At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Greece was caught in the vortex of great economic, social, cultural, and political turbulences that have since upset the heretofore image of its European course and have brought about radical changes in the attitude, ideology, and economic situation of its citizens. Under these unprecedented circumstances, a new reality is emerging in the theatre as well; a reality quite different, albeit unclear, from all previous realities. Therefore, any conclusions made can be but simply initial observations in need of further documentation.

The conflict between the native and the foreign, the familiar and the alien, the Eastern and the Western, the Mediterranean and the European, the north and the south, which had dominated the discourse of Greek theatre practitioners for many decades, is now in its heyday. Nationalistic voices, which had formerly been rather mild and almost non-existent, are currently heard more often. Xenophobic and racist tendencies, almost unknown to Greek society a few years ago, are gaining ground. Anti-European bells are ringing loud and, like new sirens, warn of the negative and deadlocked future of Greece within the European Union, without, however, counter-proposing any specific solutions.

The pursuit of real or hypothetical alliances with other European Mediterranean countries, with the aim to form a unified front representing the “South” as opposed to the corresponding one of the “North,” is gradually gaining ground in the mind of many Greeks. Rapture, rivalry, separation, and conflict on a real and/or imaginary, ideological and social level have already become a reality in
contemporary Greece and have replaced or threaten to do so any sociopolitical stability and progress. The theatre, as a sensitive receiver and index of this reality, is once again called to turn into drama and spectacle what is happening.

Just prior to this turbulent period, contemporary Greek drama included works whose subject matter, aesthetics and morphology were completely integrated within the framework of contemporary European and international postmodern theatre (Pefanis, “Classification Problems” 21-44). Although their ethographic background was still there as an organizing principle, neo-realistic elements, in combination with contemporary thematic and aesthetic concerns, have come to enrich their ethographic content (Rosi 55-100). California Dreaming [Καλιφόρνια Ντρίμιν], The Milk [το γάλα] by Vassilis Katsikounouris, Shaved Chins [Συρισμένα πηγούνια] by Yiannis Tsiros, Morning Dew [πάχνη] by Brothers Koufali, Anna, said I [Αννα , είπα] by Panagiotis Mentis, Melted Butter [Λιωμένο βούτυρο] by Sakis Serefas, Seven Logical Answers [Εφτά λογικές απαντήσεις] by Leonidas Prousalidis, are just few examples of this neo-ethographic trend in contemporary Greek theatre.

