CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

APORIA, THE SPHINX, AND THE HOPE THAT LIFE WILL MAKE SENSE

'Whatever champions of contingency we might be, we cannot help expecting with part of our mind that the world will make sense, and feeling vaguely cheated if it does not' (Eagleton, 2003: 106).

There comes a moment when one needs to face up to one's ignorance and puzzlement, to one's *aporia*. Such a moment, when everything is thrown into disarray and questioned, determines the person one was, is, and the person one is going to be. This aporia is a profound impasse, not just a problem. It arises when meaning grinds to a halt and a step must be taken, even against one's best interest. The encounter strikes one as a moment of terror. One comes out of it as *other subject* (Zupančič, 2000: 235).

An impasse is related, on the one hand, to death, the limit condition of being (Derrida, 2008), and, on the other, to truth and knowledge, which one man in antiquity – let's call him Oedipus – could pursue rationally in the realm of the Law-governed polis (city). Today, we may still contemplate mortality, or pursue truth and knowledge, but the *horizon* of the inquiry, the scope of life, death and desire, and the fabric of the polis, have changed to such an extent that the most pertinent question might not be 'What is the truth?' but 'How will I recognise the truth when I come across it?'. This question was not unknown to the contemporaries of Sophocles and Euripides. It was best captured by Euripides in the extant play *Ion*, which never attracted Freud's attention and never acquired canonical status in Psychoanalysis. Euripides formulates the question in relation to a young slave, Ion, and his *living* father who returns *out of the blue,* promising to restore his son to

his rightful place. The effect of this unexpected development and the impasse it creates are no less frightening than the *ate* (fate) immortalised in the Sophoclean play.

In contemporary culture, the motif of the return of the father has gained unwavering popularity, becoming the vehicle for a host of cultural concerns which join forces with the questions of truth and death. And we know that when mythical and tragic figures are employed, the intention usually is to try to express something universal about human nature.

In *Tron Legacy* (2010), the sequel to the 1980s popular science fiction film *Tron* (1982), the return of the father chimes with the progress of digital technology and the promise of immortality. The son (Sam) is enticed into 'Tron', the virtual world of an old video game created by the father (Flynn). The invitation seems to have originated from the long-lost presumed dead father. Inside the virtual world, Sam will meet Quora, the last survivor of a digital species. Quora will bring Sam to his ageing father. The three will plan their escape from the virtual world, but only Sam and Quora make it out alive, bringing humanity a radically new insight into the nature of the DNA and the promise of immortality.

In *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010), the first book in a very popular teenage fantasy series, the return of the Olympian father, Poseidon, chimes with perceived post-9/11 threats against the West. Poseidon claims young Percy as his son and instructs him to descend to Hades to retrieve Zeus' thunderbolt. The thunderbolt, symbol of Olympian power, is coveted by the dark side, the insurgent Kronos. Percy must accomplish his mission both in order to create a rapport with his father, and in order to ensure the continuation of western civilisation.

Moira Buffini's play *Welcome to Thebes* (2010) and Nikos Koundouros' film *The Photographers* (1998) are modern versions of Sophocles' Antigone. The new daughters of Oedipus experience a

different facet of the Father, the collapse of what Lacan calls the *Name of the Father*, that is, the established socio-symbolic order. In *Welcome to Thebes*, Antigone has just buried her brother, like her ancient counterpart. Around her the destroyed city is steeped in mourning. Antigone contemplates the meaninglessness of one more death, her own, and, when pardoned by the head of state, decides that she wants to live. In *The Photographers*, Antigone is a village girl in an imaginary Afghani village destroyed by war. This young woman has a double, an American female photographer who arrives at the village with a media crew. While the local girl buries her brother like her ancient counterpart, her act goes rather unnoticed. This unlikely development is superseded by an even more scandalous event: the two identical women flee the destroyed village together, rescued by an army helicopter. In both the play and the film Antigone fulfils her ancient moral obligation towards her brother but survives the destruction of the social fabric.

Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* (2012), the prequel to the classic science fiction film *Alien* (1979), is a cautionary tale about what happens to those who pursue the Father and immortality too keenly. The spaceship 'Prometheus' is on a mission to find mankind's alien ancestors, the Engineers. 'Prometheus' lands on a desolate planet, from where the Engineers are supposed to have originated. Much to the disappointment of the archaeologists on board, Elizabeth Shaw and Charlie Holloway, none of the Engineers is still alive. During the expedition, which is funded by the octogenarian millionaire Wayland, the careless crew and a clever robot reawaken various forms of alien life, which turn against the humans, unleashing carnage. The sole human survivor, Elizabeth Shaw, vows to continue her search for the origin of mankind while declaring her faith in God, reintroducing the question of what is 'human', the problem of mortality and the possibility of hope in a post-apocalyptic universe.

All the above characters have one in common: they are the jaded children of the postmodern age. They are not wise and mature like Oedipus. Some, like Sam, are 'cool', apathetic and indifferent to the bigger issues pertaining to human existence. Some, like Elizabeth, are alert and critical. But they all experience the return of the father – God, creator, inventor, Engineer – as a return of the repressed and an urgent need to deal with what has lied dormant, unrecognised or Real[1].

Their dramatic antecedent is Euripides' Ion. Let us accept this propositions as straightforward and 'evident' for the moment. *The Ion* takes place at Delphi. Ion is the illegitimate son of the God Apollo and an Athenian princess, Creusa. Apollo plans to return Ion to his mother's city by giving him 'as a son' to Xuthus, Creusa's husband. He does not explain the situation to Ion. Perplexed by the conflicting versions of the story of his birth, the inconsistencies, the lies and the contradictions, Ion voices serious concerns about Apollo's ability to tell the truth and refuses to comply with the God's desire. 'Does Apollo tell the truth?', the once faithful servant asks at some point, feeling the doubt driving him insane. This moment of doubt puts in jeopardy the divine plan as well as the young man's future. It shatters his faith to any form of truth and secure knowledge.

Ion and his modern counterparts share old problem, the difficulty of setting the conditions of truth and the conditions of interpretation (*hermeneia*) that allow one to differentiate between truthful and deceitful representations. Oedipus never doubted his ability to reach the truth, and the Sophoclean drama never problematized truth, making it the only possible outcome of a rational inquiry. To ask 'Is there truth?' or 'How will I know truth when I come across it?' is an altogether different problem. It pertains to the limits of knowledge and to the very fabric of the world, the Other as we know it.

There is a second commonality between *The Ion* and the cultural products I introduced above.

They are all *catastrophes survived*. To *survive,* to avoid death, is one thing; to *live* is another.

Not all tragic plays end in death, but living can be tragic. To anticipate *living* is to imagine a

future – as young people often do; and that, in turn, entails hope and a set of principles, if not

ideals, upon which one can rely in order to go on living. Ion's worldview is shaken when, at

Delphi, the birthplace of Apollonian truth, he wakes up to the possibility of infinite distortions

and lies. For the contemporary heroes, the tragic insight concerns the dissolution of the

traditional social fabric (Other), the loss of the centrality of the human being in a world of fast

technological change, the dubious nature of the desire for immortality, and the return of a

mighty, desirous parent who threatens to crush the child with his exorbitant demands.

If Greek tragedy entails a process of illumination, the films, the plays and the book I consider

here show how the inquiry for one's truth – the classic 'who am I?' – turns into the simultaneous

contemplation of death/mortality and humanity and truth, while registering a contemporary

departure from the classic question of subjectivity. We generally accept that contemporary

individuality is constituted reflexively, also having espoused a postmodern cynicism which often

leaves little room for illusory hope and grand fantasies[2]. The situation is made worse by the

ongoing crisis of the financial and social institutions which are both unable and unwilling to

support the individual as before. Stiegler reckons that today we need new myths, new ways of re-

enchanting the world and re-igniting hope (2014c). At the same time, he argues that, more than

ever before, we need to cultivate a tragic view (2014a: 92), a critical approach comparable to the

intellectual ways of the fifth century BC, which could help us think our way out of the multiple

socio-political and individual dead-ends of contemporary capitalism. How can we be mythic and

tragic today? How do we envisage the pursuit of truth and the concern of death and

(im)mortality, together with the collapse of the Other? We will explore these questions through Lacan, Baudrillard and Stigler. Culture, high and low, posits such questions and envisages possible outcomes, capturing the spirit of our times. It does not necessarily advance tangible solutions but, much like philosophy and psychoanalysis, allows us to explore the limits of the imaginable and the unimaginable.

Myth and tragedy in contemporary context

Contemporary usages of myth and tragedy vary from simple evocation of easily recognizable names and plots (e.g. the character of Hercules in Disney animation), to purposeful selections of features or theatrical conventions[3], to philosophically nuanced attempts to gauge the ontological issues that inhabit the mythical and the tragic today.

