

Leveling the Land

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*Earth, is this not what you want: to arise within us  
invisibly?—Is it not your dream  
someday to be invisible?—Earth: invisible!  
What if not transformation is your urgent commission?*

—*Duinesian Elegies*, R.M. Rilke

In a time when the basic premises of both architecture and landscape are being reconsidered, the topic of leveled land calls for attention because it is arguably the first and most fundamental act of topographical construction. Whether mounded up on an open plain or cut into the slope of a hillside, every terrain that has been transformed into a terrace serves as the physical and conceptual foundation for the accommodation and enactment of a broad range of topographical purposes, from the most mundane to the most elevated. Without this basis, most cultural practices are quite simply impossible. Certainly it is true that landscapes lacking level can be aesthetically pleasing, yet they may well be only that, which is to say they may well be useless and unlivable. This makes the platform a primary topic in the sort of site construction that envisages inhabitation. Yet, despite its primacy, leveled land is rarely given much attention in current discourse, perhaps because it is so commonly taken for granted.

The question this paper asks concerns the meanings conferred by topographical levels. Considerations of geometry and shape are important, but formal considerations of this kind are much more interesting when they are seen in connection with the cultural meanings they sustain. In the past, leveled land has symbolized attitudes toward gender, for example. Likewise, platform construction was, in some societies, accorded political significance on the premise that site building prefigures city building or sets the stage for public life.

In what follows, meanings of this kind are introduced in consideration of ancient, Renaissance, and modern cases. This range is invoked not to suggest the influence of one on the other but to differentiate ways of interpreting a topic

Fig. 1. Rising Earth (Semele?), red-figured krater. From H. Robert, *Archäologische Mährchen*, 1898.



of design that I see as fundamental in site building. Moreover, I do not suggest that these meanings should be revived or restored in our time (implying that we have none of our own) nor that they should be rejected (as a sign of contemporary enlightenment); rather, I suggest that analogous potentials should be sought and can be found within contemporary culture and current practices of terrain design—that we, too, can discover in topographical construction symbols of existence. I will achieve my purpose if I demonstrate the interplay of the technical and ethical aspects of leveled land, for that is where the real drama of place building is played out. There, too, we will find the possibility of recovering a fuller sense of landscape.

The word *terrain* is cognate with *terrace*, both deriving from the Latin *terra*, which not only signifies “earth” but also gives rise to a set of approximately synonymous terms—*parterre*, *terrestrial*, *territory*, and *terra firma*—as well as the names of some earthbound objects—*tureen* and *terrier*, for example. As above, so below; anything beneath the level of the terrace is *subterranean*, hence *interment*. Together with its designation of particular geological strata, the etymology of *terrain* connotes a particular material quality. *Terra* is related to *tersa*, which signifies in Latin “dry ground” and translates the Greek *tersesthai*, meaning “dried” or “to dry up,” as soil is when baked by the sun. From this last set of terms derives the English word *terse*, which means “neat,” “concise,” and “abbreviated” as well as “clean and dry” or “wiped off”—hence the word *detergent*, the action of which leaves a shine, like the gloss of polished stone. Not just stone reflects light; leveled terrain can have these characteristics too. To understand why, we must try to imagine what is beneath its surface.

If the terrace is essentially a level, limited, and dry deck, the subsoil is, by contrast, unlimited and wet, or at least moist. This recognizes a vertical antinomy between what is dry above and wet below the level of constructed topography, an antinomy that has had great force and amplitude in the history of ideas about the nature of built sites. For present purposes, a topical reading of this history can begin with the ancient Greeks, for whom a number of polarities were associated with the contrast between all things wet and dry—unbounded and bounded, polluted and pure, feminine and masculine, and most broadly, content and form.<sup>1</sup> These pairs were differentiated in Pythagorean symbolism and restated by Aristotle, but they appeared even earlier in cosmologies that emerged out of archaic patriarchal social institutions. The stuff or matter of creation was symbolized as formless and wet, likely to leak, and lacking of lasting limits, which explained for Aristotle matter’s “desire” for form, a desire consummated

in the marriage between substance and shape.<sup>2</sup> Before this, in an age, time, or moment when the stuff of the world was without shape, matter was not only undefined and amorphous but *unknowable*, for it was only through edges that all things were defined.<sup>3</sup> Edgeless matter was, nevertheless, vital and procreative—a fertile fluidity from which all visible things arose.

