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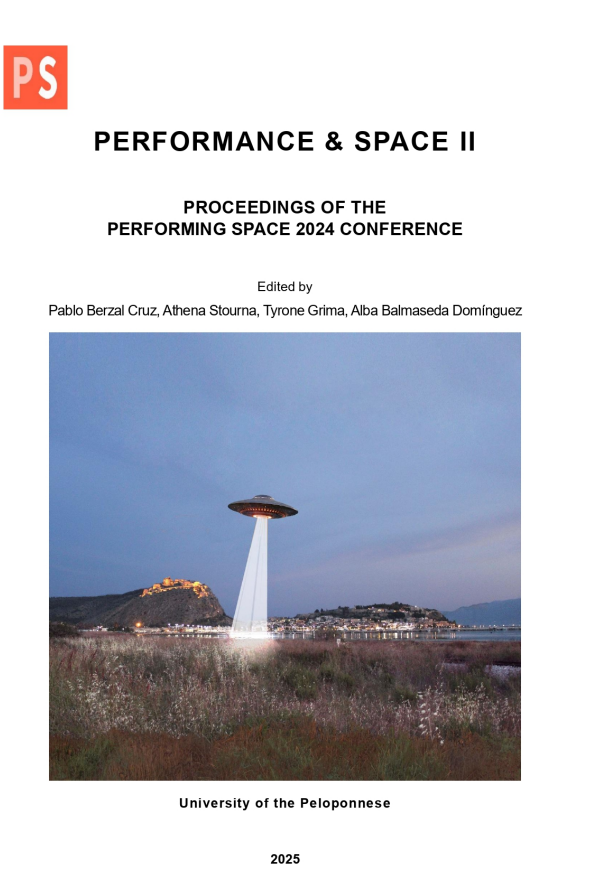

Approaching Threshold Spatialities: The Example of the Theatrical Workshop I Want to fly of Eleonas Refugee Camp

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Approaching Threshold Spatialities: The Example of the Theatrical Workshop *I Want to fly* of Eleonas Refugee Camp

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Abstract

If space is not considered as an empty container in which the world of stage is constituted, but as a field that both shapes and is shaped by exposed identities, then identities-in-transition and the practices by which these identities inhabit the space produce possibilities for the emergence of liminal conditions and, therefore, new ways of the production of space. The performative practices of the theatrical process not only establish spatio-temporal conditions of the stage but also constitute multiple thresholds that capture passages between potential worlds and identities. More specifically, the research examines the example of the theatrical workshop *I want to fly*, which was organized in the "Safe Zone" of the Eleonas Refugee Camp from December 2020 to March 2021 with the participation of 15 unaccompanied minors. Through this example, the research examines the production of threshold spatiality through three different aspects: (1) through Turner's concept of the liminal practices in the inhabitation of identities and space (2) through the particular interaction embedded in the heterotopia of the Eleonas Refugee Camp (3) through the spaces of memory, experience, and imagination that emerged, within the context of the out-of-the-everyday condition that the workshop produced.

Keywords: Threshold spatiality, Otherness, Stage, Being in between, Liminal space, Heterotopia

Approaching Threshold Spatialities

The view of architecture as practice links the study of space to the set of practices that shape it, that make it generic, that redefine its experiential boundaries, as well as its inherent meanings. In light of such a perspective, this research takes a critical approach to the study of space, questioning *subject-identity* and the production of space through *expressive behaviour*. The study of modes of *identity production*, as well as the ways in which this identity finds new boundaries within the realm of *otherness*, is essential to understanding how the subject – as a carrier of meaning – alters the meaning and the experience of space. The way in which new identities emerge simultaneously constitutes a new production of space.

