

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

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### Anti-Memory

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## **Anti-Memory. The Space Where the Body Moves Becomes its Place of Origin**

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### **Abstract**

This article approaches the process of aesthetic creation that involves physical performance practices. It focuses on how memory, performative action, and space interact with each other and how the past can be perceived differently. The research process focuses on building a "sensory" approach that delves into the communication between space, body, memory, and history. It does not prioritise content but rather integrates history and its narration through performative action, emphasising the significance of memory and its continuity. The shift from research to performance can recall the connection between experience and memory. As the bodies reframe their historical perception of the event in the present moment, they gain a sense of unity. As the performance highlights the importance of using art to speak about history in today's society, empowering its members' relationships.

*Keywords:* Physical practices, public space, history, memory, site-specific performance, theatre

### **Anti-Memory. The Space Where the Body Moves Becomes its Place of Origin**

In this study, as we are using sources from oral history (Abrams, 2016) and its imprint on the perception of public history, we focus on the ethnography of the persecuted body and its demand to be integrated by restoring its absorption deficit in social cohesion. Throughout the performance, the configuration of the way we perceive the rights of the "Other" changes. Thus, a spectacle testimony is formed, as it activates a complex palimpsest that relates to its stratifications, the body, the public space, the text, the mnemonic testimony, and the reportage (Rigopoulou, 2008).

**Figure 1**

The Will. Video still by Patricia Lazou



By studying the creation of the art of action, as performance is characterised, leading art forms that are not stored in museum spaces, the use of public space is also examined. A field of claims that includes the event, the action, and the environment, allowing the symbolic similarity of the viewers who enter and are surrounded by it. Through the artistic event, personal history, which is part of collective history, highlights a monumental "text" that transforms bodies into punctuation marks, shaping the anthropology of social memory (Patsalides, 2013).

The ongoing practice acquires a self-limiting and therefore ecological and artistic behaviour of ontological choice. It aims to capture the emergence of the elements that try to coexist in space, broadening the way it improves the relationship between the sign and the whole, through the artistic performance project. In the context that is formed and constitutes field research with qualitative characteristics, the viewer is integrated into the produced action. The viewer perceives an action that captures a series of questions related to creativity and the causes of aesthetic conflicts triggered by history as it interferes with people's relationships. As the man or woman narrates, they enter the centre of history.

Through this idea, the following research questions arise:

Why performance? In which space? What happens in the body? What is the physical context that guides the field of negotiation between the theoretical approach and the substantiation of interpretation? If public space acts as a melting pot for recycling private

experiences by projecting and embodying what we allow to appear in our public presence, can we rise to the challenge?

If we reverse the order of the stimuli, can public experience and the collective memory of historical records constitute a narrative that starts from our need to be part of a journey with heroic moments, with small or big expectations, with traumas and temporal discontinuities? If our goal concerns our contact with the past through experience, what do we choose from the "bank of memories"?

How is the information illuminated strengthened and utilised over time for society?

Researching the origins and conquest of the right of citizens to use public space from ancient times to the present day, I have repeatedly asked myself what we define as public space. I am looking for the possibility of finding a definition that contains space for people, allowing them to participate in the diffusion of the historical narrative, which is reproduced by their public search and sees in a new way the circularity of the relationship: city-empty space/occupied space-inhabitant.

The subjective perception of facts is at the same time responsible for objective testimony. The "person-archive," the witness of narration by an elder or a previous lived experience, lost in their past "when these things happened", still keeps the shock of their participation in historical time.

Despite its problems of completeness and objectivity, oral history has the role of the starting point from which research begins. Despite its problems of completeness and objectivity, oral history is the starting point from which research begins. It is very important to emphasise that in the Greek historical documentation of the events the possibility of accessing the archives was achieved much later, since no archives were kept. (Vervenioti, 2008).

As I was writing my paper, I wondered what kind of place a text that substantiates theoretical research for an experiential action acquires, if it fails to incorporate memory "during its "aestheticization" listening. To avoid the creation of a latent relationship, which prevents the closeness between the metaplastic memory of the creator-informant with the institutional memory that is often imposed on the viewer. The boundaries that distinguish these two issues can only be perceived through the performances that create the conceptual framework developed through the ethics of activism (Bakhtin, 1981).