Water exaggerates these qualities of shapeless territory. “Always below me is water,” says the twentieth-century surrealist poet Francis Ponge.<sup>4</sup> We must lower our eyes to see its formless and fresh shine. Water has the virtue of unselfish willingness to sacrifice its present form for the shape of its next container, doing this continually and insistently, as if this act of humility were its lifelong task and highest purpose—as if its charge were to fill every space it enters the way sound does a room, pressing everything other than itself out of its new container. If passive, water is forcefully so, and therefore consequential. The pressure it exerts substantiates shape, serving as its underside energy and source. By contrast, the word *formal* identifies the dry and empty sort of figures that lack this expressive depth. Unfortunately, it is precisely this latter sort that is the subject matter of much aesthetic appreciation.

For the ancient Greeks, this substantiating force was generally thought to be female. Anne Carson, a contemporary classics scholar, poet, and feminist critic, observes that in the ancient Hippocratic treatises women, not men, were thought to be essentially congenial to water: “The female [writes the Hippocratic author] flourishes more in an environment of water, from things cold and wet and soft, whether food or drink or activities.”<sup>5</sup> Further, subterranean soil and women were believed akin to one another by virtue of their shared vital liquidity, because both were thought capable of channeling the inexhaustible reservoirs of procreative power, often thought to be a dark liquid, but sometimes—and



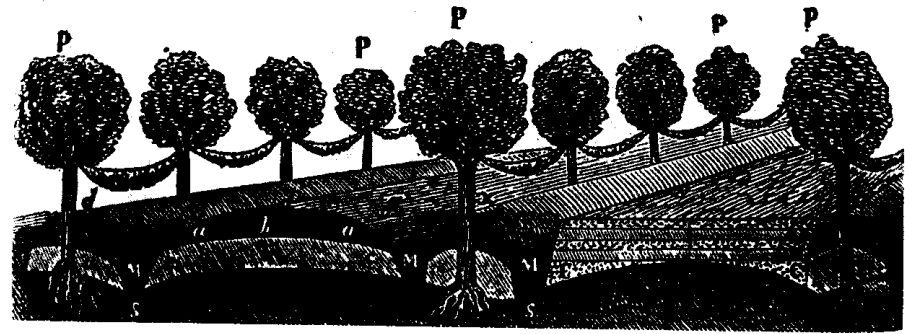
Fig. 2. Dance of Maenads, white-ground pyxis; the Sotheby Painter. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland.

surprisingly—assigned a kind of transparency, especially after some poets and philosophers had transferred the creative potency of innards to the mind, determining it to be the source of ideation.

The seat of this power was not necessarily cranial, however.<sup>6</sup> The model for the body's productivity was the earth itself. Thus, the elaborate symbolism of the earth as the great receptacle should not be allowed to eclipse the correspondence between its withdrawal and emergence, for the two movements were always seen as reciprocal: if the earth receives it also makes itself manifest; it retreats and it arises. This transaction was symbolized compactly in the cosmology of Anixamander: "Whence things have their origin [*aperion*], there they must pass away, according to necessity, for they must pay penalty for their injustice [the injustice of wanting to linger in the light too long]."<sup>7</sup> According to Carson, men, in the mind and experience of the ancient Greeks, were divorced from this cycle of arising and withdrawal and, thus, from formlessness, because they were thought self-defined and defining, upright and dry.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, marriage was thought the means whereby formed and unformed, or dry and wet, were united, in imitation of the earth, or as a way of participating in its renewal.

