PERFORMING AGONISM:
DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS AND THE PROJECT OF AUTONOMY IN ART'S SOCIAL TURN

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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To my beloved father Thomas Makkas

Abstract

Living through the aftermath of the time of crisis, the present research raises the question of the relationship between the 'performative' and the 'political'. Drawing upon philosophical discourses of agonism, autonomy and democracy the research sets out to achieve an understanding of the political nature of performance, one that renders the Evental 'We' at the centre of the political praxis focusing particularly on the Greek case.

In engaging with the conception of democracy as a 'tragic regime', as Cornelius Castoriadis suggests, each of the chapters discusses the various aspects of radical practices and performances of resistance that emerge offering a series of analyses on both the aesthetic and political practice of *agon*. Thus, the question of 'how can theatre and performance become *praxis'* frames the thematic premise of this research oriented by the demand for a radical and direct democracy. In doing so, the research is mostly concerned with reflecting on the various forms of the 'political' as articulated in participatory practices that engage the social, as seen for example in the work of Rimini Protokoll and Dries Verhoeven, and as embodied in modes of resistance that sparked the protests in Athens during 2010.

'Staging' the project of *autonomy*, at both individual and social levels, the research offers a critical reading of the occupied Embros theatre in Athens as a main case study, which inspired political activism reflecting on social imaginary significations. While such an experiment did not do much in transforming the lethargic conditions of our times; it nevertheless, remains valuable in confronting us with the limits of the 'tragic' regime of democracy suggesting a continuous process of *agon* and constant displacement. Placing the relationship between art and philosophy at the core of this project, the research serves as an inquiry into the emerging field of Performance Philosophy.

Acknowledgements

At this point, I would like to express my gratitude and sincere thanks to several people and institutions that generously contributed to the work presented in this research.

I would like to begin by thanking the Greek State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) for funding this project and for the support provided during the entire period of my postgraduate studies in the UK.

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to each and every one of the participants I met at Embros Theatre and Green Park who shared their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and dreams with me. Their contribution has collectively supported this research. Special thanks to the members of Mavili Collective for their valuable insights and conversations that provoked further thought.

My heartfelt thanks and gratitude are extended to my supervisors Dr. Broderick D. V. Chow and Dr. Mary Richards for their insightful, detailed and encouraging academic advice throughout the entire period of my PhD studies. I am enormously grateful for their invaluable support at all levels.

My deepest gratitude and appreciation go to my family who has taught me that resilience is a great virtue. Thank you for the continuous support and love.

Above all, this research is dedicated to the memory of my father who performed the most important performance of agonism of all.

CONTENTS

Performing Agonism, Thinking in Action

My aim in this opening chapter is to provide an overview of the multiple directions this research takes and offer some contextualization for the chapters that follow. The project is primarily concerned with aspects of the social, political, philosophical and performative narratives as they continue to unfold in the current setting of world-changing events. This research was inspired during a critical period in Europe's recent history, in a time characterized by profoundly precarious social, political and economic conditions; in a time where social relations are being challenged and new political forces emerge; in a time where social movements of protest, resistance and disobedience appear claiming a plural democratic vocabulary and suggesting new paths for political activism. Taking an interdisciplinary and pluralist approach to the various aspects that constitute the performative and agonistic nature of the political, the research is a study on how the performance of the political can be understood but also how the political as such can acquire an essential role in performance practice.

In the chapters that follow the relationship between performance and the political is addressed in multiple ways through a philosophical lens in order to shed some light and reconsider their identity as fields that add to the interplay between contemporary artistic practice and social imaginary. As such, the key questions that concern the present research provide a platform for a philosophical inquiry into the emerging field of Performance Philosophy. That is to say, the very question of what constitutes the field of Performance Philosophy itself is subject to redefinition considering that the relationship between performance and philosophy -since the

6th century BC when theatre and philosophy emerged in ancient Greece- has ranged from being a highly antagonistic to a highly interactive one. These approaches can be seen, for instance, in works such as Martin Puchner's essay *Afterword: Please Mind the Gap between Theatre and Philosophy*, where he clearly advocates a gap between the two, suggesting that those whose work is concerned with theatre and philosophy would do well to mind the gap between the two areas and that this should be the principle around which the study of theatre, performance, and philosophy should resolve. For Puchner the problem lies primarily in the fact that philosophy is not an object of study, as theatre is, but instead an intellectual practice that can, by all means, claim to have conceived the institution of the university itself. Both areas, Puchner argues, having been brought into the institutional context of the university appear analogous adding to the idea that they might as well be coupled, but this would seem rather difficult as they are each concerned with their own history. 'Theatre harks back to Greek theatre in much the same intense way that philosophy harks back to Greek philosophy. These two endeavours aren't going to shed their skin any time soon'[1], claims Puchner. In the opening page of *The Drama of Ideas*, Puchner, narrates the story of a young playwright in Athens, who despite his youth had managed to acquire one of the greatest positions in the Athenian theatrical stage, that of the leader of the chorus. But his greatest desire was to have a higher honour, to win the first prize as playwright which would instantly make his career, and would allow him to quit his other two occupations, wrestling and going to school. On his way to submit his play to the theatre he runs into a group of people who were listening to a strange man whom he immediately recognised as Socrates. The young playwright joined the group and was thrilled by Socrates' speech. He decided to burn his play on the steps of the theatre of Dionysus in Athens and become a student of this man.[2] The young playwright was, of course, Plato and Puchner suggests that it was Plato who first invented philosophy as drama, with Socrates acquiring a central character in his dialogues. Puchner also suggests, however, that Plato's rejection of theatre was based exactly on his engagement with it. Plato is also present in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* of Jonas Barish who argues that theatre in Western philosophy seems to be a place of untruth and which philosophy must reject in order to come into its own truth.

On the other hand, philosophical works including Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*, Alain Badiou's numerous theses on theatre, and whose work is largely discussed in

[1] Martin Puchner. *Afterword: Please Mind the Gap between Theatre and Philosophy*. Modern Drama, Volume 56, Number 4. University of Toronto Press. 2013, p. 542.
[2] Martin Puchner. *The Drama of Ideas. Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2010, p. 3.

the chapters that follow, Samuel Weber's *Theatricality as Medium,* as well as the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilles Deleuze and François Laruelle to name but a few, seek out encounters between philosophy and the arts, including theatre and performance, and it is this approach that the present research identifies with. Philosophy is itself becoming interested in its own performative aspects and in seeking sources for itself in the arts it moves away from conventional philosophical aesthetics. It is precisely from this position that the present research explores the issues related to current artistic practices that engage the social and propose a new path for political activism, as in the case of Embros Theatre and Green Park that acquire a central position in the discussion of this research.

The historical printing press of the *Embros* Newspaper transformed into a theatre in central Athens. It was shut down in 2007 and was occupied by an activist artist collective in 2011. In the theatre that had been abandoned for years, Mavili Collective proposed an intense programme of activities including events, talks, shows, exhibits, dance and theatre performances. Their aim was to give a temporary new life to Embros Theatre by proposing an alternative model of collective management and contemporary forms of artistic and creative works in the current social, political and economic setting in Greece. They proposed a space for exchange, research, debate and re-thinking. The occupation of Embros Theatre provided a context of re-considering and re-creating modes of collective production and management as a response to the shortfalls of the Greek state. Since its occupation, Embros is not used solely as a theatre, but appeals to a broader crowd being open not only to artists who cannot financially support a stage play or wish to operate independently, but also to people who are actively involved in grassroots social movements. Embros incorporates a politically plural space where art and politics are not considered as fixed and separate entities but dynamic and interrelated practices. What Embros brings in the field of Performance Philosophy is a thematic concern of not only how the performance of the political can be understood in artistic terms but also how it contributes to the essentially 'agonistic' nature of the political. In other words, what this research addresses in the chapters that follow is the question of how can this new conception of the political be thought as a problem of performance itself?

Four years after the occupation of Embros Theatre in November 2011, a group of artists, performance theorists and cultural workers occupied Green Park Café, near the park 'Pedion tou Areos' (Kypseli district, centre of Athens). This new occupation emerged from and sought to build on the failings of collective struggles of the past few years in Greece. Failings from within the emergent collective structures of resistance and from the conflicts produced in the

emergent dynamics of the Greek social, cultural and political landscape. These collective structures brought together radical political social works, institutional experimental performance, as well as established and marginalised art practices at Embros. Nonetheless, the program of the occupation allowed and embraced accidents, irruptions and failings. The kick-off events in both Embros and Green Park were similar: an intensive programme of various collaborations and presentation formats. Green Park occupation, however, is not defined by a particular ideology but rather comes as a result of the encounters born out of the struggles of the past. Seeking to rethink the need for and nature of participation the Green Park project remains imperfect and incomplete, like a work in progress. This second occupation has been focusing on the playful establishment of relationships. Experimenting with structures and modes outside conventional theatre, both occupations established themselves as a disruption contesting instituted 'rhythms of being'. What Green Park suggests that is new is the refusal to define duration and continuity. Instead, it proclaims ephemerality, fluidity and illusiveness challenging the nature of the theatrical performance itself. By abandoning time matrices, the occupations claim their right for self-institution in a way that exceeds mere negation of existing structures. They aim for different definitions of time that not only ascribe their autonomous character, but also protect them from control and domination. Proposing structures that are open to re-think and re-evaluate, both case studies examine the possibilities that such actions create. What formations and practises might allow us to rethink relations and roles in society? What is everyone's responsibility today? And more crucially, how might such practices be of concern for the field of Performance Philosophy? Can theatre and performance bring to the stage this new mode of the political? These are some of the key questions the present research will address.

My approach to the issues that concern this project has been governed by two major considerations. First, in my own work as an artist, I have always tried to seek out encounters between artistic expression and philosophical inquiry to represent the deepest meanings. In turn, these encounters have offered me new paths for creation, thought and exchange. Coming from a Fine Art background where I mostly received training in painting, printmaking, sculpture, photography and installation art but also a large part of my studies was dedicated to the philosophy of art, history and culture, I always wanted to explore other ways for creating works that would allow new perspectives to appear and allow me to move beyond traditional conceptions in both theory and practice. Theatre and performance have always acquired a prominent position in my thoughts as areas that can encompass all my previous experiences

and knowledge and mostly as areas that promote the quest for philosophical thought that is not reduced to the reflection of its own limits.[3] In my engagement with Performance Studies, this has been at the core of my inquiry. To that extent, I argue that art, including theatre and performance, should be considered as engaging in philosophical reflection via the medium itself. That is to say, art as being capable of producing a unique aesthetic and philosophical kind of thinking. By doing so, art will pave the way for an aesthetic transformation of our shared experience of the contemporary world. In a similar vein, can we think of performance as an area where philosophical practice can be performed without having to engage in the debate of 'minding the gap' between them? We would not even need to render them as equals, but rather consider art and performance as mediums that enrich the pursuit of philosophy. Laura Cull and Alice Lagaay among others have advocated an open and dynamic nature of Performance Philosophy that should 'tend more towards addressing the extent to which performance might be considered a philosophical activity in its own right (and philosophy a species of performance)'[4]. It also makes me think that the western tradition of 'authority' and 'individuality' in knowledge has contributed to a great extent in such an approach of 'minding the gap', wherein this was not the case for philosophers such as Aristotle whose work ranged from physics, politics, and ethics to theatre, metaphysics, and rhetoric. Which is to ask, to what extent has the drive towards expertise biased us against our engagement with other disciplines? I perceive this 'categorisation' of knowledge as a method that promotes the particular rather than universal truth as a form of alienation of the individual from the philosophical pursuit. And it is exactly with this in mind that I focus on collective action in this research; collective as a form that promotes and represents universal truths and concerns that have ontological extensions. Of course, many would counter argue that cross, inter or trans-disciplinary research has been established as an innovative method of research considering theories and tendencies from different fields, but think, for instance, of another major issue within the arts, that of practice-as-research, which is still struggling to acquire a place in academia as an equal form of research in relation to traditional research methods. Indeed, the discussion could end up being very long but to the extent, however, that we might attribute to art (and performance) a philosophical quality of its own right, in like manner, we could acknowledge its research qualities and dynamics.

[3] For the purposes of this research, theatre is viewed under the broadly defined area of 'performance', including social and political actions and interactions. I, therefore, do not focus narrowly on theatre as an art form, although this side is taken into account when referring to ancient Greek theatre or other forms of theatre.

[4] Laura Cull and Alice Lagaay. eds. *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2014, p.15.

Second, the events that have taken place in the period since 2008 in a number of countries around the globe, and more precisely in Greece, have made clear my personal stance. However, objective I tried to be for the purposes of this project, one question was always persistent in my mind: am I speaking as an insider or as an outsider? Am I the insider who, in the first instance, experienced the revolts that were triggered by the murder of a fifteen-year-old student by two special police officers in 2008 in Athens, which escalated to mass unrest and which soon embodied deeper causes and a widespread feeling of rage in the young generation about social, economic and political issues? Or am I the outsider that is conducting this research as an observer who is documenting the events from London? And yet the question remains. In my numerous trips to Athens and in my engagement and interaction with different groups of people who experienced the crisis in various ways –from academics, artists and journalists to members of political parties, activists and ordinary individuals– one thing remained certain: the economic crisis interrupted a normality in contemporary Greek society and posed a series of problems that needed be reconsidered and redefined, such as what is the role of the individual in contemporary society? Should we adopt a more active role in the issues that concern our engagement with the public sphere where we can be visible and audible, as Hannah Arendt would suggest?[5] The fundamental question of freedom under capitalist governmentality remained central not only in political philosophical discourse in recent years but also as a philosophical question about the very meaning of life and freedom itself. Michael Foucault and Hannah Arendt among others refer to the concept of *agonism* to conceptualize the very conditions of political freedom. Likewise, contemporary political theorists such as Chantal Mouffe, Bonnie Honig and David Owen also refer to *agonism* as an alternative vocabulary for democratic processes.

So then why *agonism* and performance? First and foremost, I shall begin with the definition of the term *agōn*, which derives from the Greek *αγών* acquiring the following meanings: gathering or meeting point/ contest/ a strenuous effort to achieve a goal. In ancient Greek theatre, *αγών* was also the debate between two opposing sides. The word *αγών* initially denotes the result of the verb *άγω*, which means 'to lead', therefore, the gathering. Homer uses the word for the gathering of Gods or ships. It then acquires the meaning of gathering to conduct athletic competitions in ancient Greece and, eventually, the word takes on the wider definition of competition, battle or struggle.[6] In a way, the answer betrays the very nature of the kind of

[5] Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. 2nd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
[6] Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott. *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. London: American Book Company, 1871. p. 10.

performances discussed in this project. That is to say, the radicality that emerges from the kind of performances including social, political and artistic is one that requires that we confront with the idea of failure, with the idea of the 'tragic' insofar as it encompasses the contingency, uncertainty, and ambiguity of human praxis, which always entails the possibility of slipping into 'hubris', just as did the heroes in the ancient Greek tragedies. This very possibility of failure discloses the agonistic nature of performance, which is precisely why in the case of the political Cornelius Castoriadis perceives it as 'tragic'. I would then suggest that the analyses that follow in each of the chapters of this research delineate a search for a democratic vocabulary that suggests new paths of social and political performances of resistance but also a search for new artistic creation reflecting on notions of collectivity, interaction and belonging. It is this agonistic nature of performance, through struggles, failures, and ruptures that renders it as tragic as democracy itself because the consequences of human action can be unpredictable and, so, 'thinking in action' as the title of this opening chapter suggests leaves open the very possibility of myriad impossibilities to unfold.

Agonism implies a deep concern but also respect for the other. *Agōn* emphasizes the importance of the struggle itself; for it to exist there must be an opponent. It is precisely this side of the term that the present research identifies with: the notion of struggle that entails conflict. In a way, being agonistic means engaging with existing institutions in order to transform them and assemble new forms of being and belonging. I perceive agonism as the result of another key concept that is mobilised frequently in this project, that of creative imagination and which Castoriadis calls 'social imaginary'. Castoriadis argued that imagination is not primarily a capacity to create visual images, but rather the singular or collective capacity to create forms. Every society creates a shared universe of meaning for itself. History, for Castoriadis, is creation; the creation of total forms of human life; or in other words, the positioning of new social forms. History is the existence of the multiplicity of such worlds. Thus, social imaginary has an open and creative character that allows a continual alteration of the given meanings and the change of significations. In this sense, social imaginary has a practical character because it is embodied in the whole of social life determining particular personal identities as well as the collective social reality. Thus, I perceive agonism as the application of creative imagination in organising new forms of life. Contemporary democracies should create the institutions that allow for conflict to take an agonistic form, as Mouffe has argued. What interests me also is to examine the conditions and breadth of ways under which this conflict becomes *praxis* at a social, political and artistic level.

In his attempt to correct Marx's reductionist approach to culture and identity, Castoriadis tried to redefine the revolutionary project by introducing the concept of the radical imaginary into it. Focusing on the relation between *theory* and *praxis*, Castoriadis endeavoured to redefine both terms. Theory is 'a doing, the always uncertain attempt to realize the project of clarifying the world'[7] while praxis is 'a doing in which the other or others are intended as autonomous beings considered as the essential agents of the development of their own autonomy'.[8] In other words, praxis for Castoriadis is creation. When the subject is probed further, the question of political praxis becomes crucial. The notion of political *doing* is a politics that aims at making political institutions through collective activity. Thus, genuine politics in Castoriadis' view (democratic politics) is about the conscious and deliberate collective praxis. Praxis is, therefore, a conscious activity and can only exist as lucid activity. The question that arises is in what way can the notion of collective praxis elucidate the anti-capitalist social movements that emerged during the financial crisis? For Castoriadis, as long as there is politics in the strong and explicit sense, new forms will emerge because history is full of forms that are other to those that already exist. This action oriented towards changing society is what Antonio Gramsci refers to as 'philosophy of praxis'. Gramsci argues for an equation between philosophy and politics, thought and action, that is, in other words, a philosophy of praxis. In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci argues for a critical self-awareness. The philosophy of praxis, Gramsci tells us, 'must initially adopt a polemical stance, as superseding the existing mode of thinking'. It must, therefore, present itself as a critique of common sense. … The relation between 'high' philosophy and common sense is assured by politics'.[9] For Gramsci, the choice is always from among different worldviews in conflict with one another and it is also the struggle for hegemony. The alternative, however, to the hegemonic discourse, for Gramsci, is not to be found in a philosophy of common sense, but is rather established by superseding existing common sense in order to create another common sense. In Gramscian terms, common sense is the most widespread and rooted ideology in a historical period, a conception of the world absorbed a-critically. It is the philosophy of the multitude and has a negative connotation. For Gramsci revolutionary theory is born in opposition to existing common sense. What is at stake is a conception of the world that needs to be transformed. In Gramsci's view, philosophy is the critique of common sense. As such, common sense becomes a necessary target of the

[7] 'ένα πράττειν, η πάντοτε αβέβαιη προσπάθεια να πραγματοποιηθεί το πρόταγμα μιας διαύγασης του κόσμου' in Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Kathleen Blamey (tr.), Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987, p. 74.
[8] 'αυτό το πράττειν, μέσα από το οποίο σκοπεύουμε τον άλλο ή τους άλλους ως αυτόνομα όντα, και τους θεωρούμε ως τον ουσιαστικό παράγοντα της ανάπτυξης της ίδιας τους της αυτονομίας', Ibid, p. 75.
[9] Joseph Francese. *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory*, London and New York: Routledge. 2009, p.132.

philosophy of praxis. Against the current hegemonic order, Gramsci, deploys his version of the philosophy of praxis as a philosophy of the 'impure act'. In doing so, Gramsci operates outside the framework of pure or practical reason of the hegemonic discourse as developed in the Kantian tradition. Gramsci introduces us to the new logic of impure reason foregrounding the collective act that aims at the reconstitution of reality. This dialectically combined impure act invites us to engage in the evental politics of counter-hegemony opposing the hegemonic order of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, the philosophy of praxis is a Marxist critique of existing forms of dominant thinking. It is this notion of the transformation of the self that praxis contributes to that interest me and which in Castoriadian terms stems from social imaginary significations. The radical transformation of the self is, therefore, established through a philosophy of praxis demolishing the hegemonic power of neoliberal capitalism.

The project began in 2013 amidst a series of turbulent events taking place in a multitude of global locations including the periphery of Europe, the Middle East and the United States. A few years earlier, in 2010 the so-called Arab Spring began in Tunisia sparking a series of protests, riots, and coups and soon spread to other countries including Libya, Egypt, Syria and Bahrain. In many occasions, the revolts resulted in violent responses from both the authorities and protestors and a number of civil wars began including the Syrian and the Libyan Civil Wars. The struggle between religious elites and the growing need for a democratic system was the result of a long politically corrupted dictatorship.[10] In May 2011, the anti-austerity movement in Spain known as the *Indignados Movement* protested against capitalism, political corruption, unemployment rates, and welfare cuts. The *Indignados* claimed to be a social movement response to the global financial crisis as a result of the high unemployment rates. On 15 May 2011 over 15,000 people gathered at *La Puerta del Sol Plaza* in Madrid, just a week before national elections took place, opposing neoliberal policies. General assemblies were held regularly and decisions were taken by consensus, in this way rejecting parliamentary indirect democracy and aiming at the creation of horizontal links between citizens.[11] The Occupy movement had begun. A few months later, in September 2011, Occupy Wall Street movement sparked a series of protests against economic inequality and wealth distribution in a number of cities across the United States. Partly inspired by the *Indignados Movement*, the protests emphasized direct action and were soon spread to other countries around the globe.

[10] Larbi Sadiki. *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring, Rethinking Democratization*, London: Routledge. 2015, pp. 105-117.
[11] Jenny Pickerill, John Krinsky, Graeme Hayes, Kevin Gillan and Brian Doherty. *Occupy! A global Movement*, London: Routledge. 2015, pp. 30-40.

The Greek case is well known, with the county suffering one of the worst periods of economic decline in its recent history. Widespread economic insecurity began in 2009 when the international capital markets affected Greece's ability to borrow from other markets. As the crisis deepened, a tripartite committee comprised by the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and representatives from the European Commission, the so-called Troika, was formed in order to manage and negotiate economic policies implemented by governments. And there came a time when Greece's debt came to a standstill and the country had only two paths to choose: default on the sovereign debt or come to terms with a bailout deal. In other words, Greece had to choose between the so-called 'Grexit' –in which case the country would no longer be part of the Eurozone– and harsh austerity cuts in order to pay back its debt –which option would guarantee Greece's membership in the Eurozone. With the global economy system being interdependent, the chosen route not only would affect Greece's own future but also that of other indebted member states of the European Union such as Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Ireland. Thus, under the threat of a domino effect, a bailout plan was regarded as the safest path to follow at the time. On 23 April 2010, the then Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou announces in a televised address to the Greek nation from the island of Kastellorizo that Greece had requested an international bailout. Comparing the country to a sinking ship, without power and credibility, Papandreou claimed he had no choice but to activate the aid package that was agreed by European finance ministers. Calling on a national and urgent need to formally ask European partners for the activation of the 'Support mechanism', he declared that the country would experience a new Odyssey in the following years. Under these conditions, in May 2010, the first rescue package accompanied by austerity measures and economic reforms in the public and private sectors was signed.

I was inspired to begin this project in response to the critical conditions of our times and in response to the proliferation of performances of *agonism* and *antagonism* and articulate them in the time of neoliberal capitalism. I refer to neoliberal capitalism as a doctrine whose structures are oriented by private and corporate interests linked with global markets. Neoliberal practices have also shown that social welfare policies are not regarded with high importance while proclaiming supportive packages to resolve issues related to poverty and debt, as happened in the case of Greece in order to conciliate social indignation. The withdrawal of government from finance giving its place to financial experts further underpinned such an approach of neoliberal capitalist view. Taking the form of structural reform programmes, these packages were often cloaked in the blurred agenda of social politics celebrating a humanitarian

character. Thus, creating spaces for *agonisms* and *antagonisms*, such practices demand a different approach to the question of democracy and social politics. In some ways, this research requires moving away from conventional thoughts and methods of consolidating a theory of democratic practice including into the discussion other discourses such as that of philosophical inquiry calling into question prevailing practices and ideologies.

The imposition of capital controls introduced in Greece in June 2015 and which for two and a half years later remain enforced, proclaimed an era of constant struggle, rupture, and displacement, being one of a series of practices whose social impact resulted in a time of stagnation. The amount of time spent by Greek people queueing at the banks and cash machines to withdraw a limited daily amount of sixty euros could not capture the agony and fear of the precarious conditions a whole nation was asked to respond to. Not to mention the high unemployment rates during the last seven years that forced thousands to seek employment in other countries, and most importantly, the alarming increase in suicide rates which Greece had never encountered before. Eve Katsouraki, in her chapter on the Greek case *A Life Not Worth Living: On the Economy of Vulnerability and Powerlessness in Political Suicide* in the edited volume *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*, drawing upon Giorgio Agamben's philosophical work, argues for the need to rethink political subjectivities reduced to the logic of biopolitical governmentality that conditions life in relation to economic measurements. Reading life through Agamben's concept of 'bare life' which, reduced to biopolitical vulnerable life, has become a dispensable economic value, Katsouraki, seeks an alternative economy of life exploring a political deployment of corporal performativity through which she reads the phenomenon of political suicide. Presenting suicide rates in Greece since the crisis erupted, Katsouraki writes that between 2009 and 2010 there were 551 cases of Greek men reported to have died by suicide, which increased to 3,000 deaths a year after 2009 and the figure is estimated to have reached the number of 12,000 deaths in 2014. 'To say that the impact of fiscal cuts on the life of Greek society was devastating may not be enough to capture the full scale of the damage suffered in the experience of the Greek people, socially, economically and politically'[12], argues Katsouraki. Such news appeared not only in the Greek media but also in the international press, causing absolute shock considering, that Greece had never seen such actions of self-exposure to violence as a form of political protest before. In the light of such events, I then wonder if the crisis may serve as an opportunity for self and

[12] Eve Katsouraki. 'A Life Not Worth Living: On the Economy of Vulnerability and Powerlessness in Political Suicide'. In *Performing Antagonism Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Fisher Tony and Katsouraki Eve. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017, p. 156.

collective reflection on the issues that are concerned with agonistic actions that become symbols of such powerful expressions of radical performances of resistance. The Greek word for crisis, *κρίσις*, apart from its literal meaning also acquires a different one, that of judgment. Thus, consider this as a stimulus to the discussion that follows.

FROM THEORY TO PRAXIS

So far, I have outlined my aims and approach to the issues that concern this research and I have provided some preliminary background information in order to, first, demonstrate my inspiration to pursue this research and, second, place this study in the context of relevant work that has been undertaken in the area. In addition to offering a comprehensive orientation to the directions and key concerns of this project, and before I move on to discuss my critical methodologies, I shall first elaborate on how this research offers some insights to the concept of *agonism* and by extension to the emerging field of Performance Philosophy. According to the 'agonistic pluralism' model that Chantal Mouffe developed in works such as *The Democratic Paradox* and *On the Political*, and deriving the notion of agonistic democracy from Carl Schmitt in a large part, pluralist democracy is primarily characterized by the distinction between the concepts of enemy and adversary. That is to say, within the 'we' that constitutes the social and political community and, therefore, the agonistic space the opponent is not regarded as an enemy to be defeated but rather as an adversary with legitimate existence. The enemy's ideas, theories, and practices will be fought with persistence but his very right to defend them will never constitute the cause of conflict. In other words, his right to do so shall never be questioned. Thus, for Mouffe, this relation between adversaries –that form a friend/enemy relation– is what primarily constitutes the agonistic space of community, for which we can understand why the agonistic dynamics, far from constituting a threat for democracy is, in fact, the very condition of its existence. For Mouffe, this expression of conflict is one that enables citizens to create alternatives. This constitutive 'we' is precisely such in a context of conflict and antagonism. Thus, the essential question of democracy is not to reach a consensus without exclusion, but rather create the conditions for a pluralist we/they relation.

What is at stake in Mouffe's agonistic struggle is the formation of the power relations that create a social order and the type of hegemony constructed through and by them. The antagonistic element is, therefore, always present. Developing an alternative understanding of the formation of social order, Mouffe, argues that the constitutive structure of society is not a contract or unanimous agreement but the conflict, or antagonism, that exists between political identities. Antagonism is, for Mouffe, constitutive of human societies and this conflict manifests the impossibility of an ultimate and definite consolidation of social order. The irreducibility of these conflicts and struggles represents an immanent limit to the formation of order. In this context, the antagonistic conflict is not a discrepancy between different options of social orders, but rather a dynamic process that brings forth all of these options in the first instance.

> While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognise the legitimacy of their opponents …This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. We would say that the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism.[13]

Hence, the agonistic model that Mouffe offers is one that acknowledges the very contingent nature of dominant hegemonic practices in a society which can only be subverted by the agonistic struggle. This approach is based on the thesis that liberalism's central deficiency in the political field is the 'negation of the ineradicable character of antagonism'[14] and, thus, our inability to envisage social problems in a *political* way. The political, as Mouffe understands it, is not merely reduced to technical issues that are to be solved by experts. 'Properly political questions always involve decisions which require us to make a choice between conflicting alternatives'.[15] This incapacity to think *politically* is to a great extent due to the typical liberal understanding of pluralism which considers that we live in a world in which there are indeed many perspectives, but owing to empirical limitations, we can never adopt them all. However, when put together, they form a harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble, which is precisely why this type of liberal structure must negate the political in its antagonistic dimension. The efforts to rid society of potential antagonisms through consensus-oriented methods are fuelled by the suspension of the basic political dimension of society. The political is defined by power

[13] Chantal Mouffe. *On the Political*. New York: Routledge, 2005. p. 20.
[14] Ibid., p. 10.
[15] Ibid., p. 10.

conflicts and is determined by the confrontational emergence of a hegemonic order. Power conflicts cannot be reconciled in democratic discourses, but they can transform into legitimate forms of articulation and such forms are established by channelling conflicts agonistically. Democratic practice begins, in other words, by acknowledging antagonistic relations and transforming them into agonistic. The failure to consider this constitutive antagonism lies in the difficulty to think of new models of democracy or what might be a new form of politics, where any social or political action would require collective action beyond a self-contained ordering structure, necessitating collective identification: the formation of a 'we'. It is with this in mind that I ask what do agonistic performances at Embros theatre have to offer in the context of neoliberal capitalism? And more, can the antagonistic relations within its grounds propose an agonistic struggle that promotes the very meaning of *agōn*? To the extent that we can attribute to art and performance a political process, we can then agree with what Tony Fisher argues in the opening chapter of *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance and Radical Democracy*:

> It can also be agreed that politics and performance share, at least on the face of it, many features in common: they are both 'discursive' and also 'embodied practices'; neither can take place without 'actors' and both indeed perform for 'publics' – however loosely constructed; historically both have employed performance as a means of staging or procuring certain rhetorical effects, seeking either to influence or to sway those publics in one way or another by directing the passionate attachments of their respective audiences, thus changing the existing affective relations between individuals and the wider world.[16]

Hannah Arendt's work is also representative of *agonism*. While Arendt refers to the Greek *agōn*, she perceives it as a condition without antagonism. Indeed, she insists on a pluralist human society but, as far as politics is concerned, she perceives it as dealing with relational meanings and conditions between the political actors –relying on intersubjective agreement– and she does not acknowledge that this pluralist character is at the core of antagonistic struggles. Thus, the political is, for Arendt, a plural condition established from multiple perspectives. What Arendt, therefore, advocates, with reference to Emanuel Kant, is an intersubjective agreement to be achieved in the public sphere where consensus can be established. This consensus is the result of a pluralist exchange of views, thoughts, and voices. Likewise, Bonnie Honig, influenced by Arendt, offers a conception of politics focused on *virtú*, just as Arendt does with the Greek sense of *doxa*, where agonistic conflict encourages the

[16] Tony Fisher. *Introduction: Performance and the Tragic Politics of Agon*. In *Performing Antagonism Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Fisher Tony and Katsouraki Eve, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p.7.

political actors to establish an open space of debate. It is precisely the public space, which for Arendt is the domain of appearance, the doxastic domain of social and political action. Making reference to Heidegger's reading of *Aletheia*, the Greek word for truth (αλήθεια), Arendt links the concept of truth to appearance displacing *Aletheia* from the sphere of *noumena* to the realm of phenomena which constitutes the space of visibility, therefore, the public space where the beings are visible. *Aletheia*, holding a α-privative (α-λήθεια) refers to a negative: α (a, 'not') and λήθη (lethe, 'the state of being forgotten and, therefore, hidden'), thus, *Aletheia* means to be hidden no longer, the state of being evident. This disclosure constitutes for Arendt the realm of public space where appearing becomes manifest.

It is precisely this public space that the present research explores, where all agonisms and antagonisms become manifest. It is the public space where performances with actors and actions become apparent and disclose new alternatives, social, political and artistic. It is the space within which Cornelius Castoriadis argues that autonomy can be achieved; autonomy at both a social and individual level. It is this space where Badiou's Event happens when the excluded part of society appears in the social sphere rupturing the appearance of normality. It is the space where, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, people recognise each other as community reflecting on their common myth. It is the space where performances of resistance appear but also the space where performances of autonomy envisage new forms of being and belonging through ruptures and failures.

I shall now move on to discuss the broad philosophical underpinnings and methodological approach in this research, which is multidisciplinary. This is essential given that my aim and focus is to examine the 'social turn' in contemporary art and performance practices. In other words, my aim is to examine practices that engage the social with participatory modes, in relation to, first, issues of democratic practices. And second, explore the relationship between art and politics, focusing on the Greek case. My interest in doing so stems from the fact that Greece has predominantly been a 'theatre of antagonisms' in the years during the financial crisis and its aftermath in multiple ways: not only at a social and political level with regards to governmental practices, but also at the artistic level considering that the cultural sector was affected to a great degree from austerity cuts. Thus, my primary research question is how do artists respond to issues of welfare, equality and social responsibility? What triggers artistic praxis in the current setting? While the crisis no longer attracts international attention and headlines as it once did, yet the country still remains vulnerable and the damage caused by

austerity has not gone away. While the troubles date back to the collapse of Greece's economy in 2010, the aftermath is arguably as resounding as the 'performance' itself.

In an article on the Greek news website *Ekathimerini.com* titled *Athens on the cutting edge of art* the journalist Margarita Pournara notes that Cathryn Drake, a writer and journalist who settled in Athens asks 'Could Athens become the art world's new Berlin?'[17] Owing to the relatively low rents and the dynamic artistic landscape with young artists doing political work, Pournara argues that 'the crisis may have brought an ill wind, but it also forced the eye of the world to turn here'[18] and she goes on to argue that Greek art has become appealing since the crisis broke out. 'Despite the negative stereotypes and the criticism levelled at Greece and its people by the international media, there seems to be plenty of room for an alternative narrative of the huge changes that have been occurring in Greece since 2009.'[19] So what are the Greek people learning then that is new? How has the crisis affected society and how is this reflected in artistic practices in theatre, the visual arts, literature and so on? In the same article, Pournara provides responses from different artists working with various mediums, artists that experienced the shift in artistic practice. Nadja Argyropoulou, a curator who organised a presentation of Greek artists at Paris's *Palais de Tokyo* stated

> All of the spotlights are turned on us. Maybe it's something like the curiosity one feels while driving past a car crash to slow down and take a look. As macabre as that sounds, it does provide us with a unique opportunity to tell the story of what is happening to us on our own terms. This overexposure to publicity may make us feel vulnerable and slandered, but what's important is to react, to step up, to talk about our truth and about what is happening around us … In some odd way, Greeks have become exotic again because the reality they are experiencing is so different from that of the Northern Europeans. That in itself is a new challenge and reignites interest. But first we have to understand our new identity before we can communicate it to others.[20]

Giorgos Georgakopoulos, founder of the Cheap Art gallery in Athens, curated a show titled *Boiling Point* at the Vienna Kunstlerhaus exhibition space in 2012. The exhibition included works from contemporary video artists and installations. In this show, fourteen artists from Athens position themselves in a world that is constantly undergoing changes. What prevails in

[17] Margarita Pournara, *Athens on the cutting edge,* Ekathimerini.com, September 2012, http://www.ekathimerini.com/145078/article/ekathimerini/life/athens-on-the-cutting-edge-of-art (accessed August 8, 2017).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

this situation is a constant struggle to survive, an *agōn* for human values, an *agōn* for life itself, with works making references to the increase of suicide rates in Greece. Georgakopoulos stated

> In contrast to the stereotypes that prevail on the political and economic fronts, art lovers and simple citizens are more willing to see us in a different light. Some of the pieces included in the exhibition addressed tough subjects, such as the rise in the Greek suicide rate. The Austrian artists greeted us with such warmth. There is without doubt solidarity among artists, a different vernacular between them. And let me say one more thing: Who can accuse us of being dependent on government funding when we paid for the transportation of the artworks to Austria out of our own pockets? The Greek state and the Ministry of Culture in particular could take better advantage of this opportunity that is being presented to change our image. But it never had a plan, not even when everything appeared to be going fine, so it won't happen now, will it?[21]

Giorgos Kotanidis is a well-known actor in Greece who played Antiochus in the Greek National Theatre production of *Pericles* and which toured in London in April 2012. The play begins with the actors in a singing circle and ends with the collective spread in a half-circle onstage which is completed by the audience of the theatre. The play, being a meaningful reflection of life's journey stands at the interplay between actor and audience, actor and space establishing a strong relation between them. 'From the top, it's clear that the production will be engaging, as the actors bound onstage from the audience with the narrator (Dimitris Piatas) taunting and inviting: 'let's play'[22], says Becky Becker, Associate Professor of Theatre at Columbus State University. 'Please, I'm starving–I'm Greek!', says Pericles weaving successfully between tragedy and comedy providing thoughtful references to contemporary reality. Actor Giorgos Kotanidis states in *Ekathimerini.com*:

> Publicity was guaranteed because of the Greek crisis but we didn't let it go to waste either. The performance was well received because we were not afraid to talk with the audience. We also added to the line: 'I'm hungry, I'm Greek.' We didn't whinge or play up the misery, but tried to project something different, something courageous and self-critical. So we were a success, with both the audience and the critics. After the curtain went down, a lot of people came to talk to us: Britons who love Greece, students, simple viewers. There was a lot of emotion, and that gave us faith and courage. It would be great if there were more screenings of Greek films,

[21] Ibid.
[22] Becky Becker. *Pericles by Becky Becker, Columbus State University. Columbus. GA, USA,* Shakespeare's Globe on the blog. April 2012, http://blog.shakespearesglobe.com/post/88280375983/pericles-by-becky-becker-columbus-state (Accessed August 8, 2016).

> plays, exhibitions and concerts around Europe, because this is a different type of diplomacy that works.[23]

Under these conditions, I wonder what has changed in Greece since then. The answer is far from certain. In the spring of 2014, the BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts Brussels organised a show titled *No Country for Young Men*. The exhibition brought together work by more than thirty contemporary Greek artists addressing the impact of the severe crisis but also considering it as an opportunity for reinvention and reassessment, venturing some 'remedies' for the country's social and political perplexities. The precise dimension of these perplexities keeps shifting. With Alexis Tsipras' victorious January 2015 election promise to defy austerity cuts, Syriza's victory was felt around the world. Tsipras was considered to be Europe's future. Syriza's election campaign agenda was set around Greece's demand for autonomy. Autonomy at all levels, calling on every Greek to take part in the decision-making process. The rhetoric for autonomy had already spoken to the social imaginary of Greek society long before Syriza's victory when hundreds of thousands occupied public squares and other spaces setting up their own autonomous spheres around the country. Building on the principles of direct democracy the Greeks were introduced to a radically different grammar of social organisation. Indeed, the referendum that was announced by Tsipras and which took place on 5 June 2015 confirmed such rhetoric by asking the citizens to decide whether they approved the proposals made to Greece by Troika. The resounding 'No' (OXI) by a majority of 61,31% over 38,69%[24] resulted in the immediate resignation of Antonis Samaras, leader of the opposition party of New Democracy.

Second, it is precisely this radical grammar of social organisation that interests me in relation to artistic practices. It is the concept of autonomy as captured in the ideas of Cornelius Castoriadis in relation to the proliferation of performances that took place at the occupied Embros theatre in Athens and the Green Park. It is under these conditions that I want to explore the relationship between art and politics; that I ask if art (broadly understood) is seen to count for much in the context of the Greek crisis. It is under these conditions that I ask to what extent art and performance can become *praxis* that serves the common good? Is the phenomenon of Embros theatre and Green Park a symptom or proposal? In other words, is Embros a symptom

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[23] Margarita Pournara. *Athens on the cutting edge.* Ekathimerini.com. September 2012. http://www.ekathimerini.com/145078/article/ekathimerini/life/athens-on-the-cutting-edge-of-art (accessed August 8, 2017).

[24] See the official results as shown by the Hellenic Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction: http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/r2015/e/public/index.html?lang=en#{%22cls%22:%22main%22,%22params%22:{}}

of the political and financial crisis or a proposal for social and institutional change? Can art and performance fill the gap in the context of a challenging social and political landscape? In my numerous visits to Embros theatre and Greek Park, I collected various responses in my interaction with visual artists, academics, journalists, performers and other participants. 'Greek artists have always been facing a challenge', a visual artist told me at Embros and I feel that, however vague and loose that claim might be, it has a lot of meaning and truth in it. 'In some ways, the crisis has brought us together, adding a feeling of solidarity and bringing a sense of purpose as we all have the same point of reference', another artist declared.

> When the crisis came, it brought a feeling of equality. We all felt as if we were nude in front of a brutal reality, but equals. You don't get it if you don't experience it yourself. And what can you do more if you don't try to find ways of coexistence, ways of common belonging that reflect our social imaginary? Shouldn't this be at the core of the social project? I feel that this sense of responsibility both as an artist and a citizen is what brings me here at Embros,

another artist replied when I asked what meaning did he find at Embros and what brought him there. Do you think that theatre and performance can propose new ways of imagining a common future? I asked a performer when we engaged in a philosophical conversation about the role of art and theatre in society. He said:

> I believe you agree with me that theatre had always had a predominant place in the Greek society, from its birth within the Athenian democracy until now that the country is facing one of its worst periods in the recent history. Whether seen as a pure form of entertainment or a platform for philosophical inquiry that reflects the tragic nature of the human being and all social and political contingencies that accompany it, one thing is certain: that theatre unites, it creates those social bonds which one way or another will make you wiser. Such imaginaries are part of our culture.

