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THE PSYCHOANALYTIC TURN IN LANGUAGE

Antigone between the Semiotic and the Symbolic

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the notion of language, as a field of studies, has expanded to englobe different disciplines, well beyond the earlier Saussurean theorization of the social (*langue*) and the individual side (*parole*) of language. This thesis retraces such a remarkable turn to Julia Kristeva, who includes the idea of language within the psychoanalytic horizon. I consider Antigone as the ideal source for the exploration of Kristeva's amplified language: this thesis will consider, in fact, how Antigone has often been associated to the speech of the other, particularly the speech of women and the feminine language of lamentation. In contrast with this view, the purpose of this research is to dispossess the figure of Antigone of the theories accrued around her, and to try to grasp Antigone as the symbol of a resisting core which eludes language and transcends time and space. In response to its multiple readings, this thesis draws on Bonnie Honig (2013) who, by questioning the dichotomy of *logos* and *phonê*, takes Antigone to be the symbol of this undecidable space that is in the middle of language, a space that becomes the vantage point from which it is possible to investigate an expanded and renewed linguistic dimension.

The first chapter focuses on Kristeva's main linguistic theories, her psychoanalytic approach, and the consequences her theories have in the relationship between language and individual. From this perspective, the second chapter aims to contextualize the tragedy of *Antigone*, focusing on the linguistic instrument of *parrhesia* and providing an overview of the most famous readings of the character of Antigone. This analysis paves the way to Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted* (2013) which, offering an original take on Sophocles' tragedy and its characters, is the main focus of the third chapter. Ultimately, the fourth chapter, providing a space to Adriana Cavarero's take on the dualism of *logos* and *phonê*, features the new terms in which *Antigone* should be framed.

## LINGUISTICS AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

When it comes to language, the general idea is to think of it as a system of structures that regulates communication and becomes tangible just with the very act of communicating. But already at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure highlighted that the concept of language occupies a broader space, or better: “language is a well-defined object in the heterogeneous mass of speech facts” (Saussure 14). As Saussure highlighted, there is a social side of language (identified as *langue*), a real system that follows specific laws to which the members of a community respond to. However, it could be argued that it is erroneous to limit the vision of language just to a structure on which any society relies. The individual and willful act of the speech is, as Saussure himself states, “many sided” (Saussure 9). This early, basic Saussurean point has productively unfolded in multiple disciplinary directions during the twentieth century: linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. This thesis wants to focus on the psychoanalytic view of language that developed building on Saussure’s theory.

It is essential to define language as a twofold system: its two subsets (*langue* and *parole*) have no absolute autonomy; one cannot exist without the other. By stretching Saussure’s assumption, it would be possible to identify speech as an independent and willful body that uses *la langue*, a shared, common language system it assimilates passively, as an instrument of thought. But to consider language as a necessary instrument at the disposal of the speaker, and therefore thinking of it just in terms of its function, is limiting: *langue* and *parole* do not exist only as a dichotomy; the speaker does not simply *use* an instrument that stands outside his reality, but *langue* and *parole* work as a duality. *La langue* is originally defined in its concreteness as the union of sign and sound that occupies the social dimension. But the subject uses *la langue* to construct there the logic of his own discourse, thus inscribing his individuality in a social structure that is essentially impersonal. The French linguist Gustave Guillaume

draws what he thinks is the path language undertakes in the process of communication: compared to the classic vision of a speaker's transition from *la langue* to *la parole*, he prefers talking about a passage from a *parole virtuelle* to a *parole actuelle*. If *la parole virtuelle* is an integral part of *la langue*, “une parole non physique, silencieuse, que le psychisme des unités de langue apporte avec soi” (Guillaume qtd in Toutain, 5), *la parole actuelle* is the discourse that is physique and effective. Guillaume's choice of vocabulary further emphasizes Saussure's indivisibility of *langue* and *parole*: language cannot be thought of as a system external to *la parole*, whereas one is part of the other. By extension, it is fundamental to consider the speaker as an integral part in the system of language: but how can the speaker inscribe his/her individuality in an impersonal system? The linguist Émile Benveniste focuses on the concealed property of the speaker: in *Problems of General Linguistics* he underlines how it is “in and through” language that the speaker is able to establish himself as a *subject*, and by extension, as a speaker (Benveniste 224, emphasis mine). Benveniste claims how the fundamental concept in language is that of “subjectivity” and how the enunciation of the “I” constitutes the person. But in language there is not only the constitution of the ego to consider: Benveniste goes further claiming that there cannot be any self-consciousness without a contrast, the “you”. There is no “I” if there is not a “you”: in picturing this dynamic and dialogic structure in which the “you” echoes the “I”, Benveniste states how “language is in the nature of men” (Benveniste 223) and how by using the “I” and the “you”, an individual is able to posit himself and the other, a “polarity of persons [that] is the fundamental condition in language” (Benveniste 225).

Therefore, as Benveniste suggests a layered and divided subject, language has always been a fundamental path in the psychoanalytic theory right from its origins: the concept of “linguistic turn” in the psychoanalytic field refers to the consideration of language as a mean through which it is possible to penetrate and explore the nature of the subjectivity of the speaker, his consciousness, always considered internal and inaccessible. In psychoanalytic

theory, the object of psychoanalysis is the patient's speech, and every symptom is considered a signifying system governed by laws (similar to language's) that must be discovered. In other words, psychoanalysis dives deep into language, understanding it as something through which the individual inscribes himself. The first part of this chapter will attempt a summary of Julia Kristeva's linguistic theory about the relationship between subject and language, which for the linguist is even more visceral.

### 1.1 The Shattering of Discourse

Building on Ferdinand de Saussure and Èmile Benveniste, Julia Kristeva refuses to consider language a system, something dead, stagnant, and ready to be disassembled. As already mentioned above, the idea of language as a speaker's tool is rejected: in Kristeva's theory, language is what helps producing subjects. Julia Kristeva's reasoning begins with a quite simple but fascinating point, beautifully expressed by the critical theorist Noëlle McAfee, who claims that Julia Kristeva

is one of very few philosophers for whom the speaking being becomes a crucial constellation for understanding oral and written literature, politics and national identity, sexuality, culture, and nature. Where other thinkers might see these fields as separate domains, Kristeva shows that the speaking being is "a strange fold" between them all - a place where inner drives are discharged into language, where sexuality interplays with thought, where the body and culture meet. Under Kristeva's gaze, no border stands untouched by the forces on either side of it (McAfee 1).

That of Kristeva is, therefore, a work that goes against the idea of sterile divisions, the dichotomous visions that immobilize the speaking subject in tight contexts. In other words, the subject is now open, active, constantly changing.

As regard the subject, there is an important distinction at the basis of Kristeva's reasoning: she uses the term "self" to refer to a being fully aware of his own goals, potentially able to master language, expressing exactly what the speaker means. The "self" would use the



realm of language, “subject to no one” (McAfee 2). But the idea of “subjectivity” instead opens new sets of dynamics for the speaker, in which the individual is seen as subject to culture, history, biography and language. This intersectionality is also the fundamental condition of the discourse which, in fact, “designates any enunciation that integrates in its structure the locutor and the listener, with the desire of the former to influence the latter” (Kristeva 11). Moreover, the individual is not fully aware of the implications of these forces that come into play, and thus a whole new dimension is opened. Kristeva explores and articulates this new dimension through psychoanalysis and the unconscious. Surely Kristeva is not the first to undermine the concept of a complete human self-consciousness. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel had already expressed his skepticism about it, claiming that the “self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged. The notion of this its unity in its duplication embraces many and varied meanings” (Hegel 111), but what is striking about Julia Kristeva’s studies is the reflection on what has involved in the building of subjectivity; she seems to try to find a balance between the magnitude and breadth of the nature and the restrictions of culture. In other words, her approach leaves behind a static vision of language and puts into the culture and linguistic equation the speaking subject and his conscious and unconscious driving forces. This attempt sees the fusion of semiotics, started with Saussure, and psychoanalysis, whose father is Sigmund Freud. A new way to study language emerges: language is viewed as an active signifying process together with the “subject of enunciation” (McAfee 15).

It is appropriate to introduce a few concepts Julia Kristeva often uses so that she may not fall into a static conception of language: right at the beginning of the first chapter of her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* (published in French in 1969), the author immediately emphasizes the word “process” in order to embrace the dynamic movement that involves and “pervades the body and the subject” (Kristeva 13), a subject that, if conceived in a immobile

vision of language, is continuously forced and encouraged to listen to the narrative of a dormant body, “withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience” (Kristeva 15). But if this isolation of language and subject is left behind, numerous consequences happen: the author gives the example of James Joyce who, by using different techniques in his works (just think of the stream of consciousness), breaks with the previous immobile and detached (in the linguistic sense) mode of production. The “explosion” of the subject and its limits in literature, Kristeva argues, are able to show, for example, how linguistic practices shape the subject and “his relation to the body, to others, and to objects” (Kristeva 15). Julia Kristeva leaves behind the concept of *discourse*, conceived as a multilayered testimony of a sleeping body, to focus on the *text* which is defined as “the essential element of a *practice* involving the sum of unconscious, subjective and social relations in gestures of confrontation and appropriation, destruction and construction” (Kristeva 16, emphasis mine).

Differently from discourse, the text “is not based on personified transference: its always absent ‘addressee’ is the site of language itself” (Kristeva 208). The text is therefore this limitless practice that works as a political revolution: in a continuous loop, it structures and de-structures the subject and what the subject relates to, like society. In this regard, Kristeva also introduces the idea of *significance*, as the endless work of the drives “toward, in and through language; toward, in and through the exchange system and its protagonist – the subject and his institutions” (Kristeva 17). *Langage*’s connections and contacts to the external psychosomatic realm are thus visible: even linguistics’ basic definition of “unmotivated, arbitrary” (Saussure 69) relation between signified and signifier points to the outside, to the extra-linguistics. Hence, one cannot fail to notice how that of language cannot be a closed system but how it has continuous exchanges with the outside.

## 1.2 The Question of the Extra-Linguistic

With these premises, Julia Kristeva starts using the term *signifying process* (referring, hence, to both language and speaking subject) emphasizing the rejection of the idea of the speaking subject as transcendent and thus affirming its interplay with language. The signifying process, Kristeva argues, operates in two modalities that work dialectically: the *symbolic* (so called because it makes use of symbols, syntax and grammar) and the *semiotic*. It is necessary to understand the meaning of the term *semiotic* used by Julia Kristeva, since here English creates ambiguity: in discussion here, it is *le sémiotique*, and not *la sémiotique* (the study of signs). What the linguist wants to grasp is one of the original senses of the word *sēmeîon* (*σημεῖον*) which, among a wide range of meanings, denotes distinctiveness, a sign by which something/someone is distinguished from others, a precursory sign. The symbolic way is built using logical words, with clear and neat meanings, while the semiotic mode is “a discharge of the subject’s energies and drives” (McAfee 16), namely the extra-verbal way in which these energies make their way into language, through the use, for example, of more emotive words. By stretching these two definitions, it would be possible to compare these two modes with terms that belong to the psychoanalytic vocabulary: the symbolic mode could be identified as something that produces a mostly *conscious* message, while the semiotic leads and partially reveals a more *unconscious* content, a comparison that makes better understand how these two modes are not separate but intertwined, interdependent. However, it is necessary to specify that the symbolic mode presents a gap in itself as well: the most logical and clear communication will always be built on the ever-present discrepancy — the “arbitrary and unmotivated relation” highlighted by Saussure and already mentioned above — between the signifier and the signified, given by the dual relationship of a term with its sound-image on a side and with its meaning on the other, in fact “the most plain-spoken language is an *uneasy* merger between a sound-image and the meaning it is supposed to denote” (McAfee 23, emphasis mine). A good

example to better understand this internal linguistic gap, remaining in the literary field, could be the one discussed by the literary critic Fredric Jameson in his book about the history of the realist novel of the nineteenth century, *The Antinomies of Realism*: here, the author focuses on the “named” emotion, namely the vast array of words pointing at emotions that are present in language (it is possible to read the language here in discussion, through Kristeva’s lenses, as the symbolic mode). The literary critic notes that

those names – love, hatred, anger [...] – have been grasped as a system of phenomena (like the system of the colors, for example); and like colors, the system is a historical one which *varies* from culture to culture and from period to period (Jameson 29 emphasis mine).

Jameson, curiously, proceeds with his theory by pointing at an “isolated body [that] begins to know more global waves of generalized sensations” (Jameson 28): these waves are defined by the author as *affect*. Jameson’s affect stands somewhere else from the *named* counterpart, implying that the affect is able to “elude language and its naming of things” (Jameson 29) and, by stretching Jameson’s theory towards Kristeva’s, it is possible to claim that the affect’s realm is the semiotic mode. It is also interesting to dwell on Jameson’s idea of an *isolated body*, a mention that, in this context, is certainly fascinating. In fact, the theories of Kristeva, Lacan and Freud originate from the concept of a *body* – hence not yet a *subject* – and its isolation. The next paragraph will try to explain the intertwining of language and psychoanalysis; for now, it is enough to mention how this isolated body mentioned by Jameson correspond to what Kristeva defines as a body immersed in the semiotic *chora*. A stage that, in Freud’s theory, could be identified as a body in a pre-Oedipal stage and in Jacques Lacan’s theory could be seen as a body in a Pre-Mirror stage.

Following Kristeva’s reasoning about the symbolic and the semiotic, the symbolic mode is meaningful because it is vitalized by the speaking subject’s energies but, at the same time, the symbolic mode allows the semiotic articulation to exit the body of the speaker and

enter the external (my stretch). The semiotic without the symbolic would be a delirium, while the symbolic by itself would be a totalitarian violence, an empty articulation, if not impossible. But at this point a question may arise: what comes first? Or better, is there an initial stage in which just one of the two (of none) exists? In this respect Julia Kristeva takes and uses the idea of *chora* (χώρα), introduced by Plato in his *Timaeus*, a dialogue that attempts to reconstruct the origins of the universe and how its structures are organized. As Elizabeth Grosz comments in her article “Women, Chora, Dwelling”, the *Timaeus* is a work of extreme importance because it

sets up a series of binary oppositions that henceforth mark Western thought: being and becoming, the intelligible and the sensible, the ideal and the material, the divine and the mortal, all versions of the distinction between the (perfect) world of reason and the (imperfect) material world (Grosz 23).

What Julia Kristeva borrows from Plato’s dialogue is the concept of *chora* as mythological bridge between the oppositions mentioned above. However, the linguist does not consider the *chora* just as a space, but also as an articulation that precedes language. As example, it is possible to catch a glimpse of this bridge just considering a baby’s coos, an articulation that, since it is obviously far away from that of the symbolic mode, can only lead to a semiotic meaning: in other words, the *semiotic chora* shows a stage in which the symbolic order is not in the equation. The term *chora*, denotes “an extremely *provisional* articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral states” (Kristeva 25, emphasis mine), an uncertain articulation whose organization is vocal and gestural and that does not depend on representation, since “it precedes spatiality, temporality and verisimilitude” (Kristeva 26).

The *chora* is not a sign, because technically it cannot represent anything for anyone *in* the *chora*, and it has no correspondence for anybody *outside* that *chora*, therefore it is not a signifier; since there is neither identity nor unity, the object is absent, and the sign is unarticulated. Despite this, to consider the *chora* as a space, as an articulation without “rules”,

would be incorrect: Kristeva argues how the semiotic *chora* is subject to an *ordonnancement* (the linguist, rightly, prefers to use the term *laws* in the symbolic context) “dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological differences between the sexes or family structure” (Kristeva 27). This has fundamental consequences on the symbolic and the semiotic modes: including social and historical constraints in the semiotic mode implies their imprint, their mark and therefore a role in the shaping of the *chora*. As a matter of fact, Plato had already defined the *chora* as a “*receptacle* of all coming into being, like [a] nurse” (Plato 18, emphasis mine), but what Kristeva adds to Plato’s reading of the *chora* is the power to *generate* these energies that stimulate the signifying process: thus, the linguist surpasses the idea of the *chora* as a simple receptacle, to turn into a space able to generate as well. Consequently, while the symbolic responds to certain laws, the *chora* responds to a certain order which, following Kristeva’s theory, is dictated by the mother’s body. That of the semiotic, then, is a rudimental system, a precondition of the symbolic mode: the semiotic disposition is “put in place by a biological setup and is always already social and therefore historical” (Kristeva 68). From this point onwards, Julia Kristeva continues her analysis through a psychoanalytic lens, which obviously finds fertile ground in theorizing a womb that stands between being and becoming, divine and mortal etc.

It is necessary to underline how a speaking subject is divided between social constraints, such as hierarchical structures and modes of production, and its own unconscious mind that, for its part, consists of what Sigmund Freud defines, in his theoretical work *The Ego and the Id*, as “two classes of instincts” (Freud 55), namely Eros (the *sexual* instincts) and Thanatos (the *death* instincts), two drives that are opposed to each other. In his article “Eros and Thanatos”, scholar Timofei Gerber explains how “Eros and Thanatos, are inherently in us from the moment of our entrance into this world. Freud was aware how provocative and counter-intuitive this is — as this means that death is not something that ‘happens to’ us, like an

accident, but something that is an inherent part of our very being” (Gerber). Julia Kristeva describes them as ambiguous because “simultaneously assimilating and destructive”, noticing also how this dualism “makes the semiotized body a place of permanent scission” (Kristeva 27). These drives, that are nothing but bio-physiological processes, involve functions that are semiotic and that belong to a pre-Oedipal stage. Here the connection with the womb mentioned above: the mother’s body works as ordering principle of the *chora*, while mediating the symbolic law. It is worth specifying that while the mother’s body represents the child’s realm, the mother is not perceived by the child as a someone distinct: the mother is, for the child, a continuation of itself.

It is necessary to introduce the term *abjection*, whose meaning is “action of throwing away, removal, rejection” (“abjection”), which is unfolded by Kristeva in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. That of the abjection is the rejection of what is other with respect to oneself, procedure that allows the definition of the fragile borders of the I: considering that the first experience of the child is an experience of plenitude (in the *chora*), the child has no borders and therefore it must develop a perimeter between itself and the other. The making of these borders happens through what Kristeva calls *abjection*, that is to say, “a process of jettisoning what seems to be part of oneself” (McAfee 46). The abject is something the subject expels with repulsion but that, interestingly, does not vanish: the abject, in fact, keeps floating close to the borders of the I, “at the periphery of one’s existence, constantly challenging one’s own tenuous borders of selfhood” (McAfee 46). Kristeva provides a fascinating, graphic description of this abject: she provides an effective example with food loathing, defined as “the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection”. Driven by repulsion, the subject violently dispels the abjection from the border of the self:

along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the

food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself* (Kristeva 3).

The most obvious case of abjection is the abjection of the mother: there is a stage preceding Lacan's mirror stage, namely the moment in which the child (who is not a subject yet, but a body) starts to reject the idea of identifying itself with the maternal body, its own origin. Moreover, the borders of the child are hard to distinguish from the one of the mother's, since they form a whole. To become a self, it must renounce to a part of itself, a part that will continue to hover around the borders of its I, throughout its life.

