TRAGEDY AS A SHARED SPACE. RECOGNITION IN FOUCAULT'S LECTURES ON *OEDIPUS THE KING*

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Abstract

Philosophical reflection of tragedy provides a possibility to think about the experience of a shared, political space in which different laws, political discourses, norms and values are in tension. Michel Foucault's (1926–1984) Oedipus lectures in *Du gouvernement des vivants*, *Mal faire dire vrai*, and *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir* provide political interpretations of tragedy. Foucault's remarks on Oedipus have mostly been interpreted in the anti-psychoanalytical context, but they are even more nuanced in terms of political philosophy. Furthermore, the lectures illustrate the necessity of taking into consideration the aspects of knowledge and power in theories of recognition. Foucault is not usually considered to be concerned with the discussion on recognition, and therefore less explicit sources have been used to formulate the connection between Foucault's critical standpoint and recognition debate. This article, however, pinpoints the concepts of recognition in Foucault's lectures on *Oedipus the King* and reflects the relationship between tragedy and political thought. Foucault's reading of *Oedipus* is an interlacing of theories concerning the history of the arts of governing, procedures of truth, and subject formation.

Keywords: Foucault, Oedipus, recognition, self-knowledge, governing, tragedy.

Introduction

In the Western culture Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (429 BC) has been an endless source of theorizing human self-consciousness, unconsciousness, being, behavior, and political space. Michel Foucault's quite recently published Oedipus lectures (*Du Gouvernement des vivants* 2012, *Mal faire dire vrai* 2012, and *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir* 2011)[2] provide political readings of the tragedy. Foucault's remarks on Oedipus have mostly been interpreted in the anti-psychoanalytical context, but I propose they are much more nuanced in terms of political philosophy. Foucault's Oedipus lectures are an interlacing of theories concerning the history of the arts of governing, procedures of truth, and subject formation. Furthermore, they illustrate the necessity of taking into consideration the aspects of knowledge and power in theories of recognition. This article brings forth the arts

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[2]   Foucault gave several Oedipus lectures: at least in Collége de France 1971 and 1981, Leuven 1981, Rio de Janeiro 1973 and Buffalo 1972. There are also several shorter references to *Oedipus* in the Collége de France lectures such as *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Government of Self and Others*.

Oedipus has got as a political leader and sigles out concepts of recognition. As Foucault is not usually considered to be concerned with the discussion on the politics of recognition, the previous engagements with the issue have used less explicit sources to formulate the connection.[3]

Hence, to Foucault, *Oedipus the King* is not a study of unconscious hidden desires. It is a play about a political leader, who falls in *hubris* after facing a conflict between laws that presuppose different kinds of processes in finding out the truth. Oedipus is the one who plays – or tries to play – with the multiplicity of forms of knowledge:

So it is not so much Oedipus's "ignorance" or "unconscious" that appears in the forefront of Sophocles' tragedy. It is rather the multiplicity of forms of knowledge, the diversity of the procedures which produce it, and the struggle between the powers which is played out through their confrontation. There is a plethora of forms of knowledge in Oedipus. Too much knowledge. And Oedipus is not someone who is kept in the dark by ignorance: he is the one who plays – or tries to play – with the multiplicity of forms of knowledge.[4]

Jean-Pierre Vernant writes how the use of tragedy makes it possible to reflect the experience of political space in which different laws, political discourses and values seem contradictory. Tragedy is born in a specific political setting which posits its heroic characters in front of democratic audiences, points out their actions, conceptions of law and just, and shows them as a question.[5] Oedipus' own method of finding out the truth has features of secular juridical practices that conflict with the traditional, religious truth processes.

Through *Oedipus the King* Foucault reflects how the self becomes an object of knowledge, and while doing so, he introduces a concept of recognition which is not reducible into a singular, well defined act or a mere

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3   See: A. Honneth: Recognition as Ideology, in: B. van den Brink et al. (eds.): *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007; D. Owen: Foucault, Tully, and the Agonistic Struggles of Recognition, in: M. Bankovsky et al. (eds.), *Recognition Theory and Contemporary French Moral and Political Philosophy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 2012; J. Tully: *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995.