This very primary, yet powerful element that we can attribute to theatre has formed the basis of my thoughts since the very beginning of this project. Such imaginary significations are indeed part of the Greek culture and Castoriadis' writings about autonomy and social imaginary seem particularly appropriate to examine the mechanisms under which Mavili Collective emerged and proposed a re-activation programme at Embros Theatre and Green Park following their occupation. Castoriadis, a Greek-French philosopher, was first and foremost a political and radical thinker, revolutionary, political intellectual who inspired workers and students during the May 1968 events in France, social critic and practicing psychoanalyst who revised

Freudian theory. Jürgen Habermas states that Castoriadis undertook '...the most original, the most ambitious and the most profound task to view... the liberating interference of history, society, inner and outer nature, as an act'.[25] His work is remembered largely for his initial support for and subsequent break from Marxism, for his call for Western philosophical thought to embrace the reality of praxis and creativity, but also for his defence of an ethics and politics based on 'lucid' deliberation and social and individual autonomy. But why Castoriadis? Over the last thirty years there has been growing interest in the work of Castoriadis, both in academic and political circles. Castoriadis, however, systematically avoided the academic and intellectual circles of Paris and remained on the fringes of academic society. Diametrically opposed to the approaches that understand the purpose of scholarly work as being at the service of the established order, Castoriadis was persistent that the role of the scholar ought to be critical and argued against a generalised pseudoconsensus. Thus, intellectual trends and fashions such as structuralism, deconstruction or existentialism did not attract him. In times of severe crisis, Castoriadis' writings could act as a source of inspiration and motivation for critically reflecting and rethinking the foundations of Western neoliberal societies. Castoriadis' contribution to critical social and political theory is such that presents us with radical philosophical and political positions with a view to formulating questions and provide answers about the inability of contemporary societies to build a radical alternatives to neoliberal capitalism. Castoriadis passionately defended the critical function of thought and argued that the most powerful creation of human history is one that allows a society to call itself into question. This is the fundamental idea of the reflective return upon oneself, of criticism and self-criticism. In other words, this is the creation of the idea of autonomy.

Castoriadis was born in Constantinople in 1922, but the Greek Turkish conflict forced his family to relocate to Athens soon after this birth. Castoriadis was attracted by philosophy at the age of thirteen and in 1937, during the Metaxas dictatorship in Greece (1936-1940), he joined the Athenian Communist Youth and later the Communist Party of Greece only to leave one year later. In 1943, he joined the Trotskyist group of Spyros Stinas, a leading member of the Greek Socialist Workers' Party (SEKE), which changed its name to Communist Party of Greece (KKE) in 1924. Stinas later became the principal representative in Greece of Castoriadis' journal and political group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (Socialism or Barbarism).

[25] Jürgen Habermas, Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne, Suhrkamp, 1985, p. 380.

After 1960, Stinas, was moving closer and closer to Anarchism and his ideas formed the basic core of Castoriadis' later critique of the Soviet system. Stinas' political activism and theoretical thought had contributed to a large degree to Castoriadis' intellectual progress. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* focused on criticizing both Soviet bureaucracy and capitalism and on developing thoughts and ideas for other possible formations in society. Reflecting on the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, Castoriadis considered one of his most important contributions to be the concept of self-management. In his later writings, the concept would develop into a theory of autonomy and Castoriadis elaborated on its meaning, application and limits. Contemporary society, argued Castoriadis in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, is split between managers who direct workers, and workers obedient to managers. The domination of society by the managerial apparatus can only be surpassed, according to Castoriadis, when workers take full responsibility for organizing themselves. This emphasis on self-organisation implies that individuals should work cooperatively and form councils consisting of elected members. While Castoriadis did support the idea of a centralized institution, capable of making rapid decisions when needed, such decisions would only be reversible by the workers and their councils. It is precisely this view of contemporary society split between political managers and citizens obedient to them that interests me in relation to the events at Embros and Green Park that make the ideas of Castoriadis particularly appropriate to form a basis for the discussion that follows. The social instituting power, which for Castoriadis can be found in the creativity of the anonymous collective, generates the question of genuine politics which is necessary for humans because humans must create themselves as they exist in relation to others and in relation to society's institutions. Thus, the question of political action is linked to the question of which institutions we shall create in society in order to achieve the good and it is with this in mind that I want to examine if the events at Embros and Green Park have contributed to this extent.

Of the various other responses that I collected during my field research, that of a Syrian refugee was illuminating when I asked him how did he find the atmosphere at Embros. 'This space is for me my home. I have met many people here and they have helped me a lot. I enjoy being here because the people are very friendly. Sometimes they argue with each other because they have different political opinions, but the next day finds them here again', he replied. He was indeed right. In the various assemblies that I attended political antagonisms were present. In one of them, I asked a theatre director, who was presenting a plan of the next shows and performances and with which not everyone agreed, what is the purpose of Embros, what do you aim at? 'Buying the theatre', he replied half joking, but he never answered my question.

Did he fail to provide an answer to my question because there was no purpose at Embros? I wonder.

Gigi Argyropoulou, member of the Mavili Collective, in her chapter *Collective Horizons: Rethinking the Performative and Political: (Im) Possibilities of Being Together* discusses the evolution of Embros which 'problematises the potentialities of collective formations'.[26] Proposing a 12-day programme of re-activation, the occupation also offered shared time and common experiences in an emergent public realm that allowed social imaginings to be formulated. On the last day of the occupation, an assembly was formed in order to decide the future of the occupation. 'However, during this public assembly, some of these imaginings proved to be incompatible. This brought to the surface a problem that most 'grassroots' political and social movements are sooner or later faced with: after a brief period of having experienced togetherness, any "collective" operation is confronted with a specifically *political* challenge'[27], argues Argyropoulou. Within such a setting, critical ethnography seemed the most appropriate method to approach the issue, primarily because ethnographic research involves participant-observation. In both cases of Embros and Green Park, I did not simply observe the events from afar, but rather, I engaged as much as possible with those involved. My aim was to demonstrate how the dynamics of the performances and events that took place could serve to illuminate and generate the enlivening possibilities for a critical analysis. The more I was exposed to the agonisms and antagonisms that took place at Embros and Green Park, the more critical my field research was becoming. Critical ethnography must extend its political aims because politics alone are incomplete without self-reflection. To this extent, critical ethnography requires a deep and abiding dialogue with others and at the same time the attention must remain grounded in the empirical world of others. 'Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain', argues Soyini Madison.[28] And he continues to say that 'the critical ethnographer takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control'.[29] In ethnographic research, the attention remains grounded in the experiences of the other. In the many conversations I engaged with, this empirical world of the other was precisely what

[26] Gigi Argyropoulou. *Collective Horizons: Rethinking the Performative and Political: (Im) Possibilities of Being Together*. In *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Fisher, Tony and Eve Katsouraki, London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017, p.173.
[27] Ibid, p.177.
[28] Soyini D. Madison. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA, New Delhi and London: SAGE Publications, 2005, p. 5.
[29] Ibid, p. 5.

mattered in my exploration of the shared grammar in an emergent public space. Not only did the interviews allow me to gain a deep understanding of the feelings, emotions, thoughts, practices and generally the common values that were formulated through imaginary significations, but they also provided a mechanism for critical self-reflection on the issues that concern contemporary society.

The analyses that I offer in the chapters that follow are then governed by the following logic, as the subsection of this opening chapter suggests: from theory to praxis. First, I explore philosophical theories that examine the relation between art and politics and the role of human being in contemporary society. I then move on to explore the political response to the challenging conditions of our times offering examples of government practices in Greece and exploring the impact of those practices in society. And finally, I move from theory to praxis by exploring the 'social turn' of contemporary art and performance practices and examine how such practices respond to the issues that concern political action that becomes praxis reflecting on imaginary significations. This range of concerns requires at the same time a multidisciplinary method which draws on political philosophy and the challenging social relations as formulated in the context of neoliberal capitalism, social theory and cultural history, but also expertise in a number of disciplines including visual arts, performance, history, urban studies and what we can broadly define as cultural materialism through which we are to understand culture in its material, historical and social context. Such an approach emphasizes that cultural practices including art and performance provide a site of ideological contest and struggle and are related to wider social and political discourses.

Chapter 1, titled *Art and Social Praxis: Learning Collectively to Take Responsibility* examines the so-called 'social turn' in contemporary art and performance practices providing a review of the literature on participatory art. In doing so, the chapter seeks to examine the ways through which to define 'social praxis' in relation to artistic and aesthetic values and explore the continuous conflicts and agonisms in the effort to identify artistic mechanisms for political positions. 'Social praxis' to this extent, is broadly conceived as a set of actions that respond to the critical conditions of their time. As such, participatory art is seen more precisely in relation to the act of occupying public spaces aiming to determine anew the relationship between the 'public sphere' and the anonymous subject within it.

Chapter 2, titled *Performances of Resistance in a State of Crisis*, focuses mainly on the Greek case and seeks to examine the notion of democracy and its intersection with art and

performance as captured in the agenda of urban politics of protest and resistance. In doing so, the chapter seeks to explore a new politics than unfolds in situations of politically subjugated beings where life is reduced to a dispensable economic value demonstrating a constant struggle in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Examining the work of Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, and Cornelius Castoriadis among others the chapter aims to rethink the idea of democracy in the current social and political landscape in Greece. Considering democracy from a Castoriadian conception and taking up Badiou's concept of *Event*, through which he develops his philosophical project, the chapter seeks to reconsider reality through a different perspective, one that demonstrates that another world is possible, by rupturing what only appears to be normal and opening up a space for new possibilities to emerge. Providing an overview of the Greek political scene since 1981 when the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) was elected as the first democratic socialist and Left-wing political party bringing a period of prosperity, until the victory of Syriza in 2015, the chapter concludes with a search for an intersection between theatre, philosophy, and democracy asking if theatre philosophizes.

Having provided the necessary social, historical and political background in Greece in chapter 2, chapter 3 titled *Performing Athens: Collective (Im) Possibilities of the Polis* seeks to explore how the concepts of participation and representation which are central to the practice of democracy can also be associated with theatre and performance as essential elements that make theatre happen. Here, perceiving democracy as a 'tragic' regime in the Castoriadian view where tragedy can also possess a clear political signification, then both democracy and tragedy are rendered to the condition of self-limitation where hubris always exists as a possibility because it involves human actions. As Castoriadis argues, tragedy is above all democratic in that it is a constant reminder or mortality, which is to say, the radical limitation of the human being. The chapter goes then on to explore three non-Greek theatrical productions performed in Athens in the years between 2010 and 2014. In doing so, my purpose is to examine how non-Greeks perceive the issues related to the Greek reality and how they address them to a Greek audience that has suffered them. Making use of participatory practices in contemporary performance and exploring issues of community and collective belonging, these cases are analysed through Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophical ideas on myth, community and participation as experienced through a shared grammar of collective significations.

Having explored the performance practices through which I examine the artistic response to the financial crisis, Chapter 4, titled *Rethinking the Imaginary: Mavili Collective and Cornelius Castoriadis* in entirely focused on the two case studies of this project. Elaborating further on

Badiou's concept of *Event* and his theory of collectivity, the chapter argues that art can propose new structures through collective action and a 'new universality' can emerge. The occupation of Embros theatre and Green Park in Athens both of which serve as examples of the Occupy movement that emerged in a critical historical moment across the globe claiming that the demand for social change is pressing. Exploring the perplexities of such a movement the chapter asks if Occupy is seen to count in contemporary revolutionary history; it asks if it stood for the social change it demanded. The cases of Embros and Green Park are examined here through the lens of their contribution to the praxis of the political. Exploring Badiou's notion of the 'new universality' that theatre can propose and Castoriadis' concept of autonomy this chapter offers an analysis to the central question of this research: can theatre and the other arts propose new methodologies in the current social and political setting? Namely, can art produce new knowledge for and by itself? Such questions form the grounds for a productive dialogue in the emerging field of Performance Philosophy. Finally, the chapter by addressing these questions offers an understanding of the complexities posed by the current social, political and cultural practices in an attempt to read the impact such practices might have in our conception of agonistic and antagonistic relations as formed through the 'commons'.

And finally, the epilogue *From the Performance of Agonism to the Performance of Philosophy*, drawing together the threads of previous chapters offers a philosophical analysis of the transformative idea of agonism. This is because, on the one hand, agonism designates a site of social and political struggle, which opens up a new reality that discloses a new *Aletheia*. On the other hand, agonism, when seen in relation to art and performance describes an aesthetic praxis of struggle that entails a sense of responsibility in that it responds to issues of crisis and challenge precisely by proposing new modes of the 'commons' and new forms of democratic articulation. By staging performances of resistance whether on the streets, public squares, occupied spaces or the 'political' stage of the theatre such praxis becomes manifest through the will to subvert and transform those mechanisms that prevail in the hegemonic discourse. Thus, to perform agonism means to perform resistance in 'political' terms including social and political action but also a radical aesthetic transformation of society.

CHAPTER 1

Art and Social Praxis:
Learning collectively to take responsibility

Much has been made of the 'social turn' of contemporary art and theatre in recent decades, and a number of theoretical points of reference cover the current literature on participatory art: the Situationist International[1], Hakim Bey, Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop, Shannon Jackson, Jen Harvey, Maurya Wickstrom, and Sophie Nield to mention only a few. This 'turn' that combines both aesthetics and politics in works of art that engage directly with specific social meanings is particularly interesting and will concern the largest part of the present research. In this chapter, I will explore some of the current literature on participatory art and social art practices with the aim to examine the multiple ways through which this social turn incorporates aesthetic values and political positions in embodied forms of art spatially and temporally. I will first consider how the act of occupying public spaces as artistic intervention offers new understandings of what I call 'social praxis', a set of actions that respond to the critical conditions of their time and, as such, the ideas generated through criticism and self-reflection have socio-political effects that may bring about social change. To this extent, I consider art as praxis capable of overturning the status quo. When art is becoming autonomous and a form of education that cultivates free spirits, then participation in all forms of social praxis of which art is part, will honour the possibility of radical social

[1] The Situationists International was an organisation whose exclusive membership consisted primarily of avant-garde artists and political theorists. Situationist theory comprised an attempt to present a critique of mid-twentieth century advanced capitalism and essential to this theory was the concept of the spectacle. The two most significant texts of the movement *The Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord, one of the most prominent theorists of the organisation, and *The Revolution of Everyday Life* by Raoul Vaneigem played an influential role in the ideas behind the May 1968 uprisings in France. Guy Debord in the homonymous movie of 1973 *The Society of the Spectacle* states that "the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among persons, mediated by images".

change. True praxis depends for most of the thinkers discussed in this research, on the refusal to yield to the oblivion in which society allows action to ossify. Art, therefore, as a form of social praxis can communicate directly and engage through participation. That being said, I argue that every form of art that has a social purpose is internally revolutionary. To this extent, art is seen as a mediated translation of theory into praxis. I will then examine the 'social turn' in art as bearer of specific social and political meanings. Art is, therefore, mediator because it can resist the powers that be, through the aesthetic experience and aesthetic cultivation, but it can also imagine the world differently. And there lies the responsibility of the individuals who hold the key to unlocking the potentials of such praxis, of releasing the possibilities of resistance and emancipation. Offering an overview of this trend that engages audiences *socially*, this chapter asks questions about why these practices are proliferating and what they can offer contemporary social relations.

On the one hand, these practices appear to carry an enormous social value because they offer widespread constructive social engagement with participants co-creating and supporting one another, celebrating art's autonomy. On the other hand, such practices appear to extend this social invitation very widely across all audiences, participating democratically in a public event where the final work is a piece created from autonomous individuals who are responsible for its completion. It is with this in mind that I also examine the act of occupying public spaces because social engagement, democratic processes and participation are key features for social, individual and artistic autonomy. Most importantly, we need social engagement to sustain democratic values, people's shared exercise of power. All of these essential values of social life are jeopardised by dominant neoliberal capitalist ideologies which aggressively promote individualism and unjust distribution of recourses.

Finally, having examined some socially engaged performance works in recent years, the chapter offers a critical reading on social art debates and sets out to explore how such trends articulate contemporary social understandings of the individual and the social. In this pressured context, I also have to ask whether art and performance can accomplish such heroic social achievements and, if so, how can they resist and oppose the critical social and political conditions of our times? How do these socially democratic art practises and neoliberal capitalist ideologies inform and challenge each other?

By exploring the significant trend of socially engaged art and performance practice, the theoretical issues discussed here will provide the grounds to open the discussion in the

following chapters and examine specific aspects of the social and the political as it unfolds in the current setting of neoliberal capitalism. To this extent, the thematic concern that governs this research is not only how the performance of the political as such can be understood but also how the politics of performance and art in general incorporate a new vocabulary that requires an alternative theoretical arsenal. Some of the key themes that unfold in this research have to do with models of social and political engagement. Questions of *autonomy* and *heteronomy* will recur throughout the chapters in order to define social praxis in relation to the complex questions of aesthetic, social and political values and to examine the continuing struggle to identify artistic parallels for political positions. This is also an attempt for the present research to consider and examine how such artistic experiments contribute to the concept and our perception of public engagement socially, politically, aesthetically and thematically. To this extent, theatre and performance hold a central position in the discussion, since participatory models of art can be more forcefully expressed through the direct involvement of live bodies. Hitherto, several names with regard to participation, collaboration, community and collectivity have been given to this 'turn' by artists and art critics, such as socially engaged art practices, community-based art, experimental communities, participatory art, collaborative art, experimental art, and most recently terms such as *social practice* and *relational aesthetics*[2] as a variant of post-studio art creation have been introduced.[3]

I will, however, be referring to this tendency as 'social praxis' throughout the chapters of this research, a term that refers to a wider range of actions that respond to their environment, from artistic interventionist actions to the idea of socio-political activity as *stasis* (*στάσις*).[4] This *stasis* is, according to Cornelius Castoriadis, an elucidative process which projects the necessity of a change through space, the individuals within it and their activities. In other words, the socio-political *stasis* defines viewpoint as theory and praxis that trigger the imaginary, which through idemisation (self-creation) leads to autonomy. Although Castoriadis' work never gained the popularity of other philosophical works of his time, his ideas have become significantly influential in current discussions about democracy, individual and collective identity, and civil society. In this respect, *stasis* primarily defines

[2] Nicolas Bourriaud defined this approach as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space", (Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics* p.113).
[3] Shannon Jackson. *Social Works: performing art, supporting practices*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011.
[4] The term stasis derives from Greek *στάσις*, which literally means the state of 'standing still'. The term also acquires the following meanings: position, attitude, stance. Here the term is used as 1. Stasis as behaviour, worldview and 2. Stasis of *philosophein* (the state of philosophizing) as spiritual uprising, through the questioning of institutions.

the course of action to be taken according to one's worldview. From *stasis* we also have words such as *αντίσταση*, anti-stasi (resistance) or *επανάσταση,* epana-stasi (revolution) in Greek. Thus, a real change that comes through *epanastasi* is the emergence of new forms, which I set out to examine here. This is also how Alain Badiou defines politics, as an action or praxis which aims at questioning the existing social structures in order to propose new ones. This possibility of politics lies in what already exists, the social. The social, as part of the situation in which politics can become praxis, is bonded to collective action. The space of collectivity is by this means the space of action seeking the actualization of a new possibility that the present research examines. The emergence of this new conception of the political discloses a radical understanding that embraces, first, the activity of human praxis that situates itself on a different terrain –not that of sovereign state, which seems a rather broken and meaningless shell– that of autonomous life that entails the inherent possibility of failure, and second, what stems from this conception at an artistic level. Namely, how can the 'social' be addressed in artistic practice in order to explore more autonomously issues of collectivity and spatiality in explicit forms of political change. To this extent, such a designation helps to define what is at stake for many contemporary scholars that are concerned with the dimension of the political at the social and aesthetic level but also informs our critical activity of thinking about issues that concern the re-situation of political relationship and that of human responsibility. Furthermore, what is of particular interest in this research is the directions that the field of Performance Philosophy might open in the attempt to understand the social, political and artistic contingencies around certain forms of theatre and performance and the extent to which such practices affect our conception of the world we inhabit.

While such artistic practices have been largely discussed in the area of theatre and performance studies, the aspect that particularly concerns this research is one that is commonly associated with the financial, institutional, social and political crisis: the act of occupying public spaces in order to redefine the public realm and to determine anew the autonomous subject in it. Although in chapter 3 I will examine some theatrical productions performed in Athens as a response to the precarious conditions of our times, they will mainly serve as examples to explore how the broader issues that relate to aesthetic practice might contribute to social imaginary significations. While the Occupy movement began in the US in late 2011 and early 2012 and soon expanded in other countries, this research will focus mainly on the Greek reality. The main claim that appears to characterize the Occupy movement is a deep sense of injustice and, thus, the movement served as the critique of

political, economic and social conditions. In Greece too, the anti-austerity movement includes a series of protests and riots associated with pay cuts, increase in taxation, pension reductions, and cuts in public education and the healthcare system to mention only a few of the measures taken by the government of George Papandreou in 2010; decisions that were also in line with the International Monetary Fund proposals. While the Greek debt and institutional crisis will be discussed extensively in the following chapter, the largest part of this research is concerned with artistic practices that emerged in response to the precarious social and political conditions in Greece. The occupation of Embros Theatre and Green Park in Athens will serve as examples to read this action as an artistic praxis of agonistic politics that emerged though social imaginary significations. I am also interested in situating these debates about social and artistic praxis in the twentieth and twenty-first century conversations about the role of art in the public sphere, especially in light of the rise of what we have come to call the free market and neoliberalism, where the concept of the social is itself a contested one.

I remarked earlier in the introductory chapter that the agonistic nature of the political entails a 'tragic' conception, according to Castoriadis. While the *agōn* initially referred to athletic contest in ancient Greece, it later came to incorporate other forms of struggle such as political or theatrical among others. It is precisely this form of the political that involves the human as the agent or bearer of *pathi* (passions and desires) that renders politics to a 'tragic' conception. The human as mediator that animates complex forms of appearance in the public realm; forms that involve deliberate actions emanating from passions, feelings and emotions. These displays of conflict and struggle connote a fundamentally performative character of the Greek *polis*. Tony Fisher writes 'the public realm was thus understood, in a pre-eminent sense, as an agonistic space activated by and promoting an ethic of 'agonic' participation'.[5] And the same applied to the theatre which also 'exemplified the formality which the *agōn* was inscribed within the social structures that reflected the Athenian mentality'.[6] Thus, this setting created at the core a political imaginary in the Athenian *polis* which defined itself as essentially agonistic. The question, therefore, that arises is whether there are today such conditions that would allow a political imaginary to emerge through theatre and performance? Before exploring these conditions, I shall first and foremost articulate the concept of the imaginary in Castoriadian terms as this is largely used in the chapters that

[5] Tony Fisher. 'Introduction: Performance and the Tragic Politics of Agon'. In *Performing Antagonism Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Tony Fisher and Eve Katsouraki, London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017, p.10.
[6] Ibid, p.10.

follow. Castoriadis writes in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*:

> Human history –therefore, also, the various forms of society we have known in history- is in its essence defined by imaginary creation. In this context, 'imaginary' obviously does not signify the 'fictive', the 'illusory', the 'specular', but rather the positing of new forms. This positing is not determined but rather determining; it is an unmotivated positing that no casual, functional, or even rational explanation can account for. Each society creates its own forms. These forms in turn bring into being a world in which this society inscribes itself and gives itself a place. It is by means of them that society constitutes a system of norms, institutions in the broadest sense of the term, values, orientations, and goals [*finalités*] of collective life as well as of individual life. At their core are to be found, each time, social imaginary significations, which also are created by each society and which are embodied in its institutions.[7]

The creation of these forms that will, by extension, bring into being or disclose a world in which each society gives itself a point of reference, can never be conceived as the work of one or of a few individuals. This is the luminous creation of what Castoriadis calls 'collective-anonymous imaginary' and the name given to it is 'instituting power'. This instituting power cannot be made fully explicit; its largest part remains hidden within the depths of every society. However, Castoriadis argues, that every society cannot exist without instituting some other kind of power which is necessarily explicit. It is precisely this power which for Castoriadis concerns the political sphere in society. The political sphere, therefore, constitutes 'the instances or authorities capable, explicitly and effectively, of issuing sanctionable injunctions'.[8] The existence of such authorities is fundamentally necessary by the very fact that every society must sustain and defend itself because it is constantly being challenged. This challenge might first of all come from its own social, historical or political imaginary which can, at any time, rise up and challenge the existing institutions and propose new ones. This is a work made by the collective anonymous imaginary. But such authorities might also be challenged by the individual within society, by the human being who first and foremost consists of a psyche which is unpredictable, irreducible and indomitable. To that extent, then, every society is reduced to a temporal dimension within which there only exist uncertainty and unforeseen events.

[7] Cornelius Castoriadis. *World in Fragments: Writings of Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination*, ed. David Ames Curtis, 84-107. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 84.
[8] Ibid, p.85.

Among the significations that articulate the institutions of each society, the most important is the one concerned with the origin and foundation of the institution: its legitimacy. It is precisely this signification that Castoriadis builds his theory on and makes the fundamental distinction between *autonomy* and *heteronomy*, between societies that institute their own *laws* (*nomos*) and societies in which the *nomos* is given by another, or *hetero*. And it is also from this point that I want to open up the discussion on the legitimacy of institutions in contemporary society and ask what sort of imaginary significations constitute the driving force of the anonymous collectivity to challenge the very existence of institutions? What is the driving force that triggers social praxis and what is the driving force that has shifted artistic orientation towards the social? Or, if I may use Claire Bishop's argument, why is the artist conceived 'less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*'? [9]

THE SOCIAL TURN

This orientation towards the social has grown exponentially in the last decades reaching countries from the US to Europe, but not limited to, as a result of the increasingly precarious social and political conditions. Likewise, this orientation has set new grounds for the relationship between the artist, the object and the audience. This aspect of the 'social turn' of art is a challenge for both artists and audiences and demands new ways of perceiving or analyzing art that are no longer limited to visuality –even though visual language and form remain a crucial parameter for communicating specific meanings. As Bishop argues in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* 'the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*'.[10] Equally important, as Shannon Jackson writes in *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Practices* is the fact that many visual artists 'have begun to refuse the static object conversations of visual art, exploring the durational, embodied, social, and extended spatially theatrical forms'.[11] But

[9] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso Books, 2012, p.2.
[10] Ibid., p.2.
[11] Shannon Jackson. *Social Works: performing art, supporting practices*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011, p.2.

also, in what we might very generally call 'experimental theatre', in recent years we observe the tendency of introducing a vocabulary from the visual arts in its tradition bringing to the foreground the conversation of the 'static'. These two trajectories, Jackson argues, may find themselves in the same room exploring possible relations and interconnections. On the one hand, we see visual artists and curators becoming less interested in the static object introducing the durational and the *performative* as part of the artwork in the space of a gallery or a museum. In other words, visual artists have begun to re-think the theatrical event through an experimental and cross-disciplinary approach in art making. Nowadays, in a variety of venues including exhibitions, festivals, biennials, community spaces and so on, we find artists using interdisciplinary methods in art-making. For example, some practices emphasize presence and shared experience in real time and space while others encompass digital means. Some works create 'characters' while others present 'ideas'. Some works situate private rooms while others address the multitude. This variety of mediums and disciplines is often the case for many experimental artists to cross the territory of other art fields. We find performers, for example, becoming fabricators challenging social roles. Gender-based issues are commonly associated with socially engaged art: Mierle Laderman Ukeles's 'maintenance art', for example, challenged the domestic role of contemporary woman with her service-oriented artworks. Or, to bring another example from the US, the Guerrilla Girls, feminist activist artists who wearing gorilla masks in public expose gender and ethnic bias but also corruption in politics, art, and culture. They make posters and signs underlining the unjust and sexist practices in the mainstream art market. They present the real facts of exhibition space, galleries and art market prices, which have influenced the collections of most galleries and museums, as the ground of their representational strategies. Much of their work is sharp and wry. In one of their recent posters they asked: 'Do women have to be naked to get into U.S museums?' providing also information about the current situation by stating that 'Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female'.[12] In another poster frankly listing the ten advantages of being a woman artist, one benefit is the relief of never having to worry about being labelled a genius.

What is also particularly interesting about Guerrilla Girls is the use of masks which allows several theatrical and performative interpretations but also the notion of anonymity under the mask is part of the wider vocabulary in activist and resistance actions. While their work has become increasingly lauded by critics and art world commentators, the Guerrilla Girls

[12] Guerilla Girls Official Website, https://www.guerrillagirls.com (Accessed October 19, 2016).

continue to remain anonymous. Think for, example, of the numerous occupations of public spaces around the world in recent years where the people rather than representing identities and interests (such as class, gender, ethnic background, sexuality etc.) came together anonymously to demand change refusing to be identified and represented in conventional ways. The widespread use of masks in such gatherings signified that anonymity kept the focus on the issues. 'By refusing to participate in the visibility-is-currency economy which determines value in "the art world," the members of the group resist the fetishization of their argument that many are, at the moment, quite ready to undertake'[13], writes Peggy Phelan, American feminist scholar and Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies. And she goes on to say that 'by resisting visible identities, the Guerrilla Girls mark the failure of the gaze to possess, and arrest, their work'.[14] Their posters are found on temporary construction sites, on the doors of museums or galleries and they remain there until other posters and messages overtake them.

In like manner, Hans-Thies Lehmann argues, that 'it is no coincidence that many practitioners of postdramatic theatre started out in the visual arts'.[15] From Lehmann we learn, argues Jackson, that contemporary theatrical experiments have reopened the discussion of a Maeterlinkian approach of the static, deconstructing canonical theatrical texts and replacing dramatic characters with sculptural figures.[16] That is to say, some theatrical experimental works have refused the conventional vocabulary of dramatic theatre approaching the static which was largely associated with other art forms such as painting or sculpture. Lehmann presents as an example to this argument the adaptation of Gorki's *Summer Guests* directed by Peter Stein where all figures were shown on stage at the same time. Gorki himself did not consider this piece a drama, play or tragedy, but 'scenes' and he claimed that the theatre in this case showed 'less a succession, a development of a story, more an involvement of inner and outer states'.[17] Lehmann notes that it is normally visual artists who speak of states of image dynamics in the process of creation. The category, therefore, appropriate to the new theatre is not action but *states*, referring to scenic dynamics.

[13] Peggy Phelan. *Unmarked The Politics of Performance.* London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p.19.
[14] Ibid
[15] Hans-Thies Lehmann. *Postdramatic Theatre*. trans. Karen Jurs-Munby. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p.68.
[16] Maeterlinck considered that actors were not in position to portray the symbolic figures of his plays as physical expressions and mannerisms served as obstacles that prevented them from achieving it. For this reason, he considered marionettes as an excellent alternative, developing this way the concept of the "static drama", where actors were not allowed to express any inner emotion to compel their movements. His ideas on the static drama were expressed in "The Tragic in Daily Life" (1896).
[17] Hans-Thies Lehmann. *Postdramatic Theatre*. trans. Karen Jurs-Munby. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p.68.

From the above we observe a kind of experimental 'interventionism' across the arts expressing itself through a variety of visual languages and mediums. Experimental art uses collective, durational, and spatial dynamics in order to foreground this turn toward the social. This performative turn indicates a shift from regarding the work of art as a static object to rethink and reconsider it as a spatial and embodied event. As a result, this turn has given new paths to performance aesthetics through the embodied experience. What is common to these attempts is that they all point at art's embeddedness in the social and the reflection of social norms in artistic practices.[18] Most importantly, 'social practice' is a term that combines aesthetics and politics and a term that describes artistic events that are inter-relational, durational, and embodied. To this extent, such practices celebrate cross-disciplinarity in art engaging sound, space, image, text and most importantly, movement and the body; in other words, all the element we find in theatre and performance. But this turn also gestures to the sphere of the socio-political and, in many cases, recalling the activist side of socially engaged praxis. Thus, exploring art's transformative power in a broader social and political context. However, this plurality in both form and medium, what Jackson calls 'aesthetics heterogeneity' is often complicated by the 'social heterogeneity' of social practice. What Jackson points out is that while for many artists the term 'social' signifies a broad interest in explicit forms of political action, for others it might refer to the aesthetic exploration of collectivity, participation, and embodiment as both medium and material.[19] Even when social practices engage with political issues we find a variety of forms in their themes but also different approaches about the aesthetic role in social, political and even philosophical inquiry. Furthermore, the activist orientation in a number of social practices demonstrates the importance and urgent need for adopting an 'anti-institutional' *stasis* in political art. It is with this in mind that this research focuses on forms of political engagement seen through an aesthetics of artistic radicality to the degree that it becomes agonistic praxis for social change.

Jackson in her *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, explores the multiple issues that arise in socially and politically engaged performance practices. In doing so, she explores the values a performance perspective offers to the discourse of social praxis from a critical position that addresses performance's place in the history of art as a cross-disciplinary time-based art form. This critical position also requires a certain degree of deliberate thought about what it means to examine human action and resistance aesthetically, spatially and

[18] Ibid., pp.18-19.
[19] Shannon Jackson. *Social Works: performing art, supporting practices*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 14.

philosophically. 'When a political art discourse too often celebrates social disruption at the expense of social coordination, we lose a more complex sense of how art practices contribute to inter-dependent social imagining'.[20] And she continues that 'whether cast in aesthetic or social terms, freedom and expression are not opposed to obligation and care but in fact depend upon each other, this is the daily lesson of any theatrical ensemble'.[21] I find this point particularly important when we speak about social praxis, whether aesthetic or social and one thing that comes to mind that relates to this point is the statement of Gary Anderson when he describes his experience at the occupied Green Park in Athens where he collaboratively produced a project for *Performance Biennial: A self-organised biennial on performance, art and politics*, organised by Gigi Argyropoulou, Kostas Tzimoulis and Vasilis Noulas. Anderson states:

> I enjoy a curious domesticity in this public squatted place. I want it to feel like home: a temporary (autonomous) domestic zone, where domestic means supportive, ears open, watching for the encounter, being permanently on the lookout, being careful about how we care for each other, practicing radical tolerance.[22]

However, as Nicolas Bourriaud's work explores, with the advanced stage of spectacular development and the market's almost total saturation of image production, artistic practices can no longer be limited to the construction of images or objects to be consumed by a passive audience. Art must now take another role, interrelating with reality in order to strengthen the social bond. One of the main reasons why artists are no longer attracted by this passive process of creation is the fact that such practices and communications have been appropriated by what Guy Debord called 'the society of the spectacle'. Bourriaud, in his *Relational Aesthetics* attempts to provide an overview of contemporary art practices identifying tendencies that emerged during the 1990s. In this attempt Bourriaud also turns to spectacle when describing relational art of that period to which I will come back in due course. Claire Bishop claims that this social turn in contemporary artistic practices could be framed in three historical moments all of which are related to movements for social change and political upheaval: the historic avant-garde in 1917, the neo avant-garde in Europe leading to 1968 and, finally, the fall of Communism in 1989 serves as a third point of transformation. She

[20] Ibid., p.14.
[21] Ibid., p.14.
[22] Gary Anderson and Lena Simic. 'At Home and Abroad: The Study Room in Exile'. In Breed, Ananda and Prentki, Tim, eds. *Performance and Civic Engagement*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan and Springer, 2017, p.80.

characteristically notes that 'it is tempting to date the rise in visibility of these practices to the early 1990s, when the fall of Communism deprived the Left of the last vestiges of the revolution that had once linked political and aesthetic radicalism'.[23]

While this research deals mostly with contemporary art and theatre, it is worth dedicating a few lines to these historic moments that contributed to the turn– or to put it more accurately– to the *return* to the social, as ongoing practices to rethink art collectively. The term avant-garde comes from the French 'vanguard', literally 'fore-guard', referring to art that is innovatory, introducing or exploring new forms, pushing the boundaries of what is accepted as norm in the cultural and social sphere.[24] The term is credited to the influential thinker Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), a French political and economic theorist whose thoughts inspired and influenced political ideologies such as socialism and anarchism. Henri de Saint-Simon believed in the social power of arts and considered artists, together with scientists and industrialists, as the leading power of a new society. In a dialogue between an artist and a scientist in 1825 he wrote:

> It is we, artists, who will serve you as an avant-garde: the power of the arts is in fact most immediate and most rapid: when we wish to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them on marble or on canvas;… and in that way above all we exert an electric and victorious influence. We address ourselves to the imagination and to the sentiments of mankind, we should therefore always exercise the liveliest and the most decisive action….What a most beautiful destiny for the arts, that of exercising over society a positive power, a true priestly function, and of marching forcefully in the van of all the intellectual faculties in the epoch of their greatest development! This is the duty of artists, this their mission….[25]

Henri de Saint-Simon found in the power of art the possibility of a social, political and economic reform and called the artists to reveal to the society a future where talented men would fight for the prospect of a new society. So the concept of avant-garde refers largely to artists whose work entails a trenchant criticism of mainstream cultural and artistic values. American art critic Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) published in 1939 in *Partisan Review* the essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* where he argued that the avant-garde has rejected the artificially created mass culture that industrialization had produced, as this culture is a direct

[23] Claire Bishop. *The social turn: Collaboration and its Discontents*. Art Forum, 2006. http://newsgrist.typepad.com/files/claire-bishop-the-social-turn-collaboration-and-its-discontents-in-2006-artforum.pdf

[24] The term "avant-garde" was originally used in a military context, referring to a small unit of skilled soldiers who marched ahead of their army.

[25] From *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industielles*, quoted by Donald Egbert, '*The Idea of Avant-Garde in Art and Politics*, American Historical Review 73, December 1967, p. 343.

product of capitalism and as such is driven by profit-oriented motives rather than ideals of true art.[26] These forms, which were often presented to have greater values than the ones they actually had, are thereby for Greenberg kitsch. In *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* Greenberg states that 'if the avant-garde imitates the processes of art, kitsch, we now see, imitates its effects'.[27]

However, a problem that arises when researching artistic practices that engage participation – as opposed to practices that involve static objects in art making–, has to do with methodological issues. To understand these artistic practices through visual images is almost impossible. Photographs of crowds, people standing, talking, participating in a project or an interview, indicate very little of the actual concept of a given project and loosen the dynamics created by artists and the people participating in it and quality becomes immediately a contested word. I should also mention at this point that this was also the problem I encountered in my numerous visits at Embros Theatre and Green Park. How is it ever possible to reflect accurately the spatial dynamics, the tension between human relations, the meaning produced by a shared vocabulary in a durational experience of which you need to be part of in order to understand its complexities? So how to value this kind of work? Social art projects can acquire a variety of responses and readings depending upon different receivers' artistic experiences at a given moment and how these experiences are encountered. Bishop argues that 'value judgements are necessary, not as a means to reinforce elite culture and police the boundaries of art and non-art, but as a way to understand and clarify our shared values at a given historical moment'[28] and she goes on to say that 'there is an urgent need to restore attention to the modes of conceptual and affective complexity generated by socially oriented art projects, particularly to those that claim to reject aesthetic quality, in order to render them more powerful and grant them a place in history'.[29] History has, indeed, presented a plethora of artistic examples that refused aesthetic quality. 'Just as we have to come to recognise Dada cabaret, Situationist *détournement*, or dematerialised conceptual and performance art as having their own aesthetics of production and circulation, so too do the often formless-looking-photo-documents of participatory projects have their own experimental regime'[30], writes Bishop. To this extent, Bishop's argument, that if we were to understand such practices through documented material, be it photographs or videos, then the very experimental character of such works, I shall argue, adds to the experimental nature of

[26] Avant-Garde and Kitsch. http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html (Accessed February 9, 2016).
[27] Avant-Garde and Kitsch. http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html (Accessed February 9, 2016).
[28] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso Books, 2012, p. 8.
[29] Ibid., p. 8.
[30] Ibid., p. 8.

the social practice itself. At an aesthetic level, this should be part of an ongoing experimental process whose effects are to be understood as we go and experience them. Thus, what I discuss in chapter 4 about the particular case studies are presented in such a way that designates the very experimental regime of social praxis in order to examine how these phenomena contribute to the artistic experience being generated in relation to social and political values and questions of the given historical moment.

When referring to avant-garde art and its contribution to contemporary social art practices, we must as well acknowledge several key moments in its history that anticipate the emergence of social praxis in a social, political, and artistic context. Its concern with issues on collaborative authorship and audience inclusion is also the main claim of contemporary participatory art practices. The first key moment is Futurism's controversial and innovative approach to performance, presenting in evening gatherings (soirée) not traditional theatrical plays but actions using a variety of media including poetry, painting, sculpture, political provocative speeches, or manifestos. These happenings denote their intention to leave their impact on the audience which could interact directly with the artist and the artwork, by offering alternative ways and spaces of presenting art and introducing new technologies in its vocabulary. These activities were held in theatres but also outdoors, in the streets or squares. Futurism's leading spokesman, Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944), acknowledged the need of addressing a mass audience in order to reach his goal, namely to overthrow the ruling bourgeoisie and promote a patriotic industrialised nationalism. For this reason, he used populist methods of communication such as newspapers and street performances in order to address larger audiences.[31] The fact that Futurism's manifesto was published in the Italian newspaper *Le Figaro* indicates also its great publicity. After 1918 Futurist performances became more political engaging larger audiences and Marinetti's close friendship with Mussolini leads to the conclusion that the Futurists were a privileged group presenting ambitious artistic and political experiments in the public sphere. Moreover, their sympathy with concepts such as nation and war came to establish the ideological foundations of Italian Fascism.[32]

The second key moment concerns the Russian avant-garde after 1917. The Bolshevik Revolution was a point of reference in history that aimed at bringing artistic practices in line

[31] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *Prime battaglie futuriste, Teoria e invezione futurista*, Milan: Mondadori, 1968 (translation in Milton Cohen, *Movement, Manifesto, Melee: The Modernist Group 1910-1914*, Lnham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004)
[32] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso Books, 2012, p. 41-49

with its ideology, reflecting the socio-political reality (and therefore rejecting bourgeois tradition) and promoting the artistic and cultural production of the working class. Bishop notes that 'one of the main arguments for the rejection of previous culture was the fact that it was produced and consumed by individuals, rather than exemplifying the new model of collective authorship'.[33] And she goes on to say that, for Alexander Bogdanov, cultural production should set the ground for a redefinition of authorship and not be understood as an independent expression of the artistic subject, but rather as 'the expression of his own active participation in the creation and development of the collective's life'.[34] The development of a collective life and imaginary is also a key aspect in the Castoriadian thought that I will return to. Thus, Bogdanov's central position was to bring cultural and artistic production in line with collectivist ideals, providing a clear parallel with today's collaborative art practices. Arguing that 'there is not and cannot be a strict delineation between creation and ordinary labour', and that "labour has always relied on collective experience", Bogdanov concluded that '(artistic) creation is the highest, most complex form of labour' and 'its methods derive from the methods of labour'.[35] The concept of labour is also central to contemporary artists whose work engages participatory practices, such as Santiago Sierra. Social art, should therefore, be re-imagined and considered as a process that involves not only the artists as creator but also the participants who contribute to its production, identifying new ways and paths to generate new meanings for the social. Collectivism unified the spiritual and the physical fostering a comradely cooperation, unlike bourgeois individualism. Education would be the most valuable tool for this process, through which the proletariat would produce a new culture; to that extent the instrumentality of art should enter the debate for a socially oriented artistic production. Alexei Gan, a key figure in the development of Constructivism, argued:

> A time of social expediency has begun. An object of only utilitarian significance will be introduced in a form acceptable to all … The roots of art were always in material- formal substances, in production … Let us tear ourselves away from our speculative activity [art] and find the way to real work, applying our knowledge and skills to real, live and expedient work … Not to reflect, not to represent, and not to interpret reality, but to really build and express the systematic tasks of the new class, the proletariat.[36]

[33] Ibid., p. 51.
[34] Alexander Bogdanov. *Russian Art of the avant-garde: The Paths of Proletarian Creation*. Translated Texts by John E. Bowlt, 1920, pp.181-182.
[35] Alexander Bogdanov. *Russian Art of the avant-garde: The Paths of Proletarian Creation*. Translated Texts by John E. Bowlt, 1920, pp.178-182.
[36] Alexei Gan, *'Constructivism', in Camila Grey, The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1962, p. 286.

