Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism

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scenario. They cannot ignore such immediately intrusive behaviour. They cannot object. They cannot join in. They are caught in an impossibility where the 'correct' response is not available and this discomfort, this impossibility is transferred to the audience. We too do not know how to react. When the carer eventually succeeds in persuading the two men outside, with the help of Karen, the soon-to-be embroiled central character, all four get in a taxi and the two men's behaviour instantly changes. It is clear that they had been acting in the restaurant; what they refer to as 'spazzing'. At this point, the audience is given a second jolt. Like the diners, we did not know how to react and now, realizing that, like them, we have been duped, we are left even more confused. One reaction is to be appalled and not a few have been extremely appalled at von Trier for presenting such a scene, complaining that he is lampooning people with disabilities. But is such a reaction really justifiable? In the moment when we believe we are witnessing people with 'real' disabilities, we are consumed by discomfort. The moment we discover the 'joke', we disavow this discomfort and adopt a position of outrage instead. Only the first reaction, as disavowed, does not disappear. Our reaction is effectively turned inside out. We are, that is, faced with our own politically correct hypocrisy. When we know clearly that what we are dealing with is a hoax, it is easy enough to decry what we are faced with as sick, but what exactly is sick about it? The behaviour we witness in the opening scene shifts, retroactively, from being uncomfortably acceptable to being unacceptable. The judgement shifts from internal to external, from subject to other.

What is significant in *The Idiots* is that there is no comfortable position to assume in response. Which is to say that it is a film which demands a response from each viewer which is uniquely the response of that viewer. There is no symbolic, pre-packaged reaction available. We have to actually feel and think about it ourselves and choose how we react. This is what renders the film ethically significant. Just as Sophocles' play stages a conflict between aspects of the law, an aporia which furnishes us with no alternative but to choose and no pre-given rules by which to choose, so von Trier's work pushes us to confront ourselves and decide. It is in this unavoidable confrontation, in this irrefusable decision, that we discern that, while the law may be on the side of the Other, the ethical always lies uniquely with the subject.

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Antigone, Antigone: Lacan and the Structure of the Law

Ahuvia Kahane

> The tyranny of memory is that which is elaborated in what we call structure.
>
> J. Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis[1]

> As a psychoanalyst—and here we catch a glimpse of the difference between psychoanalysis and philosophy or psychology—he [Lacan] does not read the *behaviour* of each of the protagonists, he defines the *structure* through which their acts must be read.
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> J. Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman*[2]

Sophocles' *Antigone* is a complex play. Yet, at its heart there lies what may seem like a simple legal/ethical principle or economic claim. Antigone will bury her brother and doing so will die: *Keinon d' egô / thapsô. kalon moi touto poiousêi thanein* (*Ant.* 71–2).[3] She will exchange an action, a responsibility, for death. It is, she says, a beautiful (*kalon*) end.

Such basic simplicity of action is not trivial. It is, however, at odds with some readings of the play, and has been challenged, not the least by Jacques Lacan, whose view of *Antigone,* will be discussed in this chapter. Lacan and his work on *Antigone* have themselves been the subject of significant challenge,

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[1] Lacan (1999: 223).
[2] Copjec (2002: 16).
[3] 'I will bury him—it would honour me/be beautiful to me to die while doing that.' It is interesting to note that although the Greek text of Sophocles' *Antigone* is problematic (cf. Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990), there are no textual difficulties as far as the key verses on which Lacan's reading of the play rests and especially Antigone's emphasis on the irreplaceability of her brother. We will, further below, consider Goethe's views on the strangeness of Antigone's argument and his famous comment: 'I wish...that one day some scholar will reveal to us that this passage is a later addition' (cf. Lacan 1999: 255).

recently and prominently, for example, by Judith Butler, whose work we shall consider too. Negotiating both the Lacanian claim and aspects of its critique in terms of questions of structure can help us trace a distinct trajectory of the problem. It can also, as I hope to show, lead us to a different, revised understanding of Antigone and her actions.[4]

But before we begin, we need to clarify the particular notion of simplicity, which underscores the questions at hand, and its relation to structure. The terms of Antigone's action—on the one hand the burial, and on the other hand her death—have been much discussed. They are not at all simple. The predication of Antigone's exchange is not simple, either. In line 72 above, for example, she says, that to die would be *kalon* to her (she uses *moi*, the first person, so-called 'ethical' dative). Her decision, then, hangs on this adjective, which bears within it—as is well known—both the 'good' and the 'beautiful', and which thus binds together being and the phenomenal. We are immediately faced with heavy questions of ontology, ethics, and aesthetics.[5] Likewise, the relationship between kinship and social norm in the play, and, fundamentally, the positions occupied by the main players, Antigone and Creon, relative to kinship and social norm, to which we shall return, are complex.[6] Yet, we might also consider the basic form of Antigone's exchange—its principles of syntax. This form, it would appear, is simple: Take 'a', give 'b', or indeed, symbolically, a = b. A certain satisfaction of intention, a certain pleasure, a certain movement or discharge, is, it seems, achieved in return for—or at the expense of—punishment, that is to say, of another kind of movement. In other words, what seems simple here, regardless of the complexity of the system's terms, or its moral positions, is the *structure* of the laws, the morphology, we might say, of the equation and the system qua system.[7]

This idea of simplicity is very common. It can be found as a broad methodological principle in other domains, sometimes even in readings

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[4] Basic references in e.g. Steiner (1996). Some references on *Antigone* and psychoanalysis in Zajko and Leonard (2006) (also notes p. 122), but missing e.g. Edelman (2004), Copjec (2002), Stavrakakis (1999), Grosz (1990), etc. Informative comments on the literature in Butler (2000), esp. ch. 3 (and references, 82–5 nn. 1–10).

[5] The resonance, of course, of *kalon*, 'beautiful', 'good, of fine quality', 'auspicious', (in a moral sense) 'beautiful, noble, honourable' (*LSJ*), also 'honour', 'glory', etc., is attested in almost every aspect of ancient Greek culture, in poetry, philosophy, rhetoric, history, etc. The inseparability of ethics and aesthetics is well recognized by Lacan. It is, arguably, a factor in Aristotle's *Poetics* (e.g. in comments on *katharsis* in *Politics* VIII), and has received new substance in recent discussions, e.g. Badiou (2005); Rancière (2004a).

[6] For Butler's critique of kinship in *Antigone* (Butler 2000), and especially of Antigone's relationship to her brother, see further below. For a critique of Butler, see e.g. Edelman (2004).

[7] See Copjec in the epigraph above (2002: 16). Prima facie, the psychoanalytic focus on structure suggests a division of form and content (and an ethical functionality of this division). This is precisely what leads, as we shall see, to Butler's critique.

that attempt to resist it most, and perhaps in Lacan's reading too (although the failure to resist may also be theorized within such readings). Let us, in order to illustrate this point, briefly consider the case of so-called 'classical' scientific systems.[8] Classical science offers highly evolved, intricate views of the world. Yet such science grasps, or 'maps', the world in terms of laws (e.g. Newtonian laws) that are essentially reductive, comprehensive, deterministic, and mostly reversible. The system, relative to the world it describes, is, in this sense, inherently simple, even as it is understood as a complete and true representation. Indeed, the power of systems of this type, of mapping in general, resides precisely in the paradox (not, of course, seen as paradox *by* the system) of their compact completeness. World and system are construed as synchronous. A mismatch between them, where detected, is defined as incidental aberration, the result of insufficiently precise de-facto measurements, less-than-perfect tools, and so on—in other words, as external to the logic of the world. The world is therefore also seen as representable, accessible, and, in this sense, fundamentally simple.[9]

If we now think back to Sophocles' *Antigone*, and to the possibility of an analogous simple structure for Antigone's actions, we can easily see the attraction. Reading line 72 and the state of being it represents, we would seem to understand in full, not the play, to be sure, but the essential rules of its action. Herein lies one kind of beauty of 'take a, give b'.

