

Introduction

Why Antigone Today?

As I write this introduction, the world is both a darker and a brighter place than it has been in a long time. We are faced with a financial crisis of unknown measure, haunted by post-9/11 fear that has prompted us to launch preemptive wars, while global warming threatens the very survival of our planet. At the same time, the citizens of the United States have elected their first African-American president, and people around the world, surprised and moved, are celebrating this historic event. The mantra throughout the presidential campaign was “Change We Can Believe In.” People are thirsty for change, not just change in the political agenda or the voices behind that agenda, but also, and perhaps more important, change in the very manner in which politics is conducted. At a moment of global crisis we allow ourselves to dream: Can we seize this moment to redefine the political as such? Could this—our sudden capacity for dreaming—have been possible only because the president is now a man of color? Has the simultaneous candidacy of a woman and a black man for what is arguably the most powerful position in the world incited the need to remap the field of politics, to redraw the demarcation lines that, until now, have defined the political as we know it?

These questions are present in my mind as I once again read the story of Antigone. Hegel compared her to Socrates and Jesus. Like them, she made the most extraordinary sacrifice for her commitments. But rather than highlighting (and thus fetishizing?) the martyrdom of these figures, what seems more important is that they represent, each in their own way, what we dream of doing today: They changed not only the content of philosophy, religion, or politics, but also, and more crucially, they revolutionized the very stakes and conditions of these respective fields. Each one of them embodies novelty and change: Socrates rejected a school of thinking that saw the task of philosophy to be rhetorical in nature—the Sophistic desire to master the art of argumentation—and embarked instead on a dialectical search for truth; Jesus inscribed forgiveness and reconciliation into the very heart of a religious discourse thitherto marked by a logic of vengeance and duty; and Antigone? Oh, Antigone. Not only did she attempt the impossible, but she herself seems impossible to label, to define. Who is she, this enigmatic figure? What are the implications

of her story? What motivated her to sacrifice her own life to honor her dead brother? And why, I ask myself as I revisit her story, do we continually return to this figure in our attempts to grapple with the struggles and crises of our own times?

Like all great Greek tragedies, *Antigone* presents us with existential questions similar to those addressed by Socrates and Jesus. In the choral ode to man (the perhaps most famous passage from this drama), human existence is characterized as wondrous, riddle-like, uncanny. Human beings are natural and rational at once, bound by necessity yet gifted with freedom, mortal yet capable of transcending the mere necessities of life and survival, the doers of good and evil, makers and breakers of laws and city walls. Although the story of Antigone addresses these universal and timeless contradictions and perplexities of humankind, it simultaneously tells the story of a singular individual: Antigone, a woman who defies King Creon's edict without any fear, doubts, or regrets. This courageous woman, the fruit of incest, has fascinated philosophers in the nineteenth century, inspired playwrights in the twentieth century, and intrigued feminist thinkers and activists for decades.

This book collects some of the most interesting and thought-provoking examples of feminist engagements with this enigmatic figure—some have been published elsewhere, others have been written specifically for this volume. In recent years we have seen a flood of interpretations and performances of this ancient drama, and today Antigone is the subject of countless conferences and college courses around the world. In order to understand the role she plays in contemporary political debates (and more specifically feminist debates), and in order to provide a comprehensive resource for those currently working on this topic as teachers, scholars, artists, or activists, I envisioned a volume that would gather the relevant texts considered “classics” in this field, alongside some newly written chapters that tarry with or move beyond the most well-known readings. Needless to say, this book covers only a slice of all the creative, provocative, and subtle feminist readings of *Antigone* that have been published in recent years. With this in mind, the bibliography in this volume lists many of the interpretations that could not be included.

My ambition is to offer a selection of chapters by authors who are concerned with the various instances in which Antigone figures in contemporary debates about the role of women in our society. Why, we ask, has Antigone become such an important figure? As modern women and men, what can we learn from her? Can a feminist politics that turns to this ancient heroine be progressive, or is it bound to romanticize the past? To claim that feminists turn to the figure of Antigone simply because she is a heroic woman is oversimplistic. Greek tragedy gives us many remarkable and inspiring female figures, most of whom have drawn the attention of contemporary feminists in various fields, although none matches the allure of Antigone. What is it about *her* story that

so compels us? How is it that this fictitious woman, at the center of a drama written 2,500 years ago, continues to shed light on the specific problems of every historical generation?