Threshold Spatiality: The Analytical Tool of the Stage

The condition of “being in between” is the pacing for the taming of the discontinuity of identities and space. Through “being in between”, the discontinuous assemblages of space are inhabited through the practices of identities exposed to it. Conversely, through space, discontinuous identities find a way to inhabit it among the dichotomous relations that produce them. The condition of “being in between” establishes a *spatio-temporal threshold* (Bourdieu 2006; Stavrides 1998, 2002, 2010), which achieves the contact of two different territories by uniting them while ensuring their separateness (Simmel, 1997). The analytical tool of the "*stage*" is understood as a spatio-temporal threshold condition and it is both a spatial affirmation and a performative practice (Schechner, 1985; Marvin, 2014).

The Example of the Theatrical Workshop *I Want to Fly*[1]

This research examines the example of the theatrical workshop *I want to fly*, which was organised in the “Safe Zone”[2] of Eleonas Refugee Camp from December 2020 to March 2021. It was a period when schools were closed due to the pandemic. The group met in a container/ Eight unaccompanied minors participated in the project. The Greek Council for

[1] The program is implemented in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and is financed by the European Comission and the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME).

[2] Safe Zones are accommodation facilities for unaccompanied minors aged 14-18, which operate within Open Accommodation Facilities for asylum applicants and vulnerable individuals. Each Safe Zone accommodates up to 30 teenagers, serving as a temporary housing solution until a more suitable, short-term accommodation facility is found. In 2019, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) assumed responsibility for the management of the Safe Zone in Elaionas (Attica region) and Alexandria (Imathia region), thereby extending its interventions in the field of child protection. In the Safe Zones, care services are provided on a 24- hour basis, seven days a week. Minors are provided with personalized psychosocial, legal and educational support by a group of professionals, with the objective of facilitating their social integration in Greek society.

Refugees was in charge of the workshop. During the three months, fifteen young people from Afghanistan participated, four of them from the beginning to the end. The workshop was called *I want to fly* and the group was called *Cheili Chop Group*.[3]

A series of scenes were organized, devised by the children themselves, taken from their everyday life and reality. Modular scenes were created through improvisations, discussions, automatic writing techniques and suggestions from the children themselves (Figure 1). Once the scenes were crystallized, the adolescents assumed different roles each time, rotating through them all[4]. The spatio-temporal conditions selected by them as scenes were the house, the park, the police station.

Figure 1

Three consecutive phases of the workshop: From the generation of ideas to the creation of scenes and the rotating interpretation of the roles, until the reception of the project in its entirety.

Note. Three consecutive phases of the workshop. by E. Koumparouli, February 2021*,* Eleonas Refugee Camp.

[3] The workshop was organised by the Greek Council for Refugees and coordinated by Vassiliki Katrivanou. Its animators were Giorgos Moschos and Eirini Koumbarouli, founding members of Inititative for Article 12 (InArt12). Kazem Ahmadi was the translator.

[4] Here is the sequence of scenes. Scene 1) A child waves goodbye to his mother and leaves to find his friends in the park. The mother, Farida (a name given by the children themselves), greets him warmly and with some concern, and announces that she will call him later on his mobile phone. The young man, fed up with his mother's nagging, greets her affectionately. Scene 2) A child is drawing in the park. Soon an older man meets him, notices him and rewards him for his work. Scene 3) The group of children from scene 1 are smoking in a corner of the park, making fun of another child who is trying to do acrobatics. Scene 4) The child from scene 1 meets the group and tries to persuade them to stop smoking. Scene 5) The police intervene and take them all to the police station. They wait for a long time in the detention room. Farida, the mother, calls her son and when she realises what has happened, she faints. Scene 6) The child who was drawing decides to ask the old man for help, who finally intervenes and vouches for the young men. The police release them.

[4] The only exception is the role of the mother, which the participants asked to be played consistently by the female youth instructor.

