

YANNIS TSAROUCIS' EXPERIMENTAL PRODUCTIONS OF ANCIENT GREEK TRAGEDY



ABSTRACT: This paper examines two experimental productions of ancient tragedy from the 1974- post-junta period when many revisionist theatre strategies were put into practice; *Trojan Women* (1977) and *Seven against Thebes* (1982) were staged according to Yannis Tsarouchis' vision of total theatre and innovative aesthetics. The paper focuses mostly on Tsarouchis' radical spatial choices placing these productions in real, found places instead of conventional theatre spaces. In both cases, a parking lot at Kaplanon Street in the urban centre of Athens and a piece of land in the rural outskirts of Thebes, Tsarouchis practices a radical, expanded notion of the stage, re-invents the dominant outdoor performance space paradigm and sets the agenda for early site-specificity in Greece. A further discussion of these locational spatialities is informed by interdisciplinary concepts and critical ideas from the current epistemological spatial turn.

STAGING GREEK TRAGEDY AS RADICAL THEATRE: SPACE MATTERS

THE NOTION OF ANCIENT GREEK theatre as framed sharply by contemporary anxieties and cutting-edge staging practices foregrounding its innovative, experimental potential is largely the cultural product of the few last decades of the twentieth century¹. In turn the systematic study of productions of ancient Graeco-Roman theatre is a scholarly phenomenon even more recent, situated in between classical reception, performance studies and the wider field of cultural studies.² A useful example to take is Schechner's per-

1. In *Dionysus since 69* (2004) there is a wide discussion by Edith Hall, Helen Foley and others, of the many practised contemporary political and cultural issues at the Dawn of the Third Millenium. David Wiles complements that the contemporary appeal of tragedy "stems not just from its content, its handling of themes like women, war, and democracy, but also from its formal properties which represent a unique challenge to modern actors and directors", *ibid.* 245.
2. For the intriguing problematics of this study area see Fiona Macintosh (2008) 247-58. Also, Lorna Hardwick's foundational approach (2003).

formance version of Euripidean *Bakkhai* with his *Dionysus in 69* (1968-69), a landmark performance of radical experimentation, avant-garde aesthetics, experiential treatment of the material and participatory strategies.³ Schechner's own account of the production as a piece of environmental theatre,⁴ highlights issues of space and environment as parameters of major importance in his work. Apart from Schechner, we find also different scholars like Rehm arguing for ancient Greek theatre's radical potential or making it their focal point of investigation⁵; what's more, this radicality is often discussed also in terms of spatial matters. Being an advocate of 'tragedy as radical theatre' Rehm repeatedly addressed the environmental dynamic of ancient Greek theatre,⁶ while also using a spatial frame to bring new insights to tragic plays.⁷

Although space-related pathways in performing arts have existed for many decades,⁸ more recently they have been intensified and epistemologically designated as 'the spatial turn'. Similarly to the performative turn, the spatial turn⁹ has been primarily an interdisciplinary phenomenon, influencing also reception literature and criticism.¹⁰ In performing arts, analysis has been drawing attention to space politics, theatre and topology, even geography, extending the debate much beyond the realm of *ὄψις*, scenography and the pictorial stage.¹¹

Following a similar direction, this discussion of Tsarouchis' spatially innovative work from the mid '70s to the early '80s — apart from its historical period contextualization — will also be influenced by several critical concepts from spatial theory and human geography, providing a more contemporary, interdisciplinary spatial perspective to Tsarouchis' artistic contribution.

Our analysis will mainly focus on *Trojan Women* (1977),¹² a ground-

3. See Zeitlin (2004) 49-75; also Macintosh (1997) 284-323.

4. Schechner (1994) 1-6, 34.

5. Rehm (2003).

6. Ibid.

7. Rehm (2002).

8. On this see Fischer-Lichte and Wihstutz (2013) 1-2.

9. The term originated in social sciences and philosophy since the late '60s and by the end of '90s was relatively influential in social geography and most humanities: literary theory, cultural studies and visual and performing arts studies, among others. For "the reinsertion of space into social sciences and humanities", indicatively see Warf and Arias (2008) 10 ff.

10. See for example Padel (1990) 336-65; Rehm (2002); Wiles (2002).

11. For a discussion of scenography (*ὄψις*) as reception see Monaghan (2010) 241-251.

12. For a literary analysis of *Trojan Women* see Goff (2013); Shapiro and Burian (2009); Willis (2005).

breaking production staged by key artist Yannis Tsarouchis¹³ — widely acclaimed as painter and theatre designer, as well as translator-director in his later creative period — according to his more personal experimental, ‘total-theatre’ approach on Greek tragedy. In an unprecedented gesture of breaking staging conventions for ancient drama and addressing more avant-garde notions of the expanded performance space, Tsarouchis placed this production in a real, found urban space, in a parking lot in the city centre of Athens. To a much lesser extent, we will also address some innovative spatialities in his production of *Seven against Thebes* (1982),¹⁴ a controversial venture with mixed aesthetic strategies, involving a retrograde take to classicism alongside the unconventional placement of the production in the rural landscape in the outskirts of Thebes. Both productions used instead of purpose-built theatrical spaces, real, found spaces which were used ephemerally, designated only briefly as performance spaces.

As an innovative take on the Euripidean play Tsarouchis’ approach clearly stands out for more radically establishing in the post-junta period the beginnings of “the tradition of the new”,¹⁵ the experimental and modernizing tendency of performances of classical tragedy in Greece.¹⁶ Tsarouchis opted clearly for updating by transposition his material rather than reconstruction, aiming to address the epoch of the spectator rather than that of myth or playwright; these elements which firmly position the production in a modern context¹⁷, have been elaborated by the artist over a long period of artistic output and also in his many writings¹⁸. Tsarouchis’ innovative tropes (anachronism) and performative modes (neorealism) have been identified by

13. For a detailed analysis of Tsarouchis’ innovative take on *Trojan Women* and his radical introduction of the avant-garde performance feature of found space in theatre in Greece see Konomis (2011) 296–317.

