

Τι είν' η πατρίδα μας;

Performing 'time out of joint' at the National Theatre of Greece (2011-13)

'We are going to open the chapter "Greece". Our aim is to talk exclusively about our country.'¹ (Anon 2011) With these words, in May 2011, the artistic director of the National Theatre of Greece Yiannis Houvardas launched the theatre's programme for the autumn 2011 - spring 2013 period. The season under the title *What is our motherland?* (*Τι είν' η πατρίδα μας;*) featured works by Greek and non-Greek artists that focused on three areas: Greeks' perceptions of themselves, non-Greeks' views of the country and its people, and what Greece might signify in that particular historical moment. The *What is our Motherland? Season* that concluded Houvardas's six-year tenure, included different kinds of events: performances, talks, rehearsed readings and exhibitions, they all offered a synchronic and diachronic perspective on the Greek nation.² This article explores three performances of Greek plays that were programmed as part of that season: Lena Kitsopoulou's *Austras or Couch Grass* (*Άουστρας ή η Αγριαδα* [2011]); Iakovos Kampnellis's *The Backyard of Miracles* (*Αυλή των Θαυμάτων*, [1957/58]), and Spyridon Peresiadis's *Golfo* (*Γκόλφω*, [1893/94]). These three texts offer insight into the performance of Greek national identity in markedly different historical moments: the pastoral drama *Golfo* was originally staged

¹ All translations from Greek material are mine. The analysis is based on my experience as audience member of *The Backyard of Miracles* (February 2012) and *Golfo* (Epidaurus theatre, August 2013) as well as on the video recordings of the productions held at the library of the National Theatre in Athens; the reading of *Austras* is solely based on the video recording, the unpublished playscript and other documentation material available at the National Theatre library.

² The repertoire included a version of Homer's *Odyssey* directed by Robert Wilson; Shakespeare's *Pericles* that was subsequently performed at the Globe Theatre as part of the 2012 Globe to Globe Season in London's theatre; a play loosely inspired by the persecution of the Greek communities living in Asia Minor by the newly formed Turkish army in 1922; a new Greek play called *Πατρίδες* (*Homelands*) that engaged with questions of immigration and a series of canonical texts by Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Heinrich von Kleist and Molière. The season, curated by artists and theatre scholars, also included readings and lectures on topics such as the Peloponnesian war, Thucydides's history and other topics about ancient and modern Greece.

at the turn of the nineteenth century, a time that coincided with the expansion of the modern Greek nation-state and the transition from the countryside to the newly formed cities. *The Backyard of Miracles*, a social realist play set more than five decades after Peresiadis's play, also engages with the transformation of Greek society offering a snapshot of the post-second world war Athenian landscape and the social tensions emerging in a setting that was rapidly, albeit chaotically, urbanised and 'modernised'. Finally, *Austras*, performed alongside the play *Invisible Olga* by Iannis Tsiros in a double bill under the title *Foreigner* (Ξένοϛ) is set in twenty-first century Athens, a capital struck by financial crisis, crime and xenophobia; Kitsopoulou's dark comedy deconstructs idealised perceptions of Greekness while raising pertinent questions about what it means to be a foreigner (*xenos*) in twenty-first century Greece.

By exploring these performances – two plays of the modern Greek Canon and one example of contemporary writing – I do not approach the question *Τι ειν' η πατριδα μας*; as one of being but rather as one of becoming. I am reframing the question as 'what *makes* our motherland?' in order to open up the space of studying theatre as a stage of nation-building, where notions of the national are being made and unmade. As Nadine Holdsworth argues in the introduction to *Theatre and National Identity*:

It is a grandiose claim to suggest that theatre has the power to bring the nation into being literally or metaphorically, but [...]the theatre, taking place in a communal public arena, can be one of the ways that members of a nation contribute to public discourse, a national conversation, which opens up the possibility for reflection and debate. (2014:2)

Amidst growing socio-political and financial crises as well as a shifting theatre and performing arts landscape, such reflection and debate were unavoidable and the National Theatre set out to fulfil its mission statement of 'promoting culture and preserving Greek cultural identity' (National Theatre Website). This article considers the value of this season and its effect (if any) on the rebranding of the Greek National Theatre at a time of crisis.

What particularly interests me and drives the argument that unfolds in the following pages is the position that the (distant and more recent) past occupies in these three performances; how might reimagining this past onstage influence the shape of a 'national conversation' as dynamic and shifting? I propose that the aesthetic that these works mobilized is one of disjointed temporality: a peculiar temporal dislocation underpins these works as past, present and future collide in ways that are performatively multilayered, ideologically charged and occasionally dubious.³ While analyzing these theatre examples, I argue that a 'time out of joint' marked the tone of Greek politics, culture and public life after 2010. I am borrowing the phrase 'time out of joint' from Jacques Derrida, who uses it as an epigraph to the first part of his 1994 *Specters of Marx* ('Injunctions of Marx') – a phrase from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reappears in the Derridean text: '*the time is out of ioynt*'. (1994:1) Time as temporality or time as our current times, the times that we live in; 'time, history, world' – all out of joint, out of order and mad. Derrida writes that time is dis-jointed, but not as

a time whose joinings are negated, broken, mistreated, dysfunctional, disadjusted, according to a *dys-* of negative opposition and dialectical disjunction, but a time without *certain* joining or determinable conjunction. (1994:20)

I propose that this lack of certitude or determinacy underpinned experiences in Greece since 2010 – not only in terms of the inability to discern the country's future in financial or sociopolitical ways but also in terms of the sheer failure to speak or narrate the ways that the country found itself in this position. Hence, the dialectics of past, present and future were radically challenged at the wake of austerity, bailouts

³ In a previous publication (Zaroulia 2014), I interrogate the role of temporal distance and affect when analyzing performances of ancient Greek drama in the Epidaurus festival, in the immediate aftermath of the 'crisis'. Writing about the National Theatre's 2010 production of Euripides's *Orestes*, directed by Houvardas, I pay particular attention to how the chorus worked as a means of distorting clear and linear structures of time, thus producing a more nuanced understanding of present and past youth revolts; the present article builds on this line of thinking.

and social turmoil. Culturally, different discourses and modes of representation emerged attempting to capture that ‘time out of joint’, that lack of ‘determinable conjunction’, both in the ways that the future was imagined as well as in the ways that the past was narrated. This article is concerned with these modes of narration and imagination, proposing three analytical frameworks to approach each theatre piece: archival logics, nostalgia and ghosts.

