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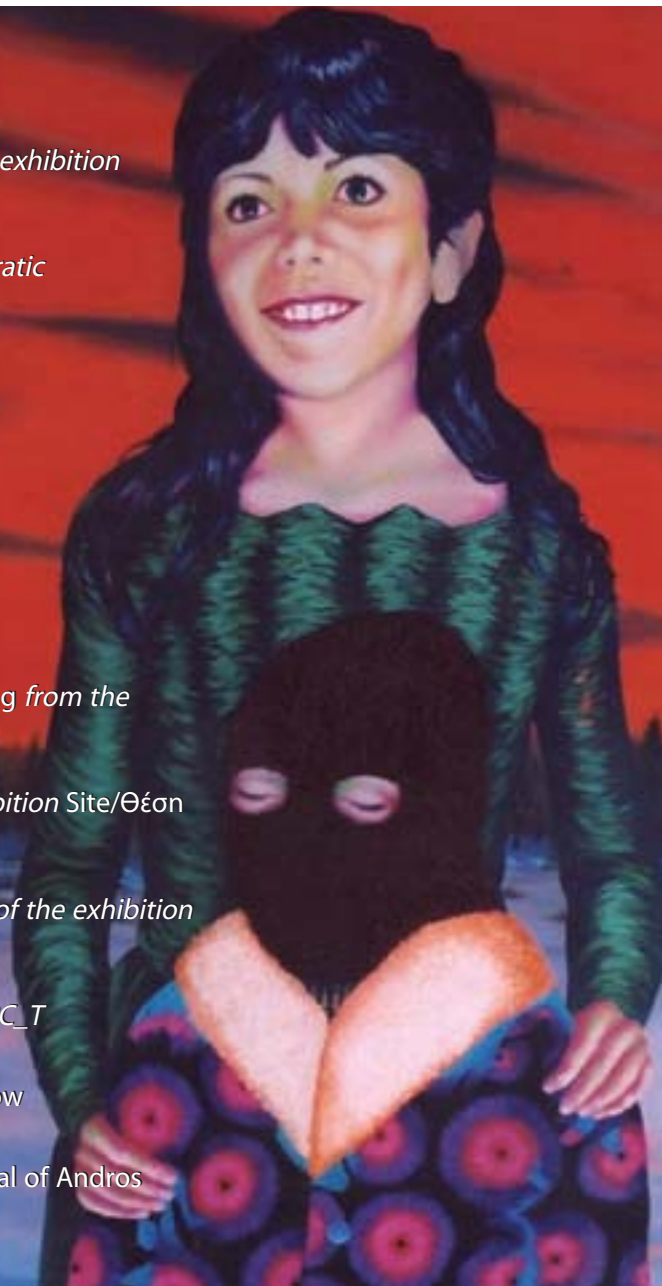
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***α* closes its first circle in the** summer, as it usually happens with the closing of circles, and restructures its contents. In the fifth issue are included two basic thematic axes: on the one hand, the discussion on the question of opposition in contemporary Greek art which was held on June 24 at the gallery To Milo on the other hand, an inlaid special edition, if we may call it so, about an e-zine, Peripheries, which travels to art events held outside Athens.

In September *α* will expand its thematic. It will add to its contents texts that, using topicality as an opportunity, will have a broader theoretical or analytical orientation. *α* will remain a magazine for the critical review of the art activities in Athens, attempting at the same time to include events that are connected in the broader sense with the culture of the image rather than being closely connected only with what is on display in the galleries, which is self-evidently considered as art.

α is always open to contributions. Also, it is always open to replies and substantiated confrontations which have been occasioned by texts that have appeared in its electronic pages. We repeat: it aims at public dialogue, not at personal discussions, however lively and interesting as they may be.

Theophilos Tramboulis

Athenian Internationals

A few essays and articles have appeared recently that attempt to critically engage the Athenian art scene and assess its vivacity. Some among them – notably a news piece by the Director of *Argos Centre for Contemporary Art* Katerina Gregos, in *Contemporary* magazine, and an essay by *Athinorama* art critic Despina Zefkili, in the free-copy publication *Local Folk* – include criticism that indeed sheds light on what is going on and expose real problems regarding institutions, collective behavior, and individual practices.

Such texts usually proceed from describing as best they can a situation where "something is happening" to reporting on a lack of official support, an inefficiency or stagnancy of public institutions, a market-oriented gallery system, the

absence of co-operative undertakings or self-organized artists' initiatives, a prevalence of authoritarian structures (as opposed to "dialogue"), a need for more "socially conscious" art, a misguided sense of locality (as opposed to a fashionable one), etc.

Criticism is a wonderful thing, but what strikes me as odd is the felling of distance that these texts exude: Yes, yes, good effort. Two points to the fledgling Athenian scene, but take it from me – the Athenian but internationally-minded art professional – you have some way to go!

Joking apart, a fledgling art scene is a very exciting circumstance, but it is also an easy target. Simply trying to appear as un-provincial as possible in the eyes of one's imagined international audience is hardly criticism. And we should watch that words such as "objectivity",

"dialogue", or "criticism" are not simply a good excuse for not getting our hands dirty.

A. Zenakos

Kinky

I don't know about art history, but I was captivated for quite a while by Caravaggio's *Saint John the Baptist*, spellbound by the painting's lust. John, still clasping in his arms the lamb, turns and glances at the viewer with a startled reproach to the intruder that dared to interrupt his embrace with the symbol of sanctity. If we could turn Baptist's head, his lips would have pressed the beast's mouth. The look in the lamb's eyes is a look of desire, which has not yet been satiated, a look of anticipation, submission. John is an adolescent, he is not at the age that he would not be able to unloose the shoes of he

"who is mightier than he", the one that is mightier than he is on his side, tame, surrendered, voluptuous. The Baptist turns to and glances at us with reproach, with that mischievous reproach which is at the same time an invitation to participate in the embrace. I sat for quite some time looking at the painting, ignoring the *Penitent Magdalene* and the *Raising of Lazarus* that were displayed in the same hall of the Goulandris Museum, at that time I wasn't interested in painting, I was only interested in that part of art which is desire.

But art isn't only desire, it is also knowledge. Next to the New Wing of the Goulandris Museum, the exhibition *Shaping The Beginning* juxtaposed exquisite modernist works, by Brancusi, Giacometti, and Picasso, along with the archaic forms from Egypt, the Cyclades, and the

Minoan Period that inspired them. The selection of the works was wise – at any rate, it was made with the erudition that is able to locate the similarities between forms and travel through art history. But that was all there was. Because if we assume that the exhibition would not intend to exhaust itself in admiring exclamations like "Just look how modern they were 3000 years ago!", or in patriotic dismissive remarks like "They took everything from the ancient Greeks", then the informational material which would teach the elderly ladies which were strolling with me through the exhibition about the conditions under which Modernism turned to archetypal art, about the way in which it intervened in the history of forms, about this reception of forms during the twentieth century, about

the popularization of the modernist project etc., was just as minimal as the best sculptures in the exhibition. One did not have the impression that no one was interested in a few pieces of information; one rather had the impression that the exhibition was mounted just fine in some other exhibition venue, and the exhibits had traveled safe and sound from the museums to which they belong, but the captions, the paintings, and the notes were lost in the airport and never managed to arrive in Greece. As far as desire is concerned the day was fine. But as to knowledge we are none the wiser.

Th. Tramboulis

Pride and Prejudice

We certainly have every right to think that a critique is malicious,

biased, partial, or even libelous. Provided that we are drawing our arguments from the text and that we are not invoking malice, bias, partiality or libel, because we actually cannot face critique itself. This happens; because we cannot admit openly that we cannot take critique, we tend to transfer the field of confrontation to a more convenient space that is encoded within the critical field: we say that so-and-so writes this way, because he holds a personal grudge against us, or, on the other hand, we say that this leads to prosecution and comes under the jurisdiction of courts. Subterfuges. Disputes should be settled within the texts. With a discourse that will be based on the texts and that will be going back to the texts. With a discourse that will be producing texts as a response and that will not be

devoting itself to personal attacks behind-the scenes. For instance, a would be happy to publish any reply to any of its texts. This dialogue is one of its objectives. Besides, we should be allowed to think that any other attitude belongs to the character that the Cephalonian author Andreas Laskaratos described in *Idou o anthropos* (Ecce Homo) as short-tempered: "He is vexed at the slightest things and sometimes, when this slightest thing is missing, he invents something with his imagination and worries silently with his thinking".

Th.Tramboulis

Versus



COURTESY: TO MILO

A discussion about defiance, contemporary art in Greece and its presuppositions

While the exhibition *Versus* that was held at the gallery To Milo was in preparation, we discussed with Paris Chaviaras and Yannis Skaltsas the possibility of writing a long text which, on the occasion of the exhibition, would discuss the broader, and yet crucial, question of opposition. The exhibition, as far as each work is concerned, tackled this question from different perspectives. For instance, Vassilis Vlastaras' work, Maro Michalakakou's work and Stavroula Papadaki's work dealt with the constitutional to creation inner conflict and the transformations of the person. Rallou Panagiotou's work dealt with a Pirandellian proliferation of the individual in the social space. Dimitris Zouroudis' work and Yannis

Coutroulis' work dealt with particular issues of political confrontation, the first with the relationship between Islam and the West, and the latter with the retail exploitation of communist mythology. Dimitris Ioannou's work dealt with the replacement of political conflict by symbolic apolitical groupings, such as the grouping of football. Nikos Papadopoulos' work and Costis Velonis' work dealt with the issues of counterpoint as to space and form that produce intangible meanings. And, finally, Paris Chaviaras' work and Yannis Skaltsas' work dealt with the issues of confrontation within the field of art.

In the end, we considered organizing a discussion that would offer us the possibility to examine the question of

opposition in the space par excellence in which it emerges: in the space of dialogue. The occasion, in part, was an article by Nikos Xydakis in *Kathimerini* which touched on the question of knowledge and ignorance of tradition by young Greek curators and artists. Considering this is as a question of constitutional confrontation in the field of Greek culture, we invited Yannis Stavrakakis, researcher at the University of Essex and political scientist, to set out the political terms for the engagement of such a dialogue, Nikos Xydakis, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Kathimerini* and art critic, and Augustine Zenakos, art critic of the newspaper *TO VIMA* and co-curator of the First Athens Biennial, to describe, each from his

own viewpoint, the oppositional dynamics and politics in the space of contemporary art in Greece. On the other hand, I attempted to discuss the archetypal contradiction between the demand for Greekness and the demand for internationality.

The discussion was held at the gallery To Milo on June 24, 2006. As you will see for yourself in its indicative transcription, the oppositions are always ready to emerge in what is said and, above all, in what is not said.

T. T.

We would like to thank Paris Stephanidis for the hospitality.

The Political as defiance and its management: democratic institutionalization and artistic praxis

VERSUS: against, in opposition to, opposed to...

In an age in which art primarily functions on a conceptual level, an exhibition's title invites us to think. What could versus mean? Which sense of the word could frame an artistic event? What sort of stimulus does it provide for artists invited to participate, or for visitors to the (extremely welcoming) space in which it is being held? At this point, we find ourselves up against the ambiguity of language. In English, for instance, the signifier versus has both legal (the Crown versus John Doe) and sporting (Manchester

United versus Bradford City) connotations.

However, everyone would agree that latent in the word's conceptual load is a dichotomic perception of the sphere of reference. Anything and everything we reference using this word is split, becomes the bone of contention between opposing, antagonistic forces. The one, the whole, automatically becomes two. In this sense, the word is intensely political. It directly references the element of opposition, of antagonism, an element which contemporary political theorists (Lefort, Laclau, Mouffe et al) label the political. Which renders political theory particularly well - suited to theorizing on this issue, which partly explains my presence on this panel. To the extent that the end of history is slow in coming - it has,

fortunately, failed to put in an appearance at numerous previous appointments-the political, antagonism and schism, remains the ultimate ontological horizon of every human society. The political of which I speak is clearly not identifiable with the political as a component part of the social whole, as political institutions, parties, ideologies, electoral systems etc. The political in the sense of againstness is ontological because it leaves its mark on the formation of every collective and subjective identity. This we now know well. There can be no identity without difference. And difference is never neutral - a simple semiotic exchange. It is something in which we invest our passions and emotions; it is the product of identifications which go beyond the simply cognitive to encompass the deeply libidinal.

Meaning we know there is no collective us on the political level, no collective political identification, without an emotionally girded differentiation from them. There can be no left without right, no populace without apparatus, no unprivileged without privileges and so on. In short, opposition lies at the root of every socio-political identity and practice.

However, this is not to say that it can be tolerated easily. Few societies recognize this ontological fact. Most prefer to exclude it or at least repress it. Their reasons are obvious. Accepting it means accept of the imperfection of every identity. If the formation of my identity presupposes the Other, at the very least as a counterweight, this means that this identity is not self-sufficient, autonomous, closed,



Klafthmonos Square, June 19 2006, Photo Yannis Stavrakakis

eternal. And this is why most human societies conceive a number of ways of forgetting this fundamental element of antagonism. Meaning that they call upon a range of guarantees that are held capable of ensuring the integrity of identities (gods, historical and natural laws etc.). In a way, they are striving thus to cast out opposition, rift and againstness. In this context, the Other, the rival, the different one, becomes a demon, a sub-human source of perversion that needs to be eradicated.

Nonetheless, there is another way of dealing with the political: the institutionalization of antagonism and eternal searching in the context of reflective, societal auto-genesis.¹ Of course, every society creates its own institutions, and yet there are societies that recognize their own

moment of genesis in this antagonism and discord. This is the core feature of the democratic concept. Only a democratic society auto-institutionalizes "overtly and reflectively", which is to say it is aware that the process does not depend on an extra-political guarantee or basis,² and that it is thus foundationally imperfect.

This form of self-aware self-institutionalization is highly characteristic of the Greek Polis, and later of Western modernity.³

The Polis knows that antagonism is unavoidable, but is also fully aware that it is hard to tolerate. It exists anyway, though it is not certain that everyone will participate in it, which could lead to distortions in the democracy ranging from the imposition of views that ultimately represent the minority to free-riding.

