

## THE "EPHEBE'S SONG"<sup>1</sup>: CONSTRUCTING CIVIC IDENTITY AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN ADOLESCENCE THROUGH STAGING GREEK DRAMA

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**Abstract:** The idea of discussing political, ethical and social issues and civil responsibilities via theatre is most welcomed when being achieved through staged theatre productions and drama education programs. The article presents a series of staged plays, under my direction and supervision, as case studies of the process of "theatre for adolescence". The plays are Vivid Film/inspired by Persians, Seven upon Thebes by Aeschylus and Ajax by Sophocles, Burying your brother in the pavement, inspired by the play by Jack Thorne, Antigone by Sophocles, and The Birds and The Clouds by Aristophanes. This article presents a combination of theatre practices, which aim to create a dynamic dialogue with participatory audiences in order to construct civil identity. This theatrical process has three axes: 1) Staging of Greek drama with professional actors for adolescent audiences. Re-inventing the ethics and the style of the play; 2) Delivering a professional performance in the actual classroom. A "handmade" theatre experience with contemporary aesthetics; 3) Creating a drama/education program (before and after the theatre production) where the audience can actively participate and discuss the topics of the staged play through theatre practices.

**Keywords:** Theatre Practices, Theatre for adolescents, civil identity

**Resumo:** A idéia de discutir questões políticas, éticas e sociais e responsabilidades civis por meio do teatro é mais bem-vinda quando ocorre através de produções teatrais encenadas e programas de educação de teatro. O artigo apresenta uma série de peças encenadas, sob a minha direção e supervisão, como estudos de caso do processo de "teatro para adolescentes". As peças são Vivid Film / inspirado por Os persas e Sete contra Tebas, de Ésquilo, e Ajax, de Sófocles, Enterrando o seu irmão no pavimento, inspirado no jogo de Jack Thorne, Antígona, de Sófocles, e os Pássaros e as Nuvens de Aristófanes. Este artigo apresenta uma combinação de práticas de teatro, cujo objetivo é criar um diálogo dinâmico com audiências participativas a fim de construir uma identidade civil. Este processo teatral tem três eixos: 1) A encenação do drama grego com atores profissionais para o público jovem. Re-invenção da ética e do estilo do jogo; 2) Realizando uma performance profissional na sala de aula real. Uma experiência de teatro "handmade" com a estética contemporânea; 3) Criação de um programa de teatro / educação (antes e depois da produção de teatro), em que o público possa participar ativamente e possa discutir os temas da peça encenada por meio de práticas de teatro.

**Palavras-chave:** Práticas de teatro, Teatro para adolescentes, identidade civil

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<sup>1</sup>The title is inspired by the term as described in the article: John J. Winkler, "The Ephebes' Song: Tragoidia and Polis Representations", No.11(Summer, 1985), University of Californian Press, pp. 26-62.

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She is a director in professional theatre performances for adolescence audiences since 2009 in theatre venues and inside Secondary Schools such as Vivid Film/ After the foam (devised), Jack Thorne's Burying your brother in the pavement, Aristophanes The birds, Shakespeare Midsummer Night's Dream, Frank Wedekind X-Press Spring, Goethe Faust, Sophocles Antigone, Aristophanes The clouds, Public signal (a walking performance based on Pericles Funeral Oration). Visiting professor in: "Theatre for Education" in Theatre Studies Dpt, University of Patras, Greece. In "Puppetry theatre dramaturgy" in Pri-primary Education Dpt, Pedagogic Universities Of Volos and Athens, Greece (2004-2013). Has taught drama and theatre education in Primary schools, Athens Art High school and professional drama schools since 1993 as well as in a series of workshops for the Hellenic Theatre/ Drama Education Network/ Tnet, Greece.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the John J. Winkler article that inspired the title of this text, the reference to the “ephebe’s song” refers to the participation of adolescent boys in the choruses of the ancient tragedies, as staged in the theatre of Dionysus in Athens. According to his research:

our evidence about tragic performance contains reasonably strong indications that the chorus members were ephebes. If true, this would allow us to sense a complex and finely controlled tension between role and role player, for the ephebes are cast in the most ‘disciplined’ part of the tragedy- disciplined in the exacting demands of unison movement, subordinated to the more prominent actors, and characterized as social dependents (women, slaves, old men)- while the actors, who are no longer ephebes, reform a tale showing the risk, the misfortunes, and sometime the glory of ephebic experience.