In this book I am interested in myth as a systematic attempt to provide a plausible explanation of the world, or to uphold a 'common sense' belief, especially at times of change. Myth was considered by post-Kantian philosophers as an early form of human thought, the 'childhood of man', or 'fiction' that preceded Logos (Dowden, 1992: 5; Detienne, 1986: 103). Mythical thinking was seen as the condition that paved the way for the advent of the Spirit, the latter being bound to maturity, language and the philosophical notion of *arché* (origin) (Cassirer 2009: 2). Although this interpretation has been superseded by more modern approaches to myth (see Detienne, 1896), it is not difficult to recognise similarities between this conceptualisation of mythical thinking and regressive thinking.

Consider the characteristics of mythical thinking as discussed by Cassirer. Causality in myth is different from the (scientific) principle of cause and effect. Myth operates on a logic of co-

existence (2009: 44). Thus, things that are in spatial proximity 'belong' together. Mythical thinking answers the question of origin by reducing complex relations to pre-existing elements (2009: 55), and space is divided in terms of 'inside' and 'outside' or 'sacred' and 'profane'. A transition from one zone to another requires rites of passage (2009: 101). Time in myth is neither linear nor regulated by the calendar and the clock, but comparable to the rhythm of nature and the musical rhythm. Action in myth chimes with the omnipotence of thought (2009: 157) and the fluid character of intuition: to think is to affect one's surroundings, while, at the same time, action makes the limits of the inner world visible (2009: 200). Cassirer compares this operation to a splitting process which allows an empirical sequence of events to be attributed to different subjects (2009: 162). The mythical mode of thinking is said to be superseded developmentally by rational thinking but may resurface when new strange and unthinkable experiences must be addressed or conceptualized.

Another sense in which I use myth is as *unexamined belief*. It is commonly accepted that science after the Enlightenment has remained mythical in the sense of upholding, with some arrogance in fact, man's superiority over nature and other species. Mary Midgley (2004) argues that we continue to pursue this myth even as we deny it. We adhere to the unexamined notion of the value-free objectivity of science and the unstoppable drive-like nature of scientific progress. We do the same with their socio-political counterparts, like the universal value of the social contract and the meaning of freedom, even when undermined by rampart individualism (2004: 3). We may have abandoned the 19th century metaphor of *the machine* as the most pertinent representation of a well-organised system, but we pursue Artificial Intelligence as the final separation of the body from the soul. Science and religion, continues Midgley, seem worlds apart but scientific prophets, from Skinner to Ford, repeatedly promise 'a theory of everything'. This,

she argues, is the imperialistic legacy of the Enlightenment (2004: 23), transformed into a megalomaniac pursuit of simplification and reductivism (2004: 29), often found in metaphors of 'mapping', 'decoding' and 'unlocking' secrets.

Midgley's argument chimes with themes central to the films examined in this book. Isn't father Flynn in *Tron Legacy* the mad scientist who has broken new grounds in the digital-virtual domain while unlocking secrets of the DNA with unfathomable possibilities for humanity? Isn't the non-human father, the Engineer, in *Prometheus* the apotheosis of artificial intelligence as the final separation of 'body' and 'soul'? The new alchemist, argues Midgley, is the bio-genetic engineer who would not hesitate to sacrifice himself or those close to him, offering them as vessels for the progress of science (2009: 111). This fantasy seems to be running through human imagination from Prometheus to Frankenstein (the New Prometheus) to the games designer and the scientist of the digital age.

Of course science fiction, cinema, theatre or literature, are not 'real life' and we should be mindful of this fundamental difference. However, it can be argued that the fantasy of omnipotence that runs through all of them is subtended by our collective desire to beat death individually, as monads. This, according to Baudrillard (2000), is our biggest contemporary folly, our biggest mythic regression and deadly self-defeating pursuit, since we have forgotten how to deal with death ritually, collectively and symbolically. Myth and mythopoetic imagination, therefore, reflect the desire to cross spatial and temporal thresholds, even death, to move beyond set limits, to break with the traditions of the body and the soul in pursuit of a new origin. Trepidation and fear arise at the threshold. We are still thinking in terms of the punishment of Gods, the regressive-mythic fear par excellence since the (many) Gods died a long time ago and (the one) God died with the advent of the Enlightenment (Stiegler 2014).

Perhaps, and contrary to what Midgley so forcefully asserts, we are becoming aware that we are no longer masters of nature and the universe. Yet, cultural representations of our human in-significance have not yet taken deep roots in our culture. How do we think ourselves in the bigger picture or, as Baudrillard puts it, how do we grasp that fact that we do not think the world but the world thinks us (2001: 89)? Possibilities, joyful anticipation of things to come, anxiety and fear arise at the realm of this contemplation, creating the perfect conditions for mythical and rationality thinking to jar with one another.

If myth as regressive thinking is to be juxtaposed to rationality, then myth as a political form of silence (coercion, unexamined acceptance, submission to authority) can be juxtaposed to speaking and articulating one's desire. At this point, I take my cue from the well-known Barthesian thesis (1973) that myth is a political form which promotes the 'common sense' and self-evident merits of consumer-capitalist culture. The problem of speaking one's desire and one's mind is central to this book. *Ion* speaks his desire with fearlessness and sincerity, addressing his words not only to his new father but to the whole democratic polis of Athens. Sam in *Tron Legacy* is too 'cool' to articulate any thoughts, a coolness which Baudrillard invites us to recognise as perilous indifference to memory and history and, ultimately, to the disintegration of the socio-political fabric. In *Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief*, young Percy is gradually inducted into the hegemonic logic of the West and Poseidon, learning to be silent and obedient to His command for fear of causing the wrath of the Olympians. Here, the mobilisation of the logic of myth and mythical figures soars up capitalist-neoliberal ideology. As Barthes observes, myth lends itself to history (1973: 149) and is always somehow historically substantiated (1973: 155). By the same token, the two Antigones illuminate a new relation to language, especially in *The*

Photographers, where the young woman is reduced to silence, failing to rise to the sublime beauty praised by so many, from Hegel to Lacan.

Speech is political (Barthes 1973: 158) and language that is not mythical transforms reality. If that was once the case, one of the questions we need to consider is how the contemporary subject creates or fail to reach the conditions for truth and transformative speech; how one manages to think or fails to think radically, differently, critically. We should also need to consider how one thinks one's place and one's (in)significance without being crushed by this knowledge. This might be one of the biggest contemporary challenges and our *tragic* accomplishment. In the pages of this book we will explore these questions through Lacan, Baudrillard and Stiegler. Before doing so, we must briefly revisit the tragic genre which formalised and still influences the aesthetic articulation of the antinomies that underline human subjectivity.

A recent expansion of interest in tragedy has been seen by many as an attempt to express a critique of contemporary times through a return to the democratic values of Athens (Rabinowitz, 122-130). Athenian tragedy was a very emplaced phenomenon, the intellectual product of a specific city-state, and a specific time, the 5th century AD[4]. The questions posited by tragedy do not have easy answers. Tragedy is primarily characterised by *tension,* especially between the divine and the mortal perspectives, reflecting the rise of individuality, the rise of rationality and the emancipation of the bourgeois citizen of Athens. The tragic hero asks '*Ti draso*?' (What am I supposed to do?), as the individual increasingly becomes the seat of action, weighting the risks ensuing from one's acts (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990: 45). By the same token, the tragic sense of responsibility arises when prominent place is given to internal debates, at a time when human action had still not acquired autonomy (1990: 47). Tragedy resides at this border.

The tragic understanding of will and agency are very different from our own. Technically, there is no word for 'will' in Greek drama, and the concept of 'agent' is totally different from the modern one (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990: 60). 'Will' is not a datum of human nature but a category determined by action (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990: 50). Where the modern mind sees 'will', the ancient mind sees knowledge of the fact that action does not emanate from a subject but envelops him: one is caught in action and eventually learns whether the chosen course was right or wrong. Volition is secondary, in the sense that one would never intentionally stir oneself to the wrong course of action or to error (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990: 82). Thus, on an intellectual and psychological level, tragedy expresses how one can be both responsible (*aitios*) and a plaything of the Gods at the same time (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990: 67). Compared to an earlier mythic and perhaps static view of life, tragedy bears witness to the progressive development of the category of the agent and the attempt to abolish the distance between agent and action when the Gods still work in the background. This is the space between necessity and divine will, echoing man's relationship to téchne (intellect, superiority) and knowledge. Overall, tragedy expresses the growing confidence of 5th century Athens in progress, rational discovery and new rhetorical arguments, the importance of language and persuasion, the control of words, the advent of relativism, sophism, and the gradual loss of the traditional order (Goldhill ,1986: 201).

