

Between, Against, Beyond:
Challenging National Identities in Contemporary Greek Theatre

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Preface

Fascinated by the potentiality of a theatre beyond fixed meanings and considering the issue of national identity an outmoded topic, I left Greece to pursue postgraduate studies abroad. I became part of a group of international students from very different cultural but also academic backgrounds. During an introductory exercise in the very first days of the programme, I realised my bewilderment towards the question of identity, when I was asked whether I could define myself as “hybrid” in any sort of way. My first spontaneous negative answer revealed not only my theoretical limitations but also my difficulty to offer any short – and why not “fancy” – answer without really having reflected before on my own self-identification in terms of Greek identity. Since then, the question of Greek identity gained the central position in one way or another in my research interests. A couple of years later, I embarked on the present research cautious about the pitfalls of such an “existential” attachment to the object of inquiry.

Over the past years, while attending different kinds of performances and particularly performances whose aesthetics would often be characterised with “post-” labels (be it postdramatic or postmodern), the same questions kept haunting me. To what extent could contemporary theatre in its various forms of expression and modes of performance indeed encourage the spectators to reflect on their national identities? How – if at all – could this kind of theatre invite spectators to shift their stance towards this complex concept, if they had not entered the theatre space already critically predisposed towards it? Could, after all, radical attack on any point of reference and attachment (including national communities) lead to a substantial renegotiation of this question that repeatedly has been declared obsolete but keeps returning?

The financial and refugee crisis in Europe during the last decade and the dangerous resurgence of extremist right-wing voices reinforced the use of concepts such as nation, nationalism, identity, homeland, and borders in the public discourse. This topicality of the issue of national identity and its definition also vis-à-vis different “others” should not, however, only urge us to consider how we can insulate our societies from dangerous nationalist phenomena. It should also function as a reminder to pay attention to unnoticed, banal forms of nationalism and the implications that these may have in the reproduction of dominant definitions of national identity across societies and the realm of everyday life. Essentially, are we not all, even if only in antithetical terms, imprisoned in our conceptions of national identity?

Contemporary theatre will be able to function as a site for the negotiation of this troubling relationship to nation only when it recognises the need of many people for self-

perception in national terms. Inevitably, the interest for the theatrical exploration of the question of national identity is related to each theatre landscape's aesthetic developments and to the particularities of the sociopolitical and cultural context inside which it takes place. In the case of Greece, for example, the issues that arise from the theatre discourses on identity are not only relevant for theatre studies; they also echo the centrality of the identity question in the Greek public discourse in general.

My aim is, however, not to offer an examination of theatre in Greece from a historiographical point of view through the prism of a particular question, namely that of national identity. In the present study, I aspire to use Greek theatre with its characteristics as a case study to explore possible ways in which this question may be critically addressed on stage. Furthermore, I will scrutinise the interplay between different theatrical endeavours and the broader sociopolitical as well as theatrical and institutional context. In no case will I suggest a model that can be transferred as such to different theatre environments but a "typology" of critical approaches that each time will have to be examined independently, taking into account the specificities of each context.

Writing in English, living in Germany while exploring the question of Greek identity has been a challenging process. The temporal (and often existential) proximity to the research subject, my spatial distance to Greece but also my intention to convey to non-Greeks an insight into Greece's contemporary theatre scene in relation to the issue of national identity inevitably made crucial the question of my own standpoint and perspective. I decided to use these existing parameters as lenses through which I have attempted a mediated approach to my familiar context. Aware of the implications that arise due to my position as one "distant entangled" away from Greece, I intend by no means to suggest one correct definition of the Greek identity or a proper way for how Greeks should perceive themselves in national terms. Nor will I argue that the discussion of Greek national identity is of particular importance compared to similar discourses in other countries. On the contrary, I aspire to propose a possible way in which we – as spectators, theatre scholars but also inevitably as members of different national communities – could reconsider the different grades of theatre's potentiality to challenge our deeply rooted (and often unnoticed) national convictions.

Introduction

*Everywhere that nations exist,
nationalism reigns.¹*

Over the recent past and despite the visible traces of globalisation and global capitalism in everyday life, the envisagement of the decline of the nation-states as already proclaimed since the 1990s² seems to recede violently. An alarming shift towards the right-wing extreme has been observed. Xenophobic rhetoric of exclusion appeared as an answer to the financial and refugee crises and became part of the dominant political discourses, revealing the failure of the existent political system. In the case of Europe, one could agree with Étienne Balibar that the political system did not pay as much attention as it should have to the national question but instead “approached nationalism rather resolutely, like a poisonous legacy of the past”.³

Since 2008 the financial crisis has shaken the foundations of the European project, challenging the fundamental idea of “community” and what this may mean in an age of globalised communication and neoliberal capitalism. The failure of European identity to crystallise equal (or even stronger) to national identities became ultimately clear, leading even supporters of the European project like Anthony Giddens to admit that the European Union did not succeed in “put[ting] down emotional roots anywhere among its citizens”.⁴ The (often concealed) national terms of the debate regarding the EU financial assistance (“rescue packages”) towards the weaker EU members implied not only a Europe of centre and periphery but also a rather complex interdependence between financial interests and hegemonic relations in a union of nation-states. In Greece, the crisis brought to the surface general symptoms of the global financial crisis but also revealed long-existing pathologies and malfunctions of the country. Not surprisingly, the financial crisis soon became social, raising thus “existential” questions and calling for a reflection on the past and its national narratives.

¹Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 23.

² See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 21 and E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 192.

³ Étienne Balibar, *Europa: Krise und Ende?*, trans. Frieder Otto Wolf (Münster: Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2016), 110.

NB. All translations in the present thesis are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Turbulent and Mighty Continent: What Future for Europe?*, rev. and updated ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 5.

The return to the “safety” of a national identity that will hold “the people” together during turbulent times, as expressed in the agenda of not only right-wing parties, calls for a reconsideration of the national connotations of this collective “we”. While theoretically identities have been declared contingent (if not outdated) since poststructuralism and the performative turn, this does not always seem to be the case in the everyday life of nations. According to Craig Calhoun,

[n]ationalism is not a moral mistake. Certainly it is too often implicated in atrocities, and in more banal but still unjust prejudices and discriminatory practices. It too often makes people think arbitrary boundaries are natural and contemporary global divisions ancient and inevitable. But it is also a form of social solidarity and one of the background conditions on which modern democracy has been based.⁵

One should hence pay attention to the possible reasons why the notion of nation may still evoke emotional responses in large parts of the population, that at the same time could not be defined as extreme right wing. A possible redefinition of dominant conceptions will not come with an oversimplifying negation of the category of identity but through the exploration of the (institutional) sites of “friction”, where official discourses and prevailing identities are called into question. A crucial issue arises here: how can we deal with the conflict between non-hegemonic conceptions of national identities on the one hand and persistent (emotionally and ideologically laden) national attachments on the other?

It is commonplace to repeat that theatre is a sensitive receiver of social and historical changes. It reflects on the past and the present but also looks towards the future, suggesting new ways to perceive the “reality” around us but also the one to come. Accounting for this role of theatre on the one hand and the persistence of the concepts of nation and identity on the other, no matter how troubling, one could agree with theatre scholar Nadine Holdsworth who in 2010 suggested that “[t]heatre can and will continue to hold a mirror up to the nation, but this does not mean that the mirror has to reflect an accurate picture – it can be distorted, expansive and utopian”.⁶

How then, does the theatre of the twenty-first century deal critically with the question of national identity? What are the aesthetic and dramaturgical strategies engaged on stage to

⁵ Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matters: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

⁶ Nadine Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 79.

challenge hegemonic definitions of nation and linear narratives upon which singular conceptions of identity still reside? How is the relationship between theatre and nation affected by the broader context within which performances are produced and received? Taking these issues as a departure point, I will propose a three-fold approach to the critical theatrical responses to the question of national identity. The thesis statement could be summarised as follows:

The modes of critical engagement with the concept of national (Greek) identity in contemporary theatre are three: i) dialectical, ii) deconstructive and iii) nation-transcending. The potential and restrictions of each mode are related to the cultural, historical and theatrical context in which the performances are embedded.

The three adjectives (dialectical, deconstructive, nation-transcending) do not characterise the aesthetics and mode of performance but an approach to the concept of national identity that is different each time. In the first case, the dialectical relationship between past and present, as well as proximity and distance, proposes a more dynamic re-signification of national identities. In the second mode of engagement, the notion of deconstruction implies both the de-hierarchisation and subversion of oppositional binaries as well as the impossibility of fixed meaning, which in turn challenge the national identity as category per se, ultimately manifesting the need for its rejection. Finally, the third term “nation-transcending” intends to describe a renegotiation of national identity, mediated through other forms of belonging, community and co-presence that exceed national and temporal demarcations.

These terms inevitably trigger certain (philosophical) associations. At the same time, they have been diversely used in relation to aspects of the identity question in both the academic and popular discourse: dialectics between identity and difference, self and other, or between different identities of the individual; deconstructing identities, conventions or norms; transcending borders, limits and boundaries. Acknowledging such connotations in the choice of these terms, on whose definition I will elaborate in the following chapters, intends to evoke particular angles of approach towards the concept of identity. These three perspectives could be hence summarised in the three prepositions found in this study’s title: between, against, beyond.

The development of this “quasi-typology” relies on the presupposition that contemporary theatre, whose aesthetics align with challenging of fixed limits and identification processes, may still deal critically with the concept of national identity (and its paraphernalia)

without necessarily rejecting it or declaring it outdated a priori. However, if from a poststructuralist point of view identities are still to be considered anyhow contingent and performed, how can their constructed character be performatively demonstrated on stage? National identities will be here understood as critically negotiated through theatrical means at a meta-level, which stresses multiplicity and distance as inherent in their construction. Following the definition of the prefix “meta-” as “self-referential”,⁷ I define as “meta-identity” the kind of onstage performed identity, which acknowledges the existence of a dominant significance while, at the same time, reflecting critically on the discursive construction of itself. A self-reflexive gesture is performed, thus, on stage, which is expressed through the three modes I define.

I will scrutinise this three-fold approach by focusing on Greek institutional theatre. In 2009, while Greek society was entering a period of severe crisis, theatre was undergoing a very fruitful period. A younger generation of playwrights, directors and theatre collectives was co-existing with an older generation of theatre-makers, who once belonged to the “avant-garde” and the “fringe-scene”, especially of Athens, and now was playing a leading role on larger (institutional) stages. In parallel to a “mainstream” theatre scene, a broad variety of new dramaturgies and modes of performance (postdramatic, devised, documentary theatre, performance art, dance theatre) shaped a polyphonic theatre landscape. A surprisingly large number of small companies and stages was attesting to this image of pluralism, despite the critical consequences of the financial crisis in the field of the arts.

Signs of this creative explosion in the field of theatre had been earlier traceable. Yet, it is not easy to pin down a particular moment when this new phase began. Theatre developments are dynamic processes full of inconsistencies, ruptures and affinities. The problem of periodisation has been a main consideration in the recent attempts to map the field of contemporary theatre. Being aware of this complexity, in their introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Greek Media and Culture* (2017) exploring changes and trajectories in Greek theatre nowadays, Marissia Fragkou and Philip Hager prefer an approach without fixed temporal boundaries. Instead, they suggest to examine “how change as a work in progress is shaped by institutional, economic, political and aesthetic conditions and (...) how such changes in the field of theatre echo wider changes in the social space.”⁸

⁷According to the Cambridge dictionary, “meta-“ means “(of something that is written or performed) referring to itself or to something of its own type” (Cambridge dictionary, s.v. “meta-”, accessed March 8, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/meta?q=meta->).

⁸ Philip Hager and Marissia Fragkou, “Editorial. Dramaturgies of Change: Greek theatre now,” *Journal of Greek Media and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2017):141. The difficulties of periodisation have been also discussed by Savas

The roots of this period of innovation can arguably be traced back to the “fringe-theatre scene” that had been developing since the late 1980s. The overt expression of these streams, however, became visible in mid-2000s. In an insightful essay, theatre scholar Grigoris Ioannidis, while agreeing that it is not clear when this period of innovation began, proposes to set as a starting point the year 2004. This year holds a special position in the Greek collective memory (organisation of the Olympic Games of Athens and triumph in Football European Championship), as it “constituted the culmination of a quite long process which aimed at creating fantasies of collective success and national recognition”.⁹ Ioannidis considers the shaping of a younger generation of Greek artists who had studied in Europe and became familiar with new trends presented at the international festivals, together with the existence of this alternative scene, as a reason for this gradual change.¹⁰ As the key turning point, however, he considers the appointment of Yorgos Loukos at the Hellenic Festival (2005) and Yannis Houvardas at the National Theatre (2007). Ioannidis accurately summarises this change:

[T]he presence and initiatives of these two people in key positions definitely gave a new boost to the alternative scene. The National Theatre, with Yannis Houvardas, almost automatically turned towards a revolutionary (for the time) interpretation of the repertoire. And the Hellenic Festival, under the direction of Yorgos Loukos, acquired a new identity, new performance venues, more flexible structures, a significant international openness through the presence of numerous daring, foreign companies.¹¹

The present research has been greatly informed by Ioannidis’ argument. As I will analyse in detail, the Hellenic Festival and the National Theatre led not only to a mobilisation of new artistic powers but also to the “institutionalisation” of artistic voices linked to a “fringe” theatre scene. Both these institutions had played a decisive role in the shaping of Greek theatre. My argument is that the shift in their programming and aesthetic strategies also had significant implications in the renegotiation of “national” meanings that had been associated with their institutional identity.

Patsalidis and Anna Stavrakopoulou, “Introduction: From the Years of Utopia to the Years of Dystopia,” *Gramma* 22, no. 2 (2014): 7 and George Pefanis, “Introduction: Mapping contemporary Greek dramaturgy: 2000–2016,” in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Greek Plays*, trans. Nina Rapi (London: Oberon Books, 2017), 7.

⁹ Grigoris Ioannidis “Le théâtre grec en période transitoire,” *Théâtre/ Public* 222 (2016): 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76. See also 3.2.1.

¹¹ Ioannidis, “Le théâtre grec,” 76.

Here I do not suggest that these two organisations were the only agents of innovation during this period. Numerous smaller spaces have opened giving a further boost to theatrical activity. Very important was also the contribution of private initiatives, such as the Onassis Cultural Centre, founded in 2010, which has hosted a great variety of interesting Greek and international (often quite experimental) productions. According to Ioannidis, the Onassis Cultural Centre became a “permanent ‘festival’ of Greek and foreign theatre”, while playing a significant role in the promotion of Greek theatre abroad.¹²

Because of the “national” terms under which their tradition and identity have been constructed, the National Theatre and the Hellenic Festival both lend themselves well to an exploration of the relationship between theatre and nation through the lens of the three critical approaches suggested above. The National Theatre, whose history intermingles to a great extent with that of the Festival, has played a decisive role in shaping – and implementing through institutionalisation – particular aesthetic tendencies. It could be suggested that the new aesthetics and modes of performance promoted by the National and the Festival during the period examined turned possible critical approaches to the question of identity and challenged dominant discourses of (national) continuity and tradition. Taking into account all these aspects of the particular theatrical background in Greece, in my study I will pursue an additional level of inquiry, revolving around the hypothesis that

both the National Theatre of Greece and the Hellenic Festival challenged singular conceptions of nation and homogeneous narratives through their new programming choices and their strategies concerning theatre space. This shift, in turn, led to a questioning of the “national” connotations that have been associated with the identity and role of these two cultural institutions.

In order to explore the different ways that contemporary Greek theatre¹³ addresses the question of national identity, I will examine theatre performances that took place at the National Theatre and the Athens and Epidaurus Festival within the period 2006–2015. In parallel, I will discuss related aspects of the theatrical and institutional Greek context.

¹² Ioannidis, “Le théâtre grec,” 77.

¹³ Given that the selected examples are theatre productions as well as stagings and adaptations of Greek plays by Greek theatre-makers that took place in Greece during period examined here, throughout this dissertation, I will primarily prefer the term “contemporary Greek theatre” over “contemporary theatre in Greece”. The latter can be considered much broader, and also includes productions of non-Greek plays, not necessarily by Greek theatre-makers or even not in the Greek language presented to an audience in Greece.

The choice of time span covered in the present research depended on the changes in the Hellenic Festival and the National Theatre during the tenures of Yorgos Loukos and Yannis Houvardas, respectively. In the case of the Hellenic Festival, a longer period of continuity can be observed, as Loukos remained in his post from 2006 until 2015.¹⁴ Despite any programmatic inconsistencies due also to financial factors amid the crisis, this period can be analysed as a concluded chapter in the recent history of the Festival. The period of Houvardas' artistic direction, on the other hand, was shorter (2007–2013) and was followed by a retreat to somewhat mainstream (if not conservative) modes of performance under the director Sotiris Hatzakis. In 2015, Stathis Livathinos was appointed new artistic director. His personal vision of the National Theatre seemed in many points to be compatible with the National's course under Houvardas. In any case, when the present research began, both the National and the Festival were going through a new phase, which could not be adequately evaluated. Therefore, I set the years 2006–2015 as the period of this research; the selected case studies, however, took place during the tenure of each artistic director, respectively.

It will be noticed that while aspects concerning the policies of the National and the Festival will be related to the turning point in 2006, most of the analysed examples still took place after 2010, namely, after the signing of the first memorandum of understanding between Greece and its creditors.¹⁵ An interconnectedness between new critical approaches to the question of identity and the crisis cannot be denied. As Nadine Holdsworth also observes, in most cases, theatre practices that deal with the issue of nation arise in moments of crisis.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, in the Greek case, the paralysing collective feeling of a pervasive instability turned to urgent need for new definitions of the (Greek) identity. Crisis brought to the surface (national) misconceptions that have been deeply rooted and reproduced over the decades, revealing the illusion of a feeling of prosperity. As Patsalidis and Stavrakopoulou incisively described it,

[o]vernigh a whole nation entered the “real world” via a shocking crisis which created a rupture between the individual and the collective perception of the nation and its

¹⁴ Loukos was appointed artistic director in November 2005. The Athens and Epidaurus Festival in summer 2006 was the first under his artistic direction.

¹⁵ On September 2008, the collapse of Lehmann Brothers unleashed a global financial crisis. In Greece, the consequences not only of the global crisis but also of a long period of maladministration and indebtedness became blatantly visible in 2009. In spring 2010, Greece signed the first memorandum of agreement with its creditors, entering to a new long period under “custody”, followed by the implementation of austerity measures. 2010 is considered a watershed moment in the recent history of modern Greece. In the present study, it will be often used conventionally as a key-date, a synonym for the Greek crisis signifying the beginning of a new period.

¹⁶ Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 6–7.

ideologies. What people thought was “there” and “theirs,” all of a sudden disappeared behind a vaporous wall of clouds.¹⁷

Here I will not, however, argue that the relationship between theatre and nation first became important as a response to the crisis. Instead, following Ioannidis, I will approach these critical engagements with the question of Greek identity as the culmination of a long interplay between Greek theatre and nation in the twentieth century. In an attempt to map contemporary trends, Grigoris Ioannidis broadly traces two related axes of development in the twentieth-century theatre in Greece: “the first responded to the demand for a Hellenocentric art that puts the spectators in spiritual contact with their ancient ancestors and revives part of the splendour of ancient Greece in modern Greece.”¹⁸ The influence of this tendency could be also traced in the official cultural policy that had been followed by the governments. The second axis that defined Greek theatre is related to the search for “Greekness” as expressed through the work of a whole generation of writers and poets (the so-called Generation of the ‘30s) which influenced the work of theatre-makers like Karolos Koun. According to Ioannidis,

the Greek theatre took shape by relying on the basis of the principles and claims of the Generation of the 1930s and its quest for an art aspiring to reveal and promote the ‘national identity’ as the façade of a profound and secular culture, which would help cultivating the true, authentic and recognisable imprint of the Greek language in European art.¹⁹

Therefore, the engagement with the concept of national identity in the transitory period of crisis through aesthetic strategies that question representation should not only be seen as a reaction to the surrounding, shattered reality. It should be also considered a response to prevailing aesthetic and ideological stances and “traditions” in theatre during the twentieth century.²⁰ From a theatre-historiographical point of view, the few years between the point of departure of this research (2006) and the rupture point of the crisis should be examined as a period of “institutionalisation” of experimental forms. Particular stagings, which took place after 2010,

¹⁷ Patsalidis and Stavrakopoulou, “Introduction,” 8.

¹⁸ Ioannidis, “Le théâtre grec,” 73.

¹⁹ Ibid. For the Generation of the ‘30s and the notion of Greekness, see 1.4.

²⁰ On the Greek theatre’s search for a Greek identity, see also Grigoris Ioannidis, “Facing Mirrors”: Contemporary Greek Theatre Productions and the Issue of Identity,” *Gramma* 22, no. 2 (2014): 75–94.

could not have been included in the programme of the National Theatre and the Festival, if it was not for this previous period of institutionalised innovation.

A definitional remark is necessary here. Many of the performances analysed here and the artistic style of some of the directors have been characterised as “postmodern” or “postdramatic”. The multiplicity of the “new” tendencies observed in Greek theatre poses the question of terminology: How can the theatre of the present be defined? Can a theatre be named “postmodern” without presupposing the chronological definition of a whole era as postmodernity? Could the aesthetics promoted by the National Theatre and the Festival be defined altogether as postmodern without accounting for broader discourses on postmodern(ism) in Greece? Given the complexity in the use of these two terms, here I will prefer the term “contemporary theatre”.

The adjective “contemporary” functions not only as a mere chronological qualifier. Following the Oxford Dictionary, “contemporary” means also i) “belonging to or occurring in the present” and ii) “following modern ideas in style or design”. Among the synonyms for the latter definition, one can find “experimental, new-fashioned, up to date”.²¹ In the field of theatre, as Patrice Pavis observes “[m]ost of the time, contemporary theatre refers to a form, an aesthetic, a practice that stems from a break, a turning point, a period or an experience that have not yet been overtaken or questioned”.²² Together with “theatre”, “writing” and “mise-en-scène”, the adjective contemporary is used in its most “commonplace sense” namely to characterise “what is being done now, or has been done for just a very short while; or indeed, quite simply, what is innovative or experimental.”²³

Of course, one should be aware of the problems inherent also in this definition. As Pavis argues, when one attributes to contemporary theatre specific characteristics such as “fragmentation, quotation, collage, document, participation”, this leads to the exclusion of all the numerous other “not very innovative” theatre performances. Pavis therefore prefers “a temporal, non-normative and non-elitist conception of contemporary works of art”.²⁴ Other theatre scholars avoid completely the term “contemporary”. For example, Fragkou and Hager

²¹ Oxford English Dictionary (Lexico), s.v. “contemporary,” accessed March 16, 2021, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/contemporary>.

²² Patrice Pavis, *The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Routledge, 2016), 41.

²³ Pavis, *Routledge Dictionary*, 40. Here Pavis also refers to Clyde Chabot, ed., *Théâtre/ Public* 184 [issue on *Théâtre contemporain: écriture textuelle, écriture scénique*] (2007).

²⁴ Pavis, *Routledge Dictionary*, 41.

prefer the notion of “now” instead of “contemporary,” approaching hence “theatre as an ongoing process operating beyond strict temporal frameworks”.²⁵

In the present research, however, the conventional use of the term “contemporary” seems to be adequate to cover a broad variety of forms and modes of performance that have been observed in Greece during the recent past. While in the very specific moment the notion of “now” may indeed gain a dynamic signification beyond temporal frameworks, my research still does not scrutinise the actual present but a very recent past, whose outcomes intermingle in a blurry way with still ongoing processes. Given also that I will analyse the work of directors who have a long presence on the independent Greek scene (e.g. Michael Marmarinos), the notion of “now” does not accurately describe the shift that I am attempting to describe. In no case do I claim that theatre in Greece does not nowadays include mainstream, commercial productions, targeting a broader audience. However, these productions reproduce older forms and directorial styles and therefore will be excluded from my analysis. Here, under “contemporary theatre”, I will include those theatrical endeavours whose form and content question previous trends and aesthetic “traditions” of theatre in Greece.

Furthermore, given that theatre reflects (or is symptomatic of) the state of societies in each epoch, the notion of contemporaneity intends also to imply this interrelation between stage and society, while avoiding the terminological maze regarding the periodisation of the present as an epoch “after” modernity. Therefore, contemporary theatre phenomena will be here associated with a series of characteristics such as the multiplicity of meaning, fragmentation of narratives and the questioning of representation and authorship that have been discussed over the past decades from a poststructuralist point of view with respect to the broader social, philosophical, cultural and artistic processes.

My approach, considering the importance of the context and conditions of production and reception has been greatly informed by Ric Knowles’ “materialist semiotics”. In his *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004), Knowles approached and analysed “theatrical performances as cultural productions which serve specific cultural and theatrical communities at particular historical moments as sites for the negotiation, transmission, and transformation of cultural values, the products of their own place and time that are nevertheless productive of social and historical reification or change”.²⁶ He explores how different identities (such as nationality, gender, sexuality, or class) can be manifested as well as questioned through

²⁵ Hager and Fragkou, “Editorial,” 141.

²⁶ Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

different performances and performance texts. He examines productions in regard to the position they take across “a continuum from radical intervention and social transformation to radical containment”. Whether one production will be closer to one end of the continuum or the other relies to some extent “on the material conditions, both theatrical and cultural, within and through which it is produced and received, conditions which function as its political unconscious, speaking through the performance text whatever its manifest content or intent”.²⁷

Bringing together theatre semiotics, cultural materialism, as well as reception theories from the perspective of cultural studies, Knowles proposes a triangular model of analysis consisted of three poles: i) performance text (including the “script, *mise en scène*, design, actors’ bodies, movement and gestures, etc. as reconstituted in discourse”), ii) conditions of production (including “actor, director, designer training and traditions, rehearsal process, working conditions, stage and backstage architecture and amenities, the historical/ cultural moment of production etc.”) and iii) conditions of reception (including “publicity/review discourse, front-of-house, auditorium, and audience amenities, neighborhood, transportation, ticket prices, historical/cultural moment of reception, etc.”).²⁸ As Knowles suggests,

each pole of the triangle is constituted by multiple and multiply coded systems of production, systems of communication, and systems of reception, all working in concert or in tension both within their own ‘corner’, and along the axes that hold the poles together and in tension with one another. ‘Meaning’ in a given performance situation – the social and cultural work done by the performance, its performativity, and its force – is the effect of all these systems and each pole of the interpretative triangle working dynamically and relationally together.²⁹

Without suggesting a closed model, Knowles’ approach lends itself well to the present analysis of the interrelation between specific performances and the institutional, cultural and historical Greek context within which they took place. As the following discussion of issues related to space, the particular historical moment of the production and cultural policies/institutional strategies will reveal, some performances were not only representative of a shift in the orientation of the National and the Festival but performatively contributed towards it.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.,19.

²⁹ Ibid.

The selection of the main case studies is by no means exhaustive but only indicative. The chosen performances attempted to cover a broad spectrum of i) topics related to the question of national identity and ii) different kinds of performance and directorial styles representative of the contemporary theatre tendencies in Greece, according also to the definition mentioned above. In terms of themes, the performances address different aspects relevant to the national identity question: the relationship to the past (ancient and recent); the importance of symbols and their (often banal) use for the reproduction of prevailing national(ist) discourses; the concept of modern Greek identity vis-à-vis the financial/social crisis; the intertwining of national (mis)conceptions and social pathologies. At the same time, the choice of performances seeks to demonstrate the different uses of various texts/plays (from strictly dramatic stagings to postdramatic performances), including ancient tragedy, Greek pastoral drama, nineteenth-century comedy and new Greek dramaturgies (including new plays, free adaptations of foreign dramas and “theatre of real people”). The scale of these productions, which I will also analyse extensively in relation to the significance of space, varies: from productions at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus to performances at the hall of the National’s neo-classicist building and site-specific productions on the new premises of the Festival in a former industrial building.

The productions were selected to reflect the diversity of artistic tendencies/styles that can be traced and to include directors/theatre groups, who while coming from different generations are currently active in Greece. In some cases, the decision to include several performances of the same director should be related to the stronger engagement of some directors with the topic of Greek identity. Furthermore, in several instances I will also include some additional comparative examples to my analysis (not necessarily presented at the National or the Festival), which either address the same issue from a different perspective or allow the charting of particular trends and affinities with regard to particular themes of interest.³⁰

For the examination of the main case studies I follow the method of performance analysis. Here the analysis will be primarily based on recordings of the productions and secondarily on personal recollections of the performances. Video recordings have been

³⁰ It will probably be noticed that in most cases the artistic directors and directors discussed here are men. This was not a choice but reflects the theatre reality in Greece. The absence of women in the key positions of institutions as well as the limited number of female directors compared to men in the mid-2000s should be considered a fact. In the period since then the number of female directors has grown significantly. It is telling, for example, that in 2019 the director Katerina Evangelatou became the first woman to take over the post of the artistic director of the Hellenic Festival. It should, however, be mentioned that during the period examined here, assistants of Loukos and Houvardas were the theatre scholar Dio Kangelari and the director Effie Theodorou, respectively.

considered a very useful tool in theatre research, although the restrictions of this medium have been extensively discussed.³¹ Taking into account that the present research covers more than a decade, the extensive use of memory protocols was not a reliable resource. Furthermore, as the focus of my analysis is primarily placed on the *mise en scène* [*Inzenierungsanalyse*] and not on the audience's experience during the performance, the recordings were considered an adequate medium for the discussion of these performances in regard to my research questions. Depending on the case, I will combine both a semiotic and phenomenological approach.³² Needless to say, my analysis offers one possible reading among many. Following Ric Knowles, the interpretations suggested here should not be understood “as evidence of what audiences-in-general felt and understood – and therefore what the performance ‘really meant’ – but as evidence of meanings and responses that specific performances in particular locations made available”.³³

Chapter Breakdown

In the next chapter I will sketch the theoretical framework and historical background of the present study. First I will offer some definitional remarks on the three key concepts of this research: “nation”, “nationalism” and “national identity”. Following that, I will discuss the current theatre scholarship on the relationship between theatre and nation. Finally, I will briefly outline the historical and cultural context, and refer to some significant moments in the history of modern Greek state and theatre with particular focus on the National Theatre and the Hellenic Festival.

Each one of the following three main chapters is structured respectively around one of the three approaches to national identity that I propose (Chapter two: dialectical mode; Chapter three: deconstructive mode; Chapter four: nation-transcending mode). Focusing exclusively on productions of the National Theatre and the Hellenic Festival I will analyse the selected case studies not only with respect to the particular mode under which I include them but also against the backdrop of the particular institutional context of their production as well as the broader contemporary theatre landscape in Greece. This framing aspires to shed light on the dynamic

³¹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theaterwissenschaft: Eine Einführung in die Grundlagen des Faches* (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2010), 77–78; Christopher Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 135; Christel Weiler and Jens Roselt, *Aufführungsanalyse: Eine Einführung*, (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2017), 60–61.

³² A combinatory approach has been favoured by many theatre scholars. See Fischer-Lichte, *Theaterwissenschaft*, 88–89; Weiler and Roselt, *Aufführungsanalyse*, 102.

³³ Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, 21.

interplay between the context of production/reception and the “performance text” in Knowles’ terms. Therefore, each subchapter about a production will be preceded by a short introductory discussion of a particular aspect of this context. In this way, I hope to initiate a “dialectical resonance” across the chapters and subchapters of the study. This notion I borrow from Jen Harvie who in her book *Staging the UK* attempts “to establish a dialectical resonance arcing across the chapters”. As she explains, the aim of her study is “to produce echoes and correspondences between its chapters, as between different rooms in an architecture, or different nations in a single state”.³⁴

³⁴ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 11.

1. Framing this study: concepts, contexts, histories

1.1 On nation, nationalism and identity

In his groundbreaking *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson defined the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”.³⁵ The ties that hold the nation together are imagined as the members of a nation do not know each other but still perceive themselves as being part of the same community. The idea of a nation as community implies the notion of “a deep, horizontal comradeship”, despite “actual inequality and exploitation” taking place in each nation. It is this feeling of “fraternity” that can explain why people are willing to kill or sacrifice their lives for a nation.³⁶ What is crucial in Anderson’s account is that, while being imagined communities, nations are not abstract constructions. Their imagined existence should not be understood in terms of “falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined”.³⁷

As an exponent of the modernist approach to nation, Anderson dates the emergence of “nation-ness” and “nationalism” around the end of the eighteenth century.³⁸ A significant role for the shaping of nationalism was a shift in the conception of time:

What has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time is, to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of “homogenous, empty time”, in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.³⁹

Anderson elaborates on this notion of simultaneity and its implications for the imagining of nations by analysing the impact of print capitalism in the self-perception of people as members of a community. The reading of newspaper (everyone alone but, at the same time, all read the same newspapers printed on the same date) constituted an exemplary social activity that revealed the existence of a community in everyday life.

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Drawing on Anderson's conception of nation, theatre scholar Jen Harvie suggests that his approach places the "lived, social effect of national change" not only at a political, institutional level, but in the realm of everyday life, which includes all the different cultural activities that people undertake. Expanding on Anderson's premise and the reading of newspapers, Harvie includes other activities including "making or watching theatre performances".⁴⁰ The Andersonian conception of simultaneity inherent in cultural activities of everyday life related to the evocation of a feeling of belonging is very important for the analysis of the effect that theatre may have towards a new definition of national identity. The process of imagining identities through cultural activities does not, however, foreshadow what kind of identities these may be. For, as Harvie rightly argues, national identities "produce and distribute power, power that can be both oppressive and enabling". By extension, national identities are also "oppressive" or "enabling" or even both at the same time.⁴¹ The notion of imagination constitutes identities "dynamic" and is therefore changeable. This change may be either positive or negative, either towards "social improvement – or decline" (e.g. xenophobia). In any case, it will be "a cultural practice that will enact both outcomes".⁴²

Anderson's emphasis on the role of the subjects who imagine challenges the dominance of objective factors that mobilise history. The parting from the necessity of somewhat restrictive objectivity through this act of imagining inserts a subjective aspect, questioning hence theories of political, economic, or social transformations. At the same time, though, one should be careful with the notion of subjectivity. As Michael Billig rightly argues, a fact that should not be overlooked is that the

[p]sychological identity, on its own, is not the driving force of history, pushing nation-states into their present shapes. National identities are forms of social life, rather than internal psychological states; as such, they are ideological creations, caught up in the historical process of nationhood.⁴³

The subjective hence aspect of the act of imagination should not be considered neutral. That is, of course, not to say that the process of imagining, identifying with, and believing in nation, namely the process of constructing (and naturalising) nationhood does not presuppose

⁴⁰ Harvie, *Staging the UK*, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴³ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Los Angeles: Sage, 1995), 24.

psychological reactions. As Billig claims, different kinds of “psychological acts” are necessary for the “reproduction of national-states”. Still, these acts and the motives lying behind them should be examined as “constituted through socio-historical processes” and not the other way around.⁴⁴

Here I am not interested in entering the long debate about the origins of nations among ethnosymbolists, primordialists (and perennialists), modernists and more recent approaches that have been often labelled as postmodernist.⁴⁵ I will also not examine whether nationalism and the building of national states precede nations or *vice versa*⁴⁶ or whether nations have been developed out of pre-existing *ethnie* – the central issue of dispute between modernists and ethnosymbolists. To put it briefly, modernists relate the phenomenon of nationalism with the political, social and economic developments associated with modernity. On the other hand, ethnosymbolists search the roots of nationalism in past ethnic formations that preceded the nation-state, focusing mainly on symbols, myths and traditions that have survived as elements of the nations.⁴⁷ Given the focus of my research, I will align with Craig Calhoun’s argument

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁵ For a concise discussion of the different stances, see Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). From an ethno-symbolist viewpoint, see Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2010). Although the inclusion of theories of nationalism under these labels is “highly arbitrary” (Özkirimli, 200), still these broad categories can be useful for a first understanding of the extremely complex field of nationalism studies. Özkirimli does not characterise his analytical approach “post-modernist” and traces three troubling issues in the adoption of the term (216–217).

⁴⁶ This is an issue of discussion even among modernists. According to Eric Hobsbawm, “[n]ations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around” (Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 10). Here he agrees with Ernest Gellner who in his *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) suggested that nationalism precedes the nations. For Gellner, however, it is necessary the existence of a certain elite that initially imposes the ideology in order to mobilise the perception of the people as nation. This is a point of Hobsbawm’s criticism to Gellner’s analysis: if one focuses on “modernization from above” (Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 11), it is not easy to equally consider the process from below, namely to understand “the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist” (ibid., 10).

⁴⁷ As the most important adherent of ethnosymbolism Anthony Smith argues, the modern era “emerges out of the complex social and ethnic formations of earlier epochs, and the different kinds of *ethnie*, which modern forces transform, but never obliterate (Anthony Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 59; emphasis in original). For Smith, *ethnie* do not survive unchangeable throughout time. Yet, if nations are considered to belong to modernity, they “are linked by the chains of memory, myth and symbol to that widespread and enduring type of community, the *ethnie*” and it is because of this connection that nations gain a “unique character” and a “profound hold over feelings and imaginations of so many people” (159). Here it should be noted that modernist approaches do not necessarily ignore the traces of pre-existent past formations. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, acknowledges the existence of proto-national bonds, namely “certain variants of feelings of collective belonging which already existed and which could operate, as it were, potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit in with modern states and nations” (*Nations and Nationalism*, 46). The way nationalism adopted and used existing symbols of prior forms of community in order to institutionalise the modern nation in the form of nation-state leads to the idea of “invention of tradition” theorised by Hobsbawm as “a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition” (Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4). For a critique of ethnosymbolism, see also Umut Özkirimli “The nation as an artichoke? A critique of ethnosymbolist interpretations of nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 3 (2003): 339–355.

that insisting on the question regarding the “pre-existing ethnicity” (even in the cases that past ethnicities may be “rightly identified”) will not help an understanding of the reasons why “so many modern movements, policies, ideologies, and conflicts are constituted within the discourse of nationalism”.⁴⁸

Without following the distinction between objective and subjective processes of identity construction and focusing on the way that nation and nationalism perpetuate in the present, here nationalism will be primarily understood as discourse, following Craig Calhoun’s and Umut Özkirimli’s approaches. In his book, *Nationalism*, Calhoun defined three “dimensions” of nationalism: i) “nationalism as discourse”, ii) “nationalism as project” (where he includes “social movements and state policies” in favour of already existent conceptions of nation (e.g. fights for independence, autonomy, protection of state) and iii) “nationalism as evaluation” (under which he categorises those ideologies that advocate the supremacy of one nation over the other). In the present analysis I will focus only on the first “dimension”. Nationalism as discourse signifies

the production of a cultural understanding and rhetoric which leads people throughout the world to think and frame their aspirations in terms of the idea of nation and national identity, and the production of particular versions of nationalist thought and language in *particular settings* and traditions.⁴⁹

Echoing Foucault, Calhoun suggests that “nationalism is a discursive formation”, namely “a way of talking, writing, and thinking about the basic units of culture, politics, and belonging that helps to constitute nations as real and powerful dimensions of social life”.⁵⁰ In a similar line of argument, acknowledging Foucault’s influence, political scientist Umut Özkirimli approaches nationalism as “a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world, a frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us”.⁵¹

Following Calhoun one should not search for the nations as entities that stand alone: they “do not exist ‘objectively’: before they exist discursively”. This is not to say, however, that the nations are not real, that they constitute “mere figments of the imagination to be dispensed with in more hard-headed analyses”.⁵² An attempt to analyse the phenomenon of

⁴⁸ Calhoun, *Nations Matter*, 44.

⁴⁹ Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 6 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰ Calhoun, *Nations Matter*, 27. See also Calhoun, *Nationalism*, 3.

⁵¹ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 206.

⁵² Calhoun, *Nations Matter*, 27.

nationalism should not be confined to fights for independence, unity, or separation; it should not be only related to “crises and overt conflicts”. On the contrary, it constitutes a core element of the collective identity as shaped in modernity and with regard to the “specific form of state”.⁵³ As such, nationalism is manifested both in “benign and reassuring” as well as “terrifying” forms, which, however, cannot be easily dissociated from each other. For, “[b]oth positive and negative manifestations of national identity and loyalty are shaped by the common discourse of nationalism”.⁵⁴

Taking Calhoun’s argument into account here I will avoid a distinction between “good” patriotism and “dangerous” nationalism. A crucial factor that should be considered are the different connotations of the terms – and especially of “nationalism” – in different languages, which do not allow its use without running the danger of misunderstanding (e.g. could the German word “Nationalismus” ever be analysed in non-negative terms?). Given these differences, a question posed is whether one should distinguish between “national” and “nationalist” discourses. In the present study, I prefer to use the term “national(ist) discourses”, hence attempting to signify the double signification of the discursive formation of nationalism.

In his analysis Özkirimli challenges nationalism’s self-evidence and stress that it has been “socially constituted” and “‘sedimented’ over time”.⁵⁵ The nationalist discourse is distinguished from other discourses through three sets of claims that it makes: “identity”, “temporal” and “spatial” ones.⁵⁶ The claims of “identity, past and territory” are presenting themselves as “the reflection of the immutable ‘essence’ of the nation”, concealing internal inconsistencies and controversies. Özkirimli hence supports an approach that will enable an understanding of the “mechanisms through which these choices present themselves as ‘natural’ and ‘inevitable’, ruling out or suppressing alternative configurations of identity, past and territory that are available at any given moment”.⁵⁷ The dominant discourse is the one that prevails over the other ones and “*consolidates its hegemony by reproducing and naturalizing itself*”.⁵⁸ It presents its claims as natural.

Nationalist discourse is legitimised through different institutions: “National identity has to be learned and internalized through socialization. Furthermore, it has to be reproduced daily

⁵³ Calhoun, *Nationalism*, 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁵ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 208.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 208–209.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* (emphasis in original).

in myriads of small ways to retain its power”.⁵⁹ The ways that nation-state implements its nationalist discourse in order to reproduce itself and secure its survival are both “institutional and informal”. The first one includes private and public institutions such as “family, schools, the workplace, the media and the army”. At the same time, the “informal” realm includes different aspects of everyday life.⁶⁰ For, the perpetuation of dominant discourses and their “auto-naturalizing” – as one may call it – circulation will not be understood as only an outcome of state power.

What is significant here is the contribution of Michael Billig, who although he did not define nationalism as discourse, explored the banal expressions of nationalism, which go beyond definitions restricted to an extreme ideology of the right. As Billig accurately points out, “[b]y being semantically restricted to small sizes and exotic colours, ‘nationalism’ becomes identified as a problem: it occurs ‘there’ on the periphery, not ‘here’ at the centre”.⁶¹ In 1995 Billig coined the term ‘banal nationalism’ in order to describe how “the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged’” in the everyday life of the citizens. He insisted that “[n]ationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in [an] established nation, is the endemic condition”. Nationalism covers a wide spectrum of “ideological means”, necessary for the reproduction of the Western nation-states. Of course, this broader use of the term “nationalism” should be careful not to equate the different expressions of nationalism (e.g. the flag waved by a separatist group and a flag outside a state building). The term “banal nationalism” intends to focus exactly on those “ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced”.⁶²

The way that people identify with the nation is deeply affected by their “discursive context” and “the pervasive narratives that surround them”.⁶³ The discourse imposed by the nation-state has to make use of all the means in the realm of everyday life in order to maintain its predominance, which should not be considered unquestionable. Nation should appear as natural, without inconsistencies and breaks – as a way of everyday reality. Therefore it “must constantly be reproduced in thousands of ways until it becomes as ordinary and quotidian as the water in which fish swim”.⁶⁴ People are brought up as members of a national culture.

⁵⁹ Umut Özkirimli, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 33.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁶¹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (2001): 868.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 871.

According to Stuart Hall, the latter constitutes another discourse: “National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ with which we can identify; they are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it”.⁶⁵ Influenced also by Foucault, Hall’s notion of discourse aligns with the definitions mentioned above. Hence, “[a] discourse is a way of talking about or representing something. It produces knowledge that shapes perceptions and practice. It is part of the way in which power operates. Therefore, it has consequences for both those who employ it and those who are ‘subjected’ to it.”⁶⁶

While, though, the role of those in power for the reproduction of one national(ist) discourse over another is unquestionable, it is still necessary to remember that the Foucauldian discourse should not be understood as a system of power implementation only from above, that is to say, from a few people who hold the power.⁶⁷ According to Foucault “[p]ower relations are rooted in the whole network of the social”.⁶⁸ Hence, they should not be only understood as fixed relations between one group holding power over another group of oppressed. Thus

discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.⁶⁹

Analysing sexism with reference to the Foucauldian view, Sara Mills suggests that in an ideological understanding of sexism, this can be understood as “an oppressive strategy employed by men to bolster their own power”, whereas when approached as discourse, “sexism *is* the site of contestation: it is both the arena where some males are ratified in their attempts to negotiate a powerful position for themselves in relation to women, but it is also the site where women can contest or collaborate with those moves”.⁷⁰ Similarly, I suggest understanding nationalism as a site of oppressive reproduction as well as a contestation of conceptions of

⁶⁵ Stuart Hall, “The Question of National Identity,” in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held et al. (Malden: Blackwell, 1996), 613.

⁶⁶ Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held et al. (Malden: Blackwell, 1996), 225.

⁶⁷ See also Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 207–08.

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 3, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (London: Penguin, 2002), 345.

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 101.

⁷⁰ Sara Mills, *Discourse*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 40 (emphasis in original).

nation based on homogeneity, exclusion and singularity. As I will argue, within this network of power relations, theatre can become the site for a bold, powerful manifestation of these contestations, de-concealing naturalised mechanisms of dominance.⁷¹

If nationalism is to be considered a discourse, then national identities are constructed within the network and power relations of discourses. In Stuart Hall's words, "[p]recisely, because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies".⁷² Associated with the different contesting discourses, identities should hence be understood neither only as non-essentialist, contingent and dynamic, nor as products of the exclusionary and unifying claims of nation(-states). Against this backdrop, I will explore how performance may unsettle these homogenising and naturalising mechanisms of national culture and suggest conceptions of national identities as resisting singularity, unity and homogeneity. Hence, I will not apply a particular definition of identity, but examine how theatre may demonstrate identity as a site of contradiction and difference within a particular context.

Understanding national identities as constructed, non-fixed and dynamic, in my analysis I will avoid the notion "nation-ness". To a great extent, my choice is related to the connotations of the related concept of "Greekness". The latter has been extensively used in the English bibliography as a translation of the Greek notion *hellenikoteta* [ελληνικότητα]. This notion, to which I will return later, carries particular connotations associated with the intellectual and artistic explorations of the so-called Generation of the '30s. Following the Oxford Dictionary, the suffix "-ness" has two meanings: i) either signifies "a state or condition" or "an instance of a state or condition", and ii) it may refer to "something in a certain state".⁷³ Combined with "nation" but even more with the adjective "Greek", to my mind both these meanings imply a notion of essentialism and fixity respectively. Based on these two meanings of "-ness", "Greekness" could hence be defined as the state of being Greek (which sounds more like a given condition – namely, a "quality"), while also implying a notion of "instance",

⁷¹ The focus on the notion of discourse does not underestimate the long historical processes that have shaped the specific social contexts. As Calhoun rightly claims, "nationalism – as a conceptual framework, a discursive formation, a rhetoric, a structure of loyalties and sentiments – takes space within history and informs history". (Calhoun, *Nations Matter*, 9). My present analysis will hence take into account the social, historical and political factors that have played a decisive role in the construction of the dominant national(ist) discourses, which subsequently demarcate certain boundaries in the definition of national identities.

⁷² Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who needs 'Identity'?", in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 4.

⁷³ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "-ness," accessed March 16, 2021, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/-ness>.

namely, a national consciousness understood in essentialist terms. To avoid misunderstandings owing to the significations of the concept in the Greek discourses, in the present study I will not use the term “Greekness” but instead the term “Greek identity”, which to my view reveals better the construction and differentiation mechanisms involved.⁷⁴

1.2 On nation and theatre

In her brief book on *Theatre and Nation* (2010), Nadine Holdsworth boldly proclaimed theatre’s ability to reflect, re-imagine but also unsettle singular conceptions of nation and national identity: “[T]heatre opens up a creative space for exploring the paradoxes, ambiguities and complexities around issues of tradition, identity, authenticity and belonging associated with the nation”.⁷⁵ As a response to unsettling times of crisis, theatre makes use of “its content, formal properties and aesthetic pleasures to generate a creative dialogue with tensions in the national fabric”. One of the ways examined by Holdsworth and particularly relevant to my present approach revolves around “the powerful role and function of national iconography”, namely, “how playwrights and theatre-makers ironically, satirically and creatively deploy national iconography to undermine and destabilise the homogeneous national image in their work”.⁷⁶

Theatre’s double role as functioning in a public “creative, communal realm” as well as contributing to the construction of nation “through the imaginative realm” turns it into an ideal site for the investigation of different conceptions of the nation.⁷⁷ Expanding on Anderson’s premise, theatre scholars such as S.E. Wilmer⁷⁸ and Jen Harvie have examined theatre’s contribution to the imaginative shaping of the nation as communal action. Theatre is treated as one of the cultural activities where the imaginative manifestation and construction of nation takes place. Nevertheless, as already suggested above, this process does not lead to fixed definitions. Jen Harvie notes, with regard also to Anderson’s premise, that national identities

⁷⁴ Here I do not suggest that all scholars using the term “Greekness” in English imply essentialist definitions. For example, Zaroulia uses the term acknowledging – in a footnote – such significations and making clear her intention to challenge such conceptions of fixed national identities (Marilena Zaroulia, “Staging ‘the Other’/Imagining ‘the Greek’: Paradigms of Greekness in the Reception of post-1956 English Drama in Post-colonels’ Athens (1974–2002)” (PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2007), 8.

⁷⁵ Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 7.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁸ S.E. Wilmer, *Theatre, Society and the Nation: Staging American Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2–3.

may be “celebratory and nationalist sometimes, but probably more often they are at least ambivalent and even self-critical”.⁷⁹

According to Harvie the fact that the people can take part in the processes of imagining implies that “authority is necessarily dispersed from the normal centres of power”. This power though, that people gain through their participation in the realm of imagination can be, at the same time, “more apparent than real”, as, for example, in the case of the neoliberal market of free choices or liberal politics.⁸⁰ The danger, however, should not be only searched for in those concealed forms of domination. For, as Zoltan Imre underlines, “authority might be dispersed, but the normal centres of power still have vital roles and functions in (re)construction and legitimization of national identities”. Therefore, identity remains a “contested site”.⁸¹ The present study focuses on this site of contestation, where official discourses are undermined and processes of homogenisation are de-concealed. My argument is that one can trace different forms and grades of critical negotiation within it.

While the above-mentioned research focuses on “counterhegemonic models of theatre”,⁸² one should not forget that theatre has been engaged with discourses on nation and nationalism not only to challenge and unsettle. Wilmer rightly reminds that “[t]heatre has often acted as a site for staging national history, folklore and myths and for formulating national ideology in many parts of the world. With its rhetorical and semiotic features, theatre has offered a particularly effective means of conveying notions of what is national and what is alien”.⁸³ This function of theatre became particularly evident in the nineteenth century vis-à-vis the sociopolitical development related to the foundation of the national theatres. In *The National Stage* (1992), one of the first studies dealing with the relationship of nation and theatre, Loren Kruger suggested that “*theatrical nationhood* manifests itself fully only in the course of the nineteenth century with the rise of mass national politics, ‘universal’ (male) suffrage, and the demand of the people for legitimate representation as protagonist on the

⁷⁹ Harvie, *Staging the UK*, 6. Harvie focuses not only on theatre performances. She comparatively examines both affirmative and critical negotiations of British identities with reference not only to theatre performances but also other performative cultural practices, such as for example, paradigms of cultural policy, festivals, or different kinds of performances (e.g. site-specific or physical theatre). Her study covers a broader period from the late 1980s until 2005.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸¹ Zoltan Imre, “Staging the Nation: Changing Concepts of a National Theatre in Europe,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2008): 77–78.

⁸² John Bull, “Introduction,” *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* (Special Issue: Nation, Nationhood and Theatre) 6, no.1 (2018): 4. Bull here relates Holdsworth’s stance to Wilmer’s focus “on counter-hegemonic and subaltern discourses” in his research on performances in the United States from the eighteenth to the twentieth century that reformulated national identity (Wilmer, *Theatre, Society and the Nation*, 3).

⁸³ Wilmer, *Theatre, Society and the Nation*, 1.

political stage”.⁸⁴ Theatre was considered “the appropriate site for nation building, as a legitimate public sphere” both by the dominant as well as critical discourses.⁸⁵

Necessary for a discussion of this complex process is an understanding of the nation’s appeal to people not only cognitively but also emotionally. In her much-acclaimed 2011 study *National Performance: Representing Quebec from EXPO to Celine Dion*, Erin Hurley explores a variety of cultural phenomena: from the performance of *Québécoisité* in the urban landscape of the 1967 Expo, to performance of dance theatre and the interweaving of affective effects and national performance manifested through the public figure of Quebecois singer Celine Dion. Hurley makes a significant distinction concerning the exploration of the relation between nation and performance, arguing for an examination of not only the “representational” but also “emotional labours”.⁸⁶ To the first category belong “representations that have a referential relation to an existing (if variable) idea of nation; they may support or contest that idea and they are decoded through analysis of signifier (the representation) and signified (the nation)”.⁸⁷ Defining this category of emotional labours, Hurley suggests “an alternate point of departure for perceiving the national, one which relies less on how performances stand in for the nation than on how performances weave shared emotional repertoires”.⁸⁸ Most importantly, what the exploration of the emotional labours allows is to examine “how one may identify *with* the nation (its values, types, etc.) without identifying *as* national”.⁸⁹ In the present study, the exploration of such underlying identification with the nation without the implication of a representational relation to a national product is useful for the examination of critical approaches in performances that may not be considered “national” but still evoke emotional responses associated with national(ist) imaginings of the past.

The relationship of theatre and nation can be scrutinised within particular national, cultural and historical contexts and in respect of the particularities of national theatre histories and “traditions”. Various collections of essays contribute to such a comparative approach, which include articles analysing case studies from different historical as well as national contexts. An excellent example is the relatively recent publication *Theatre and National*

⁸⁴ Loren Kruger, *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France, and America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 3 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁶ Erin Hurley, *National Performance: Representing Quebec from EXPO to Celine Don* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 3–4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 6. Besides the figures of “construction” and “reflection” already utilised by theatre scholars for the theoretical analysis of the relationship between performance and nation, Hurley suggests three additional figures: “simulation”, “metonymy”, and “affection” (*ibid.*).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 29 (emphasis in original).

Identity: Re-Imagining Conceptions of Nation, edited by Nadine Holdsworth.⁹⁰ Published in 2014, this collection departs from the premise that national identity and nation are still persistent conceptual categories, which, however, change depending on the different contexts.⁹¹ The different contributions are exploring how theatrical endeavours have “participated in dynamic articulations of, challenges to and reappraisals of the nation and national identity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries”.⁹² As is also the case in other collections, possible similarities that may be observed between common aspects in different cases do not imply a sense of “universalism” but encourage a comparative examination that takes into account the particularities of each case.⁹³

An overview of the relevant bibliography reveals some broad tendencies in the scholarship dealing with the relationship between nation and theatre. Not surprisingly, performance is considered a site of ambivalence and questioning of hegemonic narratives from a postcolonial perspective (as in the case of Australian theatre) or a site of (re)negotiation of identities in “small nations”, like Quebec, whose recent history has been dominated by the contestation of national(ist) discourses vis-à-vis quests for cultural diversity.⁹⁴ On the other hand, many studies can be found in English-speaking contexts. In the case of the British theatre – not surprising, given the strong tradition of dramatic theatre – the discussion extensively revolves around playwriting (although related to specific stagings, often as commissions) and the ability of the British dramatists to mirror personal and social troubles as well as the state of the nation.⁹⁵ For example, in his book *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today*, Aleks Sierz explored how during the first decade of the twenty-first century “British new writing took a wide variety of forms, and grasped the opportunity to stage an ongoing conversation, often a

⁹⁰ Besides the collection of essays Nadine Holdsworth, ed., *Theatre and National Identity: Re-Imagining Conceptions of Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2014), see also John Bull, ed., *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* (Special Issue: “Nation, Nationhood and Theatre”); Kiki Gounaridou, ed., *Staging Nationalism: Essays on Theatre and National Identity* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005); Helka Mäkinen, S. E. Wilmer and William B. Worthen, eds., *Theatre, History, and National Identities* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001); Steve Blandford, ed., *Theatre and Performance in Small Nations* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), and Jeffrey Hopes and Hélène Lecossois, eds., *Théâtre et nation*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011 (in French).

⁹¹ Nadine Holdsworth, “Introduction,” in *Theatre and National Identity*, ed. Nadine Holdsworth, 1.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁴ Indicatively see Helen Gilbert, *Sightlines: Race, Gender, and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1998). For the case of Quebec see the above-mentioned study by Erin Hurley, *National Performance* and Julia Pfahl, *Québec inszenieren: Identität, Alterität und Multikulturalität als Paradigmen im Theater von Robert Lepage* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2005).

⁹⁵ British theatre includes theatre institutions, productions and playwrights from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For a special examination of the Scottish Theatre, see Nadine Holdsworth, “Travelling Across Borders: Re-imagining the Nation and Nationalism in Contemporary Scottish Theatre,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13, no. 2 (2003): 25–39.

debate, sometimes a polemic, about who we are and what we might become”.⁹⁶ Three years earlier, Michael Billington in his *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*, a plaidoyer for the dramatic theatre as “vehicle of moral enquiry”,⁹⁷ derived from the conviction “that the health of British theatre over the past sixty years has depended heavily on its dramatists and their ability to reflect the state of the nation”.⁹⁸

This long-existing interest in the ways that playwriting reflects the current manifestations and crises of a nation that is constantly under formation should also be related to the English term “state-of-the-nation play”. According to Holdsworth, besides the national theatre, it is this type of play that directly links theatre and nation.⁹⁹ The term, as Dan Rebellato argues, lacks an “established formal definition”.¹⁰⁰ Rebellato attributes the term to a currently declined model of political theatre from the 1970s,¹⁰¹ which reflected “the nation-state in its mapping of the political onto the personal, and the general onto the particular”.¹⁰² Explaining the decline of the state-of-the-nation play, he argued that it should be examined within the particular sociopolitical context of its development and therefore as an inadequate form for the negotiation of the challenges in an age of globalisation.¹⁰³

Interestingly, the term is not translated in other theatre contexts. Holdsworth rightly expands the term and speaks about a “state-of-the-nation play or production”.¹⁰⁴ Following her definition, these are plays/productions which utilise “representations of personal events, family structures and social or political organisations as a microcosm of the nation-state to comment directly or indirectly on the ills befalling society, on key narratives of nationhood or on the state of the nation as it wrestles with changing circumstances”.¹⁰⁵

Rebellato’s argument regarding the decline of the state-of-the-nation play due to the global changes touches upon the broader discussion about the topicality of the notion of nation and identity today. From the present vantage point, theatre’s engagement with the nation and, by extension, scholarship’s interest in it in the recent years as briefly presented here reveals explicitly or implicitly the more profound acknowledgement of “the appeal and persistence of

⁹⁶ Aleks Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* (London: Methuen, 2011), 225.

⁹⁷ Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 401.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁹⁹ Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ Dan Rebellato “From the State of the Nation to Globalization: Shifting Political Agendas in Contemporary British Playwriting,” in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*, ed. Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 246.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹⁰⁴ Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 39.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

the nation and ideas of national identity as conceptual categories”¹⁰⁶ despite different traceable expressions of globalisation. For, as Jen Harvie argues,

growing awareness of global issues to do with war, climate, religions, and economies – of labor, commodities, capital, culture, and so on – have transformed “globalization” from what was once a specialist term to one with a currency that is everyday and possibly global – but not yet total, as long as nations endure as fundamental to the ways people experience the world and our place within it.¹⁰⁷

Having stressed the importance of the different national, historical as well as language contexts for the possible significations of concepts such as “nation”, it is also not surprising to observe different ways in which theatre scholars in each country deal with the relationship between theatre and nation. In the English-speaking bibliography and the British context, for example, the interest in the topic resembles in the use of the actual concepts of “nation”, “national identity” and “nationalism” in the book titles (e.g. *Theatre and Nation*, *National Performance*, *Performing Nationalism*, *Rewriting the Nation*). Interestingly enough these studies do not only investigate affirmative stagings of nation-ness, which would imply a merely negative signification of the concepts. The opposite is the case of the German bibliography, where the interest in the question of German identity in the post-war theatre appears to be either related to the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or other relevant identity issues, such as the politics of inclusion/exclusion in German society, also considering the East/West divide, migration and integration processes (e.g. post-migrant theatre). The reasons for this specificity in the German bibliography on the topic could be possibly related to the *Begriffsgeschichte* of the concepts “nation” and “nationalism”, the associations triggered because of the National Socialist past but also the particularities of the national theatre history with the absence of a central national theatre house.¹⁰⁸ A comparison between the German and the British case lies beyond the scope

¹⁰⁶ Holdsworth, “Introduction,” 1.

¹⁰⁷ Harvie, *Staging the UK*, 1–2.

¹⁰⁸ This is not to say, that many of the Staatstheater in Germany do not have a “national” function. Interesting is Peter Boenisch’s argument that “instead of representing the nation and its identity formation on stage, German theatre—as a cultural institution—in many ways is the nation. German theatre is located, far more than in other countries, at the very heart of the nation’s self-understanding as an essentially aesthetically educated ‘nation of culture’ [Kulturnation]. It is certainly not just perceived, as in the Anglo-American context, as leisurely entertainment, but instead obtains a core function in the organization of German national *jouissance*” (146). Boenisch focuses on the question of exclusion from/participation in this German “nation of culture” and the implications for the contemporary theatre practice (Peter M. Boenisch, “What Happened to our Nation of Culture? Staging the Theatre of the Other Germany,” in *Theatre and National Identity*, ed. Nadine Holdsworth, 145–160).

of this research. This short reference, however, attests to the necessity for a context-conditioned analysis of the interplay between theatre and nation.

Having said that, it is perhaps not surprising that in Greek theatre scholarship a significant interest in the question of national identity has been observed in the field of ancient drama. Experimental stagings of Greek tragedy in ancient theatres until the late 2000s, which undermined the importance of the dramatic text and proposed new ways of reading the ancient Greek drama became the topic of a long debate among scholars, critics and artists regarding contemporary theatre aesthetics and the artists' right to deconstruct classical texts.¹⁰⁹ From a historiographical point of view, national identity has been quite extensively examined within the broader context of the (theatre) history in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. The history of Greek theatre reflects the history of the newly founded Greek state, the national quests and official national(ist) discourses, as well as the conflict between modernisation/Europeanisation and "tradition". These ideological terms defined the analysis of the relationship between theatre and nation, with the focus point being placed on particular *genres* (e.g. historical drama) but also long processes such as the foundation of the Greek National Theatre and the professionalisation of theatre.¹¹⁰

On German theatre and the concept of nation, see also Max Cornish, *Performing Unification: History and Nation in German Theater after 1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

¹⁰⁹ The relevant bibliography on the topic will be discussed more extensively in 2.1.1 and 2.2.2. Indicatively see Marilena Zaroulia, "'Members of a Chorus of a Certain Tragedy': Euripides Orestes, National Theatre of Greece," in *Theatre and National Identity*, ed. Nadine Holdsworth, 200–220; Platon Mavromoustakos, "Ideological Parameters in Reactions to Performances of Ancient Drama at the End of the Twentieth Century," *The Athens Dialogues* (2010), accessed March 20, 2021, <https://uoa.academia.edu/PlatonMavromoustakos>; Mavromoustakos, "Das antike griechische Drama als nationale Frage. Kritiker- und Publikumsreaktionen auf moderne Aufführungen," in *Staging Festivity: Theater und Fest in Europa*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte und Matthias Warstat (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2009), 306–316; Savvas Patsalidis and Elizabeth Sakellaridou, "Introduction," in *(Dis)Placing Classical Greek Theatre*, ed. Savvas Patsalidis and Elizabeth Sakellaridou (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 1999), 13–24; Eleftheria Ioannidou, "Toward a National *Heterotopia*: Ancient Theaters and the Cultural Politics of Performing Ancient Drama in Modern Greece," *Comparative Drama* 44, no. 4 (2010): 385–403.

¹¹⁰ Antonis Glytzouris, "διά την διανοητικήν εξύψωσιν του λαού": *Η απόπειρα ίδρυσης Εθνικού Θεάτρου στις απαρχές της πρώτης βενιζελικής κυβέρνησης* [For the intellectual elevation of the people'; an attempt of establishing a Greek national theatre at the beginnings of the first government of Eleftherios Venizelos] (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2015); Glytzouris, *Η σκηνοθετική τέχνη στην Ελλάδα: Η ανάδυση και η εδραίωση της τέχνης του σκηνοθέτη στο νεοελληνικό θέατρο* [Stage direction in Greece: The rise and consolidation of the stage director in modern Greek theatre] (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2011), especially 419–487; Theodoros Hadjipantazis, *Ρωμαϊκός συμβολισμός: Διασταύρωση εγχώριας λαϊκής παράδοσης και ευρωπαϊκής πρωτοπορίας στο νεοελληνικό θέατρο ή Θέατρο και εθνική ταυτότητα στην Ελλάδα* [Romaic [Greek folk] symbolism: at the crossroads of folk tradition and European avant-garde in modern Greek theatre or theatre and national identity in Greece] (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2018); Hadjipantazis, *Το ελληνικό ιστορικό δράμα: Από τον 19ο στον 20ο αιώνα* [The Greek historical drama: from the 19th to the 20th century] (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2006); Hadjipantazis, *Από τον Νείλο μέχρι τον Δουνάβη: Το χρονικό της ανάπτυξης του ελληνικού επαγγελματικού θεάτρου στο ευρύτερο πλαίσιο της Ανατολικής Μεσογείου, από την ίδρυση του ανεξάρτητου κράτους ως τη Μικρασιατική Καταστροφή* [From the Nile to the Danube: The history of the development of professional Greek theatre in the broader context of the eastern Mediterranean, from the foundation of the independent Greek state to the Smyrna Catastrophe] (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2012).

Since the 2000s, a very promising shift in the interests of Greek theatre scholars (in Greek academia and abroad) can be observed, focusing on contemporary Greek theatre, new dramaturgies and aesthetic strategies with reference also to the question of identity, the current crisis and institutional politics, as well as the relation between Greek and international theatrical scene. The special issues of *Théâtre/Public*, edited by Katia Arfara; *Journal of Greek Media and Culture*, edited by Philip Hager and Marissia Fragkou and *Gramma*, edited by Anna Stavrakopoulou and Savas Patsalidis) constitute important contributions towards a mapping of the contemporary theatre landscape.¹¹¹ The present study has been informed by the research of Greek scholars (Grigoris Ioannidis, Platon Mavromoustakos, Marilena Zaroulia, Eleftheria Ioannidou and Natascha Siouzouli, to name but a few) and their stimulating accounts of different aspects of contemporary Greek theatre, including also the relationship between theatre and identity. The majority however of the scholarly contributions on these topics are essays/articles. Although the question of national identity (also during the crisis) keeps recurring in the academic and critical discourses, there is still no study focusing exclusively on this issue.¹¹² Similarly, the recent history of the National Theatre and Hellenic Festival remain to a great extent underexamined; no publication deals solely with their history in the twenty-first century.

The present study aspires to contribute to the broader international discussion regarding theatre's entanglement with the persistent notion of nation. Without proposing a new model, the suggested three modes could possibly help the charting and analysis of the different potential and restrictions within the field of critical approaches to nation. At the same time it will offer a detailed exploration of such responses to the question of identity in Greek theatre, intending also to engage in the scholarly dialogue of theatre in Greece. Furthermore, without aspiring to chart a recent institutional theatre history, the chosen perspective addresses the foreign (non-Greek speaking) reader offering an insight into some –so far not extensively discussed – aspects of recent theatre life in Greece.

¹¹¹ See also [in French] Myrto Gondicas, ed., *Auteurs dramatiques grecs d'aujourd'hui: Miroirs tragiques, fables modernes*. Les Cahiers de la Maison Antoine Vitez, no. 11 (Montreuil: éditions Théâtrales, 2014).

¹¹² On the topic of Greek identity, the only exception of an extended research is Marilena Zaroulia's unpublished dissertation, "Staging 'the Other'/Imagining 'the Greek': Paradigms of Greekness in the Reception of Post-1956 English Drama in Post-colonels' Athens (1974–2002)".

1.3 Greek (theatre) histories: pasts and presents

The question of modern Greek identity has been extensively discussed in Greek and English bibliography. From diverse standpoints and through different methodological lenses, historians, sociologists, political scientists and modern Greek scholars have attempted to tackle this persistent question. The relation to the “Other” (“West/East”) as well as the ancient past, the making of the Greek nation and nation-state (nation awakening or construction?), the sociopolitical and economic terms of development, and the (incomplete?) modernisation processes have been main topics of interest. At the same time, similar to the history of the modern Greek state, the history of theatre in Greece is full of discontinuities. These two lines of historical narrative do not develop linearly and in parallel across the centuries but present points of convergence and divergence. Theatre, found in constant exchange with society, has often expressed its response to the crucial nation-related issues discussed here. On the other hand, social and ideological parameters have often conditioned its development.

My aim here is neither to offer a detailed account of the complex sociopolitical processes that took place since the foundation of the state¹¹³ nor to chart a theatre history. Still, however, the selected performances refer (although sometimes rather allusively) to events and issues related to the national question, which are considered known to a Greek audience. In some cases, the historical background of the dramatic texts and their production history is of significant importance for understanding the critical potential that these contemporary stagings gain in the present. The issues that are addressed on stage have dominated public and academic discourse during different periods, often signifying moments of rupture in forward developments of the Greek state and triggering controversial debates not only in society but also among historians. Furthermore, a general understanding of this background may explain the centrality that is attributed to the question of national identity in Greece.

Thus, in the next section I will briefly sketch a historical framework, aspiring to help a reader who is not familiar with the history of modern Greece to gain preliminary insight into the Greek background in order to contextualise the selected performances vis-à-vis relevant socio-historical and theatrical aspects, which will be discussed later on. Within this context I will then offer an introduction to the history of the National Theatre and the Hellenic Festival.

¹¹³ There are numerous English publications on the history of Modern Greece. Indicatively see Kostas Kostis, *History's Spoiled Children: The Formation of the Modern Greek State*, trans. Jacob Moe (London: Hurst & Company, 2018); Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); John Koliopoulos and Thanos Veremis, *Modern Greece: A History Since 1821* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

Here, I intentionally adopt a conventional historiographical perspective, being aware of the danger lurking in any such selective accounting of events: to end up as a coherent narrative, which conceals ruptures, contradicting one of the main pleas of this study for discontinuity and non-homogeneity as fundamental in the perception of the past.

1.3.1 Nation-state and theatre stage

“We are all Greeks”¹¹⁴ wrote P. B. Shelley in the prologue of his lyric drama *Hellas* in autumn 1821, few months after the outbreak of the Greek Independence War against the Ottoman Occupation (1453–1821). Shelley’s drama, “written at the suggestion of the events of the moment”, reflected the European philhellenic support of that time.¹¹⁵ As is often the case, however, Shelley’s Philhellenism was derived from his Hellenism: the worship of ancient Greece was intermingled with a sense of debt, which the “rulers of the civilized world” had to pay to the “nation to which they owe their civilization, rising as it were from the ashes of their ruin”.¹¹⁶ This brief reference to Shelley, while not explaining the reasons, boldly implies the complexities of Philhellenism, especially if also considered in parallel with the foreign interventions towards the building of the nation-state. This romanticised internalisation of a familial link between the ancient past and modern present, mediated through the foreign (colonial) gaze, has been haunting identity construction processes in Greece ever since.¹¹⁷

In 1830, after almost a decade of War but also civil conflicts, the Independence of the Greek State was signed by the Great Powers (Great Britain, Russia and France) in London. A series of Protocols until 1832 defined the terms of this independence, the borders and the establishment of monarchy in Greece. The first King of Greece appointed was the underage Prince Otto, the second son of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. As Elli Skopetea underlines, it was the European diplomacy that after all decided the terms of Greece’s independence.¹¹⁸ To a great

¹¹⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Hellas,” in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 549.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 548.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 549.

¹¹⁷ Vangelis Calotychos analyses the construction of the Neohellenic identity in terms of a self-colonisation, a process of internalization of Western Hellenism and, simultaneously, resistance to it (Vangelis Calotychos, *Modern Greece: A Cultural Poetics* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 52–53). On a reading of the European Philhellenism as a form of orientalism and the implications it has for the imagining of the nation, see Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). See also the collection of essays: Dimitris Tziouvas, ed., *Re-imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹¹⁸ Elli Skopetea, *To «πρότυπο βασίλειο» και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα: Όψεις του εθνικού προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα, 1830-1880* [The “model kingdom” and the Great Idea: aspects of the national problem in Greece, 1830-1880]. (Athens: Polytypo, 1988), 21.

extent, the new state was organised upon foreign models of administration, causing conflicts between groups of former guerrilla fighters of the Independence War, other parts of the Greek-speaking population of the Ottoman Empire and diasporas, and the Bavarians. Not surprisingly, the citizens of the new state urgently required a solid national identity. Even if it may be suggested that a “community consciousness” was pre-existing, this was not enough “to inspire [the Greek citizen] respect for the law towards his free state”. Hence, the “constituent elements of ethnicity” had to be institutionalised in order to be useful for the establishment of the state¹¹⁹

Scopetea explores language, religion and education as the three already existent components of a national identity that had to be shaped during the first decades of the new kingdom. Here it is interesting to note that while nationalism as a phenomenon of modernity presupposes the secularisation of society, this does not mean that religion does not survive and remain present in the life of the national state. According to Scopetea in the early phases, depending on the viewpoint each time, the nation functioned as “guardian of religion” or vice versa.¹²⁰ Interestingly enough, Greek State and Church are not constitutively separated until today.¹²¹

The 1832 Protocol regarding the borders of the kingdom had many complex consequences. Large parts of the Greek-speaking, Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire did not become Greek citizens of the new state since many areas remained outside its borders.¹²² The troubling question which arose was who could be considered “native” in this case. In his speech before the National Assembly in 1844, the politician Ioannis Kolettis suggested that natives are not only those who live within the Greek Kingdom. In his speech,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 123. Almost immediately after the foundation of the state, the Greek Church became *Autocephalous*, namely independent and not under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who was based, under the Ottomans, in Istanbul.

¹²¹ On the complex relationship between nation-religion/state-church, indicatively, see Effi Gazi, “Revisiting religion and nationalism in nineteenth-century Greece,” in *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism and the uses of the past (1797–1986)*, ed. Roderick Beaton and David Ricks (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 95–106; Dimitris Livanios, “The Quest for Hellenism: Religion, Nationalism, and Collective Identities in Greece, 1453–1913,” in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Katerina Zacharia (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 237–69; Thalia Dragonas, “Religion in Contemporary Greece – A Modern Experience?,” in *The Greek Crisis and European Modernity*, ed. Anna Triantafyllidou et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 110–131.

¹²² In 1832, the borders of the state included only the southern part of mainland Greece; in 1864 were annexed the Ionian Islands, in 1881 the region Thessaly (middle Greece) and the Western part of Epirus. In 1912–1913 the borders expanded and included Macedonia, the rest Epirus and Crete as well as the Islands in Aegean Sea, with the exception of Dodecanese, which were annexed in 1947. Western Thrace was acquired after the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

he coined the term *Megali Idea* (Great Idea),¹²³ which was to become the “*idée fixe*”¹²⁴ of the Greeks for the next decades. To put it briefly, following Richard Clogg, “[p]roponents of this ‘Great Idea’ aspired to unite within the borders of a single state, whose capital would be Constantinople, all the areas of Greek settlement in Near East”.¹²⁵ The meaning of this term changed many times in the following decades depending on the political or diplomatic interests of each period.¹²⁶ The irredentist vision of the Greeks was to be finally terminated almost eighty years later with the Catastrophe of Smyrna in 1922.

Following its foundation, the Greek state required an official national historical narrative. In this particular case, the relationship between the present and the classic ancient past was the main issue. Narratives of revival of the modern Greeks from their ancient ancestors were undermined by the time gap between past and present. National historiography had to fill this gap and Byzantium was a crucial missing link. As historian Antonis Liakos argues, “[t]he appropriation of the Byzantine Period had major significance, since it illustrates the transition from one mental structure of historical imagination to another: from the schema of revival to one of continuity.” This shift in the perception of the past was manifested in but also to an extent caused by Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos’ *History of the Greek Nation*.¹²⁷ His narrative was constructed around the notion of Hellenism (from Ancient Hellenism to Modern Hellenism via Macedonian, Christian and Medieval Hellenism).¹²⁸

Soon the Greek nation-state required not only an official national history but institutions (such as a national theatre) that would promote its national culture. The first attempts towards a National Theatre started in 1880. King George, who had succeeded King Otto, decided the inauguration of the first national stage. Eleven years later the building of the theatre house that would host the National Theatre at St. Konstantinou Avenue was started in the centre of Athens.

¹²³ Kolettis’ speech as quoted in Konstantinos Dimaras, *Ελληνικός Ρωμαντισμός* (Athens: Ermis 1985), 405. On a discussion of the *Megali Idea* as a utopian project vis-à-vis the notion of geographical borders, see Anastasia Stouraiti and Alexander Kazamias “The Imaginary Topographies of the Megali Idea: National Territory as Utopia,” in *Spatial Conceptions of the Nation: Modernizing Geographies in Greece and Turkey*, ed. Nikiforos Diamantouros et.al. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 11–34.

¹²⁴ Andrea Papadopoulo Vretos, *De l’idée dominante des Grecs sur la conquête de Constantinople* (Athens: 1854), 4, quoted in Scopetea, *Το «πρότυπο βασίλειο»* [The “model kingdom”], 260.

¹²⁵ Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 46–47.

¹²⁶ Scopetea, *Το «πρότυπο βασίλειο»* [The “model kingdom”], 268.

¹²⁷ Antonis Liakos, “Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece: Time, Language, Space,” in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Katerina Zacharia, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 208.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 210; Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* [History of the Greek Nation], 5 volumes (Athens: Tampakis, 1925). According to Effi Gazi, for Paparrigopoulos “Modern Greece stood as a unique hybrid cultural space in which pagan and Christian components were linked in an ideally harmonious manner and the ‘ancients’ stood easily hand in hand with the Christians, producing mental and cultural artefacts of an extraordinary nature” (Effi Gazi, “Reading the Ancients: Remnants of Byzantine Controversies in the Greek National Narrative,” *Historein* 6 (2006), 146).

The Royal Theatre (but not the National) opened in 1901 and continued until 1908, when it closed for an indeterminate period.

On December 30, 1903, the Royal's performance of *Oresteia* triggered bloody riots against the translation of the ancient trilogy in modern Greek instigated by Professor Georgios Sotiriadis. Although the language of the translated text was not the vernacular demotic but “a haphazard mixture of features from various varieties of Greek”, still, for Sotiriadis, the translation of the play in modern Greek was suggesting the existence of different languages (Ancient – Modern Greek) and hence of different people.¹²⁹ The so-called *Oresteika* events had a long prehistory related to the language question of the Greek nation and nation-state. Mackridge summarises this concisely and therefore is worth quoting at length:

At the heart of the Greek language question was the desire to develop a written language that would reflect an ideal national image that would in turn embody and express the relationship of modern Greeks to the ancients. The problem was that different members of the Greek elite entertained different versions of this national image. Archaists and purists claimed that the best way to demonstrate the modern Greeks' connection with the ancients was to imitate Ancient Greek linguistic models (chiefly in vocabulary and morphology), while vernacularists (later known as demoticists) argued that they could best demonstrate their cultural descent from the ancients by writing in a variety of Greek that was as close as possible to the spoken tongue, since, they asserted, the spoken language was the outcome of the natural and continuous development of the Greek language from ancient to modern times.¹³⁰

The controversy between *katharevousa* and demotic, which had remained rather inactive since the end of the Independence War, resurged in the 1880s.¹³¹ Demotic became the dominant language in literature in the 1900s.¹³² However, *katharevousa* remained the official language of the state until 1976. Its occasional use in the following performances, evoking an ironic, critical effect, has to be understood against this backdrop.

In 1912–1913 the Balkan Wars led to the territorial expansion of Greece. The end of the Wars was followed by the “National Schism” (Ethnikos Dichasmos), a violent conflict

¹²⁹ Peter Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece: 1766–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 253.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 203.

between the newly inaugurated King Constantine and the then Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos regarding the participation of Greece in the First World War, which divided the country. One of the main factors for this conflict was related to Venizelos' intention towards a realisation of the "Great Idea".¹³³ The victory of the Allied Powers in the World War I and the latter's promises towards – the sympathetic to them – Venizelos regarding Greece's aspirations in Asia Minor, led to the arrival of the Greek troops in Smyrna in 1919, aiming at the fulfilment of the national aspirations in the area. Two years later, in September 1922 and after critical political shifts on the European diplomatic stage but also inside Turkey, the Turkish army occupied the city, killed Greek and Armenian Christian populations and burned their quarters in the city.¹³⁴ On July 24, 1923, Greece, Turkey and the Allied Powers signed the Treaty of Lausanne in Switzerland, which recognised the sovereignty of the Republic of Turkey, established the borders of Greece and guaranteed the protection of the Greek Orthodox minority in Turkey and the Muslim Territory in Thrace. Furthermore, it decided the exchange of populations between the two states based only on the criterion of the religion.¹³⁵ Arguably, the entrance of the refugees in the Greek public and cultural life was of crucial importance.¹³⁶

A decisive role in coping with the consequences of the collective traumatic experience of the Catastrophe of Smyrna played the so-called "Generation of the 1930s", who marked the cultural and intellectual life not only of the interwar period but also the whole twentieth century. This was a group of primarily writers and poets but also painters and intellectuals that in the early 1930s shaped its aesthetic quests and traits vis-à-vis previous as well as European trends and has been associated with the aforementioned concept of "Greekness". According to Dimitris Tziouvas, "[t]he Generation of the 1930s was aiming at a deeper cultural modernisation, which would not only be based on the introduction of Western-like styles but on the interaction [αλληλενέργεια] between acculturation and national self-awareness

¹³³ Interestingly enough, during the first period of Venizelos' governance (1910–1920), his vision of modernisation was identified with the irredentist quest for the "Great Idea" (Giorgos Mavrogordatos, «Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός» [Venizelism and urban modernisation], in *Βενιζελισμός και Αστικός Εκσυγχρονισμός* [Venizelism and Urban Modernisation], ed. G. Mavrogordatos, 2nd ed. (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1992), 10).

¹³⁴ Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 91–97.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹³⁶ As Veremis and Koliopoulos argue, the refugees "posed a social challenge that strained the tolerance of natives, introduced new perceptions in the closed society of the urban and rural centres, changed the face of party politics beyond recognition, gave the economy a vital transfusion of skills and labor, and affected the views of the intelligentsia as no other single source of influence had ever done before" (Koliopoulos and Veremis, *Modern Greece*, 94).

[αυτογνωσία]”.¹³⁷ To enter a dialogue with Europe they had to shape an identity and not promote a consciousness.¹³⁸ That means that they had to move beyond the notion of a “national consciousness” dominant in the self-perception of the Greek people. From this point of view, the quest for Greekness can be considered as the outcome of “an attempt to conflate identity and consciousness, aesthetic and history, invention and experience”.¹³⁹ Here the discussion regarding “Greekness” is necessary for an understanding of the centrality of the identity question in Greece over the decades – a significance that affected also the developments in the theatre field.¹⁴⁰

On October 28, 1940, Ioannis Metaxas, dictator since 1936, rejected Italy’s ultimatum and Greece entered the War. Germany occupied Greece in 1941. World War II signified a rupture in the developments of the Greek theatre during the previous decades, among which was the opening of the National Theatre and the new approaches to the stagings of ancient drama at open-air theatres. The events during the War, the National Resistance and the Civil War, and the political and ideological conflicts and changes that they triggered, introduced new quests for the theatre and its role in the society.¹⁴¹ A leading role during the following decades was played by the director Karolos Koun and his *Art Theatre (Theatro Technis)*. Inaugurated in 1942, Koun’s *Theatro Technis* became the major competitor to the National Theatre and its classicist, academic stagings. Koun introduced classical but also modern plays from the European and American repertoire to the Greek audience, while also establishing Greek playwrights.

The following decades until the fall of the colonel’s dictatorship (1967–1974) and the restoration of democracy were characterised by a predominant anti-communism. After the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, both the country and the theatre entered a new period.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Dimitris Tziouvas, *Ο Μύθος της Γενιάς του Τριάντα: νεωτερικότητα, ελληνικότητα και πολιτισμική ιδεολογία* [The Myth of the Generation of the Thirties: modernity, greekness and cultural ideology] (Athens: Polis, 2011), 61.

¹³⁸ Tziouvas draws a distinction between “consciousness” and “identity,” with the first being an “introverted, rallying and defensive mechanism of self-affirmation” whereas the notion of identity should be understood as “an extroverted, differentiating process which entails otherness and cultural dialogue” (Ibid., 288–89).

¹³⁹ Ibid., 293.

¹⁴⁰ See also Ioannidis, “Facing Mirrors,” 75–81.

¹⁴¹ Platon Mavromoustakos, *Το θέατρο στην Ελλάδα 1940–2000. Μια επισκόπηση* [Theatre in Greece 1940–2000: An overview] (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2005), 29–31. Mavromoustakos’ historical overview, by which the present study is greatly informed, is a first attempt for a theatre history that covers also the recent past, a period that tends to be usually neglected in theatre historiography. For example, in Theodoros Hadjipantazis’ history of Greek theatre published in 2017, the twenty first century covers only five pages out of the 567 pages of the book (563–567), focusing on “the directors of postmodernism”(15) (Theodoros Hadjipantazis, *Διάγραμμα Ιστορίας του Νεοελληνικού Θεάτρου* [Historical chart of modern Greek theatre] (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2017).

¹⁴² On the cultural politics during the period military dictatorship with focus on the student movements, see Kostas Kornetis, *Children of the Dictatorship: Student Resistance, Cultural Politics, and the ‘Long 1960s’ in Greece* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013). On the Greek theatre during dictatorship, see Gonda van Steen,

Metapolitefsi, the period that followed the fall of military junta, constitutes both a “rupture in the polity” as well as a “wider historical period” whose end is not easy to define.¹⁴³ Many of the issues critically discussed in the performances analysed later will be related to the context of this period. A decisive factor in the shaping of Greek society was the election of PASOK, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement under the leading figure of Andreas Papandreou. The politics of PASOK during the 1980s were characterised by modernisation with populist traits. Papandreou’s answer to the European perspective of Greece before its full entry to the EC in 1981 as promoted by Konstantinos Karamanlis (leader of the conservative party New Democracy and first Prime Minister after the fall of the junta) under the famous assertion “We belong to the West”, was “Greece for the Greeks”. The European identity of the Greeks constitutes a complex issue, whose investigation should consider not only the legitimisation reasons for Greece’s presence in the European Union but also the extent that a European identity was ultimately implemented in relation to the national as well as the Balkan identity.¹⁴⁴

In the first decade of *metapolitefsi* an interesting shift is observed. According to Effi Gazi, during the first period of PASOK, “[t]he end of *ethnikofrosyni* [= national-mindedness] is accompanied by the emergence of a ‘left-wing’ conception of the nation as part of a resistive and anti-imperialist rhetoric”, which was echoed in this slogan.¹⁴⁵ The image of a nation that is exposed to foreign political enemies as well as enemies inside the country gave its place to an “anti-right-wing, anti-imperialist nation that was constantly a victim of ‘xenokratia’ [foreign dominance]”.¹⁴⁶ Political scientist Andreas Pantazopoulos analyses PASOK’s ideology during

Stage of Emergency: Theater and Public Performance under the Greek Military Dictatorship of 1967–1974 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁴³ Vassilis Vamvakas and Panagis Panagiotopoulos, ed., «Εισαγωγή. Η Ελλάδα στη δεκαετία του ’80: Κοινωνικός εκσυγχρονισμός, πολιτικός αρχαϊσμός, πολιτισμικός πλουραλισμός» [Introduction. Greece in the 1980s: Social modernisation, political archaism and cultural pluralism], in *Η Ελλάδα στη Δεκαετία του ’80: Κοινωνικό, πολιτικό και πολιτισμικό λεξικό*, [Greece in the 1980s: Social, political and cultural dictionary], ed. Vassilis Vamvakas and Panagis Panagiotopoulos (Athens: Epikentro, 2014), xxxv.

¹⁴⁴ During the Cold War Greece was the only non-communist country on the Balkan Peninsula and since 1981 the only EU member. The Balkan identity would follow the European. According to Maria Todorova: “[l]ike all national identities, the Greeks have a hierarchy of multiple identities: a contemporary Greek would describe him or herself first as Greek, then with a local identity (Cretan, Macedonian, Epyrote, and so on), third as European, and only next as Balkan, Southern European, or Mediterranean” (Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009, 44). For the Greek perception of Balkans after the end of the Cold War, see Vangelis Calotychos, *The Balkan Prospect: Identity, Culture, and Politics in Greece after 1989* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). On the long relation between Greece and the Balkans, see indicatively Dimitris Tziouvas, ed. *Greece and the Balkans: Identities, Perceptions and the Cultural Encounters Since the Enlightenment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

¹⁴⁵ Effi Gazi, «Μεταπλάσεις της ελληνικής εθνικής ιδεολογίας και ταυτότητας στη μεταπολίτευση» [Transformations of the Greek national ideology and identity in metapolitefsi], in *Μεταπολίτευση: Η Ελλάδα στο μεταίχμιο δύο αιώνων* [Metapolitefsi: Greece on the verge of two centuries], ed. Manos Avgeridis et al. (Athens: Themelio, 2015), 260.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

the 1980s (specifically from 1981–1989) as “national-populist”.¹⁴⁷ One of the core aspects that he observes as indicative of PASOK’s ideological agenda is “the ostentatious defense of ‘national identity’, (traditions, culture, ‘soul’) as well as a denunciation of those forces that intent on neutralising its influence”.¹⁴⁸

The processes of modernisation that PASOK initiated were also reflected in the field of culture, with the state attempting to define a somehow consistent cultural policy. Mavromoustakos considers the inauguration of the Municipal Regional Theatres and the system of subsidies of theatre companies the two most decisive steps towards a change in the theatre landscape. The subsidised theatres were covering a broad spectrum of theatre companies – some of which were older whereas some only short-lived – and very different artistic approaches (from experimental to mainstream).¹⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that many of the directors that were hosted for the first time at the National Theatre during the period examined here (including the National’s artistic director Yannis Houvardas) used to direct/own some of these experimental subsidised theatres.

