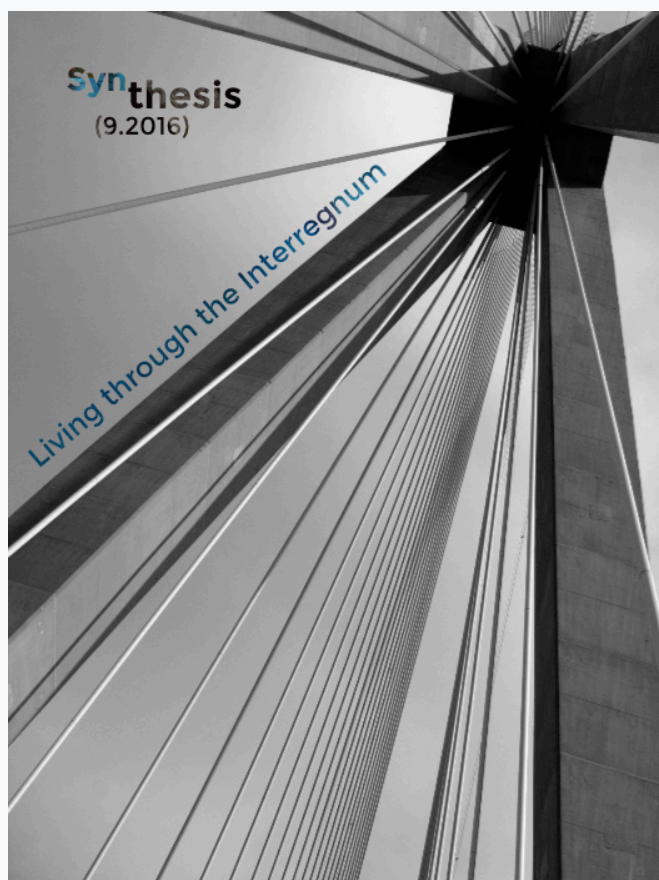


## Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

No 9 (2016)

Living through the Interregnum



### Acropolis Remapped: on a Democratic Politics of Resistance

*Philip Hager*

doi: [10.12681/syn.16226](https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.16226)

Copyright © 2016, Philip Hager



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## ***Acropolis* Remapped: on a Democratic Politics of Resistance**

Philip Hager

### **Abstract**

In 2010, forty-eight years after Jerzy Grotowski's iconic 1962 performance of Stanisław Wyspiański's *Akropolis*, Greek director Michael Marmarinos presented to the Athenian audience *Acropolis: Reconstruction*. In his homage to the Polish director, Marmarinos asked the question that Grotowski (and Wyspiański before him) had raised: what is the contemporary Acropolis? Marmarinos's *Acropolis* observes the ruins of contemporary Athens; frustrations, tensions and other dramaturgies of the crisis that was beginning to transform the urban fabric of the Greek capital. In this article, I map the in-crisis restructuring of Athens in dialogue with *Acropolis: Reconstruction*. Employing Deleuze's idea of a 'minor or minimising treatment' of the classics, I examine the becoming-ruins of monuments in a city in crisis, by searching for the contemporary acropolises not in the ruins upon the hill (the remains of classical Athens and the symbol of its democracy) but in the ruins in its shadow.

### **Preface**

On 17 December 2008, in the midst of generalised upheaval,<sup>1</sup> a group of activists placed two giant banners on the east side of the Athenian Acropolis. The one called on Europeans to get out in the streets the following day, while the other had the word 'resist' written on it in four different languages. According to Greek daily newspaper *Kathimerini*, this kind of protest went "beyond the limits" of the acceptable and, consequently "was attacked by the majority of political parties" (Kopsini).<sup>2</sup> Such accusations rhetoric propose implies that monumental spaces of that scale are immune to political discourse and, furthermore, that they carry a narrative of their own; that the encounter with the past is always prescribed and singular. Such reactions a response to the above direct action also imply suggests a disruption of the monument's narrativity and representational apparatus and raises a number of questions about memory and processes of remembering. Moreover, the staging of this urgent dramaturgy of a (democratic) politics of resistance in a space-symbol of the ancient Athenian democracy seemed to challenge the monumentality of (bourgeois) democratic politics. "December was a

question” was one of the slogans written on Athenian walls in the aftermath of the riots. Indeed, looking back at the events, one will observe that they were a preface to the Greek crisis; December appears as a period of explosive unrest that both anticipated the coming calamity and challenged political certainties by which Greeks have been living since in the period that followed the fall of the colonels’ junta in 1974.

