THE journal OF CIVIC MEDIA

ISSUE 4-5

Summer 2024

# *Civic Media In Flux*

SILVER SERIES **by Jenny Marketou**

THE journal OF CIVIC MEDIA

## Mission Statement

*The Journal of Civic Media*, a semiannual electronic journal published out of the Engagement Lab, Emerson College, is directly linked to the Media Design Master's program at Emerson College.

*The Journal of Civic Media* focuses on the art and practice of civic media and technology to facilitate the democratization process around the world by means of both local and global digital platforms and community based media initiatives that promote participatory research methods and give voice to diverse communities. Its objective is to provide an open forum for scholars, practitioners, students and the general public, to harness civic engagement and rethink the complex and ever-changing landscape of the field in the digital era.

Engagement Lab, Emerson College
120 Boylston Street, Boston MA 02116
Email for Inquiries: journalofcivicmedia@gmail.com
*The Journal of Civic Media:* https://citizentales.org/journal-of-civic-media?fbclid=IwAR03OWDO6wkgY6acMN5CVmLmrGmlOTR6frMoylmfcdPRxuJMHo-LzM7LUC4



## Cover:

*Silver Series*, by Jenny Marketou (2011)
Curator: Sabine Himmelsbach, artistic direcor at HeK in Basel, Switzerland
Gateways: Art and Networked Culture
Installation View Kumu Art Museum
Commissioned by Goethe Institut and Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn Estonia (Cultural Capital of Europe).
Curator: Sabine Himmelsbach

*Silver Lining* at Boston University was an online variation of *Silver Series*, curated by Lanfranco Aceiti.

## Editorial Policy

The editors of *The Journal of Civic Media* seek original columns between 1,500 and 2,500 words on a determined theme that contribute new ideas to the field of civic media and provoke further conversation research around the designated theme. Submissions will generally be submitted by academics, students or practitioners in the civic media field, however, all submissions will be considered. Requests and proposals regarding potential submissions are encouraged.

To be considered for publication, papers should be emailed as attachments in .doc, .docx or Google doc format, double-spaced, in Chicago Style, with the author's name and contact information. Submissions should include relevant academic or practical references, cited at the end of the text. A brief biography (50 words) should be submitted for inclusion at the end of the column. Columnists are encouraged to include visual additions such as photos, videos, gifs, data visualizations or screen captures related to their content. There is no determined limit on number of submissions that will be accepted per issue. The editorial decision-making will be based on the quality and relevence of content. Also, cover art submissions are welcome.

## Editorial Review Process

All content is reviewed and managed by the editorial team. Generally, it will review each submission, critically analyzing the content and style and providing a rating for the submission. If the submission meets the editorial standards and aligns with the issue theme, any necessary revision requests are sent to the author prior to the editing submission deadline. Once necessary revisions are made, the project goes through a final evaluation by the advisory board.

# EDITORIAL BOARD

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# FOREWORD

Greetings!

It is with mixed feelings that I write these opening remarks. On one hand, I am thrilled to see, at long last, this issue of *The Journal of Civic Media* on the theme of "Civic Media in Flux," published after a long haul due to various circumstances, including Covid related issues. On the other hand, I am sad that this journal has to discontinue. Having a niche for this journal at Emerson College's Engagement Lab has been a tremendously rewarding experience for me personally and for all members of the editorial team. For this, we are grateful to the Director of the Engagement Lab, Eric Gordon, and the Engagement Lab Faculty who have assisted us greatly throughout these years. We are equally grateful to every contributor to this journal, as well as to both the Editorial Board and the Advisory Board, as well as to the *Citizen* TALES Commons members, especially to Peter Bottéas, for their invaluable support towards the completion of this issue. We are also grateful to Jenny Marketou, for granting us permission to use her artwork for the cover of this issue.

From the journal's inception in August 2018, when I was only an editorial assistant for its first issue on *Smart Cities*, to the double issue of *Civic Imagination* in Spring 2021 and the aforementioned current double issue, we hope we have contributed something substantial to the fields of Civic Media and Civic Engagement. I hope therefore, you will enjoy the present volume on civic media in flux, which its guest editors, Hannah Trivilino and Lea Luka Sikau, have conceived and edited with so much care. We are grateful to both of them for this and hope that you, the readers, will be rewarded by reading it!

Sincerely yours,

Vassiliki Rapti
Editor, *The Journal of Civic Media*

# EDITORIAL

Civic media in flux. Media flow through and besides us. As fluidly entangled chimeras - between the virtual and the tangible - we are growing in our more-than-human entanglements. Within the conundrum of our entanglement in media, civic media studies interrogate how media's flux nurtures and/or disrupts more-than-human networks.

While we are deeply intertwined with all media, the impetus of media fostering social engagement - civic media - seeds the ground of this issue. Along the lines of new materialism, our authors explore how they become with civic media. The multifaceted contributions from artists and scholars alike shed light on diverse perspectives on their entanglement with media designed distorting or seeding their civic impact. This issue asks what makes media civic and how this relates back to experiences. While the papers in this issue extend categories in their mutli-modal approaches of negotiating mediated experiences, we mapped them into four broad themes to facilitate the reading experience.

**Bodies in Flux** engages with the affective encounters of bodies with civic media. Investigating proximity, co-emergence and fungi networks, the authors challenge conceptions of nonhuman sound generation, body-space relations and memories of terror.

Here is some space:

Or is it a field? Sketch both field and space in flux. How do they diverge and coalesce? Do they intersect?

**Space in Flux** poses questions on the collective experience of urban spaces. Spaces create portals for civic engagement. The physical space is never empty, but always filled, with scents, sounds and sights; it frames our perspective and builds an apparatus which is always-already there. Shaping and molding spaces within spaces - heterotopic entities - the contributions engage with the civic affordances of spatial framings.

Who wields the memory of a narrative? Narratives are by nature in flux as the ecology of a narrative mutates with time given changes in the perspectives, memories, corporealities, and relationships of a narrative's audiences and disseminators. So how does a narrative archived –such as ones published in a journal–create an illusion of fixedness for an inherently changing condition? **Narratives in Flux** houses projects whose forms affirm narratives as ever-changing through practices of re-telling, translation, counter-narrative, and iteration.

How did you envision the field in the earlier prompt? **Field in Flux** is about the processes and practices of navigating civic media. Where do we draw the line and why is it a line? How can lines be more permeable? Is there a field without lines? How far can we productively stretch the field of civic media, tracing its topography in areas that we yet might not have considered? This section explores the shifting nature of political, social, and pedagogical landscapes, as well as their civic navigations.

We have structured the pieces in this journal as a flowing circuit, with Bodies in Flux transforming into Space in Flux morphing into **Narratives in Flux** evolving into **Field in Flux** and mutating back to Bodies in Flux and aided in these transitions by bridge pieces who straddle bordering categorizations. Therefore, while this document appears linear, we invite you to imagine it as a circular loop.

We are grateful to all our contributors on this issue and hope you enjoy this issue of the Journal of Civic Media.

Lea Luka Sikau and Hannah Trivilino

# ABOUT THE COVER ART

The work of Jenny Marketou, *Red Eyed Sky Walkers / Silver Series 2011* is a networked environment created on site and set in the courtyard in front of the Kumu Museum in Tallinn, Estonia. The environment which, according to the artist, touches upon the vital role of the viewer indirectly incorporated in the process of the development of her work, consists of the fluid, shifting and ephemeral ecology of 49 Silver Mylar reflective meteorological balloons which are attached on the ground by several yards of transparent plastic tethers. As guests at the museum are sitting under the shelter of the balloons, they can hear the mesmerizing patterns of the wind, as it blows through the Mylar surface, when the balloons touche each other creating a real condition for a sharing experience and rest.

But aside from the silver balloons, the environment features nine wireless network video cameras, which are attached under some of the balloons. The nine cameras survey all the aerial activity between visitors and the environment and aided, by the Internet, transmit live streaming video to the gallery space, which is located on the fifth floor of the museum. There, through software specially designed for this project, it enables the artist to seek audiovisual material and other data from global networks of social media such as Wikileaks, YouTube, Tweet and Flicker, arranged in thematic archives which range from images of ourselves, video reportage, and images which convey enforced and repeated rules and codes in the control of crowds, in political and economic upheavals, in administrative apparatuses, and military technology.

In the spirit of transparency, the artist, like a contemporary documentarian wants to make us look through the collective gaze of the culture of reality TV, embedded journalism and YouTube at the uncertain state of images and other universal networks created out of audio, visual and electronic communication which have been normalized, and to ask us to critically question the profoundly ambivalent about rhetorics of truth and strategies of authenticity in those images.

http://blog.goethe.de/gateways/index.php?user_language=en

http://www.crumbweb.org/

http://www.goethe.de./ins/ee/tal/etindex.htm?wt_sc=tallinn

https://vimeo.com/25731197

* This is reproduced by this video

# BODIES IN FLUX

# The Blind and the Common: An Introduction

Tyler Thomas

***Unlike political citizenship ... art compels us to seek in ourselves the authority by which we are obliged to one another in the fleeting, discretionary occasions for publics to gather together.***[1]

**– Randy Martin**

***What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.***[2]

**– Michel de Certeau**

1. Randy Martin, introduction to *Artistic Citizenship*, ed. Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin (London: Routledge, 2006), 12.
2. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 129, https://chisineu.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/certeau-michel-de-the-practice-of-everyday-life.pdf

Blindness. A condition most typically associated with an acute lack of vision or awareness. By most accounts, such a condition is, surely, considered a loss. And yet there are alternative contexts of the word that invite a more generous assessment. Let us take, for a first example, the *blind date*. Through the coming together of strangers in this particular social engagement, we find to varying degrees within ourselves anticipation at the potential of the unknown. Blind meetings, in this way, assert a type of expectancy that is sympathetic to vulnerability, openness, and discovery. In these encounters, we feed the belly of our expectation not with concrete answers or information, but with a daring hope at the possibility of what might come next. Secondarily, the notion of blindness may also give way to images of the roaming imagination –weaned from the visibly tangible– and calling forth a sixth sense of dreaming. Therefore, considering both of these perspectives within the context of the collective, blindness that is shared –or rather, *common*– bears the potentiality of new visions of encounter, exchange, and making within a community. This is at least the proposal of Blind Platform.

Blind Platform is at its center a community of multicultural daydreamers. Broadened: it is an artistic praxis of cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary collaboration, a platform of considering new performances of co-authored art– and world-making. It is the latest formation of initiating artist Adonis Volanakis' ever-evolving **Blind Date** practice, an experimental methodology of interdisciplinary collaboration now over a decade old. Making the collective, Blind Platform proposes a

view of shared locality as a means of investigating borders of proximity and activities of co-existence. It began, just over one year ago, as an arts residency.

## The story of common platforms

In June of 2016, artists and cultural workers, Adonis Volanakis and Rafika Chawishe began the conversations that would lead to an arts residency of over 500 people in the Municipal Theatre of Piraeus in Athens. This event would be the first step in a larger action seeking to respond to the refugee crisis in Greece through and from the artist perspective.

From the beginning, for Volanakis and Chawishe, two things felt clear: they desired to create an embodied arts learning experience rooted in the pursuit of daydreaming –the arts residency– and they sought to do so in the Municipal Theater. An elegant, neoclassical building from the 1890s, featuring a luxurious Western European ballroom as its second stage, the Municipal Theater would constitute, for most of the artist participants, a mutually uncommon workspace. This shared dislocation and relocation felt important for Volanakis and Chawishe, who sought to invite all participants (both refugee and permanent residents) to transgress borders of their everyday spaces and meet at the crossroads of a common identity: artist. Seeking to challenge existing discourses and reali-

ties of who moves through which cultural spaces and how, the residency aimed to enact a form of cultural redistribution: to re(ad)dress privileges of expression and accessibility, to disturb everyday practices of social and artistic engagement, and to effectively bridge societal margins to its centers. Thus, Blind Platform emerged out of a desire to create an alternative space in which artists might "[seek] refuge in art," together.[3] The initial experiences that would come out of this, occurring over two weekends in October of 2016, became known as **Common Platforms: A Blind Date**.

Volanakis and Chawishe began their search for interested refugee artists in Eleonas, an open structure camp just outside the city center. With the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Project Elea (a group of artists volunteers working to support the residents of Eleonas), they were able to identify the presence of artists in the camp and subsequently began putting out the word. After a month of asking questions, gauging interests, and getting to know the internal situation of the camp, the two daydreamers had procured a diverse body of applicants for the residency –which also included international artists volunteering with Project Elea and Greek artists from their own networks. Over the next three months, Volanakis and Chawishe would hold a series of interviews with all potential participants to assess CVs, proof of artistic work, goals, etc., and from this process, the inaugural cohort of artists-in-residence would be selected.

In total, the group was 37, with nationalities from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Argentina, the United Kingdom, Spain, and, of course, Greece. Ages

3. "About," *Blind Platform,* accessed October 1, 2017, https://blindplatform.wordpress.com/about/

of the participants ranged from 13 to middle age, and the artistic backgrounds ranged just as far as: sculptors, singers, painters, dancers, actresses, theater educators, guitarists, rappers, DJs, political scientists, psychotherapists, drama therapists, activists, opera singers, theater makers, choreographers, photographers, art therapists, acting coaches, poets, writers, directors. Over the span of two consecutive weekends (the first exclusive to the cohort itself and the second being joined by members of the general public), all of these borders would be effectively crossed in the building of a community that could bear the weight of its difference.

The first weekend of the residency comprised of three four-hour days of discussion, performances, presentations, workshops, and sharing. The agenda for that weekend, and the next, would be completely generated, decided upon, and facilitated by the group as a whole. Nothing was preconceived except daily lunch (donated by a local NGO), an opening lecture on the Asia Minor refugee crisis of the 20th century, and the opening prompt of "dreams." The rest was given completely up to the element of surprise.

As with any blind date, the weekend began with learning names. The first day (and every one following) was kicked off by a time of name-tagging, snacks, and getting to know one another; the room buzzing with eager introductions between strangers. Installed within the space were markers, rows of brown paper, blackboards and chalk, media screens, musical instruments – utensils for a school of dreamers. In a way of introducing the group to their new, temporary residence, a lecture

was given by historian Vasias Tsokopoulos on the Asia Minor crisis as it related to the history of Municipal Theater building. After this came a few welcoming group exercises followed by the weekend's first small group discussions.

Splitting into three smaller groups spread about the theater, the artists dove into the topic of "dreams." Each group was assigned two facilitators and one translator from amongst the cohort. These, along with the groups themselves, would rotate throughout the residency, ensuring everyone the opportunity to work with each other at least once. The value of these shifting leadership roles could not be overstated. Facilitators were also responsible for keeping time and ensuring that all voices were heard, while the translators were tasked with the challenging, yet crucial work of ensuring everyone understood what was being spoken through every activity. In a room filled primarily with Farsi, Arabic, and Greek speakers, language was a substantial barrier that had to be overcome with patience, strategy, and care. (I am told that a particular shoutout must be given to two 13-year boys who were rockstars at moving through these layers of speech communities.) And yet the group saw itself rising to the challenge, with lunch time as particular opportunities to put fellowship across language and culture deeper into practice. The end of the first day saw performance presentations of each group's conversation on dreaming: a range of music and dance performances embodying ideas of ideal community, empathy, harmony, and collaboration. And thus, the starting foundation for the residency was that of common dreams.

Perhaps, this is an apt moment to include a visual detail, easily unseen, of Volanakis and Chawishe as the resident hosts of this endeavor: making sure water was available, technology functioning and prepared, lunch delivered timely, metro tickets disseminated – the list is long and the tails of their Herculean efforts in tending to the logistical details of this project are perhaps for another day, but let them be noted, however briefly, here.

The second day reflected a similar rhythm: an initial group warm-up followed by roundtable discussions, this time of the residents' main concerns as artists and human beings. It was from these conversations that the themes of research for the rest of the weekend would be decided, with the subsequent syllabus ultimately appearing: the Inner Child and Transformation, Cross Cultural Dialogue: Common Ground, and the Swarm. These subjects would be unpacked, reimagined, embodied, and performed throughout the weekend and into the next, when this unique space of collective learning would expand to include the larger public.

The second weekend, the foyer of the Municipal Theater was flooded not with its usual traffic of ticket exchanges, but with the activity of people at work. Entering the theater, invited "audience members" were handed a paper world map and marker, and asked to draw lines depicting their family migrations 3 generations back (an idea of resident artist, Dora Giannaki). This was the act performed at the threshold of a multicultural community-in-formation: the reminder that we are all travelers. At this, I am also brought to performance

studies scholar, Dwight Conquergood's articulation of contemporary cultural theory: "'location' is imagined as an itinerary [and not] a fixed point."[4] "The 'local,'" he writes, "is a leaky, contingent construction" and "[the] boundary ... more like a membrane than a wall."[5] Thus, it would seem that our performances of migration are more common than we think, and the opposition less formidable than we are taught (leaky; a membrane, not a wall). And such is the postcolonial reality of our world Conquergood remarks: "crisscrossed by transnational narratives, diaspora affiliations ... multiple migrations of people, sometimes voluntary, but often economically and politically coerced."[6] And so we are, many of us, movers and travellers of some sort. Even for those of us whose roots in a singular place dig deep, we are not excluded from meeting this reality; it eventually knocks at our door. The question of if and how we answer is the labor of coexistence.

After completing their maps, the members of the public were invited to participate in workshops conceived and facilitated by the resident artists, in addition to experiencing video samples of each of the artist's exhibited work. Conquergood might refer to such an invitation as "coperformative witnessing" – a simultaneity of listening and participating that activates the space of witnessing and invigorates our understandings of what it means to be a collaborative member of a whole.[7]

---

4. Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR/The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (2002): 145.
5. Ibid., 145.
6. Ibid., 145.
7. Ibid., 149.

I once shared a train ride with Kwame Kwei-Armah, the new artistic director of London's Young Vic –among many things–, who shared with me the following thought (in a loose paraphrase): "My responsibility as the director is to be the first audience member." As an emerging director myself, I quite liked this image, of sitting in the audience both as an inside creator of a work, intimate with its making, and as an outsider, an unknowing witness – a stranger. Choreographer and scholar Randy Martin likewise observed this dual positionality of the artist, referring to the negotiation as a "shuttling between private making and public viewing."[8] It reminds me that the office of the artist is one inherently in transit. And this is, I believe, the outline of the artistic citizen: that which can be both performer and witness, a traveller between diverging notions of inside and outside space – a functional bridge between both.

## Beyond the residency

Since the residency, Blind Platform has creatively continued its commitment to the blind dating practice. In May of this year (2017), a new collaboration was initiated with the Tijuana Zine Fest. Organized by a collective of artists working around the Tijuana-Mexico/San Diego-US border, the Tijuana Zine Fest celebrates self-publishing "as

8. Randy Martin, introduction to *Artistic Citizenship*, ed: Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin (London: Routledge, 2006), 15.

an alternate form of expression and cross-border communication."[9]

In partnership with TJZF, Blind Platform staged their transborder practice at Athens' Platforms Project, orchestrating blind arts dates between participants as they created "fanzines" for the TJZF 2017 fest. Common Platforms artist Salahedin Vahabpoor took over the walls of the space creating a mural and exhibiting his personal work as well. In April, members of the collective participated in a symposium at Green Park Athens, organized by the Athens Museum of Queer Arts, discussing "(non)performance as method." And even more projects are ongoing: collaborations between video and performing artists, scholarship offers in dramatherapy, dance performances at the Megaron Concert Hall, etc. Like the organism it is, the praxis continues to reshape itself as it seeks more and more ways to match its community with resources, other artists, and organizations.

## Building on

Of course, Blind Platform is one of many inventive coalitions doing this work in different places, in different ways, and in response to different local needs. I want to mention a few that have come to my mind while writing this, if not for the sole purpose of beginning to contextualize the inquiry


9. "Info," *Tijuana Zine Fest*, accessed October 17, 2017, https://tijuanazinefest.com/info

and effort of Blind Platform within a greater narrative of artists making community and communities making art.

In 2014, while working for The Foundry Theater, a small theater company with quite a big voice in New York City, I was fortunate enough to come across a performer by the name of Gideon Irving – a solo traveling home show artist. Beginning his modern-day troubadouring practice years ago in New Zealand, Irving has been crossing the globe on a regular basis (on bike, by car, and soon, on horse ... go look it up.), performing in people's homes for them and their friends, staying the night, and then heading off to another home the next morning (received by recommendation) to repeat the process. As I see it, Irving's work, like Blind Platform, exists at the intersection of the migratory and local. Transforming the stranger into both host (the audience) and guest (himself), he renegotiates patterns of human connection and strategies of overcoming distances of all kinds. Merging his musical storytelling skills with a love of hospitality and relationship building, his practice embodies a type of philanthropy as the Greek roots of the word would mean it: *a love for people* that breeds further compassion – and in doing so, erodes microborders between self and other that serve to circumscribe our capacity for togetherness. Irving is one man traveling through communities residing with strangers. Blind Platform is a community of travelers residing together. However, I see their works align in their pursuit of creative proposals for what we can make of our neighborhliness, for whatever time we have it.

Artist Paul Chan's staging of *Waiting for Godot* in post-Katrina New Orleans is another lens through which I see anew the work of Blind Platform. Produced by Creative Time, and made in collaboration with artists, activists, organizers, students, and local residents of New Orleans, Chan's site-specific production of Beckett's timeless and mutable work – performed on a street intersection in the Lower Ninth Ward and on the lawn of an abandoned house – set out to restage a city's narra-

tive one year after it witnessed historical devastation, ruin, and neglect. In the face of such vast disaster, a city (and its nation) watched in bewilderment, waiting, wondering, how it might rebuild. "Seeing Godot embedded in the very fabric of the landscape of New Orleans was my way of reimaging the empty roads, the debris, and, above all, the bleak silence as more than the expression of mere collapse," Chan pens in his artist statement for the project.[10] In other words, as I hear him, the restaging allowed a community to shift the focus from the damage that had been done and reactivate themselves (and their social spaces) with the task of asking "what can be done next?" And how shall we perform it? Interestingly, where the art object for Blind Platform may be the community and the process, the art, for Chan the art object was the theater and the method, community. Yet in both examples, we see *communal* meditations on the task of remaking our world by shifting the rules of how we as a social body occupy our public and private spaces.

For a final note, I want to look at the notion of collectivity and more specifically, at how other artists-scholars have engaged with and challenged the term in discourse and in practice. And how such challenges may serve to elucidate a critical question asked during the Common Platforms residency. Fairly quickly during the first weekend,

10. Paul Chan, "Waiting for Godot: An Artist Statement:" 2-3, accessed October 14, 2017, http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/chan/artist_statement.pdf

the image of "the Swarm" arose as a metaphor for the group to understand the complex collaboration of collective and individual activity and, further how a collective body might move in a way that serves both. As considered by the group, the swarm refers to animals who travel together in the same direction (think: insects or birds) and who, doing so without a distinguished leader, retain the ability for an individual to change the direction of the collective movement at any moment without sacrifice to the solidarity of the collective itself.

In her contribution to the compilation *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, Katharina Schlieben, a curator and scholar based in Berlin, proposes the use of the term *polyphony* (the harmonizing of multiple, independent melodies) as an alternative image for collective communication and decision making.

Schlieben argues that rather than demanding conformity, polyphony "furthers difference" and that such "mechanisms of individual constructions of identity through an experience of difference can [indeed] be transferred to collective and collaborative constructions of identity.[11] She further writes that "collective work processes depend on clear individual positions" – a fact which creates space for a relational, subjective component of collectivity to appear.[12] Building off this notion of subjectivity (juxtaposed with "individuality"), Hana Erdman, a performer of Isabelle Schad's keen choreographic work, *Collective Jumps*, researching collectivity through the body, remarks: "Subjectivity," as Schad encouraged the group to consider, "leaves space for 'individual' actions and interpretations [and yet] always puts you in relationship" (10).[13] She writes on, detailing their research process, and I believe the description speaks volumes to the work of Blind Platform:

We move together as a mass. We follow each other's interests, intuitions, questions, reconciliations and developments: We negotiate details, transformation, and communication in real time...I allow the movement to transform slowly, each new adjustment allows for this gradual change ...

11. Katharina Schlieben, "Polyphonous language and construction of identity: its dynamic and its crux," in *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices,* ed: Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, and Lars Nilsson (London: Black Dog, 2007), 33.
12. Ibid., 34.
13. Erdman, Hana. "Subjectivity and Individuality: Notes from the Inside." Program notes for *Collective Jumps*, Isabelle Schad, Berlin: Hau Hebbel Am Ufer, November 28, 2014, 10.

My self-awareness expands to include the whole group, and I feel the image we make ... I project myself outwards and visualize what the lines look like. I work on several layers of understanding, and slide between them... [I]t is the shift between levels of awareness that provides the motor for transforming. And it is this shifting and its rate that produces my subjective experience, which in turn immediately informs my next movement and level of activity. I play between submitting to the movement and challenging its parameters ... This movement, this negotiation ... this poetry of the single and group body ... searching for strategies for play, for citizenship, is the practice."[14]

Thus, Erdman's text reminds us that collectivity is based first in the choice of the individual to be a part of the group and then, in the play of our relationality. Collectivity is then, perhaps, not a shape to be attained, but a dynamic body in motion, renegotiating, shifting, and transforming boundaries between self, other, and the whole.

## Moving forward

These diverse bodies of work and artifact come together to document and remember an inaugural moment in the life of an ongoing project, an evolving practice, and a growing network. Artists and writers meditate on the action of Blind Platform to share what happened and ask what happens next, to continue the crucial work of restaging, revisioning, and moving forward. Bridging the fifteenth year of Blind Date to its first and the first year of Blind Platform to its next, the heart of its community is a collaborating network of bridge-builders, marking in present time the commitment to a practice in artistic citizenship, where our greatest civic duty is to the common dream.

14. Ibid., 10-11.

# Human-fungi-technology system

Denisa Pubalova

# human-fungi-technology system

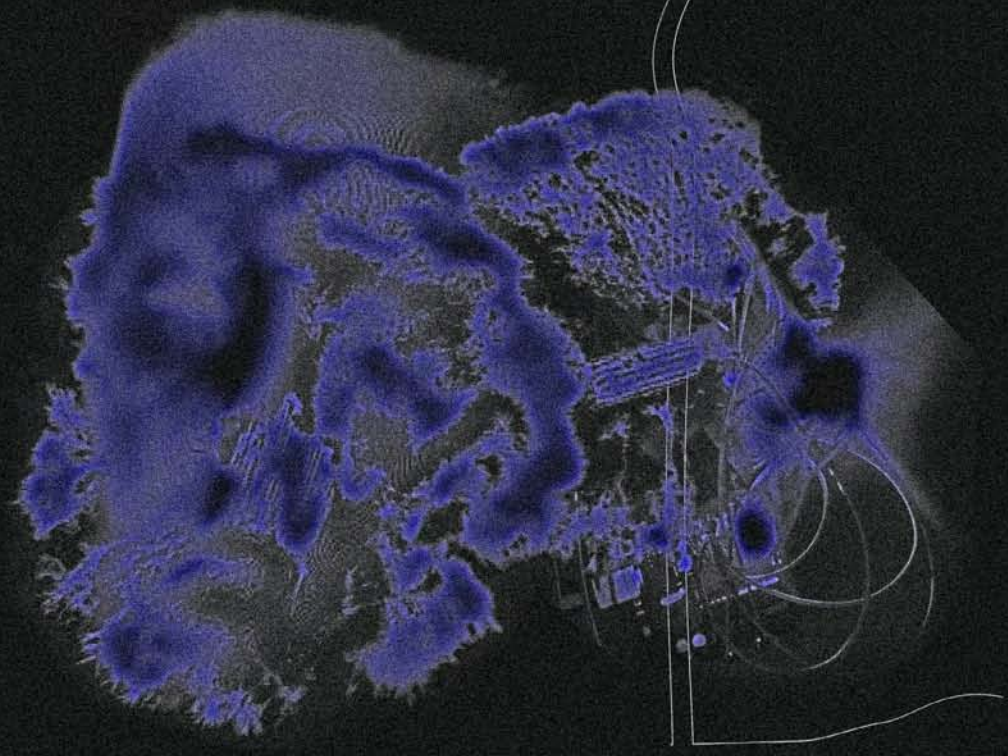
INTRODUCTION:

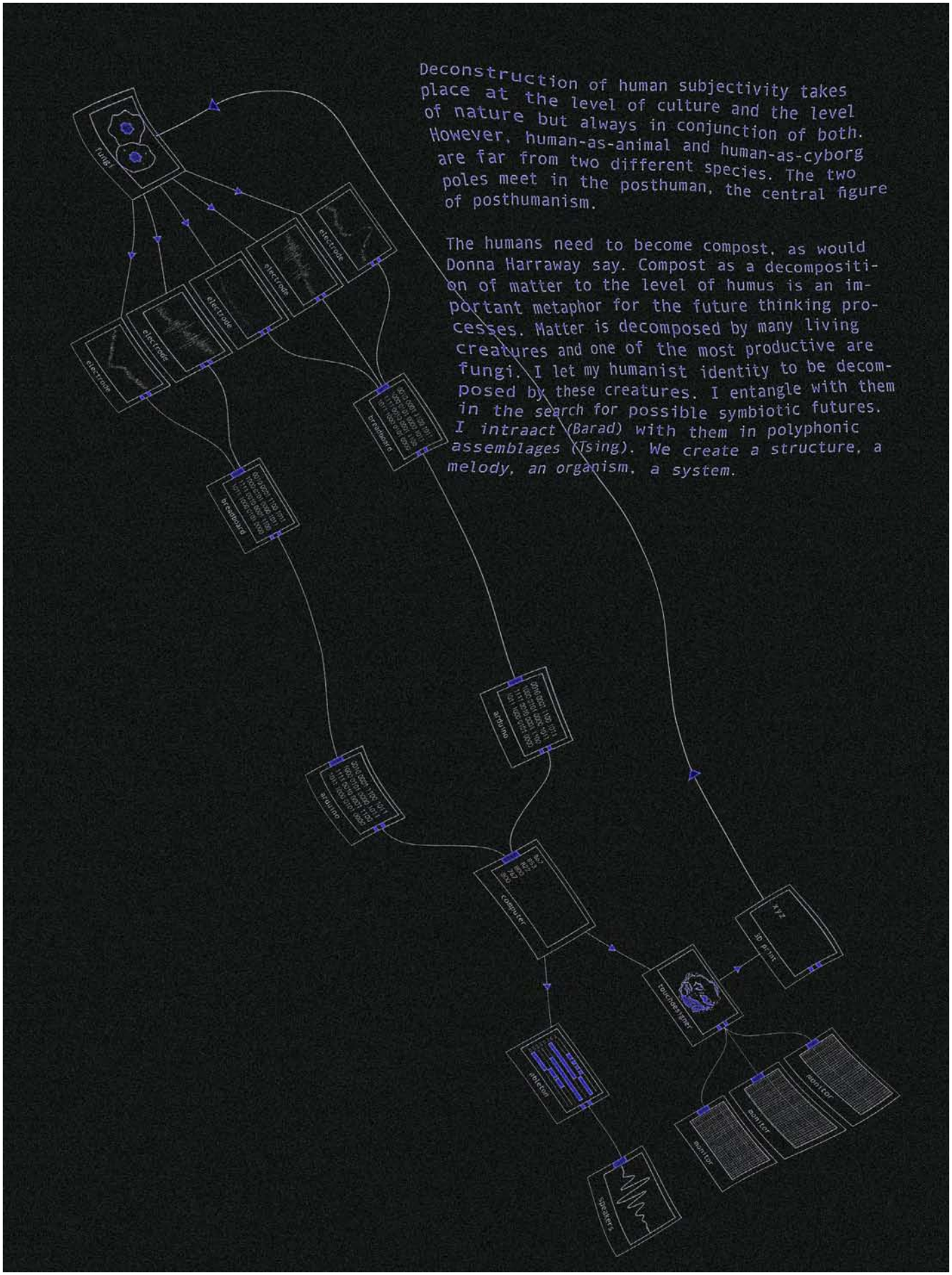
Uncertainty seems to be a ubiquitous condition of the world. The uncertainties we face need to be seen as an opportunity. An opportunity for a deconstruction of what it means to be human. It is a time for disruption of our conception of the uniqueness of man, and for an entanglement with nature, in which people have sought solace since ancient times. The intertwining of society with digital technologies has created an even more urgent need for a deconstruction of human. However, human-as-animal and human-as-cyborg are far from two different species. The two poles meet in the posthuman, the central figure of posthumanism.

Humans are complex dynamic cell networks made of many bacterial, viral, fungal creatures creating social networks between many individual networks. Humans constantly creates, transforms, and makes the world for all of us.

Fungi are complex dynamic mycelial networks connecting many creatures, creating infrastructure of a forest, decomposing matter. Fungi constantly creates, transforms, and makes the world for all of us.

Technological systems are complex dynamic networks capable of sensing, directing, and transforming signals to many different data forms. Technological systems constantly creates, transforms, and makes the world for all of us.






Deconstruction of human subjectivity takes place at the level of culture and the level of nature but always in conjunction of both. However, human-as-animal and human-as-cyborg are far from two different species. The two poles meet in the posthuman, the central figure of posthumanism.

The humans need to become compost, as would Donna Harraway say. Compost as a decomposition of matter to the level of humus is an important metaphor for the future thinking processes. Matter is decomposed by many living creatures and one of the most productive are fungi. I let my humanist identity to be decomposed by these creatures. I entangle with them in the search for possible symbiotic futures. *I intraact (Barad) with them in polyphonic assemblages (Tsing). We create a structure, a melody, an organism, a system.*

## DECONSTRUCTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

Cybernetics, which began to form in the 40s, started to reflect on the relation of human to a machine. Human was seen as an information system working on the principle of feedback loops and autopoiesis and therefore considered to be special intelligent machine (Hayles 1999, s. 58, 64). This stream of thought completely erased the dualism between the human and the machine, as much as other dualisms, like Donna Harraway stressed in the legendary Cyborg manifesto from 1985. The advanced technological culture partly erased all these binaries and created chimeras, hybrids and cyborgs in utopian post-gender world. What does it mean for the humanist idea of Vitruvian man?

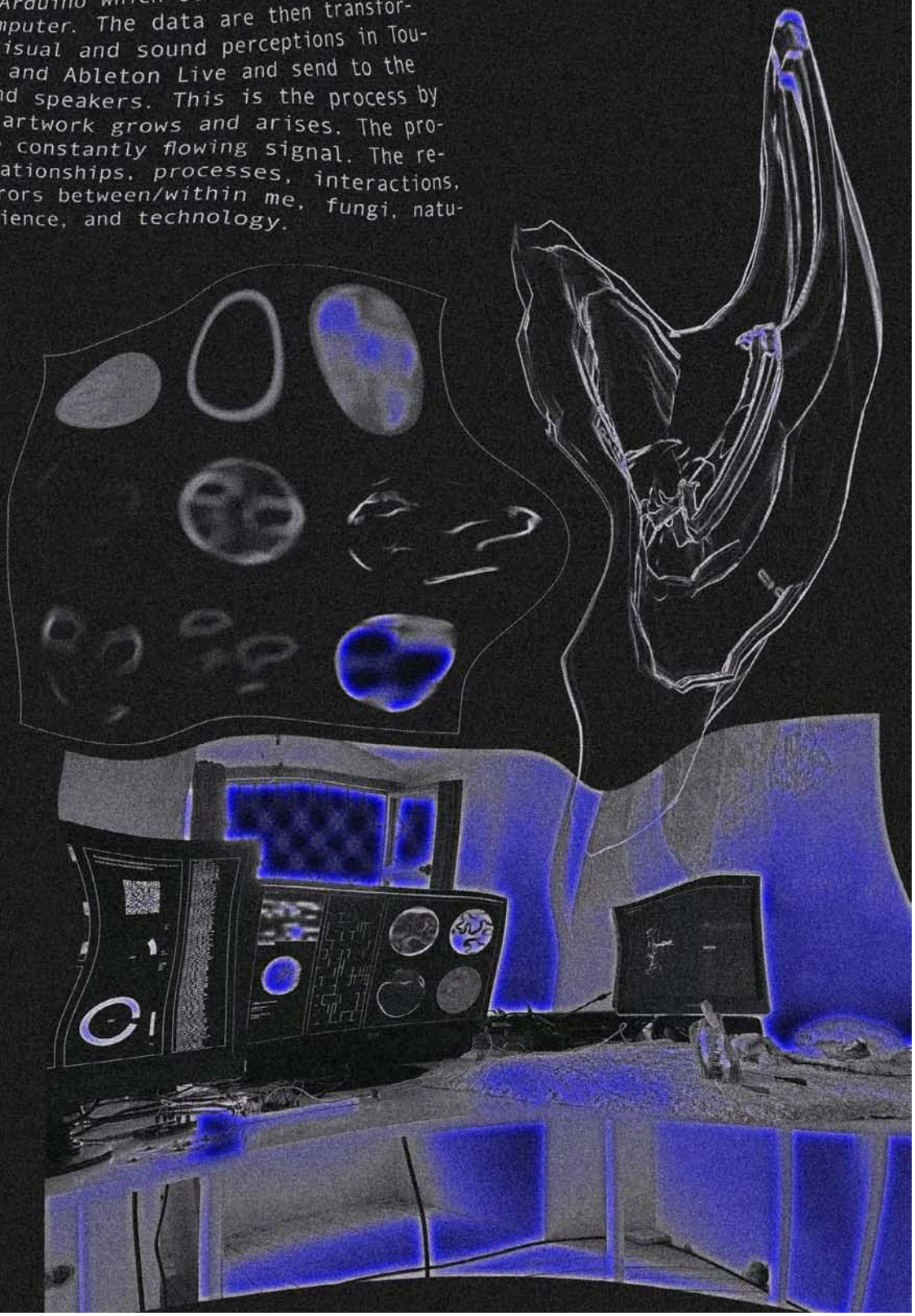
Other field that helped to deconceptualize the human nature is biology, which is just at the peak of another great revolution. Postmodern evolutionary synthesis, as the revolution is named, proves, that interspecies collaboration and symbiosis is needed for the birth, evolution and ecology. This viewpoint is possible only with the technological progress, which pushes the boundaries of what is possible to be seen (McFall-Ngai 2017, s. M52). Now we know that humans are not individuals. Humans are complex assamblages with more "foreign" cells than their own. Humans are holobionts (Margulis). And what does it mean for the humanist idea of Vitruvian man?

The system is built on these thoughts with the main effort to connect humans, nature, and technology in symbiotic relationship. The main concepts important for this work are

network, system, signal, symbiosis, assemblage, interaction, and process.

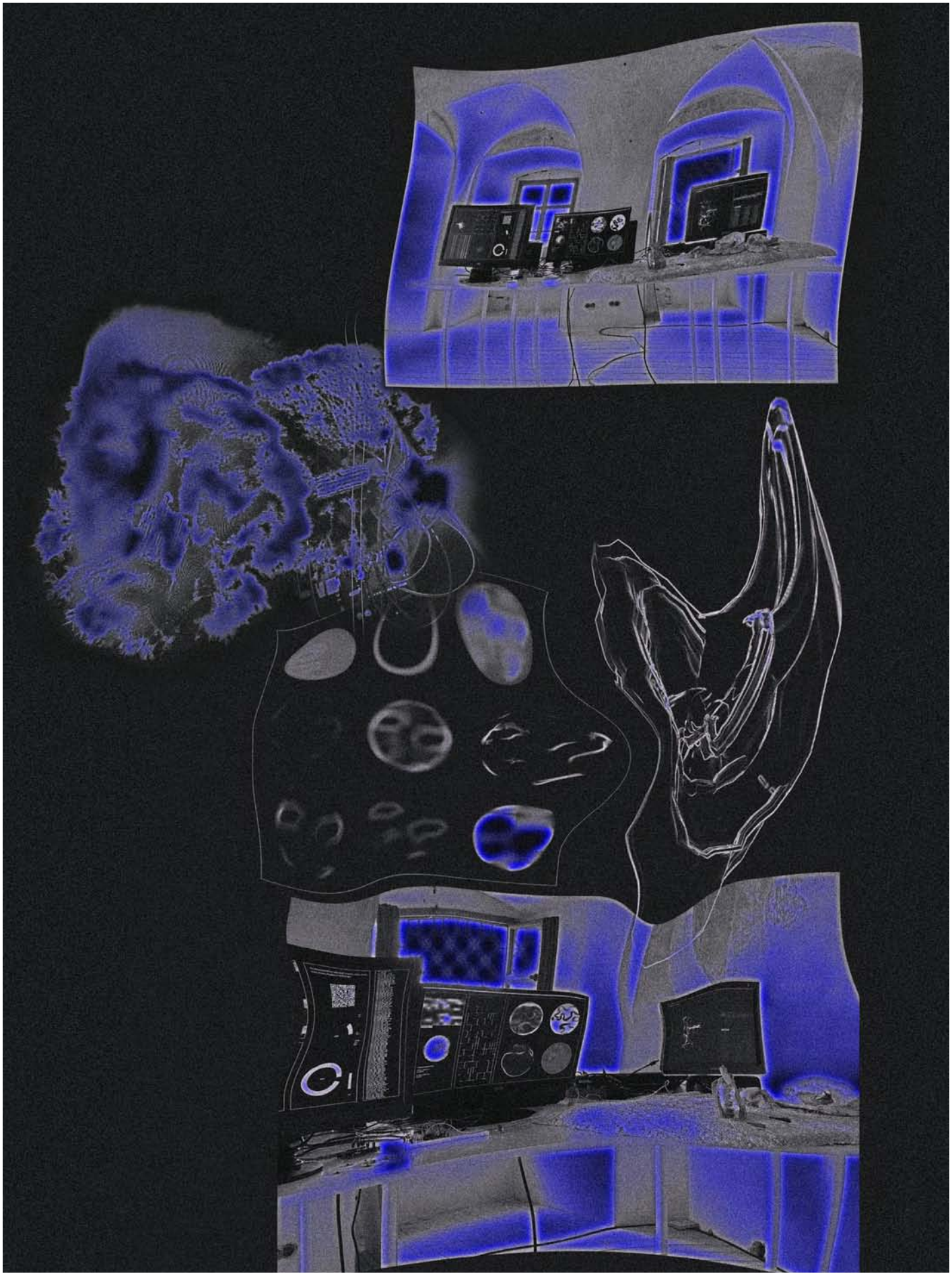
The complexity of the symbiotic world is apparently best intelligible by the idea of networks and complex systems with signals flowing through as symbiotic interactions/intra-actions of the organisms (organic or inorganic), which are themselves complex assemblages of many creatures (microorganisms, viruses, bacteria or fungi). All of this also happens in a constant process of creation and transformation, deconstruction and reconstruction. The system in flux.

The mycelial networks intertwine with 3D printed visualizations of the electrical signals of the fungi. These organic-inorganic organisms are then connected by electrodes, cables, condensers, amplifiers and other electronic components to Arduino which sends the digital data to the computer. The data are then transformed into visual and sound perceptions in Touchdesigner and Ableton Live and send to the monitors and speakers. This is the process by which this artwork grows and arises. The process of the constantly flowing signal. The record of relationships, processes, interactions, signals, errors between/within me, fungi, nature, art, science, and technology.



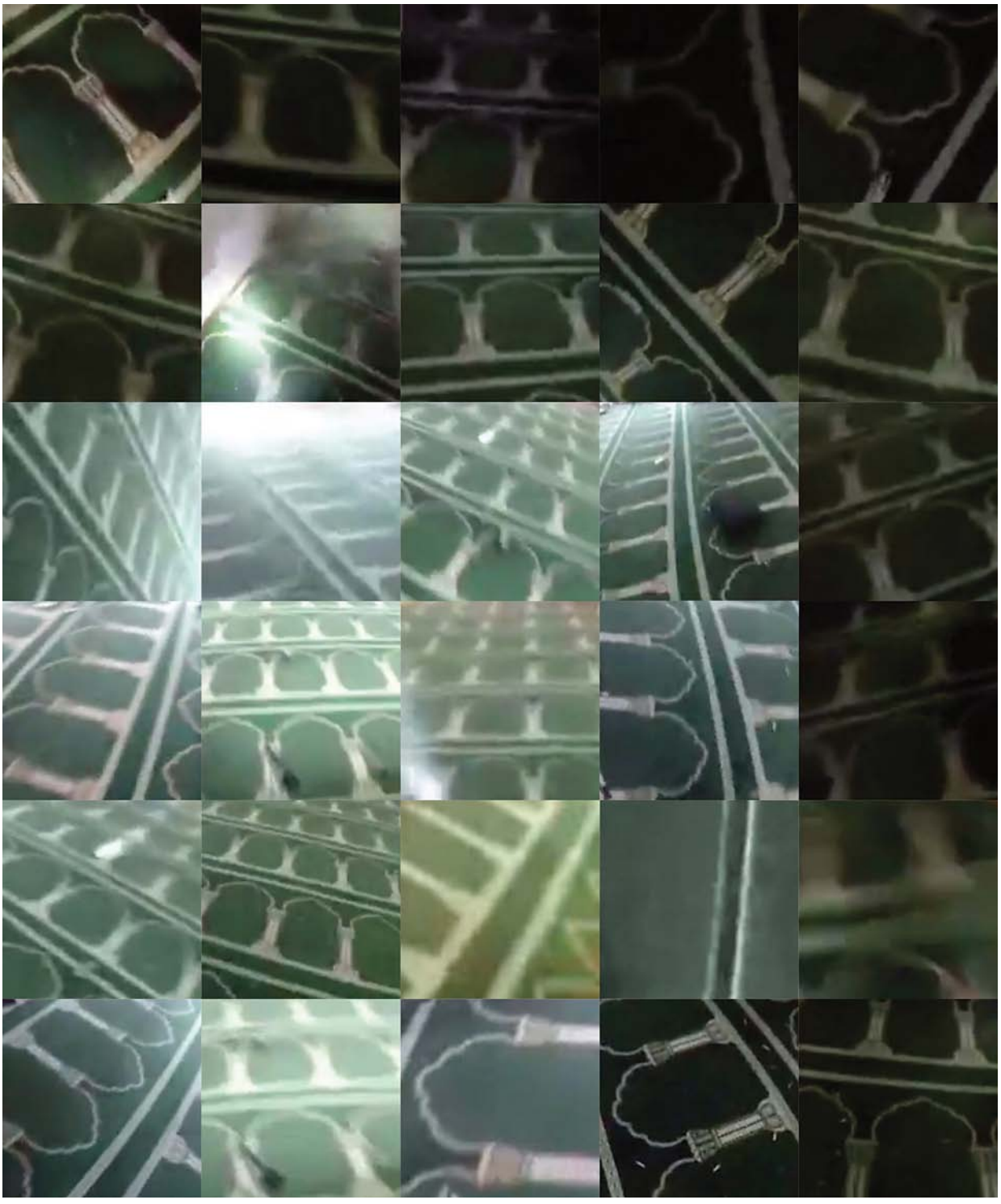
BIBLIOGRAPHY


- N. Katherine Hayles, 1999. How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN 9780226321462
- Donna Jeanne Haraway, 2016. Manifestly Haraway. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Posthumanities, 37. ISBN 9780816650477.
- Margaret McFall-Ngai, 2017. Noticing microbial worlds: The Postmodern Synthesis in Biology. In: Arts of living on a damaged planet. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan, and Heather Anne Swanson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. M3: M51-M69. ISBN 9781517902377.
- Lynn Margulis, 2004. Symbiotická planeta: nový pohled na evoluci. 1st edition, translated by Zdeněk Urban. Prague: Academia. ISBN 8020012060
- Karen Michelle Barad, 2007. Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning. Durham: Duke University Press. ISBN 9780822339175.
- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2015. The mushroom at the end of the world: on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins. Princeton: Princeton University Press. ISBN 9780691178325.



# On Ricochets

Andrea Marcellier



Certain historical moments should not be romanticized by the camera. You don't film a sunset light fading on the brick wall of a gas chamber. There are no cinematographic manners in this case: they simply do not and should not exist in the face of the violence of the history referred to.

During an informal movie screening, a fictional documentary was shown by Walid Raad: *The Bacha Tapes.* The film reconstructed a hostage-taking during the Lebanese civil war. Part of it was the testimonies of the captives talking in a gloomy room. You may remember the words of one of them especially. He was from the region and taken in the fray among Western journalists. He said that one journalist was begging him to f–k him. He was wondering why he was the one asked to be the author of this humiliation. For reasons you ignore, reasons of subtext, he was also the last to be released. The images had the aesthetics of a clandestine camera, with excessive interference. A notable part of the tape is in fact the visual noise of the camera without any other information. Filming without images perhaps meant an intentional reference to the damnation of Lebanese memory in respect of the civil war: Presumed to be over, presumed to be written. There is an analogy between the noisy camera and the example of the evening light, except that the facts here are not real. They are just plausible.

In the course of the same documentary-film evening came the suggestion to screen the terrorist attack in Christchurch, the March 15, 2019: a horrifying incident in a mosque in New Zealand. The film was live-streamed on Facebook for 20 minutes and then removed from the media. A man with a go-pro on his head and armed to the teeth like a video game ego-shooter was firing at point blank range at every person he could find. It turned out that no one in this group wanted to be confronted with these images. Some preferred to wait until they were alone, but for the majority, the mere idea of what would be shown there was enough of a shock: the height of horror, regardless of any representation. Yet if, in a circle of artists, we can talk about Walid Raad's camera, what about the intentional video game aesthetic in a terrorist attack? Would it be different if it was a drone, if there were no hand to pull the trigger?

The wonder is why we look away from "real facts" while we pay to have access to crime stories, explosion scenes with special effects, apocalyptic worlds –and that's entertainment. Do these emotions allow us to damn the memory of real events? Are we looking for a counterpart of heroism? This may be enough of a reason to watch the 20 minutes recorded by an individual whose name you don't want to know and who was killed after his attack on a mosque in Christchurch. They were anonymous blurry figures falling and piling up. When you looked at the footage, you couldn't turn on the sound. It happened in broad daylight. Far from the full HD quality of a massacre in the middle ages or whatever, and yet it was untenable. The bodies fell more easily and quickly than you could have imagined.

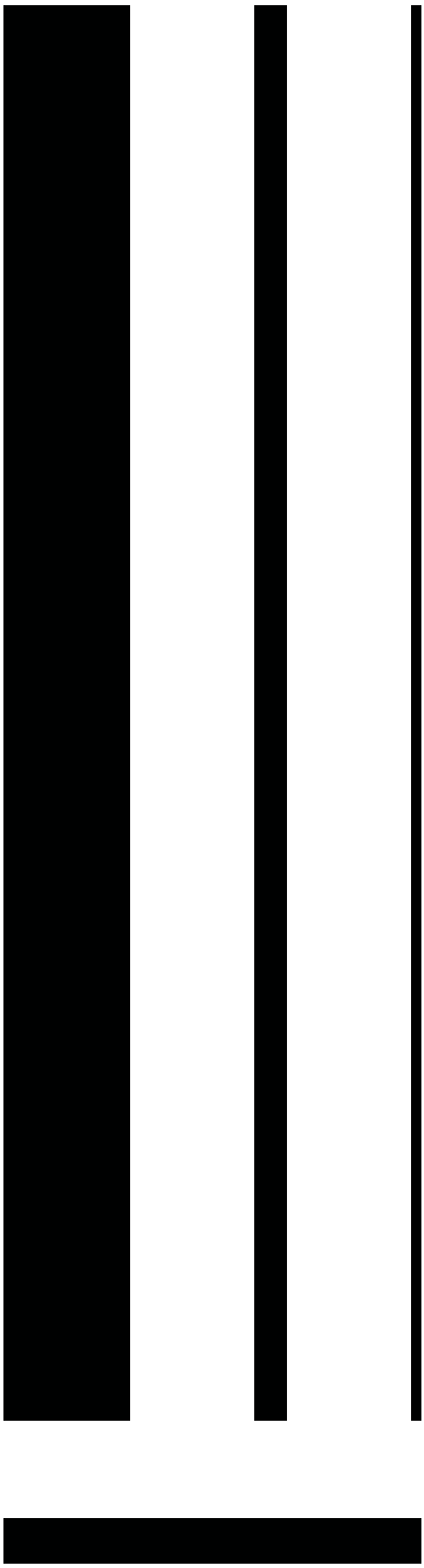
A few days later, you realized that your brain had almost erased blood and faces from your memory. What remained was the carpet, green and white, the pattern of which was perfectly clear and

a vague feeling of horror, an impersonal feeling of horror.

You began to weave that pattern as a distorted way of spending time with this abstract memory. It felt like archiving the massacre in a diffuse pain, a kind of empirical pain among other pains: taking the suffering of the world in hostage to cry one's own tears, one's own experience. So you looked for two colour, a dark green and a white, and you started to weave. Usually in the morning or in the evening before going to bed. And you would start. 1, until 1, 1, 1, 1 maybe –not long– before facing your own contradiction in realizing that it was only weaving, that your thoughts were not disciplined by the mourning you were giving them. That after some time, you would just think about something else, something less severe.

By replacing the thought with a gesture, can you better grasp how an actuality moves you? It's like being told that there are 60 deaths and you would begin to count ... 1, 1 every second 1, and after sixty seconds you realize how short the minute was, how anonymous and above all, how impossible. Of course, a minute counting is not silence. You never finished weaving this object-simply because there is nothing to finish. Like your world was a constant fiction, an only slightly delayed one. You are late when forests burn, late when a shed explodes, late for thousands of executions that have not yet taken place. Late because you archive the world's disasters in a single cinematic sadness. How can you do otherwise? Rage perhaps, and our bereavement would not be just ricochets.

November 9, 2021



# BODIES

# —>

# SPACE

# On Media In Flux: A Conversation with Artist Jenny Marketou and Poet Nicos Alexiou

Interviewed by Vassiliki Rapti

**Vassiliki Rapti**: I'm very happy to have with us today artist and scholar Jenny Marketou and Professor of Sociology Nicos Alexiou, for a conversation on media in flux, in general. They have been friends and collaborators for many years, so our issue with the special topic of civic media in flux in *The Journal of Civic Media* will benefit from this conversation. Welcome and thanks again! So let's get started with your collaboration on *Queens*, a very interesting project, right? So I'd like to know more about how you collaborate, how this collaboration can be considered as a medium in flux etc.