If at first the child is immersed in the semiotic *chora*, it gradually becomes aware of the exterior, of what is outside itself. It slowly begins to realize how language can be used to point at its surroundings, at something that is external to its identity (and here the theory reconnects with Benveniste's constitution of the "I" and the "you" mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). The awareness of a something that is external and therefore different, allows the child to also discover its own identity: so, by understanding the referential function of language, the child is also able to understand itself in terms of *subject* and to point at others in terms of *objects*. Julia Kristeva draws this linguistic theory alongside Freud's Oedipal stage's theory and Jacques Lacan's Mirror stage theory: briefly, Kristeva's "awareness of language" coincides with what for Freud is the moment in which the child detaches itself from its mother, because it realizes that the mother is not omnipotent and, in Freud's terms, she *lacks* a phallus. This lack clashes against the plenitude experienced by the child immersed in the semiotic *chora*: trying to leave aside the literal reading of the phallus as sexual organ (which will be commented in the next section), the phallus represents an absence, something missing that, in Lacan's theory, is at the center of being. This lack puts in motion a search for "objects" of desire to compensate this primordial sense of loss, a compensation that will never occur: from a linguistic point of view, this lack is untranslatable, which means that it cannot find a translation



within the symbolic. The author Ellie Raglan-Sullivan in her essay “Seeking the Third Term” writes that desire “mark[s] a place of incompleteness or aphanasis in language [...] pointing to a hole in being that must continually fill itself up, oscillating between being and nothingness” (Raglan-Sullivan 45), meaning that this sense of lack is into being and into language.

The child that experiments this lack moves from the semiotic *chora*: it is the moment equivalent to what Lacan explains as the moment in which the child, aware of its reflection, has to deal with the identification with an alien image. This development in the child’s subjectivity is called “thetic phase”: *thetic* means pertaining to a thesis, thus the first moment of the dialectic preceding the antithesis and the synthesis. Hence, in this case, it marks an initial stage of signification, in which the subject “must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects” (Kristeva 43). The moment in which the child points semiotically at something external, this semiotic piece automatically becomes a signifier: the child can recognize what is different from itself and therefore is able to give an *attribution*, thus “the nucleus of judgment and proposition” (Kristeva 43). This thetic phase, Kristeva argues, can happen only when the child enters Freud’s Oedipal stage: it can be said that this thetic passage represents a threshold between the symbolic and the semiotic, a stage in which the child is about to use language, a stage that precedes the entrance into symbolic articulation. When this entrance happens, the semiotic mode is not left behind: as mentioned above, that between semiotic and symbolic is an interdependent relation, even though, reasonably, it might seem counterproductive to have a semiotic articulation in what the communication is intended to be, namely an exchange of intended meanings between two or more interlocutors. But as already mentioned, the symbolic articulation is not as stable as it seems to be; Julia Kristeva considers also the work of Edmund Husserl, specifically his *Logical Investigation* (first edition in 1901), in which the philosopher distinguishes in each name

what it means [...] and what it names [...] Such distinctions have led to our distinction between the notions of 'expression' and 'indication', which is not in conflict with the fact that an expression in living speech also functions as an indication (Husserl 188).

In her study *Desire in Language* (1980) Kristeva explains how that of signifier and signified is a “complex architecture where intentional life-experience captures material multiplicities” (Kristeva 129): the intentional experience gives to this captured material a noetic and a noemic meaning —terms introduced by Husserl— that is to say, a meaning that has an I(subject)-pole (noesis) and a meaning that has an object-pole (noema). By stating this bipolarity in the external materials, the object “can only be transcendental in the sense that it is elaborated in its identity by the judging consciousness of transcendental ego” (Kristeva 129).

Kristeva, hence, highlights how the semiotic is a “disposition that is definitely heterogeneous to meaning but always in sight of it or in either a negative or surplus relationship to it” (Kristeva 133), indicating that being heterogeneous to meaning does not necessarily imply being meaningless. Therefore language, intended as a social practice, presupposes both the symbolic and semiotic dispositions: these can differently interplay, depending on the signifying practice. For example, in a scientific context the symbolic articulation will be predominant, but still not absolute because who symbolically articulates is always a speaking being who was born as a semiotic being (my stretch). The speaking being, as McAfee states, “begins to signify well before [it] learns words” (McAfee 27). The semiotic activity, Kristeva specifies, introduces movement, “fuzziness” into language, it is a “mark of the drives (appropriation/rejection, orality/anality, love/hate, life/death) and [...] stems from the archaisms of the semiotic body” (Kristeva 136). Julia Kristeva also reiterates how the semiotic articulation is essential to the symbolic one: the linguist affirms indeed that a sane subject needs to express the semiotic somehow. The semiotic is an articulation that reveals the instability (term to be understood in its meaning of “unsteady”) of the subject, who will always be set in motion by the energy of the drives; the signifying process shows the way in which the subject

discharges the drives and, consequently, the impact of this discharges in the symbolic articulation. Moreover, it is logical to think that if on one hand the semiotic is a precondition for symbolic articulation, on the other the semiotic could also represent a threat for the orderly symbolic space. It is also necessary to consider that the signifying process is a system that is always open and influenceable so, in other words, the process of discharge of the energies will always be subject to change: language and subject are both involved in this continuous process, so much so that Julia Kristeva defines the subject as *sujet en procès* as well. The theories here discussed have a main purpose: to show how the study of language cannot be separated from the study of the subject's development. In fact, from the exclusive semiotic *chora* to the entrance into the external world, the speaking subject is the result of linguistic processes, processes that, as it has been widely discussed, have biological, historical, cultural premises.

### 1.3 The Psychoanalytic Approach

Regarding the subject's strategies, Julia Kristeva takes a psychoanalytic approach, building her own theory starting from Sigmund Freud's and, above all, Jacques Lacan's, whose contribution in the mid-twentieth century revitalized the psychoanalytic field. To briefly introduce a context, it must be said that the father of the psychoanalysis proposed a tripartite map of the human mind, introducing the dimension of the unconscious, introduction that changed people's vision of themselves and of the world. Freud suggested that the human mind is composed by the Id, the Ego and the Superego. The Id is identified as the totally unconscious part of human mind, present from birth, that collects instincts and primitive behaviors, and it represents the source of the psychic energy: in other words, it constitutes an essential part of a person's temperament. In Freud's theory what censures the drives with moral judgment (acquired from family, society, and historical conditions) is the Superego. Lacan's new approach tends to go against that psychoanalytic branch that defines psychoanalysis as a cure

to make the sense of self completely able to dominate the Id and the Superego, since the French psychoanalyst rejects the idea of a stable, solid self, and relaunches the idea of an Ego that is not built-in, but is the result of ongoing unconscious operations that tackle and draw on issues of culture, history and language. Kristeva, in *Language: The Unknown* (1969), argues how, for psychoanalysis, that of language is a secondary signifying system that, while maintaining a relation with the *langue*'s categories, "superimposes its own organization and specific logic" (Kristeva 268). The signifying system of the unconscious, in fact, goes beyond language because it does not build itself through minimal meaningful units of language (morphemes) as it happens in organized language, but it is constructed through "extremely *condensed* signs" (Kristeva 268, emphasis mine), that would therefore correspond more to chunks of discourse. That of condensation is a technique that Freud noticed to be in use also in dreams, systems that he considered really close to linguistic expression: for example, the psychoanalyst considered them to be parallel to rebus, verbal-visual images that can have several meanings. When there is the condensation of more units into one, the resulting signified can be independent from the signified of the single parts: the signifier has a relative autonomy and the signified slides under it. Because of this sliding under something fairly independent, the signified must not necessarily be included in the signifier's units and the correct interpretation can derive just from context (my stretch): there are "nodal points" (Kristeva 270) in which numerous thoughts converge, creating this condensation. When approaching the idea that the unconscious works like a language, it is necessary to remember that, for psychoanalysis, everything that is conscious has a previous, unconscious stage; therefore, it is undoubtedly fascinating to consider that the quest for the unconscious happens in and through discourse and that, in Lacan's words "the unconscious of the subject is the discourse of the other" (Lacan qtd. in Kristeva 267). Freud has pinpointed three operations common to unconscious and dreams that suggest their structural similarities, while Lacan built the connection between dreams and language:

condensation (mentioned above), displacement and representability. About displacement, it is enough to think about the essence of thoughts: the core of thoughts (and dreams) does not resemble the content of thoughts. What happens to be articulated is a distortion of the core, a core that exists in the unconscious and that, therefore, can be partially recovered. Freud notices how the operation of representability sees the appliance of logical connections based on “similarity, consonance, or approximation – the relation of ‘just as’” (Freud qtd. in Kristeva 271): this means that the logic of dreams is a simultaneous one, dictated by a simple application of symbols that are found to be similar or coherent.

Regarding the techniques of condensation and displacement that take place in dreams, Jacques Lacan is the one who actually makes a tangible connection with them and language: he notices, in fact, how condensation and displacement are nothing less than the linguistic techniques of metaphor and metonymy. The metaphor is a word that stands for another, while the metonym works in terms of contiguity, connecting terms together: McAfee accurately describes the former as “a kind of compressed analogy” and the latter as the “use of historical and cultural associations” (McAfee 31). These works of analogies and associations, in Lacan’s opinion, occur at an unconscious level. That of dreams and language is just one of the numerous Lacan’s revisits of Freud’s theories: in this context it is fundamental to mention Lacan’s reading of Freud’s Oedipus complex, briefly mentioned in the previous section. If Freud focuses his attention to the child that realizes that its mother is not almighty and consequently directs his attention on the father (raising issues on gender and sexuality), Lacan focuses on the figure of the father and what the father represents. Considering what mentioned before, the semiotic *chora* and how the mother worked as ordering principle of it, Lacan’s theory fits perfectly in Kristeva’s, by stating that the father represents language, the same one that the child can enter when the Oedipal stage occurs: Kristeva’s symbolic language. Moreover, it is necessary to remember that while the semiotic disposition is subject to, following Kristeva’s

terms, an *ordonnancement* mediated by the mother's figure, the language, which is represented by the father, is subject to *laws*. At this point it is possible to affirm that the subject enters the symbolic law, the father's language, while being constantly kept in motion by the semiotic disposition and its *ordonnancement*.

#### 1.4 On Maternity, Female Sexuality and Politics

This section wants to introduce Kristeva's positioning on feminism: if one considers what has been discussed so far, it is not unreasonable to think of the numerous consequences entailed by the above-mentioned theories. Between psychoanalysis and feminist theory, in fact, there is a continuous and challenging negotiation: trivially, it is enough to think about all the implications on motherhood in theories such as the semiotic *chora* or the Oedipus complex — the fear of castration for the male child which translates into the lack of the phallus for the female child. Kristeva's positioning in the feminist theory is hard to frame: first, building much of her work on psychoanalytic premises means having to deal with an underlying patriarchal reasoning and secondly, from a feminist point of view, the maternal, powerless, semiotic articulation that succumbs to the organized, powerful, male symbolic mode is a risky theory. It is starting from the former that this section tries to explain Kristeva's thinking on feminism: in her article "Julia Kristeva's Feminist Revolutions", philosopher Kelly Oliver points out how

the semiotic element within the signifying process is the drives as they discharge within language. This drive discharge is associated with rhythm and tone. And because these sounds and rhythms are primarily associated with the sounds and the rhythms of the maternal body, the semiotic element of language is also associated with the maternal. The semiotic is the subterranean element of meaning within signification that does not signify (Oliver 96).

The symbolic, on the other side, does signify and, being associated with the paternal, represents the disposition that allows the take of a position, a judgement. Considering that the two are interdependent, there is a movement, "a productive oscillation that crosses ever-new thresholds

because of the dynamic tension between rejection and stasis, semiotic and symbolic” (Oliver 96). The main issue, as many feminists argued, is that while the male child’s sexual identity is built through the struggle of the separation from the mother’s body, this cannot happen with a female child because she cannot *abject* the female body without abjecting herself: the identity is built by differentiation and, moreover, as Elizabeth Grosz writes in her book *Sexual Subversions*, Kristeva’s theory “evacuate[s] women of any privileged access to femininity, and [...] position[s] men, the avant-garde, in the best position to represent, to name or speak the feminine” (Grosz 95). Furthermore, a female individual will never be able to reestablish a connection with the semiotic order (something that a male can experience through sexual relations) except by becoming a mother herself: she is, then, necessarily connected with the maternal, while feeling foreign and powerless against the male’s symbolic order. The feminine is thus generally connected to the heterogeneous and the unnameable, making Kristeva’s theories equivocal for many critics. To detangle some of her positioning in the question of feminism, it is necessary to take some facts into account: many critics read the semiotic and the symbolic space as, respectively, biological sex and culturally-built gender. This interpretation led to some misreading, such as critic Judith Butler’s who, in her work *Gender Trouble*, writes about an “*opposition* between symbolic and semiotic” (Butler 89, emphasis mine). In Kristeva’s theory the nature of interdependency between symbolic and semiotic is fundamental: first, there is not a clear cut between them and, secondly, semiotic and symbolic do not correspond to two sides of the same coin (language) the speaker needs to choose between, but semiotic and symbolic are *moments* always present in the subject’s articulation. This is fundamental, since Kristeva finds denigrating the idea of assigning to women a single linguistic moment, out of the whole process of language, also because the semiotic by itself is just hysterias, nonsense. In the light of this statement, considering the archaic stage of the semiotic *chora* as something strictly related to the maternal might lead to think about femininity

as a biological fact (and, therefore, accepting the fear of castration/lack of phallus as biological as well) but it is not true. Again, it is important to consider how timeline works in Kristeva's theory: the immersion of the child in the semiotic *chora* is a phase that *precedes* the entering of the subject into language, therefore the semiotic *articulation* only happens in language, when the child has already separated itself from its surroundings. This means that the body is not biological, but cultural. Keeping this subtle difference in mind, it is possible to see what Kristeva's theory wants to prove: it is not possible to exclude sex from gender, because the body (biological) will always be mediated through language (cultural), therefore, by stretching this concept, it is possible to affirm that there is no such thing as a pure biological body. Interestingly, Lacan refers to language as *Other*, precisely because it is something that is not born with the individual but belongs to an *other*. By extension it is possible to affirm that Kristeva attempts to disrupt a vision in which nature and culture are two opposite poles, while she tries to question if it is possible to bring them together.

This possibility exists, the linguist argues in her essay "Stabat Mater" — Eng. transl. "Stood the mother": originally, a medieval Latin hymn which focuses on the suffering of the Virgin Mary during his son's crucifixion — since this crisis of nature and culture would happen in motherhood. This essay is written in two different columns that echo each other with different registers, respectively poetical and ordinary; the poetical section contains the experience of pregnancy (presumably her own) written in the first person, in which the woman experiences her body as "unlocalizable" (Kristeva 145), looking for the love of her child who is not an *other*, but a part of herself. The experience of pregnancy, Kristeva argues, blurs the borders of subjectivity, since the pregnant mother is not herself, but it is herself + other. At the same time, this *other*, who is inside her, is not completely an *other*, but (my stretch) an *other* + herself, the mother. As already mentioned, the child immersed in the *chora* does not perceive its surroundings as such, but it perceives itself as a wholeness and, therefore, the mother is seen



as its extension. But considering the formula for which also the mother feels herself as herself + *other*, it is possible to see how the mother is able, through pregnancy, to re-experience the semiotic chora and its questioning of the self's borders, "[...] I hear nothing, but my eardrum continues to transmit this sonorous vertigo to my skull, to the roots of my hair. My body is no longer mine." (Kristeva 138). The mother feels the unity and the imminent splitting: the mother carries this cut, imprinted as a permanent mark, a mark of pain she cannot get rid of. Is the woman eventually going back to the law? The author describes what she feels like "an abyss, between me and what was mine", something uncrossable because of the blurring of her identity, because of a cut in herself, the cut of the *other*. But that within herself is not the only abyss, as there is also the one that occurs after birth, between the body of the mother and that of the child, a child with whom the mother has "no relation. Nothing to do with one another" (Kristeva 145). An abyss in which there is no identity, and the mother is able to cling to her consciousness, "lulled by habit, wherein a woman protects herself" and therefore "a kind of lucidity [...] might restore her, cut in two, one half alien to the other – fertile soil for delirium" (Kristeva 146). Trying to stretch these concepts, it is possible to hypothesize how the mark left by the child could be a linguistic mark, a mark that belong to the semiotic and carries energies and drives that hit the mother also when the child has left her body, and it has entered the symbolic. There is no relation, the author argues, between the mother and the child, except for "that abundant laughter into which some sonorous, subtle, fluid identity collapses, gently carried by the waves" (Kristeva 146): the meeting point between mother and child, Kristeva argues, happens in the symbolic because they have shared the meaninglessness, the *other*, because of the blurred borders. Julia Kristeva is very careful in not identifying the mother with the semiotic chora, but as a bridge towards the *other*, a meeting point for nature and culture.

The parallel section of the essay is written in a more formal language, and it attempts a reasoning on maternity's role: Freud, who simply read maternity as a transformation of

women's penis envy, here is just mentioned and immediately dismissed, while the author tries to focus on representations of motherhood and its functions. That of motherhood is an insidious territory when it comes to feminism: without anticipating the essay "Women's Time", that will be discussed in the next paragraph about an impossible identification of women, attention needs to be given to the question of motherhood as "the sole function of the 'other sex'" (Kristeva 133). Julia Kristeva, undeniably, attributes to maternity an immense value and, by doing so, she goes against the avant-garde feminists who see in motherhood an imposition, a burden, and a restriction of the woman's freedom; however, the linguist's positioning struggles also with the traditional representation of motherhood, as she focuses on the necessity of finding a new representation of it that could replace what the philosopher thinks is just a masculine appropriation of the maternal, that is to say "a fantasy hiding the primary narcissism" (Kristeva 135). Kristeva provides the example of the Virgin Mary as example of motherhood from which it would be necessary to detach, in order to find a way of thinking about maternity as something fulfilling and not as a call that, she argues, "raises female masochism to the status of a structural stabilizer" (Kristeva 150).

There is another issue that must be mentioned: Kristeva's essay "Women's Time", in which the linguist tries to briefly analyze the feminist interventions in relation to the socio-symbolic contract and the balance between culture and nature. The author wonders what women's place could be in the symbolic: any attempt of negotiation or subversion of the socio-symbolic contract seems to be "mutilating, sacrificial" (Kristeva 24) or it presents the risk of using stereotypes. Moreover, women experience the symbolic as an imposition, therefore they feel the weight of a symbolic that works against their will: this, Kristeva argues, makes them frustrated because they feel this double rejection from language and social engagement. In her essay, the author mentions three attitudes of European feminists to the matter. There is a fascinating analysis on the matter of time, suggested also by the very title of the essay, read

through feminine and masculine lenses. Women, in fact, the linguist argues, seem to be part of a rhythm, of a time that is circular and repetitive: obvious (natural) examples could be the menstrual cycle or the gestation. Starting from this point in Kristeva's theory, it is possible to argue that this analysis of time works also from a linguistic point of view, since that of the semiotic (exclusively assigned to women) is not a linear articulation: the semiotic alone is hysteria, lamentation, it is not something with a logic structure that can lead to a logic conclusion (the conclusion is something that closes, that brings the matter to a resolution and allows to move forward), but keeps returning on the same points and rotates around the same object, leading to no conclusion and remaining in a state of hysteria and irrationality. What is the time that belong to women? Kristeva claims how the first feminists' aim is to gain their place in the linear time, the time of history, a time that is instead present in any logical structure such as the symbolic and its language, always linearly built through subject – verb/ beginning – ending. Their goal is to have men's same opportunities and rights, since the sexual differences are not considered that relevant and, thus, repudiating anything that could question that equality. This first generation of feminists decides to sacrifice nature, to find a place in culture. But if the first feminists wanted their place in history and an identification with/within the symbolic order, the second generation of feminists (Kristeva thinks in terms of generation because she gathers the feminists' movements following their approaches) refuses the linear time and reclaims what is womanly, thus repudiating culture for nature. These feminists, who are post 1968 or women with a psychoanalytic background, refuse Freud's ideas that women are constituted by a lack (discussed above), living their lives in a semiotic space and wandering in search of a satisfaction from the symbolic order. These women reject, then, the idea of thinking about themselves through a sacrificial logic and decide to fight against it, aiming to reappropriate themselves of their circular time, trying to step back to a mythical stage, what

Kristeva defined a “counter society” (Kristeva 34), a sort of female version of the official social organization.