Which is why citizens must adopt a stance even when they are unwilling to do so. Solon's famous law states that every citizen who fails to take a position, who does not identify themselves with one side against the other, is to lose their political rights because they are dishonourable.⁴ So againstness is recognized/institutionalized as a core of democracy. Even more important is the fact that it is not institutionalized as something external to the *Demos*: the *Demos* is internally split. It can be mistaken, recognize its mistake and claim the right to change its decision. Meaning it introduces a mechanism designed to ensure precisely that: the "γραφὴ παρανόμων" (lawsuit for illegitimacy). Thus, when a law is voted in, every citizen has the right to bring its proponent to task for misleading the *Demos* into

approving an illegal proposal. In this case, the final decision is taken by a people's court composed of hundreds of citizens chosen by lot. In this way, the *Demos* calls itself to task before itself.⁵ What better proof could there be for the recognition of againstness, of the intrinsic schism present in every identity? It should also be noted that in a democratic context, art - and, above all, the theatre - also serves to showcase the political, even in its darkest manifestations. One need only consider Sophocles' *Antigone*. Of course, a city's unity must be protected from excess, from extreme forms of political opposition. This means that the recognition of the political is not absolute; it comes about as part of an extremely delicate balancing act described most revealingly by Nicole Loraux in



NSK, Passport
Office,
Thessaloniki

her important work *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*. The tightrope that had to be walked in ancient Athens, especially during the period of transition between the archaic and classical periods, was to consolidate againstness as the city's cornerstone while avoiding extreme manifestations of the same, such as stasis or civil war. This necessitates the political regulation of memory, and a series of paradoxical and contradictory policies. Their declared aim would appear to be the eradication of the violent, antagonistic moment of genesis from the city's memory. But this eradication is achieved in a way which ultimately reregisters the rift and the loss instead of casting it out. Here is one of the many examples provided by Loraux: the Athenians' decision to remove a day from their

calendar, the day commemorating the clash between Athena and Poseidon, an event that marked the mythical founding of the city, and which could be seen as legitimizing every form of extreme antagonism.⁶ That said, it is obvious that this forgetting mechanism simultaneously underscores - through the very day it removes - that which it seeks to deny: "Amidst these complications, this repeated severance serves as the most bizarre reminder of all".⁷ The democratic Polis does not lose touch with the political, even when it restricts it; even when it renounces it. But enough of ancient Greece. What about the democracies of today? The balancing act they face is not altogether different. The so-called democratic revolution was identified with a corresponding recognition of

opposition in its most fundamental aspect. This is also registered institutionally (universal suffrage, political equality, popular rule etc.). Nonetheless, recognizing the political is far from easy. It is possible to interpret the major totalitarian movements as reactions against precisely this element of contrivance in contemporary democracy. Moreover, the dynamic itself of today's actual democracies seems to lead in what many analysts now term a 'meta-democratic' direction.¹ If ancient Athens "forgot in order to remember", today "we remember in order to forget": we have instituted a host of days dedicated to noble causes that remind us of the Other, of the non-identity - "refugee day", "anti-racism day", "women's day"-simply so we can reject every such though for the rest of the year. If the meta-

democratic trend continues and takes root, we will soon be unable to rule out the possibility of an internationally recognised alibi day for democracy: "democracy day". How can we possibly define this emerging meta-democratic trend? But isn't it obvious that everything around us is turning us towards the meta-political? Towards a political 'lifestyle', towards scorn for participation, towards the idea that the fundamental trends are predetermined and inescapable? The prevailing image is generally that of political life permanently progressing - on automatic pilot - towards the establishment of a world beyond right and left, beyond principledoms and contrasts. In such a world, the only connotation left for versus is that of the clothing line produced by Versace. So we should

not be taken aback by the fact that every crack in this ideological image - from the rise of rightist populism and Metaxas' resounding 'No' to Mussolini's request for Italian troops to be granted free passage through Greece, to the French and Dutch Euro referenda and the recent explosions of violence in the Parisian projects - are a shock both to political order and to numerous academics who are often incapable of concealing their discomfort. How can one explain this discomfort? Mouffe offers a simple explanation: both the prevailing policy and 'orthodox' political analysis are moving in a meta-political direction. They reject the ontological aspect of the political, the "dimension of the antagonistic...that is a component part of human societies".⁹

But hang on a minute: isn't it the

meta-political discourse itself that often recognizes - and even demonizes - the existence of forces that impede its problem-free reproduction? But it could not be otherwise: no rejection of antagonism, of the role passions play in the formation of political identities, could ever succeed in eradicating them. So what are we experiencing? In reality, we are faced with a perilous shift. Incapable of understanding and wary of legitimizing the nodal significance of antagonism in democratic politics, the meta-democratic zeitgeist impels the expression of discord and opposition through channels that fuel a vicious circle of escalating violence: while recognizing the contradictory nature of the political allows antagonism to be transformed into agonism, the taming of brute force, the meta-

political approach leads to violent explosions which, on entering the public sphere, are nationally and internationally denominated and treated in ethical and cultural terms alone, which is to say extra-politically (hence the fixation on axes of evil, clashes of culture etc.) Mouffe notes that in these cases, too, a political border is delimited, though its political nature is simultaneously concealed so as not to ruffle the meta-political self-image. But this trend puts democracy in danger.

The downgrading of the political even within its own privileged sphere of expression and management, that of public politics, leaves space for the arts to intervene in society and underscore political antagonism and againstness. Indeed, some people have gone so

far as to attribute to the contemporary artist the features of a contemporary political/historical subject, of an exerciser of social criticism and bearer of social change. But let us shun overoptimism and excess enthusiasm. It is no secret that, excepting certain avant-garde movements, the art world was historically - and to a great extent remains - a satellite of the world of money and power. Most art produced is fully integrated into the existing status quo, into prevailing tastes. That said, however, one does still come across works in every form that exhort us to experience - albeit momentarily - a pleasure, an ineffable intensity Lacan has termed *jouissance*, when faced with something that shatters our relationship with the field of reproduction and our selves.



Michael Landy,
Breakdown,
2001

It may not be right to talk of 'political art' in the traditional sense of the word, though we can still experience 'the political in art' in artforms which depict the schism, the antagonism and the againstness re the end of history, re meta-political ennui, re the voiding of every genuine alternative. With regard, even, to our own selves to the extent that none of us are in a position to induct ourselves entirely into the system and that all of us are partly responsible for our dependence on it. It is at this point that the quest raises its head for an art that aims to highlight the non-representable - for access, as Lacan has put it, to something intolerable in itself and which must not be seen.¹⁰ Something that can only be recorded by means of signs, the incarnation of an absence (Malevich's "black rectangle" might

be a relevant example¹¹), not of a pure nothing but of the difference between something that exists and that which "is not permitted to exist", between something that prevails and that which this prevalence blocks from our field of vision (either its dark, reviled foundations or the side-effects it inevitably produces).

An art of this sort would aim to reveal the unfamiliar, terrifying aspects of the given with which we may have unconsciously familiarized ourselves, but also to highlight our responsibility for its existence, its functioning as a symptom in the psycho-analytical sense of the word: not simply as an external obstacle, but as a source of a 'pathological' pleasure that fixes us to the spot.


I will end with two or three examples of actions taken from the

art produced recently; examples that incorporate elements of a trend of this type. Hyper-identification might be a sound tactic at this point, as in the case of the Slovenian NSK (Neue Slovenische Kunst) group. The NSK reveal the contradictions in national identity by hyper-identifying with the nation state. Appropriating its symbols and techniques, they founded their own state (NSK State) with its own passports, and present us with and embroil us in the traumatic core of our otherwise given national identity, and attempt to transform it from within. In so doing, they highlight the internal schism, the eventuation in which every community is founded, but which every community struggles tooth and nail to cover up.¹² Another strategy in this sphere is that of de-identification, in which the mechanism for excessive - and

hence potentially subversive - familiarisation gives way to the laying bare of the (ultimately painful) split from everything binding us to the prevailing ideological constellation. A good example would be Michael Landy's *Breakdown*.¹³ Landy chose to gather all his belongings together, from his underwear to works of art given to him by friends (including Damien Hirst) and to destroy them on an enormous conveyer belt of destruction in a central London location. A comment on the all-embracing power of consumerism, on the culture of possession, *Breakdown* reveals the extent to which our self, assembled out of the purchase and possession of objects, is involved in the reproduction of consumer culture. Criticism can no longer be external; it must focus on our involvement in wide-ranging

ideological mechanisms. Landy's sacrificial denuding is primarily a departure from his self. Indeed, might we not ourselves be the greatest enemies of another self? The greatest obstacles to changing our identity? I should like to interpret the work by Vasilis Vlastaras here before us in this light, too; a work in which I read - possibly arbitrarily - the struggle with the Hydra of the self.

Of course, every activity of this sort has its limits. Neither Landy nor the NSK exist beyond the stock exchange and the networks of the international art market. But no matter; it is more or less unavoidable. Ultimately, the laying down of these limits is itself part of their transgression. This is not utopian art; it is art that reveals the limits of every identity, the limits of

art itself, and hence the limits of every utopia. And who - which "fine soul" - is in a position to break free once and for all from the status quo and to judge all and everything from outside, without as it were dirtying their hands? And let us not forget that at that precise point where art's ability to intervene politically in social life ends, the reverse begins to hold: the intervention of the political in art - not through art, but on art. Take, for example, the words an anonymous demonstrator added to the illustrated cow in the Cow Parade, drawing the animal - presumably without its creator wanting to do so - into participating in the issue of opposition. Perhaps, in the end, every art-form is potentially political, even if it doesn't know it. 

¹ See Castoriadis, Cornelius, "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy", Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

² See Castoriadis, Cornelius, "Culture in a Democratic Society", The Castoriadis Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p.340.

³ Castoriadis, *ibid.*

⁴ Castoriadis, *op. cit.* 1991, p.107.

⁵ Castoriadis, *ibid.*, p.117.

⁶ See Loraux, Nicole, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, Zone Books, last ed. 2006, p.241.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.266

⁸ See Mouffe, Chantal, *The democratic paradox*, Verso, 2000 and Crouch, Colin, *Post-Democracy*, Polity Press, 2004.

⁹ Mouffe, Chantal, *On the Political*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p.9.

¹⁰ Wajcman, Gerard, *L'art, la psychanalyse, le siècle*, in [Lacan, to grapto, i eikona](#), Athens: Psychogios, 2003, p.51.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.59.

¹² For more on the NSK, see Monroe, Alexei, *Interrogation Machine*, Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2005.

¹³ See Landy, Michael, *Breakdown*, London: The Times/Archangel Commission, 2001.

Theophilos Tramboulis

Where is the common word *project* derived from?

On taking the baton from Yannis Stavrakakis, I must point out that as far as titles are concerned, the first time that I can remember to have ever encountered the word versus and, what is more in its abbreviated Vs form in my own personal learning English history, was in the glorious comics of the Marvel period, when for instance Spiderman fought Dr Octopus, the cover title was *Spiderman Vs Octopus* and I kept wondering what that conjunction or connective might indicate. While it is all about a confrontation, much like the one Stavrakakis referred to between Athena and Poseidon, when two superior powers are entangled in fight over the city and the awe-stricken crowds underneath stand

watching, it is in reality its complete opposite: if Athena's and Poseidon's conflict defines the city and constitutes the basis of its construction, the superheroes' conflict cancels the city, both because of the human origin of the heroes as it is their superpowers that raise them onto a superhuman and therefore super-political condition, as well as because in reality the superhero replaces the city by securing the observance of the law, the administration of justice, order and neatness. And it is not by chance that in a great number of those stories a hard-featured, vengeful, bigoted cop or attorney appears who chases the superhero down, in both his human and his supernatural version.

But let us not get caught into Spiderman's semantic web; let us proceed with Spyridonas

Zambelios.

In 1859, Spyridon Zambelios, a minor poet from Lefkada, who was the first to introduce the tripartite distinction among the ancient, Byzantine and modern Greece, a source of inspiration for Paparigopoulos and the ideologem of helleno-christian civilization, publishes an essay under the title *Where is the common word tragoudo (to sing) derived from?* In his essay, he associates ancient greek tragedy with folk songs (demotic), wishing to prove that national continuity is constituted by a common psychic, moral and metaphysical stance through the centuries. Zambelios is targeted at both romantic poets, who write in a language that might be beamed straight back into Ancient Greece, without the Byzantine in-between, but also against Dionysios Solomos,

who according to Zambelios, had "fetched the fogs of Germany into greek poetry".

We must note at this point that it was Solomos who in his *Dialogue* set as his poetic principle to, "write poetry in the language of the people", and represents actually an excellent example of the creator, who sets, in present terms, the international scene as his standard and tries to create a modern poetic, in the same notion that Ioannis Capodistrias had tried to create a modern state.

Although such obsession with Ancient Greece is also the precondition on which the construction of the greek state was based, Zambelios and later Constantine Paparrigopoulos, go further than the invention of ancestors: they introduce the parameter of time, or even better



COURTESY, TO MILO

Versus, from left to right the works of Nikos Papadopoulos, Dimitris Zouroudis, Dimitris Ioannou and Maro Mihalakakos



Spyridon
Zambelios,
1815-1881

the abolition of time, as a characteristic of national identity. From Euripides to the *Song for the Dead Brother* only a few, coincidental changes have occurred. So, according to that Peter Pan conception of a nation, all that is national exists outside time, whatever proves that the nation has remained unaltered and therefore eternally young. The duty of the intellect, poetry and art is to certify the national as a sort of the bodiless of the Stoics, a priori Kantian and as the basic criterion for the compilation of modern greek cultural genealogy, the search for the timeless, for the discourse that might condense time and force it into a black hole, which cancels both politics and history. Whatever reveals the time coordinates, and therefore the historical and political ones, can

easily be excused as a small involuntary lapse, a small accident that is due to the momentary lack of national alertness.

Zambelios identified a corporate system of values in Byzantium, at a moment when his contemporaries regarded the medieval ages as an obscure interval in the history of civilization. I believe there is an additional reason why that peculiar personality of the 19th century should not fall into oblivion: since the early beginning he attributed to the Hellenochristian culture its two main qualities that can be observed even today as they support a variety of obsessions of public discourse, indeed so numerous, that when the ultimate, and most ridicule construction of hellenochristianism, the dictatorship of the colonels collapsed, those two wings

remained so as to host the ethnocentric homeless.