**Jenny Marketou:** Why don't you start, Nicos?

**Nicos Alexiou:** Thank you very much. Yes, I've known Mrs. Marketou's work for a long time, when she was documenting the Greek-American community here in Astoria and the project was called *Astoria*. Actually, her work, along with somebody else's work, a previous photographer, Rudolph Burckhardt, who photographed Astoria in the 1940s and then in the 1980s, when Jenny came and she produced an album of photos of Astoria. I always had this thought to create a poetry book about it because there was nothing on Astoria. Rudolph Burckhardt photographed places in Astoria in the 1940s but Jenny Marketou photographed people in Astoria in particular, she photographed ethnic groups. And I came with a book of poetry titled *Astoria*. So we are the three people who, in a lifespan of 60 or 80 years, produced three books with the title *Astoria*. Otherwise, Astoria is an unknown place, although it is a symbol of immigration for the Greeks and also because I believe that there is no isolation between the arts. I believe in the collaboration and the transcendence of the arts. I think poetry, words, the written word and other forms of art, like photography, for example, can have a dialectical relationshiop. And, of course, the city. My new work is about Queens, New York, which is expanding from the ethnic enclave. And we try to talk about an urban space and to re-imagine this new urban space, because space is very important to us, not only because we live there, but also to see the changes, the transformation, the conflicts, the ethnic issues, the racial issues. Especially during the Covid era, Queens was one of the places that was hit the hardest of all. It was the epicenter for New York, which shows it is a borough with fundamentally working class citizens. So we want also to see the class issues in this work. And, of course, it is the great poetry and the great literature of the 20th century and even the 19th century with Baudelaire. Baudelaire is about the urban space of the city. And also to remember –since this year is an anniversary of Joyce by the Dubliners– or to remember our own Cavafy's "In the Outskirts of Antioch." So you see how the space plays such a significant role to us, and, of course, in an era where not many people use photography as an art –because everybody is a photographer now– photography is something else to exercise it and practice it as an art. It is how you document people, social issues, political issues in an urban environment. So that was the idea.

**V.R.:** This is wonderful! I love the way you said that we reimagine space through art and this collaboration. So, Jenny, the floor is yours now.

**J.M.:** First of all, I want to thank you both and I want to thank you, Vassiliki, for organizing this discussion. And, of course, I want to thank you so much, Nicos, who was the one who brought

us together. And actually, it was so important for me that after so many years after meeting, as he said, when I was doing my project about the Greek community in Astoria as a graduate student as my MFA thesis project from Pratt and after so many years we disconnected and then we come back again and we are looking again for another project with the title of *Queens*, which again brings us together. And this time it is a collaboration between, I would say, language and visual imagination, which is photography, and is something that we both are discussing in collaborating. But going back to what Nicos mentioned about my first experience and introduction to Astoria was an incredible moment in my career, because I was able to capture through photography and language because I was interviewing this special moment when the Greek immigrant community was in that transition from the Greek village into becoming and assimilating into in the American reality. And actually the book's title was *The Great Longing: The Greeks of Astoria*, because in every minute, in every moment, you would see this longing for something that they left and the longing for something to reconstruct in the new country. And we are talking now about '93, which is very important, because things have changed radically as far as the physical space of Astoria is concerned, which is not 100% Greek anymore. It's now and –as I say– a compost of different communities, different languages, different ethnographies. And I think that's why I'm very interested in this new collaboration with Nicos when he looks into this Queens which is now after so many years under the way that this space, this contested –I would say– space at the moment we were talking about the Greekness now has become everybody's land, which, to me, is very interesting and very important, because I believe very much in this transformation of becoming and belonging, because –as I say– I always find in myself, being born in Greece and living in the U.S. and studying and "becoming" here, that daily I have to transpass, to transgress borders. Every day I go from one border to the other, but that has become a way of life. So, I would say talking about a mediated flux, I think also Astoria, Queens, is an incredible borough, which is transformed daily from this mediated citizenship that changes and it is always in flux among about 150 languages spoken in these boroughs. So that's my introduction to my connection and relationship with my collaboration with Nicos, which has always been and has become so special.

**V.R.:** Incredibly well-said, Jenny! I mean, this media in flux, this mediated place in flux. I was interested in the use of the word "longing" that you used in your first book. Do you see this longing still existing in Queens, New York, or wherever you work, as being part of it, or is it gone? Or, is it in another transformation, is it a longing for becoming, for instance? What is it exactly?

**J.M.:** I think so. I think because all this generation that was existing years ago does not exist anymore. These people, like grandmas, the older people, never felt very comfortable. But these people don't exist anymore. So the community has changed and transformed. So, I think, now the longing is for the future, for becoming something else or becoming someone else. In my opinion, I don't think so anymore –but Nicos can help me. The issue of ethnic identity, especially for the younger generation, is very important. Maybe the older people are still more connected with this kind of ethnic identity. But I think the younger people

have assimilated, which doesn't mean they don't still consider themselves as part of being Greek, but also, at the same moment, they are becoming every day what they are exposed to, because they went to school, they are educated, they have been married. And so, I think this longing is not exactly the longing about Greece, but it is longing about a future, about becoming something that I dream of. So, like myself, if you ask me, "What do I feel? What is the issue about your identity these days?" I would say, "Every time I change who I am. I am becoming every time according to the place where I am in, especially with my work that makes me travel over. When I was in Colombia, I felt like I tried to learn and assimilate as much as Colombia. When I am in Mexico it is the same. When I was in Africa it was the same. So, I find this is the richness that I think we can all share. But Nicos, you can talk about it, because you also teach at Queens and I teach in Manhattan. I teach at the New School, which is very diverse and very international. Queens is, but you have a very good community of students. I think that they are Greek, correct?

**N.A.:** Yes, yes, this is correct. As you said, for at least two or three censuses from 2004, the region of one particular area of Queens in Flushing, where Queens College is, has been declared the most multicultural area in the whole United States. In Queens itself, in the College itself, as you said, there have been about 170 languages and people from different countries. So, you see the multiplicity, which is exactly what Queens is and what is the concept of flux?

**J.M.:** I think I would jump in. I think it is the concept of what you talk about, Vassiliki, of being, of having an identity or citizenship being continuously in flux. And I think this is what we experience. Nicos, don't you think? We experience this all over.

**N.A.:** Exactly. And also the city. It is this multilayered, constantly changing background. And this is very important, especially in the era of neoliberalism. We have to reconsider what is a valuable city anymore, how to reconstruct it. The single lesson we realized from the pandemic is that we need to redesign cities to be balanced or to go back to some balancing or what the relation between public and private spaces is and how immigrants, how newcomers cannot adjust to this new environment. So belonging is not only about identity and feelings, but also how the external environment can affect us, right?

**J.M.:** And how we affect the environment. And that's very important, because we always talk about social design, social urbanism, social architecture. But at the same time, we also have to think how we, what our impact is on the environment, which I see now moving from Manhattan to Jackson Heights, I see how the community of Indians and Afghanistanis have impacted my neighborhood. It's not only the architecture that exists but also what they bring with them. So, I think that's what is becoming very interesting and we have to proceed from both sides.

**V.R.:** Yeah.

**J.M.:** What can we do, what we do. And this is also an environmental issue which is very interesting. What we do for this city, for this environment, for this neighborhood.

**V.R.:** This is so interesting, Jenny, because that's exactly how the Professor of Citizenship at Tufts University, Professor Peter Levine, defines the term "citizen." It is a person who asks the question "What should we do?" in front of all this constant flux that we are surrounded with. So, in a way, you see this change daily and your art is trying to capture this change and/or maybe something else. So, I'd like you to tell me what your art –and your poetry, in your case, Nicos– is trying to do. Is it trying to contribute to the question "What should we do?" like a social intervention for positive change? I see this as an essential component of your art, this intervention on the environment for positive change.

**J.M.:** My work actually has always been really socially-engaged. I was always very interested in creating spaces, creating moments in which I could somehow allow for things to happen, actions to take place. And also I was always very interested in giving voice to not just minority, but I'm always very interested in younger generations. So, it has been a consistent acknowledgment and effort to find ways to collaborate with communities of younger people, especially in my recent work, because I personally believe, especially today, that art should be very inclusive. And art is exactly this –at least for me– to be an artist is a hybrid notion. Again it is not a fixed notion for me, is not an artist in her studio and creates an art project. For me, art is something that can bring some kind of change. And even if it doesn't bring change, it can bring some kind of awareness. So, I always try to create these conditions that I can express quite at that moment. And I do that most of the time in collaboration with a community or with another artist, especially an architect, or with a designer.

> *"For me, art is something that can bring some kind of change. And even if it doesn't bring change, it can bring some kind of awareness."*

But most of the time I try to work with groups of younger people. For example, if I talk about a very recent project, which is called "Serious Games," I had the opportunity to take it to the island of Crete. I was invited to do a project in Chania, Crete, and there a very old mosque from 1635, a very famous mosque, the Yali Tzami, was offered to me. But what was the problem there? The issue was that it is a city which has an incredible Muslim tradition, but also a Jewish tradition. But at the same time, as you know, through the politics –I mean I don't want to get into this– but it is a city that depends at the moment very much on the history, which is a very nostalgic issue, which has to do with World War II and the Resistance against the German Occupation and also very much focused on tourism. So, everything that has to do with the Muslim or the Turkish or the Ottoman history of the island has been totally covered up. So, for me, it was very important to take over this mosque, which is in ruins –actually it is a very interesting issue right now. I'm very much involved there in exploring its ruination and what exactly does ruination mean from any point of view. So, anyway, I took this mosque and I decided to decolonize it, as I said, from its past memory and turned it into a social space. And I turned it into a social space after two years of research in the archives of the island of Crete and in collaboration with a group of archi-

tects from the School of Architecture in Chania, with an activist from Rosa Nera, from the feminist groups, and from young students from the high school. And before I started the project, I had assemblies and we all decided what we would like to see happening in this space, which was closed. They were renting it out for €1,000 and they would put shoes, they would put whatever. There was no respect, neither for the history nor for the architecture of the monument. So, it was very fascinating because I was actually able to radically transform this mosque into my studio. You could go in and I had tables, I had an open call to the community to bring me rugs. They brought me bathroom rugs, living room rugs, any kind of rugs, which I put in an amazing installation and we would pull them out and we would lie down and we would sit and every day I organized workshops with different groups and every workshop had a theme in which we were trying to create tools. And that's why I called it *Serious Games*, because the whole the idea was to transform this place into a place of a mediated place from all these people, but also from using different media. So, a drawing, a performance, reading and trust and creating tools which we can pass over to other generations or to other people, so they can take these tools and transform other similar places. So that lasted for one month. And I have a blog and now it's coming out the publication of the book which is one of the reasons that I'm going to Greece today, to launch the book, but I want to mention my inspiration because I want to go back to play. I draw inspiration by a very amazing architect. His name is Piolin Nielsen. In the sixties, Nielsen took the New Museum of Stockholm and he emptied it of everything. And inside he put all kinds of toys, all kinds of paints, music, costumes, carnivals, anything that you could imagine. And he allowed only kids between 4 years old and 12 to go into this museum. They were supposed to go into the museum, do whatever they wanted to do, unattended –parents were not allowed to go into the museum.– And he started from the idea that all these kids are so repressed –we are so repressed– under family values, under conditions that we have to give through play kids the agency. Agency, so play becomes a way of life, it becomes also a political tool, becomes a way of having freedom, of expressing yourself. So, although, after that –you know– there's so many other theories about play in how –you know– it frees the human and so and so. But for me, that was one of the major reasons, the catalyst in using spaces and transforming spaces in a way that allows for participants and in collaboration with participants to give them agency for creativity. So, play becomes an agency, a creative tool, but also a political tool.

**V.R.:** This is wonderful. As a play scholar myself, you nailed it, Jenny! Nicos, I don't know if you want to add anything before we move on. And I wanted to learn more about the exhibition and the undoing of this monument, the mosque in Chania.

**N.A.:** I agree with Jenny, and that's why –I know– it was so easy to reconnect and agree on a new collaboration because we have similar thoughts. Sometimes in my lectures I use the example of "Brasilia," this huge project, in a lecture on Sociology. It was the Greek architect Doxiadis, of course, and the idea was how to design a city in order to eliminate social and political conflicts. Of course how we design the city is very political because it has political implications, right? And, of course, the city itself is very paradoxical there too, a contradiction so, that makes it very

paradoxical. The Chicago School of Sociology, because Chicago was a center for immigrants in the early 1900s. And the first group of sociologists was created there. And it is this attempt to carve a tendency to the beautification of the little town, right? The little house on the prairie. This is the American conception. Even now, when you have this tremendous metropolis, not only metropolies, but also gigacities, still in the mind of the Protestant and the Puritans, this is Gomorrah. This is the city. It is a place of sin. So, this is how this works in psychology and in politics. But of course, anoother competitive theory, is the Greek city, *the polis*, which is a collectivity of people who make decisions together. The worst case in a democracy is to be an idiot. In other words, it is to be excluded from participating in the common debates and practices. So, you see how this competition still is at play, which is very political. So, in my work, especially about Queens, New York, I found it tremendously political because Queens is a borough with no center. There is no downtown. So, like when I say New York City –you know– it is downtown New York, it is downtown Brooklyn, it is somewhere, but Queens has no center. There is no downtown. And that is the critical moment: if this can be the future of the cities or it is still a tenet of colonialism according to which all borders must be tied to the poliitcs and the policies of New York City. Is it by design or is it by political intervention to have the borough of Queens without a center, because until now you cannot understand urbanity without a center? And of course, you know the famous poem, right? That "the center cannot hold anymore." Everything collapses. The center cannot hold, the famous poem, "The Second Coming." Right? So that's why I keep talking about solidarity, because the city is the place, of course, with the contradictions, but also it is the place where art can be created. Great art, all great art is being created because of the city, because of the *polis*. And all democratic processes can be found in the city and in how we design the cities, etc. So, it is in that direction... maybe we will have a chance to talk about this more.

**J.M.:** I will go back. I would take the thread and go back into the Commons. And I think because, as we talk about the cause of the Commons, there have beeb a lot of arguments about what it does mean today. And sometimes people are talking about "commonism" –not with a sense of communism– but in the sense of commonism, which, in other words, what to me translates it in my work is, instead of looking into the *polis* as a set of rules, as an artist, I'm more interested in looking into the potential of the Commons. So, for me, it is more the potentiality that interests me. And in order to explore that, I have different strategies and different ways of doing it. Sometimes actually –and I did this very famous project "How Assemblies Matter"– which also was a part of the biennial in which I invited people from all over the world and we had the marathon of assemblies. Actually this took place in Athens and they gave me the historic campus of the Polytechnic School and all the assembly took place where the assembly during the Junta took place and, if you remember the story, the tanks went in and students got killed, but that was the same room, the same where we did this incredible assembly. I have a whole website on this project and we started having a series of those assemblies and at that time we actually had the huge financial crisis. So, we started talking about knowledge production. We started talking about citizenship, about immigration and refugee rights,

social justice for refugees, which is another huge issue that we have to address right now talking about the public space and the Commons, because who makes the Commons and who are the Commons? Because again, is not just the city, is not only the built space. It is the people. These are the Commons. And because these Commons are continuously in transition, this flux is now what we see in every city we visit. It's obviosuly not only in Athens or in New York –it is the same with Paris, it is the same with Mexico City and the same with Uganda. So I find very interesting what happens now and also we see that art responds to all of these. As an artist I respond to this kind of issues and methodologies. So, my methodologies, instead of being centered in one place, I'm trying to open it up. Like, for example, right now I'm doing a project for the harbor of New York, for the waterways of New York, and all my work is fully in flux, as it floats on the waters of the harbor. But that is also a metaphor. It is a metaphor about how our being is continuously floating and it goes like the river. It runs, but we can never cross the same river. You never cross the same river twice because it continuously changes. And, I believe, New York has this kind of energy because it continuously makes visible this continuous metamorphosis and the potentiality that gives us citizens to do things in that city. That's how I see the Commons. For me, as I say, I'm very interested in it, because, you know, I can go with theories like Lefebvre, I can go with Deleuze and Guattari about all of these –you know– if I want to put my ideas into theory. Because I teach, so I have to teach theory. I want, as an artist, to respond more with an ambiguity and not to try to express theories in art. I want to make this. So these are my thoughts on the Commons.

**V.R.:** It's beautifully said. This human flow and the response to human flow from all over the place today is through your art to also invite the Commons, the common people to participate. This participatory design is in constant potentiality.

**J.M.:** Exactly. And every time you create new Commons, you create new communities, because I believe very much that our strength now is in making alliances, in making connections. Because we are all interconnected, we are also interdependent. And this is why we have to pay attention to our environment, to our climate change and to, you know, the humanitarian issue, justice, the issue of food. I mean, there are so many issues right now that every day it addresses how interconnected we are. And and that's why, as an artist, I'm very interested to use ways and methods that they can address this by, but at the same time, creating a maybe ephemeral ... but creating communities. Like now, my community is on Governors Island. It is an ephemeral community, but it is a community that belongs to everybody and to everything. It is a community of students, a community of artists, of workers, of cleaners, of boat makers, of scientists. Everybody now we belong to a community and we are talking about the rights of water. What are the rights of water? But the rights of water express our rights, the rights of our Commons. So this is how I see things, I hope I'm not confusing.

**V.R.:** Not at all. I think this also ties back to Nicos' idea of solidarity, that is also central. And I was thinking earlier, what if this lack of centrality turns into the centrality of solidarity and interconnection? Nicos, any thoughts?

**N.A.:** This is exactly it, because no matter what, the key of all citizens' spaces are the people. Right? So yes, yes, exactly. And of course, in the era of globalization locality is very important, because all politics are local, after all. So we have to see that, to realize ourselves, as Jenny said, in this global village, but at the same time the locality is absolutely the common place and where people know the concept of the *polis* has to be reinvented and reimagined in the new era.

**V.R.:** What I really admire in both of you is that you are not only artists, poets, creators, but also theorists and educators. And so you combine those that are supposedly divided, but you bring the wholeness in this constant flux from one identity to the other. And that's what brings this unique sense of what art is and what the potentiality of art is to change things for the common good.

**J.M.:** Definitely. I would say I have been very lucky because when I graduated from Pratt with an MFA, I had this incredible opportunity to teach for the first time at Cooper Union. And I had no idea about teaching. And do you know what I will never forget? It was the late Hejduk, this amazing architect who said to me, "You don't have to know anything. You are going to tell this to your students: how you made your book, *The Great Longing of Greeks of Astoria*." And it was an incredible way to start thinking what teaching is all about. Is it a process? Isn't it teaching them a process? It is not about "you know what?" that unfortunately I was taught in my homeland. You read and you repeat. It is not about this. It is about thinking, about creating a process, learning how to make this process. So that has been always also my teaching, the way I also teach. And now –you know– I taught them at CAL ARTS, in L.A., now I teach at the New School, but always I allow this exchange. My students are my teachers. I am their teacher. And we exchange, you know– and we learn from each other. And also, it's a very beautiful way to connect, especially that was a good part of Zoom, that I was able to teach, with students from all over the world and because we were not able to meet in person. So every other day I was connecting with people in China, Peru, wherever you can imagine. So that was in that a good moment that I owed to Covid, not that I want to continue, as of this fall, I will have to go back to class. But I love teaching for this aspect, for this possibility, again, of learning.

**V.R.:** Yeah. And already the word, the key word that you used, Jenny, "the process" is in itself the epitome of flux.

**J.M.:** Exactly. Because it is about process. And I think –and this is exactly why I find it so fascinating and intriguing– because it always changes in a way. I'm very, very interested in this kind of flexibility, hybridity, this continuous challenge even of adjusting, because it's a challenge, but I find it very important, something that –as far as I'm concerned– it feeds my imagination and my interest and my belief. That gives me the freedom to be an artist –you know– and do what I want to do, no matter whether my work is shown in a gallery or on the street.

**V.R.:** I want to go back to the idea of "undoing the monument" and I know you have an exhibit and it's a constant idea in your art, but also it's something that you, Nicos, deal with as part of the archival research that you're conducting in the frame

of ethnic history, right? Even in your poem, in the poem that you chose to translate into various languages, you 're kind of doing this thing, you "undo" the monument. So I want to hear your perspectives on how do you undo a monument in your own ways?

**J.M.:** First of all, I always try to define what "monument" means and what monumentality is. So that's very, very important. And I find very interesting when I talk about monuments. When I say "I'm undoing monuments" also I'm talking about ruination, which is very, very interesting, because we also find ourselves in a moment that we find a ruination on everything that we considered was a monument, was a ruin, was everything. So it is in this sense that I'm undoing and rediscovering a monument. Actually, the first work of undoing monuments was in a project that I did, and I am telling you this because I thought it is very interesting to say that, to mention this project, I'm (un)doing monuments, was a project that I did for the Nazi Museum and it was a site-specific. In Athens, it is this cultural center called The Pink House, which is across Panepistimio in Academia Street. So this public space of this house of Kostis Palamas. Actually, Kostis Palamas is a poet. It was all inhabited by statues, monuments of very, very famous poets, writers and thinkers of Greece. But all these small monuments, they were all, let's say, created by order of one of the mayors. The public was never asked what they wanted to see in this park. To make this story short, during the huge crisis that we had, the huge refugee crisis, at the same time, the economy was falling apart. What they were doing is they were going –because those monuments were made out of bronze– they were decapitating the monuments and they were selling them for bronze. So from one day to the other, it was almost 30 small monuments. They were all gone. "And all you would say were those ends." So my idea was like "What does a monument do?" Because, according to Bataille, for example, a monument, by the time you create a monument, is dead. Nobody pays attention to monuments. So monuments don't mean anything, actually, but what they do is they represent the interest of someone who has not anything to do with contemporary reality. So all the monuments are put into question. And we saw what happened the last years in this country and all over the world that people are protesting against monuments. And so, the same way I started looking into the concept of what does a mosque mean in contemporary Greece? In contemporary Greece, where the Muslim is a very poor refugee right now who hardly has any money, he cannot claim his monument, he cannot claim the mosque, but he tries to pray –whatever he does– underground. So, for me, what does a monument mean? I start thinking about their use of a monument. So decolonizing a monument is not enough because it doesn't mean much to the everyday citizen. But their use of the monument is something very interesting. And their use which reflects what the new Commons needs, how it can come into dialogue with the Commons and my tactics and the methodologies as an artist, they depend very much according to this, the local history, for example, the local archives. So somehow I try to embed some of this history in reusing this monument. And you can do that, as I say, I love the idea of play. A play is a metaphor for freedom, for expression, for agency. So for me, this undoing is more the idea of reusing, how I'm reusing the monuments. And I think this question is so relevant today because all over –if you remember– ac-

tually if I want to talk historically, the fall of the monuments started in South Africa from the students. That's where the first monument fell down because they protested against a very expensive education. And then we had the huge protest in the U.K. and then it came to this country. And I find this a very, very important issue, not only in the U.S. because in the U.S. the issue is racism most of the time, but I find it very interesting to deal with this issue in Greece. And actually right now I'm in negotiations of doing something in the mosque in Trikala.

**V.R.:** Very, very interesting approach. Nicos, do you want to add something about your way of undoing the monument in your poem "Transversely"?

**N.A.:** Yes. In this new collection "Queens," New York, there are many monuments and I am focusing on two of them. One of them is in the poem called "The Other Catherine" and it has to do with the name of Queens. The borough of Queens was given to the Queen of England as a dowry. So that's why it is called Queens. And Brooklyn was called Kingsborough because it was given to the King. And I remember in early '90s, there were a lot of protests because the city decided to erect a huge monument of Catherine, Queen of England and put it in the Five Points, an area here in Queens. A lot of protests from African-Americans, other ethnic groups, and Native Americans, because that was a moment of colonialization. Why do we need this 10-15-foot female statue here? And eventually they created another one, this one on a smaller scale. And they put it in the harbor of Lisbon now, but not in Queens. So –and I talk about the Other Catherine– above the women and the condition of the sweatshops that there were in Queens. We looked at the women working in the textile industry, etc. So the working class. So perhaps our poetry can be used to rename Queens under different names and the other poem is about a graveyard that was discovered when Robert Moses was to design the highways. He designed in a way to exclude, of course, the working classes, right? You cannot go with a high bus that brings the masses to Robert Moses, let's say, Beach, to the park, because it has low bridges. So it was well-designed to keep the working class out. But on their way to build the new Northern Boulevard, they discovered a cemetery of Native Americans and they destroyed it overnight. And they moved it, and now it is one grave in the Episcopical Church saying that this is the last Native American, which is wrong, of course. So you see how White domination erased the memory of the Native Americans and, of course, the whole history. So monuments are extremely, extremely important in how we deal with them. And I am always fascinated. There are many entrances to go to the Acropolis, but the one from Monastiraki is unique because it is next to the Roman Agora and you see the Acropolis up there, and then you see the mosque, a Jewish synagogue. So, you see how different civilizations commingle, because this is the concept of the city, because in urban spaces you can discover and rediscover history. So and is not only the current history but it is to find previous civilizations. In most cities around the world, there are layers of cities. One reason why the metro building, the subway in Athens, it took so long and still in Thessaloniki is an unsolvable issue because they discovered layers and layers of the city and how do you deal with that? And it is a unique experience to take the metro in Athens because you go through the various layers of history and you

see the statues of the different cities. So it is the rediscovery and then the influx of people in different eras in how these people were treated, what their contribution is. There is a lot of sociology in looking at different monuments and rediscovering, reevaluating, feeling. And understanding –you know– our moment, in order to understand the present you need to know the past, because the past is never absent. The past is always here. It's always in the future tense. Not in the past tense.

**J.M.:** It is exactly this. I would like to add that what makes monuments is what they call "παλίμψηστο," the palimpsest of the monument, which is this kind of all histories and cosmologies that they are, which is so rich and so important. Of course, there are many arguments. Some people believe that we have to destroy them. Some people believe that we have to keep them. Some people believe that we have to move them from where they are and put them in a museum because we shouldn't forget history. So there are many, many opinions. For me, I believe very much as an artist of course, in how we can reuse them, acknowledging their palimpsest of history in them and using that knowledge in creating a new future knowledge production but always taking in consideration how we can apply all this in the future. I mean, I'm a little bit skeptical about having nostalgia for the past and –you know– I really do. So I'm always ... and that's why I enjoy working with very young people because they bring in a lot of these, I would say, futuristic ideas, because they don't have these preconceptions. So through play again –play comes so handy– you can express a lot of these, not this knowledge production. This comes from this layering, but transforming it into something, into a tool that we can use for the future. And, you know, as an experience that we can use and apply. And that for me is very important, very challenging. And this is one of the things because now, working in the harbor of New York is not going to change the harbor of New York. In the New York Harbor, the waterways are so polluted. But by doing a project and bringing awareness, I bring people closer to the water, closer to the history of the water, closer to the connection of the history of the space, which, as we know, New York was Indigenous. Talemac people were living and actually were taking their cows from Brooklyn and they were walking through the water, because the water of the harbor was very, very low. And they could walk from Brooklyn and Manhattan and take their cows to the Governors Island in order to eat. And that's why the waterways are called buttermilk channels. Very few people know that buttermilk because they were bringing these milking cows from Brooklyn into Governors Island and back. And so by doing projects like this, you bring the audience, you bring the people, their attention, and then they start looking, "My God," you know, "I'm on an island but I don't have access to water! Why? I don't have access to water, because the water is polluted, because I cannot swim in the water, but I'm on an island." So behind this playful intervention, there are a lot of issues and a lot of ways of giving the visitor another way to look and listen into the water. So that's how I see it. So the water becomes a space for solidarity, creates now this community of water people.

**V.R.:** Beautifully said, and how they intermingle. So, I was thinking of this palimpsest and of the entrance you're going to choose to enter the Acropolis. It's this critical awareness that you

bring to everybody with your art, your civic art. I would like to close our conversation with the beautiful work that you are currently working on, Jenny, with the water. Let's use this metaphor also for our theme of civic media in flux. Can you give me some specific tools or moments –I would say– of your current project with the water on Governor's Island that also use technology? I know you are dealing with technology as well, and you are concerned with into its civic role rather than other uses.

**J.M.:** Oh, I have that. If you talk about technology, I mean I have always used different media in my artwork, especially technologies that have to do with images and with image making. So for example, this project, the project for the harbor is called "Rivering/Wet Gatherings." So I would say my inspiration came from Beatrice Diaz, the Indigenous poet, which she calls "the body is a water, the water is a body." She wrote a magnificent poem about water. And I identify this poem very much with the salmon. So I call myself *salmon* because the salmon always swims against the current. So the idea was that I was going to use this, try to do an installation, do a project in the waterways, where you always are challenged with Nature because is the most challenging, because there are three rivers, East, West and Hudson, and they change continuously. It is one of the hardest rivers, the hardest waters to sail. So there was also this component in the work. Also when I was a student again and I was doing photography at Pratt, I had photographed the island, when the Coast Guard was there. And when the Coast Guard was there, that island was very militarized. And there was also a factory that they were producing those kind of buoys that they send signals in the water. So when I was invited last year to be an artist on Governors Island, I brought my photographs back to the studio, and I say, "Why don't I make...? I have this idea... I want to connect, I want to bring this wetness, our body into the water. I want to bring this awareness. I want to go against the rules because you are not allowed to have any access to the water." So I came up with the idea, I will make my own imaginary sculptures that I would put in the water with cameras. And these cameras will be connected with wi-fi and they will capture all this agony of the water, the flows of water that change continuously, tides, currents, and when the sun is out, when the moon is out, it is incredible what happens there, but also the quality of water, because those cameras are very special and they can capture the consistency, the colors, the species that live in these waters, these polluted waters, as we know now, they tried to grow oysters and reefs with the hope to clean the water again, because New York used to be the capital of oysters. But

now they try to use this kind of ecological technology to clean the water. So, I wanted with my sculptures, these floating sculptures, to capture all this agony of the water. In order to do that, though, there was no way. As an artist though I came in touch with the Trust of the island and they said, "that's it." They loved my photographs, they loved the idea. And they brought me in touch with the Harbor School, the New York Harbor School, which is located on Governors Island, and the Billion Oyster Projects, which they decided to sponsor my work. And since last fall, I worked with the boat builders in the Harbor School. We built together in collaboration, we created –I was going three times a week on the island, whether it was snowing or raining– and I worked and in collaboration we built these amazing structures, these beautiful pieces. We put the cameras and we launched them, we anchored them in this place on the harbor. And now we put them for two weeks. We are going to put them again three more weeks in September. They have an incredible expensive maintenance –just to anchor these if I wanted to do by myself, I would need thousands of dollars because we used three boats, just three boats. And you need experienced people that they can go into the harbor. But it has been beautiful because we had a celebration last week, we invited people, along with these sculptures and sculptural elements we had built a boat and during this celebration we were taking people on the boat and they were going through the installation. It was absolutely beautiful to give everyday people who can go to the island this possibility to get access, to see the water, to touch the water of the New York Harbor, the simplest thing, you know, and then to show them. And I hope that each of these sculptures, will become a tool. I can build the kit with a camera that people can use and map their own waters. You know, meet their owners, go to rivers, go to space, go to oceans and map their own waters. So that's the idea. I'm still working on this. In the fall, we are going to have a conference. We are going to invite people, scientists, activists, theorists, philosophers that are addressing these issues. And we are going to put it again in the water. And then we are hoping to have an exhibition that will bring all the history together. That's where my heart is right now.

> *"And these cameras will be connected with wi-fi and they will capture all this agony of the water, the flows of water that change continuously, tides, currents, and when the sun is out, when the moon is out, –it is incredible what happens there."*

**V.R.:** This is beautiful. And you already took our heart there into this project as well, Jenny. And it's so interesting. It started with a poem that inspired you, which takes us back to the poetry, the role of poetry as a civic agent, in the same way as this inspired you, Jenny, for instance, to create this *Rivering* project.

**J.M.:** I was really inspired by this amazing Indigenous poet. I mean, I don't know if you know her. She's a very known Indigenous poet, but she

writes a lot about the water, because as you know, Indigenous communities are very connected with the water. The water is part of everything, you know, it's a ritual and I hope I involve that very much this fall to the show, as I found out that there is an amazing community on Long Island that has nothing to do with tourism, that really keep their traditions, the rituals and I met with one of their, I think, important part of the community in our conference that we had in the symposium were we had with A Billion Oyster Projects last week and, and because I want really to address, because, you know, we are Greeks and we live next to the water. And water has been always an important part of our lives. And as I said before, I like also the metaphor of this constant flow liquidation of the materiality. I like this idea and that's why I love technology, because it is immaterial. You don't talk with, you know, objects. This sculpture that I made, you see, they were so helpless that as soon as you put them in the water, there is nothing they can do. They have no power anymore. The water, the wind, the current takes over so that there is this new materiality that has become so important in my artwork, which is not the object, but it is the process, the idea is that these textures are becoming through thinking, observing, you know.

**V.R.:** Even the way you are describing the agonies of those sculptures and waters is flowing.

**J.M.:** And technology. I mean we see now with the NFTs –you know– is fully immaterial. You know, we talk about a fully immaterial and that's why I like poetry, Nicos! Because language has this immateriality, it makes images, it makes us think, but you cannot really touch it, you cannot own it in the sense that you can own a painting. We don't need more paintings right now. We have enough.

**N.A.:** Also water is the human condition, right? 60% or more of our body. And I remember coming to water in poetry. I remember I visited many European cities and here also in the museum in Boston. And they have Greek writings all around. They have buildings in Bath, for example, in England or like the museum in Boston they have inscriptions from Pindar "άριστον μεν ύδωρ" and, of course, I remember the poem that Seferis wrote, taken from antiquity "Μέμνησον ύδωρ, δι'ου φθίσεις." Talking to Agamemnon, "Remember the water that will kill you." So the water, yeah, it is a human condition. I'm glad that Jenny is a great artist and has realized that and how she talks about modern contemporary issues.

**V.R.:** Thank you so much and congratulations on your amazing work!

**J.M.:** I thank you very much for this wonderful discussion.

**V.R.:** I definitely want to have a sequel. I want to come to the exhibition and see your *Rivering* exhibition on the Governors Island in New York.

**J.M.:** I hope you do.

**V.R.:** And Nicos, congratulations to you, as well, on your new poetry collection!

# SPACE IN FLUX

# COMMON GROUND

by Mischa Kuball

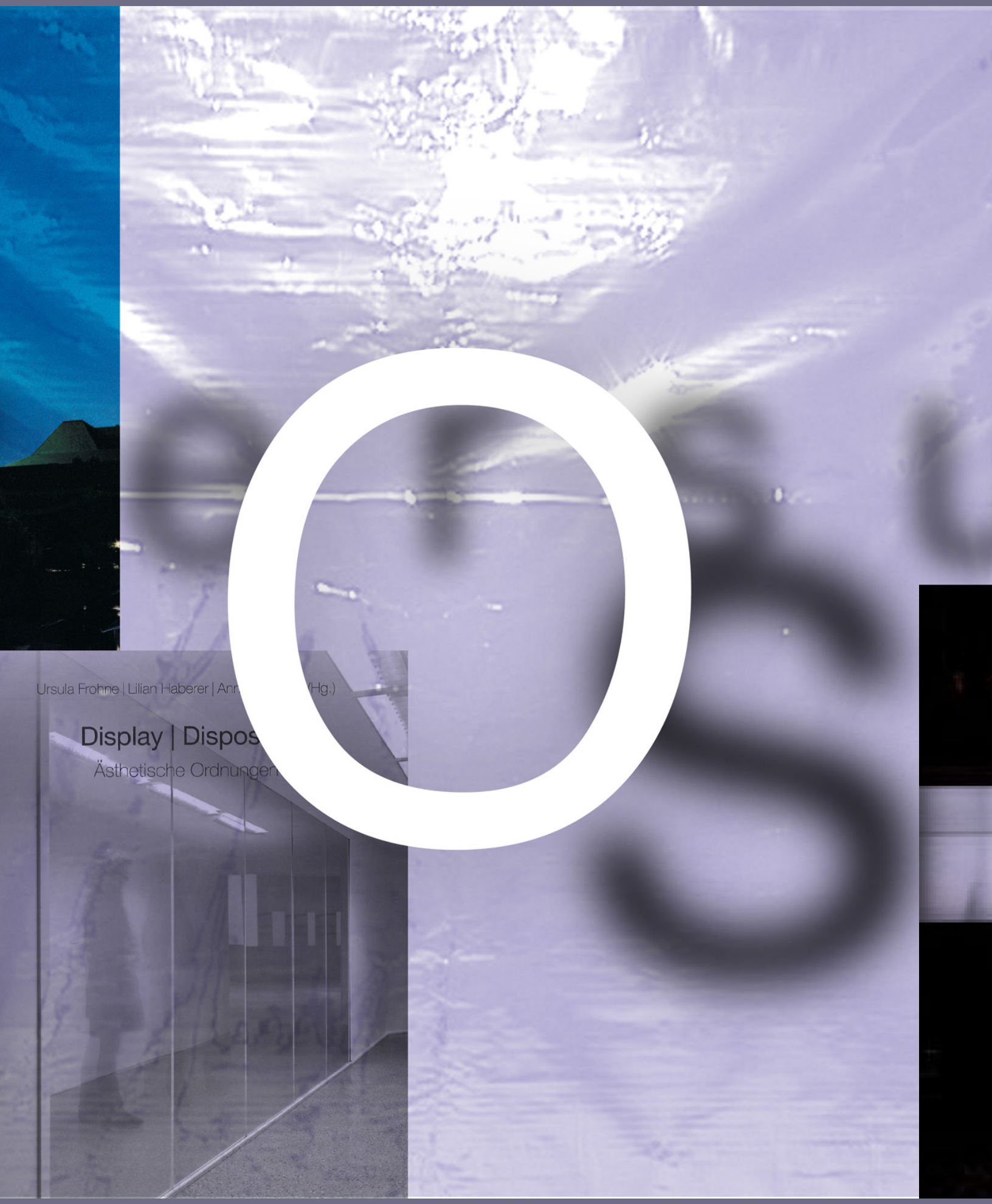
Conceptual artist Mischa Kuball, Professor for Public Art at KHM Cologne, Germany, engages with civic media by shedding choreographies of light on and, thereby, contextualizing public spaces. He draws serpentine lines of light enmeshed in philosophical, neuroscientific and cultural theories - from Plato's cave allegory to Broca, a brain area responsible for speech production.

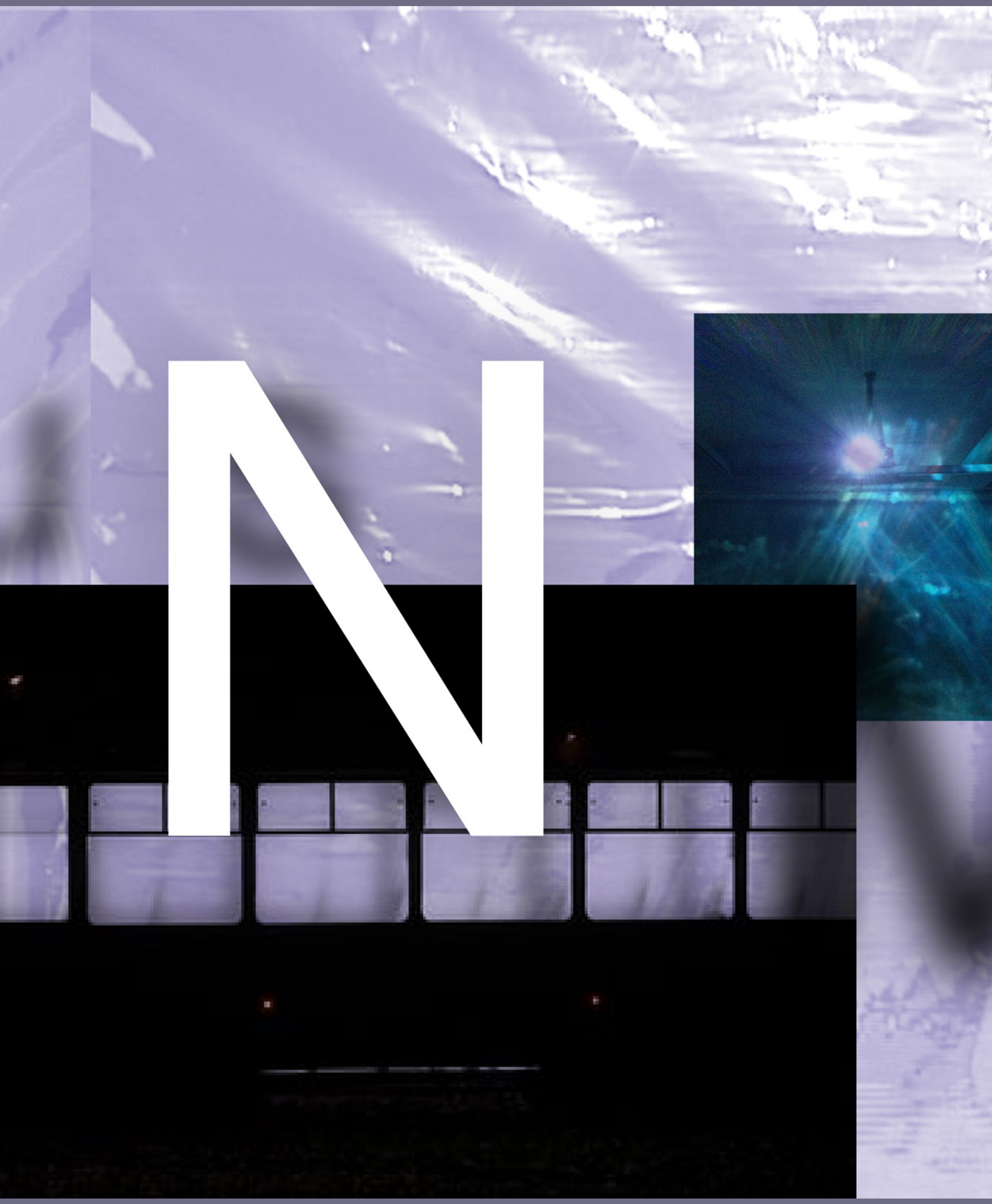
We are honoured that Kuball conceptualized a multimedia discourse on the commonness of ground specifically for this journal edition. In a shadowplay with capitalized MASS MEDIA, imagery of common ground is exemplified, laid out on a gauzy polymer sheet. The visual conversation between the two-dimensional photographies, the multilingual text chunks, and the rhythms of light spots meeting the protective surface quality of the expanded sheet provoke deeper inquiry into how terms of common, public and civic coalesce with and diverge from each other.

Dr. Lea Luka Sikau

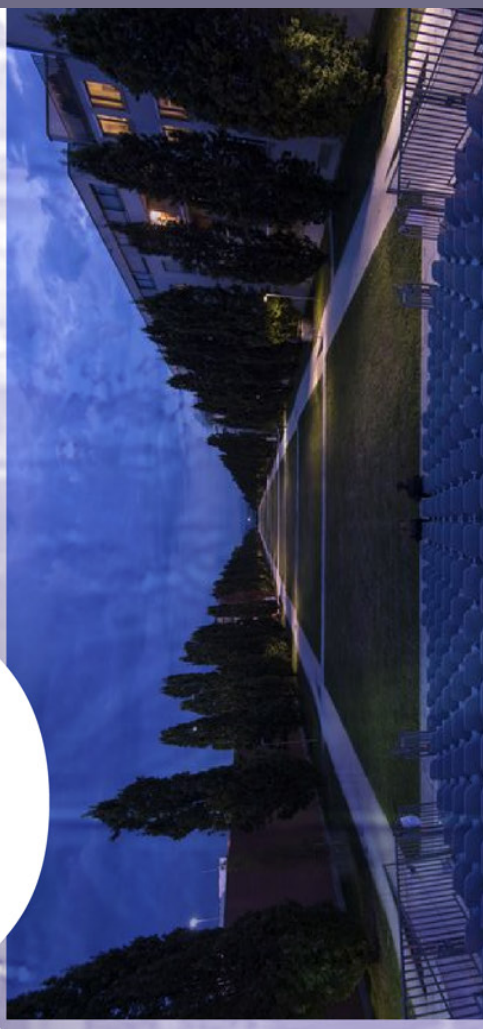
O


M
Ursula Frohne | Lilian H
Display
Ästhetisch

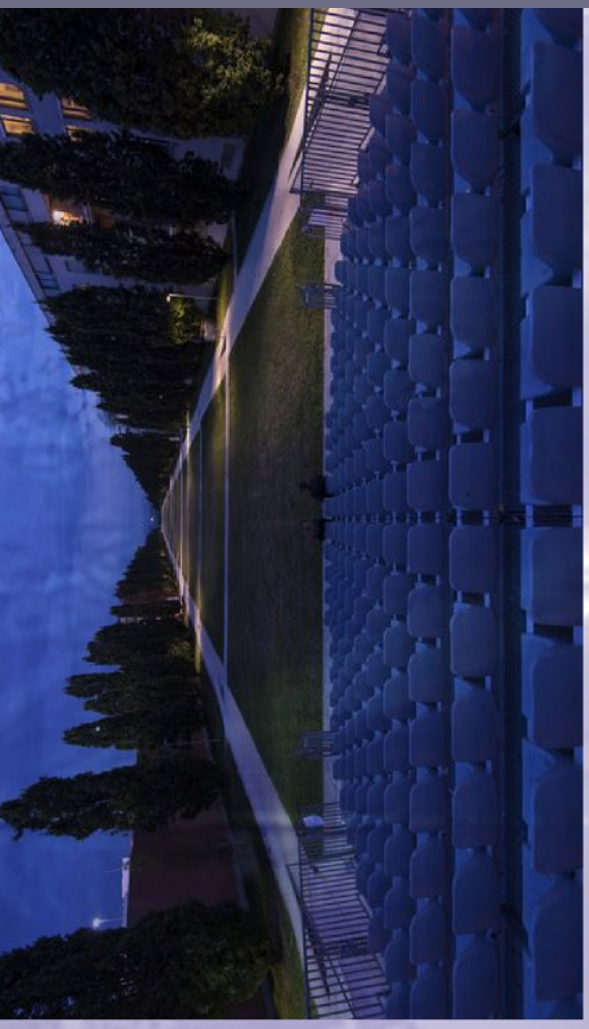

Ursula Frohne | Lilian Haberer | Ann (Hg.)
Display | Dispos
Ästhetische Ordnungen




Ursula Frohne | Lilian Haberer (Hg.)
ematographische Räume
Installationsästhetik in Film und Kunst

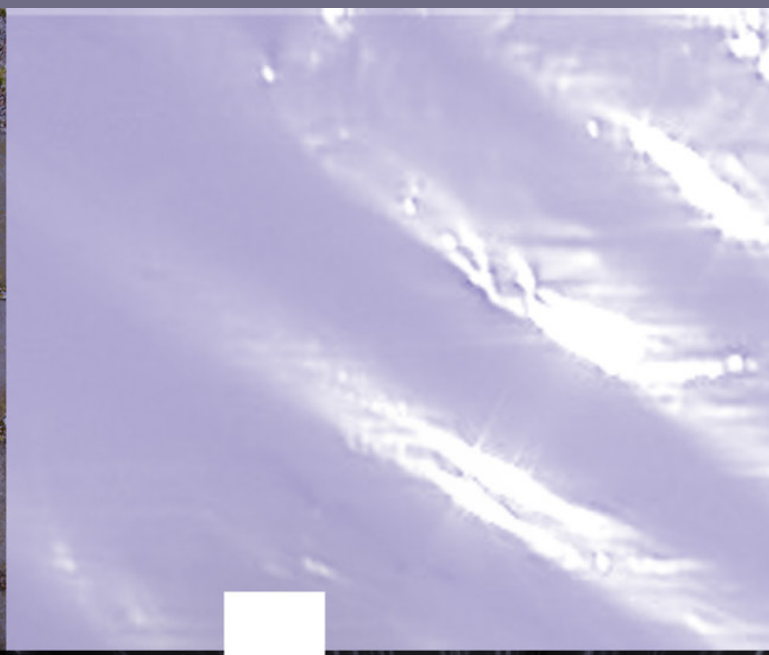


R

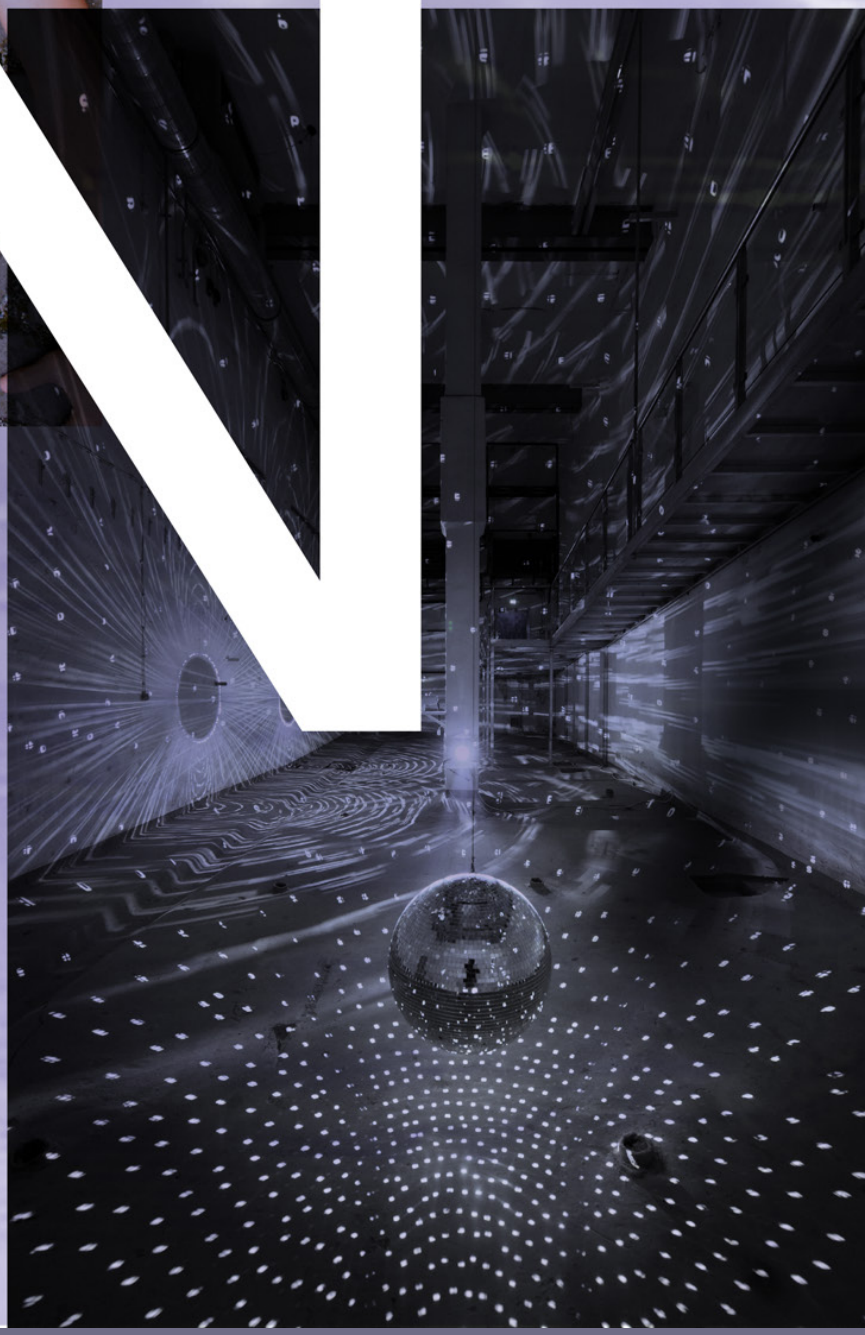


O


Jürgen Klauke
Ästhe
tische
Para
noia
Jürgen Klauke Ästhetische Paranoia

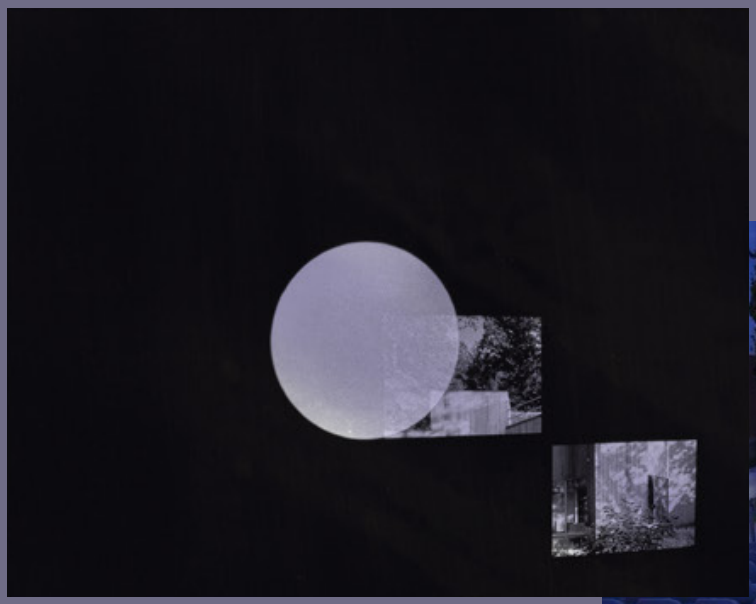


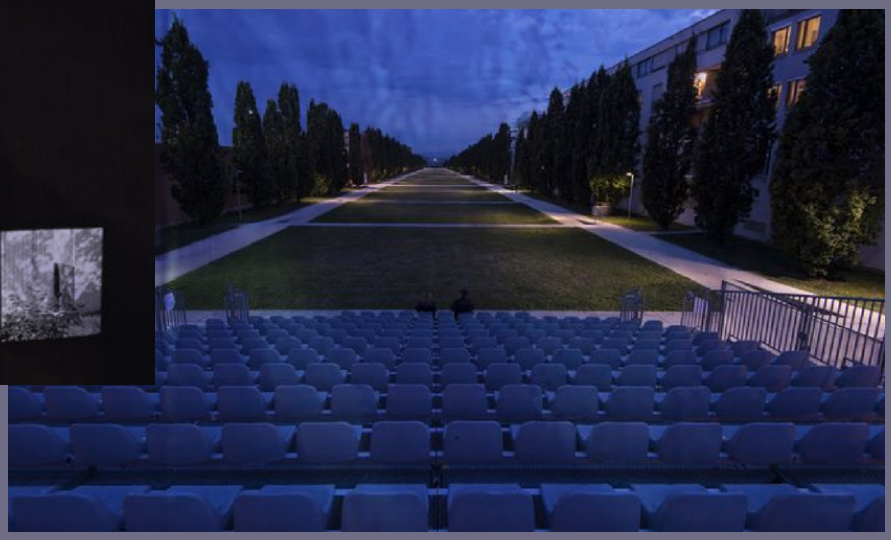
N

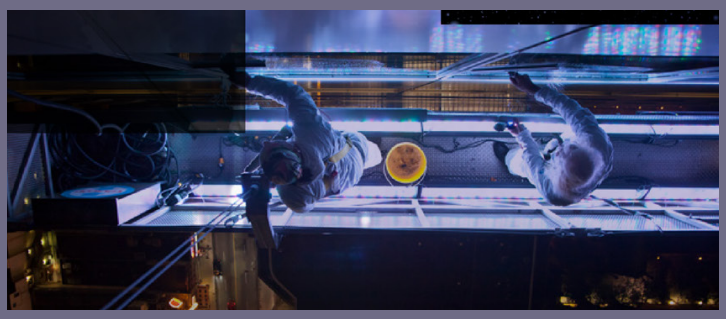


# D









# Time Structures for Publicness: Experiments in Sardinia

Zenovia Toloudi

## What Sparks Publicness?

I went to Milis, Sardinia as part of the Nocefresca residency[1] to study publicness within public spaces on a small and intimate scale, to learn from the village. As an artist and architect living on geographic peripheries in both Greece and the U.S, for 17 years on a temporary status, public space has been essential both for my everyday, as well as my academic, explorations.[2] As public space is perceived and defined[3] differently throughout different cultures, it is crucial to study it through experience, to "redefine" it (also) empirically.[4] Lately, and mostly due to the pandemic, I have been interested in public space, away from the city, asking how public space is formed in remote landscapes, nature, and the wilderness. What inspires collectiveness, what constitutes our public moments, what sparks publicness?[5] The small village in Sardinia seemed an ideal place for my intentions to expand the idea of the "small" by juxtaposing it with the theme of "travel and escape," conjuring the idea of relaxation as distraction from the worries of life. My research project asked, through an architectural and photographic study of Milis, "What are the obstacles to public life as lived in such places by both tourists and residents?" And, by extension, what are the ways art can encourage us to ask difficult but connected questions, such as, Can we relax anymore? "Is it possible to detach from worldly cares?" And: "Can we reimagine public spaces, once a defining part of such experiences, as locations that encourage connection, and even joy?"

