



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

POWERLESSNESS AS POTENTIALITY

Gigi Argyropoulou on artistic self-organisation in times of crisis, the micro-physics of power in theatre occupations, and how performance can learn from children. An interview by Eve Katsouraki and Georg Döcker.

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In the interview that follows, myself (Eve Katsouraki) and Georg Döcker had in mind one central question from which a number of co-related issues emerged. This question concerned the forms of performance-making available to us today that can claim to possibly oppose ongoing crises in our society in ways that might make viable the realisation of radically democratic goals. On that basis, we talked to curator, theorist and performance-maker Gigi Argyropoulou about her insights from her involvement with the Embros theatre occupation in Athens in 2011, and, more recently, the initiative Eight (Το Οχτώ)—two processes of material, political, and institutional expression that investigate the creative potential inherent in social relations of a communal performance-making, notably as resistance to neoliberal imposition. In deepening and extending democratic relations as part of performance-making itself, what begins to emerge are not only new methods and practices, but a more pressing objective: what theatre as an institution should look like, what conceptual resources would be required, and how we could negotiate the complexities that inevitably emerge from resorting to more participatory democratic practices. In searching for a more democratic theatre, within the purview of a model of creative expression and institutional critique, we also often stumble at who and how one makes artistic and political decisions in such cultural, artistic settings?

For thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy (1991), as well as Jacques Derrida and John Caputo (1997, 106–8), there is always a degree of danger to the idea of the “community,” in that it tends to express collectivity as a form that, although shared, can often be static, homogenous, and reluctant to internal criticism of its power relations. In this interview, we explore this problematic more closely through the processes of creating theatre *communally* while also searching for an alternative to the language of the “community” with which to create a radically democratic space for theatre making. A useful suggestion in this respect can be found, for instance, in the work of radical economist Massimo de Angelis who prefers to talk about the ideas of “commons” as opposed to community, commons comprising social spheres of life rather than cultural homogeneity or shared identity; their unifying objective is to “provide various degrees of protection from the market” (2007, 145). The commons therefore denote a shared interest in defending and producing a set of common resources which in theatre making becomes the basis, potentially, of setting democratic processes of creative and social relationships. This offers the prospect of political theatre enacting a community as “commons,” to borrow from Nancy, of “consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing” (1991, 40) which seems to be what Argyropoulou discusses when untangling the dynamics of creating collectively in a cohabited public space.

The philosophical nature of *decision*, as explained by Derrida (1988, 166) is at the core of the theatre projects that Argyropoulou partakes in: decision, not in terms of a stylistic or aesthetic choice, but in terms of who decides what, and how, which as a process of determination is also always the result of undecidability too. Undecidability is what causes these decisions to be made in the first place. For this reason, Derrida locates a paradox at the heart of every decision. A decision releases a potentially interminable deliberation while putting an end to this deliberation at the very same time. This is why Søren Kierkegaard pondered that decisions naturally evoke a degree of “madness” (1987), as the arbitrary nature of decision making presupposes a sense of potentiality that is being conjured as much as it is exhausted in the decision. The collective capacities for decision making in radically democratic theatre practices that we discuss in this interview open up the way to a prospect not immediately felt: that the radical democratization of theatre in Embros and Eight introduces, first of all, a proposition whose key purpose may be one of opposition to the cultural and political system, that is, the local political structures in Greece and their participation in the neoliberal project overall. Yet, it is more than that. Its activation expands into the cultural and political domain the power of a collective which tries to establish—however precariously—self-determined decision-making processes, rather than having their decisions depend on governmental funding, institutions, the market, etc. What is really being expanded, therefore, is the *possibility itself*, the possibility to create, to express, to share, to voice discontent. As Ernesto Laclau reminds us, in this expansion of possibility we find the expansion of democracy (1990, xv).