During the late 1980s and 1990s Greece underwent a period of excessive abundance and development, thanks to the packages of European funding. The build-up of indebtedness became even worse after the entrance of Greece to the Eurozone. The national euphoria on the eve of the new millennium culminated and was performatively manifested on different occasions during the summer of 2004: Greece not only hosted the Olympic Games, but two months earlier won, against all predictions, the European Football Championship, while a year later Greece won the Eurovision Song Contest. Effi Gazi rightly observes that all these events could be considered manifestations of a banal nationalism in Billig’s terms: “This ‘national narcissism’ seemed to be hedonic and anodyne”.¹⁵⁰ The future, nevertheless, was soon to prove this banality rather catastrophic. From today’s perspective, 2004 could be seen not only as an ironically glorious counter-pole to the crisis but as a blatant icon of many of its deeply rooted national misconceptions.

In spring 2010, Greece requested financial support. The bailout package, which was repeatedly extended over the next years, was conditioned on the implementation of severe austerity measures and control by the so-called troika (European Commission, International

¹⁴⁷ Andreas Pantazopoulos, «Για το Λαό και το Έθνος»: *Η Στιγμή Ανδρέας Παπανδρέου 1965–1989* [For People and Nation]: The Moment Andreas Papandreou 1965–1989](Athens: Polis, 2001), 31.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁴⁹ Mavromoustakos, *Το θέατρο στην Ελλάδα* [Theatre in Greece], 174–198.

¹⁵⁰ Gazi, «Μεταπλάσεις της ελληνικής εθνικής ιδεολογίας και ταυτότητας στη μεταπολίτευση» [Transformations of the Greek national ideology and identity in metapolitefsi], 257.

Monetary Fund and European Central Bank). It is open to debate whether these were the adequate measures for reforming of the Greek state and economy. However, it cannot be denied that Greece was confronted with a series of long-existing malfunctions (corruption, indebtedness and state deficit) in its incommensurably sizeable public sector. The reason for the crisis has been predominantly related to Greece's incomplete modernisation (vs tradition) and the implications this may have for its self-perception and identity.¹⁵¹

During 2015, the (self-defined) left-wing party SYRIZA twice won the national elections (in January and September) and formed a coalition government with the patriotic, right-wing party Independent Greeks (ANEK) until early 2019. Surprisingly enough, SYRIZA's rhetoric revealed the troubling interconnection between "left-wing populism" and "national-populism" as analysed by Andreas Pantazopoulos.¹⁵² The vision of a movement of solidarity that would mobilise people from all over Europe seemed to have given its place to a confused legitimisation of consolidating notions of *patria*.

1.3.2 Performing nation on/as "national stage"

In the twenty-first century, National Theatres try to keep pace with the constant socioeconomic and cultural changes worldwide. The question that arises concerns their role as institutions with a national agenda, functioning, however, at the same time as agents in transnational cultural networks. National stages are forced by the global and European reality to redefine their objectives. In 2008 Dragan Klaić suggested that "the term National Theatre has become a rather arbitrary, almost meaningless label, an anachronistic, exhausted ideological construct."¹⁵³ It is only if National Theatres come to terms with the "withering of the nation-state" and acknowledges "their own capacity to enhance intercultural competence over national tradition"

¹⁵¹ For an introduction to these issues, see Anna Triantafyllidou, Ruby Gropas and Hara Kouki, "Introduction: is Greece a Modern European Country?," in *The Greek Crisis and European Modernity*, ed. Anna Triantafyllidou, et al., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–24.

¹⁵² Pantazopoulos examines the SYRIZA phenomenon suggesting that "[n]ationalism and conspiracism are inherent to left-wing populism: they constitute its 'political' arm; it is through them that the social-populism of protest (the defense of 'the poor'/'the modest'/'the many' against / 'the rich'/'the elite'/'the few') is politicized in a vertical, antipolitical way ('decisionism') not only by defining the 'enemy' but also by highlighting and perverting another 'essential' feature of 'politics' ('sovereignty,' 'power', 'the state'), which it turns into a basic means of resistance, using as its vehicle an imaginarily unified national-social body, 'the people'" (Andreas Pantazopoulos, "The National-Populist Illusion as a "Pathology" of Politics: The Greek Case and Beyond," August 11, 2016, *Telospress*, accessed March 17, 2021, <http://www.telospress.com/the-national-populist-illusion-as-a-pathology-of-politics-the-greek-case-and-beyond/>).

¹⁵³ Dragan Klaić, "National Theatres Undermined by the Withering of the Nation-State," in *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, ed. S.E. Wilmer, 220.

that they will be able to “become a force shaping a notion of European citizenship, especially in the growing practice of bilateral and multilateral international co-productions”.¹⁵⁴

While one may agree with Klaic regarding the necessary shift in the orientation of the National Theatres, still their contemporary role should not be examined only in regard to a national-transnational axis but also against their particular history and – a still traceable although often banally expressed – inherent entanglement with the nation-state. The terms of the foundation of each National Theatre presented significant differences. According to S. E. Wilmer “each National Theatre was unique in that it reflected a specific originating moment, location, set of goals, language, history, and mythology, as well as the idiosyncratic beliefs of its individual founding members”.¹⁵⁵ The political, historical and cultural (e.g. language) conditions play a decisive role in the shaping of the national theatres’ identity, although the latter does not remain fixed during the centuries.¹⁵⁶ Taking that into account and while focusing on the Greek case, here I will argue that the National Theatre in order to be able to participate in an intercultural and transnational dialogue should first become *critically* national.

Which theatre however can be legitimised to address a nation? In 1992 Loren Kruger challenged the natural conception of an audience as national. She suggested that “[t]he idea of representing the nation in the theatre, of summoning a representative audience that will in turn recognise itself as nation on stage, offers a compelling if ambiguous image of national unity, less as an indisputable fact than as an object of speculation”.¹⁵⁷ The question posed here is not only who is addressed as national audience of a National Theatre house but also which theatre is “national”. Following Janelle Reinelt, it could be suggested that it is not only the National Theatre as an institution with its house that can be considered national in that sense:

[W]hether the theatre in question is an architectural structure specifically legitimated as a “National” cultural house, or whether it is produced by alternative theatre groups receiving no governmental support at all, both theatres can pretend that a nation exists.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 227.

¹⁵⁵ S.E. Wilmer, “The Development of National Theatres in Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, ed. S.E. Wilmer, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Interestingly enough transnational parameters have been related to the histories of the National Theatre since their beginning. According to Kruger, in the first attempts towards the foundation of National Theatres transnational aspects such as the competition over predominance of imperial languages (for example French vs. German) could already be traced (Loren Kruger, “The National Stage and the Naturalized House: (Trans)National Legitimation in Modern Europe,” in *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, ed. S.E. Wilmer, 35).

¹⁵⁷ Loren Kruger, *The National Stage*, 3.

This pretence becomes performative when the assembled audience is addressed – or even implied – as a national citizenry.¹⁵⁸

Informed by Reinelt's broader definition of a "national" theatre, I will also examine the Hellenic Festival as having pursued a "national" agenda.¹⁵⁹

Arguably, a transformative potential can be ascribed to the theatre festivals, if the latter are to be examined in respect to the interrelation between "theatre" and "fest". Following Matthias Warstat and Erika Fischer-Lichte, theatre performances as an integral part of fests do not necessarily contribute to the affirmation of collective identities; on the contrary, they may "question outdated identities and attachments and open up a site for reflection, from which a transformation of identity and an emancipation from traditional attachments may emerge".¹⁶⁰ Yet, at the same time, as Natascha Siouzouli and Eleftheria Ioannidou rightly observe, due to their institutional context, festivals are controlled both in temporal and spatial terms. Therefore, because of their regulated framework, theatre festivals can be understood as "cultural processes that can decisively forge national and political communities". The choice of space is of significant importance for this regulatory process and the effect it may have on the collective reception of the performance by the audience, not only in aesthetic but also in political/discursive terms.¹⁶¹ As I will also discuss later, in the case of the Epidaurus Festival, the institutional power over the particular theatre space should be related to the national connotations of the ancient theatre.

Following Ric Knowles, the international festivals nowadays can be analysed "as manifestations of a theatrical version of late-capitalist globalization, postmodern marketplaces

¹⁵⁸ Janelle Reinelt, "The Role of National Theatres in an Age of Globalization," in *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, ed. S.E. Wilmer, 228.

¹⁵⁹ Here it should be noted that the institutional frame of the National Theatre is similar to that of the State Theatre of Northern Greece, founded in 1960. Still, however, the latter's name and history point to the lack of such strong national connotations as in the case of the National Theatre. It is interesting for example that the State Theatre participated at the Epidaurus Festival for the first time after 1975 and the break of National's monopoly at the ancient theatre by the Art Theatre of Karolos Koun). Given that not every institutional theatre is necessarily national and that, as has been suggested, "national" may be considered –under certain conditions– also an institution like a festival, here I will not include the State Theatre of Northern Greece in my analysis. An explanation of why the State Theatre is not considered equally "National" can be found in the fact that the National Theatre in Athens has been discussed as the fulfilment of the quest for a national stage. This may also explain to a great extent the State Theatre's programming choices, which in the 1980s had already hosted rather experimental directors, like Yannis Houvardas for example.

¹⁶⁰ Erika Fischer-Lichte and Matthias Warstat, "Einleitung: Staging Festivity. Theater und Fest in Europa," in *Staging Festivity: Theater und Fest in Europa*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte and Matthias Warstat (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2009), 13.

¹⁶¹ Eleftheria Ioannidou and Natascha Siouzouli, "Crisis, Ruptures and the Rapture of an Imperceptible Aesthetics: A Recent History of the Hellenic Festival," *Gramma* 22, no. 2 (2014): 111.

for the exchange, not so much of culture as of cultural *capital*".¹⁶² Here, nevertheless, I will argue that during the examined period and despite any innovative changes, the Hellenic Festival did not become international in Ric Knowles' terms, namely, a site where "the 'Culture' of nations" is presented to "a world and audience that is thereby constructed as an international market for cultural and other 'industries'".¹⁶³ Having said that, the 2006 alignment of the Hellenic Festival with international trends in theatre practice and the attempt for re-orientation may be better understood as still targeted "inwards", inviting a (monolingual) Greek audience to broaden the (ideologically loaded) horizon of its expectations.¹⁶⁴

1.3.2.1 National Theatre

In January 2016, the National Theatre of Greece announced the cancellation of the final four shows of the production *Nash's Equilibrium* at the Experimental Stage of the National Theatre of Greece. Using different texts as material, among which were the records from the trial of the terrorist group 17th November and the book of one of its members, the performance was "about the codes of value, justice and terrorism in recent Greek history".¹⁶⁵ An interview of the imprisoned terrorist after the beginning of the performances triggered a series of reactions from the conservative party New Democracy, members of the victims' families, the Embassy of the USA in Greece and a part of the media, which requested this cancellation. Since 1974, this was the first time that censorship was exercised on the National Theatre. The counter-protests in front of the theatre – an optimistic sign of a vivid relationship between theatre and society – led to the last-minute permission of the final performance, without tickets and followed by a public discussion between audience, the directors of the Experimental Stage, and the actors.¹⁶⁶

Although I do not consider this unlucky incident representative of the vision of the artistic directors of both the National and the Experimental Stage,¹⁶⁷ it still seems to be

¹⁶² Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, 181 (emphasis in original).

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ As I will suggest in 4.2.1, the audience in both Festivals can be analysed as "festival participant" in Henri Schoenmakers' terms, who distinguishes this term from the "spectator" and the "theatergoer" (Henri Schoenmakers, "Festivals, Theatrical Events and Communicative Interactions," in *Festivalizing!: Theatrical Events, Politics and Culture*, ed. Temple Hauptfleisch et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 31).

¹⁶⁵ *Nash's Equilibrium*, National Theatre, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.n-t.gr/en/events/miadiki/>.

¹⁶⁶ For a detailed account of the case, see Spyros Kakouriotis, «Ισορροπία του Nash» [The Nash equilibrium], in *Λεξικό Λογοκρισίας στην Ελλάδα: Καχεκτική δημοκρατία, δικτατορία, μεταπολίτευση* [Dictionary of censorship in Greece: Crippled democracy, dictatorship, metapolitefsi], ed. Penelope Petsini and Dimitris Christopoulos (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2018), 367–373.

¹⁶⁷ In Spring 2015 new artistic director of the National Theatre was appointed the director Stathis Livathinos. In November 2015 the Experimental Stage opened again under the artistic direction of Anestis Azas and Prodromos Tsiniokoris.

indicative of the expectations and restrictions associated with this particular theatre's subsidised and national status. Arguably, in the twenty-first century, the interrelation of nation-state and theatre in the case of a National Theatre still defines the latter's identity. Even nowadays, the National Theatre has to find balance between "political pressures, ideological pretensions and artistic quests".¹⁶⁸

The National Theatre has been enjoying a special status as the first national stage of the country, fulfilling the expectation regarding many National Theatres in Wilmer's words, to be the "apex in production standards and artistic creativity within the country".¹⁶⁹ The issue of public subsidy has been often the argument that has legitimised people who do not even visit the National Theatre to discuss its artistic choices and policy. At the same time, due to this constitutive relationship between nation, state and theatre, the national stages resemble shifting discourses of national identity as well as broader historic-political processes. This is also the case of the National Theatre of Greece, whose long inconsistent history of foundation reflected structural malfunctions of the Greek state and syndromes of the Greek society. Discussing the post-1974 history of the National Theatre, Platon Mavromoustakos insightfully argues that "all these elements, which we include in the pathology determining the country's development after 1974, are those which are recognized and depicted in the history of our National Theatre, with backpadding and leaps, in a course often contradictory and almost always inconsistent".¹⁷⁰

Funded by the Ministry of Culture, the National Theatre became a non-profit organisation in 1994.¹⁷¹ The role of the National Theatre is clearly defined by law: "The aim of the National Theatre is the promotion through the art of theatre of the intellectual cultivation of the people and the protection of the national cultural identity". This goal is defined in a series of seven tasks. First comes the "study, research, staging and dissemination of ancient drama in Greece and abroad". The second task is the support and dissemination of the "Greek and particularly modern Greek dramaturgy". The promotion of the world dramaturgy is the third aim, while the fourth paragraph encourages "the research, exploration of and experimentation

¹⁶⁸ Evdokia Delipetrou, «Θέατρο, θεσμοί και αυτολογοκρισία: Παραδείγματα από το Εθνικό Θέατρο» [Theatre, institutions and self-censorship: examples from the National Theatre], in *Η Λογοκρισία στην Ελλάδα* [Censorship in Greece], ed. Penelope Petsini and Dimitris Christopoulos (Athens: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2016), 26.

¹⁶⁹ S.E. Wilmer, "Introduction," in *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, ed. S.E. Wilmer, 1.

¹⁷⁰ Platon Mavromoustakos, «Εθνικό Θέατρο 1974-2014: Πρώτες σημειώσεις για την ανάγνωση μιας αντιφατικής πορείας από τη Μεταπολίτευση ως την κρίση» [National Theatre 1974-2014: Initial notes on the understanding of a contradictory course from the metapolitefsi to the crisis], in *Θέατρο και Δημοκρατία* [Theatre and Democracy], ed. Kaiti Diamantakou and Alexia Altouva (Athens: Department of Theatre Studies – University of Athens, 2018), 111.

¹⁷¹ National Theatre, "Legal Entity," accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.n-t.gr/en/knownus/legalentity>.

with new forms of theatre and scenic expression”.¹⁷² This sequence is representative of the orientation of the National Theatre. As I will argue, during Houvardas’ tenure, the fourth goal gained greater attention.

The path until the foundation of the National Theatre in 1930 had been long and reflected ideological fermentation in Greek society as well as the national aspirations associated with a national stage. The first extended discussions regarding the need for the National Theatre was observed in the 1870s, almost forty years after the foundation of the Greek state. The quest for a National Theatre at that time cannot be examined separately from the irredentist vision of the above-mentioned “Great Idea”. As theatre historian Theodoros Hadjipantazis notes, theatre was, on the one hand, a means for the transmission of Greek claims through performances in the Greek-populated areas outside the country. At the same time, the future National Theatre would be responsible for the protection of the Greek theatre’s national identity and tradition, which were endangered by unquestionable adoption of foreign influences.¹⁷³

An important station in the prehistory of the National Theatre is the foundation of the Royal Theatre in 1901. In 1884 King Georgios announced his intention to construct a national stage. Seven years later the building of the theatre in a plot bought with money from Greek benefactors from abroad began. In November 1900, the Royal Theatre opened its doors.¹⁷⁴ For the next eight years, the Royal Theatre mainly presented a classic repertoire. According to Dimitris Spathis, compared retrospectively to the opening of the National Theatre in 1932, the inauguration of the Royal Theatre seemed in artistic terms more “an attempt of forced acceleration of a slow process of development”.¹⁷⁵

Between the closing of the Royal Theatre in 1908 and the opening of the National Theatre more than twenty years later, a few further attempts took place. Theatre historian Antonis Glytzouris focuses on another try at the beginning of the Governance of Eleftherios Venizelos (1910–1911). In the winter of this year, the expectations for the foundation of a National Theatre, particularly from the side of the demoticists were again high owing to the

¹⁷² *Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως* [Government Gazette], no. 233 (27 December 1994), Νόμος 2273, Άρθρο 1 [Act 2273, 1§2], 4845, accessed March 22, 2021, <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-theatra-kinimatografoi/n-2273-1994.html>.

¹⁷³ Theodoros Hadjipantazis, *Από του Νείλου μέχρι του Δουνάβειως* [From the Nile to the Danube] (vol.1), 59.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 60–66.

¹⁷⁵ Dimitris Spathis, “Εθνικό Θέατρο: Η ολοκλήρωση μιας πορείας” [National Theatre: The conclusion of a course], in *Εθνικό Θέατρο: Τα πρώτα χρόνια (1930–1941)* [National Theatre: The First Years (1930–1941)] (Athens: MIET, 2013), 15.

triumphal election of Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, who was considered supportive to their plans. In the end, however, this attempt also failed.¹⁷⁶

The questions that arose in the public debate during this period were indicative of the broader problematisation regarding the identity of the National Theatre (programming choices, target audience, artistic style) and whether this theatre should be “national or artistic”.¹⁷⁷ Glytzouris convincingly argues that at this particular historical conjuncture the discussion regarding the foundation of an artistic theatre turned into an attempt to found a national theatre.¹⁷⁸ Noticeable here is the incompatibility between the delayed planning of a national theatre in Greece and the artistic terms of the developments in Europe, where “the Schillerian quests for the education of the people and the – of Kantian origin – autonomy of the aesthetic sphere had given their place, a long time ago, to the social art of the realists and aestheticism”.¹⁷⁹

Suggestive of the discussion in the 1920s was besides the artistic vs national debate, also the distinction between national vs state theatre. Indicative was the argument in 1928 of Fotos Politis, who later became the first permanent director of the National Theatre (1932–1934). In an article, he was advocating the foundation of a “state theatre” suggesting that the lack of Greek dramaturgy and Greek playwrights whose work could shape a national dramaturgical tradition did not allow the founding of a National Theatre.¹⁸⁰

The National Theatre was finally founded in 1930. With the same act of parliament the inauguration of a National Theatre Drama School was also signed.¹⁸¹ The National Theatre finally opened its doors in March 1932 after lengthy negotiations regarding the persons who would be appointed and the ensemble of the new theatre. A further issue was whether the repertoire should be mainly Greek or include plays from world dramaturgy, a question inevitably related to the National’s artistic orientation. In any case, the National Theatre, which

¹⁷⁶ Antonis Glytzouris, “διὰ την διανοητικήν εξύψωσιν του λαού” [‘For the Intellectual Elevation of the People’], 9–46.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 77. The terms “national” vs “artistic” were used by the journalist and novelist/playwright Grigorios Xenopoulos. The two terms reflect the debate according to which the national should be confined to the Greek dramaturgy or include both foreign and Greek plays according to their quality. For Xenopoulos there should not be a differentiation between national and artistic (ibid., 75–76).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 74.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 126.

¹⁸⁰ Fotos Politis, «Περί το ‘κρατικών’ Θεάτρων» [About a state Theatre] quoted in Konstantina Stamatogiannaki, “Θέατρον Επίσημον, μόνιμον, επιχορηγούμενον από το δημόσιον’: Η πορεία προς την ίδρυση του Εθνικού Θεάτρου” [‘Theatre official, permanent, subsidized’: the course towards the foundation of the National Theatre] in *Εθνικό Θέατρο: Τα πρώτα χρόνια (1930–1941)* [National Theatre: The First Years (1930–1941)] (Athens: MIET, 2013), 40–41.

¹⁸¹ On the history of the Drama School until the 2000s, see Lydia Sapounaki-Drakaki and Maria Louisa Tzogia-Moatsou, *Η Δραματική Σχολή του Εθνικού Θεάτρου* [The Drama School of National Theatre] (Athens: MIET, 2011).

from the beginning had to function as “an official, comprehensive and compact entity” in interwar Greece, became a point of reference for both its supporters and opponents.¹⁸²

During the 1940s the National Theatre reached an adequate level in terms of ensemble and infrastructure, presenting large productions of plays mainly from the world repertoire.¹⁸³ The very close relationship between the National Theatre and staging of ancient drama was established in the after-war period thanks to the leading role of director Dimitris Rontiris. Being one of the firm advocates of the performing of ancient drama at ancient theatres, Rontiris played a significant role towards the consolidation of this scenic approach, which became a key point not only in the agenda of the National Theatre but also in the general cultural policy of that time, that also led to the foundation of the Epidaurus Festival. As Mavromoustakos notes, the argument in favour of performances at ancient theatres became the fundament of a predominant tradition in Greek theatre practice. At the same time, Rontiris’ personal take on ancient drama defined a distinguishable style that dominated the National’s performances and was related to the special position that the ancient drama gained for the Greek spectators.¹⁸⁴

After the end of the Civil War and during the 1950s the programming choices of the National Theatre were quite predictable (for example, Shakespeare, Goethe, Ibsen, Pirandello, ancient Greek drama) without including many new voices of the contemporary post-war dramaturgy.¹⁸⁵ Because of the high quality of the productions of a “serious repertoire”, however, the National enjoyed broad acceptance, also contributing to the formation of other art theatre ensembles, which presented themselves in juxtaposition to the National.¹⁸⁶ During the dictatorship, the role that has been attributed to the National Theatre to reinforce the

¹⁸² Konstantina Stamatogiannaki, “‘Θέατρον Επίσημον’ [‘Theatre Official’], 63. The publication of MIET includes a detailed register of the performances and rich photographic material of the first eleven years of the National Theatre.

¹⁸³ Mavromoustakos, *Το θέατρο στην Ελλάδα* [Theatre in Greece], 56.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 58–61. In her book *Η Αρχαία Ελληνική Τραγωδία στο Εθνικό Θέατρο* [Ancient Greek Tragedy at National Theatre] (Athens: Nefeli, 2010), Katerina Arvaniti offers a detailed description of the takes on tragedy of three major directors associated with the national stage: Thomas Oikonomou (at the Royal Theatre), Fotos Politis and Dimitris Rontiris at the National Theatre. Despite the charting of rich material, the person-oriented analysis which acknowledges a directorial tradition of the National Theatre constitutes a crucial methodological weakness implying a coherent linear development, as also noted by the theatre historian Antonis Glytzouris in his negative review of the book (Antonis Glytzouris, review of *Η Αρχαία Ελληνική Τραγωδία στο Εθνικό Θέατρο* [Ancient Greek Tragedy at National Theatre], by Katerina Arvaniti, *σκηνή*, no. 2 (2011):112, accessed March 13, 2021, <http://ejournals.lib.auth.gr/skene/article/view/277/264>). On a comparative analysis of Rontiris’ and Koun’s stagings of ancient tragedy, see Michaela Antoniou, “Performing Ancient Greek Tragedy in Twentieth-Century Greece: Dimitris Rontiris and Karolos Koun,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 33, no.1 (2017): 31–46.

¹⁸⁵ A detailed listing of the performances can be found in the special publication *60 Χρόνια Εθνικό Θέατρο: 1932–1992* [60 Years National Theatre: 1932–1992] (Athens: Kedros, 1992).

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

patriotic consciousness of the people will be put in the service of the colonels' nationalist claims under the control of the state apparatus.¹⁸⁷

In his succinct overview of the post-dictatorship history of the National Theatre in 2014, Platon Mavromoustakos distinguishes four periods: i) 1974–1985: “Towards the restoration of justice”, ii) 1985–1995: “Towards a change of the theatre landscape”, iii) 1995–2007: “Towards the establishment of hegemony” and iv) 2007–2012: “Towards the stakes of the new era”. After the fall of the dictatorship, the National Theatre has to fight against its conservative character. Hence, in the first years of the post-junta era, the perception of the National Theatre is divided, with the arguments of supporters and critics being not only culturally but also ideologically or directly political. The following effort to restore justice is twofold: first, it is related to the return or invitation of directors, authors and actors who had been excluded due to ideological reasons from the National's team; second refers to the opening of Epidaurus beyond the exclusive use of the National Theatre. In the second period (1985–1995), the National Theatre had now to redefine its orientation since its educational and cultural role seemed to be undertaken by other theatre organisations and companies. In the following period (1995–2007) the National Theatre gains its lost dominance (also filling the gap after Karolos Koun's death) thanks to its infrastructural and funding advantages but also a strategic evocation of the past glory that the National had enjoyed. The programme includes different kinds of plays at different spaces, addressing a broad audience with rather diverse tastes. Despite possible critique of the broad variety of the programming choices, the National Theatre achieved becoming dominant in the Greek theatre landscape.¹⁸⁸

In the present study, I focus on the last period of Mavromoustakos' categorisation.¹⁸⁹ In 2007, after the death of Nikos Kourkoulos, who had been National's Artistic Director since 1995, Yannis Houvardas¹⁹⁰ was appointed to the post. Under Kourkoulos' administration, the National presented an uptrend in ticket sales, without however addressing (or shaping) a particular audience. During the 1990s and 2000s, Houvardas and his Theatre of Notos (Amore) had been identified with the “avant-garde” scene of the Greek theatre.¹⁹¹ Subsidised by the

¹⁸⁷ Mavromoustakos, «Εθνικό Θέατρο 1974–2014» [National Theatre 1974–2014], 104.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 105–109.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 109–111.

¹⁹⁰ Yannis Houvardas is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, London. From 1977 until 1991 he worked as a free-lunch director at different theatres in Greece and abroad (among others: National Theatre of Sweden; National Theatre Norway; Theater tri-bühne Stuttgart; Staatstheater Wiesbaden). Since 1999 he has also been staging operas (Greek National Opera, Oper Göteborg; Staatsoper Stuttgart; Royal Opera Copenhagen). After the end of his post at the National he continued as free-lunch director in Greece and abroad (Münchner Residenztheater; Theater Neumarkt Schweiz, National Theatre Oslo, Akademietheater in Wien and elsewhere).

¹⁹¹ Theatre of Notos was founded by Houvardas in 1991 and was staged in the former cinema Amore, which –

Ministry of Culture and presenting a clear programming strategy, Amore introduced contemporary foreign playwrights and Greek plays to Greek audiences, while also presenting new stagings of classic plays. It offered new artists an open creative space for experimentation. Building up a network of permanent collaborators, Amore became a hallmark of the non-commercial, Athenian “fringe” scene.

Houvardas’ first year choices at the National signified a radical beginning. Gradually the National’s programme gained the necessary balance that was required in such a theatre organisation. The need for ticket high-sales and a positive response of the audience had to be combined with a quest for artistic innovation. The National was targeting a spectator open to new things, without excluding particular audiences. It appeared ready to challenge previous choices and “traditions” without, however, being limited to a repetition of Amore. A rich pluralism characterised the programming choices. In October 2009, the renovated building of the National Theatre at St. Konstantinou Str (Ziller building) opened again after eight years of refurbishment. The choice of Dimitris Papaioannou’s performance *Nowhere* was telling of the orientation of the Theatre: a new approach to theatre space (and aesthetics) interwoven with a “return” to a neoclassic building identified with the long history of the National.¹⁹² Broadly mapping the programme during the period 2008–2013, one could trace the following areas:

- i) stagings of classic plays from the Greek but also world dramaturgy (e.g. Racine’s *Andromache*, dir. D. Mavrikios, which was the Nationals’ first production of non-ancient drama at the ancient theatre of Epidauros)
- ii) productions of ancient drama (among others, *Herakles* analysed here or the much-discussed *Persians*, directed by Dimitri Gotscheff in 2009)
- iii) contemporary Greek plays, including also commissions of new plays and adaptations of literary works (for example, *M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A* [2009] and *Austras or Couch grass* [2011] by Lena Kitsopoulou; *Sabine X* [2008] by Manolis Tsipos)
- iv) contemporary plays from the world dramaturgy often in Greek premiere (e.g. *The Ugly One* by Marius von Mayenburg, presented in 2008, a year after its world premiere at the Schaubühne Berlin)

after being used as an auto repair shop – had been turned into theatre. From 2000 and until his post at the National, Houvardas was co-directing the theatre together with Thomas Moschopoulos, who remained at the head of *Amore* until its closure in 2008.

¹⁹² The way that the National Theatre reflected on its own role and identity will be discussed in detail later with regard to the two-year period “What is our motherland” (see 2.3.1).

- v) new dramaturgies; performance; devised theatre; dance theatre (e.g. Karazissis' *The Dance of the Solitary Heart* (see 4.2.2); Blitz's *Guns; guns; guns*, Konstantinos Rigos' *Titanic: electro dance tragedy*)
- vi) children's theatre

Although some of the directors had presented their work at the National before, the number of the new collaborations was surprisingly high. This was also visible in the first tenure when the new collaborations were more than double compared to those who had already worked at the National in the past. Among these new “entries” were both directors/actors from an older generation (e.g. Michael Marmarinos, Akillas Karazissis) as well as many younger directors and groups (indicatively only: Anestis Azas, the group Blitz).¹⁹³ The National hosted a couple of foreign productions (*Hamletmachine*, dir. D. Gotscheff – Deutsches Theater; *Die Nacht kurz vor den Wäldern*, dir. M. Jochmann – Thalia Theater Hamburg), while it also travelled with its productions abroad. It also invited foreign directors to work with the National's ensemble (e.g. Bob Wilson, Dimitri Gotscheff). Furthermore, its entrance to the “Union of the Theatres of Europe” in 2009 was another sign of alignment with the developments in European theatre.

In early 2013, Houvardas announced that he has no intention to continue at the National after his second tenure. The Theatre was presenting a positive course, having surplus, no debts and savings in the bank, while the average occupancy in all the stages was 82%.¹⁹⁴ Despite this success, during the last years, the National had also encountered difficulties, which were the outcomes of the political instability in the country amid the crisis (cutbacks; frequent changes of Ministers of Culture due to the new governments, which lead to delays such as non-appointment of the board of the theatre; delays in subsidy). Still, although the crisis doubtlessly worsened the problems, it should not be assumed that the previous years were without obstacles (e.g. delays in subsidy, in the renovation of Ziller's building).¹⁹⁵

After the end of Houvardas' administration and with great delay, a new artistic director of the National Theatre was appointed – Sotiris Hatzakis. Having been the artistic director of the State Theatre of Northern Greece, Hatzakis was known for his strong views on “Greekness”, folk tradition and a theatre for the “people”, which implied a rather different

¹⁹³ See also 3.2.1.

¹⁹⁴ Olga Sella, «Γιάννης Χουβαρδάς: το τέλος μιας εποχής» [Yannis Houvardas: the End of an Era], *Kathimerini*, May 15, 2013, March 9, 2021, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/70141/article/proswpa/proskhnio/giannhs-xoyvardas-to-telos-mias-epoxhs>.

¹⁹⁵ It would be interesting for future research to examine the effect that the structural malfunctions and inconsistency (related to the political interests of each period) that characterizes the Greek public sector has been having throughout the decades upon the Theatre's function.

aesthetic and programming approach to the idea of a national stage. This shift revealed a problem not only in Greek institutional theatre but also the public sector in general: the “short-lived” memory of institutions. In 2015, the newly appointed Minister of Culture asked for Hatzakis’ resignation. The reasons and conflicts related to this decision do not belong to the scope of my analysis. However, once again, it became visible that the intermingling between politics, the public sector and the National Theatre was shifting the attention from artistic debates and the need for a consistent cultural policy to the level of micro-politics.

1.3.2.2 Hellenic Festival

In December 2015, the artistic director Yorgos Loukos¹⁹⁶ was fired four months before the end of his tenure amid an investigation into the finances of the Festival. His hasty layoff under the suspicion of mismanagement during the first years of his tenure, which ended without any concluded investigation and evidence, made many believe that the decision was related to particular political interests. More than a hundred artists supported Loukos with an open letter.¹⁹⁷ A few months later, the minister of culture announced the appointment of Jan Fabre to the post. The Belgian artist introduced himself as a “curator”, also suggesting an openness towards different art genres based on his personal artistic vision. The announcement of the programme of the Festival and Fabre’s vision led to a massive reaction from the side of the Greek artists. The Festival would be renamed International Athens and Epidaurus Festival. The first year of the Festival would “focus on ‘the “Belgian spirit”’.¹⁹⁸ It would offer “a tribute to Belgium, Fabre’s own country and home to many internationally acclaimed artists”.¹⁹⁹ In a personal note in the Press Kit, Fabre explains his connection with Belgium, his “home and heaven”.²⁰⁰ Rather ironically, the Festival that was supposed to become “international” was introduced with a one-sided focus on the cultural production of another country.

¹⁹⁶ Yorgos Loukos has been the artistic director of the *Ballet de l’ Opéra de Lyon* since 1991. From 1992–2009 he was the director of the Festival of Dance in Cannes.

¹⁹⁷ “Επιστολή 120 καλλιτεχνών προς τον υπουργό Πολιτισμού υπέρ του Γιώργου Λούκου” [Letter from 120 artists to the Minister of Culture supporting Yorgos Loukos], *Kathimerini*, December 3, 2015, accessed March 7, 2021, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/840819/article/epikairothta/ellada/epistolh-120-kallitexnwn-pros-ton-yoyrgo-politismoy-yper-toy-giwrгой-loykoy>.

¹⁹⁸ Greek Festival, “Press Kit,” Press Conference by Jan Fabre, Athens, 29 March 2016, 7, accessed March 10, 2021, http://greekfestival.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PRESSKIT_JanFabre_en_2016.pdf.

¹⁹⁹ “General Information” in Greek Festival, “Press Kit,” 3 (emphasis added). In the following year under the thematic “consilience”, artists would participate that had worked or still work with Jan Fabre, while the one third of the artists would be Greek.

²⁰⁰ Jan Fabre, “Personal Statement,” in Greek Festival, “Press Kit,” 5.

Five hundred Greek artists gathered spontaneously and addressed open letters of protest to the minister and Fabre, calling the latter “persona non grata” and accusing him of having excluded them from their own Festival.²⁰¹ Fabre announced his resignation, which was followed on April 6, 2016 by a letter from him and his colleagues responding to the Greek artists’ letter. Rather ironically, his self-confident reply posed the reasonable question of why the Ministry of Culture chose an artistic persona like Jan Fabre as “curator” of the Festival: “If you ask an international multidisciplinary artist to become the curator of a Festival, wouldn’t you expect him to present his artistic universe? An artist speaks most clearly through his artworks: that is what I do, that is who I am.”²⁰² Here I do not intend to discuss the reasons of Loukos’ forced resignation; neither the particular choice of his successor.²⁰³ The terms of the debate on the Fabre case, however, raised crucial questions regarding the Festival’s “Greek” identity and orientation.

The Athens and Epidaurus Festival was inaugurated in 1955. In 1998, the Festival gained its legal name Hellenic Festival by law, according to which the Festival is a company that “operates in favour of public interest by the rules of private economy”. The task of the company is to organise “musical, theatrical and other types of artistic performances, all of which are meant to contribute to the culture and tourism industry of Greece”.²⁰⁴ Interestingly enough, the English translation of the name presents an, almost ironic, inconsistency: Greek or Hellenic? The official legal name is Hellenic Festival, although the announcements on the official website and the programmes are using the name Greek Festival.²⁰⁵

Having a long history, towards the end of the 1990s the Festival seemed to lack a definite orientation. As Grigoris Ioannidis observes, “it was widely acknowledged that the festival’s obsolete identity could no longer uphold its prestigious title of a Greek cultural

²⁰¹ «Οι επιστολές των καλλιτεχνών που ζητούν παραίτηση από τους Μπαλτά και Φαμπρ» [Letters from artists demanding the resignation of Baltas and Fabre], *Proto Thema*, April 1, 2016, accessed March 7, 2021, <https://www.protothema.gr/culture/article/566771/oi-epistol-es-ton-kallitehnon-pou-zitoun-paraitisi-apo-tous-balta-kai-fabr/>.

²⁰² Jan Fabre et al, “Open Letter from Jan Fabre and his team in reply to the letter from Greek artists,” 8 April 2016, *Artdependence*, April 11, 2016, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.artdependence.com/articles/jan-fabre-is-denounced-as-persona-non-grata-by-greek-artists>.

²⁰³ For a thought-provoking reading of the Fabre incident and the reactions of the Greek artists with reference to Adamantios Korais’ concept of *metakénosis*, see Maria Mytilinaki Kennedy, “During the Long Greek Crisis: Jan Fabre, the Greek Festival, and *Metakénosis*,” *Performance Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2018): 25–38.

²⁰⁴ “The Company,” Greek Festival, accessed March 10, 2021, <http://greekfestival.gr/the-company/?lang=en>.

²⁰⁵ NB. Throughout my text, I will use the name “Hellenic Festival”. However, in the citations of the website, I will refer to it as the “Greek Festival”, following the name that appears in the URL link of the official website. In order to avoid confusion, I will use the same name in all references to the Festival (e.g. websites, programmes).

institution within Greece, let alone enhance it with international luster”.²⁰⁶ As I will suggest here, during Loukos tenure from 2006–2015, the Festival started gaining a much clearer curatorial policy and identity.

Epidaurus Festival

The tenure of Yorgos Loukos signified a rupture in the history of the Epidaurus Festival, which since its inauguration had been identified with the performances of ancient drama. From the very beginning, the new artistic director showed his intention to change the orientation of the Festival by excluding from the programme theatre companies and directors that had always been presenting their work at the Festival and including (from his second year on) performances of non-ancient drama. This timid opening towards other genres besides ancient drama was highly important given the latter’s constitutive role in the development of the Festival’s identity.

The history of the Epidaurus Festival should be examined in relation to a directorial approach to ancient drama, according to which it should be presented at open-air theatres. The first initiatives in this direction in Greece can be found in the late 1920s. The first two decades of the twentieth century the performances of ancient Greek drama were presented indoors. In 1927 the Delphic Festival, organised by the poet Angelos Sikelianos and his wife Eva Palmer-Sikelianou, took the first, organised initiative for the open-air stagings of ancient drama.²⁰⁷ The same year, the director Fotos Politis, staged Euripides’ *Hecuba* at the Panathenaiko Stadium of Athens (September 18, 1927; Marika Kotopouli’s theatre company). In 1936 Dimitris Rontiris, Politis’ later successor as director of the National Theatre, staged Sophocles’ *Electra* at the Odeon Herodes Atticus. Two years later, on September 10, 1938, the same production of *Electra* was presented in Epidaurus, thus becoming the first performance that took place at the ancient theatre since antiquity. The attempts to revive ancient drama and the regular use of Epidaurus were interrupted by World War II and the Civil War. Sixteen years after the performance of *Electra*, on July 11, 1954 and August 7–8 and 31, 1954, the National Theatre of Greece presented at Epidaurus Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, directed by Dimitris Rontiris. The

²⁰⁶ Grigoris Ioannidis, “Hovering between Tradition and Experiment: The Festival of Epidaurus in Greece (July-August 2014),” *Critical Stages/Scènes critiques* 11 (2015), accessed August 18, 2021, <http://www.critical-stages.org/11/hovering-between-tradition-and-experiment/>.

²⁰⁷ On the two performances of ancient tragedy at the Delphic Festivals 1927 and 1930, see Antonis Glytzouris, “‘Resurrecting’ Ancient Bodies: The Tragic Chorus in *Prometheus Bound* and *Suppliant Women* at the Delphic Festivals in 1927 and 1930,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no.12 (2010): 2090–2120.

official opening of the Festival took place a year later with Alexis Minotis' staging of Euripides' *Hecuba* on June 19, 1955.²⁰⁸

The Hellenistic theatre of Epidaurus, built within the Sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidaurus, regained its original function as performance site in the twentieth century. Natascha Siouzouli interestingly underlines that the present knowledge about ancient drama is based on information regarding the stagings of ancient drama some centuries before the building of the theatre of Epidaurus and most probably only in ancient Athens. The Festival of Epidaurus, intentionally overlooked this detail and hence it “did not only invent and establish its own tradition but also actually constructed an ‘ancient origin’ in an arbitrary way”.²⁰⁹

Until 1975 the annual Festival was exclusively hosting productions of the National Theatre, which imposed a rather classicist approach to ancient drama. According to Mavromoustakos, during the first post-war period “Epidaurus became the space *par excellence* for the presentation of a ‘formal’ position towards ancient Greek drama, establishing the belief, of a dominant conservative part of the audience and artistic society, that the performance constituted a privileged, if not implicit, set of Greek artistic expressions”.²¹⁰ After the fall of the junta, Epidaurus opened its doors to another theatre company besides the National Theatre: Karolos Koun and Art Theatre were the first to perform at Epidaurus, presenting Aristophanes' *The Birds*.²¹¹ From 1980 onwards, the programme of the Festival included productions of other theatre companies. The few exceptions to the exclusivity of ancient drama that can be traced during the next decades were not enough to affect the character of the Festival.

Although the changes during the 1980s signify a shift in the history of the institution, the reception of most of the productions was from rather mediocre to very negative, whereas the innovative attempts of a younger generation of directors were usually receiving rather negative reviews.²¹² As I will discuss in the next chapter, the negative reception of some of the productions during the 1990s and especially the 2000s opened a public debate, which revealed how deeply rooted certain conceptions of national identity and the self-perception of some

²⁰⁸ A detailed listing of the performances in Epidaurus until 2001 can be found in Kostas Georgousopoulos et. al., *Επίδαυρος: Το αρχαίο θέατρο, οι παραστάσεις* [Epidaurus: The Ancient Theatre, the Performances] (Athens: Militos, 2004), 247–452.

²⁰⁹ Natascha Siouzouli, “Sakralität und Sakralisierung im Kontext europäischer Theaterfestivals,” in *Staging Festivity: Theater und Fest in Europa*, ed. E. Fischer-Lichte and M. Warstat (Tübingen: Narr/ Francke, 2009), 92. Here Siouzouli refers to the Eric Hobsbawm's above-mentioned definition of “invented traditions” (quoted in 91).

²¹⁰ Mavromoustakos, “Ideological Parameters,” n.p (emphasis in original).

²¹¹ This production had been initially performed in 1959 at Odeon Herodes Atticus as part of the Athens Festival, has been considered in the history of Greek theatre as a legendary, innovative modern approach to ancient comedy.

²¹² Natascha Siouzouli, «Το Φεστιβάλ της Επίδαυρου [The Epidaurus Festival], in *Επίδαυρος: το αρχαίο θέατρο, οι παραστάσεις* [Epidaurus: The Ancient Theatre, the Performances], ed. Kostas Georgousopoulos et al., 236–237.

Greeks as “official” inheritors of ancient drama were.

Since 2006, the Festival underwent a significant change, although the Epidaurus Festival never gained a consistent programming strategy as was the case of the Athens Festival under Loukos’ artistic directorship. Beyond any deeply rooted resistances related to the history of the Festival, a merely financial factor should be considered: Epidaurus is a theatre with a capacity of almost 12,000 spectators. The productions included in the programme of Epidaurus should attract a broader audience in order to cover also the expenses of the productions. Hence, the programming strategy followed was combining “commercial” performances, different international productions and rather experimental artistic takes on the ancient drama. This diversity was reflected also on the audience of Epidaurus, which should be considered very broad, with different expectations and tastes, and which consisted not only of regular theatregoers but also of those who see the Epidaurian Festival as a “must” for the social life of the Greek summer, as articles even in gossip newspapers revealed. Nevertheless, as I will further elaborate while arguably the Festival never gained the radical character that Loukos himself may have wished,²¹³ still the changes should not be underestimated.²¹⁴

This extroverted intention was even noticeable in the field of ancient drama. For example, in the first year of Loukos’ administration, the Festival co-produced two performances: a Turkish-Greek co-production of the *Persians* directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos with actors from both counties and the Dutch–Greek co-production of the *Suppliants* (co-directed by Paul Koek and Michael Marmarinos). These two performances, taking ancient drama as the mutual basis for an intercultural encounter, invited artists and spectators to reconsider the way they perceive themselves not only with regard to their cultural heritage, which often seems more familiar than it actually is, but also towards any given “Other”.²¹⁵ Worth mentioning were also three collaborations between foreign directors and Greek ensembles: *Electra*, dir. Peter Stein (National Theatre of Greece, 2007); *Medea* dir. Anatoli Vassiliev (Regional Theatre of Patras & Epidaurus Festival, 2008); and *Persians* dir. Dimitri Gotscheff (National Theatre of Greece, 2009). Although this was not the first time that

²¹³ Yorgos Loukos, «Από την ατολμία στο ρίσκο» [“From Timidity to venture”], interview by Myrto Loverdou. *To Vima*, March 28, 2010, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.tovima.gr/2010/03/28/culture/giwrkos-loykos-apolin-atolmia-sto-risko/>.

²¹⁴ See also 2.2.1.

²¹⁵ In terms of an intercultural encounter should also be mentioned the performance of *NOH – Nekyia* directed by Michael Marmarinos in collaborations with Rokuro Gensho Umewaka and the Japanese Ensemble in a production of the Epidaurus Festival nine years later (2015). The performance had been preceded by a ritual address to the sun during the sunrise the morning before. On the performance, see Anna Stavrakopoulou, “Noh/Nekyia: Homer Recited in Japanese in an Ancient Greek Theatre,” *Critical Stages/ Scènes critiques* 13 (2016), accessed March 17, 2021, <http://www.critical-stages.org/13/nohnekya-homer-recited-in-japanese-in-an-ancient-greek-theatre/>.

foreign directors had presented their work at Epidaurus, a significantly larger number of foreign productions and directors in Epidaurus could be noticed during this period.

In the last two years of Loukos' tenure a further opening can be observed, this time towards directors from a younger generation who presented their stagings of ancient tragedy for the first time. It is telling, for example, that in 2014 the programme included two directors under 40 years old: Ektoras Lygizos and the 26-years-old Dimitris Karantzas, who became the youngest director to ever present his work at the ancient theatre. Evaluating the programme of that summer's Festival, theatre scholar and critic Grigoris Ioannidis observed the co-existence of two different trends: a more provocative take on the ancient texts represented by the younger directors and a series of more conventional stagings. As he rightly observed,

[t]he impressive debut of the 2014 Festival of Epidaurus followed a number of rather conventional performances, bespeaking the dilemma that presents itself to the Greek theatre. The Greek theatre is seeking a new identity. It is struggling to hold on to tradition while at the same time it rejects the inflexibility of its heritage.²¹⁶

During the period under examination, the tensions between artistic vision and practical/financial necessities, between an attempt to align with the international trends while at the same time fulfil the expectations of a broader audience did not cease. Nevertheless, my argument will be that, to a great extent, the Festival achieved a re-signification of this particular theatre space that enabled, in turn, a renegotiation of its own past and a process of "institutional self-reflection". Given its particular history as well as the contemporary (financial) reality a much more radical shift in the identity of the Festival would never have been sustainable.

Athens Festival

While Epidaurus was symbolising the ancient past, the Athens Festival, on the other hand, seemed to be – at least at its beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s – its cosmopolitan sibling. The Festival did not have the connotations of the ancient theatre. Nevertheless, the Festival's main stage at the Roman Odeon of Herodes Atticus (Herodion) on the slope of Acropolis was implying its identification with a *Hellenic* identity of a city-brand of a nation. The Festival had

²¹⁶ Ioannidis, "Hovering between Tradition and Experiment," n.p.

been identified with the Herodion, which although not ancient Greek, was associated with Acropolis and the promotion of the “national” ancient past of the city.

The programme of the Festival cannot be easily charted. During the years 1955 until 2005 it included concerts, opera, ballet and theatre performances, with a stronger focus on music. Every summer, the Odeon hosted Greek and foreign theatre companies as well as acclaimed orchestras, conductors, and soloists from Greece and abroad: the New York Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Vienna Philharmonic, the Leningrad Philharmonic; conductors like Dimitris Mitropoulos, Herbert von Karajan, Daniel Barenboim, and soloists such as Maria Callas, Mstislav Rostropovich, Plácido Domingo, Leonidas Kavakos, the ballet dancers M. Fonteyn and R. Nureyev, to name but a few.

The Athens Festival was not identified with ancient drama as was the Epidaurus Festival. Nevertheless, from a first overview of the programmes, as collected in an anniversary publication in 2005, I observe some interesting, quantitative facts, which reveal the dominant presence of ancient drama compared to other kinds of theatre also at Herodion. Hence, from the 1279 productions that have been presented between 1955 and 2005 (music, dance opera, theatre and other productions hosted under the auspices of the Festival), there were 287 theatre productions. Of these, 203 were performances of ancient drama. It is also interesting to observe that contrary to the dominant presence of foreign orchestras, dancers, soloists, and opera singers, only thirty-one of the 287 theatre performances were foreign productions, whereas 134 were productions of the National Theatre.²¹⁷

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Festival’s programme did not resemble a creative plurality but rather the lack of any curatorial criteria: from Greek popular music to concert of international pop artists like Elton John, from philharmonic orchestras and world-renowned opera soloists to jazz concerts and Greek as well as foreign theatre companies. At the same time, the very long duration of the Festival did not help to shape a distinct identity. While during the first decades the Festival was taking place between July and September, slowly its start was moved forward. In 2004, the summer of the Olympic Games, began on May 1 and finished on September 28, while in 2005 it started on May 20 and finished on October 9.²¹⁸

The Festival had been identified with the Odeon. The only exceptions in this exclusivity of the space were the years 1967 (when the Festival took place at the Odeon, on the Pnyx and

²¹⁷ Greek Festival. *Φεστιβάλ Αθηνών (1955–2005): Πενήντα Χρόνια* [Athens Festival (1955–2005): Fifty Years] (Athens: Greek Festival, 2005). As many of the theatre companies and orchestras were presenting a different programme or play on consecutive evenings, here I have counted only the orchestras/theatre companies or other participants according to the kind of production.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 211–218.

the Stoa of Attalus) and 1999 (Odeon, Pnyx and in a former factory of Sanitas at Peiraios Str). A complication in the case of Herodion is related to its status as a protected monument. The Central Archaeological Council, which is responsible for the protection of the monuments and decides which events are allowed to take place, often gives its permission to events that do not belong to the programme of the Festival. This led to a certain confusion about whether some events were taking place under the aegis of the Festival or not, blurring even further the Festival's identity.

In 2006, Loukos followed a different strategy, based on two pillars: an extrovert programme and the change of space. It seems that while in the case of Epidaurus the challenge was to rupture an ideologised exclusion, in the case of the Athens Festival it was necessary to set up some criteria of selection which would allow the construction of a consistent identity for the Festival. Loukos decided to shorten the duration of the Festival to June and July and started using other spaces beside Herodion. Among them were other sites in Athens (such as the Rex-Stage at the National Theatre; Megaron Music Hall; Lycabettus Theatre) as well as one stage in a refurbished factory complex of the 1970s in a former industrial area of Athens. This new hall was named after its address: Peiraios 260. Many performances were also presented at 'Scholion', another former factory at Peiraios Str. A year later, in 2007, the Festival opened two more halls at Peiraios 260 (Peiraios A', H', D'). In the following years, the Peiraios post-industrial complex became the "heart" of the Festival, indicating the shift in the Festival's orientation.²¹⁹ Peiraios gained a much more experimental character focusing on theatre and dance, whereas in the case of Herodion the identity of the space remained quite blurred. For example, it continued hosting performances that did not make it to Epidaurus and concerts addressing a broader audience, together with experimental takes on ancient drama such as the much-discussed *Prometheus in Athens* by Rimini Protokoll.²²⁰

The Festival's programme included many foreign productions of theatre, dance, and music. It is impossible to name all the foreign directors, choreographers, and companies that came to Athens. Indicatively, only some names could be mentioned that reflect the different kinds of productions and respective artistic styles: Christoph Marthaler, Thomas Ostermeier, Rodrigo Garcia, Romeo Castellucci, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Johan Simons, Guy Cassiers, Ariane Mnouckhine, Lee Breuer, Rimini Protokoll, La Fura dels Baus, She She Pop, The

²¹⁹ See 4.1.1.

²²⁰ On the production, see Marissia Fragkou, "'We are Athens': Precarious Citizenship in Rimini Protokoll's *Prometheus in Athens*," in *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance: Inside/Outside Europe*, ed. Marilena Zaroulia and Philip Hager (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 171–92.

Wooster Group, Pina Baus, William Forsythe, Maggie Maren, and Sasha Waltz. The Greek audience could be informed about current international tendencies in the field of theatre and dance. Through co-productions, the Festival aspired to enter the network of European festivals. For example, in 2008 the premiere of *Hamlet* (co-production of Schaubühne, Athens Festival, and Festival d' Avignon) was presented at Peiraios 260, signifying a special moment for the Festival. It should be noted that until then foreign productions were mostly invited to Greece by private agencies, without any programming strategy and with rather high-ticket prices, reflecting the position of Greece on the “periphery”. Arguably many of the tendencies observed at the Athens Festival represented a wide variety of the contemporary theatre presented internationally.

In parallel, the Festival hosted many Greek productions. Indicative of the happy conjuncture for the Greek theatre during this period, also related to the small size of the Greek theatre market, is the fact that many of the people that for the first time presented their work at the National were presenting their work at the same time at the Festival. The same was also the case for younger artists who were supported by both the Festival and the National.²²¹ The Festival also included a side programme with exhibitions, discussions, film projections, and workshops.

As I will discuss in the following chapters, each of the two Festivals constituting the Hellenic Festival had to overcome different obstacles. The Athens Festival, while related to the Odeon of Herodes Atticus was lacking a clear agenda; the Epidaurus Festival was ideologically loaded due to the national connotations of the ancient ruins and the ancient texts. My argument here is that in both cases the re-orientation was attempted through changes in the space and the programming choices. In Epidaurus, the inclusion of (no matter how mainstream) productions of non-ancient drama allowed a re-signification of this theatre space. In the case of the Athens Festival, the dissociation of the Festival from the Roman Odeon and the move indoors, to a former industrial building enabled different kinds of performances, that could not have been presented outdoors. These two parallel processes in both Festivals, while not directly related, functioned in a complementary way towards the innovation of the Hellenic Festival.

²²¹ See 3.2.1

2. Between past(s), present(s) and future(s)

Nations imagine a past before they can even envision a future. The reproduction of national(ist) discourses is fuelled by narratives of the past – a national past whose traces are lost “in the myths of time”²²² and whose narratives hold together a vision of collective (familial) belonging. Such narratives are, for example, the national histories. According to Stuart Hall, together with literatures, media and popular culture, national histories “provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols, and rituals which stand for, or *represent* the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nations”.²²³ These official narratives, which in no case can tolerate unsettling ruptures and gaps, impose a specific approach to the past–present relation, thereby affecting the associated definitions of national identity. They promote a consolidated return to the past that offers a comforting shelter away from the troubling present and echoes a patriotic nostalgia based on narratives of uninterrupted continuity. Especially in periods of crisis the necessity for such narratives becomes urgent; the fragmentation of all certainties reinforces the need for reference points identified in the past.

The importance of the past – present relation should, however, not be confined to its manipulative use by the dominant national(ist) discourses. Each identity is anyhow constructed through the recollection of the past and narrative plots that each self creates. Therefore, a reflective approach, standing in opposition to a linear conception of a “grand” narrative, may expose the distance between past(s) and present(s), stressing subjectivity in the narrating process and the past’s impact on the construction of dynamic identities in the present but also in future. A dynamic hence understanding of this complex relationship as contingent may encourage the shaping of non-fixed identities. Still, however, such a critical way of returning to the past cannot avoid a contradiction: one perceives him/herself in direct relation to the past, feeling inevitably emotionally attached (in positive or negative terms), while, at the same time, acknowledging the ruptures and inconsistencies in this relation. I suggest understanding this entanglement between past(s), present(s) and future(s), proximity and distance, official (hi)story and subjective recollection as dialectical.

The use of the notion “dialectical”, which implies at once the existence of oppositional movements or opposite standpoints, intends to stress the inherent tension in the relationship

²²² Homi Bhabha, “Introduction: narrating the nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 1.

²²³ Hall, “The Question of National Identity,” 613 (emphasis in original).

between different temporalities and undermine linear, uninterrupted narratives of a “solid” past deriving from a fixed vantage point of view in the present.²²⁴ Here I will explore how an approach to nation and national identity that does not resolve these tensions but on the contrary exposes them can be demonstrated on stage. I argue that such a perspective on the entanglement between past–present(–future) suggests also non-homogeneous conceptions of the interrelated notions of time and (hi)story, opening the way to possible redefinitions of national identity.

The here described relationship, however, does not refer to a fixed opposition between two points, namely between *a* (concluded) past vs *a* present. On the contrary, it aspires to suggest a process of perceiving the past from a present standpoint of view that presupposes different forms of co-existence of temporalities in a permanent state of tension. The diverse ways of how one grasps through this prism his/her own present as interwoven with the past(s) lead to different narratives about this relationship and by extension to different, contingent identities that can be constructed on the base of such narratives. Hence, my choice of the adjective “dialectical” intends to suggest a certain *perspective*.

My understanding of “dialectical” has been inspired by Frederic Jameson’s discussion on the “dialectical” in his book *Valences of the Dialectic*. Here I will not adopt Jameson’s neo-Marxist line of thought in general. His definition of the adjective “dialectical”, however, has proven very thought-provoking for the conception of the first “dialectical mode” proposed here. Jameson argues that the unexpected moment of realisation that something is dialectical – the predicate “It’s dialectical!” – suggests “a startling new perspective from which to rethink the novelty in question, to defamiliarise our ordinary habits of mind and to make us suddenly conscious not only of our own non-dialectical obtuseness but also of the strangeness of reality as such”.²²⁵

²²⁴ Here I do not define the aesthetics and form of the performances as dialectical and therefore the productions cannot be approached through the lens of a (post-)Brechtian understanding of the dialectical theatre. On contemporary forms of dialectical theatre in line with the post-Brechtian tradition, see David Barnett “The Possibilities of Contemporary Dialectical Theatre: The Example of Representing Neonazism in Germany,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27, no. 2 (2017): 245–262; Barnett, “Performing Dialectics in an Age of Uncertainty, or: Why Post- Brechtian ≠ Postdramatic,” in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance*, ed. Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll, and Steve Giles. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 47–66. On the relationship between performance and dialectic see the special issue “On Dialectics,” ed. Eleanor Massie and Philip Watkinson, *Performance Research* 21, no. 3 (2016).

²²⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2010), 50. The adjective “dialectical” is the last of three different “names” of the dialectic that he discusses: i) “the dialectic with definite article,” which refers to a (philosophical) system mainly associated with Hegel and Marx, ii) “many dialectics,” where the definite gives its place to an indefinite article, describing the “dialectical moments” in the work of “non-dialectical or anti-dialectical” thinkers and iii) the “adjective ‘dialectical’” (4–5).

Jameson relates the adjective to the moment when one's feeling that s/he is "arrested and paralyzed by an antinomy" gives way at the sudden realisation that something is dialectical.²²⁶ At this instance it turns visible that

the problem itself becomes the solution, and that the opposition in which we are immobilized like a ship in the ice must itself now become the object of our thinking; that to be thus caught in an irresolvable binary opposition is in reality to have been thrown back to the very origin of dialectics itself, a welcome regression which is the very condition of progress itself.²²⁷

Following further Jameson's line of argument, "it is the unmasking of antinomy as contradiction which constitutes truly dialectical thinking as such", namely the "more dynamic and productive act of setting the antinomy itself in motion, that is to say, revealing it to have in reality been the form of a contradiction". The latter turns into something that allows "movement". Jameson thus differentiates his approach from a structuralist understanding of "contradiction in the form of antinomy", which lead to the suspension of any possible movement.²²⁸ Contradiction and antinomy should be distinguished. The latter is easier to define: "it states two propositions that are radically, indeed absolutely, incompatible". Contradiction, on the other hand, "is a matter of partialities and aspects". One of their difference is also the role of the context within which the contradiction is deciphered. The latter thus should be understood as "a singular substance, about which several different, seemingly contradictory, things get said".²²⁹ Keeping this distinction in mind, it is easier to understand what Jameson means when he suggests that the space "between internal and external relations, or unity and incommensurability, identity and difference, must be named contradiction if one or the other of these results is not to harden over and become permanent or substantial".²³⁰

In this chapter I am interested in exploring how theatre may manifest on stage such dialectical tensions, inherent in the – constitutive for the identity construction – relationship between past – present (– future) and by extension, between (emotional, spatial and temporal) distance and proximity. To what extent and through which strategies can the link between pasts and presents be theatrically demonstrated not as connecting two fixed points/concluded periods

²²⁶ Ibid.,50.

²²⁷ Ibid.,51.

²²⁸ Ibid.,43.

²²⁹ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1–2.

²³⁰ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 43.

but as interweaving them into a dynamic contradiction? To tackle these issues, I will discuss four performances that invite a reflection on the concept of Greek identity by negotiating the perception of the past in different ways. With the exception of an ancient tragedy, the other four productions are stagings of plays from the dramaturgy of the nineteenth century that took place between 2010 and 2013: i) Michael Marmarinos' staging of the Euripidean *Herakles* in 2011, ii) Nikos Karathanos' production of the 1893 pastoral drama *Golfo* at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus in 2013, and iii) Vasilis Papavasiliou's adaptation of the 1835 political satire *The Fortune Hunter* (2010) and his staging of the 1845 comedy *Koutroulis' Wedding* (2012).

All the performances connect the present vantage point to different past(s) but also, occasionally, to future(s), each focusing on a different facet of the constellation of interwoven temporalities. With reference to these examples, the dialectical mode will be analysed here in relation to i) the performative framing of the act of narration, which implies the shaping of narrative (national) identities stressing their subjective, contingent character, ii) a reflective, nostalgic recollection that acknowledges the emotional impact of the past but does not call for the latter's restoration, and iii) an onstage manifestation of a moment of *Jetztzeit* – namely of dialectical co-existence of past and future in the “now-time” in Walter Benjamin's terms.

2.1 “Familiar” stories from a remote past

In summer 2006, a Greek-Turkish bilingual production of Aeschylus' *The Persians*, directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos was presented at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus.²³¹ This oldest surviving tragedy (472 BC) narrates the victory of the Greeks over the Persian navy from the defeated enemy's point of view. Against the backdrop of the long, tensed relations between Greece and Turkey, Terzopoulos' choice to share the role of the Persians both to Turkish and Greek actors invited the Greek spectators to realise through the common lament of the enemy, the closeness between themselves and the “neighbouring other”. Following the performance, in the popular liberal daily newspaper *Eleftherotypia*, a theatre critic, focusing on the bilingual aspect was wondering how it could be acceptable to let the Turkish language be heard in Epidaurus, and the Turks perform the Aeschylean tragedy: “And the final question: Was after

²³¹ This was a co-production of the Hellenic Festival and the Istanbul Theatre Festival. It was presented at Epidaurus on 30.06 and 01.07.2006. Two months earlier, on May 11, 2006 the performance had opened the 15th International Istanbul Theatre Festival in the Byzantine church of Haghia Irene (St. Irene) in Istanbul. Interestingly, this was the first time that the *Persians* was performed in Turkey.

all Aeschylus from Eleusis speaking Turkish and we do not know it?”²³² The adverse reactions that followed pose the question, whether they were after all just responses to a personal – no matter how conservative – opinion, or to the dangerous assumption that this view probably represented a broader belief in Greek society.

In its extremity, Christides’ review revealed the main issues that had been dominating the extended discussion about the reception of ancient drama in modern Greece until the end of the 2000s: the implications of the notions of heritage, authorship and ownership for the reception of contemporary stagings of ancient drama. Here I will briefly discuss the special signification that ancient texts have gained in modern Greece as “national dramas”, namely indisputable pieces of evidence of an uninterrupted connection between antiquity and modern Greece. Against this backdrop, I will then proceed to the analysis of the Michael Marmarinos’ *Herakles*²³³ presented in 2011 at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus.

2.1.1 Ancient as “national”: on the reception of ancient tragedy in contemporary Greece

The history of the stagings of ancient drama should be examined in respect to the terms of the foundation and development of the Greek state. As theatre scholar Eleftheria Ioannidou rightly observes, the importance of the ancient drama for the Greek people “has less to do with Greece *being* the originary site of classical drama than with Greece *being credited* as such by the predominant discourse since the foundation of the Greek state”.²³⁴ The debate regarding the limits of aesthetic experimentation in the field of Greek drama (and particularly of tragedy) which went on until the late 2000s, has been exposing an audience that to a significant extent perceived itself as the natural guardians of antiquity. Tragedy was turned into “a monumental metonymy for the ideal, classical past”.²³⁵

Like the ruins of the ancient theatres, whose visible materiality activates connotations

²³² Minas Christidis, «Αλαλούμ και μαύρο σκοτάδι» [Muddle and black darkness], review of *The Persians*, directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos, *Eleftherotypia*, July 3, 2006, n.p.

²³³ The English translation of tragedy’s title *Ηρακλής Μαινόμενος* [*Herakles Mainomenos*] presents some inconsistencies. In the English part of the print programme of the production is used the Latin translation *Hercules Furens* (Theatre Programme of *Ηρακλής Μαινόμενος* [*Hercules Furens*] (Athens: National Theatre, 2011), 52). On the website of the National Theatre of Greece the title of the play is translated as *The Madness of Heracles* (https://www.n-t.gr/en/events/oldevents/hraklis_mainomenos, accessed March 9, 2021). In the online archive of the Athens & Epidaurus Festival is translated only as *Herakles* (http://greekfestival.gr/festival_events/national-theatre-of-greece-michail-marmarinos-2011/?lang=en, accessed March 10, 2021). Throughout the present analysis, the Euripidean tragedy will be mentioned as *Herakles*.

²³⁴ Eleftheria Ioannidou, “Monumental Texts in Ruins: Greek Tragedy in Greece and Michael Marmarinos’ Postmodern Stagings,” in *Epidaurus Encounters: Greek Drama, Ancient Theatre and Modern Performance*, ed. Eleftheria Ioannidou and Conor Hanratty (Berlin: Parodos Verlag, 2011), 121 (emphasis in original).

²³⁵ Zaroulia, “‘Members of a Chorus of a Certain Tragedy’,” 206.

of continuity, the ancient dramatic texts became material evidence of a self-evident kinship. Still, as Ioannidou rightly observes

[i]t appears as almost oxymoronic that although in Greece ancient drama is usually performed on the actual ruins of a theatre, the treatment of the classical text as a fragment of antiquity has traditionally been out of the question. By contrast, the ancient space imposes the treatment of the text as a monument which is to remain intact by all means.²³⁶

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than a century after the first discussions regarding the staging of ancient drama in Greece, text was still considered as the dominant component of the performance and the only guarantor of a “right” interpretation. Surprisingly enough, these opinions were overlooking the basic, indisputable fact that ancient Greek plays were translated into modern Greek; that is to say, they had already undergone adaptation before their staging. In 2004, the well-known theatre critic and scholar Kostas Georgousopoulos characterised the ancient texts as *diatiritea*, the term used for the listed buildings.²³⁷ As Eleni Papazoglou rightly points, “[p]aralleling buildings and texts (...) produces an odd textual and theatrical concept, for it presumes that the ancient text can survive its translation(s) intact and that its meaning can be immune to its performative contexts(s), provided that the text is used without modifications”.²³⁸

The search for an authentic meaning to be found in the text seems to forget the inevitable de-contextualisation that takes place through the interpretation of an ancient text on a modern stage. For, precisely the realisation of the distance between antiquity and modernity would be a sufficient argument in favour of open readings. Referring to Barthes’ definition of “Text” as “*experienced only in an activity of production*”,²³⁹ Ioannidou correctly observes that “[n]o other text could exemplify Barthes’ Text more suitably than the classical text, which is by definition evasive due to the multiple interpretative layers attributed to it by its long philological and performance histories”.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Ioannidou, “Monumental Texts in Ruins,” 123.

²³⁷ Kostas Georgousopoulos, «Κείμενα διατηρητέα» [Listed texts], *Ta Nea*, September 11–12, 2004, 18.

²³⁸ Eleni Papazoglou, “Between Texts and Contexts: Moderns against Ancients in the Reception of Ancient Tragedy in Greece (1900–1933),” in *Re-imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture*, ed. Dimitris Tziouvas, 209.

²³⁹ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 157 (emphasis in original).

²⁴⁰ Ioannidou, “Monumental Texts,” 126.

Not surprisingly the ancient theatre of Epidaurus became the site where this quest for the “protection” of the ancient texts was expressed in different tones. The deeply rooted resistances to open interpretation of the ancient texts included in some cases demonstratively walk-outs and jeers during “disrespectful” productions. Together with conservative opinions of leading critics these reactions regarding the director’s right to dramaturgical intervention provoked a public discussion among scholars, theatre-makers, critics and journalists. The terms of this debate were not limited to aesthetic issues. According to Platon Mavromoustakos,

[s]ince the 1990s, the idea that ancient Greek drama is a grave, *national* issue seems to have been gaining ground. Every production seems to either confirm or cast doubts on the stereotypes upon which modern Greek consciousness is founded (...). Criticism begins from an aesthetic point of view that arises from how the ancient texts are presented and, gradually, as part of a broader non-theatrical debate, becomes associated with our national identity. Ultimately, performances are not judged as independent offerings to a contemporary audience, but as indicators of their creators’ respect for our soothing certainties.²⁴¹

Interestingly enough, until the end of the 2000s, the reactions were particularly hostile against the productions of foreign directors. These stagings were considered “‘heretical,’ that is, ‘different’”.²⁴² In Matthias Langhoff’s 1997 staging of *Bacchae* (State Theatre of Northern Greece) the adaptation of the play to modern Greece was understood by Greek critics and spectators “as an example of an arrogant ‘neo-imperialism’ hastily disguised as an aesthetic pursuit; a parasitical activity and a contradiction of the play’s plot, aesthetics and ethos”.²⁴³ More than ten years later, in 2009 Dimiter Gotscheff staging of the *Persians* with Greek actors in a National’s production, again caused a massive uproar.²⁴⁴ Part of the audience felt legitimised to express their opinions aloud during the performance as well as to jeer at the

²⁴¹ Mavromoustakos, “Ideological Parameters,” n.p.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Patsalidis and Sakellaridou, “Introduction,” in *(Dis)placing Classical Greek Theatre*, 16. For Langhoff’s performance, see also Gonda van Steen, “Bloody (Stage) Business: Matthias Langhoff’s Sparagmos of Euripides’ *Bacchae* (1997),” in *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre*, ed. George Harrison and Vayos Liapis (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 501–15.

²⁴⁴ On Gotscheff’s performance, see Savvas Patsalidis, “‘War’ over the *Persians*,” *Critical Stages/Scènes critiques* 1 (2009), accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.critical-stages.org/1/war-over-the-persians/>; Eleni Papazoglou, “Self and Other in Aeschylus’ *Persians*: A propos de Gotscheff,” *Gramma* 22, no 2 (2014): 95–107; Eleftheria Ioannidou, “The *Persians* without Empathy,” *Engramma: La Tradizione Classica nella Memoria Occidentale*, 77 (2010), accessed March 10, 2021, http://www.egramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=394.

German-Bulgarian director in the final bow. These reactions seemed at least incompatible with the respect that is required for a space that is supposed to be perceived as “sacred”.

In the case of Epidaurus, it is as if the monumentality of the space attests to the national character of the text, while at the same time the presupposition of this character imposes limits in the possible uses of the space as the setting of a performance. The national connotations of both text and space had become part of an official discourse which in turn was defining the institutional identity of the Festival and its role as “guardian” of ancient drama. The choices of the Festival under Yorgos Loukos revealed from the beginning the intention to challenge this kind of misunderstood notions of heritage. Many theatre companies and directors that belonged among the regular guests of the Festival to this point were now excluded from the programme. As Savvas Patsalidis observed in 2009, this “bold move” not to include the usual companies had, as a consequence, that the programme of the first three years hosted new takes from both Greek and foreign artists who attempted “to re-vitalize in their way the prospects of the Festival with more cheeky, unpredictable and rowdy stage works”.²⁴⁵ Such experimental stagings of tragedy questioned an approach to ancient texts as protected museum exhibits and gave space to readings that were unsettling national significations of the texts. This shift, however, should be examined in parallel with the inclusion of foreign productions of non-ancient dramas. As I will suggest in the next chapter, this inclusion of new genres led to a re-signification of the theatre space that together with non-conventional readings of the ancient plays allowed a subtle redefinition of the Festival’s identity.

Here I do not argue that the connection between ancient and modern Greece is a mere construction. Both language and the ruins (visible and unnoticed at the same time function often as the background of the everyday life activities of modern Greeks) may indeed be understood as compelling traces of relation. Still, this relation is mediated. For, despite the acknowledgment of connection, the perception and narration of the past also have to account the temporal distance. A possible hence feeling of closeness to the past is contradicted dialectically by the irrevocable distance and the subsequent realisation of other influences that have co-shaped modern Greek identity ever since. Against this background and while considering the complex interplay between text, space and institutionalised discourses of heritage (reproduced both by the Festival and the National Theatre), in the following chapter I will analyse Michael Marmarinos’ production of *Herakles* at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus in 2011.

²⁴⁵ Patsalidis, “‘War’ over the Persians,” n.p.

In no case do I suggest here that Marmarinos was the only or first one to deal critically with the question of identity in relation to the Greek history and its non-representational negotiation in the field of ancient drama. Without demonstrating a dialectical approach as defined here, a worth-mentioned earlier take on tragedy could be considered the 1996 National Theatre of Northern Greece's production of *Ajax*. In his staging, director Vasilis Papavasiliou had approached the Sophoclean tragedy within the context of the Greek civil war. Ajax recalled the communist leader Aris Velouchiotis. Papavasiliou's performance set the tragedy in modern Greece not in order to stress the timelessness of ancient drama but to shed light on the modern reality. The recent past was approached through the lens of the Sophoclean reading of the ancient myth. This "mediation" made it easier to touch the collective, open wound of the civil war and to expose the power relations implicated in the historical narrative, depending on the perspective of each side of the conflict.

In 2011, Marmarinos' performance returned to the complex issue of the narrative of the past and its implications for identity construction.²⁴⁶ Reflecting on the Greek cultural past in a fragmented and allusive way and focusing on the dynamic and subjective process of narration, the production challenged narrative continuity, opening up the possibility for a redefinition of the Greek identity. Considering that in Greece the "performance of ancient drama turns after all into a key indicator of the image that we construct about ourselves",²⁴⁷ the search for broader definitions of Greek identity through non-conventional readings of ancient tragedy within an institutional context, not only opens new artistic perspectives in Greek theatre practice; most importantly it fights against soothing ideological certainties that contribute to the perpetuation of hegemonic conceptions of an "ancient" nation.

²⁴⁶ The question of exclusion to the hegemonic historical narratives was also addressed by Yannis Houvardas in his staging of the Euripidean *Orestes* in 2010. In his staging, which closely followed the text, the director and intendant of the National Theatre staged a chorus of young people who entered the ancient theatre recalling a group visiting students. Marilena Zaroulia suggests that the choice to stage a chorus of young people two years after the violent riots which followed the assassination of a young boy by a policeman in the centre of Athens "produced cracks in tragedy's narrative and triggered different responses from the audience, the national body"(213). The performance had a powerful affective effect, activating a sense of belonging: through affection "the nation's psyche is re-imagined," this time by also acknowledging those who have not been part of "the nation's dominant narrative"(215). Nevertheless, as Zaroulia rightly observes the production did not achieve the suggestion of a new perception of the past, which would not function in a consolatory way with regard to the troubling present. As a consequence this in turn, perpetuated the argument that "tragedy – no matter how it was approached now – is 'ours' and this, almost vicious cycle of history and identity cannot be escaped" (Zaroulia, "Members of a Chorus of a Certain Tragedy" 214.)

²⁴⁷ Platon Mavromoustakos, «Για εκείνο το τσιγάρο που δε λέει να σβήσει» [For that cigarette that never stops smoking"], *Sychrona Themata*, no. 97 (2007): 7.

2.1.2 Narrating (hi)stories, redefining identities: *Herakles* in times of crisis

An old actor steps out to a stage proscenium through a theatre curtain carrying his accordion. He announces the beginning of the performance of *Golfo*. The subsequent scene takes place in front of a provincial train station. Men and women, dressed in black and brown and holding luggage, walk slowly before they stand still and stare around. A voice-over informs in the first-person plural about the year and place: Autumn 1952 in the town Aigio – “We are tired. We haven’t slept for two days”. This was the opening of Theodoros Angelopoulos’ 1975 film *The Travelling Players* in which he chronicled the difficult period between 1939 and 1952 through the eyes of a theatre troupe travelling around Greece to perform the pastoral drama *Golfo*. Adopting a complex form of cinematic narration, he presented the historical events in inconsistent chronological sequences: the film opens with the arrival of the acting company in a small Greek town in autumn 1952 and finishes with the same troupe (but other actors) in the same town in the autumn of 1939. Followed by the moving camera, in this opening scene the *Travelling Players* began (or perhaps just concluded?) their journey through history.²⁴⁸

Almost thirty-five years after Angelopoulos’ film, some other “travelling players” are this time standing on the orchestra of the ancient theatre of Epidaurus. An old bus from the 1960s parks at the ancient theatre’s right back side. The actors walk to the left side, enter the orchestra and stand in the middle and left of the back side, looking towards the audience. The orchestra is almost empty: on the left side a bleak tree, next to it, lies a white rectangle cloth and in front three metal bins. Many of the actors wear coats; some hold luggage and musical instruments. The projected lines from Angelopoulos’ opening scene (“We are tired. We haven’t slept for two days”) immediately evoke associations between the movie and the troupe on the orchestra. The actors create a suppliant sound in atonal unison, repeated twice; the uttered words cannot be understood. After a prolonged silence, a woman, wearing a strict black skirt suit, black tights and black ankle boots begins to tremble nervously and moves her hands as if trying to avoid flies. An actor with a white t-shirt and a black coat, who throughout the group’s entrance was holding a big puppet of a young boy, brings a microphone to the right front side

²⁴⁸ According to Fredric Jameson, “the famous opening and concluding scenes and lines (...) do not at all suggest some eternal return, some Viconian or Joycean cycle of history, but rather simply ask us to review the events, to gather them together in one unique memory, beyond pathos or tragedy: they ask us, in other words, to think historically about the nature of this collective destiny by pulling all the episodes together in a continuity the film itself is unwilling to construct for us”(Fredric Jameson, “Angelopoulos and Collective Narrative,” in *The Cinema of Theo Angelopoulos*, ed. A. Koutsourakis and M. Steven (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 109).

of the orchestra and starts uttering Amphitryon's monologue, which opens the Euripidean tragedy.

This was the opening scene of the National Theatre's 2011 production of *Herakles* directed by Michael Marmarinos at the ancient theatre of Epidauros.²⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, amid the financial crisis, Marmarinos' *Herakles* was read as a comment on the Greek sociopolitical situation. The Euripidean hero was interpreted "as a metaphor for Greece" whereas "the chorus as representing the Greek people in current times of world economic crisis".²⁵⁰ Due to his complex humanism, far from being a heroic demigod, Herakles appeared as an ambivalent – and at the end exhausted – human. Although a victim of divine revenge, he has to keep living under the unbearable burden of his own deeds: the murder of his own family. As Grigoris Ioannidis noted, "[t]he issue hence is not how a demigod dies, but how a human continues to live".²⁵¹ In 2011, the Greek society was agonising over a similar question, which led to different responses: how could Greece keep moving on, despite its painful realisation of the catastrophe?

Here I will not focus on a reading of the production as response to the crisis. Informed by Ioannidis' reading of Marmarinos' staging as part of "a series of political theatre productions (...), which use classic ancient drama as a means to interpret the relationship of modern Greek identity with history, tradition and memory",²⁵² I will explore how the National's production challenged singular conceptions of Greek national identity. This was achieved on stage by weaving together different threads of the Greek cultural fabric and negotiating the complex interplay between the search for an identity in the present and the recollection of the past. Taking place at the intersection between past and present, individual

²⁴⁹ The summer production of the National Theatre was presented at the ancient theatre of Epidauros on August 5–6, 2011 and afterwards toured few open theatres in Greece. This was the second National Theatre's production of the Euripidean tragedy; the first was Takis Mouzenidis' staging, presented in Epidauros on 26 June 1960. Michael Marmarinos had already participated twice at the Epidauros Festival as director: in 1998 with a staging of *Electra* (theatre company "diplous eros") and in 2006 with the Greek-Dutch *Suppliants* (Theseum Ensemble & Veenfabrik, co-directed with Paul Koek). In 2016, he returned to Epidauros with the National Theatre's production of *Lysistrata*. A year earlier he had directed a Noh theatre adaptation of the Book 11 from the *Odyssey* in collaboration with Rokuro Gensho Umewaka. Marmarinos collaborated for the first time with the National Theatre as co-director and actor in the performance *Stalin: A Discussion about Greek Theatre* in 2007.

²⁵⁰ Vicky Manteli, "Shattered Icons and Fragmented Narrative in a World of Crisis: Herakles Mainomenos by the National Theatre of Greece at the Epidauros Festival 2011," *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies* 9 (2014): 67. Manteli's analysis does not only focus on the topical meanings of the performance but also on the problematization of the "role of the evil in the world and the relationship between man and god(s), while emphasizing the inexplicability of human action," as well as the political implications of the narrative discontinuity in the staging of the chorus (ibid.).

²⁵¹ Grigoris Ioannidis, «Ηρακλής με μένος, χωρίς λεοντή και μύθο» [Furious Herakles, without lion's skin and myth], review of *Herakles*, directed by Michael Marmarinos, *Eleftherotypia*, August 8, 2011, accessed March 22, 2021, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=300102>.

²⁵² Ioannidis, "Facing Mirrors," 92.

and collective recollection, the performative narration of (hi)stories enabled new definitions of dynamic identities.

The choice of this particular Euripidean tragedy complies with such an interpretation, due to its rather atypical structure, which does not fulfil the quest for unity in the Aristotelian sense.²⁵³ The play consists of two movements, without an organic link between them. As the classical scholar, Kathleen Riley summarises, “the first [movement] is a familiar suppliant action, a rescue story culminating in belated but convincing confirmation of Providence; the second is inaugurated by a sinister central epiphany and cancels the moral order which the first movement restored”.²⁵⁴ At the beginning of the play, while Herakles executes his final labour in the underworld, his family (his wife, Megara, their children and his father, Amphytrion) seeks shelter at Zeus’ altar to protect themselves from Lykus, the usurper of Thebes, who threatens them with death. Lykus had already assassinated Megara’s father, Creon, the ruler of Thebes. Herakles’ family is ready to surrender voluntarily in order to avoid a violent death and maintain their dignity, when Herakles unexpectedly arrives, kills the tyrant and rescues his beloved ones. Halfway through, and while “[t]he initial plot structures are played out”,²⁵⁵ a new dramatic movement is unpredictably introduced by the appearance of the two deities, Iris and Lyssa. Sent by the goddess Hera to revenge Herakles, they drive him into madness: in a state of frenzy, the tragic hero kills his children and wife. After his awakening, he must confront his dreadful deeds. Under the burden of this terrible realisation, he will be persuaded by his friend Theseus to follow him to Athens.

The opening of the performance with the entrance of the travelling troupe to the ancient theatre of Epidaurus sets from the very beginning a framework of reference for the interpretation of the production. Even if the lines from the film were not known to the spectators, the image of the actors holding luggage probably reminded the audience of the well-known poster of the film, also included in the programme of the performance.²⁵⁶ Yet, the silent entrance of the actors’ troupe to the orchestra of Epidaurus should not be understood as simply implying a “theatre-within-theatre” condition.²⁵⁷ In Marmarinos’ production, the complex

²⁵³ The tragedy was translated by the poet and translator Giorgos Blanas in collaboration with the director. Euripides, *Ηρακλής Μαινόμενος* [Herculens Furens], trans. Giorgos Blanas (Athens: Nefeli, 2011).

²⁵⁴ Kathleen Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides’ Herakles: Reasoning Madness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

²⁵⁵ Christian Wolff, “Introduction,” in *Herakles* by Euripides (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.

²⁵⁶ Theatre Programme of *Ηρακλής Μαινόμενος* [Hercules Furens]. Athens: National Theatre, 2011, 46.

²⁵⁷ This was the interpretation of the leading theatre critic and philologist Kostas Georgousopoulos, who belongs to an older generation of theatre critics. In his review (one of the few negative reviews of Marmarinos’ performance) Georgousopoulos, a sworn opponent of postmodernism, accused Marmarinos of choosing an “academic, conservative form” based on syncretism. According to the Greek critic the opening scene, using “the

interplay between the dynamic identities and the multiple levels of narrative which became visible in the course of the performance, seems to lie beyond such a self-reflective operation of the dramatic theatre. Instead, I suggest approaching it in Hans-Thies Lehmann's terms, who argued that "[i]n postdramatic theatre, the theatre situation is not simply added to the autonomous reality of the dramatic fiction to animate it. Rather, the theatre situation as such becomes a matrix within whose energy lines the elements of the scenic fictions inscribe themselves".²⁵⁸

At the same time, the initial reference to the *Travelling Players* frames a – no matter how allusive and open – historical and cultural context, while stressing the co-existence of different, not always easily identifiable, narrative levels. Referring to Hayden White's argument that "[t]he historian has to interpret his materials in order to construct the moving pattern of images in which the form of the historical process is to be mirrored",²⁵⁹ Andrew Horton argues that "'the moving pattern of images' is certainly an accurate description of history as represented by Angelopoulos".²⁶⁰ The latter utilised different, also non-verbal strategies in order to invite the spectator to reflect on a complex, traumatic period of modern Greek history: monologues to the camera, long shots, a non-chronological montage of the scenes, the implied analogy to the myth of Atrides and musical and visual elements with symbolic/historical connotations. Following Horton, it could hence be suggested that

by crossing history with other cultural elements, including myth and the realm of the mysterious, Angelopoulos not only is attempting to represent a repressed history, as in the case of the Greek civil war, but also wishes to suggest the danger of trying to draw simple conclusions from too narrow a range of history.²⁶¹

Marmarinos' production invites a similar response. In the opening scene, despite the old bus, the casual modern clothes of the actors and the emptiness of the orchestra did not point to an

idea of theatre within theatre, the travelling troupe which comes to a place, sets its stage and plays" was repeating in 2011 "an already effete idea in Europe, in Greece and Epidaurus since the 60s" (Kostas Georgousopoulos, «Ακαδημαϊκός Περσένης» [Akademaikos refenes], review of *Herakles*, directed by Michael Marmarinos, *Ta Nea*, September 18, 2011, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://www.tanea.gr/2011/09/18/lifearts/culture/akadimaikos-refenes/>).

²⁵⁸ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 128.

²⁵⁹ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 51.

²⁶⁰ Andrew Horton, *The Films of Theo Angelopoulos: A Cinema of Contemplation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 58

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

adaptation of the production in a specific period of the past. From this point of view, Angelopoulos' film is a reminiscent of a broader cultural but not strictly chronologically defined context. Hence this intermedial reference attests to two crucial aspects in the perception of the past, central to Marmarinos' staging: the narration of the past and the interplay between the mythical, the fictional and the historical level of this narrative.

Narration has a crucial function in Marmarinos' work, which explores "the testimony of a theatre that does not deal with mimesis but with the narration of the act".²⁶² Narration and the experience of history are interwoven, with the first becoming a means for the mobilisation of the latent possibilities of history. As Marmarinos claimed in the director's note,

[r]ight at this moment – precisely at this moment – history is taking place. It is moving forward and – whether you realise it or not – it includes us. (...) In any event, History has only one chance to recover when events hurl us onto the rocks, and that is when it brings us together to narrate itself to us. Hope cannot be found in History, it is found in Narration.²⁶³

The relation between history and narration poses the question of fictionality and intentionality (also in ideological terms), which affects not only the historical inquiry but also the form and style of the narrative of the past. A narrative is necessary for the perception and therefore also the charting of the past, and its form will depend on the function that has to perform each time (e.g. official national histories vs personal recollections). Still, it cannot be suggested that the historical work is merely fictional.²⁶⁴ For as Paul Ricoeur argues

a sort of tropological arbitrariness must not make us forget the kind of constraint that the past event exercises on historical discourse by way of the known documents, by

²⁶² Ioannidis, «Ηρακλής με μένος» [Furious Herakles], n.p.

²⁶³ Michael Marmarinos, "Director's note," theatre programme of *Hercules Furens* (Athens: National Theatre, 2011), 54 [English in original].

²⁶⁴ According to Hayden White, the historical work underlies the same rules as the fictional one. It should be approached "as what it most manifestly is – that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them*" (Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 2; emphasis in original). Despite the attractiveness of White's relativist approach that challenged dominant stances in historiography, one should be aware of the restrictions which arise from the existence of historical evidences.

requiring of this discourse an endless rectification. The relation between fiction and history is assuredly more complex than we will ever be able to put into words.²⁶⁵

Following this line of argument, and even if one approaches Hayden White's claim that "[a]ll stories are fictions"²⁶⁶ with a certain caution, one cannot overlook the inherent aspect of invention in the narrative of any (hi)story. History, after all, must always be narrated. One could here consider the indisputable "shift from the 'singer of tales' to the *histor*" in Paul Ricoeur's terms. Contrary to "the singer of tales", the "*histor*" grounds his narrative in documents and not in tradition. This "shift takes place within the very concept of 'point of view' which characterises the narrator as such and which must be placed on the same level as the configurational and reflective nature of the narrative act".²⁶⁷ Hence, following Ricoeur, even if one acknowledges history's claim to be "a representation of *reality*", one cannot deny that it is at the same time "a literary *artefact* (and in this sense a fiction)".²⁶⁸ Owing to the openness and contingency immanent in its narrative form, the narrative of (hi)story, even if it is based on existing documents, resists the quest for mere positivist objectivity in the process of recording the past.

For Ricoeur, the narrative identity arises at this intersection between history and fiction: the "fragile offshoot" that emanates from "the union of history and fiction".²⁶⁹ The balance between those two aspects remains dynamic, and therefore the identity is not fixed. Functioning in opposition to the pole of history, "the fictional component draws it toward those imaginative variations that destabilize narrative identity".²⁷⁰ In Ricoeur's words, the narrative identity is "the sort of identity to which a human being has access thanks to the mediation of the narrative function".²⁷¹ In the same way that one may create "several plots" about "the same incidents (which, thus, should not really be called the same events)," it is also possible to create "different, even opposed plots about lives."²⁷² The answer to the question "who did this or that" leads to the "assignation of an agent to an action", namely the acknowledgement "that the

²⁶⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 154.