The Nation & its Theatres

In her important article on ‘The Role of National Theatres in an Age of Globalization’, Janelle Reinelt builds on a comment made by Irish theatre critic Fintan O’Toole that ‘Theatre pretends that a nation exists, at least for the duration of the theatre piece’ and she argues that ‘this pretence becomes performative when the assembled audience is addressed – or even implied – as national citizenry.’ (2008: 228) In *Golfo*, *The Backyard of Miracles* and *Austras*, the audience is assembled and interpellated as national subjects; thus, albeit in different ways, these three works perpetuate an invocation of the theatre as ‘the appropriate site for nation building, as a legitimate public sphere’ (Kruger 1992: 6) and in doing so, they become ‘national’ works.

However, it is never a sole institution that shapes the audience’s role as ‘national citizenry’ or that sets the tone of a national conversation; instead, when exploring the ways that theatre shapes imaginings of the nation, we should broaden ideas of national stages beyond the National Theatre. Reinelt proposes that researchers should ‘conceptualize a network of theatrical sites that produce national identity.’ (2008: 229) Following Reinelt’s proposition, this section does not only aim to offer background on the establishment and history of the National Theatre of Greece in order to contextualize the works that this article is exploring. I also point at some developments that marked Greek theatre ecology at the turn of the third millennium, in order to argue that the *What is our Motherland?* season distils and expands attitudes and aesthetics that emerged through this ‘network of theatrical sites’ of the 1990s and 2000s. These sites and artists, some of who later moved to the National

Theatre, challenged dominant ways of Greek theatre-making and, subsequently, imaginings of Greek national identity.

The National Theatre of Greece was established in 1930, almost a century after national theatres appeared in other European countries.⁴ When the then Minister of Culture Georgios Papandreou introduced the legal framework for the establishment of the theatre in May 1930, various arguments against a national stage were put forward as the introduction of a National Theatre was bound to shift the country's cultural ecology. In an article from *Eleftheron Vima* in early 1931 (quoted in Kanakis, 1999: 21) the President of the Board noted that 'all Greek actors wanted to join the National Theatre's ensemble' and that a lot of them were putting pressure to achieve their aim 'through whatever means'. It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a comprehensive history of the country's principal stage but it is worth noting that the National Theatre's history – the choice of repertoire, the artistic directors or actors – offers interesting analogies with the history of the Greek nation; in this instance, the country's perennial problem of paternalism defined these early years of the new theatre. Similarly, the arguments for experimentation and modernization in the National Theatre that gathered momentum at the turn of the third millennium echoed the calls for the country's modernization and 'convergence' with Europe – a process that was symbolically sealed with the 2004 Athens Olympic Games and the country's inclusion in the Eurozone.

In his survey of *Theatre in Greece: 1940-2000*, theatre scholar Platon Mavromoustakos notes that after the end of the Second World War and the consequent Civil War, the national stage maintained characteristics of a 'conservative theatre' that attempted to meet the central European standards of theatre (2005: 70). During the 1950s and 1960s, although the National Theatre played an important part in the shaping of a new generation of actors and directors, its repertoire failed to meet

⁴ It is worth noting here that the building that hosts the National Theatre to this day (Tsiller venue on Agiou Konstantinou, close to Omonoia square) was originally the venue for the Royal Theatre (1901-1908) that staged 140 productions before it closed.

the calls for avant-garde modes of theatre-making, which were promoted by other theatres established in the post-war era (principally, the *Theatro Technis* led by Karolos Koun). It is only after the establishment of the National Theatre's *Nea Skene* (Νέα Σκηνή) in 1970 that the theatre's repertoire started shifting, offering a platform to alternative modes of writing and direction. Simon Trussler, in his survey of Greek theatre during the 1980s, writes that productions at the National Theatre included plays 'taken from the dramatic literature of the post-Renaissance western world and from new Greek playwrights' (1989:52); the former style defined the theatre's main stage (*Kentriki Skene*) while the latter dominated the *Nea Skene*.

The shift in the theatre's identity, initiated in the 1970s, was solidified during the last two decades of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century, under the artistic direction of Nikos Kourkoulos (1996-2006).⁵ Indeed, as Mavromoustakos observes, by the turn of the new millennium 'the National Theatre's choices were unanimously welcomed by the press [...] and audiences' (2005: 281); however, he expresses some reservations as to whether the theatre had really surpassed its old 'establishment' role, embracing new dramaturgies and modes of performance. It is in this context of modernisation and rebranding of the National Theatre's identity – initiated during the years of Kourkoulos' artistic direction and further developed during Houvardas's tenure – that the *What is our Motherland?* Season should be placed.

Appointed in the summer of 2007 by the conservative government of New Democracy, Houvardas's period of artistic leadership coincided with a tumultuous period for the country. By May 2013, when Houvardas's tenure concluded, the National Theatre had presented 104 productions in 20 different venues, employing 595 actors and 71 directors; the theatre had attracted 1,259,803 audience members and the total box office income for the period was over 18 million euros. (Dimadi 2013)

⁵ Kourkoulos, formerly a popular film actor, took over the artistic direction of the National Theatre as its legal status shifted. In 1994, the institution became a non-profit organization, ran by the Artistic Director and a seven-members board appointed by the Minister of Culture (National Theatre website).