The Threshold Spatiality Exemplified by the Theatrical Workshop *I want to fly* at the Eleonas Refugee Camp

According to the given example, the research captures the production of threshold spatiality through through different aspects:

Through Turner's Concept of Liminal Space

The period of stay of unaccompanied minors in the camp can be considered as a threshold, a passage. The concept of passage is primarily derived from Van Gennep's (1910,1960) analytical tripartite scheme (separation, transition, integration) of *Rites of passage* and from his intention to define passage in spatial terms. According to Van Gennep's ideas, the adolescent's stay in the camp is a *between and betwixt* period, during which they are neither children nor adults. It is a period of transition, a threshold, a liminal space in which the young people no longer carry their previous identity and have not yet inhabited the next social condition, that of adulthood. They test identities and inhabit both social phases or neither (Turner, 1974).

The Condition of Heterotopia according to Foucault

It is widely acknowledged that in contemporary international spatial politics the displacement of displaced populations is equivalent to the dissolution of territoriality, the necessity for human habitation, and the ambivalent role of borders (Agamben, 1998; Arendt, 1951). Spatial gestures of exclusion are based on dichotomies such as: citizen-foreigner, inside-outside, national-international (Soguk, 1999; Walker, 1993). Camps, therefore, function as other heterotopias (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986), as places where the other resides.

The adolescents' stay and habitation in the camp intensified the need to fracture enclosures and inhabit the liminal as a threshold through performative practices. In this way, the expected habitation in conditions of displacement outside the social body is disrupted. Perhaps this is precisely the importance of such inhabitation: to render these spaces places of reference, which by virtue of their deviance, offer the measure for the social condition.

The Spatio-Temporal Condition of Stage: Approaching Otherness

Within the space-time condition of the theatrical workshop, a safe passage from the here-and-now to “the elsewhere and elsewhen” was constantly and framed. A superimposed condition of imagination or memory was produced whereby the young people were able to visit spatio-temporal spaces of memory (connecting with family or homeland), or spatio-temporal spaces of imagination (future dream moments). They could also perform the reverse: from an *elsewhere and other time* to a *here-and-now*. Their need to speak,-experience and enact their contemporary reality was also very strong. This continuous flying

in superimposed spacetimes constantly created the condition of the scene (Figure 2), i.e. the state of being in-between, hence the production of threshold conditions.

It can be observed that the spatiotemporal condition of the scene frames, spatially and temporally (Brook, 1970; Feral, 2002), an encounter with otherness. The concept of otherness, as outlined by Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur ,1988, 1994), is approached here as an internal and at the same time external dimension in the way identity is constituted. Through the co-presence of the participants (Fischer-Lichte, 2013), the repetition of the performative actions (Schechner, 1985), the continuous attempt to cover the distance between speech-voice-translation, within the context of the out-of-the-everyday condition that the workshop produced, a fragile but empowered space/place of negotiating with the Otherness was formed.

Figure 2
The production of the spatio-temporal condition of imagination and memory.

Note. by E. Koumparouli, February 2021*,* Eleonas Refugee Camp.

Conclusion

According to Stavros Stavrides, "*Thresholds are places that negotiate with otherness and at the same time are places that meet the otherness*"(Stavrides 2002, p.290). It is evident that the threshold is a place-scene where performed identities are exposed to the Other. Therefore, the passage of the threshold constitutes a passage to otherness and is understood as the scene in which the passage is enacted. Moreover, it can be observed that the threshold performs-connects-enacts the relationship between worlds that could not otherwise be related, without negating their distance or separation. As Boudrieu (1977) notes, this gesture of temporary connection is marked by the meeting but also the possibility of reversal of these worlds.[5] Perhaps this is where the power of the spatiality of the threshold lies: in its capacity to connect/reverse the elements that delimit these worlds.

[5] P. Bourdieu's anthropological study "*The Kabyle house or the World Reversed*". The article was first published in Echanges et Commutations. Mélanges offers à Claude Lévi-Strauss à l'occasion de son 60e anniversaire, Mouton, Paris-Hague, 1970, pp. 739-758.

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