The first lies in the belief that western civilization poses a threat and constitutes a reduction as far as the local, self-contained and timeless creation of hellenism is concerned and the second is that, whatever is called national occupies together with its own enclosed time also its own enclosed space. Zambelios considers Solomos's turn to the German romanticism in his late poems, as an abandonment of his original ambition to write national poetry, namely a poetry that might promote and reflect every inherent characteristic of hellenicity. While inventing such a metaphysical and archetypal agent of unmingled, uninfluenced hellenicity, he tends to forget that the poetry of Solomos was from the very start

structured around the Italian influences of Ugo Foscolo and that he had actually written his early poems in Italian. We can identify the same silencing of dialogue with the metropolitan sources that necessarily constitute the unavoidable teachers (as in every relation of center to periphery) of greek discourse in almost every evaluation of emblematic forms of both scholarly, as well as folk culture. When one speaks of Papadiamantis, his relation to Guy de Maupassant or Mark Twain appears minor and what is endorsed is the formation of a language, which constitutes an intrinsic, absolute discovery, as if the second would have been able to exist without the former. When we study Kondoglou, I mean the writer, his early writings are even today considered as prolusions

compared to his mature orthodox literature and not as excellent neoteric narrative which introduces into the greek literature all sorts of heterogeneous narratives of the period, from Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* to Robert Lewis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. If a literature theoretician like Takis Kagialis dares imply that we should study greek modernism taking the ideological parameters and the historical elements it is composed of into consideration, which, by the way, are not at all irrelevant to the obsessions which stand as the supporting pillars of the dictatorial regimes in Europe at the time, he is then directly accused of having disregarded the exact characteristic of Hellenic particularity: timeless time, the a priori national trait which allows someone to stand outside history, as he supposedly

claims it as his own prestigious inheritance. Even the association of Karagiozis to Molière 's plays which at the time also constitute popular entertainment events acquires a minor fate and it is only the Turkish origin of Karagiozis which is often overstressed, possibly because on the field of imagination as contrasted to the military one, the danger from the West is much more threatening than the Eastern one.

Language constitutes the second trait, namely the mechanism through which timeless history is inscribed on subjectivity. It is anyhow the moment when historical linguistics is trying to identify the bonds which link all european languages together by detecting common roots and by tracing the common descent of the European peoples. By entitling his essay , *Where does the common*

word tragoudo (to sing) come from?, Zambelios states from the early start that language stands both as a piece of evidence and documentation but also as a factor of unity. It is not a mere nostalgic movement which ever since the Hellenistic era has sought a linguistic paradise of wisdom and political sovereignty in atticism. It is exactly the opposite: it is the certainty that the common language still exists, unaltered, without historical parameters, that ultimately, it is the lexicological and morphological relation which suffices, in order to certify the relation of both anthropological traits (songs) but also of national conscience. Let us treat Zambelios with justice. At that time, the construction of identity, and in modern terms, the issue of self-definition, on the precondition of

locality and synchronicity were critically vital, even if such synchronicity had to trace its support in the passing of centuries. Antiquity is not enough, one has to take into account also those characteristics which constitute the documentation evidence for a living nation. Let us not forget that to a certain extent Zambelios writes his essay as an answer to Dr Jacob Philip Falmerayer, who constitutes a great potential danger for the newly formed greek state. Yet, the thesis that language constitutes a mechanism of national cohesion (and not the reverse: language as a historical reflection) has transformed it into a source of metaphysical values. In the period that national literatures in Europe are settled down on a national idiom and negotiate their ruptures and continuities with Greece on



ΠΑΡΑΧΩΡΗΗ. ΤΟ ΜΗΛΟ

Versus, from left to right the works of Kostis Velonis and Manolis Merabeliotis

Versus
TheophilosTramboulis

that basis, the linguistic issue in Greece undertakes the task of expressing the contradictions, which structure greek political discourse. Neither the fact that when the communist party of Greece is being constituted, it forms a linguistic political code of an artificial demotic which unites and distinguishes its users, nor the fact that the formidable assortment of pompous leftist nationalist who frequent, Eleftherotypia newspaper for instance, very often employ words that have long since been made redundant are coincidental. They need the authority of the unhistorical cave from which they draw them. And as it is the case, every time that we claim the authority of third parties, we deliver to them part of the responsibility of our own discourse.

Although such discussion appears to be purely philological. I do believe that many of the issues dealt here, as far as the conditions as well as priorities of contemporary art in Greece are concerned, still bear its signs.

There are, for instance many people who are trying to formulate a greek claim when they realize that the lack of a recognizable identity based on hellenic tradition inevitably allows the creation of homogenized artworks, which exclusively follow the directorates of the international market; they therefore create metaphysical agents, which are metaphysical provided no protogenic hellenic tradition exists. There are only ways of receiving international dialogue in Greece, and even more: political conditions of the reception. The conversation with tradition, without

the risk of becoming traditional, as outdated, obsolete, kitsch and stereotypical, presupposes the conversation with those political conditions, under which the ancestors were formed. I am returning to something I had written on the second issue of the art review: how can the discussion among artists who commented on the work of Yorgos Ioannou in Benaki Museum some months ago be valid, when they negotiated their subject on terms of stereotyped tradition, canceling exactly those singularities that have made Ioannou's work worthy of commentary?


Or, the opposite, which is however due to the same reasons and reflects exactly the same imperfections of the domain: works ambitious to become directly integrated in the international

scene, without drawing either themes, forms or ways from their immediate environment, namely without the agony which is inevitably caused by any involvement with reality. The dialogue with modernism, for instance, is perfectly acceptable. But modernism has provided its own examples in Greece, which are now perfectly grounded on contemporary conditions and also samples that are perfectly testable, both from the political as well as the morphological points of view. I wonder how valid can dialogue with modernism be, when it does not take into consideration exactly those modernist samples we are can all become familiar with, if we go for a short walk on Patission Street. It is as if we were testing the conditions of the rise of power of the extremist right wing followers

in Greece, like describing the lifestyle of the Kypseli immigrants, contemplating on the end of the petit-bourgeois society in Colonus or negotiating one's topic in English. There is no problem at all, if the artwork is to be immediately presented in some gallery in Madrid, for instance. The international audiences should be able to understand, somehow. But if the artwork is being exhibited in Psyri, for example, I have the feeling that it loses part of its power. The artist programmatically denounces part of his responsibility by transforming his artistic work into an aesthetic, rather unproblematic object. This is not because we are unable to understand what it signifies but because we do understand that there is something it does not reveal: the artist's personal

involvement in it. Confronting tradition is an absolutely legitimate form of patricide, as tradition in Greece continues to utter a particularly compelling form of discourse, which we can all feel in the various versions of political life. But if the act of patricide is not carried out on the conditions of the Principle of reality, it remains half-finished; what is more, when it is carried out on the conditions set by the father himself, then it cannot even be called patricide. It is a plain fabrication of murder so as to deceive the insurance company, while the supposed victim is safe and sound, possibly living under alias. I believe that the extremely annoying, at least for me, quotation of foreign terms in our discussions on art or about the stock-exchange, reveals on one hand an imperfection of the field, which

lacks the necessary tools in order to integrate the new terms and on the other the same, identical stigma that since Zambelios's time has been characterizing the effort inventing a lame tradition: the inability of the elaboration of history, the wish to cancel time and space and primarily language as a source of values from which one can draw authority, by refusing one's own responsibilities.

For what other reason expressions we used to employ until recently, as we were unaware of their inefficiency, are being replaced, more and more frequently, by the all-weather project which depending on the particular case, can mean: "preparation of a work", "planning", "plan", "grandiose ambition", or " words that never turn into actions", etc... 

Warning: Out of memory

We are near awakening when we dream that we dream (Novalis)

In discussions with visual artists and curators it occasionally but invariably recurs the problem of tradition and Greekness/locality – a sort of crash-test, for numerous reasons. The answers that I am hearing are either interesting in their agony or dull and ungainly in their certainties. I keep on listening, attentively and insistently, although it's been quite a long time that I tend towards concluding that most curators do not have theoretical leanings or aesthetic leanings, but they do have ruminative certainties and an unquenchable thirst for the administration of projects. A similar ruminative approach characterizes quite a few artists, whose work

solely consists of concepts and their substance constitutes an administrable project.

Our topic, I am reminding you, is tradition and locality. Many artists belonging to the (self) styled contemporary scene are at a loss or become indignant over the questions posed by these two notions. The two notions are usually equated in an inept manner, and quite often they are covered by the ignorance of their essential characters, the ignorance of both their historical movements and factual data.

I am reading essays by young art theorists: "everything" started in the early nineties, when the market opened up internationally... How simple, how intelligible, how nice! In the bright nineties of modernity were eliminated "the conservative,

academic tenets about Greekness and the cult of antiquity... It is only recently that we all became aware of the fact that we need to reinvent our identity on the basis of the recent or current experiences rather than the distant past; experiences which are directly our own and are not performed (sic) through extraneous viewpoints" (Katerina Gregos, *Breakthrough*, exhibition catalogue).

Two years after *Breakthrough* and what I pointed out about the ideology of "pastfuturism", in the volume of interviews with young artists conducted by Christophoros Marinos (Futura Books), we observe a post-misreading: my critique to the ideological discourse of *Breakthrough* is dubbed as a critical dismissal of the exhibition owing to a deficient locality (anyhow, most

foreign newspapers noted a non-existent identity). So, the interviewed artists are asked in a vague manner about Greekness, and they answer in an equally vague manner, either dismissively or reservedly. It is only natural, however, that such "Greekness", divested from the questions of historical genealogy and characterization in time and space, is scoffed at. Only thinking loses out on this...

And yet, we are given answers. Here's a typical one: tradition is one and indivisible, universal, and after all it has nothing to do with us; locality does not exist, Greekness ended with the creators of the Generation of the Thirties.

I would accept this answer, with all its aphoristic character, if it was supported by the knowledge of

historical context, by the understanding, at least, that history develops with ruptures, not with successions and latent sublimations, by a radical disposition towards redetermination. But I'm only seeing the legitimate disposition towards patricide: for God's sake, we have enough of Moralis and Seferis... I don't see the other things, neither as knowledge nor as a suspicion.

The Messianism of the future

I will add a remark about the theoretical discourse of two contemporary statesmen, one of which aspired to compose an ideological construction: the modernization of the nineties. The tendency to obliterate the past, everything that is unpleasant and

hard to interpret, was also to be found in the discourse of Costas Simitis. The Prime Minister based his path to Powerful Greece in the obliteration of the "memory of underdevelopment", in a modernizing oblivion that surmounts rather than recompose. His speech to the intellectuals, two weeks before the elections of 2000, was such a post-historical invitation to the future.

In the discourse of G. A. Papandreou recurs the memoricide and the persevering cult of the New; now, with an additional Messianic character. G. A. P. promises an expanded future, systematically denying to analyze anything past, or to commit himself to the present. The (however) Messianic discourse of G. A. P. denies to confront anything unpleasant that has been

bequeathed to him by his political domain; from the unbearably old PASOK G. A. P. only opts for the nomination of dynasty. By denying the past (even his own), by denying committing himself to the present, he promises the future where everything is possible to be defined from the very beginning: we will build together the New Jerusalem. The Messianic rhetoric is an inhibition ad infinitum, which is perpetually expanding without ever fulfilling itself.

Modernizing parrots, young politicians, newly-speaking crowds... Modernism isn't always radical; it is often reactionary — with the current, "unfashionable" meaning. The more I am hearing about future, the more I am wearing woolens.

Pop without an audience

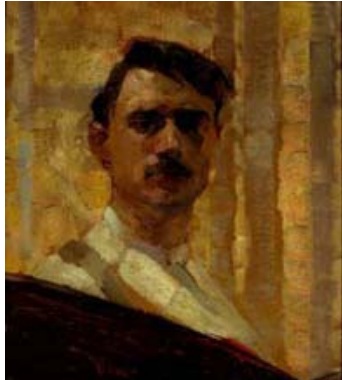
I repeat: in our time, a time of the dematerialization of the work of art, a time of gesture and pop illustration, a time of homogenization and mass production, questions such as the materiality of the work of art, the corporeality of gesture, the reflective ability of the work of art, the beauty and intellectual ardor, are also to be found in the front line. I would add: to which local social formations does the Greek avant-garde art correspond? Who does it express, to which interlocutors does it address itself? Which is its market? Does it affect thinking, aesthetics, even taste, with pop terms, with quantitative terms? Does it affect the elite? I thirst for answers.

Or is it that this pop Esperanto after



COURTESY: TO MILO

Versus, from left to right the works of Kostis Velonis, Manolis Merabeliotis, Stavroula Papadakis



*Nikolaos Lytras,
Self Portrait*

the nineties, the "scene of Psyrris" so to speak, introverted and undelivered, "loses the bird"? I thirst for answers.

Murder out of ignorance

I will now aphoristic: the discussion about tradition and locality is held in the shadow of a profound ignorance of both the texts and the works. Who hypermodern denier of the "academic" Generation of the Thirties has ever read a page by Stratis Doukas or Pentzikis, has leafed through "Trito Mati", has immersed himself in the color fields of Nicolaos Lytras and Papaloukas, has even heard of Solomos? They simply confuse Doukas with Ragavis, Pentzikis with Karantonis, and Nicolaos Lytras with Nikiforos

Lytras...


The discussion is held in the clutches of fixated figures and, perhaps more importantly, with the disposition towards domination in the present time, without any criteria, references and comparisons. By denying tradition or locality, by denying the originary framework, by placing himself outside the historical movement, the hypermodern of the present constructs the purified field of his dominance; he invents the pure present, without any burdens or commitments. In this timeless present, the hypermodern is the incontestable sovereign.

As we said, patricide is legitimate and understandable and fruitful, provided that the patricide knows what he is killing. In our case, the "hypermodern" does not even know

about what he is talking, let alone why he is transgressing it. He is just fabricating the unhistorical field of his dominance.

