

A CULTURAL HISTORY
OF THE HUMAN BODY

IN ANTIQUITY

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Marked Bodies

*Gender, Race, Class, Age, Disability,
and Disease*

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The slipperiness of bodies is not always a laughing matter for those purporting to be their masters. Put the antics of love's victims or errant slaves onstage, however, and ancient Greek and Roman audiences could find considerable pleasure in insubordination. In one comic mime from Hellenistic Greece, a mistress, Bitinna, discovers her pet slave Gastron has been in another woman's bed. The punishment is to be corporal—a thousand lashes on the front, a thousand on the back. Gastron, begging for another chance, is stripped and bound. But at the last minute, Bitinna changes her mind and decides to discipline his body with a more lasting message, a tattoo that plays with the Socratic imperative at the heart of Greek philosophy: "Since although he is human, he doesn't *know himself*, he'll know as soon as he has this inscription on his forehead."¹

The vignette recalls some of the most widespread and controversial ways of understanding marked bodies in recent years. On the one hand, Gastron's tattoo illustrates with uncommon vividness the inscription of the body, a popular idea in poststructuralist accounts of how subjectivity emerges from our embodied experience of sociopolitical regimes of power. These accounts have often emphasized less literal practices of inscription, such as the regulation of diet or sexual practices. Nevertheless, the image of the body as a passive surface subjected to a master discourse has proved to be a lightning rod for debates about the relationship between power, bodies, and selves. Gastron's tattoo may be

seen as literalizing his subjugation to a system of power where his body is not his own. The mark of punishment is equally a sign of subjectivization.

On the other hand, marked bodies can be understood on analogy with marked terms in linguistics, that is, words or forms that depart from the default term. A classic example is gender in language: words like "lioness" or "poetess" or the feminine pronoun seem to flag our attention in a way that the corresponding terms—"lion," "poet," "he" or "his"—do not. Marked terms may expose, as feminist theorists of language have argued, the unspoken assumption that the universal, that is, unmarked, subject of language is not universal at all but masculine. If we entertain the possibility that a similar situation characterizes the classification of ancient bodies, Gastron's tattoo can be seen as signaling another kind of markedness, and, in turn, another problematic universal or norm. In Greco-Roman antiquity, the subjection to torture, whipping, mutilation, rape, and tattooing defines the slave body. In the words of the fourth-century B.C. Athenian orator Demosthenes: "If you wanted to contrast the slave and the freeman, you would find the most important distinction in the fact that slaves are responsible in person (i.e., in body) for all offenses, while freemen, even in the most unfortunate circumstances, can protect their persons."² At Rome, too, class and legal status determines the integrity of individual bodies. Thus, while the *lex Porcia* protected citizens from corporal punishment, slaves could be tattooed or beaten.³ They were available to their masters as passive objects of sexual predation and abuse. Within this ideological framework, historical or mythic-historical outrages against the bodies of senators or free women play the role of exceptions that prove the perverse asymmetries of power under the Empire or outbreaks of political chaos.⁴ Gastron's tattoo, then, might also be seen as materializing the slave body's vulnerability as precisely that which marks it vis-à-vis (unmarked) elite bodies.

The first of the two provisional readings I have just outlined turns on a pair of familiar binary oppositions, namely active-passive and inside-outside: the slave's body is marked by power imposed from outside. The second reading is structured by the tension between norms and deviance. If we bring these two readings together, we might be led to conflate marked bodies in the ancient world with forcibly inscribed bodies, understood either literally or as the stigmatized identities produced by systems of power. In making this connection we would have some support from the ancient evidence. For throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, the normative subject is defined, as we have already begun to see, by his corporeal integrity, embodied signs of self-mastery, and his exercise of mastery over others: all other bodies are defined in opposition to his. While Christianity, with its claim to break down oppositions between Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female,⁵ provides considerable resources for challenges to this axiom, the active male subject remains a remarkably stable model into late antiquity and beyond.

Such categories, however, are less clear-cut in practice, both as they are elaborated in texts and images and, it would seem, at the level of lived bodies. Marks travel across bodies. They appear and disappear in accordance with nature, habit, and time, thus blurring the line between classes of bodies and inviting us to consider the relationship between flesh, identity, and mutability. Not only deviant bodies, but also normative ones are marked by power, although the weight of necessity is unevenly distributed according to class, gender, health, and age. Marks are overdetermined, appropriated, reinterpreted.

Nevertheless, the oppositions that I just introduced (active/passive, inside/outside, normal/object) structure the most pervasive representations and classifications of bodies that are used to discipline corporeal difference and naturalize systems of dominance in the ancient world. They contribute as well to the shape of modern theories of embodied subjects, many of which reach back to the ancient world for inspiration (e.g., Foucault's techniques of power or Bourdieu's *habitus*). The issues raised by Gastron's tattoo thus present a useful point of departure for thinking about the ways in which a concept of marking is apposite to our attempts to grasp how identity could be realized through the body in the ancient Western world.

Given the geographical and chronological scope of the material covered in this overview, together with the limits of space, I have adopted a synchronic approach in the hope that highlighting pervasive themes and problems will do more justice to the evidence than a partial catalogue organized by periodization, culture, or the categories of gender, age, ethnicity, disability, disease, and class. I begin by examining the relationship between normative bodies and the inversions they produce in the name of difference, before taking a closer look at how these social bodies are constructed, maintained, monitored, and destabilized. In the latter part of this overview, I examine in greater detail the fluidity of corporeal identity and how this fluidity affects practices of self-definition and the representation of others.

NORMS AND VIOLATIONS

To define marked bodies as deviations from bodies taken for granted, presumed inviolate, or extrapolated into universality, brings us face to face with a core set of concepts in the production of ancient identities within elite discourses. These discourses both require and create a normative subject: free, male, leisured, in the prime of life, healthy, and native to the geographical zones whose climates uniquely foster Greekness and Romanness. This normative body, while a statistical rarity, is the yardstick of everyone else.

Nowhere is this natural norm more productive of classes of deformity than in Aristotle. Given his role in developing ideas about nature that shore up cultural norms for later antiquity and the Western tradition, a brief examination

of his taxonomy of bodies will be useful. Women are maimed men; children are dwarves; the elderly are near-corpses.⁶ Barbarians are like slaves, slaves are like animals.⁷ The association of corporeal difference with norms and abnormality is the legacy of Aristotelian taxonomy. The pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*, for example, explains the curly hair and “bandy legs” of Ethiopians on analogy with planks “warped” by the sun.⁸ Another staunch defender of nature’s will to perfection, the second-century A.D. physician Galen, put it like this. Achilles is beautiful absolutely; an ape can never compare (although he must be compared).⁹ While an ape may, in fact, be beautiful qua ape, in the end he remains a grotesque double of Achilles. And yet, that ape is similar enough to Achilles to serve as his anatomical surrogate (Galen vivisected apes). Thus, while, on the sliding scale of Aristotle’s biology, all difference is deterioration, bodies are surprisingly interchangeable.

For Aristotle, monstrosities such as slaves and women are natural in that they have a purpose, namely to deal with *all* bodies—including those of free males—and their reproduction. It is important, however, not to conflate the functions of these deviant types. “The female and the slave are distinguished in nature,” Aristotle tells us, “for she . . . makes each thing for a single use.”¹⁰ Keeping bodies in their proper places is part of being a master: while women bear young, slaves are meant to labor on behalf of their masters, run their households, and attend to their physical needs, a muted symbiosis made uncomfortably clear in the case of one Domitius Tullus, a wealthy paralytic who complained of having to lick the fingers of his slaves every day when they brushed his teeth for him.¹¹

Other monstrosities, however, such as deformed babies, are deemed by Aristotle to be useless to the community and would be exposed by law in an ideal state.¹² What we know of the fate of Roman slaves themselves in need of care indicates that their masters shared Aristotle’s pragmatism. The Roman moralist Cato recommends selling off sick and old slaves along with worn-out tools and oxen, a practice that looks almost humane in light of the reality intimated by a first-century A.D. Roman law requiring masters to abandon, rather than kill, their infirm slaves.¹³

Thus, in dividing bodies into human and subhuman, Aristotle also ranges them according to functions, the highest function being the exercise of reason, the lower ones having to do with the labors of the body (and the lowest “function” being the lack of functionality altogether). As a result, as there are two ways of being beautiful, there are two ways of being healthy. Menstruation, for Aristotle, is the mark of a healthy female body. With other medical writers, he saw amenorrhea as a sign of a blocked uterus or constricted vessels—dangerous and potentially deadly conditions.¹⁴ Indeed, most female ailments were blamed on their reproductive system until the Hellenistic and imperial periods, when physicians began to fold female bodies more snugly into the

male model, without abandoning the importance of the uterus.¹⁵ But while menstruation is healthy from one perspective, it also indicates to Aristotle an essential difference between male and female bodies. Unlike men, women are unable, for a variety of reasons, to concoct excess blood, a residue of nourishment, into seed, with the result that the excess is evacuated as menses.¹⁶ For Aristotle, menstruation is also, then, a symptom of the weakness of the female body and its inability to contribute anything but matter—the seed being responsible for delivering form—to the embryo.¹⁷ This weakness, associated with formlessness and the rule of the passions, expresses the natural inferiority of women. While Aristotle's views on menstruation and conception were not universally accepted, his naturalization of women's need to be ruled essentially was. "Women," writes the elder Seneca four centuries later in Rome, where, as in Athens, agency was phallic, "were born to be penetrated."¹⁸

