Heinz-Uwe Haus and Theatre Making in Cyprus and Greece

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Edited by

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The history of the world
Is the world's
Court of justice.

Friedrich Schiller

FOREWORD: ATTEMPTS TO BRING THE PRESENT-DAY-WORLD ON STAGE

Brecht's influence on theatre in Cyprus and Greece cannot be overestimated. Since Karolos Koun's 1957 production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, aesthetic questions became political issues as well. "Brecht's critical stance towards theatre-making translated effectively into a critical stance toward society itself" (Elli Lambetti). His plays, aesthetic texts and especially his productions with the Berliner Ensemble were not only revolutionary for the stage but also strongly appealed to those working toward social change. "His concept of 'epic theatre' enhanced the relevance of the political issues being examined" (Petros Markaris) – an approach not unfamiliar to a theatre culture defining its roots in drama and performance of the democratic city-state of Ancient Greek society.

Brecht's "'thinking capable of intervention' helped to (re-)create an open-minded examination of controversial and critical topics that took place right in the hearts of both societies, allowing a dialectical self-examination of an identity construction trying to develop and refine itself further" (Panayiotis Serghis). The social and political conditions – Greece during the Junta from 1967 to 1974 and the following process of democratization, in Cyprus since the Greek Junta's coup d'état against President Makarios and the Turkish invasion in 1974 – created models for a new aesthetic understanding of theatre and history.

The following two quotations, which I find in my old notes, say it best: "The Brechtian process of experimenting and analysis did not only offer liberating choices, but re-instated the art of theatre as a venue for socio-cultural change" (Vladimiros Kafkarides), and "The stage became an orchestra again, where society investigates its affairs facing its historical and social contradictions" (Panayiotis Skoufis).

Karolos Koun, Aspassia Papathanassiou, Petros Markaris, Iakovos Kambanellis, Panayiotis Skoufis, Christakis Georgiou, Vladimiros Kafkarides, Nicos Shiafkalis, Nicos Charalambous, Despina Mbembedeli, Lenia Sorokou, Jenny Gaitanopoulou, Alcestis Pavlidou, Neophytos Neophytou, Adonis Katsaris, Dinos Lyras, Neoclis Neocleous, Niki Marangou, Giorgos Kotsonis, Nikos Kouroussis, Glyn Hughes, Kostas Kafkarides, Stelios

Kafkarides, Andy Bargilly, Costas Economou, Stelios Votsis, Despo Diamantidou, Kostas Koveo, Kaliopi Kopanitsa, Nikitas Tsakiroglou, Aliki Alexandraki, Yiannis Kakleas, Spiros Evangelatos and many others come to mind either as producers, dramaturges, directors, actors, artists, composers or stage designers, who looked out for new artistic methods, based on Brecht's attempts to bring "present-day men's life together, within the theatre's range of vision" (Brecht). Most of them became collaborators over the years, and all of them promoted my work.

The following personalities helped, in moments of need, our projects or myself to continue to come back to Cyprus and Greece even in the most difficult moments of ideological tensions during the Cold War: Elli Lambetti, Melina Mercouri, Stelios Tsitsimelis, Nikos Rotis, President Archbishop Makarios, President Spyros Kyprianou, Ambassador Dimitris Rallis, Prime Minister Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, Panayiotis Serghis, Yiannis Katsouris, Andreas Christophides, Rogheros Shibillis, Andreas Philippou, Evis Gavrielides, and Costas Hadjigeorgiou. I have never forgotten their impact on my work and life. I thank all artists, administrators and politicians, who enabled the work this book documents: productions at theatres in Nicosia, Athens, Thessaloniki, Kalamata, Agrinio, Patras, Oiniades, and Paphos. Based on the experiences with Brecht I had been entrusted over the years to direct also plays of Shakespeare, Schiller, Carvajal, Borchert, and Ibsen for the Cypriot and Greek audience.