## Materials, Tools, and Formation of #SpazioPubblicoMilis

So far, my projects related to public space are neither the typical urban furniture in the streets, nor the usual community engagement projects. Named as *Architectural Apparatuses*,[6] these installations for the public employ play, illusion, physicality,

---

1. "2021 Artists in residence: JUNE", https://www.nocefresca.it/ Last accessed: January 26, 2022. https://www.nocefresca.it/?/news&idn=23&lang=eng
2. Zenovia Toloudi, When Public Space Meets Civic Imagination: The Case of Harvard Square, Journal of Civic Media (Issue 2), 2021.
3. Within the USA, most of the public spaces are privately owned (POPs). In addition, the concept of "public space as an invention" is presented within: Mariana Mogilevich, *The Invention of Public Space: Designing for Inclusion in Lindsay's New York,* University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
4. This text does not wish to be an ethnographical study, but it rather attempts to show how observations from experience link to creating artistic projects.
5. Zenovia Toloudi, course entitled,"Art, Architecture, and the Shrinking Public Space," offered during Spring 2020 as part of Dartmouth College, Studio Art. As visiting public spaces within urban settings (as in previous years) was not an option, the course drew inspiration from experiences of publicness during the pandemic.
6. *Architectural Apparatuses* are **unapologetically playful**. They function as Donald Winnicott's **transitional objects** (e.g., teddy bears, dolls, and toys) transferring (us) from illusion to reality. By offering the illusionary experience, they smoothen the transition from inability to ability to mature. These transitional objects, acting within the context of the **post-screen era**, they embed **elements that communicate ideas.** They are **portals of phantasmagoria**. They draw from historical typologies of our (more) socially friendly past to **disrupt the norm**, our "individualistic" present, to offer more collective, public futures. While doing this, they don't try to be heroic: instead they count on **vulnerability and unpredictability.** Often **small** but **multiple**, these apparatuses act as **social devices.**
Ref.: Zenovia Toloudi, interview for *Architectures of Hiding,* August 2021.

and smallness to offer portals to other realities. By disrupting the norm and triggering curiosity, they introduce habits and "rituals" that might awaken civic imagination and inspire collectiveness.

Making these apparatuses requires a lot of resources, support from people (what Krzysztof Wodiczko calls *the Inner Public*[7]), and extensive planning. Working on the island of Sardinia, in remote mode (at least away from heavy tools and equipment), I had to shift my practice to allow more time for observation, time with others, and more space for impromptu experimentation, for new ideas to emerge.

Yet it made sense to have a sort-of-artifact at the end, even if entirely experimental. Making a site-specific and audience-specific project mattered. The village, Milis, would become my site and my studio.

For the formation of my practice while on the island, I revisited the materials and processes of the "Arte Povera" movement, and the innovative practice of Japanese artists of the 1960s who made art in the "wilderness," as described by art historian and curator Reiko Tomii.[8] In particular, the concepts of wilderness and working in the island. *Wilderness* defined: beyond the desolated and remote landscapes; as an intervention in the everyday; "out there," outside the norms of thinking, both in the context of the everyday life and art making; outside the seat of power; and as a space for experimentalism, literally outside the box. And *the island* being a microcosm of the local/global, giving the opportunity to build the global from the bottom up.

At Milis, my own body would be an integral part of the work, as it was the one ultimate thing I could count on (to find there, with me). In terms of materials. I relied on simple low-tech tools such as paper, tape, and chalk. For photography and documentation, I relied on the now-ubiquitous smartphone. In addition, I took with me few "foreign" objects, such as mirrors, to acknowledge that my intervention in Milis would be neither entirely "earthy" nor truly local. The remaining "tools" were to spend time observing, looking into local archives, and mingling with the others.

**Fig 01.** Formation of #SpazioPubblicoMilis process of art/architecture practice.

7. Krysztof Wodiczko, "The Inner Public." http://field-journal.com/ Last accessed January 26, 2022 http://fieldjournal.com/issue-1/wodiczko
8. Reiko Tomii, "Radicalism in the Wilderness." *International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan.* MIT Press, 2018.

I organized my process around two projects, valuing both as equally important approaches to study and pursue publicness. One would be a bottom-up project for public space that would include people's voices, collected empirically through participatory exercises (the questionnaire and the collaborative drawing). The other would be a top-down abstract art installation to reflect the multiple and ever-changing realities of the public space conditions.

Both projects opened the artwork/artifact to others and engaged with them in different ways, either by allowing their voices and habits *to be heard* or by allowing the different perspectives *to be seen*. To emphasize this desire to open up to others, I named my process at Milis, using the hashtag #SpazioPubblicoMilis.

#SpazioPubblicoMilis asks, "What happens if we *listen* more, and if we *observe* more? What happens if we slow down? What happens if we connect the one with the many? How can we reinvent moments and spaces for the *we*?"

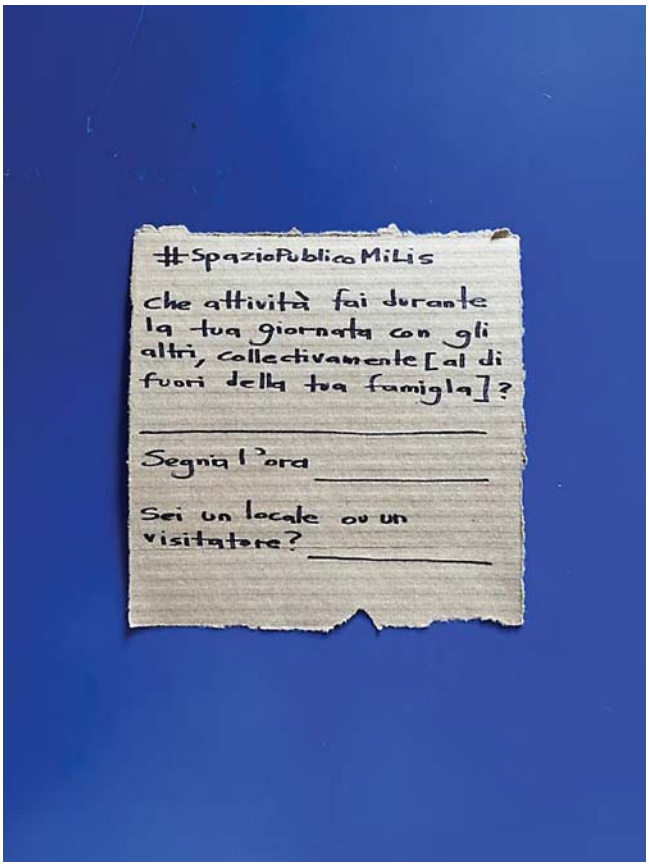



**Fig 02 (left).** #SpazioPubblicoMilis questionnaire.

**Fig 03 (right).** People in Milis filling up #SpazioPubblicoMilis questionnaire.

**Fig. 04-05.** People in Milis filling up #SpazioPubblicoMilis questionnaire.

## Habits and structures

When *one* designer aspires to create something meaningful for *many*, one hopes for this structure to be used by many. The designer might either observe informal habits of people to allocate a space within the physical environment for these to grow and evolve; or might interrupt the norm by creating something entirely different to instigate new activities– what Ben Nicholson described as design that would allow for unexpected activities to happen.[9]

Beyond creating structures that host activities, it seems essential to also think of how the physical environment might inspire us to cultivate certain values. In my work, I have been connecting the artifact and values by developing a visual vocabulary that would reinforce civicness and the presence of a social self. For example, my installation Silo(e)scapes,"[10] envisioning a future architecture, which is a hybrid of a seed bank, a sharing economy, and a museum for Mediterranean plant species that may disappear, is an effort towards that.[11] Through certain design tactics, such as the dollhouse experience of this immersive installation, or the incorporation of certain elements inspired by the Mediterranean culture and region (e.g. the columns), it aims to animate the social imaginary, to promote rituals that might build empathy, courage, and connection– to eventually trigger the extinct civic self.

Building upon this approach, I wanted to observe and document these elements within the Milis context, both in the physical environment, as well as in everyday interactions among people. What are the *small* changes that we can adopt as

9. Ben Nicholson, discussion with the author. During 2005-2006.
10. Zenovia Toloudi, *Silo(e)scapes,* Tomorrows: Urban Fictions for Possible Futures, ed. Daphne Dragona and Panos Dragonas (exhibition catalogue, 2018) p. 74-75.
11. Zenovia Toloudi, *Technoutopias* exhibition catalogue, Dartmouth College, 2019.

a community, but also architecturally, to disrupt the *big* problem of omnipresent individualism? I was investigating habits and typologies, as well as geometries, colors, shapes, textures, and materials in structures that might relate to people's interactions, inspiring us to be more together.

## Learning from the "Village"

The image of the "village" as it has been inherited to us from the past is changing.

**Fig. 06.** Café in piazza of the Martyrs in Milis.

**Fig. 07.** Local market in Milis.

In Greece, values such as "φιλότιμο"/ *filotimo,* which translates as sense of honor, hospitality, and solidarity, have been present among people of older generations (e.g., grandparents of my generation), but are not clearly visible among people of younger generations. However, the Greek sociologist Panayis Panagiotopoulos, in his recent book regarding the middle class in Greece, has observed **solidarity** as a present value (e.g., in the refugee crisis).[12] I still think it is limited in everyday things, at least outside the family.[13]

The **balance between work and fun** is not so common in contemporary work environments, at least in those of the quaternary and the quinary sectors in the USA. In Italy's Sardinia, basket makers, ceramists, farmers, and other islanders were

12. Παναγής Παναγιωτόπουλος. *Περιπέτειες της μεσαίας τάξης. Κοινωνιολογικές Καταγραφές στην Ελλάδα της Ύστερης Μεταπολίτευσης,* Επίκεντρο, 2021.
13. These values are even harder to find in non-Mediterranean landscapes, such as the U.S.

photographed (by Mario De Biasi, Marianne Sin-Pfältzer, and Henri Cartier-Bresson[14] in the 60s and 70s) working collectively, mostly outdoors, as well as sharing their breaks together, chatting by the threshold house, sitting on a terrace and dawdling, playing games, eating on the grass, lying under the trees. Their **collective habits** in the village and the outskirts document a time where work and fun time was spent together. Still, it remains a challenge to identify moments of the "we" without romanticizing the past, and without idealizing agricultural tough work. But **tradition** alone cannot guide our actions.

In Milis, there are agricultural activities (e.g., related to oranges and wine[15]), but village life is not centered merely on these. A mix of locals and visitors, permanent and seasonal residents, Milis inhabitants have reinvented traditions through their own i**nnovative** approaches.[16] **Collective habits of the now** might relate to new types of jobs and lifestyles such as maintaining a yoga center, making soap and other natural high-end products, teaching workshops for braiding straw, making and selling hats, and also promoting and creating art. Through my short time in Milis, I noticed that these contemporary villagers do support

**Fig. 08.** Contemporary Milis villagers enjoy time together in Casa Bagnolo.

14. La fotografia in Sardegna. Lo sguardo esterno 1960-1989, Ilisso, 2011.
15. "Milis Travel Guide," https://wanderingsardinia.com/ Last accessed January 26, 2022 https://wanderingsardinia.com/articles/45/milis-travel-guide
16. According to inhabitants, to avoid bureaucratic complications, what each person runs is an association (instead of a business).

each other through informal collaborations and friendly gatherings. They coexist not only as businesses, but also as friends. They eat, sing, do yoga, and celebrate together on a regular basis.

Observing these collective encounters, the small and big moments of the "we," one needs to pay attention to the physical structures that support them. In addition to the **piazzas** (the **geometry** of the main Milis "square," the piazza of the Martyrs, is an **oval** shape)**, stoas, and porticos,** there are small elements around each house, that promote the bond of neighbors, and the **presence of public life within a small scale**. Examples of these are the door threshold and *Sa Stradedda* (the built-in bench outside next to the door which served for sitting but was also used for mounting a horse),[17] the **roof tiles casting** extensive shadow (without messing with the Mistral wind), **private/public hybrid walls, shared streets**, **individual trees,** the **gardens** on the streets and pavements**,** and a **shared front yard**. Beyond offering a place to chit-chat with neighbors, there is opportunity for civic life to emerge. Let's not underestimate the image of **drying the laundry outside** one's house (in Milis, under the shadow offered by these roof tiles) might bridge public and private acts by simply exposing **the hidden private labor to the public.** And the importance of the **coffee** place and **coffee time**.

**Fig. 09.** Milis neighborhood moment.

**Fig. 10.** A Milis street.

17. "La Casa Museo. Facciata della casa," Angelo Merida.it Last accessed January 26, 2022 http://www.angelomeridda.it/museo-etnografico/facciata

**Fig. 11.** Piazza of the Martyrs.

**Fig. 12.** Piazza of the Martyrs.

**Fig. 13.** Piazza of the Martyrs.

From the photographs in the book *Salvattore Ferra* by Angelo Meridda Dessena, one can find out few things about how public life in Milis has evolved.[18] These photographs document a variety of things: **religious activities and rituals** that would take place in the piazza, such as the celebration of Easter, the 15th of August, the *Festa del Corpus Domini* marriages and other events such as dance ("Ballo in Piazza") and music (the presence of a band); **national moments,** such as a general addressing the public from the balcony of a civic building (Palazzo Boyl during the Mussolini years) or the arrival of offcials in the piazza; moments of (national) **pride or belonging** (the inauguration of public monuments); publicly "**unpleasant**" **activities** such a small boy peeing; the desire **to be seen**, such as people (including young children) wearing hats and special clothes; small groups of people participating or watching from the periphery (the feeling of belonging); the **coexistence** of the privileged and the less privileged (**diversity**); moments of **transit,** such as waiting for the bus, and others.

In addition to the events, the photographs document structures and elements of the physical environment,– for instance, certain time structures, such as the **bell tower** (Campanila a Vela); the **clock** on the front façade.

Also, the photographs show intimate public spaces that host group encounters (or relate to publicness), such the ***loggiato***, the ***terrazzo***/terrace (of the Palazzo del Marchese), the **round columns** of the **loggia**; the **altar**; steps that are also used for rest a ***pergolato*** *(La lunga terraza);* and even the "special" technique of the ceramic tiles that we see nowadays, producing shadow. Beyond these permanent structures, there are some portable elements too, such as **small flags and fireworks** for events. Through these photographs, one can be reminded of how the natural elements can affect the void and the piazza – for example the piazza being covered by grass (**soft surface**), a small **stream of water** crossing the piazza; and a tunnel ombreggiato.

## From Time Experiments to Time Structures

Equipped with my "new" tools and materials for #SpazioPubblicoMilis, and allowing myself to be informed by the ongoing Milis context, I created two projects. The first, a human sundial, was a temporary installation/experiment for public time. It marked the times and things people in Milis do together, and were all connected through the artist/gnomon. The second, was a line of circular mirrors on a wall to reflect of people's interactions as they are "temporarily" and subjectively captured by a set of "foreign" objects which were inserted in the site by the artist.

## The Human Sundial Experiments

This body of works consists of a series of photographs of the human sundial experiment taken on

18. These photographs are found mostly in the book Salvatorre Perra but in some other books by the same author.
Angelo Meridda Dessena, Salvatorre Perra, EPDO Libri
Angelo Meridda Dessena. I Marchesi Pilo Boyl di Putifigari a Milis. EPDO Libri

a Milis street (the *Gnomon* series); the documentation of the shadows captured ("Σκιοθηρικόν"/ *skiothirikon* photographs and tape drawings); the public time drawing (collaborative drawing with the people of Milis); and the visualization of the temporary human sundial installation (collage).

The human sundial seemed like an ideal structure to inspire people to spend *time* together, and at the same time it honored the the extensive ethnographic, historical, and creative work by the local Angelo Meridda Dessena (including a series of *meridiane*/sundials).[19] This human *meridiana/* sundial did not measure objective time objectively, but instead it traced (and presented) subjective time, the hours and things people of Milis do together. It was essentially **a *meridiana* for collectiveness**, as experienced in Sardinia.

**Fig. 14.** Maria and Pier in front of the Angelo Merrida meridiana. Maria holding more meridiane by Angelo Merrida.

19. "Meridiane," Angelo Merida.it. Last accessed January 26, 2022 http://www.angelomeridda.it/storia-e-archeologia/meridiane

To start the experimentation, one only needs the human body, the sun, and a marking tool (tape/chalk). So, for this analemmatic sundial, the gnomon would be the artist/maker, a woman/mother. Even if this timepiece would not eventually measure absolute time, the first efforts were made to design the "objective" perimeter of the sundial based on the sun movement (during that time of the year, in that street, which was also tilted). The site was intentionally selected right outside the temporary Nocefresca residence (40°2'56''N, 8°38'8"E), as a private/public realm that would not require permission. The fact that the street was uneven, resulting to an ellipsis with an irregular perimeter was another step closer to reach and accept the subjectivity in time.

**Fig. 15-16.** Gnomon experiments (40° 2' 56'' N, 8° 38' 8" E). Forming the sundial on the street (left). View of the sundial complete (right).

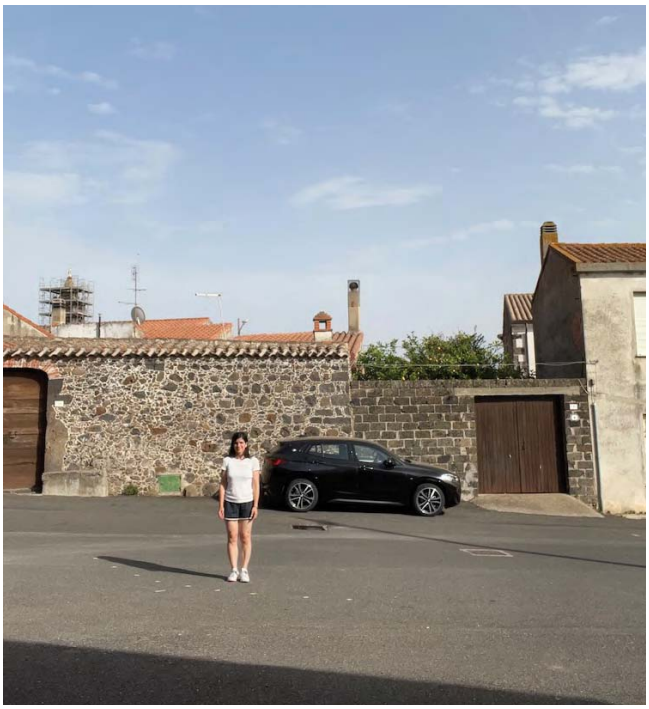


**Fig. 17-18.** Gnomon experiments (40° 2' 56'' N, 8° 38' 8" E). Marking 12 noon (left) and 6 pm (right).

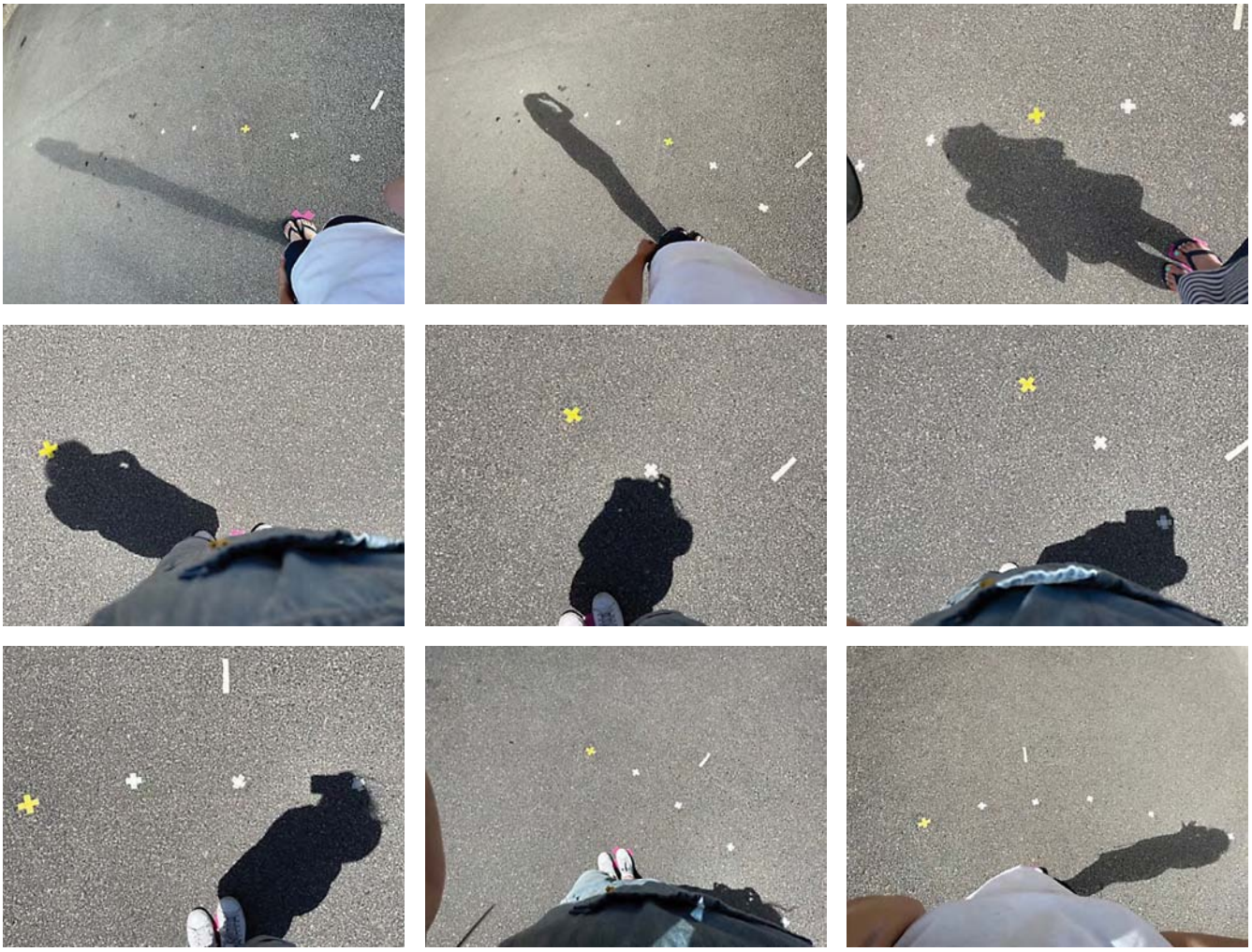


**Fig. 19-27.** "Σκιοθηρικόν"/skiothirikon photographs (40° 2' 56'' N, 8° 38' 8" E). (From left to right, top to down marking 8am, 9am, 10am, 12noon, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm, 5pm).

The marks of this sundial were in essence representations, "reminiscent" of the shadows. They were traces of the subjective time, highlighting the "we" time. And, as in Ancient Egypt, the time during the day and night were divided in uneven units (due to their duration not having a constant length).[20] The marks on this sundial were also unevenly spaced, having more density around the two edges of the long axis. As I **learnt from people in Milis**, most of the collective activities (for example when people do yoga together, sports together, hobbies together, and eat together, among other things), they happen during the beginning and the end of the day (the dawn and dusk) and then also sometimes during midday (mostly they eat together).

20. Μάνος Δανέζης, Στράτος Θεοδοσίου «Μετρώντας τον Χρόνο. Συστήματα Υπολογισμού του Χρόνου στους Αρχαίους Πολιτισμούς». Στον λαβύρινθο του Χρόνου. Η εξέλιξη των ιδεών περί Χρόνου στη Φιλοσοφία και την Επιστήμη, από την αρχαιότητα έως τον Νεύτωνα," https://www.kathimerini.gr/ Last accessed January 26, 2022 https://web.archive.org/web/20120131131234/http://wwk.kathimerini.gr/kath/7days/1998/12/27121998.pdf

**Fig. 28-29.** People in Milis participating in the public time drawing.

The body art (or performance art) has been an integral part of this horological structure. The artist as the gnomon provides literally the structure ("αναλημματικό"/meaning *the retaining wall*) for the voices and choices of people (**the others**). The artist/gnomon becomes the mediator to create a **collective subjectivity of time**– a timepiece which would measure time based on people's habits, needs, desires, and feelings of being together. By making visible these moments, we would all be more aware for our need to be together.

The body has more important role within remote landscapes. As Greek philosopher and engineer Theodosis Tassios reflected in an article about time, we first feel the universe; not by observing it, but by feeling it through our inner conditions (we feel the warmth of the sun, rather than

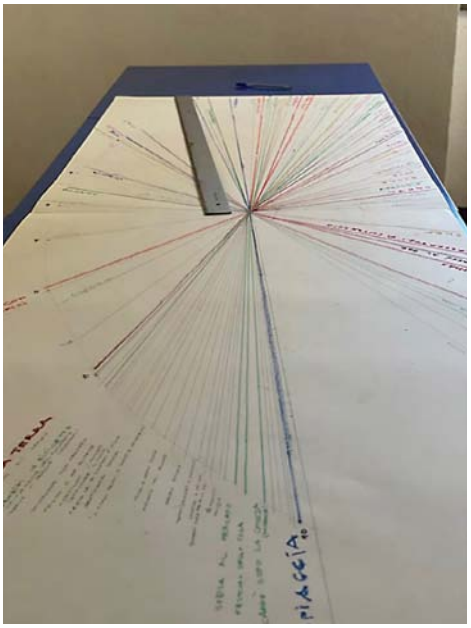


**Fig. 30-31.** Collaborative public-time drawing.

observing the sun).[21] **Remote landscapes**, being less dense, they offer more space, opportunities to **feel** and connect with the environment around and with oneself. The remote also gives more **access to nature** to this bigger force that cannot let you "untouched" once you encounter it. Islands such as Anafi, in Cyclades, that have been place for **exile**, now they are desirable destinations exactly for this **raw landscape**, the "lack" of comfort. Through such landscapes one can access an **escape place,** and potentially **a utopia.**

Gina Pane's works "**strove to create a new language** and thus **enable closer communication with nature, the other and the divine**."[22] As in Pane's horizon, for her piece "Situation Idéale: Terre-Artiste-Ciel" (1969), in which she explains: "Between two horizontals: earth/sky, I placed my body vertically to provoke an ideal situation").[23] As Critic Dean Daderko this piece is about the artist "[becoming] the connection between terrestrial and celestial realms."[24] "Rather than the landscape achieving primacy and visual power, the figure of Pane does; her physical form mediates the image. Thus, the relative simplicity of the image is belied by the potential for multiple interpretations, all of them **centering on the relationship of (wo)man to nature**."[25]

It is not by accident that this work on time and the body occurred along with (my) motherhood. Motherhood as one way in which the body connects to nature, to the universe. One would argue that both art and motherhood encapsulate by default the notion of subjective time. Through motherhood the body provides the structure, a whole environment to create, nurture, and support another human being. My self, as an artist/woman/mother (and citizen) served as reference for the voices of the collective, it became the vertical, and even the strong structure of the piece.

My body, as the one thing I could have with me and could rely on, is not only a convenient tool when doing nomadic art. Motherhood becomes essentially this one extreme sport, in which the body is the ultimate tool. And then this body is presented as a working body (not curated with black clothes as the model figure in architecture) and this body is in the frontline, where, through art, one changes the world. Here this work differentiates from other performance artists that use pain, suffering, and setting extreme conditions for themselves. This approach favors the simple, the mundane, the everyday, the small change, what in fact seems that a lot of people endure. The body, the artist as the "gnomon" **has the right to know** (literally as "γνώμονας") what is good for herself and the community. It is the relationship of a **(wo)man to others**, through a **time structure** (the lines of the sundial).

---

21. Θεοδόσιος Τάσιος, «Ο Χρόνος στη Φιλοσοφία. Από την Υποκειμενική Προσέγγιση στις Απόψεις της Φυσικής». *Στον λαβύρινθο του Χρόνου. Η εξέλιξη των ιδεών περί Χρόνου στη Φιλοσοφία και την Επιστήμη, από την αρχαιότητα έως τον Νεύτωνα,* https://www.kathimerini.gr/ Last accessed January 26, 2022 https://web.archive.org/web/20120131131234/http://wwk.kathimerini.gr/kath/7days/1998/12/27121998.pdf
22. "Gina Pane," Les Presses du Réel. Last accessed January 26, 2022. https://www.lespressesdureel.com/EN/auteur.php?id=797
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.

The work also relates to the Arte Povera movement, and the effort to make "pure" art out of through modest, everyday materials.[26] Rosalind Krauss critiques the movement, as at the end they made commodified art (as the art they tried to deviate from).[27] My work is interested in the creation of *this* (criticized) object. Some of Giovanni Anselmo works, that develop around the notion of the invisible, and the unseen elements and forces of the universe, such the series of "Documentazione di interferenza umana nella gravitazione universale" {Documentation of human interference in universal gravitation} (1969),[28] are particularly influential.

Through his works, the body, universe, and immaterial elements of life are becoming one thing. In his words: "I, the world, things, life–we are points of energy, and it is not as necessary to crystallize these points as it is to keep them open and alive is a function of our living."

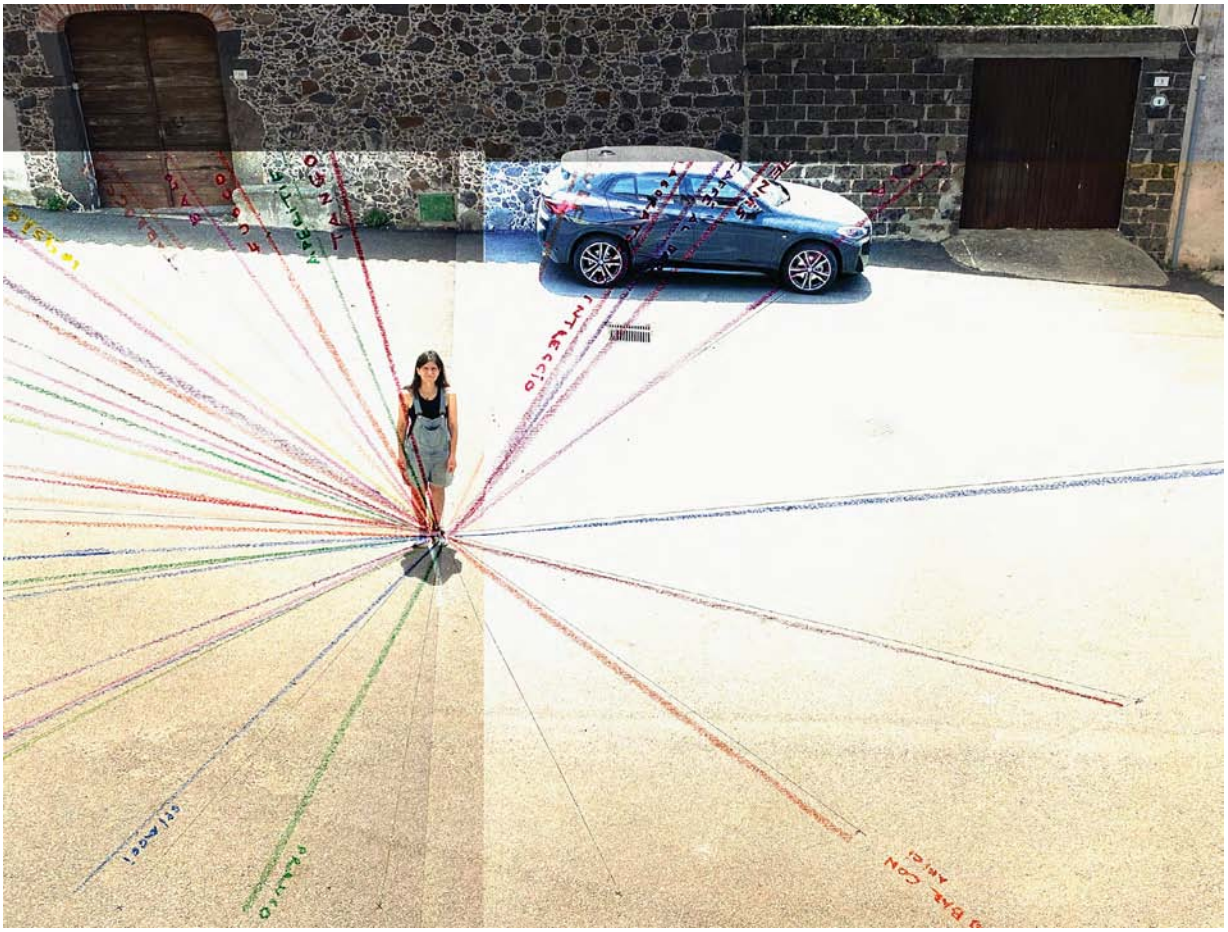


**Fig. 32.** Tempo Pubblico Meridiana, Milis (40° 2' 56'' N, 8° 38' 8" E). Collage.

26. Germano Celant, Arte Povera. Praeger Publishers. New York, 1969.
27. Rosalind Krauss has commented on Arte Povera movement eventually ending to also commodify the art. Reference to Rosalind Krauss, "Giovanni Anselmo. Matter and Monochrome." October, Spring, 2008, Vol. 124, Postwar Italian Art (Spring, 2008), MIT Press, pp. 125-136.
28. "Giovanni Anselmo," http://www.archivioanselmo.com/ Last accessed January 27, 2022. http://www.archivioanselmo.com/it/opere/sessanta/interferenza%20nella%20gravitazione...asp

## Mirror Experiments

When one works with nature, and bigger unseen dimensions (whether these are internal feelings, or external phenomena to be observed), geometry and simplicity become essential tools to allow for these phenomena to be captured and be seen. To that end, my work in Sardinia gave me the chance to revisit simple shapes such as the circle, triangle, and square. A circle relates to social life; it is the ultimate form of gathering (for learning, playing and other activities), the first formation of space; it indicates autonomy, perhaps an esoteric life, a play between inside and outside. This "return"/choice to geometry also honors what might be a connection between experts/designers and the others, a challenge when working with the public. Precise geometry, in contrast with the organic landscape forms and the uneven materiality create a spatial dialogue that does not disrupt. Even if this relationship is temporal, it has the chance to stay. These simple shapes, call for their multiplicity and repetition to construct a structure and an order for the invisible elements and the unforeseen things to happen. Together with these aforementioned elements (geometry, repetition, and simplicity), I also intended to approach subjectivity through the idea of color not being one thing.

I first experimented with "The Eye of the Wall," a series of photographs capturing a circular ready-made ("foreign") object placed in different sites/ walls of the village. Through this simple play with the walls, the image captures the textures, materials, colors, shadows, techniques, traces of time, the

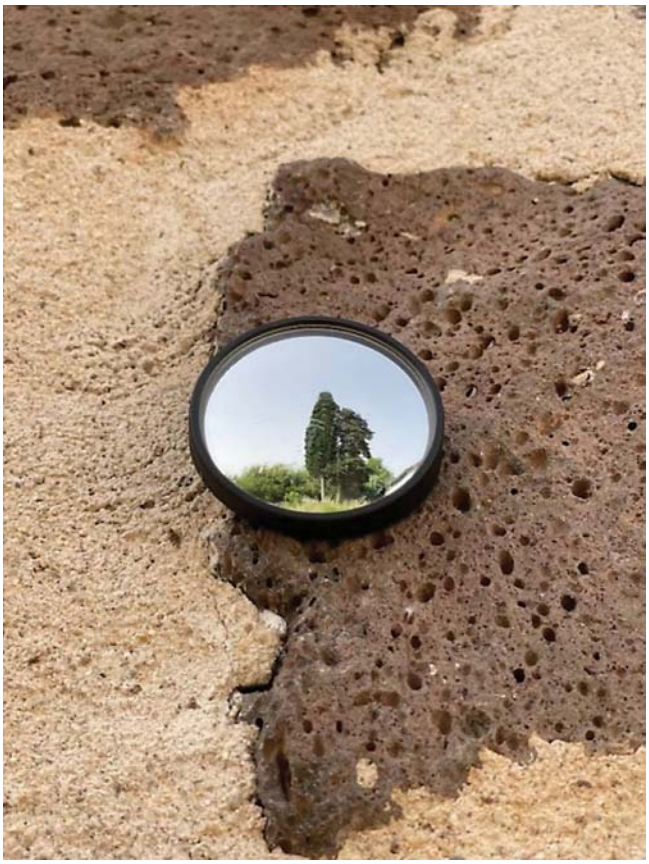


**Fig. 33-34.** The Eye of the Wall.

**Fig. 35-36.** The Eye of the Wall.

vernacular, expressions of the "raw" in Milis. In addition to the physical characteristics, one can explore otherness and subjectivity. By shifting the angled mirror, one can discover the sky, the ground, the other villagers, to decide what is important to look at through their own subjective perception of reality. *The Eye of the Wall* relates to the eyes of the neighbor in small places "surveilling" what is happening.

What are the constant variables in this small village? The rock, the wall, the color of the sky, the emptiness, the sharp shadows? Some of these experiments were done during quiet times, to not disturb, when others have been resting. Rest during the day in regions of the southern Europe and the Mediterranean is a habit that, even if it is tending to disappear (e.g., in Athens), it makes sense to keep. And here it is important to distinguish that, Relaxing should not be an alibi for (more) productivity. It should be autonomous, and this right to rest should be preserved as it is. Through these observations *One Color. Zest* was born.

**Fig. 37-38.** One Color. Zest.

**Fig. 39-40.** One Color. Zest.

**Fig. 41-42.** One Color. Zest.

*One Color. Zest* was an installation placed on a street wall to reflect the surroundings. It consisted of a series of thirteen identical mirrors. Each circle gradually tilted at different angles and directions to visually capture the various aspects of the environment. As one moved in the street these framed realities change constantly. Through *One Color. Zest*, each pedestrian (or cyclist) would see sometimes themselves, sometimes other people, but mostly variations of that one color. By using

just one material the whole installation appeared as a collage of different colors and images. *One Color. Zest* presented the multiple realities around us that can appear by simply shifting our view few degrees. The mirror set its own constructed reality where color becomes one way to question, talk about, and organize the surrounding. The "orange" view of that one "gold" color that was brought to the island, was another "foreign" thing, whose hybrid identity made sense to belong to the global/ local aspect of this intervention.

*Zest,* the second part of the title, calls our attention to slow down and enjoy. A zest is the peel of citrus fruit that provides smell and intense taste, and metaphorically it might refer to great enthusiasm and energy. As a verb, it asks to flavor, to appreciate, and taste the small things. A call for all to enjoy, feel delight, have more pleasure in life. The ancient Greek "*Zέσις*"/*zesis* literally means *boiling*, and metaphorically it means to have extremely great zeal, warmth, intense willingness.

What are these small things in life, other than the peel of a citrus? It might be the small insignificant things we do together, to listen to others, to observe the others, and to reflect with/through the others.

## Experiments in Public: After-thoughts

Rethinking, within the North American context, the café as a public domain, the idea of "καφενείο"/ *kafeneio* as an opportunity to pause, to slow down, to chit-chat with friends and others, instead of using it as a place for solitude, spending time on one's laptop while sipping a beverage or eating alone. What is architecture's role here? What structures can help us practice more things together, to cover our social, more than our individual needs? What if we had **a sound to ring** and call us to come together, not because it is an **emergency drill**, or a crisis, but simply the everyday time to have fun together, to play as it happens at school with a bell for recess. We need structures that encourage togetherness and escape from the daily routine, but in a collective mode.[29]

Beyond the structures, some support is needed by organizations, and influential groups. Arriving to Milis within the current pandemic era, after big interruptions in many aspects of life, it became clear we need **trust** and **cooperation.** The Nocefresca residency has been nurturing the environment of collaboration, and community. Beyond offering business to variety of people, promoting the heritage, the local, the art, the Nocefresca residence also offered a humane place where relationships, kindness, sharing, caring, family and the other qualities have been equally important to intellectual achievements, and the making of art. To me, it clearly offered a place to be myself, to be able to practice simultaneously two essential things: being a creative individual and being a mother.

And this simultaneity matters. **(In the western world) our inner** reality, needs, and desires to be and to share do not necessarily get along with the

29. Part of the motivation behind of some of the *Technoecologies* projects was to break away from work routine and bureaucracy (schedule, office space, regulations). T*echnoecologies* exhibition, UNC- Charlotte, 2018.

**external** reality, often overstructured and over-scheduled, and always centered around work. The need to travel and **escape** from this individualistic present, only temporarily gives relief to the burn-out of the working (wo)man. These schedules, routines are exhausting, and dull. They neither adjust to weather changes, sun/moon patterns, or various crises, nor to our body's conditions. Whether it is only one person/body, the nuclear family, the residency, or the village, it becomes obvious that the different experiences we participate, they need to (and would benefit from) synchronizing.

Time is not one thing, time is not absolute, not objective. Time is subjective. We need to alter the physical environment to include structures which allow for these nuances to be considered. We need time structures to calibrate with our bodies, to inspire our actions. We need time structures to allow for the subjectivity of time to enter. The **sundial** becomes one example of an **external** structure to reflect on the **internal** needs of Milis people. The mirror installation offered another example of a place for our perceived realities to coexist and coevolve depending on others, and on our surroundings.

This essay presented a process to make structures for public space that can affect publicness, the spirit of collectiveness through small and intimate scale. More specifically, it focused on showing how the two projects in Milis were conceived as small steps to help experience spatially and collectively slow verbs in our everyday life.

*In Milis, I used archives, books, notes, interviews, field trips, photography, and questionnaires, and I became an active participant in collective activities with others. With the help of the people of Milis, I made and experimented with the time structures.*

> *"Time is not one thing, time is not absolute, not objective. Time is subjective. We need to alter the physical environment to include structures which allow for these nuances to be considered. We need time structures to calibrate with our bodies, to inspire our actions."*

New Hampshire, Winter 2022

## Acknowledgments

All photopgraphs and artworks in the images are by Zenovia Toloudi. The author would like to thank curator Francesca Sassu and the community of Nocefresca Residency, Casa Bagnolo in Milis, Pier Gavino Meridda and Maria Morru from Museo Antica Casa Milese, Biblioteca Comunale di Milis "Giorgio Manca," and everyone in Milis, Sardinia.

> *We need structures that encourage togetherness, escape from the daily routine, but in collective mode*

Photographs and artworks by Zenovia Toloudi.

# Public Space in Flux and Cultural Memory: Educating the Public Through Art

Consul General Stratos Efthymiou
Interviewed by Vassiliki Rapti

video available at this link

**Vassiliki Rapti:** Honorable Consul General, welcome to this interview! I'm so happy to have you with us today to talk about the Permanent Exhibition of Photographs of Greece by Robert McCabe at the Consulate General of Greece in Boston as a civic medium in flux –that's what I consider it. And this is for an article that is going to be published in the special issue, "Civic Media in Flux," of *The Journal of Civic Media,* of which I'm the editor at Emerson College's Engagement Lab. I don't know if you would like me to say a few things about it – what the mission of the journal is– before we start our conversation, but I think I have already talked to you about it. We primarily focus on all kinds of new media that contribute to a process of democratization around the world. We want to give voice to diverse communities across the globe. So, this particular journal issue is looking for new ways that the media have been transformed, especially due to the Covid pandemic. Even Zoom is one of these platforms that have completely changed the landscape of new media.

**Stratos Efthymiou:** First, let me say that it is a pleasure and an honor to be with you and to be working with you–we have done many things together! And I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about the wonderful contributions of Robert McCabe and how this exhibition changed the way we approach public buildings, public diplomacy, and also some of the perceptions that during the crisis may have affected our country. And I would also like to praise your approach and the tools you have been harnessing. The key here is the word you mentioned: "democratization." I mean, sharing and giving opportunities to diverse crowds who don't necessarily have access to paid or to written or printed material in order to gain access to this information. So, thank you very much for highlighting this important issue!

**V.R.:** And you really used the perfect word, this "open public space."And you 've made the building itself and the institution of the Consulate General of Greece in Boston a public space for a unique life experience. In my opinion, it is really a civic project. I can draw a parallel to fifth-century Athens, where a city was a museum. So in that line of thought, I think the gesture that you made, the initiative that you took to make this a museum in itself to host this masterpiece, the McCabe exhibition, in this beautiful public building on Beacon Street, is just what constitutes this exhibition a media in flux, in my opinion. So let me explain a little bit more how this idea came to me and then we're going to go deeper into the idea of this exhibition as a civic medium in flux. So, when I first encountered Robert McCabe's breathtaking photo of "Santorini: Perissa from Ancient Thera" as I was waiting at the Consulate General of Greece in Boston, where before I used to sit and patiently peruse the small ads on the white board until my turn would come to get my job done–whatever that might have been, a passport, or certificate. I was then introduced to a new transformative and reawakening, aesthetic experience. I had no doubt that I was in front of a new form of civic media, one that is in constant flux in terms of an ongoing aesthetic experience, cultural exchange, and civic engagement. The exhibition itself is a unique work of art that, as you yourself said in the catalogue: "has immortalized in a unique way a part of the spirit, geometry, light and identity of a Greece that is receding in history." And again, in your own words, "which is not only a visual poetry of aesthetic perfection, but the treasure of the cultural

heritage." However, as I already said, your initiative to bring it to the building of the Consulate General in Boston automatically turned it into a civic project, a civic medium in flux. And the House of Greece in Boston became a vehicle, a living organism, an interactive museum, a point of reference and a space of connections for its visitors. And this is exactly what I see as a brilliant initiative on your part, an initiative that redefines the meaning of the role and the institution of the Consulate General, which aims not only at serving the public, but also to function as a cultural ambassador that constantly provides transformational cultural experiences that reshape and use introspection and redefine its visitors' identities, as they come in constant contact with a plurality of images of Greece from the past. In other words, it is a permanent beacon here–pun not intended–on Beacon Street, where the House of Greece resides, as a beacon of culture and a fixed point of reference or, to use your own words again from the catalogue of the exhibition, "an enduring bridge between Boston, the Athens of America, and Greece, captured through the eyes of a Philhellene American photographer." So, that being said, I would like you to take us back to the roots of this initiative. In other words, do you also see this permanent photo exhibition as a civic project, a civic medium in flux? And how did you conceive this idea? Now the floor is yours.

**S.E.:** First of all, at the end of a very tiring and frustrating day, you made my day, and I'm so flattered and really overwhelmed by your comments. I think no one could convey better than you, in the way you did, the message and the spirit of this exhibition. And it is a project that, you know, was conceived in the making, actually, because initially I had the idea of "How can we bring some life into these empty walls?" and at the same time, "How can we make these walls a bridge between the US and Greece?" and "How can we promote Greece?" and what a better way–I thought at that time–than having an American photographer who has captured the landscapes and the spirit of Greece to come and feature his work here at the Greek Consulate in a way rendering the building a bridge between Greece and the U.S.? After many exchanges–and all happened by accident because I hadn't checked all the messages that were sent to the Consulate and one of them was sent by Robert McCabe. I didn't know that he had a connection to Boston. I didn't know he was here. And I went to see his work at the American Archaeological Congress, which was at a Conference at Copley Square in Boston. And then I liked the pictures and I said, "Why can't we bring these pictures and replace the existing ones at the waiting room, and maybe, you know, bring some life in Greece, bring more Greece into the Greek Consulate, and then after a lot of changes there, the photographer kindly offered through the help of a sponsor, his son, to bring some photographs tailored for the Consulate and we installed 39 photographs of archaeological monuments from Greece. And Santorini is a kind of an exception from the general rule that highlights archaeological sites. And then a year after, after the complete transformation of the Consulate, I reached out to Mr. McCabe and I asked for more photos–photos of maritime landscapes of Greece–and to transform one more room, and there we installed photos of Patmos, of Mykonos and of the island of Santorini, photos highlighting the maritime life and island traditions of Greece. So it was a project in the making. And then this created some great attention. We had the WGBH channel and its

cultural editor, Jared Bowen, who visited the Consulate. Then we had a couple of articles in the Greek and U.S. press, and then schools started visiting the Consulate. Usually you don't want to visit the Consulate because it's a waste of time. You don't want to do the paperwork. But then we tried to combine these experiences which we tried to minimize and digitize and enhance them with some cultural experience. And this also provided us with an opportunity to highlight Greece as a tourist destination. Last week, for example, we had an inaugural event for the new direct flight from Boston to Athens, and so I started my speech by highlighting how important it is that we have these photographs here at the House of Greece inviting all the guests to come and visit Greece and, at the same time, these photographs also point out and underline the importance of the preservation of our cultural and natural landscape. This is, unfortunately, a Greece that no longer exists, but still, we can save and preserve our landscapes and our archaeological sites and to try to reconcile touristic developments with the preservation of our heritage. So that's also another way for these photographs to raise awareness of what we should do in the future to preserve our heritage.

**V.R.:** Absolutely. And I really like the point you made that you opened it up also to the schools for visiting this exhibition. So this educational component that the civic project entails is part of it. And also this ongoing in flux, continuous dialogue on Greece by various entities without any exclusion is just extraordinary.

**S.E.:** So one of the favorite games of the children who visited the Consulate was hide-and-seek and also counting how many photographs are from the Acropolis, how many are black and white, which is the only color photograph, etc. So, we did this kind of games along with other educational programs when kids are visiting.

**V.R.:** That is really amazing. And so my perception and your perception of this collection as a civic media in flux is truly captured in the following words by John Camp, the Director of the Agora Excavations of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens who wrote an introduction for the catalogue: "This is not a collection to be rushed through, but rather one to be absorbed slowly with time for contemplation. We are invited by it to consider our own associations and memories. On display are all the different facets which have drawn foreigners to Greece over the centuries." And also, as I was trying to dig deeper into the civic element of the exhibition, I was thinking that it is not only its display at the building open to the public–a civic space that is open to every citizen and provides passports–but also this exhibition has a tremendous capacity for storytelling. And this is a very important component of civic media storytelling. As it is written in an interview with Mr. McCabe, published last year, "from photographing the islands before severe earthquakes to capturing the excavations at Mycenae and sites before the restoration, your photos are not just charming and captivating. They are storytelling, and along with their captions, they are encyclopedic, a documentation of various places and areas that were destined to change and evolve." So this capacity for storytelling, prompted from each photograph, opens the path to a world of connections and empathy to the visitors and to the children that you mentioned–especially at this early age it's so important to cultivate their empathy. So, as a re-

sult, one visitor has undergone a transformational experience, perhaps similar, as I mentioned earlier, to the experience that the citizens in fifth-century Athens would have experienced. So, do you consider this permanent exhibition as such a project with an educational component?

**S.E.:** I thought it was an honor for us to have this message of John Camp. He is a legendary figure in Archaeology, the Director of the Ancient Agora Excavations in Athens for the American School of Classical Studies. So he knows what an agora is, what a civic and deliberation space such as agora constitutes. And I think that you described very well how these photos can make us reflect and use our space as a civic space and what the message of these photographs is–ancient Greece and Classical Athens–what the single most important characteristic of ancient Greece is. That's Democracy. So, that's the definition of deliberation, that's the political system of governments that is based on deliberation. So, if these photographs make us reflect a little bit on our heritage and on how important democracy was for the classical world and still is in our times, then I think that that would be the success of this exhibition. So, yes, I agree with what you said–I cannot express it as well as you.

**V.R.:** You did express it very well by using the term *agora*. It's perfect. It's exactly what I was looking for. And I'm so thrilled that you used it. So, besides storytelling, there's another element in this open forum that pertains to the democratic process. It's what happens after storytelling itself. The dialogue continues prompting new forms of storytelling about what has been experienced and remembered by the viewers while watching the exhibition. Because what I saw in the aforementioned interview with Mr. McCabe is that he uses the Instagram platform and he posts the same photographs and he receives comments and there are moments where people who were photographed so many years before recognize themselves in the pictures! So another dialogue opens up and it's just extraordinary. So, in this sense, this is a new medium that never stops. This dialogue is a continuum–back and forth–of awareness raising. So, his digital Instagram account is @McCabePhotos. And I'm going to read one excerpt from the interview that I mentioned earlier. The journalist asks him, "While some of your projects have been delayed by the pandemic, you decided to use Instagram as a modern way to communicate with your audience. Is it because of this social medium's primarily visual character?" And then he answers as follows: "March 30th, 2021, will mark the one-year anniversary of my posting on Instagram @ McCabePhotos and the medium is addictive." He says, "At times it's humbling. For example, when one of your favorite images draws a yawn. I have some regular followers whose loyalty and engagement I really appreciate. There are some wonderful images shown on Instagram. A big bonus! I have gotten some identifications of people and places that are very valuable. The lady traveling deck class with her accordion in 1954 was identified by her daughter. I think some of the inputs from Instagram will be useful in selecting and captioning images for books. It is also fun to see the consistence and creativity of the images of some of those photographers I follow." Really fascinating! What is this? After the exhibition the momentum is transferred into the digital world and the dialogue continues and the flux of ideas continues, and that is the other agora, the digital agora that takes shape thanks to that first incentive, the first moment of

the exhibition of the public forum where we have now at the General Consulate.