On the one hand, then, all bodies should be *capable* of performing the functions deemed natural to them, with the most vulnerable (infants, slaves) becoming expendable should they fail to do so. Ideally, this capability should be evident. Soranus, a physician from the early imperial period, offers a checklist for parents to determine if a child is worth rearing: he should have a strong cry; he should be complete, and not sluggish, in all his parts; he should not have any orifices obstructed; he should have an appropriate size and shape; his joints should bend; and his entire body should be sensitive to the touch.¹⁹ Another imperial-age physician, Rufus of Ephesus, wrote a book on buying slaves, with instructions on how to detect potential liabilities.²⁰ What matters is use value: the *Digest* of Justinian, a Roman legal compendium from late antiquity, declares that a slave with one eye or one jaw larger than the other is healthy, so long as he can use what he has properly.²¹

On the other hand, like the female body, even the healthy slave body should give evidence that confirms its (lowly) position on the scale of beings. One Greek treatise on physiognomy (see below) correlates corporeal signs, such as immobile or hunched shoulders, with a naturally slavish soul, and Aristotle himself believes that nature would like to distinguish the bodies of the free from the bodies of slaves.²² Whether nature always gets what it wants is another story, to which we will return.

The corollary to naturally inferior bodies is the master's body. For one of the most important tasks of the normative male subject is to exercise control over those beneath him (women, slaves, children), just as the soul is entrusted with the control of the body.²³ This task requires a uniquely male bodily constitution characterized by a robust innate heat and a tendency toward dryness, qualities that produce signs, such as beards or hairy chests, that mark men out as natural masters actively fulfilling their function as masters. The paradox of unhealthy health represented by deviant bodies disappears. Instead, signs of weakness or passivity, such as a "womanly" knock-kneed walk,²⁴ indicate that

a man is *failing* to fulfill his proper function. He thus becomes another pathological specimen, but a troubling one, given that his passivity is unnatural. The unmanly man forfeits his innate right to *transcend* his body in the exercise of reason and power. Consequently, Aristotle speaks of him as corrupted by body, that is, a man in whom the intentions of nature have come to naught.²⁵

To return, then, to the opposition between marked and unmarked: Aristotle clearly takes the male body for granted as a universal and assumed norm, just as he takes for granted the masculine subject behind the ostensibly generic word *anthrôpos*. In this he was not alone in Greco-Roman antiquity. Ann Ellis Hanson has trenchantly suggested, for example, that early medical writers thought the womb wandered through a woman's body—causing a host of debilitating symptoms—because it had no home in a man's.²⁶ And we could ask for perhaps no clearer illustration of the Romans' social and economic investment in exempting the non-free from the human norm than a custom associated with the festival of the Compitalia. Households, hoping to slake the thirst of the underworld gods for real bodies, would represent their members with two classes of woolen effigy, corresponding to the two classes of family members: dolls for the free persons, balls for the slaves.²⁷

We saw earlier that unmarked terms in language tend to suggest the idea of universals, which are challenged only when marked alternatives come to light. Yet it has also been suggested that the unmarked subject of language enjoys invisibility precisely because language may be disembodied: unencumbered by the body's needs, limitations, and particularities, the subject, especially of philosophical or scientific discourse, is free to pursue universal truths. While Aristotle is committed to the incorporeal nature of mind (*nous*), the ethical virtues and practices of reason are, for him, both grounded in and expressed through bodies. These bodies should *look* like rational agents, not like shapeless woolen masses. The body lacking in articulation is the marker of the barbarian, the effeminate, the child, the sick—those without the capacity to realize the human form fully.

There *is* no unmarked lived body in Greco-Roman antiquity, then, that is analogous to the male pronoun. However natural the right to mastery is, it must be recursively realized by free male bodies moving in a public field of vision. Moreover, one can never take it for granted in oneself—hence, the need for ethics and other techniques of self-mastery from the late fifth century onward. The normative body is not a state of being, but a collection of behaviors and visible signs. It is continually distinguished from its opposites and in danger of sliding into them.

Where do these signs come from? Are they truly symptoms of a hidden nature? Imposed from without? Forcibly inscribed or voluntarily assumed? Indelible or transitory? Fictional or lived? I would like to move beyond Aristotle at this point to take a closer look at the relationship between corporeal signs

and character in other contexts before exploring challenges to the assumed isomorphism of bodies and identities.

LEGIBLE BODIES: ICONICITY AND SEMIOTICS

The idea that one's character, and hence one's nature, is realized in the public body recurs throughout archaic and classical Greek culture and well into later antiquity. Bodies in Homer's *Iliad* are ideally transparent, their appearance an index of the gods' affection. Agamemnon looks to Priam "like a kingly man," while the rabble-rousing Thersites is bowlegged and hunched.²⁸ In Book 13, the Cretan fighter Idomeneus uses the example of an ambush as an occasion where the coward and the brave man "show themselves clearly."²⁹ The heroic body proclaims control. The coward's skin, on the other hand, turns color; his pounding heart is mirrored in his shifty feet; his teeth chatter. The somatic type of the barbarian on the Attic stage is characterized by cowardice and lack of restraint, while those portrayed as fearful on vase paintings encompass the familiar range of Others—women, children, foreign peoples, and the elderly.³⁰

Idomeneus's idea that certain situations are tests of character suggests, however, that the corporeal surface is less than transparent. Moreover, one of epic's greatest heroes, Odysseus, is known for violating the principle of iconicity with his talent for disguise and transformation.³¹ Nonetheless, the commitment to the Iliadic ideal soldiers on in the aristocratic ethos as the principle of *kalokagathia*—the fusion of a beautiful body and a noble character—and its opposites.³² Victoria Wohl has argued that in the fifth century, *kalokagathia* informs the idealized self that structures the collective identity of the Athenian citizenry as masters of empire.³³ To the extent that this aristocratic corporeal ideal succeeds as a point of psychic identification for the non-aristocratic Athenian citizen (e.g., the cobbler or the farmer), Wohl suggests it conceals the very real class differences that troubled the democracy. The idealized body of the citizen also gains definition through being opposed to others, such as the Persian or, as the citation from Demosthenes at the beginning of this chapter suggested, the slave.³⁴

In the latter part of the fifth century, *kalokagathia* gains support as a contributor to ethnic self-identity from naturalizing medical theories that look to material causes, such as the hot and the cold, rather than divine favor or disfavor, to explain the alliance of character with appearance. The author of the treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* argues that both the characters and the bodies of whole races are determined by their common environment and transmitted through heredity, a theory that helps secure what Benjamin Isaac recently called proto-racism in the ancient world.³⁵ Unchanging and wet climates are especially damning. The medical author argues, for example, that people dwelling near the Phasis river have fat, lumpy bodies, just like the local fruit, which

is stunted and "womanish" (i.e., porous and soggy).³⁶ The Phasians, like the Scythians described several chapters later, are mirror images of classical Greek sculpture's taut, muscled men.³⁷ Their ill-defined bodies allegedly signify laziness, cowardice, and thick-wittedness. Natives of less temperate climates exhibit, on the contrary, tensile bodies, along with courage and intelligence. In the environmental determinism adopted by Aristotle and, later, Hellenistic and Roman writers, the right to empire comes to be explicitly underwritten by the respective climates nurturing Greeks and Romans; other ethnic groups are thought to grow up in lands that breed slavishness.³⁸

Yet whether bodies conform to the categories of the master and the mastered because of the gods or nature, the principle of total conformity is rarely upheld outside of the shared fantasies that sustain ideological commitments to dominance. In practice, extrapolating character from bodily features requires a semiotics. If, in archaic Greek poetry, the weightiest sign of a community's health is the son who looks like his father,³⁹ the art of physiognomy is an open acknowledgment that no one, so to speak, much resembles his father. The author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomica*, our earliest extant physiognomic treatise, written in the Peripatetic tradition in the late fourth or early third century B.C., adopts the premise that the body, and especially the face and the eyes, are in fundamental sympathy with the soul. Hence, they will betray its true nature and dispositions.⁴⁰ From that premise, he develops a classification of corporeal signs according to which any individual may be judged as healthy or sick, that is, more or less *fit to rule*.