The risks of this counter society and the counter power of the first and second generation are insidious: while the latter choose to integrate in a system of values that they experience as foreign, remaining in an outside position, the counter society takes the shape of an “a-topia, a place outside the law, utopia’s floodgate” (Kristeva 27). Moreover, Kristeva notices how these two feminist strategies are nothing but an inverted sexism: they both create a “simulacrum” (Kristeva 28) of the society against which they want to fight, which means that each generation works on a denial of the socio symbolic contract but, this denial tends to build on the symbolic’s actual premises. What Kristeva suggests, for a third generation of feminism, is the research for a balance between the two poles, nature and culture, challenging the vision for which these have to be separated. The linguist believes that it is, first, necessary to dismantle the idea of the Woman, capitalized as if there was a biological, mythical identity: in her essay she mentions Lacan’s risky quote “La femme, j’insiste, qui n’existe pas” (Lacan 149). What Lacan meant, psychiatric Cristiana Cimino argues, in her article “From Freud’s Woman to Lacan’s Women” is that the woman cannot be conceptualized, in the sense that there is no possibility of a collective identification, “woman is no longer a concept, but a contingency that, in contrast to men, makes them Women” (Cimino 3). Denying the existence of a concept, renders the sentimentalization around the figure of women impossible. The concept of woman does not exist, in the sense that there are women, each one of them peculiarly existing: to this point Kristeva connects her idea to what she hopes a third generation of feminists will be, stating that it is necessary to embrace the peculiarity of women, combining nature and culture or, to be more precise, leaving women to embrace both motherhood and the linear time. Moreover, when the identification of the woman (that is not possible anymore) ceases to be relegated to the nature-pole, the consequence is that the existing dichotomy men-women/culture-nature is

called into question. Julia Kristeva, instead of attacking the socio-symbolic bipolarity, suggests to internalize its dynamics, which means understanding how these two poles that seem to work as antithesis, opposite and rival, in reality co-exist in each individual; it is possible to see how the linguist's theory orbit around the idea of putting into question borders, to stop thinking in terms of duality, a theory that unfolds starting from the interdependency of semiotic and symbolic. Or better, this duality exists but an individual cannot choose one of the two poles and, even less, it would not be a choice based on one's sexuality: stretching this concept, using the same metaphor (mine) that has been used for language above, Julia Kristeva is asking feminism to internalize the fact that what they are is a whole coin and therefore they should not choose between one of the two sides (unlike the first and second generation). Instead of cancelling or minimizing the differences between the sexes, Kristeva's idea is to embrace this difference, and using it to be productive, to free women from binding representations of motherhood: women are not to be identified with the semiotic *chora*, but it is in their power to use it strategically to signify a sexual difference from the symbolic. In other words, when one considers that of subjectivity as a delineation of borders of oneself from another, women, Kristeva argues, should take advantage of their lack of identification and trying to establish the subjectivity they want via the law, refusing both the confinement in the *chora* and the cutting of their semiotic energies to attempt a role on the border of the symbolic order.

## 1.5 Subject and Politics

This last section wants to introduce the question of the political, apex of this excursus of Kristeva's theories that, starting from language as articulation, has drawn a path between, through, and within nature and culture. The above sections have insisted on the fundamental aspect of interdependency of semiotic and symbolic: the individual oscillates between these articulations throughout life, a movement that makes him a subject in process. Logically, based

also on what has been said, one could deduce that the best position for the individual would be a balanced oscillation that allows the feeling of the drives from the semiotic, without being overwhelmed (avoiding the hysteria), and being able, at the same time, to properly move in the symbolic. It is necessary to remember that the semiotic *chora* is fed and kept in movement by the energies that simultaneously assimilate, destruct and, therefore, continuously threaten the symbolic. In other words, idealistically, the best position for the individual would be a position of stability from which he could be able to control the semiotic, while being energized by it.

This perpetual oscillation makes the individual the subject of the semiotic and the symbolic, but he is also subject *to* them: he will not always be able to control the desire that permeates the semiotic *chora*. Without anticipating the question of desire, which will be analyzed in the next chapter, in this context it is enough to frame it from a linguistic point of view: psychoanalytically, more precisely following Jacques Lacan's theory, desire inhabits, feeds, moves the dimension of the unconscious. But what is the movement that this desire is able to put in motion? As already mentioned, that of the drives is a movement that keeps the subject alive, in a sense. But if the symbolic alone corresponds to a death state, a stillness, a question may arise: how is the frantic motion of desire able to find a sort of harmony within the symbolic and being compatible and essential to the rigid articulation of the law, of the *other*? The agitated energy of desire leaves from the semiotic and moves towards the symbolic articulation because, here, there is the space for a possible process of translation of this desire, of this unconscious bit that attempts to reach symbolic language. Moreover, Lacan, in his seminars of 1960-1961, discusses how this translation does not completely overlap the unconscious material but leaves untranslatable residues, something that cannot pass through the symbolic articulation. It is through a process of translation, a movement towards the symbolic, the *other*, that the individual first experiences the discovery of the unconscious, a discovery that "presents itself as a stage of this ongoing translation of an unconscious that is

primarily the other's unconscious" (101, translation mine). But the untranslatability of some material defines each individual present in the symbolic order as someone that cannot be fully aware, and therefore in control, of their decisions – including the conscious ones – that will always have a preliminary stage in the semiotic. This last fact has an important consequence concerning politics, intended as affairs of the collectivity: if Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and symbolic connects inextricably nature and culture, this means that the unconscious of the semiotic of the individual will always be present in the decision-making processes of the symbolic, the society, politics. In her essay "Psychoanalysis and the Polis", Kristeva tries to connect the quest for a translation mentioned above with the *polis*, the law

to give a political meaning to something is perhaps only the ultimate consequence of the epistemological attitude which consists, simply, of the desire to give meaning. This attitude is not innocent but, rather, is rooted in the speaking subject's need to reassure himself of his image and his identity faced with an object. Political interpretation is thus the apogee of the obsessive quest for A Meaning (Kristeva 78).

It is fundamental to remember that the subject in process stands at the center of Kristeva's theory and, therefore, politics orbits around the individual as an open system as well. The linguist argues that the same dynamics that happen at the micro-level in the individual, the continuous status of movement and revolution, must happen also in politics, in the organization of the public sphere. Moreover, she believes that the frantic motion that moves, destroys, and reconstructs the individual constitutes a fertile ground for a revolutionary change in politics, intended at its macro-level. This is another demonstration of how public and private spheres in Kristeva are never truly separated and, for the linguist, they should not anyway: in the previous section, Kristeva's feminist theory was against a universal, public concept of woman, but it was also against a relegation of woman in a private sphere. The main accusation made to feminists' approaches, in fact, was to have attempted the construction of a figure that was either political (in the *polis*, in the symbolic, but without the semiotic) or apolitical (in the semiotic

but forced outside the *polis*). Julia Kristeva focuses on the importance of the psychic space, and therefore of the sexual and subjective identity that must be present in the symbolic. This position has caused a whole series of criticisms, a critic to what is seen as a strong individualistic and anti-democratic thought: for example, the literary critic Toril Moi in her critical work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) claims that “the stress on negativity and disruption, rather than on questions of organization and solidarity, leads Kristeva in effects to an anarchist and subjectivist political position” (Moi 170). In other words, many criticisms are made against Kristeva’s individual who, as an open system, is involved in continuous exchanges that do not allow him a stillness, a stability: the individual’s perpetual self-search is seen as an impossible premise for a collective, macro-politics. Leaving aside the historically contextualized examples made by Kristeva, who, for example, defined the totalitarianisms of XX century (fascism and Stalinism) as an objective example of a quest for a meaning, this chapter concludes with the introduction of a work, of a character that precedes the psychoanalytic theory by several centuries. The second chapter, in fact, will attempt to place Sophocles’ *Antigone* on the psychoanalytic ground analyzed in this chapter, to later draw around the figure of Antigone, unravelling between several interpretations who feel the need to place the heroine either in the *polis* or outside of it.



## THE TRAGEDY OF ANTIGONE

Then, what stops you? Are you waiting for me  
to accept what you've said? I never will.  
And nothing I say will ever please you.  
Yet, since you did mention glory, how  
could I do anything more glorious  
than building my own brother a tomb?  
These men here would approve my actions –  
if fear didn't seal their lips.  
Tyranny  
is fortunate in many ways: it can,  
for instance, say and do anything it wants.  
(Sophocles ll. 539-548)

The Theban myth of Antigone was and continues to be much discussed in multiple and different fields to such an extent that a question may arise: why is *Antigone* still so much read, discussed and interpreted? Undoubtedly, Antigone's power lies in the complexity of her character, a character able to remain firm and complete even when extrapolated from its original context of ancient Greece; however, what is striking about the myth of Antigone is the multidisciplinary discourse that arises from her figure. Antigone's timelessness is somehow grasped by philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, and feminist theory which, still, do not revolve around so much around her actions, as around her language. This thesis wants to investigate *Antigone* on a premise that is different from more common approaches (presented in the next section): humanists, for example, read Antigone as a figure able to converse with contemporaneity because her actions and message carry valid, universal, and shareable values about mourning, burials, human dignity. However, Antigone's words do not just convey a meaning, as they are primarily meaningful in themselves: why are they pronounced? As highlighted by political philosopher Bonnie Honig in her book *Antigone, Interrupted* (2013) Sophocles' protagonist "conspires with language" (Honig 8), a concept that, first of all, underlines how she mostly acts through her words and, secondly, how these acts are not so

obvious. This initial clarification is fundamental to exorcise what could be a flattening of the figure of Antigone: this chapter will build on some readings and critical essays that, while providing interesting and captivating ideas, either give priority to actions or circumscribe and read the character through a rigid, passive, and simplified language system. Honig's aim is to find a third way, which develops from a pragmatic premise: the word is action. In the 1950s, the philosopher of language and pragmatist John Langshaw Austin rejects the idea of speech as sole report and summary of the surroundings, as he glimpses the possibility of conceiving the word as an internal action that has consequences on the external world: in one of his lectures at Harvard University, published posthumously in the collection *How to do things with Words*, he claims that "to utter the sentence is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (Austin 6). Linguist John Searle inherits and develops Austin's idea of the action as within language, elaborating further theories. In his long essay *Speech Acts*, he observes that the "unit of linguistic communication [...] is the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the *performance* of the speech act" (Searle 16). Therefore, it is fundamental to consider how, contrary to many readings, Antigone's range of action is remarkable because of her language.

As a matter of fact, when considering the sequence of events, one immediately realizes how the protagonist's concrete *action*, understood in its physical meaning of "to set something in motion" from the Latin word *agere*, or "to begin" from the Greek *archein*, is actually very limited. Indeed, the tragedy develops from Antigone's first physical action of burying her brother, a crime that marks the starting point of the plot, and a second – and last – action, specifically her suicide that leads to the tragic conclusion. The tangible actions of Antigone, therefore, work as an expedient to frame the core of the tragedy: her words. Reconnecting with what has been discussed in the previous chapter, language is not a simple tool to produce a message, as speaking is not just a mean by which the information is transmitted. Bonnie

Honig's central idea is that Antigone plots with language, or in other words, to repeat the already mentioned Benveniste's words from *Problems in General Linguistics*, she makes herself "in and through" language (Benveniste 224). Trivially, Antigone's character is revealed by her discourse: in her language the audience is able to follow the unfolding of the tragedy, but it also guarantees an access to Antigone's thoughts, feelings and intentions.

## 2.1 Politics and Language

It is undeniable that the context in which the tragedy of Antigone was written makes today's reading of it fascinating, especially from a linguistic point of view: it is necessary to consider that Antigone is a Sophoclean Athenian tragedy first performed around 441 BCE in Athens in the occasion of the *Dionysia*, a great event in which many tragedies and comedies were staged to celebrate the god Dionysus. Although the setting of the tragedy is distant both in temporal and geographical terms, since its setting is that of Thebes in a distant time, the purpose was not just that of entertaining the Athenians. According to Honig, the distance in place and time of the tragedy "allowed Sophocles to broach for public consideration issues that would otherwise be dangerous to consider" (Honig 4); moreover, as Olga Taxidou claims in *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, "Athens and Thebes in myth and tragedy have an interdependent relationship, Thebes usually standing in for the other of Athens, for all the things of which the democratic state wants to rid itself" (qtd. in Honig 203). The figure of Antigone who rebels against the tyrant's unjust law, therefore, speaks to Sophocles' contemporaries, strong supporters of democracy: it is from this point that this section approaches the figure of Antigone, with the aim to contextualize her in the political environment of the time.

When considering Greece in fifth century BCE, it should be remembered that the modern idea of democracy is different from the Greek definition, as the latter develops around

the relationship individual-state, in which the single is an integral part of the *polis*. Keith Werhan in his article “The Classical Athenian Ancestry of American Freedom of Speech” defines democracy as “a revolutionary system” for which people belonging to a group rule over themselves (Werhan 293). The core idea is that democracy is founded on a multivocal community, in which each adult male individual, registered as *polis*’ citizen, has the access to the democratic process through his right to speak. As a matter of fact, when approaching fifth century BCE Greece, one immediately encounters two concepts that gravitate around that of democracy: *isêgoria* (ἰσηγορία) and *parrhesia* (παρρησία). While the first refers to the equal opportunity to speak in public assemblies, the latter means, literally, “to speak everything”, implying not only the freedom of speech but also the obligation to speak the truth, even at own risk. Jeffrey Henderson in his essay “Attic Old Comedy, Frank Speech and Democracy” states how *parrhesia* was such a fundamental component of democracy that “it could be considered not merely a citizen’s right but his moral obligation” (Henderson 256). Considered as the cornerstone of Greek democracy, *parrhesia* is a turning point that well defines the transition to the Classical age (fifth/fourth BCE) from the Archaic (seventh/fifth century BCE). It is hard not to notice how these ages’ dissimilarities are very present in the plot of *Antigone*. To give a brief historical context, that of the Archaic age is a polycentric culture, spread throughout the Mediterranean, and precursor of the democratic principles which will be developed a few hundred years later — the *polis* is not the dominant sociopolitical organization yet. The *polis* of the archaic stage, in fact, is not well defined: quoting Herbert Muller in his book *Freedom in the Ancient World*, one understands how “the polis might have almost any form; generally it veered towards aristocracy or oligarchy” (Muller 166). Also known as the age of tyrants (whose etymological meaning is “ruler”; it does not necessarily hold the negative meaning), it is a period in which an idea of community, in a broader sense, is lacking. “Law was made by Solons, citizens working in the public interest; the Greeks accepted its constraints” (Muller

166), giving priority to stability rather than freedom; “it gave them no inalienable rights as individuals” (168). Religion plays an interesting role: Muller notices how Homer’s texts (whereas there are doubts about the author’s existence, his works are dated around the eighth century BCE) reduced the gods to “a well-defined family” (158) that allowed the Greeks to identify themselves with them, perceived as “glorified human beings” (159) who hover around the civic life of Greeks. The gods, therefore, are not distant and omnipotent figures, but their resemblance to humans allows mortals to perceive greater freedom than, for example, the monotheistic religions in which there is a distant almighty god, since the Greek deities “were generally gracious, essentially reasonable, never so savage” (158). However, it must be said that in Zeus’s law there is an ethical component for which men who commit crimes are punished, a divine punishment that usually also falls on their descendants: *Antigone* opens with the protagonist’s bitterness and awareness about her incestuous and compromised family line, since “there’s nothing – no pain, no shame, no terror, no humiliation” (ll. 6-7) the law has spared her and her sister. It is inevitable that Zeus’ law, the one for which her family was punished for life, will also be the one she fears and, therefore, sides with. Therefore, the tragedy is often understood as a battle between two unassailable positions, between politics and moral: a clash for which Sophocles, in his Athens of the fifth century BCE, suggests a solution, namely that of democracy, the great achievement of the Classical *polis*, the city-state.

In the Classical age, in fact, Thebes, Sparta, Corinth and, most notably, Athens are the dominating centers around which politics and culture gravitate, but not only. With the affirmation of the *polis* there is a shift in the common values: the Classical age negotiates with the archaic legacy, introducing in it the terms and conditions that politics must meet to be prosper. Aristotle, in his work of political philosophy *Politics*, states how “the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and the individual” (Aristotle 8). But, differently from the archaic age, individuality is seen as fundamental for the democratic state. Indeed, fifth century

democracy is defined as direct precisely because it is the speech that allows a plural involvement in politics. The full political rights with the right – and moral obligation – to speak the truth guarantee the value of the individuality and the goal of a shared well-being, as Aristotle claims: “One citizen differs from another, but the salvation of the community is the common business of them all [...] the virtue of the citizen must therefore be relative to the constitution of which he is a member” (Aristotle 84). This equilibrium is necessary: if an individual prevailed over the state, there would no longer be the situation of equality and one would fall into the old, tyrannical dynamics of the Archaic age.

Athanasios Vamvoukos in his essay “Fundamental Freedoms in Athens of the Fifth Century” reflects on this idea of democracy, claiming how “democracy was a government of the people and by the people” (Vamvoukos 94) but also highlighting that “the state comes first, being a society that has developed naturally, [...] the individual is to enjoy freedom in society, but over him stands the city-state, *which follows its own laws*” (Vamvoukos 96, emphasis mine). This is the point around which the tragedy of Antigone unfolds: as Vamvoukos claims, the individual has complete freedom “within the limits set up by the interests of the community” (Vamvoukos 96) but one could argue that Creon’s edict does not concern the interests of the *polis* (Goethe thought as much, as we shall see later), indeed it dangerously touches the archaic, familiar, divine principles. Franco Ferrari in his introduction to *Antigone* claims: “The myth of Oedipus is thus conveyed by Sophocles in an archaic perspective (prior to the intellectual expectations of a rational control over reality), based on the sense of existential precariousness of man and the insurmountable limit that separates him from the gods” (Ferrari 11, translation mine).

Creon’s irruption into the archaic principles is immediately reciprocated by Antigone who, deprived of the untouchable right to bury her brother Polyneices, steps into politics with a political, democratic approach, appropriating the *isêgoria* – the equal opportunity to speak –

claiming a right that, as a woman and Oedipus' daughter, legally would not belong to her anyway. The French philosopher Michel Foucault, in his 1982 seminar on *parrhesia*, notes in fact how the freedom of speech could be "affected by the sins committed by the father or the mother" (Foucault 26, translation mine). However, the denied access to the right of *isêgoria*, does not consequently preclude the access to the one of *parrhesia*. In her essay "Women's Free Speech in Greek Tragedy", Hanna Roisman notes how to women "were permitted two venues of expression. One was in connection with their ritual and religious observances, the only venue in which women were allowed to sound their voices in public. The other was within the *oikos*, that is, to their relatives, and other members of their household" (Roisman 94). This is immediately clear also at the beginning of the tragedy, which opens with a conversation between Antigone and her sister Ismene about the prohibition of the religious rites for Polyneices. By extension, one could argue that Antigone could feel doubly entitled to speak up, since it is her uncle who imposes his edict against her religious rites.