**S.E.:** Isn't that amazing how an 85-year-old photographer finds new ways of expression and sharing with the public? That's another kind of democratization of public art. And so this took place and was discovered by McCabe during the pandemic. So, it was a time where, so many of us were confined and we were visually hungry and we were searching for a means and a vehicle to escape. And in many ways, these photographs of Robert's took us back to a different Greece, a different era, to landscapes of innocence, to a return to our traditions or identities, to our origins, and I found this fascinating. And what was amazing was the engagement of the public–thousands of likes–and how much these new kinds of public exhibition created engagement around quality photographs and around art that is so special. I'm going back to the more traditional photographs. I have a photograph of McCabe below me at the Consulate. It's from Stiles tou Olympiou Dios from Athens. So, you know, it's such a privilege to have this art featured and displayed here at the House of Greece in such an important city, Boston, the Athens of America, such a center for spiritual and academic research and study. So, I hope that many more thousands will come to receptions and events of the Consulate and will enjoy these nice photographs of Greece.

**V.R.:** I'm sure that there couldn't be a better place to host this permanent exhibition. It's really fantastic and thus the cycle continues. We have the ancient agora, then the agora in Boston thanks to your initiative, and then the digital agora of the Instagram and then all together they continue the dialogue about raising awareness on what Greece was, was it is and what it will be and how it affects us and our own individualities.

**S.E.:** You know, just today we got a message from–last week actually–but we listened to it today, from an American citizen who said "My husband in the '70s removed a piece of marble from the Acropolis and I would like to return it." And today she brought it back and this is a piece of marble she brought {showing it}.

**V.R.:** Oh my God!

**S.E.:** You know, I don't know what drove her to this gesture and I don't want to characterize the act of her husband, but still, after 50 years, they decided that this piece of marble has to return to its homeland. And I think this was a great gesture. Nobody knew that it was removed. And–you know–she could have kept it, but she said, "no, its place is in Greece and its homeland." And I think that's very important as we try to highlight how crucial it is to reunite the Parthenon Marbles, how crucial it is to reestablish the architectural integrity of both the Parthenon and the Acropolis, which is such an emblematic monument for so many countries. I mention it because it's a unique symbol of democracy in Greece. So that lady came here, I gave her a catalogue of the McCabe exhibition that gave character to the Consulate. And I think we gained one more tourist for Greece, because now she wants to go back to Greece and travel and enjoy these nice landscapes.

**V.R.:** What an extraordinary gesture! This is I think the best proof of what you did with this initiative is really working. I refer to the idea of the

Consulate General as an agora. This is what engages the public and creates an awareness that is really civic. What you just described is a momentum of an act that constitutes civic awareness. It's a symbol for the larger act of the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, as you well said. And that has to be done. I mean the civic act of bringing back the Parthenon Marbles and I hope this will be heard. So, I want to commend you on this initiative, and I want to congratulate you on this and many other initiatives that are so meaningful and truly civic. I also want to thank you very much, before I let you go, because I know you had a very long day today.

**S.E.:** It closes very well!

**V.R.:** Thank you! I just wanted to hear more about your passion as a photographer. So this passion of yours is so well displayed in this remarkable exhibition and stems from your own interest in photography, right?

**S.E.:** Yes, and I'm the curator of this exhibition and the Robert Mccabe Foundation let me pick up and select which photos I wanted to place on which of the walls. So that's what happened and I'm grateful for the freedom granted to me. That's my passion. This photography interest of mine started in Turkey when I was posted as a diplomat 15 years ago. My first professor of photography, I believe, was a Turkish friend of mine who showed me the basic stuff. And then I learned most of the things I know on my own. I think Turkey provides many opportunities to travel. And then I traveled a lot in Russia. I traveled in Greece and then my professional engagements and obligations didn't allow me very much to do what makes me happy. I mean, from time to time, I have done it here also in this city, in Boston, when it snows, when, during the pandemic, the city was an interesting object of photography. It all started with when a friend somehow scolded me by telling me, "You are a diplomat, you don't know even how to focus. You need to learn how to be a good photographer and how you will have unique opportunities to see landscapes, people and countries." So he kind of pushed me to learn how to use the medium and– you know–this is a very rewarding hobby.

**V.R.:** I'm so glad that you he pushed you in this direction. And the result was obvious from the wonderful curatorial project for you.

**S.E.:** Well, you know, one art takes you to another and then from photography you can move to painting because the rules of composition are the same. As you see here in the photographs of Santorini, one of the photographs is divided between almost one third and two thirds so you can see the wider sky. And when you see the round line that directs the eye from the right to upper part to the central bottom part. And then you see the object, which is the two boys situated on the left, which makes an impact. Note a lot would have been different if they were at the center of the photograph. But we have them on the left, so you can gaze and see the landscape. And this is an incredible composition. And the same rules of composition are in photography and the painting. And then you go to the other representatives of the arts which are sculpture and it goes on and on. It's a fascinating way to see things.

**V.R.:** And it's a fascinating note to close this interview on because what you just described is this

notion of media in flux, where the boundaries between the arts and the media that you so well describe are blurred. I'm so thankful that you gave us this opportunity. It has been really a great pleasure talking with you about this amazing exhibition, which is definitely–now I can say it for sure!–is considered a civic medium in flux.

**S.E.:** The pleasure is mine–and maybe once we should also invite Mr. Robert McCabe to join us and have his views on all this and other issues.

**V.R.:** Absolutely! I would really love to have a follow-up with him and have a discussion, all of us together.

**S.E.:** I'm trying to wrap up, but then there is always a reason to open up a new project. It's never-ending...

**V.R.:** I'm so grateful. Thank you so much and congratulations again on this wonderful initiative. And, of course, good luck with your new position!

**S.E.:** Thank you so much. All the best!

# “May 1968”: A Time Capsule for Citizenship and Participatory Democracy

by Dionysos Alexiou

"May 1968," both as a movement and as a scintillating buoy in the history of Westward-looking politics in postwar Europe, has achieved something very important: it taught people how to dream and how to plan a utopian, perhaps impossible, present and future, synonymous with changing the social values and reversing the status quo. Over and above its political import, "French May" has created a new culture, one of challenging the old ways and aiming at radicalization across almost all sectors of society the culture of a generation that spoke openly about rights and equality.

In November 2018, fifty years after the Paris events, Spyros Vrachoritis, in collaboration with Manos Karatzogiannis's "Stathmos" Theater, directed an exquisite, conceptually multi-layered performance [titled: "From Thucydides' Pericles' Funeral Oration to Debord's Panegyric. May 1968"], a stage happening imbued with unparallelled metatextuality and shocking timelessness. The meaningful sparks emitted from this on-stage project, that proposes substantial participatory democracy as the necessary basis for the sustainability of contemporary societies, ignite the puzzle put together by the risks of a latent democratic deficit.

Vrachoritis' performance engages with history to yield succinct messages that intrigue spectators to rethink the reception of anything that could be thought of or taken as "given," anything that is skilfully and politically branded as eternally "traditional," either willfully or unwittingly, with optimism or malevolence and/or ulterior motives.

In short, the performance urges you to consider the power of majority over minority and its relationship with fabricated, by and large deliberate or, at worst, socially "genic" demagogy.

Vrachoritis' performance, an amalgam of excerpts from Aristotle, Plato's *Ideal State* and Thucydides *Pericles's Funeral Oration* is filtered primarily through the lens of Castoriadis' who hovers overhead as though a historically driven drone, supervising a politically philosophical approach to the events; and, secondarily, through the lens of Vrachoritis himself, an eyewitness of May 1968 in Paris. This mosaic of outlooks comes to trigger a fruitful twirling in the mind, causing small vibrations like a string and producing a piercing sound, poignant enough to titillate us and awaken our critical thinking; to take us back to what "ought" to allegedly frighten us, which is to say back to reviewing and refashioning.

Without a doubt, "May 1968" has been an attempt at (re)socialization, albeit temporary, with an eye to challenging traditional and misconstrued ways. Such values as "freedom" and "democracy" are sewn together with sociality and citizenship and presented as the necessary ingredients for interaction between present-day historically "mature" societies. A set of sometimes obsessive, definitely deliberate references to the function of institutions within the first, real democracy in ancient Greece, proposed as seeds but not necessarily as models, betokens the need to go back and adjust these institutions to contemporary societies by way of an incubator aligned with the "principle of challenging."

This archetypal "direct democracy," as *modus operandi* and as convention in ancient Greece, reemerges much later during the 1776 American Revolution, but it also lies behind the causes of similar social revolts, mainly from within the labor movement. An example of practical application of "direct democracy" could be the well-known "Town Hall Meetings," originating in North

America. These meetings provided a channel of open communication and participatory involvement in public affairs. They were, more generally, a place and a way of bringing local authorities and elected politicians together with their electors either to address matters of common interest or to discuss specific legislations and regulations. This particular aspect was a vivid manifestation of the citizens' direct participation in local government and, *mutatis mutandis*, it could be elevated to Castoriadis concept of "self-management"; that is to say, a continuous process aimed to gradually change "basic," "constitutional," "statutory" laws (in other words, the state itself) and other institutions, in alignment with the prevailing needs and conditions. The citizens' involvement in this process creates the dynamics of an autonomous society wherein the results of the institutions' function are returned to the citizens themselves as co-deciders, participants and co-actors. In the case at hand, this viable puzzle of "direct democracy" must be imbued with the regular revocability of those in charge, in tandem with rotating tenure of syndicates to ensure polyphony and forthrightness among citizens in a democracy.

Through his dialogic performance, Vrachoritis appears to place great importance on this particular topic, insmuch as revocability curbs corruption and, if justice is actively applied, citizen participation grows apace because, on the one hand, citizens know that their request will at least be addressed and, on the other hand, they can be involved in the entire administrative environment, either state or local.

Therefore, by reaching a high level of involvement and healthy citizenship, a community can attain "self-governance," a two-pronged term of special significance. "Self-governance" should be understood primarily in terms of managing our perceptive ability and judgment, being as it is directly associated with discipline and (inter)action with society. Secondarily, the term encompasses the tendency of a society, as a given entity of persons involved in politics, to govern itself and consider itself an integrated political community. Sounds utopic? Hardly! All it takes is organization and an annotative mapping of actions.

But what exactly is this "direct democracy" intended to do? The answer is this: to apply solutions proposed by the community so as to reject policies bound to alienate structures–as long as the proportions of these communities are such as to allow an immediate application of self-governance and, therefore, maximize the citizens' involvement. A prime example of citizen involvement is the institutionalized use of referenda in Switzerland, in which citizens efficiently and effectively propose and/or approve amendments. Another example, which is in fact the other side of the coin, stems from the French presidential elections of May 1981, where the referendum, a communal expression, was used as a tool in the guise of pre-electoral commitment. More particularly, the pre-electoral agenda of the Socialist Party *(Parti Socialiste – Social-Écologie)* contained a pledge to curb the country's nuclear program until the French citizens could decide about it in a referendum. The referendum was eventually exposed as a fallacious argument for participatory democracy, part of Mitterand's pre-electoral manifesto that secured the support of the Left which, it must be said, had believed that Mitterand's positions, in tandem with the struggles of workers and the syndicates, would pave the path for radical change and open the democratic way to socialism. Regrettably, ideological proclamations for participatory democracy were replaced by "economic realism" of a clearly political value.

I do not have a liking for temporal and spatial shifts, nor for textual quotations; they do have a readerly appeal, but oftentimes become tiresome. Nevertheless, after Vrachoritis' minimalist dialogic approach, I have come to understand that the basis of participatory and direct democracy may well operate without hindrance in ancient Greece, but the survival of these institutions in local government in the U.S. to this day, with well-timed proposed reforms, clearly demonstrates that precisely the ideas of participatory and direct democracy have been rediscovered in the form of revocability of those in charge and their rotational tenure of office!

"Revocability" and "self-governance" are two interwoven concepts, the one being the other's requirement and prelude. Based on these two concepts, engaged citizens are separated into two categories: those believing that "self-governance" leads to "revocability," and those supporting the opposite, that "revocability" leads to "self-governance." The two schools of thought are reminiscent of Thucydides parabolic description of the two eternal antagonists in *Histories* [Book 1, 70.2 – 70.7]: the innovators and skillful ones, often lovers of revisionism, are juxtaposed against those sticking to what they have got, those accepting inherited values and norms, sometimes directives, by virtue of a–hopefully not autoimmune–*pop philosophy*.

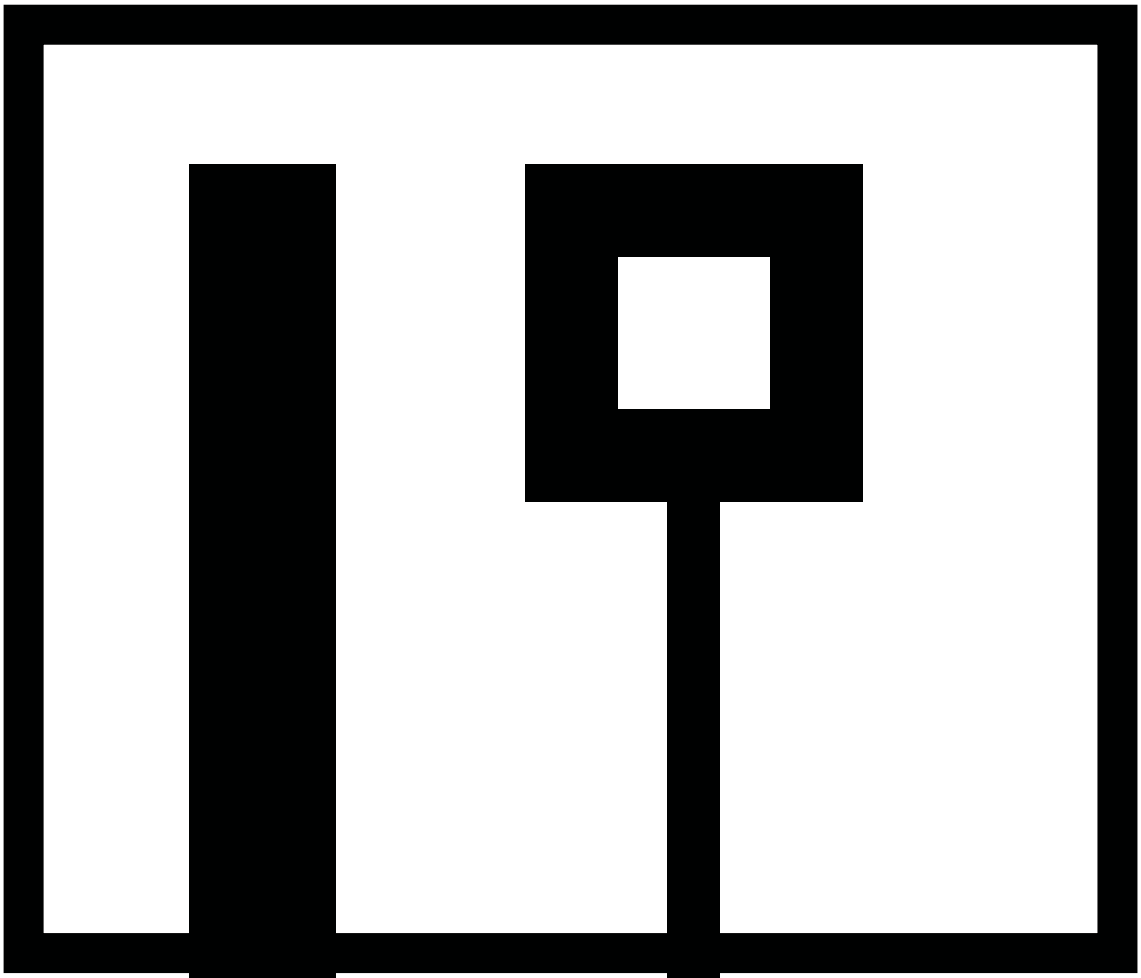
By revisiting the texts either used or implied by Vrachoritis in his project, through a particularly Daedalic juxtaposition, I was reminded that Castoriadis was intrigued by the binary perception of values and ideas in Western thought. For Castoriadis, the interstices between (a) the will to self-govern or at least to partially apply self-governance and (b) eventual political alienation as a result of "bureaucratic dictatorship" provide fertile ground for investigation. This latter term, somewhat vague, might as well be taken as a deliberate attempt to delay thought, reconsideration and revision. "Bureaucracy," either open or closed, visible or (mal)functioning, delays a person, keeps them in the waiting room until their "unruly" mind is assuaged, until they learn to accept the traditionally given and the eternally applicable! It discourages them from any change.

Bear in mind that the overall "system," or even values, are covered by a given logic. Therefore, if we wish to change something, we should cross over to "anti-logic" in search of "anti-reluctance." This may be achieved through a contemporary "direct" and participatory democracy!

"May 1968," through Vrachoritis directorial treatment, emerges as a satellite of postwar Western world, which has since been in orbit and, levitating, pushes us to question whether the new democracies are genuine, direct and participatory, or if they are, so to speak, "camouflaged liberal oligarchies." Even if this is truly the case, if new democracies are not entirely genuine, they still are the fruits of movements that have stimulated judgment, questioning and political scrutiny.

This text endeavors to stir the stagnant waters of a *polis*. I use the ancient Greek word for "city" as a group of people bearing a historical burden–which some seem to forget is also a cognitive *passe-partout* that unlocks *revision, "anti-logic," "anti-reluctance"* and *"critical thinking"* in order to attain *"self-governance"* through direct democracy.

*Note: A previous version of this article was posted here: Αλεξίου, Δ. (2022) «Μάης του '68»: μια χρονοκάψουλα για την πολιτειότητα και τη συμμετοχική δημοκρατία», Available at: https://parathyro.politis.com.cy/425469/article*



# SPACE

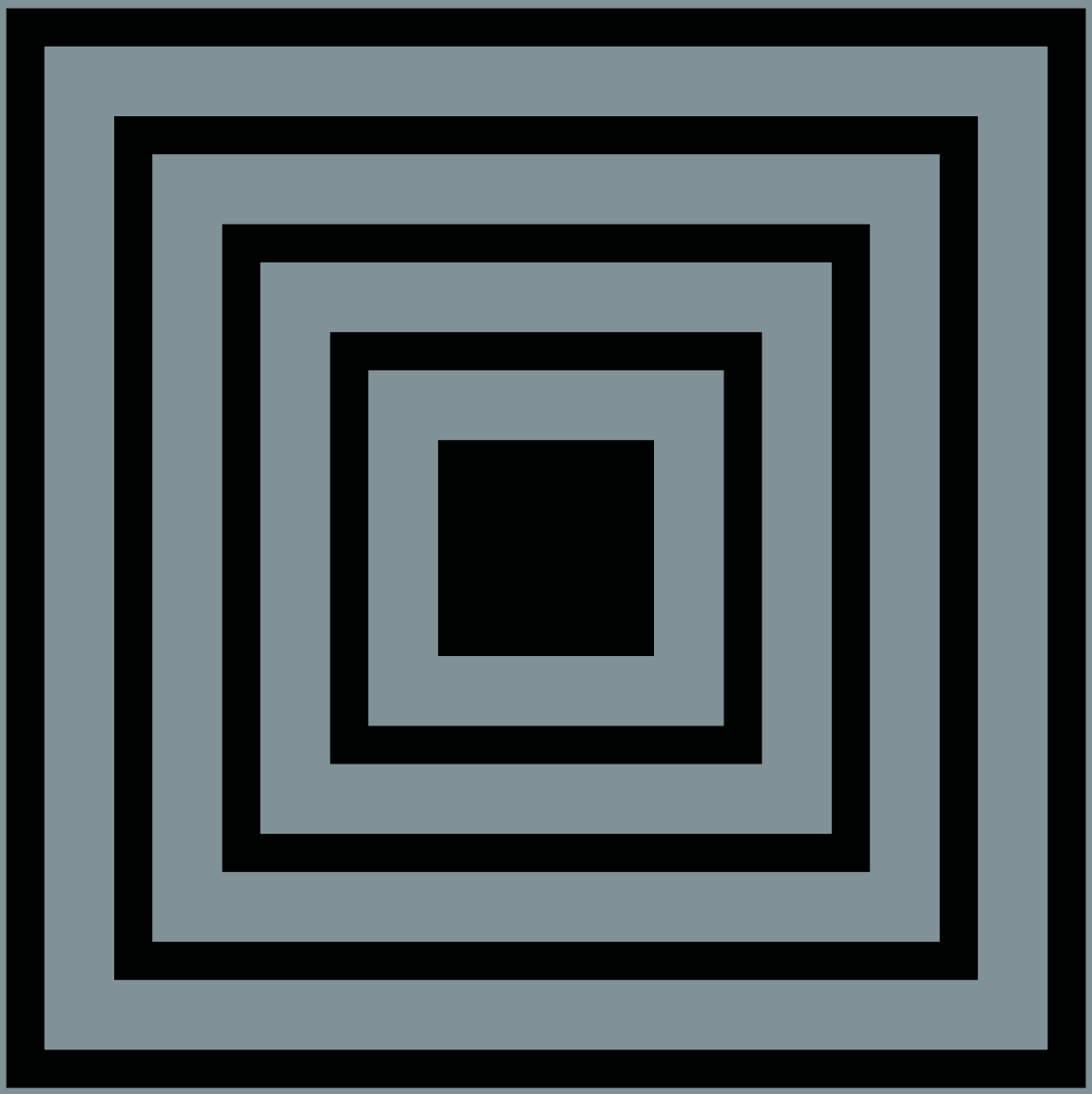
# —>

# NARRA

# -TIVES

# Techno-Voyeurism and the Illusion of Autonomy in Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*

by Andreas Foivos Apostolou



Weir's corpus as a director revolves around utopic/dystopic narratives, including pedagogical perspectives (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*, 1975, *Dead Poets Society*, 1989), technological perspectives (*Cars That Eat People*, 1974, *Mosquito Coast*, 1986), and ideological perspectives (*Gallipoli*, 1981, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, 1982, *The Way Back*, 2010). *The Truman Show* is the amalgamation of his critique of Western commercial media and his most celebrated film. Andrew Niccol's oeuvre as a screenwriter also deals with dystopic cyberpunk tropes, as demonstrated in his film *Gattaca* (1997).

*The Truman Show* tells the story of Truman ("true man") Burbank, a character living a neat, idyllic life in the town of Seahaven, a stereotypical white suburbia that replicates a 1950s American urbanist dream. Unbeknownst to him, he is being recorded and spectated as the central character of a reality show. Truman has been thoroughly objectified as a human experiment and even as a product himself, advertised by his close friends. After witnessing several strange, panoptic situations, he becomes increasingly suspicious and paranoid of his surroundings. Truman's world is shattered when he realizes that there is an invisible observer and powers of hegemony that he can't control. The film ends with Truman coming to terms with the futility of his life and walking away from a symbolic theatrical stage.

Weir is able to achieve a fusion of European auteur genre with New Hollywood American auteur genre. He creates a very powerful political critique of cyberculture and the inevitable implications of identity diffusion and alienation. Weir fulfils this vision by juxtaposing "realist" and "reflexive" textual systems, much like in Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd*, as well as "diegetic" and "extradiegetic" voyeuristic spectacle. In fact, both Weir and Kazan were successful in foreseeing the future of commodity-driven mass entertainment.

In this paper, I want to show how Truman embodies a panopticon subject with an illusion of autonomy. Also, how his façade is observed and reinforced by a consumerist techno-voyeristic audience. I will draw narrative connections with the hyperreal–specifically Michel Foucault's construction of the Panopticon. The protagonist is an unknowing performer and prisoner who is objectified and commodified as a product. I will also make a connection to Guy Debord's spectacle theory where the real, extradiegetic audience are omniscient observers of Truman's internal realization, and the hegemonic power structures that are controlling him. The superposition of diegetic and extradiegetic audiences reveals existential conflicts of power (hegemony, the invisible hand) and race (whiteness, normalcy, neo-urbanism). Finally, I will focus on Truman's resolve, a "baffle the paradigm" strategy where the hero exits the "game" and defeats the capitalist Leviathan, escaping the endless loop of consumerism and commodity fetishism.

The film had a box office revenue of $264 million and was not sold as a storyline (pitch), but as a complete script (spec)–an unusual move for a Hollywood production. To provide a complete historical picture, I will process reviews, interviews, books, journals relating to the film's critical reception, influence in popular culture, industrial business models, and scholarly bibliography relating to my theoretical stance.

## Reality TV and Techno-Voyeurism

During the production of *The Truman Show* (1998), and especially in the early 2000s, reality TV started dominating mainstream television programming by providing relatively inexpensive entertainment. Prime-time reality content, allowed producers to move away from the big budget sitcom formula. The kind of shows like *Big Brother* had a simple premise: individuals voluntarily placed themselves on public display. An average Joe or Jane could now become entertainers and influencers by forfeiting their rights to individual privacy.[1] The persistence of Reality TV shows well into the 2020s, shows that even today, surrendering solitary freedom is still perceived as a small price to pay for transient fame and possible monetary compensation. Reality TV marks a paradigm shift in entertainment. In the past, watching sitcoms was a one-way experience, whereas in reality shows the audience is allowed to directly participate from home and influence the creation of media content. The danger of this pseudo-interactive format, however, is the commodification of its viewers, who become panopticon subjects themselves. Many derivative shows, such as *The Bachelor* (2002), follow the same reality TV recipe, where following an alpha-male personality is at the forefront, and being single has become a marketable skill.

Around the same time *The Truman Show* was released, Hollywood saw an increase of reflexive critiques of surveillance and simulation. Movies such *The Matrix* (1998), *Ed TV* (1999)[2], *Vanilla Sky* (2001) and *Minority Report* (2002) draw clear distinctions between the real and the fake and lead the audience to an eventual "awakening."[3] Of course, this kind of reflexive critique can be traced back to Elia Kazan's revolutionary film *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), where Larry Rhodes, a folk singer is propped up by corporations, managers and agents to become a TV superstar. His fabricated populist persona is just a medium for companies to promote their products and for politicians to gain voters. In the end of the movie, an accidental audio transmission of Rhodes mocking his stupid, gullible viewers reveals him as a phony to millions of viewers who are faced with the harsh reality of mass corporate commodification. Kazan's criticism of capitalist consumer exploitation and his didactic Brechtian vision became a model for many utopic and dystopic films in the late 90s.

When writing the script of *The Truman Show*, Andrew Niccol had already worked on a similar film, *Gattaca* (1997), a cyberpunk sci-fi that focuses on the new values that technology and genetics are forcing on humanity. He initially wanted *The Truman Show* to take place on the Gattaca set version of Manhattan and to be far darker and Kafkaesque than the final version.[4] The film's producer, Scott Rudin was instantly enamored by Truman's story and how circumstances kept him down, where he

---

1. Papacharissi, Zizi, and Andrew L. Mendelson. "An Exploratory Study of Reality Appeal:Uses and Gratifications of Reality TV Shows." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 51, no. 2 (2007): 355-70.
2. Paradox and the Consumption of Authenticity through ... https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-abstract/32/2/284/1799132
3. King, Geoff. *The Spectacle of the Real: from Hollywood to Reality TV and Beyond.* Intellect, 2005.
4. Weinraub, Bernard. "Director Tries a Fantasy As He Questions Reality." *The New York Times,* The New York Times, 21 May 1998, https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/21/movies/director-tries-a-fantasy-as-he-questions-reality.html

had to break out of his mundane existence: "It was the escape fantasy that got to me. I found it tremendously moving."[5] He then showed the script to Peter Weir, who was immensely captivated by the freshness of the concept and dialogue. So the film was instantly bought as a spec and wasn't pitched. Weir was concerned with how metaphorical and surreal the script was and was initially hesitant. After meeting Jim Carrey in Los Angeles through Paramount and hearing him read the script, he decided to begin shooting. Paramount promoted the film in the *LA times*, TV and college campuses and the production was a box office success, with a box office revenue of $264 million and a production cost of $60 million.

*The Truman Show* resonated as a powerful story with worldwide audiences and was a critically acclaimed success. Peter Weir does an excellent job in bringing to life a highly complex script full of metaphors. One of the most essential metaphors in the film is the spectacle. Truman's life is continuously orchestrated by the director, Christof, who has autocratic control over the final visual product. It is helpful to think about *The Truman Show* in terms of Guy Debord's spectacle theory. In the 60s, he proposed that social reality is visually organized and that the modern media spectacle dispossesses humans of their powers of creative praxis and immerses them in a "wraparound imagistic consumerist environment that alienates them from real life"[6]. When Truman finds out that he is living in an enormous dome/TV stage and his life is being observed as a spectacle, he immediately dissociates himself from this reality. In fact, "Truman syndrome" was coined as a term by popular media to describe the sense of alienation of long-term reality show participants.

An earlier example of a voyeuristic spectacle is the sitcom *Ozzie and Harriet* (1952–1966). It was very successful, running from 1952 to 1966, and it blurred the line between fiction and reality, much like the *Truman Show*. The show first appeared as a radio show in 1944, where Ozzie and Harriet played themselves and actors portrayed their children. In 1949, their real sons, David and Ricky, joined the radio show, and the whole family transitioned into television. The Nelsons' television home was a replica of their real Hollywood home and their children grew up before the eyes of an audience. Peter Jones, the writer of a documentary about the Nelsons, talks about how they could be very personal and intimate, because there was this strange safety created by cameras and lights. "They were struggling to be real themselves, through the unreality of television. This is what they knew. They were struggling to escape this candy-coated, white-picket-fence version of themselves because they knew it wasn't true." In other words, the Nelsons felt that *Ozzie and Harriet* not only controlled their lives, but left them confused about their own reality.[7] One might say that the Nelsons were suffering from acute dissociation, similar to the "Truman syndrome."

---

5. ibid.
6. King, p.77.
7. Weinraub, Bernard. "Dousing the Glow Of TVs First Family; Time for the Truth About Ozzie and Harriet." *The New York Times*, 18 June 1998, https://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/18/arts/dousing-the-glow-of-tv-s-first-family-time-for-the-truth-about-ozzie-and-harriet.html

The clever cinematography of *The Truman Show* constantly reinforces a voyeuristic Peeping-Tom-like fetish that renders us paranoid. Seahaven is filled with microscopic state-of-the-art cameras, that are placed in any place imaginable in order to provide multiple angles of Truman's life. Camera shots where the field of view is narrow or seen through glasses and other materials give the impression of undercover CIA surveillance tech. Even Truman's most intimate moments are juxtaposed with voyeuristic shots from hidden cameras. During a fight with Truman and his wife, Meryl, the scene cuts to Truman shouting at her, as seen from a camera hidden inside her earring. All the footage recorded by these tiny invisible cameras is then compiled and processed within the omnicam ecosphere, a giant control room within the fake moon of Seahaven. This room is essentially a highly advanced cyber-voyeuristic panopticon and serves as a meta-critique of directing, where Christof is Peter Weir, something the director himself confirmed: "I probably see something of myself in the director".[8]

With the domestication of video recording technology and new tech, the reality TV phenomenon paves its way for a global culture of techno-voyeurism and exhibitionism. Everyone can record themselves and become content creators, possibly even celebrities. By uploading "stories," videos and pictures on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, anyone can create their own reality show. The pursuit of social media fame has become a modern-day ethos. Highly addictive techno-voyeurism and narcissism has become endemic to the modern interactive spectacle.

## Truman as Panoptic Subject

*The Truman Show* is filmed in such a way that we constantly feel like we are being watched by an unknown and omnipotent observer. Near the middle of the film, a hidden control room is revealed, inside a giant fake moon. It is the 221st floor of the OmniCam Ecosphere. That's where we'll find the "world's greatest televisionary, the designer and architect of the world within a world that is Seahaven Island: Christof",[9] played by Ed Harris. He is a superstar auteur who ironically, cares a lot about his own personal privacy: "We know how demanding your schedule is and we all know how jealously you guard your privacy."[10] Later in the film, Christof demands that any unpredictable behavior has to be reported to him. He has total control and authority over Truman's reality.

Foucault's panopticon is a great tool to describe Christof and the OmniCam control center as a whole. Originally coined by Jeremy Bentham in 1785, the panopticon is a system for surveilling prisoners. Such an "architectural structure would function primarily through the inability of any one inmate to not be seen as a consequence of the stra-

8. "Peter Weir on 'The Truman Show' and Musics Role in Film." *Classical KUSC*, 8 Aug. 2018, https://www.kusc.org/podcast/peter-weir-on-the-truman-show-and-musics-role-in-film/
9. ibid.
10. *"The Truman Show", Shooting Draft, by Andrew M Niccol,* https://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/the-truman-show_shooting.html

tegic placement of the guards/observers in centralized and elevated positions."[11] This system of discipline is most effective when prisoners know they are being watched, but are unaware of the precise angle or vantage point from which they are being watched. This uncertainty lies within Truman's paranoia, as well as our panoptic postmodern surveillance society. With observers virtually everywhere, one cannot assume that they are in a private sphere at any time, and thus, Bentham theorized, "the prisoners would begin to self-regulate, producing a self-propelling machine of fear, paranoia, and *watchedness*".[12] Foucault used this theory as a basis in his influential book *Discipline and Punish* (1977), where he investigates systems of power through the panopticon. He concluded that those in charge of institutions of power have an ultimate goal to maximize subservience and to minimize protest and unruliness.

Truman is a panopticon subject, only not as a prisoner. He hasn't committed any crime, but was subjugated at birth to live a Sisyphean life with no inherent meaning. In a way, his predicament is very similar to ours. In the cyberage, internet users unwittingly share their tracking data and other information about consumer preferences. This data is then traded for ad revenue and profit. Mark Andrejevic calls this phenomenon "free labor,"[13] because data generated by an individual is exploited by companies for profit. Internet users are panopticon subjects, much like Truman. The true nature of who is watching us is also unclear, especially considering how "Big Data," global user data, is so immensely huge that Silicon Valley companies need intricate algorithms to interpret it. Edward Snowden exposed the NSA program Prism, which is a precursor of mass-surveillance algorithms. Seahaven is a great allegory for the virtual construct we live in today.

The diegetic audience in *The Truman Show* is a crucial element in Truman's life. It embodies the modern capitalist Leviathan that keeps the show running and also us, an audience witnessing this intrusive voyeurism. We are passively participating in Peter Weir's metacommentary.

## Seaheaven: Images of White Suburbia

The set of *The Truman Show* is filmed on the Gulf Coast of Florida, in Seaside. This area's architecture is heavily influenced by New Urbanism, a movement in the twentieth century based on the cultural typologies of the New England pastoral.[14] The line between Truman's faux cinematic community of Seahaven and the hyperreality of developer Robert Davis's Seaside is nearly invisible.[15] Truman's Seahaven is an idealized conglomera-

11. Lavoie, Dusty. "Escaping the Panopticon: Utopia, Hegemony, and Performance in Peter Weirs The Truman Show." *Utopian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2011, pp. 52-73.
12. ibid.
13. Andrejevic, Mark B. "Surveillance and Alienation in the Online Economy." *Surveillance & Society,* vol. 8, no. 3, 2010, pp. 278-287., doi:10.24908/ss.v8i3.4164.
14. Wortham, Galvin, B.D. "The Fabrication of Place in America: The Fictions and Traditions of the New England Village." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*. Spring 2010, Vol. 21, No. 2. 29.
15. Ibid 27.

tion of urban and suburban benefits[16]–a fusion of walkable neighborhoods and New England suburban homes with beautiful gardens and plenty of space. The sensationalized appearance of Truman's house resembles the dream house of someone living in the 1950s who wants to retire with their children in a perfect home that is not completely remote from commercial civilization.

Postcards from the 1950s with views of Los Angeles were used as a model for the aesthetic of the film. Painted 2D images, such as cloud layers, were wrapped inside a virtual sphere with CG, in order to look distorted and artistically designed.[17]

The visual effects are very subtle, but support the story and characters to a great extent. Originally, the visual concept of *The Truman Show* was going to be photorealistic and containing credible images. However, Peter Weir conveyed to the Visual FX crew that he was after a hyperreality. The bright costume design and exaggerated lighting in the cinematography is a reflection of this hyperreal world. The CG environment is very effective in portraying a synthetic, perfect world that gives the impression of intelligent design. Visual Effects Supervisor Craig Barron was faced with the challenge of creating VFX that felt both undetectable, like an illusion and stylized. This led to artistic choices, such as having lush and pastel color palettes, a strange blue ocean, and excessive fill light. Whenever there are wide-angle shots of Seaheaven, the horizon is angled and gives the impression of a smaller place than the real world, like a little domed city.[18] These little details function as a foretelling that Truman is living in a microcosm.

The little homes of Seaside, Florida, had to be transformed into four-story buildings and include a downtown section. All of this was achieved with a close synergy between the on-set design and VFX teams. Production designer Dennis Gasser designed the downtown using CAD; he would then give the plans to the construction people to build the first story of the buildings. After that, the VFX team had to transform them into bigger buildings, and add texture and detail.

The design of the dome was particularly challenging, as Peter Weir wanted an enormous structure that looks 1.5 miles high and 3 miles wide. In the film, aerial shots of the dome reveal that it is visible from space. This effectively reinforces the idea of a giant dystopian panoptikon looming over Seahaven.

## The Myth of Autonomy and Male-Dominated Environments

When Truman goes missing, the OmniCam control room turns into a giant flashlight to look for him. Christof exclaims, "I have given Truman the chance to lead a normal life. The world is a sick place." Seaheaven is Christof's auteur utopia and

16. Kates, Ronald. "New Urbanism Meets Cinematic Fantasyland: Seaside, "The Truman Show", and New Utopias". Studies in Popular Culture, October 2000, Vol. 23, No. 2 (October 2000), pp. 93-98.
17. "The Truman Show–Visual Effects Featurette." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-zkVOp26y4
18. ibid.

Peter Weir's dystopia. Truman sets his mind to escape from Seahaven and defy the invisible hegemony that imprisoned him.

"Baffle the paradigm" is a concept used by Roland Barthes to describe walking away from the game, exiting the stage door: "the only possible way to defeat hegemony, ending its circulatory, self-propagating nature."[19] Truman Burbank decides to baffle the paradigm, because he sees no other way out of Seahaven and the endless cycle of constant surveillance. He tries to escape with a boat, despite his fear of the water. While sailing to his freedom, Christof tries to drown him with a huge artificial wave. Truman survives and then looks up in the sky and addresses Christof as a Promethean figure: "Is this all you can do?" To which Christof answers, "I am the creator of a show that gives hope, joy and inspiration to millions of people." Truman proceeds by exiting the stage and sending his farewell to the diegetic audience of *The Truman Show*.

Truman's realization of the exploitative nature of consumerism is a theme present in *A Face in the Crowd* (1957). In a similar way, Elia Kazan's film "indicts the interrelated political, economic, and institutional components of the culture industry and its ultimate reinforcement of consumer capitalism under the guise of populist entertainment."[20] In Truman's case, we can only hope that his torment ends when he steps out of the set. However, the whole movie gives the impression of a dystopic, autocratic world that is controlled by corporations. Baffling the paradigm only offers temporary freedom, but, in reality, total autonomy is an illusion.

Christof is clearly an archetypal patriarchal figure that exerts his power and control in all facets of Truman's life. Even at birth, Christof placed cameras in the womb of Truman's mother. At that moment, he turns Truman's world into a disembodied, mediated, male-dominated space.[21] The only main female figure, Truman's wife, Meryl, is a hyperreal representation of a 50s white suburban housewife. She is always overly enthusiastic, is obsessed with cooking and house chores and is, to put it plainly, dumb. All the products Meryl promotes are household products that a stereotypical housewife would need. Her hyperreal persona seems clearly fabricated by a man, Christof. As Jennifer Hammett points out, "There is a complete absence of maternal figures"[22] in Christof's world. Christof is an oppressive figure that denies femininity and creates a male-dominated space in order to control Truman and suppress his true nature.

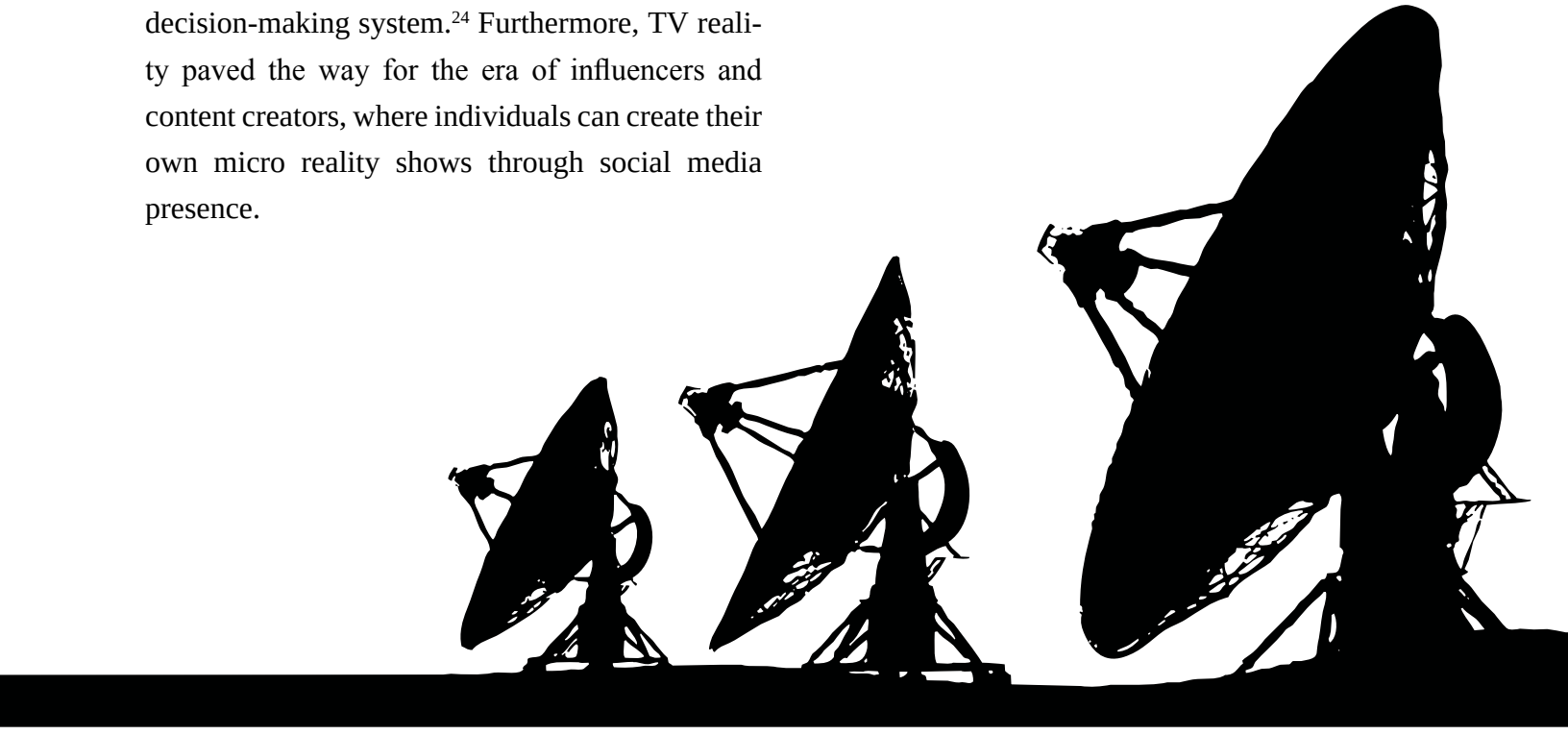
## Truman Show: A Prophetic Paradigm of Cybersurveillance

Weir's *The Truman Show* is a reflexive critique on surveillance, voyeurism and the illusion of auton-

19. Lavoie, p. 70.
20. Mann, Denise. "Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover." University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Chapter 7: A Face in the Crowd: Reframing Reflexivity. 169-191.
21. Hammett, Jennifer. "'You Never Had a Camera Inside My Head': The Masculine Subject of the Postmodern Sublime." *Criticism*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2003, p. 85.
22. Ibid 86.

omy in a capitalist society with constantly evolving technologies. Reality TV portended many of the future developments that are now prevalent in the 21st century. Already, during the film's release in 1998, tech giants were starting to emerge as powerhouses by offering us access to "free entertainment" in exchange for surveilling us, in order to capture and commodify our consumer data. *The Truman Show* predicted many of these later developments.

Truman is a performer, unknowingly, who is also a prisoner bound by the constraints of panoptic hegemony.[23] Christof, symbolizes an omnipotent autocratic power, very similar to modern-day automated surveillance: a ubiquitous data-driven decision-making system.[24] Furthermore, TV reality paved the way for the era of influencers and content creators, where individuals can create their own micro reality shows through social media presence.



23. Lavoie, Dusty. "Escaping the Panopticon: Utopia, Hegemony, and Performance in Peter Weirs The Truman Show." *Utopian Studies,* vol. 22, no. 1, 2011, pp. 63.
24. Andrejevic, Mark. "Automating Surveillance." *Surveillance & Society*, vol. 17, no. 1/2, 2019, pp. 7-13.

# NARRA
# -TIVES
# IN
# FLUX

# ...But I Hear Her

by Christa Oliver, Swati Kshama Rani, Vassiliki Rapti,
Betsy Salerno, Hannah Trivilino and children
Asha Kshama Mehta, Eliana Torres, and Katerina Triantafyllou

**Fig. 1-3. But I Hear Her mother daughter collaboration videos.**

## Introduction

*But I Hear Her* is a mutating installation that gives shape to the unique fluxes of time, bodies, space, and narratives that emerged in the Covid pandemic. Working under a framework of civic media as people's media, we posit a responsibility and duty to foreground the perspectives of mothers, children, and caretakers in our civic media lens. We find this centering to be particularly important in the context of the Covid pandemic given caretakers' unique vulnerability and marginalization at this time. *But I Hear Her* holds lives in flux born from the pandemic and attempts to further the civic by building media spaces that listen to mothers and caretakers and invest in children's creativities. The following piece introduces *But I Hear Her* and the conceptual origins for the piece; shares pictures of the project's mother-daughter collaboration videos and the installation's physical manifestation; describes audience engagement with *But I Hear Her*; and presents *But I Hear Her* as a living media archive of civic life in flux.

## Project Abstract:

*But I Hear Her* is a multi-media, interactive sculpture and audio experience that explores dimensions of mothering, care, solidarity, and collective pain/healing during the Covid pandemic; centers the knowings and creativities of daughters; and offers opportunities for families to practice co-creation with their children. The project aims to honor mothers and caretakers' labor, energy, and love by creating artistic avenues that listen to and share their stories and through creating structures that nurture futures rooted in care. The installation was created by Christa Oliver, Swati Kshama Rani, Vassiliki Rapti, Betsy Salerno, Hannah Trivilino, and children Asha Kshama Mehta, Eliana Torres, and Katerina Triantafyllou. *But I Hear Her* debuted in *The Anthropology of Motherhood* exhibit in Pittsburgh's Three River's Arts Festival in June 2022. *Anthropology of Motherhood: Culture of Care* is founded and curated by Fran Flaherty and co-curated by Dr. Amy Bownman-McElhone.

## Project's Conceptual Origins

*But I Hear Her* was born from a nexus of fluxes in public health, vinyl/media, and time passing modalities. Below, project creator Hannah Trivilino explains how these interfacing transmutations led to the development of *But I Hear Her.*

***Note:** *But I Hear Her's name hails from a lyric on the scratched Teddy Bear record (see below), as this sonic transmutation inspired the conceptual origins for the project.*
*While the name references this lyric, But I Hear Her also hears them, hears zir, hears him, hears us– we aspire to hear all who practice care.*

# Caretaking, Transmutation, Solidarity: *A Choral Installation in Flux*

Hannah Trivilino

When the Covid lockdown started, my job training high school students in dialogue facilitation suddenly stopped. In my first week of lockdown, I used my new free time to listen to a large pile of my grandparents' records to search for interesting loops from scratches. I found a loop on one 45 to be particularly intriguing. The loop repeated:

> *"and sometimes we were crying*
> *sometimes we were crying*
> *sometimes we were crying"*

I wanted to know where the original context for this phrase came from so looked up the song, which was called "Teddy Bear" by Red Sovine. I was surprised to learn it was a spoken word, truck driving story (as this was completely unlike the rest of my grandparents' records) and even more surprised to learn the song never actually says the phrase "sometimes we were crying." The lyrics instead–while describing a boy's widowed mother–read:

> *"she says not to worry*
> *that we'll make it alright*
> *but I hear her cryin'*
> *sometimes late at night"*

I was moved by the ways the record scratch inadvertently transformed a moment of maternal isolation and struggle into a collective cry–sometimes **we** were crying–and wondered what it would look like to create a praxis of this transformation via artistic translation. In imagining what it might sound like if Teddy Bear's mother was afforded space to process her experience in community–if *"but I hear her cryin' / sometimes late at night"* could become just "...but I hear her." I pictured an audio constellation of people sharing their experiences practicing mothering and/or other forms of caretaking devalued by systems of patriarchy during the Covid pandemic. This collection of stories[1] would play both over each other to create a collective chorus and individually to bear witness to the stories that may otherwise be lost to an isolated "crying late at night" realm.

I also imagined these stories having a cumulative / multiplying effect. While discussing representation and the importance of sharing one's story during a *Decolonizing Feminism* panel I attend a few years ago at Harvard Divinity School, Thenmozhi Soundararajan discussed the ways in which "[theorizing] your own freedom" leads one to "free so many others as well." Understanding the ways in which sharing your story frees others to do this same, I sequenced *But I Hear Her*'s audio stories to multiply over time to offer a counter-experience to the physical isolations born from Covid's virality; if you visit *But I Hear Her* over a series of days, you will find more and more stories added as the installation continues. I also invite those who visit the installation to contribute their stories to the project as well.

1. Two years after conceptualizing *But I Hear Her*, I learned that my friend (composer "sous chef") had created an open-source, archival Covid Diaries project at the beginning of the lockdown. Some of the audio pieces that play in *But I Hear Her* were offered to the project by sous chef and his collaborating musicians and storytellers. To learn more about sous chef' s *The Covid Diaries* project, please visit https://theCoviddiaries.bandcamp.com/

I regard continuous integration of stories to *But I Hear Her* as nurturing a version of Assata Shakur's framework of "r/evolution" from her piece "R/evolution Is Love." As the "Teddy Bear" record r/evolves around the turntable–at once both stuck on its repeating *"sometimes we were crying"* loop and evolving the song's original isolation to this solidarity; mutating like the *ouroboros* who eats its tail in self regeneration–it invites change in service of life. In *Gossips, Gorgons, and Crones*, Jane Caputi reminds us that "we can learn to retell," that we can practice "remembering and inventing other stories that are strong enough to invoke a wholly other world out of the ashes of the nuclear fatherland," that "there are wholly other stories." Growing opportunities for listening and sharing from our wholly other stories can invite such wholly other worlds.

At the end of the previously mentioned *Decolonizing Feminism* panel, Patricia Hill Collins shared that "the biggest gift that you can give someone, the best resource you can give someone is the love to sustain, so they can imagine something different for themselves." Such love must of course occur structurally, such as through the implementation of policies that facilitate life and additional interventions that our political system too often fails to do. In the absence of life–sustaining social structures, mothers and caretakers relentlessly create endless ways to give others the love to sustain–through art, through building a culture that foregrounds care, through creating space to listen, and to share. As I imagine what it might have felt like for the mother in "Teddy Bear" to have had her tears held by community, I picture this care giving her the love to sustain. My hope is that *But I Hear Her*'s collective chorus affirms what mothers and caretakers have always known to be true and offers love that positions those suffering to imagine something different for themselves. R/evolution is love.

## Centering Daughters' Creativities

As the Teddy Bear lyrics share the story of hidden tears shed in isolation, *But I Hear Her* asks: How do we create futures where such tears can be held by community? How do we grow a culture that–like the scratched "Teddy Bear" record–transforms *"but I hear her cryin' / sometimes late at night"* into *"sometimes **we** were crying,"* a collective cry? How do we foreground care? How do we shift *"but I hear her cryin' / sometimes late at night"* into "but I hear her."?

We see one path towards this future as coming from creating space for mothers and caretakers to share their experiences so they do not have to only process challenging experiences privately. We also believe in the importance of parents listening to their children as one of many ways to cultivate humans who are oriented towards care. Believing that children naturally posture themselves toward care (and only become distanced from these practices when socially constructed harshnesses–structural oppressions, colonizations, exploitations, greed, dominations, etc.– disincentivize caretaking), we propose that nurturing children's imaginations and validating children's creativities offers an antidote to potential future behaviors of carelessness/harm.

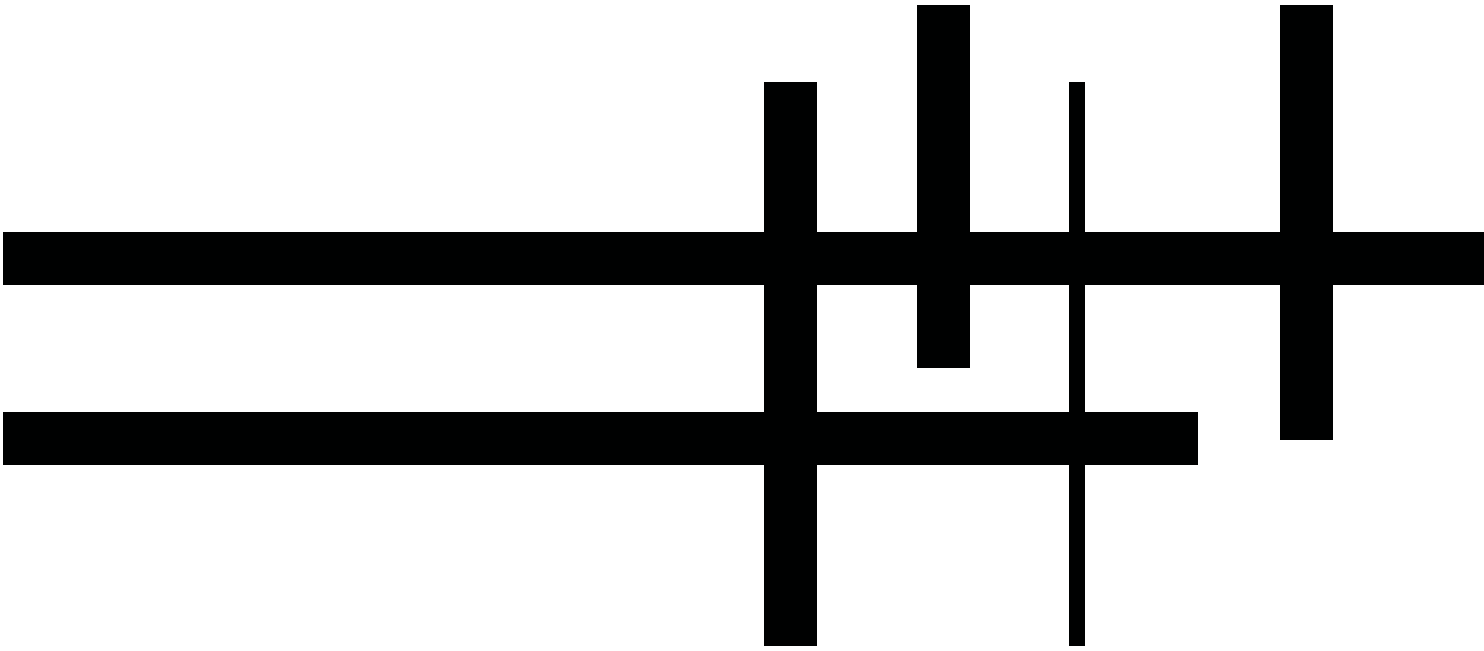
To center on children's creativities, *But I Hear Her* featured a series of video pieces created by mothers in collaboration with their daughters.