Here we see the idea of art as practice that serves social purposes and the analogies with today's discussions around socially engaged artistic practices that entail social and political meanings are fairly clear. Constructivism having had a great influence on major movements of the 20th century such as the *Bauhaus* and *De Stijl*, offered gestures of social impact and introduced the idea of a new public sphere. After this period, Paris Dada took over in order to address a wider audience and experiment with a more 'anarchic' type of artistic practice in the public sphere. The beginnings of Dada coincide with the outbreak of World War I and many of its representatives considered the movement as a protest against the ideology of bourgeois capitalist society, whose interests were believed to be the root cause of the war. German artist and prominent member of the movement, George Grosz, wrote: 'I wanted to protest against this world of mutual destruction... I saw heroism, but it seemed to be blind...what I saw more was misery, stupidity, hunger, cowardice and horror'.[37] One of his best-known works of that time, *The Hero*, depicts a wounded veteran of World War I. Crudely drawn, the work is a critique of the society that caused the war.

To come back to Bourriaud, in his *Relational Aesthetics* he argues that 'contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue'.[38] Bourriaud offers a new agenda of approaching contemporary works of art that introduce social and political reality in their context. He argues that the art of the 1990s takes as its theoretical framework 'the realm of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space'.[39] In other words, relational artworks seek to establish a new intersubjective ground in which meaning is produced collectively rather than in the privatized space of individual activity or reflection. In this sense, relational art is entirely bonded to the social, political, and economic contingencies of its environment. The audience is perceived more as a community, collective or social entity. This is achieved by setting up situations in which the viewers are actually given the opportunity to create this community through active participation and are not just addressed as a community.

The artist in Bourriaud is also seen though a different lens in this evolutionary process of modernity introducing the shift toward a participatory model of social setting. He argues, that the ambition of the artists is to seek provisional solutions in the present rather than trying to

[37] Mary Kay Flavell. *George Grosz: A Biography*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, p.27.
[38] Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 2002, p.17.
[39] Ibid., p.14 (Italics originally).

create a utopia. Contemporary artists don't aim to repeat neither the past forms or earlier claims of art, nor do they suggest that art has the same functions; they simply learn to 'inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution'.[40] Bourriaud considers relational art as a direct response to the virtual relationships of our times (internet, social media) that emanate from the mechanization of social functions that have replaced human interaction. Relational art promotes a more physical interaction between people and inspires artists to adopt a do-it-yourself approach, which is exactly what he perceives to be the core political implication of relational aesthetics. In other words, art is no longer conceived as a platform for creating utopian realities but rather as actual ways of living, acting and creating within the existing here and now. This here and now as created by a collective intensification of bodies and desires to be experienced in full is also the claim of Mavili Collective following the occupation of Embros and Greek Park.

To draw a sociology of this dimension, this evolutionary process in contemporary art originates from the birth of a globalized urban culture which by extension stems from the growth of cities particularly after the Second World War. This growth gave rise to greater technological developments, social exchanges and individual mobility in urban spaces. The contemporary city has also ushered in a new epoch of urbanisation of the artistic experiment. What is new in our perception of contemporary art is that 'it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked though […] It is henceforth presented as a period of time to be lived though, like an opening to unlimited discussion'.[41] Art in this sense should be perceived as the space and place that produces an explicit sociability that expresses itself through practices that tighten social relations. Bourriaud argues that art practices, from painting and sculpture, are particularly bonded to these relations when it comes to expressing their specific meanings as in an art exhibition, for example, where there is always the possibility of an immediate interaction with the audience.[42]

Several contemporary artists whose work moves towards this direction introducing a relational turn in post visual art following the trend of European performance art since the early 1990s which used to signify class struggle, race, gender and identity serve as examples. In Santiago Sierra's performances, live bodies serve as symbols of politicised identity and the

[40] Ibid., p. 13.
[41] Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002, p. 15.
[42] Ibid., p. 16.

absence of the artist from the occurrence designates a kind of politics seen from a critical distance. His work addresses issues of immigration, poverty, race, exile and labor, but his projects are created under the umbrella of the artist's authoritative name; one that does not operate with support from non-profit organisations or community groups but rather from the support of artist commissions, fees, royalties and a wide art world network of museums, galleries and biennials. Prior to 1999, Sierra's work was a combination of urban intervention and minimalist approach; since the late 1990s his 'actions' represent more complex relations as his work shifted from installations produced by low paid workers to inclusions of the workers themselves in the performances, with a particular emphasis placed on the fact that they are remunerated for their participation. The first piece of Sierra in which the participants were visible is *450 Paid People*, which led to *250cm Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People*, work that continues to be provocative attracting heavy criticism. Many of his early pieces involve finding people willing to participate in actions where they would undergo humiliating tasks for the minimum wage. These actions take place most frequently in Central and South America, countries which are already considered as the 'disadvantaged' zones of capitalism and globalization.

Sierra has been heavily criticised for perpetuating social and political inequities of capitalism in which rich countries provide low-paid labour for workers in developing countries. In Sierra's work, everything and everyone has a 'price'. Yet Sierra himself always draws attention to the global system of economic transactions through which his performances are produced and the way these impact upon the audience's perception of the work. 'The problem is the existence of social conditions that allow me to make this work'[43], he states. In his work, argues Bishop, 'performance is outsourced via recruitment agencies and a financial transaction takes place that leaves the artist at arm's length from the performer'.[44] This distance is clearly considered by the viewer as Sierra makes sure to include the details of each transaction in the description of the work as part of it, emphasizing the economic context as a parameter of primal importance for the work to occur. In his publications, these experimental projects of people posing as living sculptures are documented in black and white photographs, including the artwork title, the place that the performance took place and information on the participants' remuneration. Bishop argues that 'Sierra creates a kind of

[43] Shannon Jackson. *Social Works: performing art, supporting practices*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 70.
[44] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso Books, 2012, p. 223.

ethnographic realism, in which the outcome or unfolding of his action forms an indexical trace of the economic and social reality of the place in which he works'.[45]

Emphasizing the phenomenological immediacy of live bodies and the specific socio-economic and political contexts of this type of performance evokes the relation with the late 1960s and early 1970s Conceptual and Body Art, creating analogies with the work of Chris Burden and Marina Abramovic. Sierra's work, however, differs from this earlier form of performance in the use of other people as performers, as opposed to the artists in the 1970s who used their own bodies as medium. On many occasions, Sierra's works have been criticised of being unethical, abusive or authoritative, many of his pieces have shocked both audiences and art critics alike. Jackson criticised Sierra's work for being artist-centered as a result of him being bound to the artistic network. 'The concept of 'voice' is eclipsed in both the descriptions and practices of Santiago Sierra'[46], writes Jackson about Sierra's work. The collaboration in his works, she argues, lies in the hiring relationship which denies any identification of the participants by providing very little information about their histories. For Jackson this 'anonymity' of the hired performers not only neutralises and rejects the individuality of paid performers reflecting only their labour, but also reinforces the power of the author and the economic relations that define the world. Jackson's criticism lies precisely in Sierra's denial to present a dialogical exchange between him and the participants and, thus, his work offers no ethical or aesthetic critique of the capitalist world reducing the argument to the mere projection of reality without adopting a clear *stasis* and not seeking to mobilise or initiate new social relations. To this extent, Jackson's criticism lies in the fact that her work seeks 'art forms that help us to imagine sustainable social institutions'[47] and a political art discourse that advocates social coordination, as opposed to Bishop's dissensus.

Rirkrit Tiravanija's work is considered an example of 'relational' art practice because it creates encounters of sociality within Bourriaud's 'communication zones' of social interaction. Tiravanija's work, according to Bourriaud is relational because it is an example of formal arrangement that generates social relationships. Tiravanija is known for hybrid installation performances in which he cooks and offers the food to the people attending the gallery where he has been invited to work. In *Untitled (Still) (1992)* at 303 Gallery, New

[45] Claire Bishop. *'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'*. October 110: 51-79, The MIT Press, 2004pp. 51-79.
[46] Shannon Jackson. *Social Works: performing art, supporting practices*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 43.

[47] Shannon Jackson. *Social Works: performing art, supporting practices*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 14.

York, Tiravanija converted the gallery into a lounge area where he served rice and curry to the audience for free. He moved everything he found in the gallery space and storeroom into a main exhibition space and asked the director of the gallery to work in public, among other people, cooking smells, and social gatherings. It is a very simple gesture and rather unknown in an art gallery context so what this work offered was to free people to interact with contemporary art in a more sociable way. The audience is not participating in a performance that will be documented sometime in the future as art, but the audience is the work of art and is making art in real time as they eat the curry and talk to other people. A unifying principle of relational art projects is that they are open-ended, negotiating social relationships in a way that do not fall under determined social norms. In this way, they resist social formatting. Tiravanija himself has observed that this involvement of the audience is the main focus of his work. He sees the work as a platform for people to interact with the work itself but also with each other. A lot of it is about a kind of experiential relationship so the audience is not just looking at something but is part of it, thus, blurring the distance between the artist, the work, and the audience.

Tiravanija, as a conceptual artist, is not interested in a kind of art that is just made but rather in something that can be apprehended as art because of the context that it is in. He takes as a rule Marcel Duchamp's notion that a work of art is indeed a work of art if the artist claims so. Furthermore, by asking the participants to attend a gallery or a museum space the artist is asking the audience to conceive the work as such. Looking at the work itself, each day is a different experience, and from one day to the next many things happen externally that affect what happens internally. 'Underlying much of Tiravanija's practice is a desire not just to erode the distinction between institutional and social space but between artist and viewer; the phrase "lots of people" regularly appears on his lists of materials' argues Claire Bishop.[48] Tiravanija's perception of audience participation also echoes the approach of the German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys in the 1970s, who stated that 'everyone is an artist' and also defined 'social sculpture' as a form in which dialogue and ideas are an artist's primary media. In the late 1990s Tiravanija's work focused increasingly on creating situations where the audience could create its own work. His work *Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)* (1996) is a more elaborate version of 303 Gallery performance at the Kolnischer Kunstverein where he built a wooden reconstruction of his New York apartment which he opened to the public twenty-four hours a day. The empty flat is like a blank canvas that members of the public are

[48] Claire Bishop (2004), Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics, October magazine, Vol. 110, The MIT Press, pp. 51-79.

free to use and create their work. The open-house can be taken as an invitation to behave and participate in the gallery as we would at home. People were free to use the kitchen to make food, sleep in the bedroom, wash themselves in his bathroom, or hang out and chat with others in the living room. This new type of art, Bourriaud argues, is interested in creating a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity.

SOCIAL ART DEBATES

As it should be clear by now, the theoretical background I have provided in this chapter discusses the turn of contemporary artists to performance practices in order engage a wider vocabulary in participatory art practice. What I want to understand from this theoretical ground is why artists, and particularly those trained in the visual arts such as Santiago Sierra, turn to performance practice in order to reflect wider social or political implications. This is also a question for myself, why did I choose to pursue a research in performance studies? In the first instance, coming from a visual art background, I was interested in teaching myself new trajectories and discover new territories in artistic practice. At the same time, another important parameter is that cross-art practices take multiple directions, and so, I also want to ask what performance scholars and practitioners, but also artists, have to learn when we find the medium's vocabulary redefined by other fields? Do we embrace such artistic interventions or are we left with a sense of bafflement? What I have learned from my own experience is that my viewpoint and thinking in such practices have changed radically after being in the privileged position of writing from within the space of experimental practice. As such, performance requires an encounter with problems that are indeed hard to negotiate. But most importantly, performance, generates systems for managing relationality whose consequences we can hardly predict; which is precisely what constitutes its radicality when becoming the means through which we seek to subvert predetermined norms on fixed identities and subjectivities, which is precisely the case for the numerous Occupy movements. Performance also celebrates an agonistic discourse that unfolds within the limits of collaborating people who do not always know each other and so it has to endure the conflicts and antagonisms of these collaborations and sustain a critical position. I draw here on Mouffe's theory of agonism, as one that confronts us with the conflicts and antagonisms that

human relations entail, but nonetheless proposing antagonism as key element for social praxis.

What does this research have in common with this range of responses, arguments, and concerns about socially engaged art and performance practices? I want to examine and evaluate the social, political and aesthetic potential of these practices. What I seek, precisely, is their democratic potential in its radical conception and explore the multiple ways they generate possibilities (or impossibilities) for social engagement. I explore what formations of social relations these practices create but, also, I remain sceptical in the event that they create a myth of a unified singularity, and therefore, eliminate difference or propose a utopian multitude. To this extent, I am less concerned about current debates on consensus and dissensus than Bishop is, because what I am primarily interested in exploring is the political potential of actions that take place in the existing here and now. Like Bishop, I am interested in the conditions that might prevent particular groups from participating, and like Badiou, generate an Event. But I am also sceptical, like Jackson, of prioritizing dissenting art because we need some kind of agreement and creative agonism that stems from the Castoriadian imaginary.

Bishop argues for 'antagonist' possibilities in art practice: Antagonism as critical position and resistance to intelligibility. In her view, this is necessary for aesthetics but also for when art turns to occupy a social territory. Which is to say, that art practices that seek to produce a harmonious space that creates inter-subjective encounters, risk neutralizing their capacity for critical reflection, and art practices that seek to 'do good' risk becoming instrumentalized and disregard the complexities and myriad possibilities of art under the umbrella of the common good. As such, Tiravanija's work in the gallery space preparing food for the people didn't leave much room for a critical antagonism, ending up on the 'bad' side of Bishop's theory. While Sierra's work ended up on the 'good' side of antagonistic exchange. Drawing on the work of Mouffe and Laclau she advocated the necessity of antagonistic boundaries between social sectors and she agrees with Rancière's 'rupture' in theories of aesthetic and democratic radical equality, where rupture occurs in moments of crisis that are no longer able to sustain social hierarchies. Theatre scholars such as Nicolas Ridout, Alan Read and Joe Kelleher have argued that an instrumentalizing pull in participatory art practices can compromise the social antagonisms that exist in performance aesthetics. Thus, the contribution this research aims to make is to contextualize these participatory art and performance practices in their broader

social, political and aesthetic context, asking what kind of world becomes possible and what opportunities and values such practices offer to their audiences.

While Bishop critiques assumptions that participation in socially engaged art and performance practices promotes emancipatory social relations, Jackson argues that all performance is some kind of social work and that there is a mutually dependent relationship between art and publics. For Bishop, relational art can have strong political significations and produce democratic relations, but this can only happen when art cultivates positions and situations that are not socially consensual. To this extent, she argues that democracy is enacted through art practices that cultivate antagonistic relations underpinning Mouffe's argument that relations of conflict must be sustained and not undermined in a democratic society because without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of the hegemonic order that does not promote debate, exchange and participation, the essentials of democracy. Bishop uses antagonism to urge for the necessity of a critical reflection and a resistance to intelligibility that is necessary for aesthetics and neutralized when art treads into social territory. The relational antagonism that Bishop identifies in Sierra's work is predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing those mechanisms that are repressed in sustaining the appearance of this harmony. For Bishop, Sierra's work emphasizes social differences and inequality not to celebrate them, but to acknowledge them and, thus, create the conditions for critical reflection that would bring about social change. For this reason, Sierra's work if for Bishop too democratic and Tiravanija's too neoliberal.

Bishop's argument for exploration of relational art's dissensus set off a great deal of discussion in the experimental art world. However, what I want to explore is how this expansion in cultural practice affects people, how might such practices contribute to or weaken critical reflection, social relations and democratic values. What happens to social relations and, indeed, democracy in a context of neoliberal capitalism when the focus lies on the primacy of the individual and the power of the wealthy? Liam Gillick, an English conceptual artist based in New York City and whose work Bishop has criticised, draws attention to some factual errors and misrepresentations and the main argument of his disagreement with Bishop's thesis focuses on her loose interpretation of the concept of antagonism as articulated by Mouffe and Laclau. What I understand from Mouffe's assertion is that when art goes beyond a reflection of the rejected choices of the dominant status quo and attempts to address the means and understand the process through which ideas shape our contemporary environment, then we are talking about a more sophisticated understanding of

the idea of democracy, which has to do with the recognition of the antagonism suppressed within consensus-based models of democracy and not merely with a demonstration of its failings.

Jackson's account of the social turn in art on the other hand, contributes to an evolving conversation around what socially engaged art and performance practice can do. Jackson collapses the boundaries between socially engaged and participatory performance by claiming that all performance is social and treating it as 'social work'. I am in agreement with this interdisciplinary approach to art and performance because it destabilizes the boundaries between social efficacy and aesthetic legitimacy offering a rigorous take on performance practice. Jackson's approach reveals that artistic endeavours are always supported by multiple systems: independent or institutional, aesthetic or social, public or private. To this extent, all performance practice engages publics to some degree. At a time when much critical theory has established oppositional relationships between the social and the aesthetic, Jackson's approach challenges strict divisions about where art practice ends and the rest of the world begins. Jackson argues for a re-evaluation of the relationship between aesthetics and social practice in order to tease out the relationships between the artist, art making, the public that participates and social infrastructures. Jackson argues that art allows its audience to imagine sustainable social institutions. This research, too, seeks to explore these practices taking an interdisciplinary approach. Art, politics and the social, what once was conceived as narrow intersection, now opens an expansive landscape. No longer seen as a single genre or form, art elaborates what can count as politics, from the solitary creations of an artist, to the artistic interventions of a collective that occupies public spaces in the centre of Athens, to the grassroot movements of those who do not seek representation in conventional ways. To this extent, Jackson's approach opens up the discussion of what is touched by the aesthetic and what is covered by the political in the social terrain. The question for me is not simply whether there is diminished tolerance for aesthetic multiplicity but what is driving the expansiveness of art in the social and in politics but also politics in art. It is no coincidence that the public actions of politicians are frequently judged in the language of performance while artistic performances can be treated politically.

At a time when in a number of countries of the Western world including Greece, public systems are being steadily dismantled or privatized, I largely support efforts by many to develop grassroots, horizontal, DIY, rhizomatic actions that overthrow social structures that are no longer sustainable. Occupy showed us the potency of alternative forms of governance,

where activists self-consciously form, not as consensus seekers but as compositions of singularities. In Jackson's reading of Laclau and Mouffe, both thinkers are careful to emphasize that antagonism is not about opposition. In their frame, antagonism is the process that would question the givenness of human beings rather than the social relation that constitutes them. To antagonise means to engage with humans and things as social praxis. From the above I understand that antagonism has a degree of compatibility with art and performance in that it questions the conventions that produce situations as given. The fact that many contemporary theatre and performance scholars are working to find out ways into different structures associated with the social sphere means that questions searching aesthetic value will continue to emerge. Aesthetic barometers will coexist with social and political ones, producing possible expansions, but also possible reductions in what qualifies art in socially engaged art practice.

CHAPTER 2

Performances of Resistance in a State of Crisis

All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.[1]

Easter 1916, William Butler Yeats

Having explored the so-called 'social turn' in contemporary art and performance and having provided a review of literature on participatory art practices in order to examine 'social praxis' in relation to artistic and aesthetic values in chapter 1, this chapter is focused on the Greek case and seeks to examine the notion of democracy and its intersection with art and performance. My aim here is to examine the relationship between political and artistic praxis and relate it to the central argument of the thesis: that art and performance can become praxis, not only in the Aristotelian conception of the term but also in the Gramscian sense, namely, that the philosophy of praxis is a critique of the hegemonic ideology foregrounding the collective act that is committed to the passionate reconstruction of reality. The restoration of normality that the hegemonic ideology seeks to achieve must be countered by a conscious seizure of the Event that leads to hegemonic crisis challenging existing relations of power. This seizure is for Gramsci the crisis that bursts as part of a potentially revolutionary Event through a breakdown of dominant forms of power and control. My intention here is to engage with the ongoing discussion about the effects of capitalism on the cultural and artistic fields, and while some thinkers support the claim that the commodification of culture is such that leaves no space for artists to play a critical role, I prefer to talk about artistic praxes that play

[1] Tim Kendall. *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.233.

a crucial role by 'fostering agonistic public spaces where counter-hegemonic struggles could be launched against neo-liberal hegemony'[2], as Mouffe suggests. The philosophy of praxis, Gramsci tells us, must primarily adopt a polemical stance, as superseding the existing ideology. Thus, a philosophy of (artistic) praxis is a necessary intervention in order to challenge the hegemonic view that there is no alternative to the present reality.

More specifically, this chapter will provide a cultural, social and political overview of Greece from 1981 when the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) takes power. In doing so, I will provide the context from which certain democratic practices emerge but also, challenge the possibilities that they open. Sociologists claim that the economico-political development that Western societies have reached constitutes a great progress in their history and a new world is now open where partisan conflicts belong to the past and consensus can be obtained through dialogue and so liberal democracy can bring a future of peace and prosperity. But I want to challenge this 'post political' vision of public space and democracy and seek for encounters with theatre and ways in which theatre and performance might resists certain political practices and embody philosophical values.

In the years following the 2008 global financial crisis there has been much research and new writing concerning this era of highly charged social and political change. This seems, at its core, to be dealing with new ways to re-imagine, re-think and re-define the notion of democracy from an ideal to praxis. Academics, journalists, thinkers and policy makers have turned our attention to social phenomena, such as urban spatial practices and the public sphere, Occupy movement, and government agencies' policies related to arts, culture, welfare, and equality of opportunity. This chapter will focus mainly on the Greek case, while acknowledging how Greek politics and practices are influenced by other movements worldwide. Thus, the discussion that follows examines the breadth of the ways this new agenda of urban politics of protest and performances of resistance can be said to characterise contemporary cities not only across Europe but also globally, from Athens, Madrid, Rome, and Istanbul to New York, to Rio de Janeiro, Cairo and Tunisia. Among others, scholars such as Chantal Mouffe, Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek draw upon contemporary phenomena in order to question the ethical, philosophical, social and practical implications of democracy and examine the new possibilities that emerge with regard to these socio-political phenomena. Likewise, in the works of Jen Harvie, Shannon Jackson, Maurya

[2] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London and New York: Verso, 2013, p. XVII.

Wickstrom, and Claire Bishop the focus of attention lies on two strands, the first on the artistry of the social and the second on the sociality of art. Rancière, whose interest has shifted towards visual culture in recent years, explores the relation between politics and aesthetics. These fields, according to Rancière, inherently belong to one another and he does not perceive them as autonomous. Rancière argues that aesthetics is not a disciplinary field, but rather a regime of identification of art; which is to say, that art is identified as such in a given social or historical context. Similarly, the aforementioned works point out the fact that the social is not outside but implicit to theatre, performance and art in general.

What will concern the present chapter more precisely is the notion of democracy, particularly its intersection with art and performance. At the centre of the chapter is a search for a new politics that unfolds in situations of politically subjugated people whose lives are lived in conditions of disparity and injustice; whose lives are lived in conditions of political, institutional and financial depreciation and in conditions of social precarity. It is a search made at the centre of a globally distributed system of neoliberal capitalism and its forms of politics and state governance as these are applied in the middle of an economic crisis threatening not only Greece but the future of Europe. It is worth recalling at this point, as Slavoj Žižek suggests in his essay *Badiou: Notes From an Ongoing Debate,* the difference between the capitalist and the Marxist notion of economic crisis 'for the standard capitalist view, crises are "temporary, correctable glitches" in the functioning of the system, while from the Marxist point, they are its moment of truth, the "exception" which only allows us to grasp the functioning of the system'.[3] Which is to say, from a point of view of capitalist system, namely of liberal democracy, crises are conceived as empirical, as problems or vicissitudes standing in the way of the common good. While from a Marxist point of view, crises are the moments of truth, the truth of the system, which Žižek calls them 'the symptoms'. In this light, for capitalism, crises appear not as contingency of a good system, but as a necessity of the same system that posits particular goals to strive for. Inequality, for example, is a necessity of the capitalist system, which posits equality as a necessary ideological supplement and a goal to strive for.

In his *Logics of Worlds*, Alain Badiou, designates our contemporary malaise, which we might call the prevailing or hegemonic ideology, 'democratic materialism' and whose principal

[3] Slavoj Žižek. *Badiou: Notes From an Ongoing Debate*, Volume One, Number Two: Žižek & Badiou, International Journal of Žižek Studies, 2007.

axiom is that 'there are only bodies and languages'.[4] What has happened today is that to some extent this materialism has itself become idealist. The dominant contemporary ideology is portrayed not explicitly as an idealism but as a bio-materialism, borrowing its name from Foucault's term 'biopolitics'. It is therefore a materialism of life. This statement is, according to Badiou, the axiom of contemporary conviction. The materialist part comes from its interest in, identification and valorisation of the finite body and its suffering. It is also democratic because by recognizing the plurality of all languages, all differences, all discourses, the contemporary consensus presupposes their equality. This democratic materialism which describes our epoch stands at the centre of the prevailing ideology of neoliberalism prescribed by the master signifiers: 'terror', 'democracy', and 'capital'. Against the hegemony of democratic materialism, Badiou opposes his own philosophical project, one that stands between being and event, between knowledge and truth, a 'materialist dialectic'. The latter differs from democratic materialism in that there are indeed bodies and languages, 'except that there are truths'.[5] These truths are incorporeal bodies, languages devoid of meaning and constitute exceptions to what there is, namely the hegemony of democratic materialism. By this we also admit that 'what there is' is a mixture of bodies and languages. But there isn't only what there is and, according to Badiou, truth is the philosophical name of what incorporates itself into the continuity of the 'there is'.[6] Truth is connected to the Event, comprising a set of discourses that are set off by the Event and follow from it. A truth is always the truth of a particular situation because it speaks from or about this particular part that is excluded and never being recognisable by the state of the situation, namely the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology renders the excluded part invisible; but is not able to ensure that the excluded part will remain quiet. It may erupt into the situation at any time and this is when the Event occurs. The Event ruptures what only appears to be normal, and opens up a new space to reconsider reality from a different point of view in inconsistent multiplicity, in fact from its real basis. When the Event occurs the inconsistent multiplicity that was until then excluded or overshadowed by the dominant order can become the site of a new possibility at any time. The Event as such is then successful in representing a part that was previously invisible. This unfolding of new situations and representations produces new social orders and Truths. Truth, Badiou suggests, that ultimately comes from practice and struggle. This assertion could be linked to the orientation mostly identified by 'left' thinkers

[4] Alain Badiou. *Logics of Worlds*. trans. by Continuum International Publishing group, New York and London: Continuum International Publishing group, 2009, pp. 1-8.
[5] Ibid., pp. 1-8.
[6] Ibid., p. 5.

and leaders such as Lenin or Mao Zedong, who has stated that there can only be philosophy when there is class struggle. And this is because the ruling class is represented by the dominant ideology, whereas the dominated class has to find its way through agonisms, struggles and conceptual work. Philosophy can produce new ideas and systems allowing new potentialities to come into existence.

One could associate the above argument with the global protests of 2011 and the anti-austerity movements that took place in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Cyprus among others. The agents of these mass riots of 2011 were largely unseen before the riots occurred. Yet they did occur, affirming that the excluded part which normally lies beneath the dominant order can be the site of the Event at any time. The excluded part has no particular attributes or identity within the state of the situation and is radically contingent. Hence, an Event does not occur based on definite foundations or particular characteristics, but erupts into the situation on the basis of its generic humanity. This approach meets Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'bare life' in revolution. State sovereignty, according to Agamben, divides life into two kinds: *zoe* (ζωή) and *bios* (βίος), both known from ancient Greek. *Zoe* can be rendered as simple physical life, and what Agamben would call 'bare life', and *bios* can be rendered as politically-recognised life or qualified life. *Bios* is not 'bare' because it is attached to forms of meaning derived from political recognition and representation. The transition from *zoe* to *bios* involves turning bare and worthless life into valuable and good life.[7] In an Event, and only then, the inconsistent multiplicity which was previously unrepresented and subjected to a particular social order can be visible. Thus, the probability of new meanings that the Event can bring into existence declares that another world is possible. Seen from this viewpoint, an Event is necessarily ruptural in relation to the existing order deconstructing the dominant discourse and overcoming prevailing ideologies. For Badiou, this seems at its core to involve social and political revolutions.

In the *Logic of Worlds*, Badiou, offers several political examples of events, all of which derive from revolutionary history. In the Paris Commune, the worker that revolted was a politically invisible figure that became maximally apparent when the Evental revolution occurred subverting the rules of political appearance. The figure of the worker not only becomes apparent but becomes the most visible character in the Event. The Paris Commune along with the Russian Revolution, Badiou argues, were historical moments when the

[7] Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. California: Stanford University Press, 1998.

proletariat emerged as a 'subject'. These two revolutions were political Events because they rendered the working-class or proletariat (from the excluded and invisible part) visible and present in the social scene allowing its involvement in political *bios* in democratic regimes. The Maoist movement in China and particularly the Chinese Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, which drew on elements of peasant revolt, is Evental because it created a kind of popular mobilisation unknown in earlier periods. The Cultural Revolution was a socio-political movement in China launched by Mao Zedong, who saw it as a way of reinvigorating the communist revolution by strengthening ideology and weeding out opponents so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system. For Badiou, the Cultural Revolution has been a constant reference of political activity throughout the world, and particularly in France between 1967-1976; the only true political creation of the sixties and seventies with a goal to change subjectivity, to live otherwise, to think otherwise, which the Chinese called 'revolutionarization'. The revolt of May 1968 in France is also Evental in that it challenged the entire advanced capitalist French economy. May 1968 is a cultural, social and political Event. 'The occupations movement was the sudden return of the proletariat as a historical class, a proletariat now enlarged to include a majority of the salaried employees of modern society and still tending toward the real abolition of classes and of wage labour. The movement was a rediscovery of collective and individual history, an awakening to the possibility of intervening in history, an awareness of participating in an irreversible event'.[8] The question is whether the global movements of 2011 sowed the seed for the social change they proclaimed so as they could be considered as Evental? The answer, however difficult, should consider the historical past and present and the fact that every country, at least in the western world, stands under the umbrella of a developed globalised economic system. My argumentation lies on the idea that the present historical moment is in fact that of the first blending of a global social and political uprising against the capitalist regression which resembles earlier historic working class revolts. And as yet fragile, naive, and lacking of a real powerful idea and concept that constitutes their originality, these revolts teach us by challenging the very idea of democracy itself.

Badiou's theory of the Event resembles other theories of revolution and ideology. The Marxist concept of ideology also describes that the dominant ideas within a given social setting reflect the interests of a ruling economic elite. Ideology is conceived as a pure dream,

[8] Situationist International Online (September 1969), Transl. by Ken Knabb, http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/beginning.html (Accessed September 13, 2016).

illusion or imaginary construction constituted by the only reality: that of concrete history of material individuals who produce their means of existence and therefore ideology has no history itself. Whatever the form of a theory of ideology is, whether religious, ethical, social or political, it always expresses class position. Marx linked this concept of ideology to a vision of society dominated by a ruling economic class as a form of social power. His model of ideology rests upon a materialist perspective which emphasizes that material reality is the foundation of society. It is, however, in the dominant capitalist ideology that the working class takes for granted its exploitation within economic criteria of inequality. My aim, however, is to move beyond the discussion of Marxist theory, Badiou's thoughts or the adversaries of 'democratic materialism'. In fact, several contemporary political thinkers, Peter Hallward and Slavoj Žižek among them, have tried to radicalize the promise of the notion of democracy in ways that cannot easily be subsumed under the term of democratic materialism. My aim is to rethink the idea and status of democracy in the current social and political scene and not just remain at the level of exegesis; it is a matter of taking up a critical position and intervention in the present that attempts to think of our reality. It is the 'will of the people', this emancipatory and deliberate process of collective self-determination that this research focuses on. And what I would like to borrow from Badiou is that what is important is that an Event is not the realization of a possibility that already exists within the situation or that is dependent on the transcendental laws of the world. An Event is the creation or realization of new possibilities. This is not located, according to Badiou, simply at the level of objective possibilities, but at the level of the possibility of possibilities. In other words, an Event paves the way for the possibility of what would otherwise be considered impossible.[9] This impossibility is dependent on the will of the people in order to become possible. Like any other kind of will its exercise is impulsive and autonomous, a matter of actual freedom, like any other form of collective action; it requires joint action and participation. Recent examples of that sort of popular will include, as mentioned above, social movements of protest against political authorities in order to resist the power of socioeconomic, historical, cultural and political terrain that determines contemporary world; movements that received widespread attention, from the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York, the Portuguese and Spanish Indignant movements to the Greek, Cypriot, Turkish and Arab Spring uprisings. In these emancipatory political events, what is determinant is the people's will to prescribe the path of their own history. This is in Castoriadian terms the social-historical imaginary that

[9] Alain Badiou. *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

comprises the foundation of his theory of democracy. In order to overcome alienation and finitude human beings create new meanings and new imaginary social institutions. The oppressed will overcome the social obstacles and the imaginary will become the driving force of history. It is only on the basis of the human imaginary process of self-creation that something becomes possible. The creative force of the imaginary expresses an ability, on the basis of will, hope and desire, to construct a better social reality and create new social values. It is the purposeful will of the people to create their own history and retain their place in it as the *authors* and *actors* of their own play. This is not presumably to suppose that one's will creates also the conditions of its exercise *ex nihilo*. It is not to suppose that a movement which challenges or abolishes the dominant state of things proceeds through empty space. Is it not to ignore the obstacles and difficulties that one encounters along the way, or to deny their ability to influence or mislead the forging of a way. It is not to forget, however, after Sartre, that obstacles appear as such in the light of a new idea to become real and climb past them. And it is not to forget, after Marx, that we create our own history, without choosing the conditions of its creation.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

The starting point and the foundation of the theory of democracy is, according to Castoriadis, the relation between politics and philosophy in classical Greece. Philosophy is developed as a natural process in close relation to democratic politics and, thus, contributes actively to the change of social institutions. Philosophy represents the imaginary institutionalization of society because it constantly questions the dominant state of things. And accordingly, both philosophy and politics are closely connected to the development of autonomous society. Political philosophy poses the question of the validity of fundamental social norms. There are numerous examples of struggles in the light of the social imaginary paving the way to autonomy. Among them are the American and French revolutions, the struggle of the bourgeoisie against absolutism and centralism, the struggle against the absolute power of the king and the dominant State Church carried on under the flag of religious democracy; women movements in Western societies; struggles of social uprisings and so on. This is also dependent on the will of the people I referred to earlier. However, the emergence of

democracy in classical Greece becomes the most powerful expression of this ideal, where political institutions are based on direct democracy and citizens take part in the process of decision making, contributing collectively for the sake of the common good and bringing order to the existing chaos.

Another important aspect in the Castoriadian theory of democracy is that of self-limitation, which is the central notion of democratic self-understanding. An example containing exactly this notion of self-limitation is that of Sophocles' Antigone. In the tragedy both Antigone and king Creon are confronted with the power of having to control their human passions in order not to end up in a tragic series of events, which they eventually fail to accomplish. Antigone, because she acted in defiance of Creon's edict, who has decided that Polyneices's body will lie unburied on the battlefield and will be in public shame because he betrayed his country. And Creon because he acted against the Gods and lost his children and his wife as a result. For the Gods, it is a breach of the law to leave a dead body unburied, which was also the harshest punishment at the time. The first episode closes with the chorus celebrating the unlimited power of man and their nature to act against the laws of Gods and men but also pointing out their weakness when fighting the divine powers. In the last episode Creon is eventually convinced by the chorus to correct his mistakes, namely rescinding the order to bury Antigone alive in a cave, but he is too late. Antigone and Haemon, Creon's son, who is also betrothed to her, commits suicide, which also leads Eurydice, Creon's wife and Haemon's mother, to commit suicide. When Creon realises that his actions have caused a series of tragic events he blames himself for everything that had occurred. What he valued so much, however, was still protected: his power as king of Thebes. But he acted against the will of the Gods and this resulted in him losing his children and wife and caused his madness at the play's conclusion. The chorus closes by sending a message that although the Gods punish the proud, punishment always brings wisdom. The art of self-control and self-limitation is closely connected to our understanding of morality and finitude of the world, which are in turn the fundamental background for the possibility of democracy. To this extent, what matters most is to make art and philosophy a real form of social life. Castoriadis in his *Imaginary Institution of Society* claims that the ethos of democracy is based exactly on an understanding of the limits of human actions and at the same time on the impossibility of the comprehension of the consequences of these actions because democracy also includes the *tragic* aspects of human existence. The limitations, however, of democracy are not based on necessity or contingency but on human creators fully aware of the possibilities and

limitations of their actions. This is of course related to the respect for freedom and to the importance of art and philosophy becoming a real form of social life. It is because only by understanding human mortality can we regard ourselves and others as free and autonomous human beings and at the same time aim at creating these conditions for society.[10]

While Castoriadian theory of democracy will be analysed more extensively in chapter 4 of the present research, at this point I would like to consider some of its key points and relate them to the current socio-political landscape. The democratic process of society is, therefore, conceived in the Castoriadian notion as a process of self-institutionalization with community being the result of a historical creation. The Golden Age of the Athenian political hegemony, with cultural flourishing and economic growth in the period from 480 BC-404 BC, comprises an example to this process. Contrary to this is the representative democracy of our times, which cannot be defined as anything else than a 'liberal oligarchy', where only the few take part directly in the decision making while the majority remains submissive to the bureaucratic system. Castoriadis himself did not have a great respect for the development of the globalized neoliberal economy starting in the early 1990s which he experienced himself while in Paris. Contemporary social structures and institutions are characterized by strong bureaucracy and their hierarchical structures are based on instrumental and utility-oriented rationality especially in the political arena. The imaginary search for autonomy, on the other hand, is characterized by a struggle for emancipation, direct democracy and autonomy like the one embodied in emerging social groups and their reaction against dominant ideologies and social structures. Social protests and demonstrations across the globe in recent years indicate that we should conceive human revolutionary projects as extrication from these structures that no longer represent the will of the people for freedom. This imaginary builds its foundations in the capacity to create upon hopes and desires for a better future and new social structures. In this respect, philosophy's relation to the political has been fundamental. It is no coincidence that the most famous work of Plato, *The Republic*, is entirely devoted to issues and questions that concern the *polis*. While Plato was one of the opponents of Athenian democracy he did, however, support the idea that the issues concerned with the polis should be of common interest. In this sense philosophy is responsible for encountering a foundation for the political. This is to say, that philosophy being closely connected to the political, would situate

[10] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Athens: Kedros, 1978.

itself within political conflicts in order to elucidate them and, thus, give ground to new possibilities.

In an interview with Alain Badiou in 2007, the philosopher approaches this relation between philosophy and the political from the contemporary practice of politics claiming that:

> today, in the extremely obscure situation that is the general system of contemporary politics, philosophy can attempt to clarify the situation without having any pretence to "creating" situations. Philosophy has as its condition and horizon the concrete situation of different political practices, and it will try, within these conditions, to find instruments of clarification, legitimation and so on. This current takes seriously the idea that politics is itself an autonomy of thought, that it is a collective practice with an intelligence all its own.[11]

And he continues to say that the difficulty, however, today is that there is no longer a clear distinction between two different political ideologies as it was in the last century where there was an opposition between a classical bourgeois politics and another radical or revolutionary option. And it is certainly why Mouffe proposes the creation of a vibrant agonistic public sphere that opposes a consensual form of democracy. Such an approach of consensual democracy, for Mouffe, instead of contributing to a *democratization* of democracy is the origin of many of the problems that democratic institutions are currently facing. The establishment of a world beyond 'left' and 'right', beyond sovereignty, hegemony, and antagonism reveals a complete lack of understanding of what is at stake in democratic practices. The aspiration to a world where democratic politics is based on the dialogical process of consensus is not only conceptually mistaken, but also fraught with political dangers, argues Mouffe.[12] The belief in the possibility of a universal rational consensus has put democracy at risk. 'There is much talk today of "dialogue" and "deliberation" but what is the meaning of such words in the political field, if no real choice is at hand and if the participants in the discussion are not able to decide between clearly differentiated alternatives?'[13] This is also the case of the Greek political arena in the last decades and which the current crisis has made even more evident. If we consider the elections of 1981 a milestone in the history of modern Greece when a period of wealth and prosperity began (for reasons that I will elaborate below), then we can but only support this claim. It is no

[11] Interview with Alain Badiou by Filippo del Luchesse and Jason Smith, Critical Inquiry, "We Need a Popular Discipline" Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative, Los Angeles 2007.
[12] Chantal Mouffe. *On the Political*. New York: Routledge, 2005. pp. 2-4.
[13] Ibid., p. 3.

coincidence that from 1981 until 2012 only two political parties governed Greece, Pasok[14] and New Democracy[15]. Although these parties differed ideologically in their rhetoric with Pasok being a social-democratic party and New Democracy a liberal-conservative one, however, the practice of their political agenda was common and in line with the grammar of the European Union (EU). The strongest argument in support of this claim is that with the 2012 legislative elections these were two of the three parties to form a coalition government in light of the financial crisis that Greece had been facing. The oppositional voices were that of the communist party (KKE) which traditionally held a place in the Greek parliament since the 1977 legislative elections and that of Synaspismos (Coalition of the Left, of Movements and Ecology), former Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), which together with KKE got approximately 10% of the votes.

If we consider the larger picture of the revolutions of the twentieth century in Europe, the *debate* was between one or the other way to choose; it was necessarily a matter of decision where someone had to make a choice of one side or the other. The debate was not merely reduced to the existence of a global 'revolutionary' opposition itself. Today there is no sufficient evidence of the existence of a fundamental opposition of this character. For many theorists, the end of a bipolar system is seen as the hope of reaching an order beyond hegemony, of a democratic grammar based on rationalism, dialogue and consensus. But what dangers does this entail for democracy itself? The dangers entailed by the current unipolar system, Mouffe argues, can only be avoided by the implementation of a multipolar system allowing a plurality of hegemonic orders to emerge so as to avoid the hegemony of one single hyperpower.

> … what we are currently witnessing is not the disappearance of the political in its adversarial dimension but something different. What is happening is that nowadays the political is played out in the *moral register*. In other words, it still

[14] The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) was founded in 1974 by Andreas Papandreou as a democratic socialist and Left-wing nationalist party. In 1981 election Pasok became Greece's first left-of-centre party to win a majority in the Hellenic Parliament and remained one of the county's major electoral forces until 2012 elections when it lost much of its popular support with George Papandreou leadership as a result of the Greek debt crisis. In its current homepage, its members define Pasok ideology as 'a political movement of democratic socialism that seeks the real and open relationship with the citizen and society. Its action promotes the universal values of peace and peaceful resolution of disputes, democracy, freedom, social justice, equality and solidarity.' (Translated from the Greek text), (See www.pasok.gr official website).

[15] New Democracy was founded in 1974 by Konstantinos Karamanlis and has been the main centre-right political party in Greece. The party's ideology was defined as 'radical liberalism', referring to the prevalence of free market rules with the decisive intervention of the state in favour of social justice. New Democracy lost the majority in the Hellenic Parliament as a result of the Greek debt crisis and became the major opposition party after the 2015 Greek elections. In its current homepage, the members of the party state that their ideology is Social Liberalism, an anthropocentric ideology. 'It aims at the creative composition, on the one hand of the freedom of the individual to define and claim purposes and on the other the consolidation of social solidarity and the conquest of collective goods. At the centre of its political theory is the development of human personality, ethics of responsibility, relationships of people, their collective and individual identity.' (Translated from the Greek text), (See "Ideology". *New Democracy* official website).