As he noted in his final press conference, Houvardas's priorities for the theatre were to promote plural perspectives on what theatre is, to use the talent of the National's artistic, technical and administrative staff, to modernize the National by pursuing possibilities of collaboration with artists from outside Greece and by actively engaging in a dialogue with society (Dimadi 2013). The theatre's finances and administration were also key areas of concern, given the emphasis that was placed on those sectors in austerity-struck Greece.

Houvardas assumed the role of artistic director of the National Theatre, having led the *Theatro tou Notou* at the Amore theatre since 1991. *Theatro tou Notou* was a key player in the 'boom' of theatre production that took place primarily in Athens during the last decade of the twentieth century. That 'boom' was defined by a proliferation of productions, variety in repertoire, increasing number of theatre venues and gradual decentralization of theatre that facilitated collaborations between younger theatre makers and led to the emergence of new theatre companies. The theatre of the 1990s and early 2000s was reshaped, partly due to the increasing number of Drama schools, the establishment of Theatre Studies departments in universities and the key role that certain institutions played in the shaping of repertoire; for instance, the British Council was pivotal in the production of new theatre aesthetics by promoting Greek productions of 1990s British drama on Athenian stages – the Amore theatre being at the forefront of this tendency. Definitions and distinctions between 'mainstream' and 'fringe' theatres were challenged at the dawn of the new century, as new technologies, new spaces, and the mobility of artists who were not always 'tied to' specific ensembles produced new audiences.

Thus, the new identity of the National Theatre, initiated when Houvardas took over its artistic direction, can be understood as an extension of the changes that had occurred in Athenian theatre stages during the previous decade; in other words, the national theatre stage is closely linked to the developments in the wider network of theatre institutions. Lena Kitsopoulou's anarchic exploration-parody of contemporary

Greekness in *Austras* summarises and expands on these tendencies – artistically and ideologically.

Austras or Couch Grass: disturbing archival logics

Kitsopoulou, herself an actor and a writer, has been described as an ‘angry’, ‘in yer face’ playwright (Ioannidis *GreekPlayProject*); *Austras*, like many of her plays, offers an acerbic critique of the fundamental cornerstones of Greek national identity, attacking the ways in which notions of the nation have been produced and reproduced during the years. Set in an intimate space, in a traverse setting, where the audiences can watch each other as well as the action onstage, *Austras*⁶ tells the story of three friends, who invite a tourist to spend the evening with them as a way of combating their boredom. Kitsopoulou’s one-act play is reminiscent of Harold Pinter’s early ‘comedies of menace’ like *The Birthday Party*, but in the case of *Austras*, the menace does not emanate from the outside world but rests inside the house. Interestingly, the play’s title speaks to this tension between inside and outside. The title refers to the couch grass, which is a parasite that needs to be removed ‘from the root’ so that it does not spread among other plants; the couch grass is dangerous and can appear in cities, too. Are the foreigners (like the tourist of the play or the increasing number of migrants living in the country) the ‘couch grass’ that must be exterminated or are the friends, proud Greeks a version of this parasite that is spreading across the country?

⁶ *Austras or Couch Grass*, directed by Y. Kalavrianos, with L. Papaligoura, Y. Galatis, V. Karampoulas and Y. Tsouris. The play was commissioned to be performed in a double bill with *Invisible Olga* by Y. Tsiros (a play about sex trafficking in contemporary Europe). First performance at Vrissaki Living Space of Art and Theatre, 2 November 2011. The two one-act plays, commissioned by the National theatre were developed as part of *Emergency Entrance*, an international initiative funded by the European Union Culture Programme (2007-13), in collaboration with the Union of Theatres of Europe (UTE). The participant countries were Greece, Italy, Hungary, Czech Republic, Israel, Romania and the Schauspielhaus Graz theatre of Austria, where the performances were also presented in a festival in late January 2012. In this way, this project responded to the priority that Houvardas had set for the National theatre to foster stronger collaborations with artists and venues outside Greece.

The play is interesting in terms of dramatic form, as it starts in a realist way, set in a living room but the story is interrupted by what the playwright calls ‘chorus songs’. In those sections, the three actors deliver texts in unison, like a tragic chorus, in a subtle yet clear gesture of critique of the iconic status that ancient Greek drama still holds in the country. Significantly, during those chorus songs, actors do not perform as characters in a realist play but (in Kitsopoulou’s words) as ‘schizophrenic, paranoid’ versions of actors, who directly address the audience. For example, the first chorus song begins with Lena Papaligoura saying: ‘After all, Akropolis rocks!’⁷ In the hilarious interlude that follows, Papaligoura manically attacks all the master narratives about the greatness of Greece, of ‘our Marbles, our feta, our hospitality’ while deconstructing popular songs of the 1970s,⁸ pointing at the casual sexism and racism of their lyrics. In response to this running commentary on modern Greek culture, the audience frantically laughs. This is a moment where the audience is assumed and assembled as national subjects, who have been exposed to or, potentially even, expressed this perverse version of banal nationalism, the pride of being Greek. This chorus song narrates the past in ironic content and postdramatic form and in doing so it disturbs the logics that had shaped understandings of what it means to be Greek, the logics that have emphasised a linear progression that connects ancient and modern Greece.