Inspired by *But I Hear Her* co-curator Vassiliki Rapti's *A Child's Resistance* project, in which Rapti wrote a series of poems responding to prompts given to Rapti by her daughter Katerina Triantafyllou, *But I Hear Her* co-curators Christa Oliver and Swati Kshama Rani additionally co-created artistic pieces with their daughters Eliana Torres and Asha Kshama Mehta.

Christa Oliver and Eliana Torres perform a dance titled *Rooted In Love*, which they choreographed together (filmed by Ana Baer Carrillo). Oliver and Torres additionally shared a video of the two of them dancing in their living room to inspire other parents and children to create moments to dance with each other. Swati Kshama Rani and Asha Kshama Mehta's piece, *Witnessing Through Water and Play*, uses water to connect ancestors, Mother Earth, and Mehta's play to study of the pandemic. *Witnessing Through Water and Play* is themed around Rani and Mehta's five nodes of creativity: connecting, playing, problem solving, witnessing, and learning. Vassiliki Rapti and Katerina Triantafyllou read *A Child's Resistance* over a collection of photos and artwork created by the women of Rapti's family. Rapti additionally shared poems she wrote about her own mother on the installation's shrine.

*But I Hear Her* features these practices of mothers creating from a place inspired by their children to center the dual importance of both listening to the experiences of mothers and designing a world imagined by children when dreaming healthier futures. In Assata Shakur's "R/evolution is Love" (mentioned in Trivilino's conceptual origins), Shakur commands that "r/evolution means respecting and learning from your children." This tenant is central to *But I Hear Her*'s mother-daughter collaboration videos.

Below, Oliver, Rani, and Rapti share the context for their collaboration pieces.



# Rooted In Love

Christa Oliver and Eliana Torres

My daughter Eliana and I choreographed *Rooted In Love* together, which was filmed by my collaborator Ana Baer Carrillo. We filmed a second video of us dancing to James Brown in our living room. We dance together often and encourage other families to do the same. The following images are stills from the *Rooted in Love* choreography:

**Fig. 4.** Rooted In Love.

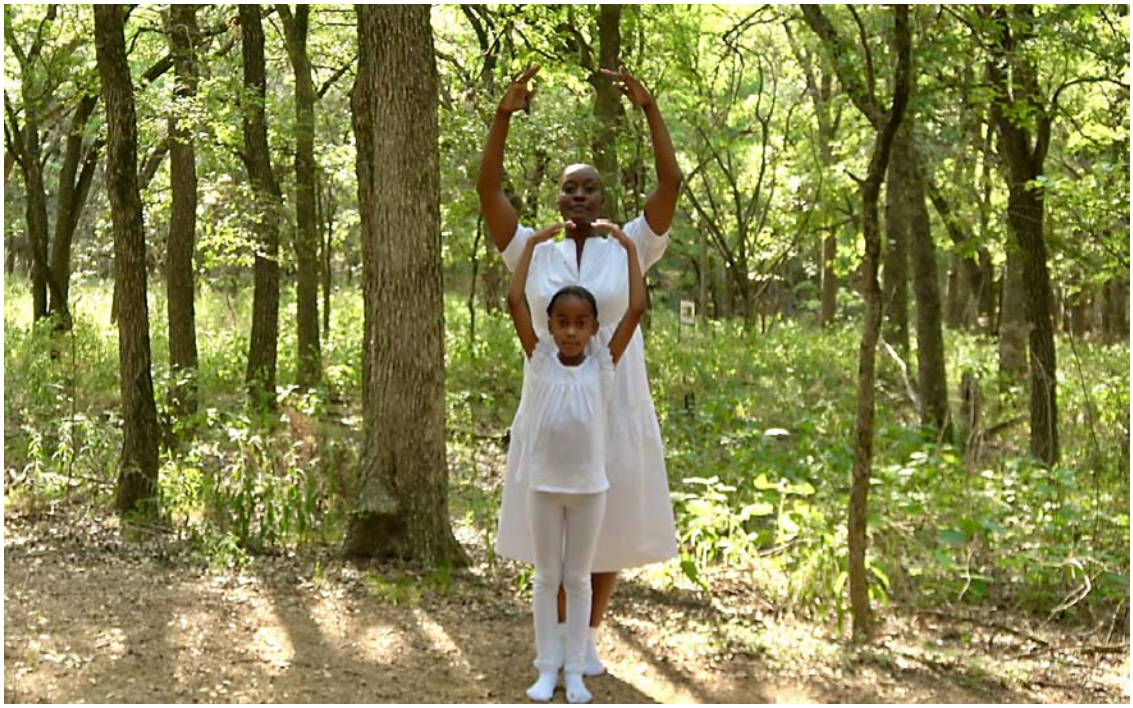


**Fig. 5.** Rooted In Love.

**Fig. 6-7.** Rooted In Love.

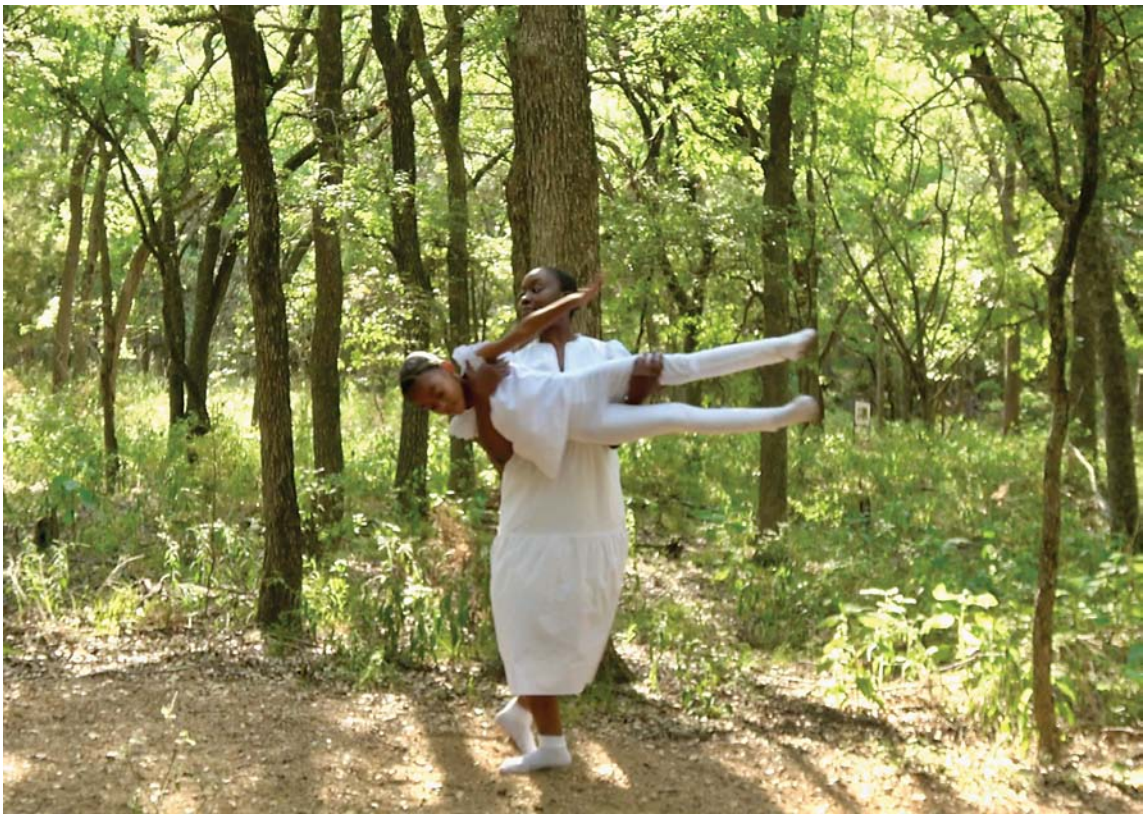


**Fig. 8.** Rooted In Love.

**Fig. 9-10.** Rooted In Love.

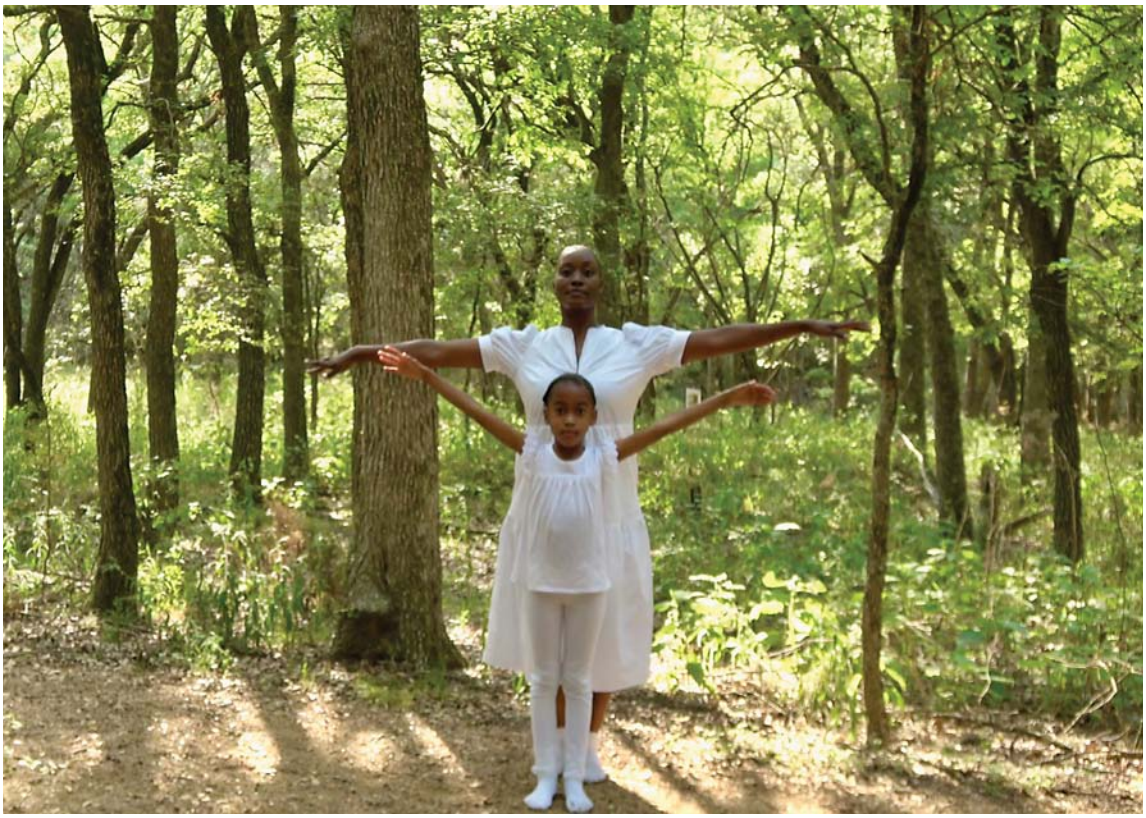


**Fig. 11.** Rooted In Love.

# Witnessing Through Water and Play

Swati Kshama Rani and Asha Kshama Mehta

When we witness children, we hand back power. Observations that are not about control invite play. My daughter has taught me so much about being more present to life through play. Our favorite element to play with is water. This montage was designed through the idea of choosing five words, recording five video clips, and extracting five themes that synthesize our play pedagogy during the pandemic.


**Fig. 12-13.** "Connecting" from Witnessing Through Water and Play.


**Fig 14-16.** "Playing" from Witnessing Through Water and Play.


**Fig. 17-18.** “Problem Solving” from Witnessing Through Water and Play.



**Fig. 19-21.** “Witnessing” from Witnessing Through Water and Play.


**Fig. 22-23.** “Learning” from Witnessing Through Water and Play.

# “To Laugh, to Seek, to Find, and not to Yield”: The Unending Co-creative Process Between Mothers and Daughters

Vassiliki Rapti and Katerina Triantafyllou

In our family, we were 7 women–no boys. My father was a migrant worker–*Gastarbeiter*–in Germany for a decade when we were young, so really we were surrounded by female presence, including two grandmothers. My mother was a trailblazer for us, a force of nature, a community healer. Part of the magic of her healing practice was her emphasis on laughter, a visceral laughter that emptied us out of all worries and fortified the bonds among us. After each session of the game "Are we laughing now?" Which she had herself invented, we were reborn! It consisted of simple instructions, resembling a ritual. We would form a circle holding hands, then we would dance while waiting to hear our mother's prompt *"Are we laughing now?"* to start laughing thunderously–piercing the silence of the Meteora–as I wrote in one of my poems, the Meteora being these huge granite rocks in Thessaly, not far away from our area, where monastic life has thrived for centuries. Our mother's energy was viral. Our laughter was birthing a motion of joy. Gone were the feelings of insecurity, gone was the feeling of our father's absence. Little did we know then that laughter was our mother's "mask" of pain transformed into solace/refuge.

No doubt, that's were the first seeds of my long-life research interest in laughter and play were sown. Now I know for sure why I claim with Eric Gordon, my co-editor of *Ludics: Play as Humanistic Inquiry*, that play is an antidote in dark times. I returned to the "Are we laughing now?" game again during the Covid years to play it with my daughter Katerina to overcome stress. We would start with it and then we would enhance it with facial grimaces, and then we would add some obstacles such as "resist laughter as much as you can," only to laugh even more thunderously than my mother did. My inspiration to work with kids comes from my work with my mother as she had hers. It's the only way to resist adversities in one's life. We all had gone through great grief; nothing was easy. But love and care and laughter united us and created a huge bond. It's this legacy from generation to generation, tying one another together.

A similar bonding process was also happening with family textiles. A big part of our tradition, woven with storytelling throughout all its phases: from gathering the wool from the sheep, washing it, and molding it with our little hands, forming it into strands ready for the traditional loom where my mom would patiently create her masterpieces with the help of us all–her six daughters, who were also concurrently initiated in the art of storytelling. She would show us the patterns that would go to the loom and would explain to us which threads we should use, row by row with our little hands, until a colorful patchwork would appear on the loom. How I loved sitting next to my mother back then! We would take breaks to laugh and ask her more questions that she always would patiently answer, stirring our imagination and our thirst for more stories; stories she had learned from her mother and grandmother: seven Penelopes weaving until Father Ulysses would come back. It was an incredible way of bonding as a family. And so text also comes to me in that way: *textile and text*.

I created *A Child's Resistance* as a series of poems inspired by prompts given to me by my daughter, Katerina, under various circumstances. It's a work in progress that brings inspiration to both of us. What I learned from this process is that children have an incredible capacity for leading us

to self-discovery. Their unique sensitivity to their surroundings brings the world upside down within us. It's not that you rediscover the lost innocence of childhood but, like a bolt of lightning, it opens a crack to a path towards your own identity, towards self-knowledge. That's why I like replacing Lord Alfred's Tennyson's famous line from his *Ulysses*, "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," with "to *laugh*, to seek, to find, and not to yield," which captures the unending process of creation between mothers and daughters!

**Fig. 24.** By Maria Rapti from A Child's Resistance.

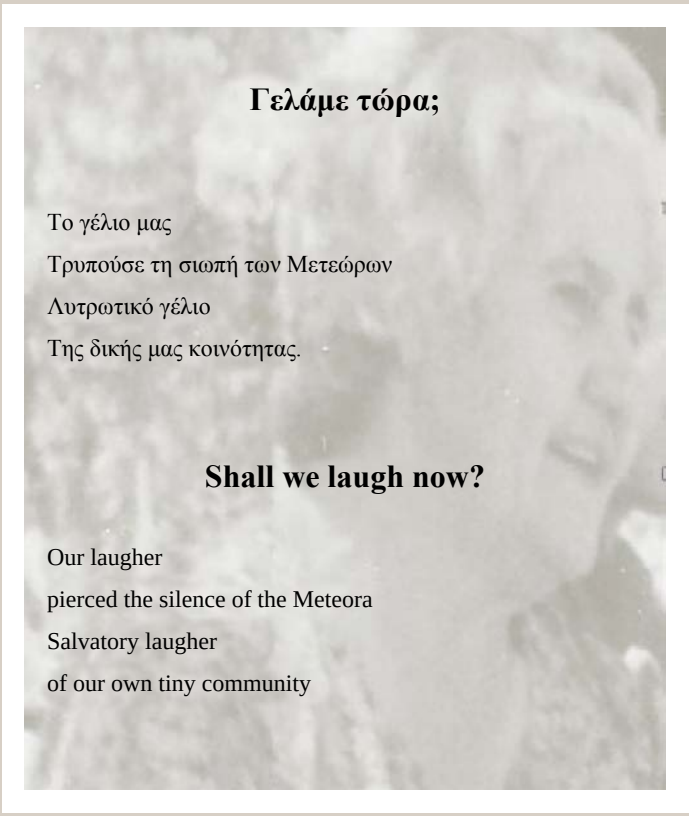
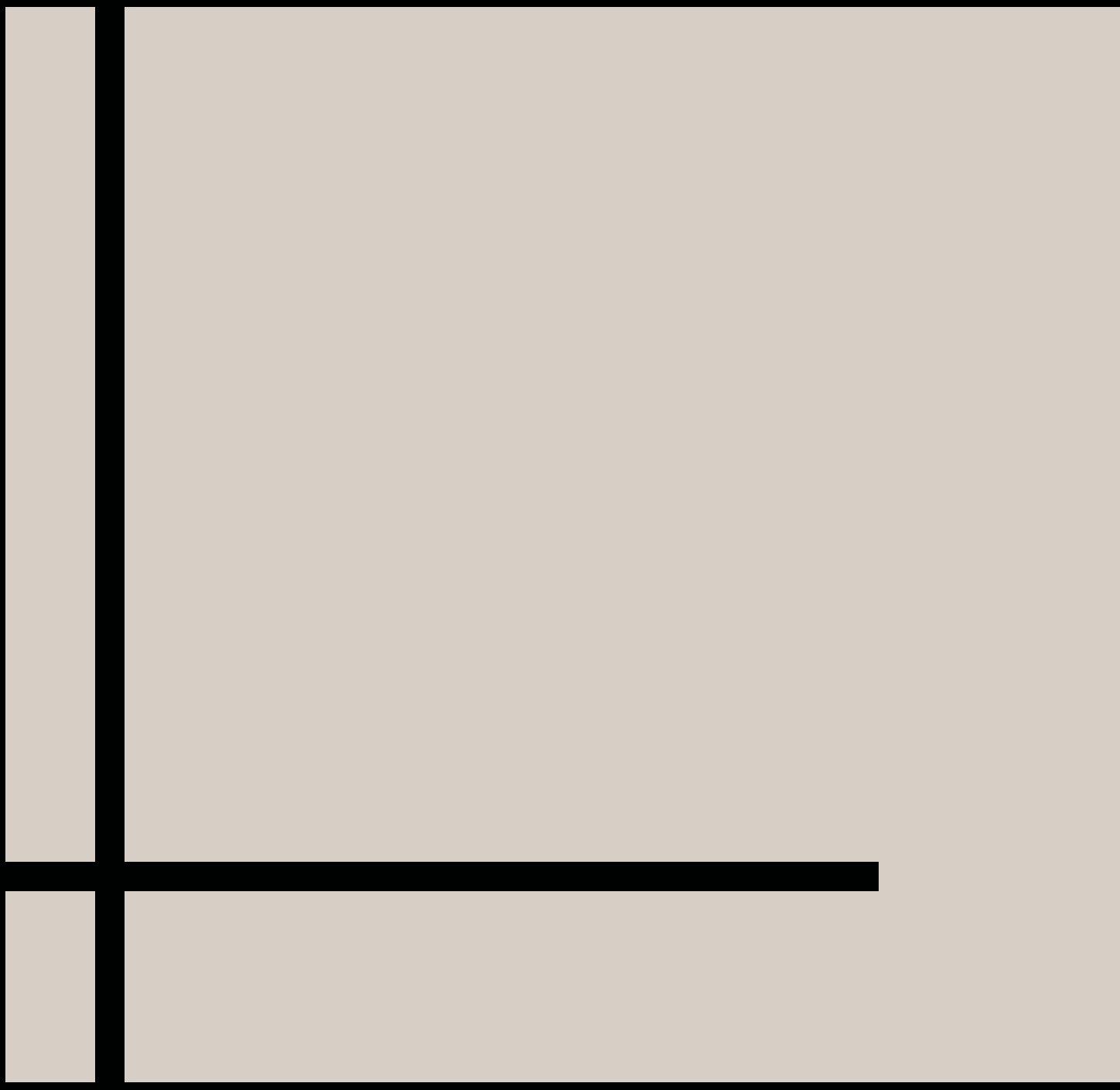



**Fig. 25.** "Shall we laugh now?" By Vassiliki Rapti from A Child's Resistance.

**Fig. 26.** By Katerina Triantafyllou from A Child's Resistance.

# And I See Her: Presenting But I Hear Her

Betsy Salerno



For the *Anthropology of Motherhood* exhibit, the mother/daughter collaboration videos and audio stories for But I Hear Her were housed in a series of shrines designed by women's mythology/spirituality educator and co-curator Betsy Salerno. The shrines were inspired by Salerno's research on the spiritual, historical, cultural, and political significances of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Black Madonnas, as well as imagery tributing motherhood across a variety of cultural traditions. To visualize the video pieces in *But I Hear Her*, Salerno designed areas surrounding each video based on the elements earth, air, fire, and water. The shrines additionally featured an altar area where exhibition attendees could pay tribute to loved ones lost to Covid and/or lost in the Covid era.

Curator Betsy Salerno writes the following of the shrines:

## *"...and I see her."*

*Earth, my body.*
*Water, my blood.*
*Air, my breath*
*And Fire, my Spirit.*

– (source unknown)

This is a song/chant that I am familiar with through my work in feminist spirituality, goddess traditions, and women's circles. It's a reminder of our sacred connection to the earth and also a way to visualize spiritual embodiment. I was inspired by this when listening to and viewing the stories of my co-creators for this project and curated the shrines, along with Hannah, with these dynamics in mind.

Mother goddesses or deities are recognized and honored all across the world in many cultures. These goddesses are often linked with literal or metaphorical qualities of motherhood, caretaking, compassion and other imagined feminine roles. Some of the more famous incarnations are The Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Gaia, Demeter, Kwan Yin, Yemaya, and Isis. I am particularly devoted to The Virgin of Guadalupe (whom I call Lupe), but have been influenced by and celebrate so many others. Many of these deities are also recognized as earth goddesses or are specifically connected to nature and to creating and healing the earth.

The physical space for this project wherein folks could listen to the stories, view the videos, and participate in other ways was designed as a shrine as a way to integrate the creations, celebrate the varied messages of motherhood and caretaking, and symbolically honor Mother Earth and Mother Goddesses. The smaller structures individually connect to themes representing the elements of Earth, Air and Water. The larger structure is designed to not only look like a spiritual Madonna with veiled robes, breasts, a womb and an umbilical cord, but also represents Fire, which is the element most connected to Spirit. The Madonna figure captures the spirit of the project and infuses the project with spiritual meaning. As I love learning about the multitude of ways that mothers and caretakers engage in spiritual practice, I invite the the participants to share their practices with our project by writing about it on paper that was provided and attaching it to the wall around the shrine.

**Fig. 27.** But I Hear Her shrine prototype.


**Fig. 28-29.** But I Hear Her shrine prototype.

## Conclusion

Those who visited the *But I Hear Her,* installation took in the project's shrine; listened to the audio chorus of stories; witnessed *But I Hear Her*'s mother/ daughter collaboration videos; visited with and contributed to the altar honoring those lost during the Covid era; learned ways to collaborate creatively with children, and more. Audiences were additionally invited to add to *But I Hear Her* by sharing their own stories to the installation. Through continued integration of additional stories, *But I Hear Her* evolves and revolves as a living archive of motherhood/caretaking during the Covid pandemic and offers a blueprint for life giving futures born from children's imaginaries.

*If you would like to share your story with* But I Hear Her *and/or create a parent-child / elder-young person collaboration project, please email* ButIHearHer@gmail.com

## Video Links:

***Rooted In Love***
by Christa Oliver
and Eliana Torres

***Witnessing Through Water & Play***
by Swati Kshama Rani &
Asha Kshama Mehta

***A Child's Resistance***
by Vassiliki Rapti and
Katerina Triantafyllou

## Citations


Caputi, Jane. *Gossips, Gorgons & Crones: The Fates of the Earth.* Bear & Company, Inc., 1993.

Hill Collins, Patricia. "Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Solidarity for Gender and Racial Equality." 8 April 2019, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge.

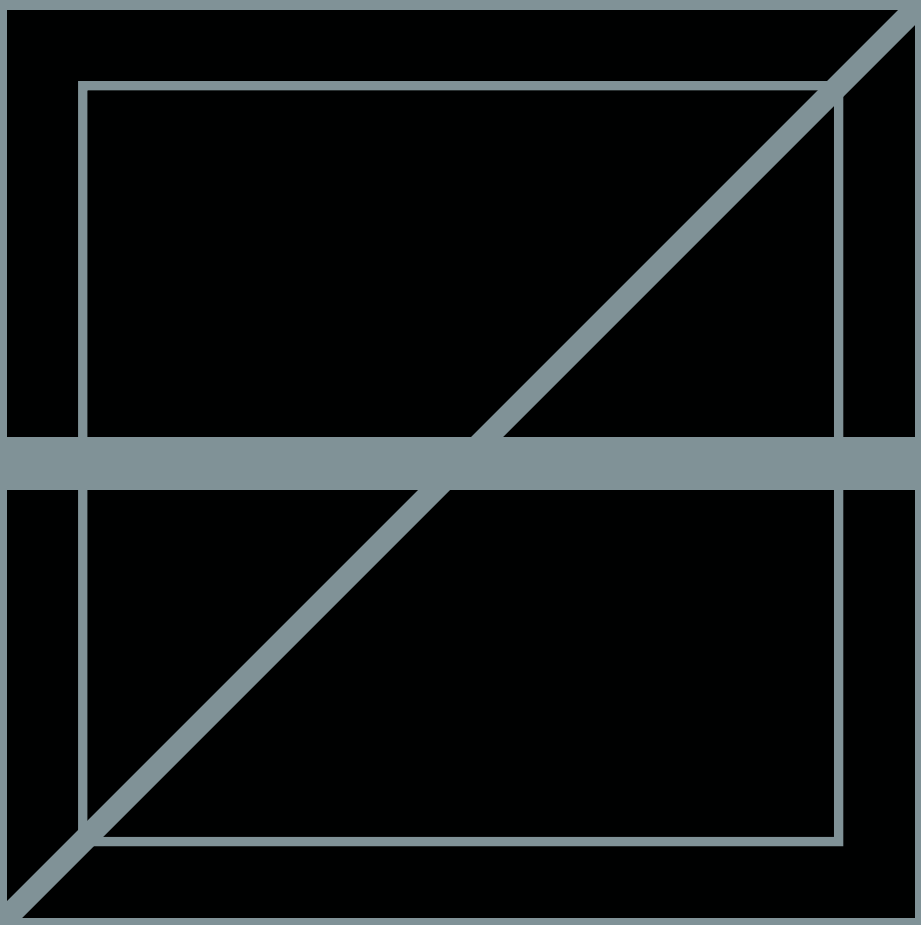
Red Sovine. *Teddy Bear*. Gusto Records, 1975. Vinyl Single.

Shakur, Assata. "r/evolution is love." from *wombanifesto* by dbi. *Bandcamp*. https://dbi333.bandcamp.com/track/r-evolution-is-love-feat-assata-shakur

Soundararajan, Thenmozhi. "Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Solidarity for Gender and Racial Equality." 8 April 2019, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge.

# A Lullaby for Alexandra/ Cântec de Leagăn Pentru Alexandra

by/ de: Dr. Catalina Florina Florescu




STOP
VIOLENCE

A LULLABY FOR ALEXANDRA/ **CÂNTEC DE LEAGĂN PENTRU ALEXANDRA**

By/ De: Dr. Catalina Florina Florescu

**25 November: DAY FOR ~~the Elimination of Violence against~~ WOMEN/**

**25 noiembrie: Ziua pentru ~~eliminarea violenței împotriva~~ femei~~lor~~**

## — PROLOGUE / PROLOG —


We are inside an Astronomical Center full with telescopes./ **Suntem într-un observator astronomic plin cu telescoape.**

We see planets so close up that they make their presence felt even closer to us. There is no more distance. We are together. / **Vedem planetele atât de aproape că ni se pare că noi suntem lângă ele, că ele sunt lângă noi. Nu mai este nicio distanță. Suntem împreună.**

We see the silhouette of a girl./ **Vedem silueta unei fete.**

A door is opened very slowly as if behind it there is a huge secret. But it makes a hissing, Erinyes-like sound. **O ușă se deschide încet, de parcă dincolo ar fi un mare secret. Numai că ușa scârțâie și se aude un hâșâit precum Furiile din tragediile din Grecia antică.**

We look around. We did not travel back in time to participate in any ancient ritual. We are safe. This is an Astronomical Center!/ **Ne uităm de jur împrejur. Nu, nu am călătorit înapoi în timp, nu suntem brusc participanți la vreun festival antic grecesc. Suntem într-un Observator astronomic!**

The light makes everything from the outer space to slowly dissolve into reality./ **Lumina care vine de la ușa întredeschisă face ca toate stelele să dispară una câte una.**

Instead of telescopes, now we see salpinges.[1]/ **În loc de telescoape, vedem numai instrumente de suflat.**
[A lullaby in Romanian/ Un cântec de leagăn în română.[2]]

## — SCENE 1/SCENA 1 —

A girl is sitting in a corner looking at the stars and holding a teddy bear in her arms./ **O fetiță stă într-un colț al camerei cu un ursuleț de pluș în mână și se uită la stele.**

She wears a see-through nightie that her grandmother sewn from scratch./ **Poartă o cămășuță de noapte suavă, transparentă pe care bunica i-a făcut-o.**

The little girl wants something embroidered. / **Fetița vrea ceva brodat pe cămașă.**

"Like what?" grandma asks./ **"Cam ce?" întreabă bunica.**

"How about all the stars in the whole universe?"/ **"Vreau toate stelele de pe cer".**

"You are silly, Alexandra."/ **"Ești tare nostimă, Alexandra".**

"Can you do that? *Please*, grandma..." /**"Buni, hai, *te rog*, poți"?**

---

1. This is a tube that resembles a trumpet. However, in anatomy, it is a(nother) (nick)name for both the Fallopian and Eustachian tubes. **/ Are formă tubulară și produce sunete asemănătoare unei trompete. În anatomie acest substan7v se referă atât la trompele lui Eustațiu cât și la cele falopiene.**
2. SuggesCon: "Du-mă, acasă, măi tramvai." Although this is not a lullaby, nonetheless it is a very soothing, quite nostalgic song./ **Suges7e: Cântecul lui Gică Petrescu nu este un cântec de leagăn propriu-zis, dar este totuși melodios și nostalgic.**

"*All* the stars???" / **"Toate stelele???"**

"Yes." / **"Da".**

"But, sweetie, they can't all fit... You are a little girl, this nightie fits your small body..."/ **Scumpa mea, n-o să încapă toate. Corpul tău e micuț acum...**

For a few seconds, they are silent. / **Pentru câteva secunde nu vorbește nimeni.**

"What if ... just hear me out... okay? What if we start to put some stars on this nightie and next year I will make you another one. You are growing and growing so much that soon I'll be needing stilts to look into your eyes. A few stars for now.

What do you say?" / **"Ce ar fi... Ești atentă? Ce ar fi dacă am broda niște stele pe cămășuța ta și la anul îți voi face alta și punem alte stele atunci? Crești atât de repede că în curând îmi vor trebui coturni ca să mă uit în ochii tăi. Hai să punem doar câteva stele acum. Ce zici?"**

"I guess..." / **"Bine..."**

"Great. What's your favorite constellation?"/ **"Perfect. Care e constelația ta favorită?"**

"What? " / **"Ce-ai zis?"**

Grandma touches Alexandra's back and together they start hunting for the most precious stars. / **Bunica o mângâie pe Alexandra pe spate și împreună se duc la vânătoarea de stele.**

...
...
...

This is how it happened, actually: "Alexandra, are you hungry?" / **De fapt așa s-a întâmplat: "Alexandra, ți-e foame?"**

"A little bit..." / **"Un picuț... "**

"Let's go in the kitchen and we will make crêpes and then... " / **"Hai să mergem în bucătărie și să facem clătite... "**

"...and then we will be strong enough to hunt for the most precious stars... we will find a constellation and put it on your nightie." / **"...și după aia, o să prindem puteri ca să vânăm stele... Și o să găsim cea mai frumoasă constelație, o voi coase pe cămășuța ta... "**

They start to synch their steps. /**Încep să își sincronizeze pașii.**

Alexandra stops. / **Alexandra se oprește.**

"Is there something wrong?" / **"S-a întâmplat ceva? "** Alexandra does not answer. / **Alexandra nu răspunde.** She stares at her palms./ **Se uită la palmele ei.**

Her body shivers. / **Corpul ei tremură.**

"Oh, dear, are you cold?" / **"Ce ai? Ți-e frig?"**

"Grandma, do you still know how to skip?"/ **"Buni, tu mai poți să țopăi?"**

Grandma's face is luminous./ **Fața bunicii se înseninează.**

"Am I the best at doing that, or what?" / **"Dacă s-ar da o medalie pentru asta! Sunt cea mai cea la țopăit".**

They start to skip together. We can hear how they giggle. / **Încep să sară împreună și să chicotească.** [A lullaby in French./ Un cântec de leagăn în franceză[3]]

## — SCENE 2/ SCENA 2 —

She is sitting in a corner./ **Stă într-un colț.**

Tied up to a bed./ **Legată de un pat.**

Dried blood on her hands, face, and legs. / **Sângele coagulat e pe mâinile, pe picioarele, pe fața ei.**

3. "Frère Jacques," the ideal candidate, n'est-ce pas?/ **"Frère Jacques", clasic, nu?**

She looks at her hands and can't help but notice how her lines in her bloodied palms now look like a filigreed leaf's *arteries* falling from a tree. / **Își examinează cu atenție palmele și e uimită să descopere prin sângele uscat cum adânciturile din palmă seamănă acum mai bine cu niște artere filigranate ale unei frunze care a căzut din copac.**

Alexandra wants to move. / **Alexandra vrea să se miște.**

But she is brutally tied to this smelly bed. / **Dar e legată cu cruzime de acest pat care pute.**

Then, a dog barks. / **Brusc, un câine latră.**

She makes loud noises in response. /**Atunci începe și ea să țipe.**

The dog is silent. / **Cățelul nu se mai aude.**

"Oh, why did you leave me?"/ **"Oh, de ce m-ai părăsit?"**[4]

She looks around and sees a very old phone./ **Se uită de jur-împrejur și vede un telefon vechi.**

"Please, please, *please* work."/ **"Te rog, te rog frumos, te *implor* să ai baterie... "** She touches it so gently, despite her pain./ **Deși toate o dor, atinge telefonul cu mare grijă.**

In fact, she touches it with her eyes closed, so that her last hope may not be shattered – unlike her body. Her face lights up. She dials./ **Îl atinge cu ochii închiși ... îi e frică ... nu vrea ca ultima ei speranță să îi fie distrusă așa cum i-a fost distrus corpul. Fața i se luminează. Formează un număr.**
"911, what's your emergency?"/ **"112, ce urgență aveți?"**

"I've been abducted."/ **"Am fost răpită".**

"Who did that?"/ **"Da, de cine"?**

"Ma'am, I am afraid..."/ **"Doamnă, mi-e frică... "**
"Where are you?"/ **"Aha... și unde ești acum?"**

---

**4.** Maybe not related/perhaps because it is taTooed in me viscerally, when I wrote (?) this line, its original caught me in a ripCde: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?"/ **Poate că nu evident la prima vedere/poate că tocmai pentru că e tatuat în mine in7m, dar când am scris (?) această replică am auzit originalul, care m-a luat ca într-un curent de ape, original pe care nu îl voi traduce.**

"I don't know... I was blindfolded."/ **"Nu știu. Am fost legată la ochi".**

...
...
...

"Hello? *Please*, send someone."/ **"Alo??? *Vă rog*, trimiteți pe cineva".**

"I was ... I was ... ra-.... "/ "**Am fost ...fost ...vio-..."**

"Give us an address."/ **"Dă-ne o adresă".**

Alexandra starts to cry. / **Alexandra începe să plângă.**

"Stop crying. Give us the address."/ **"Nu mai plânge. Dă-ne adresa ca să trimitem un echipaj".**

Alexandra starts to say a few words. She *tries*... They exit her mouth butchered. She needs more air. She closes her eyes./ **Alexandra vrea să zică ceva. Dar tot ce iese din gura ei sunt niște sunete stâlcite. Vrea să respire. Își închide ochii.** [A lullaby in English/ Un cântec de leagăn în engleză[5]]

As we hear the song, Alexandra starts singing, looking at the phone, looking at her bloodied hands, looking at her body tied up to that smelly bed onto which her entire existence and not *just* her body was raped several times./ **Alexandra fredonează același cântec de leagăn uitându-se la mâinile ei pline de sânge, la corpul ei strâns de pat cu sfoară, la patul ăsta care pute, patul ăsta unde a fost violată de mai multe ori.**

"911, what's your emergency?"/ **"112, ce urgență aveți?"**

"Could you call grandma, please?"/ **"Vă rog, sunați-o pe buni".**

"This line is for emergency only. Stop calling us!"/ **"Domnișoară, îți arde de glume? Acest număr este doar pentru urgențe!"**

"Tell my grandma I have found a star. For my nightie."/ **"Vă rog, sunați-o pe buni și spuneți-i că am găsit o stea să îmi coasă pe cămașă".**

---

5. "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean" is not exactly a lullaby either, but it has an interesCng story behind it and a personal history for me./ **Din Scoția la origine, nu este de fapt un cântec de leagăn, dar are o istorie interesantă, plus ceva personal pentru mine.**

Long, felt silence./ **O tăcere lungă și mistuitoare.**

The light from the phone transitions into a meteor shower. / **Lumina de la ecranul telefonului ne transportă într-un spectacol astral de ploaie de stele.**

Faces of girls, women, trans who have been raped gush out on that smelly bed and on the walls of a room in complete disarray./ **Fețe de fete, trans, femei sunt proiectate țâșnind din ploaia de stele pe patul acela infect, pe pereții acelei camere dizgrațioase, în acea încăpere care ar trebui să fie distrusă.**

"911, burn this hellhole down! Burn it now!/ **"112, distrugeți acest loc de coșmar. Distrugeți-l acum! "**

## — EPILOGUE/EPILOG —

A very loud sound is heard./ **Se aude o bubuitură.**

Then, the walls of that filthy room fall. / **Pereții acelei camere împuțite se năruie.**

Alexandra unties herself./ **Alexandra se dezleagă.**

She has a washcloth in her hands and cleans her body. /**Are o cârpă în mână. Începe să se curețe pe mâini și apoi pe tot corpul.**

She touches the images projected and cleans their bodies, too. / **Când a terminat începe și curață corpurile celor proiectați înainte.**

As she does that, the blood and the bruises transform into stars. / **Sângele coagulat și rănile se transformă în stele.**

Their bodies are now a constellation that starts as an image of the Eustachian tubes, which travel across the imaginary, yet arduously desired female body towards the Fallopian. /**Corpurile lor se transformă într-o constelație care la început seamănă cu trompele lui Eustațiu și apoi călătorim adânc în corpul imaginar și totuși atât de puternic dorit al femeii până când ajungem în tuburile falopiene.**

Alexandra picks up a salpinx and starts to perform./ **Alexandra pune mâna pe un salpinx și începe să cânte**.

It is night. / **Este noapte.**

We have *all* fallen asleep. / **Dormim cu *toții*.** [A lullaby without words, as universal as the pain from rape/aggression is heard/ Se aude un cântec de leagăn orchestral, fără cuvinte, pentru că violul/agresiunea este o traumă care ne lasă muți, care nu are o limbă specifică, ci doar animalitate dospind, invadând și invalidând corpul femeii.]

## FINAL NOTES:

*In memoriam*, to Alexandra Măceșanu, a 16 y.o. teen who was abducted, raped, and then savagely killed two summers ago in Romania. Alexandra dialed 911 fives times! She tried to survive. FIVE TIMES![6]/ ***In memoriam*, pentru Alexandra Măceșanu, o adolescentă de 16 ani care a fost răpită, violată de mai multe ori și tăiată în bucăți acum două veri în România. Alexandra a găsit un telefon în camera unde a fost agresată, a găsit un moment când a sunat la 112 ca să fie salvată. A sunat de CINCI ORI! Cu disperare, acest copil a vrut să nu moară.**

Drawings by Dan Perjovschi.

The choice in using orange is to honor all victims of rape/assault.


6. When this is read in English, the other actress claps five Cmes. But these claps are slaps. When the actress reads in Romanian, the other woman does the same. Reciprocate if you want to feel what we feel. Do not assume we tell *stories* to have our cries heard. Or at the end, given claps. We tell these *stories* so that you wake up./ **Când actrița care citește în engleză zice de "Cinci ori", cealaltă dă din palme, numai că acestea nu sunt aplauze, ci resimțite ca palme pe obraz. Când actrița citește în română, cealaltă va face la fel. Reciprocitate, numai așa puteți simți.**
**Doar nu credeți că zicem aceste *poveș&* doar ca să le zicem! Sau când am terminat ce aveam de spus vrem aplauze. Nu. Spunem aceste *poveș&* ca să vă trezim.**

# The Covid Diaries: A Weekly Documenting of Life in 2020 under Quarantine

Antoine Martel in Conversation with Hannah Trivilino


The Covid Diaries: Aura
sous chef


The Covid Diaries: Allison
sous chef

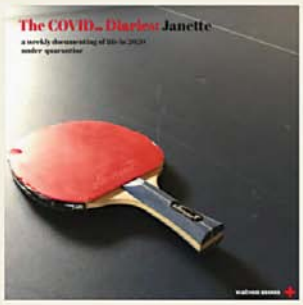

The Covid Diaries: Carly
Watson Moon


The Covid Diaries: Emily
robthesoundbank


The Covid Diaries: Katie
Max Williams


The Covid Diaries: Graham
robthesoundbank

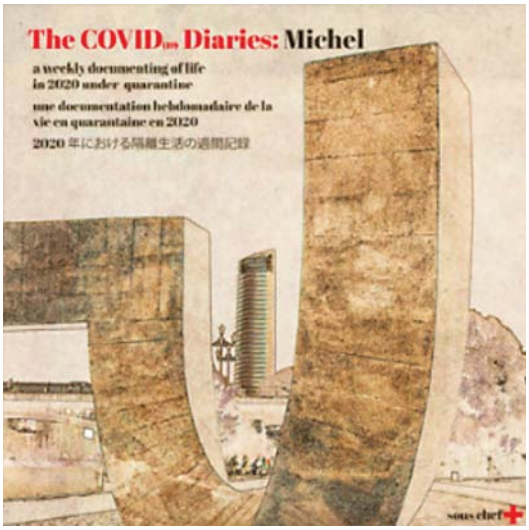

The Covid Diaries: Leon
Watson Moon

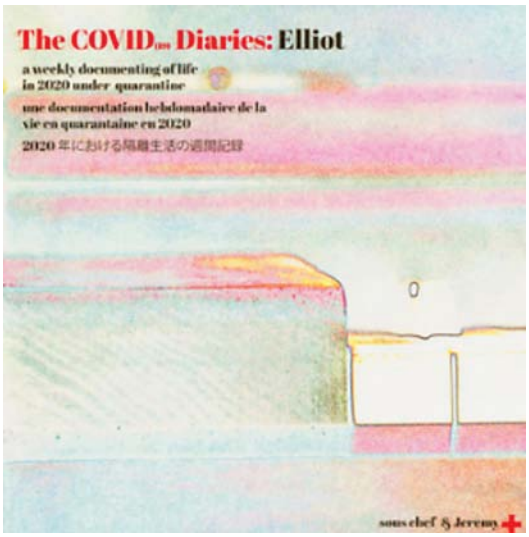



The Covid Diaries: Jeanette
Watson Moon

**Hannah Trivilino:** Hello, Antoine! I wanted to interview you about *The Covid Diaries* for *The Journal of Civic Media* issue that explores the theme of "civic media in flux." I thought *The Covid Diaries* was a really interesting manifestation of civic media in flux in the very unique context of the Covid pandemic, so was I excited to discuss this with you. Could you please tell us a little about *The Covid Diaries?* Thank you!

**Antoine Martel:** *The Covid Dairies* is an open source, musical project that I started to track the development of Covid and life under quarantine all over the world. I recorded weekly phone calls with people who offered to share their life experiences during the pandemic and then composed music to accompany the audio accounts. The prompt of the project was very simple; basically every week I would call participants, and I would ask "hi, how was your week? What did you do? How did Covid effect your life this week? What are you plans for next week?" It was super basic. It was the same questions every time, never any variation. And I tried not to interact as much as possible, so it was mostly just them talking.



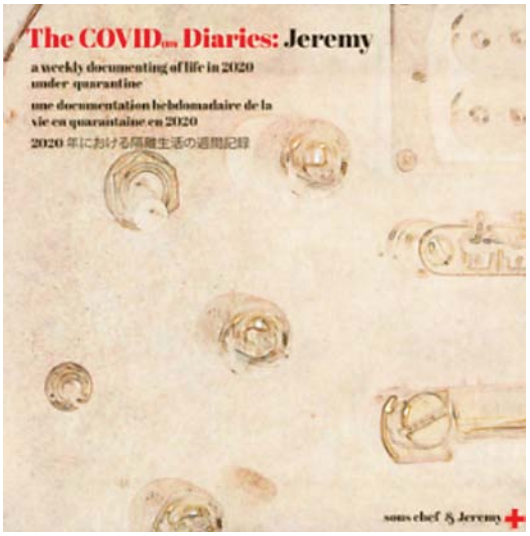




**H.T.:** Thank you! I'm first wondering what the idea of civic media means to you, and if you see *The Covid Diaries* as interfacing with the idea of civic media? As an example, I think of civic media as media with public interest, or media that doesn't have the same type of agendas that mainstream media sources connected to certain corporate and political structures might have. So for me, I say "people's media."

**A.M.:** From the description of civic media that you just told me, I very much see *The Covid Diaries* that way. The idea behind *The Covid Diaries* was to capture a people's perspective of what was going on. Because obviously if you watch TV, you get a lot of big numbers, big dramatic stories of what's happening during this global pandemic. But I didn't feel like there was necessarily a lot happening to capture the more personal perspective of the pandemic, of how it was affecting real people. And given all the time that there was at home with the pandemic, there was an opportunity–and I had a lot of friends spread out throughout the world (hopefully experiencing things slightly differently)–so I felt like combining all those things, getting these interviews from all these

people focusing on their lives and how the pandemic was effecting it would create an interesting, big picture zoom out that could have merit. And I did have a dream that maybe one day some college student would be writing a paper about the pandemic and would be able to have this weird primary source document that exists in a really pleasant form to listen to it. So in that sense, yeah, it feels like it's pretty different than mainstream media in objective and is more about sharing the perspective of the individual, normal people going through the pandemic.

**H.T.:** That's beautiful, thank you. How did you get the idea to do this with music? I resonated with you saying "in a way that was pleasant to listen to," because as someone who listened to the project, the music was something that was very appealing about it. I'm curious if that was something you always pictured from the start or if that came up later?




**A.M.:** I'm a musician. And intuitively I just was sitting around trying to make music at home, and I had been making (inspired by Madlib, Chassol, and MonoNeon) these kind of musical sketches trying out random ideas, noodling really. So the


music part of this project acted as both a musical exercise to help myself improve at composition (and being able to do it quicker) and also a way to hopefully make the experience of listening to it that much more enjoyable, because there's a score to what participants are saying.

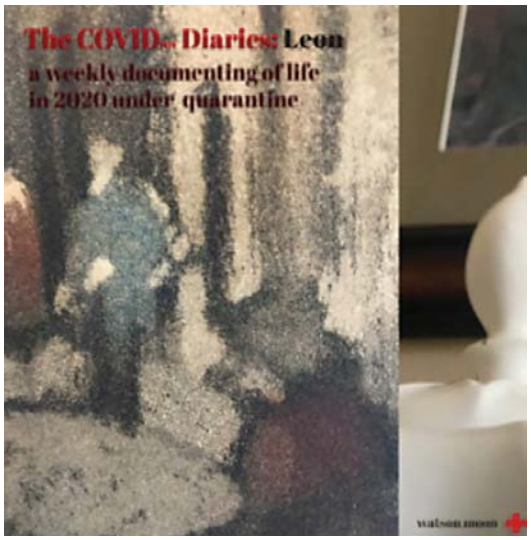
**H.T.:** At times you were working on 13 songs at once during your weekly Covid Diaries compositions. The theme of this journal is flux, and media in... the theme of this journal is flux, and media in flux (specifically civic media in flux). I'm curious if you felt flux shows up in how you were approaching each composition by working on multiple ones concurrently?

**A.M.:** When you say flux–just the changing, that kind of eb and flow of "they'll be more here, less there," back and forth...which way do you mean flux?

**H.T.:** It's open to interpretation! I'm seeing it as mutation, or evolution.

**A.M.:** Right on, I'd say definitely, a big part of it was like, everybody involved in this project is a

volunteer, and at points it even expanded beyond just me making recordings and calling people. I also had Rob Homan doing that for a while, and then my buddy Matt Melrose (who goes by Watson Moon) doing that for a while too, and they had individual people they were interviewing. It started out as a little thing that I was doing, and then it sort of ballooned over the first 6 or 7 weeks into a bigger project that involved other people. And then as the pandemic went on it also sort of wained back down, because people who were being interviewed also became busier and harder to get a hold of, or less interested. People who were working on it–including myself– were getting busier and kind of just ebbing and flowing with it. So I think the whole thing lasted 25 or 27 weeks –by the end of it there were like 2 people still doing it. Everybody sort of drops off at a different time, which is interesting. At first I was sort of disappointed in myself for having that happen, but as time went on I thought maybe this was part of that big picture I just hadn't seen coming.





**H.T.:** I can't think of many media projects in which the subject and the person producing the project are that level of equals or peers in the process. So to hear that people dropped off as they wanted to is unique. It's cool how you facilitated that, as it allowed participants to be agents of their own role in the media project, to be agents of their representation within the media.

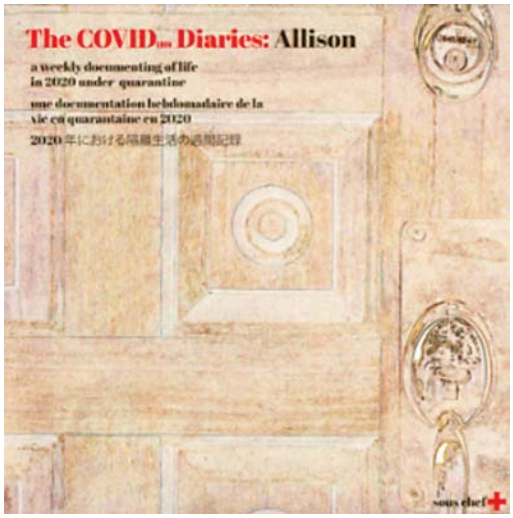
**A.M.:** In that sense, I'd say that my job in facilitating that was very simply letting people know that if they don't pick up, it's all good. It wasn't a big speech or anything, but it seemed to translate. I had one friend with whom we were doing it for a while, and then at one point he called me up and was like, "actually, man, do you mind taking all that down?" And I was like, "oh totally." And so it just disappeared; it doesn't exist anymore. I figure they're the ones talking, so they should be in charge of their destiny.

**H.T.:** That's such a different interpretation of "civic media in flux" than I could have pictured. Because usually when we hear about media getting taken down, it's about censorship, and not about people who have the agency and authority to make decisions about their own voice and where and how and when it's represented. It's very cool

that your project facilitated that agency. I hadn't thought of that as a version of civic media in flux going into this interview because I didn't know that was part of it, thank you for sharing that.

When you said the drop-off points were different for each person, I'm remembering how early on in *The Covid Diaries* pieces when there were lots of stories happening at the same time, there were certain themes that would come up across many of the stories (even though the storytellers were not coordinating with each another). For example, after George Floyd was murdered by the Minneapolis police, almost everybody discussed the subsequent uprisings in their response in their diary entries. I'm curious, as you were working on many of the compositions at once, what was it like to listen to all these different accounts share themes at times?

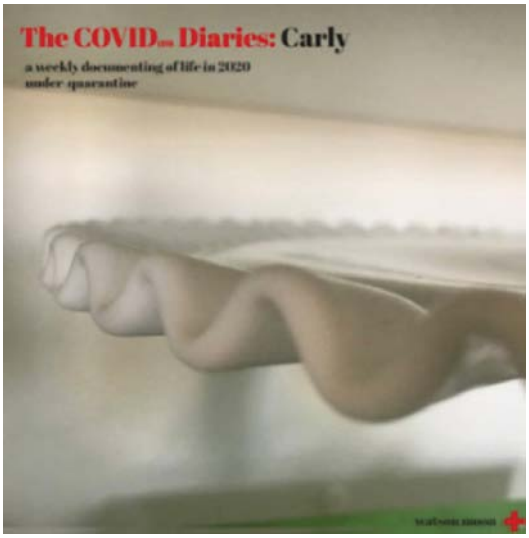
**A.M.:** It was super interesting. As you said, a lot of different people –the themes that were going on in society ended up being sort of reflected in what people chose to talk about a lot of the time when big events happened. Like when George Floyd was murdered, that was the main subject of that week's Covid diary (much more so than Covid). Which was something I hadn't necessarily anticipated. It was just sort of like "if I have these broad stroke questions, what happens?" And it was interesting from being a listener to it to more in direct response to your question–it felt like a wild, sort of an idyllic kind of news approach? There was a part of it that sort of made me ask, "maybe this is how news should kind of always be?" –that you have this network of people that you talk to every week that have a huge spectrum of opinions and are telling you what they think about all the




major events going on in the world, and as you receive all those perspectives, it gives you a sort of broader consensus. And you get to see people's biases, what your biases are–it's a lot more clear. I don't usually interact with the news that way, and it felt like a weird sort of, "oh this is a really healthy and good way to interact with the news compared to the day to day experiences."