A special word of appreciation is due to Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, my friend and co-editor, who made this book possible through his support. His interest in the subject and his urge to research encouraged me to look through old documents and notes and select some with "use value" for today. It became clear that Brecht was for many years an integral part of the cultural discourse and part of the fights of the Cold War from the first production on in THOK in 1975 until the last in 1989 after the fall of the Wall redefined in light of a dialectical perspective and historiography. The result was fruitful and influenced a sometimes-heated dialogue between ideologically tainted theory and theatrical practice that led to a new understanding of (not only) Brecht's dramaturgy and aesthetics, but theatre in general. I hope that the collected material[1] provides some of

[1] All sources have been acknowledged. Permission to republish was sought for all material previously published. Many editors granted permission – many thanks to them! Some publications have ceased existence and it was impossible to apply for or obtain permission. Some editors did not respond to our request for permission – we understood that silence as permission.

such enlightening insights into working processes, and reflects some of the developments in theatre making, which define our profession.

Heinz-Uwe Haus

INTRODUCTION

Conversation between Heinz-Uwe Haus and Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe

DMD
How come Cyprus and Greece became so important for you?

HUH
Yes, perhaps it could have been India or Finland. The SED regime had entered into treaties with countries in the third world and some neutral states, and carried out exchanges almost exclusively within the framework of such treaties. Everyone who got the chance to work for a limited period of time abroad was the incidental beneficiary of political circumstances. Cyprus was at the highest level of interest to the regime because it belonged to the founding members of the non-aligned movement (NAM), and had, with Archbishop Makarios, a leading politician of this movement as its state's president. This very large group of states identified the right of independent judgement, the struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism, and the use of moderation in relation to the big powers of the Cold War.

The Soviets tried to install this movement for its interests against western democracies. The situation after the coup d'état of the Cypriot National Guard against Makarios and in favour of affiliation with Greece and the subsequent invasion by Turkey and the continuing occupation of more than a third of the island made the Republic of Cyprus dependent on every foreign aid that it was offered. What for me was almost like salvation in the context of the carrot and stick policy of the Stasi, was, from the perspective of the SED regime, determined policy to play out ideas through me, because Brecht had the name of an ally with the left-wing people in charge on the island.

Greece followed logically from the close cultural connection of both States. I would never have been allowed an exit visa to a NATO country if it had not been for the Cyprus conflict. Remember: my production of *Mother Courage* was the first Cypriot production in Athens a year and a half after occupation. There were strong feelings of nationality and solidarity on the Greek side, which ranged well beyond the cultural scene. I became well-known in Athens very quickly. Further offers of directing immediately

followed – the first one had already happened before, from Elli Lambetti, after my first production with THOK, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The Stasi presumably found itself overrun. There was toing and froing. But by then I also had support from Western media, which was a means for pressure. After all, they tried, in the 80s, to make their profit wherever possible, politically as well as financially. Politically, because the country was deeply split after the rule of the Junta, because anti-Americanism ruled the day, and with PASOK a leftist party established itself which they tried to flatter and to win over. They also wanted to present themselves as more liberal and socially acceptable. That meant that with grinding teeth they had to give in to the invitations towards me. And financially it was the case that officially I had to do my contracts through the artists agency of the GDR, which demanded the fees in small chunks, transported in the hand luggage, and then exchanged for GDR Marks.

DMD
Subsequently you were able to work in Greece more or less without obstacle?

HUH
Less than more. The Stasi tried again and again to discredit me. It was an institution that was only able with severe difficulties to adapt to developments. Some of the examples are almost from a textbook of intentional disintegration. One example: I return from a rehearsal of *Baa*l to my hotel Pythagoras next to the National Theatre, take the lift, leave it on my floor, open the door, hesitate because it is somehow strangely dark – curtains drawn, which I never do. I turn on the light and a lady is sitting naked in bed. I knew her. I asked her to get dressed, still standing in the door frame, and to go downstairs. That is when a man with a camera rushes past and runs down the stairs. Similar events or rumours were organised again and again by the comrades. I always made them public and laughed at them. More dangerous were well-crafted intrigues spread by certain powers on the left: rumours that I was not genuinely a GDR citizen and therefore should be treated with suspicion. That was dynamite of the most devious fabrications by the Stasi. I cannot prove the extent to which the authorities were also behind the campaign from the right wing that I as a foreigner should not touch antique drama. There are still some sacks full of shredded files in Pullach.