14. For *Seven against Thebes* see Torrance (2007); Hutchinson (1985); also Marinis’ useful analysis (2012).

15. I borrow this expression from theatre critic Varopoulou (2010).

16. Significantly, Arvaniti (2011, 283 ff.) draws attention to this particular performance as an indicator of the beginnings of the modernizing phase in the production of classical theatre in contemporary Greece.

17. See for example Roland Barthes’ discussion of Barrault’s staging of *Oresteia* (1955/1972) 59–66; also, Varopoulou (2002).

18. In particular Tsarouchis’ various writings: (1986) *Αγαθόν το εξομολογείσθαι*, (1987) *Ως στρουθίον μονάζον επί δώματος*, (1989) *Εγώ ειμί πτωχός και πένης*, (1989) *Λίθον ον απεδοκίμασαν οι οικοδομούντες*, (1993) *Μάτην ωρείδισαν την ψυχήν μου*, as well as several other articles.

several critics as powerful strategies to foreground a different approach to ancient drama.¹⁹

On the other hand, hardly any attention has been brought to Tsarouchis' spatial strategies by scholars or critics; so this article will focus primarily on such aspects of Tsarouchis' work highlighting his unique revolutionary contribution. It is not in any case intended as a singular reading of his work, rather than a complementary one, which furthermore holds several interesting interdisciplinary implications.

Despite their striking differences in aesthetic scope and end staging result, both *Trojan Women* (1977) and *Seven against Thebes* (1982) are aligned in their radical use of found, real locations and their employment of site spatialities, making a point that these ventures can be essentially recontextualized as examples of 'proto' site-specific performances and early locational sensitivities in Greece. They moreover problematize the practice of staging tragedy as a contemporary genre in new radical ways and exemplify its experimental approach potential. In particular, by placing performance space outside conventional venues and given spatial frameworks these productions launch new genealogies of outdoor performing space for Greek theatre and could also be evaluated as rare, indigenous forerunners of contemporary site-specific theatre and performance²⁰ which has been booming in popularity since the '90s and has expanded to the genre of tragedy, too.²¹

RADICALISING PERFORMANCE SPATIALITIES IN GREECE

Tsarouchis' experiments come after many decades of prevalent revival aesthetics in the theatrical scene in Greece.²² In the early post-war decades a rigid canonization of stage conventions of ancient drama took place at the

19. For example Stathis Dromazos regards Tsarouchis' *Trojan Women* as a landmark performance of its time, providing a new alternative approach to ancient theatre (1993) 109–111. Dromazos suggests that the anachronism of the costumes emphasizes the timeless (diachronic) dimension of the play - a view propagated also by the artist himself (1989), *Αίθρον αν απεδοκίμασαν οι οικοδομούντες*, 75.

20. Patrice Pavis distinguishes between the various other staging typologies placed in a theatrical space and the typology of 'site-specific performance' referring "to staging and performance conceived on the basis of a place in the real world (ergo, outside of established theatre)", (1998) 337–38.

21. For example Mike Pearson's *Persians* (2010) and Katerina Evangelatou's *Rhesus* (2015) are two recent productions in this innovative performance mode.

22. See the useful historical overview in Fessa-Emmanouil (1999), in particular 39–55.



Scene from Tsarouchis' production of *Trojan Women* in urban found space at Kaplanon Street, Athens, September 1977. Smaro Stefanidou as Hecuba. Source: S. Skopelitis Photographic Archive.

outdoor theatre festivals following the long-term cultural monopoly by The National Theatre;²³ while the ancient theatres were used regularly, they were viewed predominantly as sacred monuments and much less as contemporary stages. Side-stepping canonical genealogies of outdoor performance space and addressing alternative spatialities, Tsarouchis' innovative productions not only took an iconoclastic turn on antiquity, but foregrounded the radical potential of 'relocating' performance space: *Trojan Women* (1977) were originally presented in an empty urban lot in the centre of Athens used as a car parking space, and *Seven against Thebes* (1982) outdoors, in a field in the rural outskirts of Thebes. These productions contested canonical approaches of the outdoors performance space and asserted the notion of the expanded stage. Moreover, they addressed aspects of national heritage and the diffusible supremacy of the open and outdoor performance space paradigm with regards to staging tragedy, away from monument-space: amphitheatre, odeon, stadium, archaeological site or new ancient-like form. Renegotiating these foundations and sidestepping its more conventional and historical native spatial typologies, Tsarouchis' experimental productions escaped the systemic construction of the monumental topography of the nation through

23. On the National Theatre's legacy and the founding work of three of its seminal theatre directors — Oikonomou, Politis and Rondiris — see Arvaniti's extensive analysis (2010).

monuments and archaeological sites of — mainly — classical antiquity.²⁴ Furthermore, Tsarouchis' eclectic outlook aligns with revisionist cultural strategies of the '70s theatre scene in Greece,²⁵ as well as other avant-garde and more experimental global trends in postwar art.²⁶ In particular, the notion of art in the expanded field which fuelled perhaps the most innovative part of all artistic output after 1945²⁷, constitutes an important underlying influence in Tsarouchis' site experimentations.

We would certainly not go as far as to ascribe to these two productions any complex notions and strategies of current site-specific or post-dramatic theatre modes, which employ spatialities as their main dramaturgical or performative devices.²⁸ On the other hand, while still keeping the original dramatic text as their focal point, both productions follow several place-bound tracks such as the rejection of permanent and official theatre structures and the relocation of performance space primarily in found spaces; at the same time they address notions of contemporaneity advocating the primacy of physical and embodied experience and its inevitable interrelation with the surrounding real space. In this last part, Tsarouchis particularly anticipates the vital contribution that reviewing spatialities, plac(e)ing strategies, and site can make to the signification and performative process in live arts.²⁹ His two experimental productions of ancient Greek tragedy escape existing typologies, expand the outdoor stage and set an agenda for found space and site-specificity in Greece.³⁰

A paradox emerges, as in both productions Tsarouchis' radical approach to found space is paired with a more conventional drive to formally demarcate the space as a temporary 'theatre venue' and to set up an audience space with scaffolding and wooden stalls; this is probably an indication of some influence of canonical presentation of the genre in the outdoor theatres.³¹

24. See discussion in Hamilakis (2007).

25. See van Steen (2015), especially 45–53, 88 ff.

26. See Konomis (2011) 301 ff., 358.

27. This direction proved to be especially fertile for postwar and contemporary art in Greece, and it firmly acknowledged the foundation of the artwork in real space, which became its essential component and shaped its locational identity. For an extensive discussion on this subject, see Adamopoulou (2000).

