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Introduction: Modern Greek theatre on the threshhold of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

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MODERN GREEK THEATRE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES: THEMATIC CONCERNS, DRAMATURGICAL TRENDS AND EXPLORATIONS IN THEATRE PRACTICE

Introduction

The 1990s witnessed a major turning point in the development of modern Greek theatre. Researchers of the last period of the twentieth century and the beginning of this century have observed not only a complex concentration of agitation, transformation and transition, but also moments of uncertainty; a composition of contrasting new phenomena mixed with old theatrical practices, and promising innovative beginnings accompanied by regression. This landscape clearly reflects the dynamic developments in Greek political and national life.

The collapse of the real socialist countries played an important role in the shaping of Greek society as Europeans could now develop better and closer relationships with their neighbouring eastern nations. Moreover, by 1993 the idea of the single market had been realised, ensuring the enactment of the "four freedoms" (the freedom of the movement of goods, people, services and capital over borders), while two EU treaties signed in the 1990s, Maastricht (1993) and Amsterdam (1999), delineated the physiognomy of contemporary European culture. The EU sought the protection of the environment and to establish common measures for security and defence. As for Greece, in 1997 Thessaloniki was celebrated as the European Capital of Culture, with its cultural heritage and development promoted and showcased. In the rest of the country, modernisation encompassed changes in the economy, technology and administration. Among these changes were the development and completion of the Athens Metro and the country's major motorways as well as the spread of mobile networks in the country's communication infrastructure. Finally, during this decade more and more people began using the internet for their personal interests, while it was progressively put into use in the public sector and especially in matters concerning its organisation; for instance, the first connection interface between the Foundation for Research and Technology at Heraklion, Crete, and the University of Crete.

When discussing theatrical practice, we realise that the conditions are more multifarious because of the involvement of various components: dramaturgy, actors, directors and spectators are all part of a parallel, dynamic and steady trajectory. They mirror change or new pursuits, sometimes directly, others indirectly, depending on the sensitivity and flexibility of the various contributors.

What we observe at the turn of the twenty-first century is a trend that has contributed to a different and revived reception of theatrical practices. That is, an impressive increase in the number of theatres and festivals organised by local councils, the emergence of many new theatrical groups and collectives co-existing with older groups, and the creation of small theatres in deprived urban areas of Athens (Psyri, Metaxourgeio); these urban areas have also undergone extensive structural renovation as a result of redevelopment works in the city's historical centre. A change of orientation in the essence of Greek theatre is quite apparent: the influence of television aesthetics not only on the writing but also on the direction of new Greek plays has been conclusive for the emergence of a new phenomenon, beginning with the play *Μπαμπάδες με ρούμι* (*Baba Rum*) by Michalis Reppas and Thanasis Papathanasiou, that has had a catalytic effect on an audience mainly attracted to commercial theatre productions. Moreover, a surge in migration from the countries of eastern Europe and the consequent intermingling of modern Greeks with the different ethnic presence of the "other" have created an interesting multicultural landscape of contradictory and paradoxical conditions that progressively incite Greeks playwrights to capture this atmosphere of social transformation.

In his paper, "From the Play to the Event: Delineating Phenomena of Theatrical Activity in Greece at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century", Platon Mavromoustakos focuses his scientific interest on the shift from the "play to the fact" and delves into exploring the phenomena of theatrical activity in Greece at the dawn of this century. Transferring the point of interest from the play to the production became a subsequent result, first, of the performative turn that started in the first period of the *metapolitefsi* and, second, of the gradual development and change of Greek theatre during the last two decades of the twentieth century in relation to its means of expression and its institutional framework. Moreover, many of the characteristics of playwriting have changed. Mavromoustakos identifies a variety of theatrical productions, written by both contemporary and older playwrights, which belong to a dramaturgy that seeks to render the relation of theatre with reality. He succeeds in presenting a comprehensive overview of the history of Greek theatre during the transitional period between the two centuries, where he parallels and explores the new phenomena that have emerged on the Greek stage, such as the theatre of everyday life, documentary theatre and also the theatre influenced by intense

political reflection. Approaching the theatrical phenomena by aptly combining his research material leads him to draw extensive conclusions about the performative event, which clearly departs from text-centred stage action, discards its dramatic or literary characteristics and defines a new aesthetic perception of theatrical practice. He also looks at the changes in how ancient Greek drama is received, coming to the conclusion that the original text is endangered more from its disuse or its handling as a museum piece than from a daring interpretation by the directors. Finally, his thorough analysis extends to interdisciplinary directions within economic, social and cultural history.