Discussing a range of contemporary Greek films and one theatre piece, Dimitris Papanikolaou has proposed that cultural expression in the country during the early years of the crisis (2010-11) was identified by a tendency that he terms ‘the poetics of disturbed archival logic’ or ‘the disturbed archive’.⁹ For Papanikolaou (2011), this tendency – pregnant with radical political potential – aimed ‘to critique, undermine and performatively disturb the very logics through which the story of Greece – the narrative of its national, political, sociocultural cohesion in synchrony and diachrony –

⁷ *Τελικά η Ακρόπολη και γαμώ τα κτίρια.*

⁸ *Μην βροντοχτυπάς τις χάντρες/ η δουλειά κάνει τους άντρες.*

⁹ Papanikolaou discusses Kanigkounta’s *City State* (2010, Athens Festival) as well as the films *Dogtooth* (2009, dir. Y. Lanthimos), *Country of Origin* (2010, dir. S. Tzoumerkas), and *Attenberg* (2010, dir. A. Tsagkari).

has until now been told.' Papanikolaou recognizes that this tendency is not in any way new; in fact, cultural works that challenged dominant narratives of the past, mobilizing unorthodox, non-normative archives, had already made a mark on the country's cultural landscape during the previous decade. However, what is of significance for Papanikolaou – and for my argument – is whether and how such an undermining of the hitherto dominant modes of relating to the past might constitute

[a] full-blown genealogical attack that takes the current state not as a symptom of things that went wrong in the past, but as the very point from which the past should be reviewed, revisited, re-collated, reassembled and reassessed, both in political and in identitarian terms (2011).

Austras, like other works by Kitsopoulou, demonstrates such a genealogical attack, proposing that in order to understand our past, we need to look closely at our present and its failures. In the context of *Austras*, the demonization of migrants or foreigners more broadly is not a consequence of the anxiety that the financial crisis caused; instead, it is a logical extension of the (explicit or covert) nationalist pride, a culture of superiority that had defined Greek culture and education throughout the years.

While waiting for their guest, the three friends make stupid, casual racist jokes about the Chinese food that is so popular in Athens, about the non-white migrants who live in the city and who are responsible for the increase in crime rates. Kitsopoulou's crude, caricature portrayal of these young men and woman is an attack on the proliferation of banal racist and nationalist attitudes that had gained currency in the country, not only in the discourse of Golden Dawn, the increasingly popular far-right party, but also in the views expressed by other public figures and politicians. After the tourist-guest arrives, everything spirals into madness. The evening starts in a harmless manner, as the three friends try to teach the foreigner some Greek words but when he fails to utter some of the Greek sounds accurately, his hosts grow irritated. One of the three friends demonstrates 'authentic' Greek masculinity by dancing *zeibekiko* and when the tourist fails to meet the standards, he is beaten and threatened with a gun. After they perform an interlude, giving him a short lecture on

the history of Greek-Turkish relations, the tourist is bullied into drinking – ‘Drink! Drink! You should say “yes” to the treat!’ – and ultimately, by the end of the play, he dies.¹⁰ That ending attacked and deconstructed another myth of Greek greatness, that of hospitality. Although heavily promoted by the Greek Tourism Office as the only means of healing the country’s dire economy, the celebrated Greek hospitality was in fact contradicted in the appalling ways in which migrants and refugees were treated in the country. In other words, in crisis-struck Greece, not all guests were considered of the same value.

Grigoris Ioannidis points at violence as an undercurrent element of Kitsopoulou’s body of work, a violence that can be seen in

the very models that shaped the Greek nation’s existence. Sometimes through coercion and other times through heroic symbols, modern Greek consciousness has been corroded through an invisible, silent and unconscious violence. (GreekPlayProject)

Kitsopoulou’s response to this violence is a violent form of dramaturgy that challenges the logics of narration and representation, as a way of dislocating national obsessions and paranoias. *Austras* accurately captured the paranoia that had started creeping in among certain social groups, due to the shifts in the city’s demographics. One of the very few contemporary Greek texts presented at the National Theatre during this season, *Austras* exposed the existential angst that a shifting urban landscape brings about, a landscape that challenges notions of community and belonging. As Yiannis Kalavrianos points in his (somewhat nostalgic) director’s note, in such a context, when you are surrounded by strangers (who could at any point turn into enemies), ‘everyone is to blame for everything’ (2011). Although Kitsopoulou’s text is both formally and ideologically different to the example that follows, it is worth noting here

¹⁰ In the production, the tourist lied unconscious at the end. However, according to the unpublished play script available at the National’s archive, the tourist dies.

that both *Austras* and *The Backyard of Miracles* engage with the discontents of urban life, exploring notions of inclusion and exclusion – in the 1950s and 2010s.

***The Backyard of Miracles: against nostalgia*¹¹**

Kampanellis's *The Backyard of Miracles* is an emblematic play in the history of post-war Greek theatre, capturing the tone of everyday life during the 1950s, a decade that found the country wounded and destroyed after the Nazi occupation and the Civil War (1944-49). The 1950s was hailed as the decade of reconstruction of the country, as the right-wing governments of Field Marshall Alexandros Papagos and later on Konstantinos Karamanlis capitalized on the slow recovery that the US-led Marshall plan (1948-52) had brought to Greek economy. A direct result of the Cold War tensions, the Marshall Plan was an extension of the 1947 Truman Doctrine that aimed to prevent the communist 'control' of the country. According to Thomas Gallant's survey of modern Greek history (2016: 254), 'between 1947 and 1950, \$1,237,500,000 in foreign aid was sent to Greece. An additional \$181,000,000 was allocated in the fiscal year 1951-2 and \$21,300,000 in the following year'. However, this foreign aid did not only impact on the development of the country in terms of trade, recovery of the cities and the countryside, industrial growth and infrastructure. It also perpetuated and intensified the sociopolitical divisions of the Civil War: the Communist party was outlawed and thousands of members of the Greek Resistance were persecuted and deported to concentration camps in remote islands, if they refused to sign a declaration of repentance. In the note he wrote for the play's first production at the *Theatro Technis*, Kampanellis situated his work in that shifting and contradictory sociopolitical context, emphasising that the country's, and particularly the capital's, redevelopment during the 1950s took place in an uneven manner. According to the playwright, the 'economic miracle' taking place elsewhere did not