In his article "Parrhesia: The Aesthetics of Arguing Truth to Power", scholar Gladys T. Goodnight affirms that "parrhesia always signals the uttering of a communicative argument that opposes the settled views of the demos or of the powerful. Thus, *parrhesia* is the rhetorical figure of dissent par excellence" (Goodnight 2). In his *Conversations of Goethe*, Eckermann highlights how the philosopher makes an important consideration on Sophocles' characters who all "possess the gift of eloquence, and know how to explain the motives for their action so convincingly, that the hearer is almost always on the side of the last speaker" (227). That the tragedy revolves around the obligation to speak is, however, already clear when the guard informs Creon that someone buried Polyneices: the guard feels reluctant fearing the king's reaction, but he knows he needs to speak the truth when he claims "If I'm talking annihilation here, I'll still say it, since I'm of the opinion nothing but my own fate can cause me harm" (266-268). Therefore, *parrhesia* reveals an aspect for which "it clothes bad news with an

anxious denial of responsibility and a supplication not to be punished” (Goodnight 2). But the tragedy of Antigone is not just about *parrhesia*, but also about its denial: the starting point of Honig’s work *Antigone Interrupted*, reflects on the characters of the tragedy considering the issue of interruption of speech and the role it has in *Antigone*. She claims how

interruption is itself a speech act (even if J.L. Austin does not discuss it), it is the one kind of speech act to which Antigone’s philosophical readers have been inattentive. Why? Perhaps because interruption is an odd sort of doing, not always a sort of doing. Interruption, which aborts another’s speech, may be a deliberate speech act (Honig 3).

Reconnecting with what has been said at the beginning of this section, if one considers Antigone’s words as actions, interruptions work as a counterattack or, extending Honig’s quote, a way of un-doing these actions. Honig lists the times in which Antigone’s concrete actions and words are interrupted, something that happens from beginning to end: it is my opinion, however, that the first interruption that happens in the tragedy should not be left out. Considering the dialogue above mentioned between the guard and Creon, there is a moment in which the chorus’ leader intervenes, but he is interrupted.

CHORUS LEADER	King, something has been bothering me: suppose this business was inspired by the Gods?
CREON	Stop! Before your words fill me with rage. Now, besides sounding old, you sound senile (ll. 309-312).

The guard’s hesitation mentioned above was, then, justified, since the sovereign himself *interrupts* the chorus’ leader, when he suggests that it might be risky to go against the law of the gods. I do believe this first interruption universalizes Creon’s tyrannical attitude which, therefore, is not addressed only to those who go against his law and therefore could lose the right to speak, but also towards anyone who delivers negative news. There is also another point that deserves to be considered: the guard’s observation is not absurd, it is legitimate, whereas denying a burial somehow goes against a different kind of law, it goes against Dike (Δίκη), the goddess of justice. Adriana Cavarero, at the conference held during the *FestivalFilosofia* in



2022, highlights the difference between the law of men and Dike's. While the first is fallible, subject to continuous changes, the latter is discernible (Cavarero uses the Italian term *evidente*) as it is the law that regulates the cosmic order of things. The philosopher mentions Parmenides' poem *On Nature*, particularly the proemium:

There were the gates of the paths of the Night and the paths of Day-time.  
Under the gates is a threshold of stone and above is a lintel.  
These too are closed in the ether with great doors guarded by Justice –  
Justice the mighty avenger, that keepeth the keys of requital (Parmenides 4).

In the same way Justice separates night and day, Cavarero argues, in *Antigone* Dike keeps the living on earth and the dead in Hades: Dike's separation is about an order that must be maintained. But in the tragedy of *Antigone* everything is out of place: as Hanna Roisman observes in her article "Women's Free Speech in Greek Tragedy", Polyneices' body is left unburied on the ground, outside the *polis*, while Antigone will be buried alive (Roisman 96). Also the hubristic behaviors goes against the universal order: Creon's law invades Dike's and Antigone's *parrhesia* steps into the tyrannical *polis* of Creon. Therefore, along with the political cause, also Zeus' law is called into question, a fact that makes Antigone's objection understandable. In the quote above, Creon interrupts to *undo* the insinuation that the gods may not agree with his edict, following the belief that if not said, it is not true (and considering the nature of these laws, if not written, they do not really exist). Creon in a previous scene had spoken these words:

CREON	To me, there's nothing worse than a man, while he's running a city, who fails to act on sound advice - but fears something so much his mouth clamps shut (Il. 210-213).
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It is hard not to notice how Creon goes against his own words multiple times, since he does not listen to any advice throughout the plot. From this perspective, one might observe that Antigone is the one that does not keep her mouth shut, as she uses the democratic *parrhesia* against what

instead is the tyrannical attitude of Creon. This latter refuses to question and discuss his edict, until, heeding Teiresias' warnings, he longs for, ironically enough, the chorus' truthful advice "What must I do? If you have such advice, give it to me" (ll. 1216 -1217), invoking the man's *parrhesia*, in a sense. This is the reason why Roisman's theory about the disorder that is present in the tragedy is appropriate: in *Antigone* there is no order as Antigone claims democratic rights in a tyrannical system, while Creon acts in tyrannical terms, but often preaches like a democrat.

## 2. 2 The Text of the Tragedy

Many scholars focused on the figure of Antigone, in diverse epochs and with different objectives; seen as either the embodiment of an untranslatable desire or a universal mother, as a martyr or a heroine, Antigone fluctuates in multiple contexts, often opposite each other. Scholar George Steiner in his book *Antigones*, tries to historically trace the path of this floating by posing the same question this chapter opens with: *why Antigone?* Steiner, who published his work on *Antigone* in 1984, seeks for answers in history and in philosophy. Steiner notices a renewed interest for Sophocle's text in a very precise temporal frame, between c. 1790 and c. 1905, specifically between the French Revolution and its *Liberté* ideal, and Freud's philosophical and psychoanalytic analysis on the figure of Oedipus which will lead to the shift of the scholar's focus on this character. The renaissance of *Antigone* is coherent with early Romanticism's ideal of individualism, which in *Antigone* is dramatized in the timeless conflict between private and public, inner, and historical existence. Furthermore, to explain this sudden renewed interest, Steiner detects a fortuitous and contemporaneous presence of *Antigone* in the works of Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling, a fact that gives way to numerous multidisciplinary discussions in the second half on the nineteenth century. There is an important reflection by Steiner that helps understand that *Antigone's* popularity is also due to its genre: *Antigone* is considered, in fact, by most European poets, philosophers, and scholars, as the best Greek

tragedy, at a time in which this genre matters in the philosophical discourse. According to Steiner, “the major philosophic systems since the French Revolution have been tragic systems. They have metaphorized the theological premise of the fall of man” (Steiner 2) and apparently *Antigone* is close to perfection. The author mentions the main philosophical ideas within the above-mentioned time frame: Hegel’s self-alienation, Marxist economic subjugation, Nietzsche’s decadence, and Freud’s neurosis after the Oedipal stage. The idea that fascinates philosophers is the division within the individual, or with another entity, a struggle that always involves a division, a duality, whether it is internal or external to the individual. However, tragedy is not a genre that simply tells of a duality, but it presents one in its very structure. Aristotle in his *Poetics* had already defined tragedy as “the imitation [art is a means of representation] of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude” (Aristotle 23), an action that, according to the author, is set in motion by peculiar “qualities both of character and thought” (25). Moreover, the tragedy’s action is mediated by a “language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament” (23). Aristotle’s reflection gives an idea of the tragedy’s structure: the action, which originally belongs to the genre of the epic, meets the dimension of thought which is expressed through this “embellished language”, the lyric. It is surely fascinating to notice how the clash the tragedy brings on stage is also present in the structure of the tragedy itself, in which epic and lyrical elements come into conflict. Around this definition of the tragedy as combination of the epic and the lyric, Hegel builds his own reading of the *Antigone*: in his *Aesthetics*, he claims how dramatic poetry “unites the objectivity of the epic with the subjective character of the lyric” (Hegel qtd in Rancher 65). It is necessary to understand what Hegel means by “objective” and “subjective”: while the first term refers to the accessibility to the plot from multiple perspectives and to the theme that carries the values that connect a community together, the latter refers to the inner world of the individual. The lyric grants access to the characters’ interiority: as mentioned above, the case of *Antigone*

stands out from others because the epic elements work to form the frame in which Antigone and Creon's thoughts move.

I believe it is important to briefly investigate what I consider to be the function of the chorus, an element whose position in Antigone and Creon's clash must be specified. In fact, if the two main characters move mostly on a lyrical line, one can deduce how the chorus, composed by the elders of Thebes, provides a significant part of the epic content, and represents instead those values shared by all. Hegel in his *Aesthetics* argues how the chorus represents the ethical, undivided consciousness of a community, the chorus is "a background, void of individuality, for the dispositions, ideas, and modes of feeling of the character" (Hegel 192). In her article "Suffering Tragedy", scholar Shoni Rancher claims that Hegel in his *Aesthetics* compares the chorus to "the substantive soil in which the actions of the tragic characters are rooted and out of which their action grow and develop" (Rancher 67). It can therefore be said that the chorus represents the background against which Antigone and Creon confront each other. There is an interesting analysis made by Albert Weiner in the article "The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus" in which the scholar repudiates the idea of the chorus as the intermediary between what happens on the stage and the audience, but he claims that "it is an alienating influence, working to insist on the differences not the similarities" (Weiner 212). This is a reflection that I think it has evidence in the fact that the chorus does not side neither with Creon nor with Antigone. The tragedy's conflict between society and individual is exasperated the moment in which the chorus does not dare to go against the law of Creon because he is the incumbent king, remaining firm in their position of obedience.

CREON                      Don't join the cause of those who break this law

LEADER                    Who but a fool would want to die? (ll. 252-253).

Although that of the chorus is a blind obedience, the elders of Thebes sometimes show an elasticity that the two protagonists lack: they listen to the conversation between Creon and his

son, recognizing how Haemon “spoke well” (l. 804). It is worth briefly analyzing their listening to Antigone when, entering the *polis*’ affairs through the right of *parrhesia*, she makes herself audible. This entrance, however, is legitimized by the fact that the sovereign asks her questions to which she must answer, and Antigone behaves accordingly. This is, in my opinion, a fundamental aspect often overlooked: Antigone is *in* the *polis*, and her words are being uttered before Creon and the elders of Thebes. Her first lines are very concise answers in which she acknowledges her violation of an edict she is aware of: in this respect, it is worth noting that Antigone is politically aware of what happens in the city. Her awareness clashes not only against Ismene’s, who ignores the edict, but also against the elders of Thebes, who learn about the edict almost as soon as Antigone violates it. Moreover, it must be considered that Antigone understands certain *polis*’ dynamics, since she takes for granted the lack of support of the elders, telling Creon how “these men would approve my actions – if fear didn’t seal their lips [...] To please you they bite their tongues” (ll. 545-550). Thus, Antigone embraces her democratic *parrhesia* in the terms mentioned above by scholar Goodnight, her words become the instrument for her “dissent” (Goodnight 2) towards Creon’s tyranny and in contrast with the silence of the Thebans. She therefore has a position of advantage over the chorus, the same advantage she has over the guards predisposed to the control of her brother’s body; as a woman and Oedipus’ daughter, the *polis*’ does not belong to her, but this does not prevent her from moving within it. She moves well, because Antigone manages to create fractures in the tyrannical system: although the chorus condemns her “thoughtless act” (l. 421), the elders of Thebes show some compassion when they see her heading towards her death, a scene that “also drives [the chorus’ leader] outside the law” (ll. 881-882). Therefore, in my opinion, the chorus makes the fracture between Antigone and Creon wider, since, only when asked, they advise the king to spare the girl’s life, but it will turn out that it is already too late. Scholar Lindsay G. Martin in her MA thesis “The Role of the Chorus in Sophocles’ Ajax and Antigone” suggests

that while the elders of Thebes recognize the gods' law, at the same time "they are not candid about what they are thinking. They reflect on the situation in their lyrics, but their involvement in the action is limited" (91). For this reason, one may argue that it is more correct to consider the chorus an alienating element which, despite their listening to multiple perspectives, does not speak the truth for fear of the tyrant king and, therefore, it strengthens the distance from Antigone's cause and Creon's frustration. Instead of providing a meeting point, the chorus makes clear how Creon and Antigone's perspectives and attitudes are irreconcilable.

Established the context of the tragedy, this section tried to grasp a political core in which language is essential; the next one attempts a brief analysis of *Antigone's* critics that may be helpful in reaching the reading path Bonnie Honig proposes in *Antigone, Interrupted* and from which I will try to expand on, in the third chapter.

### 2.3 The Readings of Antigone

There are many interpretations of the clash between Antigone and the *polis*, the private and public, the feminine and the masculine. Bonnie Honig manages to summarize these approaches in three macro-groups in which Antigone is defined either as "heroic conscientious objector", or "humanist lamenter of the dead" or "monstrous creature of desire" (Honig 7). That of Honig is a meticulous analysis of the potential issues for each of these readings: on my side, I could not help noticing how these readings tend, in different ways, to take Antigone away from her words. I argue, in fact, that by detaching the subject from her speech or vice versa, therefore evaluating one or the other, something is missing. Honig's perspective is interesting because she is willing to position Antigone's actions and words in a *political* context, a move that demands a re-reading of her spaces and her language. However, it must be noticed that the tragedy is not only about the context of the *polis*, but it also concerns the politics of loss, grief, burial, kinship, leadership. David McIvor in his article "Bringing Ourselves

to Grief” reflects on the “potential politics of mourning” (McIvor 410) as a personal political resistance like Antigone’s but also as “a discourse of the state, which provides an official interpretation of public loss” like Creon’s when he claims “I will never tolerate giving a bad man more respect than a good one” (ll. 240-242). To put it another way, following Kristeva’s thoughts in her article “Psychoanalysis and the Polis”, the figure of Antigone must be read in its whole, considering her political path as an epistemological quest for a meaning that can respond to “the speaking subject’s need to reassure himself of his image and his identity faced with an object” (Kristeva 78). But political discourse is not just about identification, it is also about recognition: as explained in the book *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, politics must “acknowledge socially and politically the authentic identities of others” (Appiah qtd. in Hanssen 129), which means not only to recognize someone’s identity, but also, as Beatrice Hanssen points out, “to vindicate the other politically and institutionally, as the bearer of equal rights” (129). To talk about recognition, however, involves a dangerous proximity to universalization which always involves a radical decontextualization. Honig argues how in recent readings of *Antigone* this is a very common approach. Honig identifies a recent return of a new kind of humanism, for which “what is common to humans is not rationality but the ontological fact of mortality, not the capacity to reason but vulnerability to suffering” (Honig 17). In the genre of tragedy, humanists find the perfect stage on which pain become the universal representation of the suffering of man, an agony that transcends language making itself understandable to humanity. Antigone’s so-called *lamentation* becomes the perfect example of universal cry that cannot be deciphered, but at the same time understood and shared, since it is about loss, mourning and grief.

We saw her cry out in anguish, a piercing scream like a bird homing to find her nest robbed. When she saw the body stripped naked, she wailed one more time, then yelled a string of curses at those who’d done it. She scooped up powdery dust and, from a graceful bronze urn, poured out three cool swallows for the dead (ll. 462-469).

This mention to the bird that finds an empty nest, Honig argues, in the humanist discourse, is problematic for many reasons. The cry of Antigone is immediately associated to the animal world, brought back to a primitive pain common to all living beings. Antigone, therefore, is dehumanized the moment in which she cries, but not only. If the bird relegates her to an animal dimension, the empty nest connects Antigone to a *maternal* mourning, universalizing the mothers in grief as dehumanized. Moreover, the danger is also that of maternalizing lamentation, risking to further consolidate the presence of the mother in what is already believed to be the female articulation *par excellence*, the semiotic. Honig, in this respect, works on the consequences of *classicization* or, in other words, the risks of identifying contemporary mourning with Antigone's. She argues how that of classicization "is one device by way of which a sense of the universal and extra-political character of lamentation is secured" (Honig 15); the writer, however, suggests that maternalism itself becomes a tool of universalism. To be problematic in this elevation to a universal level is the removal from the political space, as a context of action and struggle, and a dangerous approaching to the stillness of the ancestral, natural order of things: therefore, there is no solution, there is no subversion but only identification. Moreover, to tackle two concepts that have been mentioned above, mourning is identified but also *recognized*, meaning it is classified as belonging to lamentation and, by extending the reasoning in this paragraph, to the maternal. On this matter the position Honig takes is quite simple: Antigone is not a mother but a daughter and a sister, therefore it would be important to start seeing a context of sorority, instead of mothering. Regardless of the approach, however, both these relationships must be considered as "an already politicized construct of artifice" (16) and not an ideal bond that transcends politics. The risk, the writer warns, is that of building an alliance between mourning and kinship, naturalizing and investing them with "ideological power" (16). Also because, Honig argues, the very idea of grief should be questioned: she reconnects to what she calls the "mortalist humanist idea" according to



which “we should dwell longer in grief or forge in grief new solidarities, or find in grievability a new social ontology of equality” (26). This approach, among other things, seems to go along with contemporary societies’ instrumentalization of grief to justify violent policies adopted by governments. As mentioned before, a recent form of humanism found in finitude a common point to all human beings, but Honig highlights how, besides being mortal, man is also, as Arendt suggests, natal. Philosopher Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition* claims, in fact, that “action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality [...] moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality and not mortality, may be the central category of political” (Arendt 9). Arendt reads natality as a condition for which there is an onward movement that can lead to something new, different. Therefore, Arendt reads the action through natal lenses, as *initiative*, as a leap forward. Going back to *Antigone*, if the context of grief is read in mortality terms, speech becomes lamentation: there is no step forward but the dangerous circling of words that collapse on themselves. As discussed in the previous chapter, I argue this circular movement corresponds to the semiotic articulation, devoid of the logic of the symbolic, for which Antigone’s word is an end to itself. If, instead, we read Antigone in the natality terms that Honig proposes, the word becomes a forward motion, it becomes an action, it becomes political. Antigone, Honig argues, is often identified as a “death-identified” (29) character, not attached to life, but she is actually full of rage. Critics often focus on her final dirge, dismissing her other interventions (having almost half of Creon’s lines, the words analyzed are further reduced) as means to reach death. I agree with Honig when she insists on the difference between identification with death and with self-destruction, since the latter does not belong to her. She curses those who hinder the burial of Polyneices’ body, she is furious and wants revenge. Honig argues also that Antigone is not completely death-driven, as she wants to make sure that Ismene does not suffer Creon’s punishment, “Go on living. I’d rather you survived” (l. 598). However, one should avoid assigning Antigone a

mother-like dedication, neither towards the brother nor the sister, as natality should not converge in maternalism. If, in fact, natality is intended as a movement forward, Antigone's apparent maternal care would relegate her to a final, definitive maternal dimension. Honig, furthermore, suggests that identifying Antigone with both natality and mortality "may also generate a different humanism – an agonistic humanism – that might better inspire progressive democratic imaginations that common receptions of this ancient heroine as mortal (death-identified) or maternal (and mournful)" (Honig 30).

Antigone's association with motherhood discourse is, in fact, questionable, especially if we consider her claims about the children she might have in the future: simply put, Antigone argues that her brother is irreplaceable, while husbands and children are substitutable. Linguistically this is true, following Jacques Lacan's reasoning in his 1959-1961 seminars *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* and *The Transfert*: according to the psychoanalyst, the only right Antigone claims, is a linguistic one. What Antigone declares is that there is no other person who can occupy and fit into the signifier of "brother", a signifier she protects from the first lines of the tragedy.

