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Peer reviewed

A THEORY OF GREEK TRAGEDY

ARCHIVE
FEELINGS

MARIO TELÒ



ARCHIVE FEELINGS

CLASSICAL MEMORIES/MODERN IDENTITIES

Paul Allen Miller and Richard H. Armstrong, Series Editors

ARCHIVE FEELINGS

A Theory of Greek Tragedy



MARIO TELÒ



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UNLESS OTHERWISE indicated, the texts of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are cited according to the most recent OCT editions—by Page (1972), Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990), and Diggle (1981–1994), respectively—and the translations are mine.

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INTRODUCTION



Re-impressions of Greek Tragedy

Toward Anti-cathartic Aesthetics

Anne Carson: I've never understood catharsis.

Simon Critchley: It's that old idea that there should be some moral lesson that we get from tragedy, which is still an omnipresent view. But it's ludicrous. Tragedy is something else, it's much more curious.

Carson: More devastating.

Critchley: Much more, yes.¹

IN THE SUMMER of 1938, Sigmund Freud and his daughter Anna, like Oedipus and Antigone in the backstory of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, fled their home, striving to protect a family, as well as a cultural legacy, from one of history's most brutal annihilating powers.² Not just Freud's family, but all of his belongings—books as well as the objects of his extensive ancient art collection—were precipitously relocated from north Vienna to north London, from the apartment in Berggasse 19 to the three-story brick house at 20 Maresfield Gardens that is now the venue of the Freud Museum, founded by Anna.³ The chronically ailing Sigmund experienced the arrival of the collection, destined to become a public archive, as a soothing palliative for the hardships of past and impending surgeries. According to Elizabeth Young-Bruehl:

The radical excision was to be followed in a few weeks . . . by removal of a bone sequestrum; but the stubborn bone chip refused to surface, and Freud spent the entire fall, in pain and fatigued, waiting for it. The consolation was that the fall was also spent at 20 Maresfield Gardens. . . . This house became,

1. <https://www.artforum.com/slant/antigone-a-roundtable-with-anne-carson-simon-critchley-and-trajal-harrell-55046>.

2. Freud explicitly assimilates his relationship with Anna to the bond between Oedipus and Antigone in a letter to Arnold Zweig on May 2, 1935 (E. L. Freud 1970, 106); see Armstrong 2005, 56; Stewart-Steinberg 2011, 134–39; and Telò 2017, 109–10; cf. Derrida 1996, 43.

3. On Freud's museum/archive, see esp. Goldhill 2011, 103–22.

for Freud himself, the museum for his antiquities collection, which arrived there just before he was released from the clinic. Ernst Freud designed his father's study to hold the collection, and Ernst Kris helped arrange the treasures in just their Berggasse 19 order. Freud and Anna Freud both saw patients in the house, he on the first floor and she in her quarters on the third. In the evenings they discussed his last great effort to summarize his science for its practitioners, the never completed *Outline of Psychoanalysis*.⁴

Implicitly casting archival restoration as a kind of provisional relief, this narrative supplies an apt entry point into the topic of this book—Greek tragedy's archive feelings. The consolation that Freud seeks in his re-gathered art collection, his newly built archive, amounts to the (precarious) regathering of a subject worn out by physical pain, exhausted by waiting—for a diseased bodily part to be removed, for an old home to be reconstituted. In the Aristotelian theory of tragedy, the aesthetic outcome of catharsis, one of its most contested concepts, entails an emotional cleansing—relief or release—bringing the subject back to a condition of psychic equilibrium that parallels the bodily harmony and integrity of the plot.⁵ After Freud's dismissal from the hospital, his taking refuge in the Viennese study ostensibly re-created in London by his son Ernst appears to provide a cathartic relief from tragic pain and exhaustion. The return to the routine of psychoanalytic work seems to carry with itself the notion of a temporarily reacquired, reaffirmed self.

4. Young-Bruehl 1988, 236. "Radical excision" refers to surgery, for cancer of the jaw, that Freud underwent on September 8, 1938. See also Lin 2017 (ch. 4).

5. Aristotle's influential theory of catharsis depends especially on his elliptical and controversial statement in *Poetics*: "Tragedy is the imitation of an action (*mimêsis praxeôs*) . . . that through pity and fear (*di' eleou kai phobou*) accomplishes the catharsis (*katharsin*) of such emotions" (1449b24–28); cf. *Politics* 1342a1–15. Especially in the case of Aristotelian catharsis, one could say that the ancient text cannot be separated from the history of its modern reception. It is this reception that, to an extent, I summon every time I refer to Aristotelian catharsis. (On Renaissance reception, see chapter 3.) The two main interpretive variants of catharsis—as "purification" and "discharge"—both involve a kind of cleansing, whether as relief or release, though "discharge" emphasizes the physiological rather than the moral and pedagogical: see, among others, Schadewaldt 1955; Pohlenz 1956; Abdulla 1985; Halliwell 1986, 168–201, and 2011 (ch. 5); Belfiore 1992, 348–49; Lear 1992; Ford 1995; Segal 1996a, 153–57; Yates 1998; Sifakis 2001; Marchiori 2006; Munteanu 2012; Billings 2014, 24–26 and 36–37, and forthcoming; and Ferrari 2019. Bernays's interpretation ([1857] 2015) goes beyond the notion of "discharge" by unconventionally understanding catharsis as an ecstatic experience, a heightening and expansion of the spectator's sensorium through exposure to that which is outside the subject. Still, even though "the protective boundaries of the self are breached," the experience amounts, for Bernays, to a "pleasurable release" (J. I. Porter 2015, 27–28). See also pp. 5–6, this volume.

Yet in the pleasure of the renewed routine there is also the anxious and debilitating impetus to re-create the past as it was, to reconstruct a lost life, to rearrange its objects in their imaginary “original” form and order. Among these objects there is Freud himself, who, in seeking to reinhabit the setting of Viennese psychoanalysis and, through it, his earlier life, embarks on an enterprise of self-archivization, which as such notionally brings him closer to the inanimate, what from a human viewpoint may be seen as inert matter.⁶ The desire for the unattainable driving Freud’s archival efforts works against the cathartic effects they ostensibly pursue. The dilatory temporality of this archival desire, its repetitious rhythm, is not very different from the “waiting” that the surgery, the epiphany of Freud’s art collection, and the “never completed” *Outline of Psychoanalysis* were meant to temper or suppress. This is the archival rhythm, the rhythm of lack, the rhythm of an impossible reconnection with an *archê* (“origin”). Yet, while this serial, self-wearying motion runs counter to the promise of catharsis, the restoration of the subject’s equilibrium—in a tragic world, Greek and otherwise—it generates a certain masochistic pleasure.⁷

Behind this serial motion, this exhausting and never-ending quest for an origin, lies the death drive, the Freudian concept that has itself been the object of never-ending critical reassessment by postmodern thinkers (psychoanalytic, deconstructionist, post-humanist).⁸ As discussed by Jacques Derrida in his book *Archive Fever (Mal d’archive)*, whose kernel was a lecture delivered at the Freud Museum and Archive in London, the death drive generates the paradox of the archive, which Young-Bruehl’s account of Freud’s relocation to London exemplifies. In this book, I use the archive and the death drive together to theorize, through close readings of a selection of plays of Aeschylus

6. Throughout the book, I employ the terms “animate” and “inanimate” as a convenient shorthand for the notional poles that help us make sense of the human death drive, notwithstanding the animacy and vitality posited for non-living objects and materials in certain post-humanist modes of thought. See, e.g., with different orientations, Bennett 2010 and 2015, Grosz 2011, Povinelli 2016, and Telò and Mueller 2018 (for further bibliography). When, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud refers to the “organic,” he means that which has “life” in the conventional sense, i.e., that which belongs to an organism—an animal, a plant, or a single-celled life form; by “inorganic,” he means that which lacks life and thus does not constitute an organism, a “living being.” However, the death drive, as we will see, shows how all these ostensible opposites are deeply co-implicated.

7. The notion inherent to catharsis of equilibrium after a moment of emotional disruption implies restoration, even if we assume that such equilibrium leads to a *metabolê* (“an alteration of state”), i.e., it does not correspond to a return to the condition prior to tragic perturbation.

8. See, for example, the special issue of *Differences* on “Constructing the Death Drive,” edited by McNulty (2017a), and most recently, J. Butler 2019 and 2020, 151–83; J. Cohen 2020; Kelly 2020; and D. Young, forthcoming.

lus, Sophocles, and Euripides, an anti-cathartic aesthetics of Greek tragedy. Iconic figures of Greek tragedy—first and foremost, Antigone—have been seen as emblematic of the death drive.⁹ I am not interested in the psychology of characters per se but rather in death-driven modes of feeling with aesthetic force that can shake audiences through the convulsions and futile exertions not just of characters, but also plots and dramatic form broadly conceived. In my analyses, I seek to delineate affective atmospheres where words, with their formal features, and characters' psychic orientations act together.¹⁰ Acceleration, hoarding, vertiginous suspension, breathless looping, affective bulimia or binge eating, serial cutting, trying to enter or fold in upon oneself, auto-immune inflammation, the orgasm as an unfinished, non-teleological pleasure: these are the intimations of aesthetic experiences that I use to articulate my model of anti-catharsis. I regard these aesthetic potentialities as “archive feelings” because they all arise from the effort to recapture a phantasmic *archê* that, directly or indirectly, points to the ultimate origin, non-existence. These feelings also linger around containers and surfaces (bodies, objects, spaces)—material configurations that, by conjuring some form of unstable “consignation” or gathering together of elements, can be viewed as archival or proto-archival.¹¹

I explore the death drive and archive in Greek tragedy, in a sense, to offer an answer to the long-debated question “Why do human beings enjoy tragedy?” Rana Saadi Liebert’s 2017 monograph, which discusses ancient ideas of the tragic before and after Greek drama (in archaic poetry and post-Socratic philosophy), argues that an answer can be found through a rehabilitation of Plato’s aesthetics. In the Aristotelian theory of catharsis, as most scholars have seen it, *mimêsis* (or representation) is the distancing frame capable of

9. See the chapter “The Splendor of Antigone” in Lacan 1992, 243–56; for discussion, see esp. J. Butler 2000; Leonard 2005, 101–30; P. A. Miller 2007a and 2007b, 72–98; Eagleton 2010a; and Honig 2013.

10. In Aristotle, catharsis is an effect of plot structure, derived from the particular configurations of *anagnôris* (“recognition”) and *peripeteia* (“reversal”), the two fundamental components of his representational regime: see Rancière 2011, 97. On tragic plots as affective structures, see esp. Wohl 2015, ix–xi.

11. See Derrida 1996, 3: “*Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.” The archive was, of course, part of the Greek cultural imaginary. Sometime between 409 and 405 BCE, the Metroon—the central archive of Athens—was instituted, while previously “most state documents were scattered around the city at the offices of different magistrates” (Sickingner 1999, 62), i.e., at their respective *archeia*. Temples and sanctuaries, in and outside Athens, also had archival repositories. On theatrical archives in Athens, see Hanink 2018, 326–29. Even though I occasionally make references to some of these structures (see esp. the Brauron archive in chapter 4), I use the concept of the “archive” as a theoretical tool rather than a historical entity.

transforming pain into pleasure, protecting the spectator/reader of tragedy from being “hurt”; it is what ultimately places the subject in a safe position.¹² According to Liebert, “Aristotle does not resolve so much as contain the tragic paradox within the realm of representation, where it remains the case that an encounter with painful objects gives pleasure *because of* and not despite their pain.”¹³ Following the lead of Plato in the *Republic*, she sees “tragic pleasure as the satisfaction of a subrational appetite for grief,” that is to say, the fulfillment of a “hunger for tears,” which “arises from the embodied state of the soul.” The sheer “intensity” of anger and grief as conveyed by the tragic mode appeals to, and appeases, the “self-destructive impulse that Socrates posits in the human soul.”¹⁴ Liebert’s position may recall Augustine, who, reminiscing about his past as an aficionado of tragic spectacles, identifies “the pain itself” (*dolor ipse*) with “pleasure” (*voluptas*)—or, perhaps even more so, Friedrich Nietzsche, who agrees with Plato’s diagnosis of tragedy’s ability to engender intense emotion, even though he takes issue with his condemnation of it.¹⁵ Even though, in other writings, he famously rejects Aristotle’s notion of catharsis,¹⁶ in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche may have appropriated the reading of it that had been advanced by Jacob Bernays, the uncle of Freud’s wife Martha, to elaborate his Dionysian vision of tragedy as “the infinite primordial joy in existence.”¹⁷ In Bernays’s ecstatic view of catharsis, pain is mixed with

12. See, for example, Heath 2001; Halliwell 2011, 230–36; and Munteanu 2012, 118–31.

13. Liebert 2017, 12. For aesthetically informed accounts of Plato’s discussions of the pleasure of pain, or of pleasure mixed with pain, see esp. Nadaff 2002, 107–20, and Peponi 2002 and 2012, 51–58.

14. All the quotations are from Liebert 2017, 6 and 9–10. See esp. Plato, *Republic* 437d, 439d, and 605c–606b; Plato and Aristotle are influenced by Gorgias’s theory of poetic affects as enunciated especially in *Encomium of Helen* 8, 9, and 16: see esp. Segal 1962 and Munteanu 2012, 37–47. Liebert’s discussion of intensity is informed by affect theory, broadly intended, in particular by the works of Altieri (2003) and Gumbrecht (2004). Similarly to Liebert, Loraux (2002a, 35) emphasizes the power of tragic grief, its endlessly seductive sound; see also Wallace 2020, 38–39.

15. See Augustine, *Confessions* 3.2. Eagleton (2003, 175–76) points out that when Augustine warns, “Beware of uncleanness” (*cave immunditiam*), “his argument borders on Aristotle’s doctrine of *catharsis*.” For Nietzsche’s view of Plato’s tragic emotions, see *Human, All Too Human* ([1878] 1986, 98).

16. For Nietzsche’s rejection of catharsis, see, e.g., *Twilight of the Idols* ([1889] 1998, 80–81): “Saying yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems . . . *this* is what I sensed as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* freeing oneself from terror and pity, not purging oneself of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge—such was Aristotle’s understanding of it—but, over and above terror and pity, *being oneself* the eternal joy of becoming.” See Silk and Stern 1981, 269–71, and Ugolini 2002, 28–29.

17. Nietzsche (1872) 1967, 105. As he puts it, “In spite of fear and pity, we are the happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the *one* living being, with whose creative joy we are united.” Here, “to a cathartic purging of surplus affections [Nietzsche] opposes a different kind

pleasure, as “the effects of discharge persist as a feeling of painful-pleasurable release.”¹⁸ For Bernays, however, cathartic pleasure, like any other, “depends,” in fact “upon a sudden disturbance and restoration of psychic equilibrium.”¹⁹ Thus, although Bernays contested the moralistic interpretations of the Aristotelian theory, bringing out its potential for an ecstatic encounter with pure feeling, an expansion of sensory capabilities that also relied on pain, he could not dispense with the fundamental tenet of catharsis—no matter how we conceptualize it—that is, its tending toward some form of healing restoration. Catharsis makes tragic aesthetics analogous to the dynamics of carnivalesque framing, a hierarchical restoration after a temporary exposure to the forbidden identifications of “playing the other” (in the influential formulation of Froma Zeitlin).²⁰ This analogy ultimately points to a normative orientation—the way that, in its reaffirmation of “psychic equilibrium” (an important element, if not the whole story, of why, in an Aristotelian perspective, we would enjoy tragedy), catharsis may parallel the carnivalesque effort to safeguard current social structures.²¹

It goes without saying that Aristotle’s doctrine is prescriptive more than descriptive. By apparently explaining how tragedy *works*, it fixes how it *should* or *ought* to work. It is impossible, of course, to determine how an audience of spectators or readers may have reacted to a play, or, in turn, predict how it might react in the future—and the notion of a homogeneous audience is, in itself, problematic, even if heuristically convenient and, to an extent, inevitable.²² Speculating on affective experiences implies emphasizing some instead

of release, a redemptive discharging . . . of these same affections,” as observed by J. I. Porter (2016b, 218), who reads into this “discharging” (*Entladung*) the influence of Bernays’s take on catharsis in his 1857 discussion. In general, on the influence of Bernays on Nietzsche, see Gentili 1996, 294–336, and Ugolini 2002, 24–25.

18. J. I. Porter 2016b, 225.

19. Bernays (1857) 2015, 322.

20. Zeitlin 1985 and 1996.

21. Catharsis could, in other words, become an expression of what Edelman has called the “political program of happiness as a regulatory norm” (Berlant and Edelman 2014, 18). As duBois (2008, 132) observes, Aristotle’s “views on catharsis . . . refer to a disciplining of the social body,” evincing his concern “with identifying systems that prevent social disruption and disorder.” Kristeva (1982, 28) sees catharsis as what “arranges . . . harmonizes pathos.” For Toscano (2015, 194), catharsis is parallel to the reconciliation in Hegel’s dialectical reading of tragedy as an effort to “put contradiction to work.” Most recently, Critchley (2019, 245–50) has provocatively asked whether “Aristotle *really* [is] more generous to tragedy than Plato.”

22. For similar caveats, see Wohl 2015, xii. Like Wohl, in the course of the book, I will heuristically use the first-person plural to describe the affective implications of various effects of reading, “in full recognition of the inevitable gulf (synchronic and diachronic) the pronoun conceals and the imaginative projection required to leap it.” The aesthetics of reading are predicated on contingent phenomenological factors—as Snaza (2019, ch. 11) has most recently

of others and, thus, restricting potential responses. Even though I do not seek to offer reconstructions, but to draw out effects of reading and their aesthetic implications, my own intervention is necessarily conditioned by this intrinsic limitation.

My goal is to suggest an alternative to reparative or redemptive tragic aesthetics by asking, What if the pleasure of tragedy is produced not by release but by the lack of it—by a sense of stuckness rather than intensity as such? What if, in other words, the absence of psychic restoration after pleasurable pain is tragedy's main allure? Stuckness is expressed by suspension and repetition, which exhaust and undo the subject while affording it an outlet for resistance against hierarchy and teleology.²³ It is to conceptualize this possibility of pleasure in thwarted restoration that I turn to psychoanalysis and specifically to the concept of the death drive, in its multiple registers. I thus intend to look at Greek tragedy's aesthetics in terms of universal psychic dynamics, emphasizing similarity and proximity—rather than discontinuity and difference—between antiquity and modernity.²⁴

The death drive, Freud's serial, self-wearying motion, seems to me the most capacious theorization for articulating an anti-cathartic approach to Greek tragedy. As I will argue, Greek tragedy, in its capacity to transform dramatic form and representation into affective force, anticipates various figures, tropes, and metaphors that Freudian and post-Freudian theory has associated with the death drive. The sustained encounter between Greek tragedy and postmodernism that this book stages is thus grounded in death-driven modes of feeling in the extant plays that come into sharper focus through the conceptual lenses of deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and Deleuzian theory. At the same time, the techniques of formal interpretation supplied by these approaches help open up a "mesh of . . . dissonances and resonances, lapses

reminded us. They are also predicated on effects of identification, which are, of course, "mobile, elastic, and volatile" (Fuss 1995, 8), and indeed on the impossibility of full identification (as I discuss in chapter 1 in relation to Euripides' *Phoenissae*). On readerly identification and affective form, see esp. Felski 2019, 101–5.

23. I am here adapting the viewpoint of the queer critique of reparative politics advanced by Berlant in Berlant and Edelman (2014, 6), who views normativity as "an attempt to drown out the subject's constitution by and attachment to varieties of being *undone*" (my emphasis).

24. Although I am aware of the objections to applying twentieth-century psychoanalytic categories to antiquity (see esp. duBois 1988), my argument is not historical—it does not intend, in other words, to "reconstruct" how ancient Athenians reacted to tragic theater; see pp. 8–10, this volume. While I believe in the universality of psychic dynamics such as the death drive, I see psychoanalysis primarily as a strategy for reading: see, for example, Oliensis 2009, 1–13. For a critique of the historicist emphasis on diachronic discontinuity, see also the discussion of "queer unhistoricism" by Freccero (2007). On anachronism and untimeliness as conditioning any interpretive approach to antiquity, see *Postclassicism Collective* 2020, ch. 2.8.

and excesses of meaning”²⁵ that may further materialize gestures of resistance against cathartic release. Jacques Rancière has defined aesthetics as a disruptive and dissensual force (“*pathos*”) emerging in the interstices of *mimêsis*, undoing the logic of representation (“*logos*”), which he sees supremely exemplified in the Aristotelian tragic plot, with its laws of unity, necessity, and probability.²⁶ In the readings that make up this book, I also rely on interpretive strategies for reading beyond the representational level, and heeding forces that push through the gaps of the tragic *muthos*, disturbing catharsis—the designated emotional outcome of the Aristotelian plot.

This reading of death-driven aesthetics beyond or against representation is of a piece with the non-historicist orientation of my approach. For Theodor Adorno, a well-known critic of catharsis, not only do artworks have autonomy, but their political impact emerges precisely from that autonomy.²⁷ In artworks’ resistance to communicating with a socio-cultural outside, in the effects of dissonance or displacement they generate between themselves and the world, and between themselves and their recipients, they provoke a “shudder,” opening up a fissure in the status quo.²⁸ In its dissensual power, the rejection of, or breach with, socio-political reality is akin to the disruption of representation that Rancière ascribes to aesthetics.²⁹ By aligning myself with these critical approaches, I am, in a sense, departing from the fecund and exceptionally influential contextualism that has shaped and profoundly enriched the critical landscape of Greek tragedy in the past three decades. In the preface of their agenda-setting 1990 collection *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* Jack Winkler and Froma Zeitlin reacted against a critical tendency to “close out the entire social context in which the plays took place.” For them, neglecting “the extratextual aspects of tragedy” produces a “methodological *sparagmos*,” which prevents the interpreter from understanding “how those . . . scripts had meaning.”³⁰ However, the “closing out” that they attribute to critics may be seen as an effect of the texts themselves, of the fact that, as Adorno observes, “art acquires its specificity by separating itself from what it developed out

25. Sedgwick 1993, 8.

26. See Rancière 2009, 50: “*Pathos* . . . overturns the representative logic of the arrangements of actions”; Rancière identifies this *pathos* with the Freudian death drive: see chapter 3.

27. Adorno calls Aristotelian catharsis an “ideal of sublimation” that “entrusts art with the task of providing aesthetic semblance as a substitute satisfaction for the bodily satisfaction of the targeted public’s instincts and needs”; in other words, “catharsis is a purging action directed against the affects and an ally of repression” (1997, 238).

28. See, e.g., Adorno 1997, 4–5. On the “shudder,” see Adorno 1997, 245.

29. See Dasgupta (2019) on the convergence between Adorno’s *dissonance* and Rancière’s *dissensus*.

30. Winkler and Zeitlin 1990, 3–5.

of.”³¹ The structuralist-anthropological perspectives in which this contextualist approach is grounded are put to the service of appreciating “how those scripts *had* meaning,” that is, *then* and *there*. But the instructive encounters with the social “outside” that are staged by cultural critics develop from effects of reading, from the imaginative potentialities of tragic language, that is from the “text,” with its myriad, simultaneous interpretive latencies. In response to the conventional, misleading take on “il n’y a pas dehors-texte,” I would say that, notwithstanding the illusion of historical situatedness afforded by the ancient Greek idiom, the text is diachronically stratified, hosting multiple contexts shading into each other that have been or will be actualized in experiences of reading.³² Interrogating the evidence on the Athenian citizen body’s participation in the making and judging of theatrical productions, Sean Gurd has pointed out that “despite its clear grounding in civic practices and its persistent association with practices of elite self-advertisement, drama seemed frustratingly dis-integrated from its social context.” As he puts it, “the resistance of drama to easy integration within well-known patterns of social causality was a provocative anomaly, one that theorists tried to obviate by demonstrating how it was, in fact, socially productive.”³³ The pioneer of these critics is Aristotle himself, whose theory of catharsis can be construed as an attempt to undo tragedy’s aesthetic autonomy and recalcitrance by imposing an affect-based model of social functionalism.³⁴ There is a convergence between cathartic *containment* and the contextualist aspiration to embed, that is, *contain* and *constrain* meaning within the boundaries of a historically determined cultural matrix. The reparative force of catharsis is the aesthetic counterpart of hermeneutic reconstructivism. I conceive of the non-historicist orientation of my readings—the use of an indeterminate temporal framework that does not exclude but transcends antiquity—as a means of embracing the aesthetic recalcitrance of tragedy’s affective negativity (its anti-cathartic, death-driven feelings), which correlates with its breach with the outside, Adorno’s negative dialectics. I mean to expose modes of recalcitrance materialized in poetic form as (repressed) tragic pleasures.

31. Adorno 1997, 4–5.

32. Derrida (1988a, 148) himself explains how he intended the phrase “il n’y a pas dehors-texte”: it “does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book,” he says. “It does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this ‘real’ except in an interpretive experience.” On historicist contextualization as a disavowal of the critic’s own situatedness in the present, see the Postclassisms Collective’s important discussion (2020, esp. ch. 1.4 and 2.7), which refers to the eloquent response of Loraux (1993) to Vernant’s contextualism.

33. Gurd 2017, 39–41.

34. See Gurd 2017, 41.

By placing the death drive, as theorized by Freud and others after him, at the center of my model of anti-catharsis, I locate the pleasurable pain of Greek tragedy in an alluring destabilization without release, which is effected not only by moments of formal anti-closure, but also by the aesthetic power attached to fantasies of the never-ending undoing of the subject.³⁵ Whether that undoing is affectively set in motion by the pursuit of what always vanishes away (including “intense” feeling), a bodily dissolution into undulating elemental life, the proximity to death, or the postponement and impossibility of it, tragedy affords an audience the opportunity for an aestheticized exercise of the primitive compulsion for radically disrupted time, a prolongation of carnivalesque suspension. This denial of the moment of restoration provokes an audience’s negative pleasure, its perverse gratitude for being spared closure and release.³⁶ Locating counter-aesthetics embodied in tragic form, or in collisions between representation and non-representation, my argument supplies an additional perspective for thinking about the affective potentialities of tragic theater in and far beyond fifth-century Athens, thereby broadening our perception of modern and contemporary audiences’ engagement with it. For example, in reading anti-cathartically, we may perceive the troubled intimacies of the postmodern human condition in some of the most iconic tragic interpersonal bonds—Medea/Aegeus, Heracles/Theseus, Philoctetes/Neoptolemus, Agave/Cadmus. We come to see relations with other people as well as with the archival past as precarious, suspended, and even non-relational—that is, falling short of knowledge and possession, in aspiration and in fact (as subjects resist being archived or assimilated). We may see tragedy forge bonds, affective moods, and dispositions that can be regarded as “queer” not just because they twist heteronormative kinship,³⁷ but because they draw upon aestheticized expressions of refusal, futility, abeyance—negative yet possibly emancipatory sensations mobilized by formal expressiveness.³⁸

35. Many important formalistic studies, influenced by deconstruction, have emphasized the anti-closural elements of tragedy, especially Euripidean tragedy (see esp. Pucci 1977, Dunn 1996, and Wohl 2015), or even the lack of catharsis (see, e.g., Pucci 1991 and, most recently, Wallace 2020, 38–40); my interest is in seeing failed catharsis not as failed pleasure, but as the essence of tragic (unpleasurable) pleasure in itself. Catharsis, as we will see especially in chapter 3, can be construed precisely as a denial of tragic pleasure; in addition, as I will suggest later in this Introduction, catharsis contains, in a sense, anti-catharsis not just because it is unable to eliminate pain entirely or re-establish equilibrium, but because in its restorative, archival proclivity it engenders a pursuit of the unattainable.

36. Here I borrow language from the comments of one of my anonymous referees.

37. See esp. J. Butler 2000; Edelman 2004, 102–7; and Deutscher 2017, 40–48, all on the ethics and politics of Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

38. On queer feelings, see, with different emphases, Cvetkovich 2003, Love 2007, Halberstam 2011, Berlant and Edelman 2019, and Freeman 2019. The critique of the “negativity”

The archive feelings that I explore encompass various registers of the death drive. In what follows, I set up my anti-cathartic reading by laying out the theoretical models for these registers and by mapping out the shared space of the death drive and the archive as discussed especially by Derrida in *Archive Fever*. I will start with Freud's introduction of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, one of his most complex books and one that went through multiple, frustrating rounds of revision.³⁹

I. FREUD AND THE DEATH DRIVE

Repetition, the regressive nature of all instincts, or drives (*Triebe*), and the notion of life as the breach of a condition of inanimate equilibrium are among the themes that surround the *Todestrieb* ("death drive") in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).⁴⁰ Seeking to find an explanation for the repetition compulsion that he observed in survivors of the Great War, Freud put forward the provocative thesis that "there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle," the tendency in the psychic apparatus to maintain constancy within the organism by keeping excitation (*Erregung*) as low as possible. What opposes the pleasure principle, generating compulsive repetition, is a "'daemonic' force"—namely the death drive or instinct—which strives to "restore" the organism to the inanimate state, countervailing the forces of mastery and self-preservation that constitute the life instinct (also referred to as Eros).⁴¹ More than indicating a desire for death,

of these feelings offered by Ruti (2017, esp. ch. 5) seems to me to risk a certain complacency toward the identification of happiness with the maintenance of the status quo: see pp. 23–24, this volume. As the etymology indicates, queerness is a "twisting" of heteronormativity as a master signifier of the normative as such. It is a torsion of the illusion of a stable identity through affective dispositions that foster what Berlant and Warner (1998, 548) call "changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex."

39. There are two surviving manuscripts of the book, but, as Grubrich-Simitis (1996, 186–87) notes, "it is impossible to assign the two surviving manuscript versions . . . to specific phases in the chronology of that text's genesis." Freud continued to revise the text also during production and in the new three editions that were published between 1921 and 1925. For convenience's sake, my account of the text will treat it as unitary.

40. The first theorization of the death drive was formulated in 1912 by Sabina Spielrein (2015a), whose work Freud acknowledges in a footnote of *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920, 551n). Spielrein's theory was initially received with skepticism by Freud himself: see Carotenuto 1982, 147–49.

41. Freud 1920, 22, 35, and 44. Eros is here the equivalent of reproduction or, in the words of Laplanche, "the *bound and binding form* of sexuality, brought to light by the discovery of narcissism" (1976, 123). Connecting *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with the notion of the sexual instinct as inherently masochistic, which Freud had put forward in "Instincts and Their Vicis-

the *Todestrieb* “evokes the much more complex process whereby [the living being] seeks to nullify the fact of its own birth” and, thus, retroactively impose the inanimate existence that Freud sees as the primordial origin.⁴² He observes that “the ‘death instinct’ . . . was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance,”⁴³ thereby suggesting that, as soon as it breaks through, animate life—human as well as non-human or *ahuman*⁴⁴—carries within itself an urge to “cancel itself out,”⁴⁵ to reinstate inanimacy. Freud makes the additional point that any instinct, repetitious by definition, is regressive—corresponding to “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things.”⁴⁶ In this respect, the life instincts share the “compulsion to repeat” and “are actually modelled on the death drive.”⁴⁷ Their function is, in fact, “to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself.”⁴⁸ As an instinct that urges the organism not to rush its regressive journey toward the inanimate origin, but to defer it to the “right” time, Eros—like the pleasure principle, which is its ally or instrument—“seems actually to serve the death instincts.”⁴⁹ To make sense of this paradox, it seems we need to take note here of a slippage between “death instinct,” on the one hand, as a rush to death, and, on the other, as a movement toward the *telos* of life. Both the rush and the measured tread toward death represented by the life instinct “serve” that *telos*.

situdes” (1915a), Laplanche coopts sexuality as a force separated from reproduction—“antilife . . . frenetic enjoyment [*jouissance*]” (1976, 124)—into the domain of the death drive. On this point, see further, pp. 22–23, this volume.

42. The quotation is from S. Miller 2014, 7. See also J. Butler 1990, 264: “Repetition compulsion signifies the desire not merely for death, but for the possibility of never having been born.”

43. Freud 1920, 60n1.

44. Freud discusses the action of the death and life instincts in the “germ-cell” (*Keimzelle*) as a fundamental unit of organic life. Leonard (2019) sees in this proto-post-humanist interest in organic life per se, human *and* non-human—or *ahuman* (in the words of Derrida 2003c)—a major difference between Freud and Lacan, whose anti-humanist notion of the death drive is nonetheless deeply focused on the human. Morton (2018) locates the force of the Freudian death drive in non-living beings as well. On Freud’s post-humanism, see also Wills 2016 (ch. 2); on the (meta)biological dimension of Freud’s treatise, see esp. de Lauretis 2008, esp. 46–52, and Geroulanos and Meyers 2018 (ch. 7).

45. See Freud 1920, 38. See S. Miller 2014, 8 on *sich abgleichen* “to cancel itself out,” but more literally “to equal itself out” as a reference to the inanimate’s “state of unsullied equilibrium or selfsameness” and to “the agency of the compulsion to repeat.”

46. Freud 1920, 36.

47. de Lauretis 2008, 75. As J. I. Porter (2006, 136) puts it, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* affirms “a desire to see death as a permanent element in the logic of life.”

48. Freud 1920, 39.

49. Freud 1920, 63.

The temporal structure that appears to underlie Freud's revolutionary thesis—the *before* and the *after* generated by the “trauma” of the appearance of life—can be reframed as a co-implication and simultaneity of animate and inanimate, or *lifedeath*.⁵⁰ At the end of his 1920 essay, Freud states that “if . . . we are not to abandon the hypothesis of death instincts, we must suppose them to be associated from the very first with life instincts.”⁵¹ Freud troubles the binary of life and death. Since, as David Wills observes, life in Freud's schema “begins as a rupture vis-à-vis itself, an interruption of inanimate by an animate that has somehow lain inert,” it amounts to “an intractable inextricability of animate and inanimate,” a coexistence of life and death instincts, what Derrida calls *lifedeath* (*la vie la mort*).⁵² In “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” Derrida states that “life is death,” for “repetition and the beyond of the pleasure principle are native and congenital to that which they transgress.”⁵³ In other words, seeing death as an internal condition of life, its origin and end, Freud conceived of life as the “the other through which death returns to itself, accomplishes itself.”⁵⁴

Thinking in terms of *lifedeath* can help us see the death drive as lying not just beyond but even behind the pleasure principle and, by analogy, catharsis as well. When, in the *Poetics*, Aristotle introduces catharsis as the purgation of fear and pity that tragedy achieves through these same emotions, he seems to assume an instinct for survival and self-mastery (expressed in what Bernays calls the “restoration of psychic equilibrium”), which, in his schema, the assault of tragic emotion activates. As an instinct, this force of self-preservation is by definition persistent and insistent, that is, repetitious. In that sense, it can be assimilated to the Freudian life instinct, which, as we have seen, is dialectically inseparable from the death drive. Freud observes that the death drive “rushes forward (*stürmt nach vorwärts*) so as to reach

50. In reckoning with this trauma, Sabina Spielrein (2015a, 194) had theorized the death drive before Freud, positing “destruction as the cause of coming into being” and observing that “death is necessary for the advent of life.”

51. Freud 1920, 57. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud observes that the tension between the life and the death instincts is “what all life essentially consists of” (1930, 122). See also J. Butler 2006, 118, and 2020, 151–61.

52. The citation is from Wills 2016, 69. Derrida's 1975–76 seminar *La vie la mort* (2019) rethinks life and death beyond an oppositional logic. Sessions 11–14 of *La vie la mort*, which are dedicated to the discussion of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, overlap with substantial sections of *The Post Card* (1987). See Vitale 2018, 127–65, and McCance 2019.

53. Derrida 1978, 203. Derrida explains that the phrase *la vie la mort* (or *lavielamort*) drops the conjunction *et* to replace the logic of identification and opposition with the *différance* expressed by “the blanking out of a pause or the invisible trait of an *au-delà*” (2019, 25). “*Au-delà*” is an obvious allusion to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

54. Vitale 2018, 144.

the final aim of life as swiftly as possible”; but “when a particular stage in the advance has been reached,” the life instinct “jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey.”⁵⁵ Glossing Aristotle’s theory through the rhetoric of Freudian *lifedeath*, we could say that, while awakening the life instinct, enacting the pleasure principle, and, thus, “prolonging the journey,” tragic catharsis has the same directionality as the death drive—toward dissolution, toward the inanimate—even as it attempts to curb the *rushing* impetus. Yet catharsis, as analogous to an instinct, also presupposes repetition and a striving toward *re-restoration*—to “an earlier state,” as Freud would have it. That is, it may be seen as aiming to bring the subject back to an imagined wholesome *before*, a point in time anterior to the exposure to tragic excitation.⁵⁶

The archive and the particular psychology that shapes it can illuminate what the idea of a *re-restoration* entails for the notion of catharsis. After introducing Derrida’s Freudian conceptualization of the archive, and its wide application, I will conclude my theorization of catharsis’s anti-cathartic kernel before returning to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

II. THE DEATH DRIVE AND THE ARCHIVE, DERRIDA AND FREUD

A foundational text in the field of archive studies, Derrida’s *Archive Fever* is a powerful reflection on the contradictions encompassed by the verb “to archive”: both storing up and storing away, remembering and forgetting. Derrida sets out to theorize what we can call archival psychology, but also, as suggested by the book’s subtitle *une impression freudienne* (*A Freudian Impression*), the relationship between the notion of the archive and Freudian psychoanalysis.⁵⁷ As an apparent remedy against loss, the archive is already, in

55. Freud 1920, 41.

56. I am not engaging with the dispute over whether Aristotle intends catharsis as an actual restoration to an earlier state or not, or whether he regards the psychic alteration produced in catharsis as temporary or permanent. I am simply suggesting that if we conceive of catharsis as mobilized by, or at least analogous to, a life *instinct*—something that the idea of reacquired equilibrium presupposes—we inevitably see it as tending toward “an earlier state of things,” as in Freud’s definition of a drive.

57. The word “impression” is, in itself, part of Freudian psychoanalysis’s archival lexicon: see Derrida 1996, 8. The image also refers to Jakob Freud’s handwritten inscription in a copy of the Hebrew Bible given to his son Sigmund, which Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, the polemical addressee of *Archive Fever*, used, in *Freud’s Moses* (1991), as an example of the incontrovertible historical power of archival objects, of their ability to restore a self-identical past.

its conception, enmeshed with finitude and destruction. In addition, pre-supposing selecting and discarding, assembling and gathering are always “performances of exclusion.”⁵⁸ But further, as Derrida argues, the archive’s preservative function is radically compromised by its reliance on an outside, a technical exteriority, a material support that cannot in itself be safeguarded. This exteriority, a perishable prosthesis, is a place of consignment, in which to gather and stock scattered objects; a medium for writing; or, alternatively, a mnemonic surface—a *hypomnêma*—where “impressions” of the past have been imprinted, something like wax, often called forth in the ancient imagery of memory, or Freud’s mystic writing pad.⁵⁹ Conceiving the psyche as an internal substrate for recording, inscription, repression, suppression, displacement, consignment, condensation, Freudian psychoanalysis, in Derrida’s view, “becomes a theory of the archive and not only a theory of memory.”⁶⁰ In turn, the archive is, in Derrida’s view, governed by the laws of psychoanalysis:

If there is no archive without consignment in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. Consequence: right on that which permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction, introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument.⁶¹

Not only is the *hypomnêma*, the “mnemotechnical supplement,” always liable to “radical effacement” or “eradication,” but, more importantly, the aim of archival preservation—a past partially restored through impressions—is, like the life instinct, predicated on the repetitive dynamic characteristic of the

58. Tlatli 2009, 185. See also Mbembe 2002, 20. The Greek passages that present writing as a *pharmakon* (“remedy”) for forgetfulness exemplify the impossibility of disentangling preservation from destruction in that the term famously also means “poison”: see Derrida 1981a, 95–119 on Plato, *Phaedrus* 274e–275a; see also Euripides, *Palamedes* fragment 578.1–2 Kannicht.

59. On multiple occasions, in the course of his essay, Derrida dwells on the notion of the archive as “hypomnesic,” predicated, that is, on a substrate—a *hypomnêsis* or *hypomnêma* “distinct from *mnêmê* and from *anamnêsis*” (1996, 19). Important for media theory (see Doane 2002, 33–68, and Elsaesser 2009), Freud’s essay on the mystic writing pad (1925) was an essential influence for Derrida. For a survey of the imagery of mnemonic wax in ancient Greek poetry, see Agócs 2019.

60. Derrida 1996, 19.

61. Derrida 1996, 11–12; cf. 10.

Freudian death drive. Consequently, the archive “always works, and *a priori*, against itself.” It is *an-archic*, or *an-archontic*—that is to say, its death-driven impetus defies from within consignation as an expression of authority and a means for political control, aspirations that Derrida etymologically locates in the word *archê* (“commencement, origin,” but also “power, authority”) and traces back to the Athenian archons’ practice of storing documents.⁶²

Ancient as well as postmodern archives (digital, virtual) are not just *an-archic* and *an-archontic* but also *an-archivic* and *archivio-lithic* (“oblivion” is implicit in the root *lith-/lêth-*).⁶³ In the course of the book, I will use these neologisms to suggest that the archive, the realm of preservation, is haunted by forgetting and destruction, just as, in Freud’s theorization, the life and death instincts are co-implicated. Places of ephemeral, virtual preservation relying on invisible substrates that are alterable yet recalcitrant, the digital archives of the Internet and social media confront us daily with capitalistic *lifedeath*: intimacy entangled in alienation; communication, in algorithmic manipulations; the good life, in commodification.⁶⁴ They also operate through the repetition compulsion of “posting” (that is, of impressing information on a digital surface), of piling up data, as well as updating or erasing it, in the vain attempt to showcase an illusory authenticity—an “original” self that is the most derivative (*an*)-*archê* or non-self.

The anarchivic character of the archive is also exemplified in discussions of the anthropocene, the current geological age, which has been shaped by human activity. Conceptualizing its boundaries as materialized in geological strata has entailed both a retrojection to the remote past, the precise level first registering the human, and a projection toward a (not very) distant future in which the human species survives as a trace, a fossil, or perhaps as some form of disembodied consciousness loaded onto the *hypomnêmata* of computer chips in a “frantic self-gathering,” as Claire Colebrook has put it.⁶⁵ In either post-human scenario, we can detect a latent yearning for the feared disappearance, for the time after human life—as well as for the time before it

62. See note 11, this chapter. On the archive as a creation of the state that is a “constant threat to the state” and to its “ability to consume time . . . to anaestheticize the past,” see Mbembe 2002, 23. For Mbembe, like Derrida, there is something suicidal about the archive.

63. The root *lêth-*, connected with the Underworld’s river of oblivion, is present, for example, in the English word “lethargic.” The *-lith* root in *archivio-lithic* is different from the one that appears in words such as Neo-lithic (“of new stone”).

64. On the capitalistic death drive, see Morton 2017, 47; on archive fever and digital media, see, e.g., Garde-Hansen 2009, Torlasco 2015, De Kosnik 2016, and Dekker 2017.

65. Colebrook 2014, 37. Contemporary discussions of climate catastrophe are informed by the view “of our present as suspended between prehistorical catastrophe and anticipated extinction” (Toadvine 2018, 53).

or even before life tout court. In the words of Don DeLillo, “Consciousness is exhausted. Back now to inorganic matter. This is what we want. We want to be stones in a field.”⁶⁶

Mal d'archive, the phrase that provides the original title of Derrida's book, designates both “the ‘evil’ that inhabits or haunts the archive, destroying it from within”⁶⁷ and archival psychology, which I want to use to interrogate the temporality of catharsis. At the beginning of his essay, speaking of the death drive, which “threatens . . . every archontic primacy,” Derrida identifies it with what he will later call “*le mal d'archive*, ‘archive fever.’”⁶⁸ Toward the end, we read:

The *trouble de l'archive* stems from a *mal d'archive*. We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives. Listening to the French idiom, and in it the attribute *en mal de*, to be *en mal d'archive* can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from a trouble or from what the noun *mal* might name. It is to burn with a passion (*c'est brûler d'une passion*). It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away (*elle se dérobe*). It is to run after the archive . . . right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, . . . desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin . . . to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.⁶⁹

Here we find an accurate diagnosis of Freud's own archive feelings in 1938, when the apparent relief caused by the arrival of his Viennese furniture in London carried with itself a never-resting, interminable search for the irretrievable “place of absolute commencement,” as underlined in Young-Bruehl's observation that “Ernst Kris helped arrange the treasures in *just* their Berggasse 19 order.” The “burning” passion described here by Derrida resembles the kinetic persistence of the death drive, which, as Freud puts it, “rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible.” As we pronounce the final *l* in *mal* and the concentration of liquid consonants in *brûler*—unsettled, fluid sounds—we receive phonosymbolic impressions of this feverish feeling, which thrives on deferral and suspension, and perversely pleases with impossibility or unattainability. As I observed earlier, catharsis—as an analog or an expression of the life instinct—may imply an attempt to return to an origin, to

66. On the latent yearning for disappearance in what he calls “anthropocene fever,” see Skrimshire (2017), who uses the DeLillo citation (2010, 52–53) as an epigraph (2017, 138).

67. S. Miller 2014, 16.

68. Derrida 1996, 11–12.

69. Derrida 1996, 91; I intersperse phrases from the original French edition (1995b, 142).

restore a lost affective *before*. But unable to overcome the separation from the past, catharsis and the pleasure derived from it can amount to an interminable search for what “slips away,” a running after what “an-archives itself.”

Greek tragedy is itself always running after the mythical past in a pursuit that one could say mnemonically aims at recording or capturing an “event” rather than maintaining a mimetic and aesthetic distance. Tragedy’s repetitive engagement with the traumatic tales of myth implicates this dramatic form in what we can call a *traumythic* compulsion. In every instantiation, Greek tragedy stages its obsession with primal scenes and “sources,” seeking to import through its very constitution their traumatic contents and the traumatic energy of the origin as such. It is as though the traumas in tragedy’s mythical narratives circulate not just at the moment of reception, through the sensoria of viewing or reading audiences, but in the repeated act of composition, which each time produces the event differently while attempting to record it.⁷⁰ The death drive is thus inherent in Athenian theatrical practice, whose state ideology, with its grounding in the alleged *archê* (“origin”) of autochthony and in a claim to imperialistic *archê* (“command”), is just one version of what, for Jean-Luc Nancy, constitutes the West’s effort to “re-engender itself” from its sources “as the very destiny of humanity.”⁷¹ Presumed to lie in the hazy past, mythical sources stand at an unbridgeable distance, which while making them bearers of self-authorizing archaicity also makes them perpetually elusive. The unsettling quality of this (a)temporal distance stands in contrast to the safety of distance posited between mimetic fiction, “event,” and audience, as in the prevalent model of reading tragedy, from Aristotle to Jean-Pierre Vernant (and beyond). In that perspective, the fiasco of Phrynichus’s *Capture of Miletus*, marked by the audience’s non-cathartic tears, as described by Herodotus (6.21.10), has been imputed to its anomalous proximity to the event. But as Paul Kottman observes, in a re-evaluation of the tears that were shed on that occasion, “it is as if the mimetic aspect of Phrynichus’s play lay not so much

70. See Derrida 1996, 17: “Archivization produces as much as it records the event.” On myth as a tragic megatext, see Burian 1997. On the thematics of collective memory in Greek tragedy, see Ceccarelli 2019; see also Mazzaro 1993. A distinct yet related issue is theatrical performance, which has recently received attention in the field of classics: see esp. Hunter and Uhlig 2017 and Uhlig 2019; see note 94, this chapter.

71. Nancy 1991, 46. On the double meaning of *archê*, see esp. Derrida 1996, 2, and Agamben 2019, 51–53. The ideology of autochthony can be regarded as death-driven, destructive toward perceived outsiders but also self-destructive because of its obsession with provenance from the earth, a place of life and death. Autochthony’s “enrootedness”—a Heideggerian term that Levinas (1990, 232) criticizes as the “very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers”—in a sense underlies the notion of “dwelling” as the place of consignment, one of the requisites of the institutional *archive*, according to Derrida (1996, 2). On Greek tragedy’s engagement with, and critique of, autochthony, see, e.g., Loraux 1990, Scodel 2006, and Nimis 2017.

in the artifice of its theatrical manifestation, but rather in the play's function as a witness for events that the spectators had themselves seen."⁷² The Derridean epigraph used by Kottman—"life is the non-representable origin of representation"⁷³—encapsulates, then, the fundamental conundrum of tragic fiction. If it is predicated not on mimetic distance but on a will to inhabit myth, to capture it by recording what is necessarily an unapproachable, non-representable event, like life itself but to an even greater extent, then tragic aesthetics are informed by a constitutive archive fever, a death-driven circuit between the notional recording of the mythical event and its inherent impossibility, a movement reflected precisely in the endless regression that nourishes theatrical production. From mimetic distance as the necessary condition of cathartic tragic pleasure, we shift our sense of tragic aesthetics to the pleasure-in-pain of wanting but being unable to fill the gap, to make up for the lack inherent in memory.

To introduce the connection between archive fever and the different modulations of the death drive explored in my readings, I now want to return to Freud and reconsider his positioning of tragic aesthetics within the realm of the pleasure principle. At the end of his discussion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of his grandson's *fort/da* game—a game of throwing away and retrieving an object—Freud cites tragedy as the supreme example of "artistic imitation" that "[does] not spare the spectators . . . the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable." As he puts it, tragedy supplies "convincing proof that, even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind."⁷⁴ What emerges from Freud's apparent alignment of tragic aesthetics with the pleasure principle is a mechanism comparable to catharsis (or a possible reading of it)—that is, a transformation of "'unpleasurable' content [into] . . . an act of pleasurable spectatorship."⁷⁵ Freud draws the conclusion that, with the *fort/da*

72. Kottman 2003, 96. On Vernant's reading of Phrynichus's fiasco, see Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1990, 244.

73. Derrida 1978, 234.

74. Freud 1920, 17.

75. Here I am borrowing language from Leonard (2015, 157). Even though Freud does not mention Aristotle in this passage, he is likely thinking of catharsis, which he discusses, with explicit reference to Aristotle, in "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage" ([1905/1906] 1960), suggesting a similar comparison with child's play. Freud's alignment of tragedy with the pleasure principle seems at odds with the connection that, as J. Butler (2020, 152–55) has noted, he makes in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (1915b, 278–79) between the Erinyes of Greek tragedy and a boundless destructiveness in human and non-human life, which he calls "blind fury"—a clear precursor of the death drive.

game, “each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery [children] are in search of.” Yet before arriving at this conclusion, he himself counters the alignment of the game with the pleasure principle by stressing that “the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety.”⁷⁶ As Kaja Silverman suggests, in the *fort/da* game “mastery . . . exists in a parasitic or anaclitic relation to the death drive.”⁷⁷ In Freud’s description, when the child “[held] the reel by the string and very skillfully [threw] it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it,” he uttered the expressive “o-o-o-o,” which is interpreted as equivalent to *fort*.⁷⁸ The distinctive experience of the game, which, for Freud, ultimately fosters mastery, coincides with the moment of departure, loss, and pain. In a sense, the drawn-out *o* sound conveys both pain and excitement—the pleasure-in-pain of the death drive’s insistent rushing toward non-existence.

The *fort/da* game’s location beyond the pleasure principle is developed by Leo Bersani and Jacques Lacan, respectively, in terms of sadomasochism and the allure of the *objet petit a*. Elaborating on Freud’s idea that “throwing away the object so that it was ‘gone’ might satisfy an impulse of the child’s . . . to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him,”⁷⁹ Bersani points out that this sadistic dynamic encompasses—in genuinely Freudian fashion—a simultaneous masochistic component, which reinscribes the death drive within the realm of the pleasure principle; in the game, as Bersani puts it, mastery, both of others and the self, “is simultaneous with self-punishment; a fantasy of omnipotence and autonomy . . . is inseparable from a repetition of pain.”⁸⁰ This idea of repetition of a pain is also crucial for Lacan. He observes that in both *fort* and *da* “are embodied the very mechanisms of alienation—which are expressed . . . at the level of the *fort*.”⁸¹ For him, the “small bobbin” (or the “reel,” as it is rendered in the translation of Freud) is nothing else but the *objet petit a*, the unattainable object of desire, which is a “remainder” of the Real within the Symbolic.⁸² The Real is defined as what is located before and beyond symbolization, that is, before the entrance into language that con-

76. Freud 1920, 35, 16.

77. Silverman 1992, 59.

78. Freud 1920, 15.

79. Freud 1920, 16.

80. Bersani 1986, 58–59. Freud famously asserts the co-implication of sadism and masochism in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915a).

81. Lacan 1981, 239.

82. On the *objet petit a* as a “remainder,” which is “irreducible to . . . symbolization,” see, e.g., Lacan 2014, 161–62, 220, and 330. In Žižek’s words, “the *objet petit a* is not what we desire . . . but rather that which sets our desire in motion” (1997, 36).

stitutes the subject after birth and defines it as inescapably alienated. The Real is a lost reality (such as the maternal breast), or an inaccessible fullness conceived through retrospective fantasy, also corresponding to what Lacan calls the Thing.⁸³ The Real's residual force within the Symbolic and the subject—one may say its negative immanence—consists of gaps, absences, and frustrations engendered by the unceasing desire for the inaccessible, lost “plenum.”⁸⁴ The *fort/da* game is an expression of this negative immanence, enacting “endless repetition.”⁸⁵ For Lacan, the death drive, which is characterized by such repetition, emerges from the vain longing for the Real's plenum—it is the inevitable response to the trauma of subjectivization. Even though Lacan polemically pits his interpretation against Freud's, the layered, irreducibly complex, brilliantly contradictory discussion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—an enactment of archive fever in itself⁸⁶—already contains the elements of a reading of the *fort/da* game as motivated by the death drive as much as the pleasure principle.⁸⁷

83. See Lacan 1991, 66. According to Žižek (1993, 36), “the Real designates a substantial hard kernel that precedes and resists symbolization and, simultaneously, it designates the leftover, which is posited or ‘produced’ by symbolization itself.” For Lacan, *das Ding* (or “the Thing”) is “the absolute Other of the subject . . . to be found at the most as something missed” (1981, 52). Interpreting Lacan, A. Johnston observes that the maternal Thing can correspond to the breast when it is “not registered as being a separate/separable object belonging to another subject” (2005, 151). For the affinity between the Lacanian position and Melanie Klein's interpretation of the death drive as psychic negativity produced by the breach of a primordial mother-child unity anterior to yet impinging on the subject, see J. Rose 2011, 72–74; on the maternal Real in Lacan's reading of the Oedipal complex, see esp. Rabaté, forthcoming.

84. Lacan 2014, 270: “The object *a* . . . embodies the dead end of desire's access to the Thing.” According to Žižek (1993, 3), the void opened “by . . . the original loss of the *Thing* . . . is filled by the *objet petit a*, the fantasy-object” and “this loss occurs on account of our being ‘embedded’ in the symbolic universe.” In using the expression “negative immanence,” I build on the discussion of A. Johnston (2018), who observes that the Real “becomes . . . a transcendence troubling and thwarting Imaginary-Symbolic reality . . . from without as well as an immanence perturbing reality/language from within.” This immanence is negative because it manifests itself in “negativities,” e.g., “material meaninglessness both linguistic and non-linguistic, contingent traumatic events.”

85. Lacan 1981, 239 (the same passage cited on p. 20, this volume, where the *fort/da* game is discussed).

86. Derrida (1987, 320–37) regards Freud's act of recalling and writing about his grandson's game—an episode entangled with the very recent death of the child's mother (Freud's daughter Sophie)—as parallel to the game itself: see McCance 2019, 125–37. The *fort/da* game is dramatized in the compositional travails of the book (on which see note 39), as well as in the philological battles over the textual *archê* that it has recently stirred (see Schrötter and May 2013, Grubrich-Simitis 2013, and Schrötter 2013).

87. Perceptively reading between the lines of Freud's discussion, J. Butler (1990, 261), in fact, observes that “though [the *fort/da*] game does provide an indisputable pleasure for the young boy, Freud wants to argue that even this pleasure of acquiring mastery . . . is *not* primarily governed by the pleasure principle” (my emphasis).

If the force that maneuvers the *fort/da* game can be placed beyond the pleasure principle, the connection with tragedy established by Freud provides further ground for revisiting the cathartic reading that he, like Lacan in his discussion of *Antigone*, implicitly endorses and for exploring the possibility of tragedy as an aesthetic expression of the death drive.⁸⁸ In his essay “Psychopathic Characters on the Stage,” Freud explains Aristotelian catharsis as the “relief produced by . . . free discharge” and the “concomitant sexual stimulation which . . . occurs as a by-product of every emotional excitation.”⁸⁹ But in Freud’s system, sex is located beyond the pleasure principle and can be regarded as an inherently masochistic experience—what Jean Laplanche calls *ébranlement* (“shaking”) and Bersani “self-shattering”⁹⁰—that “seeks not to be released, but to be increased”⁹¹ and repeated. It seems that the Freudian take on catharsis is complicated, or even undercut, by its own anti-cathartic laten-

88. Commenting on the same passage from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Leonard (2015, 157) observes that, in Freud’s view, “tragedy has . . . nothing to with the death drive because the painful experiences that the spectators witness are filtered through an Apollonian veil of aesthetic enjoyment.” According to Leonard, it is Lacan (1991, 232–33) who, in his analysis of Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, claims that “the real outcome of tragedy is not the life but the death instinct,” thus replacing “the Oedipus of *Eros* with the Oedipus of *Thanatos*.” As Lacan puts it, *Oedipus at Colonus* shows that “this life we’re captive of, this essentially alienated life . . . this life in the other . . . always returns to death”: see esp. Felman 1983. My impression is that a death-driven reading of tragedy is already implicit in the complexities that frame Freud’s aesthetic discussion. Influenced by Bernays as much as Freud was (see note 89), Lacan (1992, 243–56) too follows Aristotle’s reading of tragedy, identifying catharsis with the filter of “beauty,” which he emblematically associates with the *éclat* (“splendor”) of *Antigone*. Such beauty, he argues, protects the subject from exposure to the horror of the sublime (associated with the death drive): see Krell 2005, 357–58, and Vives 2011, 1021–25. On catharsis in psychoanalysis, see also Abdulla 1985, 26–39.

89. Freud (1905/1906) 1960, 144. In this passage, Freud is influenced by Bernays: see, e.g., Marx 2012, 118–20, and J. I. Porter 2015, 20n21; see also Traverso 2000, 86–104. In the same essay, Freud pursues the analogy between Aristotelian catharsis and psychoanalytic “unveiling”: see Vives 2011, 1014–21. Armstrong (2006, 84–97) traces not only the influence of Bernays on Freud, but also the impact that the theatrical culture of late nineteenth-century Vienna had on his appropriation of Aristotelian catharsis as a clinical practice.

90. See the comments of Laplanche (1976, 91) and Bersani (1986, 31–41) on Freud’s discussion of sexuality and masochism in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915a). As Bersani (1986, 35) puts it, in *Three Essays* “Freud seems almost on the point of suggesting that beyond the pleasure principle we find—sexuality”; on self-shattering, see also Bersani 1995, 100–101, and 2010, 3–30, and de Lauretis 2011, 250–53. See also note 41, this chapter. In “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” Freud identifies the death drive with masochism (1924, 164).

91. Bersani 1986, 34. Notwithstanding Freud’s overall view of sex, his perspective on orgasm (1905, 76)—specifically, “male” orgasm—remains informed (as for Aristotle) by elements of cathartic teleology, that is, with the idea of a pleasurable discharge, where, one might say, the pleasure principle and the *telos* of the death drive coincide: see esp. Grosz 1995, 291, and chapter 5.

cies, as it were. We can accordingly look at tragedy as a form of dramatic poetry that finds its affective *raison d'être*—or its “pleasures”—not in a complete or partial (re)acquisition of a sense of mastery, but in a radical, unresolved loss of it; not in attainment but in frustration; not in an intrinsically normative return to (some kind of) equilibrium and integrity, but in a never-resting entanglement in a loop of contraction and expansion. I situate the aesthetics of tragedy in these anti-cathartic feelings, which shake audiences with the same immobile restlessness as archive fever. I suggest that the never-ending appeal of Greek tragedy rests in these death-driven feelings, which surreptitiously disrupt reparative scenarios, rebelling against the ideological disciplining behind the pleasurable prospect of a (partially) released, or reconstituted subject in pursuit of the greater pleasure of negating it.

The argument that tragedy enables aesthetic access to the *lifedeath* that constitutes the human subject could be seen as leading to what some thinkers have called “anti-humanism” or “mortalist humanism” in opposition to their preferred mode of engagement, which they call “agonistic humanism.”⁹² Such terminology critically frames what is seen as a pessimistic, anti-redemptive, nihilistic worldview. Though one could make a case for “pessimism” as offering more than sheer despair, my intent is, admittedly, non-edifying.⁹³ This project is not about individual redemption or redemptive collective action, but about the perverse engine of our desires—and how tragedy ritually fuels it with recalcitrant dramatic sensation, notwithstanding intermittent expressions of the pleasure principle, where crisis appears to be abated and repaired.⁹⁴ The death drive, in my view, is a fact of human existence, not the foundation for any kind of utopian future.⁹⁵ To be sure, while it can incite oppressive powers—patriarchal, capitalistic, tyrannical—it can, at the same time, threaten

92. See Honig 2013; see also Leonard 2015, 157–59.

93. As Dienstag (2004, 98) has observed, pessimism “claim[s] to describe the fundamental ontology of the human condition—one of radical insecurity, and radical possibility, freedom, and terror—that is the potential ground of tragedy.” In his view, “tragedy . . . can be pessimistic without being dead.”

94. Here, again, I borrow language from the comments of one of my anonymous referees. Jarcho (2017, 1–2) has suggested that whenever theater presents “its ‘live’ present as the enactment of repetition . . . it invites us to inhabit—to feel, and to enjoy—the temporality of the [death] drive.” We could say, on this basis, that the feeling of this temporality is, in a sense, constantly—at least latently—in the picture precisely because, as especially Schneider (2011) has shown, theatrical performance is, by definition, always a reperformance.

95. Marcuse (1966) posited the possibility of such a utopian future through the death drive’s erotic energy; while rejecting this idea, Allen (2019) seeks to reconcile the Freudian death drive with “progress,” understood, à la Klein (1975a, 1998), as a moral imperative. Fong (2016) sees the death drive as the force that can facilitate social change by destabilizing the very notion of mastery.

them, pushing against their deceptive promises for the future, as Lee Edelman has argued.⁹⁶ To the charge of falling into “mere resistance politics”⁹⁷ or even anti-politics, one could respond, following Lauren Berlant, that the ostensible inaction or anti-agonism of mortalist humanism—or, rather, of what calls itself queer negativity—is belied by its recognition of the anarchic *movement* of negative emotion.⁹⁸ Such emotion can radically reinvent social and political conditions by rejecting “two traditionally legitimating motives for political action: an ends-oriented consensually held good-life fantasy or confirmation of the transformative effectiveness of one’s action.”⁹⁹ Through the notion of *lifedeath* embedded in tragic form, I twist the dichotomy of “equality in death” vs. “equality in life”—aligned by Bonnie Honig with mortalist and agonistic humanism respectively—drawing out the subversive and thus potentially emancipatory implications of death-driven aesthetics as they tend to thwart all forms of actualization.¹⁰⁰

Making us feel the irresolvable entanglement of animate and inanimate, tragedy’s aesthetics give us a sense of the constitutionally (in)animate dimension of human life. To the extent that tragedy is viewed as “life . . . lived to the very extreme of life[, w]hich is to say, life that does not hide from death, but that stares it straight in the face,” we could look to the thrill of proximity to death, but also the perverse pleasure of postponing it, putting off the moment of fulfillment.¹⁰¹ In different ways, both aesthetic scenarios—amounting, in a

96. See Edelman 2004 and 2016; see also de Lauretis 2011, Povinelli 2011, and D. Young, forthcoming. On the death drive as animating oppressive powers, see, e.g., Featherstone 2010; Negarestani 2011; Morton 2017, 47; J. Butler 2019 and 2020, 151–83; and Kelly 2020.

97. Honig 2013, 10.

98. Queer negativity, as observed by Weiner and Young (2011, 226), “precipitates a certain reinvention of the social”—it can thus be paradoxically *construens*. It is a way not to give up on the idea of reconciling sociality with anti-sociality, as it were, or, as Povinelli (2011, 303) sees it, of finding alternative social bonds in the spaces where the law is hollowed out by “enjoyment” (or *jouissance*, on which see further). Against J. Butler’s famous identification of “queerness” with “critique” (1993b) and her warning against “uncritical exuberance” (2008) in the aftermath of Barack Obama’s election, Bradway (2017, 150–57) has proposed reclaiming “exuberance” as a form of critique through “positive” affect. However, one could regard such exuberance, with its visceral, *ex-cessive* feel, as haunted by, or perhaps even indistinguishable from, “negative” *jouissance*.

99. Berlant 2011, 260. See also Hage (2015) on stuckness as a form of (depressive) action, not a “waiting” but a “waiting out” that calls the status quo into question. On the neoliberal dismissal of despair, the (paradoxical) driving force of movements such as Afropessimism, and on despair’s potential to open up a space for critique, see Parla 2019.

100. For the dichotomy, see Honig 2013, 10. In her treatment of “equality in life” and “agonistic humanism,” Honig does not address catharsis or, more generally, the aesthetics of tragedy as a poetic form.

101. The quotation is from Paul Auster (1992, 250), commenting on Philippe Petit’s legendary 1974 enterprise of traversing a wire suspended between the twin towers of the World Trade

sense, to what Georges Bataille called “joy in the face of death”—reject the stabilization in inanimate repose, the alleged goal of the Freudian death drive, and add momentum to the drive’s unbounded mobility.¹⁰² I want to zero in on this mobility, on its possible regimes, placing the Freudian framework of Derrida’s theorization of the archive in dialogue with other interpretations of the death drive—all part of the anti-cathartic aesthetics that emerge from my readings.

III. ARCHIVE FEVER AND GREEK TRAGEDY’S DEATH DRIVES

The anarchivic aesthetics modeled for Greek tragedy in this book rely on an eclectic synthesis of Freudian and post-Freudian (Lacanian/Žižekian, Deleuzian, Nancyan) registers of the death drive, which I will now illustrate in more detail, demonstrating the concrete practice of formalistic reading that is inseparable from my theorizing.¹⁰³

In my readings of plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the endless, futile repetition expressed by the *fort/da* game is the aesthetic effect of archive fever in its multiple, overlapping manifestations—the attempt to access an imagined *archê*, become an archival object, or preserve a self-identical past. In Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* (*OC*), the last extant play and the most archival one, we can observe a pervasive acceleration compulsion—primarily associated with the exhausted, archival Oedipus—which is similar to the rushing forward depicted by Freud. Such a kinetic compulsion conveys the burning energy of the death drive—a “frenetic enjoyment” in Laplanche’s phrase.¹⁰⁴

Center. S. Miller (2017) refers to Petit’s undertaking and Auster’s comments on it to demonstrate that, as McNulty (2017b, 4) puts it, “the death drive is not merely a drive to mortality and inanimacy but is intimately bound up in what is most alive and free in human experience.”

102. “Joy in the face of death,” the title of one of Bataille’s essays (1988) and a concept that repeatedly occurs in his writings, can be taken as an image of Dionysian rapture and *ex-cess*, that is, a deadly feeling of ecstatically exiting oneself or being swallowed up (in Bataille’s own words, “the shift outside, to beside oneself”); but if we emphasize the word “in the face of”—an image of proximity *in* or *as* distance—we could also see this excess as merely an exposure to death, that is, an encounter marked by lack, delay, impossibility: on this approach, see esp. Brennan 2015. See chapter 5.

103. My eclecticism is programmatic. Rather than making hard-and-fast distinctions between thinkers—or choosing sides—I want to propose a new stylistic relation to theory, which, without eliding important differences, shows the possibility of a somewhat unified post-modern sensibility enacted in the very reading of tragedy’s densely wrought language.

104. Laplanche 1976, 124. “Frenetic enjoyment” is the translation of the French *jouissance*, which Laplanche employs to define the death drive, specifically as the unbound energy of sexuality.

This is a race to the destination of the Freudian *Todestrieb*, to the inanimate immobility “concealed beneath [speed’s] very intensification of . . . mobility.”¹⁰⁵ But the acceleration compulsion also suggests a going nowhere, as we also see with Theseus’s vain sense of urgency at the end of the play after Oedipus’s ostensible catharsis, a literal cleansing. In Oedipus’s anti-cathartic catharsis and Theseus’s sudden sense of urgency after ostensibly archiving him, there is a slippage of *da* into *fort*, the frustration and pleasure of endless repetition. A similar frustration finds an emblematic expression in the aesthetics of boredom in Euripides’ *Phoenissae*, where archival desire generates emotional and dramaturgical hoarding, with its hollow rhythm of apparent fullness serially morphing into lack.¹⁰⁶

This frustration in repetition, which shapes all the plays I analyze, is the common element in archive fever and the looping *jouissance* that Lacan and the Lacanian tradition posit as the distinctive affective texture of the death drive. For Lacan, *jouissance* is a surplus of enjoyment that goes beyond the pleasure principle—beyond the imperative of self-mastery—affording the subject an experience of pleasure-in-pain as it disrupts the apparent unity of the Symbolic through perpetual repetition. The pleasure-in-pain of *jouissance* is the distinctive feel of a death drive not directed toward the inanimate, à la Freud, but engaged in a fruitless quest for the imaginary fullness of the Thing, the repressed Real.¹⁰⁷ As Joan Copjec puts it, this drive “inhibits, as part of its very activity, the achievement of its aim”;¹⁰⁸ while desire is constituted by a lack of satisfaction, the death drive finds satisfaction in no-satisfaction.¹⁰⁹ The endless repetition of the *fort/da* game, revolving around the child’s “reel,” is a supreme example of this *jouissance*, a masochistic pleasure whose primary

105. Baudrillard 1988, 7.

106. Boredom “seems to be about both too much and too little, sensory overload and sensory deprivation,” and about the “experience of time as both empty and full” (Petro 1993–94, 81 and 86).

107. Lacan observes that “what the pleasure principle maintains is a limit with respect to *jouissance*” (2007, 46). See Edelman 2004, 25: “*Jouissance*, as fantasmatic escape from the alienation intrinsic to meaning . . . evokes the death drive that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle.” In plain terms, “the *jouissance* presumably lost to the speaking subject returns only in the guise of what might be labeled ‘limit experiences’” and “in an overriding . . . tendency compelling repetitions of . . . events upsetting the calm . . . equilibrium of psychical subjectivity’s Imaginary-Symbolic reality” (A. Johnston 2018).

108. Copjec 2002, 34. For a treatment of the Lacanian death drive from a political perspective, see also McGowan 2013.

109. On this distinction, see esp. Žižek 2012, 496; see also A. Johnston 2017.

image is the loop.¹¹⁰ According to Slavoj Žižek, “we become ‘humans’ when we get caught into a closed, self-propelling loop of repeating the same gesture and finding satisfaction in it,” and the death drive is precisely a “rotary movement in which the linear progress of time is suspended in a repetitive loop.”¹¹¹ As I will suggest, the interminable searching for the *arché* “right where it slips away” (in Derrida’s words) corresponds to this loop in iconic plays such as Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* and Euripides’ *Medea* and *Heracles*.¹¹² Here the archive fever manifested in the serial resetting of mythical lives, affective bonds, and plot rhythms acquires the aesthetic force of looping *jouissance*, which defies, with the death-driven mobility of delay and suspension, the Symbolic’s static repetition—its aspiration to replicate the status quo with deceptive promises of the future.¹¹³ *Jouissance*’s restless loop—whether it is viewed as an alternative

110. Lacan (1981, 178) refers to the “outwards-and-back movement . . . the circular character of the path of the drive.” The image of a loop appears in Lacan 1981, 182, on which see Eyers 2012, 104–5.

111. Žižek 2006, 63. The idea of a rotatory drive is already anticipated by F. W. J. Schelling in the unfinished *Die Weltalter* ([1813] 1997), as Žižek argues (1996, esp. 27–32, 100). Schelling famously regarded Greek tragedy as “the pre-theoretical moment in which freedom and necessity could be reconciled” and as the representation of “superhuman beings, endowed with the strength to demonstrate their freedom even in the moment of destruction” (Billings 2014, 86, 87); see also J. Young 2013, 68–74, and Leonard 2015, 136–37. My focus is not on tragic titanism, or “sublime” heroism—an approach that has been long applied to readings of Sophoclean characters especially. Rather, I consider how different articulations of the death drive entail not just a struggle against the necessity of the Symbolic but a perverse play with and potentially emancipatory “torsions” (see Badiou and Roudinesco 2014, 27) of it, and how such articulations materialize in formal effects capable of generating vertiginous sensations of disunity and disorientation.

112. Derrida (1996, 93) refers to the joy of archaeological discovery that, in “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896), Freud discusses in implicit comparison with the psychoanalyst’s satisfaction at digging up the “origin” of neuroses (see Orrells 2010, 177–78). As Derrida puts it, this moment of archaeological/psychoanalytic discovery—marked by the illusion that “the *arché* appears in the nude, without archive”—is experienced by Freud as “*jouissance*,” that is, with a sense of joyful relief. But there is no release here, as the ostensible reconnection with the origin is destabilized. Archive fever does not stop, and the only genuine *jouissance* that springs forth from this moment is beyond the pleasure principle. See Povinelli 2017, 150.

113. These promises constitute the “reproductive futurism” provocatively critiqued by Edelman in *No Future* (2004); see esp. chapter 2. Cf. Muñoz (2009), who attributes Edelman’s rejection of utopianism and his positing of an unspecified subject to the security experienced from a position of white maleness. While acknowledging Muñoz’s point, I endorse the razor-sharp Lacanian deconstruction of the discourse of reproduction that is laid out in *No Future*, as well as the case that the book makes for the need to question, problematize, and push against the comforts of the reparative; see also Deutscher 2017, 40–63. However, as will become clear in chapter 2, I also temper this critique by connecting it with an ethics of alterity that is inherent to Derrida’s notion of a “future to come.” Giffney (2008, 58) observes that “Edelman’s call to embrace the death drive constitutes not a nihilistic gesture but rather . . . a steadfast refusal to facilitate heteronormativity’s future”; for Schotten (2018, 110), Edelman’s “recommended accession to queerness/death” is a “radical resistance to sovereign biopolitics”

to the ultimately immobilizing cleansing of catharsis, or as catharsis's actual anarchic temporality—provides the characteristic shape of tragedy's archive fever. As we will see in the analysis of the finales of *Agamemnon*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus the King*, this loop turns even what we would regard as the climactic ending par excellence—the orgasm—into an aestheticized sensation of impossibility, an unrelenting oscillation “between movement and rest.”¹¹⁴

When the *fort/da* seems to be interrupted, however, tragic aesthetics fall back on another register of the death drive—the post-human fantasy of self-shattering into liquid intensity, along the lines of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's “body without organs.” This body of pure intensity, liberated from the hierarchical structure of the organism, replaces the inanimate matter sought after by the Freudian death drive, as Deleuze and Guattari declare when, in *Anti-Oedipus*, they borrow the concept from the avant-garde playwright Antonin Artaud.¹¹⁵ In the body without organs, “Artaud longs for . . . a blessed moment of *relief* from desire's incessant demands”;¹¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari's body without organs offers such relief but only by dissolving the subject into a flow of intensities, energies, and even “pain waves” that, in a way, vitalistically recasts the restless energy of the death drive.¹¹⁷ In Rosi Braidotti's post-humanist reading, the body without organs “marks the point of evacuation or evanescence of the bounded selves,” for, as she puts it:

and “an emancipatory and decolonizing political recommendation.” Hamzić (2019, 142–43) sees the Lacanian Real “as an invitation to reimagine, over and over again, how we-know-in-the-world—a call for a renewed attention to critique of our epistemic practices and their political implications—a reminder, that is, . . . that the world could and must be otherwise.”

114. The phrase is from Nancy (2017, viii). My discussion of *in-cess* in the *Oresteia* (chapter 4) and of the orgasm (chapter 5) will broaden the range of death-driven paradigms by engaging with Nancy's idea of the corporeal as that which occurs at the point where the body breaks or is about to break.

115. See Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 8: “The full body without organs is the unproductive, the sterile. . . . Antonin Artaud discovered this one day, finding himself with no shape or form. . . . The death instinct: that is its name.” On the connection between the body without organs and the death drive, see esp. Buchanan 2014, 199–201. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 30) observe, the body without organs is “not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization.” According to Grosz (1994, 170), the body without organs is “the body before and in excess of the coalescence of its intensities . . . into the unity of the subject and of signification.”

116. Buchanan 2014, 200 (my emphasis). Artaud's staged experience of the death drive as a desire for non-existence, enacted in repetition, emerges in passages such as this: “I have been dead for a long time, I have already committed suicide. . . . I have no appetite for death. I have an appetite for not existing” (Artaud 1988, 103).

117. See Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 153: “The BwO [= body without organs] is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated, only by intensities.” In the case of the masochist, “the BwO can no longer be populated by anything but the intensities of pain, *pain waves*” (152).

What we humans truly yearn for is to disappear by merging into [the] generative flow of becoming, the precondition for which is the loss, disappearance and disruption of the anatomized, individual self. . . . This can be described also as the moment of ascetic dissolution of the subject; the moment of its merging with the web of non-human forces that frame him/her, the cosmos as a whole.¹¹⁸

This dissolution makes the human subject join “the roar of the ‘chaosmic’ echoing chamber of becoming.” In Euripides’ *Hecuba*, when the *jouissance* emanating from the eponymous protagonist’s restless, unruly archival body and from the plot’s own archival bingeing is halted by an oppressive power, her prophesied self-drowning in the sea marks her becoming water, her merging into the “flow” of elemental life and “chaosmic” sound.

This anorganic corporeality tends toward the *jouissance* in the undulation of the waves—a mobile immobility expressed in catharsis’s own liquid medium. Deleuzian–Guattarian vitalism—the affirmative notion of a subject deterritorialized as an anorganic body, an intensity, teeming with flowing desire—seems distant from the negativity of the repetitious loop of psychoanalysis, which is the polemical target of *Anti-Oedipus*.¹¹⁹ However, the notion of suspension, which is central to Lacan and Žižek’s loop but also to Freud’s *fort/da* game and Derrida’s archive fever, is equally important for *Coldness and Cruelty*, where Deleuze sees the death drive behind the condition of the fetishistic masochist, frozen in an eroticized fantasy and rejecting the (ostensible) release, the *telos* of orgasmic pleasure.¹²⁰ In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze also sees the death drive as an attraction toward “the empty form of time.”¹²¹ In *The Fold*, describing the world as “a lapping of waves . . . a fog, or a mass of dancing particles of dust . . . [an] endles[s] furling and unfurling in every direction,” Deleuze compares this movement to the back and forth “of agitated sleepers who twist and turn on their mattresses”—as, I would note, Achilles does in the *Iliad* (24.5), enacting the looping melancholic emotionality discussed further in this section.¹²² Without denying the emancipatory

118. Braidotti 2013, 136–37.

119. A kind of fullness in its own right, Deleuzian desire appears to be the opposite of the Lacanian lack: see, e.g., Smith 2007.

120. Deleuze 1991, 70–71. Lacan considered *Coldness and Cruelty* the best theorization of masochism (1966–67). On the rejection of the orgasm in *Coldness and Cruelty* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, see chapter 5.

121. Deleuze 1994, 112.

122. Deleuze 1993, 86. On the “wave” as an image of Deleuzian masochism, see Arsić 2007, 146–58. Just like Bataille (1989, 19), Dolto (2003, 34) suggests that the wave, “at the moment when it begins to fall,” represents “the experience of the death drive.”

force of Deleuzian–Guattarian becoming, one could say that its affirmative flow is haunted by psychoanalytic negativity; to an extent, the anorganic bodies displace the loop onto the inorganic sphere.¹²³

The archive fever and the registers of the death drive that I have described have resonances in the Greek imaginary beyond the textual corpus of tragedy. In Plato's *Theaetetus* (174a–b), Socrates tells the story of how Thales, engrossed in cosmological investigation, tumbled into a well, provoking a Thracian maid's laughter because "he was eager to know the things in the sky, but what was in front of him and before his feet escaped his attention."¹²⁴ Reading against the grain, we might see Thales' tumble as a fulfillment, intentional or accidental, of an intimate desire for withdrawal from the world. Or, more pertinently, we could take it as a parodic image of the archive fever of pre-Socratic naturalist philosophy manifested in an obsession with *archai*. Plunging not into a dry pit, but, specifically, into a well (*phrear*), a source of water, Thales, the "pioneer" (*archēgos*) of natural philosophy, connects with, even blends into, the elemental substance that he considered the *archē* of everything.¹²⁵ Thales' fall may be animated precisely by a pull toward this fetishized philosophical *archē*, something between the Freudian death drive and a yearning for a Deleuzian becoming water.¹²⁶ To an extent, this fall, which has been viewed as the image of the tragic dimension of philosophical thinking,¹²⁷ resembles Empedocles' plunge into Aetna, the subject of Hölderlin's tragedy, whose unfinishedness can in itself be seen as a death-driven enactment of tragic aesthetics.¹²⁸ In Menander's *Dyskolos*, the misanthrope Knemon simi-

123. On Deleuze's disavowal of psychoanalysis, see esp. Žižek 2014, 373–74, and A. Johnston 2017. In particular, for Žižek, "what Deleuze calls desire is equivalent to what Lacan calls drive: a machinic productive movement prior to all dialectics of lack and negativity" (2014, 374). See also this significant passage from Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* (1990, 326): "The instincts . . . are unable to . . . hide that from which they come forth and into which they return: the death instinct, *not merely one instinct among others*, but the crack around which all of the instincts congregate." For discussion, see Zupančič 2017, 171. Morton (2018) posits a death drive for inorganic matter as well.

124. For a feminist critique of the Platonic story, see Cavarero 1995 (ch. 2).

125. See esp. Thales, fragment 11A12 Diels and Kranz (= Aristotle, *Metaphysics A* 3.983b18–22); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.14.2 (R40 Most and Laks), another testimonium of Thales, observes that "water" is the same as the "abyss."

126. Differently, Rojcewicz (2014, 197) views Thales' fall as "something like religious experience, ecstasy in face of the sublime," which entails "something like cooperation with the things and forces of nature."

127. See Blumenberg 2015, 27–28.

128. On the ancient tradition on the death of Empedocles, see Chitwood 1986. Hölderlin's apparent poetic task in *The Death of Empedocles*—that is, "to present, which means to translate himself into, what refuses and resists any imitation, what must remain impossible according to all mimetic production" (Warnek 2014, 219)—seems to configure a Lacanian *jouissance*.

larly falls into a well, where his utensils have been dropped and archived (625–747). Archiving or entombing himself in a space where he is screened off from any human contact seems the ideal fulfillment of his anti-social neurosis, the fulfillment of the ultimate misanthropic dream. Teasingly admonishing him, “Now that you fell into it drink the well all up, so that you won’t have to share a drop of water with anybody” (641–42), the cook even seems to envision the misanthrope’s incorporation of and transformation into the well, his becoming water. Although his “catabatic” fall need not be construed as suicidal, it marks a moment between tragedy and farce in the plot, allowing him to re-experience fetal existence for a moment, as suggested by the behavioral “rebirth” that he will apparently undergo after exiting the well, and, especially, by his announced re-emergence, through a rope, “soaked and shivering” (658), like a newborn.¹²⁹

These two parallel falls can be juxtaposed with Achilles’ archive fever in *Iliad* book 18, where he laments the death of Patroclus by swimming in dust (18.26–27):

αὐτὸς δ’ ἐν κονίησι μέγας μεγαλωστί τανυσθεῖς
κέϊτο . . .

And he himself, mightily in his might (*meḡas meḡalōsti*), lay (*keito*) stretched out in the dust (*en koniēisi*) . . .¹³⁰

Achilles’ desire to join his beloved friend in death is figured as a wish to become dust—the icon of the loop of *lifedeath* and a material archive in itself—by being absorbed into it, by “entering” it, as it were. A repetitious loop is conjured not only by the placement of subject and verb at the beginning of two consecutive lines, but, especially, by the striking contiguity of *meḡas* (“mighty, in his might”) and *meḡalōsti* (“mightily”). Visually echoing the seriality of Achilles’ immersion in the dust, his pursuing non-existence by merging quasi-erotically with it, this repetition conveys the death drive, with all the ramifications that we have illustrated thus far. “At home in non-linear, non-sequential time,” dust materializes the simultaneity of immobility and move-

129. I follow the text of Arnott (1997), who prints Maas’s widely accepted supplement *beb[am]menou* (“soaked”). Knemon’s and Thales’ falls exemplify the fantasy of “the world without others,” which Deleuze (1990, 301–20) theorizes as a version of the death drive: see esp. Kaufman 2010 and Telò 2020b, 60–63. When Knemon fantasizes about a world in which human beings are transformed into stones (153–59), he is dreaming of an inter-objective space that is prior to subjectivity or after it (see Chen 2011, 280–81).

130. Rutherford (1982, 146) notes that in this scene “Achilles . . . foreshadows the heroes of tragedy, and in particular those of Sophocles’ plays.”

ment that characterizes the death drive's unruly repetition.¹³¹ While apparently moving forward by adding a couple of "feet" (or "steps") to *megas*, *megalôsti* is looped into a journey nowhere. Covered in dirt, Achilles strives futilely for the origin, non-existence as a vanishing point or, we could even say, a pointless point. The repetition freezes the voice into a stutter or a hiccup. Similarly, *keito* ("he lay"), deceptively evoking the condition of the corpse buried in a tomb, encapsulates the frustration of lying without being dead, the impossibility of an end of movement. Like the "cloud of grief" (*acheos nephelê*) that "envelops" (*ekalupse*) Achilles, as we read a few lines earlier (22), "dust"—like "cloud," in the feminine gender (*en koniêisi*)—works as a surrogate of the maternal body, which, especially in the case of Achilles, the son of the Nereid Thetis, coincides with life *in water*.¹³² Combining pain with maternal enfoldment, the phrase "cloud of grief" expresses the same pleasure-in-pain as the primordial *jouissance* of rolling in dust, the natural archive, suspended between "conglomeration and dispersion," whose swirling "mimics that of water."¹³³ In the throes of archive fever, what appears as the inanimate is blurred with prenatal life; distinct imaginings of the *archê* are confused.

While, for Aristotle, catharsis has a physiological analog in medical purgation, anti-cathartic *jouissance* has its own in auto-immunity, a kind of archive fever within the organism.¹³⁴ As I will suggest in my reading of the end of the *Oresteia*, fear—one of Aristotle's two cathartic emotions—may be seen as provoking an aesthetic response similar to the feverish self-immolation of an organism vainly attempting to locate and expel an invisible or imaginary pathogen (another *archê*). When "a living organism . . . protect[s] itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system,"¹³⁵ this is auto-immunity, which various strands of continental philosophy have deployed in a political-theoretical key.¹³⁶ In Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, as I will suggest, we can see the aesthetic potential of auto-immunity in the unremitting burning generated by fear's resistance against any domestication. For Terry Eagleton, it is "pity" that "brings us libidinally close to" the suffering tragic characters, "while fear pushes them away in the name of the Law."¹³⁷ I see fear, instead, as

131. Marder 2016, 46.

132. Given the etymological connection between *achos* ("grief") and Achilles' name, *acheos nephelê* ("cloud of grief") can be regarded as an allusive description of Thetis herself.

133. See Marder (2016, 5 and 69), who also discusses the etymological link between English *dust* and German *Dunst* ("mist").

134. On Aristotelian catharsis and medicine, see esp. Belfiore 1992, 291–320; Rapp 2007; von Staden 2007; and Munteanu 2012, 240–43.

135. Derrida 2002, 80n27.

136. See esp. Mutsaers 2016 and Herbrechter and Jamieson 2017.

137. Eagleton 2003, 176. For a position similar to Eagleton's, see Wallace 2020, 11.

an engine of aesthetic attraction, with a masochistic libidinal force, an embodied resistance against the Law. The auto-immune response to fear may provoke emetic motions—perceptible through the rifts in poetic form—whose pleasure resides precisely in the blocked discharge. In the conclusion of this pre-eminent tragic saga, fear may reveal itself to be tragedy's programmatic archive feeling, burning with wearying power, fueling audiences' defiance against any force that would restore them.

All the registers of the death drive that I have laid out as underlying the aesthetics of tragedy connect participants with an experience of feeling material.¹³⁸ This feeling occurs whether the fantasy that tragedy taps into is of merging into the impersonal, anorganic, universal matter of elemental life (in the Deleuzian–Guattarian register influential for some of the so-called new materialisms), or becoming what, from the human standpoint, is inert matter, rejoining inanimate existence or non-existence (in more Freudian terms).¹³⁹ In either case, the idea of feeling material posited here is anti-ecstatic and, in that sense, fundamentally different from the Dionysian rapture or ecstasy, the “intoxication of feeling,” theorized by Nietzsche, which coincides with “a rejection of all the defenses against death established by the repressive forces of culture, law, and civilization.”¹⁴⁰ In Paul Gordon's view, this rapture anticipates Freud's death drive in that, through a moment of dissolution, the death of the individuated subject, it enables us to experience what Nietzsche calls the “raging desire for existence” and “joy in existence” that belongs to “primordial Being.”¹⁴¹ One could say that Nietzsche's notion of “primordial Being,” which is so influential for Deleuze and Guattari, provides one possible interpretation for the *destination* of the Freudian death drive rather than for the death drive itself, although the optimistic vitalism that Gordon, after Deleuze, sees in Nietzsche's theory of tragedy is certainly not Freudian and perhaps not even entirely Nietzschean.¹⁴² In any case, the death-driven self-undoing that, in particular, I locate in Greek tragedy is not so much an intoxicated dissolu-

138. For earlier thoughts on “feeling material” in response to tragedy, see what I say in Telò and Mueller 2018, 10–11.

139. On new materialisms, see esp. the work of Bennett (2010 and 2015); cf. Telò and Mueller 2018 and Telò, forthcoming (a). For a critique of new materialism as a new form of animism, see Lezra 2018 (ch. 6).

140. Gordon 2001, 61; for the phrase “intoxication of feeling,” see Nietzsche (1870) 1999, 137. According to J. I. Porter (2000, 157), “Dionysianism is plainly a mirror of modernity's yearning for a Beyond.” See also Leonard 2015, 145–50.