¹¹ *Backyard of Miracles*, directed by Y. Kakleas, with T. Tzimou, A. Aidini, K. Aspiotis, M. Adamaki, T. Katsafados, A. Stelatou, L. Papaligoura, P. Aleiferopoulos, N. Psarras, E. Saoulidou, N. Kouris, Y. Tzavaras, K. Yiannakopoulos, T. Kourlampas, M. Sarantis. First performed at the *Main Stage* of the National, 14 December 2011.

reach the neighbourhoods where working classes or migrants resided; thus, he calls his play a 'swan song' for a world that he knew and was now left behind.

The play tells different stories of people who long for and strive for a better future, but ultimately remain trapped and forgotten, largely due to their financial position: Voula and Mpampis want to migrate to Australia, Stelios wants to find a job and stop gambling, Yiannis wants to take his migrant parents Iordanis and Asta to a better place. *The Backyard of Miracles* is 'theatre of everyday life', based on the detailed observation and description of the lower working classes; the narrative is plausible, the characters and language are recognizable. Mavromoustakos has identified this 'theatre of everyday life' as a dominant tendency in the Greek theatre of the 1950s and 1960s, a tendency that could also be identified in other artforms such as 'the lyrics and music of Hatzidakis and Theodorakis or the films that were influenced by Italian neorealism or French auteur cinema' (Greekplayproject). He notes that Kampanellis, as well as Karolos Koun who directed the play in its first monumental production, considered the lower working classes 'pure' and this purity emerged as a constitutive element of the theatre of everyday life.

The key element of Kampanellis's work is space – the backyard – where the boundaries between public and private get blurred and a community of sorts is developed. Kampanellis's play charts the transition from such communal spaces to a more atomized, individualist organization of society and laments the end of an innocent and authentic world. During the 1950s, the initiative of *antiparohi* gathered pace, radically changing the urban landscape of Athens as well as social hierarchy. Under *antiparohi* spaces like the backyard were given up in exchange for a flat in a block of flats built where the backyard used to be; through this initiative, the city's social geography largely changed and new social classes of engineers and flat-owners appeared. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, this process of social fragmentation masqueraded as property ownership and affluence had been completed, as a lot of petit bourgeois households relied on credit to afford the houses that they lived in. By 2011, there was a steady increase in evictions and suicides, triggered by financial

collapse and loss of homes as well as the increasing privatization and gentification of crisis-struck Athens. The final moments of *The Backyard of Miracles*, when the characters have to leave their homes are both relics of a past and poignant markers of a present.

This continuity between the past and the present is emphasized in Kakleas's director note for the production's programme, entitled 'Adoration of a past or creation of a future?' He writes: '*The Backyard of Miracles* feels like a nightmare from the future rather than some nostalgic moment from the past.' (2011: 6) Unlike other productions that approached the play as a nostalgic lament for a world that had disappeared, Kakleas denies the text's nostalgia. Instead, he argues that Kampanellis's text is a 'cruel play' that offers an analysis of the 'inner workings of a Greek', it exposes 'the decadence, loneliness, the struggle for survival as well as the disastrous menace of a state-punisher'; this state has failed and subsequently its citizens fall prey to profit. For Kakleas, *The Backyard of Miracles* is a text about 'Greece today', suggesting that not much has changed since the time that Kampanellis wrote the play.

Kakleas's production adapted the play to a contemporary Athenian setting. Before the production started, as audiences were entering the Main Stage, a live-feed video of the square across the National Theatre building was being projected on the safety curtain. Later on, after the break, statues of poets, heroes of the 1821 Revolution against the Ottoman Empire, or benefactors of the modern Greek nation-state were projected on the curtain. The final projection before the second part of the performance resumed was a statue of a blind-folded female figure, potentially an allusion to justice as a blind goddess, and what is not yet achieved in crisis-struck Greece. Kakleas's version of *The Backyard of Miracles* was firmly embedded in the contemporary Athenian urban fabric, translating a play that offers a sharp commentary on the country's trajectory to post-war modernization into a more recent past of Europeanization and modernization that had come to an abrupt halt in the end of the 2000s.

In Kakleas's production, the visual vocabulary onstage offered a medley of references from the 1950s and the early 2010s, thus distorting the audience's sense of when the story is set. An audience member could see a fridge from the 1950s next to trash bins of the 2010s; the dressing style and the music were by and large of the twenty-first century; the engineers carried mobile phones and their language sounded efficient and technocratic; the riot police entered to evict the migrant who refused to leave his trailer. Further, the first act ended with Yiannis's outburst: having heard his migrant father's allegorical stories about life, Yiannis put on his hood and using a metal bar, he attacked objects onstage. This image of an unsatisfied, angry young man could bring to mind recent memories of disaffected youth and their revolt in December 2008.¹²

The text was not adapted to include references to the contemporary moment but some of the original lines in the play took a different meaning sixty years later. For instance, when the landlady Aneto, longs to see her daughter who lives in England, exclaims 'First you have children, then England is stealing them from you', the audience responded with laughter of recognition.¹³ Similarly, when references were made to Mpampis' and Voula's desire to migrate to Australia, the audience could recognize that similar tendencies had started emerging among young Greek couples in the aftermath of the crisis. Indeed, the references to migration to Europe or Australia could equally refer to past (1950s and 1960s) and present experiences, as the number of particularly young people migrating had increased after 2010, due to austerity and unemployment.