Physiognomy breaks the iconic male body down into its component parts and assigns them values. Lapses in masculinity are weighted as feminine, for in both the Greek and Roman discourses of elite male self-fashioning, anxieties about class and ethnicity tend to find expression in the language of gender. The taxonomy of bodies is thus formalized as a continuum of decreasing masculinity, which Maud Gleason has described as "an achieved state, radically underdetermined by anatomical sex."⁴¹

At the same time, every body contains elements of its categorical opposite, so that "something masculine" and "something feminine" can be found in both male and female bodies. As a result, masculinity is rarely diagnosed by a single sign. Rather, the physiognomist uses all the signs available to construct an "overall impression" (*epiprepeia*). He then views this artful edifice as if it were a "seal of the whole," although he may concede that this seal "does not provide an account in its own right, but each sign in itself, both those in the eyes and the others, together comprise the whole appearance of the man; for when all these have been gathered together the reliable truth emerges."⁴² By determining the prevailing quality, a physiognomist can identify true masculinity.

Bodies are basically incoherent sites of identity, then, to the untrained eye. Another way of putting this would be to say that they become legible only in

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the presence of readers. And given that elite masculine identity is so tied to the exercise of power, it comes as no surprise that in practice diagnosing manliness was a high-stakes game in the agonistic public arenas of the ancient world.⁴³ In a fine fourth-century B.C. specimen of political sabotage, the rhetor Aeschines accuses a rival, Timarchus, of indulging in excessive pleasures and, more specifically, for-hire, passive homosexual sex, the most feminizing transgression in ancient Athens.⁴⁴ In his speech, Aeschines recalls a time when Timarchus threw off his cloak in the assembly. The body revealed was so misshapen by debauchery that those present covered their faces in shame, performing the emotion that Timarchus himself could no longer muster.⁴⁵ But whereas Aeschines assumes a body laid bare before a group of citizen judges, the physiognomist always suspects dissembling: "As to those who are not able to keep their eyes straight or their brows level, but have trembling in them along with a look that moves slightly—these are androgynous, but make an effort to be men."⁴⁶ The surface of the body is thus the site of both the truth and a cover-up perpetuated as a form of self-defense in a hostile and charged public arena.

Dissonance between the inside and the outside of a body is itself cued as feminine in the Greco-Roman, and later the Christian, traditions, from Pandora, the original "beautiful evil," to the made-up woman of Ovid's elegies, whose creams and paints screen the lover from the naked and unbearable truths of the female body, to the whores who, according to Tertullian, sin against God with every circle of rouge and every lengthened eyelash.⁴⁷ Anxieties about deceptive surfaces assume some kind of human interference in the production of corporeal signs. Instead of the soul automatically marking its nature onto the visible body, a wily, feminine mind gets between truth and its revelation. The practice of physiognomy means being able to sort out the false signs from the true ones. The famed Stoic Cleanthes, for example, identified a hairy man garbed in rustic gear as a passive homosexual, a *cinaedus*, by his sneeze.⁴⁸

In the case of Cleanthes, the *cinaedus*'s attempts at masculinity may be dismissed as so many ruses. Yet other influential discourses vested in policing masculinity in Greco-Roman antiquity openly recognize elite men as active participants in shaping their bodies. Whereas physiognomy seeks to expose the scandal of two genders in a single deviant specimen, elite education (*paideia*) and its recursive enactment in ethical self-mastery presume the schism between male bodies and masculinity as a necessary gap within *all* elite men. These arts find their *raison d'être* in the belief that this innate uncertainty can be managed. Pleasures in classical Athens were to be carefully regulated, lest the male citizen become their slave and descend into the lethargy and cowardice of the barbarian. Emotions, too, required restraint. Gestures of mourning in Athenian vase painting are sharply distinguished for adult males—who exhibit coordinated, simple gestures—and women, who may be joined in their disarray by children and old men, that is, those outside the parameters of normative masculinity,⁴⁹

while on Attic gravestones, the bodies of slaves sometimes perform the emotion denied to citizen mourners.⁵⁰ Plato's *Protagoras*, in the eponymous dialogue, embeds the regulation of virtue in corporeal discipline: "People send their sons to a trainer, that having improved their bodies they may perform the orders of their minds, which are now in fit condition, and that they may not be forced by bodily faults to play the coward in wars and other duties."⁵¹ Indeed, management of the body through diet and exercise was often seen as critical to keeping the soul in the proper condition—dry, warm, rarefied—for rational self-mastery and the mastery of others.⁵²

The imperative to train oneself in masculinity appears with equal force in the medical, ethical, and rhetorical treatises of late Republican Rome and the first centuries A.D. Much attention has been paid in recent years to Greco-Roman theorists of elite education, who aim to inculcate political ideology in the register of the body through training in deportment, gesture, and voice. These writers target the physiognomic signs of masculinity not only as symptoms but also as sites of active production. The "good man" (*vir bonus*) has a steady gait; an erect, but comfortable demeanor; and a direct gaze; flamboyance is avoided at all costs.⁵³ Authority reverberates through a deep voice, while a high-pitched tone signals cowardice and sexual incontinence.⁵⁴ Yet this voice required training, as well as adequate diet, walks, and sexual abstinence. Failing this care, it might atrophy into the soft squeak of a woman, a eunuch, or an invalid.⁵⁵ The voice was an instrument of the soul, an index of self-control: "Shouting at high pitch . . . it has in it something unbecoming a free man, a quality that is more suited to female screaming than to speech of manly dignity."⁵⁶ Gesture, too, is subject to stringent regulations in Cicero and Quintilian, who helpfully offers a list of appropriate hand movements.⁵⁷

At any moment, however, with a servile shrug of the shoulders, a stagy expression of emotion, or a glance that solicits or promises a favor, the public male body might be seen to lapse into the corporeal habits of its opposites.⁵⁸ Yet discourses dedicated to the self-formation of a public persona were also acutely aware that the lapse could also simply be an off-key note in the performance of masculinity. The student of rhetoric's uncanny double is the actor, whose melodrama is to be deplored but who remains a seductive model for learning how to mimic one's true nature.⁵⁹ Anxiety about deceit does not, then, disappear from the semiotics of masculinity. Rather, within the practice of self-mastery, that anxiety creates a kernel of uncertainty about which signs are natural and which are artificial.

We have seen, then, that not only is a roster of marks required to identify the normative, unmarked body, but these marks may be controlled and produced by the embodied subject. These discourses of *askesis*, that is, self-training, in both Greece and Rome are directed toward free men, who alone are seen as capable of achieving full selfhood.⁶⁰ Can we conclude from this that, for he-

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gemonic subjects, the power to mark the body in the manner befitting a free man lies entirely within the self? In Foucault's last two published volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, which examine the practices of elite self-fashioning in Athens and Rome, he, in fact, treats the techniques of the self elaborated by antiquity's major regulatory discourses as facilitating the exercise of freedom. The very labor of this project—"intentional and voluntary"—challenges the notion of passive inscription suggested earlier by Gastron's tattoo.⁶¹

Classical scholars, however, have in turn contested the idea of creative self-marking, emphasizing how unstable elite masculinity functions as a political and psychic liability, as we saw was the case, for example, in Aeschines's *Against Timarchus*.⁶² Moreover, it is not simply the subject who marks himself. Marking begins from infancy. Wet nurses were advised, according to Soranus's *Gynecology*, to "mold every part according to its natural shape" and to swaddle the baby in such a way as to give it "firmness and an undistorted figure" in accordance with its sex; Plato thought the expectant mother might, through exercise, form the fetus properly in the womb.⁶³ Soranus also includes instructions for tying the male infant's foreskin over the glans to ensure it will stay there in adult life.⁶⁴ (Both Greeks and Romans found the exposed glans unnatural and offensive—it is barbarian characters who are circumcised in Attic Comedy⁶⁵—just as they reviled too large a member.) These external, social pressures are inextricable from acts of self-creation: Paul of Aegina, a physician active in Alexandria in the seventh century A.D., includes instructions for the surgical reduction of overly large breasts in a man, "which bring the reproach of femininity."⁶⁶ Another operation was de-circumcision, undertaken by Jews seeking assimilation in cultures that insisted on civic inspections of the young male body (Hellenistic Alexandria) and transacted business in the public baths (imperial Rome).⁶⁷ The daily life of men was presumably composed of such operations at the micro level.

The divergence of these modern interpretive strategies—Foucault's and that of classicists inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler—faithfully reproduces the ambivalence of ancient authors regarding the scope and the power of self-invention, as we will see further. But both approaches, in any case, recognize marks of identity as unstable. In a myriad of ways, the ancient writers do, too, despite their strident appeals to nature. It is worth examining briefly the reasons they give for the instability of embodied identity, before taking a look at the implications of this instability for the materialization of specifically nonnormative identities.