The interview took place in March 2021, almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this interview does not explicitly attempt to unpack the various implications this pandemic held for the democratic nature of theatrical expression, the unfolding discussion may still offer some answers to the complexities of democracy and radically democratic theatre in the face of a pandemic crisis. (Eve Katsouraki)

EIGHT AND THE COVID CRISIS

Georg Döcker: Gigi, it is the beginning of 2021, a year has gone by since the global outbreak of the novel corona pandemic, and most parts of the world, your home country Greece included, are still struggling to contain the virus as well as the negative effects it has had on public and daily life. As I understand, the pandemic also threatened the existence of EIGHT, a self-organised arts and research space in Athens that you co-founded with peers in 2018. EIGHT received financial support from a crowdfunding initiative entitled "Solidarity 2020" led by Wolfgang Tilman's Between Bridges project; donations to art spaces, of which EIGHT was one, were rewarded with reproductions of posters designed by renowned artists such as Anne Imhof, Jeff Koons, Pierre Huyghe, Mark Leckey, Isa Genzken, and Tilmans himself. How does EIGHT continue to exist in times of the pandemic? Can EIGHT continue to operate despite or with the circumstances of the pandemic (do you have residents?, public events?...)? I am formulating this question in terms of a temporal problem of continuity as I am aware that EIGHT was envisioned as a response to the challenge of collectively maintaining long-term artistic and social activities in the face of the politics of austerity, precarity, and permanent crisis, an issue that has occupied the minds of many in activist, feminist, anarchist and other circles in the past decade.

Gigi Argyropoulou: EIGHT or Το Οχτώ (as it is in Greek) is a collective space in the centre of Athens that was created in an attempt to find a continuity of previous experiments, whether large scale and visible—like the occupations of Embros and Green Park—or more ephemeral and less visible direct activist actions and public gestures. In a sense it seeks to experiment with what might be an intervention here and now responding to the changing cultural and political landscape of Athens. It focuses on creating situations of collective study and research and making space for doing things with others. EIGHT/ Το Οχτώ is situated in the heart of the city on Polytechniou street, opposite the Polytechnic University and the archaeological museum on the border of Exarcheia, a neighbourhood that is currently undergoing radical change. Exarcheia has historically been an anarchist-student area with many squats and an active community. In recent years, it has undergone gentrification and has become part of large-scale regeneration plans for the transformation of the city centre. The recent government has attempted to "clean" the area (from anarchist circles) and in the last year or so closed most squats and solidarity spaces of the neighbourhood while installing a large number of police force. EIGHT/ Το Οχτώ is not an occupied space, but rather a space that is managed collectively and that hosts and initiates discussions, performances, exhibitions, research groups, screenings, social actions, and an artistic residency. Eight is the number of the building on Polytechniou street, and the space was initiated eight years after the economic and social crisis in Greece, at a moment when we had to rethink our tactics and strategies of performing power/powerlessness, as you would say.

Indeed, many of the things we initiated during the last decade started from a place of powerlessness or brokenness. And yet, some of them created public moments of visibility that had a significant effect in the landscape. This brokenness created some powerful moments of resistance that functioned as moments of togetherness that produced cultural alternatives. Nonetheless, they also produced further brokenness. Especially after the end of the occupation of an abandoned café in Green Park in 2017, one of the central parks in Athens, it was difficult to find

a way forward for many of us - personally and collectively. Politically, it was a challenging moment for most initiatives of the so-called solidarity movement that emerged in Athens during the years of the economic crisis. Many initiatives had reached a moment of crisis and stasis that was caused partly by political closures after the debt referendum and an exhaustion after many years of struggle. The Green Park occupation itself required a lot of physical labour and we were under continuous pressure to evacuate. At the same time, most of us were already exhausted after many years of precarity and multiple collective challenges. We didn't know what might be a way forward that could make sense after Green Park, but from this place of powerlessness we decided to start a new space and explore a different model.

Soon after, the pandemic comes, and this forces us to rethink again, even more fundamentally, our practices and the spaces we can use now and in the next years. EIGHT is an independent space dependent upon events and audiences and free donations and it does not receive funding by private or public sources. We had to rethink if it made sense to continue and in what way we might do that and whether this current form—a space in the centre of Athens—made sense in this new landscape. We still have the space, although all recent activities happen online since Greece has had some of the longest (and least effective) lockdowns in Europe.