But there is also the resistance to simplicity, at times from the outside, but also from within systems and consequent to their economy. This has been attested with prominence in many different ways in the humanities and social sciences and no less in the sciences proper, especially in the last several decades. Briefly taking up our scientific analogue again, we could, for example, mention Heisenberg or Gödel, Schrödinger (and his cat),

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[8] The term 'classical' here does not refer to the Greek and Roman world, but to large tracts of 'modern' (mostly pre 1950s) scientific thought. See e.g. Nicolis and Prigogine (1989, p. x): 'Our physical world is no longer symbolized by the stable and periodic planetary motions that are at the heart of classical mechanics'. The slippage between the usage of the term 'classical' in the humanities and in the sciences is important, given the diachronic mapping of the relationship between the two domains, relative to 'antiquity' and 'modernity'. This matter requires a separate study. For complexity theory in the sciences and in psychoanalysis, see e.g. Hayles (1990).

[9] 'At the beginning of this century, continuing the tradition of the classical research program, physicists were almost unanimous in agreeing that the fundamental laws of the universe were deterministic and reversible. Processes that did not fit this scheme were taken to be exceptions, merely artifacts due to complexity, which itself had to be accounted for by invoking our ignorance, or our lack of control of the variables involved' (Nicolis and Prigogine 1989: 3). As in science, the essential 'order' of the world does not exclude the possibility of exception. Likewise, 'chaos' does not lead to a collapse. Cornelius Castoriadis famously says, 'The world—not only ours—is fragmented. Yet it does not fall to pieces. To reflect upon this situation seems to me to be one of the primary facts of philosophy today' (Castoriadis 1997, p. vii).

certain aspects of 'complexity' in material science (e.g. 'Benart cells' in thermodynamics), meteorological systems, and so on. These examples manifest important specific differences, but we are merely trying to stress a general point: In their various ways, and coming from within highly formalized and rigorous critical discourses, these provide an important counterpoint to principles of simplicity.

Let me briefly adduce just one paradigmatic case, namely Russell's paradox. The paradox, put forth in 1902 in a letter to Frege, suggests that it is not possible to form sets from every predicate.[10] To rephrase this in very general terms, it suggests that we cannot reduce an object to a closed set of descriptions. Transposing this idea to the context of *Antigone* implies that we cannot describe the objects of exchange in complete terms. The nature of the exchange may thus require a very different kind of understanding.

The core of Russell's paradox can be described thus: Take, for example, 'The set of horses'. This set is not itself 'a horse'. Since something has to be a horse to be counted in the set of horses, we could say that 'the set of horses' is not 'a member of itself'. Nevertheless, 'the set of sets that are not members of themselves', if it is a member of itself, *is* by definition *not* a member of itself; if it is not a member of itself, then by definition it *is* a member of itself, and so on. Russell's paradox is a prominent point of reference which challenges the notion of a fixed set of descriptions which define an object or a set, and thus, more broadly, challenges the idea of determinate positive representation.[11] If the fixed description of objects 'a' and 'b' is challenged, then, again, the equation a = b and something of the structural principles of the economy of exchange requires some rethinking, too.

There is no need to retrace the history of the critique of the economy of systems in further detail here. This critique is not predicated as a single 'object', or a system, or a view of the word.[12] But it can provide a general framework for certain gestures towards the 'law', and specifically, in our case, for Lacan's

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[10] See Russell (1967: 124–5), Russell (1903: ch. X, 100). Russell, we should note, struggled against the conclusions of the paradox for the rest of his life. It is, in this sense, an argument *a fortiori.*

[11] This remains a matter for discussion elsewhere. Joan Copjec (2002: 2–5), following Badiou, rightly points out that this argument on its own can lead to other positions, e.g. nominalist or Kantian transcendentalist, both significantly different from Lacan's. Frege, like Russell, was shaken by the paradox (which posed a challenge to the project of extensionalism, for example). Yet even Frege's work, for example his seminal argument about sense and reference and especially his 'Telescope metaphor', if read carefully, hints at the possibility of radically non-reductive and thus non-simple readings of the world. Frege says: *si duo idem faciunt, non est idem* (1956: 60). See Frege in Geach and Black (1960: 59–60).

[12] This phrasing is itself an instance of Russell's paradox and thus, perhaps, a form of representing the non-representability of the world.

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reading of *Antigone*. We might, nevertheless, usefully mention, as briefly as possible, at least one more well-known critical moment, which anchors our discussion and which is more directly related to our material. This, of course, concerns Freud and his observations in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and elsewhere, on his young nephew's little game of *fort-da* and its phenomenology.[13] Here, focused on the death drive, the relationship between, let us say, *das Ding* in its irretrievable fullness, and its representations, between desire and its 'object', between desire and its fulfilment, and thus between the real and systematic structure, is realigned. This, arguably, is another basic moment of challenge to any 'take a, give b' principle (also literally . . .).

It is at this point that we may turn back to Greek tragedy. Freud, of course, looked to Oedipus, not to Antigone, in his comments. 'What *would* have happened if Psychoanalysis were to have taken Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure?' It's an old chestnut.[14] Freud's material substance is not unimportant. Yet, *pace* interventions by Kristeva, Irigaray, and others, and their critique of Freud, and Lacan, and keeping in mind crucial recent comments on *Antigone* by Butler (to which we shall return), one of the things that 'will have happened' (Lacan's arguments on 'logical time' and on sequencing are of importance here)[15] is Lacan's reading of the play. This reading is widely accessible, and there is no need to rehearse its details yet again.[16] Let us simply recall the basics. 'Antigone,' says Lacan,

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[13] (Freud 2001: 14–15): 'This good little boy, however, had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out "o-o-o-o", accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction. His mother and the writer of the present account were agreed in thinking that this was not a mere interjection but represented the German word *fort* [gone]. I eventually realized that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play "gone" with them. One day I made an observation which confirmed my view. The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive "o-o-o-o." He then pulled the reel again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful "da" [there]. This, then, was the complete game of disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act. The interpretation of the game then became obvious. It was related to the child's great cultural achievement—the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting.' See recently e.g. Johnson (2005). In the context of *Antigone*, see Copjec (2002: 30–1).

[14] Steiner (1996: 18), Butler (2000: 57), etc.

[15] Lacan (1988b). Discussion in Pluth and Hoens (2004).

