

THEODORE GRAMMATAS

**TRENDS IN THE DIRECTION OF THE ANCIENT DRAMA IN GREECE**

**GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

### *1. The formation of the classic tradition*

The fact that the Ancient Drama has such and of that kind of value and its influence on the formation of modern global theatre is so determinative, is neither because of the width and the quality of the time values and the universal messages that it carries, nor because of its aesthetic perfection, which makes it a cross section “classic” piece of literature. It is also because (and maybe more) of its scenic presentation as a live spectacle, that is a complex artistic creation through which the final purpose is realized: its reception as experiential reality by the conscience of the viewers who are present at a specific place and take part in the scenic action, in order to realize an educational, psychological and psychocathartic communication with what happens on the stage.

The recognition of this parameter and its transliteration from the dimension of the playwright’s text, which required conventions and principles of a literary piece of reading, in that of a scenic representation and performing arts which presupposed a mediating procedure, is taking place in Europe in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. More specifically, in 1841 Ludwig Tieck “directed” *Antigone* and presented the first proposal of scenic interpretation of the Ancient Drama, which until then (since the first performance of “*Oedipus Tyrannus*” in 1585 in Teatro Olimpico of Vicenza) was realized with completely literary criteria and objectives.

In Greece, the museum piece style of the interpretation of Tragedy, as well as the nationalistic/patriotic role that it played during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to the views of Professor George Mystriotis was surpassed with the establishment of theatre play direction in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and more specifically in 1901 when Konstantinos Christomanos inaugurated the “*Nea Skini*” (New Stage) with the performance of Euripides’ *Alcestis*.

Of course, sometime earlier we had the performance of *Oedipus Tyrannus* given by the Comedie Française with the most famous actor of the time Jean Muret Sully, which stirred the stagnant waters in the theatrical life of Athens and paved the way for a new scenic interpretation of the Tragedy.

However, how could the direction of the Ancient Drama be constructed and formed in that very first moment of appearance? How could directors like Max Reinhardt and Edward Gordon Craig, Konstantinos Christomanos and Fotos Politis (if we want to mention some of the most characteristic names of that era) conceive and form scenically the performance of the Ancient Drama and it was by them that the initial “classic” form of the tradition was realized, a tradition which was going to last for at least half a century?

The answer to such questions is neither simple nor one-dimensional. It requires deep command of all the historical, social, ideological, aesthetic and in general

cultural data of the time we refer to, as well as the comprehension of the particularities of each creator, the psycho-cultural characteristics and influences that he had undergone in order to shape the opinion for the realization of the target he wanted to achieve. Lastly, it requires a wide perception of the social psychology, mentality, the aspirations and expectations of the audience to which the certain spectacle is addressed to, the certain existing experience, as well as the further confrontation of the past into the present. And this is because stage direction is not but a formation process of the “virtual reality” type- in other words an attempt to reconstruct a world which does not exist anymore, whereas our knowledge for this is fragmental, subjective and limited. The director is called to be the “bridgemaker” so that via the specific scenic iconography of the play he will allow the unhindered communication of the viewer with the messages passed scenically, so that at some time he will reach the point to be the co-creator of the play, who will even be able to substitute the playwright himself.

Therefore, whichever effort of scenic interpretation is attempted (especially when we refer to a “classic” piece of writing of a previous era for which we have only few theatrical “realia”) it can be characterized up to a certain degree by “utopian” substances, which can even be considered as arbitrary, and with which the certain director attempts to present to the viewer the “familiar” as the “unfamiliar” of the action represented. That subjective (more or less) confrontation of the dramatic play can become wider as long the distance between the “production time” and “the reception time” is magnified, something that makes the reality of that remote era, inaccessible and obscure to the potential of the contemporary audience.

In his attempt to reduce the time distance and be part of the realization of the communication between the spectator and the spectacle, the director makes full use of the historical elements, the literary findings, the theoretical facts, the accumulated knowledge and experience which the age-long archeology of knowledge has passed on to modern (both for him and for the viewer) research. However, at the same time he is counting on his own talent, his mentality and ideology, which filter the prime material of the ancient text and make the live procession of the speech and the scenic representation of the action easy to reception while they simultaneously favor the participation of the viewers as an unconditional convention of communication between the stage and the stalls.

