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MYTH AND PSYCHOANALYSIS IN *EDIPO RE* BY PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

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Abstract: Greek and Roman antiquity together with the ancient myths represent important part of European heritage, with all the dynamic aspects that this term bears. It goes about discursive practice that has powerful potential for choosing and using something from the past in order to produce meanings in presence. Perceived and constructed as a common European cradle, antiquity is specific, being shaped and reshaped in different periods and parts of Europe with different (ideological) aims. One of the most durable traces of ancient myths are found in psychology and psychoanalytical theory, which is directly related to the times of its development, that coincided with the fascination with antiquity and archaeological discoveries of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Almost everybody is familiar with Oedipus complex, but only critical academic approach to classics and myths point to the fact that when we talk about famous theory of Freud it does not go about interpretation of ancient myths in ancient context, but about their re-invention. This question of Freud's usage of the famous myth and its reading out of ancient context was discussed in the 1960ies by French anthropologist of ancient worlds Jean-Pierre Vernant. Almost at the same time, Pier Paolo Pasolini approached the same question in his famous film Edipo Re (1967). The focus of this paper will be film by Pasolini and his artistic application of Freud's theory to the ancient myth, which opens numerous questions important for the contextualisation and usage of myth both in ancient as well as in contemporary context.

Key words: Oedipus, Sophocles, Freud, Pasolini, psychoanalysis

Introduction

In 1967, Pier Paolo Pasolini made *Edipo Re*, a film starring Silvana Mangano as Jocasta, Franco Citti as Oedipus, Ninetto Davoli as Angelo the Messenger, and Julian Beck as Tiresias. The movie is a commentary on Freud's

widely known psychoanalytical reading of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, by Sophocles. Although the theory of an Oedipal complex has been repeatedly challenged, redefined, or refuted, the relationship between the theory and the myth is often left unquestioned.[1] Yet, Pier Paolo Pasolini placed the focus precisely on this relationship between Freudian theory and Sophoclean myth, and in this way situated his art in parallel to the text of anthropologist Jean-Pierre Vernant, who, in the same year Pasolini completed his film, published his text Oedipus without the Complex, in which he similarly concentrated on the issue of Freud's reading of *Oedipus Tyrannus.*

This very academic text of Vernant's offers a starting point for intertextual analysis of Pasolini's film. And while it is sometimes argued that reception studies are not concerned with the meaning of an original text in the ancient context, others contend that the relationship between ancient and modern should be considered (Hardwick & Stray, 2011, p. 4). Sharing this view, I have chosen to analyse an artistic work alongside an academic work focusing on ancient context, because of their unusual resonance and in spite of their different discourses and points of departure. Both Pasolini and Vernant focus specifically on the relationship between Freud's and Sophocles' myths about Oedipus – the first in the language of the seventh art and the second through the lens of academia.

I credit my own point of departure to Kennet MacKinnon, who called Pasolini's film a *meta-tragedy* with a modern perspective that "takes account of Marx, Freud, and Frazer" (MacKinnon, 1986, p. 41). It was precisely this standpoint that enabled Pasolini to make a film so comparable to the academic output of his contemporaries, such as Jean-Pierre Vernant. In analysing the film, my approach will be textual in the wider sense, understanding audio-visual text as a structure of signs that enable the production, exchange, and reception of meanings.

Edipo Re consists of three main parts: the prologue which is autobiographical, the central part situated in ancient Greece, and an epilogue set in contemporary Italy.[2] In this final part, the baby born in the beginning of the film

[1] The list of psychoanalytical theoreticians who criticized Freud's theory of an Oedipus complex is long, starting with Jung and Rank, and later Lacan, and continuing with feminist psychoanalysis from Karen Horney (who belonged to Freud's circle), Simon De Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and others. In her text Beyond Oedipus, Griselda Pollock focuses on feminist theories, emphasizing that "almost all psychoanalytical theories of the feminine… operate within the walls of the Oedipal topos…" (Pollock, 2008, p.88). According to Pollock, the exception among psychoanalytic readings of Greek myths, and theorization that radically deviates from the famous theory of Freud, is that of Israeli theorist, psychoanalyst, and artist Bracha Ettinger (Pollock, 2008, p. 86; Ettinger, 1992; 1994).