LABILE MATTERS: METAMORPHOSIS AND MIMESIS

We have seen that physiognomy acknowledges the presence of both masculine and feminine elements in a given character. The stigmatized *androgunoi*,

men-women, exaggerate this innate indeterminateness. Explanations of how such figures come to be reflect the fundamental sexual difference that is constitutive of human life according to the medical models that persist through the Middle Ages. Lactantius, writing early in the fourth century A.D., traces internally conflicted natures to accidents befalling the seed in the womb: "When it chances that a seed from a male parent falls into the left part of the uterus, the opinion is that a male is begotten, but since it is conceived in the female part, it suffers some female characteristics to hold sway in it more than its masculine splendor: either a beautiful figure, or exceeding whiteness or lightness of the body, or delicate limbs, or short stature, or a soft voice, or a weak mind." Female seed falling to the right side of the uterus may produce a woman marked by something masculine—strong limbs, height, ruddy complexion, a hairy face, an unlovely countenance, a heavy voice, or a daring spirit.⁶⁸ Not all ancient writers believe that women contribute seed,⁶⁹ although the left side of the womb may still cause trouble for the male fetus. Those writers who do believe in a female contribution of seed, who are in the majority in late antiquity, think that indeterminate sex may also be due to the unsuccessful mixtures of male and female seed, the latter naturally weaker and less defined.⁷⁰ Aristotle traces a number of congenital deformities to Pyrrhic victories in the womb, when (male) form does not completely master its (female) material, or when the heat necessary to imprint that form is in some way defective.⁷¹ Female embryos are formed through similar failures.⁷²

All embryos, then, take shape on the battlefield of the sexes. Moreover, the small body that emerges is resolutely composite in its mixture of different fluids and qualities (hot, cold, wet, dry), with the result that it harbors the potential for multiple identities. The very process of aging ensures that these will be played out. Most Greco-Roman writers imagine that the body grows increasingly colder with the onset of years, although they differ on whether it grows dryer or wetter.⁷³ Either way, aging is seen as a process of degeneration, as the body loses its tautness and form.⁷⁴ Women have something of a head start, since the ostensibly poorer quality of their flesh makes them take shape more slowly in the womb and age faster than men once outside it.⁷⁵

The failure to maintain the body's proper constitution may also induce change. In a fourth-century B.C. medical treatise, for example, we find a case involving two widows. Many of the early medical writers saw sex as critical to keeping passages open and excess fluids moving in the female body. In the case of the widows, their celibacy is seen to result in the onset of masculine traits (deep voices, shaggy beards).⁷⁶ Under such circumstances, however, masculinity is pathological: unable to menstruate, the women die through a failure to achieve either gender.⁷⁷ The outcome is unsurprising insofar as incoherent identities, as we have seen, are viewed by regulatory disciplines as pathological, if not always fatal. Seneca, modifying the Greco-Roman *topos* that makes

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Both the transformation of the widows and the change to the Roman matrons' nature confirms the body as responsive to habit and practice, although with negative results in both cases. The malleability of the body is arguably even more damaging to men. When the Christian moralist Clement of Alexandria attacks men who depilate, he argues that removing hair, a key indication of a man's innate heat,⁷⁹ will, in fact, *cause* effeminacy: "If such people do not decontaminate themselves by getting rid of these embellishments, they cease to enjoy sound health and decline in the direction of greater softness until they play the woman's part."⁸⁰ Transformation may require even less work. Two centuries later, another Christian moralist, John Chrysostom, comes out against the cohabitation of male ascetics and female virgins on the grounds that feminine habits and speech might "rub off" on the men's souls.⁸¹ Perception for these thinkers presents a particular danger, for the percipient is always at risk of being contaminated and seduced by images that are always peeling off of other bodies, according to materialist theories of perception developed in the fifth century B.C. So John worries, too, about what impact images of harlots might have on an otherwise virtuous man's soul; the concern about the mechanisms of vision is echoed by Tertullian in his arguments against women going without the veil.⁸² All bodies turn out to be receptive, vulnerable, and promiscuous in their interactions with the external world. Such a world poses a threat to paternity. That the queen of Ethiopia could give birth to a lily-white daughter is explained in Heliodorus's *Ethiopian Story* by the fact that she was looking at a portrait of the fair-skinned Andromeda while the king made love to her.⁸³ Children, whom Galen likened to wax,⁸⁴ were particularly susceptible to imprints, not only the orthopedics of elite subject formation but also the evil eye and the poor habits of their minders, who were often foreign slaves.⁸⁵ The second-century A.D. sophist Favorinus warned of slavishness and barbarity being passed on to the child through the wet nurse's milk.⁸⁶

The fluid relationship between inside and outside lies behind fears of mimesis in the ancient world. "Repeated imitation," Quintilian opined, arguing against the impersonation of lesser bodies (women, slaves, and so on), "passes into habit."⁸⁷ Plato famously bans citizens of his ideal city from imitating women—and the traits and behaviors associated with them, such as cowardice and grief—on stage (or off) and leaves acting to those already degraded (slaves and foreigners).⁸⁸ At Rome, actors, who were in most cases slaves or freedmen, were classed with others whose bodies were not their own (prostitutes, criminals, gladiators, slaves) and could be legally beaten. Mimes are mocked as womanish by pagans and church fathers alike.⁸⁹

Mimesis, then, is a powerful instrument of transformation. As such, however, it might also enable desired becomings. The myth of Iphis, told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is that of a baby girl spared exposure by her mother's decision to disguise and raise her as a boy. Growing up, she falls in love with a female playmate, to whom she is eventually betrothed by her unwitting father. As the marriage approaches, with its promise to unveil the sexed body, Iphis prays to Isis to make her body confirm her life's performance thus far and is granted her wish. The description of the transformation attends not to anatomy but to the public corporeal signs of masculinity—a longer stride, darker face, increased strength and vigor, sharper features, and shorter hair.⁹⁰ Iphis's metamorphosis thus locates divine authentication of her gender at the most contested corporeal sites.

The most provocative mimeses of masculinity are found in the stories of cross-dressing female saints, defiant female martyrs, and militant virgins in the first centuries of Christianity. Embodied identity was an electrified zone in the early churches. Certainly from one perspective, Christianity resolutely denied naturalized hierarchies, as well as the signs through which they materialized: Christians were made, not born. The rite of baptism, for example, stressed the dissolution of the differences (in ethnicity, status, gender) that were so central to social hierarchies in the ancient world. Like the plain and inexpensive *himation* adopted in classical Athenian democratic iconography,⁹¹ the simple garment assumed after baptism marked a leveling of rank and thus stood in diametrical opposition to the Roman toga, a clear signifier of social and political power.⁹² The sign of the cross affirmed baptism's enduring power and thus superseded the bodily mark of the covenant between God and the Jewish people, which was now seen as a false barrier between fellow Christians.⁹³ For Paul had declared that "neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation," insisting that circumcision was henceforth spiritual, rather than physical.⁹⁴ Bodies were to be transformed at the level of thoughts and desires, a domain available to all Christians. In one Coptic text, the young Mary is imagined as a model of autonomy, controlled not by men but by the "holy thought" inside of her.⁹⁵ A female slave might become a vessel of divine strength in order to stare down the wild animals of the Roman arena.⁹⁶

In its challenge to conventional social ordering, early Christianity democratized the promise of self-mastery. Yet, even within the church, the nature of this challenge was complex. More fraught than the transformation of circumcision into a metaphor or the elimination of class differences was the question of sexual difference. Paul had declared the uniformity of baptized bodies. But when the women of Corinth saw fit to discard their veils in celebration of this androgyny, he reaffirmed the principle of sexual asymmetry—"a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man . . . that is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head"⁹⁷—and

sought confirmation of the custom in corporeal signs, citing women's "naturally" long hair as prescriptive. Nevertheless, Paul seems to have allocated a significant amount of responsibility to women and worked alongside them on egalitarian terms in the early days of the Church.⁹⁸ Moreover, sexuality could be renounced, and female virgins, as well as continent widows, were powerful figures in the early churches. By holding aloof from sex, they set themselves on equal footing with men, a status they sometimes sought to confirm by rejecting the marks of their gender, as was the case with women who stood unveiled, or hoped to see confirmed by a higher power. For example, although cross-dressing was a pragmatic decision for women wishing to join ascetic communities, the transformations that it entailed were complex. For, often a woman's decision to adopt men's clothing or cut her hair, as the female saint Thecla does to follow Paul,⁹⁹ is both a prelude to, and sign of, her body's repudiation of femininity. When Hilaria, daughter of the Byzantine emperor Zeno, assumes the appearance of, first, a knight, then a monk to become an ascetic in Egypt, her initial metamorphosis is echoed by the shriveling of her breasts and her amenorrhea.¹⁰⁰ A martyr's embrace of masculine courage might also eliminate the telltale signs of femininity. As the day of her death approaches, Perpetua, a young citizen wife martyred in 203 A.D., dreams she becomes a man in order to wrestle dragons in the arena; her breasts stop yielding milk for her baby, about whom she ceases to feel anxiety.¹⁰¹

To become "like a man" in these cases is, from the perspective of marked and unmarked bodies, to lose gender. Yet the evidence of this achievement still requires the signs of gender.¹⁰² If we imagine that the tattoo Bitinna wishes to place on Gastron's forehead in Herodas's mime is, in fact, the Socratic imperative "know yourself," at a basic level this is a demand, addressed to both hegemonic and stigmatized subjects, to know one's place. Knowing one's place, however, depends at least in part on the signs through which any identity is created and sustained. For even though marks themselves might circulate, appear, or disappear, individual bodies necessarily materialize only through legible marks and categories.