**H.T.:** What if the news could go down like this? What would it do to nurture listening?

**A.M.:** What if you constantly had a team of 12 people who you trusted and respected who were giving you their opinions about events?




**H.T.:** And when you have a cross-section of society? (which I feel like your project did). That would be a very interesting model. Pivoting, with this project, I felt something so specific about Covid as the umbrella / lens / impetus that started it / around which it was organized (I feel this particularly because of the ways in which Covid distorted perceptions of time and of how people experienced time differently during the pandemic as opposed to prior to it). I'm curious, do you think you could do something like this outside of a unifying framework or umbrella? Outside of a unique shared experience? Could you just ask everybody each week "how was your week?," and would it have the same type of effect? What other types of circumstances do you think it could exist under? Could it ever? I think I'm asking if you feel that this was sort of a rare, one time thing?

**A.M.:** That's a good question. I think the big picture umbrella experience was most helpful sort of thematically because without that, you would just end up having a scattered project, and there's a lot less of a guarantee. Because of the circumstances of Covid, we were all in our homes, we're all going through a little more of a shared experience. We're obviously always having a shared experience, but it feels a little more individualistic and like people are doing more different things outside of a pandemic scenario. So that felt like it maybe brought more things naturally together and provided a reason for all these people to be connected. And I feel like without something of the sort–I don't think it necessarily has to be a pandemic–just kind of like, it acted as the main backbone for everything to come off of. And if you take that out and you don't replace it with something else, then maybe it just looks like a bunch of scattered people talking about whatever.


**H.T.:** I think it definitely gave it an intentionality and focus that is hard to picture existing in a different way. In this context, flux facilitating intentionality.

**A.M.:** I felt like there was also a flux experience in the consumption of *The Covid Diaries* because the conditions of the pandemic also made it more likely for people to tune in in a way, because, then it felt like a shared experience with them as well. Whereas, now that the pandemic is less salient, I would be surprised if as many people are listening

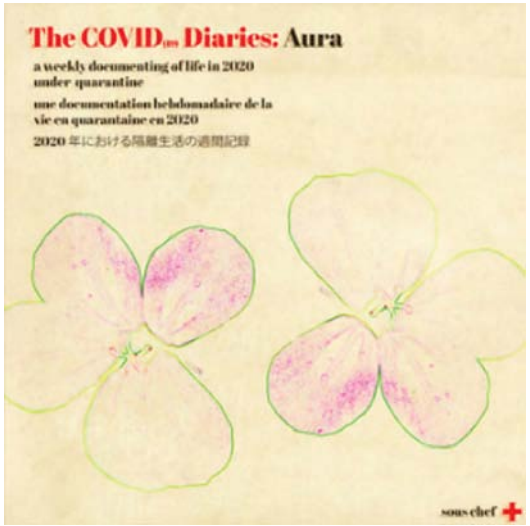

now (which is also connected to it not being as current). But there was something about it happening while you're living through it too. So now lockdown is gone, and it changes the nature of what *The Covid Diaries* is, because the live, shared experience is gone now. Now *The Covid Diaries* is a primary source document. But for a while it was a shared journey you could go on.

**H.T.:** It's making me realize, if you were listening to it, you also could be the one participating in it. You don't distinguish yourself the way you do when consuming other forms of media. This seems like a much more democratized way to approach news, and it seems empowering that the people living through the conditions of the media subject (Covid) are also positioned to be the ones reporting about their own experiences. As you say on the project's *Bandcamp* page, anybody who wants to make a *Covid Diaries* album should; all you need is a recorder, a phone, and a way to make music.

**A.M.:** That was the hope! I was excited that at least a couple of people joined in (as creators). There's some merit to that aspect of it, and people might be interested. I would have loved for that to have kept spreading. That would have been a big stretch dream of it. But, you know, people have a lot to do, it's busy, I didn't have a marketing budget or anything.


**H.T.:** It was cool that the creators, the listeners, and the content (the people sharing their stories) were all always in flux. It had a viral effect in the time of the virus.

**A.M.:** Yeah.




**H.T.:** I also found *The Covid Diaries* to be unique because I saw it as something that creates a sort

of portal back into what consciousness felt like at each moment that Covid was evolving, what it felt like to exist in your body-mind at that time. So I'm wondering if you see memory, consciousness, and time as being in flux during the pandemic? And what did the project reveal, or surprise, or affirm, or change, or teach you about time, memory, and consciousness?

**A.M.:** I think that's an interesting facet of now listening to *The Covid Diaries;* it can take you back –because people are talking about current events– and it can sort of jog memories sometimes in a way that would have been hard to without it. It would be a lot harder to pinpoint "what was the consciousness of April 2020" maybe without a little jog of "oh, these 13 people were reading this, and seeing this happening... oh yeah! Now I remember! That was the time when ____ happened to me!" So I think there is a connection there that creates memories and links to our passage of time.

**H.T.:** It's making me think about how *The Covid Diaries* is really interesting because it brought scheduled structure to something that –also because the form had music, and had this tenderness– it didn't feel bound by time but it also marked time. And I think of participants like Alyssa who had a baby during the process of the recordings; each week you're bearing witness to this pregnancy and eventual birth of Alyssa's child. Listening to these accounts and feeling the passage of time (because they were happening every week) –but also feeling the complete timelessness within it–felt like a really cool marvel. Time in flux.

**A.M.:** It would be a lie to take credit for any of these things. This was a project in which I did as little as possible to allow nature to take its course. But that was the whole thing, and the whole point was to keep it going, and it kept going, and it did the thing, which was exciting from an artistic standpoint, like "maybe that type of process can get results."


**H.T.:** The results were amazing! I was additionally really moved by the multi-lingual nature of the project. I was curious what it was like to compose for audio accounts spoken in languages you might not have understood.

**A.M.:** Absolutely! As far as the people I was interviewing, there was only Tsubasa and Yukari who were doing the project in Japanese. Although I do speak a small amount of Japanese, I did not know what they were saying because they were sharing longer and more complex ideas way above my Japanese skill tree. But the thing with Tsubasa and Yukari... everybody that I was interviewing, they were all my friends. So in their case, Tsubasa would then after he had said his piece tell me in English what he had said in a summary. And then I would get my buddy Jeremy to translate it for

me. So that's where the transcripts come from. If you want to experience those and know what's going on, they came from Jeremy. (Composer) Rob Homan had somebody I think speaking in Farsi. And then I had also a few people speaking French, but for that one I'm bilingual, so that's why I had done that, in part (because I could understand them and go over that). But then my parents were the x-factor in providing the translations, because they're much quicker at writing translations than me. So big shout outs to the parents for coming in on translation duty!

**H.T.:** Very cool. Did you feel a difference when you composed for French language stories and English language stories?

**A.M.:** Hmm... I think so, yes. With Tsubasa's for example, we had two mutual friends, one of which was living in Japan also, contributing to the music of his diary entries. That felt like an appropriate way to deepen the connection of his entries to the place he was in through the music. So that was a big example in the language–or maybe more so the location–also effecting the music. But the rest of the time when it was just me, it was more sort of in what they're saying. The one that is maybe the most dramatic effect is if you listen to Michel. If you don't speak French, I'm sure it's a way more arduous process, but they are truly amazing. Michel Rouviere is a wonderful man living in rural France, and the big thing that would affect the music with his pieces is that he spoke for way longer than anyone else, because he would go off on these long sort of philosophical ideas. It was super interesting to listen to, but then compositionally it would make this big challenge of like... I think week four is 32 minutes long. Which is like, "oh s–t, I have to make an album on top of the ten other songs this week." So that would definitely drive the music in a way. But that was less about what language he was speaking and more about just how he spoke. But they're golden content. Episode 4 is the one –if you can understand that episode, there's a whole life story and life lesson that everyone should take a hold of in there. It's a beautiful thing.


**H.T.:** That's beautiful, thank you. Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share about *The Covid Diaries*, flux, and civic media?

**A.M.:** My final thoughts would first off be a big thank you to you for having seen this project and noticed it. I super appreciate it, and it makes me happy because I think you know with a little interview here and a little dabble there, maybe one day that college student will find it and write some paper with it and do the thing, and it will have been even more worth it. It already feels like it was a worthwhile thing, that anybody who stumbles upon may or may not find interesting, but I think there's something beautiful to the fact that it's still living despite the lack of care (on my part),

which maybe speaks to the fact that the project itself has some of its own weight behind it, which feels really good. And I want to give a shoutout to Ryusuke Hamaguchi, the director of *Drive My Car*. That movie's multilingual approach was not so much an inspiration but a confirmation when I saw it that it was okay to be doing this the way I was doing it.

**H.T.:** Our friend Victory Nguyen who is currently in the car with you, Antoine, who lived with you while you were making *The Covid Diaries*. Vic, do you have anything you observed in live time while Twon was making *The Covid Diaries* that you would like to share with us?

**Victory Nguyen:** It was cool seeing somebody document history. When people document history you usually get the finished product –you get the essay, the report, the documentary– but to see it happening live was very interesting. And across the world, too.


**H.T.:** It is a pretty spectacular archive. Well, Antoine, I believe that a college student will find it; I think *The Covid Diaries* could and should end up in a museum one day; and I think it would be super cool if you pressed it on vinyl at some point.

**A.M.:** That would be wild, it's like 52 hours. But that would be super cool.

**H.T.:** I would love to listen to it in that medium. Thank you again, Antoine!

**The listen to *The Covid Diaries*, visit the project's** *bandcamp page*

“*The idea behind* The Covid Diaries *was to capture a people’s perspective of what was going on. Because obviously if you watch TV, you get a lot of big numbers, big dramatic stories of what’s happening during this global pandemic. But I didn’t feel like there was necessarily a lot happening to capture the more personal perspective of the pandemic, of how it was affecting them*”

# NARRA

# -TIVES

# —>

# FIELD

# *Wild Grass:* A Conversation with Kai Tuchmann on Postdramatic Theater

Kai Tuchmann - Interviewed by Vassiliki

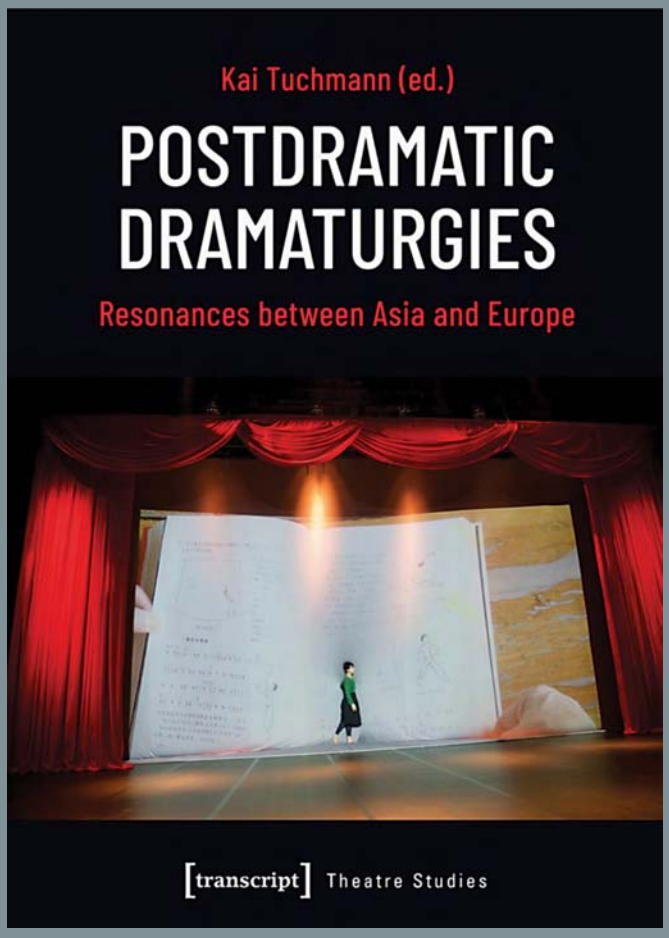



**Fig. 1. Postdramatic Dramaturgies.**

**Vassiliki Rapti:** Welcome to this session for the "Civic Media in Flux" special issue of *The Journal of Civic Media* that we publish out of the Engagement Lab at Emerson College. It is a great honor to have you with us today. Welcome Kai, and let's get started with just an introduction. You are wearing many hats, right? So, tell us who you are.

**Kai Tuchmann:** We met at Harvard, where I was talking about my most recent publication *Postdramatic Dramaturgies – Resonances between Asia and Europe*, which documents my work as a Visiting Professor at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing where together with Li Yinan I developed a dramaturgy B.A. program. And that's an activity I had kind of started almost ten years ago, I think in 2013. And yeah, in addition to this, I'm also mentoring and teaching at some European Art Academies, like at the ZHdK in Zurich, at ArtEZ in the Netherlands, and also at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Frankfurt. But actually, I describe myself as a theater practitioner who involves himself in directing and dramaturging works. So I'm also involved in directing works, curating works. And I think the most important thing is that I couldn't do all this if there wouldn't have been very long existing networks of friendships and collaborators.

**V.R.:** I'm fascinated because you are one of these new scholars who bring together the East and the West in very productive and innovative ways. So I want us to focus on your most recent work, *Postdramatic Dramaturgies: Resonances between Asia and Europe* which I just started reading. It's fascinating and I'm struck by the postdramatic title. Are you playing with the concept of the "postmodern" here? And you know, I'm also very interested in language games... What is behind all this? What is your rationale about the postdramatic?

**K.T.:** Hmm... This will now become a long answer because I had the very distinct honor to launch that book in New York at the Goethe Institute there. And I was also thinking about how to do it. Actually, I started to talk about the motto that I put in the introduction, because this motto points to the fact that actually this book should have had the title of *Wild Grass*, which is a poem by and a collection of texts and textures by the Chinese poet Lu Xun. The motto reads as follows: "From the clay of life abandoned on the ground grow no lofty trees, only wild grass. [...] Wild grass strikes no deep roots, has no beautiful flowers and leaves, yet it imbibes dew, water and the blood and flesh of the dead [...]. As long as it lives it is trampled upon and mown down, until it dies and decays. But I am not worried; I am glad. I shall laugh aloud and sing." Eventually, I gave into the logic of search engines and search algorithms, and I refused to name my book *Wild Grass*, but instead I gave it the title of *Postdramatic Dramaturgies*. But when I think about the book as a whole, I still want to evoke this very first idea, because I think this wild grass talks so beautifully about the use value of these five theatrical practices that are gathered in my book. Because –you know– Lu Xun is talking about the wild grass as something which is not concerned with beauty. It's not concerned with eternity either, but it is nurtured and nourished through a connection with the people that came before us, with the tradition, with the dead, with what we have forgotten. And most of the people are trampling on that wild grass, because they are not even seeing it. But for them who want to see the wild grass, they can and it will connect them

to past situations that might inform their futures. And I think this is a quite fantastic poetic frame of what this is about. Of course, I also own the title *Postdramatic Dramaturgies*.

And I want to talk about this actual title now. I always think about dramaturgy as a relative practice, which means that the framework of the theater you are engaged with affects the kind of dramaturgy you are practicing: e.g. are you doing dramaturgy in the system of epic theater or in the system of dramatic theater? Each system informs the dramaturgical practice differently. And then it's also very important, where the dramatrugical practice is located? I mean, will you work postdramatic theater in one of these highly-funded institutions in Germany or are you a struggler somewhere in Bombay or in New York or in Beijing, where it's so hard to get rehearsal space –not to talk about other problems–. I think to say "dramaturgy" is too little, it's too less. So, you have to exemplify more its particularities. And I think the idea of a postdramatic dramaturgy hints to the fact, for example, that this is a theatrical practice where you develop the scripts while rehearsing. So this is something which is very contrary to a dramatic dramaturgical work where you already have the script, right? In such a system, it's a lot about interpreting the script and providing it to the director, but in the postdramatic system, script development is an essential part of it.

**V.R.:** So, in a way, it's really in a constant flux or this way of thinking about today's dramaturgy is a living document that never stops. And it's in the process of becoming a practice.

**K.T.:** I just want to add, I think that also in these conversations, especially with Wang Mengfan, or also Lee Kyung-Sung that are documented in this book, I also learned that for many theater practitioners in Asia, the translation of Hans-Thies Lehmann`s "Postdramatic Theater" has a very particular history. For them, it was really a kind of relief to learn about the existence of the postdramatic theater because it was for the first time that they could locate their own practice within a tradition. So before they encountered this text, they 've always had this very uncanny feeling of being homeless, of being totally disoriented, of being beyond any kind of tradition or frame of reference. And so, especially in these conversations with Wang Mengfan and Lee Kyung-Sung, I learnt that it allowed them to get to locate their practices in the companionship with fellow artists from other times, from other places. It is important to note that there are companions out there, especially, if you're doing something new. So I also wanted to render homage to the fact that for a lot of friends whose work is documented in my book, Lehmann`s "Postdramatic Theater" really meant a lot and it constituted a kind of tradition where there was none before.

**V.R.:** You 're really opening new ground –from what I understand here– with your collaborators in rethinking dramaturgy and in locating it in this and this offers an opportunity for self-reflection and for also grounding it in "reality." You mentioned "reality." What exactly did you mean when you mentioned "reality" because it can be interpreted in different ways. So, I want your take on how you deal with the "reality" in your dramaturgy.

**K.T.:** What attracts me to use this very particular assembly that theater generates is my need to rethink reality. I mean, you just mentioned that

you're interested in language games. And I think that's pretty much what also my interest is. So which language games are constituting reality, right? In particular, by "reality" I mean the example of *Red*, the production that I also dramaturgued and that is documented in the book. It's very much about this reality of history, right? So who owns it? Who owns the narratives? What kind of accounts are absent from education, from everyday culture? And in order the theater to investigate these narratives, these absences, maybe also there is a need to reframe them. So I think this is pretty much like what we are doing. So we're gaming with reality to a certain extent.

**V.R.:** I really love your wording "gaming with reality." But since you mentioned your work *Red* I would like to hear more about it because I experienced this kind of "gaming with reality" when you showed us a short video clip from it and then I realized that it was a long time since I had been so captivated by a video of a production. And as I mentioned to you, there were some gestures there that were haunting. So, tell us more about this production of *Red* and what you all accomplished there and then how you dealt with this collective memory.

**K.T.:** You know, it has its point of departure in one of these eight model operas that were existing in the time of the Cultural Revolution, namely *The Red Detachment of Women*. And this was always a very fascinating entry point, I think, for all of us being involved in the production, that there was a time period of ten years in which all over China there were more or less eight theater plays being performed. And I mean, we are talking about a time when there was almost no television, almost no radio, or other forms of mass media, so theater was really the tool of propaganda**,** which brought the governmental framings of reality into people's mindsets, into the factories, into the rural areas. And I really feel about *Red* that it is a very particular kind of documentary theater because it's not just playing these games with reality as documentary theater does, but it also unpacks theater as a document as such. So this was something that we were very interested in, that is, to explore the role of cultural industrial products in the formation of the consciousness of people. Actually, we planned for our work to come out in 2014, which would have been the fiftieth anniversary of the first ever production of the *Red Detachment of Women*. I think this already brings along what our attempt was. We knew that the Chinese government would start a very –let's say– selective process of celebrating and commemorating the 50 years of the *Red Detachment of Women*, so we conceived our production like an alternative memory by really talking to the people who have seen it, danced in it, and we wanted to unpack this ideological dimension that I was talking about. So this is where it came from. But, you know, it didn't come out in 2014. It took us almost one and a half year longer to premiere. But still, I think this was the attempt, to come up with an alternative memory of this cultural product that resides actually in the bodies of everybody today. I mean, because the parents that are educating children today, they all have witnessed this time and it's quite amazing how absent this discourse is within Chinese families. And this is also why after a year we decided to change the cast. And I think this was one of the most crucial dramaturgical decisions we made. So, in the first year of rehearsal, we just had Wen Hui and Liu Zhuying on stage together with a male performer. The women

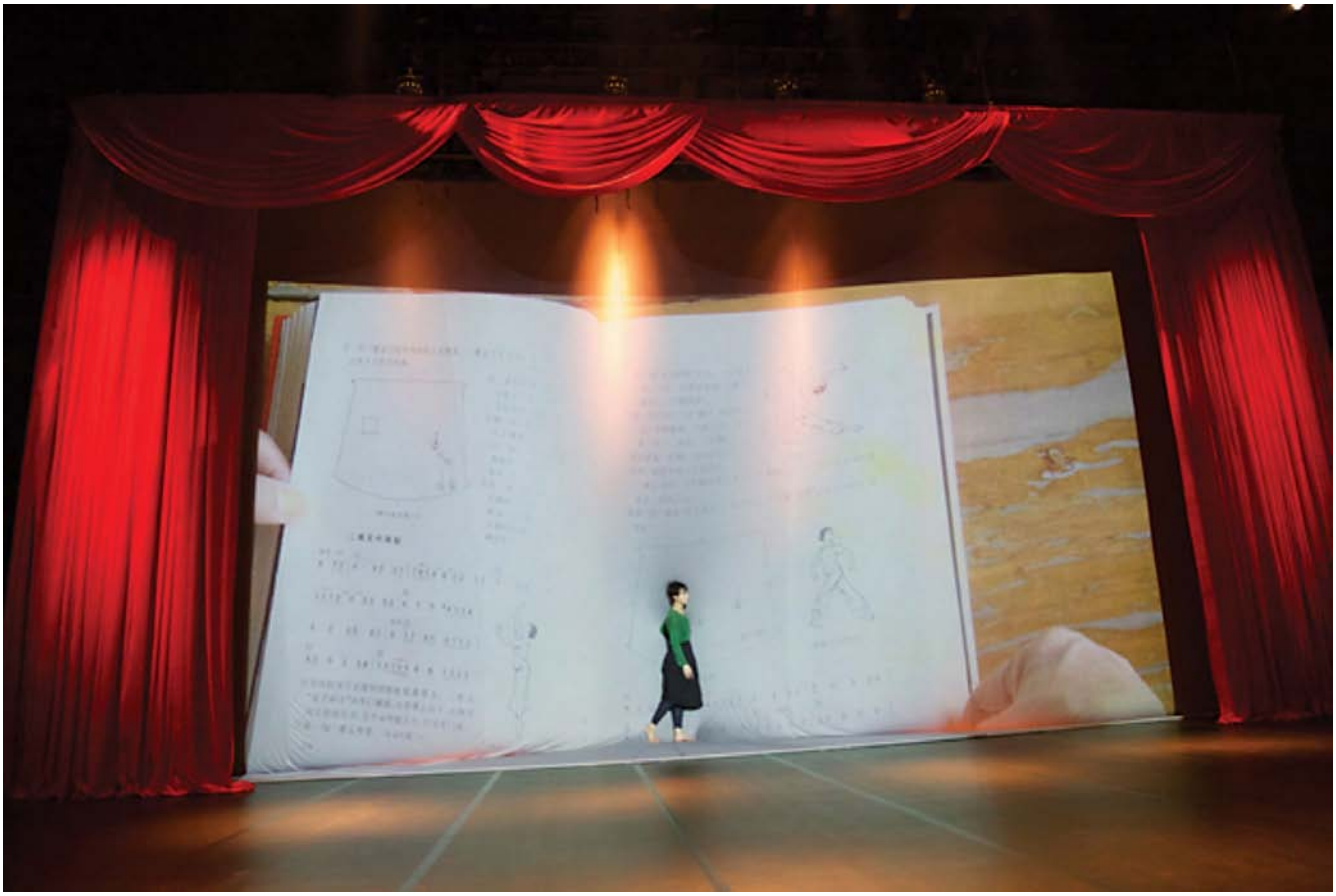


**Fig. 2.** The dancer Jiang Fan; Copyright by Richy Wong.

were both eyewitnesses of the time of the Cultural Revolution. And the man with whom we rehearsed was a quite esteemed performer as well. But then we found out that something is missing and it's exactly this intergenerational relationship that was missing. We needed the young generation in the cast: to show this absence of intergenerational communication about the memory of the Cultural Revolution and to start this conversation right on the stage. So I think this was one of the most fundamental decisions from a dramaturgical point of view that we made in the middle of the process of production.

**V.R.:** It's really interesting to hear that you read the theater as a document and it was obvious how this was done very graciously and successfully: you had a document, a huge book projected there. Right? And everybody could read it. Not only the protagonists, the dancers, but the audience as well. It's a constant reading of this big document that is History. It is encapsulated in there. I don't know if you want to add anything else on that.

**K.T.:** We just talked about these eight model operas and the *Red Detachment of Woman* is one of two ballets among these eight model operas. That means that everything is determined, the props you use, the dresses you wear, and –of course– since it's a choreography, the choreography itself. So, all the movements are determined through blocking diagrams. And this book you're talking about contains the model of how to perform it. And actually it arrived into our produc-

tion by chance, because Liu Zhuying, the dance performer who danced *The Red Detachment of Women* several hundred times in the time of the Cultural Revolution, happened to find that book –I think– through her husband, somewhere in the Yunnan province. I remember, when we started in 2014, she brought this book along to the rehearsals and said, "Look what I found!" and then it was so clear from the start that we had to relate to it. And then I remember, when Wen Hui started to film this book, she just took it to her living room and started to make these shots that we then also used in the performance. Yeah. This is the model, right? This is actually how we can make this idea of the theater as a document visual and how we can bring it across. So that's the story of this book.

**V.R.:** It's incredible how you deal with tradition in a very innovative way and with a more impactful resonance to the audience. Do you think that this model can be taken by others and use what is unique to this particular play, as well?

**K.T.:** I mean, I like *Red* a lot as an example for what documentary theater is and how it could look like. I really think it makes a good point for this kind of form and I am also interested in this kind of encounter of documentary theater and dance. In Germany we have a longstanding tradition of documentary theater –I mean, almost now 100 years now, starting all the way back to Piscator– but this is basically like spoken theater, right? And, to be honest, very often documentary theater has the danger to become very lecture-like and very talkative. But I think this dimension of dance and this investigation of where history is residing in the body –which actually is what we do when we say dance– brings an interesting aesthetic dimension to the documentary form. But of course, *Red* is also really an answer to a very concrete historic configuration, which is this time of the Cultural Revolution. I mean, I don't know if this itself could become a model. I would also say it shouldn't, actually. I feel nothing should become a model for something, because we always have to stay alert, awake to the very reality we are living in. I mean, we can use it as a source of inspiration or a starting point for our own investigations or others should use it as a starting point for their own investigations. But whether this piece about the model theater should become a model? – I think– no, it shouldn't.

**V.R.:** Also the way the production was shot and made into a film appears in itself highly aesthetic to me.

**K.T.:** Yes.

**V.R.:** So both media are mixed here and they are somehow in a constant flux.

**K.T.:** Yeah, we were very lucky because actually the images you have seen during my talk at Harvard are made by Luc Schedler, who is a Swiss film director, who happened to make a film about Wen Hui, the choreographer of *Red*. So we really were very lucky that he recorded this premiere with two cameras –one at the back of the theater and then he stood really next to the stage with a hand-camera and filming all that–. And then we also had a lot of time to edit it.

**V.R.:** How has this performance been received in China and in the West? Have you noticed any differences?

**K.T.:** We ‘ve been touring this piece now since 2015 around the world, but since 2020 we had a break, due to Covid. So there was not so much touring going on, so it will start again soon. And so far we just had about 60 performances and I think three of them were in China. These were the two runs, in Shanghai, where it premiered at the Power Station of Art. Through some connections and lucky coincidences, we were able to get permission to perform it there. And then we had –I think it was three years later, in 2018– we had one show in Beijing at the Goethe Institute there, which is like a kind of extraterritorial space. And since then we ’ve never showed it in China again, because it would be difficult. I mean, not impossible, but it’s difficult. So clearing all the permissions and licenses would take a lot of commitment and will from the producers to put something like this through. So we had most of our shows abroad. And what to me was quite outstanding was that there seems to be an East/West divide. I always felt that when we travel the show in West Europe the people very early start to “hijack” this show in order to apply their own prejudices about China. And this, of course, gets even worse every day because the China scare increases like almost every year now since our premiere in 2015. I mean, you have a fully-fledged show, where performers critically investigate history, where they do speak up, where they empower themselves through tools of dance and criticality. And still in the talkbacks, the audience starts to talk about what they read in the papers about China. It’s very hard to make them see. I’m also teaching theater management in Frankfurt, and I’m very often using this as an example that I think for festival curators it’s not just enough to invite a show. One also really has to moderate how a show lands in the discourse of a city. And I feel like in our tours to Western Europe, I really would wish that there were more moderation. So that the piece cannot so easily be taken away by the prejudices of people. In contrast, when we were touring in Eastern Europe, it was very interesting because –you know– there you had similar cultures of Socialism. So it’s also postsocialist societies. They know about party ideologies, they know about socialist propaganda art, they know about the text beneath the text. So there is a huge resonance actually in these showcases.

And you also asked about the US. We had three showcases in New York, I think it was the end of 2018. Rachel Cooper invited us to the Asia Society there, I think somewhere in Park Avenue in New York. And I remember the second run. So I think that was really the most impressive performance of *Red* that I attended, because we had the whole auditorium in the Asia Society packed with Chinese students from Columbia and NYU. And for the first time you really saw an audience relating deeply also to the language of the piece – you know– because there are some inside jokes happening that you just get when you speak Chinese or are aware of the different dialects. There is this moment in the performance in which Jiang Fan reacts to that dance education scene and we had a lot of students in the audience that started to relate intensively. And then in the after-talk we learned that they felt, they remembered about their general education. So for them, it was a symbol of how they themselves have been trained in the public school system back in China. So, it really resonated so deeply with this particular community. So to me, this is still a very remarkable run of the show.

**V.R.:** Even for me it was so intense, as a viewer. I want us to go back to those five approaches that you describe in your book. Can you tell us more about those five trends in dramaturgy? And I like the plural "dramaturgies" in the title.

**K.T.:** Because clearly they are really coming from different angles. I think it's also important to note that this book, more or less documents a seminar that I curated and organized at the Central Academy of Drama. And I was lucky to have a grant and I could invite practitioners to give input to my students. And so in this whole semester of 2018-2019, I invited these five practitioners that are now documented in this book, and my students and I, actually, we worked on a performance we called "Beijing Topography." So it was about a critical investigation of recent city development, urbanization, politics and all that. And the idea was to invite practitioners that have distinct aesthetic approaches and foremost also an awareness of methodologies and a repertoire of interesting theater techniques that they could throw at the students in order to help them with their own endeavors. So we invited these five people and it was each time a similar structure: on the first day, most of our guest speakers gave an extensive lecture about their aesthetic, their techniques, what brought them to the theater as well. And this then also ended in informal conversations with the students. But this was just one part. I also asked them to show a work where they would think of the work as a representative work within their own artistic practice. And this is basically what the book documents. So each of the guests now is represented with a lecture and with a representative piece of work, which is also talked about in the lectures. And for the first time we had two Chinese avant-garde figures of experimental theater placing a foot into a Chinese Theater Academy. So, Wen Hui and Zhao Chuan never taught inside a Chinese Theater Academy. So that was also very exciting for me. To bring the outside of the Academy into the inside of the Academy, because I know that a lot of my students, have really an interest in exploring not so mainstream and streamlined languages of performance and Zhao Chuan and Wen Hui, of course, both have a rich experience in not just techniques, but also how to produce and what are the hacks, the ways to get to produce such a kind of documentary, postdramatic work in China. So they are really like leading figures in that. So Wen Hui is the choreograph of *Red* we already talked about that. And Zhao Chuan is an independent theater maker from Shanghai, where he runs since 2005 the group Grass Stage, which is now you could say the most professional amateur theater group of all China and it's an amazing work. They produce work totally independent from all organizations, which really allows them to approach social reality, history in a very radical manner. I also invited Lee Kyung-Sung from Seoul, Korea, because he's really an outstanding expert in site-specific works. So, we were working on "Beijing Topography," which explores the city and tries to talk theatrically about city urbanization. And Lee Kyung-Sung's work for ten years has been circling around the urbanization of Seoul. Then also I invited two practitioners from Europe that have longstanding working experiences in this field of postdramatic documentary theater: Hans-Werner Kroesinger and Boris Nikitin. Hans-Werner Kroesinger is really a milestone figure in bringing the documentary theater back on the agenda in the 1980s. One could call him the founder of the third period of Documentary Theater, something quite interesting

because there's a similarity between him and Peter Weiss and the like-minded who are representative of the second period of Documentary Theater that lasted until the end of the 1960s, which is that they all use textual documents. So Kroesinger uses a lot of written materials. But what is different between him and artists like Peter Weiss is that he has–I would say – a more critical take on the capacity of the document. So I think in Peter Weiss you really find the idea that the document can show us reality "as it is," could show us history "as it really happened." And I think this kind of belief, this full-fledged belief in the capacity of the document is something with which Hans-Werner Kroesinger would disagree. So he's very much aware that a document to the same extent records events that happen but also produces them in the very moment of recording. And then I also brought Boris Nikitin, in the beginning of his 40s, who actually pushes the doubt in the capacity of the document much further. Boris investigates reality as a fiction. So you see, it's really a wide array of aesthetic approaches and languages I wanted to expose to my classroom.

**V.R.:** I want to come back to this belief in the capacity of the document. There are different approaches to history as a document and its capacity. I love these three different takes. One is recording history, documenting history as it really is, and in this one, as you said, you also produce history, which is the documents that are there to be read and interpreted. And then, I love the third approach of Nikitin's, the mixing of reality and truth. And I have also heard by a Greek poet, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, that that "reality is more fiction than fiction itself." So I want to also hear more about this huge history in Germany, about the Documentary Theater and its capacity. What does it make it so powerful and why? There was a moment that it was at its peak in Germany and then it's slowed down and then it was forgotten. And now it's emerging again. And you have now the experience from China and Europe to see what is happening in the documents, to see if this is something different, especially in the post-pandemic era?

**K.T.:** Peter Weiss attempted a very brief summary of what Documentary Theater is. I think he published it in 1968. It's called *Notes towards the Definition of Documentary Theate*r. The English translation is published in Theater Quarterly as "materials and models," something like that. And it's like a four-pager. And he starts with a definition, because he says "documentary theater reflects life." I mean, this is to some extent what Theater always did: it reflected life... But then –and this is remarkable to me– he says, "as represented by mass media." And I think this is the configuration that really gets me into this thing. Because when I said that I am gaming with reality, reframing reality, I constantly reframe mass and digital media representations of reality within one of the oldest analogue mediums, namely, the theater.

And I think this is also the very particular aspect about Nikitin's approach. He himself would always consider himself a site-specific artist. In my book he makes this point, when he says, "my site-specific works happen inside the theater," which talks about a very high awareness and consciousness of using the theater as a machine that allows you to study how we observe. How do we see? How do we assign meaning to something after we have seen something and have been exposed to it? It's this kind of theater as a machine that allows us to study

**Fig. 3.** The four performers of Red: Wen Hui, Jiang Fan, Li Xinmin, and Liu Zhuying. By Richy Wong.

how we see others, ourselves, or even abstract stuff like history, violence, loss. I think that in both Nikitin's work and mine, what is particular is that we are trying to use theater as such a machine to investigate how we see our times that are determined by the ubiquity of computing. So, when you ask about the history of Documentary Theater in Germany, I guess one could say that there were three periods. I mean, Erwin Piscator started the whole concept of Documentary Theater in the 20s, because he was a communist and when the Nazis took over, he went over to the US basically, and he became like a teacher to very influential people in the US theater, like Judith Malina and all these people. They all started in his theater workshop at the New School. In the 1950s Piscator returned to Germany and he worked as an artistic director of theaters and helped establish the second period of Documentary theater. So, it was basically through Piscator's stagings and programings of works by Peter Weiss, Rolf Hochhuth and others that helped them to break through. This second period of Documentary theater is a very text-based form of Documentary Theater as opposed to Piscator's own practice, which was a heavy theatrical, very performative one. I mean, Piscator was primarily a director, not a writer like Weiss. This second period lasted not even for ten years. In scholarship, it is pointed out that the intention of the practitioners of this second period was to openly talk about the continuity and impact of NS regime on the young Federal Republic of Germany. These kind of

continuities were mostly neglected back then by the majority of Germans. Not at least, due to the student movement in 1968 this purpose of Documentary Theater could finally gain a momentum in reality and then documentary practices slowly disappeared. It was the fall of the Wall, which then led to a new interest in this documentary form. Like I already said, Hans-Werner Kroesinger is one of the main representatives of this period.

**V.R.:** This is the perfect example of theater as a site-specific with the fall of the Wall and which is also very close to what I mean when I talk about the space theater as "a civic space" where everyone involved, whether performer or audience, has to come to the stage where you are forced to think this fundamental question, "what should we do as citizens?" And that was also the fundamental beginning of the Greek tragedy which was civic education. It was a huge project of civic education. And now with this idea of having the theaters and the site-specific, it's related to the civic space and also to this medium in flux where everything changes and also its civic role is reinforced. It's incredible what you shared with me today. I am really thankful. We had a lot of food for thought. I want to thank you for this meaningful conversation and your contribution to *The Journal of Civic Media* for our special issue.

**K.T.:** I thank you so much for this conversation. I think it's so interesting what you said about the tragedy, because I mean, I was just thinking about Hans-Thies Lehmann who coined this term, "postdramatic theater." But he has worked so much on tragedy, basically in his last writings. So, I think, this point towards an intimate relationship between the tragedy and the postdramatic. I mean, from a dramaturgical perspective, I have always been fascinated by the structure of the tragedy. It's actually a heavy montage, right? I mean, it's a montage out of like different elements–just like modern cabaret. You have rituals, you have prayers, you have the songs, you have the choir, and every audience knows, okay, the next element will come. And these elements carry more than just the meaning of a story. And this is already a very postdramatic dramaturgy. Some people think about the postdramatic as this new shiny object. But what I'm so interested in is also to understand how the concept of the postdramatic allows us actually to look back into theater history. I mean, it's also a perfect paradigm to shed different lights and to gain new perspectives of how we have made theater. In addition to postdramatic theatre's relationship to tragedy, I just want to mention the impact that the postdramatic had on Chinese Theater historiography. You know, Chinese theater is so much impacted through the naturalist theater. The spoken theater that was imported via Japan from Europe there in the in the 19th and 20th centuries. And this led to a huge neglect actually of what one calls Chinese opera. There was little attention paid towards these opera forms and it was through the publication of "Postdramatic theater" that the whole Chinese Opera was put on the agenda again, because it provided scholarship with a language to engage with this highly performative genre. So, postdramatic theater does relate to tradition and it also helps us understand where we are coming from. It's not just a rupture. It's not against something. Like the *Wild Grass* we talked about in the very beginning, it can inform our present.

**V.R.:** Yes, it's very important. What an incredible conversation. Thank you so much, Kai!

# FIELDS IN FLUX

# Democratizing Agenic and Epistemological Authority; the Generative Possibility Space; and Lecturing in Flux: MCtheProfessor.GOV

by James Ikeda in Conversation with Hannah Trivilino

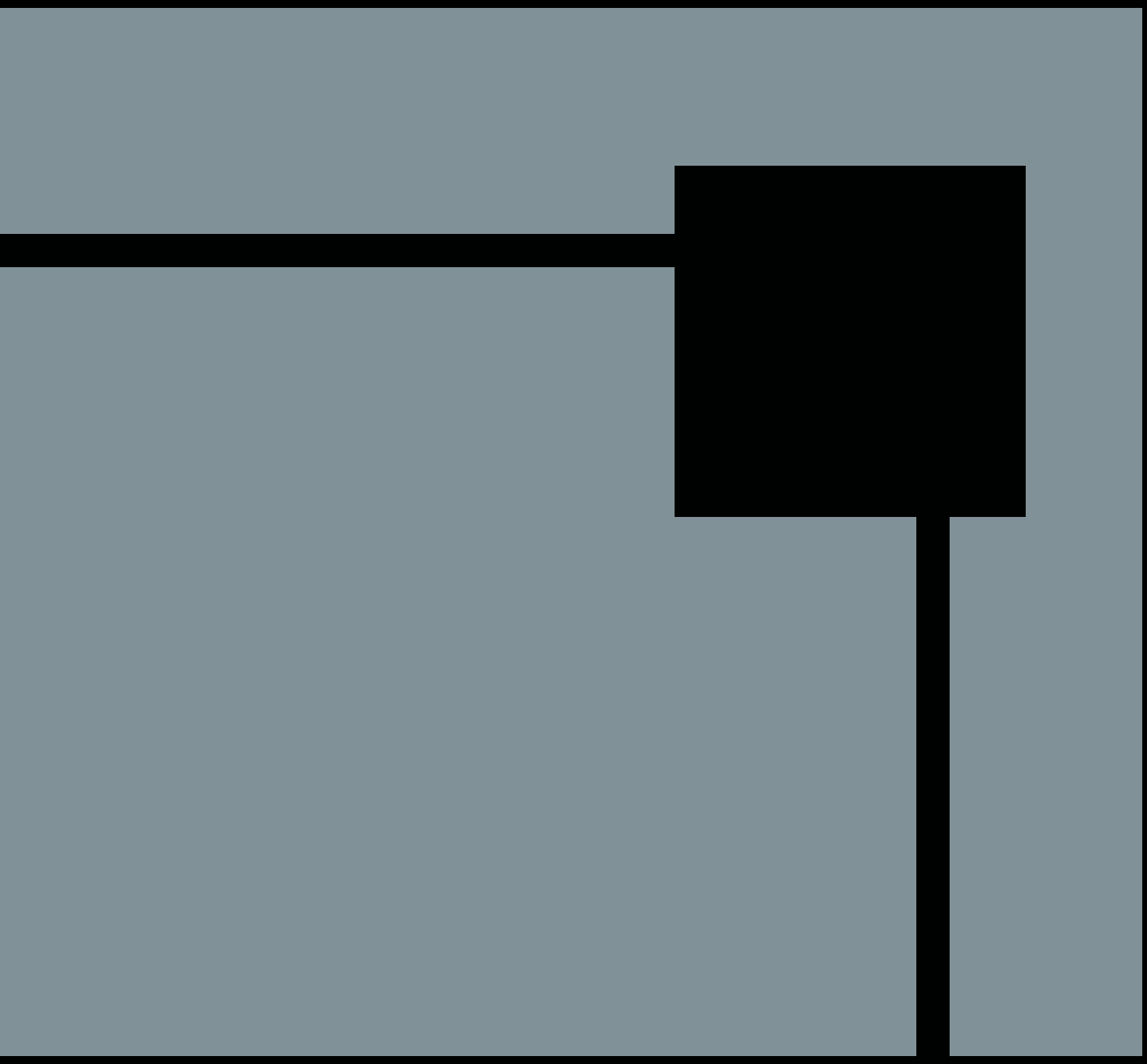



**Fig. 1.** Problematizing the National History Survey lecture at Pink Noise Studios in Somerville, MA.

**Hannah Trivilino:** Thank you for doing this interview, James! I was very excited to discuss your MCtheProfessor.GOV project in the context of "civic media in flux" because I find it to offer such an intriguing praxis of "civic media in flux." I'm also thrilled to talk with you regarding civic media, given your unique standpoint as a civic educator, civic practitioner, and civic steward via your roles as a high school History and Civics teacher; a community music organizer; a community college instructor of History, Philosophy, and Street Performance; a scholar of radical intellectual history; a musician; a poet; and an organizer of the "Bummer City Historical Society" arts and civics collective.

To provide some context, you and I met in 2018 when our mutual friend Jake Hasson invited me to your inaugural MCtheProfessor.GOV performance (titled *Problematizing the National History Survey*). Jake told me that one of the classes you were going to be teaching at Bunker Hill Community College was cancelled. He said that because you had already prepared the content for the course, you decided to present some of the lectures as public performances with a backing band. As an audience member, I found the event to be fabulously interesting, compelling, engaging, and fresh. Could you please tell us about how you came up with the idea for the MCtheProfessor.GOV project?

**James Ikeda:** Much of what I do starts as bits, and with friends. MCtheProfessor.GOV started as a joke Facebook post, which was something to the effect of, "wouldn't it be funny if I gave a History lecture with an improvisational backing band?" And then three months later we did it. Bits and jokes and humor are the origin point for a lot of the things that I spend a lot of time on, because there is a pure creativity to them. These are things that tend to just appear to me in my head, and I think there is something fun about deciding to honor that with action. It's very easy to equivocate about things a lot and to optimize and plan excessively,

and I think embracing silly things and embracing spur of the moment ideas is a really good way of breaking out of whatever your normal mental habits are. And I think of it in terms of treating the spontaneous with reverence. So in the simplest sense that was the origin of it. And it was an idea I was kicking around for a while internally, but there is a lot more content and thought because of the context.

The original idea was that when I was in Education school, lecturing was really frowned upon and was considered passé, ineffective, of the past – something that you regrettably have to do a little bit every once in a while but should very much be an afterthought in your pedagogy. I really chafed against that and chafed against a lot of the training that I received in Education school that seemed to imply that if the students are doing activities constantly than that necessarily means that they're learning better than if they're receiving what is sometimes called "direct instruction." I personally respond well to direct instruction, and I think there are certain things that you can do in stringing together complicated ideas in long form over time that you can't necessarily do with other kinds of activities. In other words, I think there's certain things you can accomplish in a lecture that you can't accomplish with another kinds of instruction. That being said, I also understood that there are lots of different learning styles and that lectures are really ineffectual for some people. And so my thought was, "is there a way to take this format and the things that can be accomplished with this format and stretch it to make it accessible and useful for a wider audience?" That was part of a broader concern with taking specifically my field of academic history –so often ensconced in the academy–and bringing that into spaces that were not traditionally academic spaces. So there's the pedagogical aspect of "how do you take the lecture format and make it more accessible?", and then the content aspect of "how do you take high level, graduate history scholarship and translate that, make it accessible to a general audience?" Those were the two motivations that blended with this bit that then took the form of this band.

To tie that all together, the way of making the lecture more accessible was to add in other engaging elements, other elements that could be latched on to. There's a lot of people who are visual learners, or oral learners, but generally speaking, it seems to be that if you have different things to associate with the content you're engaging, it's easier to think with and through it. And it's easier to pay attention, and it's easier to chunk out what you're encountering by tying it to things like visual cues or to sounds or whatever else.

**H.T.:** As somebody who has many learning disabilities, I can say that being in the audience of the MCtheProfessor.GOV shows is the best I've ever been able to pay attention in lectures.

**J.I.:** That's an amazing thing to hear. The theory was to start to build out beginning with music. I originally wanted to build a whole visual aspect around this, which as of yet has not come to pass but I do plan on doing in the future. My plan is to have a whole bunch of things going on. In fact, we applied for a grant at one point, and had we gotten it we were going to have dancers, moving set pieces, and interactive elements –even an immersive seating element where the band was interspersed with the crowd.


**Fig. 2.** A Brief History of Japanese Americans lecture at Pink Noise Studios in Somerville, MA.

Part of the ongoing idea is how you can make the simplest thing in the world (which is somebody talking about a topic) and expand it into this encompassing, multi-modal art piece into which the audience is immersed and through which the audience-performer or audience-lecturer dichotomy is disrupted and broken down. And having largely improvisational music is important specifically because it distributes the agency of performance such that it's not just me the lecturer who is leading the thing but it is in fact a whole ensemble of people who are co-creating it. And their music responds to what I am saying, but I'm also responding to the music as it changes in the interplay between the performers. Theoretically, if we expanded it out further, the audience could have an agential role in that process which overall democratizes this form of pedagogy which is emergent from a traditional idea about education whereby you have an "expert" delivering to a "novice." I love the idea of taking that arch-traditional form and democratizing it through immersion and improvisation.



**Fig. 3-4.** Civil War Memory: Contestations of the Past & Politics Today lecture at Pink Noise Studios in Somerville, MA.

**H.T.:** I love how you are positioning this traditional philosophy towards education to be in flux by thinking through the audience's agential role. I've heard this discussed in relation to students in a Critical Pedagogy context, and I've heard about audience agency in a Performance Studies context, but I often only hear the two converge in a Theater of the Oppressed context which if I'm understanding correctly doesn't usually center the lecture as the performance medium. I also love all the "in flux" dimensions of the performance–specifically how the medium for this performance is in flux (given your iterative design) whilst being about content that is also in flux (as the theme of the first lecture was about the construction of the ways we teach national histories). What is the interplay between the content and the medium for delivering the content? How are these in flux? (if you feel they are). How do you design these performances to both be structured and honor flux?

**J.I.:** At the very first performance I did have lecture notes, which I actually never use at work. I was very nervous for that performance, so I had a lot of stuff written out, and I actually used it less than I thought I was going to. For subsequent lectures I had a sort of general outline for what I wanted to cover. The lectures are divided into three sections, and so I'll know what the sections are, how I'm starting, and how I plan to finish them. But very much like what I do at work, the bulk of the lecture is improvised. You could say the content is not [in flux] in that I do have the primary kernels that I want to communicate. But I think the key thing about the lecture format is not just the content as a singular thing, but it's the way that you connect and weave together ideas. Even things like sequence; you can take the same ten thoughts and tie them together in a different order, and they light each other up in different ways. And so part of what is happening is as I'm listening to the music, as I'm moving in the space and looking at the audience and feeling the room as you do as a performer, I'm making decisions about things like sequence, which anecdotes to bring in, sometimes I'm cutting or adding content –and it's all happening in real time, so everybody is engaged in improvisation. One of the big methodological questions is how to extend that into the audience space, how to stretch the agency of the audience into the act of improvisation; what form could audience improvisation take? I would say in a macro-sense the content is set, but in reality the way it gets delivered is completely contingent upon what happens in the room.

Here's two examples. A couple of the lectures we did more than once. The first one you saw we did a couple of months later in a more built out setting and with a much bigger ensemble. In that case it was a refining of the original version. There's another lecture I have on Japanese American history (you can find the video online). We did the performance on the Day of Remembrance in 2019 or 2020 just before lockdown. The first time we did this performance on Japanese American History was at a bar in New Hampshire. During the section on internment, an old white man stood up and walked out. He said, "you're being too negative." I'm a Japanese American–although my family wasn't interned–and one of our players that night is the descendent of several internees. It was an extremely intense interaction, and the whole room sort of froze. It was being recorded, and I started sort of engaging with this person directly and saying "this performance is for you, this is why


**Fig. 5.** A Brief History of Japanese Americans lecture at Pink Noise Studios in Somerville, MA.

we're doing this." It was a really hard encounter, but it was actually an interesting example of what I'm ultimately looking for, which is that I do want the audience to interact, and I've been thinking about that largely in terms of, "is there some kind of art making thing the audience could do?" Or, "is there some kind of a movement the audience could do?" But actually the intervention of an audience question or comment in this way is altering the content. And that is a lecturer's worst nightmare, because again, the whole point of the format is that you are making these decisions of how you want to weave ideas together and seeing what works. But at the end of the day you're doing that based on what makes sense for you and what works for you as the speaker, what seems sensible for you and your read of the room and the rest of it. Oftentimes lectures are followed by Q&A, which is a totally different format. So I am thinking that in terms of content, in the long term I am thinking of how to take something with the spirit of the Q&A and figure out a way to weave that into at least a phase of the lecture itself (not as a separate thing). I have no idea how to do that, but that's a long term propelling goal.

**H.T.:** Are you familiar with an organization in Ireland called The Bright Club? They train professors in stand up comedy to make them better/more effective lecturers. Their approach and your project are unique in both offering a creative, performance-based lens towards re-imagining the lecture. I'm thinking of your Q&A curiosity in their context and wondering if they train their professors in crowd work the way a stand up comedian would do crowd work. I think reimagining Q&A is

a great example of how to propagate the potentialities that something in flux inherently offers.

**J.I.:** This is so interesting about The Bright Club, because whenever I talk about performance, I often start by talking about comedy. I was very inspired by the book *The Transformative Power of Performance* by Erica Fisher-Lichte. She defines performance as the "auto-poetic feedback loop between performer and audience." This is something that I think people who do performance understand implicitly; audiences have a role, and that role has norms, and depending on the genre of performance the norms are radically different. So in things like classical music performances, you don't clap in between movements; you only clap at the end. Whereas in poetry, you clap and snap in the middle of lines –you're supposed to be feeding your energy into what the performer is doing. Similarly with comedy, the audience laughs. If I hear a joke at a comedy show I laugh in a way and at a volume and with a level of enthusiasm that oftentimes has an element of being a put on – which is not to say that it's fake; it's a convention, it's how that medium or how that genre works. And because every genre or medium or performance style has its own conventions, I think the most fruitful space for thinking through what this project could ultimately be is taking all these different kinds of conventions and saying "how can you effectively blend these?" It is kind of the same philosophy of add a million things in and then see which becomes excessive, or which combinations work, and then take out the stuff that doesn't work.

At the show in Chicago I just played, we had a joke that we were going to take the conventions around seeing off ships in the early 20th century at shows, so at the end of my set people threw flowers. I like that idea, just toying with applying mismatching norms of performance and audience. It's fun, it's interesting.

**H.T.:** What I'm hearing here is how being able to roll with flux is an especially important skillset if a performer/facilitator/educator is going to play with the expectations of the audience-performer conventions/interactions. When you open the doors to inviting audience agency, you open the potential for audiences to engage in a generative and collaborative way and you open the possibility for the audience to engage in a destructive way/ in a way that can cause harm and/or pain, such as the story you shared from the performance in New Hampshire. How do you prepare for this?

**J.I.:** If I may begin that thread by continuing on the comedy bit, this is really interesting because every genre/mode of performance has its own conventions and norms, and within the type there is a range of acceptable kinds of participation which too can be in flux, depending on the performer and the venue etc. The best example is with comedy: hecklers are most often people who think they understand but actually do not understand the conventions of that form of art. Hecklers (I think) are generally people who believe the bits are co-created in an equal way, where the audience and the performer are playing the same role of riffing whereas in reality when comedians solicit help from the audience they're doing so in a way where they're really holding the reins, and the audience's role there is to trust that it's going somewhere. It is a relationship of participation but in a hierarchical trust relationship. And one you enter into voluntarily in theory, but then the


**Fig. 6.** Problematizing the National History Survey lecture at Pink Noise Studios in Somerville, MA.

heckler comes in and then and says "oh, this is also my show," and some comedians know how to handle that and some don't, and some hecklers are obviously more difficult to handle, and some transgress to the point where they're removed. I think when you start thinking about lecturing or teaching through a performance lens, just as you are saying, it requires that you prepare yourself with the skills to be able to flexibly respond to the different things that the audience will be one to do depending on who they are and what's going on and what they think is happening. That's a skill all teachers should have. I think trying to address this problem –or trying to conceive of this not as a problem but as a generative source of creative energy– I think there's something really fruitful and cool about that. That's the kind of thing that gets me really excited.