The end of Kakleas's production saw the play's characters trapped behind a fence, as the backyard disappeared and new buildings 'mushroomed' across the

¹² For more on the topic and the ways that the ghost of Alexis Grigoropoulos haunted previous productions of the National, see Zaroulia 2014.

¹³ During the 1950s and as the process of recovery in the countryside was starting, thousands of young Greeks left their villages. This led to the rapid urbanization of Athens (18.6% of the population lived there in 1951, 22.1% in 1961; see Gallant 2016: 263) but also to a large number of 'guest-workers' who temporarily moved to countries of the industrialized European North in search of work.

capital; in the last moment before the blackout, the actors stood behind iron bars as the building works commenced. They stared at the audience, unable to move, silent, reversed images of twenty-first century Greece, of a nation trapped between its longing for a past and a desire for a future, at whatever cost. In Kakleas's production, the characters, social outcasts of the late 1950s, emerge as the precariat of early 21st century.

Mavromoustakos suggests that setting the play in the backyard produces two kinds of spectators, onstage and off stage. The 'real' audience faces the stage-backyard but the characters are also spectators when they are not involved in the action; they witness what unfolds in the private/public space that is the backyard. That kind of setting and dual kind of spectatorship are significant for understanding the ways in which the audience as 'national citizens' were interpellated in the final moments of the 2011 production: when the characters did not have anything to witness onstage as the backyard was disappearing, their gaze turned back to the audience. This 'face to face' encounter between the characters from a 1950s play and the audience of 2011 seems to evoke the need for some sort of reaction from the audience; this ending of the play connected past, present and future in indelible manners. That ending was underpinned by a haunting quality; characters emerged as ghosts of a time past, or even a time future. As Derrida writes: 'The future can only be for ghosts. And the past.' (1994:45)

***Golfo: recalling ghosts of the past*¹⁴**

In an often-quoted section from *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson studies cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers arguing for the potency of such monuments in producing 'ghostly *national* imaginings' (2006: 9, original emphasis). In this last section, I am using Anderson's thinking about the affective dimension of

¹⁴ *Golfo*, directed by N. Karathanos, with A. Alexandraki, L. Fotopoulou, E. Saoulidou, Y. Vogiatzis, N. Karathanos, H. Fragkoulis, A. Triantafyllou, M. Sarantis, C. Maxouri, Y. Biniaris, Y. Kotsifas, A. Papadimitriou, M. Diakopanagiotou. First performance at the Rex Theatre of the National on 06 March 2013.

nationalism as a starting point in order to consider the role of ghosts in the theatre as a confrontation with the nation or national memory, particularly by means of the staging of a text that is haunted by its past stagings. Ghostliness, I argue, is the key element that defined the politics and aesthetics of Nikos Karathanos's version of Peresiadis's *Golfo*. Marvin Carlson in *The Haunted Stage* has identified ghostliness, this 'sense of return' as 'one of the universals of performance' (2003:1). Carlson is mainly concerned with the ways that narratives are recycled and cultural memory revisited and shifted as specific theatre works are repeated, re-invented and re-interpreted. Karathanos's interpretation of *Golfo*, a key text for the shaping of modern Greek national consciousness, can certainly be read in such terms, as the performance worked both as a lament for something lost in a past and a meditation on the future and its possibilities.

Unlike the visual medley that characterized *The Backyard of Miracles*, or the postdramatic irony of *Austras*, *Golfo* was presented in a minimalist setting, dominated by dark lights and black beanbags that the ensemble moved to create different spaces. The striking element of the production was the black skirts that male and female members of the company were wearing. These skirts were a direct reference to the *foustanella*, the skirt that the men who fought in the 1821 War of Independence against the Ottoman rule wore. Written in fifteen-syllable verse, like most of Greek folk poems, the play tells the tragic story of mountain girl Golfo and shepherd Tasos, set somewhere in the mountains: the two lovers swear eternal love but Tasos betrays Golfo when he is presented with the option of marrying a wealthy woman. Although he regrets his decision, it is too late to save Golfo from suicide; in this Greek version of *Romeo and Juliet*, he follows her to death at the end of the play.

Ioulia Pipinia and Andreas Dimitriadis chart the stage and screen history of Peresiadis's melodrama to contextualize their response to Karathanos's production. They explain that when the play first appeared to the Athenian audience of the 1890s, it conveyed a rather sentimentalist, traditionalist, 'distant, if not distorted' image of rural life (2016: 139). Nonetheless, *Golfo*, a

somewhat backwards yet safe choice, so safe in fact, that while her [sic] popularity waned in Athens, she [sic] continued, for eighty years, to lure primarily provincial audiences, solidifying a Greek national identity based on the legitimation and idealization of a common past. (140)

In the original context of the play, *Golfo* captured a nostalgia for the pastoral as modern Greeks moved away from the countryside to populate the new centres of the rising bourgeoisie at the dawn of a new century. The lovers' naive and eternal love seemed to stand in for the innocence that life outside the city promised. Later, the play became very popular among the troupes of travelling players in the early twentieth century and was performed across the country.¹⁵ The long history of the play's performances on stage and screen attests to its cultural significance and the choice of the National Theatre to schedule one performance of Karathanos's version as part of the 2013 Epidaurus festival further proves the canonical status of Peresiadis's play. An 'emblem' or 'allegory to modern Greek history' or synonym for 'artistic poverty' (Pipinia and Dimitriadis 140), Peresiadis's play in its many versions and appropriations is certainly a national text.