As I said, not all my wishes came true. Above all, Melina Mercouri's support as Minister of Culture and as a world-famous actress – for example in announcing publicly my production of *Hecuba* with Aspassia Papathanassiou

as the official GDR contribution at the first festival of Athens cultural city of Europe, not previously agreed with GDR authorities and although those authorities had nominated and sent an orchestra as official contribution – signalled to East Berlin at the address of
the GDR embassy, and to the strictly Stalinist communists in the country, the extent of esteem and independence of the political dimension that my work was valued with. The fact that writers, theatre makers and politicians both of Neo-democratia and Pasok became active in favour of my presence in Greece allowed me to manoeuvre the narrow ridge between the fangs of the Stasi and protection through my growing renown abroad.

What allowed me, despite all this, to go to the next rehearsal gently and upright where the fulfilling work experiences. I was needed everywhere and was able to provide my input as I wanted to. This allowed me to surpass myself.

My friendship and collaboration with Petros Markaris over many years, the support by Jakobos Kambanellis in the context of radio, Melina Mercouri's support in so many ways – from making available the antique theatre in Oinides all the way to public support what – my productions, workshops, projects in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, Agrinion, Oiniades and Kalamata connected me closely with the theatre artists and the audience, and formed me lastingly. To be able to produce and direct at the birthplace of the occident, in direct succession of Thespis, still represents the most enjoyable experience of my development.

DMD
Let us go back to your liberation, in 1975, on arrival in Larnaca.

HUH
I very quickly realised the extend of creative force that an open society releases, a society in which different, even antagonistic positions and suggestions for solutions vie for acceptance with each other. It was an enjoyable experience against the background of socialist disenfranchisement, which I had grown up with, to realise that the individual is able to participate in changing a given situation, that the individual is, as it were, worth taking himself by his own hand and carries out his own mobilisation. Everything seemed possible and was rose-coloured.

DMD
Which inconsistencies did you discover?

HUH
Cyprus made me forget that I was allowed out of the prison gGDR only for a limited period of time, when I realised to which extent politics is "handmade". After four weeks I found myself sitting with two friends at the home of the Minister of Education in the garden and we made professional and private plans. Weeks later the Foreign Secretary sent an aide memoire to East Berlin and requested from his partner there to work towards a continuation of my activity. This most certainly led to overtime at the Stasi, but most obviously there were more important interests for the regime to keep the Cypriot government well-disposed towards the state than to ruin relationships because of a loose theatre maker. I learnt to suppress my fear and to risk more than would generally have been advisable. Wounds were inevitable. But the gains in territory were considerable and contributed to self- esteem.

Cyprus, the island of Aphrodite, foam-arisen goddess of Greek mythology, who arose there from the waves of the ocean, according to myth, is an intersection of cultures. Theatre is one of her treasures, rich and bestowing identity. When I became aware of this, it became easier for me to bear well the dissensions of the Cold War.

DMD
What gave you strength in those extraordinary circumstances?

HUH
Naivety, Schwejk, recklessness and a lot of luck all combined. Diplomacy was added only much later. I relished being able to utter my opinion. One advantage was that even the Brecht-lovers did not understand anything of his dialectics which always created space for him not to be pinpointed but to provoke questions and to leave two issues that are uncomfortable. Thus it was possible in Cyprus immediately to talk and to quarrel even with the most determined representatives of ideologies that were hair-raising and hilarious, and in that way to enter a context worth thinking about further. Theatre work opens up such chances to accept contradictions as existential and to render them productive.

Then there was the Christian Orthodox culture (which I knew from Bulgaria) which alienated much for myself – the Huguenot Protestant contemporary. One late evening I sat, with my friend Neophytos Neophytou for hours in the small Chapel in the mountains and listened to the songs of the monks. What was meant to serve initially my interest in those rituals foreign to me allowed me to recognise: you have the inalienable right to listen to your own heart. You have the social obligation to follow your

dream. Only then will you be able to fulfil your fate and to carry out what you were born for. If we are listening, then hopefully we do not do this in order to collect information, but in order to encounter stories and to model behaviour

DMD
How do you relate to the Greek heritage?

