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## Oedipus and the Crisis of Humanism

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**Abstract:** Sophocles' tragedy foregrounds Oedipus's humanistic qualities. Oedipus embodies a human-centered world, showcasing remarkable wisdom in solving the Sphinx's riddle and unhesitating loyalty to Thebes. Posthumanism's current state questions the Western humanist tradition, demanding a renewed look at the human values presented in the (post)modern reinterpretations of the myth. By choosing not to take any action, Vlad Zograf's Oedipus believes he can avoid tragedy in this version of the play. Therefore, the Theban hero attempts to escape his destiny through inaction, a choice that compels a reassessment of what truth and free will represent within the contemporary theoretical framework. In this article, I assess the Oedipal figure's significance in representing the modern human subject's crisis within a context of simulacra, post-truth and post-temporality.

**Keywords:** Oedipus; Posthumanism; Post-truth; Simulacra; Agency; Absurdity; Fate; Free Will.

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### On How to Stay Human in the Age of Posthumanism. The (post)modern Oedipus

The idea of humanism's crisis is becoming anachronistic, considering the prevalence of a cultural framework where the *post-* theories have gained theoretical hegemony. Oedipus, a humanist hero, is a figure whose timelessness and influence on numerous literary works encourages a re-examination of its relevance today. In the context of posthumanism, referencing Oedipus aims to integrate a rather counter-intuitive symbol within a field that is yet to be theoretically saturated, but which clearly challenges precisely those qualities that the protagonist embodies: rationality, ethics and individuality. In the ancient tragedy, Sophocles introduces us to a figure originating from a world where truth, autonomy, and responsibility are guiding values. The core of Oedipus's humanity encompasses both strengths and weaknesses. He is a Theban political agent, searching for meaning, is wise in solving the Sphinx's riddle, yet rebellious, doubtful, and prone to error. Thus, Oedipus embodies humanism's universals, with his exceptionalism, scepticism, but also fallibility. Tracing his

origins back to ancient Greece, in *Oedipus Rex* Sophocles creates a figure of agency and action, as André Bonnard emphasizes:

The poet represents Oedipus as human perfection. He possesses all human perspicacity: sagacity, judgement, power to choose the better part in every matter. He also possesses all human 'action' (I am translating the Greek word) – spirit of decision, energy, power to incorporate the thought in the act. He is, as the Greeks would say, master of the *logos* and the *ergon*, that is of thought and act. He is the man who reflects, explains and acts<sup>1</sup>.

Oedipus admits he is also a servant of the gods. Sophocles' version demonstrates his devotion to Apollo, fighting for Thebes amid the plague and showcasing his sense of duty toward divine will: "Oedipus: [...] Therefore you'll see me join the righteous fight to help the country's cause and serve the god"<sup>2</sup>. Oedipus's commitment to the gods demonstrates his superior understanding of religious heritage compared to other tragic figures<sup>3</sup>. The protagonist's devotion to Apollo grants him the insight that his destiny is conceived by an all-powerful god, is uncontrollable by his own human will, thus he "faces it knowing that he cannot win"<sup>4</sup>. The Theban embodies the humanist struggle to reconcile autonomy with the uncontrollable forces of transcendence. He seeks truth and meaning, even though his destiny (*moira*) is ultimately shaped by an all-powerful divine order, thus making truth an external value yet to be discovered instead of being a result of an autonomous human process.

However, he disobeys the rules of destiny because of his ignorance and excessive

pride. The hero, upon learning the prophecy of patricide and incest, runs away from Polybos and Merope, his adoptive family, hoping to avoid the prophecy's fulfilment. The belief that through his own will and actions he will control his own destiny and avoid prophecy is evidence of his *hubris*<sup>5</sup>. His pride leads him to defy the divine order, opposing the gods, and utilizing reason to interpret his world. The pursuit of knowledge and desire for truth makes him a humanist trying to overcome his tragic fate. For this reason, Oedipus is a very modern character, whose irreverence sets the stage for the concept of free will of the contemporary individual.

*Oedipus Rex* is a gnoseological tragedy, since the hero's ruin stems from his urgent, independent pursuit of the shattering truth, not his wrongdoings. Within the posthumanism convention, which, due to the synergy of various *post-* movements, operates under a post-truth paradigm, the awareness of authenticity must be sought elsewhere. To reject a truth-focused world means building a new world defined by polycentrism and, consequently, a multiplication of truths. The modern retelling of the myth in Vlad Zografi's *Oedipus at Delphi* [*Oedip la Delphi*] prompts us to ask: What becomes of a world seeking new meaning if the foundation of truth-seeking is removed? What else can replace *truth* as a guiding principle? Ultimately, what happens if we remove the possibility of error?