141. Nietzsche (1872) 1967, 104.

142. See Deleuze 1983, 17–18. When Nietzsche ([1870] 1999, 129) says that “the ecstasy of the Dionysian state . . . contains a lethargic element,” he seems to preview the non-existence, the inanimate bliss pursued by the Freudian death drive. On Nietzsche's pessimism, see Dienstag 2004.

tion or vitalistic immersion as it is a troubling continuing movement at odds with the attainment that characterizes Nietzschean ecstasy. This self-undoing is situated in the movement of the death drive toward its destination, not in the destination itself. A vertiginous rupture of a never-fully ecstatic sensation, it is a different experience of feeling material, of *being* material, which could be said to emerge from the loop of *lifedeath* aesthetically enacted in the mobile stuckness of archive fever. Whether conceptualized as circling around the lost past, the Lacanian Real (the immaterial Thing beyond the Symbolic), the recalcitrant and aloof object, the inaccessible bodily inside, the finality of sexual pleasure, or the materiality of death itself, the archive fever that permeates tragedy chills as it burns, freezes as it shakes, binds as it shatters, all at once and endlessly.¹⁴³

IV. ARDENT READING, CRITIQUE, AND POST-CRITIQUE

Almost thirty-five years after the publication of Simon Goldhill's *Reading Greek Tragedy*, with its strongly programmatic, even polemical title, the present book is a renewed invitation to *read* Greek tragedy: to make its language the center of the interpretive act, to engage with the boundless potentialities of its form.¹⁴⁴ The theory of tragic aesthetics that the project puts forth is grounded in a practice of sustained close reading, what we might call *closest* reading.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, I use the theoretical framing of the book—based on the insights of a variety of post-structuralist thinkers—to defamiliarize the corpus of the extant plays. This process of defamiliarization is intended to bring out the complexities, the contradictions, and even the fervid “unconscious” of tragic language—or rather its intimate “hauntologies”—and its capacity to generate multiple possibilities of meaning through dense synergies of content and form, i.e., through the ways in which form becomes

143. For Derrida, the archival attempt to recapture a self-identical past is jeopardized by “heterogeneity,” a category that is also central to his definition of materiality as radical alterity: see Cheah 2010, 72–81. The idea of the “recalcitrant” object, theorized by Adorno, has been radicalized by object-oriented ontology (OOO), whose fundamental tenet is the aloofness and fundamental inaccessibility of the object, which is seen as similar to “a black box . . . releasing its power into the world” (Harman 2005, 95): see, e.g., Morton 2013 and Harman 2018. Crockett (2018) offers an attempt to reconcile the new materialisms, especially object-oriented ontology, with Derrida and Lacan.

144. Goldhill 1986, esp. ch. 5. The title's emphasis on *reading* emerges as an alternative to, and a corrective of, the performative reconstructivism of the late 1970s. But this emphasis is not incompatible with a consideration of the embeddedness of tragic language in its performative medium, conceived in the broadest terms: see Worthen 1998 and Perris 2010.

145. See D. A. Miller (2016, 50–54) on “too-close-reading” of Hitchcock.

content (imagery, metaphors, figures of repetition, puns, and other patterns of sound).¹⁴⁶ As I see it, Greek tragedy's tightly wrought language requires, perhaps more than any other literary idiom, the "careful teasing out of . . . conflicting forces of signification"—none in "unequivocal domination" over the other—that Barbara Johnson influentially posited as a fundamental principle of deconstructive reading.¹⁴⁷ My formalistic analysis aims to show how archival imagistic complexes do not simply illustrate themes, but shape whole plays, structuring the movement of anti-cathartic feeling.¹⁴⁸

In the chapters that follow, my methodology aligns with what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called "ardent reading."¹⁴⁹ The 2009 special issue of *Representations* on "surface reading" has opened up a fertile debate in the humanities, leading to a variety of important new approaches grouped under the umbrella term of post-critique.¹⁵⁰ Reacting against symptomatic reading's apparent presupposition of meaning "as hidden, repressed, deep and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter," surface reading advocates "just reading," that is, an anti-suspicious hermeneutic model that entails "minimal critical agency" and "accounts for what is in the text without construing presence as absence or affirmation as negation."¹⁵¹ The creation of a dichotomy between surface and depth, however, is already problematized by psychoanalysis, which, for post-critique, is the primary culprit; as Tom Eyers has pointed out, in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "it is the formal compressions and displacements . . . occurring at the imagistic surface of a dream-text that provide a sense of its meaning."¹⁵² Similarly, in response to a certain post-critical aversion to reading between the lines and against the grain, Ellen Rooney has observed that "reading against the text is always also reading with the text."

146. On the "textual unconscious" as a principle of psychoanalytic reading, see esp. Oliensis 2009. "Hauntology"—the term used by Derrida (1994) to theorize spectral ontology in relation to Marx—informs recent attempts to redefine the practice of reading as a means not so much to psychoanalyze a text as to achieve a kind of intimacy with it. See Wolfson (2018, 4), who regards reading as a search for "apparitional presences in the finely grained textures of writing, . . . haunted recalls and recognitions, . . . spectral pressures on shapes of composition."

147. Johnson 2014, 347–48.

148. My investigation is grounded in the assumptions, spelled out by Brinkema (2014a, xiv–xv), that "affects and feelings are the forgotten underside of the linguistic turn" and that aesthetic arguments are predicated on "reading specific affects as having and being bound up with specific forms."

149. Sedgwick 1993, 3–4.

150. After Best and Marcus 2009, see esp. Felski 2009 and 2016 and Anker and Felski 2017.

151. The quotations are from Best and Marcus 2009, 17, and Marcus 2007, 75. Surface reading runs counter to Spivak's notion of reading "as transgression of the text" (2003, 55), which might be seen both as an inevitability and an ethico-political imperative.

152. Eyers 2017, 15.

For Rooney, such reading is nothing else but a strategy for “bringing form into being, rather than simply discovering it.”¹⁵³ The against-the-grain readings that the following chapters draw on take inspiration from Sedgwick’s notion of ardent reading, which I conceive of as a post-critical stance in its own right, but one that never ceases to problematize the opposition or dialectic between surface and depth, “reparative” and “paranoid.”¹⁵⁴ For Sedgwick, ardent reading is a “queer,” “visceral” kind of formalism that, as she put it, “was never a matter of . . . condescension to texts, rather of the surplus charge of my trust in them to remain powerful, refractory, and exemplary.”¹⁵⁵ Carolyn Lesjak has illustrated the tenets of ardent reading in these terms:

Reading is by necessity overreading: intense rather than cool (as in “just reading”); political rather than scientific; highly interpretive rather than descriptive. Rather than the less-is-more logic of surface reading, perverse or ardent reading requires more reading, at once close . . . and distant.¹⁵⁶

My practice of ardent reading is post-critical in its rejection of the notion that critics should, or even can, place themselves outside or beyond the text and refuse any risk of affective contamination.¹⁵⁷ Ardent reading combines the deconstructionist idea of interpretation as constantly “to come” with the post-critical elevation of “emotion, mood, and disposition” as indispensable to the hermeneutic act.¹⁵⁸ It resembles Werner Hamacher’s notion of philology as an “affective relationship . . . with language,” “a longing for language, for everything grasped by it, and everything it could still touch, a longing that recoils

153. E. Rooney 2017, 131.

154. “Reading against the grain” is the practice that Sedgwick places at the center of ardent reading (1993, 4). On the opposition between “reparative” and “paranoid” reading, see note 156, this chapter.

155. Sedgwick 1993, 3–4; in these pages, Sedgwick describes “ardent reading”—what Kruse (2019, 136) calls a “passion-driven ethics of close reading”—as a “visceral near-identification with the writing I cared for, at the level of sentence structure, metrical pattern, rhyme.”

156. So Lesjak (2013, 254), who also points out how Sedgwick (2003) conceived of “reparative reading,” which shares essential tenets with surface reading, as a possible complement rather than an alternative to “paranoid” reading. Berlant and Edelman (2014, 45–47, and 2019) also push against the “critical desire to stabilize reparativity as Eve’s last (and lasting) bequest.”

157. I owe this language to one of my anonymous referees, who views “the [critic’s] affective contamination from the work itself” as “the very ‘contamination’ for which, and by which, literature as such might be said to exist in the first place.” See Kruse 2019, 135.

158. The citation is from Anker and Felski (2017, 11). Felski (2016, 10) rightly observes that suspicious reading should be seen not as an “ascetic exercise in demystification,” but as “a style of thought infused with a range of passions and pleasures, intense engagements and eager commitments.” Derrida (1996, 68) applies the phrase “future to come” (*à venir*) to the archive, as we will see in chapter 2.

from every totality.”¹⁵⁹ While I take account of the ambiguity, open-endedness, density, and even opacity of tragic language, the *philology as feeling* that informs my mode of reading leads me to seek out-of-joint syntax, dislocated semantic configurations, and subliminal patterns of signification, fervently alert to the radical possibilities of micro and macro formal elements. In this respect, I viscerally internalize while “queering” the New Critical attention to linguistic phenomena and rhetorical tropes such as isometry, repetition, sesquipedalianism, chiasmus, iconic word order, enjambment, verbal aspect, elision, and aspiration. My ardent reading never takes the text as a given, but constantly puts it under pressure—not to challenge or battle it, but to keep tragic form always moving, in a perennial, burning, anti-cathartic state of being done and undone, as it were. With its intensity and even perversity, ardent reading actualizes tragedy’s distinctive aesthetic modeling of “surviving in and as . . . loss,” in itself a definition of the archive.¹⁶⁰



The first two parts (“Archival Time” and “Archival Space”) of the book—each corresponding to two chapters—structurally reproduce the psychological temporalities of the archive, starting with the endpoint of the tragic corpus, Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 BC), and concluding with Aeschylus’s *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides* (458 BC), performed more than fifty years earlier. The edges of these sections thus chart the backward movement of the search for the origin that is one expression of archive fever. But the analysis also moves forward in mythical time, as the first part covers four plays set before the Trojan War; the second, five set during or after it. The resulting mismatch of *backward* and *forward* temporalities, unfolding simultaneously, corresponds to the back and forth, the *fort* and *da*, of the death drive’s loop. This mismatch is also central to the third part of the book (“Archival Endings”), the last chapter, which uses the finales of a group of iconic plays (*Agamemnon*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, and *Bacchae*) to consider the nexus between catharsis and the tragic ending, the privileged place where catharsis is said to be consummated.¹⁶¹

159. Hamacher 2010, 110. Hamacher’s theory of philology is anticipated by Paul de Man’s call for “a return to philology” (1986, 3–26); see also Hamilton 2018, 26–27, and Richter and Smock 2019 (esp. Bernstein 2019).

160. The citation is from Edelman in Berlant and Edelman’s discussion of anti-reparative modes of being and of the complexities of Sedgwick’s legacy (2014, 46–47).

161. While my theorization, grounded in the practice of close reading, privileges depth over breadth and cannot, of course, include the whole extant corpus of Greek tragedy, I hope it will spur explorations of tragedy’s anarchic aesthetics in other plays.

In the first chapter, I pair Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* with Euripides' *Phoenissae*, viewing both plays not as manifestations of a genre in decline, but as programmatic enactments of death-driven aesthetics. Oedipus's old body, which fuels these aesthetics, is itself a precarious gathering of impressions. In these plays, tragic anti-catharsis takes the form of two modes of futile linearity—in *OC*, a contagious sprinting nowhere that does not spare anybody; in *Phoenissae*, a slog toward death, which activates, and is activated by, the perverse pleasures of boredom and hoarding. The second chapter is centered on the figure of the masochistic spiral produced by the archive—something similar to the vertiginous circling around the *objet petit a*. I illustrate this archival feeling through a combined analysis of Euripides' *Medea* and *Heracles* in which I juxtapose the theme of infanticide with what Edelman has called the ideology of reproductive futurism. *Medea* and *Heracles* are archival figures, caught in cycles of resetting and repetitious accumulation. I argue that in these plays—whose finales I compare, respectively, with the climax of *Thelma and Louise* and the ever-floating, ever-sinking ships analyzed by Deleuze in *The Time-Image* (1989)—tragic anti-cathartic pleasure takes the form of giddy suspension.

In the third chapter, I consider how the acquisitive, archival bodies of Philoctetes and Hecuba in Sophocles and Euripides' eponymous plays feed fantasies of what Derrida has called *manger l'autre* ("eating the other"). We can see a bulimic friendship in the case of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus; a kind of parental bingeing (including mourning/melancholy) in the case of Hecuba. Vibrating with serial rhythms of fullness and emptiness, expansion and contraction, these ingestive, archival dynamics tend toward the fantasy of an unbound archive, which coincides with the subject's dissolution into the intensity of water, that is, something similar to Deleuze and Guattari's body without organs. Drowning and becoming water—an undulating elementality—may be the anti-cathartic allures beneath the cathartic legacy that *Hecuba* passes on to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In the fourth chapter, I approach the putative origin of the tragic genre by considering Aeschylus's *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides* (archival reflections of *Agamemnon*, the first play of the *Oresteia*) and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, a response of sorts to Aeschylus's trilogy. Here I focus on the archival space of the internalized, encased outside, what Derrida refers to as a "crypt"—a concept that I explore in light of the counter-monumental architecture of Daniel Libeskind. I suggest that these three plays are permeated by the pleasure-in-pain arising from the impossible desire to cut oneself in order to enter oneself. This desire to access the internal crypt, an archive of loss, offers a way of understanding Iphigenia's serial, cumulative participation in human sacrifice, as well as the actions of Orestes and Elec-

tra in *Libation Bearers*, expressions of an impetus I call *in-cess*. In a further development of this idea of *in-cess* as it presents itself in *Eumenides*, I consider aesthetic auto-immunity, the pleasurably feverish response, bound to emerge from Athena's encryption of fear in the Athenian citizen body, proposing a model of ever-burning fear as an alternative to Aristotle's cleansing by fear.

In the fifth chapter, I consider tragedy's anti-catharsis—not just a failure of catharsis, but a pulling away from it—in relation to formal and sexual *telos*. I circle back to some of the essential arguments of the book, in particular the connection between the resistance of the archive—the jolting way it recoils—and tragic *jouissance*. I reflect on what I call the intoxication of impossibility, a non-intoxicated intoxication, by considering the last scene of Euripides' *Bacchae* together with three moments, in the finales of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King*, which appear to create the sense of an ending as ejaculatory release. In effect, these moments link tragedy's anti-cathartic pleasures with the orgasm's intrinsic unfinishedness—its stuckness in a perennial process, its irreducibility to a state. In turn, the ending of *Bacchae* seems to cast tragic *jouissance* as the paradoxical intoxication of another sexual lack—a post-coital tristesse—in line with the lack of death, to which the immortal god of the theater has been forbidden access.

Archival Time





Archiving Oedipus

IN SOPHOCLES' *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus breathes his last breath at the conclusion of the journey he embarks on at the end of Euripides' *Phoenissae*. As the last play in Greek tragedy's extant corpus, *OC* generates a convergence between the death of Oedipus and an apparent endpoint in the life of the genre. *Phoenissae*, though not Euripides' final work, exhibits a strong sense of belatedness deriving from the way it warehouses the characters and stories of the Theban saga and incorporates within its largely interpolated text the accretions of reperformances and readings. Both plays place Oedipus's life after his traumatic self-discovery in a liminal space that is analogous to the threshold of tragedy's post-classical afterlife, a space conducive to their archival orientation.

Within this liminal space, Oedipus's flesh and bones, a synchronic gathering of disparate fragments of experience, are deposited (or disappear) in material containers (a home, a tomb, a whole city), along with the tragic tradition, which, to an extent, they embody. This gathering, which can be regarded as constitutive of an archive, is orchestrated by Theseus in *OC* and Eteocles and Polynices in *Phoenissae* to contain the traumatic feelings impressed on Oedipus's body. In *Phoenissae*, the complex of Oedipus and the traces he carries is filed away for the purpose of forgetting or excluding them; in *OC*, we find an ostensibly more benevolent act of political integration, which seeks to temper the unsettling force of these traces, to make them safer. These archival enter-

prises, in which preservation fades into amnesia and erasure, raise questions of ethical responsibility toward their object—Oedipus, the precarious subject constantly liable to objectification. But both efforts ultimately come up against failure, and the archives' apparently closed structures prove to be permeable, as the spectral, recalcitrant energy of the stored Oedipal feelings erupt with varying levels of intensity.

As these feelings circulate, their *containing* archives end up supplying energy to what I call *contagious* archives, which we also see in the plays. The latter are located in or on the bodies of Oedipus and those around him, who are intermittently punctured by the residual sting of his traumas.¹ Like him, they are caught in a repetition compulsion, an impossible desire for reconnection with a phantasmic point of origin (an *archê*), which, in a sense, replicates Oedipus's own search for the origin in *Oedipus the King* (*Oedipus Tyrannus* [OT]). The backward gaze toward an origin, which, according to Jacques Derrida, animates yet troubles any archive, can be seen as an expression of the classic Freudian register of the death drive, an impulse in the human psyche to return to a lost state of repose, non-existence, the primal *archê*.² In seemingly aiming for something like “constancy’ and equilibrium within the organism,”³ the containing archives in *OC* and *Phoenissae* may be initially aligned with Freud's pleasure principle. However, their failure of containment makes such equilibrium precarious or illusory. Refueling trauma, they are spectral repositories harboring an impetus “to lower excitation beyond the level required by the pleasure principle,” that is, toward “the final constancy of death, the chill repose of inorganic matter.”⁴ In *OC* and *Phoenissae*, the Oedipal desire for the origin, as dramatized by tragic characters (Oedipus himself and others), generates tragedy on both a narrative and affective level, and appeals to the same desire in viewers and readers. It likewise generates a variety of archival formations while bestowing on them a destructive proclivity that is contrary to the archive's ostensibly preservative mission, aligned with the pleasure principle.

The search for an origin, which lies behind the archival impetus, can correspond to a desire for the primal, inanimate state, a desire that tragedy has

1. On the body as a “living archive,” see, for example, Eisner 2013, 129, and Baum 2017; on archives of affect, see, for example, Cvetkovich 2003 and Morra 2020.

2. Derrida sees psychoanalysis's search for an *archê*—the primal source of neurosis—as an archival operation and links this search with the death drive, “without which,” as he puts it, “there would not . . . be any desire or any possibility for the archive” (1996, 29). See the Introduction, section 2.

3. Ellmann (1994, 8), defining the pleasure principle.

4. The quotations are, respectively, from de Lauretis (2008, 74) and Ellmann (1994, 8), both discussing the Freudian death drive as theorized in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920): see the Introduction, esp. section 1.

the potential to stir. Whether as bodily impressions or pervious containers, the two plays' archives hold material traces of *pathos* that excite an affective experience distinctive of the death drive in tragic aesthetics: a desire, in line with Freud's theorization in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to rejoin inanimate existence by breaking down into debris and thus becoming what, from the human standpoint, is inert matter, or rather to join inorganic life—in either case, to experience a radical sense of feeling material. Tragedy may tempt us to “play” not just “the other,” but also what we might call the (*n*)*other*—both “other” and “nothing”—or, to experience in Jean-Luc Nancy's phrase, “the mineralogy of being,” the non-human being of mineral existence, and thus that which, again from the perspective of the human subject, is the alterity of *non-being* or, in a sense, *being* as such, *being* in itself.⁵ Both human and non-human, living and non-living, the dirt impressed on Oedipus's skin, the bodily surface that, in *OC*, constitutes its own contagious archive, figures the traces of his (and tragedy's) never-fully-dormant experiences.⁶ But it also provides an image, a symbol of the inanimate *archê*, what Freud sees as the death drive's destructive yet enticing aim.⁷ Oedipus's somatic archive may be not just the space that precariously *preserves* tragedy but also a *mise en abyme* of it, with the same *perverse* attraction.

In the attraction to the inanimate, however, the aesthetic subject draws pleasure from frustration and repetition as much as from the notional goal. In *OC* and *Phoenissae*, archives contain impressions of traumatic feelings resulting from and steadily renewing the death drive's rushing movement toward the *archê* of non-being. But while *OC* seems propelled by an *archive fever* stricto

5. *Non-being*, from the human perspective, is the negation of what defines life, that is, as Kaufman (2013, 164) points out, to “need to begin . . . need to move.” This human *non-being*, or inhuman or inanimate *being* constitutes, in the non-vitalistic perspective of Nancy (1994, 171), “pure essence,” or “a mineralogy . . . of being,” or *being* in itself. Sedgwick (2011, 70 and 75) described her physical contact with textiles in the last part of her life as an “urgent and even exciting intimacy with non-being,” with something that “wasn't any self, and didn't want to be.”

6. In his post-humanist treatment of dust as what “crosses the boundaries between the living and the dead,” Marder (2016, xii and 11) discusses Freud's theory of the death drive, observing that “the standoff with dust *disavows* death, both acknowledging and repudiating its hold on us.” Rather than *not-being*, dust can be seen as *becoming*: see chapter 3. On soil as blurring the boundary between life and non-life, see Povinelli 2016; from a complementary environmentalist perspective, Lyons (2020, ch. 2) explores how, in soil, “death and decay are on a continuum with life.”

7. Lacan (1991, 232) observes that in *OC* “Oedipus is nothing more than the scum of the earth, the refuse, the residue.” On this statement, see esp. Žižek 1998. Lacan sees Sophocles' *OC* as exemplifying his idea that, in Leonard's formulation (2019, 88), “what is most human about us is our death.” In my analysis of *OC*, I emphasize the rushing toward death more than death per se—that is, the perverse mobility of the drive: see the Introduction, sections 2 and 3.

sensu, *Phoenissae* seems to be afflicted by what we may call *archive fatigue*.⁸ I use the phrase *archive fever* to characterize the energetic going nowhere, the sprint toward an inanimate *archê* that *OC* projects by structuring its archival imaginary around the hasty urgency of Oedipus's death, which archives the earlier play's emblematic search for an (impossible) origin as a kinetic affect—a contagious, futile velocity. Such urgency recasts the masochistic repetition haunting Freud's discussion of the *fort/da* game, alongside tragic aesthetics, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Like an acute disease, the feverish archival urgency of *OC* flips into the sense of exhaustion, of a chronic slog in *Phoenissae*. This play's textual form wears itself down through a kind of hoarding, a cumulative boredom that, like its feverish congener, is inherently destructive.⁹ The *archive fever* of *OC* and the *archive fatigue* of *Phoenissae*, as we will see, correspond, respectively, to an acceleration compulsion and an interminable accretion, the fundamental, connected pathways of tragic aesthetics in the two plays. Despite themselves, the archival formations that we see in *OC* and *Phoenissae* programmatically mark tragedy's irresistible, constitutive aesthetic pull away from the cathartic, away from the emotional integrity of the subject, toward something inimical to its ultimate relief, release, equilibrium, self-preservation.

I. RUSHING NOWHERE: SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*

Retracing the aftermath of his harrowing self-discovery in Thebes, Oedipus, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, recalls, with striking language, his initial suicidal thoughts: "On that very day, when my anger (*thumos*) was boiling, and dying and being stoned to death seemed to me the most pleasant thing, nobody appeared to help me in this desire (*erôta*)" (433–36). *OC*, I argue, connects Oedipus's apparently redemptive death with this fantasized demise, refueling as *archive fever* the quasi-erotic energy described in these lines. This malady—an urgent desire for presence, wholeness, and the primal origin

8. I owe the term *archive fatigue*, used alongside *archive fever*, to Kidd (2014, 85), who connects it with the sense of "cultural amnesia" deriving from "invest[ing] . . . technology with the responsibility to remember and store . . . materials on a hard drive in some obscure location as 'dead knowledge.'" The French term *mal* in the original title of *Archive Fever* (*Mal d'archive*) is capacious enough to encompass both *fever* and *fatigue*, even if Derrida primarily interprets it as "passion," as in the idiom *en mal de*, which, as he puts it, can convey the sense of "to burn with a passion (*brûler d'une passion*)" (1996, 91, and 1995b, 142): see the Introduction, section 2. The phrase *mal du siècle* famously indicates ennui.

9. Derrida 1996, 10 and 12.

of non-existence—might have motivated that harrowing self-discovery in the first place. In *OC*, as Oedipus is integrated into Athens, becoming, as I will suggest, an archived object, he and other characters embark on a feverish journey in which memory and preservation are enmeshed with a yearning for self-forgetting and self-loss. Shaped by this feverish impetus, the play itself becomes, more intensely and programmatically than the earlier one, an archive of traumatic traces and of human and non-human objects, which fill the text through displacement and reinscription. The diaspora of Oedipus's archival impressions intimates a reduction of his body to material debris, conveying a longing for disintegration, which is passed on or awakened in the other characters. This destructive impetus persists in the final act of Oedipus's archivization, his entombment, which, despite Theseus's purifying, safeguarding intentions—his attempt to purge the archive of its energizing fever—reinscribes the death drive's anarchic force through impressions of parricide and incest, the *archai* that it seeks to erase. These impressions, prolonging the drive's "rushing,"¹⁰ figure a resistance against catharsis in a play that is strongly concerned with purification and reparation and has thus been read as a preview of Aristotle's aesthetic theory.¹¹ At the end, we are left with an impression of Theseus's own subjection to archive fever, an accelerated movement nowhere, as I will argue.

From the beginning, the play constructs the body of Oedipus as a repository of affective experiences. In the address to Antigone that opens the play, Oedipus explains that three factors have taught him to content himself with "the little" he asks for and the portion, "even less than little," he has obtained in his life as a wanderer (5–6): his "sufferings" (*pathai* 7), "[the] long time that has accompanied me" (*chronos xun-ôn / makros* 7–8), and his noble spirit. The plural *pathai* and the temporal expanse expressed by *chronos . . . makros* ("long time") convey an onerous assemblage of experiences and feelings, which Oedipus seems to be carrying around as though they were imprinted, with gaps and discontinuities, on his body.¹² The archival quality of Oedipus's body fully emerges much later, in Polynices' account of his father's appear-

10. Freud 1920, 41.

11. See von Wartenburg 1866. In *OT*, which Aristotle uses to illustrate the connection of catharsis to *peripeteia* and *anagnôrisis* (*Poetics* 1452a24–b3), Thebes' catharsis, its recovery from the plague, is concomitant with Oedipus's (non-cathartic) self-discovery—akin to the psychoanalytic revelation of a neurosis's alleged "origin" (see chapter 5). In *OC*, Oedipus is made to undergo a physical purification, albeit one that, as we will see, is ultimately ineffective and layered with violence.

12. Murnaghan (1988, 38 and 39) observes that "the continuousness of Oedipus's experience is inscribed in his body" and that his "crimes remain part of the history . . . incorporated in his body."

ance: “I have found him here, cast out (*ek-beblêmenon*), with this dress, whose disgusting dirt, old itself, has dwelt with the old man (*gerôn geronti sun-kat-ôikêken pinos*), marring his flesh” (1257–60). This emphasis on Oedipus’s filthy clothes and marginalization brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s portrait of the archivist as a “ragpicker” (*Lumpenhändler*)—a man “whose job,” in the words he borrows from Baudelaire, “is to gather the day’s refuse in the capital . . . everything that the big city has *thrown away* . . . everything it has scorned.”¹³ Materializing time that has “accompanied” Oedipus, the grime sedimented on his clothing has supplied him with a coeval, symbiotic friend and a home, a compensation for his social exclusion. The polyptoton *gerôn geronti*, where *gerôn* (“old”) modifies *pinos* (“dirt”), does not just personify accumulated dirt; it visualizes Oedipus’s assimilation to it and to the quasi-autonomous “uncombed hair” (*komê . . . a-ktenistos* 1261) coordinated with *pinos*, his becoming archival refuse—what has been *thrown away*. The accreted filth, which embodies what remains of the experiences heaped on Oedipus’s body, is itself—like the tattered clothing it coats and the body the clothing imperfectly shelters—an archive of *pathai* that disseminates live, albeit repellent, sensations: sight, touch, and smell, the sense that, even without explicit references, is imaginatively felt throughout the play. These dispersed sensations are the traces of the archive on Oedipus’s skin, forming a complex of impressions whose spectrality is encoded in his self-presentation as an *eidôlon* (“ghost”), the negation of his “former body” (*archaion demas*), in his prologic prayer to the Eumenides (109–10).

The plea for repose that he addresses to the goddesses, while trespassing on their grove, evinces a desire for his own bodily archive, the place where his *pathai* accumulate as dirt, to cease expanding, to reach a stopping point, to be properly archived: “Accord me now a completion (*perasin*) and conclusion (*kata-strophên*)” (102–3). The same desire lurks behind Oedipus’s search for a “seat”—*thakêsis* (9) or *hedra* (90)—which informs the complex proxemics of the play’s initial movement.¹⁴ The word *archeion*, which refers to the archons’ offices in Athens, where official documents were preserved, and means “the seat of the archons,” captures the offices’ double function as a “residence” and governmental space, corresponding to the two essential meanings of *archê*: the “ontological” sense of beginning (a point of origin, exemplified in the

13. Benjamin 2002, 48 (my emphasis). The Baudelaire quotation is from the essay “Du vin et du haschisch” (*Oeuvres* 1.249–50). As Baudelaire puts it, the ragpicker goes through *les archives de la débauche*. Benjamin’s unfinished work *The Arcades Project*—which, as the title punningly indicates, is programmatically archival—is a “literary montage” based on “the rags, the refuse” (2002, 460).

14. See esp. Birge 1984; Edmunds 1996, 39–54; and Markantonatos 2007, 72–84.

space of home) and the “nomological” one of power.¹⁵ Even before Oedipus learns where he has landed, his first command to Antigone in the prologue—“Stop and seat me here” (11)—hints at Colonus as “a point of fixity”¹⁶ for his vagrant self. Here and later, when Oedipus formulates a similar imperative (“Seat [*kathize*] me here now and protect [*phulasse*] me” 21), he presents his body as the object of the action that defines the constitution of an archive: what Derrida calls “*domiciliation*” or “house arrest.”¹⁷ But this domiciliation, previewing Theseus’s official act of integration, takes place in a public space, the grove of the Eumenides, which, in its double presentation as a multifarious garden and the abode of an ensemble of divine figures, already resembles an archive. The reference to the eponymous hero of Colonus, one of these numinous figures, as *archêgos* (“founder” but also “leader” 60) lends additional archival force—both in the “ontological” and “nomological” sense of *archê*—to Oedipus’s imperious and transgressive act of self-domiciliation in the grove (“I’ll never leave this seat! [*hedras*]” 45). Depositing himself, with Antigone’s assistance, in the grove, the refugee Oedipus seems to treat this sacred space as an institutional container—a quasi-*archeion* where the precarious remains of his “former /old body” (*archaion demas*) may be sheltered from fresh *pathai* or re-enactments of the older ones. Augmenting his own bodily archive, such *pathai* could further burden and debilitate him, hastening his reduction to a kind of debris.

But the refugee’s need for a shelter may not tell the full story of Oedipus’s self-archivization, which exhibits, in its very first manifestations, the deep destructive side of the death drive. In the prologue, the phrase *chronos xun-ôn / makros* (“[the] long time that has accompanied me” 7–8) is marked by a striking enjambment, a formal signal of separation that is at odds with the companionship conveyed by *xun-ôn* (literally “being with”). Read against this graphic separation and Polynices’ description of Oedipus as *ek-beblêmenon*, meaning “exposed,” as well as “thrown out,” Oedipus’s request to be “seated” (11) may evoke, at the beginning of the play, the exposure with which his life traumatically began. Even though addressed to Antigone, *teknon* (“child”)—the play’s first word, its very *archê*—could prime us to think of Oedipus as the exposed son. But contrary to the trauma of parental abandonment, the separation from the big (*makros*) expanse of Father Time (*chronos/Kronos*) signaled by the enjambment could go along with a fantasized withdrawal from

15. On *archê*, see Derrida 1996, 2; see also Agamben 2019, 51–53. Already in pre-Socratic philosophy, *archê* means both “that from which things arise” and “that which has sovereignty over things, that which commands their coming forth” (Sallis 2016, 16).

16. Bowlby 2010, 194.

17. Derrida 1996, 2.

the “big Other” of the Symbolic order, the pre-existing world of discourse into which we are thrown at the moment of birth.¹⁸ Presenting himself as a prisoner of the stories he has been written into, Oedipus, in his dialogue with the Chorus after the parodos, denounces the wounding power of *onoma*—“name,” but in a sense also “law” (*nomos*)—contrasting it with *sôma* (“body”), which he illusorily seeks to extricate from its discursive, Symbolic attachments, its evocation of his infamous mythical past, and cast as pure presence.¹⁹ It is as though, by placing himself in the grove of Colonus, where no word can be spoken and silence is broken only by animal sounds, he unconsciously hopes to access again the condition that preceded his birth into language.²⁰ What we see is Oedipus’s “passion for the Real,” that is, for “the domain of whatever subsists outside symbolization,”²¹ or, differently put, for “the outer limit of our discourse or the silence inscribed within it . . . [a] gaping void at the core of our Symbolic schemata.”²² What is construable as Oedipus’s wish for a redemptive life conclusion—the quasi-heroic death with “indestructible fame” promised to him—could, alternatively, be an intimate wish to plunge back into the abyss of non-existence, to fulfill the death drive’s promise of radical repose, which we may read in the phrase “a pause from big time” (*paulan en chronôi makrôi* 88) in Oedipus’s prayer to the Eumenides.²³ Oedipus’s trespassing on the female space of the grove conjures the memory of his incest, which is among the *pathai* that can never be fully contained.²⁴ The incest is an image of reconnection with the primal *archê* of the prenatal state, of the

18. See Lacan 1991, 235–47. The big Other can be conceptualized as the complex of “the lives of other people and language already at work on our arrival and pressing in upon us with their claims” (Summers-Bremner 2004, 329). This oppressive force emerges at 609, where *chronos* is qualified as *pan-kratês* (“almighty”), an adjective that makes time similar to the “meta subject” or “hidden agency ‘pulling the strings,’ running the show behind the scenes,” in Žižek’s definition of the big Other (1992a, 45). The notion of “thrown-ness” is evoked by Oedipus at 997, when referring to the incest and the parricide, he says, “These are the evils that I entered into (*eis-ebên*).”

19. Cf. 264–66 “Why . . . are you expelling me from this place, just because you are afraid of my name (*onoma*)? For, you don’t fear my body (*sôma*) or deeds.” The whole passage is interspersed with forms of *onoma* and the cognate verb *onomazô* (294, 301, and 306).

20. Cf. 156–57. The taboo of speaking in the grove is thematized in the parodos (esp. 130–33): see, among others, Segal 1981, 392–93, and Nooter 2012, 155.

21. Lacan 2006, 388. “Passion for the Real” is a phrase of Eagleton, discussing the Lacanian concept (2010b, 76).

22. Eagleton 2010b, 69.

23. On the theme of hero cult in *OC*, which is a dominant topic in the scholarship on the play, see, e.g., Henrichs 1993; J. P. Wilson 1997; Kowalzig 2006, 82–85; Markantonatos 2007, 141–56; and Nagy 2013, 497–523. On redemptive readings of the play, from the Romantics to Nietzsche, see Billings 2013.

24. On the memory of the incest, see Travis 1999, 197–98, and Holmes 2013, 28.

fusion with the maternal bosom, which represents the wholeness shattered by the traumatic entrance into the Symbolic order. The death drive can be seen to tend toward such lost wholeness.²⁵ All these hints of fantasized non-existence suggest that, in hastening to archive his body in the grove, Oedipus may be driven not so much to shelter it as to discard it—just as he was discarded after being born. Even though Theseus will seek to turn Oedipus into the ultimate “sign” (*sêma*), the archive fever that sets the play in motion ignites in him a desire to become non-signifying *sôma*, to disappear into the filth encrusting his body, to turn into shapeless matter. It is the shapeless matter of the “unhewn” rock (*a-xestou* 19; *a-skeparnon* 101) on which Oedipus sits in this initial scene. Externalizing the dream of a body apart from discourse, this “unhewn” object reflects the impetus toward self-forgetting, which informs his archival self-domiciliation in the grove. The adjective *a-skeparnon*, meaning literally “untouched by an ax,” may have a particular self-referential pull for Oedipus, whose feet bear the castrating mark of a cutting object. The fantasy of lithic (stoney) metamorphosis brings to mind what Derrida calls the *archivio-lithic* nature of the archive, its predication on the “lithic” (that which pertains to “forgetting”). The extradiscursive aloofness occupied by the stone corresponds to the realm of non-(Symbolic) existence promised by the death drive fueling Oedipus’s archive fever.²⁶

Having established how the dramatic framing of *OC* connects the theme of Oedipus’s self-archivization with the death drive, I now want to consider the ways in which the contagious kinetics of this archive fever spread through the play’s formal structures and textures.

This kinetic contagion, this aesthetic force, can be perceived in the sense of urgency, the discourse of acceleration among the characters, in what has traditionally been judged a static play. This static quality arises from the immobility of Oedipus, uninterruptedly onstage, in his seated position, from the beginning until the moment of his mysterious death. This immobility is announced, in the prologue, by the word *thakêsis* (“seat”), a marker of Oedipus’s archivization, as we have seen, which punningly looks ahead to the *thêkê*

25. In his 1938 essay “Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu” (2001, 23–84), Lacan claims that, under the pressure of the death drive (*instinct de mort*), “the subject seeks to find again the image of the mother” and to return to “the maternal breast” (35); see Barzilai 1999, 44–45, and Copjec 2002, 59.

26. The stone is, in a sense, an example of the radically aloof object posited by object-oriented ontology (OOO): see Telò and Mueller 2018, 5–6. Carey (2009, 132) observes that, in *OC*, Oedipus “is presented as a geological feature, resembling the landscape into which he will be absorbed”; Nagy (2013, 497–523) notes that “Colonus” (*Kolônos*) conveys the personification of a rock as a cult hero. I have reversed this perspective by positing Oedipus’s desire for a lithic objectification as a refusal of language (of *sêma* and *kleos*) and thus of hero cult.

(1763), the casket that will notionally provide his final seating. But *thak-* (as in *thakêsis*) has a peculiar resonance with *tach-* (“speed”), a frequently appearing root in the play. *Tachos* (“speed”), *tachus* (“speedy”) and its adverbial forms, especially in Oedipus’s commands, supply a speedy energy seemingly at odds with the inertia of his seated body. Mobilized mostly to solicit actions instrumental to Oedipus’s death,²⁷ this energy, which is linked with his anger, engages the characters in what can aptly be called “a race to the grave.”²⁸ It is, however, not just the specific destination of the race, but the race itself that lends a destructive quality to the actions leading to Oedipus’s final archivization. As Jean Baudrillard has observed, “Speed is different from movement. Movement goes somewhere, speed nowhere.”²⁹ Speed disrupts temporality, amounting to “the triumph of forgetting over memory . . . a nostalgic desire . . . to revert to immobility, concealed beneath the very intensification of . . . mobility.”³⁰ It is itself a form of dying before the arrival at the destination of death—it is, in other words, an expression of the death drive. When, in the third stasimon of the play, the Chorus makes the play’s most memorable pronouncement—“Not being born is the best by every measure; and, after one has been brought to life, the second best thing is to go back, as quickly as possible (*hôs tachista*), to the place that one has come from” (1224–27)—the adverbial phrase *hôs tachista* draws attention to the correlation of speed and death.³¹ Just as death produces a permanent escape from temporality, speed, confusing objects and spaces, crystallizing its intensity into quasi-immobility, “annul[s] time itself.”³² The speed compulsion we observe in the play, then, does not just further Oedipus’s journey toward archivization but can in itself

27. See esp. 500, 1461, 1475, 1602, and 1643.

28. See 1193 *thumos oxus*; for *oxus* with the meaning of “swift,” see, e.g., *Ajax* 258 and 998. “A race to the grave” is the phrase that Deleuze (2000, 18) uses to characterize Proust’s notion of time. Love, as emblemized by the old Charlus, “unceasingly prepares its own disappearance, acts out its dissolution” (19).

29. Baudrillard 2001, 123. On the death-driven accelerationism of capitalism, see esp. Negarestani 2011 and Lie 2016; see also Telò, forthcoming (c).

30. Baudrillard (1988, 6–7), discussing the experience of driving in the American desert. At 1081, *tachu-rrhōstos* (“swift-rushing”) qualifies the movement of a dove, an absorption into the air that shatters time and bodily contours, producing an effect of disappearance and self-expenditure, which previews Oedipus’s own absorption by the earth.

31. On the famous “not being born is the best . . .” see esp. Travis 1999, 52–58, and E. Wilson 2004, 41–65. As Carey (2009, 120n5) observes, citing a comment by Simon Goldhill, it is significant that the third stasimon’s pronouncement occurs “just before the appearance of one of the sons [Polynices]”—in a kind of rejection of the reproductive imperative, a rejection that, in his Lacanian theorization of queerness, Edelman (2004) connects with the death drive: see chapter 2.

32. Baudrillard 1988, 6.

be seen as an enactment of archive fever energized by a particular, kinetic register of the death drive.

In the *parodos*, this kinetic register informs the Chorus members' impatience to discover Oedipus's identity, implicating them in his traumas even before they become known. After Oedipus has been relocated to the grove's border, the Chorus feels safe to interrogate him, to get closer to him, as it were. The command that urges Oedipus to open his personal archive, "You're delaying too long. Hurry up (*tachune!*)" (219), spurs from him a series of *antilabai* ("Do you know some [son] of Laius?" "And the house of the Labdacids?" "Wretched Oedipus?" 220–22), which reduce his past to verbal segments and draw interjections of bewilderment and horror. The Chorus's impatience can already be felt in the words that channel the *fort/da* movements of its anxiety at the very moment of its entrance (118–27):

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| ὄρα. τίς ἄρ' ἦν; ποῦ ναίει; | |
| ποῦ κυρεῖ ἐκτόπιος συθείς ὁ πάντων, | |
| ὁ πάντων ἀκορέστατος; | 120 |
| προσδέρκου, προσφθέγγου, | |
| προσπεύθου πανταχᾶ. πλανάτας, | |
| πλανάτας τις ὁ πρέσβυς, οὐδ' | |
| ἔγχωρος· προσέβα γὰρ οὐκ | 125 |
| ἄν ποτ' ἀστιβὲς ἄλσος ἐς | |
| τᾶνδ' ἀμαιμακετᾶν κορᾶν | |

Behold! Who is he? Where does he abide? Where has he hastened, out of place, the most insatiable of all (*pant-ôn*), of all (*pant-ôn*)? Look closely (*pros-derkou*), call out (*pros-phthengou*), inquire (*pros-peuthou*) everywhere (*pant-achai*). A wanderer (*planatas*), a wanderer (*planatas*) is the old man (*presbus*), not a local; for otherwise he would never have gone (*pros-eba*) to the grove, not to be trodden, of these violent maidens.

Together, the repetitions of *pant-* ("all") and *pros-* ("toward") convey fear mixed with a compulsive desire to know. The latter also expresses a yearning for proximity, contact, discovery, which is hindered by the gloomily long syllables of the isometric imperatives (*pros-derkou*, *pros-phthengou*, *pros-peuthou*). Three lines later, the juxtaposed, nearly anagrammatic words *pant-achai* ("everywhere") and *planatas* ("wanderer") point to an assimilation of experiences and a confusion of subject and object, as though the Chorus, "inquir[ing] everywhere," were re-enacting the movements of Oedipus the "wanderer." Similarly, the resonance between *presbus* ("old man") and *pros-eba*

(“would [never] have gone”) does not just identify the old Oedipus with his transgressive movement—the entrance into the female space of the Eumenides, which re-enacts the original sin of incest; it also implicates the Chorus itself, whose members are old men, in both illicit movements. Through the *pros-* actions that they urge, the Chorus becomes aligned with the refugee in his irreverent movement “toward” (*pros-eba*) the grove—at the same time, a “race to [a] grave” that belongs to them as much as to Oedipus.

The inherent instability of the archive, a container liable to slip into permeability and contagion, is apparent, in the case of Oedipus, in the Chorus’s longing for proximity even as they seek to keep him behind a figurative barrier. In the second strophe of the parodos, the Chorus curtails closeness, policing Oedipus’s irreverent movements, evocative of the incest, with the admonition “You go too far (*perais*), you go too far (*perais*)” (155–56), which sounds almost identical to the word for border or barrier (*peras*), or the limit of death.³³ The resonance of *perasis*—the barrier against suffering requested by Oedipus in his prayer to the Eumenides (103)—with *perais*, referring to the breaching of a barrier, exposes the contagious expansiveness of the corpus of traumatic traces that he seeks to archive (that is, contain or erase), their uncontainable capacity for spectral reinscription. The verbal form *perais* (“You go too far”) also haunts the adverb *pera* (“further”), which, after Oedipus has abandoned the grove, appears, in turn, in his attempt to curb the Chorus’s curiosity: “Let no one, no one, inquire of me (*mê mê m’ an-erêi tis*) who I am, and don’t interrogate me, searching further (*pera*)” (210–11). The reemergence of *perais* (“You go too far”) as *pera* (“further”) connects the Chorus’s impatience to “search further” with Oedipus’s para-incestuous, proto-archival movement into the grove, suggesting the porous boundaries of the archive, its power to awaken in others the death drive that fuels it. In Oedipus’s plea *not* (*mê*) to be asked any more questions, the homology of the negative particle with the first-person pronoun (*me* elided as *m’*) and the stutter effect of the triple repetition (*mê mê m’*) express Oedipus’s suffocating knot of self-effacement and self-revelation (before the parodos, he had hidden behind a bush, after having revealed himself to a passerby). This knot corresponds to the archive’s own irreducible dualities—containment and expansion, erasure and memorialization, distance and proximity—which are played out in this scene. The Chorus’s intervention ends with another occurrence of the adverb *pera*: “Rush out of my land, lest you cause (*pros-apsêis*) some further (*pera*) trouble to my city” (234–36). How-

33. Death as a “border-post,” a prohibition to go further (in life), overlaps with the typical condition of the refugee, blocked at the border, forbidden to go further: see Derrida 1993, 23–27. The pun of *peras* (“border”) and *perais* (“you go too far”) epitomizes, in a sense, the ambiguity of death as both a limit and a point of crossing.

ever, this formal boundary, the *pera(s)* of the Chorus's lyrics, does not limit the lingering force of *pros-apsêis* (literally "to fasten"), their last word, which resumes the language of proximity and towardness at the beginning of the parodos and, especially, the notion of contagion expressed just before the first emotional evocation of a "border" (*perais . . . perais*): "But you won't inflict upon (*pros-thêseis*) me these curses!" (155–56). This declaration, which carries over into insistent commands to move *away* (162, 167, 169), invites the danger it vigorously seeks to avert. There is a sense in which the "barrier" (*peras*) erected by the recurrences of *pera* and *perais* becomes, paradoxically, a cipher for *pelas* ("near"), concealing a desire for proximity and presence, which the archive feeds and at the same time thwarts.³⁴

The Chorus's quest for proximity to Oedipus injects an erotics of self-annihilation in a later lyric dialogue, which announces itself as a moment of archival disclosure—"It is terrible, stranger, to reawaken a long-buried evil" (510). The Chorus interrogates Oedipus, while he seeks to keep the past safely contained, reperforming Jocasta in the famous scene of *OT*, in which his irrepressible desire to know led to the discovery of the truth.³⁵ Declaring its wish to "hear the story right" (518), i.e., the way it happened, the Chorus seems to articulate its own Oedipal archival curiosity according to the positivistic notion of the archive as the "resuscitation of a self-identical past."³⁶ Yet this curiosity is layered with ardor, with the epistemological erotics captured by the phrase *eramai puthesthai* ("I desire to know" 511). Since the feminine genitive that specifies the content of this curiosity (513–14)—"the wretched . . . pain (*tas deilaias . . . algêdonos*) with which you [Oedipus] were joined"—is governed by the infinitive *puthesthai* ("to know"), but, subliminally, also by *eramai* ("I desire"), the Chorus's archive fever is, in some measure, a desire for a quasi-sexual encounter with pain, a personified, overdetermined sensation encompassing the whole range of Oedipus's traumas (exposure, swollen feet, incest, self-blinding). The only other cognate of *eramai* in the play is the suicidal *erôs* that Oedipus alludes to in the previous scene (436), where he links his "boiling anger (*thumos*)" after the discovery of the truth with the seduction of non-existence, with the pleasurable thought of being stoned to death. This desire for non-existence converges with the Chorus's feverish desire to

34. At 83, Antigone's use of the adverb *pelas* ("you're close to me only") epitomizes her eerily intimate proximity to Oedipus; at 300, *pelas* encapsulates Oedipus's demand for Theseus's presence, a demand that conveys the desire to turn the Athenian king into another caretaker, a double of Antigone.

35. Segal (1981, 393) sees a similar reperformance of Jocasta in the parodos (210–11), on which see p. 54, this volume.

36. The phrase is borrowed from Earle (2015, 316), referring to Yerushalmi's idea of the archive (1991), which Derrida (1996) criticizes.

know when, asked to confirm the incest rumor the Chorus has “heard about” (526), Oedipus responds, “Alas, it is death to hear these things” (529). Oedipus is not only re-experiencing the impulse to die engendered by his original discovery, the moment he first “heard” the truth, but also, in a sense, ascribing a vicarious version of the same impulse to the Chorus, which now wants to “hear” as intensely as he did. In the same passage, when the Chorus, prodded by Oedipus’s question “What do you want to learn now?” (542), starts interrogating him about the parricide with the single word *patros* (“of the father”), Oedipus exclaims, “Woe! You have struck me for the second time, affliction after affliction” (*papai deuteran / epaisas, epi nosôi noson* 543–44).³⁷ This shiver-inducing impression of the “father” generates uncanny archival reinscriptions. In his response, Oedipus sounds like Laius reacting to the parricidal blow of his “son,” as suggested by the vocative *pai* (“O child”) incorporated in both the interjection *papai* (“Woe!”) and the verb *epaisas* (“You have struck”). But the blow inflicted by the Chorus also evokes Oedipus’s fantasized death by stoning, both a punishment for and an unconscious re-enactment of the parricidal blow. It is as though the Chorus’s morbid opening of Oedipus’s archive concealed an erotic desire to recapture, through the sound of his voice (*papai*), an impression of the feel of the wounding objects stockpiled in his narrative of self-replicating atrocities—the iron that made his feet swell, the brooches that blinded him, the scepter that killed Laius, and a fatal stone as their surrogate.³⁸ Oedipus expresses the violence of this archive with the phrases *mu- / riôn g’ epi-strophai kakôn* (“assaults of endless evils” 536) and *epi nosôi noson* (“affliction upon affliction” 544), turning the assemblage of fragments unearthed by the Chorus—and dispersed through the lyric *strophes*—into a hoard of materialized traumas attacking him. Whether seduced by the pleasure of feeling pain or, more radically, the prospect of no longer feeling, the Chorus’s archive fever, its illusory attempt to make Oedipus’s past present, expresses an aestheticized intimate desire to lose oneself.

Figuring an audience’s access to tragedy, the Chorus’s archive fever models tragic aesthetics as a radical experience of feeling material, an enactment of the death drive, that goes beyond the emotional vulnerability theorized by Aristotle in the *Poetics*.³⁹ Responding, at the end of the parodos, to the sup-

37. On these lines see J. Butler (2000, 63), who observes that the Chorus’s inquiry “verbally repeats the crime, strikes again where Oedipus is already hurt and where he is thus hurt again.”

38. The verb *paiô* (“to hit”) also describes Oedipus’s self-blinding in *OT* 1270: see chapter 5.

39. Although, following Gould (1996) and Goldhill (1996), I reject the notion of the Chorus as an idealized audience and see the tragic audience as a “fissured” (in Goldhill’s words) collectivity, here and elsewhere I do consider the Chorus’s emotional response as *one* possible model of aesthetic reception, which may reflect or shape our own: on this “we,” see the Introduction.

plicating appeals of Antigone, the Chorus brings together a pair of emotions at the heart of the Aristotelian notion of tragedy: “Daughter of Oedipus, we pity (*oiktiromen*) you and him in equal measure for your misfortune; but fearing (*tremontes*) what the gods may send, we could not have strength to utter anything beyond (*pera*) what has just been said to you” (254–57). “Pity,” “fear,” “beyond”—together these terms conjure the possibility of an aesthetic experience whose pleasure is *beyond* the Aristotelian model of restorative closure, resembling, rather, the thrill of blending into Oedipus’s sedimented grime, the material fence (*peras*) that separates him from the Chorus. It is a pleasure captured not by cathartic *perasis* (“completion”), but by Oedipus’s proceeding “too far” (*perais*) into the grove, an intoxicating fall into the abyss of amnesia and self-disposal. It is the pleasure-in-pain characteristic of the archive, which makes us burn with a compulsive infatuation for presence and wholeness that slips into a yearning to become debris. In the next part of the analysis, I explore this yearning as a powerful anti-cathartic feeling. I focus on two moments—Oedipus’s curses against his sons and his reunion with his daughters after Creon kidnaps them—when his eagerness to become a non-human or human object, a debased relic or a bodily part severed from a signifying whole, emerges in the interstices of poetic form, affecting form itself.

In two nearly identical curses, Oedipus’s enraged energy directed against his sons bounces back, transforming the text into a desolate archive of overdetermined family relics, including Oedipus himself. The first curse occurs in the speech to Ismene where Oedipus recalls his “boiling” suicidal anger; the second is pronounced in Polynices’ presence, after Antigone has persuaded him to receive his suppliant son by arguing that he should pay attention not to the present (the current strife between Polynices and Eteocles over the rule of Thebes), but rather to the complex of paternal and maternal travails he has suffered. In the following passages, the curse does not just replicate Oedipus’s own expulsion and exclusion, which it insistently deplores, but almost converts a speech act into the physical act of spitting, an expulsion of precariously repressed memories (425–49 and 1354–56):⁴⁰

ὡς οὐτ’ ἄν ὃς νῦν σκηπτρα καὶ θρόνους ἔχει
 μείνειεν, οὐτ’ ἄν οὐξεληλυθὼς πάλιν
 ἔλθοι ποτ’ αὐθις· οἳ γε τὸν φύσαντ’ ἐμὲ
 οὕτως ἀτίμως πατρίδος ἐξωθούμενον
 οὐκ ἔσχον οὐδ’ ἤμυναν, ἀλλ’ ἀνάστατος

425

40. On the curse as spitting, see Hesiod, *Works and Days* 726. Oedipus himself evokes this analogy at 1383, when he dismisses Polynices: “Begone, spat out (*apo-ptustos*) by me.”

| | |
|--|------|
| αὐτοῖν ἐπέμφθη καὶ ἐκεκρήχθη φυγὰς. . . . | 430 |
| . . . πόλις βία | 440 |
| ἤλαυνέ μ' ἐκ γῆς . . . , οἱ δ' ἐπωφελεῖν, οἱ τοῦ πατρός, τῷ πατρὶ δυνάμενοι, τὸ δρᾶν οὐκ ἠθέλησαν. . . . | |
| τῷ δ' ἀντὶ τοῦ φύσαντος εἰλέσθη θρόνους καὶ σκῆπτρα κραίνειν καὶ τυραννεύειν χθονός. [. . .] | 448 |
| ὅς γ', ὦ κάκιστε, σκῆπτρα καὶ θρόνους ἔχων, ἄ νῦν ὁ σὸς ξύναιμος ἐν Θήβαις ἔχει, τὸν αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ πατέρα τόνδ' ἀπῆλασας | 1355 |

. . . so that the son who now has the scepter and the throne may not stay, while the one who left may not return ever again. When I, the man who begot them, was expelled from my fatherland so shamefully, they did not stop it, nor did they succor me, but I was being driven away from home by the two of them and was declared an exile. . . . The city by force pushed me out of my country, and they, the sons of their father, their father (*tou patros, tōi patri*) whom they could have helped, did not want to do it. . . . They chose thrones instead of the one who begot (*anti tou phusantos*) them and holding sway with scepters and being tyrants of the land. . . . It is you, most wicked one, who, while holding the scepter and throne that your brother now holds in Thebes, pushed away your own father.

The violent impetus of Oedipus's rage disgorges blame, but, at the beginning and at the end, it also performs an imaginary disposal of scepters and thrones, the fetishized objects of contention between brothers, as well as between fathers and sons. The combination of scepters and thrones with the theme of expulsion and the repetition of words for "father" shows that Oedipus's literal parricide haunts the symbolic one that his sons committed by failing to prevent his expulsion from Thebes. In 442, the juxtaposition *tou patros, tōi patri* amounts to a tremor of discomfort, a fissure in a wall of repression, which alerts us to the double valence of *patēr* (implicating both Oedipus and Laius) and to the multiple, almost indistinguishable referents activated here. Observing that his sons chose the throne in place of "the one who begot [them]" (*anti tou phusantos* 448), Oedipus could just as well be speaking of himself, of his own filial usurpation. In addition, the scepter is not just an emblem of his past royal authority and of his sons' recent rule, which he deems responsible for his expulsion from Thebes. It is also a parricidal weapon, the instrument of his murderous response to being struck by Laius at the crossroads (cf. *OT* 811).

The curse, then, leaves us with the impression of a varied displacement—of Oedipus onto his sons; of troubling memories figured as objects to be ejected. Antigone and Ismene—their father’s prostheses, called “scepters” in the play—are among these items, as is Oedipus himself.⁴¹ Archived among the scepters and thrones in the discourse of the curse, he is assimilated to their thingliness. Oedipus’s retaliation for his expulsion from Thebes (a re-enactment of his exposure) encodes an act of self-disposal.

Oedipus undergoes another form of disposal at the moment that Theseus officially admits him into Athens, an archival domiciliation that, while promising maternal protection, even a restoration to the *archê* of the prenatal state, subjects him to political containment. After learning from Ismene of Apollo’s oracle—that either alive or dead he will benefit the city blessed with his presence (389–90)—Oedipus offers his “wretched body” (*athlion demas* 576) to Theseus, who accepts it, substituting a legitimate archivization for Oedipus’s earlier impromptu and unlawful one. The sovereign’s formal acceptance of the refugee as a metic—“I’ll settle [him] in the land as an inhabitant of the city (*em-polin*)” (637)—establishes that, by being *in* the city (*em-polin*), he becomes *of* (that is, belongs to) the city.⁴² An outsider incorporated into the Athenian community for the sake of its security, Oedipus is domesticated, his power (his potential to become an enemy) curtailed.⁴³ The protection promised by Theseus resembles maternal care, as suggested by his presentation of Athens as a welcoming hearth, a domestic image in line with the “inside” implicit in *em-polis*. Similarly, Theseus’s appointment of the Chorus leader as Oedipus’s “guardian” (638–39) employs a verb, *phulassein*, which encompasses archival safeguarding as well as Antigone’s quasi-maternal practice of care. (In 21, Oedipus had commanded her to “seat and protect [*phulasse*]” him.) In the ensuing choral ode (the second stasimon), Colonus emerges as a place representing a return to maternal wholeness.⁴⁴ Responding, in a way, to Oedipus’s previously expressed hope that the ruler of Athens will show “care” (*en-tropên*) and “concern” (*phrontid’*) and come “close” (*pelas*) to him (299–300), Theseus offers a kind of archival protection that promises a realization of this whole-

41. Differently, Segal (1981, 375) sees the curses as part of Oedipus’s redemption, his self-purification.

42. Here I paraphrase Vidal-Naquet (2001, 195). On *em-polin* (Musgrave’s widely accepted emendation of the transmitted reading *empalin*), see also Bowlby 2010, 191–93.

43. As Leonard (2010, 244) puts it, combining Derrida’s perspective with Levinas’s, “despite his immediate, unqualified welcoming of Oedipus, Theseus’s opening on to the other is a reaffirmation of the ego.” Derrida (2000, 55) has pointed out that there is “no hospitality . . . without sovereignty of oneself over one’s home,” that is, without “excluding and doing violence.”

44. See esp. Travis 1999, 186–90; see also Saïd 2012, 86–88.

ness—the notional goal of Oedipus’s *pothos* (“longing”), of his archive fever.⁴⁵ However, this model is in tension with the stifling quality of Theseus’s care, which seems to entail, for Oedipus, an archival disposal not untouched by the force of political violence.

An act of paternal aggression, a quasi-castration, Creon’s effort to reclaim Oedipus for his own Theban archive works against itself, destroying the integrity and unity it strives to preserve, abetting his transformation into a mutilated object. Although Creon ends his deceptive speech by casting Thebes as Oedipus’s “long-time nurse” (760), Oedipus, in his response, treats the Theban king as a reincarnation of Laius. He experiences his uncle/brother-in-law’s arrival as a re-enactment of his own painful entrance into the Symbolic order (770–74):

τότ’ ἐξέωθεις κάξεβαλλες, οὐδέ σοι
 τὸ συγγενές τοῦτ’ οὐδαμῶς τότ’ ἦν φίλον·
 νῦν τ’ αὖθις, ἡνίκ’ εἰσορᾶς πόλιν τέ μοι
 ξυνοῦσαν εὖνουν τήνδε καὶ γένος τὸ πᾶν,
 πειρᾷ μετασπᾶν . . .

770

At that time you expelled me and pushed me away, and this kinship was in no way dear to you then. Now, in turn, since you see that this city and all its people are living with (*xun-ousan*) me, well-disposed (*eu-noun*), you’re trying to tear me away.

Creon’s past banishment of Oedipus and his current attempt to sever him from Athens recapitulate Laius’s brutal separation of his son from Jocasta’s breast. The adjective *eu-noun* (“well-disposed”) expresses more than Athens’ benevolence, evoking the overabundance of *eu-* compounds and words with plump diphthongs and vowels that, in the second stasimon (the ode to Colonus), translate into sound the notions of fertility and nurturing.⁴⁶ Creon, then, appears as a figure of the “big Other,” the “big time that accompanied” Oedipus (*chronos xun-ôn / makros 7–8*),” now seeking to reaffirm its own castrating force over Athens’ promise of nurturing company (*xun-ousan* “living

45. For Oedipus’s *pothos*, which emerges directly or projectively (that is, through the *pothos* he attributes to his children), see 333, 419, and 1505 (where Theseus is the object of Oedipus’s longing).

46. See the adjectives *eu-ippou* (668 [the ode’s first line]); *eu-ippon*, *eu-pôlon*, *eu-thalasson* (711); *eu-êretmos* (716). The first few lines of the stasimon show an unusual concentration of vowels and diphthongs: see, e.g., 668–71 *eu-ippou . . . hikou . . . ep-aula . . . Kolônôn . . . ligeia minuretai*.

with"). About to drag Antigone away, Creon scornfully taunts Oedipus, "You won't walk with the aid of these two scepters ever again!" (848), assimilating the daughters to the phallic prosthesis that allowed Oedipus to walk with the wound that, at the moment of the exposure, Laius had inflicted on his feet, a symbolic castration. A few lines later, Oedipus himself interprets Creon's abduction of Antigone as castrating violence, when, cursing him, he compares the impending loss to a second blinding, the gouging out of a third eye: "You, most wicked one, who go away having ripped off (*apo-spasas*) a dear eye (*philion omma*) besides the ones I lost before" (866–67).⁴⁷ Creon's actions, "archontic, that is, paternal and patriarchic," in their aim, seem to pursue "the gathering together [of] signs" into a "single corpus . . . in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration."⁴⁸ But the castration that Creon employs toward that end exposes the anarchivic nature of the archive, the violence of its search for full presence and its inevitable failure. In response to Creon's arrogant certainty of "fully" grasping him ("I'll take [*labôn*] him and drive him away" 860), Oedipus, in a sense, looks toward this failure when he defiantly projects his own elusiveness onto his oppressor, casting him as a disembodied trace, mere air: "O impudent voice, will you then put your hands on me?" (863).

When Oedipus reunites with his daughters, after their swift rescue by Theseus, he treats them as anatomical fragments, archival relics, experiencing, through them, the desire to become a disjointed bodily part, an unrecognizable human object. In light of Oedipus's comparison of Antigone to a "dear eye" (*philion omma* 866), the references, in the aftermath of the daughters' seizure (902, 1009, 1097), to them as *korai* ("girls," but also "eye pupils") conjure his missing eyes. Thus, when the Chorus announces, "I see these girls (*koras*) nearby" (1097–98), we are not just informed that the daughters, Oedipus's prosthetic eyes, have been restored to him, but also invited to perceive them as anatomical relics, pieces that Creon has "torn off" (*apo-spasas*), in effect "fragments" (*apo-spasmata*).⁴⁹ Asked by Oedipus, "Daughter, are the two of you here?" (1102), Antigone begins her response with a feminine deictic, *haide* ("these"), which, however, instead of signaling her and her sister's physical presence, as one would expect, modifies Theseus's hands—"Yes, these

47. In 866, I accept Meineke's emendation *philion* instead of the transmitted *psilon*, which is kept in the OCT edition (though Lloyd-Jones prints the emendation in the text of his Loeb [1994]). In OT 1268, *apo-spasas* designates Oedipus's "snatching" of the maternal pins, which will make him blind: see chapter 5.

48. Derrida 1996, 3 and 95.

49. In the Hippocratic corpus, *apo-spasma* signifies an "avulsion," as of bones (see *On the Surgery* 23); the word can also carry the notion of a material fragment, as in Plato, *Phaedo* 113b.

hands (*haide . . . cheres*) / of Theseus and his nearest followers have saved [us]" (1102–3). When, a few lines later, Antigone, fulfilling her father's (and her own) "longing" (*pothos* 1106), repeats the deictic *haide*, but, this time, as a way to say "we," to call attention to her and her sister's presence ("We [*haide*] together are coming near you" 1107), the interlinear echo assimilates the *korai* ("eyes / girls") to hands. The effect of these unstable deictics is not just of a displaced allusion to Oedipus's self-inflicted mutilation (no longer able to see, he can only touch), or of an announcement of the eerie familial embrace about to take place,⁵⁰ but of a transformation of the daughters into anatomical fragments. The *antilabai*, in fact, isolate Antigone's phrase "these hands" (*haide . . . cheres* 1102b) as well as Oedipus's consecutive apostrophes to his daughters as "shoots" (*ernê* 1108a) or "scepters" (1109a), fashioning verbal fragments as material relics. The "hands" and "scepters" in particular, not dissimilar from anatomical votives in a sanctuary (such as the Asclepeion), stage a quasi-necrophilic encounter with amputated limbs (organs turned inanimate) and pieces of wood serving as prosthetic legs.⁵¹ Apparently supplying Oedipus (and us) with a sense of restored wholeness, the embrace of father and daughters, with its incestuous overtones, amounts to a form of precarious presence or fragmented fullness, an archival conglomeration of scattered relics. The impossibility of restored fullness is also suggested by the taboo surrounding Creon's seizure of the daughters, which Oedipus and Antigone can bear to hear or talk about only "briefly" (*brachu* 1118). There is a connection between the breaking off of this account—whose brevity (*hôs brachist[a]* 1115) parallels the speed (*hôs tachista* 897) of Theseus's rescue⁵²—and the breach (the *apospasma*) provoked by Creon's assault, whose outcome, the return of amputated versions of Antigone and Ismene, cannot be completely repressed. Oedipus's spectral embrace resembles the gesture of the archivist seeking to assemble the parts that the "big city" (in Benjamin's phrase) or "big time" have thrown away and to domiciliate them in his own body.⁵³ But in the intimacy he establishes

50. See esp. Holmes 2013 and Worman 2017 and 2018.

51. The use of anatomical votives in classical Greece has been reassessed by Hughes (2017), who considers their centrality in the sanctuaries of Asclepius, especially the Athenian Asclepeion. As she points out (48), the visitors of a sanctuary were invited to look at "votive body parts" (hands, legs, feet, genitals, etc.) "as corresponding to the 'real' parts of a dedicant's broken body."

52. See also 904 (*sun tachei*), 933 (*hôs tachista*), 1017 (*speudousin*), and 1023 (*speusontes*).

53. The idea of incorporation is intimated by the participle *em-phunte* (1113), which appears in the description of Oedipus's incestuous embrace. The image of a pregnant Oedipus as a mother to a sister-daughter emerges at 1262–63, "Apparently, he carries the victuals of his belly akin to these [looks of his]" (*adelpa d, hôs eoike, toutoisin phorei / ta tês talainês nêduos threptêria*). Here Polynices is saying that what nourishes Oedipus's belly is "akin" (*adelpa*) to his appearance—that is, as abject as it is. However, an uncanny suggestion of Oedipal

with what the text presents as bodily relics we can also detect the ultimate aim of this archival fever—the thrilling fantasy of inanimate existence—and the particular register of the death drive that nourishes it. When he says, “Now that I have what is dearest to me, I would no longer feel utterly wretched being dead with the two of you standing beside me” (1110–11), we can imagine his broken body eagerly mingling with the anatomical relics that his daughters have, to an extent, already become. In a play so strongly concerned with Oedipus’s death and his posthumous survival, this imagery, generated by broken form, invites us to think of Oedipus, who, in a sense, *is* feet and eyes, as a disembodied object like a votive—not simply a corpse or a collection of bones destined for a tomb. While the triangle of the embrace between Oedipus and his daughters inevitably evokes the incestuous triangle of mother, father, and son, it could be construed as an alternative to inter-subjectivity, that is, a kind of “inter-objectivity” constituted by a community of non-signifying, unidentifiable human objects.⁵⁴

As we will now see in the last part of this reading, in the play’s finale, Theseus ostensibly strives to make Oedipus a fully restored subject through a literal cleansing before his death, though Oedipus’s transformation into the secret talisman of Athens, archived by Theseus, promises to objectify him as a secret *sêma*. However, the dirt, metaphorical and not, thwarts this catharsis, political as well as aesthetic, extending to Theseus—and us—the death-driven energy of Oedipus’s feverish rushing.

The account of Oedipus’s death dramatizes the archive’s nexus of preservation and amnesia, presenting him as seeking remembrance and effacement, submitting to Theseus’s filial memorialization and a purification that parricidally contains him. Before leaving the stage, Oedipus “asks that he not be forgotten”—a “plea,” an “injunction,” or even a “threat”⁵⁵ captured by the imperative *memnêisthe* (“Remember!” 1555), which he addresses to Theseus and the whole city of Athens. This order receives almost immediate execution through the voices of the Messenger and of Theseus himself, whose roles, in the play’s last scenes, are assigned to the same actor who previously played Oedipus.⁵⁶ Upon Oedipus’s mysterious disappearance, as we hear from the Messenger, Theseus covered his eyes (1650–51)—in fear

pregnancy is conveyed by the constellation of *adelphai* (which evokes “siblings”) with *phorei* (“he carries”) and *ta tês . . . nêduos threptêria* (“the victuals of his belly/womb”).

54. On inter-objectivity as a queer bond that challenges the opposition between animate and inanimate, see Chen 2011, 280–81. See also Morton (2013, 86), a theorist of object-oriented ontology (OOO), who uses inter-objectivity in a somewhat different sense.

55. Derrida (2000, 105) in his discussion of *OC*.

56. See esp. B. Johnston 1993, 280, and Ringer 1998, 93; see also Budelmann 2000, 45.

(1652), we are told, though we might read this gesture as an expression of assimilation to the blind king. Theseus also internalizes Oedipus's archived self, repeating, almost verbatim, to Antigone and Ismene, at the very end of the play (1773–74), the promise that, in the Messenger's report, Oedipus had secured from him (1633–35). This Oedipal archive created by intergenerational remembrance and re-embodiment is built, however, on elements of pre-emptive erasure. While asking not to be forgotten, Oedipus seems to take pleasure in the thought of burial as self-concealment or self-annihilation. As Derrida suggests in his essay *On Hospitality*, the infinitive *krupthênai* ("to be hidden" 1546) and the participle *krupsôn* ("To hide [my life's end]" 1552), which precede Oedipus's final exhortation to "remember," invite us to see his subterranean destination—accessed through a "path that plunges down, . . . planted in the earth" (1590–91)—as something similar to a "crypt," an archival space par excellence.⁵⁷ But this space, where Oedipus will be encrypted, is marked by numinous "placelessness" or "illocality."⁵⁸ As a placeless place, it exemplifies, virtually defines, the archive. Theseus's containment of Oedipus and Oedipus's own desire for effacement come together in the Messenger's narrative of his last actions, a narrative that, in its overdetermined proliferation of details, its gaps and contradictions, creates the "event" as an archival assemblage of its impressions.⁵⁹ Before his departure, Oedipus sits "on a tomb of stone" (1596)—a surrogate of his burial site. In this image of peaceful sitting—reminiscent of his iconic defiant posture, perched before the Sphinx, or of his installment on the throne of Thebes—we can feel the frisson of the past folded into the future, an archival feeling. Furthermore, after resting on the vicarious tomb, Oedipus takes off his "filthy clothes" (1597); with the help of his daughters, he performs cathartic rites and dons new garb. These moments hint at the price of Oedipus's archivization—a purification that redeems him, by removing, that is, destroying, the archive of his *pathai*, the accumulated dirt that had exerted its contagious pull on the Chorus.⁶⁰ In a sense, Oedipus

57. See Derrida 2000, 101–5, esp. 103 ("A sort of illegal [*clandestin*] immigrant, he will be . . . buried, interred, carried in secret in the night of a crypt"). Derrida provides an illuminating reading of *OC* without linking the play with the theme of the archive. A journey to the Underworld is suggested by the reference to the place of agreement between Theseus and Pirithous (1593–94): see Jebb 1900, ad loc.; Segal 1981, 369; and Easterling 2006, 142. On the crypt, see chapter. 4.

58. Derrida 2000, 115.

59. Oedipus's death is an example of the Derridean "event" as that which exceeds appropriation, withstanding any attempt to comprehend it (2003a, 90, and 2007b). With its multiple, dissonant accounts, it also comes close, to a degree, to Blanchot's notion of death as "the event"—that is, something inexpressible and inaccessible to us (1982, 106 and 154–55).

60. At 1574–77, the Chorus prays that Oedipus will reach the Underworld *en katharôi* ("pure").

fulfills his self-annihilating drive through Theseus's political containment. To be archived, appropriated by Athens, he has to kill a part of himself, a self-sacrifice that, while absolving Theseus of parricide, underscores the parricidal nature of the archive and, in this case, its overlap with the state's practice of immunitarian biopolitics.⁶¹ The archive entails domestication and containment, which paradoxically thwart preservation.

But the archive's death drive, in turn, thwarts the logic of domestication, as Oedipus's return to the earth, his becoming covered with the dirt he had removed, intimates an uncanny overlap between Theseus's parricidal containment and taboo sexual containment. As Theseus reveals to Antigone and Ismene during his last exchange with them (1763), Oedipus, in his mysterious burial place, "has a holy *thêkê* ('urn, tomb')." The term (from *tithêmi*, "to place") indicates his being permanently settled into immobility and conjures his initial *thakêsis* ("seating"), but also *tachos* ("speed") with its deep drive toward immobility. This *thêkê* is a tombless tomb, an invisible "ungrave," evocative, however, of a material container—perhaps an "urn" or something comparable to the Latin *arca*, a "chest" or a "coffin," which Derrida paronymologically connects with the word *archive*.⁶² Similar to a uterine cavity, this *thêkê* becomes the manufactured counterpart of the earth, whose foundation, as the Messenger reports, "having opened benevolently" (*eu-noun dia-stan* 1662), may have "made an end" (*ex-epraxen* 1659) of Oedipus. Antigone seems to confirm (1681) that scenario when she laments that "inscrutable plains" (*a-skopoi . . . plakes*), in the feminine gender, "snatched" (*emarp-san*) him. The ambiguous mixture of benevolence and violence in the earth's reception of Oedipus is woven into the play's imagistic fabric: on the one hand, as we have seen, the ode to Colonus construes the Athenian land as a utopian maternal space, where the "wide-bosomed" (691) earth is fertilized by the river Cephissus, "bringing quick birth" (689); on the other hand, the chasm in the earth through which Oedipus descended is located near the Thorician rock (1595), the place where Eos seized Cephalus as her lover. In Oedipus's "beautiful" (post-catharsis) death, which formalizes his absorption into the state's and myth's Symbolic realm, the Messenger's Oedipal voice seems, then, to

61. See Derrida (1996, 95), who observes that operating "in the name of the father as dead father" the archive always "amounts to repressed or suppressed parricide." On immunitarian biopolitics, see esp. Esposito (2013, 59–60), who refers to the obsession with "inhibiting, preventing, and fighting the spread of contagion" during the so-called refugee "crisis"; see also Sanjal 2017.

62. Derrida 1996, 23, and 2000, 113 (on the "ungrave"). See Ismene's definition of Oedipus as *a-taphos* ("tomb-less") at 1732. According to Guidorizzi (2008, 384), *thêkê* designates "the sacred space that conceals the secret force . . . of the hero who physically occupies (*echei*) it"; for a discussion of *echei*, see Budelmann 2000, 42–44.

reinscribe a destabilizing impression of the Real of incest.⁶³ Theseus's archive burns with the contagious ardor of the disturbing truth it is trying to bury. The containment, both physical and symbolic, which the Athenian archive aims to achieve, does not just lay bare the sexual containment it seeks to exclude; it seems even to coincide with it.⁶⁴ What emerges from the way Oedipus's apparently quenched fever troubles the logic of containment is the inescapable entanglement of the archive with the death drive, the never-extinguished force behind Oedipus's ardent contact with and assimilation to the soil that covers and absorbs him.

Manifested in the urgent rhythm that never seems to abandon the play, even when it reaches its conclusion, the archive's death drive also subjects Theseus and the state to its feverish impulse. The last moments seem to contrast the civic archive's containing force and the breaching, or refusal, of such containment, respectively, Theseus's vocal re-embodiment of Oedipus, which we have already observed, and the haptic impulse of Antigone and Ismene.⁶⁵ Their desire to see their father's tomb barely conceals an urge for intimacy, for full presence, a visceral *pothos* for the lost "origin" (1678, 1697), heightened by the denial of proper mourning and joined with the fantasy of self-annihilation.⁶⁶ This is quintessential archive fever, as the Chorus suggests when it commands them not to "burn (*phlegesthon*) excessively" (1695), resuming a detail of the natural turmoil that had announced the imminence of Oedipus's death, the impossibility of further delaying it: "Lightning is burning (*phlegei*) the sky again" (1466–67). Antigone describes her "longing" (*himeros* 1725) for her father's tomb—and for him—as a desire to see "the hearth beneath the earth (1726)," both the object and source of her burning feeling. Like the Chorus, Theseus seeks to constrain Antigone and Ismene (1751), but, in his last words

63. Although Holmes (2013, 28 and 37) sees Oedipus's crossing of the sacred precinct at the beginning of the play as "another unwitting trespass on to a space that is . . . female, and chthonic . . . namely the womb of his mother," she more optimistically observes that "by entrusting Theseus with the task of the burial . . . he appears to escape the incestuous bed once and for all."

64. This troubling maternal embrace may reflect the Athenian cultural imaginary of the archive. The Metroon—the central archive of Athens, instituted sometime between 409 and 405 BCE—is onomastically and ideologically connected with the mother of the gods, a deity who was also assimilated to the earth. See Loraux 1998, 67–79, and Telò 2017.

65. See esp. 1698–99, where Antigone, referring to the experience she shared with her father, says: "What was never dear (*philon*) was dear (*philon*) when I held him fast in my arms (*ton en cheroïn kat-eichon*)."

On Antigone's touch in the play, see esp. Worman 2017.

66. See 1691 (Ismene expresses the desire to "die together" with her father) and 1733, where Antigone cries out: "Take me there, and, then, kill me." As Derrida (2000, 111) puts it, what Antigone "weeps for" in this scene "is less her father, perhaps, than her mourning, the mourning she has been deprived of. . . . She weeps at being deprived of a normal mourning."

before leaving the stage, he seems to reduce the gap between his archival containment and their archival fever. After repeating almost verbatim the promise Oedipus had demanded of him (“Whatever I do will be in the interest of you two” 1773–74),⁶⁷ he adds: “I should not cease” (*ou dei m’ apo-kamnein* 1776). This declaration, which pushes against the cathartic forces of equilibrium or relief, bespeaks the urgency and speed that affect all the characters in the play, including Antigone and Ismene.

The perverse mobility released by Oedipus’s death without release is the same “race to the grave” suggested by Polynices and Oedipus in their *thumos* (“anger”). Earlier, when Antigone asks Polynices, “Why should you be angry (*thumousthai*) again?” (1420), he dismissively replies, “Don’t delay me” (1432). His previous declaration that it was not possible “to turn back” (*apo-strepsai* 1403) from the war with his brother, in turn, previews Oedipus’s embrace of death: “There is no longer any turning back (*apo-strophê* 1473).” In *On Hospitality*, Derrida observes that as Oedipus’s “host” Theseus “becomes a retained hostage, a detained addressee, responsible for and victim of the gift that Oedipus . . . makes of his dying person.”⁶⁸ Faithfully repeating Oedipus’s words, Theseus, in his last statement, remains hostage to the law of repetition, which ties archival memorialization to the death drive. The production of *OC* in 401, when the festival of the Great Dionysia was brought back to life after the restoration of democracy, involved the Athenian state in an intense process of returning to the origin.⁶⁹ The archive fever that Theseus shares with the state he represents involves them in “a race to the grave” whose disruption of time turns their memorializing into an insistent impulse to forget or dispose of themselves.⁷⁰

In the choral intervention that ends the play, we may find our aesthetic anti-catharsis in the difficulty of affirming a *da* moment or the impossibility of separating the pleasure principle from the death drive, bound as they are together in the rhythm of *lifedeath*. After Theseus resolves not to relax (*apo-kamnein*) his sense of urgency, the Chorus responds: “But stop and don’t rouse lamentation any further” (*all’ apo-pauete mêd’ epi pleiô / thrênôn egeirete* 1777–78). The echo between *apo-pauete* (“stop”) and *apo-kamnein* (“rest”), almost synonyms, includes Theseus in the Chorus’s address, placing his urgency alongside Antigone’s and Ismene’s desire for lamentation, a manifestation of

67. Compare these lines with 1633–35.

68. Derrida 2000, 107.

69. See esp. Hanink 2014, 341–44.

70. For uplifting political readings of the finale of *OC*, see, e.g., Knox 1964, 144; Segal 1981, 374; Slatkin 1986; and Hanink 2014, 342–43; differently, E. Wilson (2004, 58) does not exclude “a premonition of disaster for the city from beyond [Oedipus’s] grave.”

the same Oedipal *thumos*. Tasked with bringing the play to an end, the Chorus seems to enforce the pleasure principle, the restoration of “the ‘constancy’ and equilibrium within the organism,” the closural *da* after the *fort* unfolded through the dramatic action. But Theseus’s last words, which reduce the distance from Antigone, evincing his attraction to the archive fever he is trying to contain, do not only reveal the slippage between *da* and *fort*, the pleasure principle and the death drive. They suggest the recalcitrance of the tragic *fort* in relation to *da*, the powerful attraction that the former abidingly exerts, with its seductive prospect of annihilation. The reluctance to absorb loss is expressed, of course, in Antigone’s endless mourning or in the mourning denied to her. But it appears significant that the Chorus’s response includes, deliberately or not, Theseus too, a figure of *da* drawn into tragic *fort*—and apparently unwilling to reverse this trajectory. Through Theseus, the thrill of tragedy seems to correspond to the compulsive, contagious movement captured by his replaying Oedipus telling himself, as in the insistent pursuit of a non-existent *archê* or the *archê* of non-existence, “You mustn’t be late, you must always reduce the lateness, you must always make a little more haste.”⁷¹ The anti-closure that we are offered here does not reside in ambiguity and openness, but in an insistent automatism. With its admonition, the Chorus itself seems to return to the moments when it tried to stop Oedipus from getting too close, or excavated his painful past, in both cases barely concealing its impatience to experience the burning of his archive fever and the death drive fueling it. The end of *OC* does not archive its contagious acceleration compulsion; rather, it displays that compulsion’s unceasing destructive force. The play that for us constitutes the end of tragedy seems to locate what remains—and is distinctive—of tragic aesthetics in the experience of this feverish movement, which, like the archive itself, anti-cathartically energizes us while bringing us close to the pleasure of self-annihilation, pushes us forward while enticing us with the *jouissant* fantasy of material inertia, of mineralogical being.

II. SLOGGING TOWARD DEATH: EURIPIDES’ *PHOENISSAE*

“There is no tragedy of Euripides that requires for whoever tackles it such a miserable labor full of boredom as *Phoenissae*”: Gottfried Hermann’s trenchant verdict on *Phoenissae* targets the play as an anomaly.⁷² The phrase *labor*

71. Thus Derrida (2000, 109), who, while not concerned with Theseus, comments on the way Oedipus seems to “di[e] without too much delay.”

72. Hermann 1840, Praefatio, v.

plenus taedii (“labor full of boredom”) conveys Hermann’s reductive view of the play’s oppressive aesthetics as anti-classical and anti-tragic overabundance and ennui, products, we are invited to think, of its belatedness. I do not wish to undertake a defense of *Phoenissae*, but to show that the “fullness” (*plen[itudo]*) and “boredom” (*taedium*) lamented by ancient and modern critics alike are expressions of an *archive fatigue*, the flip side of the *archive fever* of *OC*, and as such proper to the affective experience of tragedy.⁷³ Instead of seeing *Phoenissae* as the outcome of the exhaustion of the genre—or of Euripides’ mischievous experiment in exhausting it—I read its depleting plenitude as an emblematic manifestation of tragedy’s archival aesthetics, one striking form of the death drive that, as will emerge from the analysis of earlier plays in the next chapters, the tragic experience embodies. In other words, I reclaim for *Phoenissae*, as for *OC*, an anti-cathartic programmatic force. Whereas, in *OC*, Oedipus is constantly onstage, a visible rem(a)inder of himself, and disappears only in the finale, in *Phoenissae* he is confined in his Theban house from beginning to end, when he is finally forced to exit into the open. Although this archivization, too, fails to contain Oedipus’s spectral power, dispersing piercing impressions of his wounds, the deep sense of lack caused by his drawn-out invisibility coincides with an accumulation compulsion, a kind of textual hoarding, which wears out dramatic form as well as characters and readers.⁷⁴ I am not concerned here with *Phoenissae*’s sophisticated mechanisms of narrative or intertextual accumulation, but with formal hoarding as the materialization of the play’s dramatic affect, the *jouissance* of no excitement that stems from too much excitement—what we could also call the excitement of boredom.⁷⁵ We may think of the moment when Hedda Gabler declares, “There is only one thing in the world I have any turn for.” When asked what that

73. The *hypothesis*, a Hellenistic summary of the play, defines it as *para-plêrômatikon* (“overstuffed”).

74. Hoarding supremely expresses the unruly “inertia” of inanimate matter that Freud (1920, 36) describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—that is, inanimate matter’s “drag [*Trägheit*] on what has become living matter, holding it back or beckoning its return to the prior state” (de Lauretis 2008, 75). According to Baudrillard (1993, 146), “the time of accumulation is the time of death itself.”

75. On hoarding, see Thill (2015, 108–10), who refers to Baudrillard’s discussion of consumption (2006, 205) as “irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded upon a *lack*.” On the link between hoarding, queerness, and the sexual impulse with its inherently repetitious force, see Herring 2011 and 2017. The boredom that we see in *Phoenissae* is less about desire, by definition a lack of satisfaction, than it is about a death-driven satisfaction in no-satisfaction: for the distinction, see the Introduction, section 3. With a different emphasis, Phillips (1993, 74) characterizes boredom as “a dreary agitation” or “cramped restlessness.” On *Phoenissae*’s thick intertextuality, see Säid 1985; Goff 1988; Zeitlin 1994; Dunn 1996, 190–97; Lamari 2010; and Torrance 2013, 94–133.

is, she famously responds, “*Boring myself to death.*”⁷⁶ In *Phoenissae*’s archival atmosphere, the hoarding impulse targets interchangeable *archai*: non-being, material inanimacy, the feeling of the wound itself. The same contagious compulsion lurks behind the play’s abundant interpolations, expansions prompted by a perceived lack. The archive fatigue in *Phoenissae* manifests tragedy’s aestheticized death drive as the perverse pleasure of hoarding, of fetishistic deferral, a desire to be buried as Oedipus is—to be lost in, even to become, disused objects.

The assimilation of Oedipus to castoff possessions already emerges in the prologue, where we learn of his confinement in the *skênê*—an archivization with a parricidal coloring even more pronounced than in *OC*. Jocasta, who delivers the prologue, relates how Eteocles and Polynices, on reaching puberty, concealed (*ekrupsan* 64) Oedipus in the house, wishing to ensure that his past remains “forgotten” (*a-mnêmôn* 64).⁷⁷ This Oedipal archive shows how the archive, while propelled by the father’s self-replicating (that is, castrating) impetus, operates “in the name of the father as dead father”—that is, with an eye toward a future after the father has died—and, therefore, “amounts to repressed or suppressed parricide.”⁷⁸ In archiving Oedipus, then, Eteocles and Polynices, like Theseus, reinscribe the taboo act, openly recalled by Jocasta (“The son kills the father” 44), that they intend to blot out. Exiled in the domestic recesses, Oedipus, like his counterpart in *OC*, becomes a ghost, as he will define himself at the very end of the play (1543, 1545)—a being suspended between death and life. But, since the house where he is walled in happens to be the *skênê*, a storage space for theatrical paraphernalia, we are also primed to imagine him squirreled away with discarded items, buried in the clutter of the actors’ closet, himself a prop, which may be reused at a later time, fulfilling the archive’s promise of the future, or remain disused, obsolete junk.