The chapters in this volume set out to confront these questions. In doing so, they address an extraordinary range of topics relevant to women and feminists today: female subjectivity and sexuality; questions of race and gender; the role and place of the body in our culture; the tension between and interdependence of the private and the public spheres; ethical and moral conduct; the possibility of a different future; the misogyny (or feminism?) of preeminent thinkers such as Jacques Lacan and G. W. F. Hegel; kinship, reproduction, and maternal origins; the emancipatory status and role of art and aesthetics; the tension and relationship between culture and nature, humans and animals; issues concerning freedom, citizenship, and democracy; the mechanisms that replicate taboos, normativity, and pathology; the challenges involved in intersubjective relations; and the intersection between sexism and other forms of oppression. The story of Antigone permits us to tackle these matters in a variety of ways, and I hope this collection will not only provide readers with interesting and compelling interpretations of her story, but that it can also function as a source of inspiration for feminist thought and practice at this time of crisis and potential change.



In her prologue, “Nomadic Antigone,” Moira Fradinger assumes the ambitious task of tracing the global journey of Antigone as it unfolds in the second half of the twentieth century. From Greece to Australia, via Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Poland, Spain, Egypt, Turkey, Colombia, Mexico, and beyond—is there *any* country in the world she has not visited in one of her many guises? Whatever alias she assumes—Antígona Vélez, Mariana, Antígona Pérez, Akwele, Odale, Clara Luz, Antígona Furiosa, Sofia, Melissa, Anita, Tègònni—she always challenges authority in the specific form it takes. Whenever and wherever civil liberties are endangered, when the rights or existence of aboriginal peoples are threatened, when revolutions are under way, when injustices take place—wherever she is needed, Antigone appears. And although the details and context may vary, certain elements of the story always remain the same: the lone individual fighting against state power, the kinship burial rites, and, interestingly, her status as a woman. Because whatever group or interest Antigone is brought in to defend—religious, cultural, or racial minorities; guerilla fighters; spiritual leaders; war-torn people; the economically oppressed—it is always as a woman (or, in some cases, where female actors are not available, in feminine attire) that she appears on stage. Sexual difference stood at the center of the original

Sophoclean drama, and sexual difference continues to mark her story as she is stubbornly resurrected.

But we must ask, is this eternal return of Antigone not a sign that we lack new imaginaries? If she is summoned in times of political turmoil and change, is the very repetition of her story not an indication of the static nature of political affairs? And should we, as feminists, really turn to a heroine of the past in our attempts to formulate a different future? These questions inform Catherine A. Holland's chapter, "After Antigone: Women, the Past, and the Future of Feminist Political Thought," which raises the issue of "the symbolic significance of the past within contemporary feminist political theory." If Fradinger reveals the recurrence and relevance of Antigone in modern history, Holland insists instead on her *difference* from us and articulates the political stakes in underlining such a difference or distance.

Holland begins by examining three early feminist readings of *Antigone*: Jean Bethke Elshtain's "Antigone's Daughters" (1982), which argues that the *family* has been eclipsed in current political life; Mary Dietz's "Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking" (1985), which instead suggests that *politics* (understood in terms of citizenship) has been eclipsed; and, finally, Linda Zerilli's "Machiavelli's Sisters: Women and 'the Conversation' of Political Theory" (1991), which puts forth the view that above all, the *maternal body* has been eclipsed. All three see in Antigone the possibility of recovering these lost grounds. Holland worries that each of them, in different ways, nostalgically idealizes a long lost past and consequently risks accepting a variety of problematic premises handed down by the very tradition that they set out to contest.

Her own reading of the play focuses on the way Antigone "shows us how we may innovate from within a tradition." Drawing from Froma I. Zeitlin's "Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama" (1990), which offers an analysis of Thebes as a city cursed by its own past, contrary to the dynamic politics of its neighbor Athens, Holland examines the way Antigone herself, as a consequence of her incestuous lineage, indeed is paralyzed by the past. She goes on to show, however, that Antigone's actions nevertheless allow her to overcome the fateful repetition inherent in this lineage, thus allowing for new beginnings that are both personal and collective. In this sense, Antigone does not retrieve a long-lost eclipsed past but—by introducing difference into a logic of sameness—rather puts an end to the repetitive character of the past, thereby pointing to the possibility of a different future. Holland seems to suggest that what we can learn first and foremost from the figure of Antigone is precisely the importance of avoiding an idealization of past figures and the need to, instead, develop a feminist politics grounded in the specificity of our own times and our future to come.