²⁶⁶ Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 9.

²⁶⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thomson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 280 (emphasis in original).

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 291 (emphasis in original).

²⁶⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 246.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 248–249.

²⁷¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity," *Philosophy Today* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 73.

²⁷² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 248.

action is the possession of the one who did it, that is his or hers, that belongs to one's own self".²⁷³ As Annemarie Halsema observes, in Ricoeur's thought, the self is not to be considered identical to the "text that it refers to and uses for the articulation of who it is"; on the contrary, the Ricoeurian self "reads itself in the text, identifies with it, and finds alternative possibilities in it of who it is". The self can thus perceive itself in different ways according to different texts. From this point of view, one could understand Ricoeur's narrative discourse as "the place of unending variations for the subject".²⁷⁴

Taking that into account, it could be suggested that Ricoeur's conception of identity, while holding indeed to a strong notion of narrativity, does not advocate a singular perception of identity. For, "[w]hat the narrative interpretation properly provides is precisely 'the figureable' character of the individual which has for its result, that the self, narratively interpreted, is itself a figured self – a self which figures itself as this or that".²⁷⁵ The self and the narrative identity should not be hence identified, although it is only through the narrative that the self can be understood.²⁷⁶ Interestingly, Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity is not only relevant for the individual but also communities: both construct an identity "by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history".²⁷⁷

Contrary to poststructuralist thinkers, Ricoeur does not focus on the restrictions that discourse sets for the realisation of the self. This does not, however, mean that the possible narratives that a subject may develop should be considered freed from the dominance of the prevailing discourses (for example, with regard to the dominant national(ist) discourses in the public sphere or the official national narratives learned at school). Nevertheless, Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity lends itself well to the present analysis as it stresses the dynamic possibilities that narration (like "imagining") opens for the self-perception of the subject/community. In the National Theatre's production, the performatively framed act of narration together with the uncertainty regarding the agent of the action led to a questioning of notions of representation and singularity. This rupture of narrative unity does not, however, suggest the mere deconstruction of identity but its definition as contingent and dynamic. For the unsettling of homogenising mechanisms through the performative act of narration takes place within a context that, no matter how allusively, is demarcated as Greek. The attention is

²⁷³ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity," 75.

²⁷⁴ Annemie Halsema, "The Subject of Critique: Ricoeur in Dialogue with Feminist Philosophers," *Études Ricoeuriennes/ Ricoeur Studies* 4, no.1 (2013): 29.

²⁷⁵ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity," 80.

²⁷⁶ Halsema, "The Subject of Critique," 27.

²⁷⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 247.

hence shifted from the personal narrative identity of the interlocutor to the collective identity, inviting a reconsideration of the terms under which the past is perceived while, at the same time, underscoring the subjective aspect of the collective memories, based on and through which national identities are constructed.

Given that the challenging of representation and the fragmentation of the dramatic identity has been often associated with the aesthetics of a postmodern theatre, an important clarification is necessary before proceeding. As I argue throughout this thesis, one should be very careful in the use of specific terms such as “postmodern” or “postdramatic theatre” when attempting to describe the aesthetics of the contemporary Greek theatre-makers. Especially in Greece, the interchangeable use of these two terms has led to further confusion regarding the labelling of the style of certain “experimental” artists. Marmarinos has been characterised (and often criticised by theatre critics) as an exponent of postmodern theatre in Greece.²⁷⁸ Given that the term “postmodern” cannot be used without considering the broader philosophical but also the context-conditioned discourse of postmodernity, a general labelling of Marmarinos’ work as “postmodern” seems rather hasty.

Contrary to “postmodern theatre”, Lehmann’s postdramatic theatre seems to be more easily defined as a theatrical term; despite any links to postmodern(ism), an analysis of postmodern(ity) is not necessary for the primary definition of “postdramatic” theatre. Taking this differentiation into account and cautiously avoiding any kind of generalisation regarding Marmarinos’ directorial style, it can be suggested that many of the strategies utilised in the performance of *Herakles* align (at least to a significant extent) with the aesthetics of postdramatic theatre. Although the structure of Marmarinos’ synthesis here remains closer to a dramatic model (due also to the extensive use of the Euripidean text in the second part), it is still necessary to consider the effect of the postdramatic strategies towards a questioning of homogeneity and unity, especially with regard to narration in the case of the chorus vs the protagonists.

In the National Theatre’s *Herakles*, the chorus and the tragic characters most of the time move on two parallel levels, with the first appearing less empathetic and supportive to the tragic characters and more absorbed by its own self-reflection.²⁷⁹ The protagonists lack any kind of

²⁷⁸ Marmarinos’ stagings (not only of ancient drama) have been characterised as postmodern by theatre scholars and critics. On a characterisation of his take to ancient Greek tragedy as postmodern, see Eleftheria Ioannidou, “Monumental Texts in Ruins”; Vicky Manteli, “Shattered Icons and Fragmented Narrative in a World of Crisis”; Gonda Van Steen, “Greece: A History of Turns, Traditions, and Transformations,” in *A Handbook to the Reception of Greek Drama*, ed. B. van Zyl Smit (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 214–216.

²⁷⁹ Manteli reads Heracles as a metaphor for Greece, while “the chorus/Greek people function as a subversive group, a motley group of citizens detached from the hero/country” (Manteli, “Shattered Icons,” 70).

direct interaction between them, while the chorus members physically and verbally interact and communicate with each other. Contrary to the chorus, whose words have been very freely adapted, in the case of the tragic characters, and besides the omission of verses from the Euripidean text, no further alterations may be observed. Still, the frontal positioning of the actors and the calm, almost unemotional, and often highly ironic utterance style disturbs any representational approach to the dramatic world of the Euripidean play. Illustrative is the way that the actress playing Megara breaks any possible identification in emotional terms. The indifferent female voice of the mother sounds like a voice of critical distance and together with her stressed physicality, secure the conscious awareness of the spectator.²⁸⁰

Towards this non-representational direction also operates the quite extended use of a microphone with stand, positioned frontally to the audience. The microphone does not affect the colour of the voices but only the volume. It functions as a means of estrangement stressing the act of narration, while also underscoring the distance between the actor and its “own” words. Indicative of the effect that the use of the microphone has is the actor playing Amphitryon. Speaking into the microphone with his soothing voice, Herakles’ stepfather recalls “a seductive storyteller”.²⁸¹ While answering to Lykus (in a dialogue, where both look towards the audience and speak into the microphone), the tyrant closes the microphone with his hand. Amphitryon rises his voice and his words are heard almost as loudly as with the microphone, revealing, however, anger and emotionality. The very moment of this act of censorship is not random: “And you, Greece... to praise you I cannot, /But neither can I remain silent./ Bad, and even worse you appear to my child. (...)/ Oh! My children! /Neither Greece nor Thebes will stand by you”.²⁸² The expressive, natural voice of the actor interrupts the storytelling diction of Amphitryon in microphone. The momentary distancing from the microphone allows the non-mediated sound of the voice to identify with the physical presence of the actor in the present time of the performance. This short interruption triggers new associations: Greece signifies not only the ancient land but the modern country, which during the crisis has caused ambivalent feelings in its “children”.

The multiplicity of the identities, which has been suggested already by the entrance of the troupe (chorus and protagonists together) will become even more visible in the case of

²⁸⁰ According to Ioannidis, her presence makes visible the existence of “a ‘second stage,’ which filters and selectively emphasizes a wide range of emotions” (Ioannidis, “Facing Mirrors,” 90).

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² «Κι εσένα Ελλάδα... να σε επαινέσω δεν μπορώ, / αλλά ούτε να σωπάσω. /Κακή, κάκιστη δείχνεσαι στο παιδί μου. (...)/ Αχ, παιδιά μου! Στο πλάι σας δεν θα σταθεί η Ελλάδα ούτε η Θήβα» (Euripides, *Ηρακλής Μαινόμενος* [Herakles], trans. Giorgos Blanas, 20).

Herakles and chorus. Interestingly, the messenger and Herakles are played by the same actor, stressing the fluid boundaries between the narration of story vs representation. The messenger enters the orchestra, announcing the loss of the children. Reacting to the chorus' request to speak, he begins to tell – into the microphone – the macabre story of the terrible murder, with a soft voice, revealing the worrying calmness of the shock. His monologue culminates in the description of Herakles' collapse after his frenzied crisis. The messenger lies on the *thymele* with eyes closed, holding the microphone between his hands; in the same position, Herakles will wake up from his sleep. The borders of the multiple identities are blurred: the narrator of the events becomes the protagonist of the narrative in the same way that the historical subject of the present becomes, through the process of narration, the “author” of one version of the history of the past.²⁸³

In the case of the protagonists the use of the microphone, which sets a framework to the act of narration, has an estrangement effect. This alienating function could be seen as vaguely reminiscent of the role of narration in the Brechtian theatre. On the other hand, the narration of the chorus, intermingled with personal memories and comments, gains the inverse function and gives the impression of emotional familiarity. This aligns more with the function of narration in postdramatic theatre, where “the theatre becomes the site of a narrative act”.²⁸⁴ The difference between epic and postdramatic theatre lies in this reversal of the process of distancing through narration:

[W]hile epic theatre changes the representation of the fictive events represented, distancing the spectators in order to turn them into assessors, experts and political judges, the post-epic forms of narration are about the foregrounding of the *personal*, not the demonstrating presence of the narrator, about the self-referential intensity of this contact: about the closeness within distance, not the distancing of that which is close.²⁸⁵

The distance in the case of Marmarinos' production should be examined in both temporal and spatial terms: the distance between present and a recollected past as established

²⁸³ Concerning the double role of Herakles/Messenger, Manteli quotes Ricoeur and his essay “Narrative Function” suggesting that “[t]he doubling of the role of Heracles and the Messenger stands out as a paradigm of *doing* History vs. *being* History, in Ricoeur's terms, thus implying a reciprocal relationship between the act of the narration of History and the fact that the people exist within History” (“Shattered Icons”, 77; emphasis in original).

²⁸⁴ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 109.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 110 (emphasis in original).

through the performatively framed act of narration, the distance between Greece today and the imagined places constructed (or subjectively reconstructed) through this recollection of the different pasts and the actual distance between audience and actors in the particular space of Epidaurus. It is inside this frame that the chorus' personal (and culturally familiar) presence triggers a feeling of closeness between orchestra and *koilon*.

The chorus is comprised of actors of different ages (four middle-aged and seniors, eight younger men and a young woman). Although the chorus members cannot be individually identified with specific characters, still, they can be recognised from the age, the different physical characteristics and outfit; furthermore, in some moment of the parts of the chorus they appear as individual persons with distinguishable reactions. Hence, they form a rather dynamic and polyphonic collectivity and, especially during the first part of the production, they reflect on youth, maturity, and experience, speaking in groups, in pairs or individually, singing, playing music, narrating anecdotes, or making jokes. The division of the chorus' verses to the group members, the repetition of lines and the simultaneous enunciation of different verses stress even further the chorus's position into a blurred zone between collectivity and individuality, between unison identification and dissonance.

The oral style of the still highly poetic language of the translation, together with the additions made in Marmarinos' adaptation, intensify the immediacy of the chorus' performance, often giving an impression of improvisation: whose words are heard on the orchestra of Epidaurus? In the choral odes, which in some parts are adapted very freely, the fragmented myth intermingles with the collective memories and personal stories of the individual chorus members. The Euripidean text is interrupted and filled in by the recollection of memories and the commenting on moments of the past and the public culture, which may be presumed to be – or at least sound – familiar to a Greek spectator, hence enabling a rather subtle (affective in some instances) connection between the chorus and the audience.

This uncertainty regarding the “author” is made even more explicit in the choral odes, as in many cases (in the parodos, the second and the third stasimon) the Euripidean verses are introduced with the phrase “someone said”.²⁸⁶ An indicative example of the chorus is the third stasimon, when the chorus, standing outside the palace, follows the murder of the tyrant Lykos. In the Euripidean drama, the chorus hears his voice, shouting that they killed him and then bursts in joyful jubilation. In the performance, the off-stage voice of Lykos is not heard. It is

²⁸⁶ NB. In the present thesis, the translations of lines or extracts from the performance texts that are not included in the original plays are based on my transcripts from the video recordings of the productions. These quotes will not be referenced separately but will be clearly indicated in the text as such.

the chorus that describes and responds to the invisible action either as a group or as individuals. The chorus stands as a group looking towards the right back side. The older member at the head of the chorus looks towards the rest of the group. Once again, they speak individually as well as in unison, describing the action to each other and the audience. The reported speech (e.g. “Someone said: Listen”; “They were embracing each other. And they were saying: the house is quiet”) intermingles with the narration of action (“they were embracing each other”; “someone went closer”) and the metatheatrical act of rehearsing. The older actor directs them how to utter the words: “No, no, no, no. Don’t be afraid. Now you should not be afraid. Now we have joy. Old men, the Unholy has ceased to exist. This should be said by a youngster. But at this intensity.” The younger members of the group now stage their own action and under the instructions of the eldest member they stage the announcement of the good news. With a vivid joy the group cheer: “Old men, the Unholy does not exist anymore”. At the same time, during the scene, members of the chorus respond in a “personal”, natural and almost childlike way to the re-enactment of the narrated event (“Good, really good sounds to me this song”). The oscillation between these levels not only foregrounds even further the uncertainty regarding a coherent identity of the group but also challenges the very theatrical condition. Still, the questioning of the theatrical convention is achieved without direct exposure of the border between “real” and fictive identities. For, between the fictive identity of the group as the chorus of the tragedy and the real identities of the actors lies their function as narrators, repeating (to the audience and the other chorus members) thoughts and reactions of anonymous acting individuals.²⁸⁷

Indicative is also the example of *parodos*. Suddenly, while enunciating verses of the choral odes alone, a member of the chorus appears confused regarding his following lines, also making a gesture of scratching the head to remember. Given that the introductory “someone said” points to the act of narration and not to the impersonation of a role, the uncertainty of the chorus member should not only be interpreted as a rupture of the theatricality but also as another way to frame, and thus emphasise, the function of a reteller, who holds a position between role and actor. At the same time, the casual way of dealing with the text (rather ironic, if one considers the monumentality of the ancient texts in Epidaurus), brings the chorus closer to the spectators and evokes a feeling of familiarity.

The chorus addresses the audience directly through its frontal onstage arrangement. In

²⁸⁷ On the (also political) function of the metatheatrical strategies utilized in the performance, see also Manteli, “Shattered Icons,” 70–76. Manteli also observes that “[i]n several added scenes each chorus member’s individuality was stressed and they were portrayed as ironic/commentators of history” (73).

some moments, this address becomes verbal through the direct address in second-person singular. During this recounting of the labours, the same chorus member who had forgotten his lines in *parodos*, invites the spectators to recall their own memories. The fact that only this one member of the chorus addresses the spectators in this way contributes to a loose individualisation of the chorus members, while still being part of a collective. The personal experience intermingles with the (collective) past of the myth:

You had a friend. Do you remember him? You were diving together and he was drawn in Kymi.²⁸⁸ Well, I had also one. He died suddenly three months ago. A hound from the underworld was guarding these people. And now, Herakles entered there to get this dog. Maybe, in order for our people to come back. To find them again. And not only ours.²⁸⁹

The associations triggered in the process of narrating (namely of remembering) the “small histories” of everyday people, achieve a shift of attention to the complex and often misconceived notion of familiarity with the past, be it individual or collective. Owing to its dynamics and the diversity of the voices, the chorus not only creates a collectivity of individuals broad enough to include the spectator himself; it also sets up an open framework of personal and collective references able to activate a reflection on the collective past and a (conditional) identification in the present.

In his insightful analysis, Grigoris Ioannidis suggested that in Marmarinos’ production

[t]he Chorus represents a nation that observes and, at the same time narrates, the plot. It is the image of a nation that is part of its history but also subject to it. (...) Different generations, different angles, different interpretations of the same event are all present at the same time, while the nation’s memory is being shaped. And this memory is not always compatible with the official version of events, which usually comes later in order to link events artificially, to ‘interpret’ them, and integrate them into a scale of values.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Kymi is a small coastal town located on the eastern coast of the island of Euboea.

²⁸⁹The spectator will be again addressed in second-person singular later in the first stasimon when the same chorus member wonders regarding the interests of the (hypothetical) spectator (“I am not sure if you would be interested in that”).

²⁹⁰ Ioannidis, “‘Facing Mirrors’,” 91–92.

Expanding on this argument, I will suggest that in order to renegotiate the present's relation to the past and its narratives, this collective memory is activated through the ironic but at the same time often affective allusion to fragments of the cultural and national fabric. For Marmarinos' staging does not directly adapt the Euripidean tragedy to contemporary Greece, modernising the text in a profane way. Still, however, through scattered references to the Greek history and everyday culture, the production constructs a loose cultural framework, which is underpinned by the "familiar" presence of the narrating chorus. These allusive (verbal, visual or musical) references to presumably known, at least to the Greek audience, public figures, anecdotes, images or melodies function as ambiguous, often self-ironic overtones open to multiple readings. From the very beginning, the entrance of the "travelling players" may be seen as the first such marker.

A case in point are the choral odes in the first movement of the play. In the second part, the chorus plays a much-restricted role, as the attention turns to the tragic figure of Herakles and his dreadful deeds. During the chorus' collective recollection of Herakles' labours in a free adaptation of the first stasimon, one of the two senior members of the chorus refers to the booty from the land of the Amazons. Standing on a small storage chest, the old man announces into the microphone that a younger actor has raised in front of him, that: "If you want to see this girdle you can visit the museum of Mycenae. Open every day. On Sundays, the entrance is free. For the Greeks. Because we are Greeks, Greeks...". The microphone frames the moment as a political speech. This "patriotic" outburst does not fit the vivid narration of heroic achievements. In a comic way that evoked laughter in a part of the audience, the younger members of the chorus take the old speaker down from his improvised podium, as if transporting a statue.

Whether the laughter that was heard in the audience of Epidaurus can be interpreted as an indication of the decoding of a (self-ironic) intention, remains an open question. As Linda Hutcheon claims, a single interpretation of irony is anyhow impossible given irony's various functions. A necessary presupposition for its understanding is that "what could be called 'discursive communities' already exist and provide the context for both the deployment and attribution of irony".²⁹¹ Hutcheon's term "discursive community" (pointing directly at Foucault's "discursive formation") takes into account the different discursive contexts within which each one is moving, while it pays attention to the "particularities not only of space and time but of class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual choice – not to mention nationality, religion,

²⁹¹ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1995), 18.

age, profession and all the other micropolitical groupings in which we place ourselves or are placed by our society”.²⁹² Each one belongs to different “discursive communities” and possesses different identities.²⁹³ Therefore is not possible to claim that the common nationality of the audience (presuming that the majority of the audience are Greeks as the performance was in Greek without supertitles) is necessarily a sufficient factor for the same decoding of the irony. Still, what can be claimed is that the context to which the ironic intention was pointing, was known to a large part of the audience since it was echoing a dominant ideological stance in the public discourse of the 1980s.

The ironic intention of the scene may be understood within the historic-political Greek context after the fall of the dictatorship and especially in the 1980s. During the period of governance of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) under Andreas Papandreou free access was granted to the archaeological sites to all Greek citizens. This decision was in line with the overall rhetoric of PASOK at that time. As already mentioned above, according to the political scientist Andreas Pantazopoulos, PASOK’s ideology (until 1989) can be characterised as “national-populist”.²⁹⁴ It is worth mentioning that during this period, Papandreou’s minister of culture, the actress Melina Mercouri led the campaign for the repatriation of the Elgin Marbles at an international level and turned it into an issue of national importance.²⁹⁵ Stressing Greece’s ownership over the antiquities Mercouri’s argumentation was based on the illegitimacy of the removal of the Elgin marbles, while Greece was under the Ottoman Occupation. The “national” quest for the return of the Elgin Marbles relied upon the same beliefs regarding the sacred importance of the ancient material past for the identity of modern Greece that has already been discussed in regard to Epidaurus. According to the archaeologist Yannis Hamilakis “archeological monuments contributed to the materialisation of the national dream. The Acropolis, completely purified and cleansed of the signs of its post-classical life, became the most important sacred site of this materialized dream, and the Parthenon, the most celebrated monument within it”.²⁹⁶

Given this national collective attachment to the materiality of antiquities, the plastic stools and chairs on which Marmarinos’ chorus sits, can also be read as an ironic counterpoint. During the first part of the performance (until the epiphany of Iris and Lyssa), the chorus brings

²⁹² Ibid.,92.

²⁹³ Ibid.,101.

²⁹⁴ Pantazopoulos, «Για το Λαό και το Έθνος [For People and Nation], 31.

²⁹⁵ See also, Eleana Yalouri, *The Acropolis: Global Fame, Local Claim* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 47.

²⁹⁶ Yiannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 254.

plastic stools to the orchestra. In the second part, when not on stage, the chorus members sit to the side of the audience on plastic chairs in front of the first-row seats of the ancient theatre. The cheap and counterfeit plastic may be seen as having its own, ambiguous, significance considering its wide use in Greece. The plastic monobloc chair, once a product of modernism in design, degenerated through massive production. In Greece, the plastic chair was especially identified with the summers outdoors and holiday houses and apartments, which a larger part of the population were able to buy owing to the “overflowing” prosperity since the 1980s. Looking at the chorus sitting on the white stools on the Epidaurus orchestra, one possibly recalls the picture of those vivid improvised summer gatherings in front of Greek houses, where what “someone said” it will be extensively discussed. Marmarinos’ plastic stools and chairs are not proclaiming their “cheapness”. Still, without boldly contrasting the ancient stones of the theatre, they make the difference between the materials visible in a familiar way and therefore one open to new interpretations.

Nevertheless, not all visual, verbal, or musical Greek references should be read through the prism of irony. The use of *ekkyklema* is such a case. Before gaining its typical function as a rolling platform to bring on stage the dead Megara and her children, the *ekkyklema* had been utilised as a stage for the musicians (chorus members) during the chorus’ celebrations of the tyrant Lykus’ murder.²⁹⁷ Now, *ekkyklema* gains a new use, which, nevertheless, still carries ritualist associations. The image of the musician on this wooden stage may be considered familiar to most Greeks from the *panigiria*, the traditional outdoor festivities for public celebrations of different occasions (for example, the patron saint of a church in villages). In Marmarinos’ production, the music – or at least the rhythmic muster of it – and the dance of the chorus vaguely recalls a traditional Cretan rhythm. The wooden stage, nevertheless, is not contrasting the minimalist aesthetic of the stage design. On the left side, the chorus members, moving individually to the rhythm, try to synchronise their dancing steps. The celebration on the side of the music stage could not be seen as exaggeratedly imitating the traditional festivities in a folkloristic way, attesting to a stereotypical notion of Greek festive “soul” and therefore implying a directly ironic, or even assailing intention. Instead, it could be suggested that the scene aims at an evocation of a (conditional) feeling of co-belonging and collectiveness that may be experienced in such festivities. In any case, the scene triggers a recollection of a

²⁹⁷ The rolling platform appeared for the first time on stage before Herakles’ unexpected arrival; Megara had adorned her children in the palace before their deaths, and, standing on the platform, again entered the stage, ready to surrender voluntarily. The platform was led by a wooden horse, followed by the chorus, as in a funeral procession.

likely known image of Greek public culture.

Similarly, the chorus' rejoicing for Herakles' return in the second stasimon is an ode to the power and beauty of youth. The older members individually express their wish to be young again. One of the two older chorus' members repeats insistently how it is loath to get old. When he stops, the refrain of the well-known song «Δεν θα ξαναγαπήσω» (“I will never love again” [My Share of Joy]) by Stelios Kazantzidis is whistled – without singing – by one of the chorus members. Kazantzidis' tune may be understood as a discreet reference to the famous Greek singer of urban folk music (*laiko*), who in the ears of many Greeks expressed the poverty and migration experience in post-war Greece, the difficulties of life and the pain of love and rejection. The songs of Kazantzidis as well as other *laiko* singers will be used (often ironically) in many of the performances analysed here as an easy recognisable hint to the Greeks' recent past. A few verses later, while toasting the youth and the lust for life, a chorus member begins to sing another known Greek song («Σαν απόκληρος γυρίζω» [“As outcast I am wandering”]), composed by Vassilis Tsitsanis. Slowly, indefinable background music will intermingle with the sung melody, interrupting the activation of any identification process.

At the same time, one of the two oldest chorus' members parodies the renowned Greek painter and set designer Yannis Tsarouchis (1910–1989). Without naming him but by portraying him he recalls the painter's visits to the nightclubs, where the *rembetiko*²⁹⁸ singer Sotiria Bellou was singing: supported by younger actors, the old actor tries to dance *zeimpekiko*, a solo male dance, stereotypically related to a notion of masculinity. Tsarouchis' unique artistic style had been shaped by different influences, both Greek and Western European, ancient, byzantine and even modernist.²⁹⁹ In his paintings are often depicted typical Greek motifs and elements of everyday Greek culture, such as figures from the traditional shadow theatre, Karagiozis, small decorative Greek flags, Greek signs, neoclassic buildings, traditional Greek coffee places (*kafeneion*) or the blue-white uniforms of young sailors. His

²⁹⁸ *Laika* (also translated as urban folk songs) should not be confused with *rebetika*. *Rebetiko* is a form of song accompanied by bouzouki (a string musical instrument) that the refugees brought with them from Asia Minor. It was considered an “underground” genre of the outlaws in the poor neighbourhoods of Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki during the interwar period. Usually the composer was also the performer (bouzouki player/singer). After the 1940s, *rebetiko* started deteriorating and became part of the mainstream music scene. Tsitsanis (1915 – 1984) was a famous composer and bouzouki player, who played an influential role in the reformulation of the genre. For more on *rebetiko*, see Dafni Tragaki, *Rebetiko Worlds* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

²⁹⁹ Tsarouchis' work presents a far-reaching “intertextual” dialogue with different “artistic traditions” from different epochs and places. In the early 1930s his style was influenced by the Byzantine and vernacular tradition, while later by the ancient Greek, the Hellenistic and Coptic painting. In the final period of his work he was influenced by “the baroque, the Dutch and French painters of the seventeenth century, the nineteenth-century naturalists, and the art of the Central Asian wall-paintings” (Anna Kafetsi, *Yannis Tsarouchis – Between East and West*, exhibition catalogue (Athens: Greek Ministry of Culture, 2000), 19; English in original).

work has been related to the already examined notion of “Greekness”. Tsarouchis did not use this concept, but as he claimed, he was interested in “the reality as it is shaped by our childhood memories but also by our *idiosyncrasy*”.³⁰⁰ His known liking for Bellou can be explained with regard to the fascination with the different influences in modern Greek culture. Given the association of Tsarouchis’ work to the exploration of the different elements that comprise Greek identity on the one hand, and the broader Greek cultural framework that subtly emerges in the choral parts on the other, the onstage recollection of the Greek painter’s dance is not to be understood as a disrespectful parody. Instead, it is more a playful reference to the whole discourse on “Greekness” as well as the attempt to overcome high/low culture binaries in which “Western” art was holding the “higher” position.

In the first part of the production, scattered, short, ambiguous references to modern Greek history, public figures, customs of everyday life, music and visual culture enable the narration of a loose – culturally identifiable – framework. The second part of the performance remains close to the second movement of the Euripidean play, which as noted above, has no organic connection to the first one. The chorus is not present (they sit on plastic chairs in front of the first row of the *koilon*); the attention shifts to the interpretation of the figure of a non-heroic Herakles. At the end of the performance, the actor playing Amphitryon, with his back to the audience looks at the tragic hero exiting the orchestra supported by his friend Theseus. The oldest member of the chorus approaches the microphone and utters the last verses of the Euripidean tragedy in an expressive, naturalistic way: “We are going. In tears /and with laments we keep going/ We are losing the best people, / we are losing our hopes... and we move on”.³⁰¹ Slowly, he leaves. The performance, which had opened with the silent “travelling actors” looking at the spectators frontally, finishes with the audience looking at Amphitryon’s back, who alone, in a suppliant position stands on the left side of the empty orchestra.

The recollection of the past experiences (personal as well as collective) turns into a call for awaking in the present, with the latter being resembling the tragic hero’s realisation of his deeds. The expectation of the future seems like an inevitable necessity to move on. The emotive finale aligns with the analysis of the performances as consisting of two levels, namely the protagonists and the chorus, which mirror the dialectic tensions between rational understanding and culturally conditioned, emotional perception. The use of alienation mechanisms in the case

³⁰⁰ Yannis Tsarouchis, «Περί Ελληνικότητας» [On Greekness], in *The building stone disowned by its builders* [Λίθον ον απεδοκίμασαν οι οικοδομούντες] (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1989), 189 (emphasis added).

³⁰¹ “Πηγαίνουμε. Με δάκρυα/ και θρήνους προχωράμε./ Χάνουμε τους καλύτερους,/χάνουμε τις ελπίδες μας.../ και πάμε” (Euripides, *Ηρακλής Μαινόμενος* [Herakles], trans. Giorgos Blanas, 86).

of the protagonists (e.g. neutral, dispassionate/ironic intonation, microphone, frontal acting) prevents an immediate emotional identification at the level of the mythic plot. This kind of estrangement was counterbalanced by the familiar presence of the vivid chorus. The aesthetics of the two different narrative styles underscores even further the contrast between chorus and protagonists. Requiring a different reaction and having a different effect on the spectator, these two opposite poles engage the spectator in a critical reconsideration of the “openness” of the very process of identification with(in) a cultural context.

This cultural contextualisation is achieved in a subtle, contingent and most importantly, non-representational way through the oscillation between ironic and affective references to different threads of the national culture and past. Marmarinos’ does not stage a “Greek” *Herakles* but approaches the tragic myth as a tale that this time is narrated “here and now”. The National Theatre’s production does not call for a mere deconstruction but a reconsideration of the possible open definition of Greek identity as non-fixed and contingent. The subject appears able to shape through his/her narration a personal but most importantly collective (national) identity. The selection of the events and cultural signifiers but most importantly their interpretation (for example through an ironic lens) is crucial for the kind of narrative that will be created and the ideological implications it may have in the identity construction.

In a constant interplay with the allusively Greek context, the vivid, free adaptation of the dramatic text in the case of the chorus, together with the different types of performative framing of the act of narration invited a new approach not only to the ancient drama but also to its entanglement with the notion of modern Greek identity. Marmarinos’ take on tragedy challenged a linear conception of national history that is legitimised by the material evidences of texts and ruins. Nevertheless, the existent possibility for open and loose, subjective identifications activated by culturally demarcated references, does not indicate a rejection of national identity in general. In a crucial moment for contemporary Greece, the chorus in Marmarinos’ *Herakles* suggested that any (hi)story is to a certain extent “fictional”, full of gaps but also possibilities for change: any identity is based on a plot and therefore contingent. It is only when understood as a personal narrative to be told in the present that the recollection of the past may encourage a hopeful, self-aware move towards an unknown future.

2.2 Bucolic tears in ancient ruins

In Angelopoulos' film, the travelling players tour around Greece to perform the pastoral drama *Golfo*. The members of the troupe are named after the mythical circle of Atrides.³⁰² Orestes, the son of the family-troupe, who has the role of a youth, will kill the Nazi-collaborator, lover of his mother. The rural Greek past of the pastoral drama and the ancient myth co-exist like “ghosts”, like threads that hold together the historical narrative. Recent Greek history is experienced against the backdrop of multiple layers of the national tale.

The National's production of *Golfo* at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus was based on a similar interplay between ancient myth and bucolic stories in a difficult moment of the present. After almost 60 years of history, the Festival hosted a performance of a non-ancient but Greek drama. This performance invited the audience to reflect critically on the more recent Greek past in a space that evokes complex ideological associations. In any case, if it were not for the Festival's attempt to re-orient its programme and also include performances of non-ancient drama since 2007, *Golfo* would have never been presented. Therefore, I will first contextualise the performance within the broader context, suggesting that during Loukos' tenure the Epidaurus Festival attempted not only to reflect on its own tradition but to resignify this theatre space. Then I will turn to the National's production to explore how nostalgia evoked a critical reflection on the past, which although not lacking affection, still undermined homogeneous narratives of the past–present relationship.

2.2.1 From Winnie to Golfo: performances of non-ancient drama in Epidaurus³⁰³

In Summer 2007, the programme of the Epidaurus Festival included for the first time in its history a twentieth-century (non-ancient-themed) play: the National Theatre of England presented Beckett's *Happy Days*. The very few exceptions of performances of non-ancient drama that had been presented at the ancient theatre since the inauguration of the Festival, did not achieve to question the identity of this (theatre) space – an identity that had been constructed under the weight of the troubling conception of continuity between ancient and modern Greece.

³⁰² The only named character in the film is the son of the family, the young actor Orestes. The other characters are identified with the other figures from *Oresteia* (Clytemnestra, Aegisthus etc.) due to their relation to Orestes.

³⁰³ A first version of this subchapter has been published under the title “Re-ghosting the ‘haunted stage’: The Epidaurus Festival and the resignification of (theatre) space” in *Jaws: Journal of Arts Writing by Students* 3, no.1&2 (2017): 27-36.

After the first “opening” to other theatre companies besides the National Theatre in 1975, in 1982 Peter Hall became the first foreign director with a foreign theatre company presenting a production of tragedy at the ancient theatre: it was the National Theatre of Great Britain’s production of *Oresteia*. Six years later, in 1988, Peter Hall and the National Theatre of Great Britain presented across three consecutive evenings Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. Together with Kleist’s *Penthesilea* directed by Peter Stein in 2002, these had been the only exceptions of performances of non-ancient drama. On special occasions, the Festival had hosted few opera productions and classical music concerts (e.g. in 1960 and 1961 Maria Callas sang Bellini’s *Norma* and Cherubini’s *Medea* respectively). Still, these music performances did not question the dominance of ancient drama.

The identity of the Epidaurus Festival is inseparably intertwined with the use of the specific venue. Here it is important to remember, that the power that cultural institutions may exercise upon spaces allows them to control what can be heard and seen. In the Festival’s case, its power over the particular space of the ancient theatre was decisive for the programming strategies that have been followed. This notion of “strategy” can be understood in De Certeau’s terms:

I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets and threats (...) can be managed. As in management, every ‘strategic’ rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its ‘own’ place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an ‘environment’.³⁰⁴

In the present case, such an understanding of “strategy”, reveals how the Festival’s curatorial strategies and policies not only define the use of the theatre space but also the terms of the reception of the performances within it. Rather paradoxically, it is this notion of power that may allow any kind of innovation. For, if the Festival had no power over the place, it would be also impossible to proceed to any programmatic change.

In 2007, the National Theatre presented Racines’ *Andromache* directed by Dimitris Mavrikios. In the same year, the Festival hosted the opera production of Cherubini’s *Medea*

³⁰⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 35–36 (emphasis in original).

and the above-mentioned performance of Beckett's *Happy Days*. The production of *Medea* was part of the Tribute for the thirtieth anniversary of Maria Callas' death. Deborah Warner's staging of *Happy Days*, with Fiona Shaw in the role of Winnie, was the first modern, non-ancient-themed play presented as part of the Festival's programme. Yet, could Beckett be performed at the ancient theatre? It is interesting to observe that in the discussion among Greek theatre critics, scholars and practitioners regarding the "opening" of Epidaurus to other kinds of drama, the arguments in favour of this choice were searching for a connection between Beckett and the ancient drama or were stressing the "value" of the productions.³⁰⁵

This canonical criterion defined to a great extent the choices that followed. The example of Beckett followed the productions of other plays beyond ancient drama. In 2008 Epidaurus hosted Pina Bausch's opera dansé *Orpheus and Eurydice* (Ballet de l' Opéra national de Paris). A year later, the National Theatre of Great Britain presented Racine's *Phèdre* with Helen Mirren. In the same year, Sam Mendes and the Bridge Project (a collaboration between Neal Street Productions, Brooklyn Academy of Music and The Old Vic) took part with Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. In 2010, the programme included the world premiere of Thomas Ostermeier's staging of *Othello* (Schaubühne Berlin). Ostermeier already belonged to the regular guests of the Athens Festival under Loukos' direction.³⁰⁶ In a way, Ostermeier's presence in Epidaurus could be considered as a connecting link between the two Festivals.³⁰⁷ In 2011 Sam Mendes and the Bridge Project came back with a production of *Richard III* with Kevin Spacey in the eponymous role. In 2012, Lefteris Vogiatzis staged Moliere's *Amphitryon* in a production of the National Theatre of Greece. Two years after the production of *Golfo*, which will be extensively discussed here (2013), Michael Marmarinos presented *NOH – Nekyia*, a collaboration with Rokuro Gensho Umewaka and Japanese Noh actors.

The productions of non-ancient drama allowed a gradual and rather subtle re-orientation of the Festival's programming. The choice of these productions took into account

³⁰⁵ Suggestive are the opinions of directors and critics published in two articles on a daily newspaper of wide-circulation regarding the limits in Epidaurus (Myrto Loverdou and Isma Toulatou, «Έχει όρια η Επίδauρος;» [Does Epidaurus have limits?], *To Vima*, July 29, 2007, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.tovima.gr/2008/11/25/culture/exei-oria-i-epidayros/>, and Myrto Loverdou and Isma Toulatou, «Έχει όρια η Επίδauρος;» [Does Epidaurus have limits?] (part 2), *To Vima*, August 5, 2007, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.tovima.gr/2008/11/25/culture/exei-oria-i-epidayros-2/>.

³⁰⁶ In 2006, Schaubühne presented two productions (*Nora* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream*); in 2008, the staging of Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*; in 2010 *John Gabriel Borkmann*, in 2011 *The enemy of the people* and in 2015 *The Little Foxes*.

³⁰⁷ In Loukos' view, the production of *Othello* attracted the Peiraios' audience to Epidaurus («Φέραμε στην Επίδauρο το κοινό της 'Πειραιώς 260'» [We brought the Audience of Peiraios 260 to Epidaurus], interview by Ioanna Klefogianni, *Efsyn*, August 21, 2010, accessed March 3, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=194822>).

financial restrictions as well as the broader “sensitivity” regarding the ancient space.³⁰⁸ These performances and especially the four English productions were rather mainstream, showing great respect for the (classical) dramatic text. In that sense, it could be suggested that the Festival’s aim was not to achieve a radical rupture of the previous tradition but in a concealed way to open the horizon of expectations. Indicative is the artistic director’s answer when during the press conference in 2011, he was asked if there were not enough applications for performances of ancient drama and he had to select the Bridge Project’s production: “Shakespeare is not ancient Greek drama, but it is still drama”.³⁰⁹ Considering again that three out of the five hosted foreign productions were stagings of Shakespearean plays, it is not hard to guess that this choice was relying on the perception of Shakespeare’s work as synonym of “value”. Interestingly enough, the exclusivity of Greek classics, whose invocation as inheritance played a crucial role in the reproduction of prevailing national(ist) discourses in modern Greece was challenged through the use of other canonised classical texts (Shakespeare).

The institutional status of the invited companies and the selected plays immediately functioned as guarantee upon the principle of previous expectations (classics/national theatre). The status of the two theatre companies invited (National Theatre and the Old Vic) even if not openly stated, called upon a theatrical “tradition” that had been considered by many critics and theatregoers a synonym for artistic value.³¹⁰ It seems rather ironic that in a Festival whose (aesthetic) tradition has been greatly defined by the Greek National Theatre during the first 20 years of its history, it is another National Theatre that comes to break a long history of exclusivity. The presence of the National Theatre of another country should be understood in terms of the way that Greek society perceives the institution of a National Theatre in general as – in S.E. Wilmer’s words – “the flagship of theatre culture”.³¹¹ Hence, the presence of a National Theatre, which is a carrier of value especially when coming from a country with long

³⁰⁸ For an opposite approach see Ioannidou and Siouzouli. According to them, “[t]he contemporary performance aesthetics in large-scale projects and international collaborations, which were promoted by the Festival after 2006, could not destabilize this logic to the extent that it remained tied to an established avant-garde” (Ioannidou and Siouzouli, “Crisis, Ruptures and the Rapture of an Imperceptible Aesthetics,” 114–115).

³⁰⁹ Yorgos Loukos, Athens and Epidaurus Festival: Press Conference 2011 at Benaki Museum. April 14, 2011. YouTube Video. Accessed March 3, 2021, 47:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akYDBcWcX9Y>.

³¹⁰ In this line of argument, the words of a well-known critic and theatre scholar Kostas Georgousopoulos are demonstrative; despite his critical remarks of the performance of *Phèdre* he praised the acting tradition: “The British acting school, the most important today worldwide together with the Russian, with Shakespeare as its patron saint is empirical and extrovert (...) The actors of the National Theatre of Great Britain honored their School, what we here deride when we speak of the National Theatre School (Alas! They eradicate it with a torrent of slanders)” (Kostas Georgousopoulos, «Γλώσσα στη φορμόλη» [Tongue in Formalin], *Ta Nea*, July 20, 2009, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://www.tanea.gr/2009/07/20/lifearts/culture/glwssa-sti-formoli/>).

³¹¹ Wilmer, “Introduction,” 2.

theatre tradition, does not directly confront and rebel against notions of national heritage. It could even be claimed that is a confirmation of the magnitude of these ancient ruins. In this way, and without declaring a rupture, Becket was performed at the ancient theatre.

At the same time, famous protagonists, such as Ethan Hawke, Kevin Spacey and Helen Mirren, enabled the targeting of a much larger and presumably different audience (e.g. three sold-out performances of *Richard III*). The Festival promoted the productions by stressing the much acclaimed actors and highlighting their previous roles in cinema.³¹² The pre-crisis financial problems of an already indebted institution could not afford any avant-garde experimentations. Rather pragmatically, it had to make use of the potential high-ticket sales. Targeting a much broader audience compared to the audience of the Athens Festival, the Epidaurus is one of the main sources of revenue for the Hellenic Festival. The pricing attests to this intention to address broader audiences, with the prices of the tickets varying between the low and the upper tier (e.g. the ticket prices for the performance of *Richard III* in 2011 varied from 10 (reduced) to 50 Euros).³¹³ Hence, it could be argued that despite its insistence on “value”, the Epidaurus Festival did not turn into a festival only for elites or those able to pay a high price for “high art”.

The significance of these performances of non-ancient drama can only be acknowledged in relation to the Festival’s long history of “exclusions” (e.g. only National Theatre productions until 1975). At the same time, they should be examined against the backdrop of the Festival’s power and control over the particular space and with regard to the important role that the visible materiality of the ancient ruins played in the construction (and perpetuation) of the Festival’s identity.

Theatre spaces inevitably affect the spectator’s theatre-going experience. Following Marvin Carlson, “[t]he entire theatre, its audience arrangements, its other public spaces, its physical appearance, even its location within the city, are all important elements of the process by which an audience makes meaning of its experience”.³¹⁴ Yet, these theatre spaces carry meanings and ideological references and trigger associations. As Ric Knowles suggests,

³¹² For example, the protagonist of the *Happy Days*, Fiona Shaw, was introduced to the Greek audience on the official website of the Festival: “The production’s leading lady, Fiona Shaw, whom the Greek public has to date had the pleasure to enjoy only in her film work (such as *The Black Dahlia*, the *Harry Potter* series, and *My Left Foot*) has also won many awards for her theatre performances” (“Happy Days,” Greek Festival, accessed March 10, 2021, http://greekfestival.gr/festival_events/national-theatre-of-great-britain-2007/?lang=en).

³¹³ “Richard III,” Greek Festival, accessed March 10, 2021, http://greekfestival.gr/festival_events/the-bridge-project-presented-by-bank-of-america-merrill-lynch-2011/?lang=en.

³¹⁴ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 2.

the geographical and architectural spaces of theatrical production are never empty. These are spaces full of histories, ghosts, pressures, opportunities, and constraints, of course, but most frequently they are full of ideology – the taken-for-granted of a culture, that don't need to be remarked upon but which are all the more powerful and pervasive for being invisible.³¹⁵

In the case of Epidaurus, the idea of an unfailing connection between modern Greece and antiquity could be analysed in terms of such a “taken-for-granted”, as defined by Knowles. The visible materiality of the ruins is functionalised as an unquestionable evidence of a direct relationship between ancient and modern Greeks. Similarly to the national histories as official, coherent narratives, the history of the ancient theatre has to conceal any inconsistencies and gaps.

Epidaurus can be hence understood as a “haunted” place. The ghosts in this case are not necessarily memories of actual theatre experiences but dominant (mis)conceptions of national past and heritage. These ghosts are strategically used by the Festival, affecting hence the perception of performances in the present. Hence, the recollection of ghosting memories of previous (personal) experiences in Epidaurus is imbued with expectations shaped by the dominant discourses on the origins of the Greek nation and the construction of national identity.

According to Marvin Carlson, the recollection of “previous encounters” may help “understand and interpret encounters with new and somewhat different but apparently similar phenomena”.³¹⁶ He names this process “ghosting”:

Unlike the reception operations of genre [...] in which audience members encounter a new but distinctly different example of a type of artistic product they have encountered before, ghosting presents the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context. Thus, a recognition not of similarity, as in genre, but of identity becomes a part of the reception process, with results that can complicate this process considerably.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, 63.

³¹⁶ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 6.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

In this case, identity does not mean exact repetition, something anyhow impossible, considering the ephemerality of the performative event. The notion of identity points more to the way that particular aspects of the theatrical experience (e.g. dramatic text, actor, space etc.) can be related to previous experiences and interpreted with reference to these activated memories. This process of recollection will in turn affect the perception of the new performance. According to Carlson, theatre space goes, like all other elements of a theatre performance (text, actor's body) and the production itself, through this process of ghosting, hence becoming a "haunted house".³¹⁸ The phenomenon of ghosting is often observed in cases of "specific physical buildings", in which are presented stagings of plays of the same genre.³¹⁹ Hence, the analysis of the ghosting process and how this may affect the operation of the memory, it is necessary to account not only the theatrical and social contexts involved but also the terms of the identity construction of each (theatre) space through specific programming choices.

National Theatres can be considered a characteristic example of the identification of a space with a certain theatre experience. As Marvin Carlson argues, in those houses, the ghosting is visually indicated, with their past history and theatrical tradition being exhibited on the walls of the foyers and staircases. The "general cultural memory" will be brought by the audience to the auditorium and will be added "to its specific and individual memories of theatrical experiences in these mnemonically highly charged surroundings".³²⁰

Although Epidaurus is not a national theatre building, still an activation of a cultural memory that affects the theatre experience takes place. In the foyers of the national theatre buildings, their history and (aesthetic) tradition is visually reminded through the photos of past performances and famous directors and actors. In Epidaurus a certain aesthetic tradition, directly related to the materiality of the space, seemed until recently to preoccupy significantly the audience's expectations. The natural landscape and the absence of other (at least, visual) signifiers were supporting the function of the ruins as evidence of continuity and an unmediated connection with the ancient past. As the archaeologist Yiannis Hamilakis reminds, the antiquities had "an eventful and rich social biography" before the nineteenth century, when they started playing a significant role in the construction of the national imagination:

³¹⁸ Ibid., 131–164.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

³²⁰ Ibid., 147.

They [antiquities] were the wonders and feats of past people and they held potent meanings and mysterious powers. National imagination, rather than creating a radical break, built upon and incorporated these feelings and attitudes, establishing at the same time a genealogical link: these feats are now the feats of the ancestors.³²¹

Considering the significance of the ancient past for the public imagination, it could be argued that the materiality of the ruins in Epidaurus triggers a cultural memory, which, however, has not been personally experienced. Hence, the individual, often repeated, theatre-going experience at the ancient theatre is defined by a pre-existing horizon of (“national”) expectations.

To attend a performance at the ancient theatre every Friday and Saturday in July and August, the spectators should either make a long one-day trip or stay in the nearby villages for the weekend. When reaching the theatre, they park their cars and walk uphill through the trees, until they see the ancient theatre stately emerging. Since they are not numbered, the upper-tier seats are usually occupied earlier. While waiting, the spectators stare the view of the surrounding mountains in the sunset. Like an annual “ritual”, the framing of this (for many repeated) visit to Epidaurus affects the performance experience which is going to follow. For, it will be an experience not only influenced by the drama to be seen on stage but also by the perception of the materiality of the ancient ruins and the associations in may trigger. The summer journey to Epidaurus could be compared to the long travel to the Festival of Bayreuth, which, following Carlson, can be considered “a somewhat extreme example of what might be called a pilgrimage theatre”.³²²

From this point of view, the choice to include foreign performances of non-ancient dramas may be analysed as an – although maybe inconsistent – challenging of the existing terms of this process of “ghosting”, which the Festival itself had so far intentionally preserved. Hence, although Epidaurus has remained a theatre associated with the productions of ancient drama, these stagings of other plays created new “ghosts”, which keep questioning the very perception of the ancient theatre as primarily a site of “national” heritage. The inclusion in the programme of other kinds of drama affected ever since the later theatrical experiences in Epidaurus, even during the performances of ancient drama.

³²¹ Hamilakis, *The Nation and its Ruins*, 290.

³²² Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 157.

In Carlson's terms, theatre "is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustments and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts".³²³ Taking that into account, I suggest that by hosting performances of non-ancient drama, the Festival achieved to activate a process of "re-ghosting". Here the prefix "re-" has the meaning of "afresh, anew", with the latter referring "[i]n a new or different and typically more positive way".³²⁴ In that sense, "re-ghosting" signifies here a process of ghosting in a different way, under the influence of new references that will be recalled by the spectators on their next visit.

Given that the choices of the Festival did not escape certain canonical criteria, it could be argued that the potential for change within this institutional context is rather weak, particularly if one accounts the unlimited possible subversive uses of spaces in contemporary performance. Yet, if one considers the crucial role that the ancient ruins played in the shaping of national imaginings, the value of such (even if not radical enough) curatorial choices, should not be overseen. Interestingly enough, in the case of the Festival, it is a cultural institution that makes use of its power upon a space in order not to exclude and restrict but to introduce something "new". The Festival itself broadens the horizon of expectations and in this way influences the audience's perception of future performances.

According to Benjamin Wihstutz "in the theatre, politics and the police are not always as clearly separable as Rancière's politics of aesthetics would have us believe".³²⁵ Wihstutz refers to the two Rancierian terms "police" and "politics". In Rancière's words, the "essence of police" is not "repression" or "control over the living" but consists of "a certain way of dividing up the sensible".³²⁶ Politics should be rather considered "the instituting of a dispute over the distribution of the sensible".³²⁷ Following Wihstutz,

With regard to the performance space, it thus appears to make little sense to apply the notion of politics to an emancipatory practice alone. Rather, the history of theatre demonstrates that, within the theatrical space, repression and emancipation, order and

³²³ Ibid., 2.

³²⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "re-," accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/re->; Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "anew," accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/anew>.

³²⁵ Benjamin Wihstutz, "Introduction," in *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Wihstutz (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6.

³²⁶ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 44.

³²⁷ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 45.

the redistribution of the sensible occasionally act on one another in a peculiar manner.³²⁸

Keeping this in mind, it could be argued that the Festival's programmatic changes with the inclusion of performances of non-ancient drama, suggest one of those moments of rupture, which may enable a different perception of the theatre space, without, however, undermining – at least overtly – the existing “order”. In 2013, following these productions of non-ancient drama, the Epidaurus Festival hosted for only one evening the National theatre's production of Spyridon Peresiades' pastoral drama *Golfo* (1893). Surprisingly enough this became the first Greek but non-ancient play to be performed in the ancient ruins. This production would possibly have never been presented without the “ghosts” of Winnie, Phèdre, or Richard. Six years after the discussion of whether Beckett could be performed in Epidaurus, the “tragic” story of the poor shepherdess *Golfo* was heard at the ancient theatre, ironically reminding the spectators of the recent, inglorious, rural past of modern Greece.

2.2.2 Coming to terms with an (irrevocable) past: *Golfo* at the Epidaurus Festival

An August evening. The orchestra of Epidaurus has been covered with a black floor. Only the white *thymele* in the middle stands out: a sign of respect towards the “sacrality” of the place or just a reminder of its identity as an ancient theatre? A few black beanbags stand at the back of the orchestra; on the right side, an old, black piano and an electric one. A microphone stands in front of them and another one on the left side of the orchestra. Dressed in black, the actors enter through a walkway at the back of the orchestra and hide behind the beanbags. An elderly actor enters from the right *parodos* and stares at the spectators for a prolonged moment of silence. From the other side comes an elderly actress who stands a few steps away from him. Both look towards the audience before they turn and look at each other. She approaches him slowly. They kiss. In the meantime, some other actors have climbed on the beanbags and by blowing woodwind and brass instruments make the sound of the wind. Another elderly actor approaches the kissing couple from the left side, stops in front of them and a handheld microphone announces the opening of the performance: “Ladies and Gentlemen: *Golfo*. He wanted her. She wanted him so much. At the end both die. What a nice play”. The sound of the wind together with a shrilling tenuto sound that is heard from the loudspeakers evokes a feeling

³²⁸ Wihstutz, “Introduction,” 6.

of strangeness, disturbing the romantic moment. The subtly ironic tone in the actor's voice points from the very beginning to the "banality" of the plot; the spectators are invited to search for interest in other aspects of the performance beyond the simple story. The long kiss of the old couple is, however, not ironised; they act tenderly. Under the monotonous tenuto sound, the actors move the beanbags and place them across the orchestra. The actor/narrator begins to speak the first verses of the play into the standing microphone, while a younger actor runs and climbs on a beanbag in the middle of the orchestra and gazes – as if standing on a mountain – into the distance.

This was the opening of the 2013 National Theatre's production of Spyridon Peresiades' *Golfo* (1893) directed by Nikos Karathanos and presented on August 16, 2013 at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus. The performance, first presented indoors at the National Theatre in Athens, was met with great success.³²⁹ The critical potential of Karathanos's staging to provoke a reconsideration of the notion of identity and the recollection of the national past was amplified by its inclusion in the Festival's programme and by the interplay between this particular theatre space and Peresiades' play. Therefore, here I focus only on the performance at the ancient theatre in August 2013.

Although *Golfo*, "our national melodrama, a true fountain of tears",³³⁰ has seemed in the last decades "obsolete and equivalent to 'folklore'",³³¹ it has still often been approached as "a key text for the shaping of modern Greek national consciousness".³³² Between recollection of the (fictive) past and realisation of the present, between emotional proximity and critical distance, Karathanos' staging of *Golfo* at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus although it moved the audience emotionally, did not attempt to restore an ideal "authentic" image of a lost (national) past. Here it will be argued that Karathanos' production was characterised by "reflective nostalgia". The latter was defined by Svetlana Boym and should not be confused with the rather troubling concept of nostalgia in general.³³³

³²⁹ The performance was presented at Rex – Marika Kotopouli Stage (National Theatre of Greece) from 6.3 28.4.2013 and was repeated at the Central Stage of the National Theatre from 18.10 – 28.11.2013. The performance was also presented in Thessaloniki (10 and 11. 10. 2013) as part of the Dimitria Festival at the Theatre of the Society for Macedonian Studies.

³³⁰ Grigoris Ioannidis, «Γκόλφο': καθρέφτης της εθνικής μας πορείας» [“Golfo’: Mirror of our national course], review of *Golfo*, directed by Nikos Karathanos, *Efimerida ton Sintakton*, August 19, 2013, Accessed March 28, 2021, <https://reviewtheatre.wordpress.com/2013/08/20/γκόλφο-καθρέφτης-της-εθνικής-μας-πο/>.

³³¹ Tania Neofytou, «Η Γκόλφο του Σπ. Περесиιάδη και οι σκηνικές αναζητήσεις του Σίμου Κακάλα και του Νίκου Καραθάνου: Φύση, Φως και Σκότος» [Peresiades' *Golfo* and the stage explorations of Simos Kakalas and Nikos Karathanos: Nature, Light, Darkness], *Parabasis* 13, no. 2 (2015): 93.

³³² Marilena Zaroulia, “‘What is our motherland?’ Performing ‘time out of joint’ at the National Theatre of Greece (2011–13),” *Journal of Greek Media & Culture* 3, no. 2 (2017): 204.

³³³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

Nostalgia comes from the Greek words *nostos*, meaning “return home” and *algos* means “pain”.³³⁴ In Boym’s view, it “is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy”.³³⁵ In the nineteenth century, nostalgia played a decisive role in the process of nation building. Contrary to the first generation of romantics, whose “nostalgic world view was *weltanschauung*, not *real politik*”, nostalgia became “political”.³³⁶ Boym is aware that nostalgia may lead to a dangerous confusion of “the actual home and the imaginary one”. In her view, the “sentiment itself, the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility” are fundamental aspects of the “modern condition”.³³⁷

According to Linda Hutcheon, the power of nostalgia – like the power of irony – should be sought in “a perhaps unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency—or, emotion and politics”. For, “nostalgia is not something you ‘perceive’ *in* an object; it is what you ‘feel’ when two different temporal moments, past and present, come together for you and, often, carry considerable emotional weight”. The same also happens in the case of irony, which “‘happens’ for you (or, better, you *make* it ‘happen’) when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together, usually with a certain critical edge”. Although here nostalgia will not be related to postmodernism, Hutcheon’s parallel approach to nostalgia and irony is of use because it stresses this “element of response”.³³⁸

In her analysis, Boym distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. The first, stressing the notion of “*nostos*” aspires “to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps”; the latter “dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance”.³³⁹ While the notion of restoration implies “a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment”, reflective nostalgia is characterised by “new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis”.³⁴⁰ Restorative nostalgia is the kind utilised by “national and nationalist revivals”,³⁴¹ which does not perceive the past as “duration” but as “a perfect snapshot”.³⁴² It understands itself “as truth and tradition”, whereas reflective nostalgia,

³³⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. ‘Nostalgia’, *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/nostalgia>.

³³⁵ Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xiii.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 (emphasis in original). For an overview of nostalgia’s different meanings since its first use in 1688 and until its negative connotations at the end of the nineteenth century, see the first chapter of Boym’s book (3–18).

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, xvi.

³³⁸ Linda Hutcheon & Mario J. Valdés, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue,” *Poligrafías* 3 (1998–2000):22.

³³⁹ Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

undermines such a notion of absolute truth.³⁴³ Able to be “ironic and humorous”, it suggests hence “that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection”.³⁴⁴ Fully aware of the “irrevocability of the past”, reflective nostalgia aims at “an individual narrative that savours details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself”.³⁴⁵ The narratives that reflective nostalgia produces are thus “ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary”.³⁴⁶

Following Boym’s definition, I will suggest that the way the performance in Epidaurus approached the relationship between a difficult present and a multi-layered past, enabling individual recollections of reflective narratives, was characterised by reflective nostalgia. Of course, one should keep in mind that “[n]ostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological”.³⁴⁷ It is in no case to argue that the perception/experience of the audience was the same. This parameter of subjectivity aligns with the “reflective” type of nostalgia. In her analysis Boym focuses on the interrelation between collective and individual memory, defining nostalgia as an “intermediary” between them.³⁴⁸ Here, national memory should not be confused as collective memory; the first constructs “a single teleological plot out of shared everyday recollections” and aspires to correct “gaps and discontinuities” by offering “a coherent and inspiring tale of recovered identity”. In contrast, collective memory might be understood as “the common landmarks of everyday life”, which “constitute shared social frameworks of *individual* recollections”, without however aiming to function as “prescriptions for a model tale”. It is within this shared framework of collective memory that the individual reminiscences unfold, hence enabling “multiple narratives”.³⁴⁹

Golfo, like all the dramatic idylls, was nostalgic about a lost “innocent” life in nature. Karathanos’ production attempted to restore this Greek play; yet, it did not call for a restoration of the “ideal” past as described in the play. The play was written in 1893 by Spyridon Peresiades (1854–1918).³⁵⁰ It belongs to the sub-genre of the dramatic idyll (*dramatiko*

³⁴³ Ibid., xviii.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 49–50.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 49.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 50.

³⁴⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 23.

³⁴⁸ Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 54.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 53 (emphasis added).

³⁵⁰ *Golfo: an idyllic drama in five acts* was performed for the first time at the theatre Paradise in Athens in 1894. Peresiades wrote sixteen plays and a collection of poems; besides *Golfo*, *The Slave Girl* [Σκλάββα] and *Esme* [Εσμέ] were also well known (Iro Katsioti, «Η ‘τύχη’ της Γκόλφος» [*Golfo*’s ‘fate’], in *Το Ελληνικό Θέατρο από τον 17^ο στον 20^ο αιώνα* [The Greek Theatre from the seventeenth the twentieth century](Proceedings), ed. Iossif Vivilakis, (Athens: Ergo, 2002), 185–86).

eidyllio, also translated as “pastoral drama”), a dramatic genre of the last decade of the nineteenth century. The dramatic idyll is considered an outgrowth of the comic idyll (*komeidyllio*). Its birth is dated to 1891, with Dimitrios Koromilas’ *The Lover of the Shepherdess*. Three years earlier he had also inaugurated the genre of the comic idyll with the play *Maroula’s Faith*. Following Hajipantazis, dramatic idyll should be seen as a reaction to the popularity of the comic idyll. It is “the last mission of romanticism” which aspires to reclaim its dominant position on the Greek theatre stage.³⁵¹ The interest of the Greek literary generation of the 1880s in *ethography* (*ηθογραφία* = study of folk manners), which shifted the focus from antiquity and Byzantium to contemporary folk culture, played an important role in the development of both kinds of idylls.³⁵² The dramatic idylls echo the nostalgia of the urban residents for the life in the countryside, namely in many cases for their past.³⁵³

Golfo’s rather simple plot is characteristic of this kind of play: The mountain girl *Golfo* and the young shepherd *Tassos* are secretly in love. After *Tassos* is rewarded with money for rescuing the life of an English Lord during an excursion into *Helmos* mountain, he asks *Golfo* to marry him. Soon he abandons *Golfo* to marry *Stavroula*, a rich master-shepherd’s daughter, who promises him a large dowry. *Golfo* falls into despair. In *Tassos*’ pre-wedding celebration with *Stavroula*, *Golfo* appears in a state of frenzy. *Tassos* is shocked and breaks the engagement. It is, however, too late; *Golfo* has already taken poison and she soon dies in *Tassos*’ arms. Unable to bear the pain, he kills himself with a knife.³⁵⁴

Both comic and dramatic idylls were written in demotic Greek [*demotiki*; δημοτική], the modern vernacular language, which is distinguished by the “purist” [*katharevousa*]. The latter is a language variety developed in the early nineteenth century, comprising aspects of the ancient Greek and the vernacular language of that time. While the comic idylls were written in prose, the dramatic ones, imitating the rhythm and melody of the traditional folk songs [*demotika*; δημοτικά], were written in fifteen-syllable verse [*dekapentasyllavos*; δεκαπεντασύλλαβος]. This metric line has a caesura after the eight-syllable and iambic stress.³⁵⁵ Because of the use of *dekapentasyllavos* and the imitation of the language and melody of the

³⁵¹ Theodoros Hadjipantazis, *Το Κωμειδύλλιο* [The Comic Idyll], Vol. 1 (Athens: Ermis, 2006), 144.

³⁵² Walter Puchner, «Το Κωμειδύλλιο» [“The Comic Idyll”], in *Ανθολογία Νεοελληνικής Δραματουργίας* [Anthology of Modern Greek Dramaturgy], v.2 (Athens: Cultural Bank of Greece, National Foundation, 2006), 341.

³⁵³ Walter Puchner, «Το Δραματικό Ειδύλλιο» [“The Dramatic Idyll”], in *Ανθολογία Νεοελληνικής Δραματουργίας* [Anthology of Modern Greek Dramaturgy], v.2 (Athens: Cultural Bank of Greece, National Foundation, 2006), 359.

³⁵⁴ Spyros Peresiades, *Γκόλφω* [*Golfo*] (Athens: Damianos, n.d.).

³⁵⁵ For a contemporary experimentation with this metrical form, see 3.2.2 about Kitsopoulou’s play *Athanasios Diakos*, written in 2012 in 15-syllable verse.

traditional folk song, it was thought that in the dramatic idyll the folk tradition was used in a much more integrated way than in the comic idyll.³⁵⁶ The latter, due to the humoristic background and the influence of the European models did not treat the folk themes very piously.³⁵⁷

Golfo has been one of the most performed dramas in Greece.³⁵⁸ Karathanos' performance was the second staging of *Golfo* at a state theatre; the first was Simos Kakalas' staging at the National Theatre of Northern Greece in 2004. Instead, Peresiades' play had been identified with the tradition of the *bouloukia* (travelling troupes),³⁵⁹ which performed around the country on improvised stages at the local *kafeneia* (coffee shops) and squares. Such a *boulouki* were the travelling players in Angelopoulos' film. The love story of the mountain girl has also influenced other art forms (published as novel, adapted for operetta and the Greek shadow-puppet theatre (*karagiozis*), a theme of folk paintings, etc.). Indicative of this popularity is the fact that the first Greek silent feature film ever shot was the filming of *Golfo* in 1914 (dir. Konstantinos Bahatoris).

According to Marilena Zaroulia, “[t]he long history of the play’s performances onstage and screen attests to its cultural significance and the choice of the National Theatre to schedule one performance of Karathanos’s version as part of the 2013 Epidaurus festival further proves the canonical status of Peresiades’ play”.³⁶⁰ Given not only the history of the Epidaurus Festival but also the fact that *Golfo* has been identified with the travelling troupes, it cannot so easily be suggested that the performance in Epidaurus proves its “canonical” status. As was also noted by some critics, Karathanos had to deal with a “‘naïve’ play, worn out by the use, the lifejacket of the travelling troupes, renounced as a cheap, bucolic play suitable for the villagers”.³⁶¹ In that sense, if *Golfo* is to be considered part of the canon, a more specific definition would be required. As Grigoris Ioannidis rightly points out, the choice to perform *Golfo* at the open-air amphitheatre, should not be understood as a “reconnection” with the natural, Argolic landscape of the pastoral drama.³⁶² On the contrary, it could be argued that the performance in this space

³⁵⁶ Hadjipantazis, *To Κωμειδύλλιο* [The Comic Idyll], 147.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁵⁸ According to Iro Katsioti, for the period 1895–1967 had been registered in Theatre Museum’s archive 96 programs from productions of *Golfo* (in Greece and abroad) and 26 programmes from stagings of the adaption of *Golfo* as operetta (Katsioti, «Η ‘τύχη’ της Γκόλφως [*Golfo*’s ‘fate’], 196).

³⁵⁹ The word *bouloukia* comes from the Turkish word *bölük*, which means “troop”.

³⁶⁰ Zaroulia, “‘What is our motherland?’” 205.

³⁶¹ Giorgos Sarigiannis, «Ρέκβιεμ για μια Ιουλιέτα του Χελμού» [Requiem for a Juliet from Helmos], review of *Golfo*, directed by Nikos Karathanos, *To Tetarto Koudouni* (blog), October 27, 2013, accessed March 8, 2021, http://totartetokoudouni.blogspot.gr/2013/10/blog-post_27.html.

³⁶² Ioannidis, «‘Γκόλφω’: καθρέφτης της εθνικής μας πορείας» [‘Golfo’: Mirror of our national course], n.p.

suggested a moment of rupture in the Festival's long history of exclusions, which, as already discussed, could not have been possible without the "opening" of Epidaurus since 2006 and the re-signification of the theatre space.³⁶³

Karathanos' performance presented a high grade of aesthetic balance and stylistic consistency. This *Golfo* was, literally, a dark one: both setting and costumes were black. This colour choice encouraged a more complex reading of the play, contradicting the idyllic expectations that its title may raise. The huge, shapeable, black beanbags turned throughout the performance into the mountain landscape, where *Golfo*'s story takes place. Standing often on the peak of these "mountains", the actors enunciated their words in static poses (often recalling *tableaux*). In other moments, however, the flexible movements (jumping, walking, slipping) on those beanbags gained a childlike freedom (e.g. the playful first meeting of the young couple), or functioned as a sign of "fall" (e.g. when the actor playing Tassos slides slowly to the floor after *Golfo*'s curse). The black costumes of the actors could not be easily recognised on the black beanbags (especially if one considers the distance between orchestra and the upper tier in Epidaurus). Hence, the object was becoming an extension of the subject and vice versa, while the human body was becoming an integral part of the landscape.

The choice of costumes was of great significance. Both men and women wore a black pleated skirt, which immediately recalls the *foustanela* [traditional kilt], the Greek, white, national costume.³⁶⁴ Worn by both actors and actresses this black pleated skirt could be read as a sign of unisex uniformity, implicitly opposed to the white, male connotations of *foustanela* as the traditional costume for men. Furthermore, it could be suggested that through this stylistic consistency, the spectator was invited to consider the transformation of this sign of identity. This new signification could be traced towards the end of the play when two centaurs lifted the (middle-aged) devastated *Golfo* and took her off the stage. Each centaur was performed by two actors: the first walking with naked upper body, without the skirt, wearing black trousers, while behind him, the second actor holding him in a bent-over pose. The skirt of the second actor

³⁶³ From the opposite perspective and considering the performance history and reception of the play, Ioulia Pipinia and Andreas Dimitriadis suggest that "[b]y entering Epidaurus, *Golfo* was immediately rehabilitated and accepted by upper classes and intellectuals" (Ioulia Pipinia and Andreas Dimitriadis, "Refashioning Dramaturgy: A Stage Rewriting of a 19th-c. Play in 2013 Greece," *Gamma* 22, no. 2 (2014): 140). Without a detailed audience analysis one should be, however, rather cautious about the use of such vague terms as "upper-class" or "intellectuals", when defining the audience of Epidaurus.

³⁶⁴ *Foustanela* is "a kind of multi-pleated white skirt," part of the traditional men's costume worn in Peloponnese, Attica and Central Greece. It is made from "many right-angled triangular panels of material, which are sewn together and then gathered at the waist". During the Greek War of Independence, "[t]he *foustanela* was chiefly worn by the *armatoloi* and *klephtes*, the guerrillas of the Greek uprising against the Turks". Later, during King Otto's reign, it became "a court dress" (Ioanna Papantoniou, *Greek Costumes* (Nafplion: Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, 1991), 11).

was hence giving the impression of the lower – equine – part of the centaur. Through this rather expressionistic scene, the costume (initially a reminder of the national costume) was transformed, inviting a reconsideration of the multiplicity of significances.

Whereas, as will be suggested here, the performance was not merely reduced to a naïve reading of a “national” love story, the text was treated with special attention and respect. Only minor interventions can be observed (e.g. omission of verses, different sequence and addition of words/short sentences, as in the narrator’s prologue). The romantic poetry was brought forth, shedding light on an aspect that was usually overlooked in favour of the melodramatic popularity of the shepherdess’ story. Worthy of mention is the addition of some extra verses (“about love”) to Golfo’s monologue after Tassos has abandoned her. These extra verses in fifteen-syllable verse, written by Lena Kitsopoulou, were integrated into Peresiades’ text and could not be easily recognised. However, as their inclusion was mentioned in the programme, it may be presumed that the spectator could detect them.³⁶⁵ The choice to include new verses, imitating Peresiades’ style, however, may be understood as a gesture of acknowledgement of Golfo’s poetic value. According to the director, Peresiades’ play is an underestimated excellent example of demotic poetry and, as such, requires special treatment.³⁶⁶

An interesting difference between Peresiades’ drama and the performance could be observed in the finale: Tassos does not kill himself as in the play but is encouraged by the other actors to “run”. In this final scene, the shepherd’s part is played by the elderly actor, who had opened the performance in the kiss scene. While in the beginning, the spectators could not recognise the identity of the couple, by the end of the play they have identified the actor with Tassos’ part. He is not the only one playing the leading role. In Karathanos’ performance the roles of Golfo and Tassos have been divided into three different couples of actors of different ages. A couple of younger actors, around their late twenties, performs the first part of innocent love. The middle-aged actors take over in the phase of maturity, when Tassos, thinking rationally, abandons Golfo. Finally, the elderly couple takes over at the end of the play, when Tassos recognises his mistake but Golfo has already drunk the poison. It is interesting that the couples of the same age do not take over their roles at the same point (for example, the middle-aged Tassos breaks off the engagement with the young Golfo).

³⁶⁵ Theatre programme of *Γκόλφο* [Golfo]. Athens: National Theatre, Summer 2013, 4.

³⁶⁶ Nikos Karathanos, «Το πανηγυρικό Ρέκβιεμ της Γκόλφως» [The panegyric Requiem of Golfo], interview by Christos Paridis, *Lifo*, March 13, 2013, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.lifo.gr/mag/features/3688>.

While both the young and the middle-aged actors wear the black skirt costume, the elderly couple is dressed in modern clothes of a senior style.³⁶⁷ In some instances, two or all three of the actors/actresses playing the same character encounter each other on stage and interact. In some other moments, while an actor plays the role, some verses are spoken in-between by the older or younger actor/actress. The elderly couple often remains on the side as an observer of the onstage action. All other actors (including the young and middle-aged couples), participate in the group scenes when not playing their parts. Stressed also by the uniformity of the costumes, the presence of all the actors together recalls a chorus, which either plays music, sings, or even (like in the ancient tragedy) comments on the action.

The characters emerge out of the group, thus challenging singular conceptions of identities and undermining representation. A characteristic example could be seen in the encounter between Golfo and her mother Astero in the first part of the play. While the young actress playing Golfo lies down on one of the back beanbags, another young actress on the front beanbag invites the elderly actress, who approaches her from the left, to climb on. The young actress instructs her gently how to climb on the beanbag. Her response “Mother, I know this”, reveals the interplay between different age versions of the protagonist characters. The calm voice and the tender, comforting way in which the young actress hugs the elderly one (who still stands in front of the beanbags) together with the uncertainty in the movements of the elderly actress, suggests the image of a mother with a small child, learning to walk. This reversal of roles challenges even further the singular identities of the characters.

The division of the same role to different actors and their co-presence on stage produces a space of complex simultaneities. This opens new possibilities for a reading of the performance not only as looking back to the (“national”) past (even if with critical distance) but also towards the future, hence engaging the spectators to a reconsideration of the present time in Greece of 2013. In the final scene of the performance the elderly couple meets again. The old actor’s voice transmits a childlike innocence, which is, however, contradicted by the fragility of his weak body. Golfo at first appears to be confused; then reveals that she has taken poison. Here the question of identity is raised best. When Golfo asks Tassos who he is, the actor gives her his Greek ID. The actress takes a couple of steps and shows the document to the audience. This visual reference to modern Greece (also as national state) invites the spectators to reflect not only on their own “identity” but also on the “national identity” of

³⁶⁷ The elderly actress wears a brown jacket, a floral blue-white blouse, dark midi skirt, brown short heels (pumps) and holds a small handbag. The actor playing Tassos also wears a jacket, black trousers and a light blue pullover.

Golfo's lover and by extension of the play itself. In this final scene, the actor's voice sounds surprisingly calm, undermining the highly romantic verses that they enunciate. The physical presence of the elderly actors visualises in a non-melodramatic way the irreversibility of the end. First, the elderly actress and then the other actors, who witness the scene sitting on the beanbags with their backs to the audience, ask him to run. Slowly, he runs along the walkway at the back of the orchestra, which is lit with a spotlight.

In this final scene the interweaving of different temporalities, which has been traceable during the whole performance, becomes most visible. According to Zaroulia, "the production's confrontation with the past paved the way for an approach to the present, imagined and perceived from a future vantage point. The performance's last moments offered a complex and multi-layered image of that disjointed temporality".³⁶⁸ Informed by Derrida and his conception of "time out of joint", Zaroulia analyses "the tone of Greek politics, culture, public life" since the outbreak of the crisis in 2010 as being signified by "a 'time out of joint'".³⁶⁹ Following Derrida, whom Zaroulia also quotes, this is "not a time whose joinings are negated, broken, mistreated, dysfunctional, disadjusted, according to a *dys-* of negative opposition and dialectical disjunction, but a time without *certain* joining or determinable conjunction".³⁷⁰ For Zaroulia during this period in Greece "the dialectics of past, present and future were radically challenged". It is this notion of "disjointed temporality" as "a peculiar temporal dislocation" that she observes in performances, like *Golfo*, where "past, present and future collide in ways that are performatively multi-layered, ideologically charged and occasionally dubious".³⁷¹ As she notes regarding this final scene

[a]part from defying resolution for the drama, the vulnerability and futility of this action [the old actor's exit] point to the futility of obsessing with changing the past in order to imagine a future. This is not to suggest an ahistorical perspective on the nation but a shift in perspectives on the nation, beyond narratives of survival and endurance.³⁷²

While, however, Zaroulia's understanding of the past–present relation challenges notions of continuity and unity, still she negates the dialectical relationship between them that I, on the

³⁶⁸ Marilena Zaroulia, "What is our motherland?," 206.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

³⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 20 (emphasis in original). Also quoted in Zaroulia, "What is our motherland?," 197.

³⁷¹ Zaroulia, "What is our motherland?," 197.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 207.

contrary, consider of crucial significance. I argue that the past–present connection is not disjointed but on the contrary a tensed one. The constant oscillation between identificatory proximity and critical distantiating manifested through different estrangement techniques as well as affective strategies does not imply a temporal dislocation which aims at a dissociation from the past. On the contrary, the temptation for a return to “narratives of survival” is present. It is in this dialectical tension – which is also underlined through the reflective, nostalgic character of the performance that the critical potential is preserved.

In a similar way to the different acting styles of the three generations of actors, the framing of the comic elements of the play has a distantiating function, undermining notions of homogeneity and continuity. The comic elements of the play underscore interruption. The only exception to the uniformity and monochrome of the costumes discussed so far was the case of the elderly couple. The different clothes in their case underlined the future–past standpoint from which they enter the onstage action. It is interesting to observe that the few other disruptions of blackness are related to the comic elements that can be traced in the text. In Karathanos’ staging the latter gain an ironic function, not allowing the spectators to interpret the comic scenes as simple laugh-provoking interludes (their original function in the tradition of dramatic idyll) but engaging them critically. A characteristic example is the visit of the foreign travellers who are looking for the ancient Styx in the Helmos mountains. Accompanied by a Greek guide, who wears the black *foustanela*, the travellers wear nineteenth century clothes (the women’s hats recall the Biedermeier style) in pale colours. The actor playing the English lord is wearing a black tailcoat, an embroidered waistcoat, a light-blue skirt (in the cut of the black *foustanela* but of a different textile, hence carrying philhellenic connotations) and a top hat. The actor is struggling to hold his balance on the black beanbags, giving the impression of disharmony with the “landscape”. The travellers’ costumes break the monotony of the stage. While the two elderly actors signify their temporal difference through their modern clothes, the travellers signify their cultural (and in that sense spatial) distinction from the group/place. Interestingly, in modern Greece, it was through the gaze of these “foreigners” that the “natives” constructed an identity as “heirs” of the ancient Greeks. In Peresiades’ play, when the Greek guide asks Tassos if he could help them find the river Styx, the shepherd did not immediately recognise the name of the place, because he knew it with its new name (*Mavroneri* = black water) and not the ancient one. At the ancient theatre of Epidaurus, this scene acquires a (visible) ironic signification. In these ruins, which have been often considered evidence of continuity, it reminds the audience that the “uninterrupted” link between ancient and modern Greece is a mediated construction.

The most comic figure of the play could be considered Zissis, a *tseligas* (cattle owner), who wants to persuade Tassos to marry his daughter Stavroula.³⁷³ The actor wears the black *foustanela* and a loose black coat, which suggests the typical shepherds' cape. Despite the darkness of the stage, he has black sunglasses on, the hair is slicked back and around his wrist glitters a gold watch. Zissis' figure can be also considered a parody of a stereotypical image of Greek masculinity, which has been constructed on the basis of power relationships. While still a shepherd, he differentiates himself through gold accessories, with the black sunglasses attributing a modern touch in an otherwise rural context. An analogous kitsch hybridisation of different styles can be found in the Greek rural society even nowadays. Most of the time the actor speaks, in a pompous way, into a handheld microphone, which functions as a symbol of power. In some instances, he prolongs the endings of the words, parodying the singing style of the modern folk music singers. These endings are accompanied by a movement coming from the traditional dance *tsamikos* [τσάμικος].³⁷⁴ This Greek folk circle dance is in three-quarter metre and originally was performed only by men, with the leading dancer improvising, acrobatic movements such as leaps and kicks. It should be noted that here the irony does not point to the traditional folk musicians (playing music with traditional acoustic instruments) but to those performing traditional music even nowadays in the villages in a rather hybrid way, with the use of electronic amplifiers distorting the sound.

Throughout the performance, the frontal position of the actors, looking at the audience (not always directly but also sideways), contributes crucially to a distancing effect and rejection of naturalistic representation. The spatial distance and lack of eye contact between the actors (even at close distance, when addressing each other) invites the audience to also approach the onstage action from a critical, distant standpoint (e.g. the encounter/dialogue between the middle-aged actor playing Tassos standing on the back of the orchestra and the young actress/Golfo in front, both looking at the audience, signifies the emotional distance between the characters, which is further stressed by the age difference of the actors). In many instances, all the actors are on stage, facing the audience. They either keep performing their roles or they are part of a (music) ensemble where in most cases their identities remain diffuse. This way of acting undermines the relational system of the characters and questions the

³⁷³ *Tselingato* was a form of socio-economic pastoral system with a clearly defined hierarchy. The chief was the *tselingas*, the owner of the largest flock, who also had his own pastures. He was the patron of the whole *tselingato* and responsible for all the economic decisions. The poorer shepherds were herding their smaller flocks together with the *tselingas*' sheep, while at the same time they were working for him.

³⁷⁴ *Tsamikos* is a Greek folk circle dance in three-quarter metre, originally performed only by men. The leading dancer improvises acrobatic movements such as leaps and kicks.

homogeneity of the dramatic narrative. While not directly addressing the spectators, the frontal acting style and onstage positioning indirectly provoke in the spectator a state of awareness. This does not mean that the spectators do not often feel emotionally moved. Still, however, they are invited to reflect on this affective moment and not uncritically identify with it.

A characteristic example is the much-discussed scene of Golfo's monologue after the ending of her engagement.³⁷⁵ The whole ensemble enters the orchestra, carrying black chairs and sits in two rows, looking towards the audience: in front are the three actresses playing Golfo and behind the other actors/actresses holding their musical instruments. Under the sound of a piano melody, the middle-aged actress playing Golfo takes tissues out of a black vat in front of her, wets them with water from a bottle and gives them to the other two actresses sitting on her right and left side. She begins her monologue. The actress playing the middle-aged Golfo begins her part in the performance with a *crescendo*. This should not be seen as inconsistency but as an intentional decision not to present only three different phases of the role but also three actresses with different acting styles playing the same role. At the end of each strophe, like a refrain, all the actors join with the instruments, while the three actresses demonstratively squeeze the water out of the tissues in front of their eyes as if they are crying. While the music is emotive and the acting style of the actress very passionate, at the same time the imitation of the act of crying functions as an ironic comment on the melodramatic reception of the play throughout the decades. It could be argued that this scene is indicative of how Karathanos' staging approaches Peresides' drama and its stage history: without annihilating the possible affective impact of a romantic story, it challenges an uncritical identification of the spectator with the suffering dramatic character. Through the simple, performative gesture of the tears the spectators are invited to consider the mechanisms behind the evocation of emotions in theatre, also possibly reflecting on their own reaction during this scene, which indeed had a rather emotive effect.³⁷⁶

The actors' frontal position often leads to the formation of *tableaux* which can be understood as a reference to nineteenth-century melodrama. Especially at the end of the scenes

³⁷⁵ Act III, scene A; this is the monologue with the additional verses ("love is"), written by Lena Kitsopoulou.

³⁷⁶ Here my understanding of emotion follows Erin Hurley's taxonomy of feeling, according to which emotion is differentiated from affect and mood. The latter "happens *to* us (...) and yet happens *through* us" (Erin Hurley, *Theatre and Feeling* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 22; emphasis in original). By this, she relates affect to an unconscious, subjective reaction, "an organism's autonomic reaction to an environmental change" (17). On the contrary, "emotion [...] is inevitably influenced by the person's expectations and interpretative lens", which differentiate according to the cultural and historical context (19). The third expression of feeling is "mood," which in Hurley's terms, can be seen as "a disposition or background state that orients us to certain kinds of emotional responses and reactions" (22–23). For example, music functions as a means to construct such a background state.

and acts was evoked “a resolution of meaning in tableau, where the characters’ attitudes and gestures, compositionally arranged and frozen for a moment, give, like an illustrative painting, a visual summary of the emotional situation”.³⁷⁷ Here it should not be forgotten that the dramatic idyll has been considered “a substitute” for melodrama in Greece.³⁷⁸ At the same time, in Karathanos’ staging, these *tableaux* function as another strategy to counterbalance the sentimentalism of the play by decelerating the rhythm of the performance (or even freezing it) and distantiating the spectators, who have to reflect on the non-action of this standstill. The effect of this frontal arrangement should also be analysed in regard to the simultaneous use of music, which in the National’s production, plays a crucial role. In Karathanos’ performance, the music was composed by Angelos Triantafyllou (actor in the performance) who was also playing the piano. The musical instruments (trumpet, trombone, clarinet, baglamas [= higher pitched version of bouzouki], melodica, didgeridoo, snare drum, bell plates, bass drum) were played on stage by the actors.³⁷⁹ It should be remembered that in the melodramatic tradition of the nineteenth century, “the music’s appeal to the ear underscores quite literally the tableau’s appeal to the eye”.³⁸⁰ In the present case, while on the one hand music can be seen as a “powerful mood inducer”,³⁸¹ on the other (together with the sound effects) it underscores a kind of estrangement (also evoked by the frontal position and the standstills) and hence undermines an uncritical emotional response. Often these two dialectically co-existing tendencies cause a rather ambiguous (and in some cases ironic) effect.

An interesting example is the joyful celebration of the engagement between Tassos and Golfo. Looking out at the spectators, first on the beanbags then in front of them, the actors play a catchy melody on their instruments, suggesting the approach of a happy ending. Yet, the melody is suddenly cut – stopped on the “submediant” of the scale, the melody remains “incomplete”, anticipating harmonious resolution. Only the old piano continues. The actors turn to the right, where the elderly actress plays the melody standing. The other actors exit the

³⁷⁷ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 48.

³⁷⁸ Dimitris Spathis, «Η εμφάνιση και καθιέρωση του Μελοδράματος στην Ελληνική Σκηνή» [Emergence and establishment of Melodrama on the Greek stage], in *Μελόδραμα: Ειδολογικοί και Ιδεολογικοί Μετασχηματισμοί* [Melodrama: Genre-related and ideological transformations], ed. Savas Patsalidis & Anastasia Nikolopoulou (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2001), 206.

³⁷⁹ Here it should be noted that in the dramatic idylls few songs were anyhow integrated into the plot. According to Hadjipantazis, in the comic idylls the song signified “a cut into the action, a temporal abortion of clock time,” which was allowing the audience to gain a better insight into the “character’s inner world”. On the contrary, in the dramatic idyll the songs were becoming part of the plot in a realistic way and the dramatic characters recognized the songs as such (e.g. songs during a celebration or when the village girls go to the fountain to get water) (Hadjipantazis, *To Κωμειδύλλιο* [The Comic Idyll], 128–129).

³⁸⁰ Hurley, *Theatre and Feeling*, 57.

³⁸¹ Anne Bogart, “Foreword,” in Hurley, *Theatre and Feeling*, xiv.

stage. The light goes off, while the melody continues. When the light turns on again, the actors have taken their places on the beanbags, creating a *tableau*. For a very long moment, under only the sound effect of running water, they pause before the action moves on. While at first the spectators may feel welcome to “participate” in the joyful celebration of the group (which is open enough to include them, as the actors playing music are not identified with specific roles), the sudden interruption and prolonged stillness (which excludes the spectators, by putting them in the place of observers) reminds them to remain alert.

Here it is also important to stress the interplay between the emotional power of music and the (often distancing) function of the microphone (handheld and in stand) which is used throughout the performance in different ways. Already from the beginning, it had framed the comment of the narrator introducing the play. The same function is observed later when the whole ensemble gets involved in an onstage fight. The disagreement between the (middle-aged) Golfo and the *tseligas* Zissis, turns into a public fight. The frontal positioning of the actors is interrupted and a free-for-all fight breaks out. Among curses, the same actor/narrator, comments ironically with a calm voice: “The Greek Hate. What a nice play”. The family fight turns into a collective (national) matter. It could be suggested that the comment points to the polarising and violent conflicts in the history of modern Greece during the twentieth century which has marked – and traumatised – Greek society. Although one cannot easily interpret the audience’s applause at this moment, it might be understood as a sign that the spectators have decoded the irony of the scene.

Both microphones (handheld and standing) stress the fragmentation of the role between different actors, hence suggesting the multiplicity of identities and their different temporal standpoints. The handheld microphone could be also seen as a sign of power (e.g. in the case of Zissis), as a means of persuasion (Tassos’ father encouraging Golfo to fight for his son), or as a sign of temporal distance (in the case of the final monologue of Golfo, played by the elderly actress). In addition, the handheld microphone underlines a significant rupture between the first and the second part of the play: after Tassos, played by the young actor, has expressed –without microphone – his inner struggle to decide if he should leave Golfo, the middle-aged actor takes over the part and continues the monologue into the handheld microphone. His voice sounds rather monotonous and bored, precluding his decision to proceed with the profitable wedding. Besides this use, in a similar way (which recalls the microphone’s effect in Marmarinos’ performance), the standing microphone functions as a means of estrangement. This effect is also underscored by the spatial distance between the actor speaking into the microphone (either

on the left or right) and the rest of the group/centre of the action. Hence, the position of the microphone helps the spectator visualise a notion of “critical” distance.

Still, when the solo singer/musician or small ensemble sing into the standing microphone, the effect is not alienating; on the contrary, the emphasis on the act of singing shifts the attention away from the centre of the stage. In some instances, this leads to an ambiguous emotional appeal. An indicative example is the scene where the middle-aged actor playing Tassos speaks into the handheld microphone, while the actresses (without performing their roles) sing a traditional folk song into the standing microphone, accompanied by the electric piano, a trumpet and a trombone. The rather dispassionate voice of the actor contradicts the emotive melody of the folk song and singing style of the actresses, hence having an affective but still ambiguous effect on the spectator. In two further scenes, the song into the microphone, together with the frontal position of the actors, counterbalances the melodramatic tendencies of the text. Such an effect, for example, was achieved by the brief rhythmical irregularities and a slightly disturbing dissonance between the traditional melodic line sung by the female actress and the instrumental bassline. In another instance, the sound of the high-pitched voice of a countertenor singing a melodic line (without words) in a loosely tonal harmony contributed significantly to the construction of an expressionistic black “dreamscape”, complementing the (passionately enunciated) curse of Golfo to her lover.