4   M. Foucault: *Lectures on the Will to Know. Lectures at the Collège de France 1970−1971 and Oedipal Knowledge*, Transl. Graham Burchell, London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013, p. 251; M. Foucault: *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir. Cours au Collége de France 1970–1981 suivi de Le savoir d'Œdipe*, Paris: Èdition de Seuil/Gallimard 2011.

5   J-P.Vernant: Oedipus without the Complex, in: *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Transl. Janet Lloyd, New York: Zone Books 1988, p. 88–89; J-P. Vernant: Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy, in: *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York: Zone Books, 1988, p. 33; J-P. Vernant: The Tragic Subject, in: *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York: Zone Books, 1988, p. 242.

subject-object distinction. Axel Honneth describes in "Recognition as Ideology" (2007) those objections that the concept of recognition – used by different emancipation movements – has faced. Honneth refers explicitly to Foucault and summarizes the objections by saying that praising certain characteristics can be a political instrument which only posits individuals and groups into existing structures of dominance. The problem is that subjects are encouraged to adopt those types of self-conceptions that actually motivate them to voluntarily take tasks that serve the pre-existing system[6] and to adopt those self-conceptions that conform to the established system of behavioral expectations.[7] Honneth takes this criticism seriously, but uses it to fabricate a more credible theory of recognition: theory has to take seriously the complexity of interactions. In this article Honneth's theory will not, however, be discussed in detail. Instead, I will show that even if Foucault does not operate with the concept of recognition much elsewhere, the Oedipus lectures illustrate the dynamics and problematics of recognition processes in an explicit, nuanced and conceptually sophisticated manner. In this sense these lectures open out a view of Foucault's conception of recognition in a critical context. In the end of the play the slaves have to express repeatedly their identities in interrogation processes and respond: "*yes, this is me*", meaning "I am the person who is speaking with this certain role and these particular characteristics".[8] Oedipus goes through the same procedure: he transforms from the master of truth, who runs the operation, into the most denigrated person. The procedure of truth uncovers the truth about the object of its knowledge, the subject – which is Oedipus himself.

Historical, Political and Critical Dimensions of Tragedy

Aristotle saw that history is restricted to the particular and that is why poetry (*poēsis*), including tragedy, is more philosophical than historiography: it tells how things *can* be.[9] [10] However, both Plato and Aristotle were eager to define the place and status imitations (*mimēsis*) should have. For the poets it is self-evident they are creating a world of fictions, theatrical illusions and appearances, not coherent representations of society.[11] The point is not to speak in Sophocles' name or about historical events in a

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6   Honneth, op. cit., 339.
7   Ibid., 324.
8   M. Foucault: *Du gouvernement des vivants. Cours au Collége de France 1979–1980*, ed. Michel Senellart, Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2012; M. Foucault: *Mal faire dire vrai. Fonction de l'aveu en justice. Cours de Louvain 1981*, Louvain & Chicago: University of Chicago Press & Presses Universitaires de Louvain 2012.
9   Aristotle: *Poetics. Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 23,* Transl. W.H. Fyfe, London: Harvard University Press 1932, 1451b; Vernant, op.cit., 246.
10   More precisely, Aristotle says in the passage that whereas history tells particular (*ekaston*) facts, poetics deal with the general (*katholou*), *Poetics* 1451b.
11   Vernant, op. cit., 242–243.

descriptive, direct manner.[12] These descriptive, direct forms of expressions are, however, the only forms of *mimēsis* Plato approves in his ideal state in the *Republic*. Tragedy should be excluded, because it nourishes the worst, irrational part of our souls,[13] degrades the capabilities of the citizens to act and react in the course of events[14] – and because tragedy is a threat to the desired political order. It is associated with democratic men.

Theatre – especially tragedy – can be seen as a political space of public discussion, critical reflection and interrogation. Secondly, public rituals and the use of political power can be analysed from the perspective of theatrical performances. Foucault quite often uses the technique of describing the use of power by lively scenes and thus employs the idea of theatrical expression in this latter sense. The most famous of these scenes is the spectacle of public torture in the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*. These descriptions open up particular events in front of our eyes, and even if they would lack the force of generalizability, they make visible the possible organization of power and operate as visual rendering of conceptual distinctions. In the *Psychiatric Power* Foucault thematises the analysis of these "scenes" and sets it opposite to the study of institutional organization.[15] "A scene" opens up the possibility to pinpoint very different forms of power. A scene might be composed for example of "ceremonies of sovereignty", such as coronation, but also of "rituals of service" including obeying or punishing, or these scenes can be composed of juridical procedures or even of medical practices.[16] [17] In Foucault's (unpublished) lecture in Minneapolis "Cérémonie, théâtre et politique au XVII siècle" Foucault frames his current research as a study of "how political power takes on a visible or theatrical forms and imprints itself on the imagination and behaviour of a people".[18] He refers to public debates of *agoras* in the text and defines that political ceremonies are manifestations that embody demarcations of political power. These real-life dramatic scenes hold usually a negative meaning: they are "theatrical" in the sense of acting out a play that is a type of masquerade of power.