Aristophanes *The Birds* performed in the main Square of Patras, 2012

## II. THEATRE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

“Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”

George Bernard Shaw

During adolescence, a young person attempts for the first time to understand and invent his/ her identity, and define a relationship with the environment and the world. This process of self-awareness that starts in adolescence never ends, but adolescence presents a very urgent demand for a person to adjust to his/her place in the broader adult world. In order to “invent” what is needed, a young person needs to collect, experience, absorb and reject a series of ideas, knowledge and experience, an opportunity that, unfortunately, official institutions only provide in very small quantities. Adolescents are treated as being closer to children, who therefore need special attention and supervision, and whose experience of reality needs to be monitored or beautified, and not as adults, where truth, brevity and boldness would be required. The whole educational, ethical and parental system does not enhance the skills required in order for youth to form an opinion; it prefers to offer piles of information instead of the capacity to analyze, be critical, and have an opinion.

The model of today’s’ education differs from the ideas of Greek classical ethics. It creates productive units instead of unique civilians.

This is where art, theatre in particular, can definitely play an intrinsic role, since it can introduce, or even ‘sneak in’ the ideas and experiences that adolescents need, in a creative way that is also subtle and pedagogically appropriate. In what follows I will describe my approach to “Theatre for Adolescents” as connected with texts and ethical questions drawn from Ancient Greek classical texts. I offer the combination of theatrical exposure, creative adaptation, contemporary political contexts, and classical ethics and texts that I have developed in the last decade as a suggestion for how young people can be guided through their adolescent investigations in order to become young adults, rather than remaining child-like in their political and social self-awareness.

### **III. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE TERM “THEATRE FOR ADOLESCENTS”?**

Theatre for adolescent audiences has become a tendency in Greece in the past 10 years. There have been different definitions of what theatre for adolescents is: to some, it means a theatrical text, a play, performed by teenagers attended by an audience of teenagers. To others it refers only to texts that include adolescent problems, performed by professional actors, but with a specific orientation to youth-related topics of today. In my definition of “theatre for adolescence” I understand that theatre should aim to stage generative, foundational, archetypical and ethical questions: topics that arise when you are in adolescence and never leave your mind and soul, they are never answered. When you first conceive these questions, then you are in the process to become an adult. Of course some people never connect their adolescent questions to ethics, moral dilemmas, existential questions; or they never care about it, they push it to the back of their mind and soul and when loss, poverty, rejection, failure or luck comes they are impotent to react. They never grow in their mind and soul.

In my opinion, this is what theatre for adolescent audiences should aim to do: to create thoughts and address subjects and questions that might remain unanswered, but whose

explicit presentation is worth the time and trouble, in the tender years of growing up<sup>3</sup>. By stating important and serious questions, a fifteen- year- old encounters, explores, and through participating in a creative dialogue through theatre tasks, understands the human condition as a “condition of wondering”. The young participants or audiences understand that they are not alone in their private thinking, but, on the contrary, they can feel warmth and solidarity to what is important in life, rather than what seems basic or urgent to them at the time.

#### IV. ARCHETYPICAL QUESTIONS AND GENERIC TOPICS

In my approach to theatre for adolescents, I adapted existing plays and texts, and also developed educational projects and materials that accompany the performance. In one play, *Vivid film/After the foam* (devised 2008), I used ancient plays as working material. For *Respect/ Burying your brother in the pavement*, I used contemporary theatre plays inspired by topics of ancient drama, such as the play by Jack Thorne (2009). More recently, I have adapted texts of Classical Greek drama by adding contemporary language and topics, live music, and a lively staging. The trilogy in this series includes: Aristophanes’ *The Birds: A rock performance for young adults* (2010), Sophocles’ *Antigone: The right to my own opinion* (2014) and Aristophanes’ *The Clouds: In need to want to know* (in progress, 2016).

The ancient texts focus on significant subjects, ideas, dilemmas, politics, and create social awareness on “how to live your life” instead of presenting case studies of people’s stories on “how he/ she lived his/her life”. The dramaturgical and staging approach of these plays and their focus on foundational issues, creates a theatre where people connect to the content and ideas, rather than the dramatic personae or the plot. This can give an enormous drive for someone to think about his/her place in the world, while keeping a critical distance to all that is happening on stage, instead of identifying with the characters of the play; creating a platform of dialogue, co-intentional thinking and the sharing of deeper thought and feelings.

This is the reason that in the last 8 years of my career as a director of youth theatre productions designed for 13-18 year old audiences, I have focused on topics that relate to questions such as: who is my friend, how can I love, who do I want to be like, what does bravery mean today, why be a hero, what is success, what about death, what about loss, where do I want to live, what do I want to learn, what is my role in society, do I have an ethical code, do I need one...and basically...who am I?