The Romanian author gives the ancient play a (post)modern spin. Oedipus arrives in Delphi to discover what the future holds. In Apollo's temple, the tragic hero meets Pythia, the devoted priestess. In Zografi's version of the tragedy, Pythia bridges the gap between *mythos* and *logos*,

humanism and anti-humanism. Pythia's figure is a transhuman reinterpretation, combining human and technological elements. Using video, she turns divine *logos* into projections of the future with her computer-like assembly. The entire show transforms Apollo's gift into a vulgar, shallow spectacle, yet cleverly incorporated in a profitable fortune-telling business. This version of Oedipus is naiver and more childish than Sophocles's. He is captivated by Pythia's gift, which allows her to tell the future, and prolongs his stay in Delphi. The modern version shows a greatly softened tragic hero. The cruel prophecy of patricide and incest is eventually revealed to him. However, Oedipus neither manifests the expected horror of the prophecy nor enacts the self-blinding traditionally associated with his punishment.

Vlad Zografi reveals a puzzling reaction of the Theban: he chooses stillness and inaction, thus avoiding his destiny. This choice, while absurd, proves efficient, and aligns with the existentialist philosophy, as inspired by Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. In this framework, the modern subject reclaims selfhood through *auto-poiesis*, paradoxically, not through action, but through an absurd non-involvement. Ileana Marin observes that, within a symbolic economy, the occupation of Apollo's temple and Oedipus' defiance signify the undermining of the divine order<sup>6</sup> and an act of dissent against a *status quo* the hero no longer abides by: "Oedipus: [...] Very well, the gods will have to fight against a man who doesn't feel like moving"<sup>7</sup>.

Zografi reimagines a hero of defiant agency: he chooses not to choose; he decides not to make any more decisions. The defining *ergon* of the Theban is replaced

by apathy. Coryphaeus's final words, "you walk the longest road by standing still"<sup>8</sup>, do not mean that Oedipus is morally ascetic. By positioning himself at the core of this transhumanist temple and allowing himself to be enchanted by this fortune-teller machine, Oedipus's agency is altered, transforming him into a posthumanist emblem of "radical relationality, including webs of power relations at the social, psychic, ecological and micro-biological or cellular levels"<sup>9</sup>. Should *hubris* in Antiquity result in the collapse of transcendence, the crisis of modern humanism, conversely, redefines *hubris* as the downfall of human capacity to self-determination.

In the guilt-culture, as E. R. Dodds shows, "the need for supernatural assurance, for an authority transcending man's, appears to be overwhelmingly strong"<sup>10</sup>. Transcendence here is not annihilated, but redefined, more precisely, in Cary Wolfe's terms, "rethought as the *virtual*"<sup>11</sup>. Within this context, Oedipus no longer searches for meaning, since truth is devoid of substance, thereby reorienting the focus from teleology to the mechanisms/means of existence. The hero abandons the quest for meaning and embraces an existential paralysis, a decision illustrating the new hero's absurd anti-humanism, where agency is optional: "Anti-humanism consists in de-linking the human agent from this universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on the concrete actions he is enacting"<sup>12</sup>.

With Zografi's play, Oedipus rejects Greek mythos and its transcendence, thereby becoming a "citizen" of a disenchanted world, where resistance is a form of *hubris* in a society of performance—which expects the individual to act. Like

Samuel Beckett's characters, the Romanian author creates a withdrawn, apathetic figure. Oedipus, like Vladimir and Estragon, does not wait for something to happen, but for something to make sense<sup>13</sup>. His outlook mirrors a society that, in Mark Fisher's view, is defined by an "indefinite postponement", delaying even the pursuit of significance and truth<sup>14</sup>. "Reflexive impotence", in the words of the same author, infiltrates Zografi's character as an anaesthesia of the ontological – a form of deep disengagement from the reality that contains him under the threat of a terrible prophecy. Oedipus's answer is neither detached contemplation, which would require an aesthetic solution to his problem, nor is it ascetic calmness, which would imply a moral resolution. The Theban's answer reflects a form of absurd existentialism, which involves either avoiding any elective system or, conversely, making irrational decisions in an existence that inherently lacks meaning. Oedipus uses Apollo's temple as a place to hide from his fate. His choice is defiant, a type of "game over/time out" within the logic of a game-based world. Here, fragmentation—as a unit of (non) meaning for both the world and the individual—provides the false impression of controlled disengagement without consequences. Oedipus halts the narrative, using rules akin to video games to exploit a paradoxical agency which allows him to control time, to pause, exit and reinvent the game's rules as he wishes.