As to locality, well, it certainly isn't a nostrum, it certainly is hard to diagnose it in today's homogenized medley of diffused pop, but it exists; it exists as one (of many) answer to the need for self-assessment, as a distinction, as a yardstick, as a possibility for self-determination. Not all products are made in China or are "no-name" items; we also need identity, a nuance at any rate. Value, in the globalized markets, is placed on the distinguishable and particular, not on the mass-market and anonymous. And if you bring local characters as well that will not make you less universal – on the contrary. The Internet speaks all

languages.

And, finally, the avant-garde of the twentieth century left behind it dramatic achievements and a profuse Messianism. I am afraid that the contemporary avant-garde only Messianism shares with it, and it is actually confined to the aesthetic sphere, to a style, without even a form. The murder of historical sense brings with it the murder of political content, of meaning, of substance. I recall one of the moderns, T. S. Eliot: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" ("Tradition and the individual talent"). 

Augustine Zenakos

Grounding and defiance

I am glad Nikos brought the discussion to the current conditions. I would like to approach the subject from the "what we do" perspective; that is, from the perspective of taking action. I think that there are unquestionable ascertainments in what the three here have said – certainly in what Nikos has said –, but what concerns me very much is how each one of us copes with them both individually and collectively; whether a sense of collectivity can exist, not in the sense of "all together", but rather in the sense of parties.

I will begin by saying that when we are talking about today's artistic production and, more specifically, about younger artists' production, with some of which I am concerning myself pretty much, there is constantly a debate and a demand for grounding to the Greek reality. With Theophilos we have often discussed this and there is a

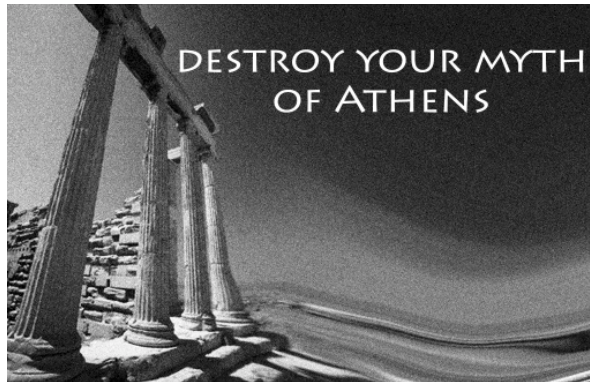
funny incident to share: when I was 14-15 and trying to write short stories – in the literary vein of adolescents – it seemed in poor taste to name my hero Vaggelis or Kostas or Nikos; I wanted to call him, say Jonathan or Maurice – in a way, it seemed more convincing. When we discussed this incident with Theophilos, we agreed that naming your hero Jonathan releases you from your responsibility towards him. It seems more convincing because you don't have to make him real, whereas if you name him Kostas, Vaggelis or Nikos, he suddenly becomes a person whom you could meet in the street, so he poses many more demands on you. I am saying all these in order to say that the demand for grounding exists and that it shouldn't be overlooked. However, in my opinion, the real issue is how to deal with it.

We see this timelessness that we often discuss in the work of the artists, but we also see it in the way we ourselves are trying to talk about the artists'

work. I have made a work hypothesis, which I will try to describe here; it has to do with real actions and not just an analysis effort.

Last week, we, the three co-curators of Athens Biennale, went to Basel in order to present our plan. A question we had to face is the question that has been posed here as well by many. "Why Biennale? Why now?" There is a big international debate about the usefulness of Biennales; very important theoreticians question whether these structures are really effective. Our response was that, "yes, we are aware of this international issue, we also read all the "right" magazines that reiterate the arguments the theoreticians make in their lectures". However, it's an issue that concerns those having such structures rather than those who don't have any. In other words, yes, there is such an issue, which poses itself transnationally, not to say internationally, but there are also certain local conditions, which, I

believe, don't allow us to deal with it as if we were the ones discussing this issue. For me, local conditions are not only a question of the artists' work or, as Nikos says, of the knowledge of tradition; it has to do with an evaluation of the mechanisms governing the place we live in. So, there are such transnational issues, which we often tend to adopt as if they were our own. One sees this in the writings of various people writing about art in our country. They obviously adopt them because they are the hype, or because they believe that this puts them on an equal level with their counterparts from abroad. However, there are certain local conditions colouring everything in a special way. I suggest the handling of both the local conditions and these international issues in a way that is rooted in our real demands. Whether we like it or not, there is a production here, there are artists working, producing art, there is a production of



**The 1st Athens Biennial:
"Destroy Athens"**

ideas – good, bad, original, borrowed... The point is that there is! There are approximately 50 galleries in Athens, most of which operate as a kind of gift shops. However, my question is this: what is this production trying to achieve? I think – I assume – I suggest it as a question, as food for thought. For many years, there is a discussion going on, where the demand posed on this production is formulated as follows: greater representation of the Greek reality, greater knowledge of tradition, why should references be there and not here, etc. I have the feeling that this demand posed on production, as well as production itself is ineffective because it develops in vacuum. It still is our own internal debate. I suggest that the involvement with a system of trading, which is transnational, constitutes a better method for both the emergence of the production's weaknesses and the feeding of this production. It is elementary, in a way: in order to have

an opposition, you need to have a position. The position I am proposing is an as far as possible active participation in the international system of trading. I think that the demand Nikos poses, and which I don't overlook at all, cannot exist as an internal procedure, a self-searching, tracing back to internal sources, but only if a truly strong and dominant trend will exist here as well, a trend that should be governed by similar mechanisms as those being in effect internationally. Only then is it meaningful to formulate such a demand, only then is it meaningful to face this demand and say, "I am not doing this, I am not this". Next, I will give a personal interpretation to opposition. The big issue is how one succeeds in connecting with these mechanisms, which are basically financial mechanisms, as they basically have to do with product trading. How does one succeed in doing this, when one's local mechanisms exclude one

systematically? My suggestion of opposition opposes neither an international assimilation nor a timeless art. It opposes managers who don't have a plan. I believe we need a plan. I believe that when our own production will stand next to other productions, it will get feedback. Our effort with Biennale is exactly that. It is a demand for connection with mechanisms that exist and function internationally. According to our work hypothesis, if such a position will be created here, then oppositions to this position will start to become real. I had made a joke at some point: we have ended up constructing that, opposite which we would like to stand. This is an internal irony. However, I believe that if we keep on talking like this, then there is no way this production will ever be grounded to reality, any reality. I believe that it should be traded in order to be grounded to reality. We cannot keep on talking in vacuum, as I think we are doing up until now. **α.**

A part of the discussion that followed the four interventions

Versus

Discussion

Audience 1: What most impressed me as far as Stavrakakis and Augoustinos are concerned was that, while Stavrakakis spoke of the political and non political, Augoustinos discussed policies. How can one be compatible with the other, setting an issue that has to do with the exploration of stereotypes, which might be integrated into the political sphere on one hand, and on the other saying that our target should be to become linked to the international distribution networks?

Zenakos: That seems contradictory. In my opinion however it is not, as I believe that an exhibition is primarily defined by its mechanism and secondly by its subject...The issue is somehow self-commentating and has to do with the fact that in order to provide the possibility of existence to any

expression of opposition, the existence of a certain position is a precondition. That is why we have chosen such a subject for our first event; one that is both self-commentating and a little auto-sarcastic.

Audience 1: Everything has to do with policies, anyhow...so, you do accept that it all starts from that point, that the way of distribution is what will make the difference. That is your position. But the point is that you do not take a position, you do not get involved into what Yannis described as the undertaking of radical action...

Zenakos: No, I don't. But as any radical action is also defined by certain conditions and it is not developed in vacuum, I do imply that, in reality, trying to establish such a connection at the point that it is lacking, constitutes a much

more powerful movement of defiance than lingering at debates, which, in my opinion, are pointless. What I mean is, in Greece one could not set his tent opposite the contemporary art museum and fill it with "other things", and thus produce alternative culture. It makes some sense if you do that sort of thing in Berlin. But here, there is no museum.

Xydakis: For as long as they let you do so...in ten minutes time the polizei will arrive and pick you up...I wish you explained the distribution thing more. What form of distribution? A commercial mechanism? Circulation of ideas? Of images? To what degree is your proposal different from the usual handling and distribution, from the Athens fair, in which we have been witnessing a P.R. activity going on for fifteen years now? What do you

know, we have reached a point that Greek collectors purchase foreign artworks at the Athens Fair...Now tell us all about the distribution...

Zenakos: Lack of purchases was not the problem with Art Athina, the real problem was that it failed to connect itself to the most powerful mechanisms within that system. You can invite a French collector of etchings here and sell, but there is something which keeps the global distribution of products up, that serves the development of cities, the exchange of products between local situations, a condition to which Art Athina completely failed to connect itself. It went on being a local market, like most of the Athens galleries.

There is Art Athina and there is a museum which is involved in certain attempts, but what I am referring to is a clearer and much



From left: Theophilos Tramboulis, Yannis Stavrakakis, Nikos Xydakis, Augustine Zenakos

more powerful link to the main stream, to greek galleries that could sell greek works abroad, I am referring to international galleries that could represent greek artists, to the participation of greek artists in international exhibitions, to an actual apparatus that might interfere so that the community here is involved to other communities. I do submit that as neither analysis nor invention but as tactics, as a clear strategic proposal. Reading Papadiamantis along with all that is a positive action. I do not disagree with that at all.

Audience 2: What I personally find annoying is that we are not discussing the fundamental opposition, which exists and should continue to exist, namely the reaction against a certain political system which all experience on a

global basis. It is all about the abolition of the political, not the abolition of policies, the particular managerial logics of what should be effected on certain situations, namely what bothers me is that art itself is not discussing whethet it is politics in itself, but that to what certain extent it includes the political and should reach a point at which it might express politics, as that is ontologically associated to art itself. I cannot accept that we should constantly speak of administration and management or tradition and exclude the most important part.

Xydakis: In what way is art failing to do that?

Michalis Paparounis: The issue lies where you have put it, at the procedures of both the production and distribution of the artwork. If we accept the existing procedures

of circulation and production, then we immediately turn conservative.

Stavrakakis: That is an important issue, but Nikos's remark is also significant. We are discussing all that in the space of a gallery, namely no pioneering reestablishment of everything is applicable. We all find ourselves in and out; if we can be out we are also in. That is what I tried to explain in my approach, that such opposition involves also reacting against ourselves, to that part of ourselves which sets us into the system, it is not an external opposition...One cannot expect the solution from others. It is all about seeing that no solution actually exists. That was the bipartition, the division I spoke about, which all of us should handle in our own way, both artists, as well as politicians, journalists, and so on...

Audience 3: It is very easy to indulge in one's own work, but that is an issue of introversion. That is to say I created an artwork and stored it, I have created THE work, that artist has nothing to say and I agree.

Xydakis: If we suppose that opposition is the subject of this discussion, it is destined to come to a dead-end as no one in this room is opposed to the other. We are all a small group, lets say more or less loosely or tightly associated members of the same community, most of us have some aspiration, some material or ideological interest, they expect something from other people, no one will fight directly with one another, they will not spoil their personal relations as there is some election pending, some university post, someone will publish one's book or organize an

exhibition for him. It is all that makes us smile awkwardly and yet it is the most connective background in what we say here. I am going to make a provocative statement. I believe that a great part of the greek intelligentia is deeply sunk in interweaving. Tell me that it is not so. So, when Michalis Paparounis all maximalistically asks, "why don't we talk about the system", I suggest you do that, Michali.

Michalis Paparounis: I did not call myself an enemy of the system. It is all a matter of desires and intentions.

Xydakis: We could all very well utter some charming atrocities that very little concern us and will much concern others outside this room so as not to cause any misunderstanding amongst us.


Zenakos: What you are describing is a reality we are all aware of. Now if we have the courage to "personalize" it in a room with 30 people present, that is another thing... I mean, you are not performing a revelation. But I would suggest that the problem has to do with the inflexibility of movement, that we are interweaved around a tiny center and therefore all interdependent, as both spaces and possibilities are very few. What I am suggesting here and which continues to be a matter of administration, is that if that multiplies, if there might be participation on a broader level, then again you will be reluctant to fight with someone who will get you into an exhibition, but there will be 40 people that might get you into 40 different events and

therefore you could very well argue with the 39 of them and that would produce discourse as its outcome, but down here you cannot argue with anyone as there are only three that might get you into an exhibition. Therefore you are forced to take sides, and that is an administrative issue.

Stavrakakis: An institutional resolution does not necessarily imply the establishment of an institute of opposition. What Nikos is saying is something we all know, however it is never being stated.

Tramboulis: Personal confrontation is frequently the issue in private conversations. If we wish to have a corporate, structured domain we should target our efforts towards the institutional character of any

confrontation, no matter if it is in the Biennale, or anyplace for that matter, so that you are not facing individuals but a certain ideology they themselves are representing, no matter if that is the ideology of tradition or the ideology of the opposition to tradition, the ideology of hiding tradition in silence or the ideology of mechanisms.

We would like to thank you all you who had the courage to stay with us on this hottest of days and also Paris Stefanidis for his hospitality. 

Special Edition Peripheries

Trikala

Kalamaria

Patras

Farkadona

Metsovo

Andros



The six artistic events that we present in this special inlaid edition are not all of the same order. The exhibition *An outing* outlines a large-scale private collection that is located in Tricala, the city where the exhibition is taking place; the exhibition *Site/Θέση* is organized at Kalamaria in Thessaloniki by the municipal authorities of the city; the exhibition *What remains is future* is being prepared for Patras, within the context of Patras, Cultural Capital of Europe, in other words within the context of an international event,

organizer of which is an assigned committee board. As to their content, the three aforementioned exhibitions focus on contemporary art in Greece, trying to depict, detect and highlight its constants and its dynamics. On the contrary, the exhibition *The scarecrow*, which is organized in Metsovo, is an international thematic exhibition by a private institution that takes into consideration the particularities of the local economy relating them with a cultural event with greater concerns. On the other hand, in Farkadona in the Trikala district, a

collaborative research program is taking place that is connected with contemporary art within the framework of what we call relational aesthetics, while in Andros the workshop *First International of Andros*, was a two-day meeting, primarily an artistic event and not an exhibition open to the public.