The quest for identity and the relation of contemporary drama to ancient Greek drama, whether in the form of tragedy or comedy, constitutes a second, equally interesting element worth examining. Although very evident in the past, nowadays the postmodernist tendencies are lessening the burden of tradition. More and more plays currently written disentangle themselves from the weight of this influence (Grammatas, “Mythocriticism and Fiction” 51-69; Pefanis, “Seeking the Clew” 21-46). Archetypes and patterns are only distantly echoed. Intertextuality and adaptation are two of the techniques through which contemporary Greek playwrights choose to converse with the ancient Greek mythos and with theatre across the world (Chassapi-Christopoulou 2002). One could mention Laios’ Murderer and the Crows [Ο δολοφόνος του Λαίου και τα κοράκια] and Cassandra Speaks to the Dead [Η Κασσάνδρα μιλάει στους νεκρούς] by Marios Pontikas; ... And Juliette [... και Ιουλιέτα], Tonight We Are Dining at Jocasta’s [Απόψε τρώμε στης Ιοκάστης], and Andromache or a Woman’s Landscape at the Height of Night [Ανδρομάχη ή Τοπίο γυναίκας στο ύψος της νύχτας] by Akis Dimou; Which Helen? [Ποιά Ελένη?] by Michalis Repas – Thanasis Papatheos; Cassandra’s Annunciation [Ο Ευαγγελισμός της Κασσάνδρας] and The Stunning of Animals Before the Slaughter [Η ζάλη των ζώων πριν τη σφαγή] by Dimi-tris Dimitriadis; Camera degli sposi and the Announcement [Αναγγελία] by Giorgos Veltsos; Juliette of the Macintosh [Ιουλιέτα των Μάκιντος] by Stelios Lytras; Clytemnestra? [Κλυταιμνήστρα?] by Andreas Staikos. Postmodern versions of dramaturgy make their presence felt in these works through poetic monologues and ironic dialogues, through the mixing of fiction and fact, through bitter humor and intense ideological demystification (Patsalidis, “Oltre il modern” 100-07; Tentorio 149-65; Pefanis, “Long Trips of National Persons” 150-89). The authors, some of whom have studied and lived abroad and have direct contact with contemporary theatre writing and practice, bring into Greek theatre an aura of cosmopolitanism and much needed openness.
A third characteristic of contemporary Greek drama is the one related to the general trends of contemporary world theatre, such as feminist and minority theatre. The influx of immigrants and the rise of refugee populations, the increasing number of incidents involving racial and sexist violence, and the appearance of marginalized social groups have created a new reality in Greece, especially in the capital and the major urban centers, which has been a source of inspiration for plays like: *Thessaloniki in the Foreground* (Θεσσαλονίκη σε πρώτο πρόσωπο) by Sakis Serefas, *Scarlet Sky* (Ο ουρανός κατακόκκινος) by Loula Anagnostaki, *Got Life into Her Hands* (Πήρε τη ζωή στα χέρια της) by Vassilis Katsikonouris, *Destiny* (Ντέστινινι) by Akis Dimou, and *When Go-Go Dancers Go-a-Dancing* (Όταν χορεύουν οι Go Go dancers) by Elena Penga.

Other works that focus on identity and otherness, illegal immigration, and racism within contemporary multicultural Greek society are *Invisible Olga* (Αόρατη Όλγα) by Yiannis Tsiros, *Homelands* (Πατρίδες) and *The Evros River Across* (Ο Έβρος απέναντι) by Michalis Repas – Thanassis Papathanassiou, *Aoustras or Couch Grass* (Άουστρας ή αγριάδα) by Lena Kitsopoulou (Blessios 647-60; Baคอนικολα 639-45).

Performances offered by new avant-garde theatre groups, such as Blitz (Galaxy, Late Night, Guns! Guns! Guns!), Kanigunda (Πόλη-Κράτος), and Pequod (Υπόθεση Εργασίας) (Sidiropoulou 113-18), form yet another category belonging to the so-called “devised theatre.”

The development of new theatre halls and other venues hosting performances is commensurate to that of dramaturgy. The livelier part of local theatre life, especially in Athens, has moved away from the city centre and from high-capacity theatre halls which accommodate mainly popular spectacles to inner city run-down areas and peripheral neighborhoods, small spaces, usually industrial or abandoned (warehouses, workshops, and factories), which are refurbished and converted into operational theatre venues. Small avant-garde groups move into these sites and create their own work, gradually attracting likeminded groups of spectators—their fans and supporters (Theatres Chytirio, Theseum, Bios, Epi Colono). The plays presented there relate to contemporary issues and aesthetics; they offer a new approach to their relationship with the audience and a different perception of the function of the art of theatre, thus introducing the trends of the world avant-garde and experimentation to Greece (Patsalidis, “The Theatrical Space” 95-117).