[2] Among scholars, there is no consensus as to whether the film consists of three or four parts. The central part of the movie can be viewed as comprising two separate segments – the first is pre-Sophoclean and the second is Sophoclean (Schironi, 2009).

has grown up, having passed through the experience – or dream – of Oedipus, in the middle, mythical stage of the movie.[3]

Despite the autobiographical tone of the film, as well as overt references to Freudian theory, I argue that the film is not straightforwardly Freudian. Indeed, as Pasolini claimed in an interview about the film: "instead of projecting the myth onto psychoanalysis, I have re-projected psychoanalysis onto the myth. This was the fundamental operation in *Oedipus*. But I kept very free, I followed up all my aspirations and impulses. I didn't deny myself a single one" (Interview by Oswald Stack, 1969). In this way, Pasolini focused on the relationship between the texts of Sophocles and Freud, which was exactly what Jean-Pierre Vernant did, though he employed the approach of historical anthropology. So, while Pasolini was exploring the topic artistically and unreservedly, Vernant was patiently and thoughtfully considering the cultural and historical context of Sophocles' myth as well as the context in which Freud conducted psychoanalytical research and made conclusions about the myth of Oedipus before labelling this complex eponymously and working to justify it (Vernant, 1996a, p. 85).

Oedipus in a time machine: from the ancient stage to Freud's couch

In 1900, Sigmund Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1997), in which he argued that the origin of different neuroses could be traced to early childhood, in particular to a child's love for one parent and hatred for the other. He characterized this as a generalized phenomenon that led to neurosis in some people and resolved in others. Freud found proof for his theory in the Sophoclean tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and it became *locus communis*, not only in psychoanalysis but in arts and everyday life.

However, in his seminal text, *Oedipus without the Complex*, published for the first time in 1967 – the same year *Edipo Re* was filmed – Vernant pointed out that Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus myth was of no value to research of tragedy and its audience in the ancient context, describing it as meaning inscribed into the ancient myth. Vernant's research in structural historical anthropology has a distinctive and detailed focus on religious, social, and politi-

[3] Psychoanalytic readings of Pasolini's *Oedipo Re* do of course dominate analysis. Mostly, they explore the idea that Pasolini employed Freudian psychoanalysis for the purposes of an autobiographical and autoartistic search. See, for example, Audrène (2004) and Petković (1997). However, Naomi Greene highlights that "not one but three texts infuse *Edipo Re*: the Oedipus tale..., Freud's reading of that tale and his elaboration of the Oedipus complex, and Pasolini's references to his own childhood" (Greene, 1990, p. 151).

cal context.[4] His brilliant and complex text regarding of Freud's use of the Oedipus myth, which illustrates Freud's complete negligence of the ancient context, may be simplified and explained through the Saussurean linguistic model of *sign = signifier + signified* in the way in which Roland Barthes appropriated it in his text *Myth Today*, defining myth as a second-order semiological system (Barthes, 1984, p. 3). Freud's reading of the Oedipus myth may be regarded as a new myth. In other words and following Barthe's interpretation, the myth of Oedipus would represent a *signifier* for a specific psychological phenomenon (the *signified*), together constituting a *sign*, which is Freud's Oedipal theory that itself appears as a meta-language not seldom understood as interpretation of the mentioned Greek myth.

The main question posed by Vernant is how a tragic work of literature created in Athens in the fifth century BC, in a specific socio-political context and referencing a Theban legend (which pre-dates even Sophocles), relates to the observation of a psychiatrist at the turn of the twentieth century (Vernant, 1996a, pp. 85-86). Thirty years before Vernant, Olga Freidenberg, another classical scholar from Saint Petersburg, had also criticized Freud for his anti-historical approach.[5] She emphasized that the eroticism which plays a key role in Freud's psychoanalytical theories was not understood in the same way in antiquity (Freidenberg, 1997, p. 28).[6]

This disparity, between perceptions of eroticism in antiquity and in the Victorian era, is just one example of the anti-historical perspective exhibited by Freud. Still, though Freud did not take historicity into account, his attitude

[4] The term 'structural' is used instead of 'structuralist' to emphasize the difference between the Levi-Strauss semantic model, which is oriented toward research of the universal in myth, and Vernant and other representatives of the French School of Anthropology of Antiquity, who focus on social and cultural context (Champagne, 2015, p. 72).