Music’s function as trigger for a rational awakening becomes most visible towards the end of the second part (Tassos’ wedding celebrations). While previously the music often had an ambiguous character (moving but also disrupting), here it directly underscores the critical potential of the onstage action, favouring an interpretation of the scene as a topical comment on modern Greece. A *klarina*³⁸² folk song is heard from the loudspeakers. In some moments, the record goes into a loop and plays over and over again the same part of the melody. The actor playing Zissis enters the stage and makes exaggerated movements from the folk dance *tsamikos* while, rather expressionistically, holding his face. His repeated movements follow one of the loops on the record and evoke tension as if the nerves of his body vibrate the echoing effect of the singer’s voice. In the meantime, the other actors have also joined this disharmonious choreography.

The actor, still wearing his black sunglasses, throws small white papers in the shape of banknotes in the air. This can be a reference to the Greek (masculine) custom to throw money to the musicians (or spit on the notes and stick them to the musician’s forehead) while dancing

³⁸² *Klarino* [κλαρίνο] is a Greek folk version of clarinet, typical instrument in traditional Greek music.

as an expression of joy. Some actors slip greedily from the beanbags to catch them. The music decelerates with a slow-motion sound effect, while the movement of the actors remains intense; music and movement are asynchronous. The actors, holding each other and imitating *tsamikos* movements, approach the first row of the spectators: for the first time, the distance between orchestra and *koilon* is “bridged”. Throughout the performance, Karathanos’ had created images of great harmony. Now, however, ambiguity gives way to destruction: the “mountains” of the idyllic landscape reveal their “real” materiality as patted down beanbags. The actress playing Stavroula, who was dressed up throughout the performance in the costume of a bear, now sits exhausted in the middle of the chaos, without having the animal’s head on. At this deconstructive moment, the actors’ dance towards the audience creates a sense of proximity which, however, should not be seen as an invitation to the spectators to identify uncritically. On the contrary, it invites a reconsideration of the present state of the Greek identity in a moment of crisis. Karathanos’ *Golfo* “ended up speaking through her history about our national course. (...) From the innocent but naïve and sentimental relationship to the cynic admission of the material wealth. And now to the necessity of the redefinition of identity”.³⁸³ The dark celebration makes visible what the spectator may have suspected from the very beginning: *Golfo* was making a comment on the present. Did it search, though, amid the crisis, for comfort in the past?

Karathanos’ staging stressed the distance between present and past, subtly challenging notions of representation and continuity. Through the (often emotional) reflection on the past, it called for a rational reconsideration of the future but also – and maybe most importantly – of the present. Therefore, it could be suggested that the performance was characterised by reflective nostalgia in Boym’s terms. Reflective nostalgics are aware that “the home” – the object of their longing – is not the same anymore or it did not even exist. Interestingly, it is exactly this “defamiliarization and sense of distance” that encourages them “to narrate the relationship between past, present and future”.³⁸⁴ The latter is part of the nostalgic longing. For, nostalgia can also be “prospective”.³⁸⁵

In 2013, Karathanos’ *Golfo*, like Marmarinos’ staging of *Herakles* two years earlier, did not reject the notion of identity. Instead it called for a renegotiation of this fundamental for the construction of national identities dialectical relationship between an “imagined” past and an experienced present (as well as an atemporal future). This time the performance underscored

³⁸³ Ioannidis, «Γκόλφο’: καθρέφτης της εθνικής μας πορείας» [‘Golfo’: Mirror of our national course], n.p.

³⁸⁴ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 50.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi.

the necessity to think of how memory affects the way that one deals with its “own” (national) past. The ruins of Epidaurus intensified the reflective potential of the performance due to the identity and history of this particular space. *Golfo* was the first non-ancient Greek drama to be staged at the ancient theatre. The Festival’s strategies, with regard to the ancient ruins, often revealed a “restorative nostalgia”. In Boym’s words, “[w]hat drives restorative nostalgia is not the sentiment of distance and longing but rather the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition”.³⁸⁶ Quite often performances served such official, institutional longings, attempting to rebuild an “authentic” glimpse of this past through a treatment of the texts as evidence of inheritance and continuity. The very choice of Karathanos’ *Golfo* was opposed to all these misconceptions about uninterrupted continuity between present and ancient past. Within the specific context of the Festival, the National Theatre’s production invited the spectators to come to terms with a rather denounced rural past: maybe it was time to accept that the children of “their fathers” were – just? – shepherds.

Of course, here it is not implied that the performance advocated the idealisation of a rural over an ancient past. Such a choice would also have troubling ideological implications, given the way that a folkloric perception of tradition had also been functionalised in the course of modern Greek history from the regimes (e.g. colonel’s junta and the traditional dances like *tsamikos* in their fests). What is suggested, however, is, that to a great extent the interplay between the different layers of the past and their (ideologically laden) perception/recollection was much more effectively questioned at the ancient theatre due to the specific significations of this space and its institutional identity. In 2013, balancing – quite dangerously one may admit – between nostalgic emotionality and conscious awareness, the National Theatre’s production did not call for an unquestionable identification with any (inevitably fictive) past. On the contrary, it constantly recalled the “gap between identity and resemblance.”³⁸⁷ After all, *Golfo*’s tears were just water squeezed from a tissue.

The importance of this particular performance at Epidaurus was also underscored by the documentary film *Golfo at Epidaurus*, a production of the Hellenic Festival. Director Elias Giannakakis, together with his assistant Apostolia Papaioannou, filmed the rehearsal week at the ancient theatre and the only performance that followed.³⁸⁸ A year later, on June 11, 2014

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 44–45.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 50.

³⁸⁸ Elias Giannakakis, dir., *Η Γκόλφο στην Επίδαυρο* [*Golfo in Epidaurus*], 2013–2014. (DVD; private copy, courtesy of the director). In Epidaurus, the cast and production team of each production that is going to be presented every weekend stay in the nearby villages and spend the week before their performance rehearsing at

the film was presented at the Athens Festival (Peiraios 260). In an intermedial way, the Festival remembered its own recent history, framing – intentionally or not – the programming choice of *Golfo* as a significant one.

The opening sequences of the film show images from the impressive mountains of Helmos, the mountain in Peloponnese where Peresiades' drama is supposedly taking place. Images of grazing goats, a sheep shed and Golfo's spring are interrupted by shots from the ancient theatre, during the first set up day, when the beanbags were shaped into "mountains" on the orchestra of Epidauros. These first shots visually contextualise *Golfo* as part of a natural landscape, suggesting an understanding of nature that surpasses any linear perception of historical time. In that sense, nature does not function as the original landscape of the play but as another argument towards a reading of the play beyond the national connotations it had gained during its long performance history.

The film follows the week in Epidauros, day after day. It illuminates the dynamic interplay between the theatrical process and the space where it takes place, namely the ancient theatre, the site around it (dressing rooms) and the background landscape. It does not document the making of a performance. The camera does not follow the rehearsal in a way that would explain how a performance that took first place indoors is adjusted to the conditions of the open-air theatre under the director's instructions, searching, hence, for a kind of "method". Instead, it focuses on the collective "journey" during this week, grasping the creative process with emphasis on the participants. Giannakakis documents moments of silence, line rehearsals during the breaks, jokes, warm ups, the actors and the director while observing their colleagues in their individual/musical rehearsals, the construction of the setting. Time appears decelerated under the sun and the sound of cicadas. The camera perspective is often from the back of the setting or from diagonal, non-frontal angles. They are not shots that aim to freeze in memory the stage action in a neutral and precise way. On the contrary, the montage not only illuminates the dynamic process by extensively filming the "off-stage" action but also openly exposes the personal sight of Giannakakis. The latter does not remain a distant observer: in his questions to the actors, director and production team he repeatedly shares his impression of the indoors performance, stressing how moved the audience felt.

In Giannakakis film the ephemerality of performance is not opposed to a stable, fixed notion of a (national) collective identity that travels across centuries; on the contrary, the

the ancient theatre. Giannakakis had already filmed the rehearsal period and performance of the indoors version of Karathanos' performance at the National Theatre the previous winter, as part of the series of documentary films (*Paraskinio*) in the public television the protagonist actress Lydia Fotopoulou (2012–2013).

fleeting moment of the creative process and the performance is contrasted with a notion of an almost transcendental union with a (natural) space. *Golfo in Epidaurus* hence does not imply a notion of authentic preservation of a moment before it gets lost, but it reflects, in the most personal way, on the inability of the theatrical phenomenon to be fully documented. During this week, in Epidaurus two creative processes simultaneously took place, with the filming process following and reflecting on the theatrical one, while, at the same time, gaining its own, independent existence. As Karathanos' said in his last dialogue with Giannakakis after the end of the performance, now his *Golfo* belonged to the past. Stressing exactly this fleeing temporality, Giannakakis' *Golfo in Epidaurus* revealed a "reflective nostalgia" for something that died the very moment of its birth: the performance itself. The film hence stressed even further the irrevocability of the past, offering at the same time a comment – commissioned by the Festival itself – on the importance of this staging at this theatre in a particular moment of the Festival.

Although Karathanos' *Golfo* will be remembered as an exceptional moment in the performance history of Peresiadis' drama (especially because of its performance at the ancient theatre), still was not the first contemporary staging of the play. In 2004, at the Foyer of the Theatre of the Society for Macedonian Studies (State Theatre of Northern Greece), the young director Simos Kakalas staged *Golfo!*³⁸⁹ This was the first performance of Peresiadis' play after a long time and its first staging ever at a state theatre. As in Karathanos' production, Kakalas kept the text almost intact. In this performance, though, the national connotations of the play were visually demarcated in a very clear way, as also indicated by the sign "Made in Greece" in the programme and the poster.³⁹⁰ The story of the shepherdess' turned ironically into a national-brand product.

The stage setting was an empty black box with three walls, inside which the actors performed; the "fourth wall" was open as a ramp leading to the stage. From the ceiling of the box hung a Greek flag bunting, like the one used to decorate school ceremonies for the national day. The male actors wore white *foustanela* skirts. Contrary to Karathanos' staging that used the black skirts as a unisex costume, in Kakalas' production only the male actors wore *foustanela*. In Epidaurus, the black skirts were used in an ambiguous way as ironic but at the same time familiar and reminiscent of a distant past. In Kakalas' case, however, the white skirts

³⁸⁹ The performance took place from February 24 until March 30, followed by a summer tour. This was the first version of the performance, as Kakalas kept experimenting with it; the last version of the performance under the title *Golfo! director's cut (English in original)* was performed in 2014.

³⁹⁰ State Theatre of Northern Greece, "Γόλφο!" [Golfo], accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.ntng.gr/default.aspx?lang=el-GR&page=2&production=5851>.

under the hanging flags were pointing directly to their literal signification as national symbols. Their naked upper-bodies (even if covered partially by a vest-like sheepskin or a modern sport fleece) recalled the ancient male sculptures. The mixing of mismatched bucolic, ancient Greek and contemporary elements pointed unsettlingly to beliefs of continuity between the ancient past and modern Greece.

The actress playing Golfo, recalling a schoolgirl with pigtails, was wearing a blue skirt and a sport blouse with long white sleeves, the typical outfit worn in the school parades.³⁹¹ This allusion together with the *foustanela* under the little hung flags, the acting style and the frontal positioning, contributed towards a reading of the production as school performance. It should be noted that in the school ceremonies even until the late twentieth century, the young schoolchildren were often dressed in national costumes. To this interpretation attested also the bios of the production crew and actors, together with the childhood pictures (in some cases wearing the national costumes) that were included in the brochure-programme. Their self-ironic but at the same time playful style (with reference to memories from school celebrations and parades) revealed the ambiguous, subjective recollection of the past: as a compulsory activity but at the same time a “special” moment (or at least perceived as such from the family) in the schoolchild’s life.³⁹²

The director’s note illuminates this line of interpretation: “At some point, our childhood was dressed with the national symbols and recited poems on school stagings. In this performance, we try to marry the memory of the body with the ‘recollections’ of the mind”.³⁹³ The body remembers the stored (theatrical) experience of the school celebrations, while the cognitive recollection of the past evokes a realisation of the ideological signification of these emotional memories. Thus childhood does not only appear as the lost, safe shelter. It also incubates pathologies and misconceptions, while at the same time remains part of one’s own narrative. Kakalas’ production stresses the way that the personal recollections are affected by the official reproduced conceptions of a nation that flags itself in the amateur school performances and national celebrations.

The final scene of the dying Golfo is representative of the play’s reading. She grasps the flag garland, which in the meantime hangs on the left side of the box-stage, in an attempt

³⁹¹ Panayiota Konstantinakou, “From ‘Made in Greece’ to ‘Made in China’: a 21st Century Touring Revival of *Golfo*, a 19th Century Greek Melodrama,” *Filmicon: Journal of Greek Film Studies* 1 (2013), 131.

³⁹² Indicative of the style is the bio of the director Simos Kakalas: “He has recited poems in school ceremonies in Canada and Greece. This traumatic experience led him slowly to lose his national identity, with destructive consequences for the development of his character” (Simos Kakalas in Theatre programme of *Golfo!* (Thessaloniki: State Theatre of Northern Greece, 2004).

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

to warm herself up after her self-poisoning. She wraps it around her neck, like a scarf and dies as if she hanged herself. Tassos, in turn, beats his head with one of the little white sheep toys that have covered the stage during the performance; he dies. On the back the weaving Greek flag is projected. The old theme tune of the Greek public television, followed by the National anthem is heard aloud. This musical motif was the opening and closing spot of the programme of public television. It was based on the folk song («Τσοπανάκος Ήμουνα» = “I was a shepherd-boy”). It can be presumed that the generation of children brought up in the 1980s and early 1990s – the generation of the actors – can recall the characteristic sound of the spot. In that sense, its connotation as closing theme of the performance attests to the critical reading of nationally loaded childhood memories. The fourth wall of the box, which was open in front as a ramp, closes. The closed box under the sound of the national anthem leaves an ironic, bittersweet impression. While the elevation of the ramp can be interpreted as creating “a fully enclosed stage space, a treasury of dear memories and valuable emotions”,³⁹⁴ still I suggest reading the closed box more as a reminder of one’s imprisonment in its own nationally connotated personal experience of childhood. No matter how critically detached, signs of a national past perpetuate through the collective memory and also imbue the personal recollections.

Kakalas’ reading of *Golfo* deconstructs the national identities by pointing to the dominant discourses that have influenced the reception of this play as having national connotations. Contrary to Karathanos’ staging, in Kakalas’ production, the attachment to the past appears as imprisonment in the beliefs that one has gained under the influence of dominant national(ist) discourses reproduced most successfully in school education. Hence the reflection of the past is not to be considered potentially dynamic but as something that should be exposed in order to be able to free him/herself. As I will discuss in the following chapter, such deconstructive readings run the danger of defining a symptom, without, however, offering an alternative solution and new definition. From this point of view, Karathanos’ reading as staged in Epidaurus can be considered much more complex. He returned to the text, stressing its poetic aspects and lyricism and undermining ironically (without, however, erasing) the national connotations. At the same time, he suggested a new, moving while distancing approach to a recollected but not necessarily experienced past. It is in this (contradictory) co-existence of an emotional (either positive or negative) attachment to the past and its – inevitably alienated – mediated understanding from a present vantage point wherein lies the possibility of a critical

³⁹⁴ Konstantinakou, “From ‘Made in Greece’ to ‘Made in China’,” 121.

reflection on one's own self-perception. As I will discuss in the following section, this process of self-reflection had not been performatively manifested only on stage but also through the programming strategies of a “national stage” such as the National Theatre.

2.3 Returning to the past, confronting the “now-time”

In *Babylonia*, a comedy written in 1836 by Dimitrios Byzantios, the main characters of the play are a group of men from different regions of the (now independent) state. The Greek citizens, who are speaking different dialects, are entering a fight and get arrested due to a language misunderstanding. The play finishes with their release. In the final scene of Vasilis Papavasiliou's staging of *Babylonia* (1994, State Theatre of Northern Greece), the actors, wearing the traditional white Greek costume *foustanela*, approach the audience. They are still locked one to the other with balls and chain. The official identity of the citizens of the new state seems to be externally enforced, like a chain that holds them together despite their vast differences.

As the productions that I will analyse in the following section illustrate, contemporary readings of the nineteenth-century dramaturgy reveal the complex implications that the identity construction processes during the first decades of the new state may have for the current Greek reality. Here I will examine two stagings of plays from the 1830s–1840s: Alexandros Rizos Rangavis' *Koutroulis' Wedding* and Michail Chourmouzis' *The Fortune Hunter*. Taking place during the early years of the crisis, these performances offer a comment on the present state of affairs not as a didactic counterexample of the past but as a reminder of the need for change as a long-existing quest in modern Greek history. However, before proceeding, I will first discuss the National's season 2011–2013 under the motto “What is our Motherland?”. My argument is that through the ironic use of this motto and its programming choices, the National Theatre “institutionalised” this quest for critical reflection on the Greek identity amid the crisis.

2.3.1 In search of “our” identity: the National's two-year season 2011–2013

In May 2011, the programme of the next two-year period of the National Theatre was launched under the motto: “What is our motherland?” [Τι είναι η πατρίδα μας;]. This question, which is the first verse of the well-known, same-titled poem by Ioannis Polemis (1862–1924), summarised the National's intention to deal with the complex issue of Greek identity. As the artistic director suggested in his curatorial note: “At a difficult conjunction, which tends to

plunge us into the morass of confusion, which raises fundamental questions and reinforces scepticism regarding the definition, the consistency and continuity of our national identity, we seek to explore its essence and dynamic, as these are depicted in our cultural heritage”.³⁹⁵ The curatorial choice of this two-year period can be understood as an attempt by the National Theatre to keep pace with Greek society and the challenges the latter confronted during the crisis. Given that the National’s intention to engage in a dialogue with the society had not been expressed in the past, Platon Mavromoustakos characterised this decision as “courageous and useful”. It was “courageous” because theatre did not remain confined to the safe space of artistic expression that observes the challenges of society passively. At the same time, it was “useful” because it stressed the social mission of theatre, beyond its role in promoting dramaturgy.³⁹⁶

Why should the idea of a dialogue between theatre and society during a financial crisis lead back to the question of national identity? On the one hand, the crisis opened up existential questions about the self-positioning of Greek society in time (*vis-a-vis* the past) and in space (regarding its position on the international scene). On the other hand, the severe financial obstacles that a considerable part of the population faced, leading to feelings of insecurity, encouraged a return to the troubling concept of “motherland”. It was not only the very dangerous rise of extremist right-wing voices (neo-Nazi in the case of the elected party Golden Dawn); even “left” voices, which in the past had rejected the notion of *patria* in the name of internationalism, developed new narratives around this notion. Greek identity was becoming the necessary stable reference point of a society whose certainties seemed to be disappearing.

The choice of Polemis’ verse “What is our motherland”, echoing the patriotic nostalgia of the late nineteenth century can be considered rather ambivalent. According to Marilena Zaroulia this was “a rather paradoxical choice (...) particularly if the intention was to highlight the National Theatre’s aim to critique definitions and performances of Greek national identity”. Instead of challenging, this title hence “reaffirms the National Theatre’s role as guarantor of theatrical tradition and national continuity”. Therefore, even if Houvardas’ tenure was

³⁹⁵ Yannis Houvardas, «Εισαγωγικό Σημείωμα Καλλιτεχνικού Διευθυντή – Θεατρικές Περιόδους 2011-2013 [Note on the Programme of the periods 2011-2012 & 2012-2013], National Theatre, May 10, 2011, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.n-t.gr/el/news/?nid=919>.

³⁹⁶ Platon Mavromoustakos in “What is our homeland”: Accounting Discussion about the performances of the season at the National Theatre” [‘Τι είναι η πατρίδα μας’: Απολογιστική συζήτηση για τις παραστάσεις της χρονιάς στο Εθνικό Θέατρο], April 4, 2012 [Video]. *Blod*, accessed March 9, 2021, 1:40, <https://www.blod.gr/lectures/ti-einai-i-patrida-mas-apologistiki-syzitisi-gia-tis-parastaseis-tis-hronias-sto-ethniko-theatro/>.

associated with the inclusion of new innovative theatrical stances, the National's contribution "in the wider theatre ecology remained largely conservative".³⁹⁷

Given the changes that can be observed at the National Theatre during Houvardas' tenure, I do not agree with an understanding of the choice of the verse as affirmative; instead I suggest it should be read as an ironic gesture, given also the associations it triggers due to the ideological connotations of the word *πατρίδα* [*patrida*; motherland].³⁹⁸ Following Hutcheon irony should not be only understood "in binary either/or term of the substitution of an "ironic" for a "literal" (and opposite) meaning". Instead she suggests a new approach, which would illuminate the "relational, inclusive, and differential" meanings: "If we considered irony to be formed through a relation both between people and also between meanings – said and unsaid – then, like the duck/rabbit image, it would involve an oscillating yet simultaneous perception of plural and different meanings".³⁹⁹ From this point of view, the interpretation of the National's motto is twofold: as a reminder (which in turn can be also critically perceived) of conservative discourses and related definitions of national identity and, at the same time, as a call for a reflection on one's own current position from a new perspective.

The word *patrida* [=fatherland; motherland; homeland] belongs to these complex concepts that gain different – ideological – significations depending on each historical context. A possible definition of this concept associates it with a particular expression of dominant conservative discourses summarised under the triptych "fatherland – religion – family" [*patris - thriskeia - oikogeneia*] which defined the decades from Metaxas' dictatorship until the fall of the junta and particularly the imperatives of the educational system during these decades. As historian Effi Gazi notes, this slogan "provided the most important ideological platform for the development of the rhetoric and propaganda of authoritarian regimes in Greece in the second half of the twentieth century while it coloured all forms of social conservatism in the country during the same period".⁴⁰⁰ Given this signification of the word "*patrida*" but also that of the verse itself, which to some may bring to mind the naïve patriotism of the schoolbooks and school celebrations of these decades, a reading of the National's motto as ironic, points to the notions of tradition and heritage, which, in turn, have been related to the role of the National

³⁹⁷ Zaroulia, "What is our motherland?," 207.

³⁹⁸ During the discussion at the National Theatre about the performances of the first season, both the director Viktor Arditis and Dimos Avdeliodis referred to an ironic intention between the use of Polemis' poem ("What is our homeland": Accounting Discussion, *Blod*.)

³⁹⁹ Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 66.

⁴⁰⁰ Effi Gazi, "Fatherland, Religion, Family': Exploring the History of a Slogan in Greece, 1880–1930," in *Sex, Gender and the Sacred: Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History*, ed. Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 304 – 305.

Theatre. The choice of Polemis' verse played with these ideological contradictions without hence negating the notion of *patria* but by stressing the multiplicity of its significations. The ironic dimension, therefore, was resembling the different (and in moments contradictory) tasks that the National attempted to fulfil.

This aligns with the self-reflective attempt of the National that has been repetitively suggested so far. For, besides the question of national identity, the choice of the National Theatre to deal with this topic in 2011 can be read as the most serious attempt to reflect on its own institutional role. Regardless of specific answers, the programming of these two years opens crucial questions for the future of the National. As Savvas Patsalidis argues, if the National is to be considered “a theatre in service of the national unity and identity”, the choice of the National's season posed two further questions concerning the signification of a theatre house and dramaturgy as national. One should hence consider the issue of spectatorship (whose theatre after all?) and the actual role of this theatre concerning contemporary developments.⁴⁰¹ The director's note explaining the rationale behind this thematic can be considered indicative of the balances that the National Theatre had to respect. The note did not reveal any obvious intention to radically reject a notion of tradition. Nevertheless, the relation to the past had to be placed under scrutiny in order to search for what remained from it. This two-year-period would reflect on the self-perception, offering a chance for “re-immersion in the roots and a recreation of tradition”. At the same time, it would offer “an inverted mirror of the way in which the foreigners saw and still see us – how they have witnessed, our passions, our culture and our history, and how they gained inspiration by us”.⁴⁰²

The choice of the repertoire would hence include not only Greek plays but also key texts that had been “influenced by Greece”, adaptations from literature as well as new commissions of plays that would deal with contemporary issues.⁴⁰³ In any case, a careful look at the choices reveals a much more promising potential for a critical renegotiation of the identity question. The different perspectives do not allow an uninterrupted conception of historical/cultural linearity and a single answer to the question of identity but a multiplicity of identities, fragmented, mediated and influenced by other perspectives.

⁴⁰¹ Savvas Patsalidis, «Ο μεταμοντερνισμός του Εθνικού Θεάτρου» [National Theatre's postmodernism], *Savvas Patsalidis* (blog), accessed March 19, 2021, http://savaspatsalidis.blogspot.com/2013/04/blog-post_30.html.

⁴⁰² Hovardas, «Εισαγωγικό Σημείωμα Καλλιτεχνικού Διευθυντή» [Note on the Programme], n.p.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

Along the line of Houvardas' note, some main areas of interest may be traced.⁴⁰⁴ The ancient mythical past was approached through distancing filters which challenged essentialist conceptions of connecting links. In the much-discussed Robert Wilson's *Odyssey* (after Homer) the distance is stressed through the iconoclastic aesthetics. In the case of two modern plays, Eugene O' Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (dir. Yannis Houvardas) and Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending* (dir. Barbara Weber), the ancient myth is freely adapted in different cultural contexts, hence stressing its universality beyond national demarcations, while the stagings underscore this distance through their non-affective aesthetic. In the Shakespearean *Pericles* (dir. Yannis Houvardas) a double mediation (Hellenistic era – Shakespeare – contemporary staging) takes place. The choices thus search for the influences of the mythological past – in cases reminiscent of the ancient drama – but in such dramaturgical and aesthetic ways that the past loses its “national” character. New metonymical readings can be opened. For example, in the Shakespearean fairy tale of *Pericles*, who has no relation to the king of ancient Athens, the adventures of the hero from Tyros should be understood as a “symbolic course to maturity, a journey of the human consciousness”.⁴⁰⁵ As in other performances, the search for a root aims at a reconsideration of the fluid, personal notion of “homeland”.

The choices of the National's productions at the ancient theatre of Epidauros are also indicative of the changes in both the National and the Festival. Besides a staging of the Aristophanean *Clouds* (dir. Nikos Mastorakis), the National's summer programme in Epidauros included the production of Moliere's *Amphitryon* (dir. Lefteris Vogiatzis). In the summer of 2013, Vasilis Papavasiliou presented his staging of the Euripidean satyr play *Cyclops*. This production should be included in the director's cycle of performances, which deal with the question of Greek identity and history. In the same summer, Epidauros also hosted *Golfo*. It should also be noted that although Marmarinos' *Herakles* did not belong officially to this two-year period, it still took place after the announcement in May 2011 of the next seasons' topic and therefore could be possibly seen as a first answer to the question about “our motherland”.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Here I refer only to the productions that are most relevant to my analysis. The programme also included a series of lectures and discussions as well as performances from the acting school of the National Theatre and children theatre.

⁴⁰⁵ Yannis Houvardas, «Σαίξπηρ on the road» [Shakespeare on the road], interview by Maria Kryou, *Athinorama*, November 17, 2011, accessed March 10, 2021, https://www.athinorama.gr/theatre/article/sunenteuksi_me_ton_gianni_xoubarda-11190.html.

⁴⁰⁶ During this period Marmarinos staged at Rex Shakespeare's *Midsummer night's dream*. The thematic relation to the notion of homeland was not directly visible. In his performance, the Shakespearean play turns into a ‘dream-nightmare’ in the city of Athens today, in times of destruction and conservatism.

Not surprisingly, the Greek dramaturgy of the nineteenth and twentieth century was brought into focus. Peresiadis' pastoral drama together with Papavasiliou's staging of *Koutroulis' Wedding*, discussed here are representative examples of this reflection of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰⁷ The post-war and contemporary Greek dramaturgy illustrates more recent phases of Greek history. The post-war plays depict a society that, in the aftermath of the traumatic Civil War, tries to find its pace in a period where processes of modernisation of Greek society take place under the authoritarian control of the deep state. Characteristic is Yannis Kakleas' production of *The Backyard of Miracles*, written by Iakovos Kambanellis and first staged at Karolos Koun's *Art Theatre* in 1957.⁴⁰⁸ The staging did not reveal any nostalgic recollection of an innocent past, despite the difficulties; on the contrary, it is "a nightmare from the future", in Kakleas' own words,⁴⁰⁹ namely, an approach that considers the self-victimisation of the Greek society as a still existing problem. From a different perspective, the political state of affairs of post-civil war Greece was explicitly discussed in the adaptation of *Z* (dir. Effi Theodorou), the political novel written in 1966 by Vasilis Vassilikos that depicts the events around the assassination of the left-wing MP Grigoris Lambrakis in 1963.

Contemporary Greek dramaturgy also had its share of the National's programme. *Vitrioli* (2010) by Yiannis Mavritsakis was staged by the French director Olivier Py. Two different perspectives on xenophobia and immigration present the commissioned plays *Invisible Olga* by Yiannis Tsiros and *Austras or Couch grass* Lena Kitsopoulou, presented in one production under the title "Foreigner": *Invisible Olga* by Yiannis Tsiros (dir. Giorgos Paloubis) and *Austras or Couch Grass* by Lena Kitsopoulou (dir. Yannis Kalavrianos).⁴¹⁰ The topic of the foreigner/migration had a central position in the programme which also included other performances dealing with it. The Greek migration to Germany was thematised in the 1978 Loula Anagnostaki's *Victory* (dir. Viktor Arditis). The production *Homelands* was directed and written by Michalis Reppas and Thanassis Papathanassiou, two playwrights who had so far mainly been identified with theatrical revues addressing a broader audience. Now

⁴⁰⁷ A staging of the 1830 drama of Antonios Matesis *Vasilikos* (dir. Spyros Evangelatos) and the adaptation of Grigorios Xenopoulos' 1905 novel *The Red Rock* (dir. Roula Pateraki), both of which followed more academic readings of the texts, can also be included here.

⁴⁰⁸ On Kakleas' staging, see also Zaroulia, "What is our motherland?," 201–204. Other staging of plays from this period were the performances of *Spectators* by Marios Pontikas (dir. Katerina Evangelatou) and the *Red Lanterns* by Alekos Galanos (dir. Konstantinos Rigos).

⁴⁰⁹ Yannis Kakleas «Η αυλή των θ(α)υμάτων» [The backyard of miracles and victims], *Protagon*, December 14, 2011, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.protagon.gr/epikairota/politismos/i-avli-twn-thaymatwn-1100000000>.

⁴¹⁰ This performance is also included in Zaroulia's analysis of this two-year period (Zaroulia, "What is our motherland?," 199–201).

they were presenting at the National their version of documentary theatre.⁴¹¹ From a different point of view, the performance of *Scorched* by Wajdi Mouawad, directed by Konstantinos Arvanitakis sheds a different light on the problematic of the search for roots and identity, this time from a non-Greek perspective.

The National's programming choices reflected the need for plural responses to the questions of identity. As Patsalidis rightly suggests, the "diverse and extrovert repertoire" revealed that the National was aspiring to address the broader society, giving room to projects that could be considered excluded from the accepted canon.⁴¹² The programme included a great variety of artists from different generations and schools, hence offering an overview of some of the most important tendencies in the Greek theatre landscape. It is also notable that during these years a couple of performances travelled abroad, while there were some important collaborations with foreign directors.⁴¹³ This attempt, even if unintentional, still resembled a new possible orientation of the National Theatre in a globalised world: extroverted while at the same time close to the current sociopolitical reality. In order, however, to look outwards, it was first necessary to reflect on one's own self.

The relation of some productions to the question of Greek identity and their critical potential was not reduced to a thematic link. It should instead be searched for in different aesthetics and modes of performance as well as the uses of the dramatic texts (adaptations, new dramaturgies, postdramatic performances). Furthermore, as already discussed in the case of *Golfo*, many of these productions encouraged a new contemplation of the past-present relationship that could enable the shaping of different narratives.⁴¹⁴

Successful or not the productions included under the theme "Greece" revealed a tendency to differently reconsider the cultural "tradition" and the National's role as "guardian of the Greek theatre". Through the ironic motto, a rather diplomatic statement, and a wide programme, the National Theatre reflected on the question of identity, acknowledging the latter's topical persistence in Greek society. The choices illustrated not only the various aspects

⁴¹¹ On the analysis of the production in the context of the National's season "What is our motherland?," see Marissia Fragkou "Strange Homelands: Encountering the Migrant on the Contemporary Greek Stage," *Modern Drama* 61, no. 3 (2008): 311–314.

⁴¹² Patsalidis, «Ο μεταμοντερνισμός του Εθνικού Θεάτρου» [National Theatre's postmodernism], n.p.

⁴¹³ On the Greek productions abroad, see also 4.2.1.

⁴¹⁴ The argument of Marilena Zaroulia is also similar: "Tempting though it is to argue that nostalgia is the constitutive feature of the 'what is our motherland?' season, offering audiences a temporary respite from the crisis, I would argue that the aesthetics of disjointed temporality that the three case studies utilized offer a more complex and nuanced understanding of time, the nation and theatre" (Marilena Zaroulia, "'What is our motherland?'" 208). Although here I do not follow her reading of the performances here as reflecting a "disjointed temporality," still it elaborates on the argument in favour of the attempt that the National undertook to question linear (institutional) narratives.

of the identity question but also the multiplicity of performative expressions of its different conceptions. This two-year period was the culmination of Houvardas tenure and is telling of the changes that took place. Despite the objections that one may have regarding the use of the concept of “postmodern theatre” in Greece, Patsalidis’ claim is accurate in terms of defining the shift that the National Theatre achieved: “Yannis Houvardas achieved and brought the National Theatre successfully from the sphere of modernism to the sphere of fruitful postmodernism”.⁴¹⁵ During this period, the National Theatre showed that if a national stage is going to maintain its role as a theatre that represents an institutionalised “high-standard”, then it should be a theatre of inclusion and not exclusion. The multiple answers given on stage during these two years pointed optimistically in this direction.

2.3.2 Malaises of the past and/in the present of the (hopeless) future: Papavasiliou’s *Koutroulis’ Wedding* and *The Fortune Hunter*

Tables with disposable paper covers are aligned and close to each other. White and red cheap plastic chairs. On the empty tables, table salt, oil bottles. Instead of fresh lemon for the grilled meat, pre-packed plastic bottles contain conserved juice. A few guests are still sitting at some tables, empty trays, bottles and leftovers in front of them. Over them hang bulbs shedding an intense light. The picture recalls the aftermath of outdoor revelries or feasts (*panigiria*) in contemporary Greece. This was the photo on the front and back cover of the programme of the National’s production of *Koutroulis’ Wedding* in 2012.⁴¹⁶ What could the connection possibly be between a *panigiri* with plastic chairs and the 1845 comedy of Alexandros Rizos Rangavis, decrying the pathologies of the Greek society (clientelism, corruption, *xenomania*) during the first decades of the independent state?

Papavasiliou’s interest in the dramaturgy of the nineteenth century with regard to the question of modern Greek identity had already been expressed back in 1994 with the already mentioned staging of Dimitris Byzantios’ *Babylonia* (1994) at the State Theatre of Northern Greece. In 2010, two years before the National’s production, Papavasiliou returned to this thematic with the production of the political satire *The Fortune Hunter* (1835) at the Athens Festival. These three plays can be considered a trilogy.⁴¹⁷ Papavasiliou’s exploration of the

⁴¹⁵ Patsalidis, «Ο μεταμοντερνισμός του Εθνικού Θεάτρου» [National Theatre’s postmodernism], n.p.

⁴¹⁶ Theatre programme of *Του Κουτρούλη ο Γάμος* [Koutroulis’ Wedding] (Athens: National Theatre of Greece, 2012).

⁴¹⁷ As the director and the dramaturg Sotiris Haviaras note, the three playwrights, Byzantios, Chourmouzis, and Rangavis while share a common interest, “which is defined by the anxiety about the troublesome identity, the

problematic of the long-existing malaise of the modern Greek society and state also continued after the performance of *Koutroulis' Wedding*, this time with the National's production of Euripides' satire drama *Cyclops* at the ancient theatre of Epidauros in the summer of 2012. The latter was his second production in the context of the National's two-year thematic about the question of motherland.

In all his three stagings of the nineteenth-century comedies, Papavasiliou addresses the troubling relationship between past and present. Here I will focus on the two most recent productions, the 2012 staging of Rangavis' comedy *Koutroulis' Wedding* and the Festival's production of the *Fortune Hunter*. Both of these performances stressed similarities between past and present to reveal the still visible consequences of the terms under which the Greek state had been founded and the Greek identity had been shaped. This reading, however, does not lead to a homogeneous historical narrative based on a conception of uninterrupted continuity between past and present, which would undermine their dialectical relation. On the contrary, the critical distance is underscored and allows a mediated reflection of the past through the present (or even the future) aiming at a critical reconsideration of the possible reasons for the current state of modern Greece. Different temporalities co-exist in a moment extracted from the conventional progress from past to future. Here I will argue that both performances echo Walter Benjamin's conception of *Jetztzeit* [=now time], a "time filled by the presence of the now".⁴¹⁸ The present is saturated with all the missed opportunities for change to break the continuum of history and stop the repetition of the past inequalities or, as I will suggest, maladies of the past.

The Wedding of Koutroulis was presented on the Main Stage of the National Theatre.⁴¹⁹ The plot of Rangavis' comedy is very simple: Manolis Koutroulis, a tailor from the island of Syros, is in love with Anthousa. The latter, however, loves the young policeman, Leonidas. In order to avoid a future wedding with Koutroulis, Anthousa demands that he first becomes a minister. With no qualifications for the post, naive Koutroulis announces his candidacy. Convinced by the people exploiting him, he and his "entourage" believe he has been elected. In the end it is revealed that Koutroulis never became a minister; the ambitious

troublesome terms, which have sealed the modern Greek condition since its inception" (Vasilis Papavasiliou and Sotiris Haviaras, « 'Άδεια σκηνή, έρημη χώρα'» [Empty stage, waste land], theatre programme of *Koutroulis' Wedding* (Athens: National Theatre of Greece, 2012), 6).

⁴¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 252–253.

⁴¹⁹ The performance took place from February 3 until May, 13 2012. For more information, see "Koutroulis' Wedding", National Theatre, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.n-t.gr/en/events/oldevents/koutroulis>. The reception of the performance by the critics was very positive.

Anthousa, though, flattered that she would become a minister's wife, had already been legally married to him.⁴²⁰

Rangavis' play, despite its concealed political message, reveals the complex ideological conflicts and sociopolitical processes that take place in the public life of the new state. The comedy is written in *katharevousa* and is strongly influenced by Aristophanes. According to Theodoros Hadjipantazis, the dramatists of that time imitating Aristophanes, not only adopted a language without idiomatic impurities but even tended towards the use of an "archaic-inspired language" [*αρχαϊζουσα*], given that "the revival of Attic comedy could be identified in the consciousness of the most utopian among them with the revival of the Attic language".⁴²¹

As the prologue of the first publication of the play reveals, Rangavis attempted to hide any political commentary about his era under his experimentation with the ancient metric form.⁴²² Nevertheless, and despite his "political diffidence",⁴²³ the political undertones in the aftermath of the 1843 uprising are traceable. On September 3, 1843, a military uprising supported by a large number of the Athenian inhabitants under the General Dimitrios Kolettis took place, demanding the signing of the constitution. King Otto conceded and in March 1844 the constitution was implemented.

In the performance, Rangavis' language and text have been kept almost intact. Based on the model of Aristophanes, Rangavis had included a chorus. In Papavasiliou's staging, this chorus gains a double function, moving back and forth between past (dramatic time) and present (time of production and Greece in crisis). This oscillation also resembled two different spatial levels (main stage – apron in front of the stage). The transitions, however, although visually demarcated do not imply a distinguished metatheatrical frame. The line between past and present remains intentionally blurred in a dynamic interplay, which enables an approach to the present through the past, while at the same time, stressing their distance. The performance opens and closes with two added scenes, which imitate in a parodic way Rangavis' language and style, implying a parodic frame of interpretation.

Upon their entrance in the auditorium, the spectators are informed about the place and time: "Athens, 2012" [Εν Αθήναις, 2012] is projected above the proscenium of the Italian-type stage. The name "Athens" [Εν Αθήναις, 2012] is written in *katharevousa*. The opening of Papavasiliou's production takes places on the lowered apron of the stage, at a level between

⁴²⁰ Alexandros Rizos Rangavis, *Τον Κουτρούλη ο Γάμος* [The Wedding of Koutroulis] (Athens: Nefeli, 2012).

⁴²¹ Theodoros Hadjipantazis, *Η Ελληνική Κωμωδία και τα πρότυπά της στον 19^ο αιώνα* [Nineteenth-century Greek Comedy and its models] (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2004), 58.

⁴²² Rangavis, *Τον Κουτρούλη ο Γάμος* [The Wedding of Koutroulis], 9.

⁴²³ Hadjipantazis, *Η Ελληνική Κωμωδία* [Nineteenth-century Greek Comedy], 59.

the audience and the stage. The whole cast of thirteen actors/musicians gradually take their positions on this little stage, frontally to the audience. An actor introduces them in a *katharevousa*-like style as members of a “*Filoglossos Etairia*” [“Φιλόγλωσσος εταιρεία” = Society of the Language’s friends”]. The word *Filoglossos* is a compound of the words *filos* [friend] and *glossa* [language/tongue].⁴²⁴ The use of *katharevousa* evokes ideological associations with the function of the language as evidence of the relation between modern Greeks and ancient ancestors, recalling at the same time the processes that took place during the first decades of the new state concerning the constitution of an official language. All actors are wearing blazers (chequered, striped, or monochrome), sneakers (All-Star type) and most of them long white shorts recalling old-fashion male underwear.

The frontal positioning together with the framing of the action in the present time (the action takes place in 2012 as the surtitle informs) and the direct address to the audience as spectators of the National Theatre, liminate the distance between stage and auditorium, without, however, totally bridging it. The “Society” turns into a vivid chorus which begins to sing and play a joyful song (whose lyrics are not in *katharevousa*) under the projected title “CABARET ‘MAGNA GRAECIA’”.⁴²⁵ This name inevitably implies a sense of “grandeur”, traceable in the collective imagination of Greek society.⁴²⁶ The song functions as a comment on the relationship between Greece and Europe, pointing to the narratives repeated in the public discourse amid the crisis regarding the (cultural) debt of the other Europeans to Greece. The vivid atmosphere immediately brings to mind carnival – a feature that dominates the performance as I will discuss. In the following dialogue in *katharevousa* between two actors at the standing microphones (left and right) acting frontally towards the audience, the interrelation between theatre, carnival and politics will be directly thematised.

While the opening and closing scenes as well as the chorus’ parts take place on the apron, Rangavis’ play is staged on an empty stage. This empty stage has been a common aspect in both the performances of *Koutroulis* and *The Fortune Hunter*. The importance of this emptiness, of this vacuum, can be explained, following Papavasiliou and Haviaras, as “precisely this pause in terms of historical time, which we experience vis-à-vis the Greek future”.⁴²⁷ The empty stage resembles the anxious feelings in front of an unforeseen future.

⁴²⁴ The double meaning of the word *glossa* is depicted on the logo of the society, visible on the badges worn by all actors and the drums, which recall the famous Rolling Stone’s tongue logo.

⁴²⁵ Here the title is not translated but projected as such.

⁴²⁶ See also Ioanna Blatsou, «Arte povera υψηλής αισθητικής» [Arte povera of high aesthetics], review of *Koutroulis’ Wedding*, directed by Vasilis Papavasiliou, *Kapa /Kathimerini*, March 11, 2012, 10.

⁴²⁷ Papavasiliou and Haviaras, « ‘Άδεια σκηνή, έρημη χώρα’ » [Empty stage, waste land], 8–9.

The answer to this state of insecurity and agony is sarcastic laughter according to a critical, carnivalesque reading. In Papavasiliou's production, the set designer explains that "the carnival arises from the vacuum, the colours fall from the sky".⁴²⁸

The transition to the staging of Rangavis' play is clearly framed through the projection of the title of the play and the name of the author as well as the dramatic characters with their description as found in the original text. The dramatic time has been moved back to 1845 when Rangavis places his play in his Prologue. Yet, the projected title "Athens, e.g. 1845" («Ev Αθήναις, π.χ. 1845») aligns with the performance's conception of time as will be analysed here: the notion of the "example" (e.g.), which of course cannot be found in the original, turns the events that are going to follow on stage as one of the possible different expressions of the same phenomenon. Under the repetition of the refrain and the projected opening titles, the actors are preparing to become Rangavis' characters, taking off their blazers and remaining with their white underclothes. From the ceiling of the semi-lightened empty stage fly in colourful fabrics, which hang like spiral-tasselled garlands. Two of the actors climb on stage and hang out two of these fabrics which turn into the costumes of the performance. These are the characters in the first scene of Rangavis' play.

Rangavis' language sounds awkwardly formal to the ears of the contemporary spectator. The bulky costumes resemble this disproportionality. As the set and costume designer Marie Noelle Semet suggests, "[t]he clothing oppresses, imposes forms, function as a disguise and therefore open lead the way to farce. The language worn by the actors becomes hilarious: they [the actors] wear it as an ill-fitting costume, they wrap themselves in words which have not been tailored for them".⁴²⁹ During the performance of Rangavis' play, the costumes, like hand-crafts, stress the carnivalesque aspect while visually signifying the construction of identity. The decision of the tailor to pursue a career as minister is visually represented through the taking off of the lowest part of the "skirt" he is wearing, which remains onstage standing in the form of a cone. From a different perspective, the colourful skirts of the actors can be analysed in comparison to the costumes in *Golfo*, where the uniformity of the black skirt has been analysed as a reference to the Greek national costume, *foustanela*. Here a similar allusion is evoked, especially in the moment where Koutroulis' and Strovilis' dancing movements recall folk dances, such as the typical circle dance *tsamikos*.

⁴²⁸ Marie Noelle Semet in theatre programme of *Koutroulis' Wedding* (Athens: National Theatre of Greece, 2012), 11.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

From the very beginning, the notion of carnival is twofold: it implies an interpretation of Greece (and its political life) as a carnival while at the same time, it is a moment of reaction to the lost feeling of the “empty” present. The most characteristic moment of this double signification is the scene of the celebrations for Koutroulis’ and Anthousa’s wedding. The motive from Mendelssohn’s “Wedding March” is played on the piano in the rhythm of the folk dance *tsamikos*. All actors are on stage (the dramatic characters with their colorful costumes, the chorus with the Society’s blazers). All hold each other in the typical *tsamikos* circle dance while “gold dust” falls from above. This out-of-rhythm choreography recalls, in a distorted way, folk celebrations (*glenti*). The song of the second semi-chorus is sung in a rather sarcastic way by the actor playing Anthousa’s father in a microphone with cable. The singing style probably reminds the spectators of jazzy dissonance and gradually turns into a *tsifteteli*. The latter is an Oriental dance, which despite its traditional roots, is associated in contemporary Greece with extroverted, abundant forms of entertainment under the sound of modern hybrid versions of urban folk music. Here the carnivalesque spirit of celebration does not imply a naïve joyful reaction but a sarcastic recollection of moments from modern Greek public cultural life.

In Papavasiliou’s performance, past and present co-exist in this moment of carnival rupture. This interplay between the different (spatial and temporal) levels of the performance undermine notions of representation, unity and continuity. The spectators, however, remain excluded from this carnival celebration. Although laughing – particularly in the moments when the spectators are addressed by the chorus (Society member) – implies an emotional response, still the use of *katharevousa*, the exaggerated acting and enunciation style (in cases pompous whereas elsewhere indifferent), the frontal positioning and the projection of parts of the text evoke a rather distantiating effect. The audience laughs while remaining a distant observant.

In the middle of the play Papavasiliou stages the “PARABASIS: (Where, as is customary, the Poet speaks as Citizen)”, as the projected title also informs the audience. This long sequence of the *paravasis* is interrupted by the actor playing Strovilis (Koutroulis’ assistant) who now calls them to hurry and continue with the performance. The actors climb on the stage, still dressed in their blazers as members of the Society. The projected title explains: “The members of the Society of the Language’s Friends are guided around the premises of the national theatre while the action goes on”. Standing in the back-right part of the stage, they observe the space like tourists, while the actor playing Xanthoulis, dressed in his costume, proceeds with his part, following Rangavis’ text. The chorus, which appears on stage on different occasions from now on (e.g. celebration for the election of Koutroulis;

wedding celebrations) will remain dressed as members of the Society. In this way, they maintain their position between the stage and the auditorium, connecting present and past.

As already established in the opening scene, the performance brought forward the political context of the mid-nineteenth century to hint at the present reality of the crisis and provide a reminder of the structural malfunctions of the Greek state since its foundation. Telling is a scene – found in the original play – of the three semi-choruses representing the different political powers (not openly named) that attempt to win over the candidate Koutroulis.⁴³⁰ In the first years of the Greek state the three “parties” or better said political constellations were representing the interests of the Greek Powers (Russian Empire, Great Britain and France).⁴³¹ In the performance, each of the three chorus’ members speak in the respective language, while on the back are projected the original (abridged) texts. The comic scene of linguistic incomprehensibility playfully reminds the audience of the influence of foreign powers in the history of the Greek state since its foundation and points ironically to the crisis (troika; the role of other EU members) and the past. Koutroulis’ response to this sequence can be read as a further political comment. The actor utters Rangavis’ text, imitating, however, the voice and accent of the former Prime Minister and later president Konstantinos Karamanlis. Considering that Karamanlis had been the proponent of the introduction of Greece to Europe, with his famous claim that “We [Greece] belong to the West”, the choice here should not be understood as a simple reference to recent Greek political life. Instead, it addresses the complex relationship between Greece and Europe while stressing the timelessness of the troubling issue of self-positioning and self-definition.

The finale of the performance implies the possibility of a future change. After the final choral ode in *katharevousa*, which has replaced Rangavis’ original text, the actor who had played Strovilis informs the audience (in *demotic* language) about two possible conclusions. The first is the classic one: the actors bow and the audience applauds. As the actor, however, continues, there is also a different possibility. In the meantime, the actors, wearing the blazers, begin to sing and dance the opening song before they exit the apron from the two sides to the auditorium. With the sound of song playing, the performance’s closing credits are projected on

⁴³⁰ In Rangavis’ text the semi-choruses are not named after the parties. Yet, from hints in the texts (regions of their reign; colonies; historical events) one is possible to identify them with the representatives of the Russian, English and French party (Rangavis, *Του Κουτρούλη ο Γάμος* [Koutroulis’ Wedding], 55–59). In the National’s performance, instead, the three parties are openly named.

⁴³¹ These “recognisable, if somewhat indeterminate ‘parties’ existed even during the non-constitutional period of Otto’s reign between 1833 and 1843”. They “reflected the way in which the representatives of the Protecting Powers, the putative generators of Greek independence, had become the foci of the various political groupings that had emerge during the course of the War of Independence in 1820s” (Richard Clogg, *Parties and Elections in Greece: The Search for Legitimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 1).

the back wall. Surprisingly enough, they do not include names but only the post of each person who worked in the production (direction, dramaturgy, “acted”, “played music” etc.), followed by the sponsors (e.g. “Sponsors: Poverty Ltd.”). To the last word “END”, written first in small letters, is added a question mark (“END?”). The size of the letters becomes gradually bigger with the question turning into a final comment on the whole performance. The decision to present the posts of the production team without names (in a similar way to the projected title including the abbreviation “e.g.” in the opening of the play) implies a notion of historical repetition: an understanding of history as a written script that will be repeated all over again with a different cast each time. The question mark, however, implying the possibility of an alternative finale, leaves the end open. This future perspective can be understood in two ways: either as a pessimistic proclamation of an inevitable repetition or as a sign of optimism with the open question – is this the end? – remaining to be answered by the audience.

The performance closes in the vivid, celebratory way that it opened – as an evening in the “Cabaret ‘Magna Graeca’”. Carnival hence gains a double meaning: it signifies a metonymy of Greece (the country as carnivalesque cabaret) while, at the same time, as a moment of rupture that may lead to a possible change in Bakhtinian terms.⁴³² In the carnival any hierarchical and social distinction, any ethical prohibition, any power relations cease. In a frenzied state of emergency, between real and imaginative, everything is possible. According to Bakhtin, this carnival state, which is governed by its own rules, can be experienced as a “universal spirit”. There are no spectators, “no other life outside it”.⁴³³ The carnival laughter is not a simple reaction to something funny. It is the “laughter of all the people” and points to the whole world, which “is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity”. It is cheerful and sarcastic, “asserts and denies, buries and revives”.⁴³⁴

Here I suggest reading this exceptional carnival moment on the National’s empty stage in relation to Benjamin’s conception of the, “now time”, the *Jetztzeit*.⁴³⁵ Opposed to a conception of history as the outcome of continuous, uninterrupted progress from past towards the future, Benjamin questions a “progression through a homogeneous, empty time”.⁴³⁶ This

⁴³² The carnivalesque elements of the performance were stressed by many critics. Indicatively see Matina Kaltaki, review of *Koutroulis’ Wedding*, directed by Vasilis Papavasiliou, *Lifo*, March 28, 2012, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.lifo.gr/mag/features/3138>.

⁴³³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), 7.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

⁴³⁵ My conception of carnival as representing a *Jetztzeit* has been strongly influenced by Savvas Michail’s text “Κεφάλαιον Ὑστερον: Πεθαίνω σα Χώρα” [Last Chapter: Dying as country], in *Homo Poëticus* (Athens: Agra, 2006), 369–70.

⁴³⁶ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 252.

Jetztzeit actively carries all the lost possibilities of the past in a latent state: “The present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe”.⁴³⁷ The Benjaminian thought combines Marxism and Jewish theology. The messianic dimension of the latter, however, does not refer to external salvation of the subjects but to their own self-awakening and reactions to breaking the chains that have imprisoned them. The subversion of the official history, written by those in power and silencing the weak voices, will only succeed, when the oppressed will break the continuum of history and free themselves hence fulfilling the quest for restoration of the past inequalities.

As I will elaborate later, in no case I imply that Papavasiliou’s performance proclaims a revolutionary uprising in Marxist terms. However, the “now time” – a moment outside of the actual historical reality amid the crisis when past and present meet momentarily – invites to a reflection primarily of the mistakes of the past. In Benjaminian thought, the people, in a moment of exception, are invited to realise what the storm of the progress did not allow the angel of the history to do: to freeze and restore the mistakes of the past.⁴³⁸ From this point of view, the carnivalesque laughter does not have a comforting function. On the contrary, it signifies this subversive instance, which can lead to the recognition of the possibility for change. Here it is the call for a change of self-perception. It is hence, not only a decrial of those in power but most importantly of the way that the Greek society perceives itself and its past history.

Papavasiliou’s staging of *The Fortune Hunter* in 2010 can be also analysed in a similar but much more complex way.⁴³⁹ Here, however, the past and the present are mediated through the future. The actual title of the performance *The Fortune Hunter...based on Chourmouzis* predisposes the spectator regarding the adaptation of the 1835 political satire. As also rather openly stated in his prologue, Chourmouzis was targeting the Bavarian general Carl Wilhelm von Heideck. The latter was associated with King Otto’s regency council, which played a decisive role in the establishment of the foreign (Bavarian) models of administration in the newly founded Greek state.⁴⁴⁰ In the play, Chourmouzis decries the foreign domination (*xenokratia*) of the Bavarian administration. He satirised the European “fortune hunters” who

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 255.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 249.

⁴³⁹ The performance took place on July 11–15, 2010 at the Hall H, Peiraios 260. For more information, see “The Fortune Hunter,” Greek Festival, accessed March 2, 2021, http://greekfestival.gr/festival_events/epoche-theatre-2006-vassilis-papavassiliou-2010/?lang=en#.

⁴⁴⁰ When appointed king, Otto was not yet 18 and therefore until his majority he had a three-member regency council which played a crucial role in the steps taken during the first years of the new state.

came to the new state to pursue a career without the necessary qualifications. The protagonist of the play presents himself as an architect for public works and wants to also invite his brother, who is actually a miller, to be appointed as an admiral.

In his early works, to which the *Fortune Hunter* belongs, Chourmouzis directly satirised the role of the foreigners and particularly the Bavarians in the state of affairs, the phenomena of cronyism and corruption in the public sector and the deference of the newly emerged “bourgeoisie” of the urban centres to European trends. In both the *Fortune Hunter* but also his next comedy *The Clerk* [1836], Chourmouzis impersonates on the face of these two characters a “political function”: the dominance of the foreign powers in the first case and the “parasitic bureaucracy” in the latter.⁴⁴¹ Chourmouzis’ plays are written in an “‘colloquial’ language of the Greek urban centres” which was still undergoing a process of development, excluding “idiomatisms, foreign residues and dialects”.⁴⁴²

Almost two centuries later, in the first years of the financial crisis, which brought forth long-existing issues such as the corrupted, oversized state apparatus but also the role of foreign powers in the course of the history of the Greek state, Chourmouzis’ play was extremely topical. The similarities between the existing malfunctions of a state member of the European Union in the twenty-first century and the problems during the first decades of the Greek state inevitably pose the question of whether the root of the “evil” for the current situation of Greece should be searched for in the terms of the state’s foundation. From the standpoint of an observer in 2019, the 2010 performance turned out to be “prophetic”.

Papavasiliou’s production, loosely based on Chourmouzis’ satire, is a synthesis of scenes and extracts from the original play together with adjunct, newly composed, texts. The production time (now) intermingles with the dramatic times (past–future) in a critical way. Similar to *Koutroulis*, this interplay between the different narrative levels undermines notions of unity and continuity and underscores the interplay between different temporalities. The questioning of any notion of linearity leads, by extension, to challenging of a positive conception of history as an inevitable movement from a left-behind past towards an unknown future. While the National’s production oscillates between proximity (expressed through laughter) and distance, this performance constantly challenges the cognitive awareness of the spectators, stressing the distance between stage and auditorium. The “cold” aesthetic of the

⁴⁴¹ Dimitris Spathis, «Μ. Χουρμούζης» [M. Chourmouzis], in *Σατιρα και Πολιτική στη Νεότερη Ελλάδα: Από τον Σολωμό ως τον Σεφέρη* [Satire and Politics in Modern Greece: From Solomos to Seferis], ed. Eleni Tsantsanoglou (Athens: Etaireia Spoudon, 1979), 78.

⁴⁴² Hadjipantazis, *Η Ελληνική Κωμωδία* [Nineteenth-century Greek Comedy], 42.

performance does not allow any possible emotional response; although satire, the staging of the play does not evoke laughter.

The theatre space at Peiraios Str. is an empty hall in a former industrial building. On one side of the stage (at ground level) stand six metal constructions with small wheels, recalling “shells”. While the spectators enter the auditorium, on the cement floor is projected the date “25 March 2021”, pointing from the beginning to a symbolic as well as an ironic time journey. On March 25, 2021, will be celebrated the 200-years-anniversary of the beginning of the Independence War against the Ottoman Occupation that led to the foundation of the Greek state under the reign of the Bavarian king.

In *The Fortune Hunter*, the audience is not addressed in an immediate, personal way as was the case in the opening scene of *Koutroulis*. Here the director Vasilis Papavasiliou enters the stage and standing frontally to the spectators begins with an official address, without however naming them. His opening address, framed as such through the projected title (“ADDRESS” [ΔΙΑΓΓΕΛΜΑ]) on the back wall, sets from the beginning the (self-)ironic tone of the performance: “God, through the creation of the world, proved his omnipotence. God, through the creation of the Modern Greek state, proved that even this divine omnipotence has its limits”.⁴⁴³

Papavasiliou introduces himself as coordinator of a commission that eleven years ago was asked to help Greece to rescue itself. In 2021, their mission ends successfully with a double celebration: 200 years from the Independence War and eleven years from the beginning of their repair mission. Inviting the people to look optimistically to the future, the last words of his long speech point to his identity as a stranger: “Long live Greece. Signature: Me, the foreigner”. Interestingly enough, the only word uttered with foreign Greek accent is the pronoun “Me”, recalling the accent of immigrants speaking Greek. This emphasis ironically questions the identity of this “foreigner”, triggering a recollection of the different responses of the Greek society to the notion of “foreigner” in the course of its history. In 2010 Greece, the “European foreigners” were seen by an extended part of the society as merely those responsible for the situation of the Greek people thereby evoking feelings of hatred. Although Chourmouzis’ satire targets the foreign interventions in the organisation of the Greek state, Papavasiliou’s production does not target the “foreigners” as solely responsible for the Greek crisis. The *Fortune Hunter* is not only Chourmouzis’ protagonist – namely a representative of the foreign

⁴⁴³ «Ο Θεός, δια της δημιουργίας του κόσμου, απέδειξε την Παντοδυναμία του. Ο Θεός δια της δημιουργίας του Νέου ελληνικού κράτους απέδειξε ότι ακόμη και η θεία παντοδυναμία έχει τα κενά της».

powers (be it in the past or present). It also represents the Greeks, substantiating a stance traceable along the whole history of Greece – a country that “hovers between hope and defeat, salvation and disaster, end and Resurrection”.⁴⁴⁴

This double perspective of the Fortune Hunter as representing both the foreigner and the Greek society is underscored by the characterisation of Rangavis’ hero in Papavasiliou’s speech as “our primogenitor”, the “first professional saviour of modern Greece: the clumsy, greedy and at the end likeable hero of Chourmouzis”. Here the pronoun “our” has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, the primogenitor can be the (Bavarian) foreign powers in Greece and the repeated presence of foreign powers in Greece; on the other hand, it can be read as a reference to the similarities in the mentality of the Greek society in mid-nineteenth century and contemporary Greek society.

While the production of *Koutroulis* negotiated the past–present relationship, here they both intermingle with the future. This additional vantage point is signified through the use of a chorus on an empty stage with only the metal shells as props. The empty stage here has a similar significance as in the National’s performance two years later: the “awkwardness when facing the agony and vertigo of tomorrow”.⁴⁴⁵ The metal shells represent a new patent that the rescue commission introduces today: the product of the first industrial investment in Greece, the “bio-shell on wheels” (*τροχήλατο βιοκέλυφος*). Already, from the beginning of the crisis, one of the main reasons considered for the crisis was the lack of productivity in Greece and its high amount of imports. Now Greece could finally be placed among the strong, productive powers of the future. Ironically enough, by restraining the movements of the actors, the “shell” resembles the state of Greece as being encouraged to move but within a metal frame, an image possibly resembling the “rescue” condition.

Contrary to the clear transition stated through the projected title in the case of *Koutroulis*, here Chourmouzis’ play emerges out of the stage action without further framing. Papavasiliou enters the centre of the scene. He performs alone, in front of the other actors standing still in the “shells”, a dialogue imitating two different voices and changing the direction of his sight. The dialogue revolves around the bad financial state of Greece and the need for credit, with the second person arguing that Europe will not give another loan, as they had spent everything on unnecessary expenses, ministers and secretaries. At the end of this short scene, Papavasiliou reveals the source of the text: “Miltiadis Chourmouzis, 1834”. The

⁴⁴⁴ Vasilis Papavasiliou, “Σημείωμα του σκηνοθέτη” [Director’s Note], programme of the Athens Festival 2010, 43.

⁴⁴⁵ Papavasiliou and Haviaras, « ‘Άδεια σκηνή, έρημη χώρα’ » [Empty stage, waste land], 9.

play was written a year later, as also mentioned in the programme. Although it seems rather unlikely that the spectators could understand that this text was not part of the play, still the reference to the time and the author shifts the perspective to the past.⁴⁴⁶

The characters of the play derive from and merge with the chorus of the black-dressed men in “shells”. Indicative is the first scene of Chourmouzis’ play: two actors exit their shells and come to the front. The first monologue, enunciated by a prone actor, allows the spectators to understand that he is the servant of the Fortune Hunter, Danilis, who complains about the pretentiousness of his boss.⁴⁴⁷ He utters his whole monologue in a tedious way lying on the floor while next to him sits an actor looking rather bewildered with his hand in front of him in a gesture of surprise. In the course of the performance this often stiltedly, indifferent and monotonous acting style underscores a sense of estrangement (e.g. the actors enunciate their texts as if reading them from imaginative computer screens on the shells’ desks). The monotone rhythmic melodies and the irritating background sounds together with the mechanic choreographies inside the shells underscore further this disturbing distance that prohibits any emotive identification.⁴⁴⁸

Chourmouzis’ play does not remain uninterrupted for the rest of the performance. The first monologue of the Fortune Hunter narrating his desperation in this new country where he came to help, is interrupted by Papavasiliou’s voice which utters a quote, naming also his source, namely, the Greek author Alexandros Papadiamantis: “Greece obtained its independence in order to prove that it cannot govern itself”.⁴⁴⁹ Later on, when the Fortune Hunter orders his servant to buy him French champagne, the action will be interrupted again by Papavasiliou’s voice. As an ironic counterpoint sounds the verse: “I have not set eyes on a place more glorious than this small threshing-floor”. This time the source is not named. It is,

⁴⁴⁶ This is an excerpt from Chourmouzis’ “First Dialogue,” a series of “feuilletons” in the form of dialogues published in 1834, in which he criticized the Bavarian administration during the first years of the new kingdom (Michail Chourmouzis, *Διάλογοι Επτά* [Seven Dialogues] (Athens: Ithaki, 1980), 11–13).

⁴⁴⁷ This is the opening scene of the first act of Chourmouzis’ play (Michail Chourmouzis, *Ο Τυχοδιώκτης* [The Fortune Hunter] (Athens: Na Ipiretoute ton Lao, 1978), 21).

⁴⁴⁸ The use of the supertitles and the interplay between the languages also functions in this direction. In many instances Papavasiliou speaks in English with a characteristic Greek accent, while the Greek text is projected on the back wall. Here it is not only the accent that points to a disturbing distance between the subject and his/her language. The spectators have to read their “familiar” language while listening to the foreign text mediated through the Greek speaker. While in *Koutroulis* the use of the supertitles had a playfully ironic function, which at the same time was signifying the interplay between the different temporalities, here supertitles are used in order to stress the difference between spoken and written language.

⁴⁴⁹ «Η Ελλάς απέκτησε την ανεξαρτησίαν της ίνα αποδείξει πως είναι αδύνατον να αυτοκυβερνηθεί». This quote is a paraphrase of a sentence from Papadiamantis’ short novel “Vardianos sta sporka” (1893): «Θα έλεγε τις ότι η χώρα αυτή ηλευθερώθη επίτηδες δια ν’ αποδειχθή ότι δεν ήτο ικανή προς αυτοδιοίκησίν» (Alexandros Papadiamantis, *Βαρδιάνος στα Σπόρκα και άλλα διηγήματα* [Vardianos at Sporka and other short stories] (Athens: Nefeli, 1990), 49).

though, quite likely that some of the spectators may know that this verse belongs to Dionysios Solomos' work *Ελεύθεροι Πολιορκημένοι* [The Free Besieged].⁴⁵⁰ The function of these (decontextualised) quotes is not the identification of their source. Instead they imply an interpretation of the onstage action as a comment on the ambivalence that characterises Greece's self-perception.

The performance challenges representation and unity while establishing a continuous estrangement. The projected titles and the interplay with the translated text contribute to such a distanciation. In many instances, Papavasiliou speaks in English – as representative of the foreign commission – with, however, a rather Greek accent. At the same time, the Greek text is projected on to the back wall. The familiarity of the Greek language is undermined through the disturbing reminder of the foreign language as well as through the visualisation of the supertitles. Furthermore, the embedded, clearly framed quotes have a similar function to the metatheatrical references that during the scenes point to the staging of Chourmouzis' play (e.g. the Fortune Hunter orders his servant to bring him an “umbrella and everything else that says Chourmouzis”). While, though, the quotes flag their function as comments, the metatheatrical strategy of “theatre-within-theatre” ruptures representation, triggering a critical interweaving of the multiple narrative and temporal levels.

Already from the beginning, Papavasiliou's first monologue has implied that the following staged action would be part of the double celebration. Papavasiliou interrupts Chourmouzis' play again and announces in English that his collaborators will now present their “tribute” to the ancient drama. On the back is projected the Greek translation of the spoken text. The following part of the ceremony, which is supposed to be related to the ancient drama, will start as a scene from Chourmouzis' text. Under the title “Public Work” [Δημόσια Έργα] follows a loose adaptation inspired by the original play, followed by a scene- comment on the issue of the Public Works with concealed allusions concerning the Greek reality of 2010 and the attempt – under troika's control – to bring order to the public finances. The staging of the “public works” as ancient drama seems highly ironic, given that in the pro-crisis era the corruption in this sector had catastrophic consequences for the house finances.

The “adaptation” of Chourmouzis play addresses the already discussed debate on the stagings of ancient drama. Papavasiliou admits the hesitancy of the rescue group to present their adaptation of the original text “in front of a public that considers itself –reasonably or not

⁴⁵⁰ «Τα μάτια μου δεν είδαν τόπον ενδοξότερόν από τούτο το αλωνάκι» (Dionysios Solomos, «Ελεύθεροι Πολιορκημένοι» [Free Besieged], in *Σολωμού Άπαντα* [Solomos' Collected Poems], vol. 1, ed. Linos Politis (Athens: Ikaros, 1961), 211).

–as the only owner of the Greek cultural legacy”. Since, however, they did not agree with this attitude, a necessary closure was signed in the contracts between the Greeks and the commission, which gave freedom to the latter to use material from the cultural heritage of Greece. Here, the relationship to signing of the first memorandum between the EU/IMF (the latter called “institutions”) and the Greek government on May 2, 2010 is direct. The ironically ambiguous way that the notion of cultural heritage intermingles with the maladministration in the sector of the public works and the memoranda invites a more complex reading of the problems in Greece, as both the outcome of foreign intervention as well as the consequence of deeply rooted misconceptions regarding the notion of “ownership” and the glorious past. This long scene ends with the announcement of the return to Chourmouzis’ original text and the introduction of each actor as the character of the play. The metatheatrical frame is openly exposed, without, however, leading to a clear distinction of the different levels and roles.

In the final scene Papavasiliou again stands alone on stage. On the back of the dark empty stage of the Hall in the industrial building of Peiraiois Str. a door has opened; the light that enters shapes a corridor on the floor. Papavasiliou approaches the audience; he opens a folded paper and reads aloud. The first sentence already probably reveals to the spectators the title of the poem: “In the Street of the Philhellenes” («Στην οδό των Φιλελλήνων»)⁴⁵¹, written by Andreas Embirikos. The indifferent recitation style of Papavasiliou stresses the act of reading, inviting the audience to pay attention to the meaning of the poem. In Embirikos’ poem, the light – nature as physical space – and the fear of death are traced as two contradictory characteristics of the Greek mentality: sublimity and fear, light and dirt. Embirikos’ text, in an ambiguous way, points to the conception of inheritance and origin, while at the same time the light coming from the open door, hesitantly signify an unknown (more enlightened?) future. The fear of death, the small, human, weakness, will perhaps win over again. Under the melody of brass instruments, the lights turn off, while the door remains open shedding light.

Papavasiliou’s performance neither offers a modern adaptation of the 1835 play, nor suggests that history simply repeats itself. The return to the past from a future vantage point of view targets the present, in order to invite a critical renegotiation of the moment of crisis, when the performance took place. The future perspective (celebrations in the year 2021) mediates between the past (1820s/1830s) and addresses the present (2010), securing the – necessary for a critical reflection – distance. This intersection of past and present on the empty stage can be

⁴⁵¹ Andreas Embirikos, «Εις την Οδόν των Φιλελλήνων» [In the Street of the Philhellenes], in *Οκτάνα* [Oktana] (Athens: Ikaros, 1980), 10–11.

read again as a moment of rupture of the linear historical progress in Benjamin's terms. It is a moment of *Jetztzeit*, an instance when a "dialectical image" is suddenly recognised.

In the "N convolute" of his unfinished *Arcades Project* Benjamin argued that,

[i]t's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, *image is dialectics at a standstill*. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.⁴⁵²

Here the differentiation implied between past and "what-has-been" illuminates the Benjaminian opposition to a conception of linear historical time. That is to say that the notion of "past" as also used in his *Theses* concerning *Jetztzeit* resembles this non-homogeneous conception of time. Following Max Pensky in the Benjaminian thought "'past' and 'present' are constantly locked in a complex interplay and what is past and what is present are negotiated through material struggles".⁴⁵³ The outcome of these struggles will allow the winners to narrate their version of the past, erasing everything that does not support it.⁴⁵⁴

These forgotten moments of the past suddenly appear in an instance of the *Jetztzeit*; the present does not follow the past in a linear sequence. The image "emerges suddenly, in a flash"⁴⁵⁵ and reveals a different perception of the past's quests. In the dialectical image, the past as "what has been" constellates with the present as "now" without however constructing a homogeneous and united new entity. According to Susan Buck-Moss, the dialectical image could be understood as "*a way of seeing that crystallizes antithetical elements by providing the axes for their alignment*".⁴⁵⁶ Being the standstill of non-static tensions, it suddenly opens a new perspective. Buck-Moss suggests that Benjamin "charts philosophical ideas visually within an unreconciled and transitory field of oppositions that can perhaps be pictured in terms of

⁴⁵² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 462 [N2a,3] (emphasis added).

⁴⁵³ Max Pensky, "Method and Time: Benjamin's dialectical images," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 180.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 180–181.

⁴⁵⁵ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 473 [N9, 7].

⁴⁵⁶ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), 210 (emphasis added).

coordinates of contradictory terms, the ‘synthesis’ of which is not a movement toward resolution, but the point at which their axes intersect”.⁴⁵⁷

The contradictions that have been inherent in the dialectic image are revealed in a “now-time”. This “Now” in Benjamin’s theory is imbued with the possibility for change: “For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter”.⁴⁵⁸ Here Messiah should not be interpreted in a mere theological way. The salvation that Benjamin promotes is the change that is going to take place within society. The possible entrance of the Messiah signifies the possibility of this subversion, not the confidence of change. Benjamin’s Messiah is not an external divine power but inherent in the social individual, in the generation of the present time that in this emergency moment is able to rupture linear development.

In the present context, I refer to the complex notion of the “dialectical image” in order to shed light on the dialectic tensions inherent in the Benjaminian conception of time, as echoed in Papavasiliou’s performance. In a similar way to Benjamin’s search for “that constellation of historical origins which has the power to explode history’s ‘continuum’,”⁴⁵⁹ the performance brings forward those moments and aspects (different texts, different narrative levels) that could lead the spectator to a different recognition of the past–present relation. The past is not recollected in a didactic way as an egregious example that should be avoided but as still inhabiting the present despite its unquestionable distance from it.

In both performances, I find the traces of a conception of a “now-time”, a moment of pause in a process towards the future. The present faces the past not in order to suggest a circular repetition but as a reminder of what has to be changed. For, Benjamin’s angel of history, while looking towards the back, still moves towards the future: “This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward”.⁴⁶⁰ Benjamin does not use the present tense randomly when describing the angel. His *Jetztzeit* is the present tense: “An allegorical embodiment of the other aspect of the present, of that ever-repeating catastrophe in which time is plunged when it stops producing anything new, the Angel is the dark side of all representation”.⁴⁶¹

In no case do I argue that these performances suggested a revolutionary rupture; here there is no quest for the salvation of the oppressed. What I, however, consider useful is to show

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁵⁸ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 255.

⁴⁵⁹ Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, x.

⁴⁶⁰ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 249.

⁴⁶¹ Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 120.

the critical potential of a conception of the “now time” through Benjamins’ lens for a negotiation of the relationship to the past and the understanding of history. In different ways, the two performances exposed the contemporaneity of different temporalities, pointing to the moments that they blur while at the same time to the differences between them. Past –present– future do not constitute a homogeneous time. Hence, here, the notion of “dialectical” not only illustrates contradictory tensions but emphasises this moment of standstill and urgency in which the different potentials of the past are dramatically crystallised together as a call for the future.

Still, nevertheless, this demand for change will not necessarily be fulfilled. It remains an open quest, a weak possibility fuelling the inevitable movement towards the future. The open door in the Festival’s dark stage in *The Fortune Hunter*’s last scene may signify such a weak hope. In 2010, the projection into the future seemed a rational warning of the consequences, calling for a critical reflection of the present–part–future relation beyond notions of linear continuity. Eleven years later, from the present viewpoint, Papavasiliou’s’ ironic “time journey” appears bitterly as another lost moment for rupture of the continuum in modern Greece.

2.4 Conclusion

Past(s), present(s) and future(s) are intermingled in a dynamic interplay. The distance between them, while remaining relentless, also implies the notion of proximity. The latter is noticed either as absence (something is distant because it is not close) or as an inherent element in the past–present relationship (the past perceived as hauntingly inhabiting the present). A further dialectical tension arises between proximity and distance. Proximity can be suggested both restoratively as well as reflectively critical. In the first case, for example, hegemonic narratives erase any in-between gaps or inconvenient periods and events that are not useful to the dominant discourses; past and present are linearly linked to each other. From a reflective standpoint, however, proximity is evoked through a fragmentary, non-linear, mediated perception of the past as familiar. This approach is further underscored either through an appeal to the emotions (e.g. emotive aspects of reflective nostalgia in *Golfo*) and recollection of personal memories (e.g. the improvisation-like chorus’ parts in *Herakles*), or, on the contrary, through the alienating emphasis on the lack of any emotional effect vis-à-vis the tracing of similarities between past, present and future (e.g. in Papavasiliou’s productions).

Recognising common aspects and similarities between past and present does not speak against a dialectical approach. A necessary prerequisite, however, is that their understanding as “common” does not imply a process of static transfer across time and space of essentialist substances that prove a homogeneous continuity. Neither does it suggest the repetition of events as the predetermined outcomes of a circular conception of historical time. On the contrary, it calls for a mediated approach to the past through a critical self-perception of the present and vice versa. This quest for a new perspective is expressed not only as a bold call for revolutionary subversion but also in a rather subtle way, through a critical reconsideration of the responsibilities of the present vis-à-vis the failures of the past and new, more flexible definitions of one’s own identity in the future.

In this chapter, I scrutinised the implications of the dynamic dialectics between past(s)-present(s) as well as proximity–distance in the redefinition of national identity. Analysing four different productions, which, to a different extent, all challenged representation, narrative unity and linear continuity, I explored the onstage interweaving of different temporalities and the interplay between proximity and distance. These entanglements are observed at different levels of the performance (aesthetic/dramaturgical) through the simultaneous demonstration of temporal, spatial and emotional distance and (emotional) proximity also expressed as cultural familiarity.

The simultaneous – often double-edged – effects of estrangement techniques and strategies that trigger a rather personal, emotional perception of closeness in relation to time and (cultural) space, facilitate the manifestation of these dialectical tensions on stage. Quite often, a gesture of alienation is followed by or combined with an allusion to the Greek cultural background, the present time of crisis or the relation to the past, demonstrated in ways that rather likely appeal to the spectators’ emotions. This (no matter how distorted) familiarity is triggered, for example, by the employment of easy recognisable narratives, symbols, historical events and aspects of folk and urban folk culture, while it is underscored further through the contrasting framing of the stage action against the contemporary background of the Greek society. In this way, even when the audience is tempted to engage emotionally, the effect of the double-edged irony that characterises the dialectic interweaving between distance and emotional closeness does not allow an unreflective identification. Expanded beyond the aesthetic and dramaturgical level, this interplay resembles the very approach to the notion of Greek identity proposed by these performances: undermining a spontaneous, non-rational identification is part of the very notion of identity, which, however, still survives as an analytical category.

Interestingly enough, many of the techniques which in some cases are associated primarily with an estrangement effect may present an opposite function elsewhere. Suggestive is, for example, the frontal staging, including the formation of *tableaux vivants* or the direct address to the audience. In all cases, the position in front of the audience ruptures representation of a closed dramatic world, prohibiting identification with the dramatic characters. In *Golfo*, where the frontal staging is dominant, its function can be characteristically understood as an attempt to undermine the melodramatic, unreflective nostalgia of the pastoral drama. Still, the frontal positioning may not exclusively imply emotional distance and defamiliarisation, especially if one considers the spatial relationship between audience and stage. In *Herakles*, for instance, the frontal acting of the chorus and the protagonists illustrates two different effects. The position of the protagonists and the indifferent enunciation of their parts into microphones ruptures representation thereby triggering estrangement. At the same time, the frontal positioning of the chorus towards the audience due to its vivid, polyphonic presence and its adapted texts bridges the distance between orchestra and *koilon*. The effect of the performative demonstration of distance through the frontal positioning and mediation of microphones in the case of the dramatic characters and of proximity in the case of the chorus who appeals to the audience's personal experiences should also be related to the questioning of the particular symbolic weight of the ancient tragic text for the Greeks. As I have discussed extensively, the ancient text often functioned as evidence of a hereditary relationship to antiquity, something that also had implications in any attempted intervention. Here the audience still feels moved but not towards the "holy" texts enunciated by the protagonists. On the contrary, their acting triggers alienation, whereas the spectators may feel emotionally addressed by the newly adapted chorus' parts with references to the recent past.

The use of microphones underscores the defamiliarising function of the frontal staging, distancing the actor from his/her role and rupturing the dramatic identity. Both handheld and standing ones frame and thus emphasise the dynamic process of narration undermining an understanding of the dramatic texts as linear, closed narratives. Yet, microphones also function as amplifiers of the onstage actions or ruptures of the plot, affecting the perception of the audience (e.g. live singing into the microphone of emotive melodies in *Golfo* or of chorus members in *Herakles*).

Music and the live singing not only have an estrangement function but also often trigger emotional responses. In *Golfo*, for instance, musical dissonance distorts the idyllic landscape of the pastoral drama, while in other moments the actor's emotive songs related to the love story most probably move the audience. At the same time, though, musical dissonance in

relation to rhythmic deceleration also implies defamiliarisation from the Greek connotations (e.g. the distorted *tsamikos* towards the finale of *Golfo* or the jazz-dissonant version of *tsifteteli* in *Koutroulis' Wedding*). Rhythmic deceleration is also expressed as a slow-motion effect, drawing attention to the movement and hence undermining (culturally conditioned) representation.

This ambiguous double function as trigger of estrangement or affective familiarity becomes even more clear on the visual level. Suggestive is the allusive reference to *foustanela* in the costumes of *Golfo* (black skirts) and *Koutroulis' Wedding* (colourful paper cones). While signifying the cultural context and associations to national tradition, they do not identify completely with the national costume as such. Hence the costumes differ from the “original” familiar national image, while critically acknowledging – without attempting to deconstruct – its dominant connotations through the very process of using it even in an abstract form.

The projection of text and supertitles facilitates both distance and closeness. Supertitles are underscoring the relation to the past, while challenging an understanding of the dramatic text as a closed narrative. They can relate the dramatic time and the time of production with a different epoch – this is, for example, the case of the projected extracts from Angelopoulos' film in *Herakles* linking the performance to the recent (cultural) history of modern Greece. In the very different case of the *Fortune Hunter*, the supertitles are used in order to comment on the stage action and the dramatic text, and also introduce the future perspective in their interpretation and stress the critical interplay between different temporalities. Furthermore, here the projection of lines in Greek while simultaneously spoken in English with a Greek accent underscore cultural distance, which, in turn, suggests a perception of the onstage action – and subsequently of the discussed similarities between past and present – from a critical distance. Even more, in *Koutroulis' Wedding*, the projections in *katharevousa* language of the nineteenth century not only function as a reminder of the existence of such distance in the same cultural space but also of a temporal one, also undermining arguments of uncritical linearity in the case of the Greek language. A similar effect also evokes the parodic imitation of *katharevousa*, in the parts that in a metatheatrical way are self-referring directly to the present production, occasionally addressing the National's audience. At the same time, the similarities between the nineteenth century and the present implied throughout the performance are further underlined through the supertitles (for example, the title signifying the dramatic time introduced characterised as “e.g.”) in a rational, defamiliarising approach to the past.

The metatheatrical framework, expanding beyond a clearly defined theatre-within-theatre condition, further stresses the dialectical constellation of different temporal layers. The

plays analysed here have an easily recognisable link to the issue of the perception of the past, either due to the terms of their reception (case of ancient drama or pastoral drama) or because of their direct association to the first stages of the modern Greek state (Papavasiliou's productions). Here the use of parody, adaptation and metatheatrical strategies hence resides on the associations to the past that these plays inevitably trigger. Their function is not a simple adaptation in the present time; they suggest a different – mediated – approach not only to these dramatic texts but also to the different Greek past(s) from the (also emotionally laden) present standpoint of crisis.

3. Deconstructing symbols, heroes and identities

The survival of national cultures (and by extension of national identities) presupposes a process of unification. As Stuart Hall observes, “[t]o put it crudely, however different its members may be in terms of class, gender, or race, a national culture seeks to unify them into one cultural identity, to represent them all as belonging to the same great national family”.⁴⁶² Nevertheless, national culture can never be as unified as it proclaims to be, since it is constituted from different cultures that have merged over years of conflicts, as well as from different classes, genders and ethnic groups.⁴⁶³ Following Hall:

Instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as constituting a *discursive device* which represents difference as unity or identity. They are cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and “unified” only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power.⁴⁶⁴

Mediated through the lens of cultural studies, behind such line of argument that perceives national cultures and their identities as non-homogeneous should be traced deconstruction’s (and particularly Derrida’s) understanding of identity as difference and the challenge to the hierarchical binary oppositions of Western logocentric thought. Following Derrida, one should first “recognise that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful co-existence of a *vis-a-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand”.⁴⁶⁵ This stage of reversing the terms of this hierarchical opposition is of crucial importance for deconstruction. For not paying enough attention to this phase would lead to a hasty “*naturalization* that *in practice* would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of intervening in the field effectively”.⁴⁶⁶ The task of deconstruction is nevertheless not exhausted in this necessary phase of overturning hierarchy but it should be proceeded by the dislocation of the whole system:

⁴⁶² Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” 616.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 616–617.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 617 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁶⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*: Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta, in *Positions*, trans. and annot. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41(emphasis in original).

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (emphasis in original).

Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an *overturning* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to *intervene* in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also a field of nondiscursive forces.⁴⁶⁷

If it can be agreed that deconstruction has challenged the “notion of an integral, originary and unified identity”, then, as Hall rightly asks, why is it necessary to keep discussing about the question of identity?⁴⁶⁸ For whom can identity be needed? As one of the two possible ways to tackle this question Hall proposes to pay closer attention to the deconstructive approach to such concepts like identity:

Unlike those forms of critique which aim to supplant inadequate concepts with ‘truer’ ones, or which aspire to the production of positive knowledge, the deconstructive approach puts key concepts ‘under erasure’. This indicates that they are no longer serviceable – ‘good to think with’ – in their originary and unreconstructed form. But since they have not been superseded dialectically, and there are no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them – albeit now in their detotalized or deconstructed forms, and no longer operating within the paradigm in which they were originally generated.⁴⁶⁹

From this point of view, the concept of identity is neither replaced by a new one, nor loses its dominance being positioned – in a reversible way at the site of an opposite concept in hierarchical terms. Here Hall refers to Derrida who distinguishes “between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new ‘concept,’ a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime”.⁴⁷⁰ Following this, Hall also proposes to approach identity as “such a concept – operating ‘under erasure’ in the interval

⁴⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Sussex: The Harvest Press, 1982), 329 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁶⁸ Hall, “Introduction: Who needs ‘Identity’?”, 1.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Positions,” 42. Also quoted in Hall, “Introduction: Who needs ‘Identity’,” 2.

between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all.”⁴⁷¹

From the beginning of this thesis I have argued for the necessity of acknowledging the persistent survival of the concept of national identity in order to subsequently find critical ways to deal with it. In the previous chapter I discussed the dialectical mode as an approach that does not promote the shattering of the identity as a category; it is through the emphasis on the internal – contradictory – tensions which affect the process of self-perception in relation to (narratives of) the past, that the limits of identity become more elastic and dynamic. What happens when the category of identity per se is the target? The first step in the fight against externally imposed norms and binaries, which function as limitations in each one’s national identity construction, is their de-naturalisation and exposure of the power relations that fuel their implementation. Yet, what follows on stage, apparently non-emotionally, the proclamation of the need to “burn one’s own home down” until only the walls stand in?

Influenced by Hall’s analysis, I will attempt to define another mode of critical engagement in order to examine first of all how national identity can be approached on stage in such a way that is “put under erasure”, disarticulating the fundamental joints that hold it together. How may theatre dismantle naturalisation and unification processes that contribute to the reproduction of dominant narratives and officially accepted conceptions of identities? Is it, after all, possible to witness on stage not only a reversal of the opposition but also “a general *displacement* of the system”, to refer again to Derrida’s words? What may the consequences be of such theatrical manifestation of the absence of any stable point of reference and identificatory attachment outside and beyond the framed condition of the performance?

This second mode of theatre’s critical engagement with national identity will be called “deconstructive”. Aware of the terminology dangers that arise from the popularity that the concept has been enjoying over the decades and without strictly following a Derridean line of thought,⁴⁷² I use the attributive adjective “deconstructive” in order to describe possible processes of disarticulation of national identities through theatrical means. I will tackle the

⁴⁷¹ Hall, “Introduction: Who needs ‘Identity’?,” 2.

⁴⁷² Over the decades “deconstruction” has gained various definitions in different disciplines, while it has also entered the popular discourse, being often used in a rather inflationary way. Derrida himself does not offer a singular definition. Considering the difficulty of a fixed definition, Nicholas Royle suggests his own dictionary entry. Deconstruction is “not what you think: the experience of the impossible: what remains to be thought: a logic of destabilization always already on the move in ‘thinks themselves’: what makes every identity at once itself and different from itself: a logic of spectrality: a theoretical and practical parasitism or virology: what is happening today in what is called society, politics, diplomacy, economics, historical reality, and so on: the opening of the future itself” (Nicholas Royle, “What is Deconstruction?” in *Deconstructions: A User’s Guide*, ed. Nicholas Royle (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 11).

above questions, while tracing two of the possible ways in which this deconstructive approach may be expressed on stage. In the first case the focus is placed on the deconstruction of predominant national(ist) discourses, symbols, national icons, narratives but also institutions (such as family) that function – residing on binary oppositions and exclusions – as unifying links at the service of naturalised conceptions of (Greek) national identities. In the second case, the notion of deconstruction is related to the shattering of the signification process as such and the infinite postponement in the completion of the meaning-making, both of which undermine singularity and fixity.

Given the different target in these two cases, the selected performances here differ from each other, also in terms of their dramaturgies/aesthetics. First, I will analyse two productions of the playwright-director Lena Kitsopoulou, after a brief introduction to her multifaceted *oeuvre* as a notable case in the contemporary theatre landscape in Greece. Her work lends itself ideally to the present analysis as an example of a radical questioning of the Greek identity, exposing how (banally but also violently) the latter's essentialist construction is achieved and reproduced. Here I will discuss i) her adaptation of Lorca's *Blood Wedding* and ii) her own play *Athanasios Diakos: The Return* about the eponymous national hero of the Greek Independence War in 1821. Following this, I will turn to the discussion of Nova Melancholia's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony: A Performance for the Nation*. In this postdramatic performance, the manifestation of de-hierarchisation, heterogeneity and uncertainty as inherent in the signification process inevitably makes any identification impossible, hence prohibiting any attempt to conceive of oneself in terms of a national identity.