Two years later Michail Marmarinos presented the Athenian audience with his *Acropolis: Reconstruction* (Athens 2010), a production that confronted engaged with a *theatrical* monument, Jerzy Grotowski’s 1962 iconic production of Stanisław Wyspiański’s play *Akropolis* (1904). In his engagement with Grotowski’s work, Marmarinos asked the central question that Grotowski and Wyspiański raised before him: what is (the) Acropolis in the contemporary world? The question asks, on the one hand, what is the monument of the contemporary world that defines it in the same way that the Athenian Acropolis has come to represent the democratic city-state of the fifth century BC and, on the other, what does the Acropolis, the ancient stones upon the hill, mean in the contemporary world? In addressing these questions, Marmarinos examined both the concept of the monument and the meaning and value of monuments. Here, I seek to follow the same path and attempt a response to these questions based on a discussion of the various Acropolises that appear on Marmarinos’ stage. My aim is not merely to analyse the production (although an analysis is proposed in the following pages), but rather to map historical parameters and processes of remembering and forgetting that constitute monumental spaces. In doing this, I will enter the performative territory of affect as I unpack my argument present my argument towards a minoritarian democratic politics and, alongside it, the becoming-ruin of the monument.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari examine the question (or the politics) of becoming as “two simultaneous movements, one by which a term (the subject) is withdrawn from a majority, and another by which a term (the medium or agent) rises up from the minority” (321). This double movement implies the deterritorialisation of the subject from the majority. Majority, they continue, is formed in relation to the standard of “man”, whereby “man” is “the average European, the subject of enunciation” (322). The second implication in Deleuze and Guattari’s politics of becoming is a movement not towards but through a minority. The deterritorialised subject becomes a medium or an agent, “a deterritorialized variable of a minority” (Deleuze and Guattari 322). Here, I am interested in the movement of the monument (Acropolis) to a withdrawal from majoritarian (dominant) narratives and its emergence as a variable of an assemblage of ruins, its becoming-ruin. In other words, I wish to suggest that

Marmarinos renders Acropolis minor; that in his “minor or minimizing treatment” he succeeds in “extricat[ing] becomings from history, lives from culture, thoughts from doctrine, grace or disgrace from dogma” (Deleuze 208). Wyspiański’s play, Grotowski’s production, the Athenian Acropolis and the many other Acropolises that emerge on the stage are related to “neither the historical or the eternal, but the untimely” (Deleuze 207-208). I wish to argue that the performers are not trying to remember the monument, but their performative gestures embrace and become monuments/ruins. They stage what seems to be neglected in History, what lies outside of (invisible to) the experience of the majority (Europe’s subject of enunciation, the universal “man”). Marmarinos’s becomings-ruin is thus, yet another form of the becoming-minoritarian; “a political affair,” Deleuze and Guattari point out, that “necessitates a labor of power (*puissance*), an active micropolitics” (322).

I approach Marmarinos’s *Reconstruction*, thus, as an invitation to unpack the problematic of the becoming-ruin of the monument as a political affair; to look up at the ancient monument and see what it is made of and what remains. In performing this task, the mapping of such becomings, another affective analysis emerges—a line of flight from the (theatrical) becomings evoked by Marmarinos to the becomings-minoritarian of democratic politics. The medium, performance (itself a line of flight), disrupts both assemblages and allows them to ‘continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other’ (Deleuze and Guattari 274-75). In a becoming, the subject does not become minoritarian, it works with/through the minority, it transforms into the potentialities of the minority. The social crosses over into the theatrical, the political into the aesthetic, the rational into the affective. Moreover, thisThe essay is divided in three sections (monuments, interval, ruins) in response to the production’s division in three sections, where different temporalities, narrative content and acting style set the tone. The first section accounts for the space and time of the monument, where performers construct, deconstruct and interact with the Acropolises. The main element here is the water; a pond that takes up part of the stage and seems to be the threshold of into that temporality. The second section, what I call the interval, turns to the space and time of the everyday; it deliberately disrupts the analysis as it seeks Acropolises in contemporary-in-crisis-Athens, while mapping the affects of crisis and presents the ruins of (democratic) politics within a neoliberal context. The third section is in the realm of memory: performing sections from Grotowski’s *Akropolis* and Marmarinos’s 2002 production *National Hymn*,<sup>3</sup> the actors stage memories—ephemeral, invisible and untimely ruins (of theatre, of politics, of indebted subjects). Finally, Athens is mapped here, as monumental space *par excellence*, a paradigm of the new incarnation of the neoliberal city. And as the

neoliberal city becomes increasingly amnesiac, memory seems to draft a monument to the disappearing ruins of democratic politics, a document to the barbarity of a time that lacks the capacity of becoming-ruin.

## Monuments

### i

The dramatic space in Wyspiański's *Acropolis* is the Cracow Cathedral on the hill of Wawel, which has been "a national sacred place" where Polish kings and national heroes are buried. In Wyspiański's words, in the Cathedral "everything is Poland, every stone and every little thing. Whoever enters it, becomes himself part of Poland... You are surrounded with Poland, eternally immortal" ("The Cathedral"). The Wawel Cathedral, thus, commemorates the greatness of the Polish nation; it reflects and shapes the making and enunciation of the national subject. In the context of Wyspiański's text, the Cathedral operates as the Polish stage of western civilization's achievements; it lays claims to European membership, as it "hoped to depict the sum total of Western civilization's contributions to humanity and juxtapose that with the Polish experience," as Slowiak and Jairo put it. The *Acropolis*, in this context is "the symbol of any civilization's highest achievement": during the play, images from the bible and ancient history are re-enacted, "heroically celebrating human accomplishment" (76). Stories that are also narrated by a series of tapestries that hang in the Cathedral. *Acropolis*, a "cemetery of the tribes" in Wyspiański's words, is revealed as a metaphor for monumentality itself.