Döcker: Staying with the financial side of things for another moment, I would like to inquire more generally about the aspects of in-/dependency and re-/distribution in alternative economies of self-declared autonomous spaces. If I understand correctly, EIGHT does not receive or desire funding from governmental funding bodies, and as such, it is in the company of residencies such as Performing Arts Forum in France who claim a correlation between socio-political, artistic, and economic influences. How does EIGHT generally acquire financial resources? What are, so to say, the transactional protocols at EIGHT, and how does the approach of resisting governmental benevolence shape social interaction between everyone involved in the residency? Also, when residents pay for their stay, do they typically apply for funding at state or regional funding bodies in their respective countries so that the space is still indirectly dependent on governmental support?

Argyropoulou: EIGHT is not only a residency space. The residency program ("The city@Eight") is part of the public program, but EIGHT mainly initiates and hosts public events, performances, exhibitions, talks, festivals and other actions. It is interesting to open up these questions of finance and organisation that somehow always come up even if it is decided that there is no monetary exchange in a space. There are always forms of exchange and the question of who supports whom and how is never unrelated to what the space seeks to do.

Now to your questions, we don't have a strong clear protocol. As with previous experiments we form our way as we go—it is a process. Of course there are some clear limits and things we wouldn't do or support, e.g. get involved with institutions we disagree with in terms of their politics and policies, but there is also a grey area that cannot be defined by a protocol and is dependent upon each project and event. We discuss things and we try to make the appropriate decisions together. Deciding to rent a space collectively already puts us in constant dialogues about financial issues

and also our protocols, ethics, boundaries and approach. We know there are grey areas and yet not everything is grey.

There are different forms of funding, institutions, policies, and histories; although to refuse all funding is one position that we have instituted in previous experiments, at EIGHT/ To Οχτώ, we discuss and decide accordingly. We are not against any form of funding, but definitely we don't follow the principle "take the money and run." For example, although EIGHT/ To Οχτώ doesn't receive any funding, we have hosted performances that have received funding from the Ministry of Culture.

We are collaborating and co-curating with HKW in Berlin in one edition of the New Alphabet School on Instituting in Athens in June 2021 with invited speakers Fred Moten and Stefano Harney and the collective ruangrupa. We have a series of research laboratories in preparation and we work with researchers, activists, artists, scientists, lawyers, theorists and groups. For these preparatory events we have received partial support from Goethe Institute. The first research workshop was on "Urban Ecologies" (November-December 2020) focusing on the city of Athens and exploring emergent forms and fragmented histories of instituting that took place before and during the years of crisis in Greece. Thinking through notions of mutating, immunity, and parasitising in relation to the urban environment, the workshop sought to examine the evolving urban ecologies of the city and how they are mapped in the streets of the city.

I would also like to mention that, in the early 2000s, many of us were part of the DIY independent performance scene of Athens where there was no funding, no institutions we could access, no space for the experimental work that we were interested in doing. We had to find our path as we improvised between constraints (e.g., financial, legal, cultural etc., or in other words, between a lack of space, money, and access to media at the time) and, in a sense, we still continue this practice. The cultural landscape changed during these 20 years, although many structural and infrastructural problems remained the same. This process of improvising between constraints becomes a necessity in precarious conditions and in precarious landscapes. With EIGHT/ To Οχτώ we continue in this way and hope to remain at this space of experimentation that can initiate moments that intervene in how reality is constructed. And yet we know it is an improvised and precarious route.

Eve Katsouraki: I would like to look at the current pandemic more closely. We're living in unprecedented times; social distancing being the new motto, tele-meetings, online teaching, working from our homes, while, on the other hand, having cinemas and theatres forced to close, including cafés, pubs, restaurants, gyms, etc. It seems the entire neoliberal infrastructure is somehow being directly undermined by an invisible threat that is aggressively contaminating an already anemic neoliberal economy. Where do you think the familiar interface between arts, experimentation, and social change stands in this new landscape of governing life? How can theatre act as a powerful agent of social justice if theatre itself is being suspended? And what can performance do in a world that is asked to breath behind a surgical mask, in isolation, and with alarmingly growing inequalities between adaptable and unadaptable workforces, the deprived and the privileged, the young and the old, and the list goes on.