So, if this performance is separated from the truth of its composition, we have a spectacle of suffering caused by this separation (Debord, 1986). Then the viewer's side, if they do not manage through this evocative experience to leap consciousness (Barba, 2019) and to differentiate organically, enjoying the appropriation of space, contributing to the mobilisation of the public community through memory, is repositioned in the Platonic view, which renders them inactive (Rancier, 2008).

The viewer perceives their reflection on the spectacle, but also its influential functionality, which has been taken away from them. This deprives them of the possibility of experiencing a situation where the information of historical flow can be captured without having to be presented as a painful "ritual drama" (Levi, 2012).

But this separated reality, which is being substantiated to be abolished, is the paradox of the viewer's position. After that, they return to search for their connection with the performative experience. This reactivates the exchange of energy, that relates the person who sees to what is seen.

This brings us to the concept of "life nexus" (Dilthey, 2010). Our shared experiences are a result of constantly processing sensory input and drawing from historical data, forming a grid of life.

Dramatised content about public space favours the breadth of artistic connections in the area of cultural consciousness. Space emerges as a flowing, constantly enriched complex network of dynamic social relations. The viewer organically remembers and connects with space through trans-local memory, which stimulates memories that his body carries, and revives approaching the truth of performative action.

Our approach considers the relationship between the natural environment and the human body, using movement as a guide to understand their codes of operation, development, and changes. The body's adaptability deteriorates when exposed. Performance coexists with space, not just seeks assimilation.

The performer needs to draw first kinetic ideas that, although they do not perceive him in the broad and usual sense of the term, lead them to "represent" images whose dynamics and momentum bring out the intensity of events that took place in the past in the space where the body acts.

The emphasis is on highlighting the body as a later addition. A material point that contributes to the "restoration of the damage" of memory for the physical public space or mnemonic place, which, as it constitutes a map of genealogical awareness and aesthetic identity, becomes a carrier of the co-managed memory that retrieves the event and favours the awareness of the experience.

The relationship between performing art and public space includes research that site-specific action incorporates the biography of the place, the public sphere, and the historical moment.

## **The Artistic Action – The Artist**

If the term representation is used, it may suggest a process of restating how something is perceived as an event. It is particularly useful to approach honestly and easily the mediator-performer who is involved in creating a direction that stands the test of time.

Acting as a magnifying glass, this artist selects themes of the past, which concern human decisions and intersect in the evergreen landscape. The present that the viewer experiences and participates in, makes them a relative to the circumstances and not a host.

The physical specificity that is proposed in the live representation always has an intense energy and an essential truth. It discusses the present time and the immediate impact of the event it presents. It is born, grows, matures, and ages along with its viewer, who for as long as they watch it appropriates the role of an eyewitness who can certify that the event happened.

Through the spectacle, the viewer approaches, knows, and understands public space, through the prism that the functional, suffering body offers. Through various techniques that connect the approach of space with historical information, the body is called upon to abandon its usual choices, to renounce its ideal characteristics, and to give visibility along with events, to the harshness of the past (Rosenberg, 2016).

At the same time, the observer, along with the experience of viewing, also experiences decay. The time captured by the performance expands and is reflected to the person watching it. Performers and spectators' "stage" together variables of reality and restore lost pieces of a personal or public story. The political act of performance dares to fill the spatial void of the city, "structuring" a new way of reading the function of its inhabitants, dedicating to them the memory of the space that surrounds them (Stavridis, 2016).

The artist, drawing on the sources of performance history, intersects and reconstructs the body politics. Empowered by ontological theories, the individual becomes strong and willing to accept the power of human endurance, and to confront authority (Castoriadis, 2017)

## **The Body**

The research for physical practices leads into our relationship with anti-memory. While creating a safe and open environment that can provide visibility into the fragmented historical unexpected. Under this perspective, the space guides the body in interpreting its orality.

If the body settles in memory space, it has the task of searching among emotional and morphic fragments for deviations from history. "It seeks unity, even if it is inaccessible, utopian, impossible and, precisely for this reason, dramatic" (Kounellis, 1991). The body finds its identity and builds resistance to the divestment of the ecological footprint that the social environment causes to the natural (Uytterhoeven, 2019).

The way a performer interprets a piece of work can influence the structure overall. Through their performance, they can convey memories and personal experiences, shedding light on the cultural context of the piece. This can reshape history and add a new perspective to it. Ultimately, the story a performer “talks” about themselves is unmediated and personal (Van Buschoten, 2016).