Being more exact about what the Greeks saw as the different sites of this union will return me to the subject of level land. To do so I propose abbreviating a story told by ancient Pherecydes of Syros, who was reputedly the teacher of Pythagoras. He explained that the world was formed when Zeus threw a matrimonial veil over the head of the goddess of the underworld. This nuptial textile instituted marriage: "When everything was ready," the story goes, "they held the wedding. On the third day Zeus made a great and fair cloth, and on it he wove the [lines or divisions of the] earth, the ocean and the houses of the ocean.... This they say was the first *anacalypteria* [wedding veil], from this the custom [of the veiled bride] arose both for gods and men."<sup>9</sup>

The marital veil, on this account, was really a map that entwined in its fibers the axes and ordinance of the world. It was not really a covering but a gauze, gossamer, or filigree framework that *disclosed* an inhabitable landscape, one that had been there but was unknown, meaning that the act of veiling resulted in an unveiling. Surely this is an outrage for logical thought, for nothing that covers can also uncover. But if we suspend for a moment the principle of noncontradiction we can see in this veiling-unveiling a reminder that every interpretation or disclosure presents itself through its own lens or framework, that the things themselves are always (and finally) inaccessible. The veil preserves or safeguards the earth's transcendence by singing it. The word *anacalypteria* derives from



*anacalypto*, to uncover, and is related to *an logos*, to use open speech; which suggests the following: the lines and light from the sky *articulated* the ground; Zeus-work served the soil by providing a framework for its voice. Veiled or praised in this way, Chthonia, who had been darkly parthenogenetic (engendered, but not through sexual union), became Gaia, still abundant after the veil, but no longer emergent (*parthenos*)—rather, emerged and, consequently, visible.

The veil, map, or woven cloth was thus a trace of the act by which soil appeared within an articulated framework. Until that time, while still unveiled, unwoven, and unlined, dark earth had been (and would have remained) uncharted and unnavigable, like the sea, expansive and absorbing. By means of this chart of horizontals, the earth was shown to be a livable horizon, matter having been abbreviated into a mat. A historical consequence of this act was the transformation of ageless latency into a present condition; the sketch of figures buried with the earth's vertical depth was rendered into something recognizable as a horizon of human affairs. Through patterned textile a livable *landscape* first emerged in light.<sup>10</sup> Yet, what emerged was neither pictorial nor scenic, as the "scape" of landscape might suggest; were neologisms acceptable, a better term for an appearance such as this would be *landscript* or *landgraph*.

The graph, map, or mat I describe was a constructed thing; through artistic work, Zeus fashioned this world-building weave. Because weaving was, in ancient Greek society, generally women's work, one detects in this myth some measure of envy; if not that, at least of emulation. Nevertheless, insofar as it was made by divine hands, this fabric served as the paradigm of any skinlike surface resulting from textile art. *Textile* is the English translation of the Latin word *texere*, which in turn derives from a family of Greek words cognate with *techné*.

Fig. 3. *Baulatura*, from Berti Pichat, *Instituzioni di agricoltura*, Bologna, 1863.

Especially important in this case is *tiktēin*, which means to engender or give birth, and relates directly to the disclosing sense of *technē*, signifying the knowledge, energy, or work whereby something comes into appearance. In prephilosophical accounts, this potential was the upward or outward pressure to which I refer above, resulting in an outward shine, or showing itself as congenial to light.<sup>11</sup> The nuptial veil made by Zeus was an artifact that allowed the earth to become articulate because it—I mean the weave—united subsoil with sky.

I want to stress that in this myth the sky image, the combination of lines and light, was only half of the reality of leveled land, a half that we tend to take as the whole. Precisely because of its tendency to withdraw from the other, the native half is often neglected and, generally, taken to be nothing more than a resource, assuming the privative sense of matter as formlessness. To build a fuller sense of the landscape's underside and substantial part, reference to another map may be helpful, one presented by Homer that is much more famous than the tale of Pherecydes. This story, and the mapmaking it describes, elaborates Greek symbols of political order, specifically the balanced and just correspondence among people, the basis for civic intersubjectivity.<sup>12</sup>

In the eighteenth book of the *Iliad*, Homer describes the making of the shield of Achilles: "When Hephaestus fashioned Achilles' shield he wrought emblems of the earth, the heavens, and the sea." This shield/map was also a dance floor, a *choros*: on the shield/map the famed god wove a dancing floor like that at Knossos Daedalus fashioned for Ariadne. Homer did not describe the level, lines, or material of this radiant surface—instead, the choreography it traced out, for across its sectional arc he wove together the steps of young dancers: "Here young boys and girls courted...linking their arms, gripping each other's wrists...and now they would run in rings on their skilled feet...and now they would run in rows, in rows criss-crossing rows—rapturous dancing."<sup>13</sup> Making a dancing deck such as this meant making a *human* textile, a society, a city. In Homeric myth, people were woven together once the vertical parts of place had been sewn into one—that is, once an artificial platform joined subsoil and sky. One imagines that its golden polish resulted from the action of the sun and of the dancers' feet. In ancient Sparta, the *agora*, or town center, was called *choros*, or dancing floor.<sup>14</sup> On this level the decisions of the *polis* were acted out.<sup>15</sup>