ANTIGONE	He's [Creon] got no right to keep from what's mine
ISMENE	He's mine too! (ll. 55-56)

Antigone's actions are put in motion by an untranslatable desire, a desire that has nothing to do with power or will but belongs to the dimension of the unconscious. In Lacan's view this unconscious desire revolves around something untranslatable, in other words meaning is missing; in the Italian edition of Lacan's *Seminario: libro VII. L'Etica della Psicoanalisi*, the editor Antonio Di Ciaccia names this untranslatability *vuoto di senso*. This lack, which Freud identified as the lack of the phallus, puts in motion the frantic desire of a search for meaning that, in Antigone's case, will lead her to death: therefore, Antigone, in Lacan's theory, is the embodiment of pure desire. This reading, Honig argues, suggests that Polyneices' burial is just

a pretext that allows Antigone to fulfill, following Freud's theory, her innate death drive. According to Lacan, Antigone's choice of death, argues Miller in his article "Lacan's Antigone", "cannot be understood according to strictly rational norms, she cannot be read as representing some simple antithesis of freedom to tyranny" (Miller 1). Lacan's reading is problematic because, the moment he sees Antigone as belonging to an external order, Antigone is not politically involved as she acts and speaks on her own register, incomprehensible to others. Besides, Lacan's reasoning on Antigone's attachment to her signifiers is unstable: similarly to Judith Butler's intervention in her counter-reading of Hegel, which will both be addressed in the next section, I reckon it is fundamental to remember that Antigone, as Oedipus' daughter, is the descendant of a lineage in which the signifiers are blurry. I notice how Ismene herself mentions this ambiguity when she retraces her father's history and the double signifier Jocasta occupies, "his wife and mother, two roles for one woman" (ll. 65-66) she claims. Judith Butler notes how the lack of stability of the signifiers is present in another ambiguous sentence, this time referred to the brother, pronounced by Antigone in the first dialogue with Creon, "I would be devastated to see *my mother's son* die and rot unburied" (ll. 504-505 emphasis mine), in which the reference points to Polyneices and to the father Oedipus (and technically, as Honig points out, Eteocles). This ambiguity goes against the idea of unicity and indivisibility Antigone has of Polyneices, whose name, besides, means "many quarrels". This ambiguity is highly problematic because it prevents the presence of Polyneices in the symbolic, since it seems to evade the symbolic's logic. Connecting with Kristeva's theories, McAfee reminds how the role of the symbolic is "a mode of signifying in which speaking beings attempt to express meaning with as little ambiguity as possible" (McAfee 16), and therefore Polyneices' instability clashes against the stable system of the symbolic. Concretely, this exclusion from the symbolic is easily understood by the fact that Polyneices is banned from the *polis* and condemned to a sort of *damnatio memoriae*: it is important to bear in mind that

Creon's edict is against the burial of the body, but it also forbids the memory of the brother. In fact, when the king reports his edict to the elders of Thebes, he claims that "it is now a crime for Thebans to *bury* him or *mourn* him" (ll. 236-237 emphasis mine). I think it is important to point out that, therefore, there is a double censorship as Polyneices is banned both from the polis and from the family who cannot mourn him. There is an exclusion from the symbolic space, the *polis*, but also there is an attempt to rule over the semiotic.

At this intersection of *polis* and family, Hegel develops a different reading of Antigone that focuses on the practice of burial and the relationship between brother and sister: the philosopher argues how in life men need to leave the family to embody the identity of citizen, while women stay behind in the realm of the household as protectors of the divine law, a law that Steiner defines in *Antigones* as "polarized in the household gods, the Lares and Penates" (Steiner 33). However, in death Polyneices goes back to the family dominion, into the custody of the family and the burial has a fundamental role, as

the family makes of the dead a member of a communal totality which is stronger than, which maintains control over the powers of the particular material elements and lower living creatures, both of which sought to have their way with the dead and to destroy him (Hegel qtd in Steiner 32-33).

Indeed, Steiner argues that the threat of decomposition and the violation of the corpse are central to the plot as it is often mentioned: dogs, vultures, wild animals chew, mangle, savage the "stripped naked" (l. 465) body. In Hegel's view, therefore, there is this strong opposition between the *polis* and the family and the clash of their respective laws; Creon is recognized by the philosopher as the spokesperson for the public law in open conflict with the intimate family love and Antigone's duty to the brother. In this regard, there is Goethe's contribution contained in *Conversations of Goethe* by Eckermann, who argues that this conflict is not about family piety and political virtue, as "when Creon forbids the burial of Polyneices [...] an action so offensive both to gods and men is by no means politically virtuous, but on the contrary a

political crime” (Eckermann 227). If Lacan interprets the figure of Antigone as a scandalous expression of desire, Hegel moves in the exact opposite direction, as he focuses on the “privileged” (Steiner 33) and pure relationship between brother and sister who, differently from all other relations, is disinterested because it is between two people that share the same blood and without the self-interest that happens instead in the relationship between parents and children. Focusing on kinship, Hegel’s Antigone is not politically involved as she acts only out of duty to her brother and her language is that of lamentation: she becomes a pure being who moves disinterestedly in defense of kin. Antigone’s act is therefore ambiguous: as Steiner highlights in *Antigones*, “when this task falls upon a sister, where a man has neither mother nor wife to bring him home to the guardian earth, burial takes on the highest degree of holiness” (Steiner 34), but in the realm of the *polis* this act is a crime of civil disobedience. Hegel, differently from Goethe, reads that of Antigone as a conflict between two unassailable different orders.

Judith Butler, who develops and modifies her reading over time, however, as already hinted, notices how Antigone’s family line is a great obstacle to Hegel’s idealized and pure family: as expressed by Honig, “for Butler [...] the formal kinship location - son of my mother - is productive because it highlights, contra structuralism, the polysemousness of kinship, its ambiguous character, its vulnerability to slippage” (Honig 105). Butler, in fact, tries to bring to light an alternative kinship, in a context of feminism and queer theory: Antigone would rather be the representative of an abnormal kin, which makes the tragic heroine’s subjectivity destabilized and queer. She, in fact, seems to threaten Creon’s stable gender identity: when Antigone faces him, Creon risks being transformed into a weak female with no powers because she becomes the dominant character. In her detailed account on Butler’s *Antigone*, Gabriella Freccero claims how the burial of Polyneices is continuously “the subject of linguistics acts” (Freccero 3, translation mine) as the guard claims he did not do it, Ismene asks to be considered

co-responsible and Antigone takes the blame “obliquely” (3), as with her “I don’t deny it” (l. 480) she admits her responsibility with a double negation. The act of burial becomes, therefore, a “verbal challenge and refusal to submit to the royal power denying the crime” (Freccero 3). In fact, Creon feels more outraged by her taking responsibility than by the act itself, when Antigone claims that the elders do not speak out of fear, Creon asks her “aren’t you ashamed not to follow their lead?” (l. 551), namely being silent and accepting the superiority of the state. Thus, Antigone who defies the *polis* law with the act of the burial, in verbally taking full responsibility for the act she “performs an act of *hybris* [...] opposing to power but assuming, however, its appearance” (Freccero 4).

In Butler’s idea, Antigone’s tragic death exemplifies the limits her kinship touched, her positioning is incomprehensible to most and her lamentation seems extreme because the fact of incest is extreme. Antigone, for Butler, has no choice because she is cursed: instead of perpetuating the Oedipal curse, she decides to interrupt it, by killing herself. But if in her early works Butler insists on the Oedipal curse as the condition that cuts the possibility of a forward action, the most recent analysis builds on a mortalist, humanist universals line; in other words, the former readings take into consideration the juxtaposition of Oedipus/Antigone, while the latter slide towards Creon/Antigone, positioning Antigone within a context “away from political collectivities and toward the binding power of grief” (Honig 64). Judith Butler’s later Antigone, in fact, is oriented more towards loss and, therefore, she is read through her lamentation: Oedipus’ daughter becomes the perfect example of grief for ungrievable life. Butler in her book *Frames of War*, claims how “an ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all” (Butler 38). Honig highlights the Chorus’ call at the beginning of the play, a call that proposes natality

CHORUS	Let us now banish this war from our minds and visit each god’s temple,
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singing all night long, may  
Bakkhos, the god whose dancing  
rocks Thebes, be there to lead us! (ll. 179-184)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, *Antigone* was played for the first time during Dionysus festival: the heavy sense of finitude told in the tragedy is meant to be integrated with the liveliness of the festival, as to provide an equilibrium of both mortality and natality. In the tragedy, Creon does not hear (or does not listen to) the chorus natal call to forget and to leave behind the horrors of the war, as the king claims the edict for which he does not forget and does not forgive the betrayal of Polyneices. He, in fact, orders the burial of a brother and the abandonment of the body of the other. In *Precarious Life*, a book post 9/11 about the political use of mourning and loss by the US government, Butler mentions a “hierarchy” of grief, explaining that “certain lives will be highly protected, and their abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as grievable” (Butler 32). These other lives are, for Butler, “queer lives” (35), namely those who are not represented in the symbolic and live at the margins. Honig, borrowing Butler’s words, argues therefore that Creon stands for “unequal grievability”, while Butler stands for “equal grievability” (Honig 45). At this point it is necessary to dispel the myth of Antigone as universal humanist, a theme that will be discussed also in the next chapter on Honig’s original reading of *Antigone*. Antigone is the first that goes against the equality in grief Butler defends, and this fact undermines the image of Oedipus’ daughter in many ways: she is not a promoter of equality in death, and this is a fact that has textual evidence. When Creon asks her what her brother Eteocles would think of her actions, Antigone is certain that he would have been on her side because “it was his brother who died, *not his slave!*” (l. 560). Antigone, therefore, thinks in hierarchical terms and, I think it is fundamental to make this connection, this hierarchy is that of the symbolic order, because she is well aware that a slave would not deserve so much attention, while the son of king Oedipus

would. This fact complicates the reading of her lamentation in universal terms: as Honig argues “Antigone invokes the very hierarchies of grievability that Butler deplores in her name” (Honig 56). Taking Antigone out of this dimension of purity and, in a sense, unachievable superiority, allows a different reading of her figure, as she is reintegrated in the symbolic order, in the *polis*, in the law. Trying to connect with another work by Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, Antigone could be considered a wild outcast who lives at the borders of the *polis* but, as also mentioned before when talking about her political awareness, not only does she understand the *polis* dynamics but she is, willingly or not, subordinated to it also in her reasoning. I think the issue of subordination must not be excluded from this reasoning, as Butler claims “subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. "Subjection" signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (Butler 2). I believe this dependency allows a different take on Antigone: she is subordinated to the *polis* power — she interiorized its dynamics — but, simultaneously, the moment in which the system fails against her brother she slips into this breach. Antigone’s revolt is not, therefore, in the *langue* but in her *parole*, the individual act, the appropriation of the *polis* code. Following this reasoning, she is not a hysterical dissident, a pure martyr, or a spokesperson for universal justice, but a human being that finds herself entrenched in a law that structures her reasoning but that presents, at the same time, a gap she cannot tolerate. This gap is, in my opinion, the exclusion of her brother from the symbolic, an order where she too is present. When discussing the dialogue between Creon and Antigone, it has been mentioned how Antigone takes responsibility for her actions, stepping into the symbolic: Judith Butler considers this step into the *polis* as an appropriation of the masculine dimension, and because of the fearless and lucid statements of Antigone, Creon feels threatened as he listens to this symbolic articulation (of which he is the ruler) turned against him. Antigone, the moment in which she lucidly mentions a hierarchy of grievability,



let us understand she is well aware of the law, so much so that she *repeats* the symbolic articulation, the law to Creon. But what is striking about Antigone is that repetition is not here a tool to consolidate the *polis* law but, as Honig finds in Butler's thinking, it is a fundamental means "to identify openings for resignification, iteration, subversion, to press for the aberrant repetition of norms, insisting on their weak dependence on the acts of subscription that others take as a sign of the norms' power and dominance" (Honig 48). As mentioned before, Creon feels most challenged by Antigone's lucid admission of guilt than by Polyneices' burial because she uses Creon's own articulation of the symbolic against him. Butler's and Honig's readings are here similar: while Butler states that Antigone acts flagrantly, Honig claims that Antigone is more subtle and conspiratorial.

Honig also mentions the American literary critic Lee Edelman, who interprets Antigone as the representative of a radical anti-humanism because of her loneliness, firmness, and absolute certainty of wanting to die. Edelman, for this reason, is openly against Butler's proposal of different kinship: the critic's reading, Honig sums up, is that of, "a fully monstrous Antigone that resists all domestication and turns no face to the future" (Honig 53). But if many critics read her composure as resignation and frantic desire to fulfill her death wish, I think it is worth assuming that Antigone's firmness is due to a real entrance into symbolic articulation. Antigone is "domestic" enough the moment in which she symbolically articulates her speech: to be scandalous it is not her intervention, but the fact that this intervention is understandable and collects consensus within the symbolic order itself.

The multiple readings of *Antigone* listed in this last section pave the way toward Honig's original reasoning in which Oedipus' daughter is not only reinserted in the context that belong to her, but also her word becomes a political action against the symbolic. Honig's theory will be discussed in the first section of the third chapter, while in the second section my attempt will be that of reconnecting with Julia Kristeva's theory of the first chapter.

## HONIG'S ANTIGONE

Bonnie Honig's reading of *Antigone* in *Antigone, Interrupted* (2013) starts from premises that are different from those of the scholars mentioned in the previous chapter: the daughter of Oedipus and her lamentation are now immersed by the scholar in a political context that "inaugurates an insurgent *politics* of lamentation that solicits out of us a potentially shared natality" (Honig 85). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the risk of binding Antigone to lamentation is to relegate her in a context in which she can only lament for either her cursed family or for an unjust law. Honig wonders what would happen if instead of dropping Antigone in the lamentation loop, this circle were opened and developed into a logical line of action. In the essay "Lament as Speech Act in Sophocles", scholar Casey Dué not only recognizes Antigone's words as "effective" (Dué 247), but also the legitimacy of her speech act. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, it is not entirely correct to define the daughter of Oedipus as a dissident who enters a world that does not belong to her: in this regard, Dué highlights how Antigone "uses lament within her prescribed gender role to powerful effect" (246), recognizing her confrontation with Creon as a legitimate speech. Dué claims, in fact, that "lament is the only medium through which women have a sanctioned public voice, the one weapon they possess to defend themselves with in desperate circumstances" (236). Although Dué frames Antigone with the metaphor of a mournful mother, whose issues were discussed in the second chapter, the scholar recognizes the action of her speech, since "through her lament, Antigone establishes the narrative of her death and constructs the memory of her that will be left behind in Thebes" (Dué 248).

Honig, with similar premises, wants a new reading of Antigone's word, an interpretation that does not have to be channeled exclusively into a semiotic, meaningless articulation that would make her the maternal lamenter of the dead or into a symbolic which would read her words as cold and aseptic calculations.

### 3.1 Honig's Democracy

Attuned to pragmatics, Honig proposes a reconsideration of lamentation as a speech act, therefore as a speech that has the force and the intensity of an action. She proposes a new point of view:

the idea is to treat lamentation as a kind of performative utterance, to look at what is said and done by way of lamentation: the curses uttered, the positions taken, the fidelities owned, the vengeance called for, the appropriations performed, the conspiracies enacted with others and with language (Honig 89).

A careful attention to Antigone's words allows an openness to new readings that can dismiss the label placed on her as lamenter, whose language collapses on itself, without logic and without objectives. Bonnie Honig rebuilds the context of burial politics in Athens in the fifth century, a way to attribute to Oedipus' daughter an identity of "partisan political actor" (95). The historical context plays therefore a fundamental role, especially if connected to lamentation and burial practices. Scholar Helene Foley, in her book *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, highlights how "the gradual rise of the city-state in Athens apparently brought with it a deliberate curtailment of death rites [...] a process of restriction or reshaping [...] lamentation was permitted at the tomb, but participation, at least on the part of the women, was now limited to close kin" (Foley 23). This cut to the grandeur of aristocratic funerals of the archaic period served "to foster the interests of the state and the public unity over those of the family" (24), a shift, therefore, from the *oikos* (family) to the *polis*. This decentering of the family, in fact, has the democratic aim to "glorify its war dead, while minimizing the visibility of all aspects of private life" (25). Therefore, Dué notices, "in order for the polis to be successful, aristocratic cycles of vendetta, in which the laments of women played a crucial motivating role, had to be put an end to" (Dué 238). Foley makes the connection between this context and the specific case of the character of Antigone, whose lamentation is the means through which she makes "a public and politically motivated display of injustice" (Foley 30).

Consequently, in Honig's reading, Antigone's is an act of elite resistance against the emerging democracy of the classical age, whose needs are provided by Creon to secure his sovereignty. This assumption definitely goes against the general idea of Antigone and Creon as the exponents of, respectively, democracy and tyranny. For Honig, Creon represents "a different elite tactic: he conspires with the new democracy and adopts many of its causes as his own" (95), while Antigone does not compromise with the democracy and remains true to her elite heritage. With these new premises, the conflict between the king and Oedipus' daughter is no longer between public and private spheres, state and family laws, but between democracy and aristocracy. In other words, in Honig's reasoning, Antigone is the spokesperson for the values of the archaic age, while Creon represents the classical: Honig thinks of Creon as the representative of the democracy and its consequences on the *polis*, he "metonymizes democracy substantively. His ban on lamentation and his repeated emphasis on the harms of individuality represent the fifth-century democratic view" (98). Honig insists on the definition of Creon as a democrat, identifying the excesses in his decisions and actions as distinctive signs of his personality: the political philosopher also suggests a certain sharpness on his side, since he is well aware that the issue with Antigone is not so much the burial as the alternative political membership that she stands for. Taking up the historical context mentioned in the previous section, Honig, in fact, reflects on the impact of burial and mourning in a democratic context: lamenting someone's death emphasizes the individuality of the deceased, therefore the individuals for whom a mourning space is created must be carefully selected. A selection is precisely what Creon does with his edict: Eteocles is allowed to have the official burial because he represents what the *polis* promotes, while for the traitor no space is provided. The *polis* must extend its democratic ideas to its dead: the state "focus[es] on gorgeous speech, oratory that moves and pleases its audience without calling for vengeance" (102), thus eliminating the cycles of aristocratic revenge and its individualistic ideals. Honig, in fact, argues how

democracy works on replaceability, for which “no one is said to be so uniquely singular that his loss should be seen as devastating to family or city to require recompense” (102). However, for Antigone the problem is precisely here, as she says, “a new brother could never bloom for me” (l. 1005): this sentence, that is often considered by many scholars too cold and calculating to be true, is to be read as an aristocratic and individualistic thought, if we follow Honig’s reasoning. However, taking up what was said in the previous chapter, I partially disagree with Honig’s positioning about the question of democracy and aristocracy. If Antigone is considered an aristocratic in a democratic context, she is relegated to an impractical alien role that forces us to read her as a dissident coming from outside, representing an external and past order. As I have already discussed, Antigone knows how to move in the society in which she is called to justify her actions, as she knows about the *polis* and power dynamics. It seems to me that when Antigone claims the irreplaceability of her brother, she is reasoning following the same economy of substitution that Creon promotes, the approach that Honig calls democratic. Her listing of who can be replaced (husband, children), therefore, is quite democratic and logic: she does not only reason about the individuality of her brother, but she also excludes his replaceability. Therefore, from her own words one can speculate that if she had another brother who was still alive the story could have gone differently. The loss of the signifier makes the reasoning of replaceability impossible, but this input of democratic replaceability exists in her mind. This connects with what I previously mentioned: Antigone is *in* the *polis* and the *polis* is in her reasoning. Obviously, a fracture is created, but it is from within: her concrete actions may be outside the *polis*, but her words are those of the symbolic, and at the moment in which they are turned against the *polis* itself, they are *revolutionary*. I intend this term in its etymological meaning of *rolling back*, from the Latin word *revolvere*; Antigone’s words “reduce the power [...] reverse the progress” (“roll back”) of the *polis*, of the symbolic. I insist

on Antigone's inside position because I believe it is fundamental to consider her as an *internal* political actor, who speaks to a society that belongs to her.

Similarly, I am hesitant to label the king as democratic because the attitude of the king is tyrannical also towards those who do not break the law. Honig claims how Creon "metonymizes democracy substantively. His ban on lamentation and his repeated emphasis on the harms of individuality represent the fifth-century democratic view" (98), and consequently the scholar considers the decision of leaving the body unburied as a hyperbole, an exaggeration of his democratic reign. Similarly, Antigone would represent the excess of a past, aristocratic reasoning when she shows "her refusal to differentiate as the democratically identified Creon wants her to between Eteocles and Polyneices" (105). I cannot agree with the argument that Creon is the defender of democracy whose ideals are extremized, also because his extreme decisions are not readable through a democratic lens, indeed. Creon is the first who does not apply his rule to all: taking into consideration these lines, one may argue that Creon did not follow his own words.