Argyropoulou: The pandemic intensified what was already there: social inequality, police brutality, systematic racism, oppression, generalised precarity, no separation between work and life. Yet, during this pandemic, together with unprecedented measures of social distancing and isolation, we have also witnessed the mobilisations in the US after the murder of George Floyd, demonstrations in France against the censorship law, and recently massive mobilisations in Greece, the UK, and other places against police brutality; and I'm only naming a few. So while we experience unprecedented conditions that make life unbearable for many, we also witness new social struggles and structures of solidarity emerging. We definitely need to rethink our ways and methods especially as it seems that in the years to come, the political, social, and economic challenges will intensify.

In her essay "Neofeudalism: The End of Capitalism?" (2020), Jodi Dean identifies a number of characteristics of feudalism in the current condition and argues that perhaps what we experience is a form of neofeudalism that includes parcellated sovereignty, new lords and peasants, hinterlandization and catastrophism. What can theatre do in these conditions and during social distancing? Well, one can only hope that it won't simply continue online, but would rather become self-reflexive and offer new forms that contest the pandemic imaginary, inequalities, entitlement of legality and experiment with new ways of being together. Forms that ephemerally undo or reveal political and social constructs whether this is done through existing artistic practices or new modes of intervention.

Crises, occupations, and collectivity

Döcker: Let's go back in time to the year 2011, when your work crystallised around the activist practice of occupations in times of crisis. In reaction to contexts and events such as the financial crash of 2007/08 and the Arab Spring, within a few months, occupations expanded across the globe. Occupy Wall Street in New York certainly was the most visible and influential camp, but theatre occupations like that of the Teatro Valle in Rome in June 2011 or Embros theatre in Athens in November 2011 were part of the wider movement. Let's consider the particular case of Embros: in your writing, you explain that the theatre was closed in 2007 due to unsustainable debt, then went into the ownership of banks for a short time, before the state took ownership, only to do nothing with the space—the theatre remained closed. Could it be said that Embros was an emblem of the corrosion of artistic infrastructures due to unsustainable neoliberal policy and the capitalist logic of credit, and therefore constituted a prime target for occupation? There is the question of where to occupy: as Mavili Collective, you did not occupy a public square or the ministry of culture, not an operating theatre, but a deserted run-down theatre.

Argyropoulou: The occupation of Embros was both pragmatic and also symbolic—to test what arts can do. The space had been deserted for seven years yet it was also a space we all remembered being active as a theatre and a drama school in the 1990s. Many times during these seven years there were rumours about plans from the state to use it, yet the space remained closed. The occupation attempted to take an abandoned and disused space in order to rethink what theatre could be in the here and now. The occupation took place at a moment when we as cultural workers

were forced to rethink what we can do with what we have, how we exercise our right to the city, and what other paradigms might be available.

This occupation was also a paradigm, an invitation to other groups and collectives to take over the city, its buildings, and places, and reimagine their function in the here and now. Crucially, Embros occupation was not simply an action of cultural critique but a tangible paradigm of organising. The occupation took the form of a twelve-day cultural programme running daily from morning to evening and hosting numerous activities that were devised to respond to the precarious cultural landscape of Greece. Making a collective, unexpected, undefinable space of cultural praxis that was responding to the cultural and political landscape and testing how a theatre might function collectively, practically and imaginatively.

Katsouraki: You decided to occupy Embros in a moment of governmental transition or interregnum, in November 2011 when early elections were agreed upon for May 2012. What was the importance of acting on a temporary instability in state power, and how did you navigate state institutions once a new government was installed? Were you met with repression or ignorance?

Argyropoulou: It was something we were thinking for some time, but we didn't know how to do. The actual timing was partly accidental, but happened at a moment when the whole society was activated. We didn't know what would happen and whether the police would close us down after a couple of days. We had legal advice beforehand, and we sought to create a different form of occupation—open to all, visible, resisting categorisation, also as a space of experimentation, of hybridity, of unexpected encounters and actions that intervened in the cultural landscape. Embros drew large and diverse audiences and became a positive “example” of responding to the crisis in local and European press and media. So the state tolerated it for some time. But after the governmental change the following year, things intensified. The centre-right government tried to close all self-organised spaces in Greece, branding them as centres of illegality—Embros was one of them. Therefore, in the autumn of 2012 the state attempted to evacuate it in order to privatise it and then another struggle started.