[5] Olga Freidenberg was a classical scholar in the first half of the twentieth century who was long unknown in international academic circles because she lived in Russia and published in Russian, and who was neglected in her own country due to a conflict she had with Russian philologist Nikolai Marr. However, some of her work was translated into English in 1997 and published under the title *Image and Concept: Mythopeic Roots of Literature*. The main methodological orientation of her work stems from her position on cognitional development and the transformation of concepts through the time, and the need for constant awareness of the instability and change in meaning of different concepts and the motives of ancient folklore. Her historical contextualization within different periods of ancient Greece places Freidenberg alongside much younger generations of scholars.

[6] Sexuality and obscenity were nothing to be ashamed of in ancient Greece, where people were not yet burdened by Christian guilt and notions of impurity. Eroticism even played an important part in ritual, in fertility cults, and in comedy. It was not until Roman times that certain expressions were deemed 'unclean' due to the vocabulary with which they were expressed. For more about obscene language in Greek antiquity, especially in Attic comedy, see Henderson, 1991.

toward ancient myth corresponded to general attitudes of his time.[7] The spirit of the European nineteenth century was strongly marked by a fascination with ancient Greece that led to appropriation for the construction of a European identity.[8] Furthermore, as Ranjana Khanna argues in her book *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, the construction of a psychoanalytic self, which harkens to the nineteenth century, is directly related to the context of European colonialism and "the language of colonial disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology." (DuBois, 2013, pp. 316-17; Khanna, 2003, pp. 27-37) Similarly, the attitude of psychoanalysis toward antiquity may be seen as a colonization of ancient myths.

Beyond issues of historical difference and context, Vernant also points out that it is impossible to prove a psychoanalytical theory without psychological research grounding it in the reaction of the audience, noting that "the material of the tragedy is not the dream, postulated as a human reality outside history, but the social thought peculiar to a fifth-century city, with the tensions and contradictions that appear in it when the advent of law and the institutions of political life place in question the old religious and moral traditional values." (Vernant, 1996a, p. 88) The analysis of Vernant, from which I have presented only certain points here, may be summed up by Pasolini's observation that Freud "projected the myth onto psychoanalysis." So, let us now turn to the film of Pasolini to see how he "re-projected psychoanalysis onto the myth."[9]

The film: a (psycho)analysis

Autobiography in the social context

The first part of Pasolini's *Edipo Re* is an obvious autobiographical representation. It is set in northern pre-war Italy, where Pasolini was born and spent

[7] There are several publications addressing the effects of nineteenth century culture and academia on Freud. See, especially: Armstrong (2006). Richard Armstrong (1999) researches the influences of nineteenth century theatrical performances of Oedipus and their impact on Freud's ideas about an Oedipal complex. Armstrong particularly singles out the play as translated by Juel Lacroix. On the same topic, as well as for a detailed history of the reception of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, also see Macintosh, 2011. Also, in the text *Beyond Oedipus,* Griselda Pollock turns to parallels between the academic work of Jane Harrison and Sigmund Freud. She also mentions George Dimock's *The Pictures over Freud's couch*, in which the author analyses the art collection of Freud and its influence on the development of his Oedipal complex theory (Pollock, 2008; Dimock, 1994).

[8] The relationship between the narratives of Freud's construction of his theory and of European appropriation of antiquity is analysed in an exceptional book by Richard H. Armstrong (2006).

[9] Cacoyannis was not wrong to claim that Pasolini's ancient-themed films were not focused on tragedy but on Greek myths (Winkler, 2009).

his childhood years. It shows the birth of a baby to his caring, gentle mother, and her husband – a young officer who is jealous of his baby boy. The scene that marks the shift between the first and the second parts of the film is one in which the father angrily grips his son's feet, hurting the boy (Oedipus means "the one with swollen feet"), having expressed in a preceding scene outrage, jealousy, and fear that his son will take everything from him. In that sequence (6.36' – 7.36'), which is followed by military music and the sounds of cicadas, the father stares at his son, who looks back at him smilingly and full of joy from a baby carriage, as the father, dressed in his military uniform and appearing solemn and angry, says nothing. Still, we hear what he is thinking, and those inner thoughts are accentuated as text that, at some points, occupies the whole screen.

> You are here to take my place in the world, send me again into the void and rob me from all I have. She will be the first thing you'll rob from me. She, the woman I love.