28. Lehmann (2006), especially 150–152.

29. One of the best discussions of spatial politics of contemporary site-specific art is by Kaye (2000).

30. For an extensive analysis of Tsarouchis' *Trojan Women* see Konomis (2011) 296–317.

31. Also, Rehm suggests interestingly that in approaching Greek theatre we keep a particular political and aesthetic context in mind: "When labeling classical Athens a 'per-



View of the scenic space in Tsarouchis' production of *Seven against Thebes*, Mosxopodio, Thebes, 1982. Temporary staging arrangement in the natural landscape. Source: S. Skopeliitis Photographic Archive.

We must take into consideration that for Greece — as with other countries with a rich archeological heritage —, spatial categorizations based on the material functions of the physical space such as historical locale and archeological site, are fundamental. These acquire an added socio-cultural significance, both on a symbolic and imaginary level, influencing all physical strata and realms of urban, rural and natural space;³² this is especially the case for the outdoor amphitheatres of antiquity like Epidauros. From another viewpoint which elaborates on this discourse, the ancient theatre of Epidauros could be considered a kind of national heterotopia, where different versions of the nations' real and imaginary aspirations regarding its past, present and future get played out in the open.³³

A complex artistic personality, whom poet Odysseas Elytis called succinctly a 'classic revolutionary', Tsarouchis was both an ardent admirer of the

formative culture', we point to overlapping areas of public activity — law courts, the assembly, symposia, the gymnasia, the theatre, and so on — that involved performers and audiences shaping and enacting their idea of the city [...] However it appears that the 'performance culture' of democratic Athens had no trouble distinguishing the stage world from that outside the theatre, and saw no advantage in blurring the practical and ontological differences between the two", (2003) 14.

32. Hamilakis (2007).

33. On this see Ioannidou (2011). Michel Foucault's (1986) original conception of 'heterotopia' referred to spaces that house otherness, marginalization and the transgressive, and theatre is such a prime category.

classical and Hellenistic art and a progressive leftist intellectual³⁴, an advocate of western as well as eastern art tropes³⁵; he also insisted on the necessity to find new means and forms to convey the deeper spirit of the ancient world. In his visionary productions Tsarouchis eschewed mainstream outdoor theatres as plagued by tourism and commodity aesthetics, state festival spectacle, opportunistic theatre vogues, elitism, nationalism and conservatism, lack of inspiration and vision.³⁶ So, avoiding both formal theatre spaces and sacralized archaeological sites and monuments, Tsarouchis addressed different kinds of urban and rural environments at a less monumental and much more intimate scale.

THE RADICAL MID '70S IN GREECE

Contextualising Tsarouchis' production of *Trojan Women* within its socio-cultural historical period provides valuable insight, since the mid '70s clearly mark the revolutionary post-junta period in Greece after a long period of "uncertain democracy" culminating in the seven-year military dictatorship. During this period Greece struggled to make democratic reforms affecting all its major political, social and cultural institutions, practices and ideologies, striving for a transition "to a genuine plural democracy".³⁷

Stakes in the revisionist reinvigoration of the cultural domain were high as junta's populist propaganda had appropriated and abused much of the legacy of classical as well as Byzantine past.³⁸ As a domain that had been affected at its most under the junta regime³⁹, performances of Greek tragedy started to manifest a breaking down of restrictive, exceptionalist 'hellenocentric' canons of the past, while opening up to progressive trends and in-

34. See introduction by Yannis Ritsos to Tsarouchis translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women* (1978) 12; and Tsarouchis (2009) 365.

35. Tsarouchis (2000).

36. Tsarouchis referred to the Epidaurus Festival as 'the spectacle industry of Argolis', Savvakis (1993) 26; and Tsarouchis (1989), *Αίθρον ον απεδοκίμασαν οι οικοδομούντες*, 185. See also Tsarouchis' quotes in Fessa-Emmanouil (1999) 288–93.

37. Clogg (1992) 166 ff, 200 ff, 225.

38. Ibid., 190: "Junta's authoritarian regime had laid much emphasis on the notion of 'Helleno-Christian Civilization' in an attempt to reconcile the essentially contradictory values of ancient Greece and Christian Byzantium, which has long been the ideological catchword of the far right". Junta's motto 'Ελλάς Ελλήνων Χριστιανών' was poetically deconstructed by Seferis in a 1968 short poem, see van Steen (2015) 133–34.

39. Ibid., 48–9.

fluences of more cosmopolitan origins, as well as the ‘multicultural world theatre’.

A fundamental concept of this often called ‘controversialist decade’ was highlighted by artist Nikos Kessanlis’ questioning of traditional constructions of national ideology and national identity.⁴⁰ Kessanlis foregrounds in a way the transposition from the national and temporal-historical to the local and socio-geographical experience;⁴¹ a view that in its more global context resonates also with the shift of focus from time and historicity towards space and the epoch of simultaneous interconnections.⁴² It also consisted in a kind of intellectual open call to the major cross-cultural tendencies which were to infiltrate Greek culture from the mid ’70s and more so during the ’80s.⁴³

Performing outdoors as a radical way of contemporary experimentation — and not merely revisiting the ancient outdoor spatial paradigm — has been largely another cultural revisionist tendency of the ’70s in Greece.⁴⁴ This happened alongside the boom in new socio-political dramaturgy⁴⁵ and the emergence of more independent theatre companies (New Greek Theatre),⁴⁶ as well as an overall flourishing of innovative and critical cultural practices that had been censored and suppressed during the rule of junta.⁴⁷

Considering in particular outdoor and locational spatialities of the period, Iannis Xenakis’ even more unconventional and idiosyncratic *Polytopon in Mycenae* (1978) stands out in its immense scale and both conceptual and formal radicality.⁴⁸ Compared with Tsarouchis’ more drama-centered ventures *Polytopon in Mycenae* was a live event loosely composed as an intermedia art synthesis based on sound, music, lighting, recited and spoken textual fragments and non-conventional narratives, while movement expanded in the surrounding environment. In Xenakis’ site-work, the physical presence of the landscape, as well as its mental and imaginary entities were given a

40. An influential visual artist and later Dean of the School of Fine Arts (1991-1995), Nikos Kessanlis was part of the cosmopolitan generation of Greek artists of the ’70s rejecting oppressive and exclusive national identity constructions in contemporary arts, i.e. the fervently articulated Hellenism doctrines of previous generations.