Döcker: The occupation of Embros was, as you once put it, “a public consideration of what theatre can do in times of crisis” (PhD, 2015, 187). I would like to talk a bit more about the meanings of “crisis” in this context. In the years of the 2007/08 financial crash and Occupy, a relation unfolded between crisis government—governing in a crisis as much as governing with a crisis as an instrument of power—and occupation as a mode of living under and despite the conditions of crisis. How would you analyse this particular coming together of mechanisms of power and resistance through a crisis? It seems to me that this constellation is not least a fight about different claims of necessity: Dario Gentili (2013) and others have analysed neoliberal crisis management as the production of necessity or the fiction of a lack of alternatives, whereas occupations insisted on the necessity of spaces for nurturing social and artistic life, the necessity of reproduction, care, etc. Two claims of necessity, which are at the same time two claims of existence and survival.

Argyropoulou: For me, the tension that you refer to was very clear in the summer of 2015, after the debt referendum. During these years of crisis, Greece functioned as a laboratory of new social

practices as over 43% of citizens took part in some form of self-organised or solidarity initiative—the basis of society was mobilised. These widespread mobilisations led to the election of Syriza in January 2015. Yet, after the debt referendum, and after further compromises with new sets of severe austerity measures, the powerlessness of such alternatives for effecting wider structures became obvious. However, even if such initiatives failed to provide sustainable counter powers, they still offered methods, practices, and ways of organising in the social that are common tools these days.

Katsouraki: We mentioned that Embros was part of the occupation movement. Some of the techniques for creating work in space mirrored the sharing of the occupied space by the inhabitants as a commune. I'm aware that in your academic writings you identified a failure in this dynamic. You have identified the failure you experienced in living and working together in the mode of a General Assembly. Is this a pessimistic outcome and what needs to change to find new, more democratic ways of creating artistic works that are engaged, relevant and, perhaps, above all, capable of shifting power relations?

Argyropoulou: Firstly, let me clarify a few things. Mavili was a collective that initiated the occupation and the public programme. And it was in collaboration with other collectives, local inhabitants and groups that the space and its public programme continued to run for a year. In the autumn of 2012, after repeated threats by the police and the state, Mavili refused to hand over the keys and made a call to groups of the city to oppose the police together. This led to a change in its mode of organisation as the space started to operate with an open-to-all-assembly. It was an assembly with very diverse attendees, and that was fruitful at first, but very soon became a highly contested space.

With the Embros occupation, Mavili tried to create a different model of occupation that didn't necessarily follow the rules of the anarchist squat that was dominant in Greece since the 1980s and sought to operate between cultural and political practice. It tried to combine experimental practices with activism (and that was not only the case for Embros, but for a series of direct actions in the following years). We tried to think content and form together, as we were trying to think of an intervention and how it might be effective. At least in Greece, but I think elsewhere too, political activism, art, and performance tends to assume expected forms, linked for instance with dramatic/narrative gestures, politicised text-based theatre pieces following representational aesthetics, and so on. As we were coming from experimental performance and active in the DIY art scene of Greece in the early 2000s, we were more interested in what Embros can offer as a space of experimentation, both culturally and politically. The initial activation program focused on experimental forms of art and performance and resisted curating a programme around a theme, but rather created critical structures that others could inhabit in response to the cultural landscape of Greece. For this initial period of the first year, Embros remained uncategorised between the cultural and the political and, in a sense, fled from established sedimented practices and power relations.

After clashes with the police, the space started to operate with open assemblies and gradually transformed as it experienced new challenges—seeking to find ways to operate through open

participation amidst different agendas, needs, and desires. Initially this difficult exercise of social pedagogy was fruitful, but soon after, Embros became a very contested space as there were many inconsolable ideas and desires for the operation and organisation of the space. Power relations and hierarchies are always present even in so-called democratic processes such as an open assembly setting. In the same way, the assembly of Embros became a space of collusion and antagonism. For me, this is not a pessimistic outcome; when you try to engage in an intervention into how things are formed and performed culturally, socially, and politically, you cannot expect happy endings (for example, the lack of sustainability or the disappearance of a space or a project is not simply a negative outcome but rather signifies a different process: an attempt to consider continuity as a constellation that exceeds the constraints of a space or a project). Seeking to undo sedimented practices and ways of doing makes a space vulnerable as it seeks to intervene between oppositional established agendas and processes. Disappearance, disorder, breaks, dissensus are all necessary processes and all come with individual, distinctive agendas. The experience of Embros definitely challenged romanticised ideas about the power of performance/art practice when intervening in the social. "Making with" others—that are unlike us and seeking to create a context—is never a route we can understand with existing neoliberal narratives of producing.