The next two chapters—Adriana Cavarero’s “On the Body of Antigone” and my “Impossible Mourning: Sophocles Reversed”—are concerned with a set of related themes, although these themes are addressed in quite distinct ways and with different interpretive tools: What, we ask, is the significance of the binary oppositions that structure the play? How are these very oppositions constitutive of the way in which “the political” is construed? And what consequences can be drawn from the fact that woman, within a binary logic, repeatedly finds herself on the *outside* of politics—an excluded other that, ironically, nevertheless functions as the hidden ground upon which the founding fathers may begin their work of constructing a polis? While Cavarero addresses these questions by examining the ambiguous tension between the body politic and the human body through a close engagement with Plato, I consider the relationship between the public and the private realms in critical dialogue with Hannah Arendt.

Cavarero describes a tradition in which the female body has been excluded from a political sphere that, precisely in order to establish itself as political, has expelled the body altogether because our bodies unavoidably confront us with our animal origins. In the tragedy of *Antigone*, the city bans the burial of Polyneices, leaving his dead unmourned body exposed to the elements, and fatally banishes the body of Antigone to the darkness of a cave. This very expulsion, Cavarero suggests, should bring our attention to the complicated and intimate way in which the physical body and the “stately body” have been linked throughout human history. Why, she asks, do both Antigone and Creon occupy themselves with the *body* of a dead man, in a cultural context that so sharply separates body from soul and, moreover, privileges the soul because the immortality of the latter is elevated over the finitude of the former? For the ancients, she argues, the soul alone is capable of being a principle for action, and, therefore, also an object of enmity. But the enemy in *Antigone* strangely appears as sheer body—the dead body of Polyneices. Herein lies the paradox of the play: In its connection with the animalistic and female elements of human life, the body is inherently *apolitical*; but insofar as it becomes a locus of enmity, it is turned into a site for political contestation. “The politics that banishes the body from within its walls speaks indeed, from beginning to end, only in the grammar of the body,” Cavarero notes. We may thus speak of a *body politic* in a literal way. But while the male body ultimately returns to the polis—be it as enemy or friend—the female body remains constitutively excluded, deeply estranged from the city that buries it alive.

In my own reading of the play, I scrutinize the way in which our heroine has been commonly understood as a representative of the family, divine law, and a mythical past, whereas Creon has been assumed to represent the state, human law, and a political present. Through an engagement with Arendt’s analysis of

the distinction between private and public in ancient Greece, I trace what I call a “Sophoclean reversal” at the heart of the play, suggesting that Antigone lays the ground for a political space where action and speech can take place, whereas Creon embodies the private sphere of household economy. If Cavarero focuses on our carnal and maternal beginnings, my main interest lies rather in the way in which Antigone embodies a *new beginning*—the beginning of the political as we know it. The paradox, however, is that Antigone, as a woman, is denied access to the very sphere that she has founded, and this paradox points not only to a well-known blind spot in Arendt’s thinking, but also to the enigmatic role that women in general play within political life.

Tina Chanter shares this interest in seeing Antigone as the constitutively excluded of the polity—an idea that runs through much of feminist scholarship on *Antigone*—in her chapter “The Performative Politics and Rebirth of Antigone in Ancient Greece and Modern South Africa.” Chanter, however, emphasizes that this logic extends well beyond the question of sexual difference. Her chapter is an attempt to point out “how exclusionary logics reiterate themselves,” whether the excluded other is marked by gender, sexuality, race, class, nationality, religion, or some other contingency. Her chapter echoes Holland’s in seeing Antigone as “calling for a renewal of the political itself.” And in this regard her own reading is performative: she turns to a contemporary adaptation of the drama (*The Island*, 1973), inscribing the legacy of Antigone into a relatively current discussion about political discourses on race (the play is staged in apartheid South Africa), and by introducing race as another constitutive outside of politics she simultaneously renews and broadens a feminist discourse that has too long remained blind to its own others, to its own constitutive outside. Just as Antigone was buried alive for a crime that was not a crime, the black prisoners on Robben Island are excluded from their polis because of their racial identity, by a political regime whose existence and structure depends on this very exclusion.