#### V. THEATRE “WITHIN THE WALLS”/ PERFORMING AT SCHOOL

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<sup>3</sup>For various terms see in Greek Τζωρτζίνα Κακουδάκη «Εφηβικό θέατρο: Μια νέα πρόκληση στις συνήθειες των καιρών», εκδ. *Επίλογος* 2014, Αθήνα, σελ. 153-162 (Georgina Kakoudaki "theater for teens; a new challenge for the habits of our times", publ. *Epilogos* 2014, Athens, page 153-162)

The staging idea, in all the theatre productions stated in this paper, was to leave the theatre stage and approach the school environment, preferably the classroom.<sup>4</sup> We have called this idea “theatre within the walls” having in mind that schools are locked at all times, people, other than the students and teachers of the particular school, need to go under a thorough detection to get permit to go inside the school (and you need a very persuasive reason to get access), and also because sometimes the educational system is very conservative to let new ideas circulate, and resistant to ideas that contradict the official curriculum.

The reason for sneaking into the school, making theatre within the walls, is also because:

-the plays relate to subjects of growing up and figuring out your responsibilities, matters that usually “happen” in the school environment under specific social pressure.

-the selected texts are part of the High School Curriculum<sup>5</sup>.

-the process of theatre at school promotes ideas of solidarity, unity, uniqueness, respect of personal opinion.

-the staging sets a priority of group experience, through the aesthetics of the staging (actors work as an ensemble), but also through the drama education program that demands equal terms to all the spectators.

-the idea of making theatre in the classroom without scenery design, electronic devises and props, give a DIY prospect to what we want to articulate with the students, based on the logic (from the actor to the young theatre spectator) “if I can do it only with my mind, my body and my intention... you can do it as well”.

-the drama education program gives a framework to feel “free” at school: to work with schoolmates in a ground level basis, without stereotypes, without evaluation or censorship, with examples from a fable, that give a security net so that you can talk about yourself, to observe yourself and others from a distance.

## **VI. DRAMA EDUCATION PROGRAMS: A WAY TO BUILD CIVIL AWARENESS**

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<sup>4</sup> The exception was the staging for the play *Burying your brother in the pavement* that was staged in a theatre venue.

<sup>5</sup> Plays that are being taught in public high schools have some better luck, since the teachers feel more secure, within a certain framework connected to the school curriculum. *The Birds* by Aristophanes, being the one of the two plays suggested to be taught in the Ancient language class/translated texts (in 3<sup>rd</sup> year of High School), enabled our performance to reach a number of 140 performances in 1 ½ years time (reaching an audience of appx.12.000 spectators). *Antigone* is being taught in Ancient Greek language class (in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Lyceum), has reached a number (accomplished or scheduled for 2016) of 100+ performances already (in period 2014- until now). *The Clouds* (scheduled for 2016-17) is also a play aiming for the subject of Ancient Greek Language/through translation (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of High school in Cyprus).

Drama education programs are becoming more popular at schools recently, where a lot of teachers have a more diverse education themselves, in matters of theatre education, through workshops delivered by both government and non-government organizations<sup>6</sup>. This happens because they give an alternative for education. They fill in gaps in the curriculum, because they can help students to establish critical thought, growth of sentimental intelligence, empathy and stability in social behavior. Through theatre/drama education programs, students can combine things they already know with subjects that they don't know<sup>7</sup>. It, therefore, creates the potential of cultural cultivation, social awareness and political thought.



Drama education program for Antigone 2015

In her description of the aims of drama education, included in the educational materials for the performance of *Respect/ Burying your brother in the pavement*, Iro Potamou writes:

Through active participation, learning and understanding are enacted and, thus, better absorbed and comprehended. Meaning

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<sup>6</sup> Impressive figures derive from the mobility of certain teachers organizations such as Hellenic Theatre & Drama in Education Network (TENet), [www.theatroedu.gr](http://www.theatroedu.gr) that create numerous workshops and theatre educational programs/projects in various school subjects, giving a boost of creativity in education structures. TEN et is our basic collaborator in the delivery of the theatre education program, created by a team of specialists and led by sociologist/drama pedagogue Iro Potamou.

<sup>7</sup>In this way they also find the methodology to work in School Projects (with different school subjects), which has been established as a requirement for schools the last years by the Ministry of Culture, without methodology workshops for the teachers and/ or the students of how to collaborate in these multitasked activities.

is made through enacting possibilities and trying out options. Safety is provided as the students have an open space to express their thoughts, experiences, and worries, without feeling exposed or threatened. Young people as participants are not told how to think or feel, or which choices are right or wrong, they are not provided with answers. On the contrary, they are encouraged to explore and reflect on questions and make meaning about issues from the personal and social sphere. It is essential for young people to be given the space, the possibility to take risks, support their choices and take responsibility for their actions. By experiencing life through the lens of drama, young people explore both the particularities of human behaviour but also raise questions on identity.<sup>8</sup>

The topics of the plays of Greek Drama are so disturbing, demanding, so urgent, so extremely updated in our confused times, that it is impossible for an audience to remain calm and untouched. The goal is not to give answers, (who has answers anyway?), since all serious dilemmas/ all questions stay, evidently, unanswered in life. But since you start a dialogue about the essentials, even better if it is a dialogue through hating, through sympathy to others because you “walk in their shoes”, that can lead a young person “to make sense” of society, to become a member of it with an active and safe, but also peaceful, uplifting procedure. The benefits, obviously, are numerous and the danger evident: when you think in a clear mind, when you are accepted as equally capable of having an opinion which you are encouraged to share, when taking responsibility of your acts is a virtue, a new era of what democracy means can make the system of today’s political priorities, tremble.