Katsouraki: Could you elaborate on the dynamics of powerlessness that you seem to indicate as being clearly in operation at the Embros project? How, for example, did Embros as a shared space manage to act as a form of "performing resistance" despite its members facing the various power relations within the collective you described? What were these power relations like in actual day-to-day creative exchange and co-creation?

Argyropoulou: Embros emerged from powerlessness (or "impotentiality," as I have written elsewhere), but then this powerlessness seemed to produce too much of a potential as it opened new ways of doing (e.g. organising, being together, making). During the initial activation programme in Embros, every evening cultural workers, architects, anarchists, professors, established artists, immigrants, inhabitants, gallery owners, and marginalised groups co-existed in the space as the space resisted categorisation. The space indeed ephemerally became a meeting place for all these diverse groups that would often occupy diverse city areas and spaces.

Mavili promised from the beginning that, after the twelve-day programme, on the last day of the occupation we will decide collectively about the future of this space through an open assembly. A series of assemblies followed in a full theatre and demonstrated the importance of the space, yet also revealed inconsolable imaginings for its future. What remained common was the desire to continue, and so we did for a year, seeking to keep the space uncategorised. We achieved this by constantly shifting structures and avoiding the establishment of patterns, offering instead space to diverse groups and collectives until the next autumn, when the state demanded to evacuate the building in order to privatise it. This threat created different positions within the collective on what might be the best way forward. Oppose the police and continue the struggle or abandon this space and continue what we did with Embros elsewhere. I wouldn't call this power relations though—it was more of a complex experiment that had an impact on the local scene and took place at a very challenging moment politically.

Katsouraki: In your writings, but also with your practice, you engage a lot with collective working practices. Could you describe these practices and give us a sense of how a more collective approach has influenced your projects, the themes you have chosen to explore, as well as your critical thinking?

Argyropoulou: Personally, my engagement with different forms of “being with” others undoubtedly formed my thinking in work and life. In the early 2000s I was part of a performance collective that attempted to make devised/post-dramatic experimental work against a conservative and exclusive cultural landscape. Unable to access established institutions, some of us, back then, started forming collectives and experimenting with ways of working collaboratively in unexpected DIY sites. In 2010, as many of us in Greece, I was part of a series of collectives and initiatives, amongst others, the Institute of Live Arts Research, an initiative that sought to create new dialogues between theory and practice. In addition, I was part of the Mavili Collective and Embros that also led to other collective formations such as Kolektiva Omonia, later Green Park and EIGHT. All these were diverse forms of collective response to the here and now; seeking to think of existing and potential practices together and respond to cultural, institutional, and political strictures.

I guess this journey reflects how such practices effected the range of my own practice as a performance maker interested in spatial interventions to then moving into political and social practices and, most recently, to forms of curating and making. So the way we work at EIGHT influenced by such collective journeys is really to experiment with structures of co-existence and modes of being together—curating as assembling—that create conditions open to elaboration, and initiate processes that remain incomplete and thus shared.

Döcker: In activist and scholarly reflections on what was soon termed the post-Occupy condition, it was highlighted that artists started to function as organisers or that the new definition of the artist was that of the organiser (MTL 2013; McKee 2017). In turn, Bojana Kunst, in a recent essay on the corona pandemic (“Beyond the time of the right care”), noted that artists had sort of become care workers in recent years. How do you perceive these shifts in the understanding of the artist and their artistic and social role?