**H.T.:** I love how excited you sound when you talk about how exciting it is because it is really exciting, and when people are nurturing the exciting potentialities in the way you are, I think it is an irresistible thing. I believe humans want to learn and are curious, and when we can be in a setting that honors that it is palpable. When I've been in the audience at the MCtheProfessor.GOV performances, the energy in the audience felt like people were bursting with excitement about learning.

**J.I.:** I feel that too, and that's very much the goal. The thing that all this brings up for me and why it's so fun to think about and talk about and work through, is that even beyond pedagogy –and maybe even beyond learning– what we're talking about is getting into a creative headspace when conceiving of relating to other people over or through common projects. I love thinking about performance (which is usually the lens I think about for this) because it forces you to acknowledge and take stock of all of the invisible structures that orient us and constrict us and constrain our imaginations in how we relate

to each other and conceiving of how we could relate to each other. Getting past that and starting to think creatively, it becomes very easy to expand this out. And so you could start thinking about things like if you can figure out how to take someone who has particular expertise, put them in a room with other people who don't have that expertise, and cultivate a collaborative democratic space that still allows for this exchange across differences of expertise and differences of experience, it brings to mind what could be the potential for applying this kind of thought in a conventional school setting. Or what could be the potential for applying this to governance or other sort of areas of life or other spaces of human relation that have their own rules and their own invisible structures which can be creatively reevaluated?

So in a way, MCtheProfessor.GOV is one means through which to think through this much bigger question of the potentialities of human relationships, and how we can work together productively, and how we can build new kinds of spaces and cultivate new kinds of norms that allow us to think beyond the confines of convention that are in a lot of ways really overdetermined, how we conceive of really basic things like teaching and learning. And I think it goes back to this critique of lecturing as a form of instruction that ought to be discarded in as much as is practicable. It's one example of a much broader problem whereby we reify these things; we reify forms of reacting and means of communication and styles communication. We reify ways people relate to each other and ways people relate to institutions and the ways they cobble themselves into groups and conceive of themselves into groups. All these things become sort of narrowed and caricaturishly simple versions of what they could be, which is anything. The endless possibility therein is the most exciting thing in the world to me and something that really drives me forward.

**H.T.:** I'm curious what your framework for "the civic" is, because when I hear "the civic" the feeling I feel is everything you just described –that teeming with the fecundity of all the ideas and possibilities of what life can be. I feel that the second you start making life narrow and prescribed and confined and "efficient," that immediately starts threatening "the civic." So I'm curious what your framework for "the civic" is and how MCtheProfessor.GOV interfaces with that.

**J.I.:** And I might add something into this which is that I think what you said is a product of capitalism–the prescribing of human relations as a way of ordering the world to make it exploitable.

**H.T.:** Definitely.

**J.I.:** I say this jokingly, but I really do chafe against even the idea of efficiency and productivity. I'm

**Fig. 7.** Civilization & Savagery lecture at The Democracy Center in Cambridge, MA.

very much bound by these things in my life; part of the daily drama of being alive for me is measuring myself against a metric of productivity that I know is imported, and I know is capitalism, and I know is bad, but it's hard to break out of. A small act of refusal like –this is going to seem completely off topic, but I don't think it is– a small act of refusal like doing something intentionally inefficiently, like taking the long way home. Done as an individual or done within a constraining context like work or school –these feel like little individual acts of liberation.

For me, "the civic" is taking those little refusals and looking not just inward but also outward at one another. And when we start to do that together, when we start to think together about "okay, here we're in this room together; what does that mean? Why is that the way that it is? What could it be like?" That might sound too general, but my conception of "the civic" is there. It's in when the acknowledgment of these sort of constricting forces transcends individual liberatory acts and individual acts of refusal and begins to coalesce

**Fig. 8.** Lecture at the Democracy Center in Cambridge, MA.

**Fig. 9.** Lecture at the Democracy Center in Cambridge, MA.

around something that is common and shared and happens essentially in social interface between people. And the cool thing about that –to repeat something I said earlier in a more concise way– is this can happen in any way. This can happen through so many different kinds of creative and collaborative activities. And education and what we would traditionally class as "Civics" (people in a society organizing towards political ends) –these are really prime and perfect places to be doing this kind of exploratory work and creative work and exciting experimentation. It's almost the most natural place to begin that sort of work because it underlies everything else.

**H.T.:** I really admire that your project is something that honors all that complexity, while still being focused. I think that people can perceive inefficiency as being unfocused when it can actually still be extremely focused while giving value to complexity and honoring it. To me, that is an important tenant of effective civic media– taking the time complexity requires I also find MCtheProfessor.GOV to be

very interesting because I regard at falling under a slightly different manifestation of civic media than I think of other civic media projects. I'm not sure how to distinguish this, but I'll try. When I think of projects like Unicorn Riot, I think of the practice of broadcasting the counter-narrative, broadcasting the perspectives that are not shared by media structures that are owned by people who wield hegemonic power. I think of your project as creating media that facilitates the civic –not that projects like Unicorn Riot don't of course do that as well; I believe they absolutely do. But there's something about MCtheProfessor.GOV teaching history via civic media in flux that gives it an interesting distinction to me as opposed to something presenting current events/current counter-narratives. Does this make sense? And do you have a framework for civic media?

**J.I.:** The distinction there would seem to just be institutionalization, right? If ultimately –I mean I don't know what, if you're thinking about this through the politics of pre-figuration or whatever– I'm not exactly sure, there's different angles to think about it –but in as much as we accept not just the inadequacy but the destructiveness of what I would call corporate media– corporate media implying for profit– these institutions that are the product of a profit-driven system need to be replaced by something that serves a genuine civic function.

In that sense, institutionalization, or if you want to be somewhat lighter about it, consistent organization and consistent community engagement and community use are the metrics of something being constituted as what you can call civic media. Thinking about things in terms of "well, civic media is sort of what we're talking about, but taking an institutional or organized form, or sustained form" seems like a lazy answer but I think is actually the best answer I can give. Because it does come down to–it's the construction of an alternative public sphere, right? Maybe civic media is the organization work of the institutions that facilitate the construction of alternative public spheres that are not subsumed by the profit motive. That feels like a workable definition for how I might think about it.

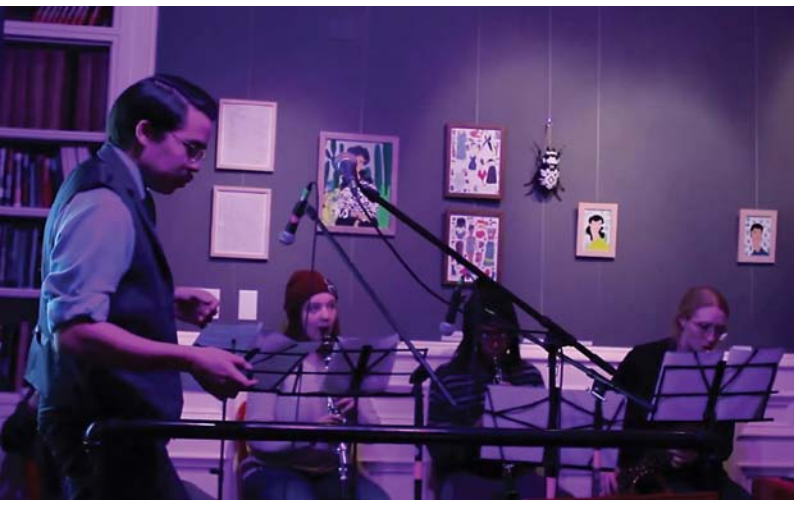


**Fig. 10.** Testimony-as-Activism lecture at Mill No. 5 in Lowell, MA.


**Fig. 11.** Testimony-as-Activism lecture at Mill No. 5 in Lowell, MA.

**H.T.:** I agree with that.

**J.I.:** How do you define civic media? And media?

**H.T.:** I think of "civic media" as "people's media." Re just "media"...the quickest answer coming to me right now is "living stories." That can mean a lot of different things, but when I layer that against your working definition of civic media I would say, "living stories in service of (James's civic media framework)."

**J.I.:** I like that, and you might add some long parenthetical of –like "living stories"– and then add in some element that's about that kind of democratization and sort of constant spreading of agenic and epistemological authority.

**H.T.:** Definitely. Can I ask how you came up with the name? "MCtheProfessor.GOV?" It's such a catchy name, and I feel it very quickly communicates to me something about the spirit of what you're doing.

**J.I.:** I mean once again this is just a joke. It's got a bit of a funny genealogy... so my friend Connor Hennessy is a folk singer but he also has a hip-hop side project. He's actually quite a good rapper. And he's a really good writer, and one of the reasons why he's a good writer is because he reads a ton. And when he started rapping, he would do these freestyle sessions with another friend. And they were really generative because that wires your brain differently. So his writing got really good because he was doing this intentional practice of cultivating wordplay. So he invited me over one day to be present at one of these sessions and to participate. And I can't do that; I'm a pretty good writer, but I can't think off the dome like that. But I went and I had thought all day of some rhymes and things like that. And when I got there we were joking around, and we were going to record. And I was like, "I need a name." And that was the name I came up with.

The joke was specifically putting ".gov" on the end of a name was a long running joke for me. But I also thought it was funny that –this wasn't explicit, but I think the thing that made the name funny to me is that it's two incongruous –not necessarily clashing–but two incongruous ways of trying to establish expert authority. "The Professor" and the ".gov," which are not synonymous. It's a goofy juxtaposition, but in that sense I think what I like about it is that I'm establishing my epistemological authority, but I'm doing it as a joke, so I'm not taking it very seriously. That's a really key part of it, right? I don't want people to come to the lectures because of the credential or because of my position. I want them to come because it's compelling. Part of that is playing within these existing systems of epistemic legitimacy –but not taking them seriously, which is important.

**H.T.:** I love how this connects to the very first thing you said about how MCtheProfessor.GOV started as a bit; I love the playfulness at play in all of this. I think if we're actually going to nurture learning, and civic learning, and practices that will hopefully steward futures that represent and affirm all people – to have that deep learning happen, it's important to first come from a place of true openness. I think about how music is one of the ways you're disarming people, softening spaces, helping the audience access that openness. I also think the joke aspect is a huge part of that.

**Fig. 12.** Problematizing the National History Survey lecture at Pink Noise Studios in Somerville, MA.

The fact that playfulness is in the project's name, so audiences enter with that humor (knowing of course that it's also serious –that it's both) communicates the spirit behind how you're approaching the project. You can tell when somebody doesn't have that playfulness as their guiding compass but then tries to add it after (which doesn't really work) rather than it being the inception place from which something is born.

**J.I.:** Absolutely. Self seriousness is such a poison to art and to civic engagement. And also to activism, and to any kind of sustainable collaborative action. It kills it, because that's its own performance. Self-seriousness is a kind of performance that has a series of conventions that don't facilitate sociability very well. Where as humor really facilitates sociability more than anything else does. So I really like the fact that if your first step, if your initial ethos is one of playfulness and silliness and humor and fun, then you can do the whole range from the silly to the serious. Whereas if your initial posture is one of self seriousness, you don't have that range then. The most tedious poetry is the kind that is self-serious and the best is the kind that starts off funny and then takes you into the dark place and then brings you back.

**H.T.:** I agree with this so much and appreciate you building MCtheProfessor.GOV with this orientation. Would you like to share any final thoughts about civic media in flux?

**J.I.:** I want to throw the word dynamism in there, for the flux component. And as a general statement, I want to say that this conversation has been

really nice and clarifying and helps me remember the fact that the reason why I do any of this is that I am excited about possibility, and possibility requires living in acknowledgment of flux. That's the only way you get any kind of appreciation for the possible alternatives that are out there or that have yet to be built.


**Fig. 13.** Problematizing the National History Survey lecture at Pink Noise Studios in Somerville, MA.

# Relevance of Civic Education in Contemporary Societies

by Bam Dev Sharma

*"To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to a society"*

**–Theodore Roosevelt**

## Abstract

*Over the years, educational practices have distinctly changed in terms of teaching and learning. Several educational approaches have been adopted to facilitate the learners and communities in the long run. Civic education as an accommodative approach of education is showing its presence focusing civic engagement and values that involve issues of public concern through educational programs and activities. Furthermore, civic education has become useful in making educational goals comprehensive incorporating citizenship values and civic engagement. This new approach takes teaching and learning not as an merely acquisition and dissemination of information and attainment of educational degrees. That is, it encompasses educational values and civic engagement. In this sense, school and college education is therefore suggested to include social, democratic, cultural, and historical values through which learners can become responsible citizens. This, then, helps them be involved into social, educational, and community causes. Being this as a comprehensive model to amalgamate education with purpose, civic education has drawn an increasing attention on behalf of educators and educational planners towards effective implementation for civic causes. Participation, collaboration, discussion, project works, meetings, discussions, and interactions help develop the civic cause. In addition, civic education initiates programs and policies that make students familiar with social and political issues. Considerable studies indicate that such participation on behalf of learners has yielded positive results. Based on this founding principle, this article tries to explore positive implications of civic pedagogy and how it can advance community causes. In justifying this claim, this article relies on an analytical approach, sharing views of renowned scholars and educators from qualitative research perspectives.*

**Keywords:** *holistic education, civic engagement, multilingualism, civic literacy, collaboration*

## Introduction

Generally, education means achieving knowledge, expertise, and training to be competent, thereby making effective decisions for prosperous and successful life. However, the complete definition of education cannot be solely limited to academic performance and degree attainment. It is also associated with social, moral, and academic values to transform society in positive perspectives. Phillip. W. Jackson, in his phenomenal book, *What is Education,* is of the opinion that education means acquiring knowledge in which some of the basic elements are included. These elements, according to Jackson, define that education should to be factual, systematic, instrumental, moral, and subjective (15)

While civic education has a wider approach of educational attainment, it is also considered as an educational tool to make public outreach with the academic training and expertise in formal and informal settings. Andrew Peterson specifically states:

> The term "civic education" refers to any formative attempt to teach the knowledge, skills or dispositions required for citizenship. Civic education comes in many guises,

> ranging from what is often characterized as the passive note-learning of civics to more active and participatory forms of learning. (1)

Civic education primarily stresses on citizenship values and skills for a learner to make access to the communities and then contribute to social and community development through involvements in both formal and informal settings. In some cases, however, the civic educational activities are quite active and in some cases, they are passive. Referring to Paulo Freire's statements in this context can be relevant:

> Ideally, educators, students, and prospective teachers should together be conversant with other forms of knowledge that are seldom part of the curriculum. They should incorporate into their way of life the ideal of permanent hope-giving search, which is one of the fruits of our essential (and assumed) unfinishedness. (38)

Civic education transcends formal curricula because it is not solely devised in routine–bound teaching-learning activities that mostly take place in the classes. That is, civic education gives priority on values and students' compatibilities with social and community life and community issues. Some of these values include respect, mutual cooperation, trust, confidence, and interpersonal exchanges with individuals. These values can be useful in further orienting students to be responsible members of the community. Civic education, in this sense, is equipped with implicit moral and social obligations for the communities they live. Thomas Lickona is of the opinion that moral implications are important in students' lives. He further argues that "moral education is not a new idea. It is, in fact, as old as education itself. Down through history, in countries all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help young people become smart and to help them become good"(18)

Lickona posits two fundamental elements of education: to make a person good for the broader social and community causes thereby to be smart in educational performance. This indicates that civic education can help people accomplish both the individual and professional skills on the one hand and social and community needs on the other.

## Contemporary Times and Civic Education

Civic education is taking substantial attention in the modern times when course planners, educators and educational reformers consider civic pedagogy relevant for the twenty first century educational needs and expectations. Considerable studies and researches have enumerated that education without civic values becomes just mechanical. Robert Putnam indicates a decline interest in civic education, citing a number of factors like low turnout of the voters, lack of philanthropic works, and declining membership of social organization. (qtd. in Peterson 20). Many of these factors reflect harrowing decline of civic education.

Lack of civic values therefore makes teaching-learning ineffectual in terms of social, cultural, democratic and institutional development. It is indisputable that civic values create effective citizens generating social and community mobility

through participation and meaningful engagements. And they, then, build rapport with the people around them and establish an influential role engaging themselves willingly in mutually beneficial activities. In addition, the learners know people and their views about the society, the social and community projects and issues being faced. This further facilitates them in broadening the objectives of educational attainment.

Because of its accommodative and dynamic nature, the civic education has ushered a paradigm shift in the prevailing education system, unlike the past in which a learner was often expected solely to obtain good grades. Civic education is thus to make learners aware of another purpose of education: to make contributions in social, democratic and civic needs. Richard Living Stone, the theorist of education of all times, states:

> I have argued that none has the right to feel himself educated if he does not know what is first rate in his daily occupation and (so far this possible) in those fields where the creative and intellectual powers of man are revealed. But there is another job much more difficult than teaching or nursing or business or medicine, in which we all are concerned –the job of living; and there surely, as much as in any other pursuit we need to know what is the first rate (qtd. in Awasthi et al. 32-33)

As discussed above, civic education embodies broader components of education; it does not merely provide acquisition of knowledge to a learner for professional attainment but also it helps them better familiarize with civic values and then comply with them. This familiarity is the basis for creating a space for the public good.

We can take an example to see this phenomenon. Suppose that medical students train themselves to become doctors and learn skills of surgery. Such professional and academic skills, indeed, make make them competent doctors because they devote time and energy in attaining the degree. At the same time, however, they should have civic responsibilities; they should also work to be available with their patients and make them feel good. If the doctors take themselves himself merely as professionals whose job is just to perform medical duties such as surgery or supervision in the hospital without paying much attention to their community and people around them, they are is not a perfect doctors.

Understandably, civic education encompasses a broad framework; it seeks holistic and comprehensive components. It incorporates knowledge, skills, aptitude, values, responsibilities and willingness to participate in social, political, and institutional building. Ron Miller's following words are apt in this:

> Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to the spiritual values such as compassion and peace. Holistic education aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and passionate love for learning. This is done, not through an academic "curriculum" that condenses the world into instructional packages, but through direct engagement with environment. (qtd. in Awasthi, et al. 18)

Considering all these founding principles, civic education is considered significant with foresights and reform activities for the modern educational objectives. As a result, several academic institutions have started to modify their curricula and pedagogies so as to give sufficient spaces for civic participations and activities.

Some educators contend that some of the courses being taught in the modern times at universities and colleges are not as accommodative as they should. They have revamped pedagogical strategies prevalent in the past. They have found the past formal school education system defective because it did not include social and citizenship values. John Holt termed school and its curriculum unfavorable for young children. He found formal education burdensome for young children as it gave pressure and routine-bound activities rather than freedom to choose what they like and do. He radically called for better options of education:

> We could also abolish the fixed, required curriculum. People remember what is interesting and useful to them, what helps them make sense of the world, or helps them to get along in it. All else they quickly forget, if they ever learn it at all. The idea of "body of knowledge" to be picked up in school and used for the rest of one's life, is nonsense in the world as complicated and rapidly changing as ours. (62)

Holt opposes fixed and formal educational approaches to deprive the learners see things and build the viewpoints beyond formal educational setting. This can also imply that civic education can be an option for tiring formal education that Holt dislikes.

That is, the civic education encourages the learners as active agents to comply with value-based, liberal, democratic, and contextual teaching/ learning environment encompassing two fundamental principles of education: the first is acquisition and dissemination of knowledge for the community, and the second is to embed civic sense and values. That said, the civic education enhances knowledge and expertise and then bringing the learners to social, cultural, communal, national, and global issues. Besides, it creates an environment for willing the learners for service learning within their communities the communities to contribute as per their professional and educational efficiencies.

To sum up, civic education includes the following components:

civic sense;
civic skills;
civic participation;
civic affinity and bond;
civic responsibilities.

## Rationale of Civic Education

Several studies indicate that young people are becoming indifferent to political and social knowledge. This is not solely due to the fact that university and curricula planners did not pay attention to this matter or they did not plan the curricula towards this direction. Studies also indicate that there is a significant fall in the young peoples' attitudes towards the programs based on civic education. Some theorists think it natural in

complex settings of life when young people have to consider their professional career, jobs, and family obligations. On this backdrop, civic education and civic engagement can be instrumental to bridge the widening gaps between young learners with the communities.

Civic education has far reaching consequences for young learners and societies because it is associated with mutual give and take. The young learners, on the one hand, develop their pragmatic skills and efficiencies through several experimentations when they engage in the communities. On the other, the communities can utilize their skills for the community development projects. Considering its importance, many pedagogical experts and educators agree without any skepticism that civic pedagogy is necessary for its citizenship values. According to Abderrahim El Kafka,

> Civic education is based on a set of general principles that are concerned with enhancing the culture of human rights in society through formal education (learning that takes place in recognized educational institution) and non formal education (learning that takes place outside of recognized educational institution. It holds that open communication, mutual respect, collaboration and cooperation between people bring about prosperity improved conditions for all. (39)

It is commonly agreed that educational goals and objectives keep on changing. Nations want educational goals to be dynamic as to accommodate most of the pressing social and academic issues. At the same time, educational knowledge and expertise have primary goals that they should improve individual's life with up to date skills and knowledge.

Furthermore, it is also obvious that educational objectives should be directed towards community needs. Civic education is therefore considered to maintain this balance.

Civic education, however, cannot be the panacea for all evils. It cannot address all the issues at the times when values of education and professional quest are changing. It is also agreed that all educational objectives are related to individual progress and for a successful. In some cases, the social and community components are more idealistic. A simple question may arise: Why should a person think of any society and community? The obvious answer to this question is: an individual has responsibilities with a civic sense.

Considering these intricate issues, civic education is equipped to face modern challenges. From pragmatic point of view also, civic education is quite rational. A learner is just not an individual, but a human resource for the community. In addition, a country invests a huge amount of time and energy on its citizens through educational trainings and curriculum plans. It therefore seems reasonable that they also expect contribution from them positively.

Past years witnessed some bitter experiences in which there appeared gaps between educational attainment and social and national needs. Every society, whether it is rich or poor, faces challenges of its peculiar kinds like domestic violence, racial conflicts, and so on. Similarly, the world, metaphorically the bigger society, is faced with

problems like climate change, terrorism, and the pandemic and so on. To combat these pressing problems, only governments and institutions or communities are not sufficient. The responsible global citizens can play significant roles.

Many of these reasons therefore justify civic education as relevant in the 21st century.

## Components of Civic Education

Civic education includes the pedagogy, the purpose, the objectives, and desired results for the communities. Civic education expects most of the stakeholders of education to be in active participation. According to Reid B. Locklin and Ellen Posman:

> The definition of civic engagement is deliberately broad, attempting to comprehend a variety of activities under a single umbrella. A problem arises, however, due to the fact that what is actually valued as responsible participation and "positive change" may take different shapes, depending on prior conceptions of democratic citizenship. (8)

Civic education fills gaps between educational achievements and social needs. Furthermore, it helps in formulating educational policy, thereby connecting learners, educational institutions, the curricula, and prevailing social and community realities. Moreover, it also demands the learners to be active in democratic process in order to make their opinions in social and political issues To be precise, the civic engagement is for an overall transformation for a harmonious and prosperous society.

Many theorists argue that civic pedagogy cannot be taught at school alone. It is also noted that civic sense can be generated through mutual interactions, dialogues, and co-operations. That said, the process of engaging a person into social and civic engagement becomes a challenging task, as it requires a couple of things like educational policies, objectives, resources, and timely curricula. For sustaining civic sense and awareness, the educational institutions and policies need to pay attention to the following:

- The learners are complete entities.
- They can contribute to the society in whatever way they can.
- They are independent learners to learn.
- Their feelings and sentiments should be taken into consideration.
- They have every right to know about social, cultural and universal problems without any restrictions.
- They can explore rights and opportunities in life.
- They should be taught values as individuals without any discrimination.

## Problems in Implementing the Civic Pedagogy

Though civic education is comprehensive and it includes several components, implementing it for educational goals is challenging. In such complex circumstances like the modern times, problems may occur in the conduction of civic pedagogy. In addition, societies are gradually expanding to be integrated and multicultural, where different stakeholders have their share and legitimate rights

in educational attainments. Furthermore, the institutions have their responsibilities and priorities to impart educational opportunities to all. We can take an example of the Australia government which has provided sufficient facilities to the aboriginal people for their transformation as compared to other people. However, human resources and capital are limited. The provision of educational facilities to all pragmatically sounds an uphill task. Sara Carpenter observes some problems in the process of implementation of civic pedagogy and argues, "Today we live with tremendous contradictions; we have not managed to materialize the kind of inequality and justice that our belief in democracy promises to provide, nor have we been able to stem the forces that create inequality and justice." (7)

There is no doubt that educational institutions are the products of social and community needs. They are supposed to respond to the demands of their times. In the present time, we are faced with surmounting problems of unprecedented nature and solving them requires collective responses. Educational institutions have greater pressures to accommodate social and community needs, at the same time; they are required to introduce innovative technology and up to date expertise. Some of these pressing issues need a broader framework and attention on behalf of educational institutions and educators and policy makers.

Among the problems multilingualism, free education for all, educations for free of cost and so on. At the same time, modern societies are becoming multicultural due to the flow of immigrants. For example, the American inclusive society has hard times to manage people with diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Studies indicate that a multilingual environment can enhance diversity and cognitive skills in the learners, however managing it is quite challenging. Considering this insight, many theorists of education lay emphasis on educational institutions, college, and schools to design multilingual courses so that students from different cultures and languages can benefit. Milambling states characteristically:

> Due to increased mobility and closely linked economies, many countries currently have significant multilingual populations in their work forces and educational systems. The demands of international commerce alone have engendered a large amount of interest and attention to multilingual education and training programs. (18)

Catering for civic pedagogy, thus, is posed with several hurdles. Though modern education has been more sophisticated and technically variegated, endorsement of civic sense and engagement may need both long term and short term goals. These goals are strategized by countries' priorities. On the other front, educators lament that humanities are on the constant wan because of several technical courses being offered at the universities that provide quick jobs to the students, yet they lack of civic sense. Because of the competitive environments in finding jobs, students are oriented to easy and convenient courses that easily sell in the job markets. Considerable data indicate that universities are having fewer enrolments in humanity courses. To some extent, this may have negative impacts for the growth of civic education.

There is another point to be noted. Regarding personal choice and freedom, attaining education is

an individual enterprise. Individuals can make choice for the courses they like. They may go for civic courses or mere technical courses without civic participation. Appealing young learners to community courses, thus, require several things.

## Institutional and Community Roles in the Formation of Civic Pedagogy

Understandably, the nations and institutions can play significant roles in the formation of civic pedagogy. They are the ones which implement plans and policies. It is obvious that civic pedagogy and community are interdependent. They maintain the supply and demand chain. Nicholas V. Longo specifically states:

> Education in the community is active learning that takes place outside of, but often connected with, the classroom. It involves more than one time community service project; it means intentionally putting education in the context of long-term community building efforts. It is most often place-based, using collaborative, integrated, problem-solving approach. (10)

Communities and societies are external factors whereas the teachers, the text books, and the classrooms are internal factors. Civic education provides students exposure to both of the factors. Furthermore, students get collaborative and integrative connections with the societies and get lifelong experiences.

Moreover, the political commitment and attitude also become important factors to determine what kind of civic education is relevant. In some cases, societies become reluctant to adopt government policies and provisions for education. In India, for example, a large number of Moslem communities don't feel comfortable using the English medium for school education and to orient children to Moslem alphabets and educations. This can hinder the development of inclusive state policies for education. I remember one incident there in Nepal. Some thirty years ago, Nepali government implemented a policy that any student doing a Masters was required to spend almost six months in the rural community and report to the universities as "Village Profile." This policy worked a lot as many young people had a good connection with rural community and its people. However, the party less government, under the direct rule of the king, suspected that such policy could fuel anti-government sentiments among the people. The program came to halt. This way, the government and community have roles in advocating the types of educational policy. Recently, in the US, it is said that in certain States have banned critical race theory from the university curricula.

## Civic Education for Political Awareness

Civic education is an unrecognized foundation for political knowledge for students. They can acquire such knowledge through political leaders, community workers, mayors, non-governmental organizations' managers and parliamentarians. The students should have basic knowledge of politics because it is pivotal in any society for overall development and public well being. V.O Key, Jr, in his book called, *Public Opinion and American Democracy,*

asserts, "national education systems indoctrinate the coming of generation with the basic outlooks and values of the political order."(316)

Democratic and liberal citizenship is considered as the fundamental goals of civic education. These goals are achieved through coordinated community and political interactions. Civic education does not give value of education if it does not help in the understanding the political and social framework of the community or nation. Students get theoretical political knowledge when they learn about political struggles, histories and different revolutions taken place in different times. This is not sufficient to be an active citizen with citizenship values. They need to be involved through pragmatic contexts. Studies indicate that young people who take part in social and political interactions have a higher influence in contributing to the community more than those who are deprived from such opportunities.

In some educational institutions, the students are suggested to take part in political debates, discussions, and political talk shows so that they acquire basic political knowledge. University and colleges have some partial programs for such awareness. It is indisputable that democratic societies are rational, liberal, and participatory without prejudice and injustice. The fruit of democracy becomes long-lasting when people live accepting others existence and differences and expressing their views within the framework of legal and constitutional provisions. Furthermore, when young people understand these foundational values for the society, peace and harmony can be felt.

## Participation

The foundation of civic education is based on participation. The more participation there is in any society, the better prospects of civic education in the communities that can bring social and community development. In the recent times, the participatory approach has been rife in social and democratic platforms where groups and individuals work in consensus and bring social and development projects which yield positive results. In the educational field as well, the concept of participation is considered crucial because educational institutions, individuals, and community stakeholders work for agreed principles and coordination. Reinhold Hedtke and Tatjana Zimenkovo explain, "Participation as an element of active citizenship in democracies has developed into prominent projects of international and national educational policy."(1)

Deliberate participation builds confidence in decision making, in expressing views, and in promoting mutually agreed projects for the larger benefits. Furthermore, participation brings inclusive reconciliation thereby reducing conflicts in social and educational plans and policies.

## Service Learning

Service learning, as part of civic learning, is a modern educational approach in which students learn different theories in the class and get a chance to implement them in practical situations in life. While performing service learning, they can work with concerned groups, public stakeholders, and community leaders. They can share their

knowledge and get useful feedbacks. Ledoux, Michael.W, Wilhite, Stephen.C and Poula Silver, in this connection, assert, "Service learning is a form of experimental education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development." (49)

Service learning provides a plank to connect students with community through certain activities. Students are assigned tasks that can do the public good. While at service, they may experiment their expertise and knowledge how well they have learned. Furthermore, service learning helps the students enhance their confidence and motivate them for future civil engagement successfully.

## Some Civic Engagement Activities

As civic education is abreast with communities, students can get direct exchange with people and societies. This helps them have ideas about people, lives, and issues practically. Numerous studies indicate that students are interested to be involved in many such projects. At the same time, students feel that they are making contributions to the communities. They feel that they gain knowledge for greater goals. Ironically, it is also seen that students themselves are not interested in learning about society, culture, democracy, constitutions, civil codes, service learning and so on. That happens mostly in the beginning of their university studies.

It, however, does not mean that they dislike learning about these things. The reason is: they are not exposed to such civic learning environments. If teachers and motivators create conducive environments, they may be interested to learn. Marilynne Boyle–Baise and Zevin Zack contend that teachers need to have some responsibilities in making students have interest in social projects and service learning. They further explain, "There is no blueprint for service learning. Service learning should be relevant to students, as well as socially worthy. There is an endless array of credible causes from which to choose. Your scholarly knowledge should bend with the project, responding to its nature" (226)

Social and community change is not the matter of whim, but of passion. It requires a great inspiration for the students in being motivated and ready for change and transformation. As Eric Liu explains, Margaret Mead's statement about social change, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" reminds us that big always starts small. But smalls create big change only when they can turn the status quo against itself."(86)

Change in societies take place when people are willingly committed. By nature, civic pedagogy differs from society to society, as it incorporates social needs and values that the young students should embody. Some of the models would be for a long time strategy and some of them would be based on the short term strategy.

However, the following would be taken into consideration:

- social and civil literacy;
- community involvement and social projects;

- welfare programs;
- engaging youth in campaign like anti drug, and environmental protection programs;
- visiting farmers at fields;
- visiting polling booths;
- taking part in blood donation programs;
- visiting orphan houses and senior citizen centers;
- visiting zoos and cleaning surrounding;
- visiting cultural sites and historical monuments;
- making social clubs at the university or at college;
- taking part in public debate;
- sharing and building opinions on social and community causes;
- conducting programs for students' leadership;
- conducting programs for social and community advocacy;
- establishing service learning information desks and platforms.

## Crucial Elements in Civic Education

The article espouses some of the crucial learning and its gist can be put in the following points:

- Civic education is not prescriptive, but suggestive;
- Civic education does no give priority to professionalism but values citizenship building;
- Civic education becomes effective when there is participation;
- Civic education encompasses liberal and inclusive approaches;
- Civic education gives space to the students to experiment the learned knowledge and expertise in the community participation;
- Civic education helps in the formation of the social and political capital of an individual.

## Conclusion

Civic education and pedagogy are becoming crucial elements in the modern education because they can combine educational expertise and community. In addition, it has created a burgeoning space for the students to orient themselves toward community needs through fruitful interactions, social projects, services, and volunteerism. Civic education is considered an instrumental tool to enhancing spirit of national sentiment, social and cultural integration, democratic institutionalization, and educational development. Understandably, the more young people are aware of community and national issues, the better they participate in the efforts of development and social and economic transformation. In this sense, citizenship values help in the growth of human resources. To put it differently, civic education therefore becomes a software for a country’s comprehensive development. When a country has a fully functional software, development activities and projects are manifested as hardware. Furthermore, civic education opens up a new frontier of educational value in which students feel that they are not products of bookish knowledge and academic qualifications but agents for transformation.

## Works Cited


Awasthi, Jay Raj, et al. “The Essential of Education”. *English for the New Millennium.* Ektabooks, 2015.

----.” Whole Child Education”. English for the New Millennium. Ektabooks, 2015.

Baise, Marilynne Boyle and Zevin Jack. *Young Citizens of the World: Teaching Elementary Social Studies Through Civic Engagement.* Routledge, 2009.

Carpenter, Sara. *The Ideology of Civic Engagement: American Corps, Politics and Ideology*. State University of New York, 2021.

Eric, Liu. *You are More Powerful Than you Think: A Citizen’s Guide to Making Change Happen.* Public Affairs New York, 2017.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*. Rowman Little Field Publishers, Inc, 2001.

Hedtke, Reinhold and Tatjana Zinemkovo, edtors. Educatin for Civic and Political Participation. Routledge, 2013.

Holt, John “ School is Bad For Children”. *New Direction: Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking.* edited by Peter S. Gardner. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 62.

Jackson, Philip. J. *What is Education?* The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Kafka, El Abderrahim. “Open Class Communication and learning of Citizen Values”. *English Teaching Forum*, 2007, Vol. 45, No. 4, p. 39.

Key, Jr, V.O. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. Alfred Knopf Publishers, 1961.

Licona, Thomas. *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Teach Respect and Responsibility.* Bantam, 1991.

Locklin, Reid, B and Posman, Ellen.” Discourse, Democracy, and many Faces of Civic Engagement. *Teaching Civic Engagement, e*dited by Forrest Clingerman and Reid B. Locklin, OUP, 2016, p. 9.

Longo, Nicholas V. *Why Community Matters: Connecting Education with Civic Life.* State University of New York Press, 2007.

Milambling, Joyce. “Bringing One Language to Another: Multilingualism as a Resource in the Language Classroom”. *English Teaching Forum*, 2011, Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 18.

Ledoux, Michael. W, Wilhite, Stephen . C, and Poulin Silver. *Civic Engagement and Service Learning in a Metropolitan University: Multiple Approaches and Perspectives.* Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2011.

Peterson, Andrew. *Civic Republicanism and Civic Education: The Education of Citizens.*Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

# Theater Studies and Digital Citizenship: From Activism to Artivism

by Zafiris Nikitas

## A (Civic) Theatrum Mundi

Is an academic of Theater Studies a (digital) citizen? In other words, is a Theater scholar a member of (an online and offline) theatrum mundi? This very question lies at the epicenter of the present article. Civic Studies, an interdisciplinary field, have established a vibrant dialogue on the importance of civic engagement, civic education and civil society in the last fifteen years, and this subject becomes even more pressing in Theater Studies, a field that is rooted in the exploration of a public-oriented art. In 2007, the framing statement "The New Civic Politics: Civic Theory and Practice for the Future" drafted by seven scholars (Harry Boyte, Stephen Elkin, Peter Levine, Jane Mansbridge, Elinor Ostrom, Karol Soltan and Rogers Smith) and printed later, in 2014, laid the groundwork for the emergence of Civic Studies, a field that stresses personal and institutional agency while connecting with Humanities and Social Sciences. The statement explored the meaning of citizenship in contemporary society as a "distinctive civic ideal" and a "set of practices involving creative agency and a form of loyalty" taking distances from the concept of citizenship as "a form of membership in the state." The proposition for the charting of this discipline was based, among others, on the observation of "emerging civic politics, along with an emerging intellectual community." Theater Studies and civic engagement have also evolved in the last fifteen years. A pending desideratum of this interconnection is the clarification of the tendencies and possibilities of Theater scholars and university departments in relation with civic action in society and academia. In the following paragraphs we will examine the rise of the academic as a digital intellectual, the correlation between human academic activism and digital academic artivism, the co-existence of scholarship, art and citizenship in Theater Studies to illuminate the emerging functions and multiple modalities of the Theater scholar as a civic mediator in a society of digital flux.

## The Academic as a Digital Intellectual

The evolution of digital means the last fifteen years has produced a new dialectics between academic knowledge, social sphere, and personal identity. Both young and established scholars turn to shareable visibility and participate in online networks of research. The year 2008 marked the initiation of three social networking websites for academics, "Academia," "Research Gate," and "Mendeley," while four years before, in 2004, "Google Scholar" was launched for the first time. The digital turn has led academics to the necessity for developing a professional online presence and instigated the evolution of agential theories. The "5C framework," for example, explores the way in which social media can be used in order to connect, communicate, curate, collaborate and create an informed digital persona that participates in scientific communities. The access to academic knowledge has also entered an in-flux Age through initiatives of "open scholarship" and the polycentricity of "knowledge as commons," while radical applications of Digital Humanities transform scholarly activity using technology. At the same time, critiques of the "prestige-economy" and the peer-reviewed process of academic publishing in times of commercialization (pro-)pose new criteria on evaluation.

Academic activism in universities has also evolved through practice and theory. In terms of theoretical approaches, the concept of the four models of "intellectual vocation" that focused on the identity of the academic in the 1990s has led to the exploration of the four ways in which academia can become a *topos* of activism in the 2010s. According to the first model (by Cornel West) the paradigms of the academic involved in active civic discourse that aspires to achieve social change are the following: the oppositional intellectual, who engages in critique through academic activity; the political intellectual, who connects directly with public debate; the organic intellectual, who represents university within the society; and the intellectual communities within academia. According to the second model (by Michael Flood, Brian Martin and Tanja Dreher) university rises as an activist site in the following manners: as a means of knowledge that informs social transformation; as a way of promoting change through research; as a space of pedagogical innovation; as a space of institutional fluxus and power relations. The rise of Civic Studies poses the need to bridge the gap between academic activism and society through the use of suitable digital platforms that engage in dialogue. At the same time, the new paradigms that enhance the models of the past bring into play the rise of the academic as a "digital intellectual" and the transformation of online university outlets (sites, journals, research platforms, social media) as a space of social connectivity.

The demand for a groundbreaking (re-)framing of the university that connects to society has become increasingly pressing. The relevant theories of connectivity that have emerged allow scholars to address this aspect within a scientific field which illuminates the continuum between universities and public sphere as a vital assertation of the contemporary academic landscape. Questions that need to be addressed are: how does higher education knowledge inform the "crisis-scapes" of society? Which are the suitable (digital) platforms and organizational measures that will turn academic institutions into active agents of change and dialogue? And how can the Humanities elevate the "cultural currency" of science (as well as arts such as Theater) within society in a technological Age? In her recent book *Generous Thinking: A Radical Approach to Saving the University* (2019) Kathleen Fitzpatrick explored the possibilities of overcoming the ruptured relationship between academia and the public while rebuilding trust and service. The key for such an endeavor is the detection of shared interests in campus and off-campus communities and a mode of collaborative engagement through constructive dialogue. In addition, the rampant tensions that rise in a social-media oriented society can be smoothed out only through the elevation of the academic as an active citizen. As an agent of *gnosis* and a facilitator of data-based public discourse in times of post-truth. Not through the dystopian withdrawal in a solipsistic space of academic isolationism where current technological outlets (and their growing social and personal gravity) are ignored.

## From Human Activism to Digital Artivism

Academic citizenship and artistic citizenship share a vocabulary of elemental terms and a wealth of common aims. Their active agent is the "citizen," the person of full rights in the medieval city that

became, through the radical French thinking of the 18th century, the vital *citoyen*. Their prevailing space is the "community," rooted in the Latin word *communis*, the shared space where individuality co-exists (harmoniously or antagonistically) with multiplicity and inclusion. Although academia focuses on the elevation of science and arts focus on the creation of *techne*, both act as drastic cultural components of a society that aspires to be civil and civilized. Although activism has entered the discussion concerning viable academic functions towards the public sphere, artivism is less related to the formal (or, at times, fathomable) endeavors of a university institution. The term "artivism" reflects a way (and an attitude) of activist engagement that uses art as a means against social injustice and political agendas. In the implementation of artivism it is often the troubled "dissensus" (to recall the political thinking of Jacques Rancière) rather than the homogenizing consensus that is employed in order to address public exigency and reflect on change. The very nature of some university departments (such as the ones, for example, that focus on Theater Studies) is especially suitable, as we will see, for the utilization of artivism.

As I argue, a vital point of convergence between universities and society is the establishment of a cultural dialogue. This aspect becomes even more relevant in specific academic institutions and university departments in Humanities that focus on performing and visual arts such as Schools of Fine Arts and Theater Studies departments. Whereas established artists often transform into vocal activists within society, established academics are often "expatriated" (or self-exiled) into the "ivory tower of academia" (into a disconnected space of social inactivity). In order to break down the barrier that keeps academic discourse on cultural matters in distance from the public sphere we need to do more than employ Civic Studies. We need to combine praxis and theory. In this way, on the one hand, academic activism can evolve into academic artivism and, on the other hand, this evolution will be framed within a critical context that illuminates the ethics of this engagement. In Theater Studies, where the interconnection between performative realization and scholarly analysis in of paramount importance, the informed transition to an interdisciplinary mode of academic artivism is very promising. Such an outlook works in a twofold manner: as a means of reforming Theater scholarship into a social tool of cultural interventionism while also enriching the applications of Theater in society. Through this lens Theater performances and art projects become a seminar should become an important part of academic research and civic engagement in Theater Studies departments.

Whereas academic activism brings into perspective the liminal space between the inward and the outward function of universities, the less evolved (if not embryonic) discussion on academic artivism can shed a light on the cultural evolution of universities. More specifically, it can illuminate the ability of art-oriented academic departments to engage consciously in ethical praxis and social justice through art. The road of the transition from a socially inactive academia to a socially active a(rt)cademia (that is an academia that employs artivism as a tool of connectivity and civic dialogue) demands both "institutional inventiveness" as well as relevant theoretical frameworks. In addition, it can be achieved only though a mentality shift that incorporates the technological possibili-

ties of the social media Age into daily academic life through strategic planning. Incorporating the existing models of social artivism and artistic citizenship within the cultural function of university communities (in and outside campuses) maximizes the potential of participatory practices as well as personal civic engagement.

> *"the less evolved (if not embryonic) discussion on academic artivism can shed light on the cultural evolution of universities. More specifically, it can illuminate the ability of art-oriented academic departments to engage consciously in ethical praxis and social justice through art."*

A vital space for the social growth of academic activism is the expansion to "digital artivism." This practice implements social media in order to interact with the public and produce participatory artistic creation. At the same time it requires "a mode of consciousness that replicates the digital potentialities and egalitariamism of cyberspace." Digital artivism can function as a pedagogical tool for civic development (addressing critical issues of racial, ethnic and social identity) and it has been already used for educational purposes in school environments. The use of digital artivism in the context of Theater Studies communities in academia benefits students and scholars in three main ways. Firstly, it allows the production of an ongoing digital portfolio in graduate and postgraduate studies turning student art (such as performance, scenography and stage-lighting projects) into a public commodity. Secondly, it reaches out to society through artistic means and elevates activism that relates to the public in an open-ended manner. Thirdly, it establishes a digital cultural milieu that combines a higher education perspective and civic engagement by addressing issues that relate to the growing citizenship of the students and their social surroundings. In addition, the overseeing Theater scholars become in this case active mediators between the university and society.

## Scholar, Artist, or Tech-Citizen?

Theater Studies (a discipline named *Theaterwissenschaft* in Germany and *Theatrology* in Greece) corresponds to the American and English term "Performance Studies." The focus of the discipline is the examination of theatrical performance in its physical, literary, historical and sociological context. As an interdisciplinary field, it uses tools concerning aesthetics and semiotics. Theater Departments all over the world often incorporate practice-based research or combine, in their academic programs, theatrical theory and implementation. As a result, these departments become a "nucleus" of art, science and pedagogy, where scholars and artists teach and realize collaborative projects with the participation of students. At the same time, examining a public-oriented art form such as Theater, Theater Studies tackle the function of citizenship in society in various ways. Through

strategic approaches in teaching, the Theater graduate can emerge as a democratic citizen. In postgraduate programs that connect with the public (such as the one in the University of Texas) students are trained in "rehearsing" and "performing" citizenship. Academics in the field also explore the realization of political work in their departments (or as public intellectuals) through advocacy. In this way, academia becomes an agent of change and public discourse.

The close connection of Theater and civic education has produced a series of theoretical models that illustrate the importance (and suitability) of performing arts for the social dialectics on citizenship. For example, two pedagogical strategies that were proposed in order to teach civic attention were "civic hermeneutics" (which focus on examining specific citizens to elevate civic respect) and "civic staging" (which organizes public spaces where citizens can communicate). The implementation of a "civic theater," inside and outside academia, can lead to the improvement of the quality of political life by elevating the public consciousness on rights, interests and duties. Another tool for teaching Civics (especially issues of democracy and migration) is the implementation of process drama, in which teachers and students examine selected subjects by taking on roles. This engaging format illuminates students on themes of citizenship through playful activity and is often used in secondary school education as a means of pedagogy. These techniques illustrate the close bond between Theater art and social dialectics. The students become actors, thinkers and citizens.

The growth of citizenship education through the lens of Theater is apparent in an international level. From USA to China and from Colombia to Russia various forms of "social Theater" look into aspects of social justice, oppositional critique and citizenship activation in times of turmoil and change. These global paradigms pose a series of questions concerning youth political literacy, moral responsibility and professional development. In addition, civic engagement and performance are becoming growingly intertwined through the active encounter between institutions, individuals and art practices. This important dialogue brings into the epicenter the public sphere as a platform of dialogue that extends in physical as well as virtual spaces of "matrix activism." Theater Studies and academic explorations are following these new tendencies to support the evolution of contemporary performing arts into a poignant civic outlet. The identity of scholar, artist and citizen become prismatic reflections of a common identity.

> *"Theater Departments all over the world often incorporate practice-based research or combine, in their academic programs, theatrical theory and implementation. As a result, these departments become a "nucleus" of art, science and pedagogy, where scholars and artists teach and realize collaborative projects with the participation of students."*

A seminal step in academia's leap to social awareness is the evolution of the scholar into a "tech-citizen," that is, a citizen who employs technology and social media in order to expand academic pedagogy and illuminate citizenship (both in the higher education and society). The rise of the tech-citizen allows the design of civic technologies for inclusiveness and the spread of academic knowledge. Much like "smart cities" that elevate citizen engagement in order to "build vision and mission," the university community can be transformed into a smart *polis* that achieves connectivity. The incorporation of digital citizenship in society-oriented activities is an added means of public discourse for Theater Studies departments which compliments (and overcomes) the challenge of corporeality which is embedded in performing arts such as Theater. The overpowering consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and the mandatory application of "social distancing" rules, for example, resulted in a severe restriction concerning performing arts in public venues as well as university training. This made clear that the evolution of alternative virtual spaces of pedagogy and dissemination are vital.

## Performing Citizenship

In an Age of "performing identity" through the use of social media the importance of "performing citizenship" in an informed and constructive manner becomes increasingly important. The growing digital and academic landscapes of the aesthetics and politics of "citizenship performance" lead to an interdisciplinary field where Theater and Performance Studies converge with Political Theory, Urban Studies, Ethnography, Migration Studies and New Media. One of the vital challenges for the contemporary Theater scholar is to bridge the gap between academia and society through the implementation of technology (thus forming the voice of a public intellectual) and the re-framing of Theater practice (as well as theory) as a tool of civic engagement. Through this perspective the academic of Theater Studies becomes a mediator that links the university community with the public sphere, using civic media and performative pedagogy. Such an endeavor strives for a significant step forward by bridging the gap between educational institutions and the new citizenry of the digital Age. In order to succeed it requires a balance between organizational strategy and a spirit of "ludic" playfulness. "Action is social," as Vassiliki Rapti and Eric Gordon proclaim, and the connection between individuals demands "expression, experimentation, exploration, and play."

# FIELD

# —>

# BODIES

# Identity Through Adaptation: Martial Arts in Flux and the Civic

Richard Santos Raya in conversation with Hannah Trivilino

**Hannah Trivilino:** Thank you, Richard, for joining us to discuss civic media in flux! Recently, you interviewed your Tae Kwon Do instructor Julius Baker about his personal journey coming to this art form and evolving his Tiger Style Tae Kwon Do. I've heard you talk over the years about Tiger Style Tae Kwon Do and its relationships to epistemology, physicality, and social movements (in particular the Black Panther Party). These stories leave me teeming with questions about how this specific field has been in flux over time and what it means to interpret Master Baker's Tiger Style Tae Kwon Do through the lens of civic media in flux. I first want to ask if you see martial arts as a form of civic media?

**Richard Santos Raya:** Yes, I do consider martial arts to be a form of civic media. It's really important to remember that, like a lot of other art styles, martial arts styles often arise in very specific contexts and in response to very specific needs. They're about how we discourse not only physically but also politically with our surrounding world, with our surrounding individuals, and with our surrounding society. So just as some quick examples, I study a form of Tae Kwon Do that has a really interesting history, but Tae Kwon Do more broadly has its roots in ancient Korean martial arts that rose to prominence to train warriors to repel overseas invaders. So there's this martial art arising in an anti-imperial context. Wing Chun is another example of a really famous martial art that was taught by one woman to another woman to protect herself from a forced marriage. There's a lot of these martial arts that carry inherent social implications, political implications, in the same token as containing physical implications. The physical representations are manifestations of a social perspective. Martial arts are a physical manifestation of a social perspective every time – that's my belief. So yes, martial arts is a form of civic media.

**H.T.:** How is this manifestation of a social perspective in flux?

**R.S.R.:** Everything's always in flux, right? But in martial arts specifically, it's in flux because every martial artist and every martial art is situated in a specific context. And contexts change, our circumstances are always shifting, and that's sort of a part of martial arts. Mr. Baker and I had a great segment about this toward the end of our conversation where he was saying that learning how to use zoom is martial arts –is the literal practice of martial arts– because martial arts is about maintaining identity while adapting. Maintaining self through adaptation. That means that definitionally, being a practitioner of martial arts means to be situated in flux. And you can take that literally, to mean, "okay, someone's punching me, now someone's tripping me, now someone's throwing me; how do I maintain my stance through all these different external indicators?" –but you also look at that as...maybe it's the '60s, and martial arts is getting very popular, and competitive martial arts as a way to supplement low-income People of Color's income is really popular, so we need to learn really aggressive competitive style fighting. Okay, now it's the '80s, and point-style fighting is very popular; now we have to learn point-style fighting. Now, actually, maybe competitive fighting is not going to set us up for the most longevity, so let's learn more of a theoretical street fighting. The martial art arises from a specific context, and then it continues to adapt to that specific context.

**HWT:** I'm curious –when you say martial arts arrives from and adapts to a specific context, I'm hearing that as somewhat reactive. But I'm also hearing you say that it is creating a manifestation of a standpoint. So I'm wondering about your thoughts on something adaptive and reactive as also being something that is creating.

**R.S.R.:** One thing that we start to talk about in a lot of martial arts practice as we get to a higher level of understanding –which of course is always trying to get back to the simple understanding– is that so many perceived dichotomies are not really dichotomies at all. On a simple level, if I punched you with a straight punch, well actually my knuckles are rotating, my wrist is rotating; there's rotation within the straightness, and there's straightness within the rotation. And something that is a block is actually an attack, and something that's an attack is actually defensive –these diametric "opposites" are always swirling around each other, so in adapting we are creating, and in creating we're actually maintaining. I think it's always a bit of both, so what's fascinating to me is trying to identify what was the essential, initial nugget of "why did this arise?" And that's what was so exciting to talk about with Mr. Baker, that he wasn't necessarily bringing up the battles on the Korean peninsula of the Hwarang –the ancient– but he was talking about these really evergreen themes of empowerment, and self-respect, and self defense, and flourishing; how do we continue to flourish and to promote ourselves even when we may be in a situation that isn't necessarily conducive to that?

**H.T.:** Thank you. When I first approached you about the idea of framing Tiger Style Tae Kwon Do through the lens of civic media in flux, you wrote the following:

> Embedded within our martial arts practice as well as in associated social organizing there lies the decolonial assertion that radical self-expression is self-defense, and that martial arts is thus not only a system of self-defense but also a type of civic media that bears such ideology into the community. Further, martial arts becomes a form of civic media because it invites us to walk into the future and explore the unknown with confidence by inculcating us with the tools needed to navigate disorienting situations, physically, mentally and spiritually. We exist by adapting, incorporating all new expressions into us and revolving them around a moral center.

I'd love to hear more of your thoughts on this idea and also learn about how your conversation with Mr. Baker informed this.