### ii

"What is the 'cemetery of the tribes' in Poland in 1962?" (Slowiak and Jairo 76). What is *our* *Acropolis*? Such questions seem to be at the core of Grotowski's approach to Wyspiański's play. However, where Wyspiański, in his romantic monument to Polishness, found Wawel Cathedral, Grotowski found Auschwitz, "this singular object that distinguishes [the twentieth] century" (Wajcman 42). A key characteristic of the holocaust, as Gerard Wajcman points out, was that it "did not produce dead bodies, but ash, nothing visible. ...An event that is unrepresentable" (43). Grotowski's *Acropolis* staged the invisible and unperformable ruin, the by-product of the "overproduction of catastrophes" that was the twentieth century (Wajcman 34). Auschwitz appears as the climax of the industrial acceleration in the twentieth century, as it marks the moment that even the production of death has been industrialised; a moment, furthermore, when death is mass produced and its traces (ruins) are disposed of. Grotowski's *Acropolis* is filled with references to the industrial world: props, soundscapes and physicalities indicate this world determined by machinic rhythmical patterns,

imagery and spatial arrangements. And just as the performances of the characters in Wyspiański's text give shape to the Cathedral, Grotowski's actors build the death camp, but they are not angels, nor heroes (like the ones whose remains inhabit Wawel); they are all victims and perpetrators, taking part in the making of *this* monument and its narrativity.

### iii

"You know how Molik<sup>4</sup> said it," says one of the actors in the beginning of Marmarinos's production: "I'm reading scenes from Akropolis and am satisfied with them ... [they are] ruled by the power of song." They all pause. Someone asks: "What kind of song?" They start singing different songs, while trying to overtake each other. A performer gets out of the water and walks to a microphone on the other side of the stage. He starts singing in a low voice. It is the "day of the Sacrifice" and the "songsters" are leaving from the "cemetery of the tribes. Our Acropolis!" The angels, still in the pond, start stretching and slowly rise from the water one by one and then start walking in space, admiring the scenery —*our* acropolis. As they walk, they leave behind wet footprints, traces, tracks. "We, angels," says one of them to the audience, "are omnipresent in your lives ... We stand in silly positions and we hold our breath." All angels execute the action. "Japanese tourists. I guess. Pilgrims. A primary school." In what follows, the angels start narrating and re-enacting the stories of the monuments, while observing the awakening of statues with excitement. The statues, manipulated in terms of movement and speech by the angel-narrator, have no past or future, only an endless now of performing the role they were assigned with; always trapped in this repetition of the same moment —the moment represented in the monument (or in the angels' stories). At the end of each scene, an angel commands the statue trapped in the trauma of *that* moment to forget. And as they forget, they are forgotten; another story is about to be narrated by the angels and another statue comes to life in this Acropolis. *Our* cemetery of the tribes.

My reading of the *Reconstruction* is based on the premise that where Wyspiański saw Wawel and Grotowski re-membered Auschwitz, Marmarinos looked at and listened to the city. Although first staged with Polish actors in Wrocław and then reconstructed by Marmarinos's own company of actors, his production resonated with the Athenian habitat, the 'cradle of western civilization,' monumental space *par excellence*. Moreover, as Athens is a city in transition (in crisis), it seems that Marmarinos's Acropolis offers a glance into the coming city, as the production echoes urban soundscapes: the girl mourning on the sarcophagus of Michał Bogoria Skotnicki,<sup>5</sup> for example, makes a high pitched sound, she has become an annoying (to the angel's ears) ambulance siren; an urban messenger of

loss. Her mourning recurs later in the performance and disappears again, like sirens of ambulances running through the city streets at random intervals.

The space further underscores this metaphor: an empty post-industrial former warehouse in the heart of what used to be an area of low-scale commerce at the centre of Athens, where the bodies of the actors perform fragments of monuments, using a limited number of props. The only fixed structure, apart from a few rows of seats flanking the performance area, is the pond and, as Lefebvre has suggested “there is no city, no urban space...without the simulation of nature,” commodified spaces which in the end become “signs of absence” (*Urban* 26-27). The performers start the performance in it; all wearing uniformed black bathing suits, erasing genders (a clear reference to Grotowski’s production where the performers’ bodies were also a-gendered – (as if in the world of the concentration camp, gender seemed was indistinguishable, irrelevant). When they get out of the water, they change into different and clearly gendered costumes: the men put on loose trousers, shirts and robes, while the women appear in dresses of different colours. Finally, one of the central props in Grotowski’s production was a bathtub, used as wedding bed and gas chamber among other things. In the *Reconstruction* the bathtub has become a fixed structure, a pond that dominates the performance space. The bathtub was for the Polish actors material with which they built their monumental space in 1962; in 2010, Marmarinos’s pond is an entrance into monumental space where, by means of performance, monuments (and memories) are inscribed on water, only to be diffused in its ripples.

The bodies of the actors do not show any kind of physical suffering, as in Grotowski’s production. In Marmarinos’s case, physical fatigue is the result of the length and the demands of the performance (it went on for almost three hours) and was beginning to become visible toward the end. Although the latter clearly walks the same path with the former, the two worlds are radically different. Whereas Grotowski mounted a representation of industrial space and time, Marmarinos’s vision reflects the everyday in a contemporary (post-industrial) metropolis; an everyday that operates on a constant present, where memory is increasingly destroyed and monuments operate as places of forgetting. Statues reconstruct the moments commemorated outside of their present, which is reduced to the construction of a snapshot, another tourist attraction. In the beginning of the show, the realisation of the constant suffering of the crucified Christ by one of the angels causes him to have a panic attack: “No, no, no, I cannot, I cannot bear watching His death everyday.” The other angel advises him to forget, exactly as he does later with the mourner from the *Skotnicki* monument, and the all the other girls of the other monuments. “Forget”! say Say the angels in the face of suffering.

iv

In this first act Marmarinos's production formed constructed an empty shell of a monument: there was no memory attached to it; just figures repeating the same actions, experiencing the same emotions over and over again, actors one could argue, performing actions that are not theirs, being there for the sake of an audience (of tourists?), performing a prescribed (master) narrative. There is no past or future, just the present tense of the theatre. The first act, then, presents a monument that is not commemorating anything but itself; a theatre that turns to itself. An institution that stages itself.