Argyropoulou: I guess the underlining question is how do we respond to the challenges around us and how are they relevant to what we do? For example, in 2010, many of us couldn’t imagine continuing to make work in the same way, but we had to rethink our practice. Embros was one thing that emerged at the time as a response to this—in which we were rather organisers, as Yates McKee suggests. However, such questions are both entangled with local histories and changes in what is perceived as art in institutional agendas—and that can go both ways. For example, socially engaged/relational practices that emerged as a form of responding to conditions of late capitalism since the 1990s, many times have been recuperated by governmental agendas to increase the social impact of the arts. They were thus utilised in urban regeneration projects and participatory projects that perform citizens’ involvement.

Katsouraki: Could we explore the notion of brokenness in your work and, more broadly, in the projects you have been involved with? I’m thinking of Embros, but also Green Park and the recent organisation EIGHT. For the Hegelian philosopher Gillian Rose, brokenness necessitates a speculative space in which

negotiation is replaced with the failure of two opposites to transform one another, resulting in a mediating 'third' term—what Rose calls, 'the broken middle' (1992, xi). Your recurrent confrontation with brokenness and failure seems to produce precisely this speculative space in which something or someone can "come to a changed relation." It is a dynamic that brings about a form of recognition so that something is understood through one's continuous engagement with and negotiation of the points of contradiction in pursuit of what Rose describes as 'a good enough justice' (1995, 116). Could you relate your creative work to this possibility? Perhaps we could say that you're not looking to resolve what still remains a problem in our culture, society, economy, and so on. Perhaps what you seek to find are ways to relate differently to the condition of loss and register not individual opposing strategies to socio-economic and cultural regimes, but to the nature of opposition itself so that a deeper understanding can be attained as a way of life, one that is characterised by human struggle and failing.

Argyropoulou: This is a very interesting elaboration! My understanding is that in the refusal to fix something there is also the refusal of functionality or of a correct way of doing, and an acknowledgement that not everything is always fixable or that one has the capacities to fix it. As Jack Halberstam writes in the introduction of the *Undercommons* by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, what if we "do not seek to fix what has been broken, then what? How do we re-solve to live with brokenness, with being broke, which is also what Moten and Harney call 'debt'" (2015). Embros, Green Park, and EIGHT operated from brokenness and in brokenness as most of us were living in multiple states of brokenness. In a sense, these projects indeed became a speculative space in the sense that you outlined. They produced changed relations which led to other broken forms, or perhaps elaborations of brokenness.

In 2016, a group of us from Green Park initiated a DIY Performance Biennial with the title "No Future," attempting to occupy the idea of the biennial and think the potential of such self-organised and broken forms of recent years. "No Future" as a provocative statement from a place of impotentiality, yet also as method; a refusal to a futurity and the hope of betterment. The event sought to analyse forms of self-organisation and structures of solidarity that emerged in Greece when our relationship with the future (e.g., a canonical, imagined future) was disturbed and when we had to engage with the "here and now." What do you do with a broken "here and now"? What forms of practice might emerge if you do not hope things will improve?

The event started from the occupied space of Green Park and the nearby park of Pedion tou Areos and travelled via boat to the island of Cythera, proposing the method of "self-curating" as assembling. Prior to the public programme, every day participants met and organised the day, sharing the labour of making things possible. During this unusual journey from an occupied space to a public park to a boat and various locations on an island together with diverse attendees, we explored once again this brokenness in the here and now. As Lauren Berlant beautifully put it, "how to be in the space of broken form and nonetheless understand that as you proceed transformation proceeds" (2017).

Outlooks

Döcker: Focusing on the immediate present and future, what do you think are the new challenges of artistic-activist resistance? Police in many countries seems determined to affirm what Foucault, the Invisible Committee, and others claimed about their prime function, which is not to execute the law, but to guarantee a contingent state of normality at all costs, a normality of crisis, of lawlessness. At the same time, there is a plethora of diagnoses that assert a new state of generalised civil war (Berardi 2022; Steyerl 2017, et al.). Where do you see theatre and performance position themselves in all this, or how do you see activist strands of theatre and performance intervene in such violent conflicts, violent in terms of bodies on the streets, but also in terms of discourse?

Argyropoulou: The question of resistance and what forms it might take is very crucial especially within the context of the pandemic. In many places, we have witnessed the failure of governments to properly act in response to the pandemic as well as the constant introduction of new sets of measures that feel absurd, random, and oppressive. These measures build a new imaginary of living that we need to reflect and act upon.