[16] Lacan (1999) and extensive discussions in scholarship. See especially Butler (2000: 40–55).

is a tragedy, and tragedy is in the forefront of our experience as analysts—something that is confirmed by the references Freud found in *Oedipus Rex* as well as in other tragedies . . . and if he himself [Freud] didn't expressly discuss *Antigone* as tragedy, that doesn't mean to say it cannot be done at this crossroads to which I have brought you [in the Seminar of 1959–60].[17]

It is *Antigone's* unique historical position in the field of ethics and the law that draws him to the play: 'Is there anyone who doesn't evoke *Antigone* whenever there is a question of a law that causes conflict in us even though it is acknowledged by the community to be a just law?'[18] The play *Antigone*, in other words, is a moment at which the asking of questions about the law (by Hegel, and many others after him) becomes particularly prominent. Yet, to this Lacan has much to add. For *Antigone*, as he famously says,

reveals to us the line of sight that defines desire. This line of sight focuses on an image that possesses a mystery which up till now has never been articulated, since it forces you to close your eyes at the very moment you look at it. Yet that image is at the centre of tragedy, since it is the fascinating image of Antigone herself. We know very well that over and beyond the dialogue, over and beyond the question of family and country, over and beyond the moralizing arguments, it is Antigone herself who fascinates us, Antigone in her unbearable splendor.[19]

Here, in a nutshell, is Lacan on tragedy, desire, speech, and speakability, and the law. This is why Lacan places so much emphasis on Antigone's splendour and on her beauty. This is why he begins his analysis with a discussion of the figure of Antigone, within which this splendour is invested: 'What does one find in *Antigone*? First of all, one finds Antigone.'[20] This vision of the heroine, the vision of her splendour and the effect of beauty, is, as Lacan plainly says, 'a blindness effect'. The importance of this effect, both as a vehicle, that is to say, as the material of tragedy, and as an end, that is to say, as a moral principle, is fundamental. Lacan concludes his discussion of *Antigone* by stressing this point. Antigone appears

as a pure and simple relationship of the human being to that of which he miraculously happens to be the bearer, namely, the signifying *cut* [emphasis added][21] that confers on him the indomitable power of being that he is in the face of everything that may oppose him.[22]

[17] Lacan (1999: 243). Cf. also e.g. (1999: 291–301) ('The Tragic Dimension of Psychoanalytic Experience').
[18] Lacan (1999: 243).
[19] Ibid. 247.
[20] Ibid. 250.
[21] The cut (*coupure*) is important: 'Topology privileges the function of the cut, since the cut is what distinguishes a discontinuous transformation from a continuous one'. (Evans 1996: 208).
[22] Lacan (1999: 283).

But let us focus on the problem with which we began, and on the structure of Antigone's economy. For here, and elsewhere, Lacan's conception of simplicity is very different from the one we have earlier outlined. We can explain this difference, for example, in terms of some of Lacan's comments on Kant.[23]

In his *Essays on Negative Greatness*, Kant puts before us, among other things, several narratives or 'little stories', as Lacan calls them. One of these concerns a man who, if he is to spend the night with a lady he desires unlawfully, will, on his way out, be put to death. Lacan provides a close commentary: 'Kant, our dear Kant,' he says, 'tells us in all his innocence, his innocent subterfuge, that . . . everyone, every man of good sense, will say no [i.e. will refuse to give up his life for the sake of spending the night with this woman]'.[24] Practical reason here dictates the response and Kant's judgement, 'in purely reasonable terms'. For Kant, the pleasure of the lady's company is opposed to, and weighed against, the pain of death. But this, as Lacan points out, 'homogenizes' the two: 'There is in terms of pleasure a plus and a minus'. Lacan—this is precisely a point of structure—sees the world in very different terms:

[O]ne only has to make a conceptual shift and move the night spent with the lady from the category of pleasure to that of *jouissance, given that* jouissance *implies precisely the acceptance of death* [emphasis added] . . . for the example to be ruined.

In other words, it is enough for *jouissance* to be a form of evil for the whole thing to change its character completely, and for the meaning of the moral law itself to be completely changed. Anyone can see that if the moral law is, in effect, capable of playing some role here, it is precisely as a support for the *jouissance* involved; it is so that the sin becomes what Saint Paul calls inordinately sinful. That's what Kant on this occasion simply ignores.[25]

It is important here to stress that most basic of facts, namely that for Lacan, as indeed for Freud, the drive is something partial and paradoxical (thus, for example, to follow the death drive is not to be suicidal). This partiality is the incompleteness of the drive, its fragmentary and self-inhibiting nature in relation to its partial objects (*objets petit a*), which are of course, now conceived, in their partiality, as totalities. *Das Ding*, to quote Joan Copjec in 'The Tomb of Perseverence: On *Antigone*',

is no longer conceivable [in Kantian terms] as a noumenal object and is retained only by the description of *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* as *partial*. It is clear from the theory that when this partial object arrives on the scene, it blocks the path to the old conception of *das Ding*, which is now only a retrospective illusion.[26]

[23] For Kant and Lacan, see especially Copjec (2002, ch. 1).
[24] Lacan (1999: 189).
[25] Lacan (1999: 189). For *jouissance*, see e.g. Evans (1996: 91–2).
[26] Copjec (2002: 37). A useful discussion can be found in Laclau (2005: 111 ff.).

If we are to follow Lacan, then, it would seem that Antigone's relationship to the 'signifying cut', to the real, is 'pure and simple'. Yet the *structure* of that relationship and of the law is not simple at all. It is certainly not a plus and a minus, not 'take "a", give "b" '. We might add that, historically, this structure has often extended beyond any straightforward practical exchange, even, for example, in the Biblical principle of 'an eye for an eye', or in Aeschylean drama,[27] let alone, for example, in Buber or Levinas, or in the work of Derrida on exchange and death.[28] It is, in a basic sense, *not* an equilibrium; it is *not* achieved through the conjunction of a 'plus' and a 'minus'.[29]

But Lacan is a figure of his time. It is perhaps inevitable that his own discourse should occur within the closure of language and history and against the background to his thought, say, Hegel, Lévi Strauss, and so on.[30] Lacan's

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[27] Leviticus 24: 20: 'Fracture for fracture, an eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth' (*shever tachat shever, 'ain tachat 'ain, shen tachat shen*). The literature on this question is extensive, of course. But see e.g. E. Levinas's discussion of the *Lex Talionis*. Closely echoing the *midrash*, he says (1990: 147): 'The principle stated by the Bible here (i.e. "an eye for an eye"), which appears to be so cruel, seeks only justice. It inserts itself into a social order in which no sanction, however slight, can be inflicted outside a juridical sentence. [It has been] interpreted in the light of the spirit that pervades the whole of the Bible. We call this method of understanding: Talmud. The doctors of the Talmud anticipated modern scruples: eye for an eye means a fine. Not for nothing is the passage relating to the material damages which the Bible demands for the loss of a beast given alongside the precepts of eye for an eye. The passage invites us to reread the verses relating to disfigurement, as if the question of damages should hold sway with the judges over the noble anger provoked by the wrongdoing. Violence calls up violence, but we must put a stop to this chain reaction. That is the nature of justice.... Justice without passion is not the only thing man must possess. He must also have justice without killing.' The literature on the *Lex Talionis* and reciprocity in Greek Tragedy, and especially in Aeschylus' Oresteian Trilogy, and the *Eumenides*, is likewise extensive. But, at the very least, critics will agree that by the time we have reached the *Eumenides*, action is taken on a basis other than straightforward reciprocity (see e.g. *Eumenides* 735–41: 'my vote I will add to Orestes' side. For I have no mother that gave me birth, and in all things, save wedlock, I am for the male with all my soul, and am entirely on the father's side. Therefore I will not hold of greater value the death of a wife who slew her lord, the lawful master of the house. Orestes, even with equal ballots, wins.'

[28] See n. 66, below.

[29] See Butler (2000: 46, citing Lacan): 'Something invariably emerges in the very trajectory of desire that appears enigmatic or mysterious from the conscious point of view that is oriented toward the pursuit of the good: "In the irreducible margin as well as at the limit of his own good, the subject reveals himself to the never entirely resolved mystery of the nature of his desire [*le sujet se révèle au mystère irrésolu de ce qu'est son désir*]" '.