Far from being forgotten, however, Oedipus possesses a viral force, spreading through the play disparate iterations of the puncture imprinted on his feet, the trace of the symbolic castration followed by the parricide that his archivization re-enacts. What Eteocles and Polynices fail to contain is the contagion of Oedipus’s chronic malaise—his being sickened by his past (66)—which, as Jocasta implies in her account, is given aural shape by the curses (67) he hurls against them. The immediate consequence of these curses—Eteocles’ and Polynices’ battle over the throne of Thebes (“They divide [*dia-lachein*] this

76. Ibsen (1891) 1990, 32.

77. In my analysis of the play, I follow the text of Mastrorarde 1994.

78. Derrida 1996, 95. The connection of Derrida’s theorization with the archival enterprise of Eteocles and Polynices is even more striking, as he adds that “the archontic is at best the takeover of the archive by the brothers.”

house with sharpened iron [*sidêrôî*]” 68)—is expressed through language that links it with Oedipus’s “primal” trauma as recounted by Jocasta, when Laius “passed (*dia-peiras*) an iron goad (*sidêra kentra*) through his ankles (*sphurôn*)” (26) before handing him over for exposure. Oedipus’s curse repeats Laius’s action; the begetter is a castrator—perhaps even by definition, as suggested by the interlinear pun between *dia-peiras* (“having pierced”) and *speiras* (“having sown” 22), modifying *patêr* (“father”). An intertextual pun between *dia-peiras* and *perasis* (“completion”) in *OC* 103 allows us to see Oedipus’s demand for archival “closure” in that play as haunted by a longing for his painful beginning. The Chorus’s insistent use of the words *peras* (“border”)/*perais* (“you are going too far”) takes the pun further, suggesting a barely repressed fascination with the piercing sensation of his exposure. In the prologue of *Phoenissae*, Jocasta connects this sensation with two other moments in her son’s life—when he used her gold-bound brooches to gouge out his eyes (*chrus-êlatois porpaisin haimaxas koras* 62) and, earlier, when, at the scene of parricide, Laius’s “horses (*pôloi*) bloodied (*ex-ephoïnisson*) the tendons of Oedipus’s feet with their hooves (*chêlais*)” (41–42). This piercing sensation, in a sense, drives the play, whose title is encrypted in *ex-ephoïnisson* (“bloodied”), for it marks many of the deaths piled up throughout the action.⁷⁹ Eteocles is killed by the iron point of his brother’s spear after it “pierce[s] through” (*di-eperasen* 1394) his shin; Jocasta commits suicide by pushing “the iron (*sidêron*) through her neck (*dia mesou . . . auchenos*)” (1457–58), instead of hanging herself; Menoeceus, Creon’s son, who takes his life before his father sacrifices him, “transfixes” (*di-êke* 1092) his throat with a sword.⁸⁰ The penetrating weapons instrumental to all these deaths are remainders of Oedipus, what is left of the absent begetter, distributed or “delivered” to others as though he were already dead.⁸¹ When Polynices arrives onstage, he places his sword in the “obscure enfoldings” (276) of the sheath, re-creating the archivization of Oedipus in the “darkness” of the house.⁸² Fulfillments of the curse, the deaths of Polynices and

79. The resonance between *ex-ephoïnisson* and the title of the play is noted by Craik (1988, ad loc.).

80. In Aeschylus’s *Seven against Thebes*, the duel between Eteocles and Polynices is already presented with elements that subliminally reconfigure the wounding of Oedipus’s ankles by his father’s hand: “through (*dia*) the iron-wielding (*sidaro-nomôi*) hand” (788–89); “they divided (*di-elachon*) their whole possession with the Scythian iron (*sidêrôî*), wrought with the hammer (*sphur-êlatôi*)” (816–17) (*sphur-* in *sphur-êlatôi* evokes Oedipus’s “ankles” [*sphura*]).

81. For the notion that “to be dead” entails “to be delivered,” see Derrida’s observation in *The Beast and the Sovereign*: “To be dead . . . signifies, for me, to be delivered, in what remains of me, as in all my remains, to be exposed or delivered . . . to the other, to the others” (2011, 126).

82. See 336 and 377. On the theme of darkness in the play, see esp. Podlecki 1962, 357–62, and Zeitlin 1994, 187–88.

the others amount to intimate encounters with remainders of a remainder, props of an abandoned paternal prop, while the curse itself serves as a metaphor of archival reinscription, the contagion of trauma.

As I will illustrate, some of the salient moments in the play (Antigone's hero-watching, Oedipus's suicidal oscillations, Teiresias's weary movement, Menoeceus's and Jocasta's actual suicides) exude a longing for the sharp intensity of Oedipal wounding, a primal *archê*, which generates a formal hoarding. The sluggish rhythm of archive fatigue infuses tragic form with the excitement of boredom—the *jouissant* sense of emptiness that arises from the impossibility of achieving a fullness of feeling no matter how much one fills oneself with feeling.

The piercing sensation that claims multiple victims in the play corresponds to a point of affective intensity, the erotic puncture generated by the encounter with a trace—something similar to what Roland Barthes calls *punctum*, a rupture that deeply connects a photograph (a form of archive) with an observer, breaking through the skin and inflicting a “lacerating” desire for what might be beyond the trace.⁸³ When Antigone observes the combatants from the walls of Thebes, “as though in a picture” (*en graphaisin* 129), she is animated by a yearning, as she says, to “throw my arms around my brother's dearest neck” (165–66).⁸⁴ But the *punctum* of the picture she is gazing at is located not in the contours of her brother's body but in the actions of a different fighter, Amphiaraus, whom she notices with surprise:⁸⁵ “How calm and controlled (*sôphrona*) the goad (*kentra*) he applies in turn to the horses (*pôlois*!” (177–78). Contiguous, *kentra* (“goad”) and *pôlois* (“horses”) breach the verbal flow (or the page), forging a pointed reminder of Oedipus's trauma—indeed, of two of the distinctive images of castration described by Jocasta in the prologue: Laius's goad (*sidêra kentra* 26) at the time of the exposure and the hooves of his horses (*pôloi* 41), which wounded Oedipus again at the crossroads. The startling appearance of the two words together conveys the uncanny effect of Amphiaraus's epiphany, which punctures Antigone's eyes with the most piercing familial memory. *Kentra* captures both the charged content of the memory and its affective impact.⁸⁶ The “goad,” wishfully qualified as *sôphrôn*

83. See Barthes (1981, 26), who defines the *punctum* as the element “which rises from the scene, shoots out of it, like an arrow, and pierces me.”

84. On the generally ephrastic qualities of this scene, suggested by *en graphaisin*, see Zeitlin 1994, 173–77, and Torrance 2013, 106–7.

85. As Silverman (1996, 182) observes, “The *punctum* is experienced by the subject when he or she directs his or her look away from those elements within an image which speak with the ‘voice’ of ‘knowledge’ . . . toward those which are decentered.”

86. In *OT* 1317–18, Oedipus conflates the puncture of the goad with the piercing power of memory; see chapter 5. According to Silverman (1996, 182), the *punctum* “can . . . best be

(“controlled”), is a token of the masochistic pleasure of gazing at a picture—the inextricable entanglement of eros and death that a wounding *punctum* delivers. Entering Antigone’s visual field, Amphiaraus becomes a site of displacement, where her desire for the *archê* of her father’s wound (the same desire that will push Jocasta to her suicide by sword) is awakened—or perhaps intensified. Exposing her virginal eyes to the goad, her hero-watching from the walls (or *teichoscopia*) affords Antigone the ghostly feel of Oedipus’s castration and, especially, of his self-castration, the wounding of his *korai* (“pupils of the eye,” but also “girls”) with sharp brooches (cf. *porpaisin haimaxas koras* “having bloodied his eye-pupils with the brooches” at 62).⁸⁷ But the piercing sensation caused by Amphiaraus’s goad as *punctum* is doubled—it consists not just of a sudden painful and pleasant sense of affective, quasi-tactile connection, but, at the same time, an archival feeling of disconnection, the wounding realization that the picture teases us with the illusion of a referent. As Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart have most recently put it, *punctum* always captures “whatever grabs you into an elsewhere of form.”⁸⁸

This sense of an unreachable “beyondness” is linked in the play to a compulsion apparently at odds with the shock, the instantaneous intensity of the photographic *punctum*: a cumulative, completist compulsion that marks the weariness of several characters, starting with Jocasta and Oedipus. We expect parental *pothos*, in a moment of apparent fulfillment, to be like that sudden, intense affective connection, but when Jocasta reappears onstage to greet her much-longed-for son Polynices (320–21), one gets the sense of sluggishness and lack. Her monody is bookended by a reference to her physical infirmity, “I am dragging (*helkô*) a trembling step with my old foot” (303), and a lament on her misfortunes, “To me have come the pains (*achê*) of these ills (*kakôn . . . tônd*)” (354). She is, in effect, *dragged down* by these ills, Thebes’ troubles, for which she offers a list of possible causes: “May these [troubles] be damned, whether (*eite*) it is the iron (*sidaros*) or (*eite*) strife or (*eite*) your father that is responsible for them, whether (*eite*) the divine power has brought a revel of destruction in the house of Oedipus” (350–53). This search for the origin results in an archival accumulation of disjunctions, something similar to what, in the same monody, Jocasta attributes to Oedipus himself. Captive “in the house,” she says, “deprived of his eyes, always holding fast a longing (*pothon*)

defined as the ‘prick’ one feels when an otherwise insignificant component of the screen comes into contact with one’s own mnemonic reserve.”

87. In the prologue, the reference to *korai* (“eye-pupils”) at 62 creates a formal loop with the use of the word at 57 to mean “girls.”

88. Berlant and Stewart 2019, 201. See Barthes 1981, 59: “The *punctum* . . . is a kind of subtle *beyond*—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see.”

wrapped in tears for the kindred team [of brothers] separated from the house, he launches himself (*an-êixe*) now to the suicidal slaughter of the sword, and then to the nooses hung from the roof” (327–33). Rummaging through the tenebrous archive of the *skênê*, Oedipus seeks to fill the void left by his children by reaching for two fellow props, the canonical instruments of tragic death. His parental *pothos* is ultimately a *pothos* for self-annihilation, but the “rushing” that expresses this death drive is not a forward movement but a serial, nervous back-and-forth in the suffocating space of the *skênê*⁸⁹—like the seriality conjured by Jocasta’s repeated references to her arms as she embraces Polynices.⁹⁰ Oedipus’s looping movement from one suicidal prop to another reveals a state of fatigue stemming from an exhaustion of possibilities, what Gilles Deleuze calls “inclusive disjunction”—an accumulation of contradictory options that he finds exemplified in Samuel Beckett.⁹¹ Oedipus’s inclusive disjunction, which reduces him to stuckness, to the fatigue of a Levinasian “condemnation to being,”⁹² gives his death drive the feeling of dilated duration. The slowness and weakness of Jocasta visualize the play’s archive fatigue, the dulling accretion of never fulfilled or fulfilling little deaths.

The notorious dreariness of the seemingly endless *Phoenissae*, the *tædium* lamented by Hermann and other readers, is an expression of this archive fatigue—the aesthetic manifestation of the death drive that entraps characters in a *horror vacui*, depleting not just physical but also formal energy as they augment the void while ardently seeking what they perceive as a lost intensity of feeling. Toward the end, when Jocasta, her sons, and Menoeceus are all dead, Antigone refers to Oedipus’s avenging spirit, his *alastôr*, as “laden with swords” (*xiphesi brithôn* 1557), a phrase that, reconfiguring the initial presentation of Polynices as “clashing with countless weapons” (*muriois hoplois*

89. As Mastronarde (1994, 244) points out, the verb *an-êixen* (“launched himself”) “is not a simple narrative aorist, but expresses a typical *repeated* act of the grief-stricken father” (my emphasis).

90. See 306–7 and 311. An intimation of suffocation is also present in Antigone’s expressed desire to embrace her brother at 161–62.

91. See Deleuze 1995a, 7. Exhaustion is produced by the co-existence of opposite possibilities, which, by neutralizing each other, produce a restless inertia, as in such Beckettian formulations as “It is night, it is not night, it is raining, it is not raining” (*Molloy* [1958, 176]) and “As for his feet, sometimes he wore on each a sock, or on the one a sock and on the other a stocking. . . . Sometimes he wore on each a stocking, or on the one a stocking and on the other a boot” (*Watt* [1953, 200]). Oedipus’s movement is similar to the back and forth of the rocking chair, which, according to Deleuze, symbolizes this exhaustion. Differently, recent scholarship on *Phoenissae* has tended to view the play’s accumulative proclivity as a kind of labyrinthine multiplicity and proliferation, even novelistic diversion and wandering: see esp. Saïd 1985; Dunn 1996, 197–98; Michelini 2009; and Lamari 2010.

92. Levinas 1978, 24. For Levinas here, “being” is Symbolic existence.

bremôn 113), reduces the play to a refuse heap, in a sense the realization of Eteocles' threat, "I will fill (*em-plêsô*) the plain with slaughter" (718). We see here the symptoms of a *horror vacui*, which emerges explicitly in Polynices' response to Jocasta's expressed desire to ask him everything about his recent past—"Do not leave anything missing (*en-dees* 385)." The same fear of gaps informs the first stasimon, where the Chorus seems engaged in verbal hoarding, while addressing Ares and then Cithaeron (789–808, 820–21):

| | |
|---|---------|
| ... σὺν ὄπλοφόροις . . . | 789 |
| κῶμον ἀναυλότατον προχορεύεις. | 790b |
| οὐδ' ὑπὸ θυρσομανεῖ νεβρίδων μέτα δίνα, | |
| . . . ψαλίους τετραβάμοσι . . . | |
| . . . Ἀργείοις ἐπιπνεύσας | |
| Σπαρτῶν γένναν, | 795 |
| ἀσπιδοφέρμονα †θίασον ἔνοπλον† | |
| [. . .] | |
| ὦ ζαθέων πετάλων πολυθηρότα- | |
| τον νάπος, Ἄρτέμιδος χιονοτρόφον ὄμμα Κιθαιρών, | |
| μήποτε τὸν θανάτῳ προτεθέντα, λόχευμ' Ἰοκάστας, | |
| ᾧφελος Οἰδιπόδαν θρέψαι, βρέφος ἔκβολον οἴκων, | |
| χρυσοδέτοις περόναις ἐπίσαμον· | 805 |
| μηδὲ τὸ παρθένιον περόν . . . ἐλθεῖν . . . | |
| Σφιγγὸς ἀμουσοτάταισι σὺν ᾠδαῖς, | 807 bis |
| ἃ ποτε Καδμογενῆ τετραβάμοσι χαλαῖς | |
| [. . .] | |
| τὰν ἀπὸ θηροτρόφου φοινικολόφοιο δράκοντος | 820 |
| γένναν ὄδοντοφυᾶ . . . | |

. . . with arms-bearing men . . . you [Ares] lead the dance of a chorus completely depleted of pipes (*an-aulotaton*) and you don't swirl with dancers dressed in fawnskin under the influence of the manic god with the thyrsus . . . you, with four-footed (*tetra-bamosi*) bridles, . . . who have stirred against the Argives the race of the Sown Men, the shield-bearing armed troop. . . . O glade of divine leaves, most crowded with wild beasts, snow-nourishing Cithaeron, eye of Artemis, would that you never nourished Oedipus, the product of Jocasta's childbirth, the baby offered to death, expelled from home, marked (*epi-samon*) by gold-bound brooches (*chruso-detois peronais*), and would that the winged virgin . . . never came, the Sphinx with her songs most hated by the Muses (*a-mousotataisi*), who with her four-footed (*tetra-bamosi*) hooves [carried off the race] born-from-Cadmus (*Kadmo-genê*) . . .

the race of the beast-nourishing (*thêro-trophou*), blood-crested (*phoinikolophoio*) serpent, born from its teeth.

Multiple sesquipedalian compounds appearing in succession create an extreme effect of agglomeration, which causes “a form of discursive exhaustion.”⁹³ Under the excessive burden of such compounds, like the *Trägheit* of matter theorized by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the very integrity of the lines is endangered—they are like containers about to explode, archival substrates about to collapse.⁹⁴ The result is a verbal complex that “continually calls attention to itself as lacking, even as it steadily accumulates.”⁹⁵ Combining an alpha privative with a drawn-out superlative structure, the adjectives *an-aulotaton* (“completely depleted of pipes”) and *a-mousotataisi* (“most hated by the Muses”) suggest accumulated lack or an inherently lacking accumulation.

Reconceptualizing the aesthetics of fatigue as *stuplimity* (a mixture of “stupor” and “sublimity”), Sianne Ngai has pointed out the twentieth-century avant-garde’s use of “boredom and astonishment,” its paradoxical “concatenation . . . of sharp, sudden excitation and prolonged desensitization.”⁹⁶ In the Euripidean passage, one of the fatiguing compounds, *chruso-detois* (“gold-bound” 805), is part of a phrase that punctures the text’s numbing affect, calling forth an Oedipal “excitation” amid the pervasive sense of lack or loss. Since antiquity, the phrase *chruso-detois peronais epi-samon* (“marked by gold-bound brooches”) has caused dismay. Though *chruso-detois . . . peronais* patently alludes to Jocasta’s brooches, which Oedipus used to blind himself (the same phrase occurs in *OT* 1268–69), commentators have been unwilling to accept the anomaly of the “wrong” piercing instrument marking Oedipus’s exposed body, preferring to assume that the referent of *peronai* is the “goads”—as though allusion could be controlled and the shock of this expression tempered or repressed.⁹⁷ In the Chorus’s catachresis, Oedipus’s

93. Ngai (2005, 258), commenting on a text by Beckett.

94. The lines dragged down by the compounds recall the giant’s shoulders carrying a “whole city” on Capaneus’s shield (1131–32) or the “chariot-filling” (1158) rock thrown by Periclymenus. *Hoplo-phorois* (“arm-bearing” 789) and *aspido-phermona* (“shield-bearing” 796) also suggest bodies encumbered by armor.

95. Ngai 2005, 256. Dismissing the aesthetic value of these lines, Hermann (1840, Praefatio xx) draws attention to the sense of lack stemming from the accumulation: *tumidissimum inani verborum strepitu carmen* (“a poem most inflated with the empty noise of words”). What Hermann considers a symptom of “decaying” tragic art I, instead, regard as a manifestation of an affective orientation that is central to the aesthetics of tragedy as such.

96. Ngai 2005, 271.

97. Mastronarde (1994, 385) observes that “an allusion to the self-blinding,” which is already posited by the scholion ad loc., “would be thematically and chronologically out of place.”

body becomes an archival substrate where two “impressions,” the castration by the father and its reinscription as his self-castration, are gathered together, overlaid, with an obvious disruption of the chronological hierarchy. Temporal lines, corresponding to physical markers, are garbled. The simultaneity resulting from this assemblage of temporal layers is precisely what makes the image shocking.⁹⁸ Stabbing through the temporal surface, the brooches produce a piercing moment in a passage otherwise dominated by the monotonous inertia of formal hoarding, channeling a violent impetus toward recapturing an imagined intensity of feeling.⁹⁹ The death drive shaping the sluggish movement of archive fatigue may be directed at the waning of excitation leading to final exhaustion, or at a sharp feeling that, while ultimately bringing about non-existence, involves a moment of rupture/rapture. Pronouncing *a-mousotataisi* or the sequences of *Kadmo-genê tetra-bamosi* (“born-from-Cadmus four-footed”) and *thêro-trophou phoiniko-lophoio* (“beast-nourishing, blood-crested”) may slacken the voice’s pace, producing a sluggish cadence, the rhythm of exhaustion, even a strain in the throat, something like suffocation—Antigone’s and Jocasta’s mode of suicide in earlier plays—which is vainly pursued in the archival *skênê* by Oedipus along with the puncture of the sword. With its combination of sluggish, almost suffocating syllabic accumulation and piercing referent, *chruso-detois peronais* (“gold-bound brooches”) brings the two pathways to death together.

Even while lamenting his weariness, Teiresias perversely increases the burden of the play’s archive fatigue by adding Menoeceus to the mass of corpses and burying himself in self-depleting cumulative language analogous to the refuse assembled through hoarding. When Teiresias drags himself onstage, escorted by his daughter and Menoeceus, he stockpiles his physical troubles (“blind foot,” tired knee, short and frequent steps, exhaustion 834–52), which assimilate him to Oedipus and reflect the verbal root in his name: *teirô* (“to weaken, afflict, wear out”). Although Creon urges him, “Muster your strength and gather your breath” (850–51), he embarks on two drawn-out speeches, which can only further tax his lungs. What drives tired Teiresias onstage is a

98. See Ngai (2005, 257), on the shock of poetic fatigue as depending on “‘simultaneous’ layering of elements in place of linear sequencing.” *Chruso-detois* may perhaps also conflate the puncture of the pins with the suffocation of hanging, as suggested by a Byzantine scholion commenting on Sophocles, *OT* 1263–64, where *em-peplegmênên*, “entangled” (a participle that describes the hanging of Jocasta), is glossed as *dedemenên* (“bound”), cognate with *-detois* (“bound”) in *chruso-detois*.

99. See Duncan’s comments on the aesthetics of boredom in the film *Gummo* (1997) as “the gap between an urgent desire to feel and the lack of occasion for feeling” (2016, 166). A further element in this collection of Oedipal castrating objects is the “hooves” (*chalais* 808), which bring to mind the wound inflicted on Oedipus by Laius’s horses (41–42).

message of death, a prophetic call for the sacrifice of Menoeceus for Thebes' sake, an act of filicide that looks back to the *archê* of Oedipus's troubles. In the throes of archive fatigue, Teiresias self-indulgently deepens his exhaustion with more words—a rehashing of Theban history and Oedipus's troubles as well as his replication of Oedipus in Menoeceus (865–95, 930–59). Followed by the two Messengers' even lengthier, oppressively detailed accounts of the fratricidal duel, Teiresias's two speeches are part of an agglutinative dramatic discourse, which can be viewed as an enactment of the death drive's destructive force of reimpression. These speeches reveal “fatigue as both a depletion of energy and a form of accumulation—an archive.”¹⁰⁰ Both Teiresias's and the two Messengers' verbal accretions serve up a burdensome fullness as a *pharmakon* against the void opened by Oedipus's invisibility. Exhaustive (and exhausted) archival conglomerations, the speeches strive for the illusory sense of wholeness and presence imputed to an imagined *archê*. Not just bodies and objects heaped on each other (881, 1194–95), but also a chariot encumbered with sacrificial victims (1110), a “wagon-filling” (*hamaxo-plêthê* 1158) stone, the panoptic monster Argus (1115–16)—a compensation for Oedipus's visual lack:¹⁰¹ these are some of the images that, in the speeches, self-reflexively mark this dynamic, which resembles hoarding. It is as though a never-ending, debilitating iteration could compensate for a lost event, reproduce its ungraspable singularity, and a puncture (*peirô* “to pierce”)—the Oedipal Ur-sensation—could be recaptured through this enervation (*teirô*), formally corresponding to the substitution of one letter (*t* for *p*). In a sense, these speeches exemplify the hoarder's self-defeating pleasure in endless acquisition, in the pursuit of a presence that can never materialize. The sense of idleness and desensitized duration that surrounds the hoarder and his cache emanates from the human and non-human detritus on the battlefield, which in its expansiveness and fragmentation, constitutes an inherently lacking form of material excess. In their agglutination, the four consecutive speeches perversely draw us—viewers and readers—into the battlefield's refuse heap through verbal matter that, through its sheer accumulation, becomes waste.¹⁰²

The practice of interpolation, one of the distinctive ways in which *Phoenissae* was received in antiquity, can be seen as a manifestation of the contagious power of the play's archive fatigue on readers, who come to share with the

100. I owe this formulation to Gorfinkel (2012, 320).

101. Zeitlin (1994, 185) notes that Argus “evokes the precisely opposite situation” (i.e., Oedipus's blindness), besides epitomizing the centrality of vision in the play.

102. Ngai (2005, 268) shows how Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (1925) produces an “immersive, downward pull into . . . the ‘common muck’ of language.” Duncan (2016, 174) observes that “boredom amount[s] to a kind of emotional discard or waste-product, a kind of emotional trash.”

characters a hoarder-like death drive, a desire to access a phantasmic textual *archê* through accumulation.¹⁰³ Consider, for example, lines 1183–86 in the first Messenger’s speech, where *komai men eis Olumpon, haima d’ eis chthona* (“His hair [was hurled] to Olympus, his blood to the earth” 1184) is unanimously regarded by modern scholars as a later addition.¹⁰⁴ Text is added to represent the mutilation and scattering of Capaneus’s body—an “aerial *sparagmos*.”¹⁰⁵ As additions, “hair” and “blood”—and possibly also “limbs” (*melê* 1183), “hands” (*cheires* 1185), and “legs” (*kôla* 1185) (depending on how extensive we judge the interpolation to be)—participate in the Messenger speech’s archive fatigue. Filling imaginary textual gaps, the mutilated body parts become verbal prostheses, compensation for Oedipus’s own mutilations and for the characters’ deeply felt lack of them. But the decomposition that these words spell out also captures the cycle of formal exhaustion, additions, and further exhaustion. In the second Messenger’s speech, we find another interpolation, describing Jocasta’s arrival on the battlefield “with the young woman and the zeal of her foot” (*sun parthenôî te kai prothumiai podos* 1430). In this outlandish zeugma, where the elements are loosely connected as in a pile, Antigone is itemized, put on the same plane as the emotion of an extremity—depleted as much as the poetic form that the addition is meant to fill in and vitalize.

In Creon’s son Menoecus, destined to be sacrificed, we see a young doppelgänger of Oedipus, a supplement to fill in the gaps of his experience whose pursuit and even attainment of sharp-edged sensation at the end of a sword cannot overcome the numbing effect of archival hoarding that his brief appearance brings to the story. When Menoecus rejects Creon’s proposal that he avoid death by escaping from Thebes to Aetolia—“Where will I go (*perô*) from there?” (981)—he uses and, in effect, rejects the verb (*perô*) that Teiresias had previously employed to refer to his sluggish gait (844).¹⁰⁶ Appropriately,

103. Tarrant (2016, 88) sees what he calls “collaborative interpolation” as a “particularly active form of reader response.” I am presenting a case of what I would call “contagious interpolation,” produced by an affective connection between reader and character. Gurd (2005, 20) regards the “plurality of origins” created by the multiple modern editions of *Iphigenia in Aulis* as a kind of repetition compulsion. The textual *archê* could be thought of as an “event” or *objet petit a*—something similar to the performative “event,” which has long been an obsession of theatrical criticism (see Goldhill 1986 and Bassi 1998). On the philologist’s relation with the textual object as an *objet petit a*, see, in general, Gumbrecht 2003, 20–21.

104. See Mastronarde 1994, 476–77.

105. In the phrase of Zeitlin (1994, 185), who notes that Capaneus’s body “is treated like an inanimate object.”

106. The same verb appears at 299, when the Chorus asks Jocasta about her hesitation to “leave” (*peran*) the house. At 100 (*ek-pera podi*), where Antigone is invited by the servant to climb up the wall, the pun between *perâô* (“to go, leave”) and *peirô* (“to pierce”) is given emphasis by the presence of *podî* (“with [your] foot”).

the verb falls one letter short of the action that, as his suicide will demonstrate, constitutes his end, *peirô*, which, as we have seen, expresses the piercings suffered by Oedipus earlier in the cycle. In a sense, by stabbing himself in the throat, Menoeceus, whose name (meaning “the one who remains at home”) confers upon him an obvious Oedipal identity, does what Oedipus fails to do in the archival home of the *skênê*—combining noose and iron in a unified act and sensation. But his intervention in the plot as an archival reinscription of the young Oedipus causes the same exhaustion-by-recombination conveyed by the suicidal inertia of the old one. Oedipus was separated from Jocasta’s breast and nursed by his adoptive mother; Menoeceus, we are told, lost his mother and was suckled by Jocasta (987–89). Oedipus was pierced by his father; Menoeceus demands the sword, but his father opposes it. Oedipus survives his exposure but kills his father; Menoeceus kills himself while his father survives. Oedipus saves Thebes (from the Sphinx); Menoeceus, in spite of his sacrifice, fails to save the city.¹⁰⁷ These implicit juxtapositions create the sense of potentialities collected all together, an image of the enervating inclusiveness of archival hoarding. In spite of its unexpected, unsettling character, Menoeceus’s Oedipal reimpression is a dull amusement, which pre-emptively numbs the *punctum* of his death.

In Jocasta’s suicidal rush to the battlefield, we see her *archive fatigue* flip into the *archive fever* of Eteocles and Polynices, her heightened restlessness culminating, like Menoeceus’s, in a sword through the neck, a *punctum* that manifests the cumulative impetus it seems to disrupt. Hearing from the first Messenger of her sons’ impending duel, Jocasta hurries to stop them—or to join their inevitable death. Although Antigone hesitates to leave the house, preferring to remain entombed in her maiden chambers (1275)—her own archival prison near Oedipus’s—Jocasta, with the urgency of the characters in *OC*, enjoins her to exit: “We should not delay. Hurry, hurry, daughter” (1279–80). When she reaches the junkyard of the battlefield, as the second Messenger reports, she finds two uncanny reminders of Oedipus—a broken spear with the point separated and the sword discarded by Eteocles when, in a moment of fatal delusion, he believed he had won the duel (1417).¹⁰⁸ Both objects, abandoned on the ground—the spearpoint (*akron doru* 1399) also

107. On Menoeceus’s episode and the problems of his “failure,” see esp. Foley 1985, 106–39, and Lamari 2010, 90–91.

108. See 1399 “the tip of the spear broke off in pieces (*apo d’ethraus*)” and 1403 “since both hands were deprived (*ap-esterêmenoin*).” The *apo*-compound and the tmesis of the prefix conjure the theme of separation in relation to Oedipus, his children, and his doubles: cf. esp. 319 (*apo-staleis*) and 328–29 (*apo- / zugeisas*), references to Polynices’ departure from home, which implicate Oedipus’s own unyoking from the domestic, motherly bond, and 988 (“deprived of the mother and separated [*apo-zugeis*] as an orphan”), in reference to Menoeceus.

isolated in the line—bring to mind Oedipus, mutilated, exposed to the cold touch of the ground, and now disused, relegated to the archival *skênê*. In the second Messenger’s speech, the participle for Eteocles’ disposal of the sword (*xiphos dikôn* “having thrown the sword” 1417) occurs in the same position as the participle, three lines later, conveying Polynices’ continued possession of his own sword (*sôizôn sidêron* “keeping the iron” 1420), which enables him to strike his brother back (1421–22). The contrastive parallelism illustrates the terms of Oedipus’s archivization—safeguarded to be thrown away, preserved to be forgotten. The second Messenger’s insistent references, over a long speech, to Eteocles’ and Polynices’ final, labored breaths, convey an exhaustion that gives way to Jocasta’s suicidal moment of *jouissance*, the excess of feeling—both pleasure and pain—signaled by the otherwise unattested participle *huper-pathêsasa* (“suffering beyond” 1456), in itself a *punctum*.¹⁰⁹ Her self-impalement is an overdetermined act coalescing around the trace of a puncture—the *per* of *peirô* contained in the prefix *huper*-. “Suffering beyond,” the Messenger says, she stabbed her neck with the sword that she “snatched from the corpses.” We are invited to imagine that the sword taken up by Jocasta is the one cast off by Eteocles, as Oedipus was after his birth. In this respect, her penetrative suicide—like her incest, of which the suicide is a reimpression—is a compensation for her son’s exposure, a re-appropriation of what was taken away and discarded.¹¹⁰ Her fervor in seizing the forsaken sword and storing it in her body, a fervor that is, appropriately, both maternal and sexual, is an expression of hoarding, “an uncontrollable impulse to take and keep . . . an urge toward incorporation for its own sake.”¹¹¹ While redressing Eteocles’ disposal (or exposure) of Oedipus’s material surrogate, Jocasta’s bodily incorporation, which buries the sword—“dipping it inside the flesh” (*eisô / sarkos ebapsen* 1577–78), as Antigone puts it—reproduces the brothers’ archival erasure of Oedipus. The culmination of her avid acquisition of sensation, Jocasta’s suicidal *punctum* only enhances the sense of lack, for it annihilates its material support—the substrate of an archival impression. Heaped on the

109. For Eteocles’ and Polynices’ final breaths, see 1419 (*em-pneôn brachu*), 1437–38, 1442, and 1454.

110. Loraux (1987, 15) connects Jocasta’s death by sword with childbirth. There is controversy on which sword Jocasta picks up. I would say that, in presenting us with the “choice” between Eteocles’ sword, lying on the ground, and that of Polynices thrust in his brother’s body, the text encourages us to imagine that she snatches the former, readily available, as it were. See Craik 1988, 255.

111. Stewart 1993, 154 (commenting on hoarding in general). For a rehabilitation of hoarding in a vibrant-materialist perspective, see Bennett 2012. While, for Bennett, hoarding fosters intimate assemblages of human/non-human matter and creates a sensuous empathy between human subject and non-human object, I see this empathy as concealing the former’s incorporation of the latter, or the former’s self-annihilation in the latter.

bodies of Eteocles and Polynices, wrapping them in her suffocating embrace and thereby re-incorporating them—“Dead, she lies among her dearest ones, wrapping her arms around (*peri-balous*) both of them” (1458–59)—Jocasta is both debris in the finale’s archive of human wreckage, and a container, an archive in herself.

In the last part of the play, the fetishism that shapes the archive fever of Antigone and, before her death, her mother seems to participate in a discourse on aesthetic reception and, more strikingly, on the emotions of pity and fear. Jocasta’s tender attention to Oedipus’s feet (and Antigone’s later intervention) will lead us to theorize anti-catharsis, to explore, that is, how the death-driven intensity of tedium—the wearing down of form that keeps the play going—may destabilize the workings of the Aristotelian cathartic emotions.

Having lived in the house with Oedipus until her death, Jocasta can be viewed not only as containing or contained in relation to the archive, but also as inhabiting it and internalizing its distinctive fetishistic and masochistic logic. When Oedipus exits the *skênê* at Antigone’s urging, he reproaches her for bringing him out “into the light” (*es phôs*), forcing him to abandon his dark bedchamber and walk with a stick (1539–40). Soon after, Oedipus responds to Creon, who has condemned him to exile, by evoking his traumatic birth, his coming “into light (*es phôs*) from maternal birth” (1597), which was followed by paternal aggression and a perennial *pothos* for Jocasta’s breast (*maston pouthounta* 1603). The archive is seductive both as a retreat into prenatal non-existence and as a venue for fetishistic indulgence. As Antigone observes while announcing Jocasta’s death: “Your sons no longer see the light, / nor does your wife (*alochos*), / who always toiled (*aien emochthei*) over your blind-footed foot (*poda . . . tuphlo-poun*) with gestures of care (*therapeumasin*) close to your walking stick (*para-baktrois*)” (1547–49). Through the eerily vague term *therapeumasin* (“gestures of care”), the word for “wife” *a-lochos* (evoking *lechos* “bed”), and the repetition of the singular “foot” in *poda . . . tuphlo-poun*, we are offered not just the image of Jocasta supplying the walking support that Antigone herself will provide in her impending journey to Colonus with Oedipus, but an unsettling intimate detail, a spousal/maternal care that resembles the primary form of fetishism, podophilia. The imperfect *emochthei* (“toiled”), together with the adverb *aien* (“always”), presents this fetishistic caretaking—something similar to breast-feeding—as a process of exhausting duration, encapsulating the play’s foot obsession.¹¹² As a phallic substitute, this fetish turns Jocasta’s caretaking into a fantasy of intercourse, linked with the incest taboo that the play exacerbates by keeping her alive,

112. Cf. 100, 105, 303, 695, 834, 846, 1323, 1410, 1537, 1540, 1549, 1616, 1715, and 1721.

near Oedipus. In Freudian psychoanalysis' male-centered model, fetishism is a palliative against castration anxiety produced by "disavowing" the mother's lack of a penis. We focus on the mother's foot to delude ourselves that she possesses what we are always afraid of losing.¹¹³ The erotics of Jocasta's foot fetishism is shaped not by fear of castration, but by a yearning for it.¹¹⁴ The persistence of her caretaking efforts has an acquisitive side, as though she were trying not just to become Oedipus's prosthesis, to be part of his body as a complement to the foot or the prosthetic scepter, but, simultaneously, to do the opposite, that is, to take in Oedipus's wounded foot.¹¹⁵ This fantasy of sexual incorporation is ultimately animated by the thrilling fantasy of experiencing Oedipus's never-healed castrating wound and of feeling his mutilated limb as her own. Clinging to a fantasy, immobilized and exhausted by a frozen image, condemned to the perversely pleasant exhaustion of constant delay, of a "repetition that erases and destroys," as Deleuze puts it, fetishists are intrinsically masochistic.¹¹⁶ Jocasta's "poderotic" caretaking is permeated by an overdetermined archival longing (simultaneously feverish and fatiguing): the yearning, at once inter-subjective and inter-objective, for the material feel of the wound and for the limb that the wound is imprinted on coexists with a wish to become the limb itself, a part almost autonomous from its whole.¹¹⁷ Exiting the "dark chambers" of the *skênê*, Oedipus, like his counterpart in *OC*, casts himself in spectral language: "a pale invisible ghost (*eidôlon*) of the sky or a corpse from beneath or a winged dream" (1543–45). In this catalog, we can recognize the entanglement of the archival forces of accumulation, repetition, and exhaustion—the way an archive is, to an extent, always an "exhausted archive," not just a ghostly space, but a place where matter is worn

113. Freud 1927.

114. In ascribing to Jocasta a castration desire, that is, the flipside of castration anxiety, I interpret castration as a loss not of the anatomical penis, but of the Lacanian, symbolic phallus, that is, of the signifier of desire. This is the solution that J. Butler (1993a, 84–85) advances for the theoretical "problem" of female fetishism. As she puts it, "If men are said to 'have' the phallus symbolically, their anatomy is also a site marked by having lost it; the anatomical part is never commensurable with the phallus itself. In this sense, men might be understood to be both castrated (already) and driven by penis envy (. . . understood as phallus envy). Conversely, insofar as women might be said to 'have' the phallus and fear its loss . . . they may be driven by castration anxiety." On female fetishism, see also Grosz 1993, 109–15.

115. The substitution intrinsic to the notions of prosthesis and fetish may be captured by the prefix *para-* in *para-baktrois*, whose literal, spatial meaning ("by, close to the stick") slips into the metaphorical one (i.e., "equivalent to the stick"), even though Mastronarde (1994, 582) observes that the former "is the more natural usage."

116. Deleuze 1991, 114. Perversity opposes normative narratives (see Halberstam and Lowe 2001).

117. On fetishism and inter-objective relationality, see Chen 2011, 280–81.

out by the logic of repetition.¹¹⁸ In Oedipus's apparition, we can also see Jocasta's fetishistic phantasm, which keeps her suspended, bound in inertia, buried in the accumulation generated by the archive's endless deferral.

In the aftermath of Jocasta's moment of archive fever, as she rushes off to the battlefield, the Chorus's song reflects what I would call our aesthetic death drive—a desire to access a never-fulfilling tragic feeling by incorporating the characters' experiences. Just after Jocasta's last appearance, the Chorus's language is haunted by her and her impending death (1284–95):

αἰαῖ αἰαῖ, τρομερὰν φρίκα
 τρομερὰν φρέν' ἔχω· διὰ σάρκα δ' ἐμὰν 1285
 ἔλεος ἔλεος ἔμολε ματέρος δειλαίας.
 δίδυμα τέκεα πότερος ἄρα πότερον αἰμάξει. . . .
 ὁμογενῆ δέραν, ὁμογενῆ ψυχὰν
 δι' ἀσπίδων, δι' αἱμάτων;
 τάλαιν' ἐγὼ τάλαινα,
 πότερον ἄρα νέκυν ὀλόμενον ἰαχήσω; 1294–95

Ah ah, I have a heart trembling (*tromeran phren'*), trembling with terror (*tromeran phrikai'*); pity, pity (*eleos eleos*) for the wretched mother has gone through my flesh (*dia sarka*). The two sons—which one will bloody the other . . . his brother's (*homo-genê*) neck, his brother's (*homo-genê*) soul through weapons (*di' aspidôn*), through gore (*di' haimatôn*)? Wretched, wretched me, which dead corpse should I lament?

The Chorus transforms Jocasta's recent past and impending future into Aristotelian tragic emotions, fear and pity. Their fear translates her "trembling" step (*tromeran* 302) into a vibration felt in the chest, as intimated by the accumulation of *rho*'s and fricatives (*tromeran phrikai' / tromeran phren'* 1284–85).¹¹⁹ In the case of pity, there is a palpable sense of penetration (*dia*) of the flesh (*sarka*), a foreboding of Jocasta's suicide, the movement of the "bronze-beaten sword" dipped "inside her flesh" (*eisô / sarkos*), as perhaps wistfully described by Antigone (1577–78). The repetition of *eleos* ("pity") feels like a double blow of the fetishized sword (the *xiphos*), which appears at the very end of the song (1305). We are invited to see the Chorus's pity, which approximates our own, as a manifestation of the same death drive that excites and exhausts Jocasta

118. I borrow the phrase "exhausted archive" from Szafraniek (2007, the title of ch. 4).

119. See Plato, *Cratylus* 426d–e, on the "shaking" expressed by the *rho* sound and the kinship between *tromos* ("trembling"), *thrauein* ("to crush"), and *thruptein* ("to break"): see Telò 2019.

with the yearning for a pointed *archê*, with the fantasy of assimilation to the object that kills her. Tragic pity is aligned with the perverse promise of feeling material, which also has an acquisitive dimension, as we have seen in the case of Jocasta's suicide. The repetitions and doublings in the second strophe, which express the terrifying expectation of fratricidal reciprocity (*homo-genê . . . homo-genê; di' aspidôn, di' haimatôn*), also intimate the homology between the punctures that will kill the brothers (*di' haimatôn* "through gore") and the Chorus's own piercing feelings (*dia sarka* "through [my] flesh"). In the duplication of the prefix *homo-* ("the same") we can detect the Chorus's, and our own, archive fever, a desire for a complete assimilation to (and of) the characters' experiences, the fantasy of capturing—in the sense of reproducing and appropriating—an imagined fullness of feeling. Besides channeling the insistence of fear, the song's repetitions communicate the insistent energy of this fantasy of appropriation. We get a glimpse of the deeply anti-cathartic impetus that tragedy awakens in its audience by making them wish to access, assimilate, and preserve the death-driven actions of its characters. The frustration of this impetus leads to the *jouissance* of hoarding—a satisfaction found in boredom, in a lack of satisfaction that, in the midst of depleting saturation, breaks and pierces just like the pity and fear described by the Chorus.

Antigone, in turn, enacts the death drive's destructive preservation through her deferred suicide, which yields a prolongation of Jocasta's fetishistic attachment to Oedipus's wound. In the last stretch of the play, as she kneels before the corpses of her mother and brothers, embracing and kissing Polyneices (1661, 1670), she seems to blend into the detritus that they have become. When Creon presents her with the prospect of marrying his son (1673–74), she threatens to imitate the husband-killing Danaids (1675) while laying her hands on—or even grasping and lifting—one of the swords planted in the human debris, vowing "May the iron (*sidêros*) and the sword (*xiphos*) on which I swear be my witnesses" (1677).¹²⁰ While her movement to reclaim the object, as her mother did, brings together a murderous threat with suicidal temptation, Antigone refrains from taking her life, announcing, instead, that she will go into exile with Oedipus (1679). She then adds (1681), "And I will die with him (*xun-thanoumai*), so that you (= Creon) learn even further (*peraiterô*)." Containing *peirô*, the adverb *peraiterô* evokes the sword's piercing sensation, but disperses it as a trace, an effect heightened by the comparative form, which stretches the apparently unstretchable idea of "beyondness" (*pera*).¹²¹

120. See Mastronarde 1994, 620: "Antigone is presumably still kneeling by the body of Polyneices and lays her hand on a sword there."

121. *Peraiterô* pre-emptively jeopardizes the demand for closure that Oedipus expresses later by referring, in a preview of *OC*, to the "fulfillment" of Apollo's prophecy (*perainetai* 1703). On the anti-closural ending of the *Phoenissae*, see Dunn 1996, 180–202.

In light of *peraiterô*, Antigone's postponement of suicide can be seen as an archiving of the puncture, a temporal dilation that attenuates it. Like Jocasta, whom Oedipus's archived, fetishized foot catches in a debilitating state of suspension, Antigone, a would-be hoarder of a scavenged sword, will tend to Oedipus's sluggish foot, the fetishistic substrate of the original wound. In this way, Antigone eroticizes the death drive's frozen progression, its repetitive deferral, its movement nowhere.

In what is most likely an interpolated finale,¹²² we find a discourse of excess and exhaustion, an image of the play's anti-cathartic aesthetics of full emptiness, empty fullness, and alluring boredom. When Antigone announces she will stay in Thebes to bury Polynices, Oedipus's response generates a baffling dialogue (1747–52):

| | |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Οι. πρὸς ἤλικας φάνηθι σάς. | 1747 |
| Αν. κόρον ἔχουσ' ἐμῶν κακῶν. | 1750 |
| Οι. σὺ δ' ἀμφὶ βωμίους λιτὰς— | 1749 |
| Αν. ἅλις ὀδυρμάτων ἐμῶν. | 1748 |
| Οι. ἴθ' ἀλλὰ Βρόμιος ἴνα τε ση- | 1751 |
| κὸς ἄβατος ὄρεσι μαϊνάδων | 1752 |

Oedipus Go and show yourself to your companions. *Antigone* They have (*echous'*) enough and more (*koron*) of my troubles. *Oedipus* And you around prayers at the altar—*Antigone* Enough (*halis*) with my lamentations. *Oedipus* Go to the mountains of the Maenads, where the inaccessible (*a-batos*) grove of Dionysus is.

Notwithstanding textual uncertainties, a self-critique, an ironical nod to the tedium provoked by the addition, emerges from this passage. The words *koron* (“enough and more,” “overload” 1750) and *halis* (“enough” 1748) metatextually signpost aesthetic saturation.¹²³ The subject of *echous'* (“they have”) in 1750 may be understood not only as Antigone's companions but even Euripides' spectators/readers, who ostensibly would have also had “enough” of her lamentations. Yet while reporting this repetitious deferral, the interpolator enables it through the very act of interpolation, and we may therefore wonder whether he, Antigone, the companions—and the audience—have really had “enough” or whether the interpolation, an expression of the repetitious

122. Following Mastrorarde (1994, 635–37), I consider lines 1736–57, which conclude the play, the product of an interpolation predating the Alexandrian edition of Euripides.

123. The same effect is conveyed by Oedipus's rhetorical question at 1762 “Why should I mourn this and lament in vain (*matên*)?”

deferral deplored through Antigone's voice, reflects a wish to keep it going, a participation in the very death drive that prolongs it. This deferral is reflected in Antigone's rejection of two consecutive suggestions by Oedipus: that she join her "companions" and that she move to the "mountains of the Maenads" (1752), Cithaeron, where he was exposed (1754–57). Cithaeron itself creates a sense of exhaustion. An overdetermined, liminal space between the *archê* of non-being and the beginning of Oedipus's life, it is loaded with the apparatus, human and non-human, of Dionysus's worship and with traces of the grove of Colonus, where birth and death will commingle again.¹²⁴ Like the interpolation and the play itself, the mountain is an archive burdened by the weight (the *koros*) of its contents, which constitute it while dragging it down. Earlier, when emerging from the *skênê*, Oedipus retraces the events after his birth and wishes that, before he was rescued, Cithaeron had fallen into the "deep abyss" (*eis a-bussa chasmata* 1605) of Tartarus—an image of non-being, but also of the void, the wound caused by the separation from the prenatal state, or of the abyss of the Real.¹²⁵ A process of accumulation, acquisition, assimilation, which implicates us as well as the characters, makes us sluggish in the vain effort to fill a wound, a lack, or simply to collapse into the abyss of non-being.



Theseus's haste at the end of *OC* and Oedipus's dull tread at the end of *Phoenissae*: these apparently opposite kinetic modes manifest the same *mal d'archive*, the same *jouissant* impetus to keep looking for something that is nowhere. As Emmanuel Levinas puts it, weariness is "an evasion without an itinerary or end, it is not trying to come ashore anywhere."¹²⁶ These two plays—one set in Colonus, the other oriented toward this destination—may seem to archive tragedy *through* and *as* reparative aesthetics by terminating Oedipus's death-driven search for himself with the catharsis of a peaceful death. Yet they invite us to regard the death drive or *mal d'archive* as one of tragedy's fundamental and most persistent attractions—what draws its readers or viewers toward endlessly iterated stories and heaps of harrowing affect in the unconscious hope of (re)gaining a lost fullness (of feeling or being) by going beyond the

124. See Sophocles, *OT* 719 for the description of Cithaeron as *a-baton*. *A-batos* qualifies the grove of Colonus at *OC* 167 and 675.

125. A similar wish appears in *OT* 1391–93, but without the image of the abyss.

126. Levinas 1978, 12. Levinas also conceives of weariness as a "closed circle" (36), an image that will be at the center of the next chapter. See Copjec 2018. Derrida (2019, 301) conceives of *lifedeath* (*la via la mort*) as a movement that does not advance—something captured by the double meaning of *pas* ("step" and "not") in French.

pleasure principle. Such an attraction entails a masochistic experience of repetition and deferral, the forces that constitute the archive as they undo it. At the end of the first play, the cleansing promised by the expected *da* is tainted by Theseus's haste, by the threat of his own collapse into the seductive abyss of *fort*; at the end of the second one, the prospect of change, of leaving Theseus for an expected catharsis in Colonus, does not alter the pervasive sense of exhaustion, of self-indulgent stuckness in the muck of accumulated matter. These plays' archival dimensions are not just the expression of a latecomer's condition of longing, of a desire, materialized in poetic affect, to prolong and preserve a tradition in its twilight. As I will show in the following chapters, other plays present dramatic form entrapped in archive fever or fatigue. More importantly, these plays exemplify tragedy's archival (that is, anarchivic) allure: the relentless transposition or continual exchange of *fort* and *da*, the anti-cathartic, death-driven irresolution of aesthetic *lifedeath*. Tragedy draws us with the fantasy of inertia, excites us with endless suspension over the abyss, with a sensation of stretched-out time that keeps us going in pursuit of what always vanishes away.

T W O



The Archive and the Loop

AFTER KILLING their children, the title characters of Euripides' *Medea* and *Heracles* are poised to leave the stage for Athens, where, like Oedipus in Colonus, they face the promise (and threat) of archival survival. Both plays present a tension between filicide, a radical negation of the future, and the prospect of an "after" beyond themselves, the future of the future's killers. In these works, we observe traces of the characters' resistance against this "after," which promises to save them by archiving them, by imposing what, in queer theory, has been called "the normativity of happiness," the replication of the status quo portended by the pledge of a redemptive future.¹ This resistance and the particular articulations of the death drive that power it will be the concerns of this chapter—together with a reconceptualization of the future, which the archive always presupposes, as an infinite responsibility toward the other. My goal is to continue exploring tragedy's beyond-the-pleasure-principle aesthetics by focusing on the loop and the spiral as figures of the death drive in its (im)mobile tendency toward repetition, deferral, and self-annihilation—the archive's anarchic forces, which these plays, like *OC* and *Phoenissae*, locate at the center of the tragic experience.

1. The phrase is from Edelman in Berlant and Edelman (2014, 17–18), observing that "the normativity of happiness," expressed in "the imperative of optimism," restrains the subject, protecting it from "the world in its . . . unpredictability," inflicting "a calcification, a sort of carapace that functions like the anticipatory act of bracing before a collision."

It is not just the filicide that marks the kinship between Medea and Heracles, two figures often regarded, in antiquity and beyond, as emblematic of the tragic, but the perennial resetting that structures their mythological biographies: both Medea's relocations—from Colchis to Iolcus to Corinth to Athens, and, perhaps, to Persia—and Heracles' labors.² The compulsive seriality of their actions and movements is the expression of a death drive that generates for both of them what I call *Argive fever*, a circling around the inaccessible object or primordial trauma (the *objet petit a*) of the Argo—Jason's ship—and Argos, the Peloponnesian birthplace of Heracles' mortal father.³ Enacting the force that makes the archive inherently anarchic, this continual circling resists the Symbolic's sovereignty and its deceptive futurism, which encompasses reproduction, preservation, and reparation—respectively, the figure of the child; the archontic, patriarchal preoccupation with a self-identical past; and the pleasure principle's imposition of a protective after-event.⁴ In the readings that follow, I will heed the masochistic pull of this tragic circularity—whether it yields a downward spiral, a suspension of representation, an exhausting simultaneity of virtual and actual, of *fort* and *da*, or a form of eroticized suffocation.

I. “LET’S KEEP GOIN’!”: EURIPIDES’ *MEDEA*

Thelma: Let's not get caught.

Louise: What're you talkin' about?

Thelma: Let's keep goin'!

Louise: What d'you mean?

Thelma: Go!

—THELMA AND LOUISE

The shocking appearance of Medea suspended on the crane, goddess-like, in the finale of Euripides' tragedy epitomizes our own emotional suspension as we imagine her fleeing after the infanticide. Can we fully sympathize with her as she triumphs over her utterly unsympathetic husband, or take pleasure in the thought that her life will go on in Athens?⁵ The infanticide makes the feel-

2. See Lacan 1992, 212 on the death drive as the “will to make a fresh start . . . to create from zero, a will to begin again.”

3. On the *objet petit a*, see the Introduction, section 3.

4. The death drive's circling around, a spiral, is a rebellion against the closed circle of reproduction—what Edelman (2004) calls “reproductive futurism.”

5. On the complexities of sympathy in the finale and throughout the play, see esp. Rabinowitz 1993, 125–54, and Lawrence 1997; see also p. 106, this volume.

ing of identification with her inevitably pending, even though the future that awaits her children, destined for hero cult, as we are told, offers a measure of closural compensation, a partial element of *da*, a symbolic (re)gaining after their most horrific loss of life. The *da* is predicated on the prospect of some kind of future beyond the play—for the children as well as for Medea—in spite of the infanticide. But this prospect is compromised by Medea's Argive fever, the focus of my analysis: a self-sabotaging fixation or, adopting Slavoj Žižek's image, a repetitious "loop," which circulates the death-driven force of archive fever, whether she acts as an abandoned relic, a catastrophic hyperobject, or an assemblage of deadly accoutrements.⁶ During Medea's last epiphany, the pleasure-in-pain of this loop's anti-futural temporality threatens to break through the play's ostensible *da* and tragedy's cathartic promise. Driving a chariot burdened with corpses, Medea sets off on a literal *death drive*, embodying a materiality that, while disintegrating others, is also in danger of disintegrating itself. Proclaiming, in her own way, "Let's not get caught. . . . Let's keep goin'!", she enacts the death drive's violent refusal of the future's reproductive logic and life itself. This refusal accelerates the anarchic principle, which confounds the patriarchal fantasy of the archive with a kind of self-destructive self-preservation. Suspended in the air, she gloats triumphantly, but her crowing may reflect—and pass on to us—the thrill of the abyss, hinting at what Georges Bataille has called "joy in the face of death."⁷

I will reconsider the play by taking as a starting point Medea's prediction of Jason's death in the finale, a moment that generates an image of a destructive archive. As she announces, while the bodies of her children will be archived in a sacred space (the *temenos* of Hera Acraia) and thus safeguarded from enemies who might "tear up" (1381) their tombs, Jason will die "struck (*peplēgmenos*) on [his] head by a fragment (*leipsanōi*) of the Argo" (1387). In a patent gesture of intratextual scorn, Medea echoes here the disingenuous self-defense of Jason, who, at an earlier moment, had claimed *not* to have been "struck (*peplēgmenos*) by yearning for a new wife" (556) and not to be guilty of "hating [Medea's] bed" (555). It is as though Jason's old bed, in the guise of a different wooden object (the ship), will return the blow of its erotic

6. Žižek (2004, 142, and 2006, 63) explains this register of the death drive by referring to the popular cartoon image of a cat that "remains for some time suspended in air, turning around in the levitated position as if caught in a loop of time, repeating the same circular moment again and again." As he puts it, "This rotary movement, in which the linear progress of time is suspended in a repetitive loop, is *drive* [i.e., death drive] at its most elementary." In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920, 39), Freud defines life as "a circuitous path to death."

7. Bataille 1988. See the Introduction, note 102.

rejection.⁸ Ancient commentators provide fanciful contexts for the unfolding of Medea's prediction, allowing us to see the Argo as another abused or traumatized object that fights back while falling apart. Two of them assume that a piece of the "rotten" ship "fell" (*ek-peson; epi-pesousês*) on Jason's head while he was sleeping beneath it; a third one imagines something similar to a murder in the museum or an archival nightmare—the "stern- or prow-ornament" (*akrostolion*) that Jason had removed from the ship and placed in the temple of Hera Acraia as a votive for the goddess "fell off" (*peson*) and killed him as soon as he entered.⁹ The mutilation that leads to the archivization of the object re-enacts the trauma caused by the construction of the Argo, built from a pine tree, which, as we read in the prologue, "fell" (*pesein* 3) in the valley of Mount Pelion after having been "felled" (*tmêtheisa* 4). In its own deadly fall, the ship ornament punishes Jason for both mutilations while, perhaps, fragmenting further as it crashes to the ground. Both as itself and the cast-off bed, the vengeful fractured ship that delivers Jason's punishment constitutes an archived materiality whose condition of mutilation and constraint energizes a self-destructive loop.

In what follows, I look at Medea's Argive fever, that is, at how her abandonment makes her burn with the destructive and self-destructive energy of the Argo and turns her into a hyperobject—something like the atmosphere or the death drive's loop, a force denying the stability that reproductive futurism seeks to impose in favor of a mobile, unruly stuckness.

In the play's prologue, the resonance of the pain of Medea—forgotten, discarded, "archived" in the *skênê*—channels the traumatic charge of the Argo, whose birth is recounted in the first few lines as a primordial event. In these lines, the Nurse invites us see the Argo as Medea, and vice versa (1–7):

Εἶθ' ὄφελ' Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτᾶσθαι σκάφος
 Κόλχων ἐς αἶαν κυανέας Συμπληγάδας,
 μηδ' ἐν νάπαισι Πηλίου πεσεῖν ποτε
 τμηθεῖσα πεύκη, μηδ' ἐρετμῶσαι χέρας
 ἀνδρῶν ἀριστέων οἱ τὸ πάγχρυσον δέρος
 Πελία μετῆλθον. οὐ γὰρ ἂν δέσποιν' ἐμῆ
 Μήδεια πύργους γῆς ἔπλευσ' Ἰωλκίας

5

If only the hull of the Argo had not flown through the dark blue Symplegades to the land of the Colchians and the pine tree (*peukê*) had not (*mêd'*)

8. Hopman (2008, 166) links *peplêgmenos* in 1387 with the etymology of the Symplegades (*Sum-plêgades*), mentioned in the prologue, viewing Jason's announced death as "a delayed response of the Crashing Rocks" to the Argo expedition; see also Pucci 1980, 161.

9. Scholion on Euripides, *Medea* 1386.

fallen, cut down (*tmêtheisa*), in the valleys of Mount Pelion, and had not (*mêd'*) outfitted with oars the hands of the brave men who sought the golden fleece for Pelias. For, in this way, my mistress Medea (*Mêdeia*) would have not set sail to the towers of the Iolchian land.

Appearing in the play's first line, the hull of the Argo becomes a material figure of the prologue as both a notional dramatic *archê* and an archival container of the action's backstories. The Argo also amounts to an *archê* as a figure of primordial trauma, which is felt through the participle *tmêtheisa* ("cut down" 4), uncannily resonant with the name of Medea, three lines later, in the same position (*Mêdeia* 7). David Konstan has noted this resonance together with fragments of her name encrypted in the negative correlatives *mêd' . . . mêd'*.¹⁰ The "negativity" common to *tmêtheisa* and these correlatives marks, I argue, the mutilated condition that Medea shares with the pine tree sacrificed to the cause of the Argo, a condition caused by her separation, for Jason's sake, from her fatherland, which the Nurse mentions in the same prologue (*patrôias . . . apo-leipesthai chthonos* 35), and, of course, by her recent separation from him. Walled-in inside the *skênê*, she makes her first appearance, through her lyric lament, as a trace, a voice separated from a visible body, the impression of a lost or inaccessible presence. Her prologic reclusion in the *skênê*, which reminds us of Oedipus in *Phoenissae*, highlights precisely her forced archivization, her reduction to a solitary relic, like a piece of the Argo deposited as a votive by Jason in Hera's sanctuary.

Although this archivization is an act of violence, the consequence of Jason's betrayal, Medea seems to embrace the archive's logic, furthering her own isolation, compounding the mutilation. In her account of Medea's invisible life, the Nurse describes her as hating her children, not "enjoying" seeing them (36), severing her sight from them to look back, in tears, to "her dear father . . . land and home" (31). The items in the list are spectral objects on which she rests her mind's eye—with pleasure. As a kind of self-mutilation, Medea's withdrawal of visual contact from the children, her effectively cutting them off, is yet another iteration of the mutilation instrumental to the birth of the Argo, the play's Ur-trauma, which itself figures the wound caused to the subject by the separation from pre-Oedipal bliss.¹¹ The Nurse's contrafactual at the beginning of the play, thus, seems to express a version of the Sopho-

10. Konstan 2007.

11. Differently put, the birth of the Argo figures the emergence of the subject from the void of the Real, which constitutes yet disrupts the Symbolic. On self-mutilation ("striking at [oneself]" or "at what is most precious to [oneself]") as a means for the subject to "gai[n] the space of free action," see Žižek 2000, 150. The infanticide is, of course, a form of self-wounding: see, e.g., Pucci 1980 and Segal 1996b, 18.

clean maxim that “not being born is the best,” while Medea’s name, resonant with *mède* (“nor”) or *mêden* (“nothing”), suggests a link with “non-being” as a marker not just of her harming capacity, but also of her death drive, the force behind her self-mutilation. Confined within an archival prison, like Oedipus or Jocasta in *Phoenissae*, Medea seems caught in archive fever, in the perverse pleasure, or *jouissance*, resulting from it. It is this *jouissance* that, as I will suggest, links the beginning with the end of the play, shaping our affective experience of it.

Medea’s archive fever is, fundamentally, Argive fever not just because of the play’s movement toward the *archê* of the Argo, but also because her anger burns with the ship’s feverish materiality. In the course of the play Medea fashions herself and her actions through nautical imagery, but the ghost of the Argo, which is thereby awakened, also haunts her initial presentation, her dramatic birth, as it were, fueling her resistance against, and attempt to exit from, the Symbolic order.¹² Consider the following fragment of Accius’s *Medea*, which records the bewildering appearance of the Argo from a shepherd’s perspective:¹³

tanta moles labitur
fremibunda ex alto ingenti sonitu et spiritu;
prae se undas volvit, vortices vi suscitatur:
ruit prolapsa, pelagus respargit reflat.
Ita dum interruptum credas nimbium volvier,
dum quod sublime ventis expulsum rapti
saxum aut procellis, vel globosos turbines
existere ictos undis concursantibus:
nisi quas terrestres pontus strages conciet

Such a huge mass (*moles*) glides along, roaring from the deep sea (*ex alto*) with immense noise and hissing (*sonitu et spiritu*). It rolls (*volvit*) billows (*undas*) in front of itself, it stirs up eddies (*vortices*) by its force; it rushes on, gliding forward, it splashes and blows back (*respargit reflat*) the sea. So you might believe now that a broken-up thunder-cloud (*nimbium*) was moving (*volvier*), now that some rock (*saxum*) thrust up on high was carried along by winds (*ventis expulsum*) or storms (*procellis*), or that water whirl-

12. On nautical imagery, see Blaiklock 1955; Musurillo 1966, 67–68; Boedeker 1997, 129–33; and Hopman 2008, 161–64.

13. Accius, 381–89 Warmington.

ing round (*globosos*) was coming forth, beaten by waves (*undis*) clashing together: unless the sea (*pontus*) stirs up some disasters for the land.¹⁴

Placed in the position of a terrified spectator, the speaker helps us feel the Euripidean Medea's Argive fever in the comments of the Nurse, an internal spectator, who conjures her mistress's anger through multiple natural becomings. When Medea is still silent, the Nurse likens her to "a boulder (*petros*) or a wave (*kludôn*) of the sea" (28–29), the natural agents with which Accius's shepherd compares the mysterious object he has spotted (*saxum . . . procellis . . . undis . . . pontus*). As soon as Medea makes herself heard from "deep" (cf. *ex alto*) inside the house, in a mixture of articulate and inarticulate sounds (*iô moi moi* 97), the Nurse draws attention to the anger that she "stirs up" (*kinei . . . kinei* 99) as though it were the boiling water churned by the Argo (*undas volvit*). The repetition of *kinei* ("[she] stirs up") is in itself an image of the repetitious movement of the waves (*respargit reflata*), their incessant loop of *fort* and *da*, which coalesces into a vortex of alliterative circular images (*volvit vortices . . . volvier . . . globosos*). Finally, the "cloud (*nephos*) of [Medea's] lament" (107) that the Nurse sees "rising from its *archê*" (*archês ex-airomenon* 106) and expanding under the effect of anger corresponds to the tumultuous "cloud" (*nimbus*) brought about by the Argo in the shepherd's perception. In the same passage, the Nurse qualifies Medea's soul with two sesquipedalian compounds, occupying a whole line (*megalo-splanchnos dus-kata-paustos* "high-stomached, hard to stop" 109), whose formal effect is to assimilate her to a *moles*, a massive materiality barely contained within the house and capable of making the house explode.¹⁵ In a sense, archive fever is expressed not just by Medea's own spectral assimilation to the Argo, but by the Argo itself, the uncontainable repressed returning through her, which churns vortices and spirals, the shapes of death-driven repetition.

In using Accius to read the Argo back into Medea, to see in her an environmental commotion, I wish to suggest that her archive or Argive fever conflates non-being with becoming a hyperobject. In Timothy Morton's definition, hyperobjects are things—like a black hole, the biosphere, or the solar system—that are "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans."¹⁶ "More than a little demonic," they "leer at [us], menacingly," disrupting the hierarchy

14. I reproduce, with minimal alterations, the translation of Manuwald (2010, 123).

15. *Moles* is a clear example of what J. I. Porter (2016a) calls the "material sublime"; Farrell (2014) sees echoes of Empedocles—a "sublime" poet/philosopher, as Porter characterizes him—in the Accius fragment.

16. Morton 2013, 1.

between subject and object, giving us a sense of our own objecthood.¹⁷ Taking the Argo as a manifestation of the sea itself, the shepherd assimilates the ship to a hyperobject, which “menacingly” stares at him, dislodging him from his notional position as a gazing subject. Even though the Argo is not simply the sea (a hyperobject in its own right), but something fabricated, the trauma of its manufacture, a mutilation that corresponds to the castration imposed by the Symbolic, endows the object with a destructive (and self-destructive) rage, which we can construe as an impetus to become a hyperobject. The same impetus can be ascribed to Medea not just in light of the natural similes and metaphors that create impressions of her before she becomes visible, but also precisely because of her initial invisibility. Like the Argo, which Accius’s shepherd mistakes for the sea it blends with, Medea coincides with—in a sense, *is*—the house, the object that disseminates her voice. While we cannot see her, she may leer at us from behind the *skênê*. Certainly, the laments of Medea’s vocal epiphany create the ambient effect of a hyperobject, enveloping spectators in an atmosphere of painful affect. Like the obsessive alliterative sounds suggestive of the Argo’s enraged movements, Medea’s cries constitute a “viscous sonic latex,” which defeats any attempt to escape it.¹⁸ But Medea’s resemblance to a hyperobject coincides with another way to become “other-than-subject.”¹⁹ Her reclusion in the *skênê*, her archivization, signifies a reluctance to come out, to be brought to life, that is, *to be born* (dramatically as well as existentially) that, in the previous chapter, we recognized in Oedipus’s forced exit onstage at the end of *Phoenissae*. The centrality of the Nurse establishes a parent-child dynamic in the scene. Marking her first appearance, the cries that Medea utters from within (*iô moi moi . . . aiai* 97, 111) can be perceived as a baby’s wailing, the sound of the trauma of birth.

In combining refusal of birth and life with the menace of a hyperobject, Medea resists the mere replication of the past concealed behind the discourse of reproductive futurism, channeling the death drive in its frustration of the archive’s preservative, reproductive mission. Medea’s rejection of birth is clearly connected with her infanticide, which is foreshadowed in her wish for collective destruction following one of her cries: “Accursed children of an odious mother, die together with your father, and *may the whole house perish (pas domos errhoi)*” (112–14). In coupling the children “with their father”

17. Morton 2013, 27–29.

18. Morton 2013, 30.

19. I borrow this phrase from Behar’s theorization of “object-oriented feminism” (2016, 16). As she puts it, “[The] conception of objects as fundamentally withdrawn . . . resonates . . . with the feminist notion that as objects we resist” (19).

(*sun patri*), she implicitly casts her sons as “congeneric doubles,”²⁰ or replicas of him—a perception that would explain her aversion to the sight of them. In his heated exchange with Medea, Jason attempts to justify his new marriage as a means for saving their children, granting them a future, by “joining” them (*xun-artêsas* 564) to royal siblings. As he puts it, “For me it is good to benefit my living children through future ones” (566–67).²¹ Later, he reiterates this idea, shamelessly claiming that his intention is to “save” (*sôsai* 595) Medea herself, and, by sowing “royal sons as brothers (*homo-sporous*) for [their] sons” (596), to build a “protection for the house” (*eruma dômasin* 597), a response of sorts to Medea’s destructive wish “may the . . . house perish” (*domos errhoi*). In these statements, the child functions as a figure of “reproductive futurism,” the ideological discourse that, as Lee Edelman has shown, employs the notions of preservation and safety (“Save our children!” or “We are fighting for the children”) to present the repetition of the present or past as future or progress. As Edelman puts it, “The figure of the Child enact[s] a logic of repetition that fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order.”²² The Child, in this respect, is aligned with the preservative, “patriarchic” archive, which, like Jason, aspires to faithful repetition, to reproduction, but which is subject to failure and to the parricidal principle.²³ As intimated by the chiasmic resonance between *eruma dômasin* (“protection for the house”) and *domos errhoi* (“may the house perish”), Medea’s curse on the house pre-emptively undoes the logic of “reproductive futurism,” casting her own refusal to exit, to come to life, as a resistance against the safety and self-preservation that biological repetition seeks to impose. The outburst of fire that she calls upon herself in the same passage—“May a flame from the sky come through my head” (144–45)—captures what we can call Medea’s catastrophic futurism. The flame reignites the fire breathed out by the bulls from which Medea protected Jason when he arrived in Colchis.²⁴ Just as Medea becomes animal, turning into an unruly reinscription of the angry bulls, to which she is twice compared, she threatens to become fire, another hyperobject, as much as being destroyed by it. With her archive fever, which this burning image aptly epitomizes, she

20. Derrida (1997a, viii) uses the phrase in a discussion of friendship.

21. On the implications of Jason’s plan, i.e., the reduction of Medea to a stepmother of her own children, see Sfyroeras 1994–95, 131–32; see also Mossman 2011, 274–75.

22. Edelman 2004, 25. The logic of reproductive futurism is correlated with the notion of women as the “nonautonomous” category of human subjects that, as W. Brown puts it, “generates, tends, and avows the bonds, relations, dependencies and connections that sustain and nourish human life” (1995, 157). On Edelman’s feminism, see Deutscher 2017, 40–63.

23. See Edelman 2011a on the connection between reproductive futurism and the aspiration of the archontic archive.

24. Cf. 478–79, on which see further.

models futurity as a destructive and self-destructive becoming, a “catastrophic mobility” exemplified by the Argo as it menacingly appears over the horizon.²⁵

In an uncanny moment of *Argive fever*, we can intermittently hear the Argo moving through Medea’s recriminations against Jason, materializing the death drive that runs counter to archival preservation and reproductive futurism. Arguing with him, she enumerates her past services, pointedly referring to the *archê* represented by the journey of the Argo (475–82):

| | |
|---|-----|
| ἐκ τῶν δὲ πρώτων πρώτων ἄρξομαι λέγειν· | 475 |
| ἔσωσά σ’ ὡς ἴσασιν Ἑλλήνων ὅσοι | |
| ταυτὸν συνεισέβησαν Ἀργῶν σκάφος, | |
| πεμφθέντα ταύρων πυρπνόων ἐπιστάτην | |
| ζεύγλαισι καὶ σπεροῦντα θανάσιμον γύην· | |
| δράκοντά θ’ ὃς πάγχρυσον ἀμπέχων δέρος | 480 |
| σπείραις ἔσφζε πολυπλόκοις ἄπνος ὦν, | |
| κτείνας’ ἀνέσχον σοι φάος σωτήριον. | |

From the first things I will first begin to speak. *I saved you, as all the Greeks who (esôsa s’ hôs isasin Hellênôn hosoi) embarked together (sun-eis-ebêsan) in the same hull (skaphos) of the Argo know, when you were sent to be the master with yokes of the fire-breathing bulls and to sow (sperounta) the deadly furrow (thanasimon guên); and, after killing the sleepless snake that safeguarded (esôize) the golden fleece, surrounding it with its entangled coils (speirais . . . polu-plokoi), I raised up for you the light of salvation (sôtêrion).*

The second line (*esôsa s’ hôs isasin Hellênôn hosoi* 476) was ridiculed in antiquity for its abundant sigmatism, but sibilant sounds are distributed throughout the whole passage, especially in 477 (*sun-eis-ebêsan . . . skaphos*) and 481 (*speirais esôize*).²⁶ The sequence of sigmas in the reference to “all the Greeks who embarked together in the same hull of the Argo” turns Medea’s voice into an archival emanation, bearing traces of the hissing of the ship, the snaky noise captured by Accius’s alliterative description (*sonitu et spiritu*).²⁷ The diffused

25. Looking at American environmentalist discourse, Sheldon (2016, 27) imputes a fear of “catastrophic mobility” to the would-be protectors of reproductive futurism. See the Chorus’s characterization of Medea’s ominous passion as a kind of “catastrophic mobility”: *penthos . . . megalôs tod’ hormatai* (“this grief is moving at a great pace” 183).

26. On line 476, cf. Plato the Comedian, fragment 29 Kassel and Austin, and Eubulus, fragment 26 Kassel and Austin; Mastronarde (2002, 252) observes that “the alliteration seems to reflect vehemence or exasperation.”

27. The resonance between *spiritu* and *speirais* (σπείραις) is striking; in Accius, it may even amount to a bilingual pun paradoxically merging breath with suffocation.

sigmatism subsumes distinct memories (the ship, the snake, the smoky fire of the bulls' nostrils), creating the hazy sense of a burning snaky ship or a ship-like snake. At the same time, the archival theme of "safeguarding" emerges from the marked repetition of the sigmatic, cognate words *esôsa*, *sôtêrion*, and *esôize*, which align Medea as a protector of Jason (*esôsa* "I saved [you]," *sôtêrion* "of salvation") with the snake as a guardian of the golden fleece (*esôize* "it safeguarded") and the Argo's hull as a shelter (*skaphos*). Medea's protection implicates reproduction, as suggested by the resonance between two other sigmatic words: *speirais*, the "coils" as "entangled, intricate" (*polu-plokois*) as Medea herself, used by her snaky double to protect the golden fleece, and *sperounta* ("[in order] to sow"), modifying Jason. While this participle refers to Jason's killing of the Sown Men, his "sow[ing] a deadly furrow," the verb *speirô* expresses, in the play, the theme of reproductive futurism that we can locate in his self-defense: "having sown (*speiras*) . . . siblings for the children I had from you . . ." (563). The verb appears again in Medea's dialogue with Aegeus, where her self-serving promise to cure his sterility ushers in the same punning effect of similarity in difference between *speirô* ("to sow") and *speira* ("coil"): "I will make you sow (*speirai*) begettings of children; I know such drugs (*pharmaka*)" (717–18). In a line closed by *pharmaka*, a word meaning not only "drugs" but also "poison," the infinitive *speirai* ("to sow") seems haunted by the homophonous word for "coils" (*speirai*), inviting us to see death behind Medea's offer of birth.²⁸ On the one hand, the implication of "sowing" and "coils" illustrates the repetitious circularity that reproductive futurism aspires to despite its promise of forward movement; on the other, it captures a different sort of loop, one constituted by the very failure of reproductive futurism, of the patriarchal archive, to achieve that self-identical repetition, the circling around a perfect reproduction that can never be achieved. The "deadly furrow (*guên*)" that Jason sows, anagrammatically a "deadly woman (*gunê*)," Medea herself, yields a poisonous and sterile harvest. Destroying Jason, but also herself, Medea embodies the force of the death drive, keenly embracing its sabotaging and self-sabotaging energy. Like the archive itself, she is a troubled "protector," the snake protecting a precious object with coils that, in a preview of the infanticide, are in danger of suffocating it. But she is also the self-eating snake, as

28. In the stories about her Athenian sojourn, we read, in fact, that Medea will actually try to kill Theseus, Aegeus's son: see Sfyroeras 1994–95. A serpentine cryptogram may be activated by the use of *sperma* for Medea's offspring in this exchange (816–17):

CHORUS: Will you dare to kill your own *seed* (*sperma*), woman?

MEDEA: Thus, the husband would be most *bitten* (*dêchtheiê*).

in the image of the *ouroboros*, which visualizes a self-destructive loop.²⁹ In disseminating through sound traces of the golden fleece's guardian, Medea reconfigures her killing of it as a form of self-killing. The snaky and fiery sigmatism that expresses Medea's archive fever replaces one type of circularity, the shape of the letter sigma itself, with another: aspirationally self-identical, immobile repetition with the coil, the rebellious loop, suffocating and self-suffocating, of the death drive.³⁰ Returning, at the end of her speech, to her initial claim, she closes the loop one last time, tightening the coil by recycling a fragment of her hissing, hyper-sigmatic beginning: "I who saved you (*esôsa se*)" (515).³¹

As the plot progresses, we see this loop in Medea's preparation of her revenge and in the deaths of Creusa and Creon—in effect, a frustrated self-killing. In their mutual entanglements, these scenes manifest an aestheticized *jouissance*, which does not end but re-emerges in the play's conclusion.

Medea's fever is inflamed by the archive of her deadly accoutrements, which also encompasses her body, as much a "tool-being" as the objects she apparently manipulates.³² In Frederick Sandys's Pre-Raphaelite painting of Medea, we see her body's enmeshment with vessels and jewelry, one hand holding but also blending into a glass, the fingers of the other touching and commingling with her necklace's strands. The Euripidean Medea's version of this assemblage of human and non-human matter seems to be permeated by a desire not so much to connect with her prosthetic accoutrements as to become one. Planning her next moves after her encounter with Creon, she initially decides to kill all of her enemies, i.e., "to make three corpses out of [them], the father and the daughter and my husband" (374–75). The polysyndeton already kills her victims, as it makes them items of a list, of a gathering of corpses. These three potential corpses are matched in number by the three objects (fire, sword, and bed) referred to in the assessment of the "deadly paths" (376) available to her: "Shall I set the bride's home on fire, or shall I push a whetted

29. For the image of the *ouroboros*, see Plato, *Timaeus* 33c. This self-eating snake captures the self-destructive element of Medea's loop, not its perennial mobility.

30. See Žižek 1992a, 48, on the death drive as "a sort of perverse pleasure *in . . . displeasure itself*, in the never-ending, repeated circulation around the unattainable . . . missed object." As Žižek goes on to say, "The Lacanian name for this 'pleasure in pain' is of course enjoyment (*jouissance*)." In Apollonius, the guardian of the Golden Fleece is endowed with "boundless, endless coils" or "coils without escape" (*a-peirona . . . kukla* 4.160–61), which we can associate with what I call the rebellious loop.

31. Mastrorarde (2002, 256) notes the "ring composition."

32. "Tool-being" is the phrase that Harman (2002) uses to articulate his ontology of withdrawn objects (object-oriented ontology), which revisits Heidegger's tool analysis in *Being and Time*.

sword through her liver, after having silently entered the house where her bed is made?" (378–80).³³ Here Medea virtually opens up the burning archive of her lethal paraphernalia—the fire that, at her behest, Pelias's daughters used to boil their dismembered father, and the sword that she employed to cut up her brother. She then removes another item of the archive—her *pharmaka* ("It is best to take the direct route . . . killing them with drugs" 384–85). When, in the subsequent lines, she worriedly wonders, "Which host . . . will rescue my body (*demas*)?" (388), she treats her own body almost as the last remaining object in the container. A "tool-being," instrumental to Jason's success, Medea cannot be distinguished from her material archive; she has been transformed from a subject into a conglomeration of objects: fire-*plus*-sword-*plus*-bed-*plus*-drugs-*plus*-body.³⁴ Her self-reduction to a *demas*—similar to Oedipus's self-archivization in *OC*—also suggests an intimate temptation to match her enemies as a corpse, a different sort of object. There is a tension between the notion of Medea as an assemblage or a complex of tools, and the idea of her as an hyperobject, or as a singular, recalcitrant, radically withdrawn object, turning its face away—as she does in the play twice³⁵—something similar to the rock, to which she is compared at the beginning and at the end, after the infanticide ("You really were a rock!" the Chorus says [1279]). What these two models have in common is a shattering of subjectivity, an expression of the death drive, but also the resistant objecthood or deadness that emerges from this shattering, whether as an alliance of individual parts, or as a singularity that can never be grasped or absorbed.

In handing over to her children the deadly gifts for her rival, parts of herself that are inseparable from the destruction they bring to others, Medea prepares to shatter the archive she embodies. The gifts—"a fine (*lepton*) dress and a crown (*plokou*) wrought with gold" (786)—are surrogates of her, prosthetic appendages, the signature elements in the assemblage that makes up her identity. It is attractive to follow an ancient commentator who viewed these objects as part of her own dowry.³⁶ In any case, *leptos* ("fine"), the adjective that Jason had previously used for her mind (529), casts the dress (*peplos*) as a property or an attribute of hers, while the golden "crown" (*plokou*) reconfigures the

33. Mossman (2011, 253) observes that the phrase *thanasimos hodos* ("deadly path") is normally used of suicide.

34. This formulation is indebted to the model of object-oriented maternity (or "post-maternity"), proposed by Baraitser (2009), which challenges traditional notions of motherly subjectivity by reconfiguring it as a conglomeration of tool-beings.

35. In 923 and 1148, where *empalin* underscores "withdrawal from, or refusal of, contact" (Mastrorade 2002, 320).

36. Scholion on Euripides, *Medea* 956 (*phernas tasde*). See Rabinowitz 1993, 144–45, and Mueller 2001, 490–92; see also Mossman 2011, 309.

“entangled (*polu-plokois*) coils (481)” of the golden fleece’s guardian, whose hissing resonated as a residual echo through her voice. In Medea’s imagining of her revenge’s consummation—“and here it is, the crown on her head, and the royal bride is perishing in her robes” (*kai dê ’pi krati stephanos, en pep-loisi de / numphê turannos ollutai* 1065–66)—the “crown” (*stephanos*), which is grammatically and phonically parallel to “the royal [bride]” (*turannos*), can be read as an additional subject of “is perishing” (*ollutai*). Like the dress, this crown, which will bring destruction to Creusa, will, in a sense, annihilate itself along with her. Not just a vehicle or object of the death drive, the crown also materializes it. That is to say, the crown is not just one of the constituents of the archival *skênê*—with which Medea is identified at the beginning—but an objectified form of the death drive’s loop or coil. Immediately after introducing the two thingly executors of her murderous plot, Medea revels in the thought of the lethal effects her deadly *kosmos* (“ornament”) will have on Creusa as soon as she “puts it *around* her skin” (788).

The rest of Medea’s speech exposes another sort of circularity, less about self-destruction itself than a frustrated will to self-destruction. Lamenting, “I made a mistake at that time, when I left my father’s house, persuaded by the words of a Greek” (800–802), she invokes the trauma of her own familial separation, as the Nurse tells us she is in the habit of doing (31–32 and 35). In effect, she elects this as her primordial wound, the “event” that represents for her the gash of subjectivization, and seeks vainly, in an endless loop, to return to it.³⁷ Circling around the same object is what, in Žižek’s Lacanian perspective, constitutes the death drive, the negating or self-sabotaging principle manifesting the Real repressed within the Symbolic.³⁸ Producing a kind of contrafactual, Medea’s words present a twofold circling, around the severance from her fatherland and the Ur-severance alluded to in the prologue, the violent cut that brought the Argo to existence.³⁹ As an alternative to the unattainable return to her life before Jason, Medea circles around self-negation. While proclaiming, “Let *nobody* think that *I* am common, feeble, *or* gentle” (*mêdeis me . . . / mêd’ . . .* 807–8), she, like the Nurse in the prologue, inscribes her own name in the negatives, unveiling an attraction toward non-being, which she

37. On the repetition compulsion provoked by the “event,” see Derrida 2003a, 90–91; on the convergence between the Derridean event and the Lacanian *objet petit a*, pertaining to the register of the Real, see Hurst 2008, 303.

38. Žižek (1996, 75) identifies the Real precisely with “the circular movement of ‘irrational’ (i.e., . . . pre-symbolic) drives which find satisfaction in the very ‘meaningless’ repetition of their circular path.” See the Introduction, section 3.

39. The participle *peistheisa* (“[having been] persuaded” 802), isolated at the beginning of the line, seems to echo *tmêtheisa* (“[having been] cut down” 4), expressing, in the prologue, the Argo’s separation trauma.

will vicariously experience through her objects' contagious contact with the death they provoke. When this loop around self-negation comes into contact with the complex of reproductive repetition represented by Jason and his new family, it wreaks a havoc that goes beyond the inherent failure built into that system. It is that system which Medea deceptively endorses with Jason when just before sending her children away with the gifts, she tells him: "[Creusa] will be happy not in one thing, but in countless things, having obtained you, the best man, as her bedfellow, and having received the ornament (*kosmon*) that Helios, the father of my father (*patros patêr*), once gave to his descendants" (952–55). The almost self-identical repetition in the polyptoton *patros patêr* resumes the overlapping logic of reproductive futurism and of the patriarchal archive, their shared notion of the child as a faithful imprinting of the father. Coming from father Helios, the gifts, which Medea insists her sons hold in their hands, that is, present as extensions of their bodies, appear as metaphors of paternal attributes notionally implanted in the child, of a past illusorily meant to be preserved through its passage into the future. Bearing, however, the distinctive mark of Medea, the gifts tighten the suffocating loop of the future and the archive, their already eternal, hollow circling around unattainable reproduction. In her last words to the children before they depart for their mission, she demands that Creusa "accept" (*dexasthai* 973) the gifts "in her hands" (973). Here Medea echoes her earlier request to Aegeus—similar to that of Oedipus to Theseus in *OC*—that he "accept" (*dexai*) her, like an object, "in his land and at [his] hearth in the house," absorbing her into Athens (713).⁴⁰ Medea imagines herself as the gift that will cause Creusa's disintegration while being attached to, and absorbed into, her disintegrating body, an additional victim, experiencing revenge beyond the pleasure principle, as it were. She then urges her sons to "go as quickly as possible (*ith' hôs tachista*)" (974) and "Go, go [inside]" (*chôreite, chôreite* 1076), an acceleration of their movement to death. As she puts it, she is eager for them to return and bring her the news of "what she desires (*erai*) to obtain" (974). The form of her urgent order (*ith'* "go"), imbued with burning *eros*, is ambiguous, an imperative in the second person plural (*ite*) made indistinguishable from the second person singular (*ithi*) by the elision.⁴¹ The exhortation, in other words, contains a self-exhortation, an impulse to join the children, the princess, and the two objects in non-being, an impulse, however, that she is unable, or unwilling, to realize, as that would end the masochistic game—the *jouissance* that

40. On the ominous overtones of Medea's request, see esp. Buchan 2008 and Mossman 2011, 287.

41. The overlap of forms is facilitated by the aspiration that the final *tau* of the imperative second person plurale *ite* (contagiously) takes on as it is followed by an aspirated word (*hôs*).

springs forth from the imperative's phonetic, grammatical, and thus aesthetic suspension.

In the Messenger's account of Creusa's demise, we see a looping *jouissance* sparked by the death drive and a liquefaction of her body that disperses traces of the Argo's traumatic severance. Clad in Medea's dress, placing the crown (*plokos*) "around her locks" (1160), Creusa inspects herself in the mirror, "smiling," as the text puts it, at an ominously "lifeless image (*a-psuchon eikô*) of her body" (1162). A few lines later, we are told that, "rejoicing exceedingly (*huper-chairousa*) at her gifts" (1165), she kept turning backward, casting "many glances many times" (*polla pollakis* 1165) at the straight tendon of her leg, apparently to check the new dress's drape, until the first symptoms of her fatal decomposition appear. Through the material agency of Medea's "loop" (the *plokos* "crown"), she is frozen in a repetitious loop, which goes along with the emotion conveyed by the present participle *huper-chairousa*—a joy that is excessive in duration or intensity, or a feeling exceeding joy itself, something comparable to Jocasta's pre-suicidal *huper-pathein* in *Phoenissae*.⁴² On the threshold between life and death, Creusa displays the impetus of the death drive and the *jouissance* derived from it, a surplus enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle. This pleasure-in-pain, generated by fixation in a loop that immobilizes time, occasions an encounter with non-being, the non-Symbolic or the Real. There is, in other words, a sense in which the excess of joy experienced by Creusa comes not from the gifts themselves, but from what they set in motion—her perverse circling around and then her physical disintegration. When we hear that the golden *plokos* "sent forth an astonishing flow (*nama*) of all-devouring fire" (1186–87), we are left with the impression of solid gold disaggregating, transitioning to the liquid state. This suggestion of a transition to liquid can be seen to exemplify, in metallurgic terms, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's take on the Freudian death drive as tending toward a body without organs that consists of intensities and flows.⁴³ The gold precipitates the same liquefaction in Creusa, whose flesh, we are told, "flowed away" (*ap-errheon* 1201) "from her bones like a pine tree's tear" (*ap' osteôn hoste peuki-*

42. Differently, Buchan (2008) connects *huper-chairousa* with the theme of repressed desire that he locates in the play; in his view, "the excess of pleasure" captured by the participle is connected with, and externalized by, the "straight tendon of her leg" (1166)—a kind of displaced phallic experience.

43. The relation between the death drive and the body without organs (BwO) is at the center of the next chapter. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 151) put it, "The BwO is what remains when you take everything away"—corresponding to "amorphous, undifferentiated fluid" (1977, 9). See also the Introduction, section 3.

non dakru 1200).⁴⁴ At the end of the line, the adjective *peukinon* (“of or from a pine tree”) causes a frisson, circling us back to the beginning of the play (cf. *tmêtheisa peukê* “cut-down pine tree” at 4), inviting us to view Creusa’s death as an impression of the Argo’s traumatic birth, and her flesh’s reduction to bodily flow, after separation from the other organs, as a rem(a)inder of the fluids, tear- or blood-like sap, streaming from that violent severance. In the same line, the sequence *osteôn hoste* captures the *jouissance* of circular stuckness even in a moment of sheer disintegration, as though the corporeal fluid generated by liquefaction were congealing back into viscous duration.