There remains the possibility that figures seeking to gain freedom from their gendered identities might invite the charge of teratology or criminality instead of indexing an unsexed soul.¹⁰³ Tertullian, for example, insisted that virgins at Carthage wear veils "unless a virgin is some monstrous third sex with her own head,"¹⁰⁴ while the *Codex Theodosianus* barred women with short hair from entering churches.¹⁰⁵ Tertullian's insistence that virgins wear veils, like Bitinna's desire to mark her slave-lover with a sign of her choosing, emphasizes the complex relationship between self-marking and the desire to mark others as a means of control. I would like to return to the question of the control of others, but it is first worth taking a closer look at the ways in which one can manipulate marks to affirm or to contest distinctions of gender, class, and ethnicity.

MOBILE SIGNS: FROM CLOTHING TO PLACARDS

The semiotic power of the veil and the *pallium* bespeak the importance of clothing and other forms of adornment as markers of status and identity. The manly (*virilis*) toga is the quintessential Roman garment, which could be worn only by (male) citizens. Its symbolic power was, as a result, considerable. Freedmen often chose to depict themselves and their freeborn children in togas on funerary monuments.¹⁰⁶ Its counterpart was the *stola*, a long, sleeveless white garment worn by citizen women over a tunic that, together with woolen bands (*vittae*) binding the hair and the *palla*, a rectangular cloth covering the head, signified the integrity of both the wearer's body and the household it represented.¹⁰⁷ By the end of the Republic, however, these garments were not always donned in daily life.¹⁰⁸ Augustus attempts to revive their use as part of his renewal of traditional Roman morality, by making it illegal, for example, for a Roman citizen to enter the Forum sans toga and establishing clothing as an integral feature of imperial iconography.¹⁰⁹ Freeborn children of both sexes wore the *toga praetexta*, whose purple border marked the wearer as sexually inviolate—slaves of any age were considered penetrable—and the *bulla*, an apotropaic amulet that was another popular symbol for freedmen to adopt on their children's funerary monuments.¹¹⁰

From the fourth to sixth centuries A.D., however, the basic dress template shifted together with the changing dynamics of power in the Empire; the toga and the traditional Roman tunic were gradually replaced with long-sleeved, snugly fitted tunics and leggings or trousers—precisely the garments that once marked the barbarian in the eyes of the Romans.¹¹¹ A law passed in 399 A.D. banning leggings and a certain kind of foreign boot (*tzangae*) from the city of Rome has the air of a belated and futile gesture:¹¹² fashions were changing in favor of the erstwhile barbarian. Of course, in the trade hubs and imperial capitals across the ancient world, cosmopolitanism among the elites had frequently favored the import over the homegrown, making a hard line between native and barbarian difficult to uphold.¹¹³ Indeed, this line is difficult to uphold within barbarian groups.¹¹⁴

The difficulty of wearing the toga—the rhetorical textbooks provide extensive instruction in keeping them appropriately draped¹¹⁵—underscores the inextricability of clothing from deportment. Already in Homeric poetry, we can observe a relationship between class and ease of movement in female dress, with the most constraining garments reserved for the wealthiest women. Keeping a toga clean was, in itself, a considerable amount of work, and dark clothing is associated with the poor throughout antiquity, albeit for a host of ideological reasons. On the stage of New Comedy, poverty is cued by the small cloaks of slaves, which allow them to move freely in the service of others.¹¹⁶ The contrast between leisure and labor was underscored further by the use of

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labor-intensive cloths, such as linen, and detailing for high-status garments.¹¹⁷ Indeed, some of the highest markers of status in the ancient world cue the difficulty required to produce and obtain them. Here we can point to the elaborate hairstyles of Roman and late antique women, which required a fleet of hair-dressing slaves (*ornatrices*);¹¹⁸ Byzantine silk, a favorite luxury for ascetics to give up, was expensive and labor-intensive;¹¹⁹ the purples that marked Roman senatorial dress and, from the time of Constantine, were associated exclusively by the imperial family, were notoriously difficult to produce.

At the same time, however, the interchangeability of clothing points to the contingency of social status, its ungroundedness in the body. The archaic Greek lyric poet Anacreon grumbles about a man who once went about with “buttons of wood hung in his ears for rings, and the hide of a threadbare ox scrubbed from a cast-off shield,” and now parades down the street with “gold on his arms, gold on his neck.”¹²⁰ (Characteristically the charge of luxury carries with it the charge of effeminacy—“like some dame in some society,” Anacreon continues). Romans like to tell themselves stories of slaves who loyally put on their masters’ clothing in order to be killed in their places during times of turmoil.¹²¹ Aristophanes’s *Frogs* plays on the way in which the right to corporeal integrity may be traded as a piece of clothing: the god Dionysus is beaten in place of his slave as soon as he assumes the slave’s costume.¹²² Clothing is key to persuasive, and indeed, too persuasive, mimesis: in late antiquity, it was illegal for actresses to dress as nuns or members of the royal family.¹²³

Scent, too, is an ambiguous sign. A Roman aristocrat in hiding might be betrayed by his perfume, as in the case of Lucius Plotius, who had been proscribed by the Triumvirate.¹²⁴ Yet anyone with money could purchase the scent of power.¹²⁵ As a result, among Roman elites in particular, perfume was a topic that inspired ambivalence. Indeed, scent, which often traveled to Rome from the eastern regions of the Empire, could be denounced as barbarian and feminine, and Pliny, who reports the story of Lucius Plotius with distaste, goes so far as to pronounce such an unguent wearer worthy of death.¹²⁶ Seneca insists that in the old days, true Romans smelled like warfare, hard work, and manliness,¹²⁷ although the vast quantities of perfume bottles yielded by archaeologists suggest that few people were willing to go *au naturel* when it came to scent.¹²⁸ Slaves and the lower classes, on the other hand, are said to smell.

Like clothing and scent, posture and position are also fluid markers of identity. With the passage of the law of Roscius Otho in 67 B.C., for example, knights in the public theatre were distinguished by where they sat (in the fourteen rows behind the patricians); later, men were separated from women, the young from the old, and married from unmarried, and senators were given reserved seats.¹²⁹ At private Roman banquets, the arrangement of different types of bodies acts as a visible marker of status: free men recline, while slaves usually stand at attention, their taut readiness contrasted with their master’s

leisurely posture.¹³⁰ The flexibility of these marks of difference means that free elite men may themselves be compelled to sit or stand as a result of a loss of status. Caligula, for example, is reported to have made senators stand while he dined and dress in tunics girt at the waist—a style so indicative of low status that, according to Philo, if freeborn men served as part of a communal duty, they deliberately left their tunics ungirt.¹³¹

The risk here is that, pace theories of natural hierarchies, without clothing or scent or deportment, bodies run together. The “Old Oligarch,” writing in fifth-century B.C. Athens, complains that he cannot exercise his citizen right to violence because he fears hitting blindly: so far as clothing and general appearance are concerned, citizens look just the same as slaves and foreigners.¹³² Even Aristotle admits that the body’s tendency to blur form makes free men end up looking slavish, and slavish men free.¹³³ The ease with which the slave body blends in is quietly attested by the degree of detail (tall, skinny, clean-shaven, with a [small] wound on the left side of the head, honey-complexioned, rather pale, with a wispy beard—in fact, with no hair at all to his beard—smooth-skinned, narrow in the jaws, long-nosed . . .) in papyri notices of runaway slaves from Roman Egypt.¹³⁴ Michele George has pointed out that stories of masters disguising themselves as slaves in Rome focus more attention on the concealment of the markers of elite identity than on the adoption of markers of slave identity.¹³⁵ While helots at Sparta were forced to wear low-class dress (animal hides, dogskin caps),¹³⁶ in societies without such sartorial distinctions, slave disguise may simply be social invisibility—the true unmarked body. And in one sense, this is how masters want it. Seneca reports a debate in the Roman Senate about requiring slaves to wear uniforms: the motion is defeated out of fear that uniforms would only make visible the slaves’ numeric strength, thereby provoking rebellion.¹³⁷

The seating arrangements at Caligula’s dinner table make it clear that compelling others to perform an identity is an exercise that confirms power. In another story from the imperial biographer Suetonius, Caligula decides to stage a triumph after a highly theatrical military campaign to Germany. He rounds up the tallest Gauls, makes them dye their hair red, grow it long, learn German, and adopt “barbaric” names.¹³⁸ The performance indicates not only some key features of Roman ethnic stereotyping but also the element of performance: the Gauls can dress up as Germans. Poets and historians, too, stress costume and language in distinguishing ethnic groups.¹³⁹ Greek and Roman artists, while developing a distinctive iconography for blacks—broad nose, full lips, corkscrew hair, dark skin—rely on clothing and weaponry for other ethnic groups. The famous Hellenistic statue of the Dying Gaul, surrounded by a Celtic trumpet, belt, and sword, wears a Celtic torque around his neck and sports the moustache associated with this ethnic group. Stereotypical details in Roman representations of conquered peoples work in concert with other iconographic

tricks—such as the miniaturization of the barbarian, who is thus easily trampled underfoot by the emperor, or the representations of captured bodies as bound or desecrated¹⁴⁰—in order to map clearly the opposition victor-victim onto the opposition Roman-Other.