Having taken all the above thoughts and facts into consideration, we can comprehend how the initial “tradition” in the direction of the Ancient Drama is formed, via the philosophy of the German Idealism and the views of Fr. Nietzsche concerning the genesis of the Tragedy, through the literary interpretation of the dramatic texts by Wilamowitz, as well as the presence of directors such as Max Reihardt. The idea of the “classic” in the performance of the Ancient Drama is constructed with such elements and a special code of acting, stage-designing,

costume designing and in general a scenic interpretation of Ancient Tragedy and Comedy, that represent only but the ideological, philosophical, aesthetic and social facts of the “era of perception”.

As a result, because of the fact that the “measures” of Tragedy are so great and far beyond the usual limits of the familiar historical reality, in the same way the acting of the performers has to be of equal importance stressing on the volume and the extravagance of the situations involved, as well as the action taking place with gestures, movements, speech processing in such a way so that the “given conscience” of the viewers in the stalls is submitted in such a manner that it is carried away in the dimension of the elsewhere and the othertime, where the plot of the play is taking place, thus making possible the “catharsis” for the modern viewer exactly in the same way that it used to happen in the ancient years. The same target applies to stage-designing, scenery, costume-designing and in general to all the secondary codes which frame audio visually the performing action.

Now, if except for the above, one also takes into consideration the general aesthetic of the time, a theatrical aesthetic that was between the classicist simplicity, as well as the romantic extravagance, the existing familiarity of the viewers with subjects equivalent to those of modern European theatre plays which up to a certain extent drew principles, ideas and meaningfulness from the corresponding Ancient Greek archetypes or theatrical forms established since the Renaissance, the Baroque and thereafter, (Alfieri, Racine, Shakespeare, Goethe, Hugo, Voltaire and so on), one can then realize the how and the why the modern world conceives and forms scenically the Ancient Drama in a “utopian” way, thus creating the original “view” and the “classic” tradition where all the subsequent directing trends will be based. These are the elements and the conditions which form the frame into which the “Greek” tradition concerning the direction of the Ancient Drama will be placed, comprehended and eventually evaluated, initiated with Fotos Politis and Dimitris Rodiris, the Sikelianos couple and Linos Karzis, and following up to Alexis Minotis and Alexis Solomos, all of whom compose the axis of the “School of the National Theatre of Greece”.

Taking all the above viewpoints and elements into consideration, one can form the initial “view” for the interpretation of Ancient Tragedy and Comedy, which, even in the way that it is made up, it contains gaps and deficiencies which can be substituted only with fantastic, speculative and subjective elements by the directors, thus projecting the “vision” of a world who claims to be real while it is just utopian in its essence.

One must not ignore the fact that the 20<sup>th</sup> century happened to be the one which made known and established the notion of the “Director”. And it was in that particular era to which we refer that personalities such as André Antoine and

Otto Brahme (heralding), Max Reinhardt and Constantin Stanislavski, Edward Gordon Craig and Vsevolod Meyerhold, Antonin Artaud and Charles Dulin, Erwin Piscator and Jaques Copeau paved the way for the course of theatrical direction on both European and world-wide level, while in Greece Konstantinos Christomanos and Thomas Economou, Fotos Politis and Spyros Melas, Dimitris Rodiris and Angelos and Eva Sikelianos, established the “classic” way of performing as far as Tragedy is concerned, with their monumental performances (“Alcestis” 1901, “Oedipus Tyrannus” 1919, “Prometheus Bound” 1927, “Agamemnon” 1932, “Electra” 1936 and so on).