Creon’s intervention in the scene shows the death drive revolting with a movement of self-annihilating circularity against reproduction and the sense of archival fixity imposed by the Symbolic order. Arriving in Creusa’s room, Creon collapses on her dead body, enfolds it in his arms (1206), offering himself as the funerary archive that will contain her (“Who makes this old man, a grave, bereaved of you?” 1209), and cries out, “Alas, may I die with (*sun-thanoimi*) you, daughter!” (1210). But when he tries to detach his body from his daughter’s, he remains stuck (*pros-eicheth’* 1213) in Medea’s textiles “like ivy in shoots of laurel” (1213).⁴⁵ He becomes, in effect, caught in the logic of reproduction (biological, archival) as parental replication and preservation of a fixed identity, a logic that he, like Jason, enforces, as indicated by the repetition of “Creon” in “Creusa.”⁴⁶ (His wish to die *together* with his daughter expresses the same paternal obsession with self-extension into the child, a quasi-incestuous infiltration in the future.) Clinging to Creon, the material assemblage of Creusa’s corpse and Medea’s textile turns against him Jason’s reproductive futurism, his “joining together” (*xun-artêsas* 564) of his *genos*—an image reflected in the binding way (*ararotôs* “fixedly”) the gold held Creusa’s bound-together robe (*sun-desma*) (1192–93), and, perhaps, in the joining together of wood for the construction of the Argo.⁴⁷ A series of iterative imperfects (1215–17) captures the compulsive self-mutilation that precedes his death—every time Creon would try to extricate himself from the knot of the robes, Creusa/Medea would tighten her grip and “he would strip his old

44. The idea that the gold and fire as well as the fabric of the poisonous garment are inextricably blurred with their victim in a deadly assemblage emerges from 1198–99, where we find the phrase “blood . . . mixed (*sum-pephurmenon*) with fire.” As Segal (1996b, 36) notes, “The bride . . . becomes a . . . parody of a . . . torch . . . an oozing mess of blood and shapeless flesh . . . running with . . . corruptive effluvia.”

45. On this image, see esp. McDermott 1989, 86–87.

46. One of the two names of Creon’s daughter, also known as Glauce.

47. See Homer, *Odyssey* 5.252, where the verb *arariskô* (“to fit together”), cognate with *ararotôs*, is used for Odysseus’s construction of his raft. At 322, Creon proclaims *arare* (“These things are fixed”) to mark his decision not to let Medea stay in Corinth longer than a day.

flesh away from his bones” (*sarkas geraias esparass’ ap’ osteôn* 1217), just as his daughter’s flesh “flowed away from her bones (*ap’ osteôn*)” (1200). Separating his flesh from his bones, liberating it from his organs before its transition to the inanimate, Creon’s spasmodic “wrestlings” (*palaismata*) pursue an escape from his own captive body as much as from the robe.⁴⁸ Like Creusa’s loop of backward glances, these violent movements, in their seriality, are permeated by the pleasure-in-pain of *jouissance*, which eludes the Symbolic order’s preservative imperative through a spiral of self-shattering. Creon’s self-inflicted *sparagmos*, the separation of flesh from bones, is another expression of archive fever or Argive fever, marking a reimpression of the Argo’s pine tree’s being torn “limb from limb.” At the same time, one could say, it reconfigures that primordial act of violence, signifying not the imposed castration marking entrance into the Symbolic order, but a self-mutilation promising a phantasmic exit.

After her infanticide, Medea’s own exit—in triumph, *ex machina*—makes for “an uncomfortable ending,” the discomfort being caused, in Judith Mossman’s view, by the dissonances of a non-goddess occupying a divine position and a future of salvation tainted by the “moral shock” of “getting away with murder.”⁴⁹ There might not be an easy way to reconcile this “moral shock” with our concomitant relief at the prospect that Jason’s punisher will, after all, “get away” with her crimes. But it is possible to interrogate this tragic relief, considering how the two elements that generate it—Medea’s announced future and the aerial ride, intended to relocate her to Athens—may also trouble it, not with ethical perturbation, but with an affective resistance on our part to self-preservation.⁵⁰ I want to heed this unruly effect of reading trembling

48. As Deleuze (2003, 15) observes, through the spasm “the body . . . attempts to escape from itself,” thus seeking to become a body without organs. In Creon’s removal of flesh from his bones, we can see Deleuze’s notion of the “bones” as the prison of the body, its “spatial structure” (2003, 21).

49. Mossman 2011, 353–54; see also Rabinowitz 1993, 148–51; Segal 1996b, 41; and Mastronarde 2010, 201–2. The discomfort with this scene dates back to Aristotle (*Poetics* 1454b1), who considers the appearance of Medea *apo mêchanês* not adequately motivated in terms of “plot” (*muthos*). Cunningham (1954) first saw the appearance of Medea on the crane as a sign of her becoming divine; but, of course, Medea’s “divided self”—in the phrase of Foley (1989)—prevents us from fully coopting her into either camp, mortal or immortal; see, e.g., Cowherd 1983; Lawrence 1997, 53–55; Mastronarde 2010, 201–2; and Hall 2014. For a survey of the interpretive issues raised by the scene, see Rutherford 2014.

50. According to Pucci (1977 and 1980, 158–59), Medea’s final triumph achieves catharsis, but takes place through a “labyrinth of amazement and confusion,” which reveals the costs of aesthetic cleansing—i.e., the violence of tragic language (what he calls Euripides’ *pharmakon*) as well as the impossibility of “remedial discourse” ever “effac[ing] loss, pain.” While I am in sympathy with Pucci’s deconstructionist orientation, I will suggest a reading that locates the pleasures offered by the finale in an anti-catharsis informed by the death drive.

through the finale at the moment when its projection into the future, or aesthetic *da*, depends on Medea's aerial suspension. First, however, I turn to the most powerful extant visual reading of the Euripidean finale, the Cleveland vase, to explore how Medea's exit, her literal *death drive*, may relate to the play's regimes of repetition, and its archive fever.⁵¹

Like a burning paternal archive, the closed circle of spikey Helios at the center of the Cleveland vase of Medea (see figure 1) contains, but also fails to contain, the spiraling seriality of the two snakes that drive Medea's chariot. In placing Medea within the solar circle, the painter visually brings out the full potential of her words as she suddenly appears on the chariot: "Helios, the father of my father (*patros Hêlios patêr*), gives us this chariot, a defense (*eruma*) against a hostile hand" (1321–22). Becoming de facto the sun, Medea becomes a flaming hyperobject, sowing destruction. Maintaining, however, an ontological, corporeal distinction from the sphere that enfolds her, she is also the hyperobject's first victim, being forced into a deadly intimacy with it. As suggested by the entwined phrase *patros Hêlios patêr* ("Helios the father of my father" 1321), the solar enclosure protecting Medea bespeaks the same aspiration toward reproductive futurism and archival immobility that she rejected through her punishment of Jason. Defiantly, she applies to the chariot Jason's own word *eruma* ("protection"), which he had used in the phrase "protection for the house" (*eruma dômasin* 597), referring to the protection granted, in his view, by his new marriage, by his joining their children to royal siblings. The future she announces in this same finale, her move to Athens to help Aegeus procreate, is another instance of the stifling reproductive loop that the sun's patriarchal circularity, its tomb-like enclosure, embodies. The spikey rays of the sun, some of which hit the children's dead bodies, are projections of Medea's infanticidal sword, but also of the Symbolic's castrating cut impressed on the Argo's wood. The solar circularity and snaky coils in the vase, the latter contained within the former, capture the ambiguity of *speirai* in the play, its two meanings—"to beget" and "coils"—corresponding respectively to (the illusion of) reproductive repetition and the death drive's spiraling movement; the Symbolic's closed cage and meaningless, non-Symbolic circling around; archival preservation and never-the-same, that is, anarchivic, self-destructive seriality. "Bigger and brighter" than Medea herself and "almost luminescent,"⁵² the snakes draw the viewer's attention, with a phallic verticality that stands in stark contrast to the flaccid corpses of the sons. But, surprisingly, these snakes are without wings, a lack that signifies their strong bent toward the ground,

51. In general, on the Cleveland vase and its connection with a performative tradition, see Revermann 2005 and Taplin 2007, 123.

52. Taplin 2007, 123.



FIGURE 1. Self-destructive seriality: Medea in her snake-driven chariot. Lucanian calyx/krater, c. 400 BCE. Courtesy of Cleveland Museum of Art.

their familiar habitat. Although the snakes are bound within the sun's circle, the necessary pull toward their own *archê*, outside the cage, jeopardizes the assemblage, insinuating the threat of an erotic spiraling downward.

There are no snakes in the final scene of Euripides' text—nor do we know if they figured in his staging of the finale—but the Cleveland vase's reading alerts us to complexities of Medea's appearance on the crane, inviting us to focus on the phenomenology of the moment, a moment of suspension, when there is no ground beneath us.⁵³ Immediately after the infanticide, the Chorus

53. There are, however, two references to "biting," at 1345 and 1370; at 1335 (*eis-ebês Argous skaphos*), Jason also "cites" a portion of Medea's hissing line (*sun-eis-ebêsan Argôion skaphos* 477), on which see pp. 98–100, this volume. The scholion on Euripides, *Medea* 1320 mentions

can find only one comparandum for Medea, Ino, who, in a fit of delirium, killed her children and then threw herself off a sea cliff (1288), “dying with them” (*xun-thanous*’ 1289)—the same verb Creon used before getting fatally stuck on his daughter’s robe. As a comparandum, Ino is usually read as marking Medea’s exceptionality, her *difference* but, as Mossman observes, “the fact that Ino’s deification . . . is not specifically mentioned . . . and that the Chorus make the story end with her death, prompts the audience to ask: will Medea die, too?”⁵⁴ When Jason, despairing over Creusa’s death but still unaware of the infanticide, appears onstage, he envisions two possible means of escape for Medea, that she “be buried below the earth, or lift her body, winged, to the depths of the sky (*es aitheros bathos*)” (1296–97). In unwittingly forecasting her aerial epiphany, he uses a phrase, *es aitheros bathos* (“to the depths of the sky”), in which up and down seem blurred, and the sky is almost an abyss—an effect heightened by the occurrence of *bathos* (“depth, abyss”) at the end of the line. Ino’s ascent to a cliff top, followed by her plunge into the abyss, haunts the upward movement that Jason ascribes to Medea. Rather than legitimately elevating Medea to divinity, her appearance on the *mêchanê* (“crane”), with the extra burden of her children’s corpses, expresses an uncomfortable suspension between mortality and immortality, life and death. After all, Bellerophon, the only other mortal character in Greek tragedy to experience the crane, employed its height to stage his own suicidal downfall.⁵⁵ The shock of Medea’s exit is to be imputed not only to her trespassing on territory reserved for divine agency, but also to her floating over the void, that is to say, to the possibility, which never completely eludes our mind’s eyes, that her suspension may end in a crash, accidental or not. The suspension is in itself “a deferral of vision,” which entails what G. E. Lessing calls a “pregnant moment,” one that asks us to expand our imagination beyond the represented.⁵⁶ As we

a chariot drawn by snakes or dragons, reflecting a post-Euripidean performative practice that is reflected in the Cleveland vase: see Revermann 2005. On the Euripidean staging, see Mastronarde 1990, 264–66, and 2002, 378; Mossman 2011, 356; and Levett 2013. For arguments in favor of the possibility that Euripides used a serpent-drawn chariot, see Wyles 2014, 59–61.

54. Mossman 2011, 353. On the connections between Medea and Ino, see esp. Newton 1985.

55. See Dobrov 2001, 92–93, and Collard and Cropp 2008, 289–93. As Mark Griffith points out to me, the appearance of Medea *ex machina* may be haunted by the self-destructive use of the same chariot by Phaethon, her uncle—the protagonist of another play of Euripides—who is explicitly evoked in Seneca’s *Medea* (599–602).

56. Stubblefield (2015, 28) discusses the “deferral of vision into an indefinite suspension” that characterizes the photographic representations of the Twin Towers crash on 9/11. In Lessing’s view, “the pregnant moment” (*der fruchtbare Augenblick*) is a frozen instant—such as Laocoon’s convulsed posture before he is torn apart by the snakes—that leaves it to the viewer to imagine the impending disaster. Another example of a “pregnant moment” is, for Lessing, Timomachus’s painting of Medea, depicting her not “at the instant when she was actually mur-

approach the end of the play, we notice at least two textual hints of a gravitational pull, an attraction to the ground, which Medea shares with her snakes on the Cleveland vase.⁵⁷ Immediately after the announcement of her relocation to Athens, she warns Jason about his future: he will die hit by a piece of the Argo (1386–87). As we saw at the beginning of this section, this murderous fragment is, in a sense, Medea herself, whom Jason’s new marriage plans had reduced to an archived relic. As we, prompted by her prophecy, visualize a solitary, Medea-like relic falling—and fracturing—over Jason’s head, we can concomitantly see her chariot collapsing to the ground from its precarious elevated position. When, responding to Jason’s plea to touch the children, she utters her last line, “It is not possible; *your word has been thrown in vain* (*matên epos errhptai*)” (1404), she conjures the Homeric image of words cast like “flying” arrows, missing the mark, not reaching their destination, falling to the ground. In doing so, she prompts us again to imagine—as a repressed but indelible potentiality—the crash of her chariot, a mobile archive of human debris.

In the intimations of the crash, fear of and desire for disaster produce a pleasure-in-pain, disrupting at once reproductive futurism, archival survival, and aesthetic relief. Medea’s suspension in mid-air while Jason laments his inability to catch and punish her brings to mind the last scene of Ridley Scott’s *Thelma and Louise* (1991), where the protagonists flee a massive deployment of male police power. In the version of Euripides’ story depicted by the Darius Painter, Medea is pursued, like Thelma and Louise, by a squadron of armed men, her veil catching the breeze, mimicking the coils of her chariot-pulling snakes, conveying her forward momentum.⁵⁸ In Scott’s film, Thelma’s exhortations to Louise—“Let’s not get caught” and “Let’s keep goin’!”—voice what Barbara Johnson has called “the adrenaline of death,”⁵⁹ the feeling that launches a *death drive* off a cliff that ends in a freeze frame of the car hovering over the void of the Grand Canyon, “suspended, waiting” to fall into an abyss “they are visually barred from entering” (see figure 2).⁶⁰ This visual chivalry emanates from the very Symbolic order that offers Thelma and Louise the

dering her children, but a few moments before” so that “our imagination carries us far beyond anything which the painter could have portrayed” ([1766] 1984, 28). This suspension goes along with the unfinishedness of the painting, on which see esp. Gurd 2007.

57. See Medea’s attraction to the ground at the beginning of the play: “neither raising (*ep-airous*) her eye nor removing it from the ground” (27).

58. For the image, see Taplin 2007, 124–25.

59. Johnson 2000, 161.

60. The quotations are from Hart 1994, 430 and 444. Seidler (2019, 607–8) observes that “the death of Thelma and Louise by automobile . . . scripts both the impossibility of continuing to live and the possibility, even the joy, of the suspension of life.”



FIGURE 2. Joy in the face of death: Thelma and Louise, suspended over “an elsewhere . . . resist[ing] representation.” Screenshot from Ridley Scott’s *Thelma and Louise* (1991).

“legal heterosexual patriarchal pseudo-protections”⁶¹ they are rejecting. But this withholding, ostensibly protective of them and us, is far from calming the “adrenaline” that flows as we imagine, even long for, “an elsewhere . . . resist[ing] representation”⁶² and a scattering of the characters into the Real of the Grand Canyon. Medea’s crash is not represented, but it is inscribed within her suspension, which puts her, like Thelma and Louise, in a thrilling contact with the void. A crash would supply her with a way “not [to] get caught,” not to stay imprisoned in the Symbolic, in the circle of Aegeus’s “patriarchal pseudo-protections.” It would be a way to make pre-emptively impotent his reproductive futurism, which goes along with the dramatic text’s own futurist, preservative preoccupation, its offer of emotional relief through refuge in a pre-scripted aftermath.⁶³ Such a crash would enact the same principle that pulls the archived piece of the Argo downward—the death drive behind the illusion of archival preservation. In Medea’s moment of suspension, there is a trace of the self-annihilating force of archive fever, “joy in the face of death,” the seduction of the abyss.⁶⁴ In that moment, we might perceive a counter-narrative pushing against the repetitious cycle awaiting Medea in Athens,

61. Johnson, 2000, 163.

62. Hart 1994, 446.

63. Such reproductive futurism, it should be noted, entails a biopolitical weaponizing of the female body as an instrument for producing killing bodies for war, a concern that is very much in the thematic purview of *Medea*: see J. Rose (2018, 48–49), commenting on lines 1090–1115. Cavarero (2008, 95–96) discusses the scandal of “suicidal horrorism,” of “a body capable of killing by killing itself” and, thus, of revealing the “impotence” of the biopolitical desire to keep the body of the warrior alive as an inexhaustible weapon.

64. For “joy in the face of death,” see Bataille 1985, 237: “Joy before death carries me. / Joy before death hurls me down / . . . I slowly lose myself in unintelligible and bottomless space.”

where, in some accounts, she will try to kill another (step)son, Theseus, and be expelled again.⁶⁵ Instead of illusory relief at Medea's prospective survival, the *da* provided by a post-dramatic future, we may joyfully encounter an experience beyond representation and the pleasure principle.

The Euripidean finale seeks to archive Medea again—not unlike Jason's Corinthian marriage plans at the beginning of the play—by enclosing her in a circle of salvation.⁶⁶ In the prospect it holds of a reproductive future in compensation for the infanticide, it bears the normalizing force of cathartic relief, instantiating the emotional experience of tragedy posited by Aristotle. I have started and concluded this section by observing the downward pull of the remnant of the Argo. This archived object, shattering itself while shattering Jason, epitomizes the archive in its entanglement with the death drive, the impulse toward repetition, which at once creates the archive's illusion of a self-identical past and subjects it to “the structural threat of . . . radical destruction.”⁶⁷ Such destruction gapes beneath Medea's groundless perch on the crane. While enabling her to reach the promised destination and, thus, to fulfill the announced future, this precarious machine filled with corpses offers an alternative or a subversive supplement, a seductive *fort*. The crane affords her the self-annihilating opportunity to extricate herself from the Symbolic's cycle of pseudo-protections, which coincide with the aesthetic pleasure principle, the cleansing *da*—the mirage of moving on or settling back into Colchian patriarchy.⁶⁸ In any wish Medea might have to exploit this opportunity, any desire to become the archived fragment of the Argo, the object about to fall and crash while crushing her oppressor, we can perceive a tragic aesthetics defined by the pleasure-in-pain of self-shattering and falling into the void—a feverish longing for the undoing of the subject. It is not just the case that tragedy's pain and loss—here, the mass of suffering materialized by the bodies of Medea's children, but also Creon and Creusa—cannot be cleansed, or archived for the sake of a new birth or a rebirth. Rather, such pain and loss induce a vertiginous suspension conveying the *jouissance* of a downward spiral—the *jouissance* of both proximity to and postponement of death, a frantic quickening of the movement of *lifedeath*.⁶⁹ Positioned in the interstices of

65. On the play's allusions to this future, see Sfyroeras 1994–95 and Buchan 2008.

66. As illustrated by the Cleveland vase, the “circle” is emblematic of wholeness, stability, predictability (the aspirations of the pleasure principle and “reproductive futurism”), while the “loop” and the “spiral” stand for the troubled circle—in perpetual, restless motion—of the death drive.

67. Earlie 2015, 326.

68. For this version of the story, cf. Diodorus 4.56.1 and Apollodorus 1.9.28.

69. The two dimensions of this *jouissance*—proximity to and postponement of death—can be linked with the models of death drive theorized by Bersani and Žižek respectively. Follow-

representation, embodying a threatening potentiality—a protracted, boundless fracturing of actuality—Medea disseminates a seductive *archive* or *Argive fever*, even amid tragedy’s pseudo-protective offers of cathartic containment and relief.

II. THAT SINKING FEELING: EURIPIDES’ *HERACLES*

Among Euripidean characters, there is an affinity between Medea and Heracles—not just because they both kill their children but also because, like Medea, Heracles is an archival assemblage. His body acts as a substrate, or a place of domiciliation, for all his accoutrements, while at the same time constituting just one among them. These accoutrements, attached to his body as tightly as his children as they innocently greet him, are remainders of his labors—but so is his body, which he has exposed to a repeated, compulsive self-expenditure or self-sacrifice, a death drive. A conglomeration of this death drive’s material traces, Heracles embodies the archive’s destructive survival. Not just a perverse or grotesque “labor” induced by madness, the infanticide, I argue, expresses the same drive that animates the canonical labors. It is the “drive . . . to kill oneself” (in the words of Jean Laplanche),⁷⁰ which the play, with its formal loops, constantly circles back to, like Heracles’ own endless, meaningless loop, the *jouissance* of an illusory escape from the Symbolic. Reading beyond madness, I consider how Heracles’ apparent integrity *before* and prospective survival *after* it are troubled by an anarchic pressure, which, in the finale, unsettles the *da* of friendship and its effort to immobilize the other. As we are about to accept, together with Heracles, friendship’s social bond, a protective enforcement of the pleasure principle that replaces the reproductive futurism symbolized by the child with a similar perpetuation of the status quo, tragic aesthetics plunges us into a “perverse pleasure in . . . displeasure itself.”⁷¹ Heracles’ departure for Athens, where we are assured he will be safely archived, is marked by the subliminal image of a sinking ship. As we

ing Laplanche’s notion of the death drive as radical unbinding (1976, 106–24), Bersani (1995 and 2010, 3–30) conceives of sex as inherently an experience of masochistic *jouissance*, a self-shattering of the subject through disruptive sensation—something germane to Bataille’s notion of “joy in the face of death” (see Brintnall 2015); see also the Introduction, section 2. Medea’s proximity to the crash brings her close to this experience. The suspension per se, the deferral of the crash adds another masochistic facet, closer to the Žižekian circling around the *objet petit a*, or “circulation around the Void,” that is, “the ethereal rotation which, as it were, sustains itself, hanging in the air” (2006, 163). On *lifedeath*, see the Introduction, section 1.

70. Laplanche 1981, 230.

71. Žižek 1992a, 56 (discussing the condition of circling around the *objet petit a*).

face what Deleuze calls a “crystal image”⁷²—one that flickers between actual and virtual, in this case between what the tragic *muthos* tells us to see and what the charged overdetermination of poetic form allows us to see—there is a kind of vertigo, a terrifying *jouissance* that galvanizes the tragic experience.

In the static opening of Euripides’ play, the gathering of Heracles’ family around the central altar to “save the children,” his three children, from the tyrant Lycus sets up an archival scenario in which this aim is subverted by their assimilation to the remnants of their absent father’s labors. Expelled from their house, the children, their mother Megara, and Heracles’ stepfather Amphitryon find protective re-domiciliation, like the exiled Oedipus, at the “site/seat” (*hedras* 51) of the altar of Zeus, who is the ultimate divine *archê*—ontologically and nomologically. The focus of the choral performance’s circular movements, the tragic altar could be construed as a kind of theatrical *archê*.⁷³ This particular Euripidean altar, which Heracles dedicated to his father Zeus as a celebration of one of the victories of his own spear belongs, in a sense, both to dedicatee and dedicator—and in this dual ownership we find hints of the Oedipal troubles of the archive, where, as we saw in the previous chapter, castrating and parricidal instincts clash.⁷⁴ Amphitryon—the patriarch in charge while Heracles is away, believed to have been permanently lost to Hades—conceives this archival setting’s promise of survival as a response to the “save the children” imperative that pervades the first part of the play, through his, Megara’s, and the Chorus’s voices.⁷⁵ The ideology of reproductive futurism lurks behind this imperative, immobilizing the children even while “saving” them, aspiring to turn them into replicas of their father, mere memorial objects—paternal altars, as it were, or, less than that, contents of the paternal altar.⁷⁶ In that regard, they are something like the spear, or the remnants of Heracles’ labors—the spoils of the Amazon Hippolyta, which, as mentioned

72. Deleuze 1989, 73–74 and 98–111.

73. In characterizing the altar as an *archê*, I am not assuming that it was a permanent feature of the stage apparatus of fifth-century drama (see Poe 1989), but simply considering the fact that the Chorus—the notional center, if not the “origin,” of dramatic performance—often describes itself as moving around an altar, no matter whether it was present or not onstage: see, e.g., Csapo 2008, 280–81, and Gagné and Hopman 2013, 9. On the centripetal force of the altar in *Heracles*, see Rehm 1988, 302–3, and 1999–2000, 369.

74. On Oedipal conflicts in *Heracles*, see Padilla 1994.

75. See the proliferation of forms of *sôizô*, *sôtêr*, *sôtêria*: 72, 80, 203, 304, 318, 346, etc.

76. See Edelman 2011a, 154, on the son’s “becom[ing] the repository that houses the father’s word: the former acquires the status of memorial, while the latter attains to the presence of life.” In 131–33 (“to the father [*pateros*] look at how these Gorgon-gazing eyes are similar!”), the Chorus comments on the resemblance of the children’s eyes to their father’s. In this comment, the emphatic position of “to the father” (*pateros*) is as striking as the absence of a word for children.

by the Chorus, are “safeguarded” (*sôizetai* 418) in Mycenae, or the lion skin he never takes off. After Heracles’ unexpected arrival, when Megara urges her sons to “cling to his robes” (520) and supplicate him, she likens his body to Zeus’s altar (“[Heracles] is for you not second to Zeus the savior” 521–22), casting the children as appendages, akin to the lion skin that covers his back. This command never to leave Heracles’ altar-like body, to become *part* of it, does not just foreshadow the infanticide, the perverse labor that will make the children into actual spoils, but hints at an unsettling connection between reproductive futurism and the labors, which, at a deep level, both express a non-preservative repetition compulsion.

In Heracles’ twelve labors, whose ostensibly cathartic, civilizing function stems from a “war on terror,” we see, in fact, the displacement outward of a repetitive, fundamentally self-destructive instinct. In the play’s prologue, Amphitryon offers the following account of the circumstances that led Heracles to undertake the labors, which Euripides, reversing the traditional mythical chronology, places before the infanticide (15–22):⁷⁷

| | |
|---|----|
| Ἀργεῖα τείχη καὶ Κυκλωπίαν πόλιν | 15 |
| ὠρέξατ’ οἰκεῖν, ἦν ἐγὼ φεύγω κτανῶν | |
| Ἥλεκτρώωνα· συμφορὰς δὲ τὰς ἐμὰς | |
| ἐξευμαρίζων καὶ πάτραν οἰκεῖν θέλων, | |
| καθόδου δίδωσι μισθὸν Εὐρυσθεὶ μέγα, | |
| ἐξημερῶσαι γαῖαν, εἴθ’ Ἥρας ὕπο | 20 |
| κέντροις δαμασθεὶς εἶτε τοῦ χρεῶν μέτα. | |
| καὶ τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους ἐξεμόχθησεν πόνους | |

[My son] yearned (*ôrexeat'*) to dwell (*oikein*) in the walls of Argos, the Cyclopean city, from which I am in exile after killing Electryon; trying to alleviate (*ex-eumarizôn*) my misfortunes and wanting (*thelôn*) to dwell (*oikein*) in his fatherland (*patran*) he offered a great recompense to Eurystheus for his return, to tame (*ex-êmerôsai*) the earth—whether he had been subdued by Hera’s goad or was just going with fate. And he completed (*ex-emochthêsen*) the other labors.

The verbal texture of these lines brings into focus the death drive’s forces of repetition and self-expenditure, which make up Heracles’ *Argive fever*, with the city of Argos, his mortal father’s own *archê*, functioning like the ship Argo in *Medea* as the phantasmic *archê*, the *objet petit a*. In the chiasmic repeti-

77. On this bold plotting twist, see Bond 1981, xxviii–xxx.

tion framing 16–18, where two verbs meaning “to desire” (*ôrexiat’ . . . thelôn*) accompany the same infinitive *oikein*, “to dwell” (*ôrexiat’ oikein . . . oikein thelôn*), we detect the constant circling around the same unattainable object that manifests the death drive. The repetitious effect of *ex-eumarizôn* (“trying to alleviate”) and *ex-êmêrôsai* (“to tame”)—two semantically similar, isometric verbs that appear at the beginning of 18 and 20—layers Heracles’ cosmic catharsis with the anti-catharsis of this “self-propelling loop,”⁷⁸ which provides the perverse enjoyment of a perennially delayed satisfaction (he will not manage to live in Argos again either in the play or in its narrative aftermath). We could even catch a glimpse of this prospective *jouissance* behind his beneficent offer to save the earth by freeing it of all the monsters that terrify it.⁷⁹ This noble mission has something of Bataillean *ex-cess*—the thrill “to exceed . . . life itself . . . in death”⁸⁰—or even a will to annihilate his own terrifying monstrosity. After all, Hera, his fiercest enemy who, as Amphitryon speculates, might maliciously have inspired him, is a part of him, being contained in his name (*Héra/Héra-clês*). The play’s first reference to Heracles’ first labor exposes how his civilizing undertaking is indistinguishable from Laplanche’s “drive . . . to kill oneself.” Seeking to belittle Heracles’ courage, Lycus taunts Megara (151–54), “What majestic thing has been achieved by your husband if he killed and destroyed a marshy water serpent or the Nemean beast? Having taken it in a snare (*en brochois helôn*), he claims to have taken it out (*ex-helein*) with the stranglings of his arm (*brachionos*).” In killing the Nemean lion, Heracles, who later on is admonished for his leonine temper (1211), is, in a sense, also killing himself. The verbal play between “inside” and “outside” that is conjured by *en . . . helôn / . . . ex-helein* (“having taken . . . in” / “. . . to have taken [out]”) goes along with the punning confusion of external and bodily weapons (*brochois/brachionos*; “snare”/“arm”) in destabilizing the direction (inward or outward) of Heracles’ aggression, which is at the same time strangulation and virtual self-strangulation. This virtuality is key to the labors’ death-driven essence, to the pleurably suffocating circularity they subject him to by frustrating the suicidal instinct they feed. The excess or the remainder of the Real within the Symbolic of his civilizing mission, Heracles’ Argive/archive fever grips him as though in snaky coils that never let him go, even after being ostensibly broken by him twice, in the cradle and in the contest with the Lernean hydra.

78. Žižek 2006, 63. See the Introduction, section 3.

79. This offer is usually seen as an expression of Heracles’ role as a benefactor of his family or a global civilizer: see, e.g., Papadopoulou 2005, 76–78, and Holmes 2008, 253.

80. Connolly (2014, 108), discussing Bataille’s notion of sacrificial excess.

This “remainder” corresponds to the name of Hera within Heracles, an enemy that is, in a sense, also kin, or an outside that is inside him. In his Freudian account of Hera as an angry mother in Greek mythology, Philip Slater sees Heracles as the emblematic son.⁸¹ I am interested, more abstractly, in the anti-cathartic effects of simultaneity in the play’s form broadly conceived: not just enemy and kin, outside and inside, but also homicide and suicide, ending and beginning, representation and non-representation. These effects are exemplified in Heracles’ murder of Lycus and the sudden entrance of Hera’s agents of madness, Iris and Lyssa. However, before I focus on these scenes, I want to look at the complex of the labors as an archive.

Evoked through a choral song’s circular movements in an homage to Heracles’ salvific power, the twelve labors disseminate their archival seriality, which, while exhausting the old members of the Chorus, releases a burning energy that will engulf the children. The first stasimon packs Heracles’ labors into the conglomeration of the lyric form, weighing down the embodied substrate provided by the old choreuts with images of monstrous bodies. They keenly inflict upon themselves an archive fatigue, which intensifies the “burden” (*baros*) of old age lamented in the *parodos* (119, 122; cf. 637–39). The complex of the labors is presented as forming a “crown” (*stephanôma mochthôn* 355–56), whose circularity is enacted in the performance of the lyric ode’s strophic structure.⁸² Through the seriality of their movements, the weary choreuts circulate the energy of the death drive, which fueled the repeated succession of the labors. In one of Heracles’ archived labors, the coils of the snake guarding the Hesperides’ golden apples are reflected in the recursive rotating motions of the choreuts themselves (398–99), suggesting an identification between the rhythm of their performance and the exhausting *jouissance* of repetition compulsion.⁸³ The impetus of this compulsion is also perceptible in another labor, Heracles’ “burning” of the Lernean hydra (421). When the Chorus sings this ode, Heracles’ children are putting on funerary clothes in preparation for their own slaughter by Lycus, who, as a result of Megara’s intervention, abandoned his original plan to burn them—“Pile the wood on both sides around the altar, set alight and burn the children’s bodies” (243–

81. Slater 1968 (esp. ch. 12).

82. The term *stephanôma* is charged with the Pindaric assimilation of choral poetry/performance to a crown: see Bond 1981, 153.

83. Higgins (1984, 97) suggests that the snake “manifest[s] with its labors the sameness of [Heracles’] recurrent labors,” that is, “a vision of [a] world where violence never ceases sprouting uncontrollably.” For Higgins, in other words, repetition simply coincides with the cyclical rhythm of time, as suggested by the play’s multiple dualities (see Ruck 1976, D. H. Porter 1987, and Dunn 1997); on this image, see Worman (1998, 100), who tracks its reverberations in the later description of Heracles’ madness. See also Padilla 1994, 289.

44). While in its anticipation of Heracles' impending arrival as a savior, the Chorus's archival "crown" of his benefactions erects an imaginary protective barrier around the children, the flame it also kindles around them feeds the destructive energy that will lead to their slaughter—not by Lycus, but by Heracles himself. The inseparability of reproductive futurism's archival aspiration from destruction materializes intratextually, through an uncanny verbal repetition that merges two apparently opposite moments in the play—the infanticide and Heracles' ritualized transmission of his legacy to the children.⁸⁴ The same phrase is used for Heracles' habit of placing his club in the hands of one of the children (*xulon kath-iei* "he put the club down" 471), as recounted by Megara just after the choral ode, and the moment when he brings it down on his son's head (*xulon kath-êke* "he put the club down" 993).⁸⁵ In the Messenger's account of the scene leading to this violence, the children figure as spectators of a sacrifice, forming a "chorus" (*choros . . . teknôn* 926), while a basket is "passed in a circle (*en kuklôî*) around the altar" (926–27) and Heracles is about to lift a torch. The circularity of the children's "chorus" and the movement of the basket reflects the shape of the death drive, equally formative of the repetitive loop of the labors and their archival conglomeration, their gathering into the Chorus's lyrico-narrative container. It is as though the children as archives have absorbed, and now circulate, the energy that is going to kill them—as though they have become vessels of Heracles' quasi-suicidal instinct.

In his efforts to fulfill this instinct, Heracles' repeated failure, the *jouissance* fueled by the labors, is captured by the murder of Lycus, his double, in which he is killing nobody, stabbing the void. Onstage when Heracles is not, wanting to kill the children before Heracles does, trying to "take" (*ex-helein* 39) them as Heracles "took" (*ex-helein* 154) the Nemean lion, Lycus is an alter ego as much as an enemy of Heracles. The parallels between the characters make them "impressions" of each other, an effect enhanced in performance by their

84. See Edelman 2011a, 154: "Survival depends on preserving . . . an order kept in motion by its persistent repetition and, in consequence, by the death drive."

85. Barlow (1996, 196) comments that, through the verbal echo, "the pathos of the contrast is stressed"; Worman (1998, 96) observes that the intratext foreshadows the transformation of the club into a weapon "for the family's destruction." What is behind this foreshadowing is, I suggest, the destructive side of intergenerational continuity—the children's reduction to corpses, archival matter—that inheres in protecting them by seeking to fix, stabilize, their identity. Euripides plays with the anagrammatic potentialities of *tekna kteinein* ("killing children"), a phrase whose resonance with *tekna tiktein* ("begetting children") indicates, as noted by Kraus (1998, 141), that "parents by nature both beget and kill." I am arguing not that protecting the children easily slips, for the contradictory and "excessive" Heracles, into its opposite, but that immobilizing them in order to protect them *is* killing them.

sharing a voice, being played by the same actor.⁸⁶ One of the multiple ironical moments generated by this aural ghosting, Heracles' killing of Lycus provokes a frisson, overlaying suicide onto murder, turning into something that is neither the former nor the latter. Putting ourselves in the place of ancient spectators hearing the murder victim's customary cry (*iô moi moi* 750) from offstage, we might find ourselves unable to share, with certainty, the Chorus's assumption that the cry comes from Lycus—and not from Heracles (751–53). As the actor's presence is entrusted to a disembodied voice split between two referents, death and life converge: in a sense, Heracles dies together with Lycus, who, however, lives on as a ghost—"hauntologically"—with (or in) an undead Heracles.⁸⁷ We are prompted to picture a backstage where Heracles attempts to kill Lycus as himself, but actually strikes no one—not even when we hear "I am being killed" (754)—stabbing the void instead, circling around an unattainable object (Lycus/himself, but also the suicidal act), relishing the fixation of the death drive. In this appendix of the labors—Lycus has, after all, the name of an animal—the death drive energizing Heracles anticipates his madness, which, as we read in the Messenger's account, includes among its manifestations his fighting against a non-existent adversary (960), a behavior that causes among the scene's observers a reaction of pleasure-in-pain—"laughter and at the same time fear" (950).

A jolt in the plot, the god-driven onslaught of Heracles' madness subjects dramatic form to the death drive's spiral, a continual starting over, through the infanticide, which, as the labor closest to suicide, the inaccessible object, energizes the obsessive loop around it. Separated from the murder of Lycus by only a momentary expression of triumph, the madness leading to infanticide follows almost seamlessly, as in the archival series of labors assembled by the Chorus. The sense of relief and restored sovereignty resulting from the death of Lycus, a quasi-ending, is quickly overtaken by the upsurge of fear (816) caused by Hera's two emissaries, Iris and Lyssa, whose intervention has traditionally been judged a "problem," a Euripidean eccentricity, in that it seems to restart the plot.⁸⁸ However, what keeps the tragic plot always dying yet never quite dead is not just more fear, anger, or pain, but rather a pleasure-in-pain, the *jouissance* of self-expenditure, in which Heracles and dramatic form are equally implicated. Appearing after a moment of ostensible closure, Iris and Lyssa are in the position of the *deus ex machina*, but their announce-

86. See Ruck 1976, 57–59; Kraus 1998, 142; Papadopoulou 2005, 25–28; and Mastronarde 2010, 69–70.

87. "Hauntology" is the name of Derrida's theory of spectrality, or haunted ontology (1994, 63).

88. See Lee 1982; Halleran 1986, 179–80; and esp. Dunn 1997, 91–96.

ment of the destructive plan that will bring Heracles down simultaneously places them in a prologic role.⁸⁹ While untying the rope, releasing madness, like a ship from its moorings (837), the goddesses pull together opposite edges, beginning and ending, forming a frenetically circling loop. This loop, which corresponds to Iris's image of the children as a "crown" (*kalli-paida stephanon* 839)—in lieu of the labors (*stephanôma mochthôn* 356)—also takes shape through a Heracleian hauntology, through the spectral return of the hero's words. Urging Lyssa, the daughter of "the dark Night" (833), to spring into action—"But come on, rally your . . . heart (*sul-labousa kardian*)" (833)—Iris echoes Heracles' words of encouragement to Megara, when, wearing funerary, Hades-like accoutrements (562), she was preparing herself to die together with her children, "Gather your courage (*sul-logon psychês labe*), / and stop trembling" (626–27). When Lyssa, in turn, announces her resolve to wreak havoc ("I will go . . . and break down [*eimi . . . kai kata-rrhêxô*] the house" 861, 864), she circles back to Heracles' similar announcement before killing Lycus ("I will go and bring down [*eimi kai kata-skapsô*] the house" 566). Lyssa's name makes her a double of Lycus, who, as we have seen, *was* Heracles, insofar as he *sounded* like him, while Iris stands in for the absent Hera, the goddess whose name is a trace of Heracles.⁹⁰ There is a sense in which, like Lycus, Iris and Lyssa are not just enemies but also enablers of Heracles, prolonging the *ex-cess* intrinsic to the labors, at a point where, having completed them, he risks absorption into the calcifying teleology of the Symbolic order. A form of self-mutilation, close to yet distant from the suicidal instinct, the infanticide intensifies the self-expenditure produced by the death drive's "endless circular movement of postponement"⁹¹ around an unattainable object, a movement parallel to the search for the impossible origin that constitutes archive fever.⁹² During the infanticide, we see Heracles momentarily immobilized, stuck in time (*chronizontos* 930), speaking with "broken laughter" (935), and then chasing one of the sons in a circle (*kuklôi* 977). While chasing his son, he is chas-

89. On Iris and Lyssa as *deae ex machina*, see Mastronarde 1990, 268–70.

90. On Lyssa as double of Lycus, see Foley 1985, 192n75; Kraus 1998, 142; and Mastronarde 2010, 70.

91. Žižek 2017, 208.

92. On the effect of simultaneous proximity to and distance from suicide, see line 839 ("his made-of-lovely children crown [*stephanon*] by the murder of his kin [*auth-entêi phonôi*]"), where the "crown" of the children—a prefiguration of the heap of the three children's corpses—is juxtaposed with a phrase marked by the ambiguity of the term *authentês*, meaning, like similar *auto*-compounds, both "kin-killing" and "suicide." In a sense, the proximity of *stephanon* to *authentêi* visualizes the circling around the *objet petit a* of suicide that the infanticide represents. I am not concerned here with the motivations of Heracles' non-suicide (on which see Yoshitake 1994 and de Romilly 2003).

ing himself; killing him, he is not quite killing himself. Breaking out of his momentary stuckness, he is caught in a different kind of stuckness, the death drive's spiral, seemingly exhausted only to be renewed.

The scenes that follow the infanticide—Athena's premature epiphany and, then, the arrival of Theseus, the faithful friend—show the violence but also the fundamental failure of the archontic offer of relief. Though such relief amounts to a homogenizing, immobilizing gathering together of scattered traces, the ethical imperative of a "future to come" gains traction through Heracles' ungraspable otherness. The analysis of the politics of containment in these scenes will provide the background for the discussion of the play's final lines, which offer suggestions of the welcome impossibility of catharsis.

Heracles' spiral is provisionally interrupted by Athena's act of salvific violence, which corresponds to a gesture of archival foundation, of archaic, patriarchal entombment. When Heracles rushes against Amphitryon (1001)—the only remaining target after he has murdered his children and wife—Athena, we are told, "held him back from his frenzied murder" (1005), quelling the parricidal rampage by slamming his chest with a "boulder" (*petron* 1004) and sending him to the ground, unconscious, beside a "shattered" (1008) column brought down during his rampage, to which the servants, with Amphitryon's help, tightly bind him. The "ropes" (*desma* 1009) they use, the "chains" of the Symbolic order, "save" Heracles by binding him to the oppressive protection of the Law of the Father, reinscribing Athena's containment of him through the boulder she hurls at him—a stony containment, as though in a cave or tomb, with an almost paternal sound: *petros* ("boulder") is almost identical to *patros* ("of the father"); *petron* ("boulder") resembles *patran* ("fatherland").⁹³ Pausanias reports seeing Athena's boulder archived in the Heracleion of Thebes, labeled *lithos sôphronistêr*, that is, "the stone that makes one restrained (*sôphrôn*)"—it is the stone that had restrained Heracles, made him sane, as *sôphrôn* as his stepfather.⁹⁴ Athena's boulder is an archive itself—that is, a place or an object that marks a nomologically sanctioned act of preservation. Casting Heracles' filicide as surpassing any other mythological atrocity, the Chorus, after the Messenger's account, evokes the Danaids' slaughter of their husbands and the archival rock that "holds" it (1016–18):

93. The quasi-entombment delivered by Athena, a *deus ex machina* of sorts, foreshadows the stone monument that Theseus promises to Heracles in 1332. On Athena's action as looking ahead to, preparing for, Heracles' glorious Athenian "rebirth," see Gregory 1991, 139–40, and Papadopoulou 2005, 126–27; for a different approach, see p. 126, this volume. Holmes (2008, 271) observes that Athena's intervention in defense of Amphitryon "leaves us with one father too many, who competes with Athena herself qua Athenian civic parent."

94. Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 9.11.2.

ὁ φόνος ἦν ὃν Ἀργολίς ἔχει πέτρα
 τότε μὲν περισημότατος καὶ ἄπιστος Ἑλλάδι
 τῶν Δαναοῦ παίδων.

The murder (*phonos*) committed by the children of Danaus, which the Argive rock (*petra*) holds (*echei*), was at that time the most famous and unimaginable in Greece.

“Holding” (*echei*), that is, marking the site where the bodily remnants of the Danaids’ husbands are buried and thus hidden, the Argive rock memorializes while erasing the murderous event, thus making it “the most famous” and “unimaginable” at the same time. Meaning “holding” as guarding and repressing, *echei* here is comparable to *esche* (“held”) in the sentence that expresses Athena’s restraint ([“Her boulder”] held him [*esche*] back from his crazed murder [*phonou*] 1005), her stopping “murder” (*phonos*) and Heracles’ madness by making him black out and, when he regains consciousness, temporarily forget his actions, while covering him with a stone, burying him, turning him into an item in an assemblage of objects (the corpses and the debris of the collapsed roof). Lying on the ground, a human remnant, Heracles resembles the shattered pillar he is attached to, a *petros* of sorts, like Athena’s missile; but, as suggested by Pausanias’s phrase *lithos sôphronistêr*, he is also bound by the assimilating power of Athena, Zeus’s emissary, and Amphitryon, in danger of becoming a mere copy of his *patêr*.⁹⁵ As Jacques Derrida puts it, archival consignment is “never without violence.” It is “never without [the] . . . pressure . . . of . . . repression . . . and . . . suppression.”⁹⁶ The divine rock that blocks Heracles’ violence, restores him to sanity, and “saves” him, i.e., (malevolently) entombs him without quite killing him, materializes the archive’s repressive force, the violence intrinsic in the protection and preservation it offers and in its pre-emptive effort to entomb the future it promises through the “affirmation . . . of the law as singular, as One,”⁹⁷ the fixity of *petros/patros*.

The assemblage into which Heracles has been gathered, however, is under the pressure of an anarchic pulse, which resists the logic of consignment. When he awakens, Heracles observes the material signs of the captivity that

95. In the terms of Edelman, referring to Derrida’s analysis of Hamlet in *Specters of Marx* (1994, 2), Heracles risks a “dead-ication,” i.e., “the condition of being mortified into the *figure* of vitality [i.e., the father] that offers as the image of the future to come a memory that returns from the past” (2011a, 161). Interestingly, the transmitted reading in 1016 is *patra* (“fatherland”), which Bothe emended to *petra*.

96. Derrida 1996, 77–78.

97. Edelman 2011a, 157.

has restored his sanity. He likens himself to a “ship anchored with ropes” (1094) to a “half-broken” (1096) stone pillar, while the contents of his personal archive, the bow and arrows that supported his labors, are scattered on the ground (*espartai* 1098).⁹⁸ Believing himself to be still in the Underworld, he looks for the denizens and objects he encountered there, in his final labor: Pluto, Persephone, and Sisyphus with his rock (*Sisupheion . . . petron* 1103). In this search for the familiar faces of the Underworld we may detect confusion and disorientation as well as a sense of longing. It is a longing not just for death per se, but for the death-driven temporality expressed by Sisyphus and his rock, the latter “ceaselessly fall[ing] back to the start,” the former “always roll[ing] it to the top of the same slope.”⁹⁹ Propelled by a serial automatism, the parallel movements of man and rock are caught in a sterile eternal return, a version of the endless loop that fed Heracles’ *jouissance* before and during his madness.¹⁰⁰ The dream of self-shattering goes along with the images of the “half-broken” stone and, especially, of Heracles’ weapons, his prosthetic bodily “parts,” strewn on the ground. Heracles as a ship anchored to a stone, a consignment, is placed alongside Heracles as an assortment of parts or pieces of wreckage—as small as the words for bow (*toxa*) and arrows (*enchê*)—resistant to being gathered together. The verb *espartai* (“[they are] scattered”), from *speirô*, meaning “to sow, beget” and “to scatter,” captures the inseparability of the archive’s archontic and an-archontic principles, which we see juxtaposed here—consignment as reproduction of the Law of the Father and *diaspora* or “dispersion beyond . . . unifying control.”¹⁰¹ When survival or the future, the promises of the institutional archive, reveal their price—the “deadening rigidity” or protective “calcification” of reproduction¹⁰²—the self-wrecking compulsion of the death drive, whether leading to barren circularity or random dispersion, appears surreptitiously as a means of escape. Seen from the harbor where Heracles is now anchored, waiting for the future foisted upon him by both his fathers, the futile movement of Sisyphus’s perpetually tumbling rock—a version of what Žižek calls “the rock of the Real”—possesses a masochistic allure.¹⁰³

98. On this scene, see most recently Weiberg (2018, 72–73), who considers Heracles’ relation of *philia* with his weapons.

99. Serres 2014, 172.

100. On Sisyphus as a symbol of this notion of the death drive, see Žižek 1991, 5–6.

101. Kujundzic (2003, 176), commenting on Derrida 1996.

102. Edelman in Berlant and Edelman 2014, 18.

103. See Žižek 1989, 69: “[The] rock . . . [of] the Real . . . resists symbolization” and “persists as a surplus and returns through all attempts to domesticate it, to gentrify it.”

Just after Amphitryon unchains Heracles, Theseus attempts to bind him again through compassion and friendship, affective bonds whose ostensible offer of comforting closure shares a coercive element with archival consignment.¹⁰⁴ Learning of his infanticide from Amphitryon, Heracles contemplates suicide—stabbing or burning himself, or jumping off “a bare rock” (1148)—but the approach of Theseus, “his friend (*philos*) and companion (*sun-genês*)” (1154), and the accompanying sense of shame and honor “[get] in the way of [his] deadly plans” (1153). Faced with this hindrance, Heracles resorts again to circularity, “throwing darkness [a veil] *around* [his] head” (1159)—a gesture that, harking back to the moment, at the beginning of the play, when his children donned funerary robes, affords a vicarious non-being, a non-Symbolic space, silent and dark.¹⁰⁵ Eager to “sail with (*sum-plein*) friends when they are in difficulty” (1225), to “suffer with” (*sun . . . prassein kakôs* 1220) Heracles, and to reward him—in his words—“for having safely brought me back to light from the dead” (1222), Theseus asks Heracles to show his face (“Unveil your wretched head. Look at us!” 1226–27). Earlier, when Theseus bids Amphitryon to “unveil” Heracles (1202) so that he may “suffer with” him (*sun-algôn* 1202), we observe the Athenian king’s solicitous compassion—even at the cost of contamination—but also a coercive element. As theorized by Emmanuel Levinas, it is through the face that we encounter the other; yet in this encounter “I do not accede to the other by seeing more . . . but by renouncing mastery over the visible.”¹⁰⁶ For Levinas, the face of the other corresponds to “the idea of infinity,” an exteriority “irreducible both to the manifestation it brings forth and to my representation of it.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the ethical dimension of the face-to-face encounter rests upon “the revelation of an exteriority beyond compre-

104. Various readings have underscored the problematic, ineffective, anti-closural force of *philia* at the end of the play. Dunn (1997) has highlighted the weakness and generalized indeterminacy of the bond offered by Theseus, while Padilla (1992 and 1994) and Griffiths (2002) have, in different ways, drawn attention to the fact that *philia* amounts to a projection of family values and structures. For Holmes (2008), the play ends as an unresolved *agôn* between friendship and family. I am focusing on the analogy of *compassion* and archival *consignment*, on the calcification or deadening violence that they similarly seek to impose.

105. On the harking back triggered by Heracles’ gesture, see D. H. Porter 1987, 102–3; Worman 1998, 97–98; and Mastrorarde 2010, 70. Žižek (2000, 82) uses Hegel’s phrase “night of the world” to refer to the death drive.

106. Thus Marion (2002, 82), in his commentary on and homage to Levinas. As Levinas puts it in Levinas and Kearney (1986, 24), “To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other’s right to exist has primacy over my own.”

107. Levinas 1969, 26, and Tahmasebi-Birgani 2014, 69. See also Levinas 1969, 198: “The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power. . . . The face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.”

hension” or an “alterity without revelation.”¹⁰⁸ Theseus’s demand for Heracles’ unveiling is an ethical command bordering on violence, as it displays the intention to bring the other to light, that is, to grasp alterity and, ultimately, to efface it. It is a command to turn the face—which, in Judith Butler’s words, “is neither reducible to the mouth nor . . . anything the mouth has to utter”—into language.¹⁰⁹ Formally supplicating Heracles to “reveal his face to the sun” (1204) and “restrain his lion-like wild spirit” (1210–11), Amphitryon tells him that “a counter-balancing weight (*baros anti-palon*) is contending with (*sun-amillatai*) [his] tears” (1205).¹¹⁰ The ethical pressure, the “weight,” that Amphitryon puts on Heracles at Theseus’s behest replaces Athena’s madness-crushing boulder, while the occurrence of the *sun-* compound *sun-amillatai* (“to contend with”) two lines after Theseus’s *sun-algôn* (“suffering with” 1202) suggests the way *sympathy*—the identification *with* the other’s suffering—is an attempt to push against the other’s irreducible resistance, to hold the other in place, even to entomb the other, in a kind of *consignation*.¹¹¹

Resistant to appropriation into sameness, Heracles’ veiled face figures an anarchic future—a future always to come, at odds with the homogenizing futurism of archival consignation. As Derrida puts it, the archive is always “an irreducible experience of the future,” but this future is—and should be—a “future to come [*l’à-venir*],” rather than “some future present.”¹¹² In other words:

The condition on which the future remains to come is not only that it not be known, but that it not be *knowable as such*. Its determination should no longer come under the order of knowledge . . . but rather a coming or an event which one *allows* or *incites* to come (without *seeing* anything come) in an experience which is heterogeneous to all taking note. . . . It is a question of this performative to come whose archive no longer has any relation to the record of what is, to the record of the presence of what is or will have been *actually* present.¹¹³

108. So Sparrow (2013, 96 and 108), who brings out the material and aesthetic potential of Levinas’s ethical notion of the face of the other.

109. J. Butler 2004, 132–33. Butler regards the Levinasian face as a site of “wordless vocalization of suffering that marks the limits of linguistic translation” (134).

110. On the wrestling image in these lines, see Bond 1981, 370–71.

111. For Levinas, there cannot be “suffering with” the other because suffering is “unassumable” (1998a, 91). From his perspective, “to identify with the other’s suffering is to bring to light, to narrate, and to represent that suffering” (Tahmasebi-Birgani 2014, 78). Levinas’s alternative is to suffer *for* the other (1998b, 124–25)—a painful exposure to others’ suffering, a responsibility toward their vulnerability, but without identification.

112. Derrida 1996, 68.

113. Derrida 1996, 72.

Ungraspable, the veiled face of Heracles is an image of this invisible, unseen, never-fully-present future, which makes archival preservation possible and ethical by overturning it, that is, by rejecting the fantasy of sameness and appropriation—by accepting, and striving for, non-homogeneity, a reproduction a priori undercut by difference, by turning the future into an infinite responsibility for the other.¹¹⁴

With Heracles' face presumably unveiled, Theseus announces an archival consignment, an Athenian memorialization, by which the *face* will become a *name*. Returning Heracles' favor, Theseus "save[s]" him, bringing him "back to light" (1222). As Theseus announces, various lots of Attic land belonging to him will be unified under Heracles' "name" (1329–30). After his death, then, Athens "will raise him up, honored" (1333)—that is, restore him to light—"with sacrifices and stony (*lainoisi*) cairns (1332)," a phrase in which the adjective *lainoisi*, previously employed for the column that Heracles had been tied to (1037, 1096), signals the persistence, even posthumous, of his captivity in the system apparently honoring him.¹¹⁵ The reciprocity between the friends implies coopting Heracles into the system of the Symbolic by turning his face, in its ungraspable otherness and phenomenological openness, into a name—an imposed signifier, whose alienness to its referent is heightened by its literal meaning, which renders Heracles the "glory" of his enemy. The "crown" of glory (*stephanos* 1334) that, as Theseus sees it, his fellow-citizens will receive from having welcomed his wretched friend is a reimpression of Heracles himself, of the wreath that adorned his head as an athletic winner.¹¹⁶ This crown is, thus, a marker of the void left by a face replaced with a name or what is left after the archival effacement that Heracles undergoes to be saved and memorialized.¹¹⁷ At the same time, as an image of the loop of the labors, the "crown" imports the spiral of the death drive, which vexes the petrifying stability promised by memorialization.

In the last moments of the play, the "aftering" that Theseus has planned for Heracles seems to run up against apparently conflicting impulses: on the one hand, to continue the repetitive loop, and, on the other, to return to inanimate oblivion, to "the mineralogy of being."¹¹⁸ In proclaiming his decision to follow

114. On this notion of the Derridean future, see, among others, Cornell 2005, 74.

115. On the vagueness of Theseus's promises, see Dunn 1996, 104, and 1997, 118; cf. Papadopolou 2005, 55–56.

116. On the centrality of this word in the play, see Padilla 1994, 287–89, and Kraus 1998, 143.

117. Pucci (1980, 187) observes that at the end of play Heracles amounts to "a monument without effigy," that is, "unable to signify an order in life." I suggest instead that it is precisely by signifying, that monumentalization defaces and effaces him.

118. On this phrase of Nancy (1994, 171), see chapter 1, note 5. For the idea of "aftering," see Edelman (2011b), who uses the term to refer to the heteronormative attempt to immobilize sex into the "aftermath" of reproduction.

Theseus to Athens (1352), Heracles seems to acquiesce to the king's archiving project. Tasking Amphitryon with burying Megara and his children, as the law of religious purity does not allow him to do it (1361), he is "unyoked" (1375) from his human family, and he turns, accordingly, toward his child-like arms, the tokens of his labors and fame, which he is now determined to "save" (1385), even though he used them to kill his own children. As the parts scattered on the ground are reconnected with the human body and joined together in an illusory unity, the Heracleian archive seems to be provisionally reconstituted, enabling the consignment intended by Theseus, who is anxious to entomb his friend, alive or dead, and reduce him to a fetishized name. But, alternatively, this reconstitution of heroic Heracles could work toward deferring his archivization, restarting him, locking him again in the repetitious loop of the labors. Urging Theseus to help him "settle" Cerberus in Argos (1387), Heracles proposes embarking on another labor, even if it is meant to be the final one and would constitute in itself an archivization (of Cerberus), parallel to his own in Athens.¹¹⁹ The mention of Argos, the *objet petit a* at the center of the labors, reinscribes the death drive as repetitious movement, an endless deferral that hardens into the outright immobilization that follows.¹²⁰ When Theseus commands him to get ready for departure and "stand up" (1394), an injunction similar to the earlier order to reveal his face (1226), Heracles remarks that "his limbs have become frozen" (*arthra . . . pepêgen* 1395) and expresses the wish to become a "rock (*petros*) with no memory (*a-mnêmôn*) of evils" (1397), an image of the Freudian death drive as an impetus toward "the icy, inert immobility of a lifeless thing."¹²¹ The normative rigidity of Theseus's archival futurism is troubled by this fantasy of corpse-like, pre-Symbolic, non-human existence, an impersonal materiality amounting to non-being or being as such.¹²² Heracles seems again to be resisting archivization—and the erasure of what the archive demands one forgets—when he asks Theseus to let him "look back (*palin*)" (1406) at the children for the last time and expresses the "longing" to embrace Amphitryon, a request for which the Athenian king rebukes him: "So, you no longer have any memory (*mnêmên*) of your labors? . . . If somebody sees you acting like a woman, he will not approve. . . . [B]ecause you are ill, you are not the legendary Heracles (*kleinos Hêraklês*)" (1410–14).

119. Barlow (1996, 183) notes that the request "comes oddly . . . amongst Heracles' deep grief."

120. I see the following line "[come with me] lest, being alone, I suffer something because of the pain for my children" (1388) as fear mixed with, or disguising, desire; cf. Holmes 2008, 268.

121. Thus Edelman (2004, 44), commenting on the death drive of Scrooge in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*: "The cold within him froze his old features . . . stiffened his gait"

122. At 1392 Heracles assimilates himself to the corpses of his children.

Though this expression of memorialistic anxiety is rendered in the negative, it amounts to a Symbolic interpellation: be, once again, the famous Heracles, the *man* who is talked about—a monumental object.¹²³ Interrupting Theseus's program for the "after" of the play, Heracles' stuckness suggests an impulse toward impassive, stubborn resistance to cooptation in an alienating system of signification, in the deadening structure of a museum.¹²⁴ Heracles, we might say, wishes to arrest memory's reparative rush, its urgent archiving of the present as past, its reduction of a *face* to a fetishized *name*. His wish to become a rock can be read as resistance to this monumental effacement, an urge to recover the incommensurability of the face through the unrepresentable presence of an immoveable, unreadable object.¹²⁵ Instead of being assimilated into a system that grants him survival by inflicting the burden or the stigma of an identity, Heracles opts for something similar to "the right to disappear," or for a form of unassimilable survival.¹²⁶ (In *a-mnêmôn* there is not just the ostensible lack of memory of the object, but also its ability to defy human "mnemonic" cognitive faculties.) In a sense, Heracles' response to Theseus is the sort of death-driven recalcitrance that pushes back against Greek tragedy's own *traumythic* compulsion, the memorializing—archival—enterprise apparent in the recording of mythic material through *recycling* and *reshaping*.

Heracles' resistance, an anti-catharsis, also comes through in the much-discussed final lines of the play, which turn political discourse into aesthetic feeling—the vertigo provoked by a crystal image flickering between actual and virtual, between representation and non-representation.

These final words, like Medea's appearance on the crane, hint at something other than a safe journey to a new harbor; in Heracles' dutiful vow, we may find the possibility of a wreckage of ship and subject that goes beyond catharsis and futurity. In response to Theseus's simple imperative "Go forward" (1418), Heracles bids farewell to Amphitryon, ordering him to bring the children's bodies—"pains hard to bear"—to their tombs (1422) and declar-

123. For alternative takes on these lines, see Padilla 1994, 297, and Holmes 2008, 270.

124. On museumification as a suppression of experience, see esp. Agamben 2007, 84. According to Seremetakis (2016), the EU's attempt to "save" Greece from its economic crisis through austerity measures resulted in a "museumification"—that is, killing—of Greek democracy, in an assimilation of Greek life to the death symbolized by Athenian classical ruins.

125. As J. Butler (2004, 144) puts it, "The face is not 'effaced' in [the] failure of representation, but is constituted in that very possibility."

126. "The right to disappear" is a phrase coined by Blanchot (1987, 84). A similar right is claimed by the young Freud when, in a letter to his wife, Martha Bernays, in 1885, he confesses to have destroyed all his papers and notes to escape from the immobilizing grip of future biographers: see Phillips 2014, 25–26. Displaying his own version of Heracles' resetting compulsion, Freud says, "All my thoughts . . . about the world . . . will now have to be thought all over again" (E. L. Freud 1970, 152).

ing, “Having destroyed our house with shameful acts, we, completely ruined, will follow Theseus like small towed boats” (*hêmeis d’an-alôsantes aischunais domon / Thêsei pan-ôleis hepsomesth’ eph-olkides* 1423–24). While taking the children inside the *skênê*, unknowingly escorting them to their death, Heracles had compared them to “small towed boats” (*eph-olkidas* 631), and himself to the leading ship dragging them along (632). There is an interpretive tendency to see this striking intratext as capturing the reversal undergone by Heracles during the play,¹²⁷ his filial dependence on Theseus, or their interdependence.¹²⁸ But these readings do not register the persistent ominous force of the image, which marks the children’s movement toward offstage death—a death that denies presence and defies representation. This resonance unsettles the announced future and Heracles’ archival boats, to which it is entrusted. The small boats may prove unfit to carry him together with his baggage of “pains hard to bear” and ultimately sink under the weight of their cargo. Resumptive—that is, referring to the ruin that has already befallen him—*pan-ôleis* (“completely ruined”) may also be proleptic, looking ahead to the sinking of the boats, to the wreckage of the Heracleian archive, now overburdened by the death drive that has sustained it. Heracles’ boats may bring down Theseus’s ship too, as their material connection corresponds to the “yoke of friendship” (*zeugos . . . philion* 1403) dramatized when, to prop himself up, Heracles had placed his arms around the Athenian king’s neck. In light of Heracles’ assimilation of this friendship to parenthood—“Now that I have been deprived of my children, I have you [Theseus] as my child” (1401)—the shipwreck that may “save” Heracles from Theseus’s future would thus encompass a second filicide. This intimated shipwreck offers Heracles and us a suggestion of the collapse of the Symbolic; it offers an encounter with the Real, which brings edgy discomfort and enjoyment, an experience of the “terrifying, impossible” *jouissance* repressed at the moment of subjectivization.¹²⁹ The overflowing water sinking Theseus’s paternal ship as it transports Heracles to his promised archivization would slosh with maternal *jouissance*, a pre-Oedipal condition.¹³⁰ In deferring his departure, Heracles delays his Athenian purification, Theseus’s reparative enterprise, which connects the fallen hero’s religious catharsis—a prospective *policing/polishing*—with our own, the aesthetic *da*.¹³¹ Affording

127. See Pucci 1980, 186; Bond 1981, 415; Dunn 1997, 116; and Weiberg 2018, 76.

128. See Barlow 1996, 184; Griffiths 2002; and Papadopoulou 2005, 179–80. The echo suggests an uplifting reversal for Higgins (1984, 104) and Foley (1985, 193).

129. Žižek 1989, 71.

130. This maternal *jouissance* would result from Heracles’ becoming a piece of wreckage fallen off from the Symbolic—Heracles without *-cles* (“fame, language”), i.e., Hera.

131. “Polish” comes from Latin *polire*, which means “to scrub, clean.” On the “immunitarian *dispositif*” of contemporary societies, eager to eliminate phantasmic pollution, see esp. Esposito 2013, 59–60.

the enticing fantasy of watery, maternal *jouissance*, the scenario conjured by Heracles' use of the ship image points prospectively to another kind of *purification*, a wiping off of Symbolic accretions that results in the delirious wreckage of the subject.¹³²

But this unfathomable shipwreck, an anti-cathartic self-shattering that comes from Heracles' refusal to be stabilized in an archival future, occurs in the gaps of representation. The ship is an example of what Deleuze calls a *circuit* or a *crystal image*, "a formation of an image with two sides, actual and virtual."¹³³ Speaking of the trans-Atlantic ship in Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), "a vast seed of death or life," he says that (like any ship), it is split into "a limpid face, which is the ship from above, where everything should be visible, according to order," and "an opaque face, which is the ship from below, and which occurs underwater."¹³⁴ The inseparability of these faces makes their corresponding, apparently mutually exclusive, scenarios—keeping afloat and capsizing—simultaneous, coexistent, co-implicated in a fluid circulation of actual and virtual. The intratextual resonance overlays the *virtual* image of the shipwreck onto the *actual* image of Heracles' (presumably) safe journey to Athens. The latent or virtual image—a catastrophe beyond representation—introduces an effect of suspension, parallel to Medea's own final appearance, hovering between salvation and a deadly crash.¹³⁵ This suspension is a way of thinking about archive fever as a constant postponement of our encounter with the event, the "event" being the "original" Heracles himself, whom Theseus's memorializing project wants to archive, to stabilize as an *actual* image.¹³⁶ Sabotaging the *actual*, the *virtual* undermines the archival attempt to pre-terminate or contain the event, or to impose a self-identical past through the mirage of protection and survival. The self-wreckage that would free Heracles from Theseus's Symbolic hold is reflected in the textual emergence of the

132. On *purification* as the outcome of a "violent peeling off" of the Symbolic, see Žižek 2003, 64.

133. Deleuze 1989, 68 (my emphasis). For Deleuze, this coexistence of actual and virtual is typical of "time-image" films, i.e., especially European films produced after World War II that disrupt traditional conceptions of cinematic plotting.

134. Deleuze 1989, 73.

135. Both Medea's final epiphany on the crane and the verbal circuit of *actual* and *virtual* in *Heracles* can be compared to the images of falling statues, such as that of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square (2003), which appear to be suspended between installment and demolition: see Stubblefield 2015, 145–49.

136. Stubblefield (2015, 37) observes that "the act of photographing"—a form of archiving, as theorized by Derrida (2007a)—"allows us to evade experience in the moment so as to postpone our encounter with the event." See also Bell 2004, 160: "The notions of the event and of the archive . . . are locked in a ballet, in a circular movement of back and forth that makes the event dependent on the archive and vice-versa."

shipwreck as a virtual image, appealing because of the *jouissant* suspension it causes.

The multiple iterations of circularity in the play—images that circle back, and circular movements periodically returning—correspond to our own *jouissance* in experiencing tragedy, a circling between *fort* and *da*, which makes us breathless as we approach the point of self-shattering. In *Heracles*, as we have seen, characters and dramatic form are caught in an unremitting loop, a claustrophobic intensification of tragic returning, typically enacted by mirror scenes and imagistic and verbal reverberations.¹³⁷ The recurrence of wreaths, *peri-* and *amphi-* compounds, and forms of *kuklos* marks this loop, an effect of meta-circularity. The circuit of virtual and actual inherent in Heracles' ship, and activated by the intratextual loop that threatens to wreck it, also participates in this effect. In the play's circularity we may detect the circuit of the death drive "in its orbit around . . . [the] *objet petit a*," the *fort* and *da* game of "cycling" through "being in control, being out of control," staying afloat and sinking, with no desire for an ending or a pause.¹³⁸ The self-expenditure caused by this fixation makes Heracles' experience of the labors, prolonged in the infanticide, comparable to the aesthetic experience of tragedy as an affective event that refuses to be stabilized, to be archived or contained by the pleasure principle, catching us in its delirious swirl. Just as the incessant rhythm of Heracles' labors or his vain combat with Lycus, a non-existent replica of himself, make him short-winded, acting out but never satisfying his drive to escape from himself, the play's cycles of repetition induce a giddy breathlessness. The virtual shipwreck in Heracles' last words evokes a more radical loss of breath, underwater suffocation, the moment of suspension just before an ending that one longs to endlessly defer. Death is a termination whose proximity and postponement constitute the *jouissance* that Theseus's redemption would deny. This is also our own tragic *jouissance*. As the virtual shipwreck promises to rescue Heracles and us from the normative "salvation" of the pleasure principle, we, like Theseus, spinning downward into the depths with Heracles, or clutching the wreckage in a state of suspension above the swirling water, feel a residue of eroticized suffocation, the death-driven excitation that arises from tragedy's anarchic allure.



137. These mirror scenes and reverberations, which in the past four decades critics have mapped out (see esp. Ruck 1976; Higgins 1984; D. H. Porter 1987, 85–107; Worman 1998; and Mastrorarde 2010, 69–70), contributed, in the first half of the twentieth century, to dismissive verdicts on the play: see, e.g., Murray (1947, 112), who labeled it "broken-back."

138. The quotations are from Edelman in Berlant and Edelman 2014, 63 and 79.

Medea's announcement in her defiant farewell to Jason that she will go "cohabit *with*" Aegeus (*sun-oikêsousa* 1385) can be placed alongside Theseus's offer to "sail *with*" (*sum-plein* 1225) Heracles. Medea's consenting to the archival consignment that Aegeus plans for her, as Theseus does for Heracles, is complicated by the precariousness of her chariot, whose midair suspension challenges representation's protection from, or censorship of, an image of wreckage. A candidate for the archival junk heap, Medea's crashed chariot—like Heracles' boat, capsized by the text's frenetic circularity—emerges from the instability of the archive, the destruction inevitably compromising its pledge of a graspable future. Whether these scenarios replace or merely cohabit with the surface images of a reparative "after," there is an effect of temporal stuckness, a circuit of back and forth—as with Creusa's compulsive gaze or Creon's serial self-rending—by which a fixation rebels against the social fixity of the future. The self-wounding that emerges from this fixation contests, through a mimetic enactment, the violence of this fixity, which excludes the ethical openness of the "future to come," a future reluctant to be assimilated into history. The temporal disruption that results is not unlike what one finds in a demented Instagram GIF, a waving or jumping or kiss-blowing ad infinitum.¹³⁹ This is the suffocating temporality that shapes the aesthetic engagement with tragedy. It is a repetitious, exhausting movement with no real purpose, a serial self-shattering stuckness. It is at odds with the prospect of any foreseeable future, with any "aftering" concern that would subject "its all-consuming and unmasterable intensities" to normativity.¹⁴⁰ There is a pleasure to be had in rejecting the protection of catharsis, in remaining vertiginously suspended or breaking apart in the duration of "non-chronological time" as long as it keeps us apart from the malignant welcome of a future present.¹⁴¹

139. On the temporality of the GIF, see McCarthy 2017.

140. See Edelman (2011b, 110), on sex.

141. Deleuze (1989, 99) uses the phrase "non-chronological time" in reference to a dynamic in European cinema—the plurality of temporal registers collapsed into a regime of simultaneity—that he traces back to Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*.

Archival Space



T H R E E



Anorganic Archives

I WILL NOW take up a relationship implicit in previous chapters: between archiving and affective or social bonds. Various connections we have seen—Theseus with Oedipus, Aegeus with Medea, Theseus with Heracles—have entailed attempts, never fully successful, to *assimilate* the other into the “law as singular, as One.”¹ *Philoctetes* and *Hecuba* present affective bonds—respectively, homosocial or even homoerotic friendship and filial-parental intimacy—that conjure not just archival imagery, but also another form of incorporation: eating and, potentially, digestion. As discussed by Jacques Derrida, friendship and love, as well as mourning, which informs both of them in the two plays, always imply a form of *manger l'autre*.² Philoctetes' cave and Hecuba's tomb-like body are archives that swallow up the other. The outcome

1. Edelman 2011a, 157.

2. *Manger l'autre* (“Eating the Other” or “Eating What Is Other”) is the title of two seminars, still unpublished, that Derrida taught in Paris in 1987–88 and 1990–91 (the latter's subtitle was *Rhétorique du cannibalisme*). The seminars focused on the topics of love and friendship. For an account, see Krell 2006. The relation between friendship, love, mourning/melancholy, and ingestion is theorized in other writings, which will be referred to in this chapter: esp. 1989, 1991, 1997a, 2001, and 2017. Assimilating ethics to the principle *il faut bien manger*; Derrida (1991) makes a fundamental step toward a post-humanist ethics (i.e., one including non-human animals) by shifting the emphasis from the Levinasian “face” (a humanist concept) to the “mouth” (or the “orifice”) as the channel of the encounter with the other; on the ethics of *buccality*, see Guyer 2007.

in both cases is compulsive, death-driven “eating,” which carries with itself the threat of self-consumption.

Philoctetes’ devouring drive, competing with an archontic power’s attempt to incorporate him, models what I call bulimic friendship, a cycle of taking in and spitting out. In *Hecuba*, parental love and mourning are drawn into the cannibalistic logic of greed and political consensus in an atmosphere of over-consumption, a kind of binge eating, with the consequence of self-annihilation forecast in the finale: Hecuba’s becoming a dog aboard the enemy’s ship and her leap into the sea. This leap marks a further step, a “becoming water,” which we can also perceive in the finale of *Philoctetes*—in both cases as a response to the interruption of the loop of *jouissance*, bulimia or binge eating. The impetus toward “becoming water” constitutes another register of the death drive, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s reconfiguration of the Freudian concept of a pull toward the inanimate.³ Instead of a corpse, they posit the “body without organs,” which joins the eternal flux of elemental existence in the form of pure intensities.⁴ A body escaping from itself through expansion and contraction—a “body without organs,” turned into a wave of intensities, water but also sound—is a fleshly archive that ingests and then implodes.⁵ While the two paradigms of *manger l’autre* that we find in *Philoctetes* and *Hecuba* model ingestive and emetic *jouissance* as possible anti-cathartic aesthetic responses, the implied possibility of becoming a “body without organs” offers a more radical escape from the subject. To the extent that we follow this implication, we share in the further *jouissance* of entering the impersonal realm of the medium of catharsis itself, a watery world of elemental intensities, of flowing vitalistic motion, as Deleuze and Guattari’s post-humanist view has it. But contrary to the vitalism of this perspective, this “becoming water” can be seen to prolong the pleasure-in-pain of *fort* and *da*—homologous to the oscillation of *lifedeath*—that is otherwise blocked by a *deus ex machina* in the

3. The phrase “becoming water” has emerged in post-humanist and eco-critical discourse in the wake of Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming animal”: see, e.g., Jagodzinski 2007. As suggested by Grant (2008, 183n7), an explicit move in the direction of “becoming water” is detectable in Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 38), as they observe that “when Thales’s thought leaps out, it comes back as water”: on the Thales episode, see the Introduction, section 3.

4. As explained in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 8) borrow the concept of the “body without organs” from Antonin Artaud: “No mouth. No tongue. No teeth. No larynx. No esophagus. No belly. No anus. . . .” In this condition, as Deleuze and Guattari say in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “organs are no longer anything more than intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients” (1987, 164). An important feminist reading of the concept is offered by Grosz (1994). Braidotti (2013, 134–42) has discussed the body without organs as a specifically post-humanist reformulation of the Freudian death drive: see the Introduction, section 3.

5. On consumption and digestion as archival metaphors, see esp. Tortorici 2014.

Sophoclean play and by etiology in the Euripidean one, opening a new rupture, reinscribing the death drive's rebellious negativity.

I. BULIMIC FRIENDSHIP IN SOPHOCLES' *PHILOCTETES*

In *Philoctetes*, we experience the hardships of a character bereft of all human bonds who strives to acquire a friend, Neoptolemus, and to store him in his cave, the archive of his possessions and traumas. Having been made similar to the disease devouring him inside with its perverse *philia*, Philoctetes seeks to assimilate Neoptolemus; conversely, like the disease, which is incorporated in Philoctetes' body but never fully assimilated, i.e., digested, Neoptolemus withstands being digested in the swallowing cave. This cannibalistic friendship generates an alternation of ingesting and vomiting, a bulimic cycle, which is broken by the happy ending promised by Heracles, the *deus ex machina* whose intervention compromises the ethics of alterity as much as Philoctetes' *philia* does. With his promise of healing, a restoration of the pleasure principle, Heracles, devouring and digesting all the characters, thwarts the *jouissance* of tragic aesthetics. Still, the death drive, which informs the bulimic cycle and unsettles the archival cave and stomach, persists. It re-emerges as a fetishization of salty water, a keen striving toward disembodied, liquid corporeality, a participation in a flux of disaggregation, which anti-cathartically immerses us in the undulating rhythm of cathartic matter.

Sophocles' play opens with descriptions of Philoctetes' cave that cast it as an archive resembling a stomach, a space where his possessions, non-human companions, are safeguarded, but also swallowed up. In his prologic account, Odysseus maps Philoctetes' world around three entities in the feminine gender, which slip into each other: the island (*nêsos*) of Lemnos and the disease (*nosos*)—differentiated only by one letter—as well as the cave. When he qualifies the cave as *di-stomos* (16)—with not just one, but two mouths!—Odysseus suggests a connection between Philoctetes' abode and the disease, which he has personified by ascribing a “devouring” power to it (*nosôi . . . dia-borôi* “disease . . . that devours” 7).⁶ There is a sense in which the space offering comfort to Philoctetes is, at the same time, uncannily similar to the source of his pain. When Neoptolemus peeks into the cave and relays its contents to Odysseus, we see how Philoctetes' cave blurs archival and gastric functions (31–39):

6. On this phrase, see Schein 2013, 118; see also Segal 1981, 303, and esp. Worman 2000, for an analysis of the play in light of the Kristevian “abject” and of the nexus between speaking and devouring.

Νε. ὀρώ κενὴν οἴκησιν ἀνθρώπων δίχα.

Οδ. οὐδ' ἔνδον οἰκοποιός ἐστί τις τροφή;

[. . .]

Νε. αὐτόξυλόν γ' ἔκπωμα, φλαουρουργοῦ τινοσ

35

τεχνήματ' ἀνδρός, καὶ πυρεῖ' ὁμοῦ τάδε.

Οδ. κείνου τὸ θησαύρισμα σημαίνεισ τόδε.

Νε. ἰοῦ ἰοῦ· καὶ ταῦτά γ' ἄλλα θάλπεται

ράκη, βαρείασ του νοσηλείασ πλέα.

Neoptolemus I see that the abode is empty (*kenên*) without human beings. *Odysseus* Isn't there any life-nourishing comfort (*trophê*) of the sort that makes a home inside? . . . *Neoptolemus* Yes, a cup made of wood, the craft (*technêmata*) of a bad artisan, and together with it these things to light fire. *Odysseus* What you are illustrating must be his collection of things (*thêsaurisma*). *Neoptolemus* Ah, Ah! And then there is other stuff, rags (*rhakê*) that are drying out in the sun, full (*plea*) of some heavy (*bareias*) sore (*nosêleias*).

Like the visitor of an archive or a museum, two concepts captured by the word *thêsaurisma*, Neoptolemus rests his gaze, curious yet timid, on all the objects gathered in the cave. These are traces of Philoctetes, possessions that bear impressions of his body, but also material companions made to serve his needs. The ideas of emptiness (*kenên* 31) and fullness (*plea* 39) that book-end the passage further complicate this archival picture. The lack of *trophê*, i.e., food, in a “double-mouthed” cave evokes an empty stomach, while the rags (*rhakê* 39), archives in themselves that voraciously suck in the disease’s morbid lymph, appear as overflowing containers, similar to stuffed bellies.⁷ The cave stands in for Philoctetes, who, as we will see, operates as a stomach in himself. The archive in this play corresponds to a body or an organ—“a desiring-machine” in Deleuze and Guattari’s definition⁸—powered, upset, and dissolved by a back and forth of stuffing and emptying, the anarchic rhythm of Philoctetes’ affective connection with Neoptolemus.

7. On rags as archives, see Telò 2017. Philoctetes is away “for the return of food” (*pi phorbês noston* [transmitted text]), as Odysseus suggests in the subsequent lines (43–44). The image of “food returning” activated by the use of *nostos* is a strong signal of the personification of food—and, symmetrically, of the assimilation of people to edible material—that pervades the play. In a sense, Odysseus casts himself as “food,” which he is often on the verge of becoming in the *Odyssey*, by attributing to “food” (*phorbê*) something as distinctively Odyssean as a *nostos*. The “return” (“coming home”) of food is in itself an image of ingestion—the stomach is food’s “home.”

8. Deleuze and Guattari 1977.

Neoptolemus is, in fact, not just a viewer of the archive, but also potentially part of the collection it gathers, an analog of Philoctetes' manufactured, non-human companions. In referring to Philoctetes' cup as *technêmata* (not just "the product of a craft" but also "artful device, trick, artifice"), Neoptolemus unwittingly describes himself, a notional product of Odyssean *technê* ("craft").⁹ Even though Neoptolemus lays claim to the role of "co-worker" (*xun-ergatês* 93), his blatant objectification in Odysseus's command—"give *yourself* to me" (84)—makes him the tool that Odysseus, the craftiest craftsman, has manufactured to accomplish his mission on behalf of the Greek army. Thus, while looking inside the cave, Neoptolemus is also looking at himself, unexpectedly finding a doppelgänger in the *skênê*, which is Philoctetes' personal archive as well as an archive of theatrical masks.¹⁰ This reflection, a kind of mirror stage, does not just constitute Neoptolemus as an alienated subject—a captive of Odysseus, the master of the signifier—but also announces that his place will somehow be *in* the archive, among the "possessions" (*ktêmata*) of Philoctetes. Neoptolemus's use of *technêmata*, in other words, signals the troubled attraction exerted on him by Philoctetes' archive, the complement of Philoctetes' own feelings, which are captured in his name: an acute fondness for possession and an equivalence between "friend" (*philos*) and "possession" (*ktêma*), by which a *philos* is not something better than any possession, but rather *just* a *ktêma*, an object to take in or store.¹¹

Philoctetes' name encodes the idea of friendship as a form of objectification or an act of cannibalistic digestion. Once asked for a definition of *philia*, Aristotle, as reported by Diogenes Laertius (5.20), responded "One soul living in two bodies," a statement in line with the idea expressed in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1170b6–7) that "the friend is another self" (*heteros gar autos ho philos*). Derrida has observed that this view of friendship, privileging sameness over difference, turns *philia* into something like kinship—and, in particular, brotherhood—or into "the friendship of self, *philautia*."¹² In this perspective, *philos*, converging with its Homeric grammatical use as a possessive adjective,

9. The term *technêma* recurs at 928, in Philoctetes' invective against Neoptolemus; see further.

10. On the metatheatrical overtones of the prologue, see esp. Falkner 1998, 33–35.

11. This is the reading of Philoctetes' name that I suggested in Telò 2018, 134; for the traditional reading, see J. Daly 1982. For the use of *philos* as a suffix indicating excessive desire, see Telò 2016, 62–63. When Odysseus says, "It is nice to take (*labein*) some gain (*ktêma*) from victory" (81), he is punning on Philoctetes' name and, in a way, internalizing his acquisitive impetus while scheming to catch him.

12. Derrida 1997a, 178. Derrida advocates a model of *philia* as radical alterity, an anti-fraternalist model of friendship that "goes beyond the proximity of the congeneric double" (1997a, viii).

becomes “property,” as in Philoctetes’ name, which suggests an equivalence with *ktêma*. For Derrida, friendship always entails a form of cannibalism, of *eating* the other. Aiming at the creation of a “congeneric double,” the Aristotelian model transforms friendship’s cannibalistic incorporation into a desire for *digestion*, the complete *assimilation* of the other into the self, an operation that, in its will to impose sameness, recalls archival consignment.¹³ This digestive impulse haunts Philoctetes’ archival cave, where, as we have seen, his possessions, which are his companions, are figurative food (*trophê*).

But just as the archive, unable to assimilate the other, inherently works against itself, so the digestive impulse in friendship generates melancholy more than mourning, as it can never be entirely fulfilled. The friendship that attempts to fraternalize, to assimilate the other is, in Derrida’s view, comparable in its aspiration to Freud’s notion of *mourning* as a process by which the subject absorbs the friend as a lost object by working through and ultimately overcoming the loss. *Melancholy*, the ostensibly pathological counterpart of *mourning* in Freud’s system (though not for Derrida), is defined by a permanent inability to overcome a loss, to digest the other internalized by the subject. For Derrida, a loyal friendship, that is to say, one respectful of alterity, is paradoxically, a form of melancholy, something analogous to Philoctetes’ relation to his disease, incorporated in his body but abidingly vital, never completely assimilated.¹⁴ Referring to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s reconceptualization of *mourning* and *melancholy* as, respectively, *introjection* and *incorporation*, Derrida observes that “there is no successful introjection, [and] there is no pure and simple incorporation.”¹⁵ He views mourning as a process that inevitably fails, for the mourner reaches a limit in the process of assimilation, incapable of wholly absorbing the mourned object. Thus, mourning is always, to an extent, melancholic. Faced with resistance on the part of the cannibalized other, the “friendship of self,” with its digestive-

13. On the impossibility of digestion, see Derrida 1991, 112–14. On Derrida’s linkage of friendship and anthropophagy, see esp. Deutscher 1998.

14. On the binary of mourning and melancholy, see Freud 1917—although, later, Freud (1923) complicated the binary, seeing melancholic dynamics in mourning (see J. Butler 1997, 132–50, and Clewell 2004). Indeed, in Cavell’s reading (2003, 116) of Freud’s essay “Transience” (1916b), mourning is already seen as a “repetitive disinvestment,” with a persistent albeit intermittent temporality. For Derrida (1989, 35), melancholy, as “an aborted interiorization,” achieves “a respect for the other as other,” while mourning “makes the other a *part* of us,” and “the other no longer quite seems to be the other.” On the relation between friendship and mourning, see Deutscher 1998 and the Introduction of Brault and Naas to Derrida 2001.

15. Derrida makes the observation in an interview (1995a, 321), referring back to his introduction to Abraham and Torok’s *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word* (Derrida 1986a). For the distinction between *introjection* and *incorporation*, see Abraham and Torok 1994; see also chapter 4.

archival impulse, is similarly bound to remain incomplete, aspirational—or, we can say, anarchivic.

In the parodos of Sophocles' play, the evocation of Echo, an icon of the archive, anticipates Philoctetes' friendship with Neoptolemus as a precarious, impossible introjection, a sequence of ingestion and ejection. In its empathic portrait of Philoctetes' solitary life, the Chorus makes a striking reference to Echo, the mountain nymph with "no door on her mouth"¹⁶ (*a-thuro-stomos* / *Achô* 188–89). Echo is Philoctetes' invisible companion, spreading his laments in the atmosphere like Narcissus's words. Her unbound orality brings her close to two other female companions of Philoctetes—the devouring disease and, especially, the cave, his echoey abode with two "mouths," doorless openings. Stuck in endless repetition, a death drive that delivers incomplete impressions of the past, that destroys while preserving, Echo is, like the cave itself, a figure of the archive. But Echo is also a double of Philoctetes himself, whom the Chorus depicts as living "isolated from others . . . pitiable . . . in . . . hunger, having (*echôn*) burdens that are untreatable and uncared for (*an-êkest' a-merimnêta*)" (183–86). The epithet *a-thuro-stomos* ("no door on her mouth") links Echo with Philoctetes in another way, which, as I argue, is programmatic of the death-driven aesthetic movement of the play. The adjective points to Echo's unceasing "eating the other," to the fact that she "with her ears and her mouth . . . , both quasi-literally and ideally, *ingests* the words of Narcissus."¹⁷ Echo's cannibalism is melancholic, non-digestive, and anarchivic because, far from generating "an empty reduplication or a hollow reverberation of the same," her voice converts the words of Narcissus into something else—"another sentence, invented, original."¹⁸ But, besides refraining from *digesting*, Echo's serial rejoinders, repetitious yet "original," also paradoxically disincorporate the other while desperately seeking to bring it close, to take it in.¹⁹ The

16. In the rendition of Carson (1986).

17. DeArmitt 2014, 130 (my emphasis), commenting on the Ovidian story.

18. DeArmitt 2014, 133, and Derrida 1997b, 15–16 (translated in DeArmitt 2014). As Derrida puts it in *Rogues* (2005, xii), Echo operates "at the intersection of repetition and the unforeseeable." For example, Echo's repetition of Narcissus's famous *veni* ("Come!" Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.382) reconfigures his mixture of surprise, curiosity, and fear into an erotic desire for proximity and presence. For Janan (2009, 138), the Ovidian Echo epitomizes meaning as "always . . . suspended and deferred"—i.e., we can say, the very Derridean idea of *différance* (see Enterline 2000, 57–58). On Echo's figuration of sound as a constituent but also a disruptive supplement of the signifier, see S. Butler 2015, 80–81. From another perspective, the non-digestive friendship that Echo embodies is of a piece with the anti-narcissistic ethics that, according to Spivak (1993), she fosters by using her voice to distract Narcissus, that is, to pull him away from his self-absorption.