41. Kessanlis in Papadopoulou (2005) 233.

42. Foucault in Soja (2011) 10 ff., Foucault (1986) 22.

43. See Arvaniti (2011) 284–85.

44. Konomis (2011) 354 ff.

45. See van Steen (2015), especially 53 ff., 136 ff., 189 ff.

46. Mavromoustakos (2005), chapter 3: 132–168.

47. Like the so called ‘Neo Kyma’ (New Greek Music), ‘Neos ellinikos kinimatographos’ (New Greek cinema).

48. For a detailed analysis of Xenakis’ work see Touloumi (2015).

determinant role, becoming essentially both the artist's main inspirational focus and the structural receptor of this unconventional, palimpsest-like synthesis. As much part of the radical cultural momentum of the '70s both Tsarouchis' experimental tragedy productions and Xenakis' *Polytopon in Mycenae* attest to a renewed interest in long-standing performance tendencies to address the outdoors and incorporate the surrounding environment and landscape.

Moreover, Tsarouchis' experimentations appear concurrently with several other productions of ancient plays that do not use formal theatre venues, experimenting with alternative outdoor spatialities — by independent theatre companies like Desmoi and Evdomo Teatro,⁴⁹ and run almost concurrently to Yorgos Michailidis' *Trojan Women* (1977) which made an expanded use of the Lykabettus modern open-air theatre.⁵⁰ Tsarouchis' experiments testify to revisionist tendencies in performances of ancient tragedy. As Gonda van Steen argues, "in the post-1974 decades in general [...] ancient drama became a free laboratory, where orthodoxies and heterodoxies were allowed to clash, and where different approaches, interpretations, and experiments were put forward".⁵¹

Despite the play's belated premiere in 1965, *Trojan Women* became since the '70s one of the most frequently performed tragic plays in Greece. Interest in the play was triggered also by more recent events of the authoritarian junta regime and the student revolt in Polytechnion, or the coup and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, as well as international events, namely the Vietnam War and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. In many cases, various links and references were established to earlier events from the Asia Minor Crisis in 1922, WW II and the Greek Civil War.⁵² This sort of contemporaneous and experiential contextualization also started to place a demand for

49. Konomis (2011) 325f., 344 ff., especially 352, 357–59.

50. Ibid., 317 ff.

51. See van Steen (2015) 133.

52. Several progressive theatre directors, among them Yorgos Michailidis and Karolos Koun, make such explicit contemporary connections; see for example Koun's remarks in *Πίζοσπάστης*, 7/8/1979, on his current production of *Trojan Women*. Also, Michailidis' quotes in *Απογευματινή*, 7/9/1977 and *Πίζοσπάστης*, 7/9/1977. Theatre critics also begin using such modern historical quotations; see for example Dromazos cross-historic references on Tsarouchis' production of *Troades* (1993) 110: "...in Hecuba's face one could see faces from the Chios' massacre, refugee mothers from '22 sitting at the front door, mothers from Kalavrita or Distomo".

‘updating’ the tragic material performed, and modernizing its presentation;⁵³ socio-political readings of the play called often also for innovative stagings.⁵⁴

This is reflected in both the spatial and aesthetic styles of Tsarouchis’ production, despite following over the years manifold tropes in his visual vocabulary.⁵⁵ Tsarouchis’ radical ventures in urban and rural found performing spaces, along with his neorealist sensitivities in the production of *Trojan Women* reflect the more progressive end of his personal theatre vocabulary and the cultural and artistic fermentations of the ’70s regarding staging tragedy. However, these proved to be directions that weren’t easily received at their time in mainstream Greek theatre and came much later to be appreciated. It is perhaps indicative that production reviews of *Trojan Women* revolve around the unprecedented radicality of Tsarouchis’ representational modes, —mostly well-received by progressive critics,⁵⁶ albeit a few maintain that Tsarouchis failed to convey the magnitude of tragedy turning it instead into neorealist drama or ‘document-drama’.⁵⁷ In any case, puzzled critics totally overlook Tsarouchis’ unconventional spatial choices expanding performance space, a subject perhaps too radical to even yield any discussion at that time.

53. Indicatively, theatre critic Stathis Dromazos refers in a review to the unique potential of *Trojan Women* to be presented as a modern piece of ‘document-theatre’ (1993) 88: “Στο Θέατρο Επιδαύρου-Εθνικό Θέατρο”, *Η Καθημερινή*, 15/7/1975). Also, Tasos Lignadis, in a later review of *Trojan Women* directed by Andreas Voutsinas in 1987 attests to the play’s actuality supporting ‘legitimate’ modernization and anachronism (Diamantakou-Agathou (2013) 464: *Η Καθημερινή*, 30/8/1987).

54. As Macintosh (1997) 320 puts it “the tragedies have always been turned to for commentary on prevailing political questions”. This is the case with such diverse, innovative stagings like Peter Stein’s *Oresteia* (1980), Ariane Mnouchkine’s *Les Atrides* (1990–1992) and Andrei Serban’s *An Ancient Trilogy* (1974–76 & 1990) (ibid., 318 ff.).

55. In his many collaborations, Tsarouchis had followed many leads in his work on classical drama: from folklore or the so-called ‘vernacular expressionism’, to downplayed classicism, and poetic realism. From his *Iphigenia* to the *Orestis* sketches, Tsarouchis’ work on tragedy and ancient myth has been taking him towards contemporary Greece, converging his theatre idiom with his well-known painting themes and sensitivities; see Konomis (2011) 299–300. However, this has been elaborated at large as his private view and in his collaborations with other directors he featured a more pared down, less monumental and eclectic classicism.

56. See reviews by Dromazos, *Η Καθημερινή*, 7/10/1977, Varopoulou, *Ανγή*, 24/9/1977, Petridi, *Ταχυδρόμος*, 13/10/1977, and Skouloudis, *Κυριακάτικη Ελευθεροτυπία*, 30/10/1977; on this see also Konomis (2011) 296–97.