However, one can consider as highly negotiable the question as to what extend this “classic” view is “Greek” indeed, as well as “native” and “self-sown”, since almost all its distinctive substances such as the role of the Chorus and the use of the stage scenery, the speech processing and the actors’ Gestus come to a certain degree from direct or indirect influences of prior European patterns in which all the equivalent Greek performances refer to obviously or in a latent manner. If we add to the above the more general aesthetic and ideological views which prevail in the further area of the Art and the Theatre and of which all Greek theatre people become part of via service, apprenticeship or at least the influence they undergo by specific figures-expressionists of the ideas given, then it can easily be comprehended that the “familiar” and the “unfamiliar”, the “id” and the “another” in cultural creation cannot exist at least with the clarity and the degree that some claim it shows, or that they would like to allege that they realize it elsewhere, without of course ignoring the “authenticity”, the “originality”, as well as the “Hellenity” of other elements such as the plastic arts frame of the performance with the scenery and the costumes of Kl. Klonis and Ant. Fokas. Only indicatively here, we can mention the service of K. Christomanos in central European theatre and his acquaintance with André Antoine, before directing “Alcestis” in 1901, while one can pinpoint great similarities with the “Oedipus Tyrannus” performance of the *Comédie Française* and the homonymous role played by Jean Munnet Sully, with the emblematic performance of the same play given in 1919 by Fotos Politis with the Greek Theatre Company and Aemilios Veakis (the comparison of the photographs possessed is indeed revealing). Moreover, for the same performance, the influence of Max Reinhardt is clearly seen (although some differences can be spotted) and the same applies to the direction of Dimitris Rodiris, a student and assistant of the famous Austrian director. Furthermore, the “Delphic Idea” and the “Prometheus Bound” direction in 1927, as well as the Aeschylus’ “The Suppliants” (“Hiketides”, “the Suppliant women”) in 1930 in Delphi, as the whole visionary and utopian conception of the Sikelianos couple, does not come (to a great degree) from the Neo-Romantic biotheories and their connection with Isadora Duncan, the Muse of Edward Gordon Craig.

Therefore, as it becomes clearly seen, the “tradition” in the interpretation of the Ancient Drama is formed in a “classic” way in Greece with a combination of

purely Greek together with foreign elements, facts which derive both from the long historical Greek tradition and other elements foreign to this. By giving to the idea of the “classic” an idealistic context and considering the globalism and timelessness of the Ancient Drama as values inextricably connected to that, the directors of that trend put as a prime target the success and promotion of it. Therefore, their mediating intervention is no other but the scenic realization of the text and the uninterrupted communication of the viewer with the playwright’s speech. Thus, via this specific composition, derives the “view” of what we can claim and it expresses the so called “School of the National Theatre” with pioneers and main representatives Fotos Politis and Dimitris Rodiris, who consequently pass on their ideas to other significant figures such as Alexis Solomos, Kostis Mihaelides, Takis Mouzenides, Alexis Minotis and many others who-sometimes with hesitant and sometimes with more bold steps-develop the existing tradition and yet they simultaneously remain attached to it.

## *2. The establishment of modernism*

As the qualities of the “classic” (metre, analogy, harmony, simplicity, equivalence between form and subject-matter and so on) in all forms of art, end up in becoming a commitment for the free expression of the artist who is aiming at the reversal of sentimentalism, exaggeration, passion and inflation of the circumstances which Romanticism initially brings, followed by the other aesthetic trends of the time, in the same way the relative directing tradition becomes an object of dispute and reversal, which leads progressively to the imposition of the “modern” and quite later the “postmodern”. Both the directing and the acting style of the performance are questioned and criticized, not only by theatrical organizations and companies (National Theatre), but also by institutions in which these spectacles are included (Athens-Epidaurus Festival). New creators appear who, even if they remain attached to “tradition”, they still present new proposals that reform the until then “classic” scenic spectacle. There are many young directors and new companies that claim a place in “paradise” (Epidaurus) with the ambition to contrast their own interpretation to the already established and thus “museum piece” “classic” tradition of the official state owned Stages. The pioneer of all this change and modernization, who in his turn created his own “School” for the interpretation of the Ancient Drama and put the basis for any future revision, is Karolos Koun. Initiating from starting points different than those of directors not only before but also of his time (Linos Karzis, Dimitris Rodiris), he conceived and phrased a different way of interpreting the Ancient Drama much more closer and within the cultural and historic/social frame of the contemporary Hellenism, thus becoming one of the most important representatives of the ideology of “Hellenity”, which specifically detained the scholars and the artists of the Interwar period.