> consists in a we/they discrimination, but the we/they instead of being defined with political categories, is now established in moral terms. In place of a struggle between 'right' and 'left' we are faced with a struggle between 'right' and 'wrong'.[16]

What defines the post-political perspective is the conception that we have entered an era where any potential antagonism has disappeared. There is no conflict between oppositional forces and more, the failure to construct collective identities contributes to exacerbating the antagonistic potential in society. 'The political', which in philosophical terms, according to Mouffe, has to do with the 'ontological' level –as opposed to politics which refers to the 'ontic' level, namely a mere practice of politics– is precisely concerned with the way in which the society is constituted[17], and therefore, I argue, the need to seek encounters between philosophy and politics is fundamental. Philosophy has to find its position in multiple situations of the political legitimisation of the decisions made. When Althusser suggests the formula that 'philosophy is the organization of the class struggle in theory'[18] he recognizes the two principles of Marxist theory: first, it is the masses that make history and second, it is the class struggle that is the motor of history. Philosophy is thereby a continuation of politics in theory by representing politics with the classes engaged in this struggle.

THE GREEK CASE: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

In political terms, national, social, economic, and political crises are the result of unforeseen (governmental) failures in established problem-solving mechanisms at an institutional level. If crises are the sum total of brief or continued systemic dysfunctions, they also generate conflict, precarity, anger and unhappiness both in society and in the individual. The word crisis comes from the Greek verb *κρίνω*<*κρίσις* (krino<krisis) which denotes the cognitive process that leads to assessments, thoughts and decisions. According to Cambridge dictionary crisis is 'a time of great disagreement, confusion, or suffering' but also 'an extremely difficult or dangerous point in a situation'. Collins English dictionary gives also the following definition of crisis, 'an unstable period, especially one of extreme trouble or danger in

[16] Chantal Mouffe. *On the Political*. New York: Routledge, 2005. p. 6.
[17] Ibid., p. 8
[18] Peter Hallward and Peden Knox. *Concept and Form, Volume 1: Selections from the Cahiers Pour L'Analyse*. London: Verso Books, 2012, p.27.

politics, economics, etc'. Crises are therefore a series of insuperable obstacles causing, and caused by, disrupted equilibrium and restrained decision making. Regarded this way, crises are a component of human experience, a situation that one continuously strives to evade, an impending social change. Financial institutions being closely connected to capitalist economies, periodically take measures in order to control or avoid harsh transitions to economic recession. In this sense, crises are also associated with an inability to predict the future, which is uncertain in a particular set of social, historic or political events and thus, crises cause confusion, disorientation and a sense of panic in societies. This is a result of institutional stultification which is itself, by extension, caused by the lack of ability to plan accordingly for the future.

In the Greek case, a number of diverse issues related to systemic dysfunctions have contributed to the so-called Greek debt crisis. Tax evasion has always been a thorn in Greek economy and this resulted in a profound mistrust of foreign-debt management and state-revenue. Among other factors, the malfunctioning of a political, national health and education systems, the distressful trimming of a needlessly obese public sector, high youth unemployment rates, weak industrial production, a corrupted political management system attached to nepotism and a populist rhetoric coupled with individual and state responsibility which together compose a grievous image of a state that seems powerless to defend itself and also of a European Union that responds inefficiently to its first critical event to threaten some of its valued members. An ineffective response because one of the key points that tarnish its character is the total lack of existence of a common safe, strategic, and political plan among its members. At the same time, the involvement of the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the Greek state's fiscal affairs have raised issues of national power and sovereignty and cultivated visions of a power shift to a European Federation or the European Parliament in Brussels. Likewise, issues of political representation due to the lack of a concrete political ideology, and thus incapacity to persuade the electorate, have propagated an array of new political parties, forced coalition governments and most importantly generated a revival of right-wing nationalism and a simultaneous rise of extremism associated with violence against vulnerable social groups. The rise of extreme right-wing parties has also been a thorn in the recent history of Europe. Amid a burgeoning political and migrant crisis, growing social and economic inequality, and a sense of lost identity, right-wing parties have gained ground in a number of European countries, with Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) being the most recent example of a right-wing party

barging into the Bundestag as the third largest party of Germany. Other countries including Hungary, Poland, Austria, Belgium, France, Denmark, Finland, and Greece saw an increase in numbers of those who voted in favour of extreme right parties. Their claim for such an action is because of their 'disappointment' with established authorities; the same pattern applies in most of these European countries. Historically, social democrats and left-wing parties' rise in power went hand in hand with a rising working class. Now, in the context of a global neoliberal capitalism this force is shrinking. Today's German workers for example are middle class. That said, social democrats and the reformist left are losing their electoral base and this is evident in all recent elections.

In the Greek terrain, many Greeks are aware that the manifestations of the current social crisis are related to the country's historical past, not only to what they know or believe actually happened but also to what kind of story they tell about it. The BBC's documentary broadcasted in 2012, *Greece: An Unquiet History*, provides an overview of that past asking if it is still haunting its present. The program begins with the Nazi occupation of Greece during WWII and footage from the BBC during the 2008 riots when Alexis Grigoropoulos, a 15-year-old Greek student, was killed by two policemen, connoting that the demons of the past were alive in the streets of Athens in 2008. The murder resulted in riots that have seen the streets of major cities in Greece turned into virtual war zones. Outside Greece, solidarity demonstrations and riots also took place in more than 70 cities around the world including London, Paris, Rome, Madrid, Dublin, Berlin, Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen. These riots are among 'the worst Greece has seen since the restoration of democracy in 1974'.[19] While the turbulence was triggered by the shooting incident, the protesters' actions were a manifestation of deeper causes and a widespread feeling of frustration related to the rise of youth unemployment rates, the general inefficiency and corruption of the political system and also to the global economic crisis that had just escalated. 'Every day new measures are being taken' says a woman among the demonstrators, and she continues 'it is an occupation … like in years with the German occupation. We cannot breathe anymore'. In a similar vein, the producer Maria Margaronis asks:

> What do these echoes mean? Are they just easy rhetoric or a way of avoiding painful truths about the present? Or is the economic crisis bringing back real memories of times when Greeks went hungry, when they lost their sovereignty,

[19] Christofer Kat. *"Athenian democracy in ruins",* The Guardian, 2008, (Accessed March 25, 2016).

> when they felt betrayed not only by their politicians but by their neighbours too? Why is it that the past in Greece refuses to lie quiet?[20]

Greece's painful twentieth century history is full of silences, some of them imposed, some chosen. There is no version of the past that most Greeks can agree on. To date, with few exceptions, the way in which a significant part of the intelligentsia has manifested past events into culturally acceptable facts has been one-sided or mainly partisan, claims Margaronis. Over the years, from the National Schism (the Greek Division) of 1910-1922 of which the crucial point was whether Greece should enter World War I and the Greek debacle in Asia Minor (1922-1923) to Metaxas' Dictatorship (1936-1941), from the Civil War (1946-1949)[21] to the Colonels' Regime (1967-1974), and from the beginnings of the *Metapolitefsi*[22] to Pasok's populism and beyond 1989, this historical and political narrative has been implicitly manipulated by a hegemonic ideology that intentionally blamed, persecuted, demonized, or excluded a part of the population, however large or small.

The aftermath of the military junta finds Greece to have experienced a series of positive social changes and unseen freedoms with Pasok of Andreas Papandreou in the leadership of the country. Pasok's political slogan of 'change' (*allagi*) was framed around the educational, social and public health system reforms, including the decentralization in the administration of the state system, egalitarianism, public participation at the provincial and local levels, the restructuring of the higher education system with the abolition of the authoritarian concept of academic chair and promoting student participation in the decision-making organs of institution governance. Other reforms included the upgrading of technical and vocational education and restructuring of elementary and secondary education introducing a progressive type of lyceum on an experimental basis.[23] While these gains came after a long period of social and political oppression, they did not go hand in hand with the necessary cultural development. Nor were they supported by the restructuring of the economy, an improvement

[20] Maria Margaronis. Greece: An Unquiet History, radio program, BBC radio online, 2012. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01dtdcb (Accessed April 17, 2016)

[21] Following WWII, a civil war broke out as a result of a highly polarized struggle between the royalists and communists in 1943. The royalists were supported financially by the United States in order to prevent communists taking control of the country and until at least the early 1950s the country was dependent on the USA both at economic and military level. Communism was declared illegal and the government introduced its notorious document known as *Certificate of Political Reliability* which declared that the document holder was not a left-wing sympathizer. The civil war left Greece politically and economically shattered and triggered a mass exodus of Greeks to countries such as Australia, Canada, and the US. (See Eirini Karamouzi (2014), Greece, the EEC and the Cold War 1974-1979: The Second Enlargement)

[22] The Metapolitefsi, translated as "polity/regime change", was a period in modern Greek history referring to the period after the fall of the military junta (Colonels' Regime) of 1967–1974. This includes the transitional period from the fall of the dictatorship to the 1974 elections and the democratic period immediately after these elections.

[23] Robert Cowen, Andreas M. Kazamias. *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. London: Springer, 2009.

of state-patronised institutions or an address of public sector nepotism and bureaucratic clientelism -factors which at the start of 1990s, Pasok was found sullied by due to its involvement in corruption scandals. Yet, it remained electorally powerful until recently, just until before the January 2015 election when Syriza took power. This atmosphere resulted in the rise of divisive attitudes and approaches which seem to have penetrated the sinews of Greek society and culture. This can be seen for example in responses to historical writings referring to the vexed issue of the Civil War, which still remains a contested subject in Greek society. Notwithstanding recurrent state and individual efforts to control these approaches and eradicate the problem, a widespread feeling to sweep past conflicts under the carpet of historical and political oblivion seems to have prevailed along with economic concerns. This could be seen as the core of a prolonged cultural crisis that has been brewing and where many opportunities were lost at an institutional level since at least 1974.[24]

Yet the question remains, how has the current crisis affected perceptions of political and cultural discourses in relation to Greece's past since 1974? Bo Strath in his paper entitled *Still the Europe of Milward? On the Need for a New Long-Term Historical Understanding of Today's Europe* aptly claims that 'we cannot plan for the future without a clear and realistic understanding of where we come from and how we got here. Politics must have a Janus face towards both the past and the future in order to correctly estimate the magnitudes and the nature of the problems we have to solve'.[25] And he goes on to say that 'politics in modern societies is a permanent process of problem resolution, where the answers to today's problems constitute the problems of tomorrow'.[26] History is, therefore, an important tool not only for the records and the archives but also for the identification of our current problems and our position in the present. Thus, the need for a historical revision is always present.

Recalling the post-1974 period which for many today seems to signal a romantic perception of Greece, which especially after the 1981 elections, the year when Greece also joined the European Economic Community (EEC), was a land of plenty and wealth, of unbridled development, prosperity and growth, of unconfined promises and prospects for the future. One might also argue that this period was the beginning of the coming crisis that Greece would experience even more profoundly because this period of growth was the result of

[24] Eirini Karamouzi. *Greece, the EEC and the Cold War 1974-1979: The Second Enlargement*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
[25] Bo Strath. *Still the Europe of Milward? On the Need for a New Long-Term Historical Understanding of Today's Europe*, The European Institute, UCL, London, 2011, p.1.
[26] Ibid, p.1.

excessive government loans from local and foreign banks and not a result of its own productive capacity. As a consequence, the levels of national debt became alarmingly high. Greek newspaper *Eleftherotypia* in an article entitled *How did we get here?* provides an overview of the Greek debt arguing that all governments since 1974 increased the levels of national debt, which today has reached 323 billion euros causing a lack of confidence among lenders. Greece's debt is higher than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country, standing at 115.1% of the value of all goods and services produced by the country in 2009, according to the latest figures from Eurostat (European Statistical Office). The period after 1946 was one of the most difficult in the Greek economy because of the preceding Second World War and the Civil War (1946-1949). The country had at that time borrowed 406 million dollars for investments in infrastructure. In 1981 the government deficit rose from 2.6% to 9.1% and increased to 16.1% in 1990. In 1993 Pasok won the election one more time and introduced mechanisms to reduce state deficit, which remained at 10% in 1994 to fall further to 7.3% in 1996 and 4% in 1997. Kostas Simitis was at the time in the leadership of the party and the country. This is when the dark period of the Greek economy begins. State deficits as shown in papers are reduced gradually (in 2000 the deficit was 2.5% of GDP) paving the way for the country's entry in the European Monetary Union (EMU). But the reality was very different. According to reports published from Eurostat and economists, it proved subsequently that the Greek government deficit was 3.7% in 2000, which is why the country should not have joined the EMU, since it never had a deficit below 3% of GDP, a condition contained in the Treaty of the EU. The Olympic Games that were held in Greece in 2004 effected deficit levels dramatically, which was 7.5% of GDP that year growing incrementally until 2010, the year when the financial crisis set in motion a domino effect, putting at risk the stability of the euro and Eurozone markets.[27]

The sovereign debt crisis emerged so drastically in 2008 due to governments' mismanagement and due to the failure of the euro-area zone member states' governments to deliver a plan to support the affected countries. Although the crisis erupted in the U.S., it resulted in a threat of total collapse of financial institutions across Europe and condemned the weakest social classes to suffer as unemployment rates rose dramatically. Likewise, issues related to structural problems lie in the foundations of the European Monetary Union (EMU), namely, the lack of balance between the centralization of monetary policy and the

[27] Christos Ioannou. *How did we get here?* Newspaper Kathimerini, Athens, 2010.

sovereignty of each member of the EMU on issues related to fiscal policy.[28] As a result, these factors combined with the real-estate bubbles, the global recession and the globalization of finance, countries such as Greece, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Island and Cyprus were all gravely affected by the crisis in the periphery of Europe. In *Reflections on the Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis: The EU Institutional Framework, Economic Adjustment in an Extensive Shadow Economy* it is argued that 'the Greek sovereign debt crisis is the outcome of public finance mismanagement and a diachronic generation of budget deficits. The main problem of the Greek banking sector is its exposure to Greek sovereign debt.'[29] Some governments including Greece have delivered bailouts in the form of financing packages by the joint European Community, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Central Bank (ECB). These packages were accompanied by severe austerity measures, and structural reform programs, aimed at generating surpluses and decreasing state deficits on future government budgets. By lowering the levels of national debt, it was hoped that the budgets would be considered sustainable. Greece was the first country to be offered such a package. This was followed by Ireland and Portugal.

On May 2010, the Eurozone countries and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreed on an initial €110 billion bailout loan for Greece to help the government pay its creditors, as its national debt threatened financial markets. The loan was conditional on compliance with several key points that were previously mentioned, such as implementation of austerity measures to restore the fiscal balance, implementation of structural reforms to improve competitiveness, and the privatization of government assets to keep the debt sustainable. It became apparent that the first bailout package was not enough. In October 2011, in order to address the limitations of the first bailout package, Eurozone leaders agreed to offer a second €130 billion bailout loan for Greece, conditional this time on the implementation of further austerity measures that would affect not only the lower but also the middle classes. The first condition was to reach an agreement with all private holders of governmental bonds to accept a 50% reduction with yields reduced to 3.5%, thus enabling a €100 billion debt reduction for Greece. The second condition was that Greece needed to implement another demanding austerity package in order to bring its budget deficit to sustainable levels. The

[28] Aristidis Bitzenis, Ioannis Papadopoulos, and Vasileios A. Vlachos. *Reflections on the Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis: The EU Institutional Framework, Economic Adjustment in an Extensive Shadow Economy*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.
[29] Aristidis Bitzenis, Ioannis Papadopoulos, and Vasileios A. Vlachos. *Reflections on the Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis: The EU Institutional Framework, Economic Adjustment in an Extensive Shadow Economy*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, p. 5.

third and final condition was that a majority of the Greek politicians would sign an agreement guaranteeing their continued support for the new austerity package, even after the elections in April 2012, regardless of the parliamentary election result.[30] The question that arises at this point is what effect has the crisis had on Greek society since the very first austerity package was agreed? Namely, how do individuals and social groups respond to the turmoil derived from the political and financial crisis?

On 1 May 2010, the announcement of the first austerity package sparked a series of demonstrations and general strikes across Greece. The package mainly included plans to cut public spending and raise taxes in exchange for the €110 billion bailout. The nation-wide strike that followed on 5 May was one of the largest in recent years in Greece and three employees were killed when protesters set fire to a Mafin Bank branch in the centre of Athens. On May 25 2011 the protestors, organized by *Direct Democracy Now!* movement, known as the *Indignant Citizens Movement*, started demonstrations in major cities across Greece. These demonstrations were organized using social networking sites such as Facebook, leading to thousands of people gathering outside the Greek parliament in Syntagma square. On May 27, the first declaration of the people's assembly in Syntagma square, published by the *Real Democracy Now!* movement stated that:

> For a long time decisions have been made for us, without consulting us. We are all workers, unemployed, retirees, youth, who have come to Syntagma square to fight and give a struggle for our lives and our future. We are here because we know that the solutions to our problems can only be provided by us. We call all residents of Athens, workers, unemployed and youth to come to Syntagma square, and all of the society to fill the public squares and take their lives into their own hands. In these public squares we will shape our claims and our demands together. We call on all workers who are going on strike in the coming days to show up and stay at Syntagma square. We will not leave the squares until those who compelled us to come here leave the country: the governments, the Troika (EU, ECB, and IMF), banks, the IMF Memoranda, and everyone who exploits us. We send them the message that the debt is not ours.[31]

On May 30, the declaration of the people's assembly of the White Tower square in Thessaloniki, the second largest city of Greece, followed stating among others that 'we condemn the selling away and the dissolution of our country's social services (education, health care, and social security)'. 'We demand that they take back the austerity measures that

[30] Eurozone crisis explained, BBC News. 9 February 2012 (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-13798000)
[31] Rita Figueiras, Paula do Espírito Santo. *Beyond the Internet: Unplugging the Protest Movement Wave*, London and New York: Routledge, 2015.

are robbing us of our present and our future. We demand the wealth that our country produces and they are taking away from us'[32]. The act of occupying public spaces and demanding social change has become a common aspect in movements related to anti-capitalism and labour. The media also played a decisive role in the organisation of these movements and their relationship to democracy and the public sphere. Social media and networking sites have had a profound impact in the dissemination of the events 'revolutionizing' the very idea of revolution. Greek and Spanish protests were largely organised and published on Facebook or Twitter playing an increasingly prominent role. The crisis and the feeling of dissatisfaction it sparked served as an impetus for many individuals to seek for alternative sources of information as opposed to mainstream media that provide subjective and misleading information serving particular interests. Likewise, social media have been used as means of disseminating information and visual material from the heart of these protests and demonstrations.

Demonstrations took place on a daily basis and 5 June 2011 is considered to be the largest demonstration in Athens since 1980 with over 500,000 people taking part in it. Demonstrations also took place in other major cities in Greece such as Thessaloniki, Patras, Volos and Heraklion. On 28 June 2011, Greek unions, including public employees, began a 48-hour strike in protest of the austerity measures which led to the freezing of public services, when Pasok voted in favour of the second set of austerity measures with a marginal majority of 155 seats in the 300-seat parliament. Prime Minister, George Papandreou, had announced earlier that a referendum would take place in order to determine whether Greece would accept the next bailout deal with the EU, IMF, and the ECB. However, such a referendum never took place and due to the ongoing protests, on 4 November 2011, after a vote of no confidence in the parliament, Pasok's leader George Papandreou agreed to resign as Prime Minister, resulting in a government of national unity taking over. Thus, a government under Lucas Papademos, a former ECB vice president was formed which governed until the national legislative election took place on Sunday 6 May 2012.

Voting is mandatory in Greece and the procedure indicates that 250 seats (out of 300) are distributed on the basis of proportional representation, with a minimum of 3% required for entry into the parliament. The remaining 50 seats are awarded to the winning party or coalition of parties. Parliamentary majority is achieved by a party or coalition of parties that

[32] Maria Margaronis. Greece: An Unquiet History, radio program, BBC radio online, 2012. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01dtdcb (Accessed April 17, 2016).

achieve at least one half plus one of the total seats (151 out of 300 seats). The election of 6 May 2012 resulted in no single party with a majority of parliamentary seats and for the first time in recent years the two largest parties, Pasok and New Democracy (ND), were rejected by Greek citizens: 19% of the vote for ND was the lowest result for the party in its history, while Pasok, after governing Greece for 21 years on-and-off since 1974, suffered their worst defeat with just 13% of the vote. Unexpectedly, Syriza, with Alexis Tsipras as a party leader, achieved at the time the highest number of votes in most urban areas and this was the first time that a party, besides the two main parties Pasok and ND, had finished as one of the top two parties.

If the attempt to form a government becomes impossible, the Greek law stipulates a procedure where the party with the highest number of votes will be given the chance to negotiate the formation of a government within three days by the Greek President. In the event that this is unsuccessful, then the second and the third parties will be given the chance to do so. If none of the three largest parties succeed in the formation, then the President will take over for a last attempt to form a government meeting with all party leaders. Finally, if this last attempt fails then a temporary government will be formed with the purpose of preparing the country for a new national election. This is what happened in the 2012 Greek legislative election. After following the procedure described, none of the parties agreed on negotiating to form a government and therefore a second election was called, with the date scheduled for 17 June 2012. A coalition government was formed by three parties, New Democracy, Pasok, and the smaller Democratic left-wing Dimar. The leader of New Democracy, Antonis Samaras, was appointed Prime Minister of Greece. This conservative-led coalition government in reality continued the policy of previous governments, under the instructions, and in some cases the demands of the Troika (European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank). Under these circumstances, the social body had been affected to a greater degree. According to EL.STAT (Hellenic Statistical Authority), the unemployment rate, from March 2013 to May 2013, was 27.4% compared to 21.8% in March 2012. Youth unemployment in the 15-24 years age group hit the staggering 64.2% compared to 55.4% in the same month of the previous year. Data of registered unemployment refer only to employees and not to the self-employed or those who closed down their businesses or those who are part-time workers without insurance. According to Euro Health Net, unemployment is the main factor that increased suicide rates by 40%. In the last four years

more than four thousand suicides have been reported. Most of these incidents are linked with the financial crisis, the austerity measures, and unemployment.

SYRIZA: A HISTORIC CHANGE FOR EU?

The historic victory of Syriza in the January 2015 national election was a great defeat for the right-wing New Democracy and an even bigger one for the country's centre-left parties (Pasok, Dimar, To Potami). During the pre-electoral period the centre-left proved unable to provide a unified character with a common leadership and a clear political line, swaying between austerity and anti-austerity, pro-Troika and anti-Troika, social reforms and anti-liberal alternatives. In a highly polarised atmosphere, a climate between right and left, these tactics were not particularly conducive for voters to take a clear decision. The centre-left parties became the observer of a debate between New Democracy's campaign of fear on the one hand, and Syriza's campaign for social reforms, hope, social change and resistance to the hegemonic policies of Germany on the other. Othon Anastasakis argues that 'this fragmented state of Greece's social democracy is the outcome of Pasok's "balkanisation", a steady process of disintegration caused by its handling of the economic crisis during the last six years.'[33]

As a result of Pasok's 'balkanisation', fragmentation or division, voters emigrated towards other political directions, the most important being towards the popular Syriza. Among them party hard-liners and trade unionists, the ones that were once privileged and benefited from clientelist strategies had now moved to Syriza which also benefited from some old politicians of Pasok who did no longer agree ideologically with its undemocratic and anti-social policies related to austerity measures. In this highly polarised political climate, To Potami (The River) with Stavros Theodorakis in the leadership, emerged as a new centre-left force refusing to identify with Syriza's anti-austerity campaign and call for social change, New Democracy's campaign of fear and Pasok's old corrupted policies, presenting a more technocratic agenda with a European orientation. Yet, it did manage to achieve a 6% of national vote coming fourth after the Golden Dawn, the far-right extremist party which came third despite the fact

[33] Othon Anastasakis. *The Balkanisation of Greece's centre-left politics*, Open Democracy, 2015. www.opendemocracy.net/

that its pre-electoral campaign was carried out from the edges with its leader in jail being accused of running a criminal organisation that attacked fragile social groups and pursued a criminal agenda of assault and murder of left-wing musician Pavlos Fyssas in September 2013. Pasok came last with 4.7% below the communist party (KKE) and the party of the Independent Greeks (ANEL), an ultra-nationalistic and anti-austerity party.

Hence, the new government has a strong anti-austerity orientation including forces that are politically and ideologically contrasting, with Syriza being the dominant campaigner of the hope for social change, anti-austerity and debt negotiation. Yet the question remains: is Syriza's victory a historic change for Europe or does it signal the weakening of Greece's ideal of democracy which is also a wider European phenomenon? 'The fading of the centre-left space in Greek politics is the outcome of a very dramatic process of domestic delegitimation, but it reflects an overall social democratic weakness in austerity-led Europe.'[34] It is clear that the crisis brought about a dramatic change not only in the social terrain but also in the political arena, hitting at the core of Greek democracy, namely its party system. In fact, the main victim of Greece's post 2009 financial crisis has been the political class, who became the primary target of the people's dissatisfaction, accused of the mismanagement of the crisis and most of all of the vast cuts in all sectors resulting in very low personal incomes. The impact of Greece's Great Depression on political parties, according to Othon Anastasakis, hit three main areas of the post-1974 political arena: first is the two party hegemony of Pasok and New Democracy, second the single party governments, and third moderation in Greek party politics.[35] As a result of this phenomenon, the crisis brought about the disintegration of the political arena, the need for coalition governments, a phenomenon we observe in many European countries, and most important the rise of extreme right parties. All these factors contribute to a general climate of political and social instability and dissatisfaction. Most political analysts seem to agree that the weakness of Greece's economic system has its roots mainly in the political system and had to do with a political clientelism and corrupt practices and politicians. 'The lack of responsible leadership, political and economic favouritism and the inability of reform in order to make the economy more functional and competitive, were due to an opportunistic political class whose primary concern was the calculation of the political cost and clinging on to power by avoiding to

[34] Othon Anastasakis. *The Balkanisation of Greece's centre-left politics*, Open Democracy, 2015. www.opendemocracy.net/
[35] Othon Anastasakis. *Greece's party landscape and the politics of 'muddling through*, The Economy Journal.com, 2014. http://www.theeconomyjournal.com/magazines/thepoliticalpartiescrisis/

disturb vested interests'.[36] This is what Othon Anastasakis calls the politics of 'muddling through'.

One crucial question is whether Greece's traumatic experience will bring about a new relationship between political parties and citizens and whether this emerging political scene will be the bearer of new ideas and discourses in the socio-political landscape? In order to answer this question, we can but only refer to Syriza's policies as bearer of the so-called 'social change' proclaiming the creation of an autonomous society when many of its significant party members, Manolis Glezos among others, supported the idea of giving power back to the people. Glezos is a left-wing politician and activist best known for his contribution to the Resistance in World War II. He was elected to the European Parliament in 2014 with over 430,000 votes, more than any other Greek candidate. However, taking up a critical position on the policies of Syriza and their impact in the social terrain, it is clear that these policies resulted in a not so different approach to the crisis than that of previous governments. Syriza's promise to negotiate the country's debt and take no further austerity measures seemed to be forgotten under the umbrella of a European hegemonism against which Greece was powerless and unable to defend itself. On 5 July 2015, following a series of unsuccessful attempts to reach a deal with European creditors regarding the Greek debt, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called a referendum for voters to decide whether to accept a bailout deal offered by its creditors, making clear his position against the unbearable, as Alexis Tsipras himself described it, bailout plan. In his statement on national Greek television, Tsipras, announced that the reforms were 'blackmail for the acceptance on our part of severe and humiliating austerity without end and without the prospect of ever prospering socially and economically'[37] calling Greek citizens to take a historic decision. 'These proposals, which clearly violate the European rules and the basic rights to work, equality and dignity, show the purpose of some of the partners and institutions was not a viable agreement for all parties, but possibly the humiliation of an entire people'[38], Tsipras said. Greek citizens were asked 'Should the proposed agreement be accepted, which was submitted by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the Eurogroup of 25.06.2015 and consists of two parts which constitute their unified proposal? The first document is entitled 'Reforms for the completion of the

[36] Ibid.
[37] Helena Smith. *Greek PM Alexis Tsipras calls referendum on bailout terms*, The Guardian, 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/
[38] Ibid.

Current Program and Beyond' and the second 'Preliminary Debt Sustainability Analysis'. The vast majority of voters decisively rejected the terms of an international bailout plan with 61.3% voting 'No' against 38.7% who voted 'Yes'.

Following a campaign of fear from the opposition and Greece's creditors that a 'No' vote would either lead to a failure to secure continued bailout support for the country or would be perceived as a rejection for Greece to remain in Europe, Syriza's victory was more profound. The prevalence of 'No' vote, however, was not translated as a rejection to austerity policies of the near past by the government of Syriza considering that a few months later a third set of measures was signed with Greece's creditors announcing further cuts and tax increases. Syriza's response to accusations that they wanted the party to continue an unsocial and undemocratic policy, was that the government managed to achieve the best possible deal for Greece given the very harsh conditions under which they came to an agreement. Reading the current pathological conjunction, what Greece is experiencing today is a transitional period in its political sphere which permeates something different and which at the same time is not easy to define. 40 years after the Colonels' regime, Greece is going through a transition that will mark its history, where politics are polarised, more extreme and fragmented. While Greece's contemporary political arena is not threatened by a military regime, the quality of democratic practice and polity is highly affected by extremism and populism. Democracy and its practice through a politics of uncertainty still remains a focus of debate, as answers are sought to improve its quality fundamentally. Despite the emergence of new political parties, new coalitions and new politicians on the political arena the anti-social one-dimensional approach to austerity perpetuates the politics of uncertainty and precarity and produces short-term politicians having no clear plan, ideology of political strategy. This is also a wider European phenomenon of polarised politics adding to the wider political confusion with democracy still remaining a contested subject.

Drawing upon the rather pathological political landscape not only in Greece, but also in other countries around the globe where we witnessed a series of shattering events in recent years, one thing is clear: that the primary task of the hegemonic order was to neutralize the true social and political dimension of these events. The media killed the radical emancipatory potential of these actions obfuscating their real effects. This is the task of the hegemonic ideology. Echoing the rise of these emancipatory movements, one has to assess the phenomenon of assembling in public spaces, its power to challenge existing power relations and, indeed, its performative effects by relating it to the conversation of contemporary

capitalism. So how can we make the dynamics of social struggle work? Or else, how can we make democracy work? The key problem for Žižek is how to pass from assembling emancipatory protests to the imposition of a new power.[39] This is, of course, not to limit the subject's freedom, but simultaneously to open up a space where freedom would allow a set of creative possibilities to unfold tracing the limits of praxis that are also the limits of thought and imaginary significations.

In the Greek case it was assumed that the programme would be effective and that the country's economy would stabilize and regain market confidence. But years after signing the 'memorandum' the Greek economy further sank. This form of capitalism which has dominated for the past two decades is the most aggressive one than mankind has ever faced. The lesson of the Greek crisis is that the hegemony of the capital is seemingly our ultimate reality. Everyone knew that the 'rescue package' for Greece would not work for the simple reason that the people could not pay back the debt. Nonetheless, new 'rescue packages' were imposed over and over again. The first scenario wanted to discipline the 'naughty child' for not having behaved properly, for being lazy, irresponsible and for dodging taxes. When the crisis revealed its devastating economic and social effects, when unemployment jumped to 27%, youth unemployment went up to 60%,[40] more than three million people were on or below the poverty line and suicide seemed to be the ultimate solution for many, then a different vocabulary was introduced. Greece was then presented as humanitarian victim in urgent need of help. The direct opposite reaction from Greece was that its national sovereignty was being threatened by the neoliberal oligarchy of Europe. Greece never accepted the scenario of the victim, fighting back and recognising the European neoliberal establishment as the main enemy. All Greece needed was solidarity in this *agōn*. First, solidarity among its own people and second, solidarity from other European member states to fight against the depoliticised technocratic model that promotes bankers and 'experts' to obliterate democracy. Thus, the real alternative to this situation is the need for societies to create a different social and political project and defend it by all means. The active participation of the masses in political life is the only one thing that frightens the hegemonic power.

[39] Slavoj Žižek. *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously*. London: Allen Lane, 2017.
[40] Costas Douzinas. *Referendum and democracy: putting the demos on stage*. Open Democracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/referendum-and-democracy-putting-demos-on-stage/ (accessed 25 October 2018)

Mouffe claims that the absence of recognised alternatives to the dominant hegemonic order has prevented its opponents from finding legitimate forms of expression.[41] In like manner, among those who have severely criticized the model of our institutional democracy, Badiou, has argued that we have never seen a complete change of society that resulted from elections.[42] Elections are merely reduced to a basic agreement between two sides concerning the organisation of the society. In other words, elections are but a façade for preserving the dominant ideology because they do not offer a true choice. In most cases, the choice is between centre-left and centre-right parties, whose political programs are hardly distinguishable. I cannot disagree with such a claim; more so, I cannot disagree because what I argue for in this project is a model of democracy that is direct and gives people the autonomy to make their own decisions. However, I want to consider for a moment the conditions under which Syriza emerged. Things in Greece took a decisive turn in the summer of 2012, when after the national election, Syriza's publicity led many to believe that it would take power. At that moment, the party, under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras, made a series of decisions concerning the party line and also the type of organisation they needed. In this respect, they opted for the transformation of Syriza from a coalition of disparate organisations and social movements into a unified and centralized party. The election result of June 2012 featured New Democracy as the largest party with 30% of the votes and Syriza as the second party with 27% of the votes. For the first time in the recent history of Greece, the elections offered a real choice: between the established order of New Democracy and Pasok on the one side and Syriza on the other. Within this political climate, Syriza's popularity was a real fact which led the party to claim victory in the following national election. Furthermore, the possibility of Syriza's victory had spread fear in the markets around the world because it proclaimed it would reverse European policies. At the same time, Syriza became the ultimate hope for the Greek people, who gave the party a clear mandate to put an end to austerity. In Gramscian terms, this moment of real choice is the 'crisis of hegemony' that throws the establishment into panic. The revolutionary process for Gramsci must evolve from its rhizomatic and liminal stage. The moment when the worker, Gramsci tells us, has recognised that the proprietor's power is unlimited and has control over his life and death, in that very moment we see forms of independent and autonomous organisations emerge and nurture the conviction that the worker is nothing but intends to become all. In that very moment when the

[41] Chantal Mouffe. *Democratic Politics and Conflict: An Agonistic Approach.* Política Común. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/pc/12322227.0009.011?view=text;rgn=main (Accessed 1 November 2018).
[42] Alain Badiou. *The alleged power of capitalism … today is merely a reflection of the weakness of its opponent*. Left East. http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/alain-badiou-of-its-opponent/ (Accessed 1 November 2018).

Greek people consciously recognised that their proprietor's power (Europe's liberal oligarchy) was threatening their sovereignty, they hoped that Syriza would lead the revolution. And then came the referendum with the resounding 'No' to the bailout terms. 'Democracy cannot be blackmailed. However, I am fully aware that the mandate here is not one to break with Europe, but a mandate to strengthen our negotiation position to seek a viable solution', announced Tsipras soon after the result.

When such moments of 'crisis' violate the hegemonic order, terrible forces are unleashed and ideological mechanisms have their heyday. The fear that the Syriza victory had spread in the international markets had to be eliminated by the exact same way, by reflecting the fright back on those who brought Syriza to power. The contradiction, however, between Syriza's vision for radical social reform and the politics it ultimately practiced has led to a number of paradoxes that are hardly justifiable. After the referendum, Tsipras went back to Brussels to negotiate with the country's creditors. Greece was brutally blackmailed into submission. The negotiations resulted in Syriza's alignment with the rules that Brussels had set: tight discipline, increased taxation, no deficit. Namely, a clear continuation of the neoliberal agenda. The tragic fact to admit about the Greek case is that the moment the choice appeared as a choice between Grexit or submission to Brussels, the battle was already lost. So, what was the Syriza government fighting for? The moderate social democratic politics that Syriza practiced for a greater debt relief is only one side of the coin. The lesson of the Greek crisis is that the battle was given in order to reveal the real face of the neoliberal dogma. The battle was given for the awakening of the people from their inertia. Everything that happened in post 2008 Greece, happened as if nothing could stop the utter domination of neoliberal hegemony. For what is striking, is the manifest impotence of radical movements to compel even the slightest retreat of capitalism. Today we are under the pressure of what Badiou calls 'enemy propaganda'. Enemy propaganda targets something of which it is not itself aware; not its actual counter forces (that are in fact its political opponents), but the *possibility* of the situation (the revolutionary emancipatory potential). In other words, enemy propaganda is trying to appease rage, indignation, disappointment and manage hope. Beyond expectations, Syriza's moderate politics became a magic tool in the hands of enemy propaganda. The conviction that the world we live in may not be the best of all possible worlds, but is the least bad one, suppressed any kind of revolutionary project. The *enemy* orchestrated the decline of the enthusiasm the Greek referendum had once sparked.

So 'is the only choice we have between the nostalgic-narcissistic remembrance of sublime moments of enthusiasm and the cynical-realist explanation of why these attempts to change the situation inevitably had to fail?'[43], asks Žižek in his *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*. It is, nonetheless, not enough to say that Syriza gave a battle to test the limits of the enemy, but now it's over. The battle has actually just begun. Instead of swaying between the contradictions of Syriza policy and the inability of the Left to propose a viable alternative or to offer a vision of life after capitalism, one should rather focus on what the enemy is doing, as Žižek suggests. 'The "contradictions" of Syriza are a mirror image of the "contradictions" of an EU establishment that is gradually undermining the very foundations of a united Europe. In the guise of Syriza "contradictions", the EU establishment is merely hearing its own message echoed in its true form.'[44] I would go further to argue that the moderate politics of the Syriza government (although not intentionally) ultimately served the purpose of the enemy. After the 2015 election Syriza toned down some of its more radical rhetoric and, indeed, tried to promote itself as a more moderate pro-EU party, albeit with an alternative political and social vision. Despite its later transformation that had brought it closer to the EU, Syriza proclaimed to be a party that evangelised a radical, anti-austerity agenda for both Greece and Europe. The announcement of Tsipras following the election results left no room for misunderstandings: 'The verdict of the Greek people ends, beyond any doubt, the vicious circle of austerity in our country. The verdict of the Greek people … annuls … in an indisputable fashion the bailout agreements of austerity and disaster. The verdict of the Greek people renders the troika a thing of the past for our common European framework.' Syriza's rise to power, representing a plethora of left-wing ideological orientations (including anarcho-communists, eurocommunists Trotskyists, former pro-Soviet communists, and social democrats), became for many a symbol of the fight over the present tendency of contemporary capitalism to suspend democracy. Nonetheless, Syriza's politics functioned as an alternative to calm public anger and stifle any attempt for socio-political change in Greece.

> What is so shocking about the Syriza government is precisely the pragmatic modesty of its policy… if one looks closely at the proposals offered by Varoufakis, one cannot help noticing that they consist of measures which, forty years ago, were part of the standard moderate social-democratic agenda… it is a sad sign of our times that today you have to belong to a radical Left to advocate these same measures – a sign of dark times but also a chance for the left to occupy the space that, decades ago, was that of the moderate Left centre,

[43] Slavoj Žižek. *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*. London and New York: Verso, 2012, p.127.
[44] Slavoj Žižek. *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously.* London: Allen Lane, 2017.

writes Žižek.[45] Evaluating the post 2015 political climate in Greece, one cannot help observing that Syriza's politics functioned more like a delaying tactic rather than the bearer of a radical and genuine political alternative. However, what has been happening in Greece is of major concern for everyone because it is the future of Europe that is at stake. It is also the main focus of this research to reflect on the difficulties posed and the great lesson of the times rather than proposing a 'solution' that would prevent the utter domination of capitalism. In my view, the root cause of this impotence is not, at bottom, the failure of the social imaginary to call upon a new meaning or the people's inertia. Greece's history of resistance to successive oppressions and occupations has always been part of the social imaginary and the communist movement has had its own powerful significations. Nevertheless, such attempts of popular protest and resistance in recent years have shown that no new thinking of politics has emerged. Although protest movements claimed the emergence of a new vocabulary through non-representational forms, their failure lies precisely in the fact that as they currently stand, they are largely inoperative. In truth, after the movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Europe has inherited a long counterrevolutionary period that has destroyed at the very least the confidence and conviction that we possess the power to create new meanings and new vocabularies. It is for this reason that I want to explore what art and theatre can offer societies. It is for this reason that I ask if artistic practices and artistic activism can still play a critical role in society. What is needed nowadays is widening the field of artistic creation and artistic intervention. This can be achieved by intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces. Under the critical conditions of the neoliberal dogma, art's objective should be to undermine the conditions necessary for capitalism's reproduction because art can offer societies a chance to collectively reflect on the imaginary meanings it depends upon. And, indeed, art has the power to invent a whole new world. For Mouffe, art's contribution to the struggle against capitalism requires a proper understanding of democratic politics that can only be achieved by acknowledging the political in its antagonistic dimension.[46] The counterrevolutionary period that we have inherited has also posed another problem: the difficulty of envisaging the challenges facing our societies in a *political* way. This incapacity to *think* politically is for Mouffe due to the uncontested hegemony of the neoliberal dogma. However, contrary to what neoliberal ideologists claim, political questions should not be

[45] Ibid.
[46] Chantal Mouffe. *Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces.* Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods. http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html (Accessed 26 October 2018).

reduced to technical issues to be solved by experts. Political questions involve critical interventions and require us to make decisions between genuine alternatives.

What kind of link can we establish between this conception of the political and the field of artistic practice? In this research the relation of art and politics is not seen in terms of two separately constituted fields, namely, art versus politics. There is an aesthetic or performative dimension in the political and there is also a pollical dimension in art. To this extent, artistic practices acquire a crucial role in society because they contribute to the creation of a given symbolic order or even to its challenging and this is where the political dimension lies. That being said, the real focus should lie on possible forms of critical art interventions, and different ways in which artistic practices can challenge the dominant hegemony. Thus, the link to be made is not one between art and politics but rather how can these two become philosophy.

ART AND POLITICS: DOES THEATRE PHILOSOSPHIZE?

I began this chapter searching for a counterpoint between the notion of democracy and its intersection with art, theatre and performance. I will conclude with the idea that art, theatre and performance stand at the interface between the creative and the political. I have previously stated that what concerns this research mostly are the performances of resistance and how they become manifest in artistic praxis in the time of neoliberal capitalism. As I discussed so far in this chapter, the social and economic projects of neoliberalism demanded urgent attention across the disciplines practicing unjust policies that show all kind of actors: states, governments, citizens, theatres, artists, juggling the practices of a free-market ideology and precariousness, including austerity and structural adjustment programmes. Today, worlds are forged in new social spaces defined by economic and political instability and ideological variability. In this context, the arts continue to negotiate a place for their work, theorizing struggles to redefine the relationship between social responsibility and artistic praxis, citizenship and capitalism. David Harvey suggests that the more neoliberalism is recognised as a failed utopian project, the more mass movements will demand social and political justice, fare trade and economic security. Thus, what I want to examine here is how theatre and

performance negotiate the many *violences* of neoliberal formations. Much work that has already preceded in the field of theatre and performance studies has made familiar the idea of sitting in the theatre space and thinking about community; thinking about the relationship of our attendance at the theatre and our engagement and active participation in the social and political dimension of community. In this context, I want to examine whether the work of theatre and performance endeavours to answer to reality or simply repeat and reproduce it. Can the relational experience in the practice of theatre offer the potential to think of a common myth? Or else, can theatre *think*, and more, can theatre itself philosophize?