[30] Butler (2000: 30) says: 'The psychic relation to social norms can, under certain conditions, posit those norms as intractable, punitive, and eternal, but that figuration of norms already takes place within what Freud called "the culture of the death drive." In other words, the very description of the symbolic as intractable law takes place within a fantasy of law as insurpassable authority. In my view, Lacan at once analyses and symptomises this fantasy.' She immediately adds 'I hope to suggest that the notion of the symbolic is limited by the description of its own transcendentalizing function, *that it can acknowledge the contingency of its own structure* [emphasis added] only by disavowing the possibility of any substantial alteration in its field of

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comments on *Antigone* should, at least in part, bear the responsibility and finality, and thus also the consequences, of their own historicity, whether they themselves aspire to transcend it or not. Indeed, recent critiques, notably by Butler, mark, rightly perhaps, some significant elisions in Lacan's argument, in regard to what Butler at one point calls 'kinship trouble', and more fundamentally, in regard to *Antigone*'s relationship to law and to what, from our perspective, we might call the structure of the law.[31] There is a broad nexus of methodological, ethical, and ontological issues at stake which, we might add, also bears upon our immediate responses to everyday situations.

Consider, then, some of these 'elisions'. They reach back to Hegel, of course. Hegel's Antigone is excluded from citizenship. Antigone's juridical position is also, in an important sense, put aside by Lacan. 'The state', as Butler says, 'makes no appearance in Lacan's discussion of Antigone'.[32] Lacan (and in a different way Hegel—that's part of the critique!) seems to sever Antigone as a figure of pure being (and as a figure of pure defiance, a figure that exposes the status of the symbolic) from the social. Against this, Butler argues that

the distinction [made by Lacan] between symbolic and social law cannot finally hold...not only is the symbolic itself the sedimentation of social practices but... radical alterations in kinship demand a rearticulation of the structuralist presuppositions of psychoanalysis and, hence, of contemporary gender and sexual theory.[33]

There is an important point here that marks a basic divide. Butler clearly states in the beginning of her argument that

for Lacan, Antigone pursues a desire that can only lead to death precisely because it seeks to defy symbolic norms [the prohibition of the Father, etc.]. But is this the right way to interpret her desire? Or has the symbolic itself produced a crisis for its own intelligibility? Can we assume that Antigone has no confusion about who is her brother, and who is her father, that Antigone is not, as it were, living the equivocations that unravel the purity and universality of those structural rules?[34]

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operation. My suggestion will be that the relation between symbolic position and social norm needs to be rethought.'

[31] Butler (2000: 62, 71).

[32] Butler (2000: 12), where Hegel's position is also discussed. The importance of Butler's critique of Lacan lies precisely in its attempt to draw *Antigone* and the ethics of psychoanalysis into a relation of responsibility towards the political.

[33] Ibid. 19.

[34] Ibid. 17–18. See also 53: 'what Lacan elides at this moment [when Antigone insists on her brother's uniqueness, remaining on the side of the incommunicable sign, the ineffable character of what is (Lacan 1999: 279)], manifesting his own blindness perhaps, is that she suffers a fatal condemnation by virtue of abrogating the incest taboo that articulates kinship and the symbolic. It is not that the pure content of the brother is irretrievable from behind the symbolic articulation of the brother but that the symbolic itself is limited by its constitutive interdictions.'

The problem is with the 'theological' impulse that governs Lacan's reading and perhaps psychoanalysis more broadly ('the law of psychoanalysis itself') which is, in the end, tautological.[35] For, as Butler explains, 'if a social norm is not the same as a symbolic position, then a symbolic position, here understood as the sedimented ideality of the norm, appears to depart from itself'.[36]

The practical lynchpin of Butler's argument is the question of kinship and the idea of the brother. Lacan (following up on Goethe's puzzled observations on *Ant.* 911–12) insists on the importance of the brother as the anchor of Antigone's being. She effectively says, 'my brother is my brother'. The brother as pure symbol enters the field.[37] Butler's extended opposition need not be repeated here. Her basic point, quite rightly, is that when Antigone acts according to the law that gives her brother precedence, 'she means more than she intends'. Her brother could also be her father (Oedipus, who is the son of her mother), or her other brother, Eteocles. 'There is nothing in the nomenclature of kinship that can successfully restrict its scope of referentiality to the single person, Polynices.'[38] Earlier on, we saw how Lacan opposes the structure of the ethical exchange, replacing it with a particular and very different kind of relationship of simplicity. Here we see that his proposed

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[35] The paradox of law, the anomic nature of sovereignty, and the paradigmatic status of states of exception is a widely discussed topic in recent years—especially in debates surrounding the work of Giorgio Agamben (heavily influenced by Weber, Benjamin, Schmitt, and others. See e.g. Agamben (2005; 1998), etc.) It is qualified by the adjective 'theological' inasmuch as it seeks a principle of the unmoved mover. The book by Schmitt, which stands at the centre of the current sovereignty debate, is, of course, entitled *Political Theology* (2006).

[36] Butler (2000: 21). '. . . if a social norm is not the same as a symbolic position, then a symbolic position, here understood as the sedimented ideality of the norm, appears to depart from itself. The distinction between them does not quite hold, for in each instance we are still referring to social norms, but in different modes of appearance.' Butler is not, in fact, arguing from the position of, for example, Irigaray, whom she criticizes (and who has been yet more openly criticized, e.g. by Jane Gallop (1982)). See e.g. Bowie (1993), Grosz (1990) (now slightly aging) for surveys.

[37] Lacan (1999: 278–9). 'Involved is an horizon determined by a structural relation; it only exists on the basis of the language of words, but it reveals their unsurpassable consequence. The point is from the moment when words and language and the signifier enter into play, something may be said, and it is said in the following way: "My brother may be whatever you say he is, a criminal. He wanted to destroy the walls of his city, lead his compatriots away in slavery. He led our enemies to the territory of our city, but he is nevertheless what he is, and he must be granted his funeral rites. He doubtless doesn't have the same rights as the other. You can tell me whatever you want, tell me that one is a hero and a friend, that the other is an enemy. But I answer that it is of no significance that the latter doesn't have the same value below. As far as I am concerned, the order that you dare refer me to doesn't mean anything, for from my point of view, my brother is my brother."

That's the paradox encountered by Goethe's thought and he vacillates. My brother is what he is, and it's because he is what he is and only he can be what he is, that I move forward towards the fatal limit.' For the discussion of Goethe, see Lacan (1999: 255).

[38] Butler (2000: 77).

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economy, too, is defined by overdetermined and, arguably, untenable structuring principles of economy, exchange, language, and representation. 'Antigone', says Butler, 'is the one for whom symbolic positions have become incoherent'.[39]

Historically, Butler argues, the problem lies with the structuralist baggage of psychoanalysis and of Lacan's thinking: Following Lévi Strauss, Lacan sees kinship (and the incest taboo, for example) as a fundamental form of the symbolic, a linguistic mechanism, a framework of exchange that, like language, establishes a social bond among men. This symbolic function is the Law and it is, according to Lacan, something that precedes the human order.[40] Indeed, this 'circuitry', as Lacan calls it, which transcends the subject, is precisely the Symbolic, and the Law. If, then, in psychoanalysis, the law requires its perversion, and if Antigone represents this necessary perversion, then both Antigone and the law operate within what is ultimately a structure that relies on exclusion:

To establish the *structural necessity* [emphasis added] of perversion to the law is to posit a static relation between the two in which each entails the other and, in that sense, is nothing without the other. This form of negative dialectics produces the satisfaction that the law is *invested* in perversion and that the law is not what it seems to be. It does not help to make possible, however, other forms of social life, inadvertent possibilities produced by the prohibitions that come to undermine the conclusion that an invariant social organization of sexuality follows of necessity from the prohibitive law.[41]

If we accept Butler's critique, then, having gone round the block, we return, it seems, to the old problem of structure, and thus to a problem of formalism which 'secures the structure against critical challenge'. In fact, Butler suggests that *Antigone* seems to compel a reading that is exactly the opposite, that challenges structure, that does not conform to the symbolic law, and that 'does not prefigure a final restitution of the law'.[42]

Historically speaking, we may be justified to level such criticism at Lacan, and perhaps also, as Butler and others have suggested, against some aspects, for example, of feminist thought in the context of *Antigone*.[43] We might nevertheless ask if, despite this, it is possible to trace a different reading of

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[39] Ibid. 22. She stresses: 'what Antigone draws into crisis is the representative function itself, the very horizon of intelligibility in which she operates and according to which she remains somewhat unthinkable'.