Greek tragedy is much more ambiguous in this regard. Foucault sees that Sophocles' tragedies are dramatizations of Greek judiciary, its in-

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12   Ibid., 243.

13   Plato: *Republic. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vols. 5 & 6*, Transl. Paul Shorey, London: Harvard University Press 1969, 605d.

14   Ibid., 604b–c.

15   M. Foucault: *Psychiatric Power. Lectures at the Collège de France 1973–1974*, Transl. Graham Burchell, London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2006, 32–33.

16   Foucault, op. cit., 32.

17   In this text Foucault makes these scenes distinct from theatrical episodes and stresses their character as the real fields of struggle. In the *Security, Territory, Population* and "Cérémonie, théâtre et politique au XVII siècle" political procedures are, however, described as "theatrical scenes".

18   Stuart Elden has published a brief summary of the lecture written by Stephen Davidson at http://progressivegeographies.com/2013/10/04/an-almost-unknown-1972-summary-of-a-lecture-by-foucault/, accessed October 24, 2013.

completeness, and of the conquests of democratic system.[19] He compares chorus to the people, *plēthos*.[20] Tragedy can be viewed as the possibility of opening up a critical space and a specific kind of critical thought.[21] Tragedy tells about the history of the right to say the truth, but also about the possibility to oppose the rulers and to judge those who govern.[22] However, Foucault is also sceptical of the democratic potential of the tragic scene in *Oedipus'* case. He describes *Oedipus the King* as a scene of a dramatic representation of regulated procedures in a public space in which pre-established truth becomes eventually confirmed.[23] Let's now take a closer look at *Oedipus the King*.

Oedipus as *Tyrannos* and the Arts of Governing

Foucault stresses the fact that the name of Sophocles' tragedy is *Oedipous tyrannos*, Oedipus the man of power. The play is not titled "Oedipus insestuous" or "Oedipus who killed his father".[24] *Tyrannos* is at times understood only as the most negative sense of the word. However, the word *tyrannos* is not used simply in a negative sense, as "a tyrant". Sophocles portrays Oedipus as precious and noble. The charm of the play is based on the audience's tendency to be on the main character's side regardless of his flaws and crimes. In the beginning of the play Oedipus enjoys the affection of the people (*plēthos*) and is recognized by them as sovereign.[25] Nietzsche writes that Oedipus faces his doom because he obeys neither the gods nor the laws, but that he is still a sublime figure who as an old man will find serenity.[26]

Nevertheless, *tyrannos* is also a problematic character described through "ceremonies of power": he is deported, but he comes back to show his qualification to use power, he is consistently imposed to fluctuating ups and downs of fortune, and he introduces a new set of relations in the city.[27] Hence, Oedipus has got both positive and negative characteristics of a legendary hero. Aristotle writes in *Poetics* that Oedipus is a perfect example of tragedy which causes purification (*katharsis*) of emotions such as pity and fear. *Katharsis* takes place, because the main character is in between the extremes of completely virtuous and bad men. According to Aristotle, the protagonist should be someone with whom one can identify: someone not too good or too bad, only misfor-

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[19]   In the *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche resents political interpretations of tragedy. To him tragedy opens up a space where the gaps between the state, society, and men dissolve. F. Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*, Transl. WM. A. Haussmann, London: G. Allen & Unwin; New York: Macmillan 1923, §7.
[20]   Foucault, op. cit., 53.
[21]   Vernant, op. cit.
[22]   M. Foucault: La vérité et les formes juridiques. In: Daniel Defert et al. (eds.), *Dits et écrits I*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard 2001, 1439.
[23]   Foucault, op. cit., 72.
[24]   Foucault, op. cit., 1430.
[25]   Foucault, op. cit., 63; *Leçons*, 237.
[26]   Nietzsche, op. cit., §9.
[27]   Foucault, op. cit., 62.

tunate.[28] The tragic experience of conflictual interest becomes apparent only if the portrait of Oedipus is neither a picture of a despot nor a polished picture of a one-dimensional hero.