One of the greatest things art and theatre can perform for the people is their function as instruments of authentic democracy. Democracy requires participation by the political body and in the Athenian regime laws were established in order to facilitate such political participation in the public sphere, and which Agamben would render into the state of *bios*. Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, as Maurya Wickstrom argues in the *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism: Thinking the Political Anew*, is a critique of democracy as a biopolitical power from its founding moments and his major contribution is to show that the very beginning of modern sovereignty and democracy is 'the moment when what has been excluded from politics (zoe) is included by the sovereign. At that moment *zoe*, the biological body, life, becomes the object of power. *Zoe* which has been denied politics, becomes politicised by virtue of being ruled and managed'.[47] This is what Agamben calls biopower; the funding moment of modern democracy and sovereignty is also the very beginning of biopolitical power. Hence, in biopolitics *zoe* and *bios* exist in an indeterminate relation to one another differing from that of classical politics.[48] Castoriadis perceives the concept of *bios* as the course of a good life rendered in the public sphere of which theatre is a part. The voices of those who are excluded from political life and public sphere have to be heard and so have the values of those who are included to be scrutinized, challenging constantly the very idea of democracy itself. Democracy also implies that the will of the majority prevails. This will, according to Castoriadis, is in its essence defined by imaginary creation. In this context 'imaginary' signifies the creation of new forms, which is not determined but rather determining. 'Each society creates its own forms and these forms in turn bring into being a world in which this society sees itself and gives itself a place', writes writer and director John

[47] Maurya Wickstrom. *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism: Thinking the Political Anew*. Series edited by Janelle Reinelt and Brian Singleton. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2012, p.26.
[48] Giorgio Agamben. Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life. California: Stanford University Press. 1998.

McGarth quoting Castoriadis in *Theatre and Democracy*.[49] The role of art and theatre is therefore vital in the process of socialisation and participation in the public sphere. Theatre dedicated itself to critically challenge its society's foundations and institutions would hold a much more significant role in the creation of both philosophical and democratic values. Philosophical interrogation and theatrical questioning should constantly take place, and the same applies to democracy. McGarth in the same article argues that there is a need for a sharp theatre to scrutinize our values, to redefine freedom, to criticize without fear and to contest the borders of democracy, of which he writes:

> In its genuine signification, democracy consists in this, viz., that society does not halt before a conception, given once and for all, of what is just, equal, or free, but rather institutes itself in such a way that the question of freedom, of justice, of equity, and of equality might always be posed anew within the framework of the 'normal' functioning of society.[50]

One might argue that theatre exists in the realm of art whereas democracy functions in the realm of politics. I do, however, support the idea that theatre and all art stand at the interface between the creative and the political calling together audiences of citizens in order to envisage their society. Furthermore, theatre can constantly renew itself challenging the very idea of its own existence and contribution only if it is part of the society it lives in. That is why theatre must reflect the core situation and central realities of its time, using a language of *truth* whether social, moral or political.

The political arena and the alarming Greek social reality have alerted the majority of intellectuals, scholars, artists, and actors who have been the main representatives expressing a feeling of social dissatisfaction and precarity. There were also some individual protests like the one of the poet Nanos Valaoritis who wrote a protest letter directly to the former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras when the government under the leadership of New Democracy decided to shut down the National Book Centre of Greece (EKEVI) in 2013 which had been in operation for 19 years. EKEVI was set up in 1994 when composer Thanos Mikroutsikos became Culture Minister aiming to help authors and publishers and promote Greek publications abroad. On another note, the mayor of Athens threatened eighty one small theatres and experimental stages in Athens with closure in 2014 based on a 1937 law according to which these stages are considered dangerous as they do not fulfil health and safety requirements. This decision triggered a strong reaction in the entire artistic community.

[49] John McGrath. *Theatre and Democracy, New Theatre Quarterly*, Volume 18, Issue 70, 2002. p. 133-139.
[50] Ibid.

The temporary decision of the government to give an extension of the deadline for obtaining the required licences needed in order not close down the theatres seemed to provide a temporary solution.

Theatre has always had its significant position in the Greek society. Art is about producing possibilities, and as Badiou argues in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* 'art accomplishes what philosophy itself can only point toward' and he continues to say that 'it is art itself that educates, because it teaches of the power of infinity held within the tormented cohesion of a form. Art delivers us from the subjective barrenness of the concept. Art is the absolute as subject'.[51] Artistic truth is different from other sorts of truths, such as political or scientific. Artistic truth is concerned with the perceptible. So the question of art is concerned with the creation of a new perceptible relation with the world. That is to say, without art, without creation, this relation would not be possible. The aim of all art and theatre is, therefore, to determine and clarify our position and orientate us in history and the values of life. Theatre for Badiou, is:

> an assemblage of extremely disparate components, both material and ideal, whose only existence lies in the performance, in the act theatrical representation... the assemblage of components directly produces ideas. These ideas are theatre ideas. This means they cannot be produced in any other place or by any other means. The idea arises in and by performance, through the art of theatrical representation.[52]

In relation to this, the audience and the space must be considered as parts of what completes the theatre idea. The theatrical landscape in Greece has changed in recent years. New groups, collectives, playwrights, actors, stand-up comedians have emerged. Shows are being performed in non-conventional theatrical spaces, such as bars, museums, warehouses, alternative theatrical stages, underground spaces and streets. Abandoned spaces, buildings, and old theatres are being reactivated. Despite a shoestring budget in most productions, artists still insist on creating this idea that makes theatre happen. Blitz Theatre Group was formed in October 2004, in Athens, by Aggeliki Papoulia, Christos Passalis and Giorgos Valais. The group's basic principles are as follows:

> Theatre is a field where people meet each other and exchange ideas in the most essential way, not a field for virtuosity and ready-made truths. There is a need for answers to what society asks from art today and what theatrical structures stand

[51] Alain Badiou. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. *Stanford*, California: Stanford University Press, 2005.
[52] Ibid.

> for in the dawn of the 21th century. All members are equal throughout conception, writing, direction and dramaturgy process, everything is under doubt, nothing must be taken for granted, neither in theatre nor in life.[53]

Last time the Blitz Collective received funding was in 2009. Since then, they have continued creating new work without any grants. Financing comes from the box office and other jobs like film shoots. Furthermore, Greece was the guest country of the Heidelberger theatre festival in Germany in 2013. Among other aspects, the festival questioned the impact of the European financial crisis on Greek society and how has the crisis affected the Greek theatrical scene. Under what circumstances are theatrical plays produced nowadays in Greece and what themes are being raised? Upcoming playwrights from Greece participated in the festival such as Anestis Azas, Lena Kitsopoulou, and Yannis Mavritsakis. As the economic crisis continues to threaten Greece's economy but also its cultural production, theatre producers in Athens return to old values in order to create new, experimental theatre. A collective theatre group led by people with equal powers was something of a small revolution eight years ago in Athens. Theatre has brought together people from all backgrounds. There offers a new feeling of solidarity. The new movement in theatre from which Mavili Collective emerged and the Blitz Theatre group participated as part of Mavili network, highlighted the fact that experimental theatre had until then little room in Greek society. The crisis has given fresh impetus to the cultural scene of Athens promoting values such as solidarity and participation taking up a critical position on social and political matters. In all areas concerned with the functioning of democratic procedures theatre has its important role to play in giving voice to the excluded and to demand the fundamental right to speak publicly, in criticizing without fear, in questioning the role of political authorities and challenging the state of situation, in questioning the boarders of freedom, in challenging the values within the borders of *demos* and in contesting these borders, in demanding equality and equality of opportunity, in creating democratic values and searching philosophical meanings, in creating Truth procedures and new possibilities. It is all art and theatre that protect the pillars of democratic life and governance by challenging the very essence of democracy itself.

In concluding, I want to suggest that the way of how art, theatre and performance speak, or better *show* and respond to the reality of their time, is an alternative to the problem of application: to treat the work of art and theatre as capable of doing philosophical work, albeit

[53] Blitz theatre group (see original website http://www.theblitz.gr/)

in a different way of conventional philosophy. In this context, art and theatre shall not be taken to simply reflect philosophical themes, but rather engage in philosophizing. I perceive this as a way that enriches our concept of philosophy. It is also a suggestion that the philosophical value of theatre and performance might lie precisely in its *resistance* to knowledge, because it is when we do not understand, when we doubt and have to leave behind our certainties that we gain greater insights. This idea of *challenge* or *non-knowledge* is philosophically very significant in that it opens up a new world of ideas. While acknowledging that there may be critics who will argue that the philosophical value of theatre and performance is metaphorical because they cannot make logical assumptions, I consider such critiques too narrow regarding what counts as philosophy. We cannot deny the fact that Western philosophy since Socrates has revolved around the examination of concepts such as, for instance, ethics, knowledge, justice and so on, which is what defines a philosophical activity as opposed to the empirical experience that theatre and performance offer. But is philosophy not –apart from being a theoretical activity– also about performing this theoretical activity? When Plato, after burning his play on the steps of the Dionysius Theatre of Athens, started to write again, he did so with a form of a type of drama: the Socratic dialogue. These dialogues were rich scenarios with attention to setting, character and plot, combining characters and ideas, actions and arguments. Plato developed in those dialogues the most unusual form of philosophical drama. Diogenes Laertius' biography portrays Plato as someone fully involved in the theatre of Athens and similarly, Socrates, is not thought of having convinced Plato to give up theatre entirely. Indeed, Socrates himself was often present in theatrical events. One anecdote wants him standing up in the theatre space during Aristophanes' *Clouds*, so that the audience could compare the real Socrates with the comic portrayal of him.[54] Plato, however, abandoned drama but he created a new philosophical drama with Socrates being the main character. It is true that Plato was critical of the entire theatre system of Athens in the same way he did not perceive poets as educators. However, Puchner argues, his critique 'must be understood not as that of an outsider but as that of a rival; he was not an enemy of theatre but a radical reformer… he sought to create an alternative form of drama'.[55] In a similar way to the new philosophical drama of Plato, I argue that theatre and performance today can disclose new ways of thinking and philosophizing in their own forms and this becomes evident through the proliferation of the

[54] Diogenes Laertius. *The Complete works of Diogenes Laertius*. East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2015.
[55] Martin Puchner. *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010, p. 5.

performances of resistance that I discuss in this research, by performing the power of theatre to generate new thinking in social and political action. Likewise, theatre's philosophical perspective can be evidenced through the extent to which it provokes new collective identities and forms of belonging.

CHAPTER 3

Performing Athens:
Collective (Im) Possibilities of the Polis

Since human nature is the true community of men,
those who produce thereby affirm their nature,
human community, and social being which, rather than an abstract,
general power in opposition to the isolated individual,
is the being of each individual, his own activity,
his own life, his own joy, his own richness.
To say that a man is alienated from himself is to say that
the society of this alienated man is the caricature of his real community.

Karl Marx

So far, I have examined the 'social turn' in art and performance practice and explored the concept of 'social praxis' in relation to aesthetic, social and political values. I have also examined the relationship between artistic praxis and the political and have argued for a reconciliation of both areas, as they are not considered as separately constituted fields, but rather as interdependent in the sense that the political embodies also aesthetic values and vice versa. Furthermore, I have argued for the need to find encounters not between art and politics but rather between the two with philosophy. In doing so, my aim is to reimagine a philosophy of praxis through artistic intervention and social and political responsibility that leads to individual and social autonomy. In the present chapter I will consider the notions of community and representation as articulated by Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophical ideas on

myth, community and participation examining them through three theatrical productions performed in Athens. My aim here is to explore the notions of participation and representation as experienced through a shared grammar of collective praxis and open up the discussion for the following chapter which explores the two main cases studies of this research, Embros theatre and Green Park, and articulate the antithesis in the dialectic of self-representation. Namely, while the productions discussed in the present chapter by Rimini Protokoll, Dries Verhoeven and Casa Branka deploy the representational architecture of theatre, the collectives involved in Embros theatre and Green Park reject it. While both the productions discussed here and the case studies in the following chapter serve as artistic responses to the financial crisis, I am interested in examining the contribution each of the cases makes to the broader discussion about theatre, community and representation.

The site of community, or what Jean Luc Nancy calls the 'political space', has generated plenty of discussions and debates in recent years. In his *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy, stresses that communism and socialism of most types, are responsible for a significant part of the set of hopes, prospects and expectations that belong to the modern and contemporary world, and from which there is no turning back. They have marked the evolution of human history and have created the hope of a rupture and revolution which is essentially associated with the idea of a re-creation of the world, of a world open to rethink, reconsider and reconstruct; of a world open to new potentialities; of a world able to create new meanings. That is to say, Nancy argues, it is not enough to stigmatize particular forms of socialisms, such as 'national socialisms', which represented under the sign of 'human rights', are accountable for crimes, errors and lies. Manifested under the assured discourse of 'human rights', 'freedom' or even 'democracy' political condemnation is always exposed to the risk of using its indisputable legitimacy to mask another legitimacy, that of 'an irreducible demand that we be capable of saying "we," that we be capable of saying we to ourselves (saying it about ourselves to one another), beginning from the point where no leader or God can say it for us',[1] writes Nancy. And he continues:

> not being able to say "we" is what plunges every "I," whether individual or collective, into the insanity where he cannot say "I" either. To want to say "we" is

[1] Jean-Luc Nancy. *Being Singular Plural*. Translated by Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 41.

> not at all sentimental, not at all familial or "communitarian." It is existence reclaiming its due or its condition: coexistence.[2]

This demand for Nancy has the terrible power to unleash, resist, challenge and overthrow dominant systems of power. The question that arises is whether this demand implies directly the idea of democracy. The socialist 'hope' was not a question of the prevalence of the rule of these people upon the rule of those people, of substituting the domination of the masses for that of their rulers; it was a question of prevalence of a shared sovereignty, at once a sovereignty of everyone and of each one. It was not a sovereignty associated with the exercise of power, but a sovereignty understood, in Nancy's words, as a '*praxis* of meaning'.[3] This meaning can only be understood as a collective 'we'. Meaning is shared. Freedom and community are concepts that play a central role in all discourses concerned with social co-existence and politics. They have, however, become blurred and abstract concepts that require be redefined and rethought. Nancy in his work, very much influenced among others by Jacques Derrida, offers a platform which serves as a demand to rethink the question of the political and not rest on the rhetoric of current democracy. In his work *The Truth of Democracy*, Nancy, proposes to rethink democracy not just as one political regime, but as one that suggests and leaves open the very experience of co-existence, of being in common and the ideas that are commonly associated with this experience, freedom, sovereignty and equality among others. Nancy here argues that democracy should build its foundations on a notion of freedom that is not based upon the mastery and sovereignty of an autonomous subject but upon an exposure to this excess of man himself. The very idea of democracy, thus, lies in what Nancy characterizes as a "communism", or being in common in a world that one is exposed to the other through shared experiences. Democracy must then be thought as the incommensurable sharing of human existence that makes the political happen but should in no way be reduced to the political itself.[4] Democracy, Nancy argues, that must 'in some way, be "communist", for otherwise it would be but the management of necessities and expediencies, lacking in desire, that is, in spirit, in breath, in sense.'[5] As such democracy is, therefore, first of all, a metaphysics before being a political and social form or regime. Democracy is nothing less than 'the breath of man, nor the man of a humanism measured against the height of man as he is given -for where would one find this given? under what

[2] Ibid, p. 42.
[3] Ibid, p. 42.
[4] Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Truth of Democracy*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
[5] Ibid., p. 15.

conditions? what status would it have? - but man who infinitely transcends man'.[6] This signifies for Nancy that democracy is, first of all, an ontological fact and such questions require an ontological approach. It is a determination of democracy as the regime of sense, and as such, it is only on condition to present itself as a politics that its metaphysical substance obtains. The reason that Nancy calls democracy a communism is because it is an exigency which never presents itself as such. It rather operates in the space of the common through finite acts that affirm we are in common.

In the previous chapter, I referred thoroughly to the idea of democracy and its values. Focusing mainly on the Greek case, chapter 2 explored the factors that led to Greece's financial, social and political decline challenging the practice of democracy as such. Providing a historical overview of the political landscape, chapter 2 was also concerned with the intersection between art and the political. My intention here, however, is to give an account of democracy's association with the essential practice of theatre, namely performance. Larry Diamond, a scholar in the field of democracy studies conceives democracy as the institutionalization of freedom with specific characteristics.

> We can think of democracy as a system of government with four key elements: 1) A political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections. 2) The active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life. 3) Protection of the human rights of all citizens. 4) A rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.[7]

According to Diamond, the first key element refers to the power of the people to elect their own leaders and representatives. Because in a democracy the people are the highest form of authority. Leaders of government only hold power given to them temporarily by the people and are exposed to open criticism of the conduct of democratic processes. The second element discusses the role of citizens and their participation in public life. Citizens must become informed about issues of public concern and participate actively in the decision-making process whether this involves their vote for a political party or candidate or their active membership in non-governmental organizations such as those of workers, doctors, teachers, farmers, activists, women and so on. This is the so-called civil society and participation in these organizations should be voluntary; no one can be forced to join against their own will. However, active participation in these organizations and in public affairs is

[6] Ibid., p. 15.
[7] Larry Diamond, *What is democracy, Lecture given at Hilla University for Humanistic studies*, Iraq 2004. https://web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhaIsDemocracy012004.htm

what makes democracy stronger because democracy depends on citizens' peaceful, respectful and tolerant forms of participation. The third element is concerned with the citizens' rights, which are protected by international laws. Citizens are free to associate with other people and interact with other groups and cultures. Mass media should be characterized by freedom and pluralism so as all voices are heard. Most importantly citizens have the right to protest freely against government decisions and express their dissatisfaction. However, they should never forget that these rights must be exercised peacefully with mutual respect for the rights of others and for the law. Finally, the fourth element makes clear the fact that democracy is a system of governance by laws and not by individuals. These laws protect the citizens and their rights and maintain order in society. Furthermore, the laws apply equally to all citizens and there should be no discrimination against any groups. The law is above all citizens and is what sets limits on the power of leaders and governments. No government may exceed these limits and those who possess power should not use it to enrich their position or interests.[8]

For all the above, if democracy is to work should rely on respect from both sides, namely the citizens and governments. Citizens must participate and observe the procedures of democratic conduct and question or challenge the actions of their leaders. Governments on the other hand, must exercise power with respect for the laws and rights of citizens because if this power is abused against certain groups then they may turn against democracy. Democracy also requires, as Diamond continues his argument, some kind of negotiation and compromise. Those willing to participate in its practice should understand that not everyone can always achieve what they want and should consider different angles of view and approaches on certain issues.

To return to the main question that also concerns this research, is there any sort of political and democratic value that may be associated with performance as theatrical form that incorporates the very essence of participation and representation? My argumentation relies on the fact that in discourses about democracy and issues that are concerned with its essential elements, namely participation and representation, theatre and performance acquire a central position in the discussion because they create a bond that strengthens this relationship; because it is exactly participation and representation that make theatre happen. When we talk for example about the Athenian conception of democracy and claim that it acquired a vital role to direct and open speech, then we could also argue that the theatre was the privileged

[8] Larry Diamond, *What is democracy*, Lecture given at Hilla University for Humanistic studies, Iraq, 2004. https://web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhaIsDemocracy012004.htm

locus of such performance. Theatre's democratic character in Athens lies in the act of participating in a philosophy and culture of democratic discourse and make heard the voices of those who had no place in the political life of the polis: slaves, women and foreigners. In order to provide an interface between theatre and democracy I would like to consider Cornelius Castoriadis, for whom this interface lies in the 'tragic' conception of democracy.

Let us first examine some of the key concepts of the Athenian democracy as created by its architects, Solon and Cleisthenes. An essential element in the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes were the concepts of *isegoria*, (*isos*=equal and *agorevo*=speak, therefore the equality of freedom of speech), which referred to every male citizen of the polis who was given equal rights to address the assembly of Athens and speak on the public affairs than concern the polis, and, *isonomia* (*isos*=equal and *nomos*=law, therefore equality of justice). Concepts such as *dike* (behaving in accordance with nature) and *dikaiosyni* (justice), were closely related to *isonomia*. When Aristotle signals the distinction between men and animals in his Politics he states that 'speech serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful and hence also the just and unjust. For it is peculiar to man as compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things of this sort; and partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city.'[9] And he goes on to say 'but justice is the bond of men in states, for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society'[10] signifying that justice is the ordering of society as a whole. Close to these two concepts lies *isotimia* (*isos*=equal and *timi*=honour), meaning literally 'of equal honour', signifying that all citizens have equal political rights and responsibilities, and, *philotimia* (*philos*=the love of and *timi*=honour). The love of honour could for instance be appreciated in the pride of athletes when winning a contest. *Agon* was a central aspect of Greek culture covering all forms of competition. *Agon* could denote war, dispute, conflict or contest. Contest could take the form of political, philosophical or artistic and within such context drama acquired an essential part of public life. The love of honour, *philotimia*, led to the urge to compete for the good of the community and for the individual representing it.[11]

[9] Aristotle. *Politics*. Edited by Barnes, Jonathan. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 1253a8.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Victor Ehrenburg. *From Solon to Socrates: Greek History and Civilization During the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.*, Routledge, Oxfordshire, 2011.

Tragedy was largely created by Aeschylus and his characters. Victor Ehrenburg argues that they were representations of an Athenian tradition going back to Solon, rendering them at the same time citizens of their polis and creatures of their Gods. *Euthynai* (responsibility, accountability) was a quality attributed to those who held public office and the deepest antithesis, Ehrenburg argues, 'between Darius and Xerxes in the *Persians* is that of responsibility and egotism; the latter the Greeks called *hubris*, the overbearing attitude of man towards both the gods and his fellow men'.[12] The 'tragic' aspect of it comes when men question the divinely imposed order and just as much as an individual the whole society can commit *hubris*. 'The tragedy of individual *hubris* was most clearly exemplified in the sphere of political reality'[13], writes Ehrenburg. In a similar vein, Castoriadis perceives democracy as a 'tragic' regime, because it confronts the individuals with their own limits.

> There were in the ancient world no 'constitutions' in the proper sense. Once one exits from a sacred world, from the imaginary signification of a transcendent foundation for the law re God and an extra-social norm for social norms, the crucial problem of self-limitation arises. Democracy is quite evidently a regime that knows no external norms; it has to create its own norms, and it has to create them without being able to lean on another norm for support. In this sense, democracy is certainly a tragic regime, subject to hubris, as it was known and was seen in the second half of the fifth century bc at Athens; it had to confront the issue of its own self-limitation.[14]

It is from this point that Castoriadis raises the connection between democratic regime and theatre:

> Finally – and unfortunately I cannot dwell on this immense theme – there is tragedy. Although its many different significations can by no means be reduced simply to political aspect, tragedy also possessed a very clear political signification: the constant reminder of self-limitation. For tragedy was also and especially the exhibition of the effects of hubris, and the demonstration that contrary reasons can co-exist (this was one of the 'lessons' of the tragedy Antigone) and that it is not in obstinately persisting in one's own reasons (monos phronein) that it becomes possible to solve the grave problems that may be encountered in collective life (which has nothing to do with the watery consensus of contemporary times). Above all else, however, tragedy was democratic in this, that it was a constant reminder of mortality, that is, of the radical limitation of human beings. What is specific to hubris is that there are no marked boundaries;

[12] Ibid, p. 151.
[13] Ibid, p. 152.
[14] Cornelius Castoriadis. *World in Fragments: Writings of Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination*, ed. David Ames Curtis, 84-107. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p.92.

> no one knows at what moment hubris begins, yet there is a moment when one is in hubris and that is when the gods or things intervene to crush you.[15]

Democracy is also tragic because is bound to the many (im) possibilities, agonies and antagonisms that characterize the political itself. The tragic conception of *agon,* with all the possible meanings the term could acquire, lies at the very core of the political experience. This conception of *agon* as struggle, dispute, and conflict entails the difficulties societies encounter along the way when questioning or apposing dominant ideologies.

The question now is how are the origins and values of ancient Greek theatre echoed today? By inviting us to step outside ourselves, acting and thinking through different voices, theatre and performance making itself can make an essential contribution to the discussion about democracy. This process is a democratic one and can illuminate what we now call social gatherings, assemblies, symposia and community in light of a deeply political and social crisis. The specific phenomena at the occupied Embros theatre and Green Park that will be discussed in chapter 4 of the present research are also being considered from this perspective. Theatre and performance will serve as tools for a better understanding of these particular phenomena. It is no coincidence, as I elaborated above, that these two forms of participation and representation, theatre and democracy, flourished in Athens. But it is also no coincidence that these modes of participatory practices in theatre and performance today signal the demand for change in a world defined by uncertainty and instability. What made Greek theatre speak to the Athenians of their role as politically-minded beings, as citizens who share a place in the public sphere, where the gatherings would take place in order to collectively decide about the future of their polis? It makes me think that theatre can still reflect on the imaginary figures it depends upon and can speak to us through a performative scope of democratic practices. It is exactly this notion that Nancy speaks of in his *The Inoperative Community*, that myth is always the myth of a communion, which is the case in Rimini Protokoll's work that I discus below. Some will argue that democracy is under threat in contemporary times but I also want to think that what Cornelius Castoriadis calls 'social imaginary' will always bring to the societies their imaginary significations that carry the values, if any, that strengthen the social bond.

Speaking of contemporary performance, this chapter will precisely concern three non-Greek theatrical events performed in Athens in the years between 2010 and 2014 when the Greek

[15] Ibid, pp.92-93.

crisis reached its peak and several social, political and economic changes occurred in the country, as discussed previously. One might immediately wonder why the selection would include non-Greek cases rather than contemporary Greek productions that address the issues that concern Greek society. My focus on these particular cases arises not only out of a research interest in how non-Greeks perceive the issues related to the Greek social and political crisis and how they address those issues to a Greek audience that has suffered them, but also because the next chapter focuses entirely on two Greek case studies, Embros Theatre and Green Park in Athens, both of which are spaces under occupation for social, political, cultural and artistic purposes. Furthermore, these cases make use of participatory practices of contemporary performance exploring issues of community and collective belonging.

CHALLENGING CONVENTIONS OF THEATRICAL REPRESENTATION

The German based collective, Rimini Protokoll, has figured prominently in the contemporary debate of post-dramatic theatre. Their documentary practice which takes the form of a mode of theatre performance has incorporated in the discussion historical, mythical, and autobiographical elements of community theatre which they innovate as much as they trouble. This mode of theatre performance is characterized by a focus on presenting public understanding of contemporary society and individuals. Their interest in representing and putting living people on stage creates a feeling of empathy and interaction with social reality and a vivid representation of their stories. They accomplish this by staging the narratives, places and bodies of non-professional actors or else 'everyday experts' of a theatre of the real world, while simultaneously twisting that impression through explicit fictional elements and theatricality. Using public auditions, thorough research and conceptual processes, they give voice to 'experts' that have a story to tell. Rimini Protokoll's purpose is primarily 'to pry apart the sense of reality and present all its facets from unusual perspectives'[16] and the engagement with real people and phenomena that would rarely be seen within the sphere of professional theatre. As they claim, 'at the focus of their work is the continuous development of the tools of the theatre to allow for unusual perspectives on our reality'.[17] This translates to the integration of experts of the everyday, of people who do not usually perform their

[16] http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/about-sk (accessed 21/4/2017).
[17] http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/about (accessed 21/4/2017).

everyday activities on stage, challenging this way the conventional norms of theatrical praxis while simultaneously re-creating this bond with the very fundamental elements of the medium.

The experts are people who are perceived by those participating in the event as cultural strangers due to their political orientation, ethnic background, occupation, or social class. They are subjects, whose lives denote a constant move such as immigrant workers, track drivers, diplomats, call-centre employees or members of forcibly re-settled communities. In an interview in 2014, Daniel Wetzel, one of the funders of the collective, states that whenever he tries to explain to a taxi driver what they do, he always says the following simple thing 'I would rather work with you than with an actor, because I find much more interesting what you have to tell me from the actor that will enact your character. Another director would say for an actor that he finds him ideal for the role of a taxi driver. For me the ideal taxi driver is a true taxi driver'.[18] Being dynamic interlocutors, Rimini Protokoll's productions respond in intriguing ways to the current discussion of contemporary post-dramatic theatre and performance and to the often-troubling social international landscape negotiating intercultural encounters with their subjects. This said, their form of documentary performance aims at methods that have much in common with what could be called a socially engaged ethnography.

Making use of techniques from different art forms such as video installation, site specific installation or sculpture Rimini Protokoll want the spectator to experience the theatre event and fully engage with it. By incorporating new technologies into the medium, they aim at expanding the experience of this innovative theatrical language navigating through issues of political and social representation to a changing European setting plotting any kind of social, political or economic asymmetries. My goal here is to introduce Rimini Protokoll's work to the larger conversation that concerns also this research, which is the role of theatre as medium that gives voice to a society that claims its dynamic in a complex globalized political economic system. Their work offers the opportunity to think about the position of 'experts' and asks what theatre's relation to this position is. The production that will precisely concern this research is Rimini Protokoll's *Prometheus in Athens*, an adaptation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* performed in Athens in 2010. The piece asks questions about social identity, democracy and representation exploring the question of what do Athenians think of

[18] Daniel Wetzel in interview with Christos Paridis 'Situation Rooms', 24 April 2014, translated from the original Greek text, http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/text/situation-rooms (accessed 21/4/2017).

their city today? Prometheus, a rebellious Titan who defied Zeus and stole the fire from the Gods in order to help humankind, is re-enacted by one hundred and three performers who are Athenian citizens found according to two criteria: first, these one hundred and three Athenians represent their city according to statistic values and second, they empathize with particular aspects of the original tragedy. The performance draws parallels of every day contemporary life and Greek mythology, imagining Athens as a continuation of the half-mythical and half-historical city.

We are Athens.
We were selected because we represent the population statistically.
We are no actors.
We are one protagonist with 103 heads.
We are a choir that doesn't speak synchronously.
We are a choir that hasn't rehearsed a song
Our city is our stage.
Our living rooms are our dressing rooms.
We are looking at the city from 103 perspectives.[19]

With this preamble, the one-night only performance by Rimini Protokoll hosted at Herodion, the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, opened on the evening of 15 July 2010. The open-air amphitheatre of Herodes Atticus, located on the southwest slope of the Acropolis of Athens, only a few metres away from the Theatre of Dionysus (325 BC) offers, if not the original atmosphere where Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* would have been performed, yet a very close approximation of it, adding a feeling of participation in an authentic re-enactment. One hundred and three Athenian citizens present themselves on stage and talk to the audience. One by one they walk towards the audience saying their names, occupation, age and place of residence. Each of the participants is asked which aspect of and characters in the ancient tragedy *Prometheus Bound* they could relate to. Each performer then walks behind to stand in front of one of the hand-written banners with the name of the character they choose to represent: Prometheus, Hephaestus, Hermes, Io, Cratus, Bia, Oceanus or the Oceanids. The original core of the statistical chain was composed by ten 'experts'. Among them the immigrant activist from Bulgaria Kostadina Kouneva, secretary of the Greek Trade Union of Cleaners and Housekeepers, famous to the Greek people because of her story of when she was attacked with sulfuric acid on 22 December 2008 because she raised her voice against

[19] Marilena Zaroulia, and Philip Hager. *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance: Inside/Outside Europe.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 171.

the working conditions of cleaning laborers. Kouvena's story sparked protests all over the country and was described by media as one of the most severe attacks on a trade unionist in Greece numbering hundreds of people on her side. Kouneva chooses to identify with Prometheus in the performance because of her suffering. In *Reaching Athens Performing participation and community in Rimini Protokoll's Prometheus in Athens,* Margherita Laera, gives an account of her experience during the night of the performance. She reports that some time later she found out that Kouneva could not be physically present on stage due to her injuries as she was still under treatment. Kouneva's friend, Effi, had interpreted the role wearing a mask and being live on the phone with Kouneva throughout the performance. Kouneva's recorded introduction and a short monologue were played during the performance.[20]

Another participant, Giannis Mylonas, who lives in Athens and works as a prison guard, identifies with Cratus (*cratos* in Greek means state, authority) because he says that in Aeschylus' original play Cratus is the one who chained Prometheus to a rock for eternity together with Via (*via* in Greek means violence) and Hephaestus, the Greek God of blacksmiths, craftsmen, fire and volcanoes. Anita Mavromichali is a civil servant on international trade who works for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Greece. Mavromichali identifies with Hermes, the Greek God of commerce who in Greek mythology is described as quick and cunning, and moving freely between the mortal and divine worlds. Andreas Kourkoulas, architect, identifies with Oceanus, the Greek God of the sea, because he believes that conflicts should be resolved peacefully. When the introduction ends, Laera states 'I realize that the group of people identifying with Prometheus, all wearing at least one yellow piece of clothing, by far exceeds every other group'.[21] What drives the majority of contemporary Athenians to identify with Prometheus, the symbol of rebellion to authority and suffering for the common good, and to what extent have the dramatic events that had taken place in winter 2010 in Athens, only a few months earlier than Rimini Protokoll's performance, triggered a feeling of revolution that night? And mostly, to what extent is the great past still present in the current social and political contingencies of Greek history so as to convey a sense of identity that carries the great values and ideals of the past? Laera writes in her article on Rimini Protokoll's *Prometheus in Athens* 'although the performers have not

[20] Margherita Laera, *Reaching Athens Performing participation and community in Rimini Protokoll's Prometheus in Athens*, Performance Research, 16:4, 46-51, 2011, p.48.
[21] Margherita Laera, *Reaching Athens Performing participation and community in Rimini Protokoll's Prometheus in Athens*, Performance Research, 16:4, 46-51, 2011, p.48.

done much so far except simply being there on display, the audience gives them repeated rounds of applause. I am intrigued by this spontaneous demonstration of warmth'.[22] How does this performance infuse a sense of participation and community not only by the 'experts' as participants but also by a welcoming audience that applauses as a sign of recognition and empathy? 'Each one is embraced as a member of the Athenian community. I, too, feel part of something. I, too, applaud the chorus members, although I hardly understand what they are saying'[23], writes Laera. And she continues to say 'This is not my city, this is not my country, these are not my fellow citizens. Why does this performance affect me so deeply? I know nobody here, but I do feel some sense of kinship with the people on stage and their half-mythical, half-historical past'.[24] I wonder, however, what different meanings and readings might this sense of kinship acquire? Does it entail a power relation and a sense of nostalgia of a mythical past that the Greeks have lost? Does this empathy derive from the acknowledgement that Greeks speak as 'outsiders' in a 'game of dominance' played within the borders of their own community, namely Europe? And, thus, does the Herodion serve as a theatrical stage that gives voice to the 'excluded'? I will return to the complexities of the discussion around the myth of community below.

The performance's dramaturgy was further underpinned by Greek tragedy conventions such as the use of mask and chorus, the structure of episodes, and *ekkyklema*, a wheeled machine or platform rolled out through the stage and was used in Greek tragedies to bring into the sight of the audience scenes that normally took place in the interior, such as revealing a dead body, or it was also used in comedies to parody a tragic event. Likewise, the myth in the original text of Aeschylus further enhanced the performance's ideological extensions: the citizens' relationship to power and authority, the drive for resistance, human rights and social and political (in) justice, the meaning of democracy and social responsibility. The introductions of the first part are followed by eight scenes based on the original text by Aeschylus. In each of the scenes one of the 'experts' in the chorus interprets the themes raised by the original plot but adapting it to every day contemporary situations. The 'experts' then address their fellow participants and spectators asking questions about the myth of Prometheus, as for instance the concept of freedom, or the idea of one man sacrificing for the common good, or the idea of revolting against authority. There are two signs on the stage, one reads *'Ego'* (I do) and the other *'Ego ochi'* (I don't) and the performers answer the

[22] Ibid, p.47.
[23] Ibid., p.47.
[24] Ibid., p. 47.

questions by walking towards one of the two signs. The stage is thus divided in two halves. The next scene opens with Dionysis Savvopoulos' song *Demosthenous Lexis,* which talks about the experience of escaping prison during the years of the Greek military junta (1967–1974). The audience instinctively participates in the happening and sings along. Dionysis Savvopoulos is a well-known artist and politically active throughout his career as a singer and songwriter. He was imprisoned for his political views by the military junta of George Papadopoulos. The following scene finds architect Andreas Kourkoulas standing in front of the audience giving a speech about the links between architecture and democracy, claiming that the Odeon of Herodes Atticus is a space where democratic values that create a community are shared and convey a sense of identity and belonging to the citizens. Andreas Kourkoulas then addresses to the audience a series of questions concerned with the current political landscape of Greece such as 'who supports the idea that the current economic crisis in Greece is his own fault?' or 'who believes Greece should go bankrupt as a hero?' This set of questions is followed in the next scene by astrophysicist Thanasis Katsiyiannis who also addresses the audience wanting to find out if humanity has learned its lesson from Prometheus asking 'who has knowledge of building a house?' or 'who knows about medicine?' or 'who feels that is represented by us?' The performance closes with Vassilis Tsitsanis' (a leading Greek composer of his time) famous song *To minore tis avgis*. The song was composed during the German occupation in Greece (1941-1944) and finds the audience singing along about freedom. 'This is a reminder that many other people in the audience are enjoying this sense of sharing and belonging, however 'unreal' it may be', writes Laera.[25]

To go back to Jean Luc Nancy, his ideas on myth, community and participation seem mostly appropriate to comprise a theoretical ground for Rimini Protokoll's performance. Myth understood as foundational discourse, for Nancy, seems to occupy an essential part for community. It is thanks to the myth that people recognise each other as community adding a sense of belonging together. Nancy begins his essay *Myth Interrupted* with the well-known scene:

> There is a gathering, and someone is telling a story. We do not yet know whether these people gathered together form an assembly, if they are a horde or a tribe. But we can call them brothers and sisters because they are gathered together and because they are listening to the same story.

[25] Margherita Laera, *Reaching Athens Performing participation and community in Rimini Protokoll's Prometheus in Athens*, Performance Research, 16:4, 46-51, 2011, p.49.

> We do not yet know whether the one speaking is from among them or if he is an outsider. We say that he is one of them, but different from them because he has the gift, or simply the right –or else it is his duty– to tell the story.
> They were not assembled like this before the story; the recitation has gathered them together. Before, they were dispersed (at least this what they story tells us at times), shoulder to shoulder, working with and confronting one another without recognizing one another. But one day one of them stood still, or perhaps he turned up, as though returning from a long absence or a mysterious exile. He stopped at a particular place, to the side of but in view of the others, on a hillock or by a tree that had been struck by lightning, and he started the narrative that brought together the others.
> He recounts to them their history, or his own, a story that they all know, but that he alone has the gift, the right, or the duty to tell. It is the story of their origin, of where they come from or of how they come from the Origin itself – them, or their mates, or their names, or the authority figure among them. And so at the same time it is also the story of the beginning of the world, of the beginning of their assembling together, or of the beginning of the narrative itself […] In the speech of the narrator, their language for the first time serves no other purpose than that of presenting the narrative and of keeping it going. It is no longer the language of their exchanges, but of their reunion –the sacred language of a foundation and an oath.[26]

Myths, Nancy argues, have the metaphysical power to gather people into a community and create a feeling of solidarity by making them recognise each other as belonging together. Myth is the community's attempt of self-formation serving the very purpose of providing an explanation of the origins of everything that exists in the world. It is myth that gives meaning to everything. It is a speech that creates an image; the story of origin. In this sense myth is *logos* because it formulates the concepts and images that will then create the form of communication of the community. Myth is the name for the world (cosmos) constituting itself in *logos*, because myth is the story that provides reason and structure, which is *logos*, for the cosmos. There can therefore be no community outside myth. Nancy refers to the narrator's performance as metaphor which enables those mechanisms needed for community to exist. The recounting of myth allows the participants of *Prometheus in Athens* to create narratives of common belonging as members of a community. It is this performance that enables a community with its imaginary significations to emerge, a community that shares a sense of belonging manifesting itself through participatory mechanisms. 'This temporary community was evoked by the performance of its own myth of "origin": the birth of "democratic" Athens which allegedly created the West and its values, just a few metres away

[26] Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Inoperative Community*. Translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Mi-chael Holland, and Simona Sawhney. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pp.43-44.

from the stage 2,519 years ago'[27], writes Laera. The location itself evoked meanings of identification and belonging allowing the significance of the myth for contemporary Athenians to create a *logos* for democracy, social identity, freedom, and representation. The mechanisms employed by Rimini Protokoll to enhance participation, included the interactive relationship between the chorus and the audience by addressing them directly and featuring popular Greek songs, waking memories of identity and belonging in times of social and political precarity. The parallels drawn between the 'experts' and the Athenian citizens of the audience with Aeschylus' characters evoked a feeling of national identity that shares the myth of origin; the myth of democracy and its values showcasing Athens as a continuation of the half-mythical, half-historical city. Rimini Protokoll artfully exposed those mechanisms of identification through which twenty-first-century Athenians like to identify with their half mythical, half historical ancestors giving an account of a transnational democratic community with foreigners and immigrants being part of the myth.

NO MAN'S LAND: THE SHARED STORY

No Man's Land is performance created by the Dutch theatre maker and visual artist Dries Verhoeven. *No Man's Land* is a walking performance taking place in the streets of Athens in May 2014 asking questions such as: what can a multicultural environment mean and what kind of relations does it create. In this performance twenty viewers and twenty economic immigrants come together in the hall of a train station. Each spectator listens on headphones to different stories about the potential life of one of the immigrants, who is also their guide during their walk through the city, showing them a side of their home city that they might have never seen or imagined before. On the way, the spectator might realise that the stories they are listening to contradict each other but this happens exactly because the starting point of the project is to dissect the view of the spectator. '*No Man's Land* poses the question of whether we base our view of foreigners on socially desirable assumptions or on actual human interactions'.[28]

[27] Margherita Laera, *Reaching Athens Performing participation and community in Rimini Protokoll's Prometheus in Athens*, Performance Research, 16:4, 46-51, 2011, p.50.

[28] Dries Verhoeven, *No man's land*, http://driesverhoeven.com/en/project/niemandsland/ (accessed 21/05/2017), 2014.

This is me.
These are my hands.
These are my legs.
This is my face.
I will take you somewhere.
If you wish follow me.
This is not a theatre costume.
This is not my voice.
This is not my language.
This is the voice of an actor.
[…]
But because of the English voice you will regard me differently,
listen differently.[29]

This performance employs similar documentary processes to Rimini Protokoll's theatre giving voice to marginalized social groups. Each spectator is treated individually, selecting a performer of the opposite gender behind a glass, whom then becomes their guide providing information on direction in order to trigger interaction. Verhoeven's piece incorporates audio walks and conversations moving through urban space in the centre of Athens. This piece also challenges the conventional representational setting in theatre and offers opportunities for individual actions and thought. Although the piece was originally performed in Utrecht in 2008, it was restaged in Athens some years later with the original text adapted to the Greek context.

The meeting point is Monastiraki Square tube station in the heart of the city. Each spectator is given a sheet of A4 paper that contains the name of the immigrant whom they will follow for an hour-long night walk. The image at the tube station resembles a typical taxi driver setting at the airport. The only rule that will enable interaction and promote engagement is to simply follow the guide who will take the spectator on a pre-determined journey in his city. The spectator wearing headphones attached to an MP3 player listens to a voiceover narrating the migrant's story, which they are not certain whether it belongs to that particular guide or could simply be the story of any man or woman who was brought there. The piece features a series of different testimonies of immigrants and refugees where fiction and reality seek to break the invisible wall between 'us' and 'them'. One by one the guides collect their spectator and

[29] Andy Lavender. *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016, p.46.

leaving a distance of a metre or so between them, making a welcoming gesture, they ask the spectator to follow them.