Oedipus's motivations and the play's open ending allow multiple interpretations<sup>15</sup>. His detachment and refusal to control what seems to be uncontrollable are significant across three analytical dimensions: politically, temporally, and

ontologically. I will try to explain each one separately.

### (Post)Homo Politicus.

#### Agency and Disengagement

Jean-Paul Sartre's play, *The Flies*, already canonized in twentieth-century dramaturgy, is a reinterpretation of Aeschylus's tragedy, *Oresteia*. Between Oedipus and Orestes there are enough differences, especially in terms of responsibility and agency towards one's own choices and actions, but in both cases, we can observe the defiance and ignorance against the totalizing system of the political *status quo*. In the existentialist version of the myth of the Atreid dynasty, at Sartre, Orestes declares in front of the crowd of Argos: "I wish to be a king without a kingdom, without subjects"<sup>16</sup>. Zografi's hero states that he never wanted to become a king, but an actor, to give life to that "non-existent man, built only from words"<sup>17</sup>.

Within Zografi's scenario, authority is relaunched in a logic of representation. The author creates a digital version of the almighty god, devoid of substance – a simulacrum of an authority, which is represented by the attitudes and gesticulations staged by Pythia's dramatic interpretation. Even though the priestess puts on a rather unskillful show, the people humbly return to the temple of Apollo to learn their future. This is a sign that authority and power survive in complicity between the controlling entity and those targeted by the implicit restrictions. Especially in the hypermodern era, or rather, in a society of the spectacle, authority operates in much more subtle ways. Despotism and coercion are first decentralized (distributed across

various belief systems and technologies), becoming less strident. Conversely, they transform into a subversive soft power that works against the *carpe diem* philosophy<sup>18</sup>.

For posthumanism to succeed, power must be less centralized, with shared knowledge and technology allowing people to enable their self-determination. But in this case, the new form of control has something savage, seductive, even hedonistic, capable of inducing the target of authority's constraints to yield to discreet collaboration. Because it removes human accountability, Oedipus cooperates with Pythia's transhuman authority, framing his errors as a consequence of technological determinism, not human will. The oracle seduces Oedipus, practicing a soft version of control over the hero, determined by one providential idea: it gives him the guarantee that he can know his future, without its truth affecting him. This creates the paradox of a posthumanist prophecy – a hedonism of technological fortune-telling – where the individual can claim ownership of the future without the future and its repercussions of its contained truth affecting the individual. This is possible through a salutary distance imposed by the regime of screening. The screen functions like a protective shield, providing the illusion of control through its implicit detachment of the one looking at it, knowing that nothing can harm him. The subject's disengagement is amplified, with the projections distancing him from the reality of suffering and allowing him a form of apparent control, based on virtual (non)involvement:

OEDIPUS (*cheerful*): There! Yes, yes, there... It's good here! It's bad there, but it's very good here... Damn good!

My dears, there is silence and peace in Delphi! Nothing bad is happening in Delphi. [...] My dears, we are in control of the situation! (*Laughs.*) [...]

MARCOS (*puts a glass of wine down his throat; disgusted and terrified*): How much suffering! (*He pours another glass, puts it down his throat and goes out. On the screen: fires. Houses are on fire one after another. They explode.*)<sup>19</sup>

The images projected by the oracle-machine at this point are images of a gory war, of extreme violence, and Oedipus, numbed by the spectacle of the world, is desensitised in front of the screen as in an ivory tower in which inaction dissolves any bad omen. According to Jean-Marie Domenach, in ancient tragedy, "error without a culprit leads to divine guilt"<sup>20</sup>. In the case of the (post)modern Oedipus, the hero foregoes critical thinking and decision-making by relying too much on technology and automated systems for a flawless sense of self-morality. The inhuman excess of information will soon overwhelm Oedipus, hindering his ability to make thoughtful choices and impacting his relationship with time and divine authority.

### In and Out of Time

Ancient tragedy organizes time in a profoundly human way. Even though the action seems compressed to a matter of hours or days, the tragic crisis follows classical chronology: from the hero's past *hamartia* through the present action to future predictions, using strategies like *deus ex machina*<sup>21</sup>. Time appears inconsistent in Vlad Zografi's reinterpretation, where the future seems to be the privileged time.