Tragic language is always the language of rationality and the polis. In *Oedipus Rex*, the hero is welcomed on stage by the chorus as a master of téchne, rhetoric and intelligence (Goldhill, 1986: 205). He is hailed as sovereign (κρατυνων) and saviour, a man who can put an end to trouble (παυστηριος), and a ruler at the peak of his power. The language of his inquiry reflects 5th century preoccupation with rationality, illustrated through a vocabulary of investigation,

examination, evidence, deduction, inference and learning. For Oedipus and his passion for knowledge the warning 'do not seek to master everything' falls on deaf ear, and it is precisely the possibility of such total, all-embracing human knowledge and mastery that is challenged by the end of the drama (Goldhill, 1986: 209). Oedipus' words, the tragic words, always have a double meaning. When he proclaims himself *homosporos* to Laios, intending to say that he sowed his seed in the same place as the old king, the audience hears another truth in that statement, that he is of the same family as Laios. At the opening of the play, Oedipus declares: 'I am the one who will bring [the cause of the present trouble] to light (*ego phano*)'. Again, the audience grasps the double meaning of the syntactic pattern: 'I shall appear myself/I shall discover myself as the cause of miasma'. For 5th century Athenians, the Gods are to be respected but ultimately do not control human fate. Thus, Apollo's oracle, which lies at the heart of Oedipus' destiny, simply sends him his own speech back, twisted and deformed (Goldhill, 1986: 116). It is his own judgement and passionate pursuit of truth that oblige him to carry his inquiry to the end. By the final scene, Oedipus discovers himself at the opposite end of where he started: the dispenser of justice is the criminal; the king reduced to beggary and exile. Tragedy is the celebration of the duplicity of language and being.

The emphasis on individuality, rationality and the values of the democratic polis have led some classicist to reject Freud's reading of the *Oedipus Rex*. Among them Vernant, whose work played an important part in the return of post-war French philosophy to classical antiquity and the democratic values of Athens (see Leonard, 2005). For Vernant, Freud ignored the historical and aesthetic parameters of the play and transformed the Athenian hero into a universal man (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1990: 174)[5].

Before that, idealist philosophers had seen tragedy as a distinctive expression of the problem of human freedom, but essentially alien to modernity, the 'closest other' to modern freedom (Billings 2014: 6). Following the Kantian concept of the sublime, tragedy was seen as the privileged negative presentation of the absolute. Tragedy was thought to reconcile freedom and necessity, bridging the gap between pure and practical reason, something that critical philosophy can never span on its own (Billings, 2014: 119). Few philosophers, argues Billings (2014: 226), would subscribe to the idealist epistemological structure today, even less so to the idealist effect of catharsis and recognition.

In modernity tragedy became more decidedly social, moving firmly in the realm of the bourgeois household. For Raymond Williams (2006), modernist tragedy was mostly played out in the field of social humanism, often focusing on the conflict between the individual and the bourgeois hegemonic values. For John Orr (1981), the tragic dramas of Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Casey, O'Neil, Miller and others, register a shift from old to new forms of responsibility. If suffering is forced upon the individual, then one needs to see what can be done to change it (1981: 8). Ibsen, notes Orr, knew there was a tragedy of demystification, denunciation, violent unmasking, but also the more tortuous kind of clinging to one's means. Tragedy today no longer focuses on the tension between man and gods but seems to indicting our existence as a whole (ibid). But if the democratic, linguistic and rational properties of the *polis* have long been altered, and the bourgeois modernity is waning, it becomes necessary to examine the *most recent* social condition upon which contemporary tragedy is articulated and the core issues it problematizes.

Examining how European political intellectual traditions have approached tragedy and tragic violence from Kant onwards, Eagleton (2003) espouses a broadly Lacanian view of subjectivity in order to justify the continuing relevance of the genre. The convergence of the psychoanalytic

and the tragic is summed by the problem of agency and free will. 'Quite who is acting', argues Eagleton,

is as much a question for Greek tragedy as it is for the psychoanalytic theory which casts a backward glance to it. Tragic protagonists receive their actions back from a place which they cannot fathom, a realm of Delphic opaqueness oy sibylline slipperiness which is nonetheless implacable in its demands. Just as the Lacanian subject can never be sure whether it has deciphered the demand of the Other aright, since that demand has to pass through the duplicitous signifier, so the Greek protagonist moves fearfully in a realm of half-legible signs and portents, groping timorously in darkness among baleful powers, perpetually at risk of stumbling against some forbidden frontier, over-reaching himself and bringing himself to nothing (2003: 108-9).

To the psychoanalytic qualities of ancient tragedy Eagleton insightfully incorporates two very important notions, namely, *creation* and the *Christian God*, bridging the gap between antiquity and monotheistic religion. The Christian God, he argues, is comparable to Freudian overdetermination. God sees what I will freely do in the future because he is omniscient, not because he forces me to do it (2003: 109). Guilt, that is, the anticipation that some of my acts might have disastrous consequences, becomes the original sin (2003: 110). The whim of God, which is the act of creation, is masterfully 'hidden' by God's transcendence. An interesting effect emerges at that point: while the narrative of creation would seem to give some point to the world, this point is ironic since the theological meaning is that it is exactly no point in the world – the latter is God's gratuitousness (2003: 128). We come across gratuitous creation and the power of the Creator-Father in Flynn's (*Tron Legacy*) attempt to design a new virtual world, and Wayland's (*Prometheus*) creation of superb robotic designs, and, implicitly, in all the other books and films. Eagleton's formulation helps us grasp the quintessentially philosophical shift

behind the contemporary tragic insight: tragedy seems to be moving away from the centrality of man's rationality as represented by the figure of Oedipus, focusing more on the meaning(lessness) of creation, or, better, on what the world looks like 'after the death of God' (Stiegler 4012b).

In psychoanalytic terms, tragedy concerns man's relation to the Other. As Zupančič (2000) shows, there is a red thread running from the relationship between gods and mortals in ancient Greek tragedy, to that of the subject and the (F)Other in Racine and Claudel. The figure of the Other (father, ruler, God), sums up the subject's relation to truth and knowledge at different historical times. Over time, there is a marked movement from the Other as the One or the authority who guarantees truth and knowledge, to accepting that the Other is blind and does not really know anything. Recognising the latter means coming to terms with the openness and contingency of the Other. In psychoanalysis coming to terms with the fact that the 'Other does not exist', or that there is no Other that pulls the stings of one's existence (Žižek, 1992:58) is a significant moment. But as Eagleton wryly observes: 'Whatever champions of contingency we might be, we cannot help expecting with part of our mind that the world will make sense, and feeling vaguely cheated if it does not' (2003: 106).

The exploration of how and if the world *will* make sense lies at the heart of the present book. It is often represented visually as an 'exit' or an escape from a dangerous place. For Lacan, after knowing that the Other does not exist, the subject must always return to the Other as Symbolic order of socio- cultural relations. *La père ou pire* (*the father or worse*) (Lacan cited Žižek 1992: 75) sums up the impossibility of not (re)entering this realm. But what happens when, as Baudrillard and Stigler argue, this realm produces distortions and effects of psychic deadness? To use a popular metaphor, what happens when one jumps out of the frying pan, shattering the

tyrannical attachment to an overbearing parent, into the fire of a deadening Other? Contemporary tragedy, it seems to me, is inviting us to consider this very situation.

At the same time, a sensitive balance must be maintained between what one finds, when, one the one hand, one looks to the past and 'inwards', and, on the other, when one looks to the future and 'outwards'. For both Zupančič and Eagleton the relevance of tragedy to modern life lies in the Kantian ethics that underline the subject's relationship to freedom and the Law. In this formulation the Law is not the opposite of desire, and liberty is not an antithesis to Law (Eagleton, 2003: 116). It rather requires the Law in order to be possible. The Kantian moral law, argues Eagleton, is the modern version of Greek destiny and just as sublimely unintelligible (2003: 117). Tragedy is the name we give to moments of truth in which recognition breaks upon us, namely that the Law is silent, as is Apollo (ibid). The stupendous thing to which tragedy awakens us is the fact that that Law was always on the inside, covertly at work in our drive to overcome it. At some point, Eagleton continues, we realise that Law and desire were always in cahoots. The radical message is that 'you need to revolt to find this out', in other words, that only the sacrifice of the finite can manifest the truth that infinite freedom is the secret of the world (Eagleton, 2003: 122).

That the Law is essentially in cahoots with desire and Apollo is silent is beautifully exemplified by Euripides' *Ion*. This tragedy with a happy ending, a catastrophe survived, therefore, becomes the notional origin of the present inquiry. In *The Ion* the young hero's concern is not how to live when crushed by guilt and incest like Oedipus, but how to live when one knows that truth might never be reached. Oedipus asked 'who am I?', paid a heavy price but eventually arrived at the truth. Ion knows only uncertainty. In that sense, he is not a 'good Oedipus' or a 'successful Oedipus' but the symbolic representative of an altogether different problem. This leads us to an

aporia, indeed, an anxiety of our time: what if there is, was and will be no truth, Law, or order? If the world or the Other is a succession of simulacra and seductive repetitions or an imploding, psychically deadening capitalist machine, how might I pick my way to the truth of my name and my desire or a Law that could operate as a (meta)stable referent to hold on to in the process of my tragic experience?