[40] Ibid. 42.

[41] Ibid. 67–8.

[42] See above, and Butler (2000: 71). See, however, Edelman (2004) for a critique of Butler.

[43] For Butler's comments on feminist thinking precisely on the basis of kinship and its residual resistance to critique, see (2000: 1–4, 71–4).

structure within the play *Antigone* 'itself', and, perhaps, within Lacan's reading of *Antigone*. Of course, in order to be useful, an answer would have to offer mediation without, as it were, resolution. It might, for example—I am here borrowing from another contemporary line of argumentation—have to sever the association of meaning and truth.[44] We would be seeking a different kind of 'structural' principle.

In order to explore this, let us first reconsider Russell's paradox. The problem here is ultimately the problem of the 'object'.[45] Can we enumerate its attributes? Can we, at some level, no matter how basic, describe its structure, that is to say, the formal relationship between its components? Lacan's answer, on the one hand, holds on to the notion of the 'object', and of designation, even as, on the other hand, it opens that object to complete and radical inaccessibility (or change of attributes). This is achieved through the process of retroactive naming.[46] An object's identity is both guaranteed and yet remains open to all alterations, to all critiques, through the retroactive process whereby it is given a name, through that quilting point (*point de caption*) which ties it all, as it were, within a single (retroactive) 'knot'.[47] Closely related, and perhaps even more important, is the notion of 'logical time'. Here, Lacan's argument rests on a reading of the following dilemma: three prisoners (A, B, and C) each have, on their backs a disc—either black or white. Each can see the other two, but not himself, and they are not allowed to speak. They are told that in all there are three white and two black discs. The first to guess the colour of the disc on his own back will be allowed to leave.

Conventionally, the answer is a matter of deduction: If prisoner A sees two black discs, he knows his disc is white; if he sees two whites, he's forced to hypothesize, first, that his disc is black. If so, and if B's disc is black too, C would, of course, leave the room immediately. Now, C hesitates and does *not* leave the room immediately, so B should conclude that he is white (still supposing A to be black). But B does not leave, thus A may conclude that his disc is white, and so on. To this, however, Lacan objects. Prisoner A realizes that his reasoning is valid only so long as B and C do not move, and that once they do move, his reasoning fails. As recent commentators note

What A realizes is that he urgently has to end his thinking process and head for the door. So he jumps to a conclusion that closes the time for comprehending, *and makes*

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that time retroactively meaningful. . . this is the moment of what Lacan calls anticipatory certitude. By this he means that A leaps ahead to a conclusion whose ground or reason can only be verified after the act [emphasis added].[48]

The act, in other words, is an element in the line of reasoning itself. It is 'anticipatory certitude', which both severs moments in time from each other, and keeps them together, as it were.[49]

Can we, from this point progress to a re-reading of Lacan's *Antigone*, of *Antigone*, and of Antigone? Let's again try to think of this problem in terms of structure. Antigone is the eponymous hero of a drama. For Lacan too, Antigone stands at the centre of the play: 'What does one find in *Antigone?* First of all, one finds Antigone.'[50] And what is at the centre of Antigone, that is, at the centre of the 'figure' of Antigone? Lacan, at least, suggests that 'at the centre of Antigone's whole drama' is an important term, repeated twenty times, the term *atê*.[51] We could try to take account of the material image that emerges from these observations combined.

Technically, and in the most practical sense, 'Antigone's drama' is, of course, the play *Antigone* itself, something which *surrounds* the figure of Antigone at its centre. At the same time, at the centre of the figure of Antigone is her *atê*. Yet again, this *atê* is, arguably, 'the whole drama' that surrounds the figure of Antigone; it is thus, technically, the figure of *Antigone*. We have to stress that we are not playing with words here. Quite the contrary: words here are a very precise representation of something which is otherwise difficult to grasp.[52] Yet this something in itself is also, it seems to me, very precise. Indeed, we could even suggest that it is a *geometrical* principle. In essence, what we

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[44] See Rancière (1994), esp. 28–9 on meaning and truth. Also, see e.g. Rancière (2004a, 2007) and especially the discussion of Hegel and the question of representation ('Are Some Things Unrepresentable?', 109–38).

[45] See e.g. Žižek (1989, esp. 94 ff.).

[46] See Žižek (1989).

[47] Ibid. 95–6; Bowie (1993: 74), etc.

[48] Pluth and Hoens (2004: 194).

[49] There is much more to this example than we can discuss in this chapter. See Pluth and Hoens (2004). In particular, one has to consider Alain Badiou's reading of Lacan on 'logical time' (Badiou 1982. See discussions in Pluth and Hoens 2004 and esp. therein 257 n. 4 for further references). Badiou's objection is that, in fact, for Lacan, Prisoner A's conclusion relies on an assumption of rationality on the part of the other, in other words, on a kind of 'algebra' or symbolic process. Badiou's fundamental question is 'What if the other is stupid?' (Badiou 1982: 270). If B and C are not acting rationally, this would, of course, offset the Lacanian calculus. Once that is allowed, we can (according to Badiou) read the decision as the result of 'haste'. Such haste is not inferable from the symbolic, and 'is the mode in which the subject exceeds the symbolic by exposing himself to the real' (Badiou 1982, cited in Pluth and Hoens 2004: 194). Here both Badiou and Butler (from different positions) challenge a certain underlying structural assumption. Badiou's conception of the subject, and his whole philosophical project, is, of course, closely informed by—but very different from Lacan's. For Badiou and Lacan in general, see e.g. Bosteels (2001, 2002); Žižek (2004b).

[50] Lacan (1999: 250).

[51] Ibid. 262. Butler (2000: 51).

[52] One could argue that this, precisely, is one of the reasons for non-melancholy readings ('post-continental', 'post-Deleuzian', etc.) of the world which point beyond the tenets of the 'postmodern' (other aspects of such readings being attitudes towards universality, mathematics, truth, etc.).
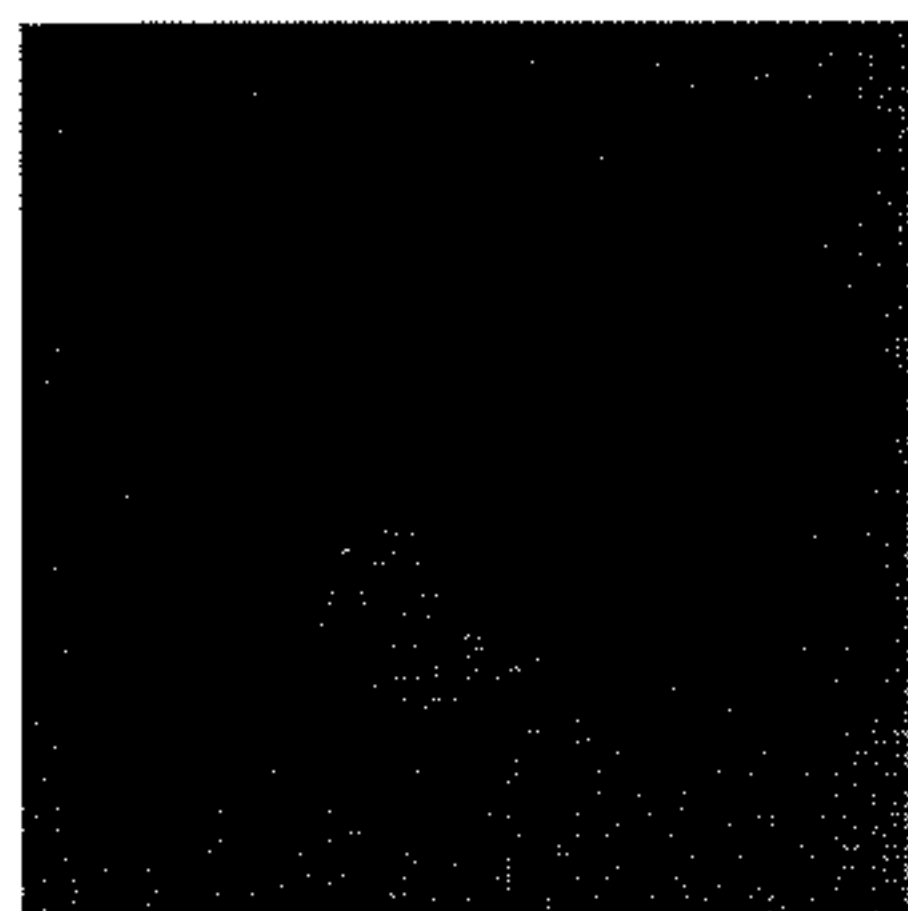
Fig. 8.1 Moebius strip.