Therefore, by calling this small special issue on regional artistic events Peripheries do we mean that their only common feature is that they are organized outside Athens? Not really. In that case we should have included Panagiotis Tetsis exhibition in

Andros. Nevertheless, these activities are not only geographically interconnected. Moreover, they designate concentric circles of peoples (artists, curators, organizers) as well as themes. Having Athens as an epicenter, they expand creating a diffused network. From this point of view, they are not activities of the periphery, but rather Peripheries in and by themselves, arcs and oscillations of a new scene under formation.



Loukia
Alavanou,
Lamp, 2003

COURTESY: BELTSIOS COLLECTION

Irene Gerogianni writes
about stagnant and living
waters, the performative
collector and the curator
curador

According to the 13th century philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas, “the difference between a stagnant pool and the living waters is that the living waters are connected to their source”.¹ The same could be said of art, especially when it comes to the bipolar structural opposition of a ‘centre’ against a ‘periphery’, where the *centre* is read as the locus of the avant-garde, while the *periphery* is condescended as traditional and static, condemned to live the aftermath of great changes, as these take place elsewhere. *An Outing*, an exhibition of the Beltsios Collection showcasing contemporary art in Greece, is a peripheral event. It is even one that

suggests such a quality by its title. Hosted by the Matsopoulos Mill at the town of Trikala, the exhibition assumes a side-line position to the (arguably) cultural centre of the capital, Athens. However, *An Outing* can claim to be different from other curated exhibitions that have been realised on Greek soil, in the sense that, not only does it assert itself as a representation of new art, but also stands as living-proof of a mode of collecting that actively works towards creating the necessary conditions for a more open, developing, diverse and economically self-sustaining visual culture. Given the exhibition’s bond to the specific private collection – let us not forget that this is a display of

the collection, and not a group show of works *from* the collection² – it is difficult to read the former as an object in and of itself, citing, as it is, a single ‘author’.³ Rather, I would suggest the co-existence of two ‘authors’, the collector Leonidas Beltsios, who has been responsible for the development of the collection, as well as the curator of the exhibition, Sotirios Bahtsetzis, who has undertaken the task of communicating the collection to the public. Leonidas Beltsios is an essentially performative collector. But what exactly is performative collecting? For Katerina Gregos, acting as chair of the *Contemporary Collecting* panel that was organised by Frieze art fair in October 2003,

“performative collecting is about being involved, it is about a personal commitment, about real personal engagement to artists and art. It is not a passive form of collecting, someone buying works from an auction catalogue or from slides. Performative collecting is about art, art as appreciation and as a way of life. It is part concept, part process, part belief, being both an emotional and an intellectual procedure. The performative collector is a new species.”⁴ As a member of this new species, Beltsios has been determined to create secure links with the ‘sources’ of new art, thus benefiting many first appearing artists – both in financial terms,



Rallou
Panagiotou
Flag, 2005

and in terms of promotion.⁵ In fact, his active development of the visual arts within the country has earned his collection the reputation of a desirable context, a 'meeting point' for a younger generation of artists, a considerable number of which "are often present and participate in the events and discussions, as well as the perspectives of the collection and the role it plays within the intellectual and professional realm".⁶

An Outing is the outcome of this organic development of the collection and, true to the openness of the latter's compilation, was planned as an exhibition that aimed to develop new audiences of contemporary art

in Greece, and especially in the country's inner *periphery*. Hence, in a genuine act of effective management, Sotirios Bahtsetzis has abandoned the curatorial prerogative of selection – frequently justified by the notoriously subjective notions of 'quality' and 'excellence' – for an unpretentious representation of a given archive: the Beltsios collection.

Bahtsetzis' renouncement of the exhibition as an exercise of taste cannot here be seen as the sign of inability to manage⁷, but the refusal to manage solely through evaluation and designation of 'correct art value'. In fact, this particular sort of management can be seen as disabling, rather than

enabling, the diversity of practice and opportunity in the art world (that being, in result, the particular area of taste, patronage, and validation). For Eric Moody, Professor of Visual Arts Management at City University London, "real curatorial achievements and professional status should derive not from the supposed quality of selection or the originality of the hang, but from the quality of the exhibition to communicate and thereby engage."⁸

And engage is what the exhibition does, exposing, as well as creating, several dialogues between its various protagonists, extending to unlimited encounters between the collector, the artists, the curator,

the architecture and the public. Indeed Bahtsetzis' use of the architectural shell and contents of the Matsopoulos Mill has contributed to the construction of unexpected narratives, as well as to opening up the works to the public.

Is, then, *An Outing* an exhibition of peripheral substance? I think not. Even if one was not to acknowledge the above mentioned qualities, the show would still present a remarkable case study to anyone interested in the development of the visual arts in Greece. And this is because it has initiated, in the realms of criticism, a knee-jerk reaction that can be located within the conditions of an underdeveloped, peripheral



COURTESY: BELTSIOS COLLECTION

Maurice Ganis, *browndeva*, 2005



COURTESY: BELTSIOS COLLECTION

Christina
Calbari,
Untitled,
2005

cultural system of the country as a whole.

It is time to take stock of the visual arts. As a state, we have a minute, unreliable system of public funding, resulting in a significantly small network of galleries incapable of developing the visual arts. The creation of an exhibition – or indeed a collection – should conventionally be understood as one cultural practice within a network of other cultural practices. According to Gertrud Sandqvist, “curating exhibitions should normally be only *one* part of a varied art world, with several actors and different institutions”.⁹ To expect a curator – or even a collector – to fill the institutional gap by single-handedly managing

and developing the visual art sector in Greece can only bring to mind an incident recalled by Belgian curator, and co-curator of *Documenta IX*, Bart de Baere: while traveling from Brazil to Chile, the staff at the hotel where he was staying glanced through some interviews he has given to Brazilian newspapers. They reacted with awe, seeing his photo, interpreting the word *curadores* in the title as ‘healers’.¹⁰ But then again, medical metaphors do not go down particularly well in this country.¹¹ 

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

² See, for example, *Inside Outside: Notes for the '60s from Beltsios Collection*, curated by Manos Stefanidis, Hellenic American Union, 12 January – 11 February 2005

³ For a discussion on the role of the curator as ‘author’

see Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, “Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur”, in R. Greenberg, B. W. Ferguson and S. Nairne (eds.), *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Routledge, 1996, pp. 231-250

⁴ Katerina Gregos, “Contemporary Collecting”, *Frieze Talks 2003* (can be accessed online, <http://www.friezeartfair.com/talks/2003/>)

⁵ See Leonidas Beltsios’ interview to Augustine Zenakos, *To Vima*, Sunday 21 May 2006, p. 8.44

⁶ Denys Zacharopoulos, “A collection invites contemporary art to view on ‘an outing in the country’, just as the first elementary school textbook in demotic greek gave the measure of language learning, in the ‘high mountains’”, in Sotirios Bahtsetzis (ed.), *An Outing* (exh.cat.), Futura, 2006, p. 15

⁷ A claim made by Augustine Zenakos, “Ektheseis ‘stin exohi’”, *To Vima*, Sunday 2 July 2006, p. 9.55

⁸ Eric Moody, “Curatorship in the Visual Arts: From Cause To Cure”, in Eric Moody (ed.), *Developing the Visual Arts*, City University London, Department of Arts Policy and Management, 1994, pp. 12-13

⁹ Gertrud Sandqvist, “Context, Construction, Criticism”, in Dorothee Richter and Eva Schmidt (eds.), *Curating Degree Zero*, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 1999, p. 44

¹⁰ Bart de Baere, “The Curator as a Beginning, Not an End”, in Carin Kuoni (ed.), *Words of Wisdom: A Curator’s Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art*, ICI, New York, 2001, p. 24

¹¹ Colonel Papadopoulos, leader-figure of the ‘Junta of the Colonels’ (1967-1974), has likened Greece to a patient that needed to be placed on the operating table.

Peripheries
Kalamaria



Despina Zefkili discusses with Elpida Karaba, Sotirios Bahtsetzis and Ann-Laure Oberson, curators of the exhibition *Site/Θέση* about the different versions of site-specificity, the importance of curatorial practice and the priorities of discourse

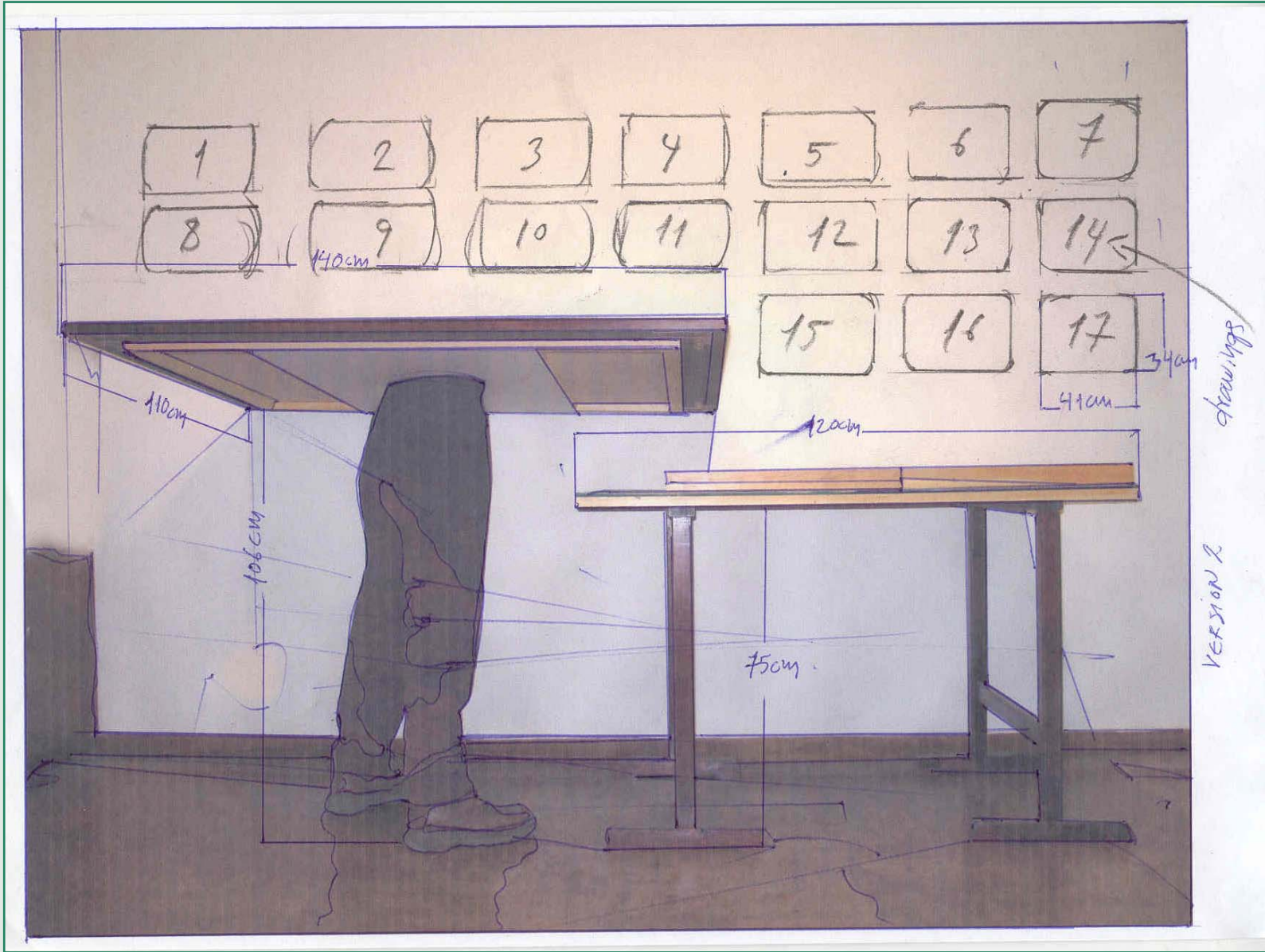
That we choose to translate 'site' into Greek as 'θέση' [thesi=site, position, stance] is important in terms of the direction we wish to give to the meaning of 'site specificity'.

"We're creating the potential for discourse through this exhibition. I don't consider this the first exhibition of its kind, nor do I expect it to be the last, but this doesn't detract from the vital importance of participating in a discourse with terms of this sort. Here in Greece, we often feel as though we have discovered gunpowder, though it's clear we're part of a broader proposal. There is a lack of discourse in the sense of dialogue, a dialogue with set principles, and this is something we all too frequently

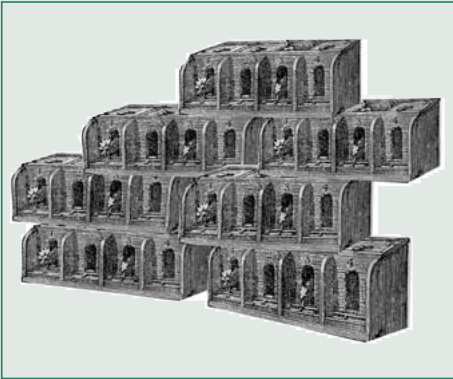
forget." Elpida Karaba—one of the three curators of the *Site/θέση* exhibition to be staged in September as part of the ProTaseis programme at the 6th Pedio Drasis Visual Arts Festival, "Kodra 06", organized by the Kalamaria Municipal Cultural Organization and curated by Christos Savvidis—was keen to clarify this at the very outset of our discussion. "I believe Greece often displays a tendency towards a morphoplastic monomania", interjects the exhibition's co-curator, Sotiris Bahtsetzis, who notes that "discussing issues such as site-specificity by means of exhibitions (i.e. through curatorial and artistic discourse) is considered somewhat passé, though they have never been

discussed in quite this way. In this case, we hope there will be other exhibitions focusing on similar issues and in the form of dialogue". "I don't mean restricted to the self-same subject, I mean working with a concept, a conceptual framework, a given subject-matter, or developing a position", Karaba adds. The word 'thesi crops up several times during our discussion with the three curators. So let's start with the translation of 'site' in the exhibition's title, which all three consider so provocative. The curatorial team, whose third member is Anne-Laure Oberson, considers the translation of the title as a programme. Karaba explains why: "Although it is a valid translation, that we choose

to translate 'site' as 'thesi' is significant in indicating the direction we want to give to the meaning of 'site specificity' in the context of artistic production. Site specificity as a category, as a genus, is something that has emerged over the last 30 years, but especially over the last 20. However, this emergence has been marked by various shifts: thus we have an artist like Serra, who defines site specificity precisely and absolutely in relation to the space in which a work is exhibited, and at the other end of the scale readings like those of Kwon or Deutsche which essentially delve into the shifts that accompany the site-specific when it becomes issue-specific or audience-specific—i.e. when other issues relating to the



Miltos Mihailidis, drawing for the exhibition



Mary
Zygouris,
drawing for
the
exhibition

political, to democracy and the public sphere, are introduced into the discussion. So over the last 20 years during which site specificity has emerged as a genus, it has not done so as a single genus; there have already been several shifts, and the concept is neither clear-cut nor homogenized. There are a range of specialized approaches, and the exhibition will shed light on these. Artists' approaches differ enormously, and it would be fascinating if our curatorial approach could underscore their con- and divergences in some way."