> I am gradually aware of other individuals observing us. They are dotted around at various distances, notable by their stillness, amid the bustle of the metro station. Purcell's 'Dido's Lament' plays on the soundtrack. The silent watchers lip-sync to the female voice. […] It is a seriously powerful moment, a form of neutral confrontation that creates a theatrical moment of interrelation between two different groups, and performs a reversal of gaze. It is we, the spectators, who are scrutinized, held in a moment of vulnerability at a liminal point of entry[30],

writes Andy Lavender of his experience of the performance. Setareh, his guide, wears a purple shirt and loose grey trousers. 'I follow her down the escalator to a central pedestrian node in the metro station, where she stops, turns and looks me in the eye as the voiceover plays. This directness is both disconcerting and engaging, a challenge to meet a gaze, make this personal'.[31] As the walk continues, they move around the streets of Monastiraki. Setareh lip-syncs to the particular piece of music swaying in front of Lavender. The story Lavender listens to speaks about the rape of the speaker's daughter. At some point all spectators congregate standing behind their guide in a line facing twenty beach huts. Setareh, Lavender's guide takes his headphones from his ears and begins to sing. All the guides sing a song from their own culture. The door to the hut has a small hole where the guide's face appears and then replaced by the face of another guide-performer. The music in the headphones stops and spectators are invited to write a comment for their guide.

In an interview with a Greek journal, Verhoeven states that one of the problems they encountered during rehearsals was the fact that the guides were not professional actors but real immigrants, and thus, they were often targeted by the police just for walking around the city. They experienced on numerous occasions policemen approaching them and asking for residency papers, going through extensive checks at the police station. For Verhoeven, this seemed unbelievable and for the Dutch embassy also. For the immigrants, this became simply a normal habit and they would not be surprised if this happened even during the live performance.[32] Verhoeven's greatest challenge was not to fall into the trap of victimizing the immigrants and present a feeling of empathy because of their traumatic experiences. *No*

[30] Andy Lavender. *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 48.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Interview with Verhoeven in *Vice*, We watched Dries Verhoeven's "No Man's Land" performance in Athens, https://www.vice.com/gr/article/ypm7nx/sti-gi-tou-kanenos translated from original Greek text (accessed 25/4/2017).

Man's Land reflects notions of both participation and representation. Challenging the social setting brought on by incorporating new technologies into the medium, Verhoeven gives the spectator access to a biography heard through headphones. However, following a guide whom you identify with creates a feeling of reality no matter if this might be partly fictionalized leaving doubts whether the story belongs to the guide you follow or not. Likewise, the city seen through a different set of eyes through which you walk, you feel, and you think creates a reality effect which incorporates discourses of public sphere and engagement in a scenery where shared values and experiences are brought together. The public space within which the promenade performance takes place is a site for shared activity in common view. It is a site where the myth is to be told by those who, as Nancy argues, have the gift or simply the duty to tell and be heard by those who have the duty to learn it so as to keep it going.

The performance opens up a discussion between the public realm and personal identity and belonging. The voice, Lavender argues, is foundational. The voice coming though the headphones is embodied in the spectator's body but also in the immigrant they follow and the performance is nothing but the expression of self, concerning the identity of both the immigrant and the place it occupies. Who does the city belong to? What do we have in common with our fellow citizens? In the case of *No Man's Land* the participants share immediately a sense of belonging together. The promenade serves as mechanism of getting to know each other, of seeing the city from a different angle. Is the guide an insider or an outsider? In this setting I also wonder what can theatre and performance bring to our contemporary world? If theatre is about sharing stories then all voices should be heard. If theatre is about maintaining the myth of identity and belonging then it should manifest itself in every possible setting, whether on stage or on the streets, whether spoken loudly or is heard through headphones, whether incorporating live bodies or fictional technologies.

POLITICAL THEATRE OR THEATRE AND POLITICS?

In the last section of this chapter I want to explore two concepts that have largely concerned this research, theatre and politics. What I want to examine is the extent to which the performances I discuss here might have a direct political effect on the reality outside theatre

in their attempt to engage in social relations. This exploration is at the same time part of a wider discussion on how theatricality or performativity can be thought of in relation to politics. I shall remark, that there is also a politics that has to do with our encounter with the performance as such. Though, the performance does not just happen of its own accord; the performance is put together in a particular way to 'work' on us. The question is how do we respond to such a call? But also, what other directions can politics take when it is staged in theatre? Before I move on to explore these questions, I would like to discuss another production performed in Athens which deployed similar mechanisms to engage social relations.

Atlas Athina is a production by the Portuguese artistic group Casa Branka. In this performance one hundred participants travel in different places creating a map of the social bond. In Greek Mythology Atlas was the one condemned to hold up the sky on his shoulders for eternity. In order to turn the theatre back into a political space 100 Athenians are on stage; a landscape of people with different professions, claiming their position in society, individually as well as in groups, mapping a sort of 'atlas' of the complex cohesion of a social tissue. The project was inspired by the ideas of the artist Joseph Beuys who argues that everyone is an artist and we are the revolution of our society. Beuys enlarged the area of art to the whole life of mankind, introducing the notion of 'social sculpture'. *Atlas Athina* is a performance motivated by the belief that art has to play an active role in society. Employing the same mechanisms as Rimini Protokoll's *Prometheus in Athens*, *Atlas Athina* is a project that begins with one person and ends with one hundred. The first half of the phrase is said by the person who enters the stage and the second half by the chorus members that are always on stage. The performers represent the citizens, each one of them with their own story, carrying the burden of their economic as well social and political precarious life, just like Atlas carried the sky. Drawing upon the current economic landscape, the performance was presented to the Greek audience in 2014 when a number of austerity measures had been taken in order to rescue Greek economy from collapse. Like *Prometheus in Athens*, this performance designates a wide set of references in politically engaged theatre.

Political theatre has worked throughout the twentieth century to illuminate the material apparatus of aesthetic values and social subjects. This political quality of theatre includes embodied action and presence from both actors and the audience, but also a relational sociality that happens *here* and *now* from the very simple fact that people are gathered to think of issues of common concern. But there is also another political quality of theatre, its

capacity to *pretend* to present a reality that might not be quite so and, thus, to propose alternative worlds. There is also another political quality of theatre, that it can speak *for* us and *of* the reality we live in. To this extent, theatre represents us because it speaks through us and it has our voice, because it exists through us and our worlds. But this representation can also take the form of political representation, because theatre stands for us. The efficacy of theatre as an art form that incorporates *logos* and live bodies and indeed action, can intriguingly respond to situations at a given historical moment. In this sense, it responds to the particular situations of the immigrants in *No Man's Land*, whose stories would not be heard otherwise. In this performance too, there is an emphasis placed on the physical here and now, giving voice to a marginalised community. In this piece, the audio walks, chat conversations, and gaze dialogues, operate beyond conventional representational patterns in theatre, but they offer opportunities for individual action. While the piece was first performed in Utrecht in 2008, it was restaged in Athens with a reworked text to stage the Greek reality. 'The translation into a mother tongue deliberately roots the voice in the place of representation, even as the piece is about dislocation and foreigners'[33], writes Lavender. Fashioned to have both a specific but also a more open representative quality, one of the stories goes:

> I can tell you about a good life, rather plain, but good. That I'm an electrical engineer or that I own a little grocery store.
> […]
> I can tell you about a prison in Spain,
> About the prison in Kirkuk,
> About the prison in Santiago.[34]

No Man's Land embeds its participants in both relational exchange but also representation. Likewise, the piece's physical connection with space becomes more powerful through a particular geography that creates real effects. The public sphere in its full meaning involves a shared discourse and a moment towards consensus.

> As we traverse public space, we perform a much more private encounter. We stand face to face. We share a soundtrack inaudible to people who might only be a metre away. The show stages a tension between the inhabitation of space on the one hand, and light nomadic travel through it on the other; between what

[33] Andy Lavender. *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016, p.48.
[34] Ibid., p. 48.

> constitutes a public realm and personal belonging; and between intimacy and separation; dependence and detachment.[35]

The immigrant's voice heard through headphones in this piece was also embodied in the participant's body through the use of technology. In this sense, the voice is precisely the voice of a person's embodied experience in a historical moment that needs to be acknowledged. This voice is a political voice that needs to be heard. When the performance ends what remains is a voiceless individual and performatively powerless. So, to come back to the question that I raised above: what happens to politics when it appears on stage? What sort of encounters does it seek with the social and what sort of formations does it create? In the first instance, theatre is political in its formal effects in that it uses such mechanisms that also appear in politics: a *logos* to persuade the viewer, an embodied action and a scene to stage them. To this extent, theatre can at the same time divide and unite. Alan Read, in *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* argues that theatre is political as a mode of representation that seeks to fix relations. If we remind ourselves of the twentieth century political theatre, we should also remember the lessons a Brechtian theatre offered and think of the potentials a post-Brechtian theatre can disclose, for which Lehmann notes that the 'post' does not necessarily denote a complete rejection of the past, but exists in productive tension with it.

Judith Butler's work has engaged with concepts of performance and performativity; the first requires subjects and the second interactive procedures. In her speech in Washington Square during the Occupy movement in the US, she provides an instance of both forms, with a performance that engages performativity and stages resistance. She said addressing the people in the square:

> If hope is an impossible demand
> *[Crowd repeats] If hope is an impossible demand*
> Then we demand the impossible
> *Then we demand the impossible*
> If the right to shelter, food and employment
> *If the right to shelter, food and employment*
> Are impossible demands
> *Are impossible demands*
> Then we demand the impossible
> *Then we demand the impossible*
> […]
> It matters
> *It matters*

[35] Ibid., p. 50.

That as bodies
That as bodies
We arrive together in public
We arrive together in public
As bodies we suffer
As bodies we suffer
[…]
So this is a politics of the public body
So this is a politics of the public body
A requirement of the body
A requirement of the body
Its movement and its voice
Its movement and its voice
[…]
But we are here
But we are here
Time and again
Time and again
Persisting
Persisting
Enacting the phrase
Enacting the phrase
We the People
We the People [36]

This effect of human microphone, produces a performance of reaffirmation, responding to the given historical moment and social condition. It is an embodied action of resistance. In the examples that I have discussed so far, the theatre is concerned with the social dramaturgy of public life. But whether theatre can enable us to do politics in the same way as it creates 'realities' is still a question to consider. However capable the theatre is of provoking and we, as spectators or participants, however able or willing we are to respond to such calls, politics is unavoidable. What is conceivable nevertheless, is to adopt a *stasis*, one that would bring into being a critical stance that enables us to identify actions of injustice not because we sympathise with the story of an immigrant for example, but learning from such stories and enabling the capacity to create new worlds. Or, in other words, to do politics.

The time, arguably, seems out of joint. The issues I have explored so far, economical disasters, social imbalance, growing right wing forces, and migration are part of our current reality. But theatre too, is in some way struggling to find its place in the current events dealing with major challenges in an attempt to respond to the rather pathological social and political climate. While some artists and theatre makers seek answers in conventional ways of

[36] Ibid., p.45.

creating which produce an art object or a narration-driven mimesis, others seek to expand established territories, such as the cases discussed here. The crisis of representation in democracy has also affected the representational mechanisms of theatre. Nonetheless, amidst such precarious conditions, a social and political turn in theatre has become apparent and the debate around these issues has incorporated new perspectives in both theory and practice. The question, however, still remains: how can theatre today become an influential tool of not only mirroring and, therefore, representing society but becoming part of its changing process?

Theatre, both in its forms and contents, has always been an expression of its current reality. The ancient Greek polis, for example, gathered in the Theatre of Dionysus to debate on social and political matters in an architectural setting that anticipated many of today's parliaments. Likewise, it was not a coincidence that the awakening of the European bourgeoisie went hand in hand with the emergence of the bourgeois theatre as a cultural and political phenomenon. Henrik Ibsen, for instance, drew on the traditions of the bourgeois theatre and understood it as a moral institution in which the values and norms of the bourgeois society could be reflected; except that he staged this style of life to examine the realities that lay behind the façades and expose the hypocrisy of the bourgeois society. Ibsen demonstrated through his plays precisely how the bourgeois tradition of family life hinders its members from gaining self-reflection and responsibility, holding up a mirror to the audience that showed them the terrible contradiction between the actual situation and the ideal that once lay behind it.

Similarly, the avant-gardes of the twentieth century made a big step further when they understood theatre as a tool to challenge existing power relations and change the status quo. With this in mind Bertolt Brecht hoped for a theatre that would function as a moral institution of class struggle, where the distinction between actor and spectator would dissolve. Remaining a lifelong committed Marxist, Brecht, explored the theatre as a forum that enables the exchange of political ideas and the creation of a critical aesthetics of dialectical materialism. Brecht's Epic Theatre proposed that the play should never cause the spectators to relate emotionally to the characters or actions before them, but rather provoke a critical analysis of the actions on stage and rational self-reflection. In doing so, Brecht, wanted his audiences to adopt a critical perspective that would help them acknowledge injustice and exploitation and be prepared to deal with such issues in the real world outside. For this purpose, Brecht, employed techniques that highlighted the constructed nature of the theatrical event, such the actor's direct address to the audience, the use of songs to interrupt the action on stage, explanatory placards and so on, which constantly reminded the spectators that the

play before them is a representation of reality and not reality itself. Employing such mechanisms, Brecht, indented to make apparent that the spectators' reality was equally constructed and, as such, was open to change.

From the history of theatre, we learn that most theatre makers used and understood theatre as a medium in which social and political relations but also aesthetic practises could be tried out. On its various stages, ideas and ideologies are taught, societies and people (actual or imagined) are performed, histories and stories are told and worlds are constructed or even re-invented. Today, more than ever, there is a strong desire by artists and audiences alike for a theatre that not only mirrors pressing social and political issues but also becomes a political space; for a theatre that becomes a public sphere in itself. Today we are in a period of experimenting, trying out, finding out, reimagining or even reinventing a theatre that is as powerful to demand change. But today we are also in a privileged position to learn from history which has featured enough impressive artistic work and political engagement that allow us to imagine again a powerful potential of theatre, unfolding a fundamental agonistic vigour. This potential is opening spheres of negotiation and debate in which contradictions can be articulated and shaped. One such contradiction that stands at the centre of the critique of post-dramatic theatre is the concept of representation. Who is representing whom, under which circumstances, in which way and with what right?

The new forms of theatre that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s and which I have extensively explored previously, aimed not just at reforming the predominant models of theatre but revolutionising them from outside the established traditions. Such forms offered a new complexity of theatre signifiers revolting against the hegemony of the director, the text and the actor, experimenting with all possibilities of spectatorship and participation. Instead of staging a 'fake' situation in order to critique it, as Brecht's Epic Theatre once did, the aim was to create a real situation, in a real space and in the co-presence of the audience, focusing on the here and how of the lived experience. Thus, the focus shifted from the aesthetic product to the form of theatre and the medium itself, from the narrative content to the creation of individual experiences in which each participant had to reimagine and recreate the political potential of theatre. This potential was not found in its concrete political contents, but was primarily reflected in 'the how' of its representation. In this context, Jacques Rancière offered a broader theoretical ground for rethinking the medium of theatre and the notion of performativity in his *The Politics of Aesthetics* and *The Emancipated Spectator*.

So where do we stand today? How can theatre create spheres where (im)possibilities can be collectively imagined, debated and confronted? For democracy, participation in shaping society is a necessity. Nevertheless, I would like to reflect on and problematize the putative participation that we are constantly confronted with in a capitalist system that has rendered terms such social responsibility and active involvement almost useless. Participation has become a pacifier which perversely delegates the responsibility for what is happening to individuals that cannot influence it (was this not the case with Greece?) and, thus, enables the capitalist system to continue undisturbed and to maintain itself. Elections are called in the name of social and political responsibility, basic social care is offered in the name of humanitarian aid, human rights violations continue to occur unnoticed, and corrupted political systems continue to exist because 'there is no alternative' and our conscience is satisfied because 'there is nothing we can do about it'. Alternatives are predetermined and therefore, no one can influence a radical change. This is what Žižek calls cultural capitalism.

Participatory art and theatre, in which people constitute the central artistic medium, often mimic such involvement offering not only stipulated and predetermined choices but also forcing the audience to participate in its transparent set-up; namely, forcing it into a fake participation, where participants are active only because they are consumers of a cultural product. In other words, this is passivity disguised as activity. If contemporary art and theatre are to reclaim their political potential, they also have to reclaim the notions of involvement and participation as such. A participation that thrives in its artistic and political form on its radical potential. Such a participation should aim at direct confrontation in the sphere of agonistic pluralism. Real participation implies giving responsibility and power to those participating. Brecht's *Teaching Plays* were to be performed by the spectators, namely the working class itself. Likewise, Augusto Boal in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* entrusted the responsibility of how the performance evolved to the 'spect-actors', spectators that during the performance turned into actors.

Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism has influenced the Dutch theatre director Lotte van den Berg and her ongoing project since 2014 *Building Conversation* explores theatre's reduction to its core. In *Building Conversation,* a small group of participants leaves on a trip together for a short enterprise. There are no introductions made, whoever is curious about the names and professions of his co-participants, has to make inquiries himself. For Van den Berg, theatre is first and foremost a meeting point and a place of communication where conflicts can and should be experienced. *Building Conversation* is just what the title of the

project implies, talking with each other. Van den Berg asks us to take a break and engage in communication, allowing the participants to experience a new way of talking and listening to one another. This performance focuses on dialogue and encourages the participants to build a society through agonistic conversation, communication and sharing. There are no actors or audience, just an invitation to participate in what is common and shared, a conversation. In order to accomplish this sharing, both the theatre maker and the theatricality of the context is reduced to an almost zero point. The project explores patterns of collective thinking and the aim is not to reach consensus, which Mouffe argues only serves to solidify our social and political divisions, but participants are experimenting with ongoing dissensus, where continual dialogue and disagreement is possible among adversaries. For this reason, the theatre maker will look for the biggest possible contrast within the group in order to start a conversation because it is important to be *agonists*, to realise and recognise that there are differences, without becoming *antagonists*. The process of moving from defensive hostility to dialogical communication through conversation and physical posturing brought a new understanding to the possibility of constructive dialogue across difference. As Van den Berg explains, the performative dialogue is partly intended to rehearse different modalities of conversation. In doing so, one can look critically at established or traditional patterns of address and how they shape our social relationships, while also potentially transforming them.[37]

Nonetheless, the question of participation is necessarily linked to the question of representation. Everyone participating in a theatre event (whether actor, performer, spect-actor or audience) is understood as representing a smaller or larger group distinguished by ethnic background, colour, age, class, profession and so on. Therefore, the question of representation that holds a central position in debates about current democracies is one that is also mirrored in theatre. Can a politician essentially represent a citizen? Can a capitalist represent a worker? Can a bourgeois actor represent a refugee? Such challenges are politically and aesthetically complex and many would argue that have to do with issues of political correctness. We, postmodern people, were raised in the cultural relativist conviction that every opinion is respected. We have grown away from difference to such an extent that even only naming it causes us difficulty. Such challenges, however, resonate with

[37] Coussens, Evelyne. *Van den Berg Recreates the Political*. Terschelling, June 2014. http://www.lottevandenberg.nu/english/files/docs/van-den-berg-recreates-the-polical.pdf (accessed August 20, 2018).

fundamental arguments about the effectiveness, necessity and rightfulness of representation within democracy but also within theatre.

Post-dramatic theatre in the early 2000s approached the problem in different ways. Many theatre makers turned towards more documentary-oriented forms, such as Rimini Protokoll, who opened the stage for the self-representation of 'experts of the everyday' working exclusively with real people and not professional actors, developing this way a very specific dramaturgy that 'takes care of the other' without turning it into its fetishization. The deployment of experts of the everyday in Rimini Protokoll's work has meant that over the years the spectators came into close contact with a diverse range of strangers. As the experts tell their stories, the boundaries between them and the audience break down and estrangement dissolves. Using techniques appropriated from experimental theatre -instead of conventional theatrical representation-, Rimini Protokoll is focused on erasing the boundaries between actor and spectator. The intention here is to integrate the two otherwise separate spheres in mutable arrangements. With the removal of the constraints of the proscenium stage, performers and spectators can respond to the demands of the immediate moment, to the 'hear and now' of the situation, locating themselves in the network of possibilities that characterizes social life in the fluid and liquid postmodern environment. Much of what they do is unrepresentable because it must be experienced and thus, unpredictability becomes key to such experiments.

So, in the end it is in theatre as it is in democracy: attempts of pluralism will bring about new networks of possibilities. As much as theatre can be a space of collective imaginary, it can also be a space of performing conflicts between ideas, powers, societies. And as in the case of Van den Berg, theatre can provide preconditions for such possibilities to emerge by focusing on the internal contradictions of society. Brecht's dialectical theatre hoped that when the class struggle would finally we won, humans would create a harmonious communist society. In the same vein, Jürgen Habermas has advocated a consensus society, based on rational-critical debate and discussion that would allow humankind to think beyond its individual interests. Habermas celebrated the emancipatory potential of a collective discourse about the nature of the public good which could be free insofar as it was rationally based on the success of argument and critique. Arguably, publicness is about connection. The private is disconnected; it is closed to the public; it claims to be self-sufficient. In public, a person has responsibilities to others, whether those responsibilities imply merely the common communication of everyday interaction, or the more complex norms for participation in an argument. In other

words, people are knitted together in public, and in addition to their private/individual interests, they have interests in how their shared social lives fare. Thus, the public sphere designates a determinate space of engagement with public issues. Hannah Arendt argued that public speech creates a space among speakers which enables the possibility of institutional arrangements that endure beyond the mere quotidian interest of those speakers. Nevertheless, while Habermas tried to protect a space for deliberation and argument from intrusions, Arendt's concern was to stress public action that could be creative and culture forming. The public realm was for Arendt composed of that which was created by human beings and held in common: culture, relationships, history and artefacts. While the latter was the only one that could in a strict sense be *made*, the rest depended on action. Action, for her, takes place in a public space of appearance, before and with others. Arendt had much in common with Habermas's distinction of communicative from instrumental action. However, her focus was not simply on rational-critical discourse aimed at understanding; it was on natality, the creative potential for novelty in society.

In his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas, argues that Europe prior to the 18th century had been dominated by a representational culture where only one party was active (bourgeois society) seeking to represent itself on its audience. The coming of the capitalist stage marked the appearance of the public sphere (Öffentlichkeit) in the 18th century salons where individuals met in conversation and exchanged views, ideas and knowledge. The Öffentlichkeit implied the social sites, where meanings were articulated and negotiated, and was characterized by a dialogical communication. However, the transformation and decay of the public sphere came when the critical public turned into a passive consumer public, turning also the public sphere into a self-interested arena rather than a space that promotes the development of a public-minded rational consensus, overcoming private interests. This collapse was due to the consumeristic drive that penetrated society, so individuals became more concerned about consumption than matters of common concern.[38] Thus, Habermas advocates a conversational deliberative theory of democracy, where cooperative discourse aims at reaching a consensual notion of the common good, moving beyond private/individual interest. Habermas's ideal, however, has been critiqued by a number of scholars. The basic question arising from his exploration of the public sphere is to what extent can opinions guiding social or political action be formed on the basis of rational-

[38] Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*: *An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity, 1992.

critical discourse? In her critique of Habermas, Mouffe, stresses that we are not only rational beings, emotion will always play a role in this process and therefore, the political is a space of power and conflict between adversaries is unavoidable as people are embedded in different collective identifications, attached to their own interpretations of the common good. For Mouffe every consensus is based on acts of exclusion and is, therefore, impossible to achieve a fully inclusive rational consensus. At a time characterized by fluidity in all sides of the social and political spectrum, we need some kind of playful agonistic negotiation where contradictions are not only kept alive, but above all can be freely articulated, be it in a gallery space, on the streets or in occupied theatres, as the following chapter explores. To this extent, art *as* public space is one of the many things theatre can offer. This public space is not limited to the physical and material space of the theatre event, but extends also to other discourses where agonistic sites are created.

In the light of such aesthetically, socially and politically complex challenges, in the following chapter I would like to discuss the relationship between the many and the few, between those representing and those being represented, or, in Castoriadian terms, the relationship between autonomy and heteronomy. On the scale of the two main areas that concern this research, art and political activism as a philosophy of praxis, the relation between representation and agonism/antagonism is at stake with regard to how we organise resistance and create alternatives. How do we organise ourselves in a collective setting? How has the art of assembling been developed both in its performative and political discourse? The social turn in the arts brings to the fore questions that accompany all socially engaged initiatives. Are those participating driven by private interest? Are they self-determined? Are such initiatives powerful enough to influence change? It soon becomes clear that such questions are difficult to answer because answers would immediately seek rational solutions to the problem and there are no such solutions, at least we are not in a position to provide them yet.

The many theatrical moments of political movements in recent years have arguably inspired artists and theatre makers who have tried to reflect some of this momentum in their art. But also, performative actions and theatre have long been part of the creative vocabulary of activism. The assemblies themselves are also performative in nature. Their political and social imaginary is also physical and performed on a variety of stages. To allow for different network of possibilities to emerge, the imaginary itself has to be a performative one, a gesture of presupposing something which could possibly transform into collective action. The creative imaginary generates a space for playful experimentation because even if wishes and

practices remain fictional and never become real, and even if something happens along the way that was not expected, it can still be an interesting peace of art or a good performance. Nevertheless, the imaginary creates an experimental space in which we dream of the improbable in the first place. The imaginary constitutes the driving force for the many to imagine the spatial, temporal and dramaturgical shape an assembly might take in order to organise gatherings accordingly. These gatherings bring with them not only the material space but also the different modes and practices of participation designating their own theatricality. What precisely the following chapter uncovers is the theatricality of society itself. Embros theatre and Green Park proposed that instead of being an audience watching the few performing for the many, people can take part and interact as participants of an assembly. By shifting performance practices from their given place in society it can be experienced that new forms of participation emerge through hybridizing given modes of assembling. It goes without saying that participation is key for every assembly. However, the organisation of such gatherings requires a radical thinking of participation. So, what is at stake in the assemblies at Embros? What kind of hopes and demands are present? No wonder it was very special for the participants and myself to witness how this very gesture of refusal became so important to real democracy movements. It felt as the critique of cultural and political representation which produced something intriguingly beautiful: the movement of the unrepresented many, the movement of the anonymous.

CHAPTER 4

Rethinking the Imaginary: Mavili Collective and Cornelius Castoriadis

The only maxim of contemporary art is not to be imperial.
This also means: it does not have to be democratic,
if democracy implies conformity with the imperial idea of political liberty.[1]

Alain Badiou

Alain Badiou's thesis introduces a political scene that raises the question of the relationship between art and politics, which is precisely the relationship that concerns the present research. How does art generally and theatre more specifically think about the current social and political phenomena and what kind of methodologies do they incorporate in their vocabulary that is valuable at a pedagogical level? I wish to consider this as a philosophical enquiry that suggests that the object of art or a performance piece is doing something on behalf of its subject, of its agent or that has even reached the autonomous level of producing knowledge for and by itself, which requires a continuous process of restructuring, reconsidering and rethinking itself and its means. For the emerging field of Performance Philosophy, this enquiry is at the core, seeking new ways of thinking about the relationship

[1] Alain Badiou, 15 *Theses on contemporary art, Lacanian Ink 22*, The Wooster Press, 2003.

between art –including theatre and performance– and philosophy, inasmuch as the political is broadly understood in philosophical terms in the present research (in engaging with theories from the field of political philosophy). That said, alternative ways to think about the relationship between performance and the other arts with philosophy are needed and presumably move beyond common conceptions that understand art as a reflection of pre-existing ideologies or philosophical values but rather think of performance and the other arts as philosophizing for and by themselves taking philosophical thought and tradition forward.

A number of philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou among others, have declared the need for philosophy to seek out encounters with other fields, including theatre and performance among the other arts that would give philosophy new directions. Deleuze in his *Difference and Repetition* develops a dramatic account of philosophy by suggesting the importance of understanding philosophy as drama and vice versa drawing from Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, both of whom Deleuze himself claimed have produced a theatre in philosophy. He writes 'Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are among those who bring to philosophy new means of expression. In relation to them we speak readily of an overcoming of philosophy'.[2] And he goes on to say that 'they invent an incredible equivalent of theatre within philosophy, thereby founding simultaneously this theatre of the future and a new philosophy'.[3] Likewise, Alain Badiou also thinks that theatre does philosophize for itself and calls upon, in his own terms, 'inaesthetics', a relational mode between art and philosophy, where the latter recognizes art's attribute to produce 'truths'. His claim that the subject of artistic truth is the set of works themselves that comprise it. That said, art is not about the particular or personal but is rather impersonal. Not in the sense that art wants the artist detached from the work of art but rather in the sense that its existence lies in the work itself upon a truth which is external to the artist, but to which the artist is entirely committed. This leads to the idea that art is the procedure of and commitment to a truth; it is the process through which a truth unfolds. This idea meets the claim of a number of contemporary performance philosophers that performance as a form of theatrical representation can arguably produce knowledge for and by itself and as Badiou argues, theatre 'separates what is mixed and confused and this separation guides the truths of which theatre is capable'.[4]

[2] Gilles Deleuze [1967] *Difference and Repetition*, Translated by Paul Patton, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 8.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Alain Badiou. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, p.73.

For Badiou, both areas of art and politics have their own truths and they are domains in which 'truth', as the ultimate purpose, is possible to achieve. Both areas provide the space for truth-processes and 'only truths (thoughts) allow man to be distinguished from the human animal that underlies him'.[5] He does not perceive politics as general social circumstances in which the individuals find themselves, but politics as an area in which truth can ultimately be achieved through political action. We may then say that this can be achieved, for example, through active participation in the community, through practices that engage citizens socially and invite them to contribute, work, act and create together. Through such practices, the individuals are encouraged to interact with each other and offer a valuable contribution to society. Politics is not only about making decisions or instituting laws which find their voice in representations within existing social structures. Politics is an action or praxis which aims at questioning those structures in order to propose new ones. The possibility of politics to become such praxis lies in what already exists, the social. The social, as part of this situation in which politics can become praxis, is bonded to (collective) action. In his *The Communist Hypothesis,* published in *New Left Review 49,* Badiou defines politics as s 'collective action, organized by certain principles, that aims to unfold the consequences of a new possibility which is currently repressed by the dominant order'.[6] The space of politics for Badiou is, therefore, the space of collectivity, the space of action seeking the actualization of a new possibility. In Badiou the political subject does not refer to a given sociological condition or to a collectivity that existed before politics, but to a heterogeneous and fragile construct which is under constant formation. The subject does not precede politics, but is formed through the political, potential or subversive consequences of an Event. The political subject, thus, must be a collective subject aiming at the creation of new political conceptions that question the dominant order.

I shall now return to Badiou's thesis at the very beginning of this chapter, which is the ninth of the *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art* in which the philosopher attempts to outline the conventions of contemporary art practice. The enticing call for art to make visible what Empire does not already acknowledge as existent, is coupled with the fundamental question of how can art be global without being imperial. Empire refers to the global system of capital and power; Empire imposes a hegemonic idea of authority. This is the axiom for the invention of a new world. Here Badiou calls for a different conception of art reading it

[5] Alain Badiou. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. California: Stanford University Press. 2003.
[6] Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*. New Left Review 49, January–February 2008.

against conventional ways of thinking. To create a locatable but open and realistic form, would be an essential praxis of creative and political formalisation. It would eliminate predetermined norms, yet give feasible experimental forms through which to act concretely and unanimously. Empire describes precisely the current order of things, the situation of a dominant system of power. Art, by not being imperial, means that it does not comply with the terms and conditions of the system of power. Empire entails the hegemonic idea of dominance over something upon which power is exercised. *Hegemon* (the state of power), however, is not much concerned about politics as long as its 'weapons' are protected, namely the means used in order to accomplish its purpose: to establish its power. Giorgio Agamben argues that hegemon's tool is the *nomos* (law).[7] In other words, the sovereign power, by controlling the *nomos* and the institutions, controls the lives of its subjects. Cornelius Castoriadis proposes autonomy as an alternative to this repression. But in order to achieve autonomy the subject must return to the primary state, just before the praxis. Namely, the social must regain its imaginary state. These ideas of the imaginary and self and social autonomy will be discussed extensively in due course. In other words, societies must be thought as subject to transformation and constantly be redefined, for which process individuals within in it are to play that role.

For Badiou the situation of politics is also the situation of art, given that both include the state of political action. Under which conditions can an event be political? An event, and the procedure in which this event reveals a truth, is political under certain conditions that are closely connected to the subject of the event. Badiou claims that

> An event is political if its material is collective, or if the event can only be attributed to a collective multiplicity. 'Collective' is not a numerical concept here. We say that the event is ontologically collective to the extent that it provides the vehicle for a virtual summoning of all. 'Collective' means immediately universalizing… The use of the term 'collective is an acknowledgement that if this thought is political, it belongs to all.[8]

When we speak about the Event in relation to art, we predominantly do so in philosophical language. However, for Badiou, philosophy itself is not able to think of the Event, it cannot identify and expose it because the Event identifies itself. Philosophy itself cannot produce

[7] Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. California: Stanford University Press, 1998.
[8] Alain Badiou. *Metapolitics*. New York: Verso books, 2005, p.141.

truths because every truth originates in an Event[9] and therefore art as an independent area of philosophy can produce effective truths. In *Being and Event*, Badiou, develops a thesis of change and explores how this change occurs through events and truth-processes. In his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* this thesis of change is explored in relation to art, according to which art is a truth procedure on its own and for this reason art is both immanent, because is closely coextensive with the truths it can produce, and singular, because these truths cannot be produced anywhere else but in the artistic praxis. And drawing from Aristotle, it is only theatre -as a form of art- that has a cathartic function, describing the state of purification that originates in it.

In the present chapter, I will argue that art through collective action can propose new structures, or as Badiou would call it a 'new universality'. The occupation of Embros Theatre and the occupation of Green Park, both of which are self-managed spaces in the centre of Athens, will serve as examples to support this argument through which the connection between art, performance and the political will unfold. We are arguably living through the aftermath of precarious social and political conditions that sparked a number of events across the globe, with the migrant crisis starting at the beginning of 2014 when rising numbers of people arrived in European territory and the global economic crash of 2008 being the most devastating ones in the current history of western nations. Amid an upsurge in the number of populations traveling across the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe, several European governments refused to provide effective solutions to the problem. They instead practiced policies that cannot claim a humanitarian character by reinforcing border control operations, thus, demonstrating a weakness to deal directly with such an urgent demand. According to reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in the summer of 2015, Greece and Italy served as first EU countries of arrival for a flow of migrants, who primarily wanted to reach Northern Europe. Turkey for the first time became one of the largest refugee-hosting countries with 1.59 million refugees seeking protection. The number of deaths from drowning, as a result of inadequate and overloaded boats sinking in the Mediterranean Sea, reached unprecedented levels in 2015[10], which along with the number of displaced people worldwide increased the headcount to almost 60 million, representing the highest number of displaced persons since World War II. Children below 18

[9] Badiou in his Handbook of Inaesthetics presents this assertion in its axiomatic state (see Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, p.11.

[10] The reports of UNHCR speak about 3,500 children, men and women reported dead or missing in the Mediterranean Sea in their attempt to seek protection from other countries.

years of age comprised 51% of the refugee population, and about 53% of the refugees worldwide came from only three countries: the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, and Somalia.[11]

In the age of unprecedented mass displacement, the need for a humanitarian response is imperative. In both the USA and in Europe amid the momentous financial crisis, and more precisely in the countries of the periphery of Europe that faced its devastating consequences to a greater extent, governments proved unable to present a social plan that would prevent the growth of social and economic inequality. They instead relied on the rhetoric of the hope for a 'better future' that would bring about the prospect of a world with equally distributed opportunities. This fraudulent promise gave rise to new political forces and ideologies that are profoundly alarming. Occupy movement across the globe grasped the critical historical moment reminding everyone that their engagement is crucial in the demand for a social change and inviting all to take part in political activism. Yet, the question remains: Is Occupy granted a place in contemporary revolutionary history? Did it stand for the social change it claimed to demand? Looking at the facts more closely, the Occupy movement inherited a complex political construction that has dominated for nearly half a century and its ideas are essentially associated with economic liberalism and refer to privatization, free trade, austerity, cuts in government spending and deregulation. What these *autonomous* communities and movements stand for is not a utopia but rather a 'method' to animate the political imaginary and define anew the subject within the public realm. Hence, we cannot disregard the fact that Occupy provided a lens into a larger democratic transition embodying a crucial and essential contribution to the practice of democracy for the insights it seeded in its policies. Seen from this point of view, Occupy, remains a remarkable phenomenon of our times. Its contribution does not lie merely on the performance of the political as such and how this can be thought about within the sphere of Performance Philosophy, but also on the fundamental insights it offered for the agonistic nature of the political. Yet, what this chapter seeks to examine is how theatre and performance can be thought as part of the political without reducing the argument merely to the idea that because theatre involves participation and it functions within the public realm, it can, therefore, be regarded as political. Or else, is it really a question of whether theatre is political or a question of whether it has a kind of social or political impact? To this end, another question to be asked is to which extent can

[11] UNHCR Global Trends –Forced Displacement in 2014. *World at War*. UNHCR. 18 June 2015., http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html, (Accessed May 20,.2017).

Occupy movements be regarded as what Sophie Nield calls 'theatres or carnivals of opposition' bringing the political and social to the 'stage' they occupy? These performances of agonism are taking place in a public stage, be it the streets, the squares or the buildings. They are explicitly concerned with the occupation of space and implicitly with its constitution. The battle is ultimately, as Nield proposes, between two spaces: 'that imagined and produced by power in its domination and organisation of social activity, and that imagined, foretold and temporarily materialised in the theatrical moment of opposition'.[12] And it is precisely this space which Henri Lefebvre argues that must change in order to change the social.

The two case studies that follow will be examined through the lens of their contribution to such praxis; by considering their symbolic production of meaning and by asking what kind of impact do they have on the practice of the political itself. Shannon Jackson writes that 'when a political art discourse too often celebrates social disruption at the expense of social coordination, we lose a more complex sense of how art practices contribute to inter-dependent social imagining'.[13] And she continues that 'whether cast in aesthetic or social terms, freedom and expression are not opposed to obligation and care, but in fact depend upon each other; this is the daily lesson of any theatrical ensemble'.[14] Certainly, these 'theatre-like' events that refer to such ideas and concepts that are not otherwise materially existent have incorporated the symbolic elements captured by the very moment of the enactment. Notwithstanding the emphasis placed on socially engaged art practices in this research, we cannot disregard the fact that any political praxis, whether artistic or of any other sort, seeks to raise the question of predominant distributions of control, power and wealth. Considering Badiou's notion of the 'new universality' that theatre can propose and Castoriadis' concept of 'autonomy' the analysis seeks to provide an answer to the central question of this research: can theatre and the other arts propose new methodologies in the current social and political setting? Namely, can art produce new knowledge for and by itself? The possibility of a 'new universality' is what triggered action at Embros. The analysis that follows will point toward the idea that artistic creation is the embodiment or the happening of an idea and therefore the 'new universality' that art can suggest is the creation of a new form of happening of the idea. The cases of Embros Theatre and Green Park will be

[12] Sophie Nield. *There is another world: Space, theatre and global anti-capitalism*. In: Harvie, Jen, and Rebellato, Dan (eds), Contemporary Theatre Review: Theatre and Globalisation. London: Routledge, 2006.
[13] Shannon Jackson. *Social Works: Performing art, supporting public*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 14.
[14] Ibid., p.14.

analysed as an attempt through which a new mode of collective practice emerges, examining the nature of the event as such.

PRAXIS ONE: THE OCCUPATION OF EMBROS THEATRE

I first visited Embros theatre in October 2013 while it was under occupation by the Mavili Collective.[15] The self-managed, artist-led theatre is regarded as a space for free cultural expression, exchange and social action. Built in the 1930s, the historical building originally functioned as a printing house of the newspaper *Embros* until 1985. In 1988 the Hellenic Public Real Estate Corporation leased the building to the actor and director Tassos Bantis who funded the theatrical organization *Morfes* followed by the theatre company *Embros* until 2007. During that time, the theatre drew large audiences and became one of the most important Athenian theatres hosting significant productions. On 2 May 1990, Edward Bond's *Saved* premiered at the theatre and presented the group that was destined to acquire an important role in the theatrical landscape of the city, *Morfes*. In the entitled article '*Saved'... Art*, published in the newspaper *Ethnos* on 29 October 1990, the character of the theatrical group *Morfes* is praised. 'Morfes is one of the few groups whom we thank for their persistence to fight the easy way that the difficulties of the times impose on creators; for their mystagogic feeling and for their visions'.[16] Henrik Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* followed and the great success came with David Mamet's play *American Buffalo,* performed on the first floor of the theatre. Marguerite Duras' *Savannah Bay* followed, the provocative *Greek* by Steven Berkoff and *Mallard* by Henrik Ibsen. Among other productions, the great success that came with the *Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams was remarkable.

Located in the Psirri neighbourhood in the heart of the historical centre of Athens, the building has been declared a protected historical monument since 1989 by the Ministry of Culture. After the death of Tassos Bantis in 2007 the theatre remained closed and deserted

[15] Mavili Collective is an autonomous collective structure funded by seven emerging artists/scholars/theatre and performance makers in Athens in 2010. Gigi Argyropoulou, Vassilis Noulas, Argyro Chioti, Anestis Azas, Giorgos Kolios, Kostas Koutsolelos, and Georgia Mavragani came together in order to re-think the current Greek cultural landscape and propose structures, collaborations, platforms for debate and creative projects in order to produce new alternatives beyond the logics of the political system.

[16] Dio Kaggelari. *"Saved"...art*. Newspaper Ethnos, 29 October 1990, Athens. http://digital.lib.auth.gr/record/71549/files/arc-2007-30334.pdf?version=1 (accessed February 7, 2016). (Original title in Greek: 'Σωσμένη'…η τέχνη. The translation from Greek is mine).

until its re-activation as an occupied space in November 2011 following the initiative of Mavili Collective. The Psirri Neighbourhood Movement as well as individual artists, scholars and theatre makers actively supported this initiative through participation in the theatre's activities. The occupation established itself as a temporary 're-activation' of the space which proposed an alternative model of collective management bringing together artists, theorists, academics, dance and theatre makers, and most important the inhabitants of Psirri neighbourhood, which has undergone massive transformation in recent decades that has led to the shift of the character of the historical centre of Athens. Small industries and arts and craft workshops have given their place to a monopoly of commercial companies.

Psirri is one of the oldest districts of the historical centre of Athens and was named after a rich man with the surname *Psirris*, who owned much land in the area. During the period of Otto (1832-1862) and until the late twentieth century, the working class comprised mainly the largest percentage of its residents, who housed their small industries and crafts workshops in the area. However, the district also hosted residents of upper social classes, such as the bourgeoisie and successful merchants who were the notable representatives of the local markets. Furthermore, the district was inhabited by tourists and notable foreign people who visited Athens during the nineteenth century. Among them, Lord Byron (1788-1824), who supported Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire. Whilst being a resident of Psirri, Lord Byron, wrote his famous poem *Maid of Athens* dedicating it to a young girl of the bourgeoisie, who also lived in the area and whose beauty was praised in this poem.