HUH
Already on the second day of my visit I was captured by Greek antiquity. On the bus journey to a performance in a village for the first time I saw layers of old cultures interwoven. They were the excavations of the antique Kourion. According to what I heard, predominantly from the 5th century after Christ, that is from Roman times. It consisted of several buildings with well-preserved floor mosaics, among them the House of Gladiators, the House of Achilles, both of them named on the basis of motives of those mosaics. The villa of Eustolios, a theatre with a view to the ocean, from the 1st to 2nd century after Christ, that's still pointing to the Greek antique heritage. Also they were an Agora, then an early Christian Basilica, and there was what Mike, the props guy, called the Earthquake House: remnants of buildings with skeletons of human and animal inhabitants surprised by the earthquake. For the actors it was a familiar place, also because they appear on this stage. A fascinating thought. Since that moment antique drama and theatre never let me go again.

DMD
What about the political contacts in Cyprus?

HUH
In all the years I explored the cultural richness, the wonder and the beauty of the free part of the island, again and again above all with my friends Malamou and Neophytos Neophytou, with the entire Kafkarides family, with Nikos Kouroussis, Panayiots Serghis und Nicos Shiafkalis. The vandalism of the Turkish occupants in the antique places, the Orthodox churches, of icons and holy places of Greek Culture in the North, which was growing in those days, confirmed my solidarity with the rightful Cypriot state and its people. For me, the events of Cyprus constituted a clash of cultures beyond the circumstances of the Cold War I had experienced so far.

Brecht's "Use Value" and Aristotle's "Artistic Proof"[1]

1. When I met for the first time Karolos Koun (1) we both tried to introduce each other by presenting our views on, for us both, common professional subjects. I remember that Koun listened to my re-reading (I called it "decoding") of Brecht, using the experiences I just had with the first Cypriot Brecht production ever, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (2), and that he described his experiments with popular roots in Ancient Greek theatre traditions. It was then, when I started to explain the functional, the "use value" of Brechtian theatre tools to underline that the aesthetic of the THOK production was not the result of a style, but the challenge of traditional local viewing habits. As Koun was not familiar with the term "use value" (Gebrauchswert), because very few non-dramatic texts of Brecht had been translated into Greek, and an ideological simplification of Brecht's terminology ("epic theatre", "alienation") had a more confusing effect than enabling theatricality, he immediately looked for a connectability to Aristotle. He started to give me a lecture about Logos, Pathos, Ethos, which he called "artistic proofs", a term I found very expressive and precise. Koun, the master of Ancient Greek comedy, laid bare a sociology of character, which was not only relatable to Brecht's model, but covered basics of theatre making. We agreed that a speech act performed on stage is not predicated on the actor that performs it but is attributed to a character in a (fictional) world. I could not agree more that as the whole, this fictional world should be seen as a rhetoric attempt to shatter the rooted values of the contemporary audience. At that first meeting a few days before Christmas 1975 with Koun in his small office at his Art Theater in Athens we contemplated about the ability of the director to look out for means of persuasion in a given situation, making rhetoric applicable in all fields, not just politics.

2. In Ancient Greece, the earliest mention of oratorical skill occurs in Homer's *Iliad*, where heroes like Achilles, Hektor, and Odysseus were honoured for their ability to advise and exhort their peers and followers (the *laos* or army) in wise and appropriate action. With the rise of the democratic polis speaking skill was adapted to the needs of the public and political life of cities in Ancient Greece, much of which revolved around the use of oratory as the medium through which political and judicial decisions were made, and through which philosophical ideas were developed and disseminated. Facility with language was referred to as *logon techne* "skill

[1] *focus*, Nicosia, Nr. 4, 2017, p. 111-115.