19. See Hardie 2002, 165: "[Echo's] . . . pastoral echoes stubbornly remain the expression of a subjectivity unable to fuse itself with the subjectivity of the object of desire."

failed digestion entails a regurgitation after each ingestion, producing a kind of bulimic dynamic, which segues into her metamorphosis, her transformation into sound, through self-starvation (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.397).²⁰

Rejecting psychiatry's pathologizing approach, Deleuze and Claire Parnet have reinterpreted anorexic and bulimic behaviors as one pathway to what they call "a body without organs," a deterritorialized body, that is, one liberated from the constraints of the organism, a corporeality reduced to pure intensities.²¹ Morphing into the material intensity (the "wave") of sound, into a "body without an image,"²² Echo exemplifies this idea of the anorexic. *A-thuro-stomos* ("[with] no door on her mouth") suggests an impetus toward the removal of organic constraints, while the Doric form of Echo's name, *Achô* (Attic *êchô*), can be read as a conflation of the alpha privative and the verb *echô* ("to have"), as though the nymph were defined by an alternation, or even a simultaneity, of having and not having, "fullness" and "void."²³ In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari connect the body without organs with the Freudian death drive, conceived as a desire to be relieved from the pressing demands and the hierarchical embodiment of the organs. The bulimic's regurgitation is a rebellion against the teleology of digestion, a circling back to the mouth that enacts the loop of the death drive.²⁴ Almost making the cave's mouth his own and becoming an echoey or Echo-like archive, Philoctetes, as we will see, repetitively ingests and ejects Neoptolemus, conjuring a model of cannibalistic friendship, whose loop of "fullness" and "void," another form of pleasure-in-pain, evinces an attraction toward disembodiment or the "anorganic" body.²⁵ The proximity in 186 between *echôn* ("having" modifying Philoctetes) and

20. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.396–98 "Her sleepless worries wear out her wretched body and wrinkles constrict her skin and the juice of the whole body is dispersed in air (*in aera*); only voice and bones are left."

21. See Deleuze and Parnet 1987, 110–11. Grosz (1994, 40) has argued that anorexia may be construed as "a kind of mourning for a . . . corporeal connection to the mother that women in patriarchy are required to abandon." See also Arsić 2008. For anorexia as a rebellious response to patriarchal expectations, see also Orbach 1986.

22. Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 8.

23. Deleuze and Parnet 1987, 110: "We should not even talk about alternation: void and fullness are like two demarcations of intensity."

24. On vomiting as anti-teleological, see Brinkema (2011), picking up on the idea of regurgitation as *jouissance* (or *Genuss*) theorized by Derrida (1981b)—that is, as a hypersensuous, "excretive" (not appetitive) pleasure caused by what cannot be digested or represented, something similar to the Kantian "sublime" (opposed to the beautiful).

25. See Deleuze and Parnet (1987, 110) on the process of "making oneself an anorganic body," which, in their view, marks anorexic behavior. While sympathetic with a Deleuzian approach to corporeal expansion and contraction, Crawford (2017) sees the use of the death drive in some analyses of obesity and anorexia as a reinscription of a pathologizing approach. Like Deleuze and Parnet, I am interested in exploring the aesthetic subversiveness of bulimic rhythms. In reconnecting the body without organs with the death drive, I mean to emphasize,

an-êkēsta (“untreatable”), whose beginning approximates the sound of the verb *ech-ô* (“I have, possess”) preceded by alpha privative, produces the same co-implication of “fullness” and “void” that, as we have noted, is intimated by Echo’s name, *Achô*.²⁶ In this parodos, Philoctetes is presented as “lacking food” (*phorbês chreiâi* 162) and “not having (*echôn*) the sight of a companion (*sun-trophon*),” literally “somebody to eat with” (171).²⁷ Philoctetes is hungry for both food and companions, but the parallelism suggests that, like Echo, he makes no distinction between the two. Philoctetes makes his first, spectral appearance in the parodos as a mere voice, like Echo, or a shout (*phthonga* 206), suggesting the impetus to escape from organic constraints, to become a corporeality consisting of intensities.²⁸

In his first dialogue with Neoptolemus, Philoctetes construes affective connection as an archival ingestion. After hearing Neoptolemus confirm his Greek provenance, Philoctetes jubilantly greets not the stranger, but the sound of his voice, the material, almost depersonalized intermediary of the unfolding intimacy: “O dearest voice! Ah, to receive the address of such a man after a long time!” (*ô philtaton phônēma: pheu to kai labein / pros-phthegma toioud’ andros en chronôi makrôi* 234–35). The enjambed juxtaposition of *labein* (“to receive, to take in”) and *pros-phthegma* (etymologically, “what is said toward”) presents the emerging *philia* as the result of an aural incorporation—like Echo’s affective ingestion—aiming at assimilation, as also suggested by the initial triple alliteration of *ph*, which underscores the reduction of Neoptolemus’s own voice to a property (*philtaton*, not just “dearest” but “very much mine”). Neoptolemus deceptively enables this logic. When, introducing himself, he uses an epithet (*peri-rrhoutou* “surrounded with water” 239) for his island, Skyros, previously used, in the play’s first line, for Lemnos, he prompts Philoctetes to address him properly, with two forms of *philos*: “O son of the dearest father, of the dear land” (*ô philtatou pai patros, ô philês chthonos* 242). Uttering the phrase “of the dear land” (*ô philês chthonos*), Philoctetes is, in a sense, conflated

not diminish, that subversiveness. On anorexia as anarchic resistance, see Anderson 2010, 53–55.

26. One could add that the “presence” of Echo in 186–89 may also be conjured by the abundance of phonic repetition (*a* and *e* sounds) in *an-êkēst’ a-merimnēta t’echôn barē* that has been observed by Kitzinger (2008, 81).

27. Coming from *cum* and *panis*, “companion” in English is an exact equivalent of *sun-trophos*.

28. On Philoctetes’ voice in the parodos, see esp. Nooter 2012, 127. In 205–6 the phrase *bal-lei ballei m’ etuma / phthonga* (“a true voice hits, hits me”) replaces Philoctetes with a “shout” as the performer of the act of shooting, a “subject.” Echo’s becoming voice through starvation is “an experiment in the impersonal, in the diminution of the ‘I’ that gives way to an intensified life”—precisely what anorexia is about according to Arsić (2008, 44), following Deleuze and Parnet.

ing the land of his new *philos* with his own island, a steady companion, like the disease. Philoctetes' encounter with Neoptolemus resembles the process that Derrida calls "friendship of self." His compulsive use of forms of *philos* amounts to an attempt to claim ownership over Neoptolemus, to make him an item in the cave through a performative utterance, as though the repeated *philos*—"friend" and a possessive—could instantly objectify him. This is the digestive aspiration that lurks behind Philoctetes' archival ingestion of Neoptolemus's voice, a trace of his new friend.²⁹

The formal texture of Philoctetes' first monologue, where he rehashes the traumas of his wound and abandonment, visualizes a persistent circling back, which conjures the shape of the cave and of the island, as well as the stomach, the spaces he himself embodies as he seeks to envelop Neoptolemus as "possession" (*ktêma*) and food. In this passage, the almost uninterrupted chain of echo-effects encapsulates Philoctetes' attempt to make Neoptolemus a "congeneric double" (276–97):

σὺ δὴ, τέκνον, ποίαν μ' ἀνάστασιν δοκεῖς
 αὐτῶν βεβῶτων ἐξ ὕπνου στήναι τότε;
 ποῖ' ἐκδακρῦσαι, ποῖ' ἀποιμῶζαι κακά;
 ὀρώντα μὲν ναῦς, ἅς ἔχων ἐναυστόλουν,
 πάσας βεβῶσας, ἄνδρα δ' οὐδέν' ἔντοπον, 280
 οὐχ ὅστις ἀρκέσειεν, οὐδ' ὅστις νόσου
 κάμνοντι συλλάβοιτο· πάντα δὲ σκοπῶν
 ἠὔρισκον οὐδὲν πλην ἀνιᾶσθαι παρόν. . . .
 ὁ μὲν χρόνος νυν διὰ χρόνου προὔβαινέ μοι. . . . 285
 . . . γαστρὶ μὲν τὰ σύμφορα
 τόξον τόδ' ἐξηύρισκε, τὰς ὑποπτέρους
 βάλλον πελείας· πρὸς δὲ τοῦθ', ὅ μοι βάλαι
 νευροσπαδῆς ἄτρακτος, αὐτὸς ἂν τάλας 290
 εἰλυόμην, δύστηνον ἐξέλκων πόδα,
 πρὸς τοῦτ' ἄν. . . .
 . . . εἶτα πῦρ ἂν οὐ παρῆν, 295
 ἀλλ' ἐν πέτροισι πέτρον ἐκτρίβων μόλις
 ἔφην' ἄφαντον φῶς, ὃ καὶ σῶζει μ' αἰεί.³⁰

What kind of rising (*ana-stasin*) from sleep, son (*teknon*), do you imagine I arose (*stênai*) to at that time, after they were gone (*bebôtôn*)? Which

29. Philoctetes is the character who most frequently uses forms and cognates of *philos* in the play.

30. In 276, I keep the transmitted reading *su* ("you").

(*poi*) troubles do you think I shed tears over, which (*poi*) do you think I lamented, seeing that the ships with which I sailed were all gone (*bebôsas*), that there was no man in place (*en-topon*), nobody *who* (*hos-tis*) could defend me, nobody *who* (*hos-tis*) could share (*sul-laboito*) the disease while I was suffering? And looking in all directions I found nothing present but distress. . . . Time (*chronos*) after time (*chronou*) passed for me. . . . This bow (*toxon*) found the things that were expedient (*ta sum-phora*) for my belly (*gastri*), striking (*ballon*) winged doves; whatever my arrow drawn by the string would strike (*baloi*), I would crawl to it (*pros . . . touth'*), miserable, dragging my wretched foot to it (*pros tout'*). . . . Then there wouldn't be fire, but I, rubbing a rock against rocks (*en petroisi petron*), would, with pain, light (*ephên'*) an invisible (*a-phanton*) light, which always saves me.

The various doublings accumulated in this monologue—*poi . . . poi*; *ana-stasin . . . stênai*; *bebôtôn . . . bebôsas*; *hos-tis . . . hos-tis*; *chronos . . . chronou*; *ballon . . . baloi*; *pros . . . touth'* . . . *pros tout'*; *petroisi petron*; *ephên' a-phanton*—convey the repetitious loop of trauma circling around the snakebite and the abandonment, the “origins” of his condition, which Philoctetes recounts in the preceding lines. In their circularity, which these verbal doublings intimate, the island and the cave do not simply hold, but materialize the archive fever that besieges him. In particular, describing how he crawled toward the food supplied to him by his (in)animate helper, the “bow” (*toxon* 288), Philoctetes demarcates a circular space through the repeated prepositional phrase *pros . . . touth'* (“to it” 289) / *pros tout'* (“to it” 292). The traumatic loop coincides with the overlapping hollows of the cave, where the bow (*toxon* but also *biós*) is stored, and of the belly—the *gastêr* evoked in line 287—where the food (*bíos* “sustenance”) is swallowed. Affectively moving toward Neoptolemus, seeking to transform him, the *teknon* (“child, son”), into another *toxon* (“bow”), Philoctetes is once again moving toward a source of nourishment, *ta sum-phora* (287)—“expedient things,” but also, in a sense, “com-panions”—encircling him in a gastric cavity, as the doubling of “toward” words (*pros . . . /pros . . .*) suggests. Neoptolemus is “in place” (*en-topon* 280) to “share” (*sul-laboito* 282) the disease “with” Philoctetes and become the saving light made “invisible” (*a-phanton* 297) by his incorporation—as invisible as the disease itself.³¹ Re-enacting his disease’s cannibalistic friendship, Philoctetes is not just the victim of the loop of archive fever, but an embodiment of it as a circular space, the stomach, an organic machine animated by a compulsion to own and digest.

31. The *figura etymologica* (*ephên' a-phanton*) intensifies the suggestion of incorporation: see Telò 2018, 138.

Philoctetes conceives of pity, the feeling he expects from Neoptolemus, as an object of consumption. Referring to others who have come to Lemnos before his new friend, Philoctetes points out that they offered *oiktos* (*oiktirantes* 309)—that is, pity without obligation to take action—together with “just a little food” (*kai boras meros* 308), a phrase that makes him loop back to the scene of the abandonment, when the Greeks, as he puts it, left him on the island with “just a little help of food” (*ti kai boras / ep-ôphelêma smikron* 274–75).³² There is an obvious parallelism between the visitors’ partial affective commitment and the limited material support they provided. For Philoctetes, they were just a small meal, as it were, allowing themselves to be eaten only up to a point. One could say they remained at the cave’s threshold. Pity whets his cannibalistic urges even as he “feeds the voracious disease (*adêphagon noson*)” with his own flesh (313). Neoptolemus appeals to Philoctetes’ hungry affective “stomach” when, faking an animus against Agamemnon and Menelaus, he says “I wish I could fill up (*plêrôsai*) my anger” (324), but this ostensible identification marks a step toward his becoming food for archival caves—Philoctetes’ body or his abode. Later on, Philoctetes will use the adjective *plêrês* (“full”) cognate with *plêrôsai*, to depict his cave as “fullest of my pain” (*plêrestaton . . . / lupas tas ap’ emou* 1087–88), an image of an archive, gastric or otherwise, crammed with emotional *trophê* (“food, nourishment”).

For Philoctetes, Neoptolemus’s entrance into his cave is an overdetermined gesture, at once a kind of eating, an incorporation of a prosthetic organ, and the *petite mort* of intercourse. When, after announcing Odysseus’s impending arrival, the Merchant, his emissary in disguise, leaves Philoctetes and Neoptolemus alone again, an intense intimacy unfolds mediated by the bow. Railing against Odysseus, Philoctetes calls forth the *echidna* responsible for his festering wound, the snake that has made him “footless,” an obvious image of castration: “I’d rather listen to the snake (*echidnês*), most hateful (*echthistês*) to me, which made me footless (*a-poun*) in this way” (631–32). This evocation of phallic surrogates—an extremity and a creeping animal—eroticizes the rest of the scene, where, as the sexualized language suggests, Neoptolemus appears titillated by the bow, the prosthetic replacement of Philoctetes’ lost foot: “Is it possible for me to take a close look at it (*kanguthen thean labein*), and hold it (*bastasai*), and prostrate myself before it (*pros-kusai*) as though it were a god?” (656–57); “Yes, I desire (*erô*) it” (660). The conclusion of the dialogue brings this erotic energy into Philoctetes’ cave.³³ After he promises to reward

32. On this meaning of *oiktos* (which, in the play, is often pitted against *eleos*), see Prauscello 2010.

33. I disagree with Kosak (1999, 96n7), who claims that the play “deliberately avoids [homoerotic] suggestions.” The sexual innuendos are unconsciously brought out by Austin

Neoptolemus by letting him fondle the bow (667, 669), Neoptolemus voices the objectifying power of friendship inscribed in Philoctetes' name: "I don't regret having . . . *taken* you as a *friend* (*labôn philon*), for whoever knows how to reciprocate the good he has received would be a *friend better than any possession* (*ktêmatos kreissôn philos*)" (671–73).³⁴ In the last two lines of the scene (674–75), marking the characters' movement inside, Neoptolemus, who believes he has "taken" Philoctetes and the bow, becomes an item in the cave, his entrance satisfying the "desire" (*pothei*) of Philoctetes' illness, as he puts it, to "take (in)" (*labein*) a new attendant.³⁵ The cave is a quasi-gastric archive, but also something between a tomb and a bedroom.³⁶ Neoptolemus's entrance into this charged offstage space thus visualizes Philoctetes' acquisition of his new friend as an incorporation of the other that is at the same time an ingestion of food, a prosthetic assimilation, and the *petite mort* of sex.³⁷ Enfolding Neoptolemus in the cave, Philoctetes realizes his cannibalistic *philia* as consuming intercourse, addressing the urgent demands of surviving organs and of the disease, and introducing an additional substitute for the lost bodily part, another organ, as it were.

We are invited to see this archiving of Neoptolemus, which is charged with mourning's digestive impulse, as a reparative ingestion, a way to fulfill a primordial hunger—for the maternal breast, the archetypal object of mourning.³⁸ Before Neoptolemus enters the cave, Philoctetes addresses him as "you, the only one who has granted (*dedôkas*) that I behold this sunlight, see the land of Oeta, the elderly father, friends (*philous*), you who raised me up (*an-estêsas*) while I was in the power of my enemies" (663–66). Treating actions that have not yet taken place almost as past, Philoctetes seems to react to the loss of someone or something treasured, memorializing its services. Neoptolemus is addressed, but he is not spoken *to* as much as he is spoken *of* or *about*, the discursive mode typical of mourning, which takes on a kind of instrumentalizing

(2011, 106), when he refers to Neoptolemus's "lust . . . to touch a weapon, and especially this fabled weapon." The erotic energy in the scene can be linked with the plot's enactment of the *ephebeia* rite, which has been discussed by Vidal-Naquet (1988).

34. On the punning encryption of Philoctetes' name in these lines, see J. Daly 1982.

35. On Sophocles' persistent play with the meanings of *labein* in this scene and throughout the play, see Goldhill 2012, 64–65. See also Greengard 1987, 60.

36. On the cave as a tomb, see Greengard 1987, 41–43; Segal 1995, 116; and Nooter 2012, 129.

37. Adhering to the traditional moralistic reading of *philia* in the play as social bond and reciprocity, Hawkins (1999, 350) notes that "Philoctetes invites Neoptolemus to come with him into his cave, into his inner experience"; see also Austin 2011, 109–10.

38. As influentially discussed by Klein in her theorization of the *infantile depressive position* (1940); see Wohl 1998, 128–30 (on Euripides' *Alcestis*). On the breast as the inaccessible maternal Thing (as opposed to milk), see Copjec 2002, 59.

perspective.³⁹ Neoptolemus's entrance into the cave serves this impulse for mourning internalization, which is in the mode of totalizing assimilation, of (impossible) digestion. Mourned, or aspirationally digested (that is, possessed and lost at the same time), Neoptolemus acts as a provisional substitute for the primordial ingestion, whose loss can never be fully mourned. In the stasimon that follows the disappearance of the two friends into the enclosure of the archive, the Chorus returns to the description of Philoctetes' routine hardships—his wandering around in search for sustenance “like a child *without* a dear nurse” (*pais ater hōs philas tithēnas* 703) after an attack of his disease.⁴⁰ The adjective *philas* (“dear”) evokes the just-acquired “friend” Neoptolemus as filling the absence not just of a nurse, but also of the organ that is behind her name (*tithēnē* “nurse” is cognate with *thêlê* “teat”). Neoptolemus thus operates as a vicarious satisfaction of the desire for the archetypal meal, but, bringing into the cave multiple prosthetic organs (a foot/phallus and a breast), he may also produce a multiplication of the organic desiring, of the body's demands, which include those of Philoctetes' disease.

Having observed the ingestive impulse in Philoctetes' melancholic friendship, I now wish to heed the almost simultaneous emetic moments, gestures of spitting out that inform the plot's *jouissant* movement, its claustrophobic back and forth, and materialize a desperate aspiration toward a disembodied archive, or a body without organs.

During Philoctetes' fit of delirium, the contradictions of his affective cannibalism are heightened, producing something similar to a bulimic attack. In the stasimon referred to previously, we hear from the Chorus that Philoctetes “never lifted the sown food of the sacred earth, nor any of the other things that we bread-eating men enjoy, except for the times when, with the winged arrows of the bow, he was able to provide food for his belly” (707–11). Bookended by *ou phorban* (“never . . . food” 707) and *gastri phorban* (“food for his belly” 711), this long sentence delineates a cycle of “non-eating” and “eating,” an alternation at play when Philoctetes is assaulted by the disease. This demonic entity “comes through” (*di-erchetai*, / *di-erchetai* 743–44) with “devouring” force, as indicated by Philoctetes' cry *brukomai* (“I am devoured” 745) and his later reference to its “having filled itself up” (*ex-e-plêsthê* 759), which resonates with his description of his cave as “fullest” (*plêrestaton* 1087) of pain. After scream-

39. In the funeral oration for Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida fights against the logic of mourning by seeing the friend's task as “to address oneself directly to the other . . . before speaking of him” (Derrida 2001, 200). See Blanchot 1997, 291: “Friendship . . . passes by way of the recognition of the common strangeness that *does not allow us to speak of our friends but only to speak to them*. . . . Speaking to us, they reserve . . . an infinite distance.”

40. This is part of a catalog of lacks: cf. 691, 696, 703, 707, and 714. See Kitzinger 2008, 13.

ing *brukomai*, Philoctetes launches into the most famous inarticulate sounds in Greek tragedy: *papai*, / *apappapai*, *papa papa papa papai* . . . *pappapap-papai* (745–46, 754). We can certainly read *pai* and *pappa*, “son” and “father” (“papa”), into this sequence, as commentators have done.⁴¹ But the serially repeated sound *pa-* may also cry out, in an infantile onomatopoeic form, the lack expressed by *ater* . . . *philas tithênas* (“without . . . a dear nurse” 703).⁴² While the “m” sound is associated with “the child’s first nourishment . . . its mother’s breast,” as Otto Jespersen has noted, we also find that connection with “the other labial sound,” the “p,” as in English “pap,” Latin *papilla*, and “words like . . . Latin *pappare* (orig. ‘to suck’).”⁴³ In Greek, this sound is found in the *pa-* root of the verb *pateomai* (“to eat”), which frequently appears in tragedy. As Philoctetes is “eaten” or “re-eaten” by the disease, he calls for the maternal breast (*pa-pa* . . . *pa-ppa* . . . *pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa* . . . *pap-pa-pap-pa-pa*, etc.). At the same time, by taking in the disease’s snaky bite, once again, he himself is “eating” it, over-stuffing himself in a manner corresponding to the overstretching of sound. But this overeating is mixed with—almost indistinguishable from—regurgitation or removal, as suggested by the impression of an alpha privative in *apappapai*; the imperatives *apamêson* (“cut off [the foot]” 749) and *pataxon* (“strike [the sword against the foot]” 748); and the labials themselves qua spitting sounds. “Cutting off” the festering *foot* means also to cast out the poisonous *food* as soon as it is ingested. The illness seems, thus, to provoke a bulimic dynamic captured by the scream itself as the intensity that registers the simultaneity of stuffing and emptying.

Bulimia and the screaming mouth are both ways for the entire body to attempt to escape from itself, to dissipate its organic structure.⁴⁴ Philoctetes’ disease, an enemy in need of constant feeding and liable to be confused with

41. See, e.g., Greengard 1987, 238; Worman 2000, 26; and Schein 2013, 238. The sounds are at the same time an expression of pain’s “resistance to language,” as discussed by Scarry (1985, 5).

42. In 742–50, Pucci (2003, 247) notices “dental and labial sounds, the first sounds of childhood.” According to Worman (2000, 26), *pappapai* signals how the disease threatens “a reversion to a state of nondifferentiation between subject and object, self and other, child and parent [i.e., father].” For other readings of these extraordinary lines, see Nooter 2012, 135–36, and Payne 2013, 47–48.

43. Jespersen 1922, 158. For *pappare*, see Plautus, *Epidicus* 727, and Persius, *Satires* 3.7; cf. *pappas* (“food”) in Varro, *Menippean Satires*, fragment 13 Riese. Jakobson (1962) analyzes the reduplicated infantile words *papa* and *mama* across multiple languages; Philoctetes, I argue, seems to suggest that *papa* is, to an extent, always “haunted” by *mama*. See Spielrein (2015b, 246), who suggests that both *mama* and *papa* “owe their origin to suckling.”

44. According to Deleuze (2003, 28), “the entire body escapes through the screaming mouth.” Deleuze reads “vomiting and excreting” as acts “in which the body attempts to escape from itself *through* one of its organs” (16).

the organs themselves—as when he rebukes his foot for the “horrible things” it will do to him (786)—is also a peculiar ally in the process of self-dissolution. Just after Philoctetes collapses on the ground, asking the earth to “receive [him] dead” (819), Neoptolemus describes the sweat dripping over his body and the flood of blood erupting from his heel (see *par-errhōgen* “[it] burst forth” and *haimo-rrhagēs* “bleeding violently” in 824–25). These are images of a body reduced to flux, to liquid intensity. It is a flux, still expressive of the logic of repetition, that we can see reflected in the prolonged seriality of *pa-pa . . . pa-ppa . . . pa-pa-pa-pa*, etc., and brought out as an object of fantasy in the imperative *em-prêson* (“burn [me]” 801), a plea for Neoptolemus to throw Philoctetes in the Lemnian fire, as Philoctetes had lit the pyre of his friend Heracles (the original possessor of the bow) to end his pains. No other wish for self-annihilation could correspond to Derrida’s archive fever better than this burning regression to an act of burning archived in Philoctetes’ cave of memories. But the desire captured by the imperative *em-prêson* may be not so much for self-annihilation per se as for a becoming fire—another expression of the body without organs (“no foot, no phallus, no breast”)⁴⁵ that the bulimic cycle strives for. Absorbing the vocative *pai* (“child” 750), with which Philoctetes addresses Neoptolemus after asking him to amputate his foot, the interjection *apappapai . . . papai* formalizes the transformation of the friend into an organ, which his entrance into the cave had already suggested. Ingested as foot/phallus and maternal breast, Neoptolemus is implicated in the cycle, but soon—by its logic of dissolution—will be ejected from Philoctetes’ stomach.

This expulsion takes place after Neoptolemus’s revelation of the truth, when Philoctetes reviles him in an emetic movement that hollows his body of the ingested friend and disease fused together (927–31):

ὦ πῦρ σὺ καὶ πᾶν δεῖμα καὶ πανουργίας
δεινῆς τέχνημι’ ἔχθιστον, οἶά μ’ εἰργάσω,
οἶ’ ἠπάτηκας· οὐδ’ ἐπαισχύνη μ’ ὀρώων
τὸν προστρόπαιον, τὸν ἰκέτην, ὃ σκέτλιε;
ἀπεστέρηκας τὸν βίον τὰ τόξ’ ἐλών. 930

You fire (*pur*), utterly fearful object (*deima*), and most hateful (*echthiston*) handiwork (*technêma*) of fearfully clever (*deinês*) wrongdoing, *what things you did to me (hoia m’ eirgasô)*! How you have deceived me! You wicked

45. On this phrase of Artaud’s, see note 4 of this chapter, and the introduction, section 3, note 115.

man, aren't you ashamed to look at me, the one turned toward you for purification (*pros-tropaion*), the suppliant (*hiketên*)? Having taken my bow, you have taken away (*ap-esterêkas*) my life.

Among the three objects or quasi-objects (*pur*, *deima*, *technêma*) to which Neoptolemus is equated in this feverish invective, *technêma* ("handiwork") signals his current captivity in Philoctetes' archive, the cave, which, as we discovered through Neoptolemus's eyes at the beginning of the play, contains, in fact, a wooden *technêma*—his drinking cup. It is as though this new *technêma* were now suddenly expelled from Philoctetes' *thêsaurisma*, his archive.⁴⁶ But another "object," manufactured by his anger, comes into view while being expelled, in the phonemic sequence of *deinês technêm' echthiston*, which anagrammatically materializes the *echidna*.⁴⁷ Having incorporated Neoptolemus into his own subject world, Philoctetes suggests on some level that he has taken in another castrating snake. As a mode of cryptic signification, the anagram, in fact, constitutes the "hidden serpent" (*kruphios* . . . *ophis* 1328) that wounded Philoctetes. It erupts with the same unexpected impetus as Neoptolemus's betrayal, reinscribing on the verbal surface a trace of the archived bite, the previously mentioned *charagma* ("mark, impression" 267), which has engraved itself on Philoctetes' skin. As suggested by the concentration of harsh guttural and aspirated sounds, this burning re-impression of the bite generates something like an emetic spasm—an effect intensified by the spewing that the *apo-* in *ap-esterêkas* ("you have taken away" 931) conveys. Vomiting upsets the logic of digestion and organic teleology by provoking a death-driven looping back—an exit through an entrance, a spewing at the site of swallowing—opening a hole in the body, initiating a scooping-out, engendering the *jouissance* of bulimic disincorporation.⁴⁸ When Neoptolemus cries out *papai*, Philoctetes, sensing betrayal (895), responds by splitting the interjection and casting off "the child," disincorporating him (from himself): "What is it, child? Where have you gone with your speech?" (*ti d' estin, ô pai? poi pot' ex-ebês logôi?* 896).⁴⁹ What gets removed in the regurgitation of the friend-snake-disease is

46. Austin (2011, 140) observes that "the *technêma*" (that is, Odysseus's deceptive plot) has been *exposed*" (my emphasis). I believe that the symbolism of the verbal echo is more pregnant and physical, signaling that Neoptolemus as the *technêma* (the subject morphed into object) is being spat out.

47. The superlative *echthistos* is used in reference to the *echidna* in 632–33 (*echthistês* . . . *echidnês*), where Odysseus is compared unfavorably to the snake. See p. 146, this volume.

48. See Nancy (2008a, 55), who groups under the "topic" of the body "its every access . . . its *fort/da*, its coming-and-going, swallowing-and-spitting."

49. In this perspective, Neoptolemus's subsequent "difficulty" (*taporon*) in speaking (*trepein epos* 897) may suggest an emetic discomfort.

something like an organ, as implied by the expression *hoia m' ergasô* ("What did you do to me?" 928), an echo of Philoctetes' apostrophe to his foot during the bout of illness: "Papai! O foot, what bad things have you done to me!" (*papai mal', ô pous, hoia m' ergasêi kaka* 786). In Philoctetes' angry "esophageal revolt,"⁵⁰ we find a version of Echo's anarchivic archive, which liberates what has been ingested from the danger of being digested while dissipating the containing body.

In the rest of the action, Philoctetes' attempts to take Neoptolemus in again, an alternating proximity and distance between the two characters, prolongs the play's affective rhythm of bulimic ingestion. Continuing his tirade against Neoptolemus, Philoctetes demands the bow (and his foot) back with a repeated *apo-dos* (*apo-dos, hiknoumai s' apo-dos* "Give it back, give it back, I beseech you" 932), a verbal form that is also, with a shift in the accent, the genitive of *a-pous* (*a-podos* "footless"). Coming just after *ap-esterêkas* ("you have taken away"), the word captures the simultaneity of taking in and spitting out, acquisition and emetic thrust—an effect that is heightened when Philoctetes again begs Neoptolemus, "Give the bow *back*; and now, come on, become again *in* yourself" (<all> *apo-dos. alla nun et' en sautôi genou* 950).⁵¹ While *apo-dos* and *en* concern giving back and consequently taking in, *apo-* and the alpha privative in the cryptic subtext (*a-podos*) convey distance, ejection; together, these effects intimate the bulimic circle. In demanding the bow—and the foot—Philoctetes, of course, also demands the return of Neoptolemus, asking him to give himself back, as it were.⁵² "O cave," Philoctetes exclaims, ". . . once again (*authis au palin*) I will enter you naked, having no food (*trophên*)!" (952–53). "Food" here includes not just the animals killed with the bow, but the bow and Neoptolemus themselves, the prostheses swallowed by Philoctetes' archival cave, giving him nourishment. The masochistic loop of input and output also emerges at the end of the last stasimon, when, after imploring the Chorus to "send [him], from somewhere, a sword, an ax, or some arrows" (1204–5), i.e., a weapon that, like the bow, will be incorporated as food, friend, and prosthetic organ, Philoctetes reveals his intention to use it to sever his head and limbs (1207).⁵³ This perverse impulse to take in and cast off gives Philoctetes' bodily archive and the play itself their characteristic bulimic rhythm. In the dialogue following the final stasimon, the phrase that Odysseus uses, with alarm, to describe Neoptolemus's movement toward

50. I borrow this phrase from Brinkema (2011).

51. I print *sautôi* ("yourself") transmitted by the majority of the manuscripts.

52. Cf. 84, where Odysseus commands Neoptolemus, "Give yourself to me" (*dos moi seauton*).

53. In 1126, Philoctetes refers to the bow as "my nourishment" (*tan eman . . . trophan*).

Philoctetes' cave (*au palin-tropos* "back again" in 1222) is echoed at the end of the line, brusquely interrupted by Odysseus, that reveals Neoptolemus's intention to return the bow: "[to the man] from whom I took (*elabon*) this bow, back again (*authis palin* 1232)—" The combination of adverbs, *authis palin*, marks a turning point in the plot, a return of the bow—and of "fullness" for Philoctetes' cannibalistic archive after the earlier void signaled when he proclaimed himself emptied of *trophê* ("food") "again" (*authis au palin* 952). The *palin* phrases, as well as *palin-tropos*, aptly describe the "backward" movement of the emptying that follows each stuffing, an emetic rebellion that makes digestion impossible.⁵⁴

The two edges of the loop are brought close together when Philoctetes, a hybrid of Echo, Actaeon, and Robinson Crusoe, offers himself as an object of ingestion.⁵⁵ As Derrida discusses in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Crusoe, besieged on an island, "is afraid of dying a living death by being swallowed . . . into the deep belly of the earth or the sea or . . . some living . . . animal." But he contemplates this threat "with such compulsion that one wonders if the threat is not also nurtured like a promise, and therefore a desire."⁵⁶ In Sophocles' play, this insular death drive emerges in the last stasimon, where Philoctetes delivers himself to the wild animals of Lemnos, assuring them (1152–54) that they should no longer be afraid to come to him, inviting a perverse form of *philia*.⁵⁷ In declaring, "Come (*herpete*), now it is fine to satiate your mouth on my quivering flesh as you please, *reciprocal murder for murder* (*anti-phonon*)" (1155–57), he offers himself as a *sun-trophos* (*com-panion*) in the sense of becoming their *trophê* (*panis* "bread").⁵⁸ In a Levinasian perspective, Philoctetes' offer of his own flesh captures the subject's desperate attempt

54. The sound *pa-* in *palin* may evoke the stuffing/emptying dynamic captured by the labial sounds of *pappapappai* vel sim. See 1169–70, where Philoctetes reacts to the Chorus's observation that "it is pitiable to nourish (*boskein*) . . . [one's] burden": "Again, again, you have reminded me of the old pain" (*palin palin palaion al- / gêm' hup-emmasas*). The striking alliteration disperses the traces of infantile hunger (*pa . . . pa . . . pa*) in the delirium scene.

55. For a comparative analysis of *Philoctetes* and *Robinson Crusoe*, see Carson 1986.

56. Derrida 2011, 77.

57. Derrida (2011, 68) observes that, as an effect of his insular living, Crusoe is affected by "a compulsive and repetitive automatism of auto-persecutory perversion"

58. The connection between "eating *with*" and "being eaten *by*" is already implicit in the address that opens Philoctetes' monologue after Neoptolemus's revelation: *ô xun-ousiai / thêrôn oreiôn* ("O companies of mountain animals" 936–37). Here the search for compassion in the name of shared vulnerability comes across as a desire for a carnal co-being on the border with mutual devouring. Consider also the slippage between *trophê* and *sun-trophos* emerging between the lines of the parodos, discussed previously.

to break through the skin and make room for the other.⁵⁹ This is an encounter with the other where being ingested is, in a way, also a form of ingesting that hollows the body. Sharp teeth—bestial organs—are taken in, as in Ovid's account of Actaeon's death (*Metamorphoses* 3.236), while flesh is scooped out, and the gap between ingestion and ejection shrinks in a sort of displaced, accelerated bulimia, approaching Echo's simultaneous stuffing and emptying. To define the reciprocity that binds him to the wild animals, Philoctetes deploys the epithet *anti-phonon* ("reciprocal murder for murder" 1156)—strikingly resonant with *anti-tupon* ("echoing" 693), which, in the first stasimon, modifies *stonon* ("groaning" 693), in a blatant evocation of Echo.⁶⁰ In a surge of archive fever, cryptically asking for another snakebite through the verb *herpete* (literally "crawl" 1155), Philoctetes points to the disease's own contradictory role as subject and object of ingestion, its devouring his body and being incorporated at the same time. Besides pointing to the ingestive force of Echo, the intratextual echo between *anti-phonon* and *anti-tupon* reveals Philoctetes' ultimate archival fantasy—escaping the prison of the body through a bulimic reduction of his flesh to pure intensity, an "impression" of a sound (*anti-tupon* "echoing" but also "impressed upon").

Even before Neoptolemus expresses his decision to go *back* and return the bow, we perceive his gradual re-ingestion in two moments of ostensible distance from Philoctetes. As he listens to Philoctetes' pleas, Neoptolemus confesses, "Some fearsome pity (*oiktos*) for this man has fallen upon (*em-peptôke*) me, not now for the first time, but even long ago" (965–66). "Fearsome pity" is perceived by Neoptolemus as biting into him with the voracity of the *echidna*, the snake hidden in Philoctetes, which periodically "falls upon," i.e., attacks him (*em-pesoi* 698).⁶¹ Later, as he realizes that Neoptolemus is about to leave together with Odysseus and the bow, Philoctetes directs a last, desperate appeal to his lost friend, showing the same hunger for his voice as Echo for Narcissus's: "Offspring of Achilles, will I no longer be addressed by your voice, but will you depart in this manner?" (1066–67). Unable to shut Neoptolemus's ears, Odysseus attempts to protect him (and himself) by warning about eye contact (*mê pros-leusse* "Don't look in his direction!" 1068)—the call of the other, which is layered here with quasi-erotic power.⁶² But it is probably too

59. Levinas sees subjects as "insufficiently open . . . suffering of constriction in [their] skin" (1998b, 110).

60. Carson observes that *anti-phonos* indicates a "perversion of reciprocity"—i.e., the reciprocity of aristocratic obligations—that, in her view, is symbolized by Echo (1986, 256).

61. On *deinos* ("fearsome") as a link between Neoptolemus's pity and Philoctetes' disease, see Worman 2000, 27.

62. On the eye as the call of alterity, see Levinas 1969, 66; on eyes (and all the senses, in general) as orifices, see Derrida 1991, 114, and 2005, 25.

late. Although Neoptolemus proposes a delay to give Philoctetes a chance to come along voluntarily, he is, on the surface, still obedient to Odysseus's plan to take the bow. Yet he prefaces his remarks by mentioning without denying what he imagines Odysseus will say about him, that he is "full (*pleôs*) of pity (*oiktou*)" (1074). With this phrase Neoptolemus equates himself not just to the cave, which only a few lines later Philoctetes will characterize as "fullest (*plêrestaton*) of pain" (1087), but also to some of the objects it contains, the rags "full (*plea*) of some heavy sore (*bareias . . . nosêleias*)" (39). The resonance between *oiktou pleôs* ("full of pity") and *bareias . . . nosêleias plea* suggests that Neoptolemus is back in the cave, supplying food to the archive's desiring machine. It is as though, in the act of speaking, Philoctetes were gulping Neoptolemus down, enclosing him in his cave's hollow—ready to start the bulimic cycle again.

As the friend is re-ingested, the specter of emetic ejection reappears. After Neoptolemus solemnly commits to returning the bow, he is greeted by Philoctetes with *ô philtat' eipôn* ("O you who have said dearest things" 1290). The grammatical ambiguity of the elided form *philtat'*—a neuter vocative plural (*philtata*) overlapping with the masculine vocative singular (*philtate*)—merges the "dearest things," Neoptolemus's words, with the objects they concern, the returned arrows, and, in turn, with Neoptolemus himself, as well as with Patroclus, Achilles' *philtata* ("[his] dearest thing"), referred to earlier (434). Later, when Philoctetes promises that, by taking him home, Neoptolemus will obtain a double "gain" (*ktêsêi* 1370), from him and his father, Neoptolemus repeats that his goal is to persuade Philoctetes to set sail for Troy "together with this man [i.e., himself], a friend" (*philou met' andros toude* 1375). The proximity between *ktêsêi* ("you will acquire") and *philou* ("[with] a friend") here reinscribes Philoctetes' name and the connection it makes between friendship and acquisition. But this reingestion is troubled by Philoctetes' impulse to cast out the commodities he has just taken back in. As Odysseus suddenly reappears, Philoctetes gets ready to strike him with an arrow, causing Neoptolemus to intervene with, "Ah, do not, not (*mê*), by the gods (*pros theôn*), release (*meth-êis*) the arrow (*belos*)" (1300),⁶³ to which he responds, "Release (*meth-es*) me (*me*), by the gods (*pros theôn*), my hand, dearest child (*teknon*)" (1301). Emitting, like Echo, traces of Neoptolemus's words (*pros theôn; meth-êis/meth-es; mê/me*), while trying to launch his arrows, Philoctetes appears poised to expel the friend, the "dearest child" that he reingested only moments ago. The appearance of *belos* ("arrow") and *teknon* ("child") in the same position strengthens the parallelism between non-human

63. I print the transmitted reading *meth-êis*.

and human commodities. Philoctetes' line reconfigures the alarmed Neoptolemus's syntactical choppiness, which is in the anxious service of restraint, as something like an emetic strain.

Intervening *ex machina*, just as Philoctetes and Neoptolemus are about to exit together, Heracles arrests not only their quasi-elopement but also the play's bulimic cycle, seemingly killing tragic *jouissance* with the prospect of a cathartic future.⁶⁴ Bookending his anapestic prelude (1409–17) with commands to listen to his *muthoi*—authoritative speech acts, in the Homeric sense—Heracles urges Philoctetes and Neoptolemus to let themselves be absorbed into the teleological design of the *muthos*, of the plot.⁶⁵ Corresponding to the Greek army, in which they are about to be absorbed, as the anapestic, marching rhythm announces, this plot fits the Aristotelian model of a composite whole where all the parts (characters and actions) are arranged together according to the laws of decorum.⁶⁶ In the last, anapestic exhortation of the Chorus of sailors—“Let's go now all together” (*chôrômen dê pantes aolleis* 1469)—we see, in fact, a plurality of parts gathering themselves into a unity, forming a *consensus*.⁶⁷ What makes this plot come together is the future announced by Heracles, the healing of Philoctetes, his catharsis.⁶⁸ Promising to put an end to his devouring, castrating disease (1424), Heracles foretells the end of the loop, of the affective bulimia that conforms to the cyclical rhythm of his *nosos*. The wound that Heracles promises to close is the symbol of the *jouissance* stemming from Philoctetes' constantly delayed assimilation of Neoptolemus, ingested and never digested. Rescuing Philoctetes and “his

64. The intervention of Heracles, the only *deus ex machina* in the extant Sophoclean corpus, is notoriously “problematic” with critics—divided, as usual, between optimists and pessimists—debating its closural force and its dramatic, psychological, and ethical credibility. On this debate, see, among others, Easterling 1978, 36–37; Winnington-Ingram 1980, 302; Blundell 1989, 224; Pucci 2003, 320–22; and Schein 2001, 2005, and 2013, 28–31.

65. Pucci (1994, 37–41) has argued that the arrival of Heracles effects a sharp generic transition—from the world of tragedy, i.e., “from a bitter view of the business of life,” to that of epic. For Hoppin (1990), the blunt transition is marked by the anapests in Heracles' speech, which calm down the frenzied atmosphere of the trochaics of 1402–5.

66. Cf. esp. *Poetics* 1451a29–34, where Aristotle conceives of the tragic (and epic) plot as a “whole” (*to holon*) whose parts ought to be “fitted together” (*sun-estanaî*) according to the laws of “necessity” and “probability.”

67. The Aristotelian *muthos*, a “coming together of parts” or *su-stasis*, corresponds to *consensus* in the Rancièrean sense of the “distribution of the sensible”—a naturalized, implicit system of aesthetic value that holds *together* the social order by policing it, turning it into a unified whole: see Rancière 2011, 97. On Rancière's reading of the Aristotelian *muthos*, see Panagia 2018, 42–51.

68. In Heracles' promise of catharsis, there is an allusion to his role as a medical *alexi-kakos* (“evil-avertter”) and perhaps to healing treatments in the Asclepeion—the Athenian sanctuary of Asclepius close to the theater of Dionysus: see Mitchell-Boyask 2007.

festering foot” from pain (1378–79) means stopping the pleasure of friendship’s compulsive ingestion. This dynamic maps onto a perverse joy in never fully possessing or absorbing the characters we take in as spectators and readers, through our eyes and ears, the orifices that correspond to Philoctetes’ many mouths, anatomical and figurative.

After showcasing another promise of Zeus, the supreme agent of the Symbolic (1428–30)—“You will send spoils to your home . . . for your *father* Poias, to the plain of Oeta, your fatherland (*Poianti patri pros patras Oitês plaka*)”—Heracles urges Philoctetes to fill his archival pyre (*puran*), by bringing some of the spoils to it as “remembrances (*mnêmeia*),” tributes to the bow (formerly possessed by Heracles), by which they were taken (*toxôn emôn mnêmeia pros puran emên* “remembrances of my bow to my pyre” 1432). In Heracles’ repeated use of the possessive (*toxôn emôn* “my bow”), we see the archival illusion of the self-identical past, his “archontic . . . paternal and patriarchic”⁶⁹ impulse to possess the “origin” by setting himself up as the only possessor of an object passed through multiple hands.⁷⁰ Defining the terms of Philoctetes’ and Neoptolemus’s future relationship, Heracles compares them to “two lions feeding together” (*leonte sun-nomô* 1436), protecting each other. The adjective *sun-nomos* recalls *sun-trophos*, an adjective whose prefix *sun-*, as we have seen, operates in a gray zone between comitative and instrumental meanings, “companion” and “food (with which) to eat.” Envisioning Philoctetes’ and Neoptolemus’s com-panionship as an experience of eating, Heracles evokes his own proverbial gluttony, materialized in his oversized belly, which, as Callimachus ironically puts it, remained equally voracious after he was divinized.⁷¹ An aspect of the Symbolic’s uplifting teleology, the *muthos* granting Philoctetes catharsis is a formal whole with the same appetite as Heracles’ stomach, a cannibalizing container defined by the pleasure principle that digests alterity—the “parts.”⁷² Yet as an archive for spoils, ostensibly meant to possess and preserve them, Heracles’ pyre, like his stomach, implies the burning of memories. To “feed” this pyre (Heracles himself) with *mnêmeia* (nearly contiguous with *puran* [“the pyre”] in 1432) is also to fuel a fire that is not just consuming but also self-consuming.

69. Derrida 1996, 95.

70. Cf. also 1427 and 1439. Segal (1981, 355), who favors a substantially optimistic reading of the finale as “rebirth” notes, however, that “there is something intransigent about the demands of the god.”

71. Callimachus, *Hymn to Diana* 159–61. Epicharmus comments on Heracles’ multiple ingestive organs (fragment 18 Kassel and Austin).

72. See also, in the last two lines of Philoctetes’ last speech (1467–68), the reference to a *pan-damatôr* (“all-taming”) *daimôn*, whose multiple referents (see Budelmann 2000, 149) include, first and foremost, Heracles.

At the same time, the verbal texture of Philoctetes' last words points to a dissensual level of meaning beyond the containing boundaries of the dramatic plot, intimating liquid life, the fantasy of the body without organs. After enthusiastically endorsing Heracles' plan ("I will not disobey your *muthoi!*" 1447), Philoctetes bids farewell to Lemnos with imagery that pushes against the *muthos*, its policing of the play's aftermath (1453–62, 1464):

χαῖρ, ὦ μέλαθρον ζύμφουρον ἐμοί,
 Νύμφαι τ' ἔνυδροι λειμωνιάδες,
 καὶ κτύπος ἄρσην πόντου προβολῆς, 1455
 οὐ πολλάκι δὴ τοῦμόν ἐτέγχθη
 κρᾶτ' ἐνδόμυχον πληγῆσι νότου,
 πολλά δὲ φωνῆς τῆς ἡμετέρας
 Ἑρμαῖον ὄρος παρέπεμψεν ἐμοί
 στόνον ἀντίτυπον χειμαζομένῳ. 1460
 νῦν δ' ὦ κρῆναι Λύκιόν τε ποτόν,
 λείπομεν ὑμᾶς, λείπομεν ἤδη. . . .
 χαῖρ, ὦ Λήμνου πέδον ἀμφιάλον

Farewell, abode that shared watches with me, and watery Nymphs of the meadows (*Numphai t'ên-udroi leimôniades*) and masculine crash (*ktupos*) of the sea (*pontou*) on the jutting rock (*pro-bolês*) where my head was often doused, in my inmost (*endo-muchon*) dwelling, by the blows of the wind, and many times Mount Hermaion sent a cry, a groan echoing (*stonon anti-tupon*) my voice (*phônês*), back to me in my stormy distress. And now, springs and Lycian water, we leave you behind, we leave you. . . . Farewell, land of Lemnos surrounded by the sea.

The dominant note of this passage is the fetishization of water—sweet or salty, in meadows, springs, or the sea. In 1455–56, the formal intimacy between the “masculine” sound of the sea (*pontos*) and a “jutting rock” in the feminine gender (*pro-bolês*) queerly generates the image of his cave (*endo-muchon* 1457), an amniotic environment where his head is drenched.⁷³ This evocation of the uterine archive is accompanied by intimations of non-language: *ktupos* (“crash”), *phônê* (“voice”), and *stonos anti-tupos*, which evokes echo and the

73. Greengard (1987, 41 and n23) sees the sexualized language of these lines as an image of Philoctetes' rebirth through a kind of Odyssean romance with the Nymphs; on Philoctetes' relation with the nymphs, see p. 159, this volume.

screams sending forth the disease.⁷⁴ This verbal texture withstands the cathartic *muthos* by conjuring a fantasy of the prenatal or pre-Symbolic.⁷⁵ In invoking the Nymphs of the sea (*Numphais haliainsis* 1470) in the play's last two lines, the Chorus circles back to the beginning of Philoctetes' farewell to Lemnos ("watery Nymphs of the meadows" 1454), seeking a safe "return" (*nostou* 1471) that could look toward Troy, home⁷⁶—or non-existence. In the watery nymphs we can detect a different expression of the death drive—aiming at a life beyond the subject, a disappearance of the body into fluid intensity, into indefinite form, neither open nor closed⁷⁷—a "volume without contours," in the phrase of Luce Irigaray.⁷⁸ A "diminution of the 'I' that gives way to an intensified life," is, in the view of Deleuze and Parnet, the aspiration of anorexia, which, as they put it, is informed by the impetus "to escape from the norms of consumption in order not to be an object of consumption."⁷⁹ In their appeal to the marine nymphs—a plurality in which the "parts" are not gathered into a unified whole (a "pack"), but produce a co-existence of

74. For Lacan (1998, 138–39), Echo may be an expression of *lalangue*, i.e., sound as an "excess" of language, a resistance against the signifier's totalizing force: see Janan 2009, 138, and S. Butler 2013, 199. Nooter (2012, 145) notes the "chant-like lilt" of Philoctetes' farewell to Lemnos.

75. Rather than suggesting "rebirth" (see note 73)—i.e., a new entrance into the Symbolic, Greengard (1987, 41n23) perceptively connects Philoctetes' Lemnian abode with the Asclepeian caves where patients were customarily placed (see, e.g., Ustinova 2009). I would suggest, instead, that Lemnos's cave is the anarchic archive that resists the "archontic" impetus of the caves where cathartic healing is practiced.

76. On these two interpretive possibilities, see Taplin 1987, 75 (favoring the idea of a return home), and Schein 2013, ad loc.

77. The "becoming nymph" that I am suggesting exemplifies the controversial relation in Deleuze and Guattari's theorization between "becoming woman" and "becoming imperceptible." As they put it, "All becomings begin and pass with and pass through becoming-woman" and "the reconstruction of the body as Body without Organs, the anorganism of the body, is inseparable from a becoming-woman" (1987, 276–77). The problem with "becoming woman" is that, as Braidotti has observed, in the case of women "one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted control over" (2003, 51); that is, using the notion as a shorthand for deterritorialized subjectivity raises the question of women's never fully recognized subjectivity. Cf. Grosz (1994, 176), who points out that "if one is a woman, it remains necessary to become-woman as a way of putting into question the . . . rigidifications and impositions required by patriarchal . . . power relations." "Becoming water" is a quintessential call for the unbound subject and for "becoming" per se: see Neimanis 2017, 50.

78. This is the definition of woman as a kind of marine becoming that is offered in Irigaray 1991b; for discussion of Irigaray in relation to Aristotle, see Hill 2019, 283–85. The sensation I am seeking to theorize for Philoctetes' non-futural future also bears some resemblance to the "oceanic feeling"—"a sensation of 'eternity,' a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded"—that Freud discusses at the beginning of *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930, 64); on the oceanic feeling, see C. Rooney 2007.

79. Arsić 2008, 40, and Deleuze and Parnet 1987, 110. Arsić discusses the anorexic's movement toward the body without organs as the pursuit of "an inorganic and living sensuality that, by falling outside the human, evades its carno-phallogocentrism."

singularities⁸⁰—the Chorus comes into contact with this centrifugal, minor, queer movement.⁸¹ After the Chorus’s self-exhortation to depart “all together” (*pantes aolleis* 1469) and Philoctetes’ reference to “the opinion of the friends (*philôn*) and the all-taming (*pan-damatôr*) god” (1467), after the apparent endorsement of the plot’s *consensus*, symbolized by the all-consuming friend Heracles, there is an impetus toward disincorporation, conceived as becoming water, that brings us back to Philoctetes’ affective bulimia, akin to Echo’s own escape from corporeality and the logic of consumption imposed by the organic body.

This becoming water, it should be noted, would not be an overcoming or an arrival, but, in the case of Philoctetes, a reinscription of his wound, a radical undoing of catharsis’s immunitarianism. As we read in Homer, the wound was inflicted by a *hydros*, a water snake (*Iliad* 2.723). Indeed, far from escaping from the loop driven by the body *with* organs, one could say, Philoctetes, as an anorganic body, would simply recast the cycles of fullness and emptiness that previously racked him, the kinetics stirred by the snake’s bite or the devouring company of the wound. In Philoctetes’ case, and more generally, we need not see the self-exit of becoming water as entailing a vitalistic escape, a sense of cosmic, non-human plenitude and contentment—which would not be so different, after all, from the wholeness offered by Heracles. The body without organs reconfigures without overcoming the death drive’s undulations, its repetitions and resistance. In the case of Philoctetes, to become water would be to partake of the sea’s wounded surface and its troubled movements: its swallowing and spitting out, its spasmodic breaking.

While Philoctetes’ prospective catharsis figures the notional emotional cleansing or decorous affective restoration that the dramatic *muthos* promises readers, the final image hints at a different aesthetic experience, not that of a cleansed human body, a fully restored body, but of a disruptive crossing of the threshold of the body, a transformation into the means of catharsis—water itself, the substance that makes the nymphs of the sea material and immaterial, like Echo, once a nymph herself. Echo returns, as we have seen, in Philoctetes’ farewell, blended with a memory of the disease, the open wound that Heracles intends to close. The fantasy of bodilessness and aqueous becoming that destabilizes the plot’s announced future arises from the same register of the death

80. On this idea of a plurality of autonomous singularities, see Nancy’s discussion of the Muses (1996).

81. The danger of contact with water nymphs—the danger, that is, of being pulled in—is exemplified by the stories of Hylas and Hermaphroditus. For Sedgwick (2011, 42–68), the nymphs belong to a group of minor, queer deities—“an elastic . . . network of versions of non-omnipotent power.”

drive that constitutes Echo as an incorporeal archive. Uncontainable, Echo is herself a non-containing, open archive, one that ingests the other, altering and dispersing it, without ever digesting it; the sea, another uncontainable hyperobject, is an archive in itself, which swallows and transforms the other, without assimilating it. In *Philoctetes*, bulimic friendship offers an aesthetic experience of tragedy as a *jouissance* of in and out that pushes against the tragic plot, tending toward a dissolution of one's constricting and constricted bodily structure by which one would become an unbound archive eluding containment and consumption, while never ceasing to rupture oneself.

II. BINGEING AND BECOMING WATER: EURIPIDES' *HECUBA*

In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, the Hecuba of Euripides' eponymous play provides a model of vengeance to both Tamora, the mother arranging the destruction of Titus's offspring in retaliation for his sacrifice of her son, and Titus himself, who kills her after serving her a pie made from her own children's flesh.⁸² Transforming Tamora-as-Hecuba into Thyestes, this appropriation of Euripides' play does not just bring out its "Senecan" latencies but also invites us to regard its protagonist as uncannily similar to her enemies, Achilles and Polymestor, who come across as eaters of her children.⁸³ Looking for "Revenge's cave," as he puts it, Titus may be seeking to inhabit the body of Hecuba, whose mourning is enacted as revenge.⁸⁴ Like Philoctetes' cave, Hecuba's body is an archive, which takes in her enemies, but also, through mourning and what Derrida calls the "sacrificial and devouring logic of love," her children.⁸⁵ Responding to an affective pressure that culminates in her watery

82. On these connections, see Mossman 1995, 235–37 and 241–43; Tassi 2011 (ch. 4); and Pollard 2017 (ch. 3). On *Hecuba's* reputation in the Renaissance, see Heath 1987. Like *Hecuba*, *Titus Andronicus* displays an obsession with containers (coffins, urns, pits, caves, tombs, stomachs, wombs) that goes along with the thematics of mutilation.

83. Charlton (1946, 33) characterizes *Hecuba* as the "most Senecan" of Greek tragedies. On Hecuba's similarities to her enemies in her role reversal "from victim to victimizer," see esp. Rabinowitz 1993, 113; see also Segal 1993, 186, and Zeitlin 1996, 177.

84. *Titus* 3.1.270. On Hecuba as an icon of mourning, see Loraux 1998, 36–41 and 50.

85. Derrida 2017, 175: "When one loves, one dreams of eating the other too. It's an expression 'I'd like to eat you'—a mother who says to her son, 'I'd like to gobble you up.' All this falls under the same sacrificial and devouring logic of love. . . . Loving . . . wants to take the other into oneself." I do not intend to characterize Hecuba as an instantiation of the "devouring mother," the counterpart in mother-daughter relationships of the "castrating father"—the quintessential figure of the Symbolic: see Freud 1931, 227, and esp. Klein 1975b, 30; see also Lacan 2007, 112, on the "crocodile mother." As observed by Irigaray (1991a, 35–40), this model

suicide, Hecuba's archival physicality conveys the ethics of *manger l'autre*, which is also the play's overarching aesthetic principle. Her body in excess breaks down, becomes an "amorphous undifferentiated fluid,"⁸⁶ reflecting the unruly sensations induced by our own binge eating, the pleasure-in-pain of experiencing a dissipation with no ecstatic resolution, the spasmodic exertions of an organism that turns into liquid intensity to stretch out its death-driven kinetics, to shake the reparative paralysis of catharsis.

At the beginning of the play, we hear of Polymestor's quasi-cannibalistic hunger, but we also encounter the hungry archive of Achilles' tomb, where devouring friendship and the Greek assembly's political *consensus* come together. In the prologue, the ghost of Polydorus refers to the greed of his murderer, Polymestor, who killed him in order to take in, consume, the "abundant . . . gold" (*polun . . . chruson* 10) that Priam sent to the Thracian king along with his son. The repetition of *polu-* produced by the sequence of *Polu-dôros* (3), *Polu-mêstoros* (7), and *polun* (10)—all at the beginning of the line—iconically visualizes this greed. Amounting to a gloss of Polydorus's name (*Polu-dôron* "abundant gift"), *polun . . . chruson* turns the king's act of murder into a cannibalistic act, as though by violently acquiring the gold, making it his own, Polymestor were also taking in the body of Priam's son.⁸⁷ But Polydorus also dwells on Achilles' cannibalism, parallel to Polymestor's. As he puts it, Achilles is demanding to "take" (*labein*) Polyxena "as a dear sacrificial victim (*philon pro-sphagma*) and a gift (*geras*) for his tomb (*tumbôi*)" (41) and "will not be left giftless by his friends (*oud' a-dôrêtos philôn* 42–43)." Achilles' tomb is the locus of a feverish *archê*, the place of an overdetermined "commencement" and "commandment."⁸⁸ It is a repository gathering up residual Iliadic energies, which initiated the Homeric poem: the contention over Briseis, a *geras* ("gift") and object of erotic *philia*, but

is in itself an enactment of the castration anxiety—the chief male projection—theorized by psychoanalysis. I sympathize with the queer notion of "the mother as maker and as unmaker," of maternity as "composed of both mothering and anti-mothering" theorized by Love (2011, 207). While the Euripidean representation of Hecuba is pervaded by castration anxiety, as discussed esp. by Rabinowitz (1993, 116–22), I argue that the play's generalized atmosphere of binge eating effects a collapse from within of representation and of the Symbolic, the register that produces the notion of the "devouring" (or "castrating") mother and disguises itself behind it. This collapse has implications for the reading of the finale. Although Hecuba "turns from a speaker to a feature in the landscape" (Rabinowitz 1993, 109), her becoming non-human intensity, which fulfills her death drive, resists the system that seeks to immobilize her as a monument.

86. Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 9.

87. The cannibalism of Polymestor becomes explicit later in the play: see p. 171, this volume.

88. On these two terms, see Derrida 1996, 1.

also, inseparable from that contention, Achilles' desire to harm his *philoï*, an expression of the *Iliad's* constitutive death drive, which is recast as hunger, the destructive energy he directs against his enemies.⁸⁹ In *Hecuba*, Achilles' hunger for Polyxena seems to spill over into a hunger for *philoï*. This is indicated by *philon pro-sphagma . . . labein* ("to take in a dear sacrificial victim"), where the sacrificial victim to be taken in is *philon*, and by *oud' a-dôrêtos philôn* ("not [left] giftless by his friends"), in which the genitive *philôn*, indicating agency, can also be read subliminally as partitive/haptic. Such a reading would suggest that Achilles' unacceptable lack of gifts is not just to be rectified by his friends; rather, the friends themselves are to be the gifts, the *pro-sphagma* ("sacrificial victim"), equivalent to Polyxena and Polydorus himself, Polymestor's abused *philos* whose name is encrypted in *oud' a-dôrêtos*.⁹⁰ The Achillean tomb's voracious "consignation," archival gathering as incorporation, also has a nomological force, coinciding with the political *consensus* of the assembly that decides to comply with Achilles' request—a space of "convergence" (*sun-echôreitên* "they came together" 125), a coerced unification of the many under "the same opinion" (*gnômêi . . . miai* 124), a "full gathering" (*plêrei xun-odôï* 107) suppressing the gaps of dissent, a coming together as the "filling" of a container.⁹¹

Hecuba, with her body affixed to the ground, is also an archival tomb with ingestive power. While Achilles' tomb is offstage, Hecuba, like Oedipus in *OC*, never leaves the stage; her fatigued body is the place where all the characters converge, a conglomerate of family ruins. Noting that he "demanded from those who have power in the underworld" that he "receive a tomb and fall into [his] mother's arms" (*tumbou kurêsai kas cheras mêtros pesein* 50), the ghost of Polydorus establishes a link between "tomb" (*tumbou*) and "mother" (*mêtros*), two terms blended into each other by their shared genitive endings. Later, when Hecuba reminds Odysseus of a moment of crisis at Troy when he supplicated her not to reveal his identity ("Didn't you touch my knees?" 245),

89. On the Iliadic resonances of Achilles' request (*geras . . . labein*), see King 1985, 51, and Battezzato 2018, ad 77; on the hero's cannibalistic fantasy in the *Iliad*, as transgressive as his (provisional) withdrawal from battle to hurt his *philoï*, see Buchan 2001; this is a fantasy that, in the Homeric poem, he shares precisely with Hecuba: see p. 172, this volume. On the reflection (and critique) of the Iliadic Achilles' "value system" in Euripides' *Hecuba*, see King (1985), who refers to Achilles' "temporary but overwhelming ruthlessness in the *Iliad* in Books 20–22 and his slaughter of twelve young men on Patroclus's funeral pyre" (49)—a kind of binge eating displaced onto Patroclus.

90. On the play's discourse of *philia* ("friendship") from a political and sociological viewpoint, see most recently Battezzato 2018, 9–14.

91. My notion of *consensus* is indebted to Jacques Rancière: see note 67. On cannibalism and Rancièrian *consensus*, see Telò 2020a. On the dynamics of the Greek assembly in *Hecuba*, see Michelini 1987, 142–44; Judith Fletcher 2012, 226–32; and Wohl 2015, 53–54.

he replies (246), “Yes, in such a way that my hand *died in (en-thanein)* your robes (*sois peploisi*).” This image of deadly folds absorbing a supplicating hand assimilates Hecuba’s body to an ingestive tomb.⁹² After hearing from Odysseus that Polyxena will soon be taken away from her, Hecuba enumerates the facets of her loss: “This [daughter] is for me a consolation in lieu of many things: city, nurse (*tithênê*), stick (*baktron*), guide of the street” (280–81). Just as, in *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus and the bow, before being lost, acted as surrogates of an absent “dear nurse” (*philas tithênas*), which fed Philoctetes, Polyxena is likened to a walking stick, a nurse, and more—a list of items used to *fill* Hecuba, nourishment for the maternal archive. A few lines later, seeking to save Polyxena, Hecuba supplicates Odysseus to alter the decision of the assembly. But, addressed to a quasi-autonomized body part, her formal language of supplication—“O dear chin / beard (*ô philon geneion*), have pity, have mercy on me!” (286–87)—seems to be charged with the fantasy of *taking in*, through *philia*, a substitute of Polyxena and the nourishing objects embodied by her. Turning from suppliant to supplicated, Odysseus again faces the traumatic threat of seeing a part of his body drawn into Hecuba’s archival tomb, almost eaten by it. Describing her current sorrows—“I am full (*plêrês*) of laments and not empty (*kenos*) of tears” (230)—Hecuba, paradoxically, aligns herself with the Greek assembly, “the full gathering” (*plêrei xun-odôî* 107), the consignment of individuals, which obeys—and replicates—Achilles’ hungry tomb.

Beyond gastric fullness and emptiness, the plot’s anti-cathartic affect circulates through a sequence of images of bodily contraction and liquid expansion. Even before the final deterritorialization of Hecuba’s own becoming water, we see the death drive in these images of liquefaction—and also in sprawling sesquipedalian compounds that engulf lines. The conglomerations of grammatical parts and the melancholic gathering up of Polydorus’s broken body convey a material sense of precarious containment both of Hecuba and the play’s poetic form, each one on the verge of bursting and dissolution.

The ingestive impetus that generates the archival capacity of Hecuba as a tomb is accompanied by a bodily expansion through dissolution. While displaying what can be construed as a cannibalistic impulse, Hecuba also fantasizes about her own transformation into nourishment for somebody else, a liquid dissolution, as when, asking to be killed together with Polyxena, she envisions herself as “twice as much a drink of blood” flooding over the earth and Achilles’ tomb (392–93). This image of bodily liquefaction continues in Polyxena’s farewell to her mother’s breasts, which, she says, “nourished me

92. This transformation of Odysseus’s hand into a dead object assimilates Hecuba to an archive of relics even before the fall of Troy; projected toward a moment of frozenness, of inorganic life, the movement of Odysseus’s hand enacts the Freudian death drive.

sweetly” (424). When, a few lines later, Polyxena declares, “I am melted in my heart by my mother’s lamentations and I melt (*ek-têkô*) her with my weeping” (433–34), we see another hint of the self-dissipating expansion that, in the text’s imagistic economy, Hecuba is undergoing. We are invited to imagine her as a tomb melting away (à la Niobe) or as a boundless, unformed archive, one that, in its very structure (a flow of blood, milk, tears), seems to contest the distinction between container and content. Arriving onstage to report Polyxena’s death, Talthybius finds Hecuba on the ground, “wrapped up in her robes” (*sun-kekklêimenê peplois* 487)—a momentary image of bodily contraction that brings to mind the folds absorbing Odysseus’s hand, causing his archival ingestion. But, as with Polyxena, Talthybius’s language suggests he will join Hecuba in an expansive, reciprocal liquefaction. “Now . . . I will moisten my eye,” Talthybius declares, “just as I did at the tomb when Polyxena died” (*Nun . . . / tenxô tod’ omma pros taphôi th’ hot’ ôlluto* 519–20). Although *pros taphôi* (“at the tomb”) refers to Achilles’ tomb, its uncanny proximity to *tenxô tod’ omma* (“I will moisten my eye”) conjures an additional referent, Hecuba herself as the *taphos* near Talthybius—an expanding mass of tears, an archive in flux, which he will feed with his own tears, as Polyxena, with her blood, fed Achilles.

In Talthybius’s account, the binge ingestion of the participants in Polyxena’s sacrifice is figured by overflowing vessels. When the Messenger reports, “The whole Greek army” (521)—coinciding with the assembly—“was present in its fullness at Achilles’ tomb for the sacrifice of your daughter” (*plêrês pro tumbou sês korês epi sphagas* 522), there is a subliminal syntactical liaison between *plêrês* (“in its fullness”) and *sês korês* (“your daughter”), as though the crowd were “filled” with her blood when “springs [of it] poured” (*krounoi d’ echôroun* 568).⁹³ One is reminded of “the full cup all in gold” (*plêres . . . depas / pan-chruson* 527–28) overflowing with libations, which Neoptolemus offered to his thirsty father as a foretaste of Polyxena’s blood. The overflowing cup captures not just the ingestive greed of Achilles’ archival tomb but also the proverbial bloodthirstiness of Neoptolemus himself, the slaughterer of Priam.⁹⁴ The copious libations and blood create an atmosphere of binge ingestion, which corresponds to the affective cadence of the play as a whole, a compulsive rhythm expressed by the repetition of the prefix *polu-* (prefix cognate with *plêrês*) in the names of the three victims of slaughter (*Polu-dôros*, *Polu-xena*, *Polu-mêstôr*).

93. Wohl (2015, 54–55) has emphasized the army’s sadistic gaze and the aestheticization of brutal violence in Talthybius’s account.

94. Cf. 536, where Neoptolemus speaks to Achilles. In the prologue, Polydorus mentions Neoptolemus’s slaughter of Priam (23–24).

Hecuba herself participates in this death-driven experience of binge ingestion—even before she takes revenge on Polymestor. After hearing Talthybius’s account, she ponders how to grant a proper burial to her daughter. Seeking to arrange the traditional funeral bath, she first commands an “old (*archaia*) servant” to take a vessel and dip it into the sea (*su d’au labousa teuchos . . . / bapsas’ enenke deuro pontias halos* 609–10). It then dawns on her that she will not be able to provide this ritual “as [Polyxena] deserves” (613), unless she “gather[s] together adornments” (*kosmon g’ ageiras*’ 615) from her fellow captive women. Exhibiting her archival identity—her capacity for “gathering”—she invites us to see the *archaia* servant, collecting water, and the sea, another female agent (*pontias halos*) with incorporating force, as intimate proxies. In “taking the vessel” (*labousa teuchos*), the servant/Hecuba repeats the gesture of Neoptolemus and the other Greek leaders, who “took” Polyxena to the tomb (523, 545), an action, expressed by the obsessively repeated verb *lambanô* (“to take”),⁹⁵ which implies ingestion. In filling the vessel, in turn, to overflowing with seawater, she recapitulates their bingeing on her blood. At the same time, the sea’s momentary absorption of the vessel intimates both Hecuba’s boundless, liquid archive and her affective cannibalism, “the . . . sacrificial and devouring logic of love,” which is formally underscored, in 581–82, by the proximity of the short word *paidos* (“child,” referring to Polyxena) and the sesquipedalian superlative *eu-teknôtatên* (“mother of the best children,” modifying the Trojan queen): *paidos thanousês eu-teknôtatên te se / . . . dustuchestatên th’ horô* (“With your child dead, I see that you are at the same time the mother of the best children and the most unfortunate”).

The delivery onstage of Polydorus’s corpse intensifies Hecuba’s archive fever—a desire to preserve what is left of her children even as she continues to assume the cannibalistic hunger of their sacrificers. When a female servant restores Polydorus’s body to Hecuba, in a sense, she places it in a tomb. In addressing the queen as *pan-talaina* (“wretched on all fronts” 667), the servant identifies her with an archive of losses—indicated by the asyndetic list of adjectives *a-pais an-andros a-polis* (“childless, husbandless, without city” 669)—absences that can only sharpen her hunger for consignment. In the third part of her lyric lament over Polydorus’s corpse (*ô teknon teknon talainas matros* “O son, son of the wretched mother” 694), Hecuba addresses him twice and speaks to him, but as her possession, thus seeking to take—or reappropriate—him into her world (see the possessive *talainas matros*, “of the wretched mother”), to *introject/incorporate* him in an act of *mourning/melancholy*. This taking-in is a way of undoing the emetic “ejections” suffered

95. See 523, 543, 545, and 558.

by Polydorus, whose corpse was successively *cast off* by Polymestor into the sea as a disposable object (*ek-blêton* “cast off” 699) and *expelled* by the sea itself onto the beach’s sand (“the marine wave of the sea ejected [*ex-ênenke*] him” 701). For Polymestor, as we have seen, the young Trojan prince and his gold are interchangeable objects of hunger. When Agamemnon refers to the Thracian king’s mad “desir[e] to take the gold” (*chruson êrasthê labein* 775), he evokes his cannibalistic greed, whose effects are graphically detailed in Hecuba’s invective against him: “Cursed among man, how you tore apart (*di-emoirasô*) the child’s flesh, having cut his limbs (*melea*) with the iron sword” (716–20). Although, thinking in terms of the “original” production, commentators are certain that “Polydorus’s body does not appear to have been dismembered,” as “it is recovered in one piece . . . and Hecuba does not make further references to the supposed dismembering,”⁹⁶ the language deployed here (*di-emoirasô*; *melea*) strongly suggests—at least metaphorically—a chopping up, a reduction of the child to edible *parts*.⁹⁷ The return to a maternal *archê*, then, may entail archival consignment, the reunification of the *parts* into a *whole*, the gathering of the pieces into a single corpus (like the Greek army or assembly).⁹⁸ This effect is perhaps intimated by the polysyllabic adjective that the Chorus reserves for Hecuba in response to her description of Polymestor’s (figurative) *sparagmos*—*polu-ponôtatên brotôn* (“The most miserable among mortals” 721), a gathering of multiple “parts” (*polu/ponôtat/ên*). Yet *polu-* establishes a strong link with Poly-mestor, furthering Hecuba’s implication in the play’s atmosphere of death-driven ingestion. Like eating, Hecuba’s lamentation incorporates the other through seriality, a repetition of words and formal patterns (lyric *melea* “songs”), which recalls an iterated swallowing of “limbs” (*melea* or *merê*). When the female servant brings Polydorus’s body to Hecuba, she is, in a sense, *servicing up* his *melea* to her, casting her as a latent Thyestes or Tamora (her Shakespearean avatar), connecting her archival *philia*, expressed in her lamentation, with the cannibalism of the enemies responsible for her losses—not just Polymestor, but also the other two archival formations in the play, Achilles’ tomb and the Greek assembly.⁹⁹ Just as these icons of political *consensus* resemble overstuffed stomachs or over-

96. Battezzato 2018, 169; see also Gregory 1999, 131.

97. On the imagery of the Dionysian *sparagmos* in these lines, see Schlesier 1988, 127–32, and Zeitlin 1996, 178–83; see also Segal 1993, 181.

98. Conceptually linked to the sphere of mourning, the English verb *remember*, coming from Old French *resembler*, evokes the idea of a “regathering of limbs” (*recompositio membrorum*): see McConnell 2016.

99. In Seneca, Thyestes asks that his children be restored to him (*redde iam natos mihi* 997). Of course, Thyestes’ cannibalism is inherently maternal, as a form of perverted pregnancy: see Gowers 2016.

flowing cups, so the compound *polu-ponô-tat-ên*, modifying Hecuba, encapsulates an archival and formal containment that stretches itself beyond its own capacity. Behind this stretching there is the force of becoming entailed by the unruly stasis of melancholy—the rejection of mourning from which the aspirational closure of mourning can never disentangle itself.¹⁰⁰

When Hecuba approaches another *philos*, Agamemnon, she equally entombs him, even if he is still alive. With Polydorus's corpse lying *beside*—but, in a sense, already *in*—Hecuba, Agamemnon arrives onstage, a *philos* intending to “collaborate” with her (*xum-ponêsai* 862) who, notwithstanding his exit, will become, like her dead son, food for her archival *consignation*. Generating a *consignation* of knees, chin, and hand (752–53),¹⁰¹ the ritual of supplication that Hecuba performs to gain Agamemnon's support also conveys the puzzling sense of her effort to re-gather his bodily parts, like Polydorus's limbs, into the new corpus she provides. As she perceives that one part is about to elude her grasp, exit the conglomeration—“Where are you taking your foot *away* (*hup-ex-ageis*) from me?” (812), she says to Agamemnon—she capitalizes on the incorporating power of the language of *philia*.¹⁰² Introducing a wily allusion to Agamemnon's sexual relation with Cassandra (“My daughter lies beside you” 826), Hecuba deliberately confuses supplication with amorous embraces, erotics with the social obligation of friendship: “Which value will you place on the dear nights (*tas philas . . . euphronas*), lord? And which favor will my daughter draw from the dearest embraces in bed (*tôn en eunêi philtatôn aspasmatôn*), and will I from her?” (828–30). The darkness evoked by Hecuba encompasses both the *petite mort* of sex and death itself. While supplicating him, Hecuba's arms figuratively draw him into an enclosed space of *philia*, her tomb-like body, which equals Philoctetes'

100. Echo, Philoctetes' alter ego, is a supreme example of the nexus of melancholic and (Deleuzian) becoming. On this nexus, see esp. Min (2003), who discusses the different readings of melancholy as deferrals of reality and gender by Agamben (1993, 3–22) and J. Butler (1997, 132–59).

101. “I supplicate you by these knees (*gounatôn*), chin (*geneiou*), and fortunate right hand (*dexias*).”

102. On the staging of Hecuba's supplication of Agamemnon, see Mercier 1993. Hecuba casts her own body as a consignation of autonomous components in 836–39, where she wishes that her arms, hands, hair, and feet, polysyndetically combined, could touch Agamemnon's knees “all at the same time” (839). See esp. Zeitlin 1996, 204. These lines, where the *parts* gather into and at the same time never cease to resist against the *whole*, resume the disincorporation of Agamemnon's foot from Hecuba's supplicatory consignation. Notwithstanding the element of disturbing self-objectification that critics have seen in Hecuba's expressed desire to turn into a Daedalic statue/automaton (see Nussbaum 1986, 415, and Michelini 1987, 152; cf. Mossman 1995, 129), we can detect a quasi-cyborgic aspiration that anticipates the post-humanist finale, with her “becoming animal” and “becoming water.”

cave/stomach—and prefigures the sepulcher that he will enter at home in Argos. Even if she presents herself as an object of pity and urges Agamemnon to look at her from a distance like a “painter” (807–8), she is the artifact that cannibalizes its viewer/creator. As a simultaneous act of dissection and re-gathering of parts (limbs or relics) into a new container, the supplication that performs Hecuba’s *philia* is an uncanny quasi-meal, another moment in the ingestive, archival compulsion that constitutes the play. In becoming a *philos* of Hecuba’s, Agamemnon seems to subject himself to the same treatment as Polymestor’s *philos*. When, learning of her revenge plans, Agamemnon asks, “Which hand will be with (*xun-estai*) you? From where will you acquire friends (*ktêsêi philous*)?” (879), he unwittingly alludes to his own transformation into one of the possessions of her archive—like Philoctetes, she is, implicitly, a lover of acquisition (*philo-ktêtês*). She confirms this characterization by responding, “These tents (*stegai*) contain (*kekeuthas*)” a mass of Trojan women” (880)—a line in which the enclosed space designated by *stegai* (“tents”) parallels Philoctetes’ cave, amounting to a metonym for Hecuba herself, the gastric tomb glutted with friends, the anarchivic archive in continual expansion, threatening to burst apart.

In the transition to the revenge scene, we observe a convergence between the archive’s bottomless hunger and the image of a gaze fixed on the abyss of a bottomless mirror. Hecuba’s dialogue with Agamemnon ends in a request to postpone the burial of Polyxena so that she and her brother may be burned on the same pyre, “by the same flame” (896). Hecuba’s imperative *epi-sches* (“Delay!” 895), an effort to arrest the incorporating machine, to pause the succession of ingestions, ironically belies her own insatiability, which becomes apparent in the cannibalistic punishment of Polymestor, a displacement of her mourning—that is, (attempted) *introjection*—of Polyxena. Before that scene, however, we get a different image of binge eating—as a visual fixation. In the last stasimon, a member of the Chorus of Trojan women recounts becoming aware of the flames razing Troy on the fatal night of its capture: “I was arranging my braids with woven headbands, looking into the boundless rays (*a-termonas eis augas*) of golden mirrors, so that I might fall into bed (*es eunan*)” (924–26).¹⁰³ The boundlessness expressed by the adjective *a-termonas* connotes a gaze lost in a limitless expanse, disappearing in the vertiginous sea of the metal’s blinding shimmer.¹⁰⁴ This gaze, experienced as interminable in its own way through a kind of transference, epitomizes the particular *jouis-*

103. For the aestheticized, sensual lyricism of this choral ode, see Wohl 2015, 55–57, and Shirazi 2018.

104. On the materiality of this shimmer, see Shirazi 2018, 102–6; on the mirror’s place within the play’s visual obsession, see Zeitlin 1996, 190.

sance of binge eating, the shape that archive fever's repetitious impetus takes in the play. It is a gaze that is strained to the point of obfuscation, a gaze by which its subject finds satisfaction in losing focus while intensifying it, in becoming indistinct and melting through the compulsion of taking in, in contracting while expanding. Collapsing into bed is a consequence of this visual exhaustion, but *es eunan* ("into bed") also works as a surrogate of *eis augas* ("into the rays"), vicariously materializing the fall into the void that is implied by looking into the bottomless mirror, a fall previewing Hecuba's plunge into the sea's abyss at the end of the play. A metallic mirror can be seen to capture this dissolution, in that its reflection alters, even disfigures, physical contours, indulging while feeding the body's desire to exit from itself.¹⁰⁵ Losing oneself in this mirror, deferring the moment of stepping away from its deep surface, means, like overeating, eagerly surrendering to the dissolution of fleshly integrity that it promises.

Hecuba's horrific revenge against Polymestor is a crucial moment in the play's aesthetic atmosphere of a *grande bouffe*, a moment of horrorism in the steady flow of violence.¹⁰⁶ The overstuffed bodies (Hecuba's and Polymestor's) that, as we will see, seek to exit from themselves by splitting apart mimetically express the rupture of the ever-expanding archive.

The impending punishment of Polymestor is signaled by a proliferation of archival spaces embodied by Hecuba's female allies. She lures her Thracian victim into her trap by mentioning "ancient caves [containing] the gold of Priam's family" (1002). These "caves" (*kat-ôruches*) are, as Polymestor himself glosses them, "hidden containers" (*kekrummenas / thêkas* 1146–47)—"hidden" like the captive women about to ambush him. There is a sense in which these women, then, are the secret places themselves, the promised archives holding treasures. Other feminine plurals, indicating the Greeks' tents where the gold is allegedly stored and the women are actually hidden, confuse containers with their contents. When Hecuba deceptively says, "[The gold] is kept in *these* tents (*taisde . . . stegais*) within the mass of spoils" (1014), Polymestor responds, "Where? *These* (*haid'*) are the *fences* (*peri-ptuchai*) of the Greeks affording a safe anchorage" (1015). Separating the deictic (*haid'*) and its ref-

105. See Deleuze (2003, 17–18) commenting on mirrors in Francis Bacon's paintings: "The body seems to elongate, flatten, or stretch itself out in the mirror . . . sometimes contracted . . . sometimes stretched and dilated. . . . The deformed body . . . escapes from itself."

106. On "horrorism" see Cavarero (2008), who employs the term for the most violent violations of the human body's vulnerability. *La grande bouffe* is the title of Marco Ferreri's film (1973), where, as observed by Delville and Norris (2017, 61), binge eating is not a carnivalesque response to (the fear of) death, but a remedy for the boredom of life. On boredom, see chapter 1, section 2.

erent (*peri-ptuchai*) so that they encircle the modifying phrase, Polymestor's language anticipates his own impending encirclement. As an adjective turns into a pronoun ("these women"), archival containers—tents and folds of robes, as additionally suggested by *peri-ptuchai*—turn into their contents, female bodies, just as the imaginary caves are actually the women.¹⁰⁷ The multiplication of containing spaces and, especially, of names for the same ones (*stegai*, *peri-ptuchai*) spreads, like the trio of *polu-* compounds, the feeling of the play's archival/ingestive fixation. The sense of encircling proliferation finds gruesome representation in Polymestor's account of Hecuba's and her allies' attack on him, after they killed his children: "And they, like octopuses (*polu-podôn*), having grabbed my arms and legs, had (*eichon*) them" (1162–64).¹⁰⁸ Reduced to a complex of hungry tentacles (*polu-podôn*), which encloses Polymestor like the tents (*peri-ptuchai*), the mass of women figuratively gathers the various prehensile, ingestive motions circulating in the play—of Achilles, Polymestor himself, Hecuba, and the assembly. They not only *immobilized* Polymestor's limbs, but, in doing so, *had* them, *possessed* them, almost like archival containers holding together his *parts* (instead of gold) after an imaginary dismemberment, parallel to the one he envisioned his female attackers, turned into Bacchantes, would inflict on his children:¹⁰⁹ "Where, where should I go, having left my children alone to these Bacchantes of Hades to dismember (*dia-moirasai*) after they have been slaughtered, a bloody meal for dogs and wild spoils cast off on the mountains?" (1076–78).¹¹⁰ The formal structure of Polymestor's lament underscores the circularity of binge eating, with the cognates *plêthei* ("against the mass") and *pleon* ("bigger, more")—also cognate with *polu-* in Polymestor's name—at the edges: "Poor me, I could not do anything against the mass of women. And the worst thing, a pain bigger than a pain . . ." (*plêthei gunaikôn ouden ênuton talas. / to loisthion de, pêma pêmatos pleon* 1167–68). The triple alliteration of *pêma pêmatos pleon* ("a pain bigger than a pain") heightens the sense of bingeing, which registers here not just as

107. The meaning of *peri-ptuchai* ("folds of robes") is activated by Polymestor himself when he asks Hecuba if she keeps her gold "hidden in her robes" (1013)—a question that brings us back to the image of Odysseus's hand buried in Hecuba's robes (see p. 164, this volume). In 1013, following Battezzato (2018), I presuppose ἦ instead of ἧ.

108. On the emendation *polu-podôn* in lieu of the transmitted reading *polemiôn*, see Battezzato 2018, ad loc.

109. On the Dionysian subtext of the play, see esp. Zeitlin 1996, 172–216.

110. The text seems to play with the idea of multiplication of parts. The colometric division of *anê-meron* isolates *meron*, almost a cryptogram of *meros* ("part"). In addition, the fragmentation of Polymestor's lines conjures a formal enactment of mutilation: *ômoi egô, pai bô, pai stô, pai kelsô* (1056–57); *pai stô, pai kampsô* (1079).

a tentacular greed but also as the gathering up of multiple parts, as suggested by the word for “octopus,” *polu-pous* (etymologically, “many-footed”).¹¹¹

In the scene, Hecuba’s archival bingeing reaches its self-depleting climax when Polymestor’s eyes are gouged out, a mutilation that pushes not just revenge, but also affective ingestion to the edge. Before voicing the fear that his children may become “a bloody meal for dogs,” Polymestor casts himself as a cannibalistic hunter of his attackers—“where should I place my foot to fill myself (*em-plêsthô*) with their flesh and bones, making a meal of wild beasts?” (1070–72), allusively evoking Hecuba’s own anthropophagic, canine impulse in the *Iliad*.¹¹² When Hecuba and her allies blind Polymestor—stabbing his “wretched pupils” (*tas talaipôrous koras* 1170), as he puts it—they perform an act of symbolic castration.¹¹³ Thus when he pursues them like “blood-stained she-dogs” (*tas miaiphonous kunas* 1173), we are invited to see his eyes/genitals as precisely the fare of the canine feast that is a typical object of epic anxieties. The loss of his eyes is, of course, parallel to that of his children, and the children are, à la Oedipus, his eyes: “Oh these children of mine (*teknôn tônd’*) and my eyes (*ommatôn . . . emôn!*)” (1255); “Who made my eye blind, having stained with blood my pupils, / and these children (*koras / paidas te tousd’*) having killed?” (1117–18). Here the juxtaposition with *paidas* (“sons”) punningly activates the second meaning of *koras*, “girls,” which is particularly pertinent in a play whose first part centered around the sacrifice of the *korê* Polyxena.¹¹⁴ It as though, by becoming animal, feasting like a canine on her enemy’s extremities, Hecuba were also surreptitiously eating her own daughter, displacing the mourning of her lost child with a quasi-ingestion of her. Revenge is not just an attempt to overcome a loss by inflicting another one, but a brutal literalization of mourning’s—and the archive’s—confusion of loss and acquisition. The multiple symbolic attachments of *korai*—eyes, genitals, Polymestor’s sons, Hecuba’s daughter—condense in one scene the play’s *grande bouffe*, its all-encompassing ingestive/archival *jouissance*, which collapses the distinction between love and violence, friends and enemies.¹¹⁵

111. Wohl (2015, 60) reads *pêma pêmatos pleon* as “the surplus suffering” (Polymestor’s two sons killed in retaliation for his killing of one of Hecuba’s sons) that “breaks the symmetry of the play’s *dikê*.”

112. See Homer, *Iliad* 24.211–13, where, imagining Hector’s corpse as satiating “dogs,” Hecuba exclaims “. . . by the strong man [Achilles] whose liver I wish I could eat in the middle.”

113. See 1155–56, where Polymestor reports that he was stripped of his clothes and left “naked”; Zeitlin (1996, 199) links this action with Polyxena’s self-baring.

114. The word *korê* occurs frequently: 46, 222, 394, 522, 537, 566, and 728. In a sense, the punning plural *korai* turns Polyxena into an archive of all of Hecuba’s daughters.

115. Intriguingly, Ferreri’s *La grande bouffe* ends with the image of food and carcasses thrown to hungry dogs: see Wocke 2016.