Pythia and her acolytes exploit the human desire to know their future, so they take advantage of this greediness, even at the cost of deceiving the passersby:

SPYROS: Well, how can I not love my city, when my city gets wealthier every day that soon we will have nowhere to put the presents. (*Laughs.*) And it gets wealthier not because you clump around the stage, but because I fish for customers obsessed with the future. The people want to know their fate and pay a lot<sup>22</sup>.

They turn the temple of Apollo into a fairground booth and exploit the innocence of those eager to learn their future. The Chorus and the Coryphaeus celebrate the future as a saving religion, the only source to offer certainties, and without which humanity would have no meaning: "Coryphaeus: Friends, only in the future's seed could we read the meaning..."<sup>23</sup>. Oedipus arrives at Delphi with a shared faith in the future: "If we don't know our future, we die without understanding why we lived"<sup>24</sup>. However, shortly after, Pythia's screen malfunctions, so instead of predictions, it displays a violent present, one which Oedipus embraces: "The present! What a spectacular present! [...]"<sup>25</sup>. Is it a technology malfunction, Apollo's irony, or a sign of a typical posthuman temporality? A paradox unfolds: the oracle reveals the present, not the future, as if the present is beyond reach. Zograf's work displays a strange temporality, pushing Oedipus into a timeless space.

The digitized prophecies witnessed by the modern hero emphasize a specific temporal moment: the "appearance of events". Paul Virilio captures the idea in an

inspired comment on the effect that television broadcasts have during moments of belligerent crises:

The three tenses of decisive action, past, present and future, have been replaced by two tenses, real time and delayed time, the future having disappeared meanwhile in computer programming, and contaminate this 'real' time which contains both a bit of the present and a bit of the immediate future. When a missile threatening in 'real time' is collected on a radar or video, the present as mediated by the display console already contains the future of the missile's impending arrival at its target. The same goes for 'delayed-time' perception, the past of the representation containing a bit of this media present, of this real-time 'telepresence', the 'live' recording preserving, like an echo, the real presence of the event. The concept of deterrence assumes its proper importance in this context, where the elimination of the truth of the actual war exclusively promotes the terrorising deterrent force of weapons of global destruction<sup>26</sup>.

Oedipus is placed within a post-historicist and post-materialist framework of modern scenography. Sitting before the screen on which Pythia projects images of current reality, the hero is kept at a distance from life by an immaterial form of materiality. Once digitized, the world's spatio-temporal coordinates are presented in an anti-mnemonic fashion<sup>27</sup>, imposing a regime of inactivity, expectation, and consumption without metabolization. Oedipus is the victim of a technopathic consumption of reality that drains



him to a state of exhaustion. Such conduct no longer makes him an active explorer of truth, but an absurdist waiting, not so much for meaning, but for a way of looking at the world. The screen-mediated present and reality effectively removes Oedipus's role as a tragic agent. Gilles Lipovetsky suggests that the tragic is now subtly embedded within ontological articulations, with the crisis of humanism revealing the shift from an exhausted Prometheus to an alienated Dionysus<sup>28</sup>. The world transforms into a spectacle, a performative act. However, the distance Oedipus takes from the world's truth puts him in a liminal position, which deepens his disengagement from reality. The emptiness of the world thus shielded reflects, in fact, a profound alienation of the individual. In the society of technological time, which is detached from the subjective, arrhythmic duration metabolized by the individual, Lipovetsky's comment is as relevant as possible:

Thus, the universe of great technological speeds would only lead to the de-realization of the world, the sped-up loss of tactile and sensory perceptions, the digitization of human experiences. 'Loss of the world and the body', disembodiment of the visual and, in a broader sense, of pleasures, the universe of performance gives rise to a disembodied, 'spectral' body<sup>29</sup>.

To talk about Oedipus' exit *from* time, we must investigate those new transhumanist expressions that alter the nature of being *in* time. Video, a distinct postmodern expression, thrives on a simulacrum: it mimics real-time and feigns the present<sup>30</sup>. Video has replaced a logocentric culture and, as Fredric Jameson claims, now holds

a special place, a more clearly defined expression of the new socio-economic structure, compared to literature and film, previous dominant systems of representation of the spirit of the (modern) era<sup>31</sup>. The video evokes an uncanny effect of defamiliarization, presenting our reality through a paradoxical illusion of distancing from the *now*. However, this unveils the video's anti-mnemonic structure, effectively suppressing any critical distance:

nothing here haunts the mind or leaves its afterimages in the manner of the great moments of film (which do not happen, of course, in the 'great' films). A description of the structural exclusion of memory, then, and of critical distance, might well lead on into the impossible a theory of video itself- how the thing blocks its own theorization becoming a theory in its own right<sup>32</sup>.