Following D.J. Hopkins and Shelley Orr's proposition that monuments offer "not only information, but interpretation; not only data, but ideology" (40), I wish to suggest that the first act of Marmarinos's *Reconstruction* exposes the workings of such understandings of the monument: if a monument does not "require our participation" to complete the image (Hopkins and Orr 40), we simply perform ritual acts, devoid of purpose, and the monument is but a space of manipulation; "[i]t is the seat of an institution," as Lefebvre points out in his arguments *against* the monument. "Any space that is organised around the monument," he continues, "is colonized and oppressed" (*Urban* 21). What matters, in this sense, is that a monument demarcates spaces of power and determines their uses and representations, thus forging images that "claim to express collective will and collective thought" (Lefebvre, *Production* 143). Monuments, in this sense, fabricate spaces where collectivities articulate who they are (or who they think they are). Marmarinos's *Acropolis* seems to project a machinic, empty conception of the world; a collective will and thought devoid of agency. As such, performance in this monument is fully colonised by monumental space, and memory is demoted to mere spectacle.

At end of the first act the performers return to the water; the performance turns into a rehearsal. It is at this moment that the first rupture to the temporality of the monument occurs; just before the interval, the acting changes and the audience is acknowledged as an equal counterpart in the making of this monument, as the actors start discussing about the Acropolis: why the Acropolis? What is it? What does it mean? What would be a contemporary Acropolis? They have to go and get into dry clothes (they tell the audience) and they will return to discuss about the Acropolis and the problems it poses. They get out of the water. For Sophie Nield monuments, as spaces produced by performance, are "a changing sequence of superimpositions, inscriptions, occupations, and clearances" and not "the stable, 'found' entity which a performance temporarily haunts" (223-31). Performance appears, thus, as a privileged site of public intervention and a strategy to



renegotiate monumentality. It is in this rupture, just before the interval, where the central question emerges again that we, the spectators, are given time to think —to look up at the Acropolis overlooking the city of Athens and receive in return its “consolidating glance” (Lefebvre, *Urban* 116). We are invited to have a glimpse into its vantage point, that virtual elsewhere located outside the realm of the everyday and try to connect the fragments of its spectacle of the city or, even, expand the spaces in between these fragments and unravel what is hidden behind its “carefully conceived and imagined (imaged)” gaze (Lefebvre, *Urban* 129-31); to map the becomings-minoritarian concealed by a monument that has come to encapsulate the European subject of enunciation.

### **Interval**

During the interval, I turn to look at the Acropolis, but buildings obstruct my view. Yet, I can feel its gaze, looking down on me, imposing a certain “dramaturgy of space,” as Nield would have it (223-31). The white marble ruins dominate the Athenian skyline, remains of a world that once existed. The flag next to them implies that that world was also Greek. When Athenians look at the ruins upon the hill, they gaze into a fragment of the nation’s virtual totality. Moreover, the newly built state-of-the-art museum next to the ‘sacred’ hill tells the ‘legitimate’ story of the monument, makes the silent stones perform their (assigned) role. I think of the ‘resist’ banner that was raised there in 2008. Following Nield’s exploration of the performative potentialities of the space of the monument, this direct action seems to draw the monument back to the polis, that is the quotidian; to disrupt the prescribed performances it nurtures. According to Hopkins and Orr (following Rebecca Schneider), it is through “messy and eruptive operations of performance” that participants are allowed to intervene in the “monolithic, univocal narrativity” of monumentality (47). It is a kind of pedestrian performance which “can access overlapping urban traumas ... in ways not necessarily given by archival history” (Hopkins and Orr 47) and thus trace the micro-narratives, the micro-politics, the micro-histories; the various becomings (-animal, -woman, -immigrant, -minoritarian) of the urban subject; the becomings-ruin of the monument.

During the interval, I perform a mental drift through the streets of Athens, a city in multiple crises<sup>6</sup>: my mind wanders in the neighbourhood of Psiri —surrounding Theseum, a Theatre for the Arts— that, in a number of ways, summarises the narratives of Greece’s modernisation; after being hailed as the ‘Athenian Soho’ in the early 2000s (Polichroniades), restaurants and bars are now closing, leaving behind boarded up windows and faded inscriptions —ruins of a world irreversibly gone. I move towards Omonoia Square: an area abundant with brothels and street prostitutes —most of them immigrants, victims of contemporary slave-traders. I

visualise its shop windows, restaurants and other businesses whose different languages demarcate the different territories —ghettos. I imagine the “dilapidated buildings” where undocumented immigrants “are packed ... and become victims of exploitation” (Alexandri 204); the pogroms (sometimes under the observing eyes of the police) by ultra-right groups in the areas where immigrants live and dwell; the police presence that has become rather visible since the beginning of the crisis. I trace the inequalities that are not the “unfortunate byproduct” of globalised capitalism, as David Harvey points out, but “the fundamental core of what neoliberalization has been about all along” (119).