Oedipus has got a specific, supreme art of governing (*tekhnē tekhnēs*). Foucault finds it noteworthy that *tekhnē*, a technical knowledge that can be learned, is included in the attributes of a political leader. Oedipus solved the riddle of the Sphinx without learning it from anyone (knowledge as *gnomê*), but an art, *tekhnē*, is something altogether different. Foucault defines *tekhnē* as a reflected system of practices, a theoretical and practical technique that is necessary to existence.[29] To Aristotle, *tekhnē* is a rational quality and a capability concerned with making (*poiēsis*): it brings things into existence. It is made distinct from things that come into existence out of necessity, such as phenomena taking place in nature. Moreover, *tekhnē* brings forth things that could also be differently.[30] It is interesting that – just like Sophocles in *Oedipus* – Aristotle associates *tekhnē* with good luck. Chance refers to the possibility of variety in the state of affairs – things can always be otherwise. In a similar vein Oedipus' *tekhnē* is associated with figuring out how fortune (*tukhē*) produces events and encounters, agitation and revolts. Oedipus' art include a temporal element in solving what happened before, what is happening at the moment, and how to manage this fortune.[31] Moreover, this superior art does not involve governing the self as it does from the Socratic-Platonic tradition onwards. To Plato governing the self and acquiring the paradoxical state of freedom in self-control (*sōfrosynē*) are the preconditions of governing others. By contrast, there is a passage in Oedipus which suggests that the arts of governing do not involve being "sound of mind" (*sōfronein*).[32]

The supreme art is also described through two other types of metaphors related to using political power: medicine and navigation.[33] From the beginning Oedipus' task is to heal the city. Secondly, the metaphor of navigation grasps the applicability of the skills at hand. The notion of navigation is significant to Foucault as it further enables to regroup and make a distinction between Oedipus' arts of governing and the arts of governing in the Socratic-Platonic and Christian literature. In these later traditions the metaphor of piloting often refers not only to political government and medicine, but also to the art of governing the self.

Moreover, when the vocabulary of governing revolves around the arts possessed by the sovereign, the problem of the excess use of power arises. When Oedipus is accused of not following the universal laws, listening to the gods or respecting justice (*Dikē*), Oedipus responds that it

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[28]   Aristotle: *Poetics. Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 23*, Transl. W.H. Fyfe, London: Harvard University Press 1932, 1453a.

[29]   M. Foucault: *Herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collége de France 1981–1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, Paris: Gallimard/Seuil 2001, 239.

[30]   Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 19*, Transl. H. Rackham, London: Harvard University Press 1934, 1140a.

[31]   Foucault: *Leaçons*, 243; *Mal faire*, 65; 67.

[32]   *Oed*, 590; Foucault: *Mal faire*, 64.

[33]   Foucault: La vérité, 1437; *Du gouvernement*, 59, 66; *Mal faire*, 66.

is not the leader's job to do so. In his view the king's task is to figure out how *tukhē* operates, to navigate and to heal the plague. Eventually, this conception of the arts specific to a political leader leads Oedipus to his doom by nourishing his tyrannical power.[34]

Recognition and Procedure of Truth Formation

Oedipus goes through a procedure which results in recognition. The procedure consists of several pieces of knowledge that need to be adjusted together: none of the pieces alone are enough for certainty. To Oedipus the spoken is just, *orthon epos*, only as far as there is a complementarity of several adjustments.[35] Foucault calls the process *alethurgy*: verbal and non-verbal expressions of truth which are tied to concrete procedures and together compose the veridiction.[36] In that sense the point is not so much in finding out what the witnesses really know, but how the truth is manifested in the procedure.