While local theatre kept growing to all directions for well over twenty five years, the economic crisis in 2009 came to create a totally new situation, by dismantling whatever had been considered a stable state of affairs up to that point. High rates of unemployment, intense insecurity, and a phobic attitude towards the future replaced the dreams of the young and also their understanding of life. What is strange for some, expected by others, is that although the new reality that has emerged from this current crisis is quite difficult, a good part of local theatre still hesitates to directly face the facts, and, instead, turns back, searching for an exit through relatively outdated forms. History is, once again, used as a
kind of safety blanket, against the uncertainties of the present. Re-immersion in
the values and models of those times offers an alibi for the present situation as
well as an example to be emulated so that the deadlock facing the Greek society
can be overcome (Grammatas, “Representations” 191-214). The future is quite
frequently described or understood in terms of the past. In some cases, domestic
neo-ethography and comedy are often combined with postmodern elements in a
mosaic of variable values that constitute (once again) the agonizing search for
cultural identity of contemporary Greeks. The absence of characters with cohe-
sive structure and the juxtaposition of disjointed, fragmentary elements consti-
tuting the jumbled entity of the postdramatic text, at some point, lose their cor-
relation with the objective reality Greek viewers expected to see on stage. Dimi-
tris Dimitriadis, Giorgos Veltsos, Maria Efstathiadi, and Akis Dimou, are among
those authors who provide a postmodern angle to reality, yet what some critics
claim is that they end up with “copies” of half-baked modernist influences, on
the one hand, and repetitive banality—a traditional ethography offered as an out-
let to dramaturgy, on the other (Freris 113-18).

This is not the first such occurrence in the history of Greek theatre. A sim-
ilar phenomenon had appeared in the period just after the Asia Minor disaster
of 1922 with works by Nikos Kazantzakis, Spyros Melas, and Giorgos
Theotokas. The urbanization of Greek society at the beginning of the twentieth
century and the country’s industrialization, along with the beneficial outcomes
of the Balkan Wars and the First World War, boosted the development of urban
drama and the theatre of ideas, establishing Ibsenism, the social and psycho-
logical drama, and the variety show, as the eminently European, entertainment
spectacle.

The disaster that Hellenism had to deal with, with the huge wave of refugee
populations coming from Asia Minor, along with all other sociopolitical pro-
blems that plagued local life and led to the ascendance of fascism and the estab-
lishment of dictatorship under Metaxas in 1936, drove local dramaturgy toward
a radical wrapping up. Playwrights, unable to handle the givens of this new re-
ality, turned to genres and forms of the past and attempted to escape via tragedy
and historic drama. With this in mind, it is no surprise that ethography emerged
as the dominant genre of interwar dramaturgy. By proposing a return to nature
and to the original mores and customs of the Greek province, it was offering a
soothing alibi for those who chose to escape from the tragic present. Honeybee
[Μέλισσα] by Nikos Kazantzakis, Rigas Velestinlis [Ρήγας Βελεστινλής] by Spy-
ros Melas, Engagement Party [Αρραβωνιάσμα] by Dimitris Bogris, The Seedling [Το μελετάμακι] by Pandelis Horn, are just a few
telling examples (Grammatas, Greek Theatre 153-74).

Something similar seems to be happening nowadays, not only in the field
of comedy but more so in special types of plays, such as those addressed to ju-
venile audiences, which openly dominate the main Athenian stages with light
dramas and all sorts of other, socially indifferent, spectacles. Examples of the
first kind—comedy—are: Ilias of the 16th Regiment [Ο Ηλίας του 16ου], The
These are representative comedies written by distinguished comedy writers of the 1950s and 1960s, which perfectly respond to the conditions of post-civil war Greece. The characters in these plays are Greek, petit bourgeois, struggling for survival in all sorts of ways, trying to make ends meet, while facing problems such as oppression, bureaucracy, economic hardships, and lack of education (often due to ideological reasons which are, however, artfully omitted or silenced, thus imposing, indirectly, a comforting historical amnesia about the recent, traumatic past).

These plays, initially, became great theatrical successes and, later, at the prime time of Greek cinema, they were made into films featuring a cast of renowned Greek comedians of the time. Films such as The Aunt from Chicago [Τέα από το Σικάγο], Thief Shouting [Φωνάζει ο κλέφτης], and Mademoiselle's Simpleton [Το κοροϊδάκι της δεσποινίδος] became box office successes. Today, the reverse phenomenon appears to be taking place, with popular films coming back to the commercial theatre stage, featuring current TV comedy stars, who stereotypically imitate their cinematic models, in an effort to entertain their audience with the attitude, grace, and situations experienced by the characters they impersonate; characters belonging to a reality so far from, but, at the same time, so near to that of the present. Through plays of this mutatis mutandis kind, the past is regrafted onto the present, or, conversely, the present seeks refuge in the past by employing the same techniques and mechanisms of “silencing” an unpleasant historical reality through the soothing escape to facile and painless laughter.