These questions, daunting as they might be, should not reduce us to helplessness. We might want to resist the discourse of the seamlessness of human disempowerment and lack of agency (Ruti, 2012: 5). 'Lacanian analysis' notes Ruti, 'is meant to show that we are rarely the entirely helpless victims of our fate' (2012: 58). In that sense, a problem, a situation, or, in our case, the repetition of a cultural pattern like the return of the (immortal) Father, might be considered as 'a wake-up call to the necessity of becoming accountable for how our unconscious habits structure the world, including our rational world' (2012: 167). We must therefore accept that, in practical terms, the relationship between the subject and the Other is constantly re-negotiated. If we must come to terms with the fact that 'the Other does not exist' and we are responsible for our own desire, we may also re- acquire 'a modicum of fantasy' (Glynos, 2001: 201), a little faith in order and stability, in order to go on living. Given that existing social ideals fray, we could argue that we create fantasies of ideological captivation and myths to live by. Fantasies and (modern) myths suture the horror of the Real and the contingency of the Other. At the other end of the spectrum, when reaching irrefutable knowledge and insight, we encounter the modern equivalent of the forlorn figure of Oedipus at the end of *Oedipus Rex* or at *Oedipus Coloneus*, the infinite loneliness of the subject who has seen and known. But what remains of seeing and knowing when we question the very possibility of truth? Ruti calls it 'the immortal within', the 'inhuman' (not fully socialized) element that chafes against the "reasonable" façade of subjectivity and

personality 'lending the subject's character an uncanny "monstrousness" beyond its symbolic and imaginary mandates" (2012: 21). This constitutive undeadness, 'this "dense core of existential loneliness" that resists all forms of social assimilation, linking us, instead, to the non-relational throb of jouissance' (2012: 23) prevents us from social assimilation. It constitutes, or at least preserves the possibility, of a subjective position just outside the Symbolic order, just outside 'the world' we might even say.

The notion of 'the immortal within', I would argue, shifts the emphasis from the past and how Law and desire are in cahoots with one another, to the infinite loneliness of the human subject and the scope of the future. Elizabeth Shaw in *Prometheus* encounters it when she becomes the last survivor heading for an infinite universe. The two Antigones experience it when they encounter death and oblivion; Sam and Percy when faced with mortal danger. The see-saw of human desire, the interplay between the subject and the Other, wanes in front of the encounter with death and infinity. This hugely important and *singular* moment does not escape Lacan's attention:

No one knows, no living being in any case, what death is. It is remarkable that spontaneous productions formulated at the level of the unconscious are stated on the basis of this, that, for anyone, death is properly speaking unknowable […] It is indispensable for life that something irreducible does not know – that I am dead. 'I am dead', very exactly, in so far as I am destined to die- but, in the name of this something that does not know it, I don't know it either (2007: 123).

The emphasis on the (im)possibility of 'my' death lies at the heart of the present book. It determines both my approach to the cultural products introduced above and the scope of the

convergence between Lacan and Baudrillard and Lacan and Stiegler, an outline of which is provided below.

Lacan, Baudrillard and Stiegler: Real Uncertainties

Central to my approach is Lacan's *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis,* and in particular the chapter entitled *'Beyond the Oedipus Complex'* (2007), in which he critiques Freud's use of the myth of the son and the father. It is generally accepted that Freud resorts to the Sophoclean myth is an attempt to offer a universal articulation of the necessity of the Law and the role of paternal authority to the orientation of human desire (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988: 283). Freud's interest in the figure of the father continues in *Totem and Taboo*, where he proposes another exegetic myth, of the primordial father being murdered by the sons who covet his position and privileges. For Lacan, Freud misses the point in both occasions. Beyond the Oedipus complex and the figure of the father in *Totem and Taboo*, Lacan glimpses the subject's own death and puts it firmly on the map of subjectivity. The intimation of death, the Real which lies outside Law and language, has ontological significance and constitutes 'a first step into nothingness' (2007: 52 and 53-8). The myth of the father's murder is therefore downgraded to an attempt to veil death and mortality (Grigg, 2006: 59).

Baudrillard dismisses the Oedipus complex as no longer relevant and operative in contemporary culture. In one of his most important writings, the *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (2004), he even relegates the discussion of the Oedipus complex to a footnote of the second chapter. Like Lacan, Baudrillard acknowledges the disruptive and potentially radical significance of death, and

proposes adopting the point of view of death and the insight of nothingness for gaining a better insight into the simulacral and deceptive character of the current socio-political order.

Stiegler, who adopts several key psychoanalytic concepts, also avoids the figure of Oedipus, proposing Prometheus as the most emblematic figure for rethinking humanity. His central thesis is that humans are essentially technical and prosthetic, characterised by the gift of fire, which is essentially 'added' to man from the beginning. Stiegler echoes Lacan in his critique of Freud and places death ('my' death) at the heart of the human experience:

And this *already* haunts me, and *firstly as the instant of my death*, that I *hallucinate* from a young age, as the very experience of time […] And this murder [of the father] is […] the fantasy par excellence of *what does not exist* insofar as it is above all a matter of the relation to *my* death, through which alone I can conceive, fear or want the death of the other: for the instant of my death is the only event that counts, the only event that truly happens, but also the only event that never truly happens, since the moment it arrives, I disappear (Stiegler, 2014b: 62-63; emphasis in the original).

We could say that Lacan, Baudrillard and Stiegler converge on death as what lies 'outside' language and the Law. To put it simply, they envisage a subjective position and a perspective from which one can see 'as if' or 'momentarily' outside[6]. But if this insight is to be radical, it should also be tragic. Lacanian psychoanalysis helps us to conceptualise the tragic in relation to the Law, the Other and the immortal 'within'. Baudrillard and Stigler show how this interiority must be constantly restructured from an outside which is both 'Real' and *cultural*.

We could use Lacan's metaphors of the mirrors to further elaborate this point. Lacan uses a schema of mirrors to locate the 'I' in culture. This schema, which in its topological dimension

resembles the stage of Greek drama, shows how the Lacanian insight into subjectivity can be translated into seeing, 'prospect' and perspective as critical vision. Lacan first introduced this visual metaphor in 1953 Lacan ([1953-54] 1988:124). It depicts an eye that looks at a bouquet of flowers placed at some distance from a vase which is hidden inside a box. The insertion of a mirror behind the box creates the illusion that the vase and flowers are on the same visual plane. The eye, which stands for the Cartesian cogito, perceives the vase and flowers as a unified real object. The problem is, notes Lacan, that the eye cannot occupy the position of the ideal observer and is likely to appear among the flowers, as part of what the mirror reflects. This problem is solved by the insertion of a second mirror which is opening up a virtual space in which one can see the coherence and unity of the picture from a certain vantage point. The second mirror allows 'me' (eye), the mythical eye as Lacan calls it (1988: 140), to see coherence and unity outside itself.

Lacan will return to the visual metaphor on several occasions, elaborating different aspects of the apparatus[7]. Overall, Lacan contends that the emergence of the coherent and convincing image for the eye depends on the inclination of the mirror, which, in turn, depends on *the symbolic connection* between human beings[8] (1988: 140, emphasis added): [It is] 'through the exchange of symbols that we locate our different selves in relation to one another… we have a symbolic relation which is complex according to the different planes on which we are placed (e.g. where we are together, in a police station or in this hall). It is the symbolic relations which define the position of the subject as seeing, it is speech which determines the perfection, approximation, completeness of the imaginary (141). It follows, therefore, that we can imagine situations in which symbolic connections fail, transcendental illusions collapse, and the inclination of the mirrors changes so much that they reflect *nothing*. We can even imagine a situation in which the two mirrors turn into

a hall of mirrors infinitely refracting objects to the extent of making the 'original' untraceable. It is *the effects of the social and cultural inclination of the mirrors* that we will explore with Baudrillard and Stiegler.

Lacan and Baudrillard

Lacanian psychoanalysis emphasises the decline of the Name of the Father in contemporary modernity (Žižek, 1999), a shift in the inclination of the mirrors which undermines the traditional authority of the father as guarantor of Law and order. Lacanian psychoanalysis accepts, however, that through a process of psychoanalytic exploration and interpretation one can at least come to terms with the bewildering openness and contingency of the Other. Baudrillard maintains that this is no longer enough. The core structures of contemporary consumer culture have shifted so dramatically that they require an entirely new mode of thinking. Baudrillard rejects both Marx and Freud to the extent that they share a fundamental illusion, namely that something, the 'unconscious' or 'value', can always be extracted, recuperated and de-alienated in the name of a better, more accomplished existence. For Baudrillard, capitalism has entered a stage of advanced simulation which makes reference to notions like 'value' and formations like 'the unconscious' totally redundant.

Simulation is the erosion of 'difference' upon which contemporary thought is predicated. Simulation, a process of production of identical copies which became dominant with the advent of the industrial machine, gradually phasing out the 'original' – let us call it 'the prototype' from which the first copy was made. As the 'original' became gradually redundant, reality also became a simulation. Examples of simulation are to be found everywhere and Baudrillard casts

the net wide: from recent attempts at cloning as faithful reproductions of the self, to mass produced Hollywood films and fashion, to virtual games and Disneyland-style entertainment. All simulacral practices are characterised by repetition, imitation of reality and lack of distinctness or difference.