By searching out for the original bond between Modern and Ancient Greece and pursuing the authenticity in the expression and by accepting the view that the Ancient Drama is “classic” and thus timeless, it therefore cannot remain a “museum piece” object of view and functionalism only, it is aiming at distinguishing the dynamics which join the past and the present of Hellenism, based on the principle of “analogy”. He “discovered” it as many others had already done before him (N. Politis) in the tradition and the livelihood of the Folk Tradition. He found within the expressive and descriptive actions of Hellenic people, the catholic acceptance of the Folk Drama and especially the most characteristic form of the Shadow Theatre and the leading figure of Karagiozis, the pure endless source of inspiration and creation. (We must not forget that during the same period-1930-another great theatre personality, Vassilis Rotas with his “Folk Theatre” put up the Euripides’ “Cyclops” with similar aesthetic and ideological approach, that placed it in the level of the renovators and modernists of the scenic interpretation of the Ancient Drama. Simultaneously, the contemporary Greek history of Byzantium, as well as the religious and worshipping tradition of orthodoxy offered Karolos Koun the morphological and functional ritual of an authentic Greek performing expression, which, theatrically formed and adapted to scenic requirements, may consist of the most accurate and useable “significance vehicle” in order to scenically convey his visions for his version of the Ancient Tragedy and Comedy.

As a result, the so called “folk expressionism” is composed in an aesthetic and ideological “view”, which is the main characteristic of Karolos Koun’s stage directing job at least during the first phase of his presence in the theatre, which starts in 1934 with the “Folk Stage” and the performance of “Alcestis” and reaches its peak with the “Art Theatre” and the great performances of Aristophanes’ “The Birds” in 1959 and Aeschylus’ “The Persians” in 1965, with which he earned international recognition.

This iconoclastic approach of the initial “classic” tradition as far as the interpretation of the Ancient Drama is concerned, and which Karolos Koun suggested, contain in its turn equally utopian and subjunctive elements similar to those of the previous trend, since, once more, the connection and reference of the Modern Greek to the Ancient Greek is materialized both ideologically and axiomatically via a telescopic approach of Time and History, which surpasses the especial portion for the sake of the final and the general. Of course, once more and to a higher degree the partly brilliant elements which are fully developed, as well as the fragmental depictions which are united and restored to a whole, are neither always nor obligatorily the products of an objective “scientific” and systematic restoration of the broken body of the performance of the Ancient Drama, which is archeologically and consistently attempted by some admirer of the Ancient Greek magnificence. Once more, we have to do with a utopian conception of a necessity which tormentingly projected the conscience of the

Interwar Period scholars, thus creating (in a way) the risk for the subsequent developing course of the nation's conscience: for the idea of "Hellenity" and the partial versions with which it made its appearance in the work of G. Theotokas and G. Seferis, D. Pikionis and Y. Tsarouchis, A. Sikelianos and F. Kodoglou. Karolos Koun came to form theatrically this pursuit and his proposal tried to fulfill the peoples' expectations, thus renovating and creatively extending the already existing tradition and creating the basis for a further development of "modernism" in the direction of the Ancient Drama, which would become fruitful considerably later, in the '60s and the '70s with the performances of the "Art Theatre" that he himself directed (until his death) as well as others after him.

Later on, other directors appeared, having similar starting points and parallel courses. All those-more or less-reformed, extended and changed the existing facts by projecting the image of a pioneer, modern and relatively timely scenic spectacle, which was established through the performances of A. Solomos, Sp. Enagelatos, G. Michaelides, A. Voutsinas, M. Volanakis, G. Lazanis, M. Kougioumtzis, V. Papavassileiou, L. Vogiatzis, K. Tsianos and others that represented the period between the old "classic" tradition of the beginning of the century and the modern "postmodern" era of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Of course, an equivalent situation appeared on the International theatrical scene, with older and younger directors such as, Giorgio Strehler, Yuri Liubimov, Andrei Șerban, Peter Hall and others, who each in his way, his aesthetic and his "view" enriched the variety of the scenic interpretation of the Ancient Drama and transformed it into a live part of modern artistic expression which concerned every viewer all over the world, thus proving its time and global value.