Then I mentally meander in Exarcheia, labelled as an ‘anarchist den,’ intellectual hub or bohemian centre of the city. Its central square has been many a time the battlefield between the police and ‘masked youth,’ an occasional lodge for drug-addicts and drug-dealers and, lately, an autonomous community centre of sorts commandeered by the residents in Exarcheia. I recall the plaque commemorating Grigoropoulos’s death, in the corner of Mesologgiou and Tzavella streets: flowers, notes and other mementa constitute the makeshift shrine that was erected in the days after the shooting. A few steps from there stands another significant patch in the urban fabric, a former parking lot in the corner of Navarinou Street and Harilaou Trikoupi Street that has also been commandeered by the locals, who planted trees, installed benches, made paths with stones. In the 2010 Rimini Protocol production *Prometheus in Athens*, architect Andreas Kourkoulas, who was one of 103 Athenians that represented their city on the stage of Herodion (at the foot of the Acropolis), argues that although it this is was a “great” initiative “the archaeologists of the future will hardly see...how young people think about the city of the future in the ruins and the traces of this park” (*Prometheus*). The park is an open, shared and autonomous space surrounded by an increasingly privatised and gentrified urban fabric. Although it does not indeed suggest a clear vision of the urban, it asks a variety of questions about the sustainability of contemporary urban processes; questions about the ethics of conviviality that invest our urban habitats. This park opens a space of political, social, ecological and economic potentialities. It defends the city against the capitalist enterprise and, as Kourkoulas said on the stage of Herodion, “it is our responsibility to defend this city, because we will be defending democracy, which falters, which is degraded” (*Prometheus*).

Finally, I imagine I am standing in Syntagma Square, the geographical, political, administrative and symbolic centre of the city. “What is the Acropolis, do you know?” asks one of the performers after the interval. The question is aimed at everyone in the room. “Acropolis equals democracy,” says another actor: “Someone has said that, in order to understand it, one must make it disappear for a while.

Good. Say we make it disappear. What do we put in its place? What could be the Acropolis of the modern Greek nation?" The discussion opens up to the audience. Ideas start emerging, while the actors make notes on a map of the world: the Berlin Wall, Istanbul, Izmir, Attika (the department store in the centre of Athens), New York (the twin towers), Makronisos (a place of exile for communists and dissidents in the early post-war years); the many Acropolises of the modern Greek nation and beyond —of the western world. I am now mentally standing outside the Greek parliament. I turn around to look at the Acropolis. The ancient *ruins upon the hill* perform their *ruin-ness*. All I can see is shattered stones, pieces of marble, standing on top of each other —not a monument to power (the ancient democratic city-state, the modern Greek state etc.), but a reflection of the failures of the liberal democratic edifice within the modern Greek state. Ruins that stand in for the ruined lives of a city in distress.

## Ruins

### i

"What we perceive in ruins," Marc Augé points out in his seminal book *Non-Places: an Introduction to Supermodernity*, "is the impossibility of imagining completely what they would have represented to those who saw them before they crumbled" (xvii). Ruins stand as reminders of our fragmented perception of the past. They are a testimony of the world as it was, whose image (the image it had of itself) will always escape our imagination. History, in this sense, emerges in assemblages of ruins that demarcate changes of representations (and of representational apparatuses), progression of time and the limitations of imagining the possible pasts. However, in *Le Temps en Ruines*, Augé suggests that "the ruin is absent from our world of images, of simulacrum and reconstitutions" because its "debris no longer has the time to become ruins" (qtd. in Burgin 28). The overproduction of catastrophes, that Wajcman mentions as one of the key characteristics of the twentieth century, produces only debris. As history in this context seems redundant, Augé continues: "At a time when everything conspires to make us believe that history is at an end and that the world is a spectacle in which this end is staged, we have to refind the time to believe in history. This, today, would be the pedagogic vocation of ruins" (qtd. in Burgin 28). In order to restart history, it follows, it is important that we conjure ruins as ma(r)kers of memory, time and becomings. *Acropolis: Reconstruction* staged fragments of various pasts, creating an assemblage of ruins and their experiences. And history emerged onstage with no beginning or end; only as a series of becomings-ruin.

ii

“Auschwitz,” writes Polish scholar Jan Kott, “is merely the inevitable part of the world of stone” where everything is of monumental magnitude and “history is a sequence of Auschwitzes, one following the other” (177). Kott here delineates a cyclical conception of history, where catastrophes mark each revolution of the circle: variations of Auschwitz return (and will return) in regular intervals. “They went and only the smoke remains” were the last words in Grotowski’s *Acropolis*. In this cycle of catastrophes, where debris is piled upon debris (unable to become ruins), what remains is the smoke, reminder of the past catastrophe and precursor to the next one. Grotowski, thus, staged the memory of smoke (its image and smell, its affect); his performance was the echo of the non-existing ruins (the experience) of Auschwitz as fragments of a world that aimed to leave behind only ashes and smoke.

In Marmarinos’s reconstruction of act II, the Song of Jacob, actors performed fragments from Grotowski’s performance, in Polish, while stills from the ‘original’ and photos of the members of Teatr Laboratorium were projected in overhead screens. This choice operated on a number of levels: first, it is a live document of (theatre) history and as such it constructs an image of both Grotowski’s production and the event it references. This section of Marmarinos’s production is itself a memorial, a performance of memory. Second, in terms of its position in the dramaturgy of the piece, it stands outside of the time of the angels; it is an image loaded with a past whose reconstruction, following Kott’s cyclical conception of history, also offers a glimpse into the end of the cycle, the marker of time, a variation of the future.