The problem for Baudrillard is neither aesthetic nor elitist. The catastrophic consequence of extended simulation, he argues, is the demise of *difference as such*, and, with it, of the desire to be different. Rather than being characterised by more freedom, more responsibility and more knowledge, our culture is marked by a renunciation of these attributes: we do not want to know, we do not want to be free or different, we do not want to have to decide and we do not want to remember. Thus, Baudrillard continues, we may have already entered a stage of *cold epilepsy* (2001: 73), in which we are no longer able to see, think or feel but only in a very superficial and predictable manner. At the same time, advances in science (e.g. DNA research), the pursuit of youth and beauty and the marginalisation of death have created a certain appetite for immortality. Today the pursuit of immortality does not concern the symbolic passage to eternal life, as in older societies, through rites of mourning and the expansion of the memory of the community. It concerns the survival of the monad, of each singular individual. This development constitutes a massive narcissistic regression on the part of humanity, an erosion of difference in extreme form involving the destabilisation of opposites like 'life' and 'death'.

In response to this situation, Baudrillard does not advocate a return to difference or a restitution of the Other. If the Other, who is traditionally build in difference, has been seriously compromised by the very erosion of difference, if symbolic relations and relation of power are no longer operative, then we must abandon them as an ineffective way of thinking. For instance, traditionally philosophy conceptualized thought as a relationship between a subject (that thinks) and an object

(that is being thought). Several thinkers, like Foucault, have challenged this relationship but Baudrillard invites us to think the subject-object relationship *radically differently*, along the lines of a reversal of causality: 'It is the object that thinks us; it is the effect which causes us; it is language which speaks us; it is death which lies in wait for us' (2001: 89). The same applies to power. If power was once activated in negotiations of authority or dominance, it is today reduced to simulation. If the Oedipus complex, for example, once represented paternal authority and the 'No' (prohibition of incest) at the heart of the Law of desire, it is now restaged as a soft game between disempowered or indifferent parents and children. The critical radical task, therefore, is not to insist on power but to illuminate the strategies of *seduction*, the soft 'game' which is very different from an encounter with destiny as we know it from Greek drama.

For Baudrillard the real philosophical, political and cultural task is to illuminate the erosion of meaning and difference, reaching a point where the absurdity of the system becomes self-evident. An ideal such moment arises when we reach a logical non sequitur or an absurdity, an 'impossible exchange' as disturbing insight into the nature of our simulacral culture. This project is predicated on seeing and knowing: 'We do not know ourselves distinctly and clearly until the day we see ourselves from the outside as another' (Baudrillard cited in Levin, 1996: 32). This ways of seeing does not call for a naïve identification with the other, or for adopting a delusional vantage point of view. It rather concerns the surprise or even horror of finding ourselves in limit conditions, in a position which confronts us with our own elision and non-significance. Levin calls it 'a position from *the ontological question of Being, presence (as) opposed to absence, is being posed'* (2004: 45). We might also call it 'tragic'.

Another strategy employed by Baudrillard is to demonstrate that there is no 'logical' resolution to the present condition, 'only a logical exacerbation and a catastrophic resolution' (2004: 84,

emphasis added). This, notes Baudrillard, is the appropriate strategy today: returning to the system its own logic by doubling it, reflecting it, *like a mirror without absorbing it'* (2004: 85, emphasis added), a mirror, we might add, which reflects nothing, an effecting a failure of vision which disturbs, displeases and evokes abject, tragic clarity. Theatre, and more generally Art, can play an important role in this endeavour[9].

Although Baudrillard rejects Freud completely, he often nods affirmatively in Lacan direction. Yet, he does not address Lacan's work systematically. Levin speaks of Baudrillard's 'hidden debt' to Lacan, a creative misprision 'in which everything in Lacan is systematically misinterpreted' (1999: 157). One idea in particular, continues Levin, is carried over: the necessity of submission to the (rule of) Law, against which Baudrillard pitches the notions of the 'game' and 'seduction' in a world with no definitive aim or goal. The game is proposed as an ironic, parodic, postmodern version of the 'Law of the Father', which preserves Lacan's original sense of the Symbol as the 'death of the object', of meaning as a process of forestalling, deferring, distracting, diverting, avoiding, escaping and so on (Levin, 1999: 157).

A closer and more systematic look at the relationship between Baudrillard and Lacan beyond 'creative misprision' is just beginning to take shape in the Theoretical Social Sciences. My reading of Lacan and Baudrillard spans two chapters. First, I explore the interaction between the Lacanian 'Law of the Father' and Baudrillard's 'Rule of the Game' and 'Seduction' in *Tron Legacy*. Baudrillard advanced this very interesting theoretical argument but never illustrated it with examples or considered how human subjects (fictional in the present case) would carry it out as 'father' and 'son', or 'mortal' and 'immortal', and, most important, without considering if the Law can ever be totally abandoned for the Game.

As a science fiction film, *Tron Legacy* also lends itself to the examination of one of Baudrillard's more 'exaggerated' and future-facing claims, namely that our modern obsession with the secrets of the DNA, cloning and immortality actually spell the death of humankind. The film articulates this possibility and in fact turns it into a tragic oversight (as well as insight), a case of blindness inherent in the attempt to give humanity new hope. This first convergence between Lacan and Baudrillard does not attempt to show the merits of one over the other but to create a dual perspective from which to consider the anxieties surrounding 'Who am I?' and the question of truth in a contemporary context of relentless scientific and technological change.

The second convergence, is exemplified with the new Antigones in Moira Buffini's *Welcome to Thebes* and Nikos Koundouros' *The Photographers*, and examines the radical and disruptive potential of the Lacanian and the Baudrillarian Real. Both Lacan and Baudrillard locate the radical potential of thought in the realm of challenging and, if necessary, transgressing the *limits* of *meaning,* subjectivity, life and death, destiny and freedom. In that sense, they complement one another when they converge *beyond language and conventional meaning*, in a realm which resists signification, rationalisation, exchange and commodification. This occurs in the play and the film on two levels. First, on the level of their content, which depart from the traditional outcome of the Sophoclean drama, namely Antigone's death. Lacan discusses Sophocles' Antigone extensively, emphasising her sublime beauty, an image of death that shines forth through her spoken words (Lacan, 1992: 273; 281). In the relevant chapter we ask: what happens when no words are spoken and the orderly universe of Greek drama disintegrates, no longer affording the speaking subject firm points of reference? For Baudrillard this would be the perfect opportunity to embrace the world as *is* and to develop *elective* affinities with others, as opposed to Oedipal attachments; to see destiny differently. From a psychoanalytic point of view, such a

radical change of perspective would entail embracing chance (*tyche*) as an encounter with objects that might be compatible with one's desire, a possibility which, Copjec (2002) assures us, is inherent in Lacan's thought but not as popular as other aspects of his theory. Such an attitude, which show ways of accepting the world (the Other) in its randomness, may arise when a subject is capable of shedding the burden of their tragic (ancient) fate. However, this hopeful turn, this happy ending, is challenged on another level, when, at the end of the film and the play, spectators are invited to contemplate the true meaning of the happy outcome as opposed to the original dramatic ending. A choice between the two might constitutes an 'impossible exchange' which confronts the spectators with the impossibilities underlining their own desire and the subtler challenges of what constitutes a tragic view today, in the commodified, seductive, simulacral culture that seeks to excise death at any cost.

Lacan and Stiegler

Stiegler's project consist of two complementary strands, a philosophical and a political one. The philosophical strand proposes that humans are *technical*. Stiegler turns to the myth of Prometheus for a succinct symbolic expression of the co-evolution of the *who* (human) and the *what* (technics), highlighting to the figure of Epimetheus, Prometheus' forgotten and forgetful brother. This is the version of the myth used by Stigler: when the Gods decided to endow all creatures with qualities, they assigned the task to Prometheus. Epimetheus asked his brother to let him do the task in his behalf. Epimetheus gave qualities to all creatures but forgot to endow humans with any. When Prometheus saw what had happened, he resolved to steal the fire from Olympus as compensation for the serious forgetting. Thus, argues Stiegler, the technical

character of humanity needs to be understood in this broad and originary sense: tools, devices of all sorts, cultural institutions and language are all *prostheses* which develop *with* the human rather than by or from them. Drawing on anthropological and archaeological evidence, Stiegler argues that hand and flint developed together, and there is no priority of the brain over the tool.

The myth of Prometheus contains another important principle: the delayed and after-the-fact (*aprés coup*) compensation for a lack or fault. Stiegler emphasizes the importance of the deferral at the (human) origin, the fact that there was nothing there to start with, no human qualities as such, nothing at the origin except a delay. This is said in response to the Metaphysical tradition, which espouses the myth of the Fall of man, the loss of plenitude and man's alienation from Nature and God. Stiegler further puts death (Thanatos) in perspective: human time is the contemplation of Thanatos. For mortals, anticipation and fore-thought, the Promethean virtues par excellence, are meaningful only in the light of death. Deferral-delay has Thanatos as its point of arrival and lies at the heart of the human anticipation of the future. In all programming and programmatic activities, from the first inscription as writing (*grammé*, line or drawing a line) to programming as organizing/anticipating the future, to organising calendar time, to programming computers, humanity emerges as a constant movement of projection and deferral of Thanatos. Destiny, for Stiegler, is the anticipation and forgetting of an end foretold (death) that only remains unknown in its specifics. Origin and deferral, life and death, are summed up in the following manner:

We are considering a passage: the passage to what we call the human. Its 'birth', if there is one. Why should we question the birth of the human? […] For the end of the human cannot be investigated without investigating its origin, just as questioning death is questioning birth in a mirror' (1998: 135).