However, all of them both Greeks and foreigners recognize the idea of the "classic" as a distinctive element of the Ancient Drama and accept its content. Nevertheless, while they on the one hand equally realize the necessity of its adaptation on a modern basis, they on the other hand remain faithful supporters of the exclusiveness in the interpretation of the Ancient Drama, its unquestioned value and reference to the contemporary world, the necessity of the preservation of certain values and conditions, so that the speech of the Ancient Drama playwrights can become perceptive by the modern time viewer. The text remains the unquestionable reference point of the performance and the only source for the comprehension of the real meaning of the play. The playwright's speech is served accurately and "emerges" in various ways according to the director's specific choices. The Ancient Drama is treated with respect, but not with "awe" anymore, as a historic-cultural creation which, in order to maintain its time value, it must be morphologically reformed so that it can apply to the modern facts and ways of perception by the viewers. Therefore, they put an end to the standardized acting of the performers and the *vécchio* style in kinesiology, they



make full use of the presence of the Chorus in a new different way and they renovate the artistic and musical frame of the performance by introducing new, modern aesthetic elements much familiar to the viewer than the supposedly original Ancient Greek dress copies. They begin to revise the acting codes on the basis of the structural reformation of the action, the renewal of the plastic arts frame and in a more general modernization of the scenic spectacle which, still remains within the frame of a “renovation” of the archeological nature of a cultural product , a re-adaptation to the demands, the expectations and the interests of the “modern” viewer, without any need for refutation and questioning of the basic structural elements which contain the essence and the value of the Ancient Drama.

### *3. Perspectives and deadlocks of postmodernism*

If one could say that the Ancient Greek Drama is “classic’, this means that he/she refers to its time value and global reference, as far as the “human conditions” are concerned, as well as the equivalent perception, reception and acceptance of it by audiences all over the world.

However, how can it be possible in a dissimilar, broken population of viewers of any kind and origin, with different perceptive abilities, social conscience, educational level, national-racial characteristics, aesthetic experience, mentality and psychology as an audience can be in a contemporary performance in a big international festival (in Epidaurus or in the Syracuse) or, at least, in a great artistic happening such as the international premiere of an Ancient Tragedy or Comedy performance, how can it be possible to function in a similar way all the basic distinctive elements of the Tragedy so that the catharsis of the viewers can come as the final demand through “Eleos” (pity) and “Phobos”(fear)?

How can the participation for the conscience of the viewer who attends a performance in the Odeon of Herodes Atticus be created, when next to him/her someone is talking to his/her mobile phone which he/she forgot to turn off, another takes photographs with or without a flash (ignoring the initial suggestions given not to do so) or, eventually, when turning his/her eyes at the starlit sky, instead of the messenger of the gods he/she sees the bright orbit of an airplane in the Athens F.I.R.?

Why does the mission of the Tragedy, the psychoanalytic, moral, metaphysic and sociological function of “catharsis” presuppose a homorganic audience who perceives the scenic messages and reacts to them with more or less similar behavior, thus daring the response of his expectations to the challenge and the stimuli of the actors’ speech. This new reality which is formed on an international level via historic-social circumstances, philosophical-ideological patterns and economic-cultural facts and corresponds to ideas such as “multiculture”, “globalization”, “identity” and the concept of the Other,

“intertextuality” and “deconstruction”, consists of a new condition which is represented with the term “postmodernism”, no matter how incorrect and abstract this be may considered.

The abolition of the one and only “metropolitan” centre that culturalism comes from, as well as the autonomy of the artistic creation with the simultaneous rehabilitation and promotion of the “national” cultural traditions, the national-racial, minority and any other particularities, put an end to the omnipotence and the existence of the one and only centre. The thus fragmental creation, earns a name of a (relatively speaking, of course) autonomous and of equal value expression of ideas and messages, which represents the same meaning but, relatively speaking, in a different point of view.