Jameson's analysis shows how transhumanism alters memory's role in personal identity, historical understanding, and self-awareness. Transhumanist utopias free individuals from the need to remember, and therefore from the critical thinking prompted by remembering. Posthumanism stresses the externalization of memory via digital tech, archives, and storages, and therefore reconsidering memory's status as an internal cognitive function. According to Cary Wolfe, memory is a cognitive "prosthesis", changed and enhanced by tools that increase human cognitive ability<sup>33</sup>. As the world is preserved in digital memory, the images of wars, fires, and calamities become micro-doses of excitement for Oedipus, who looks at reality behind the screen's shelter. The cost of this

new transhumanist religion is referred to by Byung-Chul Han as “fatigue and exhaustion”<sup>34</sup> in the performance-oriented society. This is not typical work fatigue; it is the exhaustion of feeling alienated and fragmented. The self is consumed in consuming digital reality. Thus, exhaustion felt by Oedipus is (also) the disturbing effect of an inhuman amount of information:

OEDIPUS (screams desperately): Stop! (He gets up from his chair.) Stop, don't you hear?! (Pythia makes a gesture. The images cease. He walks nervously on the stage.) I can't stand them anymore! I know them all! I've seen them all a thousand times. I saw them sleep, how they get up, how they wash, how they eat, how they scratch, how they walk on the street... How they breed like rats!<sup>35</sup>

Returning to Virilio's argument, that the video eliminated the traditional division of time, using only *real* and *delayed* time<sup>36</sup>, the author highlights a larger issue here: the difficulty of finding truth in a time constructed under transhumanist ideals. This mixed reality, which combines the *conventional* now and the *delayed* now (virtual), also suggests a constructed, therefore “falsified” idea of truth. Consequently, virtual prophecy becomes a hyperreality linked to a temporal dimension, defined by the anachronism of truth and its image. Our conventional concept of time is discarded, as time transcends its constraints, and is no longer “timed”.

CORYPHEAEUS: See? If you are relaxed, time no longer squeezes you in its claws.

CHORUS: The claws that always keep you away from your goal.

CORYPHEAEUS: You have set yourself free.

CHORUS: Time disappears.

CORYPHEAEUS: Space doesn't suffocate you anymore.

CHORUS: Distances are an illusion.

CORYPHEAEUS: In nothingness lies the infinity.

CHORUS: In nothingness.

CORYPHEAEUS: And you hold that nothing in your palm without realizing it.

CHORUS: Space disappears.

OEDIPUS (*the same game*): I'm leaving.

CHORUS: Stand still.

CORYPHEAEUS: Relax.

CHORUS: Relax, Oedipus.

CORYPHEAEUS: Time is not your enemy. And neither is space.

CHORUS: There is no point in fighting against time and space<sup>37</sup>.

The brittle temporality of Zograf's script, like in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, depicts a *chronostasis* that rejects the concept of progress. How Oedipus relates to time makes the modern hero an *auto-poietic* product. By defying the cause-effect framework, Oedipus's actions challenge the concept of time; his inaction goes against the humanist idea of linear time: “The subject is an evolutionary engine, endowed with her or his own embodied temporality, both in the sense of the specific timing of the genetic code and the more genealogical time of individualized memories”<sup>38</sup>. This timeless suspension contrasts with the immobility seen in ascetics, contemplatives, or those devoted to a cause. It



is the impassivity of non-engagement, anaesthesia, disenchantment, or detachment. The Theban hero, enticed by an AI-like entity tied to digital memories, becomes a prisoner of contemporary ennui, which is fuelled by the abundance of images from the technological oracle.

### **Tragic (Post)Ontology**

The screen acts as a mediator between being (in a Heideggerian sense) and the perception of being (phenomenologically). Hence, Oedipus can no longer be a seeker of truth in his pursuit of authenticity. He becomes a witness to a simulacrum of truth, a tragic hero of liminality, caught in the web of information. The transhumanist prophet's scenography generates an odd virtual spectrality, challenging individual authenticity. According to Cary Wolfe, humans are "prosthetic beings"<sup>39</sup> who develop through/alongside language – their initial archive. Technology acts as a seamless extension that influences the way humans perceive themselves relative to time by eradicating the illusion of "immediate presence"<sup>40</sup>. Beyond the relationship with time, virtual environments facilitate a novel mode of perceiving the self as the other, as a spectral form<sup>41</sup>. The transhumanist era's identity-otherness hybridization, or ontological dislocation, implies some post-gnoseological considerations. To what extent can Oedipus grasp his true self in the complex layers of identity? Who is the authentic Oedipus: the hero in the temple of Apollo or Pythia's screen portrayal?