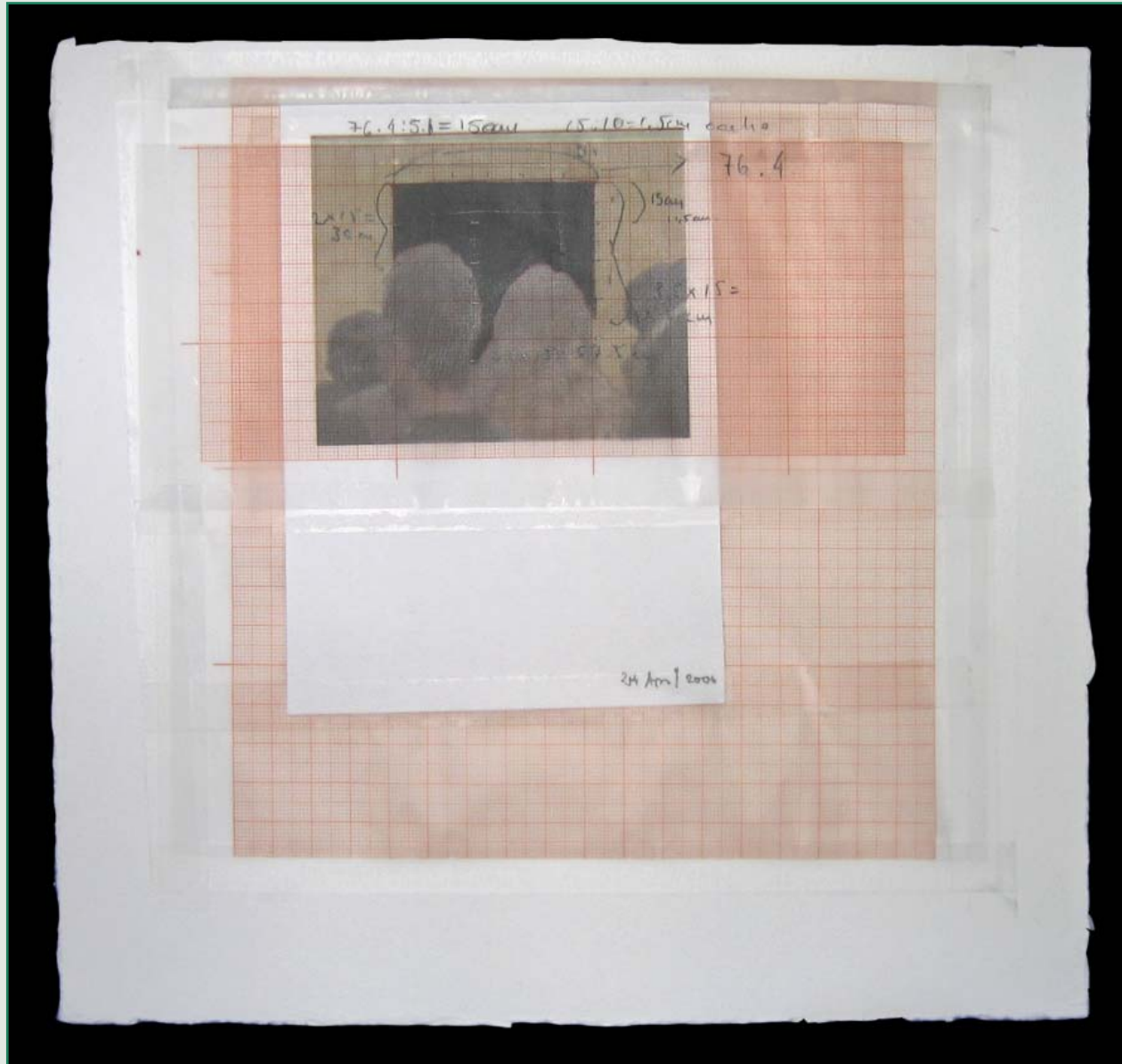
It's important that the exhibition is seen to have come into being through curatorial action.

The exhibition's subject-matter

was initially determined by theoretical and other interests shared by its three curators. All three have worked a good deal with site specificity and project art: Bahtsetzis in the context of his Ph.D thesis, a sort of archaeology of Installation Space, and the project space he maintained during his time in Berlin; Karaba as part of her doctoral research into the relationship between space and spectacle, and as a curator; Oberson through the prism of someone who has worked in community art and through the D624 space she maintains in Athens, which allows for practical experience of the concept of the site-specific. Apart from what each curator brought to the table, however, the conditions of the

present exhibition, which is held in an old barracks beside a NATO camp, also part-imposed the subject-matter. All the same, as Oberson states: "Before we'd even visited Kodra, we'd resolved to create an exhibition that would uncover the actual process of its creation through the commissioning of works to be created especially for the space and concept of the exhibition". The curators wanted to move away from the first reading of the already overburdened space and to explore another sort of parameter, to meditate on the concept of public/private space, personal/social pace, work/recreational space. But they were primarily interested in revealing the process behind the work of curators and artists alike

through the final 'product' of an exhibition. As Karaba notes: "And through the curatorial presentation, which is to say the way in which the works would be displayed in a possible dialogue between them, we would strive to highlight certain of the processes that led to the production of new works especially for it; works that would be conceptually and morphologically linked to the place they were produced and viewed. The exhibition takes place through curatorial action, none of these are works were found ready. The commission, the order for the new works to be produced—and this is the first time the institution in question has commissioned works—contains within it curatorial action. Indeed, one of the works



Georgia Kotretsos, drawing for the exhibition



Georgia Kotretsos, drawing for the exhibition

functions as a sort of brand, as a unifying project: an artist's book by Christos Lialios containing parts of the production process for every work, which is presented as an object in its own right."

We wanted to show that there are other positions from those espoused by certain groups of artists who are probably displayed more often.

Running down the list of participating artists (Nikos Arvanitis, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Mary Zygouri, Kostis Ioannidis, Dimitris Ioannou, Apostolos Karastergiou, Christos Lialios, Maria Konti, Georgia Kotretsos, Makis Kyriakopoulos, Milos Michailidis, Pavlos Nikolakopoulos, Charis

Pallas, Eftychis Patsourakis, Antonis Pittas, Kostis Stafylakis, Vasileia Stylianidou, Anna Tsouloufi, Ourania Fasoulidou), one notices the absence of some of the artists we usually see cropping up again and again in regional group exhibitions, but also that the list is not a selection of the programmes of certain galleries. "We did our research, and tried to include artists in our selection who hadn't shown their work in Greece before, or who weren't very well known. We wanted to show that there are other positions, which is important because it demonstrates the wide-ranging potential and range in the sphere. Of course, we did not sit down and say galleries were excluded; that was more to do with the

texture of the work of certain of the artists whose work is not easily saleable." When asked why they limited themselves to Greek artists, the curators replied that it was entirely a matter of budget. "We issued an invitation to artists. We took a risk, because the works weren't ready and we did not know how each of the artists would interact with our proposal. When we invited these artists, one of our concerns was to invite people who were specialized and experienced in some way, to find artists who have already worked on site-specific works, which are definitely not the norm in Greece. So Anna Tsouloufi, for example, or Nikos Arvanitis both did their Masters in public art, Kostis Stafylakis did his doctorate on political discourse, Mary Zygouri

has in the past worked on incorporating the public into her work. That said, the numerous meaning shifts to which the term site specific has been subject are frequently reflected in the works on display, which are multidimensional or reference entirely different—and in some cases mutually contradictory—readings of site-specificity, ranging from context-specific, audience-specific and issue-specific to community-specific. For example, Dimitris Ioannou's perception of site specific—he produced a sort of spatial portrait relating to the parameters of the building in terms of materials, space, temperature etc.—is very different from that of Kostis Stafylakis, who explores issues of sub-culture, youth culture and



Kodra camp,
view

nationalism. Audience involvement also plays an important role in works such as those by Vasileia Stylianidou, a sort of game subject to viewer-instigated change during the course of the exhibition, or by Makis Kyriakopoulos, who gives us a re-enactment of a removal in the exhibition space itself, as well as a Web site on which one can cut and paste together conditions of removal, movement, parting etc. as these are represented in soap operas and B-movies. Georgia Kotretsos' proposal is of special interest in terms of the way in which audience perception is affected in relation to the potential engagement provided by an exhibition-based institution. Her work deals with her experience of visiting the

Louvre on numerous occasions in an attempt to see the Mona Lisa. Her approach differs from that of Nikos Arvanitis, who creates a game of football with religious parameters, while simultaneously assembling religious paraphernalia from individuals of different faiths living in Kalamaria which is then redistributed through a game. Artists like Maria Konti and Antonis Pittas who work with the concept of gender in what could be labelled gendered space could form another subcategory. Some artists respond directly to the space at the Kodra barracks: Apostolos Karastergiou, for instance, who built a model of the building based on the memory of the curators; Nagia Giakoumaki, who works with bonsai—plants that

endure a painful process in order to survive—in a refugee camp; or Ourania Fasoulidou, who conducts linguistic research into an old lullaby a mother sings to her son urging him to grow up into a strapping lad. However, the curators state that most of the works allude to the space rather than being linked to them in linear fashion, a description they also apply to themselves, since they are dubious about works based on overly explicit guidelines. "We consider it important that these works create something else when brought together, a specific environment, an altered space", Oberson explains. *Preparing the groundwork is far more important for our generation than debating the*

existence or otherwise of a Greek scene. Turning now to how they approached the issue of an exhibition staged on the periphery of the periphery (Kalamaria is a suburb of Thessaloniki, Greece's most important provincial city), Oberson considers the provincial issue somewhat passé, preferring to treat Kalamaria as a separate centre rather than as a suburb of Thessaloniki, and hence of Athens, especially since this particular exhibition is a project brought into being by the local Municipality, and hence by the very citizens who will come to view it, rather than by a gallery or museum. Karaba is the first to admit that most projects in the Greek provinces are undertaken



From left to right: Anne-Laure Oberson, Elpida Karampa, Sotirios Bahtsetzis

by people based in its urban centres, and points out that this is unlikely to change unless the requisite foundations are laid outside these centres. “We need a framework of institutions, schools and a market if they are to be able to produce anything. I am a real believer in creating infrastructure of this sort, though it is often overlooked. No artistic genre or scene has ever been created without such foundations.” Turning to the question of whether there actually is a Greek scene as such—an issue addressed by the curators of the previous Kodra show, Augoustinos Zenakos and Xenia Kalpaktsoglou—Karaba stresses that the art field in Greece is still very new and that the historical convergence in

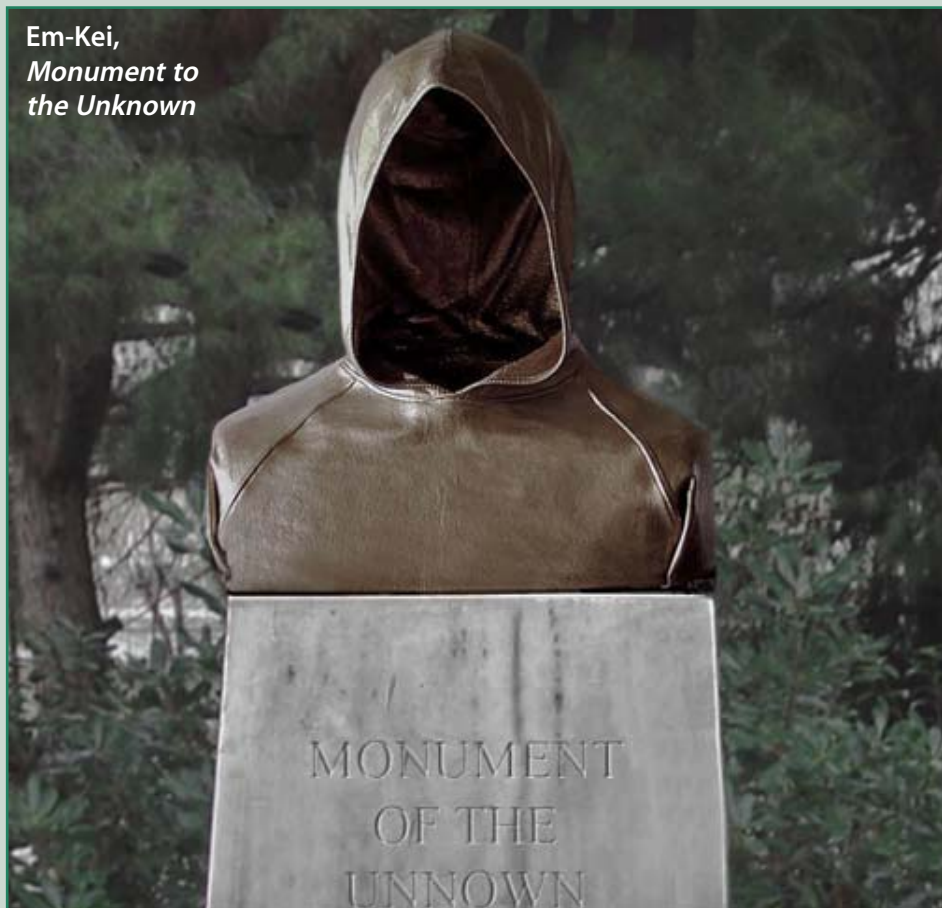
which we live makes it impossible to talk of a scene in the same way that we talk of an English or German scene. “The term is not apt for us, historically speaking, right now, because we are not as exotic as other outlying areas, but are not a part of the glorious centre, either. We are in an intermediate zone which is not particularly interesting. That said, if you think about it in terms of drawing up a sentence, with a verb, a noun and so on, the Greek scene might be the accent on the sentence, but it cannot be the verb. If people realized that, I’d say they might also grasp the fact that things of great import can take place within this framework, and things which we could turn outwards at that. But only if we have a sense of proportion.” “I’d

say the issue of a Greek scene is purely communicational. It is to do with political management and nothing else,” Bachtsetzis adds. “I’d say we should assign priority to drawing up a database of exhibitions, written texts, presentations and movements from place to place; it could be said that we can ascertain an artist’s importance nowadays from their air miles. We can’t refer to a scene on the basis of domestic production alone; the others outside must also recognize it. We can’t just sit here blowing our own trumpet, as we do in matters of cultural diplomacy; recognition has to come from the outside in.” “Yes, but that recognition can only come if there are other factors at work, too”, says Karaba, adding

that “The Greek example is not of interest taken as a whole; its interest lies in specific cases and as part of a more wide-ranging discussion. I’d say that preparing the groundwork is far more important for our generation than debating the existence or otherwise of a Greek scene. For everyone involved in art to be able to consider themselves professionals on a local and international level. Of course, we need funding, too, if there is to be culture. Let’s not forget that we paid through the nose for our ancient Greek spirit, too. [α](#).”