Another genre, representative of the phenomenon we have already mentioned, is that which refers to children and youngsters; a special audience, which, on account of its very particularity, can serve as a representative sample of the tendencies and choices prevalent in a society at a certain time, in terms of the way this society defines and delimits itself against the familiar and the alien, the native and the foreign, the past and the present. Due to the changes and revisions in the fields of pedagogy and psychology, as well as due to the transformation of how the child and childhood are viewed (brought about by the new findings of childhood sociology), the Greek stage has been the host of numerous dramatic compositions and stage performances on par with those of the European and Western world at large (Grammatas, In Totora's Land 597-604). New behavioral models, new principles, rules, and values for children and the young in Greece are now standard ingredients in most shows catering to these age groups. At the same time, however, the turn to the past, the same covert or open emergence of Hellenocentric or/and nationalistic models, all due to the economic crisis and the uncertainties it has brought, is evident here as well. The glorious past of the nation and the race—concepts which at some point were on the decline—reappear anew. Hellenism’s paternal virtues reappear as new value models and points of reference. Images focusing on Greece against its enemies (real or not), against powers of oppression and enslavement come
to centre stage, bringing memories of the past back to the mind of the adults, offering them models they might want to imitate in the future. In this manner, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, intolerance and fanaticism, hesitantly or openly, come to the front, once more giving rise to conflict and rupture, at the expense of previous, long-lasting, and well-orchestrated efforts which promoted cultural tolerance. Indicative examples are: *Fairy Tale with No Title* [Παραμύθι χωρίς ονόμα] by Penelope Delta, and *Peter’s Great Walk* [Ο μεγάλος περίπατος του Πέτρου] by Alki Zei—dramatized versions of novels bearing the same title, addressed to children and young people, and referring symbolically or realistically to real historical events (Balkan Wars, Second World War). Other pertinent examples are Penelope Delta’s intertextual composition *Penelope Delta Meets the Dude* [Η Πηνελόπη Δέλτα συναντά τον Μάγκα], Menealos Loudemis’ *A Child is Counting the Stars* [Ένα παιδί μετράει τα άστρα], and George’s Sarri’s *When the Sun* [Όταν ο ήλιος].

One more—yet no less representative—category is that of works from the classical repertory and musical theatre, known from their cinematic, theatrical, or musical versions in the past, which are also making a powerful comeback, nostalgically taking audiences back to the old times and conditions. Such a case is that of *The Red Lights* [Τα κόκκινα φανάρια] by Giorgos Galanos, a great box office success of the fifties, which showcases the social aspect of the theatre in direct relation to Greek reality of the post-civil war period. There is, also, *Our Great Circus* [Το μεγάλο μας τσίρκο] an equally great theatrical success of Iakovos Kambanellis, which, in the seventies, brought to the stage the first political messages against the almighty state of the colonels established after the coup d’état of 1967. Vitsentzos Kornaros’ *Erotokritos* [Ερωτόκριτος] is another example. This epic-lyrical poem, presented in its dramatized form, offers audiences a spectacular performance, while the same can be said to be true of Bob Wilson’s image-ridden *Odyssey* [Οδύσσεια] and Stathis Livathinos’ five-hour long *Iliad* [Ιλίαδα] (both adapted from the Homeric epic poems). We should also mention great musical hyper productions such as *Aman Amen* [Αμάν Αμήν], put together by composer Stavros Xarhakos, *I’ll Take You Away with Me* [Θα σε πάρω να φύγουμε] by Angelos Pyriohos, and *Looking for Attik* [Αναζητώντας τον Αττίκ] by Lambros Liavas.