Thus, in the third hypothesis, I agreed that Oedipus's refusal also has ontological implications. Is there any humanity in this adaptation of Oedipus? In the framework

of causalist philosophy, his behaviour is anti-human: he sidesteps cause and effect logic, initiating events while facing no consequences. His simplistic judgement equated inaction with a lack of errors. Oedipus's choice not to act could be viewed as a product of post-isms' dispersal, where the human is no longer history's primary agent, or responsible for its development. Oedipus's resistance is manifested by his refusal to act, a way of fighting against his predetermined fate. Thus, he embodies the self-fulfilling posthumanist prediction, where the subject's autonomy loses its effectiveness, becoming symbolic and fixed in irreversible alienation. In short, the subject becomes a small part of a machine that uses energies and resources outside of human goals.

These reflections allow us to consider Oedipus within a new ontological framework, which, paradoxically, reveals the Theban hero's disturbing humanity. The idea invites us to reflect once again on contemporaneity and how we can define this intimate temporality. Gianni Vattimo suggests the world's current condition discards temporal proximity and historicism, substituting them with a perception of simultaneity<sup>42</sup>. Redefining the near present is possible through Zograf's telechronicle logic, a dramatic strategy of superimposing world images and images of the world:

The succession of figures is interrupted. On the screen, the images represent exactly what is currently happening on stage. As if a camera is sweeping the stage, observing the scenery, the chorus, but the focal point becomes Oedipus. The frame gradually closes in on Oedipus. There

are also returns to the rest of the stage, but Oedipus is increasingly present on the screen. Over the course of the following scene, the camera's approach to Oedipus reveals details of his grotesquely enlarged figure<sup>43</sup>.

On stage, we have the actor playing Oedipus, along with the digital image of the hero. Zografi's protagonist shatters the humanist myth of the individual as the centre of the world, a singular, autonomous entity. This occurs within a relativistic framework where the posthuman subject embraces fluidity and plurality, synthesizing the authentic and represented selves. Identity here, caught in the liminal space between authentic existence and representation, is characteristic to the transparent society, as the Italian philosopher notes: "bringing to light the plurality, mechanisms and internal reinforcements of the construction of our culture"<sup>44</sup>.

If the screen previously separated reality and virtuality and their specific roles, the play's ending merges them. Oedipus, both actor and spectator of his tragedy, merges these roles eventually, which deepens the crisis of his humanism. The spectator's importance as a catalyst in the tragic agent-patient-spectator dynamic is rarely discussed by critics. While the tragic crisis is a *sine qua non* component in the agent-patient relationship, it is the spectator's consciousness where the tragic implications are deeply understood. The understanding is achieved through the axiological functions (evaluating the tragic), gnoseological functions (recognizing the tragic), and participation in the tragic through compassion, pity, horror (a psychological perspective)<sup>45</sup>. According to

Gabriel Liiceanu, the spectator's character reveals a deeply human dimension through moral integrity and an understanding of tragic elements: "he (i.e., the spectator) is asked to behave in the tragic context not as a person, but as a representative of the human and as human nature in general, given the need to overcome all his determinations, particularities and limited moral tendencies that could function as instincts"<sup>46</sup>. In the context described by Zografi, *to look* (spectator) substitutes for *to take part* (agent). The ancient *topos* emblematic of Oedipus's tragedy, the crossroads, is now replaced by a new, equally tragic *topos*, imposed by transhumanism: the chair in front of the screen. With this new stage design, Oedipus becomes flawed and wretched, but also very human, embodying simultaneously the agent and spectator of his own tragedy. Tragedy defines Oedipus, thus making him human.