3.1 Petit bourgeois dreams and banal nationalism in Greek society

Having wings and being unable to fly, it's incongruous, incomprehensible, *it's entirely Greek*, it's thinking like a chicken, trying to take flight and falling flat, and trying again, again and again falling flat on your face, the way that song about seagulls flying among the masts of ships can only bring tears to your eyes, that illusion that you might even be a bird, a moment's delight, then the disappointment of falling flat every time you try.⁴⁷³

Kitsopoulou's 37-year-old heroine reflects on her life. All material needs are fulfilled; still, only a feeling of deep suffocation and predestined failure remains, an endless disappointment. She is ready to commit suicide by taking the pill M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A, an acronym which in Greek means: "Do Not Resist, Fall Flat, Go to Eternal Sleep, Redeem Yourself, Commit Suicide".⁴⁷⁴ Hearing the above-quoted passage from the monologue *M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A*, the melody and lyrics of the well-known *laiko* [urban folk] song "The Seagulls" presumably sounds to the mind of the Greek spectators: "The seagulls fly among the masts, and I tell you goodbye". Kitsopoulou describes an existential dead-end; yet this existential crisis of the individual cannot be dissociated from its (Greek) environment, which functions as a nursery for complexes and national misconceptions, fostering the perpetuation of oppressive norms. Family, society and nation intermingle unnoticeably in a banal, "natural" way.

Placing at the centre of her interest the critique to heteronormative, naturalised identities and the deeply rooted "banal nationalism" of everyday familial life, Kitsopoulou's work lends itself ideally to the present research. Social malaises are related to the way that modern Greece has shaped its identity based on a distorted perception of the past. The personal impasses recall the collective crisis not as something temporary but as an inherent element of a system built upon flimsy fundamentals. These recurring thematics, the violent means of critique, as well as the postmodern aesthetics of her performances, are characteristic of her individual style. Before turning to the analysis of the two selected performances, I would like to take a closer look at some characteristic traits of her work within the broader context of contemporary Greek dramaturgy.

⁴⁷³ Lena Kitsopoulou, *M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A*, in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Greek Plays*, trans. Alikì Chapple, 53 (emphasis added).

⁴⁷⁴ As translated in Maria Karanou, Foreword to "M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A," in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Greek Plays*, trans. Alikì Chapple, 31.

3.1.1 Contemporary Greek dramaturgies: the case of Lena Kitsopoulou

Greek drama in the twenty-first century presents a remarkable variety, making difficult a clear-cut categorisation of the different tendencies. This pluralism should be scrutinised in parallel to the constantly evolving and changing dramatic production in the second half of the twentieth century. Significant of the development of contemporary Greek theatre play has been the change in the sociopolitical landscape after 1974. Until then, the repressive forces in the post-WWII society had played a crucial role in shaping the tendencies in playwriting, constraining many creative voices in a necessary use of “strategic and tactical tricks of creative expression”.⁴⁷⁵ Since then, the observed variety, also at the level of theatre practice, do not allow congruity on specific categorisations criteria.

Theatre scholars thus attempt to decipher the field of dramatic production in the last thirty years emphasising different criteria and key topics.⁴⁷⁶ In her attempt at classification, Lina Rosi includes some of the observed tendencies under the umbrella of the “post-ethographic” theatre, analysing the “long-lasting and strong influence” of the “post-war realism” on the dramatic production.⁴⁷⁷ In regard to the dominance of realistic drama, following Ioannidis, here it is important to remember that the years after the war and until 1974 “realism in all its versions was at the heart of the debate in Greek theatrical circles”, while in parallel some new “interesting offshoots” arise (political theatre and the theatre of the absurd). During those decades, a group of Greek playwrights “who bore the distinct signs of Greek writing” emerged slowly. The quest for “Hellenism”, which had been a core issue in the Greek theatre during the twentieth century, was now approached in relation to the “Greek society, of which it claimed to be an organic part”, while taking into account the developments in the European

⁴⁷⁵ Platon Mavromoustakos, “The Greek Theatre at the Dawn of the 21st Century: From Collectivity to Innerness,” trans. Elena Delliou. The Greek Play Project, accessed March 18, 2021, <http://www.greek-theatre.gr/public/en/greekplay/index/reviewview/45>.

⁴⁷⁶ For a brief discussion of the difficulties that an overview and periodisation of the Greek dramaturgy in regard also to the notion of “historicity,” see George Pefanis, “Mapping Contemporary Greek Dramaturgy,” 7–8. In his attempt to map the tendencies in Greek dramaturgy, Pefanis warns of the danger to “see only conflicts and discontinuities and to ignore continuities, connections and durations, in temporal reality” (ibid., 11). Therefore, he also names a couple of playwrights whose work cover a very long period of time and hence can be seen as reflecting different tendencies (ibid., 8–11).

⁴⁷⁷ Lina Rosi, “The Diverse Landscape of Contemporary Greek Playwriting,” *Gramma* 22, no. 2 (2014): 28. Under the umbrella of the “post-ethographic” Rosi examines for example playwrights who, “maintain a certain realistic façade – for example, they refer to recognizable social landscapes – but, at the same time, make an extensive use of postdramatic devices” (25). In parallel to the trends that can be categorized under the “post-ethographic,” she examines the “wider influence of postdramatic aesthetics” by discussing “some general directions (devices or methods) which are extensively adopted by Greek playwrights: *hybridity*, the abolition of boundaries among different genres and styles; *intermediality*, the introduction of artistic means that derive from other media; and the practice of *intertextuality*”(28; emphasis in original).

theatre.⁴⁷⁸ In his analysis, Mavromoustakos had characterised the tendency towards the capturing of the terms of the development of the Greek society (which appeared in the 1950s and remained dominant until the early 1980s) as “theatre of everyday life”. Against this background, on the eve of the twenty-first century the shift that is observed and can be considered a common aspect of the different tendencies is the “passage from a collective spirit to an individual loneliness”.⁴⁷⁹ In any case, it is important to note, that “[t]he shapes and solutions that the writers suggest vary greatly and, even if the starting point can be found in situations or attitudes that derive from the Greek society, the answers provided cannot be considered as a reproduction of such images”.⁴⁸⁰

At this point an interesting question arises, especially if one considers the pluralism of the playwrights’ responses to the personal impasses vis-à-vis the malaises of Greek reality especially amid the crisis: to what extent can contemporary dramaturgy (and contemporary theatre in general) propose new ways towards social change, hence suggesting solutions beyond a depiction of the problem? Discussing how Greek drama deals with the “social reality” during the crisis, Dimitra Kondylaki argues critically that what is missing is “[t]his sentiment of sympathy towards the characters”, an aspect that seems to intensify Greek drama’s “non-political, determinist, passive, self-destructive spirit.” Greek playwrights point to the problem without offering any alternative possibility for transformation.⁴⁸¹

Will the author’s drama metabolize this despair? Will this despair cease to turn inwards, or towards the body? Will it succeed in cracking the surface, articulating a rational interpretation of various issues, facilitating a collective comprehension of our current challenges? This awareness should not only be dark and self-punishing but also productive in a positive way, envisaging a social transformation, and thus even joyful, dynamic, explosive.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁸ Ioannidis, “Facing Mirrors”, 81.

⁴⁷⁹ Mavromoustakos, “The Greek Theatre at the Dawn of the 21st Century,” n.p.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Dimitra Kondylaki, “The ‘Polis’ and the ‘Political’ in Contemporary Greek Drama since the Eruption of the Greek Crisis: A First Appraisal (2009–2015),” *Gramma* 22, no.2 (2014): 68. Furthermore, Kondylaki adds that “[t]his transformation seems impossible in the case of narrowly political and accusatory texts, which exhaust the meaning of the political in issues such as labour relationships, immigration, the *panopticon* of power and so on. However, I detect no such transformative signs even in poetic, largely metaphorical plays, which draw exclusively on the darkness and desperation of human existence, shunning variations, nuances, self-sarcasm”(69; emphasis in original).

⁴⁸² Ibid., 70.

Although I do not fully share Kondylaki's critique, here she underlines a crucial issue, which has informed my following discussion regarding theatre's critical potential to offer alternative conceptual solution to the mere deconstruction of the notion of identity. What follows, hence, after a first shocking encounter with oneself in the mirror?

Against this background, Lena Kitsopoulou's work presents great interest for the present analysis. She has been one of the most discussed representatives of the flourishing contemporary Greek theatre. Not surprisingly, her plays and stagings have been to a great extent identified with the Festival and the National Theatre during the period examined here as well as the Art Theatre and the Onassis Cultural Centre.⁴⁸³ Both Kitsopoulou as an artist (director, actress, short stories' author, playwright) and her theatre should be examined as a rather *sui generis* case with particular traits. Her double role as playwright and director reveals the blurred boundaries between play and its stage production, hence implying a broader definition of dramaturgy.⁴⁸⁴

Her provocative work has been read as one of the most radical critiques of the petit bourgeois Greek society and its pathologies. Cynicism, provocation, humour, exaggeration, wild imagination, ironic banality and violence are only some of the characteristics that could be attributed to Kitsopoulou's theatre. Banality and extremism, blood relations and suffocative restraints, normality and monstrosity intermingle in an alarming, disturbing way. Like the heroes in her short stories, Kitsopoulou's dramatic characters are trapped within a suffocating context.⁴⁸⁵ Their reality, or better said what they perceive as possible and feasible, is dominated

⁴⁸³ Her plays have been also staged in France (indicatively, her monologue M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A, originally written from the National Theatre in 2010, has been translated and staged abroad [Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, Saint Gervais Theater in Geneva]) but also in English, while her production of *Antigone* at the Onassis Culture Centre has travelled to New York.

⁴⁸⁴ Here it is essential to keep in mind the complex meaning of the notion of dramaturgy [δραματολογία], especially as it was defined so far in Greek: dramaturgy as the composition of plays as well as the work of the dramaturg. The two meanings often overlap also in English, making necessary a definition of dramaturgy as synthesis of different elements of the performance (including text) in regard also to the dynamic process of theatre production. Following Deutsch-Schreiner, dramaturgy (*Dramaturgie*) can be understood as "the artistic combination of different components of a work, a theatre text, a production or a performative process; but also as the reflection about the effects on the audience of the performance, from a contemporary and historical perspective. Dramaturgy combines artistic elements such as text, staging (*Inszenierung*), audience and epoch and is relational and dynamic" (Evelyn Deutsch-Schreiner, *Theaterdramaturgien von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 7). The postdramatic tendencies in contemporary theatre as well as the interrelation between theatre, performance and new media reveal the loose borders between the different definitions of dramaturgy, suggesting new forms. According to Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi, "new dramaturgical forms and skills are needed, in terms of a practice that no longer reinforces the subordination of all elements under one (usually the word, the symbolic order of language), but rather a dynamic balance to be obtained anew in each performance" (Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi, "Dramaturgy on Shifting Grounds," *Performance Research* 14, no. 3 (2009): 3).

⁴⁸⁵ In 2006, Lena Kitsopoulou presents the collection of short stories *Νυχτερίδες* [Bats] (Athens: Kedros, 2006) followed by two further collections: *Μεγάλοι Δρόμοι* [Big Roads] (Athens: Metaixmio, 2015) and *Το μάτι του ψαριού* [Fish Eye] (Athens: Metaixmio, 2015).

by the pressure of a context (familial, social, national) – their only reference point. They sink in a suffocating banality, appearing settled in the passive certainty that they are too weak to react. If they dare to break the vicious circle of their “well-tidy” existence, they are capable of the most monstrous deeds.

In 2009, she wrote the aforementioned monologue *M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A.*, commissioned by the National Theatre.⁴⁸⁶ Recalling many of Kitsopoulou’s heroes, the heroin is unable to come to terms with the soothing mediocracy of the reality surrounding her: “I am sick of myself, then again not completely, I’m a little bit sick of myself, I feel a bit okay, things are a bit alright, my life seems a bit balls”.⁴⁸⁷ As Lina Rosi argues, in *M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A.* “the personal itinerary of the main character reflects the ‘biography’ of its generation”. Without challenging directly dominant “gender stereotypes”, Kitsopoulou’s character “embark[s] on a journey that questions and transgresses the domain of the ‘ordinary’”.⁴⁸⁸ She appears unable to react to a “new-rich” society, which satisfies all material needs, solves the problems with pills, manifests its impasses and narcissism as a source of artistic inspiration. What one desires has been already offered to him/her as a possible object of desire that one may easily obtain.

At this point Kitsopoulou’s characters may recall the “one-dimensional man” as defined (of course within a different politic-historical and ideological context) by Herbert Marcuse. Following his critique, the liberties given by the society seem to provide for a free life. In fact, however, what is achieved is the development of a “happy consciousness”, which comforts the individual in a rational way and, in the end, leads to the voluntary acceptance of the repressive forces of the society.⁴⁸⁹ By fulfilling externally imposed needs for further production and possession of more goods, more possibilities for fun and happiness in fact signify another way to dominate and perpetuate the power mechanisms.

⁴⁸⁶ Premiered on March 27, 2009 at the National Theatre (Contemporary Theatre of Athens, Stage B), the performance was directed by both the playwright and the protagonist of the monologue, the actress Maria Protopappa. The play was also published: Lena Kitsopoulou, *M.A.I.P.O.Y.A.A. [M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A.]* (Athens: Kedros, 2009). The play was translated in English by Alikì Chapple, see *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Greek Plays*, 30–61.

⁴⁸⁷ Lena Kitsopoulou, *M.A.I.R.O.U.L.A.*, trans. by Alikì Chapple, in *The Oberon Anthology*, 38.

⁴⁸⁸ Lina Rosi, “Cartographies of gender in contemporary Greek theatre: A work in progress?,” *Journal of Greek Media & Culture* 3, no. 2 (2017): 188.

⁴⁸⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 87.

In 2011 Kitsopoulou stages her *Austras or Couch Grass* (*Αουστράς ή Η Αγριάδα*), a further direct commission and co-production of the National Theatre.⁴⁹⁰ According to theatre scholar Dio Kangelari, this play can be considered Kitsopoulou's "most political play", followed by her "second political play", *Athanasios Diakos*.⁴⁹¹ In *Austras*, three young friends invite to their place a German tourist, whom they met accidentally on the street. Their initially harmless racist and nationalist jokes will escalate to open aggression and torturing of the guest. Kitsopoulou makes visible the way that banal forms of nationalism and racism against the foreigner Other – who in this case is not a refugee or immigrant, but simply a tourist – may trigger open expressions of fascism and xenophobia. In that way, she criticises profoundly rooted but not always visible pathologies of the Greek society together with the alarming rise of the extreme right (Nazi in the case of the Greek party Golden Dawn) voices. According to theatre scholar Marilena Zaroulia, "[i]n the context of *Austras*, the demonization of migrants or foreigners more broadly is not a consequence of the anxiety that the financial crisis caused; instead, it is a logical extension of the (explicit or covert) nationalist pride, a culture of superiority that had defined Greek culture and education throughout the years".⁴⁹² By challenging "the logics of narration and representation", Kitsopoulou's "violent form of dramaturgy" disrupts "national obsessions and paranoias".⁴⁹³

Kitsopoulou's theatre urges violently against mindsets and stereotypes prevailing in Greek society during the last decades. As Lina Rossi accurately describes, "[h]er plays are replete with strong visual, aural and physical *cacophony* creating an extravagant spectacle that reveals a very careful process of deconstructing stereotyped attitudes and dominant moral or social values that define contemporary Greek society".⁴⁹⁴ Even if the context of her plays is not openly defined as Greek, Kitsopoulou underlines the particularities of the Greek society as part of the problem, if not the root of the evil. Subtly theatre turns into a magnifying, although disturbing, mirror of the "reality" that Kitsopoulou's audience confront. The aesthetics reflect

⁴⁹⁰ The National Theatre invited two playwrights of the younger generation, Kitsopoulou and Yiannis Tsiros, to write an one-act play about the topic of the "foreigner". Both plays were presented in one performance under the title *Foreigner: "Invisible Olga," "Austras or Couch Grass"*. The performance was first presented in a co-production at the Vryssaki Living Space of Art and Action (02.11.2011 until 26.02.2012). A year later it was repeated on the Plagia (Side) Central Stage of the National Theatre (09.11.2012 until 10.02.2013).

⁴⁹¹ Lena Kitsopoulou and Dio Kangelari, "A conversation between Lena Kitsopoulou and Dio Kangelari," in *Journal of Greek Media & Culture*, 3.2 (2017), 254–255. Theatre scholar George Pefanis also detects an evident political character in Kitsopoulou's work, arguing that by "[d]ebunking myths, rejecting oppressive rules and doctrines, and expressing power in personal and collective life, her work has a strong political and critical core, presented through satire and parody" (Pefanis, "Mapping Contemporary Greek Dramaturgy," 16).

⁴⁹² Zaroulia, "What is our motherland?," 200.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁴⁹⁴ Rosi, "Cartographies of gender in contemporary Greek theatre," 189 (emphasis added).

and even substantiate the pathologies of the national and social context within which Kitsopoulou's plays and performances have been created. It should, however, be noted that, while Kitsopoulou first appears as playwright and director just on the eve of the crisis (2009), she does not directly relate her work to it. The deeply rooted malaises of the Greek society are considered already pre-existing; they were just not visible in the same way that they have been exposed under the crashing waves of the crisis. The crisis is a deeper, personal one. Approaching reality "through the lens of futility and cynicism", Kitsopoulou reminds the audience in a disheartening way, that, "[a]s everything has an end and you are aware of it, you cannot hope with innocence."⁴⁹⁵

Violence is pervasive at all levels of Kitsopoulou's work. The spectators often reach their tolerance limits. Her plays reflect not only the visible forms of violence witnessed all around but most importantly, the underlying – and therefore extreme powerful – invisible, concealed forms of violence. According to Ioannidis, it is this violence traceable "within the family and within our upbringing, violence within the prototypes after which the Greek nation formed its ideological status."⁴⁹⁶ The strategies she utilises in order to awaken her spectator recall the British "in yer face theatre".⁴⁹⁷ Kitsopoulou's spectator cannot escape her sarcastic criticism, even if s/he belongs to her "loyal" followers – to an audience, that likely considered itself "alternative" or "intellectual". As Ioannidis rightly points, if one enjoys her theatre, this does not place him/her "outside of the firing range of her satire"; on the contrary, it is as if she places him/her at the centre of her target.⁴⁹⁸ Before, however, she attacks her audience, she mocks and ironicises her very own artwork and supposed exceptional and high value mission as artist.

While for some scholars and critics Kitsopoulou's plays offer a necessary critique to contemporary Greece, for some others, the – without apparent dramaturgical reason – mockery and parody, reveals lack of depth and measure. Suggestive is Dimitra Kondylaki's stance to Kitsopoulou's dramaturgy. Analysing parody within the context of postmodernist aesthetic, Kondylaki argues that the "dissociation of the stage from the confines of representational affinity with the text ultimately favours parody as the only avenue of contact with the 'real'".

⁴⁹⁵ Kitsopoulou, and Kangelari, "A conversation between Lena Kitsopoulou and Dio Kangelari," 254.

⁴⁹⁶ Grigoris Ioannidis, "Lena Kitsopoulou's Theatre," trans. Artemis Palaska, *The Greek Play Project*, accessed March 18, 2021, <http://www.greek-theatre.gr/public/en/greekplay/index/reviewview/6>.

⁴⁹⁷ Kitsopoulou's work has been related directly to yer-face-theatre. See Kangelari in "A conversation between Lena Kitsopoulou and Dio Kangelari," 253 and Ioannidis, "Lena Kitsopoulou's Theatre," n.p.

⁴⁹⁸ Grigoris Ioannidis, «Η ρεμπέτικη μαγκιά της Κιτσουπούλου» [Rembetiki Magkia tis Kitsopoulou], review of *Tyrannosaures Rex*, directed by Lena Kitsopoulou, *Efimerida ton Sintakton*, May 29, 2017, accessed March 17, 2021, https://www.efsyn.gr/tehnas/theatro/111958_i-rempetiki-magkia-tis-kitsopoyloy.

Claiming that parody cannot go hand in hand with “action”, she approaches Kitsopoulou’s “text/performances” as “par excellence” examples of postmodern parody, as “aggressive parodies of social narratives”. Against this background Kitsopoulou’s work should be understood as “a postmodern transfiguration of the political ‘denunciatory theatre’ as didactic as the Manichaeic dualities it assaults (‘Greek villain’ versus ‘innocent foreigner,’ ‘heartless corruptor’ versus ‘fallen young woman’), and as kitsch as the *skyladiko* aesthetics which she reviles”.⁴⁹⁹

In due time, I will argue that although parody, together with the other aesthetic strategies she utilises on stage, may indeed not propose either an alternative model of action towards social transformation or a new definition of Greek identity, still Kitsopoulou’s theatre does not lack political potential. Here, however, I would like to expand briefly on Kitsopoulou’s relation to postmodernism, suggesting that indeed her work – due also to the use of parody, irony and kitsch eclecticism – can be considered an exponent of postmodern Greek theatre. While attesting to the negative connotations of the notion of postmodernism, Ioannidis argues that

[h]er theatre pertains to post-modernism [sic]. Only one thing needs to be cleared: Kitsopoulou is not post-modern by respect. She is post-modern by origin. As a Greek of her generation, she reports the irrational, flaky, yet existent reality of her country, a social, ethical and political situation which allows the unexpected alternation of facts, the annihilation of the high into the humble, the rationalization of the kitsch, the beautification of the national delirium and massive stupefaction.⁵⁰⁰

Without adopting the negative evaluation of postmodern(ism) and keeping in mind the terminology perplexities of the adjective “postmodern”, I would like to underline the association between postmodern(ism) and the Greek condition, also given the characteristic traits of Kitsopoulou’s theatre. If postmodern theatre demonstrates the dead ends of postmodern culture, then postmodern Greek theatre should be examined in this light as part of the broader discussion about the terms in which postmodern condition is traceable – if at all – in Greece. One should focus on the different ways in which postmodern(ism) is related to social and economic developments at a global level and to which extent these have an impact on the

⁴⁹⁹ Kondylaki, “The ‘Polis’ and the ‘Political’ in Contemporary Greek Drama,” 65.

⁵⁰⁰ Ioannidis, “Lena Kitsopoulou’s Theatre,” n.p.

local context of a specific culture, particularly considering the latter's social and economic history. In any case, it would be at least naive to speak about a homogenous global postmodernity. Having said that, I suggest that if one looks for a postmodern theatre in Greece one should not necessarily search for a theatre without cultural signifiers, but for a theatre that deconstructs its own cultural references. The two performances analysed here can be considered suggestive examples of this attempt.

3.1.2 Beloved (national) families and the poetry of social pathologies: A Greek *Blood Wedding*

On the Athens Festival's stage stand three small wooden houses. The middle one is positioned frontally to the audience at the back of the stage; the right and the left one stand with their back walls towards the audience, allowing only their side windows to be seen. The stage is shrouded in darkness; only a dim light in the right house is on. Short sound clips from different TV programmes are reproduced over the loudspeakers (football game, campaign for the protection of the Greek seas and beaches, dialogue from an American series). A male voice inside the house reveals that he is searching for a particular programme. Finally, a female voice from the TV is heard; the male voice confirms audibly that this is the programme he was looking for. For a prolonged moment, the audience can only hear the voice from the television, presenting the story of two children in a house of Greek immigrants in Australia. The actor's voice comments on the presenter's narrative, revealing a certain sympathy for the story of the two children. The TV show has been running for almost one and a half minutes, when – still in darkness – a strong male voice calls for his mother and asks her to turn off the television and threatens her that one day he will break the loud television.⁵⁰¹ He then announces that he is leaving for the vineyard; these are the first lines from Lorca's play.⁵⁰² The spectators can now identify the first male voice with the role of the mother. The light from the window has been switched off together with the television; the whole dialogue between Mother and the Bridegroom takes place in darkness, following Lorca's text relatively closely.

From the very beginning, the aural reference to this particular TV show implies a particular line of interpretation. Probably the voice and narrative style of the presenter had been recognised by some spectators already in the first instance: it is an excerpt from the Greek TV

⁵⁰¹ The calling of the mother is expressed with three different words for "mother": "mana" (μάνα = mother), a more casual "mama" (μαμά = mum), and an even more tender "manoula" (μανούλα = mummy).

⁵⁰² Act 1, scene 1. Throughout this chapter, the numeration of the Acts and Scenes of the play is based on the English translation of Lorca's play, considering the various modifications that the performance text has undergone (Federico Garcia Lorca, *Blood Wedding*, trans. and ed. Gwynne Edwards (London: Bloomsbury, 2006)).

show “The Package” [«Πιάμε Πακέτο»], in which families are reunited or people find their biological relatives. Presented by the same hostess, it has been on air since 2006 and has received quite high ratings; hence it could be assumed that a part of the audience, even if they do not watch this kind of show, may be aware of its existence. The way that the personal stories are exposed and the family reunion is staged on air appeals to the emotions of the audience. The show, however, aspires to distinguish itself from reality television and promotes itself as offering social help. The blood ties appear to be stronger than any obstacle in life, a belief that could be considered as rather dominant in Greek culture. The choice to open the performance with this television excerpt hence points directly to the question of family and kinship. Secondly, the choice of this show seems to be related to the aesthetic and influence of Greek private television, a corollary of the socio-economical changes since the late 1980s.

In this way Lena Kitsopoulou’s sold-out production of the *Blood Wedding* opened at the Athens Festival (Hall H of Peiraios 260) on July 23 and 24, 2014.⁵⁰³ The reviews were mixed. Some critics appraised Kitsopoulou’s creative fantasy and sharp criticism of Greek society, despite moments of exaggeration.⁵⁰⁴ Some others, however, considered her reading of the play superficial, an unsuccessful parody of Lorca’s poetic text that reproduced cliché.⁵⁰⁵ Nevertheless, both positive and negative reviews pointed to Kitsopoulou’s intention to comment on modern Greek society. As Anna Stavrakopoulou notes, “Lena Kitsopoulou

⁵⁰³ The performance took place at Peiraios 260 (Hall H). Both evenings in July were sold out and therefore the performance was repeated for three extra evenings in September, after the end of the Festival (September 15–17, 2014). For more information and photos, see “Blood Wedding,” *Greek Festival*, accessed March 2, 2021, http://greekfestival.gr/festival_events/lena-kitsopoulou-2014/?lang=en.

⁵⁰⁴ Anni Koltsidopoulou, «Τραγωδία σε σαλόνια και σε αλώνια [Tragedy in Rags and Riches], review of *Blood Wedding*, directed by Lena Kitsopoulou, *Kathimerini*, August 10, 2014, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/779126/article/politismos/8eatro/tragwdia-se-salonia-kai-se-alwnia>; Olga Sella, «Ο ‘πειραγμένος’ Λόρκα ξένισε το κοινό» [“The ‘tampered’ Lorca annoyed the audience”], review of *Blood Wedding*, directed by Lena Kitsopoulou, *Kathimerini*, July 25, 2014, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/777536/article/politismos/8eatro/o-peiragmenos-lorka-zenise-to-koino>.

⁵⁰⁵ For Louisa Arkoumanea in Kitsopoulou’s production “Everything becomes victim of a very primitive, rough reading which glorifies an easy interpretation and literality” (Louisa Arkoumanea, «Το αίμα νερό δε γίνεται» [Blood is thicker than water], review of *Blood Wedding*, directed by Lena Kitsopoulou, *To Vima*, August 3, 2014, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.tovima.gr/2014/08/01/opinions/to-aima-nero-den-ginetai/>). For Dimadi, Kitsopoulou offered a superficial, repellent parody of Lorca’s play in order to “satirize the provincial psychopathology of the modern Greek (Ileana Dimadi, «Εκκεντρικότητα: η νέα γραφικότητα του ελληνικού θεάτρου» [Eccentricity: the new quaintness of the Greek theatre], *Athinorama*, September 17, 2014, accessed March 7, 2019, https://www.athinorama.gr/theatre/article/ekkenrikotita_i_nea_grafikotita_tou_ellinikou_theatrou_-2501569.html). According to Petassi, “[s]ometimes postmodern, sometimes poetic, with extreme symbolism, vulgar humor and revue motives, sinks every now and then into banality and ruminated cliché” (Eleni Petassi, «Ματωμένος Γάμος» [“Blood Wedding”], review of *Blood Wedding*, directed by Lena Kitsopoulou, *clickatlife.gr*, August 20, 2014, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.clickatlife.gr/theatro/story/39312>). Finally, Yiannis Stamou argued that “the performance begun as a daring adaptation, continued as parody and end up to teenage waggery, which even aspired to have the finale of a tragedy, something that in no case was achieved” (Yannis Stamou, «Ματωμένος γάμος αλλά ελληνικά» [“Blood Wedding à la grecque”], review of *Blood Wedding*, directed by Lena Kitsopoulou, *Eleftherotypia*, July 25, 2014, accessed March 12, 2021, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=440713>).

attempted to map out the malaise of Greek society by staging an adaptation of *Blood Wedding* that took place in a contemporary affluent Greek rural setting, with petit-bourgeois values”.⁵⁰⁶

Following this reading, one could indeed approach the staging as a comment on the pathologies of contemporary Greece, ironically referring, either directly or subtly, to the public/cultural life since the 1980s. In Kitsopoulou’s world the notions of society and nation often seem identical. The national associations, as well as misunderstandings, imbued the social realm; Greek society appears to be shaped under these (national) narratives that, in its turn, itself reproduces. As in most of her plays and performances, Kitsopoulou targets the petit bourgeois mentality, no matter how covered the latter may appear under the shiny *nouveau riche* lifestyle of the pre-crisis Greece.

Within this context, the story of a “Greek” *Blood Wedding* lends itself well to a metonymic understanding of family standing for the Greek society. This (oppressive) interrelation between family and social context lead, in the third part of the performance, to a much more complicated, although possibly underdeveloped, questioning of the family’s role in the reproduction of prevailing values, heteronormative norms and by extension national identities. Making use of the shift that can be traced in Lorca’s third act, the performance challenges the way that Greek family may be seen as a safeguard of accepted forms of kinship and desire. Within the – visually, aurally and performatively defined as Greek – reference frame, this shift calls into question the way that family may contribute to the reproduction of naturalised conceptions of the Greek identity and perpetuation of national(ist) discourses, no matter how banally expressed. Hence the performance does not only comment on the reasons that led Greece to its crisis. Following a Foucauldian analysis of the institution of family, I will suggest that most importantly, the performance invites the audience to critically reconsider the possible role of “our beloved”, quasi-natural families to the perpetuation of deeply rooted national(ist) misconceptions upon which these social pathologies have been developed over the decades.

In the Greece of crisis, a family in crisis has been one of the main interests of contemporary playwrights, authors, directors and filmmakers, especially in the midst of crisis. Although stories of families were always among the favourite topics, still during the last years the interest on the dysfunctionality of the Greek family was increased hence gaining an

⁵⁰⁶ Anna Stavrakopoulou, review of *Blood Wedding*, directed by Lena Kitsopoulou, *Theatre Journal* 67, no. 2 (2015), 326.

exceptional position in the cultural production of the first decades of the twenty-first century.⁵⁰⁷ The family in crisis gains a metonymic function. According to Dimitris Papanikolaou, in various contemporary Greek narratives, the family reflects social impasses: “The Greek family is approached at the same time as metonymy and metaphor of a Greece in historical and social crisis, namely, concurrently as part of the problem and as its privileged micrograph”.⁵⁰⁸ Papanikolaou distinguishes two approaches. The first, focusing on the history of the past (national and personal), may ultimately lead to a wound healing. The second, on the contrary, deals with a “Greek family which does not heal its wounds, does not search for patriarchal confirmation and genealogy, does not seek to solve its problems and abridge its chasms. The Greek family in short-circuit, and this short-circuit becomes the perspective through which one may examine the broader society”.⁵⁰⁹ Kitsopoulou’s approach to the family seems to belong to the second category.

As I will illustrate in my analysis, Kitsopoulou plays with many stereotypical images associated to the Greek family. In Greece, one of the prevailing discourses of the Greek family has been suggesting its exceptionality (either in positive or critical terms). Papanikolaou analysed both narratives regarding the Greek family: the one that approaches it as exceptional and the other that sees its characteristics as traceable in other countries too. He succinctly summarises the characteristics related to the first approach, observing

a long tradition that insists that the Greek family (in the mainland, in the diaspora, in the real conditions of people’s lives as well as in their fantasies about them) is indeed exceptional; too patriarchal but also with a very strong role for the Greek mother (who often is the one fighting to safeguard the rigid traditions of the family, including its masculine bias); too firmly based on extended kinship networks of help and support,

⁵⁰⁷ Dimitris Papanikolaou, *Κάτι τρέχει με την οικογένεια: έθνος, πόθος και συγγένεια την εποχή της κρίσης* [There is something about the family: Nation, desire and kinship at a time of crisis] (Athens: Patakis, 2018), 15. In his book Papanikolaou attempts to analyse and understand this increased interest in the critical renegotiation of the dysfunctionality of Greek family as observed in different recent cultural texts in Greece. As Papanikolaou argues “[f]amily thus, exactly because it intermingles the symbolic/dominating, disciplinary and biopolitical dimension, is not an archetype which is reproduced outside history, but it constantly evolves and is constantly signified, and thus becomes a porous thematic material which brings out issues related to those three categories (symbolic, disciplinary, biopolitical) but also relates them in a critical way to the historical moment” This explains why family has lend itself so well as topic in the last years (32).

⁵⁰⁸ Dimitris Papanikolaou, «Κάτι τρέχει με την Οικογένεια» [“Greek family, representation and the new crisis archive,” *The Books’ Journal* 1 (November 2010), 96.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

but also extremely oppressive; an institution of excellence and national pride, but also the hotbed of nationalism and national intransigence.⁵¹⁰

Papanikolaou suggests that although some of the characteristics are indeed not to be found only in Greece, still it is analytically useful to pay attention to the way that the narrative about this exceptionality functions: it becomes “powerful and productive *as a narrative*, in that it frames institutional analysis and policies, deeply held beliefs and ideologies, political positions and practices”.⁵¹¹ As I will suggest, Kitsopoulou’s critical reading plays with such associations triggered by the reference to the Greek family, challenging the positive connotations attributed to this “exceptionality”. Amplifying all the clichés reproduced in Greek society, she then ironically affirms them to expose them in turn as the root of all evil.

Taking a step back from the particular Greek case, the family institution should be approached in direct relation to the discursive construction of identities and the reproduction of the prevailing national(ist) discourses. The link between family and nation has been fundamental in the nationalist projects of the nineteenth century. Anthony Smith observes that “the metaphor of family is indispensable to nationalism. The nation is depicted as one great family, the members as brothers and sisters of the motherland or fatherland, speaking their mother tongue”. Hence, the national family suppresses the family of the individual, while however triggering “similarly strong loyalties and vivid attachments”.⁵¹² It is also telling that for Benedict Anderson, nationalism should be approached “as if it belonged with ‘kinship’ and ‘religion’, rather than with ‘liberalism’ and ‘fascism’”, hence as ideology.⁵¹³ In Greece, family and nation present constitutive connections in the literary sense. According to the Constitution of Greece, Article 21 §1: “The family, being the cornerstone of the preservation and the advancement of the Nation, as well as marriage, motherhood and childhood, shall be under the protection of the State.”⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁰ Dimitris Papanikolaou “Rethinking Greece: Dimitris Papanikolaou on Greek exceptionalism and the ‘Holy Greek family’,” interview by Julia Livaditi and Nikolas Nenedakis, *GreekNewsAgenda*, September 13, 2018, accessed March 17, 2022, <http://www.greeknewsagenda.gr/index.php/interviews/rethinking-greece/6827-dimitris-papanikolaou>.

⁵¹¹ Ibid; emphasis in original.

⁵¹² Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 79.

⁵¹³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

⁵¹⁴ Constitution of Greece, Article 21 §1, Hellenic Parliament, accessed March 8, 2021, <http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf>. The following paragraphs of the same article are further illustrative of the interconnection between nation, state and family. According to the paragraph 3, “The State shall care for the health of citizens and shall adopt special measures for the protection of youth, old age, disability and for the relief of the needy,” while the paragraph 4 orders that “The acquisition of a home by the homeless or those inadequately sheltered shall constitute an object of special State care” (ibid.). Dimitris Papanikolaou rightly observes that “the article begins with the family

The institution of family functions in line with other institutions (such as schools), hence establishing prevailing discourses and contributing to their self-naturalisation. Within this context, Foucault's critique of family, although fragmentarily discussed in different moments throughout his work, would be of use for the present analysis. As Vikki Bell summarises, one should approach his writings on the family as an attempt "to problematise how terms such as 'the family' have been endowed with *quasi-natural* status. He reconsiders the term's fragmented, dispersed histories and maps the often paradoxical power relations involved in its production".⁵¹⁵ The family should hence be considered another site of power relations. However, one should not forget that for Foucault power is not merely to be understood as imposed from above: "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."⁵¹⁶

Through its policing control over the development of the child (and its sexuality), family safeguards and promotes prevailing norms, without that implying repression of sexuality. In the first volume of the *History of the Sexuality* Foucault defines family as "the interchange of sexuality and alliance: it conveys the law and the juridical dimension in the deployment of sexuality; and it conveys the economy of pleasure and the intensity of sensations in the regime of alliance".⁵¹⁷ Alliance refers here to "a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions".⁵¹⁸ The deployment of sexuality, although it overlays the "deployment of alliance", still did not completely supersede it.⁵¹⁹

As he had argued in his *Lectures at the College de France* (1973–1974) the kind of power that the family exercises is not "disciplinary" like the power of other institutions but

almost functioning as national state ('advancing' the nation) and concludes with the state (which accommodates, cares, populates, reproduces) functioning as a big family" (Papanikolaou, *Κάτι τρέχει με την οικογένεια* [There is something about the family], 32).

⁵¹⁵ Vikki Bell, "Foucault's Familial Scenes: Kangaroos, Crystals, Continenence and Oracles," in *Foucault, the Family and Politics*, ed. Robbie Duschinsky and Leon Antonio Rocha (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 39 (emphasis added).

⁵¹⁶ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 93.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 108. For Foucault, this "interpenetration of the deployment of alliance and that of sexuality" reveals three facts: "that since the eighteenth century the family has become an *obligatory* locus of affects, feelings, love; that sexuality has its privileged point of development in the family; that for this reason sexuality is 'incestuous' from the start" (ibid., 108–109; emphasis added).

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁵¹⁹ The difference between the deployment of alliance and sexuality is that the first "is attuned to a homeostasis of the social body, which it has the function of maintaining; whence its privileged link with the law; whence too the fact that the important phase for it is 'reproduction'". The latter, on the other hand, "has its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way (ibid., 107).

recalls “the power of sovereignty”.⁵²⁰ Nevertheless, it is this sovereign power that contributes to the execution of disciplinary power: “[i]t is because there is the family, it is because you have this system of sovereignty operating in society in the form of the family, that the obligation to attend school works and children, individuals, these somatic singularities, are fixed and finally individualized within the school system”.⁵²¹ Hence the interaction between these two systems leads to the appropriation of “disciplinary techniques” by the family. The latter in turn, despite its sovereignty has to undertake “the role of the agency that decides between normal and abnormal, regular and irregular” and is responsible “to hand over its abnormal, irregular individuals”.⁵²² The “discipline establishments” in their turn shape family members who are able to fit in the sovereign system of the family:

Being a good son, a good husband, and so on, is really the outcome offered by all these disciplinary establishments, by schools, hospitals, reformatories, and the rest. This means that they are machines thanks to which it is thought that disciplinary apparatuses will constitute characters who can take their place within the specific morphology of the family’s power of sovereignty.⁵²³

Foucault’s understanding of the constant interplay and exchange between the two systems highlights the way that the family may function hand in hand with other institutions of power, responsible for the imposition of certain conceptions that define the constructions of identity. Family does not remain unaffected by the ways that disciplinary institutions maintain their dominance. On the other hand, family should not be understood as a mere allegory of society.⁵²⁴ By focusing on this intersection between family and other disciplinary institutions in regard to

⁵²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France, 1973-1974*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 80.

⁵²¹ Ibid.,81. For Foucault, “power of sovereignty” is “a power relationship that links sovereign and subject according to a couple of asymmetrical relationships: a levy or deduction one side, and expenditure on the other” (ibid., 42). Disciplinary power is a “particular, as it were, terminal, capillary form of power; a final relay, a particular modality by which political power, power in general, finally reaches the level of bodies and gets a hold on them, taking actions, behavior, habits, and words into account” (ibid., 40). Contrary to the power of sovereignty, “[d]isciplinary power has an inherent tendency to intervene at the same level as what is happening, at the point when the virtual is becoming real; disciplinary power always tends to intervene beforehand, before the act itself if possible, and by means of an infra judicial interplay of supervision, rewards, punishments, and pressure” (51).

⁵²² Ibid.,115.

⁵²³ Ibid.,116.

⁵²⁴ See also, Spatharakis, who referring to Foucault, speaks against the “allegorizations of the social” through family (Kostas Spatharakis, «Η οικογενειακή αλληγορία και η αναζήτηση του πολιτικού» [The familial allegory and the search of the political], *Levga* 1 (March–April 2011), 29). As Foucault himself argues, “[t]he family does not duplicate society, just as society does not imitate the family” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 100).

the different types of power relations reproduced, one may understand the way that family functions as a site of control, safeguard of norms and by extension, allies itself with other institutions, which play an essential role in the reproduction of prevailing discourses. Kitsopoulou's adaptation of the *Blood Wedding* points to and challenges exactly this regulatory function of the family.

Lorca's play was written in 1932 and first staged in 1933. It begins with a scene between Mother and Bridegroom in which the latter announces his wish to marry. Soon the Mother will be informed that the Bride used to be a couple with Leonardo Felix. Male members of his family had killed both the Mother's husband and son (Act 1.1). Leonardo, married now to the Bride's cousin, bursts with anger after hearing about the upcoming wedding (1.2). The Mother and Bridegroom visit the Father of the Bride in order to arrange the wedding (1.3). On the wedding day, Leonardo visits the Bride and expresses his feelings again (2.1). After the ceremony, family and guests celebrate. At some point, it is noticed that the Bride is missing. When Leonardo's wife announces that her husband is gone, the Bridegroom is leaving to find the two lovers (2.2). In the third act, three woodcutters discuss the events. The moon appears in the form of a woodcutter with a white face, who together with a Beggar-woman (Death) prelude the tragic end. Leonardo and the Bride exchange words of love and feelings of guilt. After their exit, the Beggar stands silently on stage, while two screams are heard (3.1). In the final scene, the dead men are brought back to their families: Leonardo and the Bridegroom are both dead. The Bride attempts to explain to the Mother why she left her son; she responds with indifference and together with Leonardo's wife, mourns the dead (3.2).

The shift from the second to the third act presents a peculiarity. According to Reed Anderson, in the third act "Lorca has abandoned the stylised realism of the first two acts in favour of a supernatural exploration of the symbolic terms of the drama".⁵²⁵ This should be considered as intentional on Lorca's side: the "poetic symbolism" of the third act leads the spectators to an interpretation of the "tragic action purely as a consequence of the collision of antagonistic forces that are inevitably in opposition".⁵²⁶ These antagonistic forces penetrate the whole drama: "[t]he crisis of this drama is centered in the contradictory movement and clash of the two principal lines of action: one toward the celebration of the socially sanctioned union between the Bride and the Bridegroom, and another toward the consumption of an illicit and

⁵²⁵ Reed Anderson, *Federico Garcia Lorca* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 96.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 97. It is interesting to note that Maria Delgado traces in the first two acts a "symbolic realism" while on the first scene of the third act observes an "impressionist conceptualism" (M. Delgado, *Federico Garcia Lorca* (London: Routledge, 2008), 78).

erotically driven relationship between the Bride and Leonardo”. While the first is “a principle of order and coherence” to which is attributed “the authority of a moral absolute”, the second one imperils this power “with the chaos of passion, and the energy of rebellious defiance of social boundaries and moral strictures”.⁵²⁷

Since its first staging by Karolos Koun at the Art Theatre in 1948, *Blood Wedding* has a long stage history and has been the most performed of Lorca’s dramas.⁵²⁸ According to Mavromoustakos the familiarity of the Greek audience with Lorca should not only be attributed to the frequent stagings of its work but also its “extra-theatrical presence”, namely, to the musical setting of Lorca’s work and the important translations by Nikos Gatsos.⁵²⁹ The latter translated the *Blood Wedding* in 1945.⁵³⁰ Gatsos’ influential role in the introduction of Lorca’s role in Greece as well as his loosely association with the discourse of “Greekness” (as the latter has been also linked to the so-called “Generation of the 1930s” and its heirs) vis-à-vis Greek modernism set a second frame of interpretation.

Kitsopoulou’s performance is based on Gatsos’ translation. Her free adaptation kept Lorca’s dramatic text only partially. In the first act, despite additional (mainly silent) onstage actions and musical/sound interventions, small changes in the translation of some lines, a few repetitions of words and some minor omissions, Lorca’s text was followed rather closely. In the second act, however, especially from the middle of the first scene, the use of the text becomes rather fragmented: long passages were omitted, some sentences/lines were enunciated in a different sequence than in the original text and whole new scenes were added. The original texts of the third act were completely erased, except for a few lines and a part of the bride’s final monologue. The dramatic structure of the original thus still remains traceable, although in a loose way.

⁵²⁷ Anderson, *Federico Garcia Lorca*, 91.

⁵²⁸ Besides the first staging at the Art Theatre by Karolos Koun in 1948 (translation by Nikos Gatsos and music by Manos Hadjidakis) and its repetition in the period 1954–1955, Mavromoustakos has counted another fourteen performances up to 1993 (Platon Mavromoustakos, *Σχεδιάσματα Ανάγνωσης* [*Sketches of Reading*] (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2006), 98–100). In Virginia Lopez Recio’s detailed chart of performances of Lorca’s plays in Greece included in her study on the reception of Lorca in Greece in 2006, one can find 22 professional stagings of the *Blood Wedding*, including three repetitions of Koun’s 1948 staging (Virginia Lopez Recio, *Το φεγγάρι το μαχαίρι, τα νερά: ο Λόρκα στην Ελλάδα* [*The Moon, the knife, the waters: Lorca in Greece*] (Athens: Ekdoseis Filon, 2006), 71–176).

⁵²⁹ Mavromoustakos indicatively refers to the songs from the *Blood Wedding* composed by Manos Hadjidakis (who also composed the music for Koun’s performance in 1948) and the music for the *Weeping for the Death of Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* by the Greek composer Stavros Xarchakos. The music settings of Lorca’s poetry turned the latter into a part of the post-war Greek music history (*Σχεδιάσματα Ανάγνωσης* [*Sketches of Reading*], 98).

⁵³⁰ The translation is included in the book *Federico Garcia Lorca, Θέατρο και Ποίηση* [*Theatre and Poetry*], trans. Nikos Gatsos (Athens: Patakis, 2000), 15–110.

Throughout the performance, different references to modern Greek society and everyday culture demarcate a specific cultural context. Kitsopoulou, especially in the second part of the performance, points to widely reproduced stereotypes of Greek society. Interestingly, the very notion of the cultural stereotype is already critically approached from the first part, when the staging ironically acknowledges the Spanish origin of the play. In different instances, flamenco movements or Spanish songs are performed. For example, the Bride in a camisole, sits outside the house and sings along to a playback of the Spanish song “Volver”, which is also the title song of Pedro Almodovar’s eponymous film. The lyrics, translated into Greek, are projected as supertitles on the upper back of the stage, stressing the act of translation from a foreign language. At the same time, the male actor, who had previously appeared on stage dressed as the Mother-in-Law, dances flamenco with his back towards the audience.⁵³¹ Such “Spanish” interludes do not have any substantial relevance to the Greek adaptation of the play. However, the way that they are parodied and performatively framed ironically stresses their function as references to the Spanish background of the playwright and the play. It is this blatancy that invites the spectators to stand critically towards these embedded scenes and to similarly interpret also the Greek stereotypes, which, due to their familiarity, may not be so easily recognisable.

Until the middle of act two (2.2) Lorca’s drama unfolds inside the three small houses, putting the focus on the flexible border private and public. Interestingly enough, the latter recall more northern European architecture with wood and not a traditional Greek architecture. The window in the middle house allows the audience to recognise the movements of the actors inside it. As a theatre critic also noted, the way that the audience listens to the actors inside the houses recalls the way that one can hear his neighbours through the open windows and balconies.⁵³² The walls of the house obtain a symbolic function: it is the suffocating, narrow space of the family/private life that should be protected from the public gaze. These walls are also perforated: everything that takes place inside the house is heard outside. The walls may hide the family “drama” from the public eye but not from the public ear.

In the first part, the onstage actions/movements either counteract or underscore Lorca’s play performed indoors. While undermining realism, it places the private/public as well as

⁵³¹ A similar Spanish interlude can be found in the second act: before the wedding scene, the male actor playing the Mother frontally to the audience performs dance movements holding a fan under the sound of an instrumental version of Julio Iglesias’ “Abrázame”. This song has been known in Greece through a cover by the Greek singer Yannis Pouloupoulos (“Agapa me” = Love me). Yet, the music suddenly is cut off, the mother interrupts her dance and starts walking again in her elderly, careful pace.

⁵³² Sella, «Ο ‘πειραγμένος’ Λόρκα ξένισε το κοινό» [“The “tampered” Lorca annoyed the audience”], n.p.

inside/outside binaries at the centre of attention. In many instances, an actor/actress exits the small houses and sits in front of it, smokes or begins to move/dance on stage, while the spectators keep listening to the dialogue taking place inside, often under household sound effects.⁵³³ In some other cases, the movements ironically contradict what the audience hears from indoors. For example, under the sound of the TV show inside the right house, a young actor exits (the spectators have probably identified him by now with the role of the Bridegroom in the play) and dances in rather playful movements, while singing the melody of Habanera from Bizet's *Carmen*, hence distorting the narrative about a man's search for his cousin heard from the television indoors.

While the first act takes place indoors, the rest of the performance (wedding reception-death of Leonardo and the Bridegroom) is staged outdoors, in the "public" space in front of the houses. This shift from the interior to the exterior also underscores a transition from the familial to the social. During the following scenes, the doors of the houses remain open exposing the interior to the spectators' eyes, continually reminding the audience the interrelation between the two spaces and how the dysfunctionalities of the one affect the other. Interestingly enough, this transition is signified through a scene that not only undermines realistic representation and unity but also subtly points to the national signification of the social realm.

The small black desks that have stood on the left side of the stage from the beginning now suggest a coffee bar. The actors (one of them held the role of the bride's father previously) watch the football game from the qualifying playoffs for the 2014 FIFA World Cup between Greece and Romania on a television. The victory over Romania would have been the ticket to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil; the national team had, however, been defeated at the group stages a month before the Festival's production. The National team had become the "heroes" of a whole nation when they won the 2004 UEFA European Championship, the same year that Greece was going to host the Olympic Games. The hint to the 2014 defeat and the history of the national team probably brings to mind, as an antipode, the 2004 glorious victory. In an indirect way, the recollection of the national triumph likely encourages a critical reconsideration of the present as being influenced by the national illusions of the recent past.

The interruption of the plot and the interplay of the different simultaneous (visual, physical, musical) elements bring the spectator into a state of critical awareness. The actors who watch the game do not react when the Greek team scores, suggesting an inability to

⁵³³ For example, the dialogue between Leonardo and his wife inside the left house is accompanied by kitchen sounds, whilst an actress (mother-in-law), who after a fight with Leonardo exits the house and smokes in front of it, laughs hysterically in reaction to the couple's dialogue that is heard from the loudspeakers.

respond emotionally. The actress having the part of Leonardo's wife, seated on one of the chairs frontally to the audience, laughs hysterically before starting to cry. The bride, seated in front of the middle house, makes spastic movements. In the meantime, an actor in shorts, naked upper body, wearing a long black wig and towel around his neck had entered the stage shouting the surname of the Greek football player Kofidis and doing warm-up exercises and football moves (like scoring a goal) in the middle of the stage. Parallel to the intensification of the cries and the movements of the other actors, he repeats the name of the football player; his shouting sounds almost like a cry for someone. The TV remains on, without sound. The actors do not interact with each other. The interruption of the plot, the lack of communication and the intense movements, cries and laughs under the sound of a piano melody in minor create a moment of profound passivity and defeat.

The seated actors in front of the houses prelude this transition from the "private" to the "public" (Greek) space. While Lorca's plot continues indoors (bride's preparations; Leonardo's visit to his ex-fiancée), a neon signpost on the roof of the right house spelling out "Chorus" in Greek capital letters turns suddenly on. The house is now turned with its glass-door towards the audience. The signpost on the roof introduces a chorus (which does not exist as such in Lorca's play) while also recalling the signposts of Greek nightclubs. Inside, standing closely together, actors start to recite lines from Lorca's play.⁵³⁴ The recited lines are also projected as supertitles at the upper back of the stage. Here the supertitles not only accentuate Lorca's dramatic text but shift the attention to Gatsos' Greek translation; the spectators can easily recognise the latter's very poetic, metaphorical and imagery-rich language. This emphasis on Gatsos' translation whose work, as already suggested, triggers broader associations to the discourse of "Greekness" attests to a further interpretation of Kitsopoulou's adaptation through the prism of parody.

Suddenly strong stage lights turn on, while the introduction of a *skyladiko* song is loudly heard. Here it is necessary to explain this particular music choice. *Skyladiko* is a musical genre that has been identified with a specific type of nightclubs (literally translated as "dog-houses"). The use of this kind of songs, which Kitsopoulou often includes in the soundtrack of her performances, should be related to her critical approach to modern Greek society. During the 1970s the phenomenon of the *skyladiko* nightclubs arose. At that time, the term was used to characterise the "second-rate' clubs with *laiko* [=urban folk] music." Those clubs, initially

⁵³⁴ According to the scenic directions of the play these lines (song for the bride) are initially uttered by "voices" and then are divided to "girls" and "youths" (Federico Garcia Lorca, *Blood Wedding*, 29–33).

found on the periphery of the towns, slowly moved towards the city centres, as also happened in Athens.⁵³⁵ Here the entertainment had a “more excessive and personal character” including the encouragement of escorted spirit consumption [*κονσομασιόν*].⁵³⁶ During the 1980s, elements of the *skyladiko* culture started to be adopted by the artists of the popular *laiko* scene: singers identified with those places were now singing on the big nightclub stages of Athens, typical *skyladiko* habits like dancing on the tables became a common practice, while the influence of the *skyladiko* could also be observed in the topics of the songs’ lyrics.⁵³⁷ Hence, *skyladiko* began to be broadly accepted in the 1980s, the decade of a “broader legitimisation of the revelry”. The political change of the time and PASOK’s rise to power also contributed to the move in this direction. Indicative of the aesthetic and ideology of the era were, for example, the visits of the PASOK PM Andreas Papandreou to the nightclub of the *skyladiko* singer Rita Sakellariou.⁵³⁸

On the Festival’s stage, the chorus continues to recite Lorca’s lines under the sound of the *skyladiko* song. Actors and technicians construct a big table with the black desks in the middle of the stage. The bride exits the house wearing quite a pompous wedding dress. The sound of *skyladiko* will later ironically undermine the deeply tragic character of the bridal procession to the church – a cross has been placed on the right house’s roof. Followed by the bridegroom’s mother, the father-in-law, the best man, the bridegroom holding the bridal bouquet and the rest of the actors, the bride is carried to the church by the men of the chorus like a coffin on the shoulders of the pallbearers, strongly recalling a funeral procession. The chorus’ actresses follow at the rear of the procession, dressed up in formal but suggestive dresses (minis, halter), high heels, professional hair styling and make-up. This aesthetic imitates the dominant dressing style in this kind of Greek church weddings, while also recalling the dressing code for the *skyladiko* nightclubs.

⁵³⁵ Leonidas Oikonomou, «Ρεμπέτικα, λαϊκά και σκυλάδικα: όρια και μετατοπίσεις στην πρόσληψη της λαϊκής μουσικής του 20^{ου} αιώνα» [Rebetika, *laika* and *skyladika*: limits and shifts in the perception of twentieth century popular music], *Dokimes*, no. 13–14 (Spring 2005): 387–88. Illustrative of the *skyladiko* subculture in the provisional Greek towns are the films *Edge of Night* (*Αυτή η Νύχτα Μένει*), directed by Nikos Panayotopoulos (2000) and *It’s a Long Road* (*Όλα είναι δρόμος*), directed by Pantelis Voulgaris (1998).

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁵³⁷ Leonidas Oikonomou, «Σκυλάδικα: Η επικράτηση της ‘λαϊκής πίστας’ και της καπούρας» [Skyladika: The prevalence of the ‘popular music dance floor [*pista*]’ and the burning desire [*kapsoura*], in *Η Ελλάδα στη δεκαετία του ‘80: Κοινωνικό, πολιτικό και πολιτισμικό λεξικό* [Greece in the 1980s: Social, political and cultural dictionary], edited by Vassilis Vamvakas and Panagis Panagiotopoulos, 554.

⁵³⁸ Oikonomou, «Ρεμπέτικα, λαϊκά και σκυλάδικα» [Rebetika, *laika* and *skyladika*], 392. The way *skyladiko* culture had been supported by the prevailing political system was indicated by the frequent night visits of ministers to these nightclubs, even during the 90s, although the official stance of the governments towards the nightclubs had changed in this decade compared to the 80s. Against this background, it would be also interesting to remember once again Andreas Pantazopoulos’ characterization of PASOK’s ideology of the 80s (specifically from 1981–1989) as “national-populist”.

Given that the “Chorus” is not defined as such in Lorca’s play, the choice to signpost it is of particular importance, triggering direct associations to the genre of ancient Greek tragedy. The presence of the chorus stresses the play’s tragic elements and especially the tragic figure of the bride, who is brought to her wedding like a corpse to her grave.⁵³⁹ At a second level, however, within the modern Greek context described here, the chorus gains a further connotation with regard to the question of identity. I have already discussed the importance that the ancient past has in the construction of the official national narratives and the self-perception of modern Greek society. Here, however, while the chorus implicitly refers to the nationally charged genre of tragedy, the overall aesthetic of the scene (song, dresses) points to the kitsch of the *nouveau riche* Greece. Kitsopoulou cleverly underlines in a rather subtle way an existing contradiction: the newly rich aesthetic should be considered part of the modern cultural identity. It is the same identity that resides on the narrative of continuity between the ancient past and present.

Similar is the function of *skyladiko* songs. Considering also the association of the *skyladiko* phenomenon with regard to the social and ideological context of the 1980s, their use in Kitsopoulou’s productions as an ironic strategy attests to this line of interpretation. Kitsopoulou not only challenges a distinction between low/high art from a postmodernist perspective. Creating moments of highly aesthetic contradiction, she approaches *skyladiko* (and other aspects of everyday culture) as part of the Greek cultural identity. Kitsopoulou, hence, calls for a reflection on aspects of the everyday cultural life of Greece, which are not often considered as part of the official cultural identity but are dominating the public life and are suggestive of the state of the society. At the same time, she ironically exposes the different influences that can be traced in the Greek lifestyle during the last decades of the twentieth century, where foreign (primarily American) practices were combined with holdovers from traditional Greek customs. For example, the music choices, as well as the choreographies in the following wedding celebration scene underscore this modern Greek “mix and match” that presumably is somewhat familiar to the Greek audience (e.g. instead of a speech, the actor playing the mother sings in a microphone the Greek traditional song “Willow”; the Bridegroom wearing a latex full-head mask dances alone Johnny Logan’s “Hold me now” (1987); the newly-married (followed by other couples) dance Richard Marx’s “Right here waiting”, a big

⁵³⁹ According to Maria Delgado, “*Blood Wedding* is embedded in a cultural understanding of blood feuds and vendettas that bears the imprint of classical Greek tragedy” (Delgado, *Frederico Garcia Lorca*, 73).

hit of the late 1980s; the actress playing the maid, in her sequined dress, sings a Greek *tsifteteli*⁵⁴⁰).

The prolonged wedding celebration scene is not included as such in Lorca's play. The tempo in this second part of the performance is decelerated through the long toasts/speeches of the relatives and guests (parents, cousin, best man, beggar/death). The evoked feeling of boredom ironically contradicts the rather "forced" celebratory spirit, visualised on stage (the actors/guests sing monotonously "what a time we are having" following the melody of a Greek island traditional song "Dari Dari"). Since the 1980s, the celebration of the religious mystery of wedding (together with baptism) gained secular, extravagant traits. The (often quite kitschy) wedding receptions, usually following the church ceremony,⁵⁴¹ became a chance to manifest financial abundance and show off the financial (and therefore also social) status of the family.

The aesthetic of the wedding celebration scene can hence be understood not only as references to the predominant aesthetic eclecticism in cultural life but as a caustic comment on some of the reasons that brought Greece to its present condition of crisis. For instance, the opening of champagne on stage recalls images from such receptions when bottles of often just a cheap foam wine are carried in huge boxes to the dancing floor and are opened as an expression of enjoyment and a rather consumeristic generosity. Similarly telling, is the scene when Leonardo's wife after her short dialogue with the Bridegroom,⁵⁴² climbs on the table and starts eating like a bulimic, while the guests sitting at the table applaud her. Later, on her way out, she throws up on the campaigner while the guests turn towards her and applaud again. In a quite exaggerated way, the scene points to the social acknowledgement of a lifestyle based on uncontrollable consumption. A further reference to this phenomenon could be understood in the bubbles that the actors make at the beginning of the reception, while the parents make their toasts and drink champagne. The metaphor of the bubble has been used extensively during the financial crisis to describe Greece's economic prosperity of the last decades but also the

⁵⁴⁰ *Tsifteteli* (τσιφτετέλι) is a very popular Greek dance in 2/4 rhythm, a version of the Arabic belly dance. It is still considered a female, erotic dance, although it is also often danced in pairs (man-woman).

⁵⁴¹ It should be noted that in Greece the religious wedding is up to the present day legally equivalent to the civil wedding. This is one of the many characteristic examples that point to the lack of clear distinction between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Greek State. Until 1982 the only possible marriage was the Greek orthodox religious one, which raised many legal issues. For example, as Akrivopoulou notes, the couples who had had a civil wedding abroad were not considered officially married and their children were treated by the law as "illegitimate," without having the legal rights of the inheritors (Christina Akrivopoulou, «Πολιτικός Γάμος: Επιτρεπτός και 'ισόκυρος'» [Civil wedding: permissible and 'legally equivalent'], in *Η Ελλάδα στη δεκαετία του '80: Κοινωνικό, πολιτικό και πολιτισμικό λεξικό* [Greece in the 1980s: Social, political and cultural dictionary], ed. Vassilis Vamvakas and Panagis Panagiotopoulos, 475).

⁵⁴² As in other parts of the reception scene, the actors follow Lorca's text despite the interruptions and interpolations. This is also the case of the dialogue between Leonardo's wife and the bridegroom (Act 2, scene 2).

dominant glamorous lifestyle that did not correspond to the actual financial abilities of the average Greek. Blowing bubbles, a typical party activity for children, here turns into a rather ironic comment on the reasons for but also the terminology of the Greek crisis.

Within this context, one of the most interesting changes in Kitsopoulou's reading of Lorca's drama is the presence of the Beggar/Death. In the play, the figure of the Beggar appears first in the third act and speaking menacingly of death, guides the Bridegroom to find the fleeing couple (Bride – Leonardo). In Kitsopoulou's version, the third act is omitted. The Beggar/Death, however, is already present as a guest at the reception. The actress's ironic monologue is characteristic of Kitsopoulou's fusion of different conceptual and aesthetic aspects of the modern Greek culture.

In front of a curly-haired blonde actress stands on the table the sign “Grim Reaper”, relating her directly to the role of Death/Beggar. In Lorca's play, the presence of the Beggar is ominous. Similarly, in the Festival's production, the actress ironically precludes the tragic finale, without, however, following the original text. Her toast begins with an implicit reference to death, which within the Greek context triggers recognisable associations: “And I, in my turn, would like to wish Good Soul. For, the salvation of the soul is a huge thing”. The last sentence is a line from the refrain of the well-known song “The Salvation of the Soul” of the mid-1980s. The lyrics written by the well-known lyricist Lina Nikolakopoulou likely associate the song with the (rather difficult to define) genre of *entechno* [έντεχνο = artful] in the mind of many spectators. Since the 1980s, this kind of songs left behind the mixing with urban folk musical elements. As Franco Fabbri and Ioannis Tsioulakis underline, the thematics of their lyrics covered a broad spectrum of topics “from leftist activism” to “romantic, poeticised love”, with the “emphasis on intellectualism” being a distinct trait.⁵⁴³ Due to this kind of poetic expression of existential issues, often characterised by a pseudo-philosophical attitude, *entechno* ironically contradicts the aesthetic of *skyladiko* and Greek mass culture. Here the actress recites in a way that recalls the female singers' attitude in *skyladiko* nightclubs when they thank their audiences from the stage. In this way, Kitsopoulou targets not only one aspect of the public culture but also *entechno*'s self-appointed eminence in terms of a low–high culture distinction.

Laughing sarcastically, the actress exposes her foreshadowing role by announcing that: “The laughter is going to follow. Foreshadowing. Homer Iliad-Odyssey. Secondary School.

⁵⁴³ Franco Fabbri and Ioannis Tsioulakis, “Italian *canzone d'autore* and Greek *entechno tragoudi*: a comparative overview,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, ed. Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 320.

Although I bet none of you here has gone to secondary school, you seem thick country bumpkins”. Later when the sign with the name “Grim Reaper” has been moved away, the actress reads Gatsos’ introduction to the Greek publication of Lorca’s play in which he presents some biographical information about the Andalusian poet. This reference to the Greek publication attests to an interpretation of Kitsopoulou’s performance not only as an adaptation of Lorca’s play but also as a parodic reading of Gatsos’ translation with its particular connotations vis-à-vis the discussions about Greek modernism. At the same time, in both these instances (first, in relation to the *entechno* vs *skyladiko* distinction and the reference to the school knowledge and second, in the framed reading aloud of Lorca’s biographical note) can be traced the parody of the petit bourgeois belief in “encyclopaedic” knowledge, with the latter often being considered a necessary qualification for social climbing and success.

As I have so far argued, all these different allusions to modern Greek society and its popular culture, traceable particularly in the second part of the performance, frame the adaptation of Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* as “Greek”. Kitsopoulou challenges this natural “Greek” identity through postmodern strategies like postmodern parody or kitsch eclecticism. As already suggested, the latter do not attempt to surpass high- vs low-class differences but point to broader aesthetic phenomena, such as kitsch, visible in different aspects of the Greek everyday culture. The aim is neither to vindicate kitsch nor to denounce it radically from an external position of supremacy. On the contrary, it is targeted ironically from a standpoint “within” the performance, which reminds the spectators that kitsch constitutes part of their very same Greek reality and invites them to reconsider this familiarity.⁵⁴⁴

Similarly, the parody in the performance should not be understood as a parody of Lorca’s text in order to devalue the original drama, as criticised in some of the performance’s negative reviews.⁵⁴⁵ Neither does it attempt to undermine the importance of the translation of Nikos Gatsos. Instead of being confined to the mere subversion of cultural references of the past, parody in Kitsopoulou’s production should be better interpreted vis-à-vis the dominant ideological parameters of the Greek context, which have also been responsible for the legitimation of certain aesthetic phenomena. According to Linda Hutcheon, “postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, denaturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and

⁵⁴⁴ An interesting investigation with very rich photographic material of the bad taste as a broader phenomenon in modern Greek society was offered in the book by Daphne Koutsikou, ed. *Κάτι το Ωραίο. Μια περιήγηση στην νεοελληνική κακογουστιά* [Something “Beautiful”: A Guide to Modern Greek Bad Taste] (Athens: The Friends of the Periodical *Anti*, 1984).

⁵⁴⁵ Indicative is for example Dimadi’s critique that Kitsopoulou ended up “doing the easiest, inartistic, repulsive and childish: to paradise Lorca’s play” (Ileanna Dimadi, «Εκκεντρικότητα: η νέα γραφικότητα του ελληνικού θεάτρου» [Eccentricity: the new quaintness of the Greek theatre], n. p.).

through irony, the politics) of representation”. Hutcheon does not follow the dominant approach to parody among the postmodernist discourses, according to which “postmodernism offers a value-free, decorative, dehistoricized quotation of past forms”.⁵⁴⁶ The parody “‘de-doxifies’ our assumptions about our representations of that past”.⁵⁴⁷ For, as she suggests,

[p]arody has perhaps come to be a privileged mode of postmodern formal self-reflexivity because its paradoxical incorporation of the past into its very structures often points to these ideological contexts somewhat more obviously, more didactically, than other forms. Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it. Parody appears to have become, for this reason, the mode of what I have called the “ex-centric,” of those who are marginalized by a dominant ideology.⁵⁴⁸

The frequent contradiction of seemingly incompatible styles or references in Kitsopoulou’s work should be interpreted through this prism. Combining, for example, Hadjidakis’ music or Gatsos’ poetic translation with the *skyladiko* music does not aim to lower the first’s artistic value. On the contrary, this, at first sight maybe without meaning, a collage of different visual, musical but also social references points to the core of the function of parody as defined by Hutcheon. If, as she later underlines in her much more elaborated study on irony, “irony’s edge gives parody its ‘critical’ dimension in its marking of difference at the heart of similarity”,⁵⁴⁹ then its use in Kitsopoulou’s stage not only reflects the “reality” of modern Greece but causes ruptures in the homogeneity of the identities (and by extension the narratives of the past), hence becoming an effective way to challenge naturalised frames of perception and identification.

While in the second part of the performance a Greek frame of reference is constructed, underscored also by the transition from the indoors private space of home to the public space of society, in the third part, the attention is shifted to the individual and the latter’s relationship to family vis-à-vis his/her broader cultural, social and national space. In Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* two opposed movements can be traced: “the first is the marriage union by which the society guarantees continuity within families and classes, and assures the increase and regular transfer of material property”, while “the second obeys only the volatile demands of erotic

⁵⁴⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 94.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁴⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 35 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁴⁹ Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge*, 4. Yet, as already discussed irony is double-coded, therefore open to interpretation.

desire and recognises no restrictions of social class or material circumstances”.⁵⁵⁰ The characters of the play are defined “in terms of heredity”.⁵⁵¹ In Kitsopoulou’s production, the family/kinship problematic remains a central topic, while dominant definitions of these two notions are challenged. Hence, the critical potential of the production concerning the issue of identity construction should not only be sought in the way that the aesthetic of the wedding celebration may function as an ironic comment on a specific Greek context, pointing to the malaises of the pre-crisis society. Kitsopoulou’s adaptation, taking as departure point inherent topics (namely, contradictory forces) in Lorca’s play, challenges normative functions of the family and, by extension, of related prevailing, self-naturalised discourses.

The power of blood kinship is instantiated by the dramatic figure of the Mother, who in Kitsopoulou’s version also remains a central character. The casting of a male actor for the role of the Mother reveals in a very direct and simple way the distance between actor and role, hence inviting the spectator to remain critically alert. This cross-gender choice, though, especially towards the finale and together with the rather ironic acting style of the actor Nikos Karathanos, triggers further interpretations. It implies the presence of male authority as the sole representative of the institution of the family, while calling into question discourses of heteronormativity. In a rather obvious – but maybe therefore effective – way, this choice of the male actor highlights the quest for non-singular definitions of identity.

Throughout the performance, the relationship between mother and son remains at the centre of attention, revealing (homo)erotic elements, which are further stressed by Kitsopoulou’s interventions to the original text.⁵⁵² The male actor holding the part of the mother is dressed in a distinctive way for the age and social group to which the petit bourgeois mother in Kitsopoulou’s reading is supposed to belong (a skirt suit and a small handbag in mid-heel). (S)he has a very characteristic pace which recalls the way that elderly women walk. The permanent address to God, not necessarily an expression of deep belief but more a stereotypical expression in the Greek language, could be considered a characteristic feature of bereaved women in rural/ petit bourgeois Greece. The dominant presence of the mother remains visible during the whole wedding scene, ironicising not only the intrusive role of the parents on such occasions but also the way that the child turns into an object of self-pride: the old mother from

⁵⁵⁰ Anderson, *Federico Garcia Lorca*, 91.

⁵⁵¹ Delgado, *Federico Garcia Lorca*, 74.

⁵⁵² Indicative is, for example, that during the first indoors scene, the son addresses his mother as “my love,” words that cannot be found in the original text.

the Andalusian village records a video of her son's solo dance during the reception with her mobile phone, as if she was going to post it on her social media.

Following Lorca's text, the mother advises the son how to behave to his wife during their married life. In Kitsopoulou's production, the advice "to make her [the Bride] feel that you are the man, the master, the one who gives the orders"⁵⁵³ will be accompanied by a scene in which the male/mother will climb on the son, after (s)he has taken off his clothes. On the long table (s)he imitates an act of sexual intercourse while enunciating the lines from the play. Here a shift on the focus appears to take place stressing the "emasculating" role of the family, within and under the eyes of the social environment. An act of breastfeeding follows the act of incest: the mother climbs off her son, unbuttons her shirt, unzips her nursing bra, reveals her fake breast and sits back at her place. The naked son snuggles up to his mother's arms like a gigantic baby and begins to breastfeed. Only the sound of sucking is heard. All other actors sitting at the table looking towards the audience in a standstill position, while behind them, stand the background actors in semi-darkness. A traditional song from the Aegean with a typical introductory rhythmical pattern played by violins is heard from the loudspeakers. The mother stands still with the head slightly back upwards. As Stavrakopoulou rightly notes, the mother's position recalls the "Pietà pose".⁵⁵⁴

The choice of the song has its triggering connotations. "When it is dawning in the Aegean" is a song about the beauties of the Aegean Sea, the stereotypical image of Greece; the kind of circle-dance songs which are prevalent in festivities like wedding celebrations. The image of the idealised blue sea with the sunny islands intermingles with the provocative action of the male breastfeeding of the naked young actor in the sight of the other actors. In an ironic way, the private becomes national. Through the sequence of incestuous sexual intercourse and breastfeeding (the most dependent act in the life of the child), the performance not only challenges discourses of heteronormativity but also the naturalised perpetuation of relations of dependence and subordination within the safe, protected environment of the family as a fundament in the reproduction of the nation.

Towards the end of the performance, the rhythm accelerates. As already noted, the performance is not following the third act of Lorca's play closely: the ominous presence of the beggar and the moon are omitted, together with the longest part of the original text. The announcement that both Bride and Leonardo are missing leads to a loud scene of high tension.

⁵⁵³ Lorca, *Blood Wedding*, 41.

⁵⁵⁴ Stavrakopoulou, review of *Blood Wedding*, directed by Lena Kitsopoulou, 328.

The Mother asks the technicians to cut off the music; the other actors carry off the stage most of the tables. The kneeling best man becomes the Bridegroom's horse, who rides around on stage; the Mother and Father shout and turn over the remaining tables; Leonardo's wife sits on the left, close to the also seated actress that has been previously identified with the Beggar/Death. The houses have been pushed to the back wall, revealing on the left side an electric piano. The empty stage with the overturned tables and the few scattered chairs visually foreshadows the final destructive escalation that is going to follow, while at the same time, standing in opposition to the opening of the scene which took place indoors in the little provincial houses.

Kitsopoulou's voice asks the technician Nikos for a black-out and for the spotlight which as the director's voice will inform the audience is the moon: "A nice moon". In the darkness, Kitsopoulou guides the "Moon" to spot different characters of the play, which she presents with their role's name (e.g. Mother or Leonardo's Wife).⁵⁵⁵ The hugging naked couple is also lightened, standing on the back upper part of the stage, hence giving the impression that they are far away. Kitsopoulou enunciates the Bride's line simultaneously to the actress holding the role; she also speaks the first four lines of the Woodcutter's dialogue. After a long transition between the onstage characters and under the sound of non-harmonious piano sounds, the two naked actors approach the front part of the stage like a modern Adam and Eve; the following spot-moonlight now turns into an investigation lamp. Here the distance between the characters, also underscored by the spotlight, points to an individualization, contradictory to the preceding impression of forced collective belonging during the wedding celebration. The focus is hence not placed on the community but on each individual's response to the event, exposing how the private jeopardises the social/national coherence. Ultimately, each one must experience the catastrophe alone.

The lights turn on. A male singer performs in front of a standing microphone on the left side a song by the composer Manos Hadjidakis. The lyrics are the poem "A moment of silence" by Dinos Christianopoulos: a moment of silence for the desperate, a cry for acknowledgement and acceptance of a non-normative discourse of desire and love.⁵⁵⁶ Under the emotional melody

⁵⁵⁵ In a metatheatrical way, the Father acknowledges the follow spot ("Come on, Girl!"); in some other cases the lighted character presents a trait or reaction that has been identified with his presence throughout the performance (e.g. the Maid sings another *skyladiko* song, as she did already during the second act). Some other "characters," not previously present, are also announced (the "Old Bride" or the "little Girl" with the cello, shouting while playing out of tune: "They did right" [«Καλά κάνανε»]).

⁵⁵⁶ «Εσείς που βρήκατε τον άνθρωπό σας/ κι έχετε ένα χέρι να σας σφίγγει τρυφερά,/ έναν ώμο ν' ακουμπάτε την πίκρα σας/ένα κορμί να υπερασπίζει την έξαψή σας,/ κοκκινίσατε άραγε/για την τόση ευτυχία σας,/έστω και μια φορά;/ είπατε να κρατήσετε ενός λεπτού σιγή / για τους απεγνωσμένους;» ("You, who have found your soulmate/ and have a hand to hold you tenderly, /a shoulder to rest your sorrow/ a body to defend your exaltation/ have you

of Hadjidakis, the two actors playing Leonardo and the Bridegroom imitate in slow motion, the scene of stabbing and murder. All the actors, witnessing the scene, are also moving in slow motion. Without characterising Kitsopoulou's performance as postdramatic, it would still be helpful to remember the way that postdramatic theatre uses slow motion. According to Lehmann, through the enlargement and the concretisation of the slow movement, "the motor apparatus is alienated: every action (...) remains recognizable but is changed, as never seen". In this way, the onstage walking gains "the beauty of a purposeless *pure gesture*". A move without purpose does not reveal the lack of performative power. For, as Lehmann explains, "[g]esture is that which remains unsublated in any purposive action: an excess of potentiality, the phenomenality of visibility that is blinding, so to speak, namely surpassing the merely ordering gaze – having become possible because no purposiveness and no tendency to illustrate weakens the real of space, time and body".⁵⁵⁷ The onstage tempo decelerates, hence allowing the spectator to focus on the performance of the song. While the movement performatively stresses the pain and the despair of this highly emotional song, the slow motion, by exaggerating the action, functions in a distancing way, opposed to the moving melody, hence prohibiting an unreflected, emotional identification. After the men's murder, the Mother mauls the Bride on a table, before she drags her inside the house. For a prolonged moment, only the sound of the beating and the screams can be heard. The invisibility of the violent act signifies a return to the private: the circle closes there where it opened, in the nuclear – oppressive – cell, the family.⁵⁵⁸ The Bride crawls with difficulty on stage, and after covering a short distance, she falls on the floor lying. For a while, her deep breaths can be heard. In the end, however, it remains quite ambiguous, whether the Bride is dead or not.

ever blushed / from so much happiness/ even once? / did you think of keeping a moment's silence/ for the despairing"] (Dinos Christianopoulos, «Ενός λεπτού σιγή» [A moment of silence], in *Ποιήματα* [Poems] (Thessaloniki: Ianos, 2018), 59).

⁵⁵⁷ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 164. "When physical movement is slowed down to such an extent that the time of its development itself seems to be enlarged as through a magnifying glass, the body itself is inevitably *exposed* in its concreteness. It is being zoomed in on as through the lens of an observer and is simultaneously 'cut out' of time-space continuum as an art object" (ibid.; emphasis in original)

⁵⁵⁸ Here it is interesting to observe that it is a woman who – in the name of the norms arising from blood kinship – exercises her violent power over another woman. Taking into account how "women are constructed as biological reproducers of 'the nation'" and although "usually, if not always, in the sex/gender systems in their societies men are dominant," Nira Yuval-Davis argues that women should not only be considered "passive victims, or even objects, of the ideologies and policies aimed at controlling their reproduction". As she contends, "very often it is women, especially older women, who are given the roles of the cultural reproducers of 'the nation' and are empowered to rule on what is 'appropriate' behavior and appearance and what is not and to exert control over other women who might be constructed as 'deviants'. As very often this is the main source of social power allowed to women, they might become fully engaged in it" (Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 37).

In the Festival's production only a few lines from the Bride's original monologue are kept: "You would have gone too".⁵⁵⁹ Interestingly, in the Greek translation the meaning is slightly different: "You would have done the same" [«Και συ το ίδιο θα 'κανες»].⁵⁶⁰ Kitsopoulou, through Gatsos' translation, stresses the undertaking of responsibility and – by extension – the conscious decision to go against the dominant norms. This choice should also be examined with regard to the song that had been performed during the killing scene. The Bride, who has remained silent during the long scene of celebrations, thus revealing her passivity in this marriage, now takes over the responsibility of her actions by explaining herself. As already noted, the Bride's character was representing the desire that would challenge the marital unity. Following Maria Delgado, "[t]he Bride does not appear opposed to the institution of marriage as presented in the play – an economic arrangement"; she reacts because "her husband cannot satisfy her desires".⁵⁶¹ Her reaction should hence not be considered as only an agent of desire but as opposed to the conception of the wedding as a reproductive alliance. Taking also into account the gay associations of the above-mentioned poem, the mediated Bride's voice invites the audience to also consider the very notion of kinship between non-relatives, namely forms of kinship beyond the blood relation. Here one should remember that the metaphor of kinship in the national discourses (members of a nation are related through a felt kinship) presupposes singular definitions of kinship as characteristic of the heterosexual family, namely kin, either of blood or through marriage. A new conception of kinship will need, however, to go beyond the condition of a heteronormative marriage relation aiming at biological reproduction.⁵⁶²

Finally, the Bride's voice is heard. It is the female director that will enunciate the Bride's words from Lorca's text and not the actress holding the role. Kitsopoulou herself will read a part of the Bride's final monologue on a microphone, seated at the piano. A few moments later, while only the sounds from the beating inside the house are heard, Kitsopoulou's voice repeats the final line "You would have done the same" from the loudspeakers. Throughout the performance, the director has been a figure in-between the performative event and the spectators: observing and participating, she has a double role, functioning also as a "bridge" between actors and audience. By "lending" her voice to the Bride, namely through the performative act of enunciation, she spreads the question of the overtaking of responsibility as

⁵⁵⁹ Lorca, *Blood Wedding*, 60.

⁵⁶⁰ Lorca, *Θέατρο και Ποίηση* [Theatre and Poetry], 107.

⁵⁶¹ Delgado, *Federico Garcia Lorca*, 77.

⁵⁶² For an analysis of the concept of kinship beyond a biological/social binary and vis-à-vis the reproductive technologies, see Janet Carsten, *After Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

a sign of resistance to dominant discourses and invites the spectators to reflect on their position and stance. At the end of the performance, the Mother returns to stage. Among the prone bodies, she sits on a chair and screams without a voice – a moment of silence. The agent of power cannot be heard anymore. A (weak) promise of emancipatory hope?

In the Festival's production family appears as the main agent in the promotion of ideologically charged values and mentalities. The illusions that have nourished Greek society since the 1980s fall apart dramatically, dragging the personal stories with them; at the same time, the personal dysfunction reflects the social impasses. This provocative diagnosis of the malaises of contemporary Greece amid the crisis stressed the pre-existence of banal national(ist) misconceptions as inherent in the identity of Greek society and not as the mere outcome of crisis. Kitsopoulou dismantles familiar structures and destabilises fixed points of (national) reference and identification, inviting the spectators to reflect on the internal intermingling of power relations which enables "our" beloved (national) families to co-configure and impose norms, identities and desires.

3.1.2 Challenging reassuring (national) certainties: Lena Kitsopoulou's *Athanasios Diakos*

On a small wooden platform in the former industrial Hall H at Peiraios Street, an elementary set of an apartment without walls has been erected, indicated by a light wooden door and a door frame separating the toilet and kitchen. A podium stands on the right side. While the spectators enter the auditorium, a female voice welcomes them and, rather unusually, makes a pre-curtain announcement about cell phones and videos in fifteen-syllable verse, the rhythmic metre of Greek folk poetry. She also describes in detail the ensuing first scene and the onstage actions of the actor who will enter the stage.

After entering the stage on a scooter, an actor addresses the audience in an unintelligible language, recalling the sound of Arabic. The name of the grill-restaurant *Diakos* together with the sketch of a male face with a moustache can be recognised on the white scooter's delivery box. Only some words can be understood in the actor's rather prolonged and highly gesticulated monologue. He exits the hall shouting an Arabic-sounding sentence; the stage remains momentarily empty. Soon, he returns driving a car to the sound of a Greek song, entitled "I, the foreigner".⁵⁶³ The alarm lights of the car together with the flashing lights on the

⁵⁶³ The choice of the song does not seem random. It is the song "Εγώ ο ξένος" ["I, the foreigner/stanger"], sung by Stratos Dionysiou (1988). In Greek, these two words are translated with the same word *xenos* [ξένος]. Hence, it is interesting to observe that it points to both of the important levels of the performance, which will be analysed

floor create a disco-ball effect, rather comically introducing the entrance of an important guest. A male actor with a thin moustache, in a long-haired wig, white t-shirt, black trousers and the Greek traditional footwear *tsarouchia* exits the car.⁵⁶⁴ At the back side of the hall stands an actress in a security uniform. Both the other onstage actors applaud; the audience follows them. As the song continues, the long-haired actor exits the car with his hands raised towards the sky in a suppliant-like position; on his way towards the spectators he assumes the posture of a speaker giving a public speech.

The appearance of the actor and the title of the performance leave no room for uncertainty regarding the character's identity. He is Athanasios Diakos, one of the commanders of the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman rule in 1821. Diakos was executed by impalement after his defeat by Omer Vrionis' soldiers at the Alamana Battle. Due to his martyr's death, he is considered a national hero and has inspired both the folk imagination and Greek poets and painters.⁵⁶⁵ The verses from the folk songs describing Diakos' last moments are widely known even today and have contributed to the construction of Diakos' image as fearless and noble in the collective imagination.⁵⁶⁶

In Kitsopoulou's play, Diakos does not bring to mind such heroic representations; he appears instead to be an everyday modern Greek, capable of the most horrible (and ethically problematic) deeds. He has time-travelled with his wife Kroustallo from just before his execution by the Ottomans, to contemporary Greece, in 2012. Diakos is now the owner of a grill-restaurant and the boss of the Kurd delivery-boy Mohamed. Kroustallo gets pregnant with Mohamed's child and wants to leave Diakos. A series of violent physical and verbal assaults and a scene of rape culminate in Kroustallo's murder by Diakos.

Kitsopoulou's representation of Diakos as a violent, sexist, racist, cuckolded husband does not aim to satirise or denigrate the particular historical figure. Rather, it questions homogeneous – mythologising – representations of (male) national heroes, stressing their

here: the national history vs./and the personal story of adultery; the man that is turned into a stranger by his lover (in terms of proximity) and the man as a foreigner (in cultural/national terms).

⁵⁶⁴ *Tsarouchia* [Τσαρούχια] are the shoes of the traditional Greek costume. Their toes are upturned and decorated with a black pompom.

⁵⁶⁵ Diakos has been represented in paintings by, among others, Peter von Hess, Fotis Kontoglou, Theofilos and Konstantinos Parthenis. He has also been the theme of poems (by Kostas Karyotakis, Kostis Palamas and Aristoteles Valaoritis), of theatre plays and the Greek shadow theatre (*Karagkiozis*).

⁵⁶⁶ For an English translation of one of the versions of the folk song "The Death of Diakos", see Claude Fauriel, *The Songs of Greece, from the Romaic Text*, ed. Charles Brinsley Sheridan (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), accessed March 17, 2021, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081616439;view=1up;seq=163>. The translation is based on the French collection and translation by Claude Fauriel, *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne / recueillis et publiés, avec une traduction française, des éclaircissements et des notes* (Paris: Chez Firmin Didot, 1824–1825).

constructed nature and their functionalisation by the prevailing nationalist discourses. Throughout the performance, national (hi)story intermingles (and is often provocatively equated) with the personal story of adultery. As will be argued here, the constant interplay between these two levels (national/personal) leads to the deconstruction of national symbols. At the same time, it discloses the perhaps concealed but still ideologically and ethically troubling ways in which these symbols and narratives have constantly been reproduced in the everyday life of “ordinary” people, hence contributing to the perpetuation of predominant official narratives.⁵⁶⁷

National heroes have played a crucial role in the construction of official national narratives and identities.⁵⁶⁸ According to the ethnosymbolist Anthony Smith:

Heroes provide models of virtuous conduct, their deeds of valour inspire faith and courage in their oppressed and decadent descendants. The epoch in which they flourished is the great age of liberation from the foreign yoke, which released the energies of the people for cultural innovation and original political experiment.⁵⁶⁹

As Linas Eriksonas nicely formulates it, the notion of a hero “lends the idea of nationalism a human face”.⁵⁷⁰ Yet, from the perspective of the present analysis, it is important to stress that national heroes are the outcome of a “certain process of ideological construction”.⁵⁷¹ Constituting one of the “major categories of national myths”, they are characterized by “didacticism”, while their “allegorical content aims at exemplification.”⁵⁷² Narratives about them trigger emotional processes of identification and comparison from a present standpoint. As the political scientist Pantelis Lekkas suggests, the “trans-historical communication of the

⁵⁶⁷ Of course, the context of crisis cannot be ignored. Dimitris Papanikolaou draws the attention to “the way in which the past, especially as cultural archive, becomes during the crisis a privileged site of controversy”. For some artists, past is conceived as “dregs constantly present, and its cultural footprint as an archive as troubling as the current socioeconomic impasse. What we call hence cultural identity turns from an existential certainty to pressing analytical problem, a search in an archive which *has problem*”. The opposite tendency to this critical response, leads to conservative, bigoted conceptions of the past. Dimitris Papanikolaou, «Με αφορμή τις αντιδράσεις στον Αθανάσιο Διάκο της Λένας Κιτσοπούλου» [On the occasion of the reactions to Lena Kitsopoulou’s Athanasios Diakos], *Avgi*, September 9, 2012, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://enthemata.wordpress.com/2012/09/09/papanikolaoy-2/> (emphasis added).

⁵⁶⁸ According to Linas Eriksonas, all different approaches within the nationalist studies agree regarding the importance of the notion of national hero, but differ on its qualitative interpretation. (Linas Eriksonas, *National Heroes and National Identities: Scotland, Norway and Lithuania* (Bruxells: P.I.E- Peter Lang, 2004), 15).

⁵⁶⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65.

⁵⁷⁰ Eriksonas, *National Heroes and National Identities*, 15.