From the very start of Karathanos's production, space and time were not defined; although the original rhythm and language of the nineteenth century text were kept intact, the production defied its association with one of the key elements of the play, the pastoral landscape. Instead, in Karathanos's version, the action seemed to be taking place in the underworld or a world populated by specters. Karathanos cast three pairs of actors of different ages to play the lovers: a young couple (Saoulidou and Fragkoulis) performed the lovers in the early parts of the relationship; a middle-aged couple (Fotopoulou and Karathanos) took over after Tasos makes the 'sensible' decision of betraying *Golfo* for the money; and, finally, an elderly

¹⁵ The play was also performed in places where the Greek diaspora thrived (for example, in Alexandria, Egypt in the 1930s). The play was first adapted for the screen as a silent film in 1915. In *The Travelling Players* (1974), Theo Angelopoulos's monumental film on the Greek civil war, the troupe that the film follows rehearses and performs Peresiadis's text in different historical moments and places. *Golfo* re-emerged as a classic in the 21st century with Simos Kakalas's series of versions and adaptations of the play.

couple of actors (Alexandraki and Vogiatzis) appeared at the start and end of the production, potentially suggesting the eternal torture or struggle for redemption of the lovers in a world of injustice and greed.

The performance started with a long, silent kiss between the elderly couple before the ensemble appeared, playing live music. This strong first scene was juxtaposed with the childish expressions of love and affection between the young couple. It was only after Tasos's betrayal and when the middle-aged actors appeared that the mood dramatically shifted. In one of the most documented moments of the performance, the ensemble gathered and sat on chairs, like a band praising and lamenting love. In that section of the performance, none of the actors performed a character; they were just sitting, a band or troupe of actors playing the instruments, bearing the text that they spoke – a text written by Peresiadis with the addition of Kitsopoulou's poetry about love. The women were throwing water from buckets in their eyes to mourn for Tasos's betrayal; all production choices seemed to hint at a non-realist, or what critics described as an 'expressionist' staging of the text.

The logics of the dramatic universe were violated with Tasos's betrayal and what followed in Karathanos's version of *Golfo* largely deviated from the original. When Stavroula (*Golfo*'s rival) celebrated her engagement with Tasos, she appeared dressed up as a bear, while in the most memorable moment of the performance, her wealthy father started dancing a *tsamiko* dance, while the men around him showered him with money. That scene offered an interesting hybrid image of Greek traditions: *tsamiko*, a very proud dance that is mainly associated with the 1821 Independence War, and a more recent tradition of 'showering' singers with money in Greek night clubs (*bouzoukia*). This banal gesture of wasting money is often associated with the populist decades of the 1980s and 1990s when false version of wealth inundated the country.

In that scene, as the dance got more robot-like and the music got more out of tune, *Golfo* emerged as a companion-piece to *The Backyard of Miracles* and its negotiation of the impact of debt on people's subjectivity. Towards the end of

Kampanellis's play, the humiliated Stelios confronts Stratos who was effectively sponsoring Stelios's gambling in order to have an affair with his wife, Olga. In the National Theatre production, Stratos (Psarras) showers Stelios (Kouris) with money and he, beside himself, eats the money, throws them in the air or tears them apart. Although an archetypal love-story, *Golfo* also negotiates greed and loyalty; before betraying Golfo, Tasos is offered a large amount of money by a group of wealthy foreigners. After that moment, his purity is gone; the robot-like, out of tune dance was an embodied expression of the poisonous impact of wealth. In Karathanos's version, *Golfo* works as a ghost of the past – a text that offered a metaphor of the nation's transition into modernity and the (actual and metaphorical) price that had to be paid, a price that cannot be separated from foreign interventions and colonialist attitudes that shaped the modern Greek nation-state. This past ghost, a haunted text now returns to make a comment on the nation's current transformation into a neoliberal wasteland, by means of new forms of colonialism. But, like in *Austras* or in *The Backyard of Miracles*, whatever has happened in 21st century Greece is not a symptom of what went wrong in the past; instead, present predicaments offer the opportunity to look back, assess, imagine and narrate that past anew.

'In future times, when we are asked how we felt today, what kind of country we lived in and what we longed for, we would just have to speak about the National Theatre's *Golfo*'. These are the words of Ioannidis's review (2013) with the evocative title '*Golfo: A mirror of our national trajectory*'. For Ioannidis, Peresiadis's play is a play *about* the nation and its history; it speaks about the past and in doing so, it affects our conceptions of the present. Ioannidis's response to *Golfo* was not unique; indeed, the production enjoyed wide critical appraisal and audiences' enthusiastic response as it was read as a 'triumphant moment of indigenous expression of cultural independence, a monument of national pride.' (Pipinia and Dimitriadis 2016: 142) Such responses capture what Erin Hurley has described as 'national affection', the ways in which a performance 'may identify *with* the nation [...] without identifying as national.' (2011: 29). Pipinia and Dimitriadis find the national affection restricting and problematic as they argue that the production failed to offer a meaningful critique of

the nation's history. Notwithstanding what the two scholars describe as 'an outdated romanticism' and a 'desperate sense of national pride' (2016: 142) underpinning the work, I want to propose that the production's confrontation with the past paved the way for an approach to the present, imagined and perceived from a future vantage point. The performance's last moments offered a complex and multilayered image of that disjointed temporality.

When the two elderly actors meet again, Golfo has already taken the poison and she cannot recognize her lover. When she finally realises that the man is Tasos, she asks him to run and bring help to save her. The last image of *Golfo* – in complete opposition to the stillness of the trapped characters who have nowhere to go at the end of *The Backyard of Miracles* – is of an elderly man running (and in Epidaurus, running up the stairs) to change the lovers' destiny. Apart from defying resolution for the drama, the vulnerability and futility of this action points to the futility of obsessing with changing the past in order to imagine a future. This is not to suggest an a-historical perspective on the nation but a shift in perspectives on the nation, beyond narratives of survival and endurance.