have here is the figure of the play, *Antigone*, which 'contains' the figure of Antigone, which 'contains' the figure of *atê*, which is, or 'contains' the figure of the play *Antigone*, which 'contains' the figure of Antigone, and so on . . . Thus, *geometrically*, or rather *topologically* speaking, we have here a particular figure, perhaps, for example, something akin to a Moebius strip.

Topology, as we know, is one of the tropes of Lacan's ontology.[53] Be the criticism of such use of topology and of Lacan's use of mathematics (or mathematical notation) as it may, what is important for us here is a basic point: A Moebius strip does not have an 'inside' or 'outside', no 'top' which is the opposite of 'bottom'. A Moebius strip is not the subject of so-called dialectical analysis. It is, nevertheless, an 'object'.[54] It is a different kind of structure, which requires different elements, most prominently perhaps the element of time. What should we make of this element? Jean Granon-Lafont notes that:

Only a temporal event differentiates the back and the front [of the strip], which are separated by the time of making an additional turn. The dichotomy between the two notions, the back and the front, doesn't reappear except at the price of intervention of a new dimension, namely, a temporal dimension. Time, as continuous, produces the difference between the two faces. If there are no longer two measures for the surface, but instead a single edge, then time is essential in order to render account of the band.[55]

[53] See primarily Granon-Lafont (1985).

[54] There is an important relationship here between indeterminacy and being (or truth). By way of a very broad analogy (but *not* as a precise illustration), one could think, for example, of Gödel's proof. The point is this: Part of Gödel's proof (of incompleteness, but this does not matter here) consists in showing that although a certain formula (in an axiomatic system) is undecidable, it can nevertheless be demonstrated (assuming that the axioms of the system are consistent—an essential assumption), that this formula is true (through meta-mathematical reasoning). The result of the process is, to put it very crudely, a demonstration that something is both undecidable and true.

[55] Granon-Lafont (1985: 30).

With this renewed emphasis on time, and its importance for the grasping of topological objects (and hence of objects in general, as in our earlier discussion), we can now turn back to the question of kinship, to Antigone's preference for her brother in *Antigone*, lines 911–12, to Goethe's puzzled reaction to these verses (and its implications for the notion of 'text'), and to Lacan's response. This is where the several knots of our argument so far come together.

Seen in the light of time, Antigone's statement of her principles and of her commitment to her brother is surprisingly straightforward. It is worth quoting a larger section of her speech, which, of course, Antigone addresses to the object that is at once her tomb, her bridal-chamber, and her prison (*Ant.* 891–912).[56] We might, incidentally, note the appropriateness of this multiplicity of the 'object' of Antigone's speech: the moment we parse its sequence and components—tomb, bridal-chamber, prison—is the moment we falsely parse it, just as we might falsely parse the stages of reasoning in the case of the prisoner's dilemma.

Antigone says:

O tomb,[57] bridal-chamber, eternal prison in the caverned rock, whither go to find mine own, those many who have perished, and whom Persephone hath received among the dead! Last of all shall I pass thither, and far most miserably of all, before the term of my life is spent. But I cherish good hope that my coming will be welcome to my father, and pleasant to thee, my mother, and welcome, brother, to thee; for, when ye died, with mine own hands I washed and dressed you, and poured drink-offerings at your graves; and now, Polyneices, 'tis for tending thy corpse that I win such recompense as this. And yet I honoured thee, as the wise will deem, rightly. Never, had I been a mother of children, or if a husband had been mouldering in death, would I have taken this task upon me in the city's despite. What law,[58] you ask, is my warrant for that word? The husband

[56] Lacan (1999: 254–55) cites lines 911–12 and considers specifically Goethe's response to these lines.

[57] Here, and often elsewhere, Sophocles uses the Greek word *tumbos*, not the word *sêma*. Both are sometimes translated as 'tomb', but, arguably, embody somewhat different ontologies. *Sêma* is the sign, it cannot function otherwise, and does not depend on the materiality of the body (on which see Kahane 2005). *Tumbos* is much more closely defined in relation to the body (living or dead) it receives, and functions differently. The distinction between them (and the question of the body) would require a long, separate discussion.

[58] The word used is *nomos*, 'mortal law.' Lacan (1999: 278) is right to suggest that 'she [Antigone] pointedly distinguishes herself from *dikê*'. Note, however, that the speech-act is interrogative, not declarative, shifting the emphasis onto the relationship between speaker and hearer. This formal distinction is philosophically salient, especially since Antigone here speaks for the other. For whom? For her tomb? Her bridal bed? Her prison? The audience? *Who speaks*, then? *Nomos* here is, arguably, not quite the ordinary written law, but marks, perhaps as Lacan (1999: 278) says, 'a certain legality'.

lost, another might have been found, and child from another, to replace the first-born: but, father and mother hidden with Hades, no brother's life could ever bloom for me again. Such was the law whereby I held thee first in honour; but Creon deemed me guilty of error therein, and of outrage, ah brother mine! And now he leads me thus, a captive in his hands; no bridal bed, no bridal song hath been mine, no joy of marriage, no portion in the nurture of children; but thus, forlorn of friends, unhappy one, I go living to the vaults of death.

Antigone makes it plain that she does not generally spurn the laws of the city. Under different circumstances, she would never have taken upon herself this task against her city (*ou gar pot*, 'never', [had the matter involved anything but the brother] *biai politôn tond' an êiromên ponon*, 'would I have taken this task upon me in the city's despite'). Yet she also makes it clear that she's not acting randomly. Rather, she acts 'under a certain legality . . . something that is, in effect, of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain or in anything else'.[59] Antigone herself raises the question of the legality that regulates her action and warrants her position. It's of note that she does this on the one hand, only in the form of a question, that is, not as a statement embodying positive content, but on the other hand, using the term 'law', *nomos* (*tinos nomou dê tauta pros charin legô?* 'What law, you ask, is my warrant for that word?'). This legality is focused on the brother. For Lacan, it is 'an horizon determined by a structural relation' which 'only exists on the basis of the language of words'.[60]

Butler, criticizing the residual component of negative dialectic in this view, rightly stresses the open reference of this brother. The whole family, the Labdakides, suffers from radical 'kinship trouble'. What, then, is the thing that defines the non-replaceability, the absolute uniqueness of the brother? Lacan, it seems, fails to answer this crucial question. And yet Antigone explains this very clearly: it is the element of *time*. Once her parents are dead, as they are, she cannot have another brother.[61] Antigone's Order of Law, we could thus argue, is an object. Not an object like a tomb, or a bridal-chamber, or a prison individually, but another kind of object which is similar to the physical one she addresses, and which is also like the Moebius strip. Its structure is bound with the order of events and the order of time and mortality.