⁵⁷¹ Panagiotis Lekkas, *Το Παιχνίδι με το Χρόνο: Εθνικισμός και Νεοτερικότητα* [The Time Game: Nationalism and Modernity], 2nd ed. (Athens: Papazisis, 2011), 93.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 87.

present social subject with the past becomes emotionally charged, gaining a personal, almost mystical character”.⁵⁷³

For the “national pantheon” to be constructed various figures are used and mythologised. These figures are in some cases historically recorded but are also sometimes “merely mythical, historically inexistent or unconfirmed”.⁵⁷⁴ The first category of existent historical figures, to which also Diakos belongs, presents great interest. Such figures, in order to become a part of the “national continuum”, namely, particularly glorious milestones in the narrative of the nations, should be first separated from their historical and personal context.⁵⁷⁵ Without necessarily “distorting or forging” the related event, nationalist ideology adjusts them to its narrative of the past, which, however, claims to be the “prevailing, if not exclusive one”.⁵⁷⁶ The case of the national heroes that derive from the recent history is similar. Following Lekkas’ analysis, the deeds of these historical figures are directly related to the “self-consciousness of the modern nation”. Owing to chronological proximity, collecting evidences regarding these historical persons does not present great difficulties. Nevertheless, in this case as well, nationalism often requires “necessary interventions which will cleanse the heroic offer from disturbing impurities and will highlight, beyond doubt, its genuine national character”.⁵⁷⁷ Here it is also important to pay attention to the relationship between hegemonic conceptions of “masculinity” and national heroism. Despite the presence of a few female heroines, in the case of Greece as in the narratives of other nations, male heroes still dominate the national pantheon. A reason for this predominance can be searched for in the connection between warfare and masculinity: the male citizen who is willing to sacrifice himself in the fight for the nation.⁵⁷⁸

The symbolic weight of the historic figures of the 1821 Independence War should also be examined in relation to the fundamental significance that this historical event had in the perpetuation of the founding narrative of the modern Greek nation-state. An indicative example is the annual performative commemoration of the Greek Revolution and its celebration as a National Day on March 25th. This day also coincides with the Orthodox Christian feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary. Every year, on this day, the military parade of the Hellenic Armed Forces takes place in the centre of Athens. The celebrations all over Greece include

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 87–88

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ See also Pablo Dominguez Andersen and Simon Wendt, ‘Introduction: Masculinities and the nation’ in *Masculinities and the Nation in the Modern World: Between Hegemony and Marginalization*, ed. by Pablo Dominguez Andersen and Simon Wendt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5.

school student parades in cities and villages, often accompanied by school festivities, in the course of which pupils recite folk and other poems and perform skits about related historical events and figures. As Lekkas emphasises, National Days constitute another kind of “symbolism condensing the national drama”.⁵⁷⁹

The nationalist imperative of a homogeneous, uninterrupted national narrative is a recurrent theme throughout this thesis. The “small” stories of the individuals and the subjective, often contradictory, affiliation to and recollection of the past have no place in such “great” and (always to a crucial extent fictive) narrative. As argued in regard to the chorus in Marmarinos’ *Herakles*, the fictional character of history-writing may be disclosed on stage through the performative framing of the individual act of recollection and narration. The inherent subjectivity in this dynamic process challenges the authoritative coherence of the historical narrative and may trigger the subversion of fixed identities. Nevertheless, Kitsopoulou’s play does not offer a rewriting of mythologised history from a personal perspective; such an approach to (hi)story could shed light on the subjective micro-narratives and so enable alternative perceptions of the past. Instead, *Athanasios Diakos* illustrates how the responsibility for the perpetuation of predominant national(ist) discourses – which are imperative for the existence of nation-states – is diffused across society in the Foucauldian sense.

According to this point of view, the banal context of everyday life turns into a site where different discourses (among which are nation and gender) compete for dominance. The complexity of the notion of “everyday life” should not be underestimated; everyday life can be understood both as the realm for (individual) resistance to the prevailing discourses and (institutional) norms, but also as being influenced by precisely these oppressive discourses.⁵⁸⁰ Yet, in line with the second approach, the (at first sight) commonplace context of a married couple will be hereby examined as the site where stereotypical beliefs related to nation and national identity are casually expressed and reproduced in unquestionable – and often imperceptible – ways.

Lena Kitsopoulou’s *Athanasios Diakos: the Return*, directed by the playwright, premiered on the Peiraios stage of the Athens Festival (Hall H) on July 14 –16, 2012. The

⁵⁷⁹ Lekkas, *To Παιχνίδι με το Χρόνο* [The Time Game], 107. As the Commemoration Day on the 25th March reveals, the concrete date of an event is for the nationalist purpose not of importance as this was not the date of the beginning of the Revolution; rather, it was the connotation of the Revolution’s coincidence with the Orthodox Celebration of the Annunciation that led to its selection as Commemoration Day (108).

⁵⁸⁰ Ben Highmore, “Introduction: Questioning everyday life,” in *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. Ben Highmore (London: Routledge, 2002), 5. In short, and despite their complexities, these “tendencies” in the analysis of everyday life can be categorised under “micro-analysis” (in line with Michel de Certeau) and “macro-analysis” (following Foucault’s thought) (ibid.).

performance was not considered suitable for spectators under the age of 18. Quite surprisingly, almost two months after the performance, a widely circulated populist newspaper on its title page accused the performance of being “disgraceful”. This led to the condemnation of the production and the Festival’s artistic director by right-wing politicians (including the Neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn). The cover page from the newspaper on September 4, 2012 displayed a naked photo of the director, in another context, under the title “They turned Athanasios Diakos into a racist and cuckolded wife-murdering souvlaki-maker”.⁵⁸¹ The article also referred to the debate about the eventual renewal of the contract of the artistic director Yorgos Loukos, thus revealing the possible reasons of this targeting. A year later, in another country, and for the same play, Kitsopoulou was awarded the Internationaler Autorenpreis des Heidelberger Stückemarkts.⁵⁸²

Kitsopoulou’s *Diakos* is written in fifteen-syllable verse [*dekapentasyllavos*], a rhythmic metre identified with Greek folklore due to its predominant use in folk poetry and songs.⁵⁸³ As examined in Peresiades’ dramatic idyll *Golfo*, the use of *dekapentasyllavos*, due to its association with folk tradition, has contributed to the perception of the play as the “national melodrama” *par excellence*. In contrast, the use of *dekapentasyllavos* in Kitsopoulou’s *Athanasios Diakos* has much more critical intentions. Given the aforementioned connotations of this rhythmic metre, her choice to write a play in *dekapentasyllavos* in 2012 allows an interpretation through the prism of parody.⁵⁸⁴

According to Linda Hutcheon, “[a]s form of ironic representation, parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies”.⁵⁸⁵ Parody points critically both to the proximity and distance between past and present. As Hutcheon argues, “through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both

⁵⁸¹ «Εβγαλαν σουβλατζή, Κερατά-συζυγοκτόνο τον Αθανάσιο Διάκο» [They turned Athanasios Diakos into a racist and cuckolded wife-murdering souvlaki-maker], *Proto Thema*, September 4, 2012, accessed March 7, 2021, https://www.protothema.gr/culture/theater/article/220730/ebgalan-soyblatzh_-kerata-syzygoktono-ton-athanasio-diako/.

⁵⁸² Greece was the honoured country at the 30th Heidelberger Stückemarkt. For more information, see “Drei Schwestern und ihr sterbender Vater,” *Heidelberger Stückemarkt*, accessed March 10, 2021, <http://heidelberger-stueckemarkt.nachtkritik.de/2013/index.php/component/content/article/20-heidelbergerstueckemarkt/wettbewerbe/autorenwettbewerb/199-henriette-dushe-lena-kitsopoulou-philipp-loehle-davis-gieselmann-und-vangelis-hadjiyannidis-sind-die-preistraeger-beom-30-heidelberger-stueckemarkt>.

⁵⁸³ *Dekapentasyllavos* [Δεκαπεντασύλλαβος] is a fifteen-syllables line with a caesura after the eighth syllable and iambic stresses.

⁵⁸⁴ The recitation in fifteen-syllable verse is interrupted only a few times throughout the play. In these instances, the characters openly declare the inefficacy of verse to express their contemporary emotional and psychological impasses (e.g. when Diakos expresses his loss of orientation in the present, where he feels like foreigner or, in the final scene of birth, when Kroustallo in pain, asks for help while at the same time accusing Diakos).

⁵⁸⁵ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 101.

continuity and difference”.⁵⁸⁶ From this point of view, it may be argued that *Athanasios Diakos* re-narrates the story of the folk hero in the traditional rhythmic metre to emphasise a point and not disparage folk poetry in general. The parodic posturing in Kitsopoulou’s play points critically to the ideological implications inherent in the – however hybrid and confused – manifestation and appropriation of traditional folk culture in the present. Here Kitsopoulou uses parody in a similar way to her adaptation of Lorca’s *Blood Wedding*, where the point of reference was not the folk poetry but how an influential group of intellectuals and artists (who in one way or another have been associated with the Generation of the 1930s and its inheritance) has defined, also ideologically, the terms of reception, interpretation and preponderance of Lorca’s work in Greece vis-à-vis their own aesthetic quests as related to the question of identity.

Kitsopoulou’s Diakos appears conscious of all the heroic and noble characteristics attributed to the historical figure by folk imagination. He experiences a strange passivity, without any real cause to fight for, oscillating between self-certainty and fear, provocative arrogance and cowardliness. After all, he is an ordinary man, a betrayed husband, afraid as a cowed conformist ready to compromise in order to enjoy an often boring – but still comfortable – life. From the very beginning, Diakos expresses sexist views regarding woman as man’s servant, in sexual terms as well. The initially verbal expression of such views escalates to the rape of his wife and, at the end, leads to her murder. The national hero and the cuckolded modern man seem to be two sides of the same mask. Through the constant shift between their (hi)stories, Kitsopoulou ironises heroic attitudes often associated with the stereotypical (self-)representations of the Greeks. The paraphrasing of Athanasios Diakos’ famous heroic quote is suggestive; the verse “I was born a *Graikos* and I will die a *Graikos*”⁵⁸⁷ is interpreted on stage as an expression of the right for generalised disobedience: “I will speak as I please, I was born a Graikos. And since I was born a Graikos, I will die a Graikos. A Graikos has but one motto: I do as I please”.

Diakos’ first monologue interacts ironically with the stereotypical image of the Greeks under the Ottoman rule as proud, brave and fearless. Standing at the podium, he narrates the story of his salvation and his journey in time. On the dark stage only the podium is lit,

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁸⁷ *Graikos* (from the Latin *Graeci*) is one of the three ethnonyms (together with *Hellenes* and *Romaioi*) used in the Greek context before the foundation of the Greek state. For a short history of the use of these three names, see Tassos Kaplanis, “Antique Names and Self-Identification: *Hellenes*, *Graikoi*, and *Romaioi* from Late Byzantium to the Greek Nation-State,” in *Re-Imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture*, ed. Dimitris Tziouvas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 81–97.

attributing authority to the speaker. The performative frame of the lecture-like speech points critically to the process of being taught in school; an official homogeneous narrative about the achievements of historical figures like Diakos. At the same time, also following Lucia Rainer's reading of Foucault with regard to the "lecture frame",⁵⁸⁸ one could analyse a lecture as one of these "areas of discourse" which emphasise the point that discourse is not "equally open and penetrable" to everyone.⁵⁸⁹ The discourse is controlled, by "determining the conditions under which it may be employed" and by "imposing a certain number of rules upon those individuals who employ it, thus denying access to everyone else". For the discourse is not open to everyone not legitimised, namely "qualified" to do so.⁵⁹⁰ From this point of view, and also considering the spatial distance of the speaker as Rainer stresses, a lecture mutates into another "disciplinary power technique" that reproduces power relations.⁵⁹¹ By putting the hero in the position of the lecturer, the object of historic "truth" (i.e. the heroic sacrifice for the nation) turns into the subject of the act of enunciation.

On the Festival's stage, the seriousness of the negotiated themes is undermined not only by the ironic acting style but also by the irrelevant parallel stage actions that question the unity of the fictive world. Halfway through Diakos' narration, on the semi-lit left side of the stage, an actress with a pregnant belly, dressed casually in leggings, performs choreographic movements. The audience most likely recognises her as Kroustallo, Diakos' wife. The victim of severe masculine violence, she appears cynical and conformist at the same time. While she expostulates with her husband, she does not actually refute Diakos' stereotypes regarding women or foreigners. Her racist comments against her lover and the father of her child reaffirms her husband's beliefs regarding the hereditary low intelligence of the Kurd father-to-be. As I will claim in due time, Kitsopoulou does not portray the woman as a mere victim of masculine oppression and violence; in a more complex way, she poses the question of moral responsibility beyond the gender issue, which undoubtedly remains still of predominant importance.

The characters in Kitsopoulou's play can hence be best understood in oppositional terms. They are found in an antagonistic relation to each other, without, however, maintaining a consistent, clear standpoint. On the contrary, the constantly changing dynamics traced within

⁵⁸⁸ Lucia Rainer, *On the Threshold of Knowing: Lectures and Performances in Art and Academia* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017), 90.

⁵⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," Appendix in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Rupert Swyer (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 225.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 224–225.

⁵⁹¹ Rainer, *On the Threshold of Knowing*, 90.

the ordinary domestic context (which constitutes a microcosm of the national one) is crucial for an understanding of the possible critical intentions. Kroustallo's reaction after the rape scene is not only suggestive of her ambiguous character but also of the constantly changing dynamics between the two characters. While expressing the generalised feeling of alienation he experiences in modern Greece, Diakos appears weak and even voices his love to his wife; he had brutally raped her a few minutes earlier. She, in turn, responds with a vulgar outburst typical of Kitsopoulou's characters, ironically accusing antiquated moral codes regarding faith and monogamy as conservative and petit bourgeois. As elsewhere in her plays, Kitsopoulou does not call for a return to past models of life and relationships but stresses the inconsistency between different dominant stances in Greek society. On the one hand, the constant return to the national past appears as a "stable" reference point and on the other hand, the repudiation of any belief that could be considered old-fashioned according to the measures of post-dictatorship Greek society, which was striving to hastily divest itself of its deeply rooted conservative reflexes.

During Kroustallo's lines, Diakos sits inside the parked car at the back section of the hall on the right. A sudden blast from the car's horn redirects the audience's attention, who now read Diakos' lines as supertitles projected on the upper back side of the hall. Without being heard, his accusation against his wife is followed by the expression of a feeling of displacement, together with xenophobic comments. Here the use of supertitles has a dual function: on the one hand, it signifies the deprivation of power in the case of the male character, while on the other hand, it focuses attention on the confused purport of his outburst. Seated at the kitchen table, the actress lights up a cigarette and very cynically confesses her need to smoke, despite doctor's orders: "at the end of the day, the baby may be born slightly blind". The reactions of both characters (a raped woman that does not protect her own child, a cuckolded husband who expresses his anger with racist comments) and also the actor's distant co-presence on stage (she looks frontally, he screams inside the car without being heard) stress a prevailing pessimism in moral terms. Kroustallo's comment on the possible health hazard to her child is another expression of Kitsopoulou's provocative questioning of the role of mother as "normal" and "natural". This will become even more evident later in the final labour scene: a woman in pain, crying for help to save the baby from suffocation, she reveals no excitement or anticipation for her coming child. Her language in this scene remains vulgar with sexual connotations, subverting the presumably unquestioning instinct for self-denial inherent in motherhood.

The interrelation between these two characters is destabilised by the entrance of

Mohamed. Racial prejudice and an (historically unjustifiable) attitude of Greek superiority are expressed to this foreigner's face. Kitsopoulou points to the reiteration of stereotypes and racist generalisations due to ignorance: Mohamed's Kurdish origin is equated with Turkey in a dangerously general way. Both Diakos and Kroustallo make racist comments, attributing in this way the propensity for prejudice to our human nature, regardless of character or gender. They speak to one another in English with a strong Greek accent in order for the Kurd not to understand them, while joking about his appearance. The choice to speak English as if belonging to a Western country compared to the "illiterate East" illustrates one of the biggest stereotypical binaries.

Yet, as in the case of Kroustallo from a gender perspective, Mohamed is not only placed in the position of the foreigner-victim. The Kurd, while expressing prejudices against the Turks, stands in opposition to the Greeks by adopting the Turkish perspective and arguing provocatively that the Greeks have stolen the Imia islet in the Aegean Sea. This has been one of the main areas of dispute between Greece and Turkey up to the present day.⁵⁹² Interestingly enough, his character shows similarities to Diakos regarding their opinion of women. For example, when asked his opinion about Kroustallo's dress by his boss, his reply focuses on her buttocks. Diakos grabs Kroustallo's bottom. Given that the actress is not wearing a dress, here the constructed image of femininity is directly thematised. The sexist conception of dominant masculinity promoted by both men surpasses any national differences between them.

The actors' position on the stage and their movements/choreographies underscore not only these shifting power relations but also moments of distanciation or convergence between the characters. In some instances, through spatial proximity and parallel action, they appear to come closer, not only in spatial but most importantly, in ethical/ideological terms. For example, when Kroustallo, rather cynically, attempts to persuade her husband to brand his name to gain more clients, the actress manically hits the sink with a washcloth. Diakos disagrees and also starts hitting the sink with another washcloth. They both shout, advocating their views fervently. Yet, through the execution of the same intensive movements, the similarities between the two characters are stressed. The actress laughs loudly and hysterically for a prolonged moment, while she exits the apartment and walks towards the empty back-right side of the hall. Diakos throws plates towards the back of the stage. Her pretentious and exaggerated

⁵⁹²*Imia* is the name of two uninhabited islets in the Aegean Sea. Greek sovereignty over the islets became the object of a military and diplomatic crisis in February 1996. The incident has been recorded as one of the most dangerous deteriorations in Greek-Turkish relations during the 1990s and 2000s. To the present day, the Turkish side questions the Greek claim on the islets.

laughter, coupled with her displacement outside the apartment in the empty hall, brings her into a power position. She thus becomes the dominant pole for a moment. The spatial distance suddenly signifies the remoteness between the characters and their different, though mutually inconsistent viewpoints.⁵⁹³

The abrupt change of attitude, body position or topic of discussion among the characters, pointing exactly at their, at first sight, irrelevance, signal this shift between different targets of critique but also power positions, which, in turn, have ethical implications. The constant oscillation between violence and weakness, subordination and cynicism, is considered an unavoidable aspect of everyday life. In Kitsopoulou's universe, family violence does not signify a state of emergency but a normal routine. Yet, it is in the private sphere that the ground is laid for the flourishing and reproduction of nationalist misconceptions and stereotypical clichés. The personal story of adultery, the current situation in Greece and the narration of official national history intermingle, affecting the interpretation of each other. The border between social/national and private/familial remains intentionally loose.

The reproduction of prevailing, banal beliefs about Greek history, tradition or aspects associated with the Greek identity (such as religion) takes place imperceptibly through the domestic routine and everyday activities such as newspaper reading. Diakos seated calmly at the table, reads aloud. Not randomly, he mentions the increase in the number of foreigners and the criminality in immigrant areas. The subsequent newspaper reference to the church scandals leads to another monologue about the values and courage of "a genuine Christian", who nevertheless left the church (in order) to fight for Greece.⁵⁹⁴ Two characteristics that are attributed to the heroic figure of Diakos are masculinity as well as religious and patriotic faith. It is necessary to remember that throughout the performance, patriotic outbursts (often expressed offhandedly together with personal matters) are accompanied by expressions of the orthodox faith, implying a strong link between them. At the beginning of the performance, for example, Diakos' address to the audience as "Friends, Brothers, Christians" should be read as an ironic reference to the strong link between national identity and religion. Even until today, the latter is considered a central component of modern Greek identity. The reasons for this

⁵⁹³ An indicative example is the sequence of the previous scene, when Diakos standing in front of the kitchen-bench is asked on telephone by a well-known journalist if he wants to participate in a TV-show about Georgios Karaiskakis, another military commander of the Greek War of Independence. Kroustallo, seated in near darkness on a chair at the right-back of the empty hall, encourages him to go for it. Her voice – together with the intensive movements she is making with the chair – functions more as the voice of an "Erinys" who tries to persuade him to give up his beliefs and principles.

⁵⁹⁴ In Greek, the name Diakos means deacon, namely the lowest rank of clergy in the Orthodox Church. His name has indeed religious meaning, since he had entered a monastery as novice, before taking part in the Greek War of Independence.

close relation between nation and religion should be researched in the complex role of Orthodoxy (and the Church) in the national(ist) project, and the process of state building in the nineteenth century.⁵⁹⁵ Here Kitsopoulou points to the presumption that the spectators are necessarily believers or (even non-active) members of the church, something that, by extension, indicates the dominance of the Church in modern Greece. It should not be forgotten that until today, the prevailing religion is the Greek Orthodox, while the separation between state and church still remains under debate. Besides Diakos' religious self-definition, one should also pay attention to the definitions of the country. In one of his monologues Diakos refers to his journey to "this miserable country", implying not only a chronological displacement but also a spatial one. The emphasis on the distance between modern Greece and its corresponding geographic space, under Ottoman rule can be interpreted as a subtle questioning of linear national narratives. In some other instances, (Diakos' native place, namely the occupied land, is referred to with the rather pejorative colloquial name of Turkey in Greek [*Tourkià/Tourkiá*]). The use of this name challenges misbeliefs of linear descent from antiquity, which do not account for processes of cultural fusing and hybridisation. Diakos recalls the feeling of estrangement experienced in *Tourkia*; however, he experiences the same remoteness in modern Greece too. Through this equation of two supposedly different kinds of estrangement (culturally in the occupied country and chronologically due to the time journey), notions of self-evident familiarity and continuity are further challenged.

Because of the scattered, direct and implicit references to the crisis and the prevailing depressive mood since its start in 2010, it seems unavoidable to not relate Kitsopoulou's play to the contemporary context of its production. However, as in her work generally, Kitsopoulou's sharp critique is not restricted to the specific contemporary moment, given that the crisis should be understood as the consequence of a pre-existing social and national malaise. Her critical focus lies on dominant (mis)conceptions and lifestyle trends prevalent in Greek society during the last decades (*nouveau riche* aesthetic, uncritical adoption of foreign trends, and conspicuous consumption), namely, phenomena broadly regarded as the causes of the crisis.

Within this context, an existential question keeps recurring: after all, why did Diakos

⁵⁹⁵ Historian Elli Skopetea examines religion, together with language and education, as the keystones of the Greek identity in the first decades of the newly-founded Greek state. Religion and language constituted the crucial factors of "national unity, synchronic and diachronic" (Skopetea, *To «πρότυπο βασίλειο»* [The "model kingdom"], 119). For an approach to the relationship between nationalism and religion in Greece, following Smith's analysis of "displacement" as opposed to "religious replacement" (i.e. secular community replaces a religious one), see Effi Gazi, "Revisiting religion and nationalism in nineteenth-century Greece," 95–106.

leave the noble fight and sacrifice to come to modern Greece? Rather associatively, Diakos relates this question to the problem of high taxation during the crisis, equating the moral impasse to practical and financial difficulties. Diakos' wife reminds him of his own inconsistency and his ecstatic endorsement of the luxurious ease of modern life. She hysterically points out a series of comforts that were not known in their past mountain life (e.g. espresso machine, fast-food restaurants, fashion brands, filmmakers like Woody Allen, comfortable flats equipped with Jacuzzis, bio-mattresses etc.). The ironic reference to these consumerist trends, associated with the years of prosperity at the end of the twentieth century, critically highlight the effect of sudden economic abundance on the – anyhow non-gradually developed – Greek society. For, as sociologist Konstantinos Tsoukalas argues,

[t]he extremely rapid growth of consumer living standards constituted a decisive factor in a significant ideological mutation. When all the perceptions of everyday life have been transformed within less than a generation, and when the immediate functional needs tend to be confused with the symbolic significances of “objects” like refrigerators or washing machines, the cultural “shock” appears to be major and never-ending.⁵⁹⁶

As already discussed in the analysis of *Blood Wedding*, for Kitsopoulou these pathologies of modern Greek society appear directly related to prevailing national(ist) beliefs, no matter how innocuously the latter are expressed; financial maladministration, social crisis and the current impasse of a whole country intermingle with convictions regarding national pride and superiority due to a special relation with the ancient past. Kitsopoulou's characters instantiate two co-existent desiderata of the Greek society: the preservation of a self-confirming image of the (national) past and the enjoyment of material and other privileges due to the Europeanisation of Greece. The paraphrasing of a verse from the patriotic hymn *Thourios* [War Song], written by Rigas Feraios⁵⁹⁷ in 1797 and praising the fight for freedom, underscores this interplay between social and national, past and present: The original verse “[b]etter an hour of free life, Than forty years of slavery and prison!”⁵⁹⁸ is articulated by Kroustallo as “[b]etter an hour of slavery in luxury,/than forty years of living as a free popper woman”.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ Konstantinos Tsoukalas, *Ελλάδα της λήθης και της αλήθειας: Από τη μακρά εφηβεία στη βίαια ενηλικίωση* [Greece of oblivion and truth: from a prolonged adolescence to a violent maturation] (Athens: Themelio, 2013), 80.

⁵⁹⁷ Rigas Velesinlis (Feraios) [1757–1798] was one of the proto-revolutionaries of the Greek Independence. His endeavours were highly influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution.

⁵⁹⁸ As quoted in English in Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 29.

⁵⁹⁹ “Καλύτερα μιας ώρας σκλαβιά μες στη χλιδή/ Παρά σαράντα χρόνια ελεύθερη φτωχή”.

The intermingling of personal, social and national level is unambiguously underscored in the moments of destruction of nationally charged symbols. For example, following Kroustallo's confession that she loves someone else, Diakos narrates his lines, standing with his back to the audience in front of the kitchen counter. The sound of an instrumental folk piece blurs his words. Holding a washcloth as a handkerchief, he imitates statically the movements of the lead dancer in Greek traditional circle dances. Meanwhile, another actor appears on the back wearing a white skirt recalling the *foustanela*. His slow movements and static, exaggerated postures vaguely imitate folk dance movements. Interestingly enough, the whirls he performs are not traditional Greek dance movements but evoke stereotypical associations with Oriental tradition. These imperceptible details may be understood as alluding to the diverse influences on the Greek folk musical tradition during Ottoman rule.

During the scene, the actress vomits first in the toilet, then in the washbasin and finally in the kitchen sink. After a while, the actor in the background exits imitating the movements of the *tsoliades*⁶⁰⁰ in front of the Parliament in Syntagma Square in Athens. Through this visual/physical interplay between nationally connotated choreography on the one hand, and the parallel expression of disgust through the act of vomiting, folk tradition, national symbols, and family violence are destructively interconnected. The scene is absurdly interrupted when the actor turns the CD player off and announces to the actress, who lies with her head on the edge of the kitchen sink, that he has to go to the restaurant. Just as violent escalations appear integrated in family life, nationally connotated outbursts are succeeded by ordinary everyday activities.

Yet, the most telling – intentionally troubling in ethical terms – manifestations of this complex interplay between national, social, and personal themes can be traced in the scene of Kroustallo's rape. This scene offhandedly follows the coordinated dancing of the 1981 Italian hit *Maracaibo*. The dance is suddenly interrupted, when Diakos turns off the music and rapes Kroustallo. Despite her verbal attempts to resist, she is compelled to endure the rape and cries silently. A female voice requests the technician to play the song entitled "Save me" ["Σώσε με"] by the singer Rita Sakellariou. This song belongs to the already discussed *skyladiko* genre. The meaning of the song is contradictory to the rape scene: like other *skyladiko* songs, the lyrics express the unbearable pain of unfulfilled passion; a woman begs her lover to poison her, in order to rescue her from a life of torment, now that he no longer loves her. In the present

⁶⁰⁰ *Tsoliades* serve as Presidential Guard and honorary Guards at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in front of the Parliament. They wear the traditional national costume (pleated skirt (*foustanela*) and shoes (*tsarouchia*). During the change of shift they march in the characteristic slow-motion high-stepping.

context, the particular song (in whose lyrics the expressions of outspoken passion with often sexist connotations appear innocent), functions in an ambiguously provocative manner. The contradiction between rape and voluntary self-victimisation (the request for poisoning) may trigger a reconsideration of the ethical consequences of prevailing stereotypes of gender-conditioned expressions of desire.

The woman's cries are heard loudly and intermingle dramatically with the singer's voice. After the completion of the non-consensual sexual act, the actress falls on the floor, while Diakos goes to the bathroom, takes off his trousers and t-shirt and remains only with a white towel around his waist, like a skirt, while he still wears his *tsarouchia*. It is interesting to observe that this "skirt" (later he will wear his clothes again) abstractly recalls the white traditional pleated skirt of the national costume, *foustanela*. The actor's sunglasses, while prohibiting a direct identification with the historic person of Diakos, point visually towards a triggering contradiction: the modern man that attempts to "incarnate" the national hero in his private life, the rapist whose outfit is still nationally connoted.

Similar to the *Blood Wedding*, here the individual appears to be the product of his/her oppressive environment. At the same time, however, in Kitsopoulou's world the root of the evil is to be traced to human nature. As she suggests through Diakos, "[w]e all walk uphill as decreed by fate with a cross on ours backs. And we supposedly think that we determine on our own what is going to happen to us". The escalation of the ironic interplay between national (hi)story, personal drama and human nature becomes visible at the beginning of the long labour scene, which ends up with Kroustallo's murder. Diakos has another confusing outburst in which he relates the consequences of (at first sight non-aggressive) passivity of modern life to the psychological and existential crisis of a reluctant hero: the latter is after all a weak person, whose apparent strength conceals fear. The pain of impalement gives its place to heartbreak. The implied equation between patriotic love and erotic passion undermines the self-evident superiority of the noble sacrifice for the nation over the choice to die for love.

After approaching the middle of the stage and requesting a song appropriate for the occasion, Diakos asks the technicians to impale him, so that his present torture comes to an end. The actor kneels on the floor near the fallen flag and starts beating the floor with his naked buttocks. The two actors incarnating Diakos and Kroustallo, who lies on the table, have assumed a horizontal position. The parallel stance of their two static postures emphasises both states as moments of pain and torture. The beginning of life through labour and the cruel execution are – even if only visually – related and probably even equated. For the whole

duration of the song,⁶⁰¹ the lyrics of which deal with the painful feeling of being rejected in love, the actors remain still. On the left side of the hall, a naked actor on a cross is spotlighted, recalling Jesus. Diakos' static kneeling posture triggers vulgar references to the male anus, with homosexual connotations. The ironic reproduction of homosexual stereotypes does not aim to question the sexual orientation of the historical figure but is meant as a challenge to self-evident heteronormative conceptions of gender vis-à-vis the construction of the national hero.

During this prolonged scene, the entrance of two actors, whose appearance recalls Adam and Eve,⁶⁰² further underscores the aforementioned subtle transition towards a discussion of human nature. From the opening at the back of the stage, enter three actors holding a palm tree: an actress in a black security guard uniform and a male-female couple (the woman with high heel shoes and a long blond wig), with their genitals covered only by a fig-leaf. The couple walks towards the front stage holding hands. Eve enters the kitchen, opens the fridge, and eats an apple looking towards the audience, bringing fully to mind the Christian symbol of the tree in Paradise. Recalling the expulsion from Paradise, Eve is driven out of the Festival's stage – not by God as narrated in *Genesis* – but by the naked Adam, who, after harassing her brutally, forces her into the car, which is parked in the back-right centre of the hall. In Kitsopoulou's universe, the fall of man is symbolically manifested in a scene of domestic violence.

This expression of deep pessimism about human nature does not, however, expand beyond the particular Greek context; on the contrary, it functions as the ultimate means of critique. If human nature is anyhow flawed, then Greek human nature is even worse. During the birth scene, the Kurd's reaction to Kroustallo's supremacist accusations culminates in a slogan-like utterance of the words "Socialista Kurdistan". A group of riot policemen chase him and beat him with their truncheon. In the meantime, the car enters and parks at the right side; Eve takes a paper bag and a crate with apples out of the car's boot and throws them on the floor. Standing at the podium, she begins the first verse of the *rebetiko* "We exchanged heavy

⁶⁰¹ The song is the relatively recent cover of the *rebetiko* song "Leave far away from me" ["Μακριά μου να φύγεις"]. *Rebetiko* is a form of song accompanied by bouzouki (a string musical instrument) that the refugees brought with them from Asia Minor. It was considered an "underground" genre of the outlaws in the poor neighbourhoods of Athens, Piraeus, and Thessaloniki during the interwar period. Usually the composer was also the performer (bouzouki player/singer). After the 1940s, *rebetiko* started deteriorating and became part of the mainstream music scene. Tsitsanis (1915–1984) was a famous composer and bouzouki player, who played an influential role in the reformulation of the genre.

⁶⁰² The spectators probably recognize that the actress playing Eva is the director herself, who usually makes a short cameo in her performances.

words” [“Λόγια ανταλλάξαμε βαριά”], a song about the hate between two former lovers.⁶⁰³ The naked actress (namely, the director) suddenly shoots herself with a gun, falling to the floor. The original version of the song begins to be heard by the loudspeakers, while Kroustallo calls her child a “black monster” and swears against the Turkish occupation and its cultural influence on modern Greece. In an act of mere destruction, Diakos, at the back of the stage, throws chairs, tables and bottles to the front, while the police enter and stand paratactically to his left and right. It should be noted that for many Greeks the riot police are identified with repressive force, due to their violent reactions during riots. Holding the rhythm with their truncheon, they also start singing, recalling a chorus. After the end of the song, they continue beating the rhythmic motive with their truncheon in the darkness, while the actor walks towards the kitchen. The image of the national hero framed by the riot police and the rhythmical accompanying of his pace towards “home” attribute new critical connotations to the scene regarding the interplay between repressive forces, national narratives and domestic, everyday life.

Towards the end of the performance, although he had previously appeared willing to help his wife give birth, Diakos violently tears away the plastic fabric covering the actress, spills a bowl with red coloured liquid (fake blood) all over her and throws to the floor a plastic doll inside a plastic bag, namely, the embryo in the amniotic sac. The artificiality of the plastic material and the indifferent acting style provokingly devalue not only the moment of birth but also human life itself. Without any sign of remorse, Diakos washes his hands in the washbasin, while Mohamed expresses his shock for his boss’ deed. Diakos’ contends that “whatever happens is for the good” allowing a rather ironic interpretation, as it harkens back to the comforting notion propagated by the media in particular during the crisis, maintaining that one should look to the positive outcome of the crisis and the potential it offers for reflection. Kitsopoulou does not criticise the political potential for transformation through the crisis but stigmatises the repetition of comforting clichés.

The naked Eve stands up, takes off her wig and approaches the car. She drives a few metres and casually calls the actors from the window. The latter also stand up slowly, slipping on the floor while holding on to each other. When they exit the kitchen setting, they regain their stability, allowing a possible interpretation of this domestic world as a root of human

⁶⁰³ As many of the spectators may already know, Lena Kitsopoulou, besides being director, playwright, and actress is also a *rebetiko* singer. In that sense, her onstage live performance of the song’s first verses, triggers the association between the figure of Eve (with the above discussed symbolic connotations within the context of the play) and the very contemporary context of production.

problems. The director/Eve recites the final lines of the play out of the car's window, accusing human nature, which gains sadistic satisfaction from witnessing the torments of another. Human beings, whether torturer or victim, are all the same, as, after all, they have the same "holes" in their bodies. Yet, Kitsopoulou – as it always happens in her plays – still defines a Greek context while attacking her audience (e.g. reference to Loutsia, a "petit bourgeois" sea-side resort near Athens or the popular music of *bouzoukia*). The car leaves the hall. An actor playing the crucified Jesus, who during the second part of the performance was standing on the back-left side, descends from the table he was standing on and approaches the toilet carrying his cross. Turning towards the spectators, he asks them if anyone can help him pee. In Kitsopoulou's universe, even the Son of God has to endure a weak – if not disgusting – nature.

Kitsopoulou's performance sarcastically deconstructed familiar national symbols and challenged widespread national stereotypes and narratives to disclose how their reproduction (even in their most "harmless" manifestations in everyday life) contributes to the perpetuation of hegemonic definitions of identity. The constant interplay between personal and national (hi)story under the shadow of a deep pessimism regarding the human existence provoked the spectators to reflect on their own stance not only on the laden national question but also on the ethical implications that such violent unsettling of all kinds of "certainties" may have beyond the conventions of the theatrical context.

Oscillating between different, ambiguous opinions Kitsopoulou's characters are caught up in a constant antagonistic debate. Each one expresses his/her own shifting worldview, which is, nevertheless, strongly determined by the particularities of the Greek society and reflects its deeper malaise. As analysed previously, the play is constructed mainly in dialogue form, while in the first extensive part of the performance only two characters are on stage. To a certain extent here duologue can be examined in Dan Rebellato's terms, namely as a way to scrutinise on stage "the dynamics of our mutuality". Duologues often achieve that "by seeming to make tangible that primal mutuality, playing with visibility and invisibility as if aiming either to make visible those unseen ethical bonds or else to underline their absence, daring us to feel what it would be like if there were no ethical connections between us at all".⁶⁰⁴ In the present case, the performance stresses the disturbing absence of "ethical bonds": the quest for an ethical response is demonstrated through the ostensible lack of such a claim.

⁶⁰⁴ Dan Rebellato, "Two: Duologues and the Differend," in *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*, ed. Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 82.

The character of Kroustallo demonstrates in an obvious way the ethical ambiguity that characterises Kitsopoulou's work, underscoring a reading beyond gender(ed) power relations. Kroustallo is indeed a victim of masculine dominance. She, however, becomes also the victimiser – even if not using physical violence – against someone else (be it Mohamed or her own unborn baby). Here Kitsopoulou goes a step further in her provocative challenge to (ethical) norms as demonstrated in the *Blood Wedding*, where she undermined the binaries that are implied by discourses of heteronormativity, to challenge, by extension, the concealed interrelation between gender and nation that accompanies oppressive definitions of identities. In *Diakos*, however, the ethical stakes, although residing firmly in the domestic realm, still expand beyond gender identities. It is this provocative realisation that a woman raped and murdered by her husband cannot be seen one-dimensionally only as a victim, which undermines most disturbingly the comforting need for clearly defined, absolute limitations.

The violent conflict between competing but not always completely opposite perspectives is never resolved. The spectators are not forced to choose sides. Instead, they are forcefully encouraged to draw their own conclusions out of an ambivalent synthesis of contingent assertions. From this point of view, violence and undecidability can be interpreted as inviting spectators to reconsider their individual stance and responsibility outside the “safe” walls of the theatre space. Following Martin Middeke, “ethics involves facing up to undecidables while making decisions and admitting to the difficulties and aporias involved in our responsibility for the Other”.⁶⁰⁵ Kitsopoulou questions an idealistic identification with the notion of humanity and the related imperative of an essentialist moral code. The challenging of identity as a category does not imply the dissolving of any (ethical) reference point; it stresses, however, the necessity of acknowledging the impossibility of universal ethics.

Echoing Zygmunt Bauman's “postmodern ethics”, *Athanasios Diakos* reminds the Greek audience “that a non-aporetic, non-ambivalent morality, an ethics that is universal and ‘objectively founded’, is a practical impossibility; perhaps also an *oxymoron*, a contradiction in terms”.⁶⁰⁶ Bauman still believes in the existence of morality: “Moral responsibility is the most personal and inalienable of human possessions, and the most precious of human rights. (...) It

⁶⁰⁵ Martin Middeke, “The Undecidable and the Event: Ethics of Unrest in Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* and Debbie Tucker Green's *Truth and Reconciliation*,” in *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*, ed. Aragay and Monforte, 111.

⁶⁰⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 10. See also Middeke, “The Undecidable and the Event,” 97.

is there before any reassurance or proof and after any excuse or absolution”.⁶⁰⁷ Here it is necessary to keep in mind the difference between ethics and moral, as also defined by Bauman:

Ethics – a moral code, wishing to be *the* moral code, the one and only set of mutually coherent precepts that ought to be obeyed by any moral person – views the plurality of human ways and ideals as a challenge, and the ambivalence of moral judgments as a morbid state of affairs yearning to be rectified.⁶⁰⁸

Read through the lens of “postmodern ethics” it could be suggested that Kitsopoulou’s spectators are triggered to reflect on their own individual stance and responsibility. It remains an open question whether this moment of violent, uncomfortable provocation presupposes (or at least calls for) the existence of a moral self in Bauman’s terms; whether it opens up “a prospect of the moral self facing up, without being tempted to escape, to the inherent and incurable ambivalence in which that responsibility casts it and which is already its fate, still waiting to be recast into its destiny”.⁶⁰⁹ Even though one may not accept the precedence of the moral self, the spectators are invited to reconsider the interrelation between power relations (with their fundamental role also in the survival of nation-states) and the demand for universal ethical codes. For, as Bauman clearly contends,

[t]he humankind-wide moral unity is thinkable, if at all, not as the end-product of globalizing the domain of political powers with ethical pretensions, but as the utopian horizon of deconstructing the “without us the deluge” claims of nation-states, nations-in-search-of-the-state, traditional communities and communities-in-search-of-a-tradition, tribes and neo-tribes, as well as their appointed and self-appointed spokesmen and prophets.⁶¹⁰

From this point of view, I suggest that the postmodern aesthetic strategies in Kitsopoulou’s theatre do not imply an “anything goes” attitude but, on the contrary, demonstrate the consequences of such an approach: how would a world be without any limitation, namely without any responsibility for the other? Most importantly, what is one’s own moral response

⁶⁰⁷ Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 250.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

in a state where all pre-existing, ethical limits considered self-evident as part of the functioning social system, lose their dominance? Against this backdrop and within the particular Greek context in 2012, the performance can be read as a necessary uncomfortable invitation to a challenging process of self-reflection. In a country going through a financial but also social and existential crisis, experiencing not only the rise of extremist right-wing voices but also the “casual” reproduction of an apparently “benign” patriotism, the audience was triggered to question not only dominant definitions of national identity but also the often concealed interrelation between these discourses and the conformist, uncritical safety of universal ethics.

3.2 The “temptation” of being “Greek”

In her 25-minute-long film *Acropolis* (2001), director Eva Stefani through the use of super 8mm films with old destroyed porn films and other archival material such as videos from official celebrations and historical footages, likens the “sacred” rock of Acropolis to the female body. The exploitation of the ancient monument and the way it has gained its exceptional place in the collective memory is related to the exploitation of the female body through the voyeuristic gaze. The director negotiates the way that national and female identity is constructed under the dominance of hegemonic discourses. As Stefani explains: “Opposed to a haughty, official History are juxtaposed the unofficial histories, which are based on the memories of the body and the senses”.⁶¹¹

In 2008, Stefani together with the young collective Nova Melancholia took this film as a point of departure for their site-specific performance *Black Acropolis* that took place at Krinides Mud Baths. Against the background of the film, three female performers embody Acropolis in different historical periods.⁶¹² The whiteness of the monument is ironically contradicted by the black mud of the bath site.⁶¹³ Through a complex synthesis of parallel levels (film at the background and female monologues in the mud) the performance commented on the ideological mechanism in the construction of history.

Three years later, in 2011, the group Nova Melancholia returned to a similar thematic. This time, using as starting point Flaubert’s *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, they related the

⁶¹¹ Foteini Bara, “Acropolis and female body: stories of exploitation” [Ακρόπολη και γυναικείο σώμα: ιστορίες εκμετάλλευσης,” *Eleftherotypia*, August 11, 2009, accessed March 6, 2021, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=71931>.

⁶¹² For more information and videos, see “Black Acropolis,” *Nova Melancholia*, accessed March 14, 2021, <http://www.novamelancholia.gr/en/productions/2-black-acropolis>.

⁶¹³ As Stefani suggests, the white colour being associated with notions such as “spirit, virginity, purity, harmony, oblivion” is opposed to the black as related to “body, trauma, chaos” (Bara, “Acropolis and female Body,” n.p.).

identity construction process to the notion of temptation. Their multi-layered performance manifested the melancholic impossibility of producing fixed meanings, hence automatically undermining the very concept of national identity and its construction upon “naturalised” symbols and narratives. Before, however, turning to the analysis of this performance at the National Theatre, I would first like to introduce briefly some of the exponents of this younger generation of Greek theatre-makers to whom Nova Melancholia also belongs and whose work has given an immense boost to the theatrical innovation in Greece at the crossroad between institutional and “fringe” stages.

3.2.1 New voices in Greek theatre: dealing with crises

In 2014, the Epidaurus Festival hosted Dimitris Karantzas’ production of *Helen* and Ektoras Lygizos’ staging of *Prometheus Bound*. Both directors were very young (Karantzas only twenty-six and Lygizos thirty-six at the time), a fact that was both positively and negatively discussed. Did age and long experience constitute prerequisites for the participation in the Epidaurus Festival? Like in the case of *Golfo*, these two productions were presented only for one evening: a cautious measure for a non-conventional choice in the Festival’s programme?

The inclusion of younger artists in the Festival’s programme has been one of Loukos’ most important choices from the beginning. Nevertheless, especially during the years of the crisis, this choice has been related to the Festival’s budget shortages. The precarious financial condition did not allow long-term planning and the invitation of foreign productions. This difficult situation was explained at the press conference, with the artistic director himself arguing in favour of his choice of younger artists.⁶¹⁴

Natascha Siouzouli and Eleftheria Ioannidou argue that the choices made at the face of these difficulties gave more space to younger artists to present their projects, which had a lower budget. They discussed the inclusion of young artists to the Festival’s programme “as a destabilizing new dynamic which challenges the existing institutional and cultural practices in a more radical way than the international collaborations of the preceding years”. Although these international “large scale productions departed from usual representations of the classics, they were still operating within a principle of artistic and cultural legitimacy”.⁶¹⁵ On the

⁶¹⁴ Yorgos Loukos, Athens and Epidaurus Festival: Press Conference 2012 at Benaki Museum, March 28, 2012, YouTube video, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIoUKwF7KUw>.

⁶¹⁵ Ioannidou and Siouzouli, “Crisis, Ruptures and the Rapture of an Imperceptible Aesthetics,” 115.

contrary, in the particular moment of crises, the performances of younger artists presented a greater subversive potential:

Whilst the cultural repercussions of the crisis entailed the resurgence of traditionalist views of the classical past, the performances under examination here seem to escape precisely traditionalist conditions of production and reception. In this precarious moment, the move away from the “sacred” text can be seen as an emergence of a performative aesthetics, which further allows us to utilize the notion of performance in order to contemplate the experience of the crisis, in a broader sense.⁶¹⁶

Indeed, financial reasons may have encouraged the inclusion of younger artists in the Festival’s programme, while their performances open up more radical ways of questioning and critique compared to the rather mainstream international (co-)productions of the Festival. Still, nevertheless, keeping in mind my previous analysis about the ideological “ghosts” that were haunting the Festival, I suggest approaching the opening to this younger generation of theatre-makers as part of a process of (no matter how inconsistent) re-orientation, which had started before the crisis. I hence argue that the invitation of international productions is an institutional gesture compatible with (if not a prerequisite of) the inclusion of new artistic voices to the programme of main institutional stages such as the Festival.

Already before the crisis, the theatre scene in Greece has been flourishing, with many different larger and smaller stages of different artistic directions shaping a diverse theatre landscape. As already noted, Ioannidis considers the role of this younger generation of artists as significant for the blooming of contemporary Greek theatre after 2004.⁶¹⁷ The financial crisis, although leading to cutting off the subsidies and closure of many important theatre companies did not stop vivid theatre life, especially in the city of Athens. Reporting in Germany about the theatre landscape in Greece during the crisis, Anestis Azas noted that “due to the fact that there are no public institutions in the country, here there was never a border between state theatres and off-scene as known in German-speaking countries. On the contrary, the scene is a complex mosaic of great diversity of forms”.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁶¹⁷ Ioannidis, “Le théâtre grec,” 76.

⁶¹⁸ Anestis Azas, “So lange das Theater noch steht: Zur Lage der kreativen Szene in Griechenland,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, February 5, 2014, accessed March 5, 2021, <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/griechenland/178471/zur-lage-der-kreativen-szene-in-griechenland>.

Expanding on this observation I would like to draw attention to the way that the National and Festival, representing institutional structures, linked themselves through these young theatrical “agents” to the off-scene and activist initiatives amid the crisis (e.g. the Embros Theatre); at first this seems incompatible with the policy of such state institutional organisation. While the development and mobilization of new artistic voices can be related to their institutionalisation, these artists remained part of a free theatre scene, hence revealing the mobility between smaller, alternative stages and main institutional ones. Interestingly enough, an interconnectedness between different theatre spaces in Greece but also abroad can be traced; no clear-cut borders in terms of organisational and institutional structures can be defined. To briefly illustrate this interesting trait of contemporary Greek theatre I will here refer to a few theatre-makers and groups that can be considered representative exponents of a younger generation that has been active on the Greek stages during the past years. My aim is neither to analyse their work in detail, nor to offer an exhaustive overview of the Greek theatre landscape but only to draw attention to this particular trait of Greek theatre life.

However, before mapping the field briefly, an interesting question about the definition of these “new” artists should be posed: who can be included in this category and according to which criteria? Similar to the problem of periodisation and definition of particular trends, here it is not clear whether the criterion is only age or if these artists should represent something innovative in aesthetic terms. Here, when speaking of “new” voices I mean these artists who in the mid- to late 2000s introduced themselves for the first time to the Greek audience and whose work, within the context examined, was aligned with wider innovation in terms of form and dramaturgy (e.g. Kitsopoulou’s dramaturgy or the documentary theatre of the duo Azas – Tsinikoris, which will be analysed later).

In 2009, the National Theatre of Greece presented a rather unconventional performance of *Faust*, divided into five parts, each of which was directed by five different directors (Yorgos Gallos, Vasilis Mavrogeorgiou, Argyro Chioti, Argyris Xafis, and the collective Blitz). The directors, who also participated as actors, collaborated and worked with the same group of actors, each offering though his/her/their reading of Goethe’s text and following also their artistic style. This project is suggestive of the National’s opening and support to younger theatre-makers and new scenic interpretations of classic text.⁶¹⁹ Two years later the National invited four young theatre groups to participate in the initiative “Take-off Runaway: National

⁶¹⁹ The performance was presented at the National Theatre (Ziller Building, Nikos Kourkoulos Stage) from February 25 until May 17, 2009.

Theatre supports young theatre collectives”. For four weeks, every Friday, another group presented their new project in the form of a work in progress. Part of this series of performances was Nova Melancholia’s *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* analysed in the next section. Besides Nova Melancholia, their projects also presented Euripides Laskarides (and his group Osmosis), the group Mkultra under the direction of Gigi Argyropoulou and the group ASIPKA.⁶²⁰ These two initiatives (co-directed *Faust* and “Take Off Runaway” project) are telling of the inclusion in the National’s programme of some of the most interesting representatives of the younger theatre-makers, who have been active in both Greece and abroad ever since. As the indicative names mentioned above reveal, it should be observed that their presence at the National Theatre as well as the Festival during the same years confirms the peculiar intermingling in Greek theatre landscape between “alternative” theatre spaces and institutional stages.

Blitz is a theatre collective of three artists (Angeliki Papoulia, Giorgos Valais and Christos Passalis) formed in 2004. The group has been considered “emblematic of the ‘devised turn’ in the Greek independent theatre scene”.⁶²¹ Their group is founded upon the principle that “[a]ll members are equal throughout conception, writing, direction and dramaturgy process, everything is under doubt, there is nothing to be taken for granted, neither in theatre nor in life”.⁶²² Their performances combine different artistic, hybrid forms and techniques and diverse sources and materials: different kinds of texts (philosophical, novels, encyclopaedias), songs, lines from films and their own texts in order to create a “hyper-text”. Utilising “different strategies in order to abolish the contradiction between life in art and art in life”, they are exploring the possible ways that could “turn this world – that is changing continuously, leaving the humans perplexed – into a spectacle”.⁶²³ Blitz’s dramaturgy challenges any conventional notion of linear (narrative) time.⁶²⁴ Their first productions *motherland* (2006), *New Order* (2007) and *Joy Division* (2009) had been presented at Bios, an independent, multi-functional

⁶²⁰ “Διάδρομος απογείωσης: Το Εθνικό Θέατρο κοντά στις νέες ομάδες” [Take-off Runaway: National Theatre supports young theatre collectives], National Theatre, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.n-t.gr/el/news/?nid=845>.

⁶²¹ Katia Arfara, “Reframing the Real: The Blitz Theatre Group and the Awareness of Time,” *Gamma* 22, no. 2 (2014):147.

⁶²² Blitz (website), accessed March 5, 2021, <http://www.theblitz.gr/en>.

⁶²³ “Blitz Theatre Group”, in “Catalogue,” Blitz, accessed March 5, 2021, http://theblitz.gr/data/files/blitz_2011_web.pdf.

⁶²⁴ According to Arfara, the Blitz, “are making time out of displaced narratives, latent images, fictional memories, gestures, or pure physical presence – this is a theatre that *almost* touches upon real life” (148; emphasis in original). Their performances, questioning the limits “between the real and the fictional, the personal and the public, the familiar and the uncanny,” invite the spectators to reflect on their own position as spectators of/in the particular theatrical condition but also as individuals co-belonging isolated in an urban space (Arfara, “Reframing the Real,” 160).

theatre space in the centre of Athens.⁶²⁵ In 2009, they had a double presence at the National: they participated in the co-direction of the above-mentioned *Faust* and presented their performance *Guns! Guns! Guns!* The same summer they participated at the Athens Festival with their performance *Katerini*, which took place at the terrace of Bios; a year later they presented at Bios *Cinemascope* as part of the Festival.

Like Blitz, the collective Vasistas also presented their first project *get over it* at Bios in 2006. Co-founder of the group is the director Argyro Chioti, who had also co-directed the National's production of *Faust*.⁶²⁶ In 2010 the group presented their *Phobia*; a year later they participated in the Athens Festival with their performance *Spectacle*, which was also repeated a few months later at Bios. The group, which has been active in Greece and France, is interested in exploring dramaturgies that challenge linear (textual) narratives: "We compose our original polyphonic songs, we use our mother tongues and personal experiences, orchestrating 'moving images' in detail, creating a rhythm for our story, like a choreography in present time".⁶²⁷

In 2011, the National's project "Take Off" also hosted the "sound creation" *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, one of the first projects of the director and performer Euripides Laskarides and his group Osmosis, founded in 2009. Repeating a free adaptation of a provocative one-minute-long dialogue from Woody Allen's film *Deconstructing Harry*, the group focused on the interplay between signifier and signified, inviting the spectator to consider the complexity of communication in modern times and reflect on what the polyphony of endless possibilities that seemingly dominate everyday life actually means.⁶²⁸ A year later they presented their performance *Osmosis* at the Athens Festival and in 2015 the performance *Relic*, which was then repeated at Bios in autumn before travelling to London (Barbican).

In 2011, Laskaridis was one of the artists that supported the occupational reactivation of the theatre Embros in the city centre, participating with a performance. The latter was an initiative of the Mavili Collective, which was founded spontaneously in summer 2010 from the theatre-makers Anestis Azas, Gigi Argyropoulou (group Mkultra), Kostas Koutsolelos, Georgia Mavragani, Vassilis Noulas, and Manolis Tsipos (the last two are co-founders of Nova

⁶²⁵For more information, see "About us", Bios, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://bios.gr/new-version/section.php?p=4>.

⁶²⁶Besides Chioti, the group consists of: Ariane Labeled and Naima Carbajal (also co-founders of the group), Efthimis Theou, Eleni Vergeti, Antonis Antonopoulos, Georgina Chriskioti, and Evdoxia Androulidaki.

⁶²⁷Vasistas, "Towards the research of a non identified scenic form," *Mediamatic*, accessed March 22, 2021, <https://www.mediamatic.net/en/page/34032/vasistas>. On the work of Vasistas, see also Katia Arfara, "Repenser le chœur dans la scène grecque contemporaine: A propos de la compagnie Vasistas," *Théâtre/ Public*, 222 (2016): 87–91.

⁶²⁸"This is not a pipe," Euripides Laskaridis (website), accessed March 14, 2021, <https://euripides.info/this-is-not-a-pipe>.

Melancholia). The initiative was later joined by the director Argyro Chioti (co-founder of the above-mentioned Vasistas) and the set designer Giorgos Kolios. Mavili Collective is

an autonomous collective structure for emergent practitioners and came together in order to re-think and re-imagine the current Greek cultural landscape and propose structures, platforms collaborations, projects that produce new alternatives. Mavili Collective is committed to produce nomadic, autonomous collective cultural zones that appear and disappear beyond the logics of the market.⁶²⁹

Initially the collective addressed an open letter to the minister of culture, inviting him to start a dialogue regarding the issue of the subsidies, especially of the experimental theatre.⁶³⁰ In November 2011, Mavili Collective occupied the theatre Embros in the centre of Athens, which has been disused for years. They launched a twelve-days reactivation programme that included performances by emerging artists, discussions and workshops. The aim was to initiate a creative dialogue and to propose a new model of artistic production. As they stated in their manifesto:

We aim to re-activate and re-occupy this space temporarily with our own means and propose an alternative model of collective management and (new) post-contemporary forms of creative work. (...) We act in response to the total lack of a basic cultural policy on the level of education, production and support of artistic work as a national product.⁶³¹

In the activities of these twelve days many emerging (but not exclusively) artists participated in different formats of presentation and performance. To name but a few: the afternoon series “Starting Principles” where artists such as Dimitris Karantzas, the group Blitz, the group Vasistas and Yannis Leontaris with his group Kanikounda presented their own creative process and methodology; the series “Own Goals”, which included half-an-hour long performances by directors/performers like Evripidis Laskaridis or Akillas Karazissis; “open classes” with

⁶²⁹ “re-activate,” Mavili Collective (website), accessed March 5, 2021, <https://mavilicollective.wordpress.com/re-activate/>.

⁶³⁰ The open letter addressed to the minister of culture, written by the Mavili Collective and followed by almost four hundred signatures of support, can be found online («Ανοιχτή Επιστολή» [Open Letter], Mavili Collective [Web], accessed March 5, 2021, <http://anoixtiepistoli.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>).

⁶³¹ “re-activate,” Mavili Collective (website), n.p.

lectures by academics like George Sampatakakis or Eva Stefani.⁶³² The different sessions were telling of the variety of the issues addressed in regard to the material conditions of theatre making during the crisis, different aesthetic quests, strategies utilised and methodological approaches. In March 2012, this first activation project was followed by a second ten-day programme. Again ten-day activities included different forms of intervention and formats of dialogue and creative exchange. It is interesting to note the invitation to the artistic director of the National Theatre, Yannis Houvardas, who discussed together with his former collaborators about his theatre *Amore* (closed down in the meantime).⁶³³ This discussion was part of the series “operational strategies”, addressing questions related to “self-organization, autonomy and precarious structures”.⁶³⁴ The quest for new models of organization, democratised models of theatre making, independent of the rules of market was an optimistic sign of dialogue between theatre-makers and society, both of whom were confronted with precarious working and living conditions.

The entanglement of new aesthetic strategies and modes of performance as well as the search for new models of self-organisation can in no case be separated from the context of the crisis with its political implications and transformative potentiality. Through their individual approaches these artists attempted to deal with crises; not only the financial crisis but also the crisis of identity and the crisis of representation. The latter gained a double meaning as a – no matter how distorted – depiction of reality and as participation in the cultural field. At the same time, however, as this brief overview is intended to illustrate, many of the directors, playwrights, and groups that played a significant role after 2010, had appeared (just) before the crisis. The few indicative names of artists and groups mentioned here with their respective working methodologies and aesthetic imperatives have also probably illustrated the prevailing flexibility and mobility observed in the theatre landscape in terms of space and financing. From *Bios* to the Athens Festival and the National Theatre and from participating in the squatting of Embros Theatre to taking part at Festivals abroad with productions of the Hellenic Festival, the traces of artistic activity are not linear and easy to categorise but are telling of the Greek theatre reality, in respect of which one should examine particular trends, shifts and ruptures.

⁶³² “Programme Categories,” Mavili Collective (website), accessed March 5, 2021, <https://mavilicollective.wordpress.com/re-activate/programme-categories/>.

⁶³³ “Programme (8–18 March),” Mavili Collective (website), accessed March 5, 2021, <https://mavilicollective.wordpress.com/programme-8-18-march/>.

⁶³⁴ “categories of activities,” Mavili Collective (website), accessed March 5, 2021, <https://mavilicollective.wordpress.com/categories-of-activities/>.

3.2.2 Performing de-hierarchisation: Nova Melancholia's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*

In his "Introduction" to Gustave Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, Michel Foucault suggested that this short novel "is like a discourse whose function is to maintain not a single and exclusive meaning (by excising all the others), but the simultaneous existence of multiple meanings".⁶³⁵ Flaubert wrote the *Temptation* in 1849; he rewrote it for the third time in 1872. In his novel, Flaubert, who was inspired by the story of Anthony in the desert of Egypt, narrates the hallucinating temptations of the saint, which challenge his faith and arouse his carnal instincts. The sequence of scenes of the hallucinating encounters is linked loosely, undermining causality. In Foucault words, "[d]eveloped from one figure to another, a wreath is constructed that links the characters in a series of knots independent of their proper intermediaries, so that their identities are gradually merged and their different perceptions blended into a single dazzling sight".⁶³⁶

In Nova Melancholia's *The Temptation of St. Anthony: A Performance for the Nation* presented at the National Theatre in Athens on January 21, 2011, the lack of causality in the blended hallucination images observed in Flaubert's novel is now traceable at the level of the performance aesthetics. Following Hans-Thies Lehmann,

[t]he de-hierarchization of theatrical means is a universal principle of postdramatic theatre. This non-hierarchical structure blatantly contradicts tradition, which has preferred a hypotactical way of connection that governs the super- and subordination of elements, in order to avoid confusion and to produce harmony and comprehensibility. In the *parataxis* of postdramatic theatre the elements are not linked in unambiguous ways.⁶³⁷

In Nova Melancholia's performance, which aligns with this fundamental principle of postdramatic theatre, the spectators are not able to follow logical sequences and a dramatic plot; instead, they are confronted with complex parataxis of non-hierarchically and ambiguously related actions and references on stage, which make comprehension difficult.

Like Saint Anthony's hallucinations, the temptation of modern Greeks is their own past, the "tradition" and national identity as shaped under the haunting influence of (the perceived

⁶³⁵ Michael Foucault, "Introduction" to *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, by Gustav Flaubert, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001 (xxxiv)).

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

⁶³⁷ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 86.

as “glorious”) antiquity and as reproduced, facilitated by symbols and narratives. The collective described the performance as

[a] work in progress for the sacred of today, for the darkness that surrounds us and for the deification of the Greek people of today.

What is considered as sacred in Greece, today? Is there a possibility to re-use it? Is there space for resistance? And resistance against what? What is left to us out of the “ancient greek” heritage? Is it possible that this love for the antiquity is one of the most basic temptations of contemporary Greece? Do we still remember that the national anthem is, before anything else, a hymn to freedom? What is the mechanism that transforms a revolutionary song into a sacred symbol, hence making it impervious, it distances it and imprisons [sic] its always up-to-date message?

Why do we build a fence at Evros? ⁶³⁸

The projects of Nova Melancholia, who have been active since 2007, can be located on the crossroad between theatre and visual arts performance.⁶³⁹ Particularly interesting is the choice of the group’s name, which as they explain, points to their intention to go against the unreflective hyperactivity of a results-oriented modern way of life:

Contrary to the anguish of the result, of this social psychosis called ‘efficient man’, we claim the right to melancholy. It’s melancholy that’s seen – not like a state of depressive sleep in an inactive Me – but like a visionary state of dynamic reflection. Melancholy creates for us the needed interval in relation to reality, a first precious detachment in order to better respond: melancholy is the springboard for the resurgence of artistic creation. ⁶⁴⁰

Nova Melancholia’s performances can be approached as multi-layered syntheses, without any linear narrative. The simultaneous (at first sight irrelevant to each other) stage

⁶³⁸ “The Temptation of Saint Anthony: A Performance for the Nation” Nova Melancholia, accessed March 14, 2021, <http://www.novamelancholia.gr/en/productions/8-the-temptation-of-saint-anthony-a-performance-for-the-nation>.

⁶³⁹ The group was founded in Athens by Vassilis Noulas, Manolis Tsipos, Vicky Kyriakoulakou and Emi Kitsali. On the oeuvre of Nova Melancholia, see also George Sampatakakis, “*Déconstruire la normalité*. Esthétiques post-traditionnelles en Grèce,” *Théâtre/ Public*, 222, 2016, 80–85.

⁶⁴⁰ Nova Melancholia, “Focus: Sept réponses prêtes pour Nova Melancholia / Nova Melancholia’s seven ready answers,” interview by Grigoris Ioannidis, *UBU Scènes d’ Europe / European stages* 48/49, (2010; 2nd semester), 93.

actions create a “multi-perspective landscape”.⁶⁴¹ Diverse literary and theoretical/philosophical texts have a central function in their performances: Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Derrida’s *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal*, Giorgos Ioannou’s short stories or Rosa Luxemburg’s *Letters from prison to Sonia Liebknecht* just to name a few. The group, however, do not adapt these texts in order to explain them through theatrical means. Instead, one can follow Natascha Siouzouli’s approach, who

understand[s] the performances as strategies of alienation [*Verfremdung*] or, rather disaffection [*Entfremdung*] from the texts and modes of perception. The productions present themselves as spaces of collision between a very specific text which wants to be understood as such – namely as theoretical-philosophical text that expresses certain theses and negotiates specific topics – and scenic actions which resist this understanding or make it impossible.⁶⁴²

Through postdramatic strategies, the performative event turns itself into a site of ambivalence and precarity, where no fixed meaning can be generated and by extension, no stable identity can be shaped. Therein I trace the critical potential of the performance in regard to the problematic of national identity. The spectators are triggered to question their attachments to concepts and stories of symbolic dimension. The affirmation of construction of stable identities turns into an experience of a melancholic state of fragmentation, uncertainty, and incomprehensibility. The deconstructive mode will hence be related to the postdramatic manifestation of de-hierarchisation, simultaneity and incompleteness.

The simultaneity of actions, texts, sounds and movements together with the lack of a dramatic centre which, functioning like a thread throughout the performance, could facilitate understanding, challenging the spectators’ comprehension. According to Lehmann, in postdramatic theatre “the *parcelling of perception* here becomes an unavoidable experience”. The audience cannot be sure “whether there exists any real *connection* in what is being presented simultaneously or whether this is just an external *contemporaneity*”. Lehmann observes here “[a] systematic double bind”: the spectators have to concentrate on the “concrete

⁶⁴¹ “Team,” Nova Melancholia (website), accessed March 14, 2021, <http://www.novamelancholia.gr/en/team>.

⁶⁴² Natascha Siouzouli, “Theorie und Theater: Eine melancholische Beziehung. Am Beispiel von Performances der Gruppe Nova Melancholia,” in *Theorie und Theater. Zum Verhältnis von wissenschaftlichem Diskurs und theatraler Praxis*, ed. Astrid Hackel and Mascha Vollhardt (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2014), 141.

particular” while grasping “the totality”.⁶⁴³ This state makes full comprehension impossible: “[w]hile mimesis in Aristotle’s sense produces the pleasure of recognition and thus virtually always achieves a result, here the sense data always refer to answers that are sensed as possible but not (yet) graspable; what one sees and hears remains in a state of potentiality, its appropriation postponed”.⁶⁴⁴

Here I suggest relating the deconstructive approach to national identity and the mechanism of the latter’s reproduction to the postdramatic aesthetics of the performance. De-hierarchisation and incompleteness undermines and destabilises the very fundament of any identification process; no stable identity may be shaped without fixed signification. However, the critical potential of the performance regarding the national thematic should be searched in this “double bind” that triggers a simultaneous perception of the particular and the whole. The spectators very likely will recognise the (musical, textual, or visual) references and symbols as familiar and nationally connotated, while, at the same time, the onstage synthesis will constantly manifest the de-familiarising impossibility of understanding. Through this process of de-signification, these references lose their national connotation in the course of the performance.

The performance took place on January 11, 2011 and was part of a National Theatre’s special project with the title “Take-off Runaway” (Διάδρομος Απογείωσης). Young directors and theatre groups were invited to present their work in the event hall (with two characteristic chandeliers on the ceiling) at the National’s neo-classicist Tsiller building.⁶⁴⁵ The performances started at 18:00 (not a usual time in Greek theatres) and the ticket costed only five euros. The choice of the venue (not one of the main stages of the theatre) was also related to the early starting time and the price of the rather experimental form of the performances presented could frame the “Take-off Runaway” project as being at the margin of the main theatre programme. At the same time, though, it could be considered as an attempt to introduce new artistic voices, diverse dramaturgies and modes of performance.

On the right side of an upheaved small stage platform placed on the one side of the hall, stands a black grand piano with an open top. Across the hall (from the side of the audience towards the stage) hangs garlands with small paper Greek flags, recalling the decoration at the

⁶⁴³ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 88 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶⁴⁵ Besides Nova Melancholia’s performance, the programme included the performances *Στόες* [Arcades] – Group: ASPIKA, *Αυτό δεν είναι μια Πίπα* [This is not a pipe] – Group: Osmosis; *Εορτασμοί σε πρώτο ενικό* [Celebrations in the first person singular] – Group: Mkultra. See “Διάδρομος απογείωσης” [Take-off Runaway], National Theatre, n.p.

schools during the National Days celebrations. During the audience's entrance and pre-curtain, anti-cell phones announcement, four performers stand and walk around on the half-lighted stage: a male performer dressed with a long monk's hooded robe; two female performers (one wearing a white dress recalling a cloak and a strip with Greek flags and one in athletic outfit holding a helmet) and a man wearing a blond wig. Another female performer in a white shirt approaches them in front of the stage platform on the level of the audience and briefly talks with them. From the very beginning, it is not only the borderline between stage and auditorium but also between performance and reality that is undermined. All performers exit leaving the stage empty for a moment. The one chandelier will remain slightly lit throughout the performance, reminding viewers of the specificity of the space, that is to say the neo-classicist architecture of the building associated with the "haunting" past of the National Theatre.

During the performance, text is going to be projected on both the left and the right side of the back wall of the stage. Already upon the opening, on the left side the title of Flaubert's book *THE TEMPTATION OF SAINT ANTHONY* stands in capital letters. The size of the letters is so large that the projection covers the whole back wall to the floor. On the right side stands the surtitle of the performance title *A PERFORMANCE FOR THE NATION* in smaller but all caps font. The spectator will soon figure out that on the left side are projected extracts from Flaubert's text, while on the right side the supertitles frame the onstage action and relate it to the question of national identity, already announced by the production's title. The supertitles and text projections have a defamiliarising effect. The very long extent of the projected text (that is to say not only some lines or quotes but a continuous projection of a non-dramatic text) provide a constant reminder of an independent "closed" narrative, which will be disrupted by the apparently random sequence of non-representational, primarily physical acts of the performers. At the same time, though, the projected texts function as a further disruptive aspect that the spectators have to consider in their attempt to grasp the onstage synthesis.

The difference in the font size and length of the text between the left and right projection establishes a critical distinction between them, which triggers a critical interplay. The projection of the Flaubertian text vis-à-vis the nation(-state)-relevant concepts underscores an implied connection between the national identity question and the idea of "temptation". Here temptation associated with the nation and the discourses on identity should be seen as a call for a self-reflective response. Temptation requires a reaction to a call: either one gives in or resists. The spectators are provoked to consciously decide about their tempting attachment to the nation and the (emotionally) comforting reassurance that homogeneous definitions and uninterrupted narratives may offer as opposed to the uncertainty of ruptures and multiplicity.

The link between temptation and nation thematic is underscored through the onstage presence of an actor during the whole performance, likely to be associated with the hermit figure. Following this prolonged opening, on the right side appears the title “TASSOS PLAYS MUSIC”.⁶⁴⁶ A pianist produces high-pitched sounds on the strings inside the open piano. The female performer with helmet again enters the semi-darkened stage from a door on the back of the stage, takes off the helmet and for a prolonged moment starts executing stretching exercises, before she lies on the floor. On the right side are now projected longer textual passages from the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, written in lower-case: “It is in the Thebaïd, at the summit of a mountain, upon a platform, rounded off into the form of a demilune, and enclosed by huge stones.”⁶⁴⁷ The passage projected at the right announces the entrance of the Saint (“THE SAINT HAS ARRIVED!”), whereas on the left stand the first paragraphs of Flaubert’s text describing the hermit’s cell and the background landscape. For a long moment only the piano sounds can be heard. The performer in the hermit’s robe enters the stage during the projection of Flaubert’s first description of “Saint Anthony, who has a long beard, long hair, and wears a tunic of goatskin...”.⁶⁴⁸ He climbs up on a chair and stands with his back to the audience while the Flaubertian text is further projected. He will stand still on the chair until the end of the performance, functioning as a visual/physical allusion to the ambivalent link between Flaubert’s text and its association with the notion of temptation and the stage action. Yet, his back position and the lack of his face’s visibility do not allow a direct identification between the actor and an assumed “role”.

The postdramatic aesthetics of the performance underscore parataxis and non-homogeneity. Against this backdrop, the interplay between simultaneous projections of the Flaubertian text and the titles on the right side not only emphasises the connection between the notion of temptation and national attachment. It critically challenges singularity, linearity and fixity as related to the construction and reproduction process of national identity. Through the incomprehensibility of the stage action these traits and the (often banal, unnoticed) process of functionalisation of symbols, narratives and stereotypes by different agents in society (e.g. state or media) are in turn called into question. The titles on the right function not as mere comments to the Flaubertian text but insert a third layer in addition to and in interaction with the other

⁶⁴⁶ The words on the right side are written in uppercase letters, without quotation marks unless otherwise indicated.

⁶⁴⁷ Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, trans. Lafcadio Hearn (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 9. In the present analysis of the performance I will quote the English translation of the extracts projected in Greek on the left side of the wall following Lafcadio Hearn’s above-mentioned translation. The quotes follow the punctuation of the published text.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

two (stage action and projected Flaubertian text) that trigger the spectator to relate the whole scenic synthesis that s/he uncertainly witnesses and cannot interpret to the national question and the notion of temptation.

For instance, Flaubert's projected text ("It is the Devil, leaning upon the roof of the hut, and bearing beneath his two wings – like some gigantic bat suckling its little ones – the Seven Deadly Sins, whose grinning heads are dimly distinguishable"⁶⁴⁹) contradicts the lines on the right side, which ironically point to a regular functioning society: "THE CITIZEN HAS FREE WILL; THE SOCIAL FABRIC IS IMMUTABLE". Given that the association to the nation have already been implied by the surtitle of the performance (also projected on the right side), here the notion of society and nation intermingle and address the question of troubling identification of these two notions: society with its acting agents at all levels becomes the site of the perpetuation of national (mis)conceptions.

In a later moment, while on the left "Anthony meets all his enemies one after another" is projected and on the right stands: "THE TRADITION", a performer with a Spartan helmet embellished with horsehair crest over the yellow wig and a fake long black beard stands on the piano stool. On his neck hangs a necklace with small bells, reminiscent of cattle bells. With his feet, hands and even his head the keys of the piano are hit violently. Together with the sounds produced by the pianist in strings inside the grand piano, they produce a dissonant, thunderous effect. The words that are further projected on the right can be understood as the "enemies", like the ones that the hermit encounters: "THE RELIGION; THE STATE; THE NATION". Interestingly these enemies are not only notions that immediately can be related to the national question. "THE TELEVISION; THE NEWS AT 8 PM" seem at first sight irrelevant to the question of identity. Yet, as in the case of Kitsopoulou, here the mechanisms of reproducing the dominant national(ist) discourses are searched for in their banal forms of manifestation across different aspects of the everyday and social life. Television and media function as subtle allusions to the conformist illusion of a well-functioning society.

Like in Kitsopoulou's performance, the nation is here also associated with the structure of the family as a cornerstone for the perpetuation of national(ist) (mis)conceptions. Under the sequence of projected words "FAMILY: / FATHER / MOTHER", a performer dressed as liberty enters the stage through the corridor between the spectators.⁶⁵⁰ She wears a white

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁵⁰ The performer had already entered the stage once, wearing this white dress and the head of a chimpanzee. Her appearance recalls the personification of Greece as depicted in different paintings of the nineteenth century, as a woman wearing a long white chiton. The most characteristic example of such a painting is, for example, Theodoros Vryzakis' *Greece Expressing Gratitude* (1858).

garment while her head is covered with the mask of a chimpanzee. She breathes out loudly as if she is in pain, falls in front of the hermit's chair, screams and shakes her upheaved legs; her body position recalls that being in labour. While she screams in an operatic way, the performer with the warrior's head imitates the gestures of a surgeon, drugging serpentines with flags out of her belly. The vocalisms, together with the disharmonious piano sounds and the performers' nervous movements create a moment of distorting tension. The performer's possible association with the female personification of liberty together with her labour movements may function as a reminder of the foundational idea of the "birth" of the nation(-states). Simultaneously, the further projection on the right of the words "CHILD/ FAMILY/ PLACE OF ORIGIN/ ANCESTORS/ GRANDPARENTS / RELATIVES/ THIS IS VASILIS' DANCE" evoke a connection between nation and/as family. This link is further underscored by notions like «συγγενείς» [relatives] which inside the particular context remind us of the rather suffocating connotations that have often been attributed to the Greek family.

The exposure of a linear understanding of the ancient and recent past also intermingles ironically with the hegemonic quest to fill in the gaps of history and conceal the constructed nature of histories and identities against the actual background of the crisis. Indicative is one of the very few moments of verbal recitation. A female performer executes repetitive swimming movements next to the chair. Simultaneously, the performer with the helmet holds a microphone in front of the "hermit", who stands on the chair. The latter, with his back to the audience, recites a poem; the title "OF MARKOS BOTSARIS" is projected on the right side. The spectator may probably recognise that these are the lyrics of a well-known folk song about the mourning of Markos Botsaris, one of the well-known generals in the War of Independence, killed in 1823 in a battle in Karpenisi. Like Athanasios Diakos, Botsaris has been commemorated as a fearless national hero. Simultaneously, Flaubert's text depicting a feast table whose sight tempts Anthony is projected. While the spectators cannot focus on the text, still the description of the foods projected in large print, ironically contradicts the lyrics of the song about the hero's burial in Messolonghi. The co-existent, parallel levels make any affective response to the familiar verses of the poem impossible, undermining its symbolic value through its contradiction with carnal needs. The "faceless" performer/hermit is the one who recites the poem into the microphone in a monotonous, indifferent voice. The one with the Spartan helmet moves intensively and jumps behind him. He stands on the piano stool, next to the small Parthenon miniature and turns on a light inside it: the miniature lights up. The Spartan helmet (ironicised through the wig and the pants of the performer) signifies the ancient past; the latter

intermingles with the recent history of the national hero Botsaris and the miniature copy of the Parthenon.

The performance took place in 2011, during the first, shocking period of the crisis. The link between national myths and the current state of the country implies an understanding of the crisis as also partially the outcome of the reproduction of ideologically laden national narratives (e.g. narratives of a glorious ancient past) and not vice versa. While the text describes Anthony's encounter with his past, the – in the meantime – lit up miniature of the Parthenon is placed on the piano stool. The right surtitle is a direct reference to the discourses of crisis: "THE SECRET PLEASURE THAT WE HAVE NOT REACHED THE BOTTOM". The irony is evident: the fake miniature Parthenon functions as a reminder of the still traceable belief regarding the country's past glory. The projected violent description of Anthony's cruel deeds against his enemies ("before killing them he outrages them. He disembowels – he severs throats – he fells as in a slaughter house – he bales old men by the heard, crushes children, smites the wounded"⁶⁵¹) inevitably affects this established association with nation and its forms of reproduction. At the same time, the dissonant sound and the violent fall of the performer with the helmet on the piano keyboard have the effect of estrangement, disrupting such an interpretative process while evoking the feeling of a latent threat in association to the topic in question. This moment of violent culmination on stage is followed by an unexpected de-escalation: the female performer, who was lying on the feet of the hermit's chair, stands up, takes off her athletic coat and restarts her warming up, dancing movements in silence. The rather uneasy feeling of threat now gives way to the distancing demonstration of a comforting return to a soothing repetition. The de-escalation at the level of physical movement seems to reflect the naturalisation process necessary for the survival of the nation-construction.

The violent narrative of Anthony's encounter with his enemies proceeds while on the right the title "THE DANCE OF ZALONGO" is projected. Through the loudspeaker a female voice singing the well-known same title song is heard. The latter may be likely considered known to most of the spectators since it also belonged to the songs heard in the school celebrations of National Days. The voice sounds as if mediated through a microphone; nevertheless, the spectators cannot see the singer on stage. Under the sound of the song, the female performer executes rather smooth, slow contemporary dancing movements. According to the legend, in 1803 the women of Souli together with their children committed collective suicide as an act of resistance against the troops of the Albanian-Muslim Ali Pascha by

⁶⁵¹ Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, 30.

throwing themselves from a cliff singing and dancing a traditional dance in line. The legend rests on historical facts, but was exaggeratedly narrated, to a great extent also through philhellenic European eyes; the invented image of dancing women strengthened the romantic perception of the Greeks as fearless.⁶⁵² The Dance of Zalongo, as depicted through this folk song, is one of the national narratives that have been reproduced in the collective imagination. The line between national legend and historic event is blurred. The dancer lies on the stool, placing the lighted miniature of the Acropolis on her belly. Antiquity is loosely connected to the Ottoman past in an ironic way that through the performed fragmentation and multiplicity of the onstage signs undermines conceptions of a linear connection between ancient and more recent past. The small size of the miniature functions in a reverse way as an ironic reminder of the symbolic weight and size accorded to the Acropolis as a national symbol.

Similar is the critical effect of later complex sequence later, which exposes the intermingling of different historical references, symbols and concepts that can be considered preconditions of the nation-states (e.g. borders). Flaubert's text about Anthony's encounter with the Queen of Sabbath is projected in large font, covering the whole left side of the wall. The performer/hermit stands still under the dissonant sound produced on the strings of the piano. A performer on the level of the audience, begins to stretch cellophane tape from one lower side of the stage to the other. The projected title "THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FENCE" explains this action. Two performers (one dressed as "Liberty" now also wearing an animal head and the performer with the ancient Greek warrior helmet and the bells) stick A4 papers with printed ancient Greek (or at least ancient-like) words on the cellophane tapes that the other performer continues to stretch. The construction of the wall is accompanied by the recitation of "THOURIOS" (as indicated on the supertitle) by the female performer in the athletic outfit and motorcycle helmet. "Thourios" was a revolutionary hymn, written in 1796 by Rigas Feraios, one of the proto-revolutionaries of the Greek Independence whose ideas were highly influenced by the French Revolution. This hymn was a call to Greeks to take action against the Ottoman Occupation. The first verses of the poem especially should be easily recognised by the Greek audience as it has been taught in schools.

⁶⁵² The invented aspects in the narrative of this event have been researched, thanks also to the contribution of Alexis Politis, "The 'Dance of Zalongo': Information Emitters, Transmitters, Receivers" [Ο 'χορός του Ζαλόγγου': Πληροφοριακοί πομποί, πομποί αναμετάδοσης, δέκτες πρόσληψης], *Ο Πολίτης*, 139 (December 2005): 35–43. An interesting point also underlined by Politis is that at that time the inhabitants of Souli were Arvanites and were not fully integrated into the "national group of the Greeks" (42). They were Arvanites, namely they belonged to the group population that was speaking Arvanitika, an Albanian-Greek dialect.

The supertitles, which had preceded, had already set an additional frame of interpretation, which is immediately undermined by the physical movement on stage and the irritating sounds: “IOANNA SAYS: / ACROPOLIS / CHURCH / DEMOCRACY/ CONSTITUTION / ANCIENT CIVILIZATION / MONEY / GREEKNESS / THIS IS IOANNA’S DANCE”. The slow but intense body movements of the performer, the sound of the bells on the warrior helmet, the construction of the fence, the projected Flaubertian text together with the indirect speech introduction (“Ioanna says”) evoke an estrangement effect that also affects the perception of these concepts. The latter address the core of the identity issue, linking it to the nation-state, the church, the heritage and trends in Greek society (e.g. reference to the uncontrollable desire for money and, by extension, consumption which was considered characteristic of the Greek society in the decades before the crisis). The simultaneous recitation of “Thourios”, the stage movements and sounds, the supertitles and the construction of the fence ironically undermine an understanding of “Thourios” as a call for action towards modern Greeks amid the crisis. Such an interpretation would reside upon a narrative according to which the “revolutionary spirit” is an inherent trait of the Greek identity. This was an argument used repeatedly in different tones during the years of crisis; it also implied the existence of an essentialist Greek character that will resist all difficulties.

The recitation of Velestinlis’ poem is accompanied by the performance of intense movements recalling a contemporary dance choreography, under the interrupted dissonant sounds produced by the pianist in the chords. After a short pause, a second female performer enters the stage in a white shirt and grey skirt under the title “HISTORY LESSON”. Standing next to the other performer, she reads into a standing microphone a text from a history schoolbook about the reactions against the first Governor of Greece, which ultimately led to his assassination. Her enunciation reminds the spectators of the schoolchild-like way to read aloud from books. The surtitle directly states the historical event: “THE ASSASSINATION OF KAPODISTRIAS”. Her outfit recalls that worn by the girls in the school celebrations of National Days. The recitation of the text is disturbed by the dissonant sounds of the piano chords. In a similar way to Kitsopoulou’s *Athanasios Diakos*, here the frame of lecture in the microphone functions ironically under the irritating sounds. While it draws attention to historical events of significant importance for the foundation of the modern Greek state, it also challenges the unquestionable and linear version of history in schoolbooks.

The wall has been heightened by now, hiding the performers’ bodies up to their torso. The spectators have recognised for sure some of the words written on the white papers, hanging on the fence (for example “Abraham”, “Isaak” “God”). The whole text that is printed on the

white papers is now projected in small fonts. The audience rather likely recognises that it is an extract from the book of Genesis about the history of Abraham and Isaak. While the audience has time to read the projected text under the loud sounds of the piano strings, two performers hang a garland of Greek and Byzantine flags in front of the fence. The Byzantine flag, yellow with a black double-eagle, is nowadays the flag of the Greek Orthodox Church, often used together with the Greek flag in the outdoors decoration of churches. The co-existence of a church emblem (with strong associations to Byzantium and particularly Constantinople) and a national one is reminiscent of the complex link between the nation-state and church (and also recalls the ideological triptych motherland-religion-family).

Flaubert's text had been further projected on the left side, which in the meantime has been covered up to the middle by the fence. The words are now projected on the performer, who still stands on the chair and on the white printed papers of the fence partially covered by the small hanging flags. The latter now turns into a surface of projection – the focus on materiality challenges their particular signification as national symbols. This makes the comprehension of the text difficult, forcing the spectator to quit the attempt to interpret it as such and instead pay attention to what (s)he witnesses on stage. At the same time, however, the interplay of different layers also affects the perception of symbols. The difficulty in producing a fixed meaning has an input into the interpretation of the entanglement of religious and national concepts as well as emblems, pointing to the complex interrelation between them and hence triggering the spectator to reflect on the mechanisms that construct the naturalised connection between them.

In winter 2011, the fence can be considered inevitably related to the then topical decision to construct a barricade fence in Evros across the north-east borders between Greece and Turkey, thereby aiming to control the illegal migration flows. The visual sign of the fence also under the projection of the text of *Genesis* on the right side can not only be considered related to the refugee problem, which was becoming extremely burning back at that time, but also to one of the necessary preconditions for the “genesis” of a nation-state, the boundary delimitation. The performers, who in the meantime stood frontally looking towards the audience, one after the other bend behind the fence and disappear.

At the end of Flaubert's novel, Anthony recovers from his hallucinating state of agony. Recognising the face of Jesus in the shining sun, he continues his pray to be rescued from his doubts. On the National's stage the sublimity of “THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE SAINT” is framed by the changing light colours and the loud, deep-pitch piano sounds. With slow movements, the performer/hermit unties his robe. The audience sees a bearded man holding a

frappé coffee plastic shaker in his hand and wearing summer clothes with colourful floral designs. Frappé is a popular Greek way of making cold instant coffee. Stereotypically, frappé has been considered a synonym of a carefree, lazy lifestyle of people who do not work and take their time to enjoy their frappé, usually from a straw. The stereotype was extensively used in the recent years of crisis as an argument supporting the understanding of Greeks as lazy. This image should not be considered, nevertheless, as only an externally implied stereotype, since among Greeks it has also been associated with a non-critical attitude of conformity and often criticised for its “take it easy” attitude. Even if the spectators do not recognise the frappé shaker, the shaking movement that the performer is making with his raised hand is characteristic. He climbs off the chair and stands still facing towards the audience with his hands raised in the semi-darkness for a long moment. The distorted sounds of the piano stop.

The back door of the hall opens. A male performer dressed in black enters and, looking towards the audience, starts singing the National hymn through a bullhorn. The tempo of the song is different from the original hymn; the rhythm now recalls a very slow version of a *tsamikos* circle dance. In this way, ironically enough, a folk tradition and national symbol intermingle. The performer holding the shaker starts dancing *tsamikos* with the shaker in his hand recalling the characteristic white tissue of the first dancer of the circle. One after the other, the performers stand up behind the fence and join him. They make a circle around the actor singing. The text on the left depicts the hermit’s redemption:

Anthony deliriously: ‘O joy! O bliss! I have beheld the birth of life. I have seen the beginning of motion! My pulses throb even to the point of bursting. I long to fly, to swim, to bark, to bellow, to howl. Would that I had wings, a carapace, a shell...’⁶⁵³

The performers keep dancing in the darkness, while the actor sings the national hymn. The spectators can see only the dimly lighted chandelier. The sound of the jumps on the floor is heard even after the singing voice has stopped. The repetitive rhythm in darkness implies a never-ending perpetuation – a continuation that could also be related to the reproduction of the hegemony of dominant national connotations and symbols. Like the open end in Flaubert’s text (is the return to the prayers a sign of liberation or a punishment condemning him to start all over again?), the performance’s end does not manifest an easy liberation of the individual from

⁶⁵³ Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, 190.

oppressive meanings. Rather, it ironically demonstrates the possibility of their (banal) reproduction, which however brings with it the possibility of its own subversion.

In an attempt to trace the potential that the non-hierarchical simultaneity of the performance elements may have for a deconstructive approach to national identity, one could conventionally trace three different levels: Flaubert's text, the supertitles on the left and the onstage actions. In no case can these three levels be perceived independently. Each of these levels interweaves with the other but also mediates between the other two in a simultaneous, yet often contradictory and subversively ambiguous relation, catching the spectator in a forlorn attempt to comprehend and receive a clear message.

According to Lehmann,

[i]f the principle of the one dramatic action is abandoned, this is done in the name of the attempt to create events in which there remains a sphere of choice and decision for the spectators; they decide which of the simultaneously presented events they want to engage with but at the same time feel the frustration of realizing the exclusive and *limiting character of this freedom*. The procedure distinguishes itself from mere chaos in that it opens up chances for the recipient to process the simultaneous by means of their own selection and structuring.⁶⁵⁴

Expanding this argument on the spectator's response to the particular thematic examined here, I suggest that this invitation to make an individual selection may also signify the call for a subjective response to the category of identity and the "temptation" of national attachment, which will accept incompleteness of signification as inherent in the process of (national) self-perception.