Walter Pohl has stressed, however, that in later antiquity, when relations between Romans and non-Romans are particularly unstable, “the relationship between outward signs and ethnicity . . . is less well attested than ethnographic theory assumes.”¹⁴¹ Pohl argues that Roman perceptions of the telltale signs of ethnic identity were rarely, it appears, shared by the barbarians themselves.¹⁴² The difficulty of interpreting grave goods, our main evidence, in terms of ethnicity—status and age, for example, are always complicating factors—further frustrates our attempts to draw clear connections between markers and ethnic identities.¹⁴³

If the more interaction there is between peoples, the harder it is to assign distinctive marks to each, it is another truism that distance can breed an exaggerated sense of difference. Pliny speaks of people lacking noses, lips, and tongues in southwestern Ethiopia, where, he believes, the fire of the sun is strong enough to deform bodies; the geographer Pomponius Mela offers reports of the distant Blemyes, a race with faces in their chests.¹⁴⁴ But, in cases of greater proximity, extant representations of ethnicity, a “culturally constructed way of categorizing people who might differ a lot among each other, and might not be so different at all from people who do not fall into that category,”¹⁴⁵ rely on symbolic codification as much as on corporeal and cultural difference, as we have just seen. The barbarian thus requires ethnography, iconography, and theater in order to crystallize in the cultural imagination. The fourth-century A.D. *Historia Augustae* reports a triumph of Aurelian in which the barbarian captives are paraded through the city with identifying placards around their necks.¹⁴⁶

Slaves need their placards, too, as we have seen. New Comedy, a genre where Nature finally gets what it wants, uses a strict typology of masks to ensure that slaves are always recognized, for example, by their grotesque mouths, arched (read: roguish) brows, tawny hair, bulbous eyes, trumpetlike beards, and snub noses. Ancient biography, another genre that aimed to report things as they should be, described Aesop, a slave from Thrace or Syria by tradition, as potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, and liver-lipped.¹⁴⁷ Iconography supports ideology; ideology underwrites ethical categories. One can imagine that having a mascot like Socrates—ugly on the outside, godlike within—places philosophy in a complex position vis-à-vis the relationship between beauty and goodness.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, philosophy challenges the corporeal semiotics of normative (ethical) subjectivity in manifold ways, thereby rewriting the signs of masculinity and, in some cases, opening them up to women and slaves. To the

extent philosophy does democratize signs of mastery, it anticipates the more pronounced egalitarian strategies of early Christianity, which also challenges the conventional physiognomic masculinity.¹⁴⁹ Yet, when Plato wants to represent the struggle between reason and passion, he draws a vivid portrait of a soul drawn by a beautiful white horse and a snub-nosed black one, crooked of frame, grey-eyed, shaggy-eared—a massive jumble of a creature with a host of anti-ideal features.¹⁵⁰ In such an image we come full circle to the reciprocal bind between the iconography of stigmatized identities and the appeal to nature as justifying the subjugation of stigmatized people. For this black horse is none other than the embodiment of the passion that dominates the woman, the child, the aged, the barbarian. To map “deformity” onto nonhegemonic bodies or to classify corporeal difference as degeneration is an attempt to make it obvious why such bodies need masters. In closing, I would like to examine how this mapping bleeds into violence, and to consider the multiple significations of the marks it leaves.

CONTROLLING MARKS: VIOLENCE, SPECTACLE, REAPPROPRIATION

The desire to control the representation of others is not benign, but rather participates in a complex dynamics of dominance that operates at both the ideological and the material levels. If it is difficult to pinpoint natural features of the slave, he or she may be easily recognized by the scarred back.¹⁵¹ Nor is violence foreign to the production of elite male subjects. Schoolmasters at Rome were equipped with canes, whips, and sticks.¹⁵² Indeed, it is education, *paideia*, Maud Gleason has suggested, that confers on the citizen immunity to corporal punishment, which is to say that by learning reason, rhetoric, and corporeal control, the elite male subject earns the right to stop answering with his body.¹⁵³ Indeed, upon the assumption of the manly toga, he becomes the law, which he henceforth inscribes into those without the wherewithal to control themselves.

The tattoo testifies as well to a need to mark a slippery body through force: one scholiast tells us that slaves were tattooed with the phrase “Stop me, I am running away.”¹⁵⁴ Bitinna’s plan to first beat, then tattoo Gastron is designed to compel his self-knowledge: either the very act of forcible inscription is sufficient to remind him of his low status, at which point the words “know yourself”—if indeed these are the words inscribed—become redundant. Or, if Bitinna inscribes the price she paid for Gastron (three minae) on his forehead, she undoes her act of “making him a man”—the way she describes her taking him qua love object—in the name of reasserting his identity in purely economic terms. In both cases, the mark is a strategy to keep Gastron from getting away again. Bitinna’s fear that he might escape her grasp belies Cassandra’s descrip-

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tion of the captive slave, none other than herself, in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*:
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Yet who reads the signs marked on the body? Kafka's famous short story
 "The Penal Colony" describes a punishment machine designed to inscribe a
 criminal's sentence into his skin over and over until he "deciphers it with his
 wounds." Ancient masters had their own way of marking sentences in the
 body (e.g., amputated hands for thieves).¹⁵⁶ But the message that lies within
 the imperative "know yourself" or the price tag of a slave seems addressed as
 much to Bitinna as to her lover, insofar as it affirms her own economic and
 social power. At the same time, we can see her wish to hold Gastron down as
 arising from a need to stabilize her own sense of self, destabilized by desire.
 To mark another's body would thus signify both the right to mastery and its
 unstable foundations, reassuring Bitinna of her power while also memorial-
 izing Gastron's capacity to slip away. The call for the whip smacks of bravura:
 "You will find, now, a Bitinna less foolish than you think."¹⁵⁷ Likewise, the
 perpetual failure of elite subjects to achieve masculine identity (or fully reject
 it) compels not only the repetitive rituals of self-mastery but also the rituals of
 dominance.

Force thus intertwines with desire as hegemonic subjects attempt to define
 themselves by corralling those who shore up those definitions. This intertwin-
 ing of control and its loss flares up powerfully in the figure of the monster in
 late Republican and imperial Rome.¹⁵⁸ In the early Roman world, monstrous
 prodigies, such as hermaphrodites, were abhorred and exposed to die.¹⁵⁹ This
 practice appears to stop in the first century B.C., and Romans begin collect-
 ing human abnormalities for personal use. Julia, the granddaughter of August-
 us, kept a dwarf as a pet; the emperor Elagabalus was said to have so many
 dwarves, eunuchs, and other abnormal specimens that his successor simply had
 no idea know what to do with them all upon assuming power and ended up
 distributing them to the public.¹⁶⁰ Plutarch reports a market of the deformed
 at Rome, and Quintilian makes it clear that the clientele was moneyed: "We
 see that some people set a higher value on human bodies which are crippled
 or somehow deformed than on those which have lost none of the blessings of
 normality."¹⁶¹ A household's mastery of the exotic and the strange cued luxury.
 Black slaves were also valuable as status symbols. One text from the late Re-
 public speaks of a middle-class youth pining for an Ethiopian to accompany
 him to the baths, while the preponderance of small bronzes and terra-cottas
 featuring blacks involved in household tasks suggests that households without
 the means for live slaves might have used such objects as surrogates.¹⁶²

An interest in representing nonideal somatypes—the poor, the elderly, the
 disabled—is a defining, although still puzzling feature of art in the Hellenistic
 period. It is believed that for the Greeks and the Romans, blacks, dwarves,
 hunchbacks, and Pygmies, together with representations of them, functioned

as apotropaic devices: fascinating bodies were thought to distract the evil eye, thus sparing those around them from the corrosive power of envy.¹⁶³ Mosaics of ithyphallic blacks have been found in Roman baths, which constituted particularly dangerous terrain, given the number of bodies on display and the greediness of the gazes.¹⁶⁴ Belief in the fascinating power of the phallus ensured its strong association with the grotesque, and “excessive” bodies often go hand in hand with untrammelled sexuality. Not only blacks but also dwarves, hunchbacks, and Pygmies are often represented with large, erect phalluses, which had also been an integral part of Attic Comedy’s costume, fleshed out with a padded rump and belly and topped by a mask marked by squinting eyes, a snub nose, and a gaping grin.