The boy covers his eyes with his palm, indicating his desire to play the children's game of peek-a-boo; but also, hinting that he does not want to know what his father is thinking.[10]

Pasolini's father, represented as a soldier who shows no emotions to his son beyond anger and the fear that lies behind it, is as much Pasolini's autobiographical confession as a reflection of the patriarchal world in which men are expected to devote themselves to social and political obligations, and to be brave and in control of their emotions – which, Freud teaches, are impossible to truly control or suppress. Indeed, in the scene described above, the father's emotions find their way out, directed at the person most innocent, vulnerable, loving, and trustful – his baby son.

The patriarchy of society is also depicted by Pasolini through a clear division in the film between the world of men (in social spaces) and the world of women (in the private sphere, devoted to raising children and spending time with other women). The film sequences in which these two worlds meet take place in the bedroom (in the private sphere) and at an evening party (in the public sphere). However, it is noteworthy that in both public and private spaces, Pasolini's father wears his military uniform, which may point to the fact that his social role is an integral part of his inner self and his deepest intimacies.

The social context that this part of Pasolini's film provides is characteristic of the approach to myth that he and Vernant share. Pasolini points out in these scenes that people's emotional responses are inevitably related to social environments and their unwritten rules. His personalization of the Oedipal complex through auto-analysis thus offers a social contextualizing that Freud's

[10] Rossana Lauriola researches film language, including this gaze in the context of Pasolini's interpretation of Freud (2011).

theory lacks. This introductory part of the film, representing the birth of Oedipus (Pasolini) and his early childhood, precedes Sophocles' tragedy. By translating the film from an earlier point in the myth, the focus changes from Oedipus to Laius, which also shifts the psychoanalytical perspective.

Psychoanalysis of mythical Oedipus

The second part of the film is based on Greek myth and partly on the original Sophoclean text of the Oedipus myth, moving from the twentieth century to Greek antiquity. Although set in ancient Greece, it was shot in Morocco, and the costumes, colours, and landscape thus diverge from the typical imagery of Westerns presentations.[11] The music was partly composed by Pasolini, and partly acquired in Japan and Romania (Rohdie, 1995, p. 32). The result is a mixture of Arabic, Greek, and Slavic elements, among others, which adequately convey Pasolini's notion of a mythical part of the film that corresponds to Freud's idea that myth has no time or place.

In this second, mythical part of the film, Pasolini adheres to the text of Sophocles with accuracy and fidelity. Yet, even in this part of the film, the story of the myth begins long before the time of the tragedy, with a scene in which a Theban shepherd carries the baby boy to the wilderness. Instead of killing the boy, the shepherd leaves him on Mount Cithaeron, from which another shepherd takes the baby to a childless couple (Polybus and Merope) in Corinth. Oedipus (played by Franco Citti) becomes their son, the Son of Fortune, a name they bestow upon him with utmost compassion, raising him like their own and keeping from him the secret of his adoption.

Oedipus grows up and, teased because he does not look like his father, is disturbed by a recurring dream. This is an allusion to Freud and his focus on dreams, but also corresponds to a scene from the first part of the film, when baby Oedipus lies in his bed alone in the darkness. It is therefore a flashback from early childhood and not a mere imagination, directly challenging Freud's thesis that the complex of Oedipus is grounded in fantasy.

Oedipus decides to consult the Delphian oracle, to uncover the meaning of his dream. His mother is supportive at first, but when Oedipus announces that he is leaving the next day, she cries as if mourning him. As usual, the oracle does not offer direct answers and reveals only that it is the fate of Oedipus that he is going to kill his father and marry his mother. Confused and in disbelief, Oedipus laughs at this prediction, but the oracle repeats her words once more.

[11] The costumes are influenced by both Arabian and Mexican designs (Rohdie, 1995, p. 32). Designer Danilo Donati did not buy any fabrics to make the costumes, using rough materials, mostly waste canvas (Brination, 2012).

No one may escape what the gods decide. "Now go away," the oracle tells Oedipus, "Don't infect people with your presence" (25.00' – 26.10').

Oedipus cries, covering his eyes with his hands and hiding his tears, revealing his inability to confront the destiny predicted for him. This gesture replicates that of the baby in the scene from the film's prologue described above, again emphasizing the chain of events that led to each other and turning the attention of the audience away from the prophecy and toward the behaviour of Oedipus' father. This technique of scene repetition, used throughout the film, may be interpreted in the context of the dream-like second part – against which events from the prologue and epilogue are contrasted but in which the way these events are interwoven is emphasized – where it is clear how crucial they are for Pasolini in translating the focus from myth to autobiography.[12]

Oedipus travels far away from the parents who raised him, horrified by what he has heard and determined to avoid his fate. During the journey toward Thebes, he comes upon an old king who arrogantly asks Oedipus to move out of the way. It is Laius, the father Oedipus is unaware of, and when Oedipus refuses to obey, Laius' guards attack. In self-defence, Oedipus kills Laius.