## Conclusion

Through different eras and cultures, Sophocles' classic hero survives, and each retelling adds to the enduring myth as it is influenced by new ways of thinking. The tragedy of Oedipus illustrates the crisis of humanism in an age in which humans are tempted to avoid the truth, knowing it is beyond their control because their autonomy and agency are hindered or, better said, transhumanly dispersed. To preserve his human essence, the hero must deliberate between making mistakes to fulfil his destiny or avoiding error at the cost of abandoning his humanity. Posthumanism's polycentric world challenges humanism, prompting a re-evaluation of Oedipus's human basis. Vlad Zografi's absurd parable

transcends a mere retelling of the ancient myth, which emerged from a history that modern minds struggle to fully grasp. The Romanian author's play constitutes a deep reflection on André Bonnard's question: "One can avoid being a wicked man. But how can one avoid being a man?"<sup>47</sup>. *Oedipus at Delphi* examines the quest for purpose in a world that feels meaningless. Zografi presents a modern Oedipus whose heroism is marked by futile resistance as he tries to learn the truth of his tragic destiny after escaping the confines of myth. In line with the Chorus's assertion, the hero's predicament reveals a tragic connection between activity and passivity: "The Chorus: You don't need to get up to walk. You don't need to take a step to move forward. Your running is hopeless"<sup>48</sup>. The paradox Oedipus faces is, thus, illustrated by an immobility that signals not resignation or regression, but the absurdity of any commitment.

The once heroic Oedipus no longer seeks truth, instead becoming an outside observer of its imitation. Oedipus is seduced by the screen's space and the post-temporality he cannot escape. He becomes a weary hero, overwhelmed by information he cannot handle, holding a

pseudo-omniscience over the world. His derealization is the price for becoming an exhausted meta-consciousness. Refusing his destiny, Oedipus becomes a sterile hero outside the screen. The shift from ancient *mythos* to digital *logos* causes a displacement in being, relocating the focus from the hero's tragic quest for true knowledge to dismantling temporality and identity hybridisation. The (post)modern version of Oedipus thus becomes a post-gnoseological tragedy. Oedipus returns "on the path of boycotted destiny"<sup>49</sup> realizing, according to Alexandra Ciocârlie, that the threat of nothingness and existential void constitute a punishment just as tragic and absurd as the avoidance of fate. *Oedipus at Delphi* prompts us to contemplate a novel humanism: one in which individual's genuine self is lost, and the subject embodies the strain of adjusting to a multiplicity of truths. In the post-truth world – a confusing spectacle of truth's images – the hero can re-evaluate his circumstances, echoing Jean Baudrillard's concept of the hologram: a subject who does not simply recognise the self in the mirror's reflection, but who is capable of observing from afar, effectively seeing the self as the other<sup>50</sup>.

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## NOTES

1. André Bonnard, *Greek Civilization*, vol. II, translated by A. Lytton Sells, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1962, p. 87.
2. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, translation by David Mulroy, Madison & London, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011, p. 11.
3. Jocasta, on the other hand, defies the divine order, thus revealing her secular beliefs. For her, the gift of the oracle is not infallible. Given the religious framework of the Greek polis, Jocasta demonstrates an obtuse rather than rationalistic character: "Jocasta: What good can worry do a person? Chance controls our fortunes. No one sees ahead." Sophocles, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
4. Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of The Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, translated by Christine Shantz, Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1998, p. 415.
5. Employing Heideggerian philosophy, Ileana Marin provides another explanation for *hubris* in Sophocles' version. The author considers that Oedipus relinquishes his freedom, precisely because he accepts predestination as the fundamental, immutable value of his life. Consequently, Oedipus is unable to discover the meaning of his own existence and thus live authentically; instead, he is guided by a transcendental truth of the divine order. Therefore, Ileana Marin places the Oedipal guilt in an existentialist *hubris*, overlooking the anachronism of applying the idea of free will in the context of ancient tragedies. Ileana Marin, *Infidelitățile mitului. Repere hermeneutice [The Infidelities of the Myth. Hermeneutic Coordinates]*, Pitești, Paralela 45, p. 117.