CREON	Don't join the cause of those who break his law.
LEADER	Who but a fool would want to die?
CREON	Exactly. He'd be killed. Easy money frequently kills those it deludes (ll. 252-255).

In fact, although his son Haemon "fights on the woman's side" (l. 818), the king does not even consider punishing him with death. In his excesses, Creon demonstrates his tyranny in his not applying his own law nor, by extension, the principle of irreplaceability to his son. Blood matters to Creon, and the conclusion of the tragedy speaks for itself.

When analyzing the figure of tyrants, scholar Mary White in her article "Greek Tyranny" highlights how tyrants "held a personal power far surpassing any office by virtue of their successful overthrow of the aristocracy, their successful leadership of their supporters, and the benefits of their policy to the city as a whole" (White 9). I previously discussed this

attitude in parrhesiastic terms: there is not the slightest freedom of speech in Creon's reign, and this is clear from the attitude of the elders of Thebes who, as Antigone rightly notes, do not speak out of fear of the consequences and, at most, attempt minimal interventions. Creon's son and the blind prophet Tiresias are the only ones who openly speak because of their untouchable positions, they know they are exempted from the king's fury: both condemn the king for his self-referentiality, in a sense.

His son Haemon listens to and acknowledges the legitimacy of his father's thoughts, introducing, then, his own reasoning claiming that "someone else's perspective might help" (l. 762). By carefully reading Haemon's intervention, one could notice how he carefully mentions the father's inability to listen to others, as he claims, for example, "no one tells you what you'd rather not hear" (l. 766). There is another intriguing point in this conversation between the king and his son that tackles Honig's theory. In fact, I do not dismiss her idea of a clash between aristocracy and democracy, but I want to reposition those that I think are the most correct exponents. In the passage in which Haemon speaks to his father, something noteworthy happens: first, the elders' leader dares to recognize the legitimacy of a speech that is not only that of the king, "King, if he has said anything to ease this crisis, you had better learn from it. Haemon, you do the same. You both speak well" (ll. 802-804). Secondly, the king makes an intervention that is worthy of a brief analysis: after the unusual intervention of the elder, Creon asks his son, "so men my age should learn from one of yours?", thus connecting the young age of the son to a lack of wisdom. However, the elders had been previously silenced for the opposite reason as the king accused their leader of "sounding old" and "senile" (l. 311). If Haemon is silenced when claiming the king's duty to question himself, the elder is censored because he considers the possibility of a divine reaction. If the elders tackle the gods, the archaic reasoning, Haemon approaches democracy: "It's not a *city* if one man owns it", he claims to his father. Then, one might venture the hypothesis that the king thinks neither in past

(represented by the elders) nor modern terms (represented by the democratic input of his young son) but he is stuck somewhere in the middle, struggling with their negotiation. The prophet Tiresias, who confirms the divine reaction foreseen by the elders, follows Haemon's same line: "Let this man turn his anger on younger people. That might teach him to hold his tongue, and to think more wisely than he does now" (ll. 1206-1208). Curiously, this reference to younger people prophesies what will be the democratic outcome at the end of the tragedy: Creon silences himself and longs for the elder's suggestion. What Honig sees at most as "a defect of character" (Honig 99) of the democracy's representative, is, to me, a breach in a tyrannical reign which can lead to a democratic revelation. It is hard not to think that Creon ultimately comprehends what to do because, for the first time in the tragedy, he asks for advice, "what I must do? If you have such advice, give it to me" (l. 1215). I do not read this tragedy as a conflict between Creon as democrat and Antigone as aristocrat, and I am even less inclined to categorize Antigone as a democrat: I believe that in the tyranny of which both know the dynamics, the democratic instrument of parrhesia represents the element of innovation that must be learned through a path. To return to Foucault's seminar *La Parrhesia*, the philosopher highlights how that of parrhesia must be an equal exchange of articulation and listening, the speaker "must give signs of being able and of being ready to accept the truth of what the parrhesiast will tell him" (Foucault 43, translation mine). But clearly, this does not happen with the king nor with Antigone: both speak to themselves, refusing a truth outside of their own knowledge. As I mentioned, this deficiency is not just mutual between them, but it is universal; while Creon silences, mocks or interrupts the guards, the elders of Thebes, Antigone, his son and Tiresias, Antigone refuses to hear her sister's stance too. Ismene's objection, like Creon's guard, is legitimate: she reminds her sister that their family has already been affected by many tragedies and enough blood has been spilled. Antigone's reaction is very similar to Creon's, as she claims, "Say that again and I'll despise you" (l. 111). At this point it should be noted how in



her dirge, that will be discussed in the next section, Antigone utters words very similar to those of Ismene, the same ones she dismissed: “You’ve touched my worst grief, the fate of my father, which I keep turning over in my mind. We all were doomed” (ll. 943-946). The universality of this attitude, in my opinion, prevents a clear identification of Creon as a democrat and complicates Honig’s reading of Antigone as aristocratic, since she is not alien to the present political order as she shares, at a certain extent, the *polis*’ rationality.

### 3.2 Honig’s Dirge

Near death, Antigone begins what will be a quite long dirge: in his introduction to *Antigone*, Franco Ferrari claims that the woman’s act, despite being unequivocally right, has a “pathetic outcome” (Ferrari 8, translation mine), as her condemnation not only excludes her from the *polis*, but keeps Antigone in a limbo that excludes her from both the world of the living and the dead. Not for nothing Oedipus’ daughter enters into dialogue with the chorus, a particular interaction that in Greek tragedy is called *kommòs*: she attempts a negotiation of the terms in which her life will be remembered. What will her renown, her glory (*kleos*) be? Antigone’s struggle is that she wants to assure herself a posthumous place in the *polis*: it should be noted, in fact, that the one of Antigone is a condemnation that is very similar to her brother’s. In fact, even Antigone is not given a proper burial, indeed. Creon orders to “hide her, alive, in a hollow cave” (l. 854). The chorus, despite its being initially moved witnessing the woman’s demise, keeps a strict attitude towards her obstinacy: “You haven’t been wasted by disease. You’ve helped no sword earn its keep. No, you have chosen of your own free will to enter Hades while you’re still alive” (ll. 888-901). The chorus rejects the heroic terms Antigone proposes to earn a place in the *polis*’ collective memory: it was not an unfortunate fate that led her there, but herself. It is intriguing to see how Antigone tries again, cleverly connecting to the version told by the chorus: paraphrasing, when the chorus acknowledges her as the first

human to enter Hades alive because of her stubbornness, Antigone seems to confirm this version, as to please them, and then she attempts to manipulate it. Indeed, she compares herself to Niobe, a goddess whose insolent pride was the cause of the death of all her children. Recognizing that she had received the right punishment, Niobe pleads Zeus to turn her into stone: transfixed, Niobe continues to, and will, cry forever. It seems to me that Antigone is saying that her punishment is legitimate, but behind the comparison with Niobe, she is also trying to state the legitimacy of her crying. The elders, though, mocks her telling her she is not a goddess but a human; reading these two interventions, one may assume how Antigone endeavors to find a place for the memory of her story, whether it be among humans or among gods, but both endeavors fail.

As Honig highlights, the aim of Antigone's attempt is clear to Creon "who disparages her when he observes that she is singing her own dirge" (124). Antigone, in fact, is doing nothing but repeat one of the crimes she committed, she is *mourning*: if in the first place she did "cry out in anguish, a piercing scream like a bird homing to find her nest robbed [...] wailed one more time, then yelled a string of curses (ll. 463-467), this time Antigone's mourning for herself is accessible firsthand. As Honig claims "The story of what happened that first time is told to Creon by a sentry, a sighted man who did not see it, in a scene that mirrors a later scene with Tiresias, a sightless man who sees all" (Honig 156-157). It must be considered, in fact, that Antigone's first lamentation is reported by a man who spies on her from afar: her initial lament is an account that has been filtered by another person and, yet, it is the most considered. For example, it has been mentioned in the previous chapter the approach, which Honig commented, of the humanists who have read the piercing scream as "an extra-linguistic, universal experience of human grief or the isolating solitude of deep human pain recognizable to all" (19). The guard describes Antigone's mourning speech "in terms that call up all the forbidden elements of women lamentation" (104). However, I wonder, was the cry restricted

solely to the death of her brother or was also for his “body stripped naked” (l. 465) abandoned in decay? To use the guard’s words, was her lament about the emptiness of the nest or also about the atrocity of its being “robbed” (l. 464)? Although it may appear insignificant, this differentiation shifts us away from a motherly mindset while proceeding more towards a political context, as the string of curses should not be overlooked. It must be remembered that the tragedy opens on Antigone’s clear intentions of burying her brother: by carefully reading the initial lines, it could be noticed how anger is the dominant emotion as she cries for vengeance. Surely there is a significant amount of pain for Antigone outside the *polis* walls, next to her unburied brother, but there is also a sharp rage in her reaction towards the law that fails to give dignity to her brother.

Honig in this regard is very clear as she mentions the double meaning the term “to grieve” carries with it: “it means both to *express grief* and to *litigate* or seek redress for a wrong” (120 emphasis mine), therefore there is a first extra-political meaning and a second that is highly political. The extra-political realm of grief includes the lament, defined as

a sign of the partiality of our codes of grief and of the limited ability of our codes of grief to control or redeem our losses by embedding them in economies of meaning that are supposedly themselves impervious to rupture and interruption (Honig 120).

The piercing scream often misleads towards a reading of Antigone as a lamenter, but to exclusively read her as a lamenting figure would mean to relegate her to an extra-political sphere in which her universal cry stands for an ancestral pain. My hesitation in considering Antigone as the spokesperson of a past, archaic, divine order, but also of a parallel one (as it happens with Butler’s marginal positioning of Antigone, discussed in the previous chapter) has to do with the same risks of decontextualization that occur when circumscribing her to the lamentation loop. Reading her stubbornness and lucidity as a strong desire for death (e.g. Edelman) and detachment from the *polis* dangerously recalls Freud’s idea of melancholia. Freud describes the features of melancholia as

a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds its utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment (Freud 244).

Freud defines melancholia as a pathological condition of mourning. In fact, for the psychoanalyst, mourning is what “involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life [...] we rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time (243-244). The discriminating factor between the two would therefore be the attachment to reality. By extension, therefore, it can be stated that if Antigone’s action is not read, to a certain degree, as belonging to the *polis*, everything she does would fall into the field of melancholia, detached from the actual reality. Julia Kristeva in her study *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* builds on Freud’s essay on melancholia defining it as a clinical condition that “ends up in asymbolia, the loss of meaning” (Kristeva 42). While Freud focused on a mental exclusion from the outside world, Julia Kristeva takes this exclusion on a linguistic level: the psychoanalyst, in fact, speaks of a “symbolic abdication” (Kristeva 9). The symbolic, that is to say, the logical, linear articulation fails as there is a “symbolic invalidation and interruption” (Kristeva 19). At this point, a theory discussed in the previous chapter is worth to be mentioned again: by extending Butler’s focus on Antigone’s ambiguous family line, we see how one may argue that Antigone’s symbolic has always been flawed because of the incest. This emphasis on Oedipus therefore leads to an inability of movement into the symbolic a priori, understanding why Butler talks about Antigone’s as a queer existence. The ambiguity of the signifiers is queer, as her father is also her brother, and vice versa. Focusing on her concrete actions, namely the two burials and her suicide, Antigone may fit into Freud’s definition of melancholia as she excludes her sister, breaks the law, does not attempt any resistance, even when she is condemned to death, and she seems almost eager to die.

However, the moment we focus on Antigone's language, Kristeva's linguistic description of melancholia does not match with it. Noelle McAfee, in fact, claims how in Kristeva's definition of melancholia, grief is "noncommunicable" and one "*cannot share* [it] in the social/symbolic realm" (McAfee 61 emphasis mine), yet *Antigone* opens with the woman sharing her outrage with Ismene, but not only. Antigone relies on Ismene to feel the same pain and anger she feels, as she claims: "*There's nothing* – no pain, no shame, no terror, no humiliation! – *you and I haven't seen and shared*" (ll. 6-8). When Antigone brings the matter to a political level, "Will you join me? *Share the burden?*" (l. 50), Ismene takes a step back. In showing her resoluteness, Antigone invokes the blood relationship that binds them all several times: "I'm going to bury my brother – *your brother!*" (l. 54). Instead of having the melancholic "symbolic invalidation" (Kristeva 19), it seems to me that here the opposite is happening. That of Antigone, in fact, is an attempt to strengthen the validation of the place of the brother in the symbolic, in the *polis*: it is not just her brother, it is theirs. Moreover, during the conversation with Creon, Antigone highlights how Polyneices is also Eteokles' brother: "it was *his* brother who died, not his slave!" (l. 560)

Honig's contribution is brilliant because she concentrates on the other meaning of mourning, "to litigate or seek redress for a wrong", (120): this definition is able to reinsert Antigone in a context in which there is a taking of sides, a political environment. What interests Antigone is the word, what it can accomplish. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Antigone moves well in the *polis*: she is heard and manages to create a space for which an absolute law is questioned. The sovereign's son goes against his father, "the gods will not accept our prayers" (ll. 1126-1127), the elders, when asked, advise Creon to take back his edict. Honig, therefore, frames *mourning* as a term that connotes "resistance to injustice, rectification of wrong and vengeance for it" (120). Antigone, for Honig, laments but also *litigates* an injustice, a failure into the symbolic, "Antigone's dirge moves beyond the courtroom of

grievance and the sentimentalism of grief to seek out publics that Creon aims to repress and marginalize on behalf of his own view of the public order” (120). The power of Honig’s reading of Antigone’s character lies in removing Oedipus’ daughter from a melancholic scream, a loop of lamentation: to use words from the theory of Julia Kristeva, one may claim that Antigone, with Honig, is finally given an opportunity into the symbolic.

To prove that Antigone’s dirge is not mere lamentation, Honig brings textual evidence and defines the woman’s dirge as “a canny and fraught speech act delivered by a political actor positioned precariously at the juncture of myth, tragedy and history” (Honig 129). Honig notices, in fact, how Antigone’s words *mention* a historical context, *mimic* Creon and *parody* the Athenian politician Pericles. About the latter, Honig finds interesting correspondences between Antigone’s dirge and Pericles’ Funeral Oration, documented by Thucydides: although the oration came after the writing of Antigone, many classicists have speculated that the document gathered those who were the hot topics in Athens in the fifth century. This oration, in fact, “memorializes the dead by collectivizing lament and by focusing on the dead’s contribution to the polis” (129). To quote the document directly, the Oration, translated by Richard Crawley, claims:

who are still of an age of beget children must bear up in the hope of having others in their stead; not only will they help you to forget those whom you have lost, but will be to the state at once a reinforcement and security [...] While those of you who have passed your prime must congratulate yourselves with the thought that the best part of your life was fortunate, and that the brief span that remains will be cheered by the fame of the departed (Thucydides 124).

Therefore, the moment one thinks about Antigone’s famous line on the replaceability of husbands and children and the irreplaceability of a brother, it is hard not to notice the correspondences between the Oration and Antigone’s words. Honig, in fact, wonders whether what Goethe had defined as a cold and calculating thought, could be interpreted as a claim against the coldness of a state that reasons in terms of replaceability. Honig finds in Antigone’s

reasoning a parody of the Oration as she claims that her parents are dead, a reason for which “they are beyond the slim consolation of the Oration” (130). In Antigone’s claim “but with my father and mother in Hades, a new brother could never bloom for me” (ll. 1004-1005), Honig sees a “funny” parody, a parody that “is lost on modern readers because most read Antigone as dead serious; earnest, shrill, determined, perhaps mad, but not wry, funny or arch” (130). I would add that there is another textual evidence of her being wry and teasing right at the beginning of the tragedy, in her first dialogue with Creon.

CREON            Were you aware of my decree forbidding this?  
ANTIGONE        Of course I knew. We all knew (ll. 484-485).

Her answer reveals what I think is the same ironic and mocking approach: she knows because she is in the *polis*, everybody knows, she almost seems to ask why he bothers to ask the obvious.

In Antigone’s dirge Honig also highlights a mimic of Creon: mentioning again the quotation on substitution, the infamous lines for their coldness and clarity, Honig realizes how Antigone here is simply reasoning in Creon’s same terms. In fact, in a dialogue between the king and Ismene, Creon reasons in the same terms of replaceability

ISMENE            Then you’re willing to kill your own son’s bride?  
CREON            Oh yes. He’ll find other fields to plow (ll. 614-615).

The scandal of this speech about the replaceability of a husband, Honig argues, lies in the fact that Antigone “claims for herself a prerogative Creon would reserve for his son and perhaps for all sons” (130). Very close to this theory there is a Judith Butler’s reasoning about Antigone and Creon contained in her book *Antigone’s Claim* that deserves a brief comment. In Butler’s theory, as Antigone uses the language of the *polis*, she transcends herself.

As she begins to act in language, she also departs from herself. Her act is never fully her act, and though she uses language to claim her deed, to assert a “manly” and defiant autonomy, she can perform that act only through embodying the norms of the power she opposes. Indeed, what gives these verbal acts their power is the normative operation of power that they embody without quite becoming. Antigone comes, then, to act in

ways that are called manly not only because she acts in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law (Butler 10-11).

As discussed in the first chapter Julia Kristeva goes against the presumed dualism of symbolic and semiotic: if the first could be defined as “the conscious way a person tries to express using a stable sign system” (McAfee 17), the second represents “an evocation of feeling or, more pointedly, a discharge of the subject’s energies and drives” (15-16). In this regard, Julia Kristeva, in one of her interviews edited by Ross Mitchell Guberman, mentions

the Manichean position that consists in designating as feminine a phase or modality in the function of language. And if one assigns to women that phase alone, this in fact amounts to maintaining women in a position of inferiority, and, in any case, of marginality, to reserving for them the *lace of the childish, of the unsayable, or of the hysteric* (Guberman 116-117 emphasis mine).

If Butler seems to imply that the symbolic does not belong to Antigone, Kristeva, extrapolating the words from the context, seems to invite to go beyond what a convention is. Attributing the semiotic articulation to women and the symbolic to men is a limiting designation. Kristeva talks about an interdependency of these two, as one cannot exist without the other: in fact, if a purely semiotic articulation would only be hysteria, the symbolic would correspond to an unimaginable stillness. Validating Antigone’s presence in the symbolic – and validating Creon in the semiotic – means to consider the character as open, so that there is a continuous exchange between the symbolic which is vitalized by the semiotic; the semiotic, in turn, attaches to the symbolic articulation to make itself communicable, shareable. The abovementioned melancholia sees the shuttering of the symbolic and the dominance of a semiotic that, closed, imploded into a spiral of nonsense. Therefore, it would be fruitful to take a step back from the reading of Antigone as the representative of a maternal, ancestral cry (humanist approach), as a figure of monstrous desire (Lacan), as the image of pureness (Hegel), or queerness (Butler), and to establish the presence of Antigone in the *polis*, and her ability to handle the symbolic.