with arguments" or "verbal artistry". Throughout European history, rhetoric has concerned itself with persuasion in public and political settings such as assemblies and courts. Because of its associations with democratic institutions, rhetoric is commonly said to flourish in open and democratic societies with rights of free speech, free assembly, and political enfranchisement for some portion of the population. Those who classify rhetoric as a civic art believe that rhetoric has the power to shape communities, form the character of citizens and greatly impact civic life. Rhetoric was viewed as a civic art by several of the Ancient philosophers. Aristotle and Isocrates were two of the first to see rhetoric in this light. In his work, *Antidosis*, Isocrates states, "we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish". (3) With this statement he argues that rhetoric is a fundamental part of civic life in every society and that it has been necessary in the foundation of all aspects of society. He further argues that rhetoric, although it cannot be taught to just anyone, is capable of shaping the character of man. He writes, "I do think that the study of political discourse can help more than any other thing to stimulate and form such qualities of character". Aristotle, writing several years after Isocrates, supported many of his arguments for rhetoric as a civic art. According to Aristotle, our perception of a speaker or writer's character influences how believable or convincing we find what that person has to say. This projected character is called the speaker's or writer's ethos. We are naturally more likely to be persuaded by a person who, we think, has personal warmth, consideration of others, a good mind and solid learning. Often, we know something of the character of speakers and writers ahead of time. They come with a reputation or extrinsic ethos. People whose education, experience, and previous performances qualify them to speak on a certain issue earn the special extrinsic ethos. Their "character" creates the authority. But whether or not we know anything about the speaker or writer ahead of time, the actual text we hear or read, the way it is written or spoken and what it says, always conveys an impression of the author's character. This impression created by the text itself is the intrinsic ethos. Representatives of the modern history of democracy are determined by such structures and attitudes.

We remember "with malice toward none" and "we have nothing to fear" and "tear down this wall" because the words embodied the essential Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Reagan, respectively. Obama's Nobel speech cannot be summed up in a similarly pithy quotation. Taken all in all, though, it is likely to endure because it is the testament of a man whose tragic view on the world is deeply and authentically held. Obama may well become the first

US-president since Lincoln to lead his nation in a running meditation on the ways and means of fate.

In the founding text of Western ethical philosophy, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines ethics as the formation of good character through the practice of moral virtue, where moral virtue is thought not to come naturally but to require cultivation, training and repetition, like learning to play a musical instrument. Eventually the practice of virtue becomes second nature, becomes habit: "moral or ethical virtue is the product of habit (ethos), and has indeed derived its name… from that word" (Aristotle 33). Significantly, Aristotle rejects Plato's "idea of good" as the basis of ethics, instead orienting the practice of virtue towards the attainment of happiness (Aristotle 8-14).

In the Christian era, ethics loses its focus on the self and its happiness and becomes a matter of self-renunciation and submission to external law. (4)

The emphasis shifts from character and habit to decision and act. Good conduct becomes a question of choice, where at every turn the fate of the eternal soul hangs in the balance. "Christian ethics is a drama of autonomous decision- making, a theme that dovetails neatly into modern pragmatic liberalism." (5) Hence Kant's categorical imperative, which seeks to ground Christian submission to the law on the more universal and incontrovertible 'foundation of Reason itself: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." (6) For the Athenian audience, historicizing their own mythological past was a means of re-evaluating its "use value" for their actual needs as a community Re-writing pre-historic stories leads directly to the dynamic social exchange of the drama onstage and the drama of life outside the *theatron*, the "seeing place". The temporal exigencies of a dramatic performance are *ad hoc* playgrounds, engaging questions of moral, political, and religious authority, where each and every moment of the performance is significant and yet unrecoverable. The dramaturgy is always strictly the same: a known series of incidents that precipitates a crisis and brings the meaning of the protagonist's actions into focus and has to be judged for the polis's policymaking. Aristotle, we know, called this crisis the peripeteia, or reversal, and argued that it should be accompanied by an act of anagnorisis, or recognition, in which the character responds to the change.

3. As contemporary readers of Greek tragedy, we may feel that we face different truths than did the Greek audiences twenty-five hundred years ago. How, then, do we create meaning from these plays? How do we reconcile the tensions which exist between the fictional images of life the Greeks

presented and the ongoing reality of our own lives? One way to begin is to identify particular areas in which the view of life implied in Greek tragedy differs from our own. The discovery that it is possible to look at life through entirely new eyes is in itself a kind of meaning which drama has to offer. (7). This was made possible in Ancient Greek dramaturgy by the conjunction of two ingenious devices: imprinting of images on matter and mediation of language.