Theater and spectacle are, in fact, integral to the role played by abnormal bodies in the public spaces of the ancient world. Representations of dwarves dancing on Greek vases suggests that they formed part of the *aklêtoi*, the “uninvited,” the disadvantaged who provided entertainment at elite dinner parties in archaic Greece by “perform[ing] themselves as physically or morally imperfect,” thereby reinforcing the positive ideal of *kalokagathia*.¹⁶⁵ Hellenistic artists frequently depict Pygmies in comic scripts—fighting crocodiles, for example—or engaged in transgressive sex, and we hear of Hellenistic kings keeping dwarfs and mimes on hand at court. Entertainers went out of their way to exaggerate their nonhegemonic bodies, like the clown described by Lucian who shaves his head and dances himself into contortions.¹⁶⁶ The popularity of the grotesque mimic and the exhibition of human curiosities at Rome, such as in the images of marvels set up by Pompey the Great in his theater for public consumption,¹⁶⁷ attest to the Roman desire to be seduced by marginalized bodies.

And fascination not infrequently leads to mimesis on the part of the ostensibly hegemonic subjects: men dress up as women on the Attic stage;¹⁶⁸ masters become clever slaves in the comedies of Plautus; Athenians adopt the costumes and ways of life of their “barbarian” enemies;¹⁶⁹ Romans, emperors and plebs alike, had a passion for dressing up as gladiators. Corporeal difference dissolves in the mime, “faithless to his face,”¹⁷⁰ as well as in the grotesque body, which mirrors every body as monstrous.¹⁷¹ Yet the deviant body is not only imitated but also abused, often in the context of public spectacle: we can recall Odysseus rallying the troops in the *Iliad* by beating the bowlegged Thersites.¹⁷² Romans found entertainment in the production of deformed and mutilated bodies, whether in the “snuff” plays staged in the arena,¹⁷³ or in the other spectacles found there, such as gladiator fights or battles pitting wild beasts against Christian martyrs. These performances demonstrate the right of some bodies to consolidate their power through the fragmentation of others.

At the same time, it is precisely within these asymmetrical relationships of power that we find corporeal inscription being appropriated into a new

signifying system. A classic case would be the violently marked body of the martyr, a dead serious mimesis of Christ—who was played by the *stupidus* on the stage of Roman mime—that treats the violation of the body's integrity as an illustration of mastery through patience: the martyr's wounds are a way of writing Christ's name.¹⁷⁴ The valuation of bodily position is transformed, too, in a discourse that celebrates being "low, base, prone, and exposed."¹⁷⁵ And Christianity gives a jolt to the signifying potential of the diseased and disabled body, which becomes the site where the new religion's power is authenticated, rather than a sign of, or incitement to, divine displeasure. Over two dozen miracles involving the blind, the deaf, the lame, the dumb, and the leprous are ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament. These signs establish his messianic credibility, as well as that of the disciples who take up the work of healing in the following decades.¹⁷⁶ Visual representations of the disabled are integrated into Christian narratives of miracle and salvation.¹⁷⁷

The changing signification of marked bodies within Christianity underscores not only diachronic shifts in perceptions of corporeal difference but also the importance of context to the interpretation of any sign: bodies are always overdetermined sites of meaning. Moreover, context is created out of multiple, overlapping, and yet discrete relationships. Given the role of gender in thematizing Otherness, it may seem strange that the model of the hegemonic subject to which we have returned throughout this essay is a slave-owning woman. On the one hand, Bitinna's position of power is true to life. Class threads each of the categories we have explored, transforming how marked bodies were lived and represented.¹⁷⁸ Power and status are highly relational in many of the ancient societies under discussion.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, the Fifth Mime is not written by a woman, nor is it a particularly flattering picture of Bitinna. Indeed, the stereotype of the impassioned, erratic mistress who might take out her sexual frustration on her slaves was often used to illustrate the unsuitability of women, themselves lacking in self-control, as masters.¹⁸⁰ Gastron's tattoo, then, also indexes his mistress's enslavement to bodily passions. Such excesses are often seen as tyrantlike when they appear in a male subject. Thus, in a scene from a Greek novel that mirrors the Fifth Mime, a master's anger at being unable to seduce his (in fact, freeborn) slave explodes into violence—a slap across the face—and claims of dominance: "Since you will not receive me as a lover, you experience me as a master," to which the defiant victim responds by calling her tormentor a tyrant.¹⁸¹

Herodas's mime reminds us of how lopsided our view of corporeal difference and identity in the ancient world is as a result of the paucity of sources written by women, slaves, dwarves, or "barbarians." We are not, however, entirely at a loss when it comes to the competing significations attached to given marks. The Roman elegists and satirists develop a vile symptomatology of female old age—white and thinning hair, rotting teeth, sagging breasts,

wrinkled face, crooked eyes, pendulous belly, scrawny thighs, fetid vagina.¹⁸² Yet in funerary portraits of older woman, sagging flesh and crow's feet seem to signify a *matrona's* lifelong commitment to "a Republican ideal of virtue."¹⁸³ Admittedly, we should be wary of understanding these representations as more authentic, given their own participation in societal expectations about a woman's later years.¹⁸⁴ Yet they can help us gain a more complex appreciation of how female old age was represented at Rome. Portraits of older men, too, often wear their wrinkles proudly as the etchings of heavy responsibility and a lifetime of service.¹⁸⁵ We might note, too, that the ritually tattooed bodies of Thracian women or Britannic warriors were incised to mean something quite different than the degrading interpretations given to them by Greeks and Romans, as Herodotus observed (among the Thracians, "to be tattooed is considered a mark of good birth, and not to be is a mark of bad").¹⁸⁶

Shifting dynamics of power and context also affect the relationship between corporeal signs and status. Eunuchs are widely reviled by Greco-Roman writers for the challenges they pose to the two-gender system.¹⁸⁷ While invariably classified as male, they bear the telltale signs (stiffness, a shrill voice, sickly constitution, raised eyebrows, mincing steps, shifty eyes, upturned hands) of the *semivir*, the "half-man," and thus his vices.¹⁸⁸ Yet, when the poet Claudian, writing in the fourth-century A.D. court of the Latin West, has a personified Roma attack the powerful Byzantine eunuch Eutropius by declaring "the majesty of Rome cannot devolve upon a degenerate," he is speaking from a seat of dwindling influence.¹⁸⁹ Eunuchs occupied significant positions of power in the Byzantine court, where they were often assimilated to angels, and hence, signs of sacred sexlessness, rather than monstrosity. In self-representations, such as the donor miniature of the tenth-century A.D. Leo Bible, given by a court eunuch, eunuchs mark themselves by clothing that represents their status, as well as their beardlessness—a pair of signs that conjoins their corporeal identity to power, rather than its absence.¹⁹⁰ A similar logic governs official iconography. In a late ninth- or early tenth-century account of a miracle in Constantinople, the author describes the Archangel Michael himself as garbed in the clothes of a eunuch court official.¹⁹¹

Eunuchs' rise to power, however, did not mean that the significance of the mark was univocal. Indeed, so ambivalent was the figure of the eunuch within Christianity that the church fathers went to some trouble to dissuade men from castrating themselves, arguing for the importance of "spiritual" castration alongside spiritual circumcision.¹⁹² The legality of castration was also troubled. Since castration was outlawed in the Empire, most eunuchs appear to have been castrated at birth in border states before being sold into Roman or Byzantine hands. The decision of Leo I (457–474 A.D.) to uphold anticastration laws, while permitting barbarian eunuchs to be traded, attests to both the

widespread desire for eunuchs and official unease with the violence required to produce them.

In the end, the mystery of what Bitinna inscribes on her lover's forehead is solved not because we are told what is written. Rather, in ostensible recognition of the festival day, she finally decides to write nothing. Pens poised for the final word, we are in a similar position standing before the bodies of the past, worried that what we write on them will be only the sterile text of a master discourse, or perhaps the text that we ourselves wish to read there, a refracted answer to the ancient imperative "know yourself."

Our own uncertainty here does not mean, of course, that the bodies themselves were left unmarked. Two skeletons preserved in Herculaneum following the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D., both aged forty-six, seem to tell quite a simple story. The first, Erc86, was a healthy man with thick, solid bones, a man whose body appears to have been deliberately formed through regular exercise in accordance with an aesthetic norm. Ray Laurence describes the other as follows:

Erc27 is short—163.5 cm—with spindly flattened bones; he had acute dental problems, having lost 7 teeth, and had 4 caries and 4 abscesses painful enough to cause him to chew only on one side of his mouth. Seven of his thoracic vertebrae were fused, and display osteoarthritis caused by Forestier's disease. His body had been exposed to years of hard labor and had been worked beyond its strength.¹⁹³

It is tempting to take the flattening of these bones and the fusion of these vertebrae as true marks, indices of the "lived bodies" that some specialists in material culture seek beyond representation and the "superficiality" of constructivist approaches.¹⁹⁴ And yet, in the end, these signs are no easier or more reliable to read than Aristotle. We have firm evidence of the costs of the ancient world's commitment to a hegemonic subjectivity and the hierarchies required to uphold it. The psychic costs, together with traces of the complex negotiations at both the margins of this subjectivity and its center, register equally powerfully in our texts and images, as well as in their blind spots. But as for the fertile field between semiotics and silence? The bodies have simply slipped away.