Today the task of contemplating life and death is arduous because of profound socio-cultural changes effected by capitalism and rapid technological change:

This process would lead today to something inhuman, or superhuman, tearing the human away from everything that, hitherto, seemed to define him (language, work, society, reason, love and desire and everything deriving thereof, even a certain feeling of death and a certain relation to time), a process by which the realisation or the 'actualisation' of the power of man seems to be as well the derealisation of man, his disappearance in the movement of becoming that is no longer his own (1998: 133).

Stiegler is not hostile to technological progress. He only points out that contemporary societies have not yet adapted to the relentless speed of technological change in late modernity. It is for this reason that he finds the notion of the post-human to be incompatible with his own project. Let us first explore if we are human, he says (1998: 136). For Stiegler, it is important to attempt to think *in a single moment* the origin of technics and the "origin" of the human, a task which presupposes a radical conversion of one's point of view (1998: 133). Tragic thought, 5th century Greek thought, is important at this point as it is fundamentally different from the Metaphysical understanding of the human subject as superior to an object which is technical and inferior.

The political Stiegler takes a dim view of contemporary capitalism, repeatedly characterising it as a total *catastrophe*, not only an erosion of values, but, more importantly, the dissolution of the psychic mechanisms of relating and desiring which have led to massive disaffection of individuals and their disengagement from public life. For Stiegler, like many others, capitalism is based on the (death) drive. This has already produced serious side effects: it has short-circuited desire into a pursuit of quick satisfaction via ever-renewed consumer objects; it has undermined basic democratic and community values; and it has dismantled the inter-generational relations of

responsibility and care. In its global reach mass culture (e.g. Hollywood cinema) has eclipsed

local patterns of collective memory formation and points of reference. Overall, argues Stiegler,

capitalism has resulted in the proletarianisation of the spirit (2014b), a general impoverishment

of our creative skills, memory and imagination, which produces disinterested, disempowered and

isolated individuals, many of which even suffer from a loss of the feeling of existence (2013a).

This assessment chimes with Baudrillard 's state of *cold epilepsy* but, unlike Baudrillard who has

a pessimistic if not nihilistic attitude to the future, Stigler refuses to give up hope proposing a

pharmacological approach to politics and culture, a strategy of determining the 'poisonous' and

'curative' elements of every object (in the broad sense) and every situation. A prudent use of

pharmacology might help us to re-enchant the world (2014c) and to make *life worth living*.

The pharmacological project is ambitious and combines Phenomenology with Psychoanalysis in

equal measure. Capitalism as a culture of the drive tends to annihilate desire and *singularity*. At

the same time, the demise of the super ego and the 'death of God' have left us in a state of

'apocalypse without God' (Stiegler, 2013: 9). Rather than returning to patriarchal rule, to the

Other or a regression to theological fantasies, Stiegler proposes revitalising the level of what

'does not exist', a concept that definitely chimes with the Lacanian 'the Other does not exist'.

The Stieglerian *level of consistence* is complex and comprises of the following: infinity (as

opposed to the particularisation of 'finite' objects); desire and the capacity to desire (as defined

in psychoanalysis and opposed to pursuing mere satisfaction of consumer needs), belief (as

opposed to disengagement and nihilism). The level of consistence, evokes the Heideggerian

Being in the word, the Deleuzian plane of consistence[10], the social cohesive aspect of the

Lacanian Other, and the Freudian super-ego qua propensity for higher accomplishment and

abstract thought. Redefining the level of consistence lies at the heart of reviving the 'spiritual'

and the 'noetic' (see Stiegler, 2011: 89-93) and rethinking singularity against the onslaught of capitalism.

In envisaging *a new libidinal economy* as part of an effective critique of capitalism, Stigler starts from the notion of desire. Echoing Lacan, he argues that desire is ontological and cannot be reduced to the concrete objects that satisfy it. Desire is (desire-for) singularity, tending to infinity and always remaining open and incomplete (2013a: 43). The object of Desire is the Thing (das Ding), the *object that does not exist*. But instead of turning to Lacan's *object a* in order to flesh out the Thing, Stiegler evokes its spiritual-noetic and phenomenological dimension arguing that the thing must be deployed in ways that open up the *horizon* of expectation (2014a: 62).

The status of the unconscious is important in Stiegler's pharmacology. The unconscious is dual and pharmacological. As a repository of retentions acquired through mass culture, it may be seen as a pedestrian reservoir of internalised commodified 'ideals'. Yet, the unconscious can also be 'the projector of infinities,' and a source of singularity. Stigler maintains that we must make the unconscious *speak and consist* and, in that sense, comes close to Lacan for whom 'it' (unconscious) speaks (ça parle). How and under what circumstances the unconscious might speak remains subject to an experience that compels individuals to transgress their own limits. Such opportunities sometimes arise 'when life problematizes itself', (2013b: 168), that is, when we experience a decoupling between perception and action. We might identify these moments as tragic.

As with Lacan and Baudrillard, I locate the convergence between Lacan and Stiegler at the limit of aporia and death and discuss it in two chapters. First, I discuss the encounter between the son and the (mythic) father in *Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief*. The book exemplifies Stiegler's worst nightmare, the dominance of capitalist-neoliberal ideology disguised here as a

reunion of the son with the absent father and a heroic undertaking to save western culture. This happy outcome corresponds to a 'deadening' of the son's psyche, the gradual immersion into the culture of unloving and indifferent father who demands total the submission of the son and offers nothing, no psychic reciprocity, in return. The reading develops key synergies between Stiegler and psychoanalysis, to which Stiegler often refers in condensed and elliptical ways.

The second convergence is discussed through *Prometheus* and concerns the contemplation of Thanatos and origin. As I pointed out, Stiegler critiques the metaphysical tradition for transforming the aporia of death into the myth of the Fall (from Nature and Paradise) and a neat temporal break, with time before and time after the Fall neatly divided, and aporia hardening into a mythical opposition of two moments (1998: 101). Stiegler wants to keep the border 'open' and aporia 'supple'. At this point he turns to Meno's aporia in Plato: how will I look for something when I do not in the least know what it is. The question, he argues, goes to the heart of the matter; it asks what is *being* and *knowledge of being* and whereby a thing starts (1998: 97). Socrates rearticulates the inherent difficulty of the question: on the one hand, one needs not look for what one already knows, and on the other, one cannot look for what one does not know. Left unanswered Meno's aporia leads to scepticism's victory. The metaphysical response, on the other hand, invents a threshold not to be crossed. Socrates stirs the answers towards the immortality of a soul which can recall past virtue (1998: 98). This immortal soul, this Real which is outside the social but not separated by too rigid a border, chimes with the psychoanalytic 'immortal within'. It resonates, I think, not so much with resistance to the social order but with the continuous undertaking to keep in focus one's level of consistence and desire's relation to the Thing. In Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* this examination leads to the rediscovery of God, not as an

avatar of authority and power but as the necessary opposite to the arrogant father who thinks himself as the centre of the universe.

The chapters of this book

To remain aporetic, to remain tragic, means to not settle too quickly for a myth or a transcendental solution. It is *to want* to remain aporetic, or as Nobus and Quinn (2005) put it, 'stupid'[11]. For Stigler acknowledging the interplay between stupidity and truth/knowledge is a *pharmacological* strategic course of action which may well involve a regression to 'stupidity', to *not knowing,* as an opportunity for a fresh start and advancement of knowledge as a radical break with conventional wisdom, especially when 'life problematizes itself' (2013b: 168). If that is the case, we could claim that we have reached a paradoxical dislocation of Oedipal wisdom, that is, the necessity of taking stupidity into account before becoming clever again, gauging the measure of our folly as it catches up with us in the social, political and cultural domain. This book proposes that the *aporetic subject* is the contemporary subject par excellence. *After Oedipus* is therefore written from the point of view of a subject who does not know and does not simply ask 'Who am I?' but a different question: 'Is there truth?' and 'Will I recognise truth when I come across it?'. This aporetic question, central to the age of collapsing certainties, is ontological, political, cultural and technological and must be addressed in its complexity.

At this point I would like to re-introduce the chapters of this book with emphasis on the theoretical comparisons between the thinkers. As I have already said, Euripides' *Ion* deals with the paternity a young slave who lives at Delphi. In this chapter I explain why *Ion* is an ideal

aporetic subject and why the play offers ideal grounds for the comparisons between Lacan with Baudrillard and Stiegler. First, I discuss the importance of language and fearless speech (parrhesia) as traditional ways of articulating one's desire and aporia. I propose that fearless speech corresponds to what Lacan calls *full speech* (parole pleine), a mode of being and speaking in which the subject is sustained by nothing else but their aporia, risking everything and speaking even when this contradicts its own best interests. In Baudrillard's terms, this moment corresponds to an 'impossible exchange' between conventional truth and truth as an unassimilable piece of knowledge. From a Stieglerian perspective, the *Ion* articulates the young man's demand for an *interpretation* (hermeneia) of the past that will set the proper conditions for an anticipation of a viable future in the democratic Athens. All three thinker converge on the contemplation of origin, with Delphi as an original point of departure, and the point of difference/deferral between truth and the semblance of truth. Free will and desire pivot Ion's insistence on aporia.