The protracted destructive force of this *jouissance* can be detected in the intimation of a rupturing of the belly, and in the subliminal image of Troy as a place destroyed in the very act of re-gathering itself. Immediately after being blinded, Polymestor threatens to direct his bow against his fleeing attackers: “You won’t escape from me with your swift feet, for I will break (*ana-rrhêxô*) the innermost parts (*muchous*) of this house!” (1039–40). In threatening to break the house’s “innermost parts,” Polymestor appears in the moment to seek to rupture the tent and his own permanent darkness. This “breaking” (*ana-rrhêxô*) brings us back to the moment in Talthybius’s account of Polyxena’s sacrifice when she “broke her robes” (*errhêxe lagonas* 559), defiantly baring her body before her killers, in turn, broke it open.¹¹⁶ Along with the tent and the darkness, Polymestor’s threat to break “innermost parts” implicates his internal anatomy. We see a hint of this self-rupturing in his later statement, “Where should I place my foot to fill myself (*em-plêsthô*) with . . . flesh and bones?” (1071), a vision of self-stuffing seemingly to the point of corporeal splitting. The impulse to exit by breaching the tents’ walls discloses the (*ec-*)static exertion of ingestive *jouissance*. Such an exertion corresponds to the anarchic dimension of archiving, which is punningly encoded in Polymestor’s words when, speaking to Agamemnon, he concocts an improbable justification for the murder of Polydorus: “I was afraid that the child, surviving as your enemy, / would gather Troy and found it again” (*Troian athroisêi kai xun-oikisêi palin*)” (1138–39). The archival verb *athroisêi* (“gather”) anagrammatically contains *Troia(n)*, but its initial letter, working almost as an alpha privative, denies, immobilizes the possibility of a re-gathered Troy, scattering its pieces at the same time as they are reassembled.¹¹⁷ Archival *consignation*, which the verb *xun-oikisêi* (“found”) merges with the act of foundation, does not reassemble the traces of the “city” (*polin*), but it is shaped by a repetition (*palin*) that disperses while piecing together, that shatters what is being gathered.

In Polymestor’s prophecy, the death drive behind Hecuba’s *jouissance* culminates in her becoming liquid intensity, coalescing into the archive of water (1258–65):

Εκ. οὐ γάρ με χαίρειν χρή σε τιμωρουμένην;
 Πο. ἀλλ’ οὐ τάχ’ ἤνικ’ ἄν σε ποντία νοτίς . . .
 Εκ. μῶν ναυστολήση γῆς ὄρους Ἑλληνίδος;

1260

116. On Polyxena’s gesture, almost “pornographic” (Thalmann 1993, 143), see esp. Loraux 1987, 58–60; see also Mossman 1995, 157–58, and Scodel 1996, 121–23.

117. Conveying Polydorus’s hypothetical attempt to rebuild his paternal city, the pun captures the idea that the archive’s “archontic, that is, paternal and patriarchic, principle only posit[s] itself to repeat itself . . . in parricide” (Derrida 1996, 95).

Πο. κρύψη μὲν οὖν πεσοῦσαν ἐκ καρχησίων.
 Εκ. πρὸς τοῦ βιαιῶν τυγχάνουσαν ἀλμάτων;
 Πο. αὐτὴ πρὸς ἴστον ναὸς ἀμβήση ποδί.
 Εκ. ὑποπτέροις νότοισιν ἢ ποίῳ τρόπῳ;
 Πο. κύων γενήση πύρσ' ἔχουσα δέργματα.

1265

Hecuba So, shouldn't I rejoice in having punished you? *Polymestor* But you won't soon, when seawater (*pontia notis*) . . . *Hecuba* . . . perhaps will take me by ship to the borders of the Greek land? *Polymestor* . . . rather will swallow (*krupsêi*) you after you fall from the masthead. *Hecuba* Being forced to jump by whom? *Polymestor* You yourself will climb up with your foot to the mast of the ship. *Hecuba* With wings on my back, or in which way? *Polymestor* You'll become a dog with fire-red eyes (*pursa* . . . *dergmata*).

In the image of Hecuba ascending to the top of the ship to throw herself into the sea, we see how a vertical *ex-cess*—a kind of self-affirmation reminiscent of Medea's appearance on the *mêchanê*—tends toward self-negation, a stepping beyond that, in this case, corresponds to the effort to join the horizontality of the sea, just as binge eating, the play's signature excess, breaks up the self.¹¹⁸ In the frame of Deleuze and Guattari, Hecuba's transformation into a dog—before or after she climbs up to the masthead—could be seen as expressing the same deterritorializing process of fluid dissipation as her plunge from it.¹¹⁹ The fiery eyes that define Hecuba's canine identity signal—through a different element (fire instead of water)—self-annihilation by which one becomes pure intensity.¹²⁰ Commenting on the dissipation of the figures in Francis Bacon's paintings, Deleuze observes that “becoming animal is . . . one stage in a more profound becoming-imperceptible in which the Figure disappears,” that is, “no longer [is] anything but sand . . . dust or a drop of water.”¹²¹

118. Suicide is the consequence of eating exhaustion in *La grande bouffe*.

119. See Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 13: “To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape . . . to cross a threshold . . . to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone . . . to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux.” This nexus between “animal” and “unformed matter” has raised objections in the field of animal studies: see for example Haraway 2008; for attempts to reclaim Deleuze and Guattari as allies of animals, see, among others, Williams 2009 and Leston 2015.

120. On the possible meanings and symbolisms of Hecuba's canine metamorphosis, see esp. Burnett 1994; Gregory 1999, xxxiii–xxxvi; and Franco 2014, 108–18. For Zeitlin (1996, 215), Hecuba's metamorphosis is part of the play's project of “a return to the notion of an unsublimated body as defined in and through its physical parts.” I am emphasizing, instead, the shattering of Hecuba's somatic structures and parts into elemental intensity—fire, water, and air.

121. Deleuze 2003, 25, 28.

Destined to cover over (*krupsêi*) Hecuba, the “seawater” (*pontia notis*) in Polymestor’s prophecy resembles dust, which has been characterized as “a gathering place, a random community of what has been and what is yet to be, a catalog of traces . . . the precarious hanging-together of remnants, particles, fragments.”¹²² Arriving onstage to report Polyxena’s death, Talthybius had found Hecuba on the ground “mixing [her] wretched head in dust” (*konei phuroussa dustênon kara* 496). Not just a surrogate of the *korê* (“girl, daughter”) whose embrace she has lost, dust (*konei*) is the pulverized, liquid archive that she will join while drowning in the seawater’s amorphous, scattered assemblage—an archive whose never-ceasing movement back and forth prolongs the repetitious *jouissance* even after her death, in her new life as pure intensity.¹²³ As Michael Marder has observed:

The elemental cycle of dust mimics that of water. . . . The *-ing* ending [in “dusting”] accentuates [the] unfinished process, suffused with finitude yet incomplete even after we ourselves “bite the dust.”¹²⁴

In other words, the quasi-eroticized, fetishistic human motion of dusting seems to re-create the repetitive motion of dust itself.¹²⁵ The cycles of dust and water suggest the relatedness of the Deleuzian-Guattarian nomadic flux and the loop of *jouissance*, even if the former is cast as “open, drifting, expanding, productive” and the latter as “self-enclosed, repetitive.”¹²⁶

I will now consider how Hecuba’s becoming water after revenge affects the very conception of the tragic plot, modeling what we can call a death-driven *muthos*. This is a *muthos* in which *mimêsis* founders, with no aesthetic salvation, while the semiosis of the memorial designed to grant Hecuba posthumous survival—to archive her—resounds with a guttural cry, a breach in the restorative etiology meant to stabilize our affective response, along with the plot’s aftermath.

While threatening to erase elemental *jouissance*, the memorialization of Hecuba spoken of in the last part of Polymestor’s prophecy cannot suppress her becoming non-human sound, animal and elemental. In the prophecy’s etiological conclusion, he presents the Cynossema promontory on the east-

122. Marder 2016, 68.

123. The “liquid” materiality of dust is captured by the verb *phurô*, whose “basic sense . . . is to mix something dry with something wet” (Lloyd-Jones 1975, 65). The etymological link of the English *dust* with the German *Dunst* (“mist”) points to a connection with water: see Marder 2016, 4–5.

124. Marder 2016, 5.

125. On dusting as animated by the death drive, see Marder 2016, 9–11.

126. The quotations are from Žižek (2014, 374).

ern coast of the Thracian Chersonnesus as the location where Hecuba will take her life and a cenotaph will be built: “Your tomb will be given the name (*onoma . . . keklêsetai*) . . . of sign of the wretched she-dog (*kunos talainês sêma*), a signal for sailors” (1271–73). Punningly evoking *kenos* (“empty”), *kunos* (“of the she-dog”) captures the counterfeit quality of this memorialization: a sepulcher without traces of Hecuba’s body, an archive with no remnants of consignment, which will benefit her enemies, the Greek sailors, by guiding them as a beacon.¹²⁷ Not just the funerary *sêma* (a mound), but the whole rocky promontory *is* the “wretched she-dog,” the monumentalized animal that warns and safeguards sailors. The rock is a signpost of the Symbolic, as expressed by the *sêma* in its name and in its preservative function. Transformed from an ingestive tomb into a domesticated rock, a semiotic instrument,¹²⁸ the postmortem Hecuba seems to be reimprisoned, swallowed by her enemies, as Polyxena was by Achilles’ tomb. But the sound of the Thracian sea will break her rocky silence and imprisonment in the archontic archive. In an anonymous fragment, which describes the moment of her metamorphosis,¹²⁹ “Ida, the island of Tenedos, and the Thracian rocks, which love the wind,” are urged to listen to the “brazen crying from the grizzled jaws” (*chalkeon . . . / gnathôn ek polian / phthengomenas*) of “the fiery-eyed she-dog (*charopon kuna*),” while, in Ovid’s account (*Metamorphoses* 13.558–71), Hecuba’s transformation, as she attacks Polymestor’s Thracian avengers, is marked by her barking as she tries to speak (*latravit, conata loqui* 569), a hoarse murmur (*rauco cum murmure* 576), and howling (*ululavit* 571). If we consider that *rauco cum murmure* and *latravit* (“she barked”) have a distinct association with the clamor of waves, we can see that, while being transformed into a dog, Hecuba is already morphing into water.¹³⁰ Canine and marine sounds overlap.¹³¹ The “sign of the dog” memorialized at Cynossema roars with the non-semiotic “language” of the Thracian sea, an archive whose waves seethe with impressions of Hecuba’s archive fever.¹³² Even while

127. See the description of Cynossema in Pliny, *Natural History* 4.49 as a “signpost of the Achaeans.” On Cynossema as a beacon, see esp. de Polignac 2016.

128. I intend “semiotic” in the simple sense of “signifying.”

129. *Poetae Melici Graeci*, fragment 965, cited in Dio, *Orations* 33.59, translated in Mossman 1995, 35.

130. See esp. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.109 *cadens raucum . . . murmur . . . ciet* (“falling, [the wave] . . . stirs a hoarse murmur”); cf. *Aeneid* 5.866. On *murmur* in Ovid, see S. Butler 2015, 62–63. *Latrare* (“to bark”) is also used of waves: cf., e.g., Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.588. In *Metamorphoses* 13.559, Ovid also refers to Hecuba’s anger by using a verb (*exaestuât* “it infuriates”) that connotes the raging sea.

131. On the emblematic case of Scylla in the *Odyssey*, see Telò 2014.

132. In Ovid’s account, the etiology of Cynossema is directly connected with Hecuba’s barking, and no reference is made to her tomb: see *Metamorphoses* 13.569–70.

inhabiting the impersonal life of water, Hecuba continues her animal existence in the sea's canine sound—fittingly, in Euripides, her becoming dog is introduced, *hysteron proteron*, after the reference to her drowning.¹³³ For Hecuba, becoming water means, in Deleuze's terms, to subsume what he calls "orality" (the logic of ingestion and incorporation) within a system of anorganic "vocality," intended as the pure intensity of the body without organs.¹³⁴ But rather than identifying with, merging into, a unified sound, a whole, Hecuba, we could say, is similar to "a particle caught in a shaft of sound"—to use Deleuze's gloss on the "guttural cry" or "murmuring" that according to Michel Foucault gives voice to the oppressed within the silencing system of the archontic archive.¹³⁵ While tending to archive Hecuba, Polymestor's etiological etymology contains an uncontainable non-Symbolic residue. As she becomes animal and water, her marine sound, which echoes through the claustrophobic, throat-shaped strait of Cynossema, is a continuous howl of (not) escaping oneself—it is the enticing call of the death drive.

Agamemnon appears to be seduced by this call when he persists in his intention to return home even after learning from Polymestor about the murder that awaits him at the hands of Clytemnestra in his Aeschylean future anterior.¹³⁶ In rejecting this prophecy, Agamemnon appears determined to return to the home and life he had before the Trojan war, a kind of *archê*. In his last words, which precede the Chorus's closing anapests, he proclaims, "May we sail safely to the fatherland, may we see things in the house in order, *free from these toils* (*tônd' aph-eimenoï ponôn*)" (1292). However, taken together with the knowledge of the death that awaits him, the impetus toward homecoming suggests a motivation to return to a more profound freedom from toils, beyond the reparative restoration of the pleasure principle—that is, a return to the *archê* of non-being. The sense of yearning for this *archê*—the "chill repose" or "inert immobility of a lifeless thing"¹³⁷—is enhanced by the allusion to the initial line of *Agamemnon*, where, on the eve of his master's death, the Watchman prays—in vain—to the gods for a (pleasurable) "respite from my current toils"

133. We could say that what Hecuba's marine sound grants her is not *survival*, but *survivance*, which Derrida (1985, 25) defines as *plus de vie*, that is, at the same time "more life" and "no more life."

134. See Deleuze 1990, 187–89.

135. See Foucault 2019 (translation of an interview broadcast in 1983; see Luxon 2016, 2) and 2006, xxxiii, and his essay "The Lives of Infamous Men" (2000b), originally published in 1977, on which Deleuze's comment (1995b, 108) is based. See chapter 5, note 2.

136. On the intertextual relation of *Hecuba* with the *Oresteia*, see Thalmann 1993.

137. In the definitions of the Freudian death drive provided, respectively, by Ellmann (1994, 8) and Edelman (2004, 44).

(*tônd' ap-allagên ponôn*).¹³⁸ Yet we can also detect an attraction to a different mode of (non-)being, more in line with Hecuba's prophesied transformation. Responding to Polymestor's grim forecast, Agamemnon exclaims, "You, are you crazy? Do you desire (*erais*) to get into troubles," to which Polymestor retorts, "Go ahead and kill me, for murderous ablutions (*phonia loutra*) await you in Argos!" (1280–81). In light of his rejection of the prophecy, Agamemnon's attribution of a perverse *eros* to his enemy sounds like a projection of his own attraction to "troubles," as it were, specifically a version of the liquid dissolution that *polu-ponôtatê* ("most miserable") Hecuba will undergo. It is as though, even before being rematerialized as the beacon of Cynossema, Hecuba's "fiery eyes" (*pursa . . . dergmata* 1265)—a reiteration of Achilles' devouring pyre—exert their magnetic power. Instead of offering a guiding light, they lead the sailor Agamemnon to his own tomb (*sêma*). The liquid abyss into which Hecuba collapses—the *pontos* ("sea"; cf. *pontia notis* 1259) perhaps encrypted in *ponôn* (from *ponos*, "labor, trouble")—can be read in the "murderous ablutions" that Polymestor says await Agamemnon as he homes in on the murderous death-by-bath we know awaits him.¹³⁹ At the same time, Agamemnon's allusion to the Watchman's words, an *archê* that is simultaneously past and future, creates the effect of a circling backward and forward, which, like the movement of water, extends the play's *jouissance*.

Hecuba's bodily dissolution, her becoming watery sensation, may be seen as an expression of what Jacques Rancière calls the "aesthetic unconscious," an exit from mimetic representation, which in her case is propelled by the anti-cathartic force of her revenge. While revenge is surely not a feasible therapeutic program, Freud refers to its "cathartic effect" (*kathartischen Wirkung*), which aligns it with mourning, in keeping with a principle theorized by Renaissance theater critics: "In revenge my heart would find relief."¹⁴⁰ Re-venge shares an element of "mimetic againness" with *re-versal* (*peri-peteia*) and *re-cognition* (*ana-gnôrisis*), the two fundamental forces of Aristotle's cathartic *muthos*. But in *Hecuba*, the "again-ness" of revenge, which is the ultimate expression of the repetition compulsion shaping the aesthetics of the

138. For Thalmann (1993, 154–55), the allusion suggests that "the farther back in time we go, only to find the same actions underlying those of the *Oresteia*, the more remote that 'release from toils' seems."

139. *Pontos* and cognates occur frequently in the play: 28, 111, 444, 445, 610, 701, etc.

140. These are the words of Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd (2.5.40–41). See also *Macbeth* (4.3.214–16): "Be comforted. Let's make us medicines of our great revenge. To cure this deadly grief"; on catharsis in Renaissance revenge tragedy, see esp. Pollard 2010 and 2013, and Rist 2013. For Freud's perspective on revenge, see Freud and Breuer 1895, 86.

play, is more similar to melancholy than to mourning.¹⁴¹ As a marker of failed catharsis, Hecuba's suicide resonates with the ending of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (1886) as analyzed by Rancière in *The Aesthetic Unconscious*.¹⁴² At a turning point in the play, Rebecca refuses Rosmer's marriage proposal out of guilt over pushing his wife to kill herself. According to Freud, in his 1916 essay "Some Character-Types Met within Psycho-Analytic Work," a more important sense of guilt is induced by the discovery of the incest she committed with her father, whom she had believed to be her stepfather. As Rancière notes, Freud omits the end of the play, in which Rebecca and Rosmer "march joyously toward the footbridge, where they drown together in the coursing water."¹⁴³ For Rancière, Freud privileges "the good causal plot," expressed in "the rationality of the feeling of guilt," over the final self-abandonment,¹⁴⁴ which seems to have less to do with guilt per se than with "the longing for the sea," "the sea's power of attraction," in the phrases used by Ibsen in *The Lady from the Sea* (1888).¹⁴⁵ Such an impetus is the very death drive that a few years later Freud would theorize in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—even if, in that essay, he views tragic aesthetics as a function of the pleasure principle. The emergence of Rebecca's guilt—the psychoanalytic truth—is as ineffective, therapeutically, as Hecuba's revenge. What undoes this therapeutic potential is "the sea's power of attraction," which is felt by both characters; their "longing for the sea" corresponds, in Rancière view, to "the aesthetic unconscious," which overturns the notion of the causally organized Aristotelian *muthos*. Even though Hecuba's suicide is more contextually motivated than Rebecca's, it, together with her shocking animal metamorphosis, ultimately exceeds causality and representation. Escaping the ship, a kind of tomb on which she is transported to slavery, means escaping the Symbolic and its attendant laws of representation—not because her suicide is barred from sight, like most tragic examples, and only minimally described, but because its modality (becoming the howl and undulation of the sea) approaches a grotesque Real. Her drown-

141. I owe the expression "mimetic againness" to Kerrigan (1996, 21), discussing the relation between "re-venge" and "re-cognition." The scholarship on Euripides' play has, in various ways, underscored the unsatisfactory and ineffective quality of Hecuba's revenge; for a detailed survey of all the positions, see most recently Battezzato (2018, 14–18), who concludes that her death is "an event that clouds her frightening success." Wohl (2015) has suggested that catharsis is achieved—but problematized—through the play's sadistic pleasures. For Wallace (2020, 74), a form of "healing" is achieved in revenge tragedies through the very demonstration of revenge's failure.

142. Rancière 2009, 73–88.

143. Rancière 2009, 77.

144. Rancière 2009, 78.

145. Ibsen 1966, 450.

ing comes to exemplify a death drive that liberates “a *pathos* irreducible to any *logos*,”¹⁴⁶ something perhaps corresponding to the “deep black *flood* of feeling” that, according to George Bernard Shaw, permeates Ibsen’s play from the beginning to the end.¹⁴⁷ If, following Aristotle, we construe the dramatic plot as a *sustasis* of parts—a consignation of elements, a *consensus*—in the service of representation, we can locate a figure of the collapse of representation effected by Hecuba’s demise in the emptiness, the lack of parts, of the *sêma*, the tomb entrusted with reinscribing the pleasure principle and the semiotic function.¹⁴⁸ The tomb’s emptiness contests them, as do the *pathos* of the howling sea and Agamemnon’s homeward trajectory in rejection of the self-preservation that the monument’s beacon is supposed to enable, his inclination toward the “forces that go beyond the subject and tear it away from itself.”¹⁴⁹ Hecuba’s *jouissance* in ingesting both friends and enemies plunges her into an organ-less corporeality, a dispersal of sensations. In sympathy with our own fantasy of a spasmodic self-dissolution, tragedy, in this play, exceeds itself, approximating the sensory expanse of water’s flowing archive, enveloping us, like Hecuba, promising to merge us with an elemental life that will trap us in the intensity of its undulations.



The archival cannibalism that I have explored in *Philoctetes* and *Hecuba* also shapes Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. As Lee Edelman suggests, the imperative to memorialize the dead father, to safeguard the patriarchal past, fuels a compulsion that leads Hamlet (the archival child) to madness.¹⁵⁰ In the play’s “grotesquely oral world,” paternal memory and the father himself are troped as food taken in by the survivors, first and foremost Hamlet.¹⁵¹ Thus, in their cannibalistic, archival *philia* Hecuba and Philoctetes are akin to Hamlet. At the same time, Hamlet’s own engagement with Hecuba and her play, regarded

146. Rancière 2009, 86.

147. Shaw 1965, 240. My emphasis.

148. In *The Flesh of Words* (2004, 150), Rancière, referring to Deleuze’s critique of representation, sees Niobe, turned into stone—another metamorphosed tragic mother—as a departure from “the signifying system of *mimêsis*,” i.e., “a desert, a rocky expanse where figure and meaning are abolished, where *pathos* is equal to the apathy of inert matter.” The last phrase of this quotation clearly evokes Freud’s definition of the death drive. On Niobe, see Telò, forthcoming (b).

149. Rancière 2009, 87.

150. See Edelman 2011a.

151. The quotation is from Adelman (1992, 27). See also Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, 151–54, and Loftis 2009, 86.

in the Renaissance as the symbol of tragic catharsis, brings out the aesthetic implications of the ingestive archive in that work and in *Philoctetes*.¹⁵² Following the player's Hecuba-inspired performance, Hamlet laments his inability to act, even if, as he puts it, his "passion" would make him a better source of tragic feeling than the Trojan queen (2.2.560–70):

What would he do
had he the motive and the cue for passion
that I have? He would *drown* the stage with tears
and cleave the general ear with horrid speech;
make mad the guilty and appal the free,
confound the ignorant and amaze indeed
the very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
and *can say nothing!*

In observing that, if the player were animated by his "motive" and "passion," he "would *drown* the stage with tears," Hamlet, according to current readings, resumes—and amplifies—the player's earlier representation of Hecuba as a cathartic machine, who "threat'ning the flames / with bisson rheum," makes "milch the burning eyes of heaven."¹⁵³ However, interpreting "drowning" as a mere exaggeration of the cleansing imagery attenuates its force—the sense of becoming water through a violent submersion, like Hecuba, who is invoked four lines earlier ("For Hecuba! / What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, / that he should weep for her?"). In presenting himself as "dull," mute ("I . . . can say nothing"), Hamlet seems, in a sense, to be drowning, resembling one of the spectators who would be *confounded*—from the Latin word for "pour together"—should the player channel him. As a viewer of a Hecuba-inspired performance, Hamlet is affected by her drowning; he is enveloped in her watery archive. His paralysis, inseparable from the loop of "to be or not to be," killing or not killing, is also an effect of his Hecuba-like becoming water, drifting back and forth.

In *Philoctetes* and *Hecuba*, the archive's containing space hosts the *jouissance* of "eat[ing] oneself . . . in eating the other."¹⁵⁴ In both plays, even when the ingestive games of affective bulimia or binge eating are interrupted and the

152. On the intertextual kinship between *Hamlet* and *Hecuba*, see Pollard 2013, 2017 (ch. 3), and Bassi 2017.

153. *Hamlet* 2.2.513–14 and 525. See, most recently, Pollard 2017, 118.

154. Derrida 2017, 175.

pleasure principle re-instrumentalizes the subject through a *deus ex machina* or an etiology, tragedy's death drive is poised to engulf the calcifying technologies of aesthetic restoration. As with the anonymous Trojan woman's gaze into a pitless mirror in *Hecuba*, a convulsive crossing awaits, into the contourless existence of catharsis's bare medium, water in its perpetual, impersonal present. The outcome of being gathered into this floating *archê*, for characters and readers alike, is a falling apart, at once a radical self-interruption and a self-extension by which a long-tenuous, finally shattered container opens into a boundless and still endlessly troubled archive of intensities.



Archival Crypts

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, I hinted at the reframing of Freud's opposition of mourning and melancholy by the French psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. In their reconceptualization of melancholy as "incorporation," they introduce the notion of the *crypt*: a "sealed-off psychic space" where loss is "swallowed and preserved."¹ In this chapter I want to get at Greek tragedy's death-driven aesthetics through the archival fantasies of the *Oresteia*, which occupy the crypt, a phantasmic locus of origin and annihilation. Heeding these fantasies, of archiving oneself as well as the other, I will posit another expression of the death drive, which I will ultimately use to suggest an anti-cathartic model of tragic fear—not a body striving to shed its organs, but a body striving to enter itself.

As Abraham and Torok explain, "In order not to have to 'swallow' a loss, we fantasize swallowing . . . that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing." This imaginary thing becomes the content of "a secret tomb" that "inexpressible mourning erects . . . inside the subject"² or "a living dead abscessed in a specific spot in the ego . . . forming a pocket in the mourning body."³ The tomb at the center of Aeschylus's *Libation Bearers* can be

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1. Abraham and Torok 1994, 130 and 141.
 2. Abraham and Torok 1994, 130.
 3. Derrida (1988b, 57), discussing Abraham and Torok.

construed as a material intimation of such a secreted space, an inaccessible archive of loss. The Aeschylean tomb also invites us to reflect upon the crypt's contradictory interplay of *outside* and *inside*. In Jacques Derrida's words, the crypt is "an inside heterogeneous to the inside of the Self"; it is "the most inward safe," which "becomes the outcast . . . the outside . . . with respect to the outer safe . . . that includes it without comprehending it."⁴ In the plays considered in this chapter, archive fever manifests itself within this topology. In *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Eumenides*, the two plays that bracket *Libation Bearers* in my analysis, we see not just characters but also tragic emotion treated as "the inhabitant of a crypt . . . a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but *as dead*."⁵ Iphigenia and the Erinyes are archived or secreted away, like anger and fear, the emotions encrypted at the end of the two plays. In *Libation Bearers*, we glimpse Electra's and Orestes' impossible desire to burst into themselves by entering the crypt's foreign space, which is "enclosed . . . prohibited, excluded,"⁶ the outside that is inside. In *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the death drive takes a different form: the traumatic pleasure-in-pain caused by unfulfilled, denied death, a *jouissance* that the play's ostensibly happy ending does not shut down. Even as Iphigenia heads to a new external archival crypt while apparently exiting the old one, the anger that appears to be encrypted, contained, gusts forth like the wind that fills the sail of the returning ship. In *Eumenides*, the archiving of the "outcast" Erinyes intimates the aesthetic experience of encrypted fear as the "living dead" or emotional outside that turns the body against itself, endlessly hunting itself from within. In all three plays, the archive-as-crypt represents the inaccessible that must somehow be accessed even if it means "killing" oneself while killing another, cutting "into oneself, or a feverish self-immolation.

I. INTERRUPTION AND THE CRYPT: EURIPIDES' *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS*

The most blatantly archival among the plays on the House of Atreus, Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* stages a death drive spurred by an interrupted death and manifested in serial deaths and repeated deferrals. Iphigenia, Orestes, and, in a sense, the play itself are encrypted, caught in a condition of living death. Along with the archive of slaughter in which the nearly sacrificed Iphigenia is

4. Derrida 1986a, xvi and xix. As Boulter (2011, 175) observes, "The archive . . . fulfills a deeply melancholic impulse: it keeps the memory of the dead alive by introjecting their records into the space of the living."

5. Derrida 1986a, xxi.

6. Derrida 1986a, xxxv.

imprisoned, images of a partially destroyed archive and an archive of unfinished items construe survival per se—that is, thwarted death—as the wound, the traumatic remainder, the encrypted residue that remains undigested. In interrupting the fall into the abyss, in “saving” and apparently liberating the characters (and us), the play’s happy ending paradoxically perpetuates the sense of traumatic encryption, renewing the death drive it ostensibly suppresses.

In Euripides’ play, Iphigenia’s encryption is part of a dynamic of interruption and repetition that links her traumatic past and the deaths accumulated in Artemis’s Taurian temple. Unbeknownst to her family, the goddess rescued Iphigenia from sacrifice by her father and hid her in remote Tauris, where she has become a “living dead” in the sense theorized by Abraham and Torok.⁷ Her encryption is visualized in the prologue when she refers to how Artemis “put *me* in this temple” (*naoisi d’ en toisd’ . . . tithêsi me* 34). Reduced to a monosyllable (*me*), almost an anagram of *en*, which is encrypted between *naoisi* (“temple”) and *toisd’* (“this”), Iphigenia resembles a heterogeneous “pocket” in the temple, the enclosed outcast. But another detail in her narrative sheds light on her encryption and “undead” trauma.⁸ Recalling the scene of the sacrifice, she deploys the imperfect tense to describe her aborted death: “left high up (*met-arsia*) on the pyre I, miserable, was being killed (*ekainomên*) by the knife when [Artemis] snatched (*ex-eklepse*) me away” (26–28).⁹ The almost untranslatable imperfect *ekainomên* (“I was being killed”), with its conative and progressive force, together with the adjective *met-arsia* (“high up, in the air”), conveys the sense of a repeated or incomplete sacrificial act, whose harrowing interruption, provoked by Artemis’s sudden, violent intervention (*ex-eklepse*), saves Agamemnon’s daughter while suspending her physically (in the air en route to Tauris) and psychically (in a state of prospective encryption, or “living death”). The reoccurrence of the same imperfect in the active form later in the play (*patêr ekteine me* “my father was killing / was trying to kill me” 920) underscores the traumatic force of Artemis’s action—a kind of necropolitical intervention—inviting us to heed

7. While dictating to Orestes the contents of her letter to her family, Iphigenia says, she is “living (*zôs*), though . . . no longer living (*ou zôs’ eti*) for those there” (771).

8. “Undeadness” is the primary characteristic of Žižek’s Lacanian death drive, the endless circuitous movement engendered by the trauma of subjectivization: see the Introduction, section 3, and chapter 2. Stemming from a thwarted death, the condition of Iphigenia in Euripides’ play precisely dramatizes the death drive as the condition of the “eternal ‘undead,’” to use Žižek’s expression (1997, 31).

9. Following Cropp (2000), I presuppose Reiske’s emendation *ex-eklepse mi* instead of the transmitted *ex-eklepsen*.

the tense's own repetitive ("iterative") valence.¹⁰ It is as though Agamemnon's unfinished action already contained the multiple, serial flashes of death that would constitute its "undead" future, its traumatic persistence. These serial deaths correspond to the slaughters that Iphigenia is forced to inflict upon strangers as Artemis's priestess. Her new life is, in fact, dominated by a ritualistic death drive that, in a sense, is also her own. While she participates in killing Greek sailors, she also endlessly tries to kill herself, seeking retroactively to complete Agamemnon's unfulfilled act, replicating, in fact, his failure.¹¹ Traces of her slaughters are imprinted on two elements of the play's scenery, which attract Orestes' and Pylades' attention as soon as they arrive onstage like the visitors of a macabre archive: an altar bearing dry, hair-like streaks of blood (73) and the facade of the temple, where "spoils," the skulls of victims, "hang" (*skula . . . êrtêmena* 74).¹² Just as this physical suspension supplies a material impression of Iphigenia's "suspended" death and her suspension before and after it, so the spectacular archive of deaths that she helps erect can be seen as the product of her archive fever.

The dynamic behind Iphigenia's archive of deaths can be compared to the psychological complex central to Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), a highly archival film, in which human and non-human relics, including a maternal skull, bring to mind the Taurian *skula*. Here we find various instances of thwarted *petite mort*: Norman Bates's perhaps incestuous relation with his mother, interrupted by her lover; intercourse between Mrs. Bates and the lover, interrupted by Norman when he murdered them; and Norman's libidinal connections with female hotel visitors, interrupted by the jealous and murderous rage that he imputes to his (dead) mother. The chain (or archive) of homicides is visualized by the repetitive movement of the knife (a murderous and sexual weapon) in the shower scene, where our gaze is also directed to the shower rings, the circular drain, and the incessant, circling water, figurations of the loop of the death drive.¹³ Beyond the murder itself, these figures of the loop, constituting an overdetermined enclosure like Norman's maternal wig, iconically subvert the catharsis of Marion Crane's shower, visualizing her

10. On necropolitics as the state's power to mutilate in lieu of killing, see esp. Puar 2017 and Mbembe 2019.

11. Slater (1968, 171–73) sees her activity as a sacrificial priestess as displaced vengeance against Agamemnon.

12. On the identification of the macabre setting described in 73–74, see, in particular, Torrance 2009; Parker 2016, ad loc.; and Hall 2020.

13. According to Silverman (1983, 211), the back and forth of identification between victim and victimizer that this scene produces makes the viewer participate in Norman Bates' schizophrenia.

jouissance.¹⁴ In Euripides' play, as we will see, Iphigenia's ostensible salvation imaginatively resets the obstinate automatism of her murderous knife, pointed outward *and* inward, locking us in the same endlessly iterative temporality.

Norman's psychic crypt contains not just Mrs. Bates, whose corpse is archived in the fruit cellar and whose voice has taken possession of him, but also the void of unfinishedness left by the thwarted sexual "deaths." Exposing the overlapping encryptments of human and non-human, material and non-material objects (such as spear and Lacanian phallus), the rich archival imagery of *Iphigenia in Tauris* proffers a sense of a similar void—left in this case by Iphigenia's interrupted marriage (intercourse) as well as her interrupted death.¹⁵

The play is bookended by objects—a pillar and rags—that together are evocative of Iphigenia's suspended existence and her encryptment. In the prologue, she relays her dream (44–60), in which she sees a house (clearly, the palace in Argos, an archive in itself) collapsing to the ground (48–49), "shattered," with only one "pillar" (*stulos*) remaining intact (50). There is a sense in which the pillar, in its suspension, its disembodied survival, its undeadness, stands (also) for Iphigenia and her aborted sacrifice—notwithstanding her unhesitating identification of it with Orestes, whom she assumes to be dead.¹⁶ The hanging "skulls" (*skula*) connect with the suspended *stulos*, projections of its/her archive fever, iterations of her thwarted death. In the second image, at the end of the play, Athena etiologically announces Iphigenia's relocation to Brauron, referring to the archive associated with Artemis's sanctuary, where rags and garments were dedicated to the goddess to thank her for help in childbirth or, conversely, to commemorate deaths in labor.¹⁷ Adapting this tradition, Athena declares that, after her burial, Iphigenia will

14. On Marion's sexual *jouissance*, see esp. Bellour 1979, 121.

15. Iphigenia's coitus interruptus was with Achilles, to whom she had been betrothed, but, to an extent, with her father as well. Just as Norman bears his mother's name (Norma), a mark of their too-intimate kinship, Iphigenia's alternative name, Iphianassa ("the woman who rules with strength"), is onomastically an epiphenomenon of Agamemnon's role as the leader of the Greeks.

16. All interpreters assume that Orestes *is* the pillar, even when they recognize the deep ambiguity of the dream (see esp. Trieschnigg 2008). Significantly, the pillar grows blond hair (51–52) like Iphigenia (174)—a detail that is taken as a marker of the resemblance of Orestes to Iphigenia, but that underscores precisely the referential doubleness of the column. In the dream, Iphigenia imagines herself sprinkling—or beginning to sprinkle (*hudrainein* 54)—lustral water on the column, an element that conjures a pending ritual, like the unfinished sacrifice in Aulis, in a sense preparing herself yet again for sacrifice.

17. See the inscriptions, found in the Athenian shrine of Artemis Brauronia, which are collected in Linders 1972. On the play's relation with the cult of Artemis at Brauron, see esp. Wolff 1992; Scullion 1999–2000, 226–29; Tzanetou 1999–2000; Ekroth 2003; Zeitlin 2011; and Hall 2013, 29–30; for an assessment of the various positions, see Parker 2016, 346–47.

be the dedicatee of “beautifully woven pieces of clothing” (*eu-pênous huphas* 1465) that were unfinished,¹⁸ “left behind” (*lipôs’ en oikois* 1467), by women who died—or, more literally, “whose lives were broken (*psucho-rrhageis*)”—in childbirth (1466). Death interrupted the manufacture of these textiles, consigning them to “broken-ness,” making them “rags” forever (that is, *rhakê*): undone before they were ever done, fraying before they could be stitched together.¹⁹ This ragged incompleteness, another suspension, figures Iphigenia’s “undead,” encrypted stuckness, like the column spared in the collapse of the Atreid palace. The suspension is in the register of the death drive that Slavoj Žižek describes as “‘undead’ eternal life itself” and “being caught in [an] endless repetitive cycle of . . . guilt and pain.”²⁰ Grieving for Orestes, Iphigenia says, “Many embraces (*aspsmata*) I put away (*ap-ethemên*) [to experience them] again (*es authis*), thinking that I would come back to Argos again (*au palin*)” (376–77). In the again-ness of the many embraces (*aspsmata*) with Orestes that she “put away,” we feel an “endless repetitive cycle” of *spasms*—nodes of affective tension from bonds broken before they could be tied. These moments of deprivation (subliminally conveyed by the initial alpha) represent temporal and physical ruptures—like the unfinished weavings that will be archivally accumulated. Along with interrupted familial connections, interrupted death and the death drive it galvanizes are the engine of the play’s anarchic archives.

In the image of the Brauronian archive’s unfinished weavings we can also see Orestes’ own encryptment in infancy or an unrealized birth. In the parodos, imagining Orestes dead, Iphigenia mourns him as “the brother whom I left (*elipon*) sucking at the breast, still an infant (*eti brephos*), still young (*eti neon*), still a tender shoot (*eti thalos*)” (231–32).²¹ The triple repetition of *eti* (“still”) and of three isosyllabic synonyms conveys the impression that Iphigenia’s departure, her forced abandonment of quasi-maternal duties, has imposed on Orestes the “undead” stuckness of the textile dedications in the Brauronian archive. What in Iphigenia’s words appears as Orestes’ suspension—a repetitious accumulation of infancies—is akin to the serial killing she has perpetrated to fight off yet prolong her own “undeadness.” Through the sequence of the triple *eti* (“still”), she re-experiences the agony of duration conjured by the imperfect *ekainomên* (“I was being killed”), the death-driven temporality that was the price of her salvation. As in a Russian doll, Orestes is

18. See Parker 2016, 349.

19. *Rhakê* is among the terms used in the lists of textiles of the Brauronian archive: see Linders 1972.

20. Žižek 2008, 395.

21. See the quasi-repetition of these lines at 834–35.

the crypt nested in the crypt that is his sister. In the play, we see him encrypting himself, together with Pylades, in a cave—"a hollow-to-see cleft, broken apart (*dia-rrhōx*) by much rolling of waves" (262–63), which is located by the "sea flowing (*ek-rheonta*) through the Symplegades" (260). Provisionally sheltered in this tucked away, "broken" space, Orestes provides an intimation of the "tomb erected" in Iphigenia's psyche, becoming himself a crypt's "living dead" and inhabiting his own "undeadness," that is, enclosing himself in his "repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain," as shown by the impending onset of his recursive madness. But marked by the resonance between *rheō* and *rhēgnumi* (respectively, "flow" and "break apart," seen here as *ek-rheonta* and *dia-rrhōx*), Orestes' entry and blending into the marine cave also link his occupation of Iphigenia's crypt, her space of loss, with a liquid, quasi-amniotic existence, a never-accomplished birth. When, later in the play, the two siblings deliberate on how to deceive Thoas, the Taurian king, and escape together, Orestes suggests, "What if you hid (*krupseias*) me secretly in this temple?" (1024). In this suggestion, rejected by Iphigenia, we feel Orestes' temptation to regain the crypt's psychic space of suspension and repetition, of living death—an arrested death or birth.

Earlier, in the recognition scene, images of crypts proliferate—anarchival spaces of preserved loss that subsume designated agents of the archontic, patriarchal archive. After it has been established that Orestes will stay in Tauris to be sacrificed by Iphigenia while Pylades will return to Argo, Orestes looks at his friend as his archive, the "substrate" onto which a patriarchic legacy will be impressed, inerasable. As he puts it, "If you, Pylades, survive and get sons from my sister [Electra], whom I gave you as a wife, my name will still exist, and my paternal (*patrōios*) house will never be erased (*ex-aleiphtheiē*) by remaining without children (*a-pais*)" (695–98). When another archive is brought onstage, Iphigenia's letter, meant to inform her family that she is alive, the possibility of erasure is raised by both her and Pylades: "should anything happen to the ship and the letter become invisible (*a-phanēs*) in the deep (*en kludōni*)" (755–57); "should this letter be made invisible (*a-phanisthēi*) in the sea" (764).²² The "invisible" outcast buried in the sea, the letter in these hypothetical scenarios becomes a crypt, a lost object that creates an outside, a heterogeneous pocket of loss, within an inside, opening a hole within an imaginary space of sameness. Other intimations of an *outside* situated *within* occur in the dialogue between siblings that brings the recognition to fruition.

22. The letter has been commonly interpreted metatextually as a script: see Torrance 2010 and Mueller 2016, 178–84. Wright (2005, 294) notes the striking wordplay in 765 (*to sōma sōsas tous logous sōseis emoi* "Saving your body, you will save my words for me"), which seems to me another indication of archive fever.

When a discussion of family history turns to the dispute between Atreus and Thyestes, Orestes asks Iphigenia, “Do you know that you wove these things in beautifully woven weavings?” (*taut’ oun huphênas’ oisth’ en eu-pênois huphais?* 814). Nested between *huphênas’* and *huphais*, within the “sameness” of this *figura etymologica* (“that you wove . . . [in] weavings”), *eu-pênois* (“beautifully woven”) expresses the homogenizing, domesticating impetus of the archive, both phonetically (*huphênas’* is softened into *eu-pênois* through the loss of aspiration and addition of diphthongs) and in the aestheticization of gruesome ancestral strife, both an effect and an instrument of memorialization. Yet the fact that the unfinished weavings in the Brauronian archive are later referred to with the same phrase, *eu-pênous huphas*, destabilizes this textile archive, importing the loss that those scraps of fabric give shape to, creating a crypt within that archival space. The recognition is completed as soon as Orestes’ memory retrieves another token, Pelops’ “ancient spear” (*lonchê*), which is described in a full line (*Pelopos palaian en domois lonchên patros* “the old spear of Pelops in the father’s house” 823), where the object’s proximity with *patros* (“of the father”) underscores its function as a patriarchal archive, the same function that Orestes ascribes to Pylades. But the spear’s particular location in Agamemnon’s house—“hidden in the girls’ . . . quarters” (*en parthenôsi . . . kekrummenên* 826) like a male intruder—turns it into a crypt, another inside outcast, like Orestes and Iphigenia herself, both secreted away in the play.²³ The weapon is, thus, not just a symbol of the chain of violence in the Atreid family, but an analog of the loss “swallowed and preserved” inside the subject as a consequence of this violence. As an impression of the void stored, “abscessed” within the psyche, the spear slips from ostensible icon of the archontic, patriarchal archive into a marker of an absent presence. It slips from phallic prop (a symbol of Orestes’ patriarchal aspiration of impregnating his sister Electra through Pylades) into the remainder of a castration (both Iphigenia’s loss of Orestes and the paternal void in Argos), the locus of a lack that makes it less like a penis than a Lacanian phallus. The spear, that is, becomes an anarchivic crypt. The apparent token of a reaffirmed origin, it brings Orestes and Iphigenia together as it evokes the space of loss that, reciprocally, they both incorporate and inhabit. When, immediately after the participle *kekrummenên* (“hidden”) closing line 826, Iphigenia utters the classic recognition formula, *echô s’ Oresta* (“I have you, Orestes” 829)—a verbal indicator of physical presence and tactile reconnection—she also invites us to

23. On the parallelism between the spear and the Orestes-like pillar in the dream, see Mueller 2016, 87. As Cropp (2000, 224) observes, the dream, in fact, takes place while Iphigenia sleeps in the girls’ apartments (*parthenôsi d’en mesois* 45), the same kind of place where the spear is stored away (*en parthenôsi toisi sois* 826).

see her as the “girls’ quarters” in that she has already taken in her spear-like brother as a phantasmic object, a “dead entity,” which simultaneously “has, possesses” her.

Another container of siblings, Iphigenia’s bosom forms a crypt from which an archived maternal superego emanates a cold, death-driven energy. As we will see, in the finale, this affective temperature—as cold as the Black Sea region where the play takes place—congeals catharsis; it freezes the relief, the sense of aesthetic “unblocking” that we would expect from the intervention of Athena as the *deus ex machina*, from her promise that Iphigenia will successfully escape. This authoritative promise, denying death *again*, is precisely what generates anti-cathartic stuckness, a sensation troped by angry winds, which in continually moving in and out of the sail of the ship that will take Iphigenia to her destination repeat the movement of her knife.

When Iphigenia carries around the statue of Artemis as though she were cradling baby Orestes, her arms form a crypt resembling the coiled snake that, in the last stasimon, gives shape to the maternal anger of pre-Apollinean deities, the Erinyes, and Clytemnestra. The plot reaches a turning point when, preparing to escape, Iphigenia removes Artemis’s statue—the object that, according to Apollo’s prophecy, will save her and her brother—from the penetralia of the temple. At once an act of piety and a re-enactment of her own rescue from sacrifice, the removal is also sacrilegious, as we see in Thos’s reaction: “Why, child of Agamemnon, do you lift (*met-airéis*) this from its inviolate pedestal, the goddess’s statue (*theas agalma*) in your arms (*en ólenais*)?” (1157–58).²⁴ From this point on, the statue, a substitute for baby Orestes, as Froma Zeitlin observes, never leaves [Iphigenia’s] arms until the very end.²⁵ As Zeitlin also notes, in cradling Artemis’s statue, Iphigenia activates another iconic parallelism—with Orestes’ hallucinatory vision at the beginning of the play, when, exiting the sea cave, he believes he sees an Erinyes carrying his mother, “a rocky burden” (*petrinon achthos* 290), “in her arms” (*ankalais* 289).²⁶ On the surface, the parallelism marks a reconfiguration: “The phantasmatic Erinyes . . . is countered by Iphigenia, who now cradles the goddess’s statue in her joyful embrace. . . . If, in Orestes’ fevered mind, the Erinyes seemed to be carrying the burden of his mother, Iphigenia now carries

24. *Met-airéis* recalls *met-arsia* in the prologue (27); *theas agalma* is a definition that could also apply to Iphigenia.

25. Zeitlin 2005, 214.

26. Clytemnestra is in the same position as Orestes, when Iphigenia describes his infancy: “I left him, a newborn infant, in the nurse’s arms (*ankalaisi . . . trophou*)” (834–35). As Cropp (2000, ad loc.) notes, *petrinon achthos* can indicate “a stone image of Clytemnestra, something like the Gorgon’s head . . . or like the boulder which threatens to fall on Tantalus.” On the connection with Tantalus, see O’Brien 1988, 43–44, and Parker 2016, 120.

Artemis, who is to surrender her murderous rites.²⁷ This transformation is to be brought about by the purification that Iphigenia deceptively announces to Thoas she will perform on the statue. Cleansed, separated from Tauris and its “murderous rites,” Artemis, like Iphigenia herself, will apparently undergo a rebirth, becoming less similar to Clytemnestra—her mirror image, with whom she shares Agamemnon as a target—than to another mother, Leto.²⁸ This favorable future seems to be promised by the last stasimon, where the history of the Delphic oracle, with Apollo’s final triumph, is retraced.²⁹ Leaping “in his mother’s arms” (*epi materos ankalaisi* 1251), baby Apollo killed Python, who, coiled in laurel leaves (1246),³⁰ “was encircling” (*amph-epe* 1249) the sanctuary. Later, however, when Themis was expelled and Gaia vengefully sent to mortals nocturnal apparitions that would render his oracles superfluous, Apollo, we are told, “coiled (*helixen*) his young arm around [Zeus’s] throne” (1271), begging him to stop “the goddess’s chthonic anger” (1272), a request that the king of the gods fulfilled. In supplicating Zeus, Apollo uncannily adopts a serpentine shape, re-embodying the enemy he had murderously archived. As for the statue of Artemis, it is relocated from the temple’s crypt into another one, the equally inaccessible “safe” of Iphigenia’s bosom.³¹ The crypt that Iphigenia configures by cradling Artemis’s statue evokes the shape of the serpent, as suggested by the term *ankalaisi* (“arms”), which, in its para-etymological association with *anchô* (“to strangle, suffocate”), assimilates Leto’s embrace, the “model” of Iphigenia’s, to the snake writhing in the same lines toward its encounter with Apollinean death.

27. Zeitlin 2005, 214–15.

28. Zeitlin (2005, 211) considers the parallels between Clytemnestra and Iphigenia, who, in the play, is the emissary and, in a sense, the alter ego of Artemis. Artemis and Clytemnestra bookend Agamemnon’s experience, both attacking him, the former by forcing him to sacrifice his daughter. The sacrifices of Greek sailors ordered by Artemis are, in a sense, a continuation of the murder of Agamemnon. On the assimilation of Artemis to Leto that seems to be pursued at the end of the play, see Zeitlin 2005, 215.

29. On this stasimon, see Zeitlin 2005, 205–7, and Trieschnigg (2008, 472–73), who observes that the Chorus is somewhat uncertain of the success of Iphigenia’s and Orestes’ salvation plan, since “Apollo’s assumption of power in Delphi is not described as a glorious success” but as contingent upon “his father’s help.”

30. In line 1246, I accept the transmitted reading *kata-chalkos* (“bronzed”), which produces the image of a snake “bronzed in shady well-leafed laurel” (*skierai kata-chalkos eu-phullôi daphnai*) as Cropp (2000, ad loc.) renders it, that is, “with its armor-like scales lurk[ing] within the tree’s dark foliage”; for a different textual arrangement, see Parker 2016, ad loc. In 1249, *amph-epe* is Seidler’s emendation.

31. “Safe” is the translation chosen by Barbara Johnson for Derrida’s *fors*, a term that he uses to designate the crypt’s entanglement of outside and inside, for in French, it means “except for, save,” but it also (punningly) appears in the phrase *for intérieur*: see Derrida 1986a, xi–xii.

Strangulation seems to be encrypted in Iphigenia's embrace of the Artemis statue, like the death drive in the pleasure principle. The coiled arms underscore the difficulty of fully distinguishing Leto from Clytemnestra or the Erinyes, even Apollo from his chthonic adversaries. Leto's embrace has the shape of revenge on behalf of Apollo's sinuous enemy; the snake, in turn, informs the god's archive fever, making him replicate with his coiled arms the *archê* of the Delphic temple, the snake itself. Iphigenia's protective crypt figures repressed yet preserved chthonic anger, like the anger repressed yet preserved in the Freudian negation she utters when claiming no animosity (*ouchi . . . thumoumenê* "not . . . angry" 993) "toward the one who tried to kill her" (*tôi ktanonti me* 992).³² Her serpentine arms enact the maternal superego, even while demarcating the space where it abides as the enclosed outcast, death entombed within life, a kernel of resistance, like the "rocky burden" (*petrion achthos*) carried by the Erinyes or the rigid corpse of Hitchcock's Mrs. Bates, embalmed (turned into a "living dead") and archived in the fruit cellar, the house's crypt.³³ This complex of cold, immobile statue and suffocating embrace—Iphigenia's crypt—is the death-driven supplement to the pleasure principle that would bind Iphigenia in her moment of putative salvation.

In the Messenger's account of the storm that prevents Iphigenia and Orestes' ship from leaving Tauris, the arrested temporality, the ship's movement toward a deadly landing it will never reach, yields a chilly fetishistic iteration of Iphigenia's suspension on the sacrificial altar. In reporting to Thoas that Orestes and Pylades have sailed off "after having placed the holy statue in the bosom of a Greek ship" (1291–92), the Messenger announces another maternal encryptment, which also involves Iphigenia, nearly reduced by Orestes to a twin sister of the goddess's effigy (1383–84). As the account proceeds, we hear that the fugitives ran into trouble when, allied with a terrifying wind, "a wave flowing backward" (*kludôn palirrhous* 1397) had pushed the ship "back" (*palin* 1396) to the land. This regression expresses not just Poseidon's intention to return hostages, statue, and priestess to the Taurians, but also the repetitious force of trauma, the call of the origin, which the ship,

32. Dismissing Hermann's emendation *tois ktanousi* ("with/to those who killed her"), Parker (2016, 261) observes that "we have no reason to think that she [= Iphigenia] has ceased to be angry with those who aided and abetted [Agamemnon]," whereas from Parker's point of view it is evidently sensible to think that Iphigenia *is not* angry with the father who was going to kill her. But why should we make this assumption, especially if we do assume that Iphigenia is angry with her father's henchmen? On the crypt and repression, see Abraham and Torok 1975 and Derrida 1986a, xix. On Iphigenia's anger against her father, see Slater 1968, 171–73.

33. On this Hitchcockian crypt, see Tift 2015, 150–54. The "rocky burden" could be seen as a figuration of the Real—which, according to Žižek (1992b), Mrs. Bates's corpse stands for. On the "maternal superego," which (im)mobilizes Norman Bates, see Žižek 1991, 99.

with its maternal crypt, already perpetuates. The wave delivering this call gathers the multiple currents of liquid imagery that coursed through the play (libations, blood, tears, and lustral water) into an aquatic archive, threatening—or promising—death. Before the Messenger reassures Thoas that “there is no hope of safety for the strangers” (1413), we are given a last snapshot of the events: “More and more, the ship was approaching the rocks” (*mallon de mallon pros petras êiei skaphos* 1406), while the Taurians were seeking to capture it and then kill the fugitives. The narrative breaks off with this image, interrupted at a moment of suspension. Together with the imperfect tense (*êiei* “was approaching”), the repetition of the adverb *mallon* (“more”) captures a continuous movement toward a destination—death—that will not be reached. In this movement we can see a Žižekian circling around an impossible object or, rather, Gilles Deleuze’s notion of masochism as a state of frozen waiting derived from constantly delaying the *petite mort*, a notion by which the impetus toward inanimate stillness (the Freudian death drive) is reconfigured as the protracted intensity and stuckness produced by fetishistic attachment.³⁴ Tending toward the Taurian rocks (*pros petras*), the ship externalizes the fetishistic orientation of Iphigenia and Orestes toward Artemis’s statue, a stone artifact that stands for the coldness of death, or, as we have seen, the dead mother—Clytemnestra, who, during Orestes’ hallucinations, was assimilated to “a rocky burden” (*petrinon achthos* 290), something similar to a rigid corpse. In *Coldness and Cruelty*, Deleuze conceptualizes fetishistic masochism as a relation between the son and the “oral” mother—“silent,” “cold,” apathetic, and marmoreal, a figure similar to Artemis herself, who can be seen as an icy version of Clytemnestra.³⁵ The ship of Iphigenia and Orestes, the son, is frozen waiting for Artemis—the “oral” mother or “mother of the steppe” (of the Taurian steppe, we might say)—to decide the next move.³⁶ Reaching for a death that is as elusive as Tantalus’s fruit tree, the ship’s motion appears genuinely archival, haunted as it is by Iphigenia’s suspension on the altar of her inter-

34. See esp. chapter 1, section 2. As Deleuze (1991, 70) puts it, “The novels of Masoch display the most intense preoccupation with arrested movement; his scenes are frozen, as though photographed, stereotyped or painted.” Fetishism is the quintessential masochistic experience because the “belief in a female phallus”—the disavowal of the mother’s apparent castration that, for Freud (1927), characterizes the fetishist—“remains suspended or neutralized in the ideal,” that is, in the illusion (Deleuze 1991, 32).

35. Deleuze 1991, 51–53. In the Messenger’s narrative, the danger of the storm is depicted in vaguely sexual terms, with suggestions of intimacy and penetration: see 1392–93 “*Crossing through* (*dia-perôsa*), the ship, *crashing with* (*sum-pesous*) a violent wave, was pressed.”

36. Deleuze (1991, 55) defines the oral mother as the “mother of the steppe, who nurtures and brings death.” This characterization nicely dovetails with the Taurian landscape, where, as Tertullian describes it (*Against Marcion* 1.1), “everything is frozen” (*omnia rigent*). See also Telò forthcoming (b), on Niobe as an icon of glacial aesthetics.

rupted sacrifice. The narrator, in fact, describes this motion just after reporting the unfulfilled prayer for help that Iphigenia addressed to Artemis (the goddess *and* the statue). The formal repetition of the prayer—which circles back to the moment when she was rescued from the altar—is not merely a rhetorical device; it is a conveyor of fetishistic attachment at odds with the temporal, ostensibly cathartic linearity of the path to salvation, prefiguring the vessel's stalled journey.³⁷ Placing us in the cold crypt of the ship, the frozen tragic narrative and the arrested journey it conveys—both enactments of the temperature and landscape of Tauris—release *again*, without any possibility of release, aesthetic impressions of Iphigenia's traumatic suspension in Aulis.

When Athena intervenes to dispel this atmosphere of fetishistic masochism and impose her happy ending, Iphigenia's death is thwarted once again, only to be reperformed in a reinscription of sacrifice. Still implicated in the drawing of human blood, albeit non-lethally, Artemis's new ritual regime, as outlined by Athena, does not terminate but extends archive fever, as will Iphigenia's archive at Brauron with its commemoration of maternal deaths.³⁸ The continual blood-drawing in the Attic temple where the statue of Artemis will be transferred flows out of her current salvation, a secondary trauma repeating the one narrated in the prologue. As Athena rescues Iphigenia from the Taurians' attempts, like her father's, to slaughter her—as well as her brother (1429–30)—and Poseidon calms the stormy sea, enabling the Greek ship to set sail, we are back in Aulis at the moment Iphigenia was whisked away. After expecting to crash on the rocks or fall into the abyss, Iphigenia, along with Orestes, finds herself saved but undead again, like the unfinished textiles of her future archive. In turn, in the Attic temple of Artemis, her double, more Greeks, successors of the fallen at Troy or of her Taurian victims, become the displaced objects of the death drive that is left in the wake of her twice-thwarted death. It is, in fact, as a “compensation” for Orestes' unfulfilled sacrifice (1459), another thwarted death, that, Athena tells him, more blood will be shed for Artemis. In this vertiginous game, the future promised by Athena is nothing but the repetition of a repetition, the relooping of a loop, prolong-

37. See 1401–2 “You too love (*phileis*) your brother, goddess; expect me too to love (*philein*) my siblings.” The repetition of *phileis* . . . *philein* at the beginning of these consecutive lines is comparable to *mallon mallon* in 1406.

38. Zeitlin (2005, 216) suggests that “the memory of sacrificial violence remains but only as a potential danger that the new ritual inscribes only to retract”; on the domesticated new ritual (regardless of whether it reflects an actual cultic practice), see Wolff 1992, 318–22; Tzanetou 1999–2000, 210–12; and Cropp 2000, 263. On Euripides' play with and manipulation of ritual in this finale, see Dunn 1996, 63, and Scullion 1999–2000, 226–29. Wright (2005, 361–62) observes that in this play “ritual closure does not entirely provide . . . resolved endings.” The continuation of blood-drawing seems in itself a weak closure.

ing our affective sojourn in the crypt, now in the company of the interrupted weavings of the Brauronian archive.

In the last moments of the play, the Taurian anger encrypted (i.e., contained) by Athena substitutes for the Erinyes' own archive fever and re-emerges as the winds whose seriality expresses the persecutors' on-again, off-again pursuit. As we infer from some lacunose words of her prediction, Athena announces that, in a second Athenian trial, Orestes will be acquitted once and for all (1469–72). That is, even the minority of Erinyes who, according to his earlier account, had rejected the verdict of *Eumenides'* Areopagus trial and had never ceased pursuing him (970–71) will be assuaged.³⁹ When Athena closes her speech by commanding Thoas to restrain his anger (*su mê thumou* “Don't be angry” 1474), we are primed to see him as a spokesman for the dissenting Erinyes. In fact, she had begun by urging him to cease “pursuing” (*diôgmon . . . diôkôn*) the ship (1435, 1437). Voicing his obedience, Thoas declares, “May they [Orestes and Iphigenia] successfully settle (*kathidrusainto*) the statue in your land” (1480–81), evoking Orestes' earlier characterization of the Erinyes' pursuit, as “impossible to settle (*an-idrutoisin*)” (971). However, in claiming, “I'm not angry (*ouchi thumoumai*) with Orestes . . . and his sister” (1478), he echoes what can be construed as Iphigenia's Freudian negation, “I'm not angry with the one who tried to kill me” (*ouchi tôi ktanonti me / thumoumenê* 992–93).⁴⁰ Furthermore, while serving, on the surface, as an additional promise to encrypt anger, the statement “I'll stop my spear” (*pausô . . . lonchên* 1484) brings us back to the only other spear mentioned in the play—Pelops's *lonchê*, the putative *archê*, which was “concealed” (*kekrummenên*) in Iphigenia's girls' quarters. But this intratextual evocation of the crypt makes the spear, just like the silenced Erinyes and the suppressed anger, into a threatening “outcast,” a gap of dissensus, which opposes “archic” assimilation. In her final words, Athena addresses the “winds” (*ô pnoi* 1487), proclaiming that she will “travel with” them (*sum-poreusomai* 1488) and asking them to bring her to her destination safely. However, these winds cannot be completely separated from *thumos*, “anger” (connected with Latin *fumus* “smoke”). They, in fact, seem to materialize anger—in *Phoenissae*, Jocasta

39. Thus, *Iphigenia in Tauris* sets itself up as the failure of the *Eumenides* (see Goff 1999, 117) and as an (impossible) new attempt to appease the Erinyes—see 1085, where, in urging Artemis to be *eu-menês* (“propitious”), Iphigenia, as noted by Zeitlin (2005, 212), clearly involves the bloodthirsty goddesses, seeking to turn them into Eumenides once and for all. Such a renewed attempt is in itself a manifestation of the death drive that both the deities and the play circulate.

40. It is significant that all the forms of *thumomai* (“to become angry”) are in negative phrases, as though the play, alongside the characters, systematically strived to archive a quintessentially tragic emotion.

presses Eteocles to stop “his scary looks and the breaths of anger (*thumou pnoas*)” (454). The serial movement of air in and out of the ship’s sail, a kind of respiration, also reflects repeated frustration, the unceasing *fort* and *da* of the Erinyes’ pursuit, the *jouissance* of Iphigenia’s knife.

In *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the crypt is the space where the archived loss is not the loss that accompanies death so much as the lost experience of death itself. Within the frame of the play and outside—in the aesthetic world of tragic readers—the experience of life-as-crypt is defined by the masochistic enjoyment of a repetitious multiplicity of thwarted deaths. The attacks of the Erinyes, pushed with shocking irony beyond Aeschylean bounds, generate such a multiplicity, along with the *jouissance* of being endlessly chased. Emanations of the Erinyes’ archive fever, of the burning affect imposing Taurian *coldness and cruelty*, the winds that drive Orestes and Iphigenia’s ship feed this pleasure, despite the new, “definitive” archiving to which the Euripidean *deus ex machina* has subjected the vengeful deities. But as the “outcast” re-encrypted by Athena, the Erinyes’ anger may also have a different death-driven force, threatening to destroy the inside where it dwells. This threat, as we will see, is the affective allure of the finale of *Eumenides*, where the Erinyes were archived in the first place. But before turning to this troubling dimension of the *Oresteia*’s archival aesthetics, I will focus on the crypts of *Libation Bearers*, and on the particular confusion of inside and outside that, in this play, shapes the affective work of the death drive.

II. IN-CESS AND THE VOID: AESCHYLUS’S *LIBATION BEARERS*

In Keith Warner’s production of Richard Strauss’s *Elektra*, Agamemnon’s haunted house is converted into a contemporary museum visited, just before the beginning of the show, by a group of casual tourists.⁴¹ Strauss’s Jungian Electra spectrally roams between glass cases containing masks, cups, bones, corsets, and robes—as well as the ax with which, as Polymestor prophesied in *Hecuba*, Clytemnestra killed her husband—while the video of a sacrifice, an unstoppable reminder of Iphigenia’s death, plays in the background. The setting of *Libation Bearers*—the Aeschylean play that initiates the theatrical tradition of imagining the aftermath of *Agamemnon*—is, of course, a place of conservation and loss, which can be easily conceptualized as a gallery of ruins,

41. The show premiered in Prague in 2016 and was brought to San Francisco’s War Memorial Opera House the following year. I attended the show in San Francisco with my colleague Mark Griffith on September 17, 2017.

an archive of relics. I want to focus on how this archival atmosphere relates to the internal crypt, a psychic space of loss. In a climactic moment of Warner's production, we see Electra lean over the glass case holding Agamemnon's mask together with other metal pieces that form a discontinuous, mutilated corpus.⁴² A transparent rendition of Agamemnon's tomb, the case displays the empty space surrounding his relics, giving us a glimpse of the material loss swallowed within the crypt. The tense pressure of Electra's hands on the exterior of the container suggests the impossible yearning not only to join her father in the tomb, but also to lose herself in the inaccessible "crypt"—in the secreted void alien to her yet located inside of her. This impossible desire to enter oneself is a form of stuckness prompted by a fantasy of self-negation through archival self-incorporation. The crypt foments not *ex-cess*—the aspiration to exit from oneself—but what we can call *in-cess*, resonant with, but going beyond, *incest*. In *Libation Bearers*, we find tragedy's death-driven aesthetics reflected in mutually entangled objects, spaces, and bodily extensions evoking affective entombments of loss, invisible internal crypts, and in characters caught in the self-defeating effort to access their inside, to disappear or exit from themselves by cutting into themselves so as to be swallowed in these interior archives.

In the initial, fragmentary scene of *Libation Bearers*, Orestes' encounter with the tomb of Agamemnon sets the psycho-archival terms of the tragedy, drawing attention to his lock of hair as a crypt. A play of absence and presence dominates the extant verbal texture of the scene (3–9), which announces Orestes' "return" as a descent into the abyss (*kat-erchomai*):⁴³

Ορ. . . . κατέρχομαι

* * *

τύμβου δ' ἐπ' ὄχθῳ τῶδε κηρύσσω πατρὶ
κλύειν, ἀκοῦσαι

5

* * *

< > πλόκαμον Ἰνάχῳ θρεπτήριον,
τὸν δεύτερον δὲ τόνδε πενθητήριον

* * *

οὐ γὰρ παρῶν ὤμωζα σόν, πάτερ, μόρον
οὐδ' ἐξέτεινα χεῖρ' ἐπ' ἐκφορᾷ νεκροῦ.

42. For an image of this moment, see <http://archive.sfopera.com/>.

43. As possibly suggested by the initial invocation of Hermes Chthonius, on which see Garvie 1970.

Orestes I return. . . . On this (*tôide*) mound (*ochthôï*) of a tomb, I call on my father (*patri*) to hear, to listen. . . . [I give you] a nourishing (*threptêrion*) lock of hair for Inachos, and this (*tonde*) second lock, a locus of grief (*penthêtêrion*). . . . For I did not mourn (*ou . . . ôimôxa*) your death, father, while being beside (*par-ôn*) you, nor did I stretch out my hand upon the bier of your corpse.

The deictics (*tôide* and *tonde*), markers of presence, contrast with the negated participle *ou . . . par-ôn* (“not being beside you”), with which Orestes laments his absence from the ritualized mourning that he expects to have taken place after his father’s death.⁴⁴ The locks of hair, which he deposits on his father’s grave mound, are compensations for this absence, attempts to bridge a gap through a form of physical reconnection, a feeble approximation, as the text suggests, of the touch of the hand customarily stretched out to the dead body at funerals.⁴⁵ This longing for reconnection emerges with special force in line 4 through the referential ambiguity of *tôide*, modifying *ochthôï* (“the mound”), but also, subliminally, *patri* (not just a father, but *this* father). The mound grants Agamemnon a residual and fragile, yet persistent, material presence, as does grief, which Orestes externalizes by offering locks of hair.⁴⁶ The suffix *-têrion* in *penthêtêrion* casts the second *lock*, in fact, as a *locus* of “grief” (*penthos*), a place where grief abides.⁴⁷ When, as Abraham and Torok observe, “words . . . cannot be uttered . . . [and] . . . tears cannot be shed . . . , [the object] of the loss is buried alive in [a] crypt.”⁴⁸ Declaring, “I did not mourn

44. The dialectic of presence and absence is, of course, a central theme of *Libation Bearers* as the “aftermath” of *Agamemnon*: see esp. Goldhill 1984a, 99–207; see also Uhlig 2019 (ch. 4).

45. On the ritual aspects of the offering of the lock, see Kucharski 2004. For a possible staging, see Marshall 2017, 29–30. The haptics of mourning, which Orestes was deprived of, are themselves concerned with a presence that is inherently lacking. Commenting on Walter Benjamin (1985, 95 and 115), J. Butler (2003) sees the ritualized gestures of mourning as a form of non-mimetic (“pantomimic,” as Benjamin has it) “sensuousness”—that is, as a performance orphaned of a referent, mimicking the very condition of loss and mourning’s impossible effort to make absence present.

46. No matter how we imagine the mound, which is referred to elsewhere with the terms *taphos*, *tumbos*, and *chôma*, we are dealing with some structure containing ashes—that is, “what remains without remaining from the holocaust, from the all-burning, from the incineration” (Derrida 2014, 25).

47. An adjective isolated at the end of the line, *penthêtêrion* almost takes on the force of an appositional noun in line with other *-têrion* words that indicate places, such as *bouleutêrion*, *chrêtêrion*, and Aristophanes’ coinage, *phrontistêrion* in *Clouds*, a play that deeply engages with *Libation Bearers*. Lebeck (1971, 97) draws attention to the contrast between *threptêrion* and *penthêtêrion*, the latter expressing “the rite of mourning due [Orestes’] father,” the former “the debt for nurture owed his mother.”

48. Abraham and Torok 1994, 130.

[your death] . . . while being beside you” (*ou par-ôn ôimôxa* 8)—a regret for the lament that was not uttered, for the tears that were not shed—Orestes previews Electra’s complaint in the *kommos* (429–33), where she accuses her mother of making mourning inexpressible by leaving Agamemnon “unwept” (*an-oimôktos* 433) and burying him “without his citizens” (*aneu politan* 431), “without lamentations” (*aneu . . . penthêmatôn* 432). *Penthêtêrion* invites us to see the lock of hair as an objectified space or a spatialized object that substitutes for Orestes’ internal crypt, “the specific spot” where “the dead object remains like a living dead.”⁴⁹ The parallel epithet paired with *penthêtêrion*, *threptêrion*, casting the lock as a nourishing space, suggests a projection of the crypt where the loss is fed. Hair in itself amounts to a crypt—as well as an archival object.⁵⁰ An extension of the body or a prosthesis, included without being comprehended, it is an “outside,” but also a “living dead,” that is, dead matter that never ceases to grow. There is, thus, the sense that the deictics mapping the aftermath of *Agamemnon* convey non-present presence not just because they mark Orestes’ encounter with Agamemnon’s remains, with his spectral existence in and as a tomb, but also because they implicate another missing, unreachable referent, the pocket within the psyche—material, deeply felt, albeit invisible and intangible—which the dead father occupies.

Recounting her exclusion from Agamemnon’s funeral, her seclusion in the innermost recesses of the house, Electra creates the sense of an enclosure in emptiness, an external void that matches the internal crypt she is driven to enter and inhabit. In the *kommos* (444–49), Electra does not just present herself as encrypted, but also supplies a formal intimation of the emptiness that constitutes her encrypted loss. Referring to the copious lamentation that she poured forth while “concealed” (*kekrummena* 449) in the house’s inner quarters, she accumulates words with alpha privative and *apo-* compounds: *ap-estatoun* (“I stood apart” 444), *a-timos* (“dishonored” 445), *aph-erkto*s (“shut off” 446), along with *an-epheron*, where the prefix *an(a)* has the sound of an alpha privative (444–49):

ἐγὼ δ’ ἀπεστάτου
 ἄτιμος, οὐδὲν ἀξία, 445
 मुखῶ δ’ ἄφερκτος. . .
 ἐτοιμότερα γέλωτος ἀνέφερον λίβη
 χέουσα πολὺδακρυν γόον κεκρυμμένα.

49. Derrida 1988b, 57.

50. On hair as an archival object, see Cifor 2015; Dean (2017, 40–43) emphasizes the archival quality of hair as a trace of lost intimacy and connection, which eroticizes mourning.

I stood apart (*ap-estatoun*), dishonored (*a-timos*), deemed worthless, shut off (*aph-erkτος*) in the innermost part (*muchôi*) of the house. . . . Concealed (*kekrummena*), I kept bringing up (*an-epheron*) drops that were readier than laughter, pouring a lament made of many tears (*polu-dakrun*).

Expressing how Electra “kept bringing up tears” (447), *an-epheron* conjures the depths of the psyche, homologous to the domestic recesses where she is entombed. Yet what is remarkable here is not just the characteristically Aeschylean and, more generally, tragic correspondence between architecture and the mysteries of the self, but the formal collection of words of lack, deprivation, and emptiness that encircles the “inside”—variously the *muchos*, Electra-as-a-crypt, and Electra’s internal crypt.⁵¹ The accumulation of privative alphas, broadly conceived, does not merely visualize Electra’s marginalization or the emptiness of the halls where Electra-as-crypt, the “outcast” within, mourned alone. It points to the pressure of an external void on an internal space by which the outside is archived in the inside, in the internal psychic crypt, even as the empty halls abide as a projection or approximation of the materialized loss held within. While shut off in the *muchos*, against her will, encircled by loss and lack, Electra fosters an impetus to assimilate the empty halls to the loss archived in the internal crypt, a space she is impelled to access, enter, or even inhabit.

In Aeschylus’s play, Agamemnon’s tomb functions not just as the material rem(a)inder of the dead father, but also as the inaccessible inside—the crypt—which incites archive fever. A comparison with a supreme example of the contemporary architecture of loss—the Jewish Museum in Berlin by Daniel Libeskind—will help us gauge the archival implications of Agamemnon’s tomb and to connect archive fever with the aesthetics and ethics of the void. Punctuated by more than a thousand windows of irregular shape, the building’s facade resembles a body torn by slashes (see figure 3), while its zigzag plan gives architectural shape to the disconnected temporality of trauma (see figure 4). The five void spaces cut vertically through the building are its main structural axis, as well as the hallmark of its aesthetics of “disruption, dissociation, fragmentation and disarticulation.”⁵² As Libeskind explains, “The void is the impenetrable emptiness across which the absence of Berlin’s Jewish citizens

51. On the mysteries of the tragic self, see Padel 1990 and 1992, esp. 191, and Holmes 2010 (ch. 6). In the first stanza of the parodos, the strophe refers to the Chorus members’ heart as filled by perennial cries (*bosketai kear* 27), while the antistrophe, in the corresponding line, refers to a place “deep inside” (*muchothen* 35), in the women’s chambers, filled with a havoc-wreaking dream.

52. Ionescu 2017, 151.

is made apparent to the visitor.”⁵³ The museum—a counter-monument more than a monument—seeks, in fact, to immerse visitors in what Libeskind himself experienced when, walking through Berlin’s largest Jewish cemetery, with “many huge marble tombstones . . . erected by . . . families . . . to be engraved . . . as future generations passed away,” he was “struck by the fact that no members of these families could ever come back to see the emptiness of those slabs of marble.”⁵⁴ Among the five voids, which Anthony Vidler has called “unmappable spaces of the interior,”⁵⁵ the three that can be accessed convey to visitors the impression of being enveloped by an ambient absence. In one of them, the so-called Memory Void, the floor is covered by countless open-mouthed iron faces, similar to leaves, which one tramples underfoot—forgetting while remembering, destroying while preserving.⁵⁶ As for “the two voids in the middle of the building [that] are completely impenetrable” (see figure 5), “no one can enter them,” as Libeskind explains, though “they can be seen from small vertical windows in the bridges, the bridges which literally and architecturally connect the museum gallery spaces.”⁵⁷ In Derrida’s view, a substantial qualitative difference separates Libeskind’s accessible voids—“nothings” amounting to historical “somethings,” ontological entities—from the inaccessible ones.⁵⁸ In the latter, as he puts it, echoing his earlier discussions of Abraham and Torok’s terminology, there is “some sealed memory, kept as a crypt or as an unconscious, which is encrypted here.”⁵⁹ An impenetrable assemblage of ashes and archived void, Agamemnon’s *tumbos* (“tomb”) or *taphos* (“burial site”) is not just a site of memorialization and affective reconnection, but a space comparable to Libeskind’s sealed-off voids encrypted in the interstices, which, in Derrida’s view (differently from Libeskind), demonstrate the impossibility of fully accessing loss, bringing it to the open and, thus, possessing it even as one is inevitably possessed by it. The tomb confronts its visitors, Electra and Orestes, with this impossibility, signaling the edge of the forbidden zone that is the crypt, the external as well as the internal sepulcher. The gash-like windows in the bridges of Libeskind’s building, echoing the windows of the

53. Libeskind 2010.

54. Libeskind 2003, 44. The concept of the “counter-monument” in Holocaust studies is theorized by J. E. Young (1992); for its application to Libeskind’s edifice, see Mitchell 2003, 455.

55. Vidler in Libeskind 2001, 240.

56. The floor covered by leaf-like faces is Menashe Kadishman’s installation titled *Shalechet* (“Fallen Leaves”).

57. Libeskind 2003, 57.

58. Derrida 1997c, 110–12; see also 1990. Although Libeskind himself, in response to Derrida, has characterized the inaccessible spaces as “one part of the building that has not technically been designed” and thus “something which is deferred” (1997c, 115), Derrida’s reading of them has resonance.

59. Derrida 1997c, 115. See also Derrida’s discussion of Abraham and Torok in *The Ear of the Other* (1988b, 57).



FIGURE 3. A body torn by slashes: Exterior view of the Jewish Museum Berlin, Libeskind Building facade. Courtesy of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Photograph by Jens Ziehe.

facade, allow one to gaze into inaccessible voids while engraving additional wounds. It is as if a physical wound in a body, architectural or biological, were inscribed by a particular form of archive fever—an attempt to break through the barrier and reach for internal wounds, unreachable voids.⁶⁰

60. Versions of the *objet petit a*, the crypt or Libeskind's inaccessible voids figure the void of the Real, the traumatic lack around which subjectivization takes place.



FIGURE 4. The disconnected temporality of trauma: Aerial view of the Jewish Museum Berlin, Old Building and Libeskind Building. Courtesy of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Photograph by Günter Schneider.

In *Libation Bearers*, we can observe the subliminal persistence of such a dynamic—physical apertures or wounds that do not just correspond to internal ones, but express a compulsion to penetrate the crypt, to rummage in the internal archive. In the second part of the play, when the revenge plan is getting underway, the Chorus urges the tomb to lend a favorable ear (722–25):

ὦ πότνια χθῶν καὶ πότνι' ἀκτῆ
 χώματος, ἢ νῦν ἐπὶ ναυάρχῳ
 σώματι κείσαι τῷ βασιλείῳ,
 νῦν ἐπάκουσον . . .

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Lady earth and lady edge (*aktê*) of the mound (*chômatos*), you who now lie upon the body (*sômati*), kingly, of the lord of ships, now hear us.

Placed at the end of the line, *aktê* (“edge”) situates the mound, which itself appears at the beginning of the next line, as a liminal space, inaccessible yet permeated with openings, as we may gather from the overlap of *chômatos* (“mound”) and *sômati* (“body”), whose roots (*chôma/sôma*) are separated from each other by a single letter and which occupy the same position. The



FIGURE 5. “Impenetrable emptiness”: One of the enclosed voids of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Photograph by Silke Helmerdig. Used with permission.

permeability of the *sōma* derives from its violently inflicted apertures, as well as the feminization suggested by its assimilation to “lady mound.” Together, the body, punctured like the facade of Libeskind’s building, and the mound evoke Electra’s own face and torso, mutilated in mourning, as well as her inner wounds, the encrypted void that the incorporation of loss has opened

up.⁶¹ Earlier in the play, spotting Orestes' "cut strand of hair"—*tomaion* . . . *bostruchon* (168) and *chaitên kourimên* (180)—Electra was hit, as she puts it, by transfixing emotion, something like a "piercing missile" (*di-antaiôi belei* 184). The sight of Orestes' cut lock, a substitute for his own crypt, could have renewed in Electra the memory of Agamemnon's cut body, re-cutting the internal laceration provoked by the loss of her father.⁶² The "unrestrained (*a-pharktoi*) teardrops" (186) that Electra shed while being transfixed seem to have poured out of this wound, or embodied void, as suggested by the resonance of *a-pharktoi* with *aph-erkτος* ("shut off" 446), denoting both Electra's physical entombment and her internal crypt, as we saw in the *kommos*. The concentration in the passage of words for "cut"—*tomaion*, *chaitên kourimên*, and *ekeirato* (punning on Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon), along with *di-antaiôi*—reproduces the repetitious rhythm of the self-cutting alluded to by the Chorus in the *parodos*, "My cheek appears red with gashes, / a newly ripped furrow of nail" (25).⁶³ The wish to enter oneself, to access the impenetrable interior, to cut into a self-contained pocket that is itself a rupture, can be seen to drive this self-wounding. Though Electra's archival self-cutting is the quintessential practice of mourning and remembrance, the unconscious fantasy behind it—reaching the "inner rending" closed within her *sôma*—resembles tomb raiding, the feverish gesture of breaking into the forbidden inside of the *chôma* while breaking oneself open.⁶⁴

In the *parodos*, the Chorus makes a striking reference to an archival crypt—"an all-woeful hearth" (*pan-oizus hestia* 49)—and surrounds it with

61. See Orestes' description of his sister as *penthei lugrôi / prepousan* ("standing out in her mournful sorrow" 17–18).

62. Echoing Electra's phrase *di-antaiôi belei* ("piercing missile"), Orestes, in the *kommos*, observes that the Chorus's words—"the helpers of some [i.e., Agamemnon, with his men] are beneath the earth, while the rulers' hands are unclean" (376–78)—have come "piercing [through his ear] like an arrow" (*di-amperes* . . . *belos* 380–81). Perhaps similar to the news reported to Orestes in exile, these words, which are presented as the "thud of a double whip," seem to re-open the internal tear as the outcome of flagellation. On the interpretive controversy concerning lines 376–78, see Garvie 1986, ad loc.

63. On the alliteration in *chaitên kourimên charin* (180), see Nooter 2017, 200n35. In 538–39 (*tasde kêdeious choas, / akos tomaion elpisasa pêmâtôn* "having hoped that these funerary libations may be a surgical cure of pains"), the libations, Clytemnestra's ostensible "surgical cure" (*akos tomaion*) of Agamemnon's anger, become for the Chorus a "cutting pain" (i.e., a Derridean *pharmakon*) as a result of the quasi-anagram of the contiguous words *choas* ("libations") and *akos* ("remedy"), an anagram that turns *akos* into *achos*, a synonym of *pêma* ("pain"). Cf. 189 *all' oude mên nin hê ktanous' ekeirato* "but certainly the woman who killed him could not have cut the lock": observing that Clytemnestra could not have possibly "cut" the lock of hair found at Agamemnon's tomb, Electra evokes her mother's "cutting," i.e., killing, of it /him. See Goldhill 1984a, 122.

64. I borrow the term "inner rending" (*déchirure intérieure*) from Bataille (1985, 66).

privatives that beat with the cadence of self-cutting in the effort to break into the internal crypt. The invocation of Gaia (45) as an ally against Clytemnestra appropriately comes with an apostrophe to the “hearth,” the site of the maternal *archê*, which the murder of Agamemnon has filled with “woes.” These feelings “all gathered” (*pan-oizus*) in the hearth, the literal one in the house and the figurative internal one (the crypt), correspond to the Chorus’s concealed sorrows as described at the end of the parodos: “I weep under my garments for the futile misfortunes of my lord, and freeze with secret sorrows (*kruphaiois penthesin pachnoumena*)” (81–83).⁶⁵ The coldness expressed by *pachnoumena* (“I freeze”) congeals the Chorus’s pain into a crypt-like space, a hearth that has frozen over. In one of the preparatory sketches of Libeskind’s Berlin building, with crisscrossing lines that preview the plan’s zigzag movement, we read a citation from Aelius Aristides, in which the expression “unmovable hearth of the Prytaneion” (*hestian a-kinêton prutaneiou*) is glossed underneath, in tiny characters, by “Archiv für das Erinnerungswerte” (“archive for what is worth remembering”).⁶⁶ The alpha privative in *a-kinêton* (“unmovable”) has particular significance for Libeskind’s project, as it epitomizes void as the (non-)content of his counter-memorializing enterprise. Aeschylus’s “all-woeful hearth” is surrounded, in its immediate context, by a multiplicity of compounds with alpha privatives, asyndetically coordinated, as in a conglomeration: *a-chariton* (“graceless” 44); *an-êlioi* (“sunless” 51); *a-machon a-damaton a-polemon* (“unconquerable, untamed, invincible” 55).⁶⁷ Though the last three adjectives refer to “reverence” (*sebas* 55), we are told that while “once it penetrated (*perainon*) through the ears and the hearts of the people” (56), it “has now stepped aside (*aph-istatai*).” Aligned with actual privation, the privatives serially scatter material impressions of the loss—of reverence as well as Agamemnon—archived in the Chorus’s hearth or crypt. It is as if they vocalize the pain of self-mutilation as a sequence of interjections (*a . . . a . . . a* [ǎ . . . ǎ . . . ǎ]), each corresponding to a gap in the face and, through it, to a failed attempt to delve into the crypt, the archive of woes.

Orestes’ footprints prolong the Chorus’s archive fever beyond the parodos, encompassing within their bounded space imagistic sensations of self-scarring and sterile gestation. As the dual word *peri-grapha* (207), employed by Electra, indicates, the footprints *circumscribe*—in this case, an empty inside. They

65. The Chorus is circling back to the image of the congealed gore (*phonos pepêgen* 67).

66. Entitled *Illuminated Muse Matrix*, the sketch is part of the series “Out of Line,” collected in Libeskind 1997, 29. The Greek citation is from Aelius Aristides, *Orations* 1 (*Panathenaicus*). 30.

67. Nooter (2017, 190–91) regards the “pattern of alpha-prefixed polysyllabic words” as a “demonstration of phonic control” or a “source of [the Chorus’s] . . . somatic authority.”

carve out a space, something similar to a wound or a scar.⁶⁸ It is around the emotional force of footprints as scars or wounds—*trauma* in its etymological sense—that Libeskind centered his design of the memorial site of Ground Zero, exposing the foundations of the Twin Towers, turning them into two open pits, which make a notional architectural origin indistinguishable from the abyss.⁶⁹ They mark the unrepresentable trauma, the void of the Real.⁷⁰ Like Orestes' cut lock, the footprints are surrogates of the loss enclosed in the inaccessible crypt. When, recognizing them as possible traces of her brother, Electra exclaims, "Pangs and destruction of the mind are present" (*par-esti d' ôdis kai phrenôn kata-phthora* 211), Orestes springs from his hiding place in a movement that *ôdis* ("pangs") aligns with childbirth. Orestes is brought (back) to life precisely as a "destruction of the mind" (*phrenôn kata-phthora*), a phrase that comprises the archived loss Electra has nourished, in a kind of gestation, since the death of Agamemnon.⁷¹ Thus, the epiphany or the full "presencing" of Orestes, who has thus far remained encrypted with Pylades, like an archival object in the body of the tragic plot, generates, for a moment, the sense that the inaccessible crypt has been accessed. But the footprints are in themselves a reminder of its inaccessibility. Scarring the ground, they intimate Orestes' own impossible effort to reach the inner scar.⁷² They reconfigure the Chorus's gashes as another archival impression, that is, as the literal mark incised by the desire to penetrate oneself, to get lost in a phantasmic *archê*, the loss kept—or lost—within.

When, just after the *parodos*, Electra pours libations on Agamemnon's tomb, becoming water emerges as a way to access the crypt by seep-

68. There is a strong connection between writing—which is evoked by *peri-grapha* (207) as well as *hupo-graphai* (209)—and wounding, as indicated by the etymology of *graphô*. Goldhill (1984a, 125) sees the footprints as dramatizing *différance*, the impossible closure of the gap between signifier and signified.

69. For an image, see <https://libeskind.com/work/ground-zero-master-plan/>.

70. While Libeskind attributes a therapeutic function to the Ground Zero memorial, a different, anti-cathartic reading is possible, one that emphasizes the impossibility of representing trauma, of memorializing it without domesticating it: see McKim (2008), following Agamben (1999).

71. Lebeck (1971, 109) reads in *phrenôn kata-phthora* a veiled reference to Orestes' madness; see also Taplin 1977, 337–38, on this phrase and its function as an implicit stage direction. As Mark Griffith points out to me, we can perhaps view the Euripidean Electra's fake labor, which lures Clytemnestra to her death, as a quasi-parodic take on this brooding melancholic emptiness.