In a sense Chanter’s text does exactly what I call for at the end of my chapter: on her reading, Antigone redraws “the lines of the polity, so that it is no longer able to cast her out as its excluded outside,” thus “calling into being a future polity that does not rely on the political exclusion of some of its members.” The figure of Antigone, according to Chanter, thus challenges the very logic of a polity whose necessary condition for representation is exclusion—be it of women, people of color, or other marginalized subjects.

The last two chapters of the first part of the book engage with G. W. F. Hegel’s (in)famous reading of *Antigone*. Luce Irigaray’s chapter “The Eternal Irony of the Community” (first published in *Speculum of the Other Woman* in 1974) is a classic within feminist scholarship on *Antigone* (Heidi M. Ravven has called it “daring,” “almost midrashic”), while J. M. Bernstein’s “‘the celestial Antigone, the most resplendent figure ever to have appeared on earth’:

Hegel's Feminism," presents us with an altogether different Hegel than the one we find in Irigaray's influential chapter (and, for that matter, in most feminist readings). Hegel's discussion of *Antigone* appears in the chapter on Spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806) and has been the focus of attention for a host of feminist interpreters. While some commentators, like Seyla Benhabib, Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, and Kelly Oliver among others, have raised concerns about Hegel's division between family and state (and his association of woman with the former and man with the latter), others, such as Kimberly Hutchings, Alison Stone, and Laura Werner, have argued that these criticisms misread the context of Hegel's account. The two chapters included here are, to my mind, the best representatives of each of these positions.

Irigaray's chapter from 1974 marks the beginning of her lifelong interest in the figure of Antigone, to whom she returns time and again—sometimes going so far as identifying with her—and seeing her as illustrative of key aspects of her own philosophy of sexual difference. Articulating a feminist critique of Hegelian dialectics, Irigaray suggests that it is founded on a system of oppositional duality. This dichotomous logic, she argues, reaches its climax in Hegel's discussion of *Antigone*, where the relation between the sexes, on her account, is conceived in terms of polar opposition. One must overcome the other for the dialectical movement to proceed, and what is lost on this journey is not only the specificity of female subjectivity, but also the very possibility for women to claim selfhood. Woman, in this system, is reduced to a mere blood-giver who provides man with the vitality he needs to attain universality. The tomb where Antigone dies comes to represent the very space in which femininity is sacrificed and lost, and this tomb consequently also becomes the cave in which the maternal-material—repressed, unconscious, and dumb—is washed away in the waters of oblivion, making way for true Spirit.

In his feminist defense of Hegel, Bernstein traces a very different narrative in the *Phenomenology*. On his account, Hegel's reading is first and foremost concerned with the disparity between an (ideal) ethical world and (actual) ethical action. In contrast to the German celebration (from Kant to the Romantics) of Greek culture as a model of a harmonious, nonconflictual community (a world marked by "beauty"), Hegel turns to Antigone to find a figure who reveals the inherent contradictions embedded in such an idealized world. Hegel's criticism of Greek *Sittlichkeit* (morality), Bernstein argues, is based on his view that structures of what ought to be purely spiritual relations secretly (and wrongly!) depend on natural distinctions, above all the distinction between male and female. One immediate consequence of this is that individuals are reduced to their social positions. Through her transgressive act Antigone, in contrast, emerges as the first individual to express self-determining subjectivity beyond her social role. The drama thus "enacts the transition from world to action." But Antigone is, tragically, an individual that Greek social life had no way of

recognizing. Bernstein understands Hegel's chapter on Spirit as an attempt at recognizing her. The notion of true Spirit, which Irigaray identifies as a "Hegelian dream," is thus on Bernstein's account something that Hegel himself wanted to do away with—the idealized dream or fantasy of his post-Kantian contemporaries. That dream depends on what Bernstein calls "the social metaphysics of gender complementarity," and what he aims to demonstrate is that Hegel, in fact, "unequivocally and emphatically shares" Irigaray's view that such gender complementarity is what ultimately causes the collapse of that ideal world. What feminist readers have seen as an oppositional logic in Hegel's account of ethical life must, therefore, be read as a report of Creon's views within the play—views that Hegel categorically opposes.