57. This is for example the main perspective of a negative review maintaining that Tsarouchis’ performance was a “genius mistake” producing “έλεος χωρίς φόβο”, see Georgousopoulos (1982) 160–64. See also Tsarouchis (1987), *Ως στρουθίον μονάζον επί δώματος*, 150–51.

TROJAN WOMEN AT KAPLANON (1977)

Tsarouchis' production of *Trojan Women* at the parking lot on Kaplanon Street is in tune with noted experimental tendencies of the period, putting in practice the artist's mature views on modernization by analogy⁵⁸ and reflecting his experience of the Parisian progressive theatre scene while in self-exile during the seven-year junta. Tsarouchis dismissed monumental festival spaces with their standardized aesthetics, and opted for the avant-garde formulation of real, found space, materializing the first experiment with site-specificity in the ideologically and aesthetically charged genre of ancient tragedy.

The production was placed in an empty urban lot surrounded by demolished buildings on Kaplanon Street in the densely populated centre of Athens, off two central streets, Solonos and Sina. A prime feature of using real, found space is to address the multi-layering of functions and their change through time. Tsarouchis kept intact the dilapidated state of the space associated with the original residential function. The space was cleared from its current function as a car parking space to accommodate temporarily the theatrical function. Real found space was approached with the minimum intervention according to the more ascetic aesthetics associated with this sort of spatial ventures and Tsarouchis' own dramaturgy: his metaphorical conception of the ruinous front view of the blocks of high rise flats (*polikatoikies*) as parts of the fallen city of Troy. At the same time, the deformed remains of the walls of the demolished residential buildings provided Tsarouchis with a new semi-architectural, semi-sculptural, semi-textural structure, a back wall and a background, a found scenography, a sort of an urban *scaenae frons* providing also some interesting spatial subdivisions.

The contemporary urban Athenian ruins of '*polikatoikies*' become during the performance both a powerful metaphor situating the ruins of looted Troy in contemporary Greece and a metonymic device for the urban environment of the city of Athens. The commonly used in scenography met-

58. See indicatively Tsarouchis (1990), *Paintings*, pictures no.195 and no.196 featuring contemporary dress for all 'ancient' characters in his 1947 and 1955 sketches of 'The Sacrifice of Iphigenia'; on the artists' sources of inspiration see Tsarouchis (1993) *Μάτην ωρείδισαν την ψυχήν μου*, 33. Modernization by analogy was also the trope used in his 1977 *Troades* and in the sketches of an unrealized production of *Orestis* (1989). Tsarouchis' modernizing tendency manifests itself also in his various drawings for *Philoktetes* (1968), *Orestis* (1969-1971) and *Medea* (1970) among others. Tsarouchis often transfers the myth to modern Greece, according to his introductory note in the drawings of the 1974 *Calendar* (AGET); see also Konomis (2011) 298-300.

onymic strategy becomes all the more powerful through its application in the contemporary realities of the urban realm; this also registers as a deeper evolutionary process of the medium — here space itself.⁵⁹

By escaping the context of a formal festival production, Tsarouchis also managed to escape many of the established aesthetic and staging conventions. He nevertheless strove to formally demarcate the real, found space as theatre, cutting it off from the adjacent street and partly turning it into an interior performance space. He also created out of scaffolding a basic, tiered viewing structure, which was in an essentially frontal, yet more intimate relationship to the audience. The result seems a more compact version of outdoor courtyard theatre reminiscent somewhat also of the set-up of summertime outdoor cinemas in Athens.

In *Trojan Women* Tsarouchis essentially questioned the need to use the inherited ancient theatre forms along with their set tripartite function, reinventing the politics and aesthetics of the female chorus on an oblong stage space backed with a real urban wall. More and above, Tsarouchis' quest was one for a new form along with new content. By questioning the purposes for which conventional forms should be used, he also formulated the need for a contemporary socio-political reading of the Euripidean play. In this he naturally aligns himself with other modern European thinkers like Sartre, who was at first drawn to his mid '60s *Trojan Women* adaptation by the contemporary political significance of the tragedy's subject matter, its explicit associations with the Algerian War, European imperialism and colonial wars, as well as atomic warfare.⁶⁰

Tsarouchis' post-junta *Trojan Women*, was ambivalently received for its total departure from historicism, the depiction of Greek glorious past and by contrast its dangerous proximity to Greece's recent tragic history. As a genuine total theatre artist, Tsarouchis succeeded in extracting contemporary political significance through the spatial choices of the production, and the embodied experience and socio-cultural significance of space and place; also by the unprecedented use of 'naturalistic' representational codes that Tsarouchis interestingly connects with similar trends in ancient art, opposing

59. In its spatial application too, metonymy allows for any system to renew its material and to sustain a flourishing practice. Metonymy is founded and thrives in the cognitive and experiential linguistic function, where the contiguity between two linguistic entities and expressive units becomes actively reclaimed; see Veloudis' analysis (2005) 172–78.

60. Sartre (1967) xii–xiii.



Scene from the production of *Trojan Women* at Kaplanon Street, Athens, September 1977. First use of contemporary costumes in ancient drama: the Chorus in dark clothes and the uniforms of Esatzides (Military Police) of Junta. Source: S. Skopelitis Photographic Archive.

the dominant western trope of primitivism, archaism and pre-hellenic art references in the '70s.⁶¹

The iconoclastic turn of the *Trojan Women* was not restricted to the use of real, urban found space; the contemporaneity of the space was instead solidly reinforced by the choice of contemporary language, costume, sound and other visual elements. The tightly woven nexus of challenging contemporary references marked a shift in representational codes and conventions, while leaving no scope of interpretation as to Tsarouchis' intentions; interestingly, many critics regarded this updating outlook as the more contested aspect of the production.

