origin of the debt of life. Heidegger states that 'mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do this,' in fact 'nature' as a whole cannot.⁹⁶ Even Derrida reckons on this distinction, stating that animals may perish, but they 'can never properly die.'⁹⁷ Here death is twisted

94 Derrida (1993) 22.

95 Levinas (1969) 157.

96 Heidegger (1971) 107.

97 Derrida (1993) 35.

to be some kind of odd human privilege, the last chance to separate us from everything else, the entirety of the nonhuman.

Is this why the *Antigone* retains such power even today, because it stages the dissolution of a deeply indebted relation between the conceptualisation of matter, language and death that binds humans together in mutual responsibility and care for the other? Herakles' platitude in the *Alkestis*, βροτοῖς ἅπασι καθθανεῖν ὀφείλεται, 'for all mankind the debt of death is due,' and Antigone's preoccupation with death εἰ δὲ τοῦ χρόνου /πρόσθεν θανοῦμαι, κέρδος αὐτ' ἐγὼ λέγω, 'if I die before my time, still I say that is profit,' both frame death in economic terms.⁹⁸ How can death be considered cause for debt or profit? Is it because we owe ourselves to the earth in dying, but where's the profit in that? Is it because giving to the dead represents the gift in an absolute sense? Is grief a gift, from the giving of which one can gain no return?

Archaic death practices do suggest that reciprocity was a driving force in providing the dead with gifts. The dead were believed to be able to reciprocate.⁹⁹ They could always come back as a presence of pollution and disaster. Conversely, if tended well the dead might return with assistance and as beneficial presence to the living. Love might be the most beautiful form of the pure gift, but it is clouded by the presence of the other who can always reciprocate, giving love for love; it does not command the same degree of selflessness as the gift of mourning. It is by virtue of the rites of burial that, as Levinas says, 'the death of the other is the first death,' since 'it is for the death of the other that I am responsible, to the point of including myself in death. This may be phrased in a more acceptable proposition: "I am responsible for the other insofar as he is mortal."' ¹⁰⁰ The responsibility for mourning the other is at the heart of kinship relationships and is essential to understanding ancient cultural practices related to death.

If we consider hospitality in the light of mourning, it is impossible to consign it, after Mauss, to the archaic precedent of a 'gift economy,' even if, with Herman we modify this as a 'debt economy' whose

98 *Soph. Ant.* 460.

99 Josine Blok 'Solon's Funerary Laws: Questions of Authenticity and Function' in Blok and Lardinois (2006) 236–237.

100 Levinas (2000) 38–40. Cf. Derrida (1993) 38.

system is one of 'alternating disequilibrium' aiming at accumulation for de-accumulation.¹⁰¹ Gift-exchange, as Ricoeur recognised 'is neither an ancestor nor a competitor of—nor a substitute for—such commercial exchanges.'¹⁰² On the contrary, commodity-exchange occupies the site of gift-exchange, and gradually forces gift-exchange into the margins that its victor abandoned. Today calculative rationality and evaluative exchange is so firmly invested within our social practices that it is profoundly difficult to imagine how a community could function in their absence.

101 Herman (1987) 10; Cf. Mauss (1967); Lévi-Strauss (1987); Derrida (1982) 2.

102 Ricoeur (2007) 235.