Here, Pasolini has thrice expressed the motive of the father who orders the death of his son, after first doing so in the prologue, and a second time in the beginning of the second part of the film. However, when the father and son meet on the road to Thebes, Laius is no more aware of his parenthood than Oedipus is, instead expressing his sense of royalty as an unquestionable right to kill anyone standing in his way. Thus, apart from the interpretation that Laius subconsciously knew he was ordering that his own son should be killed, this points to a translation of the personal relationship to the collective (since Laius is a ruler), shifting the focus once more from Oedipus (on whom Freud concentrated) to Laius.

Despite the fact that these sequences are situated in the mythical part of the film, Pasolini's attention is oriented to establishing a relationship with the prologue of the film and the concrete events represented in it, challenging Freud's theories about inborn feelings children have toward each parent. While Vernant did this by researching the context in which the myth was presented in the Greek theatre, and paying attention to the social environment in which the play and myth were performed and perceived, Pasolini offers an auto-analysis, placing himself as Oedipus and focusing on aspects of his life and events from his early childhood that affected him in a specific social and political context.

The film continues with the journey of Oedipus. He meets with the Messenger (played by Ninetto Davoli) and then with the blind prophet Tiresias. This scene, with Tiresias, is a recognition sequence, in which Oedipus addres-

[12] Such duplicated or even triplicated scenes are numerous, partly due to the structure of the film – which is based on repetition. Various musical motives also repeat.

ses him without speaking (he does not move his lips, but we hear his words and see them written on the screen):

> Your brothers and fellow citizens suffer, weep, seek together their salvation; and you are here, blind, alone, and you are singing. I wish I were you! You sing what's beyond destiny.

This scene has an emphasized psychological dimension, marked with words unspoken, and Oedipus expresses his desire to be the same as Tiresias, to "sing of what is beyond destiny", to see what others do not. As it turns out, this will happen later.[13]

In the sequence that follows, Oedipus kills the Sphinx but not by solving the riddle made famous from the ancient mythical tradition.[14] The scene in the film is psychologized, again pointing to outbursts of negative emotion that have been suppressed. The last words of the Sphinx to Oedipus are: "The Abyss that you push me in is inside yourself." This is the clearest example of the way the myth and the film are shaped under the influence of psychoanalysis, and the abyss appears in the sequence twice – in the literal and metaphorical senses, referring to the level of subconsciousness. A psychoanalytical reference is also apparent in how the Sphinx highlights the problem Oedipus faces, yet this is not entirely compatible with Freud's theory since, in the film, the aggression Oedipus displays toward the Sphinx is rooted in the aggression his father displayed toward him as a baby.

According to the myth, Laius – who represents power – is so vain, and so fearful of the prophecy and the risk to his own life, that he is incapable of accepting and loving his own child. In Pasolini's film, the reasons for Laius' rejection of his son have rather social and psychological roots. This shift in focus, from son to father, and the pugnacity that appears later in Oedipus as a consequence of Laius' behaviour, recalls the theory of René Girard, who accepts some elements of Freud's argumentation on the Oedipus complex but introduces corrections and emphasizes that male aggression results from imitation.[15] In other words, he reads the Oedipus myth as a tool for interpreting all

[13] Schironi argues that Pasolini develops the character of Tiresias, with whom Pasolini identifies, to reveal the process of becoming a poet and an intellectual (Schironi, 2009).

[14] The riddle was never specified in the Sophoclean play, but it was famous in a Greek antiquity and is still famous today. It came to us in different versions, in the texts of Appolodorus or Athenaeus, questioning who is the creature that has sometimes two, sometimes three and sometimes four legs, and only one voice and one nature. The answer is a human, who crawls as a baby on four limbs, walks on two, and uses a cane – a "third leg" – in old age.