This is why research into our relationship to anti-memory, i.e., visibility into the fragmented historical unexpected, guides the body in interpreting its orality. It makes it capable while distinguished from space or monument, to “infuse” with its aesthetic choices the material landscape it tries to bring out. Its kinetic identity is the other material, which, although it is now “read” as part of the environment, is not assimilated, but reveals its reconciliation with natural decay and exposure to it (Cooper Albright, 2015).

The site-specific performance, which focuses on physical artistic intervention, is organised, inspired, and created around the particular habitat in which it will take place. It creates an experimental field of reconstitution and documentation of our desired relationship with ourselves, the environment, and the common public place. A process like this gives us the responsibility while acting in and for the environment to set limits for its protection as its importance determines.

The psychosocial organisation and attitude toward life, which are stimulated by the imagination of an individual, are not necessarily meaningful but still affect different aspects of one's life (Castoriadis, 2017). This concept is related to various cultural phenomena that develop a kind of “cultural mobility”. Regardless of the aesthetic origins, the dynamics of this concept can promote a pluralistic perception of the necessary ecological sensitivity, which emphasises the coexistence of natural changes, historical records, and human individuation.

### **The Metadata of Performance. Space**

The urban public space is a “syntactic” element of the city that acts as a balance concerning the built environment. The public space of the city, therefore, which coincides quite a lot with the free urban space, is the syntactic gap of the city, the built space on the contrary constitutes the syntactic complete of the city. However, the characteristic of free and equal access to public space gained through social struggles is not a given. Participation in public space has been freed from restrictions related to gender, class, and race, but it still retains its “normative” character, constituting a space of inclusion and acceptance where “foreigners”, whomever they may be, will have to fight for their integration into the public sphere. That is, where one stands to talk about the city, what one examines, what questions one poses, how one approaches, and how one assembles the various information collected.

The concept of “public space” has been introduced into the debate on the city since the mid-20th century in the context of a broader reflection that seeks to extricate urban space from its dominant static and purely territorial significance, and to link it to broader socio-political issues.

The post-use of buildings and public spaces is like an invisible writing. Information of the biography concerning the building and is legitimised through the disclosure of this in the public sphere. In this context, initially with the great contribution of social research and then through interdisciplinary approaches that often arise from multiple osmotic influences between different cognitive areas, questions arise that concern not only the parameters of spatial formation but also the criteria for its approach.

Therefore, emphasis is given to how we try to understand the mechanisms that govern the issues of space, the way we seek the internal logic of coherence of systems of thought and behaviour that concern it and we can summarise with the following description.

Public space is the “stage” where the spectacle of public life unfolds. Streets, squares, parks, monuments, and landmarks in a city give shape to the type and evolution of human interactions. Public spaces help people satisfy their important needs, shape, and protect basic human rights and transmit special cultural meanings, encourage social exchange, free communication, between strangers. Public space is the type of stable or unstable equilibrium between order and disorder, the changing organisation of contradictions (Butler, 2018).

## Epilogue

Through the strong bond, which is encapsulated in the relationship between memory and oblivion and makes the historical site a place of intergenerational interaction, the research-artistic palimpsest that emerges, offers the opportunity to approach the body and the “dramaturgy” that takes place in the spaces where it is revealed. The generosity by which artistic actions are guiding the relationship of artists by reshaping the demands of public opinion into acts of transformation, collective benefit, and acceptance. The body and everything that is inscribed in it, “organises” an artistic gesture, a kinematic catharsis, at the barricades of historical memory, which connects the meaning of the significance of the historical site through the relationship of the body with it. The body and its care concerns the common denominator that life cannot overcome: Decay.

An interconnection of the retrospective view of the past through the reconciliation of official history with memory. A spatial shift in the body of the performers that imbues in the present tense passions, terrors, manners, wounds, and possible reversals, which save the anatomy of the human desire for interpretation and possible reconciliation with the unthinkable, when we talk about the lived experience of collective evil. The experience in



which the eyewitness is absent and in his place as mediator and carrier of information is the artist (Celan, 1996). The influence of actions that expand knowledge about human beings and the events that involve them as they are given meaning by them eliminates inequalities. As the scope of these actions is large, it gives space to the desire of the viewer to protect his/her trace and his/her origin. The human condition, while space remains, deteriorates. It is differentiated, decommissioned, changed, but continues to exist and recalls its continuity, through the historical and genealogical circles that define each other. It reminds bodies that encounter history in public space, of their ability to absorb, without silencing, the moments that define memory. But to turn it into a starting point for artistic creation and a way of deepening documents (Van Steen, 2019).