A third operation of the reconstruction is related to the semiotic cross-references this scene established. This section connects the ‘original’ with the ‘reconstruction,’ revealing the performative variations of memory, the becomings of history. The reconstruction is fragmented both in terms of time and space. Between the scenes from Grotowski’s production, long pauses and entrances/exits of the actors performing in them disrupt the performance’s rhythm; it seems as if they perform extracts of a show, not the show itself. The fragmentation is also very clear in the visual properties of space: the actors still wear the costumes from the previous scenes, adding only heavy boots that look like the boots Grotowski’s actors were wearing and with which they create rhythmical patterns, alluding to the 1962 production. The few props (a long metallic pipe, a wheelbarrow, a violin) work towards the same task. Finally, and most importantly, the overhead projection divides the space in two: the space of live (present) as opposed to recorded (past) performance. The fragments from Grotowski’s production are thus

detrterritorialised: they become ruins of that world, a cryptic and ambiguous memorial to memory itself.

Finally, the reconstruction injects into the space and time of the everyday the ruins of an elsewhere. Although this act of montage resists a politics of forgetting, the ruins from Grotowski's *Acropolis* demonstrate the impossibility of imagining the past (Auschwitz), while also operating as ruins of the contemporary moment that remain invisible or illegible (as ruins): *our* Acropolis in contemporary Athens. Since 2011 2010 Greeks have witnessed the introduction of detention camps (officially presented as spaces of hospitality) for immigrants and other underprivileged minorities; the far right gaining considerable parliamentary representation and, alongside it, accelerating its 'activism'; rhetorics of hate becoming commonplace in majoritarian politics; politics of violence determining our everyday lives. Poverty is increasingly tearing the Greek society apart as the policies of austerity reduce human life to a mere statistic; unemployment is the *unfortunate by-product* of our *world of stone*: a world of rising inequalities and conflicts that extend well beyond the borders of the Greek state. All the ingredients are there, an Auschwitz *is* in the making and it is important, Marmarinos seems to remind us, that we resist this deterioration of the value of life, which has "*become* expendable and disposable" in the current moment of crisis (Butler and Athanasiou 146). Disposable bodies, migrant, unemployed and homeless bodies no longer valuable for the capitalist machine, similarly to the bodies of the inmates in Auschwitz, cannot be read according to the standard of 'man'; they are signs of a "necropolitics" that "determines who can be wasted and who cannot" (Butler and Athanasiou 20).

### iii

The last section of *Acropolis*, the "Rhapsody of Troy," begins with the words of a Bard: "From the field emerges an echo. Over from the river Scamander. It gasps and dies on the city walls. ...Troy, the tired city, sleeps. The king sleeps, the queen sleeps, everyone sleeps. ...Only the guards are awake." Paris and Helen live their love affair oblivious to the coming catastrophe. Hecuba, who "lives among memories," tells to Priam that she brings to her mind the day their firstborn came to this world; he was very small, smiling and energetic. The bells ring (Hecuba likes to hear their sound) and the dance begins. Hector leaves again for the battle. He goes to bid farewell to his wife Andromache. He promises to her that he will be back at dawn. He does not know that this will be his last battle. The rhapsody ends with Cassandra: "Look! Troy is enduring. Its walls still standing. Its musicians have not stopped playing, ... its altars still burning ... It will fall! You won't see the daylight again. Don't wait for your husband. You. And your crows! Flap your black

wings.” The end is near, but the city is asleep, oblivious to it; Troy, Cassandra knows it, is already a ruin. And its dance is just an echo from a past time of happiness and prosperity.

During this scene, Marmarinos referenced his 2002 iconic production *National Hymn: good quality memories in price you can afford*. In his analysis of Marmarinos’s 2002 production *National Hymn*, theatre scholar Dimitris Tsatsoulis argues that the “questions posed by the performance --such as: what does a national anthem communicate in the contemporary world-- are not readily provided; they emerge from this participatory practice..., from the writing they [audience members] inscribe in space, using all their senses” (83). *National Hymn* staged an interactive dinner, where audience members sat around a horseshoe-shaped table and action took place all around them. The table was lined with long white tablecloths, plates, cutlery, glasses, wine, bread and olives. During the performance chickpea soup was being prepared in a large cauldron, to be served during the interval. Tsatsoulis points out that the constant movement of spectators and their interaction with the scenery and with one another (passing bottles of wine or bowls with olives, for example) at random intervals constantly changed the space itself (bottles of wine where emptied etc.), substituting a “sense of community, gathering, celebration” for the “feeling of dining alongside others who were total strangers until very recently” (82). Meanwhile, the actors narrate and perform everyday stories about their favourite spots in the city or meetings in elevators; they sing songs and share food with the audience. Towards the end, a performer initiates a dance and invites her fellow actors and audience members to join her; gradually the scene develops into an almost ecstatic celebration, where dancing partners constantly change. Finally, one of the performers starts taking his clothes off, dancing and shouting that he is “still happy”; that he is “even happier”. The exploration of national identity, here, constructs a shared symbolic space in which, as Marilena Zaroulia points out, “actors intervene in traditional conventions using dance and song not only as a process of remembering and relating to past ideas and practices but also as a renegotiation of the present” (376-77). *National Hymn* seems to be erecting a performative monument to the national community, but in fact stages segments (memories and experiences) of Athens; a living and ephemeral monument to a city in abundance; a city that has put on its best clothes in anticipation of the greatest (and most expensive) show on earth: the Athens 2004 Olympic Games.