No such dance is possible on a wet surface, nor, for that matter, is civil society. Surfaces are slippery when wet. The aim of terrace building is not to eliminate water, though, nor to escape it, for durable platforms are dry only on their sun-facing surfaces. Pavements, said the renaissance architect Alberti, "rejoice"

in being laid in damp or humid conditions, for moisture welds their parts into an entire solid.<sup>16</sup> This weld restates the ancient cosmologist's weave, this solid the permanent unity of the *polis*.

Let me proceed with Alberti. When describing the siting of a platform on which a town could be established, he stated that all platforms were to be built up and based on a level eminence. This was motivated by an interest in both dignity and convenience. Dirt and rubbish would accumulate on a site if it were not raised up, he said, and enemies would be a constant source of trouble if they had the opportunity to attack from higher ground. Much better would be a fight on equal footing. Just as uneven advantage made both fighting and victory unjust, level standing equalized or balanced combat. So, too, in city building—level footing justified encounters. Rectitude so conceived was charged with social, legal, and structural meanings.<sup>17</sup> On such a terrace city dwellers could stand and stay together in rows criss-crossing rows. Associated with the word *stand* are a family of indicative terms—*state*, *statute*, *statue*, *stance*, *standard*, *establish*, *stable*, *station*, *static*, and *status*—that in each case refer to an experience of physical and cultural uprightness. *Droiture* in French and *aufrehtung* in German convey the same sense. Similarly, the upright experience of leveled land was thought to *sustain* civil concord.

Leveled land is not flat, however. For Alberti (Book 7, chapter 1, section 6), platforms built under the sky should have a slope of 2 inches in 10 feet, to allow for rainwater to run off. This follows the recommendation of Vitruvius (an expert in plumbing) and conforms to ancient Roman practice, as Alberti knew it from his own surveys and measurements of ancient monuments. The floor of the Pantheon in Rome is slightly convex in section, a profile that sheds the rainwater that enters the interior from the oculus above. This gentle curve appears in Piranesi's accurate sectional drawings. Admittedly, nothing more pedestrian could be observed about the Pantheon than the way its base platform stays dry.

An exterior equivalent that merits thought is the mounded landscape that resulted from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practices of land reclamation in the Italian Veneto and the agricultural practices around Bologna, in the Po valley.<sup>18</sup> The surface pattern of these earthworks was a weave of arable areas and drainage lines. Equally important was their profile, or section, which consisted of a series of convex curves, each conforming to the cross section of a sarcophagus lid or a large trunk (*baule*), although, obviously, much, much larger. The English word that expresses this compacted top surface is *bale*, whether of cotton or straw—a word that is cognate with *ball*, a circle or curve that can be read

in both plan and section. The Italian word *baule* and the profile it identifies serves as the root of the term that was used to name these dried-up sites: *baulatura*.

Another English word for such a storage trunk is indicative of its anthropological equivalent: *chest*. When the shape of a storage chest (or treasury) is compared to the bulge of a breastplate, a connection to the shield of Achilles can be inferred.<sup>19</sup> Dried land, sarcophagus, shield, breastplate, and chest—in each case we are presented with a section that reveals a slight upward or outward bulge, one that reconciles coordinate surface geometry with enlivening but unseen pressure (of the dark earth, in the case of a dry terrace, of breath in one's chest). Leveled land, in both the Venetian and Greek symbols, is neither unmarked nor flat; it is, instead, a subtle crossing-over or marriage of the two.

In Renaissance architecture the design that expresses this symbolism most eloquently is the piazza at the center of Michelangelo's Campidoglio in Rome. The connection I suggest between the breastplate or shield and the slight convexity of leveled earth was proposed in this case by James Ackerman: "The mound-like rise of Michelangelo's oval... [can be related to] a type of ancient shield upon which the zodiac was represented. The legendary shield of Achilles was adorned with the celestial signs, and Alexander the Great adopted the Achillean type along with the epithet *Kosmokrator*—ruler of the Universe."<sup>20</sup> This title, Ackerman continues, was adopted by the Roman emperors and was perfectly suited to Marcus Aurelius, whose equestrian statue stood as an upright at the center or on the top of this oval mound.

The Python usually appeared at the center of the type of shield to which Ackerman refers. This archaic figure introduces a rich and elaborate symbolism of underground genesis.<sup>21</sup> Related to it is the equally abundant imagery of *omphalos* or *umbilicus*, both seen as sites of the center of the world or cosmos, and both represented by an upward bulge of the earth, often covered with a weave or network pattern, and always symbolizing fecundity and emergence—and obviously female.<sup>22</sup> Varro defined it as follows: "What the Greeks call the *omphalos* is something at the side of the temple at Delphi, of the shape of a *thesaurus* [domical or mounded treasury], and they say it is the tumulus of Python."<sup>23</sup> Here one might recall the profile of the Pantheon floor, on the assumption that drainage was not all its designer was thinking about. The surface pattern of the Campidoglio pavement is more expressive, however, insofar as its geometry is stretched by the mound's upward push. Ackerman observes that the central boss on military shields was called the *umbilicus* or navel. One

meaning of the python symbolism was victory over death, or reemergence, a meaning appropriate to the treasury (burial place) of the *kosmokrator*, by whose means dynastic continuity was assured. The pregnant profile of the site was shaped to express this subterranean potential for (re)emergence.

The curved line of leveled land is always apparent, visually, as a horizon line. The most eloquent twentieth-century testimony to such a formation was given by the architect Le Corbusier in his book *Precisions*. "I am in Brittany," he said, "[where] this line [of the horizon] is the limit between the ocean and sky; a vast horizontal plane extends toward me. I appreciate the voluptuousness of this masterly restfulness... The sinuousness of the sandy beaches like a very soft undulation on the horizontal plane delights me."<sup>24</sup> The image of a slightly curved horizon figures in the fore- or middle ground of many of his drawings—in the drawings of his North African projects, for example. A better-known instance, perhaps, is his exterior perspective drawing of Villa Savoye, shown rising from and articulating the crest of a landscape. In his Brittany encounter, Le Corbusier confronted the essential form of the site's counterprinciple:

I was walking and suddenly stopped. Between my eyes and the horizon a sensational event has occurred: a vertical rock, in granite is there, upright, like a menhir; its vertical makes a right angle with the horizon. Crystallisation, fixation of the site. This is a place to stop, because here is a complete symphony, magnificent relationships, nobility. The vertical gives the meaning of the horizontal. One is alive because of the other.<sup>25</sup>

For Le Corbusier, the right angle was a symbol of the most basic truth of his art and of his creativity. It was also an image of his personal life, or at least his married life.<sup>26</sup> This last point is made evident in the centerpiece of the iconostasis of the *Poem to the Right Angle*, section E3, dedicated to his wife, Yvonne, affectionately known as Von. The day she died, Le Corbusier described her as "the guardian angel of the



Fig. 4. "The Point of all Dimensions," Le Corbusier, *Précision sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (Paris, 1930). Foundation Le Corbusier.

foyer, of my foyer." The term *foyer* means "hearth," in this instance, and stands for "home." The image in the *Poem* is accompanied by the following text:

Categorical right angle of character the heart's spirit. I gazed into the mirror of character and found myself/there found in me found. Looking ahead horizontal, arrows. She is right she rules and knows height/does not know it. Who made her thus, where does she come from? She is rightness/child of limpid heart/present on earth/close to me. Daily acts of humility vouch for her greatness.<sup>27</sup>

The image has at its center a black horizon joining sky and water (also a spiral and mountain); the intersecting white-and-black vertical could be a flame, signifying the foyer.<sup>28</sup> It parallels the clasped hands (another symbol of joining) and stands above a pattern that could be the candle, but also the folds of an apron, or of plowed fields—it could just as well stand for a bed or table—each one of these figures providing an equivalent symbol of a base that is both geometric and generative.<sup>29</sup> Above these layers of horizon rises the twist of a white body into the foreground and back through an opening toward a watery sun appearing through a window.

Le Corbusier's first painting was called *Chimney*. It centers on a rectangular block emerging out of a layered field of superimposed terraces—terraces of books, it seems. The word *chimney* also directly refers to fireplace and to foyer.<sup>30</sup> Chiefly important, I think, is the mounding up. A useful later image to compare is the drawing of the Acropolis, in *Towards a New Architecture*, as a mountaintop summit with the Parthenon (concealing and containing the withdrawn *parthenos*) under the light. The famous photograph of the Mill Owner's Building across a watery foreground is also indicative of mounding. In views such as these one sees the raised level that appeared in Venetian landscape, the Homeric dance and archaic creation myth. In each case, leveled land serves as the correlate of upward movement and upright posture—*ascent* and *droiture*.

This is summarized most eloquently in Le Corbusier's principle of the fusion of opposites. The principle recurs throughout his work as spirit/matter, sun/moon, day/night (as in the famous twenty-four-hour drawing), man/woman, reason/intuition, action/rest. Fusion results in balance, equilibrium, and harmony. This appears in the bottom image of the *Poem* (section G3). In his symbolism of the right angle, the vertical is the spiritual axis and the horizontal the material. If vertical refers to the axis of creativity, horizontal refers to latent

and uncreated order—primeval waters—the reflective stage of the creative process (*gestation*) out of which *droiture* arises. On this point the text and image in section A3 of the *Poem* is instructive:

The universe of our eyes rests upon a plain edged with horizon/Facing at the sky/Let us consider the inconceivable space hitherto uncomprehended. Repose supine sleep—death/With our backs on the ground.... But I am standing straight! since you are erect/you are also fit for action. Erect on the terrestrial plain of things knowable you sign a pact of solidarity with nature: this is the right angle/Vertical facing the sea/there you are on your feet.<sup>31</sup>

This pact with nature joined vertical potentiality to horizontal articulation. The right angle, too, joined opposites in this way.

Yet, to think of leveled land as flat is to wrongly project the vertical onto the horizontal, mistaking the second as a mirror image of the first, neglecting all the differences Le Corbusier and the others I've considered have observed: that topographical depth is dark, not light; moist, not dry; engendering, not engendered; and formative, not formed. Mistaking each of these for its opposite leads to a sense of design that subordinates consideration of materials and construction to those of shape and form—the aestheticism to which I briefly referred already.

In contemporary discourse and practice, materials and construction are receiving renewed attention. We have come to realize that they are not only formed but also formative. Similarly, the idea that the earth is an objectifiable resource is under widespread and increasing criticism. To understate myself: Matter is no longer "merc." Renewed attention to the "things themselves" is, I think, to be welcomed and encouraged insofar as it challenges ways of working that neglect hidden potentials. I believe that care for existing conditions is the first premise of creative work. But when the art of making livable settings is conceived as the business of letting things "speak for themselves," we substitute one distortion of topography for another; a world that is capable of making itself



Fig. 5. "Catégorique angle droit du caractère," Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de L'Angle Droit* (Paris, 1955). Foundation Le Corbusier.

is allowed to take the place of one that we have made for ourselves. I suspect that in the long run this change of direction will lead to a dead end—something one senses in the physicalism of the current preoccupation with materials, the current assumption that the qualities of shine or rust are the full subject matter of architectural disclosure. Surely it is the interplay, fusion, or marriage of geometry and materials that is key. The task of both current thought and creative work is to develop images and symbols that free us from this ancient polarity by showing that a condition of reciprocal determination is more productive and revealing, perhaps even more basic.

### Notes

- 1 A summary of these polarities as they bear on the form-content opposition is set forth in David Summers, "'Form,' Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics and the Problem of Art Historical Description," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989): 372–406. This distinction was also considered at great depth by Martin Heidegger. Most useful, perhaps, is "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry Language Thought* (New York: Harper Row, 1971), 26–31 especially. Also useful is his *What Is a Thing?* (South Bend, Ind.: Regnery, 1967). In contemporary language and practice, not all of these associations have survived, especially those about gender difference, nor would they be accepted.
- 2 Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye (New York: Random House, 1941), section 192a.
- 3 See Anne Carson, *Eros: The Bittersweet* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).
- 4 Francis Ponge, "Water," in *The Voice of Things*, trans. Beth Archer (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 49–51.
- 5 Hippocrates, *On Regimen*, sect. 28 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); cited in Anne Carson, "Putting Her in Her Place," in *Before Sexuality*, eds. David Halperin, John Winkler, Froma Zeitlin (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 137ff. See also Page duBois, *Sowing the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 70–71 especially; Ruth Padel, *In and Out of the Mind* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 99–113 especially; and Ellen Reeder, *Pandora* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- 6 Padel, *In and Out of the Mind*, 99–113.
- 7 For Anaximander, *apeiron* was not identified with any single element, not earth, air, fire, or water; it was, instead, the principle of spatial indefiniteness. Other cosmologists symbolized the basic stuff of the world by elaborating the qualities of a single element. On the vast literature concerning these cosmologies, it is, perhaps, best to begin with the texts themselves, and a useful first source is G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971). For the subject of matter itself, see Ernan McMullin, *The Concept of Matter in Greek and Medieval Philosophy* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1963), 66–69 for the matter-form distinction in Aristotle, and 83ff for ideas about the intelligibility of form. On the Anaximander fragment, the best text remains Charles Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).
- 8 Carson, "Putting Her in Her Place." See also Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 205–11.

- 9 Cited in G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 60, fragment 54.
- 10 Indra Kagis McEwen, *Socrates' Ancestor* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 54.
- 11 David Farrell Krell uses this etymology to redefine architecture itself; see his *Architecture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 11–37. See also McEwen, *Socrates' Ancestor*, 54.
- 12 It is possible that there is a common root for both grammatical forms of the word *inter*: (1) the intransitive verb in the *terra* family, signifying burial, and (2) the prefix meaning *between* or *among*, like the French *entre* and the Latin *in teris*, from which the English word *interior* derives. Accordingly, the earth platform can be seen as the topographical premise for permanent public space. Alberti made this argument, as I show below.
- 13 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), 487.
- 14 In the prelude to Theogony, Hesiod used the word *choroi* to name the dance floors of the muses, referring to terraces on Mount Helikon, which was the birthplace of memory. The most recent consideration of this term's bearing on topographical matters, particularly architecture, is Maria Theodorou, "Space as Experience," *AA Files* 34 (fall 1997): 45–55, which relies greatly on Jacques Derrida, "Khora," in *On the Name* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995).
- 15 In Pindar's poetry, citizens danced on such a surface to raise up into propitious attention the "nymph of the city" (*chthonia phren*). For a discussion of this, see William Mullen, *Choreia: Pindar and Dance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 79–89 especially.
- 16 Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), book 3, chapter 16.
- 17 On the philosophical anthropology of rectitude, see Erwin Straus, "Upright Posture," in *Phenomenological Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 137–165.
- 18 On this practice, see Emilio Sereni, *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 298–303 especially. For this reference I am indebted to Tom Beck.
- 19 In both Greek and Roman military iconography, the breastplate, like the shield, displayed ornaments that conferred on its bearer the status of *cosmocrator*. On this iconography, see both Otto Brendel, "The Shield of Achilles," in *The Visible Idea* (Washington, D.C.: Decatur House Press, 1980), 72, and Franz Cumont, *Die orientalischen Religionen* (Stuttgart, 1959), 276ff.
- 20 James Ackerman, *The Architecture of Michelangelo* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1961), 167–169.
- 21 See Marie Delcourt, *L'Oracle de Delphes* (Paris: Payot, 1981); Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); and Jane Harrison, *Themis* (London: Merlin Books, 1963).
- 22 On *omphalos*, see J.P. Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), chapter 5 especially; Hans Herrmann, *Omphalos* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1959); and Louis Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), especially chapter 15. On parallel ideas of *umbilicus*, see G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970). For the impact of symbolism on the making of landscapes and buildings, see Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); and E.B. Smith, *The Dome: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950).
- 23 Varro, *On the Latin Language*, 2 vols., trans. and ed. R.G. Kent (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), book 7, section 17.
- 24 Le Corbusier, *Precisions* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 75.