Although Bernstein's reading presents a feminist Hegel whose views begin to look similar to those of Irigaray, some central differences between the two remain. True, Hegel wants to bar sexual identity from having a determining role in spiritual life, meaning that—contrary to what most feminist critics have assumed—he would grant women access to the spiritual realm from which Creon wants to exclude them. But Hegel's argument nevertheless hinges on the *sublation* of sexual difference, and for Irigaray, Bernstein notes, this "might be thought to entail a worse repression and a deeper androcentrism than the social metaphysics of gender complementarity." While Hegel wants to rid ethical life from sexual difference altogether, Irigaray wants to articulate an ethics of sexual difference, understood in noncomplementary terms. Hegel's critique of the social metaphysics of gender complementarity is, moreover, by no means a critique of patriarchy (on a sociopolitical level Hegel was, no doubt, as much of a misogynist as his contemporaries), but it is rather a critique of Spirit represented as an ethical whole, a harmonious and beautiful ideal. His argument is thus ontological, not ethical, but it is precisely this, in Bernstein's mind, that gives it critical depth: "Any sexual division of spiritual labor must necessarily undermine the categorical requirements of individuality for any possible self-consciously self-determining community." The condition of possibility for singularity—a category central to Irigaray's own thought—is thus the elimination of social roles that reduce individuals to their sexual being.



Part two opens with two chapters that address questions involving kinship and reproduction. Judith Butler's chapter "Promiscuous Obedience" (first published as the final chapter of her book *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* in 2000) situates the figure of Antigone "within a contemporary context in which the politics of kinship has brought a classical western dilemma into contemporary crisis." In line with her previous work on gender and sexuality, Butler speaks of kinship not as a form of *being*, but rather as a form of *doing*.

In the chapter that follows, “Antigone’s Line,” Mary Beth Mader organizes her argument around this performative and socially contingent conception of kinship. But whereas Butler offers an interpretation of Antigone as a figure whose incestuous genealogy allows her to question, challenge, and transgress kinship norms (“the norms that govern legitimate and illegitimate modes of kin association might be more radically redrawn”), Mader will, contrarily, show that Antigone, in fact, *reestablishes* the very boundaries that have been transgressed by the incestuous relationship of her own parents, and that she does so precisely by performing relations of kinship (by *making* her brother into a brother). Her act is, therefore, “restorative or reparative” rather than transgressive.

Echoing her own groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler speaks about “kinship trouble” at the heart of the Sophoclean drama. She examines the interdependence of state power and kinship, wondering, on the one hand, if kinship can flourish without the support and mediation of the state and, conversely, if the state can thrive—even exist—without the family providing this very support and mediation. Although most commentators see a conflict between the forces of kinship and those of state power as represented by Antigone and Creon respectively, Butler points to various ways in which Antigone in fact *departs* from kinship. Her incestuous lineage makes regarding her as a simple representative of the sacred family difficult. But what sort of kinship, Butler asks, does Antigone represent? And what is her role within the field of politics? Can a feminist/queer politics of kinship be derived from the figure of Antigone?

Butler sees in Antigone’s act a fatal challenge to normative heterosexuality, one that allows us to question Jacques Lacan’s dependence on a heterosexual conclusion to the Oedipal drama, that is to say, the psychoanalytic view that a presocial law (the law of the Father) limits the variability of social forms; a constraint which is “understood to be beyond social alteration.” Any psychoanalytic theory that takes Antigone (a character who clearly fails to produce heterosexual closure for the drama) as its point of departure, might challenge not only psychoanalytical norms but also those that structure and shape our own contemporary society—be it in terms of racial aspects of kinship, or with regard to queer kinship, single mothers, adoptive parents, or other figurations that challenge the norms or posit themselves as the essential “perversions” that the norm depends on but nevertheless fails to include. Although Antigone most certainly is no queer heroine, she allows us to rethink kinship on the basis of aberration and the displacement of gender, making visible the inherently performative aspects of kinship, consequently showing that “kinship founders on its own founding laws.”