Butler's theory is surely captivating, but I hesitate to label Antigone's language as just borrowed. I do not support the idea that the language Antigone articulates does not belong to her: implying a departure from herself, Butler reads Antigone as a foreigner that slips into the *polis*. Moreover, by stating Antigone's speech is affective because she is using an articulation that does not belong to her, implies that she cannot move into the symbolic by herself. To read Antigone in a new way, we must identify her as an individual who belongs into the symbolic. If we want to ponder her figure considering the binary feminine-masculine, in which the semiotic is conventionally believed to belong to the first and the symbolic to the latter, Antigone's use of the symbolic is manly as Creon's mourning is, at this point, feminine. Even the king, in fact, is detached from the replaceability's reasoning when he learns of the death of his wife and son. The king, in fact, mourns: "I have just held my dead son in my arms – now I see another dead body. Ahh, unhappy mother, oh my son." (ll. 1446-1448). As Honig herself notices, "Creon mourns like a woman; his lament is loud, wailing and pained" but, differently from Antigone, "he looks to no further violence or vengeance to restore a social or political equilibrium" (116). I mentioned in the first chapter how that of lamentation is not a structure that develops on a straight line that leads to a logic conclusion which in turn allows a forward movement: on the contrary, I imagined that it is a spiral structure, in which there is a collapse. It is no coincidence that Kristeva had already pointed out how pure semiotic articulation is hysteria, nonsense. To be precise, one could claim how Creon is the one who brings on stage the pure lamentation: after having shown a linear, logic, symbolic language throughout the tragedy, in his last lines he blames himself, he mourns. There is no reaction, no opening to the outside, to the symbolic: he falls into the lament loop. The loss of the logic structure of the symbolic is evident when he claims "I'm less than nothing now" (l. 1477). This detachment is also visible for the fact that in the last moments of the tragedy, Creon does not communicate with the leader of the elders of Thebes as the dialogue seems to run on parallel lines.

Antigone, however, has a different impact because she does not complain in the canonical way: she opens the loop of her pain and introduce into her piercing scream a call for vengeance, a litigation in the symbolic. Rather than being represented by, respectively, the semiotic and symbolic, Antigone and Creon could instead be considered as the embodiment of the semiotic and symbolic interdependence. Reconnecting with Kristeva's thoughts, considering the two articulations as co-existing enables to question their borders and allow their crossing. The break of the dualism of semiotic and symbolic lets us understand how these two actually co-exist in each individual, with their dynamics both internalized.

I instead partially agree with Honig when she claims Antigone is mimicking Creon: I support the idea that there is a repetition of norms, but Honig also takes for granted the intentionality of this mimicry. In *Antigone, Interrupted*, in fact, the scholar claims that Antigone alludes to the replaceability logic employed by Creon to spell its absurdity. My response is both affirmative and negative, as we must consider that Antigone tells the truth when she affirms that she no longer has brothers: her anger is against a law that directly fails her brother. If we completely agree with Honig, we should read Antigone's words as an open condemnation to the replacement economy employed by the *polis*: would not that be equivalent to being a bearer of a universal moral? This thesis had already been dismantled by Honig herself, who notices how Antigone thinks in hierarchical terms: "it was his brother who died, not his slave!" (l. 560). This mention to the hierarchy implies that Antigone has internalized the rules of the *polis*. At the beginning of the tragedy, it is Antigone who appoints herself as the representative of another law "I'd never let any man's arrogance bully me into breaking the gods' laws" (ll. 496-497), but the version she gives at the point of death is very different. In fact, it is worth noting that Antigone in one of her final lines, claims: "But I wouldn't have taken that task on had I been a mother who lost her child, or if my husband were rotting out there. For them, I would never defy *my* city" (ll. 997-1000; emphasis mine). For this reason, I

reinforce my idea that she has incorporated the laws of the *polis*, whereas her words validate the *polis*' economy of substitutability. The city Antigone defies is *hers*, her claim is from within: there is no departure (Butler), no "crossing [of] the liminal dimension between the domestic and the public" (Acqualagna 4) whereas the domestic dimension is filtered by terms of substitutability of its components by Antigone herself. In fact, later in her dirge she claims

ANTIGONE            You want to know what law lets me say this? If my husband were dead, I could remarry. A new husband could give me a new child. But with my father and mother in Hades, a new brother could never bloom for me. *That* is the law that made me die for you, Polyneices. But Creon says I'm wrong, terribly wrong (ll. 1001-1006).

Therefore, Antigone reasons in the terms of the *polis*, she applies them to her family members: but with the last brother the law fails. There is definitely an ironic stance, as Honig highlights, a precise, sharp, and intentional language of denunciation, but I think is more fruitful to say that Antigone *consciously* moves well within language, as she *unconsciously* shares part of the dynamics of the symbolic. When one of these dynamics fails her, there is a retreat into the semiotic: the semiotic material, in Antigone's case, is then reinserted into the symbolic. Honig wants to highlight the ability of Antigone's word to be political: she alludes to Creon's reasoning of replaceability to show the flaw into the law, but she is able to see this flaw because it personally touches her: she confirms the replaceability of husbands and children, implying that it cannot apply to her brother because she has no others. This also confirms my previous statement about Antigone using the *polis*' reasoning, as she is inside the *polis*, subject to its dynamics and therefore influenced by these in her reasoning and words.

Therefore, in her analysis of Antigone's dirge, Honig highlights that, what to many seemed a lament, is actually a much more structured and telling speech. The scholar also mentions how Antigone in her dirge indirectly cites a story by Herodotus, about a wife who "chooses to save her brother because, she explains, with their parents dead he alone is

*irreplaceable*” (132), thus deciding to sacrifice the other male relatives, including her sons. This loyalty to the natal and not to the conjugal family is evident in Antigone when she claims the replaceability of husbands and children. It must be said, however, that Antigone’s privilege of the natal family fails: as Honig points out, Haemon kills himself “in an iconic marriage-to-death” (130), incorporating Antigone into the conjugal family.

Antigone’s dirge is interrupted by Creon because he is aware of her attempt “to frame the meaning and significance of her act” (140): Antigone should die in silence, far from the city. The king interrupts her negotiation of terms in which she wants to be remembered as he is aware that her words may survive her: like Niobe, her tears risk to flow forever. Moreover, as the ruler of the symbolic, Creon wants the control on the meaning of her story and the terms in which this story will be told: the law against a dissident. Creon is aware that “her speech seeks to control the field of signification” (141) and, like his son Haemon, he needs to have the last word. Honig claims how “Antigone goes on to give several long speeches. But she fails, in the end, to secure the meaning of her death” (141), as she is interrupted and then taken away in front of a not-influenced chorus. This is certainly a curious observation, as we can somehow verify it by considering the many readings that have been discussed in these chapters: Antigone is a mother, a devoted sister, a queer dissident, an image of desire, the symbol of universal values. Honig adds her own reading of Antigone: in the last section of *Antigone, Interrupted* she calls into question the sorority between Antigone and Ismene, frequently forgotten.

### 3.3 Honig’s Conspiracy

The main theory on which Honig writes *Antigone, Interrupted* is that Antigone “conspires with language” (Honig 8): this is a term that implies, first, a certain degree of secrecy and, secondly, the involvement of at least two people. Honig reconstructs, in fact, what she thinks is an evolution of Antigone’s conspiratorial conduct throughout the tragedy:

right at the beginning of the play, Antigone makes clear she will not conspire with democracy like Creon. She rejects such conspiracy, preferring to plot in the dark with her sister and then, later, to violate Creon's law in the bright light of the noon-time sun [...] At a much later point in the play [...] she has moved into conspiracy with language and it with her. Here she openly solicits the support of the Chorus, then more subtly she issues appeals to Creon's soldiers, the larger polis, and the audience that witnesses her in theater and since (Honig 90).

The language of Antigone has already been discussed: what seems a lamentation is actually an intentional and precise movement in the symbolic that creates a fracture that "seek[s] redress for a wrong" (120). The term *redress*, intended in its etymological meaning of "to put (an object) *back into* a stable, upright position" ("redress" emphasis mine) in my opinion ties well with that of *revolution* ("roll back") mentioned above as both imply an *internal* negotiation of terms. Antigone's actions and, above all, her words, tease and question from within the *polis* itself: in these terms I intend Antigone as revolutionary.

About her language, Honig highlights textual evidence about the conspiracy in her words: besides, from what has been said so far, there is a fascinating analysis on the use of the rhetorical figure of the *adianoeta*. Honig refers to the theories of the political theorist James Martel who, in his research *Textual Conspiracies*, writes about conspiracy strategies in the text of Machiavelli's works. The scholar describes the *adianoeta* as a figure of speech,

wherein words or phrases are understood to have two separate meanings, one "obvious" and one more subtle [...] As a rhetorical figure, *adianoeta* is particularly understood to mean that various members of an audience will understand the same words differently, some let in on the ironic nature of the figure and some not [...] it simply offers a reflection of a multiple, democratic perspective that is not entirely overwritten by phantasms of princely power (Martel 98-99).

Honig observes that in Antigone the *adianoeta* works to set in motion "a rivalry". The scholar suggests how "we may find in it resources and energies that feed new politics and constitute new publics" (88). For the scholar, the abovementioned hidden reference to Intaphrenes' wife

Antigone makes in her dirge is an *adianoeta*: by mentioning her, Antigone makes clear that the issue is political because she involves another woman who laments and reasons in terms of replaceability against a ruler. In the case of Intaphrenes' wife, the sovereign asks the woman to choose who to save in her family, as he wants to put an end to the woman's lamentation. Interestingly, Honig notices how it is taken for granted that the cry is referential, "the demand for a referent is itself a demand for something else: it aims to restructure desire" (134). In fact, Intaphrenes "calculates the incalculable" (135), and by deciding to save her brother, she is forced to translate her pain into a specific request. As Honig herself notices multiple times, the claim is not so much about the burial of the brother, as the "sovereign efforts to move subjects from the infinitude of loss and violent abyssal vengeance into a finite and more governable economy of wants, appetites and their satisfactions" (137). To the *polis*, Creon gives a figure to celebrate (Eteokles) and an enemy to forget (Polyneices); as the king has the power to decide what to give, he also determines what to deny. In other words, the celebration of Eteokles as a valiant man strengthens the idea that for men like him a space in the democratic *polis* is granted. If the country is a boat, a metaphor Creon himself uses, Eteokles is "among the men who sail her upright" (222-223). Symmetrically, Creon imposes an exemplary punishment of the traitor who, in fact, is denied a place. But it is precisely this deleted referent to which Antigone attach, therefore a translation of need, as it happens with Intaphrenes' wife, is impossible. In fact, if compared to that of Intaphrene's wife, the lament of Antigone cannot be conveyed towards an incalculable calculation or rather, she rejects those who were the only possible calculations, namely within the natal and within the conjugal family. If in the latter Antigone gives up a future with Haemon, in the first case she seems to exclude her sister Ismene from the moment in which she does not approve Antigone's plan. In this regard, Honig presents an original theory about their sisterhood: Honig's purpose is to identify Antigone also as a natal, therefore not as a uniquely death oriented. Unlike the readings that see her exclusively as a woman who hastens

to death, making her words vain laments, the scholar reads Ismene's exclusion as Antigone's attempt to protect her. Honig's take is quite distinctive, as she attempts a shuffle of the plots of the tragedy. She argues, for example, that critics tend to distinguish the two sisters as active and passive characters, while Ismene is often considered marginal and anti-political, the scholar notices how often classicist and democratic theorists are critical about Antigone's egocentrism; however, Honig argues that the two sisters are actually united by what happened and not separated. I mentioned above how Antigone makes clear from her first lines that she expects her sister to feel the same anger she feels because, as she herself claims, it is about "*our* loved ones" (l. 14), Polyneices is "my brother – your brother" (l. 55). Interestingly, by carefully reading the dialogue between the two sisters, one could notice as both say the same thing but with different terms: theirs is a doomed family, to whose misfortune is added the edict that prevents the burial of Polyneices. Here the sisters diverge and while Ismene suggests accepting their misfortune, "We must accept these things" (l. 77), Antigone sees in those things an earthly responsibility. She asks Ismene "Can you think of one evil - of all those Oedipus started - that Zeus hasn't used our own lives to finish? [...] Now there's this new command our commander in chief imposes on the whole city" (ll. 3-5/9-11). It seems that Antigone is unconsciously allowing herself a retelling: in which terms they want to read this edict? As another divine punishment against their family or as civic error? This is certainly a curious circle that closes in her dirge when she attempts to frame a retelling of her actions: will she be remembered in divine or civic, heroic terms? Will she be remembered at all? Immortalized in the piercing scream of a bird, Antigone belongs neither to the underworld nor to the Olympus.

Ismene steps back and refuses to help her sister, but what may seem a passive behavior, is instead a sign of someone who ponders. In such terms, scholar Jill Frank reads the figure of Ismene: in her article "The Antigone's Law" proposes a new perspective.

Where might we look for the Antigone's law, grounded in the human practice of justice, that is a combination of human art and activity, respectful of what is, and appropriate to the world of plurality that is the polis? The answer, I think, lies in a figure in the poem who, despite her age, seems to know how to pay attention to human matters and to "wait": Ismene (Frank 339).

Jill Frank, in fact, notices how Ismene is in reality a character who refuses at first Antigone's law, denying her help, but she also refuses Creon's law, as she does not denounce her sister to the king. If at first she speaks up against her sister, she then turns against the law of the sovereign. Ismene "is patient and binds her time" (Honig 154) and Jill Frank speculates that in standing for the *polis* justice, she also stands for Antigone eventually, together with Tiresias, Haemon and the chorus. Their law is guided by "the power of the citizens or the ways of polis-beings. It is self-known and self-given by the judgment of people in their plurality" (Frank 340).

Honig supports this reading of the character of Ismene, but focuses more on the two women together, rather than on Ismene as an individual. Antigone, whose mourning is prohibited by Creon, without her sister's help cannot lift her brother's corpse: Bonnie Honig in her essay "Corpses for Kilowatts?" (2013) argues how Antigone's inflexibility is due to the impossibility of burying her brother. But the burial is not about preserving the dignity of a body, as it is more a self-serving act. It is a way "to work through, by working through (with physical labor), the loss of the other and the otherness of loss. At a moment at which the ego has become uninvested in the world, recessive action is no ideal" (Honig 79). In other words, the burial forces an action that prevents Freud's melancholia, namely the detachment of the subject from the reality. In *Antigone, Interrupted* the scholar argues how Ismene's rejection of Antigone's plan worsens the situation, as Antigone is destined to "achieve only a mere simulacrum of the proper rites, and so she acts out a repetition compulsion that might have gone on forever" (Honig 158-159).



However, with an original approach, Honig considers also a second possibility, what if Ismene did the first burial? It is questionable why two burials were necessary: if the most accredited hypothesis is that, trivially, the second serves to show to the audience who is the figure who dares going against the law, Honig tries to read the two burials as the work of two different people. In this case the burials match with the people who committed it: “The first, Ismene-like, subtle, *sub rosa*, quiet, under cover of darkness [...] the second, true to Antigone is performed with loud, keening, and vengeful cries out in the open, in the noon-time sun” (161). At this point, the sisters are no longer distant but co-conspirators: Antigone in her conversation with Creon tries to hasten her death to make the king concentrate on her, saving Ismene from his fury. They are, in Honig’s words, effective partners in action as they share a way of speaking that remains incomprehensible to outsiders. I do not fully agree with the conspiratorial reading Honig presents, as it seems to me that her actions and words are striking: I follow Honig’s reading of the protective instinct Antigone has towards her sister when she confronts Creon, but I am unable to read a so complicit union of the two. In this regard, I am closer to the reading Butler gives in *Antigone’s Claim* about the boldness of Antigone, as the philosopher writes about her “loud proclamations” and “insistence” (Butler 80) in grieving. The loudness, which for Butler is the distinctive feature of a manly articulation, is to me that piercing scream that opens itself into the symbolic.

What I think is crucial in Honig’s sorority theory is the insertion of Antigone in a reading that also includes natal terms, oriented to life: terms for which she honors a brother who no longer has and protects the only sister she has. I find the theory of Ismene’s revised role captivating, not so much so for the theory of her first burial, as for what her actions imply: in fact, if one observes the ability of Ismene to listen (a skill her sister and the sovereign lack) and to speak for herself, her positioning and behaviors cannot be considered outside the logic domain, indeed. Ismene is a character that moves in the political sphere, I would say along with

Haemon and the chorus: they reflect, they change their minds. Above all, if her character is read in these terms, Antigone's ability to speak and move in the symbolic is confirmed by Ismene's new siding with the sister's cause: Antigone "graduates, as it were, from plotting to sororal conspiracy to a more ambitious conspiracy to constitute new publics" (Honig 196).

## ANTIGONE'S VOICE

This last chapter wants to analyze one last contribution that I believe is fundamental once we are able to read in *Antigone* the interdependence of semiotic and symbolic. As language has been widely discussed in its symbolic and semiotic terms, I believe that Cavarero's emphasis on the voice could enrich *Antigone's* analysis, as it includes corporality in the symbolic-semiotic discourse. Adriana Cavarero, who is also briefly mentioned by Honig, is another scholar who discusses the interdependence of the symbolic and semiotic, in slightly different terms than Kristeva. Her work *For More Than One Voice* (2005) in fact focuses on the voice as the acoustic aspect of speech. The scholar starts from Aristotle's definition of *logos*, explained in his *Poetics*, as the distinctive feature of man, "the living creature who has *logos*" (Cavarero 34), namely the signifying voice (*phone semantike*). This definition implies how "the voice as prior to speech or independent of speech is therefore simply an animal voice – an a-logic and a-semantic phonation" (34): Cavarero notices how voice is rendered as a mere instrument to vocalize concepts, thus the voice that remains detached from a signification is seen as close to animality. This implies an absolute dependency of the voice on the signified, "for it captures the voice in a complex system that subordinates the acoustic sphere to the realm of sight. As [...] sound evokes the idea; the order of the signified appertains to the realm of the eye" (35), in which the signified is something visible. While the sense of hearing is based on ephemeral sounds, something immaterial, the sight takes advantage of a more stable persistence in both space and time. From this point, Cavarero outlines "the firm belief that the more speech loses its phonic component and consists in a pure chain of signifieds, the closer it gets to the realm of truth. The voice thus becomes the limit of speech—its imperfection, its dead weight" (43). The scholar defines this as a *devocalization of logos*, for which the voice does not deserve any attention; therefore, as the sight moves toward the visible and the universally recognizable,

the realm of individual voices is forgotten. If voice is classified as nonsense, it will occupy a position that is “outside of the logocentric domain of meaning” (182). Similarly, Kristeva claims that while a pure semiotic articulation, though impossible, would coincide with meaninglessness, nonsense, therefore an articulation deprived of the bodily energies, would correspond to a state of stillness, death. Scholar Stacey Keltner highlights how instead “the relation between the semiotic and the symbolic makes signification possible, even when one is emphasized at the expense of the other, as in “purely” formalistic enterprises of thinking like math or logic or in “purely” expressive music” (Keltner 3).

Kristeva theorizes how there is no semiotic articulation that is independent from the symbolic (and vice versa) and, similarly, Cavarero works to demonstrate how what is considered a dualism of *logos* and *phonê*, is actually an interdependence of the two. Consequently, in both the theories there is no outside position. For this reason, it is crucial to theorize the presence of Antigone in the symbolic, to free her from the realm of nonsense and her consequent estrangement. The scholar theorizes, in fact, an outbreak of the *logos* in the *phonê*. As Honig contends

voice’s corporeal emanations, like the cries emitted by Antigone “like a bird at an empty nest,” introduce alienness to establish its hegemony, abstracting reason from the body and accounting for *phonê* by way of onomatopoeia, nonsense, and more, *logos* remains, Cavarero says, dependent on unruly voice, which is its alien register, its embodied materiality (Honig 143).

In other words, for Cavarero *logos* has no power to erase its bodily roots. Moreover, there is a reciprocal invasion between *phonê* and *logos*: the example of the onomatopoeia pointed out by Honig in fact consists, by definition, in the eruption of *phonê* into *logos*. Cavarero argues that the devocalization of *logos* breaks the unity between language and body, society and individual, culture and nature. Roland Barthes, in his essay “The Grain of the Voice”, supports the singularity of the voice (like Cavarero) as it is the result of the “grain” from which it originates.