## VII. THE STRUCTURE OF DRAMA EDUCATION PROGRAMS

I developed the drama education programs connected to the plays in collaboration with sociologist/ drama pedagogue Iro Potamoussi. These programs have been designed to work in four different parts. The part “Before” is an introductory level for a teacher to use in class, before the class attends the actual performance. In this state, we want to make a clear connection to the ideas and the conceptual framework of the play. Students are encouraged through drama activities to connect with the content of ancient texts and become familiar with the ideas of antiquity on fundamental matters that our present culture still appreciates.

The second part “Right after” is being delivered by the actors for a 45 minutes session, right after the performance. The audience along with the actors rethinks the dilemmas, the actions, the decisions, the sequences of the dramatic personae of the play and, through a variety of drama education techniques, try to figure out what would happen if

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<sup>8</sup>Potamoussi Iro, “On drama education”, drama/ education pack for the play “Respect/ Burying your brother in the pavement” 2009-10, available at <http://www.georginakakoudaki.org>

someone acted or thought differently, what could have happened in the past that led to the play. This is a procedure, very close to the dramaturgic analysis (aiming to be staged, that gives the actors an idea of when, who, what, how, why of the text), that enables the young audiences to understand texts as documented reality, as the toil of the author to expose society and make meaning out of it.

The third part “After”, is a handbook of topics and subjects that can work in class, inspired by the drama education material delivered after the performance. This is a suggestion of comprehensive long-term drama education programs, that the teacher can spread out into the timetable of his or her class, throughout the school year, and develop activities that reflect or apply to the topics of the theatre play.



Festival for creativity for/ by adolescents/ The Utopia and the Polis 2012

The fourth part “Through the arts”, gives a series of topics and the way that arts can support the students’ ideas and the procedure that a group of students can work with these ideas, in order to participate in a festival organized by our theatre company and be presented in a Spring “Festival for creativity for/by adolescents”. The content of the festival does not strictly apply directly to the topics of the theatre play, but it broadens the way we can be inspired by plays of antiquity<sup>9</sup>.

## VIII. THE PLAYS

There have been four productions (plus one currently in preparation for a premiere in October 2016) that relate to ancient texts. The productions are presented in brief below.

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<sup>9</sup>Realized projects related to this part connected e.g. The Birds with Environmental Politics, Antigone with Family Law, Burying your brother in the pavement with graffiti contest on the motto “Respect/ Reject” etc.



Taken together, they present my vision of how working with ancient materials, and staging theatre for adolescents and drama education programs, can inspire people to create a civic identity and become active citizens.

### **VIII.1. Vivid film/ after the foam<sup>10</sup>, devised performance - About narration/ who**

The performance related to ancient tragedies such as Aeschylus' *The Persians* and *Seven upon Thebes*, Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* and Euripides' *The Suppliant Women*. Through devising and task oriented improvisations we researched the topic of our understanding of the Greek word "andria/ ανδρεία" (connected with terms such as bravery, heroism, valor, manliness, war pride, nationalism, and ethnicity). The outcomes of this improvisation research that derived from the need of the actors to communicate their experience and ongoing process of growing up, were the material for our devised production, that was based but did not make use of the actual ancient texts.

A cast of four male actors (20 to 24 years) delivered the frustration and the deep awareness of what it means to be a young man in contemporary times, where everything is surrounded by fear, loneliness, and a very strong demand for someone to succeed, in order to be part of the male western capitalistic world.



Vivid film 2009

From the actors' view point it was very important to seek how each personal history and story can become important both for his personal growth as a person and as an actor, but also how it can be connected with the universal level; how the actor can use this experience to communicate meaning that is also important and shared with the world around him.

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<sup>10</sup>The performance was presented in a youth festival in Athens Texnopolis, in University audiences in various cities in Greece and Theatre Xora, 2008- 2009. Produced by 4frontal Theatre Group. For more visit <http://4frontal.com/performances/vivid-film>

From the audience's point of view, the important fact was that by watching someone share their personal experience and history, they can widen their field of understanding on what is worth sharing, be encouraged to express their experience and, ultimately feel part of the world.

### VIII.2. Respect, Burying your brother in the pavement by Jack Thorn - About the plot/ when

The plot of this performance<sup>11</sup> (based on a theatre stage instead of schools), related to the myth and some of the generic questions of Antigone. In the play, Tom's brother is dead. This has upset a lot of people but it hasn't upset him. Or, rather, it has upset him, but in ways he can't explain. So it seems like an odd decision to try and bury his brother in the pavement, to try and bury him at the point where he was brutally murdered. As he goes through due process on pavement burial, Tom comes across planning officials, undertakers, police officers, sisters, mothers, estate agents, ghosts. A play about grief, lack of communication, solitude, a play about loss and the way you deal with it.