In her chapter, Mader turns to these laws to make sense of the enigmatic and controversial passage in which Antigone claims that she would not do for husband or child what she was willing to do for her brother. This statement, Mader suggests, can be understood only as an attempt to differentiate between

those kin generated by oneself and those generated by another. It is a distinction that, in Antigone's own family, has been blurred: by marrying his mother, Oedipus becomes the father of his own siblings. And this is the transgression his daughter-sister, Antigone, is trying to undo. Her own transgression, on Mader's reading, is thus a necessary yet impossible effort at *restoring* her family's distorted genealogy: "Her burial of her brother is the making of a brother as something that 'cannot' be made by oneself; it is an attempt to make a 'can not' of an 'ought not,' to impart on a supposed social or moral necessity the strength of an ontological necessity." The law that Antigone wants to establish expresses the "cannot-must not" of certain kin relations. While it is possible to get oneself both a brother and a husband or child, the former is the kind of action that one can, but ought not, perform. Antigone's only chance at establishing a nonincestuous family is to recognize those family members she did not beget. Her brother must, therefore, rank over husband and child. The tragedy of the drama, however, is that Antigone cannot undo her father's violation of the incest taboo without simultaneously undoing herself.

Another important theme that runs through feminist scholarship on *Antigone* is that of sexuality and female desire. As is made clear in Mader's chapter, Antigone must sacrifice her own future as a lover, wife, and mother, in order to undo the perversions committed by her father-brother Oedipus. She has often been described as a character married to death, and her husband-to-be Haemon even joins her in a deathly embrace that puts an end to all future erotic relations. And yet this suicidal virgin-widow has prompted several discussions about the nature and status of female desire, two of which are included here. Both Cecilia Sjöholm ("Beyond Pleasure: The Other History of Sexuality") and Bracha L. Ettinger ("Transgressing With-In-To the Feminine") view female sexuality in terms of destructive forces and death. They do not, however, reduce female desire to some dark desire for death. They see it rather as a question of freedom and subject-formation. While these two chapters treat the figure of Antigone in a somewhat marginal manner, they speak to the interpretive resources that Antigone offers for thinking about a wide range of concepts important to feminist theory. These two chapters shed light on the ways in which the story of Antigone can function, on the one hand, as a springboard for alternative readings of the history of concepts such as desire, freedom, sexuality, and vulnerability (Sjöholm) and, on the other hand, for innovating a radically different approach to current theories of subject development and psychic structures (Ettinger).

Sjöholm, who has written a book on the subject of female desire using the story of Antigone as her point of departure (*The Antigone Complex: Ethics and the Invention of Feminine Desire*, 2004), provides an alternative to both the Foucauldian history of sexuality conceived from the point of view of a male subject and to the standard view of femininity that runs through a philosophical

discourse dominated by a male perspective. In turning to tragedy, she seeks to establish eros as “a form of sexuality that has more to do with weakness than virility, with exposure rather than active agency,” yet drawing from Friedrich Schelling she defines this very vulnerability not as a weakness understood in negative terms—as lack—but rather in terms of human freedom. In her engagement with the Greeks, Sjöholm not only turns to Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, but also to some lyrics by Sappho, the renowned female poet from the seventh century BCE. If Foucauldian eros is conceived in terms of pleasure and mastery of the self, tragic eros, as it appears in Sappho, is not merely pleasurable, but also exceeds control. Sexuality “is linked to the forms of negativity that manifest the limits of human agency and willpower.” And “man manifests his freedom, according to Schelling, through the exposure to sexuality.” In Schelling, sexuality thus becomes defined as “the embodied force of human freedom.” What is important, for Sjöholm, is that tragic eros, as described by Sappho and Schelling, undermines the demarcation between culture and nature, active and passive, subject and object. This allows her to regard sexuality beyond its determination by gender hierarchies, “associating it with a freedom that takes us well beyond the categories of social domination.”

If freedom is at stake for Sjöholm, Ettinger pursues the question of female desire in a way that allows us to understand it in positive terms and not merely as an inaccessible enigma. She thus challenges a recurrent theme of psychoanalytic discourse—a theme perhaps best illustrated by Sigmund Freud’s infamous “What do women want?”—moving instead beyond the Oedipal paradigm and its mystification of women with the aid of our Theban princess. In critical dialogue with Lacan’s claim that feminine sexuality is radically unknown to women and men alike, Ettinger argues that his claim only holds within a logic that presupposes the male Oedipal paradigm (one that sees woman as supplementary and derivative of man) as the sole valid model for subjectivity. This standard psychoanalytic account forecloses difference understood otherwise than in terms of phallus-presence and castration-lack and is bound to view woman as an excessive surplus. Ettinger proposes that we, instead, depart “from a difference which is feminine from the onset”—from the psychological sphere that she, elsewhere, has named matrixial (*The Matrixial Borderspace*, 2006). Such a move allows us to understand feminine desire without having to fit it into the phallic order, which, in turn, would render knowledge of feminine sexuality possible. The matrixial sphere is essentially transgressive and relational (being-born-of), and it reinscribes the maternal body and prenatal incestuous relations into the very foundation of subject-formation.