The development of multicultural societies and the virtual and multidimensional connection between the East and the West, has surpassed the stagnant traditional relations of the “loan” and “influence” type of one world and has created a holistic and catholic confrontation of the civilization as a creation able to come up to the expectations, the needs and the interests of modern people, regardless of national-racial-class origins. Simultaneously, the contemporary theory of the civilization, the interpretation of the texts, as well as the human behavior and psychology, created new factors which allow the subjectivity and the concept of the Other, as well as the demystification and the critical dialogue between the present and the past, question the until present considerations as divine laws of the human intelligentsia and civilization and legalize any “other” speech which very often has the sense of “heretic” and “subversive” for the up to that time established values.

The idea of “classic” ceases to have its former non-negotiable and unquestionable value and starts to be sensed in a different way. The creating conscience of the playwright as the unique source of the essence of the play and the one and only responsible for the result of the performance starts to be questioned, while the text itself as a self-reliant source of meaning undergoes the critical speech and the possibility of a multiple interpretation, which “legalizes” any different interpretation. The centre is thus shifted from the creator to the engaged conscience.

The viewer with his/her own subjectivity becomes the reference point of the play, as a specific-from this point on-scenic performance, a product of a complex creative influence/action/effect of multiple factors, written inside and outside the text. Thus, for the first time in the history of stage direction and especially the direction of the Ancient Drama, a new reality completely different-as far as quality is concerned compared to any other in the past- is created. According to this reality, the text and the playwright’s speech consist of one (neither always

nor the most important) of the parameters that orientate the performance, such as stage direction, acting and other secondary codes of it.

This “postmodern” convention allows new dimensions for theatrical research and offers the art of the spectacle great perspectives, thus enabling stage directors to materialize notions and visions impossible in the past, since they met with the unbreakable limits of the “permissible” and the “necessary”, while regarding as theoretically intact the idea of the “tragic” as a quality and not quantity measure which (as such) surpasses the limits of space and time and acquires a distention of globalism, which even today finds a reference, under different circumstances and within a different frame. If, according to the opinion of the supporters of this viewpoint, Ancient Drama continues to be “classic” and “global”, it must come up to the expectations of the perception of its new differentiated audience. For this reason, the conjunction of different or even more, opposing formalistic elements, the mixture of heterogenic cultural traditions and the exploitation of modern theoretical elements, originating from deconstruction and psychoanalysis, the idea of “identity” and “the idea of the Other” in cultural creation is “legalized”.

The consequences of those facts do not leave the dramatic text intact, and it subsequently undergoes new interpretations and approaches under the light of new ideas of methodological and interpretational approaches such as “intertext” and “metatheater”.

One such approach of the Ancient Drama leads in its turn to a “post-historic” interpretation, which breaks through its dependence from any historic/pragmatological dimension of the text to the era of its creation and refers to the level of a catholic perceptive conscience. Therefore, Tragedy can equally function for the modern viewer anywhere in the world with any personal or collective educational experience, regardless of special terms and conditions of “reception”, whereas Comedy can entertain the modern viewer in absentia without the knowledge of the historically defined events and the persons mentioned or hinted in it.

This “de-historicism” consists of the condition of “postmodernism” in the direction of the Ancient Drama which is not anymore committed to the creative conscience of the playwright as the uniquely produced message, has abandoned the in-text analysis of the elements of the context and has focused its attention to the viewer as the necessary co-producer of the message within, via a process of the scenic transformation of the text as a complex performance product and not as a composition of a literary piece of reading.

The start has been made with the questioning of the monopoly of the text, which step by step leads to the “death of the playwright”. Any dramatic text is not but the excuse, the canvas, the initiation, so that the stage director will be able to

project his/her own views and (according to his/her own judgment) bring the modern viewer in touch with the “classic” piece of a far too much old fashioned era. The recognition of the value of the text, the realization of its “being classic” remains the same, even if they become relative to each other. However, the way they are approached and interpreted changes. While once ideas such as “respect” and “awe”, “high-level messages”, and “universal content” were the prevailing principles according to which stage directors approached the Ancient Drama, this situation does not exist nowadays. The text has become one of the many secondary elements of the performance used by the director according to his/her opinion, always in the name of the “modernization” and the interpretational response of the audience in the stalls.