The plot refers to the dilemma of Antigone, filtered by the new basic structure of western society: the family instead of the Polis. The Polis is dangerous, full of traps, tramps, trash, terror, trembling. The Polis is excavated, there are new installations everywhere, and nothing seems safe out of the house. The ghosts of the past, the fears, dragons and fairies, all remain childish, because you are not a part of the city although you are sixteen. Still, everything will eventually happen, there is no escape from growing up. The best thing in life is to confront whatever we fear and seek what we desire.

<sup>11</sup>The performance was presented in Theatre Xora, 2009- 2010. Produced by Lykofos theatre co. For more visit <http://georginakakoudaki.org/tzak-thorn-rispekt-thavontas-ton-adelfo-sou-sto-pezdromio/>

In Respect/ Burying your brother in the pavement / Cast: Georgos Vouvakis, Konstantinos Moraitis, Athina Berdeka, Marianthi Bairaktari, Costumes/sets: Konstantinos Zamanis Choreography: Patricia Apergi, Music: Stavros Giannouladis

The drama education program that was created for this production was addressed directly to the young people that had watched it, giving prime priority to the plot. Our purpose was for the young audience to feel free and use the suggested activities on their own. The basis of the suggested activities was to gradually enable young people to be actively motivated by the play. Our suggestion was to use the activities in a group of friends, classmates or in any other group context. We suggested activities with gradual difficulty, management-wise, starting with simple games and proceeding to more complex drama activities such as hot seating or forum theatre. The purpose of each activity -from the simpler game to the more complicated improvisation- was for the young participants to realize the importance of working together and of communication (with oneself and others), two of the main factors of social identity and citizenship. An activity, for instance, was in small groups to create imaginary deleted scenes of the play that would explain the motives why each character acted as they did. In this way, the young people were asked not only to manage a group and actually make the activity happen- creating ownership of their group, their work and their involvement in the play-, but also deepen their thought in action on why someone would act as they did and how they came up with the results, that were shown on stage.

### VIII.3. *The Birds* by Aristophanes - About the place / where

“Who is a citizen? The one who can both govern and be governed!” (Aristotle)

An adaptation of *The Birds*, set in today’s morals and reality, was the first play of the “trilogy of Utopia” performances.<sup>12</sup> The way we conceive society around us, the way we can improve it, the way the utopia of a better Polis can improve everyday life was the topic of this interpretation of *The Birds*. In this performance, four youngsters go free camping in the countryside. Everyone has different goals: one to rest in the country, another to discover a natural way of living, another is there just for the company of friends, and one of them, a bit of a nerd, to do some bird watching. Surely, none of them was very happy in the city. They set their tent in nature, but...no birds are to be observed anywhere. So they decide to start a mocking pastime in expense of their nerd friend...and as they act (for mocking purposes) as different birds, the audience can gradually identify them as the Aristophanian Birds. The friends at the end, by playing the joke, create a desire to their nerd friend who develops the idea of making a new city in the wilderness.

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<sup>12</sup> The “Trilogy of Utopia”, consisted of three plays: *The Birds*/ a rock performance for young adults by Aristophanes, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*/...because everything is possible by Shakespeare and *Faust/me in the world I live in* by Goethe. All of them were a co- production of 4frontal Theatre Organization, Theatre of Neos Kosmos and Georgina Kakoudaki. For more visit [www.4frontal.com](http://www.4frontal.com)  
 In *The birds*/ Cast: Stavros Giannouladis/ Georgos Mataragas, Eleni Koutsiouba, Apostolos Koutsianikoulis, Grigoris Liakopoulos/ Thanasis Zeritis, Costumes: Dio Liakoura, Choreography: Patricia Apergi

And, thus, a new cosmogony has just begun. In between all the words, the subplots, the ideas of the Aristophanian play, evolve in a post-television constant reference. At the end, instead of Pistheteros' wedding with Vasileia, the actors go out of role and declare, as their new way to understand a "wedding" (wedding in a very relative term, as an expression of will, as a wishful thinking), what they take responsibility for, regarding the city: to respect the laws, support the institutions, create education as the basis of society, criticize the customs, and, as an absolute new idea of "right", be and feel free in your city, your Polis.

To be free means that you are able and willing to act. To act means to invent equal terms of living, of stating your opinion, of creating solidarity, of expanding your horizons. The motto of the play states: "Flying is a state of the mind, not a mechanical term".