Being the very first performance in Greek theatre to follow a contemporary, experiential, and autobiographical lead expressed in bold neorealist stylization, in *Trojan Women* the artist's previous formulations of anachronism in the characters creating an equivalent to the ancient form and content, took on a strong contemporary socio-political edge. Both radical strategies, spatial and representational, originated in Tsarouchis' own experiential resources. Far from avant-garde elitism, Tsarouchis addressed his own and the audience's

61. Tsarouchis (1989), *Αίθρον ον απεδοκίμασαν οι οικοδομούντες*, 74–75.

collective memory, their common experiences and traumas.⁶² Among the production's heavily charged contemporary references were the uniforms of the military patrol policemen of junta (ESA) and their particular use during the performance, the use of army blankets as scenic props for the women, the naval officer uniforms for Menelaus and his adjutants, the modernized by analogy female costumes of Hecuba, Cassandra and Andromache,⁶³ as well as Helen's stylish cinematic costume featuring 'French Riviera' style white beach trousers and an oversized straw hat.⁶⁴

More and above, the contemporary realistic dark-coloured costumes for the female chorus draw upon contemporary material: the real clothes of the tired women on the electric railway of Athens-Piraeus that the artist had been closely observing for years.⁶⁵ With imagery of the real-life war tragedy in Cyprus still fresh in memory by the late '70s, the chorus' costumes were bearing more painfully close resemblances to the images of Greek Cypriot women refugees, — as presented by Michael Cacoyannis documentary film *Attila '74 – The Rape of Cyprus* (1975)⁶⁶ — and were differentiated from the more orientalist, stylized costumes designed by Nicholas Georgiadis for Cacoyannis' 1971 influential film *Trojan Women*.⁶⁷

While much of the contemporary material used in the performance becomes clearly visible in the photographic documentation of the performance, — as for example the contemporary costume and the raw, urban character of the found space —, other elements are more culturally specific to the Greek audience. Thus, the 'epitafios' ritual procession originating from the religious Easter tradition of the Orthodox church, — a source frequently used as a depository of ritual, emotional and community linked elements — was transcribed in a choral procession, the moving trail of women following Cassan-

62. Tsarouchis (1993), *Μάτην ωνείδισαν την ψυχήν μου*, 37.

63. See Tsarouchis, *Λίθον ον απεδοκίμασαν οι οικοδομούντες* (1989), 74–75.

64. See Tsarouchis (1995) and (2009). Male figures in contemporary naval, marine and other uniforms mixed with naked figures feature commonly in Tsarouchis' paintings and form standard iconographic and thematic material of his artistic vocabulary with autobiographical overtones. On the other hand, the ESA references have a clear socio-political edge and feature in his works from the junta period. Also, several earlier works like 'The detention of three communists...' (Η σύλληψη τριών κομμουνιστών..., 1944) feature a mixed thematic and a more complex ideological resonance, see Tsarouchis (1990) 47.

65. Ibid.

66. The main theme of this documentary film shot in the aftermath of the Turkish invasion in Cyprus in the summer of 1974 was the historical events leading up to the invasion and the immense refugee problem in Cacoyannis' motherland Cyprus.

67. Cacoyannis (2003).



Scene from the production of *Trojan Women* at Kaplanon Street, Athens, September 1977. Eva Kotamanidou as Kassandra. Source: S. Skopelitis Photographic Archive.

dra holding lit candles, in bold neorealist style. Following Koun's influences, Tsarouchis' contemporary-clad procession scene adds to the performance space the springtime Easter ambience of community rituals performed in the open, urban space.

Tsarouchis' radical visual legacy and socio-political iconography has been very influential to well-known later productions such as Yannis Kokkos' setting for Antoine Vitez' *Electra*, or even Dionysis Fotopoulos designs for Luca Ronconi's production of *Ploutos* among others.⁶⁸

The innovative performance of *Trojan Women* in Kaplanon not only escapes the convention of fixed theatrical spaces but opens up to the diversity and richness of the everyday urban environment. This kind of outdoor urban spatialities had hardly been addressed in theatre practice of the period, which maintained a solid preference for demarcated theatres and natural landscape.⁶⁹

Addressing briefly generic categories of real, found performance space

68. See Konomis (2011), *ibid.* Neorealist or neo-pictorialist stylization for ancient theatre was often referred to by critics as cinematic, partly because it was more commonly found in cinema, suggesting though at the same time that this representational trope is not pertinent to the theatre.

69. In addition, modern urban landscapes have not been the norm for locations of films based on ancient tragedy, see Michelakis (2013) 191–93.

used in contemporary site-specific live arts could prove useful in order to more fully evaluate Tsarouchis' contribution to contemporary topological aspects of performing tragedy and establishing the formulation of new typologies. Wasteland and junk-space⁷⁰ constitute one of the most persistent categories of contemporary urban space: clearances, gaps, breaks, liminal demarcations and transitional spaces, like demolished building sites, urban voids, abandoned development projects and semi-completed buildings and road-works, deserted areas and infrastructure, inactive construction sites, dump-sites, and so on.

Within the various types and formations of urban spatialities of disused space Tsarouchis favours a common one in contemporary urban fabric and particularly distinctive of '70s post-junta Athens: the urban demolition gap, a commonly found type of small scale wasteland space. Being a clearance, an empty rupture, it acquires a dense signification, symbolising fundamentally both the demolition of the past and the hope of its future regeneration. The demolition gap, awaiting to be undertaken as a development project by building contractors, often becomes in the meanwhile an unfenced junkyard, or features a 'wild' garden; occasionally the space undertakes another function — like the cemented plot used commercially as a parking lot on Kaplanon Street. Additionally, in its functional spatial and social urban context, this generic type of demolition gap both reflects and actively contributes to the fundamental condition of Mediterranean spontaneity in the urban planning development of big cities, especially Athens.⁷¹ Tsarouchis was particularly interested in this generic type of urban space in search for a performance location for *Trojan Women* and there is ample photographic and textual documentation of his search of different demolition empty lots used as car parks at the time.⁷²

But since space is in every historic period always socio-culturally produced,⁷³ this generic space of the demolition clearance is not devoid of locational identity. This urban gap is by no means an empty space; or a non-place of passing neutrality, or transient non-placeness. To the contrary, it is closely related to place, it is place-bound. So, in the context of post-war Athens, in the '70s, this takes on specific overtones as a sort of by-product of urban practices that junta encouraged instigating a deformed sense of progress by partly abolishing the urban materiality of the past and permit-

70. See Konomis (2014) 29–45.

71. Leontidou (1990/2006).

72. Savvakis (1993) 10 ff.

73. Lefebvre (1991/2000).

ting mass demolitions of buildings in the city centre as well as their uncontrolled reconstruction.⁷⁴

With *Trojan Women* Tsarouchis opens up the potential of spatially reflecting on the various urban and cultural practices of that period. And since “popular inertia and ‘passivity’ with respect to urban issues [...] lasted longer than the dictatorship”,⁷⁵ addressing urban spatialities collectively through an event of performing arts, substantiates then a significant cultural enterprise of agency and resistance.