The dance sequence from the *National Hymn* inserted here has changed significantly: there is no table, plates, food or wine; the performers move in the empty space inviting audience members to dance, but now the smell of chickpeas is missing. It is not a celebration any longer, but its image striped of its abundance,

only the affect of ecstatic dancing remains, but this too is only a distant echo of *that* celebration (the final celebration), which resembles contemporary Athens far more than that of the pre-Olympic fever in the final days of the end-of-history-abundance. Athens in 2010 is a naked city; a city of new-poor and new-homeless people (and there is a rather striking contrast here to 2002, when Athens was a city of the new-rich); a city where more and more people are turning to non-governmental organisations and municipal centres for food, health-care and accommodation; where suicide rates have soared. What remains of the *National Hymn* is the memory of happiness. “I am still happy,” say the actors dancing, “only because I’m so happy I can take my clothes off” they continue, “otherwise I’m ashamed.” The naked body, here, is not a marker of celebratory ecstasis, but a vulnerable body: “But, why should I be ashamed? What have I got to hide from you? I’m crazy happy!” Indeed, the naked body has nothing to hide any longer in this empty Acropolis, in this naked city. The memory of the celebration haunts the experience of the crisis, while the knowledge of the calamities of the ongoing crisis turns it into a monument to an immaterial urban ruin. And the subtitle of the *National Hymn* becomes a bitter irony: “good quality memories in a price you can afford.” In this amnesiac city of austerity, good quality memories are hardly affordable, so we will have to go by with naked, precarious memories —ruins from a past that is no more.

### **Afterword: towards a minoritarian democratic politics**

Marmarinos’s “cemetery of the tribes” stages (an ephemeral monument to) ruins that failed to take shape. If performance indeed constructs the dramaturgies of monuments, as Nield suggests, *Acropolis: Reconstruction* inscribes on the (idea of) Acropolis the memory of invisible ruins and invites the audience to respond: during the show actors walked among the spectators and looked in their eyes intensely. A man sitting next to me took the hand of the actor staring at him between his own. He smiled at her; she smiled back. They remained in this position for some time, staring at each other’s eyes. Then she moved on. Such random encounters trace the urban: sitting in on the bus and catching someone else’s eyes, just for a minute before they move on to the building behind the bus stop or another fellow passenger. Random encounters with the city’s rhythms and faces (its performances) reveal the quotidian and, as ruins appear in the most unexpected places (or exactly where one expects them), one has to take a moment to think: what would could be the a contemporary Athenian Acropolis of contemporary Athens.

Marmarinos does not provide an answer; his production only invites us, the spectators, to explore the potentialities; to look for a ma(r)ker of our city in the

ruins (or to make the ruins out of debris, to become the missing ruins). In other words, I suggest that *Acropolis: Reconstruction* is a call towards a becoming-ruin, a minimising treatment of the monument. Only then, will we be able to withdraw ourselves from the majority of the white European ‘man’ and emerge from within the minority —when we finally look up at the Acropolis and see it for what it is: stones and sand. The becoming-minoritarian of the Acropolis (alongside all the myths and narratives of power attached to it) seems to challenge majoritarian politics. “Majority,” write Deleuze and Guattari, “implies a state of domination” (321). Liberal democracy is based on exclusion (who has the right to vote?) and domination (who is commanding the majority?). Wendy Brown in her 2009 essay ‘We are all democrats now’ wonders whether “democracy, like liberation, could only ever materialize as protest and, especially today, ought to be formally demoted from a form of governance to a politics of resistance” (56). Such politics of resistance is by definition deterritorialised, withdrawn from state domination and quantitative modes of representation. Such democratic politics can only emerge from the various becomings-minoritarian; it can only occur when authority and power are always already destabilised.

I have tried here to map a series of becomings in response to what I see as becomings-ruin in Marmarinos’s *Reconstruction* of Grotowski’s staging of Wyspiański’s *Akropolis*. My response seems to have become a manifesto against monumentality, or a manifesto for the value of ruins as a metaphor and a becoming. I have argued that the democratic city can be performed, re-imagined and re-membered through the ruins of the spectacles of the neoliberal city. Such was the invitation to ‘resist’ addressed from the Acropolis in December 2008 and such, I propose, was Marmarinos’s invitation to rethink the Acropolis. An invitation to disrupt the neoliberal city (a monument to necropolitics and dispossession) and re-imagine the democratic city on a collective and minoritarian basis.

---

<sup>1</sup> On the night of the 6 December 2008, Alexandros Grigoropoulos was shot dead by a police special guard in the area of Exarcheia. The shooting triggered a wave of protests and riots that lasted until the end of the month. This unrest was expressed in many ways and places all around Greece and produced heated public debate, raising questions related to democratic politics, violence and resistance. These are since referred to as the events of December (*Dekemvriana*), alluding to old *Dekemvriana* that involved the battle of Athens that started the civil war (between the communist resistance also called the Democratic Army and the national army of the newly liberated Greek state with the assistance of the British forces) in December 1944.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from sources in Greek are translated by the author, unless otherwise stated.



<sup>3</sup> In Greek the word *ὕμνος* is translated in English both as ‘anthem’ (as in the case of a national anthem) and ‘hymn’ (as in the case of ecclesiastical hymns). In the webpage and the programme of the production the title (*Εθνικός Ύμνος*) is translated as *National Hymn*, therefore I use the same translation.