[15] The idea of Oedipus as a symbol of authoritarian oppression emerged in the works of Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari, and in poststructuralist thought (Leonard & Zajko, 2008, p. 9). This might also be regarded in the theoretical thinking of Freud that preceded his Oedipal theory; in particular, I think here of his so-called *seduction theory.* Before arguing that children's fantasy is a source of possible neurosis, Freud regarded the sexual abuse of children, especially girls, as the reason for hysteria. The *seduction theory* is often cited by feminist scholars, though

masculine relations as "based on reciprocal acts of violence" (Segal, 2001, p. 165; Girard, 1979, p. 48), which in the context of Pasolini's depiction of patriarchal society, may reflect the demand that men hide their emotions, especially those marked as weak and ascribed to women. Such an intervention on the Oedipal theory echoes a sequence from Pasolini's film in which Oedipus is told by a young man that his origin is dubious. In the midst of an altercation over accusations of cheating in sport, the young man refers to Oedipus as "a false son of his father and mother" (18.03' – 19.08'). This episode reveals that it is not only aggression, but also vanity, that Laius and Oedipus share.

The vanity of Oedipus is satisfied when the citizens of Thebes glorify him, due to his success in disposing of the Sphinx and saving the city. As a reward, they organize a wedding between Oedipus and their queen, Jocasta (played by Silvana Mangano), who has been widowed, unaware that the new couple are mother and son. After some time, when the plague begins to kill the people of Thebes, people of the devastated city come to Oedipus for help. A priest addresses Oedipus, saying:

> The moment you came here, didn't you rid us of the Sphinx? You didn't perform this act because you are wiser then we, but with God's help. Therefore, Oedipus, our King, we beg you on our knees, find a solution whether prompted by a god or a man.

Here, Pasolini closely follows the Sophoclean text, which he translated himself. The episode described above is rephrased a bit but aligns to the content of the ancient tragedy. Pasolini cast himself in the role of the priest; and with this intervention, distanced himself from a simple identification with Oedipus and placed himself on the side of the confronted. As the priest, Pasolini speaks to Oedipus the king, confronting a representative of power with whom Pasolini clearly does not identify, as proven in this and many other of his films in which he takes the side of the Other.

This confrontation between the priest and Oedipus may be seen as a turning point where Oedipus starts his search for a painful truth. He tells the priest that he agonizes over people dying and is already searching for a way to solve the problem; he has sent Jocasta's brother Creon to consult the oracle in Delphi – according to whom, the city's people will suffer from the plague until the killer of Laius is punished. Here, the film presents a verbal richness in which the dialogs follow Sophocles' original text, focusing on the lack of unaware-

the most radical and most popular position on the topic (although without references to the work of his feminist colleagues, at least in his first edition) was presented by Jeffrey Masson in *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (1984). By publishing unknown letters of Freud and bringing the theory to light, Masson lost his job as director of the Sigmund Freud archive, despite the fact that proof Freud had developed such an argumentation are also found in the book *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), which Freud wrote together with Joseph Breurer. On feminist writings about seduction theory, see Rush, 1977; Buhle, 1998.

ness of Oedipus and the very gradual process by which he discovers the truth. This is basically the core of the Sophoclean tragedy, which slowly develops from the complete ignorance of Oedipus, to his suspicion that Creon and Tiresias are trying to take power from him, to denial and an unwillingness to accept what is revealed to him, to a gradual search for the truth and acceptance.

Oedipus, miserable because his people are dying and wanting to find Laius' murderer, asks the citizens of Thebes to tell him who murdered their king, if they know, even if they must accuse themselves. It is Tiresias, the blind Apollonian prophet – whom Oedipus admires and treats as his role model in the film's preceding sequence – who first hints at Oedipus' own guilt. Although Tiresias at first hides the truth (because, he says, this will bring no good to him or to Oedipus), he changes his mind after Oedipus insults him; but Oedipus does not believe what he hears. The truth next comes from the mouth of Creon, but this leads to conflict, too, after which Jocasta tries to console him, claiming that prophecies do not necessarily come true. She offers the prophecy about herself and Laius as an example, for she thinks it has never been realized.

Oedipus is deeply disturbed. He asks about Laius' death, where and when he was killed, and what he looked like. Gradually, Oedipus discovers the truth. This mythical part of the film ends when Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus blinds himself – acts which again correspond with the Sophoclean play and in which Freud grounded the thesis that self-punishment is linked to feelings of self-disgust that result from the Oedipal dream. This references the text of Sophocles, when Oedipus tells Jocasta about the prophecy and she says that many people dream passionately of their own mother; but Pasolini pays no attention to this, focusing more on the relationship between father and son, and making connection between the prologue and the mythical part of the film regarding the relationship between mother and son.