The exhibition Site/Θέση, curated by Elpida Karamba, Sotirios Bahtsetzis and Ann-Laure Oberson, is organized in September within the framework of the 6th Pedio Drasis Visual Arts Festival, “Kodra 06”, organized by the Kalamaria Municipal Cultural Organization

Em-Kei,
*Monument to
the Unknown*



Poka-Yio discusses with curator Nadja Argyropoulou about the exhibition *What remains is future* which will be held in Patras.

“And didn’t we have a luvverly time...” Shaken coachfulls of the so-called new arts scene descending on Patras. The Greek (unfortunately, in reality Athenian) scene is this year marching on Trikala and the Beltsios Collection exhibition and encamping in Thessaloniki’s Kodra barracks before wending its way down to Patras where it will attend to its shares in the future (though looking forward, too, of course, to the EMST exhibition). As for what will be left when the dust settles, we can only hope it will be “on the road” and not the usual grumbling about being bogged down, about the plane that’s always about to take off but never leaves the ground because it doesn’t have an international flying license.

And since we’re talking about shares and...future yields, the first

thing we should address is the somewhat anarchic situation that characterizes the Greek art scene. Institutional gaps covered by individuals and public bodies acting as though they’d gone private. Of course, that’s like Greek society writ small with its myriad dysfunctionality. In a country whose public sector finds it hard to develop structures capable of supporting collaboration with private bodies and foundations, without necessarily resorting to unfettered privatization, even an exhibition like the one for Patras, Cultural Capital of Europe (PCCE) has to weather hundred upon hundreds of bureaucratic waves. Indeed, a contract has still to be signed between the show’s organizers and PCCE just months before it is due to open...

The over 60 artists crammed into the queue for the “future” are the

exhibition curator—Nadia Argyropoulou’s—reading of the Greek reality in the visual arts. Nonetheless, even the stock exchange welcomes in a few new firms every year, even fewer of which will prove to be blue chips. Of course, someone will opportunistically rush to the lists of artists participating in these recent mega-exhibitions in the Greek provinces in search of gold dust, the artists of the future. In a harshly competitive art market, skimming the ‘fringes’ (I don’t believe there is a Greek underground) and crossing it with more promoted, commercial names is anything but a luxury, it is undoubtedly the primary modus operandi. Take, for example, the way in which multinationals trawl the new fringe trends (graffiti, skateboarding, fanzeens etc.), a

practice Nadia Argyropoulou is, of course, familiar with when she refers to *Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, the trend-setters’ bible. What’s more, the show’s title is actually taken from Ann Demeulemeester’s latest collection (autumn 2006), though her wan models do not, in my opinion, speak of a terribly bright future. In her urban-anarchic or anarchic urban *relance*, Nadia Argyropoulou says that no one unfamiliar with Demeulemeester’s work should be allowed into the exhibition. High/low, extroverted/introverted, fringe/established, the extremes of the autumn shows, with Argyropoulou’s taking pride of place alongside Marina Fokidis’ planned exhibition at the DESTE Foundation. Awaiting the “what remains” exhibition, Nadia Argyropoulou talks about the



Nikos Haralambidis, drawing for the exhibition



Arksakeio,
view

underpinnings of her curatorship: “Ethnismos”, a new word I discovered in the anniversary publication of the Arsakeion, Patras’ former girls’ school in whose building the exhibition is to be held. The Arsakeion came into being thanks to an emerging local middle class rooted in Greek Orthodoxy. Its purpose: to prepare the teachers who would pass on the values espoused by their class, and above all its focus on language, a sort of controlled liberalism. When this class ceased to exist, the school’s glory days were over, its romantic utopia stillborn.

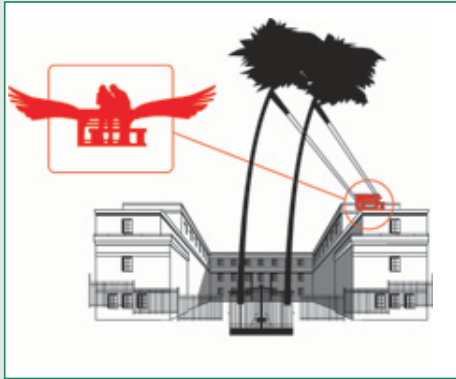
When I went down to Patras, I had decided to curate a show on the ultra contemporary Greek visual arts scene, but the sight of the Arsakeion’s space was enough to change my mind. The Girls’ School expressed my thoughts in visual

terms, which is to say that Greek artists function like a number of individual rhythms coexisting in collective spaces, but functioning by means of their own, individual rhythm. At school, we learn to incorporate our innate anarchy into a collective rhythm. My school determined how I see the contemporary visual arts. Even the site specificity/concept specificity I requested from the artists was intended to reveal how individual cases function; it was as though I’d immersed them in a condition that corresponded to my school years.

Reentering this school, many of the artists were invited to collaborate with others and to form cooperatives on group projects characterized by co-existence rather than hierarchy. As I envisaged it, the more experienced artists would ‘teach’

their somewhat younger colleagues through these group projects and would not present the sort of work generally typical of them. I’d say the show is a study in individual rhythms working together “to the same rhythm”. As for the non-hierarchical nature of the projects and the artists, I’d say it would be boring to present the works clearly sorted; after all, it’s not a museum (which might have had the chance to stage something like this), and my curatorship is itself working to its own rhythm—like all of them—but with the courage to say so openly. I could mention the highly successful Whitney biennale as a pertinent recent example of a show in which well-established artists were presented alongside others cutting their teeth for the first time.

As an institution, the school itself can function as a power mechanism whose aim it is to even out the individual rhythms; but what remains of this mechanism might be the future. Ultimately, everything that retains its nature intact is worthwhile. Which makes using a symbolic space of this sort to understand how these individual rhythms resist a challenge. A similar system exists in the visual arts. A system of galleries, museums etc. plus various units that stand out and convey the difference. The system is capable of adapting itself to this individual rhythm. When I speak of individual rhythms, I am not using specialized terminology, meaning the extent to which there are sincere or ‘stars’ because that’s a second level which it is also worthwhile to question. We take



Alexandros Pcyhoulis,
drawing for
the
exhibition

that as given, perhaps because there are no major aesthetic or ideological movements today, or because things are still in the making, which also explains the proposing of individual rhythms. My proposal does not beautify a situation: I am not saying that anything that distances itself from the system is better. Rather, I have included people who are not really my cup of tea as characters, and others who have been taken up by the art market despite their relative youth, though as the Lazyboy song says: “these are the facts of life...” that’s how I’d say things were today (of course, the same song goes on to say that, on average, we swallow eight spiders a year, something I don’t believe Argyropoulou would agree with). The show functions as a snapshot of the new art reality, in the way Walter Benjamin used the term to

describe Surrealism as “the last snapshot of the European intelligentsia”. The snapshot is more than a momentary image, it is also the instantaneous development of the image. We’re talking about the new generation of Greek artists freshly out of an education that has admittedly been enriched in recent years, often with studies abroad, and now standing with its hands full of user-unfriendly freedom of choice, and its diary packed with uncertain appointments with the international career they so desire. The bad thing about these young artists is that there just wasn’t time for a specific scene—meaning with a fixed features and a fully-formed problematic—to emerge (which is also why collectivity eludes them). On the other hand, the issue of their ‘discovery’ by the Young Greek

Curators, Young Greek Theorists, and Young & not so Young Greek Journalists has arisen with something akin to violence. Dazzled by the English or American equivalent, we have set off in search of their opposite number here. No one has said they have a problem with this ‘scene’ in anything I have read or in any of the discussions I have had with the artists themselves. All I have heard is a litany urging us to support it through participation and contributions (see the Kodra 05 catalogue, Argianas’ commentary, for instance), though I see that Thanasis Argianas is not participating in Patras—the first show, you could say, that tackles the issue (despite our many civilized conversations)—and for a simple reason: his works has to go to the *New Contemporaries*

exhibition and anywhere else on earth, and he assessed matters relating to the Greek scene as “beer garden at the rear”. And he may have been right. Given the opportunity, others might have done the same. Which brings us to the crux of the matter. Because I’m interested in young Greek artists. Because “they shame the wise”, because they will not sit back and be pigeon-holed, won’t force themselves into a mould. And they’re not scholars, either, or zealots. They’re cool, but not English-style—their coolness sometimes stems from tamed irony, sometimes from hidden obstinacy, sometimes from a well-digested demystification, sometimes because they’re simply numb, and sometimes from a mobilized, repressed ambition. I don’t know if they are really “more cool guys than good artists” (as



Haris
Epameinoda,
The Passers

Giorgos Tzirtzilakis has said), but I enjoy their playful visual behaviour. But how could it be otherwise? Tradition? What tradition, Loukas asks. He grew up with *Star Trek* and bowdlerized Greek pop. Are you kidding me—TV commercials and infotainment, Vogiatzidis' work cries out. Feminism? Oikonomou doesn't even understand the question. Handicrafts? Yes, in most cases, but their logic is borrowed from Lego: observe, deconstruct, reconstruct. Graffiti, yes, but as studies in human branding. Musical references—inclusion into the history of art? Yes, but as a motif amidst the general mix. The future? They prefer ghosts to aliens. It's the first time someone has accepted "I can only do as much as I can do" with such honesty. Greece has its galleries, collectors and artists, and the

exhibition is of interest to those artists it is betting on for the future. That's how I imagine it in three years time, perhaps in another school even, to see what remains then, what the future will be. Art, whether temporary or eternal, is like fashion, and the show's title is borrowed from the slogan on Demeulemeester's tops and cockades. The fanzeens we want to publish are temporary, too, though we're been cut down to half, meaning three at the absolute maximum, to come down to earth and the Cultural Capital with a bang. You see, I don't understand catalogues which deal with something so current and formless and under construction. Fanzeens are a core part of the exhibition; they're something like the 'making of' documentaries that demystify the work to some extent, but also

provide all sorts of important information about its creation. You asked if there is a group of travelling Athenian visual players right now, and to what extent provincial art is an issue. In answer, I should like to mention the Contemporary Art Centre in Larisa, and the work Roula Palanta has done there. It was moving how that group of middle-aged Larisa women fought the problems the Centre was facing. Of course, I couldn't even imagine every village with its own Contemporary Art Centre, but there's been too much talk about Athens for too long. Enough already about an entrenched situation. One of the options I considered was to present Reading Group, a group of theorists. They expressed their fear of aestheticizing their work, I suggested that today even a

statue is de-aestheticized. Curators often assume the role of artists, while artists have curated some of the most interesting shows—the latest Berlin biennale, for instance. A lot has changed, and it is now often more important for artists to participate in art fairs than in exhibitions. The market comes before art theory, not the other way round as it once did. All of which means we can only wait, because all that remains is the future... [a](#)

The exhibition What remains is future, curated by Nadja Argyropoulou, organized by Aggeliki Antonopoulou and produced by the Organization Patras Cultural Capital of Europe 2006 will be held in Patras from September 16th until October 12th 2006

Peripheries Farkadona



Yannis Arvanitis, member of the PPC_T group describes the theoretical framework and the activities of the architectural, anthropological and artistic group that is acting in the village of Farkadona, Trikala.

PPC_T (Post Programmed City_Territory) is an active collaborative project that deals with the recording and processing of the networks of population groups movements to Greece's geographical districts. It concerns itself with the dynamics that these movements may have for the place of settlement and the groups themselves.

For the purposes of this research, PPC_T is collaborating with a network of experts from different fields of knowledge. This network gets updated to accommodate the requirements of specific cases, retaining a basic core of partners under the coordination of the architect Harikleia Haris and the anthropologist Thiago Novaes.

The project is developing in direct contact with the population group it studies, as well as the place of this group's settlement. An effort to elaborate on the concept of local community that isn't limited to its members, but extends to the issue of territory.

Within the framework of this particular work hypothesis' methodological

approach, it seeks to combine architectural, anthropological, technological and artistic practices for the production of cultural products that venture to express views on the corresponding subjects, transcending the partial case with which the project is concerned.

The products arising from this process, which includes open to public stages in the form of workshops, are presented in a way that is trying to be open to discussion and criticism, and frequently outside the boundaries of closed exhibition places.

For the purposes of its research, the team has located four types of moving populations in Northern Greece, based on the way they settle in the city-territory that welcomes them. So, there are populations settled along the borders with Turkey, populations annexed in the cities boundaries, populations ending up at the periphery of the cities, and cases where populations get incorporated into a specific city district.

In the last two years, PPC_T studies the

case of the movement of a repatriated community from the former Soviet Union towards Farkadona, in the district of Trikala, Thessaly.

As is the policy for refugee placement to locations outside of existing centres, the state allocated an expanse of land, where used 25 square meters containers were transported in an existing military camp, as a temporary placement for the immigrants. Since then, the issue of their permanent housing is still pending. Today, after 14 years, the community is still living in the containers.