In chapter three (*Tron Legacy*) I discuss the transformation of aporia into (tragic) indifference. Sam's entry into the world of the video-game *Tron* and his meeting with the Father are used to illustrate a first approximation between Lacan and Baudrillard, drawing on the latter's arguments that contemporary culture is characterised by the fatal erosion of difference, the demise of the Oedipus complex and humanity being in the grip of a destructive desire for immortality. In visual terms, the tragic theatrical scene transforms into the circumscribed scene of the virtual game. But in the virtual game one does not have time to think and ponder destiny; only to act fast, to react and survive. In that sense, aporia as a way of speaking and knowing one's truth and desire is constantly undercut by fast movement, indifference and inability or reluctance to think.

Something different but very interesting happens along the lines of the game: if the ancient hero's misfortune was an oblique affirmation of the existence of God or the Father who guarantees Law and order, the new hero seduces the Father-God to show his power, eventually leading him to death. In this chapter I examine Baudrillard's proposal that the game has substituted the Law in advanced simulacral societies. Before that happens, however, father and son manage to procure a gift of eternal life for the humanity. Thus, Flynn and Sam, father and son, become the unlikely 'siblings' in a further dis-location of the Oedipal scenario. They are like Prometheus and Epimetheus bringing humanity the gift of immortality (Quora). They are also eternal children of the video-age, edging towards annulling the past (mortality, death) and regressing to a state of eternal life and play. Unwittingly, tragically, they pave the way for the end of the human race. In that sense, the digital phantasy of the film speaks of the originary scene of the new Anthropogony, which contains the unintended effect of Baudrillarian death.

In chapter four I discuss the two variations of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Moira Buffini's play *Welcome to Thebes* and Nikos Koundouros' film *The Photographers*. In both cases aporia is as a momentous encounter with the meaning of life and death for the hero, and the juxtaposition of presence and absence for the spectator. I draw on two key Baudrillarian ideas, namely destiny as *impersonal will* and *impossible exchange*, and align them to Lacan's concept of the death drive. I demonstrate that *impersonal will* finds a credible equivalent in Lacan's notion of the object of the drive, as the latter achieves satisfaction through 'chance' encounters with ordinary objects (Copjec, 2002: 40). I argue that the disruptive or radical potential of Lacan and Baudrillard lies not in orchestrated attempts to overturn the repressive of corrupt Symbolic order but in unexpected and in-imagined reversals which expose the subject to the power of the object and the world.

Regarding the spectator, I argue that the 'happy ending' of the play and the film confront us with a difficult question – 'Isn't that what you wanted' – the answers to which, a simple 'yes' (I wanted Antigone to live) or 'no' (I wanted Antigone to die) accentuates the difficulty of choosing one or the other without being confronted by what is lost in the alternative. Lacan and Baudrillard converge on the limits of presence/ absence in a scene that holds *me* in its gaze as much as I hold 'it' in my gaze. After free will, aporia, for both thinkers, becomes the point of radical departure from the existing order of things.

In *Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief* I give an extensive account of Stiegler's nightmare: a young boy's indoctrination into the capitalist-neoliberal system disguised as a necessary sacrifice for the good of the Western civilisation. The status quo is represented by the Olympian father, Poseidon, who is an uncaring, inaccessible father. The desire to preserve the supremacy of the West is subtended by a logic of suspension of democracy and the *polis,* in favour of a clandestine group of heroes who have a mission to protect the world. The aporetic moment occurs when Percy glimpses the dark abyss in which Kronos, the usurper of Olympian power, is kept as prisoner. Confronted with such 'un-representable' evil, he averts his eyes just as his free will and self-determination are swept aside by the state of emergency dictated by the survival of Western values. Free will is postponed due to this state of emergency, while the young man has to accept that he is nothing to the father, a totally expendable object to be sacrificed to the Father's desire. The dehumanising effect of Percy's adventure are very similar to the psychic effects of capitalism as described by Stiergler.

In the last chapter I read Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*, a quest for immortality and the origin of mankind, focusing on the female protagonist, Elizabeth Shaw. In *Prometheus* the Platonic question of truth transforms into 'How will I know that what I have found is *the origin* I was

looking for?'. The quest for origin is a contemplation of death and mortality, unfolding in an overdetermined scene – the alien spaceship is a static theatrical scene – of sibling rivalry, frustrated requests for love and an aggressive re-animation of the past. Stigler provides the theoretical concepts for thinking man as an operator, rather than master of the scene and the universe. I draw on Stiegler's commentary on the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus and his departure from the Oedipus myth, and discuss his affinity with Lacan in terms of the notion of interpretation (hermeneia) and the traversal of fantasies and scientific myths.

The female protagonist's evocation of God at the end of her ordeal offers a unique opportunity to discuss what Stiegler often calls 'an apocalypse without God' (2013a: 9), the modern condition par excellence, which posits an interesting dilemma: how to separate a regression to a myth or fantasy of paternal authority from the re-discovery of the secondary retentions and memories which makes 'it' (the unconscious) speak its truth. This chapter also offers the opportunity for a 'return to Freud' and the game of fort da he discusses in Beyond the Pleasure Principle[12]. I argue that the child's game of presence and absence is the pharmacological double of the Winnicottian transitional space, which Stiegler accepts as important in the child-parent dialectic, when it comes to building confidence and trust. Despite his philosophical acumen, Stiegler 'forgets' to recognise Freud's fort/da example as an early conjunction of hand and tool with death and language. This scene, we could say, could be read as the most symbolic antecedent of aporia at the age of technics, further allowing for representation, play and the theatrical scene to occupy their rightful place in the 'forgotten' antecedent that is the memory of childhood.

After Oedipus: The Sphinx and the hope that life will make sense

In Greek tragedy action always starts in *media res,* when something occurs *unexpectedly,* disrupting the normal flow of events and bringing the past into the present. Dealing with aporia is a spatial and ontological pursuit. Connecting Lacan with Baudrillard and Stiegler allows us to think of new *topoi*, both literal and metaphorical manifestations of the tragic-theatrical process: arriving, taking centre-stage, dealing with a powerful experience, escaping. As Derrida observes, the possibility of an existential analysis often borrows the language of crossing a border or a line between existence and non-existence, Dasein and non-Dasein (1993: 59). Finding our way through demarcations and borders helps us draw a topography of the edges (1993: 80), of limit conditions. In that sense, the theatrical scene, like a set of Lacanian mirrors, is capable of containing and holding the eye, bringing into focus the effect of tensions, threats, differences, simulations and mirages of power.

The process of exploration I develop in this book is psycho-social, since psychic and social processes demand to be understood as mutually constitutive of one another. The explorations of space, literal or metaphorical as I indicated above, is psychosocial. By the same token, the exploration of time is psychosocial. We engage with the past not for the sake of the past but from the point of view of the future, from what is yet to come. In doing so we accept, in principle at least, that we expect to find hope as Stiegler suggest, or that life should make sense as Eagleton proposes. However, we also accept a paradox, namely that we are prepared to be surprised or even horrified as we go beyond set points of origins and the existing-thinkable limits. In theoretical terms, a psychosocial approach means that we create new configurations of concepts, setting in motion synergies and unorthodox comparisons, and keeping interdisciplinary threshold open and supple.

Can we expect *to see* like Oedipus? This is no longer 'our' time and 'our' way of seeing. The shift from myth to reason was reflected in Greek art, architecture, philosophy and politics as a perceptual change from a 'flat' or *aspective* point of view to a geometrical *perspective*. The difference between the aspective and the perspective was the difference between what 'one' sees versus what the 'I' sees. It is best exemplified as the difference between the point of view in Egyptian iconography and Greek art. The Greek 'I' places *himself* at the middle-point and assembles all optical lines anthropocentrically. Man becomes the reference point of vision and the subject which discovers the world as object (Goux, 1993: 121). The object emerges not *in itself* but as it appears to the unique regard of a person uniquely situated in space. Oedipus belongs to this moment in history which brings the subject into a position of mastery over the object and the world (Goux, 1993: 123). Today we might want to try to catch a glimpse of ourselves in the shifting mirrors of culture. A question of a new per-spective arises. It calls for a reconsideration of the relation between the 'internal' (immortal within) and the 'external' world of subjects, object(s), mortals and Gods.