The spectator's melancholic state of realised uncertainty should not, nevertheless, be considered as a manifestation of mere passivity. In her analysis of Nova Melancholia's work and particularly of the performance *Meditation I: Concerning those things that can be called into doubt*, Natascha Siouzouli suggested that

[t]he performance does not want to understand the text in one way or another and convey it, but lingers and strolls in the forecourt of decision, practicing a resolute tarrying. By preferring disparity over linearity, it [the performance] suggests the

⁶⁵⁴ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 88 (emphasis in original).

absence *of a* meaning or rather *a* valid narrative and produces the plurality of action as eternal refusal of finality.⁶⁵⁵

Siouzouli's analysis is based on Joseph Vogl's definition of the concept of "tarrying" [*Zaudern*]. For Vogl this state of suspension is not an expression of negative passivity but carries a subversive potentiality. For, "[t]arrying interrupts sequences of action and functions as a caesura; it potentializes action, leads into a zone of indeterminateness between Yes and No, exposes irreducibly problematic structures and opens an in-between-time in which the contingency of incidents can articulate itself".⁶⁵⁶ Unable to produce a single meaning, the spectator is found in a melancholic state: "the struggle with the flow of stimuli will rather leave a trace of inadequacy and lack instead of satisfaction and the feeling of perfection".⁶⁵⁷ The performances hence become a site of "an arrested in-between" in Vogl's words.⁶⁵⁸

Analysing another performance of Nova Melancholia in relation again to the Vogl's notion of "tarrying", Siouzouli dissociates "agency" and "action". Agency is defined "*as precedence*, and indeed as a moment or a *topos* where no affirmed action has occurred, but where a certain contingency is articulated". Thus approaching "agency as potentiality" Siouzouli detects a "countermovement", namely a "'counter-agency', implying a desire for 'non-intervention'". The persistent contradiction between agency/action and counter-agency as well as intervention and non-intervention "implies an unhealed antinomy and a conflict manifested like an open wound that challenge affirmation and introduce negation and doubt into the process". According to Siouzouli, the performance itself turns into a site where such counter-agency is manifested as "an occurrence of movements that empathetically defy action as well as intervention, as a situation that favors withdrawal instead of energetic presence, and that nevertheless articulates this through performance".⁶⁵⁹ The performances hence signify "a *topos* of articulated contradiction, where both movements of expression and withdrawal operate simultaneously".⁶⁶⁰

Against the backdrop of my analysis of Nova Melancholia's *The Temptation of St. Anthony* with focus on the destabilisation of national-connotations, Siouzouli's idea of counter-

⁶⁵⁵ Siouzouli, "Theorie und Theater: Eine melancholische Beziehung. Am Beispiel von Performances der Gruppe Nova Melancholia," 143 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁵⁶ Joseph Vogl, *On Tarrying*, trans. Helmut Müller-Sievers (London: Seagull Books, 2019), 61.

⁶⁵⁷ Siouzouli, "Theorie und Theater: Eine melancholische Beziehung," 146.

⁶⁵⁸ Vogl, *On Tarrying*, 83. Also quoted in Siouzouli, "Theorie und Theater," 141.

⁶⁵⁹ Natascha Siouzouli, "Articulating the Farewell: Performance and the City," in *Playing Offstage: The Theater as a Presence or Factor in the Real World*, ed. Sidney Homan (Lanham: Lexington, 2017), 171.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 175 (emphasis in original).

agency through performance may here be expanded into the demonstrated questioning of national identity on stage. The performance “makes something visible that goes *beyond* activity”,⁶⁶¹ hence bringing the spectators to a state of ambiguous melancholic uncertainty, which, nevertheless, does not signify passivity and affirmation of naturalised notions. In the National’s production, they are triggered not only to actively reflect on their own (in)ability to fully interpret the performative event as a closed fictive world but also to approach the category of national identity through the lens of this de-hierarchisation and incomprehensibility articulated through postdramatic strategies.

The feeling of melancholic tarrying could be seen within the context of this particular performance as opening up a site for the rejection of any oppressive expression of dominant national(ist) discourses and their quest for linearity and consistency. Hence this time the spectators are not confronted with the question of ethical responsibility vis-à-vis the oppressive mechanism of hegemonic national(ist) discourses as in Kitsopoulou’s production; instead they encounter the possible desperate realisation of the functionalised misconceived singularity of the concepts that have shaped and dominated their self-perception inside a (banally established) national “reality”. The state of suspension from any identification process (here identification is fundamental for the signification process) does not allow any clear suggestions of any alternative definition. The moment of withdrawal from the search for stable national reference points activates a countermovement, which may be understood as the postponed, ambiguous possibility of a deconstructive response to the temptation of the need for a “national” root.

3.3 Conclusion

Deconstruction of national identity in theatre does not mean an a priori rejection of the category *per se*. It is in the course of the performances that the blatantly demonstrated fundamental terms, symbols and narratives related to the Greek national identity pose a deconstructive challenge. The interplay between different temporalities or proximity and distance analysed in the first category gives its place now to the ironic interplay between the acknowledgment of the persistent need for national identification – a need that is of course functionalised by predominant national(ist) discourses – and the de-concealment of the power and naturalisation mechanisms contributing to the meaning-making and identity-shaping processes.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 171 (emphasis in original).

On stage are (often ironically) scrutinised aspects that can be considered widely recognised among the Greeks as characteristic of Greek society (e.g. the “Greek” family) and have been stereotypically associated with a Greek “mentality”, together with historical narratives, particularly the official version taught in schools. Yet, these aspects are approached as related to singular – if not essentialist – conceptions of the Greek identity. The latter appear to have been reproduced through a repeated, unnoticed affirmation of norms and beliefs regarding the basic terms of self-definition. As such, it is put at the centre of the target. These performances propose the disclosure of the naturalisation processes and power mechanisms (traceable in public as well as in private life) that have turned such narratives, symbols or characteristics into the connecting – homogenising – joints of the Greek identity.

These two movements developed on stage, namely, the simultaneous demonstration of Greek traits and de-concealment of naturalisation processes, function antithetically but simultaneously as supplementary. The question of identity is hence addressed as part of the broader questioning of dualisms and fixed significations. The performative manifestation of the impossibility of singular meanings and clearly cut binaries through different aesthetic strategies inevitably implies non-identity as an inherent aspect in the very building of identity. The ways that fixity is undermined varies depending each time on the mode of performance (with its respective aesthetics) and on the dramatic text’s function and centrality.

In this chapter, I examined two different expressions of the deconstructive mode. First, I focused on the exposure of the naturalisation of binary oppositions and singular identities as banally perpetuated in different sites of everyday social and family life. Following that, I paid attention to the ways that the postdramatic destabilisation of the meaning production against the demonstration of a Greek background that is demarcated mainly through visual and musical signs may undermine the identity construction process. The analysis of these performances cannot be summarised in terms of common aesthetic strategies utilised on stage, as in the dialectical approach. Here the three productions present very different traits belonging to diverse kinds of theatre; therefore they have been examined as two completely distinct examples of the deconstructive mode.

In Kitsopoulou’s case, the challenging of binary opposition and identity should be examined in relation both to her dramatic characters and their shifting – ideological and ethical – viewpoints, namely, at the level of the dramatic text, and to the postmodern aesthetics of her productions that reveal fragmentation and multiplicity. As already suggested, Kitsopoulou’s productions, while not constructing a closed fictive world of representation, still do not dispute the importance of drama. In the performance of *Nova Melancholia*, on the other hand, it is the

absence of the dramatic core and the postdramatic synthesis of different (among them textual) aspects that destabilises identification and signification in favour of difference, incompleteness and incoherence. It could hence be suggested that in the first case, the deconstruction of identity is related to a programmatic (dramatic) targeting of the dominant discourses responsible for the reproduction of prevailing definitions of identity. Furthermore it is underscored through techniques that have been attributed – mainly in the English-speaking bibliography – to the postmodern theatre. In the second case, in contrast, it is primarily the postdramatic aesthetic and mode of performance that enables the questioning of national identity.

I suggested that Kitsopoulou's critical approach aligns with discourses and aesthetics associated with postmodern(ism) in order to draw attention to the cultural and national particularities of her Greek context while undermining them. Collage, subversion of distinctions between high and low culture, kitsch, parody and fragmentation are facilitated to question homogeneous national narratives, stereotypical self-perceptions, hegemonic norms, and the entanglement between dominant discourses of nation and gender that are incubated by the society and its institutions. Kitsopoulou links disparate traits of modern Greek culture, revealing the mixing of tradition, beliefs in national superiority and “undigested” foreign influences vis-à-vis the socioeconomic terms of modern Greece in the past thirty years.

This eclecticism is addressed as something representative of modern Greek society, something that one should come to terms with instead of publicly denouncing it while indirectly perpetuating it through a conformist lifestyle with nuances of a cultural/national superiority. Suggestive is, for example, the centrality of the long-discussed *skyladiko* aesthetic in the performance of the *Blood Wedding*. Against the parodic backdrop of Nikos Gatsos' poetic translation with all its associations, the kitsch, nouveau rich aesthetic and the mixed musical choices of the wedding playlist (from Greek folk song sung by the “mother” to foreign pop songs, Greek covers and *skyladiko* songs) gain an ironic function challenging ambiguously intellectual stances on Greek culture, while at the same time revealing different trends. For Kitsopoulou, modern Greek culture consists of both the poetry of Gatsos and music of Hatzidakis as well as the *skyladiko* and the kitsch wedding receptions with cheap foam-wine as a sign of abundance. Similarly, the parodic imitation of the folk poetry through the use of the fifteen-syllable verse in *Diakos* points to the ideological implications in the transmission and adaptation of aspects from the (invented) tradition to contemporary Greece. An implied idea regarding the supremacy of the past is challenged through the metric choice. The latter should be analysed together with the provocative expressions of violence and the – highly likely familiar to the audience – feeling of disorientation and defeat experienced during the

crisis understood as the outcome of prevailing discourses and lifestyles in Greek society during the recent past.

In Nova Melancholia's performance, the deconstructive approach should be related to the questioning of the centrality of the text in regard also to the permanent postponement in the completion of the meaning-making process, which – by extension – undermines the definition of fixed identities. The identity question is already placed at the center of attention in the subtitle of the performance (*The Temptation of St. Anthony: A performance for the nation*). At the same time, the text, which is projected at the background, functions as a reminder of the topic of Flaubert's novel, ironically drawing attention to the notion of temptation in relation to the Greek context discussed on stage. The strongly visual facilitation of the text as projection underscores the absence of a fictive world, aligning with the postdramatic aesthetics. The text is actually decentralised; the emphasis is being placed on physicality instead of discourse. Representation is prohibited, making an interpretation of the text impossible as explanatory of the action and vice versa. Dissonance (particularly the sounds produced by the piano chords) together with the various sounds produced on stage (e.g. bells on the neckless of performer) as well as the repetition of movements, intensive choreographies and rhythmical asynchrony disturbingly interrupt homogeneity and consistency, challenging the attention of the audience. The performance functions as a synthesis of different elements, which reveals multiplicity and shatters fixed meanings, inevitably affecting the definition of national identity.

As in the case of Kitsopoulou's performances, recognisable national icons, associations to tradition and historical narratives (e.g. a miniature of Parthenon, flag, folk songs, poems, school celebrations) are considered easily recognisable by the audience. The demonstration of aspects of the Greek identity is achieved in a fragmentary, non-linear way, undermined by the onstage action itself. In some instances, the apparently irrelevant movements and sounds destabilise profoundly national connotations (e.g. the rhythmical alteration of the national hymn at the end of the performance). However, although the banal (while possibly violent) naturalisation of these aspects is here also questioned, still contrary to Kitsopoulou's case, the focus is placed primarily on the impossibility of completed meaning. By extension, this prevents any process of identification. The search for affirmative stability and comprehension appears to be the "temptation", an imagined desire that is condemned to remain unfulfilled.

In both the cases of Kitsopoulou and Nova Melancholia, the spectators are confronted with familiar references, not in order to feel encouraged to reflect on their national attachments to the past as analysed in the case of the dialectical approach. Instead, they are triggered to

decipher the possible meaning of what they are witnessing or the implications that this very lack of clear meaning may have for the definition of one's national identity. A question that remains open concerns the consequences – both ethical and ideological – following the (brutal) shattering of all fixed points of reference regarding the spectators' stance outside the "safety" of theatre space.

4. Beyond borders and identities

Following Özkirimli's definition of nationalism as discourse, one set of claims that national(ist) discourses promote is "the quest for a 'home', actual or imagined". This may be expressed in different ways: either through "the reconstruction of social space as national territory, often with a force and intensity that erases alternatives and grafts the nation onto the physical environment and everyday social practices", or through processes of longing and imagining places where one does not belong anymore or which have actually never been part of the national territory.⁶⁶²

This persistent quest for a national "home" is not surprising given the human need to be part of, to attach to a place or a group of people. As Elspeth Probyn rightly underlines, this desire to belong "cannot be categorized as good or bad, left or right"; it is "a desire without a fixed political ground but with immense political possibilities".⁶⁶³ Stressing its emotional dimension, Nira Yuval-Davis defines belonging as "an emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about feeling 'at home'". In her analysis, however, she distinguishes "belonging" from the "politics of belonging". The latter refers to "specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to a particular collectivity/ies which are themselves being constructed in these projects in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries".⁶⁶⁴ These projects require and reproduce boundaries based on which those in power decide who ("particular people, social categories and groupings") will be included or excluded.⁶⁶⁵ The construction of national belonging – namely the establishment of national membership – is one such project.⁶⁶⁶

The concept of "belonging" has often been considered more adequate than "identity" to describe the human need to be part of a place or community also vis-à-vis globalised, transnational imaginings. Probyn prefers the notion of "belonging" over "identity" suggesting that the first

⁶⁶² Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 209.

⁶⁶³ Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 9.

⁶⁶⁴ Nira Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 10.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁶⁶ Yuval-Davis defines "three major analytical facets in which belonging is constructed"; these are: "the social locations", the "identifications and emotional attachments" and the "ethical and political value systems" (12). Belonging to a nation is examined under the first facet. Although here I am aware of the fact that "[s]ocial locations (...) even in their most stable format, are virtually never constructed along one power vector of difference, although official statistics – as well as identity politics – would often tend to construct them in this way" (13), I will not follow Yuval-Davis intersectional approach but I will focus primarily on nation.

captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state.⁶⁶⁷

This aspect of longing as an inherent component in the process of be-longing implies in a more direct way the affective parameters at play as well as the impossibility of a fully completed process of becoming part of, which, in turn, would presuppose a stable identification between self and place or group, that is to say a fixed *locus*. However, following my conception of identity as dynamic, discursively constructed and subjected to change, I do not agree with a clear distinction between belonging and identity that attributes fixity to identity. Belonging and identity-making intersect in complex ways and cannot be considered mutually exclusive terms. Neither is belonging liberated from the power mechanisms of political projects. One should not forget that, following Yuval-Davis, “[p]olitics involves the exercise of power and different hegemonic political projects of belonging represent different symbolic power orders”.⁶⁶⁸

In the present approach, national belonging is considered only one possible form of belonging. Like identities, national belongings should also be located inside the network of competing discourses, with the politics of belonging playing a decisive role in the different significations that these forms of belonging gain vis-à-vis the predominant national(ist) discourse at each time. From this point of view, the quest for belonging is employed in the process of national identity construction and constitutes an aspect of it.⁶⁶⁹ Against this background, here I am interested in exploring the parallel onstage negotiation of national and other forms of belonging and community that extend beyond national borders, stressing, in turn, the contingent character of identities. Hence what I suggest is that a moving beyond (even momentary) national limitations may, by extension, trigger a critical redefinition of identity, imbued with expanded meanings.

⁶⁶⁷ Probyn, *Outside Belonging*, 19. According to Probyn, the desire to belong will never be completely fulfilled as it is “a tenacious and fragile desire that is, (...), increasingly performed in the knowledge of the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging and the sanctity of belongings are forever past” (ibid., 8).

⁶⁶⁸ Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging*, 19.

⁶⁶⁹ According to Hedetoft and Hjort, belonging can be understood as “a fortuitous compound of *being* and *longing*, of existential and romantic-imaginary significations and associations, shaped and configured in multiple ways by the international system of nationalism as simultaneously a political and a cultural ordering principle,” as “an important element of identity” (Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort, “Introduction,” in *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity*, ed. Hedetoft and Hjort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), ix (emphasis in original).

I will call this third mode “nation-transcending”. Following the Oxford Dictionary, the verb to “transcend” means “[b]e or go beyond the range or limits of (a field of activity or conceptual sphere)”.⁶⁷⁰ The compound “nation-transcending” plays intentionally with the tension between this verb and the concept that it attempts to leave behind, namely, nation. The hyphen hence signifies (also visually) the constant interplay between them and the effect that a non-completed attempt to move beyond nation may have for the very definition of these identities. Thus, I am not interested in investigating how theatre manifests transnational identities.⁶⁷¹ For, in the notion of transnationalism, the prefix “trans-” signifies a movement beyond that leaves behind all national associations, thereby setting a new frame of reference. Instead, I will focus on a renegotiation of the notion of identity, mediated through other forms of belonging, attachment and co-presence that exceed national and temporal demarcations, while calling into question unreflected identifications with national references.

The return to a different understanding of identity – also in emotional terms – depends on whether this feeling of “atemporal togetherness” resides in the past, the present, or the future. Is it the reflection (and maybe reflective nostalgia) for a communal moment in the past as a missed chance for change that invites us to reconsider the present or is it the aspiration of the future that triggers the shaping of a community in the present? In both cases, nevertheless, this mediated conception of identity plants the seed, even in a latent, utopian way, for a more radical transgression of national identities in the future. Therefore the notion of “transcending” seems to capture accurately the potentiality of these performances towards new forms of belonging, even if, as I will here examine, this transformative expectation of the future is experienced as condemned to fail.

In which ways, however, can the manifestation of non-national belongings across time shift the attention to new conceptions of Greek identity? I will suggest that this process of a mediated approach to identity may be examined in relation to both an encounter between different cultural/national communities (which may imply the notion of spatial distantiation) and an opening towards the past and/or the future. Paying special attention to the entanglement of these two perspectives I will address these issues with reference to two performances: i) Michael Marmarinos’ production *Dying as a Country* and ii) Akillas Karazissis’ performance *The Dance of the Solitary Heart*. The first case demonstrates how the collective experience of

⁶⁷⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “transcend,” accessed March 16, 2021, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/transcend>.

⁶⁷¹ I will neither examine post-national constellations, nor the implications of globalisation in contemporary theatre. On an introduction to the latter, see Dan Rebellato’s short book *Theatre and Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

a performatively framed act of waiting and narrating may shape a different form of belonging, revealing itself full of potential for a mediated perception of the (national) self and/in the future. In the second production, the encounter with the “other” (not only the German society but also with the Greek communities of Gastarbeiters) and the post-1968 discourses serve as material for a reflection on the political potentiality of this particular period in parallel to the personal search for one’s own identity. Here the negotiation of the anyhow dislocating experience of migration within the particular historical context manifests a reflective longing for a lost past, in order, however, to remind the audience of the (forgotten) possibilities for change in a future to come.

4.1 Fragmented identities, collective experiences

Michael Marmarinos’ 2001 performance *National Hymn: A Theorem of Togetherness* can be considered one of the first theatrical endeavours, directly negotiating in a postdramatic way the laden relationship to the nation and the question of identity. Through an associative, polyvocal reflection on the meaning of the national hymn, the performance dealt with the notions of togetherness and (national) belonging: “There is not just one national anthem. There are many... Anthem to love, to death... Anthem for breaking up! ‘Famous blue raincoat’, Leonard Cohen! My own national anthem! You know how it goes?”.⁶⁷² Spectators and performers, recalling a chorus, are seated around a dinner table while a bean soup is prepared and served. The performance text is comprised of different materials: personal recollections from everyday life, literary/philosophical texts, articles, songs and interviews from people who shared their associative thoughts about national hymn. The nation is shaped as a narrative of a heterogeneous community, formed through the performative process of a communal dinner.⁶⁷³

Six years after the *National Hymn*, Marmarinos’ staging of Dimitris Dimitriadis’ *Dying as a Country*, a core text of modern Greek literature, addressed similar questions from a different perspective. Focusing on the here and now of the performance, Marmarinos’

⁶⁷² Michael Marmarinos, *National Hymn: Directing as Play-Writing*, trans. Yorgos Voudiklaris (Athens: KOEN, 2001), 76.

⁶⁷³ On Marmarinos’ performance, see Marilena Zaroulia, «Κοσμοπολιτισμός και Ουτοπία: Εκσυγχρονίζοντας την Παράδοση» [Cosmopolitanism and utopia: modernising tradition], in *Παράδοση και εκσυγχρονισμός στο νεοελληνικό θέατρο: από τις απαρχές ως τη μεταπολεμική εποχή* [Tradition and modernisation in Modern Greek Theatre: from its beginnings to the post-war period], ed. Antonis Glytzouris and Constantina Georgiadi (Heraklion: Crete UP, 2010), 371–380; Katia Arfara, «Το μεταμοντέρνο στο σύγχρονο ελληνικό θέατρο. Μια επαναπροσέγγιση του φαινομένου με αφορμή τον Εθνικό Ύμνο του Μιχαήλ Μαρμαρινού» [Postmodern in contemporary Greek theatre: A new approach to postmodernist theatre as evidenced in the *National Anthem* by Michael Marmarinos], in Glytzouris and Georgiadi, *ibid.*, 363–370.

production manifested a new way of borderless belonging in the present that goes beyond both overt and banal Greek references. It is the possibility for a future liberation from oppressive discourses as experienced in the act of narrating and waiting together that suggests a different narrative construction of the Greek identity. A crucial role in this approach played the performance venue at the Festival's new premises in Peiraios Str. As I am going to argue in the following section, while in the case of the Epidaurus Festival the re-signification of theatre space took place through the programming choices, in the case of the Athens Festival the programming changes were enabled thanks to the change of space from the Roman Herodion to the post-industrial area of Peiraios Str. The production of *Dying as a Country* can be considered the performance that first signaled an attempt towards a Festival's re-orientation.

4.1.1 From the marbles of the nation to the post-industrial buildings of the city

In her book, *Theatre and the City* theatre scholar Jen Harvie argues that by taking place in cities

[t]heatre is therefore in some ways symptomatic of urban process, demonstrating the structures, social power dynamics, politics and economies also at work more broadly throughout the city. Theatre actually does more than *demonstrate* urban process, therefore: theatre *is a part of* urban process, producing urban experience and thereby producing the city itself.⁶⁷⁴

Theatre may create “urban meaning” not only through dramatic texts and performative practices but also through the material conditions of theatre practices.⁶⁷⁵ Recalling also Ric Knowles' materialist semiotics, it could be claimed that material conditions may affect the meaning of the theatre production and experience in a way that is not necessarily related to the immediate meanings transmitted through the onstage performance. Harvey analyses material conditions such as “space, institutional structures and practices, money and people”.⁶⁷⁶ Limiting my focus to the aspects of space and institutional structure, I will briefly examine how in the case of the Athens Festival, the change in the main venue and the underscoring of its

⁶⁷⁴ Jen Harvie, *Theatre and the City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 7 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 24–25.

urban character lead to the dissociation of national connotations from the Festival's identity. In Epidaurus the wish to innovate presupposed the broadening of the programme to other genres beyond ancient drama; in the Athens Festival the development of new forms and dramaturgies required different spaces. Here I will suggest that this re-orientation of the Festival should also be associated with a shift from a city as tourist-symbol constructed upon the idealised appraisal of the monument and ruins to the city as a living (and lived) ecosystem: from a monumental (often misconceived) fame to a vivid urban cultural centre.

Festivals search for a clearly defined identity, a recognisable “brand”, in order to attract visitors. As in Edinburgh or Avignon, Festivals contribute to the branding strategies of the city. The Athens Festival's identity, however, was primarily associated with a city “nation-brand” due to its monumental past. The “nation-brand”, the image that the country shapes for itself addressing the foreign “gaze”, is not without implications for the experience of the city-symbol by its own citizens. Similarly, the historical moment of the foundation of the Athens Festival also has its significance. As Vasilis Papavasiliou suggests, the Festival was inaugurated “on the morrow of a disaster”, on the aftermath of the bloody 1940s that ended with the official end of the Civil War in 1949. During this period of Greek history, the creation of the Festival aligns with a broader intention to regularisation: “Greece leaves behind the post-war desolation to move to the phase of, although incomplete, democratic regularity, part of which is also the celebratory exceptionality of a festival”.⁶⁷⁷

The particular choice of Herodion as the permanent venue of the Festival aligns with this movement forward. Following Papavasiliou it has a symbolic importance and attests to the intention of post-war Greece both to “reclaim the top sites-monuments” as venues for artistic production and at the same time as poles of attraction of the tourist interest.⁶⁷⁸ For more than fifty years, hence, the Festival has been identified with Odeon, a choice which cannot be dissociated from the very identity and orientation of the Festival. Indicative are the opening words in the 1956 programme:

As daring in its first conception as a new prayer rising from under the venerable, honey-coloured columns of the Parthenon, the Athens Festival in its second year continues with measure and deliberation on the path it has set itself.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁷ Vasilis Papavasiliou, «Πενήντα Χρόνια» [Fifty Years], in *Φεστιβάλ Αθηνών (1955-2005): Πενήντα Χρόνια* [Athens Festival (1955-2005): Fifty Years], 12.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ “The Athens Festival,” Programme of the Athens Festival 1956, n.p. (English in original).

The Herodion is Roman and not ancient Greek, a fact that attests to the programming choices of the Athenian Festival that appeared more extroverted compared to Epidaurus. Yet, the significance of Herodion as the Festival's main venue should be related to its position on the slope of Acropolis. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, the rupture of the identification of the Athens Festival with Herodion seemed rather unthinkable. Indicative is the view of the artistic director back in 2005, Yiannis Karachisaridis, who in his note for the fifty years of the Festival, argued that although an opening of the Festival towards new collaborations would be welcome, “[s]till, the creating of new, international encounters should in no way prevent the Athens Festival to remain there, at the Odeon Herodes Atticus, as History has ordained”.⁶⁸⁰ The lack of curatorial identity in the 1990s and early 2000s seemed to be concealed under the reference to the Festival's tradition and its touristic orientation related to the particular space as associated to Athens' national heritage.⁶⁸¹ In that sense, it was not Odeon's programme but its position under the emblematic ruins of Acropolis that kept attesting to the value of the Festival.

Ruins have been instrumental in the construction of the identity of the city of Athens as visual indicators of the ancient past. These indicators were needed by the capital city of the Bavarian King in order to align with the Western idealised conception of antiquity. The inauguration of the capital city resided hence in the same narrative that defined the construction of modern Greek identity. The perception of the ruins was associated with the Western gaze. Mediated through this foreign perspective, the construction of the modern Greek identity turned into a process of re-discovery. Following the architect and philosopher Aristide Antonas:

[T]he modern city of Athens appears to have been designed for the alien gaze of a visitor. Athens has always owed its existence to elsewhere. It did not grow out of an “inner” need, but was consciously and artificially proposed as the relation to a specific location.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ Yiannis Karachisaridis, «Φεστιβάλ Αθηνών 1955-2005» [Athens Festival 1955-2005], in *Φεστιβάλ Αθηνών (1955-2005): Πενήντα Χρόνια* [Athens Festival (1955-2005): Fifty Years], 8.

⁶⁸¹ The lack of orientation is admitted by the organizers themselves, as described in the ‘history’ section of the official website (“History”, Greek Festival, accessed March 10, 2021, <http://greekfestival.gr/history/?lang=en>).

⁶⁸² Aristide Antonas, “The Construction of Southern Ruins, or Instructions for Dealing with Debt,” *South as a State of Mind, documenta Magazine* 6 (2015), accessed March 16, 2021, https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/49_the_construction_of_southern_ruins_or_instructions_for_dealing_with_debt.

This invisible *topos* to which the European travellers were turning in search of ancient roots, becomes the fundament in the construction of national identity – an identity also performed in the process of building the city of Athens as a European capital.

Against this backdrop the importance of the city of Athens (with the multiple ideological significations gained during its history) as the urban surrounding of theatre space becomes even more visible. According to Gay McAuley, “[t]he location of the theatre building necessarily makes some statement about the way theatre is perceived by society more generally and by its practitioners (whether or not they have any real choice about where they practice)”.⁶⁸³ This argument can be applied to the case of the Athens Festival, identified with only one venue. Given not only the symbolic importance of the Acropolis area for the national image of the city but also the existing power relationships between space and institutions as already discussed in the case of Epidauros, the change of location constitutes a significant gesture for the re-orientation and renovation of the Festival not only in aesthetic but also ideological terms. Positioned in the centre of the city, Herodion may not be an ancient Greek ruin but within this constellation of ruins gains, even as a side effect, the claim of proximity to the living carriers of ancient memory. In that sense, the Festival’s identification with this area, even if out of touristic purposes and not openly ideological proclamations, was reproducing, perhaps unintentionally, the old constructed categories of self-perception, inheritance and identity.

Since 2006 the Athens Festival started to use other spaces besides Herodion. The Festival created a network between different cultural spaces in the city (for example, other theatre houses or museums). The new sites were also associated with a different programme and forms of performance, which could not be staged at the Roman Odeon. Interestingly enough, in some cases, the chosen urban spaces enabled performances that would open a new experience of the city itself and its history. Most significant, though, was the choice the former factory complex of the 1970s at 260 Peiraios Street as the Festival’s main premises. In its southern part, Peiraios Street, connecting Omonoia Square in the centre of Athens and the port city of Piraeus used to be an industrial zone. The deindustrialisation and gentrification projects that took place in the past decade led gradually to the transformation of the Street to a central axis of cultural activities, with museums, theatres and the School of Fine Arts.

⁶⁸³ Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 46.

The former office furniture factory Tsaousoglou became the main site of the Festival and was also identified with the artistic programme of Yorgos Loukos. The change of the main venue together with the other hosting spaces achieved a bold dissociation between the Festival and the area near the Acropolis, namely, the part of the historical centre that to a great extent defined the “national” identity of the city. At the same time, the change to an indoors space opened new possibilities for different kinds of theatre and stagings that could not possibly be hosted at the open-air Herodion due to the restrictions of the place (acoustic, lightening, back wall). Herodion, which admittedly never gained a consistent identity, kept hosting mainly music events but also some theatre performances.⁶⁸⁴ The surroundings of the Festival premises contribute to a different experience of the theatre visit: instead of walking in front of the Acropolis museum, passing by the ruins of the Dionysus Theatre on the pedestrian zone under Acropolis hill, with old neoclassic buildings on their left hand, the spectators approach the theatre space from a street with old factories, renovated buildings and destroyed pavements that immediately pre-condition a different aesthetic experience.

The choice to move the Festival to the old factory building was programmatic in aesthetic terms. Following the renovation-models of post-industrial areas in other capital cities, the new premise was enabling the development of new performative possibilities. Opening up to new forms of performance, new genres and aesthetics – coming in many cases from foreign theatre-makers, that is to say from abroad – was defining the significations of the new space. The building was a sign of an aesthetic re-orientation which, however, was unconsciously presupposing the de-nationalisation of the Festival’s performance space and its re-inscription to the modern urban space that appears to be constantly shaped. The space of Peiraios was hence identified with theatrical innovation as the central pillar of the Festival’s programme and with Loukos’ tenure, also attesting to his curatorial shift in aesthetic terms.

Given that, following McAuley, the location of theatre (as a physical building) with a particular surrounding “makes some kind of statement” regarding the audience that is “expected or encouraged” to attend the performances,⁶⁸⁵ it could be expected that the audience of the Festival underwent some changes. Unfortunately, an audience analysis, which would

⁶⁸⁴ Herodion hosted productions that did not make it to Epidaurus; some of the summer touring productions of the municipal-regional theatres were included in the programme. Also, since 2011 some performances were repeated after Epidaurus, in early autumn, after the end of the Festival. Yet, Herodion also hosted a couple of Festival productions, which took place only there, among which a few were ancient drama or at least ancient-themed (for example: Goethe’s *Iphigenia in Tauris* [2006] (based on Euripides) directed by Vasilis Papavasiliou, where a camping tent took the place of Artemis’ temple; Rimini Protokoll’s *Prometheus in Athens* (2010), the five-hour long performance *Women* focusing on the women heroines of the Sophoklian tragedies directed by Wajdi Mouawad [2011], or the meaningfully articulated *The Throne of Atreus*, directed by Aris Retsos [2011].

⁶⁸⁵ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, 45.

offer precise information regarding the profile of the spectators, is not to be found. Arguably, however, the renewed Festival at Peiraios Street attracted a new audience compared to that of Herodion so far. The words of the artistic director in the annual programme of 2010 are telling:

Four years later, young people who approached the Festival out of curiosity, almost timid, to discover unknown to them artists, constitute now the active population of the Festival. Without pursuing this change, we expanded across the city and together with us 237,000 spectators hugged unknown urban areas.⁶⁸⁶

The location of the theatre in the city and its physical surroundings affects not only the theatre experience of the festival participants but also the reception of the performance itself. For, following Harvie, “the ostensible project of a play or even a theatre company can be undermined or radically altered by how that play or theatre actually works in its urban surroundings, in its material context of production”.⁶⁸⁷ It can be argued that in a case such as the Athens Festival, organised around specific venues, this subversive potential becomes even stronger. Usually, festivals are not identified with a particular physical building like a theatre company. Nevertheless, according to Henri Schoenmakers, a festival is characterised by a “foregrounding principle”. That is to say, “a background is necessary against which other activities or a set of activities is being *foregrounded*” and therefore “a festival can be distinguished from other, more regular activities, which are considered to be ‘normal’”.⁶⁸⁸

Schoenmakers differentiates between “theatre-goer”, “spectator” and “festival participant”. The experience of a performance as part of a Festival can be different compared to the attendance of a single performance without the festival context. Inevitably, the festival structure affects the reception of the spectators and the way they interpret, experience and evaluate the theatrical event they attend.⁶⁸⁹ To a different degree, the theatre-goer and spectator become festival participants. That is to say, s/he “is not only able to judge the performance as a piece of art made by the theatre makers, but he is able too to judge the performance as an act of selection and programming of the festival organisers”.⁶⁹⁰ The contextualisation of a performance as part of a broader structure is related to the orientation (and the curatorial

⁶⁸⁶ Yorgos Loukos, «Σημείωμα Καλλιτεχνικού Διευθυντή» [Artistic Director’s Note], Programme of the Athens Festival 2009, 6.

⁶⁸⁷ Harvie, *Theatre and the City*, 31.

⁶⁸⁸ Henri Schoenmakers, “Festivals, Theatrical Events and Communicative Interactions,” 31 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

concept) that the Festival’s organisers intend to promote. Following the line of argument, it could hence be argued that the reception of the performances and the festival experience are inevitably affected directly by the change of space. In the Athens Festival, the different audience that was attracted contributed even further to a different festival experience.

While Epidaurus seemed to be the site of the projection of the national imagining as associated with the cultural heritage of ancient drama, the Athens Festival was – at least initially – linked to the “national” brand-image that Greece wanted to promote abroad but also consume itself. The ideological entanglement between theatre space, programming choices and institutional strategies as expressed with regard to the control of (theatre) space was becoming visible once again. After 2006, the Festival attempted to deal with a complex problem: how the Festival of a city, in which the materiality of the monuments keeps rendering the past visible, may redefine its orientation in the present urban landscape, and possibly enable the construction of more fluid collective identities and a more vivid dialogue between stage and spectators, theatre and the city. One first example of this attempt was Michael Marmarinos’ site-specific staging of Dimitris Dimitriadis’ *Dying as a Country* at Peiraios 260 analysed in the next section.

4.1.2 Standing together on the ruins of history: Marmarinos’ *Dying as a Country*

In his essay “We and the Greeks”, Dimitris Dimitriadis, one of the most discussed contemporary Greek dramatists,⁶⁹¹ provocatively argued that “Greeks are Greek due and when Greece does not belong to them”.⁶⁹² Influenced by Philip Lacoue-Labarthe’s *Hoeldering and the Greeks* as the title of his essay also reveals, Dimitriadis derives from the belief that “[a]nything that is considered given and guaranteed precludes the stochastic reference to it”.⁶⁹³ Being too close to the related object, it is impossible to avoid identification and be able to reflect on it critically. Therefore, “the inhabitants of this geographic region” should try to

⁶⁹¹ Dimitriadis first play *Η τιμή της ανταρσίας στη μαύρη αγορά* [The Price of Rebellion in Black Market] (1966) was staged in Paris by Patrice Chereau. Since then he has written many theatre plays, essays, the per nature incompleting novel *Anthropodia*, and he is also known for his translations. His plays have enjoyed great reception abroad and especially in France. Indicative is the tribute in 2010 at the Odeon Theatre by Oliver Py. According to Dimitra Kondylaki, the rediscovery of his work in France since the mid-2000s also contributed to its positive reception in Greece (Dimitra Kondylaki, *Ο θεατρικός Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης* [The theatrical Dimitris Dimitriadis] (Athens: Nefeli, 2015), 20-21).

⁶⁹² Dimitris Dimitriadis, *Εμείς και οι Έλληνες* [We and the Greeks] (Athens: Agra, 2005), 5.

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 3. See also Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

become Greeks only as strangers.⁶⁹⁴ To be Greek would then mean “to try to cover the distance without being able to do so.”⁶⁹⁵ From this point of view, this “and” between “We” and the “Greeks” in the title signifies a symbol of disconnection and not of connection.⁶⁹⁶

Despite the legitimate question “whether these texts can or should function hermeneutically as a prism for his main work”,⁶⁹⁷ the text mentioned above should be understood as indicative of Dimitriadis’ views on the issues of nation, identity and tradition. While it could be suggested that in his work “nationality is found antipodal to the art, since for Dimitriadis the art aims to dissolve illusions, to uncover, to reveal”,⁶⁹⁸ the existential trouble of Greek identity seems to permeate his writings. Dimitriadis’ work calls for liberation from repressive discourses and narratives, while at the same time it stresses the unbearable power that concepts like identity, country, or nation still have. Dimitra Kondylaki rightly observes that

[t]herefore, many of his plays (...) dramatize directly or indirectly the stagnation and the deadlock of modern Greek culture as consequence of the indiscriminating adoption of myths and the survival of backwards-looking narratives which still define the notion of nation, a notion that is identified with heroic, robust and masculine models. Dimitriadis reverses these models in order to “empty” them and to disprove the notion of the nation as presently constituted by these elements.⁶⁹⁹

The subversive potential is not limited to a radical challenge to the relationship with the past. More importantly, his critique is combined with a “strategy of *adjustment* of the morally appropriate with an aesthetic goal deeply *anti-classicist*, aiming at the revelation of the monstrous as inherent in (modern Greek) truth”.⁷⁰⁰ As I will argue here in regard to his *Dying as a Country*, the subversion of nation intermingles with the deconstructive attack to accepted

⁶⁹⁴ Dimitriadis, *Εμείς και οι Έλληνες* [We and the Greeks], 4.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁹⁷ Ilias Papagiannopoulos, «Εμείς, εσείς, αυτοί: οι πληθυντικοί του πολιτικού Δημητριάδη» [“We, you, they: the plurals of the political Dimitriadis”], in *Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης: Παραβιάζοντας τα όρια* [Dimitris Dimitriadis: Violating the borders], ed. Kalliopi Exarchou (Thessaloniki: Saixpirikon, 2018), 51.

⁶⁹⁸ Kondylaki, *Ο θεατρικός Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης* [The theatrical Dimitris Dimitriadis], 87. According to Kondylaki, Dimitriadis “although Greek, rejects the intrenchment of his work in his nationality –to the extent that the latter reproduces an illusive identity based on the appropriation of the past” (ibid.).

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 32–33.

⁷⁰⁰ George Sampatakakis, «Δοσμένος ως άντρας: Η queer ποιητική του Δημήτρη Δημητριάδη» [Registered as male: The queer poetics of Dimitris Dimitriadis], in Exarchou, *Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης: Παραβιάζοντας τα όρια* [Dimitris Dimitriadis: Violating the borders], 111.

norms of sexuality and desire. Dimitriadis' plays re-write in order to disarticulate and reveal, hence inviting the Greek reader/spectator to a critical self-reflection.

According to theatre scholar Dimitris Tsatsoulis, Dimitriadis “engages even in a concealed way with both works of foreign as well as ancient or modern Greek literature and dramaturgy. This reveals that his even subversive perspective on the Greek identity has its core in the concept of Greekness [*hellenikoteta*], initiating a dialogue with it”.⁷⁰¹ Due to his exceptional interest about the problematic of Greek identity, critically reflecting on the ways that Greek literature and dramaturgy have dealt with it, Dimitriadis' dramatic work has gained its own particular place in the landscape of the Greek theatre dramaturgy. Referring to the Foucauldian notion of genealogy, Lina Rosi argues that Dimitriadis' plays have inaugurated “an alternative genealogy of Greekness”.⁷⁰² Dimitriadis not only introduced critical conceptions of national identity and history but also challenged the predominant tendencies in “their theatrical representation” by the Greek playwrights since *metapolitefsi*.⁷⁰³

As often suggested, Dimitriadis' short novel *Dying as a Country* may be considered a constitutive manifestation of his critical approach to the question of identity and tradition as expressed and elaborated in his later work.⁷⁰⁴ This short text offers an exemplary reflection on modern Greece and, amid the financial crisis, it has been considered prophetic of the present situation. Interestingly enough, when the text was written in 1978 Greece was undergoing a period of development and optimism. Dimitriadis did not “chronicle” the particular historical moment,⁷⁰⁵ yet “he seems to have listened so deeply to contemporary history, that detects in time the threat of repetition, the inscription of the future on what has already taken place”.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰¹ Dimitris Tsatsoulis, «Το θέατρο της στέρησης και της καταστροφής» [The Theatre of Deprivation and Catastrophe], afterword to *Ομηριάδα* [*Homeriad*] by Dimitris Dimitriadis (Athens: Indiktos, 2007), 103. As Dimitriadis himself has said in a conversation with Dimitra Kondylaki, he is strictly opposed to any use of the notion of “Greekness,” which ascribes particular distinctive traits to the people of a country, although these traits could also define other nations. The only distinctive trait of people is their language (Kondylaki, *Ο θεατρικός Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης* [The theatrical Dimitris Dimitriadis], 51–52).

⁷⁰² Lina Rosi, «Ανατροπή και υπονόμηση της γενεαλογίας στο θέατρο του Δημήτρη Δημητριάδη» [Rupture and subversion of the genealogy in Dimitris Dimitriadis' theatre], in Exarchou, *Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης: Παραβιάζοντας τα όρια* [Dimitris Dimitriadis: Violating the borders], 71.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 70.

⁷⁰⁴ For example, according to Rosi, *Dying as a Country* is “the constitutive text in which are sketched the relations of his work with politics and his views about national identity and History” (Ibid., 86). Dimitris Tsatsoulis also argues that this text “concentrates all these elements of his world view which will recur in different forms in his later works” (Tsatsoulis, «Το θέατρο της στέρησης και της καταστροφής» [The theatre of deprivation and catastrophe], 109).

⁷⁰⁵ As Dimitriadis argues, “writing does not chronicle”; at the moment when this text was written “it was speaking about a reality that was not visible, that means...about the future!” (Kondylaki, *Ο θεατρικός Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης* [The theatrical Dimitris Dimitriadis], 72).

⁷⁰⁶ Kondylaki, *Ο θεατρικός Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης* [The theatrical Dimitris Dimitriadis], 31.

Hence, while Greece is not mentioned by its name, the interpretation that the country is Greece is more than legitimate.

Although *Dying as a Country* is a short novel and not a play, it has been staged numerous times.⁷⁰⁷ Without characters, its first and longest part constitutes a narrative in the third person. The text is interrupted by ellipses. Towards the end, after a sudden rupture, it transforms into a woman's enraged monologue. Surrounded by the enemy, Dimitriadis' country is found in a moment of emergency, just before its final surrender. The expected fall of the south front would terminate a state of belligerence that persisted for thousands of years. The occupier is anticipated like a saviour who may liberate the citizens from their nation and those in power. For it was not only the siege of the country but a long era of infertility and depletion that had exhausted the people. The end that would come with the occupation would signify the transition to an era of indifference regarding the "survival of the nation, a circumstance going as far as the motherland's premeditated murder".⁷⁰⁸ The fall of the front was hence a moment of salvation from the nation itself, a moment of chaotic rupture.

Following Kondylaki, "[t]he destruction in the theatrical conceptions of Dimitriadis is a springboard and prerequisite for a new beginning – the more violent, the more indispensable; the more inconceivable, the more fruitful".⁷⁰⁹ His subjects stand drained between a disastrous past and an uncertain (probably non-existent) future: Debris, moral fall, an explosion of violence, hatred for the breeding womb. The disgusted citizens of the country reject anything that may remind them of the existence of the umbilical cord that the mother-country has wrapped around their neck to strangle them. No certainty is left: no nation, no identity, no symbol, no language. Is this the moment of the ultimate destruction? Or, maybe, behind the poisoning hatred for the country can be detected a weak hope, a spark of a potential messianic, in a Benjaminian sense, expectation, that could activate the quest for rectification of the past injustices against the oppressed?

After the first numbness of the country's population, follows a state of joyful relief:

⁷⁰⁷ *Dying as a Country* has been translated in French (*Je meurs comme un pays: Projet pour un roman*, trans. Michel Volkovitch (Paris: Hatier, 1997); in German (*Ich sterbe als Land*, trans. Ulf-Dieter Klemm, in "Lette International," 54 (2001); in Italian (*Muoio come un paese*, trans. Barbara Nativi and Dimitri Milopulos) and in Catalan (*Moro com a país*, trans. Joan Casas). In an appendix in her book, Dimitra Kondylaki had enumerated until 2015 seven stagings of the novel in Greece (first in 1989) and twelve abroad (Kondylaki, *Ο θεατρικός Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης* [The theatrical Dimitris Dimitriadis], 139–40).

⁷⁰⁸ Dimitris Dimitriadis, *Πεθαίνω σα χώρα: Σχέδιο ενός μυθιστορήματος* [Dying as a Country: Novel in Draft form], (Athens: Agra, 1991), 16.

⁷⁰⁹ Kondylaki, *Ο θεατρικός Δημήτρης Δημητριάδης* [The theatrical Dimitris Dimitriadis], 29.

(...) they all started making wisecracks and began to repeat various blasphemous jokes which attacked the whole History and its illustrious protagonists, and they provoked relentless laughter with their pertinent and raw descriptions. At that time, the transition from one historical circle to the next one took place – irrevocably. Through laughter.⁷¹⁰

The historical transition towards a new era, contrary to any conceptions of linear progress, was achieved through a carnivalesque moment of disruption in the Bakhtinian sense. For, in this frenzied state of ‘emergency’, between reality and imagination, in a carnival subversion where everything is possible, the power relations are undermined and questioned. This moment of chaotic anarchy reminds the spectators of the state of emergency when the Benjaminian Messiah of the historical rectification and liberation is awaited to appear through the crack. For Benjamin, a moment is enough for a sudden realisation of the power that the generation of the oppressed carries latently within it. The present generations, which have a new chance for change, are called to use it in order to give voice – even after death – not only to those whom the oppressing classes have done injustice but also to those excluded by the narrative called history.

Benjamin’s quest for the subversion of the oppressors turns here, in the shade of an external danger, into the collapse of the hegemonic powers inside the country. The notion of “power” is hence not defined in economic-political terms in a capitalist society as in the “Theses on the History”. It should be better seen in terms of suppression through the imposition of “accepted” identities, norms and acts. These are the dominant discourses that define the moral order of a certain era and whose rejection may lead to the soothing loss of identity. The violent explosion of animalistic instincts, the dissolving moral codes and the dominant conceptions of kinship and nation do not signify the chaotic approach to an end. They should be better understood as a reaction towards those in power and any form of predominant discourses (including the nation and sexuality). In Dimitriadis’ country, the Messiah will not come as one who overturns the class society, but as the liberator of the suffocating relationship with a country-oppressor-mother.

Towards the end of the narrative, Dimitriadis’ reader realises (this paragraph is written in italics) that s/he is reading pages of a historical narrative:

They are pages of a long and polyphonic Chapter, which under the title ‘Testimonies

⁷¹⁰ Dimitriadis, *Πεθαίνω σα χώρα* [Dying as a Country], 26.

*from the years of the Great Defeat' include different documents (letters, diaries, eyewitnesses narratives in the first and third person, even literary or pseudo-literary descriptions, photographs, statistics etc.) from that era, which, in all its horror has become part of the relentless imagination.*⁷¹¹

The history of the “Great Defeat” does not undergo any (ethical) censorship and does not distinguish between small and big histories. The historical narrative about the era that just began after the end of the war includes different pieces of evidence. This reminds Benjamin’s conception of a history that would not distinguish between small and large events. For Benjamin the oppressed of the past, which history has ignored, search for their salvation in the historical memory of the present. Nevertheless, Dimitriadis’ reader will be still able to read these pages of the polyphonic history comprised by the miscellaneous documents. These pages have been preserved. This is an indication that at that moment of the defeat, an attempt for historical change took place. However, this chance was condemned a priori. It happened under a regime of occupation that had led “*to the extinction of the traditional territory of the country and to its conflation within the broader world-diagram that was now covering the whole globe*”.⁷¹²

Before the end of the novel, the narrative perspective changes; now it is the voice of a woman speaking. The woman/daughter’s monologue full of hate against the mother-country does not negate the quest for salvation; it confirms the inability of the rupture. Nevertheless, this cry, which under other conditions would have been silenced by the official national voices, is still heard. It is only in a different perception of history that such a voice is allowed to be heard: a voice that attempts to resist, to kill the mother in order to differentiate herself, namely an eternally in vain attempt for liberation from the yoke that she feels on her neck: “I am not that country (...) I want to be life, I want to live, I would like to live, I would like to be able to live, I would be happy if I would want to live. But this country does not let me wanting, does not let me be life, give life”.⁷¹³

In *Dying as a Country*, the onslaught of the enemy activated the transformative quests of the past, which have been carried to the present. Like a fugitive image, like a glimpse of the Benjaminian “present” time, the transition from one circle to the other, took place without the Demetriadian subject to achieve transcendence. This time, however, as the narrative itself

⁷¹¹ Dimitriadis, *Πεθαίνω σα χώρα* [Dying as a Country], 46–47 (italics in original).

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 46 (italics in original).

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 49.

reveals, it was saved (in the form of the narrative) – a small chapter of this different, unofficial, polyphonic history. The messianic hope was inherited by the present generation, which will in their turn, with its weak messianic power, keep trying infinitely and in vain to break the historical continuum in order to be freed from their national womb.

This missed moment of liberation from the suffocating mother/national womb of the country gains a new chance on the Festival's stage: the text hands over the quest to the performance, the past hands over the hope to the future. Marmarinos' performance, which focuses on the present and the performatively framed act of narration, allows a new quasi "messianic" – now in the Derridean sense – future possibility to shine. The subversion of the hegemonic notions of identity is articulated this time not through a carnivalesque moment but through the collective experience of narration and waiting. The salvation will neither be fixed to the present nor related only to the quests for a particular (national) past. The future will be addressed in a moment of undefined hope in a form of belonging beyond – but not critically unaware of – national belongings.

In the former industrial building of Peiraios 260 Str., a long queue of people stands outside Hall D, crosses the stage, and exits through the back side of the stage space.⁷¹⁴ The queue comprises both of actors and non-actors, men and women of different ages, nationalities, professions, hence evoking an impression of pluralistic non-homogeneity. Some of them hold small foldable stools on which they occasionally sit throughout the performance. Upon entering the hall, the spectators also stand in line next to this queue; later, seated in the upwards-sloping auditorium, they observe a line of people entering and exiting the stage. One cannot see where this procession of people is heading. In the stage space, actors and non-actors stand out of the line and enunciate in turns parts of the divided text into a standing microphone on the front left side of the stage.

Witnessing the queue outside the hall before the performance, the spectators are invited "to be attentive to the rawness of their surroundings",⁷¹⁵ namely to reflect on the specificity of the Festivals' premises. The long line bridges the inside and the outside, the theatre space and the city. According to theatre scholar Dimitris Tsatsoulis, through this spatial constellation, "Dimitriadis' text becomes thus a testimony and protest of the city which intrudes into the

⁷¹⁴ The performance took place on July 30 – 31, 2007 and was repeated a year later, on July 6 & 7, 2008. For more information and photos, see "Dying as a Country," Greek Festival, accessed March 2, 2021, http://greekfestival.gr/festival_events/theseum-ensemble-2007/?lang=en.

⁷¹⁵ Avra Sidiropoulou, "Directors' Theatre in Greece: Stages of Authorship in the Work of Michael Marmarinos, Yiannis Houvardas, and Theodoros Terzopoulos," *Gamma* 22, no. 2 (2014): 124.

theatre space to exude again to the social space from which it has derived”.⁷¹⁶ Expanding this interpretation and given the complex connotations of the Demetriadian novel in regard to the (hatred) country-mother/land-nation but also the symbolic importance of Athens for the national narrative, it could be suggested that the long queue of Athenians stands not only for the multicultural city but for the polyvocal nation itself.

The standing people are moving forward under the sign of an electrical/machine sound. The spectators may soon identify this sound with the lightning function of a turned-on photocopier found on the right back side of the stage. The sound/movement is not periodic in equal intervals during the performance; it instead follows the ellipsis in brackets found in Dimitriadis’ text. Under each tone, the queue takes a step further; new people appear in the middle part of the stage across the audience. The tone and the photocopying light are hence not merely functioning as signs of a repeated process of repetition; in contrast, they trigger a movement that reveals to the audience a still new sight of the queue, even if one similar in form. Once again, this undermines the perception of the anonymous group as uniform. The linear unity of the queue is further challenged at a visual level through splitting the standing group into smaller groups, especially during improvisation-like moments that are not included in the Demetriadian text (e.g. joking, imitating in small groups).

On top of the back window of the factory-hall are projected images from the line outside the stage space (either the whole queue, part of it, *gros plan* of the faces, the backs or the waists of the standing people). The video projection evokes “a conflicting sense of intimacy and alienation”.⁷¹⁷ The visual framing of the standing people outside, looking frontwards to an invisible end of the queue, reveals further differences (for example in appearance or movements) between the anonymous individuals. At the same time, the use of video projection underscores the different spatial and temporal realities. In some cases, the difference of location draws the attention to the temporal simultaneity (for instance, when the queue outside seems to stand in rain), implying a mediated co-presence.

At the same time, the queue functions as a connecting thread between the spaces, especially in instances when the standing people both inside and outside the hall perform the same action (e.g. smoking). The performatively framed holding of the lit cigarette suggests a

⁷¹⁶ Dimitris Tsatsoulis, «Ζητήματα χώρου και μνήμες κειμένων στη σκηνική δραματουργία του Μ. Μαρμαρινού» [Space issues and text recollection in the stage dramaturgy of M. Marmarinos], *The Greek Play Project*, accessed March 17, 2021, <http://www.greek-theatre.gr/public/gr/greekplay/index/reviewview/81>. Also Sidiropoulou points to Marmarinos’ intention “to involve the city into the performance” (Sidiropoulou, “Directors’ Theatre in Greece,” 124).

⁷¹⁷ Vassilis Lambropoulos, “Greek Chorus in 09,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 28, no. 2 (2010): 278.

slower conception of time that interrupts/decelerates the tempo of the performance. Simple activities, such as smoking or the dousing of the floor with the hosepipe by a silent actor,⁷¹⁸ draw attention to the very presence of the fleeting action in the here and now: the smoke will leave no traces, the water on the floor will evaporate.

The seated spectators are always aware of this standing “audience”, which, although from another position, also witnesses the “narration” of Dimitriadis’ text. At the beginning of the performance, this additional audience was standing parallel to the entering spectators outside the hall. While the audience during the performance observes how the line follows its own route outside the stage, at the end of the performance, all the participants return and stand facing the spectators. Functioning this time as a “mirror”, they are stressing the impression of a second audience: spectators between the seated audience and the actors/narrators, challenging a clear-cut distinction between stage and auditorium, although the spatial distance between those two was never really bridged.⁷¹⁹ Theatre scholar Avra Sidiropoulou suggests that in the Festival’s production “the idea of building up a modern Chorus by turning potential spectators into agents of action, albeit an old one, seems very apt. Circulating among spectators-turned-actors, Dimitriadis’ words become lived experience and shared history”.⁷²⁰ The members of the queue become the citizens of a new country. The shaping of a new heterogeneous community, beyond the national, is amplified by the process of waiting and the shared narration. In Marmarinos’ production, waiting is without expectation, without addressee, without someone who will be expected. If according to Roland Barthes, “[t]o make someone wait: the constant prerogative of all power”,⁷²¹ here it is manifested a waiting liberated by the power relations.

As in his other performances, Marmarinos focuses on the performatively framed act of narration in order to challenge notions of homogeneity, unity and representation. The director had claimed regarding his 2003 performance *Romeo and Juliet: The Third Memory*: “We

⁷¹⁸ From the beginning of the performance a middle-aged man is seated at a desk on the left side of the stage. Recalling a janitor, he is silently present throughout the performance, without taking part in the action and without – for most of the time – looking at the participants of the queue and their monologues in front of the standing microphone.

⁷¹⁹ According to Lambropoulos “[i]n *I am Dying as a Country*, it was as if people left the auditorium to join the line passing through the stage and then returned to their seats. In both cases, actors and audience became interchangeable, or rather everybody present could turn into a performer” (Lambropoulos, “Greek Chorus in 09,” 279).

⁷²⁰ Sidiropoulou, “Directors’ Theatre in Greece,” 124. From an opposite point of view, and rather overlooking the difference between performativity and theatricality, Lambropoulos appears sceptical concerning the possibility “to have a chorus when everybody is a performer, in other words, whether it is possible to constitute a political community under conditions of total theatricality” (Lambropoulos, “Greek Chorus in 09,” 279).

⁷²¹ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2002), 40 (emphasis in original).

choose the narration as a performative means, since it is only as narrativity that the historicity of human experience may reach language. Through the raw narrativity, we experiment with a process through which the ordered structure destructs itself during its course".⁷²² On the Festival's stage, actors and non-actors approach a standing microphone on the left side of the stage and enunciate one after the other parts of Dimitriadis' text. They then return to their place in the queue.

Once again the microphone gains an ambiguous function, both alienating but also inclusive.⁷²³ While inviting the spectators to critically reflect on the performative frame of the non-representational narration, the microphone constructs a bridge between stage and auditorium. This is further facilitated by the presence of the human body, which, in a few instances, replaces the stand. An actor holds the microphone and thus becomes a part of the medium through which the narration is achieved. The microphone here still functions as a power mechanism; this time, however, not in order to express the speaker's authority over the spectator or other onstage *acteurs*. On the contrary, the microphone allows the voices of all the non-powerful and for so long silenced citizens of Dimitriadis' country to be heard. This potentially evokes a feeling of inclusion to the – anyhow silent – spectator.

The co-presence, however, during the narration does not imply a united narrative by a singular voice. The actors' enunciation/acting style and body position (also their movement towards and away from the microphone) underscore fragmentation and multivocality. While speaking, the actors stand or move in front of the microphone in somewhat uncomfortable positions (e.g. on one foot or their toes, while jumping, with crutches, wearing a neck collar, holding a cigarette or a travelling bag, reading from a booklet). Some utter their parts indifferently, while others are ironic or passionate; some speak louder, whereas others whisper. Still, they do not succeed each other in front of the microphone in the same way, hence prohibiting a linear, periodical sequence that could recall a notion of systematic progress.

Marmarinos' intention to underscore Dimitriadis' attempt to challenge conceptions of a homogeneous (Greek) nation has been revealed from the very beginning of the performance. While the spectators are entering the hall, next walking to the long queue, a young woman speaks into the standing microphone with broken Greek, standing on one foot and folding her hand uncomfortably. Her accent recalls people from Eastern Europe. Her movement and rather

⁷²² Michael Marmarinos, "Director's note," in *Ρομέο και Ιουλιέτα: Η τρίτη μνήμη* [Romeo and Juliet: The Third Memory] (Athens: Theseum the Ensemble/ Koan, 2004), 10

⁷²³ Cf. to the use of the microphones (standing and handheld) in Karathanos' *Golfo* (2.2.2), as well as the double function of the standing microphone in Marmarinos' *Herakles*, evoking a feeling of estrangement in the case of the actors/tragic characters and affection in the case of the chorus (1.1.2).

incoherent way of expressing herself stress the fact that her monologue does not belong to Dimitriadis' text. In a stammering way, she is addressing a Greek lover, confessing her wish to share a life with him in Greece. During her part, Greek *laiko* songs from the 1960s sound from the loudspeaker. These songs, characteristic of the Greek popular culture of the past and especially with the decades that had been identified with massive emigration from Greece, contradict the presence and enunciation of the immigrant woman ironically, while at the same time underscoring it. Kyriaki Frantzi rightly observes that the lyrics of the songs contrast with the monologue: "the former is about loss and abandonment, the latter about hope and faith".⁷²⁴ The woman's wish to be loved and be allowed to express her love, namely, a sign of hope and optimism for the future shifts the attention to the presence of the "other" in the Greek society. It could be suggested that her words do not address an invisible Greek man but Greece itself, with the immigrant woman searching for her position in the foreign country.

The difficulty of expression in the introductory monologue of the immigrant woman (in the same way as later foreign actors use words from their native language together with the Greek text) does not point to an idealising conception of a multilingual society. Instead, they reveal the "blockades of linguistic communication" in Lehmann's terms, experienced both by actors and spectators. Polyglossia reveals "gaps, abruptions and unsolved conflicts, even clumsiness and loss of control".⁷²⁵ The presence of non-actors as well as of foreigner actors, who either speak in their language without Greek supertitles (e.g. an Asian woman speaking in a language that may not be considered easily identifiable by the Greek audience) or speak in Greek with different foreign accents contribute to the questioning of unity. The sound of different languages and accents invites the spectators to focus on the process of narration and not only on the understanding of the text. In a postdramatic way, these instances of multilingualism break the homogeneity of the national language of a linear narrative.⁷²⁶

As I have already suggested, without directly naming the country, Dimitriadis' text can be considered a core text about Greek history and identity. Marmarinos' production while hinting at the identification of the country with Greece does not further amplify it. It constructs a fragmented Greek framework, inviting the audience to reflect critically on it while moving

⁷²⁴ Kyriaki Frantzi, "Dimitris Dimitriadis/Michael Marmarinos: Dying as a Country," in *International Conference 2010: the interchange of civilizations in the Mediterranean Area* (Pusan, Korea: Institute for Mediterranean Studies, 2011), 4.

⁷²⁵ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 147.

⁷²⁶ According to Lehmann, in postdramatic theatre "[m]ulti-lingual theatre texts dismantle the unity of national languages" (ibid.).

beyond it.⁷²⁷ Throughout the performance, scattered moments of Dimitriadis' narrative have triggered brief, related deviations with the addition of sequences not included in the original text. In many cases, these scenes use brief musical or verbal references to Greek culture, “a potpourri of cultural curios from recent Greek history”,⁷²⁸ which frames and actualises the text in the present time. Cultural familiarity functions as the departure point towards new forms of co-presence and togetherness (not only on stage). Common cultural references, while being acknowledged, do not become an absolute criterion for identification.

The performance opens with the sound of the *laiko* songs by the famous singer of the 1960s Beba Blans, accompanying the monologue of the East European immigrant. Already before entering the auditorium, the spectators may be aware that the former star singer participates in the production and the sound of her song may function as a reminder. Blans herself holds the final monologue of the woman-daughter. Alone on stage, she enunciates a part of the text while another part is heard recorded with her voice from the loudspeakers. Her voice reveals a somehow indifferent tone. As in his other performances, Marmarinos makes use of the associations that particular persons and their real lives may activate.⁷²⁹ Blans' presence has a double function: a woman of late middle age, who was known not only for her voice but also for her sex-appeal, now appears on stage exposing her (exhausted) maturity. The latter may contradict the famous image of her youth. The visible, physical maturity of the female body and the sound of songs reminds the audience of the Greek 1960s and 1970s in a reflective, nostalgic way, which points to the distance between past and present and the irrevocability of time.

In Marmarinos' production, the improvised-like references to the Greek identity and culture are either musical or verbal; yet, they are not visual (symbols of the nation or images associated with modern Greek culture) as was the case not only in *Herakles* but also the other productions analysed so far (cf. Kitsopoulou's visual deconstruction of national/cultural symbols). Here their references have a certain relation to and effect on the particular part of Dimitriadis' text to which they are associated. For example, the citizens in Dimitriadis' country were singing nostalgic songs in order to bear the centuries of siege.⁷³⁰ Just before the

⁷²⁷ Following Sidiropoulou, “Marmarinos has discovered a unique way of combining in his work essential attitudes of ‘Greek-ness’ with a broad trans-national quality. His insistence on themes permeated by issues of identity is telling, not to mention, profoundly touching” (Sidiropoulou, “Directors’ Theatre in Greece,” 125).

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

⁷²⁹ In his *Electra* (1998), for example, Marmarinos chose for Clytemnestra's role the well-known actress of the commercial Nonika Galinea, while in the staging of *Agamemnon* (2000) the eponymous role held the rock singer Blaine Reininger. See also Eleftheria Ioannidou, “Monumental Texts in Ruins,” 130.

⁷³⁰ Dimitris Dimitriadis, *Πεθαίνω σα χώρα* [Dying as a Country], 14.

enunciation of this part into the microphone, the queue begins to sing a slower version of the song *Sweet Marata*, which will be repeated several times later on. The latter belongs to the *genre* of *elafro tragoudi* [light song]⁷³¹ and expresses the (innocent) story of love without response, echoing the naïve feelings of a bourgeois entertainment just before the war. While a male actor continues his part into the microphone with interruptions, the song escalates to a unison hoot and an out of tune continuation of the song accompanied by an upheaval of the hands. The disharmony of the song, which is then heard together with a marching-style music piece composed by Dimitris Kamarotos, creates an atmosphere of carnivalesque ecstasy, undermining a possible nostalgic feeling for the years of the careless past triggered by the song.

Later on, different actors/participants run out of the queue and looking towards the audience, utter the first verses from several well-known Greek songs from different periods and *genres* (*laiko*, *entexno*, *skyladiko*, *rebetika*). Interesting enough, these verses intermingle with the sound of a jazzy melody sung by an actress and accompanied by the rhythmical clapping of the people in the queue. The various slogans that later interrupt the narration of the text have a similar function. Jumping and moving their hands frenziedly while looking towards the audience, the queuing participants loudly chant various slogans. The latter should be considered well-known in Greek public discourse, either from the protests or the graffiti on the streets, covering a wide spectrum of ideological stances (anarchists, communists, against the cobs, right wing, but also in favour of the then Prime Minister, Kostas Karamanlis). Standing out of the line and facing the audience the non-actors evoke a sense of proximity to the audience, also underscored by the common cultural background that these references may frame.

In Dimitriadis' text, one of the most direct references to Greece is the Greek surnames (together with the initials) mentioned in the description of the civil war. In Marmarinos' performance, an actress reads repetitively from a booklet these surnames of the people who killed each other in the war and who, in some cases, belonged to the same family. The loud music covers her voice; the acknowledgement of the victims is "silenced". A girl's desperate calling into the microphone of the common Greek first name "Petros" follows this intensive moment. The sound of the first name, in contrast to the repeated family names, triggers a sense of familiarity. A similar effect may be traced in the few added words heard by the narrator in

⁷³¹ As Dimitris Papanikolaou explains, "[d]irectly influenced by European popular traditions and by certain forms of classical music, like operetta, the light song did not constitute an identifiable genre. Rather, it was the undefined generic space for the non-classical urban music that used Western instruments and was more influenced by Western traditions" (Dimitris Papanikolaou, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 90).

the microphone as a comment on the changes that the language of Dimitriadis' country underwent. These four words, at first sight without relevance, words ("mine", "development", "swagger", "Greek") can be actually understood as rather ironic hints to the question of ownership, to the (modern Greek) identity and the history of the country.

These Greek allusions function inevitably as a means of contextualisation, which, in turn, affect the audience's perception of the performance and their interpretation of the critical/deconstructive potential of the staged text in regard to the specific frame of reference. At the same time, these hints (because of their familiarity) may evoke affection, even in a fragmentary and not uncritical way. Yet, in *Dying as a Country*, against the backdrop of this particular cultural context, Marmarinos invites the spectators to reflect on broader conceptions of belonging beyond national/familiar demarcations. The above scene of acknowledgement of the civil war's victims is followed by the sound of Pergolesi's "Eja, Mater, fons amorism" the soprano aria from *Stabat Mater*, this time heard a cappella by a contra-tenor voice. Interestingly, Marmarinos does not choose a Greek grieving song but a piece from the Western music corpus, which at the same time carries with it specific (non-Orthodox) connotations. This choice hence shifts the focus of interpretation from the specific to the universal, from the narrative of hate to the dramatic song for any dead. The tempo of the performance is decelerated, paused in a moment of reflective commemoration in the here and now.

While thus accounting for the past, Marmarinos' *Dying as a Country* opens a new perspective towards the future from the present vantage point. The emphasis on the collective act of narration establishes the importance of this condensed "now". On the Festival's stage, narration should not be seen only as a gesture of recollecting acknowledgement of the past but also of performative anticipation of an open future to come. Marmarinos' staging makes use of this hidden spark of weak hope to be found in the Demetriadian text. Utilising aesthetic strategies that undermine notions of linearity and unity, the performance suggests that the (transformative) "promise" can be found only in a present moment of sharing, co-belonging and waiting.

The notion of promise is related to a state of waiting, to an expectation. According to Jacques Derrida

[a]s soon as you address the other, as soon as you are open to the future, as soon as you have a temporal experience of waiting for the future, of waiting for someone to come:

that is the opening of experience. Someone is to come, is *now* to come. Justice and peace will have to do with this coming of the other, with the promise.⁷³²

Each address to the other is a promise. Derrida defines “[t]his universal structure of the promise, of the expectation for the future, for the coming, and the fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice” as “messianic structure”.⁷³³ Yet, messianic structure is not the expression of messianism. Using the notion *messianicity* instead of *messianism*, he speaks of a “messianic without messianism”.⁷³⁴ This lack of messianism, namely this “without”, does not signify the “diminishment of the force of the messianic expectation”.⁷³⁵ For, messianicity relies upon faith; a non-religious faith which is absolutely necessary for the existence of society.⁷³⁶

As Derrida explains in his elaborative essay “Marx & Sons”, the Messianicity should be understood by taking into consideration:

on the one hand, a paradoxical experience of the performative of the promise (but also of the threat at the heart of the promise) that organizes every speech act, every other performative, and even every preverbal experience of the relation to the other; and, *on the other hand*, at the point of intersection with this threatening promise, the horizon of awaiting [*attente*] that informs our relationship to time—to the event, to that which happens [*ce qui arrive*], to the one who arrives [*l’arrivant*], and to the other. Involved this time, however, would be a waiting *without* waiting, a waiting whose horizon is, as it were, punctured by the event (which is waited for *without* being awaited); we would

⁷³² Jacques Derrida, “The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida,” in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 22 (emphasis in original).

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷³⁴ Here Derrida distinguishes his conception of the “messianic” from Benjamin’s messianism as discussed in the latter’s *Theses* and explains his differentiation from Benjamin’s conception of messianic: “for, in principle, my use of the word ‘messianic’ bears no relation to any messianistic tradition. That is why I speak precisely, of ‘messianicity *without* messianism’.” Derrida clarifies that “messianic without messianism” should not be confused with Benjamin’s “weak messianic power”. The juxtaposition of these two formulations acknowledges a possible relation but defined as “a tendency running *from* weakening *to* annulment, from the ‘weak’ to the ‘without’ – and, consequently, the asymptote, and *only the asymptote*, of a *possible* convergence of Benjamin’s idea with the one I would like to propose. Between ‘weak’ and ‘without’, there is a leap – perhaps an infinite leap” (Jacques Derrida, “Marx & Sons,” in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Spectres of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 2008), 250 (emphasis in original).

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁶ Derrida, “The Villanova Roundtable,” 23.

have to do with a waiting for an event, for someone or something that, in order to happen or ‘arrive’, must exceed and surprise every determinant anticipation.⁷³⁷

While looking towards the future, Derrida’s messianic affects the present. For, this aspiration of the future takes place now and, therefore, “[t]he responsibilities that are assigned to us by this messianic structure are responsibilities for here and now”.⁷³⁸ Still, an ambiguity is immanent in the messianic structure: on the one hand, one wants the Messiah to come – “I would like him to come, I hope that he will come, that the other will come, as other, for that would be justice, peace, and revolution”. At the same time “I do not want what I want and I would like the coming of the Messiah to be infinitely postponed”.⁷³⁹ An affirmative answer to the question regarding the arrival of the Messiah would imply the end. The question signifies the waiting, the promise. For, as Derrida explains, “(...) as long as I ask you the question ‘When will you come?’, at least you are not coming. And that is the condition for me to go on asking questions and living. (...) We wait for something we would not like to wait for. That is another name for death”.⁷⁴⁰

What is anticipated remains undefinable; yet, at the same time, it lays beyond the process of deconstruction: it is “the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant as justice*”.⁷⁴¹ This justice should not be hence named, not be concretised. The indefinability of the expected future implies hence a constitutive openness towards the kind of justice to come. This, in turn, presupposes a state of waiting, liberated from the dominant discourses that shape expectations and specific political aims.⁷⁴² The “promise” should never turn into “a programmed future”.⁷⁴³ In this present condition of expectation, one’s own responsibility arises: to keep the possibility of the future active, without resting “on the good conscience of having done one’s duty”⁷⁴⁴ in the present, under the influence of oppressive beliefs.

⁷³⁷ Derrida, “Marx & Sons,” 250- 251.

⁷³⁸ Derrida, “The Villanova Roundtable,” 24.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., 24–25.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), 33 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁴² According to John Caputo, “[i]n this messianism of the democracy to come, all eyes and ears are turned to everyone and everything that is ground under by the powers that be, the powers that are present, the powers that preside, which is what the scriptures call “the nations” (*ethne*). By keeping itself free of all prevailing idols, deconstruction dreams of a democracy that keeps itself open, welcoming, to the impossible, to the coming of the *tout autre*” (John D. Caputo, “The Messianic: Waiting for the future,” in *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Jonathan Culler, Vol 3 (London: Routledge, 2003), 281).

⁷⁴³ Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 75.

⁷⁴⁴ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 33.

In this gesture towards the open future also lies the difference between Benjamin's and Derrida's conception of the messianic. Reading Dimitriadis' text through Benjamin's *Theses*, I suggested that a chance for the rectification of the past is traceable in the surrender of the country, in the state of emergency – in the here and now of the present time. According to Owen Ware, for Benjamin “messianic time breaks from any faith in the imminence of future salvation, and directs all its energy to redeeming the past that lives immanently in the now-time”.⁷⁴⁵ On the other hand, the process of waiting, inherent in the messianic conception of Derrida, stresses much more strongly the aspired future. While “debt to the past” is acknowledged, the emphasis on “the radical futurity of messianic anticipation” deprives from it “all content (justice, democracy, or equality)” and turns it into “the undetermined structure of messianicity itself (the emancipatory promise).”⁷⁴⁶

In the Festival's production, the process of waiting in a liminal moment of uncertainty sow the seed of promise and hopeful expectation. For although the event “can either come to pass or not”, still waiting appears “inseparable from a promise and an injunction that call for commitment without delay [*sans attendre*], and, in truth, rule out abstention”.⁷⁴⁷ The movement towards an unknown final point is not continuous; it accelerates and decelerates, revealing different dynamics in the process of expecting the anticipated future.

At the same time, the waiting together manifests the (liminal) formation of a community. For most of the time, the participants in Marmarinos' queue do not interact with each other; they remain strangers. This distance, however, does not prohibit the evocation of a sense of belonging together. For, according to Derrida,

[t]he structure of my relation to the other is of a ‘relation without relation’. It is a relation in which the other remains absolutely transcendent. I cannot reach the other. I cannot know the other from the inside and so on. That is not an obstacle but the condition of love, of friendship, and of war, too, a condition of the relation to the other. So, dissociation is the condition of community, the condition of any unity as such.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁵ Owen Ware, ‘Dialectic of the Past/Disjuncture of the Future: Derrida and Benjamin on the Concept of Messianism’, *Journal for Religious and Cultural Theory* 5, no. 2 (2004): 103, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://jcr.org/archives/05.2/ware.pdf>. According to Ware, “the absence of futurity in Benjamin's ‘Theses,’ and the whole-hearted affirmation of the future-to-come in Derrida's work, marks a significant difference that critics have often glossed over” (ibid., 100).

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁴⁷ Derrida, “Marx & Sons,” 249.

⁷⁴⁸ Derrida, “The Villanova Roundtable,” 14–15.

Marmarinos creates a site of distant closeness; he deconstructs but also re-establishes familiarity. In Dimitriadis' country, the mother-nation devours her children; the aspiration of salvation is related to the complete annulment of identities that have been built under prevailing discourses. In his performance, Marmarinos opens up the anticipation of a future and offers a spark of hope. The address to the audience through the narration of the text into the microphone can be interpreted as the expression of this anticipation. At the same time both narration and waiting become a shared experience – hope is the outcome of the collective presence and the community that is formed in the present of the performance becomes the answer to the need for violent destruction as manifested in Dimitriadis' text.

Hence, this multivocal community, formed in the present time of the performance, reminds the spectator that the fleeting hope is to be searched in “narration”.⁷⁴⁹ The multicultural queue in the Festival's production is waiting in the movement for something to come. Through the challenging of linearity and unity, between estrangement and familiarity, Marmarinos' performance is addressing a non-utopian utopic future. The destination is unknown; the spectator cannot see where they are heading. In the end, the queue will be dissolved and return on stage, next to the daughter –woman of the country, looking towards the audience.

Dimitriadis' *Dying as a Country* implies the notion of a now-time which carries the lost potential for liberation of the past. Here, however, the text places in a deconstructive way the notion of a nation at its centre turning into anticipation that overcomes existing borders in favour of a community shaped in the here and now. Marmarinos' performance re-activates the lost chance in the now-time of the collective act of waiting and narrating – in the here and now of the performance. The attack on the nationally and linguistically homogeneous country paves the way for a new form of co-belonging of the individuals, the citizens of a multicultural city.

The notion of expecting something to come is constitutive of the notion of co-belonging. It implies a longing for a future to come, a longing for a state of hope. But this state in the present does not resemble a historical present. It is the now of multiplicity: different languages, different individuals but also temporalities and spatialities. The double audience – one participating and one witnessing – constructs a further level of contemporaneity. But all these levels intermingle in the act of shared expectation. The latter, in relation also to the connotations of the text, signifies the shattered messianic hope. The nation is transcended in a

⁷⁴⁹ In 2011, Marmarinos concluded his director's note for the production of *Herakles* by arguing that “[h]ope cannot be found in History, it is found in Narration”, see footnote 260.

moment of transition: from text to performance, from narrative to narration, from past to present mediated through the aspiration of the future. The collective experience of a “we” is demonstrated in the (observed by the audience) queue that questions a homogeneous national community. Yet, this collective awaiting in the anonymous state of co-belonging, always takes place against this familiar Greek background, as implied by the allusive references, the finale with *Beba Blans* but also the no matter (deconstructed) Greek connotations of the Demetriadian text.

In the Festival’s production, destruction and hope intermingle: the possibility of a new beginning is manifested against a loosely demarcated Greek background of a society that acknowledges as its only possibility the opening up beyond national categories and the inclusion of the foreigner. Identities exist, but in the moment of co-presence. Marmarinos’ participant awaits still, member of a community of unknown people, whose only connecting thread is the expectation of a never-coming Messiah without identity. It is this moment of co-existence in the insecurity of the unknown that could, however, signify the expectation of liberation from the official history and the established ways of identification. It is in this moment that the possibility exists of finding new manners of self-perception as part of a community of silent individuals – a community defined not only by the existence of cultural attachments but also by multiplicity and liminality.

4.2 In search of borderless “homelands”

In 2008, a year after the premiere of *Dying as a Country* at the Athens Festival, Marmarinos’ performance was the first Greek production ever invited to the Wiener Festwochen.⁷⁵⁰ The performance was presented in Greek with supertitles, whereas the extras for the queue were partially cast in situ. An article on the Wiener Zeitung about that year’s Festival programme, while stressing the potential of an international repertoire for the enrichment of the local theatre scene, referred to Marmarinos’ production pointing to the cultural particularities of different international contributions: “The risks of a global repertoire lie, in turn, in the fact that one gets to see plays, whose – absolutely relevant at a regional level – content is difficult to be conveyed

⁷⁵⁰ The performance took place at the Halle E in MuseumsQuartier from June 13th to 15th 2008. In the same year, the production toured to the Festival Kunstfestival des arts in Brussels (22 –24 May) and to Warsaw (Festival Warszawa Centralna, 16 – 17 October). A year later it was presented at the Festival d’Automne a Paris as part of the homage to Dimitris Dimitriadis at Odéon-Théâtre de l’Europe from November 7 to November 12 2009.

in Vienna's context and thus the spectator must often sit shrugging in the auditorium".⁷⁵¹ Although Dimitriadis' play was not only considered "a diagnosis of the Greek present"⁷⁵², but also "an allegorical diagnosis of our times, in which shared responsibility had to give way to brutal individualism",⁷⁵³ still the underlying question regarding the culturally conditioned meanings of productions from different countries on an international theatre scene seems rather legitimate.

Dying as a Country was one of the first productions of the Hellenic Festival during Loukos artistic directorship that toured abroad.⁷⁵⁴ In the late 2000s and subsequently during the years of the crisis the activity of Greek theatre-makers on the international (mainly European) stages was significantly strengthened. Yet, to what extent did the Greek financial "drama" turned Greek theatre appealing to an international audience amid the deeper European crisis? And, under which terms of reception and production could these productions be primarily defined as "Greek"?

In the following section, the question of self-perception will be examined outside the familiar national context: Greeks become the "others". Through this prism I will first discuss the Greek theatrical presence abroad during the period examined here. Following that, I will analyse another possible demonstration of the "nation-transcending" mode, shifting my focus towards the onstage explorations of the Greek migrant experience – namely, Greeks as "foreigners" – and how such theatrical endeavours may, in turn, invite the audience in Greece to critically reconsider broader definitions of the Greek identity. My case study will be Akillas Karazissis' performance *The Dance of the Solitary Heart*.

⁷⁵¹ Petra Rathmanner, "Mut zur Lücke im globalen Theater," *Wiener Zeitung*, June 17, 2008, accessed March 16, 2021, https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/archiv/analysen/80832_Mut-zur-Luecke-im-globalen-Theater.html.

⁷⁵²"Ich sterbe als Land," *MuseumQuartier*, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.mqw.at/institutionen/q21/programm/2008/06/ich-sterbe-als-land/>.

⁷⁵³ "Ich sterbe als Land," in *Kunst-und Kulturbericht. Frauenkulturbericht der Stadt Wien 2008*. Vienna: Magistrat der Stadt Wien, 2009, 69, accessed March 22, 2021, <https://www.wien.gv.at/kultur/abteilung/pdf/kunstbericht2009.pdf>

⁷⁵⁴ Two years earlier Marmarinos had co-staged together with Paul Koek the *Suppliants*, a co-production of the Hellenic Festival and the Dutch theatre company Veenfabriek. In this bilingual approach to the Euripidean tragedy as rock opera mainly Dutch actors and musicians but also three Greek actors took part. After the premiere in Leiden, which followed an intense rehearsal period, the production toured in the Netherlands and was finally presented at Epidaurus on July 7th and 8th 2006. In the same year, the first of the Yorgos Loukos' artistic directorship, the Festival had also co-produced the Greek-Turkish *Persians*, directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos and with an ensemble of actors from both countries. On May 11, 2006, the performance had opened the 15th International Istanbul Theatre Festival in the Byzantine church of Haghia Irene in Istanbul. On June, 30 and July 1, 2006, the performance was presented in Epidaurus.

4.2.1 Contemporary Greek theatre abroad

In the Greek public discourse, the argument of “crisis as a chance” kept recurring. The crisis was interpreted as a chance for self-reflection on the past’s burden, the Greek identity, the Greek-European relations as well as the state’s administrative/economic malfunctions. The observed flourishing of the arts was also often explained as an opportunity for reaction to the state of political affairs. As I have contended from the beginning, the crisis cannot be considered as the primary reason for the opening of new artistic perspectives in the theatre field. The new forms and modes of performance were not initially developed under the pressure of the crisis; they had already started to be established in the mid-2000s, to a certain extent also in relation to the changes in the two cultural institutions in question.

Against this backdrop the extrovert presence of Greek theatre-makers, who began to promote their projects on international stages and Festival should also be analysed. Not surprisingly, the artists who present international activity are, although not exclusively, the same theatre-makers that I have associated so far with innovative endeavours in contemporary theatre in Greece. Moreover, the performances that have travelled abroad during the period examined here were mostly productions of the Hellenic Festival, the National Theatre and after 2010, the Onassis Cultural Foundation. The Festival undertook an active role as mediator thanks to the support and contacts of Yorgos Loukos, who brought Greek artists into contact with foreign theatres. It is of particular importance to observe that this kind of support was not consistent, as part of a planned agenda of cultural exchange, but should be better understood as a personal initiative.

Here I do not aspire to chart in detail the Greek theatrical activity abroad, but only define a hypothesis for future research, relating the rising international presence of Greek theatre-makers to the discourses of (Greek but also European) crisis and the recent theatrical developments in Greece. Noticeably, during the period of crisis, the reception of the productions has been related rather often to the political/economic situation of Greece. This connection was revealed either in the critical reviews, through the curation of parallel events (e.g. discussions about the situation in Greece), or through the choice of Greece as the guest/honoured country in Festivals.

A case in point was the 68th Avignon Festival in 2014, which hosted three Greek productions. While these plays were not directly thematising the crisis, they were considered

suggestive of the situation in Greece.⁷⁵⁵ Dimitris Dimitriadis' *The Circle of the Square*,⁷⁵⁶ was a production of the Onassis Cultural Centre which had premiered in October 2013, directed by the young director Dimitris Karantzas. In the same year, the Festival also hosted the National's production of *Vitrioli*, a play by Yannis Mavritsakis, directed by Oliver Py, premiered at the National Theatre in 2013 as part of the "What is our motherland" season. The third Greek contribution was the French premiere of Manolis Tsipos' *Still Life*, directed by Michel Raskin. Furthermore, a discussion took place on "Miroirs tragiques, fables modernes: Comment le théâtre grec contemporain parle d'aujourd'hui."⁷⁵⁷ It was organised on the occasion of the publication of a Cahier by the Maison Antoine Vitez, including translations of contemporary Greek plays in France. The topic of discussion was underlining the importance of the thematic of identity from a present standpoint: "*Qui sont, de nos jours, les héritiers (ou les enfants terribles) de Sophocle et d'Aristophane?*"⁷⁵⁸

Two years later the theatre group Blitz presented their performance *6am. How to disappear completely* at the Avignon Festival; this was another production of the Onassis Cultural Centre. Blitz have been one of the most active theatre groups abroad (among other places they have performed in the UK, France and Holland). Their international activity had started with their second production *Guns! Guns! Guns!* (2009) at the National Theatre of Greece, which some years later toured in France. The group has also collaborated with foreign ensembles, like the Schaubühne in the performance *Der terroristische Tanzsalon* (FIND Festival, Berlin 2013) and for the German version of their production *Galaxy* (premiered in 2011 at the Cacoyannis Foundation in Athens) which was presented at the 2014 FIND Festival.

In the previous years and despite (or maybe because of) the tense relationships between the two countries, the presence of Greek artists in Germany has been quite noticeable. One of the most representative cases is the director-duo Anestis Azas and Prodromos Tsinikoris,

⁷⁵⁵ See René Solis, "Le Festival affiche son profil grec," *Liberation*, July 11, 2014, accessed March 10, 2021, https://next.liberation.fr/theatre/2014/07/11/le-festival-affiche-son-profil-grec_1062342; AFP, "Le théâtre au vitriol des auteurs grecs au festival d'Avignon," *L'Express*, July 10, 2014, accessed March 16, 2020, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/societe/le-theatre-au-vitriol-des-auteurs-grecs-au-festival-d-avignon_1558558.html, and Sophie Jouve, "Avignon : "Vitrioli" ou la montée du calvaire de la Grèce par Olivier Py," *franceinfo*, July 14, 2014, accessed March 10, 2021, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/culture/spectacles/theatre/avignon-vitrioli-ou-la-montee-du-calvaire-de-la-grece-par-olivier-py_3363933.html.

⁷⁵⁶ Dimitriadis' work has been translated in French and many of his plays have been performed in France since the 1960s. His *Le Prix de la révolte au marché noir* was staged in 1968 by Patrice Chéreau.

⁷⁵⁷ "Tragic mirrors, modern tales: how does Greek contemporary theatre speak of today?"

⁷⁵⁸ "Who are, nowadays, the heirs (or the *enfants terribles*) of Sophocles and Aristophanes?". "Presentation," Avignon Festival, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://festival-avignon.com/en/edition-2014/programme/miroirs-tragiques-fables-modernes-comment-le-theatre-grec-contemporain-parle-d-aujourd-hui-13110> (english in original).

whose documentary theatre performances, often focusing on different aspects of the migration experience, have been successfully presented at theatres and festivals all over Germany. *Telemachus*, which I will analyse in the next section, was presented at Ballhaus Naunynstraße in 2013 in a co-production with the Onassis Cultural Centre. The performance was repeated in Athens, while in the following years it toured in different venues across Europe.⁷⁵⁹ This project was initiated by Ballhaus' artistic director at that time Shermin Langhoff. Following her appointment at the Maxim Gorki Theatre, Azas and Tsinikoris presented in 2015 *Geblieden um zu gehen*, where they expanded on the questions of *Telemachus*. The performance was part of the project "Berlin Calling Athens" which also included a panel discussion, *Ferngespräch*, about the Greek crisis.⁷⁶⁰

In 2013 Azas and Tsinikoris participated with their *Telemachus* in the Heidelberger Stückemarkt. That year's guest country was Greece, with the focus revolving around the crisis and the role of the arts. The programme included: i) guest theatre productions from Greece (*Meltd Butter* by Horos Company; National Theatre's *Austras or Couch Grass* by Lena Kitsopoulou, KANIGUNDA company's *Poli-Kratos* and Azas'-Tsinikoris' *Telemachus*); ii) readings of three Greek plays translated in German (Yannis Mavritsakis' *The Blind Spot*, Lena Kitsopoulou's *Athanasios Diakos: The Return* and Vangelis Hadjiyannidis' *Screenlight*)⁷⁶¹; and iii) podiums-discussion "Theater in der Wirtschaftskrise", focusing on the consequences of the crisis for the theatre scene in Greece. Under the moderation of Anestis Azas, the dramaturg Armin Kerber was in discussion with the theatre scholar Helene Varopoulou, the author Vangelis Hadjiyannidis and the director Yannis Leontaris. The participants shared their different views regarding theatrical activity in Greece, the interrelation between aesthetic, form and crisis, and what had to be done in the future.⁷⁶² The International Author prize of that year's Stückemarkt was awarded to Lena Kitsopoulou for her *Athanasios Diakos: The Return*.