In the order of time, a brother, in relation to a husband for example, is the figure, or the name, of absolute uniqueness, of radical unrepeatablility, which is none the less complete in its partiality. This radical unrepeatablity is nothing more, nothing less, than the truth of being mortal. Once repeated, we might say, time ceases to exist and beings cede their mortality. We should stress that this order of time, like the point on the Moebius strip, *is* absolutely unique. It is thus not change, or transformation, or the cycles of generation and decay, that mark, for example, Aristotelian diachrony and its conception of time as number.[62]

In contrast to the brother, the husband, within this order of time, could be marked as the name of radical iterability. In Antigone's words, the husband seems to mark time that comes around and goes around. We might better understand this idea if we think, for example, of Homer's *Odyssey*. Antigone, of course, says nothing of Homer. But he is not an accidental intertext. In classical antiquity, in ancient poetry and culture, in Athenian ('Greek') tragedy, Homer's poetry always functions as a key point of reference, is always there in the background. And Homer's *Odyssey*, let us recall, portrays the quintessential, paradigmatic 'return of the husband', that is to say, the *nostos* of Odysseus, which occurs as the years 'comes around and goes around' (cf. the 'summary' of the poem in the proem, *Odyssey* 1.16: *periplomenôn eniautôn*).[63] My point is that in the return of Odysseus after twenty years of absence, something of the essential nature of time and of Odysseus' mortality is obliterated. Time will have had no effect on the mortal man. Perhaps there's good reason in Odysseus being known as *dios Odysseus*, 'bright/divine

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[59] Lacan (1999: 278).

[60] Ibid.

[61] She uses the word *autadelphos*. As for all two-ending Greek adjectives, this form (*-os*) can apply to both male and female, and can thus also refer to Ismene (cf. *Ant.* 1). The immediate circumstances here do not call for this.

[62] For Aristotle on time, see recently, e.g. Coope (2005). Earlier discussion in Annas (1975), Bostock (1980) (using the term 'duration', but with no reference to Bergson or the Bergsonian tradition), Hussey (1993) (a commentary on *Physics* 4), Sorabji (1983), etc. It would be hard to summarize Aristotle's view on this difficult and controversial issue, but he speaks of time as involving change (*kinesis*) or movement. Aristotle argues that there is no perception of time without perception of change. Yet time for him is not change itself. It is rather the number (*arithmos*) of change in the sense of the thing being numbered (rather than the thing by which we number). Aristotle's view is that numbers are just the natural numbers. The principal passage in question is *Physics* IV 219b1 ff.

[63] It might at first seem that the *Odyssey* presents the opposite. Penelope, after all, steadfastly waited for the return of Odysseus over a period of twenty years, refusing the persistent and aggressive advances of the suitors and any replacement. But Penelope's position is not without ambiguity (cf. e.g. the famous episode in *Odyssey* 18.158–303, which has generated much scholarly controversy. See Wohl 1993: 40). More significantly, the essential question is not 'can anyone be Penelope's husband?' but rather, 'Can Penelope's husband be anyone?' Odysseus, Penelope's husband, is radically replaceable even as he is very well defined (just as, for example, there can be infinity within a precisely defined linear segment, within a set of numbers, etc.). Odysseus is precisely the *un-named* 'man' (*andra*) in the very first, 'thematic' word of the first line of the poem (*Odyssey* 1.1). Furthermore, he is both 'anyone', as he proves from his many assumed identities, and also 'no-one' (*outis*), as he calls himself in the Cyclops episode.

Odysseus'. The opposite is true of the brother: it is precisely this element of time and mortality that is preserved in his irreplaceability, in whose name Antigone dies.[64]

Antigone's 'exchange' involves trading one absolutely irreplaceable thing for another absolutely irreplaceable thing. The structure of her exchange, even as 'objects' are involved, is radically incommensurable. It would require a separate essay, but one could perhaps also argue that it is precisely in this act of giving, in her dying *for* her brother, that Antigone 'reveals to us the line of sight that defines desire'.[65] But for the fact that this is not an exchange, we could say that it is a cause well worth dying *for*.[66]

An important part of the claim here is precisely that Antigone does not die 'for' something inasmuch as by this we mean an exchange of a plus and a minus. Antigone's living death (*entre la vie et la mort*), her tomb *is* her cause, and is, we might say, the structure of her law, the synchrony of her law. She may thus be a figure that 'reveals to us the line of thought that defines desire' and affects *katharsis* (but *not* an Aristotelian *katharsis*) and is thus at the heart of both tragedy and psychoanalysis. Indeed, elsewhere it might even be possible to expand Antigone's commitment to the absolutely unique in Freudian terms of a release from repetition (an idea Freud pursues, for example, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*).

The argument, nevertheless, needs to be taken further, in a direction which is not quite Lacan's. As Granon-Lafont says, we can use the temporal event to differentiate two faces of the Moebius strip, a 'back' and 'front'. But here is the crux. First, the dialectical opposition between 'back' and 'front' would only appear if we approach the Moebius strip as a flat, two-dimensional shape twisted 180 degrees and joined together to form a new, strangely *three-dimensional* object. In other words, the opposition comes into being only if we set out and define this otherwise irreducible reality of space in terms of two dimensions and dialectical oppositions. Yet there is nothing in the inherent geometry of two dimensions that allows us to deduce a third from it as a matter of course. There is no inherent space in flatland. To this we must add a second point, namely that any conceptualization process of this type is,

necessarily, a *temporal/historical* process, a diachronic process. And, a third point, this process only comes into being through the deferral, or elision, of what we might call the real temporal/historical process. The opposition, in other words, is only possible if we map the relationship between the flat two-dimensional strip in a world of opposites and the three-dimensional topological object as two points along a 'timeline', a movement from point 'a' to point 'b', which is itself elided from our consciousness of the object. The same 'object', in other words, exists as at least two different objects in two worlds—but where its essential irreplaceability is elided. The fourth and possibly most important point is an interpolation of the previous elements: We can, of course, given the above, imagine any number of specific coordinates on the Moebius strip which will have a 'front' and 'back' or a 'top' and 'bottom'. The crucial point is this: If, following Butler, 'front' and 'back' are taken as moments of 'negative dialectics' in Lacan's structure, then we have a legitimate critique. This is where the Lacanian reading effects an exclusion. Our suggestion, however, is that we can only mark these places and conceptualize them in this way by conceptualizing the strip as a flat object (our first point), and as one in which time is defined by means of fixed coordinates (the second and third points). This occlusive conceptualization, we might further suggest (although, ultimately, this requires a separate argument), rests on the Aristotelian legacy of defining 'time as number' (Arist. *Physics* IV, 229b), which is guided by an interest in an instrumental notion of diachrony.[67] In contrast, if we view Antigone's law, and the precedence she gives to her brother, and the notion, or structure, of time, from a revised 'topological' perspective, we have a possible outlet, although it is not quite Lacanian.[68]

This chapter is not meant as a discussion of topology. I hope, however, that, with the topological example in the background, it becomes clear why a

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[64] The presentation of brothers in Homer might further support this idea. Agamemnon and Menelaos are not replaceable; neither Odysseus nor Telemachus have brothers, indeed, they are emphatically 'only sons'.

[65] Lacan (1999: 247).