The imprinting of images on matter created a specific kind of iconic signifier, coupling image and matter, which is perceptible and thus communicable. The mediation of language enabled both control over iconic signifiers and formalization of imagistic syntax – thus lending a high degree of articulation that is clearly discerned in the imagistic/iconic performing arts.

The goal of scripted Pathos and staged Ethos is to persuade the audience that the presented ideas are valid, or more valid than someone else's. Aristotle's categories of pathos, ethos and logos were in Ancient times and are still today basic categories of social communication and depend on the interests they serve. Over the past century, people studying rhetoric have tended to enlarge its object domain beyond speech texts. A wider interpretation of rhetoric as identification broadened the scope from strategic and overt political persuasion to the more implicit tactics of identification found in an immense range of sources. Here are a few examples of different aspects:

> "The personality of the orator outweighs the issues." (John Leopold)

> "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV." (1960s TV commercial for Excedrin)

> "If Aristotle's study of *pathos* is a psychology of emotion, then his treatment of ethos amounts to a sociology of character. It is not simply a how-to guide to establishing one's credibility with an audience, but rather it is a careful study of what Athenians consider to be the qualities of a trustworthy individual." (James Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*. Allyn and Bacon, 2001)

> "If, in my low moments, in word, deed or attitude, through some error of temper, taste, or tone, I have caused anyone discomfort, created pain, or revived someone's fears, that was not my truest self. If there were occasions when my grape turned into a raisin or my joy bell lost its resonance, please forgive me. Charge it to my head and not to my heart. My head – so limited in its finitude: my heart, which is boundless in its love for the human family. I am not a perfect servant. I am a public servant doing my best against the

> odds." (Jesse Jackson, Democratic National Convention Keynote Address, 1984)

The quotations illustrate what Koun and I called in our conversation "producing iconic replicas of verbal and nonverbal acts", when we compared the rhetoric of Brecht's Azdak with Ancient Athens' Pericles. The rhetorical persuasion of both wants to make possible the kind of knowledge that might lead not to catharsis but to interventionist critique. And something else I remember from our discussion. We saw structural similarities in the Ancient Greek's and in Brecht's drama: their investigative nature allows to know on behalf of, and in excess of the character's own social and psychological specificity. Instead of simply indexing "objective reality" in an attempt to uncover the real as something independent of social and political subjectivity, theatre making has developed from its very beginning an approach that dialogically structures reality into representation, invites a disrobing gaze, encourages understanding, and even implies the possibility of intervention. The question was and is always: how to re-read the given texts for a changing history.

The reality is the model for theatre making. The rise and presence of Barack Hussein Obama in US politics is such an example.

It was the Narrative - Obama's life and telling of it – that produced the Obama presidency. Many if not most of the key moments were speeches: Chicago in 2002, Boston in 2004, Philadelphia and Denver in 2008. The crafting of this story was always a joint Obama-Axelrod enterprise. At the president's address to the nation (in front of both Houses) both "authors" unveiled a new chapter in the saga. The story-telling goes like this: Our hero has been attacked by all the evil creatures in Washington and vows to tame them, either by his charm or with his bare hands. He promises to create jobs, cut the deficit, cut more taxes (but raise them on the rich), and finally redeem this promise to end the corrupt, insipid, and selfish ways of the capital.

In the House chamber, and on TV, it worked. Obama was forceful and shrewd, amiable and reasonable. He commanded the room (except for the stone-faced members of the Supreme Court) with ease. Judging from the instant polls that night, the public loved it. As a piece of political stagecraft, it impressed. But in the cold light of day, people do have a "but" – in fact more than one.

The address sometimes seemed more about Obama himself than about the country. At times it was not so much his thought on the state of the Union as it was his thoughts on the state of the presidency, and on our (the spectator's) view on him. "Now, I am not naive", the president said. "I never thought that the mere fact of my election would usher in peace, harmony,

and some post-partisan era." (8) And later. "I have never suggested that change would be easy, or that I can do it alone." Then, in the closing flourish: "I don't quit." A comedian's comment: "You'd better not, you have a four-year contract"!