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Molik was one of the actors that participated in Grotowski’s 1962 production. All quotations from *Acropolis: Reconstruction* are translated by the author from the production’s promptbook. The author would like to thank Theseum Ensemble and Michail Marmarinos for generously providing archival material.

<sup>5</sup> Michał Michał Bogoria Skotnicki (1775-1808) was a Polish doctor and painter. A monument in his honour was erected Inside the Wawel Cathedral in 1809 which depicts a sarcophagus on which stand a column with an urn on top of it, a lyre, brushes and a palette. Next to the column sits a woman whose “posture, tilted head, bent hands, bare legs and loose hair suggest that she is a mourner of the time” (Pervolaraki 22).

<sup>6</sup> I have written about the crisis-induced restructuring of Athens elsewhere (see Hager “Dramaturgies”). The account here is merely based on observation as the focus is on the affects of crisis rather than facts in their ‘objective’ materiality.

### Works Cited

- Alexandri, Georgia. “Tracing ‘gentrification’ in the centre of Athens: the case of Metaksourgeio.” [«Ανιχνεύοντας τις τάσεις του ‘εξευγενισμού’ στο κέντρο της Αθήνας: η περίπτωση του Μεταξουργείου.»] *The Centre of Athens as Political Stake*. [Το Κέντρο της Αθήνας ως Πολιτικό Διακύβευμα.] Eds. Thomas Maloutas et al. Athens: Harokopio University/National Centre of Social Research, 2013.
- Anon. “The History of Wawel Cathedral: The Cathedral of National Poets and Heroes.” *The Wawel Royal Cathedral of St Stanislaus BM and St Wenceslaus M*. English Version. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 May 2014.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: an Introduction to Supermodernity*. Trans. John Howe. London and New York: Verso, 2008.
- . *Le Temps en Ruines*. Paris: Galilée, 2003.
- Brown, Wendy. “We Are All Democrats Now...” *Democracy in What State?* Giorgio Agamben et al. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. 44-57.
- Burgin, Victor. “Monument and Melancholia.” *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City*. Eds. Uta Staiger, Henriette Steiner and Andrew Webber. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2009. 17-31.
- Butler, Judith and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2013.
- Deleuze, Gilles. “One Less Manifesto.” *The Deleuze Reader*. Ed. Constantin V. Boundas. New York, NY: Columbia UP, 1993. 204-22.

- and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London, New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Hager, Philip. "Dramaturgies of Crisis and Performance of Citizenship: Syntagma Square, Athens." *Performance and the Global City*. Eds. Hopkins DJ and Kim Solga. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 245-65.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: OUP, 2005.
- Haug, Helgard and Daniel Wetzel, Dir. *Prometheus in Athens*. Perf. 103 inhabitants of Athens. Herodeion. 15 Jul. 2010.
- Hopkins, D.J. and Shelley Orr. "Memory/Memorial/Performance: Lower Manhattan, 1776/2001." *Performance and the City*. Ed. D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr and Kim Solga. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 33-50.
- Kopsini, Christina, et al. "The reactions have reached the Acropolis." [«Οι Αντιδράσεις Έφτασαν ως την Ακρόπολη.»] Kathimerini [Καθημερινή.] 18 Dec. 2008. Web. 30 May 2014.
- Kott, Jan. *Theatre of the Essence and Other Essays*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1984.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford (UK and Cambridge (USA): Blackwell, 1991.
- . *The Urban Revolution*. Trans. Robert Bonano. Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2003.
- Marmarinos, Michail, Dir. *Akropolis: Reconstruction*. Perf. Theseum Ensemble. Theseum, a Theatre for the Arts. 8 Apr. 2010.
- Nield, Sophie. "Siting the People: Power, Protest and Public Space." *Performing Site-Specific Theatre*. Eds. Anna Birch and Joanne Tompkins. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 219-32.
- Pervolaraki, Myrto, ed. *Acropolis: Reconstruction* (Theatre Programme) Athens. n.p., 2010.
- Polichroniades, Babis. "Padlock to 'Athen's Soho'." [«Λουκέτα στο 'Σόχο της Αθήνας'.»] Eleftherotypia. [Ελευθεροτύπια] 21 Feb. 2010. Web. 30 May 2014.
- Slowiak, James and Jairo Cuesta. *Jerzy Grotowski*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Soja, Edward. *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London and New York: Verso, 1989.
- Tsatsoulis, Dimitris. *Signs of Writing, Codes of the Stage in Contemporary Greek Theatre*. [Σημεία Γραφής, Κώδικες Σκηνής στο Σύγχρονο Ελληνικό Θέατρο.] Athens: Nefeli, 2007.

Wajcman, Gérard. *L'Objet du siècle*. Paris: Verdier, 1999.

The Wooster Group. "Akropolis: Polish, English and Notes." *The Wooster Group*. N.p. 13 Apr. 2008. Web. 30 May 2014.

Zaroulia, Marilena. "Cosmopolitanism and Utopia: Modernising Tradition." [«Κοσμοπολιτισμός και Ουτοπία: Εκσυγχρονίζοντας την Παράδοση.»] Tradition and Modernization in Modern Greek Theatre: from its Beginnings to the Post-War Period. [*Παράδοση και Εκσυγχρονισμός στο Νεοελληνικό Θέατρο: Από τις Απαρχές ως τη Μεταπολεμική Εποχή.*] Eds. Antonis Glytzouris and Constantina Georgiadi. Herakleion: Crete UP, 2010.