We might even want to consider the possibility that we are (re)discovering some kind of humility or prudence. If Oedipus 'killed the Sphinx' with his arrogant self-reliance and by supressing the insight into the co-existence of man with the animal and the non-human (Goux 1993),[13] we are perhaps taking a step back, rethinking the riddle of the Sphinx, asking, again, what is human, non-human and immortal. This return to *the site of rupture* between two distinct responses in the past, myth and rational thought, is an après coup which necessitates a shift from the anthropomorphic to the techno-morphic (Stiegler) and the simulacral (Baudrillard). By this shift the border is made supple again (Stiegler ,1998). Plato envisaged the tri-partite nature of the truly philosophical soul (145-9). Later, psychoanalysis resurrected the tri-partition of the soul in the

Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real (Goux, 1993). If Oedipus opted for unintegrated tensions, we are now reconsidering that 'man himself remains permeated by an irreducible alterity… [and] not everything in man is human' (Goux, 1993: 157). But what was other in 'soul' for Plato, is today not just 'animal' but also technical and simulacral.

Rationality remains paramount. We do not abdicate reason and we do not succumb to (neoliberal) rationalisation, especially as we are critiquing the logic of capitalism and its simulacral extensions. Understanding the past through *hermeneia* (interpretation) is essential as a passage (Derrida, 1993). Derrida proposes: to pass and pass again, against the hapax of death. At the same time, we re-create the tragic perspective. Catastrophe survived calls for an examination of the *horizon* of our activities, seen from different perspectives, from different inclinations of the mirrors. It calls for the relationship of the subject and the object, the *who* and the *what*, to be revisited. It calls for a revision of destiny as pre-determination and care; for the collapse of the Other and the reactivation of the long circuits of desire (Stiegler 2014a) that might take its place; for revisiting the *originary, tragic* and de-limiting conditions of being: rupture, passage, origin of time and space. It also calls for the death to be re-examined: 'my death', the contemplation of 'my' absence from the scene, an impossible exchange of vision, delay and deferral, trompe l'oeil, and the interplay between the tragic as *blindness* and *excessive seeing*, 'an eye too many' (Green, 1979)[14].

If, as Stiegler proposes, we need rationality and re-enchantment in equal measure, myth and tragedy, hope and pragmatism, then we also need a pharmacological attitude to the *unexpected*, balancing the unexpected as something that erupts 'out of the blue', disrupts, shocks and traumatises, with the unexpected as *anelpiston* (lack of hope and anticipation of hope in Greek). In that context we might be able to think tragedy as 'the grimace' of interminable, irresolute

bemusement produced as we try to gauge the distance we need to assume from the myths that support our existence and guarantee the consistency of our symbolic universe' (Žižek, 1999, p. 82)?

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[1] There are three orders in Lacanian Psychoanalysis, the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. The Symbolic order encompasses language; representation; the Law as nexus of hierarchical organised relations in which we are emplaced as subjects; ideology; moral principles and values; culture and society. The Symbolic order arises with the child's entry into language and its separation from the mother. It entails the symbolic acceptance of the 'Father' as a representative of that order. The Symbolic is directly related to the unconscious and constitutes a double alterity often referred to as *the big Other*: both the essential alterity of the subject as unknown to itself (unconscious), and the otherness of mediated/represented reality (see Evans, 1996: 133). The Imaginary is the order of vision, images as well as of narcissism in the Freudian sense. Wanting to be like others, for instance, falling in love or being enchanted by others belong to the order of the Imaginary. Lacan locates the Freudian ego –a cluster of organised and relatively inflexible ideas about the self – in the order of the Imaginary and often considers the latter as an obstacle to accessing the truth of the unconscious (see Evans, 1996: 82-3). The Real is the order of the unrepresented, whatever resists symbolisation and remains repressed or unassimilable, outside language and consciousness (Evans, 1999:160). Un-represented does not mean 'lost' and entails the possibility of 'returning' (e.g. return of the repressed). Thus the Real is important for this disruptive and insightful power in various fields, from Art and Literature to Politics. The Real is not a mere repository of traumatic events and repressed desires but a potential source of

significant insight into experiences, practices, motivations, beliefs and actions (Evans, 1996:159-160).

[2] The word 'reflexive' also means thinking uncritically, in the sense of reflecting back an image or a message unaltered. We will return to this usage later when we discuss Baudrillard.

[3] Anouilh's *Antigone* (1944), Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973) and Fassbinder's use of Antigone in *Germany in Autumn* (1978) are examples of very different uses of the myth of Antigone in contemporary cinema and theatre.

[4] The tragic genre flourished for less than a hundred years in Athens. Tragedy is a spectacle in which mortals try to cope with events at the limits of their comprehension. Even when comprehended, this comes too late, offering the audience an insight into how the world is. Gods rarely centrepiece in tragedy. The Gods of tragedy are partially comprehensible, and aspects of them remain unfathomable and unknowable (Buxton 2013: 135-144). The omnipresence of the divine influence on human action does not negate the importance of human choice. Oedipus Rex is the primary example. Tragedy emerged from religion. It was performed at particular times of the year as part of a religious festival but gave Athens. Fifth century Athens espoused civic values like dike (justice) and *sophrosyne* (prudence). In tragedy the city, which still negotiates the best practices of democracy, was testing the norms, indeed 'testing to destruction' (Goldhill, 155). Tragic poets draw on familiar mythic themes, like the Homeric poems, moulding them to a new product the reception of which required the complicity of the audience. There is no fixed corpus of myth and no mythical orthodoxy (Burian 1997: 184). Euripides, for instance, appears to have written an Antigone in which the heroine survived and married Heammon.

[5] Vernant's reading of tragedy belongs to the anti-enlightenment post-war French tradition which sought in antiquity a grounding for the post-war French democratic polis (see Leonard 2005).

Vernant can be critiqued for making his insight emerge 'organically' from the tragic text as if structuralism 'spoke Greek'. His position influenced Foucault who, in his own anti-Freudianism, read Oedipus Rex as a drama about the establishment of juridical truth, and Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus. In the light of this intellectual political tradition, Lacan's reading of Antigone, indeed appears ahistorical and apolitical. Lacan systematically exiled the gods from his reading and, to a large extent, the polis itself. The complex relations between French thinkers, allows Leonard to quote Žižek asking, isn't Anti-Oedipus the ultimate oedipal myth? Despite the anti-humanism of that era, Leonard remarks, 'man' remains at the centre of interest.

[6] There is a long and interesting history of this exceptional place in French thought, the empty square from which one can speak critically. Bosteels (2003) examines its role in the thought of Foucault, Deleuze, de Certeau, Lacan and others and despite their differences, considers it in all cases as an effect of structuralist thinking. Whether it is the case or not for Baudrillard and Stiegler is not within the scope of the book. Suffice it to say that Baudrillard is ambivalent towards such a place. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* he seems to be critiquing psychoanalysis for assuming such a place (2004:228) but elsewhere he 'sees' as if from the outside (see Levin 1996). Stiegler (2013a) refers to the pharmacological properties of the geometrical vision which allows one to assume the position of the critical spectator-thinker.

[7] See Lacan (1991) for the role of perspective and the 'deception' of the eye in relation to being, the object a and death. In Holbein's Ambassadors, the shapeless object in the middle (which turns out to be a skull if looked at form an oblique point of view) reflects human vanitas and mortality. Lacan also comments on the effect of the screen/painting as splitting between being and semblance (1991: 107), noting that man knows how to play with the screen as locus of mediation. A pictorial object (in the representational tradition at least) has a calming effect

encouraging letting down the gaze (dompte-regard) (1991: 111). In the trompe l'oeil effect the picture does not compete with reality but evokes the Idea (qua object a) as Plato would put it.

[8] See Zupančič (2000: 74) for the relationship between Lacan's schema and Kant's transcendental idea. Lacan relates the visual effect of the mirrors to the Ich-ideal which enables man to locate his imaginary and libidinal relation into the world (1991: 125). The function of the human other in the process is both libidinal and ontological.

[9] For Baudrillard the screen (television and cinema) is the privileged postmodern surface upon which meanings and affects are projected. However, he also has a keen sense of the (theatrical) scene as a locus of convergence of disparate forces, 'different from any unimaginative mise en scene capable of enchaining meaning (2004:81). The best example of the scene as locus for implosion of meaning is his essay *The Beaubourg Effect* (2004) in which he reads the Parisian cultural centre as a heavily over-determined locus of a multitude of converging meanings, fluxes and flows and movements of people who interact with its evocative interiority and exteriority. There assemblage is characterized by *tension* rather than integration in which its elements are held, lending themselves both to *containment* – coherent 'meaning' if one is keen on seeing it that way – and the opposite: meaninglessness, implosion.

[10] In Deleuze the plane of consistence or immanence is the plane of becoming, between (chaotic) events and structured thinking, on which some kind of unity can be thought (Parr 2011: 204-6).

[11] 'Knowing Nothing, Staying Stupid' is the title of Nobus and Quinn's (2005) book on the epistemology of psychoanalysis. Staying stupid sums up the decision to remain open, inquisitive, to not-known in order to be able to see truth.

[12] See Freud ([1920]1991) for the child's game in which the words fort/da (gone/here) were uttered as an attempt to verbalise absence and presence.

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[13] Lacan (2007: 120-1) expresses similar reservations for Oedipus's lack of insight as we will see in the next chapter.

[14] This is Andre Green's characterisation of tragic/Oedipal vision: excessive insight, what one might not want to see.