In the post-Oprah age, Americans not only accept but also even demand this kind of intimate, almost confessional style in political leaders and public figures. Most Americans like Obama as a person, and most want him to succeed as a president. But he has to remember that he is supposed to be a character in our story –
not the other way around.

Unlike his perfectly paced memoirs, Obama's presidency is not a narrative whose plot he can dictate, or even control. It is not a Euripides tragedy or a James Cameron movie or a bildungsroman. It is an accretion of actions, decisions, and confrontations – some of them unexpected and unwelcome – in the real world. Reality, especially the bureaucratic and governmental one, resists the smooth-flowing hero story, and it is annoyingly prosaic. At this point even Obama's supporters no longer yearn for a superhero. As one critique wrote after the address: "The country will settle for a competent administration, and it isn't clear that this is one" (Howard Fineman, *The New Yorker*, January 18, 2010, p. 20)

4. The Tragic Hero of Ancient Greek drama is not an ideal but a warning, and the warning is addressed not to an aristocratic audience, i.e., other potentially heroic individuals, but to the *demos*, i.e., the collective chorus.

The conflict in Greek tragedy reveals forces to which both mortals and gods are subject. Recognition in Greek tragedy takes place at human and cosmic levels. At the human level, one character discovers the true identity of another. Recognition at the cosmic level is tied in with the final resolution of the conflict between human striving and the forces of denial. The Greeks believed in a universal principle which reconciled the forces of creation and destruction. They called it *Moira*, translated variously as Fate, or Necessity. To the modern mind, Necessity is an unfamiliar idea. We believe, instead, in progress – the idea that we can assert ourselves unconditionally and that, some day in the future, we will triumph once and for all over the forces of denial. The fascination in reading Greek tragedy, however, is in reading it as if we believed that our being cannot be asserted unconditionally, and that we occupy a small place in an immense universe in which all things, even the immortal gods, are subject to the one force, necessity. It is the recognition of Necessity, in one form or another, that finally resolves the conflict in Greek tragedy.

Through witnessing the fall of the tragic hero from happiness to misery, the chorus learns that the Homeric hero is not the ideal man they should try to imitate or admire. On the contrary, the strong man is tempted by his strength into becoming the impious man whom the gods punish, for the gods are not gods because they are ideally strong but because they are ideally just. Their strength is only the instrument by which they enforce their justice.

The ideal man who every member of the democracy should try to become is not the aristocratic heroic individual but the moderate law-abiding citizen who does not want to be stronger and more glorious than everybody else.

Anthony Trollope once argued that tragedy was embodied in a blind giant, a creature haunted by the memory of his former power. (9)

In the 1930's, Reinhold Niebuhr said, "The history of mankind is a perennial tragedy; for the highest ideals which the individual may project are ideals which he can never realize in social and collective terms." (10)

It is this last insight that informs Obama's thinking: tragedy as the acceptance of the fact that the world will never fully confirm our wishes, and that even the noblest human efforts will fall short of our highest aspirations. "We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth that we will not eradicate violence in our lifetimes," Obama said in Oslo. "There will be times when nations – acting individually or in concert – will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified. I face the world as it is and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world... To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism – it is a recognition of history. The imperfections of man and the limits of reason. " (11)

Politicians tend not to speak this way. It is more fun to inspire than to warn. By focusing on antagonistic contradictions, the speaker's rhetoric determines what constitutes truth, and therefore, what is beyond question and debate. The deliberation and decision-making are – as in the theatre – audience-centred. Obviously, the logos alienates the pathos and ethos of the prize acceptance ceremony. The characters of Ancient Greek plays are all about warning and the limits of reason. The observations of their actions rely on the spectator's reasonable judgement.

Our first view of Oedipus the King is of a man in the public eye, a beloved king who is sought by his people. The matching of the large group against the single figure provides the scenic background for the developing interplay between the public and the private domains. This visual relationship between the 'solitary' standing figure and the prostrate assembly is immediately reinforced in a particular and striking way:

"Children..." This, the first word of the tragedy, Oedipus addresses to young and old alike. On the other hand, it is a natural expression of the role which the presence of the suppliants confers upon him. He is the leader, the protector, the patriarch. On the other hand, there is the real father, the polluted one, who at the last is compelled to relinquish the daughters born of his own incest. The image of the father is the instant link between the external political circumstance and the lurking family horror. Oedipus' relationship with his children begins and ends the drama.