Iroon square (Heroes square), the central square of Psirri, is one of the oldest in Athens and is, in the long social history, a key element of the identity of the neighbourhood. The streets that lead to it carry names of heroes from the period of the Greek history of independence from the Ottomans (Miaouli Street, Karaiskaki Street). As far as its architecture is concerned, the district has many neoclassical houses with the same structure, namely, two floors with a balcony and a yard. From the 1980s onwards, the district radically changed its social physiognomy. Most of the workshops and craft industries that added a commercial character in the local markets of the area closed down or were relocated. Coffee shops, restaurants and bars have taken their place and this led to a wider transformation process of the urban landscape. Those behind the Embros project see the occupation as a bulwark against the violent transformation process by investors, in concert with public bodies, toward a direction of profit-oriented logics that displace the traditional character of the area. The members of Embros suggest that the occupation of the theatre took place for the sake of the 'common

good'; to provide a place for the free circulation of ideas and collaborative practices that promote social interaction.

After its occupation, Embros is reconstituted as a public space for social exchange, research, debate, meeting, re-thinking, creating and proposing. As Mavili Collective states in the manifesto that was sent to the press and public:

> 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. We act in response to the general stagnation of thinking and action in our society through collective meeting, thinking and direct action by reactivating a disused historical building in the centre of Athens. In the sight of the current situation we refuse to wait for 'better days', we refuse to accept the current crisis as terminal and we refuse to sit back. We actively propose new structures, which we hope, can become sites of negotiation, debate, and re-formulation.[17]

With time more people joined the day-to-day running of the theatre and decisions were made in weekly open assemblies forming a space where a network of different communities and groups came together to propose alternative ways of thinking, acting, engaging and contributing to the local society. The open assemblies allude to the connection with the ancient *agora* where the citizens gathered in order to discuss and decide on social and political matters. A wide community of residents, artists and scholars proposed an alternative model of solidarity aimed at coupling artistic practices and socio-political actions that take place in its grounds. The program during its first year brought together over 290 artists, theoreticians and practitioners across a variety of disciplines producing a platform of public activities challenging existing hierarchies. The action was devised in pluralist form: categories for action, stance and structures that the participants could inhabit. As its members claim, the occupation was a response to the total lack of cultural policy and platforms that support the emergence of artistic practices and values that propose new ways of thinking and creating.

Since its occupation by the members of Mavili Collective, Embros has hosted numerous performances, community events, meetings, residencies, and festivals which were offered for free to the public. It was Friday 4 October 2013 when first I visited Embros. A 24-hour event called *Embros Theatre Occupation: 24hour emergency room* had been organized. It was late evening when I arrived at the theatre and, recalling my very first impression of that night, I

[17] Mavili Collective, A temporary re-activation of disused building, http://mavilicollective.wordpress.com/ (Accessed May 18, 2015).

was amazed by the dynamic exchange of relations between different groups in the crowd, adding a very lively happening that was taking place in all surrounding streets. Small groups of people sitting outside the theatre, exchanging thoughts and ideas on artistic projects, collaborations and practices but also on current social and political debates. I had a meeting with Gigi, member of Mavili Collective, that night. She would inform me about Embros and introduce me to the other members of Mavili Collective. I decided to join the audience and watch some of the performances and talks before getting to work. The dynamic atmosphere invited everyone to become part of the happening and somehow immediately predisposing thoughts of direct action and involvement. There was only a small light on the stage located on the ground floor. One of the speakers welcomed the audience and briefly explained how the weekly open assemblies run. Some suggestions for the next assembly were made and some key points to consider, such as providing help to vulnerable social groups like immigrants, organising the following events and talks and plan for the cleaning and maintenance of the theatre. In the last performance, the artist offered an apple to the audience to share as a gesture of common and collective experience before moving upstairs to the second floor for one to one encounters including psychotherapy, fortune telling, relationship advice, and work support or memorial service. I must confess that the queue for the fortune telling was the longest. The room was full of candles denoting a relaxing atmosphere and verses written on the walls: 'I am writing to you because I know these days will be forgotten' is written in Greek. I walked around the building, there were traces of people living there everywhere. The dressing rooms with the large mirrors indicated that the theatre hosted numerous prestigious artists in these rooms not too long ago. An old red phone was still left there, it was the only object.

I spotted Gigi in the crowd. The conversation about the theatre, its people and the dynamics produced in such a context was enlightening for the purposes of this research. There was a feeling of solidarity and the people were engaged in a fruitful exchange of thoughts, stories, and experiences. There was plenty of wine for the visitors and you could smell homemade food. Gigi started narrating the story of the collective's initiative to occupy the building. Mavili Collective was formed long before the occupation and it was named after the homonymous square in Athens, Mavili Square. The founding members have presented their work in various contexts working collaboratively with other groups. She said 'the initiative was a response to the political practices that refuse to consider the people as part of the decision-making process. We thought with the other members of Mavili Collective that this

was the right moment for such a performance to take place'. The Greek society was at the time experiencing the devastating consequences of harsh austerity measures. However, this allowed for Embros to function as a point of reference in strengthening social relations giving path to new dynamics.

The occupation positioned itself as a temporary activation of the space and an intense twelve-day programme was organized initially with an emphasis on access and action. Some of the events included dance and theatre shows, panels, seminars, public debates on urgent social and political issues organised by scholars. Priority was given to new artists who were invited to present their work. The space operated as a constantly re-evaluated experimental commons: an open system that offered the potential to re-think relations between people and the possible roles of art and performance. People with different backgrounds came together beyond the limits of their practice and their expertise to propose new models of an autonomous community. They came together to suggest that common beliefs and ideas strengthen social relations, and only when the people acknowledge their ability to create new models, new structures, new discourses, and new laws, can they redefine what Cornelius Castoriadis calls 'the imaginary'.

Vassilis, one of the other members of the collective, joined the conversation. The narrative focused on the events and the difficulties they encountered since the first occupation of the building on Friday 11 November 2011, while Greece was temporarily without a government. However, as Vasilis noted:

> such experiments are of great importance; they are the source of inspiration and a necessary condition for art and the political to join hands, and at the same time, make the social landscape look like, if anything, there are still surprises to emerge and situations that engage human action are always unpredictable.

The increasingly precarious working conditions of the Greek cultural industry and the repeated threats from the government to close all self-managed spaces were at the core of the action plan. In this critical moment of Greek history, the state had proven unable or perhaps unwilling to create the social structures that will allow the emergence of a creative dialogue to offer new possibilities and perspectives. The government had demanded several times that the Mavili Collective evacuate the building announcing the potential rental of the space to private companies. On 25 October 2012 Mavilli Collective refused to hand over the building to the Public Properties Company (ETAD). This resulted in the gathering of large groups of

people outside the building making a call to support the collective's proposal. The collective succeeded in keeping the space open and it since then continued to function through open assemblies until today. A number of working groups had been established allowing an extended network of artists and scholars to offer new collaborations.

Despite the attempts to find a common ground with the Ministry of Culture and ETAD, any form of dialogue with the members of Mavili Collective or other individuals was declined. Emergency situations occurred such as the arrest of two actors on 30 October 2013 while holding rehearsals and who were indicted for a series of charges, including the repeated occupation of a public building and the disruption of domestic peace. The collective's response to the situation was immediate: 'the action of today's arrest is undeniably part of a bigger scheme of a political wipe-out of "lawlessness", in other words of the freedom of expression, of social solidarity, of self-management and the creation of culture outside the norms of the vulgar market. The attack on Embros…leaves no doubt about the intentions of a government which appears determined to "redeem itself" of all kinds of social solidarity, after having already dismantled state structures'.[18] Letters of support and expressions of solidarity were sent from several artists, thinkers, theatres and collectives from all over the world, including Raoul Vaneigem, a Situationist and author of *The Revolution of Everyday Life,* who stated:

> When a government represses the freedom of art and the freedom of expression, it no longer has the right to usurpate the name of democracy, it becomes the expression of totalitarianism that is legitimate to fight. The arrest of the members of Embros Theater reveals the intention of an obscurantism incompatible with the right we all have to education and culture. It is a concern of everyone to oppose and save cultural spaces from the mafia enterprises of the privatization and the control of the commodity.[19]

A letter of support in response to the arrests from self-managed Teatro Valle in Rome was also sent to Embros:

> We could have understood if it was a bad example of science fiction, but it's not. And it's not a show. Unfortunately, it's true. Two actors from Embros Theatre in Athens were arrested because they committed the most atrocious of crimes: rehearsing. But maybe it was because this crime is aggravated by others which are even worse, when they become possible: reclaiming public space, practicing commons and believing in culture as a primary right. This authoritarian, illogical, and repressive act of arrest is simply unacceptable. As we are able, from Rome,

[18] Embros Theatre, "News." http://www.embros.gr/index/ (Accessed March 26, 2016).
[19] Embros Theatre, "News." http://www.embros.gr/index/ (Accessed April 17, 2016).

> we would like to RE-ACT! Participants of Embros: What you're building together is strong, durable and inspiring. We are with you with eyes and heart wide open. This letter is a small gesture of solidarity, but we really want to encourage you guys to never give up.[20]

The collective's agenda, strongly associated with the operation of Embros as space for the common good, allowed the theatre to continue to function as an open social space hosting important social activities and artistic projects. As they argue 'the operational models are always in process, constantly testing modes and forms that can support its cultural and social role as an experimental common good in the heart of the city'.[21] The assemblies were at once open to a range of political and ideological positions but also vulnerable to agree on what might have brought them together. As Gigi Argyropoulou argues, 'Embros Theatre became an 'evental site'… The eventual 'we' of Embros was produced during these days through shared time, through common experience in an emergent public space'.[22] However, the methods of the artists involved had to constantly be reconsidered and subject to any change that occurred in the situation around them. During these years a number of collectives emerged and variety of activities took place in its grounds sometimes following the spirit of the initial reactivation, sometimes not. Embros operated as a difficult experiment of social methods for most of its members consumed, as they claim, in power relations and micro politics, condemned to its failure. Challenging the very relations of power and distribution, Embros destabilized the cultural and social landscape of Athens and produced new relations between forms, makers and the public bringing to the foreground the exclusions and limitations of the distribution of power. Constantly improvising and transforming itself, day by day, subject to the fluid social and political scene of the city, and for reasons that I will elaborate below, Embros continued to exist through its failures and exclusions, allowing new relations of power and politics to emerge.

[20] Embros Theatre, "News." http://www.embros.gr/index/ (Accessed April 17, 2016).
[21] Embros Theatre, "Support Embros Society and culture under threat in Greece". http://www.embros.gr/support-embros/ (Accessed May 14, 2016).
[22] Gigi Argyropoulou. *Collective Horizons: Rethinking the Performative and Political: (Im) Possibilities of Being Together*. In *Performing Antagonism Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Fisher Tony and Katsouraki Eve, London: Palgrave Macmilian. 2017. p.177.

PRAXIS TWO: THE OCCUPATION OF GREEN PARK

One evening in the summer of 2015, I found myself at an open performance space. The music was intriguingly chaotic and the park full of people. There were colourful lights everywhere and somewhere in the park an improvised bar that served drinks. I wandered around the space, an old building studded with graffiti and more people inside chatting with each other. Green Park was occupied. The second such experiment after Embros Theatre.

> Today on the 19th of June, 2015 we are occupying Green Park cafe in the Pedion tou Areos, one the two central parks of Athens. Almost 4 years after the occupation of the Empros theatre in 2011 we are activating with our own means a space deserted and left empty for years by the Greek state and propose a 10-day program of cultural and political intervention in the here and now of Athens.[23]

With these opening words, the manifesto of the occupation of the Green Park café was communicated to the public. Green Park is located at the Pedion tou Areos Park (Field of Ares), one of the largest parks in Athens. Following the occupation of Embros Theatre, Mavili collective, on a continuous process of re-evaluation, re-thinking and re-proposing initiated a second occupation in the heart of the city of Athens as a refusal to conform to neoliberal oriented logics of ownership. Having no particular ideology, but rather considering the occupation as the result of continuous experimentations and dialogues amid the struggles and failures of the last few years, Green Park seeks to rebuild modes of togetherness reclaiming a collective 'we' for the sake of its social and political importance. By proposing a model of autonomous instituting and away from power distributions, Mavili Collective, seeks for the second time to build methods that refuse political representation attempting to explore the narrative between artistic, political and theoretical action and their reflection to the public realm and the social as a continuous open process of examining individual, social and political limitations. Aware this time of the implications and struggles that such experimentations might undergo, they seek to co-imagine with fellow city dwellers through the 'ephemeral collective experiment'.

The ten-day program that followed included a series of events, happenings, and talks. A conference called *Institutions, Politics, Performance* was organised on 24-28 September 2015 in Athens bringing together interdisciplinary fields on art and politics exploring precisely the relationship between performance and institutions as formed through a set of practices,

[23] Green Park. https://greenparkathens.wordpress.com/manifesto/ (accessed 08.09.2017).

relations and patterns. Seeking to explore new ways of 'commons', the occupation of the Green Park functioned as a platform to consider how institutions become performance but also how performance practices may initiate and implement new modes of organisation that can adopt a new grammar of politics and, thus, become a dominant system of power. Most of the participants of the Green Park experiment were connected in various ways having met at the numerous events held at Embros during the last few years. As an open-ended process, the Green Park project, refused this time to offer solutions to increasingly precarious social and political conditions. Instead, it proposed a new site of methods open to constant re-evaluation and rethinking outside of politically framed forms. Seeking to remain unstructured and incomplete, the experiment hopes to maintain an open character away from any kind of limitations that would produce specific formations. Green Park seeks to rethink the need for participation, the methods under which this could be rendered possible and the languages used to introduce a new way of belonging. 'It seeks to recuperate lightness, humor, self-depreciation and joyous critique as the foundations of an open process'.[24]

Gary Anderson and Lena Simic in their chapter *At Home and Abroad: The Study Room in Exile* talk about their experience in Green Park during an event called *Performance Biennial: A self-organised biennial on performance, art and politics*, organised by Gigi Argyropoulou, Kostas Tzimoulis and Vasilis Noulas. The organisers state for the event:

> playfully subverting the term 'biennial' into a self-organised practice, the event will test self-instituted forms of culture and politics. Under the title "No Future" this guerrilla biennial will bring together forms of artistic, political and theoretical practice and discourse questioning the potential of a collective refusal to a referred futurity.[25]

With no funding or any institutional support, the organisers further state:

> seeking to problematise the role of performance in the neoliberal narrative we will collectively engage in ongoing disruptions between the institution and the self-instituted, between buildings and parks, between the centre and the periphery, between urban and rural.[26]

As Anderson and Simic get ready for their project *The Study Room in Exile at Green Park*, which consists of a series of interviews with participants conducted over six days, followed by

[24] Gigi Argyropoulou, *From Embros to Green Park On continuous failures. On continuous struggles*, 2015, http://transversal.at/blog/From-Embros-to-Green-Park (Accessed May 15, 2016).
[25] Performance Biennial. A Self-Organised Biennial on Performance, Art and Politics. https://performancebiennial.org/theme/ (Accessed November 20, 2016).
[26] Ibid.

a workshop where the participants are asked to express their thoughts on the question 'What's on your mind these days?', Anderson states 'as soon as I begin, I start feeling at home'.[27] And he continues to say:

> with Gigi's encouragement and the support of all the people working behind the scenes on meal preparation and drinks in the scorching heat and chilled-by-buckets-of-ice wine in the evenings, I enjoy a curious domesticity in this public squatted place. I want it to feel like home: a temporary (autonomous) domestic zone, where domestic means supportive, ears open, watching for the encounter, being permanently on the lookout, being careful about how we care for each other, practicing radical tolerance.[28]

Deploying a light, open and flexible method, Green Park, seems to regard the failures and struggles of the past as formations that prevented free action, allowing those participating in the experiment to decide the 'what', 'when' and 'how'. The activation of the Green Park hopes for politics to emerge through shared values and fights for and from exclusion. As Anderson explains:

> for me, the critique of the debt-laden future of the Greek state is enacted with a living, breathing alternative here and now (or there and then). 'Find a way to feel at home' felt like the gentle command of the event. From buying food at the bar for Afghan and Syrian refugees forced to live in the park next door, making sure that the bar workers got a break and a chance to listen to the speakers indoors; moving between people I haven't met before to ask for an interview; getting up the ladder to take the lights down at the end of the evening, I felt useful.[29]

Both Green Park and Embros were sites constituted as acts proposing a departure from conventional norms of commoning, avoiding pre-existing dominant structures, seeking at once to function as points of reference within the social setting they seek to transform. Green Park, however, focused more on the joyful and playful formation of relations. Experimenting with performance structures and practices outside conventional theatre directions, Green Park regarded itself as a disruption, questioning instituted modes of being. Refusing to deploy duration and continuity and highlighting the ephemeral and temporal character of the event, the experiment supports its own right to choose the end, adopting a playful performative character that challenges the very status of performance itself. Claiming its own right for self-institution with its own terms, Green Park, seeks for different definitions of time and

[27]Gary Anderson and Lena Simic. *At Home and Abroad: The Study Room in Exile.* In Breed, Ananda and Prentki, Tim, eds. *Performance and Civic Engagement*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan and Springer, 2017, p.80.
[28] Ibid., p.80.
[29] Ibid., p.81.

duration, claiming its autonomous status which at the same time protects it from prevalence and control. For it to work, they insist on the relation between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', both of which are vital for 'game'.

THE AGONISTIC PROJECT OF AUTONOMY

How do we relate the new alternatives and the new potentialities that propose or perhaps form new spaces and new discourses with the given socio-political conditions? Would a radical social change be a real possibility under these conditions? Embros and Green Park are examples of what Cornelius Castoriadis would call 'autonomous models' of society. In his *Imaginary Institution of Society,* the concept of *autonomy* is central in order to interpret social behaviours that start from the individual and extend to the society. For Castoriadis the human subject cannot exist apart from a collective and autonomy is placed at the centre of the revolutionary project.[30]

The word itself, autonomy, is of Greek origin, *auto* means 'by itself' and *nomos* means 'law'. The word therefore describes the condition of someone creating his/her own laws. Starting from the human subject and approaching social behaviours from a psychological point of view initially, as his thoughts were largely influenced by Freudian theory, Castoriadis begins his theory of autonomy by proposing 'where id was, there shall ego be'.[31] with *ego* representing consciousness and *id* representing the unconscious. In other words, analysing the above phrase, individual autonomy is to create one's own laws, norms, and meanings and having full awareness of the wishes, hopes and truths. This consists of two elements, the internal and the external. The internal represents the relation the individual creates with its psyche. This implies a balanced relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, without letting one end dominate over the other. Thus, Castoriadis completes Freud's dictum with his own 'where ego is, Id must spring forth'.[32] The external element has to do with the fact that the individual cannot be free alone in every type of society as he/she is part of a collective.

[30] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Athens: Kedros, 1978.
[31] Ibid., p.150.
[32] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Athens: Kedros, 1978, pp.150-168.

Thus, social autonomy for Castoriadis means that society posits its own laws in a collective way but also recognises itself as the source for its norms; that is the creator of its own social imaginary significations. This by extension means that we do not refer to self-institution at social level only, but we also talk about explicit self-institution. Namely, we are referring to a type of human being that reflexively gives to itself the laws of its own existence. Therefore, individual autonomy cannot exist without social autonomy and vice versa. Furthermore, individual autonomy is only possible when individuals take direct part in the formation of their own laws. Castoriadis believes that no one else is in position to understand the needs of the individuals better that the individuals themselves and thus, no one is in a position to create laws on behalf of someone else, implying here new ethical considerations that have concerned philosophers such as Plato and Socrates.

This leads us to the implication that if the project of autonomy involves direct action and if we accept the concept of autonomy as such, then the existence of human subjects within society implies directly the idea of democracy, given that democracy consists of equal participation of all individuals in instituting their laws and activities. By democracy, Castoriadis means direct democracy, not representative, as again, a society with representative democracy cannot be autonomous because when a representative is in position to create laws on behalf of the whole society then this translates to a heteronomous society (with hetero meaning 'other'). Therefore, contemporary western societies, according to Castoriadis, are not autonomous as they elect representatives who make decisions on behalf of the individuals. A heteronomous society instead of recognizing itself as a self-created one, it claims to be grounded in external powers. This is why heteronomous societies attribute their *imaginaries* to external authorities, such as history, religion or ancestors. In religion, for example, laws and meanings find their legitimation in God. Heteronomous societies legitimize their functionality and their norms on the basis of the immanent logic of that particular system. In the case of capitalist and neoliberal societies, for instance, this legitimizing logic can be identified as the maximization of utility and the minimization of cost. Such societies, therefore, impose on their members a specific set of laws whose existence functions to propagate the heteronomous logic of capital. And the reason is that these societies need to supply and maintain themselves in the particular system they have created for themselves. Imaginary significations are created in order to bond societies, in order to give humans the confidence to believe that what was chosen by them or what was created by them is what they really need. In heteronomous societies, these needs are

fabricated in such a way as to make them appear to be predetermined by an extra-social source that will already have a ready answer to anything that might be questioned. And this is what destroys one's creative ability and imagination and deprives his/her freedom of choice and the possibility of creating something genuinely new and original. Thus, the possibility of a real change does not exist under this setting.

For Castoriadis, the project of autonomy emerges for the first time in history in ancient Greece because there the concept of direct democracy was principally applied and allowed individuals to create their own institutions. Social autonomy initiated the unprecedented rhythm of creation in all areas of human evolution. Autonomy, according to Castoriadis, firstly begins in Athens at around 682 BC with the establishment of the election of the *thesmothetai,* who were the judicial magistrates. The *thesmothetai* assigned Draco in 624 BC, the first legislator of Athens, to establish a new legal code which constituted the first written laws of ancient Athens. Second, there were signs of autonomy in Sparta with the instating of all the Spartans, both men and women, as equals; and lastly, autonomy was identified in the affirmation of the rule of *nomos* (law). Castoriadis claims that 'what is important in ancient Greek political life is the *activity* and *struggle* around the change of the institutions, the explicit (even partial) self-institution of the *polis as a permanent process*'.[33] This implies the fact that the Athenians were actively engaged in the reformation process of their system, of their *polis* and they constantly altered the laws and rules according to their needs by questioning the traditional discourses. This process, Castoriadis argues, led to the establishment of direct democracy in 508 BC in Athens, which is to say, about 175 years later. The Athenian democracy for Castoriadis remains a unique model of political system and the absolute political ideal.

One could argue, the Greeks had their own religion, the Gods, their cults and mythology and yet they reached the point of autonomous society. Could this fact not have affected their unprecedented freedom of choice and creation? Castoriadis' answer is that 'religion is kept strictly at bay by political activities'.[34] Politics in ancient Greece is secular. Autonomy for him is freedom, the freedom of the creative imagination and this why direct democracy is the only regime where autonomy would be a real possibility. Focusing on Pericles' Athens he argues that there we encounter the first form of a community explicitly deliberating about its

[33] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy*. (Italics originally) Edited and translated by David Ames Curtis. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 270.
[34] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy*. Edited and translated by David Ames Curtis. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 275.

own laws and changing these laws if the need arose, which for him is a historical event of major importance. He states that 'in a democracy people can do anything -and must know that they ought not to do just anything. Democracy is the regime of self-limitation…it is the regime of freedom- and a tragic regime'.[35] Tragic because freedom is never without tragic implications, because the possibility of slipping unknowingly into hubris always exists. Hubris means excessive pride and in ancient Greece was a crime punished by law. Castoriadis argues 'he who is possessed by hubris exits from the political community of men'.[36] He becomes *apolis*, namely a man without a city. But this is at the same time 'the ultimate problem of autonomous man: the self-limitation of the individual and of the political community'[37] because man's powers and possibilities are unlimited. Hubris is something that appears in almost every Greek tragedy, serving a pedagogic character, reminding the spectators those values that make them good citizens who serve the common good.

Castoriadis argues that in the city of Athens, where the rise of democracy was so powerful, 'only in the city where the democratic process, the process of self-institution reached its climax, only there could tragedy be created'.[38] What was unique about the *polis* of Athens was that it promoted a critical self-examination of its own political and philosophical foundations. It was a social creation where ideas, thoughts, and values become an institution. He suggests that as the Athenians created their *polis*, and the *polis*, in turn, created humans that were aware of their creative abilities; it created a new type of social being.

In the Athenian society theatre had its own important position where theatrical plays and political satire such as that of Aristophanes could remarkably influence public opinion. The theatrical praxis was the substance of social, political, philosophical and cultural development. The theatrical praxis was a political praxis and this is the reason why Castoriadis turned to Greek tragedy, for its creative resources in order to work through a philosophical path toward human freedom. Olga Taxidou describes the ancient theatre 'as a specific mode of artistic production that is civic and collective, mythological and historical, private and public, written and performed, it is an essential constituent of the collective 'dream of democracy' that the Athenian polis supposedly embodied'.[39] In order to

[35] Ibid., p. 282.
[36] Ibid., p. 282.
[37] Cornelius Castoriadis. *Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Anthropos. In Figures of the Thinkable*. Translated by Helen Arnold. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007, p. 27.
[38] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy*. Edited and translated by David Ames Curtis. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 284.
[39]Olga Taxidou. *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p.2.

comprehend the nature of theatre as praxis, it is important to examine the philosophical and political environment within which theatre developed. Such an approach will raise the connections between politics and theatre, which, as Augusto Boal believed, could serve as a 'forum'[40] for teaching people those strategies they need in order to question and transform the world they live in.

The ancient Greek theatre flourished in the city of Athens between 550 BC and 220 BC. It carries a religious, yet a strong social and political character. The theatrical shows in the Athenian democracy have their roots in the *polis* and its democratic institutions. All the dramatic plays were presented during the festival *Dionysia* that was held several times every year at the theatre of Dionysus in order to honour Dionysus, the God of *eugenesis* and fertility. The theatre itself is located at the south slope of the Acropolis and it also functioned as a place for the principal assembly (Ecclesia) to hold its meetings. The assembly allowed all Athenian male citizens, regardless of economic class, to participate in the decision-making. The assembly was responsible for making decisions on issues related to war strategies, elections and legislation. The theatre determined its operational rules and flourished almost within one century, creating a parallel path with the political system. The *polis* itself promotes and underlines the aesthetic and educational values of the theatrical art. Ancient drama flourished and was perfected in the Golden Age of Athens because it was not a just a social activity or happening for entertainment. It stands in the centre of the society and the national expenses as a social institution. Thus, the connection between theatre and politics is established as the citizens themselves are actively involved in every social aspect in order to make crucial decisions for their *polis* and their own future.

Tragedy's profound connection to the democratic *polis* has been firmly explored by scholars, such as Jean-Pierre Vernant and Friedrich Nietzsche, who focused mostly on the religious side of tragedy. Castoriadis, however, focused mainly on the political.[41] The fact that the birth of both tragedy and democracy coincided with one another is something that should not remain unnoticed. The reflection in tragedy of the political scene of Athens and of the intense interest of the citizens in politics is undeniable. Both Nietzsche and Vernant's work had clearly influenced Castoriadis' thoughts. Vernant's description of an imaginary world is similar to Castoriadis' which includes the 'creation of a human world: of "things", "reality",

[40] Augusto Boal. *Theatre of the oppressed*. Translated by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride and Emily Fryer. London: Pluto, 2000.
[41] Friedrich Nietzsche. *The birth of tragedy*. Translated by N.A. Kefala. Athens: Govostis, 1973.

language, norms, values, ways of life and death [… where each particular society posits a] particular complex of rules, laws, meanings, values, tools, motivations, etc'.[42] Castoriadis found tragedy's uniqueness in its ability to resist, question and criticize fixed and predetermined forms of being. The unveiling of being as a specific mode confronted the spectators with their own creative powers, revealing their shared foundations and institutions to be their own creations and hence tragedy provided those conditions for democracy to become a social possibility.

Castoriadis continues his historical overview of the emergence of autonomous societies by noting that the second time the project of autonomy reappears in history is at the end of the Dark Ages in Europe with the appearance of political communities with emerging social structures. The 'social imaginary', namely the society's creative ability, is what leads all societies in self-institution through the creative nature of imagination which creates the world through our engagement with it. Through the 'imaginary' societies create values and principles and consequently the institutions that embody them. As I remarked earlier, a society is autonomous when it is aware of the fact that there is no extra-social source for its laws. That is why there is an essential difference between democratic societies that constantly question any kind of legitimate traditional beliefs and religious societies that take for granted certain ideas. This is why Castoriadis regarded contemporary societies heteronomous, as in most cases they have representative regimes. He characteristically states that the only decision human subjects make nowadays is to elect someone who will create the norms and laws for them, as the majority of the population does not participate in the decision-making process. He did not support the idea that a social initiative or movement with the limits and conditions set by the existing system can create or demand a social change. A movement within the system does not bring a radical change if it does not abolish the existing system creating a new order in its place. With this in mind, how do the new possibilities that Mavili Collective proposes relate to Castoriadis' project of autonomy and where does the personal responsibility of the individuals lie when demanding a social change? How does this new reality shape the emergence of new orders in relation to artistic practices that encourage social action?

Castoriadis, influenced by Aristotle, proposes a new understanding of the concept of *project* as such based on the creative dimension of action, *praxis*. For Castoriadis, history and the

[42] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy*. Edited and translated by David Ames Curtis. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 269.

social constitute an indivisible unity and form the functions of what he calls the 'social imaginary', the collective creative ability. His theory attempts to redefine the concept of the revolutionary project based on a different approach of *praxis*. He argues that philosophers including Marx have failed to analyse the concept of *praxis* approaching only two sides of it: technique and ethics. Hence, the creative ability of *praxis* was not acknowledged. Creativity for Marx was merely concerned with the production process. Castoriadis' theory differs in that Castoriadis renders creativity as the main characteristic of the *praxis*. In other words, creativity, both at individual and social level, derives from the imaginary that forms the creative ability of the human being. In his philosophy, the world is uncertain but the very element that certainly exists is that of the creative ability of the human and this element is a prerequisite for *praxis*. And thus, through a philosophy of *praxis*, a philosophy of creation is established.

Likewise, the important difference between Aristotle and Castoriadis when we talk about the concept of *praxis* is that for Aristotle *praxis* is a human action which is not aimed at something outside its own existence. For Castoriadis on the other hand, *praxis*, aims at something outside its existence, autonomy. In his *The Imaginary Institution of Society* Castoriadis defines *praxis* as 'an action which targets someone or a group of people as autonomous beings and whom we consider as a basic element in the process of the pursuit of their personal autonomy'.[43] *Praxis* thereby is closely connected with its subject and it is a path toward the unknown as it cannot fully possess the knowledge of the subject. For Castoriadis, the subject of the *praxis,* the other, can never be defined rationally and it is exactly this impossibility that ascertains the creative dimension of the *praxis*. This thought is by extension radical on the political sphere. If reality is unpredictable and the world we live in is uncertain then the revolutionary project not only constitutes a reason for *praxis,* but also constitutes a prerequisite for social action. Social action, thereby, is a creative *praxis* of the social imaginary, which lies in the possibility of the creation of new meanings, values and institutions. Social action then does not necessarily have to suggest that the society is able to propose solutions for the problems is encountering or those that might arise in the future. The most important is to be consistent in its *praxis* and the possibility of success; the possibility of a radical change would improve the ability of the society to solve efficiently its problems.

[43] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Athens: Kedros, 1978, p.114 (the translation from the original Greek text is mine).

Thus autonomy, both at individual and collective level, constitutes at the same time an end in itself and also a means of achieving its purpose.

Through the project of autonomy, Castoriadis redefines the nature of politics, claiming that what is called 'revolutionary politics' is an action whose subject is the organisation and orientation of the society within certain values and ideas and whose purpose is social autonomy at collective level. And, as mentioned earlier, this action acknowledges that autonomy involves a radical transformation of society which is also possible only through self-autonomy.[44] Now, where does the importance of the project of autonomy lie and to what extent is autonomy a possibility in contemporary society? For Castoriadis, the problem should seek its solution in the individual within the society. Self-autonomy should be a desire and a personal choice that points toward the possibility of its existence. The individual should seek for a society that would be able to bestow meaning to his/her life, for a society in which the individual would hold a central position in decision-making. The will for *praxis* implies a logical and intellectual processing of the circumstances without exhausting itself in this process. Hence, the starting point for the project of autonomy is the collection and analysis of the elements that lead to the interpretation of the problem or crisis. 'We start from the ascertainment of the social crisis…but -second element- this does not eliminate the need for an understanding, interpretation, declaration and clarification by us…and finally -third element- we adopt a stance on the social crisis and on the struggle that constitutes it'.[45] Thus, the revolutionary project is reflected on the social and the individual's actions are based on the critical processing of current reality.

In the Castoriadian analysis of the capitalist system, there is a contradiction that lies in the fact that this system claims on the one hand to seek the participation of the individuals in social affairs and activities and on the other it excludes them from these activities. The reason is that contemporary society has proved unable to accomplish its own purposes. Which is to say, that this society 'requires that people, as producers or as citizens, remain passive and confine themselves to the performance of the tasks given. When it realizes that this passivity is like a cancer within it, it encourages initiatives and participation, only to discover soon that it cannot tolerate them, for they question the very essence of the existing order'.[46] A social crisis, thereby, is not only a disorder of the existing system; it is a crisis that affects precisely

[44] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Athens: Kedros, 1978., p.117.
[45] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The revolutionary problem today*. Athens: Ypsilon Books, 2000., pp.95-96.
[46] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Athens: Kedros, p.142 (the translation from the original Greek text is mine).

the institutions within the society and its organisation. And it can only be seen as such through the constant questioning of the dominant order, through agonism and struggle against the system. In our attempt to provide an answer to the question of the importance of autonomy, we should consider that autonomy aims at giving values to human life. The human being does not deserve a life that does not allow the possibility of autonomy.[47]

Based on such an analysis of autonomy, the aspect that mostly concerns this research is that autonomous society is a body that carries and promotes the creative *praxis* of its existence, the body that produces cultural action and new perspectives. In other words, social autonomy aims at a social constitution of individuals with increased capacity for the pursuit of autonomy, namely of individuals who desire the emergence of creative practices. Self-autonomy is based on the establishment of a different relationship with the unconscious, a relationship that suggests a path toward the unknown, toward elucidation, which leads the individual to unfold his/her creative abilities. So, then the question is now how can the individuals achieve self-autonomy, given that an autonomous society cannot exist without the autonomous individuals and vice versa? And if the autonomous society is a creation of *praxis* then how is this established? Castoriadis, in his attempt to answer these questions, suggests a reading of his theory for the project of the self and social autonomy based on the Freudian theory of the conscious and the unconscious redefining the concept of imagination which is central to the concept of human freedom, for it he turned to Greek tragedy as the primary source of the imaginary and creative praxis.

Based on a Castoriadian definition of *praxis*, 'we name praxis that doing, in which the other or others are intended as autonomous beings and are considered as the essential agents of the development of their own autonomy. True politics, true pedagogy, true medicine, to the extent that these have ever existed, belong to praxis'.[48] And that is why 'praxis is a conscious activity and can only exist as lucid activity… it is provisional, because praxis itself constantly gives rise to new knowledge, for it makes the world speak a language that is at once singular and universal'.[49] How can then such performances of resistance become *praxis*? The element of *praxis* is the project and its purpose is the transformation of the real 'guided by a representation of the meaning of this transformation, taking into consideration

[47] This is where Castoriadis' thoughts meet Giorgio Agamben's theory of the *Homo Sacer* and bare life. See Agamben's work *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.
[48] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Athens: Kedros, p.114 (the translation from the original Greek text is mine).
[49] Ibid., p.115 (the translation from the original Greek text is mine).

the actual conditions and inspiring an activity'.[50] If, in the case of Greece, the actual fact is the decline of its own existence, alienation as social phenomenon for the reasons that I explicitly elaborated in chapters 2 and 3, then what the cases of Embros theatre and Green Park seek is to inspire an activity, through which new norms of the social will appear. What concerns me more in this research is whether art is able to bestow meaning in this transformation process and become *praxis* able to produce truths that would challenge the 'abstract universality' of Badiou. *Teukhein* in ancient Greek means assembling, adjusting, fabricating, creating and it is where *techne* (art) and technique derive from. The latter, however, would concern only secondary aspects of teukhein. Castoriadis claims that *teukhein* is implied in instituting: 'before there can be any question of *technique* of any sort, the social imaginary must assemble-adjust-fabricate-construct itself as society and as this society, it must make itself be as society and as this society, starting with itself and with what "is there", in a manner appropriate to and in view of being a society and this particular society'.[51] The creation of art is by extension a work of *teukhein*, because it allows for something to be, starting from the creation of something new, in a manner appropriate to and in view of creating something original.

For Aristotle *poiesis* and *praxis*, that derive from *poiein* and *prattein* respectively, belong to the sphere of the possible; they differ from each other only in that the end of *poiein* is a work that exists without reference to the activity that made it be and which is ultimately worth more than the activity itself. Aristotle argued that there are three main activities of free man: *theoria*, *poiesis* and *praxis*. Three types of knowledge corresponded to these activities, *theoretical* knowledge for which the end purpose is truth, *poietical* knowledge for which the ultimate purpose is production/creation and *practical*, for which the ultimate aim is action/praxis. Art, therefore, for Aristotle belongs to the sphere of *poiein*, art is *poiesis.* For Aristotle the creative *poiein* is based on two assumptions: on the essential indeterminacy as component of the world and on the existence of true *logos*. Aristotle defines tragedy through mimesis as a *praxis* that is important and complete. Castoriadis on the other hand noted that *praxis* exists in man's nature and that what Aristotle names as important and complete is the abuse of power. Which is to say that human nature is tragic, entailing fights and struggles and does not have any limitations, and therefore the fear of unknowingly slipping into what concerns almost every Greek tragedy, hubris*,* always exists. In the Castoriadian theory,

[50] Ibid., p.117 (the translation from the original Greek text is mine).
[51] Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Athens: Kedros, p.371 (the translation from the original Greek text is mine).

autonomy aims at *praxis* and is unfolded through the activity that creates it, in a sense that both activity and *praxis* are equally important. The concept of *praxis* has important elements from the Aristotelian notions of *poiein* and *prattein*; it differs in the concept of mimesis and in the fact that creation holds a central position in his social imaginary and the revolutionary project.

Praxis for Castoriadis is the creative ability of the individual to create something new and is essentially connected to elucidation as a step to autonomy. Elucidation is for Castoriadis what Aristotle names 'theory', which is to say, 'the labour by means of which individuals attempt to think about what they do and to know what they think. This, too, is a social-historical creation'.[52] The acknowledgment that reality is unlimited and unpredictable should not neglect revolutionary action, on the contrary, it should be a prerequisite. If reality was not indefinite then it would now allow praxis to emerge, namely new norms, modes and values through the social imaginary. Thus, the three basic activities for Castoriadis are: elucidation, praxis and autonomy.

The concept of *praxis* has been examined by scholars, such as Hannah Arendt, who argues that Western societies have neglected the active life of their members, namely the public sphere. Arendt names *praxis* the highest and most important level of active life. Arendt also argued that during antiquity what we nowadays perceive as a public sphere (agora, assembly) is the space where the people are 'visible' and 'audible' whereas the private sphere is the space where people are hidden.[53] *Praxis* for Arendt refers to public life, namely the *bios,* that is the tending of life, the course of life. Consequently, the public sphere is the space where people can coexist, bestow meaning on their life and create values to satisfy their needs through the social or, as Castoriadis would argue, through the social imaginary. In a similar view Castoriadis argues that the *agora* and the *ekklesia of demos* (assembly) mark the creation of a political domain that belongs to everyone (*ta koina*) entailing new social forms of universality among the members of society within the public sphere. In this sense the polis of Pericles, Athens, legitimized all voices and thoughts in the public sphere, granting theatre a central position as one of the most important institutions.

Castoriadis suggests that the Aristotelian notions of *praxis*, *drasis* (action), *poiesis* and *technē* should be redefined in order for a new perspective and a new reality to emerge. He calls for a

[52] Ibid., p.14 (the translation from the original Greek text is mine).
[53] Hannah Arendt. *Public Rights and Private Interests*. In M. Mooney and F. Stuber, eds. Small Comforts for Hard Times: Humanists on Public Policy. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

new reading of the concept of *project* based on creative *praxis* and *elucidation*. These two, *praxis* and *elucidation* are essential for social and individual *autopoiesis* (self-completeness) and bestow meaning on human life. Theatre and the other arts would serve as modes through which social *autopoiesis* becomes possible to achieve. Thus, the possibility of autonomy is established in the radical indeterminism of *being* and in the radical imaginary, which constitutes the creative ability of the human. This leads us from a philosophy of praxis to a philosophy of *poiesis*.

WHERE DO WE STAND? RETHINKING COLLECTIVE (IM) POSSIBILITIES AND PERFORMANCES OF FAILURE

In concluding this chapter, I offer an analysis of the complexities posed by the current social, political and cultural practices in an attempt to read the impact such practices might have in our conception of agonistic and antagonistic relations as formed through the 'commons'. In the field of Performance Philosophy such questions form the grounds of a productive dialogue. Claire Bishop's view of antagonistic relations in the performances of art and the political opened up the discussion for a democratic (or not) account of participatory practices contesting Nicholas Bourriaoud's 'relational aesthetics' and proposing a 'relational antagonism' where, Bishop argues, art can offer a critical account of pre-existing norms reassigning predetermined thoughts and values.

Yet, what the cases of Embros theatre and Green Park suggest in this setting is a radical democratic politics formed through both agonistic and antagonistic relations reflecting on new paths of protests and resistance. Agonistic because they place the struggle at the very centre of the experiment; and antagonistic because their very own existence lies in political antagonisms produced in its grounds. Likewise, the Castoriadian conception of the 'tragic' regime of democracy offers a valuable contribution to such practices in that it allows them to exist and experiment through their failures; just like the 'tragic' conception of democracy, which is never without implications; just like the human nature which allows struggles and failures; just like Embros which still continues to live through its failures in the light of social, political and ideological antagonisms. The ideological orientations of Embros slowly

changed with time and the works produced were merely concerned with the political rather that the artistic aspect. As David Graeber puts it, echoing the very ambiguous nature of such experiments:

> A revolutionary strategy based on direct action can only succeed if the principles of direct action become institutionalized. Temporary bubbles of autonomy must gradually turn into permanent, free communities. However, in order to do so, those communities cannot exist in total isolation; neither can they have a purely confrontational relation with everyone around them. They have to have some way to engage with larger economic, social or political systems that surround them. This is the trickiest question because it has proved extremely difficult for those organised on radical democratic lines to so integrate themselves in any meaningful way in larger structures without having to make endless compromises in their founding principles.[54]

At the core of all this, however, lies a very simple question: How can such practices pose the need to engage with but also propose an alternative to predetermined laws while enabling the participants' ability collectively and democratically to manage what they want to propose and by which means? Understanding politics in terms of its constitutive openness and its (im) possibilities, some set to reconstitute social and political structures during the past few years in Greece. These collective actions reflected the demand for another mode of democracy but, yet, contesting, fragile and finite as they are, have yet to succeed in forming effective mechanisms that function as counter-powers.