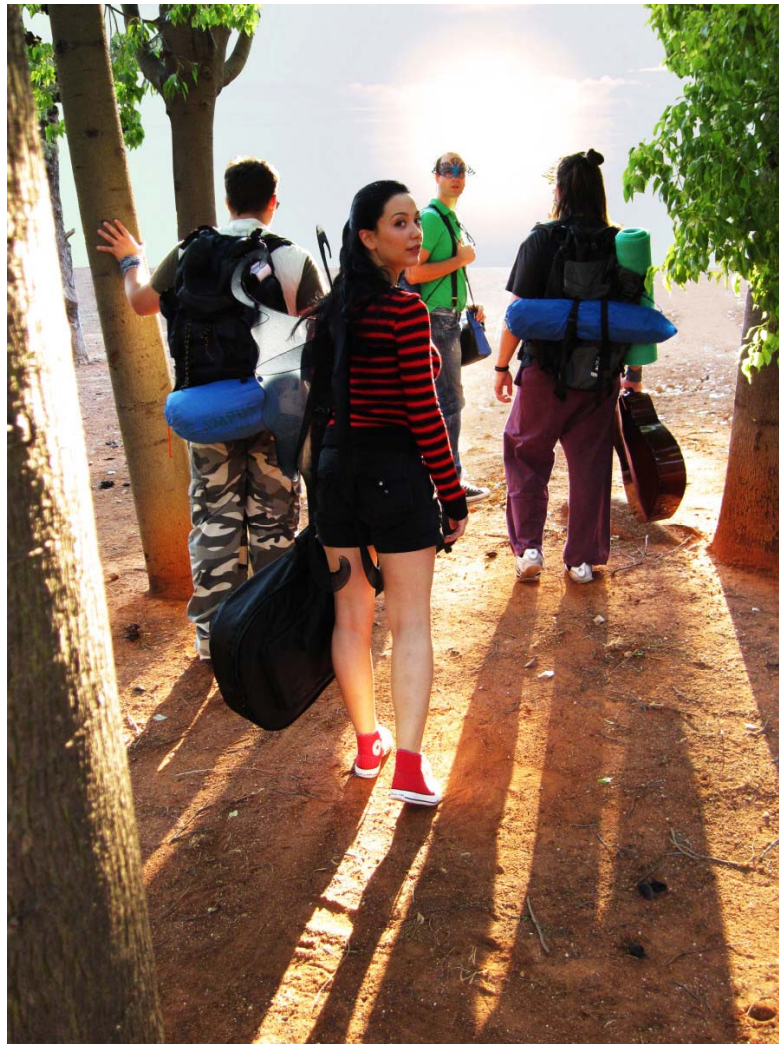
The inter temporal topic of the play, trying to find a political utopia, has a great impact of collective memory: the most evident quest is the quest of justice, the constant improvement through knowledge, the invention of the self, being present in reality. The subtitle "a rock performance for young adults" refers to our capacity and will to respond with our solid, rocky youthful spirit to the facts of life.

In the drama education program accompanying the performance the aim was to make a young person realize that, in order to be part of society, one needs to acquire the skills that will initially support oneself and empower him/her to change it, if needed.

In one of the suggested activities, for example, young people in groups are asked to create their ideal world, to make a list of its rules and laws, to make a flag and an advertising campaign that would persuade others to come and live in it.

By doing so, they were asked to actively think and build a structure and a framework of their ideal of a "working" society, using their knowledge of the society within which they were brought up, but also subtract and add on elements that would not or would work respectively. As a result, they would have created a think tank and a point of view from which they would watch the play. After such activities before the performance, adding on the same path, the play on its turn, poses questions on ideal ideas and problematizes the unrealizable and not earthed structures; stressing on the point that a young person needs to first create their strengths and build on their skills (by education and experience) in order to form their personal but mainly their social/civil/public identity so that they can transform - if they choose to-, the existent society.

This theatrical procedure tries to put reality in perspective, in a way that the audience can make a fictional equalization and understand the pros and cons of living in a "community", invent new standards of living and the structures of a Polis, in order to secure people's wellbeing.

Aristophanes *The birds* 2011

#### VIII.4. *Antigone* by Sophocles - About the content/ what and how

*Antigone* is the first play of a new trilogy. The trilogy of reality<sup>13</sup> that tries to put in action the words of B. Brecht “only through facing reality, may reality change”. In this new chapter of our performance inquiry, we wanted to focus on the dilemmas of how to become and how to act, as an active citizen.

The play being *Antigone* has a series of advantages, being a play many people know almost by heart since it has been taught in high schools throughout the century. This is,

<sup>13</sup> In “Trilogy of reality” only *Antigone*/ the right to my opinion has been completed, with 4frotnal Theatre Organization, Theatre of Neos Kosmos and Georgina Kakoudaki. The other two plays *The clouds/in need to want to know* by Aristophanes and *Caucasian circle/the benefit of doubt* by B. Brecht are scheduled for the following two years.