5. Ancient Greek characters undertake extreme, audacious objectives and pursue them relentlessly, to the point of catastrophe. Their actions help the community to face its fear of the implacable power of necessity and inspire pity for the suffering which they must undergo in the process. If we empathize with the protagonist, we can vicariously test our own powers of truth-facing and survival. But aside from the ongoing speculations about reversal and recognition and the functioning of *catharsis* or the impact the emotional pressures of the tragic actions may have on the audience, it is almost certain that the most provoking theatrical invention, which replaced the earlier choral dancing and revelry and is known from Aristophanes' plays, was the *parabasis*, the choral ode that was delivered to the audience and addressed political issues. The need to replace older viewing habits through "thinking capable of intervention" is thus not an invention of the twentieth-century theatre revolution: it was already a basic element in the development of the social function of the theatre in Ancient Greece.

Modern readers are sometimes tempted to skip choral passages, but to the Greek audience the odes were a crucial part of the play. The chorus represents the community's Elders, who, in the fictional theatre world, are deeply concerned with the fate of their city. They also perform the priestly function of speaking for and to the gods in the real world of the audience. Aristophanes expressed the Greek perception of the chorus when he wrote:

> There is no function more noble than that
> of the god-touched Chorus
> Teaching the City in Song.

This tradition of spiritual teaching in Greek tragedy is centred in the choral odes. The chorus is partly encircled by the audience to provide maximum contact in those moments when the drama "speaks the truth for the improvement of the city."

Stagecraft and tragic conception of Ancient Greek drama are always united by the idea of vision. The exploitation of children, for example, to evoke pathos is supposed to be Euripidean. Yet in two of seven plays, the

Ajax and *Oedipus the King*, Sophocles employs just such an effect. And this is not to mention the heart-rending separation and reunion of the two daughters in the *Oedipus at Colonus*. Enormity confronts innocence, terrible knowledge silent incomprehension. And how important is this scene in *Oedipus the King*; it comes last and it is that against which the beginning is measured. From success to ruin, from authority to impotence, from kingship to beggary, the reversal worked out by the whole play is very much a visual demonstration. Moreover, the scene of final pathos is but the climax of a long display of horror and suffering. The emergence of Oedipus, stumbling and self-mutilated, introduces a sight which is with us until the end of the play, no shorter "a spectacle of horror" than the sight of Pentheus' impaled head in the *Bacchae* of Euripides.

Remember the display of Oedipus' suffering comes to its climax with the arrival of his two daughters. He has begged Creon to be allowed to touch and hold them. Already he is contradicting the whole purpose of the self-mutilation: his hands are to be his eyes (1469-70). The generosity of Creon is immediately substantiated, an unquestioned thing. Oedipus hears their sobs, he gropes for them, and they come and cling to their father: "O children." With this repeated echo of the opening spectacle the reversal is brought home with crushing power, the tableaux of exaltation set against the tableaux of ruin. As the crowd was silent so now are the daughters. Here, at last, is the real father with the real children. He stoops down, bringing his bloody sockets level with his children's gaze:

> Come here, come to these hands of mine, hands of your brother, hands of your father, which made these once bright eyes to see in this way – his, who neither seeing nor knowing was seen (*ephanten*) to become your father by her from whom he himself was born. For you also I weep since I have no power to see you, when I think of the bitter life in the future. (1480-7)

The whole visual meaning of his fate is condensed into this, the final formulation of the play's controlling imagery. Still there is the seeing and the being seen. After showing himself to Thebes he shows himself to the silence of the children and horror turns to pity. The hands which so tenderly hold them are the hands which are imbued with the blind and the knowing abominations which he has done to himself. But, above all, they are the hands that "see": he "feels" the horror he has created and again in his blindness he speaks of "seeing", which at this point is not the fulfilment of his first anguished purpose, the physical assault, but a new kind of inner vision.

From a theatre-making point of view the visual imagery is simply one feature of the whole pattern of "reflexion" which is built into Oedipus's