This “grain” is “the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue” (Barthes 182): the voice is therefore indivisible from the body. If Kristeva’s signifying process corresponds to “the bodily drives and energy” (McAfee 14) discharged through language, one may argue that language and body cannot be thought as separated also in Kristeva’s theory.

There is an interesting term about the bodily dimension of the voice employed by Cavarero: she discusses an “*eroticization* of the vocal apparatus” (Cavarero 136 emphasis mine) underlying how “in the vocal exercise, lungs, throat, mouth, tongue, and ears all take pleasure [...] in phonic emission, there is a musical pleasure that the semantic order both exploits and limits, and yet still fails to control” (134). Mollie Painter is another scholar who defends the corporality of the voice: in her article “Voice as Relational Space” argues how, following the above-mentioned Barthes’ quotation, “the materiality of the body [...] plays an important role in offering a pathway between the body and speech, between language and community” (Painter 151).

Cavarero’s is a focus on singularity, the uniqueness of the speaker: for this reason, the scholar argues how it is essential to recover the theme of the voice. There is a connection between Cavarero’s voice and Kristeva’s semiotic *chora* as this latter is “the *sonorous*, presemantic source of language” (171 emphasis mine). Kristeva echoes Cavarero’s focus on voice as they both “conceptualiz[e] what exceeds the concept” (Cavarero 136). Julia Kristeva, in fact, theorizes the semiotic *chora* as “an articulation, a *rhythm* [...] that precedes language” (McAfee 18 emphasis mine), a rhythm that energizes the symbolic articulation. If with Cavarero the presence of the body is blatant, in Kristeva it is sometimes implicit: in *Revolution of the Poetic Language*, the linguist defines the *chora* as

neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm. We must restore this motility’s gestural and vocal play (to mention only the aspects relevant to language) on the level of the socialized body in order to remove motility from ontology and amorphousness (Kristeva 26)

It seems to me that Kristeva is here theorizing the distinctiveness of the *chora* (it is neither a model nor a copy) which, in its uniqueness, allows the socialized body to peculiarly change and move.

If Kristeva's semiotic is "the extra-verbal way in which bodily energy and affects make their way into language" (McAfee 17), Cavarero theorizes the voice as "sound, not speech; but speech is its essential destination. Significantly, this can also be reversed. Speech carries in itself that which the voice has destined to it" (Cavarero 209). In her work *Desire in Language* (1980), Kristeva mentions the "risky" practice of language that allows "the speaking animal to sense the rhythm of the body as well as the upheavals of history" (Kristeva 34). They both claim an interdependency of semiotic and symbolic, of *phonê* and *logos*, against the traditional dualistic thinking of the West.

#### 4.1 Against the Devocalization of Logos

With the devocalized *logos*, Cavarero argues that the unicity of the body is left outside as "logos strives to prevent the voice from entering the realm of meaning" (Cavarero 182). The scholar highlights how this voice is trapped into what Kristeva calls the semiotic realm, identified as non-sense, as pure sound, whereas "the voice pertains to the very generation of meaning" (182). The result of this devocalization is a hierarchy of articulation, in which *logos* "sweeps the voice from the realm of truth and allows philosophy to construct a system that neglects uniqueness and relationality" (Cavarero 178).

However, philosopher Jean Luc Nancy in his work *La Partizione delle Voci* (1993) claims that *logos* works as an anticipating and divided structure of the voice. If *logos*, therefore, constitutes an articulation that precedes the voice, this latter is defined as "always plural, that makes partitions, the *theia moira* (divine partition) of *logos*: its destiny and its destination in the execution, in the singular interpretation of every voice" (Nancy 89, translation mine). In

other words, what is called logocentrism, for the philosopher, is what is most destined to be decentered, because the multiple, plural voices share *logos*. Cavarero argues how this distributed *logos* vibrates in the speaker's body, highlighting that

the distinction between the semantic and the vocalic alludes to the ineludible bond between the universality of a linguistic register, which organizes the disembodied substance of signifieds, and the particularity of an embodied existence, who makes herself heard in voice. Speech—voice and signified, rather than signifying voice—bridges these two shores. Even when it begins to communicate something, obeying the universal codes of language, it still communicates singular voices and, at the same time, the rhythmic cadence of a resonance that links these voices (Cavarero 198).

I have discussed in the previous chapter how Antigone shares *logos*, reproducing the symbolic: the uniqueness of Antigone creates a fracture in the whole system. The forbidden burial does not bother Creon as much as Antigone's firmness about it: if at the beginning of the tragedy Creon reproaches the guard for his being too vague, "Why not just tell it? Then you can vanish" (277), he is annoyed by Antigone's straightforwardness. One might assume that the king would have expected a certain despair, a lament, especially reading the previous lines in which the guards' fear and the submission of the chorus are presented. Reading the first dialogue between the king and Antigone, her responses are clear and unmistakable; she acknowledges her being aware of the edict; she shows to be perfectly able to handle concise and precise language. There is sure a difference between this Antigone and the one who dialogues with Ismene: in those lines, her rage dictates the pace of their conversation, an anger that returns in the dialogue with Creon. The lucidity and the shortness of her first answers disturb Creon much more than the crime she confesses: one may argue how he decides to run the risk to give her more space of expression. It is worth mentioning how he offers her this space: the king, who first addresses her by claiming "don't stand there nodding your head. Out with it, admit this or deny it" (478-479) later he orders her to explain herself "without elaborating it" (483): in other words, he is asking her to follow the logical succession of events. It is important to highlight the fact that

Creon seems to attribute her a certain prolixity that, however, has no reason to ascribe to her, as she briefly confirms her crimes twice, without counting the nodding gesture. In Cavarero's terms this could be interpreted as an order to stick to the truth, to the facts, to *logos*. But Antigone's response is revolutionary: as discussed, Antigone introduces her pain into the symbolic texture, empowering her voice: "*I deny* that your edicts [...] have the force to trample on the god's unwritten and infallible laws" (490-492). Antigone's voice handles *logos*, as she utters a declarative speech act giving herself the right *to state* what is right and what is wrong, shaking the symbolic order.

If what Antigone says in her defense is dismissed as insolent behavior, "there's no excuse for a slave *to preen* when her master's home" (516-517), also Antigone's dirge is interrupted by Creon who, again, tries to manipulate her words. In fact, the king mocks the length of her dirge, interpreting as a way to take time and postpone the inevitable. Honig, however, gives to Creon's interruption another value: once the political value of Antigone's words has been established, also the interruption becomes an attempt to stop the influence, the plural effect that the words of Antigone contain. Creon notices how Antigone's words create consensus among young people (Haemon, Ismene) and instill doubt in the elderly, threatening a dangerous domino effect in all directions, since Haemon already informs his father that "Thebes aches for this girl" (768). Creon diverts attention away from what is Antigone's attempt to carve out a space in the public memory and "demotes Antigone from a heroic actor who does not fear death, to a more ordinary human who seeks of defer it" (Honig 124). But Antigone, with her second and last concrete action, proves to Creon that she does not fear death as she commits suicide. There is an interesting analysis by historian Nicole Loraux who, in her study *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, claims:

death, for young girls and mature women alike, was bound up to marriage and glory, but there is no doubt that the renown of virgins resembled the *eukleia* (glory) of warriors more than the renown of wives did. Glory indeed is essential virile [...] Antigone of



Sophocles was glorious in her *hybris*, the only mortal to go down to the land of the dead of her own free will (Loraux 47-48).

One could speculate that Antigone's suicide might be her way not to allow Creon to have a control over her body and its decay – "I'll leave her just enough food to evade defilement" (855-856) – which is what has happened with Polyneices: the suicide is a last act that deprives Creon of his power on Antigone's body. In the cave, where her body perishes, Antigone will not be reduced to an empty, animal voice, an unheard mere sound of lamentation.

Furthermore, the suicide of Antigone triggers a series of consequences that leads to the tragic epilogue, including the suicide of Haemon's mother (and Creon's wife) Eurydice. When she is informed of the death of her son, she leaves without a word, to the guards' surprise.

LEADER           What do you make of that? She turns and leaves without  
saying one word, brave or bitter

MESSENGER    I don't like it. I hope that having heard  
the sorry way her son died, she won't grieve  
for him in public. Maybe she's gone  
to ask her maids to mourn him in the house.  
This woman never loses her composure

LEADER           I'm not sure. To me this strange silence  
seems ominous as an outburst of grief (ll. 1378-1386).

I find this dialogue intriguing for different aspects. The guards' expectation of Eurydice's private mourning recalls in slightly different terms that of Antigone. As the theme of mourning in *Antigone* is central, Honig compares that of the two women: "Like Antigone, Eurydice curses and calls for vengeance; unlike Antigone, Eurydice wails indoors. But Eurydice's cries and words are mobile. Through the messenger, they leave the confines of the palace. This woman accepts her confinement, but her words do not" (Honig 111). I mentioned in the previous chapter that it is often forgotten that Antigone's mourning close to her brother's corpse is reported by a guard who witnesses it from afar. I disagree with Honig when she implies that Antigone wails outdoor, publicly, as one may speculate that she does not know she is being

seen. I think it is important to highlight how Antigone mourns (and calls for vengeance) not only in a place that is outside the *polis* walls but also in what is a desolate setting in which a strong presence of nature is perceived: “we kept at it until the *round sun* had climbed the heavens and baked us in the *noon heat*. Then, rising from the *earth*, a *whirlwind* whipped up the *dust*, and terror filled the *sky*, choking the *grasslands*, tearing *leaves off trees*, churning up *grit* all around us” (ll. 455-459). In that very naturalistic setting, Antigone’s voice, her scream in the desert seems almost to be part of that nature’s turbulence. Antigone cries in a solitary place and calls for vengeance for that universal order (*Dike*) that is now overturned, as a corpse lies unburied on the earth’s surface. However, Antigone’s words are as mobile as Eurydice’s: they are both reported by men, therefore also Antigone’s curses spelled outside the *polis*’ walls finds a way to reach the king. Cavarero’s focus on *phonê* and *logos* allows us to grasp a fascinating aspect about Antigone’s mourning: the guard reports the vocalicity of Antigone’s pain as she cries, screams, wails, yells. I argued in the previous chapter that the piercing scream is also an expression of anger “at those who’d done it” (l. 467), hence Antigone’s articulation is reported as *phonê*. The very fact that the situation is reported obscures the words, that *political* scream. However, the Antigone to whom the word is given, as Honig would claim,

work[s] the interval between the identities whose oppositional logic might otherwise have frozen them. Her dirge neither conforms to the expected forms nor simply violates it. Instead, she parodies, mimics, lampoons, and cites the stories, figures, and speech of the powerful, insinuating her view into their discourse, not absolutizing them [...] nor losing hold of her capacity to make sense (Honig 146).

Antigone, reported as a voice who mourns, is freed by Cavarero: her voice is not a universal cry, but it is singular, it belongs to her. If on the one hand her voice is structured by *logos*, on the other, she is able to distort this same articulation through her being concise, ironic, teasing, clever. The *logos* decentered by Antigone’s *phonê* is then revolutionary and political. Antigone’s first dialogue with Creon, often overlooked in favor of her dirge, is instead of

fundamental importance because it confirms her presence in the *polis*, a *polis* in which her singular voice pronounces the contents of *logos*. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, this *logos* belongs to her: to use Cavarero's terminology, *logos* articulates her voice, it vibrates in her body. In her words, with her voice, Antigone is decentering what Creon considers to be his *logos*.

With regard to the lines quoted above, it is also interesting to note how the mourning described by the guard will be instead Creon's. Creon, curiously, is the only one whose experience of mourning is directly shown; in a way he is the only one who wails in public. The *logos* for which he dictates the rules fails him, "take me from this place" (1499). Deprived of his *logos*, his *phoné* soon collapses, accompanied by the wish to depart from his body, "Never let me see tomorrow's dawn" (1488-1489). Creon "becomes a breathing corpse" (1297): his body is not alive anymore, he does not belong to the realm of the living, to the *polis*. His voice is reduced to a breath, emptied.

## 4.2 Antigone in the *Polis*

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt speaks of the "human condition of plurality" that, among other things, is seen as "not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* of all political life" (Arendt 7). Taking into account the context of Antigone, one may argue how the tragedy opens on an individual act that goes against a tyrannical, indisputable law: this reflection connects to Cavarero's reasoning on plurality. The philosopher, in fact, argues that, since "it is language that makes man a political being", the unicity of the voice must be recognized, considering that the political "entrusts uniqueness to speech" (Cavarero 197). As discussed in the previous chapters, Antigone's power lies in the fracture she manages to create: in the tragedy, in fact, a plurality of speeches, words, opinions are articulated against the tyrant, Antigone, the chorus etc.

There is an interesting analysis by Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text* of the closeness that the symbolic adopts, excluding the semiotic and voice, which is also mentioned in Cavarero's work. In fact, what Barthes points out is that "the sentence is hierarchical: it implies subjections, subordinations, internal reactions. Whence its competition: how can a hierarchy remain open?" (Barthes 50). As discussed in the previous chapters, the closure of the logocentric symbolic is also visible, trivially, in the logic construction of the sentence, in which there is a linear development that proceeds, logically, towards an end. The voice, left in the territory of the body, of the feminine, is instead perceived as lamentation. In the case of Antigone, for example, the piercing scream is immediately associated to the animal world, as it does not carry any signifier, but it is just pure corporeal voice. Moreover, the piercing scream is immediately connected to a maternal dimension, "like a bird homing to find her nest robbed" (464). This dehumanized sound is one of the first topics Honig discusses in her *Antigone, Interrupted*: the universal cry so supported by the humanists considers Antigone's voice as meaningless, which means that what she cries does not point to the logocentric *polis* but to an extra-linguistic, ancestral pain. In other words, Antigone's articulation is read as pure semiotic, therefore as meaningless, hysterical (it is worth mentioning that the very term "hysteria" derives from the Greek *hysteria*, uterus).

Against the devocalization of *logos*, Scholar Mollie Painter highlights Cavarero's reflection on the role the voice could have if associated with the *logos*: the voice, in fact, "reveals the particularity of the embodied experience, of pleasure or pain, and hence tends to subvert the order of language and also of the politics procured through language" (Painter 151). Antigone fits really well in this, as she surely subverts the linguistic order: her embodied experience of pain is inserted in the symbolic hierarchy. She cries (outside the *polis*) in front of her brother's corpse, but this piercing scream is later reported by a sentry inside the walls of the *polis*. Her voice is audible because it has been brought inside the *polis*, whose closed order

is thus challenged. She lets her vocal scream enter the *polis*, placing a bodily experience (pain, mourning, anger) in the logocentric *polis*. Following Honig's reasoning, Antigone becomes a political actor in the moment in which her voice is considered also in its *logos*. The unicity of her voice creates a break in the homogeneity of the tyrannical law, allowing a revolution in the very articulation of words. If Antigone introduces herself in the symbolic, Creon is the one who, in the tragic end, wants to be erased from it: "Why hasn't someone driven a two-edged sword through my heart?" (ll. 1461-1463). Honig, on this matter, notices how these lines could "tak[e] the place of the self-inflicted, heroic suicide" (Honig 116). If we consider, in fact, Creon's mourning, it is interesting to point out that Creon's is not just a lamentation for the death of his son and wife, but also a remorseful cry for his self-referentiality in the *polis*, his being a "foolish, impulsive man" (l. 1500).

Creon's lamentation should not be underestimated as, along with Antigone's movements into the symbolic, it shows the fallacy of the dualism symbolic-semiotic, *logos-phonê* enabling the reading of their interdependency. There is an important consequence in this regard, in fact as Kristeva theorizes symbolic and semiotic, Cavarero sees "the perverse binary economy that splits the vocalic from the semantic and divides them into the two genders of the human species" (Cavarero 207). The scholar claims, in fact, that

the semantic guarantees to speech a rationality that is privileged by man, the vocal keeps speech rooted in the body, which is assigned to woman. The devocalization of *logos* aims to eliminate this very ambiguity by leaving the feminine figures to embody what remains – namely, the voice (Cavarero 207).

This scenario connects with Kristeva's reasoning on women's place in the symbolic contract, discussed in the first chapter in relation to her article "Women's Time" (1981). Kristeva's works on feminism aim to remove the idea that woman is at the margin of the symbolic (which was my primary objective with the character of Antigone), without however defining women as identical to men, and vice versa. Kristeva, in fact, considering the feminists movements of

the twenty-first century, contends that women experience the “sacrificial contract” (Kristeva 25) of the sociosymbolic in which they want to be incorporated, sacrificing part of themselves to fit into it, or from which they want to take a distance, exiling themselves in a parallel order.

Although this thesis has carefully avoided attributing feminist intentions to Antigone to be able to fully focus on language and therefore, on Antigone’s unicity, I think it is important to mention that Kristeva and Cavarero’s theories work as a key to free from tedious dichotomies. Butler in *Antigone’s Kin* discusses a *sacrifice* Antigone has to make the moment in which she performs that “manly excess” (Butler 80), namely depriving herself of the right to become a mother and, trivially, to live. However, in her work *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* (2000), Kristeva claims how in psychoanalytic theory there is the possibility to think of the “*copresence* between sexuality and thought within language” (Kristeva 82 emphasis mine). As discussed in the first chapter, if the semiotic seems to be mediated by the mother’s figure (because of the semiotic *chora* in which the individual is immersed in a prelinguistic phase), the symbolic is represented by the father, subject to laws. Aligning with Butler, Antigone should therefore leave the *regulations* (Kristeva’s *ordonnancement*) of the semiotic, to go against the *law* of the father. Kristeva, however, does not want to theorize the nature pole (semiotic) and the cultural pole (symbolic) as opposite and independent, but she aims to theorize them as co-present. When she brilliantly points to the fact that a pure biological body does not exist, she is trying to remove the archaic, immobile idea of body (that Cavarero theorizes as often associated to women) from its unassailable position, moving it towards culture. The biological, natural body is always mediated through culture, language, and vice versa. The attempts of the feminists that Kristeva mentions, that is to say to sacrifice either nature or culture to find a place and an articulation to which they feel they belong, is mutilating as it will always confine them to an a-topia, a place that stands outside the law. Butler’s reading of Antigone speaks of sacrifice, self-annulation, as Antigone seems to sacrifice her nature to

fit, albeit briefly, in the symbolic law. While Butler's reading may open multiple discussions about women and their sacrificial negotiation of terms in the symbolic, I do believe that the theories of Kristeva and Cavarero involve a whole other set of considerations, because their discourse does not start from dichotomous concepts, but from singularity.

## CONCLUSION

Recognizing the semiotic and the symbolic presence, this dissertation aimed to remove Antigone from a dichotomous reading of her words and actions which prohibited her individual presence in the political context. Freeing Antigone from her exile, this work attempted to read her in a new space, which does not exclude either the semiotic or the symbolic dimension. Drawing from Edward Soja's *thirding perspective* theorized in his work *Thirdspace* (1996), we might interpret Antigone within a space of "extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange [...] rooted in a recombinatorial and radically open perspective" (Soja 5). Soja's contribution reminds us of the possibility, and the urge, to "open up our spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting politically that responds to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives" (Soja 5). The geographer theorizes what must be "a creative process of restructuring" that, starting from the dichotomies, is able to open new spaces, "new alternatives" (Soja 5).

In this third space we are able to read *Antigone* not as a clash between male and female, culture and nature, public and private but in their interlude. In other words, I read Antigone's strategic use of the semiotic as a way to signify a difference from the symbolic, a way of validating her singular voice in the symbolic contract. The semiotic, which is conventionally considered "*outside* of the symbolic as the excessive demand of affective, corporeal existence to accomplish expression" (Keltner 3) becomes instead the political mean by which Antigone expresses her heterogeneity.



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