The inhabitants' interventions on the prefabricated containers are various and visible. Light extensions, satellite dishes, modern electronic equipment, plaster decorations, wood casings, heavy urban furniture, as well as other elements both in and out constitute a singular residential whole.

The settlement lies at the edge of the pre-existing Farkadona village and is connected with it. Still, they don't function as a territorial or social whole.

One sees that the settlement's conditions

are those of isolation from the surrounding area's life in terms of socio-economical exchanges. In this way, the settlement retains for its inhabitants various elements from its previous use.

The project team, in collaboration with the settlement's inhabitants, is recording and processing this group's conditions of settlement, trying to pinpoint the interactions within the community, as well as in the way it communicates with the surrounding area, after the initial ascertainment about the isolation, as well as how these interactions manifest themselves.

Recently, PPC_T's architectural team started concerning itself with the design approach of the new residential units and settlement in Farkadona. In the context of potential typology development, there were organised discussions and workshops with the participation of the inhabitants, where material ensued that will be processed during the design.

In this phase of the project, the team is trying to set up the mechanisms that,



Installation
view at D624

after a proper management, will give the inhabitants communication and activation tools within a wider network that can overstep the boundaries of the settlement's geographical neighbourhood. These mechanisms are organised jointly with the inhabitants and then they are placed in their responsibility in what concerns their continuation or discontinuation.

It was in this direction that in June 2006, on the occasion of an ongoing workshop in collaboration with the community and after open discussions among others in the Larissa Contemporary Art Centre, with local agents and PPC_T's guests, two former military buildings within the settlement were defined, where two workshops were set up. These two workshops operated as indicative operations the community can undertake in order to shape a production


of collective products, which it then can communicate to the outside world, as well as exchange them. Also, the intention is to form reference points within the settlement, having to do with the settlement itself.

In one of the workshops, the inhabitants are learning about the possibilities the recycled computers running under free distribution software can give them both as a tool and at the creative level. In the second workshop of arts and crafts, there were created teams for producing objects, such as clothing and jewelry, with the intention of making use of the possibilities the settlement gives towards a potential process of exchanging products made in the settlement.

In the same phase, a wireless Internet connection is being set up in order for a constant communication node to exist.

During PPC_T's activity, the participants

also took up side activities, such as a film production entitled "Artur's clapperboard", the "take-over" of TV frequencies in the settlement's range with production of TV signal, as well as the production of improvised aesthetic media objects.

In order to sum up the recent PPC-T's actions and its products, two presentations took place in Athens, at D624, in the end of June, where materials from the activities within the community were presented. During the event, there was a projection of images, of videos, of the film that has been made; also, there was a presentation of the objects that were produced in the workshops, as well as of an improvised device of digital interaction and of a mechanism of intervention in the TV frequencies. 

The PPC_T team is: Yannis Arvanitis, Attasha, Anna Vasof, Insectos Tropicales, Aiki Kakoulidou, Agis Kolyvas, Mihalis Kyriazis, Lorena Tselemengou, Fay Tsitou/Divers, Charis Chlorou, Coordinators: Thiago Novaes, Hariklia Hari.

In collaboration with:

Filippo Fabbrica (head of the programme Love Difference, Cittadellarte / Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy), Aliaa El Griedy (artistic director of Gudran Foundation for Arts and Development, Alexandria, Egypt), Walid Maw'ed (artist-clothes designer / Watercollection.net, Palestine/ Italy), Otavio Savietto και Carlos Paulino (GAMB+I Grupo Autodidata de Metodologias Bem + Inteligentes, Brazil), Roula Palanta, Larissa Contemporary Art Centre.

With the support of the Hellenic Linux User Group (Hellug) and the Wireless Network of the Prefecture of Trikala.



Zafos Xagoraris,
Observatory
Viewer
Scarecrow

PHOTOGRAPHY: PANDOS KOKKINIAS

Eleni Koukou writes about the exhibition *The Scarecrow* organized by the Averof foundation and curated by Olga Daniylopoulou, Nico de Oliveira and Nicola Oxley

Mountain or sea? Every year, around June, the members of the artistic community plan a visit to one of the exhibitions being organized in the Greek countryside during the summer months: Hydra, Rethymno, Metsovo, Andros... All of a sudden, the art crowd throngs the place, and it disappears just as suddenly. What exactly are these exhibitions and what is their purpose? Are they something like the Municipal and Regional Theatres or the music tours? Are they another opportunity for (agro) tourism and cosmopolitanism, depending on the final destination? Usually, they are productions emphasizing the countryside's dependence on the central government. Of course, each case is unique and defined by the specific place, the existing infrastructure and the organisers' orientation. Metsovo, in this case, is not a

random little village of Epirus, since it constitutes a model of development for the Greek countryside. The E. Averoff-Tositsas Foundation with its permanent collection, periodic exhibitions, educational programmes and parallel events, manages to have a constant presence in the cultural life, and it contributes actively to the wider public's familiarization with – at least, the more traditional – art. This year's Averoff Foundation's choice to organize *The Scarecrow* exhibition is an example of promoting local identity and of development through modern art. The exhibition's curators, Olga Daniylopoulou, Nico de Oliveira and Nicola Oxley, didn't have any say on the theme's selection, as they simply took up the assignment. This effort becomes obvious in the exhibition catalogue as well, from the great emphasis placed upon the

Metsovo landscapes. The visitor will not view an array of scarecrows. *The Scarecrow* is approached in the wider sense of the word. It is essentially an exhibition treating fear in all its aspects. The scarecrow as an emblem with both positive and negative qualities; the coexistence of protection and threat; the amalgam of fantasies, desires and phobias existing within us. The theme's broadness was supported not only by the works of art, but also in a multilateral and interdisciplinary way, with brief introductions at the Symposium – during the opening days – *The Fear in Art and Life*. Sixty-three artists participate in the exhibition, covering a wide range of art media and directions. The works are exhibited in both the Gallery facilities, where they coexist creating at times interesting juxtapositions with the permanent collection's works, and

the Vineyards of the St Nicholas Monastery. The fact that, even though the presentation of the exhibition is uniform, there are two different approaches to the exhibition, as well as a seemingly arbitrary – in my personal opinion – segregation of Greeks and foreigners in terms of production or not of new works, may be a point of criticism. The Greek part of the exhibition was curated by Olga Daniylopoulou, with works that are all new assignments, a large part of which were created specifically for the Vineyards of the St Nicholas Monastery. This number constitutes a huge production for the Greek conditions, as well as a brave venture on the part of the curator, as there is no possibility for retreat. In cases such as this, you depend on your instinct and on your trust upon the artist, because you can only get a clear picture of




PHOTOGRAPHY: PANOS KOKKINIAS

Loriot/Mélia,
*Le Diable
probablement*

the exhibition just a little time before the opening. On the other hand, the two British curators were poles apart from Daniylopoulou. They approach the subject in a more abstract way and they bring already existing works in the exhibition. In this case, the relevance of each work with the exhibit's theme is largely a matter of interpretation. In any case, they are in a way in a privileged position in what concerns the clarity of their choices and their ability, due to ample time, to give theoretical support to their choices of works in the catalogue. However, the opportunity to view new works by many foreign artists is lost, as is the opportunity to find out whether and how differently they would have worked in this specific context. In reference to some of the works in the vineyards, Danae Stratou's

Introspect involve strongly the visitor to their works. Stratou's large, and with references to land art, installation *Introspect* encloses the viewer in the long corridor, which is delimited by branches, and brings him inevitably face to face with his own reflection. Conversely, Xagoraris' platform *Observatory Viewer Scarecrow*, placed high in the vineyards, invites the viewer to walk on it, and acts as a trap, converting him from viewer to view. The sound of your footsteps is amplified and you become the scarecrow. Finally, even though formalistic, I believe that the monumental, due to the hundreds of shining CDs, sculpture by Michalis Katzourakis was effective. In the Gallery, what mainly attracted my attention were the works of four foreign artists. When entering, the exhibition's first

work is Ugo Rondinone's *Rising Moon*, masterfully placed next to 19th century portraits. It is a work with many influences, something between an ancient ritual mask and a funny bogeyman. Boo Ritson's photograph *Godfather* is the final product of a process involving painting, sculpting and performance. By photographing people, whose heads and clothes she first splashes over with paint, she converts them to estranged effigies of themselves. Tomoko Konoike with her video installation *Mimio Odyssey* transports us to a dream-like, yet dark place of memories. Her work is a reference to both the sensitivity of William Kentridge's animations and the Japanese manga culture. Finally, in the Loriot/Mélia's video installation *Le Diable probablement*, a face, allegedly belonging to the devil, emerges through an unintelligible

play of the shadows. However, it is up to our own predisposition whether we will truly believe that we are in the face of the utter evil. Just as de Oliveira says in his very good text: "What we see isn't therefore what we are looking at, but what we know already exists where we are looking at... So, the scarecrow isn't the object we are looking at, but what we meet through the act of looking; a ghost emerging before us, our sense of vision itself, a symbol of desire and fear that obstructs us from escaping. Wherever we look, we know we shall see it in front of us". 

The exhibition The scarecrow, curated by Olga Daniylopoulou, Nico de Oliveira and Nicola Oxley is held from July 1st to September 17th in the Gallery E. Averof and the vineyards of St Nicholas Monastery in Metsovo.

Peripheries
Andros



Nico Ihlein,
Observatory 2

Eleni Papadopoulou,
co-curator with Ion Konstas
of the *First Andros
International* describes the
two days workshop at
Andros, June 2006

The idea of getting together and working with a group of international artists on Pitrofos, a small village on a hill on the isle of Andros was born at Diner last summer, a small restaurant in Brooklyn, New York.

The First Andros International was established there and then, without a second thought and without a plan to be either a formal art event, or a formal counter-event. In an increasingly professionalized art world where investments must be constantly renewed and value must radiate without respite, this International was based on the Garden of Epicurus and the philosopher's radically advanced attitude to life. "We must remember that the future is neither wholly ours nor wholly not ours, so that neither

must we count upon it as quite certain to come nor despair of it as quite certain not to come" he writes in a letter to Menoecus.

The Garden housed Epicurus' circle of friends at a time when continued political turmoil in Athens had discredited the ambitious Aristotelians and Platonists, and the politicization of philosophy and the attendant intolerance had become passé. A similar "unincorporated" unstaged world was the backdrop for the eight invited artists from Athens, New York and Berlin who uncovered another region of creating and cohabitation while in the premises (an old, traditional house, a guesthouse and grounds).

Andros, the most uncharacteristic of the Cycladic islands is bigger, greener, more silent than most. Its

harshness and total lack of cosmopolitan ambience sets the tone for a looking-within process. The days and nights of the First International were spent talking, establishing limits and self-images, reciting Claudel and doing instant translations of Andreas Embirikos poetry, reading Todd Alden's text on Lee Lozano, debating on terms such as Freud's "polymorphous perversity", enjoying the sensual, voluptuous Greek sea and making art.

Maria Papadimitriou brought with her the map of Greece which she has exhibited before-

a cartography of her own visits and interventions throughout the country- that was taped on the wall of the main house. Signage that she uses in the series of "Hotel" appropriations found their natural

place immediately: "RECEPTION", "TRAVELER'S REST". Her initial plan to set a Lidl tent and use it as the frame for a cement construction that would become a meditation room was overturned by the weather. It took almost all of the artists three hours to install it in the menacing wind: an act of defiance, collaboration and land sailing that concluded to another medium:

the deep golden/beige tent, pulsating like a Chinese dragon and the grinding sound of the wind became the protagonists of her video work, "First Andros International Hotel".

Nico Ihlein produced a series of works on paper, watercolors and pencils onto which he applied sun screen at times; the imagery emerged from dreams as well as the changing



Despina
Papadopoulou,
Day for Night

dynamics of the group. Ihlein also made a sculpture that resembled an observatory: cardboard, assembled with gaffer tape and plastered over, evoking the texture of greek island architecture, and a plaster cast of his own hand placed atop, through which one could observe the village. An Aris Constantinides book that was lying around at the house suddenly acquired new meaning: many unconscious parallels were drawn. Graham Anderson exhibited his sketchbook, but his main accomplishment was to set free ideas that were born in his New York studio. Curiously, while in the city he was almost exclusively painting landscapes, while on Andros he shifted to interiors: a baroque armchair, a mirror, a foxy cat emerging as if out of Aladdin's lamp.

He also photographed extensively the dry fields with lavender bushes, the beautiful stone walls prevailing the island's architecture, abandoned stone houses, the way the sea and the sky merge at a certain time during the day.

Dana Chang who continued working on a drawing she brought from New York discovered that the swirling shapes she inscribed with gold archival marker on black paper that came from pure imagination were not dissimilar to the shapes that emerged in her new drawing: observing oregano, the hair of a fellow artist, pebbles, tree branches.

David Kennedy Cutler dug the 8 hour hole, working non stop under the blinding sun..An exercise of self-imposed hard labour, an opportunity to be away from the group and

reflect on everything, from social working conditions, ways of life and exchange, land art, the past and the future.

Eleanna Horiti built a "Temporary Temple" out of wooden poles and an astrofoil roof. Installed on one of the "masies:" overlooking the main house it would have served as an additional hang out area but this never materialized: our Friend the Wind that Came from Afar made that impossible.

Jan Bünnig, a Berlin artist who was to attend but needed to stay back for work sent by UPS a video loop he had shot with his phone transposing the atmosphere of his studio on the remote village on the hill.

Despina Papadopoulos completed "Day-for-Night: Modular Extensible Reconfigurable",

a dress comprised of 436 white circuit boards that are linked together with metal rings. Each tile is addressable from a central control unit at the back of the dress. Solar cells are embedded on some of the tiles and charge the dress during the day. RGE LEDs flicker in various patterns when light is dim.

The First Andros International experiment worked; not totally complicit with any known system of making and exhibiting art, it became a social instrument enabling esoteric, distinctive logics.

That the artists lived and worked in the same house was crucial for the outcome for nothing exists naturally, things exist because challenged, and because summoned to respond to that challenge. [a.](#)

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page 2, Panagiotis Loukas, *Voulva Vituperation*, 2003

page 7, *Versus*, From left to right works of Rallou Panagiotou, Vassilis Vlastaras, Paris Haviaras, Maro Mihalakakou

page 32, Maria Papadimitriou, *fai hotel*, 2006