6. The cultural turn features a hero capable of confronting the old religious regime, a confrontation made even at the risk of unleashing chaos, which ultimately leads to his own freedom: "The destruction of dictatorial discourse generates chaos in a world where freedom of decision did not exist and could not exist. The absence of the transcendent, totalitarian voice shatters the mechanism that was based on the principle of unilateral listening." *Ibidem*, p. 131-132.
7. All the translations from the Romanian were made by the author of this paper. Vlad Zografi, *Oedip la Delphi [Oedipus at Delphi]*, București, Editura Humanitas, 1997, p. 38-39.
8. Vlad Zografi, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
9. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p. 102.
10. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and The Irrational*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1951, p. 75.
11. Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, Minneapolis & London, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 299.
12. Rosi Braidotti, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
13. As I argued in another study, the concept of waiting, which is defining for Samuel Beckett's heroes, becomes symptomatic of an existence that seeks to contemplate its own finality within the slow time of anticipation. In a sense, the premises of *Waiting for Godot* are similar to those of the situation in which Oedipus finds himself: "Through waiting we introduce ourselves *to* time, becoming aware of ourselves and the particular rhythms of existence. This impression of time's accentuation, specific to anticipation, offers a good occasion for reflection on the finality of waiting, on the human condition, and on existence which "expands" into waiting. Viewed through the lens of these imprecise spatio-temporal markers, and revolving around a meeting with such important stakes, Beckett's play unfolds between two references: *ab absurdo* and *expecto, ergo sum*." Mădălina Stoica, *Personajul absent și poetica absenței în literatură [The Absent Character and the Poetics of Absence in Literature]*, Bucharest, Pro Universitaria Publishing House, 2022, p. 195.
14. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Winchester, John Hunt Publishing, 2022, p. 22.
15. Vlad Zografi proposes an open ending. Oedipus leaves the temple of Apollo and heads vertiginously toward the fateful place of misfortune, the crossroad, where he would meet his father. However, the ending remains ambiguous, leaving us uncertain whether the meeting occurred under the sign of the nefarious prophecy or whether Oedipus freed himself from the burden of the parricide, becoming a truly free man. Ileana Marin argues that the ending of the play deepens the hero's tragedy, precisely due to the confusion that hangs over his destiny. Ileana Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
16. Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit & The Flies*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1977, p. 165.
17. Vlad Zografi, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
18. "Let's put it bluntly: there is no greater diagnostic error than such a judgment. Because, nowadays, nothing is spared from threats, uncertainties and risks. Jobs, new technologies, the planet, globalization, sex life, choice of studies, pensions, immigration, neighborhoods on the "periphery", almost everything is likely to feed feelings of anxiety. And while people no longer believe in a future that is necessarily better than the present, new fears about the present and the future are developing. The more hedonistic happiness is present on the poster, the more the "fears and chills" that accompany it are more manifest: it is not so much *carpe diem*, but the feeling of insecurity. To tell the truth, the cult of the moment is not in front of us, but behind us." Gilles Lipovetsky, *Paradoxical Happiness. The Paradoxical Happiness: Essay on the Hyperconsumption Society*, translated by Mihai Ungurean, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2007, p. 207.
19. Vlad Zografi, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
20. Jean-Marie Domenach, *Întoarcerea tragicului [The Return of the Tragic]*, București, Editura Meridiane, 1995, p. 31.
21. Guy Rachet, *The Greek Tragedy*, translated by Cristian Unteanu, Bucharest, Univers Publishing House, 1980, p. 204.

22. Vlad Zografi, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
23. *Ibidem*, p. 11.
24. *Ibidem*, p. 59.
25. *Ibidem*, p. 60.
26. Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, p. 66-67.
27. "What we in the classroom are now facing is a generation born into that ahistorical, anti-mnemonic blip culture - a generation, that is to say, for whom time has always come ready-cut into digital micro-slices", Mark Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
28. Gilles Lipovetsky, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
29. *Ibidem*, p. 247.
30. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, p. 74.
31. *Ibidem*, p. 69.
32. *Ibidem*, p. 70-71
33. Cary Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. xxv.
34. Byung-Chul Han, *Agonia erosului [The Agony of Eros]*, translated from German by Viorica Nișcov, foreword by Cătălin Cioabă, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2014, p. 51-56.
35. Vlad Zografi, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
36. Paul Virilio, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
37. Vlad Zografi, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
38. Rosi Braidotti, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
39. Cary Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 295.
40. *Ibidem*, p. 295.
41. *Ibidem*, p. 298.
42. Gianni Vattimo, *Societatea transparentă [The Transparent Society]*, translated by Ștefania Mincu, Constanța, Pontica Publishing House, 1995, p. 22.
43. Vlad Zografi, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
44. Gianni Vattimo, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
45. Gabriel Liiceanu, *Tragicul. O fenomenologie a limitei și depășirii [The Tragic. A Phenomenology of Limit and Overtaking]*, Bucharest, Univers Publishing House, 1995, p. 85-109.
46. *Ibidem*, p. 87.
47. André Bonnard, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
48. Vlad Zografi, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
49. Alexandra Ciocârlie, *În dialog cu anticii [In Dialogue with The Ancients]*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2014, p. 214.
50. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 106.