This leaves a lot of space for theatre and performance to both directly engage with new struggles and to offer structures to reflect on this new imaginary of life, the limits of resistance of what constituted a liveable life. Thinking of activist practice I feel there is a lot of potentiality to create moments that, as Agamben argued, “reveal the anomy of power” (2013). At the same time, at least for us in Greece, there is a need to reflect on the multiple methods and practices of the last decade and see how they might inform current processes. As I mentioned, currently at EIGHT we have a series of research workshops that seek to reflect on cultural/activist practices of the last ten years in Greece and identify areas of intervention in the here and now.

Katsouraki: Your interest in experimental performance seems to always return to how to form new political imaginaries. It seems to me that you have been trying to achieve this goal by engaging with participatory and collaborative performance practices and, most recently, by curatorial projects that encourage engagement with children. In your essay “Haunting dreams of a wild Future: or what children have to teach us about politics,” (2018) you talk about the type of methods children bring into contemporary performance making. You argue that performance “needs” children, and you develop a more hopeful analysis of what to come in our political and social landscapes. Could you tell us what led you towards this direction? How do children, performance, and radical imaginaries interconnect, and what are the ethics and politics of engaging children in experimental performance as a pole for change? I’m aware that you also draw on the modern Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis to sketch out a more radical vision of performance. Could you discuss this combination and tell us why looking at children for rethinking experimental political practice? And with this we’ll conclude this interview which has been a real pleasure.

Argyropoulou: I am glad you find some hopefulness in this article. Turning to children and performance was a different way to think through a politically bleak moment in the time after the debt referendum in Greece. Turning to children was a way to disengage with the immediate

present and reflect on how imaginaries are formed. What interests me in particular in children's doings and performance is the potential of a radical undoing of our familiar ways of being, instances that challenge what is considered as acceptable, expected, canonical. I was mainly looking at breaks, mis-performances, accidents when structure is failing and children make present other possibilities of and in the here and now. Children produce a wider questioning of how reality is constructed or, in Castoriadis terms, how social imaginaries are formed and operate. As we watch children in wild reconfigurations on stage in repeated moments of failure to perform, I argue that we reflect on our own constructs, methods of making sense, and embodied patterns of compliance to what is there. We also need to reflect on how we work with children, how this process is fruitful for them as it is for us.

But to your question: in performance making and children and the work of Castoriadis radical imaginaries meet in some inoperative everyday moments that ephemerally flee from social constructs, from what is considered canonical and performs an undoing. Inoperative moments that somehow become visible and take the centre temporarily and ask what we are doing and what we should be doing. What are the horizons of expectation that form the here and now? What is the social imaginary we actually form through repeated embodied patterns? In such fleeting moments, I see potential for performance to create "instances of undoing" that intervene into the now through the questioning of long-standing social imaginaries and internalised operations of power. And perhaps through repeated questionings of existing living structures, and through diverse instances of undoing of familiar structures, new paths might open up that offer other possible imaginaries and are practiced otherwise to the here and now.

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Biography

Gigi Argyropoulou is a researcher, dramaturg, theorist, and curator working in the fields of performance and cultural practice and based in Athens and London. Gigi has initiated and organized public programs, interventions, performances, conferences, festival, exhibitions and cultural projects both inside and outside institutions. She is a founding member of EIGHT - critical institute for arts and politics (2019), Green Park (2015), Mavili Collective (2010), Institute for Live Arts Research (2010) and F2/Mkultra (2002). As a member of Mavili and other collectives Gigi co-initiated/organised occupations, interventions, programmes and cultural critique actions during the crisis. Gigi received the Dwight Conquergood Award for her work in 2017 and the Routledge Prize (PSi18) in 2012. She holds a PhD from Roehampton University focused on space, politics and performance. She has taught at undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Gigi publishes regularly in journals, books and magazines and is editor (with H. Vourloumis) of the special issue of Performance Research "On Institutions." She is a member of the curatorial and editorial board of HKW's 'New Alphabet School' and co-curating the upcoming edition "On Instituting." Currently she is completing her first monograph.

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