The case of dramatized fiction is yet another representative trend in contemporary Greek theatre. It first appeared in the 1980s with works such as *Scenes from the Life of G. Vizyenos* [Σκηνές από τη ζωή του Γ. Βιζυηνού], a compilation of short stories and other pieces of prose by the author, Makrigiannis’ *Memoirs* [Απομνημονεύματα του Μακριγιάννη], based on an autobiographical account of the 1821 Revolution with General Makrigiannis as the main hero, as well as poems by D. Solomos such as “The Cretan” [«Ο Κρητικός»] and *The Free Besieged* [Ελεύθεροι πολιορκημένοι].

This tradition has been reinforced both by the deadends facing local dramaturgy and by contemporary versions of postmodernism in the theatre, as well as by the favorite subject matter of dramatized works and by their familiar image
in the memory bank of the audience/readers. This tradition gains prominence today, functioning as a safe refuge, offered by the illustration of past relationships and situations very close to the heart of the majority of contemporary audiences. Among the works of this same category, one could mention The Murderess [Η φόνισσα] and The American [Ο Αμερικάνος] by Alexandros Papadimitris, Pope Joan [Πάπισσα Ιωάννα] and The Tale of a Husband from Syros [Ιστορία σύμμαχοι συζύγου] by Emmanuel Roidis, My Mother’s Sin [Το αμαρτήμα της μητέρας μου] and His Life’s Only Journey [Το μόνο της ζωής του ταξιδιού] by Georgios Vizyenos, The Woman from Zante [Η γυναίκα της Ζάκυνθος] by Dionysios Solomos, Captain Mihalis [Καπετάν Μιχάλης] by Nikos Kazantzakis, Hagiography of Andreas Kordopatis [Το συναξάρι του Ανδρέα Κορδοπάτη] by Thanassis Valtinos, The Double Book [Το διπλό βιβλίο] by Dimitris Chatzis, and so on. The same category may be enriched by staged versions of great epic and epic-lyrical compositions such as Homer’s Iliad [Ιλιάδα], the tenth century Byzantine epic of Digenis Akritas [Διγενής Ακρίτας] and Erotokritos [Ερωτόκριτος] by Vitsentzos Kornaros (sixteenth century).

Other works constitute dramatized biographies, based on the life stories of popular figures from the music industry such as Eftychia Papagiannopoulou [Ευτυχία Παπαγιαννοπούλου], Sotiria Bellou: The Wandering Life of a Rebetissa [Σωτηρία Μπέλλου: Η περιπλανώμενη ζωή μιας Ρεμπέτισσας], and Who is after my life? [Ποιος τη ζωή μου:] based on the life of composer Mikis Theodorakis. Another distinctive example is that of Angela Papazoglou [Αγγέλα Παπαζόγλου], a box office hit for well over twelve years which presents the life of an emblematic personality connected to modern History (The Asia Minor Disaster).

To round up our views concerning the soothing effect of the past and the turn of modern Greek theatre to historic subject matters and obsolete situations, which many times serve as a refuge and an alibi for the current unpleasant reality, we also have to refer to the theatrical space as the place of reception and promotion of theatrical spectacles. All the commercial performances mentioned above take place in Athens and most of the times in grand theatre multiplexes; they cater mostly to middle and upper class audiences, to relatively homogeneous, mature age groups that share the same memories of the past. This is not to say, of course, that there is no alternative theatre in Athens. There is plenty. The problem is that its economics does not allow it to move to bigger venues in order to cater to larger audiences (Dimaki-Zora 2015).

In conclusion: Without downplaying or erasing the good things that contemporary dramatists brought to local theatre, what is worth examining further is how nostalgia, reminiscence, escapism, and beautification of times past, along with the unconfessed complicity of the audience to the objectionable intentions and choices of the artists, have come to now dominate a good part of local theatrical life.

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