Ioulia Pipinia, in her article "A Visit to the Our Stage Festival: Participation, Inclusion and Sharing at the Bürgerbühne Dresden", makes the most of original research methodologies to examine the development of theatre and performance where citizens, members of the community, participate in the theatrical event together with theatre professionals. This theatrical practice peaked in the last decade as a result of the political and economic crisis that Europe endured at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Economic instability and the abrupt and distressing changes in society have led to a questioning of the representation and function of institutional and political mechanisms, bringing again to the fore discussions concerning the role of the arts and the theatre and their relation with social reality. In 2009, the state theatre of Saxony created a "Citizens' Theatre" in an effort to create an artistic, political and social intervention that promotes participatory conduct and to renegotiate at the level of performance notions such as community, inclusivity, authenticity and diversity. This trend, which has become popular not only in Germany but also in other European countries from the performances of documentary theatre and the "theatre of experts" of Rimini Protokoll, has already embodied various proposals that combine practices of applied theatre, social and political intent and artistic experimentation. Drawing on her attendance at Our Stage, the 4th European festival of, and on, citizens' theatre, which took place in Dresden in May 2019, she examines the innovative model of this specific stage (Dresden Bürgerbühne) and the way it operates since it has been decisive for similar initiatives in German state theatres. She also adds examples from the performances at the festival as well as cases of contemporary trends in participatory theatre. She pertinently expresses her thoughts and observations about the increasing interest in Greece for this particular kind of theatre, but also the difficulties of adopting a corresponding model, the required processes for its redefinition and how it can function within the Greek theatrical reality.

Lina Rosi, in her study "Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Greek Theatre: Red-light Landscapes and City Legends", examines the issue of female sexuality, centring on the dramatic motif of prostitution within the urban

environment. Her research focuses on different stage readings of stories by and about prostitutes related to the history of the city. Her approach incorporates and works on two levels: the first concerns the "directing" of the heroine's body and the second the relation of the personal journey of the women with the human geography and the history of the city in which they lived. Her research clearly aims to place the female existence in different familial, political, social and literary contexts, focusing on factual personal experiences of the dramatic characters, literary narrations and the specific historical events that surround the heroines as a stage setting. The following productions are examined: *Η τελευταία μάσκα–Fallimento* (*The Last Mask–Fallimento*), staged in 2006 and based on a text by Kostas Logaras, a poet and writer from Patras, which was adapted and directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos; *Η γυναίκα της Πάτρας* (*The Woman of Patras*), based on the text of Giorgos Chronas that was staged in 2010, adapted and directed by Lena Kitsopoulou; and *Γκάμπυ* (*Gaby*), based on Gabriella Ousakova's autobiography, adapted for the stage by Anastasia Tzellou and Kirki Karali and directed by Karali (2015). Her thorough article does not attempt to discuss the ideological perspectives of the creators towards the issue of prostitution but rather looks at how theatrical narration depicts on stage the notion of the journey of these women inside the cultural development of the city as a historical field of action and reference.

Finally, my own article, "'The Notion of the 'Foreigner' in Contemporary Greek Drama: 'We' Through the Faces of the 'Others'", looks at the movement that has developed and established itself within Greek theatre that has as its prime focus the presence of the "other" in the sense of the ethnic or cultural "foreigner". The dramaturgy of Reppas and Papathanasiou, Panagiotis Mentis, Lena Kitsopoulou, Arkas, Giannis Tsiros and Vassilis Katsikonouris is examined alongside the productions of the plays and the way the reviewers of the period received them. The fact that this stage representation of alterity has had a positive impact on Greek theatre audiences is of major importance as it is a necessary condition for defining the terms of the research and analysis of the specific theatrical phenomenon.

Although the articles in this special section are small in number, they are all indicative of the existing methodological proposals that are predominant in the relevant scientific field. These four studies underline the new trends and innovative quests of the artists working in contemporary Greek theatre and open a new chapter for the exploration of and reflection on the theatrical phenomenon in modern historiography.

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