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32. Aristophanes *Wasps*, lines 1075–90.
33. Aristophanes *Wasps*, lines 1107–11.
34. Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).
35. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, 82.
36. Diehl 615.
37. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, 83.
38. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, 110.
39. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, 112.
40. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, 146.
41. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, 119.
42. Aristotle, *Physiognomics* 812a.
43. Aristotle, *Physiognomics* 812a.
44. Aristotle, *Physiognomics* 812b.
45. Herodotus *The Histories* 2.34, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
46. Herodotus *The Histories* 2.36.
47. *Hippocratic Writings*, ed. G.E.R. Lloyd (New York: Penguin, 1978), 15.
48. *Hippocratic Writings*, 22.
49. Plato *Phaedo* 81c–d, *Collected Dialogues*, ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 64.
50. Plautus *Mostellaria* 1.32.4.
51. Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 162.
52. Suetonius *Nero* 34.
53. Pindar *Pythian* 3.47–53, in *Odes*, trans. J. Sandys (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), translation modified.
54. Porphyry *Life of Plotinus* 10, in Ogden, *Magic*, 218.
55. *Moralia* Table Talk 7, in Ogden, *Magic*, 223.
56. On this and other finds, see Christopher Faraone, “Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defense Use of ‘Voodoo’ Dolls in Ancient Greece,” *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1991): 165–205.
57. Ogden, *Magic*, 246.
58. *Brutus* 217, in Ogden, *Magic*, 212.
59. Aristophanes *Wasps* 450.
60. Cicero, *Selected Letters*, trans. D.R. Shackleton-Bailey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 109, no. 39. (Leucas, November 7, 50 [B.C.E.]

Chapter 7

1. Herodes *Mimiambi* 5.77–79 (in I.C. Cunningham, ed., *Herodas, Mimiambi* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971]).
2. Demosthenes *Against Androtion* 55. Translated by J.H. Vince, in *Demosthenes*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935). Note: I have used Loeb Classical Texts when available.

3. Cicero *On Behalf of Gaius Rabirius on a Charge of Treason* 12.
4. Livy 1.58.5–12; Seneca *On Anger* 3.18.3–4; Suetonius *Caligula* 27.3; Procopius *Secret History* 3.8–13, 4.7–12.
5. Galatians 3:27–28.
6. Women: Aristotle *Generation of Animals* 737a27–28; 775a15–16. Children: Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 686b12. Elderly: Aristotle *On the Longevity and Brevity of Life* 466a17–20.
7. Barbarians: Aristotle *Politics* 1252b6–9; 1285a19–21. Slaves: *Politics* 1254b20–28.
8. [Aristotle] *Problemata* 14, 909a27–32. Cf. Ptolemy *Tetrabiblos* 2.2.
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12. Aristotle *Politics* 1335b19–21; cf. Plato *Republic* 5.459d–e; Plutarch *Life of Lycurgus* 16.1.
13. Cato *On Agriculture* 2.7; Suetonius *Claudius* 25.
14. Aristotle *Generation of Animals* 773a16–20; [Hippocrates] *Diseases of Young Virgins*, in Émile Littré, ed., *Ceuvres complètes d'Hippocrate*, 10 vols. (Paris: Baillière, 1839–1861), vol. 8, 466–470. Soranus, however, argued that menstruation was not necessarily healthy: see *Gynecology* 1.29 (I. Ilberg, ed., *Soranus, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 4 [Leipzig: Teubner, 1927]).
15. T.G. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 28–62.
16. Aristotle *Generation of Animals* 726a30–727b33.
17. Paola Manuli, “Fisiologia e patologia del femminile negli scritti ippocratici dell’antica ginecologia greca,” in *Hippocratica: Actes du Colloque hippocratique de Paris, 4–9 septembre 1978*, ed. M.D. Grmek (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1980), 402; Lesley Dean-Jones, *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 124.
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21. Ulpian *Digest* 21.1.12.1.
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23. Aristotle *Politics* 1254b2–20.
24. Aristotle *History of Animals* 538b10.
25. Aristotle *Politics* 1254a37–b2.
26. Ann Ellis Hanson, “Continuity and Change: Three Case Studies in Hippocratic Gynecological Therapy and Theory,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History*, ed. S. B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 82.
27. Pompeius Festus 272L. Cited and discussed in Amy Richlin, “Cicero’s Head,” in *Constructions of the Classical Body*, ed. J. I. Porter (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 194.

28. Homer *The Iliad* 2.216–19 (Thersites); 3.170 (Agamemnon).
29. Homer *The Iliad* 13.275–86.
30. Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 79–83; Timothy McNiven, “Behaving Like an Other: Telltale Gestures in Athenian Vase Painting,” in *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*, ed. Beth Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 83–94.
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35. Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 55–109.
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39. Hesiod *Works and Days* 235.
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41. Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 59.
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 44. J. Davidson, "Dover, Foucault and Greek Homosexuality: Penetration and the Truth of Sex," *Past and Present* 170 (2001): 3-51. On female excesses, see also Anne Carson, "Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire," in D. Halperin, J. J. Winkler, and F. I. Zeitlin (eds.), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 135-69.
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58. Quintilian *Education of an Orator* 11.3.76, 83. On the characteristic gestures of comic slaves, see Fritz Graf, "Gestures and Conventions: The Gestures of Roman Actors and Orators," in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 36–58.
59. E.g., Cicero *On Oratory* 1.59.251; Quintilian *Education of an Orator* 11.3.88–89, 111–12. See Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity*, 111–48.
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61. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 10. See also M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986).
62. See especially Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity*, 22–25, where he uses Foucault's own earlier work in *Discipline and Punish* on the body inscribed by power to critique Foucault's later work on antiquity.
63. Soranus *Gynecology* 2.14–15, 32–35 (Ilberg, 60–62, 77–79); Plato *Laws* 7.789c.
64. Soranus *Gynecology* 2.34 (Ilberg, 79).
65. Circumcised barbarians: Aristophanes *Acharnians* 158; *Wealth* 267. Idealization of small penises: Aristophanes *Clouds* 1014.
66. Paul of Aegina *Medical Compendium in Seven Books* 6.46, in I.L. Heiberg, ed., *Paulus Aegineta*, 2 vols., *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 9.1–2, (Berlin: Teubner, 1921–1924), vol. 2, 86–87.
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74. [Hippocrates] *On Diseases* I 22 (Littré 6.184), in P. Potter, trans., *Hippocrates*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
75. [Hippocrates] *On Generation/On the Nature of Child* 18 (Littré 7.498–500); *On the Eight-Month Fetus* 9 (Littré 7.450). Cf. Euripides *Aeolus* frag. 11, F. Jouan and H. van Looy, eds., *Euripide, Fragments*, 4 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998), vol. 1, 31.

characteristic gestures of
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181. Achilles Tatius *The Story of Leucippe and Cleitophon* 6.18–22.
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188. Adamantius 2.21 (Foerster 1.369–70).
189. Claudian *Against Eutropius* 1.423–24.
190. Liz James and Shaun Tougher, "Get Your Kit On! Some Issues in the Depiction of Clothing in Byzantium," in Cleland, Harlow, and Llewellyn-Jones, *The Clothed Body*, 154–61.
191. *Narration of the Miracles of the Mighty Archangel Michael*, cited in James and Tougher, "Get Your Kit On!," 160. Indeed, Christ was often represented as androgynous (Davis, "Crossed Texts," 35).

192. See Daniel F. Caner, "The Practice and Prohibition of Self-Castration in Early Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997): 396–415.
193. Ray Laurence, "Health and the Life Course at Herculaneum and Pompeii," in *Health in Antiquity*, ed. Helen King (London: Routledge, 2005), 90. Laurence describes and compares both skeletons noted above.
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Chapter 8

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3. *Ibid.*
4. *Met.* 3.316–38.
5. *Met.* 6.424–674.
6. Ovid provides a different reason: Juno (Hera), infuriated that Tiresias claimed that women enjoyed sex more than men, blinded him (although Jupiter [Zeus] counterbalanced the punishment by giving him prophetic vision); see *Metamorphoses* 3.330–36.
7. Ovid *Met.* 3.194–203.
8. *Menexenus* 237d.
9. Gary Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 60.
10. A notable exception is the Cynic philosophical disposition; Diogenes, for example, regarded animals as superior to humans (see Kenneth S. Rothwell, *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy: A Study of Animal Choruses* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007]), 90.
11. *Republic* 441a.
12. *The History of Animals* 588b.
13. Galen *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5.5.4–4; in *Galen. De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* V.4.2.1–4, ed. and trans. P.H. de Lacy (Berlin: Akademie Verlag).
14. Semonides 7.1.
15. Semonides 7.2–5.
16. The word also denotes a female "mate" in relation to animals (see Aristotle *Politics* 1262a22).
17. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Greek Woman," in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 2, trans. M. A. Mügge (London: T. N. Foulis, 1911), 23.
18. The alternate order of constituent beings on the divine-to-animal continuum is discussed by Mark Golden, "Change or Continuity? Children and Childhood in Hellenic Historiography," in *Inventing Ancient Culture: Historicism, Periodization and the Ancient World*, ed. Mark Golden and Peter Toohey, 176–91 (London: