

Stasis: Charging the Space of Change

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Prologue: *Alien* (1979) directed by Ridley Scott

Ridley Scott's first *Alien* film opens with the crew of the *Nostramo*, a massive and cumbersome mining spaceship, being awakened from *stasis* by 'mother', the ship's computer, to investigate 'a transmission of unknown origin'. The camera dwells on the crew as they are effectively reborn as septuplets from seven interconnected *stasis*-pods, frail and naked but for their white undergarments and the electronic sensors that they peel away from their bodies on rising. Far from Planet Earth with their searching radio calls unanswered, the crew are presented as seven kindred siblings with a shared yet desperate dream: to get themselves safely back to Earth. [Fig. 1]

The alien that the crew faces seems, from the physical point of view, to be everything that the crew is not: erupting from a hatchery on an inhospitable and 'almost primordial' planet, its blood is highly corrosive 'molecular acid' that raises fears for the integrity of the ship's hull, and, with a skin of 'protein polysaccharides' and cells of 'polarized silicon', it, unlike the crew, boasts 'a prolonged resistance to adverse environmental conditions'.¹ It is also *alien* to the crew in its mode of survival: unlike them it does not rely either on technology or teamwork for its continued life, but it is, instead, the ultimate lone predator as it picks off its prey, one by one. But it is the crew's common humanity, their common human frailties and shared reliance on technology, their common contractual commitment to the same commercial company, their shared isolation from all

outside assistance, that both express and underline their *kindred* nature to each other – while the alien is repeatedly confirmed as being purely *alien*, the opposite of *kindred*, by its very lack of any such shared commonalities.

The main action of the film takes place in the spaceship *Nostramo*, whose name echoes the lost *Nostoi* poems of ancient Greece that reputedly tell of the Greek heroes' tragic attempts to return to their homes after the Trojan War. But the film is also rounded with another Greek term, *stasis* (στάσις). It opens with the crew being woken from *stasis*, and the same arrested state closes the final scene with Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) – 'last survivor of the *Nostramo*, signing off' – returning to *stasis* to resume her interrupted journey back to Earth. For her, *stasis* is blessed relief: it bestows utter physical, temporal, and emotional suspension where fears are annulled, the spatial extent of the long distance home is erased, and where the flow of time becomes timeless.

The *Alien* film locates the space of *stasis* in the 'safe' removal from engagement offered by futuristic *stasis*-pods of technological arrest. These transparent, encapsulated, coffin-like spaces present us with the complete dislocation of their inhabitants from the onward flow of time. But as this article looks back in time to the ancient Greeks it becomes clear that, for them, a *stasis* was a very different matter: a powerfully charged state of inter-kindred drama measured by restraint, *stasis* at that time

involved the lively exchange of forces between the active and vital parties to a system. Thus, in the case of the film *Alien*, the space of *stasis* would exist not in the pure isolation of sealed *stasis*-pods but in the lively space between the members of the *Nostramo*'s crew.

And so, according to an ancient Greek understanding, the film's space of *stasis* would manifest itself at the round table of the ship's mess, in the ship's corridors, its bridge and medical bay, and even in its landing craft: in short, in the ship's public space where the film's inter-crew conflicts – from light-hearted jostling to outright hostility – are played out, and where the members of the crew constitute themselves, revealing and defining their characters within the film through such exchanges. This, the spaceship's public space of *stasis*, is neatly juxtaposed in the film with its parallel space of *war*: the ship's massive, abandoned, and labyrinthine bowels and shafts, where the crew's merciless *war* with the alien takes place.

Introduction

When surveying the landscape of meaning of a word in contemporary use, one soon becomes aware of multiple echoes of past meanings upon which current understandings depend. We use language to depict, describe, and negotiate our world, but it is not always the closeness of a word to its meaning, but often it is the shadows of accumulation of meaning or the points of slippage, dislocation, or loss between words and their meaning that have the greatest power to extend our knowledge into new understandings. *Stasis* is a word which, rather than growing culturally richer over time, instead reveals itself as impoverished today when viewed against its abundant past. It is this past that I will address below.

As pointed out by Otto Alvin Loeb Dieter in his 1950 text *Stasis* on the roots of *stasis* in rhetoric, 'when we look for *stasis* in ancient thought and

culture, we seem to find it everywhere'.² Not only was *stasis* in ancient Greece widely applied as the term for civil conflict,³ the same term also had an active life in, to mention just a few, pathology, physics, boxing, and rhetoric.⁴ When looking at the frequency of use of the word across many disciplines, as well as the precision with which it was used within each discipline at that time, one soon becomes aware that *stasis* in ancient Greece occupied a cultural space that boasted a breadth and depth that have been lost to us today.

Today the word *stasis* has, of course, survived from antiquity and is still used in contemporary English, for example, in science fiction where *stasis*-pods or fields enable a total artificial disconnection from the onward flow of time, or in pathology, psychoanalysis, or palaeontology,⁵ where a *stasis* refers to a state of stagnation in a flow of bodily fluids or semi-fluids, sexual energies, or evolutionary development respectively.⁶ Indeed, *stasis* today is mostly used as a relatively pejorative term to describe conditions where forms of unwanted blockage or stagnation either arise or are created. This understanding is naturally echoed in current architectural discourse where *stasis* is used, for example, by Greg Lynn as a term of opposition to dynamism in architectural work,⁷ linking it to words like inert, traditional and static, or by Markus Miessen as a term for a lack of interaction.⁸ But although he uses the term *stasis* in this way, the thesis set out by Miessen in his 2010 book *The Nightmare of Participation* reveals apparent points of resonance with the concept of *stasis* as understood in ancient Greece. Referring to the agonistic theory of the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe, Miessen calls for a 'conflictual model' of achieving consensus, where conflict becomes understood as 'an enabler, a producer of a productive environment rather than as direct, physical violence'.⁹ In ancient Greece *stasis* was recognised as just such an enabler, but one that also set out precise demands of relationship, moderation, and reconciliation, while holding the



Fig. 1: Screenshot by the author from the film *Alien*. Directed by Ridley Scott. London: Twentieth Century Fox, 1979. The crew of the *Nostromo* are woken from *stasis* by the spaceship's computer to face the alien.

promise of new, energetic onward movement for all parties post-*stasis*.

This links to contemporary political philosophy, where awareness of the need to accommodate the conflict inherent within a system is discussed, for example, in the work of Jacques Rancière, Giorgio Agamben, Chantal Mouffe, and Slavoj Žižek. Indeed in his recent book Agamben calls for a new theory of civil war directly referencing *stasis* in antiquity as a source of knowledge in this area.¹⁰ In discourse by scholars of classical history the role of *stasis* in ancient Greece has been addressed in some depth, but with the emphasis being laid on *stasis* as civil strife between political factions escalating into outright civil war,¹¹ although Nicole Loraux's work on *stasis* in the Athenian state broadens the discourse to include *stasis* in a range of expressions such as between the family and the state.¹²

In this article I have specifically chosen not to delve further into the state of *stasis* as civil war, but to concentrate instead on the active and frequent use of the word *stasis* in ancient Greece in medicine, literature, and participatory politics; i.e. on what I term the milder expressions of *stasis*. To say these forms of *stasis* are milder is not to infer that they are in any way comfortable or welcome, but rather it refers to the level of cultural concern associated with the term in each context. My aim in this paper is to raise an understanding of the past subtleties of the *stasis* interaction, and its points of moderation and restraint, and these tend to be pushed into the background when the more destructive and often violent nature of *stasis* as outright civil conflict, and the fear it raised in the hearts of citizens at the time, are allowed to dominate.¹³

So what can new discussion of the lost cultural richness of one word – in this case, *stasis* – bring us? In his 1976 book, *Keywords*, Raymond Williams described the problems of the meaning of a word as being 'inextricably bound up with the problems it

was being used to discuss,' which raises the question as to whether the current impoverishment of meaning of the word *stasis*, once valued as a word that enabled a high level of cultural engagement with a precise form of conflictual interaction, limits our own ability to discuss the particular set of problems with which it was once associated.¹⁴ For the shifting meanings of words create more powerful dislocations in cultural understanding over time than their etymological roots can reveal. Architectural historian Adrian Forty advises that 'to find the meaning of a word at any one time is to know the available possibilities: meanings cannot be identified the way one looks up a word in a dictionary.'¹⁵ This article sets up a series of direct encounters with a range of past possibilities of meaning enabled by the word *stasis* as it was used in ancient Greek culture, with the aim of reaching a broader understanding of this specific constellation of processes and forces, and its implications on the spaces and systems from which it arose.¹⁶

If understood as a term that merely denotes stagnation then *stasis* would have limited relevance to contemporary architectural and urban space. But twentieth century literature supplies an example of the word *stasis* being used with a deeper meaning that echoes that of the ancient Greeks. In 1964 the poet T.S. Eliot wrote of 'a period of stasis; of relative and precarious stability, it is true, a brief halt in the endless march of humanity in some, or in any, direction'.¹⁷ For T.S. Eliot *stasis* not only offers a specific kind of pause before new movement but it also becomes a space of clarification as to where humanity currently stands. His words reveal the potential concealed within *stasis* for creating a temporal (and temporary) halt that also spatially locates and reorientates, while also showing *stasis* as one part of a more extended sequence of *kinesis-stasis-kinesis*, where *kinesis* – undirected movement – forms the counter-term to *stasis*. This quote gives a modern hint as to why *stasis* in ancient Greece was held in such cultural esteem:



Fig. 2: Plato (left) and Aristotle (right), in a detail from *The School of Athens* (1510–1511) by Raphael.
Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

its specific energy and located spatiality, and its defined place in a temporal sequence, had powerful implications for the future of the system from which it seemed repeatedly to emerge, only to retreat again with the silent promise to return should the system demand it.

In Section 1 below, I will refer to Plato's *Republic* to raise the concept of the *kindred* in ancient Greek culture, which is fundamental to the concept of *stasis*. Section 2 considers *stasis* as a space of loaded potentiality between two different movements in space through ancient Greek literary texts; Section 3 discusses the inevitability of *stasis* in the ancient Greek constitution through Plato's *Republic*; Section 4 presents the active role of *stasis* within the human body in ancient Greece primarily through Plato's *Timaeus*; while Section 5 explores *stasis* as a space of participation in the community arena through Solon's *Law on Stasis*.

Stasis between kindred elements in a compound system

For the ancient Greeks, the universe was full of kindred substances that were naturally held together by virtue of this kindred nature. In the *Timaeus*, Plato describes how such elements in the universe inevitably move towards each other, writing: 'and the processes [...] take place just as the motion of everything in the Universe takes place, namely, according to the law that every kindred (συγγενές) substance moves towards its kind.'¹⁸

The collective group that is constituted by such a set of kindred elements will be referred to here as a 'compound system'. In the ancient Greek understanding, the compound system within which the kindred elements resided was the locus of interaction of these elements, including through the processes of *stasis*. Such interactions were understood to enable the system to change over time, from which the system derived its ability to adapt and survive in the longer term.¹⁹ [Fig. 2]

In *The Republic* Plato describes how the state of *stasis* as civil conflict was commonly understood as differing from that of *war* in a very precise way that depended on the parties to the *stasis* being kindred in their relation within the compound system, in this case the system of the Greek city-states. He explains how *war* (πόλεμος/polemos) and *stasis* (στάσις) are to be understood as very different cultural matters requiring different terms to be used when discussing them:

In my opinion, just as we have the two terms, *war* and *stasis*, there are also two parties, distinguished by two differentiae. The two parties I mean are, firstly, those of the same house and kindred, and secondly those of different houses and strangers. Now the term employed for hostility between those of the same house is *stasis*, and for that between those of different houses is *war*.²⁰

While both *war* and *stasis* are referred to as hostilities, the distinction between the two, as Plato has Socrates explain to his friend Glaucon here, lies in the relation (or lack of relation) between the parties involved: the parties to a *war* are 'of different houses and strangers' and, as he continues later in the same discussion, are 'enemies by nature,' while those to a *stasis* are 'of the same house and kindred (οἰκεῖον καὶ συγγενές)'.²¹ Later he describes as kindred those 'who expect to be reconciled'²² and confirms *stasis* in this context as being 'any difference with Greeks who are their own people'.²³ In another text Plato has the character of the Stranger agreeing with Theaetetus that *stasis* is 'the disagreement of the kindred (συγγενοῦς)'.²⁴

Above and beyond this, *stasis* and *war* also demanded very different attitudes and actions towards the opposing parties both during and after hostilities. Socrates made this distinction clear in *The Republic*, setting it out in his argument as to how soldiers should conduct themselves in the case of hostilities where one Greek city is fighting

against another (a *stasis*) – as opposed to fighting against ‘barbarians’ (a *war*), where the ‘barbarians’, Plato writes, are all ‘enemies [of the Greeks], men, women and children’.²⁵ Socrates and Glaucon agree on the question of how opponents should be treated in a *stasis* hostility:

‘Will they not then regard any difference with Greeks who are their own people as a form of *stasis* and refuse even to speak of it as *war*?’

‘Most certainly.’

‘And they will conduct their quarrels always looking forward to a reconciliation?’

‘By all means.’

‘They will correct them, then, for their own good, not chastising them with a view to their enslavement or their destruction, but acting as correctors, not as enemies.’²⁶

Overall, Socrates and Glaucon conclude that such actions as burning land, destroying houses, ravaging the territory, and enslaving the population are not possible in the case of *stasis*, but only in the case of *war*.²⁷ *Stasis* and *war* demand different attitudes to the opposing parties (in a *stasis* ‘they will not admit that in any city all the population are their enemies, men, women and children, but will say that *only a few* at any time are their foes’), different limits to the engagement (in *stasis* they ‘will carry the conflict only to the point of compelling the guilty to do justice’), and different aims – in *stasis* the aim was ultimate reconciliation with one’s opponents.²⁸ In effect, in *stasis*, acknowledgement of the particular *kindred* relation between the opposing parties to the hostility had an effect on the characteristics, constituents, tools, and the level of restraint used within the space of engagement, creating a space that was very different to that of *war*. With this reading our contemporary term ‘civil war’ seems not only to be a misnomer but also an impossibility: a hostility that takes place in civil space (i.e. within one community or state) cannot in this understanding constitute a *war* but only a *stasis*;

and nor is it possible for a *war*, by definition, to ever occur in a civil context between kindred parties.

The above reading of *stasis* as a specifically delineated form of hostility between parties that are kindred within a common system finds echoes in Mouffe’s agonistic model of democracy where adversaries are ‘friendly enemies’ who share common ground. As Mouffe explains, ‘the main difference between enemies and adversaries is that adversaries are, so to speak, “friendly enemies”, in the sense that they have something in common. They share a symbolic space. Therefore, there can exist between them what I call a “conflictual consensus”’.²⁹ But, as I describe below, the space of *stasis* in ancient Greece also made further demands and had further implications on its participants.

‘Charging’ the space of *stasis*

Take a bus in Greece, and you may notice that each intermediate stop *en route* to the final destination is known, in modern Greek, as a *stasis*. As passengers we immediately understand that each such *stasis* stop is of a different nature to that of the final terminus. The *stasis* enacted here by the compound system of the bus, its driver, and its passengers, is not simply a stop in movement but a stop of a specific kind with precise shifts in occupation, concentration, engine power, orientation, and velocity of the various parties involved. The *stasis* is a located yet dynamic and active pause for necessary adjustment that seems to ensure the available energy for the subsequent movement, as well as being part of a larger given sequence of movement, and as such is very different to other forms of stopping: to a break-down, a simple coming to rest through a loss of energy to proceed, a final halt by parking, or to ending the journey in the violence of a crash.

Here in this modern Greek usage *stasis* is by no means a stoppage or a stagnation, echoing the fact that in ancient Greece, neither in medicine nor in

literature was the word *stasis* used in a way that can be directly translated as such. Instead when studying Plato's works it becomes clear that the verbs that he used for stagnating or stopping a forward flow were either ἐμπροδίζω (to fetter) or derivatives of ἵσχω (to curb or restrain), while for an 'inaction' a derivative of the verb ἡσυχάζω (to be still or kept quiet) was used.³⁰

But, concentrating on the period from approximately the eighth to fourth century BCE, a number of examples of *stasis* can be found that reflect and extend the concept of *stasis* as a specific kind of charged pause. For example, in the *Iliad* of Homer the participle form of *stasis*, στήσασσα, is used to describe how 'the goddess, white-armed Hera, stayed the horses' in order to pause her chariot by Zeus to ask for his assistance on a question of revenge.³¹ She then 'touched her horses with the lash; and nothing loath the pair flew on between earth and starry heaven.'³² Xenophon describes in his *Cyropaedia* how a child delights his family by composing (στήσαντα) his countenance with a *stasis*, 'assuming an expression somehow so grave and important' to offer his grandfather a cup of wine, after which he drops his grave expression to laugh and spring onto his grandfather's lap to kiss him.³³ Thirdly, in the popular sport of boxing the state of poised readiness, of tension and awareness in both body and mind that came between active attacking and defensive moves during of the bout was called a *stasis*. For example, the Greek statesman Aeschines writes in his speech *Against Ctesiphon*, 'as, therefore, in gymnastic contests you see the boxers contending with one another out of a position of *stasis* (περι τῆς στάσεως)'.³⁴

In each of these three texts from Homer, Xenophon, and Aeschines, the *stasis* is a charged pause that follows one, but precedes another, dynamic action – it is part of a clearly defined

temporal sequence of *kinesis-stasis-kinesis*. One can imagine Hera's horses stamping with bridled energy until the *stasis* is released and they may fly off; in Xenophon the child's laughter bursts out in a release of the curbed tension of the composed *stasis* that made him look so grave and important; and in Aeschines, one can picture the boxer's *stasis* as a tension of body and mind that enables a quick, forceful, and appropriate action or reaction to each of his opponent's attacks. In each case a new movement occurs post-*stasis* without the system having lost its energy: in fact, on the contrary, the elements of the system – the horses, the child, or the boxer's body – seem in each case to have been charged by the located tension of the *stasis*, on whose release new energy can flow.

At this point it is also important to note what *stasis* in this context is not. It is not, for example, a space of equilibrium, balance, or of idealised permanent harmony, but nor is it a space of violence or of collision. In each case the compound system (chariot, boy, or boxer) is understood to be active and generative both pre-*stasis*, and again post-*stasis*, where the second movement is in each case different and non-symmetrical to the first. Thus the two energetic movements (*kineses*) that bound a *stasis* in time do not oppose each other spatially: rather than being a place where opposing forces clash, the space of *stasis* is part of a clearly defined sequence that enables the energetic charging and the careful directing of forces, while also containing the assurance that the second movement, post-*stasis*, will differ from the first.³⁵

The inevitability of *stasis* in a living system

In *The Republic*, Plato discusses the effect of *stasis* on another kind of body, namely the body of the state, as part of the process of constitutional change. He acknowledges five possible forms of governance: aristocracy, timocracy (a constitution based

on the love of honour), oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. In Plato's text Glaucon and Socrates set up a hypothesis as to how changes in the 'materiality' of the citizens within an aristocracy, considered the best and most moral form of governance, lead to a *stasis* through which the aristocracy is transformed into a timocracy, considered a less ideal form of governance. Such changes in the constitution were not seen as permanent, but as cyclical with the timocracy later giving way to oligarchy, oligarchy to democracy, democracy to tyranny, and tyranny back to aristocracy, and so on. Here *stasis* in the political realm involved shifts within the citizens who constituted the whole, initiating tensions and oppositions within the body of the state, and the resulting constitutional change was acknowledged as an accepted part of the cycle of political reality.

While describing precisely how one form of government arises out of another, Socrates also points out that innovation and change would not be possible without this process of *stasis*:

'Come, then,' said I, 'let us try to tell in which way a timocracy would arise out of an aristocracy. Or is this the simple and unvarying rule, that the cause of the constitution being thrown into a different position [πολιτεία μεταβάλλει:] comes from the ruling class itself, when *stasis* [στάσις] is born within the constitution; but so long as a state, even a small state, is at one with itself innovation is impossible [δύνατον κινηθῆναι]?' 'Yes, that is so.' 'How then, Glaucon,' I said, 'will the polis be set in motion [κινηθήσεται] and in what way will our helpers and rulers disagree or express their different opinions either with each another or between themselves?'³⁶

It seems that within the ancient Greek concept of *stasis* there is an acknowledgement that permanent peaceful equilibrium between constituents of any system as the ideal to be indefinitely maintained is,

in fact, unrealistic. In any 'living' system that is a compound system of active parts, be it the Greek city-state or any other compound system, there was an understanding that these shifts and *stasis* interactions would inevitably occur. And it is also worth noting that in this understanding a *stasis* again never returns a system to its pre-*stasis* state. Instead, in each case the *stasis* enables a new form of onward movement to be expressed by the system post-*stasis*. This idea was echoed and extended in another area where the ancient Greeks discussed the internal processes of *stasis* in some detail: in discussions of the processes of disease in the human body.

***Stasis* as enabling the integration of change**

The modern definition of *stasis* in pathology as a 'stagnation or stoppage of the circulation of any of the fluids of the body, esp. of the blood in some part of the blood vessels',³⁷ is an echo of Chambers's earlier definition from 1753: 'Stasis, a word used by physicians to express a stagnation of the humors.'³⁸ Whether a stoppage of movement of blood, lymphatic fluids, or intestinal semi-fluids, this understanding of *stasis* as an unhealthy stagnation in a preferred forward flow within the body is also echoed in modern Chinese herbal medicine. In a book published in 2005 on this subject the uncomfortable signs of blood *stasis* are described as follows: [Fig. 3]

blood stasis [...] can also be seen in traumatic injuries with bruises, purple spots, stagnant nodules, fixed pain, purple dusky tongue or with purple spots on tongue, and choppy or wiry pulse.³⁹

But in ancient Greek pathology *stasis* was not understood as being stagnation in a flow *per se*, but rather it was understood that this temporary pause in onward flows was only one consequence of *stasis* in the human body. Plato describes the causes of

stasis and disease as follows in the *Timaeus*:

The origin of disease is plain, of course, to everybody. For seeing that there are four elements of which the body is compacted,—earth, fire, water and air,—when, contrary to nature, there occurs either an excess or a deficiency of these elements, or a transference thereof from their native region to an alien region; or again, seeing that fire and the rest have each more than one variety, every time that the body admits an inappropriate variety, then these and all similar occurrences bring about *stases* and disease.⁴⁰

In ancient Greece the human body was considered as a constellation of elements, defined here by Plato as earth, fire, water, and air.⁴¹ He describes *stasis* in the body as being initiated by an unwanted change in volume or location of one of these, but does not directly explain what caused this change beyond indicating that these shifts are not the exception: he talks here of ‘every time’ they occur, as if these shifts and the adjustments they demand from the body are a regular and expected part of life. Interestingly when talking of nutrition in his text, *On Ancient Medicine*, Hippocrates of Cos describes this initial change in one element that causes the *stasis* as making the element in question ‘apparent’, also translatable as ‘manifest’. He sees the component parts of man as ‘salt and bitter, sweet and acid, astringent and insipid’, elements also present in food. When these elements in the food are ‘mixed and compounded with one another [they] are neither *apparent* nor do they hurt a man; but when one of them is separated off, and stands alone, then it is *apparent* and hurts a man.’⁴²

But Plato continues by describing how during the *stasis* all of the body’s ‘particles that formerly were being cooled become heated, and the dry presently become moist, and the light heavy, and they undergo every variety of change in every respect.’⁴³ The *stasis* that Plato describes here is an attempt by the body as a whole to adjust to the initial

change. The *stasis* is a charged place where gradients of moisture or temperature or other pressures are actively applied within the system. In ancient Greece the performance of this kind of *stasis* was seen as being expressed outside the body in fairly uncomfortable ways: in the 1st century CE papyrus *On Medicine* by the unknown author *Anonymus Londinensis* we can read that ‘phlegms, boils, and substances like them are expelled from our bodies’ as a consequence of *stasis*.⁴⁴

Stasis in the ancient Greek body involved an uncomfortable but seemingly inevitable performance of adjustment to enable the body to respond to and thus accommodate an initial change, and shows distinct similarities to Plato’s description in the *Republic* of the role of *stasis* in constitutional change, cited above. It was part of the life process of the living body (or the living city-state) to adjust to these shifts using the process of *stasis*. The performance of this *stasis* was what enabled the integration of those changes that were seen as inevitable within any living system composed of active elements.

Stasis as space of full participation

Solon’s *Law on Stasis* has kindled surprise, confusion, and a range of attempts to justify or negate this law from Roman through to modern times.⁴⁵ The *Law* was part of Solon’s constitutional reforms of the Athenian state, which have long been considered as fundamental to the development of democracy but which have only survived in fragments. With these reforms, Solon aimed to counteract a visible decline in the morals of the state at that time, and specifically addressed questions of how relationships between parties to the state, members of the family, and between foreigners and the Athenian community were to be constituted.⁴⁶ The earliest citation of his *Law on Stasis* is given to us by Aristotle and sets out a very clear position demanding every citizen’s participation in a *stasis* when it arises:

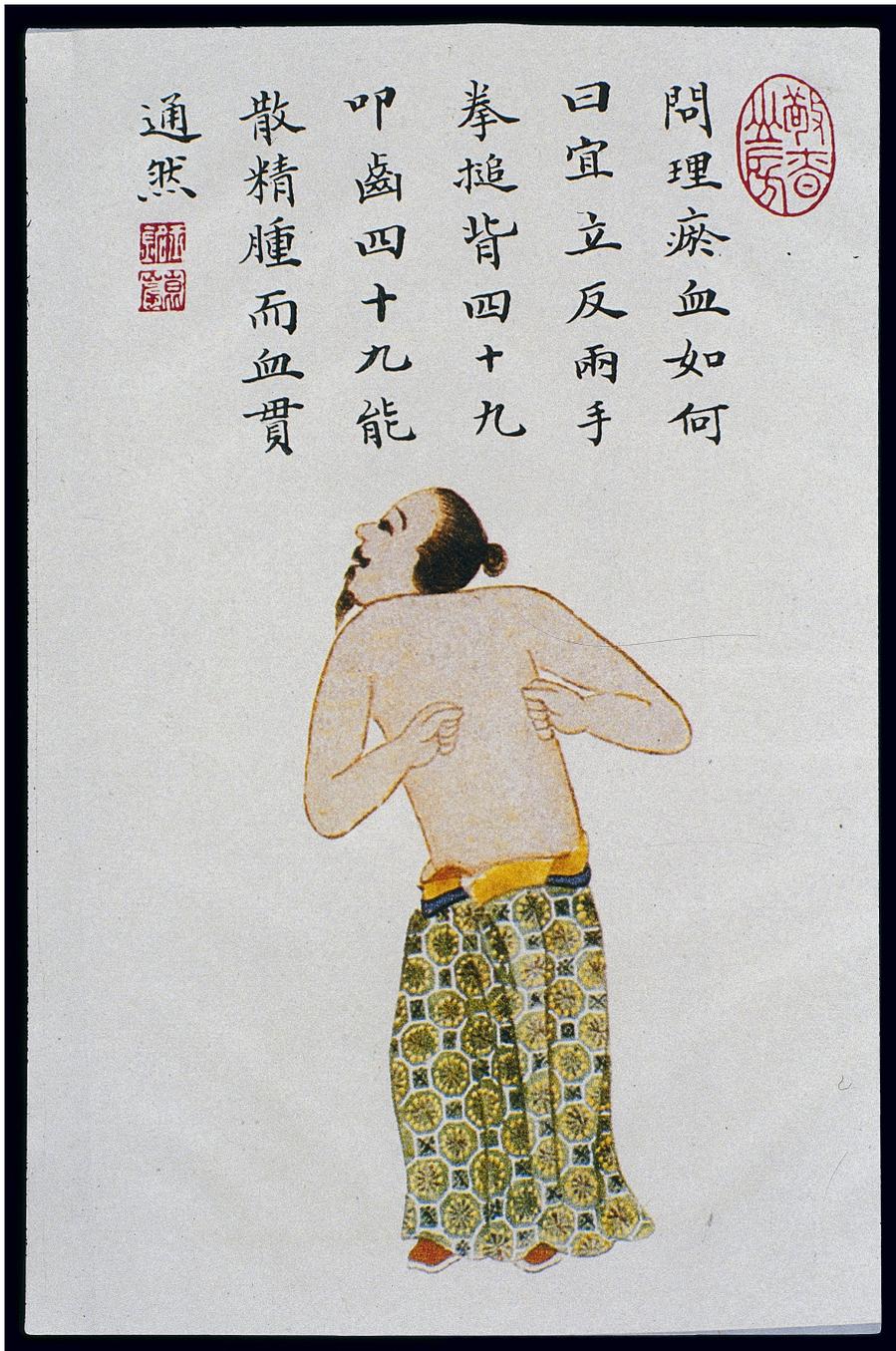


Fig. 3: 'Daoyin technique to rectify blood stasis' from a nineteenth century Chinese manuscript. Image courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

And as he [Solon] saw that the state was often in a condition of stasis, while some of the citizens through slackness were content to let things slide, he laid down a special law to deal with them, enacting that whoever when stasis prevailed did not join forces with either party was to be disfranchised and not to be a member of the state.⁴⁷

The fact that Solon made this *Law on Stasis* (and in this article I will remain with Aristotle's reading of the *Law*) acknowledges his concern that *stasis*, although surely unwelcome, will inevitably arise within a state, and thus a rule as to how citizens should act when it does arise is required. The *Law on Stasis* demanded the active presence of all the relevant actors – all citizens who had power to act within the political structure of the time – when such a *stasis* should occur. It ensured that the *stasis* became a space of full participation of those citizens in constituting and directing their own common good. Once active, the position or role that a citizen took within the *stasis* was left open: in Aristotle's reading Solon simply demands that citizens 'join forces with *either* party,' unlike Plutarch whose interpretation of the Law some 450 years later had citizens required to take up the 'better and more righteous cause'.⁴⁸

The consequences of this active participatory space of *stasis* for the polis are manifold. Solon is clearly not of the opinion that such full and active participation in a *stasis* would escalate hostilities in a negative way, but nor does he reassure us that this would, on the contrary, reduce the hostilities present in the *stasis* as it was played out. Clearly, full participation in the *stasis* would ensure the presence of those with a milder or more differentiated attitude to the questions alongside those who were more immediately concerned with the arguments, bringing into play a range of judgements, passions, and opinions, each of which could inform but also make demands upon the others. Perhaps, with this, the constellation as a whole becomes more

multi-faceted, but whether this finally results in an escalation or de-escalation of levels of hostility present in the system during the *stasis* is open to interpretation. But according to the reading of *stasis* set out in Section 2 above, the state of *stasis* was understood to 'charge' a system with energy to be channelled into the subsequent *kinesis* of the system once the *stasis* was resolved; thus in this case, although total levels of active energy in the *stasis* may indeed be increased with the maximum participation of all citizens, this energy would raise the energy of productive flow of the state post-*stasis*, with positive consequences for the system as a whole.

According to the reading given in this article, a much greater danger for the state is held in the risk of a *stasis* becoming reinterpreted by participants as its more destructive alternative, *war*. It could be considered that Solon's requirement for the active participation of all citizens in the *stasis* would have implications for those citizens' awareness of their being kindred to each other within the system of the polis, in that the very act of their taking part in directing the aims of their common city-state would reinforce those parties' understanding of themselves as holding an interest in the state that housed them, i.e. as being in a common *kindred* relation within the state. As discussed in Section 1 above, the acknowledgement of a kindred relation between the parties of a *stasis* is, following Plato's definition of *stasis* and *war*, precisely what denies the possibility of a *stasis* becoming a *war*. It seems that the greatest danger to the system as a whole would arise if a shift occurred in the parties understanding of the hostilities from *stasis* into *war* through a denial of their *kindred* relation to the other parties involved: this would have had dramatically negative implications for all those involved and for the spaces in which they commonly dwelt due to the uncontrolled levels of violence and destruction that would then have become not only conceivable but also viable.

Conclusion

This article discusses *stasis* as a specific and finely nuanced state of located dynamism. It resurrects a complex understanding of this particular kind of charged and generative pause from selected ancient Greek texts referencing milder forms of *stasis*. In ancient Greece the constituents of the *stasis* interaction were kindred elements dwelling together in a compound system of which they constituted the active parts; indeed the life of the compound system was generated, and its survival ensured, by the *stasis* interactions that occurred between these kindred constituents.

Using texts mainly from Plato but supported by other ancient Greek writers, examples of expressions of *stasis* in ancient Greece in literature, medicine, and the political arena have revealed a number of interlinked aspects of the state of *stasis*. These include: *stasis* as a 'charged' space of location and orientation that creatively enables new and energetic production to follow; *stasis* as a non-violent state through which a living system maintains the capacity to adjust itself to inevitable change; and *stasis* as a state that demands full participation both for its proper resolution and so as to counteract the danger that a *stasis* shifts into the uncontrolled destruction of *war*.

Relating these findings back to existing discourse in political theory on *stasis* as civil conflict, it is possible that the understanding of *stasis* discussed here could inform contemporary questions and problems relating to conflictual hostilities between kindred parties. Of particular relevance to such contemporary hostilities is the concept of *stasis* as a state that involves restraint and the careful measurement of force, and as a state with the potential to enable a system to move into energised productive flow, post-*stasis*, once the change that initiated the *stasis* has been addressed. This discussion has also raised the question whether the term *civil war* is itself an unhelpful misnomer in situations of civil

hostility, a question which goes hand in hand with the raised awareness of the implications for unrestrained violence should a *stasis* be transformed into a *war* in the relevant parties' understanding. *Stasis* in ancient Greece seems to inform us that a city or nation that seeks to define itself through depicting its opponents as non-kindred or alien to itself before engaging in hostilities with them, should be aware of the consequences of engaging in what the ancient Greeks would term *war* not *stasis*.

The interlinked aspects of the richer and more complex reading of *stasis* in ancient Greece discussed in this article are of real relevance to current architectural and urban discourse and practice. Indeed, as a powerful form of located interaction, *stasis* challenges us to review our current understanding of what constitutes spatial dynamism, and to consider the consequences of what could be seen as an ongoing imbalance between *stasis* and *kinesis* in the built environment. Our cities need lively, generative urban spaces of civic revitalisation that can both welcome and encourage communal energies of exchange and, as a practicing architect, I see the concept of *stasis* as relevant to the problem of positive reactivation of public space in our cities. The public spaces that we design for our cities should be able to accommodate and even welcome the frissons of active civic engagement: corresponding to Mouffe's concept of democratic adversaries as 'friendly enemies', *stasis* offers the concept of 'charged kindred engagements' which confirm reconciliation as the common aim, demand restraint due to the kindred relation between the parties, and acknowledge the *stasis* engagement as itself part of a temporal sequence which can 'charge' the space enabling energetic productive flow post-*stasis*. Beyond this, the public space of *stasis* can be seen as a space of location that could enable participants, be they families or communities, to resist excessive *kinesis*: a space to define and reorientate themselves within what T.S. Eliot termed the 'endless march of humanity

in some, or in any, direction' of our times. Finally, the shifts that the *stasis* engagement demands of the parties involved are precisely those that could enable our cities or states as a whole to adapt to inevitable change in the long term, and subsequently to become communicative, energetic, and outward-looking places during the reassuringly inevitable post-*stasis* periods of harmonious and productive flow that *stasis* in ancient Greece predicts.

Notes

1. *Alien*. Film. Directed by Ridley Scott. London: Twentieth Century Fox, 1979.
2. Otto Alvin Loeb Dieter, 'Stasis', *Speech Monographs* 17:4 (November 1950): 345–369. Dieter refers to a range of uses of the term *stasis* in ancient Greece, writing: 'the stall in which the horses stood was to the Greeks a *hippostasis*; they spoke of the *stasis* of the wind, the *stasis* of the water, the *stasis* of the air, the *stasis* of the bowel, and of the *stasis* of politics'. Dieter goes into detail on the ancient Greek understanding of *stasis* in rhetoric and physics (which I have not repeated in this article).
3. The primary sources referred to in this paper provide examples of the term *stasis* from within the Athenian context in ancient Greek culture selected from the Archaic period through to the end of the Classical or Hellenic period, more specifically, from the time of Solon to that of Aristotle.
Chronology of ancient Greek and Roman writers referred to in this article:
From the Greek Archaic period (c.8th–c.6th century BCE): Homer (7th or 8th century BCE); Solon (c. 638–c. 558 BCE).
From the Greek Classical or Hellenic period (5th–4th century BCE): Hippocrates of Cos (c. 460–c.370 BCE); Xenophon (c. 430–354 BCE); Plato (c.428–348 BCE); Aristotle (384–322 BCE); Aeschines (389–314 BCE).
From the period of the Roman Empire (27 BCE–395 CE): Plutarch (a Greek who became a Roman citizen) (c. 46–120 CE); Anonymus Londinensis (c. 1st century CE).
4. For *stasis* as civil strife in the work of fifth-century BCE historians Herodotus and Thucydides see Andrew Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Evolution in the Classical City* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 34, 51, 75–6. For *stasis* in ancient Greek pathology, see Plato, *Timaeus* 81e6–82b1, from W. R. M. Lamb (trans.) *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925); in physics and rhetoric, see Dieter, 'Stasis'; in boxing, see Charles Darwin Adams (trans.), Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon* 3:206. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.
5. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes the etymology of *stasis* as follows: 'stasis, n. /'stæsis/ /'steɪsɪs/ Etymology: modern Latin, < Greek στάσις standing, station, stoppage, < στα- to stand'. Its counter-term, *kinesis*, is defined: 'kinesis, n. /kaɪ-/ /ki'ni:sis/ Etymology: modern Latin, < Greek κίνησις motion', with *kinesis* in biology defined as: 'an undirected movement of an organism that occurs in response to a particular kind of stimulus'. <http://www.oed.com> (stasis) and <http://www.oed.com> (kinesis).
6. For (selected) examples of *stasis* in modern science fiction, see Larry Niven, *Ringworld* (New York: Ballantine, 1970); in pathology, see Sir William Arbuthnot Lane, *The Operative Treatment of Chronic Intestinal Stasis* (London: Nisbet, 1915); in psychoanalysis, see the psychoanalytical theory of Wilhelm Reich. www.wilhelmreichtrust.org. Accessed 13 November 2016; in palaeontology, see Donald Prothero, 'The Mysteries of the Tar Pits', Skepticblog, 27 March 2013, www.skepticblog.org.
7. Lynn writes, 'What makes animation so problematic for architects is that they have maintained an ethics of statics in their discipline. Because of its dedication to permanence, architecture is one of the last modes of thought based on the inert. More than even its traditional role of providing shelter, architects are expected to provide culture with stasis.' Greg Lynn, *Animate Form* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).
8. Miessen writes, 'consensus often means a decrease in interaction. No more interaction means stasis.' Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation*

- (*Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality*) (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 83.
9. *Ibid.*, 96.
 10. Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm* (Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics, 2015), 5. Agamben points out the 'manifold internal conflicts, or civil wars, that increasingly afflict the worlds populations', referring to Hannah Arendt's concept of the second world war as global civil war from her 1963 text *On Revolution*.
 11. Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife* discusses the role of *stasis* in political revolutions in Archaic and Classical Greece from 750–330BCE; M.I. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 43, outlines his view of the political meaning of the word *stasis*: 'one of the most remarkable words to be found in any language'; while Benjamin D. Gray, *Stasis and Stability : Exile, the Polis, and Political Thought, c. 404-146 BC* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 54, extends Loraux's thesis that 'in many cases [...] Greeks treated *stasis* as a collective madness or disease, for which individuals could not reasonably be held responsible'.
 12. Nicole Loraux discusses *stasis* in the Athenian state in detail in her *La Tragédie d'Athènes, La Politique entre l'Ombre et l'Utopie* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2005); see also Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens* (New York: Zone Books, 2001); and her 1986 lecture, 'La guerre dans la famille', *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 5(1997), published online 1 January 2005. <http://clio.revues.org/407>.
 13. As note 11. Also Hans-Joachim Gehrke, *Stasis: Untersuchungen Zu Den Inneren Kriegen in Den Griechischen Staaten Des 5. Und 4. Jahrhunderts V. Chr.* (Munich: Beck, 1985); and Ronald Weed, *Aristotle on Stasis: a Moral Psychology of Political Conflict* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2007).
 14. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1976).
 15. Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 15.
 16. See Gerald Raunig, *Dividuum. Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution*, vol. 1, trans. Aileen Derieg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), who traces early documented occurrences of the term 'dividuum' in Latin texts upon which foundation he develops his philosophy of dividuality.
 17. T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), 103. Eliot (1888–1965) is referring here to Matthew Arnold, the Victorian poet and cultural critic, who died in 1888.
 18. Plato, *Timaeus* 81a.
 19. Plato, *Phaedo*, in Benjamin Jowett (trans.), *Dialogues of Plato* (New York, Colonial Press, 1899), 100.
 20. Plato, *The Republic* 470b, author's translation and emphasis. Translation adapted from Paul Shorey (trans.) *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vols. 5 & 6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).
 21. *Ibid.* 470b, 470c.
 22. *Ibid.* 470e.
 23. *Ibid.* 471a.
 24. Plato, *Sophist* 228a, author's translation. John Burnet, ed. *Plato. Platonis Opera*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903).
 25. Plato, *Republic* 470d, 471a.
 26. *Ibid.* 471a.
 27. *Ibid.* 471b.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. Miessen, *Nightmare of Participation*, 109; and Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013).
 30. Plato, *Cratylus* 416b, 421b. Trans. Benjamin Jowett, <http://classics.mit.edu>.
 31. Homer, *Iliad* 5.755: ἔνθ' ἵππους στήσασα θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη. Author's emphasis. Homer, *The Iliad in Two Volumes*, trans. A.T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924).
 32. *Ibid.* 5.770.
 33. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*.1.3.9. Xenophon, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vols. 5 and 6, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).
 34. Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon*, 3:206. Author's translation and italics.
 35. My interpretation of the vector relationship within the

- physics of *stasis* differs from that set out by Dieter, *Stasis*, 348–353. Dieter quotes Stanley Caisson's *Progress and Catastrophe*: 'Between all opposite, or contrary, motions, movements, functions, or actions, there must needs always be a stasis', a position with which I slightly differ: I see the tensions between parties in stasis as part of the internal 'charging' process of the stasis, and the vectors of the flow of movement or action of the system as a whole pre- and post-stasis as always being different to each other but by no means opposing or contrary to each other.
36. Plato, *Republic* 545d, author's translation.
 37. *Oxford English Dictionary*.
 38. Ephraim Chambers and George Lewis Scott, *A Supplement to Mr. Chambers's Cyclopædia: Or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (London: W. Inngs & J. Richardson, 1753).
 39. Chongyun Liu, Angela Tseng, and Sue Yang, *Chinese Herbal Medicine: Modern Applications of Traditional Formulas* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2005).
 40. Plato, *Timaeus* 81e6-82b1. Lamb's 1925 translation has been modified in that the Greek term *stasis* has been returned to its original form by the author for the purpose of this article.
 41. In the papyrus *On Medicine* by Anonymus Londinensis the elements are blood and bile (hot elements) and wind and phlegm (cold elements). W. H. S. Jones, *The Medical Writings of Anonymus Londinensis* (Cambridge: University Press, 1947).
 42. Hippocrates of Cos, *Ancient Medicine*, chap. 14. <http://www.loebclassics.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk>. Author's emphasis.
 43. Plato, *Timaeus* 82a–82b1.
 44. Jones, *The Medical Writings of Anonymus Londinensis*.
 45. See, for example, Alexei Zadorojnyi, "'Stabbed with large pens": trajectories of literacy in Plutarch's Lives', in Lukas de Blois, et al., eds, *The Statesman in Plutarch's Works*, vol. 2 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008).
 46. Kathleen Freeman, *The Work and Life of Solon, with a Translation of His Poems* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), chap. 5.
 47. Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 20, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1952), section 8, v.5. For the purpose of this article the original Greek στασιάζουσαν is translated here as *stasis* by the author, in an amendment to Rackham's original translation.
 48. Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives with an English translation by Bernadotte Perrin in 11 Volumes*, vol. 1, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967 [1914]), 45.

Biography

Sarah Rivière is an architect based in Berlin. She set up her office as a sole practitioner in London in 1998, establishing the Berlin office in 2001. Her office's most recent project for a five storey residential building in Berlin-Kreuzberg was completed in Autumn 2016. A member of the ARB, RIBA UK, and the Berliner Architektenkammer, she has also taught urban design at the Technical University Berlin. She is currently researching a PhD in Architectural Design at the Bartlett in London on *stasis* as a generative state of spatial engagement.