Foucault identifies different forms of knowledge that appear in *Oedipus the King*. There are also several words that designate Oedipus' knowledge. First of all, Oedipus' name consists of the verb *oida* which designates both seeing and knowing.[37] Secondly, the word for knowledge is *gnōmē*, when he solves the riddle of the Sphinx all by himself without listening to anyone. And thirdly, when he has to find out the murderer and run a knowledge procedure of finding out, the word used is *heuriskein*. Oedipus seized his power by *gnōmē*, but the use of power is based on *heuriskein*, implementing a procedure to uncover the true state of affairs. Since he is the sovereign, it is him who carries out the truth process.[38] He defies religious, oracular knowledge (*manteia*) and insists a procedure based on inquiery, eye-witness and testimony – methods which today are familiar from juridical practices.[39]

All in all, there is incomplete knowledge composed of different pieces.[40] Foucault finds six components, six characters of the play, whose words are gathered together as fragments that compose the truth. Each of the fragments of knowledge is a half-truth, and the task is to examine and define the missing pieces, and name the person who possesses it.[41] Foucault calls the composition of these fragments "a play" or "a game of *symbolon*", which forms relations and leads to recognition. *Symbolon* means recognizing each other, but it derives from the verb "to put together", *symballein*. Concretely it can be an object which is broken into two parts and used by the messengers to identify the right recipient. *Symbolon* is an instrument of maintaining power as it hides a secret, authentifies the message and ensures the continuity of power in its suc-

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34 Foucault: *Mal faire*, 67.
35 Foucault: *Du gouvernement*, 29.
36 Ibid., 8.
37 Foucault: La vérité, 1434–1435.
38 Foucault: *Leçons*, 231; Foucault: *Du gouvernement*, 63.
39 Foucault: La vérité, 1410.
40 Foucault: *Leçons*, 225–226.
41 Foucault: *Du gouvernement*, 31.

cessful use.[42] In ancient Greece it is a well-known technique that seals regulations, prevents deception and lying, and finally establishes an agreement.[43] As the characters of the play and their relations to each other are very different, recognition consists of multiplicity of ties on very different levels: juridical and institutional, political, religious, familial and civilian.[44] The truth is revealed when the combination of all of these forms of knowledge is gathered together and pieces of knowledge adjusted in the whole. They are not adjusted in any manner possible, but they follow a pattern in which each form of knowledge needs another form of knowledge in order to play their part in the recomposition.

The logic of the symbol – under which the totality of comprehension is construed – dictates not only the mechanism but also the evaluation of each type of knowledge and each person involved in the process. Each character might even say the same thing, but in each case the type of knowledge, and the process to achieve it, is different. The analysis of symbol is associated with power: the definition of *symbolon* with the logic of complementary halves imposes a function to each of the fragments and to their holders, and Oedipus is the one who in his sovereignty uses this power.[45] Oedipus uses sovereign power, which involves, according to Foucault, the presupposition of a high level of individualization towards the top whereas towards the base individualization becomes absent.[46]

Recognition and Self-identification

Honneth points out how in German recognition (*Anerkennung*) implies only an act which grants a positive social status, whereas in French and English recognition includes identifying someone or something.[47] *Oedipus the King* is – besides about a ruler's knowledge and power – about self-identification through recognition. Recognition, however, is not a one-off singularity between two persons. Foucault further makes a distinction between individual and collective recognition. In the individual recognition Oedipus finds out the truth about himself in a variety of relationships. In a sense this is compatible with Martin Heidegger's notion of *Oedipus* in the the *Introduction to Metaphysics.* To Heidegger Oedipus' figure marks the Greek experience of existence or "being there" (*Dasein*) in the intersection between different forces. In the following passage Heidegger reflects the unveiling of truth through *Oedipus*:

> Let us consider Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. [...] Oedipus goes to unveil what is concealed. In doing so, he must, step by step, place himself into a concealment [...]—and then by crying out, as a blind man, for all doors to be flung open so that such a man may become revealed to the people as the man who he *is*.[48]

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[42] Foucault: *La vérité*, 1428.
[43] Foucault: *Du gouvernement*, 31–32.
[44] Foucault: *La vérité*, 1428.
[45] Foucault: *La vérité*, 1430.
[46] Foucault: *Psychiatric*, 45.
[47] Ibid., 329.
[48] M. Heidegger: *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Trans. Gregory Fried and Ri-

In this passage Heidegger points out that the truth about the subject is revealed not only to himself but to the people. Also Foucault illustrates how this other recognition takes place in front of the chorus, the assembly of people – the citizens. They constitute the legal proceedings to discover, establish, and finally validate the truth.[49] Making a distinction between individual recognition and recognition in front of the assembly, Foucault takes into account the social and institutional aspects of recognition. The socio-political process of recognition can be described as an *event* of over-lapping processes, and event, according to Foucault, is a multiplicity which occurs here and there dispersed through institutions and sets of discourse.