Joseph Roach, drawing on the work of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, maintains that performance 'stands in for an elusive entity that is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace.' (1996:3) By casting three generations of actors in *Golfo*, Karathanos did not present an image of continuity from past to present but instead challenged perspectives on authenticity and representation as none of the actors ever became the lover/metaphor for the nation. In doing so, the 2013 production of *Golfo* both 'embodied' and 'replaced' an absence – what has been imagined and described as the modern Greek nation.¹⁶

Conclusion: What makes our motherland?

¹⁶ On the topic, See Vangelis Calotychos (2004) *Modern Greece: A Cultural Poetics* and Stathis Gourgouris (1996) *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece*.

The title of the National theatre's two-year long season was borrowed from Ioannis Polemis's (1862-1924) nineteenth-century, pastoral poem of the same title; a naïve and romantic ode to Greece that for years was included in primary school books. Polemis's poem is comprised of a series of questions of what is the motherland, listing various elements of the often-celebrated Greek landscape (the mountains, the beaches, the islands, the sunshine). Thus, *Τι εἶν' ἡ πατρίδα μας* mobilizes 'the recurrent metaphor of the landscape as the inscape of national identity.' (Bhabha, 1990: 295) The poem concludes with an exclamation that 'all that is our motherland' as well as 'something that we hold in our hearts, shining like a ray of light'; this strong affective attachment to the land, the *topos* and the immaterial sentiment of love for the nation translates in a strong patriotic feeling captured in the poem's last sentence 'Onwards, friends!'¹⁷

Polemis's poem, written in a time of transition as the modern Greek nation-state was being established in the second half of the nineteenth century, captures a nationalist sentiment, was a rather paradoxical choice of a title for that theatre season, particularly if the intention was to highlight the National Theatre's aim to critique definitions and performances of Greek national identity. This choice of title attests to the persistence of a particular role for the main theatre institution of the country: it reaffirms the National Theatre's role as guarantor of theatrical tradition and national continuity. Hence, and despite the wider conversation and arguments about innovation and new progressive attitudes emerging at the National Theatre

¹⁷ This verse could also be translated as 'onwards, children', in the same way that the word 'enfants' is used in the French National Anthem, connoting both camaraderie and the fact that all national subjects can be seen as 'children' of the nation. *Τί εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα μας; Μὴν εἶν' οἱ κάμποι;/ Μὴν εἶναι τ' ἄσπαρτα ψηλὰ βουνά;/ Μὴν εἶναι ὁ ἥλιος της, ποὺ χρυσολάμπει;/ Μὴν εἶναι τ' ἄστρα της τὰ φωτεινά;/ Μὴν εἶναι κάθε της ρηχὸ ἀκρογιάλι/ καὶ κάθε χώρα της μὲ τὰ χωριά;/ κάθε νησάκι της ποὺ ἀχνὰ προβάλλει,/ κάθε της θάλασσα, κάθε στεριά;/ Μὴν εἶναι τάχατε τὰ ἐρειπωμένα/ ἀρχαία μνημεῖα της χρυσὴ στολή,/ ποὺ ἡ τέχνη ἐφόρεσε καὶ τὸ καθένα/μία δόξα ἀθάνατη ἀντιλαλεῖ;/ Ὅλα πατρίδα μας! Κι αὐτὰ κι ἐκεῖνα,/καὶ κάτι ποῦ ἔχουμε μὲς τὴν καρδιά/ καὶ λάμπει ἀθώρητο σὰν ἥλιου ἀχτίνα/ καὶ κρᾶζει μέσα μας: Ἐμπρὸς παιδιά!*

under Houvardas's artistic direction, the theatre's role in the wider theatre ecology remained largely conservative.

Polemis's poem is also deeply nostalgic. In the introduction to *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia is 'an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals.' (2001: xiv) Could it be argued that the repertoire of the National Theatre during those two years of the crisis – a time of upheaval – was underpinned by such nostalgia, a longing to return to a time now past? In performances like the revival/adaptation of *Golfo*, mobilizing such nostalgia could potentially offer a way of constructing (at least momentarily, for the duration of the performances) a community of remembering together what is now lost; in short, it could imagine that the nation still exists.

Tempting though it is to argue that nostalgia is the constitutive feature of 'what makes our motherland?', offering audiences a temporary respite from the crisis, I would argue that the aesthetics of disjointed temporality that the three case studies utilized offer a more complex and nuanced understanding of time, the nation and theatre. When studied together, *Austras*, *The Backyard of Miracles* and *Golfo* offer an interesting and eclectic triptych-kaleidoscope into the past, present and future of contemporary Greece. All three case studies map a changing world: in *Golfo* and *The Backyard of Miracles*, the innocent and pure shepherds and working classes are defeated by the new forces of history. *Austras* does not offer such a romanticized perspective on everyday people but instead, by means of a caricature-like depiction of the characters, the play demonstrates how a perverse obsession with the past may contaminate the present.

Kruger has shown that the rise of the national theatres in 19th century Europe coincides with demands for legitimate political representation of the people: 'the idea [...] of summoning a representative audience that will in turn recognize itself as nation onstage, offers a compelling if ambiguous image of national unity.' (1992: 1) The three

case studies engage with this notion of 'national unity' by interpellating audiences as national citizenry, as the people: in the direct address/chorus songs of *Austras*, in the face to face encounter of characters and audiences in *The Backyard of Miracles* and in the final moments of *Golfo* when the elderly actor runs among the audience, the boundaries between stage and auditorium become porous. During those moments, 'our motherland' is nothing more or less than the assembly of people acting and watching – in a time present the time past. Thus, this image of the nation is always temporary, fluid and processual, involving only those who have not been excluded from the nation and its stories.

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