72. In 451–52 (from the *kommos*), the much-discussed image of "writing in the mind" seems to ascribe to words a kind of wounding power that reaches the depths of the body through the skin: "Write (<*graphou*>) it in yourself; and by digging through your ears (*di' ôtôn*) bring together our speech with the still base (*bathei*) of your heart." Self-wounding, I argue, is an attempt to break through the skin and fold oneself into this invisible space underneath.

ing through the cracks. Stationed by the tomb (84–105), Electra replays the scene of her melancholic encrymptment at the time of Agamemnon's death, when, as she will recall in the *kommos*, she “poured out a lament made of many drops” (*cheousa polu-dakrun goon* 449). The resurgence of her river of tears is reflected in the repetitive verbal flow that precedes the offering of the libations:⁷³ multiple deictics, forms of *patêr* and *philos*, and verbs of saying (*phô*, *phaskô*, *eipô*), together with participles of *cheô*, “to pour” (*ek-cheasa* 95; *cheousa* 87, 99), and the cognates *choas* (“libations” 87) and *chusin* (“pouring” 95). The repetition of these last three words, in particular, previews the rhythm of the ritual with verbal ahead of liquid substance—and the occurrence of *choas* and *chusin* at the end of two lines suggests the completion of rounds of libations (*cheousa* . . . *kêdeious choas* “pouring mourning pourings” 87; *ek-cheasa* . . . *chusin* “having poured out a pouring” 95; *cheousa* . . . *pelanon* “pouring a libation” 99). In the repetitive movement dissolving the boundaries between ritual liquid, tears, and words, Electra's speech exhibits a persistent cathexis to the water touching the “place of absolute commencement”—her father, entombed.⁷⁴ In Euripides' remake of this scene, the vessel (*teuchos*) from which Aeschylus's Electra pours libations is turned into a container that she uses to collect water at the river (140–41). When in *Electra*, she recounts her routine nocturnal journeys to perform this task—“with this vessel sitting on my head I go pursuing (*met-erchomai*) the river's waters” (55–56)—her announced “pursuit” seems to imply the quest for an immersion, a “becoming water” evocative of the death of her father, the king who, having been stabbed (1148), “fell in the bath (<en> *loutrois*),” who “bathed himself (*hudranamenon*) for the last time in the most wretched bed of death” (157). Since *loutra* also means “libations,”⁷⁵ it is possible to see the Aeschylean Electra's liquid attachments, which are carried over into the servile pursuits of her Euripidean self, as shaped by the wish to experience Agamemnon's death. But leaking through the cracks of impenetrable spaces, water also shows Electra a porous pathway into the crypt, the tomb as well as the inner sepulcher, whose inaccessibility is contrastively accentuated by the container, the *teuchos*, in her hands. An alternative to self-mutilation, becoming water offers the option to enter oneself by

73. As Nooter (2017, 197) puts it, “The flowing of voice and libations is conjoined literally and figuratively”; see also Zeitlin 1996, 95 on the scene's “free flowing of pent up libations, tears, and verbal laments.” On the whole scene's self-reflexive concern with language, see Goldhill 1984a, 110–20.

74. Derrida 1996, 91. Goldhill (1984a, 120) observes the graphic play of closeness and distance between forms of *cheô/choê* and forms of *patêr*.

75. See Sophocles, *Electra* 434, where Electra refers to the “libations” (*loutra*) that Clytemnestra should have offered to Agamemnon.

exiting from oneself, that is, to access “the inside safe” in the amorphous shape of a fluid outside that percolates into it.

In the *kommos*, Electra ascribes a receptive power to the tomb, projecting onto the external crypt the fantasy that seems to drive the whole play—what I call *in-cess*, a sliding of *incest* into an incorporation of oneself within one’s body. In her first strophe, Electra, begging her father to listen to her prayers, sings words that blur the notional line between subject and object, self and other: “The tomb has received (*dedektai*) us as suppliants and exiles alike” (336). The “reception” (*dedektai*) mentioned here is analogous to the image of Agamemnon “possessed, held” by the mound that we find in Orestes’ initial strophe: “Father, my unhappy father (*ô pater aino-pater*), what do I need to say to you or do to succeed in drifting from afar to *where your bed holds you* (*entha s’ echousin eunai*)?” (315–18). The formal incorporation of *pater* into *aino-pater* visualizes the containment of Agamemnon in a bed-like tomb that is expressed by *echousin* (“holds”). Eliding the distinction between the mound and its dweller, Electra uses the same verb (*echô*) after she pours lustral water to declare that her father “holds” her “libations drunk by earth” (*echei . . . gapotous choas patêr* 164). Approaching the tomb or sitting on it—as one staging has it⁷⁶—Electra and her brother have become almost as intimate with the entombed father as the ritual liquid. But in the act of “reception” denoted by *dedektai* there is more than a simple fact—of staging and proxemics—dressed in poetic language. Being “received” into the crypt, not just the tomb, but also “the inner safe,” is, as we have seen, the concealed wish permeating the play. In Sophocles’ *Electra*, *dedektai* (“[it] has received”) is recast as a command addressed to Orestes, whom Electra believes to be contained in an empty urn: “Therefore receive me (*dexai m*), a nothing (*tên mêden*), into this receptacle (*stegos*) of yours, into a nothing (*es to mêden*), so that from now on I may live down there with you” (1165–67).⁷⁷ Here Sophocles plays up the incestuous overtones of the Aeschylean Electra’s use of *dedektai*.⁷⁸ So does Euripides, who, by grammatically connecting the Aeschylean *dedektai* and *eunai* (“bed” 318), allusively resurrects the specter of incest, even when Electra is allegedly talking about marriage: “Which husband will receive me (*me dexetai*) into a bridal bed (*numphikas eis eunas*)?” (1199–1200). The “bed” into which Aeschylus’s

76. Taplin 1978, 77.

77. This imperative is, of course, ironically charged, for, while using the urn as the destination of her wish for self-annihilation, Electra unwittingly reveals the truth that she does not yet know, i.e., that, far from containing Orestes’ ashes, the urn is empty. See Ringer 1998, 188, and Mueller 2016, 122–23 (who suggests Electra’s self-assimilation to Niobe); on the metatheatrical complexities, see Billings 2018b.

78. Worman (2018, 186) comments that “Sophocles’ Electra . . . wishes to lie with her brother in the urn that she clutches.”

Electra wishes to be “received” is the “outside inside the inside”⁷⁹ that contains Agamemnon as non-being. She ultimately seems to envision disappearing into her own inside, burying her external presence within herself, enfolding herself in an unseen place where what can be construed as psychic interiority borders on, or merges into, the crypts of the internal organs. The *thrênos*, the ritualized lament of which the *kommos* is a supreme example, is customarily seen as performing the incorporation of the lost other within the self—the *mourning* that becomes *melancholy*. This incorporation is central here too, in a song whose apparent goal is to summon Agamemnon, that is, to resuscitate him, to bring him out and to sort out their plan for revenge.⁸⁰ But through Electra’s words we may see an additional dynamic at work. For Deleuze the scream is a site of *ex-cess*, the process by which the body violently escapes from itself.⁸¹ Electra’s mourning voice cries out, instead, a fantasy of *in-cess*, of archiving oneself in the depths of one’s own body. Just as vomiting reverses the teleology of digestion, *in-cess* enacts the death drive’s regressive bent by employing the gaping mouth as a pathway for the body to fold itself inward, to penetrate its own inside. Seeking to enfold the face into the mouth, the corporeal exterior into the interior, *in-cess* is, like self-cutting, a form of shattering, the quintessential expression of the very death-driven rhythm of the body, which “never stop[s] composing or decomposing, being born or dying,” that the crypt feeds.⁸²

The morbid self-archiving promised by *in-cess* also haunts Orestes’ entombment in fear. Just before the *kommos*, Orestes catalogs the grotesque diseases that Apollo has warned will fall upon him if he fails to kill his mother. In particular, ulcers, “attackers of flesh” (*sarkôn ep-em-batêras* 280), will eat it away (*ex-esthontas* 281) in the enclosed void of their “wild jaws” (*agriais gnathois* 280), causing a lethal ingestion that resembles burial in a *sarco-phagus*, a “flesh-eating” coffin.⁸³ Orestes’ entombment seems to be prefigured by the formal texture of these lines, in which he cites the ostracism of the person subjected to chthonic punishment (288–90):

καὶ λύσσα καὶ μάταιος ἐκ νυκτῶν φόβος
κινεῖ παράσσει καὶ διωκάθει πόλεως
χαλκηλάτῳ πλάστιγγι λυμανθὲν δέμας.

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79. Derrida 1986a, xiv.

80. On the *kommos* and mourning, see esp. Goldhill 1984a, 139–40; Foley 2001, 145–71; Sifakis 2001, 60–63; and Marshall 2017, 65–76.

81. See esp. Deleuze 2003, 16 and 25.

82. Nancy 2008b, 8.

83. On sarcophagi’s dialectic of preservation and decomposition, see Platt 2012, 220.

And madness and crazy terror in the night agitate him, shake him, drive him out of the city, with his body (*demās*) degraded by the bronze collar (*chalk-êlatôî plastingi*).

The polysyndeton and asyndeton create a frantic, claustrophobic effect that swallows the lines just as fear, diseases, and a discontented *archê*—the unsated paternal tomb—threaten to swallow Orestes. But the formal frenzy also exudes a compulsion, an attraction toward the feared entombment. The bronze collar (*chalk-êlatôî plastingi* 290), which as a murderer he expects to wear, literally or metaphorically, is a metal enclosure foreshadowing the bronze urn that he will falsely present to Clytemnestra as holding his remains: “Now the flanks of a brazen urn (*lebêtos chalkeou*) conceal (*kekeuthen*) the ashes of the man who has been well lamented” (686–87). Offstage and non-existent, phantasmic and thus inaccessible, this empty sepulchral container evokes the impenetrable internal crypt and the space that contains it. The verb *keuthô* (“to conceal”), commonly used of tombs, defines, in the play, the interior space occupied by feelings.⁸⁴ “Don’t conceal [your hatred] inside (*mê keuthet’ endon*) your heart for fear of anyone” (102), says Electra to the Chorus, which, in the *kommos* wonders, “Why should, however, I conceal (*keuthô*) what floats by my mind?” (389–90) in reference to its own “angry hatred” (*en-koton stugos* 393), the uncontainable emotion contained in the tomb.⁸⁵ Later, the Nurse depicts Clytemnestra as “concealing (*keuthousa*) the laughter inside (*entos*)” (738–39) upon hearing of Orestes’ supposed death. Placing himself in the urn, as in the bronze collar, Orestes manifests archive fever as an unconscious wish for *in-cess*—a desire to entomb himself in his own interiority. In the case of the collar (*chalk-êlatôî plastingi* 290), the accusative *demās* is virtually pulled in by the locative force of the dative, which underlies the surface instrumentality. We can perceive an intimation of *in-cess*—a folding of the external body into its inside, which is analogous to the collar’s quasi-sepulchral interior.

The movement of *in-cess* informs the second part of the play, which is marked by a thickening of prosthetic imagery: the mound, a clot of blood, and Clytemnestra’s breast, all converging as potential spaces for self-encrymptment.

After Electra disappears from the stage, the tomb (*tumbos*) seems to disappear as well, supplanted by the image of a clot of blood (*thrombos*), an organic

84. On the use of *keuthô* in a funerary context, see, e.g., Heraclides Ponticus, fragment 170.9 Wehrli; *Greek Anthology Appendix*, “Sepulchral Epigrams” 213.5.

85. As Garvie (1986, 147) suggests, “Aeschylus possibly thinks of [*phrên*] as a physical organ . . . but it is unclear whether that organ is the diaphragm or midriff, or . . . the lungs.” Be that as it may, it is clear that the *phrenes* occupy the torso. See Padel (1992, esp. 20–23 and 35), who analyzes the evidence on *phrenes* and *kardia* as organic “containers” of emotions.

crypt that archives Agamemnon's death. At the end of her climactic confrontation with Orestes, Clytemnestra, realizing that all her cards have been played, compares her ineffective efforts to singing a *thrênos* to a "tomb" (*pros tumbon* 926). In his retort, opened by the genitive *patros* ("of the father"), Orestes turns this generic, proverbial *tumbos* into Agamemnon's tomb: "Yes, my father's destiny decides this doom for you" (*patros gar aisa tonde sourizeï moron* 927). The appearance of *tumbos* in a scene dramatizing the fulfillment of Clytemnestra's dream of giving birth to a snake raises the possibility of a punning link with *thrombos*, the clot that, we are told, emerged together with milk drawn from her breast by the snake (Orestes).⁸⁶ An undigested pocket of Agamemnon's death enclosed in life-giving material—*en galakti* ("in milk"), as the Chorus puts it ("draw a clot [*thrombon*] of blood in milk" 533)—the *thrombos* is a crypt, which also conjures the image in the parodos of the Chorus's own hidden congealment (*pachnoumena* 83) into a frozen hearth, an archive of suffering. When Orestes ventures to interpret the dream, the clot reappears charged with dense associations (545–46):

καὶ μαστὸν ἀμφέχασκ' ἐμὸν θρεπτήριον
θρόμβῳ δ' ἔμειξεν αἵματος φίλον γάλα.

The snake opened its jaws around the nourishing (*threptêrion*) breast (*maston*) that belonged to me (*emon*) and mixed loving milk with a clot (*thrombôï*) of blood.

Pushing against the syntax, an uncanny juxtaposition of the accusative *threptêrion*, modifying *maston*, and the dative *thrombôï* comes into view in the transition between lines. The encounter of these two words re-creates Orestes' dedication of his "nourishing" (*threptêrion*) lock to Agamemnon's *tumbos*, his mound. But it also seems to suggest the nourishment of loss, of the crypt, and at the same time the attractive power of that crypt, which corresponds, formally, to the attractive power of the dative—even as the line break marks the inseparable gulf that prevents access, however fiercely desired.

In the confrontation between Orestes and Clytemnestra, her breast emerges as a crypt in itself, an incestuous invitation to access the sense of maternal loss archived within himself. Both the congealed blood of the *thrombos* and the breast-shaped mound of the *tumbos* (coinciding with *ochthos* and *chôma*)—"Lady earth and lady edge of the mound," as the Chorus

86. This connection holds whether, in 927, we keep the transmitted reading *aisa* (as Page does in the OCT edition) or we print Blaydes's emendation *haima*, which would assimilate the tomb to Agamemnon's blood (for arguments in favor of the emendation, see Roberts 1984).

puts it (722–23)—connect Orestes and Clytemnestra yet open an unfillable gap between them. The clot congeals not just Agamemnon’s death, but also a maternal void—Orestes’ immediate separation from Clytemnestra, after his birth, which the nurse Cyllissa recalls in her speech, and the correlated gap between the name of mother and unmotherly behavior, which Electra laments (190–91). The *thrombos* marks the breast itself as a tomb—a container of death and an archive of the maternal void caused by the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the non-nourishment and forced exile of Orestes. This void may also be marital, for, when, in the heated exchange with his mother, Orestes contrasts Agamemnon’s toils with her inactivity inside the house (*esô kath-êmenê* 919), Clytemnestra casts this encryptment as a forced separation—“it is an affliction for women to be shut off (*eirgesthai*) from their husband” (920). She thus places herself in the same position as Electra, who fed her melancholy while grieving for Agamemnon in the dark and empty palace. This connection is made more pregnant by Clytemnestra’s gesture of baring her breast to Orestes (896–98), which has incestuous overtones chiasmatically reflecting Electra’s own eerie feelings for her father (and perhaps also for her brother, as later plays suggest with greater emphasis).⁸⁷ At the same time, the anatomical suggestiveness of the mound is in itself an indication of the entombed maternal or even erotic loss that the mother’s bared breast signifies. The adjective *threptêrios* (“nourishing”) in Orestes’ interpretation of his mother’s dream thus brings together her *mastos* (“breast”) and his lock of hair not only as carriers of dead nourishment, but also as material intimations of encrypted losses. It is not just the never fully eradicated maternal bond or the terror of staining himself with matricidal pollution that explains the paralysis of Orestes’ armed hand as Clytemnestra bares herself and reminds him of how, “dozing off” (*brizôn*), he “sucked nourishing milk with [his] gums” (897–98). There is, in addition, a temptation to throw himself into an apparently accessible sepulchral inside (an internal bed of oblivion), which is also his own (in his dream interpretation, Orestes oddly refers to Clytemnestra’s breast as “mine”).⁸⁸ Clytemnestra’s gesture engenders, in other words, a fantasy of *in-cess*, one that the Symbolic, entrusted to Pylades and Apollo, suppresses.⁸⁹ The allure of the

87. On the incestuous overtones, see Zeitlin 1996, 96; see also Murnaghan 1988, 33.

88. Garvie (1986, ad 545) explains that “*emon* is equivalent to the objective genitive *mou*,” but since the possessive precedes *threptêrion* (*emon threptêrion*), we may imagine that Orestes falls into a sort of intratextual slip induced by a sense of “ownership” of the adjective, which modified one of *his* locks. On the maternal breast as the *objet petit a*, the thing that goes beyond the obtainable object, the milk, and that in its unattainability provides satisfaction in no-satisfaction, see Copjec 2002, 59.

89. Providing “military, material, and political” support (Griffith 1995, 94) to Orestes and serving as the “voice . . . required to compel the plot to progress” (Nooter 2017, 233), Pylades is

sepulcher, which freezes Orestes, requiring Pylades' intervention, promises a plunge into a frozen hearth, not simply the infantile regression of taking in milk (or of returning to the womb), but an inward movement into an archived loss, a disappearance in the unseen inside of the bodily crypt.

In the play's final scene, as Orestes wheels out the corpses of his victims and holds Clytemnestra's murderous net, setting up an archival tableau, he himself becomes this crypt-like object, a parricidal relic. When the corpses of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus appear on the *ek-kuklêma*, the machine that makes the invisible visible, the resulting assemblage of body-matter corresponds to an archival consignment, a "single corpus," which Orestes himself alludes to—"they conspired together (*xun-ômosan* 978)," he says, and promised "to die together" (*xun-thaneisthai* 979).⁹⁰ "Seated" on the elevated platform, the dead bodies provide an archival impression—a distorted visual commemoration—of the defeated couple's life, which, with dark irony, Orestes captures by referring to their sitting "haughty" on thrones (975).⁹¹ As a surrogate of the kingly throne, the *ek-kuklêma* is at once the container of the archival collection and one of the collected items. The relic that receives the most attention in the tableau—the net (*stegastron* 984) employed by Clytemnestra to kill her husband—is in a similar twofold position. As the violent container of Agamemnon's hands and feet, the object turning bodily parts into relics by yoking them together ("manacles of hands and binding together [*xun-ôrida*] of feet" 982),⁹² it is an item of the archive and, at the same time, an archival consignment in itself. Making the spectators the visitors of the house's archive with a quasi-apostrophe (*idesthe* 973, 980), Orestes, with the aid of the *ek-kuklêma*, displays his archontic, patriarch(iv)al enterprise to them and the "father" (984)—not his own, as he clarifies, but presumably Zeus.⁹³ Exposing the net, he seeks to undo Clytemnestra's action—and her display of the same prop in the earlier play's mirror scene—virtually liberating Agamemnon, striving to transform a murderous *stegastron* ("covering, net, cloak") into the pledge of *stergêthron* ("affection"), the quasi-homophonous word with which

in charge of Symbolic interpellation, acting in the Name of the Father, even if we do not want to follow Knox (1972, 109) in assuming that he is ventriloquizing Apollo, i.e., that he is speaking as the god himself.

90. On the staging of this scene, a re-enactment of the finale of *Agamemnon*, and on the appearance of the *ek-kuklêma*, see Taplin 1977, 357–59; see also A. L. Brown 1983, 15–20.

91. When the Euripidean Electra imagines Clytemnestra, she describes her as sitting on the throne among Phrygian spoils (314–15). Such an image of Clytemnestra's usurped power already encapsulates her death—her transformation into one of the spoils with which she is already archived.

92. Differently from Page, *OCT*, I preserve the transmitted accusative *xun-ôrida*.

93. On Orestes' quasi-apostrophe to the spectators, see Sider 1978, 26.

Electra had proclaimed her transference of all filial love to her father (240–41). As the container of spectral content, the enclosure of an absent yet (affectively) present father, the outer layer of a space of loss, the net is another evocation of the inner crypt. It is cognate with—and perversely anticipatory of—the empty urn (*stegos*) of Orestes in Sophocles' *Electra* (1165). The *ek-kuklêma* enacts the sort of tomb raiding that, in the play, as we have seen, lurks behind self-mutilation. The net is not just the hated object, Clytemnestra's ally, but also an image of the encrypted space that Orestes wishes to inhabit, another trigger of *in-cess*.⁹⁴ As he describes the net, a speech act concomitant to its being spread out (983), he calls it *agreuma thêros* ("something to catch a wild beast" 998)—the first of many definitions that he pulls out in a feverish search for the *mot juste*. There is a frisson-inducing ambiguity in *agreuma*, which denotes not only an instrument, but also a target of hunting, precisely what Orestes will become as soon as the Erinyes appear to him, bringing the play to an end.⁹⁵ Thus even as he brandishes the *agreuma*, memorializing the father whom he had avenged, Orestes is almost already an *agreuma* himself and, in that sense, Clytemnestra's murderous weapon.⁹⁶ Acting in the name of the father, he simultaneously turns into a crypt-like parricidal relic—a trace of the feverish slippage of the archontic into the an-archontic, of reproductive futurism into the death drive. Mapping his own regained "presence" (*par-ôn* 1014) onto "this father-killing weaving" (*patro-ktonon . . . huphasma . . . tode* ["this"] 1015), Orestes identifies with a container that has destroyed its own contents.

Becoming Clytemnestra's woven net, Orestes also becomes a "woven" Erinyes, and thereby a hunter of himself in the vain pursuit of *in-cess*. When Orestes refers to the net as the "robe" (*pharos*) that "Aegisthus's sword dyed (*ebapsen*)" (1011), the possibility arises that, by mimetic logic, the net-like murderer, still holding the matricidal sword, will direct it against himself, creating an opening by which he can access his inside. When the Erinyes manifest themselves to him, they are characterized as "woven" (*peplektanêmenai*)—like a net—with thick snakes (1049). As a parricidal net, then, Orestes is, in the text's imagistic system, also an Erinyes, his own enemy. Pursued by the chthonic deities, he is also pursuing himself. I do not intend to emphasize here the idea that the Erinyes externalize conscience or guilt; rather, I wish to suggest that they enact the death drive, engaging Orestes in a self-chasing

94. Significantly, at 999 the net is compared to a "coffin" (*droitê*).

95. Cf. Euripides, *Bacchae* 1240–41 (Agave's words): "Father, accept [the prey] in your hands, / relishing what I hunted (*tois emois agreumasin*)."

96. As Worman (2015, 82–83) observes, "The net is both the trap for his father (the victim) and the trap of his mother (the murderer)—now held out as if to capture the son in its deadly embrace (as both murderer and potential victim)." Consequently, "the cloak, the mother, and [Orestes] himself become enmeshed as one monstrously proliferating theatrical sign."

propelled by the impetus to open a breach in his body and entomb himself. In the stasimon that marks the transition to the act of revenge—a catalog of mythological misdeeds, or “an archive of woes”—the Chorus recalls Althaea, Meleager’s mother, who initially kept the log on which his life depended away from the hearth, safeguarding it in a secret chest. Later (607–12), when she heard that he had murdered his brothers, she removed the log (607–8) from the chest and burned it in the hearth, killing him instantly. In this narrative of archive fever, Althaea, “the fire-lighting woman” (*pur-daês guna* 606), is a counterpart of Clytemnestra, against whom Orestes’ revenge is fashioned as a rebirth of Meleager.⁹⁷ Orestes is the son whose (re)introduction in the house by Destiny (648) is a would-be return of the log to the chest, also a crypt. An archival resurrection would coincide with the anarchivic self-entombment that he seems to chase until the end of the play and beyond, as he himself is chased by a recrudescing maternal power.

The self-entombment sought by Orestes and Electra, in a sense, reiterates Thyestes’ unwitting cannibalism, which, at the close of the play, the Chorus posits as the *archê* of the many disasters of Atreus’s family, referring to his “wretched child-devouring pains” (*paido-boroi . . . / mochthoi talanes* 1068–69). In *Libation Bearers*, Agamemnon’s children indulge in the pleasure-in-pain of wanting but not managing to be taken in by the father already dwelling—devoured but not digested—as an archived loss inside themselves. When Orestes pursues himself, attacker and victim, the deferred self-stabbing, a thwarted entrance into himself, corresponds to Iphigenia’s officiation of the repetitious stabbing of others in search of an entry point to her own crypt, a putative *archê*.⁹⁸ Orestes’ fear (1024–25 and 1052) suspends him between fleeing and pursuing what the Erinyes threaten and promise, in a confusion of self-preservation and self-destruction—the very confusion that keeps us in a state of suspension even while we desire to fold ourselves into our own bodies, penetrate our secret archives, inhabit our crypts.

III. ENCRYPTED FEAR AND ARCHIVAL AUTO- IMMUNITY: AESCHYLUS’S *EUMENIDES*

In the last play of the *Oresteia*, the archive fever disseminated by the locations (Delphi, the Areopagus), the rhythm of continual resetting, and the Erinyes’ relentless pursuit culminates in the final archiving of the unruly god-

97. On Althea and Clytemnestra, see Lebeck 1967 and Grethlein 2013, 94–96.

98. Even if, in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Iphigenia tells Orestes that she is not directly in charge of killing her victims, but simply sprinkles water on them, Thoas, speaking to her, refers to the sacrificial weapon as “your sword” (*xiphos . . . son* 1190).

desses, their metamorphosis into the civic Eumenides. Coming to occupy “a secret interior within the public square” and to constitute “an outcast outside inside the inside,”⁹⁹ the Erinyes are officially entombed in a crypt—a space that, interpreting Aeschylus’s text, Euripides calls a “chasm” (*Electra* 1271 *chasma*).¹⁰⁰ This archiving results in a partial or ineffective domestication, for, as Yopie Prins has observed, “the city somehow depends on [the Erinyes’] *mousa stugera*”—their “hateful Muse”—and “the *logos* of law is necessarily implicated in the *muthos* of the Furies.”¹⁰¹ But this recognition of the city’s reliance on the Erinyes’ anarchic emotional power to enforce its own *archè* (“rule,” “power”) does not exhaust the full anarchivic force of their incorporation. Their archiving, a political appropriation of fear, a *taking in* of the terror that the goddesses represent, brings with it the danger of auto-immunity.¹⁰² Impossible to contain, always apt to circulate, fear not only energizes democracy’s self-annihilating tendencies, but also, at the aesthetic level, thwarts the cathartic regulation of tragic emotion put to the service of the pleasure principle. As encrypted terror threatens an auto-immune response within the citizen body, at the end of the trilogy tragedy spreads a perversely alluring fear, a feverish impulse to hunt inside oneself, like the Erinyes in pursuit of Orestes, an impossible target.

At the beginning of *Eumenides*, in the Pythian prophetess’s speech outside the Delphic temple, we see both archival domiciliation as a marker of the end of the trilogy and an anarchival collapse of the expected dramatic resolution into feverish repetition and fear. In the prologue, the usual synopsis of past,

99. Derrida 1986a, xiv.

100. The notion of the crypt is in keeping with the characterization of the Erinyes as metics—foreigners with quasi-citizen status and, thus, supreme examples of the “outside inside the inside”—that we find at the end of the play (1011 and 1018).

101. Prins 1991, 192. Here *muthos* is not Homer’s authoritative speech, but a form of speech more “primitive” than *logos*. Most recently, Nooter (2017, 288) has reconfigured the poles of the opposition in terms of language and voice within an interpretive framework that underscores the ambiguities of the finale but emphasizes its ultimately repressive force. With few exceptions—e.g., Chiasson (1999) and Revermann (2008, 251), who deems *Eumenides* “the most ‘untragic’ of all preserved tragedies”—scholars, in varying degrees, have long recognized the anti-closural elements of the play: see, among others, Goldhill 1984a, 279–83; Griffith 1995; Rosenbloom 1995; Bacon 2001; D. H. Porter 2005; Easterling 2008, 230–35; Zakin 2009; Rader 2015, 184–86; and Toscano (2015), who has seen the play as contesting reconciliatory (that is, Hegelian) dialectic. Reading the archiving that closes *Eumenides* through the nexus of archive and death drive will lead me to suggest that the self-undermining stemming from the play’s repressive structure makes it deeply anti-cathartic, i.e., most tragic.

102. I use this term to model an aesthetic response that reconnects the political phenomenon repeatedly discussed by Derrida (see esp. 2002, 80n27; 2003a, 150–54; and 2005, 33–36)—and now fully assimilated in political theory—with the medical condition (on which see, e.g., Andrews 2011).

present, and future takes the form of a consignment corresponding to the Delphic temple, an *archeion* in itself.¹⁰³ Apollo, the new occupant of the temple; the Pythia; and the old goddesses whom he replaced and archived, are gathered in the same verbal space, while inside the physical space, as the horrified prophetess reports, the suppliant Orestes, forming an assemblage with his sword and laurel branch (40–45), is encrypted alongside the lethargic Erinyes. In the verbal texture of her narrative, the succession of dwellers (Gaia, Themis, Phoebe, and Apollo), domiciliations, and *archai* is expressed through various forms of the verb “to sit” and the noun “throne,” all appearing at the end of the line, as in a refrain.¹⁰⁴ This refrain at once suggests and denies that the trilogy will now be put to a rest, for the serial markers of repose coincide with repeated “beginnings” (*archai*), the frantic rhythm of a continual resetting. The prophetess herself enacts this dynamic, when, entering the temple to take a seat on her throne (29), to “archive” herself, she sees a terrifying “outside” (the Erinyes); rushes back onstage, “sent back by fear” (*deina . . . , deina . . . / palin m’ epempsen* 34–35); and begins her speech anew. Her description of the sleeping Erinyes—“a group of women sitting on thrones (*en thronois hēmenos* 47)”¹⁰⁵—is haunted by a frisson-inducing “outside,” the image, at the end of the previous play, of the corpses of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus lying on the *ek-kuklēma* instead of (or as if on) their usurped thrones (*en thronois . . . hēmenoi* 975). The sight of the Erinyes has, for the Pythia, the same shocking effect as this traumatic verbal remainder, preventing her from sitting, from enjoying an archival repose. Troubled by the Erinyes’ enthronement, the Pythia’s own throne, to which she is attracted, ends up pushing her away. Her movement, then, figures the glitch of the death drive, which immediately converts *da* into *fort*, the mirage of an ending into a compulsive restarting. While leaving the stage, still terrified, the Pythia invokes Apollo, declaring that he is a “healer-priest” (62) and a “purifier” (*katharsios* 63). Closing her speech, the adjective *katharsios* entrusts not only the god but the play itself with supplying a cathartic resolution. But even Apollo may be entangled with death-driven repetition, as the formal arrangement of the Pythia’s words suggests when she dwells on the translation of Delphic power from his grandmother to him (6–8):

103. On the archives of Apollo’s temple at Delphi, see Mari 2013.

104. See *hezeto* (3); *kath-ezeto* (6); *hizei . . . en thronois* (18); *eis thronous kath-izanô* (29); *en thronoisin hēmenos* (47).

105. Sommerstein’s comment that in this line *thronoisin* means “‘chairs’ (nothing to do with the *thronoi* of 18 and 29)” (1989, 86) is a characteristic attempt to curb Aeschylus’s play with the signifier.

Τιτανίς ἄλλη παῖς Χθονὸς καθέζετο
Φοίβη, δίδωσιν δ' ἦ γενέθλιον δόσιν
Φοίβω· τὸ **Φοίβης** δ' ὄνομ' ἔχει παρώνυμον

Another Titaness, a daughter of Gaia, took up the seat, Phoebe (*Phoibê*), who gives it as a birthday gift to Phoebus (*Phoibôî*); he has Phoebe's (*Phoibês*) name besides his own.

The alternation conjured by the familial polyptoton (*Phoibê . . . / Phoibôî . . . Phoibês*) shows how Phoebus's name facilitates the immediate return of an apparently archived power, his Titan grandmother.¹⁰⁶ Just as the Pythia's back-and-forth movement, her return onstage (*palin* 35), is determined by fear, so the return of Phoebe in the looping polyptoton seems to be haunted by *phobos* ("fear"), the affect encrypted in Apollo's name.

The plot of *Eumenides* involves a constant resetting, with repeated beginnings produced by changes of scene and new and returning characters. Even though the Pythia is, of course, Apollo's primary ally, his speech, which repeats and corrects hers, seems to replace it and, thus, to start the play all over again, forecasting, for Orestes and for us, the apparently reassuring ending that she could not anticipate. We feel archive fever as the action's generative energy especially when the power struggle breaks out between Apollo and Orestes, on the one hand, and Clytemnestra's ghost and the Erinyes, on the other. The outcome is a nervous alternation of nomological *archai*, each striving to impose itself by imparting to the play a new "beginning" (*archê*), striking through the earlier one, as it were.¹⁰⁷ When the Chorus leaves the stage, prior to the change of setting from Delphi to Athens, the ensuing emptiness—whether we see it or just imagine it while reading—fleeting evokes the fall into the abyss looming before a plot stuck between "beginnings" (*archai*) that cancel each other out. It is as if spasmodic resetting brings the play back to the very beginning of the performance, to the moment of waiting for the actors' arrival—a moment of dramatic inertia, an imaginary blank space, a kind of *archê*.¹⁰⁸ When Orestes,

106. Bowie (1983, 15) suggests that the unexpected inclusion of Phoebe in the prologue's catalog of chthonic deities looks forward to the end of the play—"though defeated" the Erinyes will not be "entirely obliterated."

107. Differently, Rehm (2002, 89) sees the multiplicity of settings as a sign of the trilogy's "movement toward . . . the open-ended contemporary world of the audience," while Revermann (2008) locates the play's abundance of "chronotopes" within an overarching ideological project of "idealizing Athenianization."

108. Cf. Rehm (2002, 97), who suggests that the empty stage enhances suspense ("What does the play hold in store? Who will enter the place this time?"). Rather than suspense, I see a sort of suspension in the face of the abyss. Discussing the exit of the Chorus—an exceptional

relocated to Athens, speaks again, he also resets the play, replacing his earlier prayer to Apollo (*anax Apollon* 85) with one to Athena (*anass' Athana* 235), the goddess whose statue he clings to in a quasi-fetal position (259).¹⁰⁹ Virtually striking through his previous *archê*—his first (and only) verbal intervention before his move to Athens—he regresses to the prenatal state, a condition that locates his hoped-for Athenian rebirth on the threshold between life and non-existence. Threatening to suck Orestes' blood and "shrivel" him (*ischmanas'* 267) to death, the Chorus of the Erinyes insinuates a reduction to emptiness, an impression of the void that, in the plot's search for the *archê*, it projected for an instant.

The compulsive resetting that marks the formal cadence of the play before the trial scene is matched by the Erinyes' *jouissance* in toiling in vain, in endlessly pursuing Orestes, in imagining the repeated blows of Clytemnestra's whip. When the Erinyes are in front of Orestes, part of the same assemblage of bodies, they fall asleep, as though the proximity abates their interest in him. Exhaustion seems to be indistinguishable from boredom. Woken up by the ghost of Clytemnestra, they bemoan the loss of their prey (148), but this loss is precisely what keeps them alive, feeding the repetitive fever of their chase, nourishing the perverse pleasure of exhaustion. The vain *again-ness* of their lament—"we suffered (*epathomen*) . . . I suffered (*pathousa*) much in vain; we suffered (*epathomen*) a suffering impossible to heal" (143–45)—is in itself a performance of their *jouissance*, like the astonishing sequence "Catch, catch, catch, catch" (*labe labe labe labe* 130), which captures the resetting imperative of the death drive, the spasms of compulsion as post-linguistic excess.¹¹⁰ For the Erinyes, "getting up" (*ana-stêsêi* 124; *an-istô* 133, 141), abandoning the provisional non-existence of sleep, amounts to re-immersing themselves in the wearying duration of a futile chase, a febrile torpor—as suggested by the double meaning of the preposition *ana* ("up" and "again").¹¹¹ Later, when the Chorus menacingly promises Apollo, "I will *never, never* leave that man" (225), the god responds, "All right then, keep pursuing and add more toil (*ponon*

measure in Greek tragedy—Taplin (1977, 375–76) refers to the extreme case of the play *Aitnaiai*, where apparently Aeschylus experimented with five changes of setting—what I would call a supreme example of a dramatic death drive.

109. In 284 Orestes declares himself ready to tell his story "from the beginning" (*ex archês*).

110. On the striking repetition in line 130, see Lebeck 1971, 145, and Prins 1991, 182. Nooter (2017, 265–66) sees the Erinyes here as "sputter[ing] in rage."

111. The second meaning of *ana-* ("again") is activated, in the context, by the reference to the Erinyes' "second chase" (139). For the *again-ness* of the Erinyes, see also 255 ("Look, look again" [*au*]) and 720 ("I'll encounter this land again [*palin*]"). The description of the Erinyes as *paides a-paides* ("unchildlike children" 1034) is, in itself, another encapsulation of the circuitous *fort/da* that shapes their identity.

pleô) for yourself” (226). What seems a threat to Apollo is not for the Erinyes, who are, in fact, cathected to *ponos* (“toil”), as we infer from Clytemnestra’s assimilation of them to “a dog that never stops being concerned with toil (*ponou* 132).”¹¹² The *jouissance* stemming from this *ponos* is figured by the physical effects that, in the Erinyes’ account, Clytemnestra’s reproach of their ill-timed drowse had on them—something similar to wounds caused “in the heart and in the guts” by a whip (155–59). Zeroing in on this pain, they characterize it as “some heavy (*baru*), very heavy (*peri-baru*) chill from the cruel public scourger” (160–61). The striking game of repetitions in these two lines bears the seriality of whipping. In the compound *peri-baru* (“very heavy”), in which the locative prefix *peri-* (“around”) takes on a superlative meaning, we perceive an intensification of the whipping blows, but also a suggestion of the loop of flagellation, of the same death-driven temporality that informs the Erinyes’ pursuit of Orestes, their archive fever.¹¹³ The apparent pain inflicted by Clytemnestra’s blame (135) seems to entail, rather, a pleasure-in-pain, which, in turn, reveals how the rhythm of futility is something like the thrilling accumulation of gashes on (or in) the body—impressions of the death drive. The reset beginnings mark a plot cutting itself, renouncing its integrity, breaking itself up in the spasmodic pursuit of a phantasmic origin—what Orestes has somehow become.

In the imagistic and affective vortex of the play, the Erinyes’ masochistic “labor” (*ponos*) and Orestes’ “fear” (*phobos*) form a tightly bound circularity figured in Clytemnestra’s net, snakes, and poison. In his initial speech, Apollo paints a frightening future for Orestes—“[The Erinyes] will always (*aiei*) pursue you even through the large mainland when you go over the earth you tread in your wanderings, over the sea, and to sea-girt (*peri-rrhutas*) cities” (75–77)—but he urges him not to grow weary in such “labor” (*ponon* 79) and, then, not to let “fear” (*phobos* 88) overwhelm him (*mê phobos se nikatô phrenas* 88). With this second exhortation, Apollo previews Clytemnestra’s similarly worded command to the Erinyes, “Do not let labor overwhelm you” (*mê se nikatô ponos* 133).¹¹⁴ The Erinyes’ pursuit and Orestes’ flight figure terror’s motion, its circulation, both internal and external. Later, when Athena asks the Erinyes where the pursuit and flight will find an “ending” (*to terma* 422) and they suggest death, the exchange anticipates Apollo’s courtroom recollection of how Clytemnestra trapped her husband “in an endless, embroi-

112. Sommerstein (1989, ad loc.) banalizes this statement into a reference to the Erinyes’ hunger for “blood” by accepting, as Page in the *OCT*, Dawe’s unnecessary emendation *phonou* instead of *ponou*.

113. See also 165 *peri poda*, *peri kara* (“around the foot, around the head”).

114. For Goldhill (1984a, 215), the echo underscores the parallelism between the two scenes.

dered robe” (*en . . . a-termoni / . . . daidalôi peplôi* 634–35). The unbound expanse of the infamous robe/net tropes the entrapment of the Erinyes and Orestes in the endless circularity of *ponos* and *phobos*. In addition, the textile’s associations with coils cast both *ponos* and *phobos* as serpentine constrictions.¹¹⁵ The snakes curled up in the Erinyes’ hair or wrapped around their arms figure their pursuit, while fear itself is snake-like in its poisonous bite.¹¹⁶ When Athena warns Orestes that, if the Erinyes do not win the trial, an “intolerable poison” (*ios . . . / a-phertos* 478–79), “an eternal disease” (*aianês nosos* 479)—a plague causing generalized sterility, as will be clarified later—will seep into the ground, we are reminded of Apollo’s reference to their “eternal” (*aei*) pursuit, spread across the earth.¹¹⁷ The word *ios* (“poison”), cognate with Latin *virus*, makes us also think of fear’s infectious flowing within and among bodies like a virus.

Through the next part of my reading, I will interrogate the aesthetic implications of the play’s political discourse, starting with Athena’s foundation of the Areopagus. In the first chapter I observed how fear can be reconceived as a radical experience of feeling material; circling back to this idea, I will suggest a different anti-cathartic interpretation of the Aristotelian emotion—as an autoimmune self-burning, causing not emesis, but emetic frustration.

Coopting the death drive behind the Erinyes’ archive fever, the Areopagus, the court whose foundation is dramatized in the play, encrypts—but also spreads—the virus of fear in the citizen body. In a climactic moment of Orestes’ trial, Athena etiologically establishes the “nomological” *archê* of the Areopagus—a seat of law—according to the principle of justice through fear, which, in most readings, constitutes the play’s (or even Aeschylus’s) ethical and political “message.”¹¹⁸ But to us, living in a post-terror era, the formulation

115. The imagistic overlap of textiles and snakes is, of course, prominent in the trilogy: see esp. *Libation Bearers* 248–49, where Orestes describes the death of Agamemnon, and 1049, discussed in the previous section.

116. In 128 (*deinês drakainês ex-ekêranan* “[sleep and toil] destroyed [the strength] of the fearsome snake”), the marked repetition of letters in the three words conveys unstoppable repetition and circularity, but also suggests a quasi-identification of serpent and fear that emerges from the anagrammatic phrase *deinês echidnês* (“fearsome snake”) in *Libation Bearers* 249; on this phrase in *Philoctetes*, see chapter 3. See also Euripides, *Electra* 1344–46, where Clytemnestra’s words, with the adjective *deinos* (“fearsome”) circling back in a sequence of three lines, visualize the terror induced by the serpentine Erinyes: *deinon . . . ichnos ballous’ epi soi / cheiro-drakontes chrôta kelainai / deinôn odunôn karpon echousai* (“These goddesses with snakes as arms, dark in their skin, carrying a fearsome harvest of sorrows, cast a fearsome step over you”).

117. Pace Sommerstein (1989, 168), *aianês* maintains here its double meaning of both “grievous” and “eternal” (related to *aei*).

118. On *Eumenides*’ recipe of justice through fear, see esp. Podlecki 1966, 81–84; Di Benedetto 1978; MacLeod 1982, 135; Sommerstein 1989, 13–15, and ad 657–66; and Visvardi 2015,

of this message could not sound more disconcerting—"I advise my fellow citizens to preserve and revere neither anarchy (*an-archon*) nor despotism and never to throw fear (*to deinon*) completely out (*exô*) of the city" (696–98).¹¹⁹ By elevating fear, the intimate partner of the Erinyes' *jouissance* in pursuit, to an "archic" principle, Athena seems to condemn the community precisely to the "anarchic" state that she intends to avert. Illustrating fear's power as a deterrent, Athena observes that it will stop citizens from contaminating "pure water" with "bad in-pourings" (*kakais epi-rrhoaisi* 694), but as a potential "bad in-pouring" in itself, fear is a *pharmakon*, a poison or disease as much as a cure.¹²⁰ Locked *inside*, inhabiting the community's internal crypt, the "congenital fear" (*phobos* . . . *xun-genês* 691) on which both the Areopagus and the democratic state (precariously) ground their sovereignty is a morbid companion, a virus. Fear and terror are the primary forces of what Derrida calls "the auto-immune pervertibility of democracy."¹²¹ As recent experiences in American history demonstrate, fear and terror, when incorporated into the community's social life by a political power ostensibly committed to protecting democratic integrity, have the opposite effect—of generating self-destructive paranoia, of perverting vulnerability into a suicidal instinct.¹²² The preservative, protective, archival function that Athena assigns to the Areopagus is jeopardized—in the mode of auto-immunity—by the death-driven entanglements of the fear seeping through the community's porous crypt.¹²³

98–119. D. Cohen (1986) emphasizes the tyrannical nature of this model; cf. Kennedy 2006, 63n96. Most recently, Pestell (2017) has surveyed the workings of the emotion throughout the play, conceptualizing its configuration in the trilogy's last play as something between the Kantian sublime, "promot[ing] freedom and moral feeling," and the Freudian uncanny. On the complex relation of Athena's declaration with its historical context (with Ephialtes' reforms), see esp. Griffith 1995.

119. Cf. Critchley's juxtaposition (2007, 137) of Athena's lines with the slogan—"a safer world, a more hopeful America"—of the 2004 Republican Convention.

120. *Epi-rrhoê* ("in-pouring") can apply to emotional onslaughts: see, e.g., Plato, *Timaeus* 85e (in reference to anger).

121. Derrida 2005, 34. In his first discussion of the concept, Derrida defines it as a process that "consists for a living organism . . . of protecting its self-protection by destroying its own immune system" (2002, 80n27).

122. See the discussion of the (suicidal) American politics of fear during the Cold War and after 9/11 in Derrida 2003a, esp. 103. Wohl (2012) locates an auto-immune assimilation of friends to enemies in Euripides' *Orestes*, which she reads as an anticipation and enactment of the impending political collapse of Athens. On the *Oresteia* as a critique of Athenian imperialism, see Rosenbloom 1995. Stocking (2014; cf. 2008) sees Sophocles' *Antigone* as depicting the auto-immunity that accompanies the subject's "attempt to protect its self-identity . . . against the threat of finitude" (78); in his view, tragedy contributes to forging a sense of community not as a fusion into a totality, but as a sharing of finitude and difference.

123. As observed by Naas (2008, 124), for Derrida "auto-immunity appears . . . akin to what Freud called the 'death drive.'"

From Athena's foundational act we can extrapolate an anti-cathartic aesthetic model of tragic *phobos* defined by the perverse attractions of auto-immune self-hunting. The fear (*to deinon*) that, in Athena's plan, is taken in and never thrown out by the citizen body can be seen as homologous to the fear instilled by tragedy, which is encrypted in the body, uncleaned (and uncleaning). In *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (5.9) we read about a "terrifying" (*phoberos*) tragic actor in the time of Nero whose gaping, bellowing mouth instilled so much fear in spectators that they fled the theater, "as though they were screamed at (*em-boêthentes*) by a god." Through the participle *em-boêthentes* (literally, "having had screaming put inside")—very similar to *em-pho-boêthentes* ("having had fear put inside")—the actor's voice, a materialization of fear in the air, seems to become a burden that, far from being discharged, lodges itself in spectators. Just as Orestes' *phobos* is closely bound with the Erinyes' *ponos*, viewing or reading subjects who have taken fear in are both hunted and hunters: hunted by fear, that is, but also, hunters—or, rather, self-hunters—as they act on the compulsion to track down the cause (the *archê*) of the fear, to expel the virus. Facing the impossibility of this internal pursuit, the terrified, self-hunting body generates an auto-immune response, a fever, a kind of self-immolation that constitutes a form of archive fever.¹²⁴ In other words, the encrypted fear theorized by Athena just before the defeat of the Erinyes in the trial suggests the possibility of radically anti-cathartic tragic reception, which reinscribes their *jouissance* as the pleasure of a frustrated, feverish search—something similar to Iphigenia's compulsive sacrifices, or Electra's and Orestes' fantasies of *in-cess* in *Libation Bearers*. At the beginning of the play, when Apollo seeks to drive the Erinyes away from his temple, he gruesomely threatens to strike them with an arrow-turned-snake: "Go away from the oracular recesses lest, having taken in (*labousa*) a winged, shining snake (*ophin*), which rushed forth from a golden bowstring, you disgorge with pain (*an-êis hup' algous*) the black foam from men, vomiting out the clots of blood that you drew out of them (*emousa thrombous hous aph-eilkusas phonou*)" (180–84). The clots—archival formations—which are taken in and painfully spit out return later as poison, as the god foretells the consequences for the Erinyes of Orestes' impending acquittal: "If you do not obtain final victory in the trial, you will vomit the poison (*emêi ton ion*)" (729–30).

124. At the end of *Libation Bearers*, Orestes presents fear as something that dances with anger—a characteristically burning sensation (1024–25). In the feverish kinetics of fear that are alluded to here we can see something similar to the auto-immune dynamic I am theorizing here. On "low-grade fever" as the typical manifestation of auto-immune diseases, see the personal, moving account of Andrews (2011). On the link between fear and fire, see [Hesiod], *Shield* 144–45; for fever produced by fear, see, e.g., *Acts of Xanthippa and Polyxena* 36 "because of fear (*apo tou phobou*), the girl was vexed by a violent fever."

The burning effort, painfully ineffective, to spew out a virus or a snake taken in, encrypted, in a moment of aesthetic enthrallment, may be one of the pleasures of tragic *phobos*.¹²⁵ There is a pleasure in ingesting fear and, especially, in the effort to spit it out, a *ponos* whose *jouissance* is an auto-immune remainder of the Erinyes' own pursuit of *phonos* and ejection of it.

After Orestes' acquittal and quasi-entombment, the Erinyes, destined to be entombed in the recesses of Athenian land, threaten to spew out their poison with language anticipating both capitulation and the persistence of the archive fever the archive is meant to stabilize. Hearing from Athena that he has been acquitted, Orestes thanks the goddess for having settled him back (*kat-ôikisas* 756) in his "fatherland" (755), but this return sounds like an entombment, the encryptment "under" the earth that awaits the Erinyes (*kata te gan oikein* 839). As if he were getting ready for a journey to the Underworld, he first imagines what one of the Greeks will say *about* or *of* him—a patent gesture of self-mourning—and then announces the punishments that he will send from "within his tomb" (*ontes en taphois* 767) against Argives who, in the future, transgress his oath of loyalty to Athens. He thus subjects himself to the archiving that Athena will soon offer to the Erinyes as an apparent reward—"seats and hollows of this upright land" (805)—an incorporation disguised as cohabitation (*xun-oikêtôr emoi* 833). In their song of resistance, the Erinyes seem to prepare for this archiving—a radical domestication of their power¹²⁶—even while threatening to "release" (*meth-eisa*), spew out but also "let go of," their "poison" (*ion ion*), the "unbearable" (*a-phoron*) *outside* encrypted in their heart (782–84).¹²⁷ The repetition of the word for poison (*ion ion*), corresponding to the serial movement of drops falling onto the ground, perhaps looks ahead to future resistance, as does the circular structure of their song.¹²⁸ At the beginning, they lament that their prey has been snatched away from them

125. The anecdote relating how Phrynichus was fined by the Athenians for the excessively terrifying *Capture of Miletus* (Herodotus 6.21.10) demonstrates the wish to rein in tragic fear and the impossibility of doing so. Differently from Rosenbloom (1993), I do not believe that Aeschylean tragedy could effectively domesticate fear through *apatê* (the filter of mimetic deception)—at least, not for every audience. On the importance of this episode for tragic aesthetics, see Kottman 2003 and the Introduction, section 2.

126. According to Loraux (2002b, 43), this domestication amounts to "a founding forgetting."

127. In 783–84, I presuppose the text *chthoni stalagmon / a-phoron*, which is based on an emendation of Turnebus.

128. Nooter (2017, 278 and n84) connects the repetition of *ion ion* with the cry *iô* that opens and ends the Chorus's strophe (778 and 791). As she suggests, referring to Lear's exposition of Freud (2005, 98), at this point the Erinyes are stuck in "melancholic repetition," while in the final lines of the play they "move through a process of mourning and reintegration." I read the whole ending as an example of the impossibility of mourning: see chapter 3. I take the diffused stuckness, caused by lingering archive fever, as what marks the play as tragic.

(779), leaving them “dishonored” (*a-timos* 780), deprived of what is owed to them. When the same adjective, *a-timos* with an alpha privative, returns in the last line, closing the song (*a-timo-pentheis* “suffering for the dishonor” 793), we feel that the Erinyes’ impending defeat will, paradoxically, re-energize their circular pursuit *around* the impossible object, the unobtainable *archê*. The not-yet-realized archiving already manifests its effects, refueling the archive fever that it intends to control. These effects are also visible in Athena’s second appeal to the Erinyes, in which she makes a case for archiving them by suggesting a comparison with Zeus’s thunderbolt, his indispensable, much-revered weapon, which is safely “sealed off” (828). As soon as she formulates the order that would bring about the archiving—“Put to sleep your dark wave’s (*koima kelainou kumatos*) relentless might” (832)—the play seems to revert to its beginning, with the Erinyes dozing off in Apollo’s temple, and Athena thus appears to fall into the resetting rhythm that spreads the goddesses’ death drive into the plot. As the triple alliteration (*koima kelainou kumatos*) portends, Athena renews the repetitious movement of the death drive even as she tries to move forward by archiving it.

In Athena’s subsequent admonitions to the Erinyes, we can perceive a compulsive—and ineffective—impulse to spit out fear, an intimation of the auto-immune aesthetics I have outlined previously. In addressing the Erinyes, Athena insistently uses prohibitions—“*Don’t (mê)* be angry, *don’t (mêd’)* produce barrenness”; “*Don’t (mê)* throw *into (en)* my land whetstones for bloodshed”; “*Don’t (mê)* put an internecine heart or an innate (*em-phulion*) belligerence *in (en)* my fellow citizens.”¹²⁹ Fear erupts here through the negatives and the images of dangerous incorporation. In imploring the Erinyes not to bring anything *in*, in laying out all the things that she is, in a sense, afraid might enter the city, Athena draws attention to what she has already allowed to enter the city—fear, the encrypted *outside* that, in founding the Areopagus, she placed at the very center of Athens’ ethico-judicial system and its survival. In the repetition of the preposition *en* (“in”), we feel the discomfort caused by the emotional *outside* archived *inside*. The fearful imperative to keep harmful things out of the city reads as a displacement of the wish to eject what has already been taken in—fear itself, the virus of *phobos*—through language, an outward channel that transforms a febrile auto-immune search into an emetic *jouissance*.¹³⁰ This unattainable ejection results in a masochistic attachment to

129. See 801–2, 858–59, and 861–63. On a literal level, Athena’s primary concern here is the avoidance of civil strife (see Goldhill 1984a, 267), but the fear that she has encrypted is the quintessential cause of *stasis*, as we have seen.

130. In 829–30, Athena may even hint, projectively, at this emetic strain when she voices another prohibition: “Don’t spit (*mê ’kbalêis*) words out of your crazed tongue against the land.”

fear—something similar to the “fearful desire” or the “desirous fear” captured by the phrase *deinos* . . . *erôs* (865), which Athena applies to her fellow citizens who are infatuated with fame.¹³¹

After the Erinyes yield to Athena and are coopted into the city’s *consensus* (*xun-oikian* 916), their language becomes the vicarious, ineffective outlet of a fear—shared by Athena and the whole community—which can never be disgorge. In praying for the sun to make “benefits burst forth from the [Athenian] soil, flooding in (*epi-ssutous*)” (924–25), the Chorus subliminally renews its earlier threat that “plant-killing, child-killing blight” will assault the land—an “assault” indicated by *epi-sumenos* (785–86), which is etymologically linked with *epi-ssutous*. This reconfiguration—from assault to flooding abundance—is not just a sign of the impending transition of the Erinyes to *Semnai Theai* (“Solemn Goddesses”), but also a marker of the archived fear attacking the body from within, which language circulates but cannot emetically discharge. In the following lines, the Chorus, like Athena, reveals the fear through prohibitions (940–45):¹³²

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| φλογμούςσ ὀμματοστερεῖσ φυτῶν τὸ | 940 |
| μῆ περᾶν ὄρον τόπων, | |
| μηδ’ ἄκαρπος αἰανῆσ ἔφερπέτω νόσος | |
| μηλά τ’ εὐθενοῦντα Πᾶν | |
| ξὺν διπλοῖσιν ἐμβρούισ | |
| τρέφοι . . . | 945 |

Flames of heat that deprive plants of their buds, may these not (*mê*) cross the boundary of our territory, nor (*mêd’*) may the sterile, eternal disease attack the land, and may Pan feed thriving flocks (*mêla*) with double offspring.

The delayed appearance of the first *mê* in the second line re-creates the workings of fear, which makes the subject take what terrifies her as a reality. The Erinyes here act at the same time as fear’s subject and object, both fearful and feared. Not just the dreaded external agent capable of ruining the crop—like

131. In 864–65, Athena announces, as a commentator puts it, that “young men with a ‘formidable desire for glory’ [*deinos eu-kleias erôs*] will have every opportunity to earn it in external war, and will have no need to seek it at the expense of their fellow citizens” (Sommerstein 1989, ad loc.). But translating *deinos* as “formidable” elides the multiple levels of fear packaged in this phrase, where we feel Athena’s concern that the distinction between external and internal war that she is trying to establish may easily break down. In the phrase, there is the young men’s desire to be feared (a kind of *oderint dum metuant*) alongside, as I suggested, Athena’s own cathexis to fear, which goes beyond her precarious use of it to enforce justice.

132. I follow the colometry of Podlecki 1989.

the Erinyes themselves—the heat that spreads through the first line is related to fear, the *nosos* (“disease”) triggering a burning auto-immune response in the body. The repetition of *mê* (“don’t”) in three consecutive lines (with the initial letters of *mêla*, “flocks,” corresponding to another negative) suggests the seriality of emetic efforts, the feverish *jouissance* derived from impossible catharsis, from striving to discharge the encrypted emotional *outside*.

In the final lines of the play, the torch that accompanies the Erinyes’ exit procession toward their Attic crypt is an image of archive fever, of the self-immolation offered by tragic fear in a form of aesthetic resistance. Before sending the Erinyes on their journey to be archived beneath the earth, Athena re-encrypts fear in the city by casting the goddesses as its vehicle. “From these terrifying (*phoberôn*) faces,” she says, “I see great profit for these citizens” (990–91).¹³³ The procession escorting the Erinyes to their new subterranean container is dominated by images of fire and torches, their “old” destructive weapons putatively converted into icons of their fiery guardianship. This processional imagery culminates with the last strophe of a final song, addressed to the Chorus of the goddesses (1040–42):¹³⁴

Ἰλαοὶ δὲ καὶ εὐθύφρονες γᾶ
 δεῦρ’ ἴτε σεμναὶ < > πυριδάπτω
 λαμπάδι τερπόμεναι καθ’ ὁδόν.

Solemn [goddesses], come here, propitious and straight-minded for this land, taking pleasure (*terpomenai*) along the way in the torch devoured by fire (*puri-daptôî*).

The torch blazing with “devouring” fire harks back to the beginning of the play, when Clytemnestra pressed the Erinyes to wake up and “shrivel” (*katischnainousa*) Orestes with their breath, “the fire of [their] belly” (*nêduos puri* 138)—a scenario in line with his nightmarish visions, in *Libation Bearers*, of post-matricide ulcers encasing him in their “wild jaws.”¹³⁵ The fear and desire that animated these visions also suffuse the final address to the goddesses. The pleasure-taking (*terpomenai*) mentioned here figures the *terpsis* (“pleasure, enjoyment”) prompted by fear—an encrypted emotion that sets the body on

133. As Goldhill (1984a, 277) observes, “The deictic *toisde* seems to extend its reference from the theatrical Athenian jurors to the Athenians in the theater.” On 990–91 as a reference to the institution of tragic choruses in Athens, see P. Wilson and Taplin 1993.

134. The speakers of these lines are usually identified, as indicated by the manuscripts, with Athena’s “assistants,” *hai propompoi*.

135. *Libation Bearers* 280 (*agriais gnathois*), on which see this chapter, section 2.

fire with an unquenchable flame.¹³⁶ A burning desire to expel the incorporated “safe,” to separate exterior from interior, non-self from self, feeds the auto-immune flame that devours the subject while imparting a frantic, vain movement. While leaving the stage and bringing the trilogy to an end, the Erinyes-turned-Eumenides embody the archival material that “seems to resist . . . [to] foment a revolution against the very power to which it [pretends] to hand itself over, to lend and even give itself.”¹³⁷ Fear’s resistance, its refusal to hand itself over, to be cleansed or turned into a policing instrument, to be dislodged from its secret crypt, keeps the aesthetic subject, just like democracy, in a steady state of motion without movement, always burning without ever being consumed.¹³⁸



We can see an encapsulation of the anti-cathartic tragic aesthetics of the three plays analyzed in this chapter in a painting by a fervent twentieth-century reader of Aeschylus. One of the best-known yet most enigmatic works of Francis Bacon, *Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus* (1981), exhibits his obsession with Greek tragedy, which haunted and hounded him like the Erinyes¹³⁹—in the case of Aeschylus, “open[ing] up the valves of sensation” for him.¹⁴⁰ According to Anne Carson, Aeschylus’s verbal experimentalism, epitomized in *Agamemnon* by Cassandra’s dissolution of language into sensation, corresponds, in Bacon’s paintings, to his programmatic effort,

136. Critchley (2019, 259) observes that “tragedy does not comfort our fever like a warm blanket; it inflames that fever and the fire begins to burn.”

137. Derrida 2003b, 12.

138. Here I am positing fear as an energizing aesthetic principle versus its use as an instrument of the state. As an aesthetic force, fear may paradoxically turn auto-immunity into an instrument of what, in *Rogues* (2005), Derrida calls “democracy to come”—a democracy that, as W. Brown (2009, 123) puts it, is always “on the move,” “rotating or oscillating.” Such an image suggests to me a kind of boundless self-undoing. Here W. Brown expands on the formalist comment made by Derrida regarding Aristotle’s definition of democracy in the *Politics* (1301a29–31), which concerns the problematics of equality: “The turns of [the] sentence are nothing short of vertiginous.”

139. See esp. Peppiatt 1996, 89–92, and Hammer 2005, 98–109. Relevant extracts from Bacon’s interviews are cited further. As Hammer reports (2005, 103), “A copy of the 1946 edition of Gilbert Murray’s translations of the *Oresteia* was unearthed in Bacon’s studio after the artist’s death.” The 1944 triptych *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* was already inspired by *Eumenides*.

140. Carson (2009, 4) refers to this quotation from Francis Bacon, without specifying the source. In one of his interviews with David Sylvester, Bacon observes that “the artist may be able to open up or . . . unlock the valves of feeling and . . . return the onlooker to life more violently” (1993, 17). On Bacon as the painter of “sensation,” see Deleuze 2003.

as Carson puts it, “to access something more raw and real than the images articulated by his conscious mind.”¹⁴¹ The central panel of the *Triptych* (see figure 6) seems to depict a more concrete effort to access what is inside oneself, to obtain the impossible entrance, or *in-cess*, that, as I have suggested, constitutes the distinctive archival feeling of *Libation Bearers*. In this panel, Bacon’s notional rendition of the trilogy’s central play, a human figure identifiable as Orestes himself is curled up on a throne, even becoming the throne, as he casts a skeletal, elongated, prehensile neck, not very different from an arm or an elephant’s trunk, into a circular black space opened up in his belly. The face, in turn, is absorbed in this hollow space scooped out, through biting or scraping, by a prosthetic attachment—whether a circle of teeth or fingers—at the neck’s lower edge.¹⁴² Bacon’s image in its way vividly illustrates the effects of reading that I have observed in this chapter, capturing interrelated death-driven dynamics: Electra’s and Orestes’ aspirational crypt scavenging in *Libation Bearers*, the feverish auto-immunity in *Eumenides*, the (ultimately) self-directed serial cuts made by Iphigenia’s knife, like Bacon’s sharp neck. The center of Bacon’s *Oresteia*, together with the circular form of the triptych itself, seems to portray the convulsions caused by a futile attempt to enter oneself, or the frustrated emesis provoked by an emotion burning inside.¹⁴³ The space broken open where the face is swallowed seems a miniature version of the glass cases that, as in a museum, occupy the two other panels/plays, the edges of the triptych/trilogy. *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides*, sealed off in separate archival containers, somehow converge in the middle, in the central bodily space, a crypt that is, arguably, the locus of the spectral entities haunting this chapter—the wound left by a thwarted death, the father encrypted as loss, and the never extinguished fear fueled by the Erinyes. Within the triptych’s pictorial economy the circular black space that constitutes the corporeal crypt of Bacon’s Orestes is also linked with the black backgrounds partially coming into view through the semi-open doors behind the glass cases. In the last panel, there is nothing behind the door, which seems, in fact, to lead into

141. Carson 2009, 4. Bacon’s reading of Aeschylus was mediated by W. B. Stanford’s influential book *Aeschylus in His Style* (1942), which also includes a section on “synaesthetic imagery”: see Hammer 2005, 102–4.

142. According to Collard (2002, lxi), “apparent teeth in a featureless face seem about to devour the figure’s own genitals”—a gesture of intergenerational voraciousness, a kind of pre-emptive Cronus-like behavior, in his view (“Orestes . . . must torture himself in reclaiming his throne”).

143. See Deleuze (2003, 60 and 62–70) on the programmatic circularity of Bacon’s triptych as the form of sensation’s never-resting movement—loops of “rising-descending, contraction-dilation . . . systolic-diastolic.” I complicate Deleuze’s reading of Bacon through the painter’s engagement with the Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* in Telò 2020c.



FIGURE 6. Entering the bodily crypt: Francis Bacon's *Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus* (1981). Oil on canvas, 218 x 168 x 8 cm. Astrup Fearnley Collection, Oslo, Norway. Photograph by Thomas Widerberg.

a deep void, a black hole. Struggling to enter oneself, to penetrate the body's interior archive, means never ceasing to strive for this inaccessible void.

The Erinyes "visited" Bacon frequently, as he said in a 1964 interview, in the persistent return of a synesthetic line—"The reek of human blood smiles out at me" (253)—that announces their choral enactment of the pursuit of Orestes.¹⁴⁴ The serial choral movement of the Erinyes around their prey, who they say is "cowering" (252) and clinging to Athena's statue (254–75), reflects the internal self-pursuit triggered in him by fear, the auto-immune response that, as I have argued, is a form of archive fever. The self-exhortation that opens the choral pursuit—"Look, look again (*hora hora mal' au*), watch everywhere" (254–55)¹⁴⁵—inevitably involves the spectator/reader in this feverish fear. In another interview, Bacon ascribes to Aeschylus the ability to "produc[e] . . . a sort of stimulation in itself . . . a sort of excitement, perhaps even like sexual excitement, like something very strong anyway, a sort of very powerful urge."¹⁴⁶ This urge is not just the creative instinct that inspired the *Triptych* but also the death drive motivating the bodily torsion depicted in the central panel. Orestes' encrypted fear, and Bacon's as his reader, manifests

144. See Peppiatt 1996, 91; Sylvester 2000, 21; and Hammer 2005, 103.

145. Like Podlecki (1989), I read *pantai leusse*.

146. Bacon in conversation with Michel Archimbaud (1993, 102–3).

itself as the sexually charged excitement of self-hunting, the repetitious strain of attempted self-penetration, the powerful *jouissance* of rummaging or retching—the body looping back upon itself in the quasi-self-encryption arising from the desperate hunt for what has been encrypted. The persistent, resistant fear that takes up residence within readers' bodies, as the finale of the *Oresteia* seems to dramatize, shapes tragic aesthetics. The burning stimulation it generates, the urge to access the inside, entails disassembling the body in order to reassemble it, to entomb outer parts and internal organs together in an unseen archive, the “most inward safe.”

Archival Endings





Tragic Jolts, *Jouissance*, Impossibility

IN HIS POWERFUL and moving book *None like Us*, Stephen Best conceptualizes the archive not as the patriarchal force that aspires to gather the traces of an experience into a coherent, unified, monolithic consignation but rather as a non-hierarchical assemblage of remains of the past. In Best's framework, this archive resists *us* as we play the role of would-be agents of consignation; indeed, its movement toward "self-divestiture" or "self-eclipse" affects us; it feeds in us a sense of frustrated possession and, in turn, a desire for self-dispossession:¹

I have often felt undone by the archive. . . . Time and again, I would set out to recover something from the archive and fail in the attempt. But what seemed to be affirmed in each attempt was not the recalcitrance of the past, but, rather, the extent to which I am drawn into being ecstatically dispossessed.²

1. Best 2018, 20. Regarding her experience of the archive, Singh (2018, 22) observes that "it kept slipping away as though it didn't want to be found, plundered, excavated . . . making clear that it didn't want our masturbatory desire for it."

2. Best 2018, 20. Best takes as a starting point Foucault's lyrical essay "Lives of Infamous Men" (2000b), originally conceived as a preface to an edition of the early-eighteenth-century archival records concerning the prisoners of the Hôpital Général and the Bastille. This project, called an "anthology of lives," included the materials of *Disorderly Families*, recently translated into English (Farge and Foucault 2016). For Foucault, the archive enables a form of survival for the struggle of the subaltern with a destructive power. As he puts it, "The most intense point

According to Best, this resistance is especially marked for the black archive—one designed to safeguard identities that he sees as constitutively defined by negation, by “appearance-in-disappearance.”³ As he puts it, “The objects of black culture are, to coin a term, ‘anarchival.’”⁴ When the historical material to be preserved is black culture, “the jolt of the archive”—that is to say, “its refusal, its rebuff”—is an invitation not just to perform the only kind of “preservation” that is possible (one that is lacking, melancholically incomplete, “destructive”), but also to participate mimetically in the archival object’s own “undoing.”

In this chapter, I conclude this book’s theorization of Greek tragedy’s archive feelings by exploring the link between tragic *jouissance* and sensual “jolts” that shake us, along with the characters, through experiences of “appearance-in-disappearance” or “possession-in-dispossession.” I locate these anti-cathartic jolts in imagery of spurting blood, intimations of orgasmic ending, in *Agamemnon*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus the King*, and also consider the erotically charged atmosphere of ostensible sadistic fulfillment in *Bacchae*. In the first three plays, when the plot is about to be archived and dead bodies are about to become archival objects, the release promised by suggestions of climax is frustrated by their formal configurations. These moments capture, instead, the pleasurable incompleteness of the completed sexual act—the lack of resolution “between tension and accomplishment, or between movement and rest,” intrinsic to orgasmic *jouissance* and to its temporality, expressed by the present infinitive *jouir* (“to come” or, more precisely, “to be coming”).⁵ Irreducible to “a state or an acquisition” or “an appropriation” (in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy),⁶ the moment of orgasmic climax cannot easily be distinguished from its aftermath, that is, post-coital tristesse. It is this relation between two types of ending—the sexual act’s pleasurable conclusion and its aftermath—that I want to interrogate through the juxtaposition of the two parts of the chapter. My exploration of orgasmic and post-orgasmic *jouissance*

of a life . . . is where it comes up against power, struggles with it, attempts to . . . evade its traps” (162). This moment is what gives the prisoners “the brief flash that carries them to us” (162). The recoil, the rebuff of the archive posited by Best has something in common with the “vibration, . . . [the] wild intensities muscling in with their own ways of saying things” (170) that Foucault sees as preserved by, even while subverting, the “stilted discourse” of archival documentation. It is an archival documentation that, in Foucault’s view, paradoxically gives voice to what it is trying to erase. Foucault feels assaulted by “the blend of dark stubbornness and rascality, of these lives whose disarray and relentless energy one senses beneath the stone-smooth words” (158).

3. Best 2018, 52.

4. Best 2018, 88. The reference to *Archive Fever* is unmistakable.

5. Nancy 2017, 7.

6. Nancy 2017, viii.

will lead me, in the last part of the chapter, to situate one pleasure of tragedy's archive fever, of its anti-catharsis, in non-ecstatic ecstasy—in an intoxicating push against Dionysian possession. Here I will observe an aesthetic model in which intoxication is not about dissolution but rather about a steady recoiling from it.

I. ORGASMIC ANTI-CATHARSIS: AGAMEMNON, ANTIGONE, AND OEDIPUS THE KING

Violence and intense eroticized pleasure are archived in *Dulce et Decorum Est*, Wilfred Owen's searing poem from the battlefields of World War I (9–28):

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

In this corrosive response to Horace's *Odes* 3.2, the signature alliteration of *dulce et decorum* is replaced by very different “d” sounds—*drunk*, *deaf* (7), *dreams*, *drowning*—which capture and encrypt the death drive. Horace's apparent celebration of the beauty of war (*dulce et decorum pro patria mori*) is

refashioned as suffocation in a gas attack, whose sensations are archived in the formal texture of the poem, a kind of lyric diary. Not simply marking the horror of war, guttering, choking, writhing, and gargling are blended into a battle with sexual repression, conjuring a linguistic *jouissance*, which translates the persistence of trauma and the masochistic (non)ecstasy it can yield.⁷ “Ecstasy of fumbling,” the phrase that shockingly closes the second stanza’s first line, initiates the sexually charged war labors, the abject joy of “curs[ing] through sludge” (2), the writhing eyes. The rapture of the broken, suspended face is the pleasure-in-pain of an attempted exit from oneself—the truth masked by the “sweet” lie of martial virtue, or *decorum*. This rapture turns into a suggestion of sexual climax in the subsequent lines, when, becoming aurally perceptible, the spasm (“at every jolt”) is simultaneously made visible by the blood that “come[s] gargling.” But we can say, with Nancy, that “the liquid of discharge”—*le jet* that coincides with the *petite mort*—“does not calm the tension,” but seems to prolong the spasms that constitute the *jouissance*.⁸

Mori (“dying”) is the last word of the poem, but the finality of death is called into question by its appearance, along with *dulce* and *decorum*, in a quotation that Owen’s poem programmatically contests. On the battlefield there is no room for *decorum*, while death seems to be negated by the repetitious vitality of painful sensations, which feed the masochistic formal texture. *Decorum* and *death* are, in a sense, parallel to each other; both the subject’s integrity, promised by the former, and its definitive undoing, granted by the latter, negate the spasm. The orgasm insinuated by the poem’s sexually exuberant language is not an indecorous catharsis, as one could describe death itself; it is rather the indefinite postponement of catharsis. The apparent release enacted by the *petite mort*, in fact, brings out “that which *bursts forth* and goes elsewhere,” an elsewhere that “escapes, flows away, disappears.”⁹ The half line that concludes the poem—a graphic visualization of incompleteness—almost turns *mori* into *mora* (“delay”), countering the categoric closure of *decorum* and *death*. The irreducibility “to a state or an acquisition, to an accomplishment . . . or an appropriation,” is enacted in the *jouir* of lingering in the muck of the battlefield. In a sense, this finale reconnects with the beginning of the second stanza, where the repetitious “Gas! GAS!” seems to vocalize the pleasure-in-

7. See Das 2016: “Guttering, choking, drowning: the compulsive rhyme of the gerundive ‘-ing’ suggests the eternal now of the trauma victim who, as Freud noted in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* . . . , is forced to relive the past experience as perpetual present.” On Owen’s homosexuality, see Das 2005 (ch. 4).

8. Nancy 2017, 51.

9. Nancy 2017, 87 (my emphasis).

pain of gagging (“Ga! Ga!”).¹⁰ In the realm of masochistic prolongation, such gagging pre-emptively undercuts the urgency of “Quick, boys!” a quasi-sexual demand for action and accomplishment. In this archival poem, a document of war but also of the desire expressed and repressed during war, the half-line ending, cast as an “old Lie,” performs the archive’s anarchival recusal, its own undoing, or “appearance-in-disappearance.”

In Owen’s poetic texture I recognize traces of the anti-cathartic aesthetics of Greek tragedy that I have explored in this book. In what follows, I consider discrete moments in the endings of three emblematic plays—Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, Sophocles’ *Antigone*, and *Oedipus the King*—whose own death-driven aesthetic pleasures, the anti-catharsis they offer, can be mapped onto the sexual climax they intimate within deeply archival settings. In his biological works, Aristotle repeatedly uses *katharsis* in reference to the discharge of menstrual blood, which he considers homologous to ejaculation.¹¹ Thus, in one reading, the mechanism of Aristotelian catharsis is, in spite of specific differences, “essentially the same in all cases, whether biological, ecstatic (*Politics*), or tragic (*Poetics*),” and draws on a quintessential model of (male) sexual pleasure—with “arousal, climax, and release.”¹² In the endings that I will reread, various formal effects of verbal prolongation, resistance, and persistence interrupt or disrupt this sequence. Although the prevalent sexual image in my analysis is ejaculation—the male-centered representational signal that “aim rules all, and its visual achievement provides closure”¹³—I will show that, as in Owen’s poem, the sexual *jouissance* supplied by tragedy radically contests the very notion of orgasmic teleology. Tragic anti-catharsis can foment what Alphonso Lingis sees in the phenomenology of the orgasm: it “engulfs . . . directions and any sense of where it itself is going”; it “surges and rushes and vaporizes and returns.”¹⁴

10. On the importance of tongue imagery and guttural phonetics in the poem, see Das 2005, 156. See also Nancy (2017, 35) on Proust’s comparison of Charlus’s and Jupien’s shouts of erotic pleasure to the noises made by a man having his throat slit.

11. On this Aristotelian homology, see esp. *Generation of Animals* 774a1–3; on the connection between aesthetic catharsis and menstrual discharge, see Lear 1992, 315. In [Aristotle], *Problems* 880a32, *apo-kathairesthai* equals ejaculation tout court. Yates (1998, 48) suggests that the discussion of ecstatic catharsis, as well as the catharsis of fear and pity, in *Politics* 1342a4–15, which is concluded by the phrase *kouphizesthai meth’ hêdonês* (“being relieved with pleasure”), is “analogous to the male version of biological catharsis, i.e., sexual excitement and ejaculation.”

12. Yates 1998, 53; see also Marx 2012, 102–5 and 121. See Freud 1905, 76.

13. Brinkema 2014b, 268.

14. Lingis 2018, 200. For a deconstruction of the teleological meaning of ejaculation that builds on the valorization of intensity by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and especially Lyotard (1993), see also Lingis 1985. Grosz (1995) contests the equivalence of the orgasm with death. Iri-

AESCHYLUS, AGAMEMNON

In *Ladies' Greek: Victorian Translations of Tragedy*, Yopie Prins explores the material archive of the affective interactions of Victorian female intellectuals with the ancient Greek language and, in particular, with tragedy.¹⁵ Through her reading of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Virginia Woolf experiences a version of "the hot-cold shiver of delight"—a strongly eroticized sensation—which learning Greek apparently caused for Jane Harrison, as Harrison herself reported.¹⁶ When Woolf describes the difficulties and pleasures of reading *Agamemnon*, she imagines quasi-suicidal thrills that presage her death: "I have taken a plunge into tough Greek, and that has so much attraction for me"; "It is necessary to take that dangerous leap through the air without the support of words."¹⁷ According to Woolf, the play reaches its emotional climax when Cassandra appears onstage and delivers her "naked cry" *otototoi popoi da. Ôpollon ôpollon* ("Otototoi popoi dah! Apollo, Apollo!" 1072–73), a moment in which language is powerfully overturned by non-signifying sound, "the literality of Greek letters."¹⁸ As Nancy Worman has observed, while transcribing the lines, Woolf "separates as *ô 'pollon ô 'pollon* what . . . [Verrall's] text prints as *ôpollon ôpollon*, thereby exaggerating the 'o-o-o' quality of the omegas and the utterance as a whole."¹⁹ In this way, we can add, Cassandra's shout, reinhabited by Woolf, overlaps with the vocalizations of Freud's grandchild—"o-o-o-o" interpreted as *fort*—which are described, as we saw in the Introduction, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.²⁰ One wonders if this "naked cry" may not be regarded by Woolf herself as a sonic impression of her "plunge" or "leap," a motion of death or, perhaps—in her affective archive of highly eroticized textual encounters—of her own *petite mort*.²¹

garay (1985, 113) notes how "the imperatives of reproduction" are used by patriarchal discourse to render the masculine subject, liquefied in the process of ejaculation, notionally solid again. Being neither subject nor object, sperm belongs to the domain of the Kristevan abject (1982, esp. 53 and 102–3), which in its various expressions contests the phallic unity of the masculine ego. See also Jagose 2013. D. Young (2018, 29–33) looks at the autonomous female orgasm—as depicted, for example, in Roger Vadim's . . . *And God Created Woman* (1956)—as a subversion of reproductive futurism.

15. Prins 2017.

16. Harrison 1919, 5–6; see Prins 2017, 43.

17. The first passage is from one of the letters (1975, 177); the second, from the 1925 essay "On Not Knowing Greek" (1992, 99). Both passages are discussed in Prins 2017, 35–37.

18. Prins 2017, 38. The phrase "naked cry" is from Woolf (1992, 100).

19. Worman 2019, 61.

20. Woolf was familiar with the work of Freud, whom she also met in London in his house on Maresfield Gardens: see esp. Briggs 2008 and Roetto 2019.

21. In this scene, in which Cassandra takes off her clothes, the kind of religious possession that defines her relationship to Apollo is strongly eroticized: see esp. Mitchell-Boyask 2006.

I will not be concerned with the appearance of Cassandra, but with another scene of the play, the finale, which climaxes with the reappearance onstage of Clytemnestra, still holding the murderous sword, standing by the corpses of her husband and Cassandra (1382–92):

ἄπειρον ἀμφιβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων,
 περιστιχίζω, πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν·
 παίω δέ νιν δίς, κὰν δυοῖν οἰμώγμασιν
 μεθήκεν αὐτοῦ κῶλα, καὶ πεπτωκότι
 1385
 τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι, τοῦ κατὰ χθονός
 Διὸς νεκρῶν σωτῆρος εὐκταίαν χάριν.
 οὔτω τὸν αὐτοῦ θυμὸν ὀρμαίνει πεσῶν
 κάκφυσιῶν ὄξειαν αἵματος σφαγῆν
 βάλλει μ' ἔρεμνῆ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου,
 1390
 χαίρουσαν οὐδὲν ἦσσον ἢ διοσδότῳ
 γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν.

Around him I place a boundless (*a-peiron*) net (*amphi-blēstron*)—an evil wealth of a robe—as for fish. I hit him twice, and in the course of two groans he let loose (*meth-ēken*) his limbs, and I add a third blow to the fallen man, a sign of gratitude to Zeus under the earth, the savior of the dead, for fulfilling my prayers. So, after having fallen, he gasps out²² his life, and blowing out (*kak-phusiôn*) a sharp (*oxeian*) slaughter of blood (*haimatos sphagên*) he hits (*ballei*) me (*m'*) with a black drop (*eremnēi psakadi*) of murderous dew (*phoinias drosou*)—me rejoicing (*chairousan*) not less than a sown seed (*sporētos*) rejoices with Zeus-given liquid sheen (*ganei*) in the labors (*en locheumasin*) of the bud (*kalukos*).

In a passage where the repressive veil of metaphor that barely covers the play's sexual subtext is shredded, the murder is almost explicitly cast as the last intercourse of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Victoria Wohl speaks of Clytemnestra's "sadistic sexuality," of her role as a fetishistic commodity that "allows the others—Agamemnon, the Chorus, the audience—to disown their own desires," while Simon Goldhill observes in these lines "a demonstration of [Clytemnestra's] corrupt view of nature, the perversion of her political/social/sexual actions seen in the reversal of natural world imagery."²³ Appropriating the penetrative logic of heteronormativity, Clytemnestra delivers a sequence

22. The translation "gasps out" follows LSJ's interpretation of the transmitted reading *hormainei*, which is problematic; Hermann's emendation, *oruganei*, is worthy of consideration. See Fraenkel 1950, ad loc.

23. Wohl 1998, 107–8, and Goldhill 1984a, 90.

of thrusts to her husband's body, which collapses exhausted. But this exhaustion does not prevent him from pushing back against this assault of Eros and Thanatos with an equally violent outpouring of blood—his last ejaculation.²⁴ The relaxation of his limbs, which, in the text, precedes this charged discharge, is actually its consequence, in a blatant distortion of physiological diachrony. The biological, agricultural imagery, which turns death into a perverted birth (“in the labors of the bud” 1392), generates a striking sexual overdeterminacy, culminating in the outré juxtaposition of *ganei* (“liquid sheen”) and *sporêtos* (“sown seed”), where rain is confused with male seed. The “rejoicing” (*chairousan* 1391) referred to by Clytemnestra is the manifestation of her sadistic violence turned into “sexual arousal,”²⁵ but also of the abject pleasure of being sprinkled with bodily fluids.²⁶

Located within the play's last movement, Agamemnon's liquid rejoinder is directed at Clytemnestra, but, in a sense, at us too—the spectators/readers. It figures an aesthetic alternative to catharsis, not just the opposite of a cleansing, but the failed, impossible release of the *petite mort*. Agamemnon's gushing—*oxeia haimatos sphagên* (“sharp slaughter of blood”); *eremnêi psakadi phoinias drosou* (“with a black drop of murderous dew”)—takes up most of lines 1389 and 1390, engulfing the verbal and metrical flow. But not (or not simply) flooding the lines, these phrases indicate the stickiness that affects the voice itself, when, for example, it pronounces the key word *psakadi* (“drop, rain”), recombining the syllables closing and starting the previous line (*sphagên* and *kakphusiôn*). This viscosity corresponds to the aspectual incompleteness of the present tenses of *ballei* (“[he] hits”) and *chairousan* (“rejoicing”), which capture the incompatibility of *jouissance* with the notion of ever *reaching* (a destination). The temporality of *chairousan* goes along with Mau-

24. While vehemently denying this interpretive effect, which Moles (1979) observed, recent commentators (Raeburn and Thomas 2011, 215, and Medda 2017, 325) reinforce it through their caution or aggressive disavowal—expressions of a hermeneutic Freudian negation. These critical positions reveal “an anxiety about ‘reading into,’” which is nothing but “a defensive . . . desire to uphold the normative,” as observed by Doyle and Getsy (2013, 63) in their theorization of queer formalism. G. J. P. Daly (1985, 10) opposes the ejaculatory/orgasmic reading not because “such sexual imagery might have been out of place in tragedy” but “for the more basic reason that it strains the language of the lines to breaking-point.” Such straining, one could say, is characteristic of tragic and especially Aeschylean language.

25. Wohl 1998, 108.

26. Even though he rejects the sexual symbolism, Medda (2017, 327) notes that the dative *eremnêi psakadi* (“black drop”), an instrumental governed by *ballei* (“hits”), also grammatically links up with *chairousan* (“rejoicing”): this overdetermined syntax reinforces the impression of orgasmic *jouissance*. DuBois (1988, 70) speaks of “a scene of a woman fertilized by her husband's blood.” Barthes (1972) comments, in general, that eroticism can emerge from the metonymic chains between different liquids.

riche Blanchot's idea that pleasure "is essentially that which escapes."²⁷ While seeking to archive Agamemnon, to gather, immobilize, and store away his whole body in a fish net, Clytemnestra enables him to archive himself, anarchically, through *dissemination*, the mobile, relational survival of a body without organs, of liquid intensities imprinting themselves on other bodies. The impossibility of subjecting Agamemnon's body to consignment is signaled by *a-peiron* "with no boundaries (or no ending)," an adjective at odds with the closure of the net, intimating its anarchic porosity.²⁸

We, like Clytemnestra, become archives—our skin, our faces, our whole bodies the substrates (or the *hypomnesic* surfaces) where the *impressions* of Agamemnon are archived.²⁹ But as the archiving substrate cannot be distinguished from the archived content, we in effect turn into archives like Oedipus at the beginning of *OC*—conglomerates of trauma and grime. We are inundated by these *impressions*, as expressed graphically by the personal pronoun *me* ("me"), which is reduced, in 1390, to one consonant and an evanescent elision. The subject is left breathless by the expansive phrasing of Agamemnon's *dissemination*. In a sense, this dispersed, *a-peiros*, liquid archive replaces the *amphi-blêstron* ("net") employed by Clytemnestra. The stuckness and sense of exhaustion that derive from the weight of these archival impressions—a weight burdening the lines themselves—are traces of the sexual languor suggested by the loosening of Agamemnon's limbs after he has been struck. When we reach the end of the play, we, bodies as viscous archives, are suffocatingly exhausted, incapable of fully distinguishing ourselves from the sediment that clings to us.³⁰ We feel tragic *jouissance* in the material traces of the sexual pleasure that "escapes"; in fact, "it is in the escaping that there is pleasure."³¹ Agamemnon's sanguinary scattering subverts catharsis—a disciplinary tool, like Clytemnestra's robe—which promises relief from emotional contraction and explosion while resembling the constancy of death more than *la petite mort*.

27. Blanchot 1988, 52.

28. On *a-peiron*, see Fraenkel (1950, ad 1382), referring to Wilamowitz (1913, 120), who interprets *a-peiron* as *ho ouk echei peras* ("what has no ending").

29. On *hypomnêsis* as the archival substrate, see Derrida 1996, 11 and 19.

30. See Brinkema 2006, 169 (on the aesthetic effects of Catherine Breillat's artsy pornography): "If we are left sticky at the end of watching . . . , it is because the touch of the film and our touch back have ceased to allow a meaningful distinction between out there and in here, in a bodily and cinematic sense." On ejaculatory viscosity in film, see also D. Young 2018, 87–90. For the archive as a "sticky and messy conglomeration of liquor, pustules, blisters, and semen," see Tortorici's analysis of archives of policed sexual acts (2014, 411 and 424).

31. Nancy 2017, 20.

Along with death, there is birth in the imagery of the passage, where we even find the word “labor” (*locheumasin* 1392). If killing Agamemnon symbolically brings Iphigenia back to Clytemnestra, it does so only through the anti-catharsis of unfulfilled childbirth, of an impossible delivery, and, thus, an indefinitely prolonged mother-daughter bond. Allied with a *jouissance* that defies closure and satisfaction, this image represents what would be for Iphigenia a blissfully blocked life, a recusal from the Symbolic.³²

SOPHOCLES, *ANTIGONE*

The sticky imagery of liquid emissions spills over from the ending of *Agamemnon* into that of *Antigone*. The echo is so striking that commentators have not hesitated to see it as a blatant case of inter-theatrical allusion, even as the indication of Sophocles’ Aeschylean anxiety of influence.³³ I want to interrogate the anti-closural implications of this closural echo—and how, in particular, its formal surroundings participate in the implicit meta-discourse of anti-catharsis initiated in *Agamemnon*. I will thus look at this echo as an indication of tragedy’s repeated, reflexive thematization of the aesthetic link between dramatic endings and sexual climax, rather than as a matter of intertextuality. Archived in her bridal cave, starved to death, Antigone is reduced to a cold corpse, an archival relic. In the following lines, the last moments of her betrothed Haemon are bookended by two kinds of liquid emissions, spitting and a flooding hemorrhage (1232–40):

πτύσας προσώπῳ κούδεν ἀντειπῶν, ξίφους
 ἔλκει διπλοῦς κνώδοντας, ἐκ δ’ ὄρμωμένου
 πατρὸς φυγαῖσιν ἤμπλακ’· εἶθ’ ὁ δύσμορος
 αὐτῷ χολωθεῖς, ὥσπερ εἶχ’, ἐπενταθεῖς 1235
 ἤρεισε πλευραῖς μέσσον ἔγχος, ἐς δ’ ὑγρὸν
 ἀγκῶν’ ἔτ’ ἔμφρων παρθένῳ προσπτύσσεται·
 καὶ φυσίων ὄξειαν ἐκβάλλει ροῆν
 λευκῆ παρειᾷ φοινίου σταλάγματος.
 κεῖται δὲ νεκρὸς περὶ νεκρῶ . . . 1240

32. On the fantasy of a corporeal homoerotic fusion between mother and daughter, see Kristeva 1980, 239, and Silverman 1988, 110–111. Cf. Grosz (1989, 126) on Irigaray (1985, ch. 11, “When Our Lips Speak Together”), for whom, as Grosz puts it, the mother-daughter relationship is a “we” that “does not subsume or merge one identity with another but fuses them without residue or loss to either.”