Through research and trust in historical science and art, focusing on the variable factors added by public history, people are placed at the central point of the map of their choices. The dynamics articulated through the artists bodies and the exhibition in public space strengthen social cohesion through the influential act that constitutes the claim of shaping the urban and non-urban, cultural-historical continuum.

### **Photo Annex of Performances in Public Space**

Within the historical, social, and artistic context, place, memory, desire, trauma, and Greek history coexist (Kounellis, 1991). At the old prison's administration office, which is preserved in the form it had until today, although it has changed use and is now part of the Tsitanis museum. The meta use of the building offers a research and study centre for new artists. It is available for recording music sessions, painting exhibitions, traditional music workshops, concerts, and other artistic practices.

This performance was the practical part of my thesis, for my master's degree in Art and Public Space.

**Figure 2**

*Interrogation, March 2005. A secret performance at Athens. The National Insurance Building. The anti-aircraft shelter ordered by the German Commander during the German Occupation. Photo by Spyros Tsakiris.*

**Figure 3**

*The Will. Video still by Patricia Lazou. Solo performance, Trikala, Thessaly*



**Figure 4**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*



**Figure 5**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*

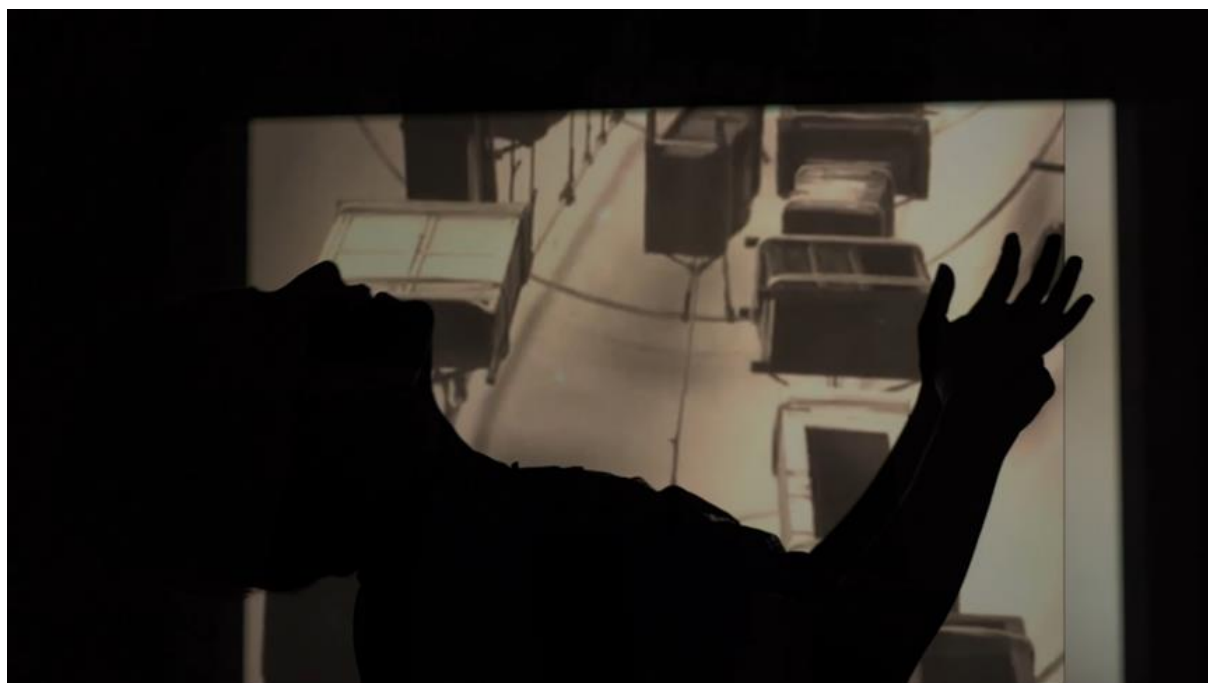


**Figure 6**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*

**Figure 7**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*



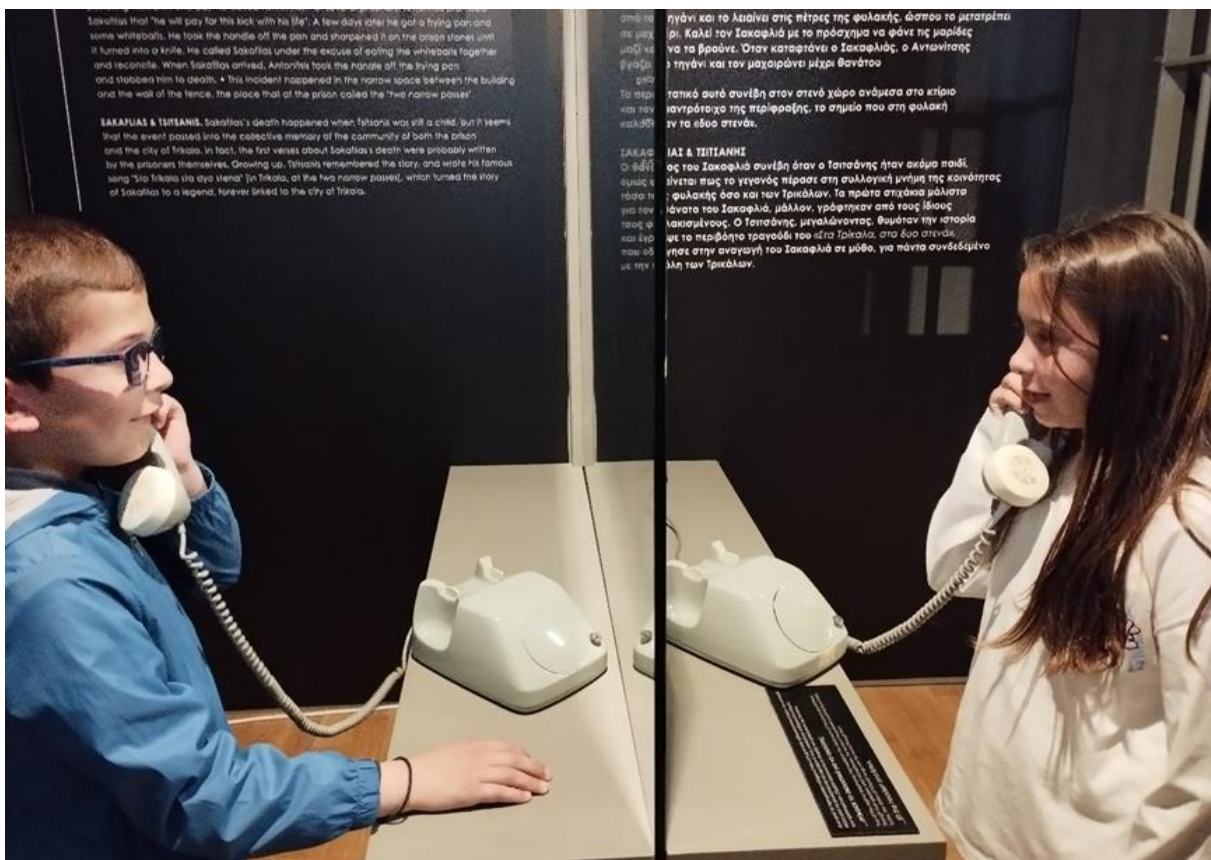


**Figure 8**

The Will. Video still by Patricia Lazou, the wall before the restoration

**Figure 9**

Look back, May 2023. Children's performance with their families. The telephone of the prison visitors, Tsitsani museum.



**Figure 10**

24 scale, June 2017. Ioannina. The site-specific performance took place during the conference "Archaeological dialogues". A walking route for the audience, in the logic of flâneurs. From the dock of the lake of Ioannina to the islet of the lake, through the alleys of the island and led to a ceremony in the monastery at the highest point of the island. Photo by Penni Noutsopoulou.

**Figure 11**

*Duende*, House of Bernarda Alba, April 2016, in the old the old flood control factory. Photo by Thanos Floulis.





**Figure 12**

*Dying in April, April 2017. Site-specific performance. Monument of the young fighters of the left party who were executed by the Germans during the occupation. Instead of a memorial. Work commissioned by the Municipality of Trikala. Photo by Giannis Floulis.*



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