⁷⁵⁹ Both directors have been closely affiliated with Germany: Tsinikoris was born in a *Gastarbeiter* family in Wuppertal; Azas, on the other hand, has studied at the Ernst Busch and had already worked both in Germany and Greece (among others as director's assistance in Gotscheff's *The Persians* and Rimini Protokoll's *Prometheus*).

⁷⁶⁰ Much discussed was also the Onassis Cultural Centre's production *Clean City* about the immigrant cleaners from different countries and their position in Greece' crisis, which toured in many German cities and elsewhere. The notion of "cleanliness" pointed to the racist arguments that became part of the public Greek discourse with the rise of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. Indicative of the production's reception in Germany was a one-page article of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* about *Clean City*: Alex Rühle, "Es gibt uns," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 12, 2017, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/theater-es-gibt-uns-1.3330214>.

⁷⁶¹ As Simone Kaempf observed, the three plays achieve to address the difficult issue of an "identity crisis," which is indeed associated with the financial crisis, but whose roots lie deeper and should be searched in the past (Simone Kaempf, "Viele blinde Flecken," *Nachkritik*, April 27, 2013, accessed March 10, 2021, <http://www.heidelberger-stueckemarkt.nachtkritik.de/2013/index.php/gastland/neue-griechische-stuecke>).

⁷⁶² On a report about this discussion, see Georg Kasch, "Für alle reicht es nicht," *Nachkritik*, April 28, 2013, accessed March 11, 2021, <http://www.heidelberger-stueckemarkt.nachtkritik.de/2013/index.php/gastland/theater-in-der-wirtschaftskrise-diskussion>.

Interestingly enough, the crisis continued to frame the reception of Greek theatre in the past few years, when the European responses and interest regarding the troubling case of Greece seemed to have become milder. For example, in 2017, the Festival *Culturscapes* (5.10–3.12) in Basel, Switzerland was dedicated to Greece. The programme, expanded to more than two months, included theatre performances, music concerts, exhibition, film, literary and culinary evenings and discussions. Once again, the curatorial note contextualised the choice of the hosted country at that year's Festival with reference to the crisis, stressing the importance of a better understanding of contemporary Greece that went beyond stereotypes:

But how did the situation look from the 'inside'? How important was and still is to understand this internal perspective and make it visible? To what extent do political, economic and cultural restrictions influence the views of the Greeks? To what degree is the attitude of outsiders determined by discourses of supremacy and normativity? CULTURESCAPES Greece has hence become not only a festival in honour of Greece and its cultural landscape but rather a search for the cultural stereotypes on both sides of this dialogue; a search for mechanisms of dissociation and the challenge of accepting yourself as the 'other'.⁷⁶³

Greek theatre and the arts, in general, are invited to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes regarding Greece that had been reproduced through media and the public discourse during the years of crisis. As the curators of the Festival suggest, this approach required a process of "unlearning", yet not simply in the sense of forgetting, but of overcoming stereotypes, assumptions and the normative discourses on political responsibility and economic independence, which are per se related to Greece".⁷⁶⁴

It is interesting to note that in the recent past quite a few theatre-makers have not only presented their Greek productions in German theatres and festivals but also worked with German ensembles. In many cases these collaborations took place after 2010, as the above-

⁷⁶³ Juurriaan Cooman und Kateryna Botanova, "Editorial," in *Culturscapes Greece 2017: Programme*, Basel: 2017, 3, accessed March 7, 2021, <https://www.culturescapes.ch/storage/2019/4/67NhBaBDc4r0Fi6n9F4jynMadJF3BUU0AIAxVfOp.pdf>.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid. The theatrical part of the program included actual performances that took place in Greece during the last season but also past or foreign productions whose thematic was relevant to the Greek context. Hence, the audience had the chance to see, among others: Dimitris Papaioannou's *The Great Timer* (a 2017 production of Onassis Cultural Centre, the aforementioned production *Clean City* by Azas-Tsinikoris, Blitz company's *Institute of Global Loneliness* (produced by the Hellenic Festival), but also a Lecture-Performance by Rimini Protokoll about their 2010 production *Prometheus in Athens* (Athens Festival) together with their new Hörstück für twenty four Spectators *EVROS WALK WATER 1 & 2*. Akillas Karazissis took part with two productions: his own *About Hashish* (presented that autumn also in Athens) and as an actor in Milo Rau's *Empire*.

mentioned production of the Blitz at the Schaubühne or Lena Kitsopoulou, who after her award at the Heidelberger Stückemarkt, had been invited 2016 to stage *Hedda Gabler* at the Oberhausen Theater with a German ensemble. Other directors had already a closer relation to Germany as in the case of Azas-Tsinikoris but also the actor/director Akillas Karazissis⁷⁶⁵ or the former artistic director of the National Theatre Yannis Houvardas.⁷⁶⁶ The case of the much-acclaimed director Theodoros Terzopoulos, who had studied and worked as assistant director at Berliner Ensemble (1972-1976) is also notable. His acting method has been internationally discussed by theatre scholars abroad since the 1990s.⁷⁶⁷ These few names referred show the existence of a particular connection between Greece and Germany. Still, the cultural transfers and exchange in the field of theatre between these two countries require further research on the role of the “travelling” theatre-makers, productions and concepts not only during the years of crisis.

The sketchy overview above did not include all the Greek productions or collaborations presented abroad; hopefully, it at least draws attention to some of the networks and *acteurs* (individuals or institutions) that in different, not necessarily consistent ways, contributed to the promotion of the Greek theatre abroad during the recent past. The question whether the “crisis” indeed functioned as chance and gave a boost to the promotion of Greek theatre at an international level, remains open. A positive answer would require consideration not only of the ideological implications in the reception of the Greek theatre abroad especially since 2010 but also the extent to which the alignment of the Greek theatre with international aesthetic trends (e.g. postdramatic theatre) made it more appealing to – if not approachable by – an international audience.

⁷⁶⁵ Karazissis had studied and worked in Germany in the 1970s – early 1980s (see also the analysis of his “autobiographical” performance in 4.2.2). In the recent past, he participated in Milo Rau’s *Empire*, also presented at the Schaubühne Berlin. In the same year, he staged the *Blood Wedding* at Theater Altenburg Gera and a year later *A Streetcar named desire* at the same theatre. Worth mentioning is that his performance *Stalin: A discussion on the Greek theatre*, co-directed by M. Marmarinos and part of the National’s programme in the first year of Houvardas tenure, was awarded the Prize of the Federal Agency for Civic Education in Germany (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) at the 7th Festival “Politik im Freien Theater” in 2008 in Cologne.

⁷⁶⁶ Houvardas, after graduating from the London’s Royal Academy of Dramatic Art had also studied in Württemberg State Theatre (1980), while he staged at the Staatstheater Wiesbaden and Theater tri-bühne in Stuttgart. In the last years, he staged *Die Ratten* at Residenztheater in München (2013), *The Seagull* at Thalia Theater in Hamburg (2014) or *Così fan Tutti* at the Oper Stuttgart.

⁷⁶⁷ Interestingly, Terzopoulos is perhaps the only Greek director whose work and method has been analysed in the foreign bibliography. Indicatively see *Dionysus in Exile: The Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2019); Frank Raddatz, ed. *Journey with Dionysos: The Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2006).

4.2.2 Performing migration (hi)stories, transcending national identities: Karazissis' *The Dance of the Solitary Heart*.

The camera zooms in on a colourful mural, depicting a figure in a short, ancient Greek cloak, a laurel hoop and sandals, holding a lyre, seated next to a musician playing the bouzouki. In front stands a microphone connected to an amplifier recalling a Greek music hall. The camera moves slightly and reveals a plaster sculpture like the Parthenon's Caryatides next to the wall. In a single handheld shot the camera turns around the room, revealing a restaurant with the chairs upside down on the tables. Male voices are heard gambling and discussing their cards game intensively; their faces cannot be seen. Only one man can be recognised through an opening that connects the different rooms of the restaurant. The camera, moving from one room to the other, focuses on a middle-aged man rolling a joint, and smoking before passing it through. Following the dark indoors scene of smoking hashish, the next long shot of a cave with stalactites under the (possibly wild) sound from a factory recalls a moment of hallucination.

This was one of the last scenes from the 1978 documentary film *Giorgos from Sotirianika*, directed by Lefteris Xanthopoulos.⁷⁶⁸ The film belongs to a trilogy by Xanthopoulos about Greek migration. A few years after the first film about the Greek community in Heidelberg dealing with the collective experience of emigration, Xanthopoulos now sheds light on the individual stories of the Greek migrants and their encounter with and perception by the German society.⁷⁶⁹ As the main plotline, Xanthopoulos follows the story of Giorgos Kozobolis. Coming from the village Sotirianika in Peloponnese, after working as a *Gastarbeiter* in German factories, Kozobolis became a very successful Greek restaurant owner in Heidelberg. The man in the aforementioned restaurant scene is Kozobolis. In 2009, during Akillas Karazissis' performance *The Dance of the Solitary Heart: Cannabis Indica – Patria Graeca* at the National Theatre of Greece,⁷⁷⁰ a senior man with a bald patch presents himself to the audience as the owner of a Greek restaurant in Heidelberg. The same man, who later will

⁷⁶⁸ *Ο Γιώργος από τα Σωτηριάτικα* [*Giorgos from Sotirianika*], dir. Lefteris Xanthopoulos, 1978, accessed March 15, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTR8QXiESew>.

⁷⁶⁹ The first film of the trilogy was entitled *Ελληνική Κοινότητα Χαϊδελβέργης* [Greek Community in Heidelberg], 1976, accessed March 15, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBoHHVknxCE>; while in 1982 the third film *Στα Τουρκοβούνια* [On the Tourkovounia] about the internal migration within the country followed.

⁷⁷⁰ The performance took place from February 21 – April 2, 2009 at the National Theatre (Contemporary Theatre of Athens, Stage A) For more information, see “The Dance of the Solitary Heart,” National Theatre, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.n-t.gr/en/events/oldevents/solitaryheart>.

share with the audience stories about his first night gambling, is the same person that almost thirty years earlier had starred in Xanthopoulos' documentary.

The performance, based to a great extent on the director's personal experience, follows the story of a young Greek who travelled to Heidelberg for studies in the mid-1970s in a fragmentary way. There he became familiar not only with the (non-homogeneous) Greek migrant community but also with the ideas and lifestyle of the post-1968 "left-alternative milieu".⁷⁷¹ Questioning narrative coherence and performatively framing the personal act of recollection and narration, Karazissis' production challenged the singular definitions of Greek national and diasporic identity. The construction of an identity based on the longing for an – even eternally postponed – return home, gives its place to the search for new forms of community beyond common cultural/national references. On the National's stage, the nostalgia for a lost place becomes a "reflective nostalgia" in Svetlana Boym's terms, for a lost (recent) past and its missed transformative potential.

The experience of the young student in Germany is imbued with *Fernweh* [wanderlust], a synonym for openness towards new encounters.⁷⁷² *Fernweh* can be opposed to the *nostos* for home [*Heimweh* = homesickness], a feeling associated with the shaping of migrant identities. The object of the longing, this missed "home", differs from the imagined/remembered one. As I will later discuss in regard to Azas' and Tsiniokoris' production of *Telemachus: Should I stay or should I go?*, in the diasporic imagination of the return "home" (no matter how this is defined) remains an open quest, often further complicated due to multiple identities. In Karazissis' performance reflective nostalgia is not restricted to the expectation of a return. On the contrary, it manifests a longing for a particular moment in the recent history, when the possibility of *Fernweh* as a way of perceiving the world seemed to still be open. As Boym rightly suggests, "[a]t first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams".⁷⁷³ Here it is a longing for the period following the May of 1968, whose traces could be still felt in

⁷⁷¹ Here I am translating Sven Reichardt's term of "linksalternatives Milieu" as analysed in his book *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014. According to Reichardt, "[t]he concept [of milieu] embeds the way that the members of the milieu think and interpret inside their everyday context [Lebenswelt] and searches for structures of the everyday life, patterns of behaviour and rhythms of life" (39). Furthermore, it "looks at behavioural regularities [*Verhaltensregelmäßigkeiten*], patterns of action and social relationships that develop in these social communities, which are organised as personal networks" (40).

⁷⁷² In one of the first scenes of the performance that refers to the young student's trip to Germany and his first impressions, the notion of *Fernweh* (uttered by one of the actors in German) is opposed to the notion of "nostalgia," here as related to the departure from the homeland.

⁷⁷³ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

Germany in the mid-1970s. The performance hence echoes a nostalgia for a time where the possibility of transformation was (experienced as) still active, a moment of change that would not be the outcome of linear historical development.⁷⁷⁴

In Nikos Karathanos' *Golfo* at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus reflective nostalgia was challenging the restorative nostalgia of a homogeneous narrative about the ancient past. It was evoking the recollection of a (possibly comforting) idealised past while constantly reminding the audience that there is no way of return. In Karazissis' performance, the "reflective nostalgia" is not a nostalgia for the actual space where these experiences took place but for the period when this happens. Still, the performed recollection is not aimed at restoring the 1970s but at reminding the audience of the possible subversive potential experienced back then. For, nostalgia does not refer only to the past: "Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future. Consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales".⁷⁷⁵ The performance is not a plea for a return to 1968 but a call to reconsider what has been still kept alive from these past "tales".

Here the nostalgia is again "reflective", in Boym's terms: ambiguous, fragmented, humorous, and affectionate. It is the type of nostalgia that "explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols".⁷⁷⁶ In the performance, the distance between past and present but also the irreversibility of time is strongly emphasised, hence prohibiting an uncritical desire for return. In *Golfo*, this distance was established on stage through the questioning of the dramatic role, alienation and the allusion to different temporalities (past–present–future). In Karazissis' performance, the necessary inherent distance in reflective nostalgia is also manifested on stage through the challenging of representation, linearity and dramatic coherence. These aspects are, however, further underscored by the emphasis on the subjectivity of the act of recollection: remembering is unavoidably affected by the present viewpoint. The recollection produces fragmented, distorted, broken narratives. The line between autobiography and fiction remains blurred; memories are located between real experience and imagination; they are fragmented and incoherent. The reflective nostalgic is aware of the idealisation, distortion, and exaggeration of this memory: "If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and

⁷⁷⁴ According to Boym, "[i]n a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition" (ibid).

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., xvi.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., xviii.

homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialise time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space”.⁷⁷⁷

On the small stage of the National Theatre, the performers are present throughout the performance. They narrate, play music, sing, dance and perform parts of a script that recalls a collage of personal memories. The ensemble consists of both professional and non-professional actors, the director (who is also an actor) Akillas Karazissis and a pianist. To a great extent, the script was based on Karazissis’ autobiographical experience in Heidelberg, where he went for studies in the mid-1970s and stayed for fifteen years. The spectators are not necessarily aware of this background information. Still, they most likely realise that some of the participants are not actors. Characteristic is the case of Giorgos Kozobolis, the senior man in a suit, who is supposed to be the chief of a Greek restaurant where the hero of the narrative finds his first job. His utterance style and vocabulary (including “Greekalized” German words)⁷⁷⁸ may reveal that he is not a trained actor, while also pointing to his migrant background in Germany, hence functioning as “signs of authenticity”⁷⁷⁹ while also setting a clear framework for interpretation of the following onstage action.

Through the questioning of authorship and narrative coherence, the different modes of narration and strategies of distantiation and ironicisation, the performance constantly challenges the borders between fiction and (autobiographical) reality. The narrative perspective is decisive for the interplay between the different grades of fictionalisation, also in the case of presumably personal experiences. Throughout the performance, some of the stories are told in the first-person singular, while, in other cases, the actors refer to a “hero”, presumably the young student, whose experience in Germany constitutes the main plot in the performance. It is interesting to note that until the final, closing monologue Karazissis himself never speaks in the first person. His first monologue is a suggestive example of the subversive undermining of the border between autobiographical recounting and fictional narrative. Wearing a fur coat (fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s) and playing the guitar in front of a standing microphone, he sings in a high-pitched voice a recitativo-like song in English about his journey to the foreign country. His song crosscuts the reading aloud of a text about the young traveller’s first impressions in the city Backnang. The singing part is in English and the first-person singular,

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁷⁷⁸ For example, Kozobolis uses the word “*karta*” to describe the menu is a “Greekalized” term for the German “(Speise)karte”; some words are either rather colloquial or sound old-fashioned, as often happened to people who were living for a long time abroad and did not follow the changes in the language back home.

⁷⁷⁹ Miriam Dreyse, “Die Aufführung beginnt jetzt: Zum Verhältnis von Realität und Fiktion,” in *Experten des Alltags: Das Theater von Rimini Protokoll*, ed. Miriam Dreyse and Florian Malzacher (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2007), 86.

while the speaking part is in Greek and the third person singular. The shift between the two languages and two modes of expression (singing and speaking/reading) is indicative of the way that Karazissis challenges the notion of authorship of the autobiographical narrative.

By using a foreign language, namely a third language, to express himself in the first person, he questions the “natural” interpretation of his song as a personal recounting. The sound of English in a performance about the move to Germany ruptures the immediate associations with the country of origin and the target country (Germany-Greece/emigration-integration). Sung in the *lingua franca*, his song underscores not only the always persistent feeling of alienation between the new foreign place and the migrating/travelling subject. It also reveals the ruptured identification of the author/narrator with his own words. “Musicalisation” [Musikalisierung] evokes a similar estrangement effect, emphasising the distinctive difference between the sung text and the tone of the everyday speaking language.⁷⁸⁰ The use of the microphones (standing and an old portable one with cable) also aim at the critical awareness of the spectator, once again playing an important role. Obtaining a function of power, the microphone strengthens the presence of the acting/narrating individual out of the constantly present group. At the same time, though, similarly to Marmarinos’ *Herakles*, the use of the microphone alienates the actor from his/her own words, hence posing a question of authorship regarding the fictiveness of the narrated story.

Halfway through the performance, the audience’s “illusion” that the script of the performance is based on the student’s “real” story in the city of Backnang is challenged by the presence of Kozobolis. Looking towards the spectators, the elderly man informs them that the local “Bar der Einsamen Herzen” was not in Backnang, but was his own Greek restaurant in Heidelberg. The interweaving between fiction and reality is further perplexing. Kozobolis triggers immediate associations related to the context of the first wave of migrants to Germany in the 1960s.⁷⁸¹ This historical background of Greek migration against which the performance negotiates the existential question of identity is of crucial importance.

Greek migration has contributed significantly to the shaping of national imagination since the end of the nineteenth century.⁷⁸² Modern Greek society has experienced waves of

⁷⁸⁰ Jenny Schrödl, *Vokale Intensitäten: Zur Ästhetik der Stimme im postdramatischen Theater* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 78.

⁷⁸¹ In 1960, the Federal Republic of Germany had signed a bilateral agreement with Greece for the recruitment of guest workers, which led to a massive migration flow. On the Gastarbeiter in the 1970s see Verena McRae, *Die Gastarbeiter: Daten, Fakten, Probleme* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1980). McRae’s study offers a detailed analysis of different aspects related to the recruitment and integration of guest workers in West Germany (e.g. housing, everyday life/free time, education) and allows the reader to trace particular common characteristics of the social environment of the migrant workers in relation to the host country.

⁷⁸² Fragkou, “Strange Homelands,” 305.

both emigration as well as immigration: Greek emigrants in the USA and Australia, political exiles after the Civil War, guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) in Germany in the 1960s, immigrants coming to Greece in the 1990s and Greek economic migrants since 2010 due to the financial crisis. To a great extent, these different phases have broadly reflected historico-political developments. According to Dimitris Tziouvas “[i]t could be argued that diaspora, exile and immigration represent three successive phases in Modern Greek history and that they could serve as useful vantage points from which to analyse changes in Greek society, politics and culture over the last three centuries”.⁷⁸³ A stereotypical image of the Greek migrant, associated with a notion of nostalgia for the lost home/land, had often underscored conceptions of an essentialist, resilient Greek identity. As Dimitris Papanikolaou notes, “the migratory narratives promoted by contemporary national culture” have a twofold role: “On the one hand, they map Greekness by underlining those aspects of identity that migrant subjects safeguard as Greek. On the other hand, they become celebratory assertions of the ability of Greekness to survive, even under pressure and displacement”.⁷⁸⁴ Such coherent depictions which dominated the Greek imagination and had been extensively reproduced in the popular culture (cinema, songs) of the first post-war decades should be considered known to the broader audience, even up to now.

As the variety of the personal stories shared on stage in performances analysed here also illustrate, and despite stereotypical conceptions reproduced also in inland public culture, the Greek migrants should not be considered as a homogeneous group with a singular identity. The diasporic and migrant subjects are found constantly in a liminal state of “in-betweenness”. With regard to the broader question of national identity, it could be suggested, following Avtar Brah, that the shaping of diasporic identity can be understood as suggestive of the plurality and constant development inherent in the very notion of identity.⁷⁸⁵ At the same time, however, the diasporic identity is constructed at the intersection of longing for roots and a state rootlessness. This may explain why conceptions of fixed identities can be found in the narratives of Greek migrants, including the second generation.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸³ Dimitris Tziouvas, “Introduction,” in *Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700: Society, Politics and Culture*, ed. Dimitris Tziouvas (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 1.

⁷⁸⁴ Dimitris Papanikolaou, “Repatriation on Screen: National Culture and the Immigrant Other since the 1990s,” in *Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700: Society, Politics and Culture*, ed. Dimitris Tziouvas (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 259.

⁷⁸⁵ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 197.

⁷⁸⁶ In their research on second-generation Greek migrants and their “return” to Greece, Christou and King observe “not only typical ‘travelling identities’ characteristic of migrants and diasporic subjects on the move, but also strong expressions of Greekness – a kind of hegemonic, auto-essentialist discourse about the special qualities of Greek identity and of themselves as (diasporic) Greeks” (Anastasia Christou and Russell King, *Counter-*

Against the backdrop of the liminal migrant state, in Karazissis' performance, the ambiguity between reality and fiction also related to the issue of authorship, leads to questioning the stereotypical national representations of the migrant subject. The liminality of the migrant identity and the non-homogeneity of the Greek community abroad despite the "common" origin are reflected in the way that Karazissis' performance represents the encounter with the other Greeks in their *Stammkneipe* (the favourite local). On the National's small stage, no "real" place is restored and represented. Through musical and verbal allusions the performance plays ironically with the associations that a stereotypical image of the Greek restaurants abroad may evoke to the Greek audience, although the recollection of this particular one is characterised by a playful affection.⁷⁸⁷ The neon sign of the restaurant's name and the wooden table at the back of the stage remain visual but vague reminders of a place that is only reconstructed as a "familiar" meeting point in the foreign country in the recollections and narrations. The scene of *Stammtisch* [regular's table] reveals this feeling of collectivity despite differences in the common denominator of the migration experience. Looking towards the audience, all the performers speak synchronically and recall in past tense first-person plural their regular meetings at this Greek restaurant with the German name. A mixture of people with common Greek origin was gathered there: "Workers, students, buccaneers, few women, in the majority men, friends of cannabis, card players, musicians, lower and middle class people". Here the unanimous speaking of the actors underscores their group identity (as the inner circle of the regulars' table). The common nationality (and language) is the first parameter for these people's encounter; the foreign country encourages the formation of new affinities among migrants, which bring forward the internal plurality of a community otherwise considered as primarily Greek and reveals the otherwise often conceived singularity and fixity in the very notion of "being Greek".⁷⁸⁸

The differences and distance between the two cultural contexts (Greece–German) are established on stage from the very beginning of the performance. This contextualisation, however, does not aim at the construction of coherent identities based on cultural difference;

Diaspora: The Greek Second Generation Returns "Home" (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 24).

⁷⁸⁷ For instance, the "kitsch" decoration of these places is recalled when an actor describes a satyr in erection, depicted on the menu he holds when in discussion with the restaurant owner.

⁷⁸⁸ According to the director, this tavern was a place of encounter between Greeks beyond class differences: "We were a group of intellectuals, that had lived during junta without passports in Heidelberg, had taken part in '68, gamblers, pimps and workers. Other after the festivities were going to the factories, other to the rock disco. We were living the life of the 1968 freaks; a rock'n'roll way of life" (Akillas Karazissis, «Φυγή προς το άγνωστο χωρίς διαβατήρια» [Escape to the unknown without passports], interview by Ioanna Kleftogianni, *Eleftherotypia*, February 14, 2009, accessed March 11, 2021, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=17083>).

on the contrary, it creates the framework against which the transcendence of homogeneous, singular definition of communities may be achieved. Seated at a small desk with wheels, which recalls the front part of a transporter, two actors narrate their trip from the south to the north, while changing LPs on two turntables that are installed in the desk. The repetitions of words and sentences reflect the long, monotonous journey in the motorways of central Europe, hence stressing the spatial distance between the two countries. Without having enough time to recognise the songs, the audience will probably identify popular Greek songs of the 1960s and rock and roll/ballad songs in English. The first set a chronological context, while the latter may imply the influence of rock and roll to the German (sub)cultures of that time.

The German framework is a collage of known (if not stereotyped) references from the Greek point of view together with allusions that a Greek spectator not familiar with the foreign country cannot decipher so easily. From aspects of the everyday life (food like *Knödel*, *Sauerteigbrot*, *Sprudelwasser* or housewares like beds with puffed quilt and gigantic pillows or lace curtains) to the central European landscape (cornfields, lakes, low clouds) and from famous German artists/authors (Tomas Mann, Marlene Dietrich, Goethe) to the political events/protagonists (RAF), these references are not hierarchically categorised. Instead, as part of a fragmentary script, they pop out in a disorganised way, with the “high” art intermingling with everyday cultural traits. Hence, this collage of recollections from German culture and life challenges the perception of an official, coherent, image of the foreign (but also possibly, by extension, one’s own?) country based only on particular national cultural trademarks.

In the case of Karazissis’ production, the sound of a foreign language (German) does not primarily aim to rupture the unity of the national language of the narrative as in Marmarinos’ *Dying as a Country*. Already at the very beginning of the performance, a kind of bilingualism (German–Greek) is utilised in order to stress the distance between the two cultures. The performance opens with the word Bach (= stream), which is highly likely to be understood by the Greek audience as the name of the German composer. An actress approaches the audience while distinctly enunciating in a cable microphone the few words related to nature and weather in both languages (Bach; Wasser; Regen; Wald; Lied) and asks them to repeat the German words. The repetition of the words takes them out of their linguistic context, hence turning them into mere sounds without a specific meaning. The request to some spectators to pronounce these words (one of the very few moments of communication between stage and

auditorium) has a rather distantiating function: the audience is urged to perceive the words in a non-rational way evaluating the meaning within the context of a different language.⁷⁸⁹

Similarly, music evokes an ambiguous effect; both ironic but at the same time critically nostalgic.⁷⁹⁰ The soundtrack of the performance points immediately to the different cultural, social and historical backgrounds discussed on stage (Greece – Germany; German society – student revolt – rock-n-roll lifestyle). I have already noted that the use of English rock-n-roll songs carries certain sociopolitical connotations, pointing to an associated alternative lifestyle. The latter functions as a juxtaposition both to the German middle-class but also to the traditionalist image of the Greek migrant community that the audience may have.

The onstage performance of music by the actors distort an uncritical identification with specific cultural traditions. Suggestive is the case of the song “The bread of emigration is bitter”, which is repeatedly played during the performance. This particular song, written in 1969, is considered synonym of the Greek emigration experience in the 1960s and 1970s. The song was sung by Stelios Kazantzidis, a *laiko* singer who had been identified with the lamenting of the emigration experience and the poverty in the first post-war decades. On the National’s stage, an actress dressed in fur sings in a microphone Kazantzidis’ song on three different occasions. Telling is, for example, the revelry scene for the celebrations of Easter, as also the plastic lamb and the singer’s wishes to be back home next year reveals.⁷⁹¹ The singer is not entirely in rhythm with the piano and bass, which accompany loudly. The actors’ choreography of the traditional circle dances usually danced in these festivities, does not pass

⁷⁸⁹ The loud cries and incomprehensible sounds produced by the actors, also function in a similarly alienating way, dissociating the sound of the words from their meaning (in the case of the word “Deutschland” this becomes just a cry without specific connotations; the repetition of the word “passport” thus gains a very critical ironic potential). Later on, the play with the German pronunciation of Greek words besides a comic effect has also a critical function. While learning the German catalogue by heart in a Greek restaurant in Germany, two male actors produce sounds of the Greek names spoken with a “foreign accent” (e.g. “d” instead of the softer sounding Greek δ), hence merging both languages, since neither Greek nor German sound “original”. Rather ironically, like the restaurant’s menu that includes both Greek specialties but also “Jägerschnitzel,” the encounter between the two cultures constructs a mixture which is neither Greek nor German, while at the same time the point of origin is still strongly enough acknowledged.

⁷⁹⁰ In the performance participated the composer and pianist Lola Totsiou, who had studied together with Karazissis in Heidelberg. According to Totsiou, in the performance the music had to “function in counterpoint to the text – never descriptive. To enter into the text and to be merged with the language, composing a whole” (Myrto Loverdou, «Θέλει και παρτενέρ ο ‘χορός της μοναχικής καρδιάς’» [The “dance of the solitary heart” needs also a partner], *To Vima*, February 25, 2009, accessed March 4, 2021, <http://www.tovima.gr/culture/article/?aid=256766>).

⁷⁹¹ This is the second time that the song is performed on stage. The first time, the singer is again accompanied by a performer at the piano and an actor playing the electric guitar (sounding like bouzouki), while the actors dance an asynchronous choreography, each one following different movements and throwing cloves in a festive atmosphere. An actor that has been identified with the “hero” in the previous sequences repetitively interrupts the singer and complains shouting into the microphone that “women here are tough,” while the singer presents him by defining him as an “extreme left student” adding his town of origin in Greece.

in this case to the rhythm of the song. The choice of the circle dance can be considered a critical comment to the way that the Greek communities have been defined to a great extent in regard to their aim to preserve the Greek “tradition”. Slowly the singer begins to sing screamingly, the sound of the bass turns louder and distorted; Kazantzidis’ song sounds now more like a heavy metal song. The voice stops and only the solo of the bass can be heard. The stage dives into darkness, with only a few spots being lighted, allowing the spectator to see the psychedelic dancing movements of the performers. The idealised image of “homeland” as sung by Kazantzidis and reproduced in the imagination of the migrant communities is aggressively ruptured by the psychedelic dance, recalling a trip experience. Somewhat ironically, the spectator is reminded of the co-existence of communities that are defined beyond national characteristics.

Through the emphasis on the personal experience in the specific place, the German city turns into a meeting point for people from different backgrounds. The relationship between a Greek student and a Swedish girl defines the particular place in a new way, transcending the specificities of German society or the customs of the Greek diaspora. For two foreigners, the new country becomes a place that unites people with different cultural and family backgrounds and different mentalities (“She is coming from the north; without family. He is coming from the south; with family”). The recollection of the Swedish girl is staged affectionately, through a new onstage encounter. Karazissis himself speaks in the microphone seated on the left side, next to the “psychologist”.⁷⁹² His words in the third person singular (“the young hero”) reveal to the spectator the love story between the Greek and the Swedish girl. The woman continues and speaks in the first person singular about her close friendship with a girl from Sweden, who ended up in a psychiatric clinic. The (autobiographical?) storytelling under the sound of a melodic piano piece, intermingles with the singing, partially together and not in the microphone, of the German translation of “Solveig’s Song” from Edward Craig’s *Peer Gynt*. The act of recollection is framed by and at the same time performatively frames a (new) onstage encounter. This personal moment of remembering goes beyond borders and contexts and reveals the personal effect of the past on the present. Even the actors’ particular position on the small stage (seating aslant on the corner of the stage, not confronting the audience) activates the impression of a personal “commemoration”.

⁷⁹² Here one could also interpret the stage presence of a psychologist, which leads to relevant scenes—lectures on the human psyche and conscious self-understanding of the self, as a further association to the historical-cultural context of the 1970s in Germany. On the “left psychoboom” of the 1970s, see Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 782–806.

In the above recounting of her relationship to the Swedish girl, the traumatic experiences of childhood appear to be a common link between people of different origin. Loss, trauma, but also the love relationship between the young couple undermine cultural differences in the same way that the complicated relationship between mother and child can be considered universal. Still, the latter brings forward the question of belonging to a “home” and identity in a much more straightforward way. On the small stage, the actress in the fur coat stands towards the audience holding the handheld microphone and, in a distancing way, frames her following monologue implying the form of a letter (“My son writes to me”). Kneeling to the floor, she begins to utter a dense, complex text, which does not allow singular readings.

Next to her lies a young actor, who repeats some sentences. On the same level of the floor the mother’s voice merges with the adult son’s words, while the bodies do not reveal their different hierarchical position. Sitting with her back to the audience and being just a mediated (through the microphone) voice, without a face, she is not a woman/mother anymore [“You are Thessaloniki, Athens, Stuttgart and Backnang. I would sing to you, if I had composed it for you, “The Queen of Germany: Opera for a mother and a son”]. Recalling in a reversed way Dimitriadis’ last monologue of the country’s “daughter”, here the mother-figure signifies the place of belonging, while at the same time implying the necessity of weaning and liberation from this womb. With reference to the 1968s discourse, the mother represents the family, which, in turn, is considered the root of the evil. The address to the mother is a hatred accusation to the middle-class family: “The middle-class politeness is the most barbarous impoliteness”, suppressing the emotions and senses. The question that arises echoes the call for political action: “What shall we do?” The radical solution is only one: “Go home, kill father and mother, hang yourself” cries the actress with anger, stressing once again the fragmentation of identities. Here the critique of the bourgeois family as institution touches upon the clashes within German society in the post-1968 era and the way that a young Greek student had possibly perceived these historical changes. Post-1968 Germany intermingles with the personal narrative especially as hints to the sexual revolution, the rejection of the “bürgerliche Familie” and the left’s terrorism as an extreme expression of the quest for social change.

The fragmented narrative is ruptured, stressing as elsewhere in the performance the breaks between the different parts of a collage of moments and memories. The sudden transition to a group choreography of a *Schlager* version of the German song “Aber Dich, gibt’s nur einmal für mich” has an ironic effect. The actors dance in group holding plates, moving in a circle, imitating pop-dance movements and running statically towards the audience. Within the present context, the plates, although not white, could be considered a condensed synonym

for the microcosm of the Greek restaurants, around which had revolved the life of the Greek communities but which had also been the place where middle-class Germany met Greek culture. The plates become a visual allusion to this whole social and cultural background within the foreign cultural environment. Associated with stereotypical impressions of Greek entertainment in these places, the signification of the plates intermingles with the kitsch aesthetic of the *Schlager* culture, allowing the spectator to consider possibly concealed aesthetic similarities between the popular culture of the two countries. At the same time, inside the German context of the 1970s, the comic dance comes as an ironic answer to the previous quest for social change. Both the music of the *Schlager* and the image of the plates refer to comforting entertainment of a middle-class Germany, hence allowing an interpretation as a sign for the loss of the fight.

In parallel to the establishment of a spatial distance, a temporal distance between past and present is also underscored. The latter is stressed through the manifestation of the changing self in the course of life. The recounting of the past is taking place from the present point of view. In this way the reflection on the history of RAF, which does not intend to justify the armed fight but approaches it as part of the sociopolitical events of that time should also be analysed. An actress with her back to the audience considers the life and imprisonment of the RAF member. While taking off her clothes to remain with her underwear and tights, the actress reflects on her possible identification with the two RAF female members:

I am 70% Ensslin and 30% Meinhof. No, no, no, no. I am, I am 45% Ensslin, 15 % Meinhof and 40% myself. No, no, no, no, no. I am 35% Ensslin, 35% Meinhof and 40% myself. No, I am 50 % of the other two and 50% myself, today. If I had been born thirty years earlier, I would have been 100% either one of them.

She recounts the path that RAF members and especially these women followed, hinting also at their relation to their children. The similarities to the RAF are not literal but metaphoric: a whole generation that – even in the wrong way – fought for transformation and social change. Successfully or not, accepted or not, the necessity for escape dominates everything. The trip experience of the actress brings her closer to the protagonists of the past. For the trip opens the eyes to hidden aspects of the world; as if the real picture of the world is revealed: “The ‘trip’ is the gaze that is now clear.” Yet, what has remained from the burning quest to change the world as each one wished? After a long silence, she concludes her monologue under the sound of the legendary Janis Joplin’s song “Bobbie Mc Gee”, which may be considered to have its

own connotations (Woodstock; heroine). Standing towards the audience, in a melancholic but at the same time childlike soothing way, she admits that now “Only the dreams comfort me, and the little luxuries, and my daughter”. After the defeat only the need to dream remains the same.

The consumption of drugs as a trigger of a consciousness expansion belongs to the 1968 discourse, evoking hence political associations. On the National’s stage, the allusion to drugs constructs an ambiguous perception of a changed reality; a reality of new identities, imagination and feelings. Drug consumption is initially related to the described (but not represented) space of the Greek restaurant and particularly to their “Stammtisch” [regular’s table]. The stage is in darkness and only the red light from the coal shines, while the sound of inhalations can be heard. For a prolonged moment, in semi-light, the actors sit silently around the table under the sound of an instrument recalling the Indian sitar. The allusion to Indian music points inevitably to the hippie journeys for “self-revelation” to India in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Karazissis’ stages a collective moment of hallucination. Under the rhythmical flashing of a projector at the right side of the stage, an actress on the table bench shouts angry, incomprehensible sentences, while two seated actors fall in slow motion on the benches and two others move around the stage with open arms. They all croak like birds, a sound that triggers an uneasy feeling to the spectators, who remain observant and therefore critically aware of this delirium state. In a high-pitched voice, an actress spins and sits on the floor, addressing an invisible mother. Her words are suggestive of the dissolution of chronological and spatial specificities:

Why you didn’t give birth to me in more historical times? Why didn’t you give birth to me in another place? In the woods of Germany, in the cold of Sweden; in Asia, in Mississippi; in the cold steppes in October ‘17, in the Parisian streets in 1789, in Souli,⁷⁹³ in 1823, some many days, so many nights, from the world I was absent...⁷⁹⁴

All the actors under the sound of sitar and the flashing lightning at the right side continue their croaking, jumping like birds with open arms in a circular movement around the stage, sharing experiences of underwater journeys, the observation of the world with a black aikido belt, an

⁷⁹³ Souli is a village found in Epirus, in north-west Greece. *Souliotes* were known in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century for their resistance against the Ottoman-Albanian ruler Ali Pascha. On the legendary collective suicide of the women from Souli in 1803, as the ultimate act of resistance instead of surrender, see footnote 648.

⁷⁹⁴ Here the historical events are followed by some easy to recognize words from the lyrics of the 1972 song “I am returning from the night” [Γυρίζω από τη Νύχτα], sung also by Stelios Kazantzidis.

address to a colonel, followed by the military salutation. The latter is the only reference to the Greek junta of the colonels found in the performance, relating the dramatic time directly in Heidelberg to the historical background in Greece. The state of “Rausch” merges different times and places, transcending borders and countries, significant events of the national histories (e.g. Souli) with events that defined the world history (French Revolution 1789), countries and identities.

The historical context of the post-1968 German “left-alternative milieu” brings specific sociopolitical implications in the use of drugs forward. The soft drugs (such as hashish) were “highly appreciated as a means towards the expansion of consciousness [*Bewusstseinsweiterung*] and self-realisation [*Selbstverwirklichung*]”.⁷⁹⁵ As Herbert Marcuse observes, the perception is affected by the oppressive mechanism of the society: “an established society imposes upon all its members the same medium of perception; and through all the differences of individual and class perspectives, horizons, backgrounds, society provides the same general universe of experience”.⁷⁹⁶ Hence, the necessity for social change and subversion of the power relations implies a new way of perceiving the world: “the rupture with the continuum of aggression and exploitation would also break with the sensibility geared to this universe”.⁷⁹⁷ From this point of view, the “trip” opens a new subversive way to approach the world:

Today’s rebels want to see, hear, feel new things in a new way: they link liberation with the dissolution of ordinary and orderly perception. The ‘trip’ involves the dissolution of the ego shaped by the established society – an artificial and short-lived dissolution. But the artificial and ‘private’ liberation anticipates, in a distorted manner, an exigency of the social liberation: the revolution must be at the same time a revolution in perception which will accompany the material and intellectual reconstruction of society, creating the new aesthetic environment.⁷⁹⁸

While Marcuse underlines the importance of this “revolution in perception”, he still draws attention to the danger that the psychedelic experience “brings temporary release not only from the reason and rationality of the established system but also from that other rationality which

⁷⁹⁵ Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 839.

⁷⁹⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 36–37.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

is to change the established system". The possibility of liberation then appears to be a priori condemned, since "[i]ntentionally non-committed, the withdrawal creates its artificial paradises within the society from which it withdrew." In that sense, no real subversion of the established function of the society is achieved, since no "union" is achieved between a "new sensibility and new rationality", that would lead to a sustainable social change.⁷⁹⁹

Marcuse's analysis of the psychedelic trip experience explains to a great extent, the political character of the drug consumption within the context of the student revolt of 1968. While one could agree with him regarding the short-lived transformative potential of the new sensibility that the "trip" experience may trigger, still the momentary dissolution of the repressive powers of the society (in abstract ways but also concretely as for example the case of the junta) implies the transcendence of the predominant discourses and therefore of fixed identities. Within the context of Karazissis' performance, performing of the trip experience does not attempt to include the audience. In its exclusion, it should be considered as an attempt to invite the audience to reflect not specifically on drug consumption but the very own process of border dissolution.

In the present performance, the use of drugs is represented on stage and not approached as the trigger of a collective experience of community that would include also the spectator. However, it still manifests the process of shaping a new form of a collective based on the distorted image of a fragmented national/cultural collective. Drugs do not imply the active dissolution of the border but a vivid, even extreme, contrast to the rather homogeneous perception of national migrant communities and directly related to the revolutionary discourse of the 1968 inheritance. Still, one should admit that the reflection does not offer much towards a coherent suggestion of social change.

In Karazissis' performance, the fragmented allusion to a Greek cultural context through Kazantzidis' song (also taking into account the associations of the singer's name) introduces certain connotations related to the issue of Greek migration and identity. The quest for a different place and time of birth poses the question of origin, while at the same time playing with the notion of randomness inherent in the national origin, without, however, implying the love-hate relation that was echoed in Dimitriadis' last monologue. Karazissis' production acknowledges the different cultural backgrounds and points to the different ways that they merge. It points to various forms of collectivity beyond specific identities (also within the "Greek" microcosm of the restaurant). Between fiction and autobiography, the recollection

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

and storytelling of the past is related to a reflective nostalgia towards the lost possibilities of a previous time. In that sense, it is not a nostalgic longing for the return to the past but an invitation to consider the possibility of a future life beyond the strict restrictions of identity. Narration as the outcome of recollection, while detouring through the past still targets the future.

Four years after Karazissis' performance, amid the Greek crisis, another theatrical negotiation of the migration experience in the German context took place. From a different point of view, remembering and narrating was also crucial for Anestis Azas' and Prodromos Tsinikoris' production *Telemachus: Should I stay or should I go?* The two young directors have been considered representatives of the documentary theatre in Greece. In their 2013 production, which was a collaboration of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße and the Onassis Cultural Foundation, they dealt with the issue of Greek migration.⁸⁰⁰ The director and actor Prodromos Tsinikoris, the son of a *Gastarbeiter* family born in Wuppertal meets Greek migrants on stage, who had moved to Germany in the 1960s, together with younger Greek people who have decided to move to Germany during the financial crisis. A young German man was accompanying them, speaking from his point of view, namely that of the "host".

The title, combining Homer's *Odyssey* and the homonymous song of the Clash, summarises the existential dilemma of Tsinikoris, who although born in Germany had "returned" in 1999 to Greece for studies. Amid the financial crisis in Greece, Tsinikoris – recalling Telemachus – asks himself and his companions whether he should now return to Germany again, as his parents did some decades ago. The personal itinerary of the young man functions not only as the connecting link of the performance script but thematises from the beginning the complex identification processes and the changing Greek diasporic identities vis-à-vis the question of migration in changing times such as the crisis.

Contrary to Karazissis' production, the moment of the production of *Telemachus* was extremely topical. The performance was not only discussing the phenomenon of migration in different historic-political contexts but offering a comment on the financial crisis, its reasons and effects on the lives of everyday people. Two years after the outbreak of the Greek financial crisis, the Greek –German relations were undergoing a period of tension. Leading the European negotiation for the Greek rescue package, Germany was perceived by a large part of the Greek

⁸⁰⁰ The performance premiered at the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, Berlin on January 11, 2013. The performance was presented at the Onassis Cultural Centre between February 27 and March 10, 2013 and was repeated later in Berlin and other cities in Germany and abroad. For more information and photos, see [in German] "*Telemachus: Should I stay or should I go?*", Ballhaus Naunynstraße, accessed March 5, 2021, <http://www.ballhausnaunynstrasse.de/stueck/telemachos>.

society as responsible for the hard austerity measures. On the other hand, the German public view was reproducing stereotypes about the corrupt state of the Greek society and their “laziness”, presenting German society like the one that had to be sacrificed. The diverse and contradictory views regarding the crisis and the prevalent stereotypes that were reproduced in the public discourse from both a Greek and a German perspective were directly thematised through the projection of videos from the streets in Athens, Thessaloniki and Berlin, in which Tsinikoris asks pedestrians what they suggest he should do.⁸⁰¹

The sharing of personal life stories was intermingled with the exchange of different opinions on the crisis and politics. Influenced by the work of Rimini Protokoll, Tsinikoris and Azas bring on stage non-trained actors, the so-called “experts”. In the performance two former *Gastarbeiter*, who had moved to Germany in the 1960-1970s together with the younger generation of “migrants” took part: a middle-aged former owner of a disc shop and two actors who for different reasons moved to Germany after 2010. Tsinikoris’ history as a second-generation migrant functioned as the common thread of the performance. The personal tone of the life stories is stressed by the projection of footages from Tsinikoris’ childhood, photos of the performers in different ages and a video-interview with Tsinikoris’ parents answering their son’s question whether he should stay in Greece or not.

Here the function of the “experts of everyday life” is similar to the theatre of Rimini Protokoll. According to Yvonne Schmidt:

As the experts of everyday life act out on their own behalf and, contrary to other forms of documentary theatre, the subjects, whose biographies are staged, are present on stage and speak for themselves, the performance coincides with the performed. It arises an authenticity in the sense of authorship which is based not on form (performance) but content (the performed).⁸⁰²

At the same time, the non-trained actors function also as “representatives of a group”.⁸⁰³ In the present case they thus represent Greek migrants in Germany.

⁸⁰¹ These videos depict the very different opinions regarding the “foreigner” in “our” country but also the decision to leave a “homeland”. Among the people can be recognized immigrants in both countries, who share their own experience as foreigners in Greece and Germany. It is interesting to observe that in the video in Germany, Tsinikoris presents himself to the interviewees by saying “Ich komme aus Griechenland”.

⁸⁰² Yvonne Schmidt, “Experten des Alltags: Zur Funktion von Laiendarstellern in den Arbeiten von Rimini Protokoll,” in *Rimini Protokoll*, ed. Anne Fournier, Paola Gilardi, Andreas Härter and Claudia Maeder (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), 130.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, 131.

Utilising different aesthetic strategies, *Telemachus*, like Karazissis' production, stresses the state of in-betweenness of the migrant subject, thereby challenging singular definitions of communities. By bringing both young and older participants to share their experience on stage, the performance stresses the common challenges faced in the condition of being the "stranger" in a new country. The critical use of the different languages emphasises the distance and the never complete integration, stressing a state of in-between. With the exception of Tsinikoris who is a native speaker in both languages, both in the case of the older Greek migrants (fluent in German; partially representative of a successful integration) and those who moved recently to Germany, the accent functions as a reminder of difference. The debate in English between the German Berger and the Greek–German Tsinikoris (native speaker in both languages) constructs on stage a space of "distance" for both participants, hence a neutral space of *agonism*. Here again, the use of foreign language interrupts the homogeneity of the national language and, by extension, the identity constructed on common linguistic premises.

While stressing the difficulties encountered in the foreign country, the stories told do not easily put the migrant in the position of the weak/victim. This is also achieved through the humorous, vivid way of sharing around the table, with the other participants commenting briefly, joking, or asking each expert. They are personal stories full of shifts, "ups and downs", defeats, difficult decisions.⁸⁰⁴ The stories of the older participants, shared on stage in a vivid, humorous (often self-ironic) way does not allow the audience's unreflective identification, despite emotive moments. These recollections bring forth the historic-political background of Greece during the post-war decades, while the narratives of the younger Greeks who left after 2010 directly thematise the Greek crisis, possible reasons and debates in the public sphere (e.g. the financial abundance of the late 1990s – early 2000s as well as a feeling of "national pride" due to the successful organisation of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and the victory in the 2004 European Football Championship).⁸⁰⁵ Taking place in 2013, *Telemachus* (at least)

⁸⁰⁴ For example, Christos Sarafianos, who went to Germany in 1967 left Greece because of a fight with his parents, opened Greek restaurants, lost and earned his fortune several times, returned to Greece where he went broke before going back again to Germany, as a pensioner with heart problems. Sofia Anastasiadou (a former member of the left-wing Grigoris Lambrakis Youth Movement) left Greece for political reasons in 1970 under the military dictatorship. In Germany, she got elected with the Green party in Steglitz; disappointed by the party's support to the War in Yugoslavia, she left the party.

⁸⁰⁵ The actor Kostis Kallivretakis inherited massive debts from his father, who had invested in the Greek stock market during the "gold" years of the Greek economy since the late 1990s. The actress and psychologist Despoina Bibika, daughter of a middle-class Greek family, left Greece to become a cleaning lady in Berlin. The former owner of a disc shop Yiannis Tsoukalas had to leave Greece after he closed his business and was fired from his job as a driver.

attempted to challenge predominant misconceptions regarding the Greek society as well as singular binaries of “us vs others” within Europe that had recurred again in the public discourse. At the time of the performance, the Greek –German relations were undergoing a period of tension, given the major role of Germany on the European political scene and the negotiations about Greece’s economic rescue.⁸⁰⁶ Against this topical background, the focus is thus shifted from the official political discourses to the “everyday” stories of the Greek–German encounter.

Within this particular historic-political context of the production, the figure of the inventive Ulysses, father of Telemachus, allows an identification with the “everyday life experts” possibly also echoing a compensatory narrative of the crisis that everything is going to work out for the Greeks in the end. The different adventures of Ulysses are recollected while extracts from the eponymous 1954 film with Kurt Douglas are projected at the back. At the same time, the reference to *Odyssey* is combined with the discussion about Horkheimer and Adorno’s *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The German actor Knut Berger uses the text as a compass to approach the mythological figure of Ulysses. Berger appears as the representative not only of the “host” country but also of the hegemonic power in Europe during the crisis. Later on, Berger’s monologue slips to oversimplifying negative stereotypes about Germans reproduced in Greece during the crisis, which possibly sounds rather comforting in the ears of the Greek audience (Germany as a country that destroyed “your” country during the World War II and afterwards, without paying compensation, invite the labour workers to war for “us”).⁸⁰⁷ Nevertheless, his presence had a critical potential, not only in regard to the political arguments he reproduces but regarding the self-criticism from the German viewpoint.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰⁶ The different views regarding the crisis and the predominant stereotypes that were reproduced from both a Greek and a German perspective were directly thematized through the projection of videos from the streets in Athens, Thessaloniki and Berlin, in which Tsirikos asks pedestrians what they would suggest he should do.

⁸⁰⁷ As also noted by some critics, the way that the actor attempts to summarise the *Dialectic* and to express his criticism of the political/financial system of Europe and the responsibility of Germany seems dramaturgically rather superficial and underdeveloped. In Greece, Ioanna Klefogianni argued that the monologue of the German participant, “reproduces in a disturbing way the stereotypes that we Greeks want to hear regarding the vengeful, sadistic Germans who have decided on a whim to attack the heroic, Greek people (Ioanna Klefogianni, “Theatre Review: «Δύο αντιρατσιστικές παραστάσεις» [Two anti-racist performances],” *Naftemporiki*, March 13, 2013, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.clickatlife.gr/theatro/story/13839>). The somehow forced emotional response in relation to Germany’s responsibility and war reparations was also underlined from a German point of view as a weak point of the performance; see Peter Nowak, “Theatre Review: ‘Nachrichten aus der Krisenzone’,” *Freitag*, accessed March 13, 2021, <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/peter-nowak/nachrichten-aus-der-krisenzone>).

⁸⁰⁸ From an opposite point of view, Olivia Landry argues that Berger’s “presence thus signals another kind of encounter inherent in theatre and performance: the encounter between performers and spectators. Yet his conceivable role as (German, male) spectator also self-reflexively mobilizes its own interrogation of itself, precisely for its hegemonic cultural positioning and homogeneity. Knut’s figure is discernibly Brechtian in its structure of distanciation, provocation, and ethos of critique” (Olivia Landry, “Greek Dispossession Staged, or When Street Politics Meets the Theater,” *Transit* 10.2 (2016), accessed March 18, 2021, <https://preserve.lehigh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=cas-mll-faculty-publications>).

This argumentation of the German side, supportive of the Greek people and also pointing to Germany's responsibility in regard also to its previous history (e.g. the argument about war reparations) triggers a debate among the participants regarding the reasons that led to the crisis. Following Berger's monologue about the responsibilities of the present political system for the situation, another actor asks the audience directly "What did the *Aganaktismenoi* and the Syntagma Square mean for you?". He approaches them with the microphone and they express different views. The direct question posed engages the spectators to reconsider not only the answer to this question but to all other issues related to identification and participation.⁸⁰⁹ The discussion about collective action at the beginning of the crisis shifts to an open debate among the participants regarding the way that one should react to the crisis and contemporary politics. The quest for a new collectivity can be traced although no answer is given. For some, the Syntagma was a "fake" rebellion intermingled with patriotic elements; for some others, this was the only possible reaction to the situation.

The brief dialogue with the audience and the debate among the participants regarding the question of personal/collective responsibility in times of crisis shifts the audience's attention from the question of identity as negotiated through the personal narratives to the quest for social, collective action. The stage becomes a site of "agonism" in Chantal Mouffe's terms, namely of a "we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledge that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents". Being hence "adversaries' not enemies" they share "a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place".⁸¹⁰ Hence although the performance does not suggest an alternative solution, the audience's attention shifts from the question of identity and belonging as negotiated through personal (but also national) narratives to a different conceptualisation of community.

It could be suggested, that in a very different (aesthetic and dramaturgical) way, and to a smaller extent, *Telemachus* also touched upon the question of new forms of community vis-à-vis the stake of a future change, as I have extensively analysed regarding the *The Dance of the Solitary Heart*. In the case of *Telemachus*, the quest for identity always remains present,

⁸⁰⁹ Following the theatre scholar Savvas Patsalidis these are "narratives which also engage the spectators with questions such as 'What did the Syntagma *Aganaktismenoi* (Indignants) represent for you?,' 'what do Greece and homeland mean to you?,' in order to expand the participatory community that is created around the table of the performance and make us feel something we share in common: we are the 'others,' strangers in our own place of origin like strangers in the host country" (Savvas Patsalidis, «Το θέατρο και ο νέος θεατής μετά τον μεταμοντερνισμό» [Theatre and the new spectator after postmodernism], *Savvas Patsalidis* (blog), accessed March 19, 2021, http://savaspatsalidis.blogspot.com/2015/11/blog-post_14.html).

⁸¹⁰ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 20.

no matter how plural and contingent this identity may be. Especially in the case of the young Greeks moving to Germany amid the crisis, the state of transition is not imbued with *Fernweh*; it appears as a necessity, the outcome of historical reality.

In both performances, the negotiation of a “familiar” identity through the prism of the encounter with a “stranger” cultural context and the fluidity of migrant identities exposed the complexities also inherent in the construction of national identity. At the same time, the very different stories of the migrants challenged pre-existing stereotypical conceptions about the Greeks in the diaspora as a homogeneous community. In turn, this multiplicity could function as a model applicable also to the Greek identity in Greece.

At the end of *Telemachus*, all performers eat together a soup that had been prepared on stage during the performance by the two older participants. In the standing microphone, Tsinikoris returns to Ulysses’ fable: “Ulysses returns to his island after he has lost all his companions on the stranger ship and inside his house, he finds new troubles”. Everyone remains alone. The antagonism/debate cannot be resolved through the eating of the soup. The older man speaks about his death: a stranger both in Greece and in Germany, he does not care where he is going to be buried. The state of in-between appears to be a burden that the migrant subject has to carry. The place of “origin” remains a recurring reference point; its loss or the inability to define it returns as a painful realisation. In that sense, the performance should be seen more as a comment on the challenges of migration and less as manifesting the transition beyond a (Greek) identity.

On the contrary, the ecstatic moment of dissolution of any border as negotiated in Karazissis’ performance revealed a reflective nostalgia, which presented a much stronger potential towards the transcendence of national demarcations. As I indicated, this implied a perspective towards a future through the recollection of the past. Within a migrant context, associated with the feeling of nostalgia for homeland, Karazissis’ performance manifested a longing for the political and transformative potential already experienced and a call to redefine it from the current standpoint of the continually changing and inevitably shattered, maturing self.

4.3 Conclusion

The transformative potentiality of the future together with the momentary – but never completed – dissolution of national definitions of belonging suggest not a non-national identity but a new conception of identity which will include these expansive possibilities. A re-signification of the concept of national identity should not only be restricted to the renegotiation of the dialectical relationship between past(s) and present(s). The possibility for new dynamic definitions of national identity can also be traced in the transgression of national demarcation (spatial and cultural) as well as temporal limitations.

The relationship between proximity-distance has been examined as constitutive in the dialectical approach, given its centrality in the development of narratives, in turn necessary for identity building. The tensions related to the internal links (temporality and proximity) were considered necessary for the construction and survival of identity. Here the national identity is not redefined upon acknowledgement of the irrevocability of the distant past. On the contrary, the definition of national identity intermingles with the aspiration for a future change, which will also affect the definition of identity. However, the (active) traces of the past are still present, this time as a reminder of the missed possibilities for liberation from oppressive powers that have also imposed national limitations. The moment of subversion is nevertheless only implied and not rejuvenated as completed against a still traceable nationally and culturally defined background. The movement towards a change that would signify a completed transition to post-national conceptions remains inconclusive; the national attachments still hold.

In the “nation-transcending” approach I examined how the reflection on the Greek identity is mediated through the process of moving beyond national demarcations against the backdrop of a Greek-flagged context, while at the same time inviting a renegotiation of the transformative potentiality of the future to come. Analysing two very different performances, I mapped possible ways that this return to the concept of national identity mediated through other forms of belonging that unsettle temporal, spatial and cultural limits, can succeed. First, the emphasis on the co-presence in the “here and now” of the present (an experience imbued with the aspiration of the future) constructs a liminal moment (of anonymity) dissolving national limitations. Following this, I explored how non-national forms of community are associated with liminal migrant identities as well as the quest for future liberation, re-activated in the present through the recollection of a particularly culture-conditioned period in the past.

In Marmarinos' *Dying as Country*, with reference to an allusively reminded Greek cultural context and the strong associations of the Demetriadian text, it is the manifestation of the onstage co-presence through a chorus of city citizens in the form of a queue-procession and the communal act of narrating, singing and waiting that suggests the possibility for a non-national belonging in the present with implications for the future. Expanding the Demetriadian text, which echoes a defeated Benjaminian expectation for transformation, the performance activates a new possibility for change in the future mobilised by the living body of the queue. The performance turns into a site of non-homogeneous co-belonging beyond fixed (also temporal) limits. A linear conception of time and progress is challenged through the chorus' movement in the sight of the seated audience. The video projection of the images from the queue outside the performance hall together with the development of the slow onstage procession towards an unknown – unable to be seen from the audience's perspective – end (in the future?) point to the simultaneous temporalities.

The participants in the queue lend their voices to the text. The narration of the shared text as well as the live singing contribute to the shaping of a liminal community. The centrality of the textual narrative is dislocated in favour of the performative narration. The language and accents of the performers enunciating the divided text into the microphone delineate the plurality of the group. The microphone here performatively frames the act of narration, shifting the attention to the different utterances of the performers and the non-homogeneity of the group that participates. At the same time, as in the chorus of *Herakles*, it also possibly functions not as a means of estrangement but of empowerment: the voices of the anonymous people that could fulfil the quest for change may now be heard and the hateful feelings towards the holy mother be expressed.

This double expansion – beyond homogeneous collectives and towards the future – is not achieved, however, against a neutral background. On the contrary, Marmarinos makes use of the strong connotations of Dimitriadis' text, which has been associated with a critique of the pathologies of modern Greece. The allusions to modern Greece dispersed throughout the performance further underscore the relation between Dimitriadis' country and the particular context, with consequences also for the possible interpretation of the questioning of national demarcation in favour of new forms of belonging. The presence of the singer Beba Blans intensify this relation, triggering specific associations to popular Greek culture. At the same time, however, Blans embodies the (non-nationally connotated) presence of non-professional performers. The anonymous "chorus"/queue in its plurality achieves the opening of the stage to the auditorium and, by extension, to the city, leaving behind the strong association to the

(national) country. The presence of “real” people is not to be understood as a call for authenticity (e.g. a part of Blans’ text is anyway heard from the speakers, hence questioning liveness as a prerequisite for authenticity). On the contrary, it stresses the plurality and non-homogeneity of a group that is formed during the performance vis-à-vis an established Greek context with national connotations within which both this group and the performance exist.

In the second case of Karazissis’ *The Dance of the Solitary Heart* the emphasis is placed on migrant identity as shaped between different national and cultural contexts. Yet, this encounter with the foreign country and its cultural specificities triggers not only a reflection of one’s own self-definition in relation to what is considered strange and what is (nationally) familiar but also on the in-between state of migrants. More importantly, it echoes a reflective nostalgia for a lost past – culturally conditioned as it is also perceived in relation to the German history of the late 1960s – early 1970s and the political quests of that time. The interplay hence between the reflection on the migrant identity (both in its non-fixed, dynamic definitions as well as its stereotypical imagined conceptions) and the recollection of the (missed) transformative possibilities of the past enables the challenges to different kinds of borders.

This negotiation of the experienced past is achieved in parallel to the questioning of “authenticity” and the binary opposition autobiography vs fiction. The personal recollection of the past and especially of the process of defining one’s self through the encounter with a foreign culture emphasises the subjectivity of the narrative construction of identity against official definitions. This subjective aspect is, however, further dislocated through the interplay between different narrative perspectives of the self in different ages. The presence of non-professional actors and particularly of people who experienced together this specific period in Germany (e.g. the elderly restaurant owner in Heidelberg Yorgos Kotzobolis) blurs even more the line between “reality” and fiction. The spectators cannot trace which aspects are fictive, which are memories of the participants, and where the line between these two lies.

Upon this de-stabilized basis a negotiation of the encounter with the German culture of the 1970s is triggered, parts of which should be considered the presence of *Gastarbeiter* communities (like the Greek one) and the cultural influence of the post 1968 left-alternative milieu. The two cultures in the 1970s and their differences are demonstrated through visual, musical and discursive references (for example, the interchange between different languages and reference to stereotypical associations of Germany; musical choices from both countries as well as songs that are considered representative of that particular period; scenographic props and costumes). The musical dissonance and intense choreographies that interrupt the memories and stories shared on stage not only affect the associations triggered by the particular songs

performed as links to a particular cultural and historical context (e.g. Kazantzidis' song culminates to a moment of extreme shouting) but also dissolve harmony in favour of an ecstatic state of trance.

This moment of "transcendence" is related to the consumption of drugs that here should be linked to the quests of the "left-alternative milieu" in post-1968 Germany towards the dissolution of oppressive forces in family, education and society. The onstage subjective narration of individual stories and memories, which constitute the loose plot of the performance, turns into a dissonant communal choreography, with the performers croaking, executing intensive movements and inconsistently merging different historical and geographical references. The strong framing of the German context from a Greek (in cases, ironically stereotypical) point of view is destabilised through the demonstration of a state beyond borders – the state of *Rausch*, where the dissolution of personal identity leads inevitably to the undermining of national connotations. Echoing a reflective nostalgia not only for a place but for a particular (life)time, Karazissis' performance invited a reflection on the transformative potential of a (utopian) belonging beyond common cultural/national references.

Conclusion

Analysing phenomena of the recent past can be a challenging process. Over the past years, not only the theatre landscape in Greece keeps changing, but the discourses regarding identities have also gained new dimensions. The severe crisis seems to retreat, but its imprints in society – also in terms of identity politics – is still to be examined. Did the crisis fundamentally question individual stances to nation and homeland after all? Did it succeed in undermining narratives that had been reproduced in public discourse, considered by some critical voices possible reasons that led to the crisis? At the same time, in the field of theatre, the impact of phenomena and tendencies developed in the previous years are not yet fully traceable. Theatre scholarship in Greece has still not exhaustively examined the history of contemporary theatre with all its shifts and inconsistencies. Will it be ultimately possible to speak about a dramaturgy of the crisis? How can the chronological limits and traits of this recent theatre history be defined, given that many of the “new” aesthetic streams and forms of performance had already been introduced – also in institutional theatre – in the late 2000s?

My aim here was not to give answers to these important questions. Nor did I aspire to offer an account of recent Greek theatre history, or to examine the issue of national identity in Greek theatre from a historiographical perspective covering a broader period. Instead, I used Greek theatre as a case study to analyse different possible ways in which the concept of national identity could be challenged on stage. Influenced by Knowles’ materialist semiotics, I followed an approach that focuses not only on the analysis of the onstage performance but also pays attention to the cultural, historical and institutional context of production. Since my intention was not to narrowly adopt Knowles’ triangle model, I did not discuss in detail all the parameters that he categorises under the three poles (performance text, conditions of production and conditions of reception). I was instead particularly interested in the way that the dynamic interrelation between the performance analysis (or close reading of the “performance text”) and the conditions of reception and production may affect the investigation of theatre’s critical response to the question of national identity.

With this approach it was possible to focus on the complex interplay between: i) aesthetic traits of the performances; ii) the theatrical, cultural and historical background (aspects of which are, for example, the performance space, the “traditions” and strategies/policies of particular theatre organisations but also, more generally a country’s theatre history and the historical moment of production and reception) and, iii) the negotiation of the question of national identity from a critical standpoint. The very structure

of the present study (with the introductory subchapters before the analysis of each performance) has attempted to illustrate the importance of such a contextualisation for understanding theatre's critical potentiality vis-à-vis the national question. Yet, as I have shown, the effect is not one-way, and it is not only the reception of the performances that is affected by the context of production. The performances themselves also have a significant effect on the redefinition of the (national) identity of cultural institutions, such as the Hellenic Festival and the National Theatre.

The present research derived from the belief that non-representational contemporary theatre forms, whose aesthetics align with the questioning of fixed limits and identificatory references, may still deal critically with the concept of national identity without rejecting it a priori. Instead, theatre may invite spectators to critically reflect on the way they perceive their national attachments, not only by deconstructing the concept of identity but also by proposing new, dynamic definitions. In no way do I suggest that theatre's mission is to reproduce national identities, so contributing to the survival and perpetuation of nations. On the contrary, my research was triggered by the growing and widely (albeit differentially) expressed need of broader parts of the societies for a stable (emotional) attachment to a national point of reference – a troubling “antidote” to feelings of insecurity. Against this backdrop, I examined the role of theatre in challenging national certainties and helping people question their individual, national self-certainties. My analysis aimed to explore how this critical negotiation of national identity could be demonstrated on stage, what the different forms of critique towards fixed conceptions of identity are, and how their critical potentiality can be evaluated in relation to the context of production. The outcome of this investigation was the development of a typology of three modes that intends to draw attention to differences traceable between theatrical endeavours that all manifest a critical approach to the analytical category of identity in one way or another. I defined three modes of theatre's critical engagement with national identity: i) dialectical, ii) deconstructive and iii) nation-transcending.

A future comparative examination of how these three modes function in a different context could be of great interest for the further development of such typologies, which do not aim at offering a fixed model but suggest a frame of investigation of a particular interplay between theatre and a persistent question in contemporary societies. For the time being, some initial observations may be here summarised regarding the possible weaknesses and transformative possibilities of these three modes. As already suggested, the critical potential and the restrictions of each mode are conditioned not only by dominant discourses on nation and identity reproduced in each society. They are also related to theatre's interest in these

thematics (or the possible reasons for a lack of interest!) and established/popular tendencies in the theatre life of each country, including the role of institutions. Therefore, the radicality (or non-radicality) of each approach depends on the background against which each mode is demonstrated. The here proposed “typology” cannot be discussed outside of a clearly defined – though dynamic – cultural, national and theatrical context. It is to be expected that the critical potential of each mode will differ depending on this context.

The dialectical approach emphasises the relationship between pasts–presents–futures and by extension proximity and distance, as all are found in a constant contradictory interplay. This co-existence of multiple temporalities destabilises the present standpoint from which one perceives the past and also affects a process of recollection necessary for the shaping of identity. The dialectical approach reveals a tension but does not aim to solve it; as it does not proclaim the complete dislocation of the concept of identity, this mode is at first sight likely considered less radical than an approach that suggests the (yet impossible) complete disappearance of identity.

This mode makes use of the emotional responses of the spectators. In some instances, they may feel moved by the melancholic melodies, live songs and emotional acting style, while the allusions to common experiences or well-known aspects of the public and everyday life in Greece may further underscore a feeling of subjective familiarity. A possible weakness of this approach can be detected in this emotional effect, which may overshadow the critical potential, leading the audience to an unreflective nostalgic recollection of the past and identification with the Greek frame of reference. Here the necessary critical distance that counterbalances the evoked proximity may be undermined. Similarly, the laughter response observed in some cases can be read ambiguously: as a self-ironic acknowledgement of an (allusive) commentary to the Greek identity, but also as a spontaneous, affective reaction to a humorous onstage action. In the second case, it can be assumed that the possible ironic intention has not been entirely decoded and, therefore, its critical effect is not completely developed.

It is, however, exactly in this ambiguity that the subversive potential of this mode can be also detected. The subtle and allusive character of the dialectical approach may encourage the spectators towards a reflection on the question of identity without clearly manifesting its critical intention. The linearity of the (hi)stories on stage is interrupted by the entanglement of multiple temporalities. Yet, while narrative coherence is undermined, these narratives do not lose their relevance for the people as familiar points of reference. The rupture of unity and continuity and the shifts between the poles of tension discussed here (distance/proximity, past/present) are achieved on the premise of the further existence of national attachments.

Owing to its capacity to evoke an emotional response without completely destroying the process of identification, the dialectical mode of engagement may address broader audiences including spectators who would not have responded to a radical deconstruction of the concept of Greek identity. The dialectical mode hence exists in an ambiguous grey zone of “in-betweenness”: between affirmation and radical rejection.

As I have argued, the particular space, the choice of the dramatic text and the historical moment of the performance play a decisive role in the analysis of the different modes. The dialectical approach, as also implied by the productions analysed here, can be considered more effective on larger stages and theatre spaces, which due to their capacity also host a rather diverse audience (e.g. the ancient theatre of Epidaurus or the Main Stage of the National Theatre). In their own way, theatre spaces, haunted by the “ghosts” of their past, affect the performance’s reception and therefore each approach to the concept of identity examined here. For instance, the negotiation of the past-present relationship in the stagings of *Herakles* and *Golfo* should be scrutinised in relation to the ancient theatre and the discourses on the reception (also in national terms) of ancient drama in this particular space.

Similar to the theatre space, the influence of the production’s institutional context in relation to the programming choices is significant. In the case of *Koutroulis’ Wedding*, for example, the frame of the “What is our homeland” two-year season further underscores an ironic reading of the play as a comment on the present Greek reality inseparable of a necessary reconsideration of the identity question. Furthermore, the associations triggered by the choice of particular plays and their dramaturgical adaptation is also of relevance. In some cases the dramaturgical interventions may also be analysed against the backdrop of the ideological reception of a particular genre: for instance, in *Herakles* the parts of the vivid chorus with allusions to recent history, popular culture and everyday life question an understanding of the ancient dramatic texts as evidences of historical (and national) continuity. In other cases, the texts function as reminders of a particular historical period (e.g. the first years of the modern Greek state), while they may also carry connotations related to their reception in the course of Greek theatre history (e.g. pastoral drama as an “easy” popular play performed by travelling troupes in countryside).

The sociopolitical moment of the performances – here the Greek crisis – functions inevitably, in one way or another, as a background against which the spectator interprets the performances. In such moments of general depression and “loss”, when the reactions inevitably appear emotionally loaded, the potential of the dialectical approach is much more significant:

it may encourage the spectators to become critical about their subjective definition of national identity without, however, requesting a mere rational self-perception.

In the deconstructive mode, the focus was placed both on the exposure of naturalised and banally reproduced narratives and conceptions of national identity, as well as on the undermining of the meaning-making process. In the first case it is exposed the naturalised use of symbols, icons, narratives and institutions (such as family) at the service of dominant conceptions of (Greek) national identities. In the second case, the notion of deconstruction is related to the constant postponement of the process of signification, which fundamentally challenges singularity and fixity.

At first sight, this approach seems more radical due to a violent attack (overt as well as subtle) on any point of reference. The performances address the spectators (primarily as individuals and not as part of a community) at a cognitive and not emotional level. It is demanded that they alone decipher the ideological, ethical and aesthetic implications of the postmodern – dramatic – stagings or postdramatic aesthetics. Shocking violence and provocation (in the case of Kitsopoulou), melancholia and incomprehensibility (in the case of Nova Melancholia) call for an individual rational reconsideration of one's personal response to the question of identity.

A possible weakness of this approach is that the extreme violence utilised as a shock strategy and the all-pervasive uncertainty may prohibit the activation of a process of self-reflection, deterring instead audiences not familiar with these kinds of theatre. The manifestation of the rejection of any point of (national) reference and identification does not acknowledge the need for national attachment. Still, in Kitsopoulou's case, the obsession of the attack could itself be considered as sign of the impossibility of liberation from such "national" bonds. The hatred reaction does not invite any form of transformative reaction. The lack of a moral code presents further ideological implications; the attack on the hegemonic discourses runs the danger of relativism. The deep disappointment following the uncovering of the existing oppressive mechanisms responsible for the reproduction of identities and norms may lead to a state of passive acceptance of one's own imprisonment. From this point of view, any response to the problem of identity coming either from the left or right side of the ideological spectrum seems without significant difference. Similarly, the melancholic state of uncertainty, while it may not suggest a state of passivity but a liminal state of reflection on the possible response, still does not indicate the direction towards which this future action should be oriented.

This deconstructive approach allows neither a negotiation of the identity question, which is most likely to appeal to broader spectatorships nor a critique that would encourage political action. However, the aggressive/melancholic diagnosis of the state of the nation and the way in which the national(ist) discourses still function in a naturalised manner in everyday life, may be considered – under particular conditions, as in the present case of Greece – as a necessary first stage in a self-critical process of realisation. The deconstructive mode draws attention to all these banal forms of nationalism and unnoticed interrelations. The effectiveness of such a radical voice should be analysed in relation to the broader theatrical discussion on the matter and the institutional context within which it takes place. From the theatre scholar's perspective, this mode may present great interest, since it places the focus on the entanglement of postmodern and postdramatic aesthetics (without conflating the two), the different manifestations of a deconstructive approach to identity, and the influence of the context of production on the latter's interpretation

Kitsopoulou's dramaturgy and productions with their unique characteristics can be understood as a Greek version of the "state-of-the-nation" play. Because of the topic's centrality in her oeuvre and the uniqueness of her dramatic/directorial style, Kitsopoulou constitutes a particular case. The fact that her work has been developed in direct affiliation to the National Theatre and the Festival is not without importance. Even if they should not be considered representative of the broader society, the reactions to *Athanasios Diakos*, based on the argument that it was a Festival production subsidised by public funding, point to existing extreme conservative reflexes – or to the increase of such beliefs amid the crisis – in Greece. The fact that such reactions became a topic – even for a while – in the public discourse has a particular significance as it reveals the resistances that still have to be discussed and overcome in Greek society.

The inclusion of Nova Melancholia's performance in the programme of the National Theatre can also be read – similar to the case of Kitsopoulou – as a sign of the establishment of experimental voices in the institutional theatre field. Not being performed on the main stages and without a conventional start time, such performances stand at the margins of the main programme. Nevertheless, even inclusion in the programme can be seen as a meaningful gesture. For in this case, the effectivity of such a deconstructive approach to identity is related to the new – for the particular context – aesthetic approaches to the topic of identity and can be related to the National's attempt to question its national connotations through the inclusion of new theatre genres. In a country where the national question still dominates the public discourse, such endeavours as Kitsopoulou's or the Nova Melancholia's performances are of

great significance for the further development of the theatrical discourse vis-à-vis the concept of national identity. Regarding the actual impact that this mode may have, however, the restrictions seem to overshadow the transformative potential. Such productions offer a rather negative answer to the initial question I posed in the prologue; namely, to what extent can particular trends of contemporary theatre invite a critical redefinition of identities if the audience is not already familiar with their aesthetics and a priori critically predisposed against the national question?

In the nation-transcending approach, the quest for an alternative form of belonging is manifested most clearly. This mode calls for a redefinition of what can be considered “national” and how other forms of non-national belonging may underscore this need to move beyond closed definitions of national identities. Here the return to identity is mediated through other forms of co-presence and community. Compared to the other two, this approach is the most likely to lead to future forms of post-national identities, which will be the outcome of a process of opening already existent self-perceptions. This mode implies an expectation of the future; of something to come; of a change. Relating the thematic of the national identity with the necessity of co-belonging and addressing the common future, it also suggests the need for collective action, while bridging countries, cultures, the closed theatre space and the city.

In this future perspective lies the strength but also a possible weakness of this approach. This emphasis on the expectation may signify a utopian postponement of any action in the present (namely, a change in one’s stance on the nation) to the future. The – experienced in the present – disappointment about the past’s failed possibilities now projected on the future may lead to a state of withdrawal satisfied in the process of waiting, instead of encouraging action towards a change. The potential of this future perspective should also be related to the fact that these performances did not take place during the crisis. It may be suggested that these performances offer a less direct and much more abstract negotiation of identity, given that the urgency of the actual social condition was not so great as in a period of crisis. Precisely because they are not responses to a moment of exception, such performances do not manifest an expectation of the future as an escape from a troubling present. The reflection on the utopian possibilities for new belongings and the need to move beyond national borders is then related not to the crisis but broader social and human quests. In this way, therefore, such an approach can also be considered as more promising since it is not so strictly dependent on a particular moment and context when the concept of identity becomes critical. Hence it does not signify a forced reaction but a more fundamental existential need.

Being mediated through different forms of belonging, here the link to the question of national identity is quite easily lost if the (national, cultural, institutional) background against which it develops is not clearly demarcated. In any other case, the performance may lead to a dissolution of national identity instead of a critical return and redefinition. No matter how thought-provoking this possibility may be, it still does not contribute to a redefinition of identities. Yet, as the performances analysed here demonstrate, the importance of the recurrent – no matter how subtle – reference to a Greek cultural context may limit such dangers to a great extent. In Marmarinos' case, the national connotations of the Demetriadian text and the site-specific character of the performance on the new premises of the Festival practically function as a frame that underscores this process of renegotiation. The act of waiting and narrating takes place as a hopeful alternative to the de(con)structive vision of Dimitriades' country, signifying a communal gesture of the anonymous citizens of the city whose "fest" (Athens Festival!) now loses its national significations. Shifting the emphasis from narrative to narration and from nation to city as a site of gathering, the performance suggests a possible alternative to an existing national – even negatively connotated – conception of identity. In Karazissis' production, it is the autobiographical dimension vis-à-vis the migration thematic that renders the performance so relevant to the issue examined here. Between fiction and autobiography, the reflective, nostalgic return to the past addresses the lost possibilities for change associated with alternative forms of community. The performance juxtaposes other forms of belonging to national communities while stressing the interweaving between political quests associated with particular forms of social and cultural life and the personal existential journey in search of identity.

Admittedly, the nation-transcending mode would remain rather abstract and without great critical potential, if it was not for the context of production. This becomes visible in a comparison between the two performances analysed in the last chapter. Marmarinos' performance could be considered as gaining a larger critical potential due to its site-specific character in the new space at Peiraïos St. and the significance of this change for the (national) identity of the Festival. The critical effect of Karazissis' production, on the other hand, though it is the only example analysed here that addresses the question of belonging in subtle but direct relation to the call for political action, seemed after all rather weak due to a lack of interrelation with the context of production.

Any attempt to evaluate the transformative potential of the three critical modes of theatre should take into account the particularities of the context. As I have stressed throughout this thesis, theatre's critical response to and possible alternative definitions of national

identity depend to a great extent on the ways that a whole society relates itself with, discusses and approaches this troubling, existential question. Hence, for example, the importance of the notion of national identity in Greece should not be only associated with the recent crisis. Instead, it should be related to the ways in which Greek society and the Greek state have shaped and perceived themselves over the past two hundred years with regards to the (ancient) past, as well as the terms of Europeanisation (and modernisation), and any given “others”.

Focusing on the Greek case, I have argued that, what at first sight may appear as more radical and aggressive, may ultimately fail to initiate a critical engagement with identity. Therefore, considering the extent to which the discussion regarding the nation and national identity preoccupy Greek society as a broadly acceptable and “natural” engagement with the past and “our” history, here I favoured the dialectical mode. In the Greek context, this approach seems more likely to address a broader audience and invite people to reflect critically (but not necessarily unemotionally) on their national attachments. Ideally, though, this will be only a first step towards a long and self-critical negotiation of identity. My argumentation, thus, in favour of the dialectical mode, should only be understood in relation to its effectiveness within this particular context.

Nonetheless, the emotionally laden quest of people for identity in national terms should not only be considered a Greek phenomenon. Therefore, I suggest in general that the potential of contemporary theatre to substantially challenge deeply rooted national certainties should not be confined to an aggressive diagnosis of a “problem”. Non-representational contemporary theatre may effectively invite questioning of national identity in the contradictory space between affirmative reproduction and radical rejection – a space shaped by the interplay between aesthetics, modes of performance and specific national, social, and institutional contexts. In order to address broader audiences and invite people to question their self-identification (even in negative terms) as members of nation(-states), contemporary theatre should still take into account the persistence of national attachments. A critical engagement with national identity as a culturally and historically conditioned construction, often banally reproduced, will then have to acknowledge both the existence of simultaneous – and therefore not singular – contemporaneities, the (often contradictory) return to the irrevocable past, and the human need to expect an unknown (better?) future. Theatre will be able to move people beyond their national “comfort zones” only if it achieves the promise of a new form of familiar togetherness – the prerequisite for hope.

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List of analysed performances

- Athanasios Diakos: The Return* [*Αθανάσιος Διάκος: Η Επιστροφή*], directed by Lena Kitsopoulou. Athens Festival (Peiraios 260, Hall H), July 14–16, 2012. DVD (Private Copy), courtesy of the director.
- The Blood Wedding* [*Ματωμένος Γάμος*], directed by Lena Kitsopoulou. Athens Festival (Peiraios 260, Hall H), July 23–24, 2014 / September 15–17, 2014. DVD (Private Copy), courtesy of the director.
- The Dance of the Solitary Heart: Cannabis Indica – Patria Graeca* [*Ο χορός της μοναχικής καρδιάς: Cannabis indica – patria graeca*], directed by Akillas Karazissis, National Theatre of Greece (Contemporary Theatre of Athens, Stage A). Premiere: February 21, 2009. DVD (Private Copy), courtesy of the director.

Dying as a Country [Πεθαίνω σα χώρα], directed by Michael Marmarinos. Athens Festival (Peiraios 260, Hall D). July 30–31, 2007 / June 6, 2008. DVD (Private Copy), courtesy of the director.

The Fortune Hunter...based on Chourmouzis [Ο Τυχοδιώκτης...βασισμένος στον Χουρμούζη], directed by Vasilis Papavasiliou. Athens Festival (Peiraios 260, Hall H), July 11–15, 2010. Video, courtesy of the director.

Golfo [Γκόλφω], directed by Nikos Karathanos. National Theatre of Greece / Epidaurus Festival (Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus), August 16, 2013. DVD (Library of the National Theatre of Greece).

Γόλφο!, directed by Simos Kakalas. State Theatre of Northern Greece (Foyer). Premiere: February 24, 2004. Video (Library of the State Theatre of Northern Greece).

Herakles [also trans. *Hercules Furens* – Ηρακλής Μαινόμενος], directed by Michael Marmarinos. National Theatre of Greece / Epidaurus Festival (Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus), August 5–6, 2011. DVD (Private Copy), courtesy of the director.

Koutroulis' Wedding [Του Κουτρούλη ο Γάμος], directed by Vasilis Papavasiliou. National Theatre of Greece. Premiere: February 3, 2012. DVD (Library of the National Theatre of Greece).

Telemachus: Should I stay or should I go? [Τηλέμαχος: Should I stay or Should I go?], directed by Anestis Azas and Prodromos Tsinikoris. Ballhaus Naunynstrasse (Berlin) – Onassis Cultural Centre (Athens). Premiere: January 11, 2013 (Berlin). Video, courtesy of the directors.

The Temptation of Saint Anthony: A Performance for the Nation [Ο πειρασμός του Αγίου Αντωνίου: Μια παράσταση για το Έθνος], a performance by Nova Melancholia. National Theatre of Greece (Event Hall), January 21, 2011. Video, courtesy of the directors.

Appendix

Abstract

The present thesis examined contemporary theatre's critical approaches to the concept of national identity. More specifically, it explored the aesthetic and dramaturgical strategies engaged on stage to challenge hegemonic definitions of nation and linear narratives upon which singular conceptions of identity are constructed. Special attention was paid to the complex relationship between theatre and nation and how this is affected by the broader context (historical, cultural, theatrical, and institutional) within which performances are produced and received. This framed approach enabled a close analysis of theatre's different grades of potentiality not only to deconstruct but also critically redefine the concept of national identity without a priori rejecting it or declaring it outdated.

I explored these issues by examining the case of contemporary Greek theatre in the period between 2006 and 2015 and particularly two cultural institutions and their theatre productions: the National Theatre of Greece and the Hellenic Festival (Athens and Epidaurus Festival). During this period, their programming choices and strategies concerning theatre space challenged "national" connotations that have been associated with their identity and institutional role.

The outcome of my research was the development of a typology of three modes of theatre's critical engagement with the concept of national identity: i) dialectical mode [chapter 2], ii) deconstructive mode [chapter 3], and iii) nation-transcending mode [chapter 4]. The first approach explores the dialectical relationships between past(s), present(s) and future(s), as well as proximity and distance, analysing the significance of the contradictory interplay between them in the redefinition of identity. The deconstructive mode refers both to the exposure of the naturalisation mechanisms that lead to the construction of hegemonic identities and (heteronormative) norms and the undermining of the meaning-making process on stage. In the nation-transcending approach, the onstage dissolving of borders and expansion beyond national demarcations, however momentary, triggers a critical redefinition of identity, mediated through other forms of belonging and community. A close examination of these modes in the case of Greek theatre showed that their radicality depends on the context of production and especially on how each society (and theatre) deals – in the present but also diachronically – with the troubling, existential question of identity.

Zusammenfassung in der deutschen Sprache

Die vorliegende Dissertation untersucht die kritischen Ansätze des zeitgenössischen Theaters zum Begriff der nationalen Identität. Es wurde erforscht, welche ästhetischen und dramaturgischen Strategien auf der Bühne verwendet werden, um hegemonische Definitionen der Nation und Konzeptionen singulärer nationaler Identitäten infrage zu stellen. Ein besonderer Forschungsschwerpunkt lag darin, zu untersuchen, wie die komplexe Beziehung zwischen Theater und Nation von dem konkreten (historischen, kulturellen sowie auch theatralischen und institutionellen) Produktions- und Rezeptionskontext der Theateraufführungen beeinflusst werden kann. Diese Art der Kontextualisierung ermöglicht eine genaue Analyse des unterschiedlichen Potenzials des Theaters, nicht nur den Begriff der Identität zu dekonstruieren, sondern auch die nationale Identität als analytische Kategorie neu zu definieren, ohne sie a priori abzulehnen.

Als Untersuchungsgegenstand diente das zeitgenössische griechische Theater in der Periode 2006 – 2015 und insbesondere zwei Theater- bzw. Kulturinstitutionen und ausgewählte Produktionen aus ihren Programm: das Nationaltheater Griechenlands und das Athen und Epidaurus Festival (Hellenic Festival). Während dieser Zeit führte ein Orientierungswechsel bzw. Erneuerungsversuch (sowohl programmatisch als auch ästhetisch) im Nationaltheater sowie im Festival zu einer Infragestellung der „nationalen“ Konnotationen, die mit ihrer institutionellen Identität und Rolle verbunden worden waren.

Das Ergebnis dieser Untersuchung war die Entwicklung einer Typologie von drei Modi der kritischen Auseinandersetzung des zeitgenössischen Theaters mit der nationalen Identität: dialektischer Modus [Kapitel 2], dekonstruktivistischer Modus [Kapitel 3] und „nationstranszendenter“ (nation-transcending) Modus [Kapitel 4]. Im Fokus des ersten Modus steht die dialektische Beziehung zwischen Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft sowie auch zwischen Nähe und Distanz, die eine wichtige Rolle bei der Definition von neuen, dynamischen nationalen Identitäten auf der Bühne spielen kann. Der dekonstruktivistische Ansatz konzentriert sich sowohl auf die Enthüllung der Naturalisierungsmechanismen, die zur Konstruktion hegemonialer Identitäten und (heteronormativer) Normen führen, als auch auf die Infragestellung der Signifizierungsprozesse. Im dritten Modus dient die (egal wie flüchtige) Auflösung von Grenzen und die Ausweitung über nationale Abgrenzungen hinaus, einer kritischen Neudefinition der nationalen Identität, die aber durch neue Formen der Zugehörigkeit und Gemeinschaft vermittelt wird. Eine genaue Untersuchung dieser drei Modi, wie sie im zeitgenössischen griechischen Theater beobachtet wurden, zeigte, dass die Wirkung

ihrer Radikalität vom Kontext der Produktion abhängt und besonders von der Art und Weise, wie sich jede Gesellschaft und ihre Theater gegenwärtig, aber auch diachronisch, mit der existenziellen Identitätsfrage auseinandersetzen.

Selbständigkeitserklärung zur Dissertation

Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die Arbeit in allen Teilen selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt habe.

Ich erkläre weiterhin, dass die vorliegende Arbeit in gleicher oder ähnlicher Fassung noch nicht Bestandteil in einem anderen Promotionsverfahren war.

Ariadni Lignou Tsamantani

Berlin, 27. Februar 2020