In *Antigone*/ Cast: Stavros Giannouladis, Eleni Koutsiouba, Apostolos Koutsianikoulis, Aristeia Stafilaraki, Thanasis Zeritis, Costumes: Niki Psychogiou, Choreography: Patricia Apergi

inevitably, a trap as well, because the new interpretation is always measured by what people know already, the way they have perceived the play in their own time. There is a tendency to have prefabricated ideas of the play *Antigone*, treated as a school text that aims to discover the motives of the dramatic personae and explain away their actions and drive beforehand.<sup>14</sup> More so, *Antigone* reflects a series of ideologies and aesthetics on how the Greek drama should be performed on stage; so the preconceptions on how the staging should be are vast.



Sophocles *Antigone* 2014

Although there are so many stereotypes about the frame of the play, nothing, in our understanding and our staging, intends to provide the audience with determined answers and axioms. In our point of view, the priority of this play lies on the specific actions of the citizens. The spectators in antiquity had completely different ethical values about the crucial subjects of the play. Despite the philosophical inquiry of the godly/ human law of 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., there is a solidly constructed ideal for the “ipsipolis” citizen, the one who is “in excellence” and follows a higher hierarchy of ethics and citizen behaviour in the Polis.

In our performance there were five actors to represent all the characters of the play. They enter the stage as a cast that reminds a choral ensemble of a stereotypical/ academic performance, and then the synthesis is deconstructed, so that is made clear to the audience, that they will not see what they might expect of this play. The actors take a series of “motif-oriented roles” in the play, in order to represent the social structure of the times/and our times. We interpreted *Antigone* as the traditional hierarchy/privileged aristocracy that is in its decline, Kreon as the new government constitution, and Aimon

<sup>14</sup> Ευφημία Καρακάντζα, «Αντιγόνη του Σοφοκλή: όχι, λοιπόν, δeneίναίολαξεκάθαρα» (Effimia Karakantza, "Antigona by Sofocles: No, its not everything clear and spoken") theatre program, pp. 4 frontal/ Theatroton Neou Kosmou, 2014, Athens.

as the argumentative political and ethical opposition. We also approached Ismini as the intellectual upper class citizen, and the guard (and bearer of all kind of news throughout the play) as the average person, concentrated to his own privileges in a city. The telling of the story reflects this “pyramid of perception”: how do you react in reality? Do you unquestionably follow the old rule? Do you invent a new, even more austere system to deal with the austerity of the past? Do you oppose to deeds of others? Do you evaluate the present situation, ever if not unquestionably, but, yet, adjust? Do you calculate the impact of things for yourself and try to always find a way out of consequences?



Drama education program “Right After” the actors create theatre scenes with students 2015

The whole idea coming out of this performance is to create positive dramatic personae that choose rightly, according to their values, temperament, expectations, and awareness of the responsibilities of their status in society. The idea “what would you do if you were in my shoes” is crucial throughout the narration of the play, in all parts of social structure: the self, family, society, country, even the afterlife...

In all, our Antigone is about two girls and a boy in adolescence that confront the given social structures and behaves in very different value statuses, towards personal happiness, duty and fulfillment.

The drama education program that follows the performance is a tool, recommended to teachers, whose main axis is to link the issues arising from the play, with the reality of teenagers today. Through the suggested activities there are stimuli for thought and action in relation to issues of choice, decisions and citizenship in order to substantially strengthen the young people and not providing answers or solutions, but allowing room for choice. In Antigone the dramatic personae act and react, defend their positions and suffer the consequences. With the stimulus of a tragic ending, perhaps one can think of alternatives that may exist...

### VIII.5. The clouds/ in need to want to know - About the reason/ why

Freedom is an activity. An activity, that knows its limits, know how to restrict itself. Freedom knows that everything is doable, but also knows that should not do everything. That is, in my opinion, the big difference between democracy and individualism.<sup>15</sup>

What is important for a young person to learn? What does he/she need to know? What do the grownups think young people need to learn? How is knowledge delivered? How do we use it? Is knowledge power? If so, power in favor of whom?

A forthcoming performance for October 2016, about the need to want to know how to become fair and positive citizens in the future. An on-stage dialogue about what is right and what is wrong, if the terminology of right/ wrong has any application in today's ethics, what is necessary and what is unnecessary in life, what is conservative and what is controversial? All that through a debate between fathers and sons and the conflict of two educational systems.

The demanding question of the play is about authority. Who has the status to teach? Is traditional education enough? Are we going to be a part of the big productive engines this one of western civilization? Is the model of technological specialization that the curriculum imposes a way to create a new type of citizen? How do we become civilians? Is freedom, free choice, critical thinking a goal of today's new system of priorities?