Unlike Embros, Green Park didn't allow visibility, refusing any kind of interaction with the media. The collective remained unidentified proposing an irregular form of activities demanding no compulsory participation, action or dialogue. Green Park continues until today as a process of continuous experimentation of social relations, yet, unable to offer any solutions. It cannot be denied that by their very nature such experiments are precarious and incomplete lacking a merely ontological or metaphysical character. The politics of the so-called 'socially engaged' practices lies precisely in the act of conflicting with the existing consensus, deploying a form of politics where the *demos* positions itself at the centre of the decision-making process through continuous antagonisms that challenge the very limits of the social. What is at stake in these performance events at Embros Theatre and Green Park and the projects assembled in the gathering, is a sequence of experiments through which we can explore their symbolic meaning, and participate in the actions that take place or the method of

[54] David Graeber. *Direct Action: An Ethnography*. Oakland, Canada: AK Press, 2009, p.210.

being autonomous. Such experiments cannot offer solutions. Such experiments, however, are valuable in their multiple interpretations confronting us with the limits of the *tragic* regime of democracy. Suggesting a continuous process of *agōn*, struggle and constant displacement, such experiments offer a productive way to think of reconfiguration through ruptures and failures, improvising possible impossibilities. In doing so, we might at least begin to envisage alternative forms to actual existing democracy and come to terms with a whole new grammar of politics disclosed in a new vocabulary of social relations.

Drawing on the social and political dimension of the contradictions in play, many theories of social protest movements have focused on the experimental qualities in redefining and reimagining a new 'we' that is formed in every collective action. Here, however, I want to offer some further insights on its performative aspects, the relation between the performance itself and what it came to embody. Embros theatre and Green Park came to reimagine a 'choreography' of protest as a form of what Richard Schechner would call 'public direct theatre'. This form of theatre is now seen everywhere, in lecture halls, buildings, streets, parks, squares and so on. Its performance is designed to confront audiences and to reframe debate. The people to which its radicality appeals are those who comprise a contested reality into what its agents hope will be a changing script. Much as in Brecht's theatre, the intention of its radicality is to spur spectators into thinking about current challenges in a new way, radical as its own methodology; except that this type of theatre does not wait for spectators and audiences to come to it, it rather invites them to collectively participate in its formation, reshaping collective identities. To this extent, the symbolism of protest is not secondary to its politics. Schechner argued that 'the direct theatre is not "about" something so much as it is made "of" something". It is, therefore, 'actual + symbolic rather than referential/ representational', Schechner writes.[55] Real people at Embros and Greek Park came as anonymous players to play their roles in public forming a new aesthetic, social and political dialectic in the idea of the 'theatrical'. This radical idea of the theatrical designates also the capacity of certain kinds of spaces to enable the production of appearances, not only in street demonstrations but also on 'public stages' to discuss matters of general interest.

Nevertheless, I would like to consider for a moment the problematic aspect of the 'public stage' in the context of the individualism of late capitalism in relation to the commodification of public stages through which citizens have become depoliticised and forms of action are

[55] Richard Schechner. *The future of ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 89.

restricted to the private domain; for otherwise we would now celebrate the triumph of Arendt's conception of public sphere, namely the space where citizens share a desire to organise relations, debate matters of common interest and collectively resolve public affairs. Within this context, the emphasis placed on the role of the individual within the liberal bourgeois model can be particularly problematic in achieving the consensus that Habermas advocates. Although Habermas himself remains sceptical about the gathering of *actual* public bodies due to the belief that the mass can act unreasonably and the politically productive enthusiasm of the crowd can easily transform into the destructive hysteria of the mob. The tension that exists in this claim holds true in that the demands that arise from the pressure of street protests and demonstrations might as well arise from the consensus of private individuals participating in public discussion driven by private interests. However, despite the theoretical and, indeed, actual tensions that exist within protest movements, such gatherings are frequently united in their opposition to dominant powers. But when it comes to articulating alternative political ends, then the ground shared by protesters is at the same time common and fragmented.

The global economic crisis of 2008 ruptured the faith that the neoliberal imaginary had placed in unfettered economic growth and unleashed waves of protests and occupations across the world. These events tested and questioned the potentialities of collective action reclaiming public spaces. So, what appeared was an 'act of the many', a 'we', that nevertheless, oscillated between the demand for radical change and what was to come next. The emergent gathering of the people reactivated a series of political questions that societies seemed to have forgotten. These collective events marked a dimension of experience from which we have to learn a lesson. The gatherings came to explore the challenges and potentialities of the multiple formations of 'we'. For Mouffe, collective identities are central in politics when societies construct them in a way that gives meaningful life to forms of democratic engagement. What kind of collective identities were produced at Embros and Green Park and what roles did its participants inhabit in an emergent experiment in democratic engagement? It is precisely this 'we' that the ongoing search of collective modes of being together in art and performance (but also in political) practices calls into question. How do *we* organise ourselves within and against the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism? How do *we* create common spaces that extend beyond individual interest and conflict? And most importantly, how do *we* maintain the collective identity of the 'we' in the ephemeral nature of an emergent experiment in democratic practice?

The diversity of participants at Embros challenged conventional disciplinary boundaries and established relations. Who was included and who was excluded from action, decisions, procedures and operations? By bringing together established artists, academics, immigrant groups, activists and students, Embros produced what Mouffe calls an agonistic framework, in which what primarily matters is the encounter with the other, in order for a we/they relation to emerge. This encounter with the other is what renders collective life possible (or impossible) and what promotes engagement with the here and now, envisaging a common future. In the weekly assemblies that were organised following the occupation of Embros, participants' encounters with each other rendered collective life possible, at least at the beginning of the weekly gatherings. With time, some of the initial imaginings of artistic and political practices proved to be incompatible. For Antonio Negri, the problematic aspect of constituent power as a constituent assembly is the decision of how the assembly itself comes about in the first place. A number of questions arise with regard to its legitimation: who is calling the assembly and who can participate? How can the inclusion of the excluded take place in the process of democratic social and political exchange? Can it exist beyond all conflicts and asymmetries?

My own experience from the several assemblies I attended at Embros had provoked mixed feelings about the future of any potential revolutionary movement. It had become obvious that the participants at Embros seemed unable to organise themselves, mostly because the tension that existed in the assemblies resulted from the consensus of private individuals that came to discuss in public. While the occupation claimed a non-representational formation and early assemblies focused on organisational aspects and participants collectively decided on a course of action, they were soon confronted with challenges that many 'grassroots' movements are faced with, as Argyropoulou explains. 'After a brief period of having experienced togetherness, any "collective" operation is confronted with a specifically *political* challenge'.[56] The collective identity of the 'we' was soon fragmented, allowing new forms of politics to emerge. In Mouffe's terms, in every agonistic relation the possibility of the re-emergence of antagonism is always present. Political antagonisms were brought to the surface and although there would always be someone sitting in the theatre where the assemblies took place, reminding participants that 'we do not discuss political ideologies

[56] Gigi Argyropoulou. *Collective Horizons: Rethinking the Performative and Political: (Im) Possibilities of Being Together*. In *Performing Antagonism Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Fisher Tony and Katsouraki Eve, London: Palgrave Macmilian. 2017. p.177.

here', many assemblies were polarised with political conflicts, allowing little space for dialogue. Argyropoulou writes about the weekly assemblies:

> The cultural and the political seemed to be foregrounded as two oppositional poles within the debates as participants instituted different modes of responding to this collective encounter. Some sought to defend Embros as a specific cultural/political experiment with its unique critical position in the Athenian landscape while others saw it as a means of direct action: following the modus operanti of squatting common spaces in Athens.[57]

In my numerous conversations with participants at Embros, many had agreed that the day-to-day procedures and operations became extremely bureaucratic with time, challenging all kind of relations formed within its grounds, fragmenting the collective identity of the 'we'. Castoriadis' critique of bureaucratic capitalism seems particularly enlightening in understanding how imaginary significations become loose and unable to bestow meaning. Bureaucratisation, according to Castoriadis, causes the draining of meaning from societies dominated by private and public bureaucracies. Sterility, impotence, incoherence and superficiality triumph over sense. Societies become consumed by operational procedures allowing trivial pursuits to prevail. In exile, in France, Castoriadis envisaged a non-bureaucratic society, a self-managed society, which he eventually named 'autonomous'. What Castoriadis identified in autonomous societies was the well-spring of creativity. He understood that human creation encouraged critical people who not only questioned the predetermined laws of society but also possessed a love for creation, an *eros* of making, inventing, innovating and bringing into being. Capitalism, for Castoriadis, was the root cause of all problems for contemporary societies. Capitalism is bad because it generates alienation. It is also bad because it lacks an internal limit. Castoriadis saw capitalist economies growing and economic growth is the legitimating force of capitalism. This growth, for Castoriadis, lacked limits and whatever lacks a limit, a *peras*, will end in grief. Growth is, for Castoriadis, a kind of ancient Greek tragedy. It is *hubris* de-personified. From the ancient drama we learn that the person with hubris did not know when to stop. The same, Castoriadis reasoned, applies to capitalist societies. Growth is equated with greed. A greedy person does not know when to stop, there is never enough. This lack of internal limit was, for Castoriadis, highly problematic and its excess would lead to its own extinction.

The paradox of democracy lies precisely in the *tragic* conception of human behaviour and Castoriadis did not ignore that. Although we all dream of a society that enables critical

[57] Ibid., p.179.

individuals to question predetermined structures, coming together to create a grammar of alternative practices in order to abolish the dominant neoliberal discourse, we are confronted with continuous failures and ruptures of modes of co-existence. 'More energy was spent on the weekly assembly and in heated email interactions between participants than engaging with the space itself and the wider needs of the city'[58], writes Argyropoulou. The tragic conception of democracy had trapped participants in the seemingly endless deadlock of coexistence. The diverse conflictual positions and practices reproduced the very relations of power they sought to eliminate in the first place. The different modalities of collective action, spatial organisation and cultural and political practices produced new forms of domination and the rupturing of consensus.

This is precisely the criticism of the Left ideology and Greece illustrates an excellent example of the tensions that exist within its grounds. On a larger scale, while Greece had a potential to become an evental site and create a vibrant agonistic space where a we/they relation would produce new modes of togetherness, the political parties of the Left, including the Communist party, were reduced to the mere reproduction of politicking and populist rhetoric, confronting society with meaningless dilemmas. While a we/they relation could be formed between the Greek people/ Troika (dogma), because this was our common enemy in the context of the neoliberal dogma, instead the we/they relation that was produced was between oppositional parties/ Syriza. Now, within the Syriza formation itself, which consisted of multiple coalitions of disparate organisations and social movements, multiples 'we's' were formed, resulting in its eventual disintegration from which a new Syriza emerged, just as in the case of Embros. Continuous internal conflicts led to the disintegration of the Mavili Collective, yet a new collective emerged. The participants of Embros, unable to live together but also unable to abandon the collective imaginary that Embros had created, suggested in the last assembly to open Embros up again to the city as a final attempt to find some common ground, says Argyropoulou. 'In the hope that a peaceful cohabitation might be possible, a new collective emerged out of this assembly'.[59] Many 'we's' were formed and reformed again bringing to the surface more antagonisms. Nevertheless, Embros continued to precariously exists as a space of 'no demands' within these tensions, seeking to examine the ideas of the 'commons', constantly creative, testing again new relations and practices. And yet, Embros remained unable to offer any solution to the challenges it was confronted with.

[58] Ibid., p.180.
[59] Ibid., p.181.

The lesson of the Greek crisis in both artistic and political practises is that in such a predicament we have to admit that there was a flaw in our goal itself; the goal was not specific enough. However, we should constantly remind ourselves that the battle was not lost. Instead, the battle should now begin. As I conclude this chapter, I would like to offer some further insights and underline the importance of Castoriadis' work in the light of the ongoing challenges that societies are confronted with. As a distinguished representative of the radical left, Castoriadis' theory is 'the most original contemporary attempt to express a political philosophy through the notion of creativity'[60], as Hans Joas has stated. In his effort to formulate a new political theory, Castoriadis, focused on the relation between *theory* and *praxis*, introducing the notion of *elucidation* that transcends the traditional distinction between the two. Theory, as an elucidated doing, and praxis as an elucidated action, are inseparable. Now, what connects these two is a thinking toward autonomy. In his psychoanalytic practice, Castoriadis, developed the idea of the 'psychic monad', which is, in fact, violently socialized, but always maintains a trace of its primary state. According to this theory, 'dreams, repressions, and speech lapses, indicate the existence of an undeletable asocial core of the psyche which, at the same time, because of its merely partial socialization, represents the inexhaustible spring of the project of autonomy', explains Theofanis Tasis.[61] The psyche is the primary cause of the emergence of any *ex nihilo* creation that stems from it. Radical imagination is, therefore, for Castoriadis, an ex nihilo creation that pre-exists and derives from the psyche. However, it is impossible for the psyche to survive without undergoing the process of interaction with others and socialization. Thus, imaginary social significations are created when people come together as social individuals in order to create new meanings.

It is precisely this compelling interpretation of the individual and by extension society that Castoriadis has presented us with that comprises an insightful theory through which I choose to read the phenomena at Embros. Moreover, what connects Castoriadis and Mouffe is the radical conception of the concept of *creation ex nihilo*, which is responsible for the creation of social imaginary significations that form new ideas of common belonging and urges people to protest against dominant powers but also encourages them to imagine a common future through the creation of vibrant agonistic spaces. This is a fundamental *praxis* of creation which comes from deliberate action. At the level of the individual, the process of self-creation

[60] Theofanis Tasis. *Human Creation, Imagination and Autonomy: A brief introduction to Castoriadis' social and psychoanalytical philosophy*. University of Crete, p.198.
[61] Ibid., p.202.

paves the way for autonomy. Through the Castoriadian process of elucidation, individuals adopt a critical position on the challenges posed, reflecting a worldview (*stasis*) that enables the capacity to constantly recreate their own being in relation to the world.

It is with this in mind that in the epilogue of this research I draw on the notion of *exodus*, as a radical way of thinking about performances of resistance. While I acknowledge that Mouffe makes explicit her objection to this kind of practice, I read exodus as the affirmation of active life that creates autonomous public spheres. Namely as a philosophical act of resistance that tends towards a conception of life as *bios philosophikos*. The beautiful gesture of living and creating together, in theatres, parks, buildings, and squares signifies a real moment of rapture in the current reality. The task to undertake, therefore, is to reflect upon our actions adopting a philosophical stasis, aiming at the ethical transformation of the self. Thus, the idea of insurrection, as I argue in the epilogue, can serve as a transformative and performative praxis of *agōn* enabling us to conceive a radically different understanding of politics but also of the 'political' in art and performance.

CHAPTER 5

Epilogue: From the Performance of Agonism to the Performance of Philosophy

There is something fundamentally performative in the idea of agonism. Agonism as conceived in this research, is the action that involves embodied practices that require actors and are performed in the realm of the public sphere, deploying certain mechanisms seeking to subvert and transform the hegemonic discourse and its practices, thus, disclosing modes that engage them in a new grammar of shared experience. Think for example of this shared experience as manifested in the protests in Athens, in occupied public squares, in occupied spaces such as Green Park and theatres such as Embros. Think of this shared experience on the stage of Herodion theatre in Athens where Rimini Protokoll performed their *Prometheus in Athens*, or think of the streets around Monastiraki square that Dries Verhoeven's *No man's land* walked through. This public sphere figures a series of performers that perform certain actions in the space within which they inhabit their bodies in public, making resounding statements in response to the events of their time. These performances of agonism that can be thought as a continuous *agōn* for creating constructions of identity are a fundamental part of the radical process and practice of the transformation of social and democratic shapes.

These performances of agonism are fighting to subvert dominant systems of power. For Foucault, power is 'the moving substance of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power'.[1] Power is, thus, everywhere, and 'where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of

[1] Michael Foucault. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated from the French by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books. 1978, p. 93.

exteriority in relation to power'.[2] There is a relational character in power formations, Foucault argues, whose existence depends 'on a multiplicity of points of resistance'.[3] And he continues:

> there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.[4]

It is, therefore, in light of this continuous struggle between power relations from which resistance emerges. Resistance animated in theatrical terms, or otherwise. As I have argued so far, much of the discussion concerned with resistance practices that appear in the public sphere has tended to start from the axiom that they are performative because they encompass certain theatrical elements. In this theatrical reading, another essential aspect we should acknowledge in these events is their temporary nature in the symbolic exchange of power relations between antagonistic sides; or if we were to use Mouffe's terms, between agonistic forms where the opponent is regarded as an adversary with legitimate existence, fully acknowledging his very right to defend his practices. The temporary dimension of these events, once more connotes their very theatrical character: there is a plot written collectively by many authors with a beginning and an (open) end, performed on the public 'stage', just like a performance event. When the lights go out, and the curtain falls, and there is no more applause, both sides move apart, and all continues as before. The designation of these events as 'performative' raises several questions that are concerned both with their imaginary symbolisms but also with the forms of space within which they function. What happens when these imaginary significations, as Sophie Nield asks, 'have crossed the imaginary "line" into "real" activity'[5] and we are left with the impact of the political practices which the performances of protest sought to eliminate in the first place? And more, what have we learned from these actions of resistance and what kind of formations become possible? What can happen more in the space they inhabit? And what does theatre have to offer in the context of relational powers that are animated in political performances?

In the attempt to provide answers to such questions and concerns that have a fundamentally ontological character, I wish to open up the discussion in this epilogue rather than propose a

[2] Ibid., p.95.
[3] Ibid., p.95.
[4] Ibid., p.95.
[5] Sophie Nield. 'There is another world: Space, theatre and global anti-capitalism'. Contemporary Theatre Review: Theatre and Globalisation, 16 (1). London: Routledge, 2006, p. 54.

synthesis of the previous chapters in this project and examine broader directions that notions of the social, political, and performative might take; but also notions that have to do with representation, space, and the individual with in it. Space is certainly implicated in discourses of power, which for Ernesto Laclau encompass their own contradictions. The notion of the political is, for Laclau, conceived, first, in the 'instituting moment' of society and, second, in 'the incompletion of all acts of political institution'.[6] Today, argues Laclau, 'we tend to de-sediment the social and to "reactivate" it by referring it back to the political moment of its originary institution'.[7] This polarised condition of society operates in the following contradiction: 'that which makes the political possible —the contingency of the acts of institution— is also what makes it impossible, as ultimately, no instituting act is fully achievable'.[8] In other words, Laclau argues, what conditions the possibility of something is precisely what can also condition its impossibility. Thus, this brings us to the problem of representation that is central in order for such a possibility to become apparent. The key element for a good representation is the *will* that moves towards one goal. In other words, from the moment the 'enactment' begins, there is a complete identification of the represented with his desire, his *will*, and by extension with the *will* of the social. The only moment that this representation is under threat, according to Laclau, is if the 'will of the representative impinged upon the wills of those that he is supposed to represent'.[9] Thus, this relation of representation is fundamental to be acknowledged. This is because 'the represented are absent from the place in which the representation takes place, and that decisions affecting them are to be taken there'.[10]

This assertion takes me to Badiou's concept of the Event, which erupts when the unrepresented part appears on the social scene rupturing the appearance of normality. In its essence, the Event comprises for Badiou his conception of revolution which is precisely to demand social change, be it in politics or other domains. Therefore, and also for Laclau, to resist is to perform in political terms; performing a praxis (*ergo*) that ruptures regularity, an action that comes from struggles. Laclau, however, poses another problem in this relational representation within which the flaws are constantly at work in the pursuit of power: 'if the represented need the relation of representation, it is because their identities are incomplete and have to be

[6] Ernesto Laclau. 'Deconstruction, Pragmatism, and Hegemony'. In *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Mouffe, Chantal. London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 49-70.
[7] Ibid., p 49.
[8] Ibid., p.50.
[9] Ibid., p.50.
[10] Ibid., p.50.

supplemented by the representative'.[11] In this light, I suggest, that the Castoriadian theory or autonomy can essentially contribute to the discussion of social change which comes from deliberate action. Occupy movements and enactments of resistance are seen to embody a new form of politics, encompassing the creation of autonomous spaces and form new relations rather than that of relational representation of identities to power. In this sense, what was genuinely striking about such enactments was their rejection of power structures and, in many cases, the total absence of clear political demands and agendas. This is powerfully expressed in the manifesto of the occupation of Green Park when they claim that the project is built on 'fluid and flexible methods' which 'refuse the enclosures of formal political representation' and 'propose friendship as a model for organizational formations and autonomous instituting'.[12] Their very originality lies in the collective shapes of the social and political life they engendered. While this presupposition has led many, including theorists, activists, and the general public, to easily celebrate an incoherent political praxis that lacks organisation, theoretical and ideological structures, it might at the same time designate something else. What if such views reflect an inability or failure to come to terms with what might be a new form of politics? What if these are the new formations that become apparent and disclose possibilities of autonomous social spheres and political life? What if the response to the bankrupt despotism and the failures of neoliberal capitalist system and, most, the rejection of heteronomous social structures are such enactments that point towards the possibility of autonomous life? This new political terrain, would, of course, demand new theoretical grounds. In this light, I suggest, that in such performances of resistance and opposition we can no longer identify the 'anonymous collectivity' awaiting a political leader to take over or a hegemonic system of power constructing identities animated in political representation, as Mouffe and Laclau suggest. Constructions of identity and political representation are intimately identified with the practice of hegemonic discourse. Here we no longer have the figure of the people operating and living around a leader, incorporated into the body of Leviathan, as Abraham Bosse luminously depicted him. Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan argues for the establishment of a commonwealth through social contract and rule by an absolute sovereign. Hobbes describes this commonwealth as an 'artificial person' and as a body politic that mimics the human body. The frontispiece of *Leviathan,* portrays the commonwealth as a gigantic human form built out of the bodies of its citizens, the sovereign as its head.

[11] Ibid., p. 50.
[12] Green Park Athens Greece. Manifesto. Official website https://greenparkathens.wordpress.com/manifesto/ (accessed April 3, 2017).

The notion of anonymous collectivity undergoing struggles as seen through performances of agonism is rather aimed at capturing those hegemonic powers positioning itself on a different terrain and ready to be newly authorised. Is this not the case for both Embros Theatre and Green Park? Is this not the case for the many other occupied spaces around the world? Occupy Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid, Occupy Syntagma Square in Athens, Occupy Wall Street or Occupy St. Paul's in London only to mention a few. Such collective actions propose a re-situation of the political away from conventional representative structures. Such actions require a different affirmation and should be read as an alternative mode of organisation and mobilization that targets the structures of capitalist powers proliferating precisely throughout the nerve centres of such systems, deploying mechanisms for the transformation of symbolic, physical and social spaces. Most importantly, these enactments of resistance should be read through symbolic figures of insurrection as the ontological reassessment of the self that points toward a different dynamic. It is exactly this process of self-reflection, according to Castoriadis, that paves the way for autonomy. In a similar vein, John Lahr and Jonathan Price in *Lifeshow: How to See Theater in Life and Life in Theater* make reference to actions by excluded social groups contesting invisibility in the social realm or, in Arendt's terms, the space of appearance. When these actions are expressed in theatrical terms, Lahr and Price write that theatrical experience 'dramatizes ways of celebrating and revealing the living moment, re-creating the world to make an audience see and feel ideas in a new way'.[13] The dynamic created by such performances makes apparent the fact that these collectives no longer wish to identify themselves in specific and predetermined ways, but rather as singularities that came together purely anonymously in place and space. Sophie Nield in *There is another world: Space, theatre and global anti-capitalism* writes about occupied space: 'space, while being produced and shaped by human actions, is able to reciprocally shape and direct human activity and experience'.[14] This experience manifests itself for example not only in the open assemblies that most occupied spaces employed as an open method of consensus-style decision-making, with participants gathered to decide about issues of common concern, but also in the numerous events and actions collectively organised where each participant had a task to accomplish and contribute to the completion of the project.

[13] John Lahr, and Jonathan Price. *Life-show: How to See Theater in Life and Life in Theater*. New York: Limelight Edition, 1973, pp 196-197.
[14] Sophie Nield. 'There is another world: Space, theatre and global anti-capitalism'. In: Harvie, Jen, and Rebellato, Dan (eds), *Contemporary Theatre Review: Theatre and Globalisation*. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 54.

It is, therefore, in the light of a radical identification of politics that such performances display a denial to be identified in the usual ways or be represented in any other way. It is a good point to recall the question I posed in the previous chapter of this research: is Occupy granted a place in contemporary revolutionary history? Unlike a revolution, occupy performances did not manifest themselves in representatives of the general will, nor in political bodies, but they were instead organised around the experiment of direct, democratic, and autonomous action. And unlike a revolution, occupy actions did not have as a goal the seizure of state power and the establishment of a new political order. Instead, what they suggest is a horizontally organised experiment of autonomous politics. To this end, such practices constitute a worldview or what Castoriadis would call a *stasis* which reflects a philosophical inquiry. Autonomy, thus, could be seen as a series of practices with an ethical and political character. Understood in this way, such practices can only be experienced in relation with the other, with collective forms of participation, through anonymous relations and ways of being. But also, this notion of the radical entails in a way its own failure, the dislocation of social and political formulations and their fragmentation in the public sphere in which at the same time another 'theatre' appears, engendering a post-dramatic conception of the political. In understanding the Castoriadian notion of politics as 'tragic' then we can also embrace a new kind of performance aesthetics as it emerges through its radical identification of pluralist forms. It seems to me, that in the same way that such enactments of resistance must be read from a post-Marxist narrative, where struggle is no longer conceived in terms of the limits of the working class –even if Marxist theory is primarily concerned with the question of economic value and its impact on human life– but in the identification of anonymous collective action; in the same way, theatre and performance, among the other arts, must disclose new radical articulations of aesthetics. Hans-Thies Lehmann writes about post-dramatic theatre:

> Post-dramatic theatre is a *post-Brechtian theatre*. It situates itself in a space opened up by the Brechtian inquiries into the presence and consciousness of the process of representation within the represented and the inquiry into a new 'art of spectating' (Brecht's Zuschaukunst). At the same time, it leaves behind the political style, the tendency towards dogmatization, and the emphasis on the rational we find in Brechtian theatre; it exists in a time *after* the authoritative validity of Brecht's theatre concept.[15]

[15] Hans-Thies Lehmann. *Postdramatic Theatre.* Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. p. 33.

The connections Lehmann makes with Brechtian theatre and post-dramatic responses are fairly clear and explanatory by calling the post-dramatic theatre 'post-Brechtian' connoting that the post-Brechtian may find itself situated on contemporary stages. I shall suggest then, that this post-Brechtian conception of the political may offer a series of reflections on the various forms of agonistic performances. It is with this in mind that I want to offer some further insights about the performance of agonism which may be found in the various forms of the political. As we have seen so far, what is at stake in the performances of protest and resistance, is the refusal of any political representation, asserting their absolute right to political life. Should this refusal not be regarded as purely political? And more, should these aspects of political life that lead to agonisms and struggles and manifest themselves by deploying performative mechanisms not be regarded as post-dramatic theatrical representations?

STAGING PHILOSOPHY

In his *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Jacques Rancière offers an analysis of the politics of theatre, for which he argues that politics is a theatre that connects the unconnected through the embodied performance of actors that reject inscription into prefabricated identities represented by the determined order of things. In this sense, political subjects are not fixed bodies with predetermined interests, but are in fact, 'fluctuating performers who have their moments, places, occurrences, and the peculiar role of inventing *arguments* and *demonstrations*'.[16] Rancière here proposes a theory of roles staged in a theatrical setting, shifting the ontological question of the political to the sphere of appearances which is analogous to the theatrical production: involving characters that perform speeches, on a stage with set and costumes. For Rancière also, democracy has its roots in tragedy because both rest upon the form of poetic dialogue employing actors. Thus, this praxis is enacted as a dramaturgy of politics. He writes:

> Performing or playing, in the theatrical sense of the word, the gap between a place where the demos exists and a place where it does not … Politics consists in playing or acting out this relationship, which means first setting it up as theatre, inventing

[16] Jacques Rancière. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. by Julie Rose. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press. 1999. p. 89.

> the argument, in the double logical and dramatic sense of the term, connecting the unconnected.[17]

Stating the political event through such performative mechanisms, people as actors undermine the authority of any formal political representation, reminding us at the same time of tragedy's mortality which resembles the radical self-limitation of human beings that Castoriadis advocates. And it is precisely this aspect of tragedy that reduces the limit of the political analogous to the condition of self-limitation that constitutes the radical democratic project. For the theatricality of the political event, Rancière writes:

> genuine participation is the invention of that unpredictable subject which momentarily occupies the street, the invention of a movement born of nothing but democracy itself. The guarantee of permanent democracy is not the flipping up of all the dead times and empty spaces by the forms of participation or of counterpower; it is the continual renewal of the actors and the forms of their actions, the ever open possibility of the fresh emergence of this fleeting subject. The test of democracy must ever be in democracy's own image: versatile, sporadic –and founded on trust.[18]

One way in which the element of *agōn*, resistance and struggle in the theatrical representation of the political might be understood is through the examination of the role of performance as such in the context of neoliberal capitalist practices. I suggest that in this context, performance may constitute a method in itself for the articulation of the ontological question of agonistic subjectivity. This thought takes us back to the introductory chapter of this research, where I opened up the discussion for the field of Performance Philosophy suggesting that performance (and art) should advocate a dynamic nature that tends towards a thinking in becoming a philosophy through the medium itself. Namely, if we consider that participation (*methexis*) is the *appearance* of the body in space and place, then this *appearance* should constitute a method of formulating new ways of being in common. Thus, another world becomes possible, where performance constitutes a mindful *conception* of *appearance* as method of disclosing a new *Aletheia* (truth). It seems to me that the social turn in art practices than engage participation is governed by such demands. I am not saying, of course, that all participatory art forms function in this way, but the proliferation of such practices reflects the proposal of another vocabulary emerging within the arts. One that when examined in parallel with what I have discussed so far about performance practices of resistance, seems to reject the role of the artist as an individual

[17] Ibid., p. 88.
[18] Jacques Rancière. *On the Shores of Politics*. Trans. by Liz Heron. London: Verso. 1995, p. 61.

producer of objects, but rather conceive the artist as one that participates (*metechei* –where *methexis* derives from) in the creation of *situations*, as Bishop argues. And the work of art is no longer a 'static' object, but an ongoing durational 'project' that involves the audience as co-creator, and participation is essential for it to disclose the meaning of the event. Think for example of Dries Verhoeven's *No man's land*, there was a story that had to be heard by a participant in a promenade performance in the streets of Athens. Or think of the 103 performers who represented the Athenian population on stage in *Prometheus in Athens*. In a similar vein, Casa Branka performed Atlas Athina with one hundred participants travelling in different places around the world creating a map of the social bond.

By adopting a critical position (*stasis*) on prefabricated identities determined by the dominant order of things, we create the capacity to improve and preserve our own being it relation to the world. Philosophy is, thus, in itself an art of thinking in an artistic performative manner. It is in the context of this subjectivity then that I am in agreement with Katsouraki when she argues that:

> what is of key significance for us here is that this concept of subjectivity–conceived as the continuous result of social discourse and material social practices–presupposes a subject that must be seen not as a hypostasised thing but as a *praxis* –indeed a *performative* that is happening in that the subject exists *in* and is transformed *by* social discourses.[19]

This notion of social responsiveness requires an alternative theoretical arsenal through which to read a different kind of social affinity that has shifted away from fixed identities and subjectivities elaborating a model of decentralised democratic forms. Saul Newman, in *Occupy and Autonomous Political Life* draws upon Paolo Virno's notion of *exodus* in order to provide an alternative way of thinking about contemporary performances of resistance. Virno, defines exodus as follows: 'I use the term Exodus here to define mass defection from the State, the alliance between general intellect and political Action, and a movement toward the public sphere of intellect'.[20] *Exodus* seen in the affirmation of active life that creates autonomous public space. Newman writes in his reading of such enactments:

[19] Eve Katsouraki. 'Epilogue: 'The Trojan Horse' –Or, from Antagonism to the Politics of Resilience'. In *Performing Antagonism Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Fisher Tony and Katsouraki Eve. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017, p. 299.

[20] Saul Newman. 'Occupy and Autonomous Political Life'. In *Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today: The Biopolitics of the Multitude versus the Hegemony of the People,* eds. Kioupkiolis, Alexandros and Katsambekis, Giorgos Milton Park, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 105.

> the notion of reclaiming or recreating a genuine public space, by occupying it, setting up encampments, and by using public space in a way that is not supposed to be used –that is, by using it precisely *as* a public space- is perhaps the most radical gesture of disobedience and refusal conceivable today.[21]

Newman also reminds us here of the controversial figure Diogenes the Cynic, who lived his entire life openly in the public realm of the Athenian *agora*. His radical gesture of disobedience and rejection of all kind of norms: the distinction between private and public, life and politics, led others to consider him a scandalous example. Foucault, also reflected on Diogenes as a pure example of the genuine philosophical life. For Foucault, the embodiment of truth and ethics of existence was reflected in every single activity of his ascetic life. Diogenes, was for Foucault the embodiment of *bios philososphikos*. 'The *bios philososphikos* as straight life is the human being's animality taken up as a challenge, practiced as an exercise, and thrown in the face of others as a scandal'[22], writes Foucault. To this extent, do theatrical actions of resistance tend towards a conception of life as *bios philososphikos*? And to reiterate the question at the beginning of this epilogue: what have we learned from these performances in the –to put it in Arendt's terms– *vita activa*? 'The beautiful, simple gesture of sleeping and living on the streets, without shame or fear, signifies, like the setting up of the revolutionary barricades of the nineteenth century, a real moment of rupture in our world'[23], says Newman. I propose then that we need to reconsider the task of reflecting upon our actions and responsibilities to those with whom we share experiences of our daily lives. This capacity will enable us to think autonomously, redefining the politics of revolution and adopting a *stasis* that defines our worldview as *bios philososphikos*, aiming at the ethical transformation of ourselves. Considering that one aspect of the political is a certain relation between people and a form of interaction, it means that it can be transcendent and transformed through a spiritual process, a process through which the self is redefined. Katsouraki, in the closing chapter of *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy* proposes resilience as a form of performative response that engages with current social and political problems. I propose that the idea of insurrection, as ethical transformation of the self, can serve as a performative praxis of *agōn* that will enable us to reflect and reconceive a radically different understanding of politics but also of the 'political' within theatre and performance. Thinking about insurrection not in the same terms as revolution which stems from a position of powerlessness –which is

[21] Ibid., p.105.
[22] Foucault quoted in Newman, Ibid., p.106.
[23] Ibid., p.106.

precisely why it seeks power– but insurrection from a position of freedom; or rather insurrection as an affirmation of the freedom that humans already possess to create possibilities of autonomous life.

While the revolution is an instrumental form of action embodied in organised political forces which aims to overturn the established conditions and transform the totality of social and political relations by constructing a new order, insurrection works within the fabric of existing social and political relations and starts from the individuals' discontent with themselves, as spiritual uprising, as the *metamorphosis* of the self, which opens up spaces of autonomous formations that are in a way immanent within the social. This *metamorphosis* does not seek to impose a unified political vision, but, rather, affirms a free form of activity and ways of being in common in the here and now. This notion of the ethical transformation of the self is radically different from most understandings of political action. Freedom is not its end goal but, rather, its starting point. It is an ontologically radical understanding of the individual that starts with the assertion of the self over the conditions that oppress humans. The ethical transformation of the self allows people to constitute their own freedom by first reclaiming their own self. To grasp this understanding of insurrection, it is necessary to relate it to the category of *destituent power*, which has indeed become more prominent in the wake of recent performances of resistance against neoliberal formations. Destituent power refers to an extra-institutional form of political mobilization seeking autonomy from state institutions rather than representing specific demands and interests through the state. One might argue that this refusal of sovereignty might lead to an *apolitical* human being. What the performances of resistance seek, however, is to renounce support to a representative sovereign politics without renouncing politics as such, but, instead, creating alternative spaces for political practices, discourses and forms of being in common which exceed the state and whose meaning is no longer determined by it. In this context, destituent power seeks to open a space of political contingency in which new autonomous practices, discourses and relations might emerge. Agamben suggests that constituent revolutionary power remains trapped within the very order of sovereignty and institutional power it aims to exceed, ending up instituting a new sovereign political order. This is why Agamben proposes destituent power which escapes the dialectic between constituent and constituted power:

> If the fundamental ontological question today is not work but inoperativity, and if this inoperativity can, however, be deployed only through a work, then the corresponding political concept can no longer be that of 'constituent power' [potere constituente], but something that could be called 'destituent power' [potenza

> destituente]… A power that was only just overthrown by violence will rise again in another form, in the incessant, inevitable dialectic between constituent power and constituted power, violence which makes the law and violence that preserves it.[24]

It is clear from the above that Agamben has in mind a form of political activity which is radically different from the revolutionary projects of the past. Understanding politics as a project, as a form of activity which diminishes means to ends is precisely what Agamben is getting at when he refers to politics as 'work'. Agamben here affirms a form of political activity understood in terms of inoperativity and which I read as a kind of withdrawal from the ontological order of power and from all overarching political projects. Inoperativity is a form of activity that is no longer consigned to 'work' and which is freed from any overarching project or *telos*. For Agamben, politics is more about this 'being-without-work' rather than being about the pursuit of universal ends such as democracy or communism. There is, for Agamben, a radical potentiality and power contained in not acting. At times, refusing to act, refusing to be drawn into codified forms of action is actually more threatening than acting. In this context, destituent power may be understood both as an *exodus* from the order of sovereignty, but also as a metaphysical *exodus* that leads to the metamorphosis of the self, invoking a form of life and political activity that is autonomous.

The question is how can this possibility become apparent through theatre and performance as terrains where *philosophein* reflects ways of being? One way, is to think through tragedy and ancient drama. One of the lessons we learn from ancient Greek theatre is that tragedy confronts us with our own limitations by revealing what we do not know about ourselves, and Aristotle reminds us that we can confront them through the imitation of action, *mimesis praxeos*. In Greek tragedies, we find human suffering that allows philosophical reflection on important ontological questions. Oedipus answered the Sphinx' riddle correctly and won the throne of the dead king, recognizing the existential disposition of the human being. The Oedipus circle is not a doctrine of fate, nor it is merely a character tragedy or a moral tragedy. It is a drama of revelation; the revealing action leads the hero to learn the truth about himself and at the same time leads him to his destruction. Oedipus is the symbol of a man who is passionately struggling to find the secrets of life. The eternal seeker of truth that begins the adventure of *exodus* from the world of ignorance. The tragic wise hero is the synonym of the lack of knowledge. All his life, he was

[24] Giorgio Agamben. 'What is a destituent power (or potentiality)?' trans., Stephanie Wakefield, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2014, volume 32, 65-74.

trapped in ignorance. His tragic marriage, the first murder of his father, the acquisition of children with his mother, all show the poetic depiction of the consequences of ignorance and the mythological fear of mortals for the *other*, the unknown. But this ignorance of Oedipus was the root of all evil. Determined in form and matter, the hero is led to his own illusions. The search for truth (*Aletheia*) and knowledge was always parallel to the blessing of ignorance. This is reflected in the struggle of Oedipus between the '*I know'* and *'I do not know'*, a vacillation that points to his ambivalence. The coupling that Oedipus represents, both the most naïve and the smartest man, is marked in him solving the mystery of the Sphinx. The answer to the Sphinx question –and the search for Oedipus, which, at a crucial moment, summarizes and symbolizes– is man. To discover himself, Oedipus began his wandering. The symbolism here is the knowledge of his true nature. Oedipus symbolizes the man himself. The tragic secret of his life, is the same as the secret of human nature, which the myth reveals metaphorically. Interpreting Sophocles, the Oedipal ignorance was never a positive thing. It is not a prospect and stance of life, but rather a cause for a tragic end, a cause and a symbol in order to teach the power of knowledge and critical thought *(κρίσις)* to its audience. Oedipus is not a hero who fell into the divine vortex of ignorance, but is the symbol of wisdom. It is he who knew all the answers, who had the wisdom to find solutions by destroying monsters.

So then what is the philosophical lesson of tragedy? What is its *stasis* in the agonistic conflict between political perplexity and moral responsibility? How can tragedy and theatre as a form of art shape our thinking? Tragedy requires complicity and participation on our part. 'One moral of tragedy, then, is that we conspire with our fate. That is, fate requires our freedom in order to bring our destiny down upon us. The essential contradiction of tragedy is that *we both know and we don't know at one and the same time and are destroyed in the process*'.[25] I propose, that this freedom should be examined at an ontological level in relation to the problem of *death*. While Castoriadis perceives *being* as both creation and destruction of all beings, he points out at *decreatio in nihilum* (total destruction of all beings) which remains another facet of *creatio ex nihilo*. The question that arises is whether we can perceive ontic destruction in equal terms with ontic creation? An important philosophical aspect, according to Castoriadis, is that knowledge, -in the sense of *theory*, which comes from the Greek *theoro* and from which derives *theoria* and *theatron*, namely the act of seeing- requires *presence*, while death is perceived as *non-presence* and is, therefore, inconceivable. So death in absence. However,

[25] Simon Critchley. *'Tragedy's Philosophy'*. In *Performing Antagonism Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Fisher Tony and Katsouraki Eve. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017, p. 31. (Italics appear in the original text).

Castoriadis himself was not much concerned with the ontological dimension of death. He rather emphasized the *creation ex nihilo* as self-creation of the being. To this extent, self-creation, is rendered in the limitations of the multiple aspects of human life, which is precisely what constitutes its radicality. To this end, the radical project of a democratic society allows for the multiple aspects of *bios* to emerge. The possibility of multiple formations of *bios* includes the creation of an image the self and the choice of alternative ways of being and belonging. Thus, the project of autonomy is defined as a project of self-creation of the being and the radical transformation of the bios. As such, the performances of resistance and agonism that I discussed in this research open up a new horizon for the political and the aesthetic and the pursuit of a *bios philososphikos*.

The recent effervescence of social self-activity in crisis-ridden Greece, opened up an alternative social and political terrain. The sovereign power has suffered a cataclysmic crisis of legitimacy. The state in contemporary liberal societies appears as an old-fashioned formation without life, a machine of domination that no longer pretends to care for the interest of all society. Voting in democratic elections and participation in political parties comes to resemble a performance in which fewer and fewer people take part. While many may speak about *apolitical* societies and individuals, I prefer to speak to the invention of alternative political spaces and practices and even the possibility of new forms of political community. Developing the political thought of Badiou and Rancière, Žižek argues that the antagonism between the included and the excluded in society is the fundamental element that ruptures capitalistic practices. In the case of Embros, however, 'in a space that sought to locate itself "beyond" the demands of capitalism, and to embrace its antagonisms, what actually occurred was the rupturing of the possibility of co-existence and continuity'.[26] The paradox, however, of democracy is repeatedly questioned through such practices of mobilisation that embody the desire for autonomous and sustainable life. While one might argue that there are no revolutionary figures today such as Lenin or Mao to lead a revolution, radical movements turn their backs on centralized structures of leadership opening up a new horizon of political participation. Theatre and performance practices are increasingly implicated in this changing social, political and economic landscape challenging the reins of power. Cases such as Embros and Green Park, questioned the concepts of theatre and performance and challenged the meaning their *work* can acquire and the space

[26] Gigi Argyropoulou. 'Collective Horizons: Rethinking the Performative and Political'*: (Im) Possibilities of Being Together*. In *Performing Antagonism Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*. eds. Fisher Tony and Katsouraki Eve, London: Palgrave Macmilian. 2017. p.180.

they operate. The stage of Embros and Greek Park tested notions of collectivity and participation and confronted democracy with multiple failings in its practices producing alliances, friendships, and collaborations but also conflicts and violences. Yet such practices reveal the challenges of the political itself though failures that are constitutive of the political. It is precisely these failures that might institute a different form of self-creation and allow for the multiple formations of *bios* to emerge.

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