[66] I am, again, thinking here of well-rehearsed arguments about exchange and the gift and, ultimately, of J. Derrida's views, and of his discussion of Patočka and history (effectively—diachrony), for example, in *The Gift of Death* (Derrida 1995), but also in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1999), *Of Hospitality* (2000), *Given Time: Counterfeit Money* (1992), *The Instant of My Death* (2000), and many of his other works.

[67] See above, n. 62. Again, Aristotle argues that where there is no perception of change (in the sense of a perception of movement from one 'number' to another), there is no perception of time. We could at this point introduce Lacan's notion of the 'second death' and its relation to being. In the 'Supplementary Note' to his discussion of Antigone (1999: 285), Lacan says: '...he [Sophocles] situates the hero in a sphere where death encroaches on life, in his relationship, that is, to what I have been calling the second death here. This relationship to being suspends everything that has to do with transformation, with the cycle of generation and decay or with history itself, and it places us on a level that is more extreme than any other insofar as it is directly attached to language as such.

'To put it in the terms of Lévi-Strauss—and I am certain that I am not mistaken in invoking him here, since I was instrumental in having had him reread *Antigone* and he expressed himself to me in such terms—Antigone with relation to Creon finds herself in place of synchrony in opposition to diachrony.'

[68] At stake is a large principle. But we must not forget the pointed materiality of the text nor the *lectio stataria* ('the art of reading slowly', as Jakobson defined philology. See Ziolkowski

critique of the residual 'negative dialectic' embodied in Lacan's notion of kinship and ultimately in his reading of the ethics of *Antigone* is, on the one hand, crucial as a critique of a kind of relationship between synchrony and being that is associated with Lacan. On the other hand, I also hope that we can see that there is a possibility of extracting ourselves from this dialectic, and of reading Antigone's claim and the structure of her exchange differently. What we are suggesting is that we can 'structure' the play *Antigone*, and the figure of Antigone, and Antigone's *atê* topologically, as it were, beyond *atê*.[69] It exposes—perhaps we can use Lacanian words here after all—'the limit that human life can only briefly cross'.[70] It exposes—we can now come back to that word with which we began this chapter, but, as in the Moebius strip, in a different sense—the *simplicity* of the structure of Antigone's claim. We have here, in revised form, a 'pure and simple relationship of the human being to that of which he miraculously happens to be the bearer'.[71]

1990). Discussing the 'limit', Lacan points 'in passing' to lines 48, 70, and 73, in which 'Antigone expresses a kind of idiocy that is apparent at the end of a sentence in the word *metá*' (Lacan 1999: 265). Here are the lines (translation as in the English text of the Seminar):

All ouden autôi tôn emôn <m'> eirgein méta (48)
[in response to the edicts] 'But it has nothing to do *with* my concerns'

Out' an keleusaim' out' an, ei thelois eti
prassein, emou g' an hêdeôs drôiês méta (69–70)
[to Ismene] 'If you wanted to come *with* me now and carry out the sacred task, I would not longer accept you.'

Philê met' autou keisomai, philou méta (73)
'I will lie down, my loving friend, my almost lover, here *with* you.'

There are three components to the argument: the semantics of *méta*, here meaning 'with', but in other constructions also signifying 'after'; grammatical word-order and the usage of *méta* in these lines in inverse position relative to its 'normal' position preceding its case; the metrical, rhythmical-phonetic pattern and the insistent repetition of *méta* at the verse-end, thrice in the space of twenty-five lines. Combined, these three elements can be read as 'in a signifying form, the kind of fierce presence Antigone represents' (Lacan 1999: 265). Adapting Lacan's view as we have, it seems to me that *méta* may repay a yet slower reading (even if that reading seems painfully technical). We might for convenience sake call *méta* a preposition. But, of course, in these lines it is not a *pre*-position at all. Note the accent of this word: it is not oxytone *metá* (i.e. it does not have an acute accent on the last syllable); *méta* is here used in anastrophe, as paroxytone (i.e. with the accent thrown back to the *paenultima*). Twice, in lines 70 and 73, it is a *post*-position (in 70 and 73), which follows its case. In the third instance, in line 48, it is, strictly speaking, a preverb, the elliptic form of an impersonal compound verb (*métesti*). Both post-positional verses, and in a slightly looser way the elliptic verbal usage too, here govern the genitive, which marks the sense 'with', not 'after' ('after' governs the accusative, of course). Lacan points us in a potentially useful direction when he says that '*meta* is, properly speaking, that which implies a break' (1999: 265). Nevertheless, we need to expand and slightly alter this

notion. There is no 'properly speaking' of *meta* (*méta* / *metá*). It is, in truth, a complex word that—almost like the two sides of a Moebius strip—is grammaticalized in multiple forms, through the genitive and accusative cases, as well as the dative, which almost 'mediates' between the two without 'proper' resolution (Cf. *LSJ* B. I.1 [of persons, *among, in company with*]; 2 [of things {*sim.*}]; 3 [of *separate parts* of persons, *between*]. The grammarian's rigid taxonomy, essential as it is, is historically anachronistic (no formalized grammatical theory or taxonomy is attested in Sophocles' time). More significantly, grammatical taxonomy is also inadequate to describe the functions of *meta*, let alone the complex effects consequent, say, to positioning the word *meta* 'after' its case, in verse-terminal position (rather than 'with' its case), or the literal, physical, phonetic 'turning back' of anastrophe, or the ellipsis of the auxiliary *-esti* in the compound verbal usage (cf. Jebb 1996, reprinted 1966: 59, ad loc.). All we can say is that amidst such complex functions there is, indeed, the simple 'idiocy', the 'fierce presence', of a simple act of language: Antigone's repeated, distinct, verse-terminal usage—*méta/ . . . méta/ . . . méta/!* It is, we should add, a typically Sophoclean, perhaps even typically 'tragic', usage (*méta* is verse-terminal in thirteen out of eighteen extant attestations: *Ant.* 48, 70, 73; *Aj.* 160, 256, 950; *OT* 247, 414, 990; *El.* 700; *Ph.* 184, 298, 343, 1110, 1312; *OC* 639, 1636; *Fr.* 479.3. Likewise the word is verse-terminal in the majority of instances in extant Greek tragedy). It's a kind of 'with', *meta*, we might say, that comes 'after' everything, at the end. It is part of a *meta*-physics, if you will (Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is, in the first instance, simply that work which comes *after* the *Physica* and yet works *with* it; it is the philosophical notion of *metaphysics* which evolves especially post-Descartes and Kant through, we might say, an act of retroactive naming). This special kind of *meta* works temporally, bringing to a close the diachronic flow of iambic trimeter verses. And yet, even as this word, *meta*, appears at the end of the line, it does not quite follow the 'law' of linear, spatial sequencing. It transcends the metrical law . . . the law of Aristotelian, arithmetical time and physics, the grammatical law, and so on. *Meta* here partakes of the 'normal,' prepositional use of the word, of the usage that precedes its (grammatical) case. But it also strives 'beyond', it strives 'backwards'. That, it seems to me, is a small, material example of the kind of expansive 'structure', the 'kind of legality', if you will, that we find in Antigone and in *Antigone*, and which, we might suggest, is a suitable structure for ethical action.

[69] Antigone wants to go *ektos âtâs* (*Ant.* 614, 625), to a place, significantly beyond hope (cf. also *Ant.* 330). Lacan says quite explicitly: 'What does it mean to us if Antigone goes beyond the limits of the human? What does it mean if not that her desire aims at the following, the beyond of *Atè*.' (1999: 263; see also 264–5.)

[70] Ibid. 262–3. On the beyond, see e.g. Lacoue-Labarthe (1996–7).

[71] Lacan (1999: 283). Quoted above, n. 22.