Ettinger, who speaks of early transsubjectivity rather than intersubjectivity, chooses two figures to illustrate this process: Tiresias, who according to myth was transformed into a woman for seven years and then back into his original sex; and Antigone, who transgresses the frontiers between life and death. Both

characters, on Lacan's account, perform the impossible; the former in extracting knowledge of the feminine, and the latter in coming to know death in the domain of life. Echoing Lacan, Ettinger draws a parallel between woman and death, connecting the two with aesthetic and ethical experience (art, on her account, is what makes possible the transgression to the "other side") yet contrary to Lacan, she views the transgression with-in-to the feminine (and death?) not as impossible, but rather as the condition of possibility for a subjectivity constituted outside of and different from already established phallic norms and laws.

A central aspect of Ettinger's work is the significance she attributes to the *mother* in her notion of the matrixial psychic space. Irigaray, in her chapter, points to the important link between Antigone and the maternal womb that has birthed her. Mader notes, in turn, that the incestuous crime that marks Antigone's family depends on the importance of maternal filiation. And Cavarero, as we have seen, proposes that the horror produced by the body be understood as a fear precisely of our maternal-material roots, of the fact of our being born. Oedipus is undoubtedly the figure that has drawn the most attention in interpretations of the cycle that bears his name, but Jocasta—the mother-grandmother—is a central figure in numerous feminist readings. Importantly, Julia Kristeva—a thinker who has written extensively on the figure of Oedipus in her psychoanalytic work—chooses to emphasize the role of this maternal figure as she, for the first time, engages in an extended discussion of *Antigone*. While Butler skillfully demonstrates that Antigone "occupies, linguistically, every kin position *except* 'mother,'" and while Cavarero notes that Antigone inhabits the position of sister and daughter, and not wife and mother (a rare phenomenon in Greek drama), Kristeva—in the final chapter of this volume ("Antigone: Limit and Horizon")—argues that it is precisely the maternal position that our heroine desires to inhabit. For although Antigone dies unwedded and childless, Kristeva brings our attention to the uncanny moments in which she mirrors Jocasta, noting her desire to fulfill the maternal vocation of tenderness and care; of sublimation.

Like several of the chapters in this volume, Kristeva's reading of *Antigone* draws from Lacan's analysis of the play, but her engagement with him is less critical than that of, for instance, Ettinger. Lacan discussed the figure of Antigone in his seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959–1960). One of the central aspects of Lacan's reading, and one that Kristeva follows and develops in her chapter, turns around a familiar theme from Greek tragedy, namely that of a *limit experience*. Antigone, the transgressor, is situated *between* worlds: she is caught between life and death, public and private, inside and outside. She is an ambiguous and oxymoronic figure who brings our attention to boundaries exactly by transgressing and destabilizing them: loyal to the brother who has launched a civil war; a member of a city that excludes her; incestuous offspring;

a divine yet exceptionally human figure. Kristeva examines the enigmatic nature of Antigone at length (thus differentiating herself from Ettinger, who rejects the view that Antigone is enigmatic or “impossible”), and positions her both as, at, and beyond the limit, as someone who exceeds herself and lacks a fixed identity, but who nevertheless knows exactly what she wants and how to pursue it. She makes her own laws, sets her own standards. And insofar as she inhabits the place of the mother, she gives birth to an imaginary universe: a “world in which life is possible at the limit.”



Perhaps it is exactly this insight that we can draw from Antigone at this moment in history, in this time of crisis and change: the possibility of giving birth to imaginary universes, of imagining a world different from the one we know. Universes where life is possible at the limit, and where life beyond that limit is not condemned to exclusion, madness, or a loss of subjectivity. As Kristeva puts it, “Those who step past this threshold usually sink into madness, lose their human contours, and pass away. Not Antigone.” Perhaps this is our task for the future: To challenge and exceed limits, like Antigone, while nevertheless maintaining our human contours, our human rights, our dignity, and our own voice.

Fanny Söderbäck, May 2009