On the self-blinding of Oedipus, Vernant has pointed out that older versions of the myth do not include this element of self-punishment. He argues that this variable part of the myth proves nothing generally as far as psychoanalytical theory. For Pasolini, this act was a final turning point that brought Oedipus toward peace in the final part of the film, in the transition from past to present. The psychoanalytical symbolism Jocasta occupies is less important to Pasolini than his relationship to his father; above all, because it is difficult to reconcile the passionate incest in the central part of the film with the ordinary, gentle, and concerned mother from the prologue. There is, for instance, a scene in the prologue in which Jocasta is breastfeeding her baby when her facial expression suddenly turns from calm happiness to gloom. Krell interprets this expression as "the very mask of tragedy" (Krell, 2005, p. 339). And while Ryan-Scheutz claims that "we have no idea what that look means, even as it devastates us" (Ryan-Scheutz, 2007, p. 61), it is easy to imagine that the mother worries for her son and is probably aware of the feelings her husband harbours toward him.

In the second part of the film, where the Sophoclean myth is replicated and where Pasolini "re-projected psychoanalysis onto the myth," there is little material connecting Pasolini and his mother in the way that Oedipus and Jocasta were intertwined. But as I stated earlier, Pasolini does not entirely identify with Oedipus. And furthermore, Pasolini rather loyally follows Sophocles' tragedy, which itself does not refer to Jocasta as a mother figure. Vernant has emphasized that if he had wanted to, Sophocles could have alluded to her "motherly" old age, but he did not; which means that for Sophocles, as for Pasolini, the mother was not burdened with Freud's characterization (Vernant, 1996a, p.108).

Scapegoating Oedipus

The epilogue of the film is set again in the twentieth century, contemporaneous to the time the film was made. Oedipus is an elderly, blind man who walks with the help of a young man, Angelos (meaning *messenger* in Greek, and portrayed by the same actor who plays the Messenger in the second part of the film), who helps Oedipus to the city square (Piazza Maggiore in Bologna) to play his pipe. Though he has lost his sight, he is able to see more than ever before – much like his former mentor and opponent, Tiresias. Here, the pipe player stands in for an artist, for Pasolini himself, who has achieved sublimation through art, establishing another parallel between Pasolini's film and Freud's psychoanalysis (Viano, 1993, p. 2; d'Stack, 1969).[16]

The scenery in the epilogue harkens back to the film's prologue, emphasizing a landscape of cathedral spires and the industrial chimneys. According to Maggi, the cathedral in front of which Oedipus sits neglected by the passers-by points to the nature of Christianity to reject questioning or doubt (Maggi, 2009, p. 67). In the context of Oedipus' unintentional and painful mistakes, it remains unclear whether ignorance is marked as one of his crucial problems, or whether his tragedy should be regarded as a criticism of hiding behind white lies. Namely, what would have been different if Oedipus had known he was adopted?

With the help of young Angelos, Oedipus returns to the house from the beginning of the film, where he was born. Walking in the direction of the meadows where he was peaceful and safe in his mother's arms, he is calm again. On his way there, Oedipus passes an altar of the Madonna and child. The reading that this image represents Pasolini and his mother is supported by his choices in another film, *Il vangelo secondo Matteo (The Gospel according to Saint Matthew),* in which the Virgin Mary is played by Pasolini's mother, Susanna

[16] Martin M. Winkler considers *Oedipo Re* an excellent example of Pasolini's notion of a *cinema of poetry* (Winkler, 2009, p. 127).

Colussi-Pasolini, alluding to the director's relationship and identification with Christ (Gordon, 1996, p. 199).

Interpretations of this altar scene develop in two directions. The first leads us to understand the relationship between a mother and son as sacred, and uncomplicated in the way a son's relationship with his father can be. In an interview with Oswald Stack, Pasolini also emphasized that "the relationship between a son and his mother is not a historical relationship, it is a purely interior, private relationship, which is outside of history, indeed is meta-historical, and therefore ideologically improductive" (Stack, 1969). Still, the Christian imagery of this scene, and even more its cultic place in the landscape and in everyday life, is an echo of an archaic cult and a time when female divinity not only played a dominant role, but when the status of women in society was not grounded in rivalry.[17]