This performance could be associated with yet another layer of signification in the urban space regarding past realities and unresolved tensions in space — namely the refugee issue put in a more human geographic historical context. In the capital city of Athens, the settlement of large numbers of refugee populations from Asia Minor in the early '20s led to the radical transformation of the geography of the city.⁷⁶ Refugees were not integrated in the centre and placed peripherally, in neighborhoods such as N. Ionia, Kokkinia, Vyronas, Kaisariani;⁷⁷ in this way perhaps tensions between refugees and the city's more permanent inhabitants were successfully avoided, albeit refugees were intentionally left excluded from the normality of the city life.⁷⁸

With *Trojan Women* strategically placed in a demolished empty plot of the city centre, the core refugee thematic is granted an unprecedented visibility and centrality in the urban environment — even if only ephemerally in a performance —, drawing all sort of associations and overtones with the urban history of the city and its collective memory.

‘SEVEN AGAINST THEBES’ (MOSXOPODIO, THEBES, 1982)

This is the second production by Tsarouchis experimenting with the parameter of real, found performance space; his ‘second experiment’ as he calls it himself.⁷⁹ This experiment featured a set of different aims, as well as various common elements with *Trojan Women* — like Tsarouchis' choice of another war play, or in his own words an anti-war play. The most striking

74. Leontidou (1990/ 2006) 209 ff., 239.

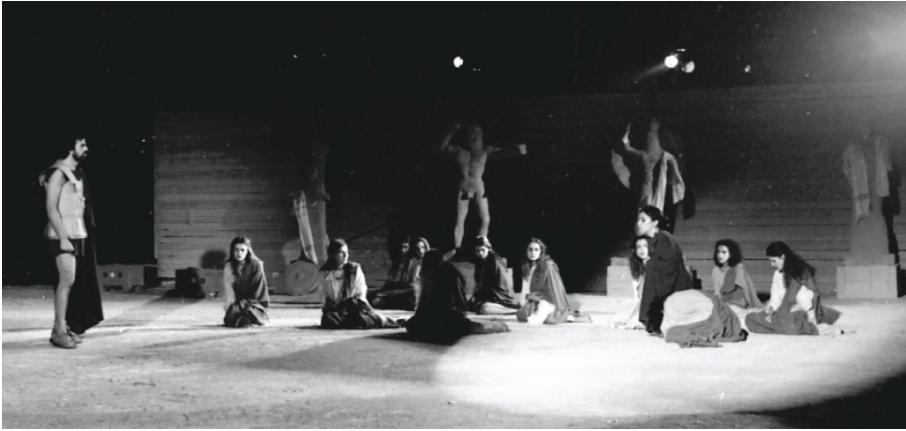
75. Ibid., 238.

76. Ibid., 71.

77. Ibid., 73.

78. Ibid., 77.

79. See Tsarouchis' prologue to the filmed performance of *Seven against Thebes* (1982) in Mosxopodio, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ETboOMyvKE>



Classical-style costumes in the production of *Seven against Thebes*, Mosxopodio, Thebes, 1982. Source: Stelios Skopelitis Photographic Archive.

difference was the ancient-style costumes, more faithful to the period of the playwright and to archaeological testimony of historical dress rather than diachronic in style. In as much as Tsarouchis sought to remain faithful to the spirit of the play and his reading of Aeschylus as an exponent of crude realism and oriental expressionism, at the same time he firmly denied trying to revive an ancient performance and he elaborated on the reasoning of his different stance.⁸⁰

Locating the play outside formal theatre architecture, Tsarouchis at the same time attempted to address performance space in a location set more geographically correct to the dramatic space of Thebes. Another transposition takes place from the essentially urban environment of 'inside the walls of the city' of Thebes under siege to the natural environment of contemporary rural Greece. The location selected in Mosxopodio, in the outskirts of Thebes, was a plain field, a clearing in the densely grown agri-forestry periphery of the city, about 3.5 km south east of Thebes.

Tsarouchis set a temporary tiered viewing structure with scaffolding and wooden seating in a slightly curved arrangement, while the stage space remained open, keeping free the horizon line of the surrounding environment and merging into an undifferentiated whole both orchestra and stage configurations, as well as spatial functions. On the whole though, the main staging space in Tsarouchis' *Seven against Thebes* was an area that remained spatially and visually similar to an ancient orchestra. Apart from his radical strate-

80. Ibid.

gy of relocating performance space outside a permanent venue, Tsarouchis' choice of an open, natural environment surrounding the temporary viewing structure explores some of the most characteristic features of ancient Greek theatre: its outdoor quality and its environmental ambience.⁸¹

Overall less successful than *Trojan Women* and contradictory in its neo-classical aesthetic venture, this production however entailed also interesting elements of an early, unconsolidated approach to site-specificity, like e.g. Tsarouchis' collaboration with amateurs-soldiers from a nearby military camp for the silent male group of soldiers, encircling the female chorus of the play.

The town of Thebes has been spatially and geographically defined for long by agricultural production and by its relation to big training military camps; such poignant contemporary overtones were though undermined in practice by dressing the soldiers to represent ancient Greeks with chlamydas and chitons (tunics) complete with period armoury. In any case, there seems to be a strong contradiction between innovative notions of performance space and conventional neoclassicist representational codes. Tsarouchis abandoned his 'naturalistic' interpretation of ancient theatre and resorted to the more fashionable at the time mix of historical periods — neoclassicist costume and archaic-influenced scenic elements (totems, wooden fences) around the orchestra space. Yet, by the early '80s this kind of visual imagery and aesthetics had become overused and considerably conventionalized.