33. On the echo, see, e.g., Fraenkel 1950, ad Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1389, and Sommerstein 2008, 169n297.

Having spat on his face (*ptusas pros-ôpôi*), without responding further, he pulls out his double-bladed sword, and missed his father as he fled away; then the wretched man, enraged against himself, just the way he was, leaning on the sword, drove its middle into his lungs, and still conscious he embraces the virgin (*parthenôi pros-ptussetai*); and breathing out (*phusiôn*), he releases (*ek-ballei*) a sharp flow (*oxeian . . . rhoên*) of bloody dripping (*phoniou stalagmatos*) against her white cheek (*leukêi pareiai*). A corpse (*nekros*), he lies wrapped around a corpse (*peri nekroî*).

A striking chiasmic circularity (*ptusas pros-ôpôi . . . / . . . parthenôi pros-ptussetai*) connects Haemon's desperate gesture of filial rebellion—his spitting on Creon's face—with his last embrace of Antigone.³⁴ Only a pair of sigmas separates physical hatred (*ptuô* “spit”) from enfolding love (*ptussô*), while the compound *pros-ptussetai* bridges the parental/filial breach visualized by the juxtaposition of *ptusas* with *pros-ôpôi*—it is as though the failed conflation of the verb and the preposition signifying *towardness* (*pros-*) manifests the paradox of spitting, a form of touch that is a violent rejection of contact. The chiasmus maps a loop of closeness and distance, with the latter haunting the former even when the spitting morphs into embracing. Line 1237 is, in fact, closed by an impossible relationality, a fetishistic intimacy—with a corpse or a relic—whose extended duration is conveyed by the length of *pros-ptussetai*, a single, heavy word occupying a whole metrical unit. Through this temporality, Haemon, then, experiences, along with us, a kind of erotic undeadness.

Haemon's “cold embrace” of Antigone, which Creon had dismissively previewed (*psuchron par-ankalisma* 650) as the sterile “pleasure” (*hêdonê* 648) allotted to his son, captures the necrophilic experience afforded by the archive to its visitors, who are affected, even assaulted, by what is “secret(ed)” in it.³⁵ Lines 1237–38 bring us back to the last scene of the *Agamemnon*, reconstituting the image of overdetermined fluids.³⁶ Haemon's saliva gushes out again as blood but also semen, generating a viscous loop, which is reflected in the chiasmic resurgence of *ptuô* (“to spit”) as *ptussô* (“to enfold”), in the very stickiness of the striking phonemic repetition. We catch a glimpse of a viscous aftermath in 1239, a list of nouns and adjectives with no verb, in which each

34. Griffith (1999, 338) calls Haemon's action “a gesture of extraordinary, almost sub-tragic, ferocity.”

35. See Tortorici (2014, 425), who explores the specifically necrophilic dimension of archival practices. As Griffith (1999, ad loc.) notes, Haemon's cold embrace is similar to the *psuchran* . . . *terpsin* offered to Admetus by Alcestis's statue, as indicated at *Alcestis* 653; as Wohl (1998, 154) puts it, this “cold pleasure” is “a libidinal cathexis to [the] dead object”; on Alcestis's statue as a corpse, see also Bassi 2018, 37.

36. On the sexual innuendos of the passage, see Craik 2002, 92.

item seems to correspond to a sticky trace on the body, a relic of the act. Dying before her encounter with Haemon, before intercourse that would have assimilated her into the logic of reproduction a priori rejected by her name (*Anti-gonê* “against generation”), Antigone is the emblem of the archival object that, while becoming visible and tangible, eludes incorporation. Her death preserves her anarchivic alterity, as it were, marking the failure of attempts at Symbolic assimilation (mourning as well as intercourse). While in *OC*, as Jacques Derrida suggests in *Of Hospitality*, Antigone embodies the genuine condition of the *étrangère*, whose “foreignness” deprives her of the right to mourn, here she pre-emptively curtails mourning, provoking with her own death Haemon’s suicide—a futile, melancholic projection toward the other who lies beyond possession.³⁷ Antigone becomes herself the target of archive fever, the embodiment of the unattainable origin (in her case, her dead father) that fed her own death drive. The failed intercourse that Haemon’s suicide constitutes—an act on the threshold of necrophilic penetration and self-defloration—expresses the solipsism of the encounter with the archival object, that is to say, the fundamental non-relationality of the archive, in spite of the energies it releases, the eroticized impressions with which it entices us as we approach it.³⁸ But aspects of this non-relationality or incomplete relationality may also ultimately concern intercourse as such.

The image of continuous dripping, introduced by *stalagmatos* (“dripping”), which is as metrically stretched-out as *pros-ptussetai*, conveys the sense of perpetual movement, of a steady duration transcending, and at odds with, the ostensibly climactic moment. While, for Gilles Deleuze, postponement of the *petite mort* constitutes the masochistic experience par excellence and provides a kind of emancipatory deterritorialization, here the ostensible ejaculatory release, notionally corresponding to cathartic discharge, remains stuck in the *fort* and *da* of an insistent dripping whose rhythm is visualized in 1240 by the cumulative language (*nekros peri nekroî* “a corpse around a corpse”).³⁹ As Murat Aydemir puts it, “Orgasm is an act that does not quite

37. See Derrida 2000, 113, on the question of the “foreigner” as the question of the “foreign woman”; see also Bowlby 2010. On the failure of mourning, see esp. chapter 3.

38. On these ambiguities in the sexual symbolism of Haemon’s suicide, see Cavarero 2002, 50, and P. Miller 2014, 171. Hiscock (2018, 15n42) notes that “the Greek . . . shies away from a straightforward image of a blow actively struck.”

39. In Deleuze’s view, the masochist postponement of the *petite mort* separates *pleasure*—the “orgasm” as a kind of *telos* that as such produces a sense of lack—from the flowing, anti-teleological intensity of *desire* (liberated from the organs). See Deleuze 1991, 33: “Pleasure is postponed for as long as possible . . . [and] the masochist is therefore able to deny the reality of pleasure at the very point of experiencing it.” See also Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 155.

happen, . . . sandwiched between anticipation and retrospection, about to happen and already over, and caught between its instantaneity and its iterative displacement.”⁴⁰ This interplay of instantaneity and iteration—which corresponds to the archive’s temporality, its endless repetition in pursuit of the instant of an “event”—is expressed by the proximity of *oxeian* (“sharp”) and *stalagmatos*, in 1238 and 1239.⁴¹ Even though the spray of blood leaves impressions sedimented on the skin, the marked enjambment between *rhoên* (“flow”) and *leukêi pareiai* (“the white cheek”) underscores a separation, a contact without contact, which we can read as fundamental to orgasmic *jouissance*: a sensation going “beyond the fulfillment of satisfaction,” a feeling of “dissatisfaction” resulting from “an endless desire to return” to a presence that disappears in the instant it manifests itself.⁴² The metrical gap in the syntax shows, in fact, that, located in a limbo between life and death, the *petite mort* is not an ending, but an opening toward an unreachable elsewhere.

The resonance of *stalagmatos*, which gives “stalagmite” in English, with *histêmi* (“to stand”) suggests fluid that does not just drip, but solidifies on a surface—uncleansable, like the *haima* (“blood”) in Haemon’s name or the echoing serial confrontations between Creon on the one hand and Antigone, Haemon, and Teiresias (played by the same actor) on the other.⁴³ These fluids also correspond, in *OC*, to the dirt on Oedipus’s body, which, once cathartically removed, clings to him again in his final, sexualized re-encounter with the earth. Oedipus’s body, like Antigone’s, Haemon’s, and our own, is a *dus-cathartos limên* (“a haven difficult to cleanse”), to use the phrase employed by Creon in reference to Hades (1284). In Haemon’s encounter with Antigone, which could be mapped onto our own presumed catharsis at the end of the play, we see our restless exhaustion as tragic spectators/readers and our tenacious attachment to the sediments of the sexual act—nourishment for our archive fever, in this case a desire to gain or regain the orgasmic pleasure of no satisfaction, of a pleasure that escapes.

40. Aydemir 2007, 200. See also Jagose (2013, 208–9), who suggests that the orgasm is never in the present—it is always “hard to recall or summon in any specificity, belonging to some moment whose distance . . . marks the impossibility of its full interpretative recovery.”

41. The adjective *oxeian* (“sharp”) could be connected with what Nancy calls “the acuity of a point” in the orgasm (2017, 36). As he puts it, a very strong pleasure or pain is “lost in the acuity of a point, which by definition has no dimensions.” See also Craik 2002, 93.

42. See Nancy 2017, 21 and 33.

43. *Stalassô* (“to trickle”), cognate with *stalagma(tos)*, is etymologically connected with *stazô* (“to drip”), which evokes the verb *histêmi* (“to stand”). On the connection of Haemon’s name with *haima*, see Ahl 1991, 59–60, and Craik 2002, 93.

SOPHOCLES, *OEDIPUS THE KING*

Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (*OT*) is not just a central text for the psychoanalytic conceptual apparatus,⁴⁴ but a demonstration of the fundamental failure of psychoanalysis as a healing search for the origin of neurosis, which corresponds, in the play, to the plague, the contamination of Thebes and of Oedipus himself. *OT* can be seen to preview the critique of the epistemological premises of Freudian psychoanalysis that is built into Derrida's *Archive Fever*, a deconstruction of the idea that "the *archê* [can ever appear] in the nude, without archive," that is, "live, without mediation and without delay."⁴⁵ As Pietro Pucci has aptly observed in his analysis of *OT*'s open-ended yet immobile finale, in which Oedipus enters his cursed abode *once again*, "The play's tragic lesson, its purifying tragic effects, are never fully obtained, for they always rest on some parts that are missing and on an origin and an end . . . whose absence . . . deflects the play into the accidentality and randomness of its production and its language."⁴⁶ In this perspective, the aesthetic pleasure generated by the play seems to be a function of the death drive behind its constitutive archive fever, which corresponds to what Roland Barthes called the "Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end)."⁴⁷ This pleasure is materialized in the bodily excess of Oedipus's swollen feet, which the first part of his punning name (*Oid-ipous*) collapses into the idea of *knowing, seeing* (everything).⁴⁸ The swollenness is thus at the same time the marker of the overlap between *naming* and *maiming*, and of the excess that exceeds, i.e., resists, this necropolitical violence of the Symbolic. This is, of course, also a verbal excess, an example of which emerges from the formal exuberance of these lines, where Oedipus's epistemological circling *around* informs his overconfidence in his ability to cure his fellow citizens (216–18):⁴⁹

44. See esp. Chase 1979; Rudnytsky 1987; Armstrong 2006 and 2012; and Leonard 2015, 111–22.

45. Derrida 1996, 92–93. See the Introduction, section 2.

46. Pucci 1991, 13; see also, e.g., Kitzinger 1993 and Burian 2009. Budelmann (2006) stresses instead the play's "closure," albeit a "mediated" one; cf. Dunn 2013.

47. Barthes 1975, 10. Barthes's "Oedipal pleasure" corresponds to what Freud calls "the drive for knowledge" in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905, 194). See Lacoue-Labarthe 2003, 15–16 for the inference that for Freud Oedipus is the embodiment of this drive.

48. Of course, there is a punning convergence between *oïda* ("I know") and *oïdeô* ("I am swollen"): on Oedipus's name, see, among others, Vernant 1978, 483–84; Edmunds 1988; and Pucci (1992, ch. 5), who also refers to a letter of Freud to Jung in which he observes that "Oedipus is swollen foot, i.e., penis in erection" (MacGuire 1974, letter 163 F, Nov. 11, 1909).

49. As Žižek (1998, 255) notes, Oedipus is "the direct embodiment of what Lacan calls *plus-de-jouir*, the 'surplus enjoyment' or excess that cannot be accommodated by any symbolic idealization." On Oedipus as a figure of "excess," see also Foucault 2000a, 24 and 29–30.

τᾶμ' ἔαν θέλης ἔπι
 κλύων δέχεσθαι τῆ νόσῳ θ' ὑπηρετεῖν
 ἀλικὴν λάβοις ἄν κἀνακούφισιν κακῶν

If, hearing my words, you want to accept them and to be in service to (*hup-êretein*) the disease (*nosôî*), you would receive strength (*alkên*) and alleviation (*ana-kouphisin*) of your ills.

Translations of 217 tend to repress the dramatic irony that makes Oedipus's promised cure for the plague (*nosôî* . . . *hup-êretein*) indistinguishable from *subjugation* to it,⁵⁰ but in the last line the resemblance of *alkê* to *archê* together with the word for “snakes” (*ophesin*) encrypted in *anak-ouphisin* takes us further, to the serpentine circularity of archive fever, the additional primal disease fed by Thebes' disease. In this formal swelling, troped by the hidden snake—the “origin” of the maternal archive of Delphi, of the navel of the world—we can locate Oedipus's and the play's *jouissance*.⁵¹ But how can we better grasp the aesthetic implications of this excess of “Oedipal pleasure”? Which sensual experiences align with Oedipus's and our own circling around the unconscious—the “most evasive archive of all”?⁵²

A possible answer comes from the line in the play in which Oedipus mentions the itch induced by the torturous, seeping suspicion that Polybus and Merope may not be his biological parents: *eknize m' aei touth'; huph-eirpe gar polu* (“This [suspicion] was always making me itch, for it creeped under [my skin] very much” 786). The imperfect of *knizô* (“to itch”)—*eknize*—overlaps here with the present imperative of the tragic verb *ek-nizô*, meaning “to cleanse,” both verbs conveying a repetitive verbal aspect.⁵³ The repetitive pleasure-in-pain of the “itch,” one could say, is an embodied expression of *fort* and *da*. Through this pun, catharsis—for Oedipus as well as for us—registers as an impossible goal, a Symbolic command, which remains ever unfulfilled in a futile movement back and forth, like a restless scratching. This

50. See the apt comment of Dawe (2006, 95): “At first sight *hup-êretein* seems to give the reverse of the sense required.”

51. The formal swelling reconfigures the initial image (22–24) of the city rolling in “a bloody marine swell” (*phoiniou salou* 24), unable to heal from the plague, to “raise its head” (*kana-kouphisai kara* 23) from the abyss (*buthôn* 24). For other occurrences of *kouphizô*, cognates, and compounds, see, e.g., Knox 1957, 140–41. On swelling snakes, see, e.g., Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.381 and 472, and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.33. On Delphi and the snake, see chapter 4.

52. In the definition of Singh (2018, 97).

53. The verb *ek-knizô* (“to scrape off”) further thickens the punning resonances, capturing the violence of “cleansing.” On the conceptual centrality of the preposition/prefix *ek-/ex-* in the play, see Goldhill 1984b.

is an eroticized scratching, just one of the sexual manifestations of Oedipal aesthetic pleasure that the play offers us.⁵⁴

With numerous occurrences of the noun *archê* and the cognate verb *archô*, *OT* is thematically preoccupied with both command/commanding and origin/beginning—dual meanings that, in turn, invite consideration of what Lee Edelman has called “(be)hindsight.”⁵⁵ Giorgio Agamben has most recently observed that “the one who commands is also the first, just as at the origin there is a command”; for him, “the beginning is always also the principle that governs and commands.” Agamben also strikingly points out that the Greek term *archos* (ἀρχός) means both “commander” and “anus,” explaining that, through this convergence of meanings, “the spirit of language, which loves to play, transforms into a play on words the theorem according to which the origin must also be ‘foundation’ and principle of governance.”⁵⁶ We could explain this unsettling semantic convergence by building on queer theorists’ use of Derrida. As Derrida suggests, every origin is constructed after the fact, in a sense, “*from the back*”—that is, “written, described from behind. *A tergo*.”⁵⁷ Considering the thirteenth-century illustration by Matthew Paris depicting Plato standing behind a seated Socrates, dictating to him, Derrida and his queer interpreters have pointed out that Plato creates Socrates, as it were, from behind, in a configuration that evokes intercourse *a tergo*.⁵⁸ In *OT*, Oedipus seeks to read himself “in a rearview mirror.”⁵⁹ Looking backward, his eyes, which, like ears and mouth, function as orifices, become the organs of “(be)hindsight,” corresponding, in a sense, to the (anatomical) *archos*.⁶⁰ An intimation of a queer sexual act, his self-blinding also reconnects—in its

54. On the eroticized pleasure-in-pain of scratching as theorized by Plato, see Peponi 2012, 114–21; see also Derrida 1981a, 97 and 99.

55. Edelman 1991, 99.

56. Agamben 2019, 52–53.

57. Derrida 1986b, 84. For a queer reading of this passage, see Hayes 2017.

58. This image was in the *carte postale*, seen by Derrida in the Bodleian Library gift shop, that supplies the cover of *The Post Card* (1987). Here is Derrida’s description of the image: “I see *Plato* getting an erection in *Socrates*’ back and see the insane hubris of his prick, an interminable, disproportionate erection traversing Paris’s head like a single idea and then the copyist’s chair, before slowly sliding, still warm, under *Socrates*’ right leg. . . . Do people . . . realize to what extent this old couple has invaded our most private domesticity . . . the one in the other . . . the one after the other, the one behind the other?” (18–19). Playing on the resonance of his surname with *derrière*, Derrida assimilates himself to this Socrates, casting his own intellectual circulation as an *after-effect* (of his translations, for example); on the reception of this image in queer theory, see esp. Edelman 1991, 110–13; Hayes 2017; and Hite 2017.

59. I borrow this phrase from Derrida’s discussion of Hegel and Genet in *Glas* (1986b, 84).

60. See Derrida 1988b and 1991 on orifices, and chapter 3; see also Singh 2018, 29–55 on the orifices as archives. Taking inspiration from Freud’s essay “A Child Is Being Beaten” (1919) and Sedgwick’s queer notion of the past as “behind” (1993, 199), Huffer (2019, 353) compares the

violent and transgressive register—with the *archê* of his paternal *archê*, Laius's rape of Chrysippus.⁶¹ In that sense, while enacting a “(be)hindsight” that reconfigures both *archê* and *archos*, Oedipus's “Oedipal pleasure” looks back to a meta-*archê*. Connecting Oedipus, the compulsive inquirer (or watcher), with the notional spectators, the eyes as organs/orifices are privileged vehicles of the overdetermined sexual act that engenders this pleasure.

Oedipus's self-blinding precariously reconnects him and us to his incest with Jocasta and to the wounding inflicted by his father—at once, an archetypal castration, the Symbolic's necropolitical violence, and an act of intimacy.⁶² When nothing more is left to discover, Jocasta, facing the truth, withdraws to the bedroom to take her life before Oedipus joins her and stabs his eyes with her brooches. The Messenger's speech that reports these facts is, in the words of John Fletcher, an “extraordinary sequence” in which “[the] strange temporal structure that condenses conception, death, and a second conception relocates the killing of Laius, . . . hitherto . . . the exclusive focus of attention, within the larger gravitational field of maternal incest.”⁶³ The Messenger prefaces his account by saying that no river—neither Ister nor Phasis—could ever “cleanse” (*nipsai katharmôî* 1228) the house, an image that underscores the ineffective violence of “purification” (*katharmôî*), something closer to a raging flood than a *pharmakon*. The account starts on a highly sexualized note, for it casts the bedroom as an archive of lovemaking. When he reports that, rushing in, Jocasta “called the long dead Laius, holding a memory of his seed from long ago” (*kalei ton êdê Laion palai nekron / mnêmên palaiôn spermatôn echousa* 1245–46), the blatant chiasmic evocation of Laius's name in the adjective *palaiôn* (“from long ago”) creates an effect of duplication, in line with the double procreation, with father and then son.⁶⁴ Causing a spasm in the voice, the triangulation of *Laion palai* . . . *palaiôn* dramatizes the spiraling movements of Jocasta's memory as well as the persistent, irrepressible circulation of Laius's seed. As soon as he enters the bedroom, Oedipus's actions

archival impetus to the masochistic pleasure in being spanked—as though the past, a naked, scarred “behind,” mimetically transmitted its accreted pain to whoever approaches it.

61. The mythical origin of Laius's unhappiness was his homosexual rape of Chrysippus, which was the focus of Euripides' play *Chrysippus* and of Aeschylus's *Laius* (see Poole 1990, Hubbard 2006, and Wright 2018, ad loc.). This story constitutes what has been called the Laius complex: see most recently Weineck 2014, 36–40. A “queer” looping effect, that is, a return to this *archê*, is then created, in some fashion, by the sense of a quasi-marriage between Oedipus and Creon that closes *OT* (on this exit, see Ormand 1999, 147–52, and 2003).

62. Perhaps Oedipus's first act of incest was his sexual initiation, as we find in Luis Alfaro's reimagining of the play, *Oedipus el Rey* (2010).

63. John Fletcher 2013, 143.

64. The play is permeated by punning resonances between Laius's name, the adjective *palaios*, and the adverb *palai*: see Ahl 1991, 61 and 256–57.

reconfigure the scene(s) of incest. In the Messenger’s description, first “he tore away (*apo-spasas*) the gold-bound brooches of [Jocasta’s] clothes from her,” then “having lifted the joints of his eyes, he hit them” (*aras epaisen arthra tôn hautou kuklôn*) (1268–70) to blind himself. While the tearing away evokes the child’s separation from the mother,⁶⁵ retrospectively projecting sexual overtones onto Oedipus’s infantile relationship with Jocasta, the blinding presents a self-penetrative intercourse that, as *kuklôn* suggests, *circles* back to two moments of his personal archive: incest with his mother in the same bedroom, but also Laius’s wounding of his “limbs” (*arthra*), the archetypal act of castration that, in this game of layered reimpresions, takes on an uncanny, queer, and even incestuous valence.⁶⁶ Just as the consensual intercourse with Jocasta seems charged with an element of violence, Laius’s castration thematizes an intermingling of violence and affective intimacy.

In the Messenger’s gory description of Oedipus’s self-penetration—notwithstanding the textual uncertainties—we can detect an orgasmic *jouissance*, which exposes Oedipus’s as well as our own spectatorial eyes to the sensation of a frustrating boundlessness (1275–81):

| | |
|--|------|
| ... πολλάκις τε κούχ ἄπαξ | 1275 |
| ἦρασσ’ ἐπαίρων βλέφαρα. φοίνια δ’ ὀμοῦ | |
| γλήῃναι γένει’ ἔτεγγον, οὐδ’ ἀνίεσαν | |
| φόνου μυδώσας σταγόνας, ἀλλ’ ὀμοῦ μέλας | |
| ὄμβρος χαλάζης αἵματοῦς †τέτέγγετο†. | |
| τάδ’ †ἐκ δυοῖν† ἔρρωγεν οὐ μόνου †κακά† | 1280 |
| ἀλλ’ ἀνδρὶ καὶ γυναικὶ συμμιγῆ κακά. ⁶⁷ | |

65. Cf. *OT* 417–18. See also *apo-spasas* in *OC* 866 and 895 (in reference to Creon’s kidnapping of Antigone), analyzed in chapter 1, and the uses of the verb *apo-zeugnumi* (“unyoke”) in Euripides’ *Phoenissae*: at 988, where Oedipus describes his separation from his mother, and at 328–29, for the severance of Eteocles and Polynices from their Theban family. See especially chapter 1, note 108.

66. For the use of *arthra* in reference to Oedipus’s feet, see 718 and 1032. We can see a suggestion of the intimacy between Oedipus and his father in Aeschylus’s lost play *Laius*, in which, as we read in one of the surviving fragments, Oedipus “spat out” (*apo-ptuō*) Laius’s blood—or there was some reference to such an act—prior to intercourse with Jocasta. See Aeschylus, fragment *122a Radt (transmitted by the *Etymologicum Genuinum*): “It was customary for those who had committed homicide to purify themselves from the murder (*aph-osiōsai ton phonon*) through an amputation of the murdered one (*dia tou dolo-phonothentos akrôtērias-mou*). . . . That they tasted the blood and spat (*ap-eptuon*) it out is recorded by Aeschylus . . . in [the play] *Laius*.” See Dirlmeier 1970, 50; Weineck (2014, 40) sees this act as a symbolic fellatio.

67. Differently from West 1978, Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, and Finglass 2018, ad loc., I do not consider 1278–79 interpolated; in 1279, I fix the metrical issue produced by the transmitted

Many times, not just once, he struck his eyes, lifting them up, and at the same time the bleeding eyeballs (*glênai*) were wetting his cheeks, and they did not stop (*oud' an-iesan*) the dripping drops of gore (*phonou mudôsas stagonas*), but at the same time a black, bloody shower of hail (*ombros chalazês*) was being poured out. These ills broke out not from one person, but the ills were mixed for the man and the woman.

In the highly sexualized atmosphere of the conjugal bedroom, the blood bursting forth from Oedipus's eye sockets, surrogates of his genitals, has obvious ejaculatory connotations.⁶⁸ What is more striking is the continuousness that marks this textual rendition of sexual *jouissance*. The most recent editors have shared Martin West's certainty that the expansion of 1278–79 is an interpolation “in the interests of goriness,” “clumsy and tasteless,” a mere appendage to “*oud' an-iesan*, which makes good sense by itself.”⁶⁹ Deletion of the phrases *phonou mudôsas stagonas* (“dripping drops of gore”) and *ombros chalazês* (“shower of hail”)⁷⁰ has the effect of closing what the text would keep open, constraining the serial, boundless sexual sensation channeled by the text within teleological limits so that one could feel, in Eugenie Brinkema's words, that “an end was reached, that orgasm took place”⁷¹ or, in cathartic terms, equilibrium was restored. The observation that “*oud' an-iesan* . . . makes good sense by itself” does not reckon with the complexities of Sophocles' language, which formally visualizes not just the flow of blood, but also the orgasmic circuit of closure and openness through the transitive-intransitive versatility of *an-iesan* (“they stopped”). This versatility prepares the way for an enjambement, by which the syntactical flow deceptively closed by the apparent intransitive force of the verb at the end of the line is re-opened in the following line with a direct object (*stagonas*). Corresponding to the liquid and solid suggested by *ombros chalazês* (literally “a rain of hail”), the transitive and intransitive senses of *an-iesan*, taken together, convey a sexual *jouissance* akin to the dizzying effect of a Deleuzian circuit of *actual* and *virtual*, the loop of *fort* and *da*, and the “come-and-go” that, as Nancy observes, “consists of repeating,

reading *haimatos* by accepting Heath's simple emendation *haimatous*. In opting for this textual arrangement, I follow S. Lavecchia in Ferrari et al. 1992, 406–8.

68. On the eyes as genitals, see Pucci 1979, 130–31, on 1375–76 (“But was the sight of my children then desirable, having been born the way it was born?” *all' hê teknôn dêt' opsis ên ephimeros, / blastous' hopôs eblaste*): “As *opsis*, sight [of the children], becomes the subject of ‘was born’ and of ‘the way it was born,’ it remains entangled with the sexual process.”

69. West 1978, 121.

70. For a defense of the tragic poeticity of these lines, see, again, S. Lavecchia in Ferrari et al. 1992, 406–8.

71. Brinkema 2014b, 277.

that is, in Latin, of asking again for it.”⁷² The loop materializes in the anagrammatic exchange between the edges of the line, the words *glénai* and *aniesan*, indicating respectively the source of the liquid flow and its (potential) ending. The steady drops of blood (*phonou mudôsas stagonas*) underscore the never-exhausted and thereby exhausting ongoingness of *jouir* (“coming”). Like Oedipus, we find ourselves in a non-state, always prior to catharsis, of unrelenting tension in a boundless duration.

The Messenger’s speech exudes the energies of this anti-cathartic non-state, when it refers not once but twice to Oedipus’s self-blinding. In the juxtaposition of the first reference (“having lifted the joints [of his eyes], he hit them” *aras epaisen arthra* 1270) with the second one (“he struck his eyes, lifting them up” *êrass’ ep-airôn blephara* 1276), we see a semantic chiasmus of lifting and hitting, hitting and lifting. However, the pattern of phonic resonances presents a countervailing pattern, not chiasmus but parallelism, not ABBA, but ABAB: *aras epaisen . . . êrass’ ep-airôn*. The incongruity, the mismatch, between meaning and sounds is of a piece with the skewed relations of mother, father, and child—the overdetermined exchanges of intimacy. Words attract each other, phonically confusing “raising” and “hitting,” suggesting a queering of relations, not only of mother and son but also of son and father. “Raising” itself confuses Oedipus’s self-blinding with sexual arousal. These lines’ ardent form betrays an excess of intimacy—an excess that is expressed by the verb *êrass’* (“he struck”). Almost a combination of *erôs* (“sexual desire”) and *aras* (“having raised”), this verb’s elided form seems to suggest the paradox of sexual fulfillment—that it is always pending.

When, after the Messenger’s speech, Oedipus appears, lyrically calling death upon himself, orgasmic *jouissance* connects with the archive fever that energizes the play (1349–52):

ἄλοιθ’ ὅστις ἦν ὃς ἀγρίας πέδας
νομάς ἐπιποδίας μ’ ἔλαβ’ ἀπό τε φόνου <μ’>
ἔρυτο κἀνέσωσεν

May he die, the shepherd who liberated me from the cruel fetter of my feet,
saved (*eruto*) me (*m’*) from slaughter (*apo . . . phonou*), and rescued me.

Behind this desire for death (*apo . . . phonou <m’> eruto* 1350–52) we might see a longing for contact with the blood shed by Laius’s wounding and the penetrative pleasure-in-pain that emerged in Oedipus’s self-blinding (*phonou . . .*

72. Nancy 2017, 53. On the Deleuzian circuit in Euripides’ *Heracles*, see chapter 2.

stagonas 1278). The shepherd is guilty of having cathartically interrupted the quasi-sexual *jouissance* of the blood flowing from and sedimented on Oedipus's mutilated body. This shepherd had referred to Oedipus's swollen feet (*podôn . . . arthra* 1032), causing him to rejoin, "Ah, why are you telling me about this ancient trouble (*archaion . . . kakon* 1033)?" In the formal edges of the shepherd's justification, "I liberated (*luô*) you when they were pierced, your feet's ends (*akmas*)" (1034), we see a cathartic effort (*luô*) to erase punctures, *punctums*, or climactic points (*akmas*).⁷³ These climactic points (*akmai*) from the *archê* chased in the play anticipate their sexualized iterations (both intercourse and self-blinding). During the same lyric lament after his self-mutilation, Oedipus cries out, "Alas, alas, once more (*oimoi mal' authis*)! How the frenzy of these goads (*kentrôn*) and the memory (*mnêmê*) of my troubles (*kakôn*) together have crawled into (*eis-edu*) me" (1317–18).⁷⁴ The penetrative verb *eis-edu* and the two genitives surrounding *mnêmê* (*kentrôn* "of goads," *kakôn* "of troubles") establish a strong connection with the phrase *mnêmên palaiôn spermatôn* ("memory of seed from long ago" 1246), which, as we have seen, introduces the memory of Jocasta's sexual intimacy with Laius. The piercing memory besetting Oedipus after his self-discovery bears the impressions of his bleeding at the moment of exposure, of intercourse with Jocasta, and of his own self-penetration. The boundaries between these archival events are blurred—one slides into another; none are capable of being pinned down or immobilized. It is the sense of open, unresolved in-betweenness that marks the erotic *jouissance* emanating from them.

Before Oedipus's self-blinding, his proclaimed intention to "purify" the city, to subject it to catharsis, appears indistinguishable from the impulse to repeat orgasmic pleasure. When, at the beginning of the play, Oedipus announces to Creon, "Not on behalf of distant friends, but I myself for my own sake will scatter this impurity (*all' autos autou tout' apo-skedô musos* 138)," one is struck by the use of the verb *apo-skedannumi* ("scatter") and by the repetition *autos autou* ("I myself"). The expressed cathartic intent evokes a *dis-semination*, the incestuous scattering of seed whose destructive consequences he intends to cleanse.⁷⁵ The subliminal ejaculation that disrupts the line makes the reflexive polyptoton *autos autou* not merely an ironic antic-

73. See *ek-lusin . . . nosêmatos* ("release from disease" 306–7) and *lusin . . . euagê* ("a healthy release" 921).

74. As Goldhill (2012, 102) notes, *oimoi mal' authis* is the characteristic cry of a character murdered within the *skênê*.

75. Oedipus's announcement recalls, in its formulation, Archilochus's *leuk]on aph-êka menos* ("I shot off my white strength") in the Cologne epode (fragment 196a.35 West). Of course, *musos* can refer to Oedipus's semen, a deeply contaminated fluid.

ἀνθ' ὧν ἐγὼ τάδ' ὥσπερ εἰ τοῦμοῦ πατρός,
ὑπερμαχοῦμαι . . .

265

Not even if the matter had not been driven by the gods would it have been right for you to leave it unpurified (*a-katharton*) in this way, since (*epei*) the best man, a king, had died, but you should have investigated; now since I happen to have (*echôn*) the power (*archas*) that he (*ekeinos*) had (*eiche*) before, to have (*echôn*) a marriage and a wife who shares our seed (*homo-sporon*), and children would have been born in common to us, if he had not had bad luck in terms of offspring—but now destiny has leaped on the head of that man—I will for these reasons fight for him as though (*hosper eî*) he were my father (*toumou patros*).

As Patrick Finglass notes, the nervous syntax of these lines appears “almost as complicated as the familial relationship that [Oedipus] falls so tragically short of expressing”; in particular, “the *epei* clause never reaches a main verb, but breaks off in 262 when Oedipus is reflecting on Laius’s failure to produce children.”⁷⁸ We could easily call this syntax anti-cathartic, a suggestion raised by the very appearance of the adjective *a-katharton* (“un-purified”) in 256. Not only does the syntax remain suspended, waiting for a moment of impossible fulfillment, but the tripartite repetition of the quintessential verb of possession, *echô* (“to have”), demonstrates our subjugation to language, the impossibility of possessing it. The position of the three forms of *echô* in lines 259–60 (*echôn . . . eiche . . . / echôn*) draws a triangular structure, which aligns with the triangle of Oedipus, Laius, and Jocasta—the three characters whose fraught relationships are barely contained in this tense textual sequence. The adjective *homo-sporon*—referring to Jocasta “because she has received both [Oedipus’s] and Laius’s seed,” but also, ironically, because she “has taken seed from the man previously sown inside her”—brings them all together yet separates them.⁷⁹ The object at the center of the triangle is *archas*, “the command,” which always presupposes the notion of origin. Circling around this word, the repeated *echô* visualizes, almost programmatically, the self-dispossession inherent to archive fever. In the semantic economy of these lines, this *archê* coincides with the seed, the *sperma*, a token of exchange among father,

78. See Finglass 2018, 256.

79. The quotation is from Finglass 2018, 256. See also Pucci 1992, 81: “Father and son are not only interchangeable vis-à-vis Jocasta’s body; because of the incest, they are in effect the same.”

mother, and son.⁸⁰ Another ironical frisson ripples through Oedipus's speech when the words "my father" (*toumou patros*) appear at the end of 264 preceded by *hosperei* ("as though"). While conveying the distance-as-closeness that links Oedipus to Laius, his still-unknown father, the comparative conjunction *hosperei*, together with the earlier *homo-sporon*, phonemically disseminates *sperma*.⁸¹ The disarrayed syntax is part of the whirl, the frenzied, futile movement marked by the three forms of *echô* chasing each other while pursuing the *archê* with orgasmic *jouissance*. Both augmented and mutilated, *hosperei* is an image of self-dispossession juxtaposed with a grammatical possessive (*toumou*) and the familial figure who embodies the archive's desire for possession and assimilation. The proximity of a dispossessed, "disassimilated" form to this figure who is at once archival in his assimilating appetite and an *archê*—unknown, dead, never possessed, never graspable—visualizes the anarchic impossibility of fulfillment on both ends.

As the play approaches its final movement, with the arrival of the shepherd from Corinth, who will reconnect the plot with its harrowing beginning, we find a remarkable sequence of three lines (924–26) whose endings play on the name of Oedipus (*Oidipous*): *hopou* / *Oidipou* / *hopou* ("where" / "of Oedipus" / "where"). In the direct contact between the beginning (*o-*) and ending (*-pou*) of his name, Oedipus loses his sight (*id-*, the root for verbs of seeing) and becomes a looping, impersonal entity, a "somewhere" (*hopou*) suspended between excess and privation. The orgasmic self-dispossession that emerges in the play's striking ejaculatory imagery seems to disperse Oedipus himself. Deleuze's anti-Freudian Oedipus is an impersonal intensity beyond the subject, a motion of desire, which works through and against the body with organs.⁸² To this I add a notion of Oedipus as the archival residue of a somatized pleasure-in-pain. He is the *im-pression* of a boundless *ex-pression* that is the sexualized experience of our own aestheticized archive fever, never extinguished in a cathartic climax.

80. Pucci (1992, 82) suggests that "the father is a many-times split figure: a *sperma* in a process of dissemination and the origin of Oedipus."

81. Derrida (1981a) theorizes the *dis-semination* of signification in terms evoking, as Aydemir (2007, 188) puts it, "an ejaculation that . . . ruptures, crosses, augments, scatters, and negates meaning" or "a de-seeding, seminal nonproductivity or impotence, as much as the hyperbolic dispersion of seed." An effect of *dissemination* can also be detected in the proliferation of the *ek-* sound in *echôn*, *eiche*, *ekeinos* that has been noted by Goldhill (1984b, 188).

82. Deleuze (1995b, 10) equates Oedipus (*Oedipe* himself, not the "Oedipal complex," as we read in the English translation by M. Joughin) to a "secretion" (*une sécrétion*).

II. INTOXICATION AND IMPOSSIBILITY: EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*

An emblem of ecstasy and excess, Dionysian intoxication has been considered a quintessential expression of Greek tragedy. First and foremost, Friedrich Nietzsche regarded *Bacchae* as a palinodic exception to Euripides' intellectualistic "destruction" of the genre.⁸³ While some see intoxication as contained by catharsis, for others—such as Jacob Bernays, whose position I analyzed in the Introduction—catharsis yields a kind of ecstasy, an exit from oneself, understood as an expansion of sensory capabilities. At least as it is usually conceived, Dionysian intoxication relies on a notion of deeply transgressive plenitude (a ritual profusion of wine, sex, and violence), which generates an experience of what Nietzsche calls the "infinite primordial joy in existence," a "rapturous superabundance," roughly in alignment with the fullness imputed by Bernays to catharsis.⁸⁴ Euripides' *Bacchae*, the play in which the god of the theater plays the role of both outcast and stage manager, is, of course, the most potent dramatization of Dionysian intoxication. But if we reread it, particularly the beginning and ending, from the viewpoint of the immortal god's archive fever toward his mortal origins, the futile looking toward a "before the beginning" on the part of the "god of the beginning," we can see his intoxication—qua character and ours in response to the plot that he stage-manages—as a rapturous, "excessive" sense of privation, dissatisfaction, and impossibility.⁸⁵ After the sadistic violence, in a feeling between frenzy and frozenness, we may experience something like post-orgasmic tristesse, a form of intoxication in its own right.

83. The image used by Nietzsche ([1872] 1967, 82) to conceptualize the exceptionality of *Bacchae* is striking; he compares Euripides to "a giddy man who, to escape the horrible vertigo he can no longer endure, casts himself from a tower." In a sense, this poetic "suicide" represents the tragic liberation, or Dionysian ecstasy, of which *Bacchae* is emblematic in Nietzsche's view. On this statement, see Billings 2018a. See also Critchley 1999 on Nietzsche's and Heidegger's comparable Romantic ideas concerning the realization of the subject through death, what "out-limits all limits" (in Heidegger's phrase).

84. In Aristotle, *Politics* 1342a4–15 "religious ecstasy" (*en-thousiasmos*), connected with Dionysian/Corybantic rituals, is said to generate catharsis itself: on this passage, see esp. Yates 1998, Ford 2004, and Griffith 2019. Nietzsche's ostensibly anti-cathartic theory of tragedy is strongly indebted to Bernays's reading of Aristotle: see Porter 2015 and 2016a and the Introduction. "Rapturous superabundance" is the title of Paul Gordon's book (2001), which connects Dionysian intoxication à la Nietzsche with a notion of the death drive as pure ecstasy. The phrase "infinite primordial joy in existence" is in Nietzsche (1872) 1967, 105. See the Introduction, section 3.

85. Carson 2015, 9: "Dionysos is god of the beginning before the beginning."

In the prologue of *Bacchae*, the flame of Zeus that Dionysus sees trailing around Semele's tomb and lapping at the ruins of his Theban family's former abode conjures his mother's anger—inseparable from his own resentful longing for the mortality stolen from him (6–9):

ὄρῳ δὲ μητρὸς μνήμα τῆς κεραυνίας
τόδ' ἐγγύς οἴκων καὶ δόμων ἐρείπια
τυφόμενα Δίου πυρὸς ἔτι ζῶσαν φλόγα,
ἄθανατον Ἥρας μητέρ' εἰς ἐμὴν ὕβριν.

I see this tomb (*mnêma*) of my mother (*mêtros*), who was struck by the thunder, near the home and the wreckage of the house smoldering with the flame (*phloga*), still alive (*eti zôsan*), of the fire (*puros*) of Zeus, the immortal *hubris* of Hera against my mother (*a-thanaton Hêras mêter' eis emên hubrin*).

In evoking the circumstances preceding his birth, Dionysus's speech reproduces the movement of the flame that haunts the play's setting. Tricked by Hera, his mother had fatally invited Zeus's thunder; Dionysus was rescued from her burning body and transferred to Zeus's thigh. While allegedly *belonging* to Zeus, this flame belongs instead to Semele, who occupies the beginning and ending (*mêtros . . . mêter'*) of the formal loop that this long sentence iconically traces as well as the very center of the last line. Sharing gender (feminine) and case (accusative), Dionysus's mother, the *hubris* she suffered, and the flame are inextricably connected—the last of these a trace of the anger that Semele's tomb contains yet circulates.⁸⁶ Dionysus's own anger, with its murderous consequences in the play, is nourished by this archive, not just because his own marginalization, the exile from Thebes, extends the *hubris* against his mother, but also because his immortality separates him from her, taking the impossibility of reconnection with the *archê*, one might say, to an even more feverish level than a mortal could experience. Subliminally, the phrase *a-thanaton . . . hubrin* (“immortal . . . *hubris*”), which bookends the last line, also captures the *hubris* against Dionysus: his elevation to the highest rank of divinity, his *a-thanatos* status, his separation from what Blanchot calls “the happiness of not being immortal or eternal.”⁸⁷ While Dionysus's ostensible motive for revenge is the rejection of his divine status, there is a sense in which Pentheus and his mother Agave, Semele's sister, are pun-

86. In his exploration of Hera as the archetypal “angry mother,” Slater (1968, 284) observes that in Nonnus's *Dionysiaca* Semele “appears as almost a precise duplicate of Hera in her arrogance and narcissism.”

87. Blanchot 2000, 69.

ished also for opening the wound of the mortality stolen from him as they accuse him of falsely claiming—stealing—immortality. When Pentheus refers incredulously to the report of the newly arrived stranger (Dionysus in mortal disguise) that the god “was once sewn in the thigh of Zeus, the god who is being burned up (*ek-puroutai*) by the flames of the thunder together with his mother (*sun mêtri*)” (244–45), there is an irony in his use of the historical present. Dionysus was *not* burned up, but is *still* threateningly burning with desire for the mortal mother denied to him in his immortality. Parallel to Semele’s unquenchable flame, “still living” (*eti zôsan*), indeed “immortal,” Dionysus’s unresolved “burning” is the death drive that carries the plot forward.

Before proceeding to consider the ending of the play, I want to look briefly at another text, roughly contemporary with *Bacchae*, which illustrates the centrality of the maternal to Dionysus’s sado-masochistic fantasies. At the beginning of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, as the slave Xanthias is crushingly weighed down by baggage, Dionysus imposes a rigid meta-comic etiquette, forbidding him to reuse the hackneyed scatological jokes that the god appears to abhor but, like the audience, secretly enjoys. These jokes engender pleasure-in-pain: as Dionysus puts it, they can provoke an emetic reaction (11) and make him feel older (22), that is, offer him the experience of human mortality—and this could indeed be seen as the source of their appeal.⁸⁸ Even though the scene casts Dionysus as the cruel taskmaster, his pleading with Xanthias not to tell another bad old joke (“Don’t, I beseech you. . . . Please don’t do it”)⁸⁹ resembles a masochist’s theatrically insincere pleas to end the game, the pleas of a child-like male ritually supplicating his domineering, “motherly” sexual partner.⁹⁰ In this scene, when Dionysus introduces himself as “the son of the cask god” (*huios Stamniou* 22) he supplies a comic “matronymic” derived from a womb-shaped object—instead of a patronymic. Carrying the “burden” (*baros* 26) of the baggage and, thus, experiencing a kind of pregnancy, Xanthias, the overworked caretaker, is in the position of the mother—cast by Dionysus not as the object of abuse, but as the stage-manager of a masochistic game that codes Dionysus as his mother’s child.⁹¹

In the finale of *Bacchae*, Cadmus recoils from Agave’s farewell embrace in a way that reflects Dionysus’s own impossible maternal embrace. After Dionysus as *deus ex machina* disappears, Agave laments her impending exile from Thebes (1363–66):

88. See Telò 2020b.

89. See 11 and 16 *mê dêth’, hiketeuô . . . mê nun poiêsêis . . .*

90. This is the dynamic theorized by Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty* (1991).

91. On *baros* with the sense of pregnancy, see Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* 992.

Αγ. ὦ πάτερ, ἐγὼ δὲ σοῦ στερεῖσα φεύξομαι.

Κα. τί μ' ἀμφιβάλλεις χερσίν, ὦ τάλαινα παῖ,

ὄρνις ὄπως κηφήνα πολιοχρῶν κύκνος;

1365

Αγ. ποῖ γὰρ τράπωμαι πατρίδος ἐκβεβλημένη;

Agave Father, I'll go into exile bereaved of you. *Cadmus* Why are you encircling me with your arms (*amphi-balleis chersin*), suffering child—as a bird (*ornis*), a swan (*kuknos*), does with [a parent], a white-colored (*polio-chrôn*) drone (*kêphêna*)? *Agave* Where shall I turn to, expelled from my fatherland?

While recoiling from arms that, having torn apart his grandson, cannot be separated from the threat of further violence, Cadmus uses language that in its dissonances suggests the impossibility of the embrace: a swan wrapping its wings around a parent as a drone (the idle inhabitant of a beehive). Robbed of a parent, exiled from Thebes, Agave finds herself in the same condition as Dionysus.⁹²

Agave's impossible embrace of Cadmus is the play's last iteration of a gestural image that speaks to Dionysus's sadistic displacement of his maternal lack. We observe this displacement in the fragmented dialogue between Dionysus and Pentheus, before they reach Mount Cithaeron (966–69):

Δι. κείθεν δ' ἀπάξει σ' ἄλλος. Πε. ἡ τεκοῦσά γε.

Δι. ἐπίσημον ὄντα πᾶσιν. Πε. ἐπὶ τόδ' ἔρχομαι.

Δι. φερόμενος ἦξεις . . . Πε. ἀβρότητ' ἐμὴν λέγεις.

Δι. . . ἐν χερσὶ μητρός. Πε. καὶ τρυφᾶν μ' ἀναγκάσεις.

Dionysus Another person will lead you back from there. *Pentheus* The woman who gave birth to me. *Dionysus* Notable (*epi-sêmon*) to all. *Pentheus* I am going for this reason. *Dionysus* When you arrive, you will be carried . . . *Pentheus* What you are describing is my softness. *Dionysus* . . . in your mother's arms (*en chersi mêtros*). *Pentheus* And you will force me to live softly (*truphan*).

Pentheus, Dionysus says, will be *epi-sêmon* (“notable”) on his return—famous or, more precisely, infamous, but also, we might say, set upon (*epi*) a funeral mound (*sêma*), his head like its own kind of “token” or “portent.” The sub-

92. Kaimio (1988, 43n46) notes that “apparently Agave embraces her father at 1363” (my emphasis), and that she performs a “short embrace.” The primary reason of what I read as Cadmus's hesitation, of his failed participation in the embrace, is Agave's impurity—the fact that her “hands are still stained with kindred blood” (Segal 1997, 325).

textual allusion to Pentheus's death serves as an antithetical response to his reference to "the woman who gave birth to me." Separated from its body, as Pentheus's head will be,⁹³ the isolated phrase "in your mother's arms" (*en chersi mêtros*) is imaginatively fleshed out by its Oedipal implications, which we can see as stirring Dionysus's impotent jealousy into sadistic displacement. Pentheus does not recoil from his mother's arms but eagerly falls into them.⁹⁴ In the Messenger's account of the *sparagmos*, the maternal embrace resonates again (1139–43):

κράτα δ' ἄθλιον,
 ὅπερ λαβοῦσα τυγχάνει μήτηρ χεροῖν, 1140
 πήξασ' ἐπ' ἄκρον θύρσον ὡς ὀρεστέρου
 φέρει λέοντος διὰ Κιθαιρῶνος μέσου,
 λιποῦσ' ἀδελφὰς ἐν χοροῖσι μαινάδων.

His pitiful head, which his mother (*mêtêr*) happens to have taken in (*labousa*) her arms (*cheroin*), she carries through Cithaeron, after planting it on the top of the thyrsus, like the head of a lion of the mountain, having left behind her sisters in the choruses of Maenads.

Gathered in Agave's arms, Pentheus is a displaced fetus repositioned as an external prosthesis of the maternal body, reconnected, however perversely, with the prenatal intimacy that was prematurely taken away from Dionysus. The description of the *sparagmos* leading to this corporeal reintegration scrambles the parts of the embrace: "taking (*labousa*) his left hand (*aristeran chera*) with her arms (*ôlenaisi*), / stepping against the ribs of the wretched man, / she tore away his shoulder" (1125–27). Before reemerging in the impossible contact between daughter and father, the image appears again through the voice of Agave, still unaware of her crime (1238–40):

φέρω δ' ἐν ὠλέναισιν, ὡς ὄρᾳς, τάδε
 λαβοῦσα τᾶριστειᾶ, σοῖσι πρὸς δόμοις
 ὡς ἀγκρεμασθῆ· σὺ δέ, πάτερ, δέξαι χεροῖν 1240

93. *Truphaô* ("to be luxuriously treated") is haunted by *thruptô* ("to break"), as discussed by Segal (1997, 201–2).

94. See, among others, Zeitlin 1990, 134. As Wohl (2005, 141) puts it, "Pentheus not only refuses to relinquish his mother; he also identifies with her. . . . [He] may wish to watch Agave having sex and to be held in her arms, but above all he longs to be like her."

In my arms (*en ôlenaisin*), as you see, I carry these prizes that I took (*labousa*), so that they may be displayed, nailed to a wall in your house; and you, father, accept (*dexai*) them in your hands (*cheroin*).

The embrace between a mother and her son, now reduced to an object firmly grasped, to the spoils won in a contest, persists but is about to be loosened. A quasi-birth will deliver the child Pentheus (victim yet double of Dionysus) into Cadmus's hands. But in alignment with Dionysus's final epiphany—a rare circling back to a god's prologic appearance—this birth formally materializes as a loop between *ôlenaisin* (“arms”) in 1238 and *cheroin* (“hands”) at the end of 1240.

In the maternal fantasy behind the sadistic displacement driving the plot, we can locate the *jouissance* of the death drive. Taking as a starting point Freud's pairing of sadism with masochism and, in particular, his idea that “there is a significant connection between a desire for death and the sadistic effort to master or injure another human being,” Judith Butler has observed:

The sadistic act must be repeated because it can never accomplish the aim it sets for itself—namely, the literal recovery of radical safety through the immobilization of the other. As repetitive, the sadistic act seeks time and again to break the veil of the present, to break the surface of the Other's body in an effort to penetrate the insistent facticity of the temporal present. In the convergence of the temporal present and past that characterizes the experience of the sadist in his or her vain repetitions, the body of the Other becomes the impenetrability of time itself. In this sense, the Other's body becomes the sign of the present which forecloses the recovery and reparation of the past; injury to that body is conceived as an injury inflicted against the contemporaneity of life. . . . The unhappy repetitions of sadistic acts bear out a useless desire to repeat and repair a history of dissatisfaction.⁹⁵

The body of Pentheus stands for the temporal surface that Dionysus seeks to break through in vain—like Heracles and Iphigenia, each in their own way. We can see an effort to reverse the direction of time in pursuit of mortality. Dionysian revenge, burning with the flame of Semele's archive, follows the logic of the death drive, which draws energy from the *jouissance* of non-realization.⁹⁶ It is expressed in the text by the compulsive repetition of the image of maternal embrace, which takes on the cadence of a broken record

95. J. Butler 1990, 274–75. Butler's essay comments on Freud's “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915a) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). See also Lacan 2006, 656.

96. On this general point, see esp. Copjec 2002, 30–31, referring to Lacan 1992, 212.

or what Butler calls “the infinite stutter of desire.”⁹⁷ Through the destructive intimacy between Pentheus and Agave, Dionysus experiments with the delusion behind his fantasy of mortality, a delusion of approaching unity with one’s mother, even while the mortal condition itself is predicated on “the non-approach to the origin, the impossibility of catching up fully”⁹⁸—that is, the impossibility of ever recapturing the unity of the mother–child relationship.

The masochistic pursuit of a denied embrace could also be seen in the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, which, in Mark di Suvero’s rendition (*Che farò senza Eurydice*), provides the cover of this book.⁹⁹ The rough configuration of the sculpture—coarse, recycled (archived) wood wedded to the pointed, piercing metal of an object reminiscent of Oedipus’s goad—suggests the self-deformation caused by Orpheus’s backward glance, which, while usually seen as the consequence of a fatal act of negligence, an uncontrollable eagerness that violates the Law, can be read as expressing the tragic affect we have been exploring throughout this book.¹⁰⁰ In such a reading, Orpheus’s separation from Eurydice would be driven by a *jouissance* of non-realization that catches him in a spasmodic knot of pleasure-in-pain through which he becomes an assemblage of restless, anguished joints and limbs.¹⁰¹ In Orpheus’s backward glance, similar to Oedipus’s, we can see the rebellious refusal of presence—a refusal that encompasses at once the Freudian notion of *rushing* back to the non-existence of the Underworld, which Orpheus has just left, and the more Lacanian/Žižekian thrill of prolonging the no-satisfaction of desire, repeating the retrospective gesture *ad infinitum*.¹⁰² Responding to “the

97. J. Butler 1990, 275.

98. Brinkema 2012, 28.

99. The title of Mark di Suvero’s sculpture is from a line of Gluck’s opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*.

100. Oddly, we know of no Greek tragedy about this unhappy romance. As we read in the label at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the wood of Mark di Suvero’s sculpture comes from demolition sites in Lower Manhattan.

101. My reading is inspired by Blanchot (1982, 172), who suggests that Orpheus “does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, in her distance . . . [he] wants to see her not when she is visible, but when she is invisible, and not as the intimacy of a familiar life, but as the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy, and wants, not to make her live, but to have living in her the plenitude of her death”; see Pero 2018, 261–62. For a different reading of Orpheus and Blanchot, see S. Butler 2009, 73. According to B. Rose, di Suvero’s typical form is “the core or trunk . . . from which upward spreading members grasp and grip space in a gesture of desperate aspiration” (1975–76, 122).

102. There is an overlap here between the death drive as what finds satisfaction in no-satisfaction and desire as what by definition is not satisfied: on the difference between them in Lacanian psychoanalysis, see the Introduction, section 3. Is Orpheus’s “looking backward” an expression of the homosexuality that emerges later in his mythical biography? The earlier discussion of the “queer” semantic ambiguity of *archos* may suggest this. On the connection

call of the anterior,” Orpheus will never stop looking back frantically, repeating the archival motion, the fixation of the drive.¹⁰³ This fixation is captured in the paronomastic resonances of the Ovidian phrase (*Metamorphoses* 10.56) modifying Orpheus in the very moment of his transgression—*avidusque videndi* (“greedy of seeing”), in which the overdetermined sense of lack stemming from *vid(u)us* (“bereft, widowed”) plus a kind of privative *a* in *a-vidus* is accompanied by the stuttering repetition of *vid-* (the root of “seeing”), as though one could always pursue the desired object by pushing it away.

As for the aftermath of Pentheus’s sparagmatic murder, the calm that characterizes it may be seen as a post-orgasmic reconfiguration of Dionysus’s *jouissance*. Cadmus’s rejection of Agave’s embrace is a rejection of the sexually tinged intoxication figured by her cruel embrace of Pentheus.¹⁰⁴ At a moment when she is forced to go into exile and re-inhabit Dionysus’s own marginalization, there seems to be no space for catharsis.¹⁰⁵ Nor is there a possibility of archival consignment. The “wretched weight” (*athlion baros* 1216) of Pentheus that Cadmus had brought onstage, having sought with much labor to gather together all the scattered parts of his dismembered body, is an anarchic object, whose weight is itself a marker of archival and reparative failure, of the object’s recalcitrance.¹⁰⁶ Cadmus’s own recalcitrant refusal of Agave’s embrace, which is, in a sense, also the audience’s, amounts to a kind of post-coital heaviness, an exhaustion and sadness—*post coitum omne animalium triste*, according to the Latin translation of a proverb attributed to Galen. Agave’s

between the Ovidian Orpheus’s separation from Eurydice and his homosexuality, see Oliensis 2009, 21–22.

103. The “powerful call of the anterior” (*appel puissant à l’antérieur*) is the phrase that Blanchot (1982, 243) employs in his discussion of the Freudian death drive.

104. The same rejection, a kind of palinode, is announced by Agave’s wish to go “where no memorial (*mnêma*) of the thyrsus is set up” (1386)—a clear reference to Semele’s tomb, as discussed by Segal (1997, 319).

105. Cf. Slater (1968, 300n9), who, while noting that “it is Cadmus . . . toward whom [Agave’s] passion is in part directed,” sees her father as a “therapist,” “a modern psychiatrist,” able to cure her—i.e., cathartically. An idea of catharsis—layered with didacticism—is at the center of Segal’s reading (1999–2000) of the finale in terms of *anagnôrisis*. However, as Segal (1997, 319) notes, “Agave is perhaps the only exile in extant Greek tragedy to exit without a specific destination either foretold or implied”—which could be taken as a signal of anti-cathartic open-endedness. Honig (2016, 371) suggests that the finale of the play is “para-reparative, as in *reparative with a touch of the paranoid*” (with reference to Sedgwick’s distinction between *paranoid* and *reparative* reading, on which see the Introduction, section 4).

106. Cadmus’s archive fever is encapsulated by the phrase that he uses in reference to his attempted restoration of Pentheus’s body: “laboring with myriad searches” (*mochthôn muriois zêtêmasin* 1218). The concern with re-assembling Pentheus emerges also in Agave’s question about his corpse: “Has it all been closed together (*sun-kekklêimenon*) well in its joints (*arthrois*)?” (1300). When Cadmus says that Pentheus “has unified (*sun-êpse*) all of us in a single ruin (*es mian blabên*)” (1303), he offers a paradoxical, archiviolithic notion of destructive consignment.

and Cadmus's apparent immobility, their lingering onstage, which Dionysus rebukes in his last line before departing ("Why then do you put off [*melleth*] the things that are necessary?" 1351), is a manifestation of this fatigue and tristesse. Cadmus's comparison of himself to a "drone" also aligns him with a condition of (post-coital) slackness.¹⁰⁷ However, as Nancy observes in *Intoxication*, "It is not easy separating sadness . . . from Dionysian joy"; furthermore, "One usually envisages excess as movement, transgression, overcoming, leap, and impetus. But it is just as much—or even more so—a suspension, cessation, stasis."¹⁰⁸ While the earlier Dionysian intoxication rested on the sense of lack amid excess (an inability to break the surface of time through sparagmatic sadism), here we are invited to experience a sense of excess amid denial. This post-coital excess is its own form of intoxication, which bursts forth from the formal surplus of Cadmus's words (1365). By the end of the line, a generic bird becomes a swan that somehow wraps its wings around a drone. The chiasmic word order ("bird . . . , white-colored drone, swan" *ornis . . . kêphêna poliochrôn kuknos* 1365) also places Cadmus, the drone, in the center, that is, *within* the body of Agave as a bird, which extends from the beginning to the end of the line (*ornis . . . kuknos*). Cadmus's recoil—his sad yet apparently reparative "cessation, stasis"—is thus erotically enhanced, and contradicted, by his language, which teems with a kind of sexual *jouissance*.¹⁰⁹ At the end of *Bacchae*, a rejected embrace captures an intoxicating numbness, the pleasure-in-pain of depletion, an anti-cathartic *jouissant* stasis.

The intoxication of this post-coital tristesse reconfigures Dionysian frenzy—one of the paradigms employed to conceptualize the affective force of tragedy—from an ecstatic dissolution, or liquefaction, into a resistance to melting (into an embrace or otherwise). In a moment of the parodos of *Bacchae* that has been translated recently by both Anne Carson and Nancy, the Chorus celebrates the defiant power of Dionysus as an outburst of liquidity (142–43):

107. In the Byzantine encyclopedia known as the *Suda*, *kêphên* is qualified as *argos*, *a-praktos*, *meteôros* ("idle, inactive, suspended"); the condition captured by the first adjective is close to *a-thumia*, the word used to describe post-orgasmic tristesse in [Aristotle], *Problems* 955a23–25. Segal (1997) sees in the finale a transition from life to death, from Dionysian abundance and fertility to old age. Through the two models of aesthetic intoxication that I am positing (unclimactic orgasm and post-orgasmic inebriation), I am, instead, construing sadistic destruction as the paradoxically "vitalistic" orgasmic pole, followed by a form of inebriating stupor.

108. Nancy 2017, 18–19.

109. As Brennan (2015, 70) observes, discussing Georges Bataille's idea of inner experience, "A libidinal economy of excess depends on cyclical moments of post-coital tristesse: the void and emptiness felt following an extreme transgression."

ῥεῖ δὲ γάλακτι πέδον, ῥεῖ δ' οἶνω,
ῥεῖ δὲ μελισσᾶν νέκταρι.

His ground (*pedon*) flows (*rhei*) with milk,
flows (*rhei*) with wine, flows (*rhei*) with nectar of bees.¹¹⁰

In these lines, which, as Gilbert Murray puts it, deliver “a beautiful dream-like effect after the horror of the *homo-phagia*,”¹¹¹ the “ground” (*pedon*) of the mountain where the Bacchic rites take place does not simply flow with wine, milk, and honey, but seems on the verge of changing from solid to liquid, the emblematic state of the god of wine.¹¹² The triple repetition of *rhei* suggests a continual flow, but, at a deeper level, it also suggests an element of immobility in the ecstatic transformation it depicts. The form evinces a hint of resistance to liquefaction—whether it is construed as ecstatic or cathartic. The terrain of Cithaeron, like the tragic spectator, seems to “let [itself] become absorbed, inundated, irrigated, impregnated.”¹¹³ While this Dionysian intoxication is a form of assimilation, a different, more emancipatory sort of intoxication can be found in the spiraling around intimated in the lines’ repeated turning without resolution. The liquefaction offered, even demanded, by Dionysus, is not so much the deterritorialized, non-hierarchical becoming water discussed in chapter 3 as it is an incorporation by a more-powerful Other. In this respect, the intoxication of the spiraling movement can be construed as a recusal, a recoil from assimilation, from resolution.

The resistance to assimilation that we have just examined in Euripides’ parodos brings us back to Cadmus’s refusal of Agave’s embrace. In the same passage, the Chorus recalls how Zeus had enveloped Dionysus in his thigh and closed it up with his “golden brooches” (*chruseasin . . . peronais* 97–98)—uncannily reminiscent of Laius’s castrating instrument (and Oedipus’s later self-blinding).¹¹⁴ After Dionysus’s birth, we are told, snakes were entrusted with safeguarding him (101–6):

110. I report the translation of Carson (2015) here. For Nancy’s rendering (2013), see note 112.

111. Cited by Dodds 1960, ad loc.

112. This effect of liquidity/liquefaction is rendered in Nancy’s flowing translation: *Le sol ruisselle de lait, ruisselle de vin, ruisselle du nectar des abeilles*.

113. Nancy 2016, 20.

114. This is a striking Oedipal “relic” in a birth that seems otherwise to challenge Oedipality, as shown by Wohl (2015, 148) in her Deleuzian–Guattarian reading of the passage. On Jocasta’s brooches and Oedipus’s castration, see chapter 1.

στεφάνωσέν τε δρακόντων
 στεφάνοις, ἔνθεν ἄγραν θηρότροφον μαι-
 νάδες ἀμφιβάλλονται πλοκάμοις,
 ὦ Σεμέλας τροφοὶ Θῆ-
 βαι, στεφανοῦσθε κισσῶ . . .

[Zeus] crowned [the baby] with crowns of snakes; hence the Maenads throw around (*amphi-ballontai*) their curls the prey that feeds on beasts. O Thebes, nurse of Semele, wreath yourselves in ivy.

Replicating Zeus's paternal encirclement of Dionysus, the Maenads "throw [snakes] around" (*amphi-ballontai*) their curls, just as Agave will later attempt to "encircl[e] (*amphi-balleis* 1364)" Cadmus with her arms. In both cases, there is a divine will to assimilation expressed through human agents; in that sense, we can see the convergence of the patriarchal and Dionysian. Aligned with Zeus's thigh as a container of the Oedipus-like baby, the snakes here enact the father's archival fantasy of possession of the child. Of course, the Dionysian experience, represented by the Maenads' encircling snakes, relies on the god's violent possession of the other. In recoiling from Agave's encircling embrace, Cadmus is the archival object whose "jolt . . . refusal . . . rebuff," to return to the words of Stephen Best, is transferred to us, its observers. The stupor, frozenness, and recoiling that close the play invite us to consider post-orgasmic tristesse as another facet of intoxication, an anarchic resistance to the orgasmic frenzy of Dionysian possession.



In a series of paintings called *Bacchus*, *Psilax*, *Mainomenos*, Cy Twombly renders Dionysian intoxication as a conglomeration of thick swirls that freezes the idea of ecstasy. An effect of this swirling and conglomeration, which emerge from each individual painting and from the collection as a whole, is that, as Twombly himself put it, "the brush got tired."¹¹⁵ In *Untitled (Bacchus 1st, Version IV)*, for example, on which I focus here (see figure 7), we see the tiredness in the thickening of the red pigment—the viscous surrogate of blood that engulfs the surface, deadening movement, blocking ecstasy.¹¹⁶ Like the triple Euripidean repetition of *rhei*, the chromatic viscosity creates the effect

115. The quote from Twombly appears in Cullinan and Serota 2010, 613.

116. Bird (2007, 504) observes that "the colored line might suggest . . . the flow of life blood, but also its draining away, the downward pressure of gravitational force returning the *materia prima* to the earth from which it came."



FIGURE 7. Coils of exhaustion: Cy Twombly's *Untitled (Bacchus 1st Version IV)* (2004). Acrylic paint and crayon on wood in artist's frame, 104½ x 79 x 2 inches. The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. © Cy Twombly Foundation.

of an arrested flow. The intoxication proffered is the weary intensity of an aftermath; the smears and smudges, the residue of a spiraling brush drenched and weighed down by the clotted color. In Twombly's rendition, Dionysian intoxication resides, in other words, in the paralysis induced by the painting's own viscous making and in an effect of residuality that is at once mobile and immobile.

Mainomenos ("mad, crazed"), the word that floats above the swirling lines like a title or caption, brings us back to the orgasmic anti-teleology discussed in the first part of this chapter. Not just a customary, unremarkable epithet for Dionysus and those affected by his frenzy, the adjective contains an internal repetition: *maino-* reduplicated as *-menos*.¹¹⁷ If we consider that *menos*, the epic word for "strength," also means "sperm," we can view *mainomenos*, in its caption-like function, as subliminally pointing to the coincidence of mad intoxication with the unremitting loop of sexual desire, materialized in a manner indistinguishable from spirals of blood.¹¹⁸ Twombly's swirls are in themselves impressions not only of a bodily rhythm but also, as observed by Barthes, of an impulse toward a signification not stabilized in any complete, orderly, or full-fledged meaning.¹¹⁹

Building "an unbroken circuit of excess,"¹²⁰ the swirls visualize the orgasm's ongoingness, which, I have suggested, is dramatized in the anti-cathartic finales of *Agamemnon*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus the King*. The frenzy of the act of painting cannot be separated from an inherent exhaustion—smears and smudges are impressions both of the excitement of expressing colors on the canvas and of the "tiredness" of the brush. Similarly, the Dionysian intoxication in Twombly's painting resides in the liminal space between the orgasm and its aftermath—between a pleasure immediately receding into the curves of its repetitious rhythm and the weary perception of having lost what was never possessed.¹²¹ Rather than corresponding to the state of ecstasy brought

117. This reading is also suggested by the gap that seems to separate *maino* from *menos* in the graphic rendition of *mainomenos*.

118. On Greek *menos* as "sperm," a meaning of the word that has been suppressed in the modern renditions of its many Iliadic occurrences, especially in reference to the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, see Davidson 2007, 317 and 320–21. On the sexualized symbolism of Twombly's swirls, see esp. Barthes (1985, 180), who compared his technique to a "dirtying" of the canvas.

119. See Barthes 2003, 26 and 34. For Barthes, Twombly's art "remains unclassifiable since its inimitable tracings conjoin inscription and effacement" (31). The idea of writing that emerges is what Barthes calls *dysgraphy* (38).

120. Bull 2005, 53.

121. For Barthes (2003), Twombly's forms "no longer sing so much of the marvel of a generation as rather of the sad sterility of repetition" (31). They "hove[r], floa[t], and drif[t] between desire . . . and . . . the discreet dismissal of every desire to capture or possess" (40).

on by Dionysian intoxication as it is usually conceived, tragic *jouissance*—tragedy’s quasi-orgasmic pleasure, we could say—is a non-state, caught, like an archival object, between appearance and disappearance, life and death—in the spiral of *lifedeath*.¹²² *Mainomenos* modifies “Bacchus,” which appears here underneath it, almost invisible, but affected by the swirling matter below, as shown by the thickened curve of the first letter C. Despite the presence of its referent, this participle is almost separated from it, left hanging. The participle does not simply signal the dissolution—that is, the “liquefaction” of the subject—through manic intoxication. It points to a willful separation of the subject from its attributes, a kind of “self-divestiture” similar to the resistance of the archival object posited by Stephen Best in *None like Us*. It is a self-divestiture that resists the danger intrinsic to dissolution: alienation (being *assimilated into*). Twombly’s self-divested subject remains pleasurably stuck between appearance and disappearance, but also between body and nomadic intensity, in the space opened up by the formal excess of *mainomenos*, by its punning suspension between the personal and the impersonal, the participle and the reduplicated *menos*. Twombly’s swirls seem to bring together the sexualized anti-cathartic experiences that we have explored in this chapter. Evocative of tragic *jouissance*, Twombly’s rendering of intoxication amounts to a serial swirling-around that defies stability and assimilation. This *jouissance* is, I argue, something comparable to approaching the orgasmic illusion—the unsettling unboundedness promised by sexual climax—or receding from it, enthralled in the coils of exhaustion.

122. Barthes (2003, 31) suggests that Twombly’s paintings convey “Life-Death as a unified thought, as one sole gesture.”

EPILOGUE



Reading Greek Tragedy, Reading Archivaly

I BEGAN this book with Freud's flight from Vienna and resettlement in his London home on Maresfield Gardens—already an archive before it officially became one. Circling back, I now want to return briefly to this Oedipal exile, and to a text that seems to gather together the tragic death-driven registers that we have explored in this book. In a letter to his colleague and friend Max Eitington just after his arrival in London, before he moved to Maresfield Gardens, Freud declares:

The feeling of triumph on being liberated is too strongly mixed with sorrow, for in spite of everything I still greatly loved the prison from which I have been released.¹

On the surface, Freud seems to air the homesickness of the refugee. But the reevaluation of “liberation” and “prison” invites us to think of the ways that the two apparent opposites are difficult to tease apart. Vienna is for Freud both “prison” and likely death. London is “liberation” but also impending death. The co-implication of life and death in both locations offers a biographical/geographical expression of the *lifedeath* dynamic that Freud theorized in each subject's life in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. For the subject, “prison” may

1. E. L. Freud 1970, 446.

be the pre-life of the womb or the apparent non-life of sheer matter, from which it emerges, always longing for one or the other.² Alternatively, life can be the “prison,” the container of the death drive’s perpetual movement, which seeks not so much death itself as a perpetual postponement of the “release” it promises. Either way, the prison rather than the liberation becomes the desideratum. Philoctetes is “released” from the prisons of cave, island, and disease but, at the very moment of liberation, seems to look for envelopment in the sea. Hecuba’s self-consignment to the sea resists the promise of liberation/survival in the form of a monument. Euripides’ Oedipus rushes vainly back and forth between sword and noose in the prison archive of the *skênê* in *Phoenissae*; in the same *skênê* prison, his Heracles insistently stabs the void. Medea is pre-emptively “liberated” from the prison to which her unspeakable crime would condemn her, but, to avoid paying the price of this liberation, i.e., another patriarchal prison awaiting her in Athens, she immobilizes herself in anti-cathartic suspension above a shattering crash. In Freud’s self-description we can also find the condition of the patient of psychoanalysis, nostalgic for the “prison” (of neurosis, repression, compulsive behavior, etc.) from which, ostensibly, he has been “released.” It is the condition of Sophocles’ Oedipus, whether he longs, as in *OT*, for his piercing bonds—the instruments of the sexualized *jouissance* sedimented in the blood that was cleansed off at the moment of his rescue—or, as in *OC*, for the bonds of the dirt to which he is drawn in his mysterious exit.³ Furthermore, in the persistent attachment to the “prison” that Freud has been released from there is the intimation of a shift in the object of psychoanalysis’s own cathexis from the goal to the means: from the (impossible) “liberation” of the unconscious, a liberation that Freud repeatedly equates with archaeological discovery, to the repeated, never-ending effort to break into the imagined “prison” where the most hidden secrets are held. The effort to break into prison finds perverse expression in the urge to break into one’s own (or somebody else’s) body, to break through skin and the surface of time, as we see with Iphigenia, Aeschylus’s Orestes, and Dionysus. This urge holds them captive, as it were, feeding their desire to liberate emotional and parental encryptions while sparing them cathartic liberation.

2. In letters of the period, Freud unsurprisingly welcomes death. See, e.g., the letter sent to Stefan Zweig on May 18, 1936: “I . . . cannot reconcile myself to the wretchedness and helplessness of old age, and look forward with a kind of longing to the transition into non-existence” (E. L. Freud 1970, 429).

3. In this respect, Oedipus in *OT* seems to be more Lacanian; in *OC*, more Freudian—contrary, one might say, to the alignment of Freud/*OT* and Lacan/*OC* that Felman (1983) has influentially proposed, following Lacan’s discussion of *OC*.

In her novel *Paradise* (1997), Toni Morrison describes the *jouissance* of self-mutilation experienced by Seneca, a female character in the habit of trying to release her traumas “with whatever came to hand: razor, safety pin, paring knife,” to bring them out as though they were extraneous bodies ensconced in her own. As Morrison puts it, “She held toilet tissue to catch the blood, but she liked to let it run too.”⁴ Morrison’s novels can be regarded as expressions of the tragic as an aesthetic register that translates ancestral trauma into a recursive and recalcitrant lyrical form, one that never fully gives itself away. Morrison’s engagement with Greek tragedy—a strong presence in her novels, as various studies have shown⁵—goes far beyond intertextuality, which is, of course, the very condition of the literary. It is a matter of a distinctive aesthetic atmosphere encompassing recognizable but also not-quite-recognizable plots, characters, and even formal elements.⁶ *Paradise* offers one particularly fruitful example of how Greek tragedy can bridge the gap between the ancient and the contemporary. In *Paradise*, Seneca’s self-mutilation, evoking the death of her Roman namesake, also has something in common with the *jouissance* of Oedipus’s self-blinding.

More broadly, Morrison’s novel, depicting the troubles and traumas of the all-black town of Ruby, Oklahoma, encodes the archive feelings that, as I suggested in this book, shape the anti-cathartic aesthetics of Greek tragedy.⁷ I would argue that what makes this novel a postmodern Greek tragedy is not so much the widely recognized allegiance to the moral and structural patterns of the tragic *muthos* theorized by Aristotle as the pervasiveness of an aestheticized archive fever, which affects both the plot and language.⁸ Chosen almost randomly, (un)collected, the following excerpts present equivalents of

4. Morrison 1997, 222.

5. See, e.g., Jones 1985; Haley 1995; Otten 1998; Roynon 2013, 11–14 and ch. 3; and McConnell 2016. On Morrison’s engagement with Aristotle’s *Poetics* in her Cornell M.A. thesis, see this chapter, note 8.

6. In a 1986 interview, just after describing her use of “bluesie” to create a specific narrative “flavor” or “atmosphere,” Morrison responds to her interviewer’s observation—“the quality [of your novels] makes it possible, even desirable, to go back and re-read your novels again and again . . . like replaying a favorite song”—with these words: “It’s like Greek drama—you can always go back and look at it one more time” (Morrison 2008, 38–39); see also Morrison 1994, 176: “The Greek Chorus . . . reminds me of what goes on in Black churches and in jazz.”

7. Morrison herself presents the novel as the product of work in the tragic African-American archive, referring in the foreword to her experience of collecting “in photographs and print so much African American history—sad, ironic, resistant, tragic” (1997, xii). On the archival dimension of *Paradise*, see esp. Walters 2013 (ch. 3).

8. Roynon (2013, 62–63) points to Morrison’s Cornell M.A. thesis on the influence of the Aristotelian theory of tragedy on William Faulkner and emphasizes how, in *Paradise*, she “creates the effect of a morality tale,” with characters undergoing “an Aristotelian process of recognition and reversal.”

Oedipus's desire for archivization as self-disposal; Theseus's rushing nowhere; Medea's and Heracles' unrelenting, vertiginous starting over; the hoarding and bingeing of *Phoenissae* and *Hecuba*; and the boundlessness of orgasmic finales. Regardless of situation, character, and speaker, these passages give a sense of an archive fever that affects the novel's very texture:

Already in a space tight enough for a coffin, already devoted to the dark, long removed from appetites, craving only oblivion, she struggled to understand the delay. . . . A man and a woman fucking forever [. . .] Moving, moving, all the time moving. . . . "I just want to . . . ride [. . .] fast as I can." . . . They had been first to understand everything, remember everything. . . . In hospitals [eyes like those] belonged to patients who paced day and night; on the road, [. . .] people with eyes like that would walk forever. . . . The more Steward acquired, the more visible his losses. . . . Like a child alone in a deserted playground, she drew her name in the dirt with her toe. Then slowly, imitating the girl's earlier erasure with the vomit, she kicked her name away, covering it completely with red dirt. . . . She might as well start over in Alcorn, Mississippi. . . . Each congregation had people who were among or related to the fifteen families to leave Haven and start over. . . . The twenty minutes she spent looking at the Blackhorse Bible [. . .] convinced her that a new species of tree would be needed to go further, to record accurately the relationships among the fifteen families of Ruby. . . . One by one she dropped cardboard files, sheets of paper—both stapled and loose—into the flames.⁹

In a sense, the aesthetic feeling exuded by the passages gathered here issues from the self-sabotaging cathexis to the origin that drives the novel's plot. Ruby, also called New Haven, is a rebuilt, relocated, renamed version of the town of Haven, which the community's leaders, former slaves from the East, had founded, "feverish" in their quest for a promised land, a paradise in the West.¹⁰ The origin here coincides with racial homogeneity and purity, which the leading families of Ruby try to preserve at any cost, repeating the dynamics of discrimination they originally sought to escape, spreading death against others—and themselves.¹¹

9. Morrison 1997, 221, 63, 75, 110, 128, 82, 175, 68, 83, 188, and 216.

10. As Morrison (1997, xii) says in the foreword to the book, in the late nineteenth century "the opportunity to establish black towns was as *feverish* as the rush for whites to occupy the land" (my emphasis).

11. See Page (2001, 644), describing the ethico-political dynamic in *Paradise*: "Unity that is too tight only precipitates the dissolution it is designed to prevent. Central to this rigid unity is a refusal by the ruling fathers to tolerate divergent interpretations of the town's past."

A public oven that the townspeople bring with them when they relocate serves as the community archive and nourishes their archive fever as they rebuild it and delusionally seek to protect it from any alteration. Sitting around this fetishized oven, a kind of hearth or altar, the men of Ruby enact the circular futility, the spiraling stuckness, that characterizes this novel and Greek tragedy.¹² Their impossible fantasy of liberation is, then, attached to a prison of sorts, the oven, a symbol of *lifedeath*. It is an archetypal place of nourishment and at the same time the abyss of death, which affects the men with its energy while they remain on its edges. *Oven* is their *haven* or *heaven*—the loop of the quasi-homophonic words tropes the circularity of the oven's archival prison. The anti-cathartic impossibility of liberation (and indeed the characters' insistent albeit unconscious rejection of it) is what makes *Paradise* tragic—*Paradise* is tragic, that is, not *because* it appropriates the convention of the Aristotelian *muthos*, teleologically directed toward catharsis, but rather *despite* that appropriation.

In this book, reading anti-cathartically has meant feeling without ever capturing death-driven intensities in the folds of tragic form. While, for some critics, performance ("original" or not) is what would allow us full access to the embodied, sensual qualities of theatrical semiosis, for others, including myself, these qualities are ultimately the expression of tragic language itself. In the *jouissance* of my hermeneutics, in the spiraling energy of my analyses, I have tried to reproduce the feeling of the death-driven modes of aesthetic reception that I seek to uncover. Twisting the practice of close reading into a liminal exercise between critique and post-critique, I have relished the excess that oozes from formal edges. Just as Iphigenia, Orestes, and Dionysus strive to break through the skin or the surface of time, attached more to these exertions than to their (impossible) goal, the readings that I put forward cut into the text, not to open up alleged deep, hidden secrets, but to model the aesthetics of the death drive, which I argue are essential to understanding tragic form. Attending to its unceasing semantic spirals, its rebuff, I refrain from "liberating" its meaning, from monumentalizing it as an *archê* of signification. Going beyond the opposition of reparative and paranoid reading, and their corollaries, surface and depth, the stance that I have adopted has privileged what I would call reading *around*. By this I mean a kind of reading that, like the death drive's distinctive trajectory, operates through relentless spinning, a reading that does not simply question the idea of an *archê* but inhabits the perversely productive, quasi-erotic energy released (without release) by the search for it. *Aroundness* is the direction of a reading caught

12. See Roynon 2013, 64–65, for the comparison of the oven to an ancient Greek hearth.

not simply in the hermeneutic circle, but in delirious looping, an endless spiraling of effects of reading. This movement corresponds not to the “spiraling loop of self-complicating questions and reservations” associated with traditional suspicious critique, but to a disposition of reading that internalizes the death drive, rendering it into a mood, an intensity, at once hermeneutic and anti-hermeneutic, which performs, in the approach to the text, the very tragic aesthetics it seeks to recover.¹³ I recast “look[ing] *around* at the context of the words that stopped us”—in Jane Gallop’s definition of close reading¹⁴—as the interpretive embrace of a psychic force that makes us humans and yet, as Freud himself implicitly suggested, decenters the human, linking human with non-human existence, binding subjectivity to an unbound, unruly, impersonal automatism—not the cycle of life and death, but the dizzying loop of *lifedeath*. The condition of anti-cathartic interpretive *jouissance* that results—oblivious to any distinction between form and content, meaning and non-meaning, morphology and syntax, individual word and notional context—offers the possibility of an affective register that respects and even actualizes, at the point of reception, the stubbornness of tragic form, its intoxicated recoil.

Experienced as interpretive *jouissance*, the anti-cathartic aesthetics described in this book can enable us to feel in a visceral way the emancipatory force of tragic language. Explaining Aristotelian *mimêsis*, a theorization of representational decorum that imprisons tragedy while ostensibly freeing it from Platonic condemnation, Jacques Rancière considers its “system of legitimacy,” which includes “a reality principle for fiction that circumscribes its specific space-time and its particular regime of speech.”¹⁵ To counter Plato’s idea that watching tragic plays caused permanent, or dangerously enduring, disturbances in the soul, Aristotle, as Rancière points out, used catharsis to limit the impact of tragedy to the sealed-off, self-contained experience of theatrical performance. In other words, for Aristotle—as well as Freud and Jacques Lacan, as we have seen—the equilibrium brought about by catharsis at the end of a tragic play would allow spectators to leave the theater psychologically undamaged. For Rancière, however, this mimetic system kills aesthetics, which he conceives of as the regime of sensation, a disruption of the logic of meaning capable of investing art with political—that is, emancipatory—force. As Davide Panagia has observed, “The problem for Rancière isn’t so much to alter the structure of relations in any existing order but to render those forms of connectivity as parts of a collective ensemble open to dissolution

13. The quotation is from Anker and Felski (2017, 9), who speak from a post-critical point of view.

14. Gallop 2000, 12 (my emphasis).

15. Rancière 2011, 97.

and rearrangement.”¹⁶ In other words, the emergence of the possibility that apparently “necessary” relations of structural connectivity may be suspended is, for Rancière, “an archetype for the radical *an-arche* that is the aesthetic force of democracy.”¹⁷ Contrary to the Aristotelian model, we can say that the force of archive fever—which I have suggested is the engine of Greek tragedy’s anti-cathartic aesthetics—yields its own model of “radical *an-arche*.” In Euripides’ *Heracles*, for example, in the encounter of actual and virtual, safe passage and shipwreck that closes, without closing, this play, there is an unresolved encounter between representation and non-representation, a disturbance of the logic of *mimêsis*, which generates an anarchical sensation of suspension. This suspension goes along with Heracles’ archive fever, his breathless circling around the origin, even as he resists the memorializing patriarchal archive. Such a condition of an-archival immobility has as its emancipatory correlates dis-unification, disagreement, the rupturing of the system of perceptive parameters that shape the social order, which Rancière calls *consensus*. In the finale of *Heracles*, the intervals that open up in the apparently solid unity of representation correspond to the void over which we hang, along with the characters, in an anti-cathartic and dissensual space, never closed, never fully fixed in a virtuality turned into actuality—something similar to the never-present “future to come” that, for Jacques Derrida, is the ethical legacy of the anarchic archive, an archive always working against itself, against its own homogenizing aspiration. The unruly, vertiginous sensation that breaks out in these intervals may constitute the aesthetics of political *dissensus* as well as a source of tragic form’s death-driven appeal.

The mobile stuckness circulated by the various archive feelings explored in this book is distinct from Plato’s idea of tragedy as violence inflicted on the soul—a psychic disturbance comparable to utter madness or, in his sexist view, emasculation—but also from the carnivalesque transgression of “playing the other,” which ascribes to the tragic experience a potential to open a contained space for dissent within the community. Greek tragedy, as I have argued, appeals not just, à la Plato, to an irrational desire for grief, but to a more radical self-destructive urge, which, since its first theorizations (by Sabina Spielrein and Freud), has been denied and ridiculed. Reacting against the very idea of containment in all its forms—even ecstasy when it closes in and stabilizes—tragedy, through its death-driven aesthetics, carries emancipatory force, claiming a place for futility, suspension, undulation, frozenness, mere duration, and purposeless sensation within the realm of public feeling.

16. Panagia 2018, 61.

17. Panagia 2018, 81.

These archive feelings are *queer* feelings of twistedness and fractured temporality, of being caught between *backward* and *forward*.¹⁸ The constitutive mutilation of the archived object—the product of a loss—can be reread as a marker of willed unfinishedness, a refusal of calcification into an organized state. Alternatively, the mutilated object can be seen as simultaneously tending toward stabilization into a complete shape and rejecting it, in a movement analogous to that of *lifedeath*, which spirals around the rupture of non-life into life. In other words, archival mutilation can be regarded as a death-driven pre-emption of the object's own objecthood. Feeling like an archival object, whose mutilation figures a perennial becoming, an ever-delayed being, the subject experiencing tragedy inhabits a non-ecstatic affective territory where the objectification of cathartic restoration is evaded along with its correlate—reproduction as an economic as well as a biological mechanism. Death-driven in its own right, reproduction demands the creation of material objects that are shut off from the threshold between potentiality and actuality, fragmentariness and wholeness. The tragic death drive spirals away from a linearity that it incessantly contorts. In the void of a stalled transition between two inaccessible origins—the mutilation of the archival object and its imagined completion—archive feelings are the queer (non)pleasures that yield perennial contortions within the contortion of *lifedeath*.

While they express distinct paroxysms of archive fever, the movements of Oedipus's maternal brooches, Iphigenia's and Heracles' sacrificial weapons, Orestes' *in-cessive* sword, and Agave's Dionysian limb-rending hands all trope the unrelenting impulse to break and break into poetic form that tragedy's aesthetics instill. The death-driven search for the *archê* that we have located throughout the diachronic span of extant plays is the source of these an-archic aesthetics. Greek tragedy offers the engrossed reading or viewing subject the sensation of a rebuff again and again in the swirl of *lifedeath*. It is the promise of this an-archic sensation that, while wearing us out, makes us never tire of entering the archive of Greek tragedy, of visiting and revisiting its anti-cathartic pleasures.

18. Cf. Love (2007, esp. ch. 5), who identifies queerness with “feeling backward” and specific negative affects including “shyness, ambivalence, failure, melancholia, loneliness, regression . . . immaturity, self-hatred, despair” (146). Luciano (2011, 131) connects Derrida's *mal d'archive* with “the twisted temporalities that queer attachments set into play.” Rather than seeing queer archives as privileged instantiations of the contradictions of the archive (see esp. Cvetkovich 2003; Ahmed 2014, 7–18; Brinkema 2014b; and Dean 2017), I propose that we view the archival object as a model for queerness in itself. On queerness and objecthood, see, with different emphases, Ahmed 2006, Chen 2011, Herring 2011, and Kim 2015.

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