Symbolon characterizes the logic and technique, which Oedipus himself uses in the process. However, to define the individual recognition Foucault refers to Aristotle's concept *anagnōrisis*. Recognition as *anagnōrisis* describes the moment in which Oedipus as an individual subject realizes his identity. Aristotle formulates the theory from the author's perspective: *anagnōrisis* is a constituent element of a plot, a moment in a play when a character realizes something decisive.[50] *Anagnōrisis* is not only about recognizing a given fact, but a person, and what that person stands for. The concept captures the idea of a sudden moment when the character becomes significantly aware of the situation and realizes her/his relationship to the others. Aristotle writes:

> [A]s the term [*anagnōrisis*] itself implies, it is a change from igno-rance to knowledge, producing either friendship or hatred in those who are destined for good fortune or ill. A discovery [*anagnōrisis*] is most effective when it coincides with reversals [*peripeteia*], such as that involved by the discovery in the Oedipus. [...] Now since the discovery is *somebody's* discovery, in some scenes one character only is discovered to another, the identity of the other being obvious; but sometimes each must discover the other.[51]

It is noteworthy that Aristotle states that *anagnōrisis* is conflictual: it produces relations such as friendship or hatred and posits individuals in these categories.

In Foucault's reading the one who executes the process in *Oedipus the King* becomes simultaneously the object of the research:[52]

> In *Oedipus the King*, recognition—*anagnōrisis* by which the one who does not know becomes one who knows and by which the one who thought he did not know realizes that he already knew—has two particular characters [...] the one who seeks is the object of the search; the one who is ignorant is the one it is a question of knowing about; he who unleashed the dogs is himself the prey.[53]

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chard Polt, New Haven & London: Yale University Press 2000, 112.
49   Foucault: *Mal faire*, 53.
50   Foucault: *Leçons*, 25.
51   *Poetics*, 1452a–b, italics mine.
52   Foucault: *Leçons*, 226; Foucault: *Du gouvernement*, 25.
53   Foucault: *Lectures*, 229; *Leçons*, 226; italics mine.

In the 1971 Nietzsche lecture in the *Lectures on the Will to Know* Foucault criticizes theories that seek to dissolve the subject-object relation by bringing them closer to each other. Instead, one should do one's best to keep subject and object as far away from each other as possible, and to scatter those processes which reinforce subjectivation: the processes in which people voluntarily become subjects and simultaneously objects of their own actions.

Oedipus' recognition holds also a temporal quality of a decisive moment. Aristotle writes in *Poetics* that in *Oedipus the King* the two most crucial points of tragedy coincide: recognition (*anagnōrisis*) and the turning point (*peripeteia*).[54] Recognizing someone as such-and-such transforms all the things that have been said and done, and it changes the course of future events. The person in this process is no longer the same, and the context in which the former self-conception was embedded has dramatically changed. When Oedipus is recognized his actions become opposite from the intended.[55] He is a political leader, who believes to be doing the right thing, but who discovers that he has done everything wrong. Only when all action is over one understands what was said, what the actors have done, what their actions imply, and what they themselves are.[56]

Oedipus is actually not the only one who becomes identified in the procedure. While Honneth creates a positive theory of recognition which needs to be based on the trinity of individual acts, institutional practices and material fulfillment,[57] Foucault brings forth a scene which is a failure in all these regards. In the scene Oedipus interrogates a slave. The positive aspect of the scene is that slave's words come last and seal the truth as *symbolon*: they make the pieces correspond. The slave's talk is indispensable, because there would be no *orthon epos* without those words. Oedipus' downfall becomes evident not when the god confirms the truth, but when the slaves, the people, tell about their experiences.[58]

However, this is not simply a democratic moment in a transition from monarchy to democracy: there is still a clear distinction between divine truths and the truths of the slaves. The content of their words is similar, and the slave confirms the truth that the god has already spoken.[59] The difference between these similar words lies in their orientation to the future and the possibility of having an impact. The prophet speaks only of the present and the future as he has the same vision and knowledge as the gods, but the slaves are only spectators of events initiated by others—they speak of things that happened in the past as if they had no impact on future events.[60] Foucault notes that the slave does not only convince (*fēmi*), he also recognizes and confesses (Gr. *homologeō*,

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[54] *Poetics*, 1452a.