And because of the fact that the audience is of the particular type that we all know, with a specific educational background and his controlling reception has been formed by the television and its dynamic of the picture within the spectacle society, so the “postmodern” version is often driven to intentional pretensions and exaggerations which end up degrading the idea of the “theatre” and transforming it into a wide range consumption “spectacle”.

Therefore, within that frame the idea of the “Tragedy” suffers the consequences of the deconstructive and iconoclastic mentality that has been generally established. Any “reversal” or “differentiation” is not composed (as it should) with an equivalent interpretation of the text, that is an original, even a subversive interpretational contribution to some of its most basic parameters (characters, conflicts, relations, dramatic conditions, ideology). One such energy would (consequently) substantiate any original, resourceful, imaginative, pioneering, even iconoclastic answer to all the scenic problems that appear and as a result, it would “demand” the extension of the classic “mise en scène” in the dimension of the “view”, in order to materialize the theoretical frame and the in that way create a “different” interpretation of the text. On the contrary, they resort to the easy solution of trying to make an impression and seduce the spectators, thus leading Tragedy to lose its real meaning and purpose of existence, as well as its relation of the signifier and the signified (which are the values of the Ancient Greek civilization) thus undermining and finally alienating the real value which it (is supposed to) represent. However, (more or less) the same applies to the plays of Aristophanes’ comedies, which in the name of being easily “digested”, entertaining and a spectacle for the masses, they are often transformed into a vulgar revue, with an equivalent linguistic, notional and cultural ruin of their content.

Theatre matters were not always the same. When in the mid '70s and even sometime later in the '80s theatre people like Richard Schechner and Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook and Arianne Mnouschkine, Tadashi Souzouki and Bob Wilson, Peter Stein and Lee Brouer, theatre companies such as the La mama, the Bread

and Puppet and the Living Theatre under the influence of Semiotics and Sociology of the theatre, theatrical anthropology and psychoanalysis, as well as the culture studies and the study of communication, began to redefine the idea and the contents of theatrical play, to escape from the restrictive limits of the “classic”, even the “modern” by claiming and projecting new types of scenic expression such as the multiplication and de-multiplication of theatrical role, the deconstruction of the place and the person, the embodiment of the action, the multinational performance, the mixing of the acting codes as well as the exploitation of ‘different’ theatrical places, a new perspective appeared for the theatre and a new confrontation of the Ancient Tragedy was internationally established. This renovating spirit came to eliminate the until then existing “value” in stage direction and proposed something different and new, to which the conscience of the theatre goes responded. Acting codes of the Noh theatre are now combined with Stanislavski’s techniques and Brechtian elements enrich the established techniques of Physical theatre. Types of expression such as Performance and Dance theater are equally accepted as classic and traditional forms of the scenic expression of a play, whether it is about an Ancient Drama, or about the Theatre of the Absurd. Elements of the Plastic Arts such as musical frame, performance elements of any cultural origin coexist sometimes in array and sometimes in combination, in a dialogue about civilizations, which regardless of any reservations phrased at times, they unify place and time through artistic inspiration and creation.

In Greece, with a considerable delay as usual, and together with the relevant distortions and misunderstandings often caused by little learning and an absence of a suitable scholar and artistic background, these “postmodern” views became accepted with a roar of relief, since it was considered that we had surpassed the limitation of the until then powerful “classic”, even the “modern” tradition (which only a few and for a very short period of time served) that “limited” the free expression of the young creators, while (in that way) the country was proceeding (as all the fanatics of this trend claimed) to the phase of modernization, the “europeization” and the discharge of the ideological remains of the past.