The Aristophanes play, situated in our days keeps the structure, the comedy elements and the poetics but is hugely devised in the ethics of present day. The main dialectic,- to remember the way Thucydides puts it choose between indolence and freedom... to be free you have to work..." - is timeless; the basic and foundational questions easily relate to the play, but they raise questions for the facts and figures of the present day. The five actors of the performance split the content and create an organic ensemble where each one, at certain times of the performance, is the "role in focus".

The drama education program consists of a series of actions, forum theatre practices, dialectic and rhetoric exercises from handbooks with activities about civil rights<sup>16</sup>, applied democracy theatre training<sup>17</sup>, evaluation sheets from official recourses on appreciation of knowledge, statistics about the profile and the impact of various professions according to public opinion.

<sup>15</sup> Κορνήλιος Καστοριάδης, «Υστερόγραφο στην Ασημαντότητα»,εφ.Ελευθεροτυπία (Cornelius Castoriadis, "postscript into insignificance" Jornal Eleftherotyria) - 20.7.1998.

<sup>16</sup> Also visit <https://www.unhcr.gr/ekpaideysi/ekpaideytiko-yliko/drastiriotites-biomatikis-mathisis-sta-anthropina-dikaiomata-kai-ta-dikaiomata-ton-prosfygon-6-18-eton.html>

<sup>17</sup>also visit <http://foundation.parliament.gr/central.aspx?slId=110I360I1013I646I451631>



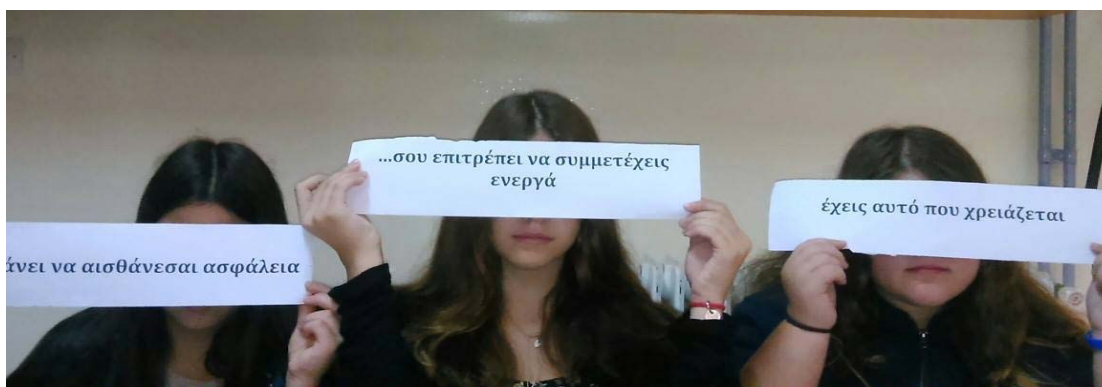
## IX. EPILOGUE... OR A STARTING POINT?

Theatre in Greek high schools is seriously undermined. There are no relevant subjects, apart from the textbooks used by the teachers to teach ancient texts, there are no official educational visits to attend cultural projects out of the school walls. High school is, in many ways, a suffocating environment for young students, primarily used to prepare them for their University entrance exams, a place of selection, study, and evaluation. There are some attempts for theatre groups, which are usually extra-curricular, with very dubious quality and little expertise from the leaders of the groups (usually school teachers).

When our theatre group enters the school gym, activities hall or even the classroom, already a miracle happens at school. Students frustrated by the need to have comprehensive knowledge of the subjects of ancient Greek language (which is the most demanding class in the high school hierarchy, along with math and physics) enter a creative two-hour- parenthesis that combines:

- visitors from outside to the otherwise segregated environment of the school (obtaining admission to schools has been a great victory for our theatre group)
- artists of free will who talk in a language that teenagers understand while dealing with matters of extreme importance
- new texts emerging out of old textbooks, texts that become real and give a completely different perspective to what they actually are thought to mean
- drama education programs that allow students to talk freely, express an opinion, move their souls and bodies, be able to be moved emotionally and sentimentally
- a good starting point for a group of young people to expand their creativity in the future by making a piece of theatre/staged ideas themselves.

In my opinion, this whole procedure, where teachers, headmasters and parents frequently embrace and support this form of theatre, in our 8 years of experience and constant presence in the school system, creates the space for a young person to evolve. Offering the initiating idea of realizing Utopia, within the school walls, and doing so through theatre, this huge achievement of Greek culture, is, in my opinion, a crucial step towards civic identity, and a step worth taking.



Drama education program “Before” for Aristophanes *The clouds*.

Girls from left to right: its makes you feel security; allows you to participate actively; you have what you need to have.

In today’s morals, a discipline difficult to achieve is the experience to learn to respect other people’s rights and be active citizens in society. If true, we should support our ‘buds and flowers’ of society and allow them to participate in the matters of society, allow them to have a voice and create a “ephebe’s song” of their own.

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