[55] Vernant: Ambiguity and Reversal, in: *Myth and Tragedy*, 118; *Oed* 132.

[56] Vernant, *Tensions*, 45.

[57] Honneth: *Recognition*, 345.

[58] A. Cutrofello: Foucault on Tragedy, in: *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 31:573 (2005), 574.

[59] Ibid., 575.

[60] Foucault: *Du gouvernement*, 38.

Fr. *je reconnais*, *j'avoue*). He repeats the expression "it is me". It is me in my identity, the slave, who saw and now talks.[61] This is Foucault's way of pointing out the use of sovereign power in a procedure in which one has to reveal one's identity in the form of confession. As a sovereign, Oedipus operates between people and gods, and as he is the ruler, he does not confess.[62]

Furthermore, Oedipus' arts of governing do not involve the production of free, truth-telling subjects that democracy presupposes.[63] Oedipus truth-procedure is imposed on people who are not considered to be active citizens, and in the end truth is something that must be accepted like a sentence.[64] In this article Oedipus himself and his actions have been analyzed by regrouping them according to the triangle of power, truth-formation, and subjectivity. Alexandre Macmillan sees, however, that in Oedipus' governance knowledge, power, and subject formation are dissociated. It is true that in the experience of the ruler's subjects these three aspects remain disconnected.[65] This is seen in the maltreatment of the slave: the slave has to obey instead of becoming voluntarily individualized as an object of governing. The task of becoming a subject, who governs oneself just as well as the others, is associated with altogether different kinds of techniques and practices which take place in freedom with other free citizens.

Within the complex procedure of *symbolon* and finally recognition, subject-object and master-slave patterns are found and produced both in Oedipus figure and between the characters. Nevertheless, there is nothing necessary or natural in these relations, and they are not the only relations within the composition. In the end of the play, Oedipus finds himself in the *symbolon*: he has simultaneously become a multifold duality and a multiplicity. It turns out that Oedipus himself is the missing piece in the compound of excessive halves.[66] He is the king, the assassin of the king, a murderer, a child, a spouse, a father, the brother of his own children, the seeker and the one who is sought, the expelled, and the one who demands the deportation. And finally, he realizes in the process of recognition that he himself is the plague that needs to be sent off or the city will perish.[67]

Conclusions

While recognition is tied to the idea of recognizing someone, it is associated with the question of power. Tragedy tells about the experience of conflict between different motives, laws and values. In Oedipus' case it tells also about a political leader, who nevertheless needs to

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61   Foucault: *Du gouvernement*, 35; 37; 49; Foucault: *Mal faire*, 69.
62   Foucault: *Mal faire*, 70.
63   A. Macmillan: Michel Foucault's Techniques of the Self and the Christian Politics of Obedience, in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 28:3 (2011), 18.
64   Ibid., 18.
65   Ibid., 18.
66   Foucault: *La vérité*, 1430; 1436.
67   Foucault: *Leçons*, 230–231.

make decisions and carry out actions. He firmly believes to be doing the right thing, but in this conviction he ends up doing everything wrong. Oedipus' arts of governing include managing fortune and healing the city – the leader is able to change the course of events. These arts of governing are characterized as "the superior art" (*tekhnē tekhnēs*). In the procedure the fragments are verified, and following a certain pattern of execution – the logic of *symbolon* –they constitute the truth which identifies the person. Recognition takes place when the truth is gathered together from several pieces that entail different relations and conceptions of knowledge. Aristotle's concept of recognition, *anagnōrisis,* and its relation to the idea of turning point, brings forth the process of identification and self-identification, which dramatically changes the course of the future events, individual's position in them, and the conception of the past. However, if recognition is reflected as an event in the Foucauldian sense, the concept holds various kinds of social and political relations. Foucault's Oedipus lectures can be seen as a critical description of the problems of emancipatory theories of recognition, and their political task is to question the obligations to follow a certain process in finding out the truth and obligations to manifest the truth about one self.