It is true that several “young” stage directors since the ‘80s and after, knowing directly or indirectly these new trends, by serving overtly or secretly close to foreign teachers from the West and/or the East, managed to present notable spectacles, which promote the relative theatrical research and add valuable elements to the one way or another rich native experience of the stage direction of the Ancient Drama. Among them, we could mention the names of Th. Terzopoulos, M. Marmarinos, Y. Houvardas, Sp. Livathinos, Y. Kakleas, N. Kontouris and others, who, with their performances systematically served the ideas of theatrical modernism and creatively brought on the Greek theatrical stage all the contemporary global theatre trends. With performances which they

had the chance to present in official theatrical places, in front of large audiences, they gave excellent specimens of modern interpretation of the Ancient Drama and contributed to the enhancement and the promotion of the rich and age-long native production. Apart from that, we must also take into consideration the fact that of equal importance for the revival and establishment of theatrical modernism as far as the interpretation of the Ancient Drama is concerned, is the role played by the institution of the Athens-Epidaurus Festival: in the above places, famous foreign stage directors and pioneering theatre companies like Tadashi Suzuki, Karin Neuhäuser, Andrej Wajda, Yukio Ninagawa, Bob Willson, Thomas Ostermeier, Cezaris Graužinis, Oskaras Koršunovas, often give Ancient Drama performances and bring the Greek audience in touch with the experimental and avant-garde global theatre. However, others- sometimes because of extreme secretiveness and a tendency of self-promotion, factors that are accepted only by an audience of half or completely ignorant viewers and sometimes either because of the fact that they wanted to emphatically declare their own personal presence and seal the interpretational proposal they had introduced with their own signature, or sometimes out of unrehearsed haste for their participation in theatrical matters of mostly a tourist attraction and not a real artistic pursuit, they degraded the result and undermined the value they supposedly represented. We have thus become witnesses of the ruthless violation of the classic texts, the misunderstood interpretation of the Ancient Drama and a cultural corruption, the negative consequences of which have not yet been realized by those responsible, who without the slightest hesitation provide with every kind of support (economic assistance, official theatrical spaces/places, promotion) all those culturally dangerous for the future of Hellenism people. In this way, the “postmodern” and whatever this claims to represent, by starting as an attempt to re-adapt the “classic” into the modern reality, ends up becoming stagnant not only within a Greek but also an international level, thus leading Theatre to a dead end and eventually undermining the value and the distinctive difference from other forms of art and spectacle: the speech as an iconic representation of a condition which is scenically dramatized in order to be perceived by the viewers. Without any a priori connotation, because of the violation it suffers on the one hand and the ill-treatment because of the innate weakness and its restricted limits on the other, no matter how strange it seems, when the basic reversals have taken place, any further possibility of originality is restricted or overthrown and any “notion” is transformed into a “manière”, thus resulting in becoming a synonym of bad taste demonized by a part of the audience, or the “panacea”, under the divine law of another.

However, once more, one may realize that while the stage directors of the specific trend even if they directly or indirectly claim that for the first time they escaped the dilemma of the performance or reproduction of the ancient world

via the scenic interpretation of the Ancient Drama that they attempt by abandoning any conscious intention (and the subsequent attempt) for “resemblance” of the conditions of the antiquity to those of the modern world, thus putting aside any attempt of “classic” or even “modern” scenic interpretation of the Ancient Drama, they eventually reach the same point by using an alternative route. Once more, stage direction reveals its utopian character since, once more, with this “postmodern” (or whatever other name it is called ) version, only remains the figment of the imagination of a certain artist, the product of an arbitrary and subjective conclusion, concerning the way with which it could exist and function as a “classic” text in an era that refuses the value of the idea itself. Being such, the conception of the Ancient Greek Drama within the frame of the modern world may preserve its “classicism”, since it can be interpreted variably and be decoded by the personal conscience of any viewer. Nevertheless, this doesn’t have to do with the until now existing image that the history of stage direction has established for the archetypal texts and the emblematic performances of the Ancient Drama. Much more than that, it does not often refer to the riches and the magnificence of the dramatic text, which it vulgarly and unscrupulously scenically violates to the benefit of the so called reception by the modern viewer.

Nevertheless, in spite of the pessimistic confrontation of the subject, a sign of optimism can be pinpointed and a new perspective of “post-postmodern” can be composed, thus enigmatically outlining the secret of timelessness and the universality of the Ancient Drama. As it invariably happens to the agitated developing course of the civilization either with a dialectic or another transcendent way, a new beginning is always written in the end. Let us hope that this also applies to the stage direction of the Ancient Drama as well.

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