The choice of the location according to the geography of the dramaturgy also resonated with the nation's imaginary as regards the natural environment, the idealised 'strong desire for the landscape', perhaps as an opposing force to the country's undergoing of intense urbanization; this desire had been also strongly manifested during the interwar period in several attempts to take classical performance straight out of the ancient amphitheatres, in natural sites close to the Athenian historic city centre, like Filopappou and Lykabettos.⁸² This activity must be evaluated though mainly as testing ground aiming at eventually building new outdoor theatres that would keep the basic open-air condition of the ancient theatres with a more updated ar-

81. As Rehm pointed out, the 'theatrical aesthetic' of the Athenians was acted out in public space "... subject to the forces of nature [...], played against a backdrop of the polis, acted out on a beaten earth orchestra, with the land, sea, and sky beyond" (2003) 22; he also usefully quotes Barthes' observation that "the spectator's immersion in the complex polyphony of the open air (shifting sun, rising wind, flying birds, noise(s) of the city) restores to the drama the singularity of the event" Barthes (1985).

82. Konstantinakou (2014) 34 ff. See also Tsintziloni (2015).

chitectural form and being closer to the densely populated capital city of Athens.

Although, Tsarouchis' performance was connected in a much more ephemeral way to the landscape, there had been a brief prospect of establishing a more permanent open air theatre site in that area. As it happened, the outdoor theatre Melina Merkouri was only built much later, in 1995, through the government scheme of support for municipal cultural infrastructure yielding numerous new ancient-like open theatres in regional Greece.⁸³

For *Seven against Thebes*, Tsarouchis succeeded in creating some additional spatial tension by geographically matching real found space, dramatic space and locale. Leaving the city behind and reaching for the outskirts of Thebes Tsarouchis turned to a mixed natural environment partly rural in character, promoting seemingly the geographical over the historical. However, Tsarouchis' ambivalent position on modernising and his choice of straightforward classical style costumes, resulted in a largely conventional staging, despite the innovative placement in real, found outdoor space.

PERFORMANCE SPACE, TOPOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY: FINAL THOUGHTS

Moving further than the physical evidence and materiality of Tsarouchis' own perception of performances within their relational temporal frame, we find ourselves engaging in a much wider sense with the socio-spatial themes and discourses these performances produced within the urban environment of the city, as a diachronic spatial entity. The notion of topological performance space, refers to the potential via placement, via geography, of spatial relations and spatial politics to generate a *logos* on *topos*, extending the realities of performance space and time, so as to produce and to frame theatrical meaning, but also to contribute, to the collective topological memory of the city. This extended spatial discourse and the ability to reflect on urban themes has been a persistent key feature of site-specific practice globally.⁸⁴

In particular, Tsarouchis' production of *Trojan Women* in real, found urban space attests to the inherent potential of live events to perform deeply embedded urban structures and to facilitate a critical and collective reflection on urban spatial phenomena; this in fact consists in one of the most

83. See Vettas (1999) 85–93.

84. See Konomis (2014) 29–45.

innovative aspects of current site-specific art and performance.⁸⁵ Such performative events could partake in critical urban cultural practices energetically contributing to rethinking active participation and agency, spontaneity and grassroots creativity in the urban environment.

From another perspective however, such a use of the public space of the city, as the backdrop and a basic parameter of the physical environment of performance, could be also freely viewed as a sort of converging point of classical and modern sensibilities. This constitutes a marked venture of the avant-garde⁸⁶, but also a distinguished feature of classical theatre: the visible geography of the city of Athens played an important role in audience viewing with its dominant materiality⁸⁷ and its relation to the materialization of dramatic space in performance.⁸⁸

Moving beyond canonical outdoor theatre spaces of the open-air festivals in both his productions, Tsarouchis revisits this whole idea of the real/found versus constructed/architectural performance space according to his experimental outlook on staging tragedy and his personal, experiential and locational definition of Hellenic identity, 'hellenikotita';⁸⁹ this undoubtedly draws him closer to other avant-garde artists, as well as current site-specific practice, while also foreshadowing the many transpositions and displacements of Greek tragedy.⁹⁰

However radical in his artistic approach, Tsarouchis explores sensitivi-

85. Kaye, (2000); Konomis, (2014).

86. There is extensive bibliography on the subject; see indicatively Carlson (2014), 17–28; and Konomis (2014) 29–45.

87. Rehm proclaims that in ancient Athens "Time and time again tragedy draws together the natural world and the built environment of the polis, forging a deep connection between art and audience, between fiction and reality, between culture and nature" (2003) 27. Tragedy happened against an "impressive civic backdrop": "From their different vantage points, the audience looked down over the temple and sanctuary of Dionysus, the city walls, and as many as five city gates. Visible from the cavea were various sanctuaries and temples, shrines, lawcourts, and private houses of the southern city, the oldest inhabited part of Athens outside of the Acropolis. Those sitting high up saw the Ilissos valley and the extension of the city to the south, including the gymnasium of Kynosarges and the Kallirhoe spring, which provided water for the nuptial baths that the bride and groom took (separately) as part of their wedding ritual; to the east they viewed the slopes of Mount Hymettos, known for marble quarries that provided some of the building material for Athens' public monuments; to the south and west appeared the Saronic gulf ..." (ibid., 25). See also, Rehm (2002) 36–37.

88. See Rehm's spatial categories (2002); also Wiles (2002).

89. Tsarouchis, *Αθήνα: οι απεδοκίμασαν οι οικοδομούντες* (1989) 189.

90. Patsalidis and Sakellariou (eds) (1999).

ties of found space via different conceptual and artistic channels from various historic and post war avant-gardes in the performing arts. In resisting dominant performance conventions, Tsarouchis' approach to found space and performance placement is not defined so much against the indoors, 'italianate' stage, but more to the aestheticized uses of the outdoor theatres of antiquity, as historical monuments, rather than contemporary stages.

Despite their mix of old formulas and new sensibilities, Tsarouchis' experimental productions pointed towards the potential of an innovative spatial paradigm for staging Greek tragedy and classical repertoire in general. Contemporary site-specific theatre and performance practitioners could find useful this pathway of innovative placement strategies and the radical quest for an expanded performance space for tragedy, and further expand on Tsarouchis' legacy.*

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