A second interpretation of the altar is related to the institution of the sacrificial victim, the scapegoat, or the Athenian *pharmakos* mentioned in some analyses of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Vernant, 1996b; Vidal-Naquet, 1996, p. 349). The *pharmakos* was a human victim (in classical Athens, exiled but not killed), chosen and praised for his virtues, who absorbed all the guilt and impurity of the citizens of Athens before being sacrificed in order to bring salvation to the community. This is exactly the way Oedipus is represented – first as a chosen one, then as a (most distinguished) member of the collective, and then as the cause of evil, for which he is rejected and expelled. Comparisons to Christ and his sacrifice are not difficult to make. The idea of Jesus Christ as the perfect victim, sacrificed for all, is still influential in contemporary theory and in the philosophy of religion (Clack, 2004, p. 110; McLean, 1996). Did Pasolini make the same parallel? The sacrificial victim in Sophocles' tragedy leads us to the Oedipus of psychoanalysis; to a child described by Freud as burdened by inborn drives of both affection and hatred toward his own parents. While Pasolini appropriates psychoanalysis, and starts from Freud's Oedipal theory, he resolves this by once more using his film to give voice to those who cannot speak – children.[18]

[17] Some of the beliefs and ritual practices devoted to the Virgin Mary across Europe lead to the conclusion that, in some ways, she is the successor to a prehistoric Great Goddess, the bearer of life, the earth mother who brings regeneration (see Gimbutas, 2001).

[18] Pasolini also did this in *Medea*, filmed only two years after *Oedipo Re*, in which he enabled the audience to hear the voice of an oppressed foreign woman in such a disturbing way that Ian Christie called it an "act of artistic terrorism" (Christie, 2001, pp. 154-155).

Conclusion

With its autobiographical and psychoanalytical approach, Pasolini's film added another dimension to reflections on the nonlinear relationship between the texts of Freud and Sophocles. The myth of Oedipus as told in the second part of the film presents the dream that, according to Freud, all children dream. But, Pasolini has widened the frame with an introduction in the first part of the film to the father, in whom we witness an obvious hatred and rejection of the baby boy. Pasolini is not pointing to the fantasy of children, but to the real hostility of a father toward his son because of social rules and circumstances; or, as Pasolini has said, because of ideology:

> …what produces history is the relationship of hatred and love between father and son, so naturally this interested me more than the one between son and mother. While everything ideological, voluntary, active and practical in my actions as a writer depends on my struggle with my father. That's why I put in things which weren't in Sophocles, but which I don't think are outside psycho-analysis, because psycho-analysis talks about the super-ego represented by the father repressing the child; so in a way I just applied psychoanalytic notions in the way I felt.... (Interview by Oswald Stack, 1969).

Also present in the film are questions about the role of Oedipus' adoptive parents, who express love and care for their son. It is not only Oedipus who consistently thinks of them as his parents, but the film audience does as well. This establishes a dialogue between Pasolini and Freud, which rises to the forefront again when we encounter the Sphinx, representing the subconscious. In the film, it is a physical attack that kills the Sphinx, motivated by Oedipus' belief that by saving the city and marrying its queen, he will save himself from the destiny of marrying his own mother. Here, Pasolini applies Freud's psychoanalysis to the myth by sometimes, paradoxically, widening the scope and emphasizing mythical elements outside of Freud's focus, and sometimes erasing the myth altogether through psychoanalysis.

This text has tried to reveal in which way Pasolini, similarly to Vernant, explored the relationship between Freudean theory and Sophoclean myth about Oedipus. Vernant does it in the frame of academic discipline he is engaged in, and that is historical anthropology. He researches and emphasizes the context in which the myth was presented in the Greek theatre, pointing out to Freud's negligence of contextualization, both regarding the understanding of myth, as well as regarding human psyche (that according to Freud has universal characteristic both among Athenian theatre audience in 5^{th}ct. BC and among his clients). Pasolini's artistic approach to the mentioned texts is also based on contextualization, but this time it happens through auto-analysis in which Pasolini appears as Oedipus who reveals events from his early childhood. Important for this autobiographical part is that it is clearly put in a specific social and

political frame. Furthermore, Pasolini applies psychoanalysis on the famous Greek myth. Doing this, Pasolini reminds us of the same thing Vernant underscores – that each text and each interpretation is new, and that the proofs and patterns for researching the delicate functioning of human souls are hard to find in one text, even when it is as sophisticated and as complex as an ancient tragedy or a film by Pasolini.

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