**RSR:** Self defense is self expression, and self expression is self defense. When we practice we create, and when we create we affirm ourselves. In my interview with Mr. Baker, he talks about being this young man who just got out of the navy, first being introduced to martial arts, coming to the Bay Area, setting up shop in Oakland, the political moment, and how everything was very interwoven and exciting. There were a lot of people exploring different methods of Black self expression, and to be a part of that conversation with martial arts and to have martial arts be foregrounded in that was a natural mix being sought out by activists at the time. One of the great things that he said to me that was funny, but also encapsulates what I'm trying

to get at is –again, he knows I have an interest in social activism and the Black Panthers, so he was giving me some fun tidbits– but it wasn't like Mr. Baker learned from his masters, and then one day he was like, "I must now contribute to the Black Panthers." For Mr. Baker, martial arts was life; that was it. All he wanted to do was train every day and fight every day. And teaching at the local community colleges gave him an opportunity to do that. Well, the local community colleges were also filled with Black Panthers, because that site also gave people an opportunity to organize, and to learn. So there's a nexus there of these sort of community investments that are not at the level that they once were of well funded community colleges, community centers, and youth centers that are open and actually offer programming.

The community investments provided the fertile earth for a lot of powerful organizing and self expression to go down. And then they're all literally happening in the same physical site as well; all his students were also in that burgeoning Black Panther club at North Peralta Community College (Merritt College). And so Mr. Baker was laughing, saying he found out years later that the FBI had a file on him just for teaching martial arts. He joked that if you were doing anything cool back then they had a file on you. But you know, he's there at the same time as Huey Newton, Angela Davis is also at the exact same community college – it's this incredibly historic moment that really alters the way people think about organizing and liberation for years after. And then here's someone who's also starting to promote and practice and share martial arts –and even that martial arts style is in flux.

**H.T.:** I'm so glad you shared the role of the community college. That was something I was hoping you would emphasize after listening to your interview with Mr. Baker.

**R.S.R.:** That's huge. Part of why I got the idea to sit down and talk with Mr. Baker about this time period is because he invited me to this event honoring Black martial artists in the Bay Area. It was him and his colleague Sifu Bill Owens. There were people whose lives they had changed (who they had started training 50 years ago) who came and spoke. It was so significant because I had just come off of my own city council campaign, and I was listening to this martial artist speak. He was saying, "make sure you keep putting your kids in martial arts, do xyz, and also make sure that you support Councilwoman Carroll Fife, because she's the only one fighting to restore community centers and community colleges, and that's what makes this art form flourish, that's what makes our people flourish." It helped me connect my own commitment to these types of things, like martial arts and public schools. There is a long legacy of these things not only being linked, but also kind of being the same thing.

**H.T.:** Yes! Support Carroll Fife! I love how the community colleges created space for Mr. Baker and his students to learn and teach this martial arts style that was adapting to and arising from the larger social/political context of Oakland in the '70s. I really hope contemporary equivalents can continue to happen now (so again, everyone support Carroll Fife!!). Can you speak about the ways that the martial art itself was in flux? How Mr. Baker evolved Tiger Style Tae Kwon Do?

**R.S.R.:** I think one thing to bring up when you talk about the idea of "in flux" is that Mr. Baker talks about how –like I was foreshadowing earlier– initially, he just wanted to fight. And then he wanted to fight to win, because you could actually win cash prizes back then. And then there was an opportunity to make Tae Kwon Do –their organization specifically– part of the Olympics. But at the time, the Olympics banned pro-athletes; you couldn't be in the Olympics if you were fighting for money, which a lot of Mr. Baker and his students were because they thought it was the best way to promote their art and show that their art was the best and most effective. That was so much of the discourse back then, "can Tae Kwon Do beat Karate, beat kung fu?" In a tournament, can you win the money so then it's "proven" that it's the best art? Mr. Baker teamed up eventually years later with Sifu Bill Owens, who was another local martial arts master who practiced a Chinese martial art. Owens was one of Mr. Baker's great rivals initially; Mr. Baker was so mad because he'd heard so much about Owens, but then when he finally saw him fight he thought Owens wasn't that great of a fighter (although later realized Owens was). But Mr. Baker couldn't understand why this man was heralded as such a hero, and the reason wasn't just because Owens was a skilled fighter, it was that he was really rooted in the community, and trying to find a way to put Black self expression into this Chinese art form, and trying to find a way to empower youth, and to make sure that these youth were staying on the right path. Owens ended up going from a rival to a thought partner and helped Mr. Baker reformulate how they could make this martial art their own, how they could further hone what was already their own and sharpen it. Again, the civic media in flux is: the needs of this martial art are always about serving and protecting the community in which it's arriving. Well, now we're in Oakland in the '60s, '70s, and '80s. What does that mean? It might mean incorporating music into our art. It might mean taking different hand techniques that didn't exist in Tae Kwon Do and adding them in. And all of that did happen.

I had never heard this story until last year, but Mr. Baker and Sifu Bill Owens ended up going on a trip to Brazil to study Capoeira with some long time Capoeira practitioners not just because they had a love of martial arts –yes because of that– but also because Capoeira is really known and heralded as a Black martial art and an inherently political martial art. If you don't know the one sentence summary, Capoeira is the martial art practiced by the African enslaved people in Brazil, but it's "disguised" as dancing and ceremony –and not even necessarily disguised, because the music and the rhythm are still a big part of the ceremony. But Mr. Baker points to that as a really big, important moment in his critical development and as the progenitor of his style of Tae Kwon Do that he's teaching in Oakland, of "maybe our style can be a little more inclusive, maybe our style can be a little more original, and that will actually serve the needs of our students more."

One of the things that he said to me one day after class was that, "when I was younger, I was convinced with creating the greatest fighters. But now, I'm obsessed with creating the greatest people." And his martial art is a path to that. Even that statement is evidence of the fact that the way that this martial art is honed and delivered, that is constantly in flux. As are with most other martial arts. And

as we see with the rise of MMA and things like that. These art forms are constantly in dialogue with each other.

**H.T.:** That's very interesting because I can't think of many athletic forms necessarily that in the form themselves are so intentionally in flux whilst also interfacing with a civic purpose. When you said that Mr. Baker initially wanted to train the best fighters but evolved to wanting to train the best people –to me, that's a very civic statement. What does Mr. Baker mean by the "best" people? What type of people does he want to cultivate?

**R.S.R.:** We could ask him. But I think Mr. Baker, he talks a lot about the principals of martial arts, which is daily self improvement, and adaptation, and honesty, and creativity. I don't know if those can be shaped to a specific civic component, but it communicates that there is a world outside of the Dojo. There's a world outside of your own body. But you and your body and your heart are situated in that world and can and do have an impact on that. There's a point at the interview where Mr. Baker is talking about Putin. He says, "that's not a real martial artist." That you have all these people out there that are obsessed with showing the world how strong they are, like Putin and Jeff Bezos, and they are literally starting wars; if only they had been introduced to martial arts earlier in life, they wouldn't have to be proving and influencing on the world so much. They would just be situated within themselves. In the interview, Mr. Baker says, "if we're good people we don't need to worry about wars, who to steal from, and hurt. But we have to work at it."

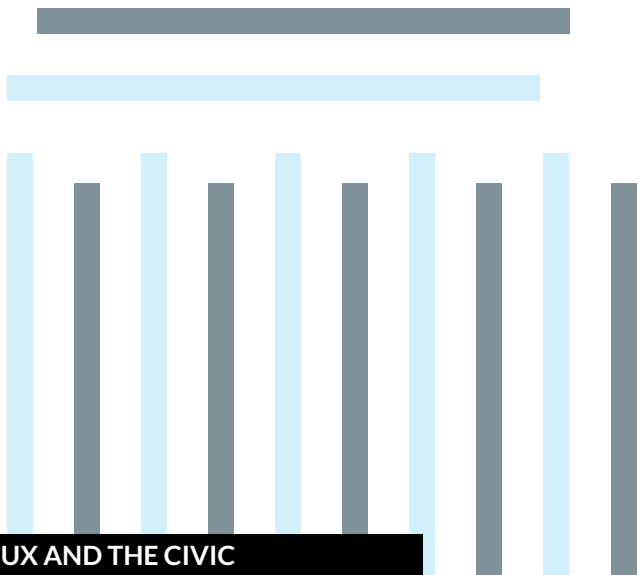
**H.T.:** This makes me think of the Baker's Martial Arts student creed.

**R.S.R.:** *"Knowledge in the mind, honesty in the heart, and strength in the body// To keep friendship with one another and to build a strong and happy community. Never fight to achieve selfish ends but to develop might for right."* The original author of this is, I believe, Master Jhoon Rhee, and similar versions of this creed are used by martial arts schools across the country.

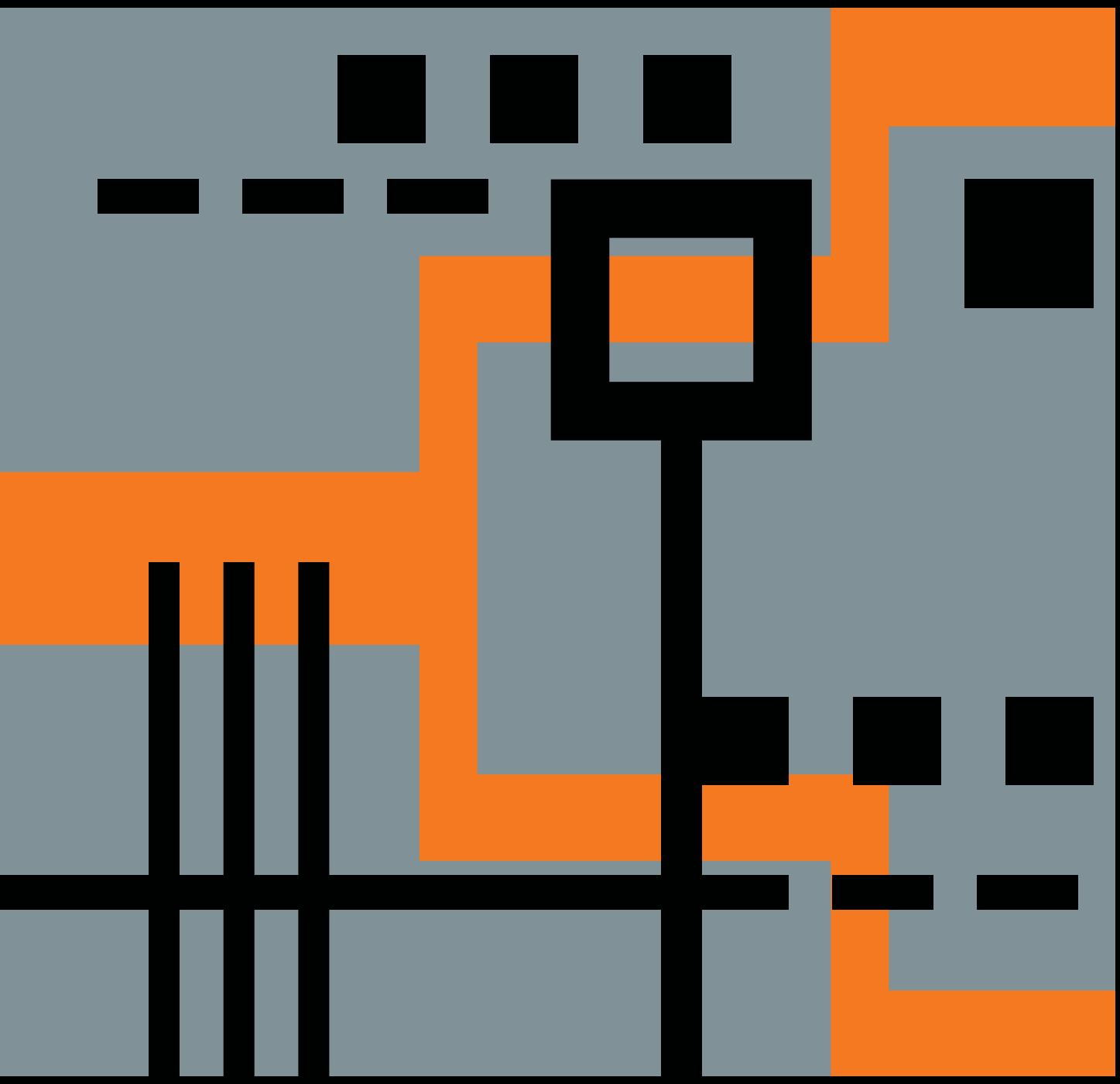
**H.T.:** Beautiful. Any final words about martial arts as civic media in flux?

**R.S.R.:** It's a commitment to live well and to grow, to flourish like a flower or tree, and to adapt. Whether it's an incoming jump kick, or a back injury, or a Zoom class, what can you do now? You can still contribute, adapt, exist, teach, and flourish.

*To read additional scholarship on the intersections between Tiger Style Tae Kwon Do and the Black Panther Party, see Richard Santos Raya's "Might for Right: Martial Arts as a Way to Understand the Black Panthers" available here.*



# BIOS



**Dionysos Alexiou** holds a BA in Classics, an MA in Medieval Greek Literature, and a Ph.D. on the Reception of Ancient Greek Drama in Modern Dramaturgy. He has successfully completed specialised courses in Cultural Diplomacy and in Managing Arts Organizations. He is also an accredited Gallery Guide-Docent. Throughout his studies, he has worked on educational campaigns that took place in developing countries involving the repatriation of stolen artifacts to their country of origin as well as combating illicit art traffic. He is now working as an Adjunct Lecturer at the University Nicosia, and as a postdoctoral researcher at Harvard University's Centre for Hellenic Studies.

More recently, he has become a research fellow at the University of Southern California, Center on Public Diplomacy. His research interests focus on the reception of ancient Greek drama, the role of thematic motifs in narrative folktales, arts management, cultural diplomacy, corporate cultural diplomacy, international relations etc. Before that, Dionysos was an Associate to the Office of the President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus for 5 years, where among other responsibilities he served as Parliamentary Representative/Coordinator of the Committee on Literature, Arts and Quality Education, and the Committee of Cultural Heritage; both aforementioned committees make part of the *Parallel Parliament* initiative.

---

**Nicos Alexiou**, born in Volos, Greece, in 1959, pursued studies in Economics in Athens before relocating to New York in the mid-1980s for graduate studies in Sociology. Since 1990, he has been a faculty member in the Department of Sociology at Queens College, CUNY, where he received the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching. His academic interests include social and political theory, ethnic studies, and research.

Alexiou founded the first Archive-Library-Museum for the Greek Diaspora of New York, and is the founding director of Research at the Hellenic American Project (HAP) at Queens College (www.hapsoc.org).

He has authored seven poetry books, with many poems featured in Greek and American journals and anthologies. A member of the Greek Authors Association in Greece, Alexiou also serves as President of the Greek American Authors Society in New York.

---

**Andreas Foivos Apostolou** is a pianist-composer and producer from Athens, Greece. He was born into an artistic family in Athens, Greece, and was brought up by his mother, an actress. Theater and storytelling are vital sources of inspiration in his music. His works are often described as jazzy, Balkan, prog metal, and minimalist. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Composition for Visual Media at UCLA. As a concert pianist, he has toured in Europe, Asia, and America performing a wide range of repertoire, including premières by Leo Ornstein, Bernard Rands, Anders Hillborg, and Apostolou's own works. His works have been recorded by Naxos, and he has won first prizes in international competitions, both as a pianist and as a composer.

**Stratos Efthymiou** is the spokesperson of the Greek Foreign Ministry. He is a career diplomat who has served at the Embassies of Greece in Ankara and Moscow, at Greece's Permanent Mission to the EU, and as Consul General of Greece in Boston from 2017-2022.

Stratos holds a BA in International Relations and European Affairs from Panteion University (2000), an MA in International Relations from Sciences-Po Paris (2001), and an MA from the Fletcher School (2021). He is a 2019 fellow of Harvard's Weatherhead Center, and during his studies in Paris he published articles as freelancer in the Greek daily Kathimerini. He speaks English, Greek, French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Turkish.

---

**Dr. Catalina Florina Florescu** holds a Ph.D. from Purdue University with a double specialization in Medical Humanities and Comparative Theater. She teaches at Pace University. She is the curator for new play festival at Jersey City Theater Center. She has published extensively on issues related to health, immigration, motherhood, as well as creatively. One of her next projects is under contract with Routledge, *Female Playwrights and Intersectionality in Contemporary Romanian Theater*. http://www.catalinaflorescu.com/

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

**James Ikeda** is a PhD candidate in World History at Northeastern University. He holds an MA in History and an M.Ed. in Learning and instruction from Northeastern, as well as an MA in History from Tufts University, and a BS in Social Studies Education from Boston University. His research focuses on the Black Radical Tradition, the US Third World Left, Black Nationalism, Left Transnational Solidarities, and Colonialism in Black Radical Thought. He teaches history at Quincy High School and Bunker Hill Community College.

---

**Mischa Kuball** was born in 1959 in Düsseldorf, Germany, where he currently lives and works. A conceptual artist, he has been working in the public and institutional sphere since 1977. He uses light as a medium to explore architectural spaces as well as social and political discourses and reflects on a whole variety of aspects from sociocultural structures to architectural interventions as well as emphasising or reinterpreting their monumental nature and context in architectural history. Public and private space merge into an indistinguishable whole in politically motivated participation projects, providing a platform for communication between the audence, the artist, the work itself and public space. Since 2009, Mischa Kuball has developed a series of site-specific installations entitled "public preposition" -a group of works, interventions, projects, and performances made over a period of several decades. What they have in common is that they appeal to a public sphere and implicitly question in what locations and under what circumstances what we mean by "public" is constituted and how it should be understood.

**Jenny Marketou**, born in Athens, Greece lives and works in New York and Athens. She is a professor of New Media Art and Public Engagement at The New Schoo/Parsons in New York.

She holds a BFA from Corcoran School of Art (Washington, DC) and an MFA from Pratt Art Institute (Brooklyn, New York). In her practice she has developed and designed projects that propose playful solutions to social problems through a variety of media and an open invitation for community engagement.

Her recent institutional solo and group exhibitions were held at New York Harbor, Governors Island, NY(2022), The House of Challenging Orders, Vienna Art Week, Vienna (2022), Folk Fiction, One Minute Space, Athens, Greece (2022), The High Line, New York (2018), Praxis, ARTIUM Contemporary Art Museum of the Basque Country (2014), Reina Sofia, Madrid, (2012 ), The National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST), Athens (2010).

She participated in Biennial de Mediterranean 19, San Marino; documenta 14, Manifesta, European Biennial; Biennial of Seville, Spain; Biennial of Sao Paolo, Brazil; Biennial de Cartagena, Colombia; Thessaloniki Biennial, Greece.

Marketou's work was included in exhibitions at ZKM, Center for Media Arts, Karlsruhe; Museum Tinguely, Basel; Kumu Art Museum, Estonia; Kunsthalle Basel (2014), Queens Museum, New York, The New Museum, New York among others.

Her books include *Serious Games* (released on July, 2022), *How Assemblies Matter*, *Organizing from Below*, 2014, *Paperophanies,* 2012, *Smell-Bytes*, 2001, and her essays include *Perform Interdependency*, 2017, and *The School of Everything*, 2017.

---

**Antoine Martel** is sous chef, a culinary master of audio food, always cookin up new recipes. Whenever he's not living that road life with sunking & high pulp, he sleeps & works out of the kitchen// la cuisine, his studio in Seattle, producing & exploring new flavors, courses, and musical meals to delight and expand your eardrums.

---

**Andrea Marcellier** is a French-Venezuelan artist born in Paris in 1995. She studied Fine Arts at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf under Professors Gregor Schneider, John Morgan, and Peter Piller, graduating with an excellence diploma. She later pursued research on power dynamics in New York. Currently, she is based between Paris and Berlin and is a member of Kunsthaus KuLe e.V.

Whether formal or performative, the dialogue between her work and the audience is central to Marcellier's artistic practice. This interplay is part of an imagined realism that bridges the gap between a deep human bond and the spectacle of daily existence. Her work explores the notion of gesture, which she transcribes through various mediums.

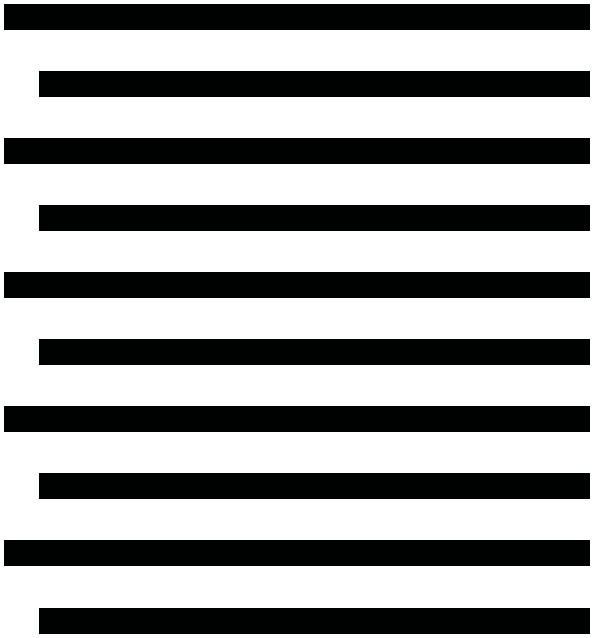
**Asha Kshama Mehta** identifies as brown girl born in Boston with Indian roots. Asha means radical hope. She attends a small neighborhood school and lives in two homes, with co-parents. She loves to make music and "masti" and co-constructed her kindergarten year in the pandemic.

---

**Zafiris Nikitas** teaches theatre at the Theatre Department of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and holds a Ph.D. in Theatre Studies. He studied Law and Theatre at the Aristotle University. His scientific interests focus on the cultural poetics of American, European and Greek Theatre (19th-21st century). He has published articles in international and Greek peer-reviewed journals and he has participated in Conferences organized by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Frei Universität Berlin, Sapienza Università di Roma etc. His postdoctoral research focuses on Minority Theatre and he takes part in the research project "Audience Research in Performances of Ancient Drama." His monograph *Representing the Nation: The dramaturgy of Jannis Kambysis* is under publication. Lastly, he has published three literature books and one translation in collaboration with Aristotle University Professor Dimitrios Z. Nikitas.

---

**Christa Oliver** is an Associate Teaching Professor in the department and the Director of the Panoramic Dance Project. Prior to joining NC State, she taught for eleven years in the Department of Theatre and Dance at Texas State University. Christa is an educator, dance activist, performer, and choreographer. She holds a Master of the Arts degree in Dance Performance and a Professional Diploma in Dance Studies from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (England). She is also a Mellon Fellow in the School of Theater and Performance Research at Harvard University. Throughout her career, Christa has collaborated with renowned choreographers such as Donald McKayle, Valerie Preston-Dunlop, Rafael Bonachela, Donald Byrd, Rennie Harris, Lula Washington, Victor Quijada, Christopher Huggins, Willi Dorner, Miguel Periera, Robin Lewis, and Dominique Kelly. She has performed professionally in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Mexico, and Amsterdam and was the dance captain on the national tour of The Color Purple. She has also showcased her acting and dancing skills on the big screen in Hollywood films such as Avatar and Crazy on the Outside.



**Dan Perjovschi**'s "drawings have been widely disseminated -from the walls of museums to the pages of newspapers. Since 1990, following the demise of Communism in Eastern Europe and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the artist has contributed hundreds of witty and incisive observations to literary and political journals, such as Contrapunct and 22. The latter was the first independent oppositional weekly published in Romania in the aftermath of the Democratic Revolution. Taking its name from the date December 22, 1989, the historic day on which Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was ousted from power, 22 is the brainchild of the Group of Social Dialogue, a think tank of dissident writers, artists, and philosophers who endorse freedom of expression and human rights. As an illustrator for 22, and as its former art director, Perjovschi has transformed drawing into a medium of information and political commentary. Expressing complex ideas in rapidly executed, off-the-cuff drawings, Perjovschi's installation propose that art can be engaged without being moralistic." (Source: Museum of Modern Art, MoMa: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/24 )

---

**Maria Platia** is an experienced graphic designer with a rich background in both fashion design and graphic arts. Based in Athens, Greece, she has established herself as a versatile freelance graphic designer, collaborating with esteemed publishing houses, newspapers, and magazines across the country. Her extensive portfolio includes designing books, albums, magazines, CDs, and fairy tale illustrations for a diverse range of clients, from major companies to individual projects. Some of her recent major projects include the design and graphic creation of albums featuring collections of artworks and objects from Greek collectors, as well as providing graphic design support for large exhibitions and events. She has received awards and commendations for her participation as a designer and for fabric and garment design in competitions. In her free time, Maria is passionately involved in painting and creating artistic constructions.

---

**Denisa Pubalova** is an interdisciplinary artist working at the intersection of art and science with the main focus on the ecology of relations. Her curious practice involves many disciplines ranging from art and posthumanities to speculative philosophy and new media studies, to the fields of science. In her artistic practice, she conceptualizes processes beyond the human experience. To communicate the concepts, she uses generative art as a principle able to simulate these post-anthropocentric processes. Currently, she is a Master's student in Interaction design at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen and at New Media Studies at Charles University in Prague.

She is an alumna of the Festival University program of JKU and Ars Electronica collaboration.

**Dr. Swati Kshama Rani** is a Lecturer at Boston University where she fosters decolonizing pedagogy through multiple literacies. She's also an activist in her neighborhood and fosters community that amplifies kids' voices on issues of social justice.

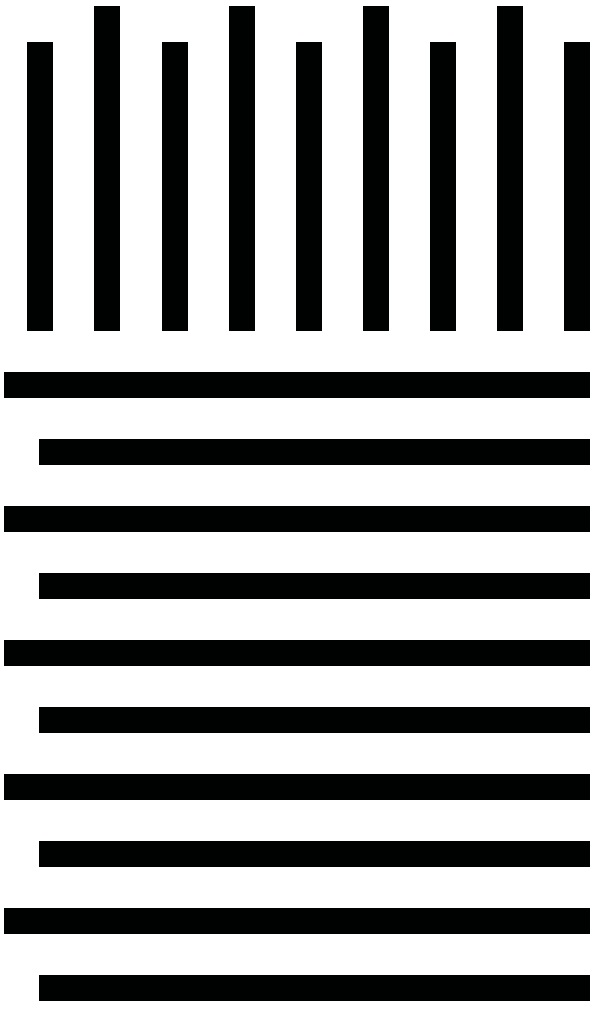
---

**Vassiliki Rapti**, Ph.D., is a scholar of comparative literature and civic media, editor, translator, curator, and currently the editor of *The Journal of Civic Media*.

During the years 2008–2016 she has served as Preceptor in Modern Greek at Harvard University, where in 2013 she co-founded and co-chaired the Ludics Seminar at the Mahindra Humanities Center and the Advanced Training in Greek Poetry Translation and Performance Workshop, which she has been running since then along with *Citizen TALES* Commons, a research team of scholars and artists, based in Cambridge, MA.

Her publications and research interests center around civic media, ludic theory, avant-garde theater and performance with an emphasis on Surrealism, literary theory and women's wriitng. She is the co-editor of *Ludics: Play as Humanistic Inquiry* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2021) and author of *Ludics in Surrealist Theater and Beyond* (Ashgate, 2013) and of several edited books and translation volumes including Nanos Valaoritis's *"Nightfall Hotel": A Surrealist Romeo and Juliet* (Somerset Hall Press, 2017) and of several poetry collections including *Transitorium* (Somerset Hall Press, 2015). During the years 2002–2004 she cofounded and co-edited the journal *Theatron*.

**Marα Rapti** is currently retired. She has served as Principal of the 7th E.K. of Piraeus, Greece, where she promoted enhancement programs for both faculty and students in which emphasis was placed in the intersection of arts and professional studies. As a Citizen TALES Commons member, she is currently working on a comparative study on caregiving from the Byzantine times to today in Greece. Trained initially as an RN, she holds a Masters' in Religious Studies from The Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, France, where she studied as a scholar of the Greek State Scholarship Foundation. Painting is a lifelong pursuit of hers.



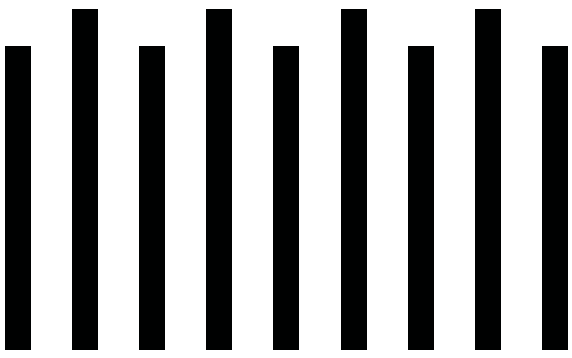
**Betsy Salerno** holds a Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a specialization in Women's and Cultural Studies from Lesley University. Her research examines the cultural phenomenon of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Black Madonnas in relation to their spiritual, political, historical, cultural and personal significances for women. Betsy has also examined female divinity in Indigenous cultures (analyzing how these become dynamic symbols of feminine source and creativity that empower and activate women); developed the course Changing Woman Reality and Myth (which examines the lives of Native American Women); taught courses on the relationships between religion, spirituality, ecology and sustainability; and creates and practices ritual and ceremony that explores diverse spiritual ideas and meanings. She teaches Women's & Gender Studies at Merrimack College and the University of New Hampshire and is a member of the Association for the Study of Women and Mythology.

---

**Dr. Lea Luka Sikau** (she/her) is an Artist-Researcher with a PhD on critical posthumanism, new music and rehearsal ethnography from the University of Cambridge. She teaches on artistic research processes at Humboldt University Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin and Seoul National University. Sikau has been a Bavarian American Academy Fellow at Harvard University's Mellon School for Performance and Theater Research and was awarded with the Bavarian Cultural Award for her research at MIT's Center for Art, Science and Technology. She has worked with some of the most sought-after visionaries in the arts such as Romeo Castellucci, Marina Abramović and Stefan Kaegi (Rimini Protokoll). As a media artist and mezzosoprano, Sikau was commissioned by the European Commission (S+T+ARTS), Ligeti Center, Ars Electronica Festival, transmediale, Impakt, Ensemble Modern and Climate Week NYC.

---

**Richard Santos Raya** (he/him) is a writer, educator, and martial artist from Berkeley and Oakland, CA. A stand up comedian and storyteller with a Bachelor's in American Studies from Macalester College and a J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law, Richard combines creativity and critical thinking with a strong grounding in historical and political contexts to both think systemically and examine locally. Richard has used his skills to teach law to teenagers at Centro Legal de la Raza's Youth Law Academy, as well as run a campaign for Oakland City Council in District 5 as a part of the larger defund-the-police movement. Richard recently graduated from NYU's Tisch School of the arts with a MFA in game design and has recently begun writing plays. He geeks out on storytelling, myth, and games of all kinds, holding a deep belief in their power and potential as educational and liberatory tools.



**Bam Dev Sharma** is an assistant Professor at the Ratnarajyalaxmi Campus of Trinhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal, where he teaches American poetry to graduate students in the English Department. A published poet, children's writer and author of several books, he joined *Citizen TALES Commons* to engage in an open dialogue with other members on creative writing and scholarship.

---

**Tyler Thomas** is a New York-based theater director and Susan Stroman Directing Award recipient. Most recently, she has developed and directed new work in New York City and across the U.S. at Pasadena Playhouse, Vineyard Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Rattlestick Playwrights, Geva Theatre, Northern Stage, and The Flea. Tyler is a former 2050 Fellow with New York Theater Workshop, Foeller Fellow at Williamstown Theatre Festival, and member of the Lincoln Center Directors' Lab. She has been a Visiting Artist at the Athens Conservatoire in Greece and Guest Artist at UCLA and UC Santa Cruz. Tyler holds a BFA in Drama and MA in Arts Politics from the New York University's Tisch School of Drama. She is currently the Associate Artistic Director of the U.S. national arts and health initiative, Arts for EveryBody, inspired by the Federal Theatre Project.

---

**Zenovia Toloudi** is an Architect, Artist, and Assistant Professor at Studio Art, Dartmouth College. Her work critiques the contemporary alienation of humans from nature and sociability in architecture and public space, and investigates spatial typologies to reestablish cohabitation, inclusion, and participation through digital, physical, and organic media. The founder of Studio Z, a creative research practice on art, architecture, and urbanism, Zenovia has exhibited internationally, including at the Biennale in Venice, the Center for Architecture, the Athens Byzantine Museum, the Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art and the Onassis Cultural Center. She has won commissions from Illuminus Boston, The Lab at Harvard, and the Leslie Center for Humanities at Dartmouth. Zenovia's work belongs to permanent collections at Aristotle University (AUTh) and the Thracian Pinacotheca. Her essays have been published in Routledge, Technoetic Arts, and MAS Context. Zenovia is the recipient of The Class of 1962 Fellowship. She was a Public Voices Fellow; a Research Fellow at Art, Culture, and Technology Program at MIT; and a Fulbright Fellow. Zenovia received her Doctor of Design degree from Harvard's GSD (2011), a Master of Architecture degree as a Fulbright Fellow at the Illinois Institute of Technology (2006), and in 2003, she graduated from the AUTh in Architectural Engineering. Website: http://zenovia.net/

---

**Eliana Torres** is a singer, dancer, author, model, and child entrepreneur. She recently qualified for a grant to develop her eco-friendly, non-toxic nail polish and is currently working with chemists from Texas State University and UT Austin. Eliana is Christa Oliver's daughter and loves choreographing dances with Christa.

---

**Katerina Triantafyllou**, is currently a senior at the Cambridge Rindge & Latin School. In the fall of 2024 she will be attending Washington University in St. Louis as a John B. Ervin scholar. A multiple scholarships recipient including the prestigious City of Cambridge Award, the Cambridge Club Community Service Award, and the Cheri Kamen Memorial Scholarship in the Humanities granted by Remie Targoff and Stephen Greenblatt, she is passionate about the humanities, languages, STEM, media journalism, writing and music. She has played the piano for 14 years, and the violin for 8 years. She is committed to social justice and she cares about social innovation where language, sciences, arts, and technology intersect. As a Founder and Co-Leader of the Youth Mentoring Forum on Civic Innovation of *Citizen* TALES Commons, she aspires to empower youth by amplifying their voices.

---

**Hannah Trivilino** (she/hers) is a transdisciplinary artist-scholar, experiential educator, and creative consultant. Hannah is trained in Feminist and Queer Theory, Cultural Studies, and Education which informs her current and past work teaching undergraduate courses; institutionalizing community engagement in higher education policy; training secondary education students in dialogue facilitation; co-developing Citizen TALES Commons; and more. Hannah has also worked on political campaigns, performed with world-renowned musicians, and won awards in community building, playwriting, and social engagement. She has additional backgrounds in dance, art, and comedy and is currently devising a cross-sensory project exploring intersections between epistemology, dis/ability, de/colonialisms, cognition, memory, and pedagogy.

---

**Kai Tuchmann** graduated in directing from Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch in Berlin. He works as a dramaturg, director and academic. As a visiting professor at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, he helped develop the curriculum for the BA Dramaturgy program there. Kai has also researched the history of dramaturgy as a Fulbright Scholar at the Graduate Center of the City University New York, and he is a Fellow of the Mellon School of Theater at Harvard University.

In his internationally shown documentary theater works, Kai has explored the afterlife of the Cultural Revolution in contemporary China, the impact of urbanization on migrant workers in Europe and Asia, and the role of the body in the face of digital technologies.

He is the co-editor of *www.connectingrealities.org*, which examines Indian and Asian performance practices, both traditional and contemporary, that relate to performing reality. He is also the co-translator of Li Yinan`s 当代剧场访谈录. *Juchang Performance in Contemporary Chinese Society (1980–2020)*. His recent publication is the edited volume *Postdramatic Dramaturgies-Resonances between Asia and Europe* (transcript, 2022).

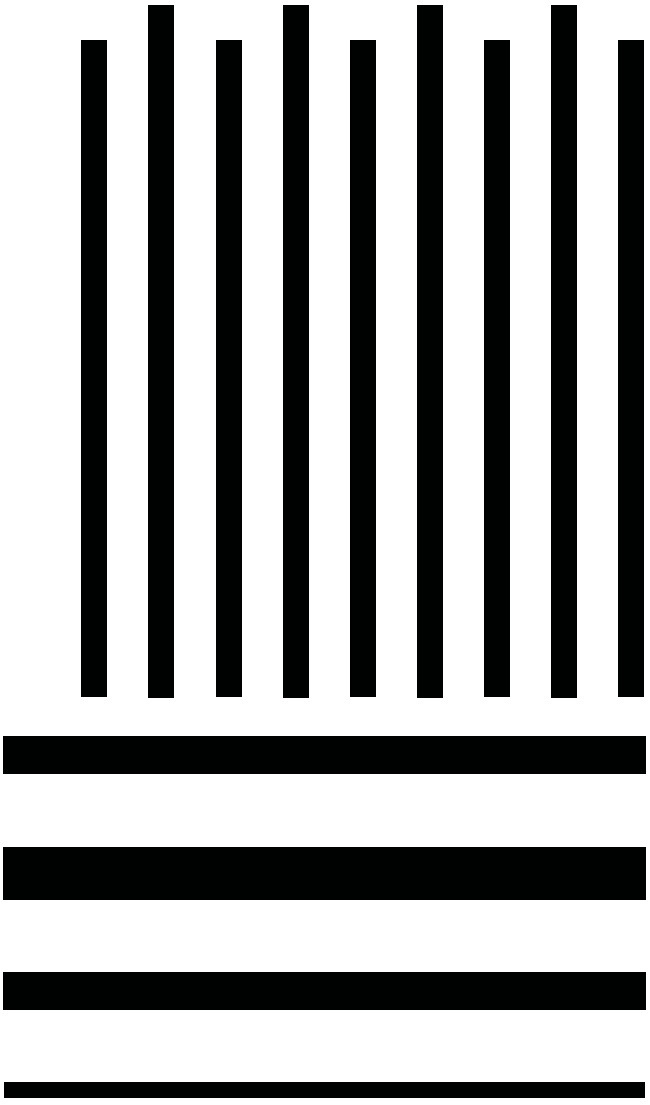
**Adonis Volanakis** born in Athens, Greece in 1976. studied at University of Arts London, Wimbledon College of Art/BA (Hons), Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design and Aalto University/ MA, and Athens University/ Ph.D.

His performative practice is the interchanging amalgam of blind dates and aesthetics, poetry and politics, visual and performing arts, public and indoor spaces. Adonis creates installations and performances, instigates collaborative platforms and exhibitions, as well as he designs and/or directs dance, Theater and opera.

In 2006 he founded and facilitates blinddate12, a togethering collaborative platform, with visual artists, performers, poets, philosophers and newcomer artists from Middle East. Adonis creates performances and installations, curates exhibitions, as well as he designs and/or directs dance, Theater and opera in: USA (Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery, Dixon's Place, Kimmel Galleries), in UK (Royal Opera House-Covent Garden, National Theater), in Switzerland (Archeological Museum of Basel, Kaskadenkondensator); in Georgia (History Museum of Tbilisi, State Silk Museum); in Greece (DOCUMENTA 14, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, State Museum of Contemporary Art, European Cultural Centre of Delphi, Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete, National Theater, Greek National Opera, Athens and Epidaurus Festival, Benaki Museum, Onassis Cultural Centre, Cacoyannis Foundation, Athens Biennial) and in France, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland. Adonis has curated and facilitated community public art projects in Greece (Patras, Ithaca, Heraklion,Piraeus) and Czech Republic.

Foundations that support his work: Fulbright, A.S.Onassis, London Institute, Arts and Humanities Research Board/UK, B&E Goulandris, Propondis and Leventis.

Source: https://adonisvolanakis.com/bio



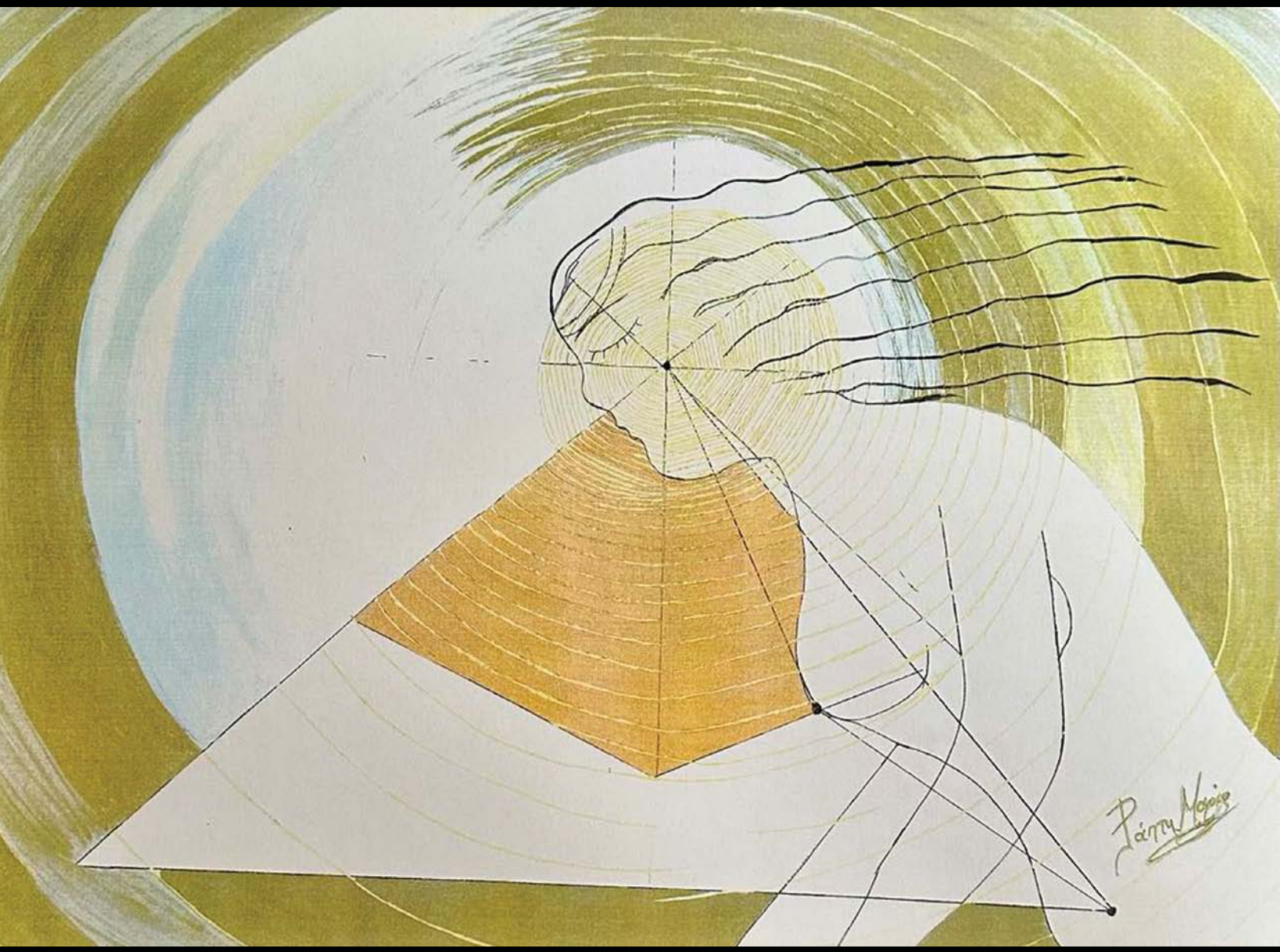
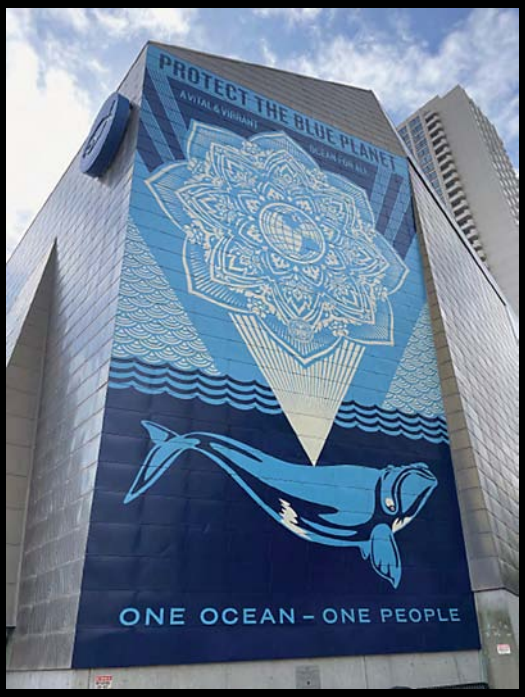
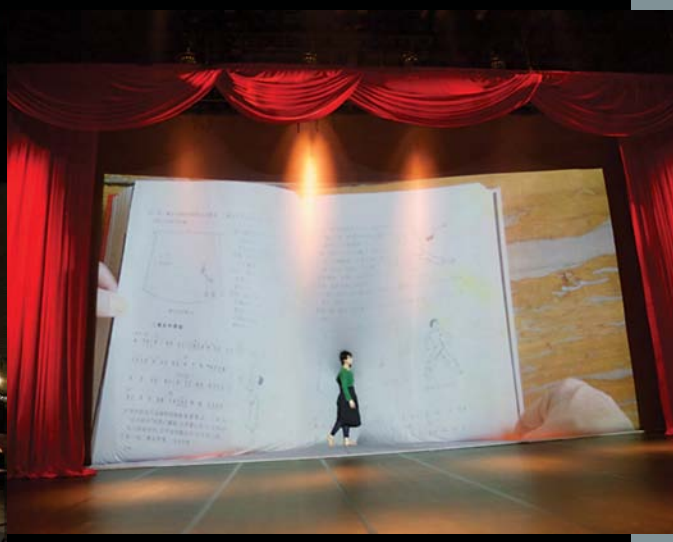


**Fig. 23. Labyrinth by Mara Rapti.**

**Earth (2023). Artwork, Maria Platia.**

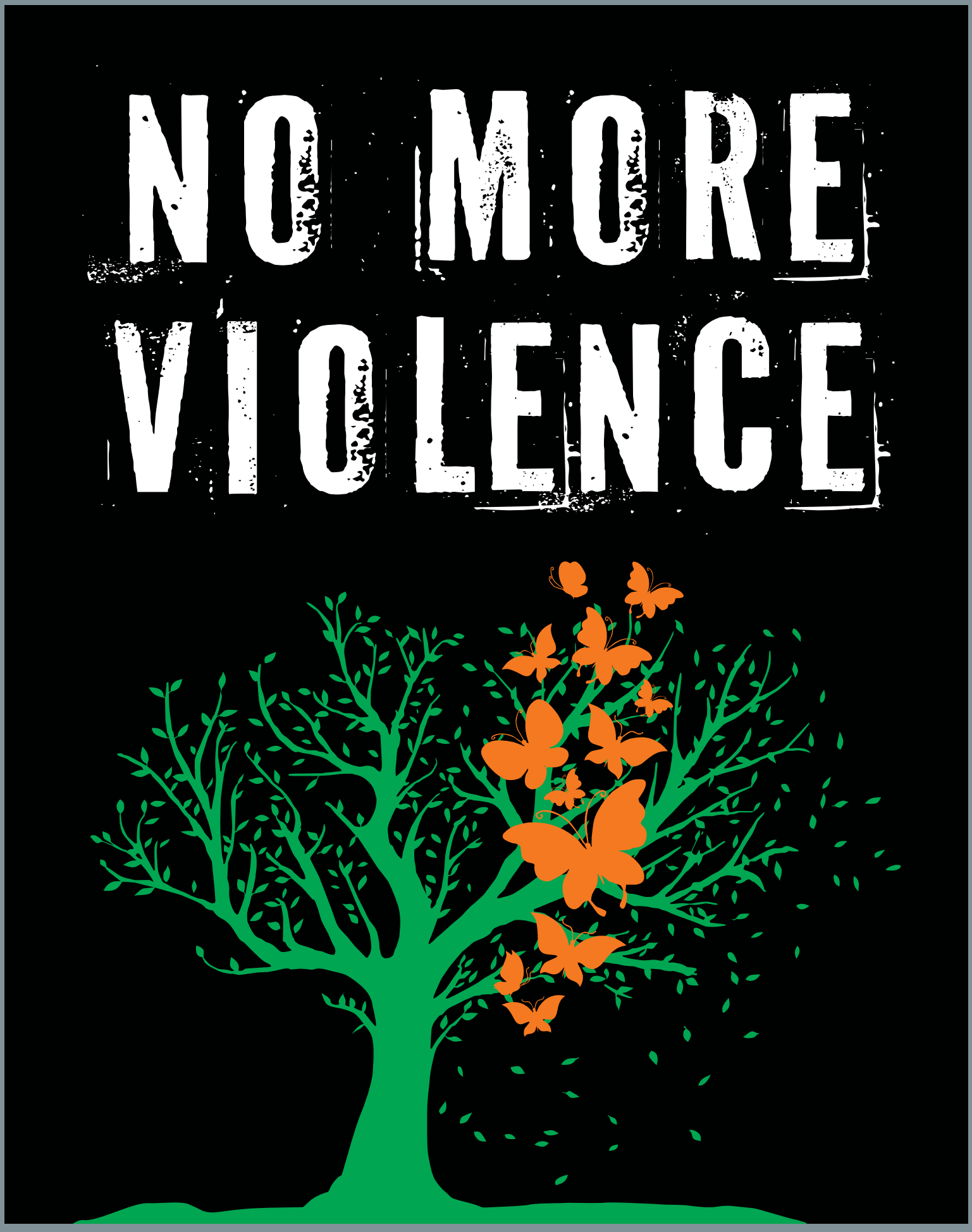

# Civic Media In Flux

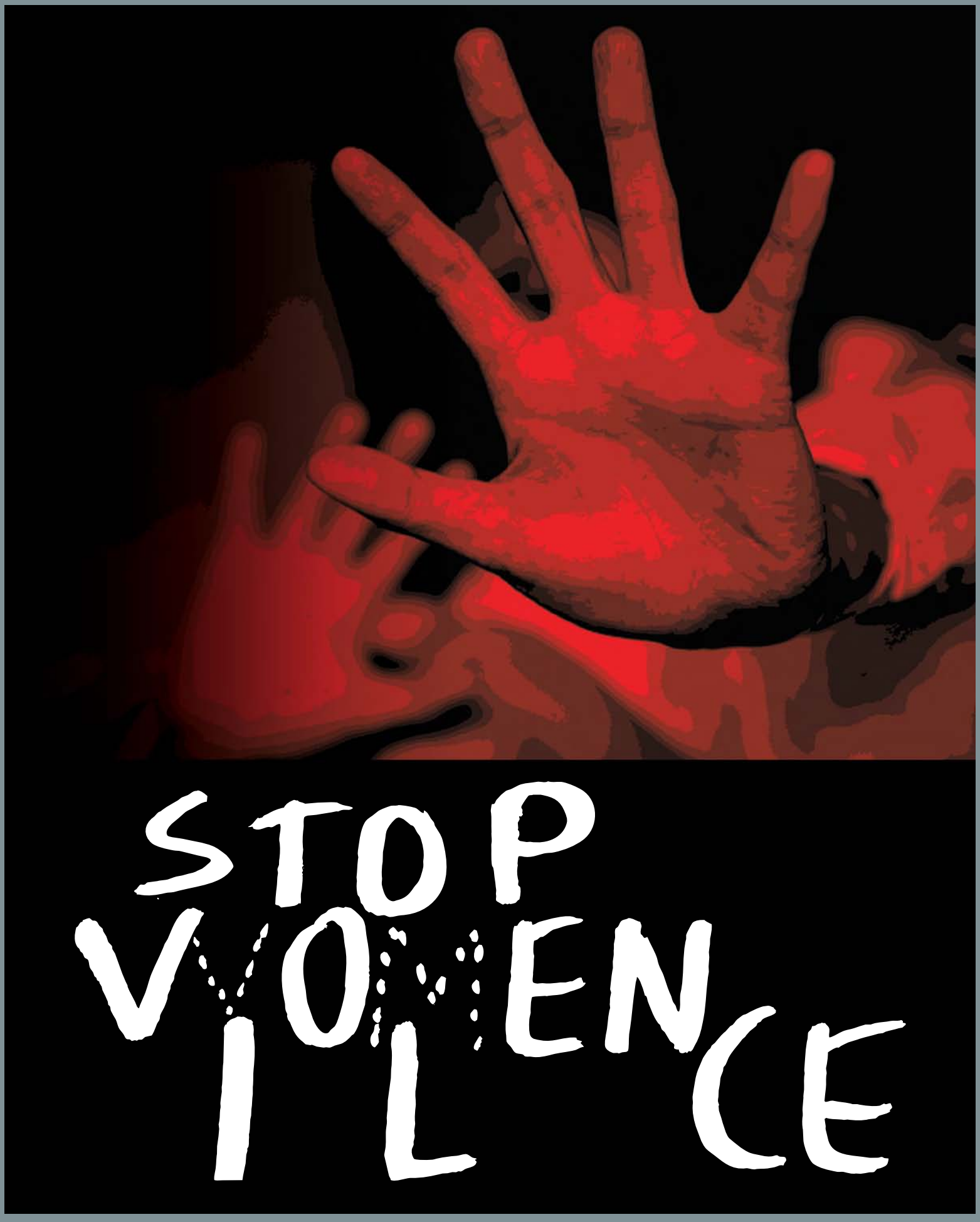

PROTECT THE BLUE PLANET
ONE OCEAN – ONE PEOPLE




In a sense,
all Activism
is Testimony


"Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United
States of America and faithfully defend the United
from any or all attack by foreign or domestic
and forswear any form of allegiance or
to the Jap emperor, or any o
government, or organization?"


NO MORE
VIOLENCE


STOP
VIOLENCE

THE